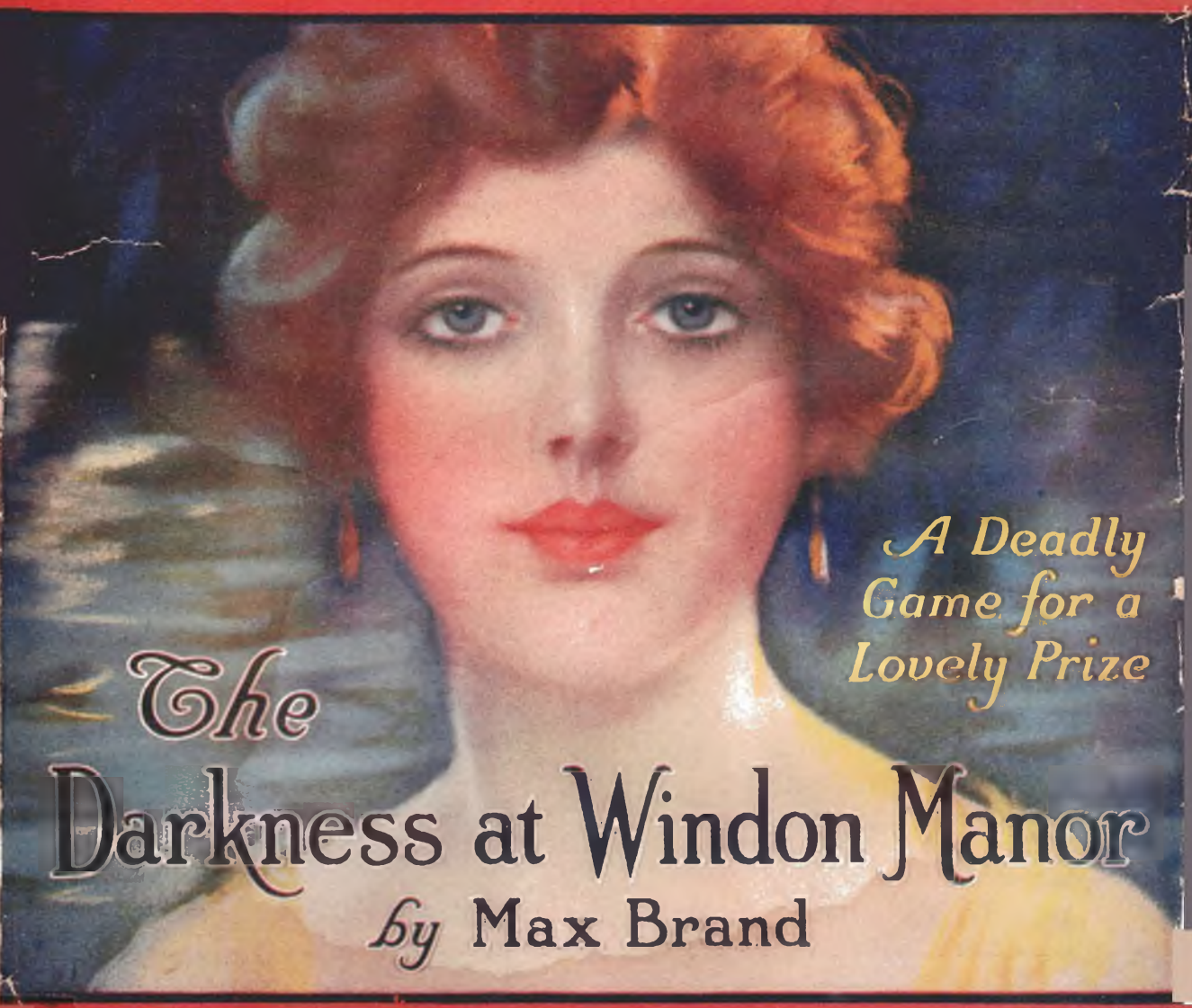
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



A Deadly Game for a Lovely Prize

The Darkness at Windon Manor

by Max Brand

10¢ PER COPY — APRIL 21 — BY THE YEAR $4.00

"Hello, Central
Emergency Call
Police, please!"

For the protection of *your* home and property against unlawful intrusion, a Colt is today most essential.

Send for booklet, "Romance of a Colt"

COLT'S PATENT FIRE ARMS MFG. CO., HARTFORD, CONN.
Pacific Coast Representative, Phil. B. Bekeart Co.
717 Market Street, San Francisco, Calif.

Make This FREE TEST If You Want Bigger Pay

There's a sure way to increase your earning power. And here is such an opportunity. Look into it—you may recognize it as your one chance to earn the biggest money of your life.

ARE you ready for a shock?

Then, let me tell you that if you have average intelligence and can read and write, there is a quick and easy way for you to double or triple your present salary—to earn enough money to satisfy any average ambition. And after reading this offer, if you do not quickly make more money, you have no one to blame but yourself.

Don't take my word for it. By a simple free test—one you can make in the privacy of your home—you will know that every word I say is true—or otherwise. The test does not obligate you or cost you one penny. **But make it!** Then judge for yourself. It has proved to be **THE opportunity** for thousands. They have found the way to bigger pay—are now earning from five to twenty times as much as formerly. And the beauty of it is they enjoy every minute in the day's work. They are their own bosses.

Unlimited Opportunities

The thousands who have made this test before you, and who are now making the money you would like to make, are now salesmen. Ninety-five per cent once thought they were not "cut out for selling" that salesmen were "born" and not made. They found it was a fallacy that had kept them in the rut. They discovered that **any one with proper training can sell,** and they are making from $5,000 to $10,000 a year, because they had the vision to recognize opportunity.

Thousands Have Proved It

For example: Charles Berry, of Winterset, Ia., stepped from $18 a week to a position making him $1,000 the very first month. J. P. Overstreet, Denison, Texas, was on the Capitol Police Force at a salary of less than $1,000 a year. He decided to see how much there was to our claim, and very shortly after he earned $1,800 in six weeks as a salesman. F. Wynn, Portland, Ore., ex-service man, never thought he was cut out for selling, but this Association of Master Salesmen and Sales Managers convinced him he could sell, taught him how; and in one week he earned $554. George W. Kearns, of Oklahoma City, was making $80 a month on a ranch and then earned $524 in two weeks as a salesman. Warren Hartle, Chicago, spent ten years in the railway mail service. Then jumped into selling and multiplied his earnings six times the first year.

These men were formerly clerks, bookkeepers, factory workers, farm hands, mechanics, machinists, chauffeurs, firemen, motormen, conductors, etc. Their success proves that previous experience or training has nothing to do with success in the selling field. It proves that any man who wants to, and who is willing to put in a few hours of spare time each week, can quickly get a selling position and make big money. And **they started with this free test.**

Why don't you make this free test and prove, to your own satisfaction, that a bigger salary is easy to get? The test is contained in a free book, "Modern Salesmanship," which we will gladly send you without obligation. After reading the book through you will ask yourself the questions it brings up. The answers will show you whether you can get away from the humdrum, small-pay job for the lucrative and fascinating work of selling.

Make This Free Test at Once

Don't turn this page until you have clipped the coupon, filled it out, and sent it on its way. It may mean the turning-point in your life. Write now while the impulse to succeed is upon you.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. 2-D **Chicago, Ill.**

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. 2-D, Chicago, Illinois

Please send me, without obligation on my part, your free book, "Modern Salesmanship," which will enable me to test my ability at home, and full information about the **N. S. T. A.** System of Salesmanship Training and Employment Service.

Name .....

Address .....

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

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

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CL CONTENTS FOR APRIL 21, 1923 NUMBER 6

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

A SHARP-FOCUS STUDY OF AMERICAN CITY AND RURAL LIFE, SOFTENED BY A HEART-WARMING SYMPATHY, BEGINS NEXT WEEK IN

EDGAR FRANKLIN'S HUMAN BEINGS

A FIVE-PART STORY OF SMILES AND FROWNS, TEARS AND LAUGHTER.

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.

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

$80 Drafting Course Free

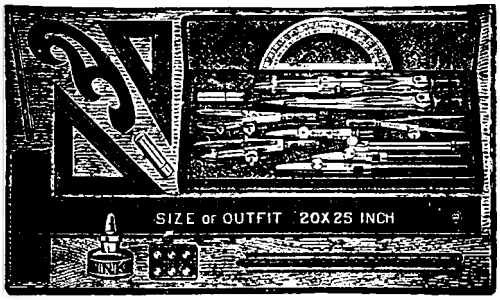
There is such an urgent demand for practical, trained Draftsmen that I am making this special offer in order to enable deserving, ambitious and bright men to get into this line of work. I will teach you to become a Draftsman and Designer, until you are **drawing a salary of $250.00 a month.** You need not pay me for my personal instruction or for the complete set of instruments.

$250 a Month

Starting salary according to my agreement and guarantee. Draftsmen's work is pleasant and profitable. Positions are open paying $3,600.00 a year in the best surroundings. They are open everywhere. Thousands of men are needed who have just the kind of training I will give you. You can get this training during spare time in your own home.

Mail the Coupon

for my valuable book—"Successful **Draftsmanship.**" It explains how YOU can become a Successful Draftsman in a short time. The book is free at present, so write **AT ONCE.**



Earn While Learning

You can be earning a handsome income while learning at home. This is a special offer I am making. Absolutely no obligations of any kind in sending coupon. But you must write at once, as I limit the number of my students.

Mail the FREE Coupon at once for my book—"*Successful Draftsmanship,*" also list of open positions and for the free offer to be earning good money at once while learning at home. This offer is limited and in order to benefit thereby — **act at once.**

Chief Draftsman Dobe
1951 Lawrence Ave., Div. 14-54, Chicago, Ill.

Chief Draftsman Will Train You Personally

on practical Drafting-room work **Until** you are competent and **Until** you are in a permanent position at a salary paying at least $250 per month. This is an exceptional opportunity for a few selected ambitious men, between the ages of 16 and 50 whom I will train personally.

Send the Coupon

or a letter and let me tell you how you can become a Draftsman in your spare time and earn a good salary. Don't delay — send the coupon at once.

I Guarantee
To instruct you until competent and in a permanent paying position at a regular Draftsman's salary of at least $250 per month and guarantee to furnish you free complete Draftsman's working outfit at once from the start.

FREE—this $25.00 Draftsman's Working Outfit

These are regular working instruments, the kind I use myself. I give them free to you if you enroll at once. **Send the Free Coupon today.**

Free Course Offer Coupon
Chief Draftsman Dobe
1951 Lawrence Ave. Div. 14-54. Chicago

Without any obligation to me please mail your book, "Successful Draftsmanship" and full particulars of your liberal "Personal Instruction" offer to a few students. It is understood I am obligated in no way whatever.

*Name*_____

Address _____

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I WANT 100 MEN AND WOMEN QUICK TO TAKE ORDERS FOR RAIN-COATS, RAINCAPES AND WATERPROOF APRONS. THOUSANDS OF ORDERS WAITING FOR YOU. $2.00 AN HOUR FOR SPARE TIME. MAHER MADE $597.50 IN JUNE. NISSEN $19 IN THREE HOURS. PURVIANCE $207 IN SEVEN DAYS. $2500 A YEAR PROFIT FOR FOUR AVERAGE ORDERS A DAY. NO DELIVERING OR COLLECTING. NO EXPERIENCE OR CAPITAL REQUIRED. WRITE QUICK FOR INFORMATION. COMER MFG. CO., DEPT. Y-156, DAYTON, OHIO.

TAILORING SALESMEN MAKE $75.00 A WEEK selling our strictly All-Wool Made-to-Measure Suits all at one surprising low price. You collect profits in advance and keep them. We supply finest selling outfit in America. Many exclusive money-making features. Tailoring, raincoat and side-line men, part or full time, get in touch with us immediately. PARK TAILORING COMPANY, Dept. 619, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS—$10.00 DAILY ON SIDE. FACTORY, OFFICE EMPLOYEES, MILK, GROCERY, LAUNDRY, BUTTER DELIVERERS — COLLECTORS. SELL SOAPS, FLAVORING, TOILET GOODS. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. BICK CO., 118A OLIVE, ST. LOUIS, MO.

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-W, Chicago.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

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

"$10 A DAY AND MORE," our new book, shows clearly how you may gain sure success and large profits selling Guaranteed Hosiery and Underwear, factory to family. It is Free. Write today. C. & D. CO., 15-E Grand Rapids, Mich.

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE OFFER. HO-RO-CO, 137 LOCUST, ST. LOUIS, MO.

27,000 RECORDS GUARANTEED WITH ONE EVERPLAY PHONOGRAPH NEEDLE; new, different; cannot injure records; $10.00 daily easy. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Desk 412, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

HERE IT IS—Fifty Fast Sellers. Everybody needs and buys. Fifty dollars weekly easily made. B. & G. RUBBER COMPANY, Dept. 263, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

TAILORING AGENTS: Our $20.50 All Wool tailored to order suits and overcoats are $20 cheaper than store prices. Commissions paid in advance. Protected territory. Beautiful assortment. 6x9 swatches free. J. B. SIMPSON, Dept. 554, 831 Adams St., Chicago.

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

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

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

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

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 Fitzgerald Building, New York.

SONG POEMS WANTED: If you have a song poem, do not hesitate. Submit at once to us. Popular song writers make big money. HARMONY PUBLISHING CO., Box 268, St. Louis, Mo.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR $$—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Advice free. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 918 Western Mutual Life Bldg., Los Angeles.

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

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

LANDSEEKERS! ATTENTION! $10 to $50 down starts you on 20, 40, or 80 acres; near thriving city in Mich.; bal. long time. Write today for big free booklet giving full information. Swigart Land Co., Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

$13.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT—regular $25.00 value. We are making this bargain offer to prove our remarkable values in tailoring. Write for our big sample outfit showing how agents make $35.00 to $40.00 extra every week taking orders for high-grade tailoring. WASHINGTON TAILORING CO., Dept. R-304, Chicago.

$5 TO $15 DAILY SWORN PROOF. You simply write orders for guaranteed hosiery for men, women, children. We deliver and collect. Your pay daily. No capital or experience required. Elegant outfit furnished, all colors and grades including silks. Promotions made from sales agents to district managerships. MAC-O-CHEE MILLS CO., Desk 2707, Cincinnati, Ohio.

GREATEST SENSATION! ELEVEN PIECE toilet article set selling like blazes at $1.75 with $1.00 dressmakers shears free to each customer. Spring rush on. FOSTER REID CO., 90 Winslow Bldg., Station C, Chicago.

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

PORTRAIT AGENTS: Our goods will make you big profits. Delivery guaranteed. Rejects credited. Prompt shipments. Send for latest catalog and prices. ADAM J. KROLL & CO., 600 Blue Island Ave., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: $8 to $16 a day. Brand new cutlery set. You display and take orders. We deliver and collect. Pay you daily. Sample free. Try it out. JENNINGS MFG. CO., Dept. 1609, Dayton, Ohio.

NEW SPECIALTY. All retailers. $40 a week and expenses guaranteed against liberal commissions. Good steady income from reorders. Dept. 6, Box 602, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

AGENTS—Household necessities galore food products, toilet preparations, extracts, remedies, soaps; two big lines; catalogues free. WESTERN PRODUCTS, 606 N. Oakley, Dept. BA, Chicago.

AGENTS—SELL SONG PARODIES. 25 parodies including Georgette, Hot Lips, The Sheik, Three O'Clock in the Morning, Tomorrow, and all the big hits, mailed on receipt of 25c in stamps, special agents sample price. TRUMAN BROWN, 6239 Delmar Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

OUR AGENTS MAKE $35 TO $50 DAILY and are getting it with new marvelous invention. Sells to everybody. Low price. Pocket outfit. Write SUREN CO., 25 N. Dearborn St., Chicago.

District Managers, Side Line Salesmen, Live Agents Earn Big Money. Natex Products, 9 big sellers, nationally advertised, sell on sight to merchants, housewives and motorists. Write for territory. Natex Products Co., Dept. A, 2422 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

TAILORING SALESMEN—Fastest selling line, suits, made to measure—$20.50—one price, all wool. Profits in advance. Biggest old reliable house. W. D. SMITH CO., established 1895, Dept. 21, Chicago.

AGENTS—CREW MANAGERS—SELL WONDERFUL NEW food product direct to homes. Joy-Jel makes all jelly "jell." Big profit-maker, instant seller, sure repeater, exclusive territory. Sample free. Joy-Jel Company, 835 Grand, St. Joseph, Mo.

AGENTS—Mason sold 18 Comet Sprayers and Autowashers one Saturday. Profits $2.50 each. Particulars free. Established 50 years. RUSLER CO., Johnstown, Ohio, Dept. 19A.

AGENTS:—Men and Women to take orders for Dyx Guaranteed Silk Hosiery sold direct from the mill to the wearer. Possibilities unlimited for making money. DYX HOSIERY COMPANY, 506 Lyric Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS: Big money selling "Packard Shirts" direct to the wearer. We show the latest patterns and our proposition is entirely new. Write today for FREE spring outfit. PACKARD SHIRT CO., 19 South Wells St., Chicago, Ill.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

$200 TO $500 WILL START A CASH BUSINESS. FREE INFORMATION DEPT. 70. PAUL KAYE, 149 B'WAY, NEW YORK.

AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

EARN MORE MONEY by learning the auto business at the Pioneer Auto School, 20 years in business. Plenty of good jobs now open. Big catalog free. CLEVELAND AUTO SCHOOL, 1819 East 24th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

AUTOMOBILES

AUTOMOBILE OWNERS, GARAGEMEN, MECHANICS, send today for free copy America's most popular motor magazine. Contains helpful articles on overhauling, repairing, ignition, carburetors, batteries, etc. AUTOMOBILE DIGEST, 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

Automobile Parts, all cars and trucks, motor parts, clutch parts, universal joints, axle shafts, gears, hall, roller, thrust bearings, timing chains. State make, model and parts wanted. Special prices. All new parts. In stock. MERRIN MOTOR PARTS CO., 1726 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

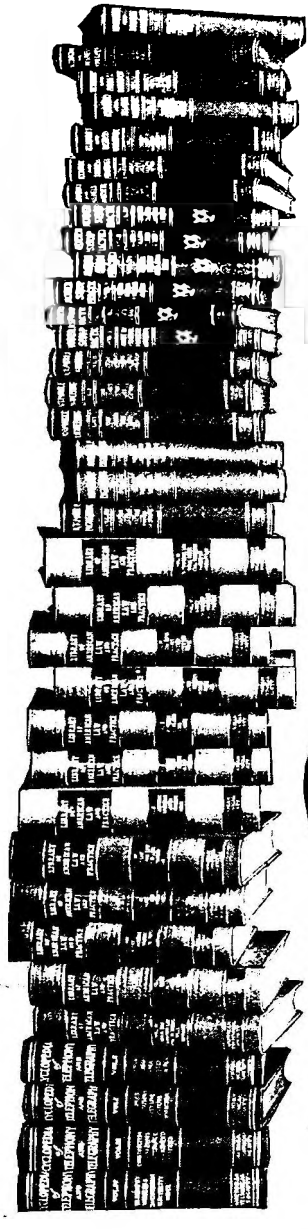
AUTOMOBILE TIRES

NEW INNER TUBE FREE WITH EACH slightly used tire ordered. 30x3, 30x3½, 32x3½, $4.00. All 4 inch tires $5.00. All 4½ and 5 inch tires $5.50. C. O. D., no deposit required. National Tire Jobbers, 2767 Madison, Chicago.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

200,000 Men

Are Earning More With the Help of these Books



Every day men report increases in salary to us because of what they learned from these great books. Right now thousands are getting ready for bigger pay. By the end of this year a quarter-million men will be started on the road to real and lasting success.

What Other Men Have Done You Can Do Too

Don't you be content plodding along year after year, depending on hit-or-miss experience to get you a little raise now and then. It takes years of downright hard work to get ahead that way. Take the short cut. Cash in on what other men have learned on jobs just like yours. Take advantage of their knowledge gained from their lifetime of experiences on which these books are built. No matter what kind of work you are doing or would like to do—no matter whether you are a beginner or an old-timer—there are a set of these books to help you—written by the biggest and best known authorities we could find. Each set is the work of a dozen or more of these authorities—it's not a one man proposition.

Try These Books on Your Own Job

Everything you ought to know about the work you want to do is explained in plain, every day English that anybody can understand. Every book is illustrated with plans, pictures, blueprints and diagrams that help to make difficult problems easy. Every page gives you new and better ways of doing things, approved methods and money making facts you couldn't get any other way. You can be an expert in your choosen field if you will follow the path these books will make for you.

Don't Send Money—Coupon Brings the Books for Free Trial

Any Set You want Only 10¢ a Day

Select the set of Pay Raising Books that suits your work best and mail the coupon for free trial. Don't send any money. We ship the whole set for you to use a week just as though they were your own. You be the judge and decide with the books before you if they will do for you what they have done for 200,000 other men. Return them at our expense if they don't please you. The coupon below explains our free examination offer and the easy monthly payment plan on which you can buy the books you want. Check the coupon, fill in the blank lines and mail it today.

American Technical Society

Dept. X-164. Chicago, Illinois

American Technical Society, Dept. X-164. Chicago, U. S. A.

You may send me the set of Pay-Raising Books I have checked, by express collect for a week's FREE use. At the end of one week I will either return them at your expense or send you $2.80 as first payment and pay the balance of the reduced price as shown below in monthly payments of $3.00 each.

	Books in Set	Old Price	New Price
Auto Engineering	6	$45.00	$21.80
Carpentry and Contracting	5	37.50	19.80
Practical Applied Electricity	5	60.00	29.80
American Law and Practice	3	37.50	19.80
Modern Civil Engineering	5	67.50	34.80
Drawing	4	30.00	14.80
Steam and Gas Engineering	7	52.50	24.80
Fire Prevention and Insurance	4	30.00	14.80
Modern Machine Shop Practice	6	45.00	21.80
Accountancy and Business Management	7	52.50	29.80
Sanitation, Heating and Ventilation	4	30.00	14.80
Telephony and Telegraphy	4	30.00	14.80
Employment Management and Safety	7	52.50	24.80

Name .....

Address ..... Employed by .....

WANTED TO BUY

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

HELP WANTED—MALE

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

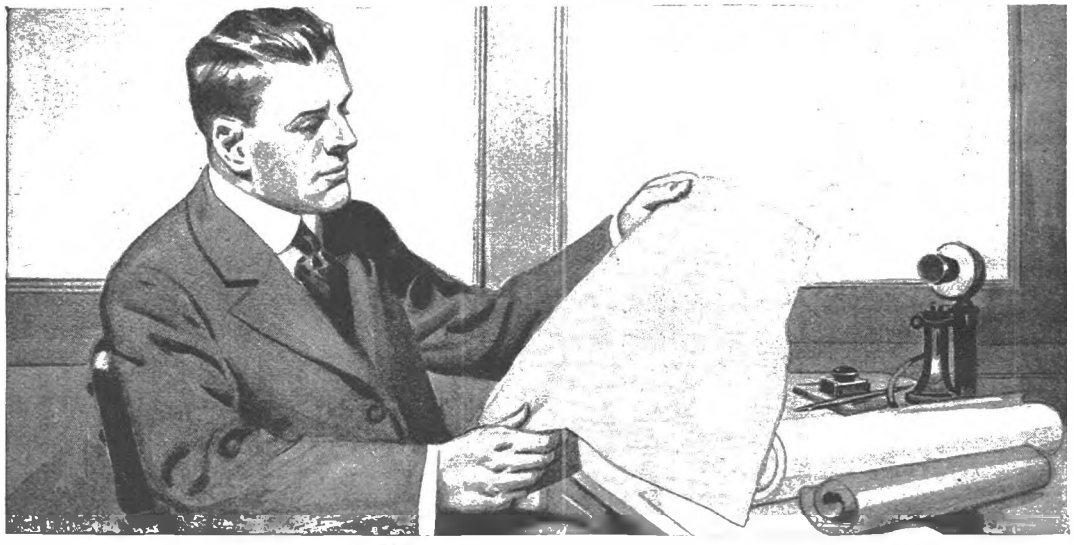
HELP WANTED—GENERAL

FLOWERS AND SEEDS

HOW TO ENTERTAIN

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS AND INVENTIONS



HOW TO READ BLUE PRINTS

An interesting, practical course that will be of great help to every man in the building trades

THE building trades are booming. There is a shortage of trained men in many lines. Men who can read blue prints are especially in demand. Wouldn't *you* like to be one of these men? Think of the dollars it would add to your salary!

It isn't hard to learn to read blue prints if you go about it in the right way. You can learn right at home, through the International Correspondence Schools, without losing a day or a dollar from your present work.

This I. C. S. course in Blue Print Reading is intensely practical and interesting. You not only learn all you need to know about building materials and specification writing, but you take up problems that you meet every day in your work.

Ten working drawings for a moderate size residence are furnished with the course—the very same blue prints that a contractor would receive if asked for an estimate or a foreman would receive from a contractor. You also work on a set of plans for a six room public school building.

Everything is so clearly explained that you just can't help make rapid progress. In a surprisingly short time you can acquire a knowledge of blue prints that will be of great, practical value to you in a salary way the rest of your life. Mail the coupon to-day for full particulars.

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS, BOX 2187-C, SCRANTON, PA.

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

☐ Blue Print Reading	☐ Automobile Work	☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Architect	☐ Electrical Engineering	☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Electric Lighting and Rwys.	☐ Personnel Organization	☐ Better Letters
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Mechanical Engineer	☐ Traffic Management	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Business Law	☐ Business Spanish ☐ French
☐ Civil Engineer	☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ Teacher ☐ Civil Service
☐ Metallurgy	☐ Railroad Positions	☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Mining	☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy	☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Private Secretary	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Airplane Engines ☐ Radio	☐ Steam Engineering	☐ Business English	☐ Illustrating

Name..... Street Address.....

City..... State..... Occupation.....

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

Wouldn't More Money Make You Happy?

This old world would be a better place to live in if you had another $5 to $20 every week.

I Can Get It For You!

IT'S easy for people to talk. But it's pretty hard to keep happy and contented if your pocketbook or purse is always running short.

Pretty hard to keep your spirits up if lack of money is always cheating you out of something you need, or want, something you've got your heart set on.

Pretty hard to keep cheerful with that old joy-killer, "Can't-Afford-It," always staring you in the face.

Every ambitious woman has some goal, some pet desire, some pent-up hope or wish or longing that depends on money for its realization. And it's pretty hard to keep from getting blue and discouraged when you don't know where the money's coming from.

Maybe your long-denied ambition is to dress better. Maybe to travel, to visit far-off relatives or see the country. Maybe to own a home. Maybe to buy a car. Maybe to get a better education or to send a son or daughter to college. Maybe to pay old bills and get out of debt. Maybe to have a comfortable bank account as a reserve against emergencies or old age. Maybe it's to live better, to get more pleasure and enjoyment out of life.

But let's look the facts straight in the eye. No one ever did or ever will get anything in this life just by *wishing* for it. There's only one sure and dependable way to have more money in your purse—that's by *earning it yourself.*

And I can show you a way to do it. Just by using your spare time—time that so many women idle away. You can earn it right in your own home. You don't have to take a single step away from your own door.

All In Spare Time

No matter what your pet wish or ambition may be, no matter what you want more money for, if an extra $3 to $10 or $15 every week or so will help make you happier and better satisfied, then I can show you how to get it.

I have provided profitable and pleasant spare-time home-work for hundreds of people—both women and men. Now I want to start at least a thousand more. The work is interesting. In fact, some of those who have taken it up tell me it is positively fascinating—more like a pastime than work. You can do it entirely at your own convenience—sit down and work at it any time of the day or evening that happens handy—start and stop whenever you like. It needn't interfere a particle with your regular duties.

It's a kind of work that you can take pride in doing. From every angle it's an ideal way to turn your spare hours into dollars—knitting wool socks for the Home Profit Hosiery Company on our famous Home Profit Knitter. It is many times faster than hand-knitting. That's why home-knitting on this skillful little machine pays so well. That's why so many users of it call it their "Purse-Filler."

Fast or slow, just as you turn the handle, this skillful little knitter knits and shapes each sock from heel to toe. It knits either a ribbed or solid weave, and either a plain or fancy top.

You know the rage for wool hose. Everybody wearing them—men, women, children. There's a steady year-round demand for the quality of socks so easily knitted on the Home Profit Knitter. That's why we want more and more home workers who are willing to do spare-time knitting for us.

You Get Good Pay

You don't need to know a single thing about knitting to take up this work. We show you how. Complete instructions that make everything plain and clear come with the knitter. With practice, anyone who follows directions—anyone who really wants to **earn** money instead of merely **wishing** for it, anyone who is willing to make a little effort and do his or her part—can soon be turning out perfect socks—and getting good pay for every pair.

The pay is sure. The Home Profit Hosiery Company **guarantees** to take every pair of socks you knit for us on a Home Profit Knitter in accordance with our simple instructions, and guarantees to pay you a fixed price for each pair as fast as you finish the socks and send them in. But if preferred, you have the privilege of selling part or all of the socks you knit direct to friends or neighbors or local stores, at your own price.

For all who want to have more money.

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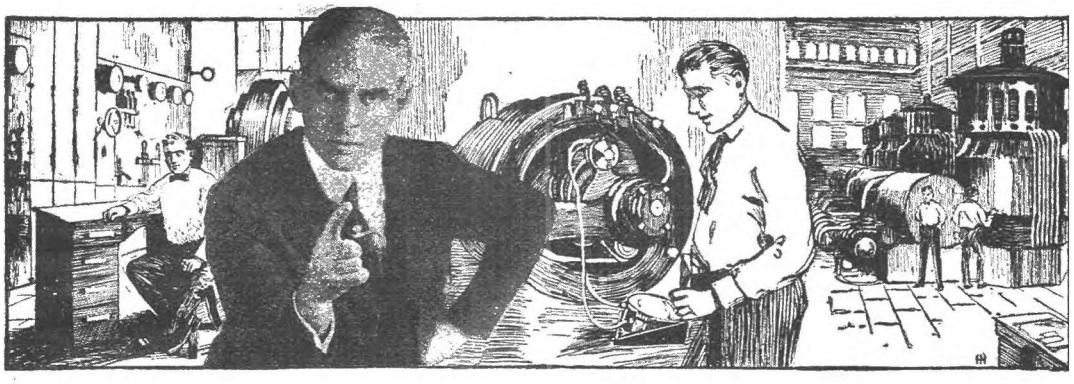

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

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The Darkness at Windon Manor

By MAX BRAND

Author of "Kain," "The Night Horseman," "Black Jack," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE SENSE OF LOSS.

THOUGH the chair in which he sat was one of a long and closely filled line, Andrew Creel seemed sufficiently aloof. It was not that the steamer rug wrapped closely about his knees or the cap drawn far over his eyes differed from those of the men near him, not that his lean face and dark eye were forbidding in any degree; but he carried about him that air of self-completeness which does not invite inquiry.

Conversation, after all, generally starts with discomfort of mind or body. When a man is lonely, or too hot, or too cold, or wearied of his surroundings, he turns to a neighbor who seems to suffer mutually; he voices a common protest, and the conver-

sation begins on common grounds. It is not hard to tell when a man is ready for and open to approaches. A slight wandering of the eye, a yawn which never springs from sleepiness, a sullen drooping of the mouth, a nervousness of hand and foot—these are the signs which betray a man who pines for conversation.

But Andrew Creel was one of those who can be heated neither by conversation nor wine, nor by a tropic sun; they cannot be crowded in a throng, and they cannot be made lonely in a desert. They neither criticize nor protest nor praise. They merely watch; and one cannot tell whether their observations are retained in mental notes or consigned to oblivion. All down the line of steamer chairs there were perpetual changes. Some one leaned forward to draw his rug closer or loosen it; some one rearranged his hat; some one leaned back and tried to sleep with a scowl on his forehead, as if defying any one to accuse him of ill success; but Andrew Creel seemed utterly unmoved. His hands never altered their position in his lap; a corner of his rug had worked loose in the wind, and it flapped unheeded; his head turned from time to time, slowly, never jerked about by irritation or curiosity.

Indeed, it seemed as if the quiet eye of Andrew Creel found something new in each one of the vast groundswells which heaved about the side of the ship and went wandering off against the distant sky line with ridges of white and little rushings of foam along its sides. The swagger of the ship on the crest of the wave and its drunken lunge into the hollow of the trough seemed equally soothing to him. When people passed, the eye of Creel followed them calmly down the deck at times, never prying and never omitting the slightest detail.

It did not irritate those he observed, for they knew that he noted, but felt that he made no criticism; it was not much more than the observant eye of an animal. Again, he fairly looked through a whole group and bent his observation past them on the familiar rise and fall of the waves. One could never prophesy his state of mind; he might be on the verge of whistling a tune or closing his eyes in dreamless sleep.

In fact, Creel was very much what he seemed. He had spent a number of years wandering the earth, living well within the limits of a comfortable income. In all places he was at home, and he became the back of a camel in Egypt as well as the saddle on a spirited horse in Central Park. Bohemia accepted him in Paris without a murmur, and respectability opened its doors to him in London. What he gained from his wanderings no one would be prepared to guess, for he had never opened his heart to a confidant. It was really hard to conceive of such a man having a confidant. And though one presumed that under stimulation he might be a most fascinating narrator, it was obvious that nature intended him for a listener rather than a talker.

Life had left him as unmarked within as his forehead was smooth without. He was a man untested, untried. If there was strength in him, it was like the speed of the pedigreed horse which has never trodden a race track. He did not make an appeal vital enough to stimulate wonder and puzzling estimates; perhaps he might have been called the Sphinx without her smile. At the most, people surmised in him cleanness of body, heart and mind; and probably Andrew Creel made no more definite estimate than this of himself. He had no enemies, and yet he did not feel ineffectual; he had no friends, and yet he was never lonely.

On a gray day he mildly enjoyed the dimness; on a bright day he mildly enjoyed the color. He did not object to liquor, and yet he had never been drunk; he found women amusing, but he had never been in love; he enjoyed money, but he never yearned hungrily for silken luxury. To be sure, he was not asleep, but one could not help asking: "What if this man should awaken? What if he should desire, dread, hate, love? What if the black and white of his life should be flushed with sudden color—golden, reds, and purples?"

This very question in much the same words passed through the mind of Creel as he sat in the sunshine of the deck of the steamer. The stimulus to the question was a man who stood half facing him at the rail. This fellow had taken his hat off and

the sea breeze was ruffling his hair; his head was bent a little back, and with partially closed eyes and faintly smiling lips he breathed deep of the same wind. Undoubtedly, Andrew Creel had seen a hundred other men in similar postures and had never been stirred to question or to comparison of their mood with his own. The difference this time lay in the similarity which existed between the bareheaded man and himself.

Not that they at all approached the same identity. To be sure, no one could ever mistake them; but they belonged to the same physical type. There was the high, rather narrow forehead, with marked prominences just above the eyebrows, the straight lips, the thin chin, the arched nose, the dark, sallow complexion, the black eyes, the lean, erect body suggesting agility rather than downright strength, endurance rather than sudden bursts of speed.

It was the call of like to like which first drew Creel's sharp attention. He noted one by one with unerring eyes the similarities, and in the second place he enumerated the differences. Here, however, there were difficulties. No matter how he concentrated on the subject, he could not make a list of the distinctions. His strong sense of order revolted against this failure. It was finally borne in upon him that the distinction was mostly a matter of differing spirits.

This man had rubbed shoulders with the world, had trodden the race track of human competition. The parallel lines had been engraved between his eyes by strife, victory, and perhaps defeat. He was capable of sorrow; he was capable of joy. Ah, there was the vital thing!

The salt wind in the face of Creel, which was a mere physical fact, made the stranger straighten his body and close his eyes in exquisite enjoyment. Creel caught the sense of the other covering space; that wind blew him into the past—how far? and into the future—how far? What keen associations pierced with that wind into the center of his being? For the first time in his entire life Creel was conscious of a hollow sense of loss, of desire. He had missed something in life. What was it?

The questions we ask ourselves cannot be evaded. Andrew Creel discovered with infinite discomfort that he could not turn his shoulder on himself as he had turned his shoulder on the world. He made, at last, a silent, sharp resolution to pierce the secret of this other man; to seek him out; to open him like a book and read therein. That resolution was the turning point in his life. He felt like the man who sits half dozing by the fire until a sudden thought comes knocking at his mind and he startles erect with the feeling that some one else has been in the room and watching him. Indeed, considering Creel in the light of what he did thereafter, it might be said that he had never before been awake.

CHAPTER II.

THE DESTROYER.

UNACCUSTOMED as Creel was to feel under the positive necessity of meeting any human being, he was in doubt as to how he should approach the stranger. It seemed clumsy to go to him with some direct question in front of the crowd of languid passengers. He stared down, concentrating on the problem, and when he looked up again the stranger was gone.

He noted it with a quickening of the heart. There was no doubt now that he *must* exchange words with this man. Eventually he sauntered around the deck, but the stranger was nowhere in sight, and Creel carried his disappointment down to dinner with him. His gloom was the greater because this was the last evening on board ship, and the next morning everybody's time would be taken in the bustle of making port; in fact, by sunrise they would be among the approaches to New York. To-night was his last chance to find his man.

After dinner, accordingly, he went directly up to the deck. Once there, it was the wind which led him, for it was strongly connected in his mind with his earliest picture of the other. Creel went straight forward to the point where the wind was sure to be strongest—the bow. He was correct.

There, leaning on the railing and apparently watching the bow wave, was his quarry. So sharpened were his eyes for the search that he recognized his man by the shape of his back.

Creel approached slowly, pondering ways of opening the conversation, when the wind which had already helped him assisted him again. It flipped the hat from the head of the other and whisked it straight into the hands of Creel. He laughed; there was exultation in his voice, for he knew that chance was playing into his hand.

"The Lord be praised," said the stranger, "for you've saved the only thing about me that won't be alien in America." He touched the hat into shape, for the crown had been deeply indented, and replaced it on his head.

"You see," he explained, "before I left London I intended to get clothes from an American tailor—a whole outfit—but I dodged the job until the last moment, and then I only had time to get a hat."

"Well," nodded Creel, as he took a position at the rail near the other, "we're certainly exact opposites; the only thing American about you is your hat, and the only thing English about me is the same article. Yet on the whole I prefer English styles throughout."

The other shrugged his shoulders. He said:

"We're on the way toward making comparisons between the English and Americans. Let's avoid it."

"And why?" asked Creel. "To the end of the world we'll remain interested in our differences; I've never known an American who could spend an hour in London without making comparisons between it and New York, and *vice versa*. There are very good reasons for it."

"Aye," replied the other, "cousins are always curious concerning each other."

"Exactly. We're just enough alike to make us appreciate our differences."

"And just close enough to fail to see each other in perspective."

"To be sure," agreed Creel. "We forget that we speak the same language, and remember that we have differing accents; we habitually underrate each other, and yet, when it comes to a pinch, blood usually tells. Still, the habit is irritating."

"Good again. The Yankee calls the Englishman dull, and the Englishman calls the Yankee cheap."

"But give them both the same environment, and you can't tell them apart, perhaps, in a single generation."

"To be sure; we have the same thieving ancestry," said the stranger.

"Thieving?" echoed Creel.

"Well, why not call it that?" argued his companion. "What other is the ancestry of the Englishman and the American? Not that I mean that we are still thieves, but we gained our strength from a strong infusion of the bloods of predatory races. In the beginning the Celts were in Great Britain. They were harmless enough to the world; they injured no one but themselves. At the same time they accomplished no particular good; they added nothing to the civilization of the world. They're a comparatively new race, and yet they left so few monuments and influences that they're almost prehistoric. They didn't try to take from others, but neither did they give to others. But then came the robber Saxons. They were an element of aggression and strength. They made a mark.

"Next came the robber Danes. Another element of strength. Finally came the robber Normans. Four elements of blood go to the making of the modern Englishman—and American—and three of those elements are from predatory races. They all had the acquisitive impulse, so that they stole at first, and when there was nothing else to steal they began to make for themselves."

He broke off and chuckled to himself, then he added, nodding in self-agreement: "Yes, we call the Englishman's instinct to conquer and rule to-day imperialistic instinct, but I wonder if it isn't a lineal inheritance from the spirit of the Vikings."

"Ah," murmured Creel, "you believe that the thief and the creator are only short steps apart?"

The other started and turned more directly toward Creel. His eyes sharpened.

"In a manner of speaking," he said, "that's exactly what I *do* mean. Come, come! We begin to agree famously!"

"Well," answered Creel, "it's a new viewpoint, but I suppose a fairly sound one. The impulse of the thief is to have and to hold; so he takes what some one else has already made. But if there's nothing to take he makes it for himself. He raises his own grain, perhaps."

"Or irrigates the desert," added the other.

"Or paints his own picture."

"Quite right. One generation steals a country to which their only title deed is the stronger hand; the next generation celebrates the theft with an epic poem. Superior strength, superior subtlety makes the theft possible; and strength and cleverness are the materials which the poet wants for his singing, his idealization."

"According to this," said Creel, smiling, "the thief is a very important and necessary element in civilization."

"And why not admit it?" answered the other with a touch of sharpness. "Strength is the important thing in men, and thieves are strong. They pit their single power against the banded might of the law. The primitive impulse which the average man reduces to spite, jealousy, backbiting, the thief admits to himself and follows. At least, he is not a hypocrite, and hypocrisy is the damning sin of every other class of society."

"Now we have reduced it to this," summed up Creel: "the thief is strong, clever—and honest." He laughed softly.

"You laugh," nodded the other, "but nevertheless you agree with me!"

And in spite of the growing dimness of the evening Creel saw that his eyes lighted with triumph. He added:

"Paris stole Helen; hence Odysseus and Agamemnon and Achilles; hence Homer. It all began with a theft; and after all, when does a good man make a satisfactory hero? He may be impressive, but he can never be real.

"The hero of Paradise Lost, every one admits, is Satan. Our sympathies lie with Abel; our interests lie with Cain. The destroyer holds the center of the stage. Cæsar stole their rights from the populace; and the populace dropped upon their collective knees and thanked him for it. Yes," he concluded, "for a life which gives a man excitement, pleasure, leisure, and a light conscience, give me the profession of the thief."

As he ended, a searchlight from the bridge, whose shaft of light had been wandering wildly across the clouds, now dropped for an instant toward the prow of the ship and fell upon the figure of Creel's companion. His hand flew up automatically, as if to ward a blow. In raising it the two middle fingers were closed, but the forefinger and the little finger remained extended stiffly. It was an odd gesture; even when the searchlight flashed away the oddity of it remained imprinted on the mind of Creel. For no real reason he wished suddenly to be alone; to think over and analyze at leisure the host of impressions which the stranger had given him.

"I have to get my things in shape for the landing," he said, "so I'll bid you a very good evening. And perhaps," he added, "we can meet again in the morning? Perhaps we can find other points for agreement, eh?"

"By all means," chuckled the other, "and suppose we make this the meeting place — any time after breakfast. I'm usually out here watching the gallop of the bow wave and catching the breath of the wind. The wind, my friend—there's the predatory spirit for you!"

It was full night as Creel turned away and walked back up the deck. He remembered, after he had gone a little distance, that he had forgotten to ask the name of his new found friend, and he turned sharply about. He was loath, however, to return for such a purpose; it was too blunt, too crass a question; it showed too much curiosity, and if there was one thing on which Creel prided himself, it was his profound indifference.

As he stood, hesitating, he saw a broad-shouldered, stocky man walk down the deck toward the prow. The eye of Creel followed him, partly because of his powerful proportions, partly because his head was canted in an odd, thoughtful manner to one side, partly because he was walking straight toward the place where the stranger stood at the prow watching the rushing of

the bow wave, faintly white, below. But the night was now so thick that the eye of Creel did not reach to the prow itself. Into that gloom the figure of the stocky man with the canted head disappeared. At that Creel turned and went slowly to his cabin.

CHAPTER III.

THE SIGN OF ORMONDE.

THE next morning breakfast was hardly done when Andrew Creel went straight to the bow. It was already crowded with passengers who kept their eyes fixed on the approaches to New York Harbor, and among them there was no sign of the interesting stranger of the night before. It irritated Creel but hardly surprised him, for the stranger was distinctly not the man on whom engagements lie heavily; he would follow his mood.

Creel waited patiently, and when his man did not appear he made a careful tour of the decks. He regretted doubly now that he had not learned the name of his singular acquaintance, but finally he resigned himself to his fate. They were already in the heart of the harbor—the jagged outline of the Battery was like a row of lances cutting into the sky.

It was not hard to dismiss the stranger, no matter how promising their talk had been, for it seemed to Andrew Creel that he had already caught at the secret. The feeling that he had slept all his life was stronger than ever in him; it made the consciousness of his present alertness all the more keen. He fell to watching the faces of men and women and children who passed him. To be sure, this had always been a favorite amusement of his, but there was now a difference.

Whereas he had formerly merely caught at the characteristics and type of a man, he now tried to go back into his past, and from that he tried to build the man's future. It seemed to Creel in the delight of his new attitude that every line in a man's face was as significant as a chapter in a biography. Aye, every man was an open book, though each was written in a differing language; but everything helped Creel—the shape and activity of hands, the set of a chin, the brightness of an eye, the carriage of head and shoulders.

Not men alone, but the very feel of sun and air was new to Creel, and the distant heights of the Battery were like a jumble of imperial towers over a fairy city; when he stepped ashore he would be in the land of adventure. It was strange that a glance at a man and five minutes conversation should have affected him so vitally, but perhaps Creel had merely reached the natural end of his period of inertness.

After all, most men reach some such awakening. To some it comes through the sudden love for a woman, disappointed or fulfilled. A lesser thing affected it with Creel: he was as changed from himself of yesterday as the adolescent is removed from the mature man. It was not strange, therefore, that he was whistling as he moved down the gangplank, and when at last he was free to pass on into the city he walked with a springing, eager step like an athlete from whose shoulders a weight had been removed.

It was as he passed in the steady stream of people out onto the street that a form of great height loomed suddenly at his elbow, and a voice boomed:

"Hel-*lo!*"

He whirled, shaken with surprise, and his hand automatically flew up as if in self-defense; but when it rose the middle fingers were clenched and the fore and little fingers stiffly extended in the manner of the stranger on the ship the night before. He dropped his hand at once and found himself looking up into the face of a burly monster a whole head taller than himself; a man with a comfortably rounded vest and a plump face, tinged with the pink of good living. His eyebrows were so highly arched and his eyes so wide and extraordinarily blue that his expression was one of the most extreme candor and naïveté.

Before the gesture of Creel he started, and the color in his face deepened; his eyes darted once to right and left, and brushing close to Creel he muttered:

"Good God, Ormonde, do you give that sign in public places?"

The blood leaped from the heart of Creel to his head and then back again. He stared straight before him; the sun had never been so bright—faces were a swirl of dazzling white in that radiance. For the dream of the morning was true: he had stepped into a land of adventure—a fairyland. Ormonde? Well, he would be Ormonde or any one else for the nonce. The words came of themselves; his volition had nothing to do with them. He said:

"My dear fellow, it's become a second nature to me, and there's really no danger in it."

And to prove it he brazenly raised his hand in the same manner with the two fingers stiffly extended. The big man cursed softly; he was so excited that his forehead gleamed with sweat.

"Damnation, Ormonde!" he muttered. "Are you going to turn out as bad as everything we've heard about you? Follow me—this way!"

He led the way to an automobile, a long-bodied roadster, and they began to wind away through the heavy traffic with horns blaring about them and the rumble of trucks over the cobblestones.

"You took me on trust from the signal?" cried the giant in a voice that boomed easily over the rush of traffic.

"Not altogether," smiled Creel.

"Ah, I suppose that Anne said a word about me?"

"More than a word, in fact," replied Creel. "Quite a lengthy description."

"H-m!" rumbled the other, and his pink face turned red with pleasure. "A damned good girl—Anne! Did she call me Uncle Larry or just plain Payson?"

There was a note of concern in his question.

"Uncle Larry," replied Andrew Creel.

"Good!" nodded Payson. "She and I are as thick as—ha! I always choke over that word, Ormonde, damn it!"

"Naturally," said Creel.

"Eh? Naturally."

The big man swung about in his seat to stare at his companion in such amazement that he avoided a passing street car by the least portion of an inch. But Creel leaned back against the cushions perfectly at ease. He had never been more pleasantly stirred in his life, and he was inwardly sworn to see this adventure through.

"Tut, tut!" he protested. "Are you about to quarrel over a word?" And then he made his first wild venture toward the truth.

"Can't I step out of the profession for a single instant?"

"To be sure! To be sure!" agreed the other. "You are talking unofficially, so to speak. That's a good one!" He laughed thunderously. "But I'm not going to quarrel about the word. No, Ormonde, I'm a little too conservative to quarrel with *you*."

He laughed again, but this time without much mirth. "You see, we have heard a little of your history."

"I hope," murmured Creel, "that you enjoyed it."

"Enjoyed?" echoed Uncle Larry Payson. "By the Lord, Ormonde, I tell you my hair stood on end during part of it, particularly that whole Marborough episode. D'you know that when I heard how they both arrived at the same time I gave you up—I buried you!"

"Really?"

"You think I should have had more confidence in you than that? Well, sir, I have! After that yarn was done I was prepared to believe you could go through solids like an X-ray, and now that you have the Bigbee case—well, sir, when we get home I'll tell you at length what I think of you and what all the rest of the boys think of you. We are agreed on that. In fact, Ormonde, your fame has spread abroad through America among others than us. Yes, sir, you'll be delighted with a tribute that was paid you the other day. I was dining with the new police commissioner."

"With the police commissioner!" echoed Creel rather more than politely surprised.

Payson smiled with fatherly benevolence.

"We are thick—the best of friends," he went on. "I am one of the advisory cabinet, so to speak, and confer with the chief on his most difficult cases. He considers me a rare amateur in crime."

"An amateur?" repeated Creel, and then laughed softly. His mirth was mightily reenforced by Payson.

"Yes, sir, those are the words of old Tom York, God bless him! An amateur in crime! If he knew the truth he would not believe what his eyes and ears told him. But I was about to tell you of the compliment he paid you. We had a good deal of wine with dinner, and Tom grew rather warm. He began to talk about big cases he knew of—in fact, he gave me some invaluable information that I'll tell you about later. In the midst of things he began to talk about the greatest criminals the law has combatted. And finally he said:

"'There's a young fellow in England the world will hear of one of these days. I've heard of some of his exploits, but not all of them. In fact, I've reason to believe that no one dreams of half the things he has done. His name, I understand, is Edward Ormonde, and in my personal opinion, Mr. Payson, he is the greatest thief that ever lived.' How's that, Ormonde?"

Creel flushed and was silent.

"You aren't offended?" inquired Payson eagerly.

"The word won't do!" said Creel decisively. "Won't do at all, in fact. Thief? Pah!"

"To be sure," cried Payson hastily. "I don't mean to circumscribe your talents to the one branch. By no means! And for that matter neither did Tom York, I'm sure!"

"Let it go," said Creel, relenting. "But it always irritates me a little to hear a fine—er—art, degraded with the name of thievery!"

Payson coughed and swallowed his smile, but by a mighty effort he presented a fairly straight face to Creel, though the cost was swelling purple veins above his forehead.

"If Edward Ormonde calls it an art," he said, "why, an art it is!"

CHAPTER IV.

CROSSING THE RUBICON.

THE long roadster by this time was humming softly on its way across the Fifty-Ninth Street bridge. In a few minutes it had cleared the suburbs of Brooklyn and was rushing along a country road. Since the remark about theft being an art Payson had few comments to make. Presently, however, he pointed to the left.

They had just topped a hill and they looked down upon a promontory. It was a triangle, the point touching the mainland, while the ocean surrounded it almost completely from the three sides. Down to the sea it dropped in sheer cliffs and at the bottom of these Creel saw the white lines of the surf and caught the far-off murmur of its rolling. The top of the promontory rose smoothly up toward the center, a fine lawn covering the outer portions and the mansion rising in the center, surrounded with mighty trees.

"Anne sent you a picture of it, didn't she?" went on Payson, as though irritated by the persistent silence of Creel. "Recognize it?"

"It shows even finer than it did in the picture," answered Creel. "In fact, I've rarely seen a finer place!"

"H-m!" nodded Payson. "That's what I say—though it's throwing a bouquet at myself—for I chose the site myself, you know, and I supervised the fitting up of the house. All that left wing is my work, besides the stables and the garage. We call the place Windon Manor."

"The whole group of buildings hangs well together," agreed Creel. "You did a good job of that. I suppose it's much admired."

They were sweeping down the graveled road from the crest of the hill toward the gate in the stone wall which crossed the neck of the promontory.

"The trouble is," answered Payson regretfully, "that men in our profession are usually too busy with other things to pay much attention to architecture. I can't tell you how glad I am to see that you're not like the general run. Naturally, men outside the profession never enter the grounds."

"Naturally," echoed Creel noncommittally, "you couldn't let men of another sort enter."

"I should say not," sighed Payson. "We'd venture daylight murder to keep others out."

Coming down the sweep of the hillside the car had gathered terrific momentum.

" Really?" murmured Creel. " And what would you do if a man not in your—or our —profession, got into the house or even the grounds? Would you actually go so far as murder?"

" Murder?" cried Payson. " Good Heavens, Ormonde, don't you see that it would be absolute ruin for an outsider to come in with us—even at a distance? We couldn't take a chance. There are things in that house that might—but let's not talk of the danger of an outsider getting in! It sets my blood running cold, the very thought! Murder? Why, Ormonde, we'd have to kill the unfortunate beggar and burn his body to ashes in the furnace. We'd have to annihilate him and every trace of him!"

Here the car, striking a slight rise of ground just before the gate, seemed to rise from the road and leap like a winged thing through the gate. Andrew Creel settled back against the cushions, his eyes half closed.

" But," said Payson, easing up the speed of the machine as they approached the house, " we give every one who comes here the acid test and you may be sure we know their history backward before they are trusted."

" And yet," said Creel, driven by the imp of the perverse, " just how much do you know about me?"

" Of course not much," chuckled Payson, " but then you would be an exception in any society—absolutely!"

" I wonder!" murmured Creel. and glancing back over his shoulder he noted the gate far behind him. He felt as if he had crossed the Rubicon, indeed.

They ran the car into a roomy garage, and a mechanician in a greasy cap approached them as they walked back toward the door.

" This chap is our chauffeur and chief mechanic," advised Payson, " and he's as true as steel all the way through. He's never failed us in a pinch. Better stop and have a word with him. He knows you were coming and he'd be mighty happy to have you notice him." And as the chauffeur came up. " Bud, I've been telling our friend about you. This is Ormonde."

Flannery wiped his grimy hand industriously on his overalls and then extended it with some diffidence.

" Glad to know you," he said.

" And I," said Creel, shaking hands with a heartiness that brought light into the eyes of the other, " am mightily glad to know a man who never fails in a pinch."

Flannery grinned with overmodesty.

" Oh," he replied, " I ain't so slow on the get-away. Maybe some of the flatties know me, but they got nothing on me, I broke a leg once and done my bit, but it was only a drag. And since then the dicks have never got a whiff of my trail."

The eyes of Creel wandered slightly, but he returned gallantly to the charge.

" I believe you," he said, " and it may be that we can do a bit of work together one of these days."

Flannery swelled visibly.

" You can count me in," he said, " on anything from a gat play to soaping a peter. Why, captain, I'd go along just for the sake of watchin' you work!"

Creel waved his adieu and went on with Payson. " Gat play " and " soaping a peter " and doing a " bit " and a " drag " were far beyond his comprehension. He thanked his Creator for a liberal endowment in the power of silence.

" If you could let me have a peek at the stuff," urged Payson as they approached the house, " I'd be eternally grateful. I'd feel as if I had something on the rest of the lads."

Creel hunted desperately through his mind for an answer.

" But I suppose," went on Payson, " that you want Anne to have the first look. Well, it's her right, I guess. Personally, Ormonde, I think you're getting her cheaply even at the price of the Bigbee case; for she's a jewel among women, lad, and I'd back her with my life and everything I have. But—you don't mind if I speak frankly?—considering you in the light of your past history, I'm damned if any of us can understand how you took up with such a romantic idea as this!"

It came home to Creel for the first time clearly, and the blow of understanding stunned him. In that house was a girl named Anne with whom he was supposed to

be in love; as the price of her love he was bringing from England the Bigbee case, though what the Bigbee case might be he had not the slightest dream. Hitherto, he had gathered that only the arrival of the real Edward Ormonde would reveal his identity.

But Anne—the first glance from her would disclose him to the others; and then would follow that annihilation to which Payson had referred as they rushed in the car toward the gate of the place. Yet even now, after the first shock, he was not unhappy. Boundless hope filled him; the sense of approaching danger was like wine in his blood.

The door opened before them when they had climbed the broad steps leading up to the porch and a servant, perfectly groomed as the most conservative of servants, stood holding it wide. Within Creel saw a spacious hall with a lofty ceiling; within he knew the power of the gang, whatever it might be, would close around him. There was still a chance of escape, perhaps. Yet the imp of the perverse urged him on once more. He crossed the threshold with a light step which was instantly silent on the thick rug within.

The door closed with an almost imperceptible click; the final step was taken. He gave his light overcoat and his hat to the servant. Payson had already deposited his bag and now shook a warning finger at the servant.

"And, mind you, Harry," he said gravely, "no trifling with that bag or anything in it."

"Aw, listen, chief," drawled Harry, "maybe I'm a dub, but I ain't so green as to play *him* for a fall guy!"

"That 'll do!" said Payson sharply.

The servant stiffened back to his former manner instantly. The difference between it and his attitude of the instant before was as great as the change from the stiffly starched shirt from the laundry and the crumpled rag which is tossed into the laundry bag.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Very good, sir."

And past his blank stare they walked into an inner room. Here three gentlemen rose at once to greet them. They looked to Andrew Creel very much as he would have expected the owner and the guests of such a mansion to appear. They were all well past middle age; they were perfectly groomed; courtesy looked from their eyes; their manner was, one and all, the manner of the man of the world. Creel had seen such men in every great cosmopolitan city. What he had heard led him to believe them a gang of unscrupulous thieves; his senses showed him in mien and manner three complete gentlemen. Payson stepped a little away from him and bowed both to him and to the others.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have the honor of presenting to you Mr. Edward Ormonde, of England, and now, I trust, of America. Mr. Ormonde, these are my friends and yours: Mr. John Rincon, Mr. Matthew Kingston, Mr. Robert Lorrimer."

CHAPTER V.

THREE GOOD MEN AND TRUE.

ANDREW CREEL surveyed the three cultured reprobates with a passive eye. Mr. John Rincon was very little, very withered, and very red. His complexion was so violently sanguine, indeed, that one felt as if the skin were of tissue paper thinness—as if the rubbing of the fingers against it would break the delicate tissue. It gave him an appearance of extreme boyishness which made a singularly grim contrast with the frailty of age. This contrast was sharpened, made ludicrous, by a bass voice so tremendous that it filled the apartment and came booming back from the walls; when he spoke his chest labored heavily and perceptibly.

By his side stood Robert Lorrimer. He was almost as tall as Payson himself, but not a tithe of the latter's bulk. He had a bushy, white mustache and a fluff of silver hair so thin that it stood up with every touch of a draft. His baldness accentuated a truly remarkable forehead. It was divided by a sharp line in the center, like a perpetual frown, which threw into relief the two swelling lobes of that great brow. It was his habit to speak slowly, thoughtfully, in a voice so faint and husky that at times he

was almost unintelligible, and he continually paused to clear his throat.

Of the three Matthew Kingston seemed by far the youngest, but he was of that plump type who resist the approach of years. For the rest, he was quite ordinary in appearance, except that his eyes continually twinkled as though he were enjoying some secret jest. He seldom spoke, even to his intimates; he was prevented by a voice so shrill and piping that it brought an instant smile to the face of an auditor.

Accordingly, while the other three shook hands and expressed the appropriate pleasure in the introduction, Matthew Kingston murmured something unheard and let his smile take the place of words. Little John Rincon immediately took possession of Creel's arm.

"Come, come!" he said in that terrific voice. "Sit over here by the window—in that chair—so!—now we have a look at you. Well, well! So this is the great Ormonde! Sir, I shall mark this day in red chalk."

"And I," said the faint voice of Robert Lorrimer, "look forward to a long chat with you—a very long one, indeed, Mr. Ormonde!"

As for Matthew Kingston, he said not a word, but he stood with his pudgy hands clasped behind him, teetering slowly back and forth from heel to toe and smiling benignly down upon Creel.

"And where's Anne?" asked Payson. "I suppose that would be more to the point with Ormonde?"

"Of course it would, and she's due directly—she and her father. A dear girl, Ormonde, and we envy you your good luck!"

So saying, he rubbed his little, clawlike hands together and laughed with deafening heartiness.

He continued: "They'll be in directly; they didn't expect to see you here so soon. Quick trip, Payson, old boy!"

"And now," suggested Robert Lorrimer, "a peek at the Bigbee case, eh?"

"Not at all!" protested Payson, and he raised his big hand. "Not at all! Let Anne have the first look at 'em. After all, she's to pay the price!"

His chuckle over this witticism called forth a soft-voiced but stern rebuke from Lorrimer:

"My dear Payson, you are not in the slums, you know. You really are not. I wish you would watch your vocabulary."

"Rot!" blurted Payson. "Ormonde's a man; he takes no offense at a harmless little jest."

"At least," murmured Lorrimer, "Mr. Ormonde is a gentleman; and as such he will forget. Well, Mr. Ormonde, we all regret that our chief is not here to welcome you; but perhaps you're already acquainted with him in some other place? His name is James Ashe—to his friends."

"I have never had the pleasure," answered Creel.

And he wondered at the man who could be named chief in such a circle of accomplished scoundrels.

"It is to be regretted," said Lorrimer. Here he lowered his voice so that there was a singular emphasis on all that followed, though it may have been due to the constitutional weakness of his throat. It gave the impression that he excluded the others in the room from his comments, as though Ormonde alone could understand and appreciate. He said:

"It's a full month since Ashe left us. In fact, he departed almost immediately after we received word of your offer, your most unusual offer, sir!"

"Unusual?" boomed Rincon. "By the Lord, yes, and most welcome! But I'd like to know this: was it for the sake of poor Berwick or for his daughter alone, or for both of them, that you have acted with this—"

"Unprecedented generosity," filled in Lorrimer. "I'll wager that both reasons operated on Mr. Ormonde—both humanity and—a love of the beautiful."

He pointed his speech with a slight and graceful bow toward Creel, who suavely replied:

"That's kind of you. And, in fact, you're right. You have described the lady yourself, and Berwick is—"

He paused, as though hunting for a word and Lorrimer, as he had expected, came again to the rescue: "A traitor," he sug-

gested, "and a coward, but—a human being. None of us suspected him on either count until he stole the Bigbee case from us; afterwards he showed in his true colors."

"Yellow," blurted Payson, "just damned yellow—the dog!"

"Come, come!" protested Lorrimer, and he raised a thin-fingered hand. "There are qualifying remarks to make. He pretended that he wanted to make enough at a blow to retire and set up an establishment of his own for the sake of Anne. Treason? Yes, but let's bear the redeeming features in mind. On the whole, Mr. Ormonde, I'm very glad that Berwick is not to be sacrificed—though you must admit that our provocation was extreme."

"Intolerable," agreed Creel calmly. "Absolutely!"

"I'm glad you agree," sighed Lorrimer. "I wouldn't have had you think us inhuman!"

"Lorrimer!" cut in Payson. "Don't be such an infernal, cold-blooded hypocrite; don't you suppose Ormonde knows us already? Are you going to try to pull the wool over *his* eyes?"

"Payson," said Lorrimer gently, "you sadden me; you cut me to the quick!"

"Oh—" began Payson, and then shut his teeth with a click and finished his sentence by bringing a huge fist snapping home against the palm of his other hand.

"Whatever I know," said Creel, who could not refrain from smiling, "always I am glad to have my ideas amended and—improved."

And he favored Lorrimer with his most courtly bow. All the time he had been measuring the four; he had been estimating their strength of body and mind. He knew that he balanced over a gulf of destruction, but the danger did not paralyze him. He recognized with a sudden wonder that he was not afraid to die. The threat suspended over his head merely served to clear his mind, sharpen his insight into the soft-voiced cruelty of Lorrimer, the brutality of Payson, the silent malice of Kingston, and the inhuman viciousness of Rincon.

What he would do he had not the slightest idea. The coming of Anne would precipitate the final action; the coming of the real Ormonde would do the same thing.

In the little breathing space of suspense that remained to him, he found life incredibly dear, but the excitement of the moment was even more priceless.

"Thank you," Lorrimer was saying, "and, in spite of Payson, I want to assure you that it was not I but Ashe who pressed us to put Berwick out of the way; in fact, to the very end the firmness of Ashe was incredible. He was so set against accepting any ransom for the life of Berwick—even the lost Bigbee case—that I feared for a time." He completed his sentence with a marvelously expressive shrug of his shoulders.

"The truth is," broke in the thunder of Rincon, "that Ashe is pretty fond of Anne himself. He fought tooth and nail against a ransom for Berwick so long as the price of that ransom was to be Anne herself. But she settled it herself when she told him that if her father died she would lay the death at his door. Also, we voted Ashe down for the first time—even though Lorrimer was on his side!"

"Tut, tut!" said the soft-spoken Lorrimer. "Are you going to rake up old scores? It was a matter of policy, my dear Ormonde! Surely you will understand that it was a matter of mere policy; I could not consult my own humane instincts against the safety of the circle."

"Matter of mere life or death for Berwick—the cur!" said Payson. "But now you're safely here, Ormonde, I'll tell you a suspicion I've had. You see, Ashe left us immediately after we'd decided to accept your offer and spare Berwick in return for the Bigbee case. It was my personal opinion that he went to England to do you wrong—dispose of you, in fact, before you could bring the case back to us and take Anne away with you. Now I suppose Ashe merely went away to be by himself. He's terribly wrapped up in Anne, but I suppose he's submitted to the inevitable. I hope so, at least."

"Yes," roared Rincon. "A rare mind, that! He established us, you know."

"Ah," murmured Creel. "Tell me about that!"

"You do it," said Rincon to Lorrimer. "You're the orator."

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF A GREAT BEGINNING.

"YOU flatter me," smiled Lorrimer, and he went on in his slow, almost faltering manner: "You see we were all once ordinary—er—business men—all of us. Our finances were tied up in the affairs of a great bank. For obvious reasons I cannot name the bank even to you, Mr. Ormonde."

"Certainly not," agreed Creel.

"Thank you. Well, then, we were all heavily engaged to the interests of this bank, as I was saying, when it failed. Yes, sir, it failed utterly owing to embezzlement—the stupidest, most transparent embezzlement which had been going on for years, and no depositor suspected it and none of the directors.

"At any rate, the embezzling went on, and on one fine day we discovered that we were ruined—all of us. The bank couldn't pay ten cents on a dollar; a disturbance of the Street helped to tear things to pieces. Well, sir, eventually we were gathered together—twenty-two good men and true, eight years ago almost to a day. We had one common topic which bound us together—our complete financial ruin. Some one remarked that if a man of mere uninspired common sense was capable of robbing a great bank with impunity for years, a group of intelligent men would probably be able to rob the world with impunity forever. Needless to say, the man who made that remark was the very youngest of us all—James Ashe.

"In ordinary circumstances the remark would have fallen on barren ground as a mere commonplace, but we were twenty-two desperate men; we felt that the world owed us some return for the honest money we had gathered and had lost."

"Honest?" growled Payson.

"As for your affairs," smiled Lorrimer imperturbably, "I'm sure that I can't express a well grounded opinion."

"Well," began Payson, but stopped short, and Creel wondered to see the giant quelled by the calm voice and the smiling eye of old Lorrimer.

"We felt, I say," resumed the narrator, "that we deserved compensation and that whatever we could get, the end would justify the means. Some one took up the comment of Ashe—"

"It was yourself!" bellowed Rincon.

Lorrimer reproved him with a glance and continued:

"And supported him with a little impromptu sketch of the opportunities which might open before such an association. By the time his talk was ended others were ready to add remarks. Well, sir, that meeting lasted far into the night, though it began in the middle of the afternoon, and before the meeting broke up every member of it was pledged to secrecy and faithfulness to a new organization of a character which you may be able to surmise. We had accepted a constitution and we had named young Ashe as president. The great work was under way!"

As he paused Creel interpolated the question: "Twenty-two?"

"You naturally wonder at the number," agreed Lorrimer, "when we are now only six all told. But, you see, it was found that some of the men weakened from time to time, and the moment they weakened it was necessary that the rest of us should dispose of them. We appointed a secret committee of three to ferret out the discontented and the weak."

"And you headed the committee," commented Payson.

"And did my work thoroughly," said Lorrimer with a sudden metallic ringing of his voice, as though the memory stimulated him to an almost youthful vigor. "Did it thoroughly and would take the same steps again in case of need! When one of my committee failed me, he fell by my hand!"

His manner changed instantly, and passing his fingers through the fluff of silvery hair, he pursued his tale with a voice as soft as dripping honey:

"But those harsh days are long past, the Lord be praised! In five years the only defection has been that of poor Berwick. But to go on.

" When our number was so sorely diminished we finally decided that the remnant of the original members should no longer take an active part in the outside work except in cases of great need. We concluded that it would be wiser to constitute ourselves an inner council to plan, advise, and direct our active workers.

" These workers were recruited from various classes, beginning with what may be called the underworld of society and extending up to men of an incredibly high position. None of these was taken fully into our confidence and none was allowed to know the full extent or the details of our operations. Each was sworn, of course, to absolute secrecy, and the oath was reinforced by such proved examples of our power and instant execution of the unfaithful that our workers dread the decisions of the council far more than they dread the power of the law.

" Yes, sir, our power is felt so keenly by them that several of them have died in the chair refusing to confess to the law or to involve their directors even when pardon and police protection were offered as a reward for confession. Mr. Ormonde, I myself have witnessed two such executions, and on each occasion I was highly edified by the conduct of our unfortunate allies. They died like men; they proved themselves worthy of our society; and their names are inscribed in our memories!"

He made an impressive pause: and during it a chill went up the spine of Creel like a slowly moving piece of ice.

" As the result of these examples," said Lorrimer, " our organization is bound together with ties stronger than iron or adamant. We are dreaded more than the most horrible certainty of death; we can trust our members in every crisis. Moreover, they are forced to obey the least of instructions. They execute our orders not only in effect, but in form. In this manner we are enabled to conduct the most serious operations without unnecessary waste of life; a result which is highly gratifying to us all, needless to say!"

" Sir," said Creel, " your restraint is obvious and commendable."

Lorrimer bowed profoundly.

" Praise from Edward Ormonde," he said, " is praise indeed; but will you allow me to comment that you have not always showed the constraint which you now praise in us?"

" Explanations," said Creel carelessly, " never take much of my time. I will only say that when an end is before me I accomplish it by the most direct means. If there is opposition I destroy it; if there is revenge, I take my chance with it. And what, Mr. Lorrimer, is life without chance? It is profitable, perhaps, but very stale and weary!"

" Ah," murmured Lorrimer, " that is the opinion of a brilliant and self-confident artist, but in the end—well, each to his own preference. I prefer a longer life even if it is somewhat less crowded with action."

" And now that you've heard a little about us," boomed Rincon, " won't you favor us with something out of your own past, Ormonde? We're eating our hearts out with curiosity."

The others agreed with sparkling eyes.

" What, gentlemen, would you suggest?" asked Creel.

" The Gastonbrook affair!" cried Payson.

" The story of the two Lancasters!" said Rincon.

And the ludicrous, piping voice of Matthew Kingston now spoke for the first time: " The Van Zanten pearls!"

Creel swept them with a lingering glance of good nature.

" Ah," he said to Kingston, " I see you have an eye for the spectacular even more than the others. Now let me be perfectly frank with you: I rarely tell stories connected with my past."

He watched them exchange glances of astonishment.

" Why, Ormonde," came the roaring voice of Rincon, " we have understood that the most singular part about you is that you are always willing to confide in others any detail of your operations!"

" And so," growled the others, " have we all understood."

" No doubt, no doubt," answered Creel airily, " and as a matter of fact, that is the impression which I have always attempted to convey. But I draw a line of distinction between others I have talked to and you—

my very good friends! I have talked—yes, but though I've handled the near-truth often enough, I've always avoided the exact details.

"In place of the actual happenings, when it came to the finer points, I've always substituted little touches of the imagination. For you see, gentlemen, I could not expose my methods in their entirety. I expose enough to make others believe they know all; I reserve the really distinguishing features. It is necessary. But with you, sirs, I prefer to tell the whole story or nothing at all. And of the two choices I'm sure you will forgive me if I select the second and say not a word about my past."

Lorrimer and Rincon exchanged glances, but Payson said instantly:

"That's what I call straight-from-the-shoulder talk, and I like it. Ormonde, I think more of you now than I ever have before. To tell you the truth, I've always had an idea that you were a windy, conceited, clever—damned fool. But I retract all my former opinions. And here's my hand on it!"

Before Creel could answer, Rincon announced in his terrific voice:

"And here you are, Ormonde. The lady is with us!"

CHAPTER VII.

SUNSHINE.

LIKE the rest, Creel rose from his chair and turned toward the door—slowly, for when he faced that door at last he expected a sharp outcry of surprise that would bring weapons into the hands of every man in that room.

He turned, steeling his nerves, and when he saw the figure in the door he received two shocks which almost destroyed his reserve of nervous endurance. She had been riding, and she stood in the doorway, tugging off her gloves. The derby hat sat jauntily just a trifle to one side, and under it there was sunny hair, and flushed cheeks, and straight, black eyebrows. That was the singular feature—the bright hair, and the black of eyebrows and eyes.

In every respect his expectations were upset. For here was pride in place of boldness and feminine poise in place of worldly complacence. It was a darkly furnished room, high-ceilinged, of puritanically severe proportions, and spaciousness almost its only charm; she came into it like a touch of the fresh outdoors, like a sudden burst of living sunshine. At sight of Creel her eyes wavered an instant and the flush of exercise rushed into a flame of color; but at once she controlled herself and walked straight toward him, smiling faintly.

It was this that shook Creel's self-control to the core. This was the woman with whom Ormonde was supposed to be in love, and yet she did not know his face! In his utter confusion he must have betrayed himself if she had reached him, but now a man came from behind her, almost trotting in haste, and rushed upon Creel.

It was a little man, plump, with a well-rounded vest that shook as he hurried forward. His face had small and regular features which had once been extremely handsome, no doubt, but good living had blurred and disfigured that face with fat, loosening the mouth, almost obscuring the eyes; and this fat, in turn, recent anxiety had converted to flabby folds.

Purple pouches were under the eyes, and grim lines ran past the mouth, and under the chin hung a loose pocket of flesh. He came now, illumined with inward light, and seized on both the hands of Creel. His own were at once cold and moist and slippery to the touch.

"You are here!" he cried when at last he could speak. "Thank God you are here at last—my boy—my son! Ormonde, God bless you for what you've done for me."

A repulsion against which he could not fight swept over Creel; he jerked his hands free and stepped back.

"I can't keep silent any longer," he said, facing Lorrimer instinctively. "I've come a long ways simply to tell you that I haven't the Bigbee case with me!"

It was singular to note the manner in which the different people received the information. Payson, the smile wiped from his face, remained staring stupidly; Rincon turned from red to purple; Matthew Kingston turned on his heel and strode toward

the far end of the room; Lorrimer sat bolt upright, clasping the arms of his chair, and a devil glittered in his eyes; the girl had turned utterly white, as though one stroke of a sponge had wiped the color from her face, yet there was something akin to relief in her sigh. As for Berwick himself, he had, in spite of his repulse of the moment before, been nodding and grinning; now his nodding and his grinning continued, but his eye was blank. He turned to the girl.

"Anne," he said feebly, "what does it mean?"

Some of her color returned—a burning spot in either cheek—and her eyes fixed and narrowed upon Creel.

"I think it means what the words said," she answered slowly.

"Then God help me!" moaned Berwick, and fell rather than sank into a chair. His daughter regarded him with a singular mixture of sympathy and scorn.

"Do you expect him to help *you?*" she asked harshly, and then dropping to her knees with a little cry of sorrow, she threw her arm around his shoulder and commenced to murmur little words of comfort; the two were quite shut off from the others.

Of the rest, Creel was the least discomposed. For he had expected sudden ruin with the entrance of the girl, and now he had at least a fighting chance left him. He sat down in a chair and commenced to drum his fingers lightly on the arm.

The others remained still unchanged in their attitudes, their glances one and all fixed ominously upon him, when a whistling broke in upon them with the opening of some outer door. Lorrimer smiled without trace of mirth and turned his evil eye toward the entrance to the room and then back to Creel.

"That's the whistle of James Ashe," he said, "and he comes in good time. *He* will have something to say to you, Mr. Ormonde; and the rest of us will abide by his decision. Ah, Jimmy!"

It was a man of very broad shoulders, the rest of his body tapering down so that he gave a promise of agility as well as terrible physical strength. There was nothing distinctive about his face save the massiveness of the jaw which gave him, in repose, the expression of one who has just set his lips in determination.

"Ashe," cried Rincon in his great voice, "here's Edward Ormonde at last!"

The man with the massive shoulders started, whirled until he faced Creel directly, and then walked hastily toward him. He came to an abrupt halt half a pace away and surveyed his man with manifest insolence from head to foot.

"You!" he snarled. "You? Edward Ormonde?"

"And he came," cut in the soft voice of Lorrimer, "without the Bigbee case!"

"Ha!" said Ashe, and whirled toward the speaker. "Without the Bigbee case, did you say?"

And then, strange to say, he dropped into a chair and burst into a convulsion of laughter—homeric laughter; it seemed inextinguishable; it came roar on roar and peal on peal. It reduced him to a shaking bulk which loosely filled his chair from arm to arm. Then he sobered with an equally astonishing suddenness. He sat erect and regarded Creel with an undisguised sneer.

"So—Edward Ormonde"—and he gave the name an odd emphasis—"you came, and without the case? It was all a bluff? And just what is your purpose, my friend, in coming at all?"

"My dear fellow," said Creel, unmoved, though he understood at once that Ashe knew he was not Ormonde. "My dear fellow, in a dozen lifetimes you would never guess why I am here."

He was strong with sudden confidence; something kept Ashe from telling what he knew. Something would continue to prevent him, whatever the reason might be. On that score, at least, he was safe, until Ormonde himself appeared. But why did not Ormonde come? He was already long overdue.

"I want to call to your attention, Mr. President—" began Lorrimer coldly.

"What?" called Ashe, now grave indeed. "What do you mean by that?"

Lorrimer waved a hand of protest.

"Naturally," he said, "when Ormonde came I told him freely about our organization."

"Naturally," said Ashe with heat, "you

are just clever enough to make an ass of yourself at times, Lorrimer!"

He glanced fiercely at Creel, then shrugged his shoulders and relaxed in his chair. "Well, go on."

"What I call to your attention," said Lorrimer, overlooking the rebuke, "is that Ormonde has imposed on us, grossly. He keyed up our expectations; he led us on; he lied to us in his cablegrams."

"I only interpose to remark," said Creel, "that I have never lied to you in a cablegram."

"Ah!" said Ashe. "You never lied in a cablegram addressed to us? Well, I believe you!"

And he burst again into his heavy laughter.

"Is it a laughing matter?" bellowed Rincon, smashing his clawlike fist against his knee. "I tell you, Ashe, we've let Ormonde into our inner circle to-day! That was natural when we thought we were getting a sufficient pledge from him—and giving him one in return. But what about it now that there's no tie between him and us?"

"It's perfectly simple," said Ashe. "We remove Mr. — er — Ormonde from our midst."

"Turn him loose without any bond from him?" cried Lorrimer. "Ashe, have you departed from the last of your senses?"

"I used the word 'remove'," answered Ashe dryly, "in a sense which I was sure you, at least, Lorrimer, would not fail to understand."

"Ah!" cried Lorrimer, and a grim joy lighted his eyes. "Remove him? Good! Very good indeed. He's trifled with us and your decision is admirable—admirable!"

He sat with his glance hungrily upon Creel and his lips parted like one who drank —deeply.

"Let him be—removed—and perhaps at the same time that Berwick pays his penalty?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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FUTILITY

I SAID "I will laugh
Though the whole world weep;
No sorrow shall touch me,
Awake or asleep!"

I laughed at the light
And I laughed at the dark
And I laughed at the shadows
Of grief—but hark!

I found that laughter
Could be all wrong,
For I laughed too loud and
I laughed too long.

Till my tear founts dried
And my heart grew cold
And I suddenly found
I was *old—old—old!*

G. G. Bostwick.

Out of the Sky

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Author of "Playing the Man," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

THE INVENTIVE TEMPERAMENT.

DOROTHY BARTON was hanging the heavy, wet sheets, pillow slips, and other items of the weekly wash on the clotheslines stretched between poles at the rear of the Barton cottage. Her delicate hands and arms were not those of the laundress or the industrious housewife and a scowl of vexation and discontent disturbed an uncommonly lovely face that spoke of a temperament pathetically unsuited to the practical domestic departments of a home.

Dorothy was twenty, golden-haired, blue-eyed, enchantingly dainty, and bewitching with a capacity for the enjoyment of luxury and entertainment; but she was the wife of Peter Barton, whom people called an inventor, though the results of his labors had not yet justified the assumption of that title, and she was trying heroically to exist along with Peter from day to day, sustained by little more than the roseate dreams of future affluence which were the product of her talented husband's peculiarly sanguine and patient mind.

A muffled detonation sounded suddenly from the old stable at the rear of the garden, which served Peter Barton as a laboratory and workshop. Dorothy dropped a tablecloth and a handful of clothespins and uttered a scream. She stared in terror at the ramshackle old building, and saw little wisps of vapor curling upward from the two open windows of the upper story. She screamed again, ran swiftly to the workshop and up the precarious stairs, bursting into the laboratory and into a cloud of vile-smelling gas that filled the place with an opalescent haze.

Peter was standing by his work table, ruefully regarding the wreck of what had been an impressive array of mysterious bulbous and tubular arrangements of glassware. He was a bit dazed, quite frankly astounded, but evidently unharmed physically, and he

managed to affect a smile that was intended to be reassuring.

"What in the world—" Dorothy gasped faintly, as she covered her mouth with her handkerchief to keep from strangling.

Peter made a further effort to render the smile reassuring, and shrugged his shoulders over the ruins with the fatalism of the sportsman and the philosopher.

"I almost had it that time, dear," he said, "but it—it busted."

Dorothy was relieved, but indignant.

"You almost had it!" she echoed ironically. "You're forever almost having it, Peter! And it always busts, in one way or another, doesn't it? Bust, bust, bust!—your pocketbook, your ideas—everything! *We* are busted! And now you start blowing up things! I don't know what saved the building, and it 'll be a miracle if you don't blow up our home and everything."

Peter's long, thin face took on an appropriate expression of regret and contrition, and his soft brown eyes gazed pleadingly at his wife through the large, round lenses of his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"I'm awfully sorry, Dot," he said plaintively. "I know it must have given you a scare. But accidents will happen now and then, and it really wasn't my fault. If the blamed stuff hadn't blown up, I'd—"

"Oh, I know all about it!" Dorothy interrupted sharply. "It it hadn't blown up we might be rich, and all that. It's getting rather sickening! You are a philosopher, but I'm not, and I have all the worry and the humiliation and the disgrace. Here I have the bridge club on my hands this evening—why I was ever fool enough to join it I don't know! I ordered some things from the grocer for the supper, and he sent his boy up here to say that he couldn't deliver them, because you have not paid the bill for two months. Our credit is cut off, Peter Barton, and we haven't any cash to buy food with!"

Peter flinched. With all his optimism it was hard for his kindly, patient eyes to meet those blue, accusing ones across the table. He hung his head and made a sorry show of rummaging in his pockets for cash; but the rummaging did develop some loose change to the extent of seventy cents, and he tendered it to his wife.

Dorothy rejected the offering, and stamped her foot in a rage.

"That," she cried, "is literally all the money we have in the world, and I wonder that you have the effrontery to show it to me!"

No longer able to endure the present sight of the humble, contrite philosopher, she tossed her golden head spiritedly and flounced out of the workshop, leaving Peter to shake his head slowly, and silently arraign himself for being the unhappy cause of so much misery.

Casting about in his mind for an immediate solution of the problem, which was centered in the imminent gathering of the bridge club, Peter arrived at nothing more inspired than a mental picture of the grasping and merciless town pawnbroker. However, even that was like a ray of light piercing the gloom, and he set about almost blithely to gather up a pitiful collection of books, mechanic's tools, copper laboratory utensils, and some odd bits of electrical engineering material. The books were quickly bound together with a cord, the miscellaneous articles were packed carefully into a large toolbox, and the whole array was transferred to the shed which did duty as a garage for Peter's dilapidated but cherished "old bus."

As he stowed the cargo in the rear of the ancient motor car, and proceeded to crank a particularly unwilling engine, Mr. Keating, who had lately moved into the cottage next door, sauntered over to the fence.

"Just what breed of car have you got there, Mr. Barton?" he inquired jocularly.

The melancholy Peter brightened, even at so doubtful an overture of friendly sociability.

"There's no car in this town with a better pedigree, Mr. Keating," he replied enthusiastically. "That's a Packard body on a Cadillac chassis, with a Marmon rear end. Even the horn came out of a real Rolls-Royce. And the Mercedes motor is just as good to-day as it was twenty years ago. I think I can call my old bus a real thoroughbred!"

The new neighbor nodded understandingly, but without committing himself to a definite opinion of the composite pro-

duct. He said, by way of turning off the topic:

"Well, I'm not much of a mechanic. Some folks buy a car to drive around in, and others seem to want one so they can have something to tinker with. I can't even put my wife's coffee percolator together, but I guess you're one of the kind that likes to tinker."

Peter acknowledged the compliment, construing it as such, and then grinned triumphantly as a violent turn of the crank set the ancient motor to vibrating furiously. Scarcely daring to delay his departure while the old bus was in a complaisant mood, he waved his hand to the neighbor, took his place at the wheel, and clanked noisily out of the yard.

Fifteen minutes later Peter was piling his pitiful offering on the worn counter of the pawnshop, under the baleful gaze of the pawnbroker himself. He cut the cord that held the books together, and spread the contents of the toolbox across the counter, then said with an apologetic cough:

"How—how much could you allow me on all that?"

The pawnbroker's gaze had become a devastating glare. He deigned, however, to finger one of the books contemptuously, and airily fluttered his practiced hands over the miscellaneous articles. Utterance seemed difficult for him, but at last he muttered raspingly:

"Three dollars—seein' you've been here before."

Peter winced, and sighed gently.

"Some of the tools are quite valuable," he said timorously.

"I do' want the stuff: take it away!" the pawnbroker muttered fiercely, and Peter hurriedly capitulated.

The old bus, relieved of part of its burden, was at home again, resting under its shed, in another quarter of an hour, and Peter entered the kitchen to find an angry and tearful Dorothy arguing violently, but vainly, with an agent of the electric light company who was engaged in cutting off the current from the meter over the kitchen door.

Peter rose to the occasion with alacrity.

"It seems I am just in time," he said with a friendly smile. "I have three dollars and seventy cents here, and I guess that will carry us over to next month, won't it?"

The man grinned, for Peter's smiles were always infectious, but the grin was rather sardonic.

"That won't do a bit o' good," said the man. "The bill is six dollars and fifty cents, see? It has to be paid in full, right now, or off goes the juice. You haven't paid for the last two months."

"I'm sorry," Peter murmured ruefully.

"So'm I; but that don't do no good," and the man went on with his work of destruction.

When he left Dorothy regarded Peter across the kitchen table with ominous eyes. Peter fidgeted, pulled a long face, and remarked mournfully:

"'One woe doth tread upon another's heel, so fast they follow!'"

The lovely Dorothy pounded the table with a small fist, and cried shrilly:

"*You!* You can stand there and quote Shakespeare while we are starved—and humiliated—and insulted—and disgraced!"

Peter hung his head, but he raised it again to offer a hopeful word.

"Just think, Dot!" he said, trying to sparkle optimistically. "Within a month I may be able to show the world how to make motor fuel—better than gasoline—out of a city's garbage. We may be worth thousands; we may—"

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Dorothy, inarticulate with rage and disgust, and swept tragically out of the room.

The bell rang, and Peter ambled to the front door, hanging his head dejectedly; but the postman was there, and as Peter was habitually on good terms with all living creatures, he managed a cheerful smile and chatted with the man for two minutes. There were several letters for Peter, and he took them into the parlor and opened them one by one, hopefully, even to the last. But a glance into each open envelope was enough in almost every case: "Please remit," "Account overdue," "We have placed your account in the hands of our attorneys," "Immediate settlement is demanded," and so on, in the same minor key.

His troubled scowl relaxed for an instant as he opened the last letter, but gathered again as he read:

> —And the design you have submitted is interesting, but our engineers pronounced it impracticable. We would advise you in a friendly way to abandon the project, and—

Peter sighed, and stuffed all the letters into a drawer of the parlor table, desirous of getting them out of sight. He sauntered back to the kitchen disconsolately, and regarded the defunct electric meter with vain regret.

Suddenly the gleam of inspiration flashed into his face. The meter belonged to the electric light company, but not so the wires and the fixtures and the lamps. In the shop, among his experimental contrivances, was an interesting assortment of electrical paraphernalia: a generator, a dynamo, and an abundance of wire. And for power—had not the old bus a gas engine that was as good as it had been twenty years before?

Peter flung open the kitchen door and sped across the garden. He stopped for a breathless moment to jerk open the hood of the automobile and make some rapid calculations, then dashed upstairs to the shop.

Half an hour later Dorothy glanced from her bedroom window and saw Peter busily attaching a long, narrow belt to the old bus. the other end of which disappeared through one of the shop windows. She sniffed and turned her back on the window. A little later, however, she forgot her resolution and looked out again to behold Peter jumping about the yard with a roll of wire over his arm and a pair of pliers in his hand. She groaned and cast herself upon the bed.

When Peter called her presently to come downstairs, his tone was offensively blithe, and she did not answer: but she went down slowly, armed at all points for probable hostilities. Peter was standing in the dining room, actually grinning. He touched the electric switch button, and the lights over the table flared forth with their normal brightness.

"Oh!" exclaimed Dorothy, but did not permit herself to smile.

"Pretty good?" Peter queried.

"I suppose it's all right," she allowed, grudgingly. "The bridge club won't have to play in the dark. Now, if I had anything but cornflakes to feed them—"

"I'll get some cheese down at the corner store, also some crackers and some lemons," Peter proposed hopefully. "We might have sardines, too."

Dorothy shrugged her shoulders indifferently, looked speculatively at the glowing electric lamps again, and returned to her room.

"She feels better now, anyway," murmured Peter almost happily, and proceeded to light his old brier pipe, the faithful companion of his many solitary hours.

CHAPTER II.

UP IN THE AIR.

IN a large city about one hundred miles from Spurling, where Peter Barton lived, at about the hour when Peter was trembling in the awful presence of the pawnbroker, two businesslike young men walked up to the paying teller's window in a bank, greeted the teller with friendly familiarity, and presented a printed and typewritten slip that called for various amounts of currency to make up the pay roll of a construction camp that was situated near a new water supply reservoir. The slip mentioned such things as one-hundred-dollar bills, twenties, ten, fives, and ones, with such small matters as pennies, nickels, and dimes, and finally it showed a grand total of thirty-nine thousand seven hundred and forty-seven dollars and fifty-seven cents.

The teller and an assistant, unamazed by such figures, brought forth packages of paper money and rolls of coins, and the two businesslike young men carefully stowed them in a large, stout bag, and then walked out of the bank and got into a waiting motor car, in which sat two more businesslike young men. The car passed swiftly out of the city, through the suburbs, and into the open country, bound for the big construction camp.

As the car sped along the smooth stretches of road and into a region where pastures and plains gave place to wooded tracts, the four young men suddenly observed with little more than casual interest an airplane

standing idle in a tree-bordered field. It was about three hundred yards from the road, and had evidently made a forced landing, but no men were to be seen near it. The four young fellows peered curiously at the great resting bird, and speculated upon its peculiar situation, but a patch of woodland suddenly cut off their view and turned their attention to the beauties of the now winding and canopied forest trail.

The car was making a good thirty miles an hour when suddenly, even as Birnam Wood came to Dunsinane, one of the forest trees left the ranks of its fellows without visible human agency and fell crashing to the road. The driver of the car cried out in terror, in unison with his three companions, but had no time to think of the brakes; the car veered crazily toward the ditch, struck the tree, bounded, turned over, and mingled its shattered members with branches, twigs, and leaves.

Instantly two men, with peaked caps pulled low over their eyes, sprang into the road, brandishing each a pistol, and made a show of covering the four victims of the wreck; but the poor fellows, struggling feebly to extricate themselves, were in no condition to resist attack, and one of the robbers succeeded with little trouble in dragging the bag of treasure from the tangle which had been the rear end of the car. He and his accomplice did not stop to offer help or first aid to the sufferers, but darted back into the woods and disappeared with their booty.

One by one, the late guardians of the pay roll dragged themselves from the ruin and took stock of their injuries. There were painful bruises, wrenched joints, and bleeding cuts, and the driver groaned over a broken leg; but one man found himself able to hobble, and he limped slowly away in search of aid.

The two bandits quickly traversed the patch of woodland and a series of fenced fields, then came to the airplane which the four young men had looked at with curiosity. They rather excitedly flung the precious bag into the front cockpit, then dragged out two sets of flying togs and arrayed themselves in leather coats, helmets, and goggles. One of them clambered into the front seat and hastily manipulated the switch and throttle, while the other jumped to the propeller, wound it up, and released it. The motor roared, the pilot's companion leaped to the rear seat, and the plane lumbered across the field, glided clear of the grasses and daisies and soared into the air.

Far away, in the town of Spurling, Peter Barton stood in the dining room of his cottage, coaxing his old brier into a cheery glow, and he was about to go out again to the workshop when a footfall sounded upon the front porch and the door bell rang.

Peter, in his habitual costume of old shoes, frayed trousers, unbuttoned waistcoat, colored shirt, low collar, and stringy four-in-hand tie went to the door and greeted cordially a caller of no little social distinction. Horace Arkwright, a handsome man in the early thirties, was rated among the lesser millionaires of the business world. As president, by inheritance, of the prominent engineering firm, the Arkwright Construction Company, he found his post of duty in the city, but he had established a bachelor's country seat near the town of Spurling, and Spurling people accepted him gratefully as their social overlord, and bent the knee as faithful vassals of a modern feudal system.

Peter admired Arkwright's smart appearance, and the smart appearance of the maroon-and-silver sport car that stood at the curb, but in his own democratic scheme he accorded the millionaire the same cordiality which the mail carrier had enjoyed at his hands, and nothing more. A critical bystander might easily have detected a certain unbending, an unsuccessfully concealed condescension, in Arkwright's manner; but it escaped the urbane Peter, who would have been unabashed in the presence of kings.

"Ah, Mr. Barton," murmured Arkwright. "Mrs. Barton at home? Yes? Good! Hacking around in my car for a bit of air and sunshine, you see. How about you and Mrs. Barton coming out for a little spin—out to the country club and back?"

Peter looked genuinely pleased. He was not dressed at the moment for a visit to the country club, but dressing was a small matter of buttoning up his waistcoat, slipping on his coat, and brushing his shoes. He smiled

appreciatively, and the critical bystander might then have discovered a look of apprehension stealing into the eyes of Arkwright. But the alert Dorothy had heard the voices of the two men, and she arrived at the front door suddenly with a prettily playful little bounce, to shake hands with Mr. Arkwright and signify her appreciation of his gracious condescension.

She beamed happily upon the society man and upon the car and contrived, with feminine skill, to flash eloquent glances of devastating disapproval upon Peter at the same time.

Peter's receiving apparatus caught the message, and he acknowledged it silently. He wilted a little, and his smile was dimmed, but he spoke up cheerily.

"I'm afraid I can't go along just now, Mr. Arkwright," he said, "I've got so much to do around the place; but I guess Dorothy will be glad enough to be a passenger."

"Oh, too bad! Sorry!" exclaimed the other man with relief. "Hoping you could come along to-day, Mr. Barton. But your wife? You'll take pity on me, won't you, Mrs. Barton? Just a little spin before dinner?"

Dorothy decided that it could be arranged, and Peter stood in the front garden, puffing at his pipe, and saw her spring buoyantly into the handsome car and ride away with the grand seigneur. She looked rather more than well in her dainty summer frock, and the expensive motor car seemed particularly appropriate as a setting for her, even as the smart, well-groomed man fitted into the scene as her companion. But Peter was neither jealous nor envious; he simply wished, a little forlornly, that Dorothy might have such an equipage to ride about in; and it merely occurred to him very vaguely indeed that he might dress himself to look a little like Horace Arkwright.

He strolled pensively to the kitchen garden at the rear of the cottage, and awoke with a start to the discovery that the old bus was using up gasoline to manufacture electricity that was not needed until evening. With a word of apology to the veteran engine, he stopped it, and then walked back to inspect his plants.

Ambitious blades of grass and thrifty weeds were setting up active competition and he fetched a hoe from the shed and went at them.

Suddenly he heard a faint humming sound in the air, and stopped hoeing to listen. Yes, there was an airplane coming. He was interested in airplanes, as in all mechanical things, so he dropped the hoe and shaded his eyes with his hand to peer into the brightly glowing western sky.

There it was, as yet but a mere speck, but coming nearer. Peter became enthusiastic, and darted across the garden to the shop, up the stairs, and down again with an old pair of field glasses. Now, with the glasses, he could make out the lines of the approaching craft. It was a biplane of familiar design, and from the voice of its motor he guessed it to be one of the old "J N-4" type of the war period.

Up in the air, about two thousand feet, the pilot of the plane was vexatiously wrestling with a very precious bag which crowded him in his cockpit, and berating himself for being such a fool as to stow the thing in that place. He kicked the heavy object from time to time, and tried to shift its position, but it constantly threatened to foul his stick or to bear upon the rudder controls. Thoroughly exasperated, he cut his motor, glided gently, and addressed the man in the rear seat.

"What 'll I do?" he demanded. "All I can do to work 'em now. Anything go wrong, and I'd—"

"Shove it back to me!" cried the other impatiently. "What's the matter with you? 'Fraid to trust me with it up here?"

The pilot started the engine again and zoomed and climbed until he had regained lost altitude, then cut the switch once more and glided. Gripping the stick between his knees, he reached down and raised the heavy bag in both hands, lifted it quickly over his right shoulder, and rested it upon the cowl of the rear seat.

"All right; I got it; let 'er go!" yelled the other man as he grasped the bag with both hands.

The pilot had moved the stick between his knees during the exertion of transferring the bag, and the plane lurched suddenly and side-slipped. He cursed fervently, threw in

the motor, kicked the rudder, and manipulated the stick. The plane righted itself in a half turn, changing direction, and he kicked the rudder again and banked the ship rather sharply.

Curses poured from the throat of the man in the rear seat, but were lost in the thunder of the engine. The heavy bag had lurched almost out of his grasp at the first side-slip, but he had saved it by throwing himself forward upon it. He dragged it back, to lower it from the cowl into his lap, but the excited pilot banked the plane at that moment, and the bag slipped again. The man pawed it frantically, strained at his lifebelt, and cursed; but the bag eluded his clutching fingers and went hurtling earthward.

The pilot sensed the tragedy that had happened behind him, and once more the plane glided without the motor. He saw the face of his companion and heard inarticulate sounds issue from his cracking throat. Then the pilot, too, became inarticulate. He jerked a small brass fire extinguisher from a holder at the side of the cockpit, swung it aloft, and turned in his seat to aim a smashing blow at the head of the luckless man. The other fended off the blow, and warned his assailant in high-explosive words that the ship was going into a tail spin. The pilot grudgingly resumed his duty, righted the ship, and then devoted himself to a search for a landing field. He could see a town below him, and near that town the bag must have fallen; but the country around the spot was rough, with hardly a patch of smooth green or brown to indicate hospitality for aircraft.

"I'll get back there and find that bag if it fell right into a county jail!" vowed the pilot, and headed his ship for the gleaming lines of a railroad which might lead to more level country.

CHAPTER III.

THE WINDFALL.

PETER BARTON, with his head thrown back and the glasses perpendicular, viewed the nether surfaces of the airplane as it passed directly over his cottage, and was satisfied that his identification of the type was corect. As he moved his head and the glasses slowly, to keep pace with the speeding object of his curiosity, something—a mere flicker—disturbed his clear vision. It seemed to him that some trifling mote flashed across the field of the lenses, but he gave scarcely a thought to it, and continued to follow the course of the plane. Then there came a curiously stunning, but dull, detonation, as it were, and the ground beneath his feet vibrated with the shock.

Peter reacted to the startling phenomenon with a jump, almost flinging the glasses from his hand. He saw, where a moment before had been a promising half dozen of his cherished Ponderosa tomato plants, a bulky object imbedded in the mellow loam of the garden.

In that first instant of half comprehension, he thought vaguely of the meteorites that fall upon the land of poor farmers in story books, and are sold to museums for princes' ransoms; but, as his eyes became focused upon the startling object, he saw, not the celestial mineral elements of star fragments, but a substance which was nothing more than good tanned leather, with rows of ordinary human needlework upon it. The needlework, incidentally, had not stood the strain of flight through the ether and impact with the earth, for where the seams had been were now gaping rents, and even the leather had given way at its weakest spots.

Viewed soberly, after the initial surprise, the mysterious object was obviously a tan leather bag, and quite obviously it had fallen from the passing airplane. Peter strained his eyes after the now disappearing speck in the sky, and for a moment he felt impelled to wave his arms and shout, but there is scarcely a better example of futility than the picture of a lone man on the ground trying to communicate with an airship two thousand feet above him. He turned slowly back to the aviators' lost property and went down on his knees beside the bag.

A touch showed him that it was half buried in the garden mold, and he got his hoe and gently introduced the handle between the bag and the earth as a lever, raised the bag, and turned it upon its side. One of the gaping rents in the leather

yawned still more widely, and out tumbled a neat parcel of twenty-dollar bank notes.

Peter stared at the money incredulously and with a certain awe. He prodded the bag with the hoe, and a broad fissure in the side disclosed a tumbled mass of similar bundles of currency, and some cyindrical packets of coins, looking much like the rolls of peppermint and wintergreen wafers that are displayed in the candy shops. Such a sight vaguely alarmed Peter, and he hastily gathered the treasure into his arms and bore it to the shop and up the stairs. In his workroom he placed it carefully on the long table, amid the litter of tools and apparatus, and as he released it the seams yawned again, and out came bundles of twenties, tens and fives, and there was a flashing glimpse of a hundred-dollar bill.

"H-m! I'd better call up the police station," Peter muttered hoarsely, and left the shop, after locking the door, to go to the telephone in the house.

The maroon-and-silver car returned, and Dorothy alighted, flushed and pleasantly excited.

"Thank you—so much!" she said earnestly, and held out her hand to Horace Arkwright, who remained seated at the wheel. "You won't fail to come to my bridge this evening, will you?" she added naïvely. "The bridge club will be so surprised and pleased!"

"Never mind what the bridge club will think about it," he said gayly; "I shall come to please myself."

He waved his hand to her and drove away, and she turned and hurried into the house, feeling guilty and gravely worried because she had allowed herself to enjoy the ride without Peter's company.

In her contrition she was prepared to be uncommonly nice to Peter, and when she saw him standing at the telephone in the hall she smiled and nodded; but Peter's face was knotted into a scowl of vexation, and he pumped the receiver hook up and down, and vainly shouted to a silent operator, insisting upon a response. Dorothy halted and watched him, and her contrition was dissipated by a sudden wave of impatience and anger.

"I forgot to tell you," she said, "that the telephone was discontinued to-day, because you hadn't paid the bill. I don't see how you can expect to get any service of any sort, if you can't pay for it."

Peter smiled sheepishly, hung up the receiver, and walked away with a foolishly baffled look. He was struck with the irony of the situation: his poverty had gone so far as to prevent him from notifying the police of his treasure-trove. He shook his head slowly and smiled, and Dorothy immediately resented the smile and flounced out of the hall in a temper which cleared her conscience.

Peter shrugged patiently and walked out at the front door, to go around to the shop, but he came face to face with one Simmonds, a dealer in coal and wood, who had turned in at the gate.

"See here, Mr. Barton, I want some money out o' you!" the man exclaimed sharply. "You don't need no coal now it's come summer, but I need my money."

"I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Simmonds," Peter responded ruefully, "but I have been disappointed in some business matters; I haven't a cent for you yet."

"That's what they all say!" snorted the man. "They're always gettin' disappointed. I'm gettin' disappointed, too, but I can't tell that to the wholesalers I deal with. Say, I got to have some money! Can't you dig up some somewheres? Can't you get your hands on a little somehow?"

Peter almost smiled, as he had smiled at Dorothy. Could he not get his hands upon some money? Yes, there were bank notes in the old workshop, enough to purchase Mr. Simmonds's entire business. He thought of the title of an old book he had once read: "A Great Chance for a Villain."

"If I could get my hands on any money at all," he replied presently, "I should lose no time in paying my bills. I'm sure to have some soon, though, and I'll pay you the minute I get it."

"It 'll have to be mighty soon!" growled Simmonds. "Remember that! It's all my fault, any way you look at it: it's what I get for trusting such folks as you—artists and inventors, and all them that live easy without doin' any work. I'm a soft-boiled egg, that's what I am!"

"Then I suppose I must be the egg-beater," Peter murmured to himself as he mournfully watched the indignant man stalk furiously down the street.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. BARTON IS EXCUSED.

AT nine o'clock in the evening the meeting of the bridge club was in full swing. There were twenty young men and women, married and single; all more or less identified with the almost fast set of the town. Horace Arkwright was the last to arrive, and he figured as a distinguished extra guest, coming as a happy surprise to the others, who scarcely aspired to the honor of being reckoned as intimate acquaintances of a veritable city millionaire.

"I shall have to ask you to excuse Mr. Barton this evening," Dorothy said to the company. "I urged him to join us for a little recreation, but he is all wrapped up in—in a rather important experiment in his laboratory—an experiment that may mean a great deal to us."

There was a murmur indicating that Peter was excused, and two or three guests nodded and smiled a little too understandingly, having an intimate knowledge of Peter's indifference to social diversions. as well as being familiar with Peter's important experiments, which had already become a topic for jests in Spurling.

"I suppose," remarked Horace Arkwright pleasantly, "that it would be difficult to drag Edison or Maxim or Steinmetz up to a bridge table: genius is immune to frivolity, and it would be lese majesty to require the ordinary amenities from supermen."

The thinly veiled irony was accepted as delightfully subtle by the bridge club, and the little burst of appreciative laughter was becomingly restrained. Dorothy was in doubt as to the intention behind the speech, and scarcely knew whether to rebuke or applaud, so she finished by laughing a little too shrilly.

As a matter of fact, Peter's activities at that moment were not scientific. He was sitting upon a stool in the workshop, puffing nervously at his pipe, and regarding with painful awe the ragged package of wealth upon the table.

All at once he shook his head vigorously, as though denying some thought that had entered his mind, and then drew the stool closer to the table and deliberately set himself to the making of a practical estimate of the value of the treasure. The original fastenings of the leather bag were locked, but it was a simple matter to dump the contents on the table by lifting the wreck and giving it a few gentle shakes.

Without breaking the paper bands that bound the parcels of notes, he counted the currency carefully, and jotted down the tally upon a scrap of paper. The amounts contained in the rolls of coins were stamped upon the paper wrappers, so little time was required for that part of the inventory, but the old clock in the shop struck eleven as Peter totaled his long column of figures. His eyes opened to unusual roundness at the first addition, but he restrained his feelings until he had checked the results; then he dropped his pipe and stood up.

"Holy mackerel!" he cried. "There's about forty thousand dollars!"

Reaction brought a sigh of weariness, and he sat down again and relighted his pipe. He had no problem before him, but the temporary possession of the fortune was an extraordinary and vaguely trying experience. Early in the morning he would turn the money over to the police, and be done with it; but now he was alone with it, and it gave him peculiar thrills.

Forty cents, to Peter, was a sum of money to be considered and to be expended judiciously; forty dollars would have brought temporary financial relief to him at this time; a thousand dollars would have rendered him practically independent for a short time. But forty thousand dollars! It was beyond his comprehension. An impecunious bank clerk can handle millions without a thrill, even as a butcher may handle quarters of beef without having his appetite for steaks even stirred, for the familiarity of routine establishes a comfortable contempt; but Peter had never viewed more than five hundred dollars at close range in his life, and this amazing proximity to forty thousand dollars staggered him.

Presently he shook himself together and sought relief in action. He bustled about the shop and found some large sheets of strong paper and a ball of hemp twine, and set about the task of wrapping up the fortune for safekeeping. The packets of bills and coins were stuffed back into the damaged bag, the paper and twine were applied with care, and soon a rather commonplace brown paper parcel, ready for transportation, was all that was visible on the table to thrill or disturb the observer.

Peter sat down again, but a startling knock brought him to his feet, and reminded him that the door was unlocked. It occurred to him that Dorothy might be seeking him, and he calmly bade the knocker come in. The door opened and closed, shuffling feet padded up the stairs, and a man whom Peter recognized as one of the town loafers slouched into the lighted room.

"Little late for a call, Mr. Barton," said the man with affected humility, "but I won't take much of your time. I'm out of a job—have been for a couple o' weeks—and I'm just plumb hungry. Nothin' to eat all day! You've got a heart, Mr. Barton—everybody says so—and I was thinkin' you might spare me two bits."

Peter smiled sympathetically, but a little wanly, and the man sat down on the stool without invitation. With an air of pathetic weariness he leaned on the edge of the table, and his arm touched the big brown paper parcel.

"I don't know what I can do for you," Peter said regretfully. "I don't doubt that you're hungry, but I don't get hold of two bits very often myself nowadays. Let's see!"

He crossed the room and proceeded to rummage in the pockets of his coat for loose change. There were muffled sounds of chinking metal as he moved the coat without taking it from the nail on which it hung, but the pocket linings were ragged, and Peter was rarely methodical about stowing his change in his pockets, so the quest became a hunt.

The mendicant watched him hopefully for a moment, then cast his eyes furtively around, with the craftiness of a predatory raven. In changing his position he moved away from direct contact with forty thousand dollars, which was guarded only by an unarmed man, and his greedy hand suddenly glided to the other end of the table and enveloped Peter's old field glasses. They were not valuable, but might be good for a dollar or two at the pawnshop, and the thief made sure that the owner's back was still turned toward him, then thrust the glasses into the ragged pocket of his coat.

"I bought some things at the store this evening," Peter said confidentially, "and two bits is about all I have left. I'm sorry, but that will get you some coffee and a sandwich."

He held out a quarter to the man, who steadied the stolen glasses in his flapping pocket with his left hand while he took the coin in his right.

"You're a gen'leman, Mr. Barton, just as I always says," he declared. "There's rich folks in this town that wouldn't give up a nickel to save a poor guy like me from starving, but I knew who to come to. They tell round town that I ain't any good, but I can't help my luck; I'm an honest man, an' willing to work, and I'll show 'em all some day. Thank you for your kindness, Mr. Barton; you're a gen'leman, an' I'll tell the world so!"

He backed out of the room, bowing obsequiously, and Peter followed him down the stairs and locked the door after him.

Alone once more, Peter glanced at the big package a little nervously. He wondered if the town loafer, an apparently harmless parasite, would have been sorely tempted if he had known of the contents of the bundle. Yes, without a doubt, the fellow would have been flabbergasted and tempted, but a creature of his type might have lacked the courage to fight even for such a fortune.

"And that stuff would buy eighty thousand good square meals for poor devils like him!" Peter exclaimed aloud, and began to fill his pipe for another smoke.

Thus Peter's important experiment went on, while the bridge club amused itself with red-and-white and black-and-white pasteboards. Midnight came on, and Dorothy reluctantly went to the kitchen and surveyed moodily several neatly arranged trays

of sandwiches and small cakes. While she fetched a piece of ice from the chest and slipped it into the lemonade in the cheap punchbowl, she reflected bitterly that she was the only member of the bridge club who had no maidservant, and she knew that the guests would talk about it on their way home.

Tears gathered in her eyes as she stirred the lemonade and gave some final touches to the trays, and she whispered tragically:

"Cheese sandwiches and lemonade—for people that are able to have *paté de foie gras* and champagne-cup! It's too ghastly! I can't stand it much longer."

But she pulled herself together, dried her eyes, and forced a charming smile as she called two of the ladies to help her serve the supper. The two women admired the service and the simple delicacies mendaciously, and exchanged glances as they joined the hostess in a procession to the dining room; but the guests drank the lemonade and ate the sandwiches with a gusto.

At one o'clock some of the married folk thought it was time to go home, but Horace Arkwright declared that the party was really just beginning, so the bridge club heartily violated all precedents and returned to the card tables.

"How about a little sporting proposition, people?" asked Horace. "Now, I don't know whether I've won or lost tonight, because I have to figure out such things in dollars and cents to know where I stand. Get me? Let's put up just a little money to worry about. I love to have something to worry about; it's all that makes life interesting."

Dorothy found something to worry about instantly, and was vaguely shocked. Instinctively she wondered what Peter would think about such a proposal; but the other sheep bravely concealed whatever qualms they felt, and acclaimed the suggestion as a glorious inspiration. All, however, instantly sat up straighter in their chairs and began to take a vital interest in the cards—the men with sharp-eyed, militant gravity, and the women with varying emotions of nervousness and latent greed.

Ten minutes later the bridge tables had become miniature battlefields, to the vast entertainment of Arkwright, the evil genius. Old friends of the previously innocuous bridge club were casting malignant glances at one another, and the polite society small talk had given place to the grim strategy and the finesse of warfare. Husbands and wives and intimate friends bullied one another and exchanged sharp rebukes, and the little hostess concealed her anguish behind a fixed smile; but Arkwright, bland and urbane, presided over the turbid arena with obvious delight, flattering himself that his suggestion had provided an exhibition of middle-class vulgarity, and undisturbed by the thought that certain young men and their wives were losing money to the tune of a month's income.

This devastating play lasted scarcely more than an hour, however, for certain tired business men, at ominous signals from their wives, declared with suspicious gravity that they must get a few hours' sleep before the beginning of the day of toil. The homeward movement, started by the more courageous ones, was immediately popular, and the bridge club adjourned.

The departing guests perjured their souls in thanking Mr. Arkwright for the pleasure his suggestion had given them; but Dorothy, at the door, came in for more natural and spontaneous expressions of feeling. Some of the players assured her that they had enjoyed her entertainment, for they had basked in the smiles of fortune, but others were laboring under emotions ranging from positive rage to sullen despair, and they did not spare her black looks and stinging irony.

"Such a cleverly planned party, my dear!" murmured one of the older women. "And so practical and businesslike! You must be a great help to your husband."

"You're wasted on the town of Spurling, Mrs. Barton," muttered Spurling's leading real estate specialist; "you ought to be doing business at Monte Carlo."

The excited and tremulous hostess made sorry work of speeding the parting guests, and as the last of them disappeared she turned with a groan of relief to Horace Arkwright, who still remained.

"I can hardly believe it!" she exclaimed half fearfully. "I have actually won over

eighty dollars—and it's the first time I ever played cards for money in my life."

Horace opened his eyes in mock astonishment, and congratulated her. He said sagely:

"You're too good a player to play for nothing. Always play for *something*, my dear child. It is never worth while to play *anything* for *nothing*."

Horace was pleased with himself as he bade her good night and went quietly out.

CHAPTER V.

THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE.

PETER had kept his post as a faithful sentinel over somebody's lost treasure all through the night, and maintained his makeshift, but effective, power plant with the old bus until the last light in the house, that in Dorothy's room, was extinguished. He was a bit groggy in the morning, and when Dorothy called him to breakfast at half past eight, in an unnaturally shrill voice, he knocked out his pipe for the tenth time, yawned and stretched himself, and dragged his weary frame from the shop to the house.

Dorothy, crushed under the heavy sense of guilt, and dismally worried about her ill-advised gambling adventure, took refuge by daylight in a sullen mood, trying to ease her conscience by blaming Peter for her misadventures. She had prepared ham and eggs, with toast and coffee, all with no more than indifferent success, and when Peter slumped into his chair at the table and ate quietly and wearily without comment, she said belligerently:

"You certainly have no cause to be sullen and unsociable; you can't blame me, you know, for our miserable condition."

Peter agreed with her meekly.

"I have a fretful kind of a headache," he explained, "and I was up all night in the shop; didn't try to get even a nap."

When he turned his slow, patient smile upon her, she found herself unable to meet his eyes, and she devoted her attention to her plate, but said sharply:

"When will you learn better than to wreck your nerves with this foolish all-night business, and make the daytime more hideous for me? You accomplish nothing but headaches and bad temper."

A sharp thud against the front door caused Dorothy to utter a startled cry, and announced that the morning paper had been delivered.

"I didn't expect to get a paper this morning," she said acidly, as she recovered from the shock; "the man has been here three times for his money, and he said he'd have to stop the paper if you didn't pay. You shut yourself up securely in your shop and leave me here to meet the wolves and the jackals. Isn't it nice that you have somebody to take the disagreeable *minor* details of your business off your shoulders?"

Peter sighed softly.

"I'll go get the paper," he said, and cringed instinctively in anticipation of another body blow.

When he returned she was munching toast with quick, hostile little bites, and she disdainfully rejected his silent offer of the sheet.

"I can't bear to read a newspaper that isn't paid for," she snapped.

Peter sat down again and sipped his coffee with the exaggerated formality of one who does not know what course of action is appropriate to a situation. He was in miserable doubt as to whether he should gulp the coffee fiercely, or coldly abstain from further eating or drinking.

He glanced furtively at the front page of the paper, when his eyes snapped wide open, and he gasped softly as he noted the caption of the right-hand column.

AIRPLANE BANDITS WIN CASH BUT LOSE THEIR LIVES

Forty-Thousand-Dollar Pay Roll Mysteriously Missing.

Crystal Lake Construction Camp Motor Car Ambushed and Wrecked.

Two Flying Bandits Killed When Airplane Crashes Hundred Miles from Scene of Robbery.

Peter lowered the paper, which he had rashly lifted to the level of his eyes, and

looked at Dorothy, his face aflame with excitement. He was at the point of telling her the delayed story of the treasure that had fallen from the clouds, but Dorothy's fragile nerves had been getting slowly beyond control during the ordeal of breakfast with her exasperating husband, and she normally had little patience with his sudden enthusiasms, so at the first flash of his excitement she sprang up from the table, uttered a little hysterical sob, and rushed from the room.

Peter rose slowly and stared after her, nonplused and vaguely grieved, but he glanced again at the paper, and his excitement returned. Standing by the table, he reviewed the headlines, then plunged into the context, which was scarcely more than a reporter's elaboration of the information conveyed by the heavier type.

Four men had been battered and sorely hurt in an automobile accident staged by bandits; the bandits had seized the pay roll that the men were guarding, and escaped, but only to lose their booty and their lives in an attempt to adapt the airplane to the methods of brigandage. The fatal accident had occurred at a point one hundred miles from the scene of the robbery—and Peter quickly noted that the same point was at least twenty miles from his quiet garden. The stolen money, the paper said, was missing when some farmers discovered the bodies of the bandits crushed beneath the ruin of the airship. Two of the victims of the motor car crash had identified the bodies as those of the attacking bandits, and they recognized the airplane as the one that they had observed near the scene of the robbery; but the total disappearance of the money was still a matter beyond conjecture.

It was, Peter thought again, "*a great chance for a villain,*" but he was not a villain, and he lighted his pipe and hurried out to the shop. It was necessary to readjust the old bus to its normal functions, but in ten minutes he had the engine wheezing lustily, and he fetched the paper wrapped bundle from the shop and placed it gingerly on the rear seat of the car.

There was a certain distinction in salvaging forty thousand dollars; the newspapers would have something to say about the humble suburbanite who hastened to deliver a strayed treasure to its owners; and the genial chief of police of Spurling would be a vastly astonished and delighted man that morning.

Peter actually whistled as he drove into town, for he had a comfortable trick of forgetting his worries in moments of excitement or enthusiasm, thereby breathing the refreshing air of bright little oases in a desert of care.

His efficient brake ground the venerable car to a halt in front of the little brick police station, and he began to make up his mouth for a speech as he got out and laid hands almost reverently upon the large parcel. But at that moment another and prouder automobile glided alongside his craft, and one Thomas Anson, a neighbor of the Bartons, called out:

"Say, Barton! Hold on there! Old Jonas Turner is up at your house, an' your wife sent me after you. Old Turner wants to see you right off, an' your missus acted like she wanted to see you mighty bad, too."

"All right; I'll go right back," Peter responded, looking gravely worried. "It was nice of you to take all that trouble, Anson. Thank you very much."

"No damage done," said the neighbor jocularly. "I count on you to tip me off when my better half is looking for me with blood in her eye. So-long!"

Peter stood on the sidewalk, wavering uncertainly, with the heavy packet in his arms. The dramatic little scene which he had planned for the police station setting was now utterly spoiled. The mere name of Jonas Turner had banished all joy from life, and if Turner was in a hurry, to think nothing of Dorothy in a bad mood, there must be no delay. It would be practically an impossibility, however, to transfer that prince's ransom to other hands with a few hurried words, be they never so appropriate and lucid. Peter wagged his head and scowled darkly, in a turmoil of doubt, and suddenly he bundled the fortune back into the car, clambered stiffly into his seat, and drove homeward without whistling.

Jonas Turner's old car—a flivver—was

in front of the Barton cottage, and Peter could picture the familiar business man awaiting him in the parlor; but Peter drove into the yard and stowed the treasure in the shop before he went into the house.

There were three persons in the parlor—Jonas Turner, Turner's elderly and trusted attorney, and Dorothy. The latter's face was pale and drawn; she had been crying, and was still dabbing her eyes with a crumpled handkerchief. Jonas Turner, looking pained but dignified, was pacing the room with his hands clasped behind him, and his lawyer sat by the table with the tranquillity of well-paid patience.

Peter walked into the room with the air of a prisoner entering the dock, and Dorothy rose to meet him.

"Peter Barton!" she cried tragically. "We have lost our home!"

Peter was not astonished, but his face showed the bitter, hopeless chagrin of one whose worst fears are suddenly realized.

The austere Jonas Turner bowed solemnly to Peter, struck an oratorical attitude, and said:

"Mr. Barton, I feel that I have given you as many chances as any reasonable man could expect. As you know, it would take four thousand four hundred and eighty dollars to pay off your mortgage with accrued interest, and I understand that you now have practically no assets. I am deeply sorry, I assure you, but I have instructed my attorney here to institute foreclosure proceedings at once. You people will have to look for another home, and we shall give you a reasonable time to do so."

Peter, whose optimism was forever denying the possibility of such calamities, was hard hit. He stood with stooped shoulders and drawn face, staring at Turner with a fatalistic expression. Dorothy gave way to tears and sobbed out desperately:

"How can we look for another home? There's nothing left for us now but the almshouse"

She turned frantically to Turner. "I have eighty dollars," she said. "Will you take that and allow us a little more time?"

Turner managed a sorrowful smirk as he waved away the feeble offer with a gentle flourish of both hands, but Peter stared at Dorothy in sudden consternation. Eighty dollars was a vast sum of money in the Barton household, and he could not account for such wealth in the actual possession of his wife.

Her offer rejected, Dorothy sank into a chair and gave herself up to lamentation.

Peter glanced from the two smugly merciless business men to his heartbroken young wife. He was humiliated to his very soul and overcome with vague remorse. He contemplated the situation from the woman's viewpoint, and almost wept with his wife. She was little more than a bride; she had come to him from a moderately luxurious home in which she had been tenderly nourished and protected, and he had given her nothing, with his love, save struggle, hardship, privation and devastating anxiety. For a few months she had regarded him proudly as a genius and a hero, struggling valiantly toward a shining goal; but disillusionment and worry had worn her down, and he pondered the hate which must be taking the place of her love.

He became in an awful moment of introspection utterly desperate, and for the first time in his life he grew crafty and malevolent. A faint light of grim inspiration spread over his fact, and he turned suddenly upon Jonas Turner with an air of independence.

"You might have waited for my answer before establishing my financial status and declaring your plans," he said belligerently. "Please stay here a moment," he added sharply, and strode out of the room.

Without faltering, without asking himself a question, he went to the old shop, caught up a knife, and slashed at the wrappings of the large packet until the battered bag with its protruding bundles of money was once more exposed to view. His hands shook now, and he breathed heavily, but without hesitation he ripped open the bag, snapped the paper bands that bound the bundles, and feverishly counted out hundreds, twenties and tens until he had four thousand four hundred and eighty dollars piled upon the table.

It seemed to him now that all the world was changed; it was as though he had encountered death and gone on into another

sphere. He gathered the money into a neat pile in his left hand, went out of the shop, locking it after him, and returned to the house. Dorothy was still sobbing, but she started up and looked at him curiously as he entered the parlor. Turner and the lawyer were both on their feet, pacing the floor impatiently.

Peter laid the money on the table and invited the attention of the men to it with a wave of the hand.

"Count it," was all he said.

Dorothy rose slowly from her chair and gazed at the pile of bills incredulously; and even the lawyer, who began to count the money with calm professional interest, seemed vaguely mystified.

"That is right," he announced presently. "I will write you a receipt, Mr. Barton, and we can close the matter up at my office whenever it is convenient to you. Allow me to congratulate you, sir; you must have met with unexpected good fortune."

"Can't keep a good man down, eh?" Jonas Turner chuckled. "Well, Mr. Barton, there's no one more pleased about it than I am."

"I'll call at your office to-morrow to finish up the business," Peter said coldly. "I believe there's nothing more to detain you now."

The men stared at him, a little hurt, but they accepted the curt dismissal and left immediately. Peter went with them to the door, and when they were gone he passed out of the front door himself, without turning back to the parlor, and made for the shop. He did not ask himself why he shrank from facing Dorothy, but he wanted to be alone.

Seated on his stool beside the shop table, he looked at the treasure with a new awe. He saw again, in his mind, the newspaper headlines:

Forty-Thousand-Dollar Pay Roll Mysteriously Missing.

Two Flying Bandits Killed When Airplane Crashes Hundred Miles from Scene of Robbery.

His tired eyes narrowed and he leaned forward and touched one of the broken packets of bills speculatively. Then, suddenly, the pent-up emotions of months and years of struggle and disappointment, privation and worry, burst forth; he threw himself upon the rich hoard and scrambled the piles of money into his arms, clutching and scooping up the loose notes in a frenzy, like a demented miser. The bills were tossed in the air, and they fluttered to the floor and scattered about the room. He laughed crazily and reveled in his orgy.

All at once he leaped to his feet and stood erect, his face suffused with a savage glory, and unconsciously he struck the attitude of *Monte Cristo* on the sea-girt rock at the Château d'If, and cried aloud: "The world is mine!"

CHAPTER VI.

DAME CARE ARRIVES.

AT dinner that evening Dorothy had recovered control of herself, but she was nervous and resentfully silent. Peter had undergone a change; there was about him an indefinable air of independence, even of challenge; his shoulders were squared so that it was easy to fancy a chip balanced tauntingly upon one of them. The wonted mood of good-humored deprecation and perpetual apology was strikingly absent, and his wife was puzzled and not a little irritated.

The metamorphosis was no more becoming to Peter than are most of the reversals of form in human beings, and the grimly curious woman detected even a sinister gleam in the eyes that had ever been as soft and amiable as a fawn's.

The painful silence that endured through a first course of tinned tomato soup was broken when Dorothy placed a dish of rather pallid scrambled eggs on the table. Peter positively scowled in critical disapproval, and churlishly drew a twenty-dollar bill from his pocket and tossed it across the table.

"Better restock the pantry to-morrow," he said crustily. "I'll send checks to the grocer and butcher, and fix up our credit with them. There's no need of living on Russian peasant fare any longer."

His speech hoisted the red flag of revolution in the home, and the reaction brought a dark flush to his face and held his guilty eyes to his plate. Dorothy was affronted and angry, but something like vague fear kept her silent for a moment; the gentle, conciliating Peter bursting forth in the rôle of a *Petrucio* was beyond comprehension. Presently, however, her wounded *amour propre* definitely asserted itself, but her *riposte* was considered and restrained.

"Is your good fortune such a dark secret that I am to hear nothing about it?" she asked coldly.

The inquiry was entirely expected; Peter had been waiting for it through soup and scrambled eggs, but he was still unprepared for it. Again he shattered all precedents by rising abruptly from the table, casting down his napkin with a gesture of exasperation and actually glowering upon the now anxious Dorothy.

"Aren't you satisfied?" he demanded. "I have saved the house, and I have as much as said that we now have money enough for our needs. Only the other day, when I was trying to tell you of my plans for the future, you stopped me and said that you didn't care whether I invented a motorless motor car or an automatic toothpick, so long as I could get some real money for it. The real money is here now, but that doesn't satisfy you. Perhaps you want an accounting rendered before you use any of the cash?"

"What has come over you, Peter?" she demanded, almost gasping.

"Money!" answered Peter tragically. "I have money in my hands now—something tangible to worry about. The old troubles were abstractions. A poor man suffers because he has too much of nothing, but money will buy real, concrete misery."

"It has made you very dramatic, anyway," Dorothy remarked cuttingly. "But please don't worry about my curiosity; I shan't ask any more questions, and I don't care whether you have got ten thousand dollars or ten million. But just remember that you harped on one string for a good while, about its being a wife's duty to take an interest in all her husband's affairs. I've taken an interest, and I shall be mighty careful not to do so again."

Peter was secretly crushed by a realization of his brutality, but strangely unable to take down his defenses. He was a good man, a tender man, and his nature could not readily adjust itself to the atmosphere of crime. Had *Lady Macbeth* possessed the nature and temperament of *Ophelia, Macbeth,* the vacillator, might conceivable have treated her as Peter now treated Dorothy.

The harassed inventor was put to it to invent a plausible retreat from his position. He sat down again at the table and twisted his napkin between his hands.

"Perhaps you may also remember," he said judicially, "that I have sometimes harped upon another string: I have always held that married persons should have due respect for each other's private affairs. I have never pried into matters that seemed to concern you individually. I didn't ask you this morning where you got the eighty dollars that you offered to Turner; it is enough for me that you didn't see fit to tell me about it."

Dorothy's face went crimson, and the blush made her more furious than did the taunt.

"Perhaps you think I didn't have the money; that I was trying to bluff Turner for the moment," she said, begging the issue for the moment. "Well, I did have it; I have it now, and there's no secret about it. I don't mind telling you that I—oh, but I won't tell you! I won't be bullied like this. I'll never tell you—not in a thousand years."

A flood of angry tears came with the last declaration, and she got up from the table and almost staggered to the door. There, however, she turned again.

"I don't care," she said brokenly, "how much money you have, or what you did to get it—except—I want to know just one thing: did you get it from Mr. Arkwright? Did you have the nerve to go to him and ask for help? I don't know where you went this morning, but you must have brought the money home with you."

The name of Arkwright seemed suddenly to have become irritating to Peter, for he flushed instantly and scowled. He hesi-

tated, and the hesitation seemed significant to Dorothy; but then he said crossly:

"For reasons of my own I have not told you where I got the money, and I don't intend to be quizzed until it becomes a process of elimination; but I did not go to Arkwright for it, and I didn't go to the mayor, or the butcher, or the baker, or the candlestick maker. Is that enough?"

"Yes, it's quite enough!" she replied, and went out of the room and up the stairs, to weep adequately in the privacy of her chamber.

Peter surveyed for a while a cold remnant of scrambled eggs upon his plate, and never afterward could he endure the sight or the name of scrambled eggs; even omelets bore for him a sinister suggestiveness in after days.

As usual, he took refuge presently in his workshop, but was shaken by a chill when he faced the bag of money again. The rents in the leather were gaping wounds in the body of a victim, and they oozed green blood. He was past turning back however, for even in his unpleasant passage at arms with his wife he had given her assurances of easier times and freedom from care. As he thought of this the irony of the situation scorched him, for Dame Care had now taken his arm to walk with him as his constant companion, and all the yesterdays were as the days of untroubled childhood.

CHAPTER VII.

A MERE DETAIL.

A FEW days later Peter drove into the yard of his shabby little home in a rather imposing sedan car, and stepped out with the brisk air of a busy man. The old bus stood idle in its shed, and Peter refrained from looking at it, acutely conscious of his disloyalty. He still wore the familiar horn-rimmed spectacles, which were one with his nose and eyes and other parts of his face, but a jaunty hat rested just above them; and a smart waistcoat—buttoned—was a part of a modish costume appropriate to his apotheosis.

In the house he greeted Dorothy with a sort of formal courtesy, and she responded perfunctorily. Her smart frock gave evidence of her acceptance of the new order, and she moved about with a hectic enthusiasm, busily spending money by mail, by telephone, and by personal contact with local tradesmen. She knew nothing of the source of their sudden affluence, but she accepted it with the complacency of a gambler's wife.

"I have made a Chicago man an offer for some half-dead patents of motor parts," Peter said conversationally, "and if he accepts it I shall go ahead with my old motor idea, and either sell it to the highest bidder or manufacture it myself."

"I'm not interested in your business," she replied haughtily. "You may as well understand that. If you make more money, I'll do my part in spending it; that is evidently what a wife is for. I was looking at houses around town this morning, and I told the agent that I would have you see the one in Linden Street. It's good enough, if you want to pay the price; but I can't understand why you want to stick to this town, when we might as well live in the city."

"This town is large enough for the present," Peter returned, "and when I find that I am outgrowing it we will talk about the city."

He inquired about dinner, and Dorothy murmured a little unnaturally that the maid was about to put it on the table. The maid was the first servant that they had ever had, and even after three days of such grandeur they still found it difficult to speak of her without a certain embarrassment.

Peter went to the front door and found the evening paper on the porch. He took it to the little parlor and sat down to read, but first drew pencil and note book from his pocket and thoughtfully jotted down some figures. Proceeding with the caution of a practiced criminal, he had deposited two hundred dollars in currency in one bank, three hundred in another, and was now planning the bolder action of placing two thousand in a city bank. The Monte Cristo treasure still reposed in a tool chest

in the workshop, but it was subject to the risk of fire, if not that of robbery, and he found it a source of constant anxiety.

Still thinking and planning, he lifted the newspaper and glanced at the headlines on the first page, and instantly he leaned forward with a gasp and stared at the large type:

AIRPLANE ROBBERY STILL BAFFLES THE POLICE

Treasure That Disappeared from Fatal Wreck May Never Be Found

He conned the headlines without any joyous elation, but with a sort of tragic satisfaction, for they seemed to give assurances of continued security. Never for a moment did he think of the money as stolen, but as borrowed, and he believed that he should one day restore it to its owners with interest piled up and running over. If the police presently abandoned the search he could sit back comfortably and watch his fortunes wax an flourish until the great day of restitution.

His eyes went to the context of the report and scanned it with indifference until, suddenly, a name flashed out of the small type. With pounding heart and staring eyes he flashed over the story and groaned as he read:

> interviewed at his office by a reporter, Horace Arkwright, the president of the Arkwright Construction Company, owners of the Crystal Lake Construction Camp from which the pay roll amounting to forty thousand dollars was stolen, expressed himself as doubtful of the recovery of the money. The long jump made by the ill-fated aviators, he said, left no clew upon which

The paper dropped from Peter's hand, and he slumped down in his chair and exclaimed bitterly:

"My God! Horace Arkwright! Oh, if I had known that!"

Dorothy came into the parlor.

"Dear me! You look as though you had seen a ghost!" she exclaimed, not solicitously, but flippantly, for most of their conversation nowadays was conducted in such tones.

"Not at all," he said quickly, recovering himself. "I was merely interested in reading that Arkwright, or his company, has lost some money in a rather picturesque robbery."

He handed her the paper, pointing to the headlines; and she glanced over the article rapidly and with lively interest.

"Now, isn't that a shame?" she said. "Forty thousand dollars! That's a lot of money to lose! Do you suppose that will hurt their business?"

"Hardly!" Peter snapped almost angrily. "A millionaire and a corporation like that would feel such a loss about as much as I would feel the loss of a dollar, I fancy."

"Isn't it too bad that there are so many desperately dishonest people?" she went on feelingly. "And the robbers were killed in trying to escape in an airplane, weren't they? But somebody still has the money, and what good can they get out of it?"

"I wonder!" Peter murmured.

Dorothy waxed philosophical while her husband squirmed.

"Now people think that a robber who escapes with a sum of money like that is going unpunished," she said, "but how little they know about it! Some man has that forty thousand right now, but he may be suffering like a hunted animal. The worst man has some kind of a conscience, and at any rate he would never be free from the fear of prison."

"Isn't dinner nearly ready?" Peter asked hoarsely.

"Yes, I came in tell you that it was," she said. "But I declare, I've almost lost my appetite. Poor Mr. Arkwright! He must feel it, even if he is a millionaire."

"Yes, I dare say," Peter murmured, and they went in to dinner.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW ORDER.

THREE months later the Bartons had acquired an entourage of two maids and a chauffeur, and they were living in the smart residence section of the town of Spurling. The house was small, but rather important in the community as an example of English cottage architecture. It

stood on an acre of land, with landscape gardening all around it, and there were cement walks and a drive, and a little garage that carried out the period motif of the house.

Already Dorothy had reached the stage of having chocolate and muffins in bed at ten o'clock, or later, but Peter breakfasted in the dining room at nine, and then strolled out to his waiting car and solemnly returned the military salute of the chauffeur.

He dressed well now—quite as well, Dorothy allowed, as Horace Arkwright, and the retained affectations of horn-rimmed spectacles and an old briar pipe were rather suggestive of genius.

The remarkable change in Peter, however, was not one to interest the superficial observer. To his new friends and business associates he was quite everything that a business man should be, conforming to the twentieth century ideas of brisk efficiency, keen-eyed shrewdness, and suave adaptability to the social needs of the moment! but an old friend—of the few intimates that Peter enjoyed during his period of penury—would have been gravely puzzled by the subtle changes that had hardened that kind and generous face. Alert and aggressive, as the successful man must be, he was at the same time furtive, and on his guard for a possible attack. The old easy geniality had given place to an incipient cynicism which narrowed the eyes and drew the lines of a permanent saturnine smirk about the mobile mouth. The persecutions of Dame Care, through all Peter's hag-ridden years, had never hardened the man, but prosperity had achieved that result in a brief season.

Peter's early morning drive in the smartly appointed car was through the pretentious residence district of the town, and it took him logically to the equally pretentious business district where modern banks and office buildings displayed marble and sandstone examples of classical art and practical efficiency. The car stopped these mornings in front of a long, low brick building, obviously new, with an impressive entrance over which a row of chaste gilt letters spelled the legend, "The Barton Laboratories."

When Peter entered the building, doorkeepers and clerks saluted him reverently, and a private secretary awaited him with the solemn pomp of a prime minister. Beyond the glass partitions of the brass and mahogany office region could be heard pleasantly subdued sounds of whirring machinery, and in a small open court at the end of the building motor trucks busily unloaded materials and took on crated packages and boxes.

On one of these mornings, before it was time even for Dorothy to have her chocolate and muffins, Peter arrived at his office to find a stout, jolly middle-aged man awaiting him, and the man wrung Peter's hand with diplomatic cordiality and said:

"I'm Williamson—of the Inter-Ocean Engineering Company, you know. Had to come myself to see you and get acquainted, Mr. Barton, because you have shot into the scientific firmament like a new comet."

Peter acknowledged the compliment with sober gravity, and scarcely lost his new aplomb when the strenuous visitor leaned across the desk from his chair and announced:

"I'm a straight shooter, Mr. Barton, and I don't beat about the bush. We're interested in your device for canal locks, and I'm going to offer you one hundred thousand cash for the patent."

Peter was pleased, but without any emotional demonstration, and certain arrangements were agreed upon. Peter called his secretary and gave orders, like a general, for the drawing up of necessary papers; and then the two men lighted cigars and settled down to a sociable chat.

"I'm always interested in successful young men," said Williamson. "I'm a self-made man myself, and you're a mighty conspicuous self-made man. How did you get your start, if it's not a dark secret?"

Peter was staggered for the moment, and looked positively ill. Attacked so unexpectedly, his conscience suffered a violent reaction. He braced himself, however, and forced a rather painful smile. He shrugged his shoulders with an air of modest deprecation and protested against being regarded as a prodigy. Williamson was delighted, and declared that modesty went hand in hand with true genius, and after another half hour he adjourned the business session

to the afternoon and departed ceremoniously, trailing compliments and assurances of friendship.

Left alone, Peter held his head between his hands and groaned softly in an agony of spirit. Controlling himself, he tilted his chair back and tried to relax his taut muscles. A glance at his half-smoked cigar brought a grimace to his face, with the thought of the cigar as a symbol of the new luxury and the new torture. He flung the thing from him and brought his precious old briar from his pocket, filled it with tobacco and lighted it, and as the smoke ascended in clouds he relaxed in a measure and seemed to find a vague comfort in the homely relic of the past.

That evening he appeared in the handsomely furnished drawing room of the new residence in evening clothes, and Dorothy, in a smart new gown, greeted him pleasantly, but without warmth.

"Another little stroke of luck to-day," he announced almost grimly: "The Inter-Ocean Engineering Company is buying my patent on a device for canal locks for a hundred thousand."

Dorothy was delighted, and she sparkled, but without any show of affection; her enthusiasm was that of a business partner.

"It's wonderful!" she exclaimed. "Things do come your way like magic, don't they? We'll be outgrowing this house presently."

"It seems to be rather a decent sort of a house," Peter returned, with a slight scowl. "I haven't felt any discomfort here yet."

"Don't be absurd!" she retorted. "Of course, it's a perfectly comfortable house—much better than I ever dreamed of having; but your successful business men keep their houses up to the scale of their success, don't they?"

Peter squirmed inwardly, forced to reflect upon the actual scale of his success, and he started nervously when the perfectly correct maid servant, in black gown with white cap and apron, quietly announced Mr. Horace Arkwright.

Horace tripped jauntily into the room, very dapper in his evening clothes, and greeted Dorothy with something of an excess of cordiality, while he had for Peter a little more friendliness than he had been wont to show him. The two men shook hands, but the greeting was an ordeal for Peter, and Arkwright felt the chill in the atmosphere.

The three went into the modestly luxurious dining room, and Dorothy presided at the dinner table graciously, making up for Peter's coldly taciturn manner with her bright animation. They took coffee in the drawing room, and Peter, with a gesture of apology, lighted his old pipe.

"Don't apologize," Horace said dryly, as he took a cigarette from a silver box on the table. "A genius, you know, may smoke an old pipe or a Pittsburgh stogie, or he may blow rings of opium or hasheesh."

Horace and Dorothy talked of the few variously fast or smart persons who made up the quasi-exclusive set of the Spurling Country Club, and the gossip expanded to reach the smart folk of the larger world, of whom Horace spoke with enviable familiarity. It was a conversation in which Peter could not join, and he quite naturally excused himself after a half hour, and went upstairs to his study.

The study was a comfortable room, with a rather orderly litter of books, papers, smoking things, and some small mechanical models. It was perhaps a trifle too well furnished and comfortable for Peter, and he did not fit into it with the ease which he had known in the old shop of cobwebs and dust.

He smoked his pipe thoughtfully, standing in the middle of the room, and his brows gathered into a troubled scowl. He crossed the room presently and knelt before a small household safe that was set into the wall. Operating the combination lock, he swung back the door, and took from one of the two compartments of the safe the battered and broken leather bag in which his fortune had come to him. He gazed upon this *corpus delicti*, the souvenir of his fall from honesty and virtue, with dull horror, and then he studied it as the symbol of his problem, pondering profoundly and painfully.

For all his gloom and dismal introspection this evening, he felt a vast relief, for the transaction with the Inter-Ocean Engineering Company had assured him that he would have the means to make restitution

of the stolen fortune to the Arkwright Construction Company. Restitution of the money, however, was all the relief that he could promise to his conscience, for he could not confess his sin, and his ingenuity could not conjure up any poetic penance that would serve as balm to his shattered self-respect.

The simple restitution of the money in itself was problem enough for one tortured mind. He had thought of practical ways and fantastical ways in which the money might be transferred to the losers of the original fortune, but precarious chances seemed to be attached to every method. The thing must be done anonymously, and it must be accomplished in such a manner that the action could never be traced to him. His speculations led invariably to one conclusion: the money must be found just as the original package dropped from the ill-fated airplane.

Downstairs in the drawing room Horace Arkwright was politely making small talk, and, assured against interruption by certain busy sounds from the direction of Peter's study, Dorothy grew suddenly serious.

"We are friends, aren't we?" she asked Horace, and when he hastened to assure her that they were, with extravagant protestations, she went on:

"Peter is the sort of husband, with all his tender devotion, who does not confide in his wife when it comes to business matters, and there is something that is worrying me—something that has been worrying me for a long while. I want to ask you a question, and I want to know if you will answer it frankly and truthfully, and then never say aything more about it?"

"Really! I can't imagine!" Horace exclaimed quite sincerely. "But, of course! Fire away, and I'll do my best to help you out."

Dorothy listened cautiously and heard Peter moving about in the study above, then she said softly:

"I know, as well as you do, that Peter did not leap into fame and fortune through the success of any invention of his, and I can't endure all the mystery about it. Now, did you lend him the money for the mortgage on our old house—and did you furnish the capital for his new shop and the development of his patents?"

Horace looked puzzled, and a little disappointed; he had hoped for something a little more within his ken, and something a little more sensational. However, he made the best of the situation as a sporting proposition, and played for time by averting his face for a moment in a manner to suggest hesitation and reflection.

"You needn't fear that I cannot keep a secret," Dorothy whispered earnestly. "Whatever you may tell me, I shall never mention it again."

Horace affected an air of mental anguish, resulting from the struggle between better judgment and momentary impulse, and Dorothy read his mood, she believed, very shrewdly.

"There are—matters between men," he said at last, rather painfully, "that are—Oh! you must know that there are some things a man simply can't do—or say!"

Dorothy heaved a sigh of relief, of gratification, and she glanced toward the ceiling in the direction of Peter's study with a certain grim triumph.

"Thank you very much!" she said excitedly. "I think you have played the part of a good sportsman. You certainly have not violated any confidence, but you have answered my question as well as I could expect to have it answered."

"If you don't mind," rejoined Horace anxiously, "I'd rather we didn't say another word about it. Let's talk of pleasant things."

He smiled engagingly and glanced at her with so warm an admiration for her sparkling eyes and heightened color that she was a little startled and uneasy.

She had been warned by vigilant friends, of the sort that keeps watch and ward over morals and reputations with suspicious zeal, that Horace Arkwright was only too well-known in the city as a confirmed philanderer, but Horace had been very courteous and friendly to her and to Peter, in spite of their diminutive social stature, and his deportment had been consistently above reproach. As a matter of fact, Dorothy was too naïve and unsophisticated to detect the ear-marks of the philanderer who was not actively en-

gaged in philandering, and Horace was deliberately playing the long and patient game of the practiced angler. Dorothy was pretty and winsome beyond the average of city or town, but she was of the skittish type, easily put to flight, and Horace had become something of an artist in the art of flirtation. He had made progress this evening, in winning the lady's confidence, and he was abundantly satisfied.

"I must go," he announced almost immediately; "I'm afraid I can't wait for Barton to finish his work upstairs. Say ta-ta to him for me like a good girl, won't you? See you at the country club to-morrow, and we'll have tea on the terrace."

She walked to the door with him, and they shook hands again with profound formality.

When she returned to the reading table, she took up a book of Shaw's plays casually and read the pungent, ironical lines at random, and she hit upon a scene that was so suggestive of the one just enacted between her and Horace Arkwright that she flung the book down and became unreasonably irritated.

Five minutes later Peter came down from the study and strolled into the room.

"Arkwright didn't stay long," he remarked.

"He asked me to say good-night to you," Dorothy responded coldly, and then she eyed Peter keenly and added: "In view of—of certain things, I should think you might behave a little more cordially toward Mr. Arkwright."

Peter started nervously, as though recoiling from a sudden blow. He stared at his wife in consternation for an instant, but recovered himself and demanded a little sharply:

"What do you mean by that, Dorothy?"

She smiled very slightly, with unconcealed irony.

"I might gather from that question that you really want an explanation," she said tartly, "but it seems to me that you show by your look, by your strange nervousness of manner, that you know perfectly well what I mean."

She waited long enough to enjoy his mystification and his obvious defeat, but when he seemed to be about to speak again, she turned abruptly and tripped nonchalantly out of the room and up the stairs.

CHAPTER IX.

HISTORY REPEATS.

NEXT day Peter drove to one of the banks in town and withdrew from his account a thousand dollars in one-hundred-dollar bills. The friendly paying teller attempted to discuss the weather, but Peter seemed doubtful as to whether it was fair or foul. His hands shook when he counted the money to verify the amount of the withdrawal, and he had a guilty feeling that invisible spies were watching him.

As he was leaving the bank and crossing the sidewalk to his car, a passing policeman accosted him, and he started violently and almost dropped the Boston bag in which he had placed the money. He almost shrank from the policeman, expecting him to lay a heavy hand upon his shoulder. A timorous glance at the large red face of the man reassured him, for it was genial and wreathed with smiles, but he scarcely breathed until he heard:

"Excuse me, Mr. Barton, but would ye be buyin' a ticket off me for the policeman's ball?"

Peter laughed aloud in his relief, and he explained awkwardly to the man that he had been startled out of deep thought. He was up to the neck in work, he said, and was not a dancing man anyway, but he took a ticket for the policeman's ball and paid for it with a generous contribution, worthy of a man who had suddenly shot into the class of leading citizens.

He had contemplated visits to four banks and withdrawals totaling a fourth part of the amount of cash that his plan required, but the experience at the first bank, coupled with the harrowing episode of the good-natured policeman, seemed quite enough for one day, so the Boston bag was not filled with currency.

The first thousand dollars rested in the study safe overnight, and went with the increasingly nervous Peter on his second day travels. He felt a peculiar sensitive-

ness about the banks of Spurling, and it led him to board a morning train to the big city in whose banks a considerable portion of his lately accumulated wealth was deposited. When he returned to Spurling in the evening the Boston bag contained currency to the amount of ten thousand dollars, in bills of the larger denominations, and he sat late in the study—after Dorothy had retired—and made up packets of the bills in painstaking imitation of the packages which he had once ruthlessly burst asunder.

For a week Peter's secretary and the other members of the office force noticed his unusual preoccupation, but at the end of that six days of worry, of vague apprehension and baseless alarms, and of excursions out of town and about the town, he had a rather artistically prepared replica of the original treasure stowed in the study safe. His antics during that period had been, he reflected, quite enough to surround him with an atmosphere of doubt and suspicion, had not the men of his community regarded him as a person of that type of rock-ribbed integrity which is utterly above suspicion and beyond reproach.

It remained for Peter to complete his elaborate plan of restitution, but he carried the program over the week-end, and let the treasure rest in the safe. It would have been more secure in the big safe at the office, but he scarcely thought of it as a large sum of money: it was a grotesque old bag of stuff that he must get rid of, a monster to be returned to its rightful master, a Nemesis to be exorcised. To possible robbers he gave no more than a passing thought, for no one knew that he had collected the fortune and carried it to his house, and no one would dream that a business man would keep a large sum of money in a household safe.

His overwrought mind was alive to all perils and hazards, but it seemed that he had thought least of all of fire. When he was called to the telephone at the country club, where he and Dorothy were taking Sunday afternoon tea, and told by a man at the police station that his house was burning up, it flashed upon him in that hideous moment that Fate had assailed him upon the single unfortified salient of his battle line. He dropped the receiver and ran out of the clubhouse, without stopping to tell Dorothy, and drove his car at death-defying speed to the scene of the cataclysm, but when he got there the policemen would not let him pass their lines, and they invited his attention to the spectacular bonfire which had taken the place of his handsome residence.

It was conjectured afterward that imperfect insulation in the electric lighting equipment of the house had started the fire while the two maidservants were out walking during the absence of the master and mistress. A neighbor, rising from a Sunday afternoon nap, had discovered smoke pouring from the windows of the house, and had sent in an alarm; but there was a brisk breeze blowing, and when the fire department arrived there was nothing to do but take due precautions against the spreading of the conflagration to other houses.

Peter stood and looked at the spectacle, and mumbled assurances to solicitous firemen and policemen that he would not attempt to charge into the seething furnace. Dorothy came up with some country club people a few minutes later, and upbraided Peter roundly for deserting her, but he scarcely heard her arraignment. He shared her profound regret at the loss of a home, but he could not tell her that the total loss to him would make the value of the building and its furnishings seem insignificant, so he said little or nothing, and convinced her that his eccentricities were becoming excessive.

The Bartons moved their very scanty belongings to a handsome new family hotel on the outskirts of Spurling that evening, and engaged to occupy one of the comfortable apartments for an indefinite period. Early Monday morning Peter went to the ruins of his home, and two firemen who were keeping guard over the smoldering embers helped him to dig out the small steel safe. It was intact, but the pitifully light steel walls were warped, and the paint was blackened and blistered. Peter wisely refrained from bursting it open, and had it placed on a truck and delivered at his office.

At the office the private secretary was solicitous and interested, but Peter sent him

about his business, and went at the warped steel box with a cold-chisel and hammer, behind locked doors. He found as much as he expected within the safe: bundles of charred paper, with occasional pieces barely recognizable from smoke-bordered vignettes of old-time statesmen and cabinet ministers. There were a few bills which might have been redeemed, from the fragments that remained, but the value was negligible, and Peter did not feel that he could tell any one the story of how he kept money in his library safe at home. Such a proceeding would invite questions and necessitate answers, and he was still nervously sensitive.

To his credit, he blandly accepted the adjustments of the fire insurance company, and immediately set about the accumulation of another duplicate of the Arkwright Construction Company's lost pay roll. His way was beset by new difficulties and bewilderments now, for he could not obtain forty thousand dollars more by merely making withdrawals from his bank accounts. He borrowed money upon notes from local banks and deposited it in the city banks, then gradually took back the necessary amounts of assorted currency. But all this was done at the expense of the efficiency of his laboratories; curtailments had to be made in the program of development and operation, and the employees in the shop and the offices were mystified and troubled. It was rumored in the offices that the "boss" was taking flyers in Wall Street, and fears were expressed that he would wreck the business and ruin the devoted working force; but he still had the confidence of his employees and they were ready to sink or swim with him.

It was difficult enough to raise the second forty thousand in cold cash, but the obstacle that staggered Peter was the creation of an imitation of the battered leather bag. He had taken measurements of the blackened frame of the bag before he personally consigned the entire burnt offering to the furnace in the cellar of the laboratories, and presently he went to the city and canvassed the pawnshops for old bags that might conform to his requirements. The eleventh pawnshop yielded up a used kit bag that resembled the original one, and Peter cheerfully paid the Shylock behind the counter a price far in excess of its practical value.

Weary days of experiments in the aging and ruining of a bag followed, and Peter went to his shop at night and dropped the bag, stuffed with waste paper, down the elevator well of the building. Unfortunately the leather proved to be as durable as the pawnbroker had declared it was, and it gave up its integrity only crack by crack, in repeated crashes at the bottom of the shaft. At first it seemed to the plotter that he must duplicate every rent in the bag that fell from the sky, but later it occurred to him, as a surprising reflection, that he was the only human creature that even seen the bag as it fell in the garden.

The second duplicate of the treasure, properly bundled and bagged, reposed in the safe in Peter's private office for three days after its assembly; then, one morning at four o'clock, Peter entered his domain stealthily, carried out the heavy bag, and placed it in his waiting car. In the darkness of a cloudy night, before dawn had begun to appear in the east, he drove to a large farm outside the town and bumped his way into an open field where grain was being harvested. Part of the field had been cut over already with a mowing machine, and, reasoning that the work would be resumed at daybreak, Peter unloaded the treasure and artfully nestled it among the dense stalks of growing grain that were evidently about to be reaped. The field had been selected from a dozen that he had had under observation for several weeks, and he knew even the financial status and character of the farmer who owned it.

After a few final touches to his work, devotedly performed in the darkness by sense of touch, he returned to his car and backed out of the field, and drove away into the country to kill time until the coming of dawn.

At six o'clock, under a gray sky, an elderly farmer and a younger assistant went to work in the field with a small tractor and a mowing machine, and they rapidly laid low the rows of grain, rank by rank, coming closer and closer to the cached treasure.

At half past six o'clock, Peter Barton suddenly drove into the field and tried all too nervously to make it appear that city business men are given to the practice of motoring about the rural districts in the early morning. The farmer was an honest, simple soul, to whom early hours were nothing strange, and he never questioned Peter's motive or his sincerity when the latter hailed him and broached the question of the purchase of the straw after the grain had been threshed. Peter explained that he needed straw for packing operations at his shop, and the farmer left his man to operate the tractor and the mowing machine, and leaned upon the door of the automobile to enjoy a profitable chat.

Presently, and in agreeable accordance with Peter's schedule, the ponderous wheels of the tractor passed over the concealed bag, and in an instant the mowing machine was fouled by the bulky object.

"Hey! What's the matter there?" called the farmer, as the man stopped the tractor and began an investigation, and Peter watched the proceedings in breathless suspense.

The man bent over the object that was dimly discernible under the clogged teeth of the machine, and then rose up excitedly and called his employer. Peter felt justified in leaving his car, and he and the farmer hurried forward. All three were gathered now about the battered and torn leather bag, and they quickly gave way to amazement and excitement as they beheld partially exposed packets of bank notes.

Peter uttered vociferous exclamations in his efforts to appear genuinely astonished, and the practical old farmer went down on his knees and began a quick and rough appraisal of the fortune. Presently the old man started up with the light of inspiration in his face, and exclaimed:

"Know what that is, Mr. Barton? That's that gol-darned pay roll money that was lost out o' that airship a long while ago, sure as shootin'!"

Peter clapped the farmer on the back in rather overdone enthusiasm, and hastened to suggest that the find should be placed in his car and driven at once to the police station in town. The farmer agreed heartily, and the farm hand—who had been glaring at the money with popping eyes—was called upon to help his employer lift the bag and carry it to the automobile.

A moment later the bag resetd on the rear seat of the car for the second time that morning, and Peter was in the act of stepping upon the running-board when the farm hand jerked a monkey-wrench from the pocket of his overalls and felled him with a murderous blow upon the back of the head. The astounded farmer raised a hoarse cry and started for his man in righteous anger, but the man turned swiftly and dealt the unarmed farmer a blow which laid him senseless beside Peter Barton. Then, wild as a maniac, the man leaped into the car, started it, and charged through the open gateway of the field; slued into the highway, and went rocking and bumping away into the open country.

CHAPTER X.

COVERED BY INSURANCE.

THE concussion which the doctors found to be the result of the application of the monkey-wrench to Peter Barton's head kept him in the Spurling hospital three weeks and made him something of a hero in the community. Had he not been engaged in a commendable effort to restore lost property of fabulous value to its owners? Had not the service which led to the adventure with the murderous assailant been entirely disinterested and altruistic on his part?

The newspapers discussed it in the news columns editorially, and Peter and the man with the monkey-wrench served respectively as extreme examples of the model citizen and the menace to society. The elderly farmer figured scarcely more than incidentally, being practically unknown in the community, but the newspapers heralded the fact that Peter's first action upon his restoration to full consciousness was to cause the farmer to be moved from the public ward to one of the hospital's costliest private rooms. The farmer was a well-to-do man, as farmers go, but the almost fatal adventure had brought him to the experience of a degree

of luxury and comfort hitherto not even touched by his simple imagination.

Early in the third week the attending physician permitted Peter to see and talk with his private secretary, and the latter sat by the bed and read letters and commercial documents to his employer. A famous engineering firm had offered Peter sixty thousand upon a contract to lease one of his patents for a term of years, and Peter gave the secretary explicit directions for the further correspondence, and expressed the opinion that the offer was a liberal one.

"Money to *burn!*" he exclaimed softly, but with peculiar emphasis.

"I beg pardon," said the secretary uncertainly, for he was a young man of literal mind.

"Nothing at all," Peter answered; "merely talking to myself out loud."

"Ah, yes!" the secretary murmured respectfully, then added with an apologetic smile: "I thought you might be alluding to the unfortunate fire that destroyed your residence. But, of course, your loss was fully covered by insurance."

"M-m—yes, fully covered—house, furniture, garage—even the grass, I believe," said Peter rather grimly; "yet it does seem that we greenhorns, who are not used to money, manage to burn it up pretty well without thinking of insurance."

The secretary smiled doubtfully, and felt that the office rumors of Peter's reckless speculations were confirmed.

"The doctor warned me not to disturb you with irritating news, Mr. Barton," he said, as he got up to go, "but you might be interested to know that your car has been found by the police. It was wrecked quite badly about fifty miles from here. They discovered it near a railway junction and think that the robber may have got away on a freight train. So far, they haven't got a trace of the man. I'm afraid that the Arkwright Company may never get its money."

"Oh, yes, I have an idea that the Arkwright Company *will* get its money—eventually," Peter rejoined almost savagely. "But wasn't it lucky that I had my car insured?"

The secretary agreed with him, as he bowed himself out of the room, and Peter turned over in bed and glared out the window at the dismal roofs of the houses around the hospital.

"Eighty thousand dollars!" he muttered through clenched teeth. "Forty thousand, it cost me, to burn up my house; and now it's another forty thousand to send another man straight to the devil.

"And if the farmer doesn't fully recover," he rambled on, after a moment's agonizing thought, "I'll have him on my mind for the rest of my life."

The nurse popped into the room at that moment and shook an official finger at him.

"Now, Mr. Barton, you know that you have been ordered not to talk," she said with mock severity; "and it's just as bad to talk to yourself as it is to carry on a conversation."

"I'll be good," Peter promised, with a sigh. "But talking is a relief," he pleaded; "it's thinking that does all the harm, and who in the world is going to keep me from thinking, if I can't stop it myself?"

The secretary came daily after that day, and a week later Peter was able to move from the hospital to his apartment hotel. The farmer left the hospital at about the same time, and when Peter was permitted to drive into the country, in a new car, he found the farmer engaged in finishing the harvest of the memorable field, and hastened to purchase the straw that he had once spoken of, at a liberal rate.

Dorothy had been devotedly attentive to her husband during the days at the hospital, and it seemed now that their intercourse was freed from the constraint that had grown up between them since the beginning of their prosperity. They drove together daily during his convalescence, and she was brightly cheerful and full of rosy visions of the future.

One afternoon she directed the drive to a palatial country house about five miles from town, and gleefully informed Peter that the house had been vacated recently by the owner, and that it was for sale at a delightfully reasonable figure—something less than a hundred thousand dollars.

Peter was startled and somewhat shocked, but he had not the heart to break the cheerful spell that was upon his wife. The

house was a very desirable one, for a millionaire; it was of authentic Georgian style, elaborately conceived and carried out, and surrounded by orderly terraces and lawns and gardens in the midst of a hundred acres or more of sightly landscape.

"My dearest child!" he exclaimed, after gratifying her by taking a long look at the place from the car, "aren't your ambitions getting a little bit ahead of our position? It's a bang-up home for a grand-duke or an oil magnate or a patent-medicine king, but for a struggling inventor—"

"Oh, I know a lot more about business than you think I do!" she cried blithely. "You wouldn't be expected to put all that money into it; no one does that. You would put up a certain amount, and then the banks would carry the rest of it for you. And they'd be awfully glad to do it, for you're getting a big reputation, and you're making more money every day. Just think: sixty thousand dollars while you were lying in bed at the hospital!"

"But I'm not merely taking in money, Dot," he argued. "I'm doing rather a big business there in my shop, and a lot of money has to keep going out. Now, as soon as I am able to stick around the office again, I have to square up a lot of odds and ends; I have to meet one obligation as soon as possible, and it amounts to—well, forty thousand dollars, and that's a lot of money."

His brows had gathered into a scowl at the thought, and it was borne in upon him that he had now no plan for the next attempt at the restitution of the elusive fortune. Superstition so readily insinuates itself into any human mind that it was becoming difficult for Peter to think of his now established obsession without reckoning a personified fate as his antagonist.

Dorothy was agreeably inclined to be reasonable, according to her lights, but she looked over the magnificent stretches of the baronial estate and sighed softly.

"Wouldn't such a home as that be—what do you call it?—an asset?" she inquired shrewdly. "That's good advertising psychology, isn't it? You're a great big man in business now, Peter, but wouldn't you be quite a lot bigger if you lived in a home like that? Men would come and look at your house, and then they'd make you president of banks and stock companies and all sorts of big things."

"Where did you master the science of salesmanship?" he laughed. "You must be working for a commission on that house. But we'd better think it over for a while, Dot, and see if the ducats keep on rolling in."

"Of course," she agreed prettily, "we must be reasonably conservative. But it's fun just to think about it as a possibility, isn't it? In a few days, when you're feeling stronger, I wish you would run out here and look over the place. The inside of the house is worth seeing even if one doesn't want to buy it."

Peter was at the desk in his private office again presently, and he found business waiting to welcome him. Lordly men from the big cities journeyed to Spurling to have chats with him, and they talked about his recent injury as though it had been a matter of national news.

One afternoon the secretary ushered into the office a mannish woman of impressive bearing, and she gave Peter a hearty handshake and said in a positively rumbling contralto voice:

"So you're Mr. Peter Barton! Well, the *Universal Magazine* has sent me to interview you, Mr. Barton. We want you to tell the young men of America how to start at the bottom, as you did, and win fame and success just by sheer hard work and honest effort."

Peter winced. A flash of poignant pain crossed his face, and he turned to the woman as though he would plead for mercy. But she was already writing busily upon a pad of paper, and she glanced at him from time to time with her head cocked at an angle as though she were making a pencil sketch.

"I wonder," he murmured, upon sudden impulse, "why your 'uplift' periodicals never ask the successful business man to tell their readers of his regrets. It's always a story of heroic struggle and brilliant achievement, and it seems to be all light and no shade. Don't you think that your average celebrity, on the journey from the

little red schoolhouse to the seats of the mighty, has stubbed his toe more than once? Yet they're not ready to admit it. They tell us to be honest, but they never stop to mark the limed twigs, or the pits, or the deadfalls for us."

"It's the example, of course," she said practically; "it wouldn't do to tell the young reader that his hero had ever kicked another struggling man in the face, would it? But you seem very earnest about it, Mr. Barton! Surely, you're too well known for your altruism and your simple virtue for me to think that you might be able to offer yourself as a horrible example."

The woman was not feminine, and Peter tacitly followed her lead of blunt directness.

"Oh, tell them to be honest!" he exclaimed impatiently. "They won't be, no matter how many times you tell them to, but keep on telling them; they may learn the lesson in ten more generations. Be honest! Keep on being honest. There's no pulling back after you have let yourself slip, so the only hope is in not slipping."

The woman wrote rapidly and much; she had the interviewer's faculty for ignoring the victim and writing her story quite subjectively. She poised her pencil now and then while she asked supplementary questions of a commonplace personal sort. She inspected his attire and his surroundings critically, and she asked him to tell her what he ate.

"Food, food, food!" he answered rudely, but with a saving smile. "It's about all there is to eat, isn't it? I can't help you there. I don't know how many calories there are in my breakfast, and I'm not the least bit interested in vitamines. Oh! you might tell them I am one busy man who doesn't get his relaxation in paper-backed detective stories. I had a college education, yet—strangely enough!—I actually enjoy good literature. They won't believe it, but I can really idle away an enjoyable hour or two with Keats, or Shelley, or Walter Pater, or Henry James."

"I'll tell them you are a humorist," she laughed.

"Yes, that will save the situation, won't it?" he said ironically.

She was through with him in a half-hour, and she departed breezily after another strenuous handshake. He was left weak and shaken, for the matter of being written up as an example for the youth of the land had been a trying ordeal for him. It brought the haunting question of the restitution before him insistently, and he got up and paced the office with quick nervous strides.

The secretary brought in another visitor, a real estate man of the town who was not unknown to Peter.

"Mr. Barton!" exclaimed the man jubilantly, charging upon him with eagerly outstretched hand. "So glad you can spare the time to see me! Mrs. Barton tells me that you have your eye on the Tretheway estate, and I'm going to ask you to run out there with me in my car."

CHAPTER XI.

FATE FIDDLES.

A MONTH later Peter and Dorothy were installed in the magnificent Tretheway manor with a small retinue of very correct servants in chaste and conservative livery. The awful formality required in living up to such a dwelling quickly became a matter of routine with Peter, and he wore his evening clothes nightly with the ease of familiarity, and could sit through dinner unabashed by the presence of the exacting English butler.

In this setting Dorothy bloomed into the radiance of full plumage and seemed extravagantly happy. Such realization of her ambition and desires made her gratefully affectionate and even tender with Peter, but the latter settled gradually into a deeper gloom of quiet melancholy and became a gentle specter at the feast.

Dorothy revised her visiting list, ruthlessly eliminating certain undesirables according to the dicta of her social mentors, and presently she gave a house party in the new palace and included Horace Arkwright in the gathering of county aristocracy.

Most of the guests arrived between noon and dinner time on a Saturday, and at sunset a carefully groomed Peter reviewed a rather startling assemblage on the terrace.

The women seemed consistently fast and ultra-fashionable as a whole, and the men furnished types for a twentieth century Thackeray novel. There were elderly rakes and rounders, younger men of the standardized dancing variety, and delicate youths of the radical-esthetic cults. They were for the most part strangers to Peter, but they paid him due homage as lord of the manor.

A dandified old gentleman of the hardy-perennial sort patted Peter on the back with rather patronizing friendliness, and said:

" 'Pon my soul, Barton, you inventor fellows must have some sort of an Aladdin's lamp up your sleeves. From obscurity to the pinnacle of affluence in a moment—in the twinkling of an eye! One might think you had come upon a Monte Cristo treasure somewhere, eh?"

Peter cringed, and for an instant he was utterly out of countenance, but he forced a laugh and shrugged his shoulders, and a briskly talkative woman hastened to his relief.

" Monte Cristo treasures," she said, " are hardly necessary when one gets a respectable fortune for a new recipe for concrete. Mr. Barton is merely a latter day magician."

The guests were largely inclined to pet their host, however, and the women, particularly the flappers, went out of their way to do so, lured by the glamour of his still uncertain wealth. Only the young men of the new juvenile sophistication held aloof, and Peter felt that some of them were frankly engaged in psycho-analyzing him.

Horace Arkwright was the life of the party, and he became ostentatiously devoted to his entertainers. To Peter's horror and agony, he advertised with loud zest the nobility of his host in lately risking his life to restore to him the famous lost pay roll. The pay roll was still no less lost, but Horace would never forget the knightly and devoted action of his friend which had so nearly resulted in his death by the assault of a ruffian.

Peter fled to the terrace alone, while the dancing went on more or less riotously, and walked in the moonlight a long and fast sentry-go. The music in the house, the laughter and revelry, and the costly magnificence of the place, all made up a hell from which the lord of the manor could find no escape, and he writhed under the feeling that Arkwright's money had paid for the horrible luxury that surrounded him. That Arkwright was entirely unconscious of the situation was a matter of no comfort at all; Peter had, he reflected bitterly, an acute conscience, and it was an uncomfortable thing for a voluntary crook to live with.

Some ten days later Peter took up the morning paper in his office and stared in consternation at the headlines:

ARKWRIGHT CONSTRUCTION COMPANY INSOLVENT.

Labor Troubles and Contract Forfeitures Threaten Ruin of Well-Known Engineering Firm

Peter paced the floor in a fever of anguish. To his inflamed conscience it appeared immediately that he was responsible for the financial difficulties of the great construction company. That fateful forty thousand dollars had been but one pay roll, one of many, but to an insolvent business might not forty thousand dollars be a prodigious sum?

He thought with little liking, but with a certain pity, of the debonair Horace, spendthrift and polished dandy. The man certainly had known of his firm's impending ruin that night of the house party, yet he had been the gayest of the gay.

A wave of self-contempt and burning contrition swept over Peter, and it was followed by grim resolution. He sent for his secretary and gave orders which caused the young man to stare at him incredulously.

At that moment, in the city offices of the Arkwright Construction Company, a darkly serious Horace Arkwright was in conference with four fellow members of the firm. Horace had a telephone on the table in front of him, and was excitedly discussing the desperate situation of the business with one of the company's agents. His face was white and set when he hung up the receiver, and he said to the other men huskily:

" That's the last chance! The Occidental Trust Company refuses to accept my notes."

He crumpled up in his chair after making the announcement, and the others looked at one another silently, baffled and disheartened.

A clerk darted into the office excitedly and handed Horace a telegram which he had just typed from telephonic dictation. Horace's eyes widened with amazement as he read it, and he turned to the other men with a shout and declaimed the message:

"'Have placed three hundred thousand dollars to your credit. Hope that it will relieve the present situation. Peter Barton.'"

It brought the men to their feet, and they took the message from Arkwright and scanned it incredulously. Horace drummed on the table with quivering fingers, and muttered very softly to himself.

An hour later, in Spurling, Peter's secretary handed him a telegram in reply to his message to Arkwright.

> Your magnificent assistance has saved the situation. Directors insist that you accept position of vice president of Arkwright Construction Company.
>
> (Signed) HORACE ARKWRIGHT.

Peter read the message slowly and a look of calm satisfaction spread over his countenance. For the first time since he ruthlessly broke into the bag of treasure his aching conscience was soothed, and the huge amount of money now involved gave him no twinge of anxiety.

The devoted private secretary passed through the room, looking vaguely worried, and a new and boyish Peter slapped that young man on the back and laughed foolishly. The secretary was invited to read the message, and he did so quite deferentially, but wagged his head doubtfully as he passed out of the room.

At dinner that evening Peter astonished Dorothy with his high spirits, and he impulsively told her what he had done for the embarrassed Arkwright Construction Company. Dorothy was mystified and delighted, and when he showed her the telegram from Horace she was ecstatic.

"What a wonderful thing!" she cried. "Vice president of the Arkwright Construction Company! It will absolutely *make* us socially."

Peter had not thought of the triumph in that light, and he could not explain to her the things that were teeming in his brain, but his spirits could not now be dampened, and she found him gayly companionable for the first time in many months.

He was in a perpetual ecstasy of good spirits for a week. He had, largely by way of humoring Dorothy's whim, accepted the offer of the vice presidency of the Arkwright Construction Company in a grateful letter to Horace Arkwright. The letter was, more than he realized, pathetically humble and contrite in tone, and it accomplished the complete mystification of Horace when it was received.

Peter seemed scarcely to appreciate the magnitude of his aid to the company, and the confusion which the tremendous draft upon his own resources created in his own business gave him no worry. He effected various readjustments of his affairs to meet the condition with a blithe cheerfulness that amazed and disturbed his associates, and the fact that his own credit was seriously curtailed by the peculiar transaction in the financial circles of Spurling added, if anything, to his contentment. He had, after months of feverish agony of spirit, attempted the propitiation of his personal gods by a votive offering out of all proportion to the material aspect of his sin, and his conscience was drunk with gratifiction.

Three men who were well known to Peter in the public life of Spurling and the county called upon him at the office one afternoon and requested an audience with impressive formality. The spokesman of the trio, Mr. Hastings Whiteley, an ex-mayor of Spurling, stood very erect and delivered an address to Peter which made the latter recall whimsically the remark of Queen Victoria that Gladstone always irritated her by talking as though he were addressing a public meeting. Mr. Whiteley had oratorical gifts of a sort, and in the course of a ten-minute address that was overwhelming he caused Peter to comprehend vaguely that the committee of three was offering him a nomination to a seat in Congress.

"The time is ripe for a radical change, Mr. Barton," Whiteley declared in a spirited peroration, in which metaphors were hashed

ruthlessly. "Overwhelmed as we were four years ago by a tidal wave of hostility that threw us high upon the rocks, we have rested quietly on our oars, and in the next election we shall show a new and fresher growth, and bloom more brightly in the pleasant meadows of success. We want you, sir, for our pilot, to bear our banner in the final triumphant charge. You, Mr. Barton, are the man of the hour; a citizen and a business man of untarnished record: a man whose honesty and integrity, ability and leadership, stand four-square like a strong tower, to light the mariner through storms and angry seas."

Peter sat at his desk, listening in amazement to the speech, and when the words "honesty and integrity" rolled out he winced and wilted. He was sobered instantly from the happy intoxication of the past week, and conscience was on the rack again. He knew Hastings Whiteley for a man ill qualified to judge the honesty and integrity of other men, and he knew furthermore that the party machine had barely a fighting chance of landing either in calm waters or pleasant meadows in the next election, but these three men—regarded either as public spirited citizens or as intriguing politicians—had paid him a flattering compliment, and he was not worthy even to thank them for it. They were proposing to make him the leader of a reform movement which was obviously calculated to resuscitate a moribund political machine, but it was apparent that they needed a really strong man and a man of unchallenged reputation, and they did not know that Peter Barton was a thief and a weakling.

"You have—rather taken me off my feet, gentlemen," he said huskily as he rose slowly from his chair. "I have never dreamed of running for any political office; I would hardly think of qualifying for the district school committee. I can't even talk, you see, except to tell you that the whole idea is impossible; I should fall down ridiculously and do nothing but embarrass you. You need an experienced man, a well balanced man, and I don't know anything in the world but electricity and engineering. I think I could qualify as a chauffeur for a Congressman, but to be a Congressman myself—you see the absurdity of it, don't you?"

"You don't understand at all, Mr. Barton," Whiteley protested rather impatiently; "you simply don't know the game. Our last Governor didn't know much of anything outside the great American game of poker, but he was at least a trained bluffer, and we put him in, didn't we?"

"I couldn't offer you even that accomplishment," said Peter uneasily. "I am very much honored, and I thank you heartily for the compliments you have paid me, but I can't think of such a thing, and that must be my final answer."

Hastings Whiteley's two henchmen shared their leader's disappointment and uncomprehending disgust, and the committee assailed Peter in a body with all manner of arguments, but in the end the simple artlessness of the man discouraged them.

They said among themselves, as they departed, that they had made a mistake; that Peter would be too much of a lamb, too blatantly honest for the job, too innocent and virtuous to lead a successful reform movement. But Peter, left alone, laid his head upon his desk and groaned in anguish: he had just declined to accept honor and success because he knew himself to be a wolf in sheep's clothing, not honest enough to occupy a position of responsibility, and too guilty and perfidious to pose as a leader in a political housecleaning. He realized with devastating bitterness that his sin was not expiated, and that he was not a man to be thought of in relation to the qualities of honesty and integrity.

In the midst of his travail his secretary stole into the office and mournfully handed him a telegram from Horace Arkwright. It read:

> General strike declared at our Crystal Lake construction camp. Sabotage and violence feared. Situation has affected our credit seriously. We may be ruined unless immediate support is secured. Can you do anything to save the business in this crisis?
>
> HORACE ARKWRIGHT.

Peter read the message anxiously and was interested immediately. The mere existence of the Arkwright Construction Company seemed to have become a very vital thing to

him, and his lately depressed spirits rose valiantly to this clarion call of distress. The murky clouds of the moment before cleared away and his face glowed as he lighted his old pipe and sat back to think of what was to be done. Presently he left the office, animated and intent upon a plan, and drove to his attorneys. He burst in upon the senior member of the firm, Warren Hargrave, and said excitedly:

"I want you to give me all your time for a few hours, Mr. Hargrave. I have a big piece of business on hand, and action is the word. I want to convert my business property and my home into negotiable securities immediately—to-day—and I want every penny that can be squeezed out of my available resources."

Hargrave was thunderstruck, and he protested mildly against such a sweeping transaction. He wondered if Peter were not acting too impulsively, and if it would not be the part of sober judgment to consider the matter soberly for twenty-four hours.

"I've thought it all out," Peter said impatiently. "I'm a vice president in the Arkwright Construction Company now, you know, and the company is in a tight place. I've got to help them out—I've got to do it!—and it 'll probably take every cent I'm worth. Now, let's get about it!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRIBUNAL.

TOWARD noon of the next day Peter left the office of the attorneys with a quantity of negotiable commercial paper done up securely in a leather dispatch case. His chauffeur had reported sick that morning, and he drove the car himself, going quickly home and stopping there only long enough to make preparations for a flying trip to the Crystal Lake construction camp.

He had told Dorothy something of Horace Arkwright's appeal for aid and she was pleasantly excited. The bulky dispatch case was significant of the importance of his errand, and when he told her that he had talked with Horace over the telephone and agreed to meet him at the construction camp, where he had already taken his stand to face the strike situation in person, she proposed to accompany him. Peter was not alarmed about the strike as a source of personal danger, and he merely suggested casually that they might run into some sort of unpleasantness, but she talked down all objections and in half an hour they started upon the seventy-mile drive to Crystal Lake.

It was late in the afternoon when they came in sight of the lake, with its new concrete dam and the small city of wooden barracks, shops, and administrative offices. A uniformed motorcycle patrolman of the State constabulary stopped them and took Peter's name as they approached the entrance to the camp, and farther on, among the buildings, they saw civilian watchmen, armed with rifles, guarding the shops and the dam. There were small groups of idle, sullen-faced men standing about, obviously of the disturbing element, but no signs of disorder could be seen, and a sort of Sabbath quiet pervaded the place.

Peter drove at once to the office building, close by the end of the dam, and was directed by a watchman to the office of Arkwright. He left Dorothy sitting in the car, secure in the protection of the watchman at the door, and hurried in with his precious dispatch case.

At one end of a long room, full of deserted desks, filing cabinets, and the like, was the president's private office, and Horace Arkwright opened the glass-paneled door and came out to welcome Peter effusively.

"It looks as though the rats had fled the ship," he said jocularly, indicating the idle desks, "but things are not going badly at all. The girl stenographers were nervous, and business is rather at a standstill, so I let the whole outfit take a half day off."

The man's appearance was reassuring; he was as dapper and nonchalant as usual, and was smartly dressed for his part as the head of the camp in flannel shirt, riding breeches, and leather leggings.

The two shook hands with cordiality, and as soon as they were seated in the private office Peter undid the dispatch case and poured the valuable paper upon the desk. At his request Horace quickly verified the amount that he mentioned, then fell back

in his chair, staggered by the munificence of the man whom he had often scorned and ridiculed. He was perhaps overcome for the moment with a sort of remorse, but his face was of that inherent hardness that does not soften with emotion, and the gleam in his eye was one of selfish gratification.

"I declare I can't understand it, Barton!" he exclaimed. "I can't think you're so inexperienced as to believe that you're going to make a lot of money out of our company; you know that we still have little more than a fighting chance to pull through—I think I made that plain to you. No, I couldn't make a guess as to why you came to the rescue the first time, and now you've carried the thing beyond human comprehension."

Peter's emotions were susceptible to almost any manner of appeal, and Arkwright's mere astonishment touched him sensibly. He found it hard to meet the other's glance, and harder to voice any speech in answer to the challenge of this mystified man.

"I wonder if you know yourself why you have done it?" said Horace.

Peter looked around the room helplessly, wishing that he might escape. He looked at Arkwright and his face flushed hotly to a deeper crimson than it had worn already, then his mouth opened and words came out of it.

"I've given you," he said in a strained, detached way, "a little over half a million dollars altogether, haven't I? I can hardly believe it myself—I didn't know that I had made so much money in the few months that I've been selling things. I've got to tell you all about it now, and then you'll know. If a man steals forty thousand dollars, and then confesses the crime, and gives back over ten times as much as he took, that's about all he can do to square himself, isn't it?"

"What in the devil are you talking about?" Arkwright demanded sharply.

The crimson faded out of Peter's face and he was white when he got out of the chair and stood in front of Arkwright's desk.

"I'm talking about my own particular hell," he said shrilly. "You lost a forty-thousand-dollar pay roll, didn't you? Some men robbed your pay clerks! There was an airplane! The poor devils that took the money fell to death in the airplane, you know, but before they were killed they lost the money that they had taken from you—lost it right out of the flying airplane in some way that I don't know anything about—except that the money fell out when the plane was flying right over my house—the day you drove Dorothy out to the country club. The bag nearly hit me in the garden where I was working—and I picked it up and I tried to take care of it and give it back. I didn't know whose money it was at all, but I wanted to give it back—so help me God!—and I tried to take it to the police station, but everything worked against me—and the damned poverty got me! I couldn't stand the strain any longer when they wanted to take my home away from me—and I ripped open your money and took some—and then I took some more—and then I took it all! I didn't steal it! I didn't mean to steal it! I just borrowed it—and I've paid back the loan, haven't I? I knew I could pay it back. Everything comes to a man that's got money, and it all worked out just as I knew it would. You haven't lost anything by me, have you? It's all right now, isn't it? A crook wouldn't do what I have done, would he? Tell me what you think! I'm not a crook now, am I? Tell me what you think!"

He stood looking intently at Arkwright, his haggard face working spasmodically, and his whole body trembling, and Arkwright looked at him, amazed, indeed, but showing no sign of sympathy.

"For God's sake, say something!" Peter cried hoarsely.

Horace's face grew harder with a mirthless smile, and he fingered the papers on the desk.

"So that was the way the great inventor came into his own!" he said at last. "You inventors and geniuses have a peculiar sense of values, anyway. May I ask if Mistress Dorothy happens to know that her talented husband's fortunes were founded upon a theft?"

For the moment Peter was dumfounded. The man's attitude was utterly unexpected. He had hoped for more mercy, more charity. But the dragging in of his wife's name

angered him, and he suddenly leaned over the desk and said gravely, almost calmly:

"All right, this is business now, between you and me. And we'll leave my wife out of it. Do you want to accept this money? What do you want to do? What do you want me to do?"

"You've talked about enough, Barton," Arkwright said harshly. "It would seem that I'm the one to do the talking now—to dictate the terms. It's for me to decide whether you are to go to jail or to buy yourself off. Listen! It wouldn't matter if you had given me a million; you're a scoundrel—a sneak thief—a pickpocket!"

Peter had suffered too much during the months of remorse to be supine under this new torture, and he struck Arkwright in the face.

Arkwright cursed him violently and returned the blow, and they grappled across the desk, slid off at the end, and rolled upon the floor. Half of the precious papers were scattered about the room, chairs were overturned, and in an instant the office was a scene of battle and disorder. Peter regained his feet, lifted Arkwright, and threw him against the desk, then held him for a moment while he clawed savagely for his throat. Horace was the lighter man, with lighter muscles, and he felt himself weakening, but he flung back one hand and caught a glass paper weight from the desk. He swung his arm furiously, the heavy object crashed upon Peter's head, and Peter let go his hold on his opponent and fell like a dead man.

Horace shook himself and breathed deeply. He glanced at the fallen enemy, muttered an oath, and then very practically scrambled together the papers on the floor, arranged them with the others on the desk, and crammed them all into the dispatch case. One moment more he stopped, to kneel and feel for Peter's pulse, but he merely shook his head doubtfully when the experiment proved unsatisfactory, then got up and hastened out of the room, locking the door after him.

As he started forward through the large outer room, a door at the far end of it opened and startled Arkwright disagreeably. A man in the uniform of the State constabulary walked through the large room to meet Horace, and the latter nervously patted his touseled hair into place, blinked painfully with one damaged eye, and prepared to be nonchalantly friendly with the patrolman.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Arkwright," the policeman said as they met, "but the city police have telephoned us instructions to arrest you. Your own firm accuses you of the embezzlement of a hundred thousand dollars from its treasury. Sorry, but we'll have to hold you until we get further orders."

The announcement was like a blow between the eyes to Horace, and for a moment he gave back in confusion, but his habitual *sang-froid,* more foolhardy than courageous, presently asserted itself and all emotion was immediately concealed back of that masklike "poker" face.

"There's some ghastly, stupid blunder!" he exclaimed with aristocratic dignity. "I never heard of anything half so absurd. But we'll have it explained and made right, of course. You have a warrant, I suppose?"

"No warrant yet," answered the policeman. "But it's a criminal case, Mr. Arkwright; there's a warrant out in the city, and the police have ordered you held. It wouldn't do you any good to put up a fight against arrest, and you know, sir, that I have to obey orders."

"Of course, of course," Horace agreed reasonably. "Come this way, and we'll talk the thing over."

He led the way to a storeroom at one side of the large office, a place of shelves and cupboards where office material was kept, and as the policeman followed him into the small room, glancing about him curiously, Horace suddenly turned with lightning quickness, caught up a heavy steel instrument used for opening boxes, and stretched the man senseless on the floor with a crashing blow across the top of the head. Instantly he darted out of the room, closed the door and locked it with a padlock, and hurried on his way out of the building.

As he stepped into the roadway he caught sight of Peter's car with Dorothy waiting patiently on the front seat, and he started back in surprise. The surprise was but momentary, and he went forward with a plan made on the inspiration of the moment.

Dorothy returned his greeting cordially and gave him her hand as he stopped and leaned on the car door, but she looked with anxious concern at his injured eye, and noted his generally rumpled condition.

"It's nothing at all!" he protested airily. "Had a little scrimmage here this afternoon, but the excitement is all over now. Your excellent husband is helping us out very handsomely, and we are so busy that I have asked him to let me drive you over to Crystal Lake village. I have a little bungalow over there, you know, for my quarters, and we'll all have dinner there this evening."

He took her consent for granted and stepped into the car as he spoke, placing Peter's dispatch case between himself and Dorothy as he took the steering wheel. He started the car rather suddenly, in ill-concealed haste, but Dorothy's suspicions were not stirred, and she laughed and chatted comfortably as he drove across the dam and sped recklessly along the country road beyond.

They came quickly to the old village, with its smart new growth of modern bungalows for the city people that were attached to the engineering and administrative forces at the camp, and Horace halted the car in front of his own miniature mansion, and lost no time in conducting Dorothy into the house.

A manservant received them ceremoniously and they entered a lavishly furnished living room. Horace dropped the dispatch case upon a table, gave the man some orders in a low tone and sent him away, then turned with alarming abruptness to Dorothy.

"I have your husband's money here, and his car, and his wife," he said in a voice husky with emotion. "They all belong to me! Your husband robbed me of forty thousand dollars to give himself a start in the world. He has returned the money with interest, and he expects forgiveness, but I am going to put him where he belongs for a few years."

"My husband never had anything to do with you or your business before he became prosperous!" Dorothy exclaimed, aghast. "How could he possibly rob you of forty thousand dollars?"

"It was the famous airplane robbery," he answered promptly. "My money fell from the airplane, it seems, and landed in your garden. Your genius husband received it like manna from the skies, and made use of it in his charmingly innocent and child-like manner. I had some difficulty in convincing him that he was a common thief and a criminal, but I believe that he realizes it now."

"I want to see Peter," she said almost calmly; "I want to hear his side of the story. Where is he now? Is that what that policeman went into your office for?"

"Exactly—to arrest your husband!" Horace answered readily. "No, my dear child, I don't intend that you shall see him again. My man is packing my bags, and we are going away from here. I want to get you away from the embarrassment, the disgrace! He is not worthy to see you again, and I'll take care of you. I'll show you that I can do that rather well, and we'll forget all the beastly business that has made us all so miserable."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE VERDICT.

THE motorcycle policeman was blessed with a hard head and abundant vitality, and he opened his eyes consciously and sat up on the floor of the storeroom while it was still dusk. He was sorely hurt, but recollection brought righteous anger to such a degree that recuperation was rapid. He pulled himself together and got on his feet, and it happened that the heavy tool with which he had been felled came to his hand and served excellently as an instrument to overcome the resistance of the padlocked door.

He staggered out into the deserted office, balanced himself giddily while he looked about him speculatively, and began with certain ominous inclinations to take stock of his official weapons, which Horace Arkwright in his haste had neglected to secure.

A faint sound came to his ear from the door of the private office, something like a muffled groan, and he reeled to that door and listened. Something was moving inside, and the policeman unceremoniously put

his shoulder to the panels and burst them inward.

The sight of the battered and disheveled Peter startled him and still further restored his faculties. He lifted Peter to his feet, and Peter groaned, blinked stupidly, and leaned heavily upon him. The policeman asked questions with growing interest, and Peter slowly came to himself and recalled the recent struggle.

He staggered to the window and looked for his car and Dorothy in vain, then, with realization and apprehension dawning upon him, he turned to the policeman and asked for explanations. It occurred to him vaguely that the officer must be there to arrest him, but he heard Horace Arkwright's name uttered several times in a manner that was mystifying and peculiarly comforting, and he felt drawn to the uniformed stranger as to a friend and rescuer.

After some moments of groping through a mental haze, the two men found themselves conferring together with increasing intelligence, and presently they were inspired to leave the office and hurry out to the road, with the policeman supporting Peter by one arm.

With a tangible object in view, they sought one of the reservoir guards and asked questions, and the man told them readily that Horace Arkwright had driven away with the lady in the car, and had gone toward Crystal Lake village.

The policeman thanked the guard vigorously, with certain picturesque references to Horace Arkwright, and hastened to drag his own motorcycle from the roadside and mount it. Peter instantly regained the use of brain and muscle, and begged spiritedly to be taken along. The policeman objected, but Peter insisted heatedly, and suddenly perched himself upon the frame of the motorcycle at the rear of the saddle. The rider shook his head dubiously, but started the machine and drove off over the dam.

At Arkwright's bungalow the manservant interrupted the continued argument between Horace and Dorothy by announcing that his master's bags were packed, and that he had filled the tank of the car with gasoline.

"Then we're ready to start," said Horace.

"You know that you can't force me to go with you," Dorothy declared angrily. "You are not quite powerful enough to abduct a woman and escape the law."

"We'll start with the abduction business if necessary," Horace announced grimly, "and you'll be more reasonable after you have thought over the situation. We are going away from here together, and far enough to be safe from annoyance.

"Put the bags in the car," he ordered, and the man bowed and took up the luggage.

The door bell rang, and Horace started nervously.

The man put down the bags and went to to the door.

"Mr. Arkwright is not here," the servant said curtly to some one, and then Horace and Dorothy heard a sound of scuffling, saw the servant flung across the hall, and saw Peter standing in the doorway of the room.

The three were speechless for a moment, while Peter eyed Horace significantly; then Dorothy cried out in a burst of pent-up emotion, ran to Peter, and threw her arms about him.

"If he is a thief and a swindler, and all that you say he is," she cried defiantly to Arkwright, "he is a better man than a thousand like you!"

The instant turning of the woman so positively against him sent Horace into a rage, and he leaped at Peter. They went to the floor in a fierce struggle, but the waiting policeman darted into the house and sharply ordered them apart, brandishing his revolver.

Horace sprang up, pointed a trembling finger at Peter, and cried out:

"Arrest that man! He is—"

The policeman drowned the rest of the speech with the violence of his oath.

"You've got your nerve," he added, "talking about arresting anybody. I want you, Arkwright!"

Horace acted with amazing initiative. He was no more than a yard from the policeman, and he lunged forward viciously and landed a stunning blow on his chin. The officer fell into Peter's arms, and Horace snatched the dispatch case from the table and dashed out of the house.

Peter started after him, but Dorothy flung her arms about him and held on desperately, begging him to let the man go and to have no further violence.

The policeman got on his feet again, shaking his head like a fighter in the prize ring, and blundered unsteadily to the porch of the house, just in time to see Arkwright turn the car about, head it for the dam, and dash away, ingeniously smashing the waiting motorcycle by side-swiping it as it leaned against the curb. The officer fired his revolver after the speeding car vainly, then turned to implore Peter to get him another motorcycle or a car in which to pursue the fugitive.

Arkwright fled back to the camp with the wild recklessness of the hunted, and feverishly planned his further flight as he went. He realized that he had nothing to hope for but an escape from the country and a long journey to some place in which he could lose himself from the world. At the moment he saw time as the thing most necessary to him, and he cast about for anything that would cover his tracks.

No one challenged him at the dam, for there he was still the president of the company and the head of the camp. He was going on through without stopping, but a wild inspiration seized him and he halted suddenly at the office building. Leaping from the car he took one look at his back trail and listened for sounds of pursuit, then ran into the building. A vast project seething in his mind contemplated the blocking of present pursuit, and the creation of a diversion that would take all attention from him for at least that night.

From his private office he snatched a bunch of keys, then ran out of the building and along the road to the engineers' storehouse. An armed guard saluted him and did not check his progress, and he opened the storehouse and hurried to the vault where the high explosives were kept.

Five minutes later one of the guards watched him curiously as he lowered himself over the parapet of the new dam and clambered down a steep bank toward the base, carrying a parcel under his arm.

"What you doing down there, Mr. Arkwright?" asked the guard.

"Taking a few precautions," Horace answered truthfully. "Go about your business and don't bother me."

The guard said no more, but his curiosity was actively aroused, and he lingered in the immediate vicinity instead of walking to the other end of his beat. Thus he was standing near the parapet when a mounted trooper of the State constabulary came down the road at a gallop and reined up his horse to ask him for information.

"I'm looking for Mr. Horace Arkwright," said the trooper. "Has he driven through the camp lately?"

"That's the car he was in a minute or so ago," answered the guard, pointing to the Barton car in front of the administration building. "He's just gone down the bank there, but he'll probably be back in a minute."

"All right," said the trooper, and dismounted.

Horace Arkwright's head appeared over the parapet, and he vaulted it and stood in the road.

"Get out of here, all you fellows!" he shouted excitedly. "There's going to be trouble."

He turned as he spoke and ran to the car, but the trooper ran after him and caught him rather violently by the arm.

"Hold on there, Mr. Arkwright!" the trooper ordered. "We got telephone instructions from Crystal Lake village to stop you here and arrest you. Don't make any more trouble, for I've got my eye on you."

Horace whirled upon him, but the trooper was too quick for him, and snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

Horace cried out as in agony and swore at the man and at the world.

"Run for your life!" he yelled. "The dam is going to blow up! We haven't ten seconds!"

The warning was echoed by the watchman from the parapet as he suddenly dashed away.

"Beat it—everybody!" he shouted. "There's a charge of dynamite down there!"

The trooper took alarm and relinquished his prisoner, self-preservation being more important to him at the moment than his

orders from headquarters. He vaulted into his saddle and spurred his horse into a run away from the dam.

Horace wrenched at the handcuffs that hampered his movements as he leaped wildly for the car. He fumbled awkwardly with the door, but got it open and scrambled in. It was more difficulty than he had expected to manipulate the starter and the gears with hands bound closely together, and he went mad, shrieking for help and fighting with the car as though it had life.

The end of the dam structure and the administration building rose suddenly into the air, and the ground heaved as in an earthquake.

On a knoll, some three hundred yards from the dam, the trooper flung himself from his horse and clasped his hands over his head to ward off the flying and falling débris, and the fleeing watchman reached the knoll and cowered beside the trooper.

"The poor boob!" muttered the trooper. "He might 'a' got away if he hadn't stopped for the car. It got 'im, all right!"

"There's another car on the dam," said the watchman; "see the lights. They missed it by about a yard."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE READJUSTMENT.

A WEEK later Peter and Dorothy were seated in the office of Peter's attorney in Spurling, and Mr. Hargrave was pacing the floor in sympathetic agitation. Peter's head was bandaged and one arm was in a sling, for he and the motorcycle policeman had missed Horace Arkwright's explosion by feet and inches.

"I can hardly understand why you insisted upon pressing the securities that were recovered from the ruins, upon the Arkwright Company," Hargrave complained. "You are absolutely cleaned out, Mr. Barton, for your own creditors will take the little that you have left in your shops. With the wreck of the dam and the panic of the creditors, the Arkwright Company has utterly collapsed."

Dorothy looked at Peter a little tragically, but with unusual resignation, and Peter seemed unable to grasp seriously the disaster that had come upon him.

"I shall be glad if my personal creditors can be satisfied," he said almost cheerfully. "Oddly enough, I still have one piece of property that may escape the final reckoning; I had practically overlooked our little old home on Spring Street; we were so wealthy for a while that I actually forgot to sell it, or even to rent it. I hope that the creditors may not need that."

"You must indeed be a philosopher," Hargrave said dryly. "I didn't know that any human being could suffer such a loss and keep on smiling."

"Peter isn't like other human beings, Mr. Hargrave," Dorothy remarked quietly, "so it is hard for any less patient persons to understand him." And she astonished Peter by stepping over to his chair and resting her hand on his shoulder.

The garden and the lawn of the old cottage on Spring Street had grown up to tall grass and weeds when Peter and Dorothy returned to it. Peter explored the yard curiously, shook his head over the ruinous condition of things, and dragged a rusty scythe and a crippled lawn mower from beneath the porch, preparatory to an attack upon the grass and weeds.

He strolled to the rear of the garden and looked with whimsical affection at the old bus, still standing under the ramshackle shed. On sudden impulse he went at it with boyish enthusiasm and laboriously cranked the engine, and when it began to vibrate and shake the car from stem to stern, he shouted with delight.

Dorothy came out on the back porch with a broom in her hand, attired in a pretty, plain dress, with a gingham apron over it. She showed nothing of her old aversion to the car or to the place, but joined Peter in watching the struggles and antics of the ancient relic.

Peter went into the old workshop and seemed enchanted at the sight of the dust, cobwebs and litter. He contemplated the array of chemical apparatus on the table, and all at once he took off his coat, hung it on a nail, and rolled up his shirt sleeves. He filled and lighted his pipe, then slowly un-

buttoned his waistcoat—and the old Peter stood there in the shop as in the days before the "windfall."

Presently he was cooking something over a spirit lamp with great care and suppressed enthusiasm, and when he removed the compound from the flame and subjected it to certain tests with other chemicals, he opened his mouth and let out a great shout, and danced about the table in wild glee.

Dorothy rushed into the shop to learn the cause of the uproar, and Peter cried out joyfully:

"It didn't bust up that time, Dot! I've got it! With just a little more development, it will—oh, you know! We'll win out, anyhow!"

The old skepticism had left Dorothy, and she partook of his fervid enthusiasm. Her eyes were moist as she contemplated the mysteries of the old laboratory, and presently she stole into Peter's arms and embraced him with old-time affectionate devotion.

"I hope," she said, "that we shall never be—too—wealthy—again."

THE END.

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THE WANDERER

OH, I have sailed the seven seas,
And I have traveled far,
Into the unknown places where
The great adventures are!
I have seen dawn, a scarlet flag,
From mountain peaks unfurled,
And I have felt the hunger of
The lonely, groping world.

Oh, I have known the urge of roads,
That lured my vagrant feet,
And I have blessed the sudden rest
That wanderers find sweet.
My eyes have searched a tropic vale,
To glimpse a passion flower—
And I have felt the jungle's heart
Throb at the twilight hour.

Oh, I have forded streams that swept,
White crested through the night;
And I have followed frozen trails
Blazed by the North Star's light.
I have passed dangers, unafraid,
And I have met with pain,
And smiled into the eyes of Hope,
And ventured forth again!

The city roars about my soul,
The city binds my hands—
But in my heart brave journeys start,
To vivid, unguessed lands.
Oh, I have sailed the seven seas,
And I have traveled far,
Into the wonder places where
The dreams of romance are!

Margaret E. Sangster.

Queen of the Night

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "Jungle Test," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

THREE hard-bitten mariners, Captain Jarvy, Mate Grimpen, and Tom Yarre, boatswain, from a rusty freighter, bring an old sea chest to Sundown Café, near a ship channel leading to the Gulf of Mexico. Their appearance frightens Herzog, the innkeeper, a rogue, but he gives them a room. There they open the chest. The skipper and the mate divide the gold within, giving Tom Yarre, despite his objections, a mass of beautiful shawls, silks, serapes and bangles. In the hope of making trouble between the two officers, Yarre gives the apparel to Juana, a beautiful, tigerlike girl dressed in rags, who waits on them at the inn. But before the captain and mate can get over their surprise at the changed appearance of the little serving girl, there enters Señor El Gato, former bullfighter, but now, a little touched in the head, a fighter of men. He instantly declares his devotion to Juana.

CHAPTER VII.

"IT IS DONE!"

"A DRINK for the whole house, my host!" the gentleman from Equatorial America announced. "A drink in honor of the new queen of the Sundown Café. Your finest wine, and your guests shall be my guests for this one night!"

The gaming room and dance hall of Herzog's café had already begun to simmer with the excitement of a fiesta. Herzog's fiestas were famed throughout many a Gulf port. There was always some new dancer to perform a *guaracha* or *fandango;* there was always an unlimited flow of wine, the grapes of which were grown in Herzog's own back yard. Sometimes blood flowed. Seamen could engage in fist fights or dance

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the Texas Tommy, each man to his liking. Ragtime or *Chileanette*—both could be stepped to the music of the three-piece negro band. Cotton factors and sugar planters had been known to trot in through the emparrado of the café on horseback, and the hoofs of their pintos had pounded the dance-floor in a horse-quadrille.

Whatever the guests of the Sundown Café preferred to dance, they would find themselves showered with paper roses, tangled up comfortably with their partners in long streamers, or hit upon the head with eggshells filled with confetti. Sometimes they would be hit upon the head with flying chairs—but that was all in the spirit of the Sundown Café.

And now came a new sensation—a woman dressed like some Aztec princess, and a rich stranger inviting this hodgepodge crowd of gamblers, crimps, dance-hall girls and mariners to be his guests.

This new aspect of the part Juana was to play in the life of the Sundown Café pleased the proprietor immensely. If Herzog was to make money on this crazy masquerade which Juana was affecting, there could certainly be no reasonable objection on his part. While his guests cheered the announcement of the stranger from Nicaragua, Herzog, in company with the cook and the stable mozo, prepared to serve the house with Juarez.

Tom Yarre came down into the scene with a swagger of indifference. He already knew that the trouble which he had started was going to be more than he had bargained for. For that reason he resolved definitely to remain aloof. There was no sense in stepping consciously into a barroom brawl. On the other hand, Tom Yarre had no intention of leaving the scene of combat. He would enjoy it as the gods on Olympus enjoyed the squabbles and vanities of petty mortal men. He was resolved that he at least must hold himself free from the wiles of this woman he had transformed into Circe. He was like Odysseus, who bound himself to a mast while sailing past the deadly and beautiful sirens.

With an expression of utter nonchalance, as if totally ignorant of any complicity in the trouble that was brewing, he took a seat in one of the booths, the floor of which was about a yard higher than the floor of the dance room. This particular vantage point afforded a fine view of the dining room, dance hall and staircase beyond. It was for this reason and the fact that Señor El Gato's table was directly below, that Tom Yarre picked it out. Once seated, he took out a pack of dog-eared playing cards, wet his fingers, and began laying out the deck for a game of solitaire.

With great ceremony Señor El Gato ushered Juana to a seat at his table.

"*Señorita*," he was saying, "youth has forsaken me. Time, the locust, has eaten away those years I spent in the bull rings of Havana and Madrid. I traveled. I lavished my days. I saw many lands and peoples without the desire to live or fight among them. And now behold"—he indicated his listener—"a beautiful woman has restored the years which the locusts have eaten! Love heats my veins. My blood courses with the hot desire to fight for her as in the old days I fought that the Queen of Spain might smile!"

"Ees wonderful. I am so gifted that I make old fighters into new!"

"Your smile, *señorita*," the stranger continued, "inspires more fervent madness in my soul than the Queen of Spain. For her I would face a bull; for you I would face an Andalusian! For her I would wear a pigtail when a youth; for you I would wear it all my life—even though a pigtail beyond onescore years and ten means death!"

"Is it to every woman you spik thees beautiful lingo?" Juana asked excitedly. "Ees for every woman you will mak' bullfight?"

"For only one in the world! And only one for the rest of the days of my life! You are the one, *señorita!* 'When tongues speak sweetly, then they name your name!' When lovers sigh it is your beauty which they dream their mistresses possess! When the moon shines in Valencia, O queen of queens, it is like the light of your face shining upon my soul!"

"Ees very interesting," Juana remarked rather skeptically. "But tell me of your fights in the old days."

"Ah!" The stranger kissed his fingers.

"My name it was a household word. I fight! I conquer! I kill! My sword drips like the sword of Guerrita! My stroke, my technique, my abandon! It is not like Bombita! It is the inspiration of Machaquito! Some toreadors, *señorita*, fight with a skill born in their brains—their heads. My skill, Doña Juana," he concluded, tossing off his glass of wine, "was of the heart!"

"Maybe so," Juana said, shrugging her beautiful shoulders. "But all this loco business over wan poor bull! You should see the stockyards in this country where they kill se beef! Ees more blood than flows in all of Spain!"

"I myself have killed bulls without number—Andalusians—herds of them—their blood clots a dozen bull rings—"

"*Bueno!*" Juana remarked with another shrug. "Bulls may be killed. Ees all very well. But—"

She paused.

El Gato raised his jet eyebrows in expectancy. "Yes?"

She lowered her voice. "Did you kill any men?"

Kill men? Why was this woman changing the subject from bulls to such a weakling accomplishment as the killing of men?

"Men! Pouf!" He snapped his fingers in disgust. "Of course I have slain men. For the sake of woman in distress, and for my own honor!" he laughed scornfully. "Ha! I have killed more men than bulls. But why boast of that? Shall a bullfighter bray out his merit when he kills a man? Shall a hunter trumpet forth the death of a fox when he has killed a boar? Man—chut! A stick in the lung. They howl. They die. But, doña, the bulls are something to fear—a horn in your stomach which brings festerings, gangrene! A knife wound—pouf! Death is merciful at the hands of a man. Bulls are something to boast about, but men!"

He spat.

Then on the spur of the moment the stranger looked across the table into Juana's glowing eyes.

"It occurs to me, *señorita*, that you are in distress. This house is a prison, its keeper your jailer. I heard strange words. They called you scullion—you who are a queen fit to sit among the stars."

"I was scullion. But nevermore. I am—as you call me—the Señorita Juana."

"Good! Your name shall from this moment be Doña Juana. But is there no man who will laugh? The innkeeper—"

"*Si!* Herzog is a pig if ever there was one. Caramba! but I would like to see him—"

She paused abruptly.

"To see him dead at your feet?" the matador prompted softly.

Juana said nothing, but her eyes flashed darkly about the room, meeting the eyes of the man opposite to her for just a moment.

"I see it in your eyes. You would have me raise my hand to slay him. It is done!"

"You will kill just because I—Juana—bids you?" the girl asked, startled. "Ees possible?"

"I would kill seven men—"

"And for what reward?"

Although the question demanded a careful reply, Señor El Gato shot back his answer with passionate eagerness.

"To kiss the hand of Doña Juana! And stand in the glory of her smile!"

"*Señor*, you are one great bullfighter! But here in America when we spik of bullfighting we mean ozzer things!"

"If you do not believe what I say," the stranger cried, "put me to the test. Does Doña Juana command? Shall I kill this man who was her persecutor? Shall I bury my knife in the innkeeper's heart?"

"I have command nossing, *señor*."

"But your eyes. They command me."

"My eyes command you to kill?"

"They do. And this knife which I carry with me when I travel in strange ports—"

"You like for to stick that knife into Herzog?" Juana asked voicelessly.

"Your eyes command me."

"*Bueno!* I cannot help what my eyes say. Ees very onlucky for Señor Herzog!"

"It is done!"

Tom Yarre mussed up his game with the intention of starting over again. He had played it without sufficient concentration.

As he turned over his cards he was thinking of other things—the vow of the stranger, the flashing eyes of Juana, the first unhappy man upon whom the lightning of her new-found power had struck. And for some peculiar reason the boatswain thought of the rust-bound sea-chest and the body of Rob Hawkins floating—as the superstition goes—slowly and surely toward home shores.

CHAPTER VIII.

"BEFORE THE NEXT DANCE!"

NO one in the house understood what was going on between the innkeeper and Señor El Gato—no one, that is to say, except Juana herself and perhaps Tom Yarre. The stranger accosted old Herzog by the bar.

A bow—rather too elaborate to be wasted upon an innkeeper—preceded a few whispered sentences. Herzog rubbed his hands, trembled, and stammered. El Gato slipped him a gold condor, and the blood came back into the innkeeper's cheeks. He smiled, bowed, walked backward to the stairs, then taking a key from the board of hooks which contained the room keys, he hobbled up the steps.

Tom Yarre saw El Gato follow.

To the crowd this pantomime meant nothing. It was the ordinary incident of a tavern keeper showing a guest to his room. To Tom Yarre the scene was considerably more dramatic.

As for Juana, she had no time to ponder over it. For no sooner had she been left alone at her table than a new suitor immediately presented himself. His approach was less ostentatious than the approach of Señor El Gato. It seemed less importunate, but yet there was more to be feared. It was Mr. Grimpen, the mate of the Orinoco.

The piano, drum and cornet of the three negroes on the orchestra dais had already invited several couples to the floor. Quinolas and monte had gathered the gamblers into groups. The stable mozo and the cook were both busy bringing drinks. And some of the guests who were brave enough to risk asking the new queen of the Sundown Café for a dance crowded about her table. But it was Mr. Grimpen, who had been watching her as a cat watches a mouse, who sprang to her side first.

"Look here, me gel," he said in a cool, rapid voice, "I am no great shakes at making love to slaveys or charladies. That is why I didn't arsk you to dine with me before you put on this rig. But let me tell you, I knew as how you were a lidy, and fit, by Crikey, to be a duchess—if I ever saw one."

"Ees very peculiar that a duchess should have wan dronk sailor come to her—as you come to me—and ask for to dine."

"I'm not a sailor, me gel! I am the first officer of the Orinoco. And that doesn't put me so very far below you! Does it now?"

"Mebbe yes!" Juana replied with a shrug that brought one of her shoulders slightly nearer to Grimpen's lowered face. "You are a sailor from ship—like every sailor what comes to this café for to drink wine and for to find beautiful woman! Except for that I am a lady, I would break se jaw for you, *señor*."

The ring of men about Juana's table took this speech as reason enough to withdraw.

"She'll treat him like she treated the old bargeman!" some one laughed.

"She ain't changed, except her clothes!" an old sailor chuckled. "Careful, there, Mr. Dickey, or she'll have your eyes outen your ole head!"

But the mate remained, taking advantage of the fact that his competition had withdrawn. The music beat and thrummed rhythmically, crowding the floor with couples. For the rest of the dance the first officer of the Orinoco had the girl to himself.

"Now look here, me lidy," he said in a changed voice, "if you want to make a laughing stock of me, let me tell you a thing or two. I ain't proud. I will be laughed at for your sake. But get this: I ain't below *you!* Don't put on that swank, I advise you. You got them duds out of an old rusty sea-chest a sailor gave to you. Didn't a sailor give you them duds, eh?"

"*Si!* A great man this sailor with tattoo

on his hands and the scar on his cheek. Be careful how you mak' fon of me and my clothes, Mr. Officer, or you will have the scar on the neck yourself!"

"Sh!" Mate Grimpen held up his scrawny yellow palms. "Hush! Hush!" he urged. "Don't get the monkeys over nothin'. I ain't makin' fun of your clothes. They're great. I've never seen the like of them this side of Lunnon, damme! But it's not the clothes. Not another woman in the world could carry them on her back and not look like a circus rider.

"It's *you* that's beautiful, me lidy! It's you with your hair done up that way; it's you with your arms bare. It's you, my duchess, with your eyes glowin' like the stars before a bloody typhoon!"

"You, too, are a bullfighter!" Juana remarked dryly. "Is it not so, *señor?*"

"A bullfighter? Where in hell do you get that? I'm a ship's mate—a good man for a girl like you. Look here, me lidy, I'd jump the bally ole ship for your sake! I'll take you with me to New Orleans—"

"You say my eyes are like what you call se typhoon, eh? Ees ridiculous!"

Mr. Grimpen went on in his eager purr: "To New Orleans, I said, where they know a beauty when they see one! You're a Creole—that's plain enough to be seen: I'll buy you jewels, gowns, fans! I'll take you to the cafés—to Antoine's, to the Louisiane, to the theaters—I'll make a great lidy out of you, by Crikey! You ought to be on the stage with your side and swagger. *I* could put you acrost, damme!"

"Juana—she looks like the typhoon, eh? Yes! That is right!"

Mr. Grimpen continued with gathering but well suppressed fervor:

"Or else, wot's better than the stage—a gamin' 'ouse! I've had it in my mind for years to open up a gamin' palace in 'Avanah. You'd be worth your weight in gold. You'd have diamonds and rings on your fingers; you'd make every man who saw you crazy mad! And they'd not be silver rings, me lidy, remember that! Like them cigar bands you got on which you found 'em in the sea-chest!"

He bent his face closer, radiant, flushed, sweating. "I tell you you'll put on some swank! I tell you I'm rich! You'll Rotten Row it the rest of your life! I'll give you whatever you want!"

"I want for all men to kneel before me," Juana replied. "For sailors' promises I care nossing!"

"*I'll* kneel before you, damme! *I'll* kiss your feet! Come with me and leave this stinkin' little den! I'll be your slave—"

"Slave!" Juana cried exultantly. "Ees what I want! Ees what I wanted all my life—slaves! Ees what my ancestors had to crawl before them on se belly! They have the sawdust of the floor stick on their belly and the stripes of the rawhide romal on the back! The stripes which I—Juana—whip them! That is the slave I want!"

"Come with me—and you'll get all that! Cross me 'eart! I'll give you everything!"

"But you are so homely, *señor.* You are thin. Your hands she are yellow. Your nose she are very long and have the pock mark or the pimples—no man can tell which! You have the brosh on the temples like butlers in the mov-ing picture! You are good for slave—but that is all!"

"Well, of all the blahsted, swankin' bats!" Mr. Grimpen cried, for the first time raising his voice to a passionate whine. "So that's it! You're a bat like the rest of 'em, bringin' all the ill luck of any flat-footed woman crossin' a mariner's path. Pretendin' you're a lady, is it, when you're only a plurry little rotter—the same as any dame in a sailors' café? Well and good! I've got somethin' as will make yer shut yer mag."

He opened his blue coat, his fingers trembling with anger and excitement as he showed the girl the wide leather belt underneath.

"I've got somethin' here that *your* kind wants: gold, be God! That's wot it is. Enough condors and Argentines to buy you a 'ouse in Lunnon. Since you're the kind as wants money, 'ere you are!"

The mate paused, realizing that in raising his voice his passion was audible to the circle of men watching Juana. The girl sprang to her feet. The spectators melted backward, confidently expecting her sudden reversion to type.

"*Madre de Dios!* It is eensult!" she

cried. "You dare offer money to Juana, daughter of Miguel! Ees too mooch! To-night you will have scar across your throat like Mr. Tom Yarre, the capitan! You will have horseshoe nailed to your foot like the jackass what you are—"

Juana did not finish her maledictions. In the very process of lapsing into her former character of catamount, she saw Señor El Gato descending the stairs.

His entrance commanded an immediate cessation of everything that was taking place in that café. He was a sinister figure, holding his hand under his black coat upon his heart. Juana was shocked at the peculiar calm written on his face—a calm almost suggestive of benignity. She tried to read in that face just what events had transpired upstairs whither the matador had accompanied Herzog. From the inscrutable poise of the head, the smile of the thin lips, the placidity of those black eyes, she could guess nothing.

He walked to the table which separated the two standing figures—Juana and the mate of the Orinocó. Mr. Grimpen, for some reason or other, felt a dreadful tensity in the scene, partly because the music had stopped and the dancers were standing scattered on the floor in couples, expectantly watching the central group.

When Señor El Gato reached the table Juana's eyes met his in a mute questioning look. The stranger did not answer that question with words. Instead he took his hand from under his coat and threw down the knife which it had held. It was a suppressed gesture, visible only to Juana, the mate, and to Tom Yarre, seated in the booth above. These three looked down upon the table where the knife had clattered between the wine bottle and a glass. It dripped a tiny pool of blood—scarcely more than a small clot, on the cloth, which was of the purple color of Herzog's wine.

"Who is this gentleman?" the stranger asked, calmly staring at the pale Mr. Grimpen.

"He is the man who—"

Juana caught herself abruptly. She had no desire to see that knife of Señor El Gato in actual operation. "He is a frand from the steamer Orinoco." But she could not help adding: "And mebbe dronk if I know something."

She turned to the mate and introduced the stranger.

"This man," she said, "is bullfighter from City of Mexico. He kills many bulls, and also I think so—ozzer things. A dam' brave man is this Señor El Gato. Which should be too bad for you, mebbe."

"I'm glad to meet you, Señor El Gato," Mr. Grimpen stammered. "May I have the pleasure of ordering a drink for the three of us?"

El Gato smiled and bowed. He motioned graciously to chairs.

"We have certain things to talk over," he said, "and it might be best to take our time."

The wine was brought; the music banged out again; couples danced. Tom Yarre continued playing at solitaire. Captain Jarvy, the skipper of the Orinoco, guzzled his wine at a separate table, watching Juana with the resignation of a grizzly bear waiting for a pack of wolves to leave his meal. The cook and mozo, streaming with perspiration, waited on the tables.

"Now then, my dear sir," Señor El Gato said, "the subject which I wish to talk about is—as the saying goes in your country—a matter of life and death."

"The knife—" Mr. Grimpen suggested rubbing his hands nervously.

"Don't be disturbed," El Gato replied quickly. "Merely the blood of a calf."

"Can our lidy friend here enjoy drinkin' orf this treat when there's a bally bleedin' knife under our very nose?"

"But the knife concerns us now deeply. It would, as a matter of fact, be ridiculous for me to sheath it when I expect to use it again before we finish this bottle of wine."

"Slop me gob if I can understand wot the 'ell you're saying!"

"It's very damn fonny," Juana commented.

"Then I will explain. When I came into this room I saw a very significant sight."

"By that I suppose you refer to our lidy friend. Yuss! She was standin' up on one side of the table sure enough, hurlin' cuss words at me. But that's orl right. We're friends now. Arsk her!"

"Surely, *señor,* we are se very good frands!" Juana hastened to admit.

"The sight which met my gaze," Señor El Gato went on, as if he had not been interrupted, "was one which, to a gentleman and a fighter, is like the red outer covering of the mantillas which toreadors use to enrage a bull."

"My dear sir," Mr. Grimpen cried in great alarm, "if you think I actually insulted the lidy, you are very much mistaken."

Again Señor El Gato went on as if no one had spoken to him.

"My youth was spent in vital contact with the bulls of the Aficion. So vital was it that men say I am imbued with the spirit of the animals I fight, study, dream of, kill. Is that not natural? When I am hungry, I stamp the foot; when I am pierced with banderillas, I become dangerous; and when I see red, I become mad!"

"Look 'ere, my dear sir!" Mr. Grimpen cried desperately.

"One moment. I will finish. To-night I have seen red. I have dealt with one persecutor of Doña Juana as all her persecutors shall be dealt with. Those who court her are my enemies. Those who insult her are my creditors to whom shall be paid the wages of death."

He paused, watching Mr. Grimpen's reaction. But this time the mate appeared to be too bewildered to reply. Señor El Gato turned to Juana.

"Let this purple blood which clots the tablecloth before us mingle with the yellow blood of any other who stains your honor." Señor El Gato inclined himself to Juana's ear. "But say the word, and it shall be done."

Juana leaped to her feet, as did Mr. Grimpen. Both had blanched, but the different complexion of the mate made his face seem the whiter of the two.

"*Madre de Dios, señor!*" Juana cried. "I have said nossing. He is not worth killing — this sailor! Do not interpret everysing poor Juana says as the word of a jodge to condemn to the death!"

The Spaniard politely arose, apparently with the instinctive aversion to remaining seated in the presence of a lady.

"There is no need for Doña Juana to utter a word," he said. "Her eyes speak laws that are inviolate. When she commands the impossible, it shall be done. When she commands what is easy, as the death of a scurvy rogue, it is already done!"

"I have command nossing, *señor.* What more bloodshed will be laid against my soul!"

Juana was so agitated that there now seemed danger of attracting the attention of the crowd about them—had it not been for the extraordinary poise and serenity of Señor El Gato. The strange guest seemed to have a born faculty for making matters of life and death smack of the small talk of diplomats at an embassy ball.

"You are a woman and cannot kill," he said graciously, in response to Juana's outburst. "But you are a woman, too, who cannot be insulted."

He turned to Mr. Grimpen, whose upper lip was trembling. The crowd about them might have thought that the three people were merely terminating the polite conversation of a ballroom interlude. In fact, the *señor's* words were uttered with supreme graciousness, urbanity—even with smiles.

It was only a brief sentence that he purred to the mate. But it was sufficient.

"Mariner—before the next dance—"

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTAIN JARVY TAKES A HAND.

THE innkeeper's wife, searching for the stable mozo, found him in Tom Yarre's booth, to which he had come with an ordered cigar.

Cora was violently perturbed. Her plump face bore up well under most nights of excitement and brawling, but on this particular occasion its tendency to flabbiness caused a haggard and, it seemed, a permanently horrified expression. Wrinkles under her eyes cracked the thick coating of powder. Parted lips betrayed the artificial cupid's bow—the mouth was purple, the cupid's bow a vivid red. A touch of rouge smirched the tooth with which she had bitten her lower lip.

"I'm lookin' for Herzog," she said in a husky voice when she came into the booth and saw the mozo and Tom Yarre.

The mozo was a frightened bird of a man with muddy eyes and chin stained from a greenish Mexican chewing tobacco. He looked no more alarmed after hearing what his mistress had to say than before. Tom Yarre continued turning over a card or two.

"I saw him go upstairs," the boatswain said indifferently. "He was with the gentleman from Yucatan."

"Ah, then it is as I expected. Strange things are happening in this house, mister. And it's my opinion you are the one who started it. Putting them rags on that little minx there has got the whole house daffy—what with her own nerve! It ain't the rags, it's the gal herself. She thinks she's a lady because she's dressed like one. And let me tell you, mister"—the woman shook her bediamonded fist at Yarre—"it 'll be lucky if you get out of this house alive."

"Find out what's happened to your little husband before worrying about me," Tom advised.

"Sure. I'll find him. I'm goin' upstairs to hunt for him. If anything's happened to him it serves him right. He was fallin' for the gal himself—the loon!

"Look here, Pancho," she said to the stableman, "you go out and look for him around the place. He never leaves when we're pulling off a fiesta. Somethin's happened. That woman's got everyone bewitched—they're all goin' plumb crazy! She's like loco-weed to these here calves!"

"If you want my advice," Tom Yarre said quietly, "it's this: since there is undoubtedly something going on between decks in this house and since his nibs, the proprietor, has disappeared, you would be doing very well if you called the police."

"The police! The police when we're making more money than any night this season! Say, mister, you'd make a fine saloonkeeper. You haven't got sense enough to be a barkeep! And look here, you keep out of this, get me? When there's murder here we hide it—we don't use it to advertise the place. The police will put the lid on for good, if to-night's doings ever leak out."

"I see," Tom remarked dryly. "Then let the typhoon blow itself out!"

Cora left the room uncertainly, rubbing her heavily jeweled hands like some one trying to flee an inescapable doom. But whatever that doom was it must be braved—for the sake of money.

The mozo followed her, and shaking his small pointed head, he shuffled out toward the kitchen.

For a moment Tom Yarre stopped dealing out cards to himself. He sat partially overcome with mingled puzzlement and awe. Something most assuredly had happened to Herzog or else he would not have disappeared at the very time he was most needed. It was not the fate of Herzog, however, that horrified the boatswain. It was the dreadful coolness, the quiet inexorable certainty of El Gato's methods.

Who was this smiling soft-voiced demon who could leave his table so calmly to go about the business of knifing a man, and then as calmly return to his partner, drink wine with a second victim and graciously announce his intention of murdering him? It was unbelievable, it was shocking even to Tom Yarre, who himself was no novice at waterfront brawls.

The boatswain looked down from his booth into El Gato's face as the latter was seated in company with the mate and Juana. His inscrutable smile, his graciousness in the business of murder was little short of horrible. He seemed to be entirely in the spirit of the dance. His face responded to the joyful pounding of the music, as if his vivacious facial muscles were dancing under the thin brown skin; his very shoulders swayed to the ragtime, and his eyes mirrored the gayety of the dancing couples who thumped and whirled around his table.

And through it all he was whimsically contemplating the murder of whomever Juana, the queen of the café, singled out for his knife!

Seated opposite to him was the hapless mate of the Orinoco. Mr. Grimpen was not a man who at that time could elicit much sympathy from Tom Yarre. The boatswain regarded the fate that was coming to Grimpen as something indisputably

just. But it was too smooth, too harrowing. Grimpen was like a little kitten waiting the advance of a snake—not, Tom Yarre reflected, with any sense of ignorance, but with an utter paralysis of will—a pitiable helplessness.

The mate, Yarre observed, was well aware of his position. During the conversation he had with Juana and the gentleman from Yucatan, a very peculiar change had come over Mr. Grimpen. His smile did not leave him, but it was the peculiar sobbing sort of smile of a very nervous and frightened man. In fact, the twitching of his upper lip was the peculiar ungovernable movement which precedes the bawling of a small boy. He actually sniffed.

And then, with the blood gone entirely from his lips, he seemed suddenly to go to pieces. His hands trembled; his knees as he struggled upward from his chair were of the flabbiness of intoxication. His whole frame dissolved from the elongated wiry mariner to the formless soggy outline of a woman like Cora, the innkeeper's wife.

Mr. Grimpen supported himself first with his own chair, then with the back of a chair at the adjacent table. Finally, having navigated the intervening space as far as the door to the patio, he broke into a run. Certain of the diners at the tables surrounding the dance floor were already throwing confetti and streamers at the dancing couples. The mate, Mr. Grimpen, before he reached the door was wound with streamers like a worm in a cocoon, and his bald head was powdered with red, green and gold confetti.

One or two sailors watching the mate of the Orinoco—his own men—laughed boisterously in their glee at seeing an officer of their ship intoxicated. But beyond this no one took any particular notice of Mr. Grimpen's exit.

Tom Yarre looked back at the table where Juana, El Gato and the mate had enacted their little scene. Juana was seated alone. Above her El Gato was bowing his leave with an elegant flourish. In another moment he slipped between the dancing couples and out into the patio.

Tom Yarre shivered at the boisterous revelry. If there had been a drunken brawl, hurled chairs, gunshooting, death, he could have enjoyed himself. But this music, this dancing, this revelry!

And the undercurrent of it!

He pictured the meeting of El Gato and the mate out there under the red stars in the suffocating perfume of the patio; the fireflies pulsating, the toreador's knife gleaming: and finally the sacrifice of Mr. Grimpen entangled with a purple streamer; his head dotted with the brilliant flecks of color where the confetti had showered him!

As Tom Yarre had anticipated, Juana was not left alone for a single moment. Before the dance was over—in fact, the very instant El Gato had disappeared—another suitor had come to bid for the queen's favor.

Captain Jarvy of the steamship Orinoco had remained at his table for some time considering the advisability of making an advance. He thought twice before leaving his booth, because of the fact that some of his own crew had come to the fiesta. He reflected that it would be most embarrassing to be turned down by a dance hall woman before their eyes. But, he argued with himself, he had never been turned down before.

Being the captain of a tramp freighter he had found it inconvenient to stay away from the taverns frequented by his sailors —particularly in small Gulf ports. Upon this occasion Captain Jarvy, aged forty-eight, was tipsy with the youthful bewilderment which besets a man upon seeing a beautiful woman who is strange.

This woman had already given him an intimation that she was different. That made him desire her all the more—she was a prize worth fighting for—and a prize most certainly not beyond his reach—even though, he recalled, he had one scene with her in which she had unquestionably bested him.

Considering these matters had taken time, and Captain Jarvy had awaited a seasonable opportunity to make his advance. Now that the peculiar, nondescript gentleman from Yucatan and Mr. Grimpen were out of the way, the skipper decided to ask for a dance.

"Well, miss, what do you say to a round on the deck?" were his words.

"Wis *you?*" Juana asked, tilting her nose in an undisguised grimace.

"I'm the gent you was serving dinner to. Mebbe you remember you threw my dish out into the yard. But let me tell you, if I'd only known who you was! I thought you belonged in the galley! But if some one had only told me what you looked like, you could have fed me anything and I'd have ate it! I'd have ate it without a whimper—and right out'n your hand!"

"Ugh! I am disgust! Your whiskers, *señor,* in my hand! Caramba!"

Juana held up her slender palm, which Captain Jarvy adjudged beautiful beyond words.

"I suppose you're sore because we had that little tiff! But I'm apologizing—and that's lots for the skipper of the Orinoco to do—to apologize to a woman. To a man sometimes you have to apologize for the sake of peace—but to a woman—never! In doin' that, miss, I'm kotowin' to you right proper—and more than Captain Jarvy ever did to any woman. You've got me strapped. I'm worshippin' you! I'm in love for the first time since I come into the Gulf trade, be gad!"

"*Madre de Dios!* How unfortunate!" Juana cried shaking her head. "How many men will die for me to-night!"

"Die for you!" the skipper laughed. "Of course, I'll die for you! Die? Bah! What does that mean to Captain Jarvy? A woman like you in my arms and I'll break the bones of a whole crew—if you say the word. Come aboard my ship. You'll see what Captain Jarvy's afraid of! Men? Be God, I ain't afeared of a typhoon—if I had a queen like you aboard!"

"You, too, talk of typhoons? Maybe one is coming. Who can tell?"

"There's nothing to fear, miss, when I get up on the bridge—typhoon or hurricane, or smooth sailing—it's all the same to Captain Jarvy. He'll take you to all the ports of the world. He'll sail with you to Rio, to Buenos Aires—Galveston and New Orleans and Florida—all on a pleasure yacht, be gad. Because that's what the ole freighter will be when I get you on board!"

"You make lof to me just like the other sailor!"

"I suppose you mean my mate, Grimpen?"

"*Si.*"

"If he thinks he can make love to you, I'll show him how I make love! I'll kick him through this here adobe wall! I'll flense his hide for him—the damned, yellow-livered skunk!"

"You are just like him wis your promises—except he says he will jump from ship for my sake. Ees a very brave vow to mak' to Juana! Jump from ship—*bueno!*"

"Jump the ship—aye? He said he was going to jump the ship? God! I'll put him under hatches until he rots his damned carcass! The lubber! I'll kill him!"

"There'll be no need for zat, *señor* skipper!" Juana said significantly.

"Forget him," the skipper urged, "and come aboard with me. You'll be the queen of the Seven Seas, be God!"

"*Señor* skipper," Juana interrupted coolly. "Maybe you, too, would like to have a bottle of wine with the bullfighter?"

"A bottle of wine with you—yes! With that Mex hanging around—no!"

"If you stay here you will be invited to drink wis the bullfighter!"

"What do I care? Are you trying to throw a scare into *me?* I've been in tavern brawls before this, my baby! I'll break the cholo's teeth for him! I've fought many fights and I always win!"

"I don't think so," Juana remarked skeptically.

"And I win the gal, too, see! I'm going to get you. If you don't come with me of your own will, be God, you'll come anyway. I'll take you with these here hands. Say, woman, maybe you've never heard tell of the Orinoco before, have you? It's a tramp—that's all most people know of it.

"But get this: the Orinoco takes freight which ain't always on its bill of lading. In plain terms you may find yourself aboard and no destination marked on your papers. Whether you like it or not you're goin' to be the queen of the Seven Seas!"

"Then you are pirate?" Juana asked with an awakened enthusiasm.

"Sure I'm a pirate—if that's what you

like. I'm the bloodiest pirate that ever gutted a ship!"

"You are pirate who steal his bride and mak' her queen of the Spanish Main? Who give her doubloons and fine lace, who mak's her jodge which man shall die, which ship shall be sink, which town shall be destroy' by fire, which army shall be capture' to be her slaves?"

"Be gad you sure do want something, gal. But it ain't for Captain Jarvy to refuse nothin'. Whatever you say, you'll get! It's slaves you want—aye? Armies, towns! Wow!"

"*Bueno!*" Juana said, "then I think you are greater man than señor bullfighter."

Captain Jarvy, seeing Señor el Gato returning from the direction of the patio, and realizing that his tête-à-tête with Juana was coming to an end, made the most of the last precious moments.

"Look here, miss," he cried eagerly, rapidly. "There ain't no woman ever asked me to make such promises as that—but Captain Jarvy never stopped at nothin'! No, ma'am! If you say what you want, you get it! The Orinoco from this time on steams under your orders! You come with me and we'll bubble along down the coast of Mexico. You see a village in the palms and you say you want it! Be gad, it's yourn! And when you're tired of it, we'll burn it down, only keepin' a few peons to be your slaves! We'll make you the queen of Yucatan. I'll buy the whole dam' country for you and the jungles of Honduras for your back yard! Queen of Yucatan—"

Intuitively, Captain Jarvy realized that his swollen words had popped like a balloon coming in contact with a pin. That pin was the name, "Yucatan." He should not have mentioned that name; it awakened him from his dream. It was like a bucket of cold water poured upon him when he was reveling in the ecstasies of opium.

"Yucatan, you say?" Juana's face changed expression so suddenly that Captain Jarvy knew Señor El Gato was standing behind him. He stopped breathing and settled back in his chair as immovable as a sack of bran. His two hairy paws remained listless upon the tablecloth.

"Where have you been?" Juana cried, staring over Jarvy's huge shoulder to the benign El Gato. "No, do not tell me, *señor!* I do not want to hear!"

"Don't be alarmed," Señor El Gato said considerately. "We shall refer no more to so unpleasant a subject as the catgut which I have been slicing. Let us finish our wine."

"Santa Maria, *señor,* but I have had enough of you! Thees man is nearer to my heart!"

El Gato looked down at the oxlike shoulders of the skipper.

"May I have the pleasure—"

"Ees pirate captain," Juana said by way of introduction—"his promises are wissout limit, like the monte which is play' in this house!"

Noting that a stiletto had not yet been stuck in his back, the skipper's courage returned to him. He slowly turned a savage face around toward El Gato.

"A great pleasure," Señor El Gato vouchsafed graciously.

"The hell of a pleasure it is for *me,* Mr. Mex!" Captain Jarvy rejoined. "Now you shag out of here pronto, or I'll break your damned Mexican neck."

Juana leaped gracefully between the two, as the skipper got to his feet.

"Ees only pirate talk," she said in mediatory accents, explaining the situation to El Gato. "When you say, 'It is pleasure to meet you,' the pirate he say politely, 'Dam' to 'ell!' When pirate say, 'Dam to 'ell,' he only means 'The same to you, *señor!*' So you two mak' good frands. I think so!"

"Yes, I think so!" the skipper echoed loudly, still glaring at El Gato. "Friends with *you,* aye? You little wart! Don't grin and scrape to me, or I'll scrape your chin with this here fist. That's clear, ain't it? So belay and git!"

The skipper had raised his voice to such a pitch now that Tom Yarre could hear his words above the music. The boatswain had a peculiar conviction that there was no chance for a fight there on that dance floor, no matter how much the big skipper desired it. For one thing the expression on El Gato's face was too placid—absolutely imperturbable.

But with this same conviction Tom Yarre

felt that the skipper was stepping blindly into an inescapable doom. His death hung over him in the tobacco clouds above, in the shafts of light from the hanging lanterns, in the snowstorm of confetti and cascarone balls! It was not an obvious death—it was something almost uncanny, supernatural. For Tom Yarre, although mentally impervious to sea superstition, could not help connecting the fate of the mate and Skipper Jarvy with the casket of the dead Rob Hawkins. The skipper, blustering and swearing and flying into a passion before the serene and insignificant El Gato, was defying the gods.

"I, Señor El Gato," the matador said with quiet pride, "shall not throw back your insults at the present hour! People look at us! They smile. They hear you shout. They expect us to descend to brawling and fisticuffs. El Gato's name is dragged in the sawdust of a tavern brawl! Shall he fight as men of this country fight—in the presence of a lady? No! I shall fight you, captain—by and by. But now, sir, I smile upon you and bow."

"Ees a good idea?" Juana commented. "Let us have a drink to forget eensults and by and by maybe you two may have glorious fight and keel each osser like the gentlemen."

El Gato nodded his head and continued, addressing himself to Jarvy:

"You yourself are a gentleman not without glory, being the captain of a ship. Let us settle our quarrels as befits two gentlemen."

"Two gentlemen! Well, damme if it isn't the first time I ever heard a Mexican cowcatcher call himself a gentleman! But if you're holding it against me to fight in the presence of this here lady—which she sure is one—I'll wait until we get out to the stables where you belong!"

"*Bueno!* Then we are all frands now!" Juana cried with a sigh of relief.

"At least let it appear so. It is most distasteful to me to have a scene. Altercations in which a lady is concerned should be settled in a scene apart—quietly, and, of course, conclusively—in the dark."

"Ees my opinion," Juana agreed.

"You suggest the stables?" El Gato said to the skipper. "Well and good. I shall use this knife." He again took out the wet black dagger, holding it in the palm of his hand so that only Juana and the skipper could see it. "This has already tasted the blood of two men to-night. I'll meet you before the dance is over—within the shadow of the stables."

"If you want to fight with a razor, like the black pork you are, well and good!" Skipper Jarvy sneered. "All as I'll use is this here fist which I'll wrap it around your soft yellow neck! No knives for Captain Jarvy—just this fist."

"In the shadow of the stables then," Señor El Gato said softly, as he made an elaborate curtsy and withdrew.

The big skipper did not immediately follow. He had caught something of El Gato's aversion to a scene. He did not want his crew to see him chasing a small man out of the dance hall. It was truly ridiculous. A second reason: Juana dissuaded him. A third: he had a feeling this gentleman from Yucatan was an extraordinary man.

"Don' follow him!" Juana pleaded. "He is terrible man. When I wink the eye, psst! he sticks a man like he is calf!"

"Let him try to stick me. The greaser! I'll twist his little head off for him! Let me get my hooks in him! I'll show him who Captain Jarvy of the Orinoco is!"

The skipper waited for a moment. He found himself hoping that the dance would be a little longer than usual. Finally his oaths were compressed to a throaty grumble as if he were mumbling to himself. He left Juana abruptly and threaded his way through the dancing couples. When he reached the door, Juana, breathlessly watching, saw him feel under the tail of his white coat for something in his hip pocket.

"So!" Juana commented to herself. "He has decide to use something other than the fist! *Bueno!* I pray to Mary Madre de Dios that this may be the last murder laid to my soul!"

Tom Yarre had watched the scene out of the corner of his eye. When he saw the big skipper drawn into this web, it reminded him of a huge blowfly buzzing loudly into

the mesh of a spider. But it was not Tom Yarre's impression that the web had been spun by Señor El Gato. It had come out of the bowels of that old sea-chest of Rob Hawkins!

The boatswain laughed at his own superstitious convictions. It was all nonsense. And yet, no matter where Rob Hawkins was that night—no matter what sea encompassed his body, Tom Yarre felt that the old stoker's spirit was there in that sailor's café watching the havoc his sea-chest had wrought. His ghost might have been seated at one of those tables where the mariners were gambling their pay; or out there on the dance floor thumping about with some thickly rouged woman; or else perhaps in one of the rooms upstairs where he could have taken lodging for the night! Yes, that's where Tom Yarre felt the old stoker was—upstairs bending over his empty chest, contemplating the typhoon of passions which it had disgorged, shaking his soot-begrimed shoulders with the aloof and heedless laughter of the gods!

CHAPTER X.

QUEEN JUANA COMMANDS.

A FIESTA at Herzog's inn approached its climax generally about midnight. Of course under certain circumstances a brawl might be precipitated considerably earlier in the evening.

On the occasion of Juana's ascension to the throne as queen of the Sundown Café, the climactic moment of the evening's revelry was reached when the skipper and Señor El Gato withdrew. Juana was then left to the mercy of the sousing bargemen, Portuguese sailors, Cubans, and the card sharps of Texas and Louisiana. This hodge-podge of bayou character descended upon her, clamoring for a dance.

Beefy Johnson, the cornetist and leader of the little ragtime band, had been waiting a long time for word from Herzog to start the grand march. Several dances now had been played and it was getting late, but no order from Herzog was forthcoming. The leader, a fat, jovial negro, thinking that the innkeeper had forgotten him, decided to take the matter into his own hands. A long roll of the drum silenced the crowd, while Beefy made his announcement.

Sailors scrambled for their partners.

"Cora ain't here, so let Juana lead the pee-rade!" some cried. "She's the queen now!"

"If I am your queen," Juana cried, "it is not for me to dance with any wan who walks over my train! It is not for my subjects to use me as a dance partner—or a door mat, either. If I am the queen let me have se followers. Let me have se subjects like Señor Skipper, who will mak me to rule over his pirates. Or like the Señor El Gato who will obey the commands of my eyes!"

Having but a short while ago enjoyed a drink to Juana's health, the crowd was well disposed to humor her now.

"Sure we're your subjects!" they cried. "We'll kotow to you. We'll kneel before you. We'll set you up on a t'rone. We'll fight for you! We'll be your pirates or whatever else you want to call us!"

Before she knew it, Juana found herself surrounded by all the sailors in the room, who clapped and shouted, some singing chanties drunkenly and swearing with great oaths that Juana was to be old Jarvy's mate on a pirate cruise; others holding up their glasses to her again with cheers, yowls, acclamations; and four of the bolder mariners picking up the chair in which she sat and holding her high above the heads of the ribald gang.

Old Johnson, who was the quickest of any to catch the spirit of the play, motioned these four men to carry their load about the room. Couples followed, the band leader brayed out a loud military call on his bugle and then the music for the grand march began.

Tom Yarre, from the vantage point in his separate booth, could see that Juana was very much in the spirit of the game. Even though it was obvious that most of the seamen were entering into the proceedings as merely a night's revel, Juana seemed to take the matter seriously. It was a jubilee—a triumph, and her flushed face and glowing eyes showed that she was making the most of it. She was the center of a veritable Mardi Gras. It was a coronation!

Even the women of the café—among whom the innkeeper's wife had been none too popular during her reign—joined now with their partners in a mock coronation march.

What more could Juana, the daughter of Miguel, wish for? The whole café was at her feet, every sailor bowed before her, mocking the elaborate gestures of Señor El Gato. What a night it was. Men had fought for her; blood had been shed for her; her persecutors, Herzog and Cora, were humbled to the dust; the first mate of a steamer had vowed himself her slave; a sea captain had humbled himself before her. What else could her heart desire?

There was one thing else.

Juana noticed that during the riotous celebration, when every one in the room followed her about like a rabble following a royal sedan, one man remained aloof, smiling superciliously like a father smiling upon the play of his children. And now she realized with a peculiar throb and awakening in her breast that these sailors with their mock, drunken courtesies were not enough. There was one man who did not bow to her. It occurred to Juana then—and a very natural whim it was—that all the sailors of the Seven Seas kotowing would not satisfy her soul if this one man refused to call her queen!

This man was Tom Yarre.

Juana, like a capricious child, possessed all that her heart could desire except one insignificant thing, which became then the only thing she wanted.

Juana could see that the boatswain had decked her out in all her finery merely to watch her effect upon these sousing mariners as a man watches some bantams working themselves up into a flurry of murder in a cock-fight arena!

Indeed, that was Tom Yarre's view of the whole matter. He had in the spirit of a prank, out of a mere sailor's caprice, dressed up this woman and sent her out to try her power among the characters who had always regarded her as humble and powerless. The woman herself had not interested him very vitally. He was fond of escapades, of practical tricks, but, it must be said, this trick had gone considerably beyond his expectations. Wisely enough he resolved to remain aloof.

Naturally enough Juana objected.

She waited until the four sailors had carried her in the rollicking journey about the room and placed her chair upon the dais which served as the orchestra's platform. Here she surveyed the group of flushed, steaming men before her. From the expression on her face her "subjects" were not so sure whether the reign of Juana over the Sundown Café was to be one of benevolence or tyranny. Something, there was no doubt, was lacking in her kingdom.

Juana held up her hand to the orchestra leader, and old Johnson, with a fine understanding of the dramatic value of the scene, put his cornet to his big lips and brayed out a call like the flourish of trumpets preceding the edict of a king.

"Why is it that wan man does not follow in my train?" Juan asked, shaking her finger at Tom Yarre so that the bracelets on her arm jingled sharply.

Another flourish on the bugle echoed her speech.

Tom Yarre bent forward to his table and applied himself sedulously to the pattern of cards.

Beefy Johnson divining that the Queen of the Sundown Café was about to make another remark, blew the introductory fanfare.

Juana's crisp command cut dramatically into the momentary silence.

"Bring him here before my feet!"

"Ta, de ta, ta, toot!" went Beefy's bugle call.

Two of the Orinoco's crew hurried to the boatswain's booth.

"Belay there, bos'n," they cried, "and stand by her blinkin' majesty the queen!"

Tom Yarre, this time unwisely, did not look up from his cards.

"Are you two men sober or drunk?" he asked in a low voice, quietly flicking another card onto the table.

"Where do you get that, bos'n!" the Orinoco's cook asked angrily. "Can't you see we're just playin' the game with the rest of the crowd. A little gal which was the waitress here is bein' made the queen of the café. Sport you know—it's like the

Mardi Gras at N'Orleans—means a lot of free drinks. But, damn it, we ain't drunk."

"Don't call us drunk yet, bos'n," the other seaman said. "Though I ain't promisin' nothin' for the future."

"Very well, then," Yarre rejoined, still pretending to play. "If you are sober get this: Do you know what's happened to your skipper? Do you know what's happened to your Dickey, Mr. Grimpen? If I don't miss my guess they've both of 'em been knifed. Now keep calm. Don't blab what I'm tellin' you. When we get a chance the three of us will go out in the patio and to the stables, and hunt for 'em. Go back and tell the girl I'll come by and by."

Juana waited enthroned in state, tapping her foot impatiently. The one man she had set her heart upon as the only one worth calling a subject did not come. Calmly he went on perfecting his pattern of cards.

Suddenly the fire broke out within her. And no guest of the Sundown Café had ever yet seen Juana start in so ferociously to tear herself to tatters.

"*Madre de Dios!*" she screamed. "Is it possible that Juana shall be humiliate'. And here before all who are worshiping at her foot! Is it possible one sailor from tramp ship will refuse to come when she bid! It is eensult! It is to keel! All others have bow' to me to-night but you! And you shall, too, Señor Coyote, or I myself will anchor thees fingers in your cheeks! Sí! Until you fall screaming from my feet!"

She sprang down from her throne and a lane in the laughing mob opened for her.

Tom Yarre waited, realizing now that he was drawn, whether he wished it or not, into the maelstrom of passion which he himself had started whirling. No longer could Tom Yarre be a god on Olympus. He was a fly now in a caldron of whirling water.

The next instant he saw the cards before him mussed and shuffled by the beautiful hand which he himself had encircled with bracelets. The whole pack was thrown upward into the air, so that it fluttered about him like a flock of whistling bats.

"You will play cards! You will play and scoff when she is call you—Juana who you mak' queen! Queen, is it?" she snorted passionately. "Queen! Bah! Joker! That is what you mak' Juana. The damn joker for you to play wis and laugh on—eh! *Bueno!* I am no more se queen! Take your jewels. Take your silks—your comb—"

She stripped herself of the bracelets, hurled them at Yarre's table; yanked out the comb so that her hair tumbled down over her glowing eyes. Then as Yarre arose to his feet, she tore the silk bodice from her waist, unfurled it with the gesture of one who cracks a whip, so that the long mesh of silk spun out in the air entangling itself about the boatswain's head.

How far she would have gone in this act of disrobing before the gaping inhabitants of the Sundown Café, Yarre could not guess. At any rate, he put a stop to it by peremptorily throwing his arms about the girl. She beat upon his breast. He crushed her toward him. She proceeded to fulfill her threat about burying her fingers in his face. He pinned her arms, tightened his hold until she screamed, gasped, writhed, weakened.

What was this clawing catamount—this bundle of rags, of hate, or was it of love? What was this disheveled tangled mass of silk and hair, of hot, writhing shoulders, of blazing eyes, of flashing teeth? To what end had she brought Herzog? And the mate who had sworn to kiss her feet?

Two men were already stabbed for her sake. And even now as Tom held her in his arms shuddering at his own folly in unleashing this catamount, a sharp sinister noise struck in upon his ears. It was a gunshot.

In the confusion of tussling he was not sure which direction the sound had come from—except that he saw the laughing crowd turn about, abruptly, laughter silenced, faces paling, eyes staring. Tom saw that they turned toward the door through which Señor El Gato had last disappeared.

The sound of that shot outside broke the tensity of his viselike grip. But—

"Don' let me go!" Juana cried to him. "If you let me go—yes, believe what Juana tell you, captain—you will die! Don' loosen your arms or Juana—herself will keel you!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The Winged Derelict

By WALTER WILLOUGHBY SNYDER

THERE were four of us, and we sat on the broad, cool veranda of the Singapore Sports Club, sipping our whisky and soda, and watching the sparkle of the Indian Ocean where it shone through the patches in the row of great tamarind trees that marked the far side of the polo course. The talk had drifted to racial characteristics, and Sykes, the young aviator, was speaking.

"I don't suppose you would agree with me if I told you I thought the Scotch were the least imaginative race in the world. You'd probably point out Scott and Burns and even Harry Lauder. Well, perhaps you'd be right; but still there's a certain quality in most Scotchmen—not all, you understand, but in most of them—that I'm floundering around to find the word to describe.

"Phlegmatic? No, that's not exactly it. The world calls us English that. Come to think of it, it is a kind of phlegm—not the kind you mean, though, the sort you see at afternoon teas and the matinée. I'm thinking of a more powerful, elemental kind of phlegm—the kind that shows itself under fire. You might call it coolness, bravery, or something like that, but I shouldn't, even if it does look like it on the surface. Dash it all, when an Englishman shows it, it's will forged, with a camouflaged, cultivated exterior. He has to force himself to hide his fear, though he generally does it, thank God.

"But your Scotchman is different. Under ordinary circumstances he has as much temperament as any of us, perhaps more, but when the real pinch comes he is a man of brass and iron because he has only enough imagination for the moment. All the countless imps of groundless fears that try to throttle most of us, and that do sometimes succeed in making us jumpy, seem to leave the Scotchman alone, unperturbed, with only the real danger of the moment.

"I've seen it time and again—in the war, for instance. Let a few shells drop around a billet, and most of us, although outwardly

composed, were having a struggle somewhere inside of us. But the old Scotchman in our platoon went on feeding condensed milk to the stray cat he had picked up, and as far as noticing explosions he might have been sitting on a doorstep in peaceful Aberdeen instead of devastated Ypres. Then there was that old Highlander sitting beside the Menin road scraping the mud off his kilts. Two high-velocity, six-inch crumps tore up the earth about fifty yards from him, and he was too confounded absorbed in his kilt renovating even to look up. Then a dud planted itself between his legs with a sort of tearing noise in the earth, and the shock of impact bowled him over.

"Think of it! The only shell that hadn't exploded was the one in the ground beneath him. I suppose any one of us would have at least looked dumfounded or acted like a D. T. patient for a few minutes; but when I went up to that chap and asked him if he was hurt he looked at me as if I had insulted him, and gruffly said, 'Dinna fash yersel' aboot me, laddie,' and went on scraping his kilt. And yet that same Scotchman would probably have made an awful stir if some one had upset his soup in the mess line.

"You probably remember the famine last year up in Burma. That was when I first got tied up with the Straits Settlements Aviation outfit, and became acquainted with MacKay—Sandy MacKay, the boys call him. You've probably seen him hanging around the club—sort of gruff chap, about thirty years old, small, tough-looking, and wiry, with a set of rather unkempt red whiskers, so fiery that you'd think he wouldn't need a head protector to keep him warm when he's up in the clouds. No, I shouldn't say he has no imagination. Come to think of it, he has lots of it, creative imagination, too—the kind that makes a man resourceful in a dilemma, but somehow it doesn't invent a thousand little fears that eat a man's heart out when he needs it most.

"You know, it wasn't till the other day that I learned that MacKay had been an ace in the war. He had twenty-one Boche planes to his credit. Of course, that's nothing compared to the records of Ball, Bishop, or Lufberry, but then MacKay hadn't been in France as long as they. You wouldn't think it to look at him, would you? He doesn't cut a very dashing figure. He doesn't in the air, either; but when something has to be done, MacKay can do it if any one can.

"No, I don't know much about MacKay in France. I didn't get mixed up in aviation until the latter part of the war, and about the time I'd finished the cadet course and put in my flying hours the armistice came along. Of course it nearly bowled me over. I always have been a romantic sort of an ass, and I had been counting on trying my mettle in France in a more individualistic way than the trenches gave opportunity for.

"Well, the Air Board was very kind to me—as kind as it could be, I suppose. It handed me a pilot's certificate which I really felt I hadn't earned, and then gave me a discharge. You can imagine the way I felt about it. Every one else was saying how jolly fine it was that the war was over; but all I could see was a gray, drab future in that clerical berth in Cheapside which I had had before August, 1914. Somehow I felt cheated. I had been living entirely in a world of romance, and the bottom had suddenly dropped out of it, leaving only a pair of little gilt-edged wings on my tunic front to remind me of it.

"There was talk of an air line mail route between London and Paris, and I pestered the Air Board about it every few days. But I could see the smiles half concealed behind hands when I gave my experience. Two or three fly-by-night aviation companies sprang up on the island, but their lives were short. Of course I had my applications in—in fact, I had put in applications every place where there was even a rumor of aërial service—but nothing happened, and in due time, thanks to a lean purse, I was sedimented, like many of the disbanded army, into my proper pigeonhole in Cheapside.

"Time finally let habit clamp me down to my office chair, and I began to feel that I was going to be a permanent fixture. You can imagine my surprise when one morning two years later I received a cablegram from

the Straits Settlements Aviation Company, asking me if I could report for pilot duty at Singapore at an early date. I hadn't seen the cockpit of a flying machine for so long that I'd almost forgotten what it looked like. I'd even forgotten about this particular application; but I was off on the next steamer.

"I arrived four weeks later at the Singapore aviation grounds just in time to see the company's hangar going up in flames. Some coolie had dropped a lighted match near a leaky petrol tank. The shame of it! Five airplanes utterly destroyed just when I had arrived to taste winged romance once more. I was thwarted again.

"But I hadn't reckoned on the famine. The press was full of it. The Indian government suddenly took a notion that certain dispatches must be conveyed immediately by air line to Rangoon, and they invited the Straits Settlements Company to do the job. A thousand-mile trip it was, and there was only one airplane in Singapore—an old De Haviland, in such bad condition that the company had not thought it worth their while to park it in the hangar. For that run they picked MacKay, and because no one else cared to team up with him, they sent me along as emergency pilot. MacKay somehow was a little too domineering for the rest of those chaps, and I can really see why they would dislike him. He is a rather crusty old beggar until you get under his skin.

"I found him out among the smoldering ruins of the hangar. After I had introduced myself he stared at me in a rude way, and said: 'I suppose you can fly.'

"I began to chatter off my experience like a parrot. You see, even after two years my old job-hunting speech came back to me.

"'Oh, hell!' he interrupted. 'I want to know if you can fly.'

"'Yes,' I managed to gulp in an uneasy manner, though I had been away from the game so long that I was beginning to doubt myself.

"'Well, get in there,' he said, waving his arms toward the wreckage, 'and see if you can salvage tools, wire, anything to make that old bus float.'

"I wish you could have seen that 'old bus!' She's lying on the scrap heap in Rangoon now, and I'll wager she stays there. MacKay and I toiled over her for a day and a half, and even then she didn't look safe enough to taxi around the grounds in; but the company was riding our necks to get that dispatch off, and MacKay finally pronounced her navigable after we had trued up the center planes and fuselage and checked her dihedral. It took us an hour's priming to get the motor started, it was so rusty with disuse.

"I didn't like the appearance of the flying wires, and there was a frayed bit of wire just beside the port wing aileron control pulley; but Mac shouted, 'Contact!' and I jerked over the prop and climbed in behind him, and we were off with a roar of that old engine that sounded like a thousand chains dragging over the side of an Indian Ocean tramp steamer. I had a feeling that the romance I had been searching was going to come rather thick, when the joy stick in front of me slid back toward my knees and the green turf receded from us.

"It wasn't very comfortable in that cockpit, either, because MacKay had fastened in it all the extra cans of petrol and tools we could carry, including a soldering outfit. I had never been in a plane like that one before. I have seen the War Department condemn them when they were at least six times more airworthy.

"We had climbed a thousand feet, and MacKay had just headed her north, with the motor singing out its brave tune, 'Rangoon, or bust,' when I suddenly felt sheets of something warm and of a disagreeable smell pouring over me. I managed to catch a glimpse of a slime-coated apparition in front of me; then the motor ceased suddenly, and with it the deluge; the control lever swung forward, and I felt that sinking sensation in my vitals of a nose dive. I heard a voice shout, 'Pump, you blighter!' and I leaned forward instinctively, grasped the pressure pump, and worked like mad, my eyes fastened on the misty gage, and all the time we were dropping like a comet toward the earth.

"Then the motor roared again, the warm

stream splashed on my head, and before I knew it we had landed in the aviation field and fetched up with a jerk, my ears humming. As he climbed to the ground in his dark, slimy flying gear, MacKay looked like a sea diver emerging from the depths. I tingled all over with pleasure. Adventure had come, and with it had come work to do. Occupy a man's mind in a moment of danger, and he'll ride through anything. After all, it was nothing but a break in the oil line. But what if this had happened midway in our flight hundreds of miles from any supply station?

"We got out the soldering outfit and went to work in our shirt sleeves, while the coolies scrubbed the machine and our oily leather coats. MacKay fumed and cursed both at the delay and the enormous waste of oil. You wouldn't call that phlegmatic, would you? It seemed to me that this fiery Scotchman was exhibiting altogether too much temperament.

"In an hour we ascended again and turned northward, with the earth slipping away from us and the horizon spreading in a wide circle until the altimeter registered two thousand feet, when we hummed a parallel flight to the earth's surface. Far below the irregular coast line of the peninsula wound like a dirty string. Late in the afternoon I took the controls, and the Scotchman studied the maps. We were soaring over the little coast town of Penang, and we could see its brilliant pagodas and prachedis rosy tinted in the waning sunlight. The steady monsoon breeze surged around us. Then the surface of the earth turned suddenly black, and the fiery disk in the west slid out of view.

"The silent figure in front of me sat erect, and in the dusk the contour of that head protector was like that of some immobile Malay god. How far away from that office in Cheapside! I was riding through infinite space, steering a rumbling old planet guided by a relentless, unflinching spirit that sat before me.

"Then the head moved and an arm pointed toward our starboard quarter. There was something shadowy out there in the gloom, and even as I looked a tiny fork of light streaked an inky streamer and revealed a black storm cloud. There was a sort of trouble and blackness stirring out in the beyond, and I felt in my heart that gloom that comes out of twilight's ebb in the lonely spaces. At the same time I sensed that almost imperceptible lag that runs through an airplane when it strikes a lull.

"'Keep her headed for it," sang out the voice in front of me. 'No time to turn now.'

"But the words were scarcely flung when a ruddy glare enveloped us, and I felt a warm wave at my back. The figure in front turned, looked back for one brief instant, shouted 'Let me take her!' then leaned forward, and I felt the control lever shoot forward out of my grasp as we plunged straight downward. Our tail was afire. Some spark from the exhaust must have kindled the oil puddles in the empennage neglected by the coolies. Afire in a black night with tips of flames licking the stars, nose diving into what? Eternity? Nothing below, I knew, but a snarling jungle and a relentless sea. Could we make a landing, somewhere on that dark, treacherous octopus below that was already reaching out for us?

"I could only pump and pray. The terrible racing of the old motor jarred my spine. Suddenly forked fire from the heavens revealed the trees dashing toward us. Immediately we were plunged into blackness, and then I felt the control slipping back, and the soothing sensation of an upward glide. MacKay had extinguished the flames in a daring, speed-lashing nose dive.

"But now a new terror awaited us. The storm was plunging toward us, and the atmosphere milled around with hot pockets rising and cold taking their places. It was a region of bumps, and as we struck each of these we bounced upward with a jar that shook the old plane to its vitals, and then crashed down again in a semivacuum to strike mercilessly another bump, bumps of soft, filmy air as hard as the hardest rocks. The gap wires twanged and hummed; every joint in the old machine screamed in distress. I heard the crack of a splitting strut, and the storm tore at us blindly like a great demon gnashing its teeth.

"The machine shuddered and gasped, lolled and bounced upward, the flying wires —those slender threads on which our lives hung—shrieking in agony. Torrents of water shot at us and like a million tiny needles punished our faces. I heard the old motor groaning and coughing. Once or twice she missed fire. No wonder in that deluge. And all the time that dark shape in front of me jerked at the controls, manipulated the throttle, and seemed to pour something of his unquenchable, onward spirit into that old mechanism that bravely obeyed his touch. A god surely he was, unmoved by time, space, the elements, or the puny struggles of mankind.

"In front of me a tiny electric bulb lit up the dial of the compass whose quivering, dancing needle always hovered as if drawn by supernatural magnetism toward the region of north twenty west. That little gleam of light, that quaking needle, somehow seemed so incongruous out in this black, crashing, shrieking, interminable chaos. Intense nerve exhaustion had numbed me. I felt that apathy stealing over me, that listlessness which is perhaps the worst phase of cowardice.

"You see, I knew we were doomed. There was nothing I could do to save us. Something would snap soon, and we would be plunged into the beyond. It seemed idiotic that any one should try to conquer the inevitable. We might just as well release the controls and let the end come now. What difference could a few minutes make? I sat there huddled up, immovable, staring at that damnable silly needle, and the night hooted and mocked me.

"A voice shook me. 'Get out and fix that strut!'

"It all seemed so droll. The meaning of the words hadn't penetrated my reason. Why should a human voice ring out in this clashing of the elemental forces? And that beastly needle—

"'Get out and splice that damned strut!'

"I went, I don't know why, with a pair of pliers gripped in my teeth and a coil of wire about my waist. Dash it all, I couldn't help going! There was a relentless force in front of me impelling me to go. I couldn't help myself. I had never been out on a wing before, and that I should crawl out there in the face of a terrifying, needle-pointed gale that lashed and bit and struck at me, trying to tear me loose from my grip, seemed inconceivable. I remember I threw my head back and laughed at the storm. I was in sympathy with the gale. It was shrieking with furious, satirical laughter. What a joke for the elements —this infinitesimal speck of a human clinging to sheer threads of wire on a fragile, flapping airplane wing, trying to lash a strut! The forces of nature would toy with me, of course, and then with dramatic irony plunge us into eternal darkness.

"I remember I made a good job of it. Kneeling among those wires, now taut, now slack, as they sawed under my arms, while the electricity of the maelstrom cracked out in balls of fire around us, I made a good job of it—best splice I ever made. Why? I don't know why, unless it was to make the storm laugh more. At every lurch I redoubled my efforts. I was calm, too, and methodical. I was going to give nature something to really laugh at. I recollect that I was very careful, unusually so, and put unnecessarily taut and well finished twists to the job.

"And then unexpectedly I found we were through the storm, and that a brilliant tropical moon smiled at us over the edge of a silver-capped black cloud, and that the grunt coming from that fiery little Malay god as I swung back into the cockpit thrilled me as much as a recommendation from the Almighty.

"The old De Haviland had found its soul and purred onward like an old cat pleased with its master's caresses. Then it began to bank. MacKay wanted to circle down to get our location. But somehow we didn't come out of that bank. Something caught and held the control, and before we were aware of it we were plunging earthward, and the moon and the stars reeled around in dizzy circuit.

"'My turn now,' flung back MacKay. 'Control wire caught. Think I know where it is. Hold her rudder steady as you can hard a starboard.' He crawled out on the port plane which, wheeling around, held me,

in the cockpit, in the vortex of a flat spin. The Scotchman was coolly working out there somewhere on the end of our silly whirligig. I could feel the joy stick give as he pulled on the aileron control wire. Then his voice rolled out of the drunken night as calm as you please. 'Have you got any tobacco? I dropped mine.'

"I was sure the blighter had gone cuckoo with that spinning out there. I expected to see him follow the tobacco.

"'Now ease her port into a tight spin, and then shoot her hard a starboard.'

"I couldn't see anything else to do. I might as well obey the instructions of a Scotch lunatic whirling around somewhere in the air over the Indian Ocean as do anything else. Dramatic irony was about to come into play anyhow. In a moment the moon was a white streak, and my head was swimming. Then I jammed the control to starboard, and we came out of it with a jerk; and before I knew it we were purring on again, and MacKay was beside me, asking for tobacco; and, dash it all, I didn't have any!

"That confounded bit of frayed aileron control wire which I had noticed when we were doing our overhauling at the hangar had slipped off the pulley and jammed.

"A beautiful Laos dawn found us spinning along high over the teak forests of the Mesawt region, a little out of our route, and we turned a more westerly course toward Rangoon. I was at the controls while MacKay munched at his crackers and chocolate bars. We were humming a steady flight, with only about two hundred miles to go and no worries to speak of. I had begun to have a profound respect for the old De Haviland. She was going to carry us through. I had had adventure—more adventure than I had ever dreamed of, and all in such a few hours. The hideous night lay as far behind us as the miles, and I looked down once more upon a smiling, real world.

"Then—would you believe it?—that blooming oil line split again, and MacKay and I dived into a native village, two shiny, slippery, brown things huddled in a shiny, dripping devil from the air. No wonder those blacks stampeded. But they came back again, slowly, by twos and threes, and squatted in a great circle around the machine, gaping and gesticulating wildly. Even the spectacle of a fiery-whiskered arch fiend and his demon flinging queer words to the sky as they tinkered with metal and a strange hissing torch, and plunged a steaming iron into the winged monster's vitals, could not dispel their curiosity. And all the time one thought was in our minds. Where could we get oil? Our reserve was exhausted.

"Then it began to dawn on us that we had interrupted some sort of a ceremony. The crowd slowly diminished, and we could see it milling around a squat, brown temple with a dirty-looking prachedi. We went over there after a while, deep in thought, the full nature of our plight dawning upon us. It would take us days to get out of there over almost impassable trails, and all the time Rangoon was waiting for dispatches. The blacks made way for us at the gates, and then we bumped into a row of naked, brown youths as shiny and greasy as ourselves. An old blue-pated Buddhist priest was dipping something out of a great stone urn and pouring it on a skinny youngster, mumbling the while.

"That devil of the red mustache walked up and peered into the urn, stuck his finger in it, and said, 'Oil!' It was oil—some beastly stuff they had distilled from I don't know what—and they were baptizing their boys with it.

"The Scotchman began making pantomime gestures, indicating he would bear the urn away. The priest shook his head, and his face looked, 'No!' We emptied our pockets of rupees and held them out to him, but the old blighter shook his head all the more vehemently. Then MacKay waved his arms and swore, and the priest and the boys backed away, whereupon he lifted the urn to his shoulder and marched out. What a foolish thing to do! Only a crazy Scotchman fresh from a thrilling nose dive would think of meddling with native religion. But he got away with it—an urnful of oil that looked as good as any that was ever poured into a crankcase—and all the while those blacks were too dumfounded to do anything but trail after us with gaping mouths. He

was irresistible. We oiled up, put the urn on the ground, and I stood ready to swing the prop. I was anxious to get away. I didn't like the look of that crowd. Then the red-whiskered one turned around and stared at it.

"'I wonder if those black blighters have got any tobacco," he said.

"A diabolical howl rang out, and we saw the old priest emerging from the temple, followed by his ordnance department, and a hundred red, lusty, dark-encircled mouths took up the clamor. I swung the prop and dashed into the cockpit. The roar of the motor saved us, for it silenced that gang of blacks just long enough to give us a start; but only for a moment, and then the ordnance department peppered the De Haviland with darts, and the priest's old javelin hurtled through the starboard wing just as the sky devil rode off.

"I wish you could have seen us when we arrived at Rangoon. One side of our elevator was burned half off, and the whole tail unit was a black smudge. A great hole gaped in the lower starboard plane, and the whole machine shook and shuddered like a greasy old Chinese kite. No sooner had we taken the turf when the port landing wires snapped. The plane sagged, caught in the ground, and spun us around with a crash. Of course the inevitable crowd of blacks and white men was there, and out of its depths stepped the big official. I walked in a whirl. Strange, out of the way place of the world I was in, where men gazed respectfully at *me*, a romantic figure fresh from the skies on a winged derelict. I was thrilled, thrilled with the joy of conquest, of adventure well met, worlds of it tumbling all around me. That Scotchman, that unbelievable, irresistible Scotchman, handed the dispatches over to the big official, and then I heard him speak.

"'I say, you haven't any tobacco, have you?'"

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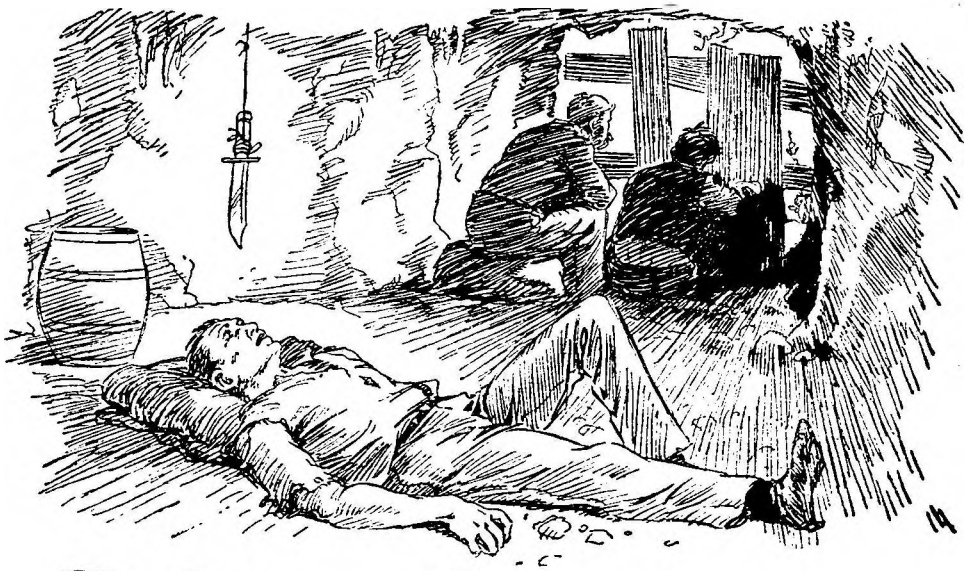
TO WOMEN OF THE SEA

IT becomes such a ponderous world,
And oh, such a perilous sea,
When you pace on the sands
With your heart and your hands
Reaching out where the ship ought to be.

It becomes such a shell of a bark,
But oh, such a marvelous crew,
When the joy of your realm
Stands his watch at the helm
And you know that he's beckoning you.

It becomes such a wonderful flight,
When the ghosts with your spirit depart,
O'er the foam and the bars
To the quivering spars—
While an anchor tugs hard at your heart.

Margaret Severance.



The Apes of Devil's Island

By JOHN CUNNINGHAM

CHAPTER IX *(continued).*

THE MISSING BOAT.

"WISH I had some chloroform," breathed Grame. "Pick him up and carry him. Put one arm under his shoulders and one under his knees. He won't make any noise until several seconds after he has awakened. By that time I will have him so he can't squeal."

According to instructions I lifted Nicky in my arms, and started toward Eleanor, with Grame at my side. He was watching Nicky's face intently. The sleeping boy showed no signs of waking.

Several of the apes stirred as we slowly made our way to the edge of the clearing. However, we did not let this stop us—we were too near freedom.

Finally we reached Eleanor. We struck out for the beach, walking noiselessly. Our progress was slow indeed. I could not see where I was putting my feet, and Grame had his eyes glued on Nicky's face. It fell to Eleanor to lead the way, while I kept her in the general direction of the shore.

Each moment carried us further from the apes, and gave us a little more hope. Quite naturally we increased our speed. Nicky turned out to be a much sounder sleeper than I had dared hope.

Grame took him when I was almost tired out, and I watched for his awakening. However, this did not come. As I continually

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looked at his face I could not help noticing what a change had come into it.

Nicky was no longer the little boy who had built card houses on the Mermaid. His face was the face of a cunning, sly criminal. His upper teeth protruded slightly over his lower lip, and the skin at the corners of his mouth had become taut. It was surprising that a person with such a face could sleep so soundly. I mentioned this to Grame. He nodded his head and said:

"Once again we find him, but on the border line—otherwise he would not be asleep now. When he wakes he will perhaps be almost normal. No one can say."

The underbrush became less dense; soon we were back at the beach again.

"We'll have to wake him now," said the doctor. "We had better run while we can. He can do that more efficiently if he is awake."

Grame laid him on the sand and shook him violently. His eyes opened and he glanced around blankly for a moment. Then his gaze fell on us. An ugly snarl spread over his face and his mouth started to open. Quick as a flash Grame closed his fingers over Nicky's throat and thrust the handkerchief in his mouth.

A gurgle was all that resulted from the child's attempt to scream. Grame adjusted the handkerchief, and with the aid of a small stick made a perfect gag. Nicky could not make a sound louder than a whisper.

"Now, young man," began Grame, "you're going to come with us, and you're not going to make any noise, or try to get away—understand? If you do I'll tan the hide off you."

Nicky only made a snarling noise and lifted his hand to the gag. Grame gave him four resounding slaps in the face that brought a little cry from Eleanor. But if these blows pained Eleanor, they pained Nicky also, for he rose quickly to his feet, and let his hands remain at his sides.

"Still on the border," muttered Grame to me as he took off his necktie and bound Nicky's hands behind his back. When he had tied the last knot, he turned to me and said:

"You help Eleanor, and I'll give Nicky a hand. We've got to run. They may be after us any minute now."

I took Eleanor's arm, Grame seized the shoulder of Nicky's shirt, and we were off. Eleanor was game, and so was Nicky. He knew he had to do as he was told, and it was wonderful the way he held out. In a very short time we were at the grove of palm trees. We walked for a while here, to give Eleanor and Nicky a chance to get their breath. I was glad to rest myself. As for Grame, I don't believe he was at all tired.

The doctor did not let us tarry long. He gave the word and we set out again at a fast trot. The distance was shorter than I had thought it. We passed several odd shaped stumps that I remembered. The boat should have been quite near now. However, it was not in sight. There was a curve in the coast line several hundred yards away—had we left the boat just around the bend?

"Where in the name of science is that boat?" said Grame, coming to a halt.

"It must be around the bend up there," I answered.

"We left it on this side," asserted the doctor.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

We stood and looked at each other.

"Well, let's go on anyway; perhaps we did leave it there," Grame conceded.

We took up the trot again, but I soon saw an object that caused me to stop short. It was the log we had tied the boat to. I recognized it, and also the two little mangroves near by.

"It's gone," I said briefly. Grame ran down to the cape while Eleanor and I looked in the grass and along the edge of the woods. We found nothing, not even footprints. Grame returned and reported that he had seen no signs of our boat.

"Well, it's gone. What are we going to do?" I asked.

"Swim, I guess," was his verdict.

"S-h! Listen," Eleanor broke in.

We held our breath and did as commanded. From the hammock came a crackling noise from the tangle. It sounded like a party of people or things pursuing us.

"Swim?" asked Grame.

Eleanor and I assented.

"I'll take the child," said the doctor. "You and Eleanor look after each other."

"We will only have to go as far as the first island," I said. "The raft is there."

"Good enough," answered Grame. "Let's get started."

The swim to Little Island was tiring, but apparently we were not seen. Grame left the gag in Nicky's mouth, and we arrived among the mangroves undiscovered. A short walk brought us to the cove where I had left the raft. It was still there, fast among the roots of the surrounding trees. We disentangled it, pulled off a couple of planks for paddles, and after half an hour's labor, arrived safely at the Meredithes' camp.

Grame removed the gag from Nicky's mouth, and we pulled the raft high and dry on shore, aided by George and Don, who had remained awake and heard our approach.

CHAPTER X.

ELEANOR'S STORY.

KISSING, tears, laughter and bustling about followed. Nothing would satisfy Mrs. Meredith but that she feed her heaven-returned children with her own hand. It was a gay little party that was gathered around the roaring camp fire; gay in spite of the grim situation in which it found itself.

Nicky was treated as if he were the soul of virtue. Dr. Grame had warned Mrs. Meredith that her son had been temporarily out of his head, probably because of fright and privation. He added that it would be better not to ask him any questions concerning his disappearance and subsequent adventures; it would merely upset him, and perhaps derange his mind.

We had all lived up to the doctor's instructions, and no curiosity had been shown about his or Eleanor's adventure. We all sat around the fire, and were just glad to see each other again, until Nicky's head began to nod, and finally lay against his mother's shoulder. "You had better put him to bed," said Grame, indicating the tarpaulin shelter. "He's sound asleep. I would suggest that you do not leave his side. Strange things have been going on in him up here," he added, tapping his head.

I lifted Nicky and carried him to the tarpaulin. There was a large pile of palm leaves and sedge grass hard by, gathered by George. We constructed two beds, and put Nicky on one.

Before I returned to the fire, Mrs. Meredith made me tell her of the rescue. I did so, briefly enough, asking her forgiveness for not having told her of Eleanor when I had first found the party. Of course she forgave me and added:

"I want to hear the details so much. But as Dr. Grame says, my place is here. I owe a double debt to you both—may God bless two of the bravest men in the world!"

With that she kissed me on the cheek.

When I returned to the group around the fire, Dr. Grame was in the midst of explaining Nicky's situation. As I sat down by Eleanor, the doctor turned to me and said:

"I was just telling them. We are probably in for more trouble with the apes. It is necessary that we all understand Nicky. It may save lives."

I agreed with him, and he continued his explanation. I had heard it once, and it did not hold my attention now. I could not help watching the faces of the listeners as Dr. Grame unfolded his remarkable theory. George listened with a half incredulous, half puzzled expression. Don paid careful attention, and it was evident that the subject was not new to him. Dr. Meredith drank in every word eagerly, but it was not hard to see that he was suffering.

He had probably known for a long time that Nicky was not normal. He was glad to hear this explanation; anything was better than uncertainty. As for Eleanor, she comprehended but vaguely, and could not repress an occasional sob, although during the flight from Crescent Island she had been as brave as any of us. Who could blame the poor girl for crying now? When I thought of what she had been through I shuddered.

At length Grame concluded, and Dr. Meredith asked:

"Do you think he remembers what he has done since he left us?"

"There is no doubt about it. He does. In his good moments he remembers perfectly well his actions in his bad moments. I'm glad you brought this point up. As long as he does remember these bad periods, you may know he has turned neither way.

"If ever the time comes when he does not remember these times, you may be certain that his development has come through the critical period, and that he will always be quite normal. In his bad moments he remembers who he is—that he is a human. Should he ever forget this he is gone forever."

"What can be done for him?" the father almost begged.

"Nothing here," answered Grame softly, "nothing but kind treatment. The more association he has with all of us the better. A shock might cure him, or on the other hand, it might ruin him. If we can get him to New York I know of an apparatus that might— But there, just remember to be kind to him, and see as much of him as possible.

"This is not the sort of case that is helped by punishment of any sort. Whatsoever he does is through no desire of his own. He cannot keep from doing it; that is all." After Grame had concluded his discussion of Nicky's condition, all were eager to hear Eleanor's story. The reader already knows part of it, so we will take up her narrative at the point where she fell asleep on Devil's Island.

"I awoke suddenly. Some one was holding my arms tightly behind my back while they were being tied. I cried out, again and again.

"When my hands were tied I was dragged to my feet. At first I could see nothing. The moon had set; everything was dark. I was horribly frightened. But when I saw those apes standing around me in a circle, all grinning—"

The poor girl stopped. The memory was too much for her. However, she continued after a moment:

"I saw Jimmy lying on the ground. An ape, very much smaller than the rest, rolled him over, and then gave him a kick. As the ape turned, the light fell on its face. It was Nicky! At first I thought he was a captive, too—but only for a moment. A second look at his face told me he was mad.

"I called to him; I pleaded with him, but he would not listen. Two apes seized me by the arms and dragged me along between them. I stumbled frequently, but they held me up. We reached the shore and got into three long, narrow boats.

"Nicky was in the boat with me. He would not talk to me, would not listen to me. At length I gave up trying to reason with him.

"He seemed to be in command of our boat. He jabbered to the apes who were paddling with boards or flattened limbs, and seemed to have trouble in making himself understood.

"We reached the island you found me on while it was still dark. Nicky ordered me to get out, and the whole party landed, except a few who stayed in the canoes, and paddled them up the shore.

"We walked inland until we came to a large clearing—not the one you found us in to-night. There were a lot of hut things there; made of branches and leaves. We met more monkeys here. There were about fifty altogether.

"They put me in one of the huts, with guards on the outside. The thing smelled awfully. At last the sun came up; I could see it through the openings in the wall.

"I don't know what had been happening outside; but suddenly there was an uproar. The apes were all jabbering and screaming. Those things are almost human. I've seen monkeys before, but none like those. I suppose they are the missing links; anyway, they are just like people in many ways.

"The jabbering kept up. Then I heard a noise outside of my hut, and Nicky came in with an ugly old ape. The thing really bowed to me—then stood and looked at me, all over."

I thought she was going to have to stop again—but she only shuddered, and kept on bravely enough.

"They jabbered at each other for a minute or two. Then the thing bowed to me again, and went out with Nicky. A minute later Nicky came back in, and untied my hands and told me to follow him.

"When I came out of the hut every ape in the clearing was looking at me. The one who had come in with Nicky stepped up to my side. I really recognized him. They are just like people that way. No two look alike. I can't tell one Chinaman from another, but I could those apes.

"The silence lasted several minutes. They all just stood and looked. You can't imagine how awful it was. At last one huge ape that stood in front of the others began to jabber. He turned toward the rest and made motions with his arms. He pointed at Nicky, who stood looking like a young devil.

"When the ape finished talking, the others stood still, looking from one to another. I hadn't the slightest idea what was taking place. They looked from the orator to the ape beside me, and then at Nicky.

"It was evident that the situation, whatever it might be, was strained. Then the ape beside me began to advance on the orator slowly. The others stood back. The one who had jabbered crouched and awaited the attack. I knew instinctively that they were going to fight. Oh, it was fearful! They fought for at least an hour. I have never heard such awful screams. They fought on the ground, in the trees and in the air; the others just standing still and looking.

"They fought locked in close embrace—strangling, biting, clawing. For a long time neither had an apparent advantage. Then the one who had come into my hut bore his adversary to the ground, and sank his teeth in the other's throat. The massive jaws held like a vise, and after much struggling and sobbing, the talker died.

"The victor was borne away almost exhausted, and Nicky seemed to take command of the rest of the band. I tried to question him, but he ordered me to return to the hut. I did so immediately; I had no desire to be dragged there by a couple of apes.

"About an hour later Nicky came in with a gourd of coconut milk, some cooked fish, and coconut meat. I was hungry enough and ate heartily. While I ate my meal, Nicky sat and eyed me with a thoughtful expression. When I had finished he asked me if I had noticed the ape who had accompanied him into the tent earlier and who had been the victor in the death struggle.

"'He is the chief of this band now,' Nicky told me. 'The one he killed used to be. I am to be the leader of all the tribes. The former ruler of this one opposed me, and you know what happened to him!'

"I saw it was no use to try to dissuade him or bring him to his senses. He was no longer a child. Yet I made the attempt and tried to get him to sit in my lap. However, it was to no avail. So I said to him:

"'Why did you take me outside to see the fight? You knew I did not want to!'

"'I took you out to see whether the people would stand beside Uglub (he called those hairy things—people!). Uglub was second in power. He promised to kill the chief and support me. You are to stay with me and help me rule. I desired to see what the people would think of their new chief's sister."

"There is no need to speak of the effect the announcement had on me. I a member of this band of animals. It is a wonder I did not have hysterics. However, I did my best to keep my head, and by a miracle succeeded.

"I knew appealing to him would do no good, so I said nothing. He left the hut and I sat by myself all the afternoon, watching the shadows of the trees slowly lengthen. I thought of attempting an escape, but rejected the idea when I had considered it logically. If I did get away from the apes, would I be in any better position? I determined to wait and see what turned up. I thought Nicky might come to his senses and then we could escape together.

"When night fell there was a great commotion. Nicky came into the hut, and told me we were going to move. What the reason was I do not know. We went through the woods, and met another party."

"The one whose trail we crossed, no doubt," put in Grame. Eleanor continued:

"My shoe came off and they would not let me stop to pick it up. And then we came to the clearing. Nicky and several of the apes sat and jabbered for a long time. Then they all lay down and went to sleep.

"I could not sleep. I just lay awake for

hours—it seemed like centuries. I'm afraid I cried. And then I heard whistling. You know the rest."

"But we don't," said her father, nodding toward George and Don. "I'll tell you," said Eleanor. When she finished her tale the gathering around the fire broke up. We were all tired and needed sleep. It was decided that a watch should be kept till morning, each man taking a two-hour shift. Dr. Meredith volunteered to head the list, as he had had some sleep already.

In arranging the beds, I found myself beside Dr. Grame.

"What will be our program for to-morrow?" I asked.

"I should think the best thing would be to make the raft large enough to hold us all," he answered. "If the apes take it into their heads to attack us, we can board the raft and put to sea. If they attack us in their boats, we can shoot them one at a time. I believe we could handle them from the raft with two revolvers."

"Hope they don't get after us before we can make the raft," I remarked. "Have we enough water and provisions?"

Grame thought a minute.

"Yes," he said at length, "with what we can collect from the island. Speaking of water, the keg is down by the boat. It ought to be up here where we can have an eye on it."

I took the hint, and volunteered to get it. Eleanor, who had come up and said she would go with me. We walked down to the beach in silence. The warm breeze, the star-strewn sky, the waves lapping on the white sand—what a contrast to the danger we were in! Nature is not without her appeal even in a moment of stress, so we stopped to admire the tropical beauty of the night.

Then Eleanor spoke.

"This is the second time you have saved my life," she said, and would have continued, but I interrupted. When I insisted that I had not saved her life, she merely said:

"Say what you want—but if you hadn't saved me, I should have killed myself the first chance I got."

I could think of nothing to say in answer, and took her hand in silence. She let her hand remain in mine for a moment, and then gave it a little squeeze.

"Come," she said, "this is no time to be romantic. They're waiting for us."

As we walked back to the tarpaulin shelter, I cursed all water kegs because you have to carry them with both hands.

CHAPTER XI.

"THE CAVE!"

THE branches of the palm trees shone brightly against the light blue of the early morning sky, and the smell of salt and seaweed was in my nostrils. The rustling of the foliage in the light breeze lulled me toward sleep. The sun was an hour in the sky, and sucking up the dew with its slanting rays. I lay a moment enjoying the deliciousness of the half-awake state; then I remembered our position, and sat up.

There were sleeping forms about me. A little way off, feeding the fire, was Don. They had not awakened me to take my turn as sentinel. I arose guiltily, and walked to the fire, wishing Don a good morning.

He told me that Dr. Meredith had kept watch till sunrise. He himself had awakened then, and persuaded the doctor to turn over the post to him, and try to get some rest. The whole party were now asleep, except George, who had set out to catch some fish with Dr. Grame's net.

The latter fact caused me not a little concern. It was foolish for any of us to separate from the rest—especially when unarmed.

"It seems to me it's time to get busy, if we are going to do anything to-day," I said, "let's wake up everybody but Dr. Meredith."

As a result of much shaking, the camp was soon buzzing with life. Mrs. Meredith and Eleanor set about cooking several crawfish we had at hand. The former called to me for my knife to open a can of hominy, several of which were among our stores, but Grame wisely objected.

"We may need that later," he said. "Let's eat what we can get from the island

as long as possible. What has become of my fish net?"

We told him George had taken it about twenty minutes ago, and had not returned yet. It was very foolish to try calling to him because of the possibility of betraying our presence to the apes. It was decided that we should eat first, and if he did not return by the time we had finished, Don and I would go after him.

"We can't afford to separate," said Grame. "Besides, we want to get busy on the raft. It must be made larger."

Roasted crawfish and water made a meager breakfast, yet it tasted good enough to us. When we finished George was still absent. It did no good to rail at his foolishness, so Don and I started out to locate him without further discussion. As we left the fire, Grame said:

"Keep an eye out for anything we could use for the raft."

I started toward the shore; however, Don halted me, and explained that George had intended going to a kind of lake that lay at the end of a long inlet, or creek. There were no fish along the beach, and this pool was nearer than the mangrove shore, which was on the other side of the island.

Thus it was that our path led through the woods, if woods they might be called. The combination of trees, bushes and vines would better be termed a jungle. We made our way with difficulty, winding in and out to escape the denser parts. The gnarled, spreading oaks, with streamers of Spanish moss hanging from their branches like the ghost of a beard from a skeleton's chin; the thick vines winding round and round the trunks of unknown trees, like serpents; the dense foliage overhead that shut out the sun, all combined to create in the place an unnatural and clammy atmosphere. It was cool, dismal and dark. We fought on, calling out George's name from time to time in guarded tones. We saw and heard nothing.

After some fifteen minutes we came to the pool. George was not to be seen. We called several times, and received no reply. Don suggested that the sailor might have changed his mind, and gone to some other part of the island for fish. However, we had come so far to this pool, that I was not content to return until we made a thorough search. I voiced my opinion and Don agreed.

We walked around the edge of the water, keeping a careful eye out for footprints or any other sign of the former presence of a human being. Our search proved to be fruitful; about half way around we found a spot that was covered with the prints of shoes. George had evidently stood here some time, changing his footing frequently. It was on the water's edge, and an ideal place to scoop for fish. The singular thing was that a trail of the same prints led off into the jungle again, toward the other shore.

"That isn't the direction to camp," observed Don. "He must not have found any fish, and left for the other side of the island."

Perhaps George had not found fish, but I saw a quantity—snappers, brilliantly green; blue and yellow parrot fish, angel fish; all kinds of fish, some wheeling about indolently, some darting hither and thither, like arrows.

"Whatever reason he left," I answered, "the only thing to do is to follow his trail."

It led up through a swampy lane between thick walls of foliage. As we made our way along this path, something about the footprints struck me as being odd. I observed them carefully before coming to a conclusion.

"Do you see anything queer about those prints?" I asked Don.

He reflected a minute, and answered:

"Why, yes—they are abnormally far apart."

"Right," I continued. "That means he was running. Now, why was he?"

"Looks kind of bad, doesn't it?" said Don.

It did look bad. I thought of ten reasons why George should leave the pool and run up the lane in the forest; none of these reasons was pleasant to think of.

The lane gradually narrowed; then disappeared. We were in the jungle again, though it was less dense here than I had seen it anywhere else on the island. All trace of George was lost. In order to pick it up again Don and I advanced some little

distance apart. We continued the search a short time. Then I heard him call to me:

"Hey! Wait a minute! There is something here that—" his voice trailed off into silence. I waited, and became impatient.

"What is it?" I called.

His reply was unintelligible, so I made my way toward him as quickly as possible. As I approached, he called out, "I've found a cave."

When I reached Don I found him standing in front of a rock ledge some ten feet high. In the face of the ledge was a narrow opening. Beyond the opening we could see but a short way. Don eyed me interrogatively.

"Sure," I said. "Let's go in and see what's there."

In we went, Don taking the lead with me close at his heels. The walls of the cave were about fifteen feet apart, and the ceiling barely cleared our heads. When our eyes became accustomed to the dim light, we could see the end of the cave some thirty feet on. We stumbled over the rough ground, away from the entrance.

"That isn't the end," cried Don, as we drew nearer. "It turns off to the right."

It did; a narrow corridor branched out from the cave and led off to the right, but only for ten feet or so. When we turned into the corridor, another blank wall faced us.

"Not much to explore," muttered Don.

"But it will serve its purpose as a cave as far as we are concerned," I answered.

"Meaning what?"

"That we might find this a handy spot if the apes get too neighborly. They are dangerous in large numbers."

We lost very little time in looking about the cave further. I noticed the opening as we went out, and saw that it could be very easily barricaded with a few planks.

We had been away from the rest of the party some time now. They were probably getting worried about us, so we decided to make for the camp at full speed. No doubt George had returned long ago, and was now wondering whether he should set out to rescue us.

We were soon back at the pool, and then came the struggle through the hammock again. It was such slow going that we decided to go straight toward the shore, and then walk up the beach to our camp.

As we approached the shore, the trees and vines became less thick. Walking was easier, and at times it was possible to see fifty feet or more through the forest.

It was in one of these open spaces that something caught my eye which made me seize Don's arm.

"Look!" I whispered.

His only reply was a gasp.

"Do you suppose—" I began. However, it was no time for words, so we ran up to the figure lying on the ground. It was a man—dead.

Don rolled the corpse over on its back, and we saw the face of George. Not his lined, smiling face, but a face contorted and twisted into a mask of pain and fury. We looked a moment in silence. Then Don rolled the body over again.

"Back broken," he said; then with a sob, "damn whoever did this. I didn't know him very well—but he was a real man."

"We all liked him, Don," I answered.

"We ought to bury him," said my companion; "but I don't believe it would be right to the others to stay away from them any longer."

"You are right, Don. We must hurry back to camp as quickly as we can, else they may be like this, too."

The thought gave us wings. We hated to leave the dead man thus, but our duty to the living called us. We reached the coast, and ran up the beach at full speed.

The sand was soft, and it was a long run, but neither of us tired. The awful thought of what might have happened, or might be happening, to those we had left at the fire drove all else from our minds.

We rounded a bend in the beach; camp came into sight. For one terrible moment I saw no human being; then Dr. Grame came into view and one after another all appeared. We learned later they were gathering material for the raft when they heard our approach.

When we arrived all were waiting excitedly to know what had happened. I told them of George's death in as few words as possible.

"Then they are on this island," said Eleanor. "What are we going to do?"

"The cave!" ejaculated Don.

"What cave?" asked Grame.

We hurriedly explained. Dr. Grame and Dr. Meredith agreed that it would be the only safe place if the apes were present in numbers. Mrs. Meredith was on the point of tears, pressing Nicky to her bosom. Eleanor was quite calm and collected.

A rapid fire conversation followed, and we came to the conclusion that it was useless to try the raft, as it was still far too small. Don and I were to scout in the opposite direction from the cave and attempt to determine where the apes were, and how numerous.

And so the engineer and I set out into the jungle again, while those behind us were busy collecting the food and preparing to move to new quarters in the cavern.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ATTACK IN FORCE.

OUR reconnoitering was destined to be short-lived. We had not gone two hundred yards from camp before we heard a noise on our right. We crouched and waited. All was quiet. Then a flat, hairy face appeared among the shrubbery several yards away from us. It was joined by a second. With a roar of fury the two beasts dashed toward us.

My revolver spoke; the leading ape staggered, but maintained his advance. Another shot momentarily checked the second ape. As I was about to fire at the first again, a third appeared. He was behind the other two, and I could not get a shot at him.

Subconsciously I realized it would be better to wound two apes than to kill one. But the last one was screened by his fellows, and the first was almost upon us. A bullet full in the face finished him, but the other two were only a yard away. A hastily fired shot caught the last monkey in the neck and knocked him down.

I felt the arms of the remaining ape closing about my body. Two things were in my favor—the ape had received one bullet in the abdomen, and had not pinned my right arm to my side. I raised the revolver quickly, a glimpse of the beast's red jaws passing under my chin; his hot breath on my neck; these were the impressions I had before the gun exploded, and my eyes were blinded by the ape's blood. The embrace relaxed, and my antagonist sank to the ground.

Wiping my face with my sleeve, I saw all three of the apes lying dead. My first thought was to reload the gun; then we stood on the defensive a moment or so, awaiting further attack. None came.

"Do you suppose there are any more around?" whispered Don.

"Don't know," I answered. "You take the gun, and I'll climb up this tree and have a look."

The tree had numerous branches, and was easy to climb. In a moment I was high enough to command a view of the entire island and surrounding waters. What immediately caught my attention was a fleet of canoes approaching from Crescent Island. I judged there were about ten of them, with four or five apes in each. They would land in the course of ten or fifteen minutes. A careful scrutiny of the island itself brought to light no traces of apes. Climbing quickly down, I told Don what I had seen, and we started back to the camp at a run.

When we arrived we found the party in great excitement. They had heard the shots, and had feared for our safety. We told them of the approach of the apes. There followed a scene of the greatest bustle and commotion. Quickly collecting everything that we considered of value to us, we started to the cave. I carried the water barrel and various cans of vegetables and meat. Dr. Grame had a part of the raft on his massive back. This we intended to use as a barricade for the entrance. All the rest were laden with the provisions and extra clothing that had been put into the lifeboat.

If our progress to the pool had been difficult early that morning it was trebly so now. We were hampered by our loads, and Mrs. Meredith and Eleanor were handicapped by

their skirts. We toiled forward slowly, dragging our various burdens through the clinging creepers, and stumbling repeatedly.

I feared that Mrs. Meredith or Eleanor might faint; the circumstances certainly warranted it, if ever circumstances did. But they both showed great bravery, and trailed along beside us doggedly.

When we arrived at the pool a thing occurred that gave us all a fright. We stopped at the entrance of the lane to rest a moment. No sooner had we done so than Nicky made a break, and started off up the cut at full speed. Don and Grame were after him in a moment. Perceiving that he was being followed, Nicky turned off into the woods, and both he and his pursuers were lost to our sight.

I was tempted to join the chase, but realized it would be foolhardy to leave the women unprotected; Dr. Meredith had no gun.

In a few minutes Grame shouted to us that the young runaway had been captured, and before long all three had rejoined us. Having spent all the time we safely could, we picked up our loads and started off up the lane. This time Nicky accompanied Dr. Grame, who held him by one hand. The chances of a second escape were slight.

We had little difficulty in finding the cave again. Our journey from the pool was much quicker because of the nature of the land. We soon struck the cliff, and after following it a little way, we came to the opening in the rocks.

After we had settled down in the cave and arranged the baricade, Don and I took our places in the entrance, awaiting the appearance of the apes. Time passed, but not one of our foes was seen. It was probable that they were having difficulty tracing us.

There was nothing at all to do in our new stronghold, and time hung heavy on every one's hands. Age naturally seeks its own level, and I was not at all surprised when Eleanor joined us behind the barricade.

The conversation jumped from apes to sharks, and from sharks to morays. We spoke of everything. At last food for talk grew very low, and we dealt in personalities. We learned that Don had been three years at Annapolis; had failed to pass some examinations and had been dropped. His presence in Florida and occupation as an underengineer had been the result of his apprehension about his father's temper. Besides he had desired adventure and now his desire was being fulfilled with a vengeance.

Eleanor told us of her school days, and Don and I decided that we were glad that we were not girls.

Our conversation dragged on, and so did the day. At length a brown figure appeared through the woods some hundred yards away. We called to Grame, and had a consultation.

"They'll certainly find us here sooner or later," said the doctor; "might as well let them know right away. Shoot him—it may scare the others off."

I was elected to rid the world of this particular ape. Resting the muzzle of the revolver on a log in the barricade, I took careful aim. The report of the gun was followed by a scream. The simian sank to the ground, out of view among the bushes.

"Number one!" said Don. "Many happy returns of the day."

Our momentary diversion over, we resumed our seats on the hard ground, and tried to think of something cheerful. The sun had passed under a mass of dark clouds, and a chill had come into the air. It looked like rain.

As we sat behind the barricade and talked, it seemed to me that Eleanor was very much interested in Don. It was only natural that she should thank him for diving in the ocean after her the night of the wreck—but was it only natural that she should dwell upon the matter with what struck me as inordinate tenacity? Was she really interested in the fellow? I was unable to answer the question, and my mood grew as dark and taciturn as the weather. I was in my shirt sleeves, and was cold; so I sat hugging myself, and looking gloomily at the woods, taking no part in the conversation.

What would be the end of all this? At the beginning of the voyage, little had I dreamed of a hand-to-hand battle with a shark and withstanding a siege by apes in a dark cave on a West Indian island. After all, there was still some adventure left in the world.

Nicky joined our little group at the mouth of the cave, but I was absorbed in my own thoughts, and paid little attention to him.

Don and Eleanor seemed to be oblivious to my sulky humor, chattering gayly on and addressing a remark to me at intervals. I answered with a grunt. Whether they attributed my curtness to its real cause, or whether they thought I was preoccupied in watching the woods I do not know. At any rate, they left me alone in the end.

I was beginning to weary of the sulks, and wished to join the conversation again, when a low noise caught my ear. I could not tell where it came from. It was barely audible and intermittent. Instead of calling the attention of the others to it I sat still and listened.

It seemed to grow somewhat louder. Of late I had become extremely cautious, so I drew my gun, and held it in readiness. However, the noise died away. I sat with ears alert for at least five minutes, but heard nothing more. Nevertheless, I still kept my gun in hand.

I looked around to call Grame and tell him of the noise, for I had come to rely upon him more than any other of the party. The words were left unsaid, for my eye fell upon Nicky. He was sitting close beside one of the walls, and his face was working queerly. I hardly recognized him. His muscles appeared tense, and his eyes roved restlessly up and down the walls of the cliff —he seemed to be just on the point of doing something.

I have not mentioned it before, but the cliff was bent into the shape of a sharp crescent, and the walls were visible from the opening of the cave for hundreds of yards on either side. If the cliff had been straight, the apes could have crept along the face of the walls, and fallen upon us in large numbers before we were aware of their approach. If they ever managed to tear down our barricade we were lost. They would overwhelm us by sheer numbers.

Following the direction of Nicky's gaze, I half expected to see a band of apes advancing along the face of the cliff. My fear proved false; there was not a living thing in sight. Evidently the child was about to lapse into the monkey state.

I was on the point of calling Grame when Nicky suddenly leaped up, rushed against the barricade, upset it, and started toward the woods. In an instant I was after him. Just as I was crossing the baricade a hand seized me by the belt, and I was lifted off my feet, and hauled backward. I landed on my back with a thud in time to see Grame pulling our primitive door into place. As he did so a brown body fell from above, hit the barricade as it was rising into position, and landed in front of Eleanor.

The cave rang with the report of two shots from Don's revolver, and the monkey remained still on the floor. By this time the apes were dropping in front of the barricade like brown leaves in autumn. Don and I emptied our revolvers judiciously, decreasing the number of apes as fast as it increased.

We reloaded and emptied several times before the apes gave up the attempt, and broke into headlong flight. We refrained from shooting at them as they fled, for ammunition was too scarce.

When the last of the brown forms had disappeared in the forest, at least twenty lay dead in front of the barricade. The silence that reigned in the cave was broken by convulsive sobs from Mrs. Meredith.

Dr. Grame muttered: "Well, I'll be damned!"

"Good thing Grame nabbed you before you got across the barricade," said Don. "What happened, anyway?" First thing I knew we were in the middle of a brown whirlwind.

"Well," said Grame, "I had been hearing a noise from above for some time. I judged from your expression"—turning to me—"that you heard it, too. First thing I knew Nicky was headed for the woods. I realized that the apes were above us on the ledge, ready to jump down and annihilate us. It was a trap to get by the barricade; that noise was monkey talk, I guess. Evidently Nicky understands it. Thank God I was right behind Jimmy when he started after Nicky."

"I hate to think of the results if you hadn't been," I answered with a shiver.

"Close call," said Don, running a piece of his shirt through the barrel of his re-

volver. "If they had got by that barricade—well, we wouldn't look like we do now."

Dr. Meredith and Eleanor were at the back of the cave trying to comfort the heart-broken mother. The rest of us remained near the barricade.

So the day passed and the night drew on. No more apes were seen. Grame and I came to the conclusion that they would wait, and try to starve us out. This would not take long, as our provisions would only last us a couple of days more. Our water supply was also getting low. It was perfectly evident that unless the apes wearied of the siege and left us, we would have to devise some means of escape.

We talked the matter over exhaustively, but decided we would attempt nothing that night; we would wait and see what developments the morrow would bring.

Very fortunately the sky had cleared, and the woods were catching the first light from the rising moon. In case of a second attack of the apes, we would at least be able to see. Nevertheless, I felt apprehensive about our safety during the long hours of the night that was to come.

It was decided that a watch of two would be maintained at the baricade throughout the night. Dr. Meredith and I were to take the first turn, from bedtime to one or two in the morning, and Don and Dr. Grame from that time till dawn.

About eight o'clock we all sat down to a very light meal. Don and I sat very near the entrance, needless to say. Mrs. Meredith refused to eat anything, but very bravely joined the group and talked with us while we had our supper.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DESPERATE ATTEMPT.

A KNIFE does not appeal to me, especially when pointed in my direction. So it was with an unpleasant feeling that I watched one slowly creeping down toward my face. What struck me as peculiar was that it was my knife. Now why should my knife be drifting about in the air?

The problem stumped me. As I lay on my back, and watched with half open eyes, the knife descended until it was several inches from my nose and then began to ascend in uneven jumps. As sleep gradually left me, I noticed that the knife was attached to a string, and that the string went through a small hole in the roof of the cave. Without moving my head I could see the backs of Dr. Grame and Don, who were watching the woods.

I was now wide awake, I said to myself, and the knife was a dream. But when I looked above me again the knife was still there, ascending jerkily. Obviously it was being pulled up by some one at the other end of the string.

But who was it, how had he got my knife, and what sense was there in pulling it up and down at the end of a string?

My eyes were glued on the point of the knife. Suddenly it came flying down, right at my face. A quick movement of my head enabled me to let it whiz by my ear into the dirt beside my head. It quivered a moment, and was still. Then the line started to tighten. I seized the knife quickly and snapped the string with a sudden jerk. A muttered exclamation came to my ears in reply.

Whoever was up there had got his aim by letting the knife down on a string, to make sure it would hit me if dropped through the hole. After I was dispatched, the genius above had intended drawing the knife up again. Thus he would have put one of the enemy out of the way without losing a precious weapon.

The knife I held in my hand was my own. Nicky must have taken it from the water keg where I had carelessly left it after opening a can of beans. He had had it concealed on him when he made his escape.

Grame uttered a cry of astonishment when he saw me sitting up with my knife in my hand, examining a string tied to its hilt.

"What in the name of Heaven—" he began. I explained the affair to him.

"Of all the little devils," he muttered. "We'll have to watch out for him or he'll get us in hot water yet."

"I should say he had already got us in lukewarm," grunted Don. "Let's not wake

them, though," he added, pointing to the Merediths, who were still fast asleep.

I spent the next five minutes wondering why I had waked just when I did. Two minutes later and I might have been past awakening. I looked at the roof of the cave and saw the little hole. It had not been there before, I was sure. Would the apes be able to make an opening large enough to come through? I determined to keep an ear out for any noises overhead.

The sun rose, and the forest out in front of us took on color. The dense green was flecked with blossoms of red, white and yellow. A slight breeze shook the leaves and a faint rustling sound came to my ears. Somewhere within that green mantle lay the animals that desired our destruction. It was to be a battle to the finish—and yet a battle without a purpose.

In due time the Merediths awoke, and we had our breakfast. The morning wore on without incident. We lay in the shadows of the cave and looked out on the brilliant jungle, almost wishing an ape would show himself to break the monotony.

Mrs. Meredith did not speak of her grief. Eleanor could not be happy with her brother demented and leagued with a band of apes. Don and I missed her companionship. Dr. Grame and Dr. Meredith withdrew to the back of the cave, and sat in silence. We had all exhausted conversation—there was nothing left to talk about. You can't realize what a terrible state this is until you have experienced it.

The sun beat down on the island with vertical rays, and the air in the cave was hot and sultry. Our water supply was fast diminishing; I judged roughly that it would last us through the next day. I knew that we would have to make some effort to escape, and make it soon. The wildest kind of projects kept turning over in my mind, but none was logical.

Don interrupted my train of thought by asking: "How many cartridges have you left?"

I counted the ones remaining in my belt.

"Eleven," I answered, "and six in my gun—seventeen in all. How many have you?"

"Six in my gun and four in my pocket."

"Twenty-seven between us," I groaned. "Enough to hold off just one more attack. We've got to do something, Don."

He nodded, but said nothing.

In the middle of the afternoon Don called me to the barricade. I had been in the rear of the cave trying to sleep, but the sultry air had kept me awake. When I joined Don at the barricade, he pointed toward the woods.

"Do you see those bushes moving?" he asked.

I followed the direction of his extended arm. There was a little clump of bushes on the edge of the jungle; it was evident that something was moving about in it. Then a body appeared. Don raised his gun and asked almost pleadingly:

"Shall I shoot?"

"No," answered Dr. Meredith, who had joined us. "I think it is coming this way. Wait and see what it does."

It came on toward us through the underbrush. We did not get a good look at it until it came to the open ground; then we saw it was Nicky.

Dr. Meridith uttered a smothered exclamation, and looked toward Mrs. Meredith, who was sitting in the back of the cave, paying no attention to us.

"Sh-h!" whispered her husband, nodding toward the silent form.

Nicky came on until he was within calling distance. It was obvious he did not want to run any risk of getting caught by us. There were no apes in sight, but I had no doubt that they were waiting in large numbers within the woods, or directly above our heads.

Then he hailed us. His father answered.

"You, mother, sister, and Don will be safe if you surrender. I swear it," called Nicky.

"What about Dr. Grame and Jimmy?" asked Dr. Meredith.

Nicky merely shrugged his shoulders.

Mrs. Meredith had heard Nicky's voice, and rushed to the entrance. She pleaded with him as only a mother can. However, he only laughed. Dr. Meredith realized it would do no good, and only unstring the poor woman's nerves.

"That is not your son, Julia," he said

softly, and led her back into the recesses of the cave.

Nicky lingered a while, shouting at us and laughing diabolically.

"We've got to get him away," said Grame. "He'll have the women in hysterics. Plant a shot near him—he'll probably take the hint."

I followed the doctor's suggestion, and a moment later saw Nicky retreating, shaking his fist at us. He disappeared into the green blanket of the hammock, and all was quiet again. The woods sweltered in the heat. We panted for breath.

"He's the funniest one I ever saw," said Don, and I agreed with him.

When Dr. Meredith joined us an idea occurred to me.

"Why don't you give us up?" I asked. "In that case Mrs. Meredith and Eleanor will be safe and—"

"Safe?" said he. "I think not. There is no use discussing it. In the first place I would not consent to abandoning you and Grame. I feel responsible for you—you are my guests, you know," he added with a wan smile. "In the second place, there would be no safety for us among the apes. We are better off as we are."

"Right," answered Grame, and that seemed to settle the matter.

The afternoon dragged on.

"Well," said Grame, when I had finished unfolding my plan to him, "it might work. I don't see why it shouldn't. At any rate, I agree with you that you ought to try it."

"If we get out of this we're going to have to run some danger any way you look at it," I said.

"Right," he answered. "Go to it, and God help you!"

The afternoon had passed and night come on. All were asleep except Grame and I, who were keeping watch.

I sat a moment looking at the jungle with the tops of the trees lit up by the moonlight, and dark shadows beneath. In a moment I was going to crawl into the night. My return would mean safety for us all; but I might never return.

I did not look forward to the adventure, for I had had enough lately. However, here was a duty to be done, and I was the one to do it, in view of the fact that it was my idea. And so I was ready enough. If I should be caught in the attempt I was about to make, I would die miserably; but if I did not make the attempt, we would probably all die, no less miserably. And so you see, after all, it took no great amount of bravery to steel me for the undertaking.

"I won't take a revolver," I said, "if I'm caught I can kill only a few at the most, and you will have one less gun here. I'll only take my knife."

Grame said no word, but grasped my hand.

"Farewell," he said.

"Just a moment," I muttered, "I want to see whether Eleanor is awake."

"I understand," said my friend. "I'm going to watch the woods."

I made my way silently to where Eleanor was lying. Her breath came regularly and heavily. I dropped to my knees and listened. She was asleep. Why should I wake her? For a while, at any rate, she was not in a cave surrounded by bloodthirsty apes, but in the blessed fields and gardens of dreams. I rose to go, but a hand was laid on my arm.

"I'm not asleep, and I heard you and Dr. Grame."

"I came to say good-by," I said simply.

"Oh, Jimmy," she whispered. "Don't go!"

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because," she answered, "because"—and was silent.

I felt her arms go around my neck, and heard her say: "Because—this—"

The next moment I crushed her in my embrace and kissed her. I held her a moment and then withdrew my arms.

"Do you remember that day when you found me on the raft?" she asked.

I admitted that I did.

"And do you remember that you carried me in your arms?"

"Yes," I answered.

"And do you remember that you did what you did?"

"Yes," I murmured, "I'm sorry, but—"

"Well," she said. "I was conscious all the time."

Such are the ways of woman.

A few moments later Grame lowered the barricade for me and I crawled out into the night as happy as I had ever been in my life.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTURED!

AS I crept toward the dark forest there came a sinking sensation about my heart. How futile the attempt seemed! What chance was there of success in an effort to steal the apes' boats from their own camp?

If I were successful in this, there was every probability that the rest of the plan would miscarry. Would I be able to take the boats to the entrance of the little stream that led up to the pool? How could I bring them all at once, especially if they did not have ropes by which to tow them? I might bring one, and set the rest adrift. But this was counting my chickens before they were hatched, and I turned my thoughts to more immediate problems.

The first thing was to find the camp of the apes. I might happen upon it in ten minutes, and it might take me hours. My best move was to get a view of the whole island from a tall tree, as it was quite probable that the monkeys would have a fire. In that case the first part of my problem would be solved.

There was either no guard on the ledge or he had failed to see me. I made the first fringe of the jungle in safety. It was a far more comfortable feeling to slide along in the deep shadows of the great trees than to inch along through low grass and bushes in the full light of the moon. I felt comparatively secure, so I made the best time I could.

In the course of a few minutes I came upon a tree that suited my purpose very well. The ascent of the trunk to the first branch was difficult enough, but thereafter it was simple. I swung myself up from branch to branch until I was as near the top as my weight made safe.

Clinging to the trunk, with my feet in the forks of two small limbs, I could see over to my left the white crescent of sand that marked the island on which we had first made the acquaintance of our present enemies. Not far from the beach lay Small Island, where I had landed after my journey from Devil's Island. I could even see the latter, an indistinct blotch in the distance.

Below me the hammock lay still as death. The moon lit up the face of the cliff, and a white stretch of shore shone between the black of the forest and gray of the ocean. There was no trace of a fire in any direction. But somewhere below me was the camp of the animals that so closely resembled humans.

Not far distant was a splotch of shadow on the tops of the trees, which stretched away toward the shore in a thin line. I guessed this was the pool and the creek that joined it to the ocean. I strained my eyes in vain for details in the moon-lit treetops that might give a clew to the position of the camp I was seeking.

Disappointed by my failure to find anything, I tried to reason out the logical camp site for the apes. I was forced to give it up, as ape reasoning proved baffling.

When I had descended I turned my steps toward the pool. I intended to follow the creek to the ocean and make a tour of the entire shore of the island. The boats would have to be somewhere near the water.

It was extremely difficult to keep any idea of direction. Overhead all was dark, except here or there where the stars or moon peeped through. I found my best guide was the moon, of which I had an occasional glimpse.

Eventually I found myself at the pool, black and still in the shadow of the live oaks and mangroves.

I made my way with difficulty down the bank of the creek to the shore, and started up the beach, seeking shelter under the fringe of palm trees.

I had walked a half mile or so when a low noise came to my ears. It was a sort of moaning. I had never heard a sound quite like it, so I attributed it to the apes. It seemed to come from up the beach.

Now that I had some clew as to the position of the monkeys' camp the sense of hopelessness that I had experienced before vanished. I advanced cautiously up the

shore, listening to the strange noise. It was unquestionably becoming louder and louder, but it was impossible to say whether it came from close at hand or from afar.

Our old camping ground was passed. The sight of it recalled many memories, among others those of a water barrel.

The noise now seemed to be coming from inland. I pushed through a thick screen of vines, stopped short, and crouched down. In front of me was what I sought.

The apes were there! They were all on their bellies, squirming about the ground, and uttering the peculiar sound that had led me to them. As I watched I began to realize that there was some method in the mad wriggling. The prone forms seemed to be crawling in concentric circles. In the center was a figure seated majestically on a block of wood and holding a baton in its hand. In the moonlight I recognized Nicky.

After a while the apes ceased wriggling along the ground and formed themselves into a line, standing. The line approached the sitting figure. The first one knelt in front of Nicky. The boy rose, and after uttering a few gibberish sounds, tapped the ape on the head with his stick. This performance was repeated with each one of the monkeys. I suppose it was some sort of coronation ceremony to celebrate the accession of the new king.

Nothing could have fitted in better with my design to get possession of the boats. All the apes were presumably engrossed in the fête; it would be easy to pass unnoticed, for they had eyes and ears for nothing but their strange rites.

I guessed that the boats were near by on the beach, probably made fast to stumps or logs. I advanced along the edge of the clearing, keeping close to the tree trunks. The shadows hid me well. However, my very caution proved to be my undoing. As I hugged the tree trunks I pushed into one that had been dead for a long time.

It must have been on the point of falling, for my weight sufficed to topple it over. Down it came, ripping through the branches of the neighboring trees, and hit the ground with a crash. I looked hurriedly toward the apes; they had ceased their ceremony, and were gazing in the direction of the fallen tree. Then they started to advance, slowly at first, and then more rapidly. It was evident that their suspicions had been aroused.

There was still time to escape in the darkness, but haste was imperative. I started off, gliding as rapidly as possible from tree to tree. Luckily the ground was open. The apes must have heard me, for they began to run. I followed their lead and set out at full speed.

But luck was against me. My toe caught in a root, and I went flying into a thicket. I must have hit a tree trunk, for I felt a stunning blow on the head, and lost consciousness.

I do not know how long I lay thus. When I came to it seemed to me that a large hammer was striking rhythmically on the back of my head. I could still hear my pursuers beating the woods for me. At times they passed so close I could hear their low chattering.

I must have lost consciousness again. When I came to, the second time, all was silent. The apes must have given me up, I thought. Getting to my feet dizzily I determined to continue my search for the boats. I felt myself fainting once or twice, and had to sit down.

There was a thick mass of vines ahead of me, and I thought I had better not try to push through it in my present state. As I skirted the edge, an arm was passed around my neck from behind, and I was dragged backward in a powerful embrace.

I struggled fiercely and tried to reach my knife; but to no avail. The hold around my neck tightened and I could not breathe. My knees began to sag, and the hands that tore at the hairy arm had no strength. Then all went black, and I knew no more.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

A Bunch of Keys

By PHILIP M. FISHER, JR.

IT was not at what he had just left behind him that John Mathews shuddered. The bitter experience had long since schooled his emotions to overcome that recollection. It was not the cold of the wet wind that whipped up the bay and chilled to the bone through the cheap cotton clothing he wore. He was oblivious to that. Nor was it because the future seemed so utterly devoid of hope.

No, it was because the guard, in locking the great steel gate behind him, had given his keys a shake on their ring. Simply that.

Keys. Rattling keys, jingling keys, rasping keys. Ever and always, for the last ten years, he had lived to the tune of keys. Out of his cell for morning drill—keys. Back to his cell after drill—keys. Out for breakfast and the mill—keys. Guards in the mill, guards in the eating hall, in the mill again, and at the evening meal—keys. Into his cell again at night—keys. Keys, keys, keys, rattling, jingling, rasping keys; morning, noon, and night, his every move, his every thought, during days that numbered thousands, minutes that reached into unthinkable millions, seconds—to the tune of keys, keys, keys.

And now the last sound after his release, the last word the prison gave him, and the first that came to him as he stood a free man on free grounds, the rattle of keys.

Oblivious to thoughts of the ten dead, monotonous years, of the wind wailing with its frosty breath, of the black horror of empty days to come, John Mathews pressed his hands to his ears and fled from the sound of keys.

The prison bus came to a creaking stop beside him, and a guard called out—didn't he want to ride? He shuddered again from association of thoughts, and shook his head, and plodded on.

At San Rafael he took the train to Sausalito. Thence the ferry to San Francisco. Stepped into the whirling throng before the ferry building, and let it carry him in its tide until he found himself at Third and Market. Then, at last, he came to.

In his pocket were one hundred and thirty-seven dollars and twenty-seven cents

—his earnings of ten years' labor in the San Quentin jute mill.

He could live three months on that—exist. Perhaps during that time he could get over his prison pallor, his prison gait, his prison slouch, his prison eye—and find some one who would give him a job.

First, a boarding place.

Nickels counted. He entered the *Chronicle* offices and searched the advertisement columns.

The landlady ushered him into a room. John Mathews hardly gave it a glance. The price was within his scheduled means. He nodded—it would do.

The landlady held out her hand.

"Here is the key."

Every nerve in Mathews's body screamed in agony. He threw himself back, hands thrust out in horror. Then, as he saw the sudden fear come into the woman's eyes, he gripped his emotion.

"Excuse me," he said. "Just gettin' over nervous breakdown. Keep the key; I got no use for it. Nothin' valuable."

When the door closed behind her he flung himself upon the bed, every muscle convulsively jumping, his skin wet with cold perspiration. Keys, keys, keys. God! Would it be always this way?

Slowly he became calmer.

He began to reason.

He was a free man now, and the world was going on about him irrespective of what he had been. He must fit himself in. Oh, yes, he'd go straight now! Ten years—long enough to teach a man that the crooked life did not pay. If he could get rid of the prison taint now, and find a job! He was young enough. And with half a chance—

For a month he sought no work. Instead he let himself drift with the sidewalk crowds, teaching himself to assume the nonchalant carriage and brisk step of the men who had ever been free. He sunned himself out on the beaches. He brought himself to looking a policeman straight in the eye when he asked about a Valencia car.

And when five weeks had passed from the time of his release he stood before the waving mirror of his decrepit bureau and decided that he appeared as other men. He would look for a job—and go straight.

He searched the advertisement columns once more. In answer to each that held possibility he made a personal application. At the end of a week he was disappointed.

By the end of the second week discouragement was heavy upon him.

He stared into the mirror again.

"Somethin' wrong," he muttered. "But, hang it, it ain't me. I don't look like a jail bird. I don't!"

He began to feel that the world was unjust. And with the thought something came creeping into his consciousness, feeling its way, insinuating itself, when the future seemed blackest, into his voluntary thought. He felt this call, and roughly cursed it off.

By the end of the third week of his search he was well nigh in despair. And the cankerous thing of evil called out loud to him.

"Look up the old gang," it suggested. "They'll give you a job."

John Mathews stiffened.

"By thunder—"

He stopped abruptly, overwhelmed by the shadow of the last ten years. He shook his fist at his reflection in the mirror.

"I'm no jail bird, you hear me? I don't look like one. I'll not go back. By thunder, I won't!"

The thing spoke again.

"All right, then. But what you need is to go to a new place. Some people know you here, you know. That's not good. You might get a job—and lose it. Understand? A new place."

Mathews sat down on the bed. That wasn't a bad idea at all. Perhaps he was mistaken about his appearance. He had changed so much that he thought he could pass as any ordinary man. But the change, after all, was but one of comparison. It was a change to himself. To others there might still be some touch that was unmistakably of the prison. Hence, no job.

But he had no money to try a new city, a new State.

The voice spoke again.

"Simple enough, John Mathews. Go ahead and look for a job. But in looking, keep your eyes open. Something—something might turn up. You see? You understand? The money to get away"

Mathews smote his palm.

"That's the chance!" he cried. "A double chance—a job, or the cash to make a getaway."

He sought the papers again.

And at three o'clock on Monday afternoon found himself in the office of the warehouse of Mitten, Hautz & Co., silk importers, down on Mission Street.

There were five men waiting there before him—all evidently applicants for the same position. Mathews looked them over. The advertisement had simply called for a "strong, middle-aged, man, who was not afraid of being alone." He felt he had as much chance as any of them. And the grim humor of the last requisite appealed to him. He, certainly, was not afraid of being alone.

Then the door opened and a man stepped before them. Mathews blinked a moment, for somehow he felt that he had seen that man before. Then he arose as he was addressed, gave his name, answered a question or two, and sat down as the man passed to the next applicant.

He chuckled to himself: Ten years—just a resemblance to some prison acquaintance, that was it. What else could it be? Lucky he hadn't asked too many questions, though, at that.

The questioner requested the men to wait a moment, and returned to the office. Five minutes passed, during which came the hum of conversation through the thin walls. Then the man came out, and Mathews started. A fellow in a slick gray suit, undoubtedly a plain clothes man, was with him. For a moment the latter stared unblinkingly at the six applicants. Then gave an abrupt nod, and forthwith strode from the warehouse.

"You'll do. Come into the office.'

Mathews's heart gave a sudden beat. He had a job! He picked up his hat and followed through the glass door. His new employer pointed to a seat, and began to rustle among the papers on his desk. Evidently finding the one he wanted, he carefully perused it, then took out a fountain pen, and signed his name.

Then he looked at Mathews.

"Wait here. I have to go with my friend. Be back in about twenty minutes. There's newspaper on the table."

Mathews nodded, and reached for the paper.

He heard the man give a slight exclamation, and, from early training, watched him covertly. He saw him biting his lip as though impatient with his own forgetfulness. Saw him take from his coat pocket a package of bank notes, and whistled to himself—hundred dollar bills. Saw him go to the safe, unlock a drawer, carefully press the packet inside as though the compartment were already nearly full, then relock the drawer, and return to his desk.

Then he picked up the paper he had just signed, folded it, and thrust it into his pocket. Then, with a glance at Mathews, and a repetition of the words: "Back in twenty minutes," he left the office.

And John Mathews's heart gave a great beat, every fiber of his old self keenly on the alert. The man had left his key, still on the ring with the others, in the lock of the drawer into which he had put the money!

And the admonition of the inner voice flashed back to Mathews: "You might get a job—and lose it. Keep your eyes open. The money to get away. Understand?"

Here was the chance! And by thunder, he'd take it! A new city, a new State—then the straight life. He buried himself in the newspaper. He had twenty minutes in which to get the stuff. The fellow might have forgotten something, as he forgot to put the money away, as he had forgotten his keys.

Mathews let five minutes tick slowly by, apparently absorbed in the sporting sheet. Then he slowly raised his head. Listened. Not a sound, except muffled movements above where probably workmen were busy. He looked about him. Yes, there was another door to the office, glazed, and down the wall another street entrance, too. He wouldn't need to chance meeting the fellow on the walk. Easy.

Then another thought smote his growing enthusiasm. Was it, could it be, a trick? That plain clothes man— He folded the paper noisily, and coughed, then stepped to the door through which his tentative em-

ployer had gone, opened it, and spat loudly. Returned satisfied. No one was there.

He would do it. And now was the time.

He arose again, and made one step toward the safe. Then suddenly the shuddering seized him again, and he fell back into the chair, with his hands to his ears.

Keys. He could not, he dare not, touch them. Keys, keys, keys. Those damnable keys. Rattling keys, jingling keys, rasping keys. Ever and always, morning, noon, and night, his every move, his every thought, during days that numbered thousands, minutes that reached into unthinkable millions, seconds—to the tune of keys, keys, keys.

God! He wanted that money. The ease of it. Fool that he was! He could not touch them. Yet there the money lay—thousands! But the keys—at the first touch, jingle, rattle, rasp in the lock. That last day, when he was released—he could not touch them! Keys, keys, keys. And that money—

He cried aloud in the agony of it.

"I can't do it. I can't!"

And as though his words were a cue, the man who had left the keys in the safe stepped into the office through the second door, and behind him came the plain clothes man.

"I'm glad to hear you can't, Mathews," he said. "Pretty good test, wasn't it. I'm Mitten, you remember; was in San Quentin for six months with you on a faked up charge. Since then I'm always careful whom I employ—a plain clothes man on hand you see. Recognized you right off, and took a chance on your wanting to go straight. For a minute I thought you were going to fall for the money there, but glad to see you're going to play the game. The job's yours."

Mathews rose unsteadily. Keys, keys—by thunder, they'd saved him!

"Yes, sir," he stammered. "When do I go to work."

"Right now," the man returned. "Night watchman on the first shift, from four in the afternoon until midnight." He reached into a desk drawer. Something jingled in his hand. "Here are the keys," he said.

"Yes, sir," returned John Mathews.

And, amazed at his own action, he took them in his hand. Then his knees gave way, and he fell into his chair. The keys jingled again in his hand. He stared at them a moment, then sprang up and seized his employer's arm.

"By thunder, Mr. Mitten, you won't have to play tricks on me again. I'm your man."

And with something like a sob clutching at his throat he stumbled from the room, jingling the keys.

BLOSSOM TIME

'TIS blossom time! The meads are gay
With faery flowers; the roundelay
Of birds sets love to limpid rime.
The heart beats high; ah, Love o' Mine,
Lips, trembling, taste life's subtlest wine
In blossom time!

'Tis blossom time! The meads are sere,
The death knell of the passing year
Rings down the wind its mournful chime.
Aye, though the brooding skies be gray,
Within the heart of love, alway
'Tis blossom time!

Leigh Gordon Giltner.

Gentleman Roger's Girl

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "A New Girl in Town," "A Self-Made Thief," etc.

CHAPTER XII *(continued).*

THE STREET MUSICIANS.

THEY finally came to a fine, modern police station. Celesta and Hal were led past great iron gates, which shut behind them with a horrid clang, and through an arched passage into a stone-paved courtyard. Celesta was shaking pitifully.

"You gonna lock-a us up?" Hal asked desperately.

"Sure!" said the policeman.

"You letta my sista stay with me?"

A coarse laugh answered him. "Likely, ain't it?"

Hal looked at him murderously.

"Leave your hurdy-gurdy there," said the policeman, pointing to a corner of the court.

A slight hesitation in his manner gave Hal an idea.

"You keep-a da mus' here," he suggested. "To-morrow I bringa da license."

"Think this is a storage warehouse, bo?"

"I paya for keep. I paya fi' dollar for keep!"

A subtle transformation took place in the policeman's face.

"Oh, well—" he said. He came close to Hal. The piano on one side and his own bulk on the other cut them off from possible observation from the windows. "Slip it to me, Tony, and beat it!"

The clanging of the iron gates with them *outside* had not nearly so sinister a sound. As they hurried away Hal scarcely dared to look in Celesta's face for fear of reading there the effects of the shock she must have received. As they turned the first corner

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 31.

how surprised and how relieved he was to hear her laugh!

"Phew, that was a close shave!" she murmured, slipping her hand under his arm.

He pressed it hard against his ribs. "Oh, Celesta, what a duffer I was to get you into such a mess!" he groaned.

"Nobody could have foreseen it," she protested. "And it was wonderful the way you got us out of it!"

He was comforted.

But they were not yet out of their troubles. Hastening to the corner in the busiest part of town where they had agreed to meet Roger, although it was now past the hour, he was not there. A sickening anxiety attacked Hal. Could Roger have been arrested? Without saying anything of his fears to Celesta he bought a newspaper on the corner. There was no word in it concerning Roger. They waited.

With all the office workers streaming homeward, it was one of the busiest moments of the day. The seeming Italians in their picturesque costumes had attracted no undue attention while they trudged through the streets dragging their piano, for that was part of the customary scene; but the same figures on the sidewalk *without* their piano, or any visible reason for being there, created a phenomenon that caused the passers-by to linger and stare. Such are townsfolk!

Hal took Celesta's arm and walked away. They could not go far for fear of missing Roger, and were soon obliged to return. The people continued to shove and crane their necks, and the inevitable policeman appeared. This one looked not so much crooked, as merely thick-headed.

"What youse guys doin' here?" he demanded.

"I waita for my fren'," said Hal, cursing him in his heart.

"Who's your friend?"

"Mist' Kelly." This was the name they had decided on for Roger.

"Another dago like yourself, eh?" said the policeman facetiously. He was rewarded by a great laugh from the crowd. "Have you got any place to go, Tony?"

"*Si! Si!* Mist' Kelly, he getta rooms for me."

"Have you got a job? Every wop in this burg's got to have a job.' '

"I gotta da street mus'," said Hal with pantomime of turning the crank.

"Where is it?"

"I store it to-night."

"Where?"

Hal had to think of something quickly. The truth seemed safest. "I leava my mus' by de station house till I getta de license."

"Well, just come along with me and we'll verify that."

Once more the procession got under way, a crowd falling in behind. Hal groaned in spirit.

Suddenly in the throng he caught sight of Roger's dismayed face. Roger, coming suddenly on this scene, thought the worst had happened, and for the moment he was at a loss how to act.

Hal gave him his cue. Shoving through the crowd, he seized Roger's hand and pumped it up and down. "Here's-a my fren'! Here's-a Mist' Kelly!" he cried. "You aska him!"

"You know these wops?" demanded the policeman.

"Why, sure!" said Roger nervously.

"He says you got rooms for them."

"That's right."

"Have they got any visible means of support?"

"He owns a street piano."

"Well, take 'em away, take 'em away, then! Don't let them parade the streets like a circus! They're obstructin' traffic!"

The three lost no time in getting away from there. They plunged into less frequented streets.

"I was there on time," Roger explained. "When you didn't come I got anxious. I walked a little way out River Street thinking I'd meet you on the way in."

Roger had secured rooms for them in the quarter of the town known as Dublin Hill. It was scarcely an improvement on the Cut, but moving had sadly depleted their reserves again, and they could afford no better. In their relief at having successfully run the gantlet, they were little disposed to quarrel with their new home.

Next day, the license having been secured,

and the street piano successfully retrieved, Hal and Celesta were making their way by easy stages to Catherine Street, while Roger remained at home biting his fingers in impatience. The once fashionable quarter was not a good one for business. The boarding houses seemed to be deserted during the day, and the landladies not susceptible to the charms of such music as Hal had to purvey.

They turned into the very block at last, and their hearts beat faster. Hal could not but remember with a twinge that the last time he had been in that block he had been driving his own car, which now rested on the bed of the Corbyhanna River. They played through their repertoire at the corner without eliciting the slightest response, and moved up in front of Mrs. Blakemore's.

They had changed, but the immense, grimy white mansion with all its gables, turrets, gingerbread work and stained glass had not. The same row of rockers with pillows in the seats and pillow cases drawn down over the backs was still on the porch. They were untenanted. Nobody was to be seen around the place; no face was drawn to any of the windows by the strains of their music.

"Which were Inchfawn's windows?" whispered Hal.

"I don't know where his bedroom was," said Celesta. "He did his work up in the garret. Those three little windows in the front gable must be it. But I remember they were curtained off. He worked under a skylight."

When they had played their six tunes through they had to move on, feeling very flat. Was all their careful preparation to result only in this? How inhospitable a house appears if you may not ring the bell!

"It's likely to be a long job," said Hal. "If we came back too often it would certainly excite suspicion in this quiet street."

All day long they only took in a few cents more than a dollar, and things began to look blue again.

On the following morning they tried again. This time the door of the house opened and Mrs. Blakemore herself stepped forth, rouged to the eyes and wearing a remarkable hat. She was bound to market. Celesta received another object lesson in the ways of the world. Mrs. Blakemore was one thing to an agreeable guest, and another to intinerant street musicians.

"Be off with you! Be off with you!" she said. "Your piano's all out of tune! Sets my teeth on edge!"

The charge was only too true! They obeyed disconsolately.

"Anyhow," said Celesta, trying to find some comfort in the situation, "she looked straight at me, and didn't recognize me."

After this they had to stop short of the Blakemore house and resume their music beyond it. They tried different hours of the day without any success. Other boarders came and went, but never the man they were looking for. Meanwhile, the citizens of Clayton continued to be hard-hearted, and money was running low.

"Couldn't we call up the house?" suggested Roger one night.

"If the house is watched the telephone wire is certainly tapped," objected Hal.

"The trouble is, Mr. Inchfawn used to work in his studio all day long," said Celesta.

"Such a man often goes out for air just before dinner," said Hal. "Let's try six o'clock to-morrow."

This time their patience was rewarded. They had been waiting for him so long that his coming had all the effect of a breathless surprise. Hal was playing away in the empty street when Inchfawn suddenly rounded a corner and bore down on them, bound homeward.

"Here he is! Here he is!" whispered Celesta, wild with excitement.

He came toward them with his head lowered, seeing nothing. Celesta's hand shook so she could scarcely hold the tambourine. She planted herself in his path and smiling her professional smile, rattled the tambourine under his nose.

He started violently, cast a look of pure hatred on her which was merely the effect of exacerbated nerves, and hastened on. The man looked ill and old. His face was yellowed like old parchment.

Celesta returned to Hal almost ready to cry. "Oh, I should have spoken to him!" she murmured. "My wits deserted me."

"But he's here," said Hal. "That's the main thing."

Roger thought so, too, when they told him. They had hard work keeping Roger at home after that. He wanted to take up a stand at Mrs. Blakemore's gate himself.

The next afternoon Inchfawn came home about the same hour, but by ill luck Hal and Celesta were surrounded by children who had followed them from another street. As before, he passed them unseeing.

The third time they saw him they were alone, and Celesta was ready for him. Without altering her fixed smile she shook the tambourine and murmured:

"Mr. Inchfawn, don't you know me?"

He gasped and stared as at a ghostly apparition. Clearly he did not know her.

"Celesta Manion," she whispered, still making play with the tambourine. Hal was energetically churning the piano.

Inchfawn's agitation increased. He leaned against a fence post for support. He seemed to be on the verge of a collapse. This time Celesta's wits did not fail her.

"Don't notice me now," she whispered swiftly. "We'll be back again same time to-morrow."

Inchfawn went on like a man in a dream.

On the following afternoon he had his nerves under better control. When Celesta shook her tambourine he paused with a sickly smile, such as a man might be supposed to bestow on a pretty Italian girl, and fumbled in his pocket for a coin.

Celesta, always smiling, whispered: "Are you watched by the police?"

He answered: "There's a detective at Mrs. Blakemore's, but he does not suspect me at present."

"Can you safely come to see my father?"

"Yes."

"The address is 232 South Franklin Street. Ask for Kelly."

He repeated the address after her. "I'll be there to-night," he added, and dropping a quarter in the tambourine, went on.

When Roger heard the news he could scarcely contain his excitement. He could not eat his supper. He wanted to shave and dress forthwith, and they had much ado to dissuade him.

"This man is my employee," he said with his old high manner, which sat quaintly on his present disguise. "He looks up to me. It will ruin my influence with him to have him find me looking like this."

"But you're in Clayton," Hal pointed out. "Where they still publish your picture every few days with a price on your head. The fact that the police have a man at Mrs. Blakemore's shows they're still keen on the chase."

Roger yielded reluctantly.

He spent the time walking up and down the kitchen. By the time the door finally opened to admit Inchfawn, he had worked himself up to such a state he could scarcely articulate.

"Inchfawn! Inchfawn!" he stuttered.

Inchfawn, unwarned, was greatly shocked at the seeming change in Gentleman Roger. His jaw dropped. "Have you come to this?" he murmured.

"It's a disguise!" cried Roger furiously.

"Oh," said Inchfawn, dazed.

Roger seized his two hands and squeezed them until the man winced with pain. "Inchfawn, what about the property? You know! Is it safe? Oh, God, is it safe?"

"Why—why, yes," stammered Inchfawn. "Perfectly safe."

"Oh, thank God!" cried Roger. He dropped into a chair and weakly wiped his face.

Celesta and Hal looked on at this little scene, she full of commiseration, but he, tougher-minded, with a certain reserve. Roger's excessive excitement supported certain suspicions that Hal had conceived. Why need Roger be so anxious since Inchfawn had proved his good intent by coming to him?

"You will want to talk business with Mr. Inchfawn," said Celesta. "Hal and I will go into the next room."

As soon as the door closed behind them, Roger signed to Inchfawn to draw a chair close to his. He jerked his head toward the door.

"They know nothing," he explained. "Keep your voice down. Tell me everything that has happened."

"It was a close shave for all of us," said Inchfawn. "Why didn't you give us some warning of your intention to escape?"

"Warning!" cried Roger. "Because I had none myself! I was kidnaped out of the prison!"

Inchfawn stared at him open-mouthed.

"Oh, I assure you it's quite true!" Roger declared irritably. "Never mind the details now. Tell me your story."

"Well, I got my first knowledge of your escape," Inchfawn began, "when I came down to my breakfast that morning and found the boarding house full of detectives." He shuddered at the recollection. "With all the bonds lying upstairs in my studio! And the plate there! I nearly collapsed—"

"Well? Well?" said Roger impatiently.

"They were searching your daughter's room, and questioning Mrs. Blakemore. They paid no attention to me. I went back to my studio. I did not seem to be able to think. I sat there waiting to hear them on the stairs—my revolver in my hand—"

Roger uttered an impatient and contemptuous exclamation.

"But they did not come up, and after a while I began to bestir myself. I washed the plate with acids until it was clean—"

"Good!" said Roger. "It had served its purpose."

"I put the packages of bonds in a suit case," Inchfawn went on, "and started downstairs. But I was afraid. It seemed to me that the sight of a man leaving the house with a suit case would excite any detective's suspicion. So I went back.

"I telephoned to the express company on my own wire to send for a package. I did up the bonds in strong paper, a harmless looking package, and addressed it to myself in New York, to be called for. They sent the expressman right up through the house to my door, and he took the package. They never interfered with him.

"Glancing out of my front window I saw him toss the package in his wagon and drive away. I—I completely lost hold of myself for a while. I wouldn't go through with it again for ten times the amount of my share!"

"Pooh!" said Roger coolly. "That feeling will pass—and your share will remain in good cold cash! Are they still lying in the express office?" he demanded anxiously.

"No, Miss Divart has them."

"Where is she?"

"In Canton, New York."

"Ah, yes, her home town."

"She was less fortunate than I," Inchfawn continued. "She was roused out of bed in the hotel by the detectives. They kept her in custody for a while. However, they were unable to show that she had any connection with your escape, and they were obliged to let her go.

"They discovered that she had telephoned me on several occasions, and that turned their attention to me. They searched my studio and bedroom, but the incriminating evidence was gone, thank God! They ceased to take any interest in me. My best course appeared to be to remain where I was and go on with my etchings of the town, until I should hear from you." Inchfawn passed a hand over his drawn face. "It has been a difficult time," he declared.

"Not a patch to what *I* have been through!" said Roger bitterly.

"As soon as Miss Divart was released," Inchfawn went on, "she went to Canton, where, I understand, her family enjoys excellent repute—"

"Father's a parson," put in Roger.

"She could not communicate with me while she was under surveillance, but as soon as she got to Canton she wrote."

"To the boarding house?"

"No, in care of general delivery, to a name we had agreed upon. I then sent her the express receipt for the bonds, instructing her to go to New York and claim them. She subsequently wrote me that she had them safe."

"Fine!" cried Roger, jumping up. "All is clear sailing then. Why have they still got a detective in Mrs. Blakemore's house?"

"To watch your daughter's belongings. It is supposed that she will try to get them sooner or later."

Roger said anxiously: "How are you off for money, Inchfawn?"

"I have plenty. Miss Divart disposed of two or three of the bonds and sent me a draft. Thinking you might be short, I brought five hundred with me."

He thrust a hand in his trouser pocket.

Roger's eyes glittered. "Lord! to feel

of a little real money again!" he murmured.

He got the roll and crushed it voluptuously in his hand. His back stiffened, his head went up, his voice became round and full. Roger was his own man again.

He strode to the door between the two rooms and flung it open.

"Come in, come in, children!" he cried. "We have no secrets from you!"

They came in, Celesta's face all lighted up at the sound of his glad tones; Hall still looking wary.

Roger was superb. "Congratulate me, my darling!" he cried to Celesta. "My affairs are in excellent order. Mr. Inchfawn has been a faithful steward!" He waved his hand to indicate the squalid kitchen. "We're done with all this, thank God! And you're done with that confounded barrel organ!"

Hal's face turned grim.

"What are your future plans, Mr. Manion?" asked Inchfawn.

The artist's respectful manner was meat and drink to Roger.

"Well, I think we'll go to New York," he said.

"New York!" cried Hal. "That's Campas's hangout."

"It's also the hangout of a few million other people," retorted Roger. "Best hiding place in the world! How would you like a season in New York, daughter?"

"Very well," said Celesta amiably.

"Perhaps we'd better go somewhere else for a few days," Roger went on. "Say to Saratoga. To give your complexion time to fade out. In New York we must take our proper places—"

Suddenly Roger became aware of Hal's set face in the background. A curious expression crossed Roger's face. His hand went up to tug at the non-existent mustache. Hal had suddenly come to be most awkwardly in his way.

"'Pon my soul, Bainton, I forgot all about you!" he cried with his most disarming air of frankness—an air with which he was quite capable of administering a mortal wound. "This will ruin your business, won't it? You'll have to sell the barrel-organ. I certainly am sorry! Anything I can do, you know. Don't hesitate to call on me."

This did not surprise Hal at all. He had seen it coming. During the last weeks he had come to know Roger pretty well. He laughed mirthlessly. But Celesta *was* surprised. Her beloved father had gone too far, even for her.

"Father!" she cried, astonished. "Hal is coming with us, of course!"

Roger, seeing that he had lost ground with her, sought to recover it with his lightninglike dexterity.

"Indeed, I wish he would!" he cried with an appearance of cordiality which did not deceive Hal in the least. "But Hal is so confoundedly independent I thought it was useless to suggest it."

"But he will come—he will!" cried Celesta. "If I ask him. Why, we owe everything to him! We couldn't let him go, just when things began to be easy for us."

"How about it, Hal?" asked Roger with his friendliest smile.

The eyes of the two men met. Celesta could not read all that passed between them. In the younger man's eyes Roger perceived a scornful generosity. He could not support that look, and his eyes fell; but they were still full of complacency because he saw he was going to get his way.

"No, thanks," said Hal quietly. "I must be on my own."

"But, Hal!" Celesta protested. "Times are so hard!"

"Oh, it's always easy to make out on your own," he said lightly.

"But, Hal, we want you!"

"I'm satisfied if *you* do," said Hal. "Don't lose touch with me, that's all."

"Certainly not! But, Hal—"

He shook his head with a firmness there was no mistaking.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN NEW YORK.

ROGER and Celesta registered at the Madagascar Hotel in New York, as Colonel Arthur Herron, Sydney, N. S. W., and Miss Muriel Herron. Roger's attire had become positively effulgent. He

had dyed his hair black, also his mustache, which was, of course, of much less generous proportions than in the past. He now wore, too, a little patch of hair upon his lower lip, and embryo imperial which lent his face distinction, and as a finishing touch a monocle was screwed into his eye.

Celesta, in her fine new clothes, looked the worthy daughter of such a sire. Roger engaged a corner suite, one of the best in the house; and even in the Madagascar, which is accustomed to receiving eminences from all over the world, their arrival created notice.

As soon as they were domiciled Roger set about in earnest to buy clothes. He enjoyed choosing for Celesta even more than for himself. An orgy of visits to jewelers and to the most fashionable man dressmakers and milliners followed. Celesta went through with it a little dazed, but she enjoyed it, of course. Had she not been walled up in a convent the greater part of her days? She had qualms of anxiety, though.

"Are we really so rich?" she asked.

"We have enough," said Roger airily.

There was a practical strain in Celesta. She would have liked to know the precise nature and extent of their wealth, but did not like to ask.

Once when he incautiously pulled open a drawer of his dresser she saw several crisp new Liberty bonds lying within. Somehow she understood that the sale of these next day provided them with fresh funds.

"We are not living on our principal, are we?" she asked diffidently.

"No, no, my child," Roger replied with a wave of his hand. "You may safely leave all such matters to me!"

When the beautiful dresses and hats and wraps were sent home, and Celesta began to wear them Roger was a little dissatisfied with the result. The fault was in his own taste, but he was not prepared to admit that. He had overweighted Celesta's exquisite, simple girlishness.

Celesta knew what was the matter. In their peregrinations up and down the Avenue she had discovered the strange fact that the simplest things were the most expensive, and had put two and two together.

One evening when they were starting down to dinner, she caught him glancing askance at her with a little less than satisfaction. She said smiling:

"Can I afford one more evening dress?"

"A dozen, my child!"

"Then let me buy it all by myself."

He heard no more of the matter, nor did he see the garment until she appeared in it one night, ready to go down. It was a piece of soft, pale ivory silk draped by a master and requiring no trimming whatsoever.

She had dressed her crinkly dark hair in the simplest manner, low over the ears and twisted in a loose knot behind, and around her neck she had a string of small fine pearls he had given her. With this costume one of the cloaks Roger had ordered, a dull silver brocade with a collar of white fox, went admirably. Her little head rose out of the white fur as gracefully as a spring blossom out of snow.

The sight of her took Roger's breath away. "Ah, my child, how beautiful you are!" he murmured, and there were actual tears in his eyes. Roger was full of temperament.

After that he never interfered with her clothes.

When the business of buying clothes was finished, Celesta found a curious emptiness creeping into her luxurious days. Not so Roger. He was probably as happy as he had ever been in his life before. The lovely figure of Celesta clinging to his arm, completed his glory.

Roger had a theory that the best way to hide was to make one's self conspicuous. There was a good deal in it; Celesta understood that Campas would never dream of looking for them in such places as they now frequented. Every night they dined in a different fashionable restaurant. How Roger enjoyed the movement of heads when they entered! Nearly every night they went afterward to a play.

At first Celesta was terrified at showing herself so publicly, but as the days passed and nothing happened, the sense of danger passed. She never enjoyed being stared at though; she knew she looked well, but she wished that to be taken for granted. Peo-

ple's stares forced her to retire into herself when she would have liked to give herself up to the glittering spectacle.

Within a few days they had acquired a whole circle of "friends": just how, Celesta could scarcely have said. Very agreeable people with a great deal to say, which somehow didn't amount to much. You couldn't get very far with them. Celesta was lonely. They also saw Miss Divart (who now called herself Mrs. Tudor) and Inchfawn, who kept his own name. But the former Celesta could not like however hard she tried; and no one could be thoroughly at ease with the nervous Inchfawn.

Roger explained to her that the reason Inchfawn kept his name was that he was known in New York, and had his own circle there. Celesta wondered why they didn't meet *them*. Once she ventured to ask Inchfawn about his daughter. He was oddly disconcerted and mumbled something about her being away at school. From other things he had said, Celesta knew this was not true. She gave it up with a sigh.

She often found herself sighing. Life lacked something, she scarcely knew what. When she felt like this she often sat down and wrote to Hal—but without connecting the one thing with the other in her mind. They carried on an active correspondence, very matter of fact. Hal had worked his way east as far as Philadelphia, where, according to his account, he had secured a good job in a garage. He called himself George Porter, a plain name for a plain guy, he said.

Roger noticed his daughter's growing listlessness and twitted her with it.

"I haven't enough to do," she said.

He raised his eyebrows.

"I mean useful things."

"Suppose we take a furnished house," Roger suggested. "That would give you occupation."

"Oh, yes!" Celesta agreed. "I could cook."

"Well, I don't know about cooking," said Roger. "But I've been thinking about a house. This hotel life is very pleasant, but now that we've made a few friends it would be nice to entertain them in our own house. More freedom. I'll look into it."

A few days later he announced that he had found the very thing; and after breakfast they set off in a taxicab to inspect it. Somewhat to Celesta's surprise they turned downtown, and lost themselves in the cañons between the tall loft buildings below Madison Square.

"Does anybody live down here?" she asked.

"Just you wait!" said Roger.

Crossing Fourteenth street they entered abruptly into another sort of neighborhood altogether, with handsome old churches, a dignified old-fashioned family hotel or two, and rows of stately plain dwellings.

"The Washington Square district," Roger explained with unction. "The very best people live here. Old Knickerbocker families. Trust your old dad to find the best!"

Eleventh street was their destination. They came to a stop a few doors west of the avenue, before a little house that caused Celesta to exclaim with delight. It was one of three just alike, Georgian houses of warm red brick with wooden cornices painted white and white front doors. They were very small, merely one floor above the front door and an attic, but they were beautifully kept, and their very smallness gave them a choice air.

"These three little houses are always let furnished," said Roger. "It appears they are known in the neighborhood as 'the brides' row' from the number of young couples who first set up housekeeping here. We are lucky to find one vacant."

"But can we afford it?" asked Celesta.

"The rent is no more than we paid at the hotel."

"But we'll have to have servants here," said the practical Celesta. "And gas and electricity and many things."

"A mere bagatelle!" Roger declared.

Celesta was enchanted with the inside of the house. Although so small, it was laid out on a liberal plan. The rooms were much larger than might have been supposed from the outside. On the main floor there were two square drawing-rooms with beautiful old mantels, and a dining room in the rear extension. Overhead there was a delightful living room running right across the

front of the house, with a bedroom behind it for Roger, and a room over the dining room for Celesta. The house was simply and beautifully furnished throughout in its own period.

Roger surveyed the Adam drawing-rooms in high satisfaction. "We could entertain very nicely here in a small way," he remarked.

Three days later they moved in. Celesta found a family of irreproachable French servants already installed. There was Etienne, major-domo, who wore a green baize apron in the mornings and evening dress the rest of the day; there was Sophie, his wife, cook, who sent up the most delicious things from the kitchen; finally there was Valerie, their daughter, who combined the functions of housemaid and waitress. Valerie was not beautiful, nor even chic, as all French maids are supposed to be, but she was undoubtedly efficient. Celesta was secretly in awe of the whole efficient family.

"French servants are the very latest thing," Roger whispered to her with a knowing look.

"But aren't they frightfully expensive?" asked Celesta.

He shrugged.

It was not long before Celesta discovered that she had less than ever to do in her own house. The idea of messing about in a kitchen presided over by Sophie was, of course, preposterous.

The day after they moved in, an aristocratic little brougham took up its place at the door. It was painted peacock blue with silver lamps, and it had a chauffeur in livery to match. Inside it was a dream of pale buff upholstery and silver fittings.

Celesta was as charmed with it as any child with a new toy, yet she experienced a curious sinking of the heart, too, that she could not have explained. She was a little terrified by all these trappings of luxury.

Roger enjoyed the house better than the hotel, because he had in it a more complete sense of proprietorship. With Celesta and a perfectly appointed establishment to show off (a bijou establishment, he was fond of calling it) his cup of happiness was full. It seemed not to make so much difference to whom he showed it. Two or three times a week they gave intimate little dinners of six or eight covers to their hotel acquaintances and others who mysteriously came and went. Celesta was sometimes in doubt as to the identity of her own guests. But whoever they might be, Roger basked in their envy and admiration.

One morning when Roger and Celesta were pleasantly idling in their living room, awaiting the summons to lunch, Etienne, the perfect major-domo, came upstairs with a card on a salver. In offering it to Roger, Etienne permitted himself a certain air of disapproval. Roger looked at the card, and Celesta looked at Roger. Etienne waited.

Roger restrained himself from any vulgar start, but the watching Celesta saw the warm color fade out of his face, saw his hand begin to tremble. To conceal its trembling, he let it fall on the arm of his chair. Celesta saw how his nostrils were distended under the strain of controlling himself. She guessed what had happened.

"Oh, send him away! Send him away!" she whispered.

Roger shook his head. "That would solve nothing," he murmured. "The situation's got to be faced." Raising his voice, he said: "Tell the gentleman I'll be right down."

Etienne retired.

"How could he have found us!" gasped Celesta.

"What does it matter now?" Roger said impatiently. "He's here." He took a turn up and down the room.

"What shall we do!" she persisted.

Roger could never confess before Celesta to being at a loss. "Well—well, after all Campas is only an ordinary man," he observed, pacing. "In the past I have handled hundreds such as he. In having plenty of money we enjoy an advantage we didn't possess before. You can leave him to me, my dear."

He turned to the door, and Celesta sat down in terror to await the result of the interview.

As Roger went downstairs his spirits began to rise. After all, he was no stranger to such ticklish situations; he believed in his luck. This Campas had a sort of

dogged, peasant cunning that was not to be despised, but Roger knew himself to be an abler man. It was with quite a cheerful air, therefore, that he turned into the drawing-room.

"Hello, Campas!" he said, putting out his hand.

Campas was sharply taken aback by the style of this greeting, so different from what he had expected, and Roger's spirits arose a little more.

"You find us in slightly different circumstances from the last time, eh?" he went on with a laugh.

Campas's only reply was a black scowl. He was more soberly dressed than on the last occasion Roger had seen him. He looked as if he had found a really good tailor. But no tailor could disguise the brutalized nature of the man.

"I've been regretting ever since that we gave you the slip in Westmoreland in such an unceremonious fashion," Roger went on pleasantly. "I took it that your offer was made in good faith, but Bainton thought you had some ulterior motive and I allowed myself to be over-persuaded. But it's no great matter now, since you've found us, and everything has turned out all right."

He continued to enlarge in this agreeable manner, while Campas watched him with his suspicious little eyes. Roger was aware that he had made an excellent beginning, but he had the unpleasant feeling that he had gone about as far as he could go, and the end was not in sight.

"Where's Bainton now?" Campas asked hoarsely.

"I scarcely know," Roger replied shrugging. "We parted before coming to New York. A good fellow, Bainton, but not just the one I would choose for a friend. Our association was a compulsory one. It has ended."

It was clear from Campas's scowl that he did not know how much of this he could believe.

"How did you find us out?" Roger asked carelessly.

The question was a mistake. It reminded Campas of the cards *he* held; a glint appeared in the dull eyes. "You gave me the slip in Westmoreland all right," he said with a sneer, "but I didn't waste any time hanging round there. I went right up to Canton, N. Y."

In spite of himself, Roger's eyes conveyed his inward start.

Campas did not miss it. The grin of malice appeared. "I used to talk to Miss Divart when she visited you in the infirmary. Once she said something that gave me the tip Canton was her home town. I remembered it. Easy enough to find her when I got there, though Divart is not her real name. Her father's a prominent minister there."

"Why, of course!" said Roger smiling.

"I didn't make myself known to her," Campas went on. "Just kept an eye on her. I thought you and she would meet up some time. I followed her to New York, and I was present at your meeting in the Madagascar."

"Why all that secrecy?" asked Roger with admirable, seeming frankness. "Why not speak to us?"

"You're a pretty slick one, Roger," Campas said grinning. "I was afraid you'd put one over on me. I'm no fool. I could see if you had plenty of dough that my former arguments wouldn't have the same weight with you. Of course, I could have put you back in jail, but I didn't want to do that unless you forced me to. So I just thought I better hold back and watch you till I got some better arguments."

Campas's confidence was steadily increasing, and Roger's breast began to turn cold.

"Well, I got those arguments now," Campas added coolly.

Roger smiled in an indulgent sort of way, but his lips were stiff. "This is strange sort of talk!" he said.

Campas stuck his chin out. "Up in Canton I had already seen how Cora got her old man to sell a couple of Liberty bonds for her."

At those words Roger turned sick at heart.

"In New York I saw her sell more in a broker's office. I spotted you each time you sold Liberty bonds. And Inchfawn. I marked that Inchfawn was a sort of engraver. I watched the fine clothes, and the

string of pearls, and the automobile as they appeared."

In spite of himself Roger betrayed his consternation in his face. Surely no man could have hidden it. His enemy in possession of his secret! Little beads of perspiration sprang out on his forehead. To have wiped it off would have called attention to it. He felt absolutely gone inside, but he said with a sort of bravado:

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do," Campas asserted sneeringly. "I see I've said enough to show you I'm wise." His tone changed. "My God, Roger! I got to take off my hat to you. My friends and I, we've always made a good living, but we're pikers alongside of you. When I saw the scale you operated on, I changed my plans entirely. I made up my mind I'd shake my bunch, and join yours."

"But this is sheer nonsense!" said Roger out of his white, drawn face. "You have no proof!"

"Sure I have proof," Campas declared coolly. "But I wouldn't need any at that. All I got to do is go to the Department of Justice and tell them Gentleman Roger Manion is living in style up on Eleventh street, and passing nice new Liberty bonds. Think of Celesta!"

Roger jumped up. A groan was forced from him. He gave up.

"No need for you to take on about it." Campas went on in his dogged way. "It's a genuine offer I'm making you. I admire you, Roger. I'd be proud to work under you. And you need a fellow like me. Look at Inchfawn, a nervous wreck. Cora's all right, but she's a woman. And you, you've got to stick to the gentlemanly. You need me to do the rough work. I'm not a hog. I only ask to be admitted on the same footing with Inchfawn and Cora."

Roger felt sick, sick! But he was never one to hesitate in the face of the inevitable. "All right, Campas," he said, "you have me! I'll admit you freely to partnership with the rest of us, and hereafter will depend on you just like one of the others."

A complacent grin spread across Campas's face.

But Roger had not finished speaking. "I'm afraid you're due for a disappointment, though. There's not as much in it as you seem to suppose. And that's your fault. When you kidnaped me out of prison, Inchfawn was not finished printing. The bulls descended on the boarding house and he had to destroy—"

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" Campas interrupted with his malicious grin at its widest. "I thought you might try to pull something like that, so I went to see Inchfawn first this morning. That's the proof I spoke of. The poor fish broke down completely; confessed he'd printed three thousand bonds, the five hundred dollar kind."

Roger walked away grinding his teeth. When he came back he flung up his hands. "I give in!" he said.

"How do you split?" Campas asked.

"I take half. Cora and Inchfawn each a quarter."

"All right," said Campas, "let's stick to the same proportion. You take two-fifths, and the rest of us a fifth each."

Roger shrugged.

"I make one condition," Campas continued. "You got to admit me on the same social footing as the others. Let me come here just like they do. I won't shame you, I guess. I'm learning what's what." He indicated his changed appearance.

All Roger's better instincts that centered around Celesta were revolted. But he was helpless. "All right," he agreed shortly. To himself he vowed that it should only be for a few days.

Campas wanted certain guarantees of Roger's good faith. A meeting was arranged to take place later in the day at Inchfawn's studio, where Campas was to be formally presented as a partner to the other members of the "association" (as Roger termed it) and his share of what had already been taken out, handed to him.

Even after these details had been arranged, Campas lingered on, watching the hall in his furtive way, listening for sounds within the house. Finally he blurted out:

"Where's Celesta?"

"She has gone out," Roger replied smoothly.

Campas got up at last. "Well—I'll come back again," he said. He paused at the door. "I know you don't exactly feel friendly toward me right now," he said, "but I'll show you. I don't deny it's a big thing for me to be associated with you in business, and I mean to make good. I'm a faithful dog, too. Anybody that knows me will tell you the same. Treat me white, and I'll stick to you through anything. But treat me white, that's all!"

Roger was obliged to listen to these protestations with a sympathetic air, wishing meanwhile with all his soul that he could strike the man dead.

After Campas had gone he continued to pace up and down the drawing-rooms. Gradually he brought some sort of order out of his thoughts. There was a philosophic strain in the queer, tangled web of Roger's nature. He was not one to cry long over spilt milk.

The interview with Campas had cost him a cool hundred and fifty thousand. So be it! It was gone. He still had enough left to live on. And by taking Campas in they had removed him as a possible danger.

This pleasant life in New York must now end. He'd get in touch with Barkdull again, and dispose of the bonds in a lump. Then he'd lop off all dangerous old associations with one stroke. He'd carry Celesta to Europe out of reach of all of them. A new life then, a safe life, a life worthy of his daughter.

He went back upstairs, and in response to Celesta's distressed, questioning eyes, he was able to say with an appearance of calmness:

"It seems to be all right, my dear. Campas is evidently not such a bad fellow as Hal gave us to suppose. He had no intention of informing against us. He merely asks to be received here on a friendly footing".

"Oh, have we got to see him?" she faltered.

"I think it would be better," said Roger.

"There's something about him that makes my flesh crawl!" Celesta declared.

"Mine, too." he agreed. "But don't you think we'd better dissemble for the present?"

"Oh, yes. If he seems friendly."

"Most friendly," said Roger with a wry smile.

Roger got in touch with Cora as soon as he could. With her he was a good deal franker respecting Campas—but not wholly frank. He said nothing to her about the proposed trip to Europe. Cora herself was one of the old associations that Roger purposed lopping off. He dispatched her to Philadelphia to get in touch with Barkdull.

CHAPTER XIV.

HAL BOBS UP.

THE next day was Sunday. While Celesta was dressing, Valerie came to the room to announce that a gentleman was calling.

"But it's not ten o'clock!" said Celesta. "Who is it?"

"'E not tell me 'is name," said Valerie. She spread out her hands expressively. "I say *mademoiselle* ees not up yet. 'E say, jus' tak' 'er a message."

"What message?" asked Celesta quickly.

"Tell 'er ze zhentleman from Philadelphia is calling."

Celesta blushed a rosy pink. "Oh-h!" she breathed delightedly. "Tell him I'll be down directly. Tell Sophie we'll have breakfast downstairs. Covers for three, please."

Valerie, with a sly look out of the ends of her long eyes, went.

Thereafter Celesta's fingers flew, and an enchanting smile wreathed the corners of her lips. But it was simply a childlike gladness; she looked in the mirror no oftener, nor longer than usual. On her way out she knocked on her father's door.

"Hal's here!" she cried.

"Splendid!" Roger answered instantly. It was just as well for Celesta that she could not see his face.

She went cascading down the stairs. Hal was standing in the middle of the front drawing-room somewhat ill at ease. To tell the truth he looked out of place amid the delicately fashioned Adam chairs. There was nothing delicately fashioned about his

square, vigorous frame and rough-hewn, masculine face. His fine hands were scarred with hard work.

Celesta saw no incongruity. She swam toward him blushing and beaming, both hands outstretched.

"Hal! Hal! Hal!" she cried. "How glad I am!"

The poor fellow could not speak at first. He crushed her hands. His deep questing gaze lost itself in her eyes. He laughed deeply and shakily.

"Why didn't you come before?" she demanded.

"Came as soon as I could get my Sunday suit out of hock and pay my fare," he said, grinning.

"Oh, Hal! Why didn't you let me know you were coming?"

"Wanted to surprise you. Wanted to see with my own eyes how you'd take it."

"Did you think I'd change?" she asked a little hurt.

He did not tell her, of course, that he hoped she might change. "Things are a lot changed," he said, glancing around.

"But not me! How long can you stay?"

"Must go back to Philadelphia to-night."

"We have all day, then. You'll have breakfast and luncheon and dinner with us."

"Hold on! Better wait and see what your father says."

"He'll be as glad as I am."

Hal discreetly lowered his eyes.

Presently he said seriously: "It was your saying in yesterday's letter that Campas had turned up that brought me so quick. I'd like to hear more about that."

"I told you everything," said Celesta. "It seems to be all right."

"H-m!" Hal pondered dubiously. He let the matter drop for the moment. He expected to learn more by observation during the day.

They sat on a sofa against the wall alongside the window. Celesta ever asked a fresh question before he could answer the last. She fondled his hand between hers exactly as a little girl might have done.

Hal did not misunderstand. While he laughed at her delightedly, his eyes brooded over her with an extraordinary sadness in their depths. He loved her so!—and he could not speak of it. He saw clearly that her nature still slept in perfect innocence. He longed for her to awaken, but for him to make any move, to speak a word that might awaken her, seemed like sacrilege. He was incapable of it.

"Nothing has happened to me except jobs," he said, smiling. "You're the one that has things to tell."

"Yes, isn't this house perfect?" Celesta demanded. "I'll show it all to you after breakfast. I'd show you all my wonderful new clothes, too, if you weren't a man. But wait till you see my motor car! I simply can't believe that it is mine. We give a party nearly every night. We go to the theater and sit in a box—"

"Every night?" said Hal.

Her innocent delight was suddenly overshadowed. "Yes, it's too much, isn't it?" she said. "It scares me, really. But dad enjoys it so! It seems we're quite rich, Hal."

"Where did he get it!" said Hal, involuntarily.

The instant it was out he could have bitten off his tongue. Celesta dropped his hand and shrank away from him. Her eyes grew big with reproach.

"Hal!" she murmured. "Even you!"

Once it was out the honest Hal could not take it back. He plunged ahead doggedly. "I don't mean necessarily that I thought he got it dishonestly. But it seems so strange. Why, that charge he was convicted on last year only involved a few thousands."

"Exactly!" cried Celesta. "How ridiculous to charge a man of his means with such a thing!"

"But surely," said Hal, "he had only to prove to the court that he was a rich man to have the charge fall of its own weight!"

Reasons had not much weight with Celesta's loyal heart. "You only suspect him because you don't like him," she said in hurt tones. "It makes me perfectly miserable! I know there's some natural explanation, but I wouldn't ask for it!"

Hal shrugged helplessly. There was nothing to be said. They both tried to thrust the painful subject out of sight, and regain their old happy footing.

Presently Roger entered. On the surface he was all cordiality.

"He's going to stay to breakfast and luncheon and dinner!" cried Celesta.

"Really!" said Roger. Icy overtones tinkled through his glad voice.

The two men looked at each other. But the same trick did not work for Roger a second time. Hal's face reddened a little, and turned dogged.

"Celesta was kind enough to ask me," he said. His eyes added to Roger. "I've earned this much, and I'm going to take it!"

"Fine!" Roger returned.

By and by Celesta went to see if her instructions for breakfast were being carried out. The atmosphere of the drawing-room became somewhat tense. Roger looked out of the window with an inattentive air that was designed to be offensive. It only made Hal more dogged. Hal thought: "I owe this man nothing. But I owe Celesta everything in the world. It's due to her to try to find out what's behind all this."

He remarked in a determinedly friendly tone: "This is rather different from the Cut, eh?"

"Slightly," said Roger without looking at him.

"I didn't know you were so well off," Hal pursued.

Roger was silent.

"Have you had a stroke of luck lately?" persisted Hal.

"Are you catechizing me?" demanded Roger in his high and mighty manner.

Hal met it coolly. "It seems so strange that a man of your wealth should have been charged with that petty scheme to work the Clayton banks last year," he said.

"So others thought at the time," Roger observed acidly.

"But why didn't you lay evidence of your means before the court?"

"I didn't care to take the court into my confidence."

"But surely rather than go to jail—"

"I don't care to discuss the matter," said Roger loftily. "You and I don't see eye to eye in such things."

Hal's face hardened. "Pretty thin!" he thought.

Celesta returned.

On the whole, the day that Hal had looked forward to with so passionate a desire could hardly have been called a success. Roger took care never to leave him alone with Celesta for more than a moment at a time; and while he was present he somehow contrived, with an appearance of the greatest friendliness, to wither the pleasure of their intercourse. The worst of it was Celesta never saw through him.

Hal burned with a dull resentment all day. The older man was at the same time so clever and so petty you could not compete with him. Nevertheless, Hal got something out of the day; like a miser he stored away a hundred lovely fresh impressions of Celesta to be counted over in secret later.

After dinner there was a peaceful interlude while Celesta played and sang in the pretty fashion that is taught in convents. To Hal it was heavenly music. The piano stood under the arch between the two rooms. In the front room Roger sat reading a newspaper like a male duenna.

Cora called. Hal had seen her in the prison a number of times. Without appearing to, he watched her and Roger. He guessed from the glance of intelligence that passed between them that she had come with some communication. With all Cora's bright charm she made it clear to Hal that she meant to sit him out. Well, Hal had his own stubbornness. He had no intention of leaving for a good while.

A few minutes later Campas was announced. The faces of the four in the room offered a study. He had to be admitted, of course, for the drawing-room opened off the hall, and he could hear their voices.

Roger, recalling that he had a serious situation on his hands, bestirred himself to meet it. "Glad to see you, Campas," he said with quiet heartiness. "Celesta was giving us a little music. Do you know Porter?" (Porter was for the benefit of Etienne). He dropped in on us unexpectedly to-day. You'll find cigars and cigarettes on the table yonder. Make yourself at home."

Campas having caught sight of Hal, was literally aware of nobody else in the room. He paid not the slightest attention to Roger. His face turned blackish; his head sunk.

Hal's instinct warned him not to offer the man his hand. He thought: "This fellow would knife me if he had a knife." And smiled.

Celesta, after a glance of dismay upon hearing Campas's name, called upon her resources. She arose from the piano bench with her inveterate air of kindness and gentleness, and offered Campas her hand, and bade him welcome. Only Hal, who was clairvoyant in respect to Celesta, perceived how terrified she was. Campas's eyes gave a painful roll in her direction, and returned to Hal. He had not spoken at all.

Campas dropped in a chair. One could almost see the thought working in his slow brain that he must keep a grip on himself in such a place. But his feelings were too strong for him; his murderous glance was continually dragged back to Hal's face.

It was a shocking display there, in that pretty, sophisticated little room. The savagery of the man was accentuated by the fact that he was wearing evening dress, although it was Sunday night. It was a well-cut suit and it became him, albeit the effect was marred by too showy a display of studs and rings and patent leather. Roger was still making agreeable conversation, but his words were lost as on a great wind.

Very much against his will, Hal saw that it was up to him to save the situation. It was a bitter, bitter dose to his pride to retire and leave the other man in possession of the field, but he could do even that for Celesta. She must not be frightened.

It was unthinkable that she should be exposed to an ugly scene there in her own house. In himself Campas did not seem important to Hal. Hal could not be jealous of such a one. That such a one should aspire to Celesta was simply grotesque.

After allowing a decent interval to elapse Hal arose. "Almost time for my train," he said.

Celesta jumped up from the piano bench with an exclamation on her lips, but the expression on Hal's face caused her to withhold it. He took her hand. He saw that she intended to come into the hall with him.

"Don't leave the room," he murmured. "I'll write." Aloud he said: "Good-by. I've had a wonderful time."

Celesta, with downcast eyes, let him go.

Roger accompanied him out into the hall. He was more nearly friendly than he had been all day. Nevertheless, there was a tinge of contempt in his manner. He was grateful to Hal for cutting the knot, but at the same time it pleased him to think that Hal had been scared off by the other. Such was Roger. He was warm in his expressions, but he did not invite Hal to come again.

Hal had two hours before his train left. He walked up one street and down another, thinking hard. Gradually the resolve took shape in his mind not to return to Philadelphia.

"Roger is certainly running crooked," he mused. "That would explain everything. Nothing else explains things. This Cora Divart or Tudor, or whatever she wants to call herself, has the look of an accomplice, a go-between. I believe Roger's up to something right now, something big! Looks as if he'd taken Campas in on it to keep him quiet. Campas and Roger pals! Good God, what a horrible situation! If the police descended on them, Celesta would be taken with the others! What can I do? Useless to warn her. She'd turn on me. I haven't any proof. If I could only show some connection between Roger and Barkdull! There's one thing I can do. Stay near her!"

He had the money for his return ticket to Philadelphia. He sought out a cheap lodging house and engaged a room. Before turning in he wrote two letters; the first to his landlady in Philadelphia asking her to send him his things—surely she ought to do that for him since she was in a week's board paid in advance; the second to Celesta. This one was rather disjointed; that was because his heart was too full of what must not be uttered. It read:

DEAR CELESTA:

I have decided not to return to Philadelphia. I can get a job in this town just as well, and then I can see you occasionally. But I won't come to the house. It's not on account of Campas, of course. He's a joke. But your father doesn't like it. Maybe you'd meet me outside once. But you must do what you think right about that.

I have taken a room at the above address.

As soon as I find a job I'll send you that address, too, and the telephone number. I would like to have you feel that you can get hold of me at any time. The reason I wouldn't let you come out into the hall was I didn't want that fellow to break out there in your house. He's a sort of wild man. You mustn't take him seriously. He's a joke. I wanted you to come.

I'm going to bed now. Good night, Celesta. I shall be thinking of you. I'm always doing that. Remember, there is nothing, nothing, you could not ask of me.

HAL.

CHAPTER XV.

CAMPAS.

MEANWHILE, Hal's departure automatically relieved the tension in the Adam drawing-room. Campas came to himself. He evidently believed that he had driven his rival off, and a certain complacency showed in his heavy face. Roger, cursing both young men in his heart, still played the affable host, and Cora waited patiently for an opportunity to talk privately with Roger.

"I don't like that fellow," Campas said. "I guess he saw it all right."

Celesta had left the piano. At this speech her eyes went down, and a faint red spot arose in either cheek.

"We all saw it," Roger declared with a laugh. "Your methods are a little too direct for the drawing-room, Campas."

The hint was wasted. "I always show what I feel," Campas asserted. "And speak out what I think."

"Admirable!" said Roger dryly.

"He doesn't fit here," Campas went on. "He's got no refinement. That suit he had on looked as it had been slept in."

Roger saw that another word would provoke an explosion from the gentle Celesta, and he made haste to say lightly: "Oh, Hal's a good fellow in his way. Won't you give us some more music, my dear?"

Celesta, thankful for the diversion, went back to the piano.

The instrument was a small grand. When Celesta sat down to play Campas stood in the hollow of the piano case, and leaning on his elbows watched her hungrily.

She kept her head down, but even so, was aware of the strained gaze of his little eyes, full of pain, perplexity, resentment. She could have been sorry for him had not the eyes also suggested a mindless, savage nature that revolted and frightened her. Her fingers stumbled over the keys.

Under cover of the music he whispered to her: "Do I look all right to-night?" There was no vanity in the question, but a great anxiety.

Celesta marveled at his simplicity.

"Why, yes," she murmured, without looking up.

"No, but tell me what you think of it. I got this rig for you."

"You shouldn't have done that."

"Why not? I want to please you. It's all I care about. You must tell me if anything is wrong."

"You look very nice, I'm sure."

"You could soon make a gentleman of me."

Celesta deliberately played a false chord. That was her retort.

"Can't you fix it so I can talk to you alone some time?" he whispered urgently. "It's so hard to talk to you when other people are in the room."

"I can't very well ask them to go out," said Celesta.

"No, but girls can always manage. Let's sit down on that sofa in the back room. They couldn't hear then."

"Don't you like my music?"

"I have no ear for music. Come on back."

Celesta shook her head.

He scowled. "Why not?"

"It—it would look too conspicuous," she answered at random.

Roger, aware of Celesta's growing distress, spoke up: "Play Traumerei, daughter."

"It's too difficult," said Celesta. "My fingers are all thumbs."

"Aw, come on back!" whispered Campas.

Disgust overcame the sensitive Celesta like a physical nausea. She suddenly arose. "In fact, I can't play at all to-night," she announced. "I'm murdering everything." She went into the front room, and Campas perforce had to follow.

"Are you not well?" Roger inquired solicitously.

"I have a headache," she replied, putting her fingers to her temples.

"My poor child!" said Roger. "You should go right to bed. I'm sure Cora and Campas will excuse you."

"If you don't mind," Celesta said, smiling deprecatingly at each in turn.

Cora excused her with alacrity. Campas frowned without speaking. But the door was open to freedom, and she cared little for his scowl. She went upstairs with a thankful heart. Just to be rid of the man's presence was like recovering from an illness.

Roger and Cora conversed together as a cover for Campas's boorishness. Campas said never a word, but sat scowling at the floor. Finally he got up, and, with the most abrupt leave-taking, walked out of the room, and, getting his things in the hall, out of the house.

"He's dangerous," said Cora apprehensively.

"Not now," Roger declared, with a bitter shrug. "The money will keep him quiet."

"This can't go on," said Cora.

"I don't intend that it shall," said Roger.

"What are you going to do?"

He declined to take her into his confidence. "I am taking my measures."

Cora, with a shrug, proceeded to her main business. "I saw Barkdull to-day."

"Well?"

"He declines to come up here."

"Ha!" exclaimed Roger.

"He gave me a check for the proceeds of the two bonds you handed him in the infirmary, but he says your rashness in breaking out of prison has put him off the job."

"You explained to him how that happened?"

"Of course. He merely smiled incredulously.

Roger's lip curled. "He's angling for better terms."

"He said he'd be glad to see you any time you cared to run down to Philadelphia."

"Exactly! That would be putting myself right in his hands." Roger strode up and down the room, rubbing his stubbly mustache. "It's damned awkward!" he went on. "One needs time to play a man like Sol Barkdull properly, and I'm pushed for time now."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'll write to Barkdull to-night. The kind of letter that ought to bring him. I know him pretty well. If it doesn't bring him—well, I'll have to go down there, that's all. I'll have to raise the ante."

After two tight-waisted days Hal succeeded in landing a job at miserable wages in an obscure garage south of Washington Square. The only advantage it had was in being near Eleventh Street. He wrote to Celesta at once, giving her the information, and casually mentioning that he would spend his luncheon hour next day in the square.

She went to him there. She had not mentioned to Roger that Hal had remained in New York. In order to get out of the house she had to tell a lie, for which her conscience reproached her, but she rather enjoyed the excitement. It has been guessed before this that there was a spice of the rogue under Celesta's air of breathless diffidence.

The old square was crowded. More than at any other spot in New York, perhaps, extremes meet there. Some of the most aristocratic houses in town face the north side; and some not at all aristocratic the south side.

Celesta was beautifully dressed, and people stared. They stared harder when they saw her put out her hands so gladly to the roughly dressed young mechanic.

Their stares spoiled the meeting for Hal. There was no place they could go to escape them. He quickly made up his mind that he would not allow her to subject herself to this again. Hungry as he was for the sound of her voice, he made believe that he had a rush job at the garage and must go right back.

Celesta's face fell. "To-morrow, then?" she suggested.

Hal shook his head. "It's useless to

plan it," he said. "Work is so irregular at this shop I can't tell when I can get out. We might go for a walk on Sunday," he added wistfully.

"All right," Celesta agreed. "But Sunday's so far away."

"I'll write every night."

She walked to the south side of the square with him. As they were about to part Hal said somewhat diffidently:

"There's something I'd like to ask you, if you don't mind."

She looked her question.

"Do you remember the man who came to see your father in the infirmary the day of the big upset? A banker he was, Chalmers by name."

"I remember him," said Celesta. "What of it?"

"Is your father still in communication with him?"

"I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"He hasn't been to the house, then?"

"No."

"Will you let me know if he comes—or if you hear anything that shows your father is still in touch with him?"

Celesta looked troubled. "I think you ought to tell me what is on your mind," she said. "If you still have some ridiculous suspicion of father—"

Hal was terrified of splitting on this rock again.

"Not of your father," he declared quickly, "but this fellow Barkdull."

"Barkdull?" Celesta repeated, perplexed.

"That is his right name. Chalmers is just an alias. He's a crook. I stumbled on the evidence in Philadelpha, where he lives."

"Do you mean to suggest—" Celesta began indignantly.

But this time Hal had prepared his line in advance.

"I'm not suggesting anything about anybody but Barkdull," he said doggedly. "He's a crook, and I can prove it. If Mr. Manion has no further connection with him there's no use bothering him about it. But if he is in with him in any way he ought to be warned against the fellow."

"Oh," said Celesta, mollified.

Hal breathed freely again. He considered that he had negotiated this difficult corner rather cleverly. "Then, you'll let me know if you hear anything of him?" he asked.

"Yes, I'll let you know," Celesta replied.

They parted. Half hidden behind a tree, Hal watched her wistfully until she was out of sight.

Sunday *was* a long way off. Already by eight o'clock that night the ache in his breast had become almost more than he could bear. The inevitable happened. As soon as the streets became dusky he turned into Eleventh Street, and with his hat pulled down over his eyes, walked up and down the other side of the street, glancing at the trim little Georgian house with something of the same look in his eyes that he bent on its mistress when he thought himself unobserved. There was some satisfaction even in looking at the house, though the darkened windows suggested the occupants were out—but not much.

On the following night he returned a little earlier. This time he had the luck to see Celesta descend the steps wrapped in the dull silver cloak with the white fox collar. That was worth something. She and Roger got in the little car and drove away.

On Thursday night of this week the occupants of the little house were favored by another call from Campas. Roger, for reasons of his own, had proposed that they spend this evening at home. He was in a restless state. Under the circumstances Campas's call was doubly inopportune.

"He asked for Miss Manion," said Etienne.

"Oh, do I have to see him?" Celesta murmured imploringly to her father.

Roger rubbed his lip in damnable perplexity. His heart was with Celesta, but great affairs were hanging in the balance. He had had disastrous experience of Campas's violent nature in the past. At this juncture an explosion must be averted at all costs. The gentle Celesta had to be sacrificed to a certain extent.

"She will be down directly," he said to Etienne over Celesta's head.

"Oh, father!" Celesta whispered reproachfully.

Roger drew her hand under his arm and patted it.

"Of course I will go down with you," he said.

Turning into the drawing-room Roger cried genially: "Hello, Campas!"

Celesta bowed and smiled. Outwardly, Campas looked very sleek and trim in his evening dress, but his eyes were still the eyes on an elemental, dangerous man.

"So glad you found us at home," Roger declared. "Celesta and I were boring each other to extinction. It's only natural that she should find her old dad tiresome at times."

Celesta hated to stoop to dissemble before one whom she disliked so much, but Roger forced the attitude on her.

"Dad, you know that's not so," she said with a stiff smile.

"We had expected to go out," Roger went on, "but I suddenly recollected a man had half promised to call on business to-night. Nowadays the pace is so swift that business even slops over into the evening. He probably won't come, anyhow."

Roger was overdoing it. His unusual geniality only had the effect of making Campas suspicious. Roger cared very little for that. His object was simply to stun him with words and keep him quiescent. So he rattled on about anything that happened to come into his head, while Celesta sat with her hands in her lap, wretchedly trying to second him. Campas became more and more sullen, but did not know how to interrupt the glib flow. Meanwhile, Roger's restlessness increased. His ears were pricked for sounds outside the room, and when a car was heard to stop outside, good as his self-control ordinarily was, he could not forbear springing to the window and peeping around the blind.

When he turned around his face was all alight. "It's the man I was expecting," he said. "I did not really think he'd come. You won't mind excusing me, I am sure."

The door bell rang. Celesta was so appalled at the prospect of being left alone with Campas, that she never noticed her father's unusual excitement.

Half way up the stairs Roger leaned over the rail to intercept Etienne. "You may bring the gentleman up to the living-room."

Celesta was fairly panic-stricken. She received a subconscious impression of a well-groomed, dark gentleman passing the door on his way upstairs, but she did not look at him.

She could not look directly at Campas either, but was nevertheless aware of something savage that leaped nakedly out of his eyes as soon as Roger left the room. Her only recourse was to talk. She was not so glib as her father, but she did her best, assuring herself meanwhile that she was a fool to be so frightened.

What harm could come to her there in her own house with her father immediately overhead, and the three servants within call? But all the time, something primitive within her, that had nothing to do with houses and servants, continued to tremble.

Campas suddenly said hoarsely: "He's left us alone. I never thought he'd give me a chance alone with you. I suppose he'll be back shortly. There's something I got to tell you."

Celesta made believe not to hear him. Conscious that it was a silly expedient, she could think of no better. She talked on faster, her voice pitched a little higher.

"Ah, cut it out!" Campas exclaimed with a violent gesture. "This has got beyond parlor manners. No man has any call to go on suffering the way I am. I can't forget you for a minute. I'm no good for anything. I scarcely know what I'm doing any more!"

Celesta's pretenses collapsed. "Mr. Campas, you mustn't!" she gasped. "I'll have to leave the room."

Like an animal, he glided between her and the door, and closed it. He put his back against the panels.

"You got to listen to me," he muttered. "I won't get another chance. This can't go on. I've reached my limit."

She attempted to face him out. "What is the matter with you?" she demanded.

"You know!" he said.

Her eyes fell. "I can't help it," she whispered.

"You can! You can!" he asserted

hoarsely. "It's up to you. I'm near done." He brushed the back of his hand across his eyes. "You can save me if you want. Only you can. You know how."

"No! No!" she murmured, shaken by a profound shuddering.

He was panting for breath, and his outstretched hands were trembling incontrollably. There was a terrible physical eloquence in him that turned Celesta faint with repulsion.

"This feeling I have for you gives me the right to speak," he went on. "It's no ordinary feeling. No man will ever want you as I want you. You can have me body and soul. You can break me up and throw me away if you want!"

He had backed her by degrees to the fireplace opposite the door. She leaned against it with closed eyes, and faintly shook her head.

"Open your eyes and look at me," he said. "You got to believe what I'm telling you. It's not just threats. I tell you this thing has grown to be too strong for me. Well, if it's going to do for me anyhow, I'm going to have you before I go! Better give yourself to me with a good will."

He dropped his heavy hands on her shoulders and a low cry broke from Celesta, a cry so sharp with horror that it pulled him up. His arms dropped down.

"Am I so awful to you?" he demanded hoarsely.

Goaded beyond endurance, Celesta cried:

"Yes! Yes! If you took me in your arms it would kill me with disgust! Go!"

He stood staring at her stupidly. Slowly his face turned livid. When he began to speak his words came in gasps like an exhausted runner's. "Disgust, eh? Does that damn Bainton disgust you too? I guess not!"

Anger came to Celesta's aid. "How dare you!" she said.

A harsh croak of laughter escaped him. "Ah! Your fine lady airs can't scare me now," he said. "Nor your silks and pearls! I'm too far gone! If it *is* him, by God, I'll kill him! I'll kill any man that comes between us! And you, too, if I can't have you! You, too!"

He ran from the room. When the front door closed behind him, Celesta sank suddenly in a chair. But she did not faint, nor even weep. Inside her there was just a mad welter of sensations. She had the strange feeling that somehow she was not finding the effect of Campas's conduct as terrible as she ought.

There was a sort of spring in her breast—a spring! a fountain rather, gushing up; something suddenly released! Exhilaration! How strange at such a moment! But she seemed to have been robbed of the power of thought as well as of motion.

However, a sound from the room overhead galvanized her into motion again. She thought the men were coming down. Springing up, she ran upstairs and thankfully got the door of her own room closed behind her. She flung herself down on her bed, wreathing her arms about her head as if to keep off something.

She was horrified by what had happened; she was terrified for Hal's safety (she never gave a thought to her own), but she merely glanced at these feelings in passing; they had to wait. There was something much greater; something that caused her to burrow her hot face in the coverlet in the effort to avoid facing it; something neither bad nor good, but simply overwhelming.

By and by, still at the mercy of her sensations, she sprang off the bed and, flinging herself into the chair at her desk, drew writing-paper toward her with trembling fingers. The phrases tumbled headlong from her pen.

DEAR HAL:

Come to me as soon as you get this in the morning. You can make some excuse at your work. Never mind how early it is or how you're dressed. I'll be up. I must see you. I'd come to your lodging house to-night if I could only think of some way to get out of the house and in again. How wild this sounds! Don't let it scare you. It's simply that I have just realized things. I've realized all you've done for me the past weeks, and without ever saying a word for yourself! And me, I took everything you did for me for granted, like a child! What a child I have been! Oh, I do hope my childishness has not outwearied you! I am a woman now.

At this point in her letter Celesta was interrupted by a tap on her door. It was

Roger. He looked at her keenly. She instantly made her face a pleasant, open mask. She seemed suddenly to have learned guile, with other things. Her instinct told her her father was no safe guide in this crisis.

"Chalmers has just gone," Roger said. "I was surprised when I looked in the drawing-room and found it empty. Where's Campas?"

"He soon left," she explained coolly. "He had an engagement."

Roger had his instincts, too. He knew in his heart that something disagreeable must have happened, but with his inveterate impulse to stidestep the disagreeable, he chose to accept Celesta's statement at face value.

"You're all right?" he inquired.

"Quite all right," Celesta replied.

"Everything will be cleaned up to-morrow!" he declared gayly. With this cryptic assurance he bade her good-night.

Celesta flew back to her letter.

Be sure to come as soon as you get this. The first postman comes at eight or shortly after. You will be just arriving at the garage when he comes. Oh, Hal! My heart reproaches me every time I think of that horrible garage, and your dreadful lodging house. I know it must be a dreadful place because you never speak of it. When you ought to be saving people's lives as a doctor, and living at least in comfort. And all my fault. How could you let me!

I hope you still have your pistol. I want you to promise me to carry it with you wherever you go. And be on the lookout against that man Campas. He has made threats against you. Don't laugh at this. It is serious.

I shall be looking for you in the morning.

CELESTA.

She was about to seal her letter, when suddenly the name of her father's caller appeared out of her subconsciousness where it had dropped unheeded. Agitated as she was it had no particular significance to her, but she recollected she had made Hal a promise. So she took her letter out of the envelope and added a postscript.

That man from Philadelphia, Chalmers, was here to-night to see father. I promised to let you know.

Celesta rang for Valerie. Every night nearly, Valerie carried her letter to the corner box. But never before a letter like this.

"It's not too late, is it?" asked Celesta anxiously.

"No, mademoiselle. 'E don' come to our corner till 'alf past eleven."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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MOMENTS

A BREATH of lilacs o'er a sill,
Spring's first peepers down the hill,

The sight of distant-tossing seas—
Has life dearer ecstasies?

A flight of wild geese crying north,
Stars from spent clouds breaking forth,

The first sweet certainty of one
At last by hopeless loving won—

Can life, with all her poignancies,
Stab hearts with sharper times than these?

Perhaps not life; perhaps we must
Seek brighter rainbows in the dust.

T. Morris Longstreth.

The Heart of a Cake-Eater

By CARROLL JOHN DALY

THE Cake-Eater stepped out upon his front porch and, after giving a determined pull to his already overabused coat, tripped lightly down the steps. His pace was moderate, more than moderate; it was the pace of one who has nothing but time, and plenty of that. A few hasty tugs at his tie and a gentle twirl on the silk handkerchief which protruded from his breast pocket at a dangerous angle, and he was ready.

There was no well-founded reason for it, but the Cake-Eater always felt that he was ready. Without such a feeling he would have been sad, very sad indeed, and this summer afternoon he was bursting inwardly with song. He felt that he was perfect; that is, as perfect as he could possibly be in his own neighborhood. He would have liked to swing a cane, but such a display of gentility would have invited unkind comments if not actual violence on the block where he was born and brought up.

Now, the Cake-Eater's appearance of leisure was part of a deeply laid plot. In reality he was in a most desperate hurry, and had been so for the past two weeks. Always he came slowly down the steps and sauntered aimlessly to the corner. His left foot turned that corner with the same indolent procedure with which it had carried him the last half block, but the right foot took life the moment the left had disappeared from view of the window. Once around that corner, he made speed. It was two o'clock when he turned the corner, and he must be at a certain spot some ten blocks away at ten minutes past the hour. His pace to the corner was for the benefit of

those who might watch from the window; his pace from the corner on was for the benefit of himself, his rapidly moving heart, and the fair Millicent who awaited his arrival. The Cake-Eater was eighteen and in love.

There was one whom the Cake-Eater did not fool; one who had lately studied his ways, and found food for thought in his actions. Chester Robinson, aged twelve, took up a position of vantage across the street, where he could witness the departure of the Cake-Eater from his habitat and his sudden awakening as he turned the corner. To the active mind of Chester this savored of mystery and was in tune with his professional dignity. For, since first taking note of this strange behavior, he had become a detective.

Three times he had unsuccessfully attempted to trail the Cake-Eater. Five blocks was the best he could do. Here the trail vanished into thin air. He was baffled, but not discouraged. Of course he could have followed him, but that was not playing the game. He must give him five minutes start and then trace him. To follow him outright and see where he went was a clumsy way of doing business and too easy to be considered. Besides, the very best detectives invariably lost their man after the first half block, and from then on took weeks to pick up the lost clew and trace the culprit to his lair. Chester was too modest to improve the custom of the élite.

To-day he was in a glowing mood; there was new hope. He had purloined his father's camera and snapped a picture of his man. The fate of the Cake-Eater lay within the palm of his hand. Loitering, looking in shop windows, and careful to convey the impression that he was simply taking a stroll, Chester made the five blocks to where the trail of the Cake-Eater grew cold. A man who sold carnations helped him along another block, where he stood in front of a haberdashery deep in thought.

Two minutes later he entered the store with an air of nonchalance which drew the attention of A. Cohen, the proprietor.

"What do you want?" A. Cohen eyed the small boy suspiciously, but hopefully.

"Lost anything lately?" Chester regarded the man with a look of deep concern.

"No, I haven't. What do you want?" Mr. Cohen did his best to catch a glimpse of the photograph which Chester held tightly in his right hand.

"Not yet, eh?" Chester shook his head.

"What do you mean—not yet?" Mr. Cohen leaned far over the counter and fixed his beady eyes upon the boy. "Did you expect I was going to lose money?"

"Well, no. Daughter, or somethin'."

"I have no daughter."

This was plainly disappointing.

"Oh, you haven't—you haven't, eh? How do you know you haven't?"

"How's that?" The dealer stepped from behind the counter.

"Here, look at that." Startled by Mr. Cohen's sudden advance, Chester thrust the snapshot into the man's hand. "Do you know that man?" he said in his best professional style; and as Mr. Cohen looked at the picture and gulped Chester took courage. "You don't need to say nothin'. You know you better not say nothin'. Do you know that man?"

"What's he been doin'?" A. Cohen had unpleasant recollections of his previous dealings with the police.

"What's he been doin'?" Chester mimicked the shopkeeper's docile tones. "There's lots of people who'd like to know what's he been doin'."

"Is he your brother, little man—your big brother, what's been a little wild?" He patted Chester on the head in an ingratiating manner. "There, there, tell your papa that Mr. Cohen is as silent as the grave."

"Here, give me that picture." Chester snatched the photograph and started toward the door. He was not overpleased with A. Cohen's familiarity; he was really suspicious now. He had read "Oliver Twist," and understood parts of it.

"I didn't do no more than sell him a cane." Mr. Cohen followed him to the door. "I thought he come by the money honest. He just wanted to leave the cane here, because he thought his friends would laugh at him. Now he calls for it 'most every day and takes it to the theater with

him. Tell your papa I can't return the money, 'cause the cane's all scratched. But I'll put him out o' here—him and his cane."

There was more, but Chester did not wait to hear it. He felt that he had done enough for one day. If nothing serious came of this little misunderstanding, he would continue with the cane to-morrow.

About five minutes after six, from his favorite position, Chester watched the Cake-Eater return. He was red, but not from running. It was quite apparent, even to a stranger, that the Cake-Eater could not run. His walk was halting, weak, and as he came down the street more than one sympathetic friend questioned him concerning his sudden lameness. But Chester knew that a cane, running far down his trouser leg, was the real cause of his stiffness of limb.

But the Cake-Eater held no suspicions that Chester had played a part in the loss of the parking place for his cane. He greeted the small boy as cordially as ever, and met him the following day, with the usual and simple salutation: "Get out of my way!"

And Chester answered him as politely: "Aw, go chase yourself!"

Chester had a clew now—something definite to work upon. He knew that the Cake-Eater visited a theater. That he visited the same theater each day Chester held no doubts. First, he tried a few of the movies. From the startled way the ticket sellers received his curt speech, "Do you know this man?" as he flashed the photograph before them, the boy was convinced that they had taken no note of the Cake-Eater entering their respective houses. That they would not, in the futre, observe the Cake-Eater's entrance without notifying the police, he was also sure. Something told the boy that the Cake-Eater's road to entertainment would not be one of rosy bowers, but rather a pathway of thorns.

Whistling merrily, Chester stepped into the lobby of the only theater in Newton worthy of the name—Newton Hall—where a stock company held forth during the summer months. There was something about the golden columns and gaudy posters that somewhat checked the boy's *sang-froid*. He loitered in the lobby, inspecting with the air of a prospective patron the pictures which told in no hazy manner that a melodrama was being presented within.

A tap on the shoulder made him turn suddenly. A giant of a ticket seller was looking down at him.

"Looking for some one, Johnny?" The man's voice was not unkind, but the huge bulk was hardly assuring.

Surprised into sudden action, Chester dived into his pocket and produced the photograph.

"Know that man?" He tried to keep his voice from shaking.

"Why, yes, I know him." The big man smiled. "He's Milly's fellow. Want him? He's inside now."

"Yep." Chester gulped. It was not what he wanted to say, but the sudden disclosure, together with the size of the informant, somehow made him consider this answer imperative to his safety. He was about to add, as an extra precaution, "And get him quick, or I'll call the police," but something held his tongue. As the man departed, the boy thrust the picture into his pocket and waited, as composed as his inward fears would permit.

A minute later the Cake-Eater and the young detective faced each other. If Chester was fearful of the outcome of this meeting, the Cake-Eater was doubly so; his face was white. That his stern father should hear of his activities in theatrical circles was something too terrible to think upon.

"What do you want?" There was neither hate nor threat in the Cake-Eater's voice. He saw in Chester the avenging angel, and wondered who had sent him.

"Oh, I just wanta go into the show." Chester was regaining his lost courage.

"Who sent you here?" The Cake-Eater's voice trembled.

"No one. I just come." Chester slipped his hands into his pockets. He was thoroughly at ease now. Blackmail loomed up as a pleasant diversion from his detective line.

"No one knows you're here?" The Cake-Eater leaned forward eagerly, a little color returning to his cheeks.

Chester took warning from his attitude.

"No one knows it—yet," he said. "But if I don't return on the last stroke of six, a letter—"

"Oh, that's all right," the Cake-Eater interrupted, greatly relieved.

"How's the show?" Chester put his former request for admission more delicately.

"Why, I can't take you in to-day. You see, I'm broke. Perhaps, to-morrow—" He wanted time to think.

"How do you get in? Don't try to tell me you pay every time ya come here. I wanta see the show—now."

"Well, you see—I get in free. I'm—I'm sort of a friend of the management. You wouldn't understand."

"No? How's Milly?"

"Millicent? Millicent! You know about Millicent?" This was a second shock.

"Yep. I hope no one else hears about her. I'd like to see the show." The threat in the boy's voice was unmistakable. Chester was forbidden the theater, and here was a chance to eat of the forbidden fruit.

"Wait—wait! Don't go, but wait!"

Clutching wildly at his hair, the Cake-Eater turned and dashed madly into the auditorium.

From his distant point at the door the doorman winked at Chester and tapped his forehead.

Chester nodded in silent understanding and approval.

Five minutes later the Cake-Eater returned, accompanied by a young lady of his own age. She was small and chubby, with a great shock of red hair and a nose that was slightly tilted.

A multitude of freckles shone out, like so many stars on a bright night, from beneath a sky of heavy, white powder. A large red star, on the sleeve of a gray uniform, indicated an usher—the head usher.

"Miss Millicent, the manager's daughter." The Cake-Eater hurriedly made the introduction, and then added, that the boy might not hastily misjudge the menial office of the girl: "It's a secret, Ches, but Millicent said I might tell you, since you know so much. Millicent's a great New York actress. She's playing again on Broadway next winter in 'The Suffering Usher.' She is just up here practicing for the part. She's gotta learn by being an usher. Ain't she a wonder? She's doing it all for art's sake." In admiration of the bespeckled Millicent his fears were for the moment forgotten.

"Is she goin' to get me in?" Chester looked up, interested. "She looks a'right," he added. There was no use to throw obstacles in the way of his entrance.

"Yes, I'll take you in, little boy." And there Millicent made her mistake. Her last two words, thoughtlessly uttered, made Chester an enemy for life.

"Well, she'd better hurry. I didn't come for to miss the show," and Chester walked boldly toward the entrance. The future loomed up brilliantly, but it was as well that his victims knew their places, now.

Both the young people could have wrung Chester's neck. But they understood the seriousness of the situation and checked their natural desires. Millicent knew that the Cake-Eater's father abhorred the "profession."

Seated in the vacant back row, Millicent proceeded to pump Chester.

"Do you go out often in Mr. Hobson's limousine?" Millicent indicated the Cake-Eater with a graceful jerk of her thumb.

"Not much. I like our car better. It's bigger." After this falsehood, Chester returned the Cake-Eater's elbow thrust with interest.

"Oh! Is Mr. Hobson very cranky?" she whispered, with an eye to the future.

"He's worse than that." This was a subject that Chester could discuss with some authority. He had an unpleasant recollection of the day he and young George Hobson were caught at the county fair. For ten minutes or more, he entertained the lady with a list of Mr. Hobson's shortcomings. Upon the financial standing of the Hobson's, Chester was also garrulous. He painted a picture of vast wealth.

For more than a week, Chester kept the Cake-Eater company. In fact, he became greatly interested in the young couple and looked upon the little romance with the air of a proprietor. At length Millicent grew tired of the obnoxious presence of the boy,

and put it up to the Cake-Eater in no uncertain language.

"Is he going to be with us all our lives? Is he going on our honeymoon—" She paused and hung her head.

The Cake-Eater felt that there was a tear in either eye. A thrill ran through him.

"I try to get rid of him, Millicent, but it's no use. He just says he'll write to my father."

"But does his father know that he goes to the theater?"

"No, if he knew that he'd skin him alive." A pleasant smile came over his face for a moment, but it changed almost at once to the usual look of deep despondency. "I threatened to tell, but then he'd tell on me. He's an awful bad actor, 'most the worse I know."

"Write his father an anonymous letter. That's what I do, when any one treats me bad." It seemed that there was a hidden threat in her words, but it did not disturb the Cake-Eater. He loved his Millicent better than his life.

For some time they talked it over and at length decided to scare Chester. Millicent, having the most courage, appointed herself as a committee of one to wait upon the boy. She watched for Chester that afternoon, and when he presented himself at the door, she laid down the law to him.

Chester was surprised and shocked at her language.

"Now you stay away from this theater, you nasty little grafter, and if you say one word about my feller, I'll write and tell your old man where you've been every afternoon.

"You better look out what you're doin'." Chester backed away from the threatening fist. "You tell Billy Hobson to come out here, if he knows what's good for him. I can't talk to a lot of women. Ole red head!"

This last remark was too much for the temperamental Millicent. Reaching quickly forward, she took the startled boy by the ear, and despite his kicks, led him from the theater. "Now, you stay outside and if Billy ever catches you, he'll—he'll—"

"He won't do nothin'—the big loafer—ole red head." Chester moved to a safe distance and stuck out his tongue.

Realizing the uselessness of continuing the argument, Millicent retired, her face glowing with victory.

For three days Chester kept clear of the Cake-Eater, and when the young man was assured that Chester was defeated, he received another shock. Chester passed him with a smile—a smile that sent a chill of fear to his heart. A smile that he had often seen upon the sinister lips of the villain at Newton Hall. Chester had laid his plans. Vengeance was his.

It had taken Chester three restless nights to think out his scheme. He could not tell the Cake-Eater's father, for that would bring immediate and terrible retribution. But he could tell Millicent that there was not so much as a flivver to hold up the Cake-Eater's claim to a limousine. The romance would be broken up. Chester had seen the money lust in Millicent's flashing eyes. So it was with a light heart and a sweet smile that Chester approached Newton Hall that summer afternoon.

It began to rain a little and the show was hardly half over. Chester entered the lobby, and while pretending to inspect the posters, kept an eye on the doorman, who regarded the youthful desperado with good natured tolerance.

"What's the matter? Haven't you got the price of the show?"

Chester swung around, startled at the sudden voice coming from his unprotected side. A little girl of twelve, stood regarding him with a look of great sagacity.

"The price of this show?" Chester shrugged his shoulders, disdainfully. "Why, I guess, if I wanted to, I could buy this ole theater twice over. But I don't wanta," he added quickly, having no desire to enter into an argument on the subject.

"Aren't you the little boy I use'ta see in the house with Milly and her feller?"

"I'm the man—if that's what you mean."

"Yes," she laughed. "Milly don't like you."

"I should worry." The shoulders shrugged again.

"I don't like her, neither." The little girl made a face.

"You don't? Who are you?" Chester was interested.

" I'm the manager's daughter, Dolly."

" Another one of 'em. You're ole red head's sister?"

" I should say I ain't! I wouldn't be her sister! She's just an usher. Only acting head-usher for the summer."

" Oh, she ain't the manager's daughter. I suppose, she ain't a great New York actress, neither."

" Milly—I should say not. She can't even play prop parts, when we need extras. I often play parts. Would you like to come in and see the show?"

Chester was thinking — most pleasant thoughts. He would not disturb this romance now, for anything. Let them get married and then find out how they had been fooling each other.

" I said, would you like to come in and see the show? You can sit in a box with me," the girl added.

The invitation was sudden, and Chester was suspicious of a deep laid plot involving personal violence.

" Oh, I don't know—guess not. I gotta meet a man here."

" Oh, come on! Milly don't dare touch you when you're with me. We can sit in a box. I hate Milly."

" Me, too—ole red head." He made a circle with the toe of his left foot.

" I just hate Milly. I wish you'd come in with me. It'd make her awful mad, and her fellow, too—and she couldn't do nothin'."

" Gee—and Billy Hobson, too. I'll go in with you, Dolly. Don't forget, we're to sit in a box."

Chester was handsome enough as boys go, but Dolly had not fallen for his manly beauty, nor was it her dislike of Milly that gave Chester the seat in the box. It was all the nucleus of a plot. The fair Dolly was mercenary and Chester was the victim of her love of money. The show the following week had a graveyard scene, which required two orphans to walk across the stage in the first act. Dolly could be one. Another was needed. Extras in children's parts cost her father from twenty-five to fifty cents a performance. But if Dolly could supply the talent free of charge, she received one dollar at the end of the week. It was a most satisfactory arrangement. Both father and daughter made money.

Chester enjoyed the show. Once, between the acts, Millicent was obliged to pass directly beneath Chester, thereby causing the displeasure of a gentleman on whom she spilt a cup of water. That the old gentleman did not hear Chester's whispered greeting, " Hello, ole red head," did not compensate Millicent in her resentment over the unjust abuse.

The next day, Dolly felt that her charms had already laid the foundation for her financial gain, and she delicately put her offer before Chester.

" I like you awful lots," she said coyly, " and I was thinking how mad it would make Milly and her beau if you was to be an actor. Play a part on the stage, next week—right in front of them."

" Yes." Chester brightened. " Would I be leading man?"

" Well, not exactly; but you'd be the leading boy character."

" Will I—a'right. What do I do? Do I kill any one? Oh, gee! but I can't stay out late at nights."

" That's a'right; you'll be finished in the first act."

" It can't be much of a part. Do I kill any one?"

" Not exactly, but it's almost the same thing. The scene's in a cemetery." Dolly tried to make her voice enthusiastic.

Chester could not enthuse.

" I ain't much stuck on graveyards," he said.

" They ain't real grave-stones. They're only soap boxes." Dolly laughed cheerfully. For once, she felt that she was earning her dollar.

" Well, I wouldn't mind if I was sure." He scratched his head, doubtfully.

" You'll be a'right. There'll be hundreds of people lookin' at ya."

" What kind of people?" the boy asked, quickly.

" Why, the audience, of course."

" They'll all be lookin' at me?" There was a ring of pride in his voice.

" And me, too," she added softly.

Chester looked down at her. " I don't care if they do," he said, gallantly.

"Chester," she smiled up at him, whispering softly. "You may kiss me, Chester."

"What's the matter with you? Do you think I'm nutty."

With this gracious reply he turned and, leaving the already empty theater, plodded along toward home.

Chester rehearsed a few mornings. There was nothing much for him to do; just walk across the graveyard with Dolly. But he grew to like it. The soap boxes, with their gaudy colored labels, had a reassuring aspect. But there was one thing that did not take place in the rehearsal. At the fall of the curtain Dolly was to throw her arms about Chester and kiss him. She pleaded with her father to reserve this until the opening night. She did not say that she feared Chester's refusal, and such a thought never entered her father's head. She said she feared the ridicule of the other actors; Chester might misunderstand their good-natured banter and quit. The possibility of a free performer quitting convinced the manager that this part was not necessary to the rehearsals. It was left for the final effect, at the opening. So Chester went on, in happy ignorance of the indignity that was to be thrust upon him.

And Dolly felt that she had guarded her dollar. She had little doubt of Chester, for she had kissed the boys before, and, after the first shock, discovered that they really liked it. So she counted on the glamour of the footlights and her own frail beauty to hold him.

Came the night—the opening night—and everything was in readiness. The two orphans were in the wings, one of them shaking as though his bereavement was actually of the moment.

"Now!" hissed the prompter, and hand in hand the boy and the girl went upon the stage, into that deserted graveyard, where the moment before two had searched for them. One the hero, with untold wealth at his disposal; the other the villain, with murder in his heart.

Chester's idea of looking out and spotting the Cake-Eater was forgotten. Things seemed different. The soap boxes had turned into gruesome tombstones, and the wind whistling through the trees held an uncanny sound. Altogether the boy felt that the life of an actor was not what it is cracked up to be.

Some one in the audience sneezed, and Chester looked up, startled.

"What's that?" he whispered to his companion. This was not in his part, but it had a good effect on those in the first three or four rows. His voice had betrayed a dramatic ability marvelous in one so young.

"Sh!" Dolly led him to their accustomed seat on a soap box that had changed to a dark gray specter of its former beauty.

Now came the storm; It did not have the metallic clang that it carried in rehearsal. It was real and deadly, and the thunder made him shudder. And then, when Chester thought the curtain was ready to drop, Dolly leaned forward and, placing her arms about his neck, kissed him full upon the lips. The boy came back to reality with a sudden start that shocked Dolly's artistic temperament.

"Hey, look out what you're doin'! Who do ya think I am?" His voice was loud enough for those in the gallery to hear. And then, amid the roar of laughter which followed, he thrust Dolly from him, caught his foot in the covering of the tombstone, and, clutching wildly in the air, grabbed the girl and, dragging her and the gravestone with him, fell to the floor. A gaudy sign, "Adams Soap for My Lady's Toilet," greeted the laughing eyes of the audience.

There, from his recumbent position, Chester looked out into the theater and up into a box. In the dim light he recognized his mother, and held but little doubt that the broad-shouldered gentleman beside her, who scowled through a pair of opera glasses, was his father. Then the curtain fell. His night had been a success—perhaps not a howling success, but the boy felt that the howling would come later.

Disentangling himself from the wreckage, he dashed madly to the stage door and so out into the street. Once in the open, he made tracks for hime. He had hardly opened his front door when the telephone rung. It was the Cake-Eater.

"Lissen, Ches," he said hurriedly, as the boy in some fear pulled down the receiver.

"Go over to my house and get into bed with my brother George. Be sure you lock your front door. You know what a good scout my Uncle Willie is. Well, he's the only one home, and he says he thinks he can fix it for you. I just rung him up."

"But, lissen—"

"Go on—beat it, and don't forget to lock the front door. There ain't a minute to lose."

Anything at all! Chester hung up the receiver, and, after locking his front door, raced to the Hobson house. Uncle Willie met him at the door.

"So you're the actor. I wish I had been there." Uncle Willie laughed as he took the boy inside and handed him a pair of young George Hobson's pyjamas. "Now, undress and make speed."

Without a word the frightened boy ran up the stairs. With quick, deft movements Uncle Willie lighted his pipe and, slipping out to the porch, dropped into a large chair as the Robinson family came down the street.

"Evening," greeted Uncle Willie. "You are a fine father, to go and lock your boy out."

"Haven't time to talk now." Mr. Robinson was somewhat out of breath.

"Oh, I just wanted to tell you that Chester couldn't get in, so I told him he'd better spend the night with George. They're both in bed now."

Mr. Robinson stopped short and swung around.

"What's that

"I said they were both asleep—now."

Mr. Robinson mounted the steps and stood looking down at Uncle Willie. "Do you mean to tell me that my boy is in bed and asleep in your house—now?"

"Why, yes. I didn't think you would mind." Uncle Willie answered somewhat stiffly, appearing to take offense at Mr. Robinson's curtness.

"I beg your pardon." Mr. Robinson hesitated. "I have had a bit of a shock. I thought—I thought Chester was somewhere else."

"He was dead tired." Uncle Willie laughed. "The two of them played hard all day. They were dead to the world when I looked in at them half an hour ago. Yes"—he consulted his watch—"just half an hour ago."

Mr. Robinson coughed. "Of course it is very nice of you to keep him here. I did not recollect locking the door. Besides, I did not expect to go out. But I—" He felt that he was explaining too much. After all, he may have been mistaken—excited at the anonymous letter—the stage was very dark, but surely, with the glasses—"I would like to kiss him good night." His stern visage never relaxed.

Uncle Willie smiled at this show of paternal affection. His smile broadened to such an extent that Mr. Robinson was forced to explain. "I always kiss him good night."

"Well, don't break any hard and fast rules on my account, but be careful about waking George. He's a light sleeper."

"I shall be back in a moment, my dear," Mr. Robinson called to his wife, who still lingered by the steps.

Mr. Robinson listened to the deep breathing of his son as he lay with his head buried in the pillow. Uncle Willie, sensing what ran through the man's mind, turned toward the window, where a looking glass reflected the bed. He smiled as Mr. Robinson gently pulled down the bedclothes and, for the fraction of a second, examined Chester's attire. George rolled restlessly in bed, as the draft disturbed him. Mr. Robinson hastily restored the covers, and with a few mumbled words descended the stairs and joined his wife.

"It is a most peculiar thing, my dear," he said. "But it only goes to show what imagination can do. That letter and my glasses. Why, if I had not seen Chester fast asleep— I wonder what Mr. Hobson must think of me?"

"It doesn't matter. Of course you were mistaken about Chester. I told you it was not he." But what Uncle Willie thought about Mr. Robinson, or what Mrs. Robinson thought about Uncle Willie, never came to light. But she knew her own boy, and did not need opera glasses. But then, Mr. Robinson was very strict, and there were times when she wished that he might be more lenient with Chester. Altogether, she

was more than happy that it was the servant's night out.

The next morning Chester's conscience bothered him when, after breakfast, the Cake-Eater took him aside and told him how his scheme had worked.

"I had kind of a row with Millicent," the Cake-Eater went on. "You see, Ches, she didn't like you, and wrote a note to your father about your being in the play. I told her I didn't think it was the fair thing to do. But I'll make it up with her, to-day. She's a great actress." A light of love shone in his eyes.

"I tell you what." Chester faced the Cake-Eater as man to man. "You lay off o' that dame, Billy. She ain't no actress—she ain't no more than a half-baked usher." Then he told him what he had learned from Dolly. "She was jealous of me 'cause she wanted to play the part. I heard the manager tell her that her legs were too fat."

"Are you sure of what you tell me?" A great light dawned upon the Cake-Eater. Many of Millicent's little crudities were now explained.

"Absolutely!"

"She *is* sort o' fat." The love was dying out of his eyes.

"Awful fat—and full of freckles."

"Well, she *ain't* much to look at."

"There ain't nothin' to her. Ole red head!"

"She use to say her hair was golden."

"You must 'a' been blind. She ain't nothin' but an ole red head."

"Oh, I never liked her much anyway. I was going to drop her, only I—" The Cake-Eater paused; his face grew white. He suddenly remembered Millicent's letter-writing ability.

"I knew you never could see nothin' in her." Chester thought that, after all, the Cake-Eater was a pretty good fellow. He let him down easy. "Ole red head," he finished half aloud.

"Ole red head," echoed the Cake-Eater.

"Let's have a walk, Billy." Chester grew familiar.

"A' right—but I'll have to wait till the mail comes, first. There—there might be a letter."

Chester understood and nodded approval.

"You're a good fellow, Billy. I'll help you watch for the mail. You did me a good turn and—and I'll tear up the letter for you, if you're afraid. I ain't afraid of nothin'. Ole red head!"

BE A WINNER

NEVER give up—never say die,
Just keep on striving;
You'll win if you try.
Don't let the rough waves
E'er knock you out.
Jump up, full of fight—
You will win without doubt.
Rise up each morning
To a new life;
Grin at each failure,
Revel in strife.
Some day success
Will come galloping in.
Keep up the fight, boys—
You can't help but win.

Margaret G. Hays.
8 A

A Boob There Was

By C. C. WADDELL

Author of "So This Is Arizona!" etc.

CHAPTER XX.

"MRS. SCOTT OF PHILADELPHIA."

A BOBBED-HAIR bit of Broadway descended from the train at Guadaljara City, suit case in hand.

There might be skirts just as short from Memphis; there might be heels just as high from St. Paul; there might be blouses as daring from Portland, Maine, and complexions as palpably made up from Portland, Oregon.

But that air of supreme sophistication, that condescending lift of the eyelid which measures everything seen by the standards of Longacre Square, comes from only one spot on the face of the earth. The label is as unmistakable as that of certain brands of talking machines, baking powder, safety razors and cigarettes.

Jean, being what she was, knew just what to do, and how to go about it.

Had she been suddenly precipitated into an Eskimo village, it is dollars to doughnuts that she would promptly have succeeded in establishing herself in the most desirable igloo and securing the choicest cut of blubber.

Unhesitatingly she picked out the best of the flivvers collected at the far end of the station platform, easily defeated an attempt to extort from her more than the proper fare, ordered herself driven to the Palace Hotel, and arriving there, squelched an effort on the part of the hotel clerk to get fresh, and had him assign her to the best room in the house—no stuffy den with a broken window shade such as Bob had got, but the one usually reserved for the Governor of the State on his visits.

All this, without once raising her voice, or even getting her nose shiny.

The fact that she powdered that small but aggressive feature as she leaned against the hotel desk after sending her suit case to her room, was more for its effect on the already subdued clerk than from any necessity.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 24.

"Mr. Robert Moore of N' Yawk stopping here?" she inquired languidly, as she restored the disk of chamois skin to her handbag and drew out a tube of lip stick.

"Well, I don't know." The clerk eyed her speculatively. "His name's still on the register; but from all I can find out, he's changed his quarters."

"Trailing that small-town flapper of his," thought Jean. "Hammock stuff and all that sort of thing, I suppose, instead of attending to business."

Aloud, she merely said impatiently: "Where'd I be most apt to find him?"

"That's what a good many people would like to know; especially the sheriff."

"The sheriff?"

The clerk was beginning to enjoy himself. Here was evidently his chance to get back at this imperious dame. Unfortunately Jean caught the sly glint in his eye.

"Now, look here, Percy," she withered him with a glance; "when I want comedy I'll buy it at the box office. But I'm paying here for courtesy and information; and if I don't get it something is going to happen. That understood, kindly pass the apple sauce."

"Well, ain't I telling you?" he muttered sulkily. "Bob Moore's flew the coop, and the sheriff's looking for him."

"In the name of Mary's little lamb, what for?"

"Murder."

Even Jean's insouciance was not proof against that dread word.

She fell back a step or two, her mouth involuntarily dropping open. Then reaching in her bag again for her chamois skin, she began energetically powdering her nose.

"I can see, Reginald," she observed, "that you're just bursting with the sensational details. All right." She glanced at her wrist watch. "I've got ten minutes I can spare. Spill."

When he had finished she drew a long breath.

"If that isn't hick reasoning for you!" she jeered. "Bob Moore goes out in an airplane to look for this girl and doesn't come back. Therefore, Bob Moore is guilty, and has beat it. None of you stops to consider that the chances are about fifty-fifty against any goof who goes up in an airplane ever getting back."

"Well, people might have figured that way, if it wasn't for Moore's own friends. Pull anything like that on Billy Van Carpen and he just looks worried and shakes his head. And Billy ought to know. He was with Moore in the aviation corps, and was a pal of his in New York."

"So that's what's getting you folks all worked up, is it?" Jean nodded shrewdly. "What kind of a guy is this Billy Van Carpen?"

"Oh, he's a prince. And you don't want to think he's knocking Moore. He says he still clings to the hope that Bob will come back and be able to clear himself. Only, as he told the sheriff, he's got to admit that the case looks pretty black. His idea is, as he let out to one or two people on the quiet, that Moore and Northrup have lit out across the border, and are streaking it down through Mexico."

"Careful about his confidences, ain't he? Just imparts them to a few friends and strangers, and the Seventh Regiment. And makes an especial point of spinning his little surmises to the sheriff, eh? Well, it looks as if I didn't get here any too soon. I guess I'll go over and have a little chat with the sheriff myself."

But as she came out of the door of the hotel drawing on her gloves, her eye was caught by the new gilt of that sign across the street, and she abruptly changed her plans.

"'Van Carpen Oil Company,'" she read. "That must mean Bob's earnest little champion. Deliver me from my friends, as the saying goes. And, 'Exploiting the Rawlinson Tract,' eh? Well, here's a part of the Rawlinson Tract that they're not going to exploit in a hurry."

Then, with a glance at her reflection in the glass of the door to see that her hat was on straight, she sailed across the street, and entered the office.

Her appearance created somewhat of a commotion. The clerical staff which consisted of one blonde stenographer wasn't exactly certain whether this gaudy visitor was a touring millionairess, or merely a vamp book agent.

"Mr. Van Carpen in?" asked Jean briskly.

No, she was informed; Mr. Van Carpen was busy over an airplane which had just arrived for him from Santa Fe. The caller, being a stranger, might not have heard, but a very prominent young lady of the town had either been murdered or carried away, and Mr. Van Carpen was preparing to conduct a search for her. Consequently, it was hard to say just when he would be in.

"Well, isn't there anybody else that I can talk to?" demanded Jean.

"No," again returned the stenographer, but she hesitated slightly. J. P., she knew, was hidden in his private office; but that was the answer she had been told to give if any one inquired for him.

His gloomy forebodings of disaster had not lessened any since the night before, had in fact, rather increased as further telephone messages from Red only reported continued ill-success in finding that lost "package."

Everything to him seemed to be heading for a grand smash-up; and all of Van Carpen's optimistic arguments would not have persuaded him to remain in Guadaljara City an hour longer if he had been in any position to leave.

But he was practically broke; and he could not quite resign himself to abandoning that seventy-five thousand of Bob Moore's which he had come to look upon as his own.

That morning, spurred by the perils of the situation, he had made another try at forging Bob's signature underneath the unsigned acknowledgment, and although not entirely satisfied with the result, had taken it over to the bank.

"Have you got enough currency on hand to pay those three drafts of Moore's?" he asked Jeff Taggart, as he presented himself at the window.

Jeff nodded. "Yes. I prepared for that."

"Then I guess I'll take it," said J. P. nonchalantly. "I've got a lot of options I want to look after."

"But, say, look here." Taggart scrutinized the backs of the three drafts and shook his head. "These indorsements are no good without an authorization from Moore stating that you have shown him satisfactory indications of oil."

"Oh, sure," said J. P. "Didn't I give you that? No," extracting the paper from his billfold; "my mistatke. Here it is."

He stood in an attitude of easy unconcern, his expression absolutely serene, as Taggart took the paper and looked over it. But he was far less easy than he appeared. Why was the teller giving it such prolonged study?

Taggart finally raised his head. "Do you mean to tell me that you have found oil on the Rawlinson tract?" he challenged.

J. P. shrugged his shoulders. "Moore seems to be satisfied of it, doesn't he?"

"This is the signature of Robert Moore on this paper, is it?"

"Certainly. He signed it last night just before he took off in his airplane."

The next instant J. P. could have bitten his tongue out for making that statement: Taggart might know of his frenzied seeking for a fountain pen.

The teller glanced at the paper again. "That might explain it," he said reflectively. "The instrument itself is in Moore's handwriting unquestionably, but there are discrepancies in the signature that would strike any one. Since you say, though, that it was signed hurriedly and under excitement, that might be accounted for."

J. P. breathed more freely.

"You have a sharp eye," he laughed. "I never noticed the slightest difference between that and Moore's ordinary signature. However, it's all right of course, and I can draw—"

"No." The teller shook his head. "I don't think the bank will care to pay those drafts to-day, Mr. Perkins."

"What?" J. P. drew himself up indignantly. "You question that signature?"

"I won't say that. Put it, rather, that I question the circumstances. I don't believe for a moment that there is oil on the Rawlinson tract, but that is none of my business. If Mr. Moore came in here and personally acknowledged this paper as his, I would have no alternative but to pay over the money. But you want me to act on an unwitnessed instrument, signed as you say, under great excitement. Another thing, if Moore is dead, and that is certainly a possibility, I have no right to pay those

drafts. You would have to enter claim against his estate. In short, the whole transaction looks peculiar. So, until Mr. Moore himself directs me to pay over the money, or I receive a court order to that effect, I decline to do so."

There was nothing for J. P. to do. "Very well," he said stiffly. "I will take up the matter with my lawyer." And he stalked out.

But one chance was left to him now; that Van Carpen might be able to put through his fake rescue of the kidnaped girl. In that case, the colonel would be so grateful that he would probably order the drafts paid. J. P. returned to his office, and managing to get into communication with Red, besought him desperately to recover the lost package at any hazard.

However, as the day passed on, he began to question more and more if he had not made a mistake in staying on. Red's occasional reports over the telephone gave no encouragement; and whenever he ventured abroad he found public sentiment becoming more and more inflamed against Moore. This was due largely, he learned, to Van Carpen's insinuations, but he could not stop the latter; they differed as to the course to be pursued.

Van Carpen's airplane had arrived from Santa Fe, and he was busily preparing to start out—would be away, if any trouble broke loose, J. P. bitterly reflected, while he, the unfortunate partner, would be there to bear the full brunt of it.

By mid-afternoon he had worked himself into such a state of nerves that he dared not appear on the street. He imagined that the townfolk looked menacingly at him as he passed; he saw lynching parties in every little group that collected.

Finally, instructing the stenographer to tell any one who called that he was not in, he locked himself in his private office and cowered there in terror.

So, obedient to orders, the stepographer shook her head when Jean asked if there wasn't some one in authority that she could talk to.

But the manicure girl's quick ear had caught the note of hesitation in that negative.

"Too bad." She raised her voice. "I have some money I want to invest in oil properties, and I would have liked to look into this proposition."

Her high, clear tones carried to J. P. in his retreat. A woman with money to invest! It sounded like manna in the desert. He almost burst down the door getting out to her.

"Wait a moment, madam! I think I can give you the information you want."

Jean faced about to meet him.

"And who are you?" she asked.

"My name is Perkins. I am Mr. Van Carpen's partner, and the vice president and treasurer of this company."

"That's more like it." The caller seemed duly impressed. "You see, Mr. Perkins, I have done some business at various times with Mr. Robert Moore, and a week or two ago he wrote me a letter telling me about this Rawlinson tract proposition and asking me if I didn't want to take an interest. Unfortunately, though, I was away from home —I live in Philadelphia—and the letter did not reach me until yesterday at Albuquerque. Then it struck me that being so near I might as well run down here and see if there was still a chance to get in. Am I too late?"

This sounded almost too good to be true. J. P. wondered if he wasn't dreaming.

"Well," he pondered frowningly, "our list is closed, of course, Mrs.—"

"Scott," supplied Jean. She thought "Mrs. Scott of Philadelphia" had a sort of solid, ready-money flavor.

"Mrs. Scott." J. P. bowed. "As I was saying, then, our list is closed; but I think—in fact, I am sure—that we will still be able to take care of a friend of Moore's. That is, to a limited amount, and if the arrangement is made at once. Er—how much of an investment were you contemplating, Mrs. Scott?"

"Well, Mr. Moore suggested— By the way, can't I talk to him?"

"Unfortunately he is out of town just at present, and the matter is hardly one that permits of delay. Won't you let me try to take his place?" He smiled his most disarming smile. "I promise to take good care of you."

"Oh, I'm sure of that," Jean simpered. "As to the amount, then, Mr. Moore suggested twenty-five thousand dollars. But if the prospects are as good as he says, that seems a rather small participation, don't you think?"

"Fifty thousand would certainly be more advisable," admitted J. P. "Indeed, if you felt like going seventy-five or a hundred thousand, it would—"

"No." She began to look a little frightened. "Fifty thousand seems to me about enough."

"And quite right," quickly assented J. P. "I was about to say that if you wanted more than that it would be impossible to let you have it; and even if it were, I would advise you against it. One never wants all one's eggs in a single basket, no matter how safe the basket may be."

This point settled then, he got down his maps and engineering reports, and plunged into a flow of selling patter.

But Mrs. Scott proved to be a little more astute than he had bargained on. Adept though he was at skimming over thin ice, and presenting only the rosy side of the picture, it required all his ingenuity at times to evade her shrewd questioning.

Finally, she balked on the point that his company had only the placer oil mining rights to the property, and no deed to the surface! and from that she refused to be shaken off.

"Ah, but madam," protested J. P., driven at last to the wall, "that surface ownership is under the control of Bob Moore, and we have a contract with him to turn it over to the company."

"May I see that contract?"

With that fifty thousand hanging in the balance, he did not dare refuse. Just as he took the contract from his desk and handed it to her Red rang up again on the telephone.

J. P., with a hurried "Excuse me," dashed into the booth, failing in his haste quite to close the door. The snatches of conversation she overheard excited Jean's curiosity.

"I don't care anything about this sandstorm," J. P. exclaimed testily. "That gir—that lost package has got to be found. Do you get that? It's got to be found, alive or dead. And I want you to search for that fallen airplane, too."

Out of the corner of her eye just then Jean noticed that the blonde stenographer was watching her, and unwilling to arouse suspicion, she picked up the contract J. P. had laid before her, and began to examine it.

But as she unfolded the instrument a loose sheet of paper dropped out in her lap, all covered with more or less accurate imitations of Bob Moore's signature.

"Would you mind getting me a glass of water, dear?" she smiled at the stenographer. Then when the girl's back was turned she swiftly slipped the telltale sheet of paper into her bag.

"I don't know just what it means," she said to herself, "but it's crookedness of some sort, and I'd better keep it. It may come in handy."

CHAPTER XXI.

BROADWAY TO THE RESCUE.

AS J. P. returned from the telephone booth and picked up the discussion where it had been left off, he was pale but determined. One could see that he did not propose to let this woman escape. He was flogged by desperation. By strategic questioning, as he ran over with her the terms of Moore's contract, he learned that "Mrs. Scott" was prepared to pay the fifty thousand dollars that day if necessary. She had brought Liberty bonds with her to that amount, she said. And, with this assurance, J. P. was like a hungry tiger sighting a flock of unprotected sheep.

All his practiced arts of persuasion, all those "rush" tactics which the confidence man employs for the "push-over," he brought to bear in an effort to close quickly. Never had he been more brilliant, more convincing, more ready with just the right answer.

But Mrs. Scott, in her deprecating, feminine way, continued to raise one objection after another. For that fifty thousand dollars J. P. would willingly have turned over

to her the Van Carpen Oil Company, lock, stock and barrel; but he had to dissemble and pretend to weigh and consider the suggestions she made. He had to appear grave and judicial when he was really seething with impatience.

And Jean, noting this from under her demurely lowered lids, and sensing intuitively that he was figuring on a get-away," took pleasure in prolonging his agony.

At last, though, expressing herself as satisfied with the arrangement he offered, she said she would go and get the bonds.

" Why bother to come back here?" urged J. P., unwilling to let her out of sight, lest she might change her mind. " I can take the papers, and go with you for the bonds. They are over at the hotel, I suppose."

But no; she had left them with a friend for safe keeping, it appeared, and naturally she didn't want to intrude her business matters into a house where she was stopping as a guest. She would be back almost immediately.

" That was a downright lie," thought Jean uncomfortably, for she was generally truthful, " but you've got to fight the devil with fire."

So leaving him willy nilly there to wait for her, she pattered up the street on her French heels and entered the sheriff's office.

Meanwhile, Van Carpen, getting his airplane ready for a flight, had been treated to a surprise also. Happening to glance up, he saw another plane just coming down. The noise of his own engine which was running, and his absorption in his task, had prevented him from noticing it before.

Incredulously he gazed at the spectacle. It was almost as much of a shock to him as if he had seen a ghost. Either Moore or Northrup it must be. But which one?

With bated breath he waited until the landing had been effected. Then, as the aviator sprang out, he gave a muttered curse. Of the two, it was the one he least wished to see alive—his *bête noir,* the man he hated with a sort of superstitious dread —Cale Northrup.

Northrup hesitated a moment, then strode swiftly toward him.

The two were alone in the field, except for one or two kids over by the fence; for Northrup's arrival had drawn no especial attention uptown. Those who saw him in the air merely supposed it was Van Carpen testing out his plane.

Trembling and pale, Van Carpen caught up a big wrench as the other advanced, and stood on the defensive; but as on the occasion at the oil well, Northrup made a gesture of contempt.

" I'm not going to hurt you, Van Carpen," he repeated; " not yet. I merely want to know if Bob Moore has got back."

Van Carpen hesitated a moment, then decided that it was better to answer. " Not the last that I heard," he mumbled.

" And nothing been heard from him?"

" Not by me. Perhaps by the sheriff," with a covert sneer. " He's supposed to have him in custody."

Northrup overlooked the taunting response; his face had become grave.

" As I feared," he muttered.

Then he suddenly whirled on Van Carpen, his glance so sternly menacing that the latter involuntarily cowered.

" Look here, you," he said. " There is a long score between us. But if I find that Bob Moore has been crashed in his plane, all the rest sinks into insignificance. I'll never give up until I land you in the electric chair."

" Wh—why should you think I had anything to do with it, if Moore has had an accident?" stammered Van Carpen, his lips ashy.

" Why? Because your face is a confession," thundered Northrup. " But I've got more than that. My own plane tumbled on me last night. By sheer luck I happened to be near my landing place in the mountains, and I managed to make it unhurt. Investigation showed, though, that my plane had been tampered with; and in view of this silence on his part I have no doubt that Moore suffered the same outrage. If he fell, the proof will be found in his plane; and I intend to find that proof, and to lay the responsibility where it belongs, at your door."

And, without waiting for any denial or defense to his charges, he turned and hurried off toward town.

Van Carpen, too agitated and shaken by the encounter and the unexpected calamity of his enemy's safe return to continue at his task, threw down his wrench and followed in the other's course, although by another route.

As he passed through the Mexican quarter, a huddled collection of adobe shacks just beyond the railroad tracks, he saw Pedro, the bootlegger, sunning himself in his doorway; and with a glance around to make sure that he was unobserved he caught the greaser by the arm and jerked him into the house.

"Curse you," he snarled, "you've made a nice mess of it, haven't you? Northrup is back without a scratch on him."

"*Dios!*" Pedro rolled his eyes incredulously. "He did not fall?"

"Fall? Sure, he fell. That's just the trouble. He knows what made him fall. And he intends to prove that Moore got the same dose."

"Zen, *señor,* you must—vat you say?—beat him to it." The Mexican clutched Van Carpen by the lapel. "You have ze airplane ready to fly? *Si?* Zen start at oce. Find ze Señor Moore's plane first, an' burn heem up."

Van Carpen gave a little start.

"That's not a bad idea, Pedro. Get rid of the evidence, eh? I'll leave at once. Or, no: I guess I'd better wise up J. P. first as to what is in the wind. Maybe, too, Red may have run across Moore's fallen plane and phoned in about it. That would help a lot."

"Good! Good!" The greaser seized his hand as he started to dash away. "An' as for zis Nort'rup, 'ave no fear, *amigo.* Ze next time I feex heem so zere will be no come-back."

"But he will be on guard, Pedro. You won't get a chance."

The fellow's malevolent air did not alter. "I feex heem." He wagged his head confidently. "Go now, *señor.*"

Van Carpen, bolstered up a little by the comforting counsel of this ally of his, but still perturbed and uneasy, hastened on to the office; but owing to his delay at Pedro's house, J. P. was already acquainted with the news.

For Northrup had no sooner appeared on Main Street than the people began to pour out of houses and stores to besiege him with eager questions. As he advanced toward the sheriff's office he was surrounded by a crowd which every moment grew denser.

J. P. going to the door to see if there was any sign of "Mrs. Scott's" return, descried this approaching throng, and immediately believed his worst fears realized. A mob had been organized and was coming after him.

Precipitately he dived back to the private office, shouting to the stenographer to keep them off him; to tell them he had left town—was dead—anything.

When the girl learned a moment or two later the real cause of the commotion, she could not keep back a derisive laugh at her employer's panic.

"There's no one after you, Mr. Perkins." Her voice still held a titter as she knocked at the door. "You're quite safe to come out."

"What's all the rumpus down the street for, then?" He emerged, wiping his brow.

"Why, it's just that Cale Northrup has come back, and everybody naturally wants to know if he's found any trace of Faith Howland, or if he knows where this Bob Moore is, and all that."

"Northrup back?" He was as thunderstruck as had been Van Carpen.

What did Northrup know? What was he going to do? A dozen disastrous contingencies flashed to his mind. Had J. P. consulted his impulses at that moment, he would have taken to his heels.

But there was "Mrs. Scott" apt to come back at any moment with that fifty thousand dollars in Liberty bonds. He could not bring himself to abandon that easy stake. So, torn between his cupidity and his fears, he lingered on.

Northrup and his encompassing escort passed by and reached the courthouse, where Cale, freeing himself of the crowd, made his way into the sheriff's office.

There was no one in the outer room as he entered, but hearing voices from behind a partition in the back, he looked through the doorway.

A remarkable sight met his eyes. There the big sheriff stood, backed up against the wall, red-faced and abashed, while a diminutive figure in the garb of a Broadway chicken wagged an accusing finger in his face and stridently laid down the law.

"Don't talk to me about 'incriminating statements,' and 'suspicious disappearances,' sheriff," she was saying. "My answer to all that sort of chatter is simply that Bob Moore couldn't do such a thing if he tried. He's too decent for one thing, and he's too much of a boob not to have bungled it.

"You and your rube villagers are just letting yourselves be played by that *Wallingford* outfit down the street. Everything that I've heard against Bob smells to me like propaganda handed out from that shop. If you want some use for your handcuffs and your hoosegow, there's the pair for you to go after, I'm telling you; and you can also take it on the word of a manicure that those two are at the bottom of this whole rotten mess. I ain't met but one of these birds yet, but that's enough to give me their number; for if ever I saw the fingers of a crook, and I've polished a lot of 'em, this J. P. Perkins is one."

She might have gone on further in her excitement; but the unobserved auditor in the doorway could no longer restrain his approval.

"I don't know you, sister," he said, "nor just where you fit into this business; but you've sure called the turn."

The sheriff looked up at the interruption. "Northrup!" he gasped.

Jean, also, had whirled about; and now at the name she gave a quick cry, and ran over to the man in the doorway.

"Is Bob back, too?" she asked eagerly.

Then as Northrup regretfully shook his head, her face clouded over; but it was only for a moment.

"He will be," she said confidently. "There's something happened to him, of course. Anybody would understand that." with a withering glance at the sheriff. "But I'll stake the little old diamond lavaliere that he turns up all right. He's too much of a boob not to. As the saying is, a boob for luck.

"And I've got something to tell you, too, Mr. Northrup," she went on briskly. "Do you know I've been tracing you down all over New York for the last two weeks?"

"Tracing me?" He stared at her.

"Yes; only to run into you out here in the sticks when I wasn't expecting it. Ain't it a scream?"

"But why on earth were you looking for me?" he stammered.

"You're Lieutenant Cale Northrup, of the air service, who was court martialed in France for cowardice, ain't you?"

"Yes." He flung up his head haughtily. "But—"

"Now, now; don't start freezing. I've got the papers to prove that you were framed on that deal, and—"

"What?" He seized her hands. His own were trembling; he seemed to have difficulty in getting his breath; his words came tumbling out of his mouth. "You have papers to prove my innocence? What papers? How did you get them?"

"It's too long a story to go into now." She shook her head. "We've all got things on hand that can't wait. But I can tell you enough, I guess, to tip you that I'm dealing a straight hand.

"Ain't it true, then," she demanded, "that you were given a written order by your commanding officer to play the coward and crook so that you could help trap a party that was suspected of giving information to the enemy? You did it, but the party you were laying for somehow got wind of the game, and turned the tables by having charges preferred against you. You then discovered that not only your copy of your order, but the one on file had been stolen, and as your commanding officer had been killed, you had no way to clear yourself; so, rather than put up a defense which you knew nobody would believe, you took your medicine."

"Yes," assented Northrup, "that is exactly what happened. But how, in pity's name, did you ever discover it? And, more important, how can it ever be proved?"

"That is what I am just telling you. The party you were after was, of course, the one who stole those orders. But he didn't destroy them. He left them with a lot of

other shady junk in the care of a Frenchman who was an associate of his. This French bird got tired of having that sort of stuff around or something, and shipped it all to his little pal here in the United States. But the only address he knew was mine; so naturally these orders about you fell into my hands. They're in my safety deposit box in New York, for you to use whenever you're ready."

"What can I say?" cried Northrup dazedly. "Do you realize what this means to me? Why, little girl, you've made the world over for me." He broke off overwhelmed with emotion. He could only cling to Jean's hands and pump them up and down in his gratitude.

"But there's one point I don't quite get," he puzzled. "You say, these papers were sent to your address. Are you a sister or relative of—"

"Hold on! Hold on!" She held up a deterrent hand. "I'll be answering questions here all night, if we start in. What we've got to do now is to clean up this business out here; and it strikes me that the best place to start in is at that sucker trap down the street with the new gilt sign over the door.

"Suppose you and I drop down there for a little call? I have an idea that with the trumps we hold in our hand now, we may be able to persuade that pair to come clean with all they know.

"And maybe you'd better come, too, sheriff, and chaperon us," she added shrewdly, smiling up at the big official. "I'd hate to have the party spoiled by any shooting."

Accordingly, the three started out together; but the sheriff, impressed by Jean's suggestion, called Northrup back on an afterthought to make sure that he didn't have a gun, and the manicure girl strolled ahead alone.

J. P., watching like Sister Ann from his office window, spied her.

He had promptly entered a stern veto when Van Carpen came rushing in all out of breath to tell him of Northrup's return and of the new plans concocted by Pedro and himself in view of that calamity.

"Nothing doing," said J. P. firmly. "By dead, bull-headed luck a dame breezed in here this afternoon with fifty thousand berries in her kick. I rigged her up for it, and she's gone now to get the bundle. When she comes back and hands over, we leave. Do you get that?"

When J. P. spoke in that tone, Van Carpen knew it was useless to argue. And, after all, with things breaking so badly, if they could get away with fifty thousand for a new stake, he was satisfied.

"What's the dame's name?" he asked.

"Mrs. Scott of Philadelphia. She's a client of Bob Moore's."

"And it's a sure thing, eh?"

"Sure as I ever saw."

That was good enough for Van Carpen. He went back to look through his desk and gather any papers he wanted in readiness for their departure.

J. P. remained at the window, watching for the return of their victim.

"Here she comes!" he called as the high heels tripped into sight.

"Where?" Van Carpen was leaning over his shoulder.

"There." He pointed to the advancing figure, only to hear a gasp of dismay.

"Mrs. Scott of Philadelphia? Thunder and guns, man! That's Jean Rawlinson, my wife!

"And look"—as two masculine forms caught up with the girl—"she's got Northrup and the sheriff with her. Beat it!"

J. P. needed no injunction to that effect. He was already on his feet and away.

Back through the office they swept side by side, vaulted out of a rear window into an alley, and then through back streets pelted as fast as they could run to Van Carpen's airplane.

CHAPTER XXII.

A MISTAKE IN TACTICS.

ONE of the first rules of the successful office worker is never to betray by voice, act or expression any of the "inside stuff" of the establishment.

This was the blonde stenographer's first job; but the rule had been drilled into her at the business college which she had attended, and she observed it scrupulously.

What she thought of the somewhat unconventional departure of her employers it would be hard to say; but to the three visitors who appeared at the door almost as J. P. and Van Carpen went out of that rear window she presented an unruffled front—unruffled, that is, save for the slow movement of her jaws upon her gum.

"No," she responded placidly in answer to their inquiries, Mr. Perkins and Mr. Van Carpen had both gone out. They hadn't said where they were going nor just when they were coming back. Possibly the surest time to catch them would be in the morning.

"No," announced Northrup grimly; "we'll wait."

The blonde stenographer shrugged lightly as if the matter was indifferent to her, and reseating herself at her typewriter, began clattering the keys.

This pose of unconcern would probably have carried with the two men; but Jean, as she bent an unwavering glance upon the girl, perceived that the latter was beginning to grow uneasy under it. She shifted in her chair, struck wrong keys on the machine and had frequent recourse to her eraser. Also her gum-chewing grew more rapid and uncontrolled.

Suddenly Jean rose and stepped quickly over to her desk.

"Now, look here, kid," she said; "it won't do. Those two bozos is finished. Oh, don't give me that baby stare; you understand what I mean. They're through and done. You're lucky if you ain't been dished for a week's salary. Nothing to be gained by holding out. You see the sheriff yonder; he ain't here just to pass the time of day. So, if you want to keep out of trouble, come through and tell us what you know."

The stenographer crumpled as she realized that she was up against one of her own sex and began to cry.

"There; that's better." Jean patted her on the shoulder. "Now get it all off your chest. Tell it to mother."

But there was really very little that the stenographer could tell. Mr. Perkins and Mr. Van Carpen had both seemed considerably upset all day and had held many whispered consultations, but what about she couldn't say. Then as they saw the three visitors approaching, they had dashed off and gone through the rear window.

As she finished her sobbing recital, a zooming like the buzz of a big bumble-bee struck upon the ears of her listeners. Simultaneously the three crowded to the front door and gazed upward. There, high in the air, was an airplane heading south.

"They're off in that plane of Van Carpen's!" exclaimed Northrup. "I must go after them."

But as he started on a run down the street Jean caught at his arm and held him back.

"Cut out that thrilling chase idea," she protested. "The telegraph is quicker, and the sheriff can attend to that. Our job at present is to get on the track of Bob Moore and that girl."

"But those two could have told us where to look for them," grumbled Northrup as he unwillingly let her drag him back into the office.

"No," she said; "I don't believe they know much more about that than we do. I've just remembered—it kind of slipped my mind in all this excitement—hearing that J. P. talking to somebody over the telephone and ordering this other party to keep up a search for the girl and for a fallen airplane. The other man evidently wanted to give up, he said there'd been a sandstorm, and—"

"That's right," the sheriff interrupted. "There was a reg'lar stem-winder of a sand storm over northeast this afternoon. Sam Bixby had just been telephoning me about it afore the little lady here come into my office. And this unknown party she's talking about was right; if anybody got caught out in that, 'tain't much use looking for 'em. Didn't get no clew as to who this other man on the wire was, did you, ma'am?"

"Only that J. P. called him Red."

The sheriff's brows contracted at the name, and he laid down his cigar.

"There's lots of Reds, of course," he said slowly. "But if it's one I know about—well, I don't know but what 'twould be better for Faith and Bob Moore to have got ketched in the sandstorm than to fall into his hands."

As he sat pondering this matter the telephone rang and the stenographer rose to answer it.

At the hail she quickly covered the mouthpiece with her hand and turned to the little group, for she was now fully enlisted on their side.

"It's the man that's been calling up Mr. Perkins all day," she whispered excitedly; "this Red you've been speaking about. What shall I do?"

"Ask him if he's found anything yet," directed the sheriff.

"He says no," she reported after she had complied. "And he says he wants to talk to the guv'nor himself."

"Tell him to hold the wire." The sheriff rose. "I'll answer him."

But he had scarcely finished saying "Yes, this is Perkins talking" before he began jiggling the hook.

"No good." He turned to the others with a shake of the head. "He smelled a mouse right away and hung up on me.

"Wait, though; I can find out where that call came from." He swung back to the instrument and engaged in a brief conversation with central, and then with a station she called for him.

"It was the Red I was afraid 'twould be," he told them. "And he was talking from the post office at Sligo Springs. They say there he druv off on the Chimney Mesa trail. That means they must be searchin' somewheres about in the center of the Rawlinson tract.

"An' that don't look so good from no standpoint," he added pessimistically. "Just about there, 'cordin' to what Sam Bixby told me, the sandstorm was at its worst."

"Nevertheless, it's a clew," said Northrup, rising: "a shade better than just looking for a needle in a haystack. So don't attempt to stop me again; I'm going. It ought to be easy if Moore has really fallen to spot the wreck of his plane from the air. How Faith could be alone away out in that section, though, I cannot understand. Do you suppose the kidnapers abandoned her out there on the desert to die?"

"Mebbe this Moore rescued her from the kidnapers and then had his accident while they was coming back," suggested the sheriff.

"Huh!" Jean sniffed skeptically. "If there was any rescuing done, more likely she rescued him. Bob oughtn't to be trusted out alone, without a nurse."

"Well, there's no use speculating," Northrup broke in. "The one fact we have to go on is that these ruffians are seeking for both of them in the same locality. So the thing to do is to get out there and have a look-see."

But with all the haste that he could make it was some little time before he was aloft. There were certain unavoidable preparations required, and then, too, he did not propose again to be caught napping.

The man he had left in charge of the plane told him that no one had been permitted to come near it; but not satisfied with this Northrup personally went over every part of it down to the smallest detail, while the curious crowd which had gathered to watch him was kept at a safe distance by the sheriff.

In this crowd was a one-eyed Mexican who did not seem at all pleased by this overexcess of caution; that is, if one were to judge by the scowl on his evil face and by the outlandish Spanish oaths he muttered.

"Nevair mind," he growled under his breath as Northrup finally took off. "I miss you zis time, but I feex you yet. I will watch till you come back; zen I will feex you. Caramba! 'Ow I will feex you!"

It was now after dark, and under ordinary circumstances Northrup would have waited until moonrise; but his impatience to be doing something was too great. He reached the Rawlinson tract very shortly, but it did him little good. Even flying low, he was able to make out but little on the surface in the darkness. He could but put in the time circling aimlessly about and watching the east for the appearance of the moon.

At last it came, a flood of silver spreading across the desert like the wash of a great wave. He speeded up, and following the same tactics that Moore had used the night before, started to cover the territory by a series of concentric circles.

It was on the third round that he spied on the surface about ten miles away what

appeared to be two black beetles crawling over the ground, but which he recognized as motor cars traveling at a pretty rapid rate.

As he headed toward them he saw them veer slightly from their course and halt beside a big sand dune. If he had only known it that dune covered the remains of Moore's wrecked airplane, for some sight of which he had been so vainly straining his eyes.

The halt of the two automobiles, however, was but momentary; then they went on more swiftly than before. Their objective, as well as he could make out, seemed to be a small black spot in a sort of hollow or depression, which because it stood stationary, he judged to be a rock. And yet it was a funny, square looking rock.

As Northrup directed his gaze toward the hollow, trying to make out what this object could be, he straightened up abruptly and rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand.

Was he the victim of an illusion? What was that thread of silver winding back from the hollow across the desert, and shimmering and sparkling in the moonlight? Surely it must be a stream of running water. But how could there be water here? Evidently, his senses were deceiving him. He closed his eyes and opened them to look again. But still the hallucination persisted.

His speculations on this score, however, were startlingly interrupted.

The two automobiles by this time had reached the edge of the hollow; and up through the air came to Northrup a snapping and crackling like the explosion of a pack of firecrackers. But he had heard that sound too often over on the other side not to recognize what it was.

Looking down he could see flashes of fire spitting out from the two automobiles, and a response in kind from underneath the square, black thing which he had taken to be a rock.

He realized now that this was another car, and that its occupants were defending themselves against an attack from the larger party.

"But what's all the shooting about?" he wondered. "Can it be Bob and Faith in the front machine? How did they ever get a car? And, whoever it is, why do they stay there, and fight against such odds? Why don't they run for it? Are they stalled?

"See! The big cars are going after the little one!" he exclaimed, hardly knowing that he spoke aloud in his excitement.

At the same instant he jerked the control stick sharply, and shot down toward the scene of the unequal battle.

On account of the direction of the wind and also probably because too deeply absorbed in their chase and its results, Red's party had failed to hear the sound of the airplane or to note its approach.

Arriving within gunshot of the blocked flivver, they let out a yell of triumph. Not having Northrup's advantage of looking down and seeing the stream of water, it never struck them what was the real cause of the flivver's stoppage. They simply believed that the small car had run into a patch of soft, heavy sand, and so was rendered an easy prey to them.

But their exultant yells changed to cries of rage as Bob defiantly sent a couple of revolver shots winging toward them and managed with one of these to wound the chauffeur of their forward car.

Immediately they responded with a volley; but Bob, with the arsenal of weapons he had gathered from his two captives, and with plenty of ammunition, was able to send back almost as heavy a fire as he got.

He had prepared for the encounter when he saw it was inevitable by piling up all the camping paraphernalia in the flivver together with the cushions into a sort of barricade on the back seat; and behind this Faith and he crouched and poured in round after round against the enemy.

The back and top of the flivver was riddled with bullets, but its two defenders behind their barricade were untouched; while Red's forces, with no cover to protect them, had already suffered a number of casualties.

Their leader, cursing and raging at the unexpected check, realized that he must change his tactics, and ordered his two cars backed out of the range of Bob's guns.

The idea in his mind was to send one of his cars by a detour around in front of the flivver, then, by attacking from both directions, to catch his adversary between two

fires. It was about the best plan available under the circumstances, and would probably have forced Bob to surrender.

But in the lull of firing and as he started to give his men their instructions, the zooming of the plane overhead was borne down to his ears.

He glanced sharply up. Was it a friend or foe? He could not tell of course; and it didn't make much difference. The chances were that it was Van Carpen who, J. P. had told him, would be coming out in a plane; and if it was, he didn't propose to let an employer see him playing the cautious old woman. His chief asset was his reputation as a dare-devil ruffian, who balked at nothing.

If, on the other hand, it was an enemy swooping down from above, the quicker he got hold of Bob and Faith and was able to use them as a shield against attack, the better it would be for him.

Abruptly he reversed his plans, and swearing, swung around upon his men.

"What are you," he snarled, "a lot of miserable rats? Twelve of you; and, by cripes, you let yourself be druv back by one man and a gal. By Godfrey, you hear me; you're going in there. You're going in there, one car on each side of the flivver, and you're going to get them two. I'll be right along with you, both my guns out. But b'ar in mind, I won't be watchin' the flivver; I'll be watchin' you. And the first man I see flinchin' or holdin' back, I plugs full o' holes.

"All set now?" He saw his party in their places, and gave the order to advance. "Let's go!"

Down the slope toward the hollow whirled the two big cars. Bob cut loose with all his artillery, but it did not stay their progress for an instant. The fear of Red among those men was greater than any his bullets could inspire.

At furious speed the two machines reached the edge of the quicksand and plunged into it. Their momentum was so great that it carried them almost to the flivver. Then their wheels clogged and they began to sink.

Whether the fact that they were of heavier build was responsible, or whether it was that they struck a more fluid section of quicksand, they certainly went down much more rapidly than the flivver.

Almost before the ruffian crew recognized their plight, the treacherous sand was up even with the floor on both machines. Then, seized with panic, the occupants went leaping out over the sides in a mad scramble to escape.

It was a horrible scene. The air was full of their shrieks and curses and prayers as they fought against the irresistible grip of the sand and felt themselves dragged down. But gradually, one by one, their voices were stilled.

And it was not long. In less than three minutes the churning surface had resumed its semblance of deceptive calm. All was over.

One or two of the strongest of the party, as by a miracle, did manage to flounder out to shore, where they quickly made themselves scarce; but all the rest of the company, including their leader, perished miserably in the trap.

During the course of the tragedy Faith clung sobbing to Bob, hiding her face against him and trying to shut her ears to the cries of those doomed wretches. And he was almost equally beside himself. Enemies though they were, and murderers, he would have done anything to save those men; but he was powerless. To attempt to aid them in any way would merely have been to sacrifice himself—equivalent to suicide.

And for that matter his predicament and Faith's was not much better. The sand was now up above the floor of the flivver, and oozing in at the crevices of the doors. He could see that they were sinking much more rapidly.

Feverishly he started to toss overboard the articles out of which he had built his barricade; he wrenched loose the top and flung it out, tore away every movable part—anything to lighten weight. But the flivver still continued to sink.

It was at that moment of utter hopelessness that he and Faith suddenly started and clutched at each other.

Like a great bird of rescue, Northrup's plane, which they had hitherto been too en-

grossed to observe, swept down across their field of vision and landed about a hundred yards away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOMETHING THEY FORGOT.

NORTHRUP leaped out of the plane and came running down the slope.

"Who are you?" he hailed; then as he recognized the voices shouting back at him he gave a yell of overjoyed relief.

"And Faith is there, too?" he cried.

It seemed too much for him. Heedless of Bob's warning expostulations, he dashed on down the slope. Evidently he was bent on coming out to them, and didn't intend to be stopped.

Hurriedly Bob jerked out the pistol which he had thrust back into his belt at the end of the battle, and sent half a dozen shots singing to kick up the dust right in front of Northrup's feet. It was the best argument he could think of, and it certainly proved effective.

Northrup stopped so abruptly that he almost disjointed himself.

"Y—you say you are Bob Moore?" he quavered uncertainly. "Don't you know I want to help you? I am Cale Northrup."

"Well, you won't help us any by acting like a locoed jack rabbit," Bob snapped. "This is quicksand out here, and you want to keep away from it."

"Quicksand?" Northrup gaped at him. "What are you talking about? How can there be quicksand out here in the middle of the desert?"

Bob jerked his gun up with an exasperated gesture.

"If you stop to ask any more foolish questions I'll bore you right. This is quicksand, I tell you, and we're almost down in it. It's a matter of minutes with us, man, unless you do something. So get that plane of yours down here and tow us out."

At last Northrup understood the desperate character of the situation. He turned and started pell-mell up the bank; but at the end of half a dozen steps he stopped, struck by a sudden thought.

"It won't work, Bob," he shouted back. "It would only be a waste of time. You know as well as I do that no plane has power enough to yank out that flivver."

Bob recognized the force of the argument. But what else were they to do? There was nothing at hand with which to bridge the chasm between the flivver and the bank, no planks or logs to thrust under the wheels and provide a footing, nothing which could be utilized as a windlass to help them out.

At a loss for any expedient to offer he stood staring horror-struck at the oozy surface about him, now mounting so terribly near. Were he and Faith to perish, with help only a stone's throw away?

Almost equally overwhelmed, Northrup strode up and down the bank, beating his hands, trying to think of some way out.

It was Faith whose wits proved able to solve the dilemma.

"How far are we out from firm ground, Cale?" she called.

He went down to the edge of the spreading patch, and made a test.

"It will bear me up here," he said. "That, I should judge, makes the distance a bit over twenty feet."

"And you told me once," she cried, "that the wings of your plane are forty-six feet long, so they must jut out about twenty-three feet on each side. Why, then, not place the plane sidewise at the edge of the pool, and let the wing stick out to us."

He had caught her idea and was off, almost before she had the words out of her mouth.

Quickly he hustled the plane down the bank to the verge of the quicksand and swung it about into position. The wing reached across the gap.

A minute later both Bob and Faith had crossed the improvised bridge in safety, and were back once more on solid ground.

"And to think that neither of us had brains enough to think of a simple plan like that!" exclaimed Northrup almost disgustedly. "Moore, we're a pair of boobs for fair."

"Well, I never claimed to be anything else," said Bob.

"And what little wit I have went to pot when you started banging away at me with

your gun," returned Northrup. "Nice way you have of welcoming a gallant rescuer."

Both of them adopted this rather light and flippant tone because they were afraid that Faith would collapse or grow hysterical as a result of the ordeal through which she had passed and the tragic scenes she had witnessed.

But they need not have worried. She was a true daughter of the Southwest, with a spirit and resolution that rose superior to feminine nerves. Indeed, of the three she was probably the least shaky and the most composed.

Northrup was already wheeling the plane up the bank away from the quicksand.

"Come on," he said with a shudder; "let's get away from here."

"Not so fast!" protested Faith. "I don't leave this spot until we have posted warning notices all around that patch of quicksand. We can't go away from here, and perhaps allow other travelers ignorantly to fall into that awful trap."

They could not help but agree with her, and although it proved a longer and somewhat arduous task than they anticipated, they kept at it until every approach to the danger spot was fully guarded by their cautioning signs.

As a result of this their return to Guadaljara City was considerably delayed, and they did not reach the landing field beyond the railroad tracks until after one o'clock.

To their surprise they discovered as they came down another plane already in the field.

"Well, what do you know about that?" exclaimed Northrup. "Van Carpen and his pal must have come back after all. Probably they forgot something in the haste of their get-away and thought they could sneak in under cover of night and get it. We'll likely find them at their office."

"Then let's hurry and get there," said Bob grimly. "I'd like to have just about a ten-minute session with those two birds."

Accordingly, the three of them rushed over to the station, routed out a sleeping cabman and told him to get them uptown the shortest way, and to "step on her."

But, although he obeyed instructions in a way that left no room for criticism, they found when they reached the office of the Van Carpen Oil Company that the place was dark and deserted. No glimmer of light showed from within; rattling at the door handle evoked no response.

They were just turning away disappointedly when the sound of a dull, muffled explosion smote their ears from across the street.

"By George!" Northrup caught his breath. "Somebody is robbing the bank!"

He was perfectly right. He was right, too, when he had said down at the landing field that Van Carpen and J. P. must have come back for something they had left behind in the hurry of their departure.

That "something" was Bob Moore's seventy-five thousand dollars which J. P. knew from his talk with Jeff Taggart the previous morning was in the vaults of the bank in cold cash.

"I must get the sheriff!" cried Northrup. "Then we'll go after them."

He dashed away toward the sheriff's residence just back of the courthouse; but he had hardly started when two figures slipped out of the door of the bank, each carrying a suit case, and walked away with an air of unconcern.

Northrup retraced the distance he had gone in about two steps.

"No time to get the sheriff now," he hissed. "You and I will have to land 'em, Moore."

"We will," returned Bob with emphasis; for just then the two figures passed under a street light and he recognized Perkins and Van Carpen.

"Hey, there!" Involuntarily he gave a shout. "You two stop!"

The two figures turned, looked over their shoulders, then as they saw two men coming after them, broke into a run.

"Into the cab!" gasped Northrup. "We can run them down quicker that way."

So into the cab the two piled with Faith, who had not got out when they stopped; and again the driver was given a peremptory order to "step on her."

He did his best, but the cab was a flivver of ancient vintage and stalled on him. While he was trying to coax its decrepit ignition

back to life, Van Carpen and J. P. receded rapidly into the distance.

"We can't fool here any longer," jerked out Northrup. "We'll have to chase them on foot after all. Come on, Bob."

But both of them had been through a good deal that day and night, and were not exactly in racing trim. Even with the weight of the suit cases the other pair managed easily to outstrip them.

By the time Bob and Northrup reached the railroad tracks the plane had already taken off, and was high up above the roof-tops.

Its zooming resounded over in the Mexican quarter of town, where Pedro Ponco, having done what he considered a good night's work, had about an hour before retired to his couch.

He opened his one eye at the sound, blinked, and then his features relaxed into a smile of sweet content.

"I feex heem zis time," he murmured sleepily. "I 'ave feex heem good."

There was no smile of satisfaction on Bob's face, though, as he watched the plane's upward flight.

"I ought to have had better sense than to shout at them," he muttered dejectedly. "It just sort of popped out before I thought."

"Well, there's no use crying over spilt milk," returned Northrup philosophically. "They've got away on us; and that's that. Thank the Lord that cabby has his engine going again; here he comes down the street. Now let's get Faith home and then go to bed."

They could see the girl looking out of the window at the plane's ascending flight as the cab drew up for them. Then just as they started to get in they heard her give a cry and saw her point excitedly upward.

Turning they looked; and in chorus gave a cry no less startled than hers.

The plane, a mass of flames, was swirling cometlike to earth, turning over and over as it fell.

Pedro Ponce spoke advisedly. He had "fixed" it, and "fixed" it good; only he made the error of thinking that the plane he found standing unguarded in the field was Northrup's, and so brought catastrophe to his friends instead of to the man he was hired to get rid of.

When rescuers reached the scene of the crash and pulled the two blackened and motionless forms out of the still blazing wreck J. P. was dead, but Van Carpen, although evidently terribly injured, was breathing faintly and was taken to a hospital.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"LET ME TELL YOU, DEARY."

IT was about noon the next day that Bob came into the bank. He would not have appeared as soon as that if he had not been anxious in regard to the fate of those three drafts which he had indorsed over to the Van Carpen Oil Company, for once in bed, he felt as though he never wanted to get up again.

Yet, to his surprise, he found Faith there ahead of him, looking as fresh and unwearied as if the two days of abduction and all the strain she had been through were no more than an evening of jazz at the country club.

She was talking earnestly to another woman, who, turning as Bob came in, gave him another shock by revealing herself as Jean.

"Mrs. Rawlinson is just back from the hospital, Bob," said Faith, "and she says that her husband—"

He gasped at her bewilderedly.

"Oh, I forgot you didn't know that Van Carpen's right name is Arthur Rawlinson. Well, it is, and he is her husband, although she didn't know herself that he was traveling under the name of Van Carpen until about a week ago. But what I'm getting at is, that the doctors tell her he will live, and she wants when he is well enough to be moved, to take him back East with her."

"Very praiseworthy," murmured Bob; but he did not hail the news with any great degree of warmth.

"I'll tell you how it is, Bobolink," Jean spoke up. "He's been all kinds of a crook, I know; but he's down and out now. He hasn't got a dollar, and although they say he'll live, he'll never walk again, and he's

always bound to be more or less of an invalid. So I feel it's sort of up to me to look after him. The dream you and I had of riches is collapsed; I understand the Rawlinson tract's got no more oil on it than there is pansies at the North Pole. But I guess the little old glass-topped table 'll somehow manage to take care of Artie and me.

"So I want to take him back to New York," she went on; "and I know I haven't any right to ask it, but I'd like to have you folks be a bit easy on him. I just can't bear to think of him being in prison all sick and broken as he is, and that's where he'll go if any of you press your charges against him. Mr. Northrup has already promised, and Miss Howland; and now it's for you to say, Bob."

"Me?" he answered. "Why, Jean, for your sake, I'd connive at letting the worst criminal on earth go free. And I have really suffered at Van Carpen's hands less than any of the others."

Just at that moment Jeff Taggart came toward them with a paper in his hands.

"Oh, Mr. Moore," he said, "just to keep my records straight I want to ask you if this is your signature?" And he thrust out the acknowledgment at the bottom of which J. P. had forged Bob's name.

"My signature?" Bob glanced at it. "Well, I should say—"

But Faith had snatched the paper out of his hand, and perusing it, broke in:

"Surely it's your signature." She nudged him sharply. "You know it is, Bob?"

"Y—yes," he stammered dazedly. "Oh, yes; that is my signature, Mr. Taggart."

Taggart skeptically shook his head, as if the matter was beyond him.

"And do you really have the nerve to tell me, Moore," he demanded, "that you people have struck oil out there on the Rawlinson tract?"

"Well, not exactly oil, Jeff," Faith spoke up. "But water. Enough of it so that it's already cut a stream through the desert."

"Water?" He stared at her. "Oh, that's different. That's better than oil, for with it you can make the Rawlinson tract bloom like a garden. Let me congratulate you, Moore; your fortune's made."

"And I can have a sable coat?" Jean gave a little squeal.

"Any number of them, I guess." Faith nodded. "For it is really your deed to the surface of the property that counts now."

"But what I can't understand," Bob muttered as Taggart passed on, "is why you got me to admit that signature when it is a palpable forgery?"

"Why, that is simple," she explained. "It establishes, don't you see, your interest in the Van Carpen Oil Company, which you and Mrs. Rawlinson will now control and so prevents that corporation, or whoever might get hold of it, from bothering you in any way over your water rights. If you hadn't admitted that signature, Bob, and so confirmed the contract you had with the Van Carpen Oil Company you'd have been nothing less than a boob."

"Let me tell you something, deary," murmured Jean, sidling up confidentially to Faith. "All men are boobs, unless they have a woman to look after them."

THE END

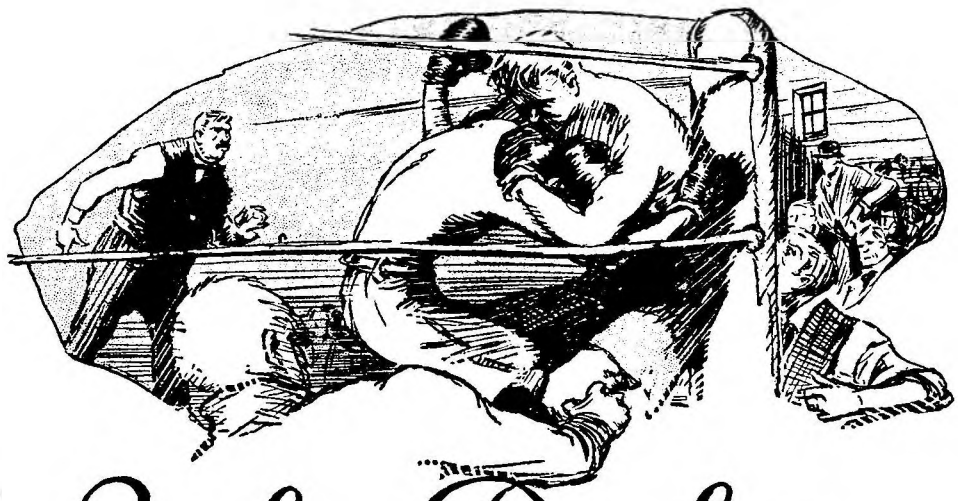
U U U

IMPERATIVE

I CANNOT conquer this mad mood to-night
  Lighting its little fires in every vein.
I can but droop my head on outstretched arms
  And listen to the throbbing of this pain.

There is no quiet for such restlessness,
  No good, beloved, philosophies can do.
The myriad voices clamorous within,
  Demand an answer, and that answer, you.

Frances R. Durham.



Socker Dooley's Deluge

By CHARLES FRANCIS COE

THE Overland Limited stopped at a ramshackle way station. Ready hands bent to the immediate performance of efficient tasks. The huge water pipe was swung out over the tender of the engine. The stop at Holestown was a necessary evil.

From between two cars a dirty figure dropped into the shadows. It had been a long, hard ride. Cinders had rained upon the car roofs and been driven between the accordion wind curtains with the force and sting of pygmy bullets. The figure paused a moment, as if to accustom itself to the feeling of terra firma once more. Shouts from the train crew and a series of grunts and complaints from the wheels put the Limited again upon its way.

In less than three minutes the figure was alone. There was no light in the travesty for a station which marked the point of the world where stood Holestown. The twinkling rear lamps of the train seemed to reflect in the beaten eyes of the lone traveler the mockery of his career.

"I wonder wot dump this is?" he mused as he gazed upon the scene of desolation about him. "Wish I'd 'a' dropped off in Scranton. There ain't nothin' here."

The sound of dripping water came to his ears. It was leakage from the tank which had just supplied the Overland. With a shuffling step the man found his way to the water.

He drank deep of the stream that seeped from the bulging receptacle to leap into space and splash into the cinders at his feet. Then he stripped the large bandanna from his neck and shook the gritty particles out of its folds.

Next he pulled off his cap and slapped it against the tank support. Finally he held his grimy hands under the falling water and scooped quantities of the liquid against his face. Again the handkerchief came into use as a towel.

Along one side of the station he found a bench. Upon this he stretched with the comfort born of experience, and in five minutes he was asleep. In this inglorious manner did "Socker" Dooley fasten himself upon the population of the rough little mining town of Holestown.

Morning brought an unmistakable craving for food. It was a thing which could no longer be denied. The urgency of the need manifested itself with an alarming persistence. He hadn't so much as a dime in his superannuated clothes.

He found the main street of the town, and followed it with the purposeless wandering which proclaims a man's complete disassociation with the whirl of the business world. Socker was down and out: in the picturesque parlance of the masses, he was a bum!

There had been a day when the multitude rose to the mention of his name. That was before his crippled hands had buckled under the shoulder punches that had won him his title. That was in the days of fading memory, when Socker graced the upper rungs of the pugilistic ladder, and beamed upon a kindly world through the transitory lenses of affluence. Now he was a bum.

"It's a great life," he muttered. "A bunch of side-steppin' ribbon sellers is rakin' in de kale fer dodgin' punches dat wouldn't shake up a bottle o' perfume; an' here I am wit' nothin' ter feed me face, let alone anything more. It's a great life!"

Having thus relieved his mind of the philosophy born of observation, he paused to gaze into the murky window of an equally murky restaurant. There was the longing of failure in his battered eyes, the crouch of discouragement in his posture.

Suddenly he became aware of a presence at his side. Habit spoke; he turned to walk away. When any one stopped to look at Socker, it was either a cop or some one to whom he owed money. The moving was instinctive; animal-like in its cowering before a world that had left him foundered in its wake.

"That ear!" some one said: and a hand clasped his arm. "Those eyes, those lips, those nose!"

Now a hand was upon each arm, and Socker was privileged to gaze upon a radiance of checked suit and questionable diamonds. The man who seemed ecstatic over the only trophies Socker had to show for the triumphs which had graced his ring career fairly beamed upon him.

"Oh, boy!" the fellow grinned. "The luck of 'Pittsburgh Phil' ain't nothin' to this! Gawd knows where you come from; an' mebbe He cares! I don't. All I know is—you're *here!*"

"Where am I goin'?" Socker wanted to know.

The stranger ran a speculative eye over the Socker's form, as though to avoid any possibility of error. The glance of appraisal obviously confirmed, even augmented, his earlier satisfaction.

"You're a 'pug'!" There was joy supreme in the tone. "You're a pug—an' there ain't nothin' I need quite so bad right now as a pug."

"I'm Socker Dooley," answered Socker. And it must be admitted that the glories of a combative past asserted themselves in the announcement.

"You're also hungry, ain't you? Come, we will step within the portals of yon hash foundry an' slip the highly advertised feed bag under our chins. The cost is on me, Socker. We're gonna be friends."

Fickle fate! Kindly Providence! Socker would have strode into the jaws of the place that drove Dante's press agent to the effort of his life for those simple words. Man alive! Eats!

"Throw back your ears, Socker," commanded the man behind the shepherd plaid, as he seemed to peek between the gaudy stripes of his silk shirt. "There ain't no limit. Pack in the eats, old kid. Then we'll talk."

Even the acoustics of the place were conducive to appetite. The clatter of pans, the rattle of dishes, the medley of odors, fresh from the kitchen, and the accompaniment of shouted orders for everything from 'ham and' to 'sinkers and slush.'

For forty minutes Socker ate. Sometimes he heard what the other said, sometimes he did not.

When finally he had stuffed to the uttermost of his capacity he raised inquiring

eyes to his benefactor. The latter snatched a cigarette case from his vest pocket. With the dexterity of practice he kept the untarnished side exposed.

"Prosperity, Socker," he began—"there ain't nothin' in the world that shows so quick. We all love a winner, an' winners ain't flashin' nothin' but reg'lar clothes. You can't find no millionaires runnin' round loose with the cuffs on their pants wore through.

"Now, take me." He waved his hand in a gesture that invited the most expert attempt at criticism of his apparel. "Ain't I *snappy*, kid? There ain't no flies in the *same block* with me! Some suit! Some shirt!"

"Looks like a Fifth Av'noo awnin'," acknowledged Socker admiringly.

"I'm there!" grinned the other confidently. "You don't need to *tell* me! An' believe me, kid, the layout that I got now will put us both on the plush!"

"Shoot," nodded Socker. "I'm listenin' so hard I can hear me teeth decayin'."

"Your face is your fortune" was the radiant one's startling comment. Socker knew that there would be a catch somewhere, after that. He was going to feel a lot better when he saw the check for what he had eaten paid.

"Yes, sir, right now, that mug of yours is gonna clean up for us, Socker. Lissen to me. This here town is fight crazy. They got a guy from the mines that has been drapin' 'em over the ropes like a washwoman hangin' out clothes. The miners are clean 'nuts' over him. Think he can lick Dempsey with a chain around one leg an' his eyes bandaged. To-night he fights another miner. I don't know who's gonna win, an' it don't make no diff'rence to us. You meet the winner!"

"I ain't fought in two years," admitted Socker, as he saw the sudden fortune slipping away upon the deadening lack of ability that had brought him to his present pass. "I couldn't 'take' a blind man, unless somebody moved his cup out o' de way. I might as well admit it!"

"Lissen, 'slumber,' you're numb in the brain! I ain't askin' you to lick nobody. All I want you to do is to *fight* 'em."

"Just take a beatin', eh?"

"You're recoverin'," nodded the stranger. "Now get this straight. I'm Danny Donnelly, an' I'm some promoter in these parts. After the fight to-night I'm goin' to announce that I will import the great Socker Dooley to meet the winner. One week from to-night the fight takes place. I'll see you fixed up in a set of colors that 'll make you look like a wanderin' duke. You blow into town. With them tin ears of yours, an' the rest of that dial—boy, you'll knock 'em dead on sight. The rest is easy."

"Sure. You play to win. What's my end?"

"I play him to win in the *fifth round!*" grinned Donnelly. "The gang will figure him a wonder if he licks you over the whole route; with the advertisin' I'll give you, it won't be hard to lay bets on him to win inside five rounds."

"You mean fer me to do a 'dive' in the fifth?"

"Wisdom tints thy countenance, Socker. I mean just that little thing. I'll send you out of town with one 'grand' in your hip boot, an' a suit of clothes that 'll remind you of the old days."

Temptation. That is the one thing that many men find it impossible to resist! And here it faced Socker in all its allurement. He was at a vast disadvantage. Condone the hesitancy with which he measured the price of honor against the food and clothes that we are prone to claim as the heritage of birth!

I repeat: one must have been both "up" and "down" before one knows life. The barnacles that clutter the bottom of a ship compare ill with the snowy decks that adorn her top. Much depends upon the angle from which one views the vessel.

He who hesitates is lost. But Socker put up a game struggle.

"I ain't never done a 'flop' in me life," he muttered, a far-away look in his eyes and no little pride in his voice.

"That's the bunk!" chortled Danny.

"You're a liar!" Socker declared with promptitude and conviction.

"Don't get me wrong, Socker," Danny hastened to retort. "I ain't sayin' that wot

you tell me is the bunk. Aw, gee, Socker—not that fer a minute! Wot I mean is that it's the bunk to fight your head off when there's more 'sock linin'' the other way."

"I don't think I can do it," said Socker faintly. "Honest, you can't get my slant on the thing, Danny; it's diff'runt fer me."

"I know how you feel, kid. I gotta hand it to any guy that plays the game on the 'up an' up,' but you got yourself to think of too. Wot did it get you to play 'em all straight across the board? The same guys that used to holler their hind teeth loose fer you are doing the same thing fer some new 'resin pounder' now. An' you ain't eatin' regular!"

The sad truth of the assertion was its greatest claim to consideration. The passing of greatness is a sudden, and a complete, process. Danny saw that his arguments were beginning to tell.

"Get it straight, Socker. What's one fight when you've given 'em a barrel of 'em that has been on the level? It's time to lay a bet fer Socker Dooley now! You may never get another chance. With that thousand 'berries' you can go back to the big time an' get a start."

Danny won.

"I'll go yuh," grunted Socker throatily. "It ain't no cinch to do this thing, Danny." And Socker but spoke the truth. He was going to learn that which has come to many a crooked fighter, in the course of a frame-up. About the hardest thing in the world to do is to "lay down" gracefully. Every instinct is to do exactly the opposite.

II.

Two hours later Socker Dooley "rode the cushions" to Scranton. In his pocket reposed the funds for a "new deal on the scenery," as Danny had described the process of buying new clothes.

Once there he made short work of the rehabilitation of the wreck. With the addition of each garment his head went a notch higher. What if there was a wrinkle over the left shoulder? That would appear as the carelessness of the wealthy once he struck Holestown again.

When he felt satisfied that he was considerable of his old self he journeyed to the telegraph office. Laboriously he wrote the following message:

> MR. DANIEL DONNELLY,
> Holestown, Pennsylvania.
> Your offer seems fair. Socker Dooley will meet winner to-night's bout. We must have guarantee twenty-five hundred dollars. Will send Socker to your town to-morrow. He is in the best shape of his life.
> (Signed) MANAGER SOCKER DOOLEY.

That done, Socker found a room in a moderate hotel, and gave the matter of two hours' consideration to the question of whether he would have steak or chicken for dinner.

Next day he returned to Holestown. Danny was there with at least a hundred fans to greet him. From the steps of the dizzy station Socker was introduced. The acclaim warmed the soul of him. It harked back to days that had seemed about to become obscured prematurely in the fog of memories.

As Danny related to the avidly interested miners the feats of the man upon whom they were now privileged to gaze, Socker looked automatically at the water tank. It still leaked. There was a hard wooden bench along the side of the station too.

All over town the energetic Danny had plastered posters announcing that the one and only Socker Dooley would meet the winner of the bout for the local championship on the following Saturday night.

At Danny's ill equipped gymnasium Socker trained. The interest exceeded even the fond hopes of the exuberant Danny. So much so, in fact, that he became magnanimous to the extent of remarking to Socker:

"You're knockin' 'em dead, dumb-bell. Charge 'em a dime fer to watch yuh work out; an' buy yourself a cranberry ranch with the receipts."

Socker looked at Danny with an endless gratitude in his eyes. Danny caught the feeling back of the look. With a shrug he said:

"Oh, I know the diff'rence between some guys an' a regular guy! Play with me, an' you're playin' safe, Socker."

The glamour of training kept Socker up

when he was in company. It was when he was alone that thoughts of the thing which he was about to do obsessed him with that most poignant of all thoughts, self-condemnation. He hated himself, did the uncouth Socker Dooley.

Hard working miners came to watch his training stunts. They shouted rough approval of his shifty footwork. They roared appreciation of his tricks with the punching bag. He sensed the friendly feeling that had meant so much in the roseate past. Then arose the "thing." He was selling out. What if *they* didn't know it? *He did!*

As the night of the fight approached, the gloom that killed the joy in his life increased. What Danny said was true. In two weeks the whole thing would be forgotten. The very men around him would do the same thing if they had the chance. He had a right to one final start in life!

Came the day when Danny slipped into the Socker's room.

"Gee, Socker! Things is goin' great! We started a pool on the rounds and then we bought up all the chances for the fifth. We got ten pools goin'. Four of them rides at ten bucks a crack. The winner is the guy who has the round that sees the finish of the bout. Oh, you fifth round! Mebbe we can stretch that 'grand' a bit for you. A thousand don't mean the limit if I get the kale comin' good."

Later the promoter confided that he had succeeded in placing a nice ten thousand that the fight wouldn't go over five rounds. A syndicate had furnished the money.

And with the knowledge of these things in his mind, Socker hardened his heart. They could think what they pleased. Three hours after the fight he would be out of town, never to return. In a new suit of clothes he would be carrying fifteen hundred dollars; and it wouldn't go the way of the rest. He was past that day. This was the chance of his life!

The night of the fight arrived. Socker journeyed to the hall and gazed over the setting. What a familiar sight it was! What a sudden tightening of the nerves it brought him! He had never expected to feel that thrill again.

In his dressing room he refused to dwell upon the things which presented themselves automatically to his mind. To-night was to-night, true; and it held things peculiar unto itself. But he must not forget that to-morrow was another day. No. Socker would go through with the "frame." In forty-eight hours he would tread the streets of New York once more, and to the jingle of a "roll."

Danny burst into the crowded dressing room. Socker was just tying the lace of the new boxing shoes the promoter had furnished. A pair of gorgeous purple trunks fluttered about his athletic legs. The shoulders had not lost the myriad little humps and ridges that accrue as a result of sustained training.

Socker still had the shell which had once housed a great fighting machine. He was good to look upon. With an eye to the theatrical, and because of the frenzied nature of the money influx, Danny had furnished even a brilliant bathrobe. Seizing it, he cast it over Socker's shoulders.

"Yuh look like a million bucks," he whispered. "This is the night of our clean up, Socker."

Local towel swingers already graced the corner of the ring which had been allotted the now well-known Dooley. As he walked along the aisle, the old familiar hands reached out to wish him luck—to touch his person. He heard the mighty roar as his approach was noted. It was all the same. Nothing had changed from the old days. The old smile of confidence settled over his face unconsciously.

It was as though a magic hand had reached into the pit of oblivion and snatched Socker back into the things of which he seemed a part. He was at home here. There was nothing that he did not know about the right way to climb between ropes; to glance at bucket, towels, ammonia bottle.

With a careless wave of the hand to the cheering crowd he strode across the ring and bent over the hands of his adversary. A wise boxer always sees for himself that tape, and only the accepted amount of it, adorns the fists which will soon rain blows at his head.

"Boy! Ain't he a dream!" muttered Danny Donnelly into the ear of a man at his side. "He makes the thing look like it was all won for him!"

Once in his corner, Socker dropped upon the little camp stool and rested one elbow upon his knee, as his seconds yanked the new gloves over his hands. Then, with a dexterous twist, he "broke" the leather casings. Which means that he pressed the padding forward and backward in such a manner as to leave little but the leather itself over the knuckles.

When he stepped to the center of the ring at the call of the referees, it was with the swing of a man bored with the delay that kept him from rocking his opponent into the land where dreams of millions are flattened by the rather dusty taste of resin.

Returning to his corner, he slipped the robe from his shoulders and hooked the gloves over the upper robe. Then he indulged in two or three muscle loosening dips. At the tap of the gong he was in the center of the ring. The fight was on!

With a wisdom born of experience, Socker waited. The tensity of the first five seconds of action kept his opponent alert; on precisely the sixth second the left hand of Socker darted out. It found repose upon the unhandsome proboscis of the local champion. A howl rose from the crowd; a sniff from the champion.

And with the sniff came another left, then another. The champion swung his "famous right" with a deadly force and accuracy, to the exact spot where Socker had been. Then he straightened suddenly—with the aid of another of those untraceable lefts.

The crowd was in an uproar. Socker crossed his right and the champion swung half round under the impact. Again he swept the right that had won him fame—through space. Once more came the stinging left.

When next the bell rang the champion returned to his corner with the look of wonderment upon a countenance that was decorated by a rather brilliant nose. The round was Socker's by the proverbial mile. He hadn't been hit yet.

Socker slid into the chair for the brief minute of rest with an expression of sweet contentment upon his face. What had made him think that he was through? Wasn't the old left working like a charm? Hadn't he seen the look of doubt that had sprung into the champion's eyes? Boy! All he had ever needed was a good long rest.

The excited seconds began a mad swinging of towels before his face. One of them set up a brisk rubbing of the muscles of his abdomen.

"Can de theatricals," grunted Socker disdainfully. "I ain't even yawned yet. Wait till I bust dis groundhog on de top of de thing he lives in!"

Again came the bell. The experienced Socker was across the ring like a caged tiger. Before the champion sensed that it was time to fight he was forced to crouch behind doubled arms. It was bewildering.

Finally Socker allowed him to uncover. It was the one way he could get a chance to hit the man. The process of straightening brought forth another of those terrific swings. Socker stepped inside the blow and let it wind harmlessly around his shoulders.

Mysteriously the open palm of his glove found its way onto the man's chest. Then Socker began a series of meaningless twists and turns. If he wanted to make it a wrestling match, the miner could play at that game too.

The champion likewise twisted, then he turned; then his head flew upward, and an unavoidable grunt escaped his tortured lips. The harmless glove that had reposed upon his chest was now under his chin. Then it slipped scrapingly over his lips, and the leather "grip" on its palm managed to catch under his already tortured nose. When finally he had twisted his face away from the torment there was a stiff thumb that happened to stick into his eye.

The next thing he realized was that Socker was out of his arms, and there was every evidence that more of those stinging lefts were in preparation.

There was something strange about this. It wasn't at all as the champion had expected. Apparently there were certain things that "just happened" when one was boxing a first rater.

Just before the bell clanged for the close of the round the Socker did an amazing thing. He deliberately started the same old left hand punch. The miner threw up his arm to ward off the blow, and suddenly from directly behind the left came a flying right. There was no time to move, and no way of blocking the punch. How could he have known that it was coming? Socker's shoulder had been directly in the way. You can't dodge something you don't see.

He rocked back upon his heels from the force of the blow. For a fraction of a second his mind was blurred. Again Socker was inside his swings. He grinned apishly and whispered into the champion's ear.

"That's a 'one, two punch,' kid. Ain't it a beaut?"

The miner rubbed his nose ruefully the while his advisers poured words of encouragement and counsel into his ringing ears.

"Watch his eyes," whispered one. "Don't you move until you can see by his eyes that he's gonna shoot a punch."

"I'm havin' a hell of a time watchin' me own eyes!" growled the champion. "That guy's tryin' tuh dig 'em out!"

And in Socker's corner enthusiastic seconds were pouring forth reams of confidence. Here was music for the ears of a passing pug! Socker drank deep of the wine of a forgotten success.

"Why, dat mutt couldn't connect wit' me wit' a handful o' beans!" he confided.

But the very emptiness of the shell is what makes it roar. In the fourth round Socker felt the weariness that spelled doom creeping over him. For a brief moment he planned a feint, then a sudden right cross that would win him the fight.

But there was always the poverty that was the inevitable reward of such a course to be considered. He withheld the finishing blow. Still, in the ring a man must fight.

He crashed his right to the miner's ear. A sudden, sickening snap sounded inside the glove. The hand dropped to the Socker's hip and he danced away from the plugging champion.

"My fists ain't nothin' but chalk," he muttered under his breath. Though a smile of confidence played over his face, there was a wonderment in his mind that the miner seemed to sense. He pressed relentlessly to the task. Again Socker found the hard jaw of the man; again there came that ominous snap and the pain that hurt the pit of the Socker's stomach fully as much as the knuckle which had buckled.

The higher order of intelligence is susceptible to the sudden knockout. With the lower order, knockouts are generally a matter of assimilation. Rather than the sudden shock and darkness, it is a process of dulling animation.

Both these men were of the latter type. At the middle of the fourth round Socker contracted a cramp in his right instep. It was the beginning of the end. None knew that better than Socker. The man he faced had youth. He could absorb and recuperate. All that was left to Socker was age.

Almost immediately there came a tightening of the Socker's knee tendons. He was fighting flat-footed now. Then the arms upon which he must call for execution of lightning orders gave a meaningful twitching in the cords of the elbows.

The mind and the fighting instinct were supreme. Orders snapped from the brain with the speed and accuracy of a machine. But coördination was gone. Muscles failed to execute. There was no power behind the lagging blows that found their mark.

"Ain't that bird a cuckoo?" whispered Danny in the ear of a sinister member of the infamous syndicate. "Ain't he re'lastick fer yuh?"

"It takes a pug fer ter t'row a fight right," the man answered. "Yuh kin see that he knows de game. None o' dese hicks knows de taste of mustard from anyt'ing he's pulled."

"Good old Socker," breathed Danny in delight. "He lugs away de extra five hunderd, believe you me!"

By the close of the fourth round the champion sensed victory. He rushed into close quarters and his mighty arms beat incessantly against the perfect guard of Socker. Perfect, that is, with the exception of the rigidity of his leaden arms. They were always there to receive the blow that was directed at a vital spot, but they were not always possessed of the strength to prevent partial landing of the fists.

And the next was the fatal fifth. The round in which Socker was to sell all that remained to him of his ring career. The hour was come when he must pay the price!

He dropped wearily into a clinch at the opening of the round. The terrible right of the champion found lodgment under his shoulder with a resounding thump. The crowd "oooed!" Socker stumbled to his knees, then sprawled upon his face.

What bedlam! Mighty roars of mingled surprise and joy, sorrow and disbelief, reverberated through the smoke-filled hall. Like a thief in the night, Socker opened one eye and gazed across the sea of milling faces.

Can the artist of the violin tolerate the raucous chord? Does not the pianist tremble at the discordant note? Does the soldier weep as he raises eyes to the flag for which he is giving his life? No!

No more could Socker tolerate the rasping note of deceit that was about to spell finis to his fistic career. Not alone to the high are given souls! Socker's had been cramped, molded to the will of environment, for years. But it was there! A victim in the prison of the past it had been.

But not to-night. The soul was freed. Socker rose. With the precision of the machine he took up the task that presented itself. What he might do must be done promptly. There was little he had to do with!

The friends of the champion screamed encouragement. He lashed out with that devastating right hand. Socker saw the blow coming. Every instinct bellowed orders to an unresponsive physique.

So slow was the response of arms and legs that he barely escaped destruction. He raised himself to his faltering toes, and the blow fell upon his chest. He staggered halfway across the ring from the force of it.

The champion was upon him before he could recover. Again he felt the dull impact. He thought that the blow had struck his head—he couldn't be quite sure. There came a roaring in his ears. Feebly he opened his eyes. Again there was that sea of faces. He was down, the referee was counting.

He stumbled to his feet, staggered, and fell again. Once more he heard that far-off counting. Crawling, he gained his knees, then his feet.

"What a lulu that boy is!" mumbled Danny from his position at the ringside. "He's got de drama-tick sens', dat guy! I'd back him fer *Little Eva* in 'Uncle Tom's Cottage.'"

All those screaming voices were lost to Socker's deadened ears. The faces had centered into one great, leering, accusing ogre. He saw the man before him dimly. Wildly he swung the powdered right hand.

There came a faint movement of arms, a shifting of far-away bodies; then that terrible thud again. Socker's head snapped back, a wild streak of brilliant light blinded him; then came a peaceful darkness.

Socker's mind was dull, but retentive once it acquired a thing. When it resumed its functioning it was capable only of picturing the things which he had last seen.

"I'm Socker Dooley," he mumbled, "an' nobody ain't gonna change dat ter 'Sucker' Dooley, on account o' me t'rowin' no fights!"

"Socker, you're a nine-clawed wonder!" It was Danny Donnelly who gushed the glowing words.

Dizzily Socker grasped what was being said. If only that fellow would stop hammering he would be able to hear.

"Hones' to Gawd, the hull Carrymore fambly can't swing a towel fer yuh! It was the greates' piece o' actin' I ever seen!"

"Actin'!" gasped the throbbing Socker. "My Gawd, Danny! Actin'! Boy, I hit dat gink wit' all I had! If I'd 'a' had a gun I'd 'a' killed de big bruiser! I did me best tuh t'row yuh, Danny. I didn't come t'rough fer yuh—I couldn't."

"That's old Socker," cried Danny, throwing an affectionate arm about his neck.

"But I—" began Socker.

Some one grabbed his throbbing hand, still incased in the battered glove. It was the miner champion. His face was flushed with victory.

"You're a game guy, Socker," he said fervently. "An' dey don't come no faster. A guy can't fight all his life, y' know. I

could 'a' got yuh in de third round, but I wanted ter give de fans a run fer dere money. Remember w'en yuh busted yer mitt in de fourt'? I knew it! I wuz all set ter slip yuh de 'restful razz' den. It wuz jus' like Fitz done ter Dempsey in New Orleans."

"T'anks. But ease off on de flipper, kid. It's busted!" Something in the tone of Socker had changed. It was a softer note that had found its way there. He shrugged his shoulders as he gazed into the beaming face of Danny Donnelly; felt a series of affectionate taps on his bare shoulder.

The Overland Limited stopped again at the tank that marked the Holestown station. Once again ready hands performed efficient tasks. And once again Socker was there waiting. But this time he crawled into the silent sleeping car and slipped a dollar to the porter.

Alone in the silence of the night he sat. His chalk hands bore a swath of bandages. A ruminative expression played over a swollen face. He looked at the hands speculatively; then he rubbed an elbow against the pocket of a new suit and grinned at the crinkle of bills that responded to the pressure.

"Dem guys won't never see Socker Dooley again," he muttered softly. "An' I gotta live de rest of me life wit' him."

Memories of his hopeless fight to conquer the young miner crowded his mind.

"Aw, well—I'm satisfied!"

THE CASTING NET

I'VE a casting net for sorrows,
  Which I hurl back o'er the past.
When I drag it in the shallows
  All the oddest griefs are fast.

For the long and slithering creatures
  Are the lies that I have told,
And their damp, repellent features
  Make them sinister and cold.

Then those stiff and wirelike grasses
  Are the people I have hurt,
With the thoughtless words one passes,
  In a manner brief and curt.

But the shining streaks that taunted
  Slipping off without distress
Were the vagrant dreams which haunted,
  Dreams I never could express.

I've a casting net for sorrows,
  Which I hurl back o'er the past.
When I drag it in the shallows
  All the oddest griefs are fast.

Harriette G. Bingham.

The Second Kiss

By WILLIAM FREEMAN

THE green-shaded light on Cayleigh's study table cast a vivid circle on his writing, on the pen, on the hand that held it. But the rest of the room was almost in darkness. The blinds were not drawn, for the night was close, and one of the French windows he had unfastened opened and closed at intervals as gently and deliberately as though touched by human fingers.

Cayleigh had been in his seat since ten o'clock; it was now nearly one. He had half dressed, and slipped down noiselessly from the room in which Christine supposed him to be sleeping. He added a final sheet to the pile on his right, blinked to relieve the strain on his aching eyes, and then took up the papers again and began to read them through.

It was a concise narrative: Cayleigh, unsuccessful barrister, turned successful journalist, was not likely to bungle the business of telling what he had to tell. He knew he had been ill, but to-night the mists that had clogged his brain had suddenly lifted, and this story of his had suddenly become the most urgent thing in the world.

"I want," the manuscript began, "to set down what has happened since the twenty-eighth of April, last year, when I first met Christine, my present wife. That was at Liverpool Street station; we were both journalists, on our way to Bishops Stortford in connection with the Dupplin murder case. She was working on the *Daily*, while I'd a roving commission on behalf of the *Echo*. We dropped into conversation, and later I was of service in getting her a seat in court—crowded, as such places always are during a big trial, to suffocation point. We sat side by side, and when there was nothing to make notes about, I caught myself studying her profile. It was worth studying, for she was—and is—beautiful. And I think I was in love with her from the first moment of our meeting. The trial kept us in Stortford for over a week, and when it ended—Dupplin was hanged through the single little slip they say that all murderers, even the cleverest,

make sooner or later—we, Christine and I, went back to town together.

"We met again soon afterwards — the thing was inevitable. And our second meeting taught me, beyond all possible doubt, that I wanted her unendurably—I, a married man of forty-five, living in secure, commonplace suburban surroundings, with an excellently secure, commonplace, and suburban wife.

"I'd spoken of Christine to Etta. But the two never met. I've doubted, since, whether it would have made any difference if they had—whether it would have stabilized matters, so to speak. I fancy Etta would have regarded her not so much as a rival, but rather as something incongruous and disturbing; as a disconcerting ripple in her placid, self-suffering existence.

"I wonder if other men whose routine has been shattered by an inrush of passion are struck by the injustice, as well as the exultation of the thing, and by a sense of undeserved disaster? I can recall, still, moods of savage and unreasoning exasperation with the whole business. Perhaps insomnia had something to do with it. Night after night I'd lie awake, running over what had happened during the day—a steady procession of trivialities marching through my tired brain. Then, abruptly, the figure of Christine would appear, and the procession would halt, like an army at the command of its general, and Christine and I would talk, and I'd look into her eyes and tell her the most secret things of my soul, confident and sure that she'd understand as Etta would never understand. And always, just at the end, she'd tell me the one thing of which, in our real meetings, she'd never give me the shadow of a hint—that she cared, too. And our dream interview would end, generally a little before daybreak, and I'd drop into a restless doze.

"So it went on. I'd see her constantly, sometimes without difficulty, sometimes only after an amount of patient, petty scheming that amazed myself, three or four times by sheer accident. Once, I remember, it was outside Blagstock's, the big drapers, when I came upon her. She was examining a fabric that the assistant had brought to exhibit by daylight.

"'Yes, I'll take that,' I heard her say, and checked my step. She looked up, and her eyes met mine, and a flush swept over her cheeks. I lingered until she'd bought what she wanted, and joined her when she came out. I've forgotten, utterly, what we talked about during our walk; all that lingers now is that flash of recognition and welcome in her gray eyes.

"I don't think Etta detected any change in my attitude toward her; I took a preposterous amount of trouble to prevent her detecting any. My work was responsible for my being out a good deal, and at irregular hours, and she had long ago ceased to take more than a perfunctory interest in it. The path that Christine and I trod—I, at any rate, with no sense of guilt at all—had no obstructions, wherever it might lead.

"Summer came. Etta had decided to spend the holiday, as usual, at Newton Regis, whose beauties I discovered in the year that the *Echo* sent me down to interview a certain elusive cabinet minister. The scenery was pleasant and unspoilt, and I took a fancy to the place, and Etta, liking it also, was satisfied to go there year after year. Whereas Christine would have gone once — and then explored further. That was characteristic of the difference between the two.

"We went usually for three weeks, and I found myself dreading the break intensely. The mere thought of leaving Christine behind in the swelter of London was pain. I've no space, or time, to set down here the ever-increasing delight I found in her company, nor the dull misery and sense of loss that followed each parting. But I can recall vividly the efforts I made to delay the journey, and how Etta's quiet, smiling persistence canceled and negatived them all. We were to leave Waterloo by the two fifteen: my scheming did, at any rate, achieve an interview with Christine on the day we left. On the plea of sudden urgency, I went to town by a morning train, left my luggage in the cloak room—I was to meet Etta there in time to get some lunch—and took a taxi straight to Christine's office. She had lately received promotion, and had now one of her own.

"Christine, as it chanced, was out, but

was expected back within a few minutes. I hung about in a stuffy waiting room, turning over the pages of the magazines there, until a rabbit-faced messenger-girl opened the door, and announced, 'Miss Frome has come, and will you please go up to her room?'

"I went up, every nerve tense. The office was small and cramped, with a window giving a vista of chimney pots and slate roofs. And it was furnished with little beyond the inevitable roll-top desk and revolving chair. But Christine's pride in it was immense.

"'It's a jolly den, isn't it?' she said, smiling at me from under the hat she hadn't had time to remove. 'And my very own!'

"'It's very jolly indeed,' I agreed.

"'Won't you sit down?' she went on. 'That's the visitors' chair—the big padded one.' And then, I imagine, something in my face struck her, for she said in a different tone, 'What's happened?'

"I began to pace the room, avoiding her gaze. She repeated her question. I stopped, and for an instant our eyes met, and then hers fell. I saw the hand that gripped the edge of the desk begin to tremble.

"'Christine,' I heard my voice saying huskily, 'you know what's happened. And it can't go on!'

"She made no answer; only watched me defensively.

"'I've made a hash of my own life,' I told her, 'and God knows I don't want to spoil yours. But—I love you. You can't be ignorant of *that*. I've pretended, like a silly child, that we were just friends—good comrades. Well, I'm not capable of pretending any longer. And there you have it!'

"She remained silent. I had stopped opposite her, motionless. Now that, in one swift stroke, the barrier that I'd so laboriously kept between us was smashed, the longing to take her in my arms was almost intolerable. But it was as though the crash of its failing had been something physical, stunning us both.

"A clock on the mantel shelf struck noisily.

"'I am waiting,' I said.

"She made a little gesture of distress and confusion.

"'I—I didn't dream of this. Ah, yes, I did—I must have done. But I pretended—'

"'As we both pretended.'

"'As we both pretended. But what is the use of it all? Where can it lead?' And she went on, in a flat, lifeless voice, to speak of Etta.

"I caught her by the wrists and drew her toward me.

"'Etta! I'm offering you nothing that she's capable of holding—of understanding. All the best of me is yours—*yours*, Christine. Answer me—do you care?'

"She nodded faintly. The door handle clicked, and as I released her the rabbit-faced girl came in with a wad of proofs.

"'The chief will be glad, Miss Frome, if you'll deal with these as soon as possible,' she said.

"Christine took the papers mechanically. The spell was broken.

"'You must go,' she said, as the door closed again. 'If I'd been stronger—braver—this wouldn't have happened. You're leaving for Devonshire to-day, aren't you?'

"'I'd arranged to leave. But I'm not going—now—until we've faced the future squarely.'

"She flinched, and temporized.

"'How can we—here, with all these interruptions? Perhaps when you come back—' The telephone bell on her desk began to clamor, and with a little distracted movement she turned to attend to it. 'Good-by!' she said, her hand on the receiver. 'Please, *please* go. Yes? Yes, this is Miss Frome's office. Yes?'

"I went down, and into the street again. At the corner a taxi drifted past me, and I beckoned the driver.

"'Where to, guv'nor?' asked the man, a surly specimen.

"'Waterloo.'

"'Any one 'd think,' he muttered, 'that it was 'alfway to 'ell!'

"'It is,' I told him.

"Etta and I went to Newton Regis. We had taken rooms there for the usual three weeks. But the high gods decreed otherwise. We reached the village on the fif-

teenth: on the twentieth the accident happened.

"There's a long stone jetty there, that curves into the sea, like a gnarled gray arm, to protect the little brown sailed fleet. We'd been standing at the far end, watching a couple of lads fishing. I'd moved a few steps away when I heard a sudden cry, and turned in time to see Etta slip on the worn, spray-damp stonework, fling up her arms helplessly, and vanish over the edge into fifteen feet of yeasty water.

"There was no one in sight except the boys, and they were too stunned by what had happened to make any effective attempt at rescue. I've been able to swim almost as long as I've been able to walk, and in an instant I had flung off my coat and dived, and found myself in the sea beside Etta. The night before had been stormy, and several small boats had been battered to pieces, and there was a deal of driftwood about. I think some of this must have been flung against her, for she seemed scarcely conscious when I caught her under the arms and struck out for an iron ladder that ran down into the sea some ten yards away. Only one movement she made, and that was when, with a drowsy smile, she leaned back and touched my cheek with her cold, sea-wet lips.

"The tide was going out, in a dragging, dangerous swell. And there was the driftwood—I've spoken of that. It buffeted us cruelly. Hampered with the extra weight, I seemed to make no progress at all. It was borne upon me that the chances against us both reaching the ladder were overwhelming—and with that, there came a strange, clear vision of Christine's face as I'd seen it when we parted at her office, her cheeks flushed, her eyes misty and troubled. It passed. The water creamed and swirled about me; I could feel my strength ebbing as resistlessly as the tide itself. A wave, higher than the rest, crashed down—and I gave up the struggle, and unclasped my hands. No one among the crowd that by now was watching us from the jetty saw what happened. The boatmen, pulling desperately toward us, did not see. The waves hid all.

"But even *they* couldn't hide what I'd done from the spirit eyes of the wife I left to drown.

"I've only the vaguest recollection of my own rescue, of the inquest, of the coroner's condolences. 'Mr. Cayleigh did all that it was humanly possible to do," he said, and the jury added the conventional expressions of sympathy. Their voices came like voices in a dream. They brought in a verdict of death from misadventure. Etta was buried in the little graveyard on the hillside—you can see the jetty from the church door. The week after, I went back to town.

"Christine was out when I called at her office, but came in soon afterwards. She looked pale, and there were shadows under her eyes, as though she hadn't been sleeping well.

"She spoke, of course, of the tragedy.

"'I happened to be in the room when the telegraphic report came,' she said. 'It was stated at first that *both* of you—'

"'Well, the report was wrong, and I'm here to-day to prove it. You've been overworking.'

"'Perhaps,' she admitted. 'But we're bringing out a new magazine, and the chief's offered me the editorship.'

"'I've already heard rumors. But tell me about it.'

"She plunged into details. I listened only perfunctorily. I was too busy watching her lips, the glint of her dark hair where the sunlight caught it, the tired droop of her shoulders.

"Two months after that I asked her to marry me. She said, very simply, 'Yes, if you're sure that you want me,' and an instant later she was in my arms.

"We were married in the late spring.

"We'd neither of us any relatives who counted, and there were only the two of us, with the necessary witnesses, at the registrar's. We spent a couple of weeks at a Sussex farmhouse, and then came back, I to go with my work, she to take her place as the mistress of my home.

"'Hugh, we're going to be happy,' she told me, her dear eyes shining. 'Happier than any two people in the world!' How mockingly the fates must smile at those

words; how wearied they must be of hearing them!

"That, I remember, was on the evening of our return. We had been walking down a path that led past the rose garden to a little summer house of the usual rustic type. As we reached the seat, Christine leaned sidewise and lightly kissed my cheek. And at that same moment I felt, cold and sea-wet, a second kiss—the kiss that Etta had given me when I leaped into the water to save her at Newton Regis. My heart seemed to stop beating. The vivid green of the grass and trees was blotted out in a gray, choking mist. The roar of that last great wave was in my ears. From a distance I heard the voice of Christine, saying, 'How cold you are! We ought not to have stayed out so late. Come back into the house.'

"We went back—to bright lights, to the coming and going of maids, to the trivialities of eating and drinking. The mist vanished: I did my best to cheat myself into the belief that that second kiss had been sheer hallucination; that it had been the touch of a falling leaf, the dew, the twitch of a nerve. And that in time would come forgetfulness.

"But that night I dreamed of Etta. And the night after again, and then again. I saw her as she was in the early days of our marriage, and then her face, puckered with weeping, when the child that might have been a bond between us, and that died so soon, was buried; and lastly as I'd seen her when, white and perhaps already dead, she floated from my loosened clasp on the crest of the wave toward the rescuing boats that came too late.

"Yet, through it all—through the day's work that divided dream from dream—I knew that I loved Christine as I'd never loved Etta. Etta had been my wife: she stood for order, routine, habit, and a certain kindliness that so often survives when love itself has died. But Christine—I could never even think of her without a glow, an exquisite sense of gratitude. And the conviction that there was nothing ignoble or mean or guilty in our love has never left me.

"Yet that kiss, that second kiss! Each time that Christine's lips met mine, I felt it, and there would follow a stab of yearning to see Etta again—to explain, to make her understand. It was like a touch upon an exposed nerve. It has become poignant beyond endurance."

There, abruptly, the last sheet ended. Cayleigh had written no more; he had been too tired. He laid it down, stared unseeingly before him for a space; swayed; fell forward with a crash.

At the sound, a woman ran in. With a cry she crossed to the limp figure. Her hand groped to see if the heart still beat. An instant later, and she was at the telephone, calling frenziedly for a doctor.

The doctor came. Cayleigh was carried up to his room.

"There is nothing more that you can do at present, Mrs. Cayleigh," the doctor told her. "You'd better get some rest. You look as though you need it."

"You'll call me at once, if—if—"

"If there's any change? Of course."

She moved reluctantly toward the room that she had made her own since Cayleigh had been so ill and restless. But sleep—how could she sleep? When had she last slept?

At the door, she paused. Her eye was caught by the lights that had been left burning in the study. Mechanically she went down to extinguish them; with the same absence of active intention, glanced at the papers on the table. She sat down and began to read.

"Mrs. Cayleigh—" The words came, in an urgent whisper, as she laid down the last page.

She stumbled up to the room—to the bedside. The doctor followed her. She had passed without even seeing him. His fingers closed about the thin wrist of the man lying there. The pulse still fluttered.

"Mrs. Cayleigh, I'm going to be quite frank with you. There is some weight, some intolerable burden on your husband's mind. If I'd known of it when I first attended him—"

She nodded impatiently. The doctor continued: "He's on the border line between consciousness and — oblivion. And in this case—I am putting it plainly—it is

the border line between life and death. He's been asking for you. There is a chance—the slenderest chance—of his recovery. It rests with him. At present he is just drifting—drifting—"

"Will he understand me if I speak to him?"

"I think so."

She bent over the figure on the bed. She spoke softly, but very calmly and clearly.

"Hugh. Hugh dear, it's I—Christine!"

The closed eyelids flickered, but did not lift. She saw that he was making an effort to repeat her name, but could not.

"It's Christine, your wife, holding your hand, *so*— I've been reading through the papers you wrote this evening. Dear, it's all a mistake—a delusion. If only you'd told me what was troubling you! But you wouldn't, though you've been so ill. Listen! A drifting log struck you and Etta just before you were drawn out of the water at Newton Regis. It injured your head badly. But you didn't leave go. You held her tightly, to the very end. They had to loosen your fingers from her poor, battered body."

She stopped. Slowly, as if with an enormous effort, Cayleigh's eyes opened.

"Is this true?" She could just catch the words.

"It is true, my own, dear love."

"Kiss me, Christine."

She bent still lower, kissed him, drew away again. In the pause that followed, the beating of her heart seemed the only sound in the world. She knew the thing he waited for—and that at the touch of the second kiss he would release his weak, half-reluctant hold upon life.

Cayleigh drew a long, shuddering sigh and closed his eyes.

The doctor loosened his clasp of the lax wrist.

"The tide has turned," he said slowly. "He will live."

ʊ ʊ ʊ

IN SPRING

OH, thoughtless apple tree,
Wherefore display
A robe of pink and white,
Since she, that loves the sight,
Is not at hand to see
Your fine array?

Blackbird, your song has been
Whistled in vain,
For how may summer be
Until the day when she,
She who is summer's queen,
Shall come again?

But you, soft winds, that stir
The blossoming
Of all these orchard trees,
Blow far across the seas,
And whisper unto her
Of home and spring!

La Touche Hancock.

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I'm a traveling salesman and average 2300 miles per month the year round, and frankly state the Hupp is the most durable and dependable car I have ever had.

As to economy, I get 24½ miles to a gallon of gasoline and 800 miles to one-half pint of oil. I drain the crankcase every 800 miles and fill with new oil. I don't have to put any in again until I've gone 800 miles, and when I drain it, it is only one-half pint short.

I have driven many makes of cars in the past 15 years, but the Hupp is like a little team of black horses my father had on the farm years ago. When the wagon got into mud axle deep, all we had to do was talk to the little black babies and through they went.

So it is with the Hupp. I've been in mud and sand axle deep many a time with my different Hupmobiles, but I never have had to be pulled out, as the Hupp will sure respond when you step on it.

GEO. H. DIEKER.

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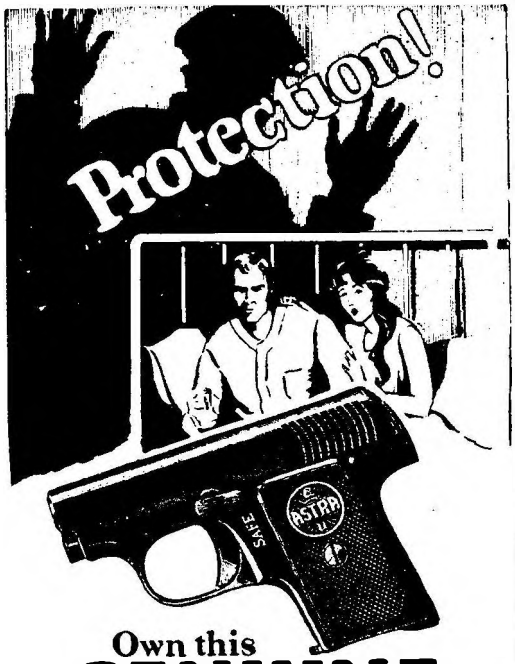
Hupp Motor Car Corporation, Detroit, Michigan

Hupmobile



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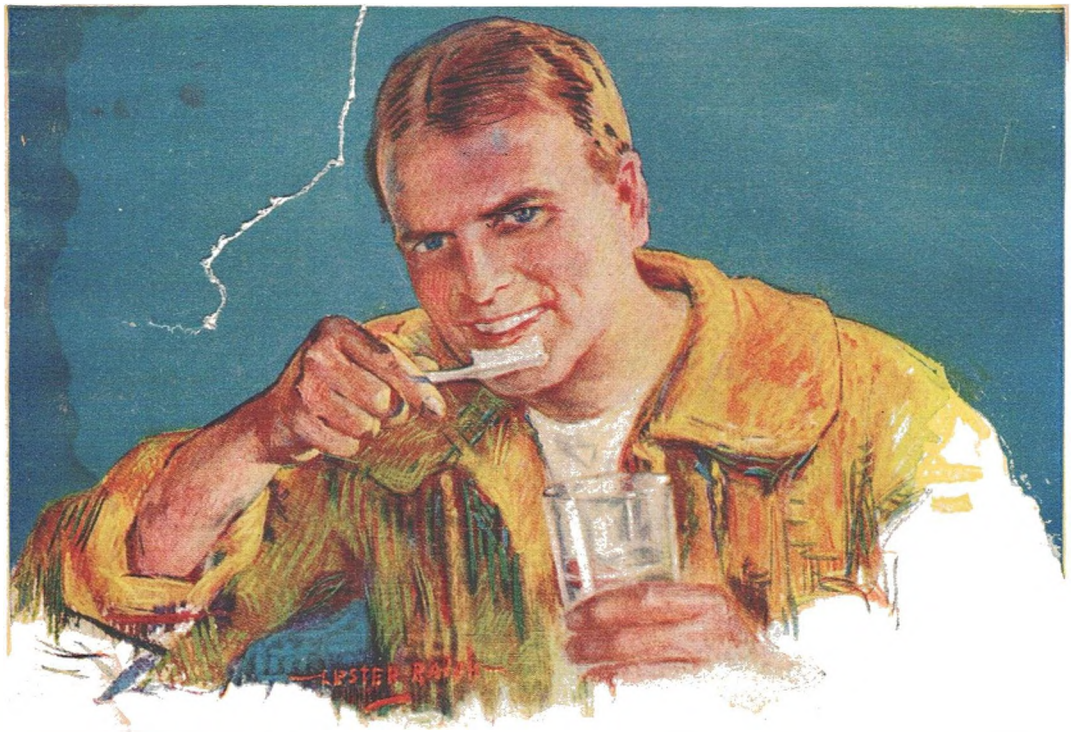

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