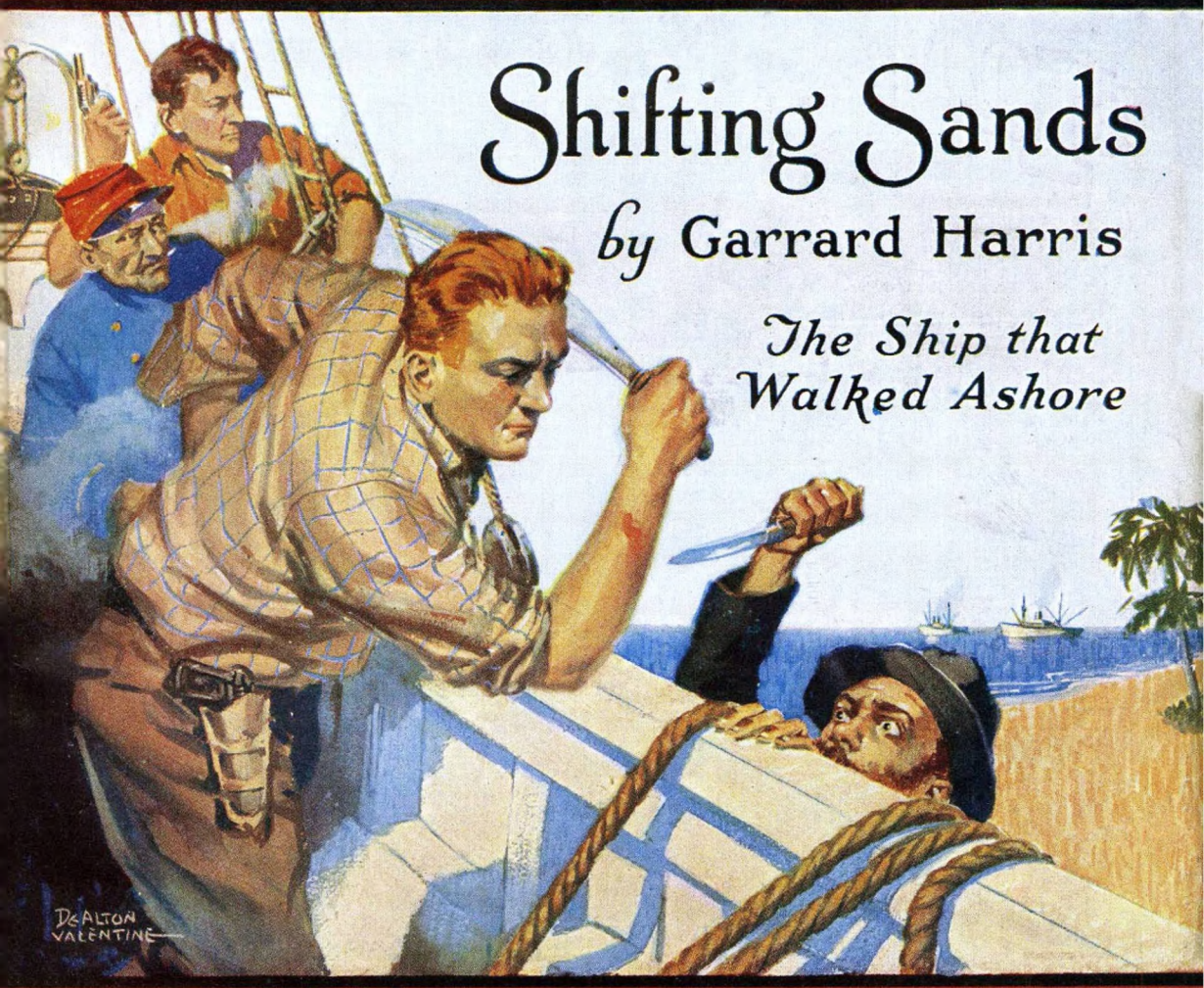
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Shifting Sands

by Garrard Harris

The Ship that Walked Ashore

10¢ PER COPY FEBRUARY 23 BY THE YEAR $4.00

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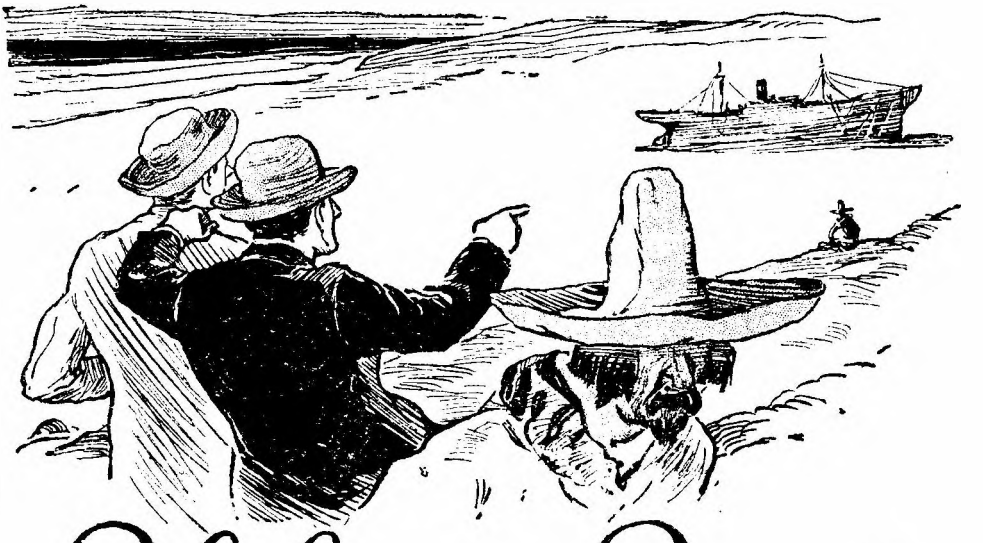
ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLVIII SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1924 NUMBER 2



Shifting Sands

By GARRARD HARRIS

CHAPTER I.

A KICK REPAID.

THE schooner Windsor Castle, of Montego Bay, Jamaica, eased up the coast of Panama from old Porto Bello, tacked into Colon Harbor, and let her crazy quilt patchwork sails come rattling down. Then she dropped her mudhook and slowly swung her bow to the freshening trade wind from off the Caribbean.

"Get that bloomin' dory off the davits; Hi'm going ashore."

Captain Harry Montmorency Scruggs was fat, pompous, and black as tar, yet he spoke with a mixed cockney and extreme English accent. He went sedately below, and returned to deck after a bit attired in white duck and a panama hat, which accentuated his exceeding brunette type. Also he was wiping his mouth and the odor of rum was quite pronounced in his vicinity.

The old Windsor Castle was loaded nearly to the scuppers with coconuts, mainly; some balata, cohune nuts, many odoriferous hides of cattle, deer, and tiger; a few bags of vanilla beans; some mother of pearl shell, a few tons of copra. A cage up near the bow held about a hundred parrots bought from the San Blas Indians; another cage held some fifty monkeys, also to sell. Five young goats roamed about the deck.

The crew of eight ranged from the copper hue of Manuel, the Venezuelan Indian, to the coal-tar black of W. Ashburton-Smythe, the mate, a product of Kingston, Jamaica—that is, all save one.

This was rather a stocky individual, burned to a brick red. His hair was a deeper red and bristly, his eyebrows a sandy red, and a short reddish beard straggled over his face. He appeared about thirty-two years of age, and, for all his ragged clothes, long hair, and unkempt beard, as much out of place on that floating menagerie as a white dove in a flock of crows. He was standing near when Captain Scruggs came up from below.

"Oh, blarst my bloody heye, why in 'ell don't you slackin' lubbers get that dory ready?" bawled the captain.

The hard liquor was getting in its work. Naturally inclined to domineer and bulldoze, a few jiggers of rum made Scruggs absolutely insufferable.

"Beg pahdon, sah, but you didn't mention who you wished to row you ashore, sah?" reminded Mate Ashburton-Smythe gently.

"Oh, wot the bleedin' 'ell does it matter who rows me, you balmy awss? Don't you know enough to tell off four of the crew to row a boat?"

The mate saluted, and gave his orders. He picked four black men of the crew for the detail.

"I'd like to get ashore as soon as possible, sir?" The white man stepped forward.

"When I need your advice, I'll arsk it, Watson," replied Mate Ashburton-Smythe crushingly.

"But, you know I signed on at Trinidad for Colon; my time is up, and I want to be getting back to the States!" expostulated Watson earnestly.

"If Captain Scruggs desiahed you to go ashore and be paid awrf, he would say so."

"Well, I'll ask him, then." Suiting action to the word, Breckenridge Mosby Watson, born in Kentucky, approached Captain Scruggs and touched his hat.

"I'd like to go ashore with you, sir, and be paid off, so I can get out of here for home, sir?"

"Watson, you're an imper'ent boundah. When I'm ready for you to go ashore, I'll say so."

The captain was enjoying the rare privilege of heckling a moneyless, helpless, and friendless white man.

"But my time's up, sir; and you owe me forty dollars for two months' pay. Why keep me on the boat doing nothing?"

"I'll settle with you when I get ready."

"But, captain, why delay me?"

"Because I choose. You'll be paid when I say."

"That's damned unfair!" blurted the man, with troubled face.

"Don't you jaw me, you beach comber! Get away—and shut up!"

Captain Scruggs aimed a kick at him, and missed by the fraction of an inch. The white man half turned, as if to resent it—and there was death in his bright blue eyes. Then he dropped his fists at the memory of what had happened down off Margarita Island. He had knocked the captain down, but thereafter six men of the crew held Watson down until Scruggs had exhausted himself beating him.

Watson slouched forward with no further word, and stood leaning, chin in hand, looking over the rail.

To have made a move would have resulted in Scruggs haling him before the British consul, preferring trumped up charges which the rest of that abject crew would swear to; a fine which would take the pittance coming to him, and perhaps a jail sentence. Watson shuddered at the idea of being in a Latin-American jail. He knew the Mexican brand, and they were all of a sort.

The dory pulled away, Captain Scruggs sitting grandly in the stern while four men handled the oars. Instead of heading for the Panaman port of Colon, the craft was going to the great American docks at Cristobal, Canal Zone—American territory. Buyers of coconuts were to be found there in plenty this year, 1917, when vegetable fats were almost worth their weight in gold to the Germans.

Breck Watson reflected gloomily upon his experiences. The war had drawn nearly every tramp steamer to the European side, and the horde of ships of Scandinavian

registry that normally made the ports were carrying on traffic in the North Sea at princely freight rates. Business generally was paralyzed.

Sent to South America on an ill-considered expedition to attempt to sell goods from a group of little provincial industries, Watson had been dropped, cold as a wedge, down in Brazil. His backers had gotten "cold feet."

He went in to Buenos Aires, hoping to get work. His cables to his employers for money upon which to come home were left unanswered.

Two months virtually without money or without a chance to earn any, for the war had paralyzed everything, reduced Watson to desperation, and the resolve to begin the task of working his way back to the States, some way, somehow. He did odd jobs on miserable little coasting vessels from port to port, first to Montevideo, then Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Paranagua, and then Santos, where he hoped to get on a coffee ship bound for the States.

Alas, everything was bound for Europe, and there also was mighty little American registered shipping then. At Rio he had no better luck, but a Brazilian coast tramp, a horrible little wheezy tub, needed a second engineer. Watson had handled tugs, stationary engines, and the like, down about Tampico in the oil fields, so he shipped on. She only went as far as Georgetown, Demerara.

There he quit, for the Dom Miguel was turning southward and going back to Rio de Janeiro. Out of the few sols of pay he received, he bought passage on the wretched steamboat plying between Georgetown and Port of Spain, Trinidad.

At Trinidad he was becalmed again for a month. The consul aided him with some odd jobs, to eke out his slender resources for the plainest, cheapest food. A steamer for the States had not touched there in forty days; as far as any one knew, there would never be another. Shipping circles were in a panic over German raiders. Save for the French cruiser Amiral Descartes patrolling those immediate waters, vessels were rare indeed.

Breck Watson saw that something had to be done; he might be stuck there in that steamy, mosquito infested island for months, subject to daily insults from the inhabitants. They vented their spite upon all Americans because the United States had not gotten into the European war. Natives of England are not more truculently British than these colonists, especially those emotional ones of darker hue in the West Indies.

Down on the water front this black captain of the trading schooner was trying to muster a crew. Six of his eight men had succumbed to prevailing hysteria about German raiders and submarines, and vanished. Others would not risk the danger. It was ship on the Windsor Castle, or stay—and Watson signed on for as far as Colon at twenty dollars a month, United States gold, on arrival.

Then began the crawling course around the southerly rim of the Caribbean, stopping to chaffer and trade for pearl shells at Margarita Island; at Cumana for hides; at La Guiara for hides and balata; at Puerto Cabello for more hides; at Maracaibo for some coffee, hides, and copra; then on to the Gulf of Darien, and taking on the coconuts the Darien and San Blas Indians were anxious to sell from their island groves.

A hellish trip—two months and three days—in the dirty, vermin infested old tub; abused by the black captain and crew, imposed upon, given the dirtiest jobs, and discriminated against at every turn and in every way.

And now denied settlement and release, in an effort to hold him for the trip from Colon to Jamaica!

A small sailboat came beating in on a course which would take her across the stern of the Windsor Castle. Watson looked about. The mate was below; the three other members of the crew had stolen a bottle of the captain's trading rum and were asleep on the deck.

The white man climbed over the stern, down as far as he could hang, and dropped feet foremost into the water so as to make as little splash as possible.

He swam with swift, sure strokes and met the boat a hundred yards from the Windsor

Castle. She heaved to, threw him a line on his call, and picked him up.

Fortunately, the occupants were Americans returning from a fishing trip down the coast. Watson rapidly sketched his plight and his determination to catch his late captain on American territory and force a settlement.

"I'll land you over here at the wharf at Cristobal—that's United States territory—and you'll probably find your man down at the end of that second pier; that's where most of the coconuts are bought around here," advised the man at the tiller. "Good luck to you!" he waved as Breck Watson clambered ashore and started looking for Captain Scruggs.

He found him under ideal surroundings, down in the far end of one of the long warehouses, chaffering with a buyer of coconuts, copra, and the like. Nobody else was about save one of the military guard, leisurely walking his beat outside. Watson adopted the wise course and spoke to the guard first.

"Friend, that black Jamaica coon over there has had me at his mercy two months, kicking and abusing me all over his ratty old schooner—me the only white man in the crew, and it my only chance to get home.

"He refuses to pay me and is trying to make me go on to Jamaica. My time's up. I want to try to get my money!"

"By gosh, friend—go to it!" heartily assented the soldier.

"Well, if there's a row and trouble, remember I've been a slave to that black drunken devil for two months, and don't interfere unless you have to!"

"I enlisted in Yazoo County, Mississippi, myself—and my heart's with you. I got to see these proceedin's, and maybe pinch you afterward, but sometimes I can't run very fast and I'm a damn poor shot!" He grinned amiably.

The trade was apparently off; Captain Harry Scruggs was still too truculent from his rum to suit the buyer, who abruptly turned his back on him and walked out of the warehouse.

That left Scruggs, the soldier at the door, and Breck Watson.

"You owe me forty-two dollars and fifty cents, gold. Pay me!"

Captain Scruggs glared in utter amazement to see the butt of his mistreatment ashore.

"Say 'sir' to me! Didn't Hi tell you you couldn't come ashore? Get back to the ship!"

"You'll pay me now, and I'm not going back to the ship."

"Why, you imper'ent devil—get away!" Scruggs aimed a kick—and stopped a terrific right hander which landed on an eye. Watson's fists worked like pistons, and a smashing uppercut got Scruggs under the jaw, and he took the count.

The late object of the captain's ill temper crawled astride of him, took an ear in each hand, and began to lift and slam Scruggs's head with much violence against the floor.

"Going to pay me?" inquired Watson.

"Help! Help! Hi'm a British subjec—Hi demands protection!" bawled Scruggs in hiccupy tones as his head arose and fell under Watson's ministrations.

"Pay me!" insisted Watson.

"Yuss—yuss. Hi cawn't get me money with you roostin' hon me—"

"Get up then—and if you don't pay me there's more of the same waiting for you."

"Hey, officer, arrest this man!" demanded Scruggs, rising, and catching sight of the sentry. "He's tryin' to rob me—he's a deserter—assaulted me—Hi'm a Britisher, Hi demands protection, and he be turned over to his majesty's consul—Gawd bless him!"

"Who, bless this feller?" inquired the gentleman from Yazoo, sauntering over.

"Hi'm a British subjec—I demand justice!"

"Ain't you gettin' it?" drawled the sentry.

"Pay me!" The blue eyes were ablaze now.

"I won't!"

The fists were at work again, more deadly in their execution this time. He knocked Scruggs backward into a puddle of dirty blackstrap molasses from a leaky barrel; knocked him down again as he blindly arose, and then again—cold as a wedge this time. One eye was closed, the other nearly

so when he recovered and scrambled to his feet groggily.

"Pay me!"

Captain Scruggs counted out the money in American bills.

"Now, you write me a statement that you owed it to me and my time is up on your blasted tub!"

Scruggs laboriously wrote as dictated, using an old memorandum book resting on the head of a barrel. The sentry witnessed it. Watson put the leaf in his pocket.

"Now—you kicked me once on that ship—you blasted, bullying devil! I'm going to give it back to you—with interest!"

He collared Scruggs and began using his right shoe upon him with astonishing force and rapidity. Scruggs now screeched in dead earnest for the police. His yells were making an awful racket in that resounding warehouse.

"Hey! Shut up that row!" The sentry collared Scruggs. "Watson, you go ahead and report at the guard room. This here blackbird from furrin parts says he wants to file a complaint against you. I gotter take him on up to the officer of the day. The guard detail is near the gate. And if I should never see you again—you should lose your way or anything—I want to say I ain't never seen a more satisfactory job of lickin' done up in Yazoo County!"

Taking the hint, Watson walked rapidly across to the other side of the warehouse, out on the wharf, and toward shore. The sentry insisted that he must have a formal complaint before he arrested a free-born American citizen, and forced the protesting Scruggs to accompany him—in a different direction from that taken by Watson.

Elated, feeling that scores had been evened up, and with self-respect returning, Breck Watson hurried out and down the coconut shaded road through Cristobal toward Colon. He had an idea that distance between him and the guard would save a lot of talk.

He came abreast of the Panama Railway Station, saw the conductor give the go-ahead signal, and the waiting passenger train began to slowly pull out.

Something whispered to Watson that Old Panama might be healthier for him than Colon and international complications. He dashed past the ticket chopper at the gate, caught the rail, and swung up on the rear platform of the moving train.

CHAPTER II.

LOOSE TONGUE.

AT Panama City, Watson left the depot hurriedly, making for a clothing store, where he invested in a complete new outfit, hat and shoes included. Then he found an American barber shop on Avenida Central, and luxuriated in a scalding hot bath and a prolonged cold shower afterward. Dressing, he submitted to the ministrations of the barber.

There stepped out of that shop later a jaunty, clean shaven chap with a square jaw, closely cropped hair and clear, scintillant blue eyes of peculiar directness. Around the edges were little lines that gave him an expression as if half laughing. The same hint lurked about the corners of his mouth, and when his lips smiled his even white teeth added to his appearance. He held himself upright—the Windsor Castle was a bad dream.

The immaculate, rejuvenated Watson had only three dollars left, but he felt himself a man and a gentleman again. Buying a package of American cigarettes, and lighting one, he sauntered up to the great Tivoli Hotel, on Zone territory—American headquarters in Panama City.

In the hotel writing room he indited several sizzling epistles to his late connections in business. He demanded a remittance sufficient to ease him financially, and expenses home for further conversation on the subject of his being cut adrift without warning five thousand miles from the U. S. A.

Realizing the necessity of temporary employment, Watson walked down to the American consulate general, where the consul, good friend and aid to his countrymen, was interested immediately he heard Watson's story.

"What can you do?" he inquired encouragingly.

"Well," mused Breck, "I've punched

steers in the Texas Panhandle; know all about running an oil drilling outfit; can operate any sort of a stationary or marine engine; can do anything on a ship from deck hand to first engineer; drove a street car for a while in San 'Tone when Villa ran us out of Mexico; and I'll tell the world I'm a darn poor salesman."

"I don't know of anything in any of your lines," the consul remarked smilingly; "but I'll get busy."

"Thunderation! I'll do anything that's honest and will pay my board until I hear from that outfit of welchers up home."

"Here's a note to the superintendent of the Balboa terminals. That is about your only chance. Maybe you can get something over there paying enough to sustain you, at any rate."

"Consul, you're a credit to your Uncle Samuel! I'll hitch on, for I'm not afraid of work. Much obliged; I'm on my way."

Fortunately for Watson, one of the warehouse freight checkers was leaving next day on a British freighter to volunteer and join up with the Allies in France. Breck slid right into the job. It was not highly remunerative, but it guaranteed expenses and self-respect.

Three days later there came a young chap, Ted Clay, also bearing a letter from the good hearted consul. He had been selling a line of mining and other machinery, but war conditions had forced his house in the States into bankruptcy, and he was stranded and flat broke.

He had come up all the way from Antofagasta, expecting to find funds at Panama. Instead, he found a notice from the trustee in bankruptcy to file his claim with the referee for salary due.

Clay was game, and went to work at two dollars a day, trucking freight about the warehouse, rather than loaf, or borrow from local acquaintances when he had no prospect of paying. A week later there was a vacancy as freight checker, and Watson recommended him for the place.

These two soldiers of misfortune became friends from the start. They obtained a cheap, clean room, and shared it; went to work together, quit at the same time. Clay found an extra job, keeping books for a small American firm, after work hours at Balboa, and Watson connected as substitute engineer at nights at the Panama brewery. Both were saving every cent possible each week and putting it aside as an emergency fund.

Nights when they were not employed they drifted up to the Tivoli Hotel, social and recreational rendezvous for Americans. Both were clean, gentlemanly chaps, of good manners, and they soon became welcome members of the chatting groups on the Tivoli verandas.

Business was bad in the States, according to the conversation of recent arrivals and from late newspapers; much unemployment, business stagnation, and uncertainty. Bankruptcies were growing and business slowing down.

It was all a question of ships. There were not enough ships to carry American goods abroad. War munitions had first call and, therefore, industry was slowing down and conditions becoming steadily worse in all other lines.

Fabulous prices were being offered for anything in the shape of a ship that could keep afloat. German commerce raiders and submarines were making serious inroads on the supply of tonnage. Rotten old tubs were being hauled out of the discard, their barnacled bottoms scraped; cheesy, rust eaten plates daubed with thick coats of paint and sold for dazzling fortunes. Then they were resold, always at a great advance.

Still the figures of sunken tonnage rose, and more frantic became the quest for ships. Yards, springing up everywhere, were glutted with craft on the ways—but it takes months to build ships. The Germans were sinking them faster than the yards could turn them out.

Fascinating yarns were heard how this, that, and the other old vessel or wreck had been raised, patched up, and sold at a huge profit. Rich strikes in a newly discovered gold field were not of more absorbing interest.

The weeks dragged along. Not a word came from the former employers of Watson; not a favorable reply from the dozens of letters written by Clay seeking new connections.

"Looks like something to do is the main thing not to be had at home now," commented Watson, reading a dozen disappointing letters on steamer day. He had been trying to get something himself.

"I swear I don't know what to do," said Clay ruefully. "Checking freight in a hot warehouse all day and working on a set of books half the night is not my idea of a merry life."

"But, boy, we're eating regular, saving a bit, and don't owe anybody anything. That's more than millions are doing in the States now."

"Funny, isn't it," mused Clay, "how one suddenly realizes he ought to be thankful for those things he usually takes as a matter of course?"

They were sitting on the porch at the Tivoli. A man named Morrill, whom they had met a few evenings before, came up and flopped into one of the rocking chairs. He was rather a fat, flashy and flamboyant individual, a great braggart, and the two friends did not welcome his advent with any marked cordiality.

"Well, boys, my fortune's made!" Morrill began, putting his feet up on the rail and lighting a cigar with a grand air.

"Fine! How did you do it? We are looking for one, too," suggested Ted Clay.

"Oh, by just keeping my eyes and ears open." Morrill winked one of his porcine optics knowingly.

"Will you give us some lessons, please, sir?" inquired Watson with mock humility.

"No, but I'll tell you how I put two and two together which makes a fortune, instead of merely twice two."

"Shoot! That's the kind of arithmetic that interests me strangely," urged Clay.

"Well, I came up from Santiago ten days ago on a ship loaded with nitrate. Heard some fellows in the smoking room talking about the fortunes some of their friends were making pulling ships off the rocks and selling 'em to the Scandihoovians who are blockade-running stuff into Germany. Seems this gang has a regular ship salvaging outfit and are working their way up the coast. One of these birds says: 'Well, the juiciest plum of the whole lot they will have will be the Loreli, up above Panama—if they can get her afloat.'"

"Most interesting! But how do you come in?" asked Watson.

"So I starts pumping this bird next day, kinda casual like, and find out where this Loreli ship is located."

"Did you get the dope?"

"Sure! She's high and dry up at a little place called La Paz, about five hundred miles north of here. So I gets here, noses around, find the tip is straight, cables a wrecking outfit in the States, and they are coming down and float her. We'll mop up—I'll take a third for mine—and that means a half a million for me!"

"But how do you get in?" demanded the puzzled Clay. "Who does the boat belong to?"

"Belongs to anybody who can take possession of her and float her. She's a forty-nine hundred and fifty ton vessel, German built; was out on her second trip coming down from 'Frisco to South America; ran into one of these Pacific storms that last two or three days. The captain got on a spree and the ship lost her bearings. Finally she got to running right before the wind, and on top of that a tidal wave comes along, too, and lifts her high and dry nearly a quarter of a mile up the beach."

"When was all that?" asked Watson.

"Why, about three years ago. But she was a brand new boat, a dandy, according to Lloyd's Register. I looked it all up."

"Getting a ship afloat from dry land is some job," mused Clay.

"It has been done!" asserted Morrill. "Worse cases than this. Why, the U. S. Cruiser Monongahela was carried ashore at Santa Cruz in eighteen sixty seven—a wave so big it took her clear over the tops of cocoanut trees along the shore and put her down away inland—but they floated her."

"But still I don't see where you get in on this?" persisted Watson. "Where'd you get any right to make a deal with the wrecking outfit?"

"Why, dammit—can't you understand that I've as much right to her as anybody—only I beat 'em to it?"

"Have you been up there?" innocently asked Clay.

"No—what's the use? I'll just claim her, and make the outfit from the States give me a third."

"And nobody else has a claim on her?"

"Nobody. She's an abandoned wreck. The German's can't claim her—the underwriters have abandoned her—why man, it's like picking up a half million in the road!"

"I should say so; congratulations!" drawled Watson. "When are your folks expected down?"

"Cable said it would be a month or more before they could start a wrecking ship from Newport News."

"Well, I may be around to borrow some of that half million when you cash in," said Clay rising. "Breck, if we are going to get any sleep we better be moving?"

"See you later!" advised Watson.

"Use your brains, boys, use your brains—and maybe sometime you will be in the millionaire class too!" exulted Morrill.

"Thank you kindly, sir, for that good advice—so long!" Clay gayly called back.

"Come in here a minute!"

Watson pulled Ted Clay into the writing room where a large map of Central America hung on the wall.

La Paz, they found, was a hamlet on the coast of the Republic of Amititlan; no railroad closer than three hundred miles; no port of call closer than a hundred. Back of it was the range of Cordilleras that form the backbone of the Isthmus. The nearest port was the little one of San Jose.

"Gosh; it's an out-of-the-way place!" commented Clay.

"Wonder where we can get a Lloyd's Register?" said Watson as they went down the steps.

"At the Consulate, surely?"

"All right, we'll head for there soon as we knock off to-morrow. I wonder if this Morrill has his facts right?"

"Talks like it. And hasn't he a nerve, claiming that ship when he's never been nearer to La Paz than Panama?" Clay laughed.

"He's just figuring on getting there first—and he didn't even discover her."

"Thinks he's a smart boy, doesn't he?"

"Recommends himself very highly," admitted Watson.

They walked down the hill for a while in silence.

"How much money have you got saved up, Breck?"

"Two hundred and eighty dollars."

"I've three hundred."

In the rush of business next day nothing more was said until noon, when Ted Clay hustled over from his warehouse section, bubbling with excitement.

"Say, Breck, there's a lot of freight being unloaded from that Panama Canal steamer for reshipment to San Jose, and a dozen truckloads have come already from jobbers down in Panama City, to go up on the Pacific Mail boat day after to-morrow. First time I've seen a pound of freight for San Jose?"

"All right, wait for me at five and have a hack ready, if you can get word to one."

They hustled down to the Consulate before it closed up, and were soon deep in study of the marine register. Sure enough there was the record of the Loreli, just as Morrill had said, with notation as to her loss. The consulate clerk was sticking around, waiting to close up for the day.

"Say, how do you change a vessel from one flag to another?" inquired Clay.

"Easy enough; we've the blanks, and all that here."

"All right, we want to enter the Loreli, formerly German, under American registry," asserted Watson.

"Oh, quit your kidding!"

"Fact; it's our vessel just as much as anybody's!"

"All right, I'll make out the papers if you pay the fees."

The consul was over at Taboga Island for a few days' rest, and the clerk was vice consul, and acting. He signed, sealed and delivered the papers which put the Loreli under the American flag, with her home port as New Orleans. Then he hunted around and found a perfectly good American flag discarded for a newer one as the consulate emblem and solemnly presented it to the new owners.

They sallied forth with the flag carefully wrapped up in a neat package. A visit to the consul of Amititlan for passports resulted in the documents being issued. A

search of the pawnshops provided very cheaply two old-fashioned six shooters.

With a couple of cheap suitcases they went to their room and began packing their plunder. Everything was in readiness.

The Pacific Mail steamer came in that afternoon and began discharging, and taking on freight for ports on the up trip to San Francisco. Watson made inquiries and found the crew list was full, and the fare to San Jose was $44, gold. She was scheduled to sail at eleven next day.

The two men drew the pay coming to them; went around to the banks and money changers and put half their remaining funds in sols, pesos and smaller silver, which made a considerable bag full. The rest they converted into American five and ten dollar gold pieces. With their grips they hung around the piers; no use to spend that money for tickets yet—something might turn up.

Half an hour before sailing time a hack drove up from Panama City with two members of the crew, copiously loaded. They started a row with the driver about the fare. They spoke no Spanish and the driver very little English, so the negotiations were most complicated and vociferous.

Watson went over, and the amount being adjusted with his aid, he then paid it, for it appeared the sailors had no money left, and a devastating thirst. The nearest saloon was a mile away, over in Panama City, for none is allowed on Zone territory.

"How'd you chaps like a little nip of real Santa Cruz rum?" Watson asked genially.

"Don' want a little nip—wanner big one," advised one.

"Step right around the corner here."

From his grip Watson produced a quart of rum and each sailor man took a drink.

"How about swapping jobs; we've left two places open here in the warehouse. We want to get up the Coast, and we'll give you each five dollars to boot?" Watson suggested.

"Shay, Bill, didja hear that—whatcher think?"

"Damn go back!" announced Bill positively. "Tired of that old hooker. Rotten chow."

"Five dollars each, gold!" Clay clinked the coins in his hand. "And we'll stand for a treat and hack fare down town to boot?"

"Done!" replied Bill, applying himself to the bottle, and handing it to his pal.

Watson wrote on a piece of paper a message to the captain from the men saying they had decided to lay off a trip, but were sending two able seamen in their places. They scrawlingly signed it.

Clay handed over the gold; Watson presented them with the bottle, called a hack and paid their fare down to the city—with a tip to the coachman to drive fast before the mate came snooping about looking for his lost lambs.

The hack rolled off, with the seafaring men singing uproariously. The whistle of the steamer blew, and just as the gangplank was about to be hauled in, Watson and Clay stepped aboard.

The captain was wrathy at first, but subsided, and ordered the men to their quarters. The ship swung out, cleared the Canal entrances and Taboga Island, then turned northeast.

"Well, old shipowner?" grinned Clay as they met, clearing up the deck.

"Admiral, howdy!"

"The next thing is to get off this old tub. I prefer my own flagship!"

"You said it, boy—and we're going to, some day!"

CHAPTER III.

ADVENTURE'S BECKONING HAND.

AT San Jose the rickety, barnacled pier extending out fifteen hundred feet into the Pacific, with a warehouse on the sea end, did not reach water deep enough to allow large ships to come close to it.

The port was virtually an open roadstead. Long rollers combed in with ivory crests, and crashed and thundered on the beach below the town. They jarred and shook the pier, and such was the rise and fall of tides and wave movement that no craft of any size could moor alongside.

Passengers were loaded into huge, flat-bottomed rowboats, carried to the ships a

half mile out and there taken aboard in a sort of huge parrot-cage of iron bars let down by block and tackle at the end of a boom. Freight was unloaded by slings from the hold, hauled up by the winch and let down to the lighters, or large flatboats with high sides, bow and stern tethered alongside.

Luckily, Watson and Clay were told off to get into the hold and help move cargo into the rope slings. Luck was induced by sundry bragging statements made by them in the presence of the second mate, as to how expertly they handled freight at the Balboa terminals. Neither had ever handled a sling, or helped unload into a lighter. What they did not actually know about the work they made up for in energy and activity.

The main point was, and at which they were so elated, they had managed to get at the strategic point; everything depended upon their making use of the opportunity thus afforded. A lot of miscellaneous freight, groceries, corrugated iron, dry goods and what-not had gone into one lighter, filling it completely. Six men with huge oars were rowing the cumbersome craft slowly shoreward. The last of the general freight was loaded into the second lighter, and then began the task of getting eight hundred sacks of corn out of the hold and into the boats.

The men down in the second lighter did not appear to understand how to manipulate the sling. Their signals to the winchman could not be understood, they moved as if tired beyond all measure. The captain was fuming at the delay.

"Let me go down there, mate—I'll jazz those spiggoties up and show 'em how to handle that sling?" suggested Watson.

"Wish to thunder you would; biggest lot of fools I ever saw."

Watson climbed astride the next turn of seven sacks of corn, was hoisted out of the deep hold, up through the hatch high above the deck, then swung outward at the end of the boom and lowered into the bobbing, dancing lighter below. He unhooked the sling, began to issue orders in fluent Spanish, and the men jumped to their work.

When only a few more slings full would give the lighter her capacity, Watson rode the hook and empty sling back up and then down into the hold.

"Those spigs tell me, sir," he said saluting the second mate, "that these are the only two available lighters. If they are left to unload without supervision the ship might as well figure on being here twelve hours longer. If you'll let Clay come with me to handle one lighter and me the other, we'll speed 'em up and get those tubs back out here in a hurry?"

"Good scheme, Watson—hey, you, Clay! Go on this lighter with Watson, and help get discharged; and for the love of Pete hurry those boats back here?"

"Aye, aye, sir; we'll get action for you!"

The mate turned to check his tally sheet and Clay threw on the sling of sacks what looked like a bunch of empties, got astride, gave the signal to hoist and was up and out before the mate could notice anything peculiar.

Watson followed on the next turn; the bundle had been shoved aside and the men's coats thrown over it. Three more turns, and the lighter was loaded.

"Well, admiral; so far, so good?" Clay grinned as he saluted.

"Get the flagship under way, captain!"

"Bear a hand then with an oar, you big stiff, like I'm going to do. I want to feel the soil of Amititlan under my feet!"

With each American at an oar doing more than four natives with theirs the lighter moved shoreward, aided by wind and wave. At the pier half the crew of the first boat were sitting around, doing nothing.

"Hey, you dad-blasted bunch of *sin verguenzas—porque—porque?* What 'n 'ell do you mean? Get to hustling that freight off before I come and knock your blocks off—*muy pronto* or I'll report you to the port captain. Get a move on you!"

The wild, fierce looking, fierce talking red headed man seemed a very besom of fury and energy. The lethargic boatmen sprang to the task, both on his lighter and the other.

Picking a man from among the extra help, Watson scribbled a note to the captain saying that Clay and himself had gone into the hinterland on some urgent personal

business and would not return; their work would pay for their passage. Giving the man a silver *peso* to go out on the returning lighter and deliver it, the two adventurers took their grips and proceeded to the custom's office at the end of the pier.

Exhibiting their passports they explained they were prospectors going out to locate a claim, and passed the perfunctory examination with flying colors. The two revolvers were not discovered, owing to have been stowed inside their shirt-bosoms, and the ammunition was hidden in the center of a bundle of soiled clothes.

Thinking it wise to disappear until the steamer departed, for fear the captain might lose his temper and try to have them arrested as deserters, they walked through the little town of San Jose strung along the beach, followed a trail up the mountain slope in the rear, and finally sat down in a dense plantain grove to await developments. After a couple of hours the steamer's whistle blew, and she pulled out.

"Well, so far, so good; next thing is to get to La Paz?" suggested Watson.

"Boat's the best way, I guess," said Clay, viewing the long succession of serrated mountain peaks extending down the coast toward their destination. "It's a hundred miles in an air line; it would be two hundred, scrambling up and down those mountains."

"Come on then, let's get down town and see about something to ride in."

They put up at the little hotel, and the proprietor was enlisted in the search for a boat to take them down to La Paz.

"I have the brother-in-law, Juan Alegre—he has sailed up and down here for many years, and he has a good boat?" suggested the boniface.

"Trot him around; if he is reliable and his boat will sail we'll do business," commanded Ted Clay.

Juan, a grizzled old half-Indian fisherman, was soon rounded up. Yes, he had a two-masted little fishing boat. He had been to La Paz once, years ago; usually he did not range so far, but he knew the coast; it was more than a hundred miles. He figured it would take maybe four days. And would sixty pesos be a fair price?

"Fair enough; we'll pay you half now and the rest on arrival?" agreed Watson, counting out the money and exhibiting to Juan the balance so he might not have any doubts.

"You should provide the food; I will get the water?" suggested Juan.

"Go ahead and provision the boat; we'll pay for it. How much will it take?" inquired Clay.

"Five *pesos* will be enough."

"All right; here's the money." It equalled $2 American!

"And my boy, Pedro, will go with me to help handle the boat. Could you give him a little something?"

"Surely; what would be fair for him?"

"Five pesos?" suggested Juan Alegre, tentatively.

"All right; he's on for the five. Anything else?" inquired Clay, who was acting as paymaster general.

"Nothing more, *senors—muchos gracias.*"

"*Bueno;* let us get an early start," suggested Watson.

"I will come for you by daylight. *Adios.*"

"Let's see—sixty and five and five—seventy pesos—that's $28 American—dirt cheap, and much lighter than I thought we'd get off?" Watson jubilated as they started to go to bed.

"Well, it was coming to us; didn't we arrive in this country on a 'lighter'?" Clay dodged the shoe Watson aimed at him.

They were like two schoolboys out on an adventure. Hope ran riot. The excitement of going into one of the most out of the way places in the world, the possibilities the enterprise held for them, the probability that they might have to contend seriously with others for the prize, keyed both men up to high pitch.

The hour was late before they fell asleep, and it seemed almost instantly thereafter old Juan Alegre was knocking on their door. Early coffee and fruit and bread and butter was ready for them. Then they descended to the beach where La Esperanza (The Hope) was tugging at her anchor in the freshening breeze.

Pedro greeted the passengers as he made ready. He was a likable chap of twenty two,

markedly intelligent in appearance, good humored, and vivacious. The Esperanza was old and rather rusty looking, but she had good lines. Pedro dragged the little anchor aboard, set the jib, hoisted the foresail, and the boat swung about to the breeze and glided out on the Pacific.

The high range of mountains just back of San Jose obscured the rising sun, but its rays radiated in broad beams in the blue heaven, gilded the points and crests of the purple peaks, and intensified the sapphire blue of the water. The tide was out and the sea calm, save for little wavelets and the unending slow heave of the Pacific.

A cool breeze from the land—the *terral* as Juan Alegre called it—was ideal for the boat. Despite her looks, she was speedy, and Juan knew how to get the most out of her.

As the day wore on there was nothing to do but gaze at the scenery as they cruised offshore. The *terral* died down; there was an hour's interval of light, puffy breeze, and then when the tide started coming in the wind freshened. On the left as they beat southward was a never ending panorama of mountains, many of them symmetrical, volcanic cones, with one or two further back in the hazy, purple distance giving off faint wisps of smoke; some of the taller cones wreathed about with masses of cloud near their summits, others standing stark and clear.

The purple and mauve tints of distance and haze shaded into varying hues of green, ending at the water which slashed and seethed among the volcanic rocks of the shore, opaline and ivory, jade and emerald where it swirled and eddied along the shores.

By noon the travelers were ravenously hungry. Pedro offered them a large tin coffee can filled half full of a brownish powder; he poured some in his hand and put the stuff in his mouth. Clay tasted dubiously, tentatively, then ecstatically.

"What is it—bully taste!" he commented.

"An Indian dish, *senor*," advised Juan Alegre. "They call it 'the strong food.' It is made of maize—corn—parched brown and ground to a powder; then cacao beans, roasted, ground fine and mixed with the meal and a bit of sugar ground up in it, and just a pinch of vanilla. Indians when they go on a journey carry a bag of it. One can live for weeks upon it, and grow fat."

"Best stuff I've tried in a long time," Watson declared.

"It is good to drink, too," continued Juan. "Fix them a drink, Pedro?"

The son took two heaping tablespoonfuls, put it in a tin cup, poured in some water and stirred the mixture well. Proffering it to Clay the latter sipped, then drank avidly.

"It's better that way than dry," he commented. "Tastes like the chocolate milk one buys at soda fountains in the States—only better. Where'd you get it, Pedro?"

"Oh, the Indians bring it in and sell it. You can get plenty down about La Paz; mostly Indians live in that district. It is fine stuff."

A bag of *tortillas*, several loaves of bread, some bananas, avocados, *pinas* and mangoes made up the lunch, together with a bucket of black beans which had been boiled, mashed and then fried in little cakes, with a bit of onion added.

The passengers dozed as best they could after eating, and when the sun was getting low they suggested to Juan that he run in somewhere and make camp. They were tired and cramped from being long hours in the boat.

Twenty minutes later they sailed through the entrance of a little bay into calm water. A stream came down at the side from the mountains, and there was a wide, dazzlingly white beach of clean sand. Outside there was another stretch of beach, where the rollers crashed and thundered.

On the little rocky ridge separating bay from ocean, the passengers began taking off their clothes; the sight of that surf was too great a temptation to resist. They were running down toward the water, when a shrill cry halted them as the foam curled about their knees.

Pedro was waving backward frantically for them to come out. They paused, nonplused, as he rushed toward them.

"No, *senors*—if you love your lives, keep out of that surf! Look! Look!"

A hundred yards out six triangular black fins were showing above the surface of the rollers just before the waves combed and crashed to the beach.

"*Tiburones—tiburones, senors*, big ones! They feed in the surf as the tide comes in. They perhaps saw you and were waiting for you to go in the water. They would have dashed in and got you! Come inside to the bay and let me pour water on you from a bucket, but remember these waters are full of sharks big enough to eat you!"

Trembling from their narrow escape, the two men stood a few moments and watched the school of sharks, which undoubtedly had seen the bathers, and were in mass formation ready for a dash at them.

"Ah, those sharks, they are very smart!" commented old Juan. "Like rats—very cunning—they get you when you least think!"

They poured sea water on each other as they stood at the edge of the little inlet, while old Juan and Pedro, having moored the boat, were foraging for fresh water and driftwood for the fire. Soon the coffee was boiling. Watson and Clay, having dressed, sauntered about, and caught a small fish left in a pool by the tide the day before.

Pedro cut a chunk off the fish with his knife and, clambering up on the huge rocks near the entrance, tied the morsel to a line and let it down alongside. Directly he drew it up with an enormous rock-crab holding on. His father came running with a landing net and, immediately after securing the crab, put it in a bucket of water on the fire; threw in a handful of salt, and broke up several red pepper pods in it.

Pedro caught eight crabs, huge ones, each of them with a single claw as large as that of a lobster. They were popped into the bucket of boiling salty water, to add to the supper.

Watson found a fishing line in the Esperanza, and put a piece of the cut bait on the hook, whirled the line about his head and sent it out into the little bay. It began to run through his fingers, burning them considerably until he managed to get a sort of half hitch on the line around his forearm.

Then he had a tussle which at times pulled him to the edge of the water, and finally dragged out into the shallows an albacore of fifteen pounds. Pedro pounced on it, and holding the fish by the gills, hauled it ashore.

"Aha, a fine fish; one of the best to eat!" commented Juan.

"We will have him as the Indians cook fish," explained Pedro. He directed Watson and Clay to gather all the driftwood they could find, and to dig a hole in the sand and pave the bottom with stones. Pedro then went up into the dank woods of the mountainside and returned with armfuls of wild banana and plaintain leaves and a large handful of some others which gave an aromatic odor.

Digging a hole in the sand about two feet deep, it was paved with the stones and a fire built in it. Other rocks were arranged about the sides and a flat, larger one was propped up so it would heat. Throwing plenty of wood on the fire the party assembled for supper.

Juan Alegre had made coffee, grown upon the very mountains in whose shadow they were encamped; roasted almost to a cinder at home and pounded up by his wife, ready for use. There were the huge, sweet rock crabs, better even than lobster. There were bread and fruit, and some of the bean cakes warmed—a most satisfying meal.

More wood was gathered to keep a blaze going during the night as protection against tigers, huge snakes, and wolves. The fire in the pit had died down to coals. These were raked out; the albacore stuffed with the spicy leaves gathered by Pedro, then wrapped in many folds of the banana and plaintain leaves, and laid on the hot stones.

The large flat top rock was very hot, but it was pried in place as a sort of cover, leaves stuffed under it and all about the fish. Then Pedro dashed a bucket of water down in the hole and all hands hastened to make a mound of sand, covering the hot rocks deeply.

When this had been completed they made ready for sleep right out on the warm, dry sand. The thunder of surf outside lulled them and the warm, soft salt breeze was an overpowering opiate.

Almost before they knew it, Juan was shaking them. He had made fresh coffee, and offered them each a cupful as is the custom in the tropics—it was black and strong enough to float an iron wedge.

Day had come. More sea water was dashed over each other by the passengers and they dressed. Hurrying to where Pedro was raking sand from the mound they had erected over the fish, they encountered a cloud of steam, appetizing, tantalizing, hunger compelling.

Pedro lifted the dried, browned mass of leaves out and deposited his burden on a sort of tablecloth of plantain fronds he had gathered and laid on the beach. Carefully he cut the wrappings from around the fish, and there it lay, almost as beautiful as when caught, not a scale disturbed.

Making an incision Pedro ran his knife under the skin, then pulled, and it all came off, exposing the beautiful, delicate white meat, piping hot. On a piece of green plaintain leaf he heaped chunks of the flaky delicacy and handed it to Clay and Watson.

"I'll tell the world this is the best fish I ever ate in all my days!" asserted Clay, with his mouth full.

"My only regret is I didn't catch one as big as a shark," sighed Watson, "and had room to eat it all. And just to think that up in the States a lot of folks believe the fireless cooker is a strictly modern Yankee invention—and something brand new?"

"Look here, Juan, you needn't strain the Esperanza getting to La Paz. We've got to have a couple more camps ashore; there'll be pay accordingly for the delay to you," suggested Ted Clay.

"Man, I'm having the time of my life; that taste of fish was worth coming all this way to get," Watson agreed. "I don't care if it takes us two weeks to get to La Paz."

There were two more delightful nights ashore as they cruised down the coast, more fish *a la* Indian; more crabs, and the next morning they set out upon the final lap of their trip.

Into what dangers and perils they were venturing they did not know or care. They were resolutely determined to see it through, firm in the belief that if they played the part of men, fortune was bound to be theirs!

CHAPTER IV.

PARADISE IN ISOLATION.

TWO shoulders of the mountain range extended outward into the Pacific five miles apart, with diminishing promontories curving slightly toward each other until there was formed a little crescent shaped gulf, with an entrance a half mile wide, and about a mile and a half from the entrance to the farthest indent of the curve against the foothills.

La Esperanza was running freely before a brisk breeze and, as she came opposite the entrance, Juan Alegre pointed to a speck of white gleaming against the dark green of mountain verdure.

"There is La Paz," he said, swinging the craft to the left and making for the center of the entrance. On each side the water seethed and swirled, showing half hidden rocks.

From the water's edge the mountains sloped gently backward in a series of wide, green steps, or tablelands. They ended in the far horizon where jagged purple peaks merged into an unbelievably blue sky, with here and there a wreath of white mist and cloud clinging to the summit of higher elevations. It was a background vivid, yet harmonious, such as one sees in paintings sometimes, in back drops of stage scenery once in a while, but seldom in actuality.

At the center of the curve of the crescent shaped bay, a short distance above the water line, red tiled roofs were now seen through the shade of overhanging coconut and *palma real* trees. White walls gleamed dazzlingly under bougainvillea vines in a riot of lavender and magenta colored flowers, with here and there the vivid pink of long festoons of coral vine blossoms.

White and pink oleanders grew in great clumps along the cobblestoned streets leading up the hill from the water's edge; great bushes of hibiscus were aflame with scarlet blossoms. Plaintains and bananas waved

their cool, wide green leaves in the yards and about the houses, and on the gentle slope of tableland above the town there appeared fields of corn.

To the right of the town, facing toward the entrance, where the shoulder of the mountain sloped into a gradual decline and then a long, low ridge curving around to form one of the sides of the bay, it became a sort of mud flat and sandy bar, or beach of considerable width at low tide.

There, near where the terrain began its gradual rise from the flat to the sharper slope beyond, sat the Loreli, rusty, forlorn, and strange looking, far up on what appeared to be dry land. She rested on an even keel, sunk deeply into the sand.

"Well, yonder's our boat!" Breck Watson exclaimed jubilantly.

"And she isn't any quarter of a mile from the water—but a pretty good distance at that," commented Ted Clay, measuring with his eye.

Her stern was to the Pacific and her bow to the mountain. And rusty, deserted and a wreck though she was, the ship was attractive. Her stack was set at a rakish angle, and her lines were good.

"Let's square ourselves with the authorities at first, and get started right?" suggested Watson. We'll have plenty of time to look after the boat. Obtain the good will of the *alcalde* and *commandante* and it will be much easier for us in every way hereafter." Clay nodded assent.

The *altalde*, Don Enrique Mendoza, was in the small group at the landing. He came forward and greeted the visitors cordially. It was an event in La Paz for even a fishing boat from the outside to arrive.

Knowing the Latin-American love for formality and recognition, Watson suggested that they be allowed to call at his office, present their credentials and explain their presence in the town. This was a master stroke, and fat old Don Enrique waddled importantly ahead of them up the slope into the town. Curious eyes stared from doorways and the shade of porches; the little crowd trailing after was augmented from time to time.

"Would it not be well to have the *commandante* present also?" suggested Clay.

"I will send for el Coronel Don Luis Agramonte; it is due him and his office," replied Don Enrique.

The *alcalde,* or mayor; occupied one of the more pretentious houses of the town. It was a low, whitewashed, rambling structure of stone, with red tiled roof, the whole embowered in flowering vines. The visitors were escorted to the parlor and invited to sit on the sofa—the mark of high distinction.

Soon the *commandante* arrived. For the occasion he had donned his uniform and sword, and the visitors were presented. Also the priest of the community had been asked, as the adviser of both the *alcalde* and *commandante.*

Padre Francisco was an old, old man, but a very much alive old man, a smiling, jolly, friendly old soul, dignified withal, and evidently held in deepest respect and veneration by the officials and people of La Paz, where he had labored for fifty years.

During the waits for the *commandante* and Padre Francisco, Watson and Clay had an opportunity to study the little gathering. The *alcalde,* the *commandante* and several other prominent citizens were evidently more Indian than Spanish. It was apparent throughout the town that Indian blood predominated in the inhabitants, but a high type of Indian.

"You may now proceed, *señors,*" the mayor remarked after the assemblage was complete.

"We have come to your beautiful little city to be among you for a while," said Watson, rising and bowing to the officials, "and we hope we are welcome. We have the permission of your country to come." He handed over the passports, which were gravely inspected.

"We have acquired claim to the vessel which is stranded in your harbor, and here is our registration of her." He showed the certificate changing her nationality. The padre, who could read English, interpreted it.

"Very likely we will need some help in cleaning up the vessel and subsequent operations, and will be able to give work to some of your citizens at fair wages. We are glad to be here, and know we will enjoy

our stay. We wish to conform to all laws, regulations and customs, and ask your friendly help in enabling us to do so."

The mayor welcomed them, as did Colonel Agramonte and Padre Francisco, the last named inviting them to stay at his house until they made other arrangements, for visitors were so few at La Paz there was no hotel.

Juan Alegre and Pedro were sent for the baggage and then, in the presence of the padre, the debt to Juan was discharged, with ten pesos extra; and Pedro was paid the five pesos agreed upon, and five more for his services as fishermen and aide on the camps.

Old Juan told the little knot of townsfolk at the gate that the visitors were "*finas Americanos; buenos caballeros, y muy simpatica.*" No higher recommendation could have been given them.

"Come and walk with me about our little town, and get acquainted," suggested the padre.

"It is a very old place," he continued as they strolled up the street. "From the first, when Pedro Alvarado conquered the Indian nation of Guatemala in 1424 and established his capital at *Ciudad de Guatemala* at the foot of the volcano Agua, his reign as captain general was most cruel and oppressive.

"He wanted gold, and he caused much blood to be spilled to obtain it. The church itself was not less greedy than Alvarado, and perhaps it was a judgment that the capital city was destroyed by hot water from the volcano in 1541.

"The capital was moved and rebuilt as *Santiago de los Caballeros* at a different site. Cruelties of church and state persisted, and that city was also destroyed by an earthquake, a magnificent city. One can see the ruins now near Guatemala; it is called Antigua.

"So, tired of oppressing the Indians; convinced there had been too much bloodshed and cruelty and lust of gold mixed in along with anxiety for the welfare of the Indians' souls, Fray Antonio de Toledo slipped away from the new city and with half a dozen or more gentlemen and their wives and families, determined to find some place where there could be peace and the real spirit of the meek and kindly Lord.

"They wandered hundreds of miles over mountains; endured many perils and, finally, some Indians, really convinced of their good intentions, guided them to this spot. It was founded in 1690, named La Paz—and 'The Peaceful' it has been ever since, thank God!"

"A beautiful and inspiring beginning," commented Clay.

"They sent back word after a while to other friends who they knew were tired of the intrigue, the vanity, the strife and godlessness of the capital city, and these slipped away to join them, and so the little settlement grew. The Indians of these remote districts trusted the Spaniards, and the latter were kind and considerate. In the years they intermarried and, although other Spaniards came, the place became more Indian in blood than Spanish. And so, that is the history of La Paz!"

They had come to a rushing, tumbling, strong stream of water which came down from the mountains, ran alongside and back of the little town, and emptied somewhere down in the bay.

"*Rio Frio,*" commented the padre. "This is the reason La Paz was located here—fine water, never failing. A bold, beautiful stream, is it not? It comes from far up on the mountains, and is cold always, even in the hottest days."

Where the party stood was three hundred feet above the surface of the bay; the stream rushed and tumbled along its rocky bed, with a tremendous fall.

"And what sustains the people here?" inquired Clay.

"They are self-sustaining," replied Padre Francisco, smiling. "And they have few wants. Up above us on the first wide plateau is our farming land; there grows the corn, and further up the mountain on the next shelf, the wheat. Our coffee, chocolate and vanilla grow wild on these slopes. There are abundant plantains, yams, bananas; oranges grow wild, so do avocados and a dozen other fruits.

"Then there are the gardens for each house, and the fields of beans. There are deer, bear and other game in the mountains:

the householders have plenty of poultry and cows, pigs, and goats."

"Your people are certainly well fixed, but what of other wants?" inquired Watson.

"There are few others, and simple. The women weave the wild cotton, maguey and yucca fibers into cloth and we make our own hats from the young shoots of the palm trees. Shoes are of home tanned leather. Most of the household furniture is home-made, and there are craftsmen here who can do many things."

"And trade; is there much of that?"

"Very little, because the people have been raised to be content with simple things. About twice a year a trip is made overland to the nearest town, a hundred and fifty miles in the interior, to buy such things as the community needs. We have only one store."

"And what do you export?" wondered Clay.

"Little or nothing. We are so out of the way few come to trade, and we do not worry about it, for there is not much use for money. And so, we live content and simply."

As the party turned to go back down the hill into town, the tones of the church bell sounding the Angelus halted them. The padre stopped, and said a prayer.

It was the sweetest note Clay had ever heard from a bell, a haunting, ringing note, as soft and sweet and having a faint resemblance to the distant song of a mourning dove. He commented upon its peculiar beauty.

"One reason is," explained the padre, "the bell is fixed, and is struck with a wooden mallet, instead of a metal clapper. Another is the bell itself.

"Some years after those first settlers laid the foundation for the little church down there, they began to accumulate metal for a bell. The *caballeros* broke up their swords, threw in their steel gauntlets and pieces of armor; the women contributed their gold rings and other jewelry, as emblematic of their new life.

"The Indians became interested, and smelted silver from somewhere up in the mountains and brought the ingots in; and quills full of gold, and nuggets they had washed from the streams. I should say that bell is at least half silver.

"There was a metal worker in the number of those who came to seek a peaceful home here. He directed the construction of a crude charcoal furnace, made the bellows for the blast, and made the wooden pattern of the bell himself. Then the sand was found in which to cast it, sifted through the finest muslin from Spain—and the result is what you heard."

The padre and his guests strolled back toward the town. At a home near the little old church Pedro Alegre was seen as the center of a family group on a front porch, animatedly talking to a very beautiful girl, who was leaning forward, absorbed in his utterances. When supper had been finished, old Juan Alegre came to say goodby to his late passengers.

"Pedro has decided to stay here and work with you, *señors*," he announced. "Treat him well. He is a good boy."

Then he turned and went down the hill, to sail at break of dawn next day.

"Well, to-morrow we'll take possession and raise the flag on the Loreli," mused Watson as the two prepared for bed. "It is a new sensation, being that of a shipowner. I like it."

The padre came in to bring them a jug of fresh, cold water, and a little basket of fruit in case they should become hungry.

"You will find the ship just as she was left by the crew," he said. "Our people have taken nothing off. The captain shot himself when he realized the disaster due to his drinking; he is buried here in our cemetery. The crew took the records and a few other things and went overland to the capital, then on down to the Atlantic port."

"You know," said Watson, when the padre left, "I've just been thinking; we're gambling on a bunch of gamblers. Suppose they haven't any money to buy us out?"

"Why, by golly, we'll float her ourselves!" Ted Clay's brilliant, dark eyes fired with the idea, and his face, usually rather somber, was alight with enthusiasm.

"You're crazy with the heat!" jeered his partner.

"I don't know about that; I've a sort of scheme maturing."

"Fat chance we have," insisted Watson. "Two of us and a few natives."

"You know anything about hydraulics?"

"Not a thing."

"Well, that's been my business mainly. And we stand to make the difference between ten or twenty thousand apiece if we sell out, or splitting a million if we float her."

"That's an awful stimulant to effort; for five hundred thousand dollars I'd try to drag her off by myself!" Breck assured him.

"Well, I'm not certain, but I think we've a chance."

"Gosh all hemlock—how?"

"Wait; let me look a bit further into it."

CHAPTER V.

CLEARING THE DECKS.

BREAKFAST was had soon after dawn. Clay and Watson, full of plans and enthusiasm, descended to the water front where Pedro Alegre was waiting for them. He had employed a young man of about his age named Juan Monte—brother of the good looking girl—to go along, and had made arrangements with a boatman.

The Loreli was a half mile from La Paz around the curve of the bay. Landing directly in rear of the vessel, the party walked up to the wreck.

Morrill had said at Panama that she was a quarter of a mile up on dry land. Watson stepped the distance from the rowboat, at the water's edge, and it was low tide. He estimated it as three hundred yards instead of four hundred and forty. The high tide line was plain about the vessel two-thirds of her length, the bow section being above it. Watson also estimated the fall from extreme high tide mark to low water at ebb as being between five and six feet.

The Loreli had settled down in the mud and sand on even keel to a depth of at least eight or nine feet. The ladder was down, where the crew left it when they departed. Watson climbed up, followed by Ted Clay, Pedro, Juan Monte and the boatman.

A flock of gulls making headquarters on the wreck arose and circled with eerie, discordant cries; a dozen or more pelicans solemnly ranged on the rail of the bridge sailed lumberingly away, clapping their beaks in vast indignation at being disturbed.

It was a scene of desolation which greeted the visitors, from the rusty, salt incrusted and streaked smokestacks, to rusted steel masts, decks and winches. The brass fittings were corroded; paint was peeling from woodwork under combined influence of tropic sun and rain. The hundreds of gulls and pelicans using the place as a rendezvous and roost had added to the unpromising outlook.

"Gosh, it's going to be one awful job to clear this old hulk up!" ejaculated Watson. "Pedro, you get me a dozen men for tomorrow. If she's got any paint in her stores we can stop this rust eating on her, and the woodwork needs it worse than the steel."

The party made the rounds of the lower deck. There were two hatches forward and two aft, with twin winches located between. The cargo booms attached to the steel masts appeared to be all right, except badly rusted, and of course would not swing. While a deal of old rope, cable, rotted tarpaulins, splintered remains of lifeboats and other débris cluttered the deck, there appeared to be nothing vitally smashed or badly damaged.

"So far, so good; let's see how she is upstairs?" suggested Watson, leading the way to the bridge. The door to the wheel house had been stove in by waves; glass in windows was smashed and the floor littered with rubbish. The wheel and compass appeared to be in good shape.

The chart room in the rear had a splintered door, and two window lights gone. Charts were on the floor, faded and crumpled up; the cushions from the wall seat were rotted, and the swinging lamp was smashed.

The cabin of the officer of the watch next behind was in confusion. Moldy mattresses, pillows, and rotted linoleum all mixed on the floor; a couple of window lights broken and the door warped and jammed.

"Not so bad when we clean it up; this ought to make a dandy cool room for us when we move over," suggested Clay.

"You bet, and we'll start cleaning right

here at the top. Let's see how she looks below?" Watson was on his way down the steps to the main deck.

Immediately below the bridge were the captain's quarters, dining saloon and petty officer's staterooms, with the galley in the rear. Much of the china and glassware had been broken; most of the linen was musty and rotten, and nearly all the mattresses and pillows beyond salvage.

In the galley there was a good range and plenty of copper cooking utensils scattered about. Everything was in confusion—rusty, moldy, and in some instances damp.

"Still not so bad!" commented Watson. "Now for the main thing—the engine and boiler rooms—that's where I'm at home!"

The party descended into the dim, mysterious regions amidship and abaft. The odor of fetid, stale air was almost unbearable, and in the deep gloom nothing could be discerned clearly.

"We better find the storeroom and see if there are any lanterns and oil for them," suggested Watson. "Can't turn a wheel without some light down there."

The storeroom was located, the lock on the door forced, and the explorers entered. There were lanterns in plenty, paraffin coated boxes of matches, and cans of oil for the lanterns. Filling and lighting six, the men descended again to engine and boiler rooms. The air was oppressively foul.

"Say, this air is too bad; we better get out and open up things a bit?" suggested Clay. "These lights are guttering; it's dangerous!"

"Guess you're right; I'm dizzy from it now."

The retreat was speedy. Back up on deck, after much effort, the rusted ventilators were worked loose enough to turn, and slewed about with their wide mouths seaward to catch the rising breeze.

"Wouldn't it help some to open the hatches?" suggested Clay.

"Sure would; bring that pinch bar and that ax." Watson led the way to the forward hatch.

It was a grueling job to get the first hatch cover off and open it up. Finally it was accomplished, and the stale air released from that hold was enough to knock an elephant down.

"Whew! Bet a thousand rats died down there; and goodness knows what sort of a cargo has spoiled," commented Clay, pointing his nose to windward for a fresh breath.

"*Mucho malo — vamonos?*" suggested Pedro.

"Sure, it's bad, but we ain't going anywhere. We're going to give her the fresh air treatment for a day, anyway. Say, you Pedro, take that boatman and beat it back to town; get us some grub, plenty of drinking water and pick up some more men. We can take on a dozen more to-day, and more to-morrow. Hurry!"

The task of opening the remaining hatches proved a two hour job. Then a visit was made to the storeroom to find out just what was available in the way of supplies.

The room they had entered contained plenty of white paint for inside work, gray for outside woodwork, superstructure and deck, and black bituminous paint for stack, masts and hull. There were brushes, mops, brass polish, extra panes of glass, sets of overalls, rubber boots, spare tarpaulins, wire and manila rope and tools of all sorts. The contents of the room, having been protected, were in very fair condition.

The second storeroom contained shovels, galvanized buckets, much wrought pipe of assorted sizes, fittings and a work bench and tools, spare parts for engine and machinery and odds and ends of stuff, and more black paint.

Selecting two scoop shovels, three galvanized tin buckets, three steel bristle brushes, three mops and several packages of scouring powder, Watson, Clay, and Juan Monte returned to the bridge deck. The pelicans were back on the rail and gulls all over the structure again.

Clay swung his mop and knocked two pelicans off the bridge. Watson threw a piece of plank and fired three shots from his revolver at the gulls, scaring them thoroughly.

"We're going to have the devil's own time breaking up this place as general headquarters and a roost," grumbled Watson, beginning to scrape trash and debris from

the bridge floor with his shovel and heave it over the side. "Hey, you fellows, get inside and start cleaning up!"

"How about water to scrub with?" demanded Clay.

"By golly, that is necessary! Bring the buckets and let's see if the tanks have any in them?"

The hand pump on the lower deck showed plenty of water, but with a very bad odor.

"The smell will leave after the air hits it. At any rate, it is all we have," Watson said cheerily, returning to his task of cleaning up the bridge.

By the time Pedro returned with food and drinking water the workers were almost famished. He brought three men with him. Two were given buckets of white paint and started on the interior woodwork and steel walls of the superstructure. They were inexperienced, of course, and their work was rough, but it helped appearances greatly.

The other man was started carrying trash and old bedding from the quarters below, dumping it overboard to be burned when the sun had dried it thoroughly. Watson and Clay were helping everywhere, while Pedro and Juan Monte were now using paint on the bridge deck, on the outside.

Dusk brought cessation of labor. The help promised to return next morning and bring other men to work. They left, walking around the shore toward town; Watson, Clay, Pedro, and Juan returning by boat. After a shower bath and a hearty supper, the two Americans turned in early, dead tired. Padre Francisco had held them for an hour listening to the latest news by overland courier from the war in Europe.

Back on the job next morning, the owners of the Loreli found eight new applicants for work awaiting them in addition to the three of the day before. Four were told off to start painting the rusty smokestack, masts and booms; two were put at work clearing out the forecastle, washing it and washing off the deck; two more were to follow them with gray paint for the forecastle interior and the deck and rail walls.

Rubbish was cleared from the officers' quarters, dining saloon and galley, and two more men were put on the interior, using white paint. Pedro and the other men were left up on the bridge deck to continue the painting and cleaning up there.

Watson and Clay lighted four lanterns and sallied down into the boiler and engine rooms on an inspection tour. The strong sea breeze with ventilators properly adjusted and hatches open had swept most of the foul air out, but still it was not overly pleasant down there.

"A whole lot depends on what I find down here, Ted, old hoss!" advised Watson as the two reached the engine room.

"Here's hoping you find all you hope for, and more!"

Silently, and with the air of one who knows exactly what he is about, the keen blue eyes of Breck Watson examined engines, steam pipes, water gauges, connections; tested this and that lever. Then he passed into the fire room. There was abundant coal in the bunkers, a reserve supply bunkered in a pen amidship and the water tanks were well filled.

"See all this bilge water?" Watson demanded jubilantly.

"Feel it mostly; it's nearly to my shoe tops."

"It's a good sign. It has come in mainly through rains, down the stack, down ventilators and some got in during the storm. The hull's all right; that's the main point!"

"How do you know?"

"The bilge is proof of that; otherwise it would have seeped out."

"That is good news, sure enough; how's the machinery?"

"Dandy engine and boilers, but mighty dirty and rusty, of course. Need an awful lot of work on them, but blamed if I can see anything radically wrong.

"First thing, we have to get some more hands and start the hand pumps going and get this bilge out of here so I can work on the machinery. We'll send that boatman back to town for more men."

"All right; let's get out of here." Clay led the way.

"Then I'm going to raise a bit of steam, just to test out the connections—"

"You're liable to blow us up; suppose some of those boiler tubes are rusted out?" demurred Clay.

"Oh, I won't run her over twenty pounds, just enough to test her out, try the winches, and so on."

"Well, I'm nervous about it."

"Forget it; twenty pounds of steam would only fizzle a bit even if anything went wrong."

"But why bother with the steam?" Clay scratched his head dubiously. "Suppose she's got some bad flues?"

"Has it ever occurred to you that this ship's full of a rotten cargo of some kind, and to get the stuff out of her will make her just about half as light, that is, easier to float, provided some way is figured out to float her?"

"No, I told you I don't know anything about ships; my line is hydraulic and mining machinery."

"Well, I think I know what I'm doing. And then, too, it may not amount to anything on the floating end, but the more work of a substantial nature we do on her the bigger bona fide claim we have and the more we can ask, provided we sell out; or even if the case gets in the courts."

"But what's all that got to do with raising steam?" Clay insisted.

"Oh, darn it, can't you see that I've got to have steam to operate those winches, to hoist all this truck out of her and dump it overboard to lighten her?"

"Excuse me, I didn't know—"

"Well, that's the idea. *Oiga — compañero!*" he yelled at the boatman. "*Tragame quatros mas hombres—muy fuerte—y pronto—tambien?*"

"*Si, si, capitan!*" The boatman went over the side and down the ladder to go get the four more men.

"Come on, let's get busy while we can; no telling when an outfit will land here and try to break up our playhouse!" Watson took up the scrubbing brush dropped by the boatman and Clay opened another bucket of white paint and began using the brush.

"Do you really suppose we are likely to have trouble?" he asked as he freshened up interior woodwork.

"Wouldn't surprise me a bit. Suppose you had come all the way from the States and expected to clean up about a million, and had a heavy expense, too, and found a couple of adventurers had beat you to it and were in possession, what would you do?" inquired Watson.

"Why—why—I'd try to buy them out reasonably—"

"Suppose the adventurers were not reasonable, and you didn't have any too much money?"

"I'd run 'em off!"

"Exactly!" exclaimed Watson. "Now, when you figure there's another outfit of sure enough hard boiled ginks and wreckers from down on the coast of Chili also expecting to come up here and pick this juicy plum, you see, it's no blooming picnic we are on?"

"You're damn well right!" blurted Clay. "Suppose we could put on a bigger crew and get away before they come?"

"Hardly, but it's worth trying; at two *reales* a day per hand that all of twenty-two cents."

"Suppose they'd help us fight?"

"Doubt it; spigs are rotten shots—at least, Mexicans are. Shut their eyes when they pull the trigger. Besides, we haven't anything to shoot with except these two old gats."

"Looks a bit bilious, doesn't it?"

"Friend, in a little better than three weeks I look to see hell a-popping around this beautiful little City of Peace!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM—*By RAY CUMMINGS*

originally printed in this magazine, as listed in the issue for November 11, 1922, on the occasion of its being brought out in book form in England, has now been issued between covers in this country by Harper & Brothers, New York, price $2.00.

The Collision

By LAURIE YORK ERSKINE

Author of "The Laughing Rider," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

"IT'S her seventh," Alicia said moodily.

"And Brent's salary is fifty-five dollars a week," added the practical Marion.

"I was speaking with her last week," continued Alicia. "She said that she married him to better herself."

"What was she before?"

"Sixth child in a family of eight. Her father was a chauffeur."

Marion laughed.

"It's what is described in the vulgate as the limit, isn't it?"

Alicia did not answer her. She sat in the bay window of her sitting room at Northover, and gazed thoughtfully upon her father's glossy black car as it stood outside the chauffeur's cottage across the driveway. Morley Averill was a humane man, because he felt he could afford it, and he had sent his family doctor down to Northover to attend his chauffeur's wife, just as if he really liked her to have more children than she could take care of.

"It's dreadful!" said Alicia. Her wealth of golden colored hair was spread out behind her, drying, and her lovely, patrician face looked like the face of a princess, suffering for the troubles of her people.

Behind her Marion Ray brought the whole picture down to earth. Nothing of the fairy books about Marion. She was neat, she was pretty. She was brunette; and she was eminently practical. They said that Marion had a clever line. Morley Averill was far too aristocratic to under-

stand what that meant; but he said the same thing in his own words. "Marion is admirably sensible, my dear," he told his daughter. And that's why Marion was more than a poor relation to the Averill's. Morley felt that under Marion's watchful companionship, his unsophisticated heiress was safe. Safe from what? you will ask. Listen.

"It's just what father is trying to do for me," declared Alicia, bitterly.

"What is?" asked Marion.

"Marry me for the purpose of 'bettering myself'."

"That's why everybody gets married."

"I don't believe it, Marion. And you don't, either. A marriage is a thing that cannot be planned, as the practical matters of life are planned. And yet father is planning my marriage exactly as if he were buying a new railroad. It's intolerable."

"But Craig Rutledge could hardly be described as a chauffeur, Alicia; and anyway there's no reason why you need have more than three or four children."

"Marion!"

Alicia's gaze left the polished car and wandered down the driveway to the ribbon of white road beyond. A hay wagon was crawling down that road, and lazily she watched it.

"I'm not going to do it!" she exclaimed suddenly. "If father doesn't come down on Saturday, I'll go back to New York."

Marion indulged in a smile.

"For the love of Tut, Alicia, use your head. You're quite a big girl, now. Do you know why you're down here?"

"Of course I do. I'm down here to meet this Rutledge man and get myself married to him. It's too dreadful!"

"That's only about a third of the plot, my dear. There are about twenty-seven reasons why you're down here, and they're all in New York City waiting patiently for little Alice to return and gum up the good works."

"I wish you'd study English, Marion. Not knowing the language, you seem bound to speak in riddles. I hate riddles; I always think of a good solution, and it's always the wrong one. What are you talking about."

"You, chiefly. When you came back from your French school, or was it Russia or Afghanistan?"

"Switzerland."

"Well, when you came back last fall, all the cake eaters on the Avenue pricked up their ears, and smelt orange blossoms. 'Alicia Averill,' they told the world, 'will make a good match.' But they weren't thinking of matches, Alicia. They were thinking of cigarettes, and Rolls-Royces, and the monthly deluge. So they spent their last penny on glosserino for the hair and rallied round for the grand overture. I said twenty-seven, didn't I? Well, you can add ten and then be overlooking Freddie Ostrander, the demon opportunist in the lists of matrimony; and when you motored home from the Westerfelt's barn dance at the Ritz with little Freddie himself, and took two hours to get from Forty-Seventh to Sixty-Sixth Street; and when Freddie came around to see father's library the following day, father began to smell orange blossoms, too. But father wanted to pick the groom; and that groom was not going to list seed cake as his favorite food, and the barber at the Ritz as his only friend."

"Why, Marion, what nonsense. Freddie Ostrander was nothing to me."

"To your father he is fifty per cent less than nothing. But the point is, Alicia, not whom you're going to reject, but whom you're going to accept. And when father picked Craig Rutledge to play that part, he picked a winner."

"But I haven't even met him?"

"Well, that's as good an argument for you to stay, as it is for you to leave."

"Marion, I'm afraid you are like all the rest of the people in this country. Can't you see that to any person of finer feeling a marriage can only be the inevitable consummation of a natural attraction. We go through life like the ancient knight who sought the Grail, and some day, at some moment, we turn a corner, and see it in all its splendor, there upon the altar for our taking. That is what love is, Marion. It is from that love only that a happy marriage can emerge."

"Sounds to me like a product of Switzerland. Like their navy."

"What do you mean?"

"The Swiss navy. It may be seaworthy, but there's nothing to float it on, so you can't prove it." Marion turned and seated herself in front of her companion. "Alicia, dear, your brain is all cluttered up with going to school in the Alps. You can't sit on the Matterhorn five years without getting a low opinion of skyscrapers, but let me tell you that it's in the skyscrapers you buy all the tickets for Switzerland and other cultural eminences. In short the American viewpoint may not be Alpine, but it helps you to get there. Now, how are you going to get around the corner where your true knight waits, unless you come to the corner? You haven't even seen this Rutledge proposition. He may be just the mixed grill you're looking for."

"I said Grail, not grill," corrected Alicia. She had seen the hay wagon disappear in the woods which screened the entrance to the Northover drive, and now dreamily regarded the vacant roadway, as though she felt that her knight might come galloping down that shimmering ribbon even while she watched.

She slowly but decidedly shook her lovely head.

"It's too dreadful!" she cried again. "How can I meet him? How can I look into the man's face? It's too obvious! Daddy will give a party, and everybody will know then that he has taken this place for the summer just for the purpose of bringing us together."

"Don't let that worry you," quoth Marion shrewdly. "That particular game is played so often over here that houses are built in the country for no other purpose. Anyway, you could never have met him any other way. He's the real thing, is this little Craig Rutledge. He's got a studio or something down here, and he only goes up to town to fire the help and reorganize companies. You talk about knights and mixed grills, my dear, but you don't want to get all worked up when a real, genuine, two-fisted, he-man, is sicked onto you. Besides, my dear, there is money attached."

"Marion, how can you!" Alicia spoke with considerable warmth, but her serene and beautiful face never betrayed the depth of her feeling for an instant. She almost reclined into the comfortable arms of the chair she occupied and her sapphire eyes were set dreamily upon a tiny, nondescript car which was scurrying out of the distance down the white ribbon of road. "That is all I hear of this man. His capacity for work, and his money. Are there no more essential things in life? Does happiness consist of nothing more than shrewdness and common sense? The ability to make money?"

Marion's interest, however, had for the moment wandered. The doctor had emerged from the chauffeur's cottage and entered the shining body of the car. He was closely followed by the chauffeur himself, who, radiant with an imbecile happiness, clambered into his seat at the wheel.

"Brent is due to give the doctor some thrills," observed Marion. "He can get seventy m. p. h. out of that car, and he's so anxious to get back to his new liability that he'll probably only hit the hill tops on the way to and from."

Certainly from the whizz of the wheels, they heard as the great car sped down the drive, Brent seemed determined that Marion's prophecy should be fulfilled.

"Common sense and business efficiency are good enough fetishes for the struggling youth," remarked Alicia Averill, with a quaint little touch of philosophy, "but love and marriage should mean something more than that."

"What for instance?" parried Marion. "Like Lohengrin, I suppose? fairy princes in oyster shell canoes?"

But Alicia had leaped from her chair, with white face and blue eyes wide open.

"Marion!" she cried, and clutched her companion's arm. "Oh, ring, Marion! Something awful has happened! Ring!"

She had seen the little, nondescript car disappear, as the hay wagon had disappeared, behind the screening woodland. Then the great black car had shot down the driveway like an avenging monster. Like a shining beast it had plunged into those same woods, and vanished. There had followed an audible crash, and like a dummy tossed by a strong arm, the body of a man with a terrible scarlet head had

come hurtling through the hedge which separated those woods from the grounds, to lie hideously inert on the grass.

Following Alicia's gaze, Marion summed up the situation in a glance.

"Ring?" she cried. "You mean run! Come on, Alicia, Brent has hit more than a hilltop this time!" And with the grace of an athlete, Marion swept from the room, while Alicia, just as supple, just as graceful in the lissome beauty of her youth, followed her with hair flying like a golden pennant about her shoulders.

II

It was one of the most astonishing incidents of that remarkable occurrence that Cowper got there first. Alicia and Marion had not been the only interested watchers of the glossy car as it waited outside the chauffeur's cottage that morning; for all Brent's fellow servants were grouped in the porch with their eyes glued on the doorway of the chauffeur's humble cot, as if the brass knocker on it might have been expected to tell them at any minute whether it was a boy or girl.

Cowper didn't approve of this business of bringing the family doctor down to attend to the chauffeur's brat, as he unfeelingly described it, and was just telling Burden, the gardener, that no good could come of it, when Brent followed the doctor out of his cottage door and whisked him away down the drive without giving them a word to relieve their curiosity.

Cowper shook his head gloomily at that. He was the Averill butler. He should have been apprised with some ceremony of what had occurred within. He asked Burden what the world was coming to. Burden did not reply, but almost immediately the subdued crash, and the appearance of the scarlet headed man through the hedge, informed that Brent, for his part, had come to a disastrous stop.

A housemaid screamed.

"He's broke the hedge!" exclaimed Burden, incredulously.

"Goo—!" remarked Cowper, "Look at the blood!" And forgetting his dignity, he started to run. Burden started to run, too, and they found themselves racing for the scene of the disaster. Cowper won, not because he was younger than Burden, nor because he had sounder wind or limb. Cowper won because Burden in some manner mixed up his feet and hit the road with his stomach. After that he had to retire to the shrubbery, because the slide he had made had affected his braces.

Cowper came upon the scene just as Brent and the doctor picked up the man with the scarlet head and laid him beneath a tree. He found that he was panting in a manner unworthy of the perfect butler, and strove for dignity by pretending that he always breathed like that.

"Is 'e—'urt—sir?" gasped Cowper.

Brent looked at him with a feverish eye.

"Here, Cowper, you're a witness of this!" he cried savagely. "You saw it, didn't you? He was on the wrong side, wasn't he? Wasn't he on the wrong side?"

Cowper goggled an owlish eye at the chauffeur, and made funny noises in his throat.

"Of course," he finally pronounced. "Of course he's on the wrong side. Comin' through the 'edge that way can only be described as trespassing."

Marion Ray swept down upon them, Alicia at her elbow.

"Whose fault, doctor?" she asked.

"Is he badly hurt, Dr. Finch?" chimed Alicia's voice.

"I really couldn't say," answered the doctor. "I wasn't looking."

"Oh, please look!" pleaded Alicia. "His head is bleeding."

"I was referring to the accident," said the doctor coldly. "I had been thinking of a private matter." (He had been thinking how much he might charge Morley Averill for this trip to the country), "when there was a terrific crash, and I was upset on the floor of the car. It was your chauffeur who first called my attention to the fact that this person had been injured."

Marion turned without another word to investigate the scene of the accident. Alicia, all compassion, bent over the fallen man.

"His injuries, Dr. Finch, what are they? Are they serious?"

"I can't tell you, Miss Averill. I must make a further examination."

"Brent, is the car still running?"

"Yes, Miss. She'll still move. She's only bent about the nose. He was on the wrong side, miss. Cowper will tell you. He saw it all."

Alicia totally ignored this amazing testimony, and she ignored as well the astonished protest of Cowper. Her thought was only for the wounded.

"Cowper, Burden!" she cried. "Carry him to the car and run him up to the house immediately. Quick!"

Cowper stood gazing upon the inert figure. It was the figure of a rough, unshaven and not overly clean man in overalls. The overalls were generously besmeared with grease, and the dusty face of the wearer was profusely stained with blood. Cowper gazed upon the figure with aversion. He conceived that the duties of a butler stopped short at carrying such burdens as this. And it would never do to let it into the house.

"Come on, Burden, look alive!" he snapped. "And you too!" he glared at a youth of eighteen who was the gardener's assistant. "Lay hold of him." And such was the awe inspiring grandeur of that most perfect of butlers, that Burden and the pop-eyed youth laid hold of the greasy victim and carried him to the car, which Brent brought up from the road. The doctor climbed in with this new charge, and overcame his impatience to get home again by computing another one.

"Drive to the garage," ordered Cowper.

"I said the house," corrected Alicia. "And see that he's put in a spare room, please."

"But, my lady—" Cowper was horrified. "He's hardly in a condition."

"A spare room," insisted Alicia firmly.

The car purred up the drive again, shamefully twisting her broken nose away from the sunlight. Alicia looked for Marion. That maiden rejoined her pensively through the gap which the victim had made in the hedge.

"Brent has done it this time," she announced in her crisp manner. "Look!" She pointed through the hedge to the ruins of a little, tinny car, which appeared to have been half truck and half runabout. On the side of the truck part of the vehicle was painted in large yellow letters, "George Drayton, Mason, Painter and Machinist."

"The gentleman in the overalls was evidently transporting a tool shop and Brent has scattered hardware over three counties. Also he has hit our George into everlasting overtime. If the man recovers it will cost your father a cool twenty thousand. If he doesn't the sum total will depend on how long the widow and children survive him."

Alicia frowned. The practical side of the matter had not occurred to her.

"Widow and children?" she asked. "How do you know he has any?"

"They all have," explained Marion. "Plumbers, masons, steam fitters, and machinists must have children to base their rates on."

"It's dreadful," postulated Alicia. "Fancy our car doing a thing like that!"

They had reached the house now, and entered to find that Cowper had had the victim placed on a great Chesterfield couch in the library. The thoughtful man had also seen that a canvas had been thrown over the Chesterfield first. Alicia, with her hair a golden light about her shoulders, swept into the room like an angel visitant, or a legendary princess.

"How is he, Dr. Finch?" she asked, breathlessly.

Dr. Finch, conscientiously determined to earn the large fee he had decided to charge for this retention, shook his head.

"A case of concussion," he said.

Cowper cleared his throat.

"Think of that," he remarked.

"I asked you to take him to a spare bedroom, Cowper," accused the princess.

"I thought you said just a spare room, Miss Alicia," protested Cowper. He raised his eyebrows defensively. He assumed dignity. "This was the most convenient room we had to spare, ma'am."

The doctor skillfully manipulated a ribbon of gauze and decorated the inert machinist with a white halo. Alicia looked upon the face below the bandage and caught her breath with a little click as she

saw the transparent pallor which the hurried cleansing had exposed.

"Oh, he's dying!" she whispered. "Marion, dear, go and see that a room is prepared for him. Is there anything we can get for him, Dr. Finch?"

"A lawyer," suggested Marion cynically.

Alicia frowned.

"It's too bad of you, Marion. Do go and get that room ready."

There was something in her eyes and voice which moved Marion to depart, despite herself and see about that room.

"Cowper, you must go and lay out some clothes. You know, bed clothes."

Cowper's thin body stiffened.

"Clothes, miss?" he queried. And his eyebrows nearly lost themselves in that lock of hair which he wore in a wily design to conceal the fact that it stood alone.

"Yes. Pajamas, linen—you know."

"But we have none, miss."

Alicia stared at him, amazed.

"Have none? Surely my father's—Mr. Averill's wardrobe is full of things."

Cowper's jaw dropped, but his eyebrows might have been entangled in that deceptive lock of hair. They did not come down.

"Yes, miss," he said, and left the room with a stateliness which was arctic. Outside he found the uneasy Brent, waiting for news of the disaster.

"Is he better?" Brent eagerly wanted to know.

"Clothes!" uttered Cowper in sepulchral tone. "It's a disgrace to the family, that's what it is." He regarded the chauffeur moodily, severely. "He goes and gets himself run into by the family car. Him with his nasty, greasy overalls. He gets run into, and makes us take him into the house. Into Mr. Averill's library, he does. A nice thing." Cowper's voice was bitter, his expression a grimace of the most unutterable distaste. "Then she asks me to give him clothes. Clothes! It ain't good enough for him that he breaks down the 'edge, and gets into the 'ouse. But we must give him the master's clothes. A disgrace, I call it."

"Then he's better?"

Cowper regarded the questioner with a jaundiced eye.

"Better? That young bounder. Brent, is better off than he'll ever be all the rest of his born days. Breakin' into other people's 'ouses!"

III.

COWPER did not approve of the hospitality lavished upon this fragment of human wreckage, and he was determined that anything he might do for the victim's comfort would be done under protest. Had they taken him to the garage, or into the servants' hall, it would have been different, but Cowper could only construe the man's entrance into the very library of one of the first New England families as a piece of diabolic and subtle plotting. So Cowper was frigid.

It may have been this very frigidity upon Cowper's part that did the trick, or it may have been the most ordinary process of nature; but the fact remains that hardly had Cowper left his stimulating atmosphere of extreme coolness behind him when the victim recovered consciousness. He opened his eyes, stared at the ceiling, gave voice to the most unearthly noise Alicia had ever heard—she was so upset that it almost sounded to her as if he had uttered the word "damn"—and tried to sit up.

"There," said the doctor. "It's all right."

"Where the deuce—" muttered the invalid.

"You are among good friends," Alicia assured him, hurriedly. "I am more sorry than I can tell you, Mr. Drayton—"

Then he sat up in earnest. He had caught a glimpse of Alicia, and he wanted to see more.

"You had better lie down," she murmured. She was afraid for him.

She placed a hand upon his shoulder, as though gently to force him back upon the cushions, but the doctor had seized the man's pulse, and frowned about it thoughtfully.

"It's all right," he said. "Let him sit up."

So Alicia contented herself with placing cushions behind the invalid's shoulders.

"It is too terrible to think of," she said. "That our car should have done this. I assure you, Mr. Drayton, that you may

rest easily. We will do everything possible to see that you are taken care of. Please don't worry about anything."

He smiled.

"I'm not," he said. "How did you know my name?"

"It was on your poor little car."

His brow darkened. A cloud of pain and regret depressed him.

"Is it badly smashed?" he asked, anxiously.

"Completely wrecked, I'm afraid," she answered. Then sensitive of his regret, she hurried to reassure him. "Don't worry, we will replace it for you. You must rest now. I am having a room prepared for you."

He moved and she hurried to place a cushion at his elbow.

"I'm a nuisance," he said, apologetically.

She smiled. His eyes wandered to the doctor who was busy returning various instruments to his case. Alicia, hovering over him, saw what direction his gaze had taken, and smiled again, as his face lit up with an amused response to the doctor's absurd dignity. Dr. Finch put away his instruments with the air of an abandoned father putting cherished children into bed.

"Don't break that monkey wrench, doc," the invalid warned him.

"I beg your pardon?" queried the doctor coldly. He was putting an instrument to bed in cotton batting.

"Nothing," smiled the invalid.

"Are you feeling better now?" Alicia asked him.

"Yes, better," he remarked.

She watched him as his eyes wandered over the beautiful, luxuriously furnished apartment. She had long since forgotten the greasy overalls which clothed him, and looked past the dark growth of beard, to those restless eyes.

His gaze wandered from the serried rows of well bound books, and dwelt for a moment upon a fine El Greco which hung in a burnished frame above the fireplace. Alicia frowned a little, perplexed frown, as she noticed that gaze. It seemed to recognize and appreciate.

From the painting, his eyes fell upon the carved table and the three bronzes ranged along its edge. He smiled, and she wondered at his seeming familiarity with his environment. It suddenly occurred to her that this might be no ordinary laborer. He was a painter; "George Drayton, painter," the sign had read. Perhaps a master painter, who merely employed the men who did the masonry and machinist part.

Then her gaze fell upon his hands. They were stained, with broken nails, and scarred finger tips, and she remembered that pathetic little car. That brought her back to the greasy overalls, and her quick, romantic illusion disappeared. He was indeed a laborer, one of the incomprehensible poor, which her world did not include, and could not understand.

"You have some beautiful things here," he remarked, breaking into Alicia's thoughts with startling suddenness.

"Yes, it is a very unusual collection, I believe."

"You know I've never been to this house before. You'll pardon me if I seem impertinent, but I didn't know there were ladies here."

"We just took the place for the summer," explained Alicia, and she knit her brows at the remembrance of the reason she was there. "Father thought it might be useful for a business deal he is planning." She tossed her head.

He was looking at her. Looking into her eyes.

"You are a great addition to the collection," he blurted out suddenly.

"Arrhem!" It was the doctor. Dr. Finch had never lost sight of the greasy overalls for a moment. He, too, felt faintly the impudence of a man clad in that manner, who could get mixed up in an accident which would bring him into such a home as this. That the man should go further and include such a priceless possession of the aristocracy as Miss Alicia Averill in his conversation, was, thought the doctor, a bit thick.

"You seem to be doing very well," he said.

Marion entered, and observed with disfavor that Alicia had been conversing with the invalid.

"Oh, you're conscious," she remarked.

"In a way, yes," responded the invalid.

"That's fine!" said Marion crisply. She sparkled down upon him with her cool, practical eyes, and, surprisingly, every occupant of the room felt that a situation was developing. There was a certain constraint in the atmosphere, a certain effort on the part of Marion, and a certain defiance in the voice of the intruder. It was one of those things. You can't explain them or describe them. You just feel them.

"You know we'd better take care of the business side of this affair," Marion informed Alicia. "This man's rights have got to be protected." She grinned crisply at the subject of her remarks, who studied her without a smile.

"Of course," admitted Alicia vaguely. "But let us wait till he's better."

"No time like the present," breezed on Marion. "Besides, the doctor's here now, and a witness is always best. There are the widow and children you know. We've got to think of his family, dear." She sparkled upon the invalid.

"Tell us your story of the accident, please, Mr. Drayton," she ordered. "And remember we have witnesses present."

"Why, Marion!" cried Alicia. "I never heard of such a thing. We mustn't worry him now."

"How about it, doctor?" asked the efficient Marion. "Can he stand a few simple words?"

"I think so." Dr. Finch was grinning appreciatively. This is how the man should have been treated from the first. Crawling into private houses!

"All right." Marion turned with the most businesslike geniality upon the invalid. "Now tell us all about it," she urged him. Her eyes, however, added very plainly to her remark the warning: "And we want the truth, you know."

Alicia would have protested again, but she caught the eye of Marion's victim, and saw that it contained no hint of helplessness. Mr. George Drayton was regarding his inquisitor with an enigmatical smile.

"You mean about the accident?" he asked.

"Yes," encouraged Marion. "About the accident. There was a smash, you know."

"I seem to remember something about it. I ought to. My car is a complete wreck, and I've lost at least a week's work, you know."

"We can discuss that later. What we want are the facts."

"I was just giving them to you."

"I mean about the smash. We all know that your car was wrecked, and that you are injured. But it remains to prove who was to blame for it?"

"You mean my car remains to prove who was to blame for it."

Marion permitted her smile to vanish.

"Young man," she said, "I suppose you want to play this thing for all it's worth. Heavy damages, and all that. Very well. Suppose you give us your account of the whole affair." She smiled significantly. "You may be sure we won't believe it," said that smile.

"Well," began the young man, "I was motoring down the road at a reasonable rate—"

"You're sure you weren't speeding?" snapped Marion deftly. A remarkable girl, Marion.

"Marion, I think this is utterly absurd!" interrupted Alicia, then. "Of course he wasn't speeding! I saw him coming down the road myself!"

"Please let me handle this, Alicia," begged Marion with her sparkling smile. "Really, Mr. Drayton can understand that it is quite necessary. Can't you, Mr. Drayton?"

"Quite," assented the victim. "It's as plain as the nose on your face—"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I didn't mean that personally—just a figure of speech. What I mean to say is, that it's quite plain you are taking advantage of my position. You want to flurry me into foregoing all claim to damages for this accident."

"Please recollect to whom you are speaking, Mr. Drayton," interrupted Dr. Finch, coldly. "I cannot let you insult these young ladies."

Drayton smiled at the doctor appreciatively.

"Thanks. It's nice to know that they are properly protected. But what I have said is the truth; and really, Mrs. Averill."

"My name is Miss Ray," corrected Marion, who had congealed into a frigid patience which boded ill for the moment when she would speak her mind.

"Beg pardon—Miss Ray. Really, Miss Ray, I am amazed that you should take advantage of a man in my position. You wish me to give up all claim upon you; and I suppose I ought to see my attorney before I make any statement about it. But giving up all claim upon you is precisely what I do. The accident was due entirely to the fact that I was thinking of something else at the time, and approached your driveway on the wrong side of the road. Your chauffeur reminded me of it in the most pointed manner. The crash was entirely my own fault, and I hope you will be merciful about collecting for the damages to your car."

In the silence that followed a coupling pin could have been heard to drop. The doctor emitted an exclamation of disgust. He was appalled at the presumption of a mere painter and mason who would practice *noblesse oblige* in the very homes of the wealthy. Marion exclaimed "What?" in a very dramatic tone, and fell to eying the man with the narrow gaze of profoundest suspicion. He was deeper than she had expected. Alicia threw up her head and spoke proudly.

"We owe you an apology," she said to the victim. "I was sure you would behave as you have done. I am sorry, and I am grateful to you for your frankness."

Marion's voice sounded like the drip of water upon tin, and her very pretty face might have been carved from ice, as she capped Alicia's remark with her own.

"We will see that Mr. Averill's lawyer attends to the matter," she announced. "You may feel sure that you will be reimbursed for any loss you may suffer if our chauffeur should prove to have been at fault—"

"Yours very truly—" smiled Drayton.

Marion frowned.

"The car is outside," she added. "You may go home as soon as you want to."

Alicia flushed. This was too much.

"Marion dear," she spoke in a voice which was admirably composed and soft as silk, "I think that you are a little excited. I have asked Mr. Drayton to stay with us until he is better. He will take a spare room for a day or two." Then turning coolly from her companion, she addressed the invalid. "I hope you will give us the pleasure of entertaining you here for a few days. You have been more than kind about this affair, and I couldn't possibly let you go until I can feel sure you are quite recovered. Let Brent carry any message you wish to your people."

"That's all very well, Alicia dear," Marion swiftly interposed before Drayton could speak, "but Cowper tells me there are no arrangements for the spare rooms. We must wait till things are sent down from New York."

Alicia turned upon her very warmly.

"Nonsense, dear!" she said shortly, and belied the endearment with a flashing reproof from her sapphire eyes. "If you will wait here, Mr. Drayton, I shall see that a room is prepared for you immediately."

He inclined his head.

"At your service, Miss Averill," he smiled; and Alicia swept from the room.

IV.

MARION turned upon the guest with a shrewd and understanding smile.

"That was very well done, Mr. Drayton," she said. "You must think you've fallen into a free pass to the Ritz. 'This ticket admits holder to all concessions.' Eh?"

He smiled frankly up at her.

"It does look pretty good to me," he confessed.

Marion turned to the doctor.

"How is he?" she asked.

The doctor gazed at the man with distaste and cold reproof.

"Just a slight concussion," he pronounced. "He'll be as good as ever in a few hours."

"Thank you. Good afternoon, doctor."

The doctor took his leave. Marion

turned again to the job in hand. Nobody was going to put it over on the Averill family while she was present. And she let the invalid know it.

"I knew that nothing had happened to your nerve," she informed him. "Now I'll tell you what you are going to do. We've been looking on this thing as an accident. But you admit that it was your fault. We'll overlook that. We'll overlook the fact that through that accident you got into this house; and seem to have arranged to stay. I say we'll look on this matter as an accident, providing you get right into that little car outside and let Brent take you back to the bosom of your family. See?"

He tipped his head to one side and regarded her.

"But I've already accepted Miss Averill's invitation," he pointed out.

She grinned tightly.

"It won't work, Georgie," she announced. "Your bluff is absolutely no good at all. I wouldn't swap it for a second hand lip stick. When Miss Averill returns to these parts, your going to bid Miss Averill and these parts a long farewell, see?"

"You mean that you suspect me of running into your car for fun?"

"For the fun of chumming up to James Morley Averill, yes."

"Holy Mike! You're kidding me."

"If you want to hear how sincere I am, wait until Miss Averill returns, and we'll talk it all over in front of her. There's lots of things to be said, and sundry sweet remarks might prove unpleasing to the ear of honest labor."

"For instance?"

"For instance the advantages to be gained by an obscure house painter in having a familiar knowledge of the interior arrangements and personnel of a house like this. What a useful friend Mr. Averill could be for you."

"But you don't suppose I'd go crashing into a high powered car just to get acquainted with a rich man, do you?"

"I'm just telling you how it sounds." She suddenly adopted a very serious and what she fondly imagined to be an impressive tone. She did not know how youthful and charmingly harmless she appeared directly she permitted herself to be serious. "I want to tell you that I have noticed your attempts to ingratiate yourself with Miss Averill, and it's no use. Your plans, whatever they are, are quite hopeless as long as I am wise to them. So don't you think you'd better go now and avoid a scene?"

While she had thus spoken to him seriously, his face had gradually softened. A twinkle had appeared in his eye, and when he spoke it was with profound humility.

"Miss Hooray," he said, "you are right. I've always wanted to have a ride in a millionaire's car, and I think I'll let your chauffeur take me down to the village. I may never have another such chance again."

Alicia entered just as he rose to his feet, and she stepped quickly to his side, anxious that he should not hurt himself.

"You must rest!" she cried.

"No. It is kind of you, but I must go." He smiled at her, and found her eyes so near his own that he felt it necessary to turn them quickly from her. He realized that he had never seen such eyes before.

"What are you talking about?" she asked, amazed.

"Mr. Drayton has decided that he had better get back to his wife and family," said Marion cheerily.

"I merely said family," he corrected her coolly.

"But are you sure that you are strong enough?" Alicia looked from one to the other in perplexity.

"Yes, quite strong enough. Will you give me a hand to the door?"

Marion eyed him narrowly.

"Brent can do that," she said, and she called to the chauffeur who was at the door. "Assist Mr. Drayton to the car," she directed, and smiled into his eyes as the chauffeur relieved Alicia's arm of its burden.

"Where shall he drive you?" inquired Alicia, solicitously.

"To—" He gazed for a moment into her exquisite face. "Oh, to the shop, of

course. Drayton's shop. I'll show it to you when we come to it," he told the chauffeur. He turned to Alicia again. "Good-by," he said.

She shook his hand.

"Good-by. Let us know how you get on."

"I will! Good-by, Miss Ray." And he was gone.

Alicia stood on the step of the porch and looked after the great car as it glided down the drive. Marion watched her.

"It was lucky he didn't get badly hurt," she remarked.

"Yes," said Alicia. "It was too bad of you, Marion, to treat him so shabbily. It was, indeed. It was petty, cruel."

Marion laughed and put her arm about Alicia's shoulder.

"You ought to go in the movies," she said. "You could write scenarios between the acts. Romance and the Alpine viewpoint make a rotten tape measure, though. When you judge a man you want to be sure your eyes are in good condish."

"Really, Marion, I think you might give me credit for an occasional brain. I'm not such a bad judge as you seem to think. I'll bet anything you like that that man was no ordinary laborer."

Marion gazed at her companion with a searching eye.

"A fairy prince in an oyster shell canoe, I suppose?" she suggested, sarcastically.

Alicia shook her head.

"Something finer than that," she said. "Something finer even than a real prince in a Rolls-Royce."

"What's that?" queried Marion.

"A man in a Ford," said Alicia; and passing Marion, she entered the house with a smile upon her lips which troubled Marion, but which Marion could not understand.

V.

Two days afterward the man came back.

He came humming up the driveway in a car which Marion afterward described as a country boy's dream come true. It seemed to be a Ford, and yet it looked like the caricature of a racing car; it suggested a racing car, and yet one could not overlook its unmistakable resemblance to a flivver. It had been painted crimson, once.

The invalid dismounted jauntily from this car under the very porch of the Averill mansion, and very jauntily he mounted the doorstep and rang the bell.

He was now clad in a pair of loose khaki trousers, a khaki shirt, and serviceable boots. While it was obvious that this regalia had come fresh from the laundry, it nevertheless showed the amorphous blotches of grease which had been displayed more frankly upon his overalls. As far as grease was concerned, this young man seemed a beggar for punishment.

Cowper opened the door, and at the same time, Marion, who had witnessed the visitor's arrival from the lawn, made an approach on the enemy from the rear.

Cowper looked straight through the young man on the doorstep, and wasted few words.

"There's a door at the back," he pointed out.

He did not recognize the visitor because no blood was on his head, and he had come upon this visit clean shaven and neatly groomed. The shave revealed his face as a good, blunt, cheery sort of thing. His gray eyes sparkled humorously under sandy brows, and his crisp, curly hair had more than a touch of red in it. Only a snowy patch upon the forehead bore witness to his recent accident.

"I called to see Miss Averill," he said.

Then Cowper realized who it was.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he asked. "Well, she's out."

"Go back and ask her again."

Cowper eyed him morosely.

"When a gentleman says that a lady is out," he remarked seriously, "she is out. You ought to know better than that."

"I do," answered the visitor. "I saw her in the window."

"I'm sorry," said Cowper frigidly, and would have shut the door, only the caller was a little too far inside. "If you wish an interview with Miss—"

"Can I do anything for you?" It was Marion, directly behind him.

He wheeled about.

"Miss Brrmph!" he exclaimed—he could

not recall the name. "I came to see Miss Averill, but come to think of it, you will do."

"That's flattering. It's so nice to know I'll do."

"Yes, I thought you'd like it."

"Well, what's it all about?"

"Perhaps if you could take a message to Miss Averill?"

"She isn't accustomed to talking business matters over with the workmen. Tell me what you want, and I'll take it up with Mr. Averill by phone."

She intended that to impress him; but he was not impressed.

"All right," he assented. "It's about that accident."

"What accident?"

"Surely you haven't forgotten? I'm the man who was hit by your car on Monday."

"Oh, yes, I do seem to recall a man running into our car. You needn't feel frightened. We have no intention of prosecuting the case."

"That's what I wanted to speak about. I made a slight error, I believe, that afternoon. I have remembered since that it was not my fault at all. Your man was on the wrong side of the road."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Suppose we step inside and talk about it."

He pushed past her into the hallway, and she noticed that he limped heavily upon one foot as he headed to a carved oak settle and made room for her beside him. Cowper, feeling himself dismissed, slipped disapprovingly down the corridor, and Marion, with a danger signal flying in her eyes, ignored the proffered seat and took a chair.

"I can't see anything to talk about," she said. "It seems to me we've done enough of that. You have admitted that the fault was all your own, and we have the doctor as a witness."

"The doctor will also witness that at the time I was suffering from a slight concussion. A man with concussion of the brain is not responsible before the law."

Marion bit her lip. Then she experienced the sensation commonly described as having a bright idea.

"Of course," she said. "And your poor head was so badly hit, too. Now just you go home, and we'll see that it's all arranged satisfactorily." She rose and placed a friendly hand on his shoulder, urging him toward the door. But he remained firm in his seat.

"It's unfortunate," he remarked. "But the matter seems to have gone farther than my head. As a matter of fact, my left—I mean my right leg is rather badly wrenched. It may never be the same again."

She gazed upon him solicitously, but her eyes had a mischievous sparkle.

"Does your head hurt you now?"

"Not as badly as my leg."

"Do you find it hard to think clearly? Does it ache?"

"My leg? You bet it does. As a matter of fact the doctor tells me it may lay me up for some time. So I want to talk over damages, and since Mr. Averill is away, I'd better see Miss Averill about it."

That made Marion so angry that she laughed, and as she laughed, Alicia entered. She recognized the invalid immediately.

"Marion, why didn't you tell me Mr. Drayton was here!" she exclaimed, and he rose to his feet with a bound. Alicia came into the dim hallway like sunlight, her hair in golden loops about her head, and her sapphire eyes full of friendliness. "How are you, Mr. Drayton? I had almost decided to go into the village and inquire after you."

"That was kind of you," he said. "As a matter of fact, I'm not too fit. My right—left—right leg seems to have been badly wrenched."

"And his head was very severely injured," put in Marion, telegraphing suggestively with her eyes from behind him.

"You should have told me he was here," Alicia reproved her.

"He just came to have a chat with Cowper," explained Marion, mischievously.

"You do Cowper a wrong," reproved Drayton. "I'm sure he would never think of chatting with a man to whom he has been so slightly introduced."

"He thinks he wants damages," Marion explained. "It's his poor head."

"Damages?" Alicia's brow puckered swiftly. "But you are not really badly injured?" It was an expression of pure sympathy.

"No," he explained gravely. "But I am afraid I shall be laid off from work for at least two or three weeks, and I thought you would rather see that the thing is made right privately than have the bother of—well, legal affairs."

"Of course!" said Alicia warmly. "How much do you think would be fair?"

He gazed at Marion.

"That," he said, "I should like to talk over with you privately."

"Privately?"

"Well, it would naturally concern my—er—earning capacity; my income, you know—" She saw the delicacy of the situation immediately.

"Of course," she said. "Marion, dear, please let me talk with Mr. Drayton alone."

Again Marion bit her lip. She was genuinely troubled.

"But Alicia, you know, in the absence of your father, we are our only chaperones."

Alicia smiled.

"I don't think Mr. Drayton will abduct me," she said.

Marion could have shaken her—I mean she would have liked to.

"But the accident, my dear. His poor head was so badly injured."

"Marion!" Alicia deliberately turned her back upon her companion. "Perhaps you will walk in the garden with me, Mr. Drayton?" she suggested.

He did not answer, but limping to the door, he opened it while she passed through, and followed her across the driveway to the lawn beyond. Marion frowned, when, looking after them, she noticed that as he walked at Alicia's side, he totally forgot to limp. Then she went directly to the telephone and put in a call for Morley Averill in New York.

VI.

One of the greatest beauties at Northover is the sunken garden. Its the usual thing in formal walks and hedges, with the usual fountain at the end, but an unusual touch is given by the profuse thickets of blossoming shrubs which color the hedge rows and make bowers for the garden seats. On this particular afternoon an additional beauty was provided in the person of Alicia.

The heavy handed son of toil looked upon her with appreciation as, clad in some light stuff of richest blue, her slim, graceful form led him to one of the most scented bowers in the garden. She sat with unconscious charm of gesture upon the seat, and gazed up at him expectantly.

"Won't you sit down?" she suggested. Then a cloud passed over her lovely face. "Oh, I've forgotten your poor leg!" she exclaimed. "I should never have let you walk so far!"

He laughed.

"Look!" he said; and without effort he leaped with the elastic spring of an athlete over the marble seat, the back of which was not a low one, and then, leaning over that back, he addressed her mirthfully.

"Twenty-seven next birthday!" he laughed. "And sound in wind and limb."

"Then you were not serious—" Her voice was perplexed.

With a spring so easily executed that it seemed as little as the ordinary step of a brisk young man, he was over the bench once more, and sitting beside her.

"Yes," he said. "I was serious. I was seriously trying to get a word alone with you."

She turned upon him without offense, but complete mystification in her eyes.

"I don't understand," she said slowly.

Immediately after he had spoken he had reproved himself. He expected her to be offended, reproachful, indignant. It moved him to see the perfect trust with which she voiced her perplexity.

"The accident was nothing," he said. "I have forgotten it, as far as any injury is concerned. Aside from that, it was all my fault. But ever since I came around after that bump on the head, and saw you there, gazing upon the injured laborer with such compassion, I have wanted to see you again."

She divined that there was something in his words that carried them beyond formality.

"That's very kind of you," she said.

"And alone. I wanted to see you alone."

"So you have said before."

"Because, you see, there is something in my gratitude which I didn't want Miss Ray to hear me confess. I am really grateful to you. Deeply grateful. You were so kind, and so compassionate. Of course if I had been any other laborer, similarly afflicted, you would have been the same. I know that. And that is what I wanted to tell you. You can understand that I couldn't say that with your companion present. You can understand that, can't you?" He was very anxious to assure her of the impersonal nature of his gratitude.

Alicia heard him with an increasing sense of uneasiness. She felt that she ought to resent this overture on the part of a common working man. And yet she didn't resent it. There was something about this young man which forbade her to consider him presumptuous. Yet, she felt, she must be firm.

"That is very good of you," she said. "And I appreciate your gratitude. But it was nothing for me to do. It was necessary. You were right when you said that I would have done as much for anybody. It was the thing to do."

"Your friend didn't think so," he reminded her.

"I don't think that you are in a position to pass judgment on that, do you?"

"I beg your pardon."

"Really, Mr. Drayton, it was not right of you to approach me in such a—such a peculiar manner. It's almost overt. I should have been glad to see you if you had only called in the usual way."

"I did. But there was the butler, and there was Miss Ray. I couldn't resist the opportunity of making her happy."

"Happy?"

"Yes. She is so happy when she is defending the family, you know."

"Now you are becoming personal again."

"Am I? I'm sorry. Of course I'm the most utter stranger to you. I apologize."

"Oh, I didn't mean to hurt you. But after all, we haven't known each other very long, have we?" Again she felt that strange sensation which made his stained clothing and labor scarred hands as nothing.

"Is there nothing I can tell you about myself?" he suggested.

She gazed at the still water in the fountain bowl which lay almost at their feet.

"There is one thing only about which I have been curious," she said slowly.

"Ask it," he urged.

"Is there a widow and—I mean, are you—oh—"

"Am I married? No."

Alicia flushed.

"Oh, forgive me, Mr. Drayton. I can't think what made me ask such an intolerable question. You must forget it, Mr. Drayton." She rose.

He did not get up immediately, but sat and looked at her with grave eyes.

"Yes," he said seriously. "I will forget it. On one condition."

"I did not anticipate conditions," she reproved him. He rose and faced her.

"And that is that you forget my offer to tell you anything about myself."

"I assure you I had no intention of taking advantage of you."

"I don't think you understand. Considering the circumstances under which we met, and the fact that you and your companion have made up your minds as to what manner of man I am; and considering that I am going to come and see you again and again, I think it would be very interesting if I allowed you to discover all about me for yourself."

Again he expected indignation, and a cold dismissal. Again she did the unexpected.

"And what," she asked him, "do you suppose I have decided about you?"

"I think you have decided that I am one of the unsuccessful, futile men who must ever grub a living from the needs of the class in which you move."

She had turned away from him and taken a step or two toward the edge of the fountain pool, and there, gazing upon the lily pads, it seemed to her as though she were bewitched. A further testimony to her enchantment lay in the fact that now she spoke words which she could not keep back.

"I only know," she said, "that you are a man, and that you work with your hands. Yet I think you should tell me why it is

that I cannot think of you, or look upon you as one of that army of the futile and unavailing poor."

He fixed his gaze upon the sunlit aura of her hair, and the lovely, girlish profile beneath. He struggled for a moment with a thought, then he spoke, firmly, and with resolution.

"All right," he said. "I will tell you."

But she turned the sunlit face to him and spoke quickly with wide eyes.

"No!" she cried. "No! I do not want to hear." She was frightful of losing hold upon a dream. "Has it never occurred to you how far from our lives fantastic and romantic things are kept. You must not tell me what you are, for that would make you real! You think that I see little of life, and know nothing of such people as you have mentioned. It isn't so. I have seen the homes of the futile, unhappy ones, and I can't bear—"

She stopped short. Suddenly she realized that he was looking at her as painters and masons are not accustomed to look upon the daughters of old New England families. She stopped short, and drawing upon the training of a lifetime, withdrew suddenly into that shell of cool reserve which is provided for every girl who can afford the acquisition of it.

"Good afternoon," she said abruptly; and turned to walk from him up the garden path. He looked after her for a moment in silence. Then stood with one hand upon the back of that marble bench, as though he himself were made from the same substance.

VII.

MARION RAY, meanwhile, had prevailed upon the telephone operator to connect her with Morley Averill in his New York office. The cold voice of the impassive Mr. Averill was so refreshing after the mind rocking achievement of getting that connection that Marion with difficulty restrained herself from greeting him with cheers. Then she informed him that a man with an injured head was intruding upon them.

"Ginger bread?" queried the astonished Mr. Averill. "Tell him you don't want any."

"Not ginger bread. *Inn-jerred hed!*" explained Marion. "He got it in a motor accident."

"Was anybody injured?"

"No. Yes. I mean there is a crazy man here. You'd better come down at once."

"Lazy? You mean one of the help is lazy? Why should I come down?"

Marion finally conveyed to her benefactor that a man who was not mentally responsible was haunting the house and grounds. She suspected blackmail.

Morley Averill was very polite about it, but she felt with a pang of vexation that he was inclined to belittle her alarm. She regretted the unfortunate misunderstanding at the beginning of the conversation. That had made her raise her voice—caused her to seem overexcited.

"I'm not alarmed," she told him. "I just thought you'd like to come down."

"Saturday afternoon," replied Morley Averill with cool preciseness. "Just tell the men to keep a lookout for your visitor and keep him off the grounds."

And that's all the satisfaction Marion got from Morley Averill. She knew that she could have brought him down immediately if she had but mentioned Alicia. Had she even remotely suggested that the intruder had designs upon his daughter, Morley Averill would have come if he had had to run all the way at a dog trot. But Marion found that in a pinch she was not capable of stating such a ridiculous case over the telephone. So she hung up the receiver, and called for Cowper.

"Go out into the garden, Cowper," she told him, "and if that young man is still out there, wait till Miss Averill leaves him, then put him off the grounds."

That is why the intruder, standing statuesquely beside the bench, was suddenly confronted by the determined figure of the Averill butler.

"Now, then, come on, get along," said Cowper.

"Eh?"

"I said get along with you, that's what I said." Cowper was mentally calculating what more could be done in the matter.

"I think you might put it a bit more lucidly," complained his victim.

"I mean that you're not wanted about here, and the sooner you get off the grounds the better."

"But I was just studying the play of the sunlight on the water. Have you ever noticed the play of sunlight on the water?"

"All I notice is that you're trespassing, young feller; and if you don't get off these grounds in a 'urry, I'll put you off." The butler regarded this assertion for a moment. "As sure as my name's Cowper," he added.

"Cowper? You amaze me. Not the poet?"

This was capping injury with insult. It was more than Cowper could stand.

"Come on!" he cried, and dashed at the heinous young man.

I have said that Drayton's conversation was more than Cowper could stand. Immediately upon his rush at the young man, however, it may be said that Cowper capitulated in this respect. He summarily ceased to stand. It is true he made an effort to do so, but that effort was a failure.

The young caller, it seemed, did not like being rushed; and also he had evidently decided upon moving forward at precisely the same moment as Cowper made his onset. The result was that Cowper went backward. He went backward as far as the very brim of the fountain pool, and it was there that he made his most determined effort to stand. It was there, also, that he failed. He subsided with a cry which had the grotesque quality of a cheer, into the three feet of water, and he hit the water flat.

The intruder hastened his steps thereupon toward his waiting car, and the absurd little machine was heard to buzz off down the driveway at precisely the same moment as Cowper, again upon the brim of the pool, disentangled the last clinging stalk of water lily from his melancholy lock of hair.

VIII.

MARION RAY drove down to the village. That is, she had Brent drive her down. In that state of mind which the events of the last few days had engendered in her, she could not have trusted herself to drive the neat sports model which was the car she usually took to town. She felt that she would deliberately, and with malice aforethought, have chased every human being she met to the side of the road and run over it. And this she could not bring herself to do. It was not fair to the children, she reflected. All of which should give the reader an idea of the state, as it is called, of Marion's mind.

Arriving in the village, it was her first intention to visit the headquarters of the village police and set the august machinery of the law upon an inquiry into the affairs of Mr. George Drayton; but seen from the main street the machinery of the village law did not seem particularly august. Indeed, as personified in the appearance of Police Chief Elisha Dudberry, it seemed little short of disreputable.

Elisha Dudberry included the entire police force of Northover village. Elisha was in himself the majesty of the law; and he was not majestic. He was not even fat. It appeared as though he had been once, but the flesh having vanished, a plethora of skin had been left to hang roomily about his shrunken person, and drape itself in unbeautiful dewlaps about his jaw, in pouches under his self important eyes, in furls upon his brow. And Elisha's nose was red.

Marion regarded him with intense disfavor as Brent whisked the car to an impressive stop at the steps of Elisha's office. The law's majesty sat on those steps and returned Marion's gaze with the misanthropic pessimism of a bloodhound that had swallowed a ball of twine.

"Are you the chief of police?" she inquired.

Elisha considered this manifestation of ignorance ungraciously.

"You're one of them city people," he said accusatively.

Marion frowned.

"My name is Miss Ray," she pointed out to him.

"Never heard it," he answered. "What you want with the police force?"

"Ordinary politeness," replied Marion.

He grinned, causing horrible disturbances of his draperies.

"Well, you got that," he remarked. "Now what else?"

At this point Marion decided that the majesty of the law, as personified in Mr. Elisha Dudberry, could never be intrusted with so delicate a mission as the quashing of the obnoxious Drayton. Once let such a matter fall into the knowledge of such a man as this, she reflected, and the village of Northover will laugh again.

"I am staying at Northover, the big house," she explained. "We've taken it for the summer, you know."

"Young woman," he remarked, impressively, "the police department of this village knows of all newcomers, and keeps its eyes strictly open to all evidence. I know all about who's at the big house this summer, and it ain't you. It's a party named Haverhill."

"Of course," said Marion, and smiled upon him brilliantly. "It's because I know you have all the information about the village that I came here. I am Miss Averill's companion. We have to have some carpentry work done, and I have been told that a good man for the job is a fellow named Drayton. I thought you could tell me something about him. Is he trustworthy?"

Mr. Dudberry regarded her with gravity that was tempered with scorn. Why the scorn, Marion could not fathom; but there it was, all the same.

"Of course he's trustworthy," exclaimed the majesty of the law. "The trouble with you city folks is that you think every honest working man in the country isn't good enough to do honest labor without he's dishonest or something. George Drayton's as honest a man as you or me. He does drink too much, and ain't seldom but hardly sober, and they do say that for a young pair so recent coupled up, he treats his wife cruel—"

"He's married?" cried Marion.

"I should hope he's married!" replied Mr. Dudberry sternly. "We don't allow no such goin's on down here to Northover, no *sir!*"

"Thank you," then said Marion. "I just wanted to know about him. I'm sure if you recommend him, he must be more than perfect. If we decide to have the work done, I'll let Mr. Drayton know. All right, Brent."

Brent whisked the car away, and they left Mr. Dudberry to munch upon the surprise that Marion had shown at the fact of Drayton's marriage. Mr. Dudberry could bring the evidence to only one conclusion.

"Dad-rat it!" he chuckled. "If George Drayton ain't the devil with the women. An' a high up girl like her, too! It beats all!"

While Mr. Dudberry indulged in these reflections Brent drove so swiftly, noiselessly, and artfully through the village that no fewer than seven inhabitants had the narrowest escape of their lives without even the thrill of knowing they had been in danger. Brent's eighth encounter, however, was not blind to the benefits of fate.

He was a tall young man of infinitely slender figure who was crossing Main Street with a suit case. Brent missed the young man, but he hit the suit case. It was a flimsy suit case, and it is probable that it was burst open at the first blow of the great car's fender; anyway, it was without doubt wide open when it landed upon Brent's head, because Brent was as completely extinguished by it as he would have been extinguished by an inverted packing case. And about his shoulders were draped articles of male apparel which are seldom mentioned in polite society, but often displayed in advertisements.

Brent swore muffled oaths and brought the car to halt just before it hit the window of Terwilliger's drug store.

"My suit case, I believe?" said the young man politely as he mounted to the running board and took the article off Brent's head.

"Why can't you look where you're going?" mumbled the outraged chauffeur, spitting out collars.

"Douglas Gilfillan!" cried Marion. "What in the world are you doing here?"

"Counting my laundry," explained the cheerful Mr. Gilfillan, recovering his scattered belongings. He addressed himself to Brent. "I was going to speak to Miss Ray," he explained.

Marion eyed him warily.

"Is that why you're here?" she asked.

"That," explained Mr. Gilfillan, "is why I am here."

Brent swung his car about and faced the road again.

"Did I hear you ask me to drive with you?" asked the young man.

"No, you didn't, but if you listen carefully you might gather that I wish you'd either get off that running board or come inside. You make me nervous."

He stepped in and sat beside her.

"Which is a confession that I was right," he remarked as he sank into the soft leather cushions.

She looked at him sharply.

"Oh, and how is that?"

"You will perhaps find it difficult to recall the last conversation we had—although I shall never forget it. Do you?"

"No."

"You don't forget it?"

"I don't recall it."

"Then let me remind you. I explained at that time that I should some day make my fortune out of the ideas with which I am gifted and my immortal pen. You were not optimistic about it. You said that I could never achieve the impossible. You have just confessed that you were wrong."

"What logic!" she murmured. "Surely this must be Aristotle himself."

"No, Gilfillan," he protested modestly. "The Greek strain in our blood was lost some years ago. But you digress. I just pointed out, you will remember that you were wrong."

"Very well, I bite. How was I wrong?"

"You admitted that I made you nervous. In short, that I achieved the impossible."

"If you can convince me of that," remarked Marion, "you will have done it again."

"No," he said. "I'll rest on my victory. It is enough for me to know that a regard for my welfare can make you nervous."

"Oh, I wasn't nervous about you," she explained brightly. "I couldn't bear the thought of any more accidents. Which reminds me that I'm glad you came."

He brightened up. "Aha—she softens at last—"

"Don't give me the attributes of your own brain," she protested. "I'm glad to see you, because I was about to hire a night watchman, and I think you'll fill the bill. Have you had any experience?"

He affected the most doleful sigh he could command.

"Experience?" he cried. "And you can ask me that? How many nights have I watched until the last man had departed from No. 82 East Sixty-Eighth Street, so that I might hear again from those sweet lips that: 'It's absolutely no use, Doug; when I marry it's going to be a man with two feet on the good old earth and an elementary knowledge of single entry bookkeeping. Poetry and the silver laces of the moon may be all right for nymphs or fairy princesses, but I don't figure in the society columns of either set mentioned. In my set little reminders are mailed to you every month, and a discount is made for cash.' All that sordid sort of thing. And you ask me if I've had experience as a night watchman! I've watched your two little red lips say those words so often that next time I can't meet my rent I shall make something on the side as a lip reader."

"When you've finished making an exhibition of yourself—" she suggested.

"All right. Just one word from you, and I'll be good as gold."

She shook her head.

"Go on and say it," she urged. "Will I marry you? No. I like you as well as any man I've ever met, Doug, but you can't—"

"Live on love. I know—I've heard those words before." He took her slim little forearm in one earnest hand and spoke with renewed warmth. "That's enough for today," he said. "I have made it a point never to ask you to marry me more than once a day. Then you can't say no twice. But it will come off, some day, Marion. Some day something will bring this matter to a head. Some day you will say yes."

"Oh, give up this foolish idea of writing, Doug!" she cried impulsively.

"You were speaking of a job. You wanted a night watchman."

"Yes, it's a plumber or steam fitter, or something," she said. "Our car hit his the other day, and I guess he's determined to collect heavy damages, even if he has to blackmail us for it. The crash injured his head, and anyway he's well known as a drunkard and wife beater. And he comes around annoying us. He told Alicia that he is bent on seeing her again. I want to keep him away."

He smiled upon her reassuringly. "We will," he said.

By this time they were swinging into the grounds of Northover, and Brent was whisking them up the drive.

"It's a chance to serve you," he pointed out. "A good sign."

Alicia ran from the door to greet the returning Marion. In her hand she held an opened envelope.

"Hello, Douglas!" she cried. "So glad you came down!" Then she ignored him, turning her sky blue eyes, bright with triumph, upon Marion. "I told you he is no ordinary laborer!" she cried.

Marion remembered Mr. Dudberry's information.

"No," she admitted. "I don't think he is."

IX.

THE basis of Alicia's renewed faith in the extraordinary qualities of Mr. Drayton, it seems, was contained in a letter which that morning had been delivered by a smudgy faced boy with a bandaged hand.

"One of the children, I suppose," said Marion brightly.

"Marion, you are incorrigible," Alicia pointed out. "But read that letter, Marion. Read that letter, and then tell me if it was sent by an ordinary laboring man."

Marion read the letter, and she blinked with surprise as she did so.

This I have to hold to my heart,
  This to take by the hand:
Sweet we were for a summer month
  As the sun on the dry, white sand:

Mild we were for a summer month
  As the wind from over the weirs;
And blessed be death, that hushed with salt
  The harsh and slovenly years!

"Mild we were?" repeated Marion. "Well, ask Cowper." She read on:

A fugitive verse out of Millay. Something to fit a mood and to tell you that I will come to your bower this night and hush all those dead, futile years which I lived before we met.

"Isn't that a lovely piece of verse?" exulted Alicia. "He seems to have a native feeling for the beautiful things of life."

"My dear Alicia, he merely has a nasty knock on the head. Of course you won't notice this evidence of his injuries?"

Alicia did not answer her. Instead, she stood and regarded her companion with a steady glance in which reproach was mingled with disdain. She turned and left the room, speaking as she halted for a moment in the doorway.

"When this poor gentleman comes," she said, "he will find that I am ready to receive him. I cannot think of any reason to mistreat him, unless it might be because we are conscious of having injured him."

A perceptible silence followed her exit.

"You see?" Marion appealed to Gilfillan, who waited at her elbow. "That street cleaner has so worked upon Alicia's feelings that she'll be mortgaging the old homestead to pay his damage claims before we know it. She thinks he's romantic. My dear Doug, if you could have only seen the romantic manner in which he remembered that Brent was to blame in running him down! He's as romantic as Laura Jean Libbey: a space rate for every heart throb."

"Do you think he'll come to-night?"

"I think he'll try to come. Do you know what was in that letter?"

"An invitation to Northover."

"What is Millay?" she asked.

"Search me. I think it's either a French diminutive for the name Millicent, or some kind of rolled oat."

Marion shook her head.

"It's one of the latest poets. That letter was made up mostly of verses from Millay, and for the rest from what inspiration he could get out of them. 'Sweet were we—' Ye gods! Of course he got a pretty bad bang on the head, you know."

"And your idea is for me to greet him this evening with a half a dozen more, I presume?"

"You grow brighter. It is."

"I await, all mysterious in the bushes, and fell him as he approaches the lady fair?"

"You do."

"Taking advantage of the fact that he is lame in one leg and unsteady of brain?"

"If you like to fall in with his little conceit, yes. And Cowper will be at hand to help you."

"For your sake, fair lady, and because I think that this is fate's manner of bringing forth a yes from those sweet lips, I'd talk a dumb man to death or throttle an octogenarian who was choking on a fish bone. Who is Cowper?"

She rang the bell.

"Cowper is the butler," she explained. And Cowper entered.

"Cowper, this is Mr. Gilfillan. He has accepted the job of night watchman for the grounds." She grinned mischievously at the surprised Mr. Gilfillan. "I'll leave you with him to make any arrangements you can. That Drayton has threatened to come and visit us to-night."

Cowper frowned, secretly relieved that he had an ally with whom to greet the invader.

"Yes, miss," he promised, and bowed as she left the room. "Now, then, young fellow, if you'll do as you're told, and take directions as I give them, you'll have no cause to complain, I'm sure, and Miss Ray will be properly thankful." He pursed his lips and strove to impress Gilfillan with his superiority by sheer effect of eyebrow and that supercilious lock of hair.

"Miss Ray thought I had better lurk in the bushes," suggested Gilfillan meekly.

Cowper brightened at that.

"A very good idea," he said. "And I shall sit in the hall."

"I have been directed to give him a thrashing," continued Gilfillan.

Cowper was visibly pleased.

"My own thought," he confided from one side of his ample mouth. "And do it near the fountain if you can. He ought to be ducked—and 'eld under."

"Suppose you attend to that part of it," suggested Gilfillan.

Cowper assumed an expression which might almost have been described as doubtful.

"No, you," he rejoined.

"All right. But supposing he gets by me. I presume he will come to the door. Will you administer the thrashing then?"

Cowper nodded very confidently.

"I will," he said.

Gilfillan appraised the frail form of the attenuated butler. If one hit it, reflected he, one might break it.

"He'd muss you up considerably," he warned him.

Cowper shook his head.

"No," he said with assurance. Then, confidently: "The master's fowling piece; I shall 'ave it under my arm."

Gilfillan's expression bordered on the mirthful. Cowper eyed him suspiciously.

"Now, none of yer cheek, young feller!" he warned. "Just go to your room over the garage, take your meals in the servants' 'all, and when I say be ready, why, be ready—and no nonsense about it, either."

"Yes, sir," said Gilfillan meekly.

He retired to the garage with his outraged suit case, and took one of the rooms on the second floor of that building which was pointed out to him by Brent, who was frankly amazed at seeing this young man among the servants. It reduced Miss Ray in his respect.

Gilfillan didn't wait to consider Brent's feelings, however. Having deposited his suit case, he set forth at once to find Marion again. He wanted to speak with her. This he did not achieve immediately because the enemy had reached Marion first and was at that moment employed in verbal combat with her. They stood in the middle of the road at the foot of the drive while Gilfillan looked for the perfidious woman through the rich halls of Northover.

X.

MARION had seen the enemy employed mysteriously about the underbrush that fringed the roadside at the bottom of the drive. She had not identified him imme-

diately, but lured by the curiosity which would have led any woman to investigate a man who did mysterious things with a tape measure along country roads, she had turned from her walk in the tame woods of the grounds, and watched the fellow. He seemed to seek carefully for a certain spot in the road. He bent so that his nose approached the very dirt of the highway. Then he straightened up, cast a quick look over his shoulder, as though to make sure he were not watched and, taking a tape measure from his pocket, measured from the spot he had chosen to another spot on the edge of the road—a spot where the hedge was broken. Then Marion recalled that this was the scene of the famous accident, and at the same time recognized the man before her as the unspeakable Drayton.

It occurred to her, also, that the look he had cast behind him had been to make sure he was *watched!* To make sure that *she* was the watcher! To make sure that he had brought her skillfully to overlook his work.

She felt herself trapped, and was angry. She would have turned away and left him then and there, had it not been for the subtle touch of defeat that such a course would imply. So, lacking nothing in courage, she stepped forward instead and engaged the enemy.

"Have you dropped something?" she asked politely.

He looked about him. "Thank you," he said, and picked up a piece of chalk at his feet. "I just laid it down for a moment. Why, it's Miss Ray."

She acknowledged his greeting with sparkling eyes, and her chin elevated.

"I thought you might have lost your mind," she remarked. "How is your poor head? And that leg? Are you still lame?"

"Yes, indeed," he assured her seriously, and limped across to her side to prove it.

"And Mrs. Drayton? How is she?"

He shot a quick glance toward her, and wiped his hands slowly upon his overalls as he stood there smiling.

"I don't see Mrs. Drayton very often," he said. "But I believe she is all right."

"I'm glad to hear it," she observed dryly. "And now you've found your chalk, I suppose you won't have to measure the road any more?"

"Oh, no," he protested quickly. "The chalk is a part of it. I'm getting evidence for my damage suit."

"What damage suit?"

"Against the Averills. I don't suppose I ought to talk about it with you, but I'm planning to collect damages for the collision. Their car ran into mine, you know."

"But I thought you wanted to fix that out of court."

"I did, but there have been one or two hitches. Of course we may come to an understanding to-night."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I'm to have a conference with Miss Averill this evening. Didn't she tell you about it?"

"I believe she did say something to Cowper about not being at home this evening."

He shook his head gravely.

"I'm afraid Cowper is inclined to misunderstand Miss Alicia. You know those two are not really happy together."

"It seems to me," she said, "that you are evading the issue. You forget that we have long since filed the evidence you gave before witnesses that you were to blame for the affair."

"Oh, that's only a part of it," he assured her. "Of course I was not responsible at the time. Concussion, you know." He eyed her thoughtfully for a moment. "I'm not sure," he went on, "but what I have a case against you for coercion, or something. You know, eliciting a confession under undue influences. It may harm your case."

"See here, young man, do you honestly think that Morley Averill is going to take kindly to a little matter like blackmail? You must want free board and lodging pretty badly to invite disaster that way."

He frowned gravely, almost sorrowfully.

"You mustn't talk like that," he said. "It weakens your case. Another thing is that you hurried me out of your house without proper treatment, so that the ill effects of the smash were aided and abetted. I might have been crippled for life."

"Would that make you unhappy?" she asked softly.

"Of course. It would ruin me."

"Then stay away from the house to-night," she warned him. "If to be crippled for life will really ruin you, don't try to see Miss Averill this evening."

"I don't understand," he said. "Has Cowper been taking Swedish exercises?"

"Cowper has been cleaning Mr. Averill's bird gun."

"How unworthy of him! I shall have to try to stay in one place when Cowper appears. His target will never be hit."

She eyed him pessimistically.

"There are others. Cowper, I think you ought to know, is not alone."

"How nice! I have put much that is regrettable in Cowper down to the fact that he has ever been a lonely man. Perhaps he will improve after this."

"Your sympathy does you credit. But don't you think we ought to have some thought for ourselves? How about your own improvement? Your physical improvement, I mean? If you visit the house to-night, I prophesy your complete physical collapse."

"Thanks. But I assure you my own good health will always be my first concern. I shall do my best to preserve it."

It occurred to Marion that this interview was better ended. She was giving him too much rope. She must be sharp with him.

"And your poor wife," she said. "Think of her. Can you imagine what it will mean if you should be badly treated to-night and the facts of your conference with Miss Averill should be made public? Can't you see what it will mean for your wife?"

Of course she intended to imply a definite threat, and so skillful was Marion in the gentle art of sarcasm that it is certain that he gathered her fullest meaning. And yet he did not seem perturbed. He answered her with a smile.

"When I visit Miss Averill this evening," he said, "I assure you that my only thought will be for my wife."

"Well, I can only suggest that you allow at least one more person to share her place in your mind, then."

"And that is?"

"A good doctor."

With which remark Marion left him to his measurements, which, upon her departure, seemed to interest him no longer.

XI.

After dinner, during which meal the chief topic of conversation had been the unexpected absence of Mr. Gilfillan, Alicia Averill decided that she would retire to her room. She was expecting Mr. Drayton to call, she explained, and would write some letters until he appeared.

"As many letters as that?" questioned Marion.

"You mean that he will not come?"

"I mean that it is absurd for you to endeavor to keep alive the age of romance. People don't even read Laura Jean Libbey any more. All the factory girls read Freud and educated people rely on the movies."

"But he said that he would be here," argued Alicia, who was a fundamentalist.

"That was yesterday, and on the impulse of the moment. He thought it might help his case."

"Do you seriously think he intends to sue my father for damages? And you, who laugh at romance. That's worse than romance. It's sheer fantasy."

"To you, perhaps, but while you were chasing the everlasting mixed grill from peak to peak of the Swiss mountains, I have been living among a large number of the *genus Americanus* which includes not a few George Washington Draytons. I tell you he is playing up to you for no good reason, Alicia, and when he came to me this evening to worry about his little damages—which are a fake—I warned him off."

Alicia greeted this report of service rendered with a complete lack of appreciation.

"Do you think a warning from you would keep him away?" she asked evenly.

"I think it will. Anyway, his wife might not let him come."

"That's unworthy of you, dear."

"It is the truth. I've asked about him in the village, and I know."

"You have been misinformed."

"Alicia dear, let us be sensible about this. I'll grant you that the cold common sense, the eagle eye, and the shrewd guess are not to be compared with the ultimate romance as far as heart throbs are concerned. But this is a grave matter. I tell you seriously, Alicia, that for your sake I have inquired about our George, and I find that he is a married man. They do say that he drinks too much, and don't treat his wife well at all. That's the honest truth, Alicia." Despite the crisp drollery which she could not divorce from her conversation, Marion found herself urging this upon Alicia with a deep and vital earnestness. Alicia gazed with her serene blue eyes at her companion in some astonishment, but she was not convinced.

"It is good of you to think of my welfare, Marion dear," she said calmly. "But you are misinformed."

It was Marion's turn to be astonished.

"Alicia!" she cried. "You don't believe it?"

Alicia arose from the table.

"I don't believe it," she answered with a quiet smile. "See that I am told when he comes, won't you, Marion dear?"

Marion let her go from the room.

"If he gets in the house, I will," she breathed to herself, and sought the outdoors and Douglas Gilfillan.

Gilfillan had failed to see her that afternoon because he had become involved in the affairs of Cowper. Cowper had done the involving. He had waylaid Gilfillan between the garage and the sunken garden, and had recited to him with elaborate detail the events of the last hundred days that preceded the demise of a Mrs. Cowper, who hadn't been able to bear the rude transplantation from a perfect paradise which Cowper called Hingland, to the United States, which Gilfillan gathered were not all they might have been.

Gilfillan, all sympathy, listened as a trapped animal might have listened to a songful trapper, and said "Yes, to be sure," at stated intervals.

"You wouldn't 'ardly believe it, but not one of the family even so much as followed 'er coffin, and we'd been workin' for them seven years," concluded Cowper bitterly. "That's yer Hamerican millionaire for yer. I might 'ave been a dog—less than that—a bloomin' vermint I might of been."

"Yes, to be sure," assented Gilfillan, and taking advantage of Cowper's hurt amazement he had resumed his attempt to find Marion, all too late. He had eaten with the Averill servants in a state which was made the more solemn by virtue of an antipathy which seemed to have sprung up between the butler and the newcomer—an antipathy which increased to a point which merged the butler into a silence no one dared to break when Gilfillan lightly asked Cowper if he ever went in bathing.

After dinner Gilfillan had smoked his pipe in the kitchen garden until Cowper came formally to apprise him that the time had arrived to take his post. He then walked to the front of the house, and in obedience to a preconcerted plan took his place among the trees and shrubs which hedged the lawns from the drive just below the front porch. From this patrol he could command any approach up the driveway or across the lawn. It was very strategic.

Marion, seeking him in this miniature jungle, found herself swallowed by a darkness that she had not suspected to exist so near the house, and for a moment felt as though she was deep in a primitive forest, hundreds of miles from human habitation. She beat about the bushes which surrounded her, and broke out into a little open space where a grove of balsam seemed to frown upon her; she darted from this into a thicket of lighter tinted growth which welcomed her with their suggestion of light. Then she saw the dark form of a man loom up close to her, and involuntarily started away. She caught her foot in a tenuous branch and was flung forward. She would have sprawled, but a strong arm caught her, jerked her to her feet, and held her tight.

"Easy on the high dive," said a voice. "It's too shallow."

It was Douglas Gilfillan.

"Oh, it's you!" she said, catching her breath.

"Yes. I wanted to speak to you about my wages. We said nothing about that, you know."

"I am not in danger of falling now," she reminded him coldly.

"Yes, to be sure. Of course," he explained, and took his arm from about her waist.

"Now, what do you mean by wages?" she asked.

"Pay," he answered.

"Oh, I thought you might be referring to commissions."

"No." He was unabashed. "Our union—you know, the Amalgamated Night Watchmen and Finale Hoppers, Inc.—ruled against a commission basis last month. What we stand for is a piece work rate, and time and a half for all the time our watch is running. Dollar watches are preferred."

"Speak to Cowper about it."

"Thank you, but Cowper's wife died, you know."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"The subject of night watching might get him started again. He has a recitation about it, you know."

"About watching?"

"Yes, among other things. He does the talking, and you the watching. You watch his wife die by slow stages for three months."

"That's too much time for anybody to die in. I want you to do the job in just about five minutes."

"What—die?"

"No, and of course I don't really want you to slay the man. I speak figuratively. You must stop him from reaching the house at all costs."

"Exactly. I agree to stop him at all costs. Now, let's talk about the costs."

"You seem to be very mercenary this evening."

"Is not the laborer worthy of his hirer?"

"Well, what do you suggest? Cowper gets seventy dollars a month."

"He could get more than that in vaudeville. I think I ought to charge by the job."

"Well, what would you consider fair?"

He appeared to think deeply.

"I'll tell you what we do," he suggested. "I'll fix this man up for you so that he won't appear in the open again all summer. Then I will come to you, and I will say: 'The job is done.' You will respond: 'How nice! Oh, my hero!' Then I shall say: 'Oh, it's nothing—a mere nothing. Will you marry me?' And you will say: 'Yes, I will.' How's that?"

"That's very unsatisfactory. It smacks of commercialism."

He seized her in his arms and kissed her.

"How does that smack?" he asked.

Very composedly she broke away from him.

"Do your duty, Douglas," she murmured. "We'll talk about the wages afterward." Then, as she turned on her heel: "Of course deductions will be made against all advances."

Douglas Gilfillan saw the darkness swallow up her neat little form, and then turned to his task with a high heart and a very ready fist. He would not fail her.

But he did.

XII.

Miss Alicia Averill's visitor approached the grounds of Northover House with darkened headlights. He ran his absurd little racing car up the driveway until it was swallowed up by the great shadow of a copse of elm trees. Here he dismounted and strode up the drive on foot. He had not taken seven paces when Douglas Gilfillan stepped from the shrubbery and accosted him.

"Good evening," said Douglas Gilfillan.

"Good evening," responded Alicia's visitor. "A nice night."

"Yes, are you walking home?"

"No. As a matter of fact, I am about to make a call here."

"Driving home, then, perhaps?"

"You don't seem to understand. I am about to call at this house. Northover House, you know." He endeavored to pass the faithful Douglas, but Douglas stood in his way. Also, Douglas shook his head.

"Oh, no," said Douglas. "You are going home. I suggest that you walk, or if you have a car, drive. The point is that you are going home."

The visitor stood a second and pulled himself up, placing his thumbs in his belt.

"You must be crazy," he announced.

Gilfillan shook his head.

"Merely omniscient," he replied. "I know everything. I know that you are going home. I know that if you don't drive yourself home now, somebody else will drive you home later."

"Marvelous," quoth the other. "And who, in a manner of speaking, are you?"

"I am he who sees, and thinks, and lives while the world is asleep. I am he who knows the moon and stars. I know the comings and goings of men and women in the night time. I am the night watchman."

"You are also a sumptuous chump."

Douglas Gilfillan removed his coat very deliberately.

"In which I have the advantage of you," he warned. "For you are about to be unconscious."

With which remark he sprang upon Alicia's visitor with an ardor that was only equaled by the skill with which he used his fists. And that skill in itself was only equaled by an equal skill on the part of Alicia's visitor.

In the darkness of the driveway the two men did battle with the clean cut precision of two very good middleweight boxers. When Gilfillan rushed, the other shuffled backward with exquisite dexterity and rained blows upon Douglas's guard. Douglas presented a shoulder, and sent his opponent reeling with a fine body blow which he followed up with a left to the other's chin which would have done damage if it had landed. But it didn't. Instead Douglas stopped a mighty swing to his right temple, and ducked into a right which made his ribs creak. He backed away, and his opponent shifted. It was then that Douglas began to realize that his opponent had indeed been guilty of misrepresentation. He was not lame, and his head was sound. Douglas's was not.

Douglas was the lighter man. The matter boiled itself down to precisely that. When a good heavy man meets a good light man, the result is foreordained. Douglas ordained it himself at about the same moment as he discovered that his opponent was not lame. But Douglas was no quitter. He tried to overcome his disadvantage by footwork and defensive fighting, but that first rush: that first high spirited attempt to make the affair a short one, had used him badly. Douglas had pressed the fight when he ought to have avoided it. As a result he had spent his best blows—and the bloom of his effort before his adversary had really settled down to boxing.

And now that adversary pressed him. He pressed him with dire weight and heavy blows. Douglas tried footwork with leather soled feet that slipped and rolled upon the gravel. His opponent, clad in khaki and shod with sneakers, followed him mercilessly.

Douglas closed in. He closed in with short armed, hearty blows at his adversary's torso. These he felt land upon the elastic, muscular body of his man, but Alicia's visitor appeared quite unfeeling in the matter. He brought a hooked right arm about and snapped Gilfillan's head sharply over to the left.

"Ugh!" remarked Gilfillan, and relaxed. Alicia's visitor shifted and swung a hooked left that snapped Gilfillan's head back again. For this Douglas appeared to have no comment. He swayed for a split second on the balls of his feet. Alicia's visitor delivered a body blow which was little more than a push. Douglas fell upon his face in the driveway.

"See the moon and the stars," suggested his opponent cheerfully, and with a springy stride he darted forward up the drive.

XIII.

Marion Ray sat in the great bay window that jutted forth from the library of Northover. She sat in the bay window because, with the lights out, and a superhuman concentration of vision, she could imagine that from the bay window she could see down the drive for a considerable distance.

Marion felt decidedly uneasy. Especially she felt uneasy because it seemed that the principal matter of the evening was becoming obscured in her mind by a consideration which insisted upon a position there of greater importance than any other consideration whatever. Like a persistent and spoiled child this matter wormed its way

into Marion's consciousness, and would not let her think of the danger which threatened Alicia and the house of Averill.

"Is he in any danger?" was the question. "Could it be possible that Drayton would carry a gun? And if so, might not Douglas Gilfillan be in peril of his life?"

Suddenly Marion surrendered to that apprehension out of hand. Suppose her mind *was* on Douglas Gilfillan? she argued with herself defensively. One couldn't let a man in for murder and sudden death without *some* consideration. And she felt rather proud as she considered that Douglas Gilfillan was capable of anything. He didn't know what fear was. She decided to go out and speak with Douglas Gilfillan.

In the hallway she came upon Cowper, who sat like a lean and supercilious reminder of man's mortality upon an exceedingly high Renaissance armchair, with a fowling piece across his knees Instead of laughing, Marion found that she was pleased at the sight of that colossal fowling piece.

"I'm going down the drive, Cowper," she said. "Better come along. Bring that gun with you."

Cowper covered with haughty disdain the fact that he didn't like to go out in the dark.

"I think one of us ought to stay here, miss," he objected.

"No. He can't very well get past us to the house if we keep our eyes open," she decided. "Come along."

Cowper clutched his weapon and followed her.

Alicia's visitor, having dispatched Douglas Gilfillan, as recorded in a previous chapter, saw them emerge from the house as he stood in the scented screen of the rhododendrons across the drive. After they had passed down the latter and vanished into darkness, he left his concealment and crossed to the great front door.

Finding it locked, he began to circle the house. They had locked him out, he reflected, and he well knew that he stood little chance of gaining an entrance by ringing the bell. Well, he need not stand upon the conventions; he had got along without that so far. If a window were open, it would do as well; and she would understand. She thirsted for romance; she was wiser than the old-young children of her time; she thirsted for romance. Very well, he would give her romance.

He looked upward, and saw a light which shone from a bay window that opened upon a balcony. He thought quickly. She would expect him. She would wait for him in her sitting room. Her sitting room would be upon the second floor, and that light in the bay window was the only second floor light.

He examined that window and he examined the wall, which was thickly screened with a gnarled and sinuous vine of ivy. He smiled to himself. She thirsted for romance! He drew himself from the ground, with his hands strongly grasping the vine. There was a wealth of footholds. Slowly he climbed toward her window.

Marion, meanwhile, had dragged the unwilling Cowper through all the shrubbery and verdure among which she had sought for Douglas Gilfillan before. And Cowper was unhappy. Cowper was one of those who never leave the paths of this world. The grass beneath his feet was anathema to Cowper, and the shrubbery which clutched at his clothes abhorrent. Life in that moment was further darkened for Cowper by virtue of the fact that he was not familiar with guns, didn't like guns, and had been wont all his life to study with a morbid fascination all those newspaper cases of horrible deaths resulting from guns that had gone off by accident.

"Farmer Blown in Half When Gun Catches Tree!" was a caption that flashed into Cowper's mind at this moment, and he held the gun so high above him that he discovered for the first time how really heavy it could be.

"He's not here," whispered Marion.

"Better go back," instantly suggested Cowper.

"We'll go out on the road first," rejoined Marion.

With a desperate prayer that the gun might not go off until they got into the open spaces of the road, Cowper followed her. As she stepped out of the shrubbery onto the driveway her foot slipped upon a splash of oil.

"Blood!" she cried.

"Gawd!" said Cowper, and the gun went off.

"What do you see?" she exclaimed. But Cowper was speechless.

"What is it?" cried Marion. And Douglas Gilfillan stepped out from the shadows. It was not the Douglas Gilfillan of old, because one of his eyes was closed, and there was blood upon his chin; but he would do.

"Oh, Douglas!" she cried. "You are not hurt."

"No, but it's not Cowper's fault. Please aim at me next time you shoot, Cowper. I like a modicum of safety."

Cowper looked upon the newcomer with disfavor. He didn't know what the world was coming to with servants speaking to their superiors like this. He tried to put something of this disfavor into his voice, but he found that the shock of that gun explosion had wreaked frightful damage with his vocal cords.

"Mind your manners, young man," he abjured Mr. Gilfillan.

"Beg pardon? That intruder of yours knocked me out. Seems to have affected my hearing? What was it you said?"

Cowper replied with a shrill falsetto laugh, thereby surprising himself into an agitation verging on speechlessness.

"Knocked 'im—out—eh?" he quavered. "Serves you right." He assumed a tone of great wisdom and patriarchal dignity. "A fall comes once to everybody in life," he pronounced wisely.

Marion had been listening to this with a wide eyed gaze at the damaged Mr. Gilfillan. To Cowper's remarks she was deaf; to the business of the evening she was blind. Her senses were evenly divided between relief that Douglas was not dead, and solicitude for his injuries.

"The brute!" she cried. "Where is he?"

"I don't know. He left me asleep on spot marked with cross. I suppose he's lurking about the grounds somewhere."

"Cowper! Do you hear that? Go find him!"

"Where?" he cried, and clutched the gun.

"Has that gun another barrel?" asked Gilfillan, pushing it away from his face.

"Yes."

"Then go and stand outside the door with it. If you see him, shoot—but shoot at the door. You can't do worse than break a few windows, then."

Cowper made a last pathetic effort to be supercilious about it, but he found circumstances too much for him.

"Go on. Do as Mr. Gilfillan suggests," said Marion crisply.

Cowper went. As he disappeared he was heard to mutter to himself.

"*Mister* Gilfillan!" he muttered. "Goo!"

"And now what?" asked Marion, turning to Gilfillan.

He seized her by the hand and led her like a little child across the velvet carpet of the grass.

"We'll look for him by ourselves," he said. "I'm anxious to see him again. I think I can handle him if I can get another chance."

They disappeared into the obscurity of the garden side by side.

XIV.

ALICIA AVERILL first discovered that her caller had arrived when he rapped sharply upon her window. Of course she hadn't been writing letters; nobody ever does when retiring to one's room to do so. She had been reclining upon a deep armchair with a book in her lap; and she had been thinking that this world is very cruel to people who fail to make a great deal of money out of it. Especially if they aspire to an acquaintance with the fortunate few. Then the rap came sharply upon her window pane, and she put the book down with no more break in the serenity of her composure than was betrayed in the almost imperceptible lift of one finely drawn eyebrow.

"That's strange," she said.

Again the rap upon the window pane.

Alicia rose, placed her book upon her table, and without hesitation stepped to the window and threw it open. The man outside smiled upon her reassuringly.

"This is scarcely what I expected," she said. "How did you manage to get there, Mr. Drayton."

"Climbed up the ivy," he explained. "May I come in?"

"I'm so glad you mentioned the ivy," she answered. "These things are so disturbing when unexplained. It really seemed as if you'd flown here."

But he harked back to his request.

"We can be so easily seen against the open window," he protested. "Suppose I come inside?"

"Who is there to see us?" she asked.

"Well, among others, the man who waylaid me. When he comes to, he may look about to see where I disappeared to."

"You were waylaid?"

"Yes, you know, I dislike to carp against fate, but I really believe your companion is making a determined effort to prevent us from meeting."

"Who was it waylaid you?"

"A night watchman who spoke in riddles. A first rate boxer, but too light."

"We have no night watchman."

"You may not know it, but you have. And he is a poet. I liked him—a man after my own heart. But don't you think I had better come in?"

"I am alone here. You should really not have come."

"Don't scold me," he pleaded. "Why should I not come up to your window as a suitor should? Must I admit that my princess is too far away?"

The dull report of a gun shot resounded from the night.

"What's that?" she murmured.

He stood in the window, serious and alert.

"It sounds to me as if they were rather overdoing it," he said. "They're shooting."

"At you?"

But he was not considering the refinements of the matter. He thought of her.

"You must go inside," he ordered sharply. "And I must follow you, or leave. Which shall it be?"

He threw one leg over the iron railing of the balcony.

"Must I go?" he asked her.

"No!" cried she. "Come in!"

And he was in the room beside her with the window closed, and the world of realities shut out.

"This is unwise," she murmured. "It is unwise of you to come like this. You place me in a peculiar position."

He shook his head.

"Don't speak like that," he warned her. "Don't recall the stilted world of every day. If you listen to it, you must become as all that world is, dry and dull, and stifled. It is only to those who dare that the other world is revealed."

"What other world?"

"Of dreams come true, because we are brave enough to make them so."

"You speak like a man who has never been contaminated by the world I know," she said. "You are not like my father, and the others. You seem to know something beyond the awful barrier of what the world will think."

"It is because I can overcome barriers," he answered gayly. "There was once a lovely princess who lived in a tower of brass which people called the world of every day. And she could not free herself from that tower, because of its brazen walls. But one day a poor man came along, who saw the princess there, and he stood below her window and cried out: 'Send me down a ladder, fair princess, so that I may come up and save you?' And she threw him down a smile of understanding, and of compassion. In spite of the fact that this ladder was a thing so frail as scarcely to bear his weight, he climbed up to her, and freed her from the tower. Only one thing could have helped him overcome that barrier, but he possessed that thing, for she had given it to him with her smile."

"She must have had a nice smile," remarked Alicia.

"It was the most beautiful smile I have ever seen."

"And what was it he obtained that made him so strong?" she asked.

He gazed straight into her sapphire eyes, and she returned his glance bravely. When she had been with him in the garden she had been afraid of his eager gaze, but now she felt no fear.

"What did he find in her smile?" she insisted.

"He found that he loved her," he said.

Again Alicia showed her mettle. She did not start; she did not drop her gaze. She

continued to look at him, and her eyes seemed to search his soul.

"This is the end," she murmured. "I have known it from the beginning, that it must end this way. You found love in the smile of your princess, and she— What of her? Did she return that love?"

"She could not have been freed from her tower otherwise."

"But supposing she was afraid to be free? Supposing she had lived so long behind those walls of brass that she feared the world outside?"

His gaze was very serious.

She did not know that he was fighting an impulse to reach out and touch her.

"Shall I tell you what would have happened if she had been afraid to leave the tower?" he asked in his deep, vibrant voice.

She appeared a little miserable, a little pathetic, as she stood there in her almost regal beauty and gazed up at him.

"Yes," she murmured.

"She would not have let down that ladder," he said.

"You mean that I have gone too far to retreat?" she asked.

"I mean that I love you, and that you will not retreat."

Thoughtfully she gazed upon him.

"No," she said at last, "I will not. You have spoken the truth—when you said that it is only to the brave that the gates of life are open. Yet it is an exceedingly great thing you ask of me. You ask me to trust you, whom I know less than my father's humblest servant. You ask me to throw in my life with yours, and I am to give up my family and all the life I know—however stifling it may be—to plunge into a world I have never seen. Can you see how much you are asking?"

"I do not ask it. You must desire it, or our love must come to nothing. And yet I tell you that even if I were to prove unworthy and our love should break upon the rocks of stark reality, you would be happier for having left your tower, because you will have lived, and you will find strength and gladness in misfortune out of the bravery of your decision."

She still gazed into his eyes.

"I knew this would be the end," she told him. "When I met you in the garden, I knew it. I knew that I loved you, and that this would be the end."

"It is the beginning, my splendid princess," he said, and took her into his arms.

"I'm glad," she murmured. "I am very happy. When shall we go?"

"When do you desire it?"

"To-morrow. Father will be down Saturday, and I want to go while I am still brave."

"You mean that he might be too much for you?"

"I mean that he *will* be too much for me."

"Nonsense. I know you too well."

"But you don't know father."

"Very well, then. To-morrow."

She considered this seriously, bravely.

"And father must forgive us afterward," she said, doubting it.

He laughed.

"Can you doubt it?" he asked.

She could.

Then he became mysterious.

"You trust me, don't you?" he asked her.

"You don't know how deeply I have proved it," she assured him.

"Then believe me, your father will forgive you," he said.

There was a moment when she was in his arms again; then she pressed him away.

"You must go now," she said. "Come for me to-morrow at eleven in the morning."

"At eleven," he said.

He kissed her again, and she felt helpless in his arms.

XV.

ALICIA saw him disappear in the darkness beneath her balcony, and then, having promised, she withdrew, closing her window behind her. But she sat in a tension of nervous expectation, awaiting the sound of his car. She remembered that shot from the darkness below her, and she feared for him.

She strained every nerve with listening. And at last it came. Not the sound of his car, but a shot. A gunshot from the dark.

She rose with the calm majesty of true tragedy, and swept through her doorway with splendid grace.

Alicia's visitor, having climbed slowly down the ivy vine, feeling his way step by step in the blackness, had finally seen dimly the ground beneath him, and had dropped lightly from the vine. He landed squarely upon the shoulders of the faithful but faint hearted Cowper.

"Gawd!" cried Cowper; and the gun went off.

Like a stag, the young man had regained his feet and bounded away into the darkness swiftly.

Marion and Douglas Gilfillan, hearing the shot, came running to the startled butler's side.

"Where is he?" cried Marion.

"Did you ring the bell?" hailed Douglas.

But Cowper was inarticulate.

"Heelumpjun!" was the best he could do in his present condition.

"What's the matter?"

"He jumped on me!" sobbed Cowper. "Like a tiger it was!"

"Where? Where is he?" cried Marion and Douglas as one.

"There! He run!"

The distracted Cowper pointed into the dim fastnesses behind the garage.

With the suddenness of an apparition Alicia was in their midst.

"Is he hurt?" she demanded coolly. She seemed the calmest of them all.

"No, miss. No, milady," Cowper answered. "It just went orf."

Marion laid an arm upon Alicia's shoulder.

"Don't worry, dear," she said. "We'll get him. Better go into the house."

Alicia gazed at her calmly.

"Very well," she assented. "If no one is injured. Perhaps you are right. I will leave it to you, Marion," and started for the doorway.

Marion, pleased and surprised at Alicia's ready assent, turned to her two confederates.

"Come on!" she cried. "He's lurking behind the garage. We'll see him in jail for this."

"Or hospital," smiled Douglas. "I have something to say to him." He nursed a doubled fist, and taking the reluctant Cowper by an arm, led him after the energetic Marion.

Alicia Averill saw them go, then turned from the doorway immediately. She had suddenly found that beneath her well bred reserve lay a woman of action. She thought quickly, and acted swiftly upon the thought. He would dodge them in the dark and as soon as he lost them would make for the car. When he reached it he would be saved if the engine was running.

With elastic strides Alicia ran down the drive. Somewhere down there his car would be hidden. She reached it and, bounding into the driver's seat, placed her foot upon the starter. With an expert hand she prepared to feed the engine and start it from inertia to the power of a living thing. Then she waited.

For the time she heard nothing. Then came footsteps—hurried footsteps. A man running toward her in the darkness. It was he. Her hand flew swiftly, the starter screamed, the motor rumbled under her manipulation. The engine roared.

He bounded into the car beside her.

"You!" he cried; and she slid across him, permitting him to take the wheel.

"Good-by!" he cried. "To-morrow!"

But she did not leave his side.

"To-night!" she said. "I am going with you."

Behind them the roar of a high-powered engine leaping to life burst from the darkness.

"They've heard you!" she cried. "Go! Fly!"

And the little car leaped forward.

"All right!" he cried. "To-night!" He threw the wheel over, so that the light machine left the drive and whizzed, bird-like, over the soft lawn. He was making for a hole in the hedge which he himself had made.

XVI.

It was the alert Marion who first caught the sound of the engine which betrayed the departure of her prey. Hearing it, she had seized Gilfillan's arm—he was remarkably close to her if the circumstances of their

position were considered—and he in turn had grabbed Cowper, who for another reason had hugged close to the young man's side. They appeared, indeed, as they skulked about the shadows of the outbuildings, like three guilty conspirators of comic opera, closely banded together.

"That's his car!" cried Marion. "Come on!"

At first Gilfillan entertained the extravagant idea that she contemplated chasing the little car on foot; and he almost laughed as he pictured her dashing madly down country roads with himself supporting a fainting butler in the rear. But she led them at a run to the garage, and fairly bounded into the maroon roadster with the long, proud nose, which was her favorite vehicle, and which she controlled as an expert equestrian might control a spirited horse.

Gilfillan followed her, and in the unreasonable impulse of the moment he dragged Cowper, who still clutched the empty gun, up beside him.

They were closely crowded in the narrow seat of the speedster as Marion deftly conjured the great machine into life and sent it plunging through the doors upon the trail. They emerged from the garage just as the fugitive, seeking the hole in the hedge, flashed on his headlights as he sped across the lawn.

"Goo!" remarked Cowper.

He was capable of nothing more comprehensible.

"He thinks he'll get a start on us," grinned Marion. "Lizzie is all right on the grass, but wait till we hit the road!"

As if to furnish a sample of what the machine would do, she hit the drive at fifty-four miles per hour, and scarcely drew up to skid about the turn and swing into the roadway. Cowper threw both arms about Gilfillan's neck as they skidded, and began to cry.

They shot down the road, gaining speed as if rushing, brakeless, down a mountainside. As they approached the hole in the hedge, the little car shot forth in front of them. It bobbed into the road as lightly as if made of cork, and, to the surprise of the pursuers, bobbed perceptibly away from them as it picked up speed on the road.

Marion, for her part, was so astonished that she forgot a well known rut which crossed the drive at this point, hit it at full speed, bounded out of the road, skidded about like a mighty top, and would have plunged into the ditch had not Gilfillan thrown his full weight upon the emergency brake and brought the roaring monster to a stop.

Marion, pale as death, threw her gears into neutral and switched off. She sat silent for a second. Douglas Gilfillan expected her to turn back, but she was made of sterner stuff.

"Take the wheel, Doug," she said. "I want to do some deep breathing. And get him!"

This she added with intense determination as she slipped into Gilfillan's seat and Douglas took the wheel.

"Get *them!*" said Douglas as he started the motor humming. And sure enough, in the glare of their headlight, they could discern two occupants in the little car that was so rapidly receding from them.

"She's with him! Good grief!" cried Marion. "She's with him! Hell for leather, Doug!"

But she had no need to urge him. The great car had already picked up speed, and was whistling in pursuit, its tires shrieking on the macadam.

"Don't wipe your nose on me, Cowper!" snapped Marion, whose soul responded to the mad speed of their pursuit; and she shoved the limp butler from her. Cowper, completely broken, sat thereafter as stiff as a rod—as a corpse—as a butler already dead.

Then, with an arm about his shoulder, and narrowed eyes fixed on the unwinding road, Marion learned that Douglas Gilfillan was a man in a million. A man with nerves of steel—a man who could govern a spirited car, and who understood the dim and devious ways of country roads.

He followed that road with a swift omniscience which thrilled her to the soul. He swept about ruts and holes as though the machine beneath his hand had vision and sense, whisking and twisting about like a

live thing. At seventy miles an hour he could run that car at dark woodlands, rein her in for a turn which he must have felt rather than discerned, and send her shooting forth once more in the even surge of a speeding beast set free. She loved him for it. She felt that she could motor thus through all the years of life, with flashing, unfettered speed, along roads of adventure, to the end of time—with Douglas Gilfillan at the wheel.

"Ah!" she murmured, and clutched tightly at his arm, as they skidded about a corner which she could never have perceived. And they came about on two wheels into the road again.

"Seventy-four!" he grinned, as he pressed the accelerator down with the white highway before them again. Before them they could see the little car which they pursued. It seemed that they had gained upon it now, but in the clean stretch of the road, while the maroon demon surged onward always faster, sang through the black night air, and seemed to gain speed from the very winds through which she swept, the little fugitive appeared to more than hold her own. The white road stretched straight in a sheer line before them—miles of it.

"Step on her! Step on her!" cried Marion, noting this.

He was stepping. The accelerator was pressed home upon the footboard. Eighty-three, eighty-four, eighty-five, read the speedometer. Yet the little car held her own. Far up the road the flare of the red car's headlight picked out the little, beetle-like body.

"Faster!" urged Marion.

Eighty-five, eighty-six, eighty-seven, read the speedometer, as the great engine heated up. But the little car grew dimmer in the headlight. Dimmer and dimmer, as faster and faster it drew away.

Marion could not believe her eyes.

"It can't be a racer!" she muttered. "He could never afford it!"

But the little car seemed suddenly to take wings to itself, and even as they whined and whistled through the darkness with the cut-out roaring, and the pebbles rattling on their fenders, the little car vanished from the range of the great searchlights, and they seemed alone in a void of blackness which leaped in upon them with a shriek.

"It's the devil!" cried Marion.

"It's speed!" said Gilfillan.

Then the little car appeared again.

"He's slowing down!" cried Marion.

And with that the little car vanished completely.

"A curve!" cried Marion. Then, remembering: "And a hill! Slow down!"

Like a mad horse under the hand of a giant, Gilfillan pulled her in with a lurch that almost threw Cowper through the windshield. Bringing the machine into the road, he took the tortuous twisting of that hill as though the wheels were on steel tracks. On the last turn they caught sight of their quarry, who had allowed them to gain by impudently treating fate with a respect that did him credit.

They saw something else as well. They saw the glaring lights of a large touring car which was in the act of plunging toward them, speeding up from the bottom of the hill, seeking impetus for the climb. The little car ahead swept straight at the approaching motor with amazing determination, and they could all but hear the chauffeur of the touring car swear as the oncoming but diminutive racer drove it to the side of the road, and swept by to whizz up the opposite elevation. And close behind that mad little car roared the crimson demon with glaring lights.

The chauffeur of the touring car seemed to have lost his nerve at the sight of the pursuer, for having turned off to the side of the road he stopped there, and Marion caught her breath as Douglas, scarcely drawing in, whisked out to pass the big car by. He did so, but, having passed it, the crimson demon stopped almost dead with a sickening lurch and roared as her hind wheels shrieked helplessly in a mud hole.

It was the same mud that had stopped the touring car; and touring car and protesting crimson demon were stuck fast therein. The chase was over. Douglas Gilfillan switched off.

The chauffeur of the touring car came forward.

"Where in blazes do you think you are going to?" he asked. "A poker party in hell?"

We quote him approximately rather than literally.

"Steady on, old sporting blood!" warned Douglas Gilfillan.

"Marion Ray!" exclaimed the passenger of the touring car. It was Morley Averill himself. He stood in the road and looked up at her. "Is Cowper taken along as chaperon?" he asked.

And Marion found that since the first approach of that perilous passing she had retained Douglas in a firm and not unbecoming embrace.

"No," she said. "For protection. You won't let any harm come to us, will you, Cowper?"

But Cowper was speechless. He would never be his old, supercilious self again.

"Well"—Morley Averill smiled his well bred smile—"I have no desire to be intrusive, but perhaps you will pardon a certain curiosity. I think a certain curiosity is pardonable under the circumstances. Where were you going in such a hurry?"

"We were trying to catch up with another car," explained Douglas Gilfillan.

"Ah! And why?"

"Why? Oh, yes—er—why, Marion?"

Marion tried to think of a good reason. The real one, she reflected, would hardly do to give him.

"Anything the matter?" asked a cheery voice.

And Marion gasped. It was the imperturbable voice of her enemy, the unquenchable Drayton. Sure enough, Marion's visitor stepped unembarrassed into the headlights.

Morley Averill greeted him with surprise and pleasure.

"Craig Rutledge!" he cried. "You're the most welcome man in the world. If ever a mechanical genius was needed, you are in demand at this moment. Both of these cars require your services, if I'm not mistaken."

Mr. Craig Rutledge, some time mistaken at Northover House for Mr. George Drayton, whose flivver he had borrowed that fateful morning in his characteristically democratic way, calmly walked about the two cars and examined their position.

While he did so Marion made some mental adjustments.

"We'll have it out in a jiffy—both of them," he said brightly. "I've got a little car here with my latest engine in it. Most powerful motor ever perfected, if I do say it myself. Isn't it, Miss Ray?"

"Yes, it's powerful," she admitted.

Rutledge hesitated a moment.

"I think I ought to tell you, Morley, before I bring the car along. I happen to be taking Miss Averill for a drive in it. Miss Averill and I have come to a sort of understanding. I hope you don't mind."

"Of course not!" cried Morley Averill heartily. "I don't mind confessing that I rather hoped something of the sort would happen from your meeting down here. But I scarcely thought you would have the opportunity of meeting until I arrived." He shook Mr. Rutledge warmly by the hand. "I can't tell you how glad I am!" he exclaimed.

"As for us getting together," laughed Rutledge, "you must thank Miss Ray for that."

And he departed to bring up his car.

Morley Averill gazed with admiration upon Marion Ray.

"I don't know how you did it, Marion," he said. "But I always said you were the cleverest little person in the family."

"Thank you, Uncle Morley," she smiled. "I hope you will think I have been as clever in choosing a husband for myself as I have been in picking one for Alicia. You know Mr. Gilfillan, don't you?"

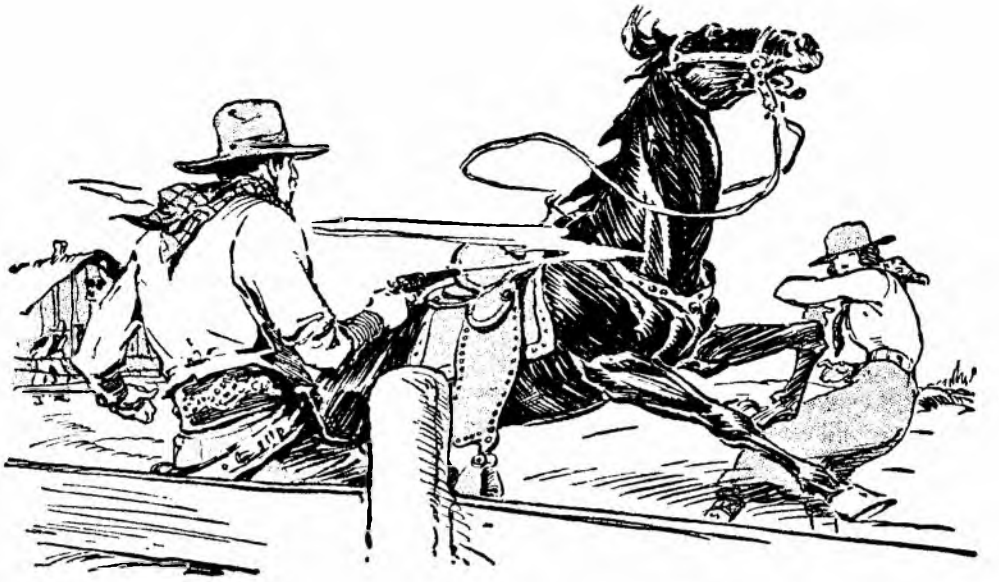
Mr. Averill politely admitted that he felt sure he had met him somewhere.

"You can say what you like about your honest laboring men in Fords," added Marion, "but I do think we should have a touch of romance in life, don't you?"

"I'm sure you are to be trusted about that," said her uncle vaguely.

"Yes," said she. "Douglas is my fairy prince in an oyster shell canoe. Get out, Cowper. Mr. Gilfillan and I are going for a drive."

THE END



Mystery Land

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "The Way of the Buffalo," "Brass Commandments," "Riddle Gawne," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

CHANNING, foreman of the Circle B, morosely eyes the desert town of Red Mesa, while its bad men cautiously survey him from the shelter of the grimy saloons. They know that the broad shouldered, long legged cowman's reputation of killer is genuine. The westbound Limited discharges three passengers—a woman, a girl of eight years, and a man. This fellow attempts to compel his companions to return to the train, but Channing intervenes in response to the appeal in the woman's eyes, chokes the man into submission and tosses him onto the platform of the moving train. Red Mesa has no decent accommodations for the two friendless ones, so Channing brings them to the Circle B. Dave Bassett, owner of the ranch, is a queer compound of sane courage and insane rage, but the cold menace of Channing's presence is a check on his excesses. The woman is Jane Winthrop, a divorcee, and the child is her daughter Evangeline. Bassett tricks Channing into riding to a remote part of the range; meanwhile, he persuades Jane to remain to keep house for him. Exulting to himself over the jealousy of Channing, he turns—and there stands the killer, watching him.

CHAPTER V.

A CONSUMING HATRED.

CHANNING was rigid; his face was pale; there were little flecks of passion in his eyes. But he was self-possessed, as usual.

That was one thing Bassett admired in Channing, even while he hated the man for it—his marvelous self-possession.

Right now he knew Channing was in a terrible rage. Bassett knew he had gone immediately to his shack, to find the woman and the child gone.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for February 16.

Also, Channing suspected that they had been taken away from the shack at his, Bassett's, orders. Bassett also knew that at this minute Channing was yearning to kill him and that, if he found circumstances justified such action, he would do it.

What overjoyed Bassett at this minute was the fact that he hadn't done anything for which he ought to be killed. He had been perfectly gentlemanly about everything, and regular. He'd been polite to the woman; he'd fed her, had taken her in, had hired her.

Everything was all regular and straight. Channing couldn't complain. Yet Bassett knew he would complain; that was what he had come for.

But he'd been too "slick" for Channing. He smiled into Channing's flaming eyes, and though he stiffened he didn't flinch a bit when Channing crossed the floor of the stable and stood within arm's length of him. Channing's body had slouched a little, his feet were planted a little farther apart than usual, his arms were hanging limply at his sides and his head was shoved forward in that queer way which betrays a wanton lust for violence.

"Where's the woman and the child, Bassett?" said Channing.

His voice was dry and light. But it was also steady. Not a quaver in it. No passion, no excitement. Yet it portended violence.

No matter how deeply you hated Channing you couldn't help admiring him! Here he was. He'd been fooled; the woman and the child had been taken from the shack and still you couldn't have told that he was excited about it!

"They're up in the house, Channing. I took them up there to feed them. Did you find any traces of wolves?"

"Bassett, you're a damned liar! There wasn't any wolves. You knew it when you sent me to look for them! If you've been bull-dozin' that woman—"

"Shucks!" broke in Bassett. "Bull-dozin' her! This is my place, ain't it? An' if I want to invite a woman to breakfast, there ain't no one goin' to stop me. You don't need to be so cussed scared. There ain't nothin' happened to them. Right now they're up there runnin' the house. I've hired her to work for me!"

It amused Bassett to see the queer light that leaped into Channing's eyes. Jealousy! That news had taken the starch out of Channing. Inwardly, Channing was writhing; he was in a black rage. There was murder in Channing's heart!

"Go up an' have a talk with them," suggested Bassett. His blood was surging in fierce exultation; he would have laughed aloud at Channing had he dared.

Channing did not answer. He turned, walked out of the stable, went up the path toward the house and stepped up on the kitchen porch.

Bassett watched him. It was sort of carrying on with a high hand, Bassett thought, this thing of a man going right up to the house like that—his house, Bassett's! Just as if he owned the place. Just as though he, Bassett, was a negligible quantity; as if he was not being considered at all!

Bassett's thoughts became abysmal. He stood in the stable door fighting the strange malady that lately had gripped him. His teeth were tightly clenched, his eyes sullen.

Channing saw Jane Winthrop in the kitchen. She had heard his step and had come toward the door. Her face was flushed, but there was delight in her eyes.

Of course, she didn't know what sort of a man Bassett was; she didn't know how matters stood between Channing and Bassett. Channing had come with the intention of telling her, but when he saw the delight in her eyes he knew she thought she had found a haven, and he decided he'd keep his thoughts to himself.

Besides, if he told her what he knew about Bassett she'd insist upon going right back to Red Mesa to take the next train. He didn't want that to happen.

"Good mornin'," he said. "So you're all established, eh? Bassett was tellin' me. I'm right sorry I wasn't around earlier. But there was some wolves at the herd, an' that couldn't be neglected."

"Mr. Bassett told me about them," he said.

His lips curved a little at the "Mr." But there was no emotion in his voice.

"But the herd is all right now," he added. "You've had breakfast, eh? You're all right?"

"Everything is all right," she assured him, watching him intently. "Were you thinking I was in trouble?"

"Trouble!" he smiled. "Oh, no. No trouble is comin' to you, ma'am. You won't have any trouble here. You reckon you're goin' to like it?"

"It is wonderful!" she returned. "The air, the surroundings—everything. And Mr. Bassett is a wonderful man! He has been very kind to Eve and me." The flush in her cheeks deepened. "We like it so well here that I have agreed to stay and keep house for Mr. Bassett."

Again he decided that it wouldn't do to deprecate Bassett. He contrived to smile.

"Accordin' to that I'll be drivin' the buckboard back to Red Mesa," he said. "You won't be needin' it."

"I shall stay here for a while, anyway," she said. Her voice lowered, softened a little, he thought. "I want to thank you for —for what you did for us," she added. "I—I think you must have known right away—when you first saw us, that is—how things stood with us. Channing, you didn't know that I hadn't a cent in my purse!"

Channing's lips straightened.

"You didn't tell Bassett that?" he questioned.

"I would never tell Mr. Bassett!" she declared, firmly.

"But you're tellin' me."

"Channing," she said; "you are my friend. Mr. Bassett is my employer. Isn't there a difference?"

"Some," agreed Channing. He smiled. At a stroke all his rage against Bassett had been banished. He didn't know exactly what he had feared when Bassett had told him that Jane and Eve were quartered in the ranch house; the emotion that had seized him then had defied his reasoning powers. But whatever the emotion it troubled him no longer.

"Well," he said, "I'm mighty glad you're goin' to stay. Mebbe there's a lot of things in this country that will interest you. It's right pretty in spots." He had forgotten that yesterday, before the arrival of the Limited, he had mentally damned the country from horizon to horizon. Now, it seemed to him that it held beauties which he had not half appreciated.

Where yesterday he had been able to see nothing but dust, he now observed long and inviting green stretches, patches of forest, an emerald carpet in a little basin, a tangle of wild, beautiful brush in a distant flat. He saw majesty in the lofty blue peaks of some remote mountains, too—the Santa Catalinas westward; eastward the Caliuros, and behind them the rugged crags of the Pinalenos.

He pointed them all out to her, too; and she came out upon the porch the better to look at them.

"This country ain't half appreciated, ma'am," he told her, gravely; "there's folks that pass through here on the trains, an' when they get where they're goin' they claim they ain't seen anything. That's because they don't look long enough, I reckon. You can't see a country by runnin' through it on a train goin' sixty miles an hour.

"You can look all day at them mountains an' every minute you'll see somethin' different in them Some day, after you're sort of established, an' Eve is a little stronger, we'll ride over that way an' look at them closer."

"I'd love to!" she said. "Yes; we'll go. But first I must learn to ride."

"Shucks," he deprecated; "you'd learn to ride in no time. I'll gentle a horse for you. That will take mebbe a week." He looked at her and his expression grew grave and speculative. "But you'd have to ride 'straddle' I reckon. There ain't a side-saddle on the place."

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

"That ain't anything," he declared soberly. "The women out here all ride that way. Nobody does any criticizin'. An' when you once learn to ride that way you wouldn't want to ride any other way.

"We'll teach Eve to ride, too. We'll set out some mornin' early, takin' grub an' water, an' we'll—"

"Channing," interrupted Bassett; "the boys are waitin' for you to comb them

calves out of the timber! You'd better drag it if you figure on gettin' through today!"

Bassett was standing near the edge of the porch. Neither Jane nor Channing had heard him approach, so intent had they been upon their talk.

Jane took the interruption calmly, but a flood of red surged up Channing's neck, suffused his face and then receded, leaving him pale.

He looked straight at Bassett and smiled with maddening gentleness.

"I've been warnin' you about your voice, Bassett," he said. "It's goin' back on you. A few weeks ago you could whisper a mile away an' scare the cows off the range. Now you've got to get right behind a man for him to hear you when you try to bellow."

He turned to Jane and smiled broadly. "As I was tellin' you a little while ago, ma'am," he said. "Don't you get to worryin'. No trouble is goin' to bother you. An' don't you work too hard an' spoil your health. An' some day we'll have that ride. I'll let you know when I've got a horse gentled for you."

He smiled at Jane, stepped down from the porch and walked past Bassett without looking at him.

Both Jane and Bassett watched him go. But only the two men who had been in camp the night before rode southward into the timber to search for the missing calves. Channing roped the two pinto ponies in the corral, hitched them to the buckboard and drove northward, toward Red Mesa, to return the vehicle to its owner.

It was flagrant insubordination on Channing's part, and Jane looked at Bassett to see how he was taking it. To her astonishment Bassett betrayed no emotion of any kind except for a queer glint in his eyes, which might have been amusement. Observing that she was watching him, Bassett smiled.

"Channing's headstrong, sort of," he said. "I always let the cuss have his way."

Jane went inside. Bassett stood for some time on the porch, watching the progress of the buckboard northward.

So that was how matters stood between Jane and Channing, was it? Already, having known Jane only one day, he was asking her to go riding with him. He'd gentle a horse for her! Bassett stood on the porch for a long time. A strange weakness had come upon him. It was as though a white hot fire was raging through him, consuming his vitality.

He knew now that he couldn't put it off any longer; he'd have to devise some means of getting Channing out of the way!

CHAPTER VI.

AND JEALOUSY.

IT wasn't until three or four days later that Bassett discovered what looked like a bundle of brown cloth lying on a chair in the sitting room of the ranch house. He wouldn't have noticed the bundle at all if a part of it that was draped over the seat of the chair hadn't reminded him of a trouser leg. He walked back and forth past the bundle several times before he observed that there were buttons on the thing, and then he gingerly seized it and held it up.

The piece he held up was a coat. The coat had a narrow waist, a belt, and wide pleats. Buttons, larger than those he wore on his own clothing, ran down the front. A wide collar gave his blood impetus, drew his lips together, brought suspicion and disapproval into his eyes.

He discovered he had only inspected one piece of apparel; he took up another piece, spread it in his big hands and stared at it.

Knee length riding breeches!

He crushed the garment in one hand, reached down and took up a third.

A short riding skirt, pleated like the coat!

Bassett stood for an instant, rigid, silent. Every muscle in his body was taut, every nerve was tingling. His face whitened, he breathed fast.

He wanted to rage up and down the room; he wanted to tear the three garments into pieces and hurl them out of an open window near him; he was beset with a bitter impulse to storm out into the kitchen to ask Jane Winthrop where she had got the "fool stuff" he had found.

He did none of those things. A glimmer of reason that shot through the fire in his brain warned him that he'd best not exhibit any of those riotous impulses. Jane Winthrop did not belong to him; she was only his housekeeper. To rush into her presence in his present frame of mind would be to reveal himself to her.

He didn't want to do that: he wanted her to have a good opinion of him. He liked her; he hoped she'd marry him some day.

He'd figured that out. He meant to marry again. He'd found out why the ranch house was so lonesome. It needed the presence of a woman—a woman like Jane Winthrop. She'd never marry him if he betrayed passion in her presence. She was so calm and dignified that she'd hate any display of rage.

He fought down his passions, conquered them. At the end of several minutes he was able to smile. It was a smile full of malice and derision, but it showed that he was master of himself; that he still had self-control. Of late he had begun to think that he was letting his temper get the better of him. Now he knew he hadn't.

It required several more minutes for him to recover his calmness; and when de did recover it he took the riding breeches to the kitchen door and held them up so that Jane could see them.

He contrived to smile; and his voice was steady.

"Where on earth did these come from?" he asked. "You had them in one of your bags, I reckon. You didn't tell me you could ride."

Jane was standing at the stove. She blushed furiously when she saw what Bassett was showing her.

"I—I didn't have them in one of my bags," she said, haltingly. "I can't ride—yet. Mr. Channing has promised to teach me to ride. He is going to gentle a horse for me." She paused. Observing that Bassett was waiting for her to say something more, she added:

"Channing brought them the day he returned the buckboard to Red Mesa."

Bassett had suspected that. Channing had bought them! Slick, Channing was. Trying to get the start of him! Trying to worm himself into Jane's favor! Buying her riding things! Promising to teach her to ride; to gentle a horse for her!

Bassett did not say anything; he dared not say anything, for fear he'd screech his rage at her and spoil everything. He stood, looking at her, trying his best to smile. He did smile, for she answered it.

"I told Channing I would pay for them," she said.

Bassett muttered something that was intended for approval. But he turned his back upon Jane, re-entered the sitting room, dropped the garment to the chair and walked out the front door.

He crossed the ranch house yard, strode through the timber down near the creek; leaped over the creek itself at a shallow and walked several miles through the knee high sage to a low hill. There he stood for an hour, staring back at the ranch house.

When he returned to the ranch house he was calm. No doubt of that! He felt calm. He had the calmness that comes with decision. Nervousness was a sign of indecision; a nervous man would want to do several things at one time. There was only one thing he wanted to do, and that was to kill Channing.

And there needn't be any hurry about that, either. There couldn't be. A man in a hurry makes mistakes; and he didn't dare make any mistakes when he tackled Channing!

He wouldn't hurry. He'd wait. There would come a time when Channing would relax his incessant watchfulness; there'd come a time when circumstances would conspire to place Channing in a position which would make him an easy victim. No need for him to endanger his own life!

The next day he felt even more calm. It seemed to him that the more intense his hatred of Channing, the more his nerves seemed to steady. Soothing, it was, to think about Channing.

He wouldn't kill Channing just yet; he'd wait awhile. Channing was a brave man; he knew that! And death to Channing wouldn't mean anything. Death wouldn't be punishment.

What he wanted was to see Channing suffer. Channing liked to win all the time;

the man's manner was always that of a winner. Triumph was in the atmosphere around Channing; you felt it whenever you went near him; the atmosphere permeated you; went through you like a knife! It cast a chill over you; it made you feel apprehensive, cautious, timid! It was a hell of a feeling. It took the pugnacity out of a man; it made you feel negligible, inferior, childish.

Well, he'd triumph over Channing. This time he'd reverse things. Channing would gentle a horse for Jane, would he? He'd teach her to ride! Well, maybe Channing wouldn't be successful in those things. What then? Wasn't that failure? And wouldn't that cause Jane to lose faith in Channing?

Of course, Bassett conceded, a great deal depended upon Channing's choice of a horse. Channing wouldn't choose a wild horse to start on. It would be sheer insanity for him to choose an outlaw. He'd be doomed to defeat from the outset.

No; Channing would select a horse that could be ridden. To be sure, there wasn't a horse in the remuda that a woman could safely ride. There wasn't one of them that wouldn't require a lot of gentling before a woman could handle it.

Bassett didn't betray the anxiety that tortured him. He went about his affairs calmly, treating Jane with the same quiet consideration that had marked his manner toward her on the morning he had invited her into the ranch house for breakfast. He assured himself that he was even more considerate. At any rate he was more attentive.

Twice within a week she mentioned her forthcoming riding lessons.

"Seems Channing is delayin' a lot," smiled Bassett. "When is he goin' to gentle that horse?"

"He has been very busy," answered Jane.

"That's so," agreed Bassett. He did not look at Jane as he asked:

"He ain't decided on a horse yet, has he?"

"Why, yes, I believe he has. He mentioned a black horse. I think he called him Midnight."

Bassett was glad his face was averted. Jane would certainly have seen the flash of triumph in his eyes!

Midnight! Midnight was the biggest hypocrite in the Circle B string! Midnight had a church door manner and the heart of a devil! Midnight had been the worst outlaw in the country!

But Bassett was almost forgetting. Channing had not been at the Circle B when Midnight had been broken. Channing had ridden Midnight, but Channing was a wizard with horses and Midnight was always on his best behavior when Channing was in the saddle. He had never betrayed any of his peculiarities to Channing; he had been quiet, obedient and dependable. He must have exhibited all those virtues to induce Channing to choose him for Jane!

But Bassett knew one or two traits about Midnight that no one else knew. And so he did not permit Jane to look into his eyes for a time. He stood near her, pretending to be interested in something outside.

"When's Channing goin' to start gentlin' Midnight?" he asked.

"To-morrow."

"Well; Midnight's good." Bassett appeared to hesitate. "But Midnight's got his faults. An' I ain't meanin' to say anything to run down Channing, ma'am; but if I was figurin' to have a horse gentled for a lady I wouldn't get Channing to do the gentlin'."

"Isn't Channing a good rider? Doesn't he know horses?"

"I ain't sayin' anything about Channing's ridin'. I'd say that he's about as good a rider as any man in the outfit. But Channing's got one fault; he's got a whole lot more conceit than a man ought to have.

"Channing's somethin' of a poser; he likes to make believe he knows how to do a thing whether he knows or not. Likes to shoot off his mouth. You stay around here a while an' you'll find him out."

"Why, I thought he was bashful!" said Jane, astonished at this revelation of Channing's character. She looked sharply at Bassett, and her eyes narrowed a very little, for she thought she detected a flush on Bassett's cheeks; and she now remembered

the sharpness in his voice when he had interrupted the conversation between herself and Channing that day on the rear porch; the day he had ordered Channing to go with the other men to get the calves out of the timber—and Channing had driven the buckboard to Red Mesa.

She could account for Bassett's derogatory words, she thought. For a moment she had almost doubted Channing's ability. Again she shot a glance at Bassett. He was not looking at her, but her own cheeks reddened. Inwardly she laughed. How ridiculous! Why, Channing was almost young enough to be her son! Could Bassett think—! How foolish men were!

But there was no mistaking the discovery. Bassett was jealous.

Her eyes grew thoughtful, serious. She had never thought of Bassett as a possible suitor; and after he left her she began mentally to examine her own feelings. He had made an impression she decided. She liked him. His smile, which was rare, had more than once disturbed her; it had awakened something in her which had been dormant for some time.

Bassett said nothing more to Jane about Channing. He observed, however, that the following morning Channing roped Midnight, saddled and bridled him and rode him out into the sage. For a time Bassett watched horse and rider. Then he went into the stable, delved into a corner and found a quirt.

The quirt was unlike others that hung here and there in the stable. Bassett had bought it several years before from a Mexican. Its rawhide thongs were more slender than those on the other quirts owned by the Circle B; and the extreme end of each thong was tipped with a sphere of silver, about the size of buckshot.

Bassett stuck the implement inside his shirt and walked to the harness shop, where he sat for some time on a bench, rubbing oil on the rawhide thongs of the quirt, to make them pliable. The quirt had been used on Midnight years ago. Bassett wondered if Midnight would remember it.

Bassett thought Midnight would never forget the quirt. In fact, there were times when Midnight's eyes glowed red. Those were the times when Bassett came near him. Yes; he thought Midnight remembered.

CHAPTER VII.

THE QUIRT.

CHANNING worked with Midnight a little while each day, but he did not work every day at the same time, and so Bassett found it hard to be around to watch the contest between man and beast. He couldn't be around all the time, for continued watchfulness might arouse suspicion; and he wanted Channing to go ahead, not mistrusting anything.

Some days he missed seeing Channing put the black horse through his paces. But on those days when he did see he was forced to admit that Channing had adopted the proper method of gentling a horse. But that merely vindicated Bassett's previous conviction that Channing was a wizard with horses, even though the spectacle aroused in him a new contempt of Channing. At various times he asked himself the question: "Wasn't it odd that he didn't fire Channing?"

A queer chill that always ran over him with the propounding of the question was the answer. He was certain that his firing Channing would bring about a clash with the man. And he shrank from a clash with Channing. Channing had an evil temper. Behind Channing's quietness was volcanic passion.

He'd seen Channing exhibit passion. He'd never blown up, as some men did; he'd never raved aloud or threatened. Channing wasn't that kind. When Channing spoke he meant what he said; when he moved, something happened. No; he'd never discharge Channing. That much was definite.

As the days fled Bassett seemed to grow more calm. Channing was doing wonders with Midnight. He had the horse trained to fear a rope, to answer the reins at the slightest touch; to stand perfectly still while Channing mounted him. He'd even taught the animal to lift a foreleg at the touch of a hand!

And Midnight had entirely ceased buck-

ing! That was marvelous! Also, Channing had developed in Midnight a mincing pace, a gentle chop trot with such smooth undulations that when Channing was riding him he seemed almost to glide. The damned horse would never do anything like that for Bassett!

Bassett never asked Jane any more questions about riding. He exerted himself to be kind to her; and he felt that he was making progress. Times when she thought he was interested in something else he knew she was watching him, searching his face for signs of character. When he caught her doing that he'd smile. And he really felt like smiling, because it was gratifying to feel that he was making an impression.

He discovered that when he looked at Jane and smiled her eyes seemed to grow strangely gentle. But he didn't overdo the smiles; he was too wise to make that mistake! Hell; she'd think him a Chessy cat!

There came a day, though, when he dared not smile when she looked at him. It was when she told him in a burst of joyous confidence that she was going riding with Channing the first thing the following morning.

So Channing had Midnight ready, had he?

Bassett replied to Jane; telling her to be careful. He hoped she'd enjoy herself. He told her to watch out for prairie dog towns, and to be sure to ride straight up in the saddle for fear of pitching out of it in case the horse stepped suddenly into a depression. She must keep her stirrups a little forward.

She could keep the reins tight if she wanted to, but with range horses that wasn't necessary. A range horse usually saw a break in the trail before its rider. All she had to do when she rode a range horse was to look out for sudden stops and swerves.

Jane had confided her news to Bassett at noon. An hour later Bassett stuck his head into the mess house, where Channing and two other men of the outfit were eating dinner.

" Channing," he said; " I want you three boys to ride over to the south basin an' throw that little herd into that new grass west of Two Forks. That 'll put them just north of the main herd, an' they'll work toward them. You can camp at Two Forks to-night an' light out for home at daylight. An' day after to-morrow you can brand them dogies we picked up the other day."

Channing turned a slow gaze upon Bassett. Bassett endured his scrutiny steadily; with such calmness that it appeared to Channing that Bassett's mind was concerned only with the day's work.

Channing nodded.

Shortly afterward Channing and the two punchers rode southward with their war bags strapped to the cantles of their saddles. If Bassett had put Channing upon a task that would have required his absence from the ranch the following morning, Channing would have found some excuse to postpone the trip.

Bassett knew that. That was why he had suggested that they " light out for home at daylight."

Bassett indulged in a huge laugh after Channing and the others had gone. He stood in the stable door and watched them out of sight. Then he gazed long at the ranch house. It was now mid-afternoon, and Bassett thought Jane and Evangeline would be on the front veranda or in its vicinity. For the first time since he had established himself at the Circle B he carefully estimated the distance between the house and the stable in the door of which he stood.

The distance was rather greater than he had thought, although he had walked it hundreds of times without paying any particular attention to it. He estimated it at three hundred yards. Between the house and the stable were other buildings. He held a finger up to the breeze. The breeze was blowing from the direction of the ranch house.

Bassett's eyes glowed with satisfaction. He emerged from the stable, went to the harness shop and found the quirt whose thongs he had oiled many days before. He stuck the quirt into his shirt and went back into the stable.

He got a rope from a peg, uncoiled it and " ran " the noose; then coiled the rope again and walked from the stable with the rope dangling from his left arm. He went to the

gate of the horse corral, opened it, entered, slid the bar into place and began to walk toward three or four horses which were grouped together, watching him.

He walked toward the horses, singling out Midnight. Midnight snorted when Bassett continued to approach him, kicked up his heels and raced to the far side of the corral, where he stood, his nostrils flaring, watching Bassett.

Bassett was amused. Midnight, he observed, had not forgotten him. That was good; he wanted Midnight to remember; that was what he had been figuring on.

Bassett was now smiling with straight lips. His eyes were hard as agates. A strange pallor had come into his face, although a spot of deep red glowed in each cheek. He was breathing shallowly, with sharp, rapid, shrill inhalations. The calm that had enveloped him for many days was gone.

His hands trembled as he shifted the rope he carried; he swayed as he walked around the corral seeking to get within throwing distance of Midnight. Bassett was in the grip of the strange malady that he had been fighting for years.

Midnight seemed to sense the transformation in the man. He was wild with rage and fear as he whipped around the corral trying to keep away from the rope. He saw the rope in Bassett's right hand. The sinuous loop he dreaded was swinging in the right hand, the rope's end was in Bassett's left.

Midnight's eyes were alight with a red fire. Bassett made several casts, but Midnight adroitly evaded them, and each time he escaped he snorted and bared his teeth.

Relentlessly, remorselessly, Bassett pursued Midnight. Bassett betrayed absolutely no discouragement at his frequent misses. He seeemd to expect to miss; it was as though he had had this same experience with Midnight before and knew exactly what was in prospect.

Bassett's movements were unhurried, deliberate. The straight lipped smile stayed. It was fixed; it was a smirk that advertised the tenacity of his purpose. He made no sound as he followed Midnight around the corral; his pursuit was inexorable; it could have but one end.

The end came with startling suddenness. Bassett made a feint with the rope. Midnight dodged, wheeled and bolted. He hadn't taken half a dozen strides when the noose slipped over his head.

Frenziedly he fought the noose. He backed away and shook his head like a terrier shaking a rat. The noose tightened, and he had to lunge forward to keep from choking to death. The lunge brought him a moment's respite, and anticipating freedom he reared to his hind legs, pawed at the rope with both forelegs. When he came down he leaped directly away from Bassett. But with a swift flirt of the arm Bassett twirled the rope around the snubbing post in the center of the corral, and when Midnight's third or fourth leap pulled the rope suddenly taut his head was drawn between his forelegs.

He turned completely over and landed heavily on his side. There he stayed, motionless, the breath knocked out of him, while Bassett, releasing the rope from the snubbing post, leaned over him and twisted a loop about his muzzle. Then the rope was slipped off Midnight's neck.

He rose and stood trembling. He knew the fight was over, that he had been conquered.

Still trembling, he permitted Bassett to lead him out of the corral. The corral gate, self-closing, banged behind horse and man.

Bassett's lips were still in the straight smile, though his breathing was heavier. Midnight, too, was breathing shrilly, for he had fought hard. Had one been watching this spectacle it must have been apparent that the horse knew he was beaten and that Bassett, in the rôle of victor, had not yet completed his victory.

He led Midnight into the big stables; into a stout box stall. He loosed the rope around Midnight's muzzle, slipped the bar on the door into place. Then he walked to the stable door and gazed toward the ranch house.

There had been no witnesses to the scene in the corral: there was no sign of life around the ranch house.

Bassett closed the stable door, locked it. He went back to the box stall, climbed to

its top and looked down at Midnight. Bassett's lips were parted now, and the strange smile had grown broader. But something new had come into his eyes—a wild, cruel glare.

"Now, you black devil!" he said. His voice was dry and vibrant. "You'll let Channing gentle you, will you! You'd let him get the best of me, would you!"

He drew out the silver tipped quirt.

CHAPTER VIII.

A REBELLIOUS BEAST.

"SO this is the mornin', eh?" said Bassett. He looked at Jane Winthrop across the breakfast table.

High color was in Jane's cheeks; subdued excitement was in her manner. The glance she gave Bassett was so full of eagerness that a frightful pang of sullen fury shot through him. He felt he managed to conceal his rage from her. He smiled.

"You're keen for the ride, eh?" he inquired. "Well, that's right. You have a good time. I'll stay around here an' take care of Eve. But, mind you, don't ride too long, or you'll pay for it to-morrow. It takes time to get accustomed to ridin'."

But he didn't think she'd do any riding at all. He felt assured of that. He'd "fixed" Midnight. But he had to pretend that he wished her to ride; it was the only way to make progress with her.

"Wish I'd have known you'd thought of ridin'," he told her. "I'd have got you them ridin' things.

"Channing beat me there," he added. "He got them before he knew you wanted them. But I reckon I'm goin' to get in on the ride, anyway. I reckon Channing didn't think of everything."

He arose from the table, went into his room and returned, bearing a bundle. He placed the bundle on the table in front of her and sat back to watch her open it.

When the paper was finally turned back, to disclose a pair of new riding boots, Jane gasped.

Then she sat back and gave Bassett a glance that made the blood surge through him.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "They are wonderful!"

They were wonderful. The soft tops were like velvet. They were so fine and delicate that it seemed a sacrilege to wear them.

Jane took one of them up and gazed at the size mark.

Astonished, she again gave Bassett a glance that made his heart leap.

"Mr. Bassett," she said, "how did you guess my size?"

"Easy. There wasn't much guessin' to it. I just sent one of your shoes away. The boots came back with the shoe. I was scared you'd miss the shoe, but you didn't. I reckon there wasn't any harm done."

"Harm!" she echoed. "Mr. Bassett, I shall never be able to thank you enough. I've been worried over how I should look arrayed in that riding habit, with no boots to match it!"

"H-m! Well, that's settled. Here's another thing. I've found out that somethin' like this comes in mighty handy at times."

He drew the silver tipped quirt out of his shirt front. Some new color surged into his face as he held the quirt out to her.

"Spurs ain't no good for a woman rider," he declared. "They keep gettin' in the way, an' snaggin'. That's why I didn't have any fit onto your boots. Now this here quirt is some different. I bought it from a greaser several years ago. Them silver tips will cut like blazes if you lay them on hard.

"But the beauty of it is you don't have to strike hard with them. If you want your horse to run all you have to do is to let the tips lay against his flanks. You wear it like this."

He ran a hand through the braided horse hair loop of the handle and let it dangle from his wrist.

"No chance of losin' it," he added; "an' you don't have to go to grabbin' for it when you want it. I wouldn't take a hundred dollars for it, but you can have it every time you go ridin'."

He didn't wait to hear Jane's thanks. He got out of the house as soon as he could and made his way to the corral. He caught up his own horse, saddled and bridled it

and led it to the front of the stable. Then he stood for a little while looking into the corral at Midnight.

Midnight bore few marks of the beating he had received, for Bassett had not confined his blows to one particular spot. After watching Midnight for some time Bassett moved away. He finally disappeared into the harness shop.

An hour later he saw Channing come out of the mess house and go to the stable. When Channing reappeared he bore his rope, a saddle and a bridle.

Channing went into the corral, roped Midnight, saddled and bridled him and led him outside the corral, hitching him to a post near the gate. Then he got another bridle and saddle and went again into the corral, emerging this time with the horse he had ridden the day before. He and the other two men had not followed Bassett's orders about camping at Two Forks; they had reached home before midnight.

Shortly after Channing brought his own horse out Jane Winthrop appeared at the kitchen door of the ranch house; and at the sight of her walking down the path toward the stable a renewed, sullen rage gripped Bassett. His thoughts dwelt upon the intimacy that must be between Jane and Channing, an intimacy that, while not perhaps serious, had made it possible for them to talk together about this proposed ride, which had resulted in setting an appointed time, and which, if it was permitted to continue, would result in greater intimacy.

Bassett emerged from the harness shop. He began to walk toward the place where the two horses were hitched, so timing his pace that he arrived there just before Jane came up.

Her color was still high, and she smiled at both Bassett and Channing, and at the two punchers who had come out of the door of the mess house and stood, intently watching.

Bassett mechanically answered her smile, but his gaze was upon her right wrist, searching for the silver tipped quirt.

It was there!

Jane spoke to Channing. "I'm late, I think."

"We'll have nothin' but time to-day," was Channing's gentle reply.

"Mr. Bassett," Jane called. "You remember you promised to take care of Eve!"

"I'm takin' her over to the south fork to look at the red buttes," returned Bassett. "You have a good time. Don't you get to worryin' about Eve."

He moved forward a little, edging along the stable until he reached the door, behind which he stood, watching Jane as she advanced toward Midnight.

Bassett alone, it appeared, had observed the restlessness that had seized Midnight at sight of Jane. Bassett alone knew that the restlessness was caused by the sight of the quirt that dangled from Jane's right wrist. Channing, for all his wisdom, had not noticed, or if he did he was not aware of the cause of it.

Bassett saw Channing move forward more rapidly as Jane approached Midnight. Evidently he *had* observed Midnight's strange manner and was intent upon reaching the horse before Jane.

"Dame his hide!" muttered Bassett. "He'll spoil it!"

Channing, though, was too late. Jane was within arm's length of Midnight when Midnight's ears went suddenly flat and his lips rolled back from his teeth.

Instantly several things happened.

Bassett saw Jane shrink back, a startled scream breaking from her. She retreated toward Bassett. She should have stood her ground and used the quirt Bassett had given her. That's what Bassett would have done. She retreated two or three paces.

Bassett had started toward her. Channing was running toward her. The two punchers who had been watching from the mess house were running toward her. But Channing was not near enough, and there was not the slightest chance of the two punchers reaching Jane, even though their experienced eyes told them that Midnight meant evil to the woman.

Channing, being behind Midnight, had no chance to do anything until he could reach the animal's head. Bassett alone could help Jane.

Bassett did help her; that was why he had come to the stable door.

Midnight's eyes were red with fury. He was expressing his hatred of the quirt. There in the box stall the afternoon before he hadn't a chance to fight back. Bassett's blows had fallen upon him from above.

They had been cunning blows that the confined space had helped to make accurate. He couldn't dodge or otherwise avoid them. But now he was in the open, where he was able to fight back.

He meant to kill. As he reared upward and struck at Jane with his fore hoofs his head and neck formed a sinuous, serpent-like line. The leaping, writhing muscles of his body expressed malignance.

Jane's retreating steps had taken her out of Midnight's reach, away from the sweep of his avenging hoofs. When he came down and leaped forward after Jane, she was in Bassett's arms.

Channing had leaped in, but he couldn't have saved Jane. The two punchers were still some distance away when Bassett, sweeping Jane behind him, stepped out to confront Midnight.

Midnight hadn't seen Bassett until now. At sight of him he reared back, halted. Then with a squeal of triumphant rage he leaped forward.

Bassett's right hand went to his hip. A stream of fire started from his side and struck Midnight's chest. At the second report of Bassett's weapon Midnight halted and set his forelegs wide, bracing himself. Three other lancelike streaks shot from Bassett's side, and Midnight, balked of his vengeance, collapsed.

Bassett's face was chalk white. His hand shook when he sheathed the six-shooter. But he turned to Jane, who was leaning against the wall of the stable, and put an arm around her shoulders.

"It's all right, Jane," he soothed; "he won't bother you any more."

"Oh!" she said weakly. She laid her head on Bassett's shoulder and clung to him, shuddering. Channing stood, several feet distant, staring glumly downward, ashamed, disgraced. The two punchers had halted, their faces were blank.

Some little time elapsed before anything was said or done. Bassett, with Jane in his arms, would not have moved. But at last Jane stood erect, freed herself. There was no color in her cheeks; her eyes were wide with horror.

She swayed when she started to walk away, and threw an appealing glance at Bassett.

"Sure," he said; "you want to get away from here. I'll take you up to the house."

He hadn't taken more than half a dozen steps with Jane when he halted, turned.

"Channing," he said, accusingly; "this is what comes of your way of doin' things without askin' questions. It's the first time I ever heard of any man tryin' to gentle a man killer for a woman to ride!"

Channing said nothing. Bassett continued to lead Jane toward the house.

CHAPTER IX.

PUBLISHING THE BANNS.

THE killing of Midnight by Bassett had seemed to end the little intimacy that had sprung up between Channing and Jane. He saw her seldom, and then only at a distance.

But Channing's disappointment was somewhat assuaged by little Eve's manner toward him. During the days when Bassett was with Jane, Eve passed many hours with the man who, to her, was invested with romance.

Sitting on Channing's knee late one afternoon in the shade of the foreman's shanty, the child touched Channing's cheek with an investigating finger.

"Channing," she said—for he had taught her to drop the prefix "mister," which he told her was not much used in the country, "why do your cheeks always turn red like that when you see mother?"

"Shucks, they don't!" he denied, the cheeks in question becoming crimson.

"You don't know?" she questioned.

"I reckon not."

She gazed gravely at him. "I wish my cheeks would get red like that."

"They're mighty nice, right now," he declared, hugging her to him. "They're a heap better than they was when you came. Why, they've got a lot more color in them than they had!"

She patted his face.

"Channing," she said, studying him, "you are much nicer looking than Mr. Bassett. Why doesn't mother go riding with you?"

"I expect she's busy," he answered.

"Well," she asserted, raising her head defiantly, "when I get strong enough I am going to go riding with you every day!"

"There's Vallon," suggested Channing.

Eve shook her head.

"Burns."

Another shake, this time more positive.

"Keating."

Eve looked into Channing's eyes and smiled knowingly.

"Channing," she remarked. "I know. You are just trying to annoy me. I won't go riding with anybody but you!"

"Shucks!" he said, his voice suddenly hoarse. "We'll sure go ridin'."

Eve's faith in him was greater than Jane's. And yet he had no blame for Jane; and he could not explain Midnight's surprising action in trying to kill her. Ned Vallon, the tallest of the two punchers who had witnessed Midnight's finish, was positive that the quirt was to blame.

"That there hoss used to be a hell's fire outlaw," he said. "He'd made the acquaintance of a quirt. Mebbe you ought to hev knowed thet, an' mebbe you'd ought to hev opened yore gab to Bassett before you started to gentle him. I ain't makin' no claims, but I won't be none surprised when the packin' is all out of the bag if you find that the quirt is at the bottom of it!"

But it did none of them any good to conjecture; Channing least of all. At a stroke his relations with Jane Winthrop had been broken off.

He sought no explanation from her or from Bassett; he gave no excuses for what had happened. In fact, he had no opportunity to present excuses. For Jane spent most of her time with Bassett. What was worse, he saw her several times riding with Bassett.

Bassett had gentled a horse for her, and apparently he had done a good job of it. To get her to ride Bassett must have won her confidence. And to win her confidence after what had happened Bassett must have called Jane's attention to his, Channing's, inefficiency. That thought made Channing writhe, because he felt he had not been to blame for Midnight's surprising action.

But Channing's thoughts did not get him anywhere. He had become an outsider, an onlooker.

And he observed that Bassett kept him away from the home ranch as much as possible. Channing suspected what was happening, and he wanted to warn Jane concerning the character of the man who was trying to win her.

But he knew only too well that since Midnight's defection she couldn't be expected to take his word, and if he voluntarily offered to defame Bassett she would think he was making an effort to win back her confidence at Bassett's expense.

Bassett's manner of late was that of the victor. Channing observed that he was wearing better clothing and that he gave more attention than formerly to his personal appearance. And he appeared secretly amused when he met Channing, although he never mentioned Midnight.

On a morning about a month after the adventure with Midnight, Channing, Vallon, and several men of the outfit were saddling their horses in the corral when Channing observed Bassett walking down the path from the ranch house toward them.

Bassett came close; stood near the corral fence watching men and horses. He said nothing until the men were ready to mount, and then his voice brought them all about, facing him.

"Boys," he said, "I'm wantin' to tell you somethin'." He paused and smiled, saving a final amused glance for Channing. Then he went on:

"I reckon you all know that there's been a lady at the house for some time. Tomorrow she'll be Mrs. Bassett. We're goin' away for about two weeks. When we come back you boys will get time off to celebrate. I reckon that's all."

Again he gazed around at the men, and again he saved the final glance for Channing. This time Channing did not see the amusement in Bassett's eyes, for he was tightening one of the cinches of the saddle and his back was toward Bassett.

Ten minutes later when Bassett was just entering the house, the outfit rode southward. There were men in the outfit that knew of the little intimacy that had sprung up between Channing and the woman who was now to become Mrs. Bassett, and they forbore to speak of the forthcoming marriage.

But because they had seen Jane Winthrop, and because they knew her as a quiet, gentle voiced "lady," they were not enthusiastic over her choice, and a thoughtful silence had descended upon them.

This silence was broken after a while. It was Ned Vallon who broke it.

"Hell!" he declared, his voice thick with rage and disappointment. "He'll kill her! Damn him, he'll kill her! Nothin' human ever does any growin' around old Bassett!"

CHAPTER X.

YOUTH.

WHEN Eve stepped out of the kitchen door to the rear porch her first glance went down the old path that led to the bunk and mess houses and the stable. She saw Channing standing at the corral fence looking at the horses.

Eve smiled.

Channing! The name was synonymous with service, gentleness, fidelity and consideration. He represented about everything good that had come into Eve's life in the ten years that she had been at the Circle B. Her earliest recollections of him centered around a dark night, a railroad station platform, a ride in a buckboard, and a subsequent sleep in a bed that had felt like down to her.

Since that night she had depended upon Channing. He had never failed her. His manner toward her was the same as it had been on the night he had brought her and her mother to the Circle B. She had been eight then; she was now eighteen; and Channing treated her as he had treated her through all the years. He had been just what she felt a brother ought to be.

Channing had brought her books, presents. He had taught her to ride. He had advised her when she needed advice; he had calmed her infrequent mental tempests—especially when Bassett had annoyed her in some way.

So great had been Channing's influence upon her life that she felt she had grown to be almost like him. She had the same quiet manner, the same gentleness of voice, the same disturbing steadiness of eye.

Eve's slim young body was erect. There was life, joy of living, vitality and zest in every line of her figure. When she saw Channing looking at her she smiled again, waved a hand at him and went down the path toward him.

When she reached him he was blushing as furiously as when she had first looked at him that day on the station platform at Red Mesa. Eve's memory of that meeting was still vivid, although each time she caught Channing blushing she found herself marveling.

Channing had never been able to conquer the embarrassment that seized him whenever Eve came near him. He had always felt as he felt now, that her calm, direct gaze went straight through him, and that she knew his thoughts as quickly as they were formed.

In ten years Evangeline had grown much taller. She was now able by standing on her toes to meet Channing's eyes nearly on a level. And she had a trick of doing that very thing each time they met, much to his discomfiture.

The slim figure that had been hers that day on the station platform at Red Mesa had rounded and developed in the pure, keen air of the country. Her skin was still of the fine texture that had distinguished it on the day of their first meeting, but the bloom of health was in it now, and maturity had brought a subtle charm which could be sensed, but which could not be analyzed.

Eve had always made Channing think of roses. She seemed as fragrant, as pure. Her cheeks had the same satiny smoothness; the delicacy and grace of a rose's unfolding petals was in the lithe lines of her figure; and he knew she was as sensitive to the moods of others as the rose to the changes of the atmosphere.

"Larry," she charged, "you are in one

of your black tempers again! If you don't smile this minute I'll shake you!"

Channing smiled.

"That's better!" she declared. "Now I forbid you to think such thoughts again. There isn't a thing in the world for any one to brood about. People who brood are selfish. Do you want to be thought selfish?"

"Not by you, Eve."

She looked at him and he saw a shade of derisive thought cross her eyes. Then she laughed aloud.

"Larry," she said, "he's taken up poetry!"

"He," Channing knew, meant Bassett. Eve never referred to Bassett in any other way. Channing had observed that peculiarity in Eve's manner toward her stepfather—that she never accorded him the dignity of his new position. "He," spoken with a sort of awed constraint, had in the early days been the manner in which she distinguished Bassett from other men. Of late the awe had been absent, to be substituted by a trace of derision, as in the present instance.

"Poetry," repeated Channing. He gave the girl a glance which she understood. "So he's taken another turn, has he? What sort of poetry has he taken up?"

"Byron. Larry, it's too amusing. Byron is among the books you gave me. Two or three weeks ago he overheard me reading to mother. He asked me to read the poem again. Since then he has asked me to read it to him nearly every evening. While I read he sits there with the oddest expression in his eyes. He gives me the shivers. Ugh!"

"What's the poem?"

"Mazeppa."

"That wild horse thing, eh? I read it when I was a kid. H-m! Well, I reckon Bassett would like that sort of thing."

But Eve's thoughts were wandering. She did not even hear Channing's final words. Her thoughts were of a new resident who had settled upon some land, southward. The new resident was a young man, and Eve was a-throb with curiosity.

"Channing," she said quietly, "I have heard that we have a new neighbor. Have we called upon him?"

"I've been over there," announced Channing.

"Officially?" asked Eve.

"Well, I reckon not. I was passin' his shack, an' stopped to talk to him."

"Who is he, Channing?"

"Calls himself Wayne Warren. He's from the East. He's let it be known that he's travelin' through the West, roughin' it, he says. He spoke some of his 'peregrinations.' I've looked that word up; it means senseless wanderin's. He's in that old shack that used to belong to Ben Mellert—I reckon you don't remember it. It's over on Two Forks, about ten miles south. He's got a woman with him."

"Oh," said Eve.

"An old woman," amended Channing, his lips twitching oddly. "She's Irish. Mrs. Bailey. He brought her from Red Mesa to cook for him. I reckon if she wasn't there he'd starve to death."

Eve turned her head a little, so that Channing could not see the curiosity in her eyes. And when she spoke it was with a softness that did not mislead Channing.

"Channing," she said, "I think we ought to visit Mr. Warren formally. He has been here a long time, hasn't he?"

"Just about long enough to get his bearin's. About two months."

"Two months! He has been here that long, and not one of us has been over! Why, he will think we are unneighborly! Channing, please rope my horse. I am going right over. And you are going with me!"

Channing moved to the corral gate. He roped two horses, saddled and bridled them; helped Eve up on one by holding the animal, mounted the other and rode southward, Eve at his side. Later they were riding in the knee high sage of a flat in the great rolling country that stretched from the Circle B ranch house.

Somehow, Channing had no great liking for this trip. There was a repressed eagerness in Eve's manner that bothered him. She was too curious about Wayne Warren. It was as if she expected to be pleased when she saw him.

Channing did not want her to be pleased. But he was afraid she would be pleased.

Warren was a manly chap. He was a man other men liked. Channing liked him. He admitted as much as he rode.

Warren was good looking. A man would say that about him and speak only half the truth. A girl like Eve, who had never seen any men except the cowboys who had worked for the Circle B, would very likely consider Warren handsome. And there would be much justification for such a decision.

Channing covertly watched Eve. He had observed the slow change that had come over her. In the past year or two she had grown more serious, more quiet, more thoughtful. There had come a new expression into her eyes—a fleeting dreaminess.

It now came to Channing with something of a shock that Eve had grown up, had become a woman without his knowing it! He'd been so accustomed to thinking of her as a child that he had forgotten that the day would come when she would be a woman.

He permitted Eve to ride ahead. He trailed her, watching her.

She had changed wonderfully! The little pale faced girl of Red Mesa had grown into a beautiful woman! The frail bud he had watched had developed into a rose that was now almost full blown.

Take her hair for instance. It had always been beautiful, but never as beautiful as now. It bulged from the back of her felt hat in wonderful waves and coils! Golden curls and wisps lay against the back of her neck in such graceful disorder that he felt he would like to ride close to her and touch them.

And it was curious about the skin of her face. It seemed immune to the ravages of wind and sun. It was as white and transparent, almost, as it had been on the first day he had seen her. The bloom in her cheeks was not the red of sunburn.

And there was never a squint in her eyes. She could gaze against the sun as clear eyed as she could look at any one.

Eve's eyes were clear and direct and appraising when they met Warren on a little level near his shack. He was a young man, not older than Channing on the day the latter had met Eve and Jane on the station platform at Red Mesa. He was tall, lithe, with good features and clear, steady eyes. His lips were set in serious lines when he rode up to greet his visitors, although his eyes flashed a welcome to them.

He bestrode a roan horse; he was arrayed in knee length riding breeches of brown, above which was a gray flannel shirt with a tight fitting collar and a black tie. Soft boots incased his feet. He had taken off his hat at Eve's approach, and it dangled in his left hand as he sat on his horse and looked at her.

He bowed when Channing mentioned Eve's name.

"You'll get down, of course," he said to both Eve and Channing. "You'll find my powers of entertainment pretty meager. This happens to be the first time that any one around here has honored me with a visit."

Channing glanced at Eve, expecting she would find some excuse to decline. He was hoping she would. Instead, she was slipping out of the saddle as calmly as if first formal visits were of everyday occurrence.

She hadn't begun to dismount, however, when Warren was at her stirrup. He had acted while Channing had been wondering what Eve would do. Decidedly, the young man was quick witted and gallant.

Channing had never assisted Eve to mount or dismount. Eve had never required assistance. She could get out and into a saddle about as quickly as Channing.

He watched out of the tail of his eye as Eve permitted herself to be helped down. His lips twitched wryly as he meditated upon Eve's present manner. She was pretending she needed assistance and her cheeks were scarlet.

After alighting she stood for an instant close to Warren. Both laughed, and Warren's eyes were swimming with admiration.

"I stepped on your foot," apologized Eve.

"I expect I'm pretty awkward, Miss Bassett."

"Oh, I didn't mean to intimate—"

"You didn't," disclaimed Warren quickly. "Besides, my foot ought to be glad—"

He flushed, seemed to remember Chan-

ning, and looked up. His eyes were dancing.

"Beg pardon, you'll get down, too, of course, Channing," he invited.

Channing's glance was steady, his eyes expressionless.

"I reckon not," he said shortly. "I'll have a look at your layout."

Channing rode away with the disturbing conviction that he would not be missed.

Eve walked beside Warren to the porch of the shack and stood watching Channing hitch the horses while Warren went into the shack and returned with chairs.

This was the first time in her life that Eve had met a young man of Warren's type, and she expected to find herself embarrassed. She was amazed when she discovered she was talking with Warren as if she had known him for years. It was not until later, when she knew Warren better, that she realized that it had been the young man's manner which had set her at ease.

If Warren had been cool and self-possessed she might have been confused, speechless. She had half anticipated that result, had feared.

But she had not been sitting in the chair an instant when she discovered that Warren was blushing. Therefore, some of her own high color receded and she smiled complacently.

But she had by no means dispersed her curiosity. There were dozens of questions she wanted to ask, but she had no authority on curiosity to consult as to the polite method of putting her questions. As a matter of fact, she was not certain if it was at all proper to ask questions. The knowledge imparted to her by her mother and the things she had learned from her books had not equipped her with the sheath of refinement.

The men she had known all her days were blunt, frank; they had not been skilled in the art of obliqueness. Her mother, too, had a direct habit of speech. And Eve, desiring to know something about Warren and about the country from which he had come, decided that the only way she could satisfy her curiosity was to ask questions.

She clearly foresaw that Warren would volunteer no information about himself. Still, she felt she ought to preface her questions:

"We—that is, I—thought it was about time to call," she said.

"I'm mighty glad you did!" declared Warren.

Silence ensued. Eve caught Warren looking at her. Both blushed.

"You are not very old, are you?" was Eve's next question.

Warren proved his youthfulness by announcing his age as twenty-five.

And yet to Eve, Warren appeared older. There was something about him that reminded her of Channing. Warren had the same steady eyes; there was about him, despite his present embarrassment, a grave deliberation such as distinguished Channing.

Eve was not surprised that Warren blushed when she looked at him, for Channing had done that from the very first. She felt that in some way both Warren and Channing were admitting mental disturbance when they blushed. Her calmness increased.

"I am eighteen," she announced.

He had no reply to make to that. But she saw a shade of disturbed thought in his eyes.

"How old is Channing?" he asked.

"Channing is thirty-seven."

"Nice fellow."

Eve's education may have been somewhat neglected, but the feminine analytical instinct, strong in her, detected jealousy as the basis of Warren's question regarding Channing's age. There was some defiance in her eyes and not a little mockery as she met Warren's gaze.

"Thirty-seven isn't actually old. Is it?"

"Channing is still a young man. Is he married?"

"No."

Eve laughed. She had never imagined Channing as being married. But Warren's words provoked the question: Why hadn't Channing married?

"You like him, I suppose?" said Warren.

"Channing is the dearest man in the world!"

"H-m!" Warren smiled. "Does he know that you think that about him?"

"Certainly."

Warren said, gravely: "Channing is very fortunate," and leaned back a little in his chair as though for the first time since meeting Eve he was studying her.

His embarrassment had gone. Much of the laughter had left his eyes. He seemed very serious to Eve; the change in him annoyed her.

What she had said about Channing had brought the quick constraint upon Warren. Eve's emotions were in something of a tumult. She felt resentful, piqued.

"You like people, don't you?" she challenged.

"Certainly."

"Girls?"

"Yes."

"Well, I like Channing. I love him!"

"So you intimated. I wish you happiness."

Eve's cheeks turned crimson.

"I am sure I am grateful," she said stiffly; "but a girl can love a man without marrying him, can't she? Have you married all the girls you have loved?"

Warren flushed. His smile betrayed his relief. He grew suddenly very calm and deliberate, and his eyes twinkled. Eve knew her words had banished his jealous thoughts, but she didn't know whether she was glad or sorry. If she could have been certain his thoughts had been jealous ones she might have annoyed him a little longer.

"Yes," he said gently, "it is possible to love without marrying. Some of the great loves of history have been platonic."

Eve frowned.

"I don't think I should care to love that way!" she declared. "If I loved a man I think I should want to marry him!"

His eyes sobered.

"I think I have misunderstood you. I was certain I heard you say you loved Channing."

"I love Channing. But I have never thought of marrying him. I don't think he would have me. I suppose he thinks I am too young and—and foolish."

"I see. Channing is a very wise man, I suppose."

"Awfully. I—I think Channing knows everything. Of course, his grammar isn't what it should be. I don't mean that. It's in other things. Channing is great!"

"Yes, I think he is. He impressed me that way. He is master of himself."

Warren's manner had changed. His eyes had brightened; there was a glow in his cheeks; a repressed enthusiasm seemed to possess him. He insisted upon showing Eve some photographs he had taken back East. Several of them were bits of scenery, buildings, a stretch of beach with some bathers basking in the sun. There were others with girls in the foreground. Eve examined these at some length.

When she passed the pictures back to Warren she settled back into her chair and regarded him for a time with steady, unsmiling eyes.

"You knew many girls back East, I suppose?"

"Quite a few, naturally," he confessed with evident reluctance. "You see," he went on apologetically, "they are there, and—and you can't help it."

"No, I presume not."

Eve's voice was low, even, toneless. Very deliberately she got up, walked to the edge of the porch and motioned to Channing, who was still on his horse, and riding slowly along a rambling fence about two hundred yards distant.

Warren had got up, too, and was standing near the chair in which Eve had been sitting. He made no protest, and was silent as Channing rode up, leading Eve's horse.

Ready to mount, Eve turned and looked at Warren. Her eyes were still very steady, though now they had a flash of defiance in them, even though she smiled.

"Thank you for a very pleasant visit, Mr. Warren," she said.

"Miss Bassett," said Warren eagerly, "I wouldn't have missed your visit for anything. I shall be repaying it some day."

Eve mounted her horse without assistance, Channing observed. And without looking at Warren she spoke as she moved away.

"You will be welcome, I'm sure, Mr. Warren. I hope we shall become very good—neighbors."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Weasel

By STANLEY WALKER

"THE weasel," says the dictionary, "is a small, elongated musteloid carnivore of the genus *Putorius*." So far, so good. But Ross Maguire, the roaring, red headed foreman of the old Oliver ranch up in the Devil's River country, was not addicted to the close perusal of dictionaries, and even if he had stumbled across that definition of a weasel he would not have known much more than he did before.

Nor would he have been much better off if he had read a little further, where the dictionary says: "It (the weasel) preys on the smaller mammals and birds and is noted for its bloodthirstiness."

Ross Maguire would have laughed at that, for he had just called little dried-up Pancho Jones, the new ranch hand, a weasel. Certainly Pancho was not bloodthirsty. But the foreman was not interested in definitions that morning. All he saw was that Pancho Jones had a streak of yellow, broad and glaring, clear up his back. In short, the foreman had spotted Pancho for a coward.

It happened this way. On this particular morning Maguire had ordered Pancho and three other cowboys to get on their ponies and round up two hundred head of yearlings that had been ranging up along the river bluffs and had evaded branding. Pancho Jones had drifted in on a little ragged burro three days before, with a banjo strapped on behind the saddle, and had asked Maguire to hire him as a cow hand.

Ordinarily, Maguire would have laughed at any tramp that came riding a burro, especially if he turned out to be as skinny, ornery, and all around worthless looking as this fellow. But he was short handed, and he agreed to take Pancho Jones on for a while.

On the third day the foreman decided it was time for Pancho to do a little work instead of spending all his time playing the

banjo; so he told him to help the three cowboys round up the yearlings.

"Saddle that little sorrel mare over there," said Maguire. "She's all right for you."

"Is she gentle?" asked Pancho.

"What difference does that make? She's a cow pony, and you said you were a good cow hand. So hop to it."

Pancho Jones caught the sorrel mare all right, and put on the saddle, and then he started to get on. The pony's eyes suddenly drew to a fine point, the ears laid down flat on her head, and she arched her back ever so slightly. Her lips quivered, showing a set of long, wicked looking teeth.

Pancho evidently knew what was coming, and didn't like the idea, for he backed off, first taking his left foot out of the stirrup. Well, there was only one explanation. The new hand was afraid.

The exact words that Ross Maguire used in firing Pancho Jones are not important at this point, even if it were possible to reproduce them faithfully. Suffice it to say that the peroration, the final ending up of his outburst of spleen, went something like this:

"Now, you miserable, cowardly half-breed, take your donkey and your banjo, and get off this ranch! You damned weasel!"

The three cowboys, sitting quietly on their horses, laughed, but a little nervously, for Ross Maguire's manner of cussing a man out, although it had its humorous points, was fundamentally a very serious matter.

Pancho Jones didn't say anything. He took the saddle off the sorrel mare, put it in the shed, and then bundled his things on his little burro, and rode dejectedly away.

"It's always like this," he reflected as his scrawny shoulders slumped forward in the saddle, and the burro's little pacing feet kicked up spurts of dust. "I just guess I'm no good. What was that he called me—oh, yes. Weasel! That's it!"

Of course it wouldn't have done any good for Pancho Jones, the Weasel, to have explained to the foreman that he had once been a great and fearless rider, and that he would have been one on this day if it hadn't been for the accursed memory of that day at the rodeo when a wild black pony had got him down and put a hoof almost through his right chest, breaking ribs as it went.

No, that wouldn't have helped him keep the job. Not even the fact that his right lung was practically gone as a result of the rodeo accident—not even that would have helped. The truth of the matter, as the Weasel admitted to himself was that a cowboy was supposed to ride a horse. If you can't, then you're no good on the ranch. That's all there is to it.

II.

OLD MAN MASTERSON was sitting out in front of his rock and adobe house, smoking a very foul pipe, while his pretty daughter Nan got supper. This was a pleasant life, the old man thought, even if he had been looked down on for many years because he owned sheep. Thirty years before he had built this house with his own hands, protected his little valley range with his rifle, and had stuck it out until his place was as secure as that of the big Oliver cattle ranch, which all but hemmed him in on all sides.

The old man pulled out his pipe, and grunted in surprise as he saw a strange looking object coming toward him. It was the Weasel and his burro. They rode up close.

"Hello," said the Weasel. "You're Mr. Masterson, ain't you?"

"Yep," said the old man—"that's me. And who are you?"

"Well, I have a pretty good ordinary name, but a little while ago I had a new one hung on me, and I think I'll stick to it. I'm the Weasel."

"All right," agreed Old Man Masterson, "have it your own way. And what can I do for you—Weasel?"

"I wonder if you could give me a little supper and a place to throw my blanket to-night? I'll be moseying on in the morning."

Old Man Masterson arose and told the stranger that he was welcome, but that the only place he could put him for the night

was out in the harness and tool shed between the house and the square of rock fence that formed the sheep pen.

"Gosh!" said the Weasel. "I ain't looking for no hotel. That's swell enough for me, and many thanks to you, Mr. Masterson."

The Weasel got off and led his burro around to the shed, where there was a little pile of hay, and removed the saddle, with his blanket and banjo. In a moment he joined the old man.

"Supper 'll be ready right away now," said the sheep man, with his customary hospitality. "Just make yourself at home, Mr.—ah—Weasel. Durned if that ain't a funny name to own up to having. But I guess you've got a reason."

"Yes," said the Weasel: "I guess I have."

The two men sat in silence for a few minutes, while the delicious odor of fried chicken came from the kitchen. The sun was going down, big and red, over the bluffs across the river. It would soon be night, but it would not be dark, for a clear round moon was coming up. Such a moon makes the clear white nights of the Texas ranges seem more pleasant than day.

The sound of a bell came from the direction of the river. The Weasel made out a small herd of sheep approaching, with a cloud of dust hanging over them. They came nearer, and the Weasel saw that at the head of the column of dirty, grayish animals was an enormous bellwether.

"There comes old Dan," said Masterson. "Do you know, young feller, that's the finest piece of sheep flesh I ever saw in my life! Look at him—tall and clean limbed, except for that bunch of wrinkles along his dewlap."

"How long have you had him?"

"I raised him myself. He's about ten years old, coming this next spring—nine and a half, if you want to be exact. His mother was a little old wrinkled Merino ewe, and his daddy was one of these big Shropshires that's got lots of size to him, but no wool to speak of."

"What's he good for?" asked the Weasel.

"Why, you durned idiot," said the old man, "don't you know what a bellwether is good for? If it wasn't for old Dan, there is no telling what these sheep would do. They might stay out along the river, or over in the bluffs where the wolves could get 'em, if he didn't bring 'em home. They've been tagging along behind that brass bell of Dan's ever since he was a year old. He always leads 'em home, and when I hear that old bell—I'd recognize it anywhere, young feller—I know that Dan's bringing 'em in safe."

Nan Masterson, her face flushed from the heat of the wood stove, came out and told the men to come in. The Weasel, who was introduced without any flourish, was ill at ease. He sat at one end of the table, saying nothing, and fumbling with the fried chicken.

Nan once or twice tried to make conversation, but the Weasel wouldn't budge. When asked where he was going he said frankly that he didn't know.

"Guess maybe I'll try to get a few little jobs on the way," he said, "and maybe I'll drift on into San Antone for the winter. I can always live somehow in San Antone, even if I have to tend bar at a chili joint."

Then, abashed by this much talkativeness, he lapsed into a silence so deep that there was no use trying to pull him out again. Old Man Masterson, looking at the Weasel over his coffee, was sorry for him. He looked so frail and helpless. And there was something wistful about the Weasel—something in his black eyes and the way his long locks of dark hair came down over his forehead.

After dinner the Weasel excused himself, saying he was tired, and went out to the harness shed. The burro was still nibbling at the pile of hay.

The Weasel sat down by his saddle, lit a cigarette, and picked up his banjo. He jerked his fingers across it a few times, tightened the strings, and then began playing and humming an old Mexican love song—the same song, though he didn't know it, that his Mexican mother used to play for his American father in San Antonio. Then he played other things, some warlike and some pathetic, and some with love in them. And all the time Old Man Masterson and

his daughter Nan were sitting out in front of the stone and adobe house, listening to the music that came across to them in the white night.

Next the Weasel played a little song that he had made up for himself—a song that seemed to him to express an old and heart-felt longing.

"Oh, I'm tired of this life I'm living,
This life in Poverty Town.
I wish the stars were dollars,
And the thunder was shaking 'em down."

The Weasel strummed on.

"With holes in all my pockets,
The girls all turn me down.
Oh, I wish the stars were dollars
And the thunder would shake them down."

And then, while the old man and his daughter strained their ears to catch the words, the Weasel sang in a whining, smooth voice:

"Oh, I'd get me a girl and a poodle dog,
And I'd buy her a golden crown,
And I'd make the whole world follow,
My dollars' jing-ul-ing sound."

He droned out the last, then laid down his banjo and lit another cigarette. Across on the steps of the house the old man and the girl sat, hoping he would play some more. But the Weasel was through for the night. He spread out his blanket on the floor, where the white moon could shine in on him, and soon dropped off into a deep sleep.

III.

"DADDY," said the girl, "I want to learn how to play the banjo."

"I'm willin', but who's a goin' to teach you?"

"Why, daddy, this funny little man, the Weasel, might teach me how."

"But he's leaving to-morrow."

"Oh, you could get him to stay, couldn't you? He said that he didn't know where he was going. And anyhow, you're liable to need a lot of help with the sheep before long. If Owen lets us have that bluff and thicket pasture of his while the grass is so short, somebody will have to watch the sheep and look out for wolves."

"I'll watch 'em myself," declared the old man.

"But, daddy, you're not as young as you used to be, and you can't go climbing all over the bluffs."

"Yep," snapped the old sheep man, "I'm just as young as I ever was."

And so they kept up the argument for an hour, but at the end, after Nan had patted her father's long hair, the old man gave in and agreed to make the Weasel a proposition the next morning whereby he was to herd sheep for his board and tobacco and spend his spare time teaching Nan how to play the banjo.

"But all this depends," old Masterson warned her just as he was going to bed—"it all depends on Owen letting us have that river range for the sheep."

"Oh, I'm sure Owen will do that. You know, daddy, he'd do anything I'd ask."

"Yes," said the old man; "and when I think of that boy owning the whole of the Oliver ranch it seems mighty funny to me. Why, his daddy, old Tom Oliver, would have killed me on sight one time, just because I was a sheep man."

"But you were good friends before he died, weren't you?"

"Yes; old Tom was all right. It was five years ago, while you were away at school, that we finally got to be good friends. And he lived till two years ago. Seems funny now to think of how the sheep men and the cow men used to fight each other. A little sense would have kept 'em from having any trouble at all.

"By the way," asked the old man a little later, "when is Owen coming over?"

"He told me he'd drop around some time in the morning," said Nan. "You can talk to him about it then."

"All right. Good night, girl."

Silence soon settled over the old stone and adobe house. The only sounds came from the sheep pens. Now and then a bleat—sometimes plaintive, appealing, and sometimes merely noisy—that was all except for the occasional snuffling sound that comes when a sleeping ewe decides to blow her nose.

Old Man Masterson had a good little sheep ranch there, but not as good as it once was. And it had been a very bad summer. The grass in his little valley was

all gone, and the sheep were beginning to show the effects of it. They still had plenty of drinking water from the little hole in the river that Masterson had once gained in an armistice with Owen Oliver's father, the belligerent but good hearted old Tom.

The herd had been dwindling for more than a year now. The sheep seemed to die off without any reason. Wolves and wild dogs made several inroads. Years before, when the ranch was booming, the old man had five hundred sheep. Now he had less than a hundred.

But the loss, part of it at least, had been worth it. He had sent Nan off to school, just like her mother would have wanted it. And now, as soon as things began to boom again, she was going to marry young Owen.

Old Masterson frequently chuckled to himself as he thought of this attachment between his daughter and the son of his old enemy. Young Owen, too, had been away, and had come back to the Oliver ranch full of new ideas and new ambitions. For one thing, he already had improved the strain of his cattle.

Oliver wanted to buy out the Masterson sheep ranch, let it lie idle for a few years, until the grass grew long again, and then stock it up with fine cattle. But the old man was obdurate: he wouldn't sell. Nor would he consent to parting with the sheep at any price.

They had come to mean his life to him, those sheep, and were second only to his regard for his daughter. It hurt, too, when people told him he was getting too old to run his little ranch.

But for days the old man had been worried about the pasturage. Certainly he had to have more grass. That fenced-in space along the thickets and bluffs, a rarely used portion of the Oliver estate, was what he needed. The sheep could live on that all winter, if it became necessary.

IV.

THE next morning the Weasel pulled himself out of the shed, yawned, and sat down weakly. He felt very sick.

"Gosh," he breathed, "I hate to have to hit the trail again to-day!"

Old Man Masterson came out directly and called him to breakfast. Over the coffee and bacon the old sheep man brought up the subject.

"We heard you a-playin' the banjo last night," he said. "Mighty pretty music, we thought. Now, Nan, here, wants to learn how to play one o' them things. Suppose you could teach her."

"Why," said the Weasel, hesitating and glancing quickly toward the girl, "I don't know about that. I guess I've got to be going on. I'm not very rich, and I better find a job somewhere.

"I'd like to teach you, though, miss," he added, nodding politely to the girl.

"Then why not?" asked Nan. "You know, young man, you admitted last night that you weren't going anywhere in particular. Now, why can't you stay here a month or so—or however long it takes me to learn—and you can help daddy with the sheep, or do painting around the place, or help fix the fences— Oh, there are lots of things you could do around here."

Old Masterson nodded in agreement and looked to the Weasel for an answer. There was no hesitating now. The coal black eyes of the Weasel lit up with gratitude. He half raised himself to shake hands with the sheep man, and then caught himself and slumped back.

"Thanks," he said limply. "It's so good of you both, I don't know what to say. But I'll earn my keep. And I'll make myself useful if you'll just let me stick around a while."

After breakfast Masterson and his daughter heard the Weasel humming and whistling to himself out in the shed. He was fixing up a cot, a mirror and some other things to make himself comfortable; and he was happy.

A horseman rode by the shed. The Weasel's back was turned, but the man on horseback recognized him, and rode on toward the house, where he dismounted.

Nan Masterson ran out to meet him.

"Hello, Owen," she called. "I was wondering when you would get here."

"Been missing me at all?" asked the young man eagerly.

"You know I have, all the time."

"Then, why don't you persuade your father to sell this place, get rid of his dirty little bunch of sheep, and then we'll get married? What do you say?"

The girl sobered. She shook her head.

"It isn't so easy, Owen. You see, daddy is all wrapped up in this place. He's spent so much of his life here. And he loves those sheep in spite of what you say about them."

The man laughed. They went on toward the back yard, where old Masterson was propped up in the shade, smoking his pipe and reading the county newspaper. He laid down the paper when he heard footsteps, and began knocking out his pipe.

"Hi, there, Owen, young feller," he called out. "Glad to see you. How's everything on the old Oliver ranch? Prosperous?"

"Can't complain, Mr. Masterson. The cattle are looking mighty good to me. But I do wish it would rain."

The old man's face clouded. Well, he may as well have it out.

"Yes, Owen, we need rain, especially on this little ranch o' mine. I was goin' to ask you what you thought about lettin' me run my sheep over on the piece of land in the bluffs. Just till it rains, Owen."

"But now, Mr. Masterson—" began the young rancher; then he glanced at the girl.

Something he saw in her face decided the question for him.

"Why didn't you ask me before?" he demanded of the old man. "Of course you can run your sheep over there. Long as you want to. But you want to keep a close watch on 'em or the wolves will give you trouble."

Masterson laughed and pulled at his dust colored gray beard.

"I've got a hired hand now. First sheepherder I ever had. But I guess I'm gettin' old and deserve a little help now. I can't chase after the sheep like I used to."

"Who is it?" asked Owen Oliver. "Not that little shrimp I passed out in the shed a while ago?"

"Yep," said the old man. "That's the boy. He plays a banjo mighty pretty. He's gonna teach Nan how to play it—and herd sheep for me between times."

Owen was amused at the arrangement. He was far too big hearted and jovial a person, and too confident of himself, to object to the Weasel being near the old man and the girl. But he pretended just a trifle that he was jealous.

"Why, Nan, if you want to play the banjo, why not let me teach you?"

"But you can't play as well as my new teacher. You ought to hear him."

"Don't care to," said Oliver. "I've heard some bad tales about that boy. He's been over at my place for three days. Ross Maguire hired him because he was sorry for him and then had to fire him."

"What did he do?" asked Nan.

"Oh, I don't exactly know. Maguire told me some rigamarole about his being afraid of a horse. The boys were all laughing about how Maguire bawled him out when he fired him. Called him yellow, and a weasel, and then told him to beat it."

"But," she defended him, "he's not a regular man, that little fellow is not. He must be a half breed of some sort, and he's sick. Anybody could tell that. He's going to stay here as long as he wants to—long as I need banjo lessons, anyhow."

"All right, Nan, have it your own way."

V.

THOSE were happy days for the Weasel. His only trouble seemed to be that he wouldn't work. Even the banjo lessons seemed too much for him. Often during the evenings, while the old man sat and smoked and said nothing, the Weasel tried to teach Nan to play, but always, after a little while, Old Man Masterson would break in—

"You play, Weasel. I'd like to hear you. Nan can't play."

And then the Weasel would lean back and pick the banjo and lift up his whiny voice in a mournful song. And most of his concerts ended with

"Oh, I wish the stars were dollars,
And the thunder was shakin' 'em down."

And herding the sheep, he found, was the easiest work he ever had been asked to do.

The sheep ranged across the bluff pasture, eating leaves and nibbling at the green grass that sprouted from the crevices. The Weasel always sat on a rock, from which he could see the whole herd, while he played his banjo and hummed his melancholy tunes.

And every day as the sun went down the big bellwether, Dan, would turn his head toward the pens a mile and a half away and start his stately march, with the brass bell tinkling. He understood why old Masterson said he would know the sound of that bell anywhere. It was loud and clear, and in its notes was a call to follow.

As soon as big Dan turned his noble head toward home, and the bell started its regular beat, the other sheep, even though scattered through the thickets, immediately followed.

Behind the herd every day rode the Weasel. He was contented. Sometimes he was in such good spirits that he would amuse himself out in his shed by imitating the animals, and bleating like sheep, so that old Masterson, hearing him, would turn to Nan and say:

"Listen to that! I believe the little devil's happy."

But Masterson never knew that the racking in the Weasel's right side grew worse every day, and that on many nights he groped about on the floor of the shed, in such pain that the tears came to his eyes.

VI.

Old Man Masterson was sick. There was no doubt of it. For two days he had been complaining, and had stuck close to the house. And on this morning he could not leave his bed. Nan found him, gazing at her pathetically.

"I guess I'm pretty bad," came the old man's weak voice.

Nan felt his forehead. It was very hot. She went to the cupboard, poured out a stiff drink of whisky and held it to her father's lips while he gulped it down. Then she put wet towels about his head.

"I'll be back right away, daddy," she said. "Try to rest easy."

Nan ran out to the corral, caught the bony old buggy mare that had been in the family nearly as long as big Dan, the bellwether, and leaped to his back. She kicked the mare into a fast gallop and set out across the ranges toward the Oliver ranch house, five miles away. She galloped across the river, now dry except for the little pools that stood in the deep holes here and there, across the stretch of brush along the river banks, and then over the plateau country beyond. Soon the big white Oliver ranch house loomed up across the rolling prairie.

Fortunately Owen was at home. He met her at the front gate and, as soon as he heard of her errand, ran in and telephoned to Dr. Gibson, who was twenty miles away in Lamapesa.

"Thank God we've got a telephone here," he said. "It's a shame you never could get your father to put one in over at his place."

"Daddy said he couldn't afford it," laughed the girl, and then, anxiously, she went on, "Come, Owen, let's hurry; he's mighty sick."

Owen Oliver ran to the long red barn, disappeared toward the stables, and five minutes later rode out on his big bay. He joined the girl and together they galloped back to the house where Masterson lay.

They found that the Weasel had beaten them there. He was bathing the old man's forehead, looking pathetic in his helplessness.

"I saw you riding off in a hurry, Miss Nan," he said, "and I rode the burro on in to see what was wrong."

They doctored the sick man, trying to keep up his strength and allay the fever until Dr. Gibson arrived. The roads were bad and he undoubtedly would be slow in coming. He was always slow.

The afternoon was half gone when the doctor came rattling up in his dilapidated flivver and got out stiffly. He came in, carrying his little black bag, and hurriedly made his way to the bed of the sick man. After an examination he ordered the bed moved over close to the window, from which point it was possible to see all along the little valley ranch, with the river bluffs seeming suddenly to shoot up in the distance.

"Fever," said Dr. Gibson, quietly, as he turned to Nan and Owen. "He'll pull out all right, though, if you can keep him quiet. If he gets through to-night he ought to be all right."

"But you'll stay, won't you, doctor?" asked Nan.

"Yes, I'll stay till dark, anyhow. I want to see how he reacts to that stuff I just gave him."

It was terribly hot. The valley seemed like an oven. All summer the ranchers had been hoping for rain, and it never had come. Now the ranges were drying up, and even the brush along the river was withering.

Old Man Masterson lay in his bed beside the window, his fine white head in repose. He said nothing, but was fully conscious, and his eyes wandered feverishly across the sweep of valley, where the heat waves danced as they would on a hot stove.

Near by sat Dr. Gibson, his keen eyes on the patient, and out on the small vine covered veranda were Owen and Nan. The Weasel seemed nervous and upset. He would go out to the shed, pace about anxiously, then return to repeat to the doctor: "He's goin' to be all right, ain't he?"

Owen smiled as he watched the agitated little fellow.

"He's kind of fond of your dad, isn't he?" he said to Nan.

"Yes, he told me the other day he didn't know what would have become of him if we hadn't let him stay. He's a funny little fellow."

"Sure is," agreed Owen. "Do you all still call him Weasel?"

"Yes, and he doesn't seem to mind, though he told me once that he's got a real name, a simple American-Mexican combination—Pancho Jones, I think he said."

The afternoon wore on. The old man began to toss restlessly. The shadows lengthened as the sun came low over the river bluffs. Suddenly the old man sat up, pointed a shaking forearm out of the window and cried in his quavering, delirious voice:

"Look Nan! Oh, Lord! The fire! The fire! The sheep will burn up!"

The doctor, with Nan and Owen at his heels, hurried to the window. Sure enough, the dry thickets along the river were ablaze. The flames were climbing the little slopes and shooting high into the air as they devoured clumps of brush and long, dry grass.

Somewhere in the coulees along that burning patch of woods and grass were the sheep that Old Man Masterson loved. And the old man knew it. He would not be comforted. Time and again he tried to raise himself from his pillow, and was angry when pushed back by the doctor. Not even Nan could soothe him.

"My sheep! My sheep!" he cried over and over.

Owen knew that the fire itself couldn't do much damage. It could only burn the hundred or so acres of brushy country along the edge of the river, and then would spend itself a half mile down the river, where a broad expanse of sand would prevent its further spread. In fact, he had intended to burn out that scraggly growth anyhow, if Masterson hadn't wanted it for sheep pasturage.

But the fact that the fire couldn't last, and must surely spend itself in another hour or so—that didn't solve the problem of the sheep. Certainly the sheep were somewhere in that fiery, smoking inferno. Night came on quickly. It was already beginning to descend as the sun went down back of the burning bluffs.

"My sheep!" droned the old man in his delirium. "Can't anybody get 'em, or let me go? They're burning, I tell you! Oh, why can't old Dan bring 'em in! He always does—him and his bell. Oh, my poor sheep!"

The doctor was worried.

"If this lasts much longer," he said, shaking his head, "he'll go out just like that!" And he snapped his fingers to show just how surely and quickly the old man would die.

The Weasel, hanging about the doorway, heard. He tiptoed up to the old man's bed.

"Don't worry, Mr. Masterson," he said soothingly, "I'll get the sheep. They'll all be safe in the pen an hour from now."

And with that promise, which all knew was impossible of fulfillment, the Weasel

jammed his hat down over his eyes and ran out to the shed.

A minute later Nan and Owen saw his thin little figure astride his burro, spurring that animal into an awkward run. The gathering darkness soon shut the eager little man from view, and the watchers turned to Old Man Masterson. It was the sheep that worried him, and he clung to the horror of their fate with a singleness of concentration that was rapidly driving him into a state of exhaustion from which he could not rally.

A half hour passed. Then fifteen more minutes. The old man was wearing himself down, his eyes glaring about him unseeing, and muttering feebly but fiercely, "My sheep! My poor sheep!" Over and over he said it, like some sad litany.

The doctor drew Nan aside.

"I don't know what to do," he confessed. "I haven't any dope to quiet him. If he could only rest with his mind easy, he'd pull through. But he's killing himself like this."

The room, for one brief interval, became quiet. Suddenly the three watchers at the bedside started.

"What was that?" asked Nan.

Again it came, floating in through the open window—the sound of a bell. Then came the plaintive bleat of a ewe, followed by the high treble cry of a lamb separated from its mother. And the sound of the bell beat regularly. Even the old man heard it. Wonderment overspread his face.

"What's that?" he faltered. "Oh, I know! I'd know that bell anywhere! Big Dan is bringin' 'em home!"

The sound of the bell came nearer, leading toward the corral. Mingled with its tinkling was the sound of bleating sheep, and now and then the muffled sneeze of a sheep trying to breathe through the dust. Owen looked at Nan in astonishment.

"Well, I'm a son of a gun," he whispered in awe, "that little devil actually is bringing 'em in! It's impossible—and he's done it!"

Over the face of the old man came an expression of contentment. He rested his head back on the pillow and soon was asleep. The doctor bent over him.

"It's all right now," he told Nan and Owen; "he'll pull through without any trouble."

Dr. Gibson went out, and soon his flivver was sputtering away toward Lamapesa.

VII.

Owen and Nan left the sick room and walked out in the moonlight toward the corral. In the distance, back of the river, a dozen glowing spots, where old stumps still burned, marked the course of the fire. A few thin clouds hurried across the skies, giving promise of rain soon.

"If your father didn't love that scraggly bunch of sheep so much," began Owen, "I'd be sorry they're not all roasted up there in the bluffs."

"When he gets better," said the girl, "I think he'll agree to part with them. He'll have to rest a long time."

"And then," responded Owen, with a sigh of vast relief, "then we can get married, get rid of this little herd of sheep and bring your father over to live with us."

"All right," assented Nan, and they walked on in silence.

They came to the tall rock fence around the pens and leaned against it. Suddenly Owen looked up, puzzled. Then he peered out over the fence. The girl's glance followed his.

"Why, what—?" the girl faltered. And then she knew. For there were no sheep. Only the empty pens, with the rock fence, and the scurrying clouds overhead. Owen and Nan walked around toward the shed, fearful of what they should see. They came upon the burro, hunched dejectedly, and giving forth the odor of burnt hair.

A dozen feet away, barely discernible near the entrance to the shed, was another figure, lying on the ground. Owen ran over and lifted this figure. It was the Weasel.

The face that turned toward Owen was set in a grim smile, but the eyes were closed. His hair, even to the eyebrows, was burned away. His clothes were in tatters.

And when Owen saw, clasped tightly in the Weasel's right hand, the brass bell of big Dan, he understood. Somewhere out in the bluffs the Weasel—the little half-

breed who had been branded as a coward —had come upon the pathetic herd of burned sheep, had sought out the bellwether and removed the bell from his carcass. Then had come the march back to the corral, the Weasel using all his powers of mimicry to create the illusion of the herd coming home.

They carried the little figure across to the vine-covered veranda. A dash of cold water brought open his eyes.

"How's Mr. Masterson?" he asked weakly.

"He's all right," said Owen, "and how's the Weasel?"

The dark face smiled wanly.

"I ain't no Weasel," he blustered.

"You bet you're not," agreed Owen Oliver, "and you've got a job on my ranch as long as you want it. Hasn't he, Nan?"

"Yes," said Nan, "and he still owes me a lot of banjo lessons."

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ENVY

A POET strolled by the road, alone,
And he watched a laborer cracking stone
And digging away with pick and spade
In the yielding earth, as the road he made.
The poet sighed, and he said, said he:
"That's pretty easy, it seems to me!
Nothing to do but dig all day
In a heedless, thoughtless, casual way,
And then, at evening, to drop it there,
And homeward hasten, all free from care!
While I—from the dawn to the setting sun,
My ceaseless labors are never done!
Thinking, thinking! I work and work!
My brain won't stop, so I cannot shirk,
And even then, in the dead of night,
I have to think of the things to write!
Oh, happy the laborer, blithe and gay,
Whose labors stop with the close of day!
I envy his lot, so gay and free!
That's the sort of a life for me!"

The laborer sighed as the poet went.
"Ah, gee!" he said in his discontent.
"Look at that guy! A cinch he's got!
Pretty easy and soft his lot!
Nothing to do but think up things
'Bout love and kisses, and birds on wings,
And fairies dancin' in flower beds sunny,
An' write 'em down for to get the money!
While me—I'm usin' my strength all day,
Diggin', drivin', delvin' away,
To quit at night all done, worked out,
About as good as an old dish clout!
His hands don't hurt and his back don't pain—
He's nothin' to use except his brain,
And that's dead easy, it is, be gee!
That's the sort of a life for me!"

Paul West.

Eight Monkeys and a Catspaw

By HARRY B. SMITH

Author of "Robin Hood," "Rob Roy," etc.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE—AND A SHOCK.

ABOUT a month after the banquet, Seumas Shayne's novel, "Dancing Dolls"—by Roddy Blythe—was published "with illustrations by the author"—the work of Ted Chaworth. Even before it was reviewed, the book was in demand, and the sale started off nicely, on account of the author's reputation as a composer and dramatist. It had been out for only a fortnight when somebody discovered that it was "a mischievous and demoralizing book," and this caused it to attract the attention of a Society for the Promotion of Vice, or something of the sort. The joyful publisher made the most of this, and soon long lines of people waiting at the desks in the public libraries were told that the novel was not obtainable.

Those who worried about the morals of the community wrote letters to the press denouncing the book as one that was likely to have a most pernicious influence. It was thought disgraceful that such a work should be placed in the hands of the youth of our fair land, and it was claimed that the rising generation should be shielded from all knowledge of our best society as exploited in "Dancing Dolls." Naturally these indignant letters were not published by newspapers that have learned to avoid competition with their own advertising depart-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for February 9.

ments; but the reviewers could not ignore the novel, and there soon developed a controversy over " Dancing Dolls " which the publishers could not have bought for any amount of money.

Making hay while the sun shone and assuming a pose of conscious rectitude, the publishers sent copies to two legal luminaries of political authority, whose wives read it and reported that it was a great book, true to life, some of the women in it being exactly like women of their acquaintance. Sophisticated young daughters perused it eagerly and their verdict was that you could say what you pleased but society was just like that. Eventually it was decided by the powers that were that there would be no prosecution, on the ground that " David Copperfield " and Byron's Poems were to be found in every library.

Roddy Blythe sent me a copy of " Dancing Dolls " with his autograph inscription on the title page, " With Seumas Shayne's sincere regards," and I kept it at the office and read parts of it when I had no other work to do. It was, as our paper said, " a scathing arraignment of modern society and the ruthless methods of insatiate monopolists."

All the characters had more money than they knew what to do with, and evidently possessed well stored cellars, as cocktails were passed around in every chapter. No work on geometry ever had so many triangles as were formed by the characters, and, with one exception, the only respectable people were the servants, of whom there were so many in every household that it is no wonder that ordinary folks can't get a general houseworker. The exception mentioned was one nice woman, a good wife and mother, but she always got the worst of it, and the whole idea of the story seemed to be: " Be clever, sweet maid, and let who will be good."

I wrote to Roddy, acknowledging the presentation copy of " Dancing Dolls." I told him that he had written " a big book " —and it *was* nearly five hundred pages. I alluded to it as " a book with a purpose and a mission," which I knew would please him, though, as nearly as I could make out, the moral seemed to be, " Stay single."

My private opinion was that if " Dancing Dolls " was a true to life picture of modern society, *Robinson Crusoe* had the right idea. I felt it my duty as a friend to warn Roddy that, whatever he might write in the future, he should never let Ruth know that he had written this book. As her father had refused to allow them to be engaged until Roddy had written a novel of which he approved, and as " Pickwick " was the old gentleman's idea of a good novel, I suggested that it would be bad diplomacy to let him know anything about this one. Roddy wrote to thank me for my interest and advice, saying that he was quite willing that Seumas Shayne should continue to get all the credit for " Dancing Dolls," and that he would write a " Pickwick " later on.

Naturally enough, the nation-wide advertising provided for the novel by the custodians of public morals soon began to bring results. Several of the larger bookshops had special window displays of Seumas Shayne's best seller with large signs reminding passers-by that it was a book that in olden times would have been burned by the common hangman. Of course the sale was enormous.

People in the class with which it dealt read it and recognized characters they were positive had been drawn from their friends. Those who only looked over the fence at society read it, and, excepting for the reckless display of cocktails, rejoiced that they were plain, homespun Americans living the simple life of the good old days. The hold that the book had upon the public was shown by the fact that the sale was not injured by the almost simultaneous publication of " Cypress and Ivy " by Seumas Shayne, the same being a volume of Chub Burton's poetry " with illustrations by the author—by McKesson in the style of Aubrey Beardsley. Chub sent me a copy with his autograph inscription on the flyleaf:

To my friend
Who can read and understand.
From Seumas Shayne.

Chub was one of the kindest-hearted chaps in the world; but the inscription exaggerated my intelligence and was grossly flattering. I could by main strength read

his symptoms of melancholia, but understanding them was miles beyond me. However, I wrote him a properly appreciative letter and told him how delighted I was to have the book; and I revived Douglas Jerrold's classic line, " I shall lose no time in reading it," taking a chance that Chub had never heard it. As anything by the author of " Dancing Dolls " was sure to have a good sale, a publisher was encouraged to issue a volume of essays, " Moth and Rust," by Seumas Shayne—written by Hugh Malcolm—and he, too, sent me an inscribed copy, which I frankly confess I have never read. I looked over the list of subjects, and made up my mind that nobody but a college professor ought to tackle it.

People were still talking about Shayne's novel and his opera, and " A Woman's Word " and " The Lilac Lady " were in the height of their success, when the spring exhibition of the Independent Artists' Union opened. I knew that two pals of mine had sent pictures, so I attended the first afternoon. When I entered the main gallery I found that a majority of those who had already arrived had gathered in two groups, one clustered around Shayne's landscape by Chaworth, and the other admiring Shayne's portrait of Gladys Gwyn, the dancer, by McKesson.

The latter group was the larger and the more talkative, for those who were not expressing their interest in the portrait were comparing gossip about the fair Gladys herself. Of late she had occupied a good deal of space in the newspapers on account of her breach of promise suit against an aged millionaire in which she claimed that the repairs of a broken heart and a shattered reputation would cost half a million dollars. The flattered defendant had gladly settled for two hundred thousand dollars with which the fair Gladys had endowered the dancing partner of her choice in a marriage which she told the reporters was " a real love match."

Two men who were amateur art connoisseurs were going from one of the " Shayne " pictures to the other, followed by people listening to their comments. The experts certainly had a wonderful time over those two paintings. They looked at them from every possible distance and angle, sometimes shading their eyes with their hands, and now and then leaning over the brass rail as if they could tell a lot about a picture if they smelled the paint. One of them had a large magnifying glass which he used as if a painting was some kind of insect.

" The man cannot escape his own mannerisms," said this learned Theban, shaking his head and looking as wise as the portraits of John Ruskin.

" Even Gainsborough could not do that," the other sage remarked. " One can always tell his landscapes by the mannerisms that appear in his portraits."

The two eminent authorities agreed on every point, excepting that one considered Shayne a born portrait painter likely to be a modern Sir Joshua Reynolds, while the other was equally sure that the clever newcomer should devote his extraordinary talent exclusively to landscape, that he was out of his element in any other line, though he admitted that the portrait of Gladys Gwyn showed a certain versatility and was a clever *tour de force.*

When I had listened to as much of this sort of wisdom as I could stand without laughing, and had come to my own conclusion that Larry and Ted had two of the finest paintings in the exhibition, I wandered into the adjoining gallery, and there the first picture that caught my eye was one of nature's masterpieces. I know Whistler's ironic remark: " Nature is creeping up;" but this picture proved to me that Art has a lot to learn.

She was sitting on one of the velvet couches in the center of the room, and she was gazing, as if fascinated, at a painting hung " on the line," directly before her. The moment I saw her I forgot that there was any such thing as painting. At first sight, she appeared to consist entirely of eyes; but the dazzled beholder—meaning me—immediately realized that bounteous nature had provided " added attractions," as the billboards say, all star features of the highest class. In fact, when she smiled, her eyes had to look to their laurels, and one suspected for an instant what had become of that string of perfectly matched

pearls for which the mysterious lady of Park Avenue put in a claim against the burglar insurance company.

As nearly as I could make out without getting personally acquainted, her eyes were dark blue, with more than the usual allowance of lashes. Her hair was brown and curled in little ringlets around her forehead. It restored one's faith in girl nature to see one who did not have bobbed hair, wore no earrings, and whose pose did not suggest a carefully cultivated curvature of the spine. I do not exaggerate a particle when I say that her picture, just as I saw her there, on a magazine cover, would have boosted the circulation fifty thousand copies.

I had come upon this vision suddenly as I entered through the arch from another gallery, and I imagine that I must have stared at her quite a while—though it did not seem long to me—before I realized that she had good cause for thinking me an ill-mannered cub; but there was no danger; she never saw me; never knew I was on earth. Her thoughts were following her eyes, and her eyes were gazing enrapt on the painting before her. If a girl ever looked at me with her expression as she looked at that picture, I would feel that life was worth living, even if I had been reading Chub Burton's poetry.

When by a mighty effort of will power I stopped staring at her, I glanced at the painting that was inspiring the look of adoration in those wonderful eyes. It was a portrait, the portrait of a man, and although I hated the sight of him, I was compelled to admit that he was handsomer than any man has a right to be. I confessed to myself that he was a magnificent looking chap.

It was an unconventional portrait, for he wore what appeared to be the upper section of a bathing suit and limited white nether garments; some sort of rowing togs apparently. Evidently he was an athlete and a good one. His arms were like Carpentier's, splendidly developed, but sleek and smooth, without the knots and lumps that make so many heavyweights look muscle-bound. It always gave me a pain to hear a girl I knew raving about a fellow who she said looked "like a Greek God;" but there was something about this chap in the picture that suggested some of those old statues. I have often wondered if there ever was a time when people looked like those Apollos and Dianas instead of being like the types you see nowadays.

Glad that the beautiful vision had remained oblivious to my presence, I reluctantly started to make a tour of the room, though the charms of nature had seriously impaired my interest in the works of art. As I passed her, she happened to drop her catalogue. I picked it up, returned it to her, and she thanked me. I noticed the number on the portrait which seemed to her the only picture in the room that was worth looking at. Then I went and bought a catalogue and turned to number 157. There I read:

Portrait of the Artist. Seumas Shayne.

CHAPTER XI.

DANGER!

NOT infrequently a man sees a girl who he thinks would be just the wife for him, and cases have been known in which men have backed their judgment and proved that they were fairly good guessers; but the perfect beauty is about as rarely seen as the comet that calls on us once in a hundred years.

On two or three occasions in a lifetime one encounters a being of such transcendent loveliness that it would be presumptuous for an ordinary mortal to do more than wonder and admire, without a profane thought of love or matrimony. No moth would have the audacity to flutter around a star so glorious. In case this poetic allusion seems a little vague, what I mean to say is that there are plenty of nice attractive girls, to whom one might suggest two rooms, bath, and kitchenette; but one would hesitate to mention such things to a Lady Clara Vere de Vere who looks as every princess would if she could have her own way and say about it.

I mention this merely that it may be perfectly understood that there was no love-at-first-sight nonsense mingled with my admiration for the girl in the art gallery.

In the first place I have too keen a sense of the value of my own time, to waste the precious hours on a hopeless enterprise. The fact that the beauteous unknown admired the Apollo Belvedere type was in itself more than enough to settle *my* chances, though I am not saying that I would not cut a pretty fair figure in a Roger's Group representing the youngest son returning to his rural family after a year in the great city.

As soon as I could get the lovely apparition out of my thoughts, so that business was going on in the dome as usual, I realized that there could be no such superman as that portrait represented, that it was merely a work of imagination by which McKesson had sought to have a private and exclusive laugh at the expense of the rest of the Seumas coterie.

With the chivalry which has inspired all rescuers of beauty in distress from Perseus to Bill Hart, my first impulse was to save our heroine from infatuation with a chimera. I felt it my bounden duty to get acquainted with her in some diplomatic way, in order that I might assure her that her adoration was wasted on a mere figment of eight inventive brains. But, I reflected, why shatter anyone's ideals? We have so few illusions and they are so soon lost. Her ideal was only paint and canvas, as those of so many of us are only paint and powder. She was in love with someone who never existed, but many of us have had, and are having, the same experience.

And yet it seemed a shame that so much affection should be wasted on a picture. My imagination traveled far enough to wonder what effect it would have if I assumed my best imitation of Chesterfieldian courtesy, introduced myself, and told her that the picture was an invention and not a portrait. It did not rehearse well. Moreover, I realized that it would be a mean trick to play on the boys after all their hard work in establishing Seumas as a celebrity.

I was tempted to wait on the steps of the art gallery long enough to catch a last lingering look; but my better nature conquered and I dragged myself away. In a short walk to the nearest elevated station, I had three narrow escapes from being run over, and excited taxi drivers called me not a few names, one of which particularly agreed with my own estimate of myself at the moment.

In the city room of the *Bulletin* I found Miss Teller seated at my desk, getting up her copy for the Woman's Page, her own desk being temporarily occupied by a visitor reading proof on some contribution to our valued columns. Nell Teller was a girl scribe who had recently come from Boston, thereby, I doubt not, materially reducing the average of feminine loveliness in that cultured burg

I am not saying that Nellie Teller was a perfect dream like the unknown beauty in the art gallery; but I do claim that she was prettier than any clever girl is expected to be. Indisputably clever she was, although she conducted several departments on the Woman's Page, all the most frightful mush, especially the one she called "Answers to the Love-lorn," a feature which she transplanted from the Boston paper on which she had been employed before coming to us. This bromide repository told worried wives how to retain their husbands' love in spite of increasing embonpoint, stated what presents a girl of seventeen might accept from a young man without causing the neighbors to talk, described how a pretty house frock could be made for one dollar and ninety-five cents, and was altogether a fount of wise advice for the sex that so rarely takes it.

Miss Teller's sense of humor enabled her to get a good deal of fun out of her department, which she took seriously only on pay day. She had suggested several good ideas for special articles to Ackerman, the Sunday editor, which he had approved and she had written, the result showing that she wielded a breezy pen, in spite of the Woman's Page.

"Keep right on," I said, when I found her busy at my desk. "I am not bringing in any story, so I'm not going to write."

"Not helping out on the book reviews, are you?" she asked.

"Not in my line. Literary Department, second aisle to the left."

"I see you're quite a reader though," she remarked. "Those books," and she

indicated the few volumes on my desk. "Of course, one finds 'Dancing Dolls' everywhere; but the poetry and essays! *Ou avez-vous obtenu cette étoffe?*"

I knew just enough French to know that she was asking me where I got that stuff, and not thinking what deep water I was wading into, I showed her the author's presentation inscription in "Dancing Dolls."

"Yes," she said, "I noticed the inscriptions in the other books, too. He's a versatile writer."

"Very."

"Even his handwriting is versatile."

"Ye—es. So you have been looking at my books?"

"I always look at books wherever I find them. I didn't think you'd mind. You don't, do you?"

"Not at all."

After a short pause, in which I began to feel rather uncomfortable, Nell began again:

"This Seumas Shayne is a very remarkable man. Have you known him long?"

"Oh, yes—quite a while."

"Seen him lately?"

"No. He's in Europe."

"I see. He sent these books to you?"

"Oh, yes, he sends me all his books. We were at school together."

"I noticed that one of the inscriptions is dated 'New York, April third,' only a month ago."

"Oh, yes; he made a flying trip over here to see his play. Went back on the next steamer."

"*I* see," she said, and her smile seemed to me just a trifle ironical. "There's something rather mysterious about him."

"Is there?" I asked, getting a little nervous.

"Well, he has been doing such wonderful work, and yet nobody seems to know anything about him. You're the first person I've met who claims to know him."

"Yes, but you see he has lived in Europe since—oh, most of his life."

"*I* see. He certainly is a talented person." She gave me a detective sort of look, and asked: "How do you account for his writing three different hands?"

"Eccentricity of genius, I suppose," I extemporized. "He's always done that; did it in school. I guess, being an artist, he can vary his handwriting just as he varies his style of painting, according to the mood of the moment. A lot of people do it. I do, myself. When I have time and take pains, I write like copper-plate; but my ordinary hand has driven many a printer to drink."

I knew that this explanation did not explain, for, with the inscriptions in those three books in evidence, anyone could see that Seumas Shayne wrote three hands, no two of which resembled each other in any way. They were as unlike as the signature of John Hancock and the scrawl of Horace Greeley. I had hard work to conceal my nervousness, especially as Nell, the Lady Sleuth, seemed to be steaming up to ask more leading questions. Just in time the telephone rang, and fortunately it was for her.

Apparently the call was from a constant reader of the Answers to the Love-lorn, some silly girl asking about a man with whom, I suppose, as in most cases, she had "been keeping company for some time." My thoughts reverted to the girl I had seen in the art gallery, and I could not help contrasting her with the silly young women to whom Nell Teller's department was a storehouse of wise counsel. It appeared, however, that this particular customer was a friend of Nell's, and the portion of the conversation that I could hear was about as follows:

"Yes, this is Miss Teller. Yes. This you, Leila? Where? No, I haven't been there yet. My dear, I haven't time. Worth seeing; are they? Only *one?* Rather a poor showing for a whole exhibition. Really? What's he like? Oh! as much as that! Stop raving. I don't know him. No, I can't come to-day, but call me up to-morrow—no, the day after. I may have something interesting to tell you. About *him?* Of course. Frightfully tiring? Yes, of course. Oh, that's all right. Day after to-morrow. About this time. Good-by."

I arranged to vanish through the nearest doorway at the moment Nell hung up the receiver, for I apprehended that she would

resume her questionnaire on the subject of Seumas Shayne. I can't be certain whether it was an accident or carefully planned by Nell, but it happened that within half an hour she and I were fellow passengers in the elevator bound for Broadway.

"Just the very man I wanted to see," she exclaimed, without overdoing the surprise. "I've had a bit of luck. I suggested a special article to Mr. Ackerman and he thinks it's a great idea. I am to make two pages of it for Sunday, with all the pictures I can get."

"The Thurtell divorce case, I suppose?"

"Not at all. It's about your friend, Seumas Shayne. It's a wonder to me that no one has thought of it before. Here is a man who is a big success as novelist, playwright, composer, poet, painter—an all-round genius, and yet nobody but little me has thought of telling a waiting world all about him."

"Oh, it has all been tried before," I said, with a pretty fair attempt at nonchalance. "When 'A Woman's Word' and 'The Lilac Lady' were produced on the same evening every theatrical reporter in New York was sleuthing to find something to write about Seumas, and the same thing happened when 'The Hero' was produced at the Metropolitan."

"Didn't they publish anything about him?"

"A lot, opinions, advice, anecdotes—everything but facts. The result was that the only thing the writers agreed on was that Seumas lived in Europe."

"Europe's quite a sizable town," said Nell. I may want to cable him. What's his street address?"

"I believe he travels a lot. He has a chateau in Brittany and a villa in Italy. Sometimes he takes a notion to run off to Abyssinia or Ceylon. I don't want to discourage you; but I doubt if you can find out anything about him that hasn't been printed."

Nell laughed in a way that I found very annoying and said, "I'd like to make a little bet with you that I find out *all* about him."

"Oh, I wouldn't bet against you," I hastened to assure her, "especially as I am very much interested, and I'm going to help you all I can."

"Awfully sweet of you," she said, and, though I was careful not to look at her, I could feel a satirical smile floating around.

"But honestly," I added with a first class imitation of sincerity, "if I had been given the assignment, I wouldn't know how to go about getting the right dope. Of course, unless you mean to go to Europe."

"I don't think it will be necessary to go so far," she said, "and what is more, I am surprised at your saying that you would not know how to start this investigation, a man who is a shark at murder mysteries and such-like."

"Well, how are *you* going about it? And what started you on the idea anyway?"

"The fact is I have been interested in this Seumas Shayne for a long time. Before I left Boston to come here, I received letters from a girl friend who admired his writings. She telephoned me at the office this afternoon. I told her some time ago that my theory is that this Seumas Shayne is a sort of syndicate."

At this there was a sound of hearty and prolonged laughter from me; but I felt that it did not ring true. Actors say that a natural laugh is one of the most difficult of histrionic achievements. I ended this outburst of derision with the word that Napoleon said should not exist—Impossible.

"Yes, I find that I was wrong," Nell admitted. "My girl friend phoned me that the famous Seumas Shayne can't be a syndicate because she has seen his portrait."

"Really! A photograph of Seumas Shayne?"

"Not a photograph; a painting, in the Independent Art League Exhibition."

"Is that so? I must go and see it. Is this girl friend of yours—is she—er—what does she look like?" I suppose I must have shown an eagerness for which there was no apparent cause, for I felt Nell giving me a sharp look as she said:

"She looks like the prettiest girl you ever saw, and she is probably the richest. Why do you ask?"

"Just curiosity to know what sort of girl would fall in love with a man she has never seen."

"How do you know she's never seen him? And who told you she was in love with him?"

"Why, you did, didn't you?"

"I did not."

"Well, you gave me that impression anyway."

I could see that Nell was growing more suspicious every minute, and I didn't blame her. I realized that under her questioning I was showing myself the intellectual peer of a starfish. She gave me a few seconds to think things over hurriedly and then remarked:

"Of course if there is a portrait of Seumas Shayne on exhibition, he can't be a syndicate; but, on the other hand, three different handwritings seem to prove that he is at least a triumvirate."

"I've explained about his handwriting," I said, "and as I used to go to school with him, I can assure you that he is just an individual whose talents happen to be unusually versatile."

"Well, I'm going to find out all about him. If he lives in Europe, he must have an agent or a representative. I shall go to the managers and publishers who have dealings with him and find out to whom they make their payments."

I imagined an interview between Nell Teller and Spinoza Malcolm. If she ever started to cross-examine him, that would be the finish of Seumas. It seemed a shame to deceive this innocent trusting girl; it also seemed extremely difficult; but I saw that, as a friend and confidant of the boys, I would have to try my best to do so.

"I believe you have the right idea," I said. "Of course he must have some kind of an agent in New York, and, if you can find out who he is, that would be a starter any way. If you like, I can find out that much for you. I'm going uptown now in the neighborhood of the Temple Theatre. I'll drop in and see Skipworth and ask him where he sends Seumas Shayne's royalties for 'The Lilac Lady.'"

"Awfully good of you. Sure it isn't too much trouble?"

"Not a bit. It's a pleasure. In fact, I shall be glad to help you with the article in any way that I can; and, if there's any mystery about Seumas—which I doubt—you have been good enough to say that mysteries are my long suit; so probably I can be of real assistance to you."

"That would be fine. Thanks."

She didn't exactly offer her hand, but I took it anyway, and a nice hand it was, not too small, but shapely and competent looking. It was a genuine pleasure to hold it for a moment, though I didn't consider it shaking hands on a bargain, because, no matter how much I liked Nell, I felt that my first duty was to prevent a discovery that would ruin the prospects of eight more or less deserving young men. It was not difficult to prevail on Nell to wait a couple of days while I did some preliminary investigations, which I assured her would make it easier for her to get on the trail. After I had helped her into a taxi, she gave me her hand again, and her eyes expressed so much confidence and gratitude that I regained my self-respect only by reflecting on the undoubted excellence of my motives. Incidentally, I hoped that the recording angel was not a stenographer.

CHAPTER XII.

ENTER SEUMAS.

AFTER parting from Nell Teller, I hurried to the nearest subway station, caught an uptown train and, getting off at Fourteenth Street, walked as fast as I could to Mrs. Clow's. The front of the house was now quite inviting. For me, with my inside information and previous knowledge of the premises, there might just as well have been a sign over the door: "The boys have paid up."

That was the only way to account for the transformation scene. The entire front of the house had been painted a pale mayonnaise color with green trimmings. There were flower boxes in some of the windows and, though the geraniums and pansies needed a thorough dusting, the intention was all right, and doubtless the artistic effect enabled Mrs. Clow to boost the prices of the smaller rooms at least a dollar a week.

Alfred, Uncle Tom's younger brother, in-

stead of coming to the door in his shirt-sleeves, as of yore, wore a white linen jacket, immaculate excepting for a few fingerprints for identification purposes. The only thing that reminded me of the old home was Mrs. Clow listening behind the hall portiere, just as she used to when snooping to find out whose collector was calling.

On hearing my voice and Alfred's chuckling assurance that he was glad to see me and had never seen me looking so well, Ozella made a showy entrance from her place of concealment and gave further evidence that the long period of financial depression was over and that all concerned in the Clow establishment were in the midst of a wave of unexampled prosperity. Ozella's historic cretonne wrapper, the cyclorama of parrots and chrysanthemums with more hues in it than one of Joseph Urban's coats of many colors, had been eliminated at last. It was an even bet whether it had found a home in the Metropolitan Museum or had been sent to some unfortunate poor relation in sunny Tennessee.

She now wore a pink gabardine trimmed with little tufts of white fur, strong circumstantial evidence that a white cat, erstwhile the belle of the adjacent back yards, had departed to the only bourne whence no cat comes back. At last a chance shot with a beer bottle had hushed its song forever. Ozella had discarded her cheap orange-colored rouge of former days, and with her new color scheme she looked ten days younger. The cluster diamond ring, presented to her by the late able but bibulous lawyer, was now out of pawn, as her every gesture proved.

I congratulated Mrs. Clow on the improved appearance of the mansion. She was affable enough, though inclined to be haughty, as she always was to any one who had shown no appreciation of the refined surroundings of her select establishment and had moved away. She seemed to take an almost spiteful pleasure in telling me that she had no vacancies at present, imagining that I was a returned prodigal yearning to get back to chicken salad made of the fatted calf.

Inquiry regarding the boys, revealed the fact that two or three, eager to get rid of their money, had moved to more expensive and pretentious quarters, but the nucleus of Seumas was still loyal to the Clow establishment. Some of the fellows, who in former times could not pay for one room, were now having suites, sitting-rooms, and other sybaritic indulgences.

While I was admiring the new "golden oak" hat-rack and the ornate umbrella jar, a murmur of conversation, which had been audible through the closed doors of Bert Hollister's room, swelled in volume and became the excited argument of half-a-dozen voices.

Alfred knocked at the door to announce me; but the noise in the room apparently prevented the knock from being heard; so I presumed upon old acquaintance, opened the door and entered without any herald or fanfare. All the boys were there excepting Roddy Blythe and Ben Gleason who had found Mrs. Clow's too quiet and home-like for their now extravagant ideas. They all stopped talking long enough to say "Hello," though they said it as if they had something more important on their minds.

In a remote corner of the window seat was a stranger, and I nearly fell backward through the doorway, for the moment that I saw him I realized that I had been all wrong in my theory that McKesson's portrait was a work of imagination. It was the Greek-looking athlete sure enough, as large as life, and that's saying a lot.

He was just as big and blond and good-looking as the portrait. McKesson hadn't idealized him a particle, excepting in the matter of clothes. The modern Ajax wore an old grey tweed suit that still had the identification marks of having been made by a first class tailor; and the toes of his shoes proved that he could still afford socks. His right hand and arm were heavily bandaged and supported in a sling.

Curled up on the window-seat smoking a pipe as disreputable as Hugh Malcolm's worst, he looked like Apollo made up to play in a moving picture comedy. It was obvious that he was the center of the conversational storm that was raging, but he

seemed to be regarding it with amused tolerance. Recognizing the fact that I was not welcomed by my old pals with the riotous enthusiasm I had expected, I excused my intrusion by saying that I simply had to see them all at once about a matter of vital importance.

Hollister intimated that they were all discussing something private and confidential, and suggested that it might be a good idea for me to take a stroll around the neighborhood and come back a little later. I was about to take this gentle hint, but Dick Harlowe insisted on my remaining, reminding all parties concerned that I had been in the Seumas Shayne secret from the start. He flattered me by adding that I might be able to find a solution of the problem which was giving them all brain-fag. After I had assured them all that I remained solely because I had an important communication to make, I took the only vacant chair and Dick started to address the meeting, evidently beginning the discussion where I had interrupted it.

"Well, that's the situation," he said. "We're up against it, and the question is what are we going to do about it. Several thousand people will see that picture, including a lot of newspaper men. The portrait will be reproduced in half the illustrated supplements from Maine to California."

"That won't do any harm," put in McKesson, as if he were the defendant in the case. "In fact, it will help. If anyone has been in doubt, he will now be convinced that Seumas Shayne is a real person."

"Oh, yes," said Chaworth with cheery sarcasm; "and the next time a newspaper man sees Tom Jervis on the street, he will corner him and demand an interview. *Then* what will happen?"

Several pairs of hands went up in despair, and I noticed that those who had formerly favored the dissolution of the Seumas corporation now groaned the loudest as if they saw the goose that laid the golden eggs led forth for execution.

"It's all up, boys," said Bert Hollister. "As Dick says, that picture will be known all over the country, and Jervis is a fellow of such unusual appearance that he will easily be identified. Seumas is through for good and all. Mac has dumped the apple cart and our orgy of coin collecting is a thing of the past."

Everybody began to swear at McKesson, who after being informed in a great variety of language just what he was, protested feebly that he had told them a dozen times that the portrait was a joke. He tried hard to get his co-Seumases to see it in that light; but he might as well have attempted to show them that there is a sunny side to a toothache.

They were all convinced that there would be an investigation and that they had better take their profits and get out before the coming of the crash. McKesson made a last futile effort to persuade them that they were worrying about something that would never happen, but the suggestion was derided, and the poor chap looked so broken-hearted that I made a diversion in his favor.

"I happen to know," I said, "that an interviewer is already camping on the trail of Seumas, and what is worse, she is the cleverest newspaper woman in town. I found it out an hour ago, and that is why I am here—to tip you fellows off. She has figured it out that Shayne is a syndicate. In other words, she has made a pretty accurate guess how many beans are in the jar."

After the gnashing of teeth had subsided and McKesson had been described and classified in picturesque phrases, I went on with my chapter of revelations.

"You must know that for quite a while there have been rumors that Seumas Shayne is a *nom de plume*, adopted by several writers; and now, with Nell Teller on the job, it is up to you to prove that the theory is wrong. Couldn't one of you be Seumas as far as newspaper interviews are concerned? He could have recently arrived from Europe, and after being in evidence just long enough to squelch truthful but damaging reports, he could return to the safe and congenial atmosphere of the Old World."

"That's about as foolish a suggestion as I ever heard," said Bert Hollister. "We

all have people who know us. How could any one of us suddenly claim to be somebody else?"

Chaworth said my idea was idiotic.

"You seem to forget," he said, "that there is a picture labeled Seumas Shayne staring everybody in the face. None of us look like *him.*"

The gloom thickened, and into it broke the voice of the handsome devil on the window seat. It was a resonant baritone that compelled attention.

"See here, you fellows; I seem to have gotten you all into a lot of trouble somehow. I haven't the least idea what it's all about. Personally, I never heard of this party Shayne, and, as for that picture of me, I had no idea that it was going to be exhibited. Mac asked me to let him paint it and I didn't see any harm in it. If this Shayne party is peeved about it, don't blame me."

He got up while he was talking and sauntered toward the door starting to make an exit with nonchalant dignity. He was recalled by a chorus, the theme of which was that *he* was all right and nobody blamed him in any way. While I was looking at him, an idea occurred to me which at the time I thought was fairly bright.

"Boys," I said, "there is no doubt in the world that you will have to produce Seumas Shayne in person. Owing to the exhibition of his portrait, his appearance will soon be known in every city in America. Consequently there is only one man who will be accepted as Shayne and that man is—" And I looked at the unknown.

"Tom Jervis!" exclaimed McKesson.

"If that's his name."

"Sure it is," said Harlowe. "I forgot you hadn't met him. Excuse *me*. Shake hands with Mr. Jervis," and he mentioned my name, giving me a send-off as a shining light of journalism and a friend who could keep a secret.

With his left hand, the interesting stranger gave me a grip of such muscular energy that I had all I could do to maintain a genial smile and say I was pleased to meet him. His handshake made me wonder if he had strained his bandaged right arm by lifting an elephant.

"What's this you're wishing on me?" he asked. "Some kind of detective stuff? I don't make you exactly. Who is this Sumac party you're talking about?"

Harlowe said something in an undertone to McKesson, who, evidently prompted, remarked to Jervis: "Tom, old man, you were to have that arm dressed at three o'clock, and it's ten minutes to three. You'd better beat it."

"I get you," said Jervis with a genial grin. "Three-thirty it was; but I have taken hints from some of our best hinters. How long will my absence be desirable?"

"Come back as soon as the doc has fixed up your arm," replied McKesson." "We may have something interesting to tell you."

"Right-o! Suppose I drop in here about four. Will that give you time to say everything about me that you can think of?"

They all assured him that nothing would be said that he could take the least exception to, so he borrowed a few cigarettes from Hollister and went on his merry way. As he disappeared, all the fellows turned toward me with the precision of a well-drilled chorus, and seeing that I was regarded for the moment as a fountain of wisdom I said:

"This is my suggestion. This Nell Teller is as foolish as Reynard the Fox, and she has been assigned to write a two-page special for the Sunday *Bulletin*. She firmly believes that Shayne is the mask, so to speak, of a group of writers. She was starting off this afternoon to call on managers and publishers, all who have had any business dealings with Shayne, to find out all she could about him. She would be on your trail now, if I hadn't volunteered to collect the preliminary information for her. I side-tracked her till I could get a chance to talk it over with you."

"Skipworth and the other managers will refer her to Spinoza," remarked Chaworth, looking at Malcolm.

"I'd much prefer not to meet her," said Malcolm. "I wouldn't like to deceive a woman."

"Don't flatter yourself. You *couldn't* deceive this one," I assured him. "But even if you could, she wouldn't be satisfied

by being referred to an agent. Believe me, she is clever enough to dig up the truth. She has pretty good evidence now that there are at least three Seumas Shaynes."

I told them about the inscriptions in three different handwritings in the three books, all signed Seumas Shayne, bringing upon myself a verbal walloping for my carelessness in leaving the books around where they could be seen. I had to remind them that, but for me, Nell Teller would have been at her work of destruction by this time. Then I told them that Nell's syndicate theory had been jarred a bit, and her suspicions diverted into new channels by the fact that she had learned that there was a portrait of Seumas in the exhibition of the Independent Artists' League, that she would certainly go to see this portrait and would corner the original the first time she saw him in the street and demand an interview.

"Unless," I concluded, "you intend to keep Tom What's-his-name a prisoner for life like the Man in the Iron Mask, and, personally, after shaking hands with him, I choose not to be his jailer."

"The objection is," said McKesson, "that if Tom Jervis posed as anybody else for ten minutes in a deaf and dumb asylum, he'd be found out."

"Why?"

"Because—well, he's a fine chap, but an awful boob in a lot of ways," Mac replied, and I realized then why he had gotten rid of Jervis.

"He seems to have ordinary average intelligence," I suggested.

"Just about," Mac admitted.

"Who is he anyway?" I asked; and Mac told me all about him, much of the information appearing to be quite as new to the others as it was to me. It seemed that the aristocratic looking Jervis was not Bertie Cecil of the Coldstream Guards nor the younger son of the Earl of Plantagenet —as such people are described in Ouida's novels—I don't mean as they look in real life.

He was a product of the great and glorious Middle West, and a stranger in New York. He had attended a small Western college where he had distinguished himself in athletics and had learned to read and write. Returning to the home town, he had embarked upon a career of variegated failure, trying a lot of ways to make a living and falling down in one and all. When he got a job as a motion picture actor, it seemed as if, with his appearance and athletic prowess, he might have found his vocation; but, as usual, old Dame Misfortune was on watch for him. On his first day, he was given some stunt to do, and succeeded in getting a bad fracture of the forearm. Judging from McKesson's recital, Jervis was the original bad luck kid.

"One would imagine," I commented, "that a person with his extraordinary good looks would get along on that equipment alone. With women voting now, why doesn't he run for President? I'm surprised that some millionaire's wife has not recommended him to friend husband as a private secretary at a large salary."

"Never in the world," said Harlowe. "If a married woman ever suggested having a chap as good looking as Jervis within a thousand miles, her husband would think his happy home was rocking on its foundations."

"He wouldn't have to worry," McKesson said. "Tom isn't as fresh with the fair sex as many a chap who, if his face was his fortune, would be a million dollars in debt. Of course they do run after him a lot; but he isn't crazy about them."

"Probably for the same reason that the sea isn't crazy about fish," Hollister suggested.

"He isn't a bit conceited," McKesson continued. "He claims that he has never met that celebrated 'right one.' Moreover, if a girl asked him for an ice cream soda, he would have to negotiate a loan."

"Never mind his love affairs," I said. "It doesn't matter whether he is Don Juan's understudy or Saint Anthony's pet pupil. Still it is just as well that he is not too susceptible; for he is the only man who can pose as Seumas Shayne, simply because he is the only one who looks like that portrait. That's logical, isn't it? And if, as you claim, he has average human in-

telligence, you can coach him for Nell Teller's impending interview. If he gets away with it, you're all right. If he doesn't you're no worse off than you are now."

"Yes," Harlowe objected, "but if she's as clever as you say and has seen those three inscriptions in books given to you by Chub, Blythe, and Malcolm, the first thing she will do will be to ask for his autograph. Then where is he?"

"That only goes to prove that a broken arm is a blessing in disguise," I said. There was quite a murmur of approbation, and the boys nodded and smiled at me as if brains hitherto unsuspected had suddenly been revealed to them.

"This is what I suggest," I proceeded; "I know just about the questions an interviewer will ask. I'll write out an interview containing all these questions and with answers which brother Jervis can commit to memory. He has a memory, I suppose."

"Oh, don't misunderstand me," McKesson interposed; "Tom is nobody's fool. He's a pretty fair talker when he gets started. Among other jobs he has tried, he has solicited life insurance and sold automobiles, or tried to sell them, and though he was a failure at both, he must have learned something about talking."

"Nell Teller likes to air the fact that she can speak French. Can Jervis speak French?" I asked.

"*Can* he?" said McKesson. "His mother was French, and when he had money, it was a liberal education to hear him order a dinner."

Several of the fellows instantly declared themselves in favor of my plan; others suggested objections and possible snags that might be struck; but the more these considered the scheme the better they liked it and the finish was that I was acclaimed as a peerless leader.

It was arranged that I should draw up an imaginary interview containing all the questions that Nell Teller, or any other interviewer would be likely to ask, together with carefully prepared answers; also, at Harlowe's suggestion, I was to write out a list of "Don'ts" as a warning to Tom Jervis, telling him what subjects to avoid. The scheme grew in popular favor as we discussed it, and at the end of the consultation it looked like a pretty fair gleam of hope.

We had just settled everything nicely when Tom Jervis reappeared bringing with him a cheerful smile and a slight whiff of iodoform. He offered to go away again if we hadn't finished all we had to say about him; but he received the unanimous assurance that the discussion had been entirely in his interest. He was asked to sit down, provided with a drink, and then the proposition was put up to him, including a full account of the Seumas Shayne scheme from its inception.

When he knew what the boys were up against and learned that he was proposed as the man of the hour, he laughed loud and long. He had the sort of laugh that calls upon all hearers to join in, and then and there some of the Seumases saw for the first time the comic side of the great conspiracy. It was quite a relief to me to find that the lad had a sense of humor, as it indicated that he would enter into the project, if only as a joke, and would carry it through in the proper spirit.

"Of course I'll do it," he said, "if it will help you out of a scrape. You have all been mighty nice to me. The only danger I can see is that some one from out West might happen along and recognize me."

"We'll look out for that," Harlowe assured him. "Fortunately you know hardly anyone in New York, and since you've been in town all you have seen of it has been in your walks to and from the doctor's office."

"And from now on you'll have to keep under cover until you make your début as Seumas," added McKesson. "Just leave all that to us."

"But do you think I could get away with it?" Jervis asked doubtfully. "As you tell it to me, I am supposed to be a musician, a painter, a novelist, a poet, and the Lord knows what beside. I might make some awful break and give the whole thing away. For instance, do you think I could talk like a poet?"

"We don't want you to," answered Chaworth, grinning at Chub Burton. "All we want of you is to be a regular human

being and a good fellow, such as all men of real talent are. No posing; no affectation. Just be yourself."

I cheered him up considerably by explaining that everything he would have to say would be written out for him to memorize. He said his memory was first class; but he saw a difficulty in the fact that he did not look like a prosperous celebrity. He certainly was right as far as externals were concerned. It is well known that many great authors are careless in their dress, but their indifference rarely goes as far as a preference for moth-holes in their trousers, and boots that should have been in the ash-can.

Jervis also suggested that a famous author with empty pockets, while not unknown in the annals of literature, was not convincing and might stir the suspicions of the doubtful. These reasonable objections were met by the assurance that the enterprise would be adequately financed.

"I want to make one more suggestion," said Dick Harlowe. "We are all here excepting Blythe and Ben Gleason. Six out of eight would be considered a quorum in any directors' meeting, so we can decide an important financial matter. Tom Jervis is the one man in the world who can keep our scheme going. Without him we would have to dissolve a prosperous partnership. I move that hereafter, instead of dividing our profits into eight parts, we divide in ninths and hand the extra share to Jervis."

The others agreed to this at once; but Jervis protested that he would not think of taking money for doing a good turn for fellows who had been friendly to him. Dick assured him that he would earn the money; that he was now the most valuable member of the organization. The only condition attached to this munificent offer was that, after being interviewed enough to convince all doubters that there really was a Seumas Shayne, Jervis was to go to London or Paris as the firm's European representative.

It required considerable argument to convince Jervis that he could make this arrangement without being a grafter or an object of charity; but the fellows finally proved to him that his services in this emergency were well worth all he would receive.

Thus it was settled that three days later Tom Jervis was to arrive at the St. Felix Hotel with an entire new outfit of modish raiment, a liberal supply of ready money, and as much smart looking luggage as a distinguished author might be supposed to bring with him when on a flying trip to the land of more or less freedom. I was to receive confidential information that the celebrated all-round genius was in the city for a brief visit; then I was to pass the word to Nell Teller and arrange for her to meet him.

Harlowe and I spent the evening in getting up an interview, in which I sustained the reportorial end of the conversation and Dick supplied the line of talk for the distinguished author. If I do say it, the result was a pretty bit of work.

I surmised that one of Nell's first questions would refer to the three different autographs in the three Seumas Shayne books presented to me. Tom's explanation was to be that his varied handwriting was a gift which had caused a lot of practical joking when he was at school, so he had written the inscriptions differently in giving the books to an old schoolmate. Nell might ask for a demonstration of this peculiar talent; but that was where the bandaged wrist was a gift from Heaven. It was my intention that she should be the first and, if possible, the only writer to interview the elusive celebrity, as I wanted to compensate her for the shameful way in which I was deceiving her. We might not be able to avoid other interviews; but we figured that if Jervis got safely through the first ordeal, the others would be easy, as they would be practically repetitions.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMING OF "R. JONES."

MY plan was to inform Nell Teller that Seumas Shayne had arrived in New York for the purpose of hearing his opera. As she had had her suspicions aroused, she would probably look over the passenger lists of incoming steamers and if she failed to find his name, she would be apt to ask me a lot of annoying questions,

This necessitated carefully manufactured evidence that the famous writer had traveled incognito.

I found that the Ionic was due to arrive on the day following the conference at Mrs. Clow's, and on the passenger list were the names of Rushmore Jones and Richard Jones; so R. Jones seemed a safe and suitable name for Tom Jervis to register at the St. Felix, and the new and very English looking luggage was ordered to be marked " R. J.," as corroborative detail.

As there was no time to get the right sort of trousseau made, McKesson took Jervis early the next morning to an establishment where ready-to-wear garments closely approximated the style and fit of made to order articles. Here he was provided with everything necessary for the careful dressing of the part he was to play. To prevent his being prematurely seen and recognized as the original of the portrait in the art exhibition, Tom was then taken in a taxi to Ben Gleason's place at Shoreville, Long Island, where he was to train for the coming verbal battle.

The cheerful composer of popular songs was the sort of youth who develops megalomania from a little germ of prosperity. Since the dance orchestras had taken to playing his tunes, Ben had been displaying a great interest in himself and nothing was too good for him. He had been so dazzled by the checks for royalties that for some time past he had been throwing dollars around as if they were mere marks. He had made the first payment on a big handsome house with several acres of ground. At any time in his previous career, Ben would have regarded his present garage as a Castle in Spain, magnificent beyond his wildest dream and ambition. This property he proudly but prematurely referred to as *his*, irrespective of any opinion to the contrary which the mortgagee might have.

Ben had two fine polo ponies, which he had purchased at a high price with the idea of going in for the most aristocratic of sports. He had taken a tentative ride on one of these spirited animals, and would have sold them both the next day, only he was too proud to weaken. Polo, however, was postponed indefinitely, and his sporting instincts found an outlet in the soul-stirring game of croquet.

As a further fashionable extravagance, the whim of a reckless moment, Ben had treated himself to two German police dogs of ferocious appearance. These sagacious brutes seemed to know that their owner had not any too much confidence in their dispositions; and they were right. If Ben braced his courage to the point of daring to pat one of them on the head, the rest of the day he put on more airs than Jack the Giant Killer.

Among the other decorative features were two disconsolate looking deer, representing the first step toward the establishment of an estate, what the guide books to the British peerage would have called a " seat." If Ben had been a reading man, I would have suspected him of being a copy-cat of Sir Walter trying to start a Long Island Abbotsford; but as far as he knew, " Ivanhoe," was the name of a sleeping car. He was confident that he was just beginning a career that would make Puccini's look like an organ grinder's, and when not hammering on the piano, he spent most of his time sauntering around his estate, always making sure that the two police dogs were either chained in the stable or securely muzzled. Dressed in golf togs, he certainly looked every inch a pinochle player.

In this surburban Paradise, Tom Jervis was installed and carefully instructed to be wary about showing himself to the neighbors. The next day was devoted to taking photographs of him, as I knew that Nell Teller's first demand would be for pictures to illustrate her article. The broken wrist was unbandaged for this purpose and seemed to be nearly normal; but Tom was cautioned that he must continue to be a bird with a broken wing until all the interviewing was over. That his right hand was disabled was one of our most valuable assets.

Chaworth and McKesson took charge of the art department and turned out some admirable pictures of Tom with Ben Gleason's dogs and horses. Even the deer were useful for once in their lives, contributing local color to a view of Shayne's estate in

Devonshire. Chaworth found some old engravings in a print shop and his photographs of them were adequate representations of Seumas's villa in Italy and his chateau in Brittany.

After the official photographers had completed their equipment, Harlowe and I took Jervis in hand with the interview that we had concocted. This included all the questions that a bright young newspaper woman was likely to ask a distinguished visitor to our shores, together with the answers that a modest man of genius would be expected to make. As a newspaper man, I looked after the usual material of such an interview, comparisons of our country with the decadent nations of Europe, and all the customary piffle.

Harlowe, however, had the hardest part of the work, for he had to invent a complete outfit of opinions on a great variety of subjects, seeing to it that the great author vividly described his methods of work in composing, writing and painting. He had some interesting ideas about censorship, to which he was opposed, and he elucidated his theories of self-expression in literature and the arts. Nearly all of Harlowe's contribution to our dummy interview had to be explained to Jervis, and I must admit that some of it was over my head; but the big blond had a first class memory, and after a few rehearsals he gave a most convincing performance, reeling off Harlowe's long words and complicated sentences, looking as wise as a parrot.

We tried to cover all possible questions; but realizing that Nell might think of some not included in our routine, we supplied Tom with a number of evasive replies such as "I fear I cannot answer that question without seeming egotistical," or "Really there is so much to be said on both sides that I have formed no definite opinion." As his broken wrist prevented his furnishing any samples of his playing, painting, or writing, all signs pointed to his coming out of the interview with flying colors.

I stayed away from the office for two days during the preparations, to avoid Nell Teller, as I knew she would ask me what I had accomplished in the way of discoveries to help her. I wanted to have everything arranged nicely before her questioning began. When I reappeared at my desk, I knew that the complicated machinery of our diplomacy was well oiled and running smoothly, and soon after my arrival, Nell made a breezy entrance. She wore a dress and hat that had not been previously exhibited to my admiring gaze, and she looked so pretty that I was tempted to confess everything then and there.

"Well," she started, looking me over with calm disapproval, "is this the way you lend a helping hand to the poor working girl? How about your promise to be here yesterday with thrilling information about your friend, Seumas Shayne? If that's the way you city chaps are going to treat our Nell, I'm going back to the little farm in Boston."

"Just a minute," I protested. "You don't seem to realize that Old Sleuth is very sensitive and, if his feelings are hurt, his precious secret is likely to perish with him."

"Oh, of course, I know you have been terribly busy," she said, seeing that much might be done by the power of kindness. "I really didn't expect you to help me. I know how men make promises just to be pleasant. I'm going right ahead in my own way, so please don't bother about it at all."

"Have you discovered anything new?" I asked, in order to make sure of my ground before going any further.

"Of course not," she said. "Didn't you ask me to leave it to you to put me on the right track? I suppose you haven't given the matter a thought."

I was telling her how dreadful it was for a girl to have such a suspicious nature and assuring her that she would live to regret those cruel, scornful words, when the telephone rang. I glanced at the clock and knew pretty well who was calling; but I kept right on chatting with her till the office boy interrupted by telling me that I was wanted. Pretending to be greatly annoyed, I asked Nell not to go away as I had something important to tell her; and I could see that she was listening while I talked on the phone.

It was a brief conversation, but my part of it, which she heard, was filled with surprise and excitement. In the first place

I had to say that I did not know any Mr. R. Jones of London, and I followed this with exclamations of delight, saying how glad I was to hear the voice of the person at the other end of the line, asking where he was stopping, when he arrived, and other details, giving him an enthusiastic welcome to our city. The finish was that I promised to call at the St. Felix Hotel the next morning at eleven; and I asked permission to bring a lady with me.

"No, not my *fiancée*," I answered with a poignant note of regret. "Just a friend."

I hung up the receiver and returned to Nell.

"Now will you be good?" I asked trying to look quizzical and triumphant.

"Why now, particularly?"

"Promise me that you will never doubt me again."

"Why should I promise that?"

"Because," I whispered mysteriously, "to-morrow at eleven o'clock you are going to be the first writer who ever interviewed Seumas Shayne."

"Do you mean to say that was Seumas Shayne you were talking to?"

"Please," I cautioned. "Don't advertise it! Do you want to lose a big exclusive story?"

"But you said something about a man named Jones."

"That's the name he's using, Richard Jones. He's traveling incog; always does. He's a peculiar chap, lives for his work, hates publicity."

"Did you know he was coming over?"

"Not positively," I answered; "but in looking up information to help you I ran across a chap named Spinoza, a sort of agent of his. Knowing me to be a trustworthy old friend, Spinoza intimated that Seumas might run over any time to hear his opera, 'The Hero.' I suppose Spinoza and I are the only two men in America who know of this visit. I feel as if I were betraying a confidence, but I'm doing it for you."

"It's wonderful of you," she said, and she gave me a look that filled me with a mixture of rapture and remorse.

"I'll go with you to-morrow," I assured her, "and I'll try to convince him that he shouldn't lead the life of a hermit. The world is entitled to know something about its great men. We'll tell him that such inordinate modesty is positively morbid."

"Honestly, I don't know how to thank you," she said, and she gave me her hand and let me hold it till even I thought I might be holding it too long.

"You don't have to thank me at all," I told her. "Only too glad to be of any help."

Her smile and her nice gray eyes would have made me feel conscience-stricken, if I had not thought of the dreadful consequences often caused by well-meaning people who are the slaves of veracity.

CHAPTER XIV.

SEUMAS CHANGES HIS MIND—TWICE.

THE next morning I called for Nell and we hailed a taxi and went to the St. Felix Hotel. We found the great author, artist and everything occupying a handsome suite, and the alleged Seumas and I greeted each other like old friends and schoolmates, with much affectionate slapping on the back and the usual rough and ready endearments of pals who love to recall boyhood's happy days.

Everything went along nicely according to plans and specifications. When I introduced him to Nell, saying that she represented the *Bulletin*, Tom Jervis's surprise showed that, whatever talents he might lack, he had the making of a good actor. When he reminded me that his visit here was a secret, that he had never been interviewed and that he detested publicity, his reproaches had just the right tone.

He called attention to his bandaged arm and explained that he had been injured by being thrown from a favorite hunter, adding that he would much rather write an article himself than talk for publication; but of course, in the circumstances, he could not. We used the persuasive argument that the American press, unable to learn anything about him, had given currency to many erroneous reports, assuring him that sooner or later he would have to come out of his shell, and that this was a golden op-

portunity to put a quietus on the false rumors that were in circulation.

He finally consented, making the condition that Nell and I should tell no one of his presence in America until after the publication of the interview. By that time, he said, he would be on his return voyage. When this was settled, I took my leave, feeling fairly certain that all would be well.

I left the office before Nell had time to finish her interview and get back, as I knew she would ask a lot of questions and I feared I might in my answers contradict something that the pseudo Seumas had said. Late in the afternoon I called up R. Jones at the St. Felix and rejoiced to discover that everything had been asked and answered according to our schedule. The broken wrist had helped immensely. It had made it impossible for the famous author to give his interviewer an autograph, and as for playing his latest composition, that was out of the question.

Tom was pretty nervous, thinking that other newspaper writers might find out about him and that he might not come out of the ordeal so well another time. He said he wanted to get back to Ben Gleason's place as soon as possible and then sail for Europe as we had planned for him to do. He seemed quite keen on the European trip and declared that he had absolutely nothing to keep him in America. I promised to see him the next day, and then telephoned to Harlowe and reported in guarded language that our interview was a success and that the scheme so far had worked to perfection.

On the following day, at luncheon time, I called at the St. Felix and asked for Mr. R. Jones. I had a borrowed car with the curtains drawn waiting at the door, and it was my intention to smuggle Tom out of the hotel and convey him to Ben Gleason's place. Tom had promised to have his bills settled and everything ready for a prompt departure.

I was both surprised and alarmed when the hotel clerk informed me that Mr. Jones was in the restaurant. This was entirely irregular, as it had been a condition precedent that the temporary impersonator of Seumas was not to be seen in public, as we realized how dangerous it was, with that portrait of him on exhibition. It had been distinctly understood and agreed that he was to have all his meals served in his room, and I went into the restaurant prepared to chide him for his carelessness.

There he was at a table with Nell Teller. Another girl was with them, and when I recognized this third party, I nearly did a Charley Chaplin swoon into the arms of the head waiter. She was looking at Tom Jervis with the same adoring expression that on a memorable occasion she had wasted on "Portrait of the Artist, by Seumas Shayne."

The three were having a wonderful time, though Nell seemed to be doing all the talking, the perspective of the other two being limited to each other's eyes. I was afraid of complications, so I did not venture to intrude, but sent a note from the office asking if I might see Mr. Jones on a matter of great importance.

The impersonator of universal genius presently came out, radiant with good humor and happiness, looking handsomer than his own portrait. It was evident that one of the menaces to our little scheme would be motion picture scouts looking for new matinée idols.

"Well, old boyhood's chum, what's on your mind?" he asked, giving me a cruelly cordial grip with his mighty left.

"You know you're not supposed to be seen in public," I remonstrated, "and I've come to take you away."

"Where?" he inquired, rather perturbed.

"To Gleason's place on Long Island, where you said you wanted to go as soon as possible and where people won't see you."

"Oh, Long Island," he said, thinking it over. "Well, that's all right. I'll go. Suppose we make it to-morrow; or what's the matter with next week some time?"

"The only matter with to-morrow is that it isn't soon enough," I told him," and you'll have to stay at Gleason's till you sail for Europe. That was understood."

"Europe? Yes, we'll talk about that later," he said. "They tell me conditions there are terrible just now; and, come to think of it, I have an engagement to-mor-

row. Won't you come in and join us at luncheon? Miss Teller asked me if she could bring a friend who wanted to meet me. She's a lovely girl and it seems she is a great admirer of my work."

"I've no doubt that your work is superfine," I said. "What's her name?"

"She's a Miss Landon."

"Do you mean to say that girl is Leila Landon?"

"Why, yes; Miss Teller calls her Leila."

"Good Lord! You're flying high."

"What do you mean?" he demanded; "isn't she on your paper too?"

I could see his innocence was perfectly on the level.

"Do you mean to tell me you don't know that she is one of the richest girls in America?"

"What!" he exclaimed. "Is that beautiful girl *rich?*"

"Nothing but the only daughter of Phineas Landon, if that means anything in your life," I told him.

Tom looked dazed for a minute. I attributed this to the awe that is subconsciously inspired by the mention of a very rich man or an abnormal income. Finally he said, "I thought she was another newspaper girl, as Miss Teller described her as an intimate friend."

"The nearest she comes to being a newspaper girl is that her father owns a newspaper just for amusement," I informed him; and deeming it advisable to put up a "Keep off the grass" sign, I added: "Nell Teller is the sweetest girl in the world, but her father was not so adept as old Phineas in getting more than his share, so she has to work for hers; but that won't be for very long." I gave him a wink which was intended as the announcement of Nell's engagement to a rising young journalist. "And now the question is," I continued, "when are you going back to Long Island?"

"As soon as we finish luncheon," he replied. "Say, in an hour, and about Europe—you might as well fix it up for me to sail as soon as possible."

He had turned pretty serious all of a sudden, and as he went back to join the girls in the restaurant his smile had disappeared entirely and his most conspicuous features were his determined looking mouth and his square jaw. At the time, I thought his sudden change was due to my revelation of Nell's matrimonial destiny; but later on I discovered that it was owing to something entirely different.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SQUARE JAW WINS.

ON the Saturday following the interview with our distinguished visitor from foreign shores, all the members of Clan Seumas foregathered at the baronial mansion at Shoreville, Long Island, week-end guests invited by Squire Ben Gleason, the song-writing lord of the manor.

An important assignment—namely to take Nell Teller to the theater prevented me from going with the others, and I arrived at about luncheon time on Sunday. Ben sent his second-best car to meet me at the station, and when I got to the house I found the fellows in the highly ornate living room entirely surrounded by copies of the Sunday *Bulletin* containing Nell's interview with the eminent Mr. Shayne.

Tom Jervis himself was taking a walk about the estate accompanied only by Ben's dogs, and the general impression seemed to be that he was not his old bright self, having apparently something on his mind.

With all its pictures, the interview filled two pages of the paper. The versatile genius was shown at his desk, pen in hand, wooing the Muses; at the piano seeking inspiration, and at his easel working at a picture. His recreations received due attention, with photographs of him playing golf, riding his favorite horse—one of Ben's, and standing triumphant beside an enormous tiger, the victim of his prowess as a big game hunter. The last was cleverly faked by McKesson from a picture in an old magazine.

These illustrated interviews with celebrities are usually the old stock stuff and, although I have written a lot of them, I have often wondered what kind of people waste their time in reading them. It is bad enough to have to write them, but one must live.

Nell had succeeded in getting out of the

interviewing rut and the article was really bright, quite free from the labored cleverness which makes many things of the kind so well worth skipping. Of course she had been helped a great deal by the scenario which we had arranged. Harlowe had liberally salted it with glittering bromides and studied impromptus, all of which Tom Jervis had committed to memory, and he had really done it very well, the few breaks that he made being charged by Nell to the eccentricity of genius.

It was impossible for anyone to read the article without coming to the conclusion that here was a phenomenally gifted being who did not take himself seriously and was as natural and unaffected as an unspoiled child. His pictures indicated that, in the matter of personal appearance alone, he had a legitimate right to think highly of himself; yet it was evident that he was not as conceited as many a runt who looks about three generations removed from his anthropoid ancestors.

Most of the fellows were highly delighted with the way the interview had turned out, and a chemical analysis would have shown slight traces of gratitude to me for having originated the scheme and helped them out of a scrape. Of course the satisfaction was not unanimous; that there would be malcontents was to have been expected. Our host, Ben Gleason, was unable to conceal his feeling that a great wrong had been done and that, if there were any justice in the world, he and none other would be the subject of the two page article in the *Bulletin*, with the headlines about America's greatest composer. The contributions of the others to the reputation of Seumas apparently were negligible in Ben's opinion.

Chub Burton was another dissatisfied party, and he considered it one of the darkest tragedies in literary annals that the credit for his beautiful poetry should be given to another. Aside from these two assassins of joy, the opinion prevailed that they had all escaped a great peril; that the interview would set all doubts at rest, and that the name that they had made for themselves would be worth more than ever before. I knew that other papers and periodicals would soon start snooping around for articles, so Harlowe and I arranged that our original synopsis of an interview should be typed in order that copies might be given out by "Spinoza" Malcolm, to whom, as agent, all comers would be referred.

Tom Jervis soon returned from his walk, half a dozen assorted dogs making as much fuss over him as if he were the founder of the S. P. C. A. He seemed rather depressed; in fact his cheery and careless manner had vanished entirely.

"Ah! the new Admirable Crichton!" I greeted him, that being one of the subheads of Nell's interview. "How do you like your suite in the Hall of Fame?"

"It's all right, I guess," he said in a resigned sort of way; "outside of it making me feel like a crook."

Chub and Ben seemed to think that was the way he ought to feel, but the rest of us all reasoned with him, telling him that he had wronged nobody and humbugged no one but the public who were used to it.

"Just think of the good turn you have done for a lot of deserving young men," said Harlowe. "You've saved our joint reputation for us. But for you, a noble name would have been dragged in the mire."

"Beside," Roddy Blythe reminded him, "it's a perfectly legitimate business deal. We go on gathering the coin and you go to Europe with a good salary to represent us."

Tom looked uncomfortable and seemed about to say something when Bert Hollister asked: "When had he better start?"

"The sooner the better," I suggested. "The Bessarabia sails on Tuesday."

"I'll attend to the tickets," McKesson volunteered.

"Much obliged," said Tom calmly; "but I can't get ready by Tuesday."

"Well, then, there's another boat on Wednesday," said Harlowe. "Not that I want to hurry you, but the sooner you sail—"

"I have an engagement in New York on Wednesday evening," declared Tom casually, playing with one of the dogs. "Besides, I've thought the matter over, and I'm not going to Europe."

"Oh, yes, you are," insisted McKesson. "That was part of the bargain."

Tom Jervis didn't say anything to this; but, although he kept on fooling with the dogs, there was something in the expression of his face that made me think it likely that he would select the side of the Atlantic that he preferred.

"It certainly was understood," Harlowe remonstrated, "that you were going to Europe to represent us, and we offered you a share of the profits of our little syndicate."

"I know you made the proposition to me," Tom admitted; "but I never really accepted it. In fact I said it was a ridiculous salary for nothing at all. I feel that it would be mere charity and an imposition on you fellows."

"But my dear Jervis," I said, "if you stay here, people are sure to recognize you and it won't be long before everything is found out."

"Why shouldn't I stay here, in the country?" demanded Tom.

"Here!" exclaimed Ben Gleason, viewing with alarm the prospect of a permanent guest of his size and justifiable appetite.

"Give me a job here," Tom suggested. "There must be an awful lot to do around the place. An out-door life is my long suit. I know all about horses and dogs and gardening. No one can spot me here and I can earn my board and keep. I'm not going to Europe and I'm not going to graft on you fellows; so that's settled."

We all tried to change his mind by arguments good, bad, and indifferent; but Tom's insensibility to logic, persuasion, and pleadings, proved that his square jaw was no mere ornament, but was bestowed upon him for good and sufficient reasons. His last word was that if he was not allowed to stay at Gleason's place as handy man, he would go to New York and look for work, taking the first thing that offered.

It was obvious that he could not appear in New York without wrecking the Seumas Shayne corporation and sending its stock down to zero. If he got a job as a ticket-chopper or a soda fountain clerk, he would be spotted as the original of the photographs in the *Bulletin* article. It was a sure thing bet that the very next day after his appearance in public, the newspapers would have articles about the famous novelist and playwright seeking new experiences to get material.

It was evident that the only way to get along with Tom Jervis was to let him do as he liked; so the conference ended in everybody's seeing no harm in his staying at Ben Gleason's. He was to make himself generally useful for his board and twenty-five dollars a week, Ben reserving the right to terminate the arrangement at any time by giving a week's notice to his associates. Ben's place seemed a pretty safe refuge, if Tom did not make himself conspicuous in the neighborhood, and this he promised.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM JERVIS ACTS.

ALL the way back to town I worried about what I should say to Nell Teller. As Tom declined to go to Europe, I would have to invent some reason for his disappearance. Nell was clever, and her suspicious nature indicated that whoever married her would either be a good husband or one certain to be found out.

I knew it would be impossible to fool her in this affair for any great length of time; but this difficulty was solved by Nell herself in an unsuspected way and one which, for me, had its unpleasant features. She had a great aunt, or something of the sort, living in California, and this ancient dame, having a sudden attack of relativity, wrote to Nell to come and make her a visit. The old lady was wealthy, but, knowing Nell as well as I do now, I am positive that there was no mercenary motive in her prompt acceptance of the invitation. She would have gone even more readily if the aunt in question had been a public charge. Nell was that kind of a niece.

It certainly was a relief to know that for a while at least, I would be free from cross-examination about Seumas; but this immunity was purchased at considerable expense in the way of missing her cheery voice and sunny smiles at the office.

After her departure, the old man made me general manager of a first class murder mystery and I was so busy working on this

case that the boys and their Frankenstein monster were forgotten for a month or so. Then, one Sunday, Harlowe called me up and asked me to go with him to Gleason's place. We went and found that Tom Jervis had gone to New York.

Harlowe began to worry, for in spite of his share in the profits he was still about seventy-five thousand dollars short of the one hundred thousand dollars which the parents of the fair Annabel expected as a proof that Dick could support a Mrs. Harlowe in the style to which she was accustomed. Good money was coming in, but it had to be divided among eight fellows, and Dick was naturally anxious that Seumas Shayne should last as a trade mark till the goal of six figures was in sight.

"What the devil is he doing in New York?" Dick asked in considerable excitement.

"How should I know?" demanded Ben. "He goes there about three evenings a week."

"The more fool you to let him go."

"Is that so?" said Ben. "Well, you stay down here and prevent it if you like. What do you expect me to do, chloroform him and chain him in the cellar? Maybe you think I ought to get him down and sit on his head. He weighs only about a hundred pounds more than I do. Please remember that I'm a piano player, not a Terrible Turk."

"But it isn't safe for him to be wandering around New York."

"Maybe it isn't; but it's a darned sight safer than it would be for me to try to hold him. Gosh! Have you ever seen his arms? Besides," Ben went on, "he's such an all-fired fine chap, when you get to know him, he ought to be allowed to do as he likes, especially as he's going to do it anyway."

"Dick is right," I said; "if anyone recognizes him from the pictures in the *Bulletin* or the painting in the art exhibition, good night, Seumas!"

"I don't care a hang about that," Ben admitted. "I'm sick of having a guy that doesn't exist get the credit for my music."

"Where does he go in New York, to the the theatres?" Dick asked.

"No; he calls on a young lady."

"Under the name of Seumas Shayne?"

"I suppose so."

"Who is she?"

"How should I know?" inquired Ben peevishly. "Probably some girl who admires him because she thinks he is the composer of my songs."

I knew perfectly well that the girl was Leila Landon, and I understood then and there why Tom Jervis had refused to carry out his agreement and go to Europe. As I had seen her, I could not blame him for falling in love with her, especially if she had looked at him in the way I had seen her look at his portrait in the art gallery. And she had probably done that very thing. When I informed him that Leila was an heiress, he had been discouraged and had decided that he had better go to Europe and forget her; but had changed his mind when her eyes revealed to him that he had a chance.

"Look here, Ben," said Harlowe, "haven't you told him how dangerous it is for him to be seen around New York, not only for us but for his job here?"

"Why, yes," Ben replied, "I've told him all that; but he says he doesn't go about much in town and is not likely to be seen. He just calls on this girl. It seems she is crazy about music. To-night he is taking her to a Philharmonic concert."

I could not help wondering whether Leila Landon talked high-brow music to Tom and what words the supposed composer of "The Hero" would find to disguise his thoughts. Of course he had the repertoire of opinions and musical terms that we had provided for him in the *Bulletin* interview; but if Miss Landon knew anything about music, Tom was apt to get into trouble. As far as he knew, Chaminade was a salad and Stravinsky some kind of fur.

"It listens very risky to me," said Harlowe. "I'm going to stay here till he comes home. I intend to have a serious talk with him."

Ben gave us to understand that he would be medium delighted to put us up for the night, so the three of us played dummy bridge all the evening. At about midnight we heard Tom Jervis's footsteps on the veranda and presently he appeared. His

face was rather pale, considering the outdoor life he had been leading, and he seemed nervous, but his celebrated jaw was firmer than ever. He said something incoherent in reply to our hearty greetings and started up the stairs; but Harlowe hailed him and asked him to come in for a minute.

Tom came in and sat down. His expression was not very encouraging to anyone who had a remonstrance to make.

"Jervis, old man," Dick began, "I just want to ask you if you think it's quite according to house rules for you to be showing yourself in New York. You know our agreement was—"

"You needn't worry any further about me," Tom interrupted. "I'm through! This rotten scheme of yours has ruined me." And he walked out of the room curtly refusing the high ball I was mixing for him.

"Don't worry, Jervis. Everything will be all right. We'll talk it over in the morning." Dick called this from the doorway as Tom was going upstairs, but he didn't condescend to answer.

"I'll bet he's had a quarrel with the girl," said Ben.

"Sure thing," Dick agreed, and I was of the same opinion, though I didn't express it, for I could imagine what the quarrel was about and thought it likely that Tom Jervis was right when he said that he was "through."

The next morning the three of us assembled at breakfast, and we had all started on our second cups of coffee before Ben sent the Jap to call Jervis who, apparently, had passed a sleepless night and was making up for it in the morning hours. Tutankhamen, or whatever his name was, came back in a few minutes and reported that, having knocked in vain, he had gone into the room and found that Jervis was not there. Ben thought he must be around the grounds somewhere, perhaps taking a walk with the dogs, but the Jap opined that he had gone away, as his old satchel was missing.

We all went up to the bedroom and, sure enough, all signs indicated that the bird had flown for good. The suits, hats, and other equipment bought out of the communistic purse to make Seumas presentable were all laid out on the bed. Jervis had evidently gone away in the clothes that he had worn when he arrived at Mrs. Clow's and had taken the rest of his belongings in his antique satchel. On the dressing table was a sheet of paper on which he had written:

"Much obliged to all you fellows. No doubt you meant well; but for reasons that I can't explain, I'm through."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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CAMARADERIE

I USED to wish I had a friend
From whom to borrow and to lend.

Some one who'd let me have his shirt
And if I soiled it, laugh at dirt!
Some one with lots of pep, who liked good fun,
To tramp with me, or swim, or ride, or run;
Some one to share my woes;
Some one to laugh with me, or cry—if need arose;
Some one to tell my wild ambitions to,
With whom to dream beneath the stars of conquests new;
Some one, well, not too lavish with his praise,
But wouldn't tear his hair if I should get a raise;
Some one to say: "Why, he's my friend!"
And prove the words by action, years on end.

I used to *wish* that stuff—in days gone by;
I've quit it now, old thing, *you are that guy!*

Stobart LaMotte.

Not Sufficient Funds

By WILLIAM V. NEWELL

FRANK HATHAWAY sat in the bookkeeper's office twirling his plaid cap and looking sulkily at the clock. It now registered 7:45. His eyes turned with increasing vexation to his wife's bobbed golden hair. He observed, absent-mindedly, the neatness with which she kept the smooth back of her neck shaved. He was not always so particular with his own chin.

"Say, Flo—" he began impatiently, for the tenth time.

"Will you shut up! Darn it! Now I'll have to add this slip again."

The manager poked his head through the doorway.

"Better give it up, Mrs. Hathaway. I'm not going to let you stay here all night to find a shortage of twenty-two cents. I'll just put two dimes and two coppers in the cash-drawer."

"Not on your life, you won't," snapped the girl, swinging her slim legs around in her swivel chair. She crossed one silk-stockinged knee over the other and shook a very sharp-pointed pencil at her superior.

"This office is going to be run right—to a cent, as long as I'm running it. I can't keep books if you jazz up the figures by taking cash out of your own pocket."

"Oh, all right! All right," acquiesced the manager, meekly. "I just thought—"

"However," continued the bookkeeper, "I think I've got the little tramps cornered now. Just run that bunch of slips through

the machine, will you, while I go over these four or five."

The manager obediently seated himself before the adding machine and started to tap the keys, rather clumsily.

As Florence bent again to the task before her, her husband glanced once more at the clock, looked with an expression of furtive glee at the two pre-occupied backs, and then slipped quietly through the door which had been left open.

"Ah-hah!" exclaimed the bookkeeper triumphantly, a moment later. "Here's your brace of ducks, Mr. Gilchrist. It's that girl at the glove-counter, Number 237, again. The big dumb-bell makes her sevens with a loop, so that they look like nines, and two of 'em together make a difference of just twenty-two cents. Now I can charge that off 'account saleslady's clerical error.' That keeps the books straight and saves you twenty-two cents. See!"

"Well, by George!" exclaimed the manager admiringly. "Say, do you know—twenty-two cents is just exactly the amount I started in business with, thirty-odd years ago. Bought ten boxes of shoe-blacking and sold 'em for a dime apiece."

Mr. Gilchrist was given to boasting a little about his rise from poverty, but he had a right to be proud of it.

"You're certainly a crackerjack, young lady," he continued. "You're too smart to be still working in this store."

"No, you mean I'm smart enough to hold my old job in the store, and, believe me, I've got to do it—when my husband can't stay in any one place long enough to—"

Turning to see that the young man got the rebuke which he amply deserved, she found her last words justified by his defection. She ran to the door and peered down the empty hall.

"Oh! O-oh!" she exclaimed with bitter exasperation. She dropped into her chair and buried her face in her hands.

"There! There!" said Gilchrist, sympathetically. "He's just in a huff, I guess, because you've been panning him pretty hard. Haven't you?"

"Well, by criminy, he's got it coming to him, and then some! I swear I just can't stand it much longer, Mr. Gilchrist. Frank's got lots of ability. He's pretty slack in some ways, but he really isn't afraid of work, and he hasn't a mean hair in his head. He's a willing boy, a good boy. He's—he's a good fellow. That's the trouble with him. He doesn't drink—much—but he's absolutely irresponsible. And he will gamble. He plays poker all night with Covert and his gang. He's lost three jobs in three months, one because he was garnisheed, and one because he showed up late at work several times, and the last one just because they found out that he gambled. He promised to go out to the country with me this evening, to spend Sunday with dad and mother. I think dad can do something with him. But if he's left me I know he'll be with those tin-horns again to-night. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, damn!"

She threw herself forward on her desk and sobbed several times. But almost immediately she pulled herself together with a snap. She went to the wash-bowl in the corner of the room and washed her tear-stained cheeks. Then she proceeded, with the modern young woman's indifference to observation, to apply a not excessive amount of artificial adornment to a face which needed none whatever.

"Where are you going now, may I ask, Mrs. Hathaway?"

"I'm going home, and if that big ninny is there, I'll shake the living daylights out of him and cook his dinner for him and then take him out to the country. And if he isn't there I'll hunt up that skunk of a Covert and give him hell, and jerk Frank away from him before he loses any more money that he hasn't got."

"Say now, let me help you. It's this late work that has interfered with your plan. You let me run you home in my car. We'll wait long enough for your husband to come, if he's coming. And if he doesn't come—well, you've saved me twenty-two cents. I'll take you down town and buy you a good dinner. Oh, it's perfectly all right. I'll get Mrs. Gilchrist to come too, though, of course, she's had her dinner before now. And then we'll look for Frank. If we can find him I'll

drive you both out to the country. Mrs. Gilchrist would enjoy the ride."

But Frank Hathaway was not at home. They waited half an hour for him. He didn't come.

Florence did not particularly enjoy her dinner, though it was a very good one. Mrs. Gilchrist, who took a cup of coffee and an ice with them, was pleasant enough, but Florence always thought that she had a rather condescending manner, and, on her part, Mrs. Gilchrist had never thoroughly approved of the girl, with her bobbed hair and her short skirts, though she was convinced of the efficiency of "that fresh young thing." Florence was simply too nervous and impatient to eat, and she hurried her host away from the table before he had really satisfied a normal male appetite which had been well sharpened by two hours of waiting.

"The Streeter Hotel is where that man has his hangout," she informed Mr. Gilchrist.

To the Streeter Hotel, then, they proceeded. Florence was for storming Covert's room in person, but Gilchrist urged that it would be unseemly to do so, and, for fear of shocking Mrs. Gilchrist's sensibilities too much, she allowed him to go.

He returned almost immediately.

"Frank's there," he informed the ladies. "He's coming right down."

Down he came, shame-faced but resentful.

The ride proceeded for several miles in silence. Finally—"Well, how much did you lose to-night, Frank?" inquired the girl.

"Oh, yes, I lost, of course," replied the youth, bitterly. "But I'd have won all right, if you hadn't come to the hotel to bust up the game."

"That wasn't what I asked" persisted his wife. "I asked, 'how much did you lose.'"

Frank was silent for a moment. Then he blurted, "Only a hundred and eighteen!"

Gilchrist, at the wheel, whistled softly. Florence raised her clenched hands in desperation, her finger-nails fairly cutting into her palms.

"Fine!" she cried. "Oh, isn't it just fine! Almost three weeks' salary for me! Three months' rent shot to blazes in three hours—and our furniture not paid for yet. Oh, you—"

Mr. Gilchrist thought it was time to interpose.

"Take an old stager's advice, Frank. I've been through the mill myself, and I can tell you something about it."

The estimable man was fond of deluding himself with the pretense—especially before Mrs. Gilchrist—that he had once been a devil of a fellow. His gambling experience had been confined to a very few games of penny-ante with some less serious-minded lads at the business school through which he had worked his plodding way, back in the eighties. This indulgence, bitterly repented at the time, for financial reasons, was now garnered in his memory and highly prized as his only crop of wild oats.

"When I was at college," he continued, oracularly, "I took a long and expensive course in the Great American Game. I learned very thoroughly—that I couldn't play it. There isn't anybody who can play it unless he makes a business of it and even then he's likely to slip. But the fellows that do play it get all their profits from the fellows who keep playing to win back what they've lost."

"But, Frank," pursued the young woman, "how did you pay him all that money?"

"Gave him my check, of course," said her husband, with injured dignity.

"Your check! Since when have you had a hundred and eighteen dollars in the bank?"

"Well, I—I raised a little money to-day. Was going to tell you about it when I came up to your office, but you were too busy chasing twenty-two cents for the store."

Florence Hathaway deemed it wise not to press the inquiry further at that moment, but, as she looked unseeingly at the pretty farmhouses and the friendly hills which they were passing, she tried to formulate a plan of action. It was still a little hazy when the Gilchrists left them at her father's house.

Angus McGowan had been a small builder in the city. His means had always been meager. Broken in health, he had

bought this little place in the country. It was a rather unprofitable refuge for the declining years of the old contractor and his wife. Florence was accustomed to help her parents, occasionally, out of her salary. And now—to have this terrible jolt in her own domestic finances!

The cross-examination was resumed when she got Frank alone.

It appeared that he had borrowed a hundred and fifty dollars at the bank. How had he borrowed it? Why, on his note, of course. Any security? No. Any indorsement? Well, he had—he had—. Out it came, finally. He had signed her name to the note!

As Florence gazed at him with horror-stricken and incredulous eyes he elucidated further. The cashier of course knew that she was working at the big store, knew that she was getting a good salary, knew that she was liked by her employers, and so had asked him to get his wife's indorsement. And—well, he had gone out and gotten it—that was all!

As the boy began to realize the enormity of his act, he became contrite, almost abject.

"Oh, now, Flo—I can make it up. I sure will make it up. I'll work like a nailer. Oh, Flo, don't tell your folks! Flo, I just thought I'd make a little killing and plump two or three hundred into your lap. You work so hard, Flo! Of course, it ain't fair, and it makes me feel rotten. I did it for you, Flo! Honest, I did."

"W-well, it's a f-fine stunt to do for me, I must say! Forge my name and then g-gamble the money away!"

She flung herself face down on the bed and wept bitterly, pounding the pillows with her fists.

"Please, please, Flo! Oh, Flo, dear, you're so good, and I'm such a beast. I'll quit it for good, Flo. Honest! Honest, I will."

"Oh, Frank, Frank! If I could only believe you."

Financially, however, the situation was really not desperate. Florence had some money, about two hundred dollars, in a little savings account of her own, which Frank knew nothing about. He never should know anything about it, she determined, until he had proved himself. There must be some anchor to windward, if his gaming passion were not to drive them against the rocks. And it was his job, as a husband, to pay for the furniture, too.

The desperate thing was the depth to which his weakness had led him. She shuddered in the dark.

Florence slept badly, waking frequently from the same dream: Frank, his handsome, boyish face aghast with terror, falling over a cliff while she reached in vain to save him. Once she must have screamed aloud, for she felt his hand patting her shoulder gently. Her father called, from another part of the house, "Hello! Anything wrong?"

"No, dad," responded Frank, cheerfully. "We're all right."

In the morning Florence was pale and tired, but very calm.

"I'm going to town on the nine o'clock train," she announced quietly. "No, you stay here, Frank. You can't help me. I've just thought of something I want to do, and I won't have time Monday after the store opens."

The girl who could keep the finances of a large mercantile establishment correct to a cent, but who had been able to do nothing at all with her husband's monetary affairs, was thinking very hard during the hour's ride back by train. Arriving at the city she went straight to the Streeter Hotel and asked for Mr. Covert.

The clerk was not surprised to find a handsome young woman inquiring for that gentleman, though the hour was a little unusual.

"I don't think he's come down yet, miss," he said, looking in box 618 to see if the key was there. "I'll call his room."

Mr. Covert was evidently still asleep, for there seemed to be some delay in getting an answer.

"Lady inquiring for you, Mr. Covert."

There was some response which made the clerk laugh. He looked at Florence.

"She certainly is," he replied through the telephone. "I'll tell the world!" He addressed her: "What's your name, please, miss?"

"Never mind my name," snapped the girl. "You just tell Covert I want to see him, right now."

So it wasn't simply a friendly visit. The clerk saw trouble brewing for the hotel's guest, doubtless a result of one of his numerous affairs outside. The hotel, of course, was eminently respectable. But he transmitted the demand to the occupant of Room 618, and then informed Florence, "Mr. Covert says he'll be down in about half an hour."

Florence's controlled anger burst into sudden flame.

"Half an hour, eh! Well, you can just tell him that I'll be up there in half a minute!"

"Hold on, miss! Wait a moment, please! We can't allow that."

But Florence was already in the elevator and on her upward way, and in not much more than the thirty seconds which she had allowed herself she was pounding at the door of 618. Receiving no answer she called through it.

"You open up that door, Covert, and be quick about it, or I'll open it up myself."

Suiting the action to the word, she applied a firm young shoulder to the panel.

Florence Hathaway, née MacGowan, came of a very resolute race, she belonged to an age which has not developed youthful female modesty to the point of inconvenience, she was a business woman who believed in getting results—and right now she was a very angry young woman.

Nevertheless, the door did not open under the pressure of a hundred and twenty pounds of vigorous flapper, though it yielded a trifle.

"Hey, wait a minute, wait a minute!" came Covert's voice from inside. "What's your hurry, anyway? Waking people up at this hour Sunday morning!"

The door opened as Florence was bending her lithe young body for a fresh assault upon it. She thus faced Covert in an especially belligerent attitude. He was quite calm, however, and exceedingly dignified, though his costume, so far as it was visible, consisted of bedroom slippers and a pink bathrobe embroidered with green roses.

"What in the world is the matter, young woman?" he demanded sternly. "What is the cause of this rowdy performance?"

"Rowdy performance! You're going to see a real one, if you don't give me back my husband's money!"

"Your husband's money! Then you are Mrs. —"

"Mrs. Frank Hathaway, and I want that hundred and eighteen dollars, and I want it this minute."

The altercation was attracting the attention of other guests, particularly of two shifty-eyed men who emerged from adjoining rooms. The clerk also arrived, with the hotel's special officer.

"Young woman," said the latter, "I shall have to take you in custody if you persist in this disturbance."

Florence was considerably taken aback. Was the law, then, on the side of the crook? The thought steadied her, as a blow sometimes steadies a rushing fighter. She returned to the attack, but more calmly.

"My husband," she said, "was playing poker last night in this hotel, with that man, and lost a hundred and eighteen dollars. I demand the money."

Covert became, if possible, even more cool and dignified than before, secure in the thought of the weekly sum which he paid for "police protection."

"It is quite true," he said, "that several gentlemen were spending last evening with me. One of them, I think it was this young —this young lady's husband, suggested a game of cards. We played for some trifling stake, merely to add interest to the game and to make a little fund for refreshments. My guests were generous enough to insist that the refreshments should be settled for in that way. I do not remember just how the game came out. If this—this lady's husband lost a few dollars I am sure that he paid his score."

The hotel detective touched Florence on the arm.

"Better be going, young woman," he remarked significantly.

Florence found that this game was stacked against her, as the card game was doubtless stacked against her husband. But she fired one more shot.

"My husband paid you by check, Co-

vert," she said quietly. "A gambling game is an illegal transaction, and you're not going to cash that check.. I'll have payment stopped on it."

Covert raised his eyebrows slightly.

"I am sure, madam," he replied with icy dignity, "that your husband is not a man who would repudiate a debt of honor."

As the car sank with her to the next floor, Florence thought she heard the sound of laughter near the door of room 618.

"Debt of honor!" she repeated bitterly, to herself. The debt of honor would be her own debt when she honored her forged indorsement of the note. She could not bring her mind to the point of exposing the forgery.

Frank came home on the afternoon train. He was very penitent, very humble, but when Florence demanded that he stop payment of the check, he mounted his high horse again. Unheard of! A gentleman simply had to pay his gambling debts.

"Well, now, Frank, Covert isn't going to cash that check. If you think you can pay a dirty, cheating gambler, and take it out of your wife on a forged signature, you and I are through—that's all."

"Now, hold on a minute, dear. You're not going to pay that note. I'm going to pay it. I've got another job in sight, and I'll turn my money over to you. I'm not going to play any more But Covert's got to cash the check I gave him. You wouldn't have me be a welsher, would you?"

"Well, all I've got to say is—don't be a welsher to me."

Covert did cash the check, though Florence was at the bank the very moment that it opened. Monday morning. The cashier was sympathetic, but he was unable to help her.

"Of course it was, as you say, an illegal transaction. But your husband gave the check on an account standing in his own name. He could stop payment, if he chose to do so, but you can't do it, Mrs. Hathaway."

And as she looked over the low oak partition which bounded the cashier's little corner, she saw Covert, who must have risen earlier than usual that morning, receiving some cash at the paying teller's window. He passed her a moment later and bowed elaborately.

"Good morning, Mrs. Hathaway," he said, removing his gray derby with a tremendous flourish. "A lovely morning, isn't it?"

It is to be recorded that Frank did pay the note. He landed a job as salesman for a real estate firm which was opening a new addition. Frank was naturally a good salesman. He had a cheerful, open manner, engaging but not too breezy, which made people like him. Moreover, while his real estate project was speculative, it was really meritorious. What was still more to the point, he was determined to show his wife that he was made of good stuff. His weekly commissions swelled rapidly. Florence was proud of him. The last installment was paid on the furniture. Her own savings account grew. She helped her parents materially. Frank himself urged her to do so.

That reformed youth, fighting against a terrible yearning, refused several invitations from Covert, who had not failed to observe his increasing prosperity.

All might have gone well if several different events had not occurred too closely together. The first was that Florence's mother contracted pneumonia, and the girl asked her employers for a leave of absence. The second was that during her absence Frank closed a big deal which netted him a thousand dollars in one lump.

And then it just happened that Covert got him by telephone an hour or two after he had received his commission check.

"Say, Frank," he said, "I'm leaving town next Monday. Giving a little farewell party to-night for four or five of the boys. Won't you come up? Oh, yes, we'll probably play a few hands, but you needn't stay a minute longer than you want to. I'd just like to have you with us once more for sociability, before I go."

After all, what would be the harm? He had worked hard and faithfully. He was entitled to an evening's fun. He was doing well. He would soon be able to get Florence out of that store. Besides—she didn't know that he had this last big wad.

The evening passed pleasantly indeed. With Covert were his friends Baker and Rittick, who were also guests at the hotel; Carterfield, a stock broker, and Murfree, a wealthy cattleman from the West. Covert had secured what he said was real pre-war whisky, and the high balls rolled around with comforting regularity. Frank had never been accustomed to drink much, although on previous evenings with members of this group, he had usually taken two or three drinks. For the last six months he had not touched a drop. This evening he indulged himself with one high ball.

Covert, on the other hand, whom he had never seen take more than one—and that only as a "nightcap" when the party was breaking up—this evening allowed himself more liberty and refilled his glass frequently, as did the others.

Frank had resolved to play moderately and cautiously, but the others were not satisfied with the comparatively small limit with which the game started. Carterfield and Murfree, who were losing, both insisted on "table stakes." Baker and Rittick, who had won a little, thought this didn't give opportunity enough to those who were ahead. They suggested a ten-dollar limit. Covert consented with apparent reluctance. Frank didn't like to be a piker.

"Well," thought he, "I should worry. I'm on velvet right now"—he was about fifty dollars ahead—"and I've got a thousand in my jeans."

As often happens in a game of such personnel, the cards seemed obsessed by perverse runs of very good and very bad hands. For perhaps a dozen rounds they would show little better than two pairs, with a rare three of a kind. Then, suddenly, there would be a short epidemic of flushes and full houses, sprinkled with occasional fours. Oddly enough, when these good hands occurred—and they were generally bunched in the same round—Carterfield and Murfree always seemed to lose. Covert lost occasionally, but on the whole was ahead. Rittick and Baker gradually pulled ahead in fairly substantial amounts.

At about one o'clock, Carterfield rose.

"I've lost eight hundred," said he. "That's an evening's fun. I'll just have another of Brother Covert's good high balls and watch you fellows for a while."

"Well, let's all quit at two," said Frank. "I'm about a hundred and fifty ahead, but I can probably lose it all in that time. I've got to go out to the country in the morning."

Murfree approved this arrangement, although he was several hundred dollars behind. The others did not seem very enthusiastic about the time limit, but agreed to it.

As the play proceeded during the last hour, Frank became convinced that he was going to quit a winner. It suddenly occurred to him that, although he had frequently been ahead in the early stages of a game, he had never occupied that position before upon leaving this table. Altogether, he must have rolled some two thousand dollars in red, white and blue chips into the pockets of Covert and his companions, Rittick and Baker. Carterfield had played occasionally and had usually lost, as he had to-night. Murfree was new to this company.

The reflection disturbed Frank vaguely. Was the game not square? Was there some element in it other than the superior skill of the more experienced players. No, for Frank was surely ahead to-night. He won the next two small pots.

Murfree took the next, Rittick the next, Covert the next, and Murfree the one after that. Frank glanced at his watch. It was two minutes before two.

Baker dealt the cards for the last round. Murfree put in five dollars for the "edge." Rittick raised it ten without looking at his cards. Frank picked up his and was greeted by an African royal family with one black slave, the king, queen, jack and ten of spades and a little three-spot of clubs.

"This is going to be either mighty good or a complete flivver," he reflected, as he raised Rittick's ante ten dollars.

"Well, boys, it's going to cost you all ten more bones," announced Covert cheerfully, putting three blues and a red into the pot.

"Let's make it a good one," said Baker, in his turn. He put in four blues and a red.

"Percentage too large to quit now," remarked the cattleman. He covered the several raises by putting in the necessary forty dollars. Then the slaughter continued. Rittick silently raised it another ten.

"Whew!" whistled Frank. "You fellows must be awful confident! So it's going to cost me thirty more just to draw cards! Well, here goes."

But Covert was still not satisfied. "Let's make this last pot worth while," said he, making yet another raise.

"Now, that's what I call true charity," bantered the dealer. He followed Covert's example. He also took another swig from his high ball glass.

"Too expensive for me, boys," said Murfree. "I'm going to say good-by to my option on this pot." He passed his hand, face downward, to Carterfield, who inspected the cards gravely, refreshing himself mildly from his glass.

Frank suddenly felt a distinct pressure on his toe. He saw Murfree looking him steadily in the face. Was it a warning? Well, his hand was too good to throw down before the draw. He covered the previous bets. The pressure was suddenly released. Murfree raised his eyebrows and puckered his lips into a silent whistle. Then he lighted a large cigar and assumed an expression of complete indifference.

"Cards, gentlemen?" inquired Baker.

"I'll play these," said Rittick dryly.

"One," said Frank, throwing the three of clubs into the discard.

Baker, who had been fingering the top card only, shot it quickly across the table. Frank put his thumb on it and watched while the others drew. Covert took the next card, which Baker was holding expectantly poised between his slim fingers.

"And two to the dealer," announced that gentleman. "Now, if we all catch, we'll make Rittick's pat hand look sick."

Frank cautiously but casually picked up his drawn card. It was the ace of spades!

He tried to control the shiver that ran down his spine, as he started the betting with a blue chip. The others, each in turn, raised it one more blue.

"Say, boys," suggested Covert, "this is the last pot, and there's close to four hundred in it now. No use piking along with ten-dollar raises. What do you say to making it a hundred dollar limit till the end?"

All agreed, but Frank saw Murfree, over the edge of his high ball glass, looking at him with an expression of what appeared to be rather scornful commiseration.

Frank's previously won chips traveled, by stacks of blues, to the center of the table. His thousand started to follow, a hundred at a time. At six hundred Rittick dropped out. At eight hundred Baker quit, refusing to call Covert's last hundred dollar raise.

A sudden spasm of disgust swept Frank's spirit. He was bound to win, but what was it worth, after his broken promise to Florence? And so, from sheer nausea, he did something which he never before would have thought of doing with a hand like that.

"Call you, Covert," he said, abandoning his former jocularity.

"Straight flush," announced the other, throwing them face up on the table and reaching for the chips.

"Same here," responded Frank, controlling his voice with an effort. "Only mine's ace high—a nice little royal."

Covert's face positively turned green. He looked suddenly at Baker. Baker appeared puzzled. He looked at Rittick, and Rittick returned him a stony stare. Baker's puzzled expression turned to one of helplessness.

Murfree was smiling oddly. Carterfield audibly chuckled from the depths of the Morris chair.

Frank started to stack his chips. They seemed to burn his fingers. But he had won twenty-seven hundred and fifty dollars.

"Haven't got quite that amount with me in currency," said Covert, the banker, his face twitching; "but I'll write you out a check."

He did not offer them the usual parting drink. Murfree and Carterfield, however, helped themselves to a quick one and then followed Frank to the elevator. Rittick and Baker lingered a moment. Some one closed the door of 618.

"First time you've won, Frank?" asked Carterfield as they waited for the car.

"The very first, and I've been playing with those fellows every week for two years until the last six months."

"How much did you drop, Murfree?" continued the broker.

"About nine hundred."

The elevator arrived and they stepped into it.

"Well," remarked Carterfield, "God knows I'm no squealer, but that's a crooked game if there ever was one. I'll bet as much as I lost to-night that Baker fumbled that last deal, or Hathaway wouldn't have won."

"Plain as a green brand," replied the Westerner. "He gave Hathaway the hand that he intended for Rittick. I didn't know that, of course, till the finish, but I tried to give the kid a tip to stay out."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when there came a sound of violent language from the region of the room they had just left. It was not very distinct, but the words sounded like "You —— —— fool," and there was a violent bump on the floor.

The men in the elevator exchanged significant glances.

"Say, fellows," said Frank, "I'll be glad to split my check with you, three ways."

"Nothin' doin', kid," replied Murfree. "When I'm stung, I'm stung."

"Same here, Frank," said Carterfield. "It's your turn, anyhow."

Frank rose late the next morning. He had been restless. Somehow the breaking of his faith with Florence weighed upon him more heavily than if he had lost. If the game had resulted as usual, he might have appeased his conscience a little with the thought that the loss was his punishment. He was filled with loathing at the very thought of the cards. Well, he would go to her and make a clean breast of it.

"You look tired, dear," Florence Hathaway said as he stepped onto the farmhouse porch.

"I am tired. Tired and disgusted—disgusted with myself. Florence, I've got to tell you—I've been gambling again."

She looked at him silently, with hopeless eyes.

"I hope you'll give me one more chance. I know that I'm through with it forever."

"How much did you lose this time, Frank?" she inquired listlessly, as if it did not matter much.

"That's the worst of it, the way I feel now. I didn't lose. I won—won more than all my previous losses."

She started with surprise. He took Covert's check from his pocket and handed it to her. It was drawn on their own bank.

"It's all yours, honey—if you'll take it. I'm feeling so darn virtuous that I don't want a cent of it."

"Well," she replied, sardonically, "I don't feel quite as virtuous as that, myself. But I tell you what you do, Frank. You go round to the bank and cash this the very first thing Monday morning. We'll decide what to do with the money after we get it. And say—mother's a lot better, and I'm going back to town with you to-night—you come by the store as soon as you've been to the bank."

"Do you mean you don't think Covert's check is good?"

"Oh—I didn't say so. But let's get the cash."

Alas! The check apparently did not represent cash. When Frank presented it the teller scratched his head and then called upstairs through his counter telephone. After that he took a cruel rubber stamp and smeared in violet ink across the face of Covert's handsome voucher the brutal words, "Not Sufficient Funds."

Frank felt sheepish indeed as he entered his wife's little office. That fine new righteous feeling—to end in such a fizzle!

"Well?" said Florence briskly.

He handed her the stamped check.

"I knew it! I knew it! Well, what did you do about it?"

"Nothing yet. I tried to get Covert by phone at the hotel, but they said he wasn't up, and would I please call a little later."

Florence shot him a look which very plainly said that for sheer incompetence husbands were certainly the limit. She

put the check, now decorated also with Frank's indorsement, in her purse bag.

"Miss Levy," she called through the doorway into the connecting office, "tell Mr. Gilchrist that I'm going out for about half an hour."

Tell Mr. Gilchrist, eh! Well, that was like the independent young baggage. Slipping out, as if she were the owner, right in the middle of the morning. But she was old Gilchrist's pet. She could get away with murder!

That indeed was about what she intended to get away with, as she strode up to the desk at the Streeter Hotel.

"Mr. Covert, please!" she snapped to the clerk.

"Why—er—good morning, Mrs. Hathaway," said that functionary, who remembered her name quite well, "Mr. Covert is in the dining room. I'll call him."

"You needn't. I'll call him myself," answered the young woman, marching rapidly toward the restaurant. "And call him good and hard, too," she added under her breath.

Covert looked up from his newspaper, and saw her coming too late to duck. She flashed the check from her purse. He made a grab at it.

"Oh, no, you don't, you crook! But it's no good! 'Not sufficient funds.' When are you going to make it good? I'll give you just time to get to the bank."

Covert recovered his dignity. A very pleasing idea occurred to him.

"My dear Mrs. Hathaway," he said, rising with elaborate politeness, "excuse my rudeness. You are perfectly welcome to keep that check as an interesting souvenir. You must realize that it was given in an illegal transaction. Of course, you cannot expect to cash it."

"Well, you're certainly a—" began Florence. Then she suddenly decided that it was no use trying to tell him what he was. It was a task too great for the expressive vocabulary of the modern flapper, even if she was also a business woman.

She hurried out, but she could not restrain the impulse to look back, and almost experienced the fate of Lot's wife. Covert was leaning back in his chair and laughing so hard that the tears were running down his face.

Florence did not return directly to the store. She went to the bank and seated herself beside the cashier's desk.

"Mr. Curtis," she began, "do you remember some six months ago when I talked to you about a check of my husband's?"

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Hathaway. You're not trying to stop another one, are you?"

"No, I want you to pay another one—this one."

The cashier inspected the check with the violet scar across its face. Then he looked inquiringly at Florence, who went on:

"Now, Mr. Curtis, I realize it's a little irregular, but I want you to tell me, confidentially, what Mr. Covert's balance is."

The cashier liked Florence on her own account as a capable young business woman. Furthermore, she was a responsible fiscal employee of one of the bank's largest depositors. He hesitated a moment, then telephoned upstairs. Pencil in hand, he made a note on the back of an envelope and turned it so that Florence could see the figures, $2,345.22.

"You see," he said, "he wasn't shy such an enormous amount. Probably an honest enough mistake, though not the kind that you or I would make. No doubt the check will be made good right away."

"Yes, no doubt," said Florence, rising. "Thank you, Mr. Curtis."

She went straight back to the savings department and drew from her account the sum of four hundred and five dollars, mentally figuring, as she did so, that she was going to lose about eight dollars in interest. That certainly went against her Scotch grain! Taking the four one-hundred-dollar bills and the one five-dollar bill to the center table, she made out duplicate deposit slips in the name of E. M. Covert, and then stepped to the deposit window. The teller whisked the bills into his little compartments and stamped her duplicate slip. Florence then took her place in the line before the paying teller's window.

"Good morning, Mrs. Hathaway," said that brisk young man. They all knew her in the bank. She presented Covert's check for its second appearance at that window.

"This has been covered by a deposit," she said.

"Sure?" inquired the teller doubtfully. She showed the deposit slip and he used the desk telephone again.

"Yep. It's all right now."

"Of course it is," she replied, smiling. "It was just a mistake. Mr. Covert wouldn't allow one of his checks to be turned down."

She packed the money in her purse and went back to the savings deposit window.

"My gracious, Mrs. Hathaway," said the bald-headed gentleman behind that grille. "You made a quick profit on that four hundred and five! How do you do it."

"Oh, sometimes there's a chance to play a sure thing," she responded. "But the real sure thing is the little old savings account."

She started happily out of the bank, but as she went past the end of the line in front of the paying teller's window she saw an acquaintance, Mr. E. M. Covert. There was a suit case on the floor beside him, and he was consulting a railroad time-table.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Covert," said Florence, very cheerfully and with elaborate politeness. "I just made a deposit for your account. Four hundred and five dollars. Here's the duplicate slip."

Covert stared at her in perplexity. She stepped very close to him and looked him straight in the eye at short range. "And your balance is now twenty-two cents. Enough to start an honest business. Lovely morning, isn't it, Mr. Covert?"

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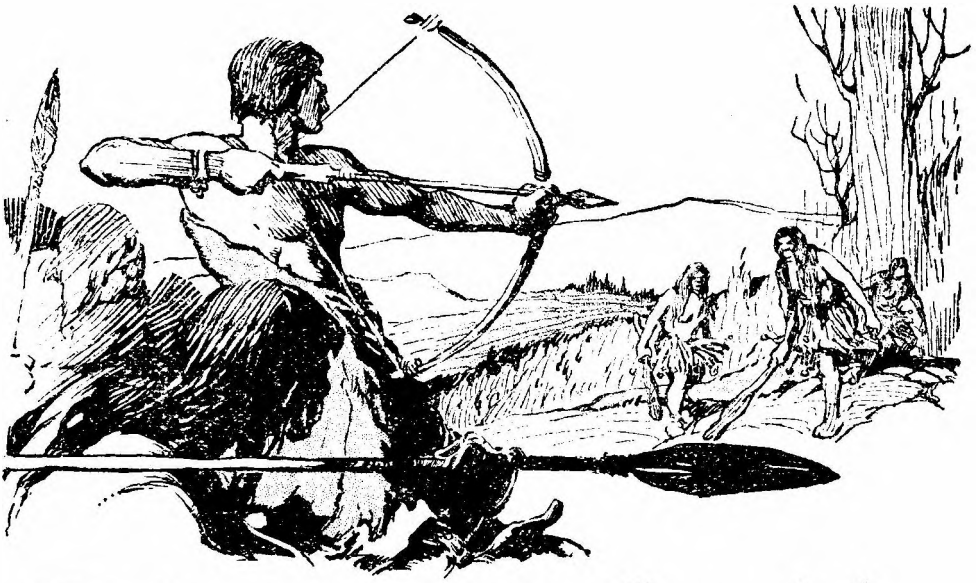
WOOING WEATHER

'TIS sweetly ring the silver bells like mad imps loosed of tether,
And straining steel and leather bear you on with gladsome tug;
And 'neath you skims the roadway soft as downy eider's feather,
And hands are clasped together fast beneath the bearskin rug;
Oh, that's the time of cooing, lad,
Of daring and of doing, lad,
The nipping time of wooing, lad,
The time and place to hug.

Let scoffers boast of summer joys, but heed no braggart's boasting;
There's no fun like the coasting on a bob-sled down the hill;
And when the play is over and the pretty maid is hosting,
And stinging fingers toasting where the kettle's piping shrill,
Ah, that's the land where bliss is, lad,
Don't mind the steam that hisses, lad,
But take your fill of kisses, lad,
While there are lips to thrill.

'Tis sweetly broods the starry night on wold and white brake eery,
And logs are singing cheery through the shadow elfins dole,
And on her lips are dancing sweet the merry smiles of feary;
And never smiles were dreary to a fainting lover's soul;
Ah, then your heart is shriven, lad—
'Twas long since much forgiven, lad—
You're at the gates of heaven, lad,
And love's the golden toll.

Gordon Johnstone.



Tarzan and the Ant Men*

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Author of "Tarzan and the Golden Lion," "The Moon Maid," "Chessmen of Mars," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I, II and III.

TARZAN of the Apes, now Lord Greystoke, crashes in his biplane in a hitherto undiscovered African jungle. He is found unconscious by a huge female of the Alali, voiceless brutes more akin to the gorilla than to man, and she carries him to her den. The males of the tribe are timorous weaklings who lurk in the forest in continual dread of the dominant shes that cruelly hunt them down with bludgeons during the mating season. On recovering consciousness, Tarzan escapes in company with a youth of the Alali to whom he teaches the art of the bow and arrow. An Alalus woman waging war on a troop of white pygmies mounted on dwarf antelopes, turn from them to capture Tarzan, but he slays her with an arrow. The pygmies welcome him to their city of ant hill structures, and in a battle with a rival city of ant-men he is overwhelmed by countless numbers, stunned and taken prisoner. On awakening he is amazed to discover that the former enemy pygmies now are his equal in height and that their antelopes are as large as the Giant Eland. Condemned to slavery in the quarries, he finds Talaskar, a beautiful slave girl, eager to do his cooking. And then suddenly she appears to his eyes a hideous and wrinkled hag.

CHAPTER XI (*Continued*).

THE SLAVE GIRL.

"GOD!" ejaculated Tarzan.

Slowly the girl's face relaxed, assuming its normal lines of beauty, and with quick, deft touches she arranged her disheveled hair.

"My mother taught me this," she said, "so that when they came and looked upon me they would not want me."

"But would it not be better to be mated with one of them and live a life of comfort above ground than to eke out a terrible existence below ground?" he demanded. "The warriors of Veltoptismakus are, doubtless,

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for February 2.

but little different from those of your own country."

She shook her head. "It cannot be, for me," she said. "My father is of far Mandalamakus. My mother was stolen from him only a couple of moons before I was born in this horrid chamber far from the air and sunlight that my mother never tired of telling me about."

"And your mother?" asked Tarzan. "Is she here?"

The girl shook her head sadly. "They came for her over twenty moons since and took her away. I do not know what became of her."

"And these others, they never betray you?" he inquired.

"Never! Whatever slave betrayed another would be torn to pieces by his fellows. But come, you must be hungry," and she offered him of the flesh she had been cooking.

Tarzan would have preferred his meat raw, but he did not wish to offend her and so he thanked her and ate that which she offered him, squatting on his haunches across the brazier from her.

"It is strange that he does not come," she remarked, referring to Eight Hundred Cubed Plus Nineteen. "Never before has he been so late."

A brawny slave, who had approached from behind her, had halted and was looking scowlingly at Tarzan.

"Perhaps this is he," said Tarzan to the girl, indicating the man with a gesture.

Talaskar turned quickly, an almost happy light in her eyes, but when she saw who it was that stood behind her she rose quickly and stepped back, her expression altered to one of disgust.

"No," she said, "it is not he."

"You are cooking for him?" demanded the fellow, pointing at Tarzan. "But you would not cook for me," he accused, not waiting for a reply to his question, the answer to which was all too obvious. "Who is he that you should cook for him? Is he better than I? You will cook for me, also."

"There are plenty to cook for you, Caraftap," replied Talaskar, "and I do not wish to. Go to some other woman. Until there are too many men we are permitted to choose those whom we shall cook for. I do not choose to cook for you."

"If you know what is well for you you will cook for me," growled the man. "You will be my mate, too. I have a right to you, because I have asked you many times before these others came. Rather than let them have you I will tell the Vental tomorrow the truth about you and he will take you away. Have you ever seen Kalfastoban?"

The girl shuddered.

"I will see that Kalfastoban gets you," continued Caraftap. "They will not permit you to remain here when they find that you refuse to produce more slaves."

"I should prefer Kalfastoban to you," sneered the girl, "but neither one nor the other shall have me."

"Do not be too sure of that," he cried, and stepping forward, quickly, seized her by the arm before she could elude him. Dragging her toward him the man attempted to kiss her—but he did not succeed.

Steel fingers closed upon his shoulder, he was torn roughly from his prey and hurled ruthlessly a dozen paces, stumbling and falling to the floor. Between him and the girl stood the gray eyed stranger with the shock of black hair.

Almost roaring in his rage, Caraftap scrambled to his feet and charged Tarzan—charged as a mad bull charges, with lowered head and blood-shot eyes.

"For this you shall die," he screamed.

CHAPTER XII.

CARAFTAP THE BULLY.

THE son of the First Woman strode proudly through the forest. He carried a spear, jauntily, and there was a bow and arrows slung to his back. Behind him came ten other males of his species, similarly armed, and each walked as if he owned the earth he trod.

Toward them along the trail, although still beyond their sight, or hearing, or smell, came a woman of their kind. She, too, walked with fearless step. Presently her

eyes narrowed and she paused, up-pricking her great, flat ears to listen; sniffing the air. Men!

She increased her gait to a trot, bearing down upon them. There was more than one—there were several. If she came upon them suddenly they would be startled, filled with confusion, and no doubt she could seize one of them before they took to flight. If not—the feathered pebbles at her girdle would seek one out.

For some time men had been scarce. Many women of her tribe who had gone out into the forest to capture mates had never returned. She had seen the corpses of several of these herself, lying in the forest. She had wondered what had killed them. But here were men at last, the first she had discovered in two moons, and this time she would not return empty handed to her cave.

At a sudden turning of the forest trail she came within sight of them, but saw, to her dismay, that they were still a long way off. They would be sure to escape if they saw her, and she was upon the point of hiding when she realized that already it was too late. One of them was pointing at her.

Loosening a missile from her girdle and grasping her cudgel more firmly she started toward them at a rapid, lumbering run. She was both surprised and pleased when she saw that they made no attempt to escape. How terrified they must be to stand thus docilely while she approached them.

But what was this? They were advancing to meet her! And now she saw the expressions upon their faces. No fear there—only rage and menace. What were the strange things they carried in their hands?

One who was running toward her, the nearest, paused and hurled a long pointed stick at her. It was sharp and when it grazed her shoulder it brought blood. Another paused and holding a little stick across a longer stick, the ends of which were bent back with a piece of gut, suddenly released the smaller stick, which leaped through the air and pierced the flesh beneath one of her arms.

And behind these two the others were rushing upon her with similar weapons. She recalled the corpses of women she had seen in the forest and the dearth of men for the last several moons, and although she was dull of wit yet she was not without reasoning faculties and so she compared these facts with the occurrences of the last few seconds with a resultant judgment that sent her lumbering away, in the direction from which she had come, as fast as her hairy legs would carry her. Nor did she once pause in her mad flight until she sank exhausted at the mouth of her own cave.

The men did not pursue her. As yet they had not reached that stage in their emancipation that was to give them sufficient courage and confidence in themselves to overcome entirely their hereditary fear of women. To chase one away was sufficient. To pursue her would have been tempting Providence.

When the other women of the tribe saw their sister brute stagger to her cave and sensed that her condition was the result of terror and the physical strain of long flight they seized their cudgels and ran forth, prepared to meet and vanquish her pursuer, which they immediately assumed to be a lion. But no lion appeared and then some of them wandered to the side of the woman who lay panting on her threshold.

"From what did you run?" they asked her in their simple sign language.

"Men," she replied.

Disgust showed plainly upon every face, and one of them kicked her and another spat upon her.

"There were many," she told them, "and they would have killed me with flying sticks. Look!" and she showed them the spear wound and the arrow still embedded in the flesh beneath her arm. "They did not run from me, but came forward to attack me. Thus have all the women been killed whose corpses we have seen in the forest during the past few moons."

This troubled them. They ceased to annoy the prostrate woman. Their leader, the fiercest of them, paced to and fro, making hideous faces. Suddenly she halted.

"Come!" she signalled. "We shall go forth together and find these men, and bring them back and punish them." She shook

her cudgel above her head and grimaced horribly.

The others danced about her, imitating her expression and her actions, and when she started off toward the forest they trooped behind her, a savage, blood-thirsty company—all but the woman who still lay panting where she had fallen. She had had enough of man—she was through with him forever.

"For this you shall die!" screamed Caraftap, as he rushed upon Tarzan of the Apes in the long gallery of the slaves' quarters in the quarry of Elkomoelhago, king of Veltoptismakus.

The ape-man stepped quickly aside, avoiding the other, and tripped him with a foot, sending him sprawling, face downward, upon the floor. Caraftap, before he rose, looked about as though in search of a weapon and, his eyes alighting upon the hot brazier, he reached forth to seize it. A murmur of disapproval rose from the slaves who, having been occupied nearby, had seen the inception of the quarrel.

"No weapons!" cried one. "It is not permitted among us. Fight with your bare hands or not at all."

But Caraftap was too drunk with hate and jealousy to hear them, or to heed had he heard, and so he grasped the brazier and, rising, rushed at Tarzan to hurl it in his face. Now it was another who tripped him and this time two slaves leaped upon him and wrenched the brazier from his hand. "Fight fair!" they admonished him, and dragged him to his feet.

Tarzan had stood smiling and indifferent, for the rage of others amused him where it was greater than circumstances warranted, and now he waited for Caraftap, and when his adversary saw the smile upon his face it but increased his spleen, so that he fairly leaped upon the ape-man in his madness to destroy him. Tarzan met him with the most surprising defense that Caraftap, who for long had been a bully among the slaves, ever had encountered. It was a doubled fist at the end of a straight arm, and it caught Caraftap upon the point of his chin, stretching him upon his back. The slaves, who had by this time gathered in considerable numbers to watch the quarrel, voiced their approval in the shrill, "Ee-ah-ee-ah," that constituted their form of applause.

Dazed and groggy, Caraftap staggered to his feet once more and with lowered head looked about him as if in search of his enemy. The girl, Talaskar, had come to Tarzan's side and was standing there looking up into his face.

"You are very strong," she said, but the expression in her eyes said more, or at least it appeared to Caraftap to say more. It seemed to speak of love, whereas it was only the admiration that a normal woman always feels for strength exercised in a worthy cause.

Caraftap made a noise in his throat that sounded much like the squeal of an angry pig and once again he rushed upon the ape-man. Behind them some slaves were being let into the corridor and as the aperture was open one of the warriors beyond it, who chanced to be stooping down at the time, could see within. He saw but little, although what he saw was enough—a large slave with a shock of black hair raising another large slave high above his head and dashing him to the hard floor.

The warrior, pushing the slaves aside, scrambled through into the corridor and ran forward toward its center. Before they were aware of his presence he stood facing Tarzan and Talaskar. It was Kalfastoban.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried in a loud voice, and then: "Ah, ha! I see. It is the Giant. He would show the other slaves how strong he is, would he?" He glanced at Caraftap, struggling to rise from the floor, and his face grew very dark—Caraftap was a favorite of his.

"Such things are not permitted here, fellow!" he cried, shaking his fist in the ape-man's face, and forgetting in his anger that the new slave neither spoke nor understood. But presently he recollected and motioned Tarzan to follow him. "A hundred lashes will explain to him that he must not quarrel," he said aloud, to no one in particular. but he was looking at Talaskar.

"Do not punish him," cried the girl, still forgetful of herself. "It was all Caraftap's fault. Zuanthrol acted in self-defense."

Kalfastoban could not take his eyes from the girl's face and presently she sensed her danger and flushed, but still she stood her ground, interceding for the ape-man. A crooked smile twisted Kalfastoban's mouth as he laid a familiar hand upon her shoulder.

"How old are you?" he asked.

She told him, shuddering.

"I shall see your master, and purchase you," he announced. "Take no mate."

Tarzan was looking at Talaskar and it seemed that he could see her wilt, as a flower wilts in noxious air, and then Kalfastoban turned upon him.

"You cannot understand me, you stupid beast," he said; "but I can tell you, and those around you may listen and, perhaps guide you from danger. This time I shall let you off, but let it happen again and you shall have a hundred lashes or worse, maybe. And if I hear that you have aught to do with this girl, whom I intend to purchase and take to the surface, it will go still harder with you," with which he strode to the entrance and passed through into the corridor beyond.

After the Vental had departed and the door of the chamber been closed a hand was laid upon Tarzan's shoulder from behind and a man's voice called him by name: "Tarzan!" It sounded strange in his ears, far down in this buried chamber beneath the ground, in an alien city and among an alien people, not one of whom ever had heard his name, but as he turned to face the man who had greeted him a look of recognition and a smile of pleasure overspread his features.

"Kom—!" he started to ejaculate, but the other placed a finger to his lips. "Not here," he said. "Here I am Aoponato or Eight Hundred Cubed Plus Nineteen."

"But your stature! You are as large as I. It is beyond me. What has happened to swell the race of Minunians to such relatively gigantic proportions?"

Komodoflorensal smiled. "Human egotism would not permit you to attribute this change to an opposite cause from that to which you have ascribed it," he said.

Tarzan knit his brows and gazed long and thoughtfully at his royal friend. An expression that was of mingled incredulity and amusement crept gradually over his countenance.

"You mean," he asked slowly, "that I —have been—reduced in size to the stature of a Minunian?"

Komodoflorensal nodded. "Is it not easier to believe that than to think that an entire race of people and all their belongings, even their dwellings and the stones that they were built of, and all their weapons and their diadets, had been increased in size to your own stature?"

"But I tell you it is impossible!" cried the ape-man.

"I should have said the same thing a few moons ago," replied the prince. "Even when I heard the rumor here that they had reduced you I did not believe it, not for a long time, and I was still a bit skeptical until I entered this chamber and saw you with my own eyes"

"How was it accomplished?" demanded Tarzan.

"The greatest mind in Veltoptismakus, and perhaps in all Minuni, is Zoanthrohago," explained Komodoflorensal. "We have recognized this for many moons, for, during the occasional intervals that we are at peace with Veltoptismakus, there is some exchange of ideas as well as goods between the two cities, and thus we heard of the many marvels attributed to this greatest of walmaks."

"I have never heard a wizard spoken of in Minuni until now," said Tarzan, for he thought that that was the meaning of the word walmak, and perhaps it is, as nearly as it can be translated into English. A scientist who works miracles would be, perhaps, a truer definition.

"It was Zoanthrohago who captured you," continued Aoponato, "encompassing your fall by means at once scientific and miraculous. After you had fallen he caused you to lose consciousness, and while you were in that condition you were dragged hither by a score of diadets hitched to a hastily improvised litter built of small trees tied securely one to the other, after their branches had been removed.

"It was after they had you safely within Veltoptismakus that Zoanthrohago set to

work upon you to reduce your stature, using apparatus that he has built himself. I have heard them discussing it and they say that it did not take him over long."

"I hope that Zoanthrohago has the power to undo that which he has done," said the ape-man.

"They say that that is doubtful. He has never been able to make a creature larger than it formerly was, although in his numerous experiments he has reduced the size of many of the lower animals. The fact of the matter is," continued Aoponato, "that he has been searching for a means to enlarge the Veltoptismakusians so that they may overcome all the other peoples of Minuni, but he has only succeeded in developing a method that gives precisely opposite results from that which they seek, so, if he cannot make others larger, I doubt if he can make you any larger than you are now."

"I would be rather helpless among the enemies of my own world," said Tarzan, ruefully.

"You need not worry about that, my friend," said the prince gently.

"Why?" asked the ape-man.

"Because your chances of reaching your own world again are virtually non-existent," said Komodoflorensal, a trifle sadly. "I have no hope of ever seeing Trohanadalmakus again. Only by the utter overthrow of Veltoptismakus by my father's warriors could I hope for rescue, since nothing less could overcome the guard in the quarry mouth.

"While we often capture slaves of the white tunic from the enemies' cities, it is seldom that we gather in any of the green tunic. Only in the rare cases of utter surprise attacks by daylight do any of us catch an enemy's green slaves above ground, and surprise day attacks may occur once in the lifetime of a man, or never."

"You believe that we will spend the rest of our lives in this underground hole?" demanded Tarzan.

"Unless we chance to be used for labor above ground during the daytime, occasionally," replied Komodoflorensal.

The ape-man shrugged. "We shall see," he said.

After Kalfastoban had left, Caraftap had limped away to the far end of the chamber, muttering to himself, his ugly face black and scowling.

"I am afraid that he will make you trouble," Talaskar said to Tarzan, indicating the disgruntled slave with a nod of her shapely head, "and I am sorry, for it is all my fault."

"Your fault?" demanded Komodoflorensal.

"Yes," said the girl. "Caraftap was threatening me when Aopontando interfered and punished him."

"Your fault?" demanded Komodoflorensal.

"That is my number," explained Tarzan.

"And it was on account of Talaskar that you were fighting? I thank you, my friend. I am sorry that I was not here to protect her. Talaskar cooks for me. She is a good girl."

Komodoflorensal was looking at the girl as he spoke and Tarzan saw how her eyes lowered beneath his gaze and the delicate flush that mounted her cheeks, and he realized that he was down-wind from an idea, and smiled.

"So this is the Aoponato of whom you told me?" he said to Talaskar.

"Yes, this is he."

"I am sorry that he was captured, but it is good to find a friend here," said the ape-man. "We three should be able to hit upon some plan of escape," but the twain shook their heads, smiling sadly.

For a while, after they had eaten, they sat talking together, being joined occasionally by other slaves, for Tarzan had many friends here now since he had chastised Caraftap, and they would have talked all night had not the ape-man questioned Komodoflorensal as to the sleeping arrangements of the slaves.

Komodoflorensal laughed, and pointed here and there about the chamber at recumbent figures lying upon the hard earthen floor; men, women and children sleeping, for the most part, where they had eaten their evening meal.

"The green slaves are not pampered," he remarked laconically.

"I can sleep anywhere," said Tarzan,

"but more easily when it is dark. I shall wait until the lights are extinguished."

"You will wait forever, then," Komodoflorensal told him.

"The lights are never extinguished?" demanded the ape-man.

"Were they, we should all be soon dead," replied the prince. "These flames serve two purposes—they dissipate the darkness and consume the foul gases that would otherwise quickly asphyxiate us. Unlike the ordinary flame, that consumes oxygen, these candles, perfected from the discoveries and inventions of an ancient Minunian scientist, consume the deadly gases and liberate oxygen.

"It is because of this even more than for the light they give that they are used exclusively throughout Minuni. Even our domes would be dark, ill-smelling, noxious places were it not for them, while the quarries would be absolutely unworkable."

"Then I shall not wait for them to be extinguished," said Tarzan, stretching himself at full length upon the earth floor, with a nod and a "Tuano!" a Minunian "Good-night!" to Talaskar and Komodoflorensal.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE ROYAL DOME.

AS Talaskar was preparing their breakfast the following morning Komodoflorensal remarked to Tarzan that he wished they two could be employed upon the same work, that they might be always together.

"If there is ever the chance for escape that you seem to think will some day present itself," he said, "then it will be well if we are together."

"When we go," replied Tarzan, "we must take Talaskar with us."

Komodoflorensal cast a swift glance at the ape-man, but made no comment upon his suggestion.

"You would take me with you!" exclaimed Talaskar. "Ah, if such a dream could but be realized! I would go with you to Trohanadalmakus and be your slave, for I know that you would not harm me. But, alas, it can be nothing more than a pleasant day-dream, enduring for a brief time, for Kalfastoban has spoken for me and doubtless my master will be glad to sell me to him, for I have heard it said among the slaves that he sells many of his each year to raise the money to pay his taxes."

"We will do what we can, Talaskar," said Tarzan, "and if Aoponato and I find a means of escape we will take you with us; but first he and I must find a way to be together more."

"I have a plan," said Komodoflorensal, "that might prove successful. They believe that you neither speak nor understand their language. To work a slave with whom they cannot communicate is, to say the least, annoying. I shall tell them that I can communicate with you, when it is quite probable that they will assign us to the same crew."

"But how will you communicate with me without using the Minunian language?" demanded the ape-man.

"Leave that to me," replied Komodoflorensal. "Until they discover in some other way that you speak Minunian I can continue to deceive them."

It was not long before the fruits of Komodoflorensal's plan ripened. The guards had come for the slaves and the various parties had gone forth from the sleeping chamber, joining in the outside corridors the thousands of others wending their way to the scene of their daily labor.

The ape-man joined the timbering crew at the extension of the thirteenth tunnel at the thirty-sixth level where he once more attacked the monotonous work of shoring the sides and roof of the shaft with an enthusiasm that elicited commendation from even the surly Kalfastoban, although Caraftap, who was removing rocks just ahead of Tarzan, often shot venomous looks at the ape-man.

The work had been progressing for perhaps two or three hours when two warriors descended the tunnel and halted beside Kalfastoban. They were escorting a green-tunicked slave, to whom Tarzan paid no more attention than he did to the warriors until a scrap of their conversation reached his ears, then he shot a quick glance in the direction of the four and saw that the slave

was Komodoflorensal, Prince of Trohanadalmakus, known in the quarries of Veltoptismakus as Slave Aoponato, or Eight Hundred Cubed Plus Nineteen, which is written in Minunian hieroglyphics:

Tarzan's number, Aopontando, Eight Hundred Cubed Plus Twenty-One, appeared thus, upon the shoulder of his green tunic:

Although the Minunian form occupies less space than would our English equivalent of Tarzan's number, which is 512,000,021, it would be more difficult to read if expressed in English words, for it then would be, ten times ten times eight, cubed, plus seven times three; but the Minunians translate it in no such way. To them it is a whole number, Aopontando, which represents at first glance a single quantity as surely as do the digits 37 represent to our minds an invariable amount, a certain, definite measure of quantity which we never think of as three times ten plus seven, which, in reality, it is.

The Minunian system of numerals, while unthinkably cumbersome and awkward from the modern point of view, is, however, not without its merits, and has aroused such keen interest among the archæologists and anthropologists of Europe and America, that I have decided to include a brief explanation in an appendix, inasmuch as it has been suggested that the hieroglyphics of the ant-men are not without their similarities to the hitherto undecipherable writings of the mysterious ruins of Easter Island and Peru. It always has been my pleasure to aid scientific investigation.

As Tarzan looked up Komodoflorensal caught his eye and winked, and then Kalfastoban beckoned to the ape-man, who crossed the corridor and stood in silence before the Vental.

"Let us hear you talk to him," cried Kalfastoban to Komodoflorensal. "I don't believe that he will understand you. How could he when he cannot understand us?" The fellow could not conceive of another language than his own.

"I will ask him in his own language," said Komodoflorensal, "if he understands me, and you will see that he nods his head affirmatively."

"Very good," cried Kalfastoban; "ask him."

Komodoflorensal turned toward Tarzan and voiced a dozen syllables of incomprehensible gibberish and when he was done the ape-man nodded his head.

"You see?" demanded Komodoflorensal.

Kalfastoban scratched his head. "It is even as he says," he admitted, ruefully, "the Zertalacolol has a language."

Tarzan did not smile, although he should have liked to, at the clever manner in which Komodoflorensal had deceived the Veltoptismakusians into believing that he had communicated with Tarzan in a strange language. As long as he could contrive to put all his communications into questions that could be answered by yes or no, the deception would be easily maintained; but under circumstances that made this impossible some embarrassments might be expected to arise, and he wondered how the resourceful Trohanadalmakusians would handle these.

"Tell him," said one of the warriors to Komodoflorensal, "that his master, Zoanthrohago, has sent for him, and ask him if he fully understands that he is a slave and that upon his good behavior depends his comfort; yes, even his life, for Zoanthrohago has the power of life and death over him; as much so as have the royal family. If he comes docilely to his master and is obedient he will not fare ill, but if he be lazy, impudent, or threatening he may expect to taste the point of a freeman's sword."

Komodoflorensal strung out, this time, a much longer series of senseless syllables, until he could scarce compose his features to comport with the seriousness of his mien.

"Tell them," said Tarzan, in English, which, of course, not one of them understood, "that at the first opportunity I shall break the neck of my master: that it would require but little incentive to cause me to seize one of these timbers and crack the

skull of Kalfastoban and the rest of the warriors about us; and that I shall run away at the first opportunity and take you and Talaskar with me."

Komodoflorensal listened intently until Tarzan had ceased speaking and then turned to the two warriors who had come with him to find the ape-man.

"Zuanthrol says that he fully understands his position and that he is glad to serve the noble and illustrious Zoanthrohago, from whom he claims but a single boon," translated the Trohanadalmakusian prince, rather freely.

"And what boon is that?" demanded one of the warriors.

"That I be permitted to accompany him that he may thus better fulfill the wishes of his master, since without me he could not even know what was desired of him," explained Aoponato.

Tarzan understood now how Komodoflorensal would surmount whatever difficulties of communication might arise and he felt that he would be safe in the hands of his quick witted friend for as long a time as he cared to pretend ignorance of the Minunian tongue.

"The thought was even in our minds, slave, when we heard that you could communicate with this fellow," said the warrior to whom Komodoflorensal had addressed the suggestion. "You shall both be taken to Zoanthrohago, who will doubtless decide his wishes without consulting you or any other slave. Come! Kalfastoban Vental, we assume responsibility for the slave Zuanthrol," and they handed the vental a slip of paper upon which they had marked some curious hieroglyphics.

Then, with swords drawn, they motioned Komodoflorensal and Tarzan to precede them along the corridor, for the story of Tarzan's handling of Caraftap had reached even to the guard room of the quarry, and these warriors were taking no chances.

The way led through a straight corridor and up a winding spiral runway to the surface, where Tarzan greeted the sunlight and the fresh air almost with a sob of gratitude, for to be shut away from them for even a brief day was to the ape-man cruel punishment, indeed. Here he saw again the vast multitude of slaves bearing endlessly their heavy burdens to and fro, the trim warriors who paced haughtily upon either flank of the long lines of toiling serfs, the richly trapped nobles of the higher castes and the innumerable white tunicked slaves who darted hither and thither upon the errands of their masters, or upon their own business or pleasure, for many of these had a certain freedom and independence that gave them almost the standing of freedmen.

Always were these slaves of the white tunic owned by a master, but, especially in the case of skilled artisans, about the only allegiance they owed to this master was to pay to him a certain percentage of their incomes. They constituted the bourgeoisie of Minuni and also the higher caste serving class. Unlike the green tunicked slaves, no guard was placed over them to prevent their escape, since there was no danger that they would attempt to escape, there being no city in Minuni where their estate would be improved, for any other city than that of their birth would treat them as alien prisoners, reducing them immediately to the green tunic and lifelong hard labor.

The domes of Veltoptismakus were as imposing as those of Trohanadalmakus. In fact, to Tarzan, they appeared infinitely larger since he now was one fourth the size he had been when he had left Trohanadalmakus. There were eight of them fully occupied and another in course of construction, for the surface population of Veltoptismakus was already four hundred and eighty thousand souls, and as overcrowding was not permitted in the king's dome the remaining seven were packed densely with humanity.

It was to the royal dome that Tarzan and Komodoflorensal were conducted, but they did not enter by way of the King's Corridor, before the gates of which fluttered the white and gold of the royal standards. Instead they were escorted to the Warriors' Corridor, which opens toward the west. Unlike the city of Trohanadalmakus, Veltoptismakus was beautiful in the areas between the domes with flowers and shrubbery and trees, among which wound graveled walks and broad roadways.

The royal dome faced upon a large parade where a body of mounted warriors was at drill. There were a thousand of them, forming an amak, consisting of four ovands of two hundred and fifty men each, the larger body being commanded by a kamak and the smaller by a novand. Five entex of fifty men each compose an ovand, there being five entals of ten men each to an entex; these latter units commanded by a vental and a ventex, respectively. The evolutions of the amak were performed with kaleidoscopic rapidity, so quick upon their feet and so well trained were the tiny diadets.

There was one evolution in particular, performed while he was passing, that greatly interested the ape-man. Two ovands formed line at one end of the parade and two at the other and at the command of the kamak the thousand men charged swiftly down the field in two solid ranks that approached each other with the speed of an express train. Just when it appeared impossible that a serious accident could be averted, when it seemed that in another instant diadets and riders must crash together in a bloody jumble of broken bones, the warriors rushing so swiftly toward the east raised their agile mounts, which fairly flew above the heads of the opposing force and, alighting upon the other side in an unbroken line, continued to the far end of the field.

Tarzan was commenting on this maneuver and upon the beauties of the landscaping of the city of Veltoptismakus to Komodoflorensal as they proceeded along the Warriors' Corridor, sufficiently ahead of their escort that Tarzan might speak in a low tone without the guard being cognizant of the fact that he was using the language of Minuni.

"It is a beautiful evolution," replied Komodoflorensal, "and it was performed with a precision seldom attained. I have heard that Elkomoelhago's troops are famous for the perfection of their drill, and as justly so as is Veltoptismakus for the beauty of her walks and gardens; but, my friend, these very things constitute the weakness of the city.

"While Elkomoelhago's warriors are practicing to perfect their appearance upon parade, the warriors of my father, Adendrohahkis, are far afield, out of sight of admiring women and spying slaves, practicing the art of war under the rough conditions of the field and camp. The amaks of Elkomoelhago might easily defeat those of Adendrohahkis in a contest for the most beautiful; but it was not long since you saw less than fifteen thousand Trohanadalmakusians repulse fully thirty thousand warriors of Veltoptismakus, for they never passed the infantry line that day.

"Yes, they can drill beautifully upon parade and they are courageous, all Minunians are that, but they have not been trained in the sterner arts of war—it is not the way of Elkomoelhago. He is soft and effeminate. He cares not for war. He listens to the advice he likes best—the advice of the weaklings and the women who urge him to refrain from war entirely, which would be not altogether bad if he could persuade the other fellow to refrain also.

"The beautiful trees and shrubs that almost make a forest of Veltoptismakus, and which you so admire! I, too, admire them—especially do I admire them in the city of an enemy. How easy it would be for a Trohanadalmakusian army to creep through the night, hidden by the beautiful trees and shrubs, to the very gateways of the domes of Veltoptismakus! Do you understand now, my friend, why you saw less perfect maneuvers upon the parade grounds of my city than you have seen here, and why, although we love trees and shrubbery, we have none planted within the city of Trohanadalmakus?"

One of the guards who had approached him quickly from the rear touched Komodoflorensal upon the shoulder. "You said that Zuanthrol does not understand our language. Why then do you speak to him in this tongue which he cannot understand?" the fellow demanded.

Komodoflorensal did not know how much the warrior had overheard. If he had heard Tarzan speak in Minuni it might be difficult to persuade the fellow that the "giant" did not understand the language; but he must act on the assumption that he alone had been overheard.

"He wishes to learn it, and I am trying to teach him," replied Komodoflorensal quickly.

"Has he learned anything of it?" asked the warrior.

"No," said Komodoflorensal, "he is very stupid."

And after this they went in silence, winding up long, gentle inclines, or again scaling the primitive ladders that the Minunians use to reach the upper levels of their dome houses between the occasional levels that are not connected by the inclined runways, which are thus frequently broken for purposes of defense, the ladders being easily withdrawn upward behind hard pressed defenders and the advance of the enemy thus more easily checked.

The royal dome of Elkomoelhago was of vast proportions, its summit rising to an equivalent of more than four hundred feet, had it been built upon a scale corresponding to the relatively larger size of ordinary mankind. Tarzan ascended until he was almost as far above ground as he had been below ground in the quarry. Where the corridors on lower levels had been crowded with humanity, those which they now traversed were almost devoid of life. Occasionally they passed a tenanted chamber, but far more generally the rooms were utilized for storage purposes, especially for food, great quantities of which, cured, dried and neatly wrapped, was packed ceiling high in many large chambers.

The decorations of the walls were less ornate and the corridors narrower, on the whole, than those at lower levels. However, they passed through many large chambers, or halls which were gorgeously decorated and in several of which were many people of both sexes and all ages variously occupied, either with domestic activities or with the handiwork of one art or another.

Here was a man working in silver, perhaps fashioning a bracelet of delicate filigree, or another carving beautiful arabesques upon leather. There were makers of pottery, weavers of cloth, metal stampers, painters, makers of candles, and these appeared to predominate, for the candle was in truth life to these people.

And then, at last, they reached the highest level, far above the ground, where the rooms were much closer to daylight because of the diminished thickness of the walls near the summit of the dome, but even here were the ever present candles. Suddenly the walls of the corridor became gorgeously decorated, the number of candles increased, and Tarzan sensed that they were approaching the quarters of a rich or powerful noble. They halted, now, before a doorway where stood a sentinel, with whom one of the warriors conducting them communicated.

"Tell Zoanthrohago Zertol that we have brought Zuanthrol and another slave who can communicate with him in a strange tongue."

The sentinel struck a heavy gong with his lance and presently, from the interior of the chamber, a man appeared to whom the sentinel repeated the warrior's message.

"Let them enter," said the newcomer, who was a white tunicked slave; "my glorious master, Zoanthrohago Zertol, expects his slave Zuanthrol. Follow me!"

They followed him through several chambers until at last he led them into the presence of a gorgeously garbed warrior who was seated behind a large table, or desk, upon which were numerous strange instruments, large, cumbersome looking volumes, pads of heavy Minunian writing paper and the necessary implements for writing. The man looked up as they entered the room.

"It is your slave, Zuanthrol, Zertol," announced the fellow who had led them hither.

"But the other?" Prince Zoanthrohago pointed at Komodoflorensal.

"He speaks the strange language that Zuanthrol speaks, and he was brought along that you might communicate with Zuanthrol if you so wished."

Zoanthrohago nodded and turned to Komodoflorensal. "Ask him," he ordered, "if he feels any differently since I reduced his size."

When the question was put to Tarzan by Komodoflorensal in the imaginary language with which they were supposed to communicate the ape-man shook his head, at the same time speaking a few words in English.

"He says no, illustrious prince," trans-

lated Komodoflorensal out of his imagination, "and he asks when you will restore him to his normal size and permit him to return to his own country, which is far from Minuni."

"As a Minunian he should know," replied the Zertol, "that he never will be permitted to return to his own country—Trohanadalmakus never will see him again."

"But he is not of Trohanadalmakus, nor is he a Minunian," explained Komodoflorensal. "He came to us and we did not make a slave of him, but treated him as a friend, because he is from a far country with which we have never made war."

"What country is that?" demanded Zoanthrohago.

"That we do not know, but he says that there is a great country beyond the thorns where dwell many millions as large as was he. He says that his people would not be unfriendly to ours and for this reason we should not enslave him, but treat him as a guest."

Zoanthrohago smiled. "If you believe this you must be a simple fellow, Trohanadalmakusian," he said. "We all know that there is naught beyond Minuni but impenetrable forests of thorn to the very uttermost wall of the blue dome within which we all dwell. I can well believe that the fellow is no Trohanadalmakusian, but he most certainly is a Minunian, since all creatures of whatever kind dwell in Minuni. Doubtless he is a strange form of Zertalacolol, a member of a tribe inhabiting some remote mountain fastness, which we have never previously discovered; but be that as it may, he will never—"

At this juncture the prince was interrupted by the clanging of the great gong at the outer entrance to his apartments. He paused to count the strokes and when they reached five and ceased he turned to the warriors who had conducted Tarzan and Komodoflorensal to his presence.

"Take the slaves into that chamber," he instructed, pointing to a doorway in the rear of the apartment in which he had received them. "When the king has gone I will send for them."

As they were crossing toward the doorway Zoanthrohago had indicated a warrior halted in the main entrance to the chamber. "Elkomoelhago," he announced, "Thagosto of Veltoptismakus, Ruler of All Men, Master of Created Things, All Wise, All Courageous, All Glorious! Down before the Thagosto!"

Tarzan glanced back as he was quitting the chamber to see Zoanthrohago and the others in the room kneel and lean far back with arms raised high above their heads as Elkomoelhago entered with a guard of a dozen gorgeous warriors, and he could not but compare this ruler with the simple and dignified soldier who ruled Trohanadalmakus and who went about his city without show or pomp, and oftentimes with no other escort than a single slave; a ruler to whom no man bent his knee, yet to whom was accorded the maximum of veneration and respect.

And Elkomoelhago had seen the slaves and the warriors leave the chamber as he had entered it. He acknowledged the salutes of Zoanthrohago and his people with a curt wave of the hand and commanded them to arise.

"Who quitted the apartment as I entered?" he demanded, looking suspiciously at Zoanthrohago.

"The slave Zuanthrol and another who interprets his strange language for me," explained the Zertol.

"Have them back," commanded the thagosto; "I would speak with you concerning Zuanthrol."

Zoanthrohago instructed one of his slaves to fetch them and, in the few moments that it required, Elkomoelhago took a chair behind the desk at which his host had been sitting. When Tarzan and Komodoflorensal entered the chamber the guard who accompanied them brought them to within a few paces of the desk behind which the king sat, and here he bade them kneel and make their obeisance to the thagosto.

Familiar since childhood was every tradition of slavery to Komodoflorensal the Trohanadalmakusian. Almost in a spirit of fatalism had he accepted the conditions of this servitude that the fortunes of war had thrust him into and so it was that, without question or hesitation, he dropped to one knee in servile salute to this alien king; but

not so Tarzan of the Apes. He was thinking of Adendrohahkis. He had bent no knee to him and he did not propose to do greater honor to Elkomoelhago, whose very courtiers and slaves despised him, than he had done to a really great king.

Elkomoelhago glared at him. "The fellow is not kneeling," he whispered to Zoanthrohago, who had been leaning back so far that he had not noticed the new slave's act of disrespect.

The Zertol glanced toward Tarzan. "Down, fellow!" he cried, and then recalling that he understood no Minunian, he commanded Komodoflorensal to order him to kneel, but when the Trohanadalmakusian zertolosto pretended so to do Tarzan only shook his head.

Elkomoelhago signaled the others to arise. "We will let it pass this time," he said, for something in the attitude of the slave told him that Zuanthrol never would kneel to him and as he was valuable because of the experiment of which he was the subject the king preferred to swallow his pride rather than risk having the slave killed in an effort to compel him to kneel. "He is but an ignorant Zertalacolol. See that he is properly instructed before we observe him again."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SECRET FORMULA.

THE Alali women, fifty strong, sallied forth into the forest to chastise their recalcitrant males. They carried their heavy bludgeons and many feathered pebbles, but most formidable of all was their terrible rage.

Never in the memory of one of them had man dared question their authority, never had he presumed to show aught but fear of them; and now, instead of slinking away at their approach, he dared defy them, to attack them, to slay them! But such a condition was too preposterous, too unnatural, to exist, nor would it exist much longer.

Had they had speech they would have said that and a number of other things. It was looking black for the men: the women were in an ugly mood—but what else could be expected of women who were denied the power of speech?

And in this temper they came upon the men in a large clearing where the renegades had built a fire and were cooking the flesh of a number of antelope. Never had the women seen their men so sleek and trim. Always before had they appeared skinny to the verge of cadaverousness, for in the past they had never fared so well as since the day that Tarzan of the Apes had given weapons to the son of the First Woman.

Where before they had spent their lives fleeing in terror from their terrible women, with scarcely time to hunt for decent food, now they had leisure and peace of mind and their weapons brought them flesh that otherwise they might not have tasted once in a year. From caterpillars and grubs and worms they had been graduated to an almost steady diet of antelope meat.

But the women gave very little heed at the moment to the physical appearance of the men. They had found them. That was enough.

The shes were creeping nearer when one of the men looked up and discovered them, and so insistent are the demands of habit that he forgot his new-found independence and, leaping to his feet, bolted for the trees. The others, hardly waiting to know the cause of his precipitancy, followed close upon his heels.

The women raced across the clearing as the men disappeared among the trees upon the opposite side. They knew what the men would do. Once in the forest they would stop behind the nearest trees and look back to see if their pursuers were coming in their direction. It was this silly habit of the males that permitted their being easily caught by the less agile females.

But all the men had not disappeared. One had taken a few steps in the mad race for safety and had then halted and wheeled about, facing the oncoming women. He was the son of the First Woman, and to him Tarzan had imparted something more than knowledge of new weapons, for from the Lord of the Jungle, whom he worshiped with doglike devotion, he had acquired the first rudiments of courage.

And so it now happened that when his

more timorous fellows paused behind the trees and looked back they saw this one standing alone facing the charge of fifty infuriated shes. They saw him fit arrow to bow, and the women saw, too, but they did not understand — not immediately — and then the bow string twanged and the foremost woman collapsed with an arrow in her heart; but the others did not pause, because the thing had been done so quickly that the full purport of it had not as yet penetrated their thick skulls.

The son of the First Woman fitted a second arrow and sped it. Another woman fell, rolling over and over, and now the others hesitated—hesitated and were lost, for that momentary pause gave courage to the other men peering from behind the trees. If one of their number could face fifty women and bring them to halt what might not eleven men banded together accomplish?

They rushed forth then with spears and arrows just as the women renewed their assault. The feathered pebbles flew thick and fast, but faster and more accurately flew the feathered arrows of the men. The leading women rushed courageously forward to close quarters where they might use their bludgeons and lay hold of the men with their mighty hands, but they learned then that spears were more formidable weapons than bludgeons, with the result that those who did not fall wounded, turned and fled.

It was then that the son of the First Woman revealed possession of a spark of generalship that decided the issue for that day, and, perhaps, for all time. His action was epochal in the existence of the Zertalacolols. Instead of being satisfied with repulsing the women, instead of resting upon laurels gloriously won, he turned the tables upon the hereditary foe and charged the women, signaling his fellows to accompany him, and when they saw the women running from them, so inspired were they by this reversal of a custom ages old, they leaped swiftly in pursuit.

They thought that the son of the First Woman intended that they should slay all the enemy and so they were surprised when they saw him overhaul a comely, young female and, seizing her by the hair, disarm her. So remarkable did it seem to them that one of their number, having a woman in his power, did not immediately slay her, they were constrained to pause and gather around him, asking questions in their strange sign language.

"Why do you hold her?" "Why do you not kill her?" "Are you not afraid that she will kill you?" were some of the many questions that were launched at him.

"I am going to keep her," replied the son of the First Woman. "I do not like to cook. She shall cook for me. If she refuses I shall stick her with this," and he made a jab toward the young woman's ribs with his spear, a gesture that caused her to cower and drop fearfully upon one knee.

The men jumped up and down in excitement as the value of this plan and the evident terror of the woman for the man sank into their dull souls.

"Where are the women?" they signed to one another; but the women had disappeared.

One of the men started off in the direction they had gone. "I go!" he signaled. "I come back with a woman of my own, to cook for me!" In a mad rush the others followed him, leaving the son of the First Woman alone with his she. He turned upon her.

"You will cook for me?" he demanded.

To his signs she but returned a sullen, snarling visage. The son of the First Woman raised his spear and with the heavy shaft struck the girl upon the head, knocking her down, and he stood over her, himself snarling and scowling, menacing her with further punishment, while she cowered where she had fallen. He kicked her in the side.

"Get up!" he commanded.

Slowly she crawled to her knees and embracing his legs gazed up into his face with an expression of cowlike adulation and devotion.

"You will cook for me?" he demanded again.

"Forever!" she replied in the sign language of their people.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Silver King

By ERIC D. WALROND

"WELL, Silver King, whad daya say dey?"

"Whad daya say dey you'self?"

"Oh, I ain't hollerin'."

"Say, seen that sparring partner o' mine up in the glory hole?"

"Dat boy? Oh, man, he is de good-fernothingest, laziest coon I evah seen in mah whole life."

For reply the Silver King relocked the ship's silver chest and started up the saloon deck. Chest thrown back, tall, black, majestic, the Silver King, a Mississippi roustabout, walked with the dignity befitting a man of his nautical station. More than any other member of the crew—a polyglot conglomeration of West Indians, Africans, East Indians, Chinese, Mexicans, Ecuadoreans—he was physically and metaphysically best suited for his treasure hoarding job. As guardian of the ship's silver and basking in the sunlight of the grandiloquent title of "Silver King," it devolved on him to hand out to the waiters and stewards at mealtime the sterling cups and dishes and knives and forks and sheeny platters.

In this he ruled like a tyrant. Not even the chief steward, a stern, silent Scotchman, dared interfere with the autocratic rulings of the Silver King. In the domain of the ship's silver chest he was truly and rigidly lord of all he surveyed. At tea-time, for instance, if a waiter dared, one minute after the Silver King had finished polishing up and storing away the silver, to put a stray fork or spoon or knife on the Silver King's table, it was the same as if an Eurasian infidel had had the audacity to violate the sacred sepulcher of Mohammed.

"Say, where dat spoon come from at?"

"Oh, I just picked it up—"

"Well, lissen, pardner, dis joint shets down at six—six sharp—and lissen, pardner, I gots orders from de boss not to recept nothin' from nobody no time atter that.

So gwan! Th'ow 'em overboard, ef you like. Th'ow 'em! Only don't le' me know nothin' 'bout it!"

Such in substance was the gigantic belligerence of him. So much so that he had it —this job of keeping track of the ship's silver—down to a science. In the waiters' steeplechase rush to get out of the galley with their steaming dishes one would imagine that the Silver King, near by, polishing the used silver, would be too preoccupied to pay attention to them. But, no, the Silver King, with the deacon's eagle eye, could go into the dining saloon blindfolded and put his hand on every piece of silver out of the chest. Outside of Salambo, the Porto Rican dishwasher, his job was the nearest thing to his heart.

Up to the negro glory hole he strutted. It was half past six. Already the warm tropic sun had shot rays of gold across the lacquered deck. The ship had, the day before, left Kingston, Jamaica, for its port of destination, Porto Cortez. Back aft, thrown together like herring in a barrel, the hatch was a sizzling oven of black humanity—West Indian contract laborers, singing and crooning and telling each other Anancy tales, bound for the banana lagoons of Central America.

Opening the door, the Silver King stared at Salambo, the Porto Rican dishwasher, lying across his bunk hugging the assafetida quilt. As usual, Salambo was the last man to rise. Shaking his head in dolorous despair, the Silver King went over to him and shook him.

"Hey, Salambo, get up! Where you think you at? Hey, get up—six o'clock gone!"

Snufflings, groans, tossings greeted him. Then, the usual query: "Silver King, six o'clock already?"

"It ain't four!"

"Oh, man, I am so tired—"

"You always tiad! Boy, get up! Suppose you had my job? No use, you couldn't handle it nohow, but jess suppos'n you had. Man, get up!"

Across the way in the waiters' glory hole the ship's printer, a mulatto "highbrow" from Belize, British Honduras, and deadly hated by the Silver King because, in addition to his highbrow airs, he had such a soft job he didn't have to get up before seven o'clock, began to sing the waiter's Song of Sorrows. Bits of it floated over to the Silver King helping "ma boy" Salambo put on his clothes.

"Hey, you pot washers, pearl divers, dish slingers, ham fats—come ooooon; Oon, I says! I don't wants you; white folks needs you. Time's gone! Ain't waitin' for nobody. Gone! Oon, fellows! Make up your mind, fellows. I don't wants you; white folks needs you."

Clothes on at last, Salambo, the ship's "sheik," put his arm in the Silver King's as the latter proudly led the way to the galley. Even though he slept late on mornings, even though he sometimes got his goat, the Silver King liked Salambo—would fight the biggest man on the ship for him. It was constantly, eternally, "Leave ma boy alone. Don't tech ma boy. Else I knock the stuffin's out of you."

In the pages of Flaubert, *Salambo* is a woman—sister of the Carthaginian conqueror; but aboard the Orient, Salambo, the Porto Rican dishwasher, was a man—a man with the heart of a woman. For, is it not said, somewhere in the writings of the wise men, that poets and star-gazers have the minds of women? Certainly. And Salambo, the dishwasher, as he yanked the steaming egg-stained plates out of the frosty soapsudsy water, cared not one whit how many knots "she" was making. Cared not how far it is "round the Horn," or anything, nautical or domestic, of the kind. All he cared about was the condition of his temperament—whether or not he was in a creative mood.

All he cared about, this Latin protégé of an English sea lord, was the color of the sea, the beauty of the sky, the poetry in a *señorita's* smile. Such utterly empyrean things claimed his attention. One hears of geniuses starving in garrets, but this was one instance of a genius—of a kind—sprouting in the galley of an Atlantic fruit ship.

In direct antithesis to this was Salambo's sparring partner, the Silver King, the Mississippi roustabout, raw, crude, unpoetical, sordid, disillusioned, a romantic iconoclast,

a man of the world, a believer in the doctrine that money and not the finer things that Salambo believed in ruled the universe.

At night, when the men came up from the galley, Salambo and the Silver King would sit on the hatch and chew the rag. The waiters, those gods of the white coats, would scarcely nod to them as they went into the glory hole counting the day's tips—while Salambo, oblivious to the rest of creation, would gaze at the phosphorescent moon and the stars glowing like agates in the heavens and the sea bouncing against the side of the ship. It was in this manner that he got his inspiration for those atrocious sonnets of his which "inspirate the sea."

Two days before the ship landed at Porto Cortez they sat on the hatch, the Porto Rican with a batch of his lyrical creations under his arm. Come what might, the Silver King, as he sat on the hatch, had a roving premonition that Salambo was determined to read some of that poetry to him that night.

"You want to hear some of my latest, Silver King?" Salambo asked, as he put the notebook on his knee to let the moon's rays shine on it.

"Say, lissen—cut dat stuff out, Salambo. You don't know how to write poetry nohow."

"Oh, what do you know? I was a cabin boy on a ship plying to China and Japan, with an English captain. He was a man who wrote books. And he taught me how to read and write. He also wrote poetry. He was all right."

"A-ha—well, that's fair enough; but you ain't said nothin' yet. You think that stuff I bin hearin' you growl is poetry? Boy, you must be crazy. Ef you want to hear good poetry, read Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Ef thar was a poet in dis worle, thar was one."

"That may be so, Silver King, but in my country, in Porto Rico, you know, everybody is a poet. The man at the kiosk who sells you the lottery ticket, he is a poet."

"Well, come on and read dat stuff Le' me hear you read some of dat poetry."

In a voice tingling with emotion Salambo read:

"SERENADE.

"I am going to show you travelers
That go to the sea
How the clouds run
With the big storms and winds.

"They look very soft
Like a smoke they are,
They go from the earth
And they will come back.

"That is what we see
When we are going in a ship
They are very soft
And we cannot believe
How they run so easy
With a storm of wind.

"How you like that, Silver King? That is a nice poetry, ah?"

For answer, the Silver King took a red, large silk kerchief out of his pocket, wiped his forehead, spat, blew a mighty nasal blast, and got up. It was useless, he told himself, trying to get this barbarian to write decent poetry. For fully ten minutes he stood, brows corrugated, staring at the much embarrassed, much bewildered Salambo.

"Boy," he shouted, facing him, "where you learn to write poetry at? Dat ain't no poetry. Dat is mought-water. Mought-water! Dat's what it is. You, you"—and he shook a finger at Salambo—"you listen to this—"

Whereupon the Silver King, in his golden *basso profundissimo* that used to "carry" so well with the "gals" down in Mississippi, sang poetry to Salambo.

"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust
Ef de booze don't git you
Why, de wimmin must

"Hot dam'!" the Silver King exploded, doing a "Charleston"—a Harlem negro dance quite impossible of description. "Dat's whut I calls poetry, ma boy. Dat's Mr. Dunbar hese'f! Him and I used to be like-a thet."

"Is that so?" Salambo breathed, overcome by the inferiority complex.

"You heard me."

"Recite me another one, Silver King," the other urged. "You are a real poet, man."

"Oh, I ain't no poet." Then, bristling with an idea, he elucidated. "Ah tells you, Salambo, a lot of dese nigger waiters you see floatin' aroun' heah, thenk dey know a helluva lot, but half uv 'm ain't know a crying thing. Not a crying thing! You see me? You don't see me go chasing aroun' de deck beefin' as how I kin do dis and dat, is ya?"

"Sing another poetry, Silver King," Salambo urged, bewitched by the flow of golden language that fell from the other's lips.

"Let ma see— Ah, lissen to dis:

"Ef luck don't change
Aroun' heah
Thar's gwine be some stealin' done.

"Ef luck don't change
Aroun' heah
Thar's gwine be some stealin' done.

"Boy, who says I ain't no poet? Man, I is a poetizin' fool, I is! Heah, Salambo, lissen to dis one:

"You say you gwine a fishin'
I'm gwine a fishin', too.
You can bet yo' life
Dat your lovin' wife
Will ketch mo' fish 'an you!"

His reputation as a poet established, it was well-nigh impossible for the Silver King to keep his feet on the ground. He had utterly and effectually eclipsed Salambo as the ship's warbling bard. Henceforth it was the act of a drowning man seizing a straw for Salambo even to attempt to tweedle a lyre. But this did not dampen the Porto Rican's ardor. The poet in him cried out for a hearing. This time the instinct to create found expression in the dance. While the Silver King would be "making poetry" Salambo would be dancing a *plena*—dancing "on the point of a nail." For the occasion he exhumed an old Spanish street song, "Carabelita," he used to adore as a boy in San Juan:

"I drink Carabelita rum,
Although I die of stomach ache.
I dance on the point of a nail,
Although my parents don't want me to."

Winning laurels as a poet had gone to the Silver King's head. It was difficult for even Salambo to get him to sit on the deck at night and gaze at the opalescent stars and the dream-swept sky. However, the night before the ship docked at Porto Cortez, Salambo had something of great moment to say to the Silver King. After polishing up, the latter came out on the hatch, Salambo beside him.

"You know, Silver King, I am going to desert the ship at Porto Cortez."

"You gwine do what?"

"Quit at Porto Cortez. I am going, and I want you to help me with my things."

"For Gawd's sake, man, where you get that idea at?"

"You see, I have a girl in Porto Cortez—"

A loud, harsh, bantering laugh interrupted him. All seriousness gone from his face, the Silver King rolled over and over the hatch, holding his splitting sides.

"Well, ef you ain't de funniest man I evah seen befo'. Boy, is dat whut you gwine quit de boat fo'? Ain't you got no mo' sense 'n dat?"

"I am going to get married—"

"Zat so? Well, wouldn't dat kill ya? Marry! Wha' fo'?"

"You don't understand, Silver King. Elisa is a lady—a nice Spanish lady—and I love her. She has consented to marry me."

"Well, well, to think dat some men is still as dum' as all dat. Boy, ain't you got no sense? Is you sick? Wha' you gwine marry she fo'? You ain't got to marry no wench nowadays. Say, let me tell you somethin'. Don't nevah marry no woman, you heah? Ain't a doggone one o' 'em no good—"

"But I love Elisa," Salambo expostulated, desperately. "Besides, she is a lady."

"Wha' you mean, 'a lady'?" The Silver King was suspicious.

"Don't you know what a lady is? Some one who is clean, noble, honorable—"

"Say, lissen, tie dat bull outside. You can't hand me none o' dat gaff. Ma name ain't Green. Wha' do ya think I bin gwine ter sea all dese years fo'? I ain't no monkey chaser."

"I know, Silver King, but Elisa is a different sort of girl—"

"How you know?"

"She told me. I know—"

"Orright! I ain't gwine stop you. Go ahead and marry yo' Spanish jane. And don't forgit, brother, dat what evah you does, don't nevah say I ain't tole you to marry no wench. I am thoo."

"And I want you to be at the wedding, see?"

"Me? Oh, I dunno."

Deep down in his heart he knew. In fact, it flattered him to think that Salambo should think of asking him to his wedding. A man, the Silver King reflected, only asks his tried and true friends to his wedding. It, to say the least, struck a responsive chord in the Silver King. He didn't say anything, but that night while Salambo and the other boys in the glory hole slept, he lay awake for hours, thinking, thinking, thinking.

II.

At Porto Cortez, Salambo, just as the dusking sky began to cast its radiant shadows over the sea, stole alongside the box cars on the pier to the water front Farther down the dock a Chilean cattle boat was unloading. Up and down the pier there ran an endless stream of barefooted natives in flying white shirts selling tropical fruits, Indian soldiers, and black shawled *señoritas*. All hovered about the ship, like a brood of angry hawks, ready to devour the crew. Safely stealing to the gate Salambo raced up a lane leading to the easternmost tip of the village. It was twilight when, after a half hour's brisk walk through a zigzaggy path of huts, swamps, rum shops and fish stalls, he paused in front of a thatched bamboo hut. Only a half hour's walk from the ship, but it was a million miles from civilization.

It was on the edge of the Guatemalan coast, but it was the same as if he had been lost in the untethered jungles of darkest Africa. A stone's throw from the hut, which stood on the edge of a coast noted for its fine scenery, its turquoise ocean, its birds and sea flowers, Salambo saw the mighty wall of jungle grass, the black, thick, dense banana lagoon of Equatorial Guatemala. Up from the ocean there rose a breeze that brought relief to the resistless humidity. It was white hot. Still, as Salambo waited, jipi japa hat in hand, for Elisa, his betrothed, he did not despair of life in this primitive outpost. Soon the door opened and Elisa, stunning in a native gown of sweet smelling grass, as beautiful as a Polynesian princess, paused.

"Oh, *mi corazon,*" she cried, and flew to Salambo's arms.

Ah, if the Silver King could only see him now! Could see what a nice girl Elisa was! Surely here was one maiden who was a living lie to all his disillusioning theories about her sex.

"How handsome you look, Salambo," Elisa cried. "How strong and noble!"

At arm's length Elisa surveyed him, out there on the porch with his straw valise, and fastidious American clothes. How he was going to revolutionize the life of this peasant village!

"Let us go inside, Salambo, everything is ready."

Very proudly Elisa led him inside—to the altar. In the hut Salambo saw the village priest, a dried-up, barefooted man; two or three old witch looking women, an Indian girl, heart mate of Elisa's, and the bride's mother, a black, white haired woman, smoking a pipe of Ghanga weed. "It mek you smaht lek a flea—" and wallowing most assuredly in the mystic lore of *brujeria.*

Salambo smelt the odor of incense and tropical herbs. The old lady was burning a candle on the shelf. On the bamboo walls he saw sheep down made in all sorts of grotesque symbols. Indian war relics of all descriptions, knives, tiger skulls, clubs, stuffed iguanas, *et cetera.*

At the young man's entrance the old women nudged each other and whispered. A nice fellow! How tall and dark and handsome! The old padre welcomed him.

"My son," he said, "did you have a good trip?"

"*Si, señor,* not a mishap on the way."

"*Gracias, Dios!* Elisa there—she prayed quite a lot for you. And every boat that came from New Orleans she went down to the *muelle* and asked about you. Of course she never once doubted that you would come back."

Very properly Elisa blushed—and a jewcled hand crept slowly to her bosom. Sitting there beside her Salambo turned, like the Latin cavalier that he was, and looked at the white pearls in her ears, the soft, brown complexion, the slender, birdlike neck, and the little near white hands.

"Elisa," he whispered, "I love you dearly." It startled her—the way he said it. As if she didn't know it already. So like Salambo, so like the talking poet in him.

"Oh," she cried, "oh, if only I knew how to show you how much I care!"

"Enough, Elisa," Salambo whispered softly.

"Come, *mis hitas*," the old padre announced, "let us get on with the wedding."

Salambo hunted for the ring. Where was it? Was he so absent minded as to have left it aboard the ship? Now—let me see—ah, there it was. In his valise. The ring in his hand, Salambo, as a poem went swimming through his head, led Elisa to the altar.

After the wedding and the guests had betaken themselves to the other part of the dingy hut and sat down to the bridal supper, Salambo was alarmed at the sound of some one knocking at the door.

"Go and see who it is, Elisa," the old lady murmured. "If it is that old wretch, Carmencita Salzedo, don't let her in. Let her get a daughter of her own and see her married off."

"No, let me go," Salambo volunteered, "I'll be right back."

At the door, blowing, sweating, stuffed like a peacock, Salambo gasped as he saw the night black face of the Silver King.

"Jess got thoo feeding up," the Silver King wheezed. "Dam! Ef it ain't hot. Boy, how kin you stand this heat?"

"Come on, Silver King, I didn't expect to see you. I thought you wouldn't be able to make it, after all."

"Yeah, I thoughts I wouldn'ta made it maself, but I got thoo early. Where you folks at?"

"In here. Come and let me introduce you to my wife."

"Dam', ef it ain't hot!" the Silver King cried, mopping his forehead as he strode into the next room.

Inside Elisa's folks warmed to him. Another man—and not a mere man, but an *American*, talking the glorious language of the United States! Why, look at the pretty clothes he wore! The check suit, with white embroidered vest to match, the large, black dotted green tie, the stiff, white collar, and the oily plastered hair, off of which he had half an hour before taken a skull cap. Indeed, as Salambo presented the Silver King he felt proud and honored at the way the folks literally took him to their bosoms.

"Salambo, you tell de folks I is mighty glad to be here—you know what I means."

Nods of approval greeted this. The priest, satisfied that he belonged there, ordered the supper served. Sitting beside Elisa, Salambo drew a manuscript from his pocket, much to the horror of the Silver King.

"Bafo' you reads any o' dat poetry," he interposed, "jess 'low me to get rid o' this."

Standing up, the Silver King extracted from his bosom, his coat pockets, his vest, his shoe tops, his waist, his sleeves, one by one, knives, forks, spoons, platters. Never in all their lives did those humble peasant folk see such an assemblage of precious metal. Silver! Never in all their lives did they see such treasures that glittered in the candlelight like the emblazoning rays of the morning sun. It dug up in the retrospective mind of the padre lurid tales of the English pirate Morgan and his bloody conquest of the Spanish Main. It will go down in history, this splendid array of silver at Elisa's wedding, the padre decided. Silently he sent up praises to the Lord.

Elisa's eyes roved over the jingling metal as the Silver King, with studied indifference, continued to throw it on the table. It was a crowning triumph to her idealistic courtship—this gorgeous display of glowing silver. How the other less fortunate girls in the village would envy her! How they would come for days on all sorts of pretenses just to get a glimpse of her beautiful silver. The girl's eyes danced from the table to the stalwart form of the Silver King as he threw the last fork on the table, slowly sat down, and mopped his steaming forehead.

"Dam' if it ain't hot!"

"This is so unexpected," Elisa murmured, looking at him. "So unexpected."

"Come on, Salambo, cut that poetry out. Wha she say?"

"Oh, dat ain't nuthin'," the Silver King took it blushingly, as Elisa continued to look at him. "Lady, ef you evah needs a fren', don't nevah resitate to call on me. Dis old synopsosium of a husban' o' yours is de best pal I evah had in ma life."

Which, duly translated, only resulted in a "corner" on Silver King.

"Let us," the priest intervened, "get on with the supper."

On the table reposed bunches of grapes, figs, oranges, dried meat, *dulce*, jellies, water cresses, white cheese, *cebada*, goblets of it, and native nuts. Sitting beside Elisa's mother, the Silver King, as he was passed a yard of smoked something, examined it skeptically before he dared put it to his mouth.

"Fo' Gawd A'mighty sake," he whispered, "where you folks get dis stuff at? Come givin' me bolonie or some dam' thin' and callin' it by some foxy name. Dam' ef it ain't hot."

At the head of the table Salambo, oblivous of the food and the old lady shoving the tobacco in her odoriferous pipe with the Silver King's good silver fork, drank of the pearls that swam in Elisa's eyes, and volume after volume read his soul poems to her.

It might be said, to her credit, that Elisa, between 'sporadic outbursts of "Fine!" "Magnificent!" "Beautiful!" *et cetera*, ate, gulped, and surreptitiously felt the weight of the Silver King's silver spoons. Ofttimes Elisa kept an eye shining with admiration on him down at the foot of the table, managing with masterly pantomimic genius to talk to her witch mother at his side.

As the night wore on and the guests drank and laughed and secretly weighed the silver, Salambo read more poetry to Elisa—read reams and reams of it to her. One by one the guests began to depart. First the priest who had to go 'way up in the interior of Salamanca, next the old woman, and so on. Soon it dwindled to four—Salambo, Elisa, Silver King and the old lady. Sleep having claimed her, the Silver King began to look about himself. He, too, had better be going. Nothing left to be eaten, Elisa at last was forced to focus her entire attention on her lover and let him saturate her soul with his ecstatic poetry. Completely enthralled, she had naught else for him and the lovely pearls which fell from his lips. Oh, how happy she was!

"Well, folks"—the Silver King rose—"I guess I'd better be beatin' it."

"Going already?" Salambo inquired.

"Yes, I guess I got to get back. Got to get up at six as ujual."

Suddenly lifting the lamp off the table, the Silver King gathered up the silver, tablecloth and all, and tied it up in a bundle. He even ducked under the table to see if a stray fork had got under there. No, every piece was accounted for all right, and, tying it at the top, coolie fashion, he grasped it, and said good-by.

"See you later, Salambo, and tell that gal o' yourn I hopes she'll make you a good wife."

And as the Silver King closed the door behind him, Elisa, dumfounded at the catastrophic fall of her hopes of having that silver to flaunt in the faces of the local *señoritas*, sat there speechless, staring open-mouthed at the bare, hard, top of the table.

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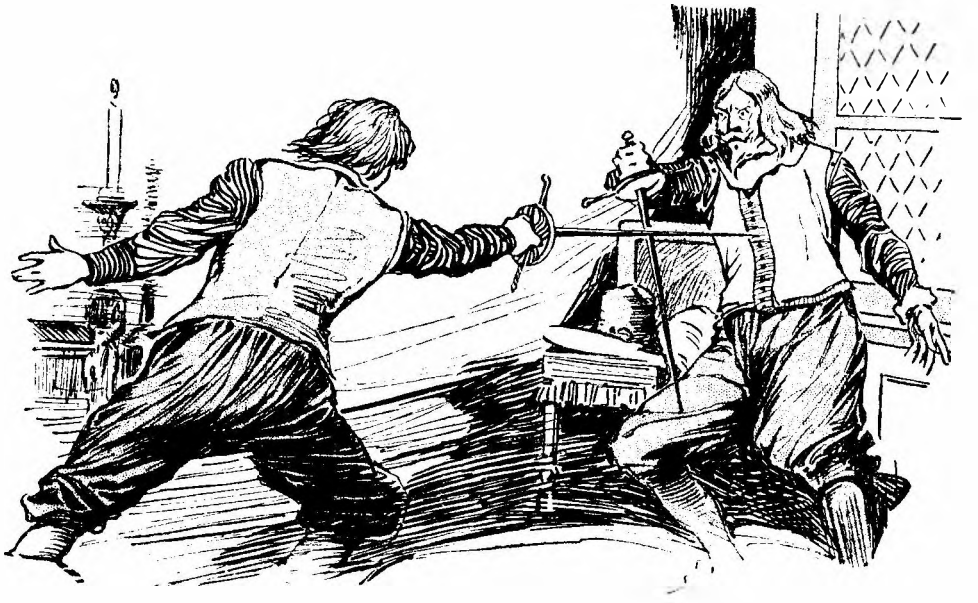
IN THE ROUND ROOM

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

will be next week's Novelette, another vividly thrilling adventure of Madame Storey in her search for the perpetrators of crime. It is by far the most breath-holding narrative in the series, each story of which is complete in itself.



A Centaur of Navarre

By CHARLES B. STILSON

Author of "The Black Wolf of Picardy," etc.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

I BECOME A REBEL.

WITH my authority as captain, I had but to order my troop to follow me. My men would obey me without question, go whither I listed. Such was my intention as I left the Inn of the Black Fish.

Conscience struck me then a staggering blow. With a sickening sense of helplessness came the thought that I had no right to lead ignorant men, who were sworn to serve their king, to risk their necks on a private enterprise of my own, which would most certainly rouse Henri's anger against me, and which might be construed as desertion and treason for all of us.

If ever cause were just, I felt that mine was; but I could not ask others to share it blindly. Though I tried to strangle conscience, and cursed myself for a weak, over scrupulous fool, I could not do that.

In the little room which Moise and I shared in the village hall I found my brother at work upon his reports. Above his desk hung a portrait of the stern old Chancellor Michel de l'Hôpital, who had died of a broken heart because the promises which he had made had been broken by his sovereign. The iron face seemed to frown down at me forbiddingly.

Briefly I told Moise of my dilemma. Though he did not say so, I saw that he viewed the matter as did I. He wrung my hand.

"Whatever you may decide, you know that I will go with you," said he. I knew

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 12.

that he should *not*, should I have to tie him to prevent it. I would not have him in this trouble, too.

While every thought and nerve of me cried out for haste, I forced myself to deliberation. I sent Moise off to see Aunt Dorothée, and Jacquou to call in Mark and Tête Grise. These two I knew would second my hand in anything, and from Torinaz I hoped to get wisdom.

Each of them saw the matter by his own light, and answered after his fashion.

"By Saint George! the thing looks plain to me, master," spoke Mark, tossing his red mane. "You are the captain. It is bugles, trot, gallop, a sword for this viscount if he will not harken to reason, and then away over the border to Italy or some other where. When the king's stomach has cooled, as it will, we can come back again. And if we cannot, why, many a prince would pay handsomely for the services of a troop of horse."

There spoke the rider of the roads, who had been lieutenant to Regnault Duhamel.

Torinaz was slower to speak. He shook his head.

"Captain," said he, after a time of thought, "you are about to break military law in obedience to that which is higher than military law. The act which will succor a maiden and at the same time save a great man from his sin surely has the sanction of God. Still, it is by military law that you and those who may abet you will be judged.

"My advice is that you take as few men as you can do with, leave your post well guarded and in charge of Lieutenant Duhamel, your brother, and trust the rest to the good God. I would suggest further that you lay the matter before the men whom you may wish to follow you, letting them decide for themselves, and that you appeal only to your own men from Champagne. If trouble should come of it, they would be less open to blame than others, for having followed their natural leader."

"And afterward—after we have rescued *mademoiselle?*" I asked.

"You wish my full mind, my captain?"

I nodded.

"Then I would say to wed the damsel, convey or send her to a place of safety, and return with all speed to your post. So will you have satisfied duty and honor so far as is humanly possible."

"Name of a name! you are counselling him to thrust his head into the lion's mouth," Mark objected. "The lion will snap it off first, and then think to be sorry afterward."

"The king may be sorely vexed, doubtless will be," replied Torinaz steadily; "but he is great hearted. I have set the matter out as I see it. We have served King Henri well. I think that he will remember that and forgive."

I had found the wisdom which I sought. When I looked up, it seemed to me that the rugged countenance of L'Hôpital no longer frowned at me from its frame.

In an upper room a few minutes later Mark marshaled the men from Champagne, and they drew up in two lines before me.

Mon Dieu! what fine fellows they were! Picked men indeed, straight and lean limbed, with bronzed, alert faces. And it seemed but a short time ago that I had seen them ride in from Champagne, raw, awkward lads with pink and white cheeks. Ah me, but it had been three years since then; and of the forty, fourteen were lying under the sod on King Henri's battlefields, and four others had returned to their homes, broken and crippled wrecks of war.

Many of them I had disciplined, when discipline had been necessary; but there was not one of them of whom I could not recall some good or brave deed. I had striven to be fair in all my dealings with them. Would they remember that now? How wholly dependent upon their good will was the entire fabric of my future happiness! And how near to them my trouble had brought me!

In the realizations of that moment I lost forever any inclination to play the grand gentleman. Most of these lads were sons of my tenants, and by the traditions of French gentlemen, they were mine to do with as I willed. Folly! they were men like myself, and by them I must stand or fall.

Feeble enough were the words which rose to my lips as I faced those orderly lines:

"Comrades, I speak to you not as your

captain, but as Hilaire Duhamel, hard hit by great trouble, and in sore need of aid. You know that M. the Duke d'Épernon brought about the death of my father. For the sake of the king, and for other reasons, I have foregone the vengeance which I would have taken. Now that same man threatens the honor of the lady whom I hope to make my wife. He would sell her to another man, basely, and as cattle are sold.

"She has sent a messenger to me with a call for aid. I ride to-day to try to save her. Until I have done so, I renounce my allegiance to the king, and in this one thing become his enemy—for it is to the king that M. the Duke would sell my lady.

"Alone I can do little. Yet I cannot ask any soldier of the king to peril his head in my behalf. But if there be among ye any who think my cause deserving of his aid, I will accept it gratefully, and will do my utmost to take upon myself full responsibility before the king."

I stopped short. It was all that I could say.

"I ride with Captain Duhamel," said Torinaz, advancing beside me.

"And I," growled Mark, "as any fool might know," and he stood at my other elbow.

The men stood staring at us and uneasily kicking their heels. One Lazare Doury, son of a farmer on my lands, a careless, rather loose tongued fellow usually, was the first to speak; and his face was earnest.

"My captain, we all know that the Sieur Duhamel, your father, was a just man, and you are like him. We left our homes to fight for France, and for the king, because we thought that he would do the right for France. We knew that some of us would not go home again; for that is war.

"Now in what you have told us you are right, and the king is wrong, and what is right cannot harm France. There is danger too, you say. Eh, well, then it is the same. By God and His throne, I would as lief go jogging home and tell my old mother and my sister that I had in truth turned traitor to France as that I had failed the Sieur Duhamel and his lady in such a case!"

"And I! And I!" cried the others, their assent merging into acclamation. I saw their honest, eager faces through a sudden mist.

"Can't you see how it is, my captain?" sang out Jacquou Coudriet. "We would all be blithe to ride through hell with you, but know not how to tell you so."

"So it is bugles, trot, gallop, after all!" blared Mark. "Come, my braves; let us be getting the saddles on!"

While we were making ready, Moise returned from the inn. It cost me no little argument to make the lad see that he would best serve me by remaining with the troop; but I convinced him.

"Aunt Dorothée would say another word to you before you go, Hilaire," he told me. "My faith! what a wonderful old lady she is—all love and fire," he sighed; and I knew that she had been petting him and talking about our mother.

Our way lay by the inn, and I stopped there. Aunt Dorothée was at a window, and motioned to me not to dismount. She had been counting my men like a general.

"You may need more aid, Hilaire," she said, as I rode near. "I have thought of something. 'Tis a good thought too, if only because it will plague Jean." She chuckled maliciously.

"On your way to Rambouillet, go to Épernon, which will be little out of your way. Say boldly to Jean that you have been sent by the king to take Serene, and demand aid in the king's name against De Belleforêt. The fact that you know of her plight will be your warranty. He will never suspect that I, whom he deems a fool, have dared to hunt you. He thinks that I am with her.

"Nor will he credit you with daring to run counter to the king. He will be compelled to aid you, which will vex him; and when he finds that he has been tricked, he will rave until his tongue grows weary, and I shall laugh at him.

"Now farewell, and may God bless and speed you, dear boy!"

She leaned from the window to pat my shoulder, and once more I kissed her hand.

Brave old Aunt Dorothée! I never saw

her again; for she died soon afterward. I hope that she is happier among her saints than ever she was down here.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN OLD SCORE PAID.

DUSK was falling when we clattered out of Argueil and down the southern road past the wondering pickets of the garrison which we were deserting. Shortly after midafternoon of the next day we were trotting along the east bank of the River Eure. Below us on the other side of the stream we could see the spires of Rambouillet thrusting up through the green of its surrounding forest.

We had come twenty leagues. We might have traveled faster; but by any reckoning I knew that we must be hours and miles ahead of the king's riders; and I had wished to save the horses against our later need. Early in the morning we had halted, and again at noon, and rested both beasts and men.

Audacious as it was, I was minded to abide by the plan of Aunt Dorothée. If I knew aught of my uncle—and I flattered myself that I did—it would give him such spiteful pleasure to find me come on such an errand, that he would do nothing to interfere with me, but chuckle to see me so punished.

So we asked the way of a peasant, and passing below the bridge of Rambouillet, turned southeast toward Épernon.

Ten miles ride from the river brought us to the great estate which the minion king had given to his favorite.

There, in the midst of wide fields where peasants were toiling, was the *château* of M. the Duke, an immense pile of gray stone with four round towers, the whole doubly girdled by wall and moat, and with a thick and stately wood behind it.

It was evident that the duke knew how to keep and care for what was his. One looking at his prosperous acres and the solid walls of his castle-like *château,* found little difficulty in believing the reports that he was one of the richest men in France.

Soldiers about the gate stared truculently at my little troop; but the gate captain came running out with the air of one who expected us. He nodded when I told him that I had come from the king.

"M. the Duke will see you at once," he said.

From the gate to the *château* I was convoyed by the same massive lackey whom I had twice encountered in Paris. He remembered me not; but I did him, though the monstrous calves which once I had been tempted to puncture with a pin were encased in green instead of yellow. Being springtime, I suppose that they had not blossomed.

Within its walls the place was even more impressive than it had been from the outside. The court was a stone paved field; and around its borders were enough barracks to accommodate a small army.

The lackey led me through the hall and into a large, eight sided room, the walls of which were hung above with blue velvet and cloth of gold, and below were wainscoted with panels of gilded leather, and into which the sunlight shone through the colored panes of many mullioned windows.

My uncle sat by a table in converse with a white robed Dominican father. I smiled grimly to see how he came up out of his chair when his flunkey bawled:

"M. the Captain Duhamel, your grace."

As his eyes fell upon me, he made a gesture toward a bell cord, but instantly mastered himself, and relaxed into his seat.

"Captain," he repeated. "By God, in return for all the money which your father stole, the king should have done better for you. I should have made you a baron at least."

This was no more than I had expected; but it sent the blood to my face.

"M. the Duke," I said with what dignity I could command, "I am just from Normandie. I come to you from the king."

D'Épernon jerked out of his chair again, with a warning look in his eyes. He bowed to the Dominican.

"Good Father Valerien, I will continue the discussion with you later. At present I pray that you will excuse me. I must find out what presumption leads Henri of Navarre to send a messenger to me."

"But certainly, my son," returned the monk, rising, albeit reluctantly, I thought. He included us both in an inclination of his head, and swept off down the room, vanishing like a tall, pale ghost into the dusk of an apartment beyond. The instant his back was turned, the duke laid a finger across his lips. Nor was he satisfied to speak to me until he had made the round of all his doors, to make sure that there were no listeners.

"Fool!" he snarled. "To speak before him of the king!"

I felt my calm returning. I had made him one return for his thrust about my father; and I was beginning to vex him.

He paused in front of me, tugging nervously with both hands at the gold chain which hung across his breast.

"I had not expected to hear from the king so soon," he went on. "My courier must have ridden well. Did he return with you? What are your instructions?"

"I did not see your courier, M. the Duke. I heard that he had been pitched from his horse and had broken an arm," I lied readily. "My instructions were brought me by a rider from Yvetot, where the king gives battle to the Spaniards. They were to take what men might be spared from the garrison at Argueil and to ride hither in haste to act as escort to a certain lady. I was further instructed to call upon you for aid to recover the lady from where she is."

"Plague! Does he expect me to do that, too?" M. the Duke was very vexed indeed.

"Yes," said I; "I have only twenty-five men."

"Eh, well"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I will find you the men if I must; but 'tis dangerous business. Know you who the lady is?"

He leered up at me wickedly.

"Yes; she is Mlle. Serene de Lorme, your grace's cousin," I said, as indifferently as I could manage. My apparent unease pleased him vastly. He sat down again.

"What devilish tricks fate plays with you, to be sure, nephew," he resumed, putting the tips of his fingers together. "Your respected father, the horse trader, turns out to be a robber; there is another matter, of which I will not speak even to you; and now you are sent by the king to fetch to him the little turtle dove, for whom, if I mistake not, your own heart has been hankering these three years. Poor boy!"

"You have omitted the greatest of all my misfortunes," I replied, maintaining my coolness, when I could cheerfully have strangled him.

"And that is?"

"That M. the Duke d'Épernon is my uncle. I can conceive of no disgrace more humiliating than that."

He sprang up, quivering. But he, too, restrained himself.

"Tut, we must not be flying at each other's throats! First of all comes the king's affair. As for the rest of it, it seems that I have all the best of you, nephew."

"You will give me men?" I asked. "Time presses."

"Yes; you shall have a score or so of my varlets. But there is not so much haste. I expect an agent from Rambouillet at any moment, to report on the course of events there. Another thing: the deed must be done by daylight, so that M. the Viscount can see for himself that I have no part in it. It was not in my understanding with the king that I should embroil myself with the League—not yet. You shall go to Rambouillet to-morrow. Bring in your men and house them here for the night, nephew; and if there cannot be peace between us, let there at least be truce."

I would have laid down considerable gold sooner than pass a night under my uncle's roof; but I saw no way out of it. I went out and fetched in my men. Torinaz, by his own suggestion, rode on to Rambouillet, to lie there for the night, and keep his eyes and ears open.

While we were stabling the horses, D'Épernon's flunkey came seeking me. I found with his master none other than that burly assassin Nicolas, who greeted my appearance with an air of mingled uneasiness and bravado.

"Nicolas is an excellent spy," commended his master. "He says that M. d'Orsang is to be wedded to-morrow afternoon, and will at once set out with his bride for Paris.

So, as the king doubtless will prefer a maid to a wife or a widow, you had best go in the morning and take her.

"Thunders of heaven! I regret that I shall not be there. It were worth while to watch both of you—and *mademoiselle*, too, when she learns what business her former cavalier is about."

The vile old pander combed his beard with his fingers, and laughed heartily at the picture which his spite conjured up. "That is all, Nicolas."

"And I need not return to Rambouillet to-night, master?" asked Nicolas; and he appeared monstrously well satisfied when he was told that he need not.

M. the Duke would have had me to sup with him, doubtless foreseeing more entertainment to be had from baiting me; but I disappointed him and ate with my men in the kitchen hall of the *château*.

While we were eating, I saw to my intense surprise that Mark was fraternizing with D'Épernon's men as though he were one of them. I actually saw him clinking cups boisterously with Nicolas!

After I had disposed of my men for the night in the duke's barracks, where I stayed with them, I felt no call of sleep, but fell a prey to the doubts and apprehensions, which, on the eve of a desperate venture, are prone to seize upon one who has too keen an imagination. To add to my fretfulness, Mark had disappeared, and none of his fellows knew whither. I knew the capability of my big henchman to cope for himself against either bottle or battle; nevertheless, his absence worried me. It was after midnight before I slept. When I awoke in the early morning, there lay Mark among the others, slumbering like a wintered bear.

I began to question him as to his doings of the night; but he made me a mysterious sign to desist. Later I heard him bawling loudly that some knave had stolen his bridle; and he ended by purchasing one from D'Épernon's farrier.

M. the Duke gave me thirty men, instructing them to obey my orders as they would his own, and on no account to return to Épernon within a week. He had intended to send Nicolas along; but that worthy was nowhere to be found: though his master cursed, and the fat lackey shouted himself hoarse and purple.

While that was going on I chanced to meet Mark's eye, and he winked at me portentously. As we trotted off along the Rambouillet road, he brought his black horse alongside of Fanchon.

"Well, master," he said in a low voice, "one score is settled. Nicolas—may his bed be warm!—will do no more murders."

"What!" I exclaimed. I had been prepared for a revelation of some sort; but this information startled me.

Mark twisted himself in his saddle and pointed back the way we had come.

"See the tall pine yonder, master—the one which tops all the rest in the wood back of the *château?* Well, Nicolas is dangling from one of its branches, waiting for the crows to come and pick him."

I thought that Mark had taken leave of his senses, and so told him.

"Not the least in the world, master," he answered, wagging his head and grinning. "Nicolas was main glad that he was not sent back to Rambouillet last night, for cause that he had a tryst with a lass of the neighborhood. I overheard his mates japing him about her. Then I was glad, too.

"Having helped coax considerable wine into his skin, I set a watch on Master Nicolas. There is a postern door in the rear wall, to which he had a key, and there is a boat in the moat. I passed through the postern behind him, and with a tap on his sconce from my pistol I persuaded him to allow me to ferry him across.

"When he had his wits again, I conversed with him concerning the evils of his past life. He was a hard rogue, and unrepentant, master; so I hanged him neatly to the big pine, for which purpose I had taken with me the bridle off Harry here. He is done for. Returning that way two hours later, I felt of him, and he was as fine and cold a corpse as one could wish to see."

"Returning, say you!" I gasped, astounded by this grim midnight tale. "Where had you been?"

"Why, to keep his tryst with the maid, master. Having deprived her of her lover's

society by hanging him, I felt bound to supply her lack. Besides, I feared that she might come hunting him. I told her that he had been sent on a long journey, and that he had begged me as a friend to make his excuses and console her.

"She proved a reasonable maid. Not finding what she had looked for, she was e'en content with what fortune sent her. He had a keen eye for maids, had Nicolas. I know; for there was good moonlight."

Mark chuckled at sight of my blank face.

"If trouble ever comes of it, remember that we had the king's permission to hunt Nicolas," he reminded me. "Would that I could have swung his evil little master up beside him!"

Although the taking off of Nicolas was a pleasure which I had long before promised myself, I was not altogether displeased to learn that Mark had deprived me of it.

As we came to the approach of the Rambouillet bridge, under which the Eure was foaming in springtide freshet, we heard on its floor the hollow thunder of hoofs in desperate haste.

It was Tête Grise who came riding thus furiously, his gray hair whipping about his ears.

"Ride! Ride!" he shouted, wheeling his rearing horse beside me at the bridge head. "The priests are on their way to the viscount's *hôtel!*"

With a leaping heart I raised myself in the stirrups, and gave the order to gallop.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A STUBBORN BRIDEGROOM.

A FIERY current of madness, swift and stormy as the flooded river, flowed through my veins as we pounded across the bridge and down the tree lined road to Rambouillet. On its crest my black doubts of the night and my cowardly hesitation were forever swept away.

Imminence of danger and action had roused me and set my spirit free, and it shouted within me. I echoed its call with my voice. My men stared at me. Then they, too, took fire, and rode shouting with me. Swords leaped from their scabbards, and above our heads the sunlight flashed and shimmered on a wave of scintillant steel.

In the wake of that heady frenzy my mind became clear with a cool recklessness, and my purpose steadfast.

No longer was I the king's captain and bound by his laws. I was his cousin, proud of the blood which I had from my father, and I would make my own law.

Ahead of me, my dear lady was waiting; and I swore by God and His bright angels that I would not fail her. She still believed in me. She had called me, and I was coming. Disgrace and death might lay their chill fingers upon me afterward, and let them; but dishonor should never touch her! Henri of Navarre should be cheated of his toy. D'Épernon should have nothing to smile and rub his hands over.

Rambouillet's villagers and their dogs and pigs and chickens scurried helter-skelter from our path as we dashed headlong through their narrow streets.

D'Orsang's *hôtel,* a fair villa of red stone, lay at the western outskirt of the town. It was our good fortune that his grounds were not walled. His wide lawns were separated from the street by a fence of iron palings only. A crowd which was gathered before the gates gave way to us in loud alarm.

We whirled in through the lane they made for us, and along a curving driveway flanked by beds of flowers and vaulted by noble trees. Standing in my stirrups, I caught a glimpse over the shrubbery of the front doorway of the *hôtel,* and of the flutter of priestly garments entering in; and I knew that I had come in time.

As we rounded the last curve of the drive, a sharp, military command rang from the front of the building. M. d'Orsang had anticipated that his nuptials might not be peaceful. Besides setting forward the hour of the ceremony, he had further prepared himself against disturbance.

A score of mounted musketeers were ranged before his porch. Behind them a clump of household servants armed with miscellaneous weapons held the steps, and the lower windows of the mansion bristled with firearms.

Near the corner of the building next the drive a groom was holding the bridles of a sorrel war-horse and a lady's palfrey with a cushioned saddle.

So furiously had we ridden in that when I reined Fanchon on her haunches in the gravel, there was scarcely a lance's length between me and the leveled muskets of the men-at-arms.

Warned by the cries which had greeted our arrival, a group of gayly clad gentlemen issued from the hall, and completed the viscount's battle front with a half circle of drawn rapiers before his door.

At each side of me my men filled up the open space in front of the *hôtel*, and formed in steady line of charge confronting the threatening muskets. The noise of trampling hoofs ceased, and there came an interval of silence, broken only by the panting of winded horses and the ominous clicking of pistol locks.

Then from within the house came a merry peal of women's laughter. M. d'Orsang's fair guests knew not, or were careless, that death had paused at the door.

"We be ready when you are, master," muttered Mark at my right.

"Can we not parley, captain, and prevent bloodshed," breathed Torinaz at my left.

I had seen the priests enter the *hôtel*, and I was minded that my parley should be brief.

"I must see M. the Viscount on the instant," I said, addressing myself to the gentlemen who guarded the doorway.

"*Monsieur* shall have that pleasure," replied a harsh, croaking voice from the hall. "I am coming."

A broad shouldered man in complete armor pushed through the swordsmen and advanced to the head of the steps.

"I am M. d'Orsang, *monsieur*," he said, bowing, and to the leader of his men-at-arms:

"Thiebaud, train a brace of your surest muskets on this young man. At the first sign of disturbance, shoot him. M. the Duke d'Épernon has insolently dared to send an invasion. Very well; it shall return to him peacefully, or leaderless."

With admirable coolness in the face of a superior force, Thiebaud ordered two of his musketeers to give me their undivided attention, which they did at once, aiming at me between their horses' ears.

Despite the grim surveillance of those two dark muzzles, I sat easier in my saddle. It was patent that while M. the Viscount was on his front porch talking to me, he could not be in his parlor marrying Serene. No suspicion of a trick—that this might be other than he—entered my mind.

"Ugly as sin itself," Aunt Dorothée had described him. *Mon Dieu!* my dear aunt had libeled sin by the comparison! There could not have been an uglier man in France.

Nature had been unkind to him in the beginning. Accident and the hand of man had completed the desolation. Large as was his face, beauty had been crowded off it altogether. It was a collection of enormities, of which green eyes, badly mated; a mouth like a thief's pocket, and a horrible scar were the most outrageous.

A sword cut had deprived him of his left eyebrow, and passing downward had split his nose, divided his lips, and cleft his chin. The features thus severed had reunited unwillingly. The scene of their reluctant agreement, poorly curtained by a tawny moustache and beard, was hideous.

He was tall, and his body was of ungainly strength, his arms borrowed from a far larger man; and one of his legs had been broken and twisted so that it formed the half of a right angle at the knee. When he walked, this deformity caused his shoulders to swing like those of a marching ape.

"Well, *monsieur*, with what commission did M. the Duke d'Épernon invest you?" he inquired, having satisfied himself that his musketeers would not miss me. "And why did not M. the Duke come himself?"

"But I do not come from D'Épernon, *monsieur*," I replied. "I am Hilaire Duhamel, captain of cavalry in the army of King Henri of France. My commission is from him. It is to find Mlle. Serene de Lorme, and to escort her hence at once."

"Eh, what! From the king, say you?" The viscount started, and there was a noticeable movement among the gentlemen

behind him. His discomposure was momentary.

"Henri of Navarre is not yet the king of France," he continued; "but if he always acts with the celerity which he has shown in this affair, I will not gainsay his chances.

"Nevertheless, it will be impossible for you to execute your commission, Captain Duhamel, for the very excellent reason that within half an hour Mlle. de Lorme will have ceased to exist, and will have become Madame d'Orsang, who as such will accompany me to Paris. Now, if *monsieur* will excuse me, we will proceed with the ceremony. Afterward we will endeavor to find refreshment for *monsieur* and his men."

He bowed to me with perfect aplomb.

"Thiebaud, see to your muskets," he cautioned.

M. d'Orsang was about to swing upon his heel, and I to order a charge in spite of his muskets, when the crescent of swordsmen at the doorway was broken again.

"*Hilaire! Hilaire!*"

In bridal white, with flowers in her shining hair, my lady came running to the top of the steps, a small, palpitating, dancing figure, weeping and laughing at once, and holding out her arms toward me.

M. d'Orsang stared.

"Hilaire! You have come for me! Praise be to God! Praise be to God!"

At that cry my heart vibrated like a smitten drum.

She saw then the menace of the guns, and she went down on her knees, clutching at the wondering viscount's hand.

"Ah, for the love of the good God in heaven, M. d'Orsang, do not bid them shoot him!" she implored. "Let me go, M. d'Orsang! Let me go with him! We will bless you all the days of our life!"

M. the Viscount raised her; and I saw that the uncouth being could be both gentle and courteous.

"Captain Duhamel shall come to no harm through me, my dear lady—so long as he is reasonable," he said. "But do I understand that you ask to go with him? He comes from Henri of Navarre."

Serene cowered at mention of that name. She looked down at me; and I think that she read my eyes.

"But I will go with Hilaire anywhere," she answered with proud trustfulness. "Forgive me, M. d'Orsang, for the unmaidenly trick I have played you! Tell me that you forgive me, and let me go!"

"Trick!"

D'Orsang looked from her to me, bewildered. His fearful face had turned white, and he swayed as if a club had smitten him.

"Mother of God! here is something which I understand not at all," he muttered. He drew a hand across his brow. Aware of the curious glances of his guests and soldiers, he straightened upright.

"Will *monsieur* do me the honor to come within?" he asked, beckoning to me.

"Be not mad, master!" hissed Mark in my ear.

But Aunt Dorothée had named this viscount an honest man, and my own observation seconded her belief. I slipped from Fanchon's saddle and passed through the line of men-at-arms. On the steps I felt a touch against my elbow. Mark had come with me.

A parlor on the lower floor which looked out upon the side lawn had been decked for the wedding. Three priests stood by an altar under a bower of sweet smelling spring blossoms. Midway down the room was gathered a group of brightly gowned women, their faces pale and anxious. They started toward us; but the viscount waved them back, and led us to one of the windows. Mark tarried by the hall door.

"Explain, I pray you," said M. d'Orsang, "how it is that *mademoiselle,* having claimed the protection of my name to escape Henri of Navarre, now wishes to leave me and go to him. I do not understand."

There was a look in the man's green eyes which made me pity him, and the pallor had left his face. It promised to be awkward, this explaining. I took the resolve to be honest with him.

"I am a captain in the king's army, as I told you, *monsieur,*" said I; "but I was not sent here by the king. This is my dear lady, and I have come to save her from the king."

"So it is not Henri of Navarre, but

Henri of Navarre's young captain, to whom you wish to go, *mademoiselle?*" D'Orsang asked. "And why did you not go to him before?"

In a misery of remorse at the pain she caused him, Serene told him our little tale of love, and how, when her hopes had been dashed by D'Épernon's shameful bargain with the king, she had been driven to desperate remedies.

"And I hope that you can forgive me, M. d'Orsang," she ended; "for, oh, I know that I have treated you very ill."

"I believe that you have, *mademoiselle*," he assented, looking at her with some sternness. "So, if your gallant had failed you, then, sooner than yield to Henri, you would have done me the honor to become my wife?"

"Yes, *monsieur*," Serene answered weakly; "but—but, Hilaire has come."

D'Orsang plucked at his mustache and stared gloomily from the window at the soldiers outside.

"*Mademoiselle* would have done best by telling me the whole truth when she came to me," he said. "'Twould have been painful, but—not like this."

Serene bowed her head; nor did I know what to say to him. The man was right, and he was honest, and I was sorry for him.

"But you will let us go now, *monsieur?*" she pleaded softly. "You see, we love each other."

"I see. What a sweet, fair thing this love can be! I've now had some small measure of experience with it. A sweet cup—with a dash of poison in it!"

He laughed, and it was a hard sound, and deep in his throat.

"Eh, well, I forgive you, *mademoiselle*, and doubtless I shall recover from it in time. But you, *monsieur*—"

He whirled on me and thrust his face close to mine.

"You, my young captain, I cannot forgive so easily. I cannot forgive you your tall, straight body, your comely face, and your pleasant voice. You shall have your *mademoiselle*—if you can take her from me."

"You mean?"

The viscount touched the hilt of his sword.

"No, no! You shall not!" Serene cried. "Why should you fight? I have earned your contempt, M. d'Orsang. Reproach me as you will; I deserve it; but do not fight with Hilaire! He is blameless!"

She reached to take his hands; but he shrank away from her, continuing to regard me.

"What says the captain?" he asked.

"That I have no wish to fight you, M. the Viscount—and besides, see little hope of mending matters by the shedding of our blood."

"Will this be necessary?" He raised his hand.

"Blood of God, *monsieur!*"

"Very well, then. There is a room across the hall. Come."

Serene ran after me to the door.

"Do not harm him, Hilaire!" she implored; "and, oh, my dear, do not let him harm you!" *Mon Dieu*—the things a woman will ask of a man!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

M. D'ORSANG'S GIFTS.

IT was a small room to which we went to fight.

"We shall require no witnesses," M. d'Orsang said, glancing at Mark, who had followed us and stood in the doorway.

Mark looked to me for orders. I nodded, and he closed the door and went away, whistling under his breath. A couple of moments later I heard his voice at the front door of the *hôtel*, bidding my men to sit tight, as the master had "a small matter to arrange."

M. the Viscount and I were alone in the little room. Bookshelves were on its walls, and a table by the windows was piled high with volumes. Near one end of the table stood a tall harp with a frame of dark wood, a stool, and a stand with music on it. Seeing these things, I wondered more at the strangely mingled character of this man whom I was to fight.

"Shall we lay aside this cumbersome frippery and fight it out like men, cap-

tain?" he asked, striking a hand upon his corselet.

"As you will, *monsieur*," I replied, and I began to unlace the fastenings of my helmet. He eyed me with somber approval. Presently he came and helped me to remove my corselet, and I helped him with his.

When we stood in our leather shirts and hose, M. d'Orsang turned his sleeve back from an arm which was like the root of an oak.

"There is good light here in front of the windows, captain," he advised.

It was excellent. We fell into position there, and our blades crossed.

I was not keen for this fight; but a look in the viscount's mismated eyes had put me upon my mettle. I was resolved that I would let him do me no mischief; nor would I harm him if I could avoid it.

Before we had made a half dozen passes, I knew that I was called upon to exercise no forbearance on his account, and before a score, that I had met a master swordsman; and if I would save my skin and see my lady again, I must go my best pace.

And it was better so. If I must—as sometimes it has happened—meet a man in the debate where steel is the argument and the eager point its eloquence, I love that we shall be fairly matched. Too great advantage in skill eliminates all chance, and, pressed to its conclusion, is little less than murder.

Mon Dieu! I had my liking in that ogre of a viscount! His ape-like arms gave him the reach of me; and in five minutes of fighting I learned that his misshapen frame was as strong as my own. He had, too, the temperament of the perfect bladesman—a composite of fire and ice.

No chance which offered seemed too desperate for him to take; and he guided his blade with an exquisite coolness of control which turned his lost strokes into defense in a manner to make me marvel.

In one respect only did I feel any superiority: His crooked leg prevented him from moving about lightly. When his wrist should begin to tire, I told myself, my greater activity would enable me to press him and attain the end I sought, which was to disarm him.

Occasionally, as we fought, I caught glimpses of a wooden clock which hung upon the wall. Five minutes passed, and ten. The irregular clangor of the steel which had marked our opening, as we felt each his way to the other's strength had given place to a steady, almost rhythmic, cadence. So closely were the blades engaged that there was scarcely an interruption of that vibrant diapason.

Twenty minutes; and the tune was still playing. The viscount's wrist was unwearied. Nor had my smartest rallies forced him to give back a step.

I was, and am, a good swordsman. I say it without boast; for the proof has been made.

I had been taught the art by Mark, who never met his peer, and three years in camp and field had seasoned me. But I was not iron.

As the twenty minutes lengthened toward the half hour, I began to feel the strain of that unremitting contest. My muscles were losing their spring. Perspiration ran from me in rivulets. My breathing had become a pain.

Opposite me, scarcely moving an inch from his stand, the viscount was fighting as coolly, to all appearances, as though he had just stepped from his bath.

Every trick at my command, and they were not few, I had tried and repeated in the effort to beat down his sword. Some of them had troubled him—I had seen that—but all of them had failed.

I gave up the attempt. There was only one recourse. Summoning my waning strength and failing breath, I concentrated all my skill in a fierce attack. If I must I would kill him—if it were not too late. Fool, to have delayed so long!

Along his blade M. d'Orsang felt my change of play, and understood its purpose. He laughed harshly.

"Now, you have begun to fight, captain," he said. "The rest was mere fencing. I have been waiting for this."

"God knows that I do not wish to kill you," I gasped, sending in at the same time a thrust at his neck which ill accorded with my declaration. He parried it as he had parried all the others.

"I *do* wish to kill you, *monsieur*," he replied; "but I shall not—

"So!"

Caught like a straw in a gale, my blade was whirled wide. An irresistible pressure wrested its hilt from my fingers, and it clanged upon the floor.

The viscount's point described an odd pattern in the air, so close to my face that I felt the wind of it, then sank and rested at his feet.

Breathless, I stared at him, and wondered at the tingling pain which coursed from wrist to shoulder of my sword arm.

"An accident, captain." M. d'Orsang's scarred features writhed into the unlovely semblance of a smile. "Pick it up."

"*Monsieur* is too generous," said I, swallowing my humiliation; for I knew that it had not been an accident. "If he does not intend to kill me, why continue the matter?"

"Take up your sword!"

There was a bitterness in the command which stung me, as no doubt he meant it should. Without further word, I recovered my blade and fell upon him furiously, for the first time fighting with real temper. The tune of the swords became a wild, uneven discord.

This was not fencing. It was fighting.

By sheer reckless impetuosity I drove him back a little, but not far—and in doing so discovered his weakness.

Balanced in one spot, and with his length of arm and his undoubted skill, M. d'Orsang was the most redoubtable antagonist with whom I ever crossed blades. At the fencing, of which he had spoken with contempt, he was incomparable; mounted, he would have been well nigh invincible.

But pressed from his position by a man who had the hardihood to dare his point, and the skill to use his advantages, he was less to be feared.

In my own rash confidence, I had met him on his favorite ground, had fought him foot to foot—and got my lesson.

With temper thrilling me, my play was different. My weariness forgotten, I leaped and skipped, attacking now from one side and now the other, and forcing him to turn to meet me.

In one of our close rallies he tried again his master stroke—a combination which I have never fathomed—but he bungled it. My blade slipped out of its embrace. Before he could recover from the surprise which his confidence had led him into—for he thought that it was over—with a favorite trick of Mark's I engaged his hilt, and sent his sword ringing against a bookcase.

My point stood against his breast so that he felt the prick of it—almost it had gone home. He did not flinch; and, my senses returned to me, I backed away from him and fell panting upon a bench.

"By Saint Denys, I should not care to meet you on horseback!" I said.

"You have beaten me fairly," he responded, speaking with some difficulty, and ignoring my remark. He had not looked for this outcome. He had meant to play with me again. I saw it in his disappointed eyes.

"Nevertheless, I made my gifts," he went on; "for you stood before me once unarmed."

"Gifts?" I echoed.

"Yes, *monsieur*—your good looks, which I might have marred, your life, which I might have taken. I wished to give them both to *mademoiselle*, and I have done so. Between you, you have taken from me all that I value most. Permit me to add these. You are free to leave my house in peace, captain, you and *mademoiselle*. But you will not forget me, M. Duhamel. You may never understand me; you may never like me; but by God's throne, you can never despise me!"

That was truth; though I thought him somewhat mad.

"Our armor," he said; "and then let us go out to *mademoiselle*. She will be uneasy. Some day you will tell her of my gifts, *monsieur*. She does not love me—it was not to be expected that she could. My dream was foolish. But I would have her think of me sometimes. Treat her gently and fairly always, M. Duhamel. If you do not, so sure as there is a world where men live and are unhappy, I will hunt you to its borders!"

We helped each other to arm, and M. d'Orsang limped ahead of me into the hall.

Guests and priests, who had heard the song of the swords, were gathered in a frightened knot about the parlor door. Serene stood clutching at its casing, her face as white as the silk of her bridal gown. At sight of the viscount she moaned, then saw me following, and ran to meet me, and in her joy bruised her tender arms on my steel shell.

Mark was leaning against the wall of the corridor, and trying to appear unconcerned. He gave me a strange look. Long afterward he told me that by listening near the door he had followed the course of events in the little room. "And I would give a hundred crowns to know the stroke which disarmed you, master."

I would give a thousand.

M. d'Orsang sent a servant to tell Thiebaud that he might put his muskets down.

"There is a palfrey outside," he said to me. "It was to have carried Mme. d'Orsang"—his rough voice broke a little—"to Paris. Permit that I present it to *mademoiselle*. I—"

A tremendous din at the front of the *hôtel* interrupted him. Oaths and loud cries were mingled with the trampling of many hoofs on the graveled drive. Through the doorway and into the hall came first the viscount's gentlemen guests, and behind them a jostling rabble of servants and men-at arms, M. d'Orsang's and my own.

Tête Grise was one of the first to reach me.

"The king has come," he said.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE STARS SHINE CLEAR.

"*THE king!*"

A dozen voices near me echoed the words. I ran to one of the parlor windows.

Two companies of the royal horse, led by captains whom I knew well, had entered the viscount's grounds. One troop was deployed across the lawns in a semicircle which included the *hôtel* and its drive. The other had dismounted and was forming in good order for an advance toward the building. Detached troopers were catching the horses which my men had abandoned. At one side the thirty riders whom D'Épernon had loaned me sat their saddles in a disordered group, astonishment writ large upon their faces.

Beside the captain of the men who were preparing to march across the lawn was a small, wide shouldered man whom I had followed too often not to recognize him.

These things I saw in a glance, and my soul sank within me. I had failed. My high resolves had come to nothing. We were trapped.

Had we been in the saddle and upon the road, there might have been a chance to escape; for the king's horses were weary and ours were fresh. But fighting here could mean only defeat and death.

It was the stubbornness of the viscount that had done it; and in my heart I cursed him for it, not knowing how soon he was to make amends.

Serene—the king would take her! By God, he should not!

At my feet lay a musket, left there by one of M. d'Orsang's servants. In my madness I stooped and seized it.

"*Hilaire!* My God, not that!"

Serene had followed me to the window. She seized my wrist and clung to it with the strength of a man. In my unreasoning frenzy I tried to shake her grip. Two other hands closed upon the musket barrel and wrested the weapon from me.

"Not if you kill me, my captain!"

It was the voice of Torinaz. He pitched the musket out into a flower bed.

Over the sorcerer's shoulder I saw the confused medley of wedding guests and fighting men standing tense as statues, every eye upon me.

"See, captain," Torinaz continued, "though we have failed, we have still one hope."

"What—a miracle of God?" I laughed in his face.

"No; but one of His sacraments."

Torinaz waved his hand toward the priests. In my excitement I failed to take his meaning, and glared at him dully. My lady took my hand.

"He means, Hilaire—oh, surely even the king would respect your wife!"

M. d'Orsang had come near us and had heard.

"She has reason!" he exclaimed, and in a lower voice meant for me. "This makes my gifts complete."

He turned to one of the priests.

"Marry them, father," he said. He bowed toward his guests. "I invited you to a wedding, my friends. You shall not be cheated of it."

"By Saint George!" roared Mark, comprehending the trend of events. "Tie the knot! I will keep them back out there!" And he hastened to the front door and stood there with his sword like a red headed Saint Michael.

I looked down at Serene. For the first time that day there was color in her cheeks.

"Do you consent?" I asked her.

"Foolish Hilaire—why, pray, did I send for you?"

I am quite sure that I kissed her.

"You are welcome to all my poor trappings here," said M. d'Orsang, pointing to the bower and altar opposite the door. "I will engage that you shall not be disturbed." He limped rapidly into the hall.

Events had been crowding rather fast for my poor head; but I mustered wit enough to lead my lady to the altar, behind which the priest had betaken himself. I would gladly have stood behind it, too, to hide the trembling of my legs.

Hardly were we in place when a loud voice on the lawn summoned Mark, as the only visible garrison, to give up the doorway. Then we heard the rasping tones of the viscount:

"This is my door, my fine fellow, and I will protect it."

The priest began the marriage service.

From the doorway M. d'Orsang's harsh croaking sounded again:

"In five minutes you may come in. Before that time no man shall enter—not even you, M. the Béarnais."

"Thousand devils! But I say that I will enter now," answered the king. "Stand out of that doorway, M. d'Orsang!"

"Not for five minutes."

A clash of steel followed, and I knew that the king and the viscount were at it.

Not for any business less important than what I was about would I have missed that swordplay. As it was, my attention was divided. Twice I felt Serene tug at my hand impatiently; and I knew that I must have been making a mess of my responses.

But I got through with it somehow. With the "amen," one of M. d'Orsang's friends called the word to him, and he let fall his sword.

"You may come in now," he said.

I tucked my wife under my arm and passed to the rear of the altar, where I could have a wall behind me. Mark had come in, and he and my men ranged themselves with me. In a quick glance around I saw only determined faces and shining eyes. Brave fellows! Whatever fate should be mine, they were willing to share.

The viscount's friends and servants drew away toward the lower end of the parlor. The priest who had married us remained at the altar.

Steel shod feet clanked along the corridor. The room began to fill with the king's troopers. Two of them led in M. d'Orsang. He was bleeding from a slight gash in the cheek.

A quick step approached the doorway. At each side of it the soldiers stood at salute; and the arms of my men were lifted also. The king came in and paused in front of the altar.

The dust of many roads was thick upon his armor and in his beard, and his face was haggard from weariness; but his keen gray eyes were bright and restless, with a glint of anger in them.

Around the room they shifted, from the priest at the altar to the viscount's guests and soldiers, and then to the group of us against the wall, where I stood with an arm around Serene.

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" he swore with a short laugh. "I have traveled shorter distances to more cordial greetings. What has happened here?"

"A wedding," answered M. d'Orsang.

Henri's glance flashed to Serene, and I felt her tremble under his regard. He strode over toward the viscount.

"Unhand him," he commanded. The troopers obeyed.

"So you have married?"

"No, *monsieur*"—the viscount would not call him sire—"not I, but your young captain here," pointing to me. "He interrupted my nuptials. His own were more fortunate. You and I are two disappointed men."

"*So-o?* I thought that I had a quarrel with you, D'Orsang. It seems that another has taken it upon himself."

"Am I a prisoner?" the viscount asked.

"No; I forgive you the sword practice. *Ventre Saint Gris!* It is something to have touched you."

"Thanks. I will be going."

"Whither?"

"To Paris."

"So shall I—some day." Henri laughed again.

"I shall help prepare a welcome for you," retorted the fearless D'Orsang. He moved toward the door, his friends following.

"I doubt not that 'twill be a warm one," the king flung after him.

In the doorway the viscount paused, and bowed to Serene.

"*Madame* is welcome to make my home her own for so long as may please her," he said; "and *monsieur*, too—if the Béarnais is generous. I will leave orders."

"And me—am I welcome, too?" inquired the king ironically.

"Yes—when I am gone." The viscount bowed again, and disappeared.

Henri stepped around the altar and confronted us. He paid me no attention, but bent his eyes upon Serene. Again I felt her shrink, and I tightened my clasp of her waist.

"So, to escape me, my pretty one, you would have married *him?*" He jerked his thumb toward the door. "My God, how you must hate me!"

"No, sire." Serene straightened upright and faced him boldly. "I hate you not at all. But M. d'Orsang is an honest man; and I would sooner be wife to such than mistress to a king."

Henri folded one arm across the other and gazed at her, pulling at one of his ears. Of a sudden he snapped his eyes to me.

"And you, Captain Duhamel," he said sternly; "I find you guilty of desertion and rebellion. *Ventre Saint Gris!* I catch you at it red handed! What say you?"

"I sent for him, sire. I alone am to blame," interposed Serene, squeezing my hand to keep me silent. But I would not keep silent.

"Rebel and deserter I am, if you choose to say it, sire," I answered; "but if a man may not protect his own from dishonor, this is not free France."

I met his eyes and waited for the lightning. Instead, they began to winkle. The tip of his nose twitched down, the corners of his mouth flew up, and he began to laugh, this time without irony.

"God's blood! When I learned from D'Épernon what you were about, I had envy to hang you, as you hanged Nicolas—and as I think M. the Duke would hang you if he could catch you, for all that you are his nephew. How he did rave when they found his varlet swinging!

"*Ventre Saint Gris!* You have been a busy man these last twenty-four hours, my boy! You have deserted your post, incited some of my best soldiers to rebellion, hanged a man without trial, and made your king wait upon a doorstep while you were being married. Now I suppose that you will tell me that I am to blame for it all.

"Good; I am going to punish you."

Serene held out her hands in quick appeal.

But I was no longer afraid. The king had laughed at me; and by that token I knew that his great heart had conquered both passion and anger, and I had little to fear of his punishment.

"Your penalty," he continued, "is dismissal from my army for one year, which you will pass in close confinement on your estate in Champagne—with *madame*."

A shout which shook the windows went up from the soldiers, my lads from Champagne cheering loudest of all.

"And you too, my children," the king said, nodding to the line of them. "You have served me faithfully for three years, and have earned a rest. In the north the Spaniard is beaten, and we shall take time to breathe."

They cheered him again for that.

Serene pulled at my hand to have me kneel; and though I knew how he disliked it, I started to comply.

"Not that," he objected, holding out a hand; and then, quizzically: "But think you not that I might kiss the bride?"

When he had touched Serene's lips, he held her for a moment by the shoulders, then pushed her gently toward me.

"*Ventre Saint Gris, madame!*" he exclaimed ruefully, "you make me wish that I had hanged him;" and he sighed and turned away.

The remainder of that day and that night we tarried at Rambouillet. Long after dusk had fallen, we sat, my lady and I, by one of the upper windows of the Hôtel d'Orsang. Below us in the darkness the king's horses stamped upon the lawn, and we could hear the tread of his sentinels on the walks.

Serene nestled close and hid her face against my doublet.

"Are the stars shining, Hilaire?" she whispered.

And I answered: "They are all out, every one."

How the king was crowned at Chartres, and was received at last into Paris; how the League was broken, and Mayenne made his submission; these things have all been told by Master Matthieu.

In many of the aims which he set out to accomplish Henri has succeeded. He is a good king, the best France ever had. Most of his people love him. But there are malcontents, some of them great and powerful. Among them is my turncoat uncle, M. the Duke d'Épernon, grown more rich and powerful than ever — as I have noticed the wicked often do.

I was with Navarre when he went to Paris, and I fought for him again in the north at Amiens. Moise is with him yet, and is in a fair way to both fame and wealth; and I hear that a young court beauty has set her cap for him.

When the day came on which the king offered me a title and a place at court, I, having made up my mind to it long before, refused them. I am content to remain here at Château Duhamel with the blessings which have been vouchsafed me. Court is no place for a man with a pretty wife, especially if he be the father of three children.

Besides, I long before had refused a higher title than any within the king's gift. In that knowledge I am well content to remain the Sieur Duhamel.

Torinaz has established himself at Raucourt. Since his return with honors from the wars, his name of Tête Grise has fallen into disuse. He is known now as Dr. Torinaz.

Mark, dear old Mark, his red poll somewhat grizzled now, is with us.

Fanchon is still in my stables; and Leo, grown older and rusty in the joints, lies much by the hearth, where I have bidden Silvie keep her broomstick off him.

On occasions—when we entertain guests of note, or one of the children has a festival—Serene clasps around the dog's white throat a collar of gold, set with brilliants.

'Tis the gage he won at Ivry, the gift of a man so great that he would keep his promise to even a dog — King Henri of France and Navarre.

THE END

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SEE YOURSELF AS YOU ARE

JUST stand aside and watch yourself go by;
Think of yourself as "he" instead of "I."
Pick flaws, find fault, forget the man is you,
And strive to make your estimate ring true.
Confront yourself and look you in the eye—
Just stand aside and watch yourself go by.

Leon Gertsman.

According to the Evidence

By GARRET SMITH

"I WISH I dared warn the boy that a guy's fixin' to murder him." This from old Barney, night man at the Primo Garage, to his friend Tim.

Young Mr. Penfield Wimbleton, to whom Barney referred, had just settled his lanky, sport-suited length under his steering wheel. Spurring Lucifer, his big racer, into a roaring rage worthy of its namesake, whose pert metal image perched at the end of the rakish hood, he slipped in the clutch and with a masterful anticlimax rolled the big car out of the garage as gently as a baby carriage. In another moment he had softly rounded the corner into Park Avenue.

"Can ye beat it?" Barney demanded. "It's the divil what women do to a driver! Makin' speeders outa gray haired bankers an' turnin' young road eatin' divils like this boy into regular old maids, handlin' a wheel like it was a cup o' tea!"

"Meanin' who, and who aims to murder him?" asked Tim, who had dropped in to gossip for an hour.

"Young Wimbleton there is the feller in danger, him that used to shoot that hell wagon o' his outa here on two wheels an' make the cop on the corner jump outa the way to keep from bein' run over."

"Oh, that's Wimbleton!" Tim recalled. "Yeh, I remember the boy. Won the Long Island road race two years ago. Been in the papers half a dozen times for speedin' accidents, ain't he?"

"Easy that. Last time Judge Thomas promised to send him to jail if he got caught again."

"But what's the murder story?"

"There's a young society drunkard named Frank Long, runs in Mr. Wimbleton's set, I take it, but ain't his kind. Long's pal is young George Varnum, a whole lot of a little rat. Ye may have seen 'em round. Both keep their cars here.

"Well, only this afternoon Long brought his car in an' I notice him fussin' around Wimbleton's machine. After he left I find one hind hub unscrewed and the wheel about ready to drop off. I can't say noth-

in' yet, and I ain't losin' my job talkin' about patrons premature."

"What's this Long got against Wimbleton? Is it the girl yer speakin' of? Who is she?"

"Old Harwood's daughter. Harwood ain't takin' to the idea of this young racin' divil marryin' his girl, an' it ain't been easy goin'. But he's tryin' his almighty best to make good. Ain't been up fer speedin' ner had an accident in six months. Young Long might be after the girl, too, likely enough."

"You talk like this here Wimbleton an' this Harwood was tellin' you all their secret sorrows," commented Tim wonderingly.

"Not any. I'm just tellin' it to ye accordin' to the evidence."

"Evidence?"

"Sure. I ain't been usin' me eyes an' nose round taxis an' garages fer twenty years fer nothin'. Not till six months ago did I get any scent o' perfumery off the cushions o' that boy's car, or find any handkerchiefs or such that the girls are always losin' in machines. Then about that time I gets a scent from his cushions, jest a faint one, kind o' perfume a real lady uses. An' one night I picks up a lace handkerchief with 'M. H.' on it. That don't tell me nothin' till one afternoon ol' Harwood, who's keepin' his car here, too, slips me a case note an' says, 'Barney, I'd appreciate it if you'd tell me what kind of hours Mr. Wimbleton keeps, and what kind of condition he and his car are in when he comes in. I've a very particular reason,' he says, 'fer wantin' to know whether this young gentleman's steadyin' down. Don't mention my speakin' of it,' he says.

"'I won't mention it, Mr. Harwood,' I says, handin' back the case note. 'I'd have ye know I'm not mentionin' the affairs o' any o' my patrons to anybody,' I says; an' we ain't been real friendly since.

"Then I remembers them initials on the handkerchief and recalls Miss Mary Harwood. An' a month ago ol' Harwood tells me he'll be away fer a month er two, an' to jack up his car. I figgers little Mary went with him, fer they ain't been no perfumery on Wimbleton's cushions since."

Meanwhile, Pen Wimbleton, guiding Lucifer along the avenue on this particular night in which Barney had confided to his friend his mysterious forebodings, was again fighting the old fire of speed madness that rushed through his veins. For the moment he was the demon driver again instead of the lover. For the first time since he had fallen under Mary Harwood's sway, the itch for thunderbolt flight threatened to dominate him again. It offered release from the canker of loneliness. He was merely holding himself in check by supreme effort of the will. His hands clutched the wheel with convulsive intensity. The foot over the accelerator itched for action.

Up through the Bronx and into the open country he drove steadily, never quite letting himself past the speed limit. Again and again on a stretch of open moonlit road the urge to let Lucifer out became almost irresistible. But each time a foreboding of disaster clutched him.

"Be just my luck to let out for one sprint, get jugged or wrecked, and have Mary come back to-morrow," he warned himself finally and turned back toward home.

It was past midnight when he neared the garage again; nevertheless he turned out of his course to perform a rite that had been a regular proceeding every evening since Mary went away. In the edge of the park opposite the end of her street lay a bend in the road from which were visible the windows of Mary's home. The path beside this road had been one of his favorite walks with her.

To-night, as on other nights when he had taken Lucifer out, he took several turns about the wide circle of the road, slowing down at the bend next the avenue each time, hoping that he might see a light in her window.

As he completed the third turn and rolled into a patch of open road brightly lit by an arc lamp, he saw Officer Doane, with whom he had recently had a sharp tilt, standing beside the way eying him dourly. Pen felt certain that his enemy had recognized him. The park was empty at this hour. His was the only car he had seen on the roads.

It made him feel uncomfortably conspicuous.

So he jogged Lucifer up a notch or two and turned out of the park toward the garage. Old Barney couldn't conceal his expression of relief at seeing this erratic patron safe back.

"You look as though you thought I was keeping pretty late hours again, Barney," Pen remarked.

"Sure, now, sir, it's no affair of mine what hours ye keep."

"Well, I'd appreciate it if you don't mention around here what time I got in to-night," Pen added as a sudden afterthought, it having occurred to him that exaggerated gossip around the garage might get to Mr. Harwood's ears.

"Beg yer pardon, Mr. Wimbleton, but have ye ever minded me lettin' me tongue gallop off an' make a ninny of me?"

"Oh, no, Barney—of course not! No offense intended. I know I can trust you."

"Thank ye, sir."

A half hour later, just as Pen was preparing for bed, there came a ring at the door of his bachelor suite. He had told his man not to wait up for him. So he went to the door himself, wondering who could have come unannounced and at this hour.

There, to his amazement, stood a police officer.

"Mr. Penfield Wimbleton?" asked the caller, consulting a paper.

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

"I'll have to ask ye to go to the station with me. You're under arrest for killing a man in the park."

For a full minute Pen stood staring at his caller, unable to speak. This was some ghastly joke, of course! Or a silly mistake.

"You got in the wrong aisle, old man," he said at last. "I haven't been killing anybody this evening."

"Can it, kid. You admit ye're Penfield Wimbleton, don't ye? That lets me out. We got ye cinched, car number an' all, an' we're hep to yer record."

"But—but—whom am I supposed to have killed, and where?"

"I'm here to get ye—not to answer questions. Come along now."

Being arrested was no novelty to Pen Wimbleton. But it had hitherto been a comparatively dignified affair, the reception of a ticket, a voluntary appearance in court, a lecture from the magistrate, and payment of a fine.

Now Pen found himself led ignominiously through the street by his arm, on which the officer kept a tight clutch.

"One phony move an' I'll put the handcuffs on ye," had been the ultimatum as they stepped into the elevator of his apartment house before the lift man's amazed eyes.

II.

THE first person Pen noticed when he was led before the desk at the police station was George Varnum, his clothing begrimed and torn, his face scratched and bleeding, and one eye blacked and swollen shut. Varnum was shaking with nervous agitation. He gave Pen one fleeting glance with his usable eye and then refused to look squarely at him again.

Now Pen noted that the officer standing beside Varnum was Doane, his enemy of the park police.

A conspiracy! This was the thought that passed through his head. He had heard of police railroading to prison those who defied them. But where did little Varnum come in? He had certainly been hit by somebody. But at least he was alive. That part about the killing was a mistake after all.

Pen breathed more freely. But was George Varnum going to swear that Pen had put him in this condition? Pen and he were rivals for the hand of Mary Harwood, to be sure, and he was something of a little rat under the surface, as Barney had said, but he could hardly credit him with venom enough for this, or courage to carry it through.

Almost automatically he answered the questions of the lieutenant at the desk as that officer filled in the blotter. He was still in a daze, his bewildered mind trying to untangle the puzzle. Then he found himself suddenly listening acutely.

"Now, sir, if you'll tell your story," said the lieutenant to Varnum.

"I'd been making some calls during the evening, and was walking home up the avenue when I met my friend, Frank Long, and we strolled along together, taking a turn through the park. We sat down on a bench and talked for a while. Then we started for home and were just crossing the roadway when I heard a car coming around the bend. It was going so fast that before we could jump back it hit us. The fender hit me and knocked me down. Long was struck squarely. I jumped up and shouted. This officer came running up and blew his whistle, but the car speeded up and disappeared. Then we looked at Long and found he was dead.

Pen's heart seemed to stop beating for a full minute.

Frank Long dead! And he accused of killing him—the one man in the world he would be most likely to want to kill if it were possible for him to want to kill anybody!

But how absurd! Of course it was some other car that did the killing. He started forward impulsively to make an indignant denial, but the lieutenant was speaking again.

"You say you identified the car?"

"Yes," Varnum affirmed. "I know that car well. And I recognized Wimbleton as he came toward us. He never slowed down or turned out an inch. It was a bright spot near a lamp. He certainly must have seen us."

Again Pen started to speak.

"And you, officer?" the lieutenant interposed. This to Doane.

"I'd just spotted this fellow an' his car when I heard the yell. I got his number. Anyhow, I know him without. I've seen him speedin' in the park before. Him an' me had a bit of a set-to a while back. He put on more gas when he see me an' never stopped for me whistle."

"It's a lie — a damnable lie!" Pen shouted.

The rough hand of his captor seized his arm.

"Cut it out. That 'll do ye no good."

"Couldn't have been some other car did it, you think, officer?" went on the imperturbable lieutenant.

"There was no other went that way in an hour," Doane asserted positively.

Baffled at every point, but still convinced that this ghastly plot could be easily overturned, Pen became suddenly calm.

"I demand the right to call my lawyer," he insisted.

"It's yer right," the lieutenant agreed, and a half hour later Amos Manley, who had looked after the Wimbletons' legal business for two generations, hurried into the station as nearly in a state of perturbation as that dignified gentleman could get. After a talk with the lieutenant he was allowed a few minutes alone with his client.

"Tell me what happened, Pen," was his greeting.

"Happened? Nothing happened as far as I'm concerned. I know I didn't hit anybody. I didn't see a soul in the park except this lying officer who backs up Varnum's statement. I didn't drive beyond the speed limits once the whole evening."

"Now, look here, Pen. You know I've got you out of a lot of scrapes, and I've always told you a man gets off lightest when he has an accident, if he confesses frankly. If you hit this man, say so, and we'll prove it was his fault."

"Look here! I didn't hit him. Do you think I'm lying?"

"No, no—of course not. We'll just have to assume this is a conspiracy by the police and that they've got this little fool of a Varnum so scared he thinks he saw what they tell him he saw. We'll straighten it out in magistrate's court in the morning. Don't worry. Sorry you've got to stay here to-night, but there's no bail allowed. They're making this a manslaughter case. You don't mind my asking a few personal questions, do you?

"The park officer, Doane, says you and Long had a fight in the park a while ago, and he separated you. He says you threatened then to get Long some day. You apparently got the officer pretty sore. He says you defied him. He seems to believe you ran Long down on purpose.

"Now, what was it about? I understand you and Long and Varnum have all been attentive to Thomas Harwood's daughter. Had that anything to do with it? This is

all coming out in court, so you'd better be frank with me."

"Yes," Pen admitted reluctantly. "I've had trouble with Frank Long ever since the Princeton-Yale football game at Princeton last fall. That's when I began going with Mary Harwood. She went out with Long in his car. I took George Varnum with me. Long got drunk, and Mary refused to ride back with him. So I brought her back, and Long had it in for me."

Pen recalled bitterly that Mary had been almost as reluctant to ride with him sober as with Long drunk, on account of Pen's reputation as a reckless driver. He had only got her promise to ride with him a second time on condition that he go for a month without an accident or an arrest. And now this, just when he was beginning to have hope of winning her for life!

"The fight in the park," he admitted to the lawyer, "was directly over Mary. She and Long and I were out walking together. Long was a little drunk again and was offensive to Mary. I reproved him, and he hit me. Mary made us leave her and go in opposite directions, and made us promise not to fight. But Long cut across the lawn after she'd gone, and attacked me. When Doane separated us, Long said I'd attacked him. Doane had caught me speeding in the park once or twice, and had it in for me, anyhow, so he believed Long and threatened to arrest me. I dared him to, and he gave up the idea, but he was pretty sore. I admit I told Long I'd get him yet."

"That's bad," mourned the lawyer solemnly. "But cheer up. I'm sure we can fix it up in the morning."

Pen's thoughts the rest of that night in his cell were more of what the effect of this would be on Mary than of his danger of prison.

When, a month ago, Mary had departed with her father for unknown regions, Mr. Harwood had made her promise not to tell any of her admirers their destination, nor to write to them during her absence.

"I think father 'll get over his grouch against you if you keep up the good record you've been making lately for another six months or so," she had conceded. What her own sentiments were she had refused to reveal. Pen had played poker with experts, but he had never seen a face more completely illegible than was Mary's when she said good-by.

And now, thought Pen in his lonely cell, Mary might be back any day and find him in this mess. Would she believe him, he wondered? Did she care?

"I hope to the Lord old Manley can quash it in the morning as easy as he thinks he can!" he groaned. "Maybe it 'll blow over before she gets back."

But the case against Pen Wimbleton was not quashed in the morning. Amos Manley tried in vain to shake the testimony of his two accusers. Other witnesses established the fact of bad blood between Pen and the dead man. The magistrate was relentless in his determination to push this old offender to the limit.

The upshot was that Pen was held for the grand jury, indicted the following month, and settled in jail to wait indefinitely for his turn on the crowded calendar.

And all this time he had heard nothing from Mary Harwood. He wondered if the papers with the sensational account of his case had reached her and if she believed their misleading statements. All these thoughts were despairing ones. For he began to fear now that the false web of evidence was closing around him relentlessly.

Old Barney, sitting with his friend Tim in the Primo Garage, the night after the indictment, was equally hopeless. He had been called as a minor witness to testify as to the time of Pen's departure and return on the night of the killing.

"All the little they'd let me tell was no matter at all," he declared. "They wouldn't let me give me real evidence, and they made me admit he'd asked me not to mention when he came in that night."

"Ye mean ye had other evidence?"

"Sure! Couldn't I prove the boy hadn't been speedin' at all that evenin' when I'd been keepin' track of his speedometer right along for that purpose? Didn't I know how long he'd been out and how far he'd gone? 'Tis simple arithmetic! Besides, his car 'd just been washed an' there

wasn't the dust on it speedin' would show. His radiator wasn't hot. An' they was no mark of his bumpin' anythin'. But thin all that proves nothin'. Accordin' to all the evidence they're usin', he's guilty. Yet I know he ain't."

"How do ye know?"

"The evidence o' the boy himself. He ain't yeller."

There was ruminating silence for a time. Suddenly Barney sat up straight and both stubbed feet slapped the floor.

"I wonder now! Couldn't I use a bit of evidence out o' court? I believe I'll try it."

A few moments he sat in thought, then rose and went into a phone booth, where he made two calls. The first was on George Varnum, whom he located with some difficulty.

After explaining who he was he gave him these cryptic directions:

"I and a friend o' mine have some information for ye about the Wimbleton case that ye'll want badly to get. It would make ye a lot of trouble if anybody else got it. Ye'll not be wantin' even yer lawyer to hear it. So ye better come alone. If ye don't come we'll just figger ye don't mind our reportin' it to the district attorney."

Then he called up his old friend Mike Regan, of the police force, whom he fortunately found off duty.

"Mike," he said, "come over to the Primo at ten-thirty, an' I may be able to cover ye with glory in the Wimbleton case. Ask me no questions. Ye'll know what to do if my hunch is right."

Then returning to Tim, he gave him his orders.

"If I'm right in me evidence, young Mr. Varnum 'll be in here alone about eleven. All ye do is sit tight an' agree to anything I say. I'm goin' to do a bit of lyin' about ye, Tim, boy. 'Twill do no harm. If we are wrong, we'll call it a joke."

Promptly on time was Officer Regan, and still mystified, he was secreted behind the safe in the office. As promptly at eleven George Varnum arrived alone. He was hesitant and plainly distrustful.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked, standing just inside the door as if prepared for flight. "Don't try any monkey business, because I have friends just outside to protect me."

Opposite him, Barney and Tim, sitting against the wall in deadly calm, eyed him coldly for a long moment without speaking. In the interval the caller visibly wilted. Finally, Barney spoke in a soft, almost wheedling voice.

"Me friend, Tim Moran, here, has brought me a bit of information that's just between us two yet," he lied glibly. "He'd been workin' late the night your friend Long was killed, and it bein' a warm evenin', he took a stroll across the park toward his home over by the river in Seventy-Sixth Street. Thinkin' it would be pretty hot in his flat fer sleepin', he dropped down behind a bush in the cool grass and took a bit of a nap. He was waked up by voices. What he heard an' saw in the next half hour kept him listenin' with both ears and lookin' with both eyes.

"He heard and saw plain. But Tim, here, ain't strong with the police, an' had his reason for not spillin' what he heard and seen. But to-night he gets confidential and tells me. I'm tellin' him he should tell the police. He thinks mebbe, though, ye might make it worth his while not to tell 'em."

Barney paused and bored his victim's face with his keen blue eyes. For a moment Varnum made an effort to retain his self-control, then began to tremble visibly and sank into a chair, staring at his inquisitor in horror.

A sudden change came over the old garage man. He leaped to his feet and seemed to gain whole inches in stature as he towered over the now thoroughly frightened youth.

"You yeller, murderin' little skunk!" he roared. "Would ye be sendin' an innocent man to prison? Can ye give me any reason why I shouldn't turn ye over to the police now?"

Varnum leaped to his feet in a frenzy of panic and tried to hurl himself out of the door, but Barney was too quick for him. With a leap he reached the door first and threw the other man back in his chair.

Then Varnum broke down completely and talked in a torrent.

"I didn't mean to do it. He attacked me. I can prove it was self-defense. He was drunk, and when he saw Wimbleton drive by the first time he said he was going to waylay him and do him up. Then he turned on me and said he was going to kill me because I was a witness. We fought, and he had nearly choked me senseless when I happened to whirl just right and threw him against the bench. His head must have hit the iron leg. Just then Wimbleton drove by again, and I heard the officer coming. I didn't stop to think. I just threw his body in the road back of Wimbleton's car and yelled for the police. Don't tell the police. I'll pay you anything you want."

"Officer Regan, do your duty," said Barney grimly; and the waiting Regan emerged from behind the safe.

III.

"How did ye guess it?" asked Tim admiringly, after they had gone.

"I didn't," said Barney. "I had evidence the boy here had done some dirty trick, but I'd no idea what. I just bluffed him into spillin' the beans."

"What evidence had ye?"

"The evidence of the boy himself. He's yeller."

"But I didn't see it like ye said. They'll ask me in court."

"Let 'em. 'Tis a trick the police use themselves. We can swear to the boy's confession."

The next morning Pen Wimbleton was back in his own apartment, free and exonerated; but he was not happy. A friend who had called at the jail the morning before told him that Mary Harwood and her father had just returned to town. Yet, that last day in jail had passed, and he had heard nothing from Mary. Now he felt it was too late. He would never know whether she had believed in him or cared for him before he had been proved innocent.

While he was still ruminating bitterly his morning mail was delivered. In the midst of a miscellaneous assortment of letters was an envelope bearing the corner card of the Primo Garage. He came near not opening it, thinking it a bill, but the crabbed, nearly illegible handwriting in which it was addressed aroused a faint curiosity. In the same crabbed hand the letter read as follows:

DEAR MR. WIMBLETON:

Pardon me bein' so bold as to write you. I'm wantin' no thanks fer helpin' you out. You'd do the same fer me. I'm just writin' to give you one more bit of evidence I'm thinkin' you may need, if you'll pardon me bein' so bold.

Miss Mary Harwood come into the garage yesterday with her father when he came to get their car out, they havin' just come back to town. When I was talkin' to Mr. Harwood I minded the young lady, thinkin' nobody saw her, standin' in front of your car and pattin' that little brass divil you have on the hood, and out of the corner of me eye I saw there was tears in her eyes when she did it.

Very respectfully yours,
BERNARD DOHERTY.

Ten minutes later Pen Wimbleton was on his way to the home of Mary Harwood. He didn't stop to get Lucifer this time. He was in too much of a hurry.

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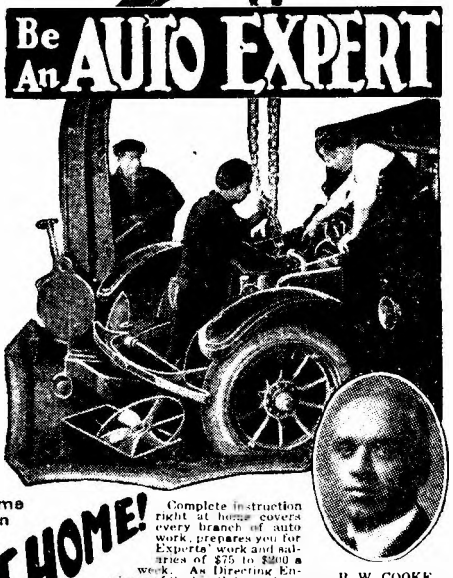

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