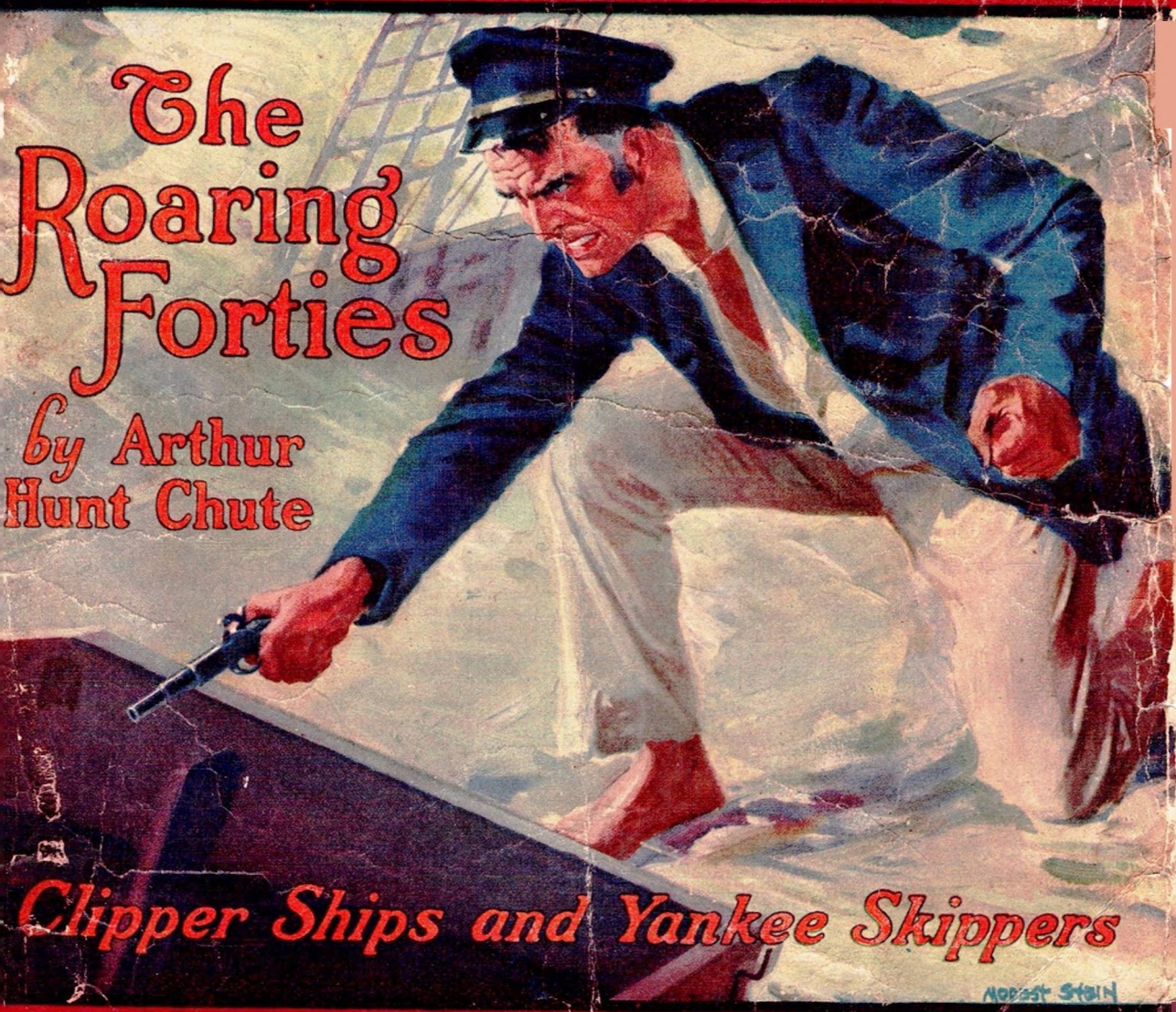
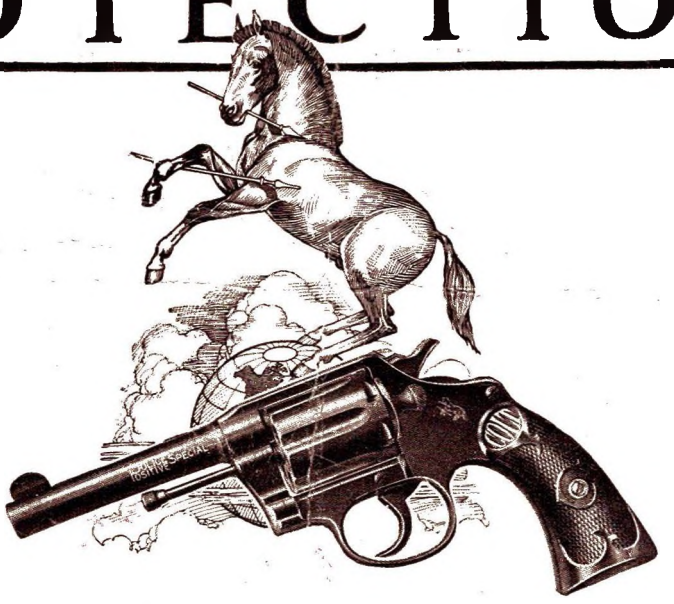
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



10¢ PER COPY — APRIL 19 — BY THE YEAR $4.00

PROTECTION



BECAUSE Colt's Fire Arms have always been *safest* to handle and carry — because they get into action *quickest* when quickness is vital — because their fire is *sure* and *accurate* — they have won Government and Police endorsement for nigh on a century. Protection is only *complete* when *all* these qualities are present; so make sure of Colt security for your home by possessing a revolver or automatic pistol bearing this time honored name. Ask your Hardware or Sporting Goods dealer to show you his full line of Colt's fire arms. They're reasonably priced.

Catalogue? Of course. Want it?

Colt's Patent Fire Arms Mfg. Co.
Hartford, Conn.

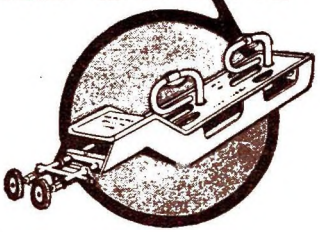
Pacific Coast Representative
Phil. B. Bekeart Co., 717 Market St., San Francisco, Calif.

COLT'S

THE ARM OF LAW AND ORDER

MAKE YOUR RANGE A GAS STOVE

Keep Summer Kitchens Cool and Clean



No more sweltering Summer kitchens—no more dirty, heavy coal and wood to lift, no more chopping, shaking ashes, emptying scuttles—no more smelly, undependable oil stoves to clutter kitchen—no more soot, ashes, dirt, smoke and drudgery.

This summer, YOU—like thousands of other women can have a cool, clean, comfortable kitchen. You can cook and bake quicker and easier than ever before. You can have all the convenience of city gas—but use your own dependable range.

Wonderful Baking and Cooking

A wonderful device called the Oliver Oil-Gas Burner ends forever woman's slavery to a hot, mussy kitchen range.

This wonderful device can be slipped into any stove in 15 minutes' time. There are no bolts to fasten, no holes to drill, no changes whatever to your stove. Turn a little valve and you have any degree of heat needed. Cooks and bakes better and quicker than coal, wood or oil stoves. The fire is turned out before it has had time to heat up the kitchen. Women using Olivers tell of taking prizes with their baking. An end to burned or uncooked food!

Fits All Ranges and Stoves

This wonderful device is called the Oliver Oil-Gas Burner because it combines minute particles of oil with a large quantity of air to form an intense, clean, blue-white flame. No wicks, no smoke, no odor. Absolutely safe. Lasts a lifetime. Makes Summer oil stoves that take up space in your kitchen unnecessary. Has numerous advantages over coal and wood for Spring, Fall and Winter heating. 16 different models to fit any kind of range, heater or furnace. Over 200,000 in use.

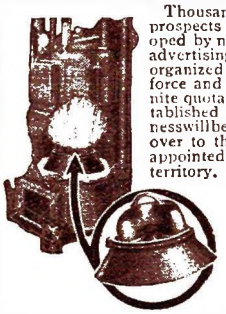
Write for Free Book

Don't go through another Summer putting up with unbearable coal or wood fires—the smoke, ashes; and the drudgery that saps your vitality. Think of the leisure hours you can have for sewing, reading or resting. If you will mail the coupon immediately you will get full details of this remarkable device and an interesting Free Book. Already the big Summer demand for these burners is keeping our factory working day and night. Don't delay. Fill in and mail the coupon immediately. This does not obligate you. Send coupon today.

Distributors
Salesmen Dealers

The Oliver line is complete, including burners for every type of furnace, heating stove and range.

There are now openings in the Oliver Sales organization for every type of man. Our nation-wide business is being transferred to Distributors. Men who can meet the necessary qualifications for distributors have an unusual opportunity to make from $10,000 to $25,000 a year in an established business of their own. Successful business experience is given more important consideration than capital.



Thousands of prospects developed by national advertising, an organized sales force and a definite quota of established business will be turned over to the men appointed in each territory.

To perfect our organization we need city distributors, dealers and agents. Dealers are making $5,000 to $10,000 and up a year. Salesmen and agents in many cases make as high as $100 a week.

Write or wire at once for full details, mentioning the proposition in which you are interested.

OLIVER OIL-GAS BURNER

OLIVER OIL-GAS BURNER CO., 45 Oliver Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Oldest and Largest Manufacturers of Oil-Gas Burners in the World

Canadian Distributors: **45 Oliver Building, Toronto, Ontario**

Oliver Oil-Gas Burner Co., 45 Oliver Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Send me your FREE Book and Special Introductory Offer. I am interested in a burner for a

☐ Range ☐ Heating Stove ☐ Furnace

Name .....

Address ..... County .....

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

If interested in selling Oliver Burners fill out this part of coupon. I can devote ( ) Part Time ( ) Full Time.

Present Occupation .....

Oliver Furnace Burners fit all hot air, hot water and steam furnaces. No noisy motors, no electricity, no moving parts. Sold at one-third the cost of other furnace burners.

Thousands in use for years; put yours in now and save money.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLIX CONTENTS FOR APRIL 19, 1924 NUMBER 4

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FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

Hit in the face, handed a hundred dollar bill, pushed into a cell, he thought he was having a very brisk time, but—nothing really happened until he demanded a lawyer. Then—well, read it yourself in

A STRANGER IN TOWN

By J. U. GIESY and JUNIUS B. SMITH

A FOUR PART SERIAL BEGINNING NEXT WEEK

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, 1924

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COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

Agents! $25 to $75 A Week! EXTRA!

Sell Boys 2 pants SUITS!

Old-Timers, new beginners, clothing Agents, Look Here! No fancy salesmanship needed to sell $18 boys 2-pants suits for $11.95. Every boy's mother buys and buys! Fastest seller, biggest repeater, easiest line you ever handled. $5 to $15 cash every day. You get your profit in advance. No waiting—no delivering—no collecting.

No Competition—Easy Sales

Only direct-from-factory boys suits. Price 50% less than stores. A clear field, big sales, big profits. $25 to $50 for your spare time. Full time Agents make $75, $100 and more a week! And you can build a permanent growing business of your own. We show you how, we help you succeed!

START MAKING MONEY THE VERY FIRST DAY

Right this minute there are hundreds of customers in your territory waiting for you to take their orders! Don't wait—be the first to cash in on the enormous demand for boys 2-pants suits at half price! Exclusive rights to sell WRIGHT Suits worth $5000 a year and more. So act quick—don't lose this opportunity thru delay! Write today!

Surprise Offer! $2500 Given Away!

Big Outfit FREE!

Most sensational offer made to Agents. We actually give to Wright Agents $2500. This in addition to the Big Profits you make on every sale. We supply big selling outfit FREE, and show you how to go right out and make up to $75 a week. Mail name immediately and get complete confidential offer. Hurry! Write now—today. DON'T WAIT A MINUTE!

WRIGHT & CO. Dept. B33, HARRISON, THROOP and CONGRESS STS., CHICAGO, ILL.

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	1.50	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

Teach Children To Use Cuticura

Soothes and Heals Rashes and Irritations

Cuticura Soap Keeps the Skin Clear

"I'm Going to Send It in To-night"

"I'VE been drifting too long. . . . Two years ago, when Tom Adams took up an I. C. S. course, I determined to study too. But I put it off—and off—and off—

"Tom's manager of the department now and earning twice as much as I am. It isn't because he has more natural ability than I have, but because he's trained! That's it—*he's trained!*

"Me? Why I'm just one of a score of routine workers. Tom gets the big salary because the firm knows he's trained himself to handle work that I can't do.

"I've wasted two years, but it's not too late. This time I'm really going to send in that I. C. S. coupon too. The sooner I send it in, the sooner I'll be promoted like Tom."

Mail the Coupon To-day!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2243-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	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Personnel Organization	☐ Better Letters
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Show Card Lettering
☐ Business Law	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ Business English
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Civil Service
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Private Secretary	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Spanish ☐ French	☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

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

Name.....

Street Address.....

11-21-23

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

Occupation.....

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

BEAUTIFUL NEW SUIT DRESS

of Longwear Serge

$3.98

Rich Gold and Silk Braided

FRENCH MODEL

Without question the style bit of the season! Taking country by storm! Clever new Parisian style Suit Dress, so designed that coat can easily be detached and skirt worn separately. The price is almost unbelievable, but we mean it! For a short time only is this offer made to bring us a host of new friends. Get your order onto the first Chicago train.

Send No Money

Fashioned from the famous Longwear Gabardine weave Serge, always looks beautiful and wears splendidly. Elaborately embellished with finest artistically arranged silk and gold braid. This elegant braiding extends clear around bottom of coat and cuffs and also on vestee. Charming silky Venetian collar with pretty silk tie with decorative end tips. Wonderfully tailored throughout—your friends will think you paid several times this sale price.

Send name, size and color—no money now. Pay only on arrival $3.98 and postage. After try on, if you don't think it the best buy of your lifetime, your money comes back quick and without question.

COLORS: Navy Blue or Brown. SIZES: Women's 32 to 46 bust: Misses' 14 to 22 years.

INTERNATIONAL MAIL ORDER CO.
Dept. B-2142. Chicago

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, supply you with work and pay you cash each week. Write today for full particulars and free booklet.

WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE LIMITED
Authorized Capital $1,250,000.00
72 Colborne Building, Toronto, Can.

PIMPLES

Your Skin can be Quickly Cleared of Pimples, Blackheads Acne Eruptions on the face or body, Barbers Itch, Eczema, Enlarged Pores, Oily or Shiny Skin.

FREE Write today for my FREE Booklet, *"A Clear-Tone Skin."* telling how I cured myself after being afflicted for over fifteen years.

$1,000 Cold Cash says I can clear your skin of the above blemishes.
E. S. GIVENS, 113 Chemical Building, KANSAS CITY, MO.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. Write showcards for us. We instruct and supply work. No experience necessary. WILSON METHODS, LIMITED, Dept. 50G, Toronto, Canada.

Railway Mail Clerks, Stenographers, Clerks, Typists, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly, prepare at home. Write free list and plan T, no charge if unsuccessful. C. J. O., 1710 Market St., Philadelphia.

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.

MEN OVER 18 WILLING TO TRAVEL. Make secret investigations. Reports. Salary and expenses. Experience unnecessary. Write J. GANOR, Former Government Detective, St. Louis.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

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

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.

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-H Romax Building, New York.

BROADWAY HITS THREE FOR TEN CENTS, just out including the Famous Sanitary Blues, One Step, Waltz and Fox Trot. Send coin and 2 cent stamp. Rowan Music Co., Suite 1226, 1133 Broadway, New York City.

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.

MAKE MONEY AT HOME

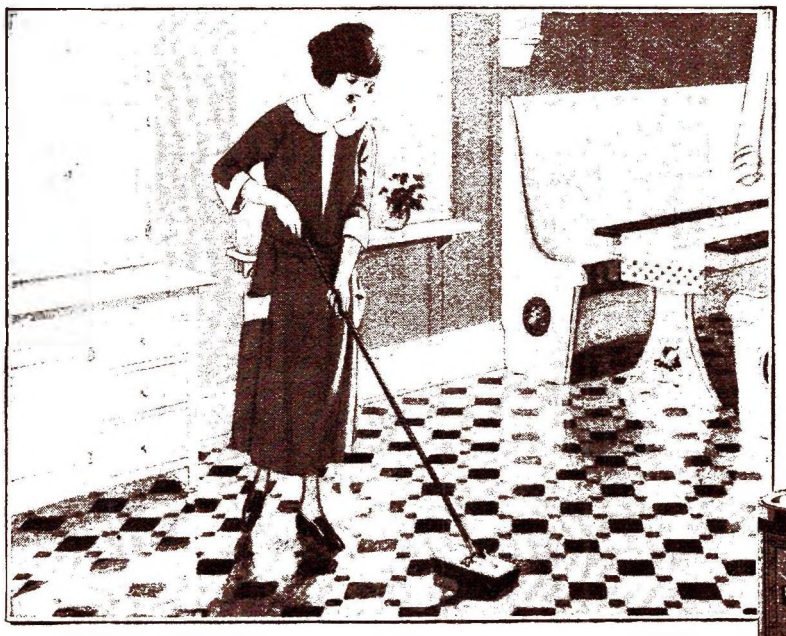
YOU CAN make $1 to $2 an hour writing show cards at home in your spare time. Quickly and easily learned by our new simple method. No canvassing or soliciting. We show you how, guarantee you work at home no matter where you live and pay you cash each week. Full particulars and booklet free. Write to-day.

AMERICAN SHOW CARD SYSTEM LIMITED
Authorized and Fully Paid Capital, One Million Dollars
202 Adams Bldg. Toronto, Canada

$75.00 CASH WEEKLY also Guaranteed Salary

Steady income; pleasant, easy, demonstrating Violet Rays and Electrical devices. Experience not required; the demonstration makes many buy on sight; marvelous, scientific devices bring health and beauty. Endorsed by doctors and plain folks. MEN and WOMEN earn big money, spare or all time. Salary to producers. Commissions liberal, in advance. We deliver and collect. A pushover, quick money. Write for exclusive territory.

VI-REX CO. 211 S. Peoria Street Dept. A-65 **Chicago**



Conveniently put up in Paste, Liquid and Powder. Use the Powdered Wax for dancing floors.

WAX Your Linoleum *with*

JOHNSON'S POLISHING WAX

Your linoleum will last longer, look better and clean easier if you polish it occasionally with Johnson's Paste or Liquid Wax. It helps preserve the life and resilience of linoleum—brings out the pattern and color—and protects from wear. Johnson's Wax is endorsed by the leading manufacturers of linoleum.

Use Johnson's Wax on all your floors. It will make them beautiful—easy to care for—they won't be slippery—and will not heel-print. Wax is, by far, the most economical floor finish—a lb. (85c) can of Johnson's Wax being sufficient for 300 sq. ft.—one coat. With waxed floors expensive refinishing is never necessary, for worn spots can be easily re-waxed without going over the entire floor.

Johnson's *Liquid* Wax is the ideal furniture polish. It quickly produces an exquisite, velvety lustre of great beauty and durability. Imparts a hard, dry, glass-like polish which will not collect dust and lint or show finger prints. Covers up surface mars and prevents checking. Johnson's Wax takes all the drudgery from dusting. It adds years to the life and beauty of varnish. Easy to apply and polish.

Generous Sample FREE

Fill out and mail coupon below for a good sized sample of *Johnson's Liquid Wax*—enough to polish several pieces of furniture. We will also send you a copy of our new illustrated Book on Home Beautifying.

FREE—Book on Home Beautifying

S. C. JOHNSON & SON, Dept. A. R. 4, Racine, Wis.

Please send me a good sized sample of Johnson's Liquid Wax and your FREE Book on Home Beautifying. I enclose 10c. to cover mailing cost.

My Dealer is.....

My Name.....

Address.....

City and State.....

It tells how to make your home more artistic, cheery and inviting. Explains how inexpensive soft woods may be finished so they are as beautiful as hardwood. Tells just what materials to use and how to apply them. Includes color charts—gives covering capacities, etc.

S. C. Johnson & Son

Racine, Wis.

"The Wood Finishing Authorities"

(Canadian Factory—Brantford)

WEAR SEVEN DAYS FREE

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 7. **$2.63**
No. 2—Gents Heavy Tooth Belcher, 1 ct. gem, 14k gold 7. **3.25**
No. 3—Ladies 3 stone Duchess ring, fine platino finish, two 5/8 ct. first water Mex. diamonds, one blue sapphire **3.98**
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.

Try before you Buy.

Your choice of **44 styles,** colors and sizes in the famous **Ranger** line. Write for our marvelous prices and terms. Shipped on approval and **30 DAYS FREE TRIAL,** *express prepaid.*

$5 a Month You can get immediate possession and use of your choice from Ranger or Pathfinder bicycles on our liberal easy Monthly Payment plan.

Tires Best quality at factory prices, *express paid.* Lamps, wheels, horns, equipment and repairs at unusually low prices.

Mead CYCLE COMPANY DEPT. L-30, CHICAGO

Write today for free Ranger Catalog, factory prices and marvellous easy payment terms

No Joke To Be Deaf

—Every Deaf Person Knows That

I make myself hear, after being deaf for 25 years, with my Artificial Ear Drums. I wear them day and night. They are perfectly comfortable. No one sees them. They stop head-noises. Write me and I will tell you a true story, how I became deaf and how I make you hear. Address

GEO. P. WAY, Artificial Ear Drum Co. (Inc.)
38 Hoffman Bldg., 2539 Woodward Ave., Detroit, Mich.

LEARN AUTOMOBILE *and* ELECTRICAL BUSINESS

Earn $150 to $400 a Month. We will teach you.

Greater Opportunities Than Ever.

Rahe trained motor mechanics learn here in 6 to 8 weeks. Write for special low tuition rate and FREE Illustrated Catalogue. (Free R. R. fare and board and room offer.)

RAHE AUTO & ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
916 Forbes Street, Dept. BB PITTSBURGH, PA.
Also 11th and Locust Streets Kansas City, Mo.

$1 DOWN

21 Jewels

Nothing less than 21 Ruby and Sapphire jewels is good enough for the Burlington masterpiece.

Quality and Style

Adjusted to the second—temperature—isochronism—positions. 25 year Gold Strata Case, in 100 exquisite designs. Only $1 down. Balance in small monthly payments. Send for free book.

Burlington Watch Company
19th Street and Marshall Boulevard
Dept. 14-54 Chicago, Illinois

Mar del Plata
The Newport of the Argentine

Under the SOUTHERN CROSS

ARE you longing to get "away"? Do you dream of the gay glitter of Latin civilization under the semi-tropic night?

Then make your plans now for a trip to South America. It takes only 12 days, and is surprisingly inexpensive on the great new U. S. Government ships of the Munson Line. They sail every two weeks from New York to Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Montevideo and Buenos Aires and are the finest and fastest ships on the route. Tours around South America conveniently arranged. Investigate without obligation today.

FREE LITERATURE ***Send the Coupon***

Beautiful, colored illustrated booklets will be sent to you free and without obligation. Ask for the new booklet "Around South America." Send coupon today.

Munson S. S. Line
67 Wall Street, New York City
Managing Operators for
U. S. SHIPPING BOARD
Ask your local Agent

INFORMATION BLANK
To U. S. Shipping Board
Infor. Desk U2274 Washington, D. C.

Please send the U. S. Government Booklet giving travel facts. I am considering a trip to South America ☐, to Europe ☐, to the Orient from San Francisco ☐, to the Orient from Seattle ☐.

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____ State _____

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

YEAR IN AND YEAR OUT—$5 TO $15 DAILY EASY—YOUR PAY IN ADVANCE—Introducing New Style Insured Hosiery—No delivering—No collecting—Quick easy sales with our Special Premium offer to new customers—No capital or experience needed. We teach you. (Spare time will do.) **Proof of Profits** and New Sales plan **FREE.** MACOCHEE COMPANY Room 2708, Cincinnati, O.

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-BZ, Chicago.

TAILORING SALESMEN. Make Big Money taking orders for "Individual Good Clothes." Guaranteed all wool, tailored-to-measure suits $29.50. Big line of 6 x 9 swatches free. Write today for exclusive territory and complete selling outfit. INDIVIDUAL TAILORING CO., Dept. A, Cincinnati, O.

LET US MAIL YOU A FREE Bottle of our Life Tonic Elixir, Face Powder, Vegetable Oil Soap and Terms to Agents. All Big Repeaters. LACASSIAN CO., Dept. 45, St. Louis, Mo.

GET INTO THE BIG MONEY CLASS. Make $15 to $25 daily selling the famous guaranteed Hamilton Hosiery from Mill to Wearer. Selling outfit free. R. M. Hamilton Corporation, 11 Barrow St., New York.

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—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE OFFER. HO-RO-CO, 2718 DODIER ST., ST. LOUIS, MO.

WONDERFUL INVENTION eliminates all needles for Phonographs. New, different, lasts for years. Preserves records. 12,000,000 prospects. $15 to $30 daily easy. Carry day's supply in pocket. EVERPLAY, Desk 5-D McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

$4,939.66 in 3¾ months to one Salesman in 1923. Wonderful Vapor Humidifier. 66 Miles on 1 Gallon! Resident County Distributor—Salesmen wanted, handy with car. Exclusive. Patented. 200% profit. 1 free, demonstrator. VIX, 565 Washington, Suite 390, Chicago.

HIGH GRADE SALESMEN WANTED

SELL COAL IN CARLOAD LOTS. Side or main line. Experience unnecessary. EARN WEEK'S PAY IN AN HOUR. WASHINGTON COAL COMPANY, 712 Coal Exchange Building, Armour Station, Chicago.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

WRITE FOR MONEY—We want people to write articles, stories, scenarios, poems, etc., for publication. Inclose self addressed envelope. CALIFORNIA GUIDE, Box 697, Los Angeles, California.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED FOR PUBLICATION. GOOD IDEAS BRING BIG MONEY. SUBMIT MSS., OR WRITE LITERARY BUREAU, 110, HANNIBAL, MO.

EARN $25 WEEKLY IN SPARE TIME writing for newspapers and magazines. Experience unnecessary. Copyright book, "How to Write for Pay" FREE. PRESS SYNDICATE 997, Times Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

SHORT STORIES ARE IN GREAT DEMAND. We are short story specialists—let us make yours salable. No courses or books. Write for details. FRANK PRESS SERVICE, Dept. 2, 411 Humboldt Pkwy, Buffalo, N. Y.

AUTOMOBILE PARTS

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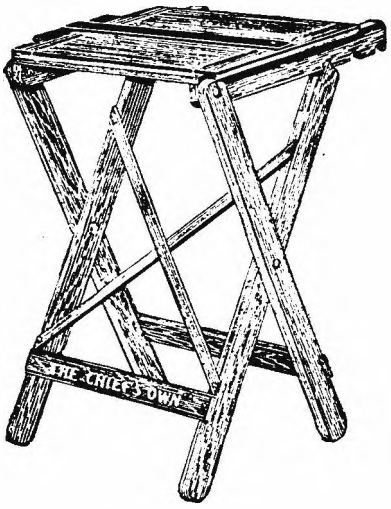

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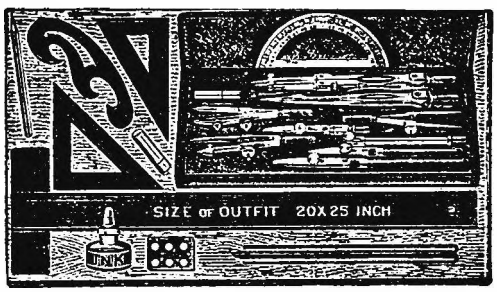

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The Roaring Forties

By ARTHUR HUNT CHUTE

FOREWORD

THE events recorded in this narrative took place between the years 1854 and 1857, when New England was supreme upon the sea, when the Yankee clipper queened it over every ocean.

In the clipper ship era, America reached her zenith on the sea. Then every town and hamlet along the New England coast was dotted with shipyards, while the Yankee house flags were known in every quarter of the globe. Then all the great fortunes of the United States were derived from maritime endeavor, hence the interest in ships was more than a sentiment.

James Baynes, of the Black Ball Line, Donald MacKay, and Bully Forbes were dominating characters of the clipper ship era.

In the Louvre in Paris is the bust of Donald MacKay, the foremost sailing ship designer of all time. He was born and bred in Nova Scotia, he built ships in New-

buryport and in Boston. He built such ships as the world shall never see again; greatest of them all, the Lightning.

To-day, we may look at pictures on the wall, but the breath of life is not in pictures. To see aright, we must behold the living Lightning, riding before the gales like some archangel of the tempest.

Four hundred and thirty-six miles in one day was the achievement of the Lightning, a sailing ship record for all time. Take notice, ye who boast of speed and progress, that this record was achieved in the year 1854! Only in our own day have we been able to surpass with steam and electricity that immortal record carved out in those roaring days by naked fists and manhood's hearts of oak.

Why did the Yankee lose his leadership upon the sea? Because of the passing of the sailing ship, is commonly given as the reason, but this is superficial. The same men who gained renown in sail could gain renown in steam.

The Yankees turned from their maritime empire because they lost the vision of the sea. The railroads, the prairie farms, and the wealth of an opening West allured them, and they turned their backs upon blue water.

England, with her cliffs forever whitened by the foam of the Channel, has never been allowed to lose the vision of the sea, and she has never lost her heritage upon the water. That same heritage, with reënkindled vision, may even yet return to New England.

A friend of mine laments: "We used to have lions and tigers in the woods; now we've got nothing but chipmunks."

When the old-timer utters this lament he is thinking of America's royal blood, of her cattle kings, and her clipper captains, imperial gamblers who used to play poker with ten thousand head of steer in the jack pot, who used to bet, at the Astor House bar, for stakes that were nothing less than the commercial supremacy of the world.

These were strong men with strong virtues, and also with strong vices. Their whisky and their poker might not commend them to our sterilized humanitarians. But when we hear the milk and water slopping in humanitarian veins, we must admit a hankering for the dashing pungency of Bully Forbes, with his "Hell or Melbourne in sixty days."

Depend upon it there was no "safety first" emblazoned on the cabin bulkhead of the fastest ship that sailed the seas.

It was rumored that Forbes was occasionally religious, but that there was no religion with him outside the three mile limit.

This rumor was not just. Outside the three mile limit Bully Forbes represented the strongest, and manliest religion—the religion of valor.

Whenever the Rev. Dr. Broughton in his ministerial capacity upbraided Forbes for "cracking on," his rejoinder was: "The bold man seldom gets hurt"; another way of saying bravery is beloved of God.

I always intended to put Forbes down on paper, but he is an elusive person, this master of the Lightning, alias the Valkyrie. I have taken him out of the pages of history, allowing him at times the freedom of fiction, for Forbes was nothing if he was not free.

CHAPTER I.

DEVOTEES OF BEAUTY.

"THE two most beautiful things in the world are women and roses," exclaimed Captain Forbes.

"Ah," replied Donald MacKay, "but you have never seen Valkyrie under sail." Valkyrie was merely a draftsman's plan on blueprint. But for Donald MacKay she was the most wondrous of his storm birds.

They were in the model room, at Newburyport, discussing hemp and rig, when Mary Williston, passing without, caused a sudden distraction.

The girl in the street paused and smiled, then catching a glimpse of Donald MacKay, she waved her hand and in another moment came bounding into the model room.

On the China Coast it was rumored that Captain Forbes had a way with him with the ladies. At all events he now evidenced

an amazing interest. Before his appraising eye, every movement of Mary Williston appeared enticing. She was clad in sailor reefer, and white duck skirt, worn shorter than the custom, revealing the clean ankles of the thoroughbred. Hers was that kind of dress admired most by men, affected least by women, designed primarily for service, for she was the girl of the great outdoors, yet not without its daintiness.

Winds and seas had imparted to her a radiant and healthful glow. Beyond a rose, there was no artful touch; indeed there was no need, for the dark serge reefer set off the blue eyes and the blond hair in bewitching contrast.

On her arm she carried something wrapped up in an oilskin jacket, which she began to unfold. Then, startled by a too curious attention from the stranger, she wrapped it tight again, assuming a manner distant and reserved.

"You must not be shy, my dear," said Donald MacKay, in reassuring tones. "Guess who we have in here to-night."

"I can't possibly say."

With a slight bow toward the stranger, Donald MacKay announced, "Captain Forbes, my niece, Miss Mary Williston."

"Oh, oh, but I am glad to meet you," said the girl, once more, all vivacity, for Captain Forbes was the sailor hero wherever square rig flourished.

Mary Williston, a sailor's daughter in a sailor town, had heard the name "Bully Forbes," since childhood, associated with wonder stories of New England on the sea.

As Captain Forbes advanced and took the girl's soft hand in his iron paw, there was presented a picture of beauty and the beast. The only soft touch about him was the warm, admiring light of his eye. But even this momentary softening could not veil his hard, almost brutal expression. Every purposeful line of his face, every movement of his lean, lithe body bespoke driving force incarnate.

What in others might have been called a boastful strut was pardonable with him when it was borne in mind that he was *the* sail carrier in a fleet of sail carriers.

Forbes was the first to get down to the commonplace.

"Where have you been with the oilskin jacket?"

"Out sailing in the harbor."

"She's a bonnie sailor," broke in Donald MacKay; "can handle my yacht, the Alcala, by herself, better than any lad in town."

"Well, it's a treat to hear of a girl that can do things like that."

But Donald MacKay was not in agreement. "No, I don't believe in it. Of course, I have to give in, but as Mrs. MacKay says, it's hardly the thing for a girl to do."

"But we're not always going to be the same as Mrs. MacKay. Just as your clippers change, so we must change, Uncle Donald.

"Bravo," exclaimed Captain Forbes. "You stick it out, Miss Mary, for your share of sport, and if they ever turn you away from the Alcala, come to me, and I'll let you sail Valkyrie."

"Let me sail Valkyrie!" Mary's eyes were dancing. "Of course, I couldn't sail her. But remember, Captain Forbes, I won't forget what you have said, and sometime you've got to take me for a trip in the Valkyrie, because I know she's going to be the loveliest ship that Uncle Donald ever built.

"I'm awfully glad that you two are here together now, because I've got something that I made for your new clipper. What do you think I have in here?"

Both shook their heads, while the girl held up the oilskin bundle, in suggestive manner.

"Well, you can each have one guess. What do you say it is Uncle Donald!"

"A ship's cat."

"And you?"

"A looking glass for the captain's cabin."

"No, you're both wrong."

With a certain ceremoniousness, she unrolled the oilskin parcel, disclosing a scarlet burgee with a blue star.

At the sight of this Donald MacKay's eyes filled with tears, and he arose out of respect for Mary's flag.

While the old designer stood, visibly moved, Mary exclaimed in clear, ringing tones:

" Uncle Donald, and Captain Forbes, I have great pleasure in presenting to you this scarlet burgee, which I have worked with my own hands, to be flown from the main truck of the Valkyrie. I hope that this flag will be associated with what I believe will be a distinguished clipper, perhaps the queen.

" I present this flag with the hope that it may fly with good luck above Valkyrie on every sea."

With more emotion than might have been expected from a dour Highlander, Donald MacKay said:

" I will ask you, Captain Forbes, as prospective owner, to receive this flag."

Here, at last, was something that impinged upon a strong man's love, for under all his blood and iron, Bully Forbes had a tender place in his heart for the tall ships that had done so much for the development of his country.

With the gravity of one who took upon himself a sacred trust, Captain Forbes accepted the scarlet burgee from the hand of Mary Williston.

" I am not a speech-maker, Miss Mary, I am merely a rough sailor, but I accept this flag with the wish that Valkyrie may well sustain this gift and trust of a fair lady."

Mary did not tarry, after this formal presentation. With a swift adieu, she departed as suddenly as she had come.

CHAPTER II.

A DREAMER IN YARDS AND SPARS.

DUSK was gathering, shadows were deepening in the model room. A long unbroken silence fell. Captain Forbes still held the scarlet burgee, while for him the room was instinct with the radiant beauty of the girl. But Donald MacKay saw her no more; his eye was on another beauty, the Valkyrie.

It was most fitting that MacKay, a veritable eagle, should be the creator of soaring clippers. He was, in one, the dreamer, and the doer. His strong and rugged figure spoke of action, while in his eye was the light of the Highland mystic.

All about on the walls were the models of ships which he had created. This was the workroom of the premier sailing ship designer of all time. The soul of an artist never conceived anything finer than his clippers, representing beauty, born not for ease, but for the test of hardest action.

The Valkyrie was being built for the order of Captain Forbes, a man who not only knew ships, but loved them for their own sakes. Thus between designer and owner a perfect harmony existed.

Forbes possessed an infallible faith in MacKay.

" You've made forty ships, and every one has been successful. I don't believe that you could make a failure."

" Ah," replied MacKay, " in our finest work we never can be sure. We may frame and fashion the fabric, but in the end the way of a ship in the midst of the sea must always remain a mystery."

" This time, Captain Forbes, you have asked for speed. You may depend upon me to do my best."

" That's enough for me. Don't spare yourself. I'm behind you for every penny of expense. This time you may sacrifice every other consideration to speed. Already the weak sisters are full of fears. They say that she's a freak; that's she's too sharp; that she's overhatted; that you have been too bold, and chanced too much. But as you and I both know, it's boldness that wins, both in designing and in sailing. If she's extreme in model, I'll take a chance as far as you will. I'll trust you to make her the fastest ship that sails the seas."

A few moments later Captain Forbes departed, leaving Donald MacKay alone in the darkness of the model room. Outside the harbor lights twinkled like a garden of stars, but MacKay was gazing beyond the twinkling lights, beyond the harbor, at the black and lifting ocean, stretching out and out into the night.

There, with the eye of a seer, he saw his new creation, no longer as a model on the blueprint—he saw her, full born, with soaring spires of canvas, running down her easting. He heard the whistle and scream of the mighty westerlies in her rigging, he himself enduring all the buffetings, until at

times it seemed as though the breath was nigh gone from him. In the fury of the elements his heart was torn with every groaning spar and wrenched with every twanging stay.

Hour after hour, in the darkness, he fought it out in those roaring latitudes that search the very heart and fabric of a vessel. He was an artist who created beauties to queen it o'er the ocean. Such creations, even in the artist's soul, were born with the travail of the tempest.

All night long in spirit he was wrestling with the Roaring Forties, when at last the laggard dawn crept up across the harbor, Donald MacKay came back to the model room, like one returning from mortal combat.

In the gray light the face of the old designer was haggard from vicarious struggle, but in his eye there shone exultant light. Gazing at the many models of his workroom, he exclaimed:

"Yes, I believe she'll be the greatest of my storm birds."

CHAPTER III.

TEA FROM CHINA.

THE Sea Witch, of Salem, docked that afternoon at Pier 9, in the East River. The same evening, at supper, hundreds of New Yorkers remarked on the fact that their steaming cups of tea came from the first fragrant chests which the Witch had rushed ashore.

The lofty spars and famed speed of the Yankee clippers had caused the tea trade of the London market to pass almost out of the hands of the English shipowners. In this hour of gloom the stout hearted merchants of London and Liverpool had resolved that England should again become mistress of the seas. Thus an international contest had been precipitated which was followed with breathless interest on both sides of the Atlantic.

Among the evening's visitors at Pier 9 were Captain Forbes and Richard Green. They drove down to the water front together behind a pair of blood horses. Leaving the coachman at the dock entrance, they went aboard the Witch to pay their respects.

During their sojourn in the captain's cabin the rumor of their identity went forth. When they reappeared it was the signal for a demonstration.

"That's Bully Forbes," some one shouted, and in a moment the crowd burst into cheering.

"Who's that with him?"

"Dickey Green, the English guy who says he's going to bustle the bounce out of the Yanks."

Jeers and catcalls followed. But the sight of the famous rivals leaving the gangplank arm in arm precluded further hostility.

From Pier 9 the two shipowners drove up to the Astor House, the meeting place of the shipping fraternity. There was nothing tame about this Astor House gathering of gamblers and plungers, with whom fortunes were made or lost in a night. This evening the great question was, who would be the winner of the China fleet racing with new teas for the London market?

As Forbes and Green came into this merry company a florid Englishman with mutton chop whiskers was holding forth in excited tones.

"No, no, we can't do that, but we'll lay a thousand guineas, at one to three, on the challenger against the fleet, bar one. Or we'll lay the same, even odds, on the challenger against the Typhoon."

"We'll take you, even odds on the Typhoon!" sang out a dozen voices. But before the bet was closed the late arrivals had usurped attention.

The florid Englishman, recognizing the newcomers, rapped for attention.

"My word! Dickey Green and Bully Forbes coming in arm and arm! Gentlemen, I'll give you a toast: Here's to the British Lion and the American Eagle lying down together."

A click of glasses followed, with shouts of: "Dickey Green! Dickey Green!"

This was Richard Green, of the famous Blackwall Line—a bluff, red-nosed, Johnnie Bull, in nowise given to diplomacy. Replying to the calls of the crowd in loud, downright tones, he exclaimed:

"Gentlemen, you've heard about the British Lion and the American Eagle lying down together. Now, I don't know anything about that, but I do know that the British shipowners have at last sat down to play a fair and open game with the Yankees, and by Jove, we'll trump 'em!"

A couple of tea merchants from Mincing Lane greeted this with a "Hear! Hear!" at once drowned by a mighty chorus of dissent.

Up to date the advantage had been overwhelmingly with the Americans. Last year, out of China, the Witch of the Wave had won the blue ribbon of the oceans.

This year, news had come that five Yankees and four Britishers had started out of Foo Chow on that trading race course round the world. They had sailed with new teas, from the Pagoda anchorage, on the 1st of January, in the height of the northeast monsoon, and had all made remarkable runs to Java Head, which news had been telegraphed to England. Since then there had been no further word. But the announcement of the finish was hourly expected by the English mail.

What raised the interest to fever heat among this shipping crowd was the fact that representatives of the two favorite racing clippers were now in their midst.

Captain Forbes was the owner of the pride of Newburyport, the Typhoon; Dickey Green was owner of the Blackwall crack, the Challenger.

At sounds of animated discussion from the two famed owners, the gossip around the bar subsided, while all strained to listen.

"The Challenger," said Green, "is an exceptional ship in any weather, but of course she is at her best in moderate and light winds. That's why this year I think the chances are with us."

"Granted," replied Forbes, "if they have light airs, but I'm not so sure that they won't have gales. Give the Typhoon strong beam and quartering breezes, and I believe she'll show her heels to anything afloat.

"Mind you, I'm judging by actual experience since I took that beauty out of Donald MacKay's yards. On every trip she's raised my hopes. On her last, around the Horn, she only shifted topsails twice. I never dreamed she'd make it from California for this year's tea. But Killick knew better than I, he raced her across the Pacific in ballast, touching at the Sandwich Islands only long enough to back his main yard off Diamond Head, and send the mails ashore.

"That was the last I heard from Killick. Next thing I knew I got this message:"

Forbes unfolded a piece of paper, and read:

> Typhoon, leading China fleet, first through Sunda Straits.

A loud cheer followed. Green received this news unmoved.

"Yes, sir, I had that same advice," he replied, "and it looked well for your ship, but the Sunda Straits are a long ways from home."

At a caustic note in the Englishman's voice, Forbes' interest in the conversation suddenly flagged. Without a word he broke off and drifted into a far corner, where he sat alone, imbibing much whisky, and glowering across at the impassive face of Richard Green.

As the evening wore on, Forbes let out an occasional snort of rage at some fancied insult over which he brooded. There was a jaunty lift to his head that betokened slapdash chancing, while the supercilious curl of his lip spoke of rivalry, bitter, and strong. Now and again he started up impetuously, then sank back again into his cups.

Finally Michael, the venerable bartender, announced:

"Gentlemen, I'll take last orders, bar closes in five minutes."

By this time Forbes appeared like a volcano about to leap into eruption. Nothing daunted, Richard Green came over to bid him good night. He found his rival in offensive mood.

"Well, captain, we're still at sea as to the result."

"At sea be damned," answered Forbes.

"What d'ye mean?"

"I mean Typhoon will show her heels to all the China fleet."

"You're talking loud, my friend, for such an early hour of night."

At the Englishman's taunting tone,

Forbes' face suddenly became purple, while his ugly jaw shot out. Springing up from his table, it seemed for a moment as though a fight were imminent. Everybody closed in quickly to restrain him. The air had become electric, the attention of all riveted on the rival shipowners now glaring at one another.

"If you're so insultingly sure, Captain Forbes, I'll take you on. I'll lay you my Challenger against your Typhoon, ship for ship, the looser to be forfeit to the winner."

Even in the Astor House, in that atmosphere of gamblers, and reckless plungers, such a bet had never before been heard. It was astounding.

Forbes who had been flushed from much drinking, paled at the magnitude of the stakes. But he did not hesitate.

"I'm on."

Almost before the crowd could draw breath, the wager was accepted.

"One word more," said Green.

"What is it?"

"In case that either vessel should be lost, the loser will forfeit to the winner thirty thousand pounds.

"Aye, that's going a wee bit too far," said a Glasgow Scot.

But Forbes had now swept away even the thought of caution.

"All right, I'll lay thirty thousand pounds behind Typhoon, in case of wreck."

"Right you are," said the Englishman, and the bet was closed.

CHAPTER IV.

NEWS OF THE FLEET.

AS the crowd dispersed, Captain Forbes went out alone.

His carriage was waiting for him at the curb, but he was in no mood for driving home. Despatching the coachman, he set off on foot down the avenue.

Crossing to Brooklyn in the Fulton ferry, he hired a horse, and rode far out on the Long Island shore, striving to catch a first glimpse of the English packet, coming in from sea.

The weather was thick outside, and though he rode for several hours, clear out to Gravesend Bay, he could descry nothing but impenetrable fog. There was something in the mystery of that fog that filled the heart of Captain Forbes with haunting terror.

He had always professed himself a fatalist, but to-night his philosophy seemed to fall away. Harassed by a thousand fears, he came back in the Fulton ferry just as the gray of day was disclosing the tower of Trinity Church, above the low sleeping skyline of Manhattan.

On his return to the Astor House, Forbes discovered that during the night the packet ship had come in through the fog, while he looked for her in vain from the Long Island shore.

Even at that early hour the hotel rotunda was thronged with shipping men, discussing the latest news in excited tones.

A friend, noticing Forbes's apprehensive look, exclaimed:

"Why, hullo, captain, I never saw you like that before. What's up?"

"I suppose it's the China race that's got me jumpy," said Forbes, with an unsteady voice. "Have you heard the news?"

"No, I've just come in," replied the other. "Let's join the crowd, and we'll get the latest."

They started toward an excited group, when Dickey Green, and the two tea merchants from Mincing Lane, standing by, caused Forbes to stop short. There was a ring of exultation in the English voices that went to his heart like a knell of doom.

The friend, who was accompanying him, felt Forbes's hand tremble on his shoulder, and saw his rude and swollen countenance go livid. There was deepest tragedy in this sudden weakening of a man of iron.

Without a word the friend led him off to his room.

"Bring Sammy Samuels," said Forbes huskily. "He'll tell me the truth."

A few moments later Captain Samuels of the packet Dreadnaught, a most amiable and cheery fellow, was ushered in.

"Hullo, Forbes, old man, last time I saw you was with Jimmy Baynes on the Salthouse Dock."

"Tell me the worst," said Forbes.

Captain Samuels, grew grave. "The

Typhoon, leading the China fleet, went down in the English Channel."

"She was almost there?"

"Yes, she sank right in sight of the lights of home."

"Killick, and rum," Forbes groaned.

"No, sir, it was not rum. The Typhoon was rammed in fog, off the Bill of Portland. Killick went down with his ship, a crack racing skipper, doing his duty to the end.

"Poor old Killick put up the race of his life, and went out like a man. Had it not been for the tragedy in the channel, with the advantage of the terrific start which she made to Anjer, the Typhoon would have beaten the China fleet to London dock by over a week."

Captain Samuels stopped short. The agony written on the shipowner's face caused him to pour a drink as a restorative.

"I never dreamed, Forbes, old man, that this loss would cut you up so badly."

"Ah, it's not this alone. I'm ruined. What now will become of the Valkyrie?"

CHAPTER V.

WRANGLES—AND A TEMPEST.

A BRONZED, lanky fellow in blue overalls came into Gus Thomson's barber shop on Main Street. A half dozen customers were ahead of him, but he took his place in the barber's chair before them all, which precedence was quite correct in Newburyport, since the lanky fellow was a master shipwright. His breast pocket was purposely cut shallow so that a protruding rule might publish his profession to all the world.

When it came to pride, the only thing to compare with a New England shipwright was a barnyard rooster.

"Well, John Cameron, how are you today?" inquired the barber with becoming deference.

"Not so good."

"How's that?"

"Why, Captain Forbes lost control of the Valkyrie. He got bust in the China race, and had to mortgage his interests, and now, worse luck, he's been bought out by N. L. & G. Gertridge, of Boston."

The barber cocked a knowing eye. "N. L. & G. Gertridge—No Loss and Great Gain Gertridge. I know 'em well."

"It's a disgrace, them critters getting in on the MacKay yards

"Captain Forbes and Donald MacKay used to get along like brothers. Whatever MacKay wanted, Forbes paid for, but with Gertridge it's wrangle and row from morning till night. It's enough to make the chief go crazy. A damn shame, too, him the greatest shipbuilder in the world, tied hand and foot by a miserable old skinflint. I've seen some awful times up in the model room, with Gertridge standing over the blueprint of the Valkyrie, and fighting it out by the hour.

"You know MacKay's a bit of a heretic among designers. Gertridge listens to the lunkheads who build ships by the mile and saw 'em off by the yard. They say that the Valkyrie is too sharp; that MacKay has increased her length too far in comparison to her breadth and depth. Gertridge is always coming down here with some new worry."

"Well, don't you think yourself that the Valkyrie is a bit of a freak?" inquired the barber.

"She's the sharpest ship that was ever laid upon the ways. But don't you fret, old Donald MacKay knows what he's doing. The other day they came to a deadlock over the masting scheme. With the chiefs wrangling, it passed on to the men till everybody was dissatisfied. When MacKay was almost in despair Captain Forbes came up to superintend the yards. With the sight of Forbes everything started up again with a jump.

"The day he arrived here there was a lot o' rowing and jawing going on, when a feller came through the crowd looking about as sweet as a hyena. There was a lot o' drunks, and one o' 'em bumps into him. Next thing, his cane was whizzing over his shoulders, cracking everybody right and left.

"Jim Blackburn got the side of his head split open, and was picking up a rock to brain him, when some one yells:

"'Look out! That's Bully Forbes!'

"Say, mister, in another minute Forbes

had gone through that gang like a dose of dynamite!

"Any time after that when there was a row all he had to do was to show his peek-a-boo, and the worst guy was about as dangerous as a sucking dove.

"I dunno what it is about that feller Forbes; when he's mad you can feel him comin' like a kick in the belly. Just let him shoot out that ugly jaw and toss his nose into the air and snort, and by God, every mother's son is lookin' for a funk hole. Aye, he's a man driver, all right, all right!"

"Ain't he going to sail as master of the new clipper?" inquired the barber.

"That's what they say. If he does he'll make them sit up and take notice. He's only got one idea for the Valkyrie, and that is carrying on. MacKay knows this, and he never stayed a ship more scientifically; he's taking no chances with his gear aloft. Topsails, topgallantsails, and even royals are diagonally roped from clew and erring. Her fore and main stays and backstays are of eleven and a half inch Russian hemp. As for spars, they are the toughest sticks ever put into a vessel. If Bully Forbes ever gets to sea with that clipper, Gus, you can take it from me, she'll astonish the world."

"Well, why do you say, if she ever gets to sea?"

John Cameron's answer was to shrug his shoulders.

"But," pursued Gus, "with all New England waiting for Valkyrie to beat the China fleet, how in the name o' Heaven can any one hold her up?"

Cameron's face wore a look of Brahministic resignation.

"What can we do, Gus?"

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERY SHIP.

THERE was scandal in the air. Gossip about another man's wife was bad enough, but when the fair name of a ship was called in question there was no limit to which the scandalmonger might not go.

Like a fated beauty, suspicion dogged Valkyrie from the start.

With the whole town talking of something awful impending, there came upon Mary Williston an increasing fear—not of an evil star, but of foul conspiracy. It was this fear that sent her out alone into the darkness on the eve of launching.

The longshore section of Newburyport was no place for a gentle girl at this unearthly hour. Mrs. Williston would have been horrified, and rightly so, if she had known. But her daughter's other name was "Independence," and so, unescorted and unafraid, she tripped along through the sailor town until she arrived at the MacKay yards.

The whole place was illuminated in anticipation of the morrow. But even here the atmosphere of dread expectancy was not allayed. At the gates, and all along throughout the yards, Mary encountered groups of workmen discussing in awed tones the scandal of MacKay's latest beauty.

Mary did not pause to listen. Coming around the corner by the mold loft, the Valkyrie burst into view. Under the rising moon her spars and rigging were touched with mystic light.

She was fully rigged on the stocks with all her gear rove off. It was the purpose of Donald MacKay that she should go off the ways with three skysail yards across and colors flying.

All the staging used in the construction of the ship had been removed, leaving her hull in full view as she rested on the ways. Every line of that hull indicated power and speed.

Mary looked aloft at the intricate ropes, at the mighty masts, bearing huge yards. Then looking higher and higher, she saw the masts tapering, while the spars grew increasingly slender. Everywhere between yards and spars appeared the loon and tracery of lacelike rigging.

Her mast and spar measurements were tremendous. Gazing at this soaring three skysail yarder caused Mary to marvel at such daring. Even to an eye untrained Valkyrie was an audacious picture.

In a sudden burst of admiration she clapped her hands.

A burly figure was coming toward her from the shadow. As a black velvet coat and white hair came into view she cried:

"Why, it's Uncle Donald!"

"You're the last person I expected to see," he replied, beaming. "And what's the clapping for?"

"For the Valkyrie. I saw my flag flying up there on the main peak, and it seemed so far up that it just thrilled me. Why, Uncle Donald, it makes me dizzy even to look up there, and then it makes me shudder, too, because it seems almost defiance."

"Tut! tut! tut!"

Donald MacKay uttered the last with the tone of one vexed by a too insistent questioning.

"What's the greatest thing you see in that ship, Uncle Donald?"

"Power to carry sail, my dear. I don't believe that there'll be wind enough in all the ocean to really test her strength."

There was not a curve or line or angle of Valkyrie which did not carry out the idea of perfect proportion and balance. Her gracefully curving cutwater and neatly rounded stern fitted each other to perfection. Strength and power wedded to delicate, fragile beauty was the elusive blending which distinguished MacKay's cracks from all others.

"I never saw her look so lovely," said the designer. "To-morrow will be my great day. After unending perplexities and fears, everything is complete."

"Everything, but to-morrow's launching," answered Mary.

"No buts, Mary."

The night watchman, William Darrach, was approaching, and MacKay hailed him. He came up quickly, accompanied by a little girl, carrying a dinner pail.

Donald MacKay noticed the child first.

"What are you doing here, my dear?"

"Just bringing grandpa his supper."

"And what's your name?"

"Ellen."

"Ah, that's a lovely name." Reaching into his pocket he pulled out two tickets, which he gave to the night watchman.

"These are for you and Ellen for the banquet in the mold loft to-morrow. You'll be sure to be there, won't you Darrach?"

The little girl danced with glee. But the night watchman only touched his cap and looked sadly at Valkyrie.

"What's the matter?"

"I beg pardon, sir, I know there's something wrong, but I cannot tell."

"See here, Darrach, you musn't allow yourself to get like that, it will never do. Now you let my niece, Miss Mary, stay with you and Ellen here for a few minutes, while I make my last trip around the ways, to see that everything is right."

"Can't I go with you, sir?"

"No, you stay here with the girls."

"All right, sir, but be careful."

Donald MacKay's answer was a defiant laugh, and he was gone. Mary saw him vanish with a sense of doom.

"What makes you afraid, Darrach?"

"Have you heard the rumors, miss?"

"Yes, I've heard them, but I don't believe them, do you?"

"I'm afraid I do. It may seem strange to you, but I've been all my life in shipyards, till I've come to see that ships has souls, the same as humans, and it's a wae day when a ship is born with an evil soul."

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, it's plain and simple, miss; some ships is lucky, and bears a charmed life, others is born under an evil star. Of the unlucky ships, the worst of all is the man-killers, ships that without ever falling into trouble themselves, never arrive at the end of a voyage without having lost a man, in one way or another, washed overboard, falling from aloft, or—"

Darrach cut short his doleful tale, for Donald MacKay, from a distance, was calling for Mary to join him. As she bent over to kiss Ellen good-by, Mary saw in the upturned face the most tragic, haunting fear, the fear of a little child.

CHAPTER VII.

VALKYRIE'S TRYST.

DONALD MACKAY slept fitfully that night, his brief slumber broken by the apparition of a living ship upon the ways.

In his nightmare, it was borne upon him

that Valkyrie had an affinity for the sea, beyond all his other storm birds. He saw her stir upon the cradle, in answer to the breathing lift of the Atlantic. One lapping touch of the finger of the tide, and the desire of the deep went tingling through the vessel.

There on the slipping cradle from keel to truck, from stem to stern, shimmering in moonlight radiance, was a bride whose loveliness could wait no longer.

Out of the hazy realm of dreamland, like someone who beheld afar, MacKay saw the ship of his creation with languid grace stirring to keep her love tryst.

At first, soft and easy was the wooing of the ocean; soft and gentle was the answer of the vessel. Then—a crash, a roar, a mountain wave uprising, an all enfolding cloud of mist and spray; and in a sea as white as carded wool, Valkyrie leaped to find her lover.

By that strange second sight of the Gael, Donald MacKay, the Highland mystic, was prepared for the worst.

Before the dawn, there came a furtive rapping. He was waiting, as one who expected a summons. Lighting a candle he came down hastily, unbarred and opened the great front door.

The westering moon was sinking low across the harbor, brightening the landscape in its mellow glow. There upon the doorstep he beheld Ellen Darrach, sobbing piteously.

MacKay knew that evil had come before she spoke. Placing his arms around the little girl he drew her softly to him.

"Grandpa was killed," she sobbed. "Something happened to the Valkyrie. She tumbled off the ways and got all smashed and broken."

Tears trickled down MacKay's rugged cheeks, not at the shattering of his handiwork, but at the sorrow of the child.

What was to have been Newburyport's great day dawned a day of gloom. In the breathless morning the very flags hung limp, and mournful. All along the waterfront, silent groups pointed with sympathy to Donald MacKay, as he drove by with white head bowed.

Inside the shipyards a vast crowd had gathered. As the chief drove up, Captain Forbes met him. Together they repaired to the model room.

"What happened, Forbes?"

"The wedging gave, and she settled back on the blocks till she rolled them over."

"How was Darrach killed?"

"The poor fellow must have gotten suspicious, and climbed underneath, to see what was the trouble. While there, a block evidently rolled over and crushed him."

"Terrible! A good faithful fellow was Darrach.

"And what was the extent of the damage?"

"Her hull is intact, but her gear aloft is completely wrecked. This delay will be trying, to say the least."

"It's the loss of Darrach that I deplore most. Of course it's hard to see the work of your hands spoiled, but we can begin again."

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHO'S THE BOY?"

NAT GERTRIDGE, JR., had called with his dog-cart to take Mary Williston for a drive. He was son of one of the first families, becoming incredibly rich through the rising fortunes of the clipper. Was it any wonder that a prospective mother-in-law beamed upon him?

"Oh, but you are a stranger! There's no one we would rather see. Won't you come right in, Mr. Gertridge?"

"No, Mrs. Williston, I think I must wait here, thanks. My horse is a bit restless. Just tell Mary to hurry, will you?

"Hurry, indeed!" said Mary to herself. "I like your nerve."

Mary had been ready for sometime, but overhearing Nat's peremptory remark, she kept that young gentleman cooling his heels.

Mrs. Williston bobbed in and out of the house in fine frenzy. Finally, she exclaimed:

"What on earth is the matter, Mary? I never saw you so provokingly slow. You know you shouldn't keep Mr. Gertridge waiting like that."

"And why shouldn't I?" inquired Mary

languidly. "I don't want him to think I am easy, do I?"

As a declaration of independence, the girl flung off her wrap and settled back cozily upon a divan, while the important individual waiting at the gate went over the list of girls that would have been crazy for a drive with him.

Nat had been ignominiously dangling about for over half an hour when the cause of his exasperation finally appeared. He intended to register a protest, but the sight of Mary had an inhibitive effect.

Nat Gertridge was a dark, æsthetic person, destined to shine with women rather than with men; of a nervous disposition, he possessed amazing self-control, hiding his true nature behind an impassive mask. His heavy jaw, in conjunction with a lean face, bespoke a grim determination of the mind that would carry on long after brute force had succumbed.

This afternoon, in spite of vexation, Nat inquired blandly:

"How would you like to go down to see the Valkyrie, Mary?"

"That's just where I'd love to go."

"All right, we'll drive right down to the yards. You know I am very much interested in this new clipper."

"Why?"

"Because on the day of her launching I'm to take over from father as managing director."

"Oh, isn't that simply splendid! And it seems to me you are still only a boy, Nat."

"I've been out of Harvard five years. That's time enough to learn a lot in the shipping line."

"Especially if one has the name of Gertridge."

"Well, since my grandfather started in West India trade our business has certainly grown. I believe I am coming in for the best days. Freights were never higher. Ships were never a sounder investment. I wouldn't be surprised if this new clipper pays for herself before she's off the ways a year."

"And if she does, Nat, I suppose you'll be getting so rich that you won't even know your old playmates."

"Now, Mary, you mustn't get sarcastic, especially since we have been friends so long."

"Yes, Nat, I've known you ever since I was a wee tot. You seemed like such a big boy then. Don't you remember when I used to lisp and call you 'big brovver'?"

"I wish you would still call me that!"

"But I myself have grown since then. What looks big to us when we are little doesn't always look big when we are grown up."

His vanity was piqued. But Mary continued:

"Never mind what you look like, Nat. They say that you are surely going to be one of the big ones in the shipping world."

With face lighting up, he exclaimed:

"Yes, Donald MacKay has been the making of us. Now, with six of his clippers I don't believe that any one can possibly compete with us."

"If you think so well of my Uncle Donald, why do you embarrass him so often?"

"That's just what you don't understand, Mary. We are not building ships to please the artistic temperament of Donald MacKay. We're building them to pay dividends. And when we are talking about that end, we know our own needs better than any designer."

"You always seem to know exactly what you want, Nat."

"Yes; that's why I know I'm going to win exactly the things I start after."

"Oh, really!"

By this time they had come to the MacKay yards. As they drove around the corner, by the mold loft, the Valkyrie flashed into view. Every trace of the fatal night had been wiped out, and now she appeared lovelier than ever. MacKay still held to his original purpose, and she was to be launched fully rigged, with three skysail yards across.

Handing over the horse to an attendant, Nat assisted Mary up a long stairway to the lofty deck, where at the moment a crew of riggers were busy.

Mary looked at the flags with which the new queen was arrayed. Her eyes went up and up, till her glance rested on the high main truck. With that glance there came a

sudden dread, for the scarlet burgee was entwined with the lanyards. Mary knew the significance of this.

With the same idea Nat burst out:

" Hello—that's bad! The house flag all tied up! An evil omen!"

With more than casual impatience Mary stamped her foot.

" Oh, why, why can't some one go and loose that flag?"

The peeved tone was not lost on Gertridge. True, he could not climb aloft himself; but he could do something better—he could show his authority. Near by, a tall, trim young fellow of quiet demeanor was superintending the job of jacking up the backstays. Tapping him on the shoulder, Gertridge exclaimed:

" Just go aloft there, my man, and unfurl that flag, will you?"

" How many jobs do you suppose I can do at once?" was the caustic reply.

" You don't seem to know who I am. Well, I'm Nathaniel Gertridge, Jr."

" And I'm Richard Dunbar, with something else to do besides amusing you. If you want that flag unfurled, do it yourself."

" Oh, yes, do, Nat!" urged Mary, quick to catch the irony of this suggestion.

Nat cast on the girl a reproachful look, but she had no eye for him. She was gazing intently at the other person, in dirty dungarees. Blessed with keen perception, she missed nothing; his well shaped head was set on the long, lean body of an athlete. There was something clean cut about this stranger, both in face and form.

At the girl's appraising glance a reticence came over Richard Dunbar. Then with sudden decisiveness he sang out:

" Here, get on with this job smartly now. I'm going aloft."

Mary noticed the curt, crisp tone of the officer class. He might be clad in overalls, but there was no mistaking the birthright to command behind that incisive order.

Nat often boasted of those who did his bidding. But here was one who could both command and do. Swinging lightly across the main ratlines, he started upward, with the lilt and swing of one accustomed to the poetry of motion.

Gazing after, Mary saw him dancing heel and toe through the buttock shrouds. Into the topmast crosstrees he raced with undiminished speed. As he advanced he took unto himself spiderlike attributes.

With bated breath, Mary beheld him climbing across the skysail yard; then, appearing scarce larger than a fly, he began to shinny up the main truck. Attaining the capping ball, holding only by his legs, with hands free, he rapidly disengaged the twined-up flag. For a moment it hung limp, then, caught by a puff, beat out with pride against the breeze.

While Mary still watched with fascination, Richard Dunbar started to descend. Putting his feet in the royal backstay, he came flashing down on deck.

" Who is that boy?" inquired Mary.

Nat's reply was a disparaging remark, muttered to himself in a surly manner.

Mary repeated, " Who's that boy?"

But still Nat remained incoherent.

The splendid Gertridge control had utterly forsaken him at the sight of Mary's amazing interest in this unknown first officer of the Valkyrie.

As Richard Dunbar vaulted lightly into their midst, after his dashing exploit aloft, Mary felt her blood tingle while the crew began to cheer.

The girl's eyes were filled with a light of deepest admiration, which made Nat Gertridge furious, since he knew that that light was not of his kindling.

As if to tantalize her consequential escort still further, without considering any of the proprieties of an introduction, Mary rushed up to Richard, exclaiming:

" Oh, that was simply wonderful. I can't thank you enough for what you've done."

As their eyes met there was a moment of dramatic silence—a moment in which each seemed to be oblivious of all else. Then the girl continued: " You know we don't want any more bad luck aboard Valkyrie, do we?"

" No; and we certainly don't intend to have any more bad luck aboard this clipper," he answered.

" How do you know we won't?" broke in Nat, with a surly growl.

Richard did not deign to answer him, but

every one turned to look upon the young shipowner, while Mary exclaimed:

"Why, Nat, what in the world do you mean by talking like that? I never knew you to be so rude before."

But this time Nat was not to be appeased. "Well, it makes me sick—this mountebank showing off with his grand stand stunts aboard one of my clippers. And you hanging on, Mary, as if it were the most heroic deed that ever happened."

"Well, it was heroic. It was splendid."

"Bah! A workman's job; any of my men could do it."

"But you couldn't do it."

"What of it? I'm not one of these hired deckhands, am I?" answered Nat.

Richard Dunbar was still silent, but the crew of riggers, at the contemptuous fling aimed at them, looked as if they would have relished tearing Gertridge asunder.

Ignoring their threatening attitude, Nat raged on: "It's preposterous, Mary! Can't I take you out for a drive without your causing a scene like this over some worthless fellow who happens to catch your eye?"

"Excuse me, Nat Gertridge—you're the one that's made the scene. If you're the least bit of a gentleman, you'll apologize to Mr. Dunbar."

"I'll see him in hell first," retorted Nat. "What gets me is, why should you be so stuck on that scarlet burgee, anyway?"

"Because I made it," answered Mary.

At this startling information, with his nose completely out of joint, and able to contain himself no longer, Nat burst away, leaving Mary alone upon the deck.

Noticing her awkward predicament, Captain Forbes, who had been observing from the poop, here intervened and kindly offered to escort the young lady to her home.

CHAPTER IX.

LAST OF THE DUNBARS.

BACK home that evening, Mary began chat with her mother about the Valkyrie. Mrs. Williston was a gossipy person, but to-night conversation lagged, while Mrs. Williston's usually blithesome face was tinged with sadness.

"What's the matter, Mumsie?"

"Don't talk to me about that Valkyrie, Mary. Since the loss of your dear father, I have often wished that we might move inland, and get out of the sight and sound of ships."

"But, you don't often talk that way."

"Ah, my dear, it's that haunted clipper of your Uncle Donald's that makes me sad. If I had my way, no daughter of mine would ever marry a man who was wedded to the sea."

"But, you like Nat Gertridge?"

"Yes, but he is a shipowner. He's wise enough to stay ashore, and let others, if they will, throw their lives away. I'm afraid that there will be many a good lad of Newburyport missing, after that new clipper has gone out."

With a pang, Mary suddenly realized that she had a very personal interest in her mother's words. True, she had always regarded herself as the good angel of this new clipper, but now, the pang in her heart was for something more than the Valkyrie.

"Yes, many a good lad out of here will be missing with that clipper." The mother repeated this as a sad refrain.

Such a refrain was not uncommon in a sailor-town. From earliest girlhood, Mary had been trained to that resignation which is the part of waiting women. Her own father had gone out on the unreturning tide. She had accepted even that. But to-night her heart cried in rebellion.

She could think of all the rest as going out, and not returning, but to-day she had seen someone that appeared invulnerable, even from the sea. There was one dominating impression that remained from Richard Dunbar; he was alive, so touched was he with the gift of life that Mary now told herself that whatever happened, Richard must come back.

Mrs. Williston still gossiped on the evil rumors of the Valkyrie, while her daughter fell to dreaming in the firelight. Yes, the longer her mind dwelt on that afternoon picture, the surer she felt that here was a boy who, going down to the sea, needed no pity.

But who was he?

Breaking into her mother's gossip, she inquired:

"Do you remember Richard Dunbar, who used to be here with the summer colony."

"Yes, I knew him well, a wild little harum-scarum, just your age, but he never had anything to do with you."

"Why?"

"Because, the little wretch was brought up to shun the company of girls. When Mr. Gertridge, very wisely sent Nat down to play with you, Richard's father pooh-poohed the idea of a boy associating with petticoats."

"And who was his father?"

"Captain Dunbar. You must have heard me speak of him, Mary."

"I don't remember."

"Well, Captain Dunbar was a great friend of your father, but thank Heaven, we never had anything to do with his cursed business."

"What business?"

"He was an opium runner." Mrs. Williston uttered this last with a horrified inflection. "As Dr. Broughton said, in the old North Church, 'unhappiness always followed those that made their fortunes in opium.' This was certainly true in the case of the Dunbars.

"Old Captain Dunbar lived like an Eastern prince. Money flowed to him like water. During the short time that he was at home, they used to say that he brought all the magnificence of the East back to New England. But he was never long ashore. There was a kind of restlessness in the Dunbars that always kept them roving.

"The opium running, I suppose, got on their nerves. It was a hazardous trade where only the swiftest keels and the bravest fighters came out alive.

"Once, when I was with your father, we saw Dunbar's clipper, the Hawk, in the river Hooghly. I can remember distinctly how she stood out against all the shipping in the river, her low black hull, and tall rakish masts. She was a beauty. Your father said that she was the prettiest little craft in the opium business. Naturally we were proud and happy when she dipped the American ensign to us as we passed up river.

"We hoped to call on the Dunbars, but they went to sea that night. A captain in the opium trade was almost always at sea, and fine seamen they were, as they had to make the passage round to China under racing canvas at all seasons and weathers.

"Off the China coast they were constantly face to face with death. They had to fight against Chinese smugglers, and hostile mandarins; often they stood up single handed against whole fleets of Chinese pirates. As if this were not enough, they had the typhoons.

"It was in this most perilous trade that the great Dunbar fortune was established. Finally, when he had become incredibly rich, the old man retired to his magnificent home, called Bonajee, after the famous Parsee family with whom the Dunbars were associated.

"The magnificence of Bonajee was the talk of the whole country. But they did not have long to enjoy it all. As Dr. Broughton put it, a perfect Pentecost of calamity came down upon them, as a warning to God-fearing New Englanders to shun this wicked traffic.

"First, Captain Dunbar's clipper, the Hawk, under his son Jack, ran aground off the Ladrone Islands, and while she was lying helpless, she was attacked by a fleet of Pirate Lorchas. The crew were killed, down to the last man. When the Hawk was discovered later by a gunboat, she was stripped bare, with Jack's sun bleached skeleton hanging at the yard-arm.

"At the time that this news reached Captain Dunbar, he was away from home in New York. While he was yet away the most horrible tragedy took place at Bonajee. His house caught fire, during the night, and burned to the ground. When Captain Dunbar and the little boy Richard returned from New York, they found that the mother, and Richard's two little sisters had been trapped in their sleep, and burned alive.

"That summer the father brought Richard down here to the summer colony, for all his sorrow and grief. He was a gentleman of the old school, who never showed

his feelings. He was always very quiet and courtly. No one ever heard him complain.

"During the summer he spent here, his second son, Rufus, had his back broken while wearing ship in a typhoon.

"Dr. Broughton went down to pray with the stricken father, expecting to find him prostrated with grief. Instead, Captain Dunbar met him as if nothing had happened. When the pastor referred to his loss, he replied: 'I'd sooner not discuss my intimate affairs with strangers.' That was always his style. Some thought him hard-hearted. Your father, who knew better, said he grieved terribly. But it was a part of his religion not to wear his heart on his sleeve.

"While ashore, he spent much of his time in New York, where he speculated heavily. But his luck seemed to leave him when he left the sea. When he retired he was reputed to have half a million. He was then in the prime of life, with a wife, and five children. Two years later, he had lost everything. Richard alone remained.

"His one hope was that this last son might enter a profession, and thus escape from the sea. But in this, as in everything else, he was disappointed. That harum-scarum of a Richard was expelled from Harvard, during his freshman year, and before his father had time to communicate with him, he had shipped before the mast on one of Derby's vessels out of Salem.

"The only time we ever heard the old gentleman complain was on account of this last disappointment.

"It was not strange then, that with both his wealth and his family gone, Captain Dunbar should have succumbed to the lure of new fortunes being made in China tea.

"Five years ago he sailed from Boston, on a new clipper, the Twilight, for Whampoa.

"The Twilight was last sighted dropping her pilot in a blinding snow squall, off Boston Light. Never a word has been heard of her since then.

"Of course, long ago the name of poor old Captain Dunbar was put down on the missing list.

"Now you tell me that his son Richard is going out on the Valkyrie. Well, that will be the last of the Dunbars."

CHAPTER X.

A GIRL ON THE BEACH.

RICHARD DUNBAR was in charge of the night watch of the Valkyrie, on the eve of the second launching. A suspicion of foul play surrounded the first false launch; this time there was to be no chance of its repetition. Hence, a doubly strong guard had been on duty since dusk.

Sometime after midnight the bosun came to the first officer in foreboding manner.

"Excuse me, sir, but there's a young leddy as wants to see yez on the lower beach. Begging yer pardon, sir, it looks kind o' queer. Ye ken there ain't no tricks too dirty for 'em as wants to trip Valkyrie."

Dunbar was not alarmed. "Who's the young lady?"

"Didn't give no name."

"What did she look like?"

"Looked damned good to me, sir."

"Well, I'll go and see her anyway."

"Will I go with you, sir?"

"No, I'll go alone."

"Maybe foul play, sir."

"I'll chance it."

On the far end of the beach the first officer suddenly encountered the unknown enemy, a blonde beauty in sailor suit and blue reefer.

At first Dunbar was frightfully officious, but he discovered that there was something disarming in a certain smile to the accompaniment of dimples.

"It was very good of you, Mr. Dunbar, to climb to the main truck this afternoon to unfurl my scarlet burgee."

"So you're Mary Williston."

"Yes. You must think that I'm terrible, coming out to meet you at this unearthly hour. But I heard that the Valkyrie was doomed; that the men who went out on her would not come back. After what I saw you do to-day, I just felt that I had to come and tell you what they are all saying."

Richard Dunbar's answer to this plaintive appeal came in peals of laughter. It was

such a whole-hearted and spontaneous outburst that Mary found her fears dispelled. She noticed again, as on the previous afternoon, that Richard was the very embodiment of life. He seemed to be rippling and bubbling over with good spirits.

On his side Richard studied Mary closely. It was not his nature to make free with girls. All his past had tended toward repression in such company. But he told himself that there was something different in Mary Williston. In an age when woman was literally fair—even to ashen pallor—here was a girl bronzed and robust.

"By George, you're not much like the girls I've known."

"Why?"

"Because you look to me more like a shipmate than a parlor jane."

"Thanks."

"Well, I must say, I admire your spunk, coming out here in the dark to meet me on this lonely beach."

In the moonlight Mary caught the flash of Richard's eyes. To her womanly intuition they spoke of dash, of hazard. She remembered the eyes of Nat Gertridge, in contrast, as that of a lap dog by the fireside. Yes, those dancing eyes were fascinating, but they were also fraught with peril.

"I'm sure that we can be real friends," said Mary, with delightful frankness.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because you're not one of the kind of boys that makes me tired. I've only known you for a few minutes, but even if I had known you for years I don't believe I could ever tell just exactly what you were going to do next."

"Yes, and I'll bet you'll keep me guessing just about as fast, Miss Williston."

"All right, to start with, you may call me Mary."

"No, I couldn't do that."

"Why, I'll call you Richard."

"That would be quite all right, but it wouldn't seem proper, though, for me to be calling you just plain Mary, since you are the one who made the scarlet burgee for the Valkyrie."

"All right, I'll call you Mr. Dunbar, until you call me Mary," replied the girl in a petulant tone. She was accustomed to keep a close rein on every boy. But here, already, the situation was getting out of hand.

"You said, Mr. Dunbar, that you thought I looked more like a shipmate than a parlor jane. How would it do, then, for us to agree to be just like a couple of shipmates?"

"That wouldn't do at all."

Mary had reached the exasperation point. It was not her style to make herself easy in the eyes of men, but to-night her poise seemed to fail. She came out to meet a dangerous person, and for a change, it was he, not she, that retained the mastery.

A long, uneasy silence followed, in which Mary thought momentarily of fleeing before she might plunge into further indiscretion when Dunbar reassured her.

"You know, it's not that I don't want to be like a pal, Miss Williston. We could be great pals, because I know that you are a sport, and you would play according to the rules, but as I said before, you are the princess of the Valkyrie, and every man of us aboard that ship will be honor bound to look up to you, even as we do to your flag."

"You seem to be strong for your ship?"

Mary had struck a responsive cord. With the love light in his eye, as only the strong can speak of the fair, Richard spoke of the Valkyrie.

"Aye, she's going to be the loveliest thing that ever put a saucy forefoot in the brine. I know, even before she is launched, that the minute she touches the water to-morrow there'll be nothing like her on all the seas."

"Well, what is it that you like so much about her?"

"I can't tell exactly. I've seen lots of beautiful clippers before. I never saw a clipper yet that I didn't like. But none ever got me like Valkyrie."

Richard passed on to relate the surpassing virtues of his ship. It was all Greek to the girl. But she drank in every word, because even the driest technicality came pulsing and throbbing with a strong man's love.

Before they parted that night the heart of Mary Williston was on fire, as never before, over her Uncle Donald's new creation.

"I came, Mr. Dunbar, to tell you not to go. But now you must go. After listening to you talking of our clipper, I am more proud than ever that the Valkyrie carries my flag. I know that you will bring honor to that flag."

"I hope so, Miss Williston."

"I know you will."

They had come to the end of the lower beach, where a thick clump of bushes grew up to the main road. As they passed along, Richard thought he heard a stirring in the underbrush. Glancing back quickly, he was just in time to catch a glimpse of the face of Nat Gertridge, spying upon them as they passed in the moonlight. The face was instinct with quenchless hate, a hatred that could pursue, and not grow weary.

Mary noticed Richard's startled movement, and looked back also, but the slinking figure had withdrawn.

"What did you see, Mr. Dunbar?"

"Just somebody's goat, prowling around in the night."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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KAZA—OMAHA

I HEARD it through the radio,
The sweetest song I ever heard,
Sweeter than any sound I know
Of violin or warbling bird.
It filled my soul with ecstasy,
A yearning and a trembling awe;
Such bliss, such rapture came to me
From KAZA Omaha.

The Judson Baptist Sunday school
Furnished the concert of the night;
And out of it her song, so cool,
So sure, so strong, so dear, so bright.
A girlish solo, but it seemed
My very inmost soul to draw,
Revealing all my life had dreamed
In KAZA Omaha.

And since, at every evening hour
I turn the disk to 34,
And hope to come within the power
Of that sweet soaring voice once more.
But jazz and jumble, clash and gong,
Opera show and raven's caw,
And never again the angel's song
From KAZA Omaha.

Amos R. Wells.

Colossus of the Radio

By LESLIE RAMON

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

A SUSPECTED HOUSE.

"SMELLS good, May." Bill Murray came into the warm, comfortable kitchen and sat down at the table. "And," he added when his sister placed a thick, browned steak in front of him, "it looks good."

"Get on with it, and don't talk so much," said May, with a smile of pleasure at her big, cheerfully grinning brother.

Bill cut himself a good sized, a man sized piece of steak, and after the first bite gave another two words of approval.

"Tastes good," he mumbled.

Following that, there was a long silence. Bill had just come off duty. He was hungry, and—well, a man can think, but he can't do much talking while his mouth is employed with broiled sirloin steak, creamed mashed potatoes, two portions of pineapple pie, and three cups of coffee.

"A-ah!" Thus did Bill exclaim when he had finished his supper. "Now I feel better. There's nothing like home cooking for making a fellow feel fine."

"Feeling fine enough to take me to the show to-night?" asked May.

Bill shook his head. "Like to," he said, "but I've something else dated up. Honest, May, I'd take you if I could. How about Nick? Where is he anyhow? I haven't seen him for days. He's the one to take you to the pictures. You two had a fight?"

"Of course not. Nick's all right, but he's like you. Worse if anything. Never knows when to stop working. Can't get him to give a minute away from that invention of his."

"What is it?"

"I don't know. He won't tell me. That

is another thing he's like you in. Keeps his mouth shut. Anybody would think I could not be trusted."

"It's not that, May, and you know it," declared her brother, "but there are some things a wise fellow don't talk of until he's done them. Get my meaning?"

"Yes, I see what you mean, but all the same, I think it's very queer of Nick, and his silence is no excuse for your secretiveness. Anyhow, I don't have to be told what you have on to-night. I can guess, and—and I wish you wouldn't do it."

"Do what?"

"You know."

Bill stood up. He looked at the clock. "Time's getting on," he stated, "and don't get guessing too much, May. For all you know, I might have a date with some nice girl."

"You might, but you haven't. But what is the use of talking? A man's worse than a mule. You'll have your own way whatever I say. What time are you coming back? It was past twelve when you came in last night. I lay awake until I heard you come up the stairs. You may be able to pussyfoot in other places, but you can't move around your own house without your sister knowing it."

Bill grinned at her appreciatively. "You've got the looks and all your five senses about you; but, honest, you don't have to strain those pink ears of yours over me. I can look after myself. There's nothing to worry over. I'll try and get back early. Maybe I'll give Nick a visit and see what he's up to."

Leaving the kitchen, Bill Murray went up to his room. When he entered it, he was a smart, upstanding policeman. Twenty minutes later, when he came out, he was —something very different. In looks, Bill Murray was a completely changed man.

At the top of the stairs he stood for a moment. He wanted to go out of the house without being seen by his sister. Should he try to go down the stairs quietly and get away without her hearing him, or should he be bold? May had quick ears. If she thought he was trying to leave the house without her seeing him, she would come out of the kitchen at the least sound. The best way was to make plenty of noise, and so—not give cause for suspicion.

Bill started to whistle as he ran down the stairs. "Shan't be very late," he called out and hurried to the front door. His hand was on the latch. In another two seconds he would have been outside, safe from being seen by May. Then—the kitchen door flew open, and she came running.

"If you see Nick, tell him—O-o-oh! Why— What—"

May came closer. She stared at her brother.

"You look—like a bum," she declared. "That dirty old cap! Those clothes! And —no collar. Why, your face is all dirty, too. I would never have known you."

"That's just as it should be," said Bill. "The less I look like a cop and the more like a loafer, the quicker and better I'll get through with—with what I'm after. Now be a good little girl and do what your Bill tells you. Don't get to worrying about anything. I'll bring you a box of candy—the kind you like."

Before the girl had time to stop him, Bill had opened the door and gone. May went slowly back to the kitchen. Her eyes were sad and her lips trembled a little. She was very fond of big Bill.

About a mile from the little home he shared with his sister, Bill left the town behind him. Slowly, as if he had nowhere in particular to go, he walked along a dirt road. The few distant, lighted windows of the houses far across the open lots on both sides of the road made the night seem all the darker. After ten minutes' walk, Bill left the road. He crawled quietly down the side of a ditch, and after listening there a while, crept up the other side and went along the inside of the hedge until he came to a mass of trees. Hidden among these trees and bushes, Bill waited and watched a large house.

The lower windows of this house showed less darkly blank in the gloom than those on the upper floor. All the lower windows were boarded over with rough lumber. No ray of light pierced the cracks; on the floor above, the weather stained glass testified to the fact that the house had been to rent for years. Now, although there had been

no public mention of incoming tenants, Bill had a suspicion that this house was not empty. It was his belief that there was some one, or possibly more than one, occupant of the house. If so, what were they doing there? There was no furniture in the place. Nothing, so far as he could tell, worth stealing. Yet, one night, Bill thought he had seen or imagined he had seen, the flash of a light through a crevice in one of the boards on the window to the right of the front entrance. That light had come and gone in an instant.

"Did I really see it, or was it just my fancy?" thought Bill. "I feel sure I was not mistaken. If nothing happens to-night, I'll get the keys from the agent to-morrow and take a look over the inside. Meanwhile it won't hurt me to wait."

Silent as a shadow and motionless as one of the trees, Bill kept watch, but not a sign of life came from the house. For over two hours Bill stuck to the job he had set himself; then, far from satisfied that everything was as it should be, he moved away. He went as cautiously as he had come. He promised himself when he got back to the road that he would return the next day.

"I'll give Nick a call," he decided with a sharp scrutiny of his surroundings; then set off at a rapidly increasing pace.

Far behind him, running from tree to tree, crouching low and hiding in the darkest shadows, followed a trailer more cunning than Bill.

CHAPTER II.

THE THING IN THE DOORWAY.

THE old barn, or garage, as Nick called it, was not far from the house Bill had been watching. He arrived in sight of Nick's place all primed to hand out a calling down to the young man. In a very few words Bill summed up the case in his own mind. "It's nearly a year now that he's been working over that invention of his," he thought. "Turned up a good job and ain't done nothing since but make a mystery of himself. Nice feller, Nick, but I'm going to tell him what's on my mind."

This was Bill's intention, but it was put off for a while. At the open gate of the yard in front of the garage, Bill came to a sudden stop. About fifty feet away was the dark front of the garage. No light showed, and—the doors were wide open. It was too dark a night to be able to see details, but Bill's eyes were not playing him any tricks. That square, black opening marked the entrance to the garage. There was no light. The door was open.

Where was Nick? A feeling of alarm came over Bill. He started forward and—came to a sudden stop. Something moved in that square of blackness. It was a monstrous thing. Broad and high. Its head nearly touched the top of the door frame. It—it couldn't be a man. Yet—yet it was like nothing else.

Bill was a big man himself. Also, he was not lacking in his full share of courage; but for the moment he stood unable to move. The strangeness of that huge, gray thing robbed him of the power to stir. What was it? It was real enough; solid; it had moved. It was alive. A living, gigantic man. Now it stood there motionless. Was it watching him—waiting to attack him?

Bill's hand moved to his hip pocket. His fingers closed on the butt of his automatic. Then, somewhere to the right of him, he heard a faint snapping sound as if some one had trodden on a dry branch or bit of glass. He looked sidewise. Some little distance away he saw a forward bent figure of a man. Bill could not see the man's face, but he judged he was staring at the thing in the doorway of the garage.

"Hey, you!" shouted Bill. "Come—"

Without a word the man turned, and in a moment he was gone.

Bill heard the rapid fall of his flying feet.

"Skunk," muttered Bill, and looked again at the garage. Whatever it was, he was determined to tackle it himself. Such was his intention, but—there was nothing there. The black, square opening was empty. The gigantic thing had gone. Where?

The mystery angered Bill. He ran forward. As he reached the sill of the garage entrance he heard a door slam; a click, and the light came on.

His back to a partition which ran across the rear of the garage, stood Nick. Not a sign was to be seen of the gigantic thing which had been in the doorway.

"Get out of here!" he shouted.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Bill. "Oh, I see. You didn't know me in this get-up."

"Who would? You look like a regular tough. What's the idea?"

"Idea?" repeated Bill Murray. "How about yourself? Where's that—that thing gone?"

For a moment Nick did not answer.

"There's nothing here," he said at last.

Bill looked at the young man thoughtfully.

"I can see," he said, "that there's only you and me here—now. But how about before? Who—what was it in that doorway?"

Nick gave an odd laugh. "You *think* you saw something," he said. "Imagination's a wonderful thing."

"Imagination nothing," retorted Bill. "There *was* something or somebody there; and it wasn't you, either. Whoever it was, was three sizes bigger than you. Let me tell you something, it's all right to try and kid me, but I was not the only one standing out there a minute ago. There was another fellow."

"Who?" asked Nick quickly.

"Don't know. He ran off."

"I thought there was never any one around here this time of night," muttered Nick. "Anyway, it doesn't matter; he couldn't see anything."

"So there *was* something to see!" exclaimed Bill. "I knew it, and now I know that you do, too. Come across, Nick."

"I can't—not just now. It's not finished yet. I was just trying it out."

"What?"

"My invention."

Bill pushed his cap back from his forehead.

"You've got me beat," he muttered. "I can't make head nor tail of it. That thing looked like a real man, only—it was so big. Was it you dressed up in something? Sort of diving suit?"

"Give it up," suggested Nick with a grin. "You'll know all about it in a day or two. I'll show you. It wouldn't be any good my telling you, for you wouldn't believe me. You'd say I was nutty."

"I'm not sure that I don't think so now," said Bill. "You look all right, but looks are not everything. You been acting mighty queer lately. Why haven't you been round?"

"Working," said Nick, and that was all there was to be got out of him.

Full of curiosity and in a very doubtful state of mind, Bill went home. Apart from the puzzle of what Nick was up to, there was also the matter of that man who had run off. Was it by chance he had been spying, or—was it possible that he had followed Bill himself?

"May," said Bill when he gave the girl the promised box of candy, "if I was you I'd give Nick a look up in the morning. No, he's not sick, but I guess he's working too hard."

"Did he tell you about his invention?"

"Just about as much as—as a clam," said Bill, and went off to bed. He was not waiting for any more questions. May would surely want to know *what* it was that he had seen in the door of Nick's garage, and Bill didn't want to be made fun of. Besides—the thing was beyond the average man's powers of description.

"It looked like a man," muttered Bill. as he got into bed. "If it wasn't, what was it?"

CHAPTER III.

MASKED IN WHITE.

"NICK! Oh—Nick! Are you there? N-i-c-k! Don't fool. Answer me, why don't you?"

May Murray banged at the door and called again. Then, getting tired of waiting, she pushed. Rather to her surprise, the big doors parted. They swung back easily.

"Nick," she repeated and looked around the place. "Nobody home," she murmured. "Maybe Nick's still asleep."

Going a few steps into the garage, May tried once more to get some answer. She

waited, puzzled what to do. She listened and—presently an intent look came into her eyes. She had heard something. Yet—the place *seemed* to be empty. Was it? She thought she heard something move. She heard it again. Behind her. She turned around quickly.

She saw a man come out of the space between the thrown back door and the wall. An expression of fear came into May's pretty blue eyes; she shrank back. It was daylight; a bright, sunny morning; but the man would have been enough to startle a stronger nerved person than May. His attitude was suggestive of threat.

"Keep still. Don't try to scream or run."

May put her hand to her mouth. For the moment she was as helpless as a bird fascinated by a snake. She could see nothing but the man's eyes.

The man's head and shoulders were covered with an ugly, white mask. Two black holes were cut in the mask. His sinister eyes fixed on the girl, the man came toward her. Afraid to move or speak, May's lips went dry; her tongue became parched. When he was quite close to her, the masked man pointed to a door at the back of the garage.

"Go in there," he ordered.

The girl made one step back, then she stopped. An idea had come to her. Maybe it was all a joke. She tried to laugh.

"Are—are you Nick?" she asked. "If so, please—please stop fooling or—I'll—I'll call for help."

"Better not," said the masked man. "I am not Nick. Go into that room at the back there and—keep your mouth shut, and—move."

"But—"

"Move. Do as I tell you."

As he spoke, the man's hand darted out and he took a hard grip on the girl's arm. He pushed her to the door in the partition at the rear of the garage.

"Open it," he said when the girl was near the door. "Open it and go in quietly. Stay quiet for an hour or more. It will be—safer. Better for you and—the other party. Safer for the two of you to keep your mouths shut."

Pushing the girl into the dark room, the masked man shut and locked the door. Ready to cry with fear, May leaned against the door. She heard the man move away. Then—the sound of the shutting of the heavy, big doors of the garage. After that, silence.

For a short time May kept close to the door. Her hands were covering her face. She was trying to think clearly; to make up her mind what she ought to do. She wanted to get out of that room. To find Nick. Call the police. How was she to get out? What was the first thing to do? Try to break down the door or—force her way out of the window? How soon could she try to make her escape? The masked man had said: "Stay quiet for an hour or more."

"I won't. I'll get out as—as soon as I can," decided May, and tried the doorknob. She shook it gently; then harder. The door scarcely moved. Nick had had that door and partition made to keep strangers out; to keep everybody out. Now it made a prison for May.

Knowing that she could not break open the door with her empty hands, May turned and looked across the dark room to the window. The heavy shade was down. At the edge of it showed a thin line of light. May went to the window and pulled at the shade. It flew up. The light was full in the girl's eyes, but through the dirty glass she saw—bars! She was caged in.

May's throat constricted. She could break the glass, but she would not have strength enough to force those iron bars. Outside the window was an empty lot. There were no houses near. Even if she broke the glass and called for help, it might be hours before any one would come near enough to the garage to hear her. Yet, something must be done. What? Could she get out through the door?

Near the window was a table. It was covered with tools and parts of machinery. Was there an ax or chopper there? Something—anything which would quickly break down the door? She ran to the table. Her eager eyes darted over the scattered tools and bits of metal. Then—she heard her name called. The voice seemed far, far

away. With startled, fixed gaze, May stared out of the window. There was nobody to be seen. Then—

"May!"

This time the truth flashed on the girl. The voice was not faint by reason of being far away. It was somewhere very near her, but there was something preventing it from reaching her clearly. Was it Nick calling her? The masked man had said something about, "Safer for the *two* of you to keep your mouths shut." Was Nick in the room with her?

The girl looked about her anxiously. Over in the corner, behind a lathe, she saw an indistinct mass that looked like the figure of a man. She went nearer and leaned over the machine. Supine on the floor and close to the wall was—Nick! His arms and legs were tied with rope. A greasy rag was knotted over his mouth.

With a cry of mingled horror and relief May reached under the lathe. She pulled the rag off Nick's mouth.

"You—you're not hurt?" she asked, and her fingers tried to tear the ropes loose.

"No; only got a bump on the back of my head. You can't get those ropes off like that. Get a knife. There's one on the table."

When the rope fell from him Nick got up. His movements were slow.

"You *are* hurt," exclaimed the girl as she helped the young man to a chair.

"It's nothing. The ropes were tight. He knocked me out."

"The masked man?"

Nick nodded. "He caught me when I wasn't looking or listening. But it didn't do him any good. He didn't get what he came for."

"What was that? I don't see anything here worth while stealing. Only a lot of old—" May stopped speaking.

Nick grinned at her.

"Go on," he said. "I know what you were going to say. Well, maybe it does look like a lot of old junk to you, but all the same I've put every cent I had into the stuff that's in this shanty. More than two thousand dollars. It would have cost me ten thousand if I hadn't been able to make 'most everything myself."

"But what is it you have been making? It is over a year now that you have been acting the mysterious. You would not even let *me* come into this place. And now I've been forced to come in, I don't see anything except a lot of—of machines and things. You—you're not going crazy, are you? You know, Nick, inventors sometimes do!"

Nick laughed as he stood up. "I *am* crazy," he answered. "I'll admit it, but it was not over any old invention. I'm crazy about a girl, and her name is—"

May took a hammer from the table and handed it to Nick. "You've said enough," she cautioned, "Get busy and break open that door. I want to go home."

"Break nothing," ejaculated Nick, "why should I smash up my own property?"

Nick threw down the hammer and picked up a screwdriver. In less than three minutes he had taken the lock off and the door was open.

"Now," said the girl, "you'll go for the police. Get hold of Bill, he'll help you. He's smart, Bill is."

"Y-yes, but—"

"What's the matter with Bill?" asked May quickly, "he's my brother, and naturally I think a whole lot of him, but you know how clever he is. He wears a cop's uniform, but Bill is going to be a big detective one of these days."

"Sure—sure," agreed Nick, "but—well, it's like this; I don't want any fuss. If your brother comes round here as—as a cop, he'll have to report the affair."

"Why—that's what you want, isn't it? Surely you can't *want* that masked man to get away with anything. He might have killed you. Besides—look what he did to me. Scared me to death nearly. Locked me up in that room. Why, what's the matter with you? Are *you* scared? Afraid to stand up for yourself and for me?"

"Now, don't get mad," exclaimed Nick, "you know how things are with me. I wouldn't let any one touch a hair of your head if I could help it. Tell you what, don't say anything about what's happened to anybody, but tell your brother I'd like to see him when he's off duty. Like that, he won't have to report anything. See what I mean? We'll be able to talk private."

"I hate secrets," said May; "can't you tell *me* what it is you've been doing all these months?"

"Promise you won't say a word about that masked man?"

"All right. I promise."

"Then," said Nick slowly, "I'll tell you all about it, what I've been making and—I'll show it to you, when—"

"When?"

"When it is finished."

An angry sparkle came into May's eyes.

"Now, honey," said Nick, and maybe it was because of the way he had with him, or the nice fashion he had of smiling at—May, or, possibly it was because May herself was soft-hearted and—in love. Anyway, she relented and quite forgot to keep up her pose of anger.

"You *are* lucky," she said, "there must be a touch of Irish in you. You kissed the Blarney stone."

"What's that?" asked Nick.

"Ask Bill. He knows. I'll tell him to come round and see you to-night. Maybe he'll get at that wonderful secret. Good-by."

CHAPTER IV.

LIVING STEEL.

AFTER Nick had watched the girl out of sight, he returned to his workshop; screwed the lock on the door and sat down to think things out. His head was aching from the blow he had received and—he was a great deal more worried than he had allowed May to see or even guess at.

How had anybody found out that he had a secret which was worth taking the chance of killing him to get hold of? Who was the masked man? Was he the same man that Bill had spoken of the night before?

These were questions to which Nick could find no answer, so, being one who liked to *do* things instead of wasting time over something he could not ferret out right away, he locked himself in his room and started to work on his invention.

In other words, he began to put it together.

Nick was not only clever; a great deal cleverer than any one knew him to be, but he was also very cautious. Every night, before he went to sleep, he took all of his invention apart. He never went out of the garage, leaving any part connected. This is why the masked man had failed to get anything out of his attack on Nick.

From different corners of the place; under the table, and here and there behind electrical machines, Nick collected a large number of pieces of steel. Some of them were hollow; some were jointed pieces of metal of all shapes and sizes. In all, there were about seven hundred parts. Nick laid them all together in the center of the floor. Then, before he started to join up any of the pieces, he hung a strip of thin material over the lower half of the window. In this way, he had all the light he needed, but no one could creep up unnoticed and see what he was doing.

Until nearly midday, Nick sat on the floor bolting the portions of his invention together. By one o'clock, he had six sections complete. Instead of hundreds of parts, he had six large and heavy sections. And—if any one could have seen what they resembled, they would have been fairly justified in judging Nick as an enthusiast not quite normal and well balanced. Some, would bluntly have stated that he was crazy. Lots of inventors have thus been judged, and some have in reality become insane through lack of appreciation of their years of devoted labor.

Nick himself, buoyant and optimistic, had fought through his moments of depression and questioned his own imagination; but he had believed he could do certain wonderful things, and now, with those six sections of steel he was going to prove that he had not been wasting his time or spending his money for nothing.

"Now," said Nick as he got up and stretched his cramped legs, "I'll eat. After that, I'll put my baby together and practice up a bit more on control. By the time Bill comes, I'll have something to show him that'll make his eyes stick out and his hair curl."

Ten minutes sufficed for Nick's lunch. A hunk of bread; a bar of chocolate and a

glass of water do not take long to consume, and, after the meal is over, there are no dishes to clean up.

According to the program he had laid down for himself, Nick assembled his "baby" and following an hour's work connecting a multitude of wires to a series of cells and vacuum tubes, he put in the switch over the meter and sat down in front of a machine which had the appearance of a typewriter, but—was nothing of the kind. To this machine, there were three rows of keys, but as Nick pressed each key, there was no click of type; no sound at all. On the machine itself, nothing happened. The effect of pressure on the keys was manifested on the steel figure on the floor.

Before he had connected up his electrical apparatus, this "baby" of Nick's would have excited the wonder and awe of any one with the slightest knowledge and appreciation of mechanical construction. This so-called "baby" was nothing less than seven feet in length. It was rather over one thousand five hundred pounds in weight and—it was made, limbs, trunk and head, in the form of a man. A steel man. Huge in height and breadth, but well proportioned.

This was before Nick touched a key of the typewriter-like machine. Following the first depression of one of the keys, the steel man became in actuality what it had suggested by form alone. It became a thing of living movement; directed and controlled; oddly, terrifyingly deliberate.

The steel head, shaped and visored like one of the helmeted knights of old, raised itself. Nick touched another key and within a second of its depression, the steel automaton was sitting upright.

"Now," said Nick, "we'll rehearse all the old stunts and try out a few new ones. We're going to knock Bill's eye out. That is, figuratively speaking."

CHAPTER V.

MATTERS OF IMPORTANCE.

WHEN he arrived that evening, the first thing Bill did on entering the room partitioned off from the garage, was to look around. His investigating glance swept over the cleared workbench; the neat arrangement of electrical instruments, the clean floor and then settled on a bulk in the corner by the lathe. It was covered with old sacks.

"Been cleaning up," he remarked, "what's that hidden in the corner there? That thing of mystery I saw last night?"

"We'll come to that later," said Nick, "Presently, I'll satisfy all your curiosity and give you a headfull to think about. There's other matters to come first though. Your sister tell you anything; give you any sort of hint as to what I wanted to see you about?"

"Nothing definite. Couldn't get a word out of her except that you wanted to see me; tell me something as a pal and not as a cop."

"That's about the size of it. Sit down. Smoke and try and listen if you can, without going off the handle."

"That ought not to be difficult," said Bill as he filled his pipe, but it was noticeable that he began to shift uneasily in his chair as Nick's account of the morning's visitor began to include the part taken in the affair by May.

"It seems queer to me that you could let the fellow get away and never take action after laying you out and—I'll say it's darned funny that you should stand for him scaring May. Too darned funny for words. I like you, Nick. You've always seemed to me a decent sort, and until lately, a level-headed kind of a chap. Now, what with this freak invention and what you let that masked fellow get away with this morning, I'm not so sure that you're not a bit touched. I guess you've been working too hard."

Nick leaned forward. He smiled, but his eyes were serious in expression. "Don't be in too much of a hurry to judge. You haven't got the hang of this affair. It's not quite as simple as it looks and there's a good deal more at stake than you have any idea of. Besides, I believe you are partly responsible for that fellow sneaking in on me this morning."

"Me!" exclaimed Bill, "I'd like to know what I can have had to do with it?"

"Doesn't it occur to you that it was

the chap who followed you round here the night before?"

A blank look came over Bill's face. Nick followed up with another question: "Did you come straight from home?" he asked, "or had you been around doing some of your private investigating."

"I'd been watching a place, but I'll swear there wasn't any one around when I left there."

"You'd take oath there was nobody watching *you?*" inquired Nick.

Bill shook his head. "No," he said reluctantly, "I'm too old a hand at the game to be so cocksure. I don't believe I was followed, but it is possible. Anything is, if a crook is clever and crafty enough, but I don't see how you can blame me."

"I'm not," put in Nick quickly, "all I'm trying to get at is some fairly straight line whereby we can identify that masked man. If he was the fellow who was outside there with you when—when you saw what you did in the door of the garage, that will sort of give us a starting point. It would be fair to assume that he came from the place you were watching, won't it? If that point is established, then the rest will be easy. You'll be able to identify him and—"

"You're going too fast," interrupted Bill, "I'm as much in the dark as you are. The place I've been watching on and off, is that boarded up house over near Swanson Lane. I've been following up a hunch as it were. One night, a couple of weeks ago, I was passing there and I thought I saw the flicker of light. I *thought* I did. That's all I have to go on. Since then, I've not been able to pick up anything that would back me up. I had to lay low. Suspicions don't go with the powers that be in our line. I've got to have some proof, before I can come out in the open or else—get laughed at for my pains."

"But," persisted Nick, "it's more than likely that you are right. You're not the fellow to see things where they are not and if there is somebody in that house, they're there for no good. Ever been inside?"

Bill shook his head. "I thought of getting the keys from the agent and taking a look to-day, but I didn't get a chance, but all this is getting away from what I want to know. Why the dickens didn't you let us get after that fellow?"

"Because of the publicity. If I'd sent in a formal complaint; laid a charge against that masked crook, the whole place would have been turned upside down. Your people would have wanted to know all kinds of things. You would have had to tell what you saw last night and to save you from being put down as a bug, I'd have had to demonstrate. The whole business would have got into the papers and instead of having one nosey crook after me I'd have had dozens."

"How do you make that out?"

"Easily enough. The thing I've invented is worth millions and—I have no protection; no patents. Even if I had the money to protect myself in all the countries in the world, it wouldn't amount to anything. The thing's too big. I've got to get my price for it and hand it over to some big concern. As a matter of fact, it ought to go to the government. No private corporation ought to be able to control it."

"You're talking big," said Bill. "Are you sure not going it a bit too strong?"

"Seeing is believing," Nick answered as he got up from his chair. "I'll show you."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Bill, "listen, there's somebody knocking."

Without stopping for a reply from Nick, Bill hustled for the outer door. He flung it open. "May!" he exclaimed, "what in the name of goodness are you doing here?"

The panting girl darted past her brother and tucked her hand under Nick's arm. "There's nothing the matter," she explained breathlessly, "that is, nothing that I can explain. I got anxious, that's all. I —I lost my nerve. Listen, Nick, I want you to promise me something. You must come home with Bill and me to-night. This lonely place is dangerous for you all by yourself. If there's anybody after that invention of yours I'd rather them get it than that you should be hurt. Perhaps killed"

"Nonsense," said Nick, but the trembling voice of the girl communicated to him a sense of fear. Fear, not for himself, but for her. Still, it does not do to give way to one's fears, even for another's safety. Nick put the subject of danger aside.

"Now," he went on, "you're here and I'll see what I can do in the way of entertaining you. I was just about to demonstrate my invention to your brother. The show will take place in the inventor's back room hall."

Nick threw aside the sacking covering the bulky thing in the corner and turned to watch the effect on his guests. He had no reason to complain of the result. Bill jerked forward and stared without a word at the monster figure of steel. Slowly he took in the details. From the massive head, his gaze traveled down the heavy shoulders and body. He stared long at the jointed arms; the broad, blunt fingers; the thick knees and ponderous feet.

May screamed and backed against her brother, but she quickly recovered her poise.

"What's that horrible, ugly thing?" she demanded. "You don't mean to tell me that you've been wasting your time making a great big dummy like that. Why—you must be absolutely out of your mind. What in the world is the use of it? A tin man. Where's the joke? I fail to see it, Nick. You'll have to point it out to me. I'm rather dense."

Nick flushed. May was not quite in earnest in all she had said, but there was a sharp edge of sarcasm in her voice.

"I guess I'll have to actually demonstrate that I'm no candidate for a padded cell," said Nick tartly, and going to the control machine, he pressed a key. From a reclining position in the corner, the steel man came upright. Three—four keys did Nick depress in rapid succession and a flow of power: of seeming, actual life appeared to course through the mass of steel shaped in the form of a man. With an entire absence of jerkiness, the steel giant rose to his feet. There he stood, firmly balanced—immovable, waiting.

"That Nick's putting something over on us," declared Bill. "There's some joke on us somewhere. It—it's not natural to make a thing like that move—unless—"

"There's a man inside it," finished May.

"Sure, he's trying to kid the pair of us."

"Nothing of the kind," asserted Nick irritable and brought his hand down again on the control keyboard. The most he expected from May was a squeal of startled surprise, but he got more than he bargained for. The steel man swung round sharply. He made one stride toward May. He towered over her, and—barely had Nick time to touch the key which switched off the invisible power. Then he jumped for the girl. He caught her as she swayed and shook her gently.

"Easy—hold on, May," he urged. "That was a rotten trick of mine. I didn't mean to scare you so badly. It's all right; there is nothing to be afraid of."

From the safe shelter of Nick's shoulder May took a sidelong, investigating look at the object of her fright and—ridicule. She recovered her nerve almost as quickly as it had forsaken her.

"I—I'm not scared any more," she declared. "I was startled, that's all. You had no business to make him move like that. What's inside it? Now that you've properly excited the interest of both of us and startled Bill just as much as you did me, let us into the secret."

"Yes, and tell us what good it is; what use you're going to make of it," added Bill.

"The usefulness of my steel baby remains to be discovered," explained Nick, "he would make a good watchman or—a first class burglar; but I'll show you what's inside and satisfy you there's nothing of the human in him, not even a bone."

Taking a small wrench from the rack over the work table, Nick removed four bolts from the chest of the steel man. He then took off a slightly curved steel plate and beckoned to Bill and May. Heads close together, brother and sister gazed into the interior illumined by the flash light held by Nick. All they could see was a confusion of shining bars of polished steel; shafts, curiously shaped sockets; universal joints; glistening wires, bare and taut, and coils of braided cable.

"Darned if he isn't filled with a motor. He's all machine."

"That's it," agreed Nick. "He's engine plus—"

"Plus what?"

"Plus my brain, or will."

"Sounds fine," said Bill, rumpling his hair, "but I'm just as wise as I was before."

"What's the power that makes him move?" asked May.

Replacing the steel plate, Nick turned and pointed to the electric cable connected to the meter on the wall. "That," he said, and added: "Plus—"

"Plus again!" ejaculated Bill, and frowned. "Why not speak out plain? I'm no scientist, neither is May. What are you getting at when you say plus?"

"I'm trying to tell you the truth without pretending to know more than I actually know myself," explained Nick. "Let's get at it in this way. Can you tell me what electricity is?"

"Sure," answered Bill promptly, then, a look of doubt crossed his face.

"You are not so sure. Not when you stop to give the question a second thought," said Nick. "Well, that needn't bother you even if you don't know what electricity is. Nobody does. All we know is that we can produce it and make it do certain things, such as give light, heat, and power. And when I said I was making use of electricity —plus, I was speaking the literal truth, although I don't know what the plus is any more than I or anybody else knows what electricity is. The discovery I have made is this; that machine over there is a receiver and condenser. It is not connected in any way with the line from the power house, yet it absorbs current. It not only absorbs it, but it stores it up. By means of this little keyboard here I can use that power and direct it to the receivers inside my steel man. Simply put, I've worked out a practical method of transmitting wireless; radio power. The only thing my steel baby can't do is to think. He doesn't have to breathe or to eat; all he needs to get busy and move around as I want him to is to have a little of the ultrajuice run through him and—there you are."

CHAPTER VI.

ONE WHO MUST BE OBEYED.

As he finished speaking, Nick's fingers played over the keys of the controlling instrument. With silent, long strides, the steel man walked straight toward Bill. The metal of the automaton's knee was almost touching Bill. Then—the steel man stopped—turned and walked toward the lathe. As the ponderous figure drew near the machine, Bill unconsciously held his breath.

"Can't you stop him?" he gasped as the steel man came within a few inches of the lathe. "That thing's heavy. Besides—it's bolted to the floor. There—there'll be a smash up."

"Not yet," said Nick quietly, and in response to his manipulation of the keyboard, the steel man's hands came up. Within a few inches of the lathe they stopped rigid. Another step—and they struck the edge of the machine. For a moment the steel man seemed to waver. Bill glanced round at Nick. The young inventor was frowning with concentration. His fingers hovered in doubt over the keyboard. Then, in rapid succession he pressed several keys.

The steel man, his hands still against the edge of the lathe, took a backward step. His huge body leaned forward. Then—he began to push. Slowly, but with inexorable certainty, the iron bolts holding the lathe to the floor began to tear loose. In less than a minute they ripped free of the splintered floor. With a crash the lathe tilted against the wall.

"How's that?" cried Nick, and again touched the keyboard. Before either Bill or May could reply, the steel man was standing upright. "What do you think of him now?"

Bill shrugged his shoulders and looked at May. "You tell him," he suggested, "I'm out of words."

"And I'm past thinking," said the girl.

"I'll admit this," put in Bill, "you've got hold of something there that I'd be scared to handle. Supposing you lost control of the thing. There doesn't seem to be any limit to the power you can put into that steel man."

"There isn't," declared Nick, "but I've taken some precautions. There's a little contraption in what I call the brain of my steel man that will act something like a fuse. If he gets too much of the supercurrent and beyond control, why, his brain will just burn up."

"I'd like to see that," said Bill, and going to the motionless figure, raised the visor. He peered upward into the hollow. "Why," he exclaimed, "there's nothing there."

"No," replied Nick, "nothing at all. That headpiece is merely for ornament. It might come in handy as a battering ram, but as a brain box it is not in it."

"Where's what you call his brain then?"

Nick smiled. "For the present," he said, glancing apologetically at May, "I'm not telling."

"All right," replied the girl, "we won't get mad about it. You've shown us enough to make us mighty proud of you. All the same, I can't make out why you went to the trouble of making so complicated a thing as this. You could have demonstrated the radio power you've got control of on any machine, couldn't you?"

"Sure, but it wouldn't have been so showy—so spectacular. Nowadays you've got to demonstrate a new discovery in some odd and striking way in order to make people sit up and take notice."

Bill grinned. "I get your point. Sit up and take notice. That's a good one. Man alive, if you set that image walking down some street, you'll do more than make them sit up. They'll get up and git as fast as their legs 'll carry them. The look of the thing is enough. It 'd scare a Chinese idol. Don't worry, you'll get all the fame you want when—you want it. Maybe more than you bargain for."

May looked up at Nick with round, admiring eyes. "I'm sorry I was such a little beast at first," she murmured. "He's ugly, but he's wonderful—awful in a way—terribly strong. A Samson—a colossus. Colossus of the radio. That 'd be a good name."

"Fits him exactly," agreed Nick. "What?"

"How is it he moves so quietly. A big thing like that; so heavy and all made of iron or steel. It doesn't seem natural."

"He's just a carefully made engine. That's the answer. That, and the rubber soles on his feet and pads on his hands. You can't make him squeak or rattle. Like to see how easy it is to make him move? I'll show which keys to touch."

May could not at first be persuaded to go near the keyboard, but at last Nick prevailed and after the first touch of her finger tip on the key controlling the arm of the colossus, she grew eager to know more, and when Nick indicated the combination of control keys necessary to make the steel man stoop and pick up a pencil off the floor enthusiasm grew on the girl. Her eyes shone; she clapped her hands.

"I just love him," she exclaimed. "Oh, Nick, you're a wizard! You'll be the most famous man in the world. We'll all be millionaires. We—oh, I don't know what I'm saying. How far can I make him go? Will the power reach as far as—as far as the outer door?"

"That far, and probably twenty or thirty miles on top of that. So long as you have the keyboard with you, you're the boss. It 'll pick up the current from the condensers in here and transmit it to the steel man. Try him. See if you can steer him through the doorway here without making him carry away the side of the partition."

"Of course I can," said May. "I believe he'll obey my slightest wish and if the truth be told, I have an idea I can control your colossus better than you can. I'll see if I can send him right through the garage and to the door and back."

"All very nice and interesting," said Bill, "but I've got to remind the pair of you that it's late and—there are other reasons why it would be only reasonably wise for us to lock up and all go home."

"Nobody would dare come prowling around while *you* are here," exclaimed May with pride. "Besides—we have the colossus to guard us."

"I'm not at all sure that *I* might not be an added reason for the attentions of some crook or another," said Bill, "the fellow who came here with that white mask over his head may likely as not have followed me the night before. If that's the case, we ought to be on our guard. I want us to talk this thing over. Nick's been trying to keep this invention of his under cover and it appears to me now that it's on the cards that the wrong party or parties are getting wise and anxious to know more than 'll be good for Nick. I vote we close up for the night."

"Seconded, and the motion is carried."

The words fitted the occasion, but the one who had spoken them did not belong to the party. Standing partly in the shadow cast by the partition into the garage, the intruding stranger smiled sardonically at the furious Bill and Nick. He carried an automatic. It was noticeable that although he kept his eyes on the two men, his weapon was pointed in the direction of—May.

"It would be just as well," he remarked, "if you don't attempt any rough stuff. There might be an—accident and I'd hate to hurt a lady. But in case you should either of you think you can get away with anything, I'll call your attention to the gentleman on the window sill and I'll mention the fact that I have another friend keeping guard outside. Just put up your hands and we'll save you the trouble of walking home. As for the lady, she will oblige by keeping her hands down and—remain quite still. Now—Bill, you first. Walk straight through the doorway and keep going until you get to the outer door."

CHAPTER VII.

BITTER IS HELPLESSNESS.

IN the moment that he stood stiffly obedient to the order of the cruelly smiling stranger, Bill tasted to the full the sting of humiliation. Had he been alone there would have been but one reaction to that order to put up his hands. There would have been a wounded or dying Bill Murray; or—a crumpled and broken crook. As it was, May was the key to the position. Not for a fraction of a second did the hold-up man's weapon waver from being in line with the girl.

"Keep straight on," he said, "and whatever happens don't make the least resistance. If you do, the girl will go first and you and the other fellow next. We've got you where we want you and there's to be no fooling."

Evidence of this came immediately Bill had walked beyond the radius of the patch of light from the inner room. From each side of the garage came two men. A rope was flung over his uplifted hands. The noose of it was passed down his body; tightened and knotted around his knees and ankles so that he could only move his feet a few inches at a step. Then, he was ordered to lower his hands *one* at a time.

His captors paid Bill the compliment of allowing him not the slightest opportunity to take his life into his own hands. When he was securely trussed, Bill was told to shuffle as best he might, to the exit of the garage. The same procedure was meted out to Nick. May was not bound, but she was gagged.

"How about the others, Crawley?" asked one of the men. "Going to leave them free to let out a yell while we're aboard the truck?"

The chief shrugged his shoulders. "I had an idea," he said slowly, "that you and the others might be able to keep them quiet with the butt end of a gun, but since you seem doubtful, Slim, why, shove a rag in the mouths of the pair and stow them aboard quick as you like. Here's the truck now."

Crawley's orders were easily carried out—to a point. The hitch in the proceedings came when they tackled the steel man. Crawley jeered at his men for a bunch of weaklings, but sweat and low, angry words flowed before the ponderous colossus was lifted into the back of the closed truck.

"Look after that thing same as if it was made of glass and valuable as diamonds," said Crawley, "we're going to make that contraption work for us. He may look a freak, but I've a good idea he'll be worth a half million or so to us."

When the loaded truck quietly started on its journey, Slim edged closer to his chief.

"How do you figure to make good on what you said about that steel thing?" he asked.

The chief maintained a long silence before he answered. Then he turned a sneering face to Slim. "I'm boss of this outfit," he said, "and I don't have to answer fool questions. It ought to be enough for you and the rest that I've gone to all this trouble to get that steel man. Wait till I get my fingers on that keyboard and I'll show you all something that'll make you open your eyes. I've seen that bird move

and do things that six men couldn't and soon as we get to the hangout I'll get busy."

When, a few minutes later, Crawley steered the truck through the gates of a grass-grown drive, he began to chuckle.

"What's the idea?" ventured Slim.

"I was thinking of that nosey cop," replied the chief. "He's been snooping about here more than was pleasant—for us. Now, he's going to see all he wants and—it won't do him a mite of good."

A little distance up a short incline, Crawley stopped the truck. Without a word from him, Slim and the others got out and the work of unloading began. Through the trees at the top of hill the roof of the boarded-up house, which had been the object of Bill's suspicion, could be seen dark against the sky. It was not the house but a garage, partly built into the side of the hill, that gang made for.

Bill had watched the house; he had walked all round it looking for marks of entry or exit. He had found none because none existed. Ever since the gang had taken possession, their chief had issued stringent orders that no one of them was to venture anywhere within a hundred foot circle of the house. There was no necessity for the breaking of these orders. A bricked, underground tunnel ran from the back of the garage to the basement of the house.

"Take the girl into the garage, tie her up and dump the other two on the ground and bring that steel man over here. Careful how you carry him for he's a delicate baby."

Crawley snapped out his orders and assisted the work of unloading with sarcastic comments on the slowness and clumsiness of his gang. Slim, as foreman of the outfit and next in command to Crawley, ventured a few words of caution in an undertone.

"I guess you know what you're doing," he said from the corner of his mouth, "but why not load up with the stuff we've got in the house and get away from here. What with that cop we've got tied up; that other feller and his sister, we're taking an awful chance. Better go easy with the boys, they're all on edge and—"

"And you're all rattled," cried out Crawley, "Get that keyboard over here and I'll show you and the rest how to make that steel thing do tricks. He's going to be our champion safe cracker. I know what I'm about."

Crawley voiced his opinions confidently enough, but back in his mind was the desire to prove to himself without delay that the steel man could really be controlled and made to work when removed from the vicinity of the barn. If it could, all would go well. He would have the gang eating out of his hand. If on the other hand that steel automaton would not respond—the thought worried Crawley and his ease of mind did not improve.

He glanced at the blurred faces of his followers as they came nearer in the wake of Slim. The light was too dim for Crawley clearly to distinguish the features of the band of silent watchers, but he was enough of a leader to sense a surly antagonism.

Slim placed the keyboard on the step of the truck.

"Hold your light over it," said Crawley and as the beam from Slim's electric torch brought the keys of mysterious control into vivid clarity, Crawley gave a sidelong glance at the figures of Bill and Nick bound and hunched on the ground. "Turn your light on them fellers," he added and frowned with concentration as he stared at the two upturned faces.

In the eyes of Bill Murray he read plainly enough, simple, unadulterated rage and defiance. In Nick's—what? The gaze of the young inventor was altogether too calm for Crawley's liking. The tightly drawn gag distorted Nick's cheeks and gave him the appearance of grinning, but, was there not also a gleam of mockery in his eyes? Was it possible that the steel man would not work? Had Nick been claiming more for his invention than it could perform when he had stated that it could be controlled miles away from the source of power. Had he been bluffing?

Promising himself the pleasure of vindictive revenge should it prove that he had been fooled, Crawley turned to the keyboard. All eyes followed his movements. Suspense and expectancy were expressed in

silence. Then came a faint click. Crawley had depressed one of the keys. Response was instantaneous; power of action flowed through the colossus. His massive knees came up.

Crawley quivered with elation. He touched other keys. Each brought some new movement from the steel man. At length, Crawley got him to a sitting position and finally—to his feet. The gangsters retreated to a respectful distance as the steel monster towered erect.

"What did I tell you?" gloated Crawley, "I can make him do anything—*anything*!"

So far, fortune had favored Crawley in his blind, fumbling selection of the keys to touch; but just as there are gamblers who never know when to stop, so are there crooks who play with chance over long.

Surveying his awed group of men in chuckling triumph, Crawley announced the next item on his program.

"Now," he stated, "I'll make him climb into the truck and then you can all set about bringing the stuff from the house." With a gesture of bravado, Crawley then bent over the keyboard. Down came his finger on a key. He was quite sure it was the right key; the third from the left, but—he picked out the wrong rank!

"Gosh!" exclaimed Slim. The rest of the men scattered. Crawley whirled around. The colossus plunged forward. There was a crash as the bulging armor of his chest struck the side of the truck.

"Stop him, can't you? He'll shove the darned thing over!"

Slim rushed forward. He clung futilely to the steel giant. Crawley's hands wavered in distracted indecision over the keyboard. While he hesitated, the truck quivered and creaked, the step rose; tilted. The near wheels left the ground.

In a panic of alarm, Crawley grabbed the keyboard. Holding it under one arm, he struck wildly at a key. Again, it was one that he should not have touched. The colossus leaned forward. The tilt of the truck increased. In another few seconds the rising truck would overbalance; topple over, then—

Crawley completely lost his head. Key after key he depressed. The steel man jerked in violent movement. Slim was flung six feet away. He staggered and fell groaning.

Cursing shrilly, Crawley yelled to the others to drag the monster who would no longer obey his will, away from the truck. Not one of them would make a step nearer. The arms of the colossus came up; his rubber padded steel fists thudded against the side of the truck. He seemed a thing of mechanical madness bent on destruction.

Then Crawley touched a key that changed everything. A pause came in the flaying of the steel man. He leaped back. There he stopped. The truck came down on four wheels. The shock shook the ground. Immediately followed, a splintering, rending sound. The rear wheel had broken at the hub. Slowly, then with uncontrollable swiftness, the truck sagged and fell. The edge of the roof caught the visored head of the steel man. He swayed—and went down with the truck.

"You must have touched a key that shut off the power that kept him standing."

Without reply, Crawley joined the group surveying the overturned truck and the fallen steel man.

"Flash on a light."

Slim's torch showed a grotesque mess of damage and hopelessness. Not only was the truck rendered useless by reason of the splintered wheel; but the prize Crawley had risked so much precious time over and played with and lost, was surely beyond all salvage. With arms and legs asprawl, the colossus lay pinned to the ground. True, his body and limbs seemed uninjured, but his head? The glint of crushed steel showed under the edge of the truck roof.

Slim snapped off his light. "How about it?" he asked and his inquiry was followed by a rumble of distinct and threatening mutterings from the others.

Crawley passed his tongue over his dry lips. Calamity had stunned him. Reaction came in the form of desire to make some one else pay for his own folly. Thrusting aside Slim, he aimed a kick at the bound Nick.

"That'll go some way towards wiping that funny look out of your eyes and I'll hand you another dose presently."

The force of the brutal, cowardly blow toppled Nick over. He fell against Bill.

"Now," said Crawley taking out a cigar and turning to face his men, "we'll dope out a quick getaway. I slipped up, but I'm not going to lay down on my job. How about getting another truck, Slim?"

While Slim debated the question, Crawley struck a match and lighted his cigar. With well assumed confidence he flipped the match over his shoulder. The tiny flame made a thin arc of light to within a foot of the ground. Then came a startling, curious puffing sound. A burst of flame leaped from the grass. In narrow lines, two streams of yellow fire sprang up. One rivulet ran towards the truck. The other flamed crackling and hissing venomously in the direction of the garage. In an instant, a barrier of fire covered the open door.

In that garage was May. Unable to escape. Crawley had given the order for her to be tied!

CHAPTER VIII.

BY THE HEEL OF ACHILLES.

CRAWLEY was in the lead of the stampede of men away from the fire. Only two were left near the truck. *They* could not run, either for the safety of their own skins or to the rescue of May.

Bill writhed in his bonds. His helpless, ineffective fingers worked spasmodically. Against him leaned Nick, half insensible from the kick Crawley had given him on the side of the head. Yet when Nick moved, there was purpose and method in the convulsive heave of his body.

He wriggled and rolled until his head came within reach of Bill's hands. Those hands were bound at the wrists, but directly Nick's head touched Bill's hands, his fingers ceased clenching and unclenching. They ripped and tore at the gag tied at the back of Nick's head. In a few seconds the shredded rag fell lose.

"Easy now, Bill," cautioned Nick with a gasp, "I'm going to roll over you so that you can get your fingers on the knots on my wrists. For heaven's sake keep your head and *untie* them. Remember you can't possibly break the rope. Quick—but sure. It's the only way. Those yellow curs 'll stampede in a moment. They won't give a thought to May or to us."

Beyond the hedge of fire the gang clustered about their leader.

"It's each man for himself now," declared Slim. A murmur of agreement came from the men. Then as Crawley was about to speak, Slim let out a shout. "Look," he yelled, "that inventor chap is loose. what's he doing? He's manipulating that keyboard."

"Crazy," sneered Crawley, "we'd better—" He stopped. His mouth gaped open. The rest of the gang stood staring—fascinated, their eyes fixed on the bulk of the steel man.

Kneeling in the flickering glare of the flames, Nick was manipulating the keyboard. His actions were deliberate. He seemed to be indifferent to the danger that the truck's gasoline tank might blow up at any minute and spray him with red hot metal and liquid fire.

The shoulders of the colossus heaved; his arms crooked; his knees bent, and his body rose to a kneeling position. He backed away from the truck. The spellbound watchers heard the tearing rasp of the crumpled steel as he tore his head free. The next instant he was firmly erect. The light of the flames playing over him seemed to add to his stature. He loomed gigantic; a magnificent figure all the more wonder-provoking by reason of the battered, crushed head.

With steady, long strides, the steel man walked to the front of the garage. Behind him, hampered by his still bound legs, Nick dragged himself, alternately lifting and resting the keyboard.

Facing the door of the garage, the colossus stopped. Hauling himself upright by clinging to his steel man, Nick looked over the ridge of flame rising from the pool of gasolene barring the entrance. Against the farther wall, he saw the huddled form of May.

"I'm going to get you out," he shouted, "Don't be scared and struggle when he picks you up. He's coming—*now*!"

The last word was simultaneous with a touch on the control board and a forward stride of the colossus. Through the flames he went; a thing of irresistible power, obedient to the will of Nick—plus radio voltage.

Without hardly being aware of their actions Crawley, Slim and the five others gathered in a semicircle behind Nick. In the marvel of what they were beholding they momentarily forgot all else.

In the interior of the garage they saw the steel man reach the girl. She was bound and could not offer any assistance of her own. Nick pressed a key and then others. The steel man bent over. His extended arms came together—slowly—gently. He stood up; turned. A hissing gasp came from the group behind Nick. The girl was cradled in the giant's arms. He stood motionless awaiting the wireless message.

Nick's face was drawn with concentration. His colossus held a precious burden and—there was that barrier of licking flame. It was not enough that the steel man should be made to rush through. He would have to run—jump. Nick studied the keys. His lips moved. He prayed for surety of choice and touch. There is a point of trial and test of cool courage when the bravest and surest wisely lean on the Power above all else.

"God help me," whispered Nick and struck the keys. The colossus responded instantly. A mass of force beyond all human strength and agility, he bounded to the door of the garage. Without pause on the threshold, he leaped high in the air. He came down with ponderous, thudding softness on the turf. Abreast of Nick, his arms parted.

May laughed hysterically as Nick eased her to the ground. Not a flame had even scorched her.

It was a moment to relax; but Nick was at high tension pitch. May was saved, but—there was other work for the colossus to do. Action was imperative while Crawley and the others were still held by the scene they had just witnessed.

Scarcely had May's laugh died away, when Nick quietly touched the keyboard again. A yell of dismay and warning came from some member of the gang, but it was too late. Quicker than a cat, the steel man pounced on the group with extended arms. He compassed a breadth of over seven feet, seven feet of steel that snapped together like a sprung wolf trap.

Crawley, Slim, and one other, were bunched wriggling in that terrible embrace. The other four backed—to escape. From the hip pocket of Crawley, Nick jerked an automatic.

"Stop—hands up, all of you," he shouted. One shot he fired in earnest of his command and the four halted. Eight hands went stiffly aloft.

"Now, May," urged Nick as he loosed her bonds, "try to get over to Bill. Release him. No—don't bother about me. I can kneel and get my feet free with one hand. There's no danger from the tank. It was busted clean open when the truck fell over."

When Bill was freed, he found great and satisfying pleasure in applying the ropes that had held himself, Nick and May at the whim of Crawley. After the seven were all tied together, he went to the truck and reaching under the instrument board came back with something that no one had apparently thought of. It was a fire extinguisher.

"I'm anxious to see what it is they've got in the basement of that house," he said as he sprayed the chemical on the blaze. "We've got the gang all right; but so far I haven't got anything on them except attempted robbery, assault and near murder."

When the flames were put out, Bill paused for a question before going to investigate the basement.

"It beats me how you worked that steel man with his head all battered in?"

"His head was only an ornament; a finishing touch as it were," answered Nick. "I put the brain of him as you might call it, the controlling receiver and transmitter to be exact, where I considered it would be the least likely to be injured by an accident."

"And where was that?"

"In his heel. I got the idea from the fable of Achilles, y'know."

"M-m-m," responded Bill, "I'll have to take your word for it. Shan't be long."

In five minutes Bill returned from his trip through the underground passage. His face was jubilant.

"Some haul," he exclaimed, "I thought they might be members of some secret society or bootleggers, but they're even more valuable still. They're counterfeiters. There's a press, dies and all the whole lay-out down in that kitchen. Going to help me take that bunch into town?"

"Do you really need help to herd a lot of roped crooks to jail?" inquired Nick, glancing at May.

"Not so's you'd notice it," laughed Bill. "You stay. I'll be back for the pair of you."

Dawn was breaking as Bill marched his tribe of prisoners away. May looked up at the rose-tinted sky. Then she gazed at the overturned truck, the shriveled, blackened grass. Her lips trembled.

"Guess I'll have to make our steel man walk back to the barn before daylight," remarked Nick.

A sob was his answer. Nick abruptly put down the keyboard and turned to look at the girl. She was sitting on the ground; her face in her hands finding relief for tired, overstrained nerves in tears. When she felt Nick's arm around her she leaned confidently against him and presently quieted down.

"May," said Nick after a long silence. There was no answer. May was asleep.

An hour or more passed. Bill came back from the delivery of his prizes. He was not given to expression of sentiment, but there was a soft light in his eyes as he looked down at the smiling face of Nick and the peaceful, unconscious one of his sister.

"Sitting here on the damp grass like that," he remarked. After a pause, he added: "Love is a queer thing."

Nick nodded.

Bill shifted uneasily. "How about breakfast?" he asked, then he recollected something else. He looked around. "Say?" he asked, "Where's the colossus?"

"Gone," said Nick.

"Gone! Where?"

"He walked through those bushes there. You can see the marks of his passage. That's all I know about him except—that he must have kept straight on down the slope, across the sandy beach and—into the sea. He's miles away by now. Fathoms deep. Jammed against some rock at the bottom of the ocean most likely."

"But how—?" gasped Bill.

"Simple enough," explained Nick with a faint smile, "I'd just started him moving when May collapsed. After that—I just forgot. That's all there is to tell."

"I'll say—love *is* queer," muttered Bill, then he went on disconsolately, "all your work gone for nothing. Does May know?"

"Not yet, and we're not going to bother her. She's had enough to last for a while."

Bill pondered this a moment. Presently the glum expression of his face merged to a grin. "Tell you what," he said, "we'll go fifty fifty. I'll get five thousand reward out of the capture of those counterfeiters. Half of the reward is no more than your right anyhow. You can start right in and make another steel man and then get married."

"You've got that wrong, Bill," said Nick, "Married first and then I'll start to work again, but it won't be on another steel man. I'll develop the same idea along the lines of wireless power and control for airplanes and submarines. More useful. Anyhow we'll talk it over with May. Meanwhile, breakfast comes before all else."

THE END

Next Week we will give you a Novelette of thrilling Western adventure —"Jeremiah Parsons—He-Man," by Harry Adler; also the start of a series of Western humorous tales by Earl Wayland Bowman; likewise, celebrating the opening of the baseball season—"Blondes and Bleachers," by Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift.

A Crown for Sale

FROM THE MEMOIRS OF THE QUEEN OF FLORANIA

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

SHORTLY after reaching her twenty-first birthday Elizabeth, Countess Cleveland, is approached by Baron Leomar, Floranian ambassador to the Court of St. James, with a proposal of marriage from the young King Peter of Florania. The royal family is impoverished and his advisers have impressed the king with the necessity for marrying a woman of wealth.

Out of curiosity Elizabeth agrees to meet the king at dinner at the home of the Prince and Princess de Chanterelle in London. She falls in love with him, but the king regards her with indifference, considering his marriage a matter of business. Elizabeth, piqued and interested, gradually falls in with the idea of marrying him. She learns that he is reported to be in love with the Princess de Chanterelle. In a moment of impulse Elizabeth, with the help of Bunch, her cousin and confidant, disguises herself with blond wig and make-up and, posing as a dancing instructress, meets the king when he goes, incognito, to the Flower Garden dance club to indulge in a few care-free hours of dancing, of which he is passionately fond. "Betty Fane," as Elizabeth calls herself, wins his admiration as his partner in the "Sable Night" waltz, and she agrees to meet him again.

CHAPTER IV.

A JOB—AND A QUESTION.

IN the vestibule, which was almost empty as I passed, a man and a woman were talking. They stood in an archway that seemed to lead into some private room. The woman was about forty, inclined to be stout, but with a trim, beautifully corseted figure. Her face was handsome, though a little hard. Her copper hair looked dyed. She wore a plain, very distinguished black evening frock.

The man had smooth black hair, and wore big, horn-rimmed spectacles. By his appearance and speech he was an Ameri-

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can. He had a singularly pleasant voice and that almost superclean look of well-dressed American men.

As I passed I heard what he was saying to his companion.

"It's just too bad about Miss Honesty leaving, Mrs. Groote. I'm afraid it's going to make a big difference to us. And that Miss Dobson not being able to come, and Mlle. Delac getting married— Why, it's just a chapter of accidents!"

I stopped, hesitated a second, and then went up to them.

"Excuse me," I said quietly, before my courage could evaporate. "I couldn't help hearing what you said. Do you want an instructress?"

I had gathered that they were the managers or proprietors of the Flower Garden Club.

The woman stared at me in surprise, but the man looked at me with a gleam of recognition.

"I say—this is the young lady I was watching—I told you, Mrs. Groote. I was pretty certain she was a professional, only that she was a sight better than any professional I've ever seen. Do you want an engagement, Miss—"

"Fane," I put in.

"What qualifications have you?" asked Mrs. Groote.

I found out that she was the proprietress, and the man—a Mr. Anselm, her manager. Her husband, who had died three months previously, had started the club, and she was carrying it on, and Mr. Anselm, who had founded the famous Apple Tree dancing rooms in New York, was reorganizing it for her.

"Well, I could show you, couldn't I?" I answered.

"I've seen 'em," commented Mr. Anselm. "I've kept my eyes peeled on the young lady the whole evening long. She and our young foreign Adonis made as good a pair as I've ever seen."

"Were you dancing with M. Dorando, Miss Fane?" asked Mrs. Groote with sudden interest.

I admitted it, and she then asked me into her private room.

My luck was phenomenal. They raised no difficulty on the subject of references, on my telling them that I had never held a post in London, but had danced a good deal abroad. This was the strict truth. And then it turned out that Miss Honesty had only been engaged for three evenings a week. Not in the daytime at all. There were two other instructresses, who had been there since the foundation of the club. That was stupendous luck for me. I was determined to take on the job, if they would have me.

It was better than anything I could have hoped for—the chance of meeting King Peter as a man, and myself in a perfectly regular position. It was going to take some doing; but I was going to do it. A mass of objections came crowding into my mind, but I put them away.

I was to have five guineas for each evening—Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. On very rare occasions I might be asked to give some exhibition dances, but it was not a regular feature. People came to the Flower Garden Club to dance, not merely to look on.

I was to come to the club the following morning to be put through my paces. My head was in a whirl as I drove home. Bunch let me in, as arranged, by the little side door leading into the garden. From there I could get up to my rooms without using the main staircase.

We hurried up like two conspirators, Bunch in front.

"Well?" she asked as she shut my sitting room door.

I took off my hat and laughed a little hysterically.

"Not a hitch!" I said.

And I told her everything—that is, all the facts, not the main thing: that I knew I was crazily in love with King Peter and that my heart was nearly bursting with joy because he had seemed to take some interest in me.

Poor Bunch was horrified.

"It can't be done, Liz," she said. "You can't take on a job like that. To begin with, you can't manage it. Think of the risk of getting found out! And then—think of the horrid men you might come up against. You'd have to dance with any-

body and everybody. And how do you know the king will be there every time?"

I thought I did know, but I didn't say so. Those blue eyes seemed still to be smiling into mine. I saw the happy, carefree face, with all its cynical boredom gone. I felt the intoxicating thrill of that spell-binding waltz.

"It's only for three weeks, Bunch," I said. "The king is only going to be here for three weeks. I can manage that. Then we are going to the Riviera. There's nothing doing in town just now."

"You have a hundred business and charity things to attend to."

"Not at night, Bunch. I must do this. I've set my heart on it."

Seeing I was determined, she gave way. She said we could discuss ways and means to-morrow. I was too excited, and must go to bed.

But I couldn't sleep. I spent a weird, enchanted sort of night—with the music of the "Sable Night" waltz and the smile in the king's blue eyes.

The next morning my wig and my make-up stood the test of broad daylight of a peculiarly bright spring morning washed clean and vivid by heavy rain in the early hours.

Bunch repeated, after studying me from every point of view, that she would never know me.

I was at the Flower Garden Club at ten o'clock. Mrs. Groote and Mr. Anselm awaited me. I was put through my paces in the ballroom with one of the other instructresses and an attenuated orchestra.

All went well. I got the job.

Mrs. Groote made a few remarks to me about my behavior. She said they didn't go in for smartness, but were eminently respectable, or words to that effect. The quieter my manners, the better she would be pleased. She strongly discountenanced her young ladies having anything to do with the gentlemen clients outside the club. I modestly agreed with her.

It was funny to me how absolutely self-possessed I was, ever so much more so than in my own place in life. She informed me that my chief duty would probably be to act as partner to the young gentleman whose name she thought was Dorando. Miss Honesty had done practically nothing else during the last week.

"He is a foreigner," she added. "I think he is a count. How did you happen to be dancing with him, Miss Fane?"

I explained about dropping my bag and his introducing himself. I gave her the impression that I really had been looking out for a job, and had come to the Flower Garden to see what it was like. She did not apparently suspect me of any ulterior motives. She seemed very glad to have secured my services. Either she had no idea of the king's identity, or she had no intention of revealing the secret to the new instructress.

So I went back home and became Elizabeth Cleveland once more—until Tuesday night, when I should be transformed again for a few hours into Betty Fane, of the Flower Garden Club.

Later on in the morning, it being so brilliantly fine, there were lots of people walking in Hyde Park, between Hyde Park corner and Stanhope Gate. As Bunch and I walked through on our way to lunch at my great-aunt Caroline's, I overheard a woman say something that brought the blood to my cheeks.

"Look, that's Lady Cleveland—that girl in brown with the black hair and the white face. Not particularly pretty, is she? She's so hugely rich that she could buy up all England. And they say she's going to marry the King of Florania." Then she laughed and added: "I think I'd make a better use of my money than that."

I was furiously indignant. These things were being said about me. It was common gossip that I was going to buy a crown. After luncheon my great-aunt Caroline referred to it.

"Are these rumors true, child? Are you going to be a queen?"

"I haven't made up my mind," I answered awkwardly. "Please, Aunt Caroline, I don't want it talked about."

She looked at me with her shrewd old eyes.

"It's a big risk," she said. "But I dare say you'll pull through it. Your fa-

ther's daughter ought to, anyhow. Don't be hurried, Elizabeth my dear. Take your time."

That afternoon the Princess de Chanterelle called on me. She brought her brother with her, Lord Maurice Angell. I had heard that he was a noted lady killer. He certainly was awfully good looking in that lazy way of very fair men. He drawled and lounged, and his voice was too soft. It hadn't any character, any vivacity. The kind of man's voice that impressed me was the kind that made me feel queer. I could not express it otherwise to myself. And that was what King Peter's voice did to me. It wasn't musical; it was rather harsh. But it went through you, and when it was tender it made you want to cry.

Lord Maurice made himself awfully agreeable to me. He was a good tennis player, and, hearing we were going south, he said we must get some games together at Cannes and Monte Carlo. I couldn't help thinking him rather nice, and of course his handsomeness appealed to me. He was really a godlike creature, so tall and well-made, and such wonderful sun-golden coloring. His only faults were that his forehead was rather low and his wonderful hazel eyes were a little too close together.

The princess invited me to dine quite informally that evening. She said on Sundays they had regular picnic meals, and everybody helped themselves. There would only be themselves and Lord Maurice and one or two cousins and King Peter. It would have been amusing if it hadn't been hateful—the assured, careless way in which she spoke of him as if he didn't count at all. I supposed she thought of him as a slave, just waiting to obey her lightest whim.

I accepted for Bunch and myself. She was so lovely it simply hurt me to look at her. So pinky white, so dainty, so wonderful, with her dark purple eyes and her rich golden hair, and her nameless air of arrogance and carelessness. What a queen she would make, I thought miserably.

Of course, I was dying to see the king again; and in a cruel, angry way I wanted to see them together. Cruel to myself, because I knew beforehand that I should be a silly gawk again when I met him as myself.

Lord Maurice asked to see the pictures in the gallery. He was awfully keen on the surface. I had to show them to him. They are nearly all old masters. I was sure he was not really a bit impressed, and didn't know a Luini from a Cimabue. But he talked a great deal of nonsense to me, and somehow he gave me rather a sickening sense of deliberately making up to me. I suppose his manners would be thought very fascinating. I might have been the only person in the world worth considering. But—my horrid money in the background! I could not help wondering if that was what put the melting light into his golden hazel eyes. And I felt a pig for wondering. I was getting perfectly horrid.

"For goodness' sake, do dress up a bit!" said Bunch to me that evening. "You made the very worst of yourself at the De Chanterelles the other night."

One couldn't dress up very much for what the hostess described as a picnic meal. But I did try to make myself look decent. There was a fatality about it. I chose an emerald green gown. It was a color that rather suited me.

Unfortunately, when I got to Belgrave Square I found the princess in a wonderful crimson tinsel brocade frock, with strange pinkish and yellowish lights in it. It made my dress look awful. And I developed a sick headache, through excitement, I expect, and my face took on a faint greenish hue. And coming out of the room where we had taken our cloaks off, I trod on a long hanging end of my sash and my foot went right through the thin stuff, and the princess's maid had to come and sew it up, and that made me late, so that I hurried down and lost my way on the stairs, Bunch having gone down before me, in case the king had joined the party in the drawing-room.

And then I happened on a scene that turned me sick and giddy. Having lost my way, I found myself at the end of a long corridor, very dimly lit, and with heavy velvet curtains drawn across the tall windows. And as I came along, I heard a voice—the princess's. It was angry, with

a vixenish note in it, and yet it was imploring as well.

"Peter," it said, "I can't stand it any longer. I can't bear it. It's killing me. Oh, what am I to do?" A passionate sob broke from her.

I could not see them. They must have been just inside the big winter garden that opened from the corridor. But I could feel the atmosphere of passion, of something wild and hopeless, and I heard the king's voice, very low, with a kind of strangled sound, saying:

"What can we do, Laline? There is nothing to do."

It was proof positive, given to my own ears. He loved her. They had been making love behind the back of her old husband, and they had got themselves into a tangle, and they didn't know what to do. And even with her guests in the house, she was making a scene there—before dinner, upsetting the whole evening for himself and her.

I stood rooted to the spot. As they moved away, I slipped behind a curtain. I could hear the metallic rustle of the princess's brocade gown. Then I went back the way I had come, and found a servant who directed me to the drawing room.

The princess was there, but not the king. He joined us when the whole company was assembled, Captain Greffier was aid-de-camp in attendance.

The polite indifference in his greeting, charming though his manner was, struck me like a blow. Where was that happy, interested look of the Flower Garden Club? It was the cynical, bored young man again who took his seat beside me at the dinner table.

He looked down at me in his cool way, as the soup plates were taken away, and at once I felt ugly and stupid and utterly inadequate.

We talked French, of course, and that language seemed to make him say biting, clever, unkind things. Speaking it, he was so much older. The boy vanished; the man of the world took his place. One felt that this cynical young man had wandered into strange paths and had seen strange things. The words Cissie Greenstreet had spoken about him and the princess, rang miserably in my ears: "The only one he's been faithful to, they say."

The dinner was not nearly so informal as the princess had said, although I didn't think there were quite so many servants about.

Afterwards several people came in, all of them having met the king before. Card tables were brought out. Bunch settled herself to her beloved rubber. King Peter approached me and asked me carelessly if I would go and watch the gold fish in the winter garden. Everybody was moving about. Nobody seemed to notice us.

He knew his way about the house, and led me to the corridor, passing the spot where I had stood and heard him and the princess talking. I could still feel the sick horror of it, her passionate voice, his low, strained response.

"You look ill," he said to me, as we entered the winter garden.

I don't know what made me, but I flashed out:

"Your majesty means that I look ugly!" I suppose it was the contrast between the bored king in Belgrave Square and my young partner of the public ballroom. I suppose it was the secret knowledge in my heart, surging up in the first full reality—the knowledge that I loved him and that he was offering me the husk of his life in exchange for my money.

He gave an astonished laugh.

"I didn't mean that at all, I assure you. But you do look tired. Come, sit down." He drew a chair for me in the shadow of a clump of palms, quite close to the big pool, round which stood a fringe of flaming orange-red Calla lilies. "I wanted to talk to you," he went on, as he sank into a chair beside me. "To talk to you about our affairs."

His manner was stiff; his voice entirely businesslike.

"Have you given it any further thought?"

"I haven't made up my mind, if that is what your majesty means," I answered.

His eyes stared at me in angry offence.

"I'm afraid I can't wait," he said. "I shall have to ask you to decide."

"But, sir, you said the other day that there was no hurry," I protested.

"Things have changed. Rumors have got about. An announcement is expected. You are making me ridiculous. It must be yes or no."

I looked at him. He was frowning. There was a funny light in his eyes, half angry, half disgusted. Then he suddenly smiled, and the boy of the ballroom spoke to me again in that frank gaze.

"After all, it's no good pretending—it's only a matter of business."

My heart was thumping. If I said no now, as Elizabeth Cleveland, I should never see him again. He would go away, vexed with me. He would probably leave England at once. And I must see him again. I simply couldn't imagine my life without seeing him again. The "Sable Night" waltz drummed in my ears. I could hardly hear my own voice, as I asked:

"If I say, yes—when would—it come off?"

He laughed.

"Oh, you'd have time to breathe! We couldn't be married before June. We are still in mourning for my grandmother. Well, what do you say?"

He leaned toward me. He looked eager. I knew it was not because he wanted me. I was no more to him than one of the gold fish in the pool. But he wanted me to say yes, because I was an easy way out of his difficulties. Once settled, he could forget about it for a few months and enjoy himself—with the princess.

Then he smiled, and said lightly:

"I *do* seem to be a bitter pill to swallow, *milady!*"

It was the boyish, warm, impulsive smile of the Flower Garden Club. It conquered me. I hear his voice saying: "What heavenly luck for me! *Au revoir*, Miss Fane. To-night I shall never forget!" A madness entered into me.

. . . Come what may,
We will dance to-morrow; we have danced to-day

I could not let him go. I couldn't help myself. I looked at him, trying to make my face wooden and my voice businesslike and steady.

"If we needn't be married until June, I will say yes."

CHAPTER V.

TWO IN A FOG.

"IT'S such an awfully risky game, Liz, darling! I don't like it a bit."

Thus spoke Bunch on the Tuesday morning. She referred to my determination to go and take up my duties at the Flower Garden Club that evening at half past eight o'clock.

"Oh, but, Bunch," I said, "you're in it with me! You promised to help."

"I know." Bunch knitted her sandy brows in the fierce frown that made her look so deliciously comic. "But that was before you had accepted King Peter, Liz. Now you're going to marry him, every single thing you do will be more public than ever before. The press will dog your footsteps."

"I can't help it, Bunch. If it wasn't for the Flower Garden Club, I wouldn't have accepted the king."

"But, Liz, if you were found out!"

"I shan't be found out."

"But if you were!" she persisted. "The king would never forgive you."

"It's only for another fortnight," I urged. "Then the king is going back to Florania and we are going south, Bunch. Oh, you must help me out!"

I said a lot more. I told her my happiness depended on it. I declared that it would make all the difference in my life, that only she could help me to be a happy girl instead of a miserable one. In the end she gave way, and we settled down to discuss ways and means.

The greatest difficulty was my getting in and out of the house in my disguise. There were always servants about. We had managed to avoid them on the first two occasions. But it wasn't safe to risk it every time. And then, of course, there was the fact of my not being available for any social engagement, three nights each week. We were rather helpless about that. I felt and believed that I could reckon on King Peter—from then onward, of course, he was

simply Peter to me, and I may as well begin to write of him so—that I could induce him to spend those six evenings at the Flower Garden Club.

After all, that was my whole plan. If it failed, well, I was simply not going to think about that. Fortunately, there were practically no big social functions. Only the ball Lord and Lady Wolvermere were giving on the day after the state opening of Parliament and a big charity entertainment at the Princess de Chanterelle's, in aid of the Floranian Hospital in London the following week. Both of these were on Thursday. Of course, unforeseen difficulties might crop up; but we must be prepared for that.

It was a brain wave of Bunch's that solved the first and greatest difficulty.

She had a tiny house tucked away at the back of the Brompton Oratory, a quaint sort of country cottage with a wee garden. It was closed, and her caretaker, an old servant, had just been called away to nurse a sick sister in Liverpool. Bunch hadn't bothered to put anybody else in. Her valuables were at the bank, and she was one of those lovely people who trusted everybody implicitly.

The thing to do, she said, was for us both to go there on these evenings in time for her to make me up and get me ready. She would wait there until I came back for her. I would change and we would come back home. We must invent suitable engagements for the benefit of the household and any friends or acquaintances who chanced to ring us up. Bunch herself had more devoted friends than any woman I ever knew.

I was delighted. It was so easy and so feasible. Dear, unselfish Bunch! She thought nothing of the trouble to herself, and the boredom of waiting there three or four hours alone in her empty house. Not that Bunch was ever bored. She was simply a storehouse of resources, and, as one of her most fervent admirers said of her, for Miss Turke to be alone must be a treat, because she would be enjoying the finest company in the world—her own. Every alternate Tuesday and Friday was a gala night at the Flower Garden Club, and they had an extension of hours until two o'clock in the morning, but other nights they closed at midnight.

To keep up appearances, we went through the farce of dressing for dinner, and left the house about seven o'clock. The servants were told that we were dining out with friends just arrived from Paris at their hotel. Bunch had during the day driven round to her little house with my clothes and the precious wig, and the other things necessary for my make-up.

It had been a busy day, but all through it the thought of the night had been like a twisted thread of excitement and joy and fear. Supposing he didn't come? He had said he would, but then how many things might not have happened to prevent him? I had not seen him. He had had to go out of town. But in the morning had arrived, with a graceful letter and an enormous bunch of roses, a little golden box containing a wonderful ring, a large, deep, dark sapphire, blue black as a summer night. My engagement ring! That very day the formal news had been given out, our king's consent having been received, and all other official requirements complied with, and I supposed the papers would be full of it for a day or two.

Well, the day was there for interviewers and photographers and dressmakers and correspondence, and all the rest of it. And three nights each week were for my great adventure—the reckless throw on which I was hazarding my whole life's happiness.

The day for Elizabeth Cleveland and King Peter of Florania—the consenting parties to a heartless marriage of State; the night for Betty Fane and Count Dorando, for the waltz, for the sound of music, for the meetings of two strangers drawn together by the same passion, for the great deception, for the greatest gamble of all—with a man's heart for the stake.

When I was ready, Bunch surveyed me critically. She gave a little smile.

"The make-up is perfect," she said. "It's a bit hard to get it just the same every time. Look at yourself, Liz. Do you see anything wrong?"

I answered that I didn't. Each time I really marveled at the cleverness of her transformation. I was learning to do it my-

self. There were some little touches at the corners of the eyelids that made all the difference in the world.

"Silly child," Bunch said, "a little dancing instructress wouldn't be wearing a string of pearls worth ten thousand pounds. You've forgotten to take them off."

That showed how thorough Bunch was and how careless I was. A little detail like that might have caused me trouble; might even have given me away.

"Oh, what a horrid night!" exclaimed Bunch, coming to the door with me. "Liz, I don't half like your going out in it."

It had been raining all day, and had only just stopped. It was very dark and a mist was coming up from the ground of Bunch's little garden.

I assured her I should be all right and must hurry or I would be late. I got a taxi from the rank by the Oratory, and told the man to drive me to the corner of Oxford Street and Tetworth Street. From there I thought it safer to walk to the club. As we got near Oxford Street, the mist grew decidedly thicker.

I arrived at the club at the same time as Mr. Anselm, the manager. He and Mrs. Groote would not be there that evening, and he would give me my instructions. There was a small room where we changed our shoes and left our things. This was going to be another test for me, because as an instructress I must not wear a hat. Would my wig bear such close scrutiny as a man dancing with me would be almost sure to give it? How I wished I wasn't so small!

The first dancers began to arrive about nine. It was only on gala nights that the club had a dinner served. This was not one, so there would only be light refreshments for supper.

The room didn't fill up quickly. The weather was no doubt responsible. There was no sign of the king. My first duty was to pilot a very young man, hardly more than a boy, who was only learning to dance. Mr. Anselm informed me that he spent a great deal of money on lessons. It was a trial for me, because I was longing to dance to the strains of the wonderful band. The youth was eager to learn, but very clumsy, and simply tied up in a knot with nervousness. He didn't say a word, except to thank me for helping him.

Then I had to dance with an elderly man, white haired, white mustached, with apple cheeks and twinkling, humorous eyes, who obviously danced for exercise. He knew all the steps and was very energetic, but he hadn't the true dancing feet and there wasn't an atom of music in him. However, he was very nice. I had three dances with him, and he talked to me between whiles chiefly about his daughter of seventeen who was in a convent near Paris.

It was just after my third dance with him that I caught sight of the big form and fair, lazy, handsome face of Lord Maurice Angell. It gave me a shock, although I wasn't really afraid of his recognizing me, as we had only met once. But I hadn't somehow thought that any of my set came there. He was with a woman with orange colored hair and the queerest greenish eyes, very big and shining like precious stones. She wore a wonderful green and gold frock, very *outré*, sleeveless and unusually low, and all her fluffy extraordinary hair, standing out like an aureole, made her awfully noticeable.

They were both good dancers, and seemed utterly absorbed in each other. I couldn't say I liked the look of the woman, but she was interesting.

I was getting hopeless. It was after ten o'clock. My courage began to evaporate. The king wasn't coming, after all. How could I have been such a fool! I couldn't stay there, dancing with strangers, at their beck and call. I hadn't reckoned on that part of it. I had only thought of the "Sable Night" waltz, and King Peter's blue eyes, and his voice telling me that he was lonely and that he wanted us to be friends.

But weren't those words that men said lightly—to any girl that they happened to be with? Oh, what a fool I was!

I wanted to get out of it, at any cost. I was suddenly frightened. The room was full. Lord Maurice Angell passed me, and stared into my face. It was a carelessly insolent look. He turned and smiled at me.

Panic got hold of me. That was what I

was subjecting myself to. And that man was all deference and courtesy to Elizabeth Cleveland in her drawing-room. How ugly the world was! I must get back to Bunch. I must get home.

The band struck up the "Sable Night" waltz. A low murmur went round the room. I made my way to the entrance, not caring what anybody thought of me. I was going.

And then I heard a low exclamation of pleasure, and I felt an arm round my waist, and before I knew what had happened, I was being swung round to that intoxicating tune, and King Peter's blue eyes smiled down at me, and he said: "What luck that this should be played just now! How do you do, Miss Fane?"

The rest of the evening—can I describe it? I danced with no one else. King Peter told me he had been delayed, much to his disgust. He asked me about my post, and when I told him, he said he would be there on each of my evenings, and I was to dance with nobody but himself. He would arrange it with the management.

"It 'll be only five times more, Miss Fane," he said, and there sounded real regret in his voice. "I'm leaving England on Monday week. We must make the most of it. I have never danced with any one like you."

We certainly made the most of that night. We hardly spoke at all, and yet there was something that drew us together that made me feel something I couldn't put into words, but anyhow that we had much more in common than just dancing.

Then came the end. I said good night to him at the entrance. When I had got my things and made my way into the street by a side entrance, I found the fog fairly thick. The club was almost emptied. Chauffeurs and taxicab drivers were calling out warnings to each other.

I turned the corner, groping my way. I was terrified, as I had never been out alone in all my life in a fog. I realized how easy my life had been, always some one at hand, always a car to step into, no waiting, no hustling—a velvet carpet of a life. And I also realized how hard must be the lives of girls working for their living as I was supposed to be for mine. I didn't know which way to turn. A man coming in the opposite direction collided with me, and elbowed me rudely out of his way with a swear word. I felt like sinking down on a doorstep and bursting into tears.

Then I heard footsteps, and out of the darkness came a voice that thrilled me through and through.

"Is that you, Miss Fane? I thought it might be. I've followed you round. How could you dream of coming out in this weather by yourself?"

I couldn't speak. King Peter took my hand and put it through his arm.

"Come," he said, "I have a car here. Where do you live?"

"Oh, please don't bother!" I protested. "I can get back quite well."

"Where do you live?"

"It would be out of your way."

"Where is it? Nothing could be out of my way."

"Not far from the Brompton Road."

"The other side of Hyde Park! Your London fog is always worse there. I insist on seeing you home."

He was propelling me round the corner again. A car was pulled up by the curb. He opened the door and gently pushed me in, asking me the address.

I gave him the first one that came into my mind—14 Massingham Street. Of course, it wasn't the right one, but I had to trust to my wits to serve me at the other end.

We drove off at a snail's pace.

"My name is Peter," said the king. "Will you call me that? We are to be friends, you know."

Oh, I thought if he only had spoken like that to the rich girl who was to be his queen! Instead, he had said, in French, in his cynical, *blasé* tone of voice: "I'm afraid it's a difficult job you are taking on. Believe me, I shall make it as easy as possible for you."

He had not asked me to be friends. There had been none of that warm, vital interest in his voice.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Betty," I said in a whisper.

"Such a sweet English name! We are

Betty and Peter, then. Say—Peter, please, Betty!"

"Peter!" I said, hardly daring to frame the word. I was terrified. I couldn't see how he could fail to recognize me. In the ballroom, with the crowd and the lights and the music, it was different. And we hardly spoke. But here, alone in the crawling car—was it possible that he didn't *feel* that it was Elizabeth Cleveland who sat beside him?

But he didn't. Of course, I didn't allow for the fact that the idea of such a masquerade as I was playing would ever enter into his head. Even a resemblance of voice, I suppose, would have meant nothing to him, except, perhaps, to remind him disagreeably of his wooden and wealthy English bride!

He laughed.

"It's the nicest name I know when you say it, Betty," he said.

The car ceased crawling.

The chauffeur got down and addressed the king in a foreign language, which I took to be Floranian. The king explained to me that we couldn't get any further. The fog was too thick. We were, as far as could be ascertained, just by the Marble Arch. Policemen were forbidding any further advance in either direction.

"We must walk," said the king to me. "Don't worry. I'll get you home safely."

He made me get out of the car, gave the chauffeur some hurried directions, and we set off.

The first bit was nothing on earth but walking by faith. All traffic was stopped. By luck we struck the gates, and crossing the wide space, found the path leading straight to Hyde Park Corner. There were quite a few people abroad, shouting good natured directions and joking with one another.

It was like a strange dream to me. Peter held my hand in his arm. Not being able to see him made it more intimate, more dear. His gay, tender voice seemed to wrap me in a mantle of supreme content. He talked nonsense in a way, but it was the nonsense of fairyland—the nonsense of my moonshine dream that he was an ordinary young man and I an ordinary girl.

Quite magically, when we reached Hyde Park Corner, we found the fog clearing. It rolled away in banks, a light breeze having sprung up.

"Shall we take a taxi or walk the rest of the way?" he asked. "Are you tired, Betty?"

"Oh, no, I am not."

We went on down Knightsbridge, entered the Brompton Road, and then he asked for directions.

I caught at any excuse.

"Oh, please, I'll go on alone! It's quite clear now. It's been so kind of you, Mr. Dorando."

"What!" he interrupted.

"I mean — Peter. But my people wouldn't like it. Please, I'd rather go home alone."

He didn't say anything. Just on our left was an open arçade. It was quite empty. There was no one about.

He drew me into it.

And I found myself in his arms.

His voice was in my ears, low and hoarse.

"Little Betty, if only we had met—in another world!" And his lips were on mine, and though I wanted to struggle and free myself, I simply couldn't move.

"Betty," he whispered, "tell me you like me more than a little!"

I couldn't speak. I was so happy; and yet I knew I oughtn't to be. After all, what was he doing? Making love to a girl of the people; taking advantage of her helplessness and need of protection in a fog. It wasn't very heroic. It was rather despicable.

He was engaged to marry Elizabeth Cleveland and in love with Laline de Chanterelle. And yet he was crushing Betty Fane, the dancing instructress, in his arms, and kissing her and murmuring low words sounding so sincere that they might have been the first love words he had ever spoken in his life.

"Betty," he persisted, "tell me! Speak to me, little Betty! You have danced right into my heart! I didn't know anything could be like this."

"I—oh, I don't know what to say!" I faltered. "You must not speak to me like

this. What is the good? You are going away."

"I don't know how I can leave you," he said passionately, and his voice so overcame me that I hid my face, and he caught me closer still.

"Betty, you do like me more than a little," he said, with a low laugh.

"But it isn't any good."

"But we have five evenings more—five wonderful evenings! And won't you let me take you somewhere for a meal, Betty—some quiet place where we can talk?"

"No, no," I replied. "I have told you, I mustn't! I am not allowed."

"What nonsense! But we are friends."

"Only in the ballroom, Peter," I said firmly, and he let me go rather suddenly.

"I beg your pardon," he said in an offended voice, and the autocrat showed through the young man making love. But his voice melted immediately. "Oh, Betty, it's too bad of me! I'm seeing you home because of the fog. I oughtn't to worry you."

It was such a frank, generous admission that tears came into my eyes.

"I must go," I said. "Thank you very much. Please don't come any farther with me."

"I love you, Betty," was all he answered. "Say you love me!"

"No, no; I mustn't! You are going away." I clung to that statement of his.

"I know, but it makes no difference. You are the only girl I've ever loved. You just took possession of me—this sudden love—it is the real one."

I couldn't listen to any more. I should have broken down.

I turned to go.

"Say at least we will be friends," he pleaded.

"Yes," I said, "we will be friends if you wish it."

"We can be friends at a distance, Betty. If I stayed near you, I should want more. I should have to have more."

"Good-by," I said.

"Friday," he answered. "Friday, Betty. And no dancing with anybody but me."

"That is not for me to say," I answered, trying to be prim. My heart was beating madly. I was so happy, as I turned down the street after a last handshake, that I could have two-stepped all the way to Bunch's house.

CHAPTER VI.

BLISS AND SADNESS.

KING PETER being in England strictly incognito, no formal entertainment was given by any of the royal family. But I was sent for to the palace, and so very kindly received, with Peter, who was invited to return before the wedding on a visit of state. We were to be married some time in June in the capital of Florania—a lovely city of the sea, like Venice, built on several islands, with waterways everywhere, and with beautiful old houses.

The Princess de Chanterelle gave a luncheon party at which the royal princes were present. The king showed at his very best with the other boys, but again I was at my very worst. It was just like fate. I had toothache. I think I had caught a chill in the fog. And to me Peter was just as usual, formal, polite, but entirely lacking in interest. He had accepted me; that was what it came to.

He had no curiosity about me. I was the girl with millions he was going to marry. He did not attempt to get to know me. I suppose now that that was why my masquerade as Betty Fane was so successful.

After luncheon Peter and the princes went to play tennis in the covered court, Baron Leomar and the other guests took their leave, and the princess asked me to come and have a little chat with her in her boudoir. Bunch had not been at the luncheon, because she had had to go to the country for the day.

The princess's boudoir was like herself—exquisite, perfect, finished to the last degree. The furniture was painted satinwood and the hangings were of the very palest blue. Everywhere were pink roses, some in silver bowls, some growing in silvered wicker baskets. There were heaps and heaps of ornaments, little bronze and silver statuettes, snuff boxes, china figures, and any amount of photographs.

On her dainty writing bureau, with its painted shepherdesses and lakes and trees, was a very large photograph of King Peter, in a golden frame with a crown on the top. It was signed in his big bold hand with some familiar words in French. She managed to make it quite conspicuous, with a bunch of flowers beside it, and nothing else at all near.

She looked at it, as she invited me to sit down. She wore a dress of white silk Irish crochet, so fine that her slender body looked as if it were covered with tiny white roses, and some of her very big pearls, and a little hat all made of white feathers, with her rich golden curls clustering round her lovely face. I wish I could describe her face. It was so much more than words can express—the marvelous coloring, like the finest porcelain, the purple eyes, the small, haughty nose, the curving, scornful, carelessly sweet lips.

"Oh, dear Lady Cleveland," she said in her voice like a sharp peal of little bells, "isn't that a splendid picture of his majesty?"

She was very punctilious in talking about him, but at the same time she managed with extreme skill to give you the impression that they were on very intimate terms. She leaned toward me with a graceful, confidential movement.

"I do hope you don't mind my talking about you and the king," she trilled. "You see, I have such a feeling for him. He has been so very good and gracious to me—to us. And I should so much like to know you better while I can, you see, before you become a queen. I have so wondered whether you are very glad about it, or a little frightened. It is such a responsibility to have taken on."

"Yes," I said, feeling stupid and awkward with her, as I did with the king—"a crown is a responsibility."

She laughed merrily.

"And the man still more of a responsibility, dear Lady Cleveland! Or perhaps that is hardly the word. But I can see you are awfully sensible and clever and all that, so you will understand. And," she added, with a solemn air, "of course we must hope that the king will settle down."

She made me furious, and of course, wretched. I was so horribly sensitive in those days. It was as if I was being mercilessly whipped to hear this exquisite creature, who was in love with him herself, hinting at his other loves.

I spoke stolidly.

"I suppose royal personages always get talked about, princess."

"Oh, yes, with more or less reason, no doubt." She leaned nearer still. Her voice fell. "My dear, don't misunderstand me! I feel you ought to be prepared. We are both about the same age. It seems disloyal to one's sex not to speak—and we are fellow countrywomen into the bargain. Your chief difficulty will be—Fay Delsarte. It is an old attachment, almost a regular affair, don't you know? She lives in Paris—a real establishment, very discreet and all that. But they visit together among his intimates. Very easy these things are made for royalty. Still, when he *marries* you—"

My face made her stop.

"There, I've shocked you! And I only wanted to do you a good turn. Do you mean to say that you'd never heard of the Delsarte?"

"Not by name."

"She was an actress. Some people say she's the most beautiful woman alive. There's no doubt she's the real vampire, charmer—the man eating type. I hear the chances are he'll never be able to shake her off."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like this!" I burst out. "It—it makes me sick."

"My dear—really I thought you ought to know. Leomar would never tell you. Nobody would. Is there anything worse than ignorance in such cases? And, after all"—she laughed sweetly—"you'll be the queen!"

I was too utterly wretched for words. To hear these things of the Peter of the Flower Garden Club! The man who had held me in his arms and kissed me and said he loved me! But, then, there was the horror of it. I knew what he was capable of. He thought nothing of making love to little Betty Fane, of trying to steal her heart, of breaking it, perhaps, and passing on. He was a king. He could do no wrong.

I rose and said I must go. I'd an important engagement. I could not face the king again. I asked the princess to excuse me to his majesty. I hoped my face didn't show everything I felt. I hated her for having made me show myself so awkward, so obviously overcome by her revelations. Of course I knew that she hated me. It was her revenge on me for marrying the king.

The next day was Thursday—the day of the Wolvermere ball. The king had told me that he had accepted an invitation. In the morning Bunch and I played tennis in the covered court. We did nearly every morning. We loved the exercise, which kept us fit.

When we had finished—Bunch having roundly beaten me—I said:

" Bunch, I am going to bandage my right ankle. I've given it a severe strain. You understand?"

She looked blank for a second, and I explained that it was an excuse for not dancing at the Wolvermere ball. I couldn't take that risk. Of course the king would ask me to dance.

" Bunch," I said, " I'm perfectly certain that if I danced with him, after the first three steps he'd know. That's something I couldn't disguise."

It was a night of anguish for me. I had to watch the king dancing the " Sable Night " waltz with Laline de Chanterelle—she floating like a fairy in his arms. I had to watch him dance with all sorts of people, and had to hear his polite regret at my disablement, his formal courtesies, his interludes of duty conversation, through which showed so plainly the boredom he felt in the company of the rich fiancée who could not take even the most superficial part in his life.

" I was looking forward to a dance with you," he said carelessly. " Somehow you look as if you could dance."

Oh, how my heart was like to burst with misery! He made me feel so inferior, so entirely at the mercy of his *blasé* look and cynical tongue!

On the Friday evening, I was early at the Flower Garden Club.

Mrs. Groote called me into her room. There was a little smile of satisfaction on her handsome hard face.

" Miss Fane, you are in luck," she began. " But before I tell you, I must give you a piece of information which you are to keep strictly to yourself. I feel sure I can trust you. Now, promise me!"

" Oh, certainly," I said, " but I don't understand."

" You will in a moment. Miss Fane, we have very distinguished clients here. The gentleman you are dancing with to-night, and know as Count Dorando, is none other than the King of Florania."

I looked properly surprised, abashed, and excited.

" His majesty wishes to preserve the strictest *incognito*," she went on. " You must not breathe a word to a soul. I should not have told you but for the fact that several people have noticed your dancing. You have become quite a star already. Lord Maurice Angell was here on Tuesday. He is the brother of the Princess de Chanterelle, with whom the King of Florania is staying. He was very much struck with your dancing, and informed his sister about it.

" She is giving a great Charity Fête next Thursday at her house in Belgrave Square, and she wants you to go there and do some exhibition dancing. She is going to engage Jaime de Vosca, as your partner. Of course, the king will be there, and his fiancée, the Countess Cleveland, and all society. You will receive a big fee. Now, isn't that a piece of luck for you, Miss Fane?"

I suppose Mrs. Groote thought I was stricken dumb with the overwhelming good fortune that had befallen me. Really, I was struggling with an insane desire to laugh aloud.

What a mess I had landed myself in! To be asked to go and give exhibition dances at the Princess de Chanterelle's in the presence of the King of Florania and his fiancée, the Countess Cleveland! To foot it with a hired partner—Jaime de Vosca was the world-famous Brazilian dancer—for the entertainment of the princess's friends and the ultimate benefit of the Floranian Hospital!

"A wonderful piece of luck!" repeated Mrs. Groote.

"I don't believe I could do it," I told her. "I should be so awfully nervous—in front of all those people!"

"Don't be absurd," she said sharply. When she was displeased, all the hardness in her face came out. "Of course, you can do it. I told you you might have to do exhibition dancing now and then. All you want is a little practice with de Vosca. We will manage that."

"I would really rather not," I said. I was getting nervous.

"It would be madness to refuse. I was thinking of your interest, too, Miss Fane. Why, you will dance before all smart London! And the girl he's going to marry, Lady Cleveland, is the richest girl in the world, and, knowing the king is so keen on dancing, she may want to know your exact steps and she may engage you to give her some lessons. Why, my dear girl, it may be the making of you!"

"I don't think I really feel up to it," I murmured.

"Don't be ridiculous! This is no time to run yourself down. You're the best dancer I've ever seen."

I couldn't say any more then. I should have to find some way out. Of course, I couldn't do it. I couldn't take the risk. If I were found out, it would be the end of everything. And I was bound to show up at the fête myself.

The king came fairly early, and we danced every dance.

"I've booked you up for the whole evening," he told me, laughing.

I couldn't help being struck by the irony of it—his paying for the time of his wealthy bride! And for the first time I suffered a pang of remorse at my deception and felt that it was not quite fair. And a sort of panic seized me. When he found out, would he be so angry that he could not forgive me. Some day he would have to find out. I tried to harden my heart by thinking of the other women in his life. But I couldn't. I knew that his anger would make me abjectly miserable.

All through the evening Peter became more and more silent. His face was clouded over and there was a dark look in his eyes. But I knew that I had not displeased him, for every now and then, he said in a whisper:

"Look at me, Betty. I love you."

By midnight I had a sort of drugged feeling. My steps became mechanical. All the spring had gone out of my dancing.

The king, too, moved automatically; and at the end of a dance, he said:

"I've had enough to-night, Betty. I must talk to you. I have things to say—I can't say them here. Let me walk home with you."

"It's a gala night," I answered. "I shall have to stay. I may be wanted."

"Of course not! Didn't I tell you I'd bought you—for to-night?" His voice was teasing and tender. I smiled a little sadly. Hadn't I bought him—for the rest of my life?

Just then the strains of the "Sable Night" waltz fell on our ears.

"We'll dance this one, Betty," Peter said. "It shall be our last."

We danced it, encore after encore. Toward the end a madness entered into us—the madness of the music and the words—

"We will dance to-morrow; we have danced to-day!"

"Ah, that wild, free, glorious dance! We seem to be as one. Our breaths mingled. Peter's eyes blazed into mine, fiery blue. There was nothing between us; our hearts beat for each other; we were outside the world. For one short triumphant spell of time I knew that I was the one woman in the world to him.

I was quite exhausted when it was over.

"Come away now," whispered Peter. "I'll meet you outside."

I obeyed him. I couldn't have done anything else then. I was as if bound by a spell. I saw nobody as I went out.

Peter was at the side entrance. He took my arm in silence, and we started off.

"Betty," he said, "I've got to go away to-morrow. Isn't it cursed luck? That was our last waltz."

This was news to me. I felt my heart give a leap of fear. What had happened? I had not seen him that day, although we

had spoken over the telephone in the morning. Whatever was taking him away must have happened later. Probably he had rung me up in Curzon Street and found both Bunch and myself out. Unless, of course, he was only telling this to Betty Fane because he had had enough of his meetings with her.

But that was not so.

"I've been called suddenly home," he went on. "I live in Florania. Do you know where that is?"

"On the map," I answered. "I am sorry you have to go."

"I say, Betty, what a poor little word! My heart is broken at leaving you."

"You ought not to say that," I said reproachfully.

"Why not? It's true."

I looked up at him. I had taken a sudden resolve.

"I know that you are the King of Florania," I said.

"Who told you?"

"Mrs. Groote, the proprietress of the club."

"It was very wrong of her," he frowned.

"I will tell you why she told me. It seems some gentleman of the great world noticed my dancing. He's the brother of of a lady, the Princess de Chanterelle—I think is the name."

"That ass, Maurice Angell," Peter muttered savagely. "Well, what's that got to do with it?"

"Mrs. Groote said, this lady is giving a Charity Fête next Thursday and she wants to engage me to go and give exhibition dances with Jaime de Vosca."

Peter clutched my hand.

"You won't do anything of the kind, Betty. Promise me you won't. It's a hateful idea, you and that confounded South American! I won't have you make an exhibition of yourself! I wish I could force you not to dance with any other man but me all the days of your life."

My eyes filled with happy tears. But did he mean it? To how many women had he said that? Oh, that everlasting torturing question!

"No, I don't want to do it," I admitted. "I told Mrs. Groote I should be too nervous in front of all those great ladies and gentlemen."

"I should hate you to do it, Betty. And I shan't be there."

"Mrs. Groote wants me to, of course, because it would be such an advertisement."

"Damn her and her advertisements! Promise me you won't."

"No, I don't think I will. But I can't exactly promise. I've my living to earn."

"Oh, Betty, it's such a shame!" he said in a hot, pained way. And I can do nothing for you."

"Why should you do anything for me?" I asked, rather bitterly, I'm afraid.

"Well, aren't we friends, Betty?"

Oh, how his voice hurt me!

"You are going to marry a very rich lady, aren't you?" I asked. I supposed that was how Betty Fane would express herself.

"Yes," he said curtly. "So you've heard that, too. But, Betty, that has nothing to do with you and me. Kings must marry."

"Is she—very pretty?" I whispered.

"Oh, I don't know. She is considered so, I believe. Betty, you musn't ask me these questions. You don't understand."

"Aren't you in love with her—then?"

Suddenly his voice grew fierce.

"How can I be when I'm in love with you?"

I gave a little cry.

We had reached the Marble Arch.

"You mustn't come any farther," I said. "I'll take a bus."

"No, Betty, let me come as far as Hyde Park corner. It's the last time. I'm going away to-morrow night. And all to-morrow I shall have to be doing things, so there'll be no dancing for me. This is our good-by."

I couldn't resist. We walked very, very slowly, like ordinary workaday lovers, arm in arm. We hardly spoke. Before we crossed the wide space by Hyde Park corner, Peter drew me under some trees. He bent his head and kissed me, and I kissed him back. He let me go at once. It was as if we had said everything in that kiss.

He spoke very low, holding both my hands. There was pent-up passion in his voice that thrilled me with a divine happiness that was half grief.

"Good-by, Betty. I don't suppose we shall ever meet again. It's better that I'm going—better for you and for me. Think of me sometimes, Betty. Think of your poor Peter, my little friend."

I couldn't speak. His voice was so real, so sad. It was as if he were telling me that he and I had met in fairyland, and that now we had to go back to the real world, where we should not know each other even if we met face to face.

If I had stayed I should have burst out with the truth. I dared not stay. I tore my hands away from his clasp, and, without another word or look, I ran.

Bunch was waiting for me in her little house. She had not expected me yet, it being a gala night at the Flower Garden Club. She looked at me anxiously from behind the big spectacles she wore when reading or writing.

"Liz, what's the matter? You've been crying. What's happened? Tell me at once."

Before I answered her, I took off my hat and removed the golden wig.

"The king has been called away," I said. "He leaves to-morrow night. We shall hear about it, I expect, when we get to Curzon Street."

"Then this is all over. You won't be going to the dancing place any more?"

"It's all over, Bunch. We can put the old wig away in its box. The Flower Garden Club will see me no more."

"Thank God!" said Bunch fervently.

We got a message from the king at home. The reason of his sudden recall was the serious illness of the Prime Minister. He was not expected to live, and in case of his death, the king must be on the spot. The message said that the king would have to be at the Embassy most of the morning, but that he would be happy to lunch with me as already arranged.

All through that night, I heard the sad-mad-gay melody of the "Sable Night" waltz. The night was indeed falling on my golden day.

In the morning I went out early and sent a telegram to Mrs. Groote. I could not trust it to any other hand.

"Much regret must abandon post," it ran. "Reasons of health. Cannot accept engagement Charity Fête Thursday."

I signed it "Fane."

That, I supposed, was to be the end of my masquerade. I had received no money, and no doubt Mrs. Groote would curse me for an ungrateful wretch and forget all about me.

The king came to luncheon. I had asked several people whom he wished to meet. It was a formal affair. The talk was much of Floranian affairs. He singled out Bunch for his special attention, as he generally did. He left early. There was a lot for him to do.

At eight o'clock in the evening Bunch and I drove to the station to see him off. Misery had made me dull and stupid. I looked my worst, as I always did on these occasions. He was going away. I should never meet him again as Betty Fane. It would be always under these conditions that seemed to paralyze me.

For one mad moment, as we kissed under the trees in Hyde Park, he and I had been one. But he did not know it. And all the problems of our marriage remained.

Despite his incognito there were a good many people at the station.

At the last moment he took leave of me, raising my hand to his lips with graceful courtesy. His eyes were politely indifferent.

I felt no touch of him. I was utterly wretched. I longed to cry out—"Why, oh, why can't you look at me as you looked at Betty Fane!"

The next morning I read in a daily paper:

> His Majesty the King of Florania was entertained to luncheon yesterday by his fiancée, the Countess Cleveland, at her residence in Curzon Street. The sudden indisposition of his prime minister forced his majesty to cut short his visit to England. Lady Cleveland drove to Victoria station in the evening to see her fiancé off. General sympathy is felt for the young couple in this misfortune, which has prevented them from enjoying to the full the first blissful days of their betrothal

Blissful days, indeed! Or, rather, blissful hours! Those few secret, wonderful dancing hours!

That night I took the golden wig out of its box and cried over it before I went to bed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INSCRUTABLE FAY DELSARTE.

ONE of my houses was a beautiful villa in the South of France. It was at Roquebrune, quite near Monte Carlo, a great big white house with a flat roof and a tower from which there was a magnificent view over mountains and sea. The gardens ended in a broad marble terrace that hung over the Mediterranean. It was called Villa des Oeuillets, I suppose after the carnations. They were simply marvelous, deep rose-red and enormous, and in the season they covered everything in a glowing mantle, walls, terraces, cascading down almost into the sea.

Bunch and I stayed for a few days in Paris on our way down. Two days before we left I had to undergo a painfully embarrassing ordeal.

Baron Leomar, who was over there, rang up our hotel, and asked if he could have an interview with me. He came in the morning, very correctly dressed as usual, and looking very distinguished and picturesque. After his customary flowery compliments, he plunged into his business. It gave me a shock. It was about King Peter's debts. The baron excused himself. He ought to have gone to my man of business, but these were things of such a delicate nature that he felt I ought to be advised first.

I listened in dismay while he spoke with obvious reluctance by trying to be businesslike.

The king's worst escapade appeared to be that he had pawned some of the family jewels—not the crown jewels, of course, but some of the necklaces and other ornaments belonging to the royal house. They were here in Paris and they ought to be recovered. He had persuaded a famous jeweler in the Rue de la Paix to lend him a large sum on them, and the interest was not paid up, and the jeweller was becoming restive.

Of course, I said, they must be redeemed and sent back to Florania at once. It would be a costly business, said the baron. What did that matter? Wasn't that what I was there for? I didn't exactly say that, but it was the feeling at the back of my mind. I had no doubt that the poor man felt it too, for he looked at me hesitantly before he spoke again.

There was something more. The king had borrowed a million francs from a certain M. Emanuel Cirian, a cosmopolitan Jew. Again the interest had not been forthcoming, and M. Cirian was also growing restive and threatening proceedings which would create terrible scandal.

Of course, I said, M. Cirian must be paid in full.

I was woefully ignorant of procedure in such cases and asked the baron what ought to be done. He said that my lawyers and the king's lawyers should meet and arrange it all. One of the king's lawyers was in Paris at the moment. I wired at once for Mr. Martin, our old man of business. The baron went away full of apologies, regrets and gratitude.

Mr. Martin arrived the same evening. In the morning he met the king's lawyer, and afterwards had a long talk with me.

He had arranged for the jewels to be redeemed and M. Cirian to be paid.

"While we are on the subject," he said, "I may as well put the matter before you. Of course there will have to be settlements made on his majesty, which will remain always in the royal family. I suppose you would wish that—"

"Oh, please, Mr. Martin, do everything you think fit." I put it hurriedly. "I don't understand these things one little bit. The king must have everything necessary. I leave it entirely to you."

"I will talk it over with his majesty's man of business," he said. "You can trust me to safeguard your interests. I should not, for instance, think it advisable to make over the whole of your fortune and property to the king's privy purse. In my opinion you ought to retain sufficient command of your affairs, so as to be safeguarded in any emergency."

"Emergency, Mr. Martin!" I repeated blankly.

" Thrones are not such safe places as they used to be," he said.

This talk about money was very degrading. I could not help feeling humiliated, although Mr. Martin's crisp, businesslike tone made it seem as natural as it could. It was the first time. That was why I felt it so badly. It was one thing to tell yourself vaguely and cynically that you were buying a crown. It was another thing when you actually paid the first installment.

And what I felt for King Peter made it worse. When I thought of my love for him —for the Peter of the Flower Garden Club, and remembered that to me he wasn't that Peter at all, but just an extravagant and reckless young man who was using me to pay his debts and restore the financial credit of his house—oh, I could have sunk through the floor with shame!

Between me and the king money had never been mentioned after that one occasion when I asked him bluntly whether he was marrying me for my money and he pretended to be horrified. In fact, nothing had been mentioned about my property but one item of it—the racing stable and training grounds at Kalshot near Cleveland Hall.

Personally, I should not have kept it on, but I found courage once to ask him what he would like to do, and he said there was nothing he would like better than to take it over and run the horses under his own colors. He was evidently a passionate devotee of the Sport of Kings; and I never saw him so interested and animated as when he realized, from what I told him, what a wonderful legacy of breeding and form, and also luck, he was inheriting from my father.

And, as I sat there, looking rather miserably into the old lawyer's face, I wondered what my father would think of the use to which I was putting all his great possessions. My father had been the friend of kings, but would he want his little daughter to be a queen? Would he not rather she married an ordinary man who loved her?

Whither was my adventure leading me? Now that Betty Fane had gone out of King Peter's life, would Elizabeth Cleveland be able to win his heart?

It was worth winning. Oh, yes, it was! The man who had said that it was better for him and Betty Fane to part had shown the pure gold of unselfishness through all the dross of satiety and cynicism that his exalted position had gathered, like a hard husk about his soul.

Before we left Paris I told Mr. Martin to arrange everything as he saw fit, providing the king's advisers were satisfied. I'm afraid my bitter feelings were uppermost again. We must not be niggardly when we were buying a crown! I had been brooding over my position, and I felt that whatever Betty Fane had been, Elizabeth Cleveland in the king's eyes was what my father used to call a *splendidus nullus*, a splendid nothing, an automaton only animated by the power of almost limitless gold.

Two days after our arrival at the Villa des Geuillets, I heard from the king. The prime minister had taken an unexpected turn for the better, and was on the road to recovery. Under the circumstances, the king had accepted an invitation from the De Chanterelles to stay with them at the villa they had taken for the season, and he would probably arrive next week. He expressed a decorous pleasure at the prospect of our reunion, and signed himself " *votre tout dévoué*, Peter R."

I knew the De Chanterelles' villa. It was on the other side of Monte Carlo, a very magnificent house, but without much of a garden.

The princess had arrived the day after we did. She came over at once to see me. She was most awfully friendly, and plainly inclined to enter into an intimate friendship with me.

" My dear," she said, " isn't it delightful that his majesty is able to come to us? Do you know, I've come to see if I can borrow some servants from you. Two of those we engaged have disappointed us; and, of course, a king in the house does make more work, although I must say this particular one is the most modest of guests."

I lent her a man and a maid. We had brought out our English servants with us, all but the chef and his assistants, who were local men my father had always employed.

The meals at the Villa des Oeuillets were rather famous.

I always felt awkward and embarrassed with the princess, and couldn't bring myself to meet her advances with any show of enthusiasm. I was jealous of her; that was the truth. The mere thought of the king staying in her house tortured me. He and she—and her old husband who looked on complacently.

We met in the private club at the Casino the following night.

Bunch was an inveterate gambler. I didn't care about it a bit. I never did more than stake a few louis here and there quite without system, but I always won. Bunch nearly always lost; but she would never let me pay her losses, and when, on rare occasions, her luck turned and she brought off a big *coup*, she was as delighted as a child.

The princess came up to me, as I stood behind Bunch at the baccarat table. She linked her arm into mine, and led me away.

"My dear," she said in a momentous whisper, "*she* is here."

"Who?" I asked, absolutely ignorant of what she meant.

"Fay Delsarte. I feel you ought to see her. You're not angry with me, are you? I do think you ought to be prepared. Look—over there on the left by the table where my brother is taking the bank—that woman all in black! She never wears anything else—in public. The soul of discretion!"

The princess laughed softly and her laughter seemed to scorch my heart.

I did not want to look at Fay Delsarte; but I had to. She drew my eyes like a magnet. And once having looked, I had to keep on looking. Her moon face of alabaster purity and delicacy, her heavy purple black hair that hid her ears, her midnight eyes so full of secrets, her perfect figure, straight and slender, like a lance. All the hopeless misery of the world stirred in me as I realized that she was associated with Peter. Somehow, as I looked at her, I realized that the king might have made love to the princess to pass the time, but that this inscrutable, severe, statuelike beauty would hold him as Laline de Chanterelle never could.

What hope could there be for me? How could any ordinary girl pit herself against the mystery of those fathomless eyes, against the spell of those serious lips, of that calm brow?

"I knew she had a villa near here," the princess whispered to me. "But I should have thought even she would have kept away. She must know that he is coming. What do you think of her?"

"I—I don't know," I said, feeling utterly at sea. "She—she doesn't look a bad woman."

The princess shrugged her shoulders.

"It depends how you look at it. She's certainly a clever one. She's had the king on a chain for years."

"Is she French?" I asked.

"No. Half English, half Spanish, I believe."

That night when we got back to the villa, I asked Bunch whether she had ever heard gossip about King Peter and Mme. Delsarte.

Poor Bunch looked worried to death, which answered me.

"You see, Liz, you've got to face it," she said. "Kings are—well, kings. There's no doubt that he visited very much at her house in Paris, and that they had a circle of friends of their own. I suppose Laline de Chanterelle has been telling you all about it."

I was silent.

"I wonder whether you thought sufficiently about this marriage," Bunch went on anxiously. "Are you regretting it, Liz? There might still be time to draw back."

I shook my head. I could not tell her all that was in my heart.

"Bunch, the King Peter of the Flower Garden Club is quite another man."

She sighed. "And you've fallen in love with him, and you're waiting for the time when the king and the dancing partner become one and the same. It is a risky game, Liz, darling. But if you're going on with it, you must look things in the face."

My cheeks burned. I wouldn't have even beloved Bunch know that I had fallen in love with King Peter, that I was wildly jealous not only of Laline de Chanterelle, but of Mme. Delsarte.

I spent a night of anguish. The woman looking as she did made it all the worse. I could have borne it better if she had been a vulgar, painted, bejeweled member of the *demi monde.* But that deep, still loveliness, that face as of a priestess or a prophetess of antiquity—how could any man ever escape from a woman like that?

The princess confessed to me to be very worried about her brother. Every day she managed to bring us together. I found it very difficult to avoid the meetings. I liked Lord Maurice well enough and I enjoyed a game of tennis wth him as my partner, but I could not forget his insolent stare and still more insolent smile given to Betty Fane at the Flower Garden Club.

" Tennis is so good for Maury," his sister said to me. " It keeps him away from those wretched tables. I know he'll ruin himself if somebody doesn't look after him. If you knew the trouble he's been to me, my dear. That dreadful woman, Baba Hunter, has got hold of him. Her husband's out in India, and she's amusing herself with poor Maury. I'm sure he doesn't care a pin about her, but she's a regular leech and he can't get rid of her."

I thought of the woman with the aureole of orange hair and the queer greenish eyes and the interesting face dancing with Lord Maurice, and I wondered whether the princess was quite telling the truth.

" I only wish," the princess went on petulantly, " that Maury would meet a nice girl who would marry him and take him in hand."

And somehow the way she looked at me—it was meant to be a sweet look, but there was something waspish in it—made me realize that she wished I had taken it into my head to marry her brother instead of the king. Her hands were exquisite, like everything about her, with tapering, rose tipped fingers. Just then they looked to me like claws. And I saw myself as I was in her eyes—simply a mountain of gold.

The days passed quickly. On the surface they were crammed with amusements. One was always doing something, motoring, walking, playing tennis or golf, gambling, or listening to the beautiful concerts at the Casino. But my heart was full of the old ache, only it was no longer vague. I knew what it meant by that time. Life was so empty, for all its fullness. What could I look forward to, if I could not win the king's heart? Only a life of irksome duties and barren material splendor. Was it worth while?

One afternoon I stayed alone at the villa while the party we were usually with went over to a battle of flowers at Mentone. It was a hot day and I had rather a headache, and the lawyers had sent me a batch of papers to go through.

When I had finished I was thoroughly wretched. It was all money—money—money.

I went through the gardens and down a little rocky staircase path at the side of the terrace to our little sandy beach. The carnations were just beginning to come out—it was an unusually early spring—and their scent, with the tang of the salt sea on them, was delicious. The sea was like a sheet of turquoise dusted with gold. Not a ripple upon its surface.

A childish desire to paddle overcame me. I took off my shoes and stockings and waded knee deep into the water. It was so cold that it braced me and I almost immediately felt much better. I kept on running backward and forward into the sea and out of it again. I splashed about like a child. I realized how great was the power of the simple joys of nature to heal all the ugly wounds that the world inflicted. I felt for a while as I used to do when I was little and my father took me to the seaside somewhere and we spent happy days all alone.

I remembered his way of singing aloud—he had a most glorious barytone voice. And his favorite old song came to me: " The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington."

I could hear him singing it as we paced the beach of the beautiful bay of Spezzia, when I was eleven years old, near the spot where Shelley died. And I began to sing it, too, at the top of my voice.

" There was a youth, and a well beloved youth,
And he was a squire's son;
And he loved a bailiff's daughter dear,
That lived in Islington."

I was singing and staring out to sea and feeling so relieved and light about the heart when suddenly I heard my song taken up in a most melodious whistle from behind me.

Bunch was a great whistler, and I thought it must be she come back early.

"That you, Bunch?" I called out without turning round. "Do come and paddle! The water's lovely."

The whistler went on for a bar or two and then stopped. Rapid footsteps came racketing down the rocky staircase, and I turned to find King Peter there, hatless and smiling and out of breath.

"Oh, dear!" I gasped, mindful of my bare legs and feet.

"How do you do?" he cried in English. "I'm afraid I've disturbed you. Would you mind if I paddled, too? It's awfully hot."

I was covered with confusion and snatched up my shoes and stockings and hurriedly began to put them on.

"The water is cold, really," I explained. "I wouldn't paddle if you're hot. I did not expect you."

"The servants told me you were in the garden, and I came to look for you," he said. "I've only just arrived."

As I scrambled to my feet, I met his eyes. He was looking at me in a puzzled but a very friendly way.

"Do you know," he said, "we have never talked English before. When you speak English, you remind me dimly of somebody—and I can't think who."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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GHOSTS OF BROADWAY

THE wan ghost of the moon
Goes, wistful, by,
Forgotten, futile,
In the flaring sky
Above Broadway,
With none to look at her—
The lights bedazzle
Every reveler!

So might, I think,
The restless ghost return
To Broadway,
Where the lights forever burn.
Of some gay chorus lady,
Once its pride—
The wistful ghost of one
Who had not died!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery.

Linda

By RUTH ROBINSON BLODGETT

"MAYBE there's some sort of God, after all!" Maria Hodge stood stock still on the winding, macadam driveway to the State Insane Hospital, and looked up into the blue.

A frisking puff of wind lifted the incongruous buttercups from her black sailor hat. A newly-awakened awe passed over her rouged face. Never during the twenty years she had been making this trip had such palpitating, disorganizing hope pounded in her stagnant heart.

Then she set grim lips across over-large false teeth. "I'm a ninny to be expectin' too much!" she said to herself. And she climbed, with accustomed feet, on up the grade.

But something was still stirring the surface of her soddenness. The pounding at the long closed door of her heart continued.

Twenty years ago, Maria Hodge had renounced God—not deliberately—inevitably! One half, the thinking half, went. It went into that sun-bathed, yellow-brick institution up there ahead.

"We are like one super-person, you and I!" Amos had said, his eyes articulating the fondness of his heart. "You, with your feet firmly on the earth, Maizie, and I, with my head in the clouds!"

And twenty years ago, she had been obliged to "put him away!" Since then, no courage or heart to lift her eyes! Beheaded as it were—left a blasted trunk with limbs! No life-renewing sap! No spring-time tender shoots! Dead—dead!

"I'm a ninny!" she repeated to herself. But, for the hundredth time, she took from the pocket of her jacket the typewritten note from Miss Nixon, the doctor's secretary.

It read: "There has been a change. He is quite calm at times. Dr. Peck wants to know if you will come to the Saturday

morning conference. This may be hard for you. On the other hand, it may give you great satisfaction. And, in helping the doctors to understand him, you know you are helping others!"

It was on the way home from the post office with this letter, yesterday, that she had seen the buttercups in the milliner's window. It seemed like a sign—and she went in and bought them.

The pounding began again. Yes, this trip was different from all the other automatic, resigned ones, up to now. No hopes heretofore to be shattered! Amos an empty husk—the kernel gone! "It's odd how I've got used to dull pain," she reflected. "It almost hurts to have the ache stop a little!"

There had even been small compensations in these trips—the breath of fresh air from the hill, the very kindliness of the big, warm building itself—except for those iron-barred windows, the humanness and courtesy of the doctors and nurses, the realization that Amos was not alone in bondage, when she saw those other inmates, and exchanged greetings with them.

Two of them now, out there on the slope, dressed in blue jeans, were turning over the soil. The smell of up-turned earth quickened her nostrils. Memories! A back-yard framed in a dreary board fence, but a thing of dreams with its garden-plot staked out! The ceremony of the first spadeful! Discussions—plans! Where the peas—where the beans! Should it be nasturtiums and sweet alyssum, or geraniums and mignonette—there was so little room! And, through the gardens of the years, hers and Amos's, their Hazel—a baby digging in the damp earth for wriggly worms, a little girl with her own tiny garden-tools, a big girl full of her own ideas about new flowers that they must try!

"Good morning, Jerry!" she called out now. The brittleness in her voice revealed the nervous expectancy in her heart. "Aren't you startin' gardenin' early this year? There's frost in the air still!"

Jerry tipped his cap with scrupulous care and set a grin. His grin included her and the universe.

"Dunno, ma'am! To-morrer's Easter!"

Easter? So it was! Strange coincidence that this trip of hers should come on the day before Easter! Was it another sign?

She was getting short-winded. Hill-climbing, expectation, dread! They said in the churches Easter meant rebirth. Meaningless to her these twenty years! What answer was there to that gnawing question—what had become of his great soul?

But the constant, steady pricking of memories went on. It was Easter that day in the choir, when she knew by his eyes that he loved her. It was Easter when they went for three days to New York on their wedding trip. And, just because it was Easter that seemed to have knitted their lives, they had celebrated it each year with the ceremony of the first spadeful.

She could see him now—just home from the factory, his coat off, the shovel in his hand, that front lock lifted by the wind: "Isn't Easter the most wonderful time of all, Maizie! It means we don't ever need to be afraid of growing old!" Oh, what a dear he was—always so sure of himself—always looking on the bright side—getting such a lot of happiness out of little things! But, oh, so sensitive underneath, so worried if things didn't go just right, and if people didn't see it the way he did!

A tear trickled in a crooked path down the artificial layer of youth. She stopped, took off her cotton gloves, jammed them in a pocket, and mopped her face gently—very gently. It left a faint pink stain on the coarse handkerchief. Again she set her grim lips, and narrowed her dim, brown eyes to slits. Nevertheless, those words, "there has been a change. He is quite calm at times," set up the furious pounding at the long-shut door anew.

Once more she lifted her eyes to the blue. A cloud, whisked by the breeze, seemed caught for a second, a chiffon scarf, in the top branches of a tall elm.

"If you give him peace, Lord, I'll admit I've been in the wrong, and I'll go back to church to-morrow!" That was like Maria Hodge. No unconditional surrender, but a bargaining with the Lord! She had learned it did not pay to give something for nothing.

The cloud sailed on across the sky.

She rounded another bend in the road.

Ahead of her trudged two ridiculous round gray figures, topped with red tams. They must be the Paddy and Binny about whom they all talked at the hospital—the small daughters of that nice Dr. Peck, the new resident physician. She was fast gaining on them. It had been so long since she had been with children that she had forgotten how to talk to them, and they embarrassed her. The ones in the neighborhood, she knew, thought her cross-grained and queer. She had heard the boys yell out, "here come the Black Maria!"

But Paddy and Binny were used to queer people.

"Have you seen the bunny?" Paddy demanded, her round hard little face red under the permanent freckles. They both had freckles like their father. Odd for two midgets to look so like a great grown man!

"What bunny? Does your mother know you're 'way up here alone?" Their house was just below the last curve.

"No, but we got to find the bunny—"

"And tell him we want him to hide us mostly pink eggs to-morrow!" piped in Binny.

"Course I shall find more 'n Binny, cause I'm bigger!"

Binny looked crestfallen and apologetic for her lack of two inches—an unfair race, in which she was beaten at the start.

"And I can skin the cat, too," announced the aggressive Paddy. "She's too little. My daddy taught me." They walked along by her side. "If you'll let me look in that box, I'll skin the cat for you!" Maria always brought a box of goodies for Amos.

Somehow she felt powerless before this determined five-year-old. Miss Nixon said the patients felt that way before her father.

"Well, go on, child. I'll watch you."

"Oh, you'll have to put down the box. Now! Give me your hands. Hold tight!" To Maria's dismay, the child planted one brown sandal on her black serge skirt by the knee, the next one against her abdomen. She hung suspended horizontally—up—over—plopped the brown sandals and the fat, bare legs—up came the under side of the gray bloomers—and last of all a magenta Paddy, the scarlet tam still on her head.

"There!" she shouted triumphantly.

"Good gracious, child, don't ever do that to me again! I'm shaking all over. I was sure I'd drop you!"

Binny, stingy with applause, but willing to share in the reward, hovered over the box. Before two pairs of greedy, round eyes, getting rounder than ever, Maria opened it.

"You can each have a jumble, and Binny can choose first, because she's the littlest."

Binny chose the biggest, her dimple giving thanks the while.

"I like you!" She gave a complacent, cooky-filled smile. "Would you give me one of those pretty buttercups, too?"

"Oh, I can't. They don't come off, child."

"Can I whisker you a secret?" Maria bent her head. "Will you stand me on the wall, and put the buttercups under my chin, and Paddy can watch and see if I like butter."

Absurd how she did everything they suggested! She lifted the smaller round gray ball onto the wall, and stood so that the yellow of the flowers on her hat cast their brilliant hue on the under side of Binny's chin.

"She does, she does," squealed Paddy. "Now me!"

"No, I've got to be hurryin' on. I'm late now." She lifted Binny down, one hand holding her under the knee, where the flesh was soft and satiny. The touch intoxicated her.

"Now run back," she said a little brokenly and turned quickly toward the hospital. Her fingers ached with longing—old time longing—to touch that baby skin again. What agony it was, this thawing out a frozen heart! Once, long ago, she had had a little girl, soft and smooth like a peach, a little girl, whom she had held close—close—and covered her with kisses—especially in the neck, where babies smell so sweet.

The footprints of Paddy's square sandals were still clean cut on the rusty serge. She brushed them off with lingering fingers, as she reached the hospital steps.

Smells came from the kitchen wing—

corned beef and cabbage. She'd left lamb stew on the back of the stove. She hoped that old lady could warm it up without burning it. Some patients were cleaning the porch. It all had a pleasant and familiar homeliness. She nodded and passed into the hall

A privileged old timer, she! Doctors, nurses, secretaries came and went, but she came on forever. She nodded again to the girl at the switchboard, and to the nurse talking with her, and started down the corridor to Miss Nixon's office.

Something, however, had arrested her reverie. It was that startled look when they first saw her—the girl at the switchboard and the nurse—and the giggle which escaped them now that they thought she was out of hearing.

The same almost shocked surprise was reflected in Miss Nixon's eyes. "Oh, Mrs. Hodge, how good of you to come!" And she added, almost too cheerfully: "I hardly knew you at first in your gay Easter hat!" She might as well have said outright: "Why the buttercups? Why the rouge? Why the dyed hair?"

But she only said: "Would you mind waiting a few minutes—just till I finish these summaries for the conference? Doctors get so annoyed if they aren't clear." She bent a frowning brow over the work.

Maria, eager expectancy fast ebbing, walked over to a chair by the window. In crossing the room, she caught a quick view of herself in a mirror over the mantel. What a travesty of an old woman! Windblown, stray wisps of unnatural hair stuck out from under the buttercup hat, making a lurid caricature of the rouge-splotched, furrowed face.

Something suddenly happened to her inside. She was afraid to see Amos. She didn't want to see him. If he were calm and sane, he would be like a child waking from a sound sleep, expecting to take up life with the Maizie of his younger years. What would he find in her? A garish old woman, the older for the garishness. For time had done cruel things to her. Caustic lines had come about the mouth that he had only known to smile. All this fixing up to make herself the Maizie he had known was just a crude, futile attempt to reach back and clutch at something gone forever.

She shriveled inside! She was afraid! Doubts came tumbling one over the other, whisked along with last year's dead leaves, lifted and dropped by the increasingly fitful gale about the grounds. A robin flew across the window, carrying a straw. House-building! His last year's nest on the empty bough up there was deserted. So was theirs—hers and Amos's—years ago. A mortgage left for her to pay. A foreclosure. The beloved back yard now cluttered with refuse, and bizarre with an Italian wash-line.

How could she tell him that there wasn't any home? Now she was living with—no, she might as well face facts—she did housework for an old couple. And how could she tell him about the factory? She, despite his views—fanatical ones against strikes and unions—had joined up and gone to work there, after he came here, just to get those unrelenting three meals a day.

Above all, how could she tell him about Hazel, their child, the jewel in his crown? She had married the foreman, the one who took his place, and she had died in childbirth fifteen years ago. She wanted to creep out—go down the road—never come back.

"Dear Mrs. Hodge!" Miss Nixon was bending over her. "You must think me unfeeling. Of course, you are nervous, and want to know about Amos." She had looked up and caught the agony of fear on the older woman's face. Perhaps, too, pity had penetrated her own buoyant youth at these unsuccessful attempts at rejuvenation. "Mrs. Hodge, did you think he was normal, sane? Oh, no. I thought I explained that. He is not himself, but he has a very strange and definite hallucination. And it has evidently given him peace."

She sat down on the window sill by Maria and laid her hand on the gnarled, warted, twitching fingers. "Did he ever know any one named Linda? Perhaps in his early youth?"

"No! Why?"

"He says she comes to him and talks with him and makes him calm."

Another something happened inside Maria Hodge. At first it was relief at her release from this painful rendezvous. Then it was like another blow between the eyes, or—grim thought—she felt as if she had skinned the cat, been turned all the way over, and landed on her feet, but dizzy and blinded, with the ground swimming under her. She was deluged with unreasoning jealousy.

"Some one named Linda? He won't know me, It isn't me he's turning to?"

"It's some association of ideas, of course. We all ought to be glad, Mrs. Hodge, if anything has brought him peace!" There was a note of reproof in Miss Nixon's voice. It was easy to be noble when young, and when you were not deeply concerned!

Down the long corridor to the conference room she walked silently, bitterly, by the secretary's side. The very springiness in the young tread filled her with resentment. She gave monosyllabic answers to the half-heard prattle. The rows of cases, holding bright colored rugs, scarfs, toys, made by the patients, were like a funny page of a Sunday paper, in which she was the joke.

Forty years ago Amos had come full-fledged in to the choir, and into her life. Was the spirit of some girl he had known before that with him now? She bowed her shoulders, inclined to slouch, and watched her ugly button boots appear from under her too full skirt. One ill-advised remark of hers, during his breakdown, had severed him from her forever. It wasn't fair! It wasn't fair! The boots, toeing in as they clutched the ground, repeated the refrain.

In the conference room Miss Nixon moved about, arranging chairs. A whiff of wind lifted and scattered the papers she had placed on the desk.

"Do you mind closing that window, Mrs. Hodge?" Maria stepped over and lifted her hands to the heavy frame. The cold air fanned her face, and she rested a moment before she pressed down with her weight. It was then that she saw Amos at work in the little garden right near the window. He was planting tulip bulbs, and his back was turned toward her.

"Amos," she called softly, leaning out.

He turned around.

He looked as serene and happy as a child. She evidently had surprised him in some delightful dream.

"Hello," he said absently, with no sign of recognition.

And he turned back to his work.

A new wind lashed her face. She pressed the window with unnecessary weight and it slammed down with a bang.

Straight ahead, part way down the road, was the elm with swaying branches, where she had made her pact with the Lord. "It isn't fair to leave me out, if he is happy!" her heart cried aloud.

Miss Nixon came back to that side of the room.

"Chilly Easter!" Maria remarked with a sardonic twitch of the facial muscles, meant for a smile.

A trick of thought brought the ironical reminder that Easter came on April Fool's Day this year.

The doctors were coming in, greeting her with friendly cordiality and seating themselves in the sunlit room. Dr. Peck, a cheery, grown-up Paddy, sat down at the table desk by Miss Nixon.

"Our first case is an old one—Amos Hodge—the husband of this good woman here. Miss Nixon, kindly read the summary of the history."

Miss Nixon read. Dry, meaningless words. Maria, not attune to the phrases, sat like a ramrod, thinking of Dr. Peck teaching Paddy to skin the cat—and other things.

"Admitted in 1903 at his own request; maniac depressive with paranoic tendencies; now senile psychosis." It was as if she were reading the names on those horrible great skeletons in the Natural History Museum, when she and Amos were in New York.

"Varying morose and disturbed periods, marked by violence at first." That stout doctor opposite, with the pink cheeks, looked like a little boy who kissed her out back of the schoolhouse once. If she went crazy, would his spirit come back and comfort her?

"Dwells on the period of his life con-

nected with a strike at the factory." This was a more terrible ordeal than she had ever anticipated. Gracious, was she going to cry? She fastened her eye on that top button of his vest, which the tall, dark doctor was twirling absently—" rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief," she counted them off, as Hazel used to do.

" Connected his wife at first only with the period of his breakdown. Became more excited on seeing her. Of late has not recognized her." A tear rolled over, struck a furrow that sent it toward her mouth. No one was looking, and she licked it in.

" And now he has an interesting hallucination," said Dr. Peck. " But we'll let Amos tell his own story." An attendant answered his bell. " Go and get Amos, Joe, out there in the side garden."

In a few minutes they had returned.

" Come over here, Amos, by me! These are all friends of yours and mine." All eyes turned toward the small, sheet-white man, with a sharp pointed beard, standing in the doorway. The beadlike, troubled eyes caught the reassurance in the doctor's face. Tremblingly, but trustingly, Amos crossed the room to the chair beside the doctor.

When Maria looked at the aimless hands hanging over the chair arms like empty paper bags at the end of his coat sleeves, with a physical torture, the rusty hinges of her heart creaked for the last time, the door opened wide, and the resigned lethargy of twenty years vanished. She wanted to lay her own strong hands on his shoulders, kiss him, feel again the prickles of his closely trimmed beard.

That long front lock of hair, over which she had loved to run her palms, was gone now. Only two patches of white hair about the ears, and little upstanding separate ones, like a grove of birches, over the dome.

" Amos," Dr. Peck was saying, " these people here are doctors like me. They are interested because you have been sick, and are now so much better. Do you think you could tell us just how you felt when you were sick? It will help us to help other sick people. Of course, you are not sick now! But when you were, just what was it that worried you?"

The black eyes were round translucent marbles. The limp hands stiffened—gripped the chair-arms. In a strained, thin voice, growing hoarser as it gathered strength, Amos spoke.

" I did what I thought was right. They wanted to go on strike. I said it wasn't fair to the boss. He'd always been fair to us. A man from the city came and talked wild things to them. He said they were slaves, they ought to get more pay. I said ' Don't listen to them. It isn't fair to the boss.' They hooted at me. Then they went on strike. I couldn't. I didn't think it was right."

Maria's heart beat wildly. It was the old story—the old terror! She had heard it so many times. She wanted to cry out, " Oh, don't—don't, Amos!" Instead, she cried in her heart to some Unseen Power, " Stop him, stop him! Give him peace—any kind of peace! Linda! Leave me out! Only give him peace!" This time it was unconditional surrender.

But the hoarse voice went on: " My wife said to me," his eyes passed over the room, rested on her for a minute with a half-recognition, " ' you do what you think is right or you'll never feel right in your heart.' I went to the shop. They chased me. They threw things. They called me names. At last they won the strike. They got more pay, and they came back to the shop. There was a union. I would not join up. I did not think it was right. They tried to break me. They demanded another foreman. The boss went back on me. He told me to join up. If it wasn't right before, it wasn't right then. I lost my job. Then I got sick. I tried to get other work. But something went wrong." He put his hand to his head. " Everywhere I went, I saw their dark looks, and heard them saying things—whispering things about me. But I did what I thought was right. Then one day, my wife blamed me—"

He put his head in his hands.

The gale outside rattled the windows ominously.

" Oh, stop him! Let me tell it, instead of him, if you must know!" Maria was hardly conscious of having cried out. She had been biting her lips to keep back the pity in her heart.

Amos still held his head. He was still in a state of suspended consciousness—far, far away!

"It was one cold day in December." There was something about Dr. Peck that made it easy for Maria to speak. "He had gone out to find work—anything—for we hadn't any coal. Hazel came into the kitchen, where I was washing dishes. 'I'm going to give up high school and go to work!' she said. It was the bitterest pill of all. We were so proud of her, and we had plans that she should get things in life we'd never had. I leaned my head on the faucets and began to cry. And when I looked up, he had come in.

"He didn't even notice I'd been cryin', but just sank into a chair, limp-like, with his umbrella all drippin' on the floor. 'Maria, I'm afraid!' he said. I didn't know then that he was sick in his head. I just thought he was stubborn about the union. 'Afraid of what?' says I. 'Afraid of myself!' says he. And then he put his head on the umbrella handle and began to cry, mutterin' 'I've done what I thought was right!' It was too much. I pointed to Hazel. 'She's goin' to work!' I said sharp-like, 'just because you won't go back to the shop! You can't have ideals and have children, too!'

"The minute I said it, I knew I'd done wrong. And I knew he wasn't right. He grabbed the umbrella like a madman. He struck me over the head, and he struck Hazel across the shoulders. Then he tore upstairs and locked himself in all day. We stood outside and beat on the door and called, and heard him blubberin' inside. We were terrified. He was so gentle and kind always. We didn't dare call the neighbors, for we didn't want them to know.

"Late in the afternoon, he unlocked the door and crept down, all white and shaky. 'Maizie,' he says, 'I've been in hell! Somethin's gone here. I'm afraid for what I'll do. Please put me away while there's time—before I do it!'" Maria Hodge, unstrung and agitated, mopped off more rouge on to her handkerchief, and blew her nose.

The doctor leaned over and shook Amos by the arm.

"Amos, look at me!" Amos slowly raised his head. The doctor had magnetic—almost hynotic eyes. "Amos, listen to me! That part is all over. Do you understand? You need never think of it again. Hasn't Linda told you so? Won't you tell us about Linda now?"

Then Maria saw the tautness of his face relax, and joy transfigure his features.

"Linda is coming to me now!" He lifted shining eyes—across the buttercups of Maria's hat to the molding near the ceiling.

Involuntarily all eyes followed. Only a too early fly buzzed and flew in stupid figure eights.

"And now she's come down, and has entered my heart—here!" He thumped his breast. His gaze dropped to the buttercups, but no lower. "Linda is talking to me. She says it is all right. She says I did what was right. She makes me calm. It is as if she took me by the hand. The terror is all gone. She's right here in my heart!"

"Won't you tell us all about it—how she came to you, Amos!"

"It was the day of the storm. There was a blue haze after the lightning—like a cloud. I saw her. She came out of the haze—up high—all in short, pink, filmy, shiny skirts, and bare arms, and brown laughing eyes. She smiled down at me—so sweet and kind! And she said to me, 'Don't you know me, Amos? I've been here all the time, but you wouldn't see me or hear me!' Then she came down into my heart, and whispered 'I've come to stay with you always, Amos—to keep away the dread. Don't you remember,'" his voice trailed off into a joyous whisper, "'that neither life nor death can separate you from Linda!'"

He was lost in a rhapsody.

Maria sat, clutching the string on her box of jumbles. Her senses were pricked—stabbed broad awake by the knives of memories—odor of peanuts and sawdust and elephants—glare of colored lights and flashy costumes—sound of drum and horns and raucous clown cries. A salt sob shook her. Through the roughness of throat came in a hoarse shout, "The circus!"

All eyes turned to her.

"We went to it on our wedding-trip. It was at the Madison Square Gardens, and I wore a brown bombazine, and a bonnet with buttercups. 'Twas that made me get these, because he liked them. I was frightened at the riders and the trapeze things, so he held my hand. There was an old couple in front, and they were holdin' hands too. Amos whispered somethin' about our bein' like them when we got old! Near the end —a girl all in pink tarlatan—she had brown eyes like mine, he said—began to climb up —up!"

Amos seemed to be listening without seeing, as if to a hidden incantation.

"Then Amos said somethin' about her bein' like our happiness, goin' up higher and higher. She walked a tight-rope, 'way up under the roof. And Amos got more fanciful still, and said it was like our happiness goin' down the years, spinnin' a silken thread between our youth and our old age; and he motioned to the couple in front. I've thought of it again and again since this happened to him, because of what happened to her. She slipped and fell! I hid my head and screamed. When I peeked up, I saw Amos was white and faint. A crowd had gathered round her down below, and we never knew the rest. Amos said he felt sick, and wanted to get out. And we went.

"Out in the elephant quarters, we noticed the old couple had come, too. I remember how she had gray dancing curls all round under her bonnet, and he had a yellow waistcoat and side whiskers. They came straight over to us, and the old man took Amos by the hand, and said how they couldn't help hearin' what he'd said—that part about the happiness—and they couldn't bear it that the accident happened just after he'd said that. Then the old lady piped up, 'We felt as if you young people were ourselves—young all over again!' The old man was real comfortin'. Amos and I often spoke about it and tried to remember just his words: 'You young people must forget that she fell! You must only remember that happiness is not an outward thing. It is here in the heart. For me, it is in my wife's eyes.' And when he spoke those words Amos just said now, 'Neither death nor life can separate me from—'"

"Linda," repeated Amos softly—far away.

"I had forgotten it was her name!" Maria whispered.

The fly, grown bolder, beat his head furiously against the warm window-pane.

Amos, wrapped in communion with Linda, and Maria wrapped in memories, did not heed the low-toned discussion. Only one sentence of Dr. Peck's penetrated to Maria's ears. It was enough. "An interesting association of ideas! The spirit of his wife's youth has brought him peace in his old age!"

When Maria Hodge wound her way back down the hospital driveway, that thumping thing inside her was resting tranquilly—a warm and vibrant heart. And she held her head high, as if it wore a crown, instead of a ludicrous hat. She even found herself hoping that she'd see those children again, as she rounded the curve by the doctor's house. And, sure enough, there was Binny in the field, near the road.

Maria stepped over a broken place in the wall.

Binny came running. "I've wroted a letter to the bunny to tell him to leave his biggest pink egg by this rock!"

"Perhaps he'll leave you somethin', child, even if it isn't an egg!" An idea came to her.

"I wish 'twould be one of those cookies you gave me!" Binny's credulity in bunnies was abundant.

"I've learned the long prayer for Easter!" she announced. In Paddy's absence it was her great opportunity! "Our Father 'chart in heaven," she chanted, feet planted firmly apart, hands plunged into sweater pockets, a shrill voice getting shriller and shriller, "hello be my name. My kingdom come; I will be done on earth, as—"

"There, there child, that's fine, you know it. But I kinder think you ought not to be yellin' it outdoors like this. Wait till you go to bed!"

"'N' then I'll say, 'God bless you,' after my mamma and my daddy! What's your name?"

"You can just say 'God bless Linda.'"

"God bless Linda!" Binny pinned it securely to her memory.

"Binny, darling!" The word passed Maria's lips with a rusty creak, as she stooped down to the level of the child's face. "Would you mind if I kissed you?"

The little arms went around the long, gaunt neck at once, and Maria pressed the hard, freckled cheek. Almost guiltily, as if she had trespassed on another's property, she straightened up, and looked around.

"Now, Binny, it must be nearly your dinner-time. If you'll run home and not look back once, I know where to find that bunny, and I'll tell him somethin'. There'll be a surprise for you under this rock to-morrow. It's a secret! Don't tell Paddy! And, remember, don't look around!"

Binny, more controlled than Lot's wife, made for the house.

Maria removed her hat and ripped off the buttercups. She pinned them firmly by the rock with a wire hairpin. A little unseasonable perhaps, but they had come into their own appropriate resting-place among last year's weeds, there in the sunshiny field.

She took out her handkerchief, spit on it, and rubbed the last trace of rouge from her face. "There! Things of the flesh don't matter any more. I can grow old in peace."

Then she climbed back through the hole in the wall, and walked on down the road. The wind, fanned into a fury at her back, lashed the old serge skirt tight about her boney frame. It jammed the sailor down over her eyes. But her feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground.

She came to the soughing elm, and stopped again, and placed both hands on its rough bark. For a second, she rested a cheek there also, and looked up at the myriads of clouds now flying over its top branches.

"I kind of think, maybe, you aren't all-powerful, Lord. But I know you're all-powerful sorry all their Lindas can't get through to them!" She looked back at the hospital on the hill.

To-morrow was Easter. She tramped on again. She was released—set free from any time or place—from any round of menial chores. She could live in her youth again with Amos.

There was a singing in her heart. Her thoughts flew back to the village choir—Amos beside her, finding her hand for the first time in the shadows of the organ-loft. She felt his moist, warm palm. They looked into each other's eyes and sang.

No one was around. Timidly, in time to her downward clanking heels, she hummed—then she sang out in a cracked, thin voice—but true:

"The strife is o'er, the battle done!
The victory of life is won!
The song of triumph has begun!
Alleluia!"

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CONTRABAND

I MUST be mute!
And, yet, your eyes,
Like magnets of blue steel,
Draw forth, e'en to my very lips,
The words I fain would speak,
Were I not forced by fate
And circumstance to be—
To you—forever mute.

Nancy Baker Tompkins.

The Handwriting on the Wall

By DAVID FOX

Author of "The Man Who Convicted Himself," "The Super-Swing," "The Doom Dealer," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SHRED OF BLUE SERGE.

"'THE wrong number!'" Cliff repeated in dazed incredulity. Then with an ejaculation he sprang from his chair and rushed into his study, from which came the rustle of paper, clinking of reading glasses and then a prolonged silence while Ethel waited demurely.

When at length he reappeared, chagrin struggled with mounting hope in his expression and he cried:

"You win, Ethel! I can't see for the life o' me how I made that mistake, but it is an 'o' as you thought! It means we've all our work to do over again, but it's a fresh chance to find a clew! We'll keep this to ourselves for none of the others are working on the first number except Henry, and we'll soon have him back again! Now, what exchanges have you called already?"

His prediction was verified in another hour with the appearance of a thoroughly disgusted medical expert, who plumped himself down in the nearest chair, puffing and glaring in speechless resentment.

"Hello, Henry! What's that you've got

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 29.

there?" Cliff eyed the large, legal-looking envelope clutched in one fat hand, and Henry held it out.

"A clerk was asking the elevator boy just now where our office was and I relieved him of this. Said he was from Grosvenor Hood. If ever I tackle such a job again—"

"Oh, the duplicate lists I wanted of the servants employed at Monckton Manor, and those of the guests who stayed there."

Cliff glanced rapidly through them and then looked up. "Did you find number eight hundred and twenty-six?"

"I did!" Henry announced with unwonted bitterness. "It was a dog hospital and a hiding place for stolen thoroughbreds if I don't miss my guess! The big bruiser left in charge by the fake vet must have got a hunch that I was a dick, for he told me to get out or be thrown out! It's the third bawling out I've had to-day over those confounded numbers—"

"Never mind, it'll be the last." Cliff assured him consolingly. "I'll have to ask you to do some more work that's a little out of your line, though, Henry, for the rest of us are all busy. In this list of De Puyster Monckton's guests since he opened the country house last month, only four ladies are mentioned, three of whom brought maids with them, but we'll leave them aside for the time being. The gentlemen all brought valets and two of them chauffeurs, but among them all there are just three that I think will bear looking up now.

"You'll find them all here in the city, if they're still in the same situations. I want a line on Judge Abner Francis' valet, whose only name here is 'Isaac,' Dr. Lowell Kibbe's chauffeur, Paolo Galli, and Mr. Waldron Ingram's valet, Hugh Brinsley. You'll find the judge and the doctor in the phone book, and Waldron Ingram is the president of the Citizens' and Aliens' Trust Company."

"Hah!" Henry snorted. "And am I to go to the basement door and try to sell patent medicines to 'em? That's the only way I know!"

"That wouldn't work, in this case." Cliff repressed a smile. "Go directly to their employers, show your credentials, state that we are investigating the murder on behalf of Richard Monckton and ask for an interview incognito with these valets and this chauffeur, in order to quiet some suspicions we have about the servants at the Manor. That will do for an excuse."

"And what do you want me to find out when I do talk to 'em?" Henry asked skeptically but with returning good nature.

"Study them," Cliff responded. "You know a crook when you see one, don't you? I want to know if 'Isaac' and Hugh and the chauffeur are on the level or are spotters for some gang."

"God A'mighty, ain't you given up the idea yet that there was a real burglar?" Henry rose wearily. "I might as well be on my way and get it over, but you're drilling a dry hole, Cliff, for sure!"

"You heard, Ethel?" Cliff asked with a shrug after the medical expert had departed upon his uncongenial task. "That's the way they all feel!"

"Don't you care, Mr. Nichols!" Ethel returned blithely. "It's their own fault if they miss the big show, for we're going to find that man!"

They spent a busy hour calling up the various exchanges but 6090 seemed to bring as little definite result as the former number had done and Cliff rose impatiently at last.

"Ethel, I'm going to run up to the Monckton house once more. There are only a few calls yet for you to try and I'll be back before dinner-time."

"All right!" She smiled up at him with undaunted enthusiasm. "I'm sure I'll have some news for you when you come. I can feel it, just like I sort of knew we'd have something big, and couldn't keep away any longer."

Her spirits were infectious and Cliff felt unaccountably cheered and encouraged as he left her and started uptown. It seemed impossible that with only those hastily scrawled numbers to serve as a clew they would be able in all the teeming millions of the city to lay their hands on the murderer of De Puyster Monckton, and yet his faith in the little blue-eyed ex-shoplifter had been confirmed. She was more of a handwriting expert than he, and if anything came of her discovery the credit should be hers alone!

The old house hidden away in its clump of trees loomed gloomy and foreboding in the early spring dusk as again he turned in at the gate and proceeded up the drive. The burly Cerberus of the morning was still on guard at the entrance door and greeted him with a grinning nod.

"Back again?" he asked. "Got some fresh dope on that burglar of yours?"

"You boys will find out when you try to indict my client!" Cliff laughed, returning the other's manner. "Is the Miller woman here yet?"

"Upstairs, somewhere. That old guy who came with her, Monckton's valet, had a kind of a fit and they took him to the hospital; she says nothing's missing from the house as far as she can see. Uppish old dame, but she must have been some looker as a girl!"

Leaving the plainclothes man to his grudging admiration, Cliff mounted the front stairs, but went softly along the hall and descended the rear ones without meeting anyone. Here sounds of wordy strife reached him from the tradesmen's door, where a police official was evidently haranguing a ubiquitous reporter. Cliff made his way hastily through the storerooms and pantries to the one among the latter where a pane of glass in the upper sash had been removed.

There were smudges of dirt, as Phil had reported, still lying on the floor and soiling the sill, but the most sanguine seeker for clews could not have declared positively that they were footprints. They had been scuffed about by the numerous police and detectives and the ground outside was torn and trampled.

It looked unpromising for any neglected clew, but Cliff raised the sash and climbed cautiously out, dropping to the soft turf a few feet below. The springing grass of the newly-grown lawn would have held no traces of a single prowler underlying the print of many feet, but a gravel path wound near, coming from the direction of the stable and garage, and branching off toward the hedge interlacing the bars of the iron fence. Glancing quickly about him Cliff started for the boundary.

It was along this path that the thief must have come, probably from the rear, back of the garage. Cliff had noticed that open lots, strewn with bowlders and rank undergrowth stretched beyond, and the intruder must have planned his method of approach with the least likelihood of being seen paramount in his mind. But his exit was not as he must have intended; in a desperate panic, because of the thing he was leaving behind, he would have made for the nearest wall, the most direct way to the subway station, four blocks north.

The previous night had been moonless but clear, and the starlight would have been bright enough to disclose that path; surely fear-winged feet would have found and followed it instinctively.

Distant lights were springing up now at evenly-spaced intervals beyond the hedge and fence. The street lamps were lighted, but day had not yet gone. Cliff kept as much in the shelter of trees and tall clumps of bushes as he could to avoid the searching eyes of the patrol on the lookout for reporters and morbid sightseers.

Within a few yards of the fence the path turned abruptly to double back around a flower bed toward the front of the house. Cliff left it and made straight for the hedge. It was well clipped, but very old, and the brown spaces in the tender green showed where it was dying out as Cliff, bending low, moved along beside it, then turned and retraced his steps.

Somewhere along here, he was morally certain, the murderer must have crashed through the hedge and scaled the fence, the sharp iron spikes of which were raised several feet above. But the dusk was deepening rapidly and there were any number of gaps in the hedge through which the fellow might have wormed his way.

After all, how could he hope in the gathering darkness to come upon anything that eyes far better trained than his to discover a clew would not have found in broad day? Cliff felt discouragement descending again upon him, and straightened to turn once more toward the house when as he raised his eyes they fell upon something that held him transfixed.

It was just a limp, dark object caught on one of the spikes of the fence and flutter-

ing in the evening breeze. It looked like a shred of cloth, but unless the wind had carried it and impaled it there it could only have been torn from the apparel of someone who climbed over carelessly or in frantic haste. The hedge beneath was an unbroken mass of green, almost black now in the shadows and revealed no sign of damage. When Cliff assailed it, however, the twigs, elastic with new sap, bent limberly and sprang back into place.

He forced them aside and drew himself up the bars of the fence to reach and capture the fluttering shred of cloth. Then he dropped quickly down again and crouched beside the hedge, immovable, for footsteps crunched along the path from the front and the low murmur of voices came to his ears.

"It might have been, I couldn't say for sure. I haven't heard him speak in six years." The voice was unctuously smooth. "The call came at seven and I did think it odd that he wouldn't leave his name."

They were talking of the telephone call at Monckton Manor from the unknown man on the night before! The speaker must be Peter Downes, the butler; the footsteps were uneven, short, trotting ones beside slower, heavy strides. Cliff reconnoitered warily and saw that it was indeed the butler, with the policeman who that morning had been stationed at the door of the dining room. They were rounding the sharp curve in the path, going toward the garage and the officer's deeper tones reached him even more distinctly.

"'Twould be better if you could swear to it," he growled. "We'll give you a chance to hear him talk downtown and then maybe you'll be certain."

"Perhaps so and perhaps not." There was a world of meaning in the raised inflection. "I've got myself to think of and I've held my place for eighteen years. I'd not like to make a mistake that would lose it for me and bring me no thanks."

The voice trailed off into silence as the men disappeared, but Cliff had heard enough to illuminate the situation. It was the crudest attempt to influence a possible witness that he had ever listened to, but it showed that the authorities were not as sure of being able to make out a case as they had appeared. If they had decided on open bribery they would have employed a more adroit emissary than the blunt policeman, but it was plain that Peter Downes would not be averse to an offer.

He must be reckoned with, Cliff reflected, as he crept back to the house and slipping in the window, closed it after him. That snatch of conversation might prove of value to their client if he were arraigned before the murderer was found. That he would be, sooner or later, came with renewed conviction to Cliff's mind. That rag of cloth now reposing in his pocket which he had not even examined as yet brought his confidence back in a wave and there was an added jauntiness in his manner as he hastened to the front door.

"On your way already?" the detective demanded jocosely. "Didn't find your second story worker's visiting card or a lock of his hair, did you?"

"Something more personal than that!" Cliff smiled in an infinitely superior way. "It's no wonder you boys always grab the first person in sight to hang something on when you never lift your noses from the ground!"

His tone was bantering, but the other's gaze sharpened with suddenly aroused interest and he could feel it following him as he walked briskly to the gate.

He could scarcely restrain his impatience to examine his find, and when once more the subway was reached the ride down town seemed interminable. He arrived at the office of the Shadowers at length to find Ethel still in sole possession and wrestling with the telephone.

"I've got just one number left, Mr. Nichols," she remarked. "I had to hold Queensbridge nearly half an hour before it answered, and then it was a warehouse!"

"Your intuition didn't register this time, did it?" he asked. "We'll call that last number after a bit, but first I want to show you what I've found! Come into my study where there's a strong light."

The torn fragment of cloth was of the cheapest dark blue serge, worn threadbare and shiny, with more cotton than wool in its weave, but the two could not have

handled it more tenderly had it been the rarest fabric in the world. Ethel would hear of no suggestion that it had been blown on the wind and caught by the fence spike.

"That's a piece of a trouser leg!" she declared. "You can see where it's ripped from the seam on this side, and if it hadn't been so old that it gave, the man would probably have been found tied up in a knot on the other side of that fence with a broken kneecap! He's left handed and his pants are torn; that's something to go on, if he hasn't been able to get hold of another pair. And couldn't you tell about how tall he was from the distance between those figures on the wall and the floor? People usually write on a level with their eyes unless they're looking down, don't they?"

"By Jove, you're right again!" exclaimed Cliff. "Anybody else but me would have thought of that at once, but I was so taken up with the writing itself that it never occurred to me. The fellow was rather tall, I should say those figures were scrawled a little above the transmitter, as I remember, and quite far out at one side."

"That means his arms are kind of long!" Ethel nodded. "He's farsighted instead of the other way, and he isn't used to bending over a desk—he likes plenty of room. Mr. Nichols, we're getting on!"

"But that number!" Cliff thrust the fragment of cloth into the table drawer. "There's one still that you haven't tried. What exchange is it? I'll give it a ring now myself."

"Parkside," she responded promptly. "That's up in that neighborhood of cheap flats around Hillside Park, isn't it? I left it till the last because they aren't exactly tenements like you'd expect a crook of that sort to come from, nor flash joints—I mean, common, showy little places where hard working families wouldn't live."

She flushed slightly at the lapse, but Cliff turned to the telephone beside the array of inks and acids on his table.

"Parkside 6090." He spoke into the transmitter and then added in an aside: "Don't go away, Ethel. I may need you."

There was a pause and the girl beside him drew in her breath sharply while he waited in mounting suspense.

"Doesn't answer." The mechanically twanging tones of "central" came to him at length.

"They *must* answer!" Cliff retorted with a desperate eagerness. The last number left! "Keep ringing them, please. I'll hold the wire!"

A faint, whirring buzz sounded in his ears and then there came suddenly a small, sweet, piping voice.

"Hello! Who is it?"

A child! Cliff's heart sank like lead, but he asked:

"Is Harry there?"

"No, thir," the childish treble lisped. "You don't mean my Uncle Charlie, do you?"

"I mean Harry. I was told to call him up there. What is the address of this number?"

"I guess he must be one of Uncle Charlie's friends; so many of them call up here at our house! It's 840 West One Hundred and Tenth Street; mamma only had the telumphone put in last week 'cause Uncle Charlie wanted it. When she comes in do you want me to tell her anything for the other man?"

The child was all by herself and lonesome, evidently; glad of some one to talk to. It seemed hopeless ground, but Cliff ventured on a bold stroke:

"Your Uncle Charlie telephoned to Harry last night and gave him the new number. Harry expected to be there and I was to call him. I guess your mamma knows."

"I gueth tho." The child seemed to lisp only when in doubt or embarrassed. "Uncle Charlie expected somebody else, but they didn't come and he was awful. Oh, I forgot! I wathn't to dare thay a word! I'll tell Uncle Charlie thombody called up for Harry. Good-by."

The distant receiver clicked in scared haste and Cliff faced his new partner with shining eyes.

"We've got it at last, Ethel! Put down this address, quick!" He repeated it to her, together with the gist of the brief conversation and added: "That little girl's Uncle Charlie expected somebody last night and when they didn't appear he was either

in a rage or scared stiff! I fancy the latter, since she was warned not to mention it. The man he expected was the man who killed De Puyster Monckton!"

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNEXPECTED REUNION.

ON Saturday afternoon when George was awakened by Katie, the chambermaid, to learn that the kind samaritan of the night before had stolen a march on him, he lay for some time after she had left the room mentally kicking himself.

He saw it all now! Radwick had been "on" from the moment that his new next-door neighbor stepped into the elevator to descend with him late the previous afternoon, but to be sure he was trailed he had taken that devious, apparently aimless stroll, and a pretty dance he had led George!

That accounted for his restlessness during the evening when he had popped in and out of the theater and moving picture house, and he was assured of the truth and prepared to face the issue when he started back to the hotel!

George emitted a far more realistic groan than during his simulated suffering of the night before. What a complacent, self-satisfied old fool he had been! How Radwick must have laughed in his sleeve all the time!

He'd doped that dose of peppermint, all right, and then sat there calmly waiting for it to take effect, and meanwhile amused himself by giving George rope enough to hang himself. And he'd done it, higher than a kite!

The chagrined Shadower writhed in spirit as he recalled that conversation. Radwick hadn't noticed Richard particularly on board ship—oh, no! He wouldn't express any opinion about the murder for a confoundedly good reason, and he'd had the gall to laugh when he said that never having contemplated crime himself he couldn't tell how a man would act under such circumstances.

So he'd been played for a sucker, had he? George flung the covers wrathfully aside and sprang out of bed with an energy that belied his years. The game wasn't over yet, even though he'd been outplayed, and he'd show that long nosed, wall eyed son of a sneak who the come-on was before he was through!

Fate and his own cocksure carelessness had given him two stiff handicaps; the other man knew him and knew his purpose, even if he couldn't know what faction he represented. Moreover, Radwick had an eight hour start and would cover his tracks as he hadn't bothered to do when he left the pier.

It didn't matter. George had a purely personal as well as professional motive now and nothing should stand in his way!

As he dressed hurriedly and rang for coffee he gave the situation earnest thought. He could only hope to get on Radwick's trail again by outguessing him. If the fellow thought he was a natural born fool, so much the better. Radwick was shrewd, alert to grasp a situation and quick in his decisions, with a devilish sense of humor and almost uncanny self-possession. What would be his reaction to the knowledge that he was under espionage and what step would he take beyond the initial one of departing in short order?

Assuredly he would not go far from the scene of the crime, at least until the man he had trailed for so many months was indicted for it. Whatever his object, he had remained here before he knew that he was being watched and he must continue to do so.

Descending to the lobby, George bought a cigar and newspaper. Seating himself in a big leather chair near the entrance he smoked and scanned the headlines of the afternoon's news. There were no developments of any moment in the Monckton case. The authorities gave sanguine but vague assurance that the problem would be cleared up immediately and the murderer put on trial in record time, but the reporters themselves looked upon the arrest of Richard Monckton as a "material witness" as being conclusive, and without fear of libel, expressed their views more definitely. The sob sister of the sheet, too, came out with the usual maudlin tale en-

hanced by a photograph of Miss Barbara Norcross, borrowed from the society editor.

The Shadowers, Inc., a hitherto unknown firm of private detectives employed by Richard Monckton to demonstrate the fact that his father had been killed by a burglar, came in for more or less facetious comment. They had been approached, but declined to grant an interview.

George smiled grimly to himself as he pictured the form that declination had probably taken if Ethel were the one to have delivered it. Then he cast the paper aside and, rising, strolled over to a thick-set individual in light tweeds with a purple necktie forming a back ground for an impressive but off-color diamond.

"You're the house detective?" he asked in his most urbane manner. "Have a cigar?"

"Thanks." The gorgeously arrayed person nodded. "That's me."

"Come up to my room a minute." One ministerial eye closed suggestively. "This is about the time of day when, a few years ago, it was customary to take a little nourishment, and I find it difficult to accommodate myself to modern ways in my declining years."

The detective chuckled and followed him to the elevator. When they were settled behind the locked door with the flask half emptied, George remarked:

"That was a queer character you had in the next room here. Radwick, he called himself. He cleared out in a hurry this morning."

"Sure, but he paid up."

"I did, you mean!" George announced quickly. "He borrowed twenty-five from me last night, but I didn't know it was for that purpose; he was going to show me the city."

"Yeah? There are a lot of birds like that floating around, and we do our best to protect the guests from them, but if they fall for the old line and don't squeal till after the other guy's made his get-away, it ain't up to us." The detective spoke pleasantly enough, but with an air of finality. "You're lucky he didn't nick you for more."

Oh, I'm not complaining." George poured another drink for his guest. "I'd just kind of like to know where he went."

"To Chicago, I guess. Anyway, that's where he's booked from, and when he settled his bill he asked if he could get to the Grand Central in ten minutes; that's when the flyer starts."

"Chicago, eh?" George shrugged. "It wouldn't do me any good to follow him for that twenty-five. Maybe you could tell me of some of the sights here? I've never been East before."

When the detective had descended to his duties once more George packed his bag, paid his bill, and asked at the desk when the next train left for Circleville, Ohio. The last half hour had not been wasted; the house dick had been fixed by Radwick, that was plain. Otherwise he could have said that the departed guest simply walked out of the hotel with his bag, as George himself was doing, and let it go at that. Unless he was vastly mistaken, Radwick at the present moment was not more than a block or two nearer Chicago than when he left, for he'd stick around to get a line on what his follower would do.

What George did do was to proceed to the corner and pause after rounding it, to glance swiftly up and down the avenue. The roar of the elevated road overhead was deafening now that the day's traffic had thinned. He hurried to the station a block down to board the first uptown train, aware that his clerical garb and even the shabby bag he carried rendered him an easily identified figure.

But it was not for more than an hour that he reached the genteel, slightly run-down boarding house on Madison Avenue where he resided permanently. He had spent the intervening time in covering his tracks, and for a man who had succeeded in doing so when five States were on the lookout for him in connection with an original and lucrative swindle, the maze of the city made the task mere child's play.

Experience had taught him the futility of theatric disguises when a simple change of scenery would do the trick in a far more subtle and effective manner, and the person who issued from the boarding house as darkness fell was still attenuated and stoop-

shouldered with his lugubrious face unadorned with hirsute camouflage.

It was not the same person, however. This individual walked with a different step and bearing, his expression was entirely changed, and from top to toe he was dressed with ultra-elegance which bordered on the vulgar, although a second glance would have revealed the ravages of time and wear and the pathetic attempts to conceal them.

Out of sight of the boarding house he purchased a carnation for his buttonhole from a flower-seller and, swinging his stick more jauntily, he straightened and strode off toward Broadway with the lithe, trained step of the old time actor he represented. He lost himself in the crowd, disentangled himself, and merged with another moving group, and so proceeded down town to the neighborhood of the Fresno once more. The block to the westward sported two hotels side by side on the south and a third one directly opposite them. It was to the latter that George directed his steps, paying in advance for a third floor front room and incidentally casting his glance quickly down the page of the register.

There had been only a scant dozen arrivals during the day, no "Radwick," of course, and no writing which to his untrained but keen eye even remotely resembled that signature at the other hotel. Should he reconnoiter a little, or go to his room, order some food, and start his problematic vigil?

He decided on the former, despite its risk, and strolled back to Broadway in an aimless fashion, but within the next half hour he had made a circuit of every block in the immediate vicinity. If Radwick were watching for him, he was keeping under too close cover to be near enough to identify this changed personality.

Ordering a quick bit in an obscure basement restaurant, George strolled about till nearly midnight, and then stopped at a news-stand two blocks above the Fresno for a last edition, before returning to his room. The quarter he deposited on the narrow counter before the youth who stood in the little kiosk rolled over the edge and down to the floor inside.

George bent forward to help look for it. His lean frame tensed suddenly and then he straightened.

"Never mind, my lad!" he remarked in a grandiose manner. "Here is a dime in case that quarter isn't found. Good night."

Tucking his paper under his arm, he strolled away, but once around the corner he quickened his steps until he had gone completely around the block and halted in the doorway of a closed shop directly opposite the news-stand again.

When he had bent forward to look for the coin his eyes had lighted on a bag just beneath the edge of the counter—the identical bag, unless his vision failed, that he had seen through his peephole in the next room at the Fresno. It was by the sheerest accident he had spied it. Radwick could not have anticipated that. In five minutes it would be midnight. Already the newsboy was stacking up his few remaining papers preparatory to closing for the night, and he had only to wait.

At that precise moment hurried footsteps sounded along the almost deserted sidewalk and a man came into view making for the kiosk. It was Radwick. His head moved from side to side as he glanced quickly about him. George shrank further back into the shadows of the doorway, but the other passed unseeingly and halted before the counter just as the youth was putting up the shutters. The bag and a coin changed hands. Then began a chase the intricacies of which even George's wide experience had not prepared him for.

Subway and tube, elevated, taxi, and surface car all came into play during the next hour as the man with the bag crossed and recrossed on his trail, doubling back and striking off at a tangent. But always the down-at-heel actor hung on tenaciously behind, by a miracle unseen.

It wound up at last at the Grand Central Station. Was Radwick going to Chicago after all? George's mute question was soon answered, however, for his quarry broke into a run for the gates beyond which the Albany local was just pulling out, and he swung himself aboard the next-to-the-last car while his shadow made a spring for the platform of the final one.

Where was Radwick going? He must be assured that he was free from espionage now. Who could be waiting in some up-State town for news of Richard Monckton and the long chase overseas?

George hurried through the car and peered cautiously into the next one. Radwick was seated three rows within on the aisle, and his follower heaved a sigh of relief as he turned to his own coach and took an aisle seat in the fourth row, blessing the warmth of the night which caused the two end doors to have been left open so that he had an unobstructed view of the back of Radwick's head.

He kept his eyes upon it steadily as the train halted at one close-lying station after another, but it did not once turn around. Evidently, Radwick was indeed certain of his freedom, for he produced a newspaper and buried himself in its folds. George was beginning to think they were in for a prolonged run when the train halted once more and the quarry sprang up and made for the door.

George had paid the conductor for an Albany ticket to be prepared for an intermediate stop. As he dropped from the moving train and hurried after Radwick he glanced up at the sign above the station entrance. His heart gave a sudden leap.

Pocantico Hills! Radwick was going to the country place of the murdered man, the father of the young broker whom he had trailed over Europe!

With a thousand questions thronging his brain George walked softly and watched his step, for the village lay wrapped in slumber and the slightest footfall echoed alarmingly in the silence.

Up the street, around the base of a steep little hill, and off along a broad thoroughfare that merged into a winding highway, past cluttered cottages and open fields to the lines of hedges and fences marking the boundaries of opulent estates, he trailed noiselessly after the figure ahead. Radwick walked rapidly, with the assurance of one familiar with the way.

They came at length to a high stone wall, thatched with a luxuriant vine, and continued along beside it for a quarter of a mile or more past huge grilled gates inhospitably closed, to a gap in the masonry partially protected by stout wiring. Here Radwick halted, skirmished about for a brief period, and at length wriggled through and disappeared.

Without a moment's hesitation George followed, and was creeping after him in the direction of his vanishing footfalls on gravel when a third figure stepped suddenly from behind a tall bush and the starlight glinted on the blue barrel of a most businesslike looking pistol.

"Hands up!" a voice ordered in a low but peremptory tone. "I want you!"

George chuckled to himself as he obeyed. The stick-up artist was Phil!

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRUTH ABOUT RADWICK.

ON Saturday morning when Phil awakened in the little commercial hotel in Pocantico Hills he whistled softly as he dressed. You couldn't beat these French girls! They had style, even in a slinky cape, and a way with them that no American could begin to have. And that Lucie was pretty and spirited, too! The Lord only knew how she had stood this dead-alive place all through last summer, with nothing but a movie and an ice cream parlor to offer diversion. Still, a girl like that would get attention paid her in a desert, and there must be a lot of nifty chauffeurs and butlers, foreign ones, too, employed at the big estates in the neighborhood.

Phil's impressionable fancy had been caught by that momentary streak of light from his electric torch, and he concluded that after all it wouldn't do to return to the office of the Shadowers with an incomplete report. Cliff had told him to get in with the servants and find out all he could about the old guy and his friends, and had himself suggested his making the acquaintance of some pretty maid on the staff. He was only obeying instructions to the letter.

Pleasantly thrilled by his own virtue, Phil descended to the dining room and had partially demolished a generous order of bacon and eggs, when the traveling man

who had scraped acquaintance on the porch the previous afternoon joined him at the end of the long table and asked if he had been shooting pool the night before.

"No; I took a walk," Phil replied. "Is pool the chief dissipation around here? I noticed a movie house and a couple of ice cream dens—"

"I guess the best thing in the burg is the 'phone to New York!" the travelling man laughed. "It gets the girls anyway. There was a mob of them waiting for turns at the booth in the drugstore last night, and some of them were lookers, believe me! They weren't village belles, either, nor society dames, but there was one little queen—looked as if she might have been a governess, but oh, boy! what eyes, and how she could use 'em! Black as sloes, they were, with a laugh in 'em, and a little, pointed chin, and a mouth like a red dab!"

"Yeah?" Phil slowly lowered his fork. "Did she have on a white dress with a long, dark cape?"

"Dark gray, the cape was, almost black, and a little gray hat with a bright red feather!" the other supplemented eagerly. "She talked like a foreigner, with a soft, purring little accent—that's what made me think she might be a governess, for you could see she wasn't—well, not a swell. Where did you meet her?—Say, brother, if you can fix up a little party for to-night I'll hire a car—?"

He paused hopefully, but Phil grinned and shook his head.

"Sorry, but I didn't meet her; don't even know who she is. I just passed her walking along the road last night with a fellow."

"She must have had him waiting around outside somewhere, then, while she 'phoned to another guy! You can't beat 'em even if you stack the cards, can you? I was right in the next booth and heard her call up 609—What's the matter?"

Phil was staring until his eyes protruded.

"609—what?" he demanded. "That's funny! What was the last number?"

"Didn't get it, or the exchange either. "The travelling man shook his head as he pushed aside his empty oatmeal saucer. "You could tell from her tone that she was talking to a john, though. They sure can put it over, can't they? Did you think you knew that number?"

"Sounded kind of like one I've got down in a notebook," Phil replied. "It couldn't be the same, though. Going to be here long?"

He finished his breakfast and made his escape as soon as he could. That *was* funny about the first three figures of that number Lucie had called in New York the night before. There wasn't any doubt of the girl's identity, for now that he had been reminded of it Phil did remember that spiky red quill in her smart little tam.

Why in the world had Lucie gone all the way to the village to telephone when the one at the house must be available for the servants' use? Obviously so that her conversation would not be overheard by any others of the household. That couldn't be of importance to the investigation, though, and the matter of that number was just a coincidence.

Armed that afternoon with a large, flamboyantly ribboned box and a bottle of perfume with a foreign label, Phil approached the gap in the stone fence at the Manor once more. The gates were still closed and no one was visible through their grill but the intermittent beat and whir of an engine from the direction of the garage showed that one of the cars was being tuned up. From farther distant there came the buzzing drone of a lawn mower.

With one free arm he lifted a strand of the wire barrier, and, bending, crawled through and dropped behind the heap of loose fence stones to take stock of his surroundings. Generations of landscape gardening had brought the grounds to the highest perfection of studied nature, a wilderness of great trees and massed shrubbery and lovely, unexpected vistas cunningly planned. But its beauty was lost on the unappreciative Phil.

Why didn't people have straight roads and paths that a guy could follow in the dark if he had to, and clear away those old trees and bushes so they could see all around? He couldn't be three hundred yards from the house and yet there wasn't a sign of it. And how was he to find

Lucie? Maybe she hadn't meant to meet him, but had just been kidding; maybe she'd given him up and gone?

Then all at once it was borne in upon him that water was trickling somewhere near with a little splash as though it were falling over stones, and it seemed as though a tune ran along with it, like someone humming in a low, soft contralto. He rose cautiously and looked to the left, farther along than the gap in the fence through which he had entered.

A clump of dogwood trees and thick, flowering shrubbery rose in a slight depression of ground and through the meandering line of bushes that wound from it toward the house he caught glimpses of a path. Keeping parallel with the boundary he wormed his way in that direction, taking advantage of the screening undergrowth he had derided a moment before. When he reached the clump he forced the shrubbery apart and peered through the interlacing branches. A tiny stream rippled down the incline and cascaded over a miniature waterfall into a stone grotto that formed a quiet pool and on a lichen-clothed ledge beside it Lucie sat sewing and singing a gay little tune to herself.

She was prettier even than he had thought, with her small dark head bent over the foaming white needlework and her red lips slightly parted as she sang. Phil drew a deep breath and stepped forward.

"Good afternoon!" This time his debonair bow was not wasted in darkness. "I hardly hoped you'd be around but I took a chance. I'm afraid you won't like these, but they're the best in the village."

He laid his offerings before her and she reached out for them with a little cry of delight, the lace slipping from her knees to the ground.

"Oh, how lovelee—Philip!" she exclaimed. "Me, I did not think to see you, one so often forgets next day the promises of the moment, but now you shall sit here and have some of your own chocolates!"

"I'd rather smoke—and look at you!" Phil seated himself on the soft, mossy turf with his back against a dogwood tree. "You're mighty easy to look at, Lucie; did anybody ever tell you that before?"

She paused laughing, with a plump caramel half-way to her lips.

"But you are droll! Smoke your cigarette, and I shall keep these all to myself!—Unless you wish that I shall call your cousin Nora and share them with her?"

There was a malicious little sparkle in the dark eyes and Phil demanded:

"Have you been talking to her about me?"

"It takes two to talk, M'sieu. I spoke of you, but Nora finds she has forgotten you, she cannot recall that you exist and it is odd, for she has a long memory! Mon Dieu, it goes back nearly seventy years!"

"Holy Cat!" he groaned. "How was I to know how old she was!"

"The same way you knew her name, M'sieu,—and mine." Demurely Lucie slipped the candy into her small mouth and regarded him with polite inquiry.

"I'm caught!" he acknowledged laughingly, but his dismay was not all assumed. "How the devil was he to get out of this? Then a quick inspiration came to him. "I guess I'd better come clean! I would have told you last night only I didn't want to scare you, but—I followed you from the drugstore!"

"You—followed me?" The mischief was gone from her eyes and she stared stonily. She wasn't offended, a girl would pick a fellow up the way she had him? What was the matter with her? She wasn't scared? "But how did you know our names, mine and Nora's?"

Lord, he hadn't thought of that!

"I asked!" he asserted glibly. "There was a man standing at the counter beside me in chauffeur's livery and when he saw me watching you go out he told me your name and that you were a maid here at the Manor. I asked him if you were the housemaid, for right there I made up my mind I was going to meet you if I could, and he said no, that the housemaid at Monckton's was Nora Delaney. I thought Nora 'd be young too, so I was safe in telling you I was a cousin of hers and I never believed you'd be mean enough to ask her about me!"

He contrived an injuredly reproachful tone, but Lucie did not smile.

"You followed me, yet you were here when I returned. You came from the direction of the house and said that the dogs were to be turned loose on you!" she accused. Her voice wasn't soft and purring any more.

"Hadn't I found out where you worked and didn't the fellow tell me it was the only place around with a high stone wall with vines all over it? When I'd followed along behind far enough to be sure you were going straight home I cut around the next turning and came across the grounds from the other side. That's how the dogs heard me and commenced to howl. Gee, didn't I take a chance of getting bit merely to see you again?"

"What were you doing with that flash light?" There was relenting in her tone and a suspicion of a dimple in her cheek, but she was still unconvinced.

"I always carry one in the country," Phil explained speciously. "You see, I'm staying for a few days down at the hotel, looking for a likely spot along the roads around here for a garage."

"You were thinking, then, to put up a garage near Monsieu' Monckton's house in the city yesterday afternoon?" Her head was tilted slightly.

For a minute Phil looked blank then he laughed again.

"Oh, because I told you I'd been there looking for Nora? Say, the fellow in the drugstore told me this place belonged to the old millionaire who was just murdered and, of course, I'd read all about it in the papers. There was even a picture of the Manor in one of 'em and that's how I found it so easy. If you hadn't been so nice and friendly when I came on you I was going to get in with the chauffeur here and meet you that way. Listen, I was in earnest; I don't act crazy like this, but I sure fell hard when I saw you, Lucie! You ought not to blame me!"

She smiled and selected another chocolate daintily.

"That is the manner of you Americans. Always you—how do you say?—keed! It was very wrong of you, M'sieu Philip, and never would I have permitted you to talk to me but that I believed you were the cousin of Nora. I did not come here to-day to meet you, but because it will be *triste* at the house. They will bring home the body of poor Monsieu' Monckton for the funeral to-morrow."

"I read in the paper that he'd be shipped home this afternoon." Phil nodded, glad that the subject had been changed. "That man who used to come to see him, the one you told me about last night; do you think you would know him again if you should see him?"

"I should not like to see him!" Lucie sniffed at the bottle of perfume, wrinkling her small nose as though to eliminate some offensive odor. "He has a sharp, suspicious face like a ferret and eyes that bore through one! Not that they bore through *me*, for I only peep at him when he does not see! Why do you ask of him, M'sieu?"

"Oh, just curiosity!" Phil disclaimed hastily. "You believe his son killed the old man?"

She shrugged.

"What is one to think? That *bêtiste* of a robber—that is what we say camouflage. Would one do murder for an armful of old silver?"

"Maybe not, but 'one' would knock somebody flat to avoid being pinched for it," he remarked.

"What is that 'pinch'?" she asked, frowning. "Is it *argot* of the thieves?"

"Just ordinary slang for getting arrested!" Phil turned a rich red. Then the thought of those numbers scrawled on the wall returned to his mind and he observed: "I thought you'd never get through telephoning last night! You must be mighty fond of him!"

"'Him?'" she repeated. "And how do you know that I telephone to a 'him,' M'sieu Philip?"

"What if I was just curious enough to get that call traced?" he asked teasingly, and then stared in surprise, for the girl's eyes flashed sudden fire.

"You would not dare! But how could you? A pay-station, from that it is not possible to trace a call!"

"Say, don't get sore at me!" Phil pleaded. "I was only—teasing; of course I wouldn't try, even if I could, but I'm

jealous! You've sure got me going, Lucie, and when I open my own garage out here—"

He was thinking fast. So that was why she had walked all the way to the village instead of using the telephone at the Manor! It wasn't only that she didn't want to have that conversation overheard, but she meant to leave no record of the number! Was that the reason why she had looked so sort of scared when he told her he had followed her from the drug store?

The private affairs of a servant of the household could have nothing to do with the killing of its master, of course, but Cliff had told him to be on the lookout for anything suspicious and this looked like something more than a mere flirtation of hers that she went to such trouble to keep her communication secret. Phil decided that for more than personal inclination the young woman's further acquaintance might be worth while cultivating, and suggested that he rent a car and take her for a drive that evening.

Lucie shook her head regretfully but decidedly.

"Not this evening, M'sieu Philip. Another time, perhaps, but to-night it will be expected that we all remain at home, because of Monsieu'."

That sounded reasonable enough, but there had been a little catch in her breath when she declined.

"Aw, you could slip out, the way you did last night!" Phil ventured. "After all, Mr. Monckton wasn't anything to you, and I may not be around here very long. I believe you've got another date!"

"I haven't!" Lucie retorted. "I can not go, I should lose my place"

"Well, you'll lose it anyway, now the old man's gone and his son in prison; there'll be no one to keep the house open," Phil argued. "If you don't come to-night I'll know it's because of somebody else, and I'm going to be here anyway, and wait—"

"You shall not!" Lucie's voice trembled, and sweeping needlework and candy under her arm she rose. "If you come near this house to-night, I—I shall never see you, never again! I warn you, the dogs will be loose!"

There was room for no doubt now! Her anger was unfeigned, but beneath it Phil's sharp eyes read actual fear. What was going on to-night that she was afraid to have a stranger know?

"Then it is another date!" To test her he rose to histrionic heights.

"It's that fellow you phoned to last night at 609—"

"Stop!" The bottle of perfume fell crashing at her feet, sending up a wave of cloying fragrance on the still air, and her very lips went white. "You *did* trace that number, after all! I tell you, if you meddle in my affairs it shall be the worse for you! I do not know who you are nor why you have tried to talk to me, but I shall tell the gardener to watch for you, and hand you over to the police! Let me pass!"

With a rustle of her starched white skirts she was gone and for a moment Phil stood staring almost stupidly after her. Then he made his way through the gap in the fence and back to the village with one resolve firmly fixed in his mind; he would carry out his threat, and be on hand that evening. It might be a jealous lover she was expecting, but if it chanced after all to be someone in whom the Shadowers might have a vital interest, he should not be allowed to slip through their fingers.

It was after nine when he approached the Manor once more and this time, in addition to his flash light, he carried a small but serviceable pistol The wind was rising now and the stars were obscured by a heavy cloudbank, but Phil smiled to himself at the deep silence which brooded over the vast estate.

If Lucie expected a visitor she would take good care that the dogs were not only securely tied but silenced. Avoiding that gap in the masonry he dropped over the wall by means of a low-hanging branch, as he had on the previous night. There were several dim lights in the garage and outbuildings, but only one from the house and that from the rear, under the roof. The room of one of the servants, probably. Was Lucie waiting for the time of her tryst?

Taking up his stand behind a tree midway between the gate and the gap in the fence where through a vista he commanded

an unobstructed view of the garage lights, faintly outlining the path leading to the house, Phil prepared himself for a protracted vigil. It proved to be far longer than he anticipated. A distant church clock struck ten and eleven, and still no sound came to him but the whispering of the wind among the trees.

The garage lights and those in the other outbuildings went out one by one and when midnight sounded the glow from the upper bedroom in the house was extinguished and utter darkness reigned.

Accustomed as he had been in the pursuit of his previous vocation to tirelessly vigilant waiting, Phil found himself aching in every muscle, and his eyelids growing heavy. That had been a fool notion about Lucie; she was probably asleep long ago. He didn't understand those hot-tempered foreign dames, and he must have been too darn suspicious, looking for clews where there weren't any. Still he might as well wait a little longer, if he could only keep awake!

He moved about cautiously, but in the pitch darkness he kept running into trees and tripping over roots and rocks, and finally he returned to his sentinel tree and sat down, leaning against it. His head nodded lower and lower and at last rested on his chest, and he slept.

How long it was before he awakened, Phil never knew, but he came to himself suddenly with every nerve tingling, and sprang to his feet, instinctively clutching his flash light and pistol.

He had a vague notion that some one had passed him in the darkness, but that couldn't be, for they were coming now! Stealthy footsteps were creeping toward him, nearer and nearer from the direction of that break in the wall, and the cloud which had obscured the stars was gone. He shrank back in the shadow of a bush and when a gaunt figure loomed before him he stepped forward and ordered: "Hands up!"

The figure promptly stretched long arms above his head but his shoulders were shaking oddly and all at once a disgustingly familiar voice spoke:

"Anything to oblige you, Phil, but we're wasting time."

"George!" The pistol was lowered and its owner demanded, low but wrathfully: "What the hell are you doing here?"

As if in answer a half-stifled cry in feminine voice came from the direction of the drive and George exclaimed:

"Same thing you are! Come on!"

They dashed forward, and around the turn in the driveway came upon a woman in a dark cape struggling in the grasp of a man. Phil flashed his light and at the same moment the woman wrenched from her captor's hands and vanished among the trees.

"Grab him, Phil!" George cried. "That's my man! That's Radwick!"

Phil obeyed and the stranger made no sign of protest. He seemed struck dumb by their advent, but when the flash light revealed George's stern features he broke out with an oath that ended in a subdued chuckle:

"The Reverend Dr. Griffith Rhodes again!" he gasped. "You two are dicks, are you? That's a hot one! So am I!"

CHAPTER XVI.

DOUBLE PLAY.

"DON'T try to come that on me!" Phil declared in a threatening tone. "You're here to meet that woman. She phoned to you last night!"

"What woman?" Radwick stared from one to the other of them. "There's a mix-up here, all right! You don't mean the one I caught just now? Scranton Lucy?"

"'Scranton'!"

"Sure! She's a common crook. Her husband was a member of the Dobson gang and got bumped off a year and a half—"

"Let's get out of here!" George interrupted. "There's a light gone up over there and—golly, hear those dogs!"

A chorus of deep-throated baying arose upon the night. With one accord the three turned and started for the gap in the wall, George first and then Radwick with Phil at his heels, grimly covering him with the pistol. They scrambled through the wires, crossed the road and, bending low, ran in the shadow of the opposite hedge till they came to a narrow, winding lane. Here

with a simultaneous impulse they turned and dived for the cover of some bushes growing wild by the side of the road.

For a good ten minutes they crouched, scarcely daring to breathe until the excited baying died down and finally ceased altogether. Then George remarked:

"It seems to me that explanations are in order all 'round, and this is as good a place to talk as we're likely to find at this hour. You're a pretty fast worker as a stick-up guy, Phil, but it looks as though you'd pulled a boner both times."

"I have, have I?" Phil exclaimed in high dudgeon. "Didn't you tell me to grab this fellow, and how do you know he's a dick? The whole thing may be a frame!"

"You heard the dope Lucian got yesterday about a certain crockery buyer named Christopher Radwick?" George asked meaningly, but his discretion was lost upon Phil.

"Holy cat! The guy who chased Richard Monckton over Europe?" the latter cried. "Was that the job Cliff gave you—to find him?"

"Look here, boys. Suppose we get this straight?" Radwick interrupted. "I can prove my identity all right, but you have the drop on me. If you will feel in the inside pocket of my coat you'll find my permit, credentials, and a foreign passport which they forgot to collect at a frontier abroad. So you're on the Monckton case? I thought so last night. Operatives for the Shadowers, aren't you?"

"Take him up on that, George!" Phil commanded grimly, ignoring the question. "I've still got him covered."

George obeyed, and held the flash light while he ran hastily through the papers.

"Wicks's Detective Agency, eh?" he commented. "Radway Wicks, proprietor. You're Wicks himself! Our mistake, but we had to make sure. No wonder you stood aces high with that house dick at the Fresno, but he overplayed the hand you left him."

He returned the credentials, and Phil sheepishly pocketed his pistol.

"Or else you went him one better." Wicks laughed. "I thought I put you to sleep rather neatly last night and I don't know how or when you got on my trail again, but it was good work! I'll take you on whenever you want a job."

"Thank you, Wicks," George replied with dignity. "My friend here and I are not operatives, but members of a firm ourselves—you guessed it—the Shadowers. I have my police pass here, to the Monckton town house—"

"Don't bother—I'll take your word for it." Wicks waved the suggestion aside. "I only wish I'd known it last night, for we seem to have interfered with each other. I'm on a delicate private mission that has nothing to do with the murder you're investigating; I can't go any farther than that, boys, but I wish you all the luck in the world."

He rose, and Phil asked suddenly:

"Will you answer one question? I'm asking because maybe your game has something to do with ours, after all, and we might be able to swop a little dope. Are you after that woman you call 'Scranton Lucy'?"

"Lord, no! I haven't seen her in a couple of years and I don't know what she was doing in the grounds of the manor, but she wore no hat and it looks as though she was working there. I had it on pretty good authority that she quit the game and ran straight after her husband was killed, but you never can tell about these crooks. I'll tell you anything you want to know about that dame!"

"What was her line when she stood in with the gang?"

"Inside stuff. Lucy was a manicurist in a hotel in Scranton when she got stuck on a good looking guy who stopped there for a while and threw his coin around like a prince. A theatrical company was there at the same time with a star more famous for her jewels than her acting. They played Scranton two nights and on the second this million dollar kid—he called himself 'Regner'—disappeared. So did the star's sparklers and—Lucy.

"That was about four years ago, and for the next two she helped to make things hum. She learned hairdressing, picked up a few French phrases and an accent, and her lay was to take a job as lady's maid with

some rich woman, get a line on her jewels and how and when they could be got at, and then leave.

"Days, sometimes weeks, would pass before anything was pulled off and then she'd have an alibi that couldn't be shaken. But the bulls were watching when she went to work for Almadora, the opera singer. They watched after she left and they caught Regner turning the trick. He tried to run for it, then lost his head and fired, and they shot him full of holes. You've heard of the Dobson gang he worked with?"

"Top notchers — international jewel thieves!" Phil's tone was one of awed respect. "Biggest in the game, weren't they?"

"They were, but not any more!" Wicks laughed shortly. "I helped break 'em up when they tackled a client of mine, and the ringleaders are up the river or dead. None of 'em left but a few of the rough workers and they don't hang together or go after any big stuff. Lucy got out from under in time, but if there had been any ladies in Monckton's family who were kind of careless with their jewelry, I'd say she was up to her old tricks again."

Wicks laughed once more, dismissing the subject. "I guess the coast is clear now and I'll beat it. Drop in at the agency any time you want a little help and I'll be glad to see you."

"Fair enough! Same with us, but if you don't see us any quicker than you saw Lucy last summer, you wouldn't be much help!" Phil commented, adding suddenly: "Say, she knows you, don't she?"

"Not to my knowledge. When I broke up that gang she'd already quit them." Wicks eyed him curiously. "What do you mean about last summer? She wasn't working the steamers or pulling off jobs on the other side, was she?"

"Nothing like that. She was right here at the Manor the three times you called, but I guess you had other fish to fry," Phil explained blandly. "She saw you, but didn't know who you were. It looks as though you had the right dope; she must be running straight, to stay on the job in a place like that where there was nothing doing in her line for more than a year."

"Why did you grab her if you didn't want her?" George asked, quick to grasp the mental reservation hinted at in his confrere's tone.

"Running into her like that and recognizing her, I thought I'd get a little explanation of what she was doing there after two in the morning." Wicks shook his head. "It does look suspicious, but that's not my pigeon."

"I can explain that myself!" Phil lighted a cigarette and flipped the match out into the road. "She slipped out to meet a sweetheart and was trying to get in late when she bumped into you. Wonder whether she's beaten it for fear you'll hand her record to the housekeeper?"

"You said she didn't know what I was, and nothing was ever proved on her," Wicks responded. "Before her husband got killed she'd left him. There were a dozen reliable characters, neighbors, ready to swear to that. If you're still interested in her I guess you'll find that she's asleep, or pretending to be, in her room at the Manor. Don't forget to look in on me, boys; glad to meet new members of the same club."

George returned the polite invitation and the other left them and swung off down the road in the direction of the village. For a little time there was silence between the two by the roadside as Phil smoked reflectively and George ruminated on the unexpected turn of events.

Then the latter spoke.

"What was Wicks doing at the Manor last year? He didn't deny it."

"Too clever to; he knew we'd find that out if we hadn't already," Phil replied. "He came to see the old man."

"Not Monckton!"

"Sure. Had three conferences with him, and if Lucy told me the truth he must have been hired to protect the father from the son." He repeated what Lucy had told him and added: "When I sprung it on him it was just a wild guess on my part from a kind of a slim description she gave me, but she didn't recognize him, that's certain. George, I'm beginning to think that maybe old Cliff might be right after all! Lucy put it over me good and plenty about being a French girl and all that, but I found out

by accident three figures of a phone call she made Friday night and I've been right on her trail ever since. Wait 'll you hear!"

When he had finished, George said:

"My son, you've got something at last. I think Wicks took the logical view; she didn't recognize him, nor see you to-night, so it's a safe bet she didn't make her getaway just now when it might start a hue and cry after her. She's gone back to her room, but in the morning early she'll invent some excuse to beat it, and then is when we'll have to be on the job. Mine is gone, for I'm satisfied Wicks is who he declares he is; his photograph was on that foreign passport. Still, if Monckton hired him to trail Richard, why was he trying to sneak into the Manor like a thief himself? With the old man gone, his case is finished."

"Whatever his game is, he'll try it again so you'd better stick around with me," Phil advised. "There's nothing we can do tonight without rousing that house and declaring ourselves, but I'm going to hang about and be right on the spot with the first streak of dawn. If Lucy beats it I'll follow her and if I don't show up to report to Cliff before you do, tell him everything I've told you."

"I will," George promised. "I ought to send word in now, but I think I'd better keep on Wicks's trail and find out what he's up to. It won't be difficult to pick him up again if he tries to lay low, now that I know who he is. I've had more sleep than I needed in the last twenty-four hours and I'll watch while you take a nap, if you like. Look what that confounded wire did to my frock coat!"

Phil attempted to sound him as to his own experience with Wicks, but George maintained a dignified and noncommittal reserve on that score and he finally gave it up and took his confrere's advice. When he awoke the stars had disappeared and a faint pink streaked the east.

Together they crept down the turnpike once more and through the break in the wall. No one was stirring as they made their way cautiously around behind the garage and stable to a point where they could command a view of the back door of the house and the tradesmen's driveway, which led to a gate far in the rear of the estate. A single dog gave voice, but was soon quiet and they settled themselves behind a screening honeysuckle arbor to await the day.

It came sooner than they had anticipated and with it signs of renewed life in the house where the owner was lying in state. The back door opened and a stout woman and a young girl, evidently the kitchenmaid, could be glimpsed moving about within. They were joined presently by a very old woman, and then three men appeared.

"That must be Nora, the housemaid," Phil remarked softly. "Lucy told me she was nearly seventy."

"And there's Peter Downes, the butler, and Jim Ricks, the old valet. I talked to them both at the town house on Friday," George supplemented. "I don't know who that third man is—the footman, probably. If Lucy's in the house I wonder why she doesn't appear?"

"Look out, George!" Phil warned suddenly. "There are three or four men coming out of that tenant cottage; the gardeners, I suppose, and here comes the garage helper. If there's no sign of Lucy soon I'm going up to the house and ask for her."

But that step proved unnecessary, for in a few minutes more the girl appeared. She wore the gray cape and small hat with the red feather, and carried a trim black bag.

"You were right, she's making her getaway!" exclaimed Phil beneath his breath. "She's shaking hands with the butler—there, now she's coming! I'll let her get five minutes' start and then trail. Good-by, George, and good luck!"

The slim, graceful figure walked quickly past their hiding place without a sidelong glance and down to the rear gate, pausing to close it after her, and turned in the opposite direction from the village. When she had disappeared Phil also made his way to the gate, but in a roundabout fashion, dodging under every tree that offered protection from observation. There was a low pedestrian gate beside the taller one. He vaulted it, and then stood staring down the lane in the direction Lucy had taken. It was long and straight and white, with the back walls of different estates lining it on

both sides, and nowhere was the girl visible. Had she turned in at another gate to linger and see if she was pursued?

Phil paused uncertainly, but as the moments passed and she did not reappear, his anxiety increased. What if she were to cross through a neighboring estate and strike off along the main road? What if she had telephoned from the Manor to have a car take her to heaven knew where?

At last in desperation he hurried forward, but when at last he reached the boundary of the Manor and the high stone wall gave place to a thick hedge, the girl stepped suddenly through it and confronted him.

"Good morning, M. Philip of the Shadowers!" She burlesqued her own accent of the previous day. "We both leave this so charming spot, it appears; shall we not travel together?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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THE POINT OF VIEW

BILL BILGER was a shipping clerk,
Who often, as he walked to work,
Was forced to dodge the motors which
Whizzed past him, filled with idle rich.
And as a frantic leap he'd make,
He'd cry: "Say, you, for goodness sake!
Why don't you blow your horn, you clown.
To keep from running people down?
Confound these autos, anyway!
The people's lives ain't safe to-day!
The way they race 'em through a crowd—
They simply shouldn't be allowed!
It's time the poor man had the call—
The rich should have no rights at all!"

One day Bill Bilger's uncle died,
And left him well with cash supplied;
And Bill's first purchase was a great
New car, in which he rode in state.
Then, as he ran it down the street,
And scared pedestrians off their feet,
He'd glower at them and gruffly shout:
"Confound you! Why don't you look out?
Are you a pack of blind men? Say!
What rights have you got, anyway!
You make life dangerous in this town!
'Twould serve you right to run you down!
Down with the proletariat!
What good are you? Come, tell me that!"

The world is full of Bilgers, who
Completely change their point of view
With Fortune's star!
And, oh, this life's a different hive
To those who dodge and those who drive
The motor car!

Paul West.

The Decoy

By JOHN D. SWAIN

IN any city of five hundred thousand you may find a branch office of the Keene Detective Agency, usually located in a dingy building near the courthouse.

The business—or profession—was instituted half a century ago by Arlo Keene, a brilliant and ambitious sub-chief in the Federal service, and two of his surviving sons conduct it to-day. It is strictly ethical; that is, divorce scrapes are not accepted unless the retaining fee is at least one thousand dollars, and all investigations are strictly confidential. It serves a large number of prominent banks, employers of labor, and jewelers, and is at times called upon by the municipal police and even by the United States authorities.

It is best recognized by the public through its slogan, devised by the elder Keene. Upon a neat, rectangular white enameled sign appear the words in plain black lettering:

WE WORK WHILE YOU SLEEP

To enter one of its consultation rooms is to enter all. A colorless clerk takes your name and presently ushers you into a room plainly furnished, with a few shelves of books, an array of filing cabinets, ice water tank, and on the wall a life sized steel engraving of Arlo Keene, depicted as a ratty looking man with scanty burnsides and a long, pointed nose.

The local superintendent is always seated behind a large, flat topped desk, upon which stand two telephones, writing materials, cigars, and a battery of push buttons. A green shaded electrolier frames his face in

shadow and illumes your own as you take the chair he indicates at the opposite side of the desk.

The supers are an able body carefully chosen, usually after a long apprenticeship with the Keene Agency, though one or two are men who learned their trade in the C. I. D. of Scotland Yard, and a few have been lured away from rival concerns. They have this in common: they leave a client with the feeling that they are the repositories of untold secrets, that they could—were it thinkable that a Keene man could so far forget himself as to talk, even in his sleep—rock thrones or cradles, Wall Street, or the very foundations of society. They say little and imply very much, and leave the prospect hot with desire to deposit a fat retainer and turn his immortal soul inside out.

The colloquies are not literally as secret as they appear to be; for an expert stenographer sits, invisible, behind a *papier-mâché* wall not a yard from the desk, and faithfully takes down everything that is said during the interview. This is typed verbatim as soon as the visitor has departed. The copy goes to the super, who proofs it, blue pencils all frivolous and extraneous amenities, comments on the weather, and the like, after which a corrected copy is made, indexed and filed as the first document of the client's *dossier*. Before the affair is concluded by the issuance of a receipt in full for check, the Keene Agency is rather likely to know more about its customers than they do themselves.

Intriguing as it might be to listen in on some of the stories which have been spilled in one of these drab offices under the skillful questioning of the chief, the average student of human nature would prefer to push on beyond the consulting room, through the stenographer's apartment and so, by swinging doors, into a roomy lounge where wait the trusty sleuths who are ready, day or night, to hop to a remunerative bigamy case just around the corner, or to seize a ready packed kit bag and start for the interior of Korea or the upper reaches of the Amazon.

Here they are, the men who work while you sleep—or at least, toss on your uneasy cot. Sometimes one or two, again eight or ten of them, a cheery coal fire burning in winter, electric fan vibrating in summer, a long table covered with newspapers and magazines and tobacco in all its forms, smaller tables for cards or dominoes, easy chairs scattered about, and in one corner a percolator of hot coffee and plenty of sandwiches.

They are of all sorts, burly, anæmic, low-browed, scholarly; but they are alike in sharing one great ambition. Each prides himself on looking utterly unlike a detective. A Keene agent would be pained, but possibly forgiving, were you to liken him to a ring tailed ganookus, or a wart hog; but you would earn his undying enmity were you to confide that he looked exactly like a detective.

To every rule, its exception. Hence, the Boston office numbered among its dozen operatives a large, good looking creature with prominent eyes and a receding chin. He cultivated a sweeping, glossy black mustache of surprising luxuriance, wore, indoors and out, a wide brimmed black Stetson pulled well down over his eyes, and held a huge cigar in one corner of his mouth during waking hours.

He preferred clothes of a high visibility, shepherd's plaids and florid tweeds, and was only restrained from wearing a scarlet cravat by the fact that this hue has earned an unmerited reputation. Fawn colored spats—white canvas ones during the hot season—matched his pigskin or chamois gloves, and his highly burnished badge glittered whenever he consulted his platinum timepiece or sought his gold mounted fountain pen.

Alone among his confreres, he was never without a loaded gat with which he was never able to hit anything save by aiming at something else, and in his roomy pockets he carried a powerful magnifying glass, handcuffs, a pint or more of skeleton keys, and membership cards in half a dozen fraternal organizations. He was beloved of his fellows, the life of the party without knowing why, the blissfully, unaware target of endless gibes. Withal, he was one of the brilliant inspirations of Robert Keene, the Boston chief and half owner of the agency.

James Putter had grown up with the con-

cern, beginning as porter and rising by slow stages to become young Keene's chauffeur. In a moment of inspiration his employer made him a full fledged " dick," with badge, automatic and everything. It was Keene's subtle habit to send him to the scene of some dastardly crime, there to become the glittering and obvious representative of the Sleepless One, to serve, in short, as a human anise bag, a red herring dragged across the trail.

While the wily crooks, the local police and the public at large were dazed by this eye filling and completely satisfying figure, the real operatives, merging unobtrusively into the life of the community, and unknown to James Putter, who blissfully conceived himself to be working alone—as, indeed, he was—did the dirty work and got their man, or woman.

It was not desired—nor expected—that the gorgeous Putter should unearth a baffling clew, or recognize one if he stumbled upon it, or furnish a valuable suggestion, or discover any evidence, or make an arrest. And his secret grief was this: that just as his subtle net was spread, the jaws of his trap about to close upon the unwitting victim, some outsider crashed in and by bull luck hogged all the glory! Otherwise, he was a perfectly happy animal with an enormous appetite for victuals, human companionship, admiration, and the translated works of Émile Gaboriau.

He possessed a resounding terminology, and had a tenacious memory for everything he had read about detective methods. He worked, so he said, by *inductive* methods. He would not crudely state that he had ever outwitted a crook, made a monkey of him; rather, he phrased it that he had applied the *reductio ad absurdum;* and a physical encounter he termed the *argumentum ad hominum.* He was a good mixer, a free buyer of the usual thing in pre-Volstead days, and of what-have-you in these grayer times. He received a good salary and a liberal expense allowance, and earned them, though not in the ways he supposed.

Big and hearty as he was, the truth would have prostrated him; but the barbed arrows of truth never penetrated his layers of thick, plump skin, nor could. Keene had often warned his operatives not to kid James Putter too far; but the warning was unnecessary. His armor of bland, childlike, impregnable self-esteem sopped up compliments that would have roused the suspicions of a deaf and dumb cretin. James Putter was immune.

Upon a certain drizzly summer afternoon he was expounding to one of the three greatest living authorities on safe workers, a few subtle points concerning the proper—or improper—use of the can opener by yeggs. While Putter was enlightening a pop eyed group of fellow sleuths as to certain details that had been of some relevance when they were wearing rompers, Robert Keene was closeted with a worried looking man who had been delegated to enlist his services in a small city in central Massachusetts.

" 'S' this way, chief," the visitor was saying, the while he wiped his negligible brow and prominent nose with a silk handkerchief the size of a bath mat. " This is the eighth break in less'n two weeks, in Midville. All jewelry stores. There's two guys in the team. One stays outside as a lookout, the other walks in and asks can he see a sparkler, or what will you. They always pick a time when they's only one clerk on duty, and they've cleaned up big. Don't seem to care a hang whether the streets are crowded or not. Last Wednesday they got to Hamilton for a tray of rings worth over two thousand dollars; and it was the noon hour, with half a dozen looking into the show window and a traffic cop not a hundred feet away. The local force ain't doing a thing. Just making wise cracks about having a clew and an arrest to be pulled soon and that sort of bull. It's got so we jewel merchants don't dare to display nothing but junk. And every time a door slams or a flivver backfires, we jumps six feet. It's fierce!"

The chief nodded sympathetically.

" Just whom do you represent?" he asked. " What I mean is, have you really got together and arranged for a fund sufficient to finance this thing right? That's really all there is to it, you know. The Keene Agency will guarantee to land these bandits or drive them out of town; but we must not be parsimonious. The crisis is too

urgent for that. If I understand, you are losing a good many thousands a week as things stand."

The worried looking man reached eagerly for his check book. Behind her *papier-mâché* wall the trusty stenog marked the close of the interview with a few pothooks and loops which, properly transcribed, read: "We'll mail you check each week on receipt of bill. Sure! By return mail. Thanks, Mr. Keene! Goo'-by."

II.

On the brief ride to Midville James Putter was unusually discreet. Quite naturally he mentioned his mission to the conductor, also to the trainman. And he carelessly threw open his lapel when the candy butcher approached, for the sheer pleasure of beholding the gleam of interest and envy in the lad's eyes as they reflected the glitter of his nickel badge. But to the traveling man who got on at Farmingham and sat beside him in the smoker, he said never a word. He even buttoned his coat.

Discretion! That was the word. The fellow looked to be what he said he was, the advance agent for a new belt buckle that was going to knock the gents' furnishing trade dead. He gave Putter a sample buckle in oxydized plate. But the detective kept his own counsel. Or rather, he merely stated that he was visiting Midville on a mission of some delicacy, the nature of which he was unable to disclose.

He was an arresting figure as he tramped solidly onto the platform at his destination. A tasty homespun suit loosely woven with knots of green and purple and the bits of straw and wood which companion this fabric, his black Stetson freshly blocked, swinging in his right hand an immense kit bag of polished cowhide, the taxi drivers fell upon him with glee. One of them bore him to the local clubhouse of his favorite fraternal order, the Insomniacs, no loyal member of which order ever goes to bed the same day he gets up. It was Putter's intention to lodge with them while in town.

But Midville's Insomniacs had, it appeared, but a modest home. There were no quarters for sleeping. Sleeping wasn't, in fact, highly esteemed as an indoor sport. The brothers present greeted him warmly after the identification card had been displayed, the mystic word whispered into the cauliflowered ear of the keeper of the portal. Much cheer was produced. Brother Putter bought an entire box of their best cigars, and passed 'em round. In three minutes he was "Jim" to one and all.

Quite naturally, but under the sacred seal of the order, he disclosed the urgent nature of his appointed task. Some thirty odd Insomniacs peered at the glittering badge, shared the glow of a secret disclosed. More cheer was produced. When the Keene agent departed for the hotel to which he had been warmly recommended—by the brother who was its principal shareholder—he felt a real affection for the city.

Mentioning his vocation only to the desk clerk, elevator man and bellhop, he washed up and changed his collar and proceeded to Midville's most prominent bank. Here he sought the president, and did actually succeed in obtaining an interview with the second vice president.

"I'm here, Mr. Eldridge, to put an end to the wave of crime which is afflicting your beautiful and hospitable city. In short, to pinch the gunmen who have been getting away with all this ice. Here are my credentials."

He deposited a pocketful of letters, certificates, an income tax receipt, membership cards, the license to carry a gun, and so on.

"I make it a rule to identify myself at a good, sound bank in every city where I am in charge. I don't want any money now, but in my profession when you do want it, you want it bad, and quick! Be so good as to wire my chief—collect—giving description and name. Brief and snappy, you know: 'Tall, striking in appearance, dark, no blemishes, heavy mustache, regular features, impressive speech, weight two hundred and twenty.' Something like that. They will advise you to honor my personal check for any reasonable amount. Thank you so much!"

He rose, and offered his hand. No reply from the vice president seemed to be expected. And as he strode out of the office, Eldridge looked after him with a slightly be-

wildered air. He was something of a judge of human nature; but under no circumstances could he imagine any live concern intrusting to James Putter any mission more vital than the inspection of its waste paper baskets, or the ejection of undesirable visitors. Honest? Unquestionably. But dumb! All celluloid above his ears. No wonder crime waves went unchecked!

It was only five o'clock; too early to dine. But Putter felt the need of a nibble to assuage the protest of a stomach which had gone neglected since a hearty lunch about noon. He found a little grill, and stood at the bar while a couple of dozen littlenecks were opened for him as he absent-mindedly emptied the cracker bowl.

Through the single window peered the faces of a group of boys who had trailed him from his hotel, whispering excitedly. This, they knew already, was the sleuth who had come to win the thousand dollar reward offered by the mayor with the consent of the common council! Putter was aware of the silent homage, but not in the least disturbed that news of his identity should in some mysterious manner have leaked out. He knew that it was impossible for him to spend two hours in any city of the world without setting tongues to wagging. The least observant could not fail to notice that he was *somebody!*

Emerging, he came face to face with a lieutenant of police who was bidding the gang " move on." He paused, thrust out a thick, plump hand.

" Howdy, loot! I'm Putter — James Putter from Keene's. Sent to clamp the lid down on your burg. Pleased to meetcha! You mustn't have any feeling about us butting in. I know how much you have to do — traffic violations, bootlegging, unlicensed beggars, lost kids, 'n' everything. This crime stuff is a little out of your line —and we've made it a study for half a century. Yeah. Longer 'n that! We'll not pull against each other. I'll keep my trap shut, and you tip me off to anything you stumble onto. Any new dope?"

The lieutenant, Reilly, who had risen from patrolman through twenty years of arduous service, let his hard blue eyes roam up and down the six feet of Putter from the fawn spats to the costly Stetson. He knew all about the Keene people; what they stood for, the big cases they had successfully handled. He couldn't " make " the genial James, and it irritated him. What was it all about? Why, this bird advertised himself like a lighthouse, or a jazz band!

" Nothing new," he grunted. " But you gotta work fast, friend, or we'll beat you to it! We're about ready to make a—"

Putter waved a languid hand on which gleamed a large yellow diamond ring.

" Sure! I know. Old stuff. If you land the boys, nobody will be more tickled than me. There's two big cases I'm needed on right now. Keene hates to see me wasted on a mere police job, but the local ice dealers put it to him so strong he fell for it. Then, too, I can use that grand they're offering as a reward! Have a cigar?"

He ignored Reilly's protest, stuffed three or four expensive smokes into his breast pocket, and moved on with a friendly smile. Nothing like standing in with these hick constables! They were dumb — couldn't really help a good man much. But at the same time they could hinder him. Putter made it a point to win their esteem. For one thing, his nature was genial and kindly. He liked to be liked, even by a stray dog!

He looked into three or four of the shops which had been victimized. Talked with the proprietors. He was received warmly; they were ready to clutch at a straw. And James Putter was a large, fat, important looking straw.

On the way back to the hotel for dinner he passed two men who looked at him sharply without appearing to do so. One was a buyer of gold and silver scraps, bridge work, dental crowns and fillings, all sorts of salvaged precious metals. The other was a hard-looking guy whose soft collar was soiled and lacked a cravat. Both were Keene operatives, from the Boston office. Putter did not know this. He would have been deeply hurt if he had. But in order to deceive him no more elaborate disguise than a two-days' beard, a pair of shell cheaters, or a dirty cap pulled over the eyes, was necessary.

Yet, he was not unobservant, at times.

His eyes were instantly attracted to an article in a jeweler's window. It was a little shop, neat and well kept. A placard announced that one Moe Gordon was about to acquire the business, stock and goodwill, and would after inventory display the best line of watches, rings and ladies' novelties ever seen in Midville, and for less money than his competitors.

Within, two men, probably Gordon and the retiring dealer, were checking off merchandise upon the shelves. But what held Putter's regard was a large watch fob in the form of a scarab of red enamel and green gold. It was eye-filling, aglow with shimmering fire.

Putter had chanced upon a copy of the *Geographers' Magazine*, and knew, in a loose way, that the scarab beetle had been sacred in the eyes of the people of King Tut's day. The swells had expensive ones—like this in the window—buried with 'em for luck in the next world. Egyptian junk had the class, just now. He yearned to attach this fob to his watch. Its price—ten dollars—was not unreasonable. He started to enter. Then, it came to him that if he waited till the shop had changed hands, he might get it cheaper. He moved on. Fifteen minutes later he was seated in the hotel dining room awaiting the planked steak he had ordered.

After dinner he sat alone in the lobby, thinking over his case. As usual, he had been sent without special instructions. They never hampered him by trying to indicate the steps whereby he should solve the mystery on hand. Keene was too wise to crab his game! Of course, he had to send in regular reports, like every operative. Not to have demanded that would have roused his suspicions.

Also, the joy that the reports of "Operative No. 23" brought to the jaded nerves at the Keene headquarters was not lightly to be given up. They were treasured, and copies passed from city to city wherever a Keene Agency was located.

Putter drew from a pocket a map of the city. Upon it, in red ink, was indicated each jewelry store, with the date upon which it had been robbed. Putter studied this, a portentous frown between his prominent eyes. He traced, with a pencil, a line from the first break to the last. It made a meaningless spiral, like the homing footsteps of a New Year reveler. There was nothing to indicate what locality the gunmen would choose for their next break. No apparent system. Several of the most prosperous shops hadn't been troubled at all. One small place had suffered three times. There were twenty-one jewelry stores in Midville, all indicated on the map.

Thinking always fatigued James Putter. It made his head ache. Why the devil didn't the local bulls cover each of the twenty-one stores, and simply wait? Probably they hadn't that many on the force!

He folded the map and returned it to his pocket. The thought of that gold and crimson scarab fob returned. He might as well take another look at it. Nothing else to do, until some clew leaped out at him. A little walk would settle his dinner—that was a corking good steak! His mouth watered at the thought of its succulent thickness, nestling in a pleasing wreath of mashed potato and green and pink vegetables.

Midville's lighting system reflected the parsimony of its chamber of commerce. Washington Street was sufficiently bright to enable the curfew evaders to dodge the uneven spots in the brick sidewalks, but the cross streets invited lovers and porch climbers. Depot Street, on which was the shop Putter sought, had little on a rustic hedgerow. There were few wayfarers astir, and between the infrequent gas lamps there was only here and there a pool room or fruit stand or night lunch to cheer the passer-by.

Moe Gordon's was pleasantly aglow however. The two men he had seen that afternoon were still figuring and squabbling. And the show window, though denuded of everything of a precious nature, still displayed, amid a litter of cheap German clocks and strings of glass beads, the noble scarab that had won Putter's approval.

He paused to fill his eyes with it; listlessly noting as he did so that an idler who had been shuffling past turned and stared at him while fumbling in his pockets for a match to relight the butt of a cigar

he was chewing. Putter made up his mind, set a broad thumb upon the door latch and briskly entered the little shop. Both occupants looked up as he strode down the narrow aisle between the long show cases.

"*I want*—" he boomed, and was surprisingly interrupted.

One of the men whirled about, and in one lightning motion dropped a tray of watches he was appraising and flashed a gun from beneath his left arm pit.

"*Stick 'em up, you*—" he squealed. "*Quick and high!*"

James Putter was not a fast thinker, and he was never more astonished in his life than by this greeting to a customer ready and anxious to spend real money. None the less, his muscles acted automatically without waiting for orders from the slower brain. Up went his arms; and they went high.

Directly above his head was a modern globe with a very big gas mantle, which furnished a mellow but sufficient light for the place. In hoisting his hands, the left one swept this globe from its moorings in a shower of broken china and glass. Instantly, profound darkness embraced them. Door and window were alone faintly indicated by a street lamp some thirty yards distant.

Almost with the crash a gun barked, and something passed so close to James Putter's cheek that he felt the breath of it even as it splintered the transom of the door. Again, his faithful muscles acted without volition as he dropped to his hands and knees. Then, anxious only to get away, he awkwardly yet swiftly scrambled down the aisle on all fours, conscious of oaths and cries behind him, and, worse yet, of groping steps in pursuit. His left hand was wet with blood where the glass had cut it as he smashed the lamp. His right was damp with sweat as he tremblingly found the door latch and tore at it.

In his excitement, he set the catch, and it would not open. He wrenched frantically at it; then, his invisible pursuer hard upon him, he wheeled about, still crouched low to avoid exposing himself against the faint glow on the glass panels of the door. The slighter man, seeking to escape, stumbled over the great hulk of Putter, uttered a final soul-searing oath, and sprawled full length. Upon him fell two hundred and twenty pounds of solid meat.

In the few seconds which had elapsed since the light went out, several other things were also taking place. Moe Gordon, business mastering terror, had groped for and found his desk phone and was calling police headquarters. The skulking figure which Putter had abstractedly observed outside leaped into action with the sound of the first and only shot, and thrust itself against the door. But the same mischance which kept Putter in, held him out; and he was still yanking the latch when the night stick of Lieutenant Reilly wafted him to sweet dreams of boundless wealth hoarded in ancient cheese-box safes. Two men who, with Reilly, had been watching the place for some time before Putter appeared, produced pocket torches, nonchalantly kicked in a glass panel, and sprang the catch. Moe Gordon appeared from the rear of his store with an emergency lamp which he was obliged to clutch with both trembling hands.

James Putter rose from the floor, dragging up with him the figure of a limp, handcuffed creature whose lungs had been flattired when the Keene agent fell atop him.

III.

ROBERT KEENE read for the second time the painstaking report which reached him the following morning. Of course, he had been advised of the facts by telephone the night before; nevertheless he found that the report, dictated to Min, the hotel stenographer by Mr. James Putter, threw as it were a new light upon these facts. It read:

> Arrived Midville 2.31 P.M. Registered at Mansion House, then set out to get low-down on jewelry shops listed on map furnished when I got assignment. This took most of afternoon. The only suspicious thing I found was at Moe Gordon's, 117 Depot Street, where him and another man who claimed he was buying Gordon out was figuring stock.
>
> This bird didn't look right to me. I never saw him before, but seen his kind too often to be fooled. Met Lieutenant Reilly of local force, but decided to play out hunch alone.

Had dinner 6 P.M., and at 7.29 started back to give Gordon's shop the double O.

Arrived 7.45, found same character inside with him, and a lighthouse posted just outside. Nobody else in sight. Entered shop to question man with Gordon, but he must of knew me, for he beat me to the draw. There was only one thing to do, and I done it. I smashed the only light there was in the shop, cutting my hand bad. Have had same dressed by local doctor and entered fee on my expense acc't, please find inclosed. Then I locked door to keep bandit from making get-away, also to prevent his accomplice from crashing in. The gun put up a hard fight in the dark before I overcome him and snapped the bracelets on.

After it was all over Reilly shows up and the lighthouse was so dumb he run right into Reilly's arms and got himself beaned. I turned my man over to him and come back to hotel to make out report and also to get injured hand dressed. Will report in person soon as have collected reward offered by the mayor.

Moe Gordon slipped me a fine watch fob. It's a lucky beetle, like they found on King Tut. Hope I keep mine as long as he's had his.

Yours truly,
OPERATIVE 23.

ʊ ʊ ʊ ʊ

"COME ON ALONG."

SHE smiled and whispered it to me:
"Come on along! Come on along!"
What call could more alluring be—
"Come on along!"
It was a blossom-burthened day,
The kind that made them name it "May."
I followed, when I heard her say:
"Come on along!"

Cerulean were the springtime skies—
"Come on along! Come on along!"
Still more cerulean were her eyes—
"Come on along!"
I dropped the task I had in hand
As she tripped forth along the land
And wafted me her sweet command:
"Come on along!"

Could you have heard that flutelike voice—
"Come on along! Come on along!"
You would have had no other choice—
"Come on along!"
You should have followed, as did I,
Bidding your loathly task good-by,
Thrilled at the music of her cry:
"Come on along!"

Nor was it right that she should say
"Come on along! Come on along!"
In such a tone on such a day—
"Come on along!"
Yet do not chide me that I went
On toil neglecting pleasure bent—
Her call was wine-and-honey-blent:
"Come on along!"

Strickland Gillilan.

Flood

By THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

Author of "Where All Trails End," "Sea Change," etc.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROFESSIONAL VANITY OF GABE LOON.

GABE LOON, who as an assistant game warden had for years been the understudy and shadow of Paul Snider before that great man's retirement and death, was a pure bred Maliseet. He had been a widower for a long time, and his children had grown up and scattered long ago. He had worked with Snider for close upon sixteen years, and upon that famous game protector's retirement from active employment, owing to ill-health brought on by all manner of woodland hardships, he too had retired from the service of the government.

Unable to break a habit of sixteen years' growth and practice, Gabe had followed Snider to town and remained near him until that habit was broken by death. Then he had returned to the wilderness, to those wide tracts of it over which he and his friend had exercised the authority of the Crown for the protection of beasts and birds and fishes so successfully and long. But he had returned unofficially.

He possessed simple tastes and a retiring disposition, and he had saved enough money while working for the government to keep him in food and tobacco for the rest of his life—with the help of his gun. He slipped back to the wilderness like a shadow, and, although several men had felt relief at his departure, no man was aware of his return. He was without ambition, but his old professional vanity remained with him. This vanity was not only of his own past as a game warden, but also of the professional fame of the great Snider, and this vanity had once received a hurt from which it had not yet recovered.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 5.

A worthless poacher named Pete Woodhall had administered that hurt years ago in the summer of the year of the great flood. Woodhall had made a fool of Mr. Paul Snider, given Gabe Loon the slip by an hour, and escaped from the province.

Gabe had caches here and there of flour and bacon, tea and salt pork, ammunition, and tobacco. Whenever he needed more of anything of the kind, he went out as furtively as a lynx and made the purchase fifty or sixty miles away. Thus he kept his return to the fields of his former professional activities from the knowledge, even from the suspicion, of the scattered people of the district of Gunflint Creek.

Gabe had not been back in his old haunts more than a few weeks before he learned, by certain obscure signs and indications, that the man who had hurt his professional vanity and made a fool of Paul Snider had also returned to the river. So he trailed Woodhall and found him—but he did not disclose himself.

He was not a brave man, so far as physical contacts were concerned. He was afraid of Woodhall's rifle and knife and temper, for he knew the white man to be his superior in the use of weapons. On the other hand, he knew himself to be the superior in woodcraft and patience.

He decided to keep his eye on the fellow who had shot holes in Paul Snider's canoe, firmly believing that a game of watching and waiting would deliver that impudent joker into his power sooner or later. An old score would be settled then, and professional vanity satisfied. So he kept in touch with Pete Woodhall, and it is no wonder that Woodhall sometimes feared that he was haunted.

When Woodhall set out on his long downstream journey to Lob's Point, the elderly Indian watched him embark and slip away. All day the voyager believed himself to be alone and unobserved—but when he resumed his journey next morning Gabe Loon was watching him. And so it was all the way down.

No matter how many miles of white water and black he unrolled behind him between sunrise and dark, no matter how many rough portages he made, the Maliseet was always there to see him make his morning embarkation. And although he might turn and look behind him a hundred times in a day, he never glimpsed so much as the flash of a following paddle.

When Woodhall returned to his canoe above Lob's Point the sun was down, and dusk was deepening in the long valley. He deposited something on the ground—something that looked, in the deepening obscurity, like a large bundle possessed of considerable weight—and pulled his canoe from the willows. He launched the canoe, lifted the bundle into it, embarked and started upstream, close to shore, with hasty thrusts of the pole.

He went straight for two hundred yards of swift and shallow water, then vanished from the view of Gabe Loon around a bushy point. Before long he took to deeper water and exchanged the pole for a paddle. Soon after that he crossed the river on a long slant. It was not until then that the Maliseet stepped out from behind a clump of leafless choke cherries and lifted his canoe from its bed of withered sedge and launched on the darkling water.

Woodhall landed two hours later and freed little Jacob's legs and arms. He offered the child cold tea to drink and stale bread smeared with questionable butter, only to have both offerings refused by shakes of the head.

"What the sense o' that?" he asked. "Sulkin' won't het up the tea nor put jam onto the bread. An' what be ye sulkin' about, anyhow? Cryin', too! Ye ain't got nothin' to cry about, sonny. I ain't hurt ye, yet, nor I don't cal'late to. There ain't no call for 'e to be scart o' me."

"I—I'm not scared," choked the child.

"That's good! That jist how ye'd ought to feel. An' I tell 'e why. I'm yer pa, an' yer name's the same as me own—Peter Woodhall."

"My name's—Jacob Kester; and you're—not my—father."

"Ye'll l'arn better, Pete. Well, I ain't so particular about the name they call ye; but ye be my son. Ask old Kester—him ye call yer pa. He knows. Next time ye see 'im, ask 'im. An' eat yer supper. All

right, I'll eat it meself. I ain't so stuck up about me grub as some folks."

"You are not my father. I wouldn't have a man like you for a father. I'd just as soon have any old Indian."

"Is that so? Well, that's nothin'. That's only what them Kesters has l'arned ye. Ye'd like me well enough if ye'd never been sp'iled by them two old fools!"

"They're not fools! I want to go home!"

Pete Woodhall, torn between avarice and fear, was in a difficult situation. He was crafty enough, when not soaked with gin; but now, although cold sober, he could not hit on a plan of action. So he continued to move furtively up the river.

Silas Kester's words concerning the murdered squaw echoed persistently in his ears. What was he to do? Kester had evidence against him, beyond a doubt; and, equally beyond a doubt, he had in his own possession something very dear to Silas Kester. He knew, he had seen, how both the Kesters doted on their adopted son—his own son.

The boy was worth money to him, if only he could think of a way of collecting the cash without falling into the clutches of the man who knew about the dead squaw and the ax and the silver chain and the little leather pouch. He cursed the blundering of fate that had placed both his profit and peril in the one pair of hands. As he could not hit on a plan of connecting with the dollars without risking a connection with the gallows, he continued to ascend the river to Gunflint Creek. Then he ascended the creek. Indian summer held until he reached one of his old familiar retreats.

Gabe Loon followed Pete Woodhall. That old Maliseet with the single-track mind and silent, simple ways and keen vision was the greatest little follower in three provinces. He came and passed like a shadow, without disturbing the underbrush through which he slipped much more than the water over which he slid his canoe. He needed but little sleep, and could take that little at any hour of the day or night.

Sometimes he came close up to his quarry during the night, only to fall back from it before dawn. Sometimes he followed afar, smoking his pipe in comfort; at other times he kept Woodhall and the little boy under his eye for hours together in broad daylight.

Although he knew nothing of the history of the child, he guessed at Woodhall's game. The child's voice and clothing told him that he did not belong on Gunflint Creek nor in the guardianship of that disreputable woodsman. He knew that Woodhall was now playing even a more dangerous game than that of shooting holes in a warden's canoe. He knew that kidnaping was a more serious crime than shooting a moose out of season or stealing gin and food.

Gabe was no fire eater. He shrank from physical conflict with his fellow man. His appetite for the chase was out of all proportion to his appetite for its logical conclusion. He had no taste for fighting.

The raw truth is, he was afraid of a fight. In this respect he was a coward. Threaten his with fist or knife or gun, and he vanished. But only to return. Crafty offenders against the game laws, men of bulging muscles and savage spirits, had awakened more than once to find their arms and legs secured by thongs and the avoider of conflict seated close at hand drinking their own tea.

Gabe had no intention of contesting the possession of the child with Pete Woodhall without support. He had plenty of time, and watching and waiting and following were no trouble to him. He felt sure that he would learn more about Woodhall's present game sooner or later—that the situation would develop and produce or attract enlightenment if he let it take its course. He would settle that old score some fine day.

In the meantime there was nothing to worry about, and the Gunflint Creek country suited him as well as elsewhere.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHASE.

SILAS and Albina Kester, Sally Goodine and Archie McKim and Joe Newsam searched the black woods behind the smithy, the orchards old and new, and the barns, calling the boy's name and waving

lanterns, without so much as a whisper of success. They neither saw nor heard anything of little Jacob nor anything of the man with the scarred face.

Their search was for either or both, for Silas had told hurriedly of his visit from the fellow who had attempted to rob him in haying time, and of his suspicions. Mrs. Kester found the bow and several arrows.

The Ingoldsbys arrived and straightway joined the hunt. The village got wind of the trouble, and a half dozen men and boys came and offered their services. The wide intervale was searched, and its reedy bottoms and its barns and the gravel bars and sedgy shores. Shallows were waded back and forth and certain deep pools and backwaters were dragged. Every field and pasture and tract of woodland within two miles and more of the house was searched carefully before sunrise.

It was a pity that Gabe Loon had set out in pursuit of the kidnaper too soon to become aware of all that excitement, and yet if he had delayed his departure until the search had reached the river, days might have passed, or weeks, before he could have regained touch with his quarry.

In the morning Joe Newsam and Archie McKim started upstream in a canoe, and Mr. Kester set out in the same direction in a light wagon; and other parties headed downstream by water and road, and several took to the woods. Mr. Ingoldsby ordered out the rural constables and sent a message to the police of the town. A reward of five hundred dollars was offered for the return of Jacob Kester, and one of three hundred for the capture of the man with gray hair and a scarred left cheek.

Archie and Joe put ashore wherever they saw signs of human habitation, and made inquiries of every one they found concerning a boy of eight in a blue suit with a wide white collar, and a man with a scarred left cheek who called himself by several names. For a day or two they had no luck, but after that they met with scraps of encouragement here and there. An aged couple recognized the man from Archie's description.

"That would be Pete Woodhall," said the old woman. "Gunflint Crick an' thereabouts was his home off an' on afore he run away. I ain't seen 'im but only once since Mr. Snider chased 'im off the river, an' that was five days or a week ago maybe. He was headin' downstream in a canoe that time; an' I knowed 'im by the set o' his shoulders an' his holt on the paddle. I ain't seen him come on back upstream; but he passed at night, like enough. He would if he was up to some divilment. If ye want to put 'im in jail, I hope to goodness ye catches 'im!"

Then there was a Frenchman in a red shirt, who had last seen Pete Woodhall two or three weeks before and lost three dollars and sixty cents to him in a game of cards. He had not seen anything of a small boy; but if they were carrying trouble for Pete Woodhall, he wished them luck. They left him waving his arms and recounting his loss of three dollars and sixty cents.

Farther up they found an elderly man with a secretive eye and four large, savage dogs. This was at Pebbly Brook. He did not know anything, and told them so through a window, keeping his door shut. He was a poor old man who never saw nor heard nor did anything, but only waited patiently for death.

"I see ye be the same old bag o' tricks as ever, Barney Slump," said Archie McKim, stepping close to the window.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Old Man Slump. "Dandy Divil McKim!"

"That's all right, Barney. Now take another think all to yerself. How long since ye last saw this skunk Pete Woodhall, or Steve Bent, or whatever ye call 'im? An' which way was he headin', an' who was with 'im?"

"Wall, lemme cal'late. It was maybe two weeks ago last Sunday I last seen 'im. He come downstream an' tried to bum some grub offen me—but I know 'im! An' then he heads upstream agin. He warn't with nobody only the black dog that was a-ridin' his back all along o' me not trustin' 'im who ain't to be trusted."

"If ye'd trusted him, he'd of gone home with a red devil a-clawin' his innards instead of a black dog on his back," said McKim. "Ye an' yer grub, Barney! I

see ye ain't changed none since the day I throwed ye into the river for sellin' gin to Widow Gimmon's boy."

Old Man Slump smiled uneasily, but evidently could not think of retort; and Archie and Joe returned to the canoe and continued on their way. Both voyagers were silent for several minutes; and then Joe turned his head toward the stern of the canoe.

"He acted like he was scart to sass ye back," he said.

"I reckon he was," returned Archie.

"He called ye Dandy Divil McKim."

"So did plenty of folks up this way in the old days. I was a bit of a dandy, an' maybe a bit of a divil, too."

"I wouldn't wonder if ye was cock o' the river in them days, Archie."

"No more would I, Joe; an' now if ye'll p'int yer nose the way we want to go an' git busy with that thar paddle I'll be much obleeged."

"You must of done somethin' ye hadn't ought to, ye're that close-mouthed about yerself," complained Joe—but at the same time he turned his face to the front and dug his paddle into the water.

Archie McKim smiled somewhat pensively behind his whiskers.

At Indian Ferry they heard of Pete Woodhall again, but nothing new of him and nothing of the boy. He had not been seen there within the week or thereabouts.

When questioned as to the location of Woodhall's home, the people of Indian Ferry appeared to be stupidly ignorant. They had no love or respect for Pete, but they were on his side when it came to a question of law; and they naturally suspected this visit to be a matter of legal significance.

Knowing Woodhall as they did, they could not imagine two strangers coming in search of him for any other purpose than to arrest him for some old or new offence against one or another of the several laws which were constantly cramping their own styles and natural impulses. They were simple folk, these dozen inhabitants of this circumscribed locality known as Indian Ferry.

They had no knowledge of Pete Woodhall's most serious crimes. The tragic truth, the double tragedy, concerning the cabin that had been carried away by the big flood was unknown to them; and his activities in Maine were as a closed book to them.

They knew him to be a breaker of game-laws, a swiller of contraband liquors. Prohibition was then undreamed of, but there were a number of laws which complicated and attempted to control the traffic in and consumption of strong drink—a gambler and a thief. They, too, even the best of them occasionally put a crack or a bad dent in one footling little law or another.

Still farther up-stream, in a little shack overlooking black and white water and the rocky track of Hell-an'-all Carry—that is one of the shortest, but perhaps one of the worst, carry-rounds on the river—they found an ill-assorted couple, man and wife, of the name of Dix. The man was elderly and evidently in ill-health. Also, he had a crooked leg and hopped on home-made crutches. The woman was younger by twenty years, perhaps, and red haired and green eyed.

Archie and Joe disturbed them in the middle of a high-voiced quarrel. Their bitter voices fell suddenly to a vibrant silence as Archie McKim knocked on the door with a gesture that was violent, and had nothing of hospitality in it.

"What d'ye want?" she asked.

"Have ye seen a small boy in a blue suit of clothes an' a white collar 'round here anywheres of late, m'am?" asked Archie in his mild voice.

"Naw, I ain't," returned the woman.

"Have ye seen Pete Woodhall?"

"Naw—not in years. Lookin' for anyone else?"

"No one in particular—but I'm glad to see Charlie Dix behind ye thar. How-do, Charlie? Long time-no-see-um."

The man swung forward toward the door between his rough crutches, and at the same moment the woman stepped across the threshold and brushed past Archie and Joe.

"Archie McKim!" exclaimed Dix. "Dandy Divil McKim, or I'm a liar! Come in, ye old hellyun! Lay her thar!"

Archie entered, with Joe Newsam at his

heels. He and the man with the crooked leg clasped hands cordially. The woman was forgotten.

"Set down, set down!" cried Charlie, with a fine bustle of hospitality. "You too, lad. Wall, Archie, I ain't set eyes on ye for a lifetime. Not since that night ye beat the jumpin' Frenchman. Hell, but them was the days!

"That was the very identical same night I got this here leg all busted up—an' would of had my vitals cut out into the bargain but for the way you hove them thar man-eatin' Quebecers 'round an' dinted the landscape with 'em. Holy mackerel, but them was the days!

"There was reel men in these here woods when ye was cock o' the river, Archie McKim. Now it's diff'runt. Nothin' but sneak thieves an' cheap poachers an' gin-swillin' card cheats nowadays."

Archie found a stool to sit on and Joe an empty box. Charlie Dix hopped to a corner of the room and soon hopped back with a bottle in his fist. There were tin mugs on the table.

"That's fresh spring water in the bucket behind ye, lad," he said to Joe. "Dip us out a pitcher of it."

Joe complied with the request. Liquor and water were poured by all three.

"Here's to ye, with never a sorrow nor need for to borrow," chanted the lame man, flourishing his drink.

"Bless yer soul an' damn yer troubles," returned Archie.

"Good health," said Joe.

All drank with simultaneous crooks of elbows.

"Where ye been all these years?" asked Dix.

"Way down river, 'way down to Lob's P'int," replied McKim.

"What ye doin'?"

"Farmin'. Hired out. Been with the same boss ever since I quit choppin' an' drivin' an' sackin' logs."

"Married?"

"Not me."

"Yer lucky! An' what's brung ye back onto white water?"

"I be lookin' for Pete Woodhall, or Steve Bent. Reckon Woodhall's his name. Son o' Old Beardsley Woodhall, I wouldn't wonder—the queer feller who got into trouble for sellin' rum to the Injuns an' takin' skins out o' more traps nor his own."

"Sure, that's the man. I know 'im. Had a wife an' starved her to death—that's Pete. What d'ye want 'im for? Ye ain't a game warden, I guess."

"He's stole a little boy, an eight year old—Silas Kester's little boy. Joe Newsam and me—Joe works for Kester, too—want that thar little boy."

"What'll happen to Woodhall if ye catch 'im?"

"Plenty; an' Kester'll do the right thing by the man who finds the boy or catches Woodhall. Even if we did it, me an' Joe here, thar'd be a hundred dollars an' maybe more for anyone who helped us do it. Ain't that right, Joe?"

"Dead right!" replied Joe. "I'm willin' to take my share of the reward outer that scar-faced skunk's hide."

The lame man leaned forward in his chair. "I ain't seen him for a week, or maybe a mite more," he said in a low but eager voice. "He was outer this country for years—cleared out the summer o' the big flood—an' come back this year, along about August. If he's fetched the boy up-stream, then I bet a dollar he's up Gunflint Crick. He's got more 'n one hidin' place up that crick. Ye ain't forgot Gunflint Crick, Archie?"

"I logged on her one winter. Never been up in summer time, far's I kin recollect—but I know whar she runs into the river."

"Gimme a pencil an' a bit o' paper an' I'll show ye whar to hunt for Pete Woodhall."

No one had a pencil in his pocket, and no one had so much as an old envelope in the way of paper. Joe hunted about the shack and found a paper bag that had once contained sugar, and Archie fished a scrap of charcoal out of the front of the rusty stove.

With the charcoal, Dix drew a map of Gunflint Creek on the bag. It wasn't a work of art, but it wasn't despicable. It was not drawn to scale, but approximate distances between important points were

marked in words or figures; and all Woodhall's camps and retreats known to, or even suspected by, the artist were indicated by crosses.

"I hope ye catch the skunk," said Dix, handing over the map.

"Ye don't seem to like 'im, Charlie," remarked Archie.

"I don't, an' that's a fact. I ain't got no cause to love 'im."

"I reckon me an Joe had best push along. The weather's about due to break, I reckon; an' she'll bust right into winter, no doubt about it. Thar'll be snow an' ice aplenty the minute this spell o' Injun Summer's over, an' maybe we'll be livin' on the gun afore we git off of Gunflint Crick. Can ye sell us a couple o' blankets, Charlie?"

"Sure thing."

"An' we'll stop in on the way down, whether we be afloat or afoot. An' another thing, Charlie. Can ye git out to the highroad an' find Mr. Kester an' tell him ye seen us an' whar we headed for—all about it. He's drivin' a light wagon an' a big bay mare with two white feet an' a white star. Maybe he's passed, but he'd be headin' back agin sometime; or maybe he ain't come up this far yet—but ye could wait 'round or leave word for him. He'll make it worth yer trouble."

"Sure, I'll find 'im! Whar'd ye leave yer canoe?"

"At the tail o' the carry. Felt like we needed a snort afore makin' it."

"Ye'll stop for supper, won't ye? We got plenty pork an' spuds, I guess; an' the bottle ain't empty."

"Cal'late we best be movin' right along, Charlie, thanks all the same; an' if ye could make the trip back to the highroad to-night—"

"Sure thing! I'll start now. She don't lay more'n two mile back, right here. I won't stop for supper, neither."

Fifteen minutes later, Archie and Joe reached the tail of Hell-an'-All carry, which goes up and around Push-an'-Bedamn rapids. At this point, just below the pool into which the final black and white leap of the rapids dives deep, they had disembarked and unloaded and lifted out their canoe.

"What the devil?" queried Archie.

Joe stared, silent. Archie stepped forward and gazed at the rocky ground, then stepped aside and examined a clump of thin and leafless brush, then eyed the pool and the river below it and the long curve of flashing waters above it. He even turned his questing glance to the surrounding shores of rock and wood and to the sky.

"Didn't we leave 'em here?" he demanded at last.

"That's what we done, sure's shootin'!" replied Joe.

"But I reckon we couldn't of."

"Guess not, but I'd of swore to it."

"Maybe it was jist 'round that p'int."

But it wasn't. The canoe and the dunnage were not there, nor were they below the second point below the pool, nor yet below the third. They were not behind rocks or bushes anywhere along that narrow strip of passage way between the steep bank and the swift water. Canoe and blankets and rifle and grub were gone, vanished.

Joe was stricken dumb, but Archie combed his whiskers and made numerous brief remarks expressing mystification. Suddenly a change came over the old white-water boy, as if a light had been flashed into his mind.

"Hell!" he cried. "I got it! I might of knowed, for I know her breed. It's that thar dratted red headed woman!"

"What?"

"Took the canoe—took the dunnage—hove 'em into the river, like as not—that's what! I saw mischief in her eye, now I come to think of it. Didn't ye see it when I asked for Pete Woodhall? I know that breed—them red heads an' green eyes. Her name was Dudder afore it was Dix, I bet a dollar!"

"What would she do it for?" asked Joe. "That don't seem no way for folks to act. What did you ever do to her, Archie?"

"Me? Nothin'! But maybe she was thinkin' of what I was figgerin' on doin' to Pete Woodhall. Ye never can tell what them red headed Dudders is thinkin' of."

They returned to the shack above the head of the carry with all possible speed, only to find it deserted. Even the dog was

gone. Dix had set out promptly in the direction of the highroad and was far beyond recall, and Mrs. Dix had evidently not returned after the questionable activities of which Archie McKim suspected her. There was no other house within six or seven miles, so far as Archie knew.

"I'll hang round on the chance she comes home before Charlie does, an' you go on down to the tail o' the white water agin an' take another look for the canoe an' the dunnage," said Archie.

Joe went. Archie filled his pipe and smoked it out. Joe returned and reported failure. They entered the hut and built up the fire in the rusty stove. Darkness closed in, and they lit a lamp. They made tea and supped off it, and beans which they found in a crock in the oven.

The woman with the red head and green eyes did not return; and, upon Joe remarking the fact, Archie wagged his whiskers without vocal comment. He had a way of wagging and scratching that suggested a bookful.

"What d'ye reckon she's up to now?" asked Joe.

"The devil only knows!" said Archie.

It was past nine o'clock when Charlie Dix arrived home. He made a report to the effect that Mr. Kester had been at Tom Hudson's place yesterday and had gone on, but he was expected back before long, as the King's Highway wasn't must better than a logging road from Burnt Tree onward—unless he left his wagon and continued his journey on horseback.

He had asked for information concerning a little boy in a blue suit and a man with gray hair and a scarred left cheek, and had made Tom an offer of liberal rewards for the discovery of either. He, Charlie Dix, had left a message for Mr. Kester with Hudson.

Having delivered his report, Dix suddenly realized that he had not expected to see his visitors upon his return.

"Hell!" he exclaimed. "Ye was in a devil of a sweat to keep a goin' a while back! What's swung ye? An' whar's Effie?"

"We ain't set eyes on her since the first meetin'," replied Archie; "an' what's swung us is that we ain't got canoe nor dunnage nor grub nor rifle to go on with. We been cleaned out, that's what! Some one's done away with the canoe an' the whole b'ilin'—an' if he was a man I'd break his cussed neck short off for him!"

"Hell!" whispered Dix; and his lower jaw sagged. "Don't that beat all! I'd oughter knowed somethin' would happen when she lit out the minute ye come in. Ye'd ought to kep' yer mouth shut, Archie."

"That's what I think—but how was I to know?" returned Archie crisply. "But ye're right, Charlie. I'd ought to of guessed when I seen that red head an' them green eyes. She's a Dudder, ain't she?"

"Ye've said it. Now looka here! I got a canoe—but it don't count. It useter be a first rate canoe—seven year ago. But thar's Tim Leblanc on Kettle Crick—three mile back an' two mile up the crick. He's got a slick canoe, winter bark, an' built only last year; an' between him and me I reckon we kin fix ye up with grub an' blankets an' maybe some kinder old shootin' iron.

"I won't charge ye a red cent, Archie. It 'll be pay enough for me if—if ye find him ye're huntin'. An' I guess twenty dollars will buy Tim's canoe, for he's got another."

"We'll start," said Archie. "Light yer lantern."

They went afoot, and it was rough going. As they reached the mouth of Kettle Creek, Charlie Dix tripped and fell flat with the lantern beneath him. They had to feel the way from there onward, for there was no moon and the stars were dim. Archie McKim's remarks appeared to strike a spark now and again, but never bright enough or constant enough to illuminate the footing.

Tim Leblanc was not at home, nor was his wife, nor were his children. Dix had an idea that they were farther up the creek laying in a supply of venison and moose meat, and might be gone for days.

"Like enough," agreed Archie. "In that case, we'll bust in an' help ourselves an' leave the money behind the clock. Where does he keep his canoe—the good one?"

"You don't know Tim," objected Dix. "That would go with me, so long's ye left

a fair price behind, but Tim Leblanc's different. Ye might leave more'n he'd ask an' still he'd be mad. He's part French an' part Irish an' some Injun. He goes off at half cock, Tim does."

"Whar does he keep his canoes?"

"I dassent show 'e, Archie. Tim's bad when he's riz."

"Come along, Joe, an' let's take a look round. What we want, Charlie, is to git started after Woodhall agin; an' what Tim Leblanc don't like he kin lump!"

They found the older of the two canoes—a good one. They pried open a window and entered Leblanc's house.

There Archie measured flour out of a sack, salt pork out of a barrel, salt butter out of a firkin. He counted blankets out of a press upstairs.

He left thirty dollars in a teapot on the kitchen dresser.

CHAPTER XI.

MORE OF THE CHASE.

INDIAN summer ceased overnight and winter began before dawn. The sun went down after a day of cloudless voyaging in sheer azure, with just enough frost to bring out the fragrance of the brown ferns and overripe seed pods and purple cones. The ground was already frozen beneath its Indian summer skim of thaw.

No sooner had the yellow sun vanished than the frost intensified and struck like iron. Then a slow wind crept in from the westward and edged around until it blew from the north. Later, it slid in from the northeast with a veil of snow in grains as dry and hard as sand.

The brief red dawn disclosed the wilderness aching with frost to the very hearts of the big trees and filmed with white. The sun paled to the grayness of ice within a hand's breadth of the horizon.

Over all that wilderness, in houses and shacks and cabins and hunters' camps, there was a great clawing about in the dark for extra blankets between dusk and dawn that night. Some people were caught cold, with fallen fires at their feet and scanty shelters of spruce boughs over their heads.

Archie McKim and Joe Newsam were of these unfortunates, and so were Pete Woodhall and the little boy in the blue suit. Archie and Joe were overtaken by winter at the mouth of Gunflint Creek. The kidnaper and his captive were nipped at a point twenty miles farther up the creek and fully ten miles above the scar face's nearest snug retreat.

But the woman with the red head and green eyes was not caught out. She had returned to the shack above Hell-an'-all carry before sunset, somewhat tattered as to skirt and muddy as to feet, but otherwise in good order. In answer to Charlie's questions concerning her whereabouts during the last twenty-seven hours, she had told him to mind his own business. In reply to his charge of the destruction of Archie McKim's canoe and outfit, she had hooted derision.

"I'll give ye up to the police!" poor old Charlie had threatened. "They'll jail ye for ten years—an' sarve ye damn well right! Good riddance to bad rubbage, too—that's how I feel! An' what did ye do with McKim's brand new rifle? Oh! I know what ye done with it—but it won't do him much good. Dandy Devil McKim 'll git him! *He'll* kitch 'im!"

"That old stiff j'inted bunch of whiskers? You make me laugh. He's as old as yerself, Charlie Dix. He couldn't catch a porkypine. Him an' that young nigger! All they'll catch in these woods is colds."

And she had laughed derisively again and started in frying bacon for supper; and later, when the wind came freezing from the north, she simply piled all the blankets left in the house on top of herself and smiled at the thought of poor Charlie smoking and stoking all night beside the rusty, roaring stove.

Winter, striking with all his force between midnight and dawn, dragged Pete Woodhall and little Jacob Kester shivering out of their sleep. The child had been dreaming of Lob's Point. He tried to choke back his sobs, but could not stifle them.

"What the hell's eatin' ye now?" exclaimed Woodhall. "Ain't I doin' me best? Ain't ye got half the blankets? There's

some fathers would warm yer hide with a stick! A soft bed an' a full belly for you, hey?—like them cussed Kesters who stole ye away from me! Wall, ye'd be thar this very minute, only yer wonderful Mr. Kester, yer great 'dopted pa, was too mean to loan me a few dollars."

He crawled, grumbling and swearing, from his blankets and over to the fallen fire, now no more than charred butts and ash filmed embers, and blew the ashes away and the embers to a red glow. With scraps of bark and dry twigs he coaxed a yellow flame into being. He fed the flame with larger stuff, still grumbling and cursing; and in a minute the fire was humming and tossing sparks into the icy air. He crawled back to his blankets.

"Don't blame me if ye're cold," he said. "I didn't carry 'e off for choice, God knows! All I want is me rights—the rights of a father; an' if I ain't give 'em peaceful, then I gotter fight for 'em. No man can rob me of my son, an' then treat me worse'n a dog, without he pays me for it! Pay! Not him! He don't care what happens to 'e, lad, or he'd of give me a few dollars when I asked 'im."

"He will—catch you," sobbed the child. "I heard what—that woman whispered—about Archie and Joe—chasing you. And my father is—chasing you, too—I know."

"Damn them! I'd take ye back to them if I thought they'd pay me for it. But they wouldn't. They'd put me into jail, that's what they'd do."

"No, they wouldn't—not if you take me back! I'll ask them not to. I'll ask daddy to give you money and let you go—and he will do it. *Please* take me back! Please!"

"Why would he pay, if once I took ye back? No, I gotter think up some better way nor that!"

Some of the heat of the fire reached the lean-to shelter of boughs; and in a minute or two the child dozed back to his broken dreams. The man threw on more fuel, reaching forward from where he sat in his blankets. He filled and lit his pipe, gave ear to the dreary moanings and sloshings of the icy wind through the forest, cursed his luck and tried to think of a way out of his troubles.

Here was winter right on top of him, beyond a doubt; and here was a helpless child on his hands and another mouth to feed; and here was a new crime against him and a new chase at his heels. And why? He wasn't a dollar the better for it yet—except for a new rifle, which he didn't much need—and not likely to be. The chances were that things would be worse with him before they were better.

He had been a fool to grab the kid! He should have hung around Lob's Point and told his story to the people. They would have believed him after a while, and pitied him in the course of time; and then he could have threatened Kester with the law.

The law! Hell! He had forgotten about Kester's sinister and significant remarks concerning an old squaw and an ax and a little leather pouch on a silver chain. The devil! How had Kester hit on that? What had he seen? What did he know?

He decided that the law could not possibly be of any use to him in this matter—the devil take it! What else then? He needed money; he needed to get rid of the child; and he realized the necessity of doing both these things before he was caught.

He hadn't much fear of Archie McKim and Joe Newsam, knowing what he did about what had happened to their canoe and dunnage, but he suspected that Silas Kester was just the sort of pigheaded fellow who would send a dozen parties after him. What then? The child must be sent back. He must employ an agent in the matter—some one whom he could trust to bring him back most of the money obtained from Kester.

Why hadn't he thought of this before? Effie could have managed it. Why hadn't he sent the boy back with her? Well, he had not thought of it in time, that was all. His nerves were not as they should be, and she had come up on him so suddenly and scared him with her talk of McKim and Joe Newsam. He would have to find some one else to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for him—to take the boy away and bring the money back to him.

Woodhall did not move camp next day. He strengthened the lean-to of boughs, kept the fire going strong—knowing that McKim

could not possibly be in sight of his smoke even if he were still on his trail—and whined and blustered and complained all day to his son. The child said very little in reply, but he thought a great deal.

"Whar's yer tongue?" cried the man after hours of one sided talk. "Ain't ye got one? What ye sulkin' about? You act like it was my fault ye're here—like it was all my fault! Yer ma was like that—dumb! Sulky an' dumb, as if it was my fault I wasn't rich.

"D'ye think it was my fault you floated away on the flood? If Kester hadn't treated me worse'n he'd treat a dog, ye'd be snug back in that big house now. But I'm yer pa, an' don't forgit it! It's easy enough to be good if ye're rich. If I had Kester's farm an' money, an' he was poor as I be, ye'd call him good an' me bad?

"An' whar'd he git his farm an' his money? His pa give it to 'im; an' his gran'pa give it to his pa. But my pa didn't give me so much as a dollar even! But if he'd had his rights he would of. If us Woodhalls hadn't been robbed an' cheated by them Kesters an' Ingoldsbys in the old days, ye'd be glad enough to have me for yer pa now. I know what I'm sayin'.

"Say somethin', can't ye? Ain't I treated ye right? What's wrong with me? I'm yer pa, an' a better man nor Silas Kester any day—only poor. Say somethin', or I'll give 'e a lick with a stick!"

"What shall I say?"

"Say I'm yer pa."

"You are my father—but I don't believe it."

"What's that? Ye don't believe I'm yer pa? Take that back!—swaller them words!—or I'll tan yer hide! That's what the Kesters learned ye—to despise yer poor father—is it? Take it back, or I'll lambaste 'e with this here stick! I've stood all I kin of yer sulks an' airs!"

"I won't. You are bad. You are a coward. You said you were a soldier—and you never were—so you are a liar."

Woodhall snarled and made a grab with his left hand, only to miss by an inch. The boy darted out of the lean-to and around to the far side of the fire. The man cursed and leaped after him, stick in hand.

He made one leap, then halted as if he had been hit in the face. The small figure of an elderly man in a foxskin cap confronted him.

The elderly man had a round, wrinkled, flat, swarthy face and very bright black eyes. He held a double-barrelled gun in the correct position of port.

"How do," said Gabe Loon.

Gabe's voice was steady and his manner was assured. He was no longer afraid of Pete Woodhall, for he had been listening to the kidnaper's talk for more than an hour and had grasped the situation.

"You!" gulped Woodhall. "Gabe Loon! Thought ye was dead an' buried."

"Nope," said the ohter.

"Come along in outer the cold. Pete, come here. I was only foolin'."

"You weren't fooling—and my name's Jacob," cried the child, whose spirit was now thoroughly aroused. Also, the sight of the elderly stranger with the gun gave him a sense of protection.

Gabe turned to the child. "How do?" he said. "Come 'ere."

The boy obeyed.

"You go set in yer blankets nice an' warm," continued Gabe.

The child eyed him steadily for a second or two, then returned to the little shelter of boughs and sat down and drew a blanket around him.

"How you git 'im?" asked Gabe of Woodhall.

"How? He's my own son, that's how!" said Woodhall.

"You t'ief 'im from down river."

"Thief him? He's my own, I tell 'e! He was stole from me, the year o' the big freshet. But how does it consarn you, Gabe Loon?"

"You don't want 'im."

"I got a right to him if I do; an' that's me own business!"

"Silas Kester want 'im more nor you, maybe."

"Maybe so. Kester 'll have to pay to git 'im."

"Sure t'ing! You take 'im back to Kester and collec' the money, what?"

"How the devil! Kester 'd jail me, that's what would happen."

"How much Kester pay, what you t'ink?"

"Hundreds of dollars, I reckon."

"A'right. You gimme the leetle boy an' I give you one 'undred dollar for 'im, 'ard cash money slap in yer 'and."

"One hundred? What the hell d'ye take me for? Kester 'll pay four hundred, or maybe five."

"One 'undred an' one bottle o' gin."

"Go chase yerself! D'ye take me for a fool?"

"A'right. Good-day."

Gabe walked off from the fire. He walked slowly, for he moved with his back to the way of his going and his face still toward Pete Woodhall. He continued to hold the heavy gun slanted across his chest.

"Hey thar, hold on a minute!" cried Woodhall.

The Maliseet shook his head in silence and continued to retire. The child darted from the lean-to, with a blanket trailing from his shoulders, and ran to him.

"So that's yer trick!" exclaimed Woodhall, turning and making a jump toward his rifles which lay, each in its waterproof case, at the very back of the shelter of boughs.

"'Old on!" said Gabe; and though his voice was not loud, there was something peculiarly arresting in the tone of it. Woodhall held on.

"What you want? Where you go to? asked Gabe.

Woodhall turned, with a snarl that showed his teeth. His right hand was in the front of his coat. It came out quick as lightning and snapped up and back, and something flashed and whistled in the icy air. Lightning, sure enough!—and the kind that strikes!

But Gabe Loon was ready for it. He ducked to his knees and elbows, but without loosing his hands from the gun nor the thumb of his right hand from the right hand hammer.

He was onto his feet again in a wink, without so much as a glance for the big knife sticking and waggling in the bole of the young ash tree behind him. He smiled at the look of helpless chagrin on Woodhall's face.

"By 'ell! Dat make me damn mad! Now I got good mind to keep 'im for not'ing!" he cried. Shoot you, too, maybe, an' say it was a fight for the leetle boy. The law swaller dat a'right, I guess, what?"

"Ye got me whar ye want me, I reckon," replied Woodhall heavily. "What d'ye cal'late to do about it?"

CHAPTER XII.

TRADE AND TROUBLE.

GABE LOON thought quick and hard and deep. He realized that he had the bad man where he wanted him, for the moment, and that it would not be a very difficult matter for him now to take the rifles and go away with the boy. This would heal the old wound in his professional vanity, be a fine tribute to the memory of his great partner and at the same time give him every dollar of whatever sum Silas Kester would pay as a reward for the return of the child.

It was a tempting idea, and a man more courageous and reckless than Gabe would have acted upon it. But Gabe looked ahead and put the temptation aside.

He could make the get-away with the little boy and the rifles easily enough—but that would be all. Help, safety, lay many miles off—as far away as Archie McKim; and McKim, for all he knew to the contrary, was still at Hell-an'-All carry on the main river bewailing the loss of his canoe and outfit and rifle.

He had learned that much by listening-in on a woman with red hair. Safety, he calculated, lay too far off to be reached in a day's march, or a journey of two days, or even of three. He could not travel fast with the child; and he could not go for three nights, or even for two, without a wink of sleep; and he knew what would happen the moment he indulged in a wink of sleep.

Woodhall, who would keep close on his heels all day, would have him by the throat the minute his eyes were closed. The tempting idea was no good, unless—well, unless he shot Woodhall down where he stood, as he had suggested doing. He shivered slightly at the thought.

No, he couldn't do it! He wasn't made that way. He might get away with it—explain it to the satisfaction of the police—but he would never be able to make it right with his own conscience nor forget it. He pictured it and shivered again. So, after all, there was but one thing for him to do, and that was to make some sort of trade with Woodhall. The situation was not changed, actually, except that now he had the appearance of an advantage.

"What about it?" asked Woodhall, slanting an anxious glance. "Ye got the boy—my own son—an' ye got the bulge on me. Ain't that enough? Git along an' collect the money, an' that 'll be the last ye'll ever hear of me. Pullin' that trigger won't do 'e no good, not a mite. It would be murder; and ye'll hang for it, sooner or later. I got friends in these here woods, an' they'll know if anything happens to me."

He was afraid of being killed in cold blood, the poor fool! He did not know the Maliseet's nature, but judged him by himself.

"They'd git ye, Gabe, sure's hell!" he continued. "Hangin' wouldn't be bad enough for a man who'd shoot a father right before the eyes of his own little boy. An' he *is* my son! I swear by all that's holy!"

"Maybe so," said Gabe. "I dunno. You stan' still, anyhow. Got one mighty twitchy finger, me."

"Don't shoot him," cried the child. He's a bad man—and a liar—but *please* don't kill him!"

"Maybe I don't—if he don't move."

Gabe stepped back a few paces and possessed himself of the knife, extracting its point from the fibres of the young ash with a backward crook of the arm and a sudden yank. He dropped it into the side-pocket of his wool-lined jumper and returned to the fire. Not for the fraction of a second even had his glance wavered from Woodhall's face. The little boy kept close beside him. Gabe smiled across the fire at Woodhall.

"Good feller, me," he said. "You don't meet better feller nor Gabe Loon many times every day. You come 'round 'ere an' set down—plenty brush to set on!—an' maybe I treat you pretty good."

A light of relief flickered in the other's dark eyes for a moment, only to give place to a flicker of suspicion. But he obeyed; and as he moved around the margin of the fire, Gabe also moved around it, so that by the time he was at the outer edge of the fire Gabe and the child were between the fire and the lean-to.

Now he was cut off hopelessly from his rifles. He cursed the foxy old Indian and himself—but well under his breath. He could see that the right hand hammer of the big gun was at full-cock; and his fear of the finger on the trigger beneath gave him an ache in his throat. Was that finger to be trusted?—that twitchy finger?

Gabe said to the child, without turning his head, "you fetch me 'is two rifle."

The boy brought them, one at a time.

"Now, I got you beat," said Gabe to the man at the other side of the fire. "But I don't wish you no 'arm, Woodhall. Tell you what we do now. I got two bottles durn good gin—square face. A'right! You take the gin an' yer grub an' blankets an' git out. I keep the boy an' the rifle—an' don't kill you. Durn good trade!"

"Rifle? Ye got two rifles thar!"

"Sure, two rifle."

"That's a hell of a trade!"

"Pretty good. The boy for you, an' two rifle for two square-face."

"The boy for me? What d'ye mean by that?"

"I keep the boy, you stay alive. Fair trade."

"Lemme see the gin."

Gabe said a few words to Jacob and then pointed with his left hand. Jacob ran off eagerly into the underbrush.

"Ye don't need to keep that blasted gun p'inted square at my belly all the time," complained Woodhall. "Ye act like I was a wild tiger."

"A'right," said Gabe, and shifted the weapon to the crook of his left arm.

The child reappeared, dragging a small pack at his heels by a broad strap. He dragged it to the feet of his new friend and. at a word, untied the mouth of it and thrust both hands within. He pulled out one bottle and then another. Gabe stood them up side by side.

"See 'em?" he queried.

"Sure I see 'em—an' I got a corkscrew right here," replied Woodhall in a new tone of voice.

Gabe stooped and whispered into Jacob's ear. The boy listened intently, nodded and retired into the lean-to of boughs. Then Gabe lowered the cocked hammer of his gun and picked up one of the bottles by the neck with his right hand.

"Is it a trade?" he asked.

"Sure it's a trade," replied Woodhall, but in his heart he said, "you poor old fool, ye kin take the kid an' welcome, but I'll have every dollar that's on ye before ye git far with him."

"Kitch," said Gabe.

"Throw straight, for the love of Mike!" cried Woodhall.

The bottle lopped across the fire into his ready hands.

"One more," said Gabe; and the second bottle was tossed and safely caught.

Just then the small boy reappeared, still with one blanket draped about him and with another rolled under his right arm. Gabe looked at him inquiringly and received a smile and a nod. Gabe turned his glance back to Woodhall, who was already extracting the cork from one of the bottles.

"Reckon we'll move along," he said. "An' you'd best light out pretty soon yerself, or maybe someone'll ketch you you won't like—someone wid a 'arder 'eart nor Gabe Loon. So long."

"So long," returned Woodhall; and the cork came out with a plop. He raised the bottle to his lips and swigged.

"Guess I leave you one rifle, too," said Gabe. "Maybe you need 'im afore you git to Maine, what? Leave 'im right 'ere, see—an' a ten dollar bill, too. Maybe you need 'im."

He stooped and laid one of the cased rifles on the ground. Woodhall glanced at him over the bottle, then raised the bottle again to his lips. Woodhall's face wore a queer expression, a mixture of keen relish for the gin and of derision and of cunning.

The old Maliseet was soft in the head, evidently. All he had to do was pull a trigger! Instead, here he was giving away bottles of gin and ten dollar bills and handing back a rifle—without even being asked, mind you! Crazy! The poor simpleton!

And how much more money had he on him? Ninety dollars more, at least. And there he was walking off with the boy just as cool and contented as if he had bought him out of a store in town! Wouldn't it make a dog laugh? And Pete Woodhall lowered the bottle from his lips and laughed.

"I got plenty of time," he said. "Guess I'll warm up a mite an' b'ile the kittle. Ain't no hurry. It'll be like takin' money from a—"

He glanced quickly over one shoulder, then over the other. A vivid memory of a former occasion of taking money from an elderly person of Maliseet blood had suddenly flashed on his mind. He turned completely around, staring at the encircling walls of brush and tall trees through which the aching wind, shotted with frozen snow-specks, washed like an invisible tide.

He didn't see anything unusual, nor anything in motion except the boughs pressed by the wind—for Gabe Loon and the child had already disappeared—but he shivered. He hastened around the fire and into the shelter, carrying the two bottles with him. He placed the smoky kettle, which was full of frozen water, on the edge of the fire, then sat down and huddled blankets about his shoulders.

"I got plenty of time," he said. "I'll pluck the old fool clean to-night, an' then I'll beat it—an' I'll leave him keep the kid, I guess. He's got one hundred dollars on him, anyhow. He said so, an' he's fool enough to spit out the truth every time, I reckon. Fool, sure enough! He had me cold; an' then he went an' give me back a rifle. Hell!"

He heartened himself with another gulp at the bottle, then went out to pick up the rifle which Gabe Loon had so foolishly given back to him. There it lay on the frozen moss.

Then he thought of the money of which the old simpleton had spoken, the ten dollar bill, and looked for it. A ten dollar bill is worth picking up, even to a man who expects to possess himself of ten times that amount, at least, before the next morning.

He looked for it, but he didn't see it.

It wasn't under the rifle, where he naturally supposed it would be. It wasn't among the frozen ferns beside the rifle.

The wind had blown it away, of course; and he cursed the old Indian. He searched down wind among the underbrush, but without success.

"The cussed old fool!" he cried at last, and gave it up and went back to the lean-to of boughs and heaped more wood on the fire. He felt as sore toward Gabe Loon as if that worthy had cheated him out of the undiscovered money.

He drank a little more gin cold, then a mug of it diluted with hot water and sweetened with sugar. Then he made tea and laced it with gin and drank it in large quantities. He ate a little cold bacon which he had fried earlier in the day, and a slice of stale bread, and then judged that it was about time to set out on the trail of the old Indian and the little boy.

He knew that it would be a difficult trail to follow, as the dry, scanty snow was blowing too fast to make a good bed for footprints. He would close up on his quarry before sundown, then hang off until he was sure that the big double-barreled gun was laid aside and old eyes and young were sealed by sleep. It was easy—almost too easy! Poor old Gabe Loon!

He decided not to break camp. Tomorrow would be time enough for that. He would just take his rifle and a pair of blankets along with him—yes, and a few cartridges. How near he had come to forgetting the cartridges! This was certainly good gin the old Indian had given him! He laughed and drained another mug of highly flavored tea.

Then he reached behind him for his ammunition. He reached farther, and yet farther, and almost lost his balance. At last he turned around on hands and knees. No use! The ammunition wasn't there—not so much as a cartridge of it!

He jumped to his feet with an oath and rammed his head through the roof of boughs. Oaths flew from him like frightened birds out of a tree, a whole flock of them, singly and in pairs and threes; and he staggered heavily with blankets twined about his feet.

"The damn' old fox! The dirty thief! Cal'lates he's fooled me, does 'e? Took my ca'tridges an' give me back a gun! I'll larn him! I don't need no rifle, nor knife neither, for to fix *him*."

At last he got away from the lean-to. He placed several heavy sticks on the fire and then set out in the direction in which Gabe Loon and the child had gone. He had the half empty bottle of gin in a pocket of his heavy jumper. He carried an axe and blankets and, from habit, his ammunitionless rifle.

He walked quickly, but with frequent unintentional side-steps. The light was bad—gray and scanty. The sand-dry snow ran on the steady wash of icy wind, leaving scarcely a smudge on the frozen ground. It was poor tracking; and his progress was slow. He found marks here and there—but not as easily as it sounds. He fell twice, and the bottle in his pocket had two narrow escapes.

Sometimes he got down on his hands and knees and crawled in search of the tracks, and his failures to find them were as frequent as his successes. He was losing valuable time, and he knew it—but the knowledge didn't help him.

He was quite at a loss to know which way to go next in search of Gabe's trail, when a glitter on the ground caught his eye.

He picked up the glittering thing. It was a brass shell, loaded—a round of his stolen ammunition. Good! He was still on the track of that dirty old fox!

He laughed as he drew the rifle from its case, with the intention of inserting the shell in the breech. The laugh froze, then melted to a string of blistering oaths. The bolt was gone from the rifle!

So the old red-skinned dog was making a monkey of him, was he?

He pulled himself together by taking a pull at the bottle. Then he went forward at top speed for several hundred yards, without a thought of footprints on the infrequent patches of snow. Another tumble jarred his wits back to their job, and again the bottle escaped destruction by an inch. He found the tracks again before dark.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Gentle Gender

By WILSON COLLISON

SOME wise-shootin' gent has once remarked that the best glove-smackers is born and is not manufactured by the uses of dumb-bells and light bag punching. If this is the low-down on the so-called genius slat-slammers, it might be the so-so for them as has been lugged into the ring in that heaven-born condition. But nothing like this ever happened during my career in the handling of fast babies; and when I picked up Joe Gender, the funny looking heavyweight, and started him off on the road to the fame and some little fortune, I can't admit that he ever had none of them plastered-on qualities which the gods has spoke of.

Joe was ridin' round on a two-by-four trunk wagon the first time I snapped him, and the way it happened—I was strollin' along one day over in a town in Jersey, tryin' to figure out what will I do when winter comes. Well, sir, I suddenly hears the sounds of loud talking, and looking up, I sees some big, copper-riveted bozo about the size of a prize elephant; this here gent is knockin' out a wicked line of words about what does somebody mean by buttin' in his business.

Being some interested, I edges up and I sees that the somebody is a guy which might have been let out of a fish market, he is so exceptional lookin'.

This lad, he is sitting on the front seat of a busted down express wagon and is chewing some gum or eating hop, I don't know which it is—and below him in the street is this windjammer reefing his sails with the oratory. I listens a little, and it seems as if the express wagon has rode up while this here big bozo has been smackin' a worn-out lookin' horse which won't do no more work account of the facts it has been run out of gas.

" Whata you mean tellin' me to lay offen

the plug?" the big swiper howls, sticking out his jaw and doing a mean glare up into the face of the escaped laughmaker on the seat of the wagon.

"Listen," says this comedy poster, taking off something which is supposed to be a hat and wiping some beads of dew off his face. "I ain't seein' no guy lick a innocent horse. Get me?"

"Sure I'll get you!" yells the tough gent. And he reaches up to haul the other dodo out of the chariot.

"Don't do nothin' wrong," says the wagon driver, trying to wave the manhandler off with his hat. "I never hurt nobody in my life, but I ain't here to see a horse picked on."

"I'll eat you alive!" bawls the big know-a-lot; and he grabs the baby which I afterward learn is Joe Gender; he yanks him down off the seat, and is about to smack him for a iron cross.

This here is where we all go wrong sometimes, as they says that every bozo has some weakness; and the weakness of the gent which was going to murder Joe was overconfidence. When the fireworks starts to blow I has the ringside seat, and it was a show I'm glad I didn't miss.

Joe, he don't do nothing only wait for the big brass molder to haul back for the fatal spank; which he does—and Joe does a side-step and lets go with something which must 'a' had cast-iron doorknobs in it. I hears the crack of light artillery, and when I gets through blinkin' my eyes, the big boy is lollin' in the dust of the street the same as if he has been kicked by a cannon ball. Then the funniest thing which I has ever witnessed in my life goes on: Joe gets out a ragged handkerchief and wipes some real tears from his eyes.

"Say, mister," he moans, "I ain't no guy to hurt people. I told him to lay off me. Sure I did. Look what I went and did to him. Mebbe he's dead."

I looks at this surprise package in deep dismay and some wild perplexity; then I looks at the baby in the gutter, and I thinks maybe he is dead, the way he sleeps. But pretty soon he stirs round a little and sits up, wipin' the mists from his eyes and trying to find out where is the freight train that socked him for the third rail. I lets him go right on sittin' there in the street, and I turns to the boy wonder and grabs his arm.

"Looky here," I says throatily, "has you been drivin' a express wagon all your life?"

"No," he says with a far-away smile: "I used to be the porter in Robert Burns's barber shop."

Under the circumstances of normalcy I would have done a wailing laugh, but this here kid gets me crazy; when you stops to figure it out that the bozo he smacked must 'a' weighed more'n a hundred and ninety, you can see for yourself that this one must have something in his mitts which might make history if they is guided—and I is just the gent to guide him. All this dope runs through my head like a whirligig as I surveys this buddin' rose; but he don't seem conscious at all of what he's done.

I hears a shuffling sound in the gutter and snaps round; and the big boy is staggering to his feet, trying to press something to his head to relieve the pains of disaster. He don't do nothing, only take one hard. long look at Joe; then he goes over and gets his hands on his horse and wagon and quietly, and with some gentlelike care, leads the pony on down the street.

"You likes the animals?" I asks with a confidential smile.

"Sure," he says. "I never hurt nothin' in my life."

"You has it in you to break rocks with your fists," I remarks eagerly.

"I ain't afraid of nobody," he says, modestlike. Smack! Right there in that one little speech this guy gives off the thing which makes me know he has fighting material in him. When you get a bozo in the ring or out of it that ain't afraid of nothing in this wide world, they is nothing which can stop him once he gets started.

"Looky here," I says, drawing him over closer to me; "ain't you never had no inspirations to be a prize fighter?"

"Sure," he returns with a monkey grin; "I been practicin' in my studio for years."

Snigger that off, will you? Here I thinks I is going to break some good news to this freak of Jersey, and he comes right back

with the speech that already he has worked out some back yard dreams of herding himself into the ring for the purpose of tattooing some babies' faces.

"You know who I am?" I asks, getting out my card. "No, you don't. I'm Tad Bocker, the fight promoter and manager of Eddie Gerker, Wild Ike Smith, and some more little artists?"

"Is that so?" he says; and takes my card, giving it the once-over.

While I is standing here watching him and waiting for some wild shriek of joy, the tired looking plug which is attached to his wagon sticks his head over Joe's shoulder and nuzzles his face, the same as if he sure loved this baby. Joe tears his eyes away from my card and begins a petting party with the nag; and for a minute I think I will laugh in his ears and walk on down the street. I has seen some goofy beans in my time, but this here one is the gold medal egg.

"Say," he says, turning round and starting to climb his wagon; "I got to be goin' on. I killed a lot of time and I ain't takin' no chances losin' my job." He looks round at me, and a flat-faced smile spreads over his unnatural face. "Savin' my money, mister; studyin' to be a artist."

"Wait a minute!" I snaps, grabbing him by the back of his shirt. "You is a artist —I mean, you got the makin' of a real ring artist."

"I mean pictures," he says, looking at me with the same dumb-bell smile.

"Pictures?" I asks, pawing round in my brains for what he is driving for. "Movin' pictures?"

"No," he says, and I thinks he does a sneer. "I draw pictures with pen and ink."

Puff that one for a no-decision bout! Here is a peerless gent dragging a lame horse and a busted down express wagon round the town, knockin' big babies cuckoo as easy as you or me would smack a fly—and when I tries to talk prize fight stuff to him, he comes back with a pen and ink artist line. If I thought this bozo was full of lead nails before, I now has the idea he is crazy with hay fever.

"Whata you mean, pen and ink?" I inquires, looking round in my pockets for a cigar and not finding it.

"Pictures," he says, with a icelike stare. "I do them on paper with a pen and some ink."

"Whata you goin' to do with them when you gets through wastin' the paper?" I asks, thinking maybe this will bring him to life and make him wise to the facts he is in a tough world and not a silk-lined hen coop.

"Some day," he says, and he looks right up at the sky—and if you has ever seen a dyin' fish trying to get some dreams out of the above, then you knows exactly what this wagonman looks like—"some day I will sell them and become a famous artist."

"Laugh yourself to death!" I says with enthusiasm. "Ain't you never been down in Greenwich Village?"

"Sure," he returns with another far-away smile. "That's the first place I was when I come from Montana."

"Montana?" I asks, thinking this one is going to give off some more choice information. "Who drove you to Montana?"

"I was born there," he says; and he begins to make some more love to the horse.

"You don't mean it?" I chuckles. "Maybe you was a cow-hand in the pastures out there, huh?"

"I sure was," he says; and I sees he is dreaming back there in the Golden West. "Yes, sir; I was the best horse wrangler in that there country."

"Boy," I says, reaching over and tapping him lightly on the arm, "if you thinks you was a horse wrangler, you oughta start wranglin' the gents in the ring. Looky here, in some few months I could put you in the way of cleaning up some real dough."

"Mebbe you could," he says; and does a flying leap, landing on top of the busted-up seat of the wagon. "Anyways, I don't care for money. It's my art which counts."

"Wait a minute!" I yells, grabbing a spoke in the wheel and trying to keep the horse from running away. "Ain't you interested in being a prize fighter?"

"Sure," he says, looking down from the exalted heights, "but I'm drivin' a wagon now. They ain't no use to start a new job till you finish the one you're on."

"Full of bananas!" I groans. And as

the wagon starts to jar the ears rolling away, I runs round to the rear of it and grabs the end gate. I would have made the jump all okay, only something broke, and I does a whirling act and picks myself up out of the dirty dust.

Nature is a funny thing, as you learns when you gets close enough to it. For a minute I thinks I has been court-plastered to a ambulance; but as I feels myself over and sees that I is all here, I begins to yell after the New Jersey wonder ridin' off down the road on top of the circus wagon. He stops his horse with no difficulty, as I guess that horse wouldn't never move for nobody else but the nut directin' its course.

"Are you hurt?" the loose nut bawls back at me, startin' to run back through the wagon.

"I just been slammed for a dust-fest!" I yells. "Why didn't you hold the train—I told you I was lookin' for a guy like you."

"Hurry on!" he howls. "I got to get some trunks."

Runnin' like a grasshopper, I makes the wagon, and the switchman wavin' his flags reaches down and gets me by the arm. Now I has been hauled up into the air some in my time, but the way this baby zips me up offen the ground and into the back of that funeral car leads me to believe that if you ever saw him without his clothes on, the display of muscles he would offer might scare you out of your shirt and give you some cause to ponder over the histories of that gent named Samson.

"Listen," I hurls into his ear. "I'm goin' to tag right after you, and when I gets through you is goin' to have trunks—but you is goin' to wear them in the ring!"

II.

Now, I ain't the guy to annoy nobody with a long speech regarding this here queer one, Joe Gender. The facts is, I has to hang round this town in New Jersey for three weeks tryin' to pry him loose from his pen and inks and tryin' to make him take me serious.

I stakes him to a hundred good berries and induces him to stop runnin' that wagon round the city; and the minute he jumps offen the job, he takes fifty of the hundred berries I has give him and buys the horse which he says he loves. Then he takes this here world weary animal out of harness, and for the other fifty bucks, rents some room on somebody's farm for him, where he says he can die in peace, surrounded by the green fields. You can figure it out for yourself that when he gets through finding a country home for the pony, he ain't got nothing left for himself—and when I takes him to task for his wild revelry, he does a gentle smile and says he will get along all right till he earns some more money.

I turns it over in my mind should I slip him some more alfalfa; but I figures it out if I spoils him, this here horseflesh lover, right in the first round, they won't be no joy left for him when he begins to rake in his share of the gate receipts.

One night he invites me over to his house; and when we makes our torturous course there, I thinks he has led me out somewhere in the Jersey swamps to do me murder. What this here hard fisted boob's home consists of is a old, falling down barn some place on the outskirts of the city—and if you was to ask me how to get there, I couldn't never tell you, as it ain't never been carded on the maps of the Malay archipelago.

Tired as I is, I is forced to climb up a haymow ladder or something like that, and when we gets to the loft, this slugger tells me to stand still while he gets some lights. Then he fires up some two foot candles and I takes a long, hard look round his homestead.

"This here is my studio," he say modestly, dropping into a broken-up chair which makes a noise like falling slats.

Well, sir, the more I looks the more I is fascinated. This guy has jammed up a pretty cozy little corner in this livery stable, and the walls is hung full of Indian blankets, cowboy saddles, ten or fifteen guns, some cow ropes, or them things you lassos bulls with—a couple of short horn or long horn things Western cows wears for decorations, and some big pants with woolly hairs on them, some more made of soft shoe leather,

nine or ten pairs of boots dolled up with spurs—and as I staggers round in this art gallery of the dead frontiers, I begins to think this baby either takes hop or I has run onto a lost star.

"It ain't so bad, Joe," I says, thumping him familiarly on the back. "No, sir, it ain't so bad. Has you been married before?"

"Not me," he says, doing a red blush and getting up out of his chair. "I ain't never been in love even."

"My goodness!" I whispers huskily. "You don't tell me no handsome guy like you has been runnin' round loose all these years?"

"Aw, girls ain't lookin' for my kind," he replies, gazing down at the floor. "Girls, they likes fellows which has a lot of money or which is famous."

"Exactly," I shoots forth, seeing in a minute I has found the lad's sore spot. Here is a big, two fisted slap hound which has got everything in him to make a great fighter; but what he needs is some good guidance and some little flattery. I gets it that he would like to be kayo with the cuties, but being a backward kind of a bird, he don't never think he could do any high flying. "Exactly," I repeats, laying my hand on his arm. "Yes, sir. You let me handle you, Joe, and in a year you're goin' to have all the sweet girlies in the world chasin' after you for a tender smile. You got the looks, kid, and you sure has got the makin' of a wise cracker."

"Would you like to see some of my pictures?" he asks; and by his tone I sees I has touched his soul.

You know, these here kind of saps is just babies at heart, and if you treats them right and don't hurt their feelings, you got a chance to do big things with them. This one, he is so impossible lookin' in the face that if you was to meet him alone on a dark night, you'd think somebody let out a gorilla and advised it to slap you to sleep. Being wild looking and backward, this here freak ain't never had nobody to make a fuss over him—and if they is any guy in the world which don't like people, and especially the female people, to make a fuss over him—then my name is Know Nothing.

"Sure, I would wish to see your pictures, Joe," I says with heavy enthusiasm. "Maybe when we gets you trimmed up for the ring, and you has made a lot of money, you could do the retire and take up your paintin' seriouslike."

"That's what I want to do," he says with a grin. "I don't want to never have to draw for money—I just want my art to be soopreme."

While I is turning this over in my massive brains. Joe paws round in some kind of a chest and hauls out five or six million sheets of paper and comes across with them. He drags the candles up on a flat table and tells me to look while he shuffles.

Now I don't know nothin' about this kind of ink art, and I don't know whether his lines is right or not, but what this bozo unfurls for me gets me. Yes, sir, it knocks me right between the eyes for some gasps. The pictures is wows, and they is all of the Wild West, showing guys sittin' on tops of horses' heads while the horses stands up on one leg and dances; they is pictures of stage coaches and guys drawin' big guns; they is pictures of cows runnin' across plains, or whatever you calls it out there—they is some pictures of guys throwin' mean hands at poker in saloons, and they is pictures of crowds fightin' in the open air.

I looks these all over and I begins to think this here lad has got something saleable. And the more I turns this over in my mind the more I figures it out that if I don't handle him right, he won't never take up the fight game. But I get the hunch that once this Montana raspberry gets to going pretty to the sound of the gong, maybe he'll forget the Greenwich Village stuff and make some dough for all of us.

"Joe," I says softly, looking up at him in the mellows of the candle light. "I ain't no guy to kid you—you has got the goods. You is a artist. But what you has to do is to make some real money, so's you won't have to beg them critics to look over your pictures and cuss 'em out. They is a bird called Micky Squires which I wishes to work you up to. This here gent is now the prize champ heavyweight. He's the baby I is workin' you up to smack to sleep and steal that there title, which is

worth a hundred thousand berries to you—then you can go on with this here paint brush."

"Do you think I could lick him?" he asks; and I sees I is getting him warmed up a little.

"Sure," I says, confidentially. "When you has put in a year slapping a lot of second and third rate bums for practice, I can scale you right up the wall to the top notches—then we can trim some real beards and match you with Micky, and if you gets as far as shootin' at him in the ring, and if you is so lucky as to paste him for a ashcan, you can write your own ticket and go on with art."

"Do you think I could do it?" he asks again, getting kind of red in the face, like the steam of ambition is beginning to blow through his pipes. This gets me crazy, as I sees at last I has got this banana head worked up, and once I get a guy worked up, I don't give him no chance to get cold on me.

"You betcher life you can do it!" I howls, banging the table with my fist. They is a crash and some bottles of ink, pens and some other little ornaments hits the floor; but I is so busy I don't pay no attention to them—and this dodo is standing there in the candle light staring at me like he has just been let out of a asylum. I knows he is all wound and ticking for some good oratory on my part, so I lets go.

"I'm goin' to take you over to Handle's gym to-morrow and put you to work. I is goin' to make you the prize heavyweight champ of this here countryside. And right here and now, we makes a agreement, which I will write down with your ink and you will sign it. In this here agreement, I states that after you has smacked all the good boys to sleep, and has busted Micky Squires for a hulled peanut, I is goin' to help you with your fight on art. Whata you say, kid?"

"Do you think I could do it?" he asks, leaning across the table and getting me by the back of the neck. For a minute, I think he is going to twist my throat into a jelly roll, and I will state here and now that I don't never want this baloney to get mad at me and shake me for a feather duster.

"Sure you can do it!" I yells, jumping up and down. "Find the papers—we will make them out right now."

"All right," he says, letting go of my neck and looking down at the floor. "I'll do it. But I has to go on with my art, and when I has fights, I ain't goin' to hurt nobody."

"No," I says, as I reaches excitedly for a sheet of paper. "They is goin' to hurt you first."

III.

THE day we walks into Handle's gym somebody goes ahead on the floor and tells the tough boys that a circus has arrived and that I has captured the prize hyena of them all. I gets Joe stripped all right and slips him into some running pants and a light gym shirt. I has a hard time getting him onto the floor where I expects to start him off on the bag punchin' and some light exercises to loosen him up.

Say, boys, if you has ever seen a clean limbed lad, you don't know nothin' about how this gent looks. I has seen some funny figures in my life, but this here ain't no figure at all. He is just a great, big, awkward lookin' animal with arms as smooth as a baby's and you wouldn't never think that he had no hittin' power tucked away in his mitts. He kinda bends forward at the waist and when he walks, he swings from side to side like a great big ape walkin' up on you.

He is kinda nervous when I takes him by the arm and says we will go out and do a little light work. I leads him on the same as if he is a camel tied to the end of a rope. Pete Wells, a pretty good welterweight, is on the floor and doin' a little workout with One-round Poppy, a second rate heavyweight that hits like a mule and is pretty fair with his boxing abilities. They is several other guys standin' round lookin' on, including Sweeney Marks, the manager of two or three good boys which has been tryin' to break into the ring to smack Micky Squires.

Everybody lays off the workout as we steps onto the floor, and I hears Sweeney do a horse laugh. I ain't never had no love for that sausage, and he knows it; and every

time we gets together we tries to kid each other for a funeral. Joe Gender grabs me by the arm and whispers something pitiful in my ear.

"Say," he moans, "I don't want to be seen by all them fellows. They'll laugh at me."

"If they does," I says hoarsely, "smack 'em for a juicy grapefruit and tell 'em to go home."

I don't know whether you has ever been round a lot of roughneck fighters, third rate guys that never had no brains and less sense; if you has, you knows they ain't got a bit of respect for nobody and thinks everything is funny.

Well, I don't no more'n lead my man up to the bag and start to show him a little about it when One-round Poppy goes into a long, howling cry and begins to razz the life out of me and my boy. Joe don't say nothing, but he gets red and nervous; he punches the bag pretty good as he has had a little practice at it. But when he makes one heavy stab for it and misses, falling over against the wall some few feet away, everybody yells with joy. And the minute they goes into this comedy stuff, Joe turns round and leans against the wall and some tears comes into his eyes.

"You big stiffs!" I yells. "Ain't you got no respect for nobody? Lay offen my boy or I'll sic him onto you—and when you wakes up you'll think it's Decoration Day!"

"Where do you get that soft soap, Tad?" One-round Poppy bawls, stepping across toward Joe. "You ain't tryin' to kid the game by wastin' your time with that big bean. Say, if anybody ever slapped him he'd curl up and cry himself to death."

"Lay off!" I howls, pointing my finger at Poppy. "Don't pull none of your cheese jokes here, see?"

But this don't have no effect on One-round, and he goes right over, and putting his hands on his hips, looks into Joe's face and laughs. The rest of the bums standin' round thinks this is film fun stuff. If Handle had 'a' been here I'd reported them, but Ike was off some place fishin', and so I has to stand for this low comedy.

"Looky," says One-round Poppy, sticking his jaw out, "they has let a big baby in. Say, cry kid, wasn't your mamma sorry you was born?"

Now this here was just the wrong thing for Poppy to say. Yes, sir! I looks at Joe and I sees him straighten up the same as if he has been shot. His eyes gleams like a couple of beads and he moves toward Poppy just one step.

"You keep your dirty mouth shut about my mother," he says throatily. "She's dead, and I ain't havin' no rat like you mention her."

"Shut up, you flat-footed turtle!" Poppy hisses; and he playfully smacks Joe in the mouth. Then he steps back, thinking Joe will go into some more crying.

But, no, sir. Joe just hauls off and socks Poppy right on the point of the jaw. Not very hard, you understand, as I don't think Joe meant it. Anyways, Poppy's head goes back like a baseball bat has caressed him and he does a short grunt. When he comes back to foot-balance, he swings over a wicked right and slams Joe a hummer. Now Poppy is a pretty heavy hitter and most any guy that received that smack would a frozen up and died right there on the floor. But Joe don't do nothing only kinda screw his mouth up like a little bug has bit him; his lip begins to bleed and while One-round is standin' staring at him, Joe grabs him by both hands and says:

"I don't want to hurt nobody, and you better quit now, mister." This gets Poppy crazy and he tries to break loose; but he might just as well tried to tear himself out of a steel bear-trap. The other boys crowds 'round and looks at this funny sight and I sees they appears to be surprised.

"This guy is a rassler!" Poppy yells, fighting to get loose.

"I told you to lay off!" I shrieks, rocking to and fro with laughter. "Listen, you ain't never seen nothin' like this boy in this here part of the country. He's a whiz, and you oughta see him draw pictures with a pen and some ink."

This here last remark seems to please Joe considerably, for he looks over at me with a dumb-bell grin, still holding onto Poppy the same as if he was tying a one year old baby to the crib.

"Let go!" Poppy bellows, see-sawing back and forth.

"If I do," Joe says, "you got to behave yourself. I ain't here to hurt nobody. I never meant to hurt nobody in my life." Then he lets go of Poppy and starts to turn back to slam the bag some more. But One-round is so red-headed with the heat he reaches for Joe, jerks him 'round and wallops him right in the ear. Right there was where the cannons roared. Joe jumps right up in the air like he is on some rubber springs.

"You dirty coyote!" he screams. "That's my sore ear." Then he lets go; and for two minutes him and Poppy has the greatest slugging match I has ever seen.

One-round of course knows more about the game and more about defense than Joe, and he was pretty wicked at in-fighting. But it didn't do him a bit of good, for the harder he hit the madder Joe got. And as Poppy jabbed in a cruel right and came back with a pile-driving left, Joe comes up under him, and you can think I lie or not, but Poppy went up in the air about two feet—and when he hits, everything in the gym rattles. Then Joe rushes right over to the punchin' bag and tears into it—and a minute later we has to pick it up on the other side of the room. For a little while I thinks he is goin' to clean out the whole gym; and when I backs up and looks round to see where the rest of the boys are, I sees them exiting in a hurry out the nearest door.

"Listen, Mr. Bocker!" Joe yells at the top of his voice, jumping up and down and swinging his arms. "I ain't here to hurt nobody, but these fellows can't make fun of me. If you want me to be a prize-fighter, they got to let me alone. I didn't mean to hurt him, but he hurt my sore ear first." Then he goes over and picks up One-round Poppy the same as if he weighed sixty-two pounds and starts for the door with him.

"Where you goin' with that baloney?" I howls, running after him.

"To a doctor," Joe says hoarsely. "I hit a bad man out'n Montana once and killed him."

And would you believe me, that simp walks right out onto Sixth Avenue carrying that big piece of pork in his arms, and when we arrives at the nearest doctor's office, I thinks half of New York is following us.

The doc takes one look at Poppy and starts to work. When they gets him out of the land of dreams, they finds his jaw is fractured and four of his teeth is knocked out.

Later, Joe cries and tells me his sore ear was to blame. When I asks him about the ear, he says a wild bronco kicked him there four years ago and he ain't never got over it. And for the first time I sees just what is the matter with his face: the whole left side of it looks kinda dented in, and the wild horse explains it.

"Listen," I says, awed by this structural steel works, "did you kill that durned cow-pony?"

"No," he says with a little smile, "I never hurt nothing in my life. I broke it and it was the best little runner on the whole range."

Laugh that one into a balloon and wait for the fall.

IV.

Some weeks later, in the deep despair, I arranges a match between my boy and Lefty Kard, a third-rate heavyweight, for a purse as our share of so little we couldn't never expect to count it. Days and nights I has tried to make a fighter of Joe Gender—and can't do a thing with him. The more he boxes and the more he trains the worse he gets.

I has sparring partner after sparring partner go up against him in Handle's gym, and they don't do nothing only smack him all over the floor; and Joe don't do nothing only keep telling them to lay off'n his sore ear, as he don't want to hurt nobody. If this guy knows anything about boxing, then I is trained to become president of the U. S. A. Hours I spends talking to Joe and telling him he has got to learn how to defend himself; hours I tries to teach him the shifty footwork and the elusive jaw; but I can't do nothing with him, and when Lefty Kard's manager is looking for some tough-nut for Left to crack round the floor for a few rounds to get him in shape for a

real fight, I takes up this offer of five hundred for our share.

It takes me four days and four nights to talk this gentle banana of mine into stepping into the ring. It was a athletic club show and the money was easy for us; but that ain't what I was after. I has got so sick of trying to develop my gold mine that I thinks I might just as well start him out and let him get slapped to sleep, thus getting my misery over with.

Well, the night that Joe steps into the ring at the club and gazes at Lefty Kard, he looks about the color of a raw barrel of flour under the lights—and as worse a' lookin' fighter as has ever staggered round the arena. The crowd, which was made up mostly of fly young club-hounds, starts to razz the life out of Joe, but he don't do nothing only sit shivering in his corner and look at the floor. Lefty looks over at him and grins from ear to ear.

At the gong, Joe gets up the same as if he has lead in his feet. And after the first round I feels almost like putting the sponge in my mouth to stifle the agony. Lefty just mauled Joe round the same as if he was pushin' a couple of hundred pounds of salt. Joe don't do no more than just shake his gloves at Lefty and try to keep him off. The crowd is in hysterics and one boy yells it is a good burlesque and we ought to put my boy in a side-show.

The second round ain't no different from the first, aside from the facts that Lefty gets real annoyed and begins to smack Joe harder and harder. Just a second before the gong rings, Lefty lets go with a whale of a hook to Joe's jaw and I moans; but Joe don't do nothing only jerk his head back and step away a little. Lefty drops his arms and stares at Joe the same as if he has just seen somebody's ghost passin' in the night. Then the gong rings and Lefty goes back to his corner with a worried look on his face. Joe shambles over to our place like a bear that don't know what it's walkin' round about.

"Listen!" I hisses into his ear. "If you don't knock that comedy valentine out, our whole life is ruined. I'm tryin' to get a fight for you with Billy Liske. Come on, snap into it and find out you're here."

"I don't want to hurt nobody," this tin-head of mine says, shaking his head a little.

Well, sir, the next round the boys goes into it. The crowd warms up and yells. Joe seems to be tryin' to give a good exhibition of what he can do without hurting nobody, and Lefty starts in to see what he can do to kill my boy. The round is about half over and I sees that Lefty looks kinda scared. He steps back and measures Joe for the cemetery; he lets go with his right, catching the gentle one on the point of the jaw—and then shoots for the same point with his pretty good left.

Joe suddenly takes the notion he will shift his head, and does so, with the result that Lefty slams him right in the ear. Joe goes up in the air off his feet; the crowd howls with joy, and when they all looks again, Lefty is flat on the canvas where he lays so long they has to carry him out. When they gets him together again, they finds his jaw is busted up, the same as One-round Poppy's was.

Later, when I hands Joe his share of the gate receipts, he puts it in his pocket without no word and wipes some tears from his eyes. Then he asks me over to his room on Twenty-Third Street; and he proudly shows me a new picture he is working on.

V.

SLOWLY, inch by inch, I works this crazy potato of mine up the ladder. He is a joke every time he climbs into the ring; and yet every fight he has all ends the same way. Some of them travels two rounds, some of them ten—but the minute the other sap lands on his sore ear, they is smacked for the count.

Joe begins to pick up quite a little bit of dough, as I goes fifty-fifty with him—and I is exhilarated at the showing he is making. Some of the sporting writers starts to take a interest in him, and pretty soon they gets to arguing about him, with the results I starts to make some good matches for Joe for real money. He is a funny puzzle to everybody and as he goes on up the ladder he don't say nothing to speak of.

When he ain't in training or fighting he

makes them pictures with his pen; and what he ever trains for, I don't know, as he don't do nothing any other fighter ever did. He ain't lazy, but he just don't seem to get no good out of his work-outs and the slappings with his partners. In the first place he don't never hit none of them hard enough to make them jump, and to keep myself out of prison, I has to warn them to lay off his sore ear.

The last fight he has before he reaches the heights where I can have him challenge Mickey Squires, is with Carl Madigan.

Now Madigan is one of the best boys in the ring to-day; one of them unlucky guys that gets so far without never quite making the grade. He hits hard, he is a great boxer, and it is handed out by all the dope writers that my boy will die in the first round. Meeting Madigan's manager, Skeeters Garson, on the street a couple of days before the fight, I apologizes to him and tells him that Joe ain't in very good shape, as he has been working late at nights on his arts and in addition I says Joe has a sore left ear. Garson draws me out and unwillingly I speaks of the facts that Joe does pictures on the side, which sends Skeeters off into fits of laughter. I asks Skeeters to tell Madigan to fight fair and not smack Joe in the left ear no more'n he can help it.

Well, sir, the fight draws a great crowd and a lot of money. Madigan starts right off to kid Joe about his pictures in the first round, and before I sends Joe in for the second turn, I tells him to mash that banana for casting aspersions on his dreams. And Joe hops into the ring kinda mad, and two seconds later, Madigan belts him in the ear—and the fight is over.

Later, the sports writers goes mad and says Joe is the only logical contender for the crown. Moe Smith, on the *Telegraph* asks me to get a couple of Joe's pen and ink works when he ain't looking—which I does and Moe brings them out, and they creates a lot of favorable talk. This puts Joe up in the eighth heaven.

A couple of months later, after a lot of hard work, and some side-steppin' on the part of Micky Squires' manager, I gets the big fight for the middle of September.

Well, sir, I fixes up this match for the fare-you-well by getting into the Garden; the gate receipts looks like the mint and the advertising is worth a million. But I gets a awful headache out of it. Two nights before the big fight, Joe goes into one of his nut fits and I can't do nothing with him. He says he won't never fight no more as he has had some of his pictures shown, and the fight business ain't no fun and is taking him away from his art. This gets me kinda goofy, as I knows that if this Montana freak ever did make up his mind not to go through with the mill, nothing in the world would lead him into it.

I has spent hours in his room going over his pictures and telling him how great he is as a artist; and never once does I mention the fight. Along about ten o'clock he gets up and begins to walk around the room like a caged monkey. Pretty soon he sits down in a chair and leans his face in his hands, looking at me.

"Mr. Bocker," he says, "I ain't gettin' nowheres in this business."

"What!" I yells, jumping up. "You ain't gettin' nowheres? What's the matter with you? You is the talk of the country, and with this match comin' off with the champ heavyweight—say, you ain't been takin' nothin', has you?"

"No," he says, still deep in this crazy mood which is worrying me to death. "No, only I ain't goin' to never make a prize-fighter."

Wham! Can you beat that line of talk from a boob which has rushed up the ladder in the short time this one has and is standin' before the heavyweight championship?

"Looky here," I says easily, seeing they is no use to pound him. "I'll make you a promise, Joe—honest I will."

"All right," he returns, without looking at me.

"If you smacks Micky Squires out of the ring for the blue ribbon," I says, putting a hand on his head, "I'll see that you gradually work out of the game if you don't want to hold the title. I has got enough dough lined up in this here match to make us both independent."

"I guess I won't fight him," says Joe, getting up out of his chair and reaching for some of his pictures."

For a minute, I is fit to be tied and about ready to bust into a hot song and dance; but then my good sense comes to the front, and I sees this baby has the same spasms that the opera singers and actors has, and the only thing to do with him is to kid him out of the pipe-dream.

"What you need," I says gently, "is to take a little stroll with me. We'll walk down on Broadway and maybe drop into a chop house for a glass of milk."

"Sure," he says, reaching for his hat, "I guess that's what I need. I'm kinda nervous."

"Listen," I says as I tags after him, "You smack this Micky for a sack of salt, and I'll see that you gets an exhibition of your arts in the Metropolitan Gallery."

"Will you?" he asks, turning round on me and grabbing me by the arm.

"Sure," I says. "This here prize fight stuff ain't nothin' but sausage in your life. All you needs is the money to bring you to the front."

Joe, he stops sudden-like and walks back into the room, pushing me aside the same as if I am a sheet in the wind. For a minute, I thinks I has lost the bet; but I rushes right in on his heels and starts to say something.

"Mr. Bocker," he says, fallin' into a chair like a couple of tons of sawdust, "I'll fight that feller. I ain't goin' out for no buttermilk. I guess I'll go to bed."

Then this iron locomotive begins to tear off his shoes, and with a smile, I bids him so long—and drifts out.

VI.

THE fight was a joke. The cold storage frost of the age. They was nothing to it but the crowd and the pile of dough which we took in. Micky Squires steps into the ring with the sound of cheering, and Joe ambles in with the sounds of laughter. I has never heard so many wise-cracks in my life; they calls my boy everything from a ham sandwich to the ape which did the murders at the Rue Morgue. But Joe don't pay a bit of attention to it. When we fastens on his gloves, he looks at me with a far-away grin and says:

"I'm goin' to fight this feller. I guess we might as well get it over with as soon as we can. Don't forget that there exhibit for me, Mr. Bocker."

"Sure I won't," I chuckles. "Them sight-seers thinks you is a joke. They don't know you is comin' into the Met in a couple of days with the arts of the ages."

Just before the gong of this here bout, the big event of the night and of the season, I gazes out over the throng with happy eyes. To make life easier for me, I has put up a wow of a bet on my boy, Joe; and lookin' into the future of my bank book, I don't care if I never engineer another fight. I knows it is a cinch and it is—so I ain't goin' to pull no trick stuff and tell you that the surprise finish is when Joe gets smacked for a golf hole.

They starts off like wind-mills. Micky thinks it is a walk-away for him with all his science and hitting power. You know, them guys get like that after they has held the ice bags down for a couple of seasons, but some gent has once issued the funny remark that no matter how smart you thinks you is, they is still a lot of sour grapes left for you when you ain't lookin' for the side-show. Anyways, I had the time of my life. You said it! Wham!

Now I hates to tell you how many times Joe is knocked down and how many times he comes up like a rubber ball with a dumb-bell grin on his face; I hates to tell you how many times Micky slapped him with no results besides some little blood and the howls of delight from the gang. The whole show is in a uproar of frenzy—it looks like the greatest fight of the century, but it ain't. Because Micky, after mauling Joe all over the ring, does just what I knows he would—he smacks Joe with a wicked right alongside of the ear; they is a scream like a jungle cat being singed by a hot iron. Joe does his regular up-in-the-air stuff—and starts in.

But he don't knock Micky off'n his pins with the first one. Micky turns white as a sheet of paper and begins to run. Joe rushes him to the ropes; Micky goes into a clinch and Joe breaks him up the same as if Micky was made of egg shells. They works back toward the center of the canvas

in a jiffy, and as Micky goes into his famous covering-up tactics, Joe lets go with a pile-driver; he knocks Micky's arms down the same as if they is pieces of a willow tree; they is the sound of a pistol-like crack and Micky goes back. Joe rushes him like a veteran of the ring, not knowing what he's doing, of course, but being just crazy with the heat.

He slams Micky on the point of the jaw and alongside of the ear at the same time with both fists. The fight is over, right there in the first round—and for a minute the crowd is so still you could hear a pin fall. Then a cyclone breaks, a riot of noises.

Two doctors worked over the poor sap for nearly an hour, and when they finished they carried him off to the hospital. He was out of the game for nearly a year and comes back with all his nerve gone—with the results that he was batted round by all the second-rate fighters in the ring.

But all I is interested in is the beautiful gate receipts, the noise of the sports dopesters, and the racket they will make over my boy to-morrow.

The next morning, about ten o'clock, I goes over to Joe's room and finds him gone. I gets kind of excited, wondering what's happened to him; when all of a sudden, I looks at the floor and sees all his pen and ink pictures torn to ribbons. This gets me crazy, as I thinks maybe the poor boob has gone out and committed suicide just at the height of his glory. Pretty soon, I discovers a big envelope lying on the table, addressed to me. I takes it up with trembling fingers and hastily reads the scrawled lines:

DEAR MR. BOCKER:

I'm gone back to Montana for a couple of weeks of the rest. I finds they is more money and fame in fightin', and I has decided not to draw no more pictures. You can call off the exhibition for me at the Metropolitan. I'm goin' out to Montana to show some of my friends what I can do. You hold my money. Will be back in a couple of weeks; fix some good fights for me, as I likes it better than drawin' pictures.

Yours,
JOE.

Can you beat it! Who says prize-fighters ain't got the grand temperament?

ʊ ʊ ʊ

RELAY

(To My Son)

BOY, as I near the finish line,
Breathless and breaking with the stress,
Wait there and laugh, old pal of mine,
For youth can laugh at weariness.
Blood of my blood, the goal is yon;
Touch my old hand—and carry on!

For that is life: a story old
Of heart athrob and laboring lung;
Of rainbo and the pot of gold,
Of songs eternally resung—
Of sunlit speeding toward the west
Until there comes the night—and rest.

Until there comes the night . . . . but dawn
Is yours, my son, and youth and zest—
Touch my old hand—and carry on!

Olin Lyman.

The Confidence Man

By LAURIE YORK ERSKINE

Author of "The Laughing Rider," "The River Trail," etc.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A LOSING BATTLE.

SO it was done. Wade had not been bluffing. Before he had made his threat, no doubt before he had left the city, he had communicated with Welsh and arranged this gathering of witnesses which was the key to Corvan's ruin.

Corvan summed up the situation in a single flame of thought as he stood face to face with the gambler, Harmon Welsh. He knew that Welsh harbored a grudge against him, and he knew that Harmon Welsh was unforgiving.

With this man and the creatures of this man to help him, Wade could make good his threat. He could frame Corvan for a prison sentence. *"For the chair!"* Wade had cried.

Corvan doubted that, but quickly upon the doubt he remembered that he doubted once that Wade could bring these false witnesses together. What if Wade had spoken the truth again? Corvan felt a sickly, hopeless premonition that anything could happen to him now.

Like the recurring chorus of an ancient tragedy, the old thought hummed in his mind. *He could no nothing good, nothing decent, kindly or genuine, but what he brought down upon himself a retribution.*

It was as though in each decent thing he did he transgressed a natural and irresistible law. *And every such effort he had made had brought him nearer and nearer to this threshold of ruin, even death!*

If any person in that room had looked upon those two men then, they would have seen them standing, facing each other, each

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apparently transfixed by a witchcraft that held them wordless. There was struggle there, conflict; a desperate and deadly encounter.

But it was a fight without words or weapons. The spectator would only have been startled and shocked by what might have been discerned in the eyes of the men.

But none saw them. It was the end of the auction, and a crowd of tired bargain seekers were intent upon the rich old bric-a-brac which was now under the hammer in a last hurried "lot." They bid quickly, hurriedly, for it, and it was with the sound of the bidding in his ears that Corvan stood, feeling as isolated with the man before him as though upon a desert island, and thought the flaming thoughts which seared his soul.

"So this"—a soundless voice was speaking to him from within that mass which pressed upon his forehead—"this is your fate. Years back, you chose the pathway of your life, and it is written that you must walk that path forever, without straying, without turning back. If you linger to indulge in any ray of sunlight; if you turn from the way to seek any flower that is sweet or beautiful or scented with cleanliness, you will be lost."

"Hello, Corvan!"

Welsh's voice seemed to have come after a century of suspended time. A hateful, unforgiving leer was in the gambler's smile. He seemed to gloat.

"Sixty—sixty-seven dollars," droned the voice of the auctioneer. "Do I hear seventy?"

"Sixty-eight!" was bid.

"Seventy!" cried another.

Corvan answered the gambler's smile. So fate was to run him down in the person of Harmon Welsh, the gambler.

"You've come to get me?" He spoke thickly, in a deep, low voice.

"No," protested Welsh; "to remind you."

Corvan's eyes narrowed as he saw the triumph gleam in the other's eyes. Must he surrender to such scum as this? His soul revolted

"Going," droned the auctioneer. "Going for seventy-five dollars!"

Corvan heard that droning voice, and his heart leaped up with a singular effect of gladness. The need of two poor sisters was as a weapon to his hand. With the simple ministrations that a girl had taught him, he could fight this leering fate.

As though in answer to Welsh's words he grinned broadly a defiance in the gambler's face, and swung on his heel to face the dais.

"Eighty!" he cried.

There was a disturbance in the tired crowd. A flutter of excitement and despair.

"Eighty-five!" cried a dealer frantically.

"Eighty-six!" roared Corvan; and he laughed.

The eyes of the room turned upon him, and he saw them.

"Ninety!" snapped the thin dealer in antiques.

Corvan saw the many faces, and laughed. There was Maddox, on his feet at the wall. Skulking in a corner, Brower frowned upon him. Backed by a group of conspiring dealers, Jim Noylan stood like a block of wood gazing upon him with the solemn eyes of a hound. And Welsh leered up from his place beside the table with puzzlement in his eyes.

Corvan saw them all, and a great spirit throbbed within him. He felt that in this contest of commerce he was fighting all the evil forces of the world. He was fighting fate and ruin. He was fighting for a place at the side of a decent, pure woman. He was struggling to maintain a place upon the heights.

"One hundred dollars!" he cried, and there were no bids to meet him.

"Going," mourned the auctioneer. "Going."

Corvan's eyes swept the room. He was alert for every sound and every movement.

"Gone!" and the hammer fell.

Corvan caught the eye of Welsh, and laughed. Then a movement in the doorway caught his eye, and the laugh faded upon his lips. For Margaret Fiske was entering at the door, and by her side was Grimshaw.

With her entrance, Corvan felt that tension of mind and nerve which must be the lot of a field marshal who sees the enemy

closing in about him, and brings forth his last reserve. Ignoring the presence of Welsh, he made his way to the table where the auctioneer's clerk dealt with the successful bidders. Margaret greeted him, and he composed himself to reassure her.

"You came at a crucial moment," he said.

She, believing he referred to his successful bidding, was a little puzzled at his seriousness.

"Are you going to open a furniture store?" she asked.

Maddox came and put the same question in a manner all his own, but before Corvan could answer them he was besieged by the Spately sisters. On the verge of tears, they congratulated him.

"It's hard to see the old things go," faltered Miss Honoria. "But we couldn't have hoped to see them in better keeping. We are so glad it is you who got them, Mr. Corvan."

"I didn't," said Corvan. "They are yours."

They didn't understand. Corvan turned to Margaret, helplessly.

"Explain to them that the furniture is theirs," he pleaded. "A little present for them."

Margaret turned to the two little ladies, and Corvan watched her as she quieted their fears, silenced their embarrassment, and gave them richly of the sympathy and understanding which was the soul of the girl.

The room was nearly empty now. The crowd had hurried away, and there was only a little knot of dealers grouped about the table. Corvan had seen Brower and Noylan go off arm in arm, but he knew that Welsh was standing in the doorway, waiting, he presumed, to take his arm as Brower had taken Noylan's, and murmur cryptic menaces into his ear.

There was Welsh in the open doorway, and here was Margaret Fiske busily engaged upon a work that was characteristic of her. Corvan looked from one to the other, and a sudden revelation flooded his mind, filled him, and overwhelmed him, so that he felt for a moment blind and weak.

In all the long battle he had waged, the conviction and the knowledge that he could never have her; that under no consideration could she ever be his; that even while he fought for his soul with her spirit to uphold him, he contaminated her; entangled her in unmentionable things; in all that long battle it had never come home to him with such terrible conviction as the presence of Welsh now brought it home to him.

He saw suddenly with a new vision; and what he saw confounded him. His battle had been for self; and now for that self he must sacrifice her. It was she who must suffer when the revelation came. It was the unselfish and devoted spirit of Margaret Fiske that must be broken when Wade's forces closed in upon him.

And she would fight for him. She would face these hard, contaminated men in person, he would not be able to prevent that. As the field marshal upon whom the enemy is closing in must refuse to sacrifice his reserves to annihilation if he loves them, Corvan saw with this crushing clearness of new vision, that he could do battle no longer.

"I must run along," he murmured thickly in her ear. "I must get back to the house."

And leaving her to continue her ministrations upon the poor, bruised hearts of the two sisters, he hurried through the doorway, passing Welsh, passing the lined cars of the dealers he had brought to do his work; hurried up the peaceful stretches of the scented country road; through vine clad hedges, and between green meadows tinted with purple in the twilight; hurried back to his home where Wade was—and the humiliation of surrender.

Corvan found Wade upstairs in his bedroom. The door was ajar, and Corvan entered without knocking. Wade sat in an upholstered rocking chair and vigorously smoked a cigar. Corvan closed the door behind him and stood regarding his enemy.

"It's all over between you and me, Wade!" he said. In a peculiar manner he had never seemed to Wade more elegant, more the princely gentleman among commoners, than Wade saw him now. His bearing commanded and obtained from Wade a certain respect and subordination which

the big, hard man could not withhold. Wade still felt confident of his power to crush, yet he felt that he was crushing something finer and better than himself.

"You've been to that auction?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Didn't meet any old friends there?" Wade grinned like flint.

"No. But I saw some brand new enemies."

"You thought I was bluffing, huh?" Wade sneered.

Corvan searched the other's face gravely. He nodded.

"Look here." Wade drew from his inner breast pocket two documents, each of which contained several pages of typewritten script. "They're affidavits," he said. "Welsh and Noylan brought them down. We can get more, too; enough to put the district attorney on the job. When I use these, you're pinched, see?"

Corvan nodded wearily.

"Yes," he said. "You win, Wade."

Wade grinned.

"You mean you'll take Queritt's check?"

"I mean that you've got me. You've beaten me. The only thing I can fight you with would be polluted by your touch; and it could never save me from myself. So I'm going to move out of here. I'm going to run up to Brookhampton now, and get that check. Then I'll take the eight ten to the city and you can meet me there. You can take the money—"

"We'll split," smiled Wade reassuringly.

Corvan lashed him with a voice that throbbed with passion.

"*I said you will take the money!*" he cried, and paused to control himself again. "You will take the money—and we're through! Do you understand?"

Wade looked at him curiously.

"Yeah," he said; "I guess I understand."

"And one more thing!" Corvan turned at the doorsill to pursue his thought. "When I go to Brookhampton in the morning, *I disappear!* Do you understand that? I vanish from this place as completely as if I had never existed. No one in the world must know where I have gone, *or what I have been in the past!* Is that clear? Is that firmly impressed on your mind?" He advanced a few steps, coming close to loom over the seated man. "Because if it is not—if ever a word leaks out that will betray to one person what vile substance she has touched—I'm going to find you out, Wade, wherever you may be, and I'm going to kill you! Do you understand that?"

And again Wade said: "Yeah, I guess I understand."

"Then meet me up at Gasmeier's tomorrow noon, and we'll see this last graft through."

As he left the house and slammed the door behind him, he felt with a pang of pain and yearning and regret that no door could now shut out from his house the bitter memory of how sweet life might have been.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

RENUNCIATION.

CORVAN paced up and down the station platform. It would be some time before the up-train drew in, and the agent would not come to give life to the inanimate bulk of the station building until ten minutes before that time. Therefore, Corvan paced the platform in a far-reaching solitude, for the station was some distance from the town, and there was a canopy of stars in the skies above him. He thanked God for the solitude, but he awaited the train with impatience.

He felt the imperative necessity of seeing this thing through quickly. He could not trust himself to pace for long that even, cindered stretch with the gleaming tracks beside it, and, beyond them, the road which led back to East Harbor. He could not trust himself to gaze upon that road with the starlight above it; for it held the invitation of all roads that lead into the open—and Corvan knew what lay at the end of it. An immeasurable happiness, a dream which had been ineffably illumined by a woman's love, a high aspiration—these lay at the end of that road, and upon these he had turned his back. He could not long trust himself to pace the cinders of the platform with that thought tearing at his heart and breaking it.

He was impatient, too, for another, less sentimental reason. Queritt had made no difficulty about the check. He had had it, certified and ready for Corvan, when Corvan had come to ask for it. But Corvan had felt a certain hidden menace in the little man's shrewd glances; and he wondered what veiled meaning had lurked in the words that Queritt had spoken. Corvan had suspected that Queritt knew much and deduced more of Corvan's real relations with Wade, and he had approached the victim with a smooth argument to cover his apparent change of mind.

"Conditions have arisen," he had explained, "which make it imperative that I liquidate some of my securities. So if you are still prepared to buy my Turn Stiles stock, I should be glad to accept your offer."

Queritt had eyed him with his twinkling gray eyes that seemed so inconveniently wise.

"I'm glad you've decided to sell," he had said.

Corvan watched him easily as he arose and took from a brief case the certified check. What was moving behind those shrewd eyes, Corvan could not guess. How much did the little man know? And if he suspected Corvan, why did he come across so easily?

"We can fix the details afterward," Queritt assured him as he handed him the check.

And then he had spoken the words which now dwelt in Corvan's mind. "When I first met you," said Queritt, "I decided you were the kind of man it is a pleasure to do business with. You are still the same man, aren't you?"

"I certainly feel the same," said Corvan, and he smiled mendaciously.

As he left the room, Queritt had shot one question at him.

"You are going back to your house, I suppose?" he had asked.

And Corvan had lied quickly.

"Yes," he said.

Now, on the station platform, the words came up to worry him. Why had Queritt shot that last question at him? Why, above all, had he let the little man baffle him so? It occurred to him that Queritt might be laying a trap. What if he and Wade were to be followed—arrested? He found himself hoping that Wade might make a clean get-away. And he laughed. It was a laugh from a shattered heart. That would be the last fine joke the fates could perpetrate. That after all his struggle and agony of spirit—after his battle, his defeat and his renunciation—that he should fall foul of the law after all—that would be the cream of the jest.

He laughed.

On the other side of the station he heard the putter of a motor car. Subconsciously he reflected that that would be the station agent arriving. He must go in and get his ticket. Then a whistle wailed and hooted up the railway, and a great light flashed into his eyes as a train roared down upon the station.

Corvan's mind leaped suddenly from his meditations. This must be the down train which passed the one for which he waited here at Brookhampton. He had forgotten it.

As the train squealed to a stop, the door of the station opened, and a girl crossed the platform. Corvan saw her as she darted by, intent upon the still moving cars. And his heart bounded in his breast. His face turned ashen as the blood fled, and a great sickness almost overwhelmed him. It was she—Margaret Fiske!

What fate had brought her here?

Frozen to the spot, he watched her retreating form as it passed along the line of cars. She stopped before the steps of one, and he saw a slight, young figure step down to the platform beside her. Another followed—a woman. Then the trio turned toward the waiting room. As Corvan stood there on the platform they came directly toward him.

He stepped forward.

"Margaret!" he cried. It was a shattered, broken cry. A cry of hurt; of unutterable despair. "Margaret!"

"Dan Corvan! Where have you been?"

But his eyes had left her face to dwell upon the lad who stood beside her. He was a slight lad of sixteen or seventeen, but his face bore a light and a fair happiness in it

which was the radiance of youth. To Corvan's poor overwrought mind it seemed like the face of a boy Christ: and the bright eyes met his with the intelligence of a new found soul.

There flitted across Corvan's vision a picture of that face as he had seen it once before; as he had seen it, a grotesque and hideous thing in the arms of Margaret Fiske. And now a soul had entered into it; a light was in its eyes—a light that regarded him with recognition.

"It is you!" cried the boy, and he stepped forward with a glad, eager gesture that knew nothing of tempering convention.

Corvan laid his hands on the boy's slim shoulders, and he felt as he did so that he was not worthy.

"I received the wire this afternoon," Margaret was saying. "I've been looking all over for you."

"I'm glad, old man! I'm glad!" Corvan's eyes were glued to the adoring gaze of the youngster. He wrung the boy's hand and pounded him again and again upon the shoulder. "I'm glad!" It was all he could say. In his heart was an unfathomable despair that this thing, too, must be put forever behind him—that this thing, too, could be contaminated by his touch.

"But I suppose you heard!" cried Margaret.

"No. No," said Corvan. Then, suddenly, "Where are you going now?"

"To take him home, of course. Mr. Humphrey is in there." She motioned toward the waiting room. The train was pulling out, and the up-train panted down the track, waiting its turn at the station.

"Of course." He looked from one to the other of them; to the nurse who hovered as it were, in the offing. "Of course, he will be waiting. You must go to him."

Margaret and the boy turned toward the waiting room. Corvan saw that they expected him to accompany them.

"No," he smiled wanly. "You take him in to old Humphrey. Then come out. There is something I must say to you. You must be quick." He was conscious of the waiting train. "Quick," he said.

The three of them went through the doorway and left him alone to remember that understanding look which had flashed from her clear, brave eyes.

"I must!" he cried to himself. "I must! I must!"

The door opened once more, and she came out to him.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

He took her by the arm and led her away from the light which glittered through the window of the waiting room. Free from the sheltering overhang of the station roof, the star filled sky shone like a richly jewelled mantle above them. The fair night caressed them. The shouts of the railroad men came to them muffled by the scented air. In the thick hedgerow beyond the track, a thousand night things throbbed with song.

"I must hurry," Corvan murmured to her. "I must hurry—I am going away to-night. I am going to leave you—Oh, my darling, this is good-by!"

She wrenched her arm free in a quick movement, a protest.

"No!" she cried. "I don't understand—"

"Don't," he murmured hurriedly. "Don't —Hush. You must not say a word. I have no time. I must tell you—"

He gazed at her closely, devouring her with his eyes.

"Ah, how can I say it!" An impulse that was not altogether selfishness urged him to shield her from the bitterness of revelation— But he commanded himself. It must be said. Searching her face, with his own eyes sounding the depths of the emotion which her firm glance held, he heard himself saying it.

"Margaret, I have come to you like a prince in a fairy tale. I have come with money and the power of money; and with you to guide me, I have used that power for good. I have relieved the sick, and helped the poor. But it was not enough, Margaret, to prevail over what I had been before. It was not enough to force away the hand that brought me down here, or to destroy forever the path I had followed before it brought me to you. That hand was evil, and the path was crooked—.

"Listen, Margaret," he hurried on, silen-

cing her. "Before I met you, I was known as the Great Corvan, slickest of confidence men; I was an expert swindler. I came down here and posed as you have seen me, to put a swindle through!"

He pressed his self denunciation upon her through the dark, desperately—and he held her close, meanwhile, as though to protect her from it.

"I have told you this, so that you will forget me!" he finished. "For I go away to-night—on this train. I'm going away. I shall never see you again!"

He wanted to say more. He wanted to relieve the cold brutality of this revelation with a word for the miracle she had wrought in him, with a word of gratitude for the soul he had found in her. But his heart choked him, and stifled the utterance of such words.

The train panted into the station.

"Forget me!" he cried, "for God's sake, forget!" And he would have flung away from her, but she detained him. She held him tightly, and spoke with a burst of laughter and of sobbing.

"I know! I know!" she cried. "Do you think I don't know you as well as you know yourself? Do you think Grimshaw has told me nothing? Or Maddox? Or your own hunted, wearied eyes?

"Oh, my love, I know all you have told me, and more! There's no need to run away. I love you! I'd love you if you were a thousand times worse than you have told me!"

He tried to press her from him.

"You can't understand!" he protested. "There is one thing you can never understand!"

Close to him, her lovely, serious face pressed itself upon his consciousness to become a picture as she stood before him then, which his mind would never lose.

"I understand," she said, "that you are free. What you have been to us is what you will always be after this—"

"It is not enough!" he cried. "I've seen it through! I've seen this swindle through! I've got Queritt's check in my pocket, and I'm off on that train—to-night—now! Leave me—Let go—Oh, Margaret, forget!"

"Very well!" she cried; and her voice was alive with a startling vitality and command. "Only before you go—before you take this step which separates us forever, think of what I say! They have forced you to do this thing, and you have chosen the darkness of this course to something which seemed darker still. Was it as dark as life will be without our love?

"Think of it, Dan! Now. Think of it now! Is there any sorrow or disaster worse than that?"

He turned back to her slowly—forgetful of time and flight.

"Do you know Wade?" he asked.

She shuddered. She was frightened by the timbre of his voice.

"Yes!" she whispered.

"He was my partner. His hand kept me to the crooked road. I fought him, Margaret, but he won. If I turn this check back to Queritt, that man has the power to break me. He can send me to prison for years!"

Her hand leaped to her lips. She murmured a little cry.

"He can't!"

"He will!" He took her two hands in his.

"Shall I return the check?" he said.

A light of surpassing courage had come into her eyes. "What will life be without our love?" she had asked. She saw now that the answer must be hers. Her voice was firm as she gave it.

"Yes!" she decided. "Return that check to-night!"

"To-night," he assented. "I am made of iron, now." He placed his arm about her shoulder, and they turned up the platform. The train had long since gone.

But he did not notice that. He did not notice the sudden silence that enveloped them, the silence of nighttime in the country which is noisy with a thousand songs. To him it had been so from the beginning of time, he and she alone under the starlight. He held her jealously.

"It will be good-by—anyway. Good-by. But I have found out to-night that there is happiness in renunciation, and that happiness will wait for me through years of prison, or suffering, or death."

"Forever," she said. "I will wait."

With full hearts, with a singular sense of precarious happiness, they made their way to the station where, in a lonely waiting room, old Humphrey had seen his life made whole in the figure of a youth who, having gone forth an idiot, returned with the light of a soul.

CHAPTER XL.

BARED FANGS.

IN the still evening air, Corvan again approached the house which for a month had been the headquarters of his battle. He had persuaded Margaret and old Humphrey to drop him at the foot of the drive to walk to the house alone while they carried Harold Trench home to his waiting parents.

Margaret had consented, but there had been a peculiar restraint in her assent, as though she hid behind smiling eyes a secret knowledge of mysterious things which were to happen. He had sensed the same air of mystery about Queritt when that shrewd gentleman had asked him if he were returning home.

"You mustn't be too much surprised if peculiar things happen to-night," she had said.

He walked up the driveway with a spirit that had been derived from her words and the sight of her. That had been fired by the resolution she had brought him to, and fed by the sight of the boy whom, through her, he had retrieved. He was uplifted by that spirit, and before it the menace of Wade's sure vengeance sank to insignificance.

As he emerged from the trees which hedged the drive, his attention was arrested by the lights which gleamed from the windows of the house. The dining room, the kitchen, the living room, the hallway—all were alight. Light streamed from upstairs windows, and gleamed from behind blinds at every aperture.

He wondered at it. It did not seem possible that Wade or Maddox could need so much light. A quick picture occurred to his mind of Wade, left alone, searching every room and cranny of the old place with curiosity and suspicion.

He dismissed it as absurd, and hurried forward to investigate. As his steps rang upon the wooden stairway of the porch, he was amazed by a sudden transformation. All the lights went out.

They went out abruptly and unevenly. With the ghostly effect of electric light shut off by unseen hands, he saw the windows on either side of the door go black, and the fanlight above the door suddenly dimmed. Startled, he stood for a moment, motionless.

A man who had been sitting silently in a chair upon the porch arose and approached him. It was Wade, chewing a cigar, and he pressed his face forward, peering through narrowed lids.

"Where the hell did you come from?" His voice rasped like stone upon stone; but with a perceptible effort he held it subdued.

"I missed my train," said Corvan briefly. He answered Wade's lowering stare with straightforward eyes. "What's going on inside?" he asked.

"Not too loud," growled Wade. "They're a pack of damn' fools."

"What do you mean? Who?"

"Go inside and see." Corvan studied the other for a moment, conscious now of the menace embodied in this hard, cruel man. He turned to the door again. Wade clutched at his arm. "You ought not to be here!" he growled suddenly. "You can make a mess of this game yet!" He peered malevolently into Corvan's face. "By God, you ain't going to let me down!"

"Come inside and see," grinned Corvan.

He pushed open the door and entered. Wade followed close behind him. The light in the hall was dim, and, standing beneath it, Corvan felt an uneasy sense of imprisonment. All the doors leading from the hall were shut. The heavy curtains were drawn tight across the living-room archway.

It leaped into his mind that this could be a trap, that unknown forces might lie in wait behind those doors, those curtains. And Wade stood close behind him. He turned, and found Wade's face cold, grim and impassive.

"What is it?" he snapped.

As if in answer to his question, the doors opened, the curtains were flung apart, lights flooded the rooms that were revealed, and a crowd of people thronged into the hallway; pressed toward him with happy, shining faces. It appeared that all the people of the village were in that crowd, and there were more, too.

Henry Sumpty was there with Mrs. Sumpty and the brood. The homely, serious face of Mrs. Lionel Humphrey shone from the little doorway at the rear with Mrs. Bland and Millie Martin close beside her. There were the Burton boys, whom Corvan had assisted in the small matter of stocking a lumber yard.

Old Grimshaw leaned upon the arm of Bud Martin, and leered benevolently upon a self conscious Maddox who was shepherded by the vivacious Sally. The Misses Spately were among those present, and the Fiskes.

All the village of East Harbor thronged into the hall from the interior of Corvan's rented manor, with honest faces alight by virtue of the simple pleasure they derived from this "surprise party." And not least among them all was Queritt.

They pressed about Corvan, chattering and laughing, explaining and congratulating, embarrassed and happy.

"Since you only hired the house for the summer," rose Sumpty's voice, childlike, above the rest, "we arranged this here party as a sort of testimonial."

Among all the surrounding radiant faces, Corvan, at the sound of those betraying words, saw only two which stood forth as though focused by a camera whose lens obscured all else. There were the faces of Wade and Queritt. Wade, who stood at his side, hid with impassive face the black thunder of his thoughts; and Queritt, directly in front of him, explored him with lively, inquisitive eyes.

"I told them you would be back," smiled Queritt. "That's why I asked you."

"—And the tables are all laid. There's to be a supper." A babble of voices made plain to him the arrangements for the evening.

"Good!" cried Corvan. He suddenly felt strangely elated, reckless, with an insurgence of high spirit. "I'll run upstairs and get ready."

Then, as if there were no one else in the room, he spoke directly, firmly, to Queritt. "But first I want to give you this," he said.

He took from his pocket the certified check. He held it in his hand for a moment, and in that moment all the self protective guile of a lifetime cried out to him to hold his hand. This was to hand his own death warrant to the executioner, he reflected.

He caught Wade's eye, and read there what no one else could see in that barrier of granite which was the man's hard face—greed, baffled greed, and an anger, a menace, which was murder. Corvan met that malignant gaze and answered it with his own; then, his answer given, he turned deliberately to Queritt and placed the check in his hands.

"Thanks," said Queritt, quietly; and he tore the paper into pieces. Corvan perceived then how much the little man knew. He knew that Queritt understood.

But Wade saw only that whereas ninety thousand dollars had been within his reach, it now was gone. Corvan had cheated him out of ninety thousand dollars.

"Come on, Mr. Corvan!" cried the voice of a child. "It's all ready!"

Corvan laughed.

"I'll be right down!" he cried; and, shaking loose the hands of several children who had gathered close to him, he bounded up the stairs.

Wade came into the room where he wrought hurriedly at the wash basin.

"Corvan!" he uttered. "Damn you!"

Corvan looked up at the sound of the man's thick, dark voice. Wade had no need of his mask now. He had thrown it off as the fighter flings off the robe on entering the ring.

The countenance which Corvan now encountered was suffused with hatred and unquenchable malice. Wade's eyes gleamed with rage. His face was distorted with it.

"You've done it now!" The words, thick and stifled, were a sentence, a verdict, a blow. "You've done it!"

"Yes," said Corvan, "I've done it." He walked over to the bed and picked up his coat. With the coat on his arm, he faced Wade very gravely. "I've decided," he said.

Wade's laugh was a fearful thing.

"You've decided to go to hell!" he snarled. "When you go down to this little party of yours, that bunch of rubes will give you a slather of soft soap. But I've got something to say, too! When I've finished speaking, they'll ride you out of here on a rail!"

Corvan, still facing the other, slipped on his coat very gravely.

"You'd best save your breath," he said, "down here."

"And when they've chased you out—hunted you out—by God, it's into the pen for yours! You double-crossed me, Corvan! You'll get the works!"

Corvan inclined his head.

"I know," he said. "I decided on that."

He passed Wade and went from the room.

"All right. You know!" snarled the voice of Wade behind him; and Corvan knew that had Wade been by the breadth of a hair a lesser man, he would have fallen dead that moment with a bullet in his back.

It was with the sure knowledge that this adventure in the pleasant pathways of simplicity was to be his last; with the sure knowledge that he must pass from this genuine, happy gathering into the depths; it was with this knowledge in his heart that he ran lightly down the stairs to greet his friends with a smile that rivalled the happiest face among them.

There was one, however, whom Corvan did not see when he rejoined these people who had come to do him honor. Maddox had watched with troubled eyes the passing of that check from Corvan to Queritt.

And after Corvan had ascended the stairs, Maddox had never lost sight of Wade. He followed Wade when Wade had followed Corvan, for Maddox, too, had seen the murder which lurked in the big man's narrowed eyes.

While Wade had spoken his thick voiced sentence to Corvan, Maddox had lurked in the passage outside with his coat lifted up by one hand that held by a thumb to the belt above his pistol pocket. He had waited there until Corvan had gone out again and disappeared down the stairs. He had waited there until Wade, having composed himself, emerged from the room to follow.

Then Maddox had slipped forward to stand solidly in the big man's way. A single electric bulb lit the passage where they stood facing each other.

"Well?" Wade spoke through clenched teeth, harshly.

Maddox still held his hand in his belt.

"You know how it is," he said. "I'm Dan Corvan's man, see?"

"Well?" uttered Wade again. Maddox didn't flinch.

"I heard you," he blurted out. "I heard you. And I want to say that if you squeal to-night, if you do Corvan harm—I'm goin' to bump you orf—See?"

The eyes of Maddox had grown straighter and brighter of late. His voice was keener. He was less the snake. Wade tried to stare him down; he failed.

"G——!" He cried out a curse. With a short arm he flung Maddox back against the wall. "You rat!" he cried; and strode away, down the stairs.

Maddox with white lips, grinned. He took a shining instrument from his hip pocket. He examined it carefully and replaced it. Then he followed Wade.

CHAPTER XLI.

FACING THE GUNS.

BY means of planks and trestles, the heavy colonial table had been made to extend the length of the dining-room, and to be continued in a short T square across the farther end. To Corvan had been given the place of honor in the center of this T; and from this place he sat regarding all the happy faces that lined the board.

Queritt sat almost opposite him. Henry Sumpty and his lively family were at his right. At his left were five chairs left va-

cant; reserved for those he had left at the station to bear a son home to his parents, and for the Trenches themselves. Beyond these chairs sat the Fiskes, father and mother of Margaret. Judson Fiske was in this manner placed at one end of the T.

At the other end, facing him, sat Wade. The villagers had not understood Wade's surly attitude toward this party; and, realizing that attitude, they had wondered why he accepted their invitation to sit at the board. Corvan knew why he had accepted, though, and Maddox, sitting uneasily in the bosom of the Martin family some distance down the table, knew as well. Corvan, too, was aware of a bulky package that was hidden in Wade's breast pocket, making his chest bulge with a grotesque importance.

While an incessant babble of talk and laughter, hearty mirth and homely wit, filled the dining room, Corvan regarded those faces. They were all very stiff in their party clothes, but Corvan could not smile.

The countenance of every villager glowed with a rude and wholesome glow of health, and to-night they glowed as well with a pleasure that Corvan knew was all for him. They were happy because they could bring to him this simple tribute of appreciation and affection.

And Corvan knew keenly what the emotion which the sight of those many faces aroused in him bespoke. He loved these honest people. They were his people. And there was Wade to remind him that among them he was a stranger; that he was here only for a moment; for a day. The odd fantasy occurred to him that all that had befallen him here in this wind cleansed village was as the happenings of a single day, a long, adventurous day. All his movements revolving about and between these people were as the movements of a day's activities. Now evening had come, and he was at supper with them.

After the supper hour he would go. The night would follow. He would know them no longer. He would know no longer the bright old house, or the simple dwellings roundabout—or the wind swept spaces. After supper—the night.

The babble of voices and of laughter was hushed; it trailed off, and as the children were subdued, it ceased. Henry Sumpty was upon his feet, and speaking. He began with a quaint formality, a stiffness which gave him a ridiculous pompousness. But no one smiled.

It was plain that this had been planned as a serious moment, and the villagers treated it seriously, solemnly. Several of the men pushed back their chairs, assuming an after dinner ease. That was the only disturbance.

"We've come together, as you all know, to do honor where honor is doo," Henry Sumpty set forth.

Corvan, aroused from his fantasy, pushed back his chair as well. He was amazed at the drumbeat of his heart.

Henry stumbled in his speech, obviously losing a carefully prepared thread. . . . . "Came down into our midst," he was saying. "He come down here from a place as different from . . . ." The little man gulped miserably. His face reddened.

Then, with sudden determination: "What difference does it make how it's put?" he blurted out. "You all know how he came. And you all know what he's done. There ain't been no charity or patronizing about it. It's the way he's done it. Albert Trench can tell you what he done for his boy. All you women who had boys go over to the war—you know how he done for us in the memorial. And there's more he's done than we will ever know.

"All I can say is, he came to me when I was with my back to the wall. And there was another coming, too; another little one who it didn't look like we could ever feed or house. And he didn't come talkin' of charity or like that. He just did what was right, and in doing it he saved . . . ."

The poor fellow gulped again. It was plain that an emotion more profound than he had words for filled his heart and his throat. "He saved a little unborn—life! He saved— Oh, my Lord! . . . . Daniel Corvan didn't have to throw himself into the sea like he did, and be beat and battered by the water like he did to save the life of another man, for us to know he was sent straight from God!"

The man, amazed at the words he had spoken, stopped short. He was speechless. A great silence filled the room, a silence that was broken faintly by the entrance of a number of late comers who tiptoed in to seat themselves along the wall just inside the door.

Corvan looked up, noting them. Welsh and Jim Noylan were among them, and the gambler sat to fix a cold stare upon Corvan while Noylan sneered upon the room in general.

Mrs. Humphrey was on her feet. Feeling in her heart that all had not been said, that the silence following Sumpty's outburst demanded imperatively a confirming voice, she had arisen as though enchanted. She, who bore the repute of cold indifference, spilled forth the overflow of a heart that was hot with an emotion she could not fathom. She spoke of men, young men who had been boys.

" . . . . They would come into my kitchen," she said, her voice soft, and her eyes far off in retrospection. " They tracked it up. . . . . And we didn't know what would be called for from them. . . . . But it seems they had been called, these boys, and some of them had not returned. . . . . Then we didn't have the heart or the spirit to remember them. We quarreled and wrangled while they laid out there dead in strange lands. And who was it that understood at last? Who was it that must come from heaven knows where to set us right and see that the thing was done? . . . .

" It seemed as if he knew almost better than us what was in a mother's heart and mind. . . . . And that wasn't all. Do you remember what Harold Trench was like?"

They did; they did. Who among them had not viewed the twisted, idiot boy with pity as he wandered about the village? Corvan remembered, too. Under the words of the homely, gentle woman as she stood twisting nervously the napkin she held in her hands, he writhed with a feeling akin to shame. For while he remembered the Harold Trench that had been, he was gazing upon the face of Welsh—the symbol of a dark hour of the past that was to bring him ruin and degradation. And he gazed at Welsh over the shoulder of Wade. His soul revolted at the words he heard. The simplicity and directness which ruled the minds of these people; sentimentality which tinted their vision in all things which turned out well caused them to read into his actions a virtue which was not there. If they could know a shade of the real Corvan, he reflected, it would shatter all their faith.

The third Mrs. Humphrey was no orator. She knew none of the tricks which can make speech glow with pyrotechnic fire. But there was in her vast sincerity a fire of more genuine quality that burned more brightly and caught fire quickly, as fanned flame will, upon the ready fuel about it. She mentioned the storm and the wreck; the fire spread to Grimshaw as the enfeebled derelict sat with his mind upon a picture. The picture of that moment when the land had been blotted out in blackness.

Grimshaw slowly pulled himself erect. " Ef I kin interrupt—" he mumbled. The woman stopped short; stood gazing upon him; and all the company gazed upon him, too. Grimshaw seemed blind to them, however.

His burning eyes were fixed now upon Wade, now upon Corvan. Sometimes they stole to the door furtively to lave with their fire Welsh and Noylan. But chiefly he spoke to Wade.

Grimshaw was speaking of his past, and he spoke defiantly. He summed it up in short, bitter sentences, not hiding that vileness of which his whole descending life had proved man capable. The village people shuddered and paled before his words; but he was blind to them. He was speaking to his kind.

" And there's others to-day, thousands, who are headed in the same direction!" he cried into Wade's graven face. " There's others who don't know and wouldn't believe that I've done the gentleman swindler, too, in my time. . . . . You can see where it's brought me! A wharf rat! A wreck! A spy—"

" Beetle Brower, entering the room, received the phrase full in the chest. He cringed. Corvan noticed this as he noticed every movement in the room. In his heart he, too, was cringing. He had cringed at the

lash of every laudatory word the woman had spoken. Now he winced spiritually at this revelation of the world to which he belonged. It was not a pretty thing to see.

". . . . .And may the good God send to them fools that travel my way a man to show what manhood can be!" cried Grimshaw's quavering voice. "I only hope they recognize him when he comes! He came to me! It's Corvan I'm speakin' of. He came to me that day . . . ."

And Corvan felt bitterly the futility of battle as Grimshaw told of a day when he had looked at the grinning face of death through a hell of raging water, and of a strong man who had staked his life to drag him back.

"He gave up his life, but it wasn't taken. He saved me, and God knows I wasn't worth it!" Grimshaw sat down abruptly.

The third Mrs. Humphrey took up the thread where the old man dropped it. She spoke in an even, gentle voice that contrasted sharply with the harsh quaver that had just ceased. She spoke of a hundred thoughtful things that Corvan had done—of the deed to which the Spately sisters could bear witness—and Corvan winced at the remembrance of what that deed had cost him; of his quick assistance to a child with a lacerated foot; of his courtesy, and that kindness which could only spring from love.

"That's what it is! Love of human kind!" she cried. "And only love could make him understand one thing he did which none of us can really know the meaning of. That thing which made Lionel Humphrey young again—which made a soul sick mother happy and a sound man out of a father who looked on life as a failure. That thing he did when he gave Harold Trench back his mind!"

She stopped short and clapped her hand suddenly to her lips. It was as though she had said too much; but her eyes were fixed on the doorway.

Corvan's eyes had been fixed as intently upon Wade. The man's granite face that had stared so resolutely into the eyes of Grimshaw had been bent, while the woman spoke, impassively toward the cloth before him. His eyes were lowered inscrutably.

Corvan could divine nothing of what was in Wade's mind, and yet he felt a sudden, unreasonable pity for the man. Wade had the strength and the power to crush him; and from here Wade would go forth a free man, while he must go out to his ruin.

Yet Wade could never know the clear happiness which was Corvan's even while he writhed under the hurt of his unworthiness; that happiness which prevailed against the certain knowledge of his fate; the happiness which was flashed to him as though by some occult current from the eyes and faces of all who shared this board. He saw them there, beaming with a profundity of affection that could not be cast in doubt.

He caught a glimpse of Queritt's twinkling eyes, and thought he detected there a certain understanding that congratulated him. He suddenly felt, rather than heard, the voice of the woman come to a full stop. He gazed at her and saw her eyes intent upon the doorway. It was as though she saw visions. He followed her gaze, and noticed that Wade turned to follow it as well.

Within the doorway, having just entered the room, were Albert Trench and his wife. With them were old Humphrey and Margaret Fiske; and beside the girl, with her hand upon his shoulder and his young eyes bright with pleasure, stood the boy, Harold.

A murmur filled the room. There was the scraping of many chairs upon the floor as men and women arose. Mrs. Fiske arose, sprang forward a pace with a little cry, and stood, transfixed.

All the people of the village had known the idiot boy, a pathetic and yet a loathsome figure—and now he stood before them transformed. He stood in the doorway, smiling upon them with a shy, glad smile.

And there was not one in the room who did not feel as Corvan had felt when first he had looked upon this new Harold Trench; that a higher spirit walked among them. For where there had been the dull eyes of idiocy, the light of a soul now shone; and it was a soul that had never known the disillusionments of earth. The fine sapphire eyes were radiant with the trust and belief of childhood; yet they were the eyes of a man.

He stood in the doorway, and the people who filled the room murmured, cried out, burst forth, as the realization of what had been accomplished dawned upon them, in a great shout of praise and adoration. It was for Corvan. Men pounded the table, and women exclaimed ridiculous extravagant praise through sobs.

Corvan had done this thing. Above all, the kind and generous things he had wrought; above all his heroism and self-sacrifice, this miracle rose supreme. He had taken the lowest thing among them and touched it with the radiant spirit of a Christ.

They thundered their applause and wholesome gratitude. Many would have rushed forward and surrounded the boy, but Corvan, erect and commanding, held them back.

"No! Be calm! Be quiet! You must not excite him!"

At his words a great hush followed. It was the hush that follows thunder. The great peace which follows storm. And in that hush, that peace, with his eyes shining in love and gratitude, the boy walked forward—straight as a die, directly as a homing bird, to Corvan.

The room stood transfixed and bound as though by a potent spell, and watched the lad's movement. To the people of the village it was a simple allegory; the boy's spirit was filled with light, and that light had come home!

Corvan received the light to himself with fear and wistfulness. As he took the hand of Harold Trench and answered the smile with which the boy looked into his eyes, he was terribly conscious of the many faces turned toward them; of Queritt, who, standing behind his chair, leaned forward to peer across the table with a compassionate knitting of his brows; of the Trenches and old Humphrey, who stood, bound motionless, in the doorway; of Margaret, who was close to his side, enriched with a wealth of happiness that the future could not ravish; and of Maddox, who stood at his right elbow with tense face and a steely glitter in his eye.

All these people bespoke in their glances one thing with one voice, that this miracle was his—and he knew it was not his. Only Wade, sitting like a graven image at the end of the table, surveyed the scene with no hint of what was in the mind behind his hard, grim countenance.

Corvan looked long into the eyes of the boy, and then glanced quickly at Margaret. An instant glimpse of her uplifted him and took out of his heart the fear and shame that touched it, and gave him courage.

This thing might not be his, but he had fought for it. On the side of the angels he had fought, and he had won. With that assurance from her, he could face and defy whatever fate hovered over him; whatever evil was in that bulky figure which sat like an idol, watching him. With a hand on the boy's shoulder, he shot a swift, unfaltering message into the eyes of Wade, and then he spoke.

"My friends!" he said. "My friends." Sifting his emotion for words, he raised his hand from Harold's shoulder and let it fall again. There was flesh and blood beneath his touch, strong, virile youth. It was a symbol of the thing he had achieved; and yet that achievement was not the praiseworthy thing for which they gave him honor. He told them this, and they answered him with troubled eyes, not understanding him.

"The achievement—the thing I have fought for has been for myself," he said. "Even this lad whom you have loved in his youth with pity, but who has come back to claim admiration and respect; even the action which has made him whole was only a means to an end intrinsically selfish.

"Margaret Fiske inspired that action, and Lionel Humphrey has paid for it. My part was a move in a battle I have fought.

"Only this much I can say to you now: That when a man turns his back on the road which has been his life and resolves to clamber to heights which that road cannot reach, he has a fight before him. You can't erase black deeds; you must vanquish them, and the risk of your life is a small part of the battle.

"You have given me a great deal of credit which I don't deserve for the things I have done. But your words have been welcome to me. You have spoken to me of

love, and you are right; love has been my strongest weapon and my greatest help. I fought, and I have won.

"Or, rather, it is you and this clean, bright place where you live and work that have won for me. I thank you for that. What thanks I can give in words, I give you now.

"Your simple, unaffected spirit has saved me from worse than death, and a more miserable life than Harold's was. I thank you for that from the depths of my heart and soul."

He flashed a glance at Wade, and was glad he caught the man's hard eye. He knew then and from the effect that glance wrought upon him that Wade was now a little thing. He was dealing with a greater thing than Wade, or Wade's vengeance, or life, or death, or himself. Corvan was dealing with the verities, and he found them to be high above the world. He glanced at Wade, and his glance told Wade as much.

"I am going to say good-by to you now," he continued. "No battle is won without casualties, and the price of my victory is that I must leave this place and you.

"I know that I need not ask you for remembrance. Your loyalty is everlasting; your friendship will not die. I'd like to tell you what that means to me; but there are things unspeakable, and that's among them."

He saw then that men sat with woeful, disconcerted faces. He saw that his words caused women to weep silently before him.

"When I say good-by," he cried, "it must not mean unhappiness to you!"

"You mustn't go away!" It was a child's cry, the real dismay of childhood, and a small, tear stained face was turned toward him.

This was hard. He had not known how firmly he had become a part of this life.

"It isn't as though we had not known this month together!" he cried. "I see that Mrs. Humphrey's eyes are wet. Is it a matter for tears, dear lady, that you gave me the vision to do a useful, helpful thing? Let us remember that this brief comradeship has brought us only happiness.

"I see Jed Grimshaw answering me with consternation in his eyes, and gratitude—" He turned squarely on the man. "I tell you, Grimshaw, we are quits! You have done as much for me in coming when you did as anything I've done has gained for you!" And he turned to them all again.

"It is true that I must say good-by! But you must know that I leave this little corner of the world knowing that here are my true friends. Wherever life takes me, whether to high places, or to failure, it is to you that I shall turn, and when I am freed from the shackles of fate—I shall come back! For my heart and my life are here."

He turned suddenly to the end of the table where sat Wade.

"I want you all to hear that and believe it!" he cried. "I want Mr. Wade to hear it! He knows in spite of all that not least among my virtues is loyalty! I say good-by to you now, but some day, if I live, I shall come back!"

That was all he said, and he left them dumb. He could not sense whether they had understood him, although he searched their troubled, silent faces. Queritt, though, had understood, and the pressure upon his sleeve brought him about to gaze into tear filled eyes that proved there was another who understood as well; one who understood too deeply; who had seen in his words a bright dream dragged down to tragedy.

"Oh, my love!" murmured Margaret, and she turned her face from the room.

Then a tardy appreciation of the demands of the occasion burst upon the assembly. Some one started to applaud; another and another followed. The room was engulfed in an uproar of conflicting sound, of protest at his going, and of tears at the subtle strain of tragedy that the women had detected in his speech.

Above all rose the roar of the men. They leaped to their feet and pounded on the table, and dragged wives and children to their feet beside them. The cheers of the men drowned the women's sobs. And it ended in an act that surprised them all.

For the first time in that tumultuous evening one chair that had remained immovable was pushed back from the table. For

the first time one soul whose graven face had maintained the impassivity of rock, demonstrated an interest in the proceedings.

Slowly, and with immense significance, Wade arose to his feet.

"Sit down!" he barked. And responding instantly to the discordant appeal of that voice, a hush fell once more upon the room, a moment of hush, while Wade's inscrutable countenance swept up and down the table.

Corvan, with his left arm rigid, responded to the quick clutch of Margaret's hands as, white as death, she drew closer to him. His right hand was still upon the shoulder of the boy; but at his elbow he knew Maddox lurked, and in a quick glance he saw the Snake's eyes glisten with a cold and hateful brilliance. And the hand of Maddox hovered at his belt.

"Me," said Wade, "I've got something to say, too." His voice fell harshly upon the silence, and with a gesture he held in his hands the typewritten affidavits of his henchmen. He unfolded them.

"He's going to read them off!" muttered Corvan, and a cold dew glistened on his forehead.

"Like hell!" hissed a voice in his ear; and he turned to see the hand of Maddox flash back to his hip pocket. And like lightning Corvan's hand fell from the boy's shoulder and grasped the Snake's lethal arm.

"Drop it, Maddox, for God's sake!"

It was a command, whispered, but imperative. There was a moment of tense struggle which the body of Harold Trench screened from the room, and the gun slipped swiftly into Corvan's coat pocket.

Corvan bared his teeth in the gesture of a grin. He had prevented murder; but he saw the irony which provided that the last decent thing he had to do was to prevent Wade's betrayal being stopped by death.

"There's something more to be said about Mr. Corvan that you people know nothing about," Wade's cold voice was saying.

There followed a deathly pause.

Margaret pressed to Corvan's side. "I am with you," she whispered. And Harold Trench, with a boy's impulse, gathered his right hand in his.

"I know Corvan better than you people," continued Wade. "Been associated with him for years—in a business way. And all you've said of him is true. But it's only me that knows the greatest sacrifice that he's ever offered to make. He said that he must say good-by. That's it. I know why he felt that he must go away from here for good. The reason lies right in these little papers that I hold in my hand."

His voice paused for an instant, and his eyes drifted over to where Corvan stood. They lighted upon the face of Harold Trench, and there they stayed. He continued to speak, but his hard gaze rested upon Harold's face as though he spoke to him alone.

"Well, you can understand that, I guess. The reason he's giving up all the things and the friendships that mean so much happiness to him is right in these papers here: And his reason is for good. I guess you can see that? I guess you can understand me. Well, now—look!"

He scanned the table once again as if to be sure that all eyes were upon him, and then, with strong, sure hands, he slowly, deliberately, ripped the papers again and again—in halves, in quarters, into little pieces. These pieces he placed very carefully in an empty salad bowl which stood before him on the table, and just as carefully he struck a match and set fire to them. The flame arose with sacrificial brilliance, and he stood for a moment gazing upon it, the glare lighting his face fantastically.

"Now, then," he exclaimed with sudden harsh elation, "if you want to know more—if you want to know what was in those papers, read 'em. There they are. There won't ever be a word spoken or written about that thing again except for what is in them ashes!"

He clapped his hands together in a complacent, cleansing motion.

"Dan Corvan can stay here or anywhere else he likes, now!" he cried. "For all of me, he can live with the cows and chickens till hell is a summer resort!" He sat down.

And that was the end of the speech-making. There was a tiny pause during which Corvan and Margaret Fiske ex-

changed a glance of understanding and dazed bewilderment besides, and Maddox, deathly white, regarded what might have been if Corvan had not stayed his vengeful hand.

Then there followed a disturbance which continued in a wild delirium of sound for long minutes. It was hardly interrupted by the announcement of Judson Fiske, made at the request of an urgent, happy couple, that Corvan would stay on at the old Humphrey place, and that Margaret Fiske would share his home with him. And after that announcement it arose more lustily than ever.

A vast spirit of happiness and goodwill swayed the company to a degree that amazed Corvan and held Wade spellbound. Neither man had ever known to what heights simple happiness could rise.

Wade moved, surrounded by a multitude of grateful people who, not having remotely understood his cryptic utterances, nevertheless divined that he had voluntarily released some mystic hold upon their idol. If they could have seen him in the few moments during which he withdrew to hold conclave with his three henchmen in the hallway, they would have had nothing of thanks to offer him.

While Corvan remained in his place at the head of the table, with Margaret and Harold Trench on either side of him, surrounded by Maddox and the Martins, the Humphreys and the Trenches, the center of a group of loved ones who gave him an atmosphere his life had never known before—while old Humphrey chuckled with glee as he announced that the Fiske mortgage had been made over to his grandson Harold, whom he roguishly guessed would be a hard taskmaster—and while Harold himself sat silent, devouring with his clear eyes one face, one single man—Wade dismissed his henchmen in the hallway.

"It's all off," he said, biting his words impatiently. "You'd better get back to town quick. I'll see that you're fixed up all right."

"It's just as well," nodded Welsh. "I always said that Broderick would have hushed it up. It isn't as if he had died—"

"All right," said Wade hurriedly.

"Well, it ain't," insisted Welsh. "If Broderick had kicked off, we'd 'a' had Corvan clean. But he didn't, and he'd 'a' squelched your case for yer."

"All right,—all right," cried Wade. "Now go."

And they went.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SEA SINGS TO THE SANDS.

THE truth of the matter was—and Wade tried to explain it to them later—the truth of the matter was that in the dining room that evening, and by virtue of the words that were spoken and the manner in which they were said, Wade had found a new life, and a new Corvan in the center of it.

Wade was not more wholly bad than any man in the world. He had deeply desired to crush Corvan, to ruin him, or even murder him, because he saw in Corvan only a crook who for love of a woman would double-cross and betray his comrades. That was an unforgivable sin in the code of Wade and his ilk.

But at the table that night he had seen a new Corvan, the center of a world which was as high above the world Wade knew as heaven is above hell. And he saw this world as it bowed its head to Corvan. He had wondered at that. He had been astounded at the depths of idiocy to which these rubes could sink. And yet he had been moved. He had been uneasy. And then Harold Trench had entered, and Wade, even without having seen the boy in his deplorable idiocy, could sense the miracle that had been wrought. He saw the new Corvan in that moment with clear vision—and he could not break that Corvan.

This he tried rather lamely to tell them after the party was over and the crowd had gone. They sat in the living room, whither they had gone after bidding their guests farewell. The last to go had been Maddox, intent on seeing Sally Martin safely home. He had spoken hurried, incoherent words to Wade before going, but Wade had understood. He paled at the knowledge of how close death had been to

him that night; and he frowned at the knowledge that it had been Corvan's hand that had preserved him.

There were only Corvan and Margaret and Queritt left. They sat about the fireplace in the living room and listened to Wade's slow and halting speech. The big man frowned darkly into the fire, and his forehead was damp with his exertion.

"I don't know what it is that caught you, Dan," he said. "I thought at first that it was the lady here; but when that boy walked over to you, and you just stood like that and greeted him, I knew it was something deeper—something that's got me called to a showdown. That's what it was."

"It's quicksand, Wade," said Corvan. He was smiling a little smile and held Margaret's hand in his while he spoke. "It's the wide, clean waste of sands and meadows that stretch out from here to the sea. And it's—well, you heard what Mrs. Humphrey said. It's love—the quicksands of love. Sounds funny, doesn't it?"

"Yeah," growled Wade distastefully. "Let's talk business."

"That's what I've been waiting for." The dry voice of Queritt broke in like the rustle of a wind. "I wanted to tell you, Dan, that I've been buying up land."

Corvan looked up with a new interest.

"Where?" he asked.

"The whole point. All except what you have bought in for that memorial."

"But what do you want with the point? A house?"

"A hotel." Queritt smiled pleasantly. "My boy, it's the greatest idea in the world for this village. I'm going to put the finest hotel and country club on all the Atlantic coast on that point. There will be a golf course and a parkway that will run down to the memorial park. The best beach on Long Island. It's immense."

Corvan and Wade sat up. It was the old call with a new turn. Their quick minds visualized immediately the possibilities.

"Of course! It will be worth millions!" cried Wade.

"Will you swing it alone?" asked Corvan.

"No," said Queritt. "It will be a limited stock company. A half interest will go to my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Corvan. It's a wedding present!" he snapped quickly.

"But we can't!" gasped Margaret. "It would be too much."

"Oh, no," laughed Queritt. "There's a string to it. The stockholders on the spot will have a huge task to perform; and you are the stockholders on the spot. Also, we must get a trustworthy manager; and I'm hoping you will be generous enough to give him a part of your share in the business."

"Oh, Lord!" breathed Corvan. This was fulfillment.

"Oh, I know," cried Margaret. She whispered excitedly to Corvan and Queritt. Wade, embarrassed, arose and walked clumsily to the window where he looked into a blackness made bright by stars. A voice recalled him.

"Mr. Wade! Mr. Wade!" Margaret was crying. "You will, won't you?"

"I will what?" he asked.

"Be our manager. It's all arranged. You will have a third interest, and you'll work with us from the start. You must! You must!"

"Not for me!" he protested. "I've been too long— Anyway, you babies could never trust—"

But he might have known it was useless to resist. He might have known that when he broke down his barrier of granite there at the dinner table he had accepted something that would not give him peace in the old and harder world. He protested, and they scoffed at him.

He questioned his own good faith, and they reassured him with a trust that clutched at a heart he did not know he had possessed. And finally Margaret drew him aside, and he was clinched.

"But you'd better put me on probation," he said with unconscious pathos. "I'm a hard nut. I got the graft in me up to the hilt. It's something that quicksands can't pull out of a man. Corvan knows."

"We'll trust you," she said.

And he could not argue longer.

With a crash of doors Maddox returned. His face shone happily.

"She will!" he cried. "It's fixed!"

"What do you mean?" asked Corvan.

But Wade had remembered the face of Sally Martin as she had waited for Maddox to take her home.

"It's the quicksand," he said. "It's got him."

And it had. Maddox had won his bride.

"Is there any round here?" asked Wade.

"Any what?"

"Quicksand?"

Corvan laughed.

"Why, yes, there's a place down behind the post office where Uncle Ed Morley lost a cow last spring. Where are you going?"

"I'm going," said Wade at the door—"I'm going down there and throw rocks into it, to see what it feels like to sink."

He went out, leaving them, laughing, behind.

"And now I'll get the car," said Corvan. "It's time that I took you home."

"No," cried Margaret, "not the car. We'll walk."

And as they walked together down the drive, she drew his attention to the stars above them, and the sea which made its presence known by a clear breeze which blew in across the meadows, and a little, mournful sound.

"It's a song," she told him—"a love song which the sea sings to the sands. Oh, I am happy—happy!"

And they stopped short for a little while before they continued the walk which led them home.

THE END

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THE CRIER OF DREAMS

DREAMS for sale! Dreams for sale!
Pray who will buy my dreams?
Dreams all glowing with saffron light,
And shot with golden beams.

Dreams that beckon, thrill and call—
All made of faith and fire.
Come and buy! Come and buy!
Dreams of the heart's desire.

Dreams for sale! Dreams for sale!
Dreams at the lowest cost!
Come and buy! Come and buy!
For dreams are never lost.

See how they rise! See how they float!
On iridescent wings!
They are guaranteed to lift the soul
From the thrall of common things.

Dreams for sale! Dreams for sale!
Dreams for a song to-day!
The cost is trifling, take your choice,
And carry a dream away.

Lenna Williamson.

The Elk Bone Spear

By HERMAN HOWARD MATTESON

OLO found him where he lay a huddled heap in the hollow of a sand dune. She knelt, laid her hand upon his forehead, then circled half the circumference of his thick wrist with her slender fingers. She felt the flutter of a pulse. The great body stirred uneasily; a gasping sigh escaped the blue lips.

The girl laid hold of the body under the arms, gave a tug. But this was a big man, a very big man. She relinquished her grasp, gave the derelict a compassionate look, then sped up the hill toward her cabin calling, "Ya-ada! Ya-ada!"

Ya-ada, an old Indian woman who had been Olo's nurse when the girl as an infant had come to the reservation with her mother appeared in the doorway. For ten years since the death of Olo's mother she had alternately spoiled her white ward with loving prodigality, repressed with stern, Spartan discipline.

"Come, Ya-ada! On the beach, a man! I'm afraid he is dying!"

With maddening deliberation Ya-ada walked from the cabin, through the gate, down the slope of beach.

"Man, you say?" demanded the Indian. "A Siwash man? Or a Boston man?"

To this present day, a white man to an Indian of the far northwest coast of the United States is a "Boston man."

"A Boston man," Olo replied. "Very big, young man. He is—I am afraid dying."

Without any display of emotion whatever, quickening her steps not at all, Ya-ada walked on, came to a pause beside the figure stretched upon the beach. For a moment, her face as impassive as a carving upon her native totem pole, the old Indian gazed down upon the stricken fellow. Ya-ada lifted her gaze, centered a sharp look upon something that lay down the beach a distance. She lifted a withered hand and arm, pointed.

Half buried in the sands where the seas had driven it was a makeshift raft. The center portion was what remained of the

keel and shattered rib ends of a ship's work boat. On either side of the keel, and lashed in place with many turns of a heavy trawl line, were a drift log and a splintered bit of timber.

Leaving the white man where he lay, as if the raft were the more important of the two discoveries, Ya-ada walked to the latter. She leaned, extricated from the tangle of trawl line a flensing knife, with a two foot blade, and a curved three foot handle, such knives as whalers employ in making the deep, checkerboard cuttings before the blubber is stripped from the carcass.

Ya-ada turned slowly, stabbed a contemptuous thumb toward the body on the beach. "A whaler," she exclaimed, venom and hate in her voice. "Boston whalers that shoot the great *eh-ko-lie*—blue whale—with a harpoon gun are cowards. He ought to die."

"No, no, Ya-ada," protested the white girl, giving the red calico sleeve of the Indian an impatient tug. "He may not die. If we give him care, food, warmth of bed—"

Again Olo knelt beside the man. She leaned over him, spread her little hands as if she would protect him with their feeble might. She smoothed back the salt, dampened hair from his forehead and tried to dispose the huge body into a more comfortable position.

With an uncanny intuition, Ya-ada observed the girl's solicitude. Jealousy, hate flared from the deep, black eyes of the Indian. The thing that Ya-ada had dreaded, had prayed her savage gods might never happen, had come to pass, the coming of a white man that could stir the heart of Olo whom Ya-ada wanted for her selfish own.

Fiercely, Ya-ada seized Olo's arm, tried to drag her away. "Let him die alone," she said heartlessly.

Then the girl burst upon the Indian like a fury. "He shall not die! Do you hear? He shall not! Here, you *cultus*—wicked one—help me and we'll get him to the cabin."

For an instant, Ya-ada hesitated. A look of cunning malevolence crossed the seamed and wrinkled features. Then she leaned over and took ungentle grasp of the stricken body. Between them they carried, and dragged the whaler to the cabin, where they laid him upon the bed. Olo pulled off the heavy sea boots and tucked the blankets in about him. Ya-ada, giving the hoarsely breathing man a destroying look, walked from the cabin. Olo brewed a pot of tea, heated a gruel-like concoction made from the edible seaweed that the Indians call *slukkish*, and forced some of both between the man's stiffened lips.

Then, for a long, anxious time, Olo stood beside the bed looking down tenderly upon her giant, but helpless charge. Presently he opened his eyes. Curiously he surveyed the strange roof above him. Then he weakly picked up the border of an unfamiliar blanket and stared at it stupidly. Finally he turned his head, and his gaze fell upon Olo.

"Ahoy, little matey!" he said, his voice booming and hearty despite its weakness, "Ahoy!"

He batted his eyes a time or two, gave his head a faint shake as if to arouse numbed and stupid wits to action. Then he began to grin up amiably at the girl.

"Oh, yeah, now I just remember broaching to, clawin' sand to get up out of the breakers that was trying to suck me back. And you found me. And you give me a friendly, helping tow up to this here snug harbor. I swear! You, littler than a grommet wad of a whale gun, you giving me a tow. Just like one of them trig, thumb sized tugs towing a thirty thousand ton liner. Come snugger alongside, little matey, won't you? My fogger haint working good as yet."

Olo stepped forward, knelt, picked up the vast hand that lay sprawled across the blankets. The whaler fitted his head down into the pillow and turned his face toward her. Olo's brown eyes looked fairly into the man's blue-gray ones. A long time, as if hypnotized, they stared unwinkingly at each other.

"Little matey," he said finally, and a bit huskily, "you give me convoy into this harbor, didn't you, that don't know me from the bilge keel of a mud scow? I swear. Do you know, matey, if it wasn't for berthing selfish as a fo'c'sl cat, this span little cabin, pitchers on the wall, carpet on the

floor with lots of red into it, and you, smiling like, you the purtiest thing I ever seen outside a star flower on a moss bank—if it wasn't so plumb selfish, I'd want to lay hove to here till I died. Fact, I swear it is. You little matey."

The big man suddenly turned his head away, but he reached out with his great spar like arm and felt about for Olo's hand. She laid her tiny fingers in his. Gently, cautiously as though he were grasping a bird, he closed down his on them. Presently, Olo withdrew her hand, laid it for an instant upon his head, then fled to the kitchen; on out to the tiny veranda. Standing there she looked away to where the serrated whiteness of the Olympic mountains zigzagged across the blue sky. Her bosom rose and fell rapidly. It was a countenance transfigured, glorified, that looked away to the green hills that lay about the mountains' feet.

II.

TOWARD evening, Ya-ada returned to the cabin. Her words now were fair, but the dangerous ophidian glitter of the black eyes still remained. Entering the kitchen where Olo was at work, Ya-ada forced herself to make inquiry regarding the state of the derelict whom they had rescued from the beach.

"Fine, Ya-ada," answered Olo joyfully. "He's going to get well. I know he is. I'm so glad."

For just an instant Ya-ada let a scowl settle upon her wrinkled face as she studied the enraptured features of the white girl. "Maybe now, Olo," said Ya-ada after a moment, "you go down to Squiqui's cabin, fetch a salmon. Maybe now me cook some for—for him."

"Goody. I'll go! Right away!"

Olo flung off her blue gingham apron, hurried from the cabin and sped across the village to a cabin that lay at the end farthest removed from her own. The instant the girl was out of sight, Ya-ada stepped into the room where the big whaler lay. Ya-ada walked up beside the bed. The man was asleep, but she laid hold of his shoulder and gave it a shake.

The whaler, awakening suddenly, looked up. The smile that framed itself for Olo, changed to a scowl for Ya-ada.

"Boston man," said Ya-ada, with native abruptness, "soon as you get well strong, you go right away. Not stay here but hardly any time. Go right away. I tell it to you why, Boston man."

The whaler painfully lifted his head and supported it in the palm of his hand.

"Olo, her white name is Lulu," said Ya-ada, beginning her narrative in monotonous, unimpassioned tones. "Lulu Carling. Her mother fetch her here when Olo is two years big. Her mother she teach Indians' school, and she nurse when Indians is sick. When Olo is twelve years big, Olo's mother is bad sick, and gets ready to die. Olo's mother, she gives Olo to me. She is mine. Olo is mine. Olo's mother say it to me, mans, all mans, white man is wicked. She say it she don't want Olo, when she grow up marry any wicked mans, any mans. Then Olo's mother, she die. So you go away, Boston man, right away you go. Olo is mine, mine."

The expostulation that rose to the lips of the surprised whaler died unuttered. The rear door creaked, and Olo entered the kitchen. Giving the Boston man a warning look, tinctured with hate, Ya-ada departed. The white man heard Ya-ada speak guttural words to Olo in the Indian tongue, then she opened the door and disappeared toward the village.

Almost immediately thereafter Olo stood in the door, holding up a fine silver salmon for the whaler to look upon. "See," she exclaimed, advancing into the room. "You —why, do you know, I don't know what name to call you by."

"Dode is my monniker, Dode Bradbury."

"Dode, a steak of this salmon, fried just right, will it taste good to you?"

"Sure will, little matey. I'm feeling back to my prog very fast. But matey, come alongside."

Impulsive as a child, knowing nothing of the diplomacy that tempered the speech of the sophisticated, Dode Bradbury commonly blurted out in unconsidered words whatever thought his mind had entertained.

"Matey," he said, "this Indian she tells

me your maw says when you hain't only twelve years old that you shouldn't ought to never marry no man. It hain't right, little matey, for no party to chart so far ahead a course for another human soul, even your maw. It hain't right. Your maw couldn't tell what wind and weather of fortune you'd encounter. All men hain't wicked. No. Besides, matey, how do I know that Ya-ada Indian didn't lie a whole lot. Anyway, them limitations hain't in reason, or right. I was laying here half dreaming, kind of drowsy thinking like. I thinks—I—"

Abruptly Dode Bradbury ceased speaking. One less innocent, guileless than Olo Carling might shrewdly have conjectured what Dode was thinking. But if she did suspect, she gave no outward sign.

"I know you're not a wicked man, Dode," she said, coming to him, trustingly placing her hand in his. "If you were to tell me all, the very all about yourself, why there wouldn't be anything so very wicked in it. Would there?"

For an instant Dode averted his gaze, gave his head a dubious shake. "No," he answered, "not so downright, scandalous wicked at that. Us whalers hain't perlite maybe, and we hain't lahdeda. They's drinking among whalers, and cussing, and some whalers is bilge rats, and some hain't. Far as I'm concerned personal, Olo, just don't think of what's went before. Just you give me a chance and you keep lookout on what I do from now."

"I will, Dode, I will. Let me go, just a minute. This would look funny through the window, you holding one of my hands, and me with a big silver salmon in the other. Wouldn't it?"

A grin overspread the broad countenance of the whaler. "It might. But hurry on back. I'd rather gab with you than eat even silver steak. Hurry back."

Olo ran to the kitchen, piled the big silver in a dishpan, hastily washed and dried her hands and returned. "What happened to you, Dode?" she asked drawing a chair up beside his bed.

"This here I make out is Cape Flattery, hain't it, American side, far point of the State of Washington?" he asked.

Olo nodded her head.

"Then I drifted a fairish way, he continued. "We was whaling off Barclay Sound, Vancouver Island. It's a good fifty mile from here. You see the gunner had harpooned a big blue, vitaled him we thought. The old man sent me overside in a work boat, to haggle a hole in the blubber and make fast the hook to hoist the blue alongside for flensing. But this whale he wasn't dead. No. He makes a side wind at me with his flipper, and he busts me and my boat complete. First thing I knowed I kind of come to, and I was hanging to the keel of my boat, and the whaler was fifty, maybe a hundred fathom on, tearing after the blue to get in another shot. I yells, but my cry is weak. Thinking me a goner, the boat went on, kept going. I picks up some drift, tied it to my boat keel with trawl line, and then I paddles and drifts, paddles and drifts, and makes harbor here final. That's all."

Olo listened with wide eyes to the simple, epic tale. She clasped and unclasped her hands. "Dode, I'm so glad you made it, safely, to—to this very beach here. What if you had landed somewhere else, some place far off? I'm so glad."

"Matey, glad! glad!"

This time he possessed himself of both her hands. Slowly he drew her toward him. A little she resisted. Finally he relaxed his hold. "Little matey," he said earnestly, "even if this Ya-ada didn't lie, that about you, what your mother said, hain't right, Olo. Now is it?"

This time she understood the thought that traversed the simple mind of the big whaler and her face flared crimson. Without a word she rose to her feet, turned, fairly rushed into the kitchen and slammed the door after her. For a moment she stood in the middle of the floor, looking about her. Then, unaccountably, she burst into tears.

III.

Slowly Dode Bradbury recovered his strength. The mauling administered by a seventy-five ton blue whale, the salt water that he had drawn into his lungs, the long

exposure to the chill winds of Fuca Straits, conspired to deplete even his giant powers. But finally he did manage to get about and went hobbling through the village where he was met on every hand by scowling looks and mutterings. Ya-ada had been at work among her tribesmen. And her word was none of the lightest. Daughter of a Tyee, a chief, renowned as a witch woman, her authority was second only to that of the Tyee and the medicine man.

After Dode had walked on, looking back over his shoulder he detected an Indian making cabalistic signs in the sands over which the whaler had just passed. A little friend of an Indian boy, naked as the day he was born, ran out from a fir bark lodge and began viciously stabbing Dode's shadow. The Indians, led by Ya-ada, were making strong, bad medicine to destroy the Boston man.

Even after Dode had wholly recovered, he lingered on. One reason for remaining was an innate, constitutional stubbornness. A score of times Ya-ada had secretly warned him to be gone. Another reason was—Olo.

Credulous, trusting as she was, Olo was not completely stupid. Soon she became aware of the universal hostility directed toward the big whaler. And presently she discovered the cause—Ya-ada.

" You're a wicked woman, Ya-ada," Olo expostulated. " He can't go yet. He must remain here, and we must be very, very kind to him until he recovers his strength."

At this juncture Dode emerged from the forest bearing upon his shoulder a fir log that would have been a burden for six men. Even the graven image face of old Ya-ada relaxed into a scornful grin.

" Strength!" exclaimed Ya-ada, pointing. " He's ten man strong now. He pass bear for strong."

Other days passed, a week. Several times Dode had remarked that he must be going soon, that he had decided to give up whaling, go to work as a sawyer in a Seattle or Everett mill. He had worked at the mill game, he said. But he made no definite move to leave, the reason thereof being—Olo.

Finally, however, in early September, he called Olo to him as he sat on the front step gazing out over the straits. " Olo," he said, " I'll be going. Got to. Hate to, but must. I can't lollygag on here no more. Getting soft, kind of foolish, too, about you, Olo. Come alongside, little matey. What if I was to go sawyering in a mill, Olo? I got a little *pil chickamin*—money—stowed. Say a three room cabin, carpet on the floor with lots of red in it, curtains at the winders, dishes in the cupboard that's blue—say, now Olo, I figger what Ya-ada said about what your maw said, was a lie. Even if it wasn't, no human has got the right to chart a course for another human. I'm going now, Olo, to get that job. I aim to get that cabin, carpet, dishes and all. These days here have been the happiest I ever seen, Olo.

" If more such days lay ahead for me and you, it's your say, and your ordering, Olo. Run over your reckoning, little matey, read me from your chart like your heart says to read. Matey—"

There sounded the shuffling of many feet, a creaking of boards as several persons mounted the rear piazza steps. Olo, a little pale, rose quickly and passed through the house. Just as she entered the kitchen, a clear, bell like note sounded from the stoop.

She opened the door and there stood Ya-ada, Peteous Totsgi, the Tyee of the village, and old Toltoem, the medicine man. In his hand, Toltoem held the ancient copper *tin-tin*, or ceremonial gong. As Olo stepped out upon the porch, Toltoem solemnly lifted the *tlah* stick and struck the *tin-tin* a second blow.

Swiftly, passionately, Ya-ada spoke to Olo in the Indian tongue. Then the three turned and filed solemnly toward the village.

A deathly pallor succeeded the slight paleness upon Olo's features. She could hardly speak when she rejoined Dode.

" Dode," she whispered hoarsely. " You must go, at once—and alone. The council of the tribe has said it. Listen to me, Dode. The Indian agent has gone to Seattle. The summer boats have stopped running. We are alone, we two white souls, here on Cape Flattery, with five hundred Indians. And they are ugly, Dode. I

know their temper. You must go, Dode! Please! Hurry!"

"So," demanded Dode, the gray-blue eyes glinting like the shining ends of a sailor's splicing irons. "So! Give ear, little matey. I hain't ever as yet been run out of no place by nobody. I don't aim to go stampeding off terrified by no Siwash. Final, Olo I aim to stay anyway a day or two. Here I be."

IV.

WHEN, toward evening, Ya-ada returned to the cabin, Dode was in the yard splitting wood. He held up a double bitted ax, shook it in playful threat at the witch woman and grinned mockingly. "Ahoy, Ya-ada, fetch a look at my tomahawk. Any warrior hereabouts wants a *pukpuk* (fight) leave him cut his hawse and come a rarin'."

Ya-ada regarded the white man for the moment, turned and made her way back to the village. Almost immediately, a score of Indians could have been seen, some armed with rifles, a few with spears, moving toward the woods, disposing themselves about like sentinels. An equal number quietly scattered along the beach. Then an Indian boy came to the cabin and summoned Olo.

Olo looked from the window to where Dode was still chopping wood, made as if to call to him, but thought better of it. Without a protesting word she slipped quietly from the side door, accompanied the Indian boy back to the village.

When Olo returned, darkness had fallen. Dode had lighted the little kerosene lamp, and was seated in the living room. Olo tiptoed into the kitchen. In her hand she grasped the slender haft of a spear the head of which was a bit of elk bone, oil rubbed, polished to a needle like point. "My Tyee," she whispered to herself. "My Tyee will be unafraid."

The spear in her hand, she entered the room where Dode was seated. For a long time she stood regarding him. The grin with which he had welcomed her faded to an unwonted expression of seriousness as he noted her troubled countenance.

"Dode," she said, stepping a pace nearer," strange customs, beliefs these Cape Indians have. I understand them. I have lived here always. Why I never had a white girl playmate, never a white friend even—until you came. Dode, you have been a killer of whales. For that, the Indians hate you, perhaps not for that alone, but it is at least an excuse. To the Flattery Indians, the blue whale is *tomanawous*, sacred. But though sacred, once a year the Indians slay a blue whale. It is a sacrifice, they claim, a gift from the Saghalie Tyee, God. Every year, one person is selected to slay the big blue whale. He puts out alone, in the darkness of very early morning, in a skin canoe with collapsible frame; his only weapon this, the elk bone spear. It is a heroic feat, Dode, the slaying thus of a seventy-five ton whale. I myself have seen the battle waged for hours, a fight that began at earliest light, lasted until high noon. I have seen the big blue crash in the sides of the frail canoe with a sweep of a fluke. I have seen the chosen Indian, in the water, readjust the frame of the canoe, careen it back and forth, spill out the greater portion of the water, clamber in and renew the hunt. It is a heroic deed, Dode, to slay a whale thus, with this slender elk bone spear."

A moment she paused, then continued. "No wonder, Dode, when one thinks of the peril, that the Indians have the further belief that they have. It is this, Dode, that if any unworthy person offers, or is selected to slay the whale, if that person has one single sin in his heart, why, the big blue whale will kill him. And I have seen this, too, come to pass, Dode. There was Kinootl, the bear hunter. He offered himself. The big blue whale crushed him with a single blow as a hungry seal will smash a sea urchin with its flipper. Even while Kinootl's broken body lay on the beach where it had drifted in, it became known that Kinootl had stolen the love of the wife of Georg Kwates, a hunter of beaver.

"And Kwinnum Ikt, he also died in the hunt, Kwinnum, it transpired, was a thief, had stolen fishing gear from old Toltoem."

"It is the belief, my big man, that no unworthy hand can cast the elk bone spear. Further it is the belief, and I believe it, that

a worthy hand that grasps the haft of the spear will instantly feel the power. A thrill like the trickling of snow water will run along the arm. The heart quickens. The breath comes from deeper in the breast. The thrill is the power that the Saghalie gives to the worthy, I believe it."

Slowly then, as if making some votive offering before a shrine, Olo advanced her hand and laid the elk bone spear in the grasp of Dode Bradbury.

Dode poised the spear, made as if to hurl it, balanced it again. Then he turned to Olo. "I'd say a party that went hunting a big blue with this pipe stem was a plumb idiot. Why, it hain't got balance, nor heft. Now you can take a thirty-five pound harpoon, Olo, why, when a man that knows heaves it, a man that's got the steam and the strength, why, that harpoon goes deep, and vitals your whale if so be the harpoon is accurate cast. But this trinket! A man would be a fool that hunted a blue with this."

By degrees Olo's head had sagged upon her breast. For a moment she was a picture of dejection, defeat. But she lifted her head finally.

"Dode, half a hundred armed Indians are patrolling the wood and the beach. It is decreed, my big boy, that you must put out in the canoe, and with this trinket slay the big blue whale. It is the decree. If you refuse—But, Dode, don't you feel the power? Grasp the spear thus. Don't you feel the thrill? I know you're worthy. You never lied to or deceived a woman, did you, Dode? Nor ever did you steal, did you, Dode? Don't you feel the power?"

Dode's jaw jarred loose and for an instant remained foolishly pendulous. Then it closed with a snap. His eyes took on a glint. He laid his great fingers about the haft of the spear, shook it on high. Olo clasped her hands and held her breath. Then he looked into the girl's troubled face and smiled, as again he shook the spear.

"Say now, Olo, I swear I do feel it, kind of a twitter like that runs along your arm. I feel it, sure. So that's the power. Kind of like when you touch an engine battery that's short circuited. I feel it. So that's the power. Looke, little matey, I hain't a plumb fool. These Indians is five hundred to our two. They got it on us. But don't you fret none. Now I got this power business straight, why I'll just naturally call these Siwashes. Sure. To-morrow morning I'll embark in this trick canoe, and I'll go voyaging out after whale. You caper back to these savages and you say that Dode feels the power, and he aims to put out and give a blue a terrible spanking with this here switch. I'm game, Olo, and ready to perform."

For an instant, looking up into his face, a great joy and relief, thrilled her. Then as suddenly, reason, deliberate reason swept away her fancy, leaving her cold with the same old dread and fear.

"No, Dode. It was foolish of me to expect you to believe this Indian witchery. Didn't you just fib a little to me, Dode, about feeling the power, just to comfort me? I know, I understand. For you to fight a whale with this spear would be like asking you to make your kill with a bow and arrow, when you'd never hunted but with a thirty-thirty rifle. I know, Dode. If you had a month to practice with the elk bone spear, it might be different. No, Dode, you're not going to make the sacrifice. There will be, must be some other way."

She bent her head in thought, while Dode regarded her worshipfully. This little girl, with her prescient eyes of love had seen through his little subterfuge. He reached out and laid a hand on her shoulder. "Just the same, Olo, little matey, I'll go to the front and have a rassle with this whale. Chances is—"

But she interrupted him with an eager clutching at his tarpaulin coat. "I know, Dode. I know! Years ago a whale boat, white man drifted in. In the boat were two harpoons, the big iron harpoons that the Boston men use. Those harpoons are still in a shed at the end of the village. Dode, listen."

On tiptoe she whispered in his ear. "You are to leave before daybreak, in the skin canoe, with only the elk bone spear. I will steal away. Down beach I will hide my own canoe, and in that canoe I will have one of the heavy Boston whale har-

poons. When you are gone, I will put out, paddle straight to the point, and give you the iron harpoon. The Indians will never know. Then, my big boy—"

Her voice faltered. She leaned toward him weakly. He rove one of his great arms about her, drew her tight. Then he kissed her.

V.

GRAY figures flitted here and there along the beach. Upshore, a fire gleamed. Gravely the old men of the council passed the elk bone spear from hand to hand, then dispatched a young brave to carry the spear to the giant white man who stood upon the beach alongside a frail, skin covered canoe. The brave took a look in the canoe to satisfy himself that the white man had no gear or weapon, then handed over the spear. Dode thrust off the canoe, climbed in, and with a powerful swirling stroke of the paddle shot the frail craft out into the darkness.

Swiftly the young brave returned to the fire. "*Yah-ka klatawa,*" he said. "He is gone."

From the darkness, Ya-ada appeared, and elbowed her way through the throng. One withered hand she held above the flames. In her grasp were three hairs from a human head. Her thin lips moved as she uttered her heathen incantation. Then she dropped the hairs into the flames where they writhed an instant and dissolved into nothingness.

"Now he will surely die," said Ya-ada.

Down the beach a distance, Olo waited. When she heard the sound of the dipping paddle, she turned, flew down the shore. A distance beyond the border of the village, a canoe lay drawn up in the shelter of some brush. In the bottom of this canoe lay the rusted old harpoon. Olo laid hold of the canoe and started to shove it toward the water. Just as its prow touched the water, three Indians sprang from hiding, laid ungentle, brutal hands upon the girl and dragged her fighting like a wildcat toward the fire where the council were still gathered.

In amongst the redly silhouetted figures they thrust her. "It is as we said," declared one of the braves. "We were watching. We saw her place the iron spear in the canoe. She would have gone to his aid but for our watchfulness.

Guttural words passed the lips of the council. Finally Toltoem spoke. "For this act of treachery, white girl, you shall be punished. The old women of the village shall paint your face black, the color of lies, treachery. You shall be taken away to the hills of deep snow. There, under guard, you shall stay until the next season of the killing of a whale. If you try to escape, a spear thrust shall set you free."

Many hands laid hold of the wretched girl. She was dragged into a nearby cabin, the door slammed shut and propped in place. As sign and symbol of her perfidy, the iron harpoon that had been found in her canoe was thrust into the sand before the cabin door.

An hour passed. Then came three old members of the tribe. The prop was knocked from the door. The old women entered. One seized the girl, while the others made ready to daub her fair face with the hideous black pigment.

But the spirit of the girl endured. Fiercely she fought her tormentors. At last a brave was summoned to assist. While the Indian held her, the old women again made ready to apply the paint of shame, while half a dozen other Indians looked on from the doorway, uttering abusive words.

Still Olo fought her captors. Once she broke away and ran from the cabin. But the red brim of the sun was now shining over the Straits. A hundred Indians witnessed her flight, and half as many joined in the chase. Back to the cabin they dragged her.

One daub of the black pigment a wrinkled, haggish Klootchman had smeared upon Olo's cheek, when a vast body hurled itself among the Indians clustered about the door. Then a great hand possessed itself of the harpoon that was sticking in the earth. The harpoon swung itself in dizzy circles. Presently what Indians remained before the cabin, lay stretched about the ground. The remainder were in full flight.

Dode Bradbury thrust an angry, red face through the door. A sweep of his hand, and the brave, and the three Klootchmen

were flung back against the wall. One arm about the half fainting Olo, Dode, with the other, extricated from the hip pocket of his tarpaulin pants, a flaming red bandanna handkerchief. Very tenderly he wiped the smear of black from Olo's pale cheek.

Still in his arms, Olo looked up with eyes of love and wonderment. What had happened? How had Dode, giant that he was, ever traversed this hostile village without receiving a treacherous knife or spear thrust,

"Just you come on with me, little matey," said Dode, grinning as he guessed her perplexity. "Just you come on and fetch a look."

Down to the beach they went where scores of Indians were congregated, pointing, shaking their heads, muttering.

Olo looked to where Dode pointed. She snuggled herself up to him, both her hands clutching his big arm. "My Tyee," she whispered, smiling up at him gloriously. "My Tyee that was worthy."

In the offing, rolling on the swell, was a seventy-five ton blue whale. Just abaft the port side flipper, the elk bone spear was buried almost to the middle of the haft.

"I figured something had happened when you didn't come on with the harpoon, Olo. Then I just naturally thinks that what a Siwash can do, I can do, and I just paddles on, and I make out a blue feeding, and I puts alongside, and I heaves the old spear for all I got in my system. That's all."

For a time he stood gazing down at her fondly. "It hain't quite all neither. I and you is going to pull our hook, Olo. Yes. Pack up your ditty bag. This hain't a fitten place for you, never was. Listen to what I whisper—three room cabin—carpet with lots of red into it—dishes that's blue—. Come on, little matey, better be packing your dunnage."

As Dode and Olo made their way down the beach, the start of a twenty mile walk to where they could catch a steamer for Seattle, Ya-ada appeared on the front veranda. A half articulate, broken cry she sent after them. Olo heard, turned her head and waved farewell. Ya-ada lifted both her own wrinkled hands, held them palm outwards. Again Olo waved. Then she and Dode walked on down the hard, smooth sand.

"Poor Ya-ada," said Olo. "I'm so sorry. Do you know the sign, Dode, the two palms spread toward you? It's an Indian sign, Dode, and means, 'good luck go with you, and the blessings of Saghalie Tyee.'"

FRIENDS

I THOUGHT I had a faithful friend in Pleasure,
A comrade I could trust through every ill,
Who would not scorn to hymn a hopeful measure,
If, sick at heart, I toiled against my will—
But when, alas, Misfortune overtook me,
And gagged and bound me to the cart of Care,
Oh, then it was inconstant Joy forsook me,
And left me at the frenzy of Despair.

I felt I had a deathless foe in Sorrow,
An enemy equipped to stage a crime,
Who would not halt at anything to borrow
The vilest tortures of devising Time—
But when my soul was one with melancholy,
When everywhere I sought, in vain, a friend,
Ah, it was Grief, the flouted slave of Folly,
Who stood by me, and to the bitter end!

Ralph M. Thomson.

The Stolen Necklace

By ERIC D. WALROND

"OLD TIMER!" he shouted. "Old Timer! A word with you!"

Santiago did not hear him, or, if he did, showed no signs of it. He was walking down the prado — that strip of macaroni stone which, like a flame of blue flint spawning in the spine of a flying fish, divided the fingers of Cristobal and Aspinwall.

It was early in the morning. The commissary on the edge of the American border was just opening its doors. Opposite, orbs of variegated light danced on the effervescent surface of Limon Bay.

Near the sea wall and back of the railroad station early traders from the costal provinces had begun to unload their homely cargoes. San Andreans, Arrouwacks, Cayman Islanders, Caribs, Cape Verdians, half-breeds, squaws, squat, brown, marionette-like, out of their deeply laden *cayukas* and sloops bartered granadillas and golden apples; Hacya and Mora, sea eggs and cimitoes, shaddocks, and "fat pork," sowersops, papaws, cashews, mullets — mullets and mackerels and shining dolphins that were a mixture of gold and alabaster white. Crowding around the sea wall were obstreperous Creoles of noble *jefes* arguing, buying.

On such a canvas Santiago gazed, unmindful of the United States marine running behind him, breathlessly waving and shouting: "Old Timer! I say, Old Timer—"

"Old Timer — say — just a second." Again came the call.

Santiago about faced to find himself looking into the eyes of a United States marine, out there on the prado, that hot, simmering morning. He was just a marine, white, breathless, khaki clad. He was molded according to a type that rose simultaneously in the minds of the dusky *Panamenos* by simply mentioning the word "Marine." To Santiago he represented something strong, powerful, alien. Something definite. Small wonder then that Santiago, ambassador—duly Latinized—of that nomadic tribe of Indian Occidentals, the Barbadians, looked askance at the friendly arm the marine placed on his shoulder.

"Let's walk on, not to attract attention," the marine said. "I want to talk to you."

It would be well just here to point out that Santiago is a Castilianization of that very Zebedeean James. Santiago was a West Indian negro who had wallowed so voluminously in Latin civilization—or uncivilization—that it was almost a crime even to think of him as less than a native *Panameno*. It had only taken him six years to absorb completely the native point of view, to dabble in its politics, of which science he was by no means a dilettante, to marry a native *señorita,* who had died and left him a widower, and hobnob with some of the country's best liked *tinterillos*. In fact, Santiago was one of the handsomest foreign blacks in Aspinwall. There was an extraordinary mating of the color and mystery and the spiritual mysticism of Egypt with the sheer treelike mightiness of Africa in the finely carved lines of his powerful bronze body. Of a dark black complexion, with somber eyes and white, glistening teeth, Santiago besides possessed a veneer of that omnipotent thing called personality. Santiago by all means had personality.

As the marine walked along the prado with him, Santiago pondered the anomaly over. What could he want? Usually a marine is never cordial with a native, except he wanted him to buy him a drink or ask him to show him where such and such a house was. In consequence of which Santiago was determined to be shrewd and uncommunicative to the last.

"You live around here, don't you?" the marine inquired.

Santiago shook his head. "No sabe," he said. "Me no sabe."

"Say, you speak English, don't you?"

"Me no sabe." Santiago shook his head. "Me no sabe."

"God Almighty!"

Suddenly an idea occurred to Santiago. He turned. A trifling smile lit up his dark, shining cheeks.

"You wantee *ron Bolivar*—drink?" And he put an imaginary glass to his lips.

"No." The marine frowned. "Get that out of your head."

They were now by the railroad station near the flagman's hut. Going behind it the marine grew desperate as he drew the reluctant Santiago out of sight of passers-by.

"You've got to understand me," the marine hissed. "I must talk to you." "Nope, Santiago—"

"Cut that stuff out. I ain't going to do nothing to you. Listen, partner, it is just this way. I am a friend of yours, sabe?"

Santiago capitulated and volunteered in English: "Go ahead, what you want?"

"Now you're talking sense," the other rejoined. "That's the dope for me."

He was a nice fellow, Santiago concluded, admiring the white man's crystal blue eyes, gold, sunburned skin, and tight, strong lips.

"Here's the idea," he explained, "I just got in on that transport out there in the bay. Lot of us soldiers bound for the barracks up in Gorgona. You know where that is, I guess."

"Yes," Santiago put in, "two stations above Culebra. Near the mouth of the Chagres."

"Well, we are leaving to-morrow. But to-night the gang is coming ashore and there'll be hell's bells in town. Now, I've got to be with that gang, but I'm broke. I lost everything I had on the way down. Rotten luck! And I ain't got a nickel coming to me. But I got to be with that gang to-night at Brady's, and here's how I am going to do it."

The marine unbuttoned his coat, dug into an inside pocket, and extracted a small square black box. With trembling fingers he pressed the spring and the box flew open. Lost in a world of bewilderment Santiago's eyes rolled until only the whites, in the

black damask setting of his immobile face, showed. He was visibly affected. Taking out the contents of the box the marine held out in the clear tropic sunlight a necklace, fully fifteen inches long, of glowing, sparkling pearls.

"That"—the marine dangled it on his wrist—"is the most magnificent pearl necklace in the entire world. Up North any pawnbroker will let you have eight thousand berries easily on it. It came originally from the sunken caves of Polynesia. Its history reads like a page from the 'Arabian Nights.' It first was owned by an English adventurer who had spent half of his life in the South Seas. He kept it in the family chest for a hell of a long time. Then he died and his son got it. I forget the name of the family now. Well, this son, who was an earl or something, went out to Egypt and got mixed up in native affairs there and one of them Hindu high priests stole it from him. It rested in a Mohammedan temple for nearly half a century. Then along comes an American millionaire who pays a fortune for it and takes it out to his place in Montana. Now in Montana—"

Enough. Santiago was bewitched by the radiant glow of it—this priceless string of pearls basking in the shadows of a rich and colorful past. It was gorgeous.

"And that is how I got it," the marine ended simply.

Santiago took the pearls in his hands. He remembered, years ago, he had acted as guide to a party of English tourists who had gone to Darien. On the crest of a hill he had looked down on the shimmering Pacific. Later at Palo Seco, the leper colony, off Toboga, one of the ladies one morning had picked up on the beach a pearl as large as a guinea bird's egg. Such a beauty it was! So rich and priceless! And now in his hands was a string of them—not one, but at least twenty-five to thirty of them!

Santiago shrewdly appraised it. "How much you want for it?"

"Oh, I don't know." The marine shrugged his shoulders. "Give me what you got, I don't care. I am up against it and I got to be with that gang to-night. Only chance to get some honest-to-goodness Balboa beer before we get sent up to that malaria country—and we won't be back for another three months. Damn, it's hell on a marine! Three months in that mosquito hole! All I want is some beer—beer—take it and give me what you got."

Santiago's house of dreams fell with a vivid crash. All he had with him was fourteen dollars and thirty-six cents. How unfortunate! Perhaps he could take him to the *Imprenta* where he worked and ask the boss to let him have— But the marine might change his mind on the way.

"Come on, take it out, how much have you got? Give me what you got."

Slowly, reluctantly, Santiago took out the fourteen dollars and thirty-six cents. "There—that's all I got."

"That's fair enough," the other declared, much to Santiago's amazement. "You can have the necklace, Old Timer. Good luck."

Pocketing it, Santiago lost no time in crossing over to Aspinwall. If there was anything wrong with the deal they'd have to come over there and get him!

II.

TWILIGHT of the very day saw Santiago dolled up in a white shining crocus bag suit, a jippi jappa hat, spotless canvas shoes, and a stride after Lothario's own heart. Going to a dilapidated tenement on Bolivar and Third Streets he ran up a flight of dusty steps, on which grew tiny patches of moss and "Jumbie trees." Here Santiago met Etelina, a pretty, black Jamaica girl, stars shining out of her lovely black eyes. On the top of the stairs he paused—frowned.

As usual there was a gang of men there. It was Thursday—Santiago had forgot that. Lolling along the balcony were Jamaica negroes — gangs of them — sheiks from Matches Lane, Kingston, who worked on the way down to Savanilla and Santa Marta on fruit ships as painters and stevedores and baggage handlers. At Aspinwall they always got off to pay their respects to Etelina's mother, a short, fat, black woman, who, before she migrated to the isthmus, had kept a "bar" frequented by longshoremen in the heart of the Jamaica ten-

derloin. Ostensibly they brought down to her baskets of ackee and yuca and jars of tamarind sirup and other Jamaica fruits and produce. On the other hand, wagging tongues in the shadows of the dingy *callecitas* along Bolivar and Third Streets whispered that it was not altogether a platonic relationship between them and Etelina's mother.

In spite of which Santiago loved Etelina—loved the very earth she walked on. It had come about in a singularly romantic way. One day while watching the *bomberos* parade he had seen her for the first time leaning over the balcony. One glimpse of her and Santiago murmured: "Gee, I could love a girl like that. She is so—dainty." And he went on.

Now, after years of silent devotion, Santiago had emerged into a full fledged lover. And Etelina had blossomed into the comeliest black girl in Aspinwall. Other girls, octoroons, quadroons, native *señoritas,* sometimes intoxicated him, but always Santiago drifted back to Etelina, to the glowing tempestuous beauty of her. And Etelina had a way, this lovely black girl, of toying with him, of weaving her subtle charms about him. It was voodooistic. Other girls flattered him; told him he had such a handsome figure; but not Etelina. With her, to all intents and purposes, he was just a man, neither more nor less. It piqued him.

"Oh, you look splendid to-day, Etelina," Santiago murmured. "Every day you seem to grow prettier and prettier."

Etelina was always skeptical about compliments. Elevating one of her eyebrows she looked at Santiago—at Santiago admiring her.

"You are such a noisy flatterer," she sighed modestly. "I can hardly believe a word you say, Santiago."

In spite of which there crept into her cheeks a crimson spot, and Etelina's eyes dropped to the ground.

It was the way she wore her clothes. Other girls, neighbors of hers, Spanish *señoritas* and West Indian brunettes, splashed color all over themselves—wallowed in it. In Etelina's world silks and satins and bright colors had no place. She hated adornment. All she wore was a white violet flecked piqué dress, cream silk stockings, black patent leather shoes—and a stray rose stuck in the side of her well poised head. All Etelina had to do to attract attention was to walk slowly and alone through the park on a dusky moonlit night and let the rays of the moon dance on her face, on her arms and shoulders—let it absorb and reflect the lights and shadows of her golden brown satin skin.

"Come, it is almost time for me to go back," Etelina said to Santiago as she bade her folks good-by and sped down the steps with him, "I have been away nearly two days. Mrs. Kanike will be worrying about me—"

Up past the smoking dump, through the black, downy swamp, across the bosom of the billowing sea to New Cristobal, the American colony, Santiago and Etelina rode. Over the sea the forests of Coco Té perched on the horizon. Near the water's edge donkey carts, a dog's bark, straggling Spanish peasants on the road back to the city, the mooing of the cows in the abattoir, a hunter embarking for the deer country, fishermen placidly smoking their pipes and mooning at the slowly rising tide. Near the sea shoals of turtle nests, emerald crusts on the water, nets, cow skulls, and—beyond the skeleton of a schooner wrecked on the amethyst shores of Margarita.

Night wrapt its cloak about the Gopher Prairie form of New Cristobal. In the cottages library lamps burned. White canal diggers were outside on the wire screened porch smoking or reading or rocking or enjoying the night.

Santiago and Etelina crept up to one. "Have you got your key, Etelina?"

"Yes. I guess Mrs. Kanike is out. There is no light—"

Inside, Etelina let Santiago into the pantry. She turned on the light, and Santiago, for the millionth time, ejaculated at the dazzling whiteness of the tile floor and the general spick and spanness of it. He sat on a chair, crossed his legs, and smiled at Etelina as she came out of the room.

"I have got a surprise for you, Etelina," Santiago whispered. "Come over here and sit beside me."

"Don't you want me to hot you some of that *sancoche,* Santiago—"

"By George, yes!"

"I boiled it for the master," Etelina cried, "but I want you to taste it, Santiago, it is so good."

"Bring it out here, Etelina," Santiago anticipated the treat with a smack of the lips. "Let the noble and worthy Santiago sample the *sancoche* that the beautiful Etelina, with all her skill, boiled for the honorable American, Don Jota Kanike."

After the proper sampling of which, Santiago again relapsed into seriousness as he wiped his lips, admired Etelina again, and felt for the necklace in his pocket.

"I said I have got a surprise for you, Etelina," Santiago repeated, fondling the buttons on his coat.

"What is it, Santiago, *mi novio,*" Etelina softly answered.

With the air of a connoissieur, he looked at Etelina's star-lit eyes, at the mound of black flowing hair on her head, that often reminded him of zephyrs stealing up from the bowels of the sea on a black moonless night; at the curves of her comely crimson lips; down at the contours of her shapely bronze neck; at the depths of her swelling womanly bosom.

Santiago felt for the necklace in his pocket. "Etelina, lady of my heart, dream of my youth, keeper of my soul, I present you this—as a slight token of my undying love and affection for you."

He rose, unfastened the necklace, put it around Etelina's neck—and grabbed his hat. Before the girl could realize what he had done, Santiago, the lordly suitor that he was, poised on the threshold of the pantry, threw out his fingers like a Georgia negro preacher blessing his awe-inspired flock and said farewell to Etelina.

"May God bless you," Santiago piously whispered. "May He bring eternal rest and peace to your soul."

Out in the street Santiago pranced like an unbridled mare. "Paste!" He sang and danced and two-stepped, "Paste! For fourteen dollars and thirty-six cents I've got Etelina for the rest of my life! Fourteen dollars and thirty six! And that marine thought he was putting something over on me! Fourteen dollars and thirty-six cents!"

And Santiago, quite uncontrollably, waltzed and one-stepped the latest Spanish madrigal.

In the pantry, Etelina danced and cried at her wonderful fortune. She took the necklace off, put it back on again, felt it, admired it, looked at it on her bosom—

"Oh, Santiago," she murmured, "you are a darling! How I love you!" Oh, if Mrs. Kanike could see her now! "Mrs. Kanike," Etelina shouted to the empty pantry. "Look what I got." No, she wasn't in. If the girls near where she lived could only see her now! If Vi and Maggie and her sister Zenobia, whom her mother had "given" to an American lady going to Boston, could only see it—her lover's beautiful gift to her!

All of a sudden the door of the pantry slammed open. A man, a gruff, mountain peasant type, with a machete dangling at his hip, strode in. Murder curled on his tight contemptuous lips that shone like a strip of onion skin.

Etelina stopped, open mouthed, as if asphyxiated, the necklace lying in the palm of her frightened hand.

"Give me that!" he swore, seizing the necklace, "and remember, if you cry out, I'll cut your blooming throat."

He was gone.

III.

In the morning Santiago blasphemed at the sound of some one pounding on his door. "*Que cara!* Open! Who is it?"

"It is me, Etelina," a voice cried faintly.

"Etelina! Wait!" Santiago shouted, "Don't open—" There he was, half-dressed, his clothes scattered all over the room, his hair uncombed, plasterless, with the skull cap he slept with still adorning his head—oh, why did she come so early?

Racing into a dressing robe Santiago, sartorially perfect, met Etelina on the balcony.

"Oh, Santiago," Etelina flew into his arms sobbing, "oh, *mi novio,* what will you think of me?"

"Come, Etelina, darling, tell me, what is it?"

" Oh, I am wicked," the girl sobbed, " I am a wicked wretch. Do anything you like with me."

" Tell me, Etelina," Santiago frowned, " explain! What is it? Did you go out after I left you last night? Tell me what happened, sweetheart."

" No, it wasn't that " sobbed poor Etelina as she threw her arms around Santiago's neck, " I lost the necklace—"

Lightning flashed! Thunder roared! Fire and brimstone swept across the face of the earth! Soot decorated the amphitheater of heaven!

" What, lost it? You must be crazy, Etelina?"

" Oh," and the girl hung on to him for dear life, " oh, forgive me, Santiago, darling, listen to what I have to say. Oh, don't turn away, Santiago. Bear with me, my love!"

" Last night," Etelina snuffled, " when you left me I was so happy, I was admiring the necklace in the pantry when a man, a robber came in. Oh, Santiago, can't you see how much I care for you? Oh, Santiago, my heart bleeds to tell you. This man, a raw nasty fellow, I think he came from the slaughter house. He had on a leather suit and he had a big cutlass. He came in and said, ' Hands up!' Oh, I nearly fainted, Santiago. ' Hands up,' he said, ' and don't say a word else I'll kill you.' And he grabbed the necklace and went like that.

" I cried and cried until I didn't know what to do. I wanted to come straight to you—but I was afraid. It was too dark. And when Mrs. Kanike came in it was too late to do anything. So I reported it this morning to the police. I went to the *cuartel* and told the *teniente* all about it. I was frantic.

" I explained the whole thing to him and he said that they are looking for a man who has been prowling about the American quarters at New Cristobal. And the zone police are after him, too, Santiago. So it might help, *mi novio*. We might get it back." And Etelina sobbed and hid her face on Santiago's manly breast.

" Tell me you love me, Santiago," Etelina suddenly looked up, tears in her star-lit eyes. " Tell me you don't hate me, Santiago—oh, hug me, my love."

And Santiago, very reluctantly, you know, held Etelina close to his bosom.

" Oh, you hate me," Etelina sobbed, " you don't like me any more. Tell me, do you really love me, Santiago?"

" I—do."

" And you will always love me, honey?"

" I—will."

" And you won't think I am careless and good for nothing and you wouldn't think I didn't value the necklace, sweetheart?"

" I—won't."

" And, tell me, Santiago dear, you are not going to worry over the lost necklace? Such a priceless thing—and here I let a robber come and steal it! Oh, Santiago, tell me you will not worry about it! Tell me you're not brooding over it! Santiago, dear—"

" I—am not worrying over it."

" And let me hug you tighter, Santiago, because I will work and help to pay you for it. No, don't interrupt me, sweetheart, I am determined to do it! I won't let you lose so much money on account of careless, wretched me!"

" Well—"

" And you'll love me, Santiago, and come often to see me—and marry me, Santiago?" And after an affirmative pause, " Come kiss me, Santiago."

And as Santiago, not over reluctantly left Etelina and slowly stepped out into the white, moon-flecked street, he kept repeating to himself, " for God's sake! Look what fourteen dollars and thirty six cents can do! Think of it! Fourteen dollars and thirty six cents! And here's Etelina, the beautiful Etelina, the nicest, the finest, the bestest girl in the whole damn republic, wild, just wild about me. And all for a cheesy fourteen dollars and thirty six cents."

And Santiago waltzed and cakewalked and danced *plenas* to the music of the owls and bats and the memory of Etelina's endearing caresses.

And while Santiago, lying snugly in his bed, dreamed of the magic pearls and of fourteen dollars and thirty six cents and of Etelina's head-whirling kisses, a La Garta,

adventurer with a machete dangling on his hip slipped through a dingy shadowy *callecita* on Bottle Alley to the secret chambers of an Assyrian pawnbroker and receiver of stolen goods. After examining it the pawnbroker quite cynically threw the necklace back to the stranger and curtly snapped. "Fifteen hundred dollars."

"Oh, make it two thousand," the other bargained, "you know it's worth six times that much to you—"

"Not a penny more," said the truculent one.

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it I'll take it down to Estenoz. He is the best *valuador* of jewels in the whole damn republic."

"Here," the other grew dictatorial, "why don't you guys get some sense? Go ahead and take it to Estenoz. Go ahead! And he'll tell you it's worth twenty five thousand dollars, won't he? And then he'll ask you where you picked it up at, won't he? And you'll say you forget and he'll call his brother on the phone. And of course you know his brother is *Jefe De La Policia?*

"That's the trouble with you guys," the pawnbroker ladled out philosophy. "You know damn well if you keep that necklace, before long you'll give it to some woman who won't appreciate it. Why don't you get some sense in your head and take the fifteen hundred bucks I am giving you—"

"All right," the La Garta person decided, "I'll take it."

And he took the fifteen hundred bucks.

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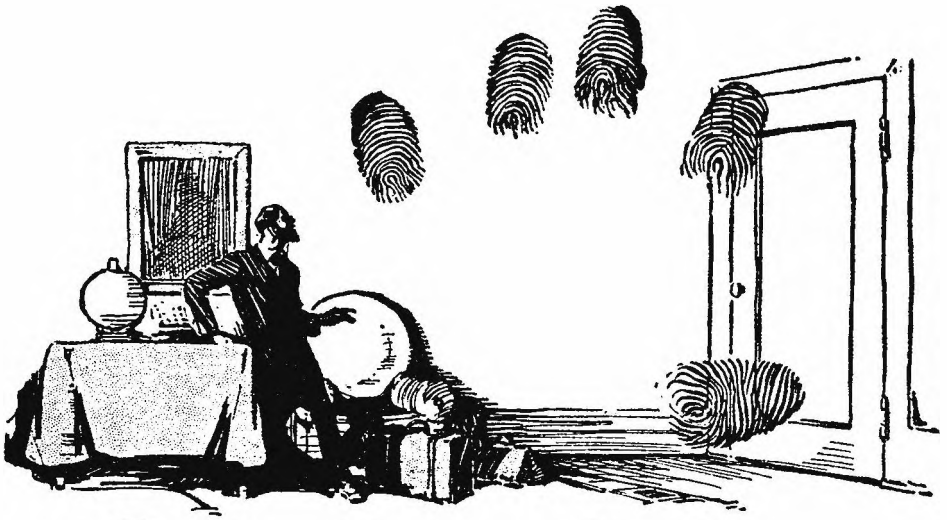
MY OWN KIN

TO longing I am suddenly a prey—
I want to talk to my own kin to-day;
I want to brush aside the weary miles,
And fill the silences with words and smiles.
I want to hear them speak; to ask them whether
They think this queer, uncertain kind of weather
Will make a difference with next summer's crops,
Affect the grass, or spoil the clover tops.

I want to know if they have set Old Red
Upon that nest behind the barrel in the shed;
I want to hear how much their apples brought,
And just how many woodchucks Towser's caught.
We planted pear trees where the paths divide—
I want to find out if they lived or died.
I want to ask about old Mrs. Brown,
And all the happenings of the little town.

You say I could learn all these things by letter.
I know, but there would still remain the fetter
Of that grim silence, which somehow, to-day
Refuses firmly to be driven away.
And all at once the city's splendors pall,
The city's pleasures now no longer call,
Since to my heart this longing has crept in—
To-day, I want to talk to my own kin!

Ida M. Thomas.



Stolen Shoes

By FLORENCE M. PETTEE

"YOU can talk about your super-sleuths and your master criminals. But you can take it from me that old Nemesis plays a bigger hand in crime than any one else. Just listen in on this one."

Steven Mordaunt leaned back and puffed away complacently. The big member of the metropolitan police was in a genial mood. He was one of the best men on the force. So when he started reminiscencing, you were certain to hear interesting things.

"Did you ever hear of the Trammers' crime?" Mordaunt began.

I hadn't. But I was just in from Rio and much can happen in three years.

Here is the odd story as Steven Mordaunt told it.

It began with Saul Trammers. He came to Widelawns in the fall of '15. He was a prosperous, dignified-looking fellow of forty or thereabouts. He came both to invest in some paying proposition in Widelawns and to settle there. He placed on deposit a comfortable sum in the First National. He arrived in Widelawns at about the time of the '15 building boom, and so entered on the ground floor. In two years he had realized heavily on his investments, bought himself a comfortable house in the suburbs and was looked upon as one of the coming big figures in Widelawns' affairs. Two years after this, he became one of the directors of the First National, was active in church circles, headed the list of charitable subscriptions, and—well, Widelawns congratulated itself on such an acquisition as Trammers.

A year after he had been made a director in the First National, Trammers developed a throat affection. Several specialists told him that a change of climate was imperative. So the long and short of it was that Trammers, at the height of his prosperity, was forced to tie up his affairs and prepare to leave for his health. He took this step with his usual methodical care. He sold his real estate, and converted all possible property into negotiable securities, cash, or

rare gems, diamonds mostly. Trammers was a judge of precious stones.

He gave out that he had already booked his passage for Australia and that he would sail on the thirteenth of November. Widelawns rose to the occasion. Trammers still occupied his home, although the servants had been placed elsewhere and the house was sold. But the new owners—citizens of Widelawns and admirers of Trammers—had courteously permitted him to live on there until he sailed. So a group of leading citizens planned a big reception to Trammers, to be held at his erstwhile residence two days before he sailed.

This was how Slippy Boggs enters the story. Slippy was as slick as his name implies. He had a record out in Kansas. He had played the part of confidence man and embezzler, among others. In addition, there was a dark story about a murder in which he was alleged to have been involved. A big criminal lawyer had provided Slippy with an all-wool alibi which the severest grilling could not break down. Then Slippy had decamped for parts unknown. He lived by his wits fairly comfortably. But for a year business had been languishing. Slippy was fastidious in his tastes. He didn't like his boarding house and traveling à la hoof and train irked him. He wanted a high-priced car with racy lines and eight cylinders under the hood.

Now the departing send-off to Trammers and the story of this solid citizen in the papers suggested to Slippy's fertile mind a scheme. The more he slept on the daring idea, the more holeproof it seemed. So Slippy attended the reception to Trammers as a reporter from one of the nearby newspapers. As he was a consummate actor, he managed to look the part. In his cub apprenticeship to crime he had done several vaudeville turns, the rapid change and quick make-up stuff. He had an excellent control of his facial muscles and was no mean mimic. These talents had served him well in more than one previous disguise—so Slippy passed unquestioned as a scribe. His shrewd eyes learned the entire lay-out of the house and grounds. He watched Trammers with leechlike care and took flashlights of him with almost youthful enthusiasm. Trammers, all unconscious, only beamed, plumed himself and posed gladly with a group of leading citizens. Slippy also learned the exact location of the ponderous safe which was built into the wall on the second floor bedroom—for the citizens of Widelawns had been given the freedom of the house. To be sure, there were a couple of plain-clothes men from the Widelawns' force casually walking about. But these minions of the law hardly worried Slippy.

He was among the last to leave, so thorough was he. He hung on Trammers' every word and set it down in an official-looking notebook. He watched the man's manner, a trick of his head, with the closest attention. And when he left the house he felt hugely pleased with himself. It was the biggest thing he had ever planned, and would succeed despite the sheer daring in back of it.

II.

THE fateful night arrived. On the morrow Trammers would set sail for Australia, according to schedule. And it was on this night, Slippy had made sure to learn that Trammers would stow away in his safe a fortune which was to be taken with him. Trammers was almost foolhardy in fearlessness.

Slippy had given notice in his boarding house. He was leaving that night—going West. He gave out that he had accepted a clerkship in a woolen house. Then he retired at dusk to his room. He brought out an old lacquer box and set it on the shabby bureau under the glaring electric light. Then he produced an envelope containing prints of the flashlights which he had developed himself—for full safety. Slippy was taking no chances, however remote.

Trammers had a type face; pronounced nose, heavy mustache, peculiar mode of hair-cut, tortoise-rimmed spectacles. Slippy laughed scornfully. Oh, he was easy! Not even a wig would be required.

Slippy trimmed his heavy black hair in a startling semblance to Trammers's style. He spent much time with the beard and when he was finished had firmly affixed the hirsute growth. It would defy the closest inspection.

Slippy paid much attention to the heavy, bushy eyebrows. They were another striking characteristic not difficult to imitate. He covered a front tooth with gold-leaf. Trammers showed an eye-tooth made of gold when he spoke. Slippy next donned the tortoise-rimmed spectacles and a suit of clothes he had been at some pains to procure from one of Trammers's own closets. He laughed at the ease with which he had lifted the suit. And he beamed on the result when he surveyed himself critically in the merciless, unshaded light. He was Trammers to the teeth.

He addressed himself in Trammers's slow drawl, raising his head in a manner which he had studied so carefully the night before. Then he walked past the mirror with Trammers's long, loping stride, one shoulder slightly raised.

Slippy was absolutely satisfied with this dress rehearsal. His trunk and suit cases he had checked to Omaha. They were already *en route*. What were a trunk and suit cases? Besides, the things might do a pal some good. For he had sent his claim checks to Jim Rutby out there. Jim was a member of the profession who had once done him a good turn. Jim would merely claim the luggage and keep his mouth shut.

So Slippy descended via the fire-escape into the dark alley below the cheap boarding house. When he emerged into the light swinging a gold-headed cane with a monogram S. T.—he was Saul Trammers beyond doubt.

He knew that Mr. Trammers was dining at home alone that night with no one in the house. He had declared that he was a bit tired from the constant jollifications given him—that he would retire early and would not see any one. A caterer sent up his dinner.

So Slippy kept from sight. He helped himself to the automobile which usually stood neglected in a side street for the night. Soon he was speeding away, his hat pulled low. He deserted the car two blocks away from Trammers's house. No one could possibly associate its discovery with the departure of Mr. Trammers for Australia.

Slippy crept through a break in the hedge at the rear of the house. He had taken an impression of the basement keyhole the night of the reception. It was but the work of a moment to force the key out on the inside, apply his new one, and enter. He carefully replaced the real key in the lock and turned it.

He listened carefully. It was only ten o'clock. If Trammers had carried out his plans he had already retired.

Slippy crept noiselessly through the corridor with which he had familiarized himself. He pushed the swinging-door to the dining room. A shaft of light from the arc outside showed him the remainder of the meal on the table. So far, so good. Then Slippy unerringly crept up the thickly carpeted stairs. Once a motor roared by with an open cut-out. Slippy wondered if Trammers were asleep and had been aroused by it.

Without untoward incident he reached the all-important room—that room housing an independent fortune in the great safe—and Trammers.

He listened outside the door. Stentorian snores fell upon his ears. Was there ever a safer plan?

Slippy slunk in. He brought from a pocket a bottle of chloroform. He had snatched a napkin from the dining room table. This he fashioned into a cone. He took a plain handkerchief from his own pocket. After saturating it with the chloroform, he pressed it firmly to Trammers's nose, then clapped the cone over it when he was sure that Trammers was helpless.

As I say, Slippy was fastidious. He shrank from blood or butchery. He watched Trammers quietly with a hand on his pulse. Minute by minute ticked by. At last, after what seemed an age the wrist was nerveless. He then stuffed the chloroformed handkerchief and cone into one of the pockets of the dead man's pyjamas and surveyed the result. A painless death, swift and certain, with no ugly telltale reminders.

Although Slippy was of the dead man's height and build his muscles were like steel bands instead of flabby fat—as were Trammers. So he shouldered the lifeless body and retraced his steps quickly. He paused

a moment in the laundry before leaving the house by the heavy shadows of the rear door. A high hedge screened his every action.

In a corner of the grounds was a deep and abandoned old well. Slippy deposited his burden on the ground a moment while he carefully removed the moss-grown cover. He listened sharply, more from over-caution than from any real fear. Nothing disturbed the stillness. He lashed two flat irons from the laundry to the body for sinkers, then raised it and dropped it into the well. He listened for the hollow splash far below in the oily, slime-covered water. Then he threw in the empty chloroform bottle. There was muck enough in the bottom to keep the gruesome burden from floating to the surface. It would stick and settle.

Slippy returned the cover with great care. He saw that every bit of moss was back, that no speck of fresh sod showed. He put back the tendrils of the creepers across the innocent-looking lichen. When he had finished there remained only a moss-grown and deserted well which to all appearance, had not been disturbed for years.

Slippy hurried back to the upstairs chamber. He opened the window and the bed to let in the fresh breezes and dissipate the smell of chloroform. Then he knelt by the safe.

It took him three-quarters of an hour to open it—a long time for Slippy. But he was a bit nervous from the affair with Trammers. And he kept looking over his shoulder. He hadn't been implicated in a major crime for some years. He apologetically told himself that he was a bit out of practice.

At last he heard the welcome click from the steel door. He brought out the envelopes and the small chamois bag. He stowed them away carefully. Then he painstakingly examined the safe to be sure that he had overlooked nothing or left no awkward reminders. He had done neither.

From now on Slippy became Saul Trammers.

He undressed and crawled into bed. Yet he had a feeling that something was going to happen. He spent hours checking up what he had done and what he intended to do. But his most scathing arraignment of all the details could find no weak spot.

At last he fell into a fitful sleep.

III.

THE boat sailed at noon the next day. The counterfeit of Trammers arose early. He spent some time on his make-up. Not that it needed it. But his strung-up condition made him see flaws where none existed. At last satisfied, he dressed. The dead man's keys lay on the dresser. Slippy opened the bags neatly packed. He was delighted with the contents. Trammers did himself well, very well. He found everything he required for the present—stateroom voucher, tickets, and a generous amount of money. He would now go out for breakfast before starting for the boat. So he called the taxicab company whom he had learned that Trammers had patronized after disposing of his limousine. He paced back and forth as he waited.

He resented his nervousness. *Dead men tell no tales.* Was there anything to show that even a robbery had been committed? Mr. Saul Trammers was merely departing for Australia according to schedule. Australia was a good country. In a few months Trammers would drop from sight there. Then Slippy would come back to the far West and enjoy life as a respectable retired business man who bore little resemblance either to Slippy Boggs of police records or to the dead Saul Trammers.

The taxicab driver was a middle-aged man. Evidently he knew Trammers well. He greeted him heartily, and wished him a speedy return to health.

The cab-driver's calm acceptance of him as Trammers steadied Slippy's nerves. He kept the cab waiting while he ate breakfast in a café which Trammers occasionally visited. And throughout his substantial breakfast no one there showed the slightest suspicion of him. Of this Slippy was sure. For he was all eyes and ears.

He returned to the cab, smoking a good cigar.

He arrived at the dock in good season. Trammers was methodical and always

ahead of time. Slippy felt that once he set foot on the boat and had stowed away his bags in his stateroom he could relax. The ordeal would be practically over. No one would come to the boat to see him off. Trammers had providentially asked this as a favor, saying that he detested such leave-takings.

Slippy breathed deeply as he followed a white-garbed steward up the gangplank in the wake of his bags. He went directly to his stateroom. His steamer trunk was already there. Undoubtedly there was other luggage in the hold.

Alone in his cabin, Slippy leaned back on his bunk. He still kept a cautious eye for every detail about his appearance. He had gone over that carefully the moment the door shut behind the steward. He pulled out his watch. A half hour to sailing, and then—an independent fortune and a life of ease. Was anything simpler? He could hear the engines throbbing as the ship was getting up steam.

Five more minutes passed. Slippy opened one of Trammers's grips and brought out a magazine. He lighted another cigar and leaned back luxuriously. "Ah, this is the life!" he told himself.

A loud knock came on his door.

That confounded steward again! What could he want? Maybe some one had sent him a telegram of final good wishes. That would be like the Trammers bunch.

With a swift glance at himself in the glass Slippy opened the door. The purser stood there with a stranger.

"Sorry, Mr. Trammers," began the purser, "but this man says he must see you."

The stranger stepped forward.

"Yes," he said curtly. "My name is Channing—of the Boise police force. I have a warrant here for your arrest. You are wanted for embezzlement at Boise six years ago when you were known as Oscar Little. It won't do you any good to say anything because here is your photograph."

He held out the likeness of the late Saul Trammers which was labeled, Oscar Little. The purser peered at it.

"There is no doubt about it," he said. "They are the same." He nodded at Slippy.

The latter's face was chalk white. But he was game.

He assumed Trammers's grand air. "You have made a frightful blunder, and you shall smart for it. I never was in Boise in my life."

Slippy was speaking the truth, and his earnestness carried conviction.

"Besides," continued the pseudo-Trammers, "while the picture does resemble me, you know as well as I do that that proves nothing. There may be three or four people in the world that look like me. Everybody has his double they say. You'll have to see my lawyers and take it up with me in Australia. You can send your apologies there, although I will tell you right now that I'm feeling pretty wrathy."

Slippy was playing the part of outraged dignity to perfection.

"Furthermore," he went on, "you have no business to rile a man up so when he is in my state of health. My doctors would throw you off the boat. Now go!"

Slippy reached a crescendo with commendable impressiveness. Perspiration dropped from his brow. And he did look sick—with apprehension.

The man from Idaho hesitated. He felt uncertain, disturbed.

"My orders are plain," he said finally. "I have a warrant for your arrest, as well as extradition papers. The metropolitan force is coöperating with us. The Boise chief has sent them every particular. I am sorry, sir, but I can't risk it. I have a warrant here to arrest Mr. Saul Trammers, formerly of Widelawns, late of Boise. You'll have to come with me. You can take a later boat. They will refund your money."

"But I tell you any delay will be fatal to my health," blazed forth Slippy.

To no avail. Ten minutes before the boat sailed for Australia he entered the cab in custody of the Boise man and was taken swiftly to police headquarters.

IV.

THE Boise man talked earnestly with the police head when the pseudo-Trammers was conducted into the private office.

"Says he has never been in Boise, eh!

Denies that he is the original of this photograph, does he? Well, we will soon settle that."

He pressed a button. A uniformed man entered. The officer murmured a few low words to him. He departed.

An awkward silence ensued. Slippy's mind was chaotic. He floundered in this unknown sea of trouble. Embezzlement—a man like Trammers! Suppose it was true, what then? Slippy shivered.

The orderly returned. Another man came with him. He bore a box under his arm. He handed a packet to the chief. The latter opened it and extracted some papers. He placed them on the desk.

Another dead silence ensued. Slippy's knees shook. What was going to happen? His sense of elation had evaporated. He had never thought of looking into his double's antecedents!

"Come here," rapped out the police head. Then he turned to the man who had just entered. "Now, Rutledge, this man here, while of course admitting that he is Saul Trammers, denies that he is Oscar Little and that he has ever been in Boise, despite his extraordinary resemblance to these photographs of Oscar Little. Very well, let us deny the evidence of our eyes since this man bears the features and the expression of Oscar Little, wanted for embezzlement. Striking resemblances are possible. But science will help us. Take his finger-prints, Rutledge. And then let us compare them with those of Oscar Little here."

When they had finished, the result proved that the man standing before them was not Oscar Little. Slippy licked his lips.. Things were going better than he had dared hope.

Rutledge leaned over and whispered something in the chief's ear.

The latter pondered. Finally he said, "If you like."

Rutledge hurried out. Slippy was conducted to a plain room down a corridor and left to wait with no explanation. He couldn't understand this new development. And he had quailed before Rutledge's keen, piercing gray eyes. What were they up to now?

He didn't have long to wait. Again he was summoned to the chief's office. Rutledge and the chief were talking in subdued voices.

The police head gestured to his desk top.

"The Widelawns First National is an up-to-date institution. It demands to have filed on record the finger-prints of every one associated with it. We have sent for Saul Trammers's finger-prints. *And we know that you are an impostor.* Your game is up. *Where* is the missing real Trammers? Come across with the truth."

Slippy wilted after three hours of grilling. They dug the facts out of him, sweated him into a confession. For finger-prints don't lie. Slippy had impersonated a man with a record. For Trammers's finger-prints tallied with those of the wanted embezzler, Oscar Little. And Slippy's own prints were the telltale joker in the pack.

So that's where Nemesis called "Hands up!" at the eleventh hour.

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