ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Gentleman Roger's Girl

by Hulbert Footner

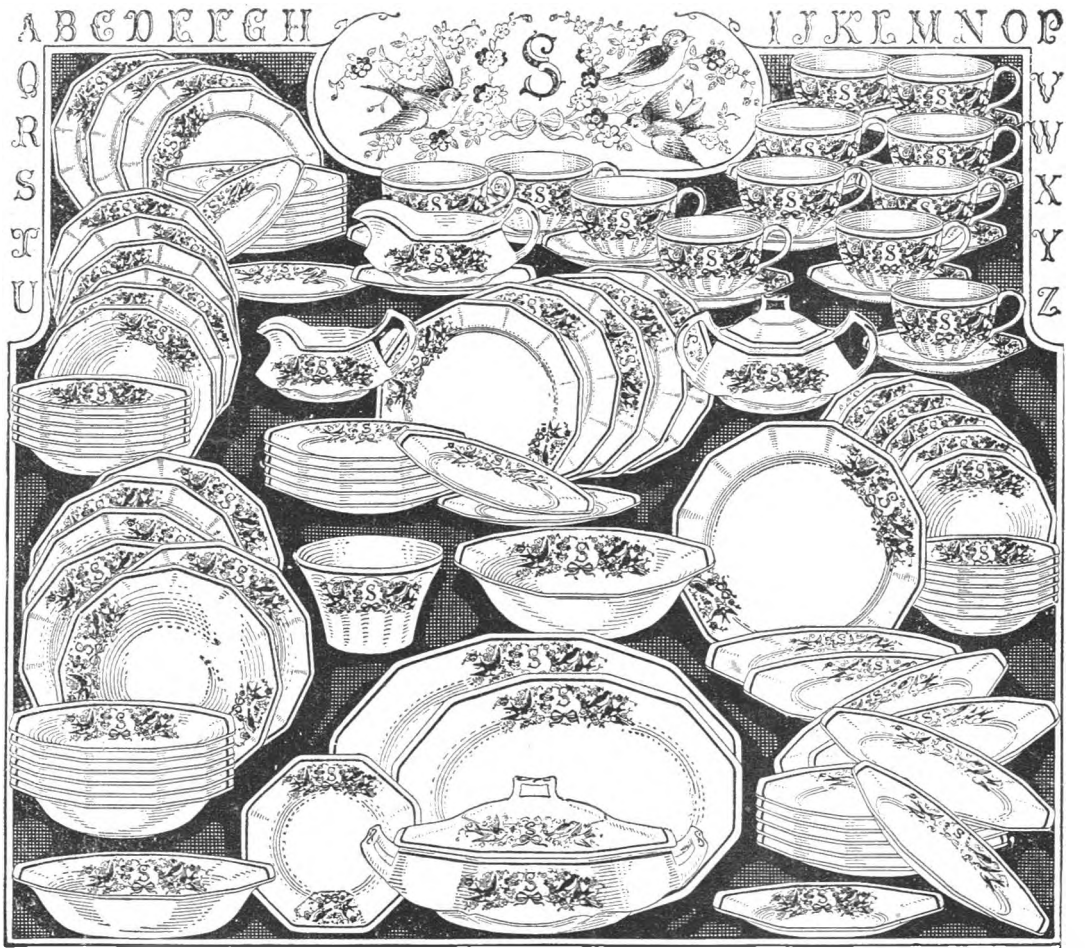
Author of "The Owl Taxi"

Oh, Promise Me

by Fred Jackson

A Smashing Novelette

10¢ PER COPY — MARCH 31 — BY THE YEAR $4.00



110-Piece Dinner Set

Superb Bluebird Monogram Design

$1.00 Down

An amazing value. A dinner set in the exquisite Bluebird design, combined with your own monogram; all blending perfectly with pink, green and lavender floral pattern. Lovely blue border on each piece. Popular Colonial shape. ***Each piece is fired in the glaze and guaranteed not to check or craze.*** That splendid Old English finish is applied to the clay before firing and gives that indestructible, snow-white finish.

Your Initial on Every Piece FREE

Yes, your choice of any initial in the distinctive shaded Puritan letter on every one of the 110 pieces—and no extra charge! This wonderful dinner set is yours for only $1.00 down and $2.70 a month; $27.90 in all.

30 Days' Trial—Easy Payments

Try this set in your home 30 days. Our guarantee protects you. If not satisfied, return it at our expense and we'll refund your $1.00 plus any freight or express you paid. If satisfied, pay balance in small monthly payments. We trust honest people anywhere in U. S. No discount for cash; nothing extra for credit. No C. O. D. Open an account with us.

Complete Service for 12 People

This splendid set consists of

12 dinner plates, 9 inches
12 breakfast plates, 7 inches
12 coupe soups, 7 1-2 in.
12 fruit saucers, 5 1-4 in.
12 oatmeal dishes, 6 inches
1 oval open vegetable dish, 8 1-2 inches
1 round vegetable dish, 8 3-4 inches
1 sugar bowl and cover (2 pieces)
1 butter dish, 7 1-2 inches
12 cups
12 saucers
12 bread and butter plates, 6 in.
1 platter, 11 1-2 in.
1 platter, 13 1-4 in.
1 covered vegetable dish (2 pieces)
1 gravy boat
1 gravy boat stand
1 bowl, 1 pint
1 cream pitcher
1 pickle dish

This set is one that will add tone and beauty to any dining room. With ordinary care it will last a lifetime. Weight packed, about 100 pounds.

Order by No. G6702WA. Send $1 with order. $2.70 monthly. Price of 110 pieces, $27.90 No C. O. D. No discount for cash

Cut Price

Rock-bottom prices now. Lowest since before the war. So send the coupon at once with only $1.00 and we will ship you this 110-Piece Bluebird Monogram Dinner Set on thirty days' trial. Money refunded if not satisfied

Free Bargain Catalog Shows thousands of bargains in furniture, jewelry, carpets, rugs, curtains, silverware, stoves, talking machines, porch and lawn furniture, women's, men's and children's clothing

Straus & Schram, Dept. 8273 W. 35th St., Chicago

Enclosed find $1. Ship special advertised 110-piece Bluebird Monogram Dinner Set, No. G6702WA. I am to have 30 days free trial. If I keep the set I will pay $2.70 monthly, $27.90 in all. If not satisfied I am to return the set within 30 days and you're to refund my money and any express charges I paid.

State Initial Desired. (*One Letter Only*).....

Name.....

St., R. F. D. or Box No......

Shipping Point.....

Post Office..... *State*.....

If you want ONLY our free catalog of home furnishings, mark X here ☐

STRAUS & SCHRAM Dept. 8273 Chicago - Illinois

$10,000 or DEATH

Millionaire Blair had laughed at the first threat of the blackmailer. And the next night his lumber yard burned to the ground. The mysterious blackmailer was plainly in earnest. His family was desperate, but Blair refused to give in. A $5,000 reward brought a score of detectives—but not a clew. Then came Wilson, the Finger Print Expert. He examined the death letter. The others had seen only the sinister skull and cross bones. But Wilson saw something else! A few moments in his laboratory. A few more among the files of his Bureau, and he said to the chief, "Pick up Ivan Markaroff. He's your man. Then send the reward to my office." How did he do it? Easy for the finger print expert. He is the leader, the cream of detectives. Almost daily, the papers tell of his marvelous exploits

Why don't You be a Finger Print Expert?

More Trained Men Needed

The demand for trained men by government, states, cities, detective agencies, corporations and private bureaus is becoming greater every day. Here is a real opportunity for YOU. Can you imagine a more fascinating line of work than this? Often life and death depend upon finger print evidence—and big rewards go to the expert. Many experts can earn regularly from $3,000 to $10,000 per year.

Learn at Home in Spare Time

And now you can learn the secrets of this science at home in your spare time. Any man with common school education and average ability can become a Finger Print Detective in surprisingly short time.

Free Course in Secret Service

For a limited time we are making a special offer of a ***Professional Finger Print Outfit, absolutely Free,*** and a ***Free Course in Secret Service Intelligence.*** Mastery of these two kindred professions will open a brilliant career for you.

Write quickly for fully illustrated free book on Finger Prints which explains this wonderful training in detail. Don't wait until this offer has expired—mail the coupon now. You may never see this announcement again! You assume no obligation—you have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Write at once—address

University of Applied Science
1920 Sunnyside Ave, Dept. 14-53 Chicago Ill.

UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Avenue Dept. 14-53, Chicago, Illinois

Gentlemen:—Without any obligation whatever, send me your new fully illustrated FREE Book on Finger Prints and your offer of a FREE course in Secret Service Intelligence and the Free Professional Finger Print Outfit.

Name.....

Address.....

Present Occupation.....*Age*.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CL. CONTENTS FOR MARCH 31, 1923 NUMBER 3

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

MISCELLANEOUS AND POETRY

The strange happenings that occurred when a boy, in whom man and animal contended for supremacy, encountered a band of apes, more than beasts, yet less than savages, on an island in the West Indies far from the usual haunts of simians are described in

THE APES OF DEVILS ISLAND

BY JOHN CUNNINGHAM

A FOUR-PART SERIAL WHICH STARTS NEXT WEEK.

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

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

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

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

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

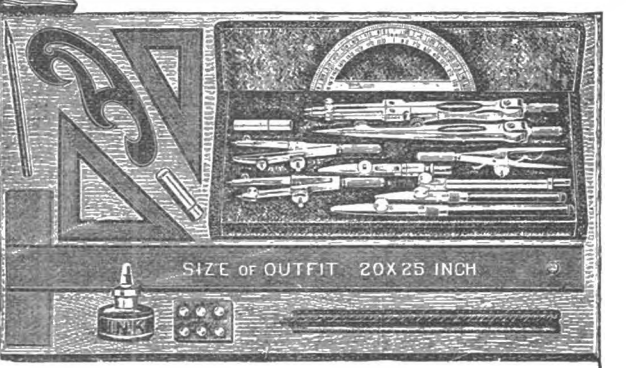
A2

Drawing Table Free!

Yes, this is exactly what I am doing. I am giving this drafting table free to you when you enroll as my student. I do this because I want you to have the right kind of Draftsman's Working Outfit — because I want to help ambitious men and boys get ahead. This is the kind you will use when you have completed my course and have become a regular draftsman.

Complete Drawing Outfit FREE

Besides the drafting table I also furnish free the $25.00 set of regular working instruments shown here. You get both table and instruments free if you enroll at once. I will do everything possible to help you get ahead.



Also FREE $90 Drafting Course

To my students enrolling now I give an opportunity of getting a $90 drafting course absolutely without cost to them. This means you need not pay me for my personal instructions or for the complete working outfit.

Salaries up to
$250 and $300 a Month

Positions paying up to $250 and $300 a month which ought to be filled by skilled draftsmen are vacant everywhere. There are in every part of the country ambitious men, who with practical training and personal assistance will be qualified to fill the positions. I can now take and train a limited number of students guarantee to train them by mail UNTIL placed in a permanent position at a salary up to $250 and $300 a month.

Here is the Rule you get FREE

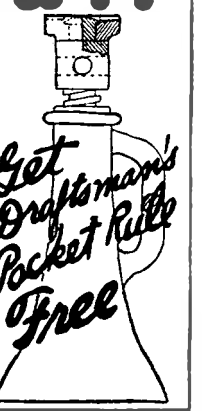
To each young man stating his age when sending a sketch as shown in box at right, I am going to mail FREE AND PREPAID the Draftsman's Ivorine Pocket Rule shown here.

Extra!!

Copy this Sketch and Get Ivorine Pocket Rule

To each young man of 16 years or older sending a sketch I will mail free prepaid the Draftsman's Ivorine Pocket Rule shown here. With it I will send you a 6 x 9 book on "Successful Draftsmanship."

There are no conditions requiring you to buy anything. You are under no obligations in sending in your sketch.



Mail Coupon

Mail coupon at once for full information how you can get the table and working instruments Free, also how you can get the $90 drafting course Free. Even if you don't send in a copy of the sketch send for this information.

Chief Draftsman, Engineers' Equipment Co.
1951 Lawrence Ave., Div. 94-53 Chicago, Ill.

Chief Draftsman, Engineers' Equipment Co.
1951 Lawrence Ave., Div. 94-53, Chicago, Ill.

Without any obligation to me please mail your book "Successful Draftsmanship" and full particulars of your liberal "Personal Direction" offer to a few students. Also full information as to how I can get a $90 Drafting Course Free.

Name .....

Address .....

..... *Age*.....

Classified Advertising

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

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $4.00 Less 2% cash discount
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50	

Minimum space four lines.

May 5th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close April 7th

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

$1.95 FOR MADE-TO-ORDER PANTS—Special 30-day offer to prove our marvelous values in made-to-measure tailoring. **Agents Wanted.** Earn $30 to $35 **Extra Every Week,** taking orders for our high-class, made-to-measure clothes. No experience necessary. Write for samples **today.** THE PROGRESS TAILORING CO., Dept. Q-104, Chicago.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell **Mendets,** a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

RUMMAGE SALES MAKE $50.00 DAILY. We start you. Representatives wanted everywhere. Permanent business. Dept. 26, "WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTORS." 609 Division St., Chicago.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—Toilet articles, perfumes and specialties. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

$50,000 PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN MADE TAKING ORDERS. Beginners can make $100.00 weekly with my canvassing spiel, experienced men make more. Free circular "Profits in Portraits" explains. Samples free. PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN. Dept. A. 673 Madison, Chicago.

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

TAILORING AGENTS: Our $29.50 All Wool tailored to order suits and overcoats are $20 cheaper than store prices. Commissions paid in advance. Protected territory. Beautiful assortment. 849 swatches free. J. B. SIMPSON, Dept. 574, 831 Adams St., Chicago.

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

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

27,000 RECORDS GUARANTEED WITH ONE EVERPLAY PHONOGRAPH NEEDLE; new, different, cannot injure records; $10.00 daily easy. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Desk 312, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

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

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

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

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

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

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

MAKE MONEY WRITING SHORT STORIES IN DEMAND. Your manuscripts revised, edited, typed and sold on commission, by Authors' Agent. Write for terms. Twenty years experience. **F. C. HILL, Suite AA, 150 Nassau St., New York.**

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TREMENDOUS OPPORTUNITY for ambitious agents. The indispensable, rapid selling Speedy Dish Washer. Price $3.50. No competition. No investment. Easy selling plan. Convenient sample. Commission daily. Make application today; exclusive territory. Shepperd-Luth Mfg. Co., 16-C Hudson St., New York.

WE PAY $200 monthly salary, furnish rig and expenses to introduce our guaranteed poultry and stock powders. BIGLER COMPANY, X-596, Springfield, Illinois.

Big Money, Quick Sales, Fine Profits and steady demand selling Clows-Knit guaranteed hosiery direct from mill to wearers. All styles for men, women, children. Many making $3000 year. George Clows Co., Desk 42, Philadelphia.

Agents $60—$200 a week FREE SAMPLES Gold Sign Letters for Store Fronts and Office Windows. Anyone can put them on. Big demand everywhere. Liberal offer to general agents. METALLIC LETTER CO., 427 North Clark St., Chicago.

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

AGENTS—C. T. A. prices reduced again. Suits $18.00, made to order, any size or style. Orders easy to get. Big profits. Sample outfit free. Write Chicago Tailors Ass'n, World's largest tailors, Dept. 369, Station C, Chicago.

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

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

ART

REAL MEXICAN BEAUTIES: Send dollar bill for sample assortment. Azteca Art Studios, Apartado 870, Dept. C, Tampico, Mexico.

DRUG STORE GOODS

HALF PRICE on All Kinds of A-1 Medicines, Novelties, etc. Request ACEY Bargain Lists. Agents & Storekeepers DOUBLE Money by simply showing Lists. (You can.) Genuine Aspirin tablets 5c doz.; 100 32c; 500 $1. $2 Hot Water Bottle or Fountain Syringe, $1 (Both $1.80). $3 Combination $1.40. Nipples 45c doz. Razor Blades 45c doz. $5 Gillette Razor outfit 95 blades $1. A. C. SMITH, Wh. Mfg. Druggist—28th yr., Box 1374-A, Detroit, Mich. (And Windsor, Ont.)

MISCELLANEOUS

YOU read these little advertisements. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read **your** message that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe **your own services?** Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write **to-day** to the Classified Manager, **The Argosy Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.**

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

On Your Wedding Night
-What if this Happened?

THE guests were departing; the banquet board was almost deserted. Soon the wedding festivities would be over, and at last they would be—alone.

Then Destiny intervened. A messenger arrived—delivered a letter, in a woman's handwriting, to the bridegroom. As he read the letter, his face blanched; his hands trembled; his features were suddenly drawn with fear, anxiety, pain.

Then he did a strange thing. He made stumbling excuses to his bride; professed to be called away on a matter of business; demanded his hat and coat—and disappeared into the night.

Where did he go—and why? What was that mysterious message, in a woman's handwriting, that had power to drag him from the side of his beloved on his wedding night? Did his bride ever learn the truth about his mysterious mission? What was the woman to him—she who had written the letter? Was his singular conduct ever explained?

There is but one way you will ever know: read "The Wedding Gift," a dramatic tale of misguided passion, youthful love and folly, by that master of startling prose narrative—

Guy de Maupassant

Author of "The Necklace," "A Piece of String," "The Coward," "Mlle. Fifi," and more than 350 other piquant stories of Parisian High Life, the Norman Peasantry, Adventure, Mystery, Love.

A Daring Writer

No writer has dared approach de Maupassant's fearless handling of delicate situations that in certain circles would be taboo. He stripped society of its silly veneer, its pretty conventions, and literally told the naked truth.

Did he wish to picture the wages of sin: did he wish to expose the frailties of men and women who, under the scarlet cloak of love, committed offenses against the laws of morality, he drew the situation boldly; he bared the innermost thoughts and desires of his characters; he uncovered their weaknesses and emotions with ruthless daring and skill.

Read "The Son," a startling tale of passion, human weakness and sin. Read "Lasting Love," wherein a beautiful girl-vagabond loved an aristocrat—who already had a wife. And these are but two of the hundreds of stories which de Maupassant wrote in a similar vein. Not to know de Maupassant is to miss a rare and fascinating literary feast. He grips like a vise. He stirs the blood. He startles, thrills, fascinates, excites, as no other writer has done before or since.

New Stories Never Before Published

It has been known for years that there were a number of stories, intimate episodes from life, which the author wrote mainly for his restricted circle of friends. These stories, 14 in all, have been found and are included in this edition. This is, therefore, the first opportunity to secure the spiciest of de Maupassant's tales, translated word for word from the original French.

And if you act promptly you can now buy these, and all the other short stories de Maupassant ever wrote, in ten beautiful volumes at the astonishingly low price, when bought in the complete set, of only 49c a volume. Think of it! A whole library—359 captivating tales—for a song.

Full Size—Beautifully Bound

These books are not small—they are full library size—7¼ inches high by 5 inches wide and 1 inch thick; are printed in big clear type on excellent paper; and beautifully bound in maroon cloth, stamped in gold.

SEND NO MONEY!

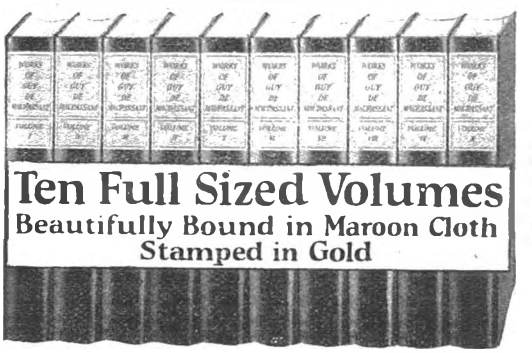
We want you to see these books. Simply mail the coupon and the 10 volumes will be forwarded at once. Deposit with the postman $1 (you pay no postage) when they arrive. Read the books 5 days. If satisfied, remit the balance of only $3.90. Otherwise return them promptly, and your dollar will be refunded.

But remember, the edition at this absurdly low price is limited. So mail the coupon now—RIGHT AWAY. Thompson-Barlow Company, Dept. 163, 43 West 16th Street, New York City.

Now Only **49¢** *a Volume!*

Sold on the ordinary part-payment plan, this set of de Maupassant would command a price of at least $18.

By eliminating all long-time contracts, costly bookkeeping, and heavy collection expense, we can sell a limited number of these elegant sets at the extremely low price of only $4.90 for the entire 10 volumes, which, by the set, is only 49c apiece. By all means, grasp this big opportunity—now.



Ten Full Sized Volumes
Beautifully Bound in Maroon Cloth Stamped in Gold

THOMPSON-BARLOW COMPANY, Dept 163
43 West 16th Street, New York City.

Send me, postage prepaid, the 10 volume set of de Maupassant. On delivery, I will deposit with the postman $1, and in 5 days, I will either remit the balance of $3.90, or return the books, and you are to refund without question the $1 paid.

Name.....

Address.....

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

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

HELP WANTED—MALE

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

HELP WANTED—GENERAL

PATENT ATTORNEYS

SONG POEMS WANTED

WANTED TO BUY

A 5

These Are The Hours That Count

MOST of your time is mortgaged to work, meals and sleep. But the hours after supper are *yours*, and your whole future depends on how you spend them. You can fritter them away on profitless pleasure, or you can make those hours bring you position, money, power, *real success* in life.

Thousands of splendid, good-paying positions are waiting in every field of work for men *trained to fill them*. There's a big job waiting for *you*—in your present work or any line you choose. Get ready for it! You can do it without losing a minute from work, or a wink of sleep, without hurrying a single meal, and with plenty of time left for recreation. You can do it in one hour a day, right at home, through the International Correspondence Schools.

Yes—You Can Win Success in an Hour a Day

Hundreds of thousands have proved it. The designer of the Packard "Twin-Six," and hundreds of other Engineers, climbed to success through I. C. S. help. The builder of the great Equitable Building and hundreds of Architects and Contractors won their way to the top through I. C. S. spare-time study. Many of this country's foremost Advertising and Sales Managers prepared for their present positions in spare hours under I. C. S. instruction.

For 31 years, in offices, stores, shops, factories, mines, railroads—in every line of technical and commercial work—men have been winning promotion and increased salaries through the I. C. S.

No matter where you live, the I. C. S. will come to *you*. No matter what your handicaps or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply-written, wonderfully-illustrated I. C. S. textbooks make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 300 I. C. S. Courses will surely suit your needs.

Make Your Start Now!

When everything has been made easy for you—when one hour a day spent with the I. C. S., in the quiet of your own home, will bring you a bigger income, more comforts, more pleasures, all that success means—can you afford to let another single priceless hour of spare time go to waste?

This is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, put it up to us to prove how we can help you. Just mark and mail this coupon.

— — — — — — — TEAR OUT HERE — — — — — — —

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2184-C, Scranton, Penna.

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

BUSINESS TRAINING DEPARTMENT

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

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEPARTMENT

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

Name .....
Street 1-10-23
Address .....
City ..... State .....
Occupation .....

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

Sir Walter and the Spud

IN Ireland, they still point to the place where Sir Walter Raleigh planted the potatoes he brought with him from America. The venturous knight was much impressed with the edible qualities of potatoes and touted them highly to his friends. But in spite of his efforts to popularize the spud, it was half a century or more before it became an article of general consumption abroad.

Today, a new food product becomes nationally known almost overnight. Modern methods of distribution quickly place it in thousands of stores. *Advertising* tells the public about it. People try it, like it, and shortly it is in general use throughout the country.

By the same means American manufacturers—*through advertising*—are putting within your reach many of the boons of modern life. Without advertising, we would lack many of the comforts and conveniences that go to make life what it is in this year of grace.

Advertising keeps your information up-to-snuff on every article of human need, whether it be food, clothing, articles of household utility, necessities or luxuries.

Advertisers deserve your support. Patronize them.

Charging Station Service
at a small cost in your own home

All merchandise offered is standard, guaranteed and is of perfect workmanship

$ 1.00 Bakelite Socket	$ .45
$10.00 Wessco Phones	4.95
$20.00 Wessco Battery Charger	12.95
$ 6.50 Wessco Audio Transformer	3.25
Thordardson Transformer	2.75
$ 5.00 Acme Transformer	3.40
$24.00 A. Battery 100 Amp. 6V.	16.75
$19.00 A. Battery 80 Amp. 6V.	11.45
$14.50 A. Battery 60 Amp. 6V.	8.75
$ 8.00 Westinghouse Storage B. Battery	5.50
$18.00 Westinghouse Rectogon Charger	14.40
$ 5.50 43 Pl. Wessco Variable Condenser	2.10
$ 5.00 23 Pl. Wessco Variable Condenser	1.85
$ 1.00 Rheostat ..	.35

Mail orders must include postage

Highest Quality—Volume Production—Lowest Prices

The Wessco Battery Charger de Luxe is designed in accordance with the most up-to-date methods of radio engineering. Good radio results necessitate a brightly burning detector unit and amplifier.

With the Wessco charger it is no longer necessary to carry your battery to a charging station. Merely attach charger clips to battery, connect plug to any socket and turn on the power; in the morning your battery is fully charged at the small cost of $.05.

The Wessco Battery Charger is beautifully finished in black and is equipped with rubber pads which eliminate any possibility of ruining the most highly polished mahogany furniture.

The Wessco charger is supreme in its own field, mechanically constructed with the Wessco doubly durable vibrator which can be removed in less than a minute without the use of tools.

This charger is sold complete with ammeter, battery clips and fuse, ready to use. The most outstanding value of its kind.

Price $12.95 for a short time only.

TERMS: Money Orders with Orders — checks not accepted

W.E. Supply & Service Corp

18 Murray Street Dept. A. S. W.-4 New York, N. Y.

$25 A DAY Selling Shirts

Large shirt manufacturer wants agents to sell complete line of shirts, pajamas, and night shirts direct to wearer. Advertised brand—exclusive patterns—easy to sell. No experience or capital required. Entirely new proposition. *Write for free samples.*

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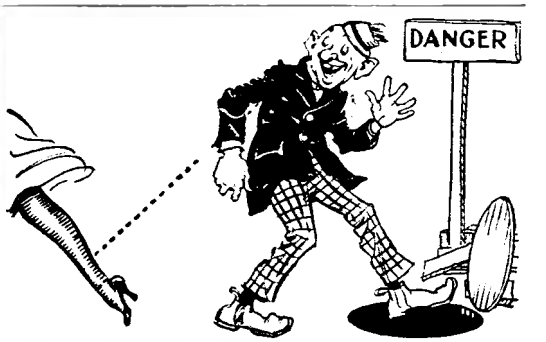

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A1c

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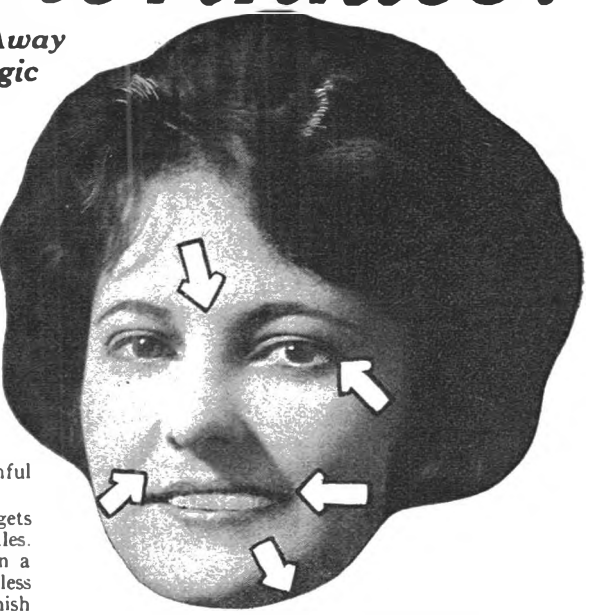
Marvelous Discovery Smooths Away Every Line—Almost Like Magic



A WONDERFUL new discovery now makes wrinkles entirely unnecessary!

No longer need women fear the little telltale marks of time which rob them of their attractiveness. No longer need they dread the tragic lines that foretell the end of youth. For Science has found a quick, easy and inexpensive way to smooth away every tired line, every laugh wrinkle, every deep frown mark, as if by magic wand.

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You will scarcely believe your eyes when you see what really wonderful results this new discovery—called Domino Wrinkle Cream—can bring. Not only your friends, but you, yourself, will be astonished at the wonderful new youthfulness your face and skin quickly acquire.

Domino Wrinkle Cream, besides banishing wrinkles, contains certain marvelous, costly ingredients which soften and whiten the skin, removing every trace of beauty-spoiling blemishes and molding the skin into a new smooth firm surface.

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Domino Wrinkle Cream will quickly and positively remove every trace of the lines that are spoiling your whole appearance. It is GUARANTEED to banish each and every wrinkle, no matter how deep seated it may be, and a $10,000 deposit in the Producers and Consumers Bank of Philadelphia backs up this guarantee. If within ten days you are not more than satisfied with the improvement it brings in your appearance, your money will be instantly refunded without question.

SEND NO MONEY

So that every woman may try this great new discovery we are making a very special introductory offer. You need not send a single penny. Simply mail the coupon and we will send you in a plain unmarked container a regular $5.00 package of Domino Wrinkle Cream. When the postman hands it to you simply pay him the **greatly reduced price of $1.95** (plus a few cents postage), in full payment.

It is only on this special introductory offer, which may never be made again, that we have reduced the price from $5.00 to $1.95. Thus you should act immediately.

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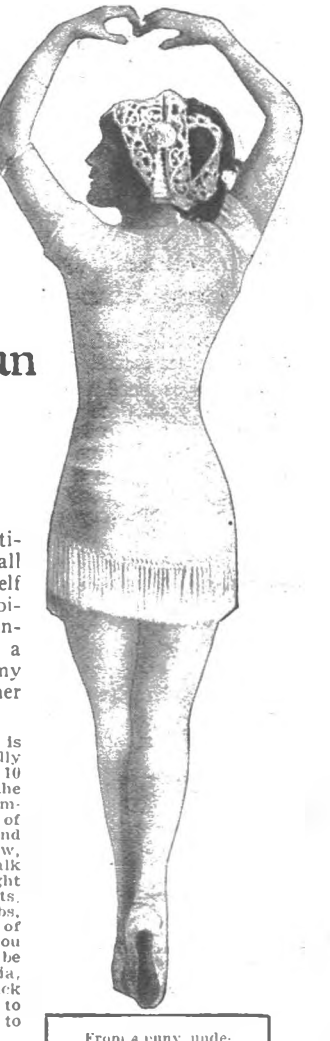

The crippled girl who became the world's most perfectly formed woman

ANNETTE KELLERMANN'S OWN STORY

MANY people will be surprised to learn that as a child I was so deformed as to be practically a cripple. The world knows me today as the most perfectly formed woman, and it is natural to assume that I have always been fortunate enough to possess a symmetrical body.

Quite the opposite is true, however. I was formerly so weak, so puny as to be an invalid. I was bow-legged to an extreme degree; I could neither stand nor walk without iron braces, which I wore constantly. For nearly two years I had to fight against consumption. No one ever dreamed that some day I would be known as the "World's most perfectly formed woman." No one ever thought I would become the champion woman swimmer of the world. No one ever dared to guess that I would be some day starred in great feature films, such as "A Daughter of the Gods," "Neptune's Daughter," etc. Yet that is exactly what has happened.

I relate these incidents of my early life and my present success simply to show that no woman need be discouraged with her figure, her health, or her complexion. The truth is, tens of thousands of tired, sickly, overweight or underweight women have already proved that a perfect figure and radiant health can be acquired in only 15 minutes a day, through the same methods as I myself used.

In fact, so remarkable are the results I have shown other women how to attain that I find far greater gratification in helping others than in all the praise and acclamation I myself have received. It became my ambition to extend any service to womankind. As a result I developed a method by which I could make my help available to any woman, in her own home.

So I now invite any woman who is interested to write to me. I will gladly tell you how I can prove to you in 10 days that you can learn to acquire the body beautiful, how to make your complexion rosy from the inside instead of from the outside, how to freshen and brighten and clarify a muddy, sallow, pimply face, how to stand and walk gracefully, how to add or remove weight at any part of the body, hips, busts, neck, arms, shoulders, chin, limbs, waist, abdomen; how to be full of health, strength and energy so that you can enjoy life to the utmost, how to be free from colds, headaches, neuralgia, nervousness, constipation, weak back and the many other ailments due to physical inefficiency: in short, how to acquire perfect womanhood.

Just mail me the coupon below or write a letter and I will send you at once and without charge my interesting, illustrated new book, "The Body Beautiful." I will also explain about my special Demonstration Offer. All this costs you nothing and may show you the way to become a stronger, healthier, more graceful and more beautiful woman, as it has already done for so many others. Just tear off the coupon now, and mail it, before my present supply of free books is exhausted. Address, Annette Kellermann, Dept. 73, 29 West 34th Street, New York City.

From a puny, undeveloped girl
ANNETTE KELLERMANN
transformed herself into the most perfectly formed woman in the world. Read how she is proving to thousands in ten days that her personal methods bring glorious health and an ideal figure to every woman

ANNETTE KELLERMANN, Dept. 73
29 West 34th Street, New York City.

Dear Miss Kellermann: Please send me, entirely free of cost, your new book, "The Body Beautiful." Also tell me how I can use the same methods that you used to acquire perfect health, radiant beauty and a perfect figure.

Name.....

Address.....

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

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

A12

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CI. SATURDAY, MARCH 31, 1923 NUMBER 3

THE FICTION OF HULBERT FOOTNER

Fifteen of his serial stories have appeared in the Munsey periodicals.—He has the double gift of being able to handle a big story of the heroic outdoors or to set a scene in the underworld of congested New York.—He rides the white waters and restless rivers in a birchbark canoe or tours through the darkened highways of the metropolis in a taxicab.

THIS is the age of youth in dramatic and romantic fiction. Men who have lived, who have traveled, who have experienced life get the best results with their pen. Experience is the first essential, given, of course, the power to express one's self. Among the numerous young authors upon whom the readers can always depend Hulbert Footner occupies a pedestal that is all his own. He never attempts to write a line about any aspect of life in which he has not had considerable experience. When he takes his readers into the mountains of Canada they feel that they are in the hands of a guide as well as an author. When he plunges into the prairies of the Middle West he knows whither he is drifting. When he is swallowed up in the shadows of the metropolis he is sure to emerge sooner or later with a thrilling story of the underworld. In eleven years he has written and published sixteen first-class novels. Thirteen of these stories appeared in the pages of this magazine, two in the *Munsey* and one in *Outing*. Our readers do not need an introduction to Footner.

TWO ON THE TRAIL,[1] the first novel, was written at Solomon's Island, Maryland, in the summer of 1910. It was directly the outcome of a summer spent in northern Alberta, and scene by scene reproduces the author's experiences—that is his visual experiences, not his emotional ones, for he went alone! Footner at that time was known for his short stories, but such was the success of the novel that he devoted himself to that form thereafter.

JACK CHANTY[1a] began to shape itself in 1911 while the author was making a more extensive trip through wildest British Columbia and Alberta, though the actual writing did not take place until he returned to pen and ink. It treats of what happened when Jack Chanty, the care-free young voyager, was unexpectedly engaged to guide a lieutenant governor and his suite through the remotest part of his domain. Freedom clashes violently with officialdom, and the governor casts off his guide with disastrous results to himself and his companions. Meanwhile Jack is pulled between the opposite charms of the governor's dazzling daughter and quiet Mary Cranston, of Spirit River. He rides north to Mary.

THE SEALED VALLEY[2] was written in 1913 when the experiences of the long journey had further crystallized and focused. Immured in the city, the author's nostalgia for the wide spaces gave his pictures of the north a moving power. Like the other northern stories this deals with actual places under different names, and in book form it contains a fanciful map of the land. Romance comes to the bored young doctor of a frontier settlement in the shape of Nahnya, an Indian girl, who carries him far into the wilderness to attend upon her mother. Nahnya's little family is concealed

within a "bowl of the mountains" where she pathetically dreams of bringing about the regeneration of the red race. But the little valley is rich in gold, and when that fact leaks out the earthly paradise is immediately threatened. Whereupon Nahnya sends her white lover from her, and seals up the little valley forever.

THE HUNTRESS[3] pursues the biggest game of all—man. Bela, a girl living among the Indians, learns that she is "'most white," and instantly sets off to get her a white husband. She has a wise mentor in Musq'oosis—little bear—whose advice, however, she generally ignores. Coming to a camp of travelers on the lake, she satisfies herself that the despised "cookie" is the best man among them, and carries him off. Cookie, being a lad of spirit, objects most strenuously.

THE FUR-BRINGERS[4] was written in 1914. While telling another romantic tale of the north, it has the further object of showing that monopoly is as great an evil in the wilderness as elsewhere. The Indians in the vicinity of Fort Enterprise revolt against the intolerable oppression of the "company" factor, and seek relief from a young "free trader." This story is painted on a large canvas. The fort is sacked, and the admirable method of the Mounted Police shown, in putting down the rising. The proud and passionate Colina Gaviller is in the end obliged to confess that her lover, the free trader, is right, even at the cost of siding against her father, the factor.

THE FUGITIVE SLEUTH[5] represents a complete departure from the preceding tales. In the streets of New York the author finds not only thrilling adventures, but excellent fun. This atmosphere of gayety is characteristic of all the city stories. A young artist caught in an inextricable web of circumstantial evidence, is obliged to find the actual murderer, while he is himself hotly pursued. In solving the mystery, he also wins the extraordinarily baffling girl who has tantalized him throughout. The headlong action of the tale ranges through out-of-the-way streets, to Coney Island, to Pimlico, to the Eastern Sho' and back to New York again.

THIEVES' WIT,[6] in the story of that name is pitted against the sober common sense of B. Enderby, a new and more human type of detective. The thieves are organized in a gang with unexpected ramifications into high places. The particular operation deals with the pearls of Irma Hamerton, the famous actress, and the unjust suspicions that are cast on her handsome leading man.

THE CHASE OF THE LINDA BELLE[7] was written in New York in 1917 as a relaxation from the cares of producing a play. It is the author's only sea piece so far. A little Maine spinster—not too old to be interesting—revolting against the tedium of life, invests her tiny patrimony in a small yacht, which she designs to hire out to summer visitors. In her very first sailing party she gets more adventure than she bargained for, and a wild chase ensues, that carries her down the coast, through the populous harbor of New York, and into the secluded coves of Chesapeake Bay.

THE SUBSTITUTE MILLIONAIRE[8] was written in 1918 at Charlesgift, the author's seventeenth century house in tidewater Maryland. It is another tale of the gorgeous hotels of Manhattan, and the quaint purlieus of that popular island. Jack Norman, kicked out of his job, inherits eighty million dollars within the hour. But a peck of trouble goes with the money, so Jack sets up one Bobo, a young actor, as the millionaire, while he privately tackles the trouble. A score of the town's picturesque aspects are glanced at: a fashionable saloon; a wig-maker's shop; a circle of anarchists, *et cetera*. Jack finds a foeman worthy of his steel in the redoubtable "Mr. B." and a helper in the adorable Kate.

THE OWL TAXI[9] in book form was Footner's most outstanding success. As one of our most prominent critics—Heywood Broun—said: "At last a story of adventure that is adventurous." It is perhaps not better than some of the others, but it had a very striking opening which stuck in people's memories. The lopsided, clanking old flivver from which it takes its name, is one of the most important characters; takes part in the principal scenes, and is in at the death. The action deals with the machinations of a gang of corrupt Central American politicians who attempt to transfer their activities to New York, and there is one of Footner's fascinating, obstinate, red-haired heroines, who is part Latin, but mostly American.

ON SWAN RIVER,[10] written in New York in 1919, is a return to the lovely summer land of the Northwest. It tells a moving tale of twin half-breed youths, one of whom

was white in spirit, the other pure red. They could not be told apart, and the appearance of one, then the other, created confusion, and the suspicion of magic in the minds of the simple people of the country; drove a white girl almost out of her wits, and even shook the firmness of Stonor the trooper, whose hard task it was to set things right. This story was published in book form under the title of "The Woman from Outside."

BLACKMAIL,[11] though it did not appear until 1920, was one of three stories written at Charlesgift in 1918, that dreadful year of grace when prices soared. The blackmail was levied by Corinna Playfair, imperious and red-haired, upon Simeon Deaves, the usurer. When Evan Wier finally caught her red-handed, a nice problem was created in his mind, because he wanted an honest woman for his wife, and he wanted none but Corinna. A terrific struggle of wills resulted. The story lately appeared in book form in England and America under the title of "The Deaves Affair," since "Blackmail" had already been used.

COUNTRY LOVE,[12] written at Charlesgift in the summer of 1919 registers another departure. Our author turns from the city to unsophisticated southern Maryland, his own country. The story is best summed up in the magazine's caption: "A stage girl's fight *against* fame and fortune." Eve Allison, the adored of New York, finds happiness with Page Brookins, a real country boy. But New York, in the person of Brutus Tawney, does not let her go without an exciting struggle. This story in book form is enjoying a success in England, but has not yet reached volume publication in America. It has been shown on the screen.

A SELF-MADE THIEF,[13] a story without a hero, written in Charleston, South Carolina, during a winter sojourn, 1919-1920, describes how a respectable young lawyer made a wager with his friends that he could hold up a bank, and get away with it. He lost his wager, and in his pique proceeded to hold up the pay car of the Elevated railway. This was attended with brilliant success, and he went on to undertake something bigger. So madly exciting was his new life that he took to cocaine to support him, and in the end cocaine took him. The end of this story is the biggest piece of writing that Footner ever attempted. There is an appealing girl who was among the thieves, but not of them. She rises as the wretched Heberden goes down.

A NEW GIRL IN TOWN[14] was written at Charlesgift during the summer of 1920, but not being satisfactory to the author, was kept by him for more than a year, and finally completely rewritten in the spring of 1922. It is a more closely knit tale; the action does not range all over the map in the light-hearted Footner fashion, but is exclusively concerned with the doings of a small, luxurious set "in the know." Experience and simplicity meet when Colonel Flowerdew, the high liver, and his lovely, unknown daughter come together. The colonel finds in innocence the most effective weapon of all wherewith to chasten evil.

THE MAN HUNT[15] is another yarn of remote tidewater Maryland, hitherto unexplored in a literary sense. It deals with the love, the faith and the courage of Pen Broome, last of her line, chatelaine of a huge, dilapidated mansion on the shores of Chesapeake Bay. Pen succors her lover; hides him; feeds him; works for him until she at last brings the crime of which he is accused to the door of the real culprit. It is just out in book form under the title of "Ramshackle House."

GENTLEMAN ROGER'S DAUGHTER was written in New Orleans during the winter of 1921-1922. Footner always goes away from a place when he wants to write about it. It improves the perspective.

1—TWO ON THE TRAIL. Outing 1911
1a—JACK CHANTY Cavalier, June 28 to July 19 1914
2—THE SEALED VALLEY Allstory-Cavalier August 29 to September 26 1914
3—THE HUNTRESS All-Story, November 13 to December 11 1915
4—THE FUR-BRINGERS Allstory-Cavalier, April 3 to April 24 1915
5—THE FUGITIVE SLEUTH All-Story June 26 to July 22 1916
6—THIEVES' WIT Munsey, August, 1916 to January 1917.
7—THE CHASE OF THE LINDA BELLE All Story, April 27 to May 25, 1918
8—THE SUBSTITUE MILLIONAIRE All Story November 9 to December 14 1918
9—THE OWL TAXI All Story May 10 to June 14 1919
10—ON SWAN RIVER All Story August 30 to September 27 1919
11—BLACKMAIL All Story, April 17 to May 22 1920
12—COUNTRY LOVE Munsey, July to December 1920
13—A SELF-MADE THIEF Argosy Allstory June 25 to July 30 1921
14—A NEW GIRL IN TOWN Argosy Allstory Sept 24 to October 28 1922
15—THE MAN HUNT Munsey, August to December. 1922

1, 1a, 2—Published by Doubleday, Page & Co
3 4, 10—Published by James A McCann Co.
6 8 9 11 15—Published by George H Doran Co
5 12—Published by Hodder & Stoughton, London

Gentleman Roger's Girl

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "A New Girl in Town," "A Self-Made Thief," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONVENT.

ON Commencement Day the usually severe face of the old convent relaxed. All afternoon Park Street was lined for a block in either direction with automobiles, and when the exercises were over the girls came streaming out in white dresses and gayly colored cloaks, their parents making a sober background, as is proper for parents. The faces of the girls wore that beatific expression only to be seen on the eve of the long vacation. When the last automobile had driven away Park Street seemed to settle back with a sigh into its customary respectable torpor.

Meanwhile, behind the convent, the garden was at the top of its beauty; the roses vying with the peonies; tall delphiniums nodding against the wall, interspersed with dazzling clumps of coreopsis. It was not too well kept a garden; there were lovely tangled places.

Immediately behind the building there was a row of broad-leaved sycamores to shield the galleries from the afternoon sun; grape vines grew under the north wall, and old peach trees filled the center of the space. Under the south wall where the shade-loving plants grew, in the midst of a riot of lilies of the valley, there was a rock grotto dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes. Among the flower beds ran old brick walls, splotched with black and green.

As the automobiles were rolling away in front of the building a dark-haired girl in a graduating dress walked alone in the garden. She looked strange without the usual appendages of parents. Her head was down, and she was tightly squeezing a handkerchief in her hand, but no tears were falling.

In her exquisite thin cheeks and soft, compressed lips there was a look of strain that had no right to be there at eighteen years old. Eighteen years old! It was her moment of flowering like the garden around

her. In her face was the same inexplicable poignant beauty of the roses and the peonies, a look that struck at the heart.

Another white-clad girl came running down the steps from the first floor gallery, this one a bright-haired girl with curved cheeks and sparkling brown eyes. As she approached her friend she was clearly trying to subdue the sparkle.

"Celesta! Celesta!" she called.

The dark-haired girl paused in her walk, and half turned, but did not raise her head.

"Oh, Celesta!" cried the other in a voice full of commiseration.

"I suppose you have come to say goodby," said Celesta quietly. "No! I thought you'd be so lonely the first night," the bright-haired one explained breathlessly. "I got permission to stay all night. I'll go home to-morrow."

Celesta said nothing, but her fingers twined warmly about those of her friend. They walked along. The bright-haired one whose name was Grace, caught Celesta's arm under her elbow and snuggled warmly against her like a baby.

"I suppose you will just stay on here until some word comes?" she said.

"How can I stay on here?" Celesta replied very low. "I do not know if the bills have been paid!"

"Oh, Celesta! But the sisters would never turn you out!"

"I couldn't stay on as a charity boarder!" said Celesta quickly. "I couldn't stay here indefinitely, anyway! Think of the long, hot summer! Nobody here but the sisters. Oh, they're kind! But they're sisters. I've put in so many summers here. But I always told myself when I'm eighteen I'll be free. I can't face another age-long summer inside these walls!"

"Whatever do you suppose has happened?" murmured Grace.

Celesta visibly struggled against her fears. "Nothing, I suppose. I am simply tormenting myself about nothing. My father has simply forgotten the date of Commencement."

"Forgotten Commencement!" exclaimed Grace, aghast.

"But you must remember, Commencement is not as important to him as to us. I'll write to him again to-night, and he'll be sure to come in a day or two."

"When did you hear from him?"

"Three months ago."

"Three months!" exclaimed the scandalized Grace.

Celesta was a little affronted. "There's nothing strange in that. How often does your father write to you?"

"Well—almost never," said Grace honestly. "But that's because he knows mother writes three times a week, and there's nothing left for him to say. But you have nobody but your father."

"His time is taken up with important affairs," said Celesta loyally. "He has to travel continually."

"Still—three months," murmured Grace.

"It isn't as if he'd changed at all," Celesta went on. "He never was one to write letters. Some people just aren't. He always says that he doesn't know what to say to a young girl. That's natural."

Grace maintained a significant silence.

"You don't understand him, Grace," Celesta said, not without a trace of a superior air. "Your father is entirely different. Your father is—is—" She sought around for a word, not wishing to be offensive. "Your father is a regular father. You've lived with him all your life. You're accustomed to him. I've only seen my father six times since he brought me here fourteen years ago."

Grace sniffed. She was keeping herself under strong control.

"I wouldn't have had it any different," Celesta said defiantly. "I'd hate to be accustomed to my father. There wouldn't be any thrill in it. You take your father as a matter of course—you know you do! Like a specially nice piece of furniture around the house. But I, all these years I've lived in a delightful state of expectation because I never knew when he'd turn up. What if I was often disappointed? It was worth it. He only came six times, but each was such a wonderful time!

"When I was a little girl long before you came here, once he came in a taxicab with the most wonderful doll's house that ever was made. Each room was furnished in a different period: it had real plumbing in the

bathroom and electric lights throughout. For days I stared at it in a trance of delight, scarcely daring to touch anything.

"When I was twelve he came one day with a maid—not a nurse, but a real lady's maid, French, and took me away and bought me the most beautiful things there were in the shops. Trunks full of clothes, and all manner of things. And we went to Europe on the Mauretania, and I had a cunning little stateroom all to myself, which is terribly expensive, they say, and we visited London and Paris and many other places. It was like a dream.

"Do you think I would change him for just a hum-drum sort of father? No, indeed! I like to have something a little out of my reach that I can *admire!* Everybody's got to admire my father; he's so good looking, so gay, so clever!"

"Just the same—" muttered Grace.

Celesta quickly hushed her up. "He'll turn up in a day or two, or write, and I shall be laughing at my anxieties!"

With such talk Celesta bolstered up her sinking heart. She deceived herself better than Grace. The latter walked along, all her sparkles dimmed, pressing her friend's arm tight under her own. To have seen them thus one would have supposed that Grace was the bereft one.

To them down the garden walk came one of the lay sisters of the convent. She said to Celesta softly: "Sister Mary Esther would like to see you in her room."

"The letter has come!" cried Celesta triumphantly to Grace. "What did I tell you?"

Sister Mary Esther's day room opened on the first floor gallery. Sister Mary Esther was the school mother, who spoiled the girls shockingly, their especial confidante to whom they ran with all their troubles. Grace accompanied Celesta as a matter of course.

But when they came to the French window opening on the gallery, they saw that Sister Gertrude was also in the room. Sister Gertrude was the one who interviewed fathers and mothers, rather a stern and stately figure. Her presence in the room gave the interview a more formal character, and Grace hung back.

"I'll wait for you in the garden," she whispered in Celesta's ear, and Celesta went in alone.

It was a small bare room. Sister Mary Esther was seated at the desk with her back to the window, while Sister Gertrude stood beside the chest of drawers with her elbow upon it and her cheek leaning against her thin hand. They were a great contrast. Sister Mary Esther's face was soft and comfortable and ruddy, Sister Gertrude's ascetic and beautiful.

"A letter from your father," murmured Sister Mary Esther, extending a sheet of note paper toward Celesta. Her hand trembled, but Celesta was so hurt by the sight of the *open* page she never noticed that.

"Where's the envelope?" she asked.

"He inclosed your letter within one addressed to me," murmured Sister Mary Esther.

"Why didn't he send it direct to me?" demanded Celesta. "He always did before."

"Just a bit of thoughtlessness, I suppose. To save time."

There was a catch in the good sister's breath. Sister Gertrude coughed significantly, and Sister Mary Esther made a great effort to control her feelings.

Celesta read:

MY DEAREST LITTLE DAUGHTER:

I cannot tell you how grieved I am at being prevented from attending your graduation. The doctors have forbidden me to go. Doctors are such tyrants, aren't they? I am laid here by the heels, and shall be, they tell me, for several months to come. But you must not be anxious about me; it is a vexatious trouble—some obscure affection of the bones—can't spell the scientific name of it, but not in the least dangerous. In a few months they tell me, I shall be as spry as ever. In the meanwhile I am very pleasantly situated, and have the best doctors obtainable. Be patient, and remain with the good sisters a little while longer until I am able to prepare a home for you. Then what good times you and your old dad will have to be sure! Never to be separated again! Much love and many kisses.

DAD.

There was something very unsatisfactory about this letter. Celesta could not have analyzed it, but she felt it. A sort of little groan of vexation and distress broke from her.

"This tells me nothing!" she cried. "It's

not dated. There's no address. Where's the envelope?"

"I—I must have destroyed it," stammered Sister Mary Esther.

"His address must be on your letter."

Sister Mary Esther partly uncovered another sheet of the well-known handwriting. "He's—he's in Clayton," she said nervously.

Celesta looked jealously at the other letter. It was much longer than her own. She was longing to ask for it, but did not dare. Sister Mary Esther quickly covered it up.

Celesta became suddenly calm. "Well, of course, I must go to him at once," she said.

"You can't do that!" both sisters cried together.

"But, why?" asked Celesta. "Clayton is not so far. Is there no money?" she asked with a painful blush. "Are my bills here not paid?"

Sister Mary Esther raised a protesting hand. "Oh, it's not that, my child. Your father arranged all that years ago."

"Then why can't I go to Clayton?"

"He forbids it."

"Oh, that's only with some idea of sparing me. If he's sick I must go and take care of him. You must see that. He has no one but me. Can I go to-night?"

"It is impossible!" said Sister Gertrude firmly.

Celesta ran abruptly from the room. She could not bear to have them see her cry. She felt estranged from the sisters. She had a deep, vague feeling that there was something here which had not been revealed.

Grace was waiting for her. The two girls embraced and wept together. Down at the foot of the garden they threshed out the whole matter according to the light of their innocence. But Celesta did not speak of her dim feeling of distrust. She could not find the words for it.

The two agreed very firmly together that Celesta had given in too easily. If her father was sick it was undeniably her right to go to him. The upshot was that Celesta presently marched back to have it out with Sister Mary Esther all over again.

But the sisters had gone on about other matters, and she found the little room empty. From among the other papers on the desk a corner of her father's letter was peeping out, with its highly characteristic handwriting.

Celesta's heart began to beat rapidly. All her half-formed suspicions leaped up. If she read that, she would know! She put out her hand, and drew it back again. An agonizing struggle went on within her.

She finally tossed her head. "He's *my* father! I have a better right to it than they have," she told herself. She unhesitatingly pulled out the letter.

The neat, picturesque characters covered several sheets. Celesta deeply resented the length of that letter. She had not time to read it all. One paragraph stood out in letters of fire:

> I am obliged to tell you that I have been confined in the Columbia State Penitentiary at Clayton for the past six months. A ridiculous, trumped-up charge that I will explain to you. I have every assurance that the truth will shortly come to light, and that the governor means to pardon me. In the meantime you had better tell my beloved little girl that I am ill. No need to darken her life—

Celesta thought she heard somebody coming. She slipped the letter back into its former place. She went out on the gallery.

She felt dazed; she could not think at first. This was the first time she had come face to face with life in the raw.

Dazed, but not crushed. Somewhere within her, she found unexpected reserves of strength with which to meet this blow. Her head went up; her cheeks began to glow. She thought:

"If he's in trouble my place is more than ever by his side! Other people would believe him guilty. *They would treat him like a criminal.* He might give up in despair if he had not one person near who believed in him—"

CHAPTER II.

THE ESCAPE.

AS seniors, Celesta and Grace had each attained the dignity of a separate tiny room in the convent. These rooms were strung along the second floor

corridor in the south wing of the building. Celesta's room was near the central stairway and Grace's halfway down the corridor.

As the big clock in the lower hall of the convent was chiming preparatory to striking twelve, the door of Celesta's room was noiselessly opened and she stepped out into the corridor. There was a single light burning in the long tunnel.

Celesta looked more mature in hat and suit. There was nothing childish now in her set, intent face, but her innocence was tragical. She carried a valise, and over her other arm were the sheets and the spread from her bed.

Softly closing the door behind her, she paused for a moment to listen. When the deep-measured strokes of the big clock ceased to sound, smaller clocks far off through the house took up the tale, some fast, some slow. Then a heavy quilt of silence seemed to descend. Celesta stole down the corridor and opened Grace's door.

Grace sat up in bed, her crinkly, bright hair flying, her eyes wide with excitement. With a bound she sprang to Celesta's side and flung her arms about her.

"Oh, my darling, if you had not come soon I should have burst out screaming with the suspense!" she gasped.

"I told you I wouldn't start until the house was thoroughly quiet," whispered Celesta. "Some of the sisters sit up late. Midnight is the best time for an escape. The first sleep is the soundest."

"Sister Emmeline keeps vigil in the lower hall to-night. Do you think she heard you?"

"No. I waited until the clock was striking before I opened my door. How you are trembling! Put on your bathrobe and slippers."

"It's not from the cold, darling."

"Better bring the sheets and the spread from your bed in case mine do not make a long enough rope. I suppose the beds in the empty rooms have been stripped."

"Oh, Celesta! How can I let you take such a risk!"

"Sh-h! Do you think they lock the empty rooms after the girls have gone?"

"Oh, I almost hope they have! This is more than I can bear!"

"Sh-h! You said you would help me! If the doors are locked I'll have to let myself down in the garden, and get over the wall somehow."

By this time Grace was in her bathrobe and slippers. She got something from the drawer of her bureau. "Here's the ten dollars that dad gave me to-day."

"Thanks, dearest," said Celesta simply.

"How much have you besides?"

"Only two dollars. I have my emerald pin that I can sell. But I suppose you can't sell anything at night. But surely twelve dollars will buy a ticket to Clayton."

"I don't know. My oldest brother went there once. It took all night. Suppose it isn't enough?"

"I'll buy a ticket as far as I can, and just stay on the train."

"But they'll put you off."

"Then I'll get on the next train."

"They'll put you off again."

"But the fast trains don't make many stops. I'd soon be there anyway. Are you ready? Come on."

Hand in hand the two girls crept the rest of the way down the corridor, Grace with her head continually over her shoulder, gasping for breath. They tried the end door. It was not locked. They got it closed behind them, and leaned against it, sobbing a little with relief.

This little room was similar to the others, but it had a window opening on the side street around the corner from the entrance to the convent. They could safely turn on the electric light here. Celesta softly raised the sash and looked down. It was about twenty feet to the ground. She set about twisting the sheets and knotting the ends together. She said in matter-of-fact tones that were belied by the little shake in her voice:

"If we knot them together catty-cornered it will make a longer rope. I'll knot them in the middle, too. But I shall need some of yours, I expect. After I have gone you can unknot them and carry my sheets back to my bed and arrange them."

"Oh, how could I go all the way down the corridor alone!" faltered Grace.

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter, I suppose. You can leave them here. As long as you

get your own sheets back, so they won't suspect you."

"But they *will* suspect me!" wailed Grace.

"What difference does it make? You've graduated now."

"But Sister Gertrude is terrible when she's angry."

"Oh, well, just as soon as I get to Clayton I'll write back explaining everything, and taking all the blame."

"Celesta! Suppose there are no more trains to-night?"

"I'll just sit in the Union Station till morning."

"What will you do when you get there?"

"I'll go direct to the prison—everybody must know where it is, and ask for my father."

"How will you ever have the courage?"

Celesta shrugged.

"Suppose they don't know him there" said Grace. "I mean in order to avoid disgracing the family name he may have given a false name when he went in."

Celesta looked troubled. "Well—I'd find him somehow," she said doggedly.

"How would you live?"

"I'd get a job."

"How does one get a job?"

"By asking for it, I suppose."

"Oh, Celesta, how brave you are!"

"I'm not brave at all!" Celesta retorted irritably. "I'm frightened to death!"

The knotted rope was finished now. Celesta stood up. "We'd better put out the light," she said. "There's light enough from the street lamps to show us what we're doing."

Grace flung her arms around Celesta again. "Oh, my darling, my darling!" she murmured. "How can I let you go out into the night alone!"

Celesta firmly disengaged herself. "Now you're just being romantic!" she said. "You promised you wouldn't!"

"Oh, I'll try, I'll try!" wailed Grace. "How will I have the strength to lower you down?"

"You don't have to. Help me move the bed over by the window. We tie the rope to that and I lower myself down. My arms are strong."

"How did you ever think of that?"

"I saw pictures of it in a comic supplement."

Before dropping the rope out of the window Celesta looked up and down the street. Innes Street, the unimportant thoroughfare below, was deserted; Park Street at the left was silent under its trees; Jefferson Street down at the end of the convent garden, was brightly lighted, and occasionally people could still be seen walking up or down, silhouetted against the light. But these were a good way off.

"Suppose somebody down there should see you?" said Grace at Celesta's shoulder.

"It 'll all be over in a minute. I'll be round the corner before they could get here. You pull up the rope quick."

"The bag?"

"I'll hang it round my neck."

There was a light at the corner of Park Street which was uncomfortably near, but fortunately the house across Innes Street was an aristocratic mansion which was seldom opened. All the windows were closed and dusty. Nothing stirred below but a cat.

Before making her rope fast to the bed, Celesta dropped an end out of the window to measure. It dangled limply against the bricks of the house, a weird-looking string of big knots and little knots, like a white snake that had overeaten. But it was long enough. It all but touched the sidewalk. Celesta drew it in again while she made the end fast.

"All ready!" she said with a shake in her voice.

Grace cast herself upon her, weeping.

"Please, *please!*" said Celesta, freeing herself.

Just as she was about to drop the rope out a second time, she perceived the legs of a man under the trees on Park Street. She held it just in time from dropping in front of his nose. He was bound along Innes Street in the direction of Jefferson, a young man.

As he passed under their window, for some reason or another he looked up and saw the two white faces peering down. He kissed his hand to them, and the two girls drew back swiftly. They heard him laugh.

"Fresh!" said Grace indignantly.

Celesta said nothing at all.

She peered out again cautiously, and saw that he continued on his way to Jefferson Street and turned out of sight. She waited a moment. Hardly likely there would be any one else right away. Without giving Grace a chance to make further demonstrations, she suddenly dropped her rope out, and climbed over the sill.

As she let herself down, hand under hand, Grace's terrified eyes peered at her over the sill, and the sound of her gasping breaths came down to her. As she descended, Celesta kept her anxious gaze directed toward Jefferson Street. Two men passed uptown, but never turned their heads.

After what seemed like an age she felt the firm pavement under her feet, with a sob of relief, and was off around the corner like a streak. No one was in sight in any direction.

A queer mixture of elation and terror filled her. She walked on air, her senses intolerably sharpened. Free! Free!

Yet night in the city with its slinking cats and street lamps which illumined nobody but herself, and its rows of dark windows behind which Heavens knows what might be watching, was so ominous and broody, just a little more would have driven her back distraught to ring the convent bell. Empty, empty streets with her own footsteps echoing so strangely! The stars were infinitesimal, remote pin points.

Park Street was too terrible under the trees. She struck through the next cross street for Jefferson. Halfway down the block a narrow alley opened at her left with a long vista of diminishing street lamps—what for? It was like a stage all set and lighted for some secret drama. Celesta thrilled and shuddered. In all her life she had never been out alone at night.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE TRAIN.

THE sole ticket seller left on duty after midnight at the Union Station of Montebello suddenly beheld a lovely pale oval framed within the wicket before him. This was so rare a phenomenon during his hours on duty that he was taken unawares. A pair of disquieting dark blue eyes regarded him gravely and a gentle voice said:

"Will you please tell me what time the next train goes to Clayton?"

The ticket seller was a young man, snappy, efficient. But he was plunged into confusion. The technique of his trade forsook him. He tried to recover himself by peering sideways through the wicket at the waiting-room clock.

"One eighteen," he answered; "the Owl Limited. Half an hour." It was useless. He gave himself up shamelessly to the pleasure of looking at her, his face all softened.

"How much does a ticket to Clayton cost?" asked the voice anxiously.

"Fare to Clayton?" he said dreamily. "Er. Oh, yes, fourteen thirty."

The flowerlike face drooped. "Are you sure?" the voice inquired in a strained tone.

The ticket seller nodded. It never occurred to him to smile at the question.

Her next question caused him to stare. "How far can I go for twelve dollars?"

"*Hey?*"

"I want to go to Clayton," said Celesta, blushing; "but I have only twelve dollars. I thought that would be enough."

The young ticket seller peered around behind her. "Are you alone?" he asked.

She nodded. "My father is in Clayton. I have to go to him."

The little catch in her breath caused him to ask quickly: "Is he sick?"

"Y-yes," faltered Celesta.

"But I couldn't let them dump you off seventy-five miles this side of Clayton," said the young man anxiously. "And you without money. What would you do?"

Celesta lowered her head. She couldn't very well confess to the young man that she intended to beat his railroad. But his honest confusion and the kindness in his voice encouraged her.

"I have this pin," she said, flushing red. "Perhaps you'd take that for the rest of the money."

The young man was hurt in his tenderest feelings. He had forgotten altogether that he was a ticket seller.

"No! No! No!" he exclaimed with a distressed face and energetic gestures of the hands.

Celesta looked at him, a little scared by his vehemence.

He snatched a ticket from a certain pocket in his rack, stamped it both back and front in his agitation, all but catching his finger in the stamp, and shoved it toward her.

"Here!" he said, "the difference is nothing!"

"Thank you," said Celesta softly. "I'll send you the money if you'll give me your name."

A wild gleam of hope showed in the young man's eye; a letter from her! The promise of an acquaintanceship! He produced a card and scribbled a private address on it.

Celesta took it, saying: "Thank you so much," with a shy and friendly smile that simply slew the young man. He gazed at her, lost for a moment, then she began to turn away. A fresh agitation attacked him.

"Wait!" he said. "Your berth. You must have a berth."

Celesta's face fell. "Oh, is there no place to sit up?"

"Yes, there's the coach, but—"

"I'd rather sit up."

"Oh, no, you must have a berth."

The personal note in the young man's voice was now too warm. It disconcerted Celesta.

"No, no!" she said hurriedly. "I couldn't sleep. I'm too anxious about my father. Thank you so much." And suddenly she was gone.

The young man groaned. There he was, locked in his cell! Already a disgusting fat man, chewing a cigar, had taken the place of the lovely apparition. He was demanding a ticket to Jamesburg. The ticket seller served him with bitterness.

Outside the waiting room the broad concourse is built over the tracks. Down each side is a row of doorways with gates opening on the stairways that lead down to the train platforms. Montebello is only a glorified way station. Over the doorways are the train signs. When a sign was put up reading: "Owl Limited for Bristol, Jamesburg, Aristoga, Clayton, and points west," Celesta, with her little satchel in hand, took up her position at the gate.

The Owl is a popular train, and a dozen or so of other intending passengers gathered around the gate, all men. It is the more experienced travelers who choose the late trains, and these looked like solid business men, salesmen, sporting characters.

There was not one among them but whose gaze, sharply arrested by the sight of Celesta, did not soften with pleasure as it dwelt upon her. They maneuvered inconspicuously in the group to get a better vantage point to see. The older men looked at her somewhat shyly with self-effacing expressions; the young men with more putting-forth looks.

There were two really young men, bachelors by a certain unbroken air. These, as was natural, regarded the girl with a more particular interest. The first was a thickset fellow expensively dressed in a sporting style. He had a lowering expression such as is generally called brutal, although it may result merely from a stupid and insensitive nature. Of all the men he was the only one who stared at Celesta with anything approaching boldness. Yet it was not exactly an offensive stare. There was an odd look of pain in his dull eyes. Somehow the girl had made the insolent young sport feel unsure of himself.

The other young man was very different. His clothes, while of good enough material, had clearly been chosen without any eye to effect. His open, good-tempered face was not handsome, but it was conspicuously vital and masculine. The fun-loving glint in his eyes was very attractive in connection with his air of modesty. His eyebrows made a straight dark band under his hat brim, and he wore a heavy mustache although he was so young. A noticeable thing about him was his hands, which had a ready and capable look. This one's glances at Celesta were more diffident. He was clearly charmed and softened, and the nucleus of a smile showed about his lips.

In the beginning the two young men were unaware of each other. When the passengers were admitted through the gate, both were behind Celesta, and when she paused

at the foot of the steps, uncertain which way to turn, both involuntarily paused also. When a trainman directed the girl to the coaches, both young men followed her up to the front of the train, although each had in his hand a coupon for a berth in the sleeping cars. It was at this moment that they became aware of each other with sidelong scowls.

The day coach was brightly lighted, but it had a forlorn aspect. There were only a few passengers, and these were jammed into the seats in excruciating, recumbent attitudes, seeking sleep. Gross, open-mouthed faces were turned up to the light. To Celesta it seemed like an indecent exhibition. She took the first vacant seat, sitting stiffly, and trying to be unconscious of her surroundings.

The heavy young man, bolder than the other, sat down across the aisle from her, where he watched her furtively, studying how to make an approach. The other had to take a place nearer the front of the car. He sat with his back against the window and looked back.

Shortly after the train had started the heavy young man leaned across the aisle, and said in a slightly hoarse voice: " Going far?"

Celesta glanced at him for the first time. She had no objection to being addressed, for she was instinctively friendly, but that coarse face so painstakingly trying to look agreeable, revolted her. However, she did not know how to rebuff anybody.

" To Clayton," she answered involuntarily.

The young man stared. " That's a long way," he remarked. He slipped his sleeping-car check into his vest pocket.

Celesta looked out of the window.

He presently went on in the same ingratiating way, but like the wolf in Red Riding Hood, his hoarse voice betrayed him: " I'm going to Clayton myself."

Celesta became very uncomfortable. She thought she had never seen anybody she disliked so much.

" It's hot in here, ain't it?" he went on. " Want your window opened?" Celesta shook her head. " You're right. Lets too many cinders in. Traveling's rotten anyway. Bores me stiff unless I got somebody to talk to."

Celesta bit her lip. At that moment her eyes happened to fall on the young man ahead, who was now glaring furiously at his rival. The sight warmed her breast. She thought: " I wish I knew him."

After a while the young sport said: " Gee, this guy here in front of me snores so loud I can't hear myself talk." He got up.

Celesta, who had foreseen some such move, had little by little edged herself into the center of the seat so that there was no room for him beside her. He stood for a moment waiting for her to move over. When she did not do so, he perched himself on the arm of her seat with one foot in the aisle. To brace himself he flung an arm across the back of Celesta's seat and half hung over her.

His nearness filled the girl with horror. Her flesh crawled at him. But she did not know how to protect herself.

" You're not like the other girls a fellow sees," he went on in a lower voice. " You're an old-fashioned sort of girl. Didn't think they was any left. Gee! I'm fed up with cootie-coops and frescoed faces. You're different. You needn't look so scared of me. I wouldn't hurt you. You'd be safe anywhere."

He was evidently sincere in saying this, but Celesta was not afraid, she was physically revolted. She suffered horribly. True, she could have got up and forced her way out of the seat, but in her shivering sensitiveness she dreaded calling the attention of the whole car to the incident.

Her eyes fell again on the young man up in front. He was furiously indignant and uncertain how to act. Their eyes met. Celesta's eyes, as simply as a child's, asked him to help her.

He jumped up as if he had been galvanized, and came quickly along the aisle. Celesta, like any young thing, instantly repented of her silent message, and looked out of the window and bit her lip. Ignorant of life as she was, her instinct told her there was likely to be a fight, now, and her heart failed her.

But her rescuer proved to be a young man of resource. Paying no attention to

the young sport, he addressed himself directly to Celesta.

"How are you?" he cried heartily, and one of the capable looking hands shot forth. "At first I didn't recognize you in that hat."

Celesta, a little dazed, obediently laid her hand within his. She was like a chip whirled from one eddy to another. But she liked this young man. She didn't have to say anything; only smile.

He still ignored the young sport, although his shoulder actually brushed against the fawn-colored coat as he leaned in front of him to speak to Celesta.

"This is a bit of luck finding you on this train," he went on cheerily. "How's all the folks? There's a hundred questions I want to ask you." He interrupted himself to ask: "Is this gentleman a friend of yours?"

Celesta shook her head, thinking with bated breath: "Now they will fight!"

Celesta's rescuer turned his head and looked the other man in the eye. "I beg your pardon," he said coolly. Then to Celesta in cheery, masterful tones: "Move over."

Celesta moved over to the window, and he coolly squeezed himself into the seat between her and the sporting character, turning his shoulder to the latter. Without giving anybody a chance to say anything he rattled on:

"I haven't seen a soul lately. Been studying night and day for my finals. But that's all behind me, thank God! Got my sheepskin in my grip. That's what they call it, but devil the hide of a sheep it ever saw. Wood pulp more like." And so forth.

The other young man's face turned an ugly, blackish red. He stood up in the aisle and glowered down at the speaker. Not for an instant was he deceived by the ruse. But he was slow-witted, and the quickness of the other confused him.

He clenched his right fist, but he held it —for why, he never could have told. Somehow they had put him in the wrong between them. An honest resentment was mingled with his rage, for according to his lights he had meant well by the girl. Neither of them paid the slightest attention to him. He finally turned and went slowly back to the sleeper, muttering under his breath:

"That's what you get for tryin' to be on the level with a skirt!" he assured himself. "That innocent stare of hers was just a stall. She's just like all the rest. You could see it the way she gave *him* the glad eye."

But in his heart he knew it was not true, and he got no comfort out of it.

When the car door closed behind him the young man beside Celesta broke off his talk and laughed a peal. "Worked all right, didn't it?"

Celesta laughed too. "You managed that well," she murmured, looking down at her hands.

The young man flushed red with pleasure. "Well, I didn't want to have an ugly mix-up here in front of you. You can generally avoid a mix-up if you use your wits. Of course, I couldn't be sure that he wasn't going to bash me on the side of the head. My right ear was shrinking like a violet. He was thick, wasn't he? A race-track follower."

"How do you know?" asked Celesta.

"By his rig. The Montebello races are on now."

Celesta looked at him with friendliness.

And he mumbled something to the effect that: "Suppose I better go back to my own seat now."

Celesta, hesitating, said nothing.

He repeated it. "I suppose I better go back to my own seat."

"I suppose so," Celesta agreed, since that seemed to be what he expected her to say.

But he did not get up. He said with an absurdly hopeful air: "Maybe I better sit here a while in case he should come back."

"Maybe you had." Celesta conceded.

He beamed. "How far up the line are you going?" he asked.

"To Clayton."

He was greatly distressed. "Oh, but you can't sit up all night!" he cried. He fumbled in a pocket. "Here, I have a berth. It's lower 10, in car 23-K." He attempted to force the check into her hand.

Celesta resisted. "I couldn't take it from you," she protested.

"Please! *Please!*"

"I couldn't take your berth from you and let you sit up. Anyway, I sat up because I preferred to. You must go and sleep in your own berth."

"And leave you here with the chance that that three-card man might come back and bother you! Or some other roughneck. What do you think I am? If you won't take it I'll sit up, too. Will you let me sit up with you?"

"I won't 'let' you," said Celesta. "But if you won't go to bed I suppose I can't make you."

"That's good enough," he declared with a laugh.

"How did you happen to be in this car if you had a sleeping-car ticket?" asked Celesta.

"Oh, I thought I'd take a smoke before I turned in."

"But this isn't a smoking-car."

"I must have made a mistake." Suddenly he cried with disarming candor. "No, that's a lie! I followed you into this car."

Celesta looked dismayed.

"I saw you in the station," he said warmly. "I couldn't help myself. It was so good to look at you. Of course, I wouldn't have bothered you. It was a pleasure just to look at you."

Celesta looked down at her hands.

But the language of sentiment was not in this young man's line, and he soon dropped it. He made love to Celesta unconsciously, with his warm eyes and the tender smile that was always hovering about his lips—as if she were the sweetest joke in the world.

"This is simply out o' sight!" he cried. "Sitting here talking to you. I never thought such luck would come my way. What is a little sleep more or less? But when you get sleepy I'll beat it back to my seat."

He told her that he had been graduated that day.

"Why, so did I," Celesta exclaimed.

"No! Shake on it! Where from?"

"Loretto convent. I've been there since I was a baby."

"Ah, that explains it."

"Explains what?"

"You."

"I expect convent girls are the same as any others," said Celesta sagely.

"I bet the sisters don't know you're sitting up in a day coach all night," he said with a twinkle.

"They don't," Celesta replied dryly, and made haste to change the subject. "Where did you graduate from?"

"P. and S."

Celesta looked blank.

"College of Physicians and Surgeons. I'm a full-fledged M.D. Look!" He dug in his pocket and produced a card case. "I had 'em printed all ready against the great day. I suppose you think I'm nutty, but I get a heap of satisfaction out of those magic letters."

Celesta read on the card he showed her: "Harry Sanford Bainton, M.D."

"My buddies call he Hal mostly," he said carelessly. "I had 'em printed in old English because the M.D. shows up better. I had to sweat to earn 'em. You see I didn't have any folks behind me. Worked my way through. No cinch in a medical course."

"What did you do?" asked Celesta.

"My only talent aside from doctoring is automobiles. I know those babies inside out. Some other fellows and I ran a small garage on Brokaw Street. I worked there nights. It generally fell to me to take out parties at night. There's money in that."

"Is there?" said Celesta without the least notion of what it meant.

"I've got a job doctoring now. I didn't have the capital to buy a practice or wait for one to grow. So I had to take a job. I'm on my way to be interne in the prison infirmary at Clayton."

"Oh!" cried Celesta involuntarily.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm going to Clayton, too," she said, confused.

"So you said."

She could not tell him the nature of her errand in Clayton. "Brokaw Street is not far from the convent," she said at random.

"No. I've often walked under that high wall and wondered what was on the other side. Do you live in Clayton?"

"No. That is, I may for a while," she said, blushing.

He saw that it distressed her to be questioned, and sheered off. He enlarged in his lively style on his college experiences, and on the happy-go-lucky garage in a side street. Whether he knew it or not, the best way to tempt a person to give himself is to give yourself freely.

To the convent-bred Celesta his story was wonderful. What a crowded, vivid life he had led! Hard work interspersed with what he called "high jinks." It was all new to her, but something in her breast instantly accepted it. A lot of her standards of right and wrong were reversed.

Notwithstanding the demands made on him by college and garage, Hal had found time somehow for pranks. Of these he said now:

"P. and S., you know, is affiliated with the State University. Us poor medicos never had the time for athletics. I mean front-page stuff. If we wanted to keep fit all we could do was streak around the cinder path early in the morning. The most we could do for our Alma Mater was to cheer the varsity teams when they brought home the bacon. The Arts crowd and the Aggies made out to look down on us as mollycoddles.

"Well, it happened that in my class there were several husky guys who had played football, and we talked it over and made up our minds we'd show them. The upshot was we got up a scrub team and challenged varsity. This was last year. Say, it was the joke of the campus. We only had three practices, and some of us, me for one, had never been in a regular game before.

"It was early in the season. It wasn't a public game, but the students turned out in a body. That is the Arts and the Aggies did, all primed to give us the laugh. Gee! The odds were about six to one against us. Even our own crowd wouldn't support us, they were so sure we were going to be massacred. But varsity was overconfident, and we were in deadly earnest. Maybe you read about the game in the newspapers? It was quite a feature."

"No, I didn't," said Celesta.

"Well, I expect the details wouldn't interest you. I played end. A useful game, but not brilliant. We weren't very scientific, I guess, but we had an old, old score to settle! We licked them proper! Yes, by George! Twenty to seven! They couldn't understand what was happening, and the bleachers were dumb! We didn't care if we had no supporters. Our little gang made up in racket what it lacked in numbers.

"Oh, boy! Oh, boy! That was the tallest night of all my stay in college. Some of the fellows had won a good bit, and we all went to dinner down at Mocks. Know Mocks?"

"No," said Celesta.

"We pretty well wrecked the joint. You know how it is with fellows when they get going in a crowd. They go crazy. It's generally laid to booze, but you can get drunk on laughter and yelling just as good. Every fellow tries to go all the rest one better.

"It's wrong, of course; things get broken, but Lord, what a blessed relief it is! After such a night you can run smoothly along the rails for weeks at a time. What would young fellows do if they didn't have some sort of safety valve? You know how it is."

"Yes," said Celesta innocently.

"When we were put out of Mocks we all piled on a trolley car for college. The timid passengers got off, but a good many liked it. I don't know just how it happened, just a spontaneous impulse, I guess, we weren't ready for bed, anyhow we decided to commandeer the car and run her all night. Crazy Ikes, that's what we were!"

"What did the conductor and the motorman do?" asked Celesta breathlessly.

"They put up a good fight, but, of course, they were helpless against so many. We tied 'em up with neckties and belts, and sat 'em up in seats. We fed 'em cigarettes, and pretty soon they began to take it philosophically. The passengers were the most scared, but we offered to take 'em on home. I was motorman. 'Tisn't so easy to drive a trolley car as it looks. I nearly jerked all the seats out of the floor when I started.

"We let the remaining passengers off at their right corners. They seemed to take

it in a sporting spirit, but, of course, we didn't know but one of them might telephone back to town, and we'd meet the police on our return. So we decided not to return. Down at the end of the Bury Street line there's a switch to the tracks of the M. A. and P., the big interurban line. They exchange freight there. I said: 'Fellows, let's shunt her over and take a run down to Patterson and back!' It was carried unanimously."

"Oh-h!" breathed Celesta.

"We had to shove her over on the heavy rails by man power, because there was no connecting wire. We got the trolley on the Interurban wire and all climbed on, and I turned on the juice. Zowie! There was a bombardment like sixteen-inch guns, and blue flames shot out of the commutator and underneath the car.

"You see, we hadn't reckoned there was too much juice on the heavy Interurban line for our old baby to swallow. It gagged her. She began to burn. Thick black smoke puffed up through the floor. Finally some guy had the wit to pull the trolley off the wire."

"What did you do then?" gasped Celesta.

"Shoved her back on her own rails and left her. She was a dead baby then. We walked back to town. The conductor and the motorman came with us. They were young fellows like ourselves, and a job more or less meant little to them. They helped us finish the night with a party in the room of a fellow who lived outside college."

"But what did they do to you when it came out next day."

"Oh, there was a big row, of course: a big row. They knew it was our class, but nobody would come forward to identify any individuals. Prexy read the riot act to the assembled class, but that was all he could do. He couldn't fire the entire class in a body. We made up a subscription among ourselves to repay the damage at Mocks. The United Railways could stand it without hurting."

Other tales of a kind followed. Celesta was horrified and charmed — but more charmed than horrified. Though this young man broke every rule which had ever been laid down for her, an instinct which was above rules told her he was sound at heart.

As the train smoothly told off mile after mile through the night, and the other passengers snored and uneasily changed position, these two made great strides in friendship. It was a delightful discovery to Celesta that one of those strange creatures, men, could be so human. In the end, as was inevitable, she told him her story.

The only difference it made in him to learn she was a convict's daughter was that his eyes brooded still more tenderly on her.

"But he's innocent, of course!" said Celesta.

"Sure," Hal agreed quickly. "A jail sentence would never count anything with me against a man. I've seen too much so-called justice. I've been a chauffeur, you know. We have a fellow-feeling for all those who get the cops down on them. What's his name?"

"Roger Manion."

Hal nodded.

"And I'm Celesta Manion."

"What a lovely name!" he declared, with a quick, warm glance.

"So old-fashioned!" said Celesta.

"I'm almost glad he's in jail," he asserted diffidently. "You know what I mean. I'll be there. It will give me a chance to help you."

She understood. It was enough. The prison was not mentioned again between them.

At three o'clock the train stopped at Jamesburg to change engines. Hal dashed out and brought back sandwiches and hot coffee in paper cups. Celesta's white teeth met through the thick bread in businesslike fashion. Laughter spiced their meal.

Later Celesta fell asleep, and Hal, sitting in the seat behind, was free to gaze at her with his whole heart uncovered in his eyes. He gazed, ever falling fathoms deeper in love without knowing it. He dozed, too, and dreamed of her, and awoke to gaze again.

At dawn they were both wide awake, and united once more in the same seat, where they watched the sun rise and talked and laughed themselves into a delightful intimacy that a lifetime could not destroy,

although it had come about in a few hours. Not that their feelings toward each other were of the same nature. Hal, while he rattled at his wildest, ached consumedly to take her hand between his, but Celesta was friendly as a boy might have been friendly, unwarmed as the dawn sky.

Hal was princely with his money. He explained that he had sold his car in Montebello and was flush. They breakfasted splendidly in the dining car. What a delightful meal breakfast is for two! The other diners took them for bride and groom. Hal saw that with a little ache at his heart, but Celesta did not.

They reached Clayton at mid-morning. Hal said it was useless for Celesta to attempt to see her father until afternoon, so they spent the rest of the morning doing the sights of Clayton in a hired car.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRISON.

THE old Columbia State Penitentiary stands on a bluff overlooking the Tappaghany River three miles east of its junction with the Corbyhanna. The city of Clayton, as everybody knows, occupies the tongue of land between the two rivers. When it was built seventy-five years ago, the penitentiary was a model institution embodying all the latest ideas of prison reform. The "Clayton system," as it is still called, marks a distinct departure from the horrible methods of the old days. But improvement has gone on, of course, and nowadays Clayton is not among either the best or the worst prisons of the country.

Its fine site is worthy of a nobler monument. Considerations of beauty, naturally, did not enter into the design of the lofty granite pile. The forbidding wall of dressed stone which incloses a space of several acres has become quite black with the deposits of soot from the furnaces across the river. Within it towers the gigantic cell-block built in the form of a Greek cross with its four wings. It is six tiers high, with an immense execution chamber up under the Gothic roof.

The inclosure is divided into outer and inner yards. Vehicles are admitted into the outer yard, which contains the residences of warden, doctor and other officials, surrounded by flower beds unnaturally well kept. Labor is plentiful within prison walls. In the rear of the outer yard is a row of smaller buildings housing the commissary, the morgue and other necessary offices. In the center of this row is the gate tower, as it is called, which admits to the prison proper, although there is still another gate at the door of the cell-block.

From the upper part of the gate tower the guards are dispatched by a narrow footway on top of the wall to their kiosks at strategic points, where they sit with their "riot guns" keeping guard over the yards below. At night every corner of the yards is illuminated by the cold bluish glare of arc lights suspended above the walls.

Entering by the gate tower, one passed through a hideous sort of cañon, where the black walls rose close on either hand and glimpses of the frowning eaves of the cell-block might be had far above. This cañon led one to the main entrance of the cell-block which opened directly into the central rotunda. It was a hundred yards long, perhaps. The prison yards proper lay on either side of the cañon. Halfway down, the wall on the right-hand side was pierced by an opening—with still another iron gate—into the infirmary, a small separate building of later date than the great cell-block.

The inside of the prison, like the outside, was all of naked granite. The great rotunda was very impressive, with its circular galleries rising tier above tier. Shortly after the prison was opened the authorities had had to stretch a tight wire mesh around the galleries, because so many poor devils had cast themselves over the balustrades.

On the ground floor there were yellow varnished benches around the wall of the rotunda, and here, under the eyes of their keepers, prisoners of the commoner sorts received what visitors they might have on the permitted days. Prisoners who enjoyed more consideration received their visitors in a room to the left of the entrance.

Keeper Dan Crear was walking along the corridor of 5C, east. He was a hearty look-

ing man, not at all the typical keeper. He did not belong to the regular detail on this corridor, but was stationed at the main entrance to the cell-block, whence he had been sent to bring down a prisoner who had a visitor.

Although it was no different from any other corridor in the cell-block, 5C, east, had somehow won the name of being the most desirable quarter of the prison: Fifth Avenue, they called it, and here the prisoners who enjoyed a pull schemed to get themselves lodged. Having a pull, many of them this afternoon had begged off from yard exercise, which they loathed, and they were lying in their hammocks or working half-heartedly at some trifling occupation or another as Crear passed.

The cell at the end of the corridor had certain advantages. To be sure, it was not as sociable as those in the middle, where you had at least six mates within easy hearing. But the cell on the end had a light on two sides, and much better ventilation. It was alongside a south window, where the sun came in all day and in hot weather the prevailing breeze blew.

Two walls of this cell were of granite; the other two were formed of iron bars. In the angle of the bars, at a small table, a man sat busily writing, looking somewhat like a bank official within his cage. The cell was extraordinarily neat, and even had certain touches of elegance. There was an expensive steamer rug thrown over the hammock. The chair in which the man sat was of wicker with gray chintz cushions. The pictures pasted up on the granite walls evinced a cultivated taste.

Crear said: "Afternoon, Mr. Manion."

The writer looked up. "Ah, Dan!" His smile was delightful, disarming, friendly; nevertheless, it was clearly the smile one bestows on an inferior; and Crear accepted it as such.

"I am wanted?" asked Manion.

"Yes, sir."

"Just a moment," said the prisoner cajolingly. "If I don't get this paragraph written down, I'll forget it before I get back."

"Sure," said Crear good-naturedly.

He unlocked the door of the cell and swung it back, then leaned against the bars of the window across the corridor, and looked idly out over the muddy river, whistling between his teeth. Meanwhile Manion wrote rapidly. Finally he stood up.

He was a man of middle height, of trim figure, with a notably handsome head. He had wavy chestnut hair still thick and full of vigor, although he was verging on middle age, and a superb red mustache, carefully tended and ending in inconspicuously waxed points.

His eyes were his best feature—bright, quick, speaking eyes, yet guarded too. Speaking eyes, yet they did not always speak the same matter at the same time as his mobile lips. A physiognomist would have said that a man with a face so quick and expressive should have been an artist, an actor or a preacher.

Before leaving his cell he examined himself attentively in a little polished metal mirror that hung on his wall, and with a pair of military brushes attacked his thick, bright hair. Even the ugly gray prison uniform could not rob his figure of distinction. An edge of white collar appeared at his neck, and cuffs at his wrists. His expensive shoes were brilliantly polished. All in all, an uncommon prisoner this, who was able to exact deference even from his keepers.

"My daughter, I suppose, Dan," he said.

"Yes, Mr. Manion."

"Ah, a wonderful daughter she has been to me, Dan! She has not missed a single visiting day since I have been here; and all through that farce they called my trial she supported me by her presence and her belief in me."

"Yes, sir."

Manion stepped out of his cell. "Come on," he said briskly; and Crear had to bestir himself to keep up.

Manion flung a cheery greeting to each prisoner as he passed his cell. The replies were friendly without being familiar. As the two went down the endless stone steps, Manion inquired with a cordial interest after every member of Crear's numerous family. Manion never forgot such things. It appeared that little Pat had the tonsilitis.

"And your wife is crazy!" said Manion

sympathetically. "Not to speak of the expense. Here, Dan, here's a mite toward it." A bill rapidly changed hands. "Not a word—not a word!"

Roger Manion, of course, was conducted into the special room for visitors. His "daughter" was a dark, pretty girl, who looked rather old for her years, or else Roger had been married very young. Her whole turnout expressed the very last word in smartness; her self-possession was perfect. She had the kind of quick, black eyes of which it is said that they miss no trick. She would have been a beauty if she had not looked quite so sharp.

Roger and this young person greeted each other affectionately, and the girl flung a dazzling smile at Crear, which powerfully affected the honest keeper. According to the prison rules, a keeper was supposed to be present at all interviews, but Crear felt so well disposed toward the Manions that he went down to the end of the room and picked up a newspaper.

When Roger saw that the keeper's attention was engaged his voice became less fatherly in tone. He said: "Been to New York, Cora?"

She replied: "Took the sleeper Sunday night. Saw Morrow there."

"And the paper for the bonds?" Roger asked breathlessly.

"Morrow had it. I brought it back with me. It's safe in Inchfawn's hands."

"Good!" he said in high relief. "Have any trouble?"

"Not for us. Morrow said the loss of the paper was discovered at the mill, and several of the employees were arrested, including the man Morrow had got it from. But there was no evidence. They'll have to let him go. And, anyhow, there's nothing to show any connection between the man who took the paper and Morrow. Or with us."

"But if the loss of the paper is known, it may make trouble for us later, when we put out the bonds."

"Morrow said the mill people hushed that up in order to avoid getting into trouble with the government, and perhaps losing their contract."

"How much paper did you get?"

"Three thousand sheets. All cut to size for the bonds."

"Hah!" Roger's eyes glistened, and his long mustache bristled slightly. "How about Inchfawn?"

"He's been working hard. He has attended to all your instructions. He says he has now got a perfect match in the yellow ink. He hasn't had time to pull a proof on the bona-fide paper, so I have nothing to show you to-day."

"Tell him not to waste any of that paper in pulling proofs," said Roger quickly. "It's worth five hundred dollars a sheet to us, and we can't get any more. Any sort of bond paper will do for proofs. Don't let him touch the real paper until he's sure he's ready to go ahead. Then let him print one and send it to me, together with the original bond to compare with. Let him take another week—two weeks, if necessary."

Cora nodded.

"I'll compare the two under a microscope," Roger went on. "We must take no chances. If I'm satisfied, I'll give him the word to print, and then you can get in touch with Barkdull."

"Must we call him in?" she asked. "He will want such a big rake-off!"

"Don't see any way to avoid it. Of course, we could put the bonds out a few at a time, but there's always the risk of a blow-up before we've finished unloading. Barkdull's in touch with big bankers and so on. He can take the whole lot at once."

"I'm afraid of Sol Barkdull," she muttered. "He'll get the best of us somehow."

"He won't get the best of *me*," Roger declared dryly. "Have him come here, and I'll make the deal with him."

"Here, to the prison?" she said, surprised.

"Why not? Barkdull never got in wrong in this State. Anyhow, he's got plenty of nerve. He'll enjoy the situation as much as I will. Let him pass as a banker, as my financial adviser—see? What's this he calls himself now? Van Lear Chalmers. Some name, eh?"

"He'll want so much!" muttered Cora.

"I won't let him swindle us, never fear.

And even after he's paid, there'll be enough left to fix us all for life. Half for me, half to be divided between you and Inchfawn. Ah, Cora—this is the culmination of my life's work! This is my last deal! My daughter's through school now. I've got to stick to the straight and narrow. She'll never know what I went through in order to get it!"

"How about me?" Cora murmured sullenly.

"You'll be absolutely independent," he said calmly. "Free to go wherever you choose."

She raised her eyes indignantly, but he supported her look, coolly and hard, and she had to drop her eyes again.

"You're so hard," she murmured.

"Not hard, my dear," he asserted mildly. "Consistent. For twelve years we've been business partners." He delicately underlined the word business. "I couldn't [redacted]better partner. But it's been understood from the first that when my daughter left the convent our association was to cease, and we were to go our separate ways. Isn't that so?"

"Yes," she muttered, "but—"

Roger coolly changed the subject.

"Where's Inchfawn going to print the bonds?" he asked.

"Right in the boarding house where he's stopping," said Cora.

"Isn't that risky?"

"Not at all. Everything is working out splendidly. It's the most fashionable boarding house in town—the last house anybody would suspect. And Inchfawn's getting all kinds of publicity as the New York etcher who has come down to do picturesque Clayton. Local pride is flattered. They talk of getting up an exhibition of his work. What more natural than for him to set up his press in the attic of the boarding house? He has his etchings to show to anybody who comes."

"You don't go there, do you?"

"Not on your life! We communicate by letter, care general delivery. Or by telephone in case of necessity."

"How long will it take him to print?"

"It's slow work printing by hand. Ten days; two weeks."

"Say three weeks, then," said Roger exultantly. "In three weeks we'll be out of the woods! We'll all be fixed for life! How goes the pardon?"

"The pipes are laid! You think I've been pretty slow about that, but I wasn't going to make any move until I got the lay of the political situation in this State. Well, I moseyed round, and now I know who's who.

"The real pardoning power in this State is Ralph Culberson, the governor's secretary. It seems that a while back the Governor was about to pardon a certain thievish politician, when the newspapers got hold of it and raised an awful hue and cry. The Governor blamed it all on Culberson. Culberson accepted the buck, but he's had it on the old man ever since, and now it's the secretary who has the say about who shall be pardoned.

"I couldn't go direct to Culberson without exciting suspicion. So I went behind him. Culberson owes his appointment to John Camp, the Fourth Ward boss in Clayton—see? I made up to John Camp, and I got him eating out of my hand. Culberson has got to do what John Camp says, and the Governor's got to pardon whoever Culberson says. You've only to say when you want it put through."

"How much will it cost you to square Camp?" asked Roger anxiously.

"Not a cent. I charmed him."

"You're a wonder, Cora!"

"You're dead right, I am!" she asserted a little sorely. "You don't half appreciate me."

"You shouldn't say that, Cora."

"Well, shall I put the thing through?"

"No," Roger answered quickly. "Let me stay right here in jail till we pull off this Liberty Bond deal. As soon as I get out the 'dicks' will camp on my trail. I couldn't move hand or foot. But as long as I'm locked up, I'm free, so to speak."

"I thought maybe you'd feel that way," said Cora; "but remember it will take a certain amount of time to—"

She was interrupted by the entrance of another keeper. This man said: "There's a visitor for Mr. Manion."

Cora and Roger exchanged a swift, un-

easy glance. No other visitor was expected.

Crear bestirred himself. "Don't you see he's got a visitor?" he said reprovingly.

Under the rules, a prisoner could receive only one visitor in an afternoon.

"This one has special permission from the warden," said the other man.

"Who is it?" asked Roger.

"Your daughter."

The faces of Roger and Cora went blank with consternation. Roger quickly recovered himself.

"My other child!" he cried with pantomime of delight. "Show her in! Show her in! Your sister!" he added to Cora.

Cora smiled in a rather sickly fashion.

A slender figure rushed in and precipitated herself into Roger's arms.

"Father! Father!"

"My darling child!"

Crear looked on at the family reunion in fatuous good nature. Roger had his back to him. Roger's face, looking over Celesta's head, offered a study in mixed emotions. He said at last:

"See, dear, your sister is here!"

Celesta jumped out of his arms as if he had stung her. "My *sister!*"

Roger whispered urgently:

"Recognize her, or you'll ruin me!"

Celesta and Cora smiled at each other with stiff lips. They dutifully pecked at each other's cheeks.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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ROMANCE

HERE at my desk I sit and dream:
I am a sailorman bold and free;
The waters roar and the white gulls scream,
But I love the sea and its mystery.

I ever sail with a gallant crew
Bravely out from the beaten way,
Over the boundless, trackless blue,
Feeling the sting of the salt sea spray.

Lo, we harry the Spanish Main,
Lusty lads in the quest for gold;
There comes a galleon bound for Spain
With the wealth of the world deep in her hold.

I am one with the dauntless Drake;
Yo-ho-ho! And the sun sinks down,
As our guns roar out in her foaming wake
To the ghost-white walls o' Colon Town.

Gold and jewels and gleaming rings!
Then away to the blue lagoon,
Where dark eyes wait and warm love clings,
And laughter lifts to the witching moon.

Here at my desk, a lad o' dreams,
I mock the challenge that life has hurled,
As I sail forever and ever, it seems,
In the romance ways of a magic world.

Edgar Daniel Kramer.

Oh, Promise Me!

By FRED JACKSON

Author of "The Mummy," "The Morocco Box," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

MR. MURRAY VAN CLEVE descended from the big touring car that had been sent to the station to meet him, and crossed the terrace to the marble steps, where his sister was waiting for him against a background of some pink-flowering thing. She made a point of meeting her arriving guests in just this spot, well knowing that she looked quite her best there. The rather thick trees dimmed the overhead sunlight to a pleasing greenness that was most becoming to her.

"My *dear!*" she cried, in greeting, and hugged him very thoroughly. But he was not a hard person to hug. "You look simply *huge* in those tweedy things," she declared, leaning back to get a good view of him, but holding tight to his shoulders. "And absolutely bronzed!"

"Leggo!" smiled Van Cleve. "There are millions of people looking on from the veranda," and added, "how'd you expect a man to look after India and Turkey and Egypt and sea voyages and so on?"

She slipped an arm through his and turned him toward the house.

"I don't know—about the way you looked when you left, I suppose," she answered. "I always expect people to stay the way they *are* and I'm always surprised when they don't! Before I stop to think about it, I mean. Of course, I expected you to look handsome—but not as handsome as *this!* Have *I* gone off any?"

"You know you haven't. You look like a dream." His eyes ran over her approvingly. "Do you still go in for the prettiest girls you can find—to show how much prettier *you* are by contrast?"

"I never did," she protested, dimpling. "But I *have* got all the season's prettiest just now. Dickie *does* adore pretty girls—in a perfectly proper, faithful-to-me fashion!"

Dickie—who was Richard Nielson Cunard in full—sauntered forward to meet them, even as she spoke. He was in polo things and looked hot and carried a high-ball glass in his hand. His chief claim to distinction was that he was Mrs. Richard Nielson Cunard's husband.

"Hello, Bub!" he called in greeting. And carefully transferring his glass to his left, shook hands warmly with his right. "Welcome to Hilltops!"

The others who knew Van Cleve crowded round cordially; those who had risen to the prominence of his sister's set since his departure two years before looked on smilingly and nodded when she presented him.

"Now," she cried, "I guess you'll all admit I haven't been exaggerating. My brother, Murray Van Cleve—Mrs. Stanley—Miss Lingard—Miss Gerould—"

There were others there—other names that Connie Cunard rattled off glibly, but from the instant his eyes fell upon Gypsy Gerould, Van Cleve heard no more. He had never seen so entrancing a bit of feminine loveliness in his life—never! There could have been no two opinions on that score—no possibility of doubt.

She was little and dainty and piquante, with a great mop of dark hair—bobbed—a tiny, pointed face—a tiny nose—long, rather oriental eyes with great fringed, sweeping lashes—and dimples at both sides of her three-cornered, slightly opened mouth. Her gown was some strange shade of burnt orange chiffon, and she held a saucy, floppy, gauzy hat in her hands. It had daringly red poppies on it, drooping over the edge.

"May I come and sit near you to have my high ball?" asked Van Cleve, when he had bowed and smiled all around.

"Please do," she said softly. "I was hoping you'd want to! And you can tell me all about the Orient—and the tigers you killed—and everything. Not that I approve of killing tigers! I think they're too beautiful! They ought to be allowed to go about anywhere unmolested—and eat anybody they fancied!"

He laughed.

"So, you think beauty is as important as that, do you?" he said.

"Yes," she answered emphatically. "Don't you think it's important?"

"Not more important than life," he answered judicially, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"But it's much more important than life to a woman," said she. "I'd rather be eaten by tigers than lose mine! Because beauty means men—and I like men!"

She smiled up at him, naïvely.

"Plural?" asked Van Cleve.

"Yes—the *pluraler* the better," said Gypsy. "Not that I lack concentration, either. I've just not found the right man yet that can make me forget that the others are on earth. I've thought I have—several times. But I've always been mistaken!"

"*Fortunately*," observed Van Cleve.

"Fortunately?" she repeated, challengingly.

"Fortunately for *me!*" he amended.

"Oh—I see. You do like me, then?"

She opened wide eyes at him and waited, breathlessly for his assurance.

"*Rather*—" He found himself blushing, his heart beating faster.

"I'm glad—because I like you, too. I liked you from your picture—in the silver frame on your sister's dressing table. And I was so afraid you mightn't fancy my type. You are sure you don't prefer us tall and blond?"

"Positive! I hate you tall and blond," said he viciously.

She beamed on him.

"You *are* nice," she said, "and I am sure you are even nicer in the moonlight. And there's a moon to-night!"

"Shall we have a rendezvous?" he asked daringly.

"I will if you will." Gypsy flashed a delightful smile at him. "I adore doing brazen, improper, shockingly unconventional things. Life is so monotonous otherwise. But perhaps you don't favor leaping the preliminaries this way? Would you prefer to begin by talking about books and plays and mutual friends?"

"I would not," said he emphatically; "I want to talk about *you!*"

"I hoped you would. I adore being talked about," returned Gypsy. "In a nice way, for preference—but otherwise rather than not at all! I suppose you know you'll

be warned against me before you're many hours older!"

"No—shall I be, really? Are you a dangerous woman?" asked Van Cleve.

"Lots of people think so. They say I am heartless and fickle and a flirt. And that I have no brains. And all because I've been engaged three times—and broken it off. Do *you* think I should have married—just to avoid criticism and censure—when I found out in time that I wasn't deeply, absorbingly, overwhelmingly in love?"

"No—decidedly not," said he.

"I am glad to hear you say that. It's hard being blamed for something that you *feel is right!* But—women always have been rather unkind to me. I suppose because men like me. And I don't give a hang, because I prefer men, anyway."

She gazed off over the distant wooded hills and sighed.

"We—hit it off—don't we?" she told him.

"It seems so!"

"I either like people or I don't, at sight," she went on, "and I almost never change."

"Well?" he asked, gazing down at her profile. It was bewitching.

"I like you lots," she assured him, turning to look up tranquilly into his eyes.

Constance Cunard, sauntering toward them, caught the look and seemed annoyed and a little exasperated for an instant before she called—with apparent nonchalance:

"If you've quite finished your high ball, Bub—I'll take you up!"

"Righto!" he answered cheerfully, and added to Gypsy: "I must have a bath and a change. Awful trip, you know—down here. But I'll see you later."

"I hope so," said she earnestly.

Constance slipped her hand through his arm, and led him toward the house.

"First of all," she said, "I want one thing understood! You are *not* to fall in love with Gypsy Gerould. She's broken more hearts than any ten other girls in New York—and she shan't break yours. She's pretty, I'll not deny—but not real, my dear! She's never had a real emotion in her petted, pampered, spoiled existence. She's just a cute and cunning and delectable *fluff*—and she's not worthy of you."

Van Cleve smiled.

"Well," he said, "now that I'm forewarned, I guess I'm comparatively safe!"

And he asked about his sister's kiddies, and so changed the subject. And presently went whistling into his bath in very fine humor indeed.

II.

Gypsy Gerould, in orange chiffon, had been delectable at the high-ball hour, but Gypsy Gerould in jade-green, with jade earrings in her ears and jade bracelets on her wrists—well, she was irresistible at cocktail time. Van Cleve saw her—the center of a crowd of men—as he came down the stairs for dinner, and he felt quite a new thrill of delighted surprise and satisfaction as his eyes wandered over her.

He had been telling himself for the past hour that no girl could have been as fascinating as she had seemed. He had been blaming his high ball—the tropical sun that had been beating down on him for months—the excitement of his homecoming. But here she was, more enthrallingly lovely than he had imagined—elfin in her tininess, her grace, her impish, mischievous, bewildering moods. The jade green gown set off her creamy, polished shoulders, her dimpled back, bare quite to the waist; her slender, incredibly shapely arms and hands. And in the glare of the electrics her mouth looked redder and hungrier; her eyes seemed darker; her hair stood out in a maze of curling silken strands. And there was a hint of dark color on her cheeks. She was radiant—audacious—irresistible!

Van Cleve was no youth just out of college. He had had love affairs before. He had some knowledge of the world and its ways—some considerable experience. But he was like a boy to-night as he stood at a distance and gazed at Gypsy Gerould. And Gypsy, noting him, as she noted everything in her immediate vicinity—especially the expressions of the men in her orbit—glowed with triumph and satisfaction and smiled like the cat who has stolen the bulldog's dinner.

"Ravishing—isn't she?" said Neville Greyson, approaching Van Cleve, and following the direction of his glance. "Like

a dancing flame—and just as hard to hold on to. I hear she has broken her engagement again. The younger Stewart boy it was this time. What I can't make out is how she catches them. They must *know* she isn't in earnest. Winning hearts is a game with her—that's all. I don't believe she's ever really cared about anybody in her life. And yet her conquests continue—and she snares victim after victim."

"I daresay," nodded Van Cleve. "It must be fascinating to play the game with her—even if you lose!"

"I suppose so—there is that!" admitted the older man. "But there is the risk, of course, that you'd forget it's just a game—and learn to care too much for your future peace of mind. She's so damned bewitching."

"Think," said Van Cleve meditatively, "of holding her in your arms—*close!* Think of pressing your mouth on hers."

"It would be—an experience," nodded Greyson.

"Yes. It would be." Van Cleve's eyes glittered as they rested on her. "There's something about her that fires your blood, isn't there?"

"Yes," said Greyson. "And that's exactly why I can never understand why fellows want to marry her! I can understand their loving her—but to attempt to live with her in the monotonous tranquillity of the married state! *Ye gods!* There'd be no peace—no relaxation. It would be like trying to trap lightning."

"Yes—impossible," agreed Van Cleve, "which is just why it would be worth trying. The impossible things, you know, are really the only things worth while doing."

He put down his cocktail glass as the butler announced dinner, and gave his arm to Mrs. Stanley—who happened to be nearest; but he hoped that his sister had been kind and had put him next Gypsy at table. But Connie had been neither kind nor wise. She had placed her brother between Ada Lingard and Marion Sturgis — both sweet, wholesome girls who would have made him most desirable wives. He could hardly remember, afterward, what they looked like; for Gypsy was almost directly opposite—and he could scarcely take his eyes off her.

She looked absurdly small in the carved, high-backed chair that gave the butler and the footmen so much trouble; and a hassock had to be brought for her feet before the dinner could proceed. And all the while she was being made comfortable she was laughing and bewailing her littleness, and waving the very big fan that almost completely hid her from view when she had a mind to hide. She could not—it seemed to Van Cleve—be more than twenty—though Connie declared later that she was at least twenty-four. She had a way of seeming like a child. But, of course, her sophistication and the things she said revealed her complete maturity. She had been out two seasons.

"It is always amazing to me," remarked Marion Sturgis, smiling, "how cleverly Gypsy manages to become the center of attention in any gathering she happens to grace. And yet she is invariably the smallest person present."

"I suppose that is an asset, though," said Ada Lingard at Van Cleve's other side. "To be the extreme of anything is desirable. The smallest or the tallest or the prettiest or the plainest. It's a—a sort of distinction that lifts one above the rest, don't you think?"

Van Cleve, unable to ignore this direct question, agreed with her.

"Though I *shouldn't* like to be the *plainest*," said Marion Sturgis.

"Oh, I don't know. Some of the most loved women of history have been positively ugly. It isn't the shape or combination of one's features that makes one a successful fascinator; it's something *in* one—a kind of magnetism that shines through. I can feel it in Gypsy myself—so I never blamed her victims."

"Has she had many?" asked Van Cleve, interested now.

"Oh, Lord, dozens!" exclaimed Ada. "And each one enters the lists so jauntily—confident of conquering her."

"But of course some day—some man will conquer her," said Van Cleve.

"Maybe. It would be poetic justice, I admit, if some one did, and treated her as she has treated so many men. But I'm not sure there's anything inside her to conquer.

It's obvious to every one that she has never really cared for any man yet. The question in my mind is whether she is capable of caring. If not, of course, she can never be punished. It's going to be interesting, I think, to watch and see!"

"Very interesting," agreed Van Cleve.

And then Ada told him that the man who was bending over Gypsy so attentively just then was the English polo player, Stockley, and the conversation drifted to polo. And Van Cleve speedily lost interest.

Afterward—a very long time afterward, it seemed to him—the interminable dinner ended; chairs were pushed back; conversations interrupted unexpectedly were finished in haste, or postponed until later—the diners moved toward the big doors, singly, or in pairs. There were various rearrangements of groups, reforming now to suit the interests of the individuals rather than the interests of the hostess. In the ensuing babble of laughter and jests, Ada Lingard whispered to Marion Sturgis that Connie's brother was handsome but quite dull, and Marion agreed emphatically. And the gentleman in question, abandoning them without further consideration, made his way determinedly to Gypsy's side.

She had ensconced herself on a seat near the piano—a short but very comfortable seat that had been designed to hold two, but she had seated herself so as to quite monopolize it—and the men who had followed her, were lined up before her, almost shutting her off from view. But Van Cleve managed to discover her there—and was presently in the front rank of them—offering her coffee and a cigarette. She accepted both with a smile and a long look upward into his eyes, and as he lighted her cigarette, she made room for him beside her.

It was obvious to all the others that she had planned this tête-à-tête deliberately; they were somewhat familiar with her methods by this time. And the other men, smiling slightly, and with a rather amused and knowing air, drifted off, leaving them together. Van Cleve's attitude of frank admiration was too plain to be ignored or overlooked. The others generously gave him over to the enchantress—and watched from a little distance though they could not overhear. The piano flanking them, precluded the possibility of this.

"Well," he began comfortably, "I've got you to myself at last—anyway—even if it is in the face of the entire population. I tell you frankly I don't approve of your being so very charming to so many men!"

"But I told you I adore them—all," she protested. "I always tell the new ones that—at once. Although there are times when I do think I would prefer some certain one—all by himself."

"Meaning—" said Van Cleve eagerly.

"Meaning," said she, letting her eyes sweep over him admiringly, "that there are *times*—when I *would* prefer—some certain one."

He smiled.

"I wonder," he said, "what you are *really* like."

"Sometimes I wonder myself," she admitted frankly. "I have often tried to discover. But I am too inconsistent—and changeable—and baffling. I suppose they have already told you what a distressingly cruel and selfish creature I am—and what a menace to mankind in general?"

"Rather." He nodded emphatically. "In great detail—and most solemnly."

"But you are not afraid?" she asked gravely.

"No-o!" He shrugged and seemed to make light of the danger.

"But you know—there is really something in it. Oh, they exaggerate, of course. But I do seem to have the dreadful faculty of making people around me unhappy. I think I am a kind of mirage—that looks to be everything it isn't—and cannot quite satisfy any one. I wish I were not this way. But one is as one is. Maybe it would be wiser not to keep that tryst in the moonlight to-night, eh? I would not like to make *you* wretched. Somehow—you are not like the rest. You who have lived in the desert places—and the ancient hills—and the jungles where the elephants come down to the water to drink, and the yellow tigers crouch—motionless—in the flowering brush—with their yellow eyes gleaming."

She was smoking, inhaling sensuously, her head tilted back, her eyes half closed. She was smoking as if she loved it.

"You talk about those things as though you have a sort of feeling for them" said he.

"I have. Perhaps it is the wild thing in me. Sometimes I suspect that—just underneath the surface, you know—I am not quite civilized. My grandmother, you see, was a gypsy. My grandfather found her in Hungary—dancing to the music of her brother's fiddle—in the streets, you know. Then they would pass through the crowd for money. He fell in love with her and married her—oh, to the horror of his family, you may be sure. The Geroulds are of England's best. But he would not be gainsaid. He brought her home to his mother's house and tried to make a lady of her—and she died."

"Poor thing," said Van Cleve.

"Yes. I feel that way about her, too. The Geroulds, of course, brought up her baby—my father—and did their best to make a Christian gentleman of him. But it was a difficult business. He gave them many an uneasy moment before he married my mother and settled down. But—grandmother's strain is rather more diluted in me—and more tractable. Only—in some ways—I'm rather gypsyish—now and then."

"I can well believe it," he assured her.

She dimpled.

"Tell me," she said, "have you ever loved any of the native girls—out there? Those marvelous Arab girls—with slender, sinuous bodies and flashing teeth and wise, wise eyes. Or the dove-eyed Indians with skin like *café au lait* and silken hair? You would not tell me if you had, of course. But I'll venture to guess you have had adventures. You are the type of man that women love."

"I was working out there," he answered, "not playing."

"I know, engineering. I have told you that the picture in your sister's boudoir interested me. She told me about you. But you cannot make me believe you worked always and—and lived like a priest. You have not the face of a priest."

"What astounding things you say," he cried, coloring under his tan.

She dimpled, delighted at having disturbed him.

"Ah—one *lives* in the twentieth century—and one thinks—and understands. I envy men their freedom to travel and risk adventure." She sighed.

"Of course you could not go to the four corners of the earth alone—as a man could. But *with the right man*—it might be pleasant, too," said he.

"Yes," she repeated dreamily "with the *right* man—it *might* be—pleasant."

She was gazing fixedly at the glowing end of her cigarette and the thin spiral of bluish smoke curling upward. His eyes were fixed on her profile—as she meant them to be. It was a profile well worth studying—so pure in line—so delicately chiseled—the lips so sensitive—the nose so straight—the chin so deliciously rounded—the sweep of the lashes so amazing. It took his breath.

"There are certain places that I should like to show you," he went on, and his voice had not its usual cool steadiness. "I have never wanted to share them with any one else in the world—before. But now—I—I think you would appreciate them. One is in the Swiss Alps—where the mountains rise to astounding snow-capped heights and catch the reflected light and color of the setting or rising sun; and beneath them are blue lakes—of a blueness I have never seen before—and fisherfolk in many hued garments, in little boats, going to and fro. And then there is a street in Constantinople, near the bridge to Old Stamboul—where the world passes and time stands still. And then—an oasis in the Arabian desert—a wonder spot of verdant green, of flowers and fruit trees and palms—where I have a friend, Sheik Ibrahim, who has seven wives—all dwelling together in perfect content—devoted to their elderly lord and master. And there famous Arabian steeds are bred, the like of which you have never seen for beauty or speed or spirit."

She looked at him with flaming eyes.

"You must show them to me—you *must!*" she cried. "I am tired of the things and places I know. I want to go away into new, strange worlds—with you. And you must teach me to see—and appreciate."

"I—I—" he stammered, flushing. And stopped as the fire died suddenly out of her eyes, and they went past him—to the room beyond.

"Your sister is coming. You are about to be rescued again," she said. "But perhaps — later — in the garden — when the others have gone up. On nights like this I cannot sleep, anyway."

"Yes," he cried eagerly. "I'll be waiting for you—"

And then Connie came up casually to suggest bridge.

III.

VAN CLEVE would not play. He could not. His thoughts were absorbed by this strange, fascinating girl, who was like no other girl he had even known before. He wanted to get away by himself—to think over all that they had said to each other—to recall her in her many moods. But Gypsy accepted the invitation nonchalantly, and presently was bending over the card table—intensely interested—concentrating upon her game.

She liked bridge. She liked all games, in fact. And she played well. One of her chief charms was her ability to enter wholeheartedly into anything that she did. She seemed to fling herself into the card game and the issues at stake with as much abandon as she had revealed in her flirtation with Van Cleve.

Realizing this, he wondered if she was really as frivolous, as flippant, as changeable as the others had said—if it was only the surface of her being that was ever stirred—if there were, perhaps, depths to be plumbed beneath those shallows that the world knew. He strolled out through the French windows and looked at the sweeping grounds surrounding his sister's place—the smooth, bricked terraces, the sunken gardens, the rolling lawns and wooded knolls in the distance. The moon was full, and on the warm breeze came the scent of the flowers—a subtle commingling of many fragrances.

Stockley, the English polo player, and Neville Greyson, sitting in a far corner of the veranda with their second cups of coffee, their liqueurs and cigars, observed the figure standing motionless by the white pillar, and Stockley said:

"Our young friend Van Cleve would seem to be hard hit!"

"Yes," rejoined Greyson, "he seems to be. And if he is, our little Gypsy will have a foeman worthy of her steel—for once. It will be an interesting combat!"

"Combat?" repeated Stockley.

Mrs. Stanley, who was reclining in a white wicker chair between them, laughed softly. She always seized the opportunity to laugh softly, because she laughed well.

"Dear Neville! He never will believe that any one is in earnest about anything. He thinks that Gypsy only plays games with men and never falls in love at all."

"And you think she does?" asked Greyson.

"Of course—tremendously—for the time being. She's just one of those natures that lack constancy and stability, that's all. I don't think she'll ever love any man—lastingly. And I don't think our friend Van Cleve will be a match for her at all. Because he's the type who feels deeply. And she isn't! So how can he hurt her?"

"Perhaps she *can* feel deeply—if she never has yet," suggested Stockley.

Mrs. Stanley laughed again.

"Perhaps," she said. "But I hope not. I glory in her. She is the Avenger of Womankind—dancing through life—destroying all men whose eyes rest on her. Exacting tributes. Paying no penalties. So many of us suffer in this man's world. But Gypsy squares the scores. I'll back her against Van Cleve—or any other man—"

"I'll take you up," said Greyson suddenly.

"Say! What's this—a wager?" asked Stockley.

"Yes," said Greyson. "You shall be witness. I wager that Van Cleve will either marry her—or break her heart."

"And I wager that she will *not* marry him. I'll wager *she* will break *his* heart. He cares too much," said Mrs. Stanley.

"And—the stakes?" asked Stockley.

Mrs. Stanley regarded Greyson speculatively.

"The loser will make such payment as he or she deems suitable," she said.

And she held out her hand to Greyson. He felt an instinctive uneasiness as he clasped it in his to bind the bargain. Mrs. Stanley was a widow.

It seemed to Van Cleve that he would never rid himself of the others who dropped into his room, a great deal later, for a final drink and a cigarette. Stockley came—and Cunard, his brother-in-law, and young Crosby-Brown, who was still at college and never wanted to go to bed, nor missed an opportunity to drink and swap stories. They kept it up interminably, in spite of Van Cleve's politely smothered yawns and tentative preparations to retire—and he was beginning to feel sure that Gypsy would never wait all this time for him—when Cunard finally moved that they adjourn—and they drifted off, reluctantly, one by one, apologizing as they remembered that Van Cleve had traveled far that day and must be tired. Then—with his lights hastily extinguished, he had to wait again, to give them time to reach their own rooms and turn in.

It was after two o'clock by that time. The bridge game had broken up at a little past twelve.

His nerves were strung taut, and he was ready to leap at the slightest sound, when he finally crept stealthily down the stairs and let himself out of one of the French windows.

It was a marvelous night still—a perfect night for tryst.

Keeping well out of view—lest some late prowler might be gazing from one of the windows—he descended the stone terrace steps, and went on toward the sunken garden, where Connie's beloved roses grew in luxurious profusion, filling the air with their heavy exotic scent.

She was not there!

He hesitated, uncertain whether to go back—or wait. It seemed unlikely that she would come now—at such an hour—so long after the others had gone up. More likely, she had already come and gone—thinking that he had not meant to keep their rendezvous. And yet—there was a chance that *she* had been detained, too, as he had been. There was just a *chance!*

He seated himself on a white bench and lighted a cigarette. And a moment later he saw her coming toward him—through the long walk—a scarf of some silvery stuff thrown over her bare shoulders—saw her come dancing like a wood nymph, heedless of reaching thorns and swaying branches. The soft click of her little heels made a strange rhythm on the stone flagging.

"So you *did* wait!" she cried gratefully as she came up—and her eyes were agleam with pleased surprise. "I thought I should never be free of them. It seemed almost as if they knew I was eager to come here—as if they were trying to prevent me."

She looked up at him, the smile dying out of her face, her eyes growing wide and wistful.

"As if," she added dreamily, "they—or *any one*—could prevent what is—inevitable."

"You think *this*—is inevitable?" he cried.

"Don't you?" she asked by way of reply. "Don't you—*feel* that it is?"

"Yes," said Van Cleve. And it was quite true. He had never been so moved by any woman before—had never been so drawn to any one. As she stood there in the moonlight, with the wind blowing her hair and the loose ends of her gown, he thought that he had never seen anything more lovely—anywhere in the world. His heart was beating violently, his breath coming hard.

"Some things," said the girl in a low voice, "you simply cannot bring about—no matter how you try. And some things come naturally, simply, swiftly—and you know they were meant to be."

And then—she was in his arms, held close to him, her lips crushed under his until she could no longer breathe. He could feel her heart throbbing wildly, as his was throbbing; could feel the flame that burned within him, scorching within her too. It was as if they two had been caught up in a swirling force too great to gainsay—overwhelmed—carried away; as if they realized this and did not even struggle; as if they perceived the futility of struggling.

"I love you," said Van Cleve hoarsely between set teeth.

"I know it," she whispered, relaxing in his arms. And she threw back her head and looked at him through drooping lids and shielding lashes. But her lips smiled. "And I love you. I don't know why, but I do. And I feel—as if I have come home—after long and weary wanderings. Hold me close—*closer—closer.*"

He crushed her to him and pressed his cheek against her hair. The warmth of her, the fragrance of her, intoxicated him.

"I have always known that it would be like this," said she. "That's why I have waited. And now—I'm glad. It's been worth while if to-morrow we don't repent to-night's madness."

"*Repent?*" he repeated, laughing. And he kissed her neck, her throat, her shoulders.

She freed herself suddenly, fiercely, and stood away from him, panting. Her eyes were bright; they flamed. Her lips were parted. Her bosom heaved beneath the folds of gauzy stuff.

"I must go," she cried. "I am frightened." And turning swiftly, she fled down the long white aisle between the nodding roses that seemed to reach out and brush against her as she went. But even as she turned, she looked back once over her shoulder, into his eyes, and cried:

"*To-morrow!*"

It was like a promise.

IV.

VAN CLEVE arranged with his man to have a note sent up to her on her breakfast tray—this after a somewhat restless and sleepless night—and he wrote:

> Come down soon. Don't wait to make a careful and elaborate toilet. You don't need to. The others cannot compete with you, in any case—no matter how simply you're turned out. *So* come soon, for pity's sake! I am lonely for you and there are millions of things I want to say! One of them is "*I still love you!*" M. V. C.

To this, in an incredibly short time, came an answer, scrawled in a big, rather careless hand, on very heavy paper, monogrammed in blue.

> MOST ADORABLE:
>
> What have you done to me? I did not sleep a wink—not *one!* I, who have never known an instant's uneasiness in my life. I *could* not sleep—for the gnawing restlessness within—which was a longing for you—for your strong arms to hold me—and your lips to crush mine. How dare you come into my life like this—unsummoned—and in *no* time—in a *flash*—become of the utmost importance so that all else is dwarfed and rendered insignificant? I resent it! But do not go away! I could not bear that! I dare not think what life would be without you, now that—you have come.
>
> I am writing this while my tub is running, and Eloise is laying out my lingerie. It is silvery-pink to-day—like peach bloom. White lingerie faintly blushing from the contact of my body—this body thrilling for the first time with an eagerness—an ardor to run—to dance—to *speed* across the intervening spaces—to where *you* are!
>
> I, too, have millions of things to say to you—but the sum and substance of all of them is "I love you with all my heart, and with every fiber of my being, and with every littlest drop of my blood!" Until we meet again—and always and forever *yours,*
>
> GYPSY.

He read it twice and slipped it into his coat pocket, blushing crimson as his sister came toward him over the broad veranda where he was waiting.

"Don't tell me she has begun writing you already!" cried Connie in dreary despair. "Certainly, she has wasted no time!"

"Who?" he asked as casually as he could.

"Gypsy, of course. She is one of our most enthusiastic letter writers at all times, and I must admit she does them rather well. But to you—and so soon! It's incredible."

"Whatever makes you think Miss Gerould is writing to me?" he asked.

"Her stationery, which I am quite sure I saw in your hands as I came toward you, Bub dear," smiled his sister. "Did you get to know each other as well as that last night in the drawing-room—or was there perhaps a meeting, later on, in the garden?"

His telltale flush assured her that her guess had hit home.

"Ah—the garden," said Connie. "I really *must* have burglar alarms for the protection of my masculine guests. She is *too* lovely at those midnight trysts."

"You talk as though she makes a habit of midnight trysts," he growled angrily.

"She does," admitted Connie blissfully. "Did you think for one moment that you were the first to inspire in her a mad and overwhelming passion—that you were the first to make love to her in my rose garden?"

"You saw us!" he cried.

"No—it was young Stewart I saw there with her, some time ago, just before they became engaged. You see, Bub, what you *will* not understand is that Gypsy Gerould is an unprincipled, unscrupulous little man hunter with no vestige of honor or reliability about her emotions—and no heart."

He controlled his rising anger with some difficulty; he was really very fond of his sister—always had been.

"I suppose," he said slowly, "all girls have their little flirtations—before they *really* fall in love. It would be absurd to expect a girl as lovely as Gypsy to grow up—in this sort of environment—without attracting quite a number of men—and being a little attracted by some. I have had *my* flirtations, too."

"Murray!" cried his sister anxiously, using his given name, so deep was her concern. "Don't tell me you fancy yourself *seriously* taken with this—this flippant, *frivolous* little chit! And so *soon!*"

He met her eyes frankly, coloring a bit, smiling.

"You know me," he said. "I've always rushed into things impulsively. Because I've usually known just what I've wanted, without having to think about it at all. And the minute I laid eyes on her—I wanted her for mine. You may as well know the truth. I'm going to have her, at any cost, in spite of anything you or any one else can do. And I'm going to have her as quickly as I can."

She was breathless. His tone and look carried absolute conviction. It was impossible to doubt that he, at least, was entirely in earnest.

"My dear!" she wailed wretchedly. "Oh, I could *kill* that little imp! She ought to have seen that you are not like the rest. She ought to have realized that you would take things seriously—and be hurt. I'll never forgive her for this—*never!*"

He grinned, looming over her there, and looked tremendously fit and quite capable of taking care of himself. Over six feet, he was, and stalwart, lean limbed and slim waisted, but muscular, thoroughly efficient.

"You aren't flattering me at all, you know," he told her, a little amused. "I assure you I can handle this matter—and this girl, too—unsophisticated and helpless as I seem to be. Because, you see, she really *is* in earnest *this* time! She may have cried 'Wolf!' before, but this time it really *is* 'Wolf!'"

Connie regarded him with pitying eyes.

"I could cry," she said drearily.

He saw the tears beginning to gather, and exclaimed:

"Here! For pity's sake—don't!"

"I shall never forgive myself for having her here—never!" said Connie.

"And I shall never be grateful enough," he told her. And then, seeing Gypsy herself in the distance, he added:

"She's coming. For Heaven's sake powder your nose and smile!"

She was in riding things this morning—white breeches that fitted her slim young legs to perfection and revealed the marvelous contour of her figure; a jaunty little jacket of dark red, over her soft white silk blouse, a black tie and an impudent hat cocked on one side—a white hat with a broad brim and an exceedingly immature-looking feather of bottle green stuck into it. She was ravishing—almost childlike in appearance and spirit as she came running to meet them.

"We're going to ride," she informed him eagerly; and then, remembering, turned to Connie with: "Morning, Connie!"

"Good morning," said Connie.

"As soon as I've had my coffee," she went on enthusiastically, "we start. I've sent Dickie Townsend for my coffee. I'm going to gulp it out here—and I am having some food put up in a red bandanna to tie on the saddle bow—or wherever it is you tie supplies when you go off for a long trip on horseback. I never start off with men without taking plenty of food," she explained to Connie confidentially.

"A good plan," agreed Connie, nodding.

"We'll be away for luncheon," added Gypsy. "We'll eat our sandwiches in the woods, and beg or buy some milk and fruit at a farmhouse. And you'll never be ready to start with me," she said, turning suddenly on Van Cleve, "unless you move fast, boy! Here come the horses now!"

He looked and saw a groom riding one and leading the other up the driveway.

"I won't be a minute!" he cried happily and bolted.

Gypsy watched him go, with a sigh, and a look of extreme satisfaction brimming out of her dark eyes. Connie watched her thoughtfully.

"He *is* handsome," said his sister quietly.

"Gorgeous!" agreed Gypsy. "And you are not to scold me! To begin with—Dickie is approaching with my coffee, and he'd spoil your scene. Besides—I *am* fascinated. I really *am!* I've never been so bowled over in my life. Honest Injun!"

"But you told me that last time—about young Stewart," Connie reminded her.

"Well—I thought so then. I admit it. But I was mistaken. This time I'm sure."

Connie shook her head.

"But that's just what you said about Stewart when I reminded you of your attitude toward the one before. Who was it? Tommy Larkin, wasn't it?"

"I think you're *horrid!*" cried Gypsy. "I can't help it if I'm deceived about myself. At least I try to be honest. I thought I was in love with Tommy. But I wasn't. You never can be sure of people until you're engaged to them, anyway. Men begin to lay down the law to you then. And I'd rather break engagements a thousand times than marry the wrong man once. And the only way to find the right one—is just to keep on looking and *hoping!* I know I've been mistaken more often than most girls; but I really *do* think this is my finish. I honestly never *have* felt this way before. When he kissed me last night— I can't *tell* you! But it was *different.*"

She closed her eyes, her lashes brushing her cheek; her bosom stirred. And so Dickie Townsend found her as he came up carrying her coffee, with a tiny triangular bit of crisp toast on the side of the saucer. He held it near her nose without speaking, and instantly her eyes popped open with an ecstatic expression in them.

"My coffee!" she cried, sniffing luxuriously. "Dickie, you *are* a darling! I don't know why I've never fallen in love with you!"

"You may yet," remarked Connie dryly.

"I hate you!" said Gypsy. "Dickie, she is being unbearably unkind to me."

And she began to sip the coffee and nibble the toast.

"Dear me! Can't have that." Dickie frowned severely upon his hostess, who, however, remained singularly serene.

She felt an almost overmastering impulse to shake this girl—sweet and appealing as she looked—for her willfulness, her defiant playing with fire, her complete indifference to possible consequences. How she had come through thus far unscathed was a mystery to Connie, for she had certainly tried a number of men very far; nor did she carefully select her victims, choosing only those not likely to prove unmanageable! She smiled on all who caught her fancy, flung herself headlong into one violent flirtation after another—and retreated just in time. It was always the same—or had been until now. Connie could not quite believe that this affair was to prove "different." There had been too many others. And she was really annoyed to think that her favorite brother's name must be added to Gypsy's already long list—and that she was powerless to prevent it. For nothing that she could do or say would weigh with the girl, she knew. And certainly nothing could weigh with her brother.

Sensing all that passed in the older woman's mind, Gypsy looked across at her—over her coffee cup—and suddenly smiled, her eyes mischievous, her lips merry, her dimples peeping out in either cheek. There was something elfin about her.

"Men and women are natural enemies—don't you know that?" she said. "If it weren't I, it would be some one else who would come into conflict with him sooner or later. You can't keep him locked up in a glass case all his life, protected from the bright eyes of danger. He's a man, and he thirsts for conquest, even as I thirst. It's born in us. And isn't it better for him to fall at the hands of a kindly and experienced duelist, rather than before some mercenary and ungenerous female pirate? Cheer up, my child! Hearts were made to break—and I risk mine in every combat."

"You haven't one to risk," said Connie. "That's just the point!"

"But I have," protested Gypsy. "You wrong me! I don't wear it on my sleeve; but I have one—one worth winning. I'm keeping it—for my master!"

Her eyes brightened.

"Is the contest open to all?" asked Dickie Townsend interestedly.

She gave him back the coffee cup.

"Yes," she answered—"to all who can qualify. But the man who wins me must be a better fighter than I am—stronger, surer, more daring, more enduring, cleverer."

"Some man!" sighed Dickie.

"Yes," admitted the girl, "but—the game will be worth the candle, I promise you. When finally I am made captive and conquered, I will be such a mate as must content the most exacting—such a mate as no man has ever had before. Wife and mother, mistress and slave, companion and friend, all rolled into one. What all these other men have taught me shall be his. I am like that Arabian steed," she added more lightly, "who threw and killed every rider not of his own choosing—but when he chose a master, served him lovingly and loyally, even unto death."

And turning, she waved to Van Cleve, who had come down the steps in riding things and waved to her, and—was off toward where the horses waited restlessly in the drive. You could tell—to see her swing up on the animal's back—that she loved horses, and an instant later as she galloped ahead of him down the drive, her hat in her hand, her head thrown back, you could tell that the sun and the wind and that violent motion thrilled her. She was a daughter of the earth and reveled in her inheritance.

V.

VAN CLEVE caught up to Gypsy before they reached the Beach Road, but there was no opportunity for conversing, because she did not slow down. Presently, however, she turned off the Beach Road into the woods, and there in the greenish twilight, under the canopy of boughs and leaves, she halted, and turned round, her cheeks glowing, her eyes dancing, her breath coming fast through parted lips.

"It's glorious—isn't it—to ride like that, against the wind? I feel such a sense of power—and—*aliveness!*"

"I know," said he, nodding. And then, making his horse draw nearer hers, added simply: "Kiss me!"

She looked at him meditatively for an instant; his eyes held hers fast. Smiling, she leaned forward, like a child, her lips pursed up obediently, and they kissed, the horses gazing round in well-bred surprise at the sound of the smack.

Gypsy threw back her bobbed head and laughed joyously.

"They think we're mad. All the world thinks we're mad. Even I do myself, a little!" she cried.

"If we are," Van Cleve rejoined, "it's a divine kind of madness!"

"I grant you that," said she with a contented sigh. "Shall we get down and sit on that log and love each other and talk? Or shall we ride on and on and on—and find new places and strange things?"

"Let us sit on the log and love each other," Van Cleve decided.

"And *talk*," she added, correcting him.

"If you like."

"I *do*. I know so little about you. I want to know everything!"

He laughed as he swung himself down, and held up his arms to help her. She slipped her leg over, so that she sat sidewise, and then slid down into his arms. He caught her close, and kissed her hair, and her brow, and her eyes, and last of all her lips. But he had scarcely pressed his hard upon them when she pushed him back—and shook her head violently.

"You kiss too well," she said regretfully. "I am afraid you like to kiss. And I shall be learning to like it, too, if I am not careful. I must not let myself begin to need it. Not after all my years of self-sufficiency and independence."

"Why not?" he asked. "You are to have all the kissing you like—from now on. Are you not? I have not formally proposed marriage, I know—because it seemed so unnecessary. But surely you understand that there's no other way out for either of us—don't you? We belong to each other. It's *got* to be."

"I hate the idea of marriage," she said wistfully.

"So do I. I've never even contemplated it before."

"It's so humdrum, and monotonous, and proper," Gypsy went on gloomily, seating herself on the log and putting the end of a long wisp of green into her mouth.

"Usually," he admitted, "but that is because most married people are humdrum and monotonous and proper. We aren't—our marriage wouldn't be."

She looked at him thoughtfully; he sat down beside her and put his arm around her; she leaned against him with a sigh and relaxed.

"Personally," she remarked, "I'd rather just run away with you. It would be wonderful to start now—and go to the furthermost parts of the earth. But it would make things so difficult for everybody else. When we met friends—or if we chose to come back here."

"So you see there really is nothing to do but get married," he admitted.

"I suppose not," she sighed. "We couldn't just go on being friends!"

"No," he declared.

"No—not for long. Kiss me!"

He kissed her. She closed her eyes, giving herself up to the thrilling joy of it—and so they were silent a long, long time—not thinking—just feeling, feeling the rise of that tremendous emotion that had engulfed them. When presently his kisses ceased she looked up to find him staring down at her with a steady, scrutinizing, stern expression. And she saw that his jaw was set tight.

"What is it?" she asked in a whisper, a little frightened.

"You are not—just playing with me, are you?" he asked.

"*Playing?*" she repeated, catching her breath. "Do I seem to be—just playing?"

"No. But I want you to say it outright. Say 'I love you! I am going to marry you—whenever you say!'"

"I love you," she repeated like a child saying lessons. "I am going to marry you—whenever you say!"

He drew her closer then, and held her fast in his arms.

"If you were playing," he told her, "I think I should have killed you. You see—I have never cared before, this way. And it has made me a little mad, I think. How soon can we marry?"

"But we met only yesterday—*yesterday!*" she cried.

"I know. What has that got to do with anything?"

"Nothing," she admitted.

"When can we marry?" he asked again. "How soon?"

"In a week or two—if you are still of the same mind then!"

He laughed shortly. "I shall be," he assured her.

"One never knows. Coming so swiftly like this—it may as swiftly pass. It is so the birds and beasts are drawn together—and liberated," she said. "We may have fallen under the sway of the great woods god."

"It is the most lasting thing about me," he said, "this love that has so suddenly been kindled. It will survive me!"

"You can't be sure," she told him practically. "Besides—we do not know each other—each other's likes and dislikes, temperaments, tastes. Oh, it would be most foolhardy to marry at once!"

"Nevertheless, we will marry at once," he said. "I give you a week. A week to find each other out. A week to court—and come to know each other."

"Two weeks," she begged. "There are things to do. Letters to write. Things to get. A week isn't half long enough. I must have two, at least."

He hesitated.

"Well, *two*, then," he agreed; "but I don't know how I shall endure them. It seems a needless waste of precious time—to me. And cruel. But this once I will not urge my judgment upon you. Two weeks from to-day it shall be! You'll come to me—to be my mate and dwell with me forever. And I shall guard you and guide you and keep you safe, whatever comes. And we'll go down through the years together, side by side, hand in hand!"

Quick tears filled her eyes as he stopped, his voice suddenly growing uncertain.

"I am frightened," she whispered.

"Frightened—of what?"

"Everything," she said. "This—this sudden force—this emotion that is changing my life. You. Everything."

He kissed her.

"Still frightened?" he asked tenderly.

"Yes."

He kissed her again—passionately, his lips clinging to hers.

"Still frightened?" he asked again, when he freed her at last.

Her eyes opened wide, flaming with light, her lips parted.

"No," she answered dreamily, "not now. Now, nothing else seems to matter. When you kiss me, the past ceases to be. Life has just begun. And there is no one in the world but you and me. I can't understand it, really. It's the same as yesterday to every one else. But your lips have found mine—your heart has found mine—and to us everything is changed. Even *I* am changed," she added in a whisper; and leaping up, cried wildly: "Come! I want to ride faster and farther than I've ever ridden before. I want to spread the news. I want to ride along the shore and tell the ocean. I want to ride to the top of the bluff there and shout it to the four winds, and the fields, and the heavens. I'm going to be married in two weeks. I'm going to be *married!*" she cried into her horse's ear. The horse tossed his head and neighed.

VI.

CONNIE CUNARD was sitting alone before the mirror in her boudoir, swathed in yellow chiffons, preparatory to making her toilet for dinner, when her brother burst in upon her, heralded only by a non-committal knock—and told her the news. She said she hoped he would be happy, and kissed him, and gave him their mother's engagement ring—a marvelous emerald—to pass on to Gypsy. She hoped that the associations surrounding the ring would appeal to the girl. Their mother had been so perfectly happy, such a devoted wife and mother.

Connie wondered, as she looked through her jewel case for the gem, just what her mother would have thought of Gypsy; but she gave Murray no hint of her thoughts. And he was too happy, too absorbed in his own plans and dreams, to be very discerning. Teatime had long since passed, and the others in the house had gone up to dress for dinner before Gypsy and he had returned from their ride. But they had not been bored. They had so much to tell each other—so many years to bridge.

As he splashed in his tub he reviewed the day—and marveled that it was possible for any one to be so happy. For Gypsy, skilled in the adorable little ways of loving, experienced beyond her years, had known how to stimulate his imagination—how to realize his ideals. She had been in love and had been engaged before—and she knew a good deal about men.

Standing before an assortment of frocks in the primrose room—which was always hers at Connie's—she was thinking of one of the things she knew, which was: "Always be different; never do or say or look as he expects you to!"

Accordingly she chose a simple frock—a foamy, diaphanous white frock draped with an art that concealed itself to perfection, and not trimmed at all; and she donned no earrings, no rings, no bracelets. He had seen her daring and dashing, the sophisticated young woman of the world. He had lighted her cigarettes and watched her lashes droop as the smoke curled upward. He had galloped with her along the coast road and had admired her in a boyish riding suit. To-night he should meet another Gypsy—a wistful, wide-eyed, sweet Gypsy; a Gypsy of dreams about to be realized; a Gypsy standing with uncertain feet upon the edge of the Big Adventure.

The bodice of the white frock was folded over, kerchief style, leaving both dimpled shoulders bare; and she sent her maid for a cluster of pink roses to wear—an old-fashioned touch that she decided would be most artistic, and that would serve to remind him too of the night before. While she waited she wrote to him:

MY MAN:

I can't realize it, somehow—that's why I'm writing it. I can't believe that something big and real and worth while has come into my life at last. I have read of great love

affairs so often—and dreamed—and wondered—and been afraid. And now—all that uncertainty is at an end—I am going to be married in two weeks—to *you!* I've promised! It's definitely settled! And I'm ecstatically happy—incredibly happy—almost *too* happy, my dear! Something is singing in my heart! I feel as if nothing that has gone before has really happened. I have just begun to live—*now!* I was *born*—the instant your eyes met mine yesterday—*yesterday!* A thousand years ago.

I cannot even be troubled for fear your love will not last! It has all been so—inevitable! I *know* you will adore me always as I shall adore you—because—*it was meant to be.*

With all the love my heart can hold,
Yours,
GYPSY.

She breathed a sigh of satisfaction as she reread the note, and sent her maid to slip it under his door. Then she fastened the pink rosebuds in her corsage and descended the stairs, star-eyed, radiant. And Van Cleve's eyes grew misty and his jaw set as he stopped tying his tie to pick up the note and read it. And he felt strangely weak and unworthy, later on, as he came down to find her waiting, and slipped his mother's emerald on her finger. And they drank their health at dinner, enthusiastically, Cunard opening his very rarest wine for the great occasion. But bets were laid on the side that Van Cleve would never succeed in marrying her. Nobody ever had.

Next day, and many days to follow, Gypsy motored into town to shop. Sometimes she carried Connie with her. Once or twice she let Van Cleve come, in order to get his honest and unbiased opinion of a hat or a tailored suit. He entered into these expeditions with joy and satisfaction. He liked adopting a proprietary air before people, liked calling her "My dear," very casually, liked the intimacy of discussing the things she would need for this or that or the other occasion that they were to meet together. And though he blushed when it came to lingerie or negligees, stockings or pyjamas, he reveled in them, as she did. And he would be very solicitous as the hours passed and he felt she must be dropping from fatigue, and would insist upon her resting, or having some tea, or driving in the park. But she always stoutly resisted, declaring that she loved shopping and never tired of it; and that if he insisted upon marrying her on such short notice, he must resign himself to getting a weary and shopped-out bride.

There is a thrill about nest building, and Van Cleve had never known it before. Many bachelors *do* know it; but there really never had been any other woman who had appealed to Van Cleve that much or in a way to inspire nest building. So they looked at apartments, at odd moments, inspecting cupboards and kitchens with great care and mentally furnishing them as they went along. And so they were always discovering many tastes that they had in common—which *proved* beyond a shadow of doubt that they were destined for each other. It would have been *too* coincidental, otherwise, that they should have similar likes and dislikes, reared in different environments, miles apart. And there was a charming game of pretending that they were *already* married—had been married for years, in fact, and had to consider the comfort and convenience of little Murray and little Gypsy—and sometimes three or four others, if he felt in an expansive mood.

Gypsy's set, quite unused to this thoroughness of detail, began to wonder if she *was* going through with it this time, after all. It was no good asking her, because they always had asked her, and she always had replied indignantly that of course she was! But in her previous engagements no wedding preparations had actually been started. They had been engagements of longer standing, and the wedding date had not been set. But this time the day was selected, and people asked—and time was passing.

"I suppose," observed Greyson, "she has always meant to do it some time—and she figures Murray as good a matrimonial risk as she'll get. But when you stop to think that she is only twenty-three—well, you wouldn't have thought she'd have ended her exciting career so soon! Would you?"

"Nowadays," said Mrs. Stanley, "when girls come out at seventeen—after a pre-

liminary season or two—they are quite ready to marry at twenty-three. Because, you see, marriage doesn't put an end to one's career any more. It just gives one more freedom and an added fascination—and the advantage of studying the male creature at closer range."

"I never could comprehend," murmured Crosby-Brown, "why people wanted marriages to last through eternity, anyway."

"Nor I," agreed Greyson. "Permanency is characteristically opposed to progress."

"That sounds shocking," cried Mrs. Stanley.

"Everything sounds shocking when you're not accustomed to it," nodded Greyson. "But conceive how much greater our development would be if we had short-term marriages. Women would retain their individualities because they would retain their own names—to avoid confusion. And nobody would ever be able to feel secure and let down. We'd all have to grow increasingly interesting as time passed in order to win and hold our transient mates. No dull and idle wives! No tired business husbands! All competitors! All interesting and interested!"

"And the children?" asked Ada Lingard, who was listening.

"There might not be so many," said Greyson, "but they'd get better care and attention from mothers who were educated and cultured individuals."

A chorus of protesting cries greeted this, and Greyson retreated, grimly smiling, behind his highball.

"To get back to Gypsy Gerould," said Mrs. Stanley. "I am not convinced yet that she means to go through with it."

But very few of the others agreed with her, because that afternoon the wedding was only two days off.

VII.

It was that same night that Van Cleve came back to the country, after a trying day in town, to find a note from her. He had been busy all day arranging his business affairs so that he could have a month of entire freedom for his honeymoon. He had taken a cottage on the shore of a lake, where they could live in an untroubled Eden all their own, swimming and riding and sailing and fishing and reading and talking and loving undisturbed. He had bought the ring, selecting it himself, because instead of meeting him for tea—as she had arranged to do—she had had some one telephone his office that she had been detained at one of the shops and would see him at dinner in the country.

She had stayed in town the night before at Geraldine Loring's, so Van Cleve had not seen her for almost forty-eight hours, when he received her note—and discovered that it had come by special delivery and that it must have been written the day before.

He opened it hurriedly with an anxious frown, and read:

DEAR MURRAY:

This is a very hard letter to write, but I must write it now, without further delay or hesitation—for your sake as well as mine! Because—I *can't* go on with it, dear, and it's much—*much* better to say so now, frankly, than to make a mistake that might wreck both our lives.

I am utterly miserable about it! I don't know *why* it is that I am *always* making this mistake—fancying myself in love and finding afterward that I'm not—shying at the bondage and responsibilities of matrimony. But I'm as I am, you see, and what can I do about it? I'm like a wild bird that simply cannot endure the thought of a cage—*any* cage—no matter how alluring or lovely.

I adored you—truly, *truly* I did—until I began to feel my captivity imminent. Then—I took fright—and fled here to Gerry's to think things out. I did not sleep a wink last night! Just walked the floor and thought—lay in bed and *thought*—and *cried*—and *thought!* I thought until my head ached and my nose was red. And I decided—that I *must* tell you the truth—and release you—and never see you again. It's no use saying I'm sorry, is it?

For, honestly, dear, I couldn't help it. I did think I loved you enough to give my life into your keeping forever and ever and ever. Now, I realize I don't. I like you! I admire you tremendously! I respect you! But I *don't love* you enough to give up everything else and *every one* else in the world for you—and that is the simple, miserable truth. Forgive me if you can, but don't quite forget me. I shall always remember these past two

weeks and your gentleness, your consideration, your tenderness! You have been a dear.

Sincerely,

GYPSY.

P. S.—I have sent for my clothes. I am not coming back to Connie's again, of course. It would be too awkward.

G.

Van Cleve stood staring down at the letter, as he finished reading, a scowl on his face, his jaw set, as one thing stood out strongly against the chaos of his mind.

She had written that she had gone to Gerry's to think—that she had not slept a wink because she had wanted to think things out—*but she had written the letter during the afternoon!* She must have written it then, or it would not have been delivered so soon. She had gone into town, *knowing* what she meant to do—but preferring to write him another interesting letter instead of facing him and *telling* him the truth.

This meant that she had *not* been sincere in the whole affair; that she had only been flirting—playing at loving—as the others had warned him she would! But that fact, staggering as it was, was still not a death-blow to his own feeling. He loved her. It was absurd of him to pretend he didn't! He still loved her and *wanted* her, in spite of her behavior, outrageous as it was. There was no sense in bandying words or attempting to hide the truth from himself. He loved her, and he had no intention of letting her escape so easily.

Crushing the letter in his pocket, he hurried from the room, left word with the butler in the lower hall that he had been called back to town unexpectedly, and raced to the garage. He stepped into the first car that was at hand—a fast little roadster belonging to his brother-in-law and seldom used by any one else—and headed for the city.

The Lorings were at dinner when he presented himself at their front door, very dusty and rather pale and stern looking. He demanded instant speech with Miss Gerould, and strode into the drawing-room to wait, ignoring the servant's uneasiness. And because he usually got what he wanted when he looked like that he was presently facing a wide-eyed and appealing Gypsy—a Gypsy, however, who was not dressed for the part, for once. She was clad in chiffony garments of flame color. Her hair and eyes looked black; her lips looked red; she had long strings of pearls around her throat and pearls in her ears. Not at all the sad and repentant girl who had unwittingly wrecked a man's life and broken his heart—rather the young and blissful siren, the enchantress who loved for the joy of loving and fled at the prospect of being snared.

So, from the start, he had her at a disadvantage!

"So," he said, surveying her grimly, "your little game is played out, and you have thrown down your cards!"

"*Don't! Don't* say such things. Don't *think* such things about me, please!" she begged wistfully.

He advanced toward her, his earnestness, his grimness, his bigness terrifying her.

"Liar! *Cheat!*" he cried scathingly. "I was warned against you, Heaven knows. But I preferred to trust to my own judgment—to accept you at your own valuation. What in God's name is so entertaining to you in leading men on—in helping them to build their dreams about you—in bewitching them—only to shatter their illusions and break their hearts? Are you really so callous that suffering doesn't stir you? Don't you *care* how much others are hurt so long as *you* are flattered and amused?"

"*Don't!* You *won't* understand. I did not set out deliberately to hurt you. I *was* in earnest. I *did* think I loved you enough. But I can't help the way I'm made. The idea of marrying you—any one—frightens me. I can't go through with it. I *daren't!*"

"Why not?"

"Because—I'm *afraid*. I'm too fickle. I don't trust myself! I love my liberty, my freedom, too dearly. I should hate you if you married me!"

"Well," said Van Cleve deliberately, "I shall have to resign myself to your hating me, then!"

"Wh-at do you mean?" she faltered, backing a step away.

"I mean—that I can't release you from our engagement at this late date. I will

not release you. I refuse to be humiliated and laughed at by my world, because you have jilted me at the altar. You've *got* to marry me whether you like it or not! I am determined upon that!"

Staring at his stern face incredulously, impressed by his unfaltering gaze, realizing that he was absolutely, terribly in earnest, she was thrilled as she had never been before. No man had ever treated her in this way. The others whom she had jilted had submitted meekly. One had said that he valued her happiness more than his own, and that she must call upon him if ever she required a friend. One had wept. One had threatened to shoot himself, but had thought better of it later. None had ever insisted on marrying her in spite of herself!

"You are excited! You don't know what you are saying! You don't want to marry me *against my will*—if it 'll make me *unhappy?*" she protested gently.

"I do," he assured her calmly.

"Does my happiness mean less to you, then, than saving yourself from ridicule?"

"Much less," he answered. "In fact, your welfare has ceased to concern me at all. My welfare never concerned you, it seems—so I must look out for myself from now on. You have promised to marry me, and I am going to hold you to that promise. A bargain is a bargain!"

"But you can't *make* me marry you, you know," said Gypsy triumphantly.

"Ah, but I can," said Van Cleve. "I can make you marry me or beggar yourself paying damages. I can sue you for breach of promise!"

"What?" gasped Gypsy, dazed.

"You may forget having written me a number of letters admitting your consent to wed. Well, either you'll marry me on the date set—or I'll start suit, and offer your letters as evidence. If you don't marry me, I'll advertise your charming system so thoroughly that you will never again make a fool of another man."

She was breathless.

"A man can't sue a woman for breach of promise!" she cried.

"Pardon me, my dear! I've studied law, you know. A man can and will. And I have an excellent case, I assure you. I have, first, your love letters; second, the testimony of shopkeepers and sales-persons who waited on us when we were purchasing the trousseau; third, testimony of friends invited to the wedding and the invitations written and sent out by you; fourth, your previous record! You will certainly look like an old offender to the court, my dear! And how the newspapers will revel in the details of your flirtatious career! Your pictures will be spread broadcast."

"You wouldn't do such a thing!" she murmured weakly.

"I would! I will—unless you marry me on the day and at the time set. That is my ultimatum. I shall have papers in my suit drawn up at once. And whether you leave the country or stay to face the music, the newspapers will have the story on my wedding day if they don't carry the report of my wedding!"

"But you will be ever so much more ridiculous suing me for breach of promise!"

"Not at all. My attitude will appeal to the public. Nobody approves of flirts. Public opinion is opposed to the shirking of responsibilities."

"But you can't want a wife who'd hate you!" she cried.

"I want *you*. Whether you love me or hate me is immaterial so long as I get you," he told her brutally.

The color flamed in her face and she shrank back; her eyes flashed furiously.

"Well, you'll *not* get me! Never! *Never!*" she stormed. "I won't be abused and insulted and—coerced! I don't care what you do! I'll *never* marry you—so there!"

"We'll see!" said Van Cleve.

He turned to depart.

"If you change your mind," he said, "you can reach me at the Plaza. I've got a bridal suite there."

"*Oh-h-h-h-h!*" she cried in exasperation as the door closed behind him. And she stood tapping her foot and frowning as the others came in. There were Geraldine Loring, her hostess, and John Loring and Teddy Newall—a new man, a Southerner with a charming drawl and a most romantic, old-fashioned sort of courtesy.

"My dear! What is it?" purred Gerry Loring curiously. "You look like a young thunderbolt — and you missed the most distracting dessert. Is anything really wrong?"

"*Wrong?* I should *think* so!" cried Gypsy. "Murray Van Cleve was here!"

"Ah!" nodded Gerry understandingly.

"He refuses to release me from my promise," declared Gypsy. "He insists upon marrying me on the day and at the time appointed."

"Insists?" repeated Loring.

"Insists," she said.

"I really can't blame him," remarked the Southerner.

Gypsy took time to flash him a sad smile of appreciation.

"But how can he insist?" asked Loring.

"By threatening suit for breach of promise. *Can* a man sue a *woman* for breach of promise?" Gypsy asked anxiously.

"Well—I dare say. I've never heard of it," said Loring. "But I can't think why not. If the law works one way it certainly ought to work another."

"My *dear!*" cried Gerry, thrilled. "Fancy his caring so much. I've never heard of anything more exciting. I'd let him do it, by all means. You'll be the talk of the town. It 'll simply be a most marvelous scandal!"

"That's just it! It 'll be dreadful!" cried Gypsy. "He'll make me out a flirt and an unscrupulous and—and all sorts of things. He says he'll call on my other fiancés to testify. *Imagine!* And he says he'll have my picture in all the papers as a—a sort of terrible example!"

"He ought to be ho'swhipped fo' threatenin' such a thing," said Teddy Newall righteously.

"I think he's a *sportsman*—and a deuced fine campaigner," smiled Loring.

"And I think you are mad, my dear, if you let him escape you," said Gerry. "He certainly sounds wonderful to me!"

The servant brought in the bridge table then, and set it up, and Loring crossed to it, and began to shuffle the cards preparatory to cutting.

"I shall never marry him—*never!*" vowed Gypsy. "Not now! My heart might have softened to him if he had taken his dismissal gracefully. But now—never! He's a brute—and a beast—and—he's no gentleman!"

She sat down with an air of finality and cut.

"The queen of hearts!" cried Loring, laughing. He was always saying things like that and finding them funny.

The others drew nearer and cut. They sat down to play, but Gypsy, who could not keep her mind on the game, lost steadily. Loring said it was because of the street band which stopped in front of the house and seemed determined not to move on. For Van Cleve had come across it before he had gone a block from the door, and had paid them well to serenade her. The tune they played—very badly, but recognizably —was De Koven's 'Oh, Promise Me That Some Day You and I—'"

VIII.

AFTER bridge, they danced, and Gypsy exercised her most effective wiles on the Southerner, who danced divinely; and by the time she got to bed at Gerry's, at something after two, she had worked herself into a frame of mind in which she felt sure that Van Cleve did not mean to sue her at all; that he was just trying to bluff her into surrendering, and that the thing to do was to call his bluff!

But at nine o'clock upon the following morning—the day before her wedding day —an important and domineering-looking gentleman of legal aspect presented his card at the Loring door, insisted upon seeing Miss Gypsy Gerould without delay, upon a matter of the utmost importance, and on being ushered into the boudoir, where she was lying on a *chaise longue*, swathed in rosy chiffons and wearing a Charlotte Corday cap—very becoming—served her with a summons in complaint in a suit for breach of promise, brought by one Mr. Murray Van Cleve, of the City of New York.

It was a very formidable document with a red seal affixed—he had got it up himself —and it reduced Gypsy to the extremities of terror and despair. But when her eye fell upon the sheets affixed, she vacillated

between a swoon and hysterics, for they were neatly typed copies of her intimate letters to Van Cleve. Her horrified eyes flashed from phrase to phrase

I am going to be married in two weeks—to *you!* (He had that underlined in red ink!)

I'm ecstatically happy—incredibly happy—almost too happy, my dear!

I have just begun to live now! I was *born* the instant your eyes met mine yesterday!

I know you will adore me always *as I shall adore you.* With all the love my heart can hold.

Yours,

GYPSY.

I love you with every fiber of my being and with every littlest drop of my blood!

I could not sleep—longing for you, for your strong arms to hold me and your lips to crush mine!

I dare not think what life would be without you, now that you have come!

What headlines for the newspapers! All her favorite lines! How would she ever dare face the world if they were printed so that any one with a couple of pennies could buy and read them! How could she bear if they shrieked at her from ash barrels and fences! And what would her friends say? And her enemies?

The awfulness of it made both swoons and hysterics seem inadequate. White to the lips — wide eyed with despair — she begged, nay, implored the silent, legal-looking gentleman not to press this absurd case against her.

He assured her, regretfully, that he had nothing whatever to do with the matter, being merely a lawyer's clerk employed to serve her with the papers; whereupon, he departed, and Gypsy ran wildly into Gerry Loring's room, to find the Lorings breakfasting together very intimately and cozily, but rather informally, since John was in a bathrobe over his pyjamas and had his bare feet in mules, and Gerry had a black robe embroidered in silver over *her* black satin pyjamas.

They chuckled with delight when Gypsy laid the summons before them—John Loring chuckling louder than his wife, because *he* knew that there was something extremely amateurish looking about the document: but their amusement in nowise lessened her concern. After all, it was not the legal aspect of the case that terrified her, nor yet the chance that Van Cleve might win and claim damages for his broken heart. She feared the notoriety—the newspaper publicity—the mental picture of her friends reading her love letters with enjoyment and quoting them to one another.

"What shall I do? What *can* I do with this awful man?" she asked helplessly. "*Do* stop grinning like idiots and advise me. *I* don't see anything funny about a girl's having to marry a man she hates—just to—to save her reputation!"

"Of course not! Stop it, John," cried Gerry severely, though her eyes twinkled. "The only thing I can think of, my dear, is—surrender! Capitulate! I'm afraid you'll have to with the best grace you can muster!"

"I suppose I must if I can't wheedle him," Gypsy agreed, facing the facts squarely.

And she crossed the room with the air of a martyr—the Charlotte Corday cap had been an inspiration—and called Van Cleve's number.

"Hello?" she cooed, in her most seductive tones, when she had got the connection. "Is that you, dear?"

The Lorings had to hold each other up.

"Murray Van Cleve talking," he answered stiffly. "I think you must have the wrong number, madam!"

"But I haven't!" she cried, as one who would break glad tidings. "*Murray!* This is Gypsy!"

"*Who?*" he asked. She felt quite sure he had heard her.

"*Gypsy,*" she repeated, more loudly.

"*Who?*"

The Lorings were in spasms of delight.

"*Gypsy!*" she almost screamed. "*Gypsy Gerould!*"

She was annoyed and irritated, but concealed her feelings carefully.

"*Oh-h-h-h!*" he exclaimed then, in a tone of recognition. "Good morning, Miss Gerould. What can I do for you?" he added, politely.

She would have liked to shake him. But she retained her sweetness with a tremendous effort.

"You can stop this idiotic legal busi-

ness," she said, in accents of unspeakable cajolery, wistfulness, and despair. "Murray, dear, do please be reasonable, and send back my letters."

"*What?*" he cried, amazed.

"My letters," she repeated, less confidently. "You wouldn't publish them—you know you wouldn't — such intimate, personal communications that I meant for no eyes but yours."

"I've already had neat copies typed for the reporters," he said. "I regret very much that I cannot comply with your request. Good-by!"

"Wait!" cried Gypsy wildly. "*Murray!*"

"Yes?" he asked, patiently.

"Please release me from that foolish engagement!"

"*Foolish?*" he challenged.

"I mean—unwise—ill advised," she hastened to explain.

"Why *should* I release you?" he asked in a businesslike voice.

"Because I don't love you, Murray," she protested, gently.

"That's a good reason for you to try to get out of it, but *not* a good reason for me to release you," he replied. "You see—unworthy as you are—vain, and heartless and faulty—I love you!"

"But you can't be *happy* with me unless I love you, too!"

"Probably not," he admitted. "But—I'll run the risk. I'll be happier married to you than I would be if you jilted me and thus classified me with your other innumerable and ridiculous victims. I have a strong disinclination to being pitied. Besides—you deserve to be punished. My fellow sufferers deserve to be avenged. And I feel like playing Nemesis!"

She felt that he was adamant. It rang in the tones of his voice.

"You really mean all this?" she asked. "You will actually bring this notoriety upon me if I refuse to marry you to-morrow?"

"Exactly. I've personally invited all the reporters to the wedding. If you don't marry me I'll give them my preliminary statement—and some of your letters. I dare say the reporters can easily procure your pictures from the different photographers."

She yielded.

"Very well, then," she said with sudden nonchalance. "If you are so determined, I'll marry you. But I'm afraid you'll regret it!"

"I'm sure of it," said he. "But I'm a helion for getting my own way. Can you be ready to motor back to Connie's with me in an hour?"

"Yes," she said. "I'll be ready. Good-by!"

"Good-by," he answered pleasantly.

The Lorings — who had been listening shamelessly—roared as she hung up the receiver.

"You're not actually going to marry him?" protested Gerry.

"I am," said Gypsy grimly, "and I'm going to make him regret it *bitterly!* I've got a temper, I tell you, when I want to let it go—and I have *never* hated any one as I hate that man!"

"Nonsense, you little fool! You love him madly," laughed Loring.

"Love him? I *despise* him!" cried Gypsy, furiously, pounding a satin cushion. "I despise *everybody!*"

And she went out and slammed the door behind her.

The Lorings clutched each other for support and rocked with laughter—laughter that rang after poor Gypsy as she fled and did not add anything to her joy in her predicament. She flung a hairbrush at her maid, and turned everything out of her handbag again after it had been packed once, and kept Van Cleve waiting for her three-quarters of an hour after his name was brought up. But even these things did not relieve her wounded feelings. She sat stormily silent beside him in the roadster all the way back to the Cunards', and thought of a thousand ways that she could torture him.

IX.

At the Cunards', meanwhile, there was much discussion over their affairs. Despite the fact that Van Cleve's message had been so noncommittal, there were those who guessed that Gypsy was at the bottom of his

sudden return to town, and speculation was rife as to whether or not the scheduled wedding would come off, after all. Mrs. Stanley still wagered that it wouldn't. Connie said it would if Murray wanted it to, as he always got his own way when he made up his mind. The men doubted his ability to dominate Gypsy until the roadster was seen to approach. Then Gypsy's grim and cowed look startled them. And they were not so sure.

She announced at once that she had a headache, and retired to her own room, declining the eagerly proffered companionship of all of the women present. So not one was able to find out from *her* what had occurred; and all that Van Cleve said was that Gypsy had been tired the night before and quite unable to motor out, so he had gone in to spend the evening with her at the Lorings. But later on some one telephoned Ada Lingard, and the news circulated that tired out as Gypsy had been the night previous, she had not been too tired to dance with Teddy Newall at the Tent—and that no one had seen Van Cleve in the party.

But no one ventured to question Van Cleve further. He had a look that warned off inquisitive acquaintances. And neither Connie nor her husband seemed able to create an opportunity for private confab with him.

He spent the afternoon playing golf—and the evening at bridge, the calmest member of the house party. And Gypsy did not come down.

Alone in her room, she thought of a dozen different ways out of her difficulty, and abandoned them, one by one. There seemed no way of preventing his lawsuit and the publication of her letters—and she simply could not bring herself to face that contingency. Rather a thousand weddings with a thousand men whom she did not love!

So she went back to planning ways to annoy and torment him. And one of the ways she thought of was to carry on most scandalous flirtations throughout her honeymoon—with the most attractive men she could find. And this pleasing picture reminded her that he was, after all, a very good-looking man, and an excellent "catch"—and that she would have infinitely more money to spend, and more liberty, and a much more firmly established social position if she *did* marry him.

By the time she fell asleep she was quite resigned to her miserable fate.

The wedding was set for high noon, and Gypsy came down just in time for the ceremony—dressed in an amazing costume: a white suit faultlessly tailored, a white cloak, a jaunty little red hat, and red boots with a Russian air about them. If she was being a martyr, it was plain that she was putting a bold face upon the matter.

She beamed as they all crowded round to congratulate her. She smiled up at Van Cleve radiantly as the minister arrived, and they took their places before the improvised altar of palms. And her voice rang out almost triumphantly as she made her response.

It was only when he kissed her passionately, at the end, that her smile flickered out, and her lashes hid her eyes.

Eventually the elaborate wedding breakfast was over—and they were off in the car amidst a shower of rice.

She relaxed in her corner after one swift side glance at his rather stern profile.

"Married! Married! Married!" something was singing, over and over, inside her, with terrible finality.

"I was thinking," she said, as she had planned—but her voice was not as steady nor as casual as she would have liked it to be. "I was thinking—we might be rather dull—just the two of us—alone—together—at the island. Don't you think we might spend our honeymoon—somewhere else?"

He turned and looked at her.

"We are not going to the island," he said.

She wet her lips, and asked, "Where, then?" seeing that he had no intention of continuing.

"We are going to the Plaza," he said, and then settled back, relapsing into silence.

She opened her lips to continue her questioning, but changed her mind, as her eyes

rested again on his firm profile. There was something about him that frightened her a little—something new—something that had not always been there—a look of grim determination—of power. Somewhere within her a great warmth kindled—and grew—surging over her in great waves of feeling. He *was* fine looking, she admitted to herself with some exultation. Not merely handsome, but *fine* looking.

Silence fell, as she in turn settled back. But her breathing was not quite regular. She was not in the least as calm and composed as she seemed.

At the Plaza they descended—and moved up the steps—crossed the lobby to the lifts. He had previously ascertained the number and location of their suite—had selected it with care.

The lift ascended — stopped. They passed into the rooms that he had selected.

First, there was a tiny hallway, in which stood a consul-table, bearing a vase full of roses, then a sitting room—filled with roses—then their bedchambers. He threw open the door to her room. She caught a glimpse of the charming interior—caught the fragrance of still more roses.

"I think you will be quite comfortable here for the present—at least until you can make other arrangements," he said. "I will be quite close, you see—so you need not feel entirely alone—and you can send for your maid in the morning. I shall be gone, no doubt, before you are up—so—good night—and good-by!"

"*Good-by?*" she repeated, staring.

"Yes, I—I'm leaving for a trip in the morning. My lawyers will arrange the divorce!"

"Divorce?" she repeated after him, in a whisper.

"Yes," said he. "I had no intention of interfering permanently with your career. I just wanted to marry you—because you had undertaken to make a fool of me, and I wanted to punish you for that. Likewise, because nobody thought I could. But now that I *have* married you. Oh, well, I am not even going to *try* to hold you. The game is ended, and I'm ready to cry quits!"

She had gone quite white. She wet her dry lips nervously.

"Game," she said. "*Game?*"

Suddenly she fell forward, fainting, into his arms.

He seized her just in time. She lay in his arms, lifeless, scarcely breathing, the sweetest burden he had ever borne. Frowning down at her, he stood for an instant, motionless, his muscles taut.

Then, slowly, he advanced into the room—laid her gently on the *chaise longue*—supported her head with a pillow. He watched the color coming back, his eyes fixed on her face. Her lashes parted. Their eyes met. Hers filled with tears.

"Don't go," she whispered, her color deepening—flaming.

"You don't *want* me to leave you?" he cried. And shook his head. "Really, you are a most unfathomable creature, you know. First, you refuse to marry me. Now you refuse to give me up. I swear I can't make you out."

"It's easy enough," she said, slowly. "I just want to be mastered."

She reached up and caught hold of his coat, drew him down so that he sat on the *chaise longue* beside her.

"I just want some one who can bend me to his will—some one bigger and stronger than I am. Some one that I can rely on—and depend on—and look up to. *You*," she added sweetly. "If you had given me up I should have known you were not *my man*. But you took me against my will. And now I can't let you give me up. I need you. You shall do with me as you wish. I'll be anything you want me to be, if you'll just—guard me and guide me—and love me—forever—and ever—as you said you would."

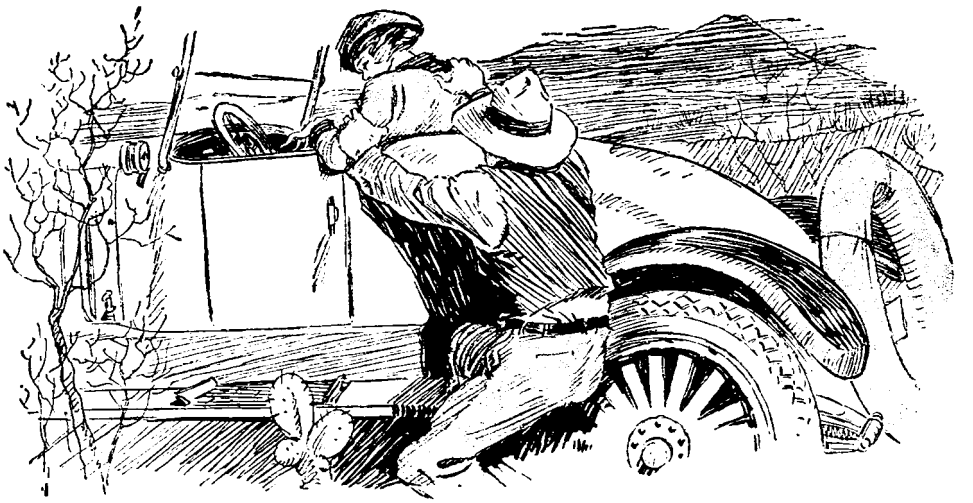
He looked down at her, his eyes kindling. Her bosom was heaving with her difficult breathing. Her cheeks were wet with tears. And she looked like a child who has been naughty, and who has been punished and who is repentant.

"I will," he said, almost solemnly.

"*Promise* me," said she.

He caught her in his arms—*close*—and kissed her mouth.

THE END.



A Boob There Was

By C. C. WADDELL

Author of "So This Is Arizona!" etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

WHILE being manicured in a New York barber shop, Bob Moore finds out by accident from the girl who is doing his hands, and with whom he has some slight acquaintance, that the husband from whom she had separated had given her as a wedding present the deeds to some worthless land in the northeastern corner of Guadaljara County, New Mexico, from which region Bob himself hails. He tells her that there are rumors of oil discovery in the neighborhood and she draws up an agreement of a half interest with him in case he can do anything with the lands.

Much excited he lets slip something of the thing to an army friend, Van Carpen, who joins himself and the Howlands at a dinner party Bob gives the Guadaljara banker, his wife, and granddaughter, Faith, that night. They are leaving for home at once and seem to have taken quite a fancy to Van Carpen. Faith, too, is oddly chummy with Gale Northrup, also of Bob's squadron in France and with whom Bob declines to shake hands on account of a charge of cowardice Northrup has incurred. Bob finds that Van Carpen has acted on the tip he—Bob—has unwittingly given him and started West to realize on it. Bob follows as quickly as possible and boils with wrath as arriving in Guadaljara City, after considerable delay en route, he discovers a sign reading "The Van Carpen Oil Co. Exploiting the Rawlinson Tract." Blood in his eye, he charges down on the place.

CHAPTER VI.

A SCRAP OF PUNCHES AND OF PAPER.

WITH a sign like that over the door, the probabilities were that Broadway's little pet, Billy Van Carpen, was not far distant. Also, that wizard of blue-sky finance, Mr. J. P. Perkins.

Wheresoever the carcass is, there shall the vultures be gathered together. The chances, too, were very strong that both partners were on the premises. There is one time when neither golf, nor the old "bus," nor even the opportunity to be a pall-bearer can keep a man away from his place of business; and that is when he is first moving in.

Bob very possibly didn't reason this all

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out. He simply realized quite suddenly that he had a pressing engagement with Mr. Van Carpen, and started out to fill it.

Neither did he stop to have the gentleman paged.

On the contrary, he went after his prospect with that brisk, breezy syle of approach which is inculcated in the best manuals on salesmanship, and sought to establish an immediate personal contact.

As he came through the door he observed the shirt-sleeved figure of Mr. Van Carpen a little way back in the room, directing one of the workmen where to place a desk, and advanced toward him with an eager enthusiasm.

Mr. Van Carpen was undoubtedly surprised to see his friend from the old home town. He had not expected so prompt a follow-up. But it was plain that he had fully anticipated the quality of the other's greeting; for, as he turned and saw who it was, he threw himself into a posture of defense.

Without delay they got down to business. No words beyond an epithet or so were exchanged between them. Their discussion was less conversational than of the sort in vogue at Boyle's Thirty Acres.

Bob led off with a vengeful smash which sent Van Carpen reeling back against the side of the desk; but the latter quickly recovered and came back with a wallop to the ear that made Bob's head sing.

They clinched and wrestled about the place, overturning chairs and tables, and exchanging short-arm jabs. Bob felt that he was the stronger of the two, but he also realized that Van Carpen had one distinct advantage. He was in a measure stripped for action, while Bob was encumbered by a dust coat which he had donned on the train and had not taken the time to discard.

The long skirts of this wrapped around his legs, and the pull of it across his shoulders also lessened the force of his blows.

Still he was well enough satisfied with the progress of the battle. Van Carpen was fighting viciously, it is true, and had landed one or two that hurt; but his wind was obviously bad. Already he was panting like a bellows, and his punches were beginning to lose steam. He would soon be helpless to avoid the hammering he deserved and which Bob was grimly determined to give him.

They had been at it possibly half a minute by this time. The workmen, astounded at Bob's cyclonic invasion, and not knowing just what it all meant, had stood aside and let the two have it out between themselves.

But now, as they surged forward and back, and milled around and around, Bob, in the whirl of the fighting, caught a glimpse over Van Carpen's shoulder of the other partner coming in at the door.

Perkins had been out on an errand to one of the near-by stores, and naturally was in ignorance of Bob's visit; but as he neared the firm's new offices on his return his ears told him that all was not well within.

He pushed hurriedly through the knot of gaping onlookers that had started to gather about the door, and paused, startled at what he saw.

But his halt was only for a second. With the next, he had sprung forward and was shouting sharp orders to his furniture movers.

"Separate them!" he roared. "Grab that crazy man! Throw him out!"

Bob saw them closing in about him. He tried to free himself from Van Carpen, and back away toward the wall where he could face them; but the other was clinging to him in a clinch of desperation.

He wrenched one arm free and drew it back to try for a knockout to Van Carpen's jaw. But as he started to swing, his wrist was seized by one of the workmen.

He turned his head to protest, to demand fair play; and as he did so he saw an uplifted chair in the hands of J. P. descending on his dome.

It came down. Crash!

And Guadaljara City vanished. Bob was in some leafy Forest of Arden, listening to the songs of little birds and watching the dappled deer as they came down to the stream to drink.

Suddenly the stream overflowed, and ingulfed him in a tidal wave.

He opened his eyes, blinking and drenched, to see one of the furniture mov-

ers just about to douse him with another pail of water.

"Hold on! I'm all right," he stammered, starting to sit up.

But with the new consciousness of a splitting pain in his head and a sense of dizzy weakness, he was glad to sink back again to a recumbent position.

At the sound of his voice, Perkins stepped quickly forward and looked down at him.

"For the love of Mary Ann!" he exclaimed with an excellent assumption of surprise. "If it isn't Bob Moore?

"Van!" he called back excitedly to the lavatory where his partner was seeking to stanch a bloodied nose. "What on earth were you fighting Bob Moore about?"

"I wasn't fighting him," returned the somewhat muffled response. "He came dashing in here without a word—aye, yes, or no—and started to murder me. Must be crazy in his head."

"Yes; and you two crooks 'll think I am crazier still before I get through with you." Bob sat up again under the spur of his grievance. "You'll do no exploiting of the Rawlinson tract, I can tell you that. That's mine!"

Van Carpen had come out of the lavatory, holding a wet towel to his face, and was in time to hear the latter part of this declaration.

He gave a start of feigned amazement.

"By the seven sisters of Satan!" he gasped as if a great light had suddenly come to him. "So that's what's eating you? Do you mean to say that the Rawlinson tract is that oil property you were singing the long song to me about a night or two before I left?"

"You know darned well it is, you dirty highbinder!" Bob glared at him. "You wormed out of me all the information you could get under the pretense of friendship, and then with that sweet-scented partner of yours, deliberately started out to double-cross me. But, by glory, you'll find out—"

His voice trailed off into an involuntary groan, and in spite of himself he reeled over against the side of a desk. His burst of excitement had brought on another spasm of giddy nausea and started the wound in his head to bleeding afresh.

J. P. stooped over quickly and caught him beneath the shoulders.

"Here, bring a chair, somebody!" he directed. "And get him up in it. That was a nasty clip I gave him over the head."

He had one of the men fetch him water and towels from the lavatory, and set about washing out the cut and stopping the flow of blood. Then, with bandages and antiseptics for which he sent out to the drug store, he deftly dressed the injury. As a final touch of good Samaritanism, he drew a bottle of hooch from his hip pocket and gave his patient a generous swig.

Meanwhile Van Carpen was running on with his voluble explanations.

"On the level, Bob," he protested, "I never dreamed that this was your proposition. To tell you the truth, I wasn't listening to half you said that night. You know how it is yourself. A fellow hears dozens of these a-million-while-you-wait schemes, and lets 'em go in one ear and out the other."

Bob cocked a coldly skeptical eye at him from under the bandage which J. P. was twining about his head.

"And you expect me to believe that," he sneered, "when you carried off my newspaper to read up about the country out here? If you weren't interested, why did you do that; and why didn't you send the paper back as you promised to?"

"I did send your paper back. I didn't have a chance to bring it back on account of leaving town so unexpectedly. But I put it in the mail. As a matter of fact, I never even glanced at it."

"You didn't read my newspaper, and you didn't listen to my talk?" Bob repeated with withering scorn. "Funny how you started right off the very next day to come out here and jump my claim."

"It is funny," admitted Van Carpen; "darnedest coincidence I ever heard of. But I give you my word, old man, and J. P. will tell you the same, that we had no more idea of coming to Guadaljara City when we left New York than we had of starting for China.

"I'll tell you how the whole thing happened," he ran on glibly. "The morning after I was talking to you, we got a tele-

gram from a friend of J. P.'s in Chicago, urging us to come right out there as he had a red-hot proposition on hand. When we got there, he put up this Rawlinson tract to us; said that it could be bought cheap, and that from his personal investigation he was satisfied there was oil on it. He's an old time oil-scout so we took his word for it, came right down here, and closed the deal yesterday. You were the very last person in the world we considered in connection with the matter. As I tell you, if I had ever heard you mention or describe such a property, I had completely forgotten it."

Bob leveled a long, disdainful look at him.

"Some smooth liar, you are, Van Carpen," he said. "But you can't put it across with me. I was tipped off within an hour after you had left New York just where you had gone, and what purpose you had in view."

"Tipped off?" The other raised his voice blusteringly. "By whom?"

"Never mind. Results show that the person knew what he was talking about."

"That won't do, Moore." J. P. spoke up. "You can't go around calling people liars and crooks on the strength of that sort of stuff. If you're not bluffing, name your man."

"Well, then," Bob faced them defiantly, "it was Cale Northrup."

"Cale Northrup!"

If Judas Iscariot, Benedict Arnold, and all the traitors and renegades of history had been rolled into one, Van Carpen couldn't have uttered the name with more disgusted rebuke.

"And do you mean to say, Bob Moore, that you accepted the word of that skunk against a buddy, one of the old squadron?"

His tone was so shocked, so reproachful, that in spite of himself Bob began to feel in the wrong. His glance dropped, and he shuffled his feet uneasily.

"Come, come, Van," J. P. again broke in. "I can't see that Bob is especially to blame. You've got to admit, that, even though the fellow was lying, it seemed to be a straight steer.

"What I can't get at in all this," he puckered his brows, "is where Bob makes out that we have done him in the transaction? Did he tell you that he was coming down here to negotiate for the Rawlinson tract?"

"Negotiate for it?" Bob snorted contemptuously. "I don't have to. I own it already—that is, I represent the owner."

J. P. seemed staggered.

"But how can that be?" he expostulated. "Van and I are the owners—paid twenty-five thousand dollars for it yesterday."

"Then you are out just twenty-five thousand," Bob declared belligerently. "My client holds unquestionable title. Here, if you want to see it, is proof of the fact."

He fished from his pocket the telegram he had received from the clerk of Guadaljara County, and held it out to them. They read it together, and then stood back staring at each other incredulously.

"Judas Priest!" gulped Van Carpen. "We've got to look into this."

Bob's sentiments toward the pair underwent a swift change. Evidently, instead of attempting a swindle, they were the victims of one. He interrupted them, as they started excitedly catechizing him.

"Don't waste time asking questions," he cried. "Go after these crooks before they get away on you. Lucky I reached here as soon as I did. Do you think you can still lay hands on the party you bought from?"

"Oh, yes," said J. P.; "no difficulty about that. It was Colonel Howland."

"Colonel Howland?"

It was now Bob's turn to be flabbergasted.

A sudden disquieting qualm seized him. Could it be possible that this deed of Jean's—

But no; he had gone over every word of it himself in the search for flaws, and had found it tight as a drum. Besides, there was the corroboration from the county clerk.

J. P. broke the dazed silence which had descended upon the three.

"The bank is only across the street," he said gravely. "I think I had better ask the colonel to step over here."

He went out, and came back in a few minutes with the colonel at his side.

The banker, ruddy faced and showing no

signs of his recent travail of spirit, greeted Bob cordially, but eyed with some surprise his bandaged and disheveled condition.

"What's the matter, Moore?" he asked. "Been in an accident?"

"Oh, Bob started in to clean us out," Van Carpen took it on himself to explain. "This Western air must have gone to his head; for he had hardly hit the town before he came storming in here like a wild man, and without a word let fly at me. I show some marks of the encounter," he touched his swollen nose jocosely; "but, as the saying is, look at the other fellow."

"But there must have been some reason?" the colonel frowned. "What was he angry about?"

"Well, Bob seems to be a bit impulsive. He got a suspicion when we left New York that we were trying to flim-flam him in some way—just how I don't yet quite understand—and without waiting to verify anything, he caught the first train out here and sailed in."

Bob could not gainsay the account; it was all true. But this was not just the way he would have liked to express it to the colonel. It made him appear a hot-headed fool, whose senseless, bullying violence had met the punishment it deserved. He reddened uncomfortably under the old man's disapproving gaze; but before he could think of anything to say that would put him in a better light, J. P. had shifted the subject.

"It is in connection with this mistaken impression of Moore's," he said, "that we want to consult you, colonel. He claims, as I gather, that some person he represents back East is the real owner of the Rawlinson tract, and that in paying you twenty-five thousand dollars we have been swindled."

"Swindled, eh?"

The colonel's eyes glinted dangerously; his voice grew hard as steel.

Once more Bob had been advertised by his loving friends rather unfortunately. And yet, what was there he could say? While he sat there tongue-tied and miserable, J. P. thrust the knife in a bit deeper and gave it a twist.

"You understand, I hope, colonel, that we are not raising any question in regard to this matter," he said ingratiatingly. "Your simple word is sufficient for us. But Mr. Moore seems to want proof that the deed you gave us is bona fide."

The colonel turned toward Bob, all trace of geniality vanished from his expression.

"I would like first to know, Moore," he said, icily businesslike, "just what is your claim in the premises?"

"I have a half interest in a deed to that property myself," mumbled Bob, "and represent the other half interest. The county clerk here assures me that our title is absolutely straight."

"Oh, I see." The colonel nodded, a sudden ironic gleam of comprehension in his eye. "Just when did you buy this half interest, Moore?"

"About a week ago. That is, I didn't exactly *buy* it. I— Well, it was given to me for—er—services, and—and all that sort of thing."

"Whew!" whistled J. P. softly. "Pretty generous commission, I'll say."

"Who then is your principal?" asked the colonel. "The holder of title?"

Bob hesitated. As already said, he was not a quick thinker, and this cross-examination had him a bit flustered.

"I think I have a right to know," insisted the colonel sharply. "You have accused me of bad faith. Now let us see who are the high-minded and honorable people on the other side? Come out into the open if you are not afraid."

"Well," Bob muttered, as if driven into a corner, "it is Mrs. Jean Rawlinson, of New York."

Van Carpen gave a high-pitched cackle of surprise.

"Jean Rawlinson!" he repeated. "Why, colonel, that is the manicure girl down in the barber shop of the hotel where you were stopping in New York. You probably noticed her, a little bobbed-hair blonde?"

He went off into another fit of laughter.

"Oh, Bobby! Bobby!" he jeered. "Some lady-killer, I'll tell the world. And you worked the poor, silly, little fool for a half interest in her deed on the strength of your service and — er — all that sort of thing?"

But the colonel seemed less amused than disgusted.

"It is just as I thought, gentlemen"—he turned to J. P. and Van Carpen—"if there was any swindling afoot, I think we know who was up to it. Certainly, this transaction with an unsophisticated working girl has a distinctly fraudulent odor.

"However," he went on curtly, "the thing isn't worth wasting time over. If it is any satisfaction to you gentlemen, I can tell you that you needn't lose any sleep over this deed of Mr. Moore's and his young lady friend. They are welcome to all they can ever get out of it. So far as you are concerned, it is a scrap of worthless paper."

CHAPTER VII.

A BOOB THERE WAS.

A BULL playing his last unhappy rôle in the arena probably doesn't mind the swift, final thrust of the matador's keen blade half as much as he does the pricking of the banderillos, the flaunt of the mocking red capes in front of him, and all the petty annoyances and insults that have gone before.

Like *El Toro* poor Bob had come bolting into the office of Van Carpen full of fire and fury; but his rush had been stopped, and thereafter he had been baited and badgered and harassed until he was almost beside himself. He didn't quite understand how it was being done, but he burned with a sullen, glowering resentment.

A quicker-witted person would have sensed the game that Perkins and Van Carpen were playing, and probably have circumvented them; but Bob, never very adroit at best, and with his head still ringing from the rap it had received, only made things worse for himself with every move he tried.

He didn't cherish any hostility now toward J. P. or his partner. Their specious explanations seemed reasonable to him; he was completely taken in by their surface attitude of friendliness. Neither did he blame Colonel Howland. Something was wrong somewhere; but it must be the perversity of circumstances and his own bone-headedness. Fervently he cursed his rotten luck, and even more fervently himself. Had there ever been such an absolute jackass?

And so poignant was this feeling of self-abasement, so stung and fretted was he by the rankling darts of misrepresentation into which he had blundered, that when the colonel made his disclosure—slaying at one stroke like the matador's sword that structure of glowing, palpitating hopes which had evolved from his interest in Jean's scrap of paper—Bob scarcely felt a twinge.

It was over; his dream of a fortune, of winning Faith Howland—everything. In a way, it was a relief to know the completeness of his shipwreck.

He listened almost apathetically as the colonel went on to expatiate upon his statement.

"You must understand, gentlemen," the old banker addressed himself ostentatiously to Van Carpen and Perkins alone, "that this property we are discussing takes its name from a former owner, Arthur Rawlinson, a fly-by-night promoter who invaded this country some years ago and left a wide trail of fraud behind him.

"Rawlinson bought it for little or nothing, I have been informed, with the idea of touting it as a copper proposition. There are some outcroppings of copper on it, but of no such character as to encourage genuine development. It was sufficient, however, to serve as a bait for suckers.

"Unfortunately for Rawlinson, though, the copper fad collapsed just about that time, and his suckers refused even to nibble. He was left high and dry, with a busted scheme and twenty thousand acres of desert on his hands. It was idle for him to think of selling. Nobody would have it at any price.

"Still there never was a truer saying than that the devil looks out for his own. It was only a few years until oil discoveries were made in this section, and at once the Rawlinson tract acquired a potential value.

"Rawlinson, who had gone back East and been pretty well trimmed on the stock market, grabbed at the first offer made him. But, as is somewhat a custom down here, he did not sell the land outright.

"He gave instead a deed to twenty thousand acres of oil placer ground, as we call it; or, in other words, the exclusive right to make borings anywhere on the tract, and to extract the oil or other minerals that might lie below the surface.

"The surface itself he did not sell. The purchasers, Job Cargill and certain associates, did not care anything about that. What they wanted was oil, and they spent over two hundred thousand dollars trying to get it before they quit. Other parties followed them in the quest, but with no better success. I hate to cast a wet blanket on any expectations you gentlemen may entertain; but it is an undoubted fact that the Rawlinson tract is regarded down here as a financial graveyard. Every quarter of it has been drilled again and again, but it has never yet yielded one drop of oil.

"Eventually, through the failure of one exploring company after another, the deed to the twenty thousand acres of oil placer ground came into the possession of the bank, and it is this which you gentlemen have acquired. You have the exclusive oil rights in the property; and that, as I understand, is what you want.

"As to the surface ownership which Rawlinson retained, although subject of course to the provisions of the instrument he gave Job Cargill, I have no personal knowledge. From Moore's story, though, he must have transferred it to this manicure girl of the same name; or it may be, and this is not an improbability, that he has learned in some way of your projected enterprise, and is endeavoring in some underhanded fashion to horn in.

"In that case"—he eyed poor Bob severly—"I can only hope that Mr. Moore is an unwitting tool in the connection. My advice to you, young man, is to cut loose from such questionable associations. Go back East, and forget your alleged half interest in this barren waste of alkali dust. If there is any value to the Rawlinson tract, it lies underneath the soil. The only thing the surface will ever produce is sand and centipedes.

"Are you gentlemen satisfied?" He turned again to Van Carpen and Perkins.

"Oh, quite, colonel," they replied in chorus. "As we told you before, your word was all the guarantee we needed."

"Then I guess I'll be stepping back to the bank. Remember"—he smiled at the two—"Mrs. Howland and Faith are expecting you to dinner at six o'clock. Don't be late."

He did not include Bob in the invitation, or even speak to him again, but with a mere stiff nod in the latter's direction, passed out at the door.

After a moment or two, Bob roused up dejectedly, and muttering something about going over to the hotel and getting into fresh clothes, also took his leave.

J. P. and Van Carpen watched through the window his somewhat unsteady progress across the street until he had disappeared inside the hotel entrance. Then retiring to the rear of the office, they shook hands in evident satisfaction.

"Well, that's that," elatedly observed J. P. "He couldn't have played up to us better if he'd been coached for it."

"Didn't I tell you that he was the biggest boob out of captivity?" Van Carpen laughed contemptuously.

"I begin to believe you. Gosh! Nothing could have been rawer than the way you queered him with the colonel, and he never tumbled to it for a second. Just sat there and goggled at you like a duck in a thunderstorm."

"Sure. He's solid ivory, I tell you. Why, he hasn't a suspicion now but what I've been absolutely straight with him. It was lucky, though, that you mixed in when you did." Van Carpen solicitously felt his injured nose again. "Like all half-wits, he's as strong as an ox; and then, too, he took me by surprise. I hadn't expected him to show up for a month yet."

"Just as well that he did, all things considered. But how do you suppose Cale Northrup ever got on to what we were up to, so as to warn him?"

The glow of exultation died out of Van Carpen's face at the question. He shook his head, scowling.

"That fellow is a regular bloodhound on my trail," he muttered darkly. "I've got to get rid of him, or some day he'll get me. I know a gunman in New York that—"

"Oh, don't do anything foolish." J. P. frowned. "If Northrup never accomplishes anything more than he did in this case, there's no need to bother. Moore, thanks to you, is off him as hard as ever, and is so sick of the whole deal that I don't believe he'd even listen to this bozo again.

"I'm only wondering"—he stroked his chin—"if maybe we didn't drive the harpoon into friend Robert a bit too deep. We don't want to lose sight of that seventy-five thousand dollars he told you he was confident of raising."

"Never fear." Van Carpen had recovered from his momentary disquietude. "I'll drop over to the hotel presently, and sound him out. If he's got any money pledged, or has a reasonable expectation of getting any, I'll offer to take him in on our show. I'll tell him that you and I have been talking it over, and that we can't feel comfortable to see an old pal froze out this way, even though we are in no way at fault."

"But will he swallow any such guff as that?" questioned J. P. "Won't he begin to smell a mouse?"

Van Carpen gave an impatient grimace.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Won't you ever understatnd? Bob Moore is the prize boob of the century."

Just then Colonel Howland came out of the door of the bank across the way, and started down the street. Perkins caught sight of him.

"No," he grinned as he pointed to the colonel's tall figure: "there goes some one that to my mind is running Moore pretty close for the honor."

"Well, I don't know," Van Carpen retorted, a shade ruefully. "Don't forget that the old bird yonder has twenty-five grand of our coin stowed away in his jeans; and he couldn't have played a stiffer bluff for it if he'd known in advance just how far we were willing to go.

"Besides, you 'fly-by-night promoter,'" he mimicked the colonel's deep voice, "I don't like to have you speak that way of my future father-in-law."

J. P. shot him a quick, startled glance.

"You surely wouldn't dream—" he gasped.

"Why not?" Van Carpen lightly snapped his fingers. "Grandmamma is already plugging for me. The colonel is ready to fall in line. And—

"Gosh Almighty!" He sprang from his chair and crouched, white-faced and trembling, behind a file case. "Did you see that?"

"What?"

"Why, Cale Northrup is here in Guadaljara City. He just went by the door."

CHAPTER VIII.

UP AGAIN, DOWN AGAIN.

BOB, miserably conscious of his sorry appearance, slunk through the lobby of the hotel, and having secured a room, lost no time in getting to it.

The bellhop who accompanied him with his grip unlocked the door, and ushered him into a chamber where the glaring sunlight was streaming in at the unshaded window, making the atmosphere within that of a furnace seven times heated.

"Whew!" gasped Bob. "That clerk must have made a mistake and assigned me to the Turkish bath."

Yet even before he peeled off the remnant of his dustcoat or removed his collar, his first act when he was alone was to consult a railroad folder he had in his suit case, and see what time the next train left for the East.

To his dismay he found that there was none before eleven o'clock the next morning. He must pass the intervening eighteen hours as a prisoner in the close confinement of that sweltering room of his, or else exhibit his battered visage to the gaze of the populace.

He wouldn't have cared so much if he had been an absolute stranger; but he had spent three weeks in Guadaljara City not six months before, and with Western heartiness had been introduced by the colonel to practically every person in the community.

He quailed at the thought of the joshing he would receive on the strength of his ill-fated pugilistic encounter, of the grins he would have to face, and the banter to which his unready tongue could offer no reply.

They would all be asking him, too, why he was stopping at the hotel, and not with

the Howlands as on his previous visit. And what was he to say?

No, he decided fiercely; he would stick in that room and cook to a cinder, before he would provide the diversion for their small-town holiday.

He stripped down to the semblance of the young men in the underwear advertisements, minus their glad smiles; and throwing himself on the ovenlike bed, tried to ease his aching head among the hot pillows.

A knock sounded at the door. The bell-hop returning with the ice water he had ordered, he supposed, or possibly the porter coming to fix the broken window shade.

"Come in," he growled, without troubling to rise.

He did not even glance toward the opening door, until he heard a startled gasp; and then he was horrified to see hastily withdrawing scandalized from the scene no one less than Mrs. Howland and an old colored woman, Aunt Sally, who was something of a cross between a duenna and a servant in the Howland household.

Bob grabbed for his dustcoat as the most convenient thing handy in the way of apparel; but of course its sleeves proved to be inside out. By the time he managed to get into it, he had just about wrecked it with his agitated struggles.

Gathering its shreds and tatters about him, though, he leaped for the door and stuck his head out into the corridor.

No one in sight. Evidently that single glimpse had been enough. They had realized that he was not in costume to receive visitors, and had departed.

Was there anything more he could do, he wondered, to get himself in Dutch?

He had already estranged the colonel. Mrs. Howland would never forgive this affront to her dignity. And Faith was already sore at him for questioning her association with Northrup.

It looked as though he had rather tipped over, not one apple cart, but a whole row of them.

Then, as he began to recover from his first throes of consternation and embarrassment at the incident, he started to wonder what on earth Mrs. Howland could have wanted.

The only plausible conclusion at which he could arrive was that she had come to repair the colonel's lapse of hospitality by inviting him to the house. And he could imagine her outraged feelings, stickler for the proprieties that she was, at finding him so shamelessly *en dishabille*.

As a matter of fact, she had called on an entirely different errand. Learning of Bob's arrival, for news travels fast in a small town, she had rung up her husband and inquired if he was to be brought to the house.

No, the colonel informed her rather shortly; Mr. Moore, he had every reason to believe, was returning to New York the next day. He would probably stay at the hotel over night.

Then a brilliant idea struck her. Some of the purchases she had made in New York needed exchanging, and she had been worrying about how to accomplish it. Here was her chance. Bob Moore was a good-natured slob—perhaps she didn't put it in just those words, but that is what she meant—who would never think of refusing.

So she loaded up Aunt Sally with a variety of parcels, and set out for the hotel.

But, after all, as Bob wryly reflected, it wasn't so much the purpose of her visit that counted; it was the results.

Of course she was entirely at fault in the matter, bursting in on him that way unannounced; but he knew Mrs. Howland well enough to realize that the blame would be very promptly shifted to his shoulders. She would probably claim that he had deliberately donned his airy attire in order to humiliate her.

Determined not to be caught a second time, though, in case she should return, he hurriedly made a complete toilet, and then sat fully garbed, even to coat, collar and shoes. For an hour he broiled vainly in the stifling heat; then just as he was about to give up hope, there came the long-anticipated rap.

In an instant Bob was on his feet and across the room. With a courtly bow he flung open the door.

But it was not Mrs. Howland who came shuffling across the threshold. It was the bent figure of an old negro, whom Bob

recognized as "Uncle Joe," the husband of "Aunt Sally," and employed as a handy man at the Howland place.

In spite of his surprise, Bob greeted the old man cordially; but Uncle Joe did not respond with any degree of enthusiasm. His manner was furtive, and he spoke sullenly.

"Ah done got a note fo' you-all," he began searching his various pockets; "some'rs round yere."

From the old man's hostile air an absurd suspicion struck Bob that the missive might be a cartel from the fire-eating colonel, containing a challenge to mortal combat for the insult to his wife.

"Mebbe it'd be all fo' de bes' ef I'd lost it," Uncle Joe was grumbling as he ransacked his voluminous garments. "Cunnel an' ole mis' bofe gave me orders dat you wasn't to set foot on de place; but—

"Oh, yere it is!" He discovered the note in the crown of his tattered hat, and handed it over.

Bob's heart gave a thrill as he recognized the handwriting on the envelope. It was from Faith! Hastily he tore it open and read:

> DEAR BOBOLINK:
>
> I have just learned that you are in town, and am very anxious to see you. For some reason which I have not discovered, you seem to be *persona non grata* at the house; so I cannot ask you to come there. I shall be driving out in my car by the old arroyo at the north edge of town about half past eight this evening; and, if you like, can pick you up there. Please let me know by Uncle Joe if this will suit your convenience.
>
> Hastily,
>
> FAITH.

As Bob took this in, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune which had been so copiously pelting him seemed all to turn the other way. He cared no more for the whips and scorns of Mrs. Howland's displeasure, the proud colonel's contumely, the ridicule of Guadaljara City, his busted bean, or anything else.

Faith wanted to see him! Faith had written to him in her old friendly tone! Evidently she had forgiven his tactless *faux pas* in New York! He was to meet her that evening! All was right with the world.

In the exuberance of his spirits he rewarded Uncle Joe so liberally that the latter's grim disapproval sensibly melted.

"You sho' is a gen'lman, Misteh Bob." The old man took his leave, bowing and ducking. "Don' keer ef de cunnel an' ole mis' does call you a scalawag. I casts my vote wid Miss Faith."

Bob called him back and bestowed an additional contribution.

Then draping a cap jauntily over his bandaged brow, he went boldly out to face the world.

As he stepped briskly out of the hotel entrance he met Van Carpen coming in.

"Oh, hello!" the latter hailed him. "I was just about to look you up."

"Good enough," Bob returned cheerfully. "Then come on and take a ramble with me. I thought I'd give the burg the once-over and see if there's been any changes since I was here last."

Van Carpen eyed him uncertainly. He could not understand this light-hearted buoyancy. He had expected to find the poor boob weighed down by affliction, and to gain his confidence by a line of disingenuous sympathy. But here was Bob as chipper as a cricket.

"Sure you're quite up to walking?" he said. "That was a nasty rap you got on the head."

"How do you get that way? A love tap like that wouldn't jolt a flea. I never felt more fit in my life."

He certainly stepped off as if he meant it, setting a pace which forced the other to exert himself to keep up.

By rights he should be dragging his heels through a slough of despond. Van Carpen wondered what on earth had happened to put so much pep and gayety into him. It looked as if he'd had a favorable assurance of some sort. What could it be?

"You know quite a good many people in this town, don't you?" he probed. "Anybody been in to see you?"

"Well," Bob could not repress a grin at the recollection, "I had one caller."

"Ah?" Van Carpen was sure now that he was on the right track. "Who was that?"

"Mrs. Howland."

It was all that Van Carpen could do to check the exclamation of amazement that came bursting to his lips. Why had Mrs. Howland called on Bob Moore? What had she told him so to restore his spirits?

Dark doubts of his hostess began to disturb Van's mind. Was she less guileless than she appeared—merely playing him to find out what he was up to?

But he let no hint of these inner questionings show on the surface.

"Mrs. Howland, eh?" he repeated. "What did she have to say?"

"Oh, nothing very much. She didn't stay long."

Bob had started in to tell the story to Van Carpen as a joke on himself, but it struck him on second thought that the episode was really more embarrassing to Mrs. Howland, and he decided to keep silence.

Not another word would he say in regard to the matter; and this of course only confirmed Van Carpen's belief that something of great advantage to Bob had been divulged at the interview.

In that case it became more than ever important that Bob should become hooked up with J. P. and himself, without delay.

So, after one or two more fruitless attempts to unlock the sealed lips of his companion, he dropped the subject and started in on the tack which he had previously outlined to Perkins.

All unsuspicious, Bob was easily led to reveal in response to artful inquiries that he had seventy-five thousand dollars actually pledged for the exploitation of his scheme.

"But of course," he sighed with momentary depression, "all bets are off now on that score."

"Don't be too sure of that," returned Van Carpen. And then he proceeded with just the proper tinge of sentiment to explain how he and J. P. couldn't stand to see an old pal "go Mulhooly," and so were willing, even though it was like giving away gold dollars, to let Bob in on their enterprise.

Bob was deeply touched—even if not so deeply "touched," as Van Carpen intended he should be later.

He inquired what they wanted him to do?

"Well, I'll tell you," said Van Carpen smoothly. "We'll put our two deeds to the Rawlinson tract together, so that there'll never be any future question as to the ownership or control of the property. Then you get your parties in New York who have pledged this seventy-five thousand dollars to you to turn it over instead to our corporation. You can easily show them that it will be twice as much to their advantage; for we know that we are going to strike oil; with you it was only guesswork. And you can hold their money. We won't ask you to pay over a cent of it, until we show actual indications."

"Sounds good to me," commented Bob. "I don't know what anybody could ask fairer."

They had walked pretty well around the town by this time, and were down by the railroad station. Guadaljara City is one of those thriving, up-to-date communities of the West, with paved streets, a "great white way," an art railroad station, and a big electric sign back of it, reading:

THIS IS GUADALJARA CITY

POPULATION IN 1930 WILL BE 50,000

Van Carpen pointed to the latter feature.

"That's wrong," he said impressively. "The population inside of a year will be over one hundred thousand, and it will all be due to the prosperity flowing from the Rawlinson tract. And you and I and J. P. will be the big men of the place, Bobby. I'm telling you."

He turned, and slapped the other on the shoulder, adding:

"It's agreed, of course, old top, so far as you are concerned?"

All Bob's impulses were to say yes; but he knew that he was slow-witted, and never liked to give a definite answer on any subject without due thought.

"I'll tell you," he hesitated; "let me have until to-morrow morning to think it over."

And so, with that understanding, they separated; for it was now time for Van Carpen to keep his dinner engagement at the Howlands.

Bob went back to the hotel, his head in a whirl. The somewhat indifferent dinner

he got at the Palace seemed to him nectar and ambrosia; his stuffy room when he went up to it again a chamber of comfort.

For everything was coming his way. The hoodoo streak which Cale Northrup's mischievous warning had inaugurated, and which had culminated that afternoon in such a whirlwind of disasters, at last had passed. He was to be in on the development of the Rawlinson tract, just the same. He was still booked for a fortune.

And, best of all, Faith had sent for him. That could only mean one thing with a girl of her spirit. She had forgiven him, and was ready to take him back on the old footing. That romance which had started six months ago was evidently with her not a mere passing flirtation.

As Bob thrilled to this thought, he determined to ask her to-night the question which had been so often on his lips, but which he had always been afraid to speak.

He would ask her to-night, though, and he believed her answer would be yes.

She had named half past eight as the hour for him to be at the old arroyo; but in his impatience he could not wait, and started off ahead of time. It was probably a quarter of an hour too early when he reached the edge of a steep, sandy bank which led down to the trysting place.

But she was already there. Her car was standing at the side of the road. He sprang forward to make the descent, but checked himself on the brink, and stood motionless. There was some one with her.

Voices came up to him. She was speaking.

"You must go now, dear," she said. "He may be here at any minute."

A man answered. "Who? Bob Moore?" he laughed. "Why, he's too slow to get anywhere on time."

"Well, go anyhow," she urged. "It would never do for him to see you here."

"All right, honey. Good luck with your interview. Tell me all about it to-morrow."

They had been standing somewhat in the shadow of the car; but now they moved out together toward the road, and Bob distinctly saw the man take her in his arms and kiss her.

Then, as he stood there, his heart like a stone, the fellow started off down the road, and Bob recognized that it was—Cale Northrup.

CHAPTER IX.

AN EVENING OF THORNS.

WHEN Bob came to himself, he was walking back toward town.

Or, no; that is hardly correct. Just at the moment he was not walking.

The thing that brought him out of the stunned coma which had overwhelmed him at the sight of Faith Howland in the embrace of another man was a particularly thorny cactus.

Stumbling over an inequality of the ground as he fled blindly from that perturbing spectacle, he had lost his balance and abruptly sat down upon the plant.

And if there is anything more calculated to make a man forget the throes of unrequited love than to sit upon a cactus, science has yet to discover it.

With a howl of anguish Bob rolled hurriedly away from the stabbing spines, and for the next few moments was too fully occupied in plucking the needle-like points from his flesh and clothing to give much heed to his emotional reactions.

But gradually as his sufferings decreased and his steady flow of profanity lessened, his mind began to revert to the wound sustained by his heart.

Was it not like him, he reflected bitterly, to pull such an anticlimax to his tragedy? Who else but Bob Moore at so profound a moment would have floundered into a cactus—worse still, have sat down on it? It was as if *Sydney Carton,* in that tremendous renunciation scene in "A Tale of Two Cities," when he starts to mount the guillotine, had been swiped with a custard pie.

No wonder people called him a boob. He certainly gave them plenty of excuse for it.

And the nerve of him to think that Faith Howland could ever dream of linking her fate to that of such a clumsy oaf! His lip twisted as he recalled his strutting complacency on the strength of her note.

What had she wanted with him, he began to wonder, his curiosity vaguely stirred? And not only his curiosity, but his conscience started to bother him.

Look here! he had made a definite appointment with her, hadn't he—promised to meet her? She was not to blame if he had misinterpreted her purpose; and she was there at the rendezvous, waiting for him. Evidently she had need of him for something; something, too, that she considered important. Her eagerness proved that; and Northrup had wished her luck in her interview as if it were a matter of definite moment.

Yet here he was running away from her, turning his back on the woman he loved, refusing her call for assistance.

His scruples rose up like a stone wall against his inclination. It would hurt horribly to go back there and talk to her now, realizing that she could never be his; but it was the only decent thing to do. He might be a boob; but, by George, he wasn't going to be a coward.

He struck a match and looked at his watch. He was still in time for the appointment; it lacked three minutes of the hour she had named.

Reluctantly he got up and made his way somewhat stiffly back to the edge of the arroyo.

Yes; she was still waiting. As he came to the top of the bank, he could see her car standing there at the side of the road.

Doggedly he started down the steep, sandy declivity, but halfway down he felt the treacherous soil beginning to slide under him. He plunged forward, lost his footing, and landed in a heap at the bottom.

A couple of overlooked cactus thorns prodded him viciously as he struck; and a small-sized avalanche of sand followed him, almost burying him from sight.

It was not exactly a dignified arrival.

Faith ran toward him with a little cry of alarm.

"Goodness, Bob! Are you hurt?"

He could not answer at once. His mouth, nose, eyes and ears were full of sand, and there were irritating trickles of it sifting down the back of his neck and into his shoes.

"Are you hurt?" she persisted, as he vainly struggled for speech.

"Not at all," he finally managed to sputter. But he lied. Talk about the stoicism of the Spartan boy and the fox. Those cactus thorns pricked him cruelly with every movement he made, and the sand trickling down his back simply wouldn't let him stand still. In spite of himself, he wriggled and twisted like the prize shimmier of a Coney Island dance contest.

Surreptitiously he reached back and tried to extract the rankling cactus spines, but they eluded his searching fingers.

Faith, her first solicitude giving way to amusement at his weird contortions, lost control of herself and broke into irrepressible laughter.

"Oh, Bob!" she giggled. "You do look so funny."

And this was his reward for crucifying himself upon his chivalric impulses in her behalf!

But worse was still to come.

"Don't stand there, giving an imitation of an hour-glass, and shivering like a lost maverick." She laid a hand upon his arm. "I've got a lot to say to you, and none too much time to say it. We can't stay here; somebody is apt to pass by and see us. So come on, and get in the car."

There was no help for it. He followed her over to the roadster and climbed in. Busy at starting, she did not notice that he winced when he sat down; his involuntary moan of pain was drowned by the clashing of the gears. Then they were off.

Faith Howland was not a careful driver; neither are the roads of Guadaljara County city asphalt.

At every jounce and bump of the car, with every rut and unevenness they struck, Bob became newly aware of those two sharp cactus spines in the seat of his trousers. In fact, they made their presence constantly known; the bounces and jolts were merely the crescendo notes in his *miserere* of suffering.

Twist and turn as he would, he could not hit any position free from their intrusive points. He could only grit his teeth, and try not to betray his anguish.

An hour before he would have regarded

riding this way with Faith Howland, as her silken ankles flashed back and forth among the pedals, her slim, ungloved hands deftly twisted the wheel, and her lithe, slender body swayed toward him with each lurch of the car, as a foretaste of heaven. Now, it was something else yet.

On they flew over one of the desert trails in what seemed to him an unending ride. She was talking steadily; but in his self-centered absorption Bob did not really hear a thing she was saying.

Finally, though, it pierced through the fog of his abstraction that she was seeking to give him some advice.

"I don't know whether he's come after you yet with an offer to take you in on their proposition," he caught her words; "but he will, putting it of course on the ground of pure friendship. And, when he does, I want you to turn him down, Bob; turn him down hard."

"Him?" Bob repeated bewilderedly. "Who are you talking about?"

She turned to give him a look of surprise.

"Why, who else have I been speaking about all this time but Van Carpen? You haven't been listening," she accused.

"Oh, yes; yes, I have," Bob protested. "Only I wanted to get it straight. I thought from the way the colonel talked this afternoon that Billy was the original fair-haired lad up at your house?"

"Well, he is in a way, so far as grandad and grandmother are concerned," she admitted; "although I think he sort of slipped a cog with granny to-night at that.

"By the way," she broke in on herself curiously, "was she down at the hotel to see you this afternoon?"

"Why—er—yes."

"What for, in Heaven's name?"

"Well, she didn't just exactly say. She didn't stay long."

"But she saw you, didn't she?"

Bob was grateful for the darkness which covered his blushes.

"Er—yes," he gulped: "she saw me."

"Bob, you are simply driving me wild with curiosity. What on earth happened?"

"Why, nothing. She came to see me all right; but I guess she must have changed her mind. She turned right around and went away again without saying anything, and Aunt Sally went with her."

"Oh, Aunt Sally was along, was she? Then, I'll find out from her. Van Carpen wasn't so lucky."

"Van Carpen?"

"Yes. You'd evidently been as non-committal with him as you have with me; and so the sneak tried to pump it out of poor gran at dinner to-night. 'I understand you paid a visit of mercy to my unfortunate opponent this afternoon, Mrs. Howland,' he said. 'It cheered Moore up wonderfully.'

"Well," Faith giggled, "he plainly struck the wrong key. Gran looked for a minute as if she wanted to throw a soup plate at him. She turned red as a turkey-cock; then she got up and left the table.

"But look here, Bob," she shifted back to her earlier trend; "if Van Carpen learned about gran's visit from you, the two of you must have had a meeting after your fight?"

"We did. Took a long walk together. He's white all right; didn't cherish a bit of bad feeling."

"White?" disdainfully. "That crawling snake! Didn't he make you a proposition?"

"Why, yes; he did. A pretty generous one, too, I'll say. But see here, Faith; what's got you down on Van? I thought he hit it off with you in New York that night like ham and eggs."

"Oh, I don't deny," she tossed her head, "that he can be agreeable enough. That is a part of the stock in trade of every bunco-steerer. As a mere passing acquaintance, I didn't stop to question what he might be. But when he came out here, and jumped your claim—"

Bob was a loyal soul. His confidence once given to a man, he did not readily withdraw it.

"Hold on there, Faith!" he interrupted. "You're using some pretty strong language. Just what do you know about Van Carpen?"

"I know he's a crook!" she flung back at him. "I know that he and his partner are out here to do you and everybody else they

can inveigle into their fraudulent schemes. Poor old grandad is pluming himself on having got the best of them. I'll bet before they get through, they'll have him skinned forty ways from Sunday."

"You say, that you know they are crooks," Bob probed sternly. "How do you know it?"

"Well, aren't they trying to get you to put money into their proposition?"

"Yes; but you must remember that it is the same proposition I was figuring on exploiting myself."

"Exactly. They steal your eggs, and then hand you out an empty shell, and make you say thank you for it."

"Oh, I guess I can look out for myself in a business deal," Bob shrugged his shoulders.

"I tell you they are crooks. I know it."

"How do you know it?"

"Anybody ought to know it. Just to listen to their talk, and watch what they are up to, is enough."

"And that is all the proof you have against them? That is all you know?"

"No." She hesitated. "Somebody told me things. Somebody you don't like very well, but—"

"Ah?" Bob threw up his head with a quick, belligerent snort. He knew well enough who her informant was.

Nor was it only jealousy of a successful rival that roused him to resentment. To him, Cale Northrup stood as a sort of symbol of bad luck. Following their first encounter had come that unfortunate evening in New York. Then on Northrup's warning, he had started off on his hoodooed trip. And, finally, to-night, with the third appearance of the man, his romance had gone blooie, and he had reaped a harvest of cactus thorns and sand.

"I don't believe, I care to hear any more, Faith," he said stiffly.

They had swung around in a wide circle over the desert, and were back now at the edge of town. There seemed to be nothing more to say. He didn't want to knock the man to whom she was betrothed, but to congratulate her was beyond him. The situation and the cactus thorns together made his position unendurable.

"I guess, I'll get out here, if you don't mind, Faith."

"Wait just a minute," she pleaded, as she stopped the car. "Let me tell you about this Van Carpen, if that is his real name, which I have considerable reason to doubt. Why, Bob, he—"

"Please don't, Faith." He held up his hand. "I can't listen."

"But, Bob," she persisted, "you at least won't take up this offer of theirs without further investigation? Promise me, you won't."

"No," he dissented. If she had only known it, she had furnished him his deciding argument when she let him learn that she was protesting on the authority of Cale Northrup. "I have already advised my New York associates to go in, and I fancy I shall find favorable replies to my telegrams awaiting me at the hotel. If I do, I shall lose no time in informing Van Carpen that I accept."

Faith Howland was not without a touch of her old grandfather's temper, and for a moment it flamed. Then as she watched him limping away, her face softened.

"The poor boob!" She shook her head pityingly. "He needs a guardian, if any one ever did. And I guess I'm elected to the job."

It was a lonely spot there by the old arroyo where she had halted the car.

As she sat lost in reverie, she felt herself suddenly gripped from behind; and before she could struggle or make an outcry, a cloth was slipped over her head. She smelled the sharp, sweetish odor of chloroform.

Then, as she lapsed into unconsciousness, the car was started and driven rapidly away up the arroyo.

CHAPTER X.

THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

WHEN Bob reached the hotel—and owing to his various physical disabilities, he broke no world's record getting there—the clerk at the desk handed him four telegrams which had arrived during his absence.

The first three were from his financial backers; and as he had predicted to Faith, they indorsed his change of plan, and authorized him to turn over the seventy-five thousand dollar exploitation fund to the Van Carpen Oil Company.

But when he opened the fourth message, which was from Jean, he got a bit of a jolt.

"Have revoked your power of attorney," it read. "Was willing to hook up with you, but not with parties I know nothing about. Am not absolutely refusing the proposition, but require more information; so am starting for New Mexico to-morrow. Do nothing until I arrive."

Bob studied the yellow slip of paper frowningly. Was it not like a fool woman to do the unexpected thing and try to throw sand in the gears that way? Here, she had been all enthusiasm over a mere gamble, a possibility of winning; yet when he offered her a live proposition in association with practical men who claimed they knew just where oil was to be found, she began to hedge and shuffle.

She certainly had a nerve, putting up her untrained judgment as superior to his. Did she think he didn't know what he was about? Hadn't he told her explicitly that her interest was to have every safeguard, that nothing was to be turned over to Van Carpen until the latter showed that he actually had the goods?

Fuming, he walked to the front of the lobby and stood by the window. As he reread her message, his anger boiled anew.

"Do nothing until I arrive." The nerve of her? Where did she get off to give him instructions? Why, her old deed didn't give her a look-in. As the colonel had said, all she'd ever get out of it she could put in her eye.

Just to be decent, and as a return for her confidence in him, he had let her in on his Van Carpen project on an equal basis with himself; yet she chose to mount the high horse, and act like she was the whole show.

Evidently some smart Aleck in New York had got hold of her and filled her full of a lot of bunk, told her she ought to be very careful before she tied herself up, and all that sort of thing.

Well, he wasn't going to let this kickup of hers interfere with his plans. His face set obstinately. When she got out here and he had a chance to explain matters, she'd probably see the light. If not, she could do the other thing.

Meanwhile, he meant to go ahead, just as if her answer had been the favorable one he expected. Wait like an errand boy until she got there? He'd like to see himself. He had promised Van Carpen an answer in the morning; and, by George, he was going to give it.

Also, he had announced to Faith Howland what he intended to do. To hold off now would make her think that he attached some weight to Northrup's malicious knocking. He'd show them, by golly!

He flung up his head resentfully at the affront to his dignity—the suggestion that he could be swayed by Northrup's slanderous gossip—and as he did so, he observed that there was a light in the office of the Van Carpen Oil Company across the street.

Late though it was, the partners were evidently there, getting everything settled in their new quarters. The shades were drawn half way up the windows, but he could see on the walls and ceiling the shadows of Van Carpen and Perkins moving about.

Why wait until morning to close with them; why not do it now?

He yielded to the impulse, and crossing the street, rapped on the door.

It was locked; but in response to the summons, Van Carpen came forward and peered out from behind the shade. When he saw who it was, he unlocked the door, but held it a trifle warily, ready to slam it shut if Bob showed any symptoms of a renewed hostility.

"Why, hello, Moore," he said. "We were just closing up and getting ready to leave. Anything I can do for you?"

His tone was almost a dismissal, an intimation that his visitor had better come around at some more convenient season; but Bob was in no good mood to brook postponement.

"I've heard from my New York associates," he said. "They've given their O. K. to your proposition. So I thought, if you didn't mind, we might as well sign up to-night."

Van Carpen's manner changed as if by magic.

"Sure," he exclaimed heartily, throwing wide the door. "Come right in, old top, and we'll get you fixed up in no time.

"Hey, J. P.," he called back to his partner. "Here's this nighthawk of a Bob Moore hunting for a dotted line to put his signiature on. Guess, we'll have to oblige him, won't we?"

Perkins somewhat hurriedly closed down his roll-top desk as the two came back toward him.

"With all the pleasure in the world. Dotted lines are our specialty. And I think I've got one here that leads straight to a fortune.

"Van, where is that agreement you had typed, in case Bob should decide to come in?"

For answer, Van Carpen drew from a drawer two contracts embodying the terms he had outlined that afternoon.

Bob glanced them over.

"There is only one possible objection that I can see," he hesitated. "I note that you fellows retain full control of the company. We of the minority could be pretty easily frozen out."

Van Carpen laughed with good natured raillery.

"You surely didn't expect us to surrender control of our own company, did you?"

"Oh, no; of course, not. I was only wondering if there wasn't some way that our minority interest could be better protected.

"I don't see what more protection, you could ask," J. P. broke in a bit sharply, "than that clause, requiring us to show satisfactory indications of oil before you put in a cent."

"Yes, Bob," Van Carpen added; "remember, we are taking all the risk. We have to show you oil, before we can even lay a finger on your money.

"And another thing, my boy," glowingly, "there's going to be such tremendous profit in this deal, that nobody would dream of taking advantage. We don't want to begin looking cross-eyed at each other like a cutthroat, Wall Street gang. We're pals, and to me there's a touch of romance in the thing. Let's make it a sort of Three Musketeers adventure—'One for all, and all for one!'"

After that Bob felt ashamed to appear too critical.

"Oh, it's all right with me," he acceded hastily. "I was just thinking how my New York associates might look at it."

"But you have a free hand, haven't you?" J. P.'s eyes narrowed a trifle. "There are no strings on you?"

Bob threw out the three telegrams he had received from his backers, and J. P., after carefully scrutinizing them, passed them over to his partner. For all Van Carpen's romantic fervor, they seemed to be pretty businesslike in their dealings.

"These seem to be all right," J. P. commented. "Now in just what shape is this fund you have raised?"

Bob reached for his billfold, and extracting three New York drafts for twenty-five thousand dollars apiece, showed them to him.

"Good as gold!" J. P.'s close-set eyes gleamed. "I suggest, Bob, that you indorse these over to us as payable when the terms of our contract are satisfied. Then we will deposit them in the colonel's bank to be held in escrow."

Bob nodded his assent.

"Now, there's only one more point. How about the Jean Rawlinson deed?"

"I'm afraid that'll have to wait for a few days." Bob shifted his feet uneasily. "You know how women are in business matters. But it seems such an unimportant detail, that I thought we might as well close up the deal and leave that for a later transfer."

J. P. didn't appear any too well pleased.

"Well, I don't know," he hesitated. "Of course, if you're sure it'll be all right—"

"Of course it's all right," Van Carpen interrupted impatiently. "Hasn't he told us that he has a half-interest in the deed himself, and a power of attorney over the whole thing? Naturally he wants an authorization from his principal; but like him, I don't see any need to hold up the deal on account of that."

The statement did not absolutely square with the existing facts; but Bob did not

take the trouble to correct it, nor to show them the telegram from Jean. Why raise a question, when he was morally sure that as soon as the manicure arrived and he had a chance to talk with her, everything would be all right?

"Come on," Van Carpen was urging. "I don't want to stick around here all night, chewing the rag. That clerk over at the hotel is a notary. Let's go over there, get these contracts signed up and acknowledged and then go home to bed."

There really seemed nothing more to discuss; so yielding to the suggestion, they all adjourned to the hotel and there with the aid of the notary night clerk soon had the agreement signed, sealed and delivered in due legal form.

"And now you're one of us," Van Carpen grasped Bob's hand. "Our little *D'Artagnan.*"

"Not quite yet," smiled Bob, with an attempt to look shrewd. "There's still one slight formality to be complied with; you've got to show me oil on the Rawlinson tract."

"Don't worry about that." J. P. gave a wag of the head. "We may show you a good deal sooner than you think.

"By the way, Van," he turned to his partner as if struck by a sudden thought, "now that Bob has signed up, why not take him along with us to-morrow, and let him see what we are doing out there?"

Van Carpen shot him a quick, startled glance of inquiry. He seemed taken aback for the moment. But J. P. covertly drooped an eyelid to signify that he knew quite well what he was doing.

"We'll be starting pretty early," he went on. "You'll have to have your breakfast and be ready by seven o'clock at the latest. But if you care to make the trip, I think you'll be interested. You'll find at least that we're losing no time in starting operations."

"Count me in," Bob promptly agreed. "But since, as you say, we've got to make an early start, I guess I'll call it a day and turn in."

"Same here," assented Van Carpen with a yawn. "Come on, J. P. So long then until morning, Bobby, old top, and pleasant dreams." And they separated.

Up in his room, Bob wasted little time in getting into bed. He had had a somewhat crowded day, mentally, morally, physically and emotionally; and his different experiences had come so fast, one on top of another, that he felt as he did after his test for the aviation service, when strapped in a chair he had been twisted and turned and whirled until he lost all sense of altitude or direction.

Nothing stood out very clear to him, or in proper perspective. His brain felt jumbled. Even the blasting of his hopes in regard to Faith Howland was more a dull ache at his heart than the poignant pain he would have expected. He knew that he would feel it terribly later; but just at present it was tangled up with the sting of cactus thorns and the crash of the chair over his skull and all the other material and spiritual afflictions which had befallen him.

For the moment his one overpowering sensation was that of a great fatigue; and his head had hardly touched the pillow before he was off into a heavy, dreamless sleep which lasted unbroken, until a pounding at his door at 6:30 in the morning brought him back to consciousness.

Had he been more wakeful, had he perchance looked out of the window, he might have discovered that in spite of the yawns of Van Carpen and J. P. and their professed purpose to seek their couches a light still burned in the office of the oil company across the way, and that both partners were there busily engaged in telephoning.

Had he been able to follow these telephone messages to their desination, he might have found that they called out certain rough and sinister looking men, and set in motion a lot of varied activities. He might have seen two or three big trucks loaded up with a lot of old junk in the way of material and machinery, and sent speeding away to the Rawlinson tract.

Also, had he looked from his window in another direction, over toward the courthouse, he might have seen a messenger come dashing there about three o'clock in the morning to rouse up the sheriff, and he would have seen that official with a hastily gathered posse start off in three automobiles for the desert.

Had his curiosity been stirred and he gone down to inquire what was the matter, he might have learned that they had gone to search for Faith Howland.

She had gone out early in the evening in her car, so it was reported to the sheriff, and nothing had been thought of her absence until ten o'clock. Then the colonel began to get anxious, and finally started out with one or two of the servants and some of the neighbors to look for her.

Their only idea was that she might have sustained an accident; but when they had explored all the roads and trails of the vicinity which she would have been likely to take, and had found no trace of her, the old grandfather had begun to fear that bandits might be at the bottom of the affair, and have either carried her off or murdered her. Then he had called upon the sheriff.

But wrapped in the profound slumber of exhaustion, Bob Moore knew no more of all this excitement and commotion than if he had been a thousand miles away.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

THE POINT OF VIEW

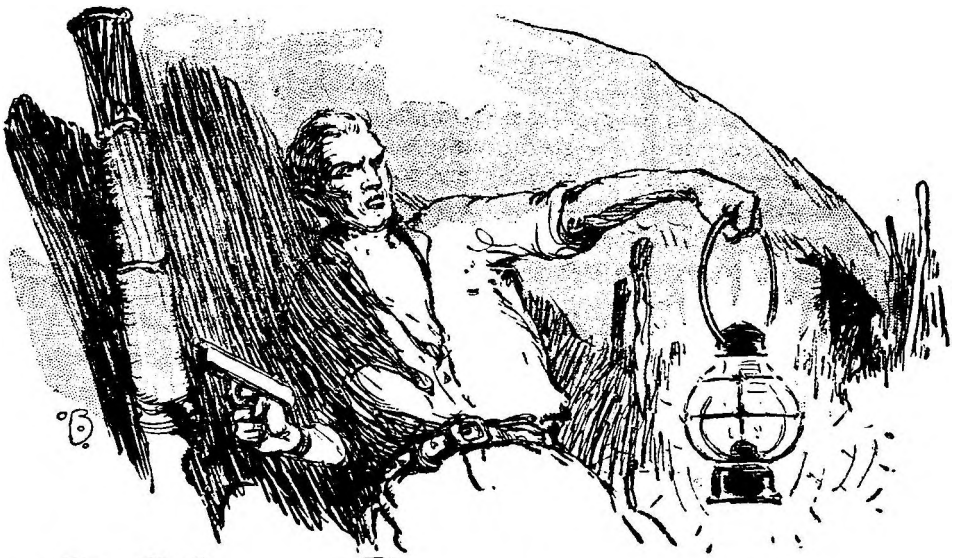
NO keener joy I know than that
Which comes from hearing ball and bat
Colliding with a mighty whack
That sends hot flashes up your back—
Provided (and right here's the rub)
The wallop's not made by some dub
Who comes along to wrench my soul
By putting our team in the hole.

I'm sure to yell and shout "Huroo!"
And pound some stranger black and blue
When down the line a sprinting bird
Is nailed while stealing home from third:
That is, of course, you understand.
I whoop and cheer to beat the band
If he is one of those galoots
That came to give our team the boots!

I love the honest umpire's voice;
It makes my very soul rejoice
To hear him sternly calling strikes
On some big slugger he dislikes,
Or, with a lordly wave of hand
Chase managers beneath the stand—
Unless, perchance, he is a crook
Who tries to give our team the hook!

I see no reason why the fan
Should not, like every other man,
Be calm and just, whoe'er it hurts,
And give to each one his deserts,
Bestow his praise where it belongs
And hail the conquerors with songs—
Except, perhaps, one time, to wit:
When our team gets the worst of it.

Frank X. Finnegan.



The Lantern Bearer

By GEORGES SURDEZ

LEANDER reached over, and with a lean brown hand spread out the five cards Jack Gunty had thrown on the table.

"Two aces, two kings and the Joker!" he enumerated. "Why the Dickens didn't you stay in?"

His voice was sharp and he seemed irritated. In truth he was annoyed that his new assistant should show up so poorly in his first poker game at the club.

"I didn't notice—" Gunty faltered.

"What's the mater?" Leander inquired with a half-wink at the other players. "Did your girl throw you down?"

"Oh, no—" Gunty returned, in deep embarrassment.

"Don't worry about that trip to Agboville," Leander went on reassuringly.

"It's not as hard as you imagine," put in Shannon, the wiry Irishman in charge of the English store.

"I'm not worrying about that," Gunty denied as he lit another cigarette.

Presently he stifled a yawn.

"Sleepy?" Leander asked.

"A little. And I want to store up on rest before starting up bush."

He got up, shook hands all around and thanked them for their wishes for a safe journey. Then, holding himself straighter than usual, he passed to the stairs and out.

When he was well out of earshot Shannon turned to the others and laughed: "This is the first time Abidjean has seen a man afraid of the dark!"

Abidjean, the commercial metropolis of the Ivory Coast, boasts of one hundred and fifty while population. It is a typical

French West African town, with its hotel where the passer-by shares his couch with many anonymous little companions, a café, and the club. The commercial establishments are near the wharf where the diminutive lagoon steamers from Grand Bassam, the seaport of the colony, come to deposit cargo, and reload again with kernels and palm oil, or tow down the rafts of mahogany logs. The residential section, on the low hills that stretch back from the lagoon, is reached by murky, unlighted streets.

Shannon held up a warning finger. "Listen!"

They could hear a man running in the distance—a white man—for he wore shoes.

"And he thinks he's hiding it completely. He doesn't know that here every one knows everything about everybody," Leander said, and puffed at his cigar uneasily.

"Is it wise to trust him with your cutting?" questioned Snail, the Abidjean manager of Kingsley Company, who looked like his namesake—fat, flabby, always wearing stiffly starched whites that formed a genuine shell about him.

"Whom else could I send?" Leander asked, partly to himself.

"That's right," Shannon agreed.

"A shame to see such hands wasted on a chap who can't play them," Snail, who was particularly unlucky at cards, grumbled.

And then they returned to the game. It was Leander's turn now to be absent-minded.

The young man's technical knowledge was evident, but his peculiarity did not tend to make him dependable in a country where a man must often depend on nerve to get along. And yet—Leander argued with himself—who else could he send?

If Gunty failed on this particular mission, he would be forced to send a report to the home office and demand his recall.

The disturbing belief that Leander was not wholly satisfied spurred Jack Gunty on to a determination to more than make good in his work up bush. Native labor was not an easy proposition for a man new to the country. But he would keep his eyes open, spare no labor or thought in his attempt to put things through, to excede, in every way, the Frenchman who had preceded him in the work. Gunty had heard gossip. *Monsieur* had been a shiftless, good-natured chap, fonder of the little brown jug than of work. He—Gunty—would consider his personal comfort and pleasure last.

His first constructive move was to engage an efficient personal servant whom he knew to be trustworthy and competent.

Koulibali was a Bambara, a member of the fighting tribe that at one time ruled the western Soudan, but if he had been born in the States with a white skin he would have been an efficiency expert. He set out at once to make himself indispensable to his master.

The train journey to Agboville was tedious. The sun beat on the tin roof of the car, making the interior oven-hot. Through the window live cinders from the engine, burning wood instead of coal, scorched holes in Gunty's white suit. Insects flew in from the outside and joined the crawling inmates of the interior, left there by natives using the cars as sleeping quarters.

The scenery was monotonous; dense jungle occasionally broken by a clearing where timber had been cut, a native village now and then, the inhabitants of which would gather near the tracks and wave their hands to the native engineer, and the negroes cluttered in the second and third class compartments.

Koulibali appeared at noon with meat and biscuits and some very good beer. Afterward he quietly gathered the dishes and as quietly disappeared. When the train pulled in the station at Agboville, Gunty found his boxes and bags in readiness.

The servant also knew the shortest route to the administrator's residence; along streets of red earth, with here and there a stretch paved in bricks, the whitewashed bungalows reflecting the sun from one side of the street to the other in a shimmering, dazzling haze of light, to the top of a hill.

The official house was surrounded by a pathetic attempt at landscape gardening. African vegetation does not lend itself to fanciful arrangement, and here some one's homesick imagination had run riot.

At the gate a sentry, his sword across his

knees, slumped against the wall. He was barefooted, though he wore rolled puttees around his skinny calves, and he breathed gently in deep and righteous slumber. On the veranda the orderly was leaning against the wall, also asleep. The first door disclosed a large room, the walls decorated with maps.

At a wide desk, littered with papers, books, inkwells, souvenirs and banana peelings, the administrator sat. His white coat was open and showed bare skin covered with a tangle of reddish hair. His bare feet rested, toes wide apart, on a leopard skin. A busy fly made repeated attempts to enter his ear, but was just as often foiled by the mechanical roll of the fat face from side to side. His head was supported on his arms, and he, too, was sleeping.

When at length he awoke, he stared at his visitor stupidly.

"*Bon jour*—" he muttered.

"*Bon jour*—" Gunty agreed, and then in his best college French told him that he wanted two men to carry his baggage.

"*Comprend pas*—" grunted the official, buttoning his coat and adding under his breath: "Barbarian!"

Koulibali, unassumingly, stepped forward and burst into a stream of fluent bush French, held up two fingers, pointed toward Gunty, and waved his hand toward the west.

"*Bien—bien*—" nodded the Frenchman. Turning to Gunty he went on in bush English. "You go Cutting Thorty-Four, no?"

Gunty assented.

The administrator shook his head. "He no be good."

"What's the matter with Cutting Thirty-Four?"

"No understand English mooch—what you say?"

"Is Cutting Thirty-Four a bad place?"

"No—oh, no—but men, dey tell funny t'ings—"

"What—for instance—"

"My name be Raoul Signer." The Frenchman bowed pleasantly, evidently thinking Gunty had introduced himself!

Again Gunty tried to gather his meaning, which was also past Koulibali's vocabulary, either in French or English.

The administrator reached for a cord dangling from the ceiling. A silvery bell rang outside. He waited. Nothing. He rang furiously, gesticulating to Gunty in explanation. Finally the orderly appeared, rubbing his eyes and stretching. He was further awakened by an accurately aimed banana. A few short words from the official and he went out—to return presently with two short, round-bellied Atches.

Gunty was glad to get out of the sleepy little town, even though he was puzzled, and uneasy. What could be wrong with Thirty-Four? What did the Frenchman know that he behaved so strangely, at one moment trying to warn him, the next pretending not to understand?

The bush trail wound up and down hill endlessly. The sun was hot, and Gunty began to wish he had taken a hammock. At the first native village the nauseating smell of perspiration, palm oil, and dust sickened him. At the second village he accepted a jug of "Benguy," or palm wine, which bore not the slightest resemblance to wine in appearance or taste, but carried a "kick" and felt cool to his parched throat.

Despite their steady pace darkness overtook them half a mile from the destination. Koulibali took the lead, with the sure-footed stride of the experienced hunter. Rounding a bend in the trail, they came to the clearing, where burning fires outlined the forms of natives. In the uncertain light Gunty discerned a cluster of bamboo huts.

A gray-haired native, slightly stooped with age, but still well preserved physically, came forward and greeted them:

"This be massa's house," he informed Koulibali, pointing to a squat bungalow, situated somewhat apart from the huts and surrounded by a high bambo fence.

Three rooms—a living room in the center and a bedroom on either side—the inner walls of twisted bamboo, the outer of mud, the floor of beaten earth: this was to be his home for the next few months! A table and a few rough chairs in the main room comprised the furniture. Four posts in the ground, leather straps nailed from one to the other—on this Koulibali spread the mattress of the camp bed and adjusted the mosquito screen on the thin frame of bamboo.

Gunty was tired from the long walk and the heat. After a light supper and a consultation with the gray-haired native, who turned out to be Sammy, the foreman, Gunty called Koulibali.

"I shall go to bed now. Leave the lamp on that box."

He indicated his trunk.

The servant obeyed and turned to leave.

"You may sleep in the other room," Gunty suggested.

Koulibali hesitated, shifting from one foot to the other. His mouth drooped at the corners.

"Oh, massa—"

"Well?"

"I like go sleep dem bushmen place if you no say no—"

After all, thought Gunty, it was only natural that he should wish to join the other natives.

"All right—go on—"

"Good night, massa—"

"Good night—"

He put on his pyjamas and slipped into the blankets. He would need them, as the nights were comparatively cool. The lamp was still burning. He must get to sleep before it went out.

All his life Gunty had been afraid of the dark. If it was an inheritance it surely was not from his father. When he was a little boy—six years old—the old man had forced him to go into the cellar after butter or preserves. Later, in the country, he had suddenly been left alone on a lonely road late at night. He had stumbled about calling for his father, and then crawled into a ditch where, face buried in his arms, he had spent the night. A severe cold caused the mother to put a stop to further attempts at a cure.

He joined the boy scouts. There also he was found out and chaffed until he was glad to leave the troop. His success on the gridiron and diamond carried him through the first years at college.

And then a girl, of whom Gunty was very fond, remembered having left her camera at the golf club. The club was two miles into the country. He picked up a lift for the first half of the journey. Then, overcome by the old terror, he sent the article back by a servant and spent the night in the deserted club reading room, with a lamp at his elbow. The girl was neither discreet nor charitable. She told others.

Supersensitive as he was, he had consulted one nerve specialist after another and recounted his every symptom. The quacks gave him various treatments for his nerves. The honest ones told him frankly that the cure was within himself. When he was graduated from college the year book published his photograph, surrounded by footballs, baseball bats, and—lanterns! The caption read: "The Lantern Bearer."

He had found an out-of-town position—his athletic record had made his name fairly well known. But as his work required night trips he was obliged to resign at the end of a few months. And here on the Ivory Coast? Yes, the night was as black as the night at home. But he need not go out of his bungalow—need not reveal his fear.

Faint noises from the native camp, laughter, and once in a while the loud voices of quarreling men. He began to feel very much alone, separated as he was by miles and miles of bush from the nearest town. Yes, the administrator at Agboville was the nearest white man.

But he must get to sleep before the light went out.

His rest was disturbed by unpleasant dreams. A man-eating lion had killed Koulibali, who had been asleep at the edge of the bush. Sammy, the foreman, came to awaken him. They found Koulibali's body—a mass of mangled flesh, out of which a hand protruded. And the laborers expected the white massa to go out into the darkness and kill the lion!

The foreman joined the others within the circle of fires. His nostrils wrinkled in scorn and he spat out the native expression of contempt: "Pow—pow!" The laborers would desert; Leander would find out. He—Gunty—would be reported at the home office.

He took his Holland and started out toward the lark line of the bush. He wanted to go on, and yet his limbs seemed powerless to carry him forward. The darkness pushed on him from all sides. He could

not move his stiffened muscles, could not go forward up the hill or back to the camp fire. A desperate effort to move brought the vague consciousness that he dreamed. It was a matter of minutes—hours they seemed—before he could lift himself out of the lethargy, throw off the nightmare that gripped at his throat and clutched at his temples.

The light had gone out. He was awake and alone in the darkness. His first instinct was to call Koulibali. An intangible idea held him silent. In his dream he had found the courage to face the darkness. Conscious or unconscious, awake or asleep, his mental self was the same, still had that courage. If he could exercise it in the one state why not in the other?

His senses pressed for immediate relief, to light a match, to call the Bambara. His reason told him to fight it out, to overcome for all time the powerful feeling that had ruled him with tyrannical persistence. Yesterday he would have given way to the first impulse, and sought companionship. To-night—yes—perhaps he could find the strength.

The minutes passed.

Tiny knocks, furtive rustlings, startled him; doubtless dry twigs snapping on the roof. Was the darkness becoming less dense? Yes, gray patches marked the windows. He would not be called to the test. He did not know whether he was disappointed or glad.

As the outline of the interior became marked out in the swiftly rising light he fell asleep.

Gunty did not linger long over breakfast, for he was anxious to see the cutting for himself. Sammy had already left. Gunty called a guide and set out—a mile walk along a trail bordered by tall trees rising above a thick tangle of undergrowth, their destination being the dry bed of the Agneby. As the waterways are the only practical transportation for timber, the logs are cut during the year and placed in the river bed to be brought down by the rains.

Gunty found Sammy directing forty or fifty chocolate-colored Korokos. He marched beside them and used blows freely. They did not seem to resent. As they strained at the ropes and pulled the roughly squared five-ton log over the runners, made of small tree trunks, they sang in chorus:

"Whoooo—ha—oooo!"

Like a pack of dogs baying the moon, they lifted their chins toward the sky and howled. Then with a snort, half grunt, they put their weight to the ropes and pulled. The perspiration rolled down their backs, and arm and leg muscles tightened in long strings beneath the reddish brown skin.

"Whooo—oo! Haw—oooo!"

Again the tense wait, the leap forward, and the log advanced a few feet. Eventually the outfit reached the river bank, from where the log was rolled into the gully that marked the bed.

"Wh—ooo!"

The natives stood erect and drew breath after exertion. An order from Sammy and they moved away, back to another log, which they brought forward by the same laborious method. They played and laughed among themselves, and Gunty saw that they were not unhappy. Suppose they did work hard. They were well fed and their season's pay would make them well to do gentlemen of leisure for the rest of the year in their villages.

The white man smiled. Was he not here also to make money and at the end of his contract return home? He was free from the lash—but if he failed in his work. The thought was not pleasant.

He recalled the administrator in Agboville and his intimation that all was not well at "Thirty-Four." And the nightmare of the night before. Always after that type of dream something disagreeable occurred. Whether the dream was a forerunner of trouble, or put him in the nervous condition to be susceptible to annoyances, he had never figured out. And yet, in this particular dream he had been more or less victorious. He had actually started off to face the dark, which might be a good omen, if one believed in omens.

He tried to throw off his uneasiness by strict attention to the work in hand. He soon perceived many ways in which the operations could be rendered more efficient.

The day passed all too swiftly and he was surprised when the foreman came to his side and announced that the men would soon quit work. As he got up to leave he became aware of a white man making his way along the trail.

Leander! What had brought him to the cutting? Gunty's thoughts were not overpleasant.

But Leander's warm greeting tended to dispel his uneasiness. He had found it necessary to come to Agboville on business, and as there was no train back to Abidjean that night he took that opportunity to join his assistant and find out if he were comfortable.

They talked of other things except work, and Gunty began to feel more at ease. Leander seemed interested in hunting, narrated some of his own exploits in the Soudan, and suggested making up a party for an elephant hunt. A friend of his in Grand Bassam had a permit and sufficient funds to carry the thing through. As the evening passed Gunty felt, more and more, his friendliness.

They talked until ten o'clock, when Leander, after a glance at his watch, suggested they turn in.

"I'm a little tired after that walk this afternoon," he explained.

And yet he did not look over-fatigued. The light from the carbide lamp brought his sharp features into relief, the tiny lines at the corners of the eyes from gazing at things long distances away.

Leander got up from his chair without effort. Gunty remembered his own aching limbs and regarded him with a feeling that approached envy. Here was a strong man, a real adventurer, and fearless. To be like him what wouldn't he give!

Koulibali set up Leander's camp bed in the other bedroom. Gunty noticed the black's evident desire to speak to Leander. Several times he hesitated before the door. Just as he was about to open his lips, to speak and ask him what caused his uneasiness, Koulibali passed out, and the pat-pat of his feet could be heard receding in the direction of the encampment.

Gunty put out his light without hesitation. In the first place, he must not let Leander know of his weakness, and besides he was not wholly alone. Could he not hear Leander moving about in the next room? Presently Leander's light went out, and Gunty fought to master his growing uneasiness. The sounds from the laborer's camp gradually dwindled until all was silent.

Minutes went by—hours.

Occasionally Leander would grunt or turn over in the other room, twenty feet away. The rustling sounds on the roof and walls were repeated. A rubbing, swishing followed by a knock recurred at irregular intervals, and at different spots.

"Damn!" he heard Leander exclaim.

Leander was up now and had scratched a match. The light threw his shadows on the floor of the living room. Then the manager went to the door, and in a few seconds Gunty heard his steps circling the house. He came back immediately. From the sounds he had again gone to bed.

What had caused Leander to go out into the night at this time? Oh, well, he'd learn in the morning. He seized upon the trite method of sleep persuasion, sheep jumping over a fence. He put five hundred across and then started them on the way back. The task was nearly completed, when he heard Leander get up again and light another match.

"Say, Gunty, are you asleep?" the manager called out.

"No; what's up?"

He got up immediately, lit the lamp, and started for the living room, where he met Leander.

"Did you hear that walking about?" Leander asked.

"Didn't notice—"

"You know—steps—" Leander explained. "All around the place. I've been hearing them ever since I went to bed."

"Were those footsteps?"

"Of course—I can tell—"

"I thought it was twigs on the roof or the wood working."

"Something moving outside, and sometimes it comes into the room. It's first a slide as of a bare foot, then a knock—"

"That's right," Gunty agreed as he recalled the peculiar sounds.

"As long as there is a light—no noises!"

" I wonder—let's look!" Gunty suggested bravely.

" You stay here," Leander advised. He appeared more nervous than the occasion seemed to warrant. " I'll go around the house again."

This time he took a lantern and his automatic. Gunty noticed with surprise that his hand shook, and that he seemed as pale as his tan would allow. Leander, who had a reputation for fearlessness, the one man Koulibali respected above a Bambara!

Leander reëntered and shook his head. " Nothing—and there are no tracks on the ground—"

" Then, what can we do but go to sleep?"

" I'd rather not." The manager wiped his forehead. " Do you mind staying up with me?"

" What is it, I wonder?" Gunty said when the silence became oppressive.

" Nothing alive—I'm sure of that!"

A footstep outside caused Leander to reach for the automatic. Both turned to face the door. The steps drew nearer.

Koulibali entered. He, too, seemed frightened.

" I look you outside, massa, and I come see what you want."

Leander hesitated a moment before he spoke. " Do dem boys say nothing about this place, noises, things that go so—" He imitated with the palm of his hand and his knuckles the noises heard.

" Yes, massa. Dem other French massa that live here before, everybody say he be crazy for head 'cause he drink too much. It not be so. He—"

Koulibali walled his eyes and gulped before he found the courage to go on. " He hear dem—dead man—"

" Nonsense!" Gunty exclaimed.

" Yes, yes, go on!" Leander said.

" Dead man come for night time. And when no light be, he walk around and knock, so, on the walls. Then he come in and he stand and look you long time in dark, and he say, but he no speak loud:

" ' You be 'live, I be dead—why you no be dead, too?' All boys they savvy this be so, so dey make dem place away from bungalow."

Leander's evident perturbation increased the Bambara's fear.

" Let's try putting out the light," Leander suggested.

The night outside was so intensely somber that the windows themselves were scarcely discernible. For nearly fifteen minutes they waited. Then Gunty gave a start. The noise—yes, a soft footfall and then a knock. He heard the gun on the table move, and knew that Leander had seized it.

" Don't fire!" he involuntarily exclaimed, fearing Leander's nervousness, and the next moment was astonished at himself for presuming to give his superior advice.

The latter's fear seemed to bring them both on an even footing. He now understood why his friends, who found out his fear of the dark, could not help but lose their esteem for him.

" Guess it wouldn't be any use," Leander muttered, and lit the lamp with shaking fingers.

Koulibali had left Leander's side, crossed around behind the table, and now stood behind Gunty. The native had sensed that the younger man was the more composed of the two. Gunty felt a sudden sense of responsibility. He lit a cigarette and said calmly enough:

" Try putting out the light."

His voice had acquired a new note of determination.

" Mr. Leander, you take the automatic. Koulibali and I will stand back to be outside the range. When the noise comes again fire through the wall."

Leander assented. The lamp was turned out. The three stood in the manner agreed. Another long wait.

" Now—"

Gunty did not know whether he or Leander had exclaimed. The gun spat out streaks of fire, revealing for fractions of seconds the tense faces of the watchers. Koulibali wheezed through his nose in his excitement, and unconsciously gripped the young man's arm in his wide paw.

Leander relit the lamp. Bullet holes perforated the partition of mud and intertwined bamboo, at the very spot, they all agreed, where the noise had occurred. They

followed Koulibali, who carried the light, out to the other side of the wall where the lead pellets had made their exodus. No tracks except the faint mark of Leander's boots, left there on his previous trips.

"It no be man," Koulibali whispered.

They reëntered, and Gunty went to his room, returning with a bottle of whisky. They drank, even Koulibali, who was too frightened to appreciate the honor. He made no move to desert them, although his usually reddish black skin had taken on a queer grayish hue. The other natives had doubtless heard the shooting, but fear put a curb on their curiosity, and even Sammy did not appear.

The manager wiped his face again with his handkerchief, lit a cigar, and then spread his hands out in a gesture of helplessness. How far from his usual self must he be! Had he not often expressed amusement at the French for gesticulating to emphasize?

Gunty walked up and down the room, his shadow following him in grotesque caricature. He threw away his half smoked cigarette.

Koulibali, in the emergency, was not bothered by religious scruples, and drank the whisky, forbidden by the Koran and unworthy of a clean man. Intoxication did not give him courage. On the contrary, his fear increased, and he followed on Gunty's heels like a dog.

"By ——," grunted Leander, "I'm going to get out this place to-morrow morning, and trek for Agboville!"

"But what about the cutting?" Gunty asked.

"You can come away with me. I don't blame you for not wanting to stay. We'll have this place burned down and another bungalow put up before we come back."

"I could camp outside with the men."

"No, no—I don't want to leave any one here when I wouldn't stay myself."

Leander, who usually used very little alcohol compared with the average coaster, emptied his glass again. Gunty had heard before of strong men, adventurers, who were afraid of nothing that walked, but who feared ghosts.

What was the psychology of fear of the unknown? Personal injury? Not always. How could a ghost harm a man? Did he, Gunty, fear personal injury from the dark? No. It was simply because he could not see, did not know. Who can know of the after life?

And yet, men do not think of death daily. In fact, it is a human idiosyncrasy to assume that only the other fellow is mortal. How futile, helpless, Leander seemed gripped by the dread of the unknown!

Gunty stopped suddenly in his walking. He had made up his mind. There was something vaguely familiar in his action. As he stood for a moment in the middle of the floor, staring with unseeing eyes at Leander and Koulibali, he remembered . . . He must take his gun, go out into the dark, and do away with the beast that frightened and harmed those dependent upon him. So now Leander seemed dependent—and Koulibali.

"Let's go outside, the three of us," he suggested to the others. "I'll stay out with my flashlight and automatic. You two come back in. Koulibali can make noise enough for two, so that whoever or whatever is outside won't know I haven't returned with you—"

"Oh, massa!" Koulibali murmured in admiration.

"It seems rather absurd to try and stalk a—" Leander broke in, but shied at the word—"anything like this. But what else is there to do?"

"Yes—what else can I do?" Gunty said, half to himself.

He went to his room for his pocket flash, and slipped his own automatic into his pyjama coat. When he came back he took Leander's gun with a short laugh of apology. He sensed that a man of Leander's type, gone to bits, is not wholly responsible, and should be given no margin.

It's the same with everything, he reasoned. Long self-restraint when relaxed leads to excesses. The teetotaller who takes a drink becomes a "souse"; the old maid who goes in for vamping is a holy terror; and the brave man afraid becomes an absolute rag. The repressed feeling snaps back with the energy of a taut steel spring. The

pendulum must have its swing. As with himself, now, could not his natural courage, long denied, be greater than that of an ordinary man who had never felt fear?

If he actually went out alone to-night in the dark, while Leander stayed behind with Koulibali and shivered in fear of what he could not see; if he were not afraid of ghosts, then how could he ever be afraid of lesser things? If a man isn't afraid of a lion, would he be afraid of a house cat?

They went out once more and flashed the light. Then Gunty crouched back against a convenient heap of rice sacks awaiting storage. The other two moved away in the dark, rather noisily, as planned, and reëntered the house. Presently a light shone through tiny cracks in the bamboo and mud walls.

Surrounded by pitch darkness, Gunty, despite his new found courage, was badly shaken. His thumb traveled to the safety catch on his automatic. His muscles were rigid, tensely alert. His mouth became dry, and he wondered why he had not thought to drink water before coming out. The minutes dragged. He could not have been there long because Leander had not yet put out the light. Why the devil didn't the man do as agreed and bring things to a crisis?

The threads of yellow in the darkness winked out, and Gunty leaned forward, his attention focused straight ahead. No movement of any kind. He thought he heard a knock. But his imagination, keyed to the snapping point, might have deceived him. He waited to be certain.

The soft shuffle, the knock! He pressed the catch of the electric torch, and a disk of light appeared on the wall, throwing every detail of the rough mud into sight. Again the knock.

Gunty straightened up suddenly and burst into a loud laugh, and ran for the door like a madman. He was still shaking with laughter when he entered the room. Koulibali managed to light the lantern, which revealed Leander, his lips in a tight line, his brows together in a questioning, nervous frown.

"Get a grip on yourself, old man," Leander suggested, doubtless thinking his assistant was becoming hysterical.

"I am! I have—I mean—" Gunty stammered. "You see, it's like this—" He broke off. "Have you ever seen a night lizard, Mr. Leander?"

Leander nodded.

"Harmless little white things. They slide along—" Gunty rubbed his palm on the table. "And when they grab an insect they bump their heads—like this—" He rapped with his knuckles.

"Well, I'll be d——!" the manager muttered.

"I'm cured of ghosts!" Leander declared.

"So am I—" Gunty hesitated a bare second. "Cured of ghosts."

He had lingered for a moment on the last word as though it held a double meaning. Leander reached across the table and gripped Gunty's closed fist in his lean brown hand. The tiny lines about his eyes deepened, and the corner of his mouth twitched ever so slightly. Leander had looked at things long distances away and had studied human nature close to. Gunty thought he caught a smile.

Of course! Koulibali was ridiculous, standing by the doorway, drunk and fearless.

Feeling the eyes of his masters upon him the Bambara was constrained to speech.

"I no fear 'um!" he mumbled, and turned and lurched out into the night.

Leander laughed loudly.

Relief from the strain no doubt, thought Jack Gunty.

Graft

By WOLCOTT LeCLÉAR BEARD

Author of "For the Flag," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

WHEN Phil Herondene, a young architect, refuses to be a party to municipal graft, the politicians decide upon a frame-up. They plan to place marked bills in his pocket, discover them, and convict him of accepting a bribe. Miss Sophronia, his lovable old aunt, discovers the plot and hires a burglar, Spike Creach, to steal the marked bills before they can be used. Spike opens the safe, secures the bills and takes them to Miss Sophronia. Then he tries to help her expose the grafters, especially the big boss. Just as he starts to name the big boss a shot is fired and Spike Creach falls dead at her feet.

Immediately afterward the mayor and the district attorney, both of whom are present in Miss Sophronia's house, enter the room and accuse Phil and his partner, Mr. Ayres, of the murder. They are arrested and taken to jail. Miss Sophronia, aided by Jack Ayres, a young lawyer, and Phelim O'Rourke, a saloonkeeper, make plans for their defense.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CLOSING TOILS.

"CIGARETTES—cheap ones," said Aunt Sophronia, musingly. "A handkerchief, also mighty cheap. A novel—paper—called *The Fiend of the Bermuda*, that looks as though it might be the cheapest of all. No; of course, I knew all along that Lawrence Horton wasn't the last man who wore this coat, but if I didn't, this would be enough to prove it. He isn't the sort of man to carry such truck around with him. But who *did* wear it? What sort of a man? A cheap man—yes. But what sort?"

Aunt Sophronia was once more seated in her library, with the half-burned coat and the contents of its pockets—which she had just enumerated—spread for examination

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on her desk. She was at a great disadvantage, and no one could realize that fact more clearly than she.

"So Horton gave that suit of clothes to a man who was cheap. But the suit itself wasn't cheap. I know it wasn't worn out; I think it was new. Of course, something might have happened to it, though it isn't likely. No; most likely, Horton gave the suit to a cheap man—the sort of man who would take a suit that another man had worn. As it was an expensive suit, he had a good reason for wanting to please that man. If we could find the reason we could find the man—or the other way about."

She was at a standstill. She had done all she could in the way of obtaining knowledge from the objects she had found in the coat. There were many things that she could have surmised, but against this she resolutely set her mind. It would be only guesswork, and a wrong guess might start her on a wrong road, so that she would waste much time in turning back and seeking the point of divergence. Hard-headed Yankee common sense taugh her that.

"I wish Phelim would come, as I told him to." said she.

As though her wish had been heard by the traditional fairy godmother, the wheels of Phelim's car sounded on the gravel of the drive, and a moment later Phelim himself appeared in the library, to be welcomed there. He knew of the fire in Peter's cottage, but not until now had he heard how that fire had happened. Aunt Sophronia showed him the coat, and the contents of its pockets. At the latter he shook his head.

"The book is the sort av thing that silly boys do sometoimes be readin' afther they've gone t'rough the sportin' pages, an' has nothin' else to do," said he. "The handkerchief and thim cigarettes is the sort that such a lad wud be loike to have. Such a lad will commonly be bechune siventeen and twinty-four years old. But the coat, now—"

He took the coat in his hands, turned up the lining to look at a seam and then read the label in the pocket.

"'McShane, the Tailor,'" he read. "That'll be Patsy McShane. Moight I use your tillyphone, ma'am? Thanks."

He called for a number and obtained it. Plainly from the one-sided conversation that could be heard by Aunt Sophronia, the tailor was out. Phelim left word that he should be called the instant McShane returned, and hung up the receiver.

"That coat has been altered—took in, ma'am," he said. "I thought, whin I first seen it, it niver would have fitted Larry Horton as it is here; already, though it's too soon for him, Larry is growin' a foine, young dinin' room extenshun av his own. But we know about how old the lad who wore this coat was, an' how big he was."

"But we don't know why he went into Peter's house," said Aunt Sophronia.

"We do not," Phelim agreed. "I've got a sorrt av hunch, ma'am, that 'twas Larry Horton himself what bribed the lad to go into Pether's house. Why, I can't guess, but there must 'a been some rayson. He may not have intinded to set the house on foire—an' then again he may, and made a bluff at thryin' for to put it out whin he seen Pether comin'. But that, an' much more, we'll foind out when we get hould av the lad himself—whoever he is."

To this Aunt Sophronia nodded agreement. "I was thinkin', Phelim, that a detective agency—" she began.

"Miss Sophrony," Phelim eagerly interrupted, "don't do it! Have nothin' to do with anny av them agencies—not for worrk in this town. Listhen, ma'am. This is a criminal case. Them private gumshoe sleuths wud have to worrk wit' the police, more or less. The police is owned, ma'am, body, soul an' breeches, by the gang that own the rest av the town, up to now. They—the police—wud beat, buy or bully them private sleuths—or more like, all three—befoor ye cud say 'knife! They're all crooks together, at best."

"But then—" began Aunt Sophronia, her face clouding. Again Phelim interrupted her.

"Listhen wance again, ma'am," said he. "I have men who know more an' can do more than anny wan of them police or private gumshoe grafters. My men is crooks, too—many av thim. Some av them is on guarrd around yer place now. But niver will they be bought by anny av the City

Gang. For loife is sweet, an'—well, ma'am, 'tis a great misfortune that wud fall on anny av thim what didn't run straight wit' the rest."

Phelim's ethics were very immoral. Aunt Sophronia must have felt an impulse to reprove one who would maintain discipline among his followers in the manner plainly implied by Phelim's last speech. But perhaps the blood of Great-grandfather Sophronius was very strongly in the ascendant just then. At all events, she passed the occasion over without comment, and reverted once more to the unsolved problems that were confronting her.

"Do you know, Phelim," said she, "that it has just occurred to me that whether it was intended or not, the fire in Peter's house was of use to Mr. Horton, this very morning."

"Yes, ma'am?" answered Phelim, eagerly. "As how?"

So Aunt Sophronia told him the story. Of Horton, who had come, who had forced his presence upon Edith, bringing with him the misguided and officious, though sincere, little clergyman, in order to detract attention from his presence.

As her tale progressed Phelim's face grew red and then purple with rage. Soon he began to curse, under his breath, softly, fluently, horribly—and quite unconsciously as well. Aunt Sophronia heard what he said. She knew that she ought, by all rules of propriety, to be shocked beyond measure; yet somehow she was not shocked at all. She glanced up at the portrait of Great-grandfather Sophronius, and fancied she saw in the old gentleman's grim face a distinct sympathy with Phelim and entire approval of his expression. She greatly feared that she was now, as on many other occasions, strongly inclined to agree with her great-grandfather.

While she was speaking Jack, pale and tired and troubled, appeared in the doorway. Aunt Sophronia did not see him; her back was turned in that direction. Phelim made him a signal to be silent, and so he remained, listening to the tale as it was told.

"I don't know what Horton said to her; she wasn't in any state of mind to tell me," said Aunt Sophronia, in finishing her story. "But I gather, from her disjointed talk, that his story was pretty much the same as the one Mr. Lamb told me. Only with additions, I gathered. He talked against Phil—made her believe that the boy was goin' straight to the electric chair. He tried to make her believe that Phil deserved to go there, I think, and—"

"And he tried to make love to her—the beast!—as he did when we were at home, in Barrasdale. I knew it as well as though I'd been here and heard every word he said. He bothered her then—hinting at favors he could do dad in a professional way. She couldn't get rid of him. I was going to tell him to clear out or take a licking—but dad told me to hold my tongue and mind my own business. Well, it *is* my business now, and if I see that face of his again—"

"Ye'll not see him here, lad; I'll go bail for that," remarked Phelim, quietly.

"His talk with Edith is past and gone, Jacky, boy," added Aunt Sophronia, soothingly. "Anyway, it didn't do any permanent harm, I hope. But how did you succeed?"

"With the papers? I got two—rotten ones, both of 'em—and a third is hanging fire. That's not what bothers me. They're impanelling a special grand jury just for father and Phil. And court is to sit directly afterward."

Aunt Sophronia was puzzled. She did not know what this signified. But Jack's dejection spoke for itself, and she saw that Phelim's face clouded, and that he emitted a long, low whistle. She looked from one to the other. It was Phelim who answered her implied question.

"'Tis a move av the inemy, ma'am," he explained. "They can take no chances—an' well they know it? Eliction is comin' on fast, now. They must clear their own records—if they can—before the votin' happens. So they're rushin' things, both for that rayson an' to kape us from gettin' ready to put up a foight. They'll railroad Masther Phil an' Mr. Ayres if they can—"

The telephone bell rang. Phelim, interrupting his explanation, took down the receiver.

"Hello!" he said. "McShane's, is ut? Is this you, Patsy? Phelim talkin'. Say

--tell me. There's a suit ye made fer thot blaggard Horton. White-an'-black checkerboard stuff it is, loike a harse-blanket. D'ye rimimber it? Ye do? When did ye deliver it?"

There was a pause, presumably occupied by McShane in looking up the desired date. Then Phelim spoke again.

"Yes—I'm still here—listenin'. On the fourth of this month, ye say? Then tell me somethin' more, Patsy. Did annything happen to that suit, do ye happen to know? I mane, did Horrton tear it or stain it or annything, so ut couldn't be mended good? How's that? He gave it away for no rayson at all? How d'ye know? He wint to you—the man Horrton gave it to—to have ut althered. Well, did ye alther it? Why not? Ye didn't want to bother to do a quick job fer the loikes av him, so ye sint him to the little Jew around the corner? Who was the guy, annyway! did ye know him? Good God!"

Phelim hung up the receiver and turned to Aunt Sophronia.

"The man that wore thim clothes—the guy what was in ould Pether's house—was Jimmy Wilson!" said he.

CHAPTER XVI.

FLICKERING OUT.

WHAT could it mean? Why had Horton given an expensive suit of clothes to Jimmy Wilson, old Libby's son? Why had Jimmy gone to Peter's house? Why had he run away when seen?

These and a score of other questions remained unanswered. Of one thing Aunt Sophronia herself felt sure: Jimmy had not gone into Peter's cottage with the intention of setting it on fire, and with this opinion both Phelim and Jack were inclined to agree. What had to be done, and why? Those were the questions that must be answered. To answer them, of course, Jimmy himself must be produced. But where was Jimmy?

It did not at first seem as though this question would be a difficult one. Upon comparing notes, however, no one there could recall having either seen or heard of him for several days. No one, in fact, had thought of him; there were too many things more important than the whereabouts of Jimmy to occupy their minds.

"But niver moind, ma'am," said Phelim, rising. "Though I mind, now I come to think about it, that I've not seen him in me place, it can't be harrd to thrace him. Dinny, me head bartender, will know where he lives, loike as not. Annyway, somebody will know. I'll go and have him hunted up, ma'am, an' let ye know. Sure it ought to be a simple thing."

"I'll go with him." Jack also rose. "That is, if you don't mind, Aunt Sophronia. I've got to do something, or I'll go crazy—and I may be of use. Besides, that newspaper—the one I said was hanging fire—the *Mercury*—promised me an answer this afternoon. So I'll just get a bite of lunch somewhere and finish up that business before I get back."

Aunt Sophronia nodded without speaking, and he followed Phelim out of the house. Aunt Sophronia sat buried in thought.

Her dismal revery was ended by Peggy, who opened the door, shuddered as her eyes fell upon the spot where Creach's body had lain, and then, pulling herself together with a fine show of indifference, delivered herself of her message.

"The nurse asked me to tell you that there's a change in Libby's condition," said she. "Whether it's for the better or worse she can't tell. But she thinks that the doctor ought to be called at once, Aunt Sophy. Shall I telephone, or will you?"

"You," answered Aunt Sophronia, rising quickly. "And tell him to hurry!"

She left the library even as she spoke. She ran up the stairs and hastened along the passage to old Libby's room.

The change was slight, Aunt Sophronia thought. Whereas the sick woman formerly had lain in a lethargic sleep, her sleep was now troubled. Her head moved restlessly from side to side. She moaned a little.

"Is she in pain?" asked Aunt Sophronia, anxiously. The nurse shook her head.

"I don't think so," she replied. "Patients in her condition seldom are. It's

mental trouble, I fancy—if anything. More likely it's just half-formed, semi-delirious dreams. Did you send for the doctor, Miss Herondene.

Aunt Sophronia nodded, and seated herself by the bedside. She had sent for the doctor—but not for Dr. Gray. He had left town, as a self-appointed ambassador to old Mr. Reynolds, that there might be no failure on his—Mr. Reynolds's—part to realize the vital need for his services. Dr. Gray had but little practice—just a few old patients—for he was retiring, gradually, and would accept no new ones. These patients, for the time, he had left in the hands of another and much younger man. Aunt Sophronia knew that he was a most capable young man; otherwise Dr. Gray would not trust him. Nevertheless she wished mightily that it might have been the older practitioner who would come.

A faint color rose in Libby's faded cheeks. Her old mistress hoped that this might be a favorable symptom, but was too experienced not to realize that it might be otherwise. After a little Libby ceased that restless motion of her head. Her eyes opened. They were very bright—unnaturally so, her mistress feared. They fell upon Aunt Sophronia with evident recognition. She smiled, and her lips moved. Miss Sophronia bent low in order to listen.

"Jimmy," murmured Libby. "Jimmy. Where is he?"

"I don't know where he is now, Libby—but he'll be here pretty soon," Aunt Sophronia assured her. "I sent for him quite a little while ago."

Reassured, Libby smiled again, and closed her eyes, whereupon Aunt Sophronia made furtive dabs at her own. For a while Libby lay quiescent. Her breathing gradually became deeper and more marked.

The doctor came, brisk, cheery and confident. At the sound of his footsteps Libby's eyes opened once more, but as she saw who it was, they closed again, and from under their lids there crept two tears.

"I thought it was Jimmy," she said. "I want Jimmy. Where is he?"

"He's on his way now; I saw him not ten minutes ago," asserted the doctor, with ready, professional mendacity. "You take this medicine now, and you'll be stronger, so that you can talk with him a little when he gets here."

He was preparing the medicine as he spoke. Libby took it almost eagerly. For a little the doctor stood watching, while once more his patient sank to sleep, appearing, save for the heightened color, as she had appeared ever since her present illness.

"Who is this Jimmy?" asked the doctor, turning to Aunt Sophronia. "Her son?"

Aunt Sophronia nodded.

"You'd better send for him, then," the physician went on. "I've given her a strong sedative—it's all I can do for her. She's in a bad way. Nevertheless she may pull through—for the time—if she's not agitated in any way. If she wants this son of hers—why, she must have him, that's all."

"How long before she'll wake?" asked Aunt Sophronia.

"Oh, three hours—four—five. Not under three, anyway, and it's impossible to say how much longer. I'll call again this evening. Good day."

He was gone, and Aunt Sophronia followed him. She went first to her library, and called up the saloon of Phelim O'Rourke on the telephone. It was Denny, the head bartender, who answered. Mr. O'Rourke was not in, he said. No, nothing had been heard of Jimmy Wilson. Mr. O'Rourke had been looking for him, and sending out others to look for him. He was looking for him now; that was the reason for his absence from his place of business.

Thanking him, Aunt Sophronia left the library, ordered her carriage and donned her outdoor garments. As she repassed the library door, she lingered irresolutely for a moment, then reëntered the room and rolled the half-burned coat into a bundle which she tucked under her arm.

The carriage came, and Peter extended his pad. Aunt Sophronia laid the bundle on the seat, and wrote:

> To the City Hall. When you get there, drive at a walk between it and Mayor Horton's apartment until you see the mayor coming. Then stop.

Luncheon time had long passed, unregarded, so far as Aunt Sophronia was con-

cerned. The afternoon was wearing on. She knew that it was the mayor's custom to leave his office early—and she had formed a plan. The doctor had assured her that at least three hours must elapse before the effect of the sedative would exhaust itself. She intended to devote those three hours, or such a part of them as might be necessary, in trying out the plan just mentioned.

"Mebbe it won't work, Peter," she said, to that familiar, unresponsive back. "But then, you see, no plan can work unless you try it, and until we try, we can't tell whether it'll work or whether it won't."

To this undoubtedly correct statement, Peter's back had no objection to offer, and therefore the subject was dropped. The City Hall was reached. The fat horses came readily to a walk; walking was a favorite mode of progression with them. Phil had been wont to describe their favorite gait as a "split between a standstill and a crawl." He was not far wrong, but even so an appreciable number of miles had been covered when at last Aunt Sophronia's patience was rewarded. The mayor came into sight.

The carriage stopped. Horton saw it. For an instant his brisk walk slowed, but then he thought better of his hesitation and came on more briskly than before, making a virtue of necessity.

"Miss Herondene," he said, with bared head, as soon as he was close enough, "I know what you're going to say, I'm afraid. I know I shouldn't have entered your place as I did this morning—that I shouldn't have seen Edith without your permission. But you see—well, I love that girl. I have no other excuse to offer."

The air of utter frankness that he assumed really was very well done. Aunt Sophronia, listening and watching with critical attention, fully appreciated this. He paused, waiting for a reply. Aunt Sophronia made none; therefore he had to continue as best he might.

"You see I lay my cards on the table—throw myself upon the mercy of the court. I wanted so much to assure Edith that I would do all I could for her—that even though it might mean losing her I would clear your nephew if I could—that I admit that I yielded to temptation and broke all rules of hospitality. Not," he hastened to add, "that I claimed that I could clear him. To my unbounded regret I can do nothing of the kind. But I would if I could. You must believe that—don't you?"

"No," answered Aunt Sophronia.

He was fairly taken aback now. There are few things more discouraging to voluble explanations than a monosyllabic reply. Still he essayed to go on.

"Do you suppose—*can* you suppose for a moment—"

"We won't discuss that," Aunt Sophronia broke in. "I want to know something quite different. Where's Jimmy Wilson?"

The shot told. Horton winced, but instantly recovered himself.

"Jimmy Wilson?" he repeated, courteously. "I don't think I understand. I don't know any Jimmy Wilson."

"You did know him," was the grim rejoinder. "Otherwise, why did you give him this coat of yours?"

The coat in question had been concealed under the lap robe. Now Aunt Sophronia flirted it open, so that it rested upon her knees. It scarcely had appeared when she knew that she had scored with the second barrel harder than with the first. Neither, however, hit hard enough wholly to disable the quarry.

"The coat is mine, apparently," admitted Horton, with extravagant carelessness. "I told my housekeeper to give it away—the whole suit. I don't know whom she gave it to. Why do you ask?"

Another question rose to Aunt Sophronia's lips, but, as she herself would have expressed it, she bit it off in time. Never had Aunt Sophronia heard of the legal axiom to the effect that it is bad policy to afford unnecessary information to the opposing side, but she acted upon it notwithstanding. Her only reply was to punch Peter in the back with her parasol, and the horses started homeward.

They had gone but a little way when, once more passing the City Hall, Aunt Sophronia caught sight of the clock in the cupola, and she started with dismay at the

hour that it registered. Again she punched Peter's back. The horses were urged to a greater speed. But even then Aunt Sophronia's heart sank as she drove through the guarded gate of her home and came within sight of the house. For Peggy, with every sign of anxious distress, stood on the veranda, awaiting her coming.

"Is Libby—" began Aunt Sophronia; then stopped because she could not bear to finish the sentence.

"She has waked up, that's all," was Peggy's reply. "She's been calling for you—for you and for Jimmy—but you were neither one here. I tried to find you both. I've been telephoning everywhere—but now you're here you'd better go right up, Aunt Sophy."

Aunt Sophronia could not reach Libby's room quickly enough. Even before she was within sight of the door, she could hear old Libby's voice.

"Jimmy! Oh, where is he?" it wailed.

Hurrying in, Miss Sophronia dropped on her knees by the bedside and threw her arms around her old servant and friend.

"Libby, listen!" she said. "I don't know where Jimmy is. I've sent for him, just as I said before. I've been out myself, trying to find him. A lot of folks are hunting for him. But he must have been away somewhere. But just the minute we can get hold of him—and it can't be long, now, I'll bring him here. So all you have to do is be quiet—go to sleep, if you can—"

"I can't go to sleep. Not yet. I don't dare," panted Libby. "My next sleep will be the one that knows no wakin' in this world I'm afraid, Miss Sophrony. And first there's somethin' I've got to straighten out—for Jimmy's sake. You know what he's been—how he was led astray—"

"Yes—hush!" cried Miss Sophronia. "Of course, I know—know all about it, Libby. But Jimmy has promised to be good, now, and I know he'll keep his word. I'll see that he does keep it—anyway, till you're able to look after him yourself. So don't worry any more. And don't talk: you'll hurt yourself."

"There ain't nothin' that'll hurt me much now," was the reply. "And whether it does or not, I ain't goin' to let you work in the dark. I want you to know all there is to know. And I want to make—"

The voice ceased. For a little Aunt Sophronia, her face buried in the pillow beside Libby's, waited for it to go on. Then the nurse forced her gently away, and drew the end of the sheet up and over Libby's face.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEEDLE AND HAYSTACK.

WHERE was Jimmy Wilson? Nobody knew, and what was more to the point, none seemed able to find out. The search was begun promptly. Hardly had he left the grounds that surrounded Aunt Sophronia's home when Phelim O'Rourke stopped his runabout at a tobacconist's where a public telephone was to be found. Jack, following him in Phil Herondene's runabout, also stopped and waited for him to come out, which he presently did, frowning and shaking his head.

"I called up Dinny, me head bartender," he explained in answer to Jack's inquiring look. "I thought maybe he, or some wan av the others, moight know where it was that Jimmy beds himself down, but they don't. It's not to be astonished at; there's a lot av me customers what don't want their home addhresses to become matthers av giner'l knowledge. But some av the bums what hangs around me place must know, or annyway, can most giner'ly foind somebody what does. I told Dinny to have thim all get busy. But tell me, Masther Jack, where'll ye be goin' from here?"

"To settle that newspaper matter," answered Jack. "That is," he added, "if they have their answer ready, as they said they would. Why?"

"'Tis a stall they'll be handin' ye, I'm thinkin'," remarked Phelim, without answering the question. "That won't keep ye for long. And aftherward, where will ye go?"

"I don't know. I want to find out if you've learned anything. Where can I find you?"

"I suppose," said Phelim, still evading

a direct reply, "that ye'd not loike for to go into a dump loike my place, for fear ye'd be seen by somebody what might be passin' by at the toime."

Now, by some people—notably those who either never have been a very young man, or who have forgotten what it was like—such a tribute to Jack's sense of propriety might be supposed to flatter him instead of being regarded as a slight upon his sophisticated knowledge of life in all its aspects. He flushed with annoyance.

"What in blazes do you suppose I care about who might see me?" he demanded. "I'll go into any place where I want or need to go."

"I didn't know," answered the diplomatic Phelim, successfully concealing a grin. "Then, if ye don't moind, will ye go there—to my place—when ye've finished wit' yer other business? I'm goin' the round av some other dumps—hangouts, like me own. If Jimmy Wilson has been seen in anny av thim, I'll hear of it. It won't take me long. I'll see ye later, then, Masther Jack."

So the two cars parted, each bound on the mission of its occupant. Jack's, as Phelim had prophesied, did not take him long. The "stall" was promptly forthcoming. He was told that before any definite answer to his proposition could be given, he must put that proposition into writing; and, "in order to save time," a document had been prepared for his signature.

Jack read this paper carefully, once and then again. A most extraordinary instrument it was, so smothered in complicated legal verbiage that at first its meaning was unintelligible. It reminded him strongly of certain mediæval legal documents that he had been obliged to study in the course of his law school career; and these studies enabled him the more readily to strip the verbal disguise from its essentials. Thus denuded it amounted to an acknowledgment that he, acting as agent for Sophronia Herondene, desired to bribe the free and enlightened press.

Tearing the paper across, Jack tossed it into the waste-paper basket and rose.

"Gentlemen," said he, to the assembled board of directors, "I am here to buy this paper, its plant, its good-will and all that it has, if you will sell. That is my offer. I'll put it into writing if you want me to, though I shouldn't think that you'd have any trouble in either understanding or remembering it. You said you'd have an answer for me at this hour. I'm here to receive that answer. What is it?"

There was no answer. The management was not prepared to deal in this direct and simple manner. He was informed that time was needed for further deliberation; so Jack shrugged his shoulders and left, his mission a failure for the present time at least, and probably, as he fully recognized, for all time.

He had known, of course, of the political machine that for so long had held the city—and, indeed, the State as well—in its grip. Everybody knew of it. It was discussed whenever politics were mentioned. But the extent of that power—its ramifications, its czarlike autocracy, its smooth, insidious machinery—never before, somehow, had these facts come home to his mind as they did now.

Starting his engine, Jack drove down the long hill toward Phelim's saloon. He drove slowly, because he needed time to arrange and formulate the thoughts that came in the train of this new realization of the power against which Aunt Sophronia, a little, old maiden lady, aided only by the keeper of a tough saloon, and Jack himself, a boy just out of college, must fight for a life that she valued infinitely more than she ever had valued her own. The more he thought, the more vivid the impression of that opposing power became.

The very streets through which Jack passed seemed fairly to reek of this same sinister power. Billboards along the route were newly covered, or were in the process of being covered, with posters announcing Lawrence Horton's candidacy for governor. The lithographed countenance of Horton simpered out at him from each poster, and Jack's excited imagination transformed the simper into a grin of malicious triumph, which roused in him an anger that might have been caused by a personal insult. In order more quickly to leave those posters

behind, he released his brakes, allowing his car to coast as swiftly as it would—but there were always more posters. They simpered—or grinned, according to the way one looked at the face—from everywhere. The world seemed to be filled with those faces.

When Jack reached the saloon he found Phelim's car already there, and Phelim just alighting.

"Well," said the latter. "What luck?"

"You mean with those newspaper owners?" returned Jack. "They stalled, just as you said they would. I called their bluff. I don't know what they'll do now."

"I do," answered Phelim, grimly. "They'll stall some more. They'll thry in ivery way they can, if Miss Sophrony has something up her sleeve, what she's li'ble to bring out unexpected; and if so, what thot something is."

"But I don't know myself," Jack protested.

"Av coorse ye don't," agreed Phelim. "No more does annybody else, except her. She may just be gropin' in the darrk—I doubt if she is, but she may be—but even so, we'll win out sooner through that gropin' av hers than by anny other road I can foind. Ye see, I *know* Miss Sophrony. I know when in doubt the safest an' best thing to do is the thing she tells ye to do. Just now she's told us to get hold av that little scut, Jimmy Wilson, but divvle the hide nor hair of him can I foind. Let's go inside, an' see if Dinny can tell us annything."

He led the way into the little back room of his saloon—the smallest of several back rooms, and the one in which Aunt Sophronia had been received. Changes, however, had been made in its arrangements since that time. Several of the round tables, of the sort common in such rooms, had been replaced by a single much larger one, upon which stood an inkstand, some pads of blank paper, others of telegraph blanks and two desk telephones.

"I've made a sorrt av headquarters av the place," explained Phelim, pressing a button. "We'll be needin' something av the kind, I'm thinkin'."

Denny, the head bartender, presently appeared in response to the call. Phelim, without speaking, looked at him inquiringly.

"Yes, I found out something, but I'm afraid it don't get us nowhere," said Denny, answering that unuttered question. "Jimmy Wilson was in here. Early in the morning it was, long before I come on watch. It was that new boy, Pat, what served him. Pat said that Jimmy was all smeared and black, like he'd been grubbin' in a coal mine. He was all in—plumb played out. He was scared or somethin'—anyhow, so rattled that first off Pat thought he was drunk. He hadn't been drinkin', though—took just the one slug—and needed it."

"And then?" demanded Phelim, as Denny paused for breath.

"Then he beat it. Said he was going to the country somewhere. That was a lie, most likely; if he was scared, he wouldn't be spillin' any dope about the place he was goin' to hole up in—especial, not over no bar. I sent a lot of guys out to try an' get word of him, but—"

Denny flung his open hands outward in a gesture that admirably expressed the idea that after having left the saloon, Jimmy had apparently vanished into thin air. At this Phelim shook his head with a look of troubled dejection so deep that Jack tried to cheer him.

"Aunt Sophronia only guesses that Jimmy may be of use in finding out the truth in helping the case of my father and Phil," he said. "She's sure of nothing. And perhaps, after all—"

"If she wants him, it's important; ye can lay to that," interrupted Phelim, gloomily, rejecting the proffered comfort. "Heaven knows we ought to be able to foind him for her, if he's above ground. But what we're to do, more than we have done, is something that sure licks me."

"The guys I sent out to find Jimmy ain't all come back to report, yet," began Denny, but his tone was not very hopeful.

The telephone bell interrupted him. Phelim reached for an instrument; and as he held the receiver to his ear, Jack and Denny saw the gloom on his face vanish.

"Oh!" he cried. "Is that you, Miss Sophrony? Yes, ma'am; this is Phelim.

No, ma'am, not much I fear. Sure, ma'am! Masther Jack is roight here, an'—"

At this point Jack snatched up the other instrument and said, "Hello, Aunt Sophronia."

"Hello, Jack dear," returned the voice of Aunt Sophronia. "Phelim tells me you haven't had much success. But just what has been done, dear? I want to know."

So Jack began to relate, in chronological sequence, what had occurred. As he finished telling of the outcome of his attempt to buy the newspaper, Aunt Sophronia stopped him.

"Wasn't a man named Allen—Lysander Q. Allen—one of those who wouldn't give you an answer, and who tried to lead you into a trap?" she asked.

"A man named Allen was the ringleader, and, in fact, the whole show," Jack replied. "I didn't hear his first name."

"It was Lysander Q. There isn't any other Allen in that connection," returned the old lady, confidently. "Now, listen, Jack," she went on. "There must be records of all court trials. I don't know just what they are, but such records must exist. You have somebody go right away, look up two trials where the name of Lysander Q. Allen appears, get copies of the records and bring 'em there, will you? Pay double price or more to have it done quick. Now go on, Phelim, and tell me what's been done about Jimmy."

Phelim obeyed. "Is there annything more we can do, ma'am?" he asked, in conclusion.

"Anything more!" repeated Aunt Sophronia, with a touch of asperity. "Yes, there is! To begin with, Jimmy left an address with his mother! I found it in her top bureau drawer after she died—"

"Died!" cried Jack and Phelim, in chorus; then the former added. "Did we understand you correctly, Aunt Sophronia? Is Libby dead?"

"Yes," replied Aunt Sophronia, with a little catch in her voice. "She died soon after you and Phelim left the house, Jack. I forgot that you didn't know. That's another reason why we ought to find Jimmy and let him know. The address I spoke of is 318 Saxby Street. You might go there yourself, Jack, if you have time, and see if anything is known. Luden, the caterer, might have heard something. Send and see. At one time Jimmy worked for both the Grand Hotel and the Palmenberg & Schmidt restaurants. Find out if they've had any word. You'd better take those names down on paper, Jack, so you won't forget."

"Got 'em," replied Jack, who had been working with pad and pencil while Aunt Sophronia was speaking. "Anything else?"

"Yes," resumed Aunt Sophronia. "Libby had a sister—her only relative—who's livin' out in the Township. She hasn't got any telephone, and she's got to be told about Libby. So I'm goin' to drive out there, for I have other business in the neighborhood besides. Phelim!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Listen. I've been thinkin' it over, and I want detectives. I don't know how many; you'll know that. Telegraph to the best agency there is for the best men they have, to follow Lawrence Horton, Chapin, Wash Dunning, Lafe Feelin, Lysander Q. Allen and every other man who is high enough up among those politicians to be capable of mischief. Then I want just as many men who needn't be so good—almost anybody will do for this second lot. I want 'em for the same purpose. For I want this last lot of men to be so clumsy that those who are being followed will find out that these men are followin' them. I want those men to be scared, so they'll betray themselves. Also I want their attention to be drawn away from those who are doin' the real work. Do you understand me, Phelim?"

"I do, ma'am," answered Phelim, gravely. "But—excuse me, Miss Sophrony—aren't ye a bit careless in 'phonin' ordhers like these? If there's a leak in the tilly-phone exchange—if wan av thim operators listhens in—"

"Don't be silly!" snapped Aunt Sophronia. "Of course, they'll listen in, and likely they'll tell the men I was talkin' about. But what effect could it have but to scare those men worse than anything else could do—start them to suspectin'

everybody they see? Try and use your head, Phelim! And now hurry, for there ain't much time. I'm just startin' out for the Township, and I'll call you up on my way back to hear what's been done. Good-by."

Phelim, chuckling, hung up the receiver, and in that chuckle was implied as great a tribute of unstinted admiration as ever Aunt Sophronia had received. But he wasted no time in idle words when there was work to be done.

Therefore, after rapidly dictating to Jack a list of the men to be trailed by detectives, he requested the young lawyer—for Phelim himself was not facile in the use of a pen—to write the necessary telegram. He also dictated and signed a note—and a most imperative note it was—to his personal lawyers, demanding that transcripts of the trials mentioned by Aunt Sophronia be instantly forthcoming. These were intrusted to Denny, who departed at a run for his street clothing, peeling off his official white jacket as he went. Three other henchmen, called in from the barroom, were sent to Luden, the caterer, and the two restaurants.

"Now," said Phelim, rising, "I'm thinkin', Masther Jack, that ye'll be goin' to that Saxby Sthreet place, and I'll go wit' ye. For 'tis not a place larrgely frequinted by polite society."

They started, in Jack's car—or rather, poor Phil's—as Phelim's had been sent back to its garage. For some time Phelim spoke only in order to indicate the necessary turnings, but at length ended what appeared to be a period of profound reflection.

"Now, none av us—not you, nor Dinny, nor me—have domes av solid ivory," said he. "Yet, while we was settin', wondherin' what to do next, there that little ould lady pipes up over the 'phone and sets us all to goin' like mad—and in just the way we'd ought to have been goin' all along. Yet at thot, 'tis no disgrace—not to anny wan av us."

"No," agreed Jack. "There aren't many like Aunt Sophronia."

"There ain't *anny*," corrected Phelim. "They tuk an' broke the molds whin she was made. Did ye mind the cuteness av her play about them detectives? Ye cuddent bate it. Nobody could. She cud rule this town—yes, and the State, too—if she'd only have took on the job. I wish she had!"

"Amen to that!" was the younger man's fervent response. "The town, and the State also, is in the grip of as rotten a bunch of crooks as ever robbed a treasury! But—pardon me, Phelim, if I seem rude—didn't you stand in with that gang until lately? I always understood so."

"I did," sighed Phelim. "My hands—God forgive me!—is not clane. But the gang wasn't so rotten, then. There was money—graft, if ye loike—and each man got his bit. 'Twas practical politics—no more. Then Chapin got control av the State machine an' puts Horton, his man, in to run the city. Things changed. No longer was it simple graft what went, but robbery—no less. Yet divvle a cent, if they cud help ut, did anny wan but themselves and a few fr'inds av theirs iver see. A little man don't get his bit. If he won't do what they tell him, he's framed—and there ye are."

"You mean he's falsely accused and railroaded into jail?" asked Jack, curiously.

"Maybe. Or maybe he's bate up so he has six months in a horspittle—or his business ruined—or killed—and there's more than wan has been killed. 'Tis by fear that this gang is rulin'. Look at the case av Tom Clancy, fer instance."

"Tom Clancy?" repeated Jack, questioningly.

"Tom—yes. Brother av Dinny, me bartender. 'Tis a long tale, and I won't tell it now. But he was sint up for twinty years—and him innocint as the babe unborrn. What cud Dinny, wit' a woife an' big family av his own, do to help Tom's wife an' eight kids? What? An' who'd be helpin' them then, but Miss Sophrony—an' she all the toime thinkin' Tom to be guilty becus she can't belave that anny men wud falsely swear away the liberty av a husband and father."

Phelim paused and spat over the side of the car as though the recollection of Tom Clancy's plight had left a bad taste in his mouth. Then, with a shake of his head, he resumed:

"Very shortly—God help her!—she'll be learnin' betther, I fear. But I think she knows that niver did I frame anny man, nor niver will. And she knows thot since this matther av yer father an' Masther Phil arose, I'm wit' her in a finish foight; an' if they try to frame me—"

He paused, with a grin that was neither mirthful nor pleasant to see. In a moment, however, the grin faded, and he changed the subject.

"This is Saxby Sthreet," said he, "and yondher shanty is the house. Wud ye loike to be livin' here, Masther Jack? Ye wud not!"

That last assertion surely was a safe one to make. Saxby Street was a slum more squalid than any Jack had seen until now, and the shanty in question was in no way superior to its surroundings.

From one of its filthy windows a fat, blear-eyed woman leaned, watching them approach.

"Say!" she screamed to them, as the car stopped. "Are youse another bunch of Jim Wilson's friends? 'Cause if you are, you're too late. I ain't seen Jim for days, and yestiddy the first bunch of friends come an' packed up his things—there wasn't many—and took 'em away—to send 'em to him in New York, they said."

"New Yorrk! Well, now ye surproise me!" exclaimed Phelim, truthfully enough. "We expicted for to foind Jimmy here," he continued, less truthfully. "He must have went sudden, I'm thinkin'. I'd loike to ask them other fr'inds av his about him. Who was they, annyhow?"

"I'll never tell yer," responded the lady, crossly. "I never laid eyes on 'em before and never want to again."

She slammed down the window. Plainly, the conversation was at an end. Jack began to back the car around. Again Phelim shook his head.

"Sure, 'tis a moighty dull needle that Jimmy'd make," he sighed, "and yet, huntin' fer a needle in a haystack, such as ye hear tell about, has got nothin' at all on our hunt for him. Not fer a bloody minute do I balave he's gone to New Yorrk. But who was them fr'inds av his, an' what did they want, d'ye s'pose, now?"

Jack made no reply. He had none to offer, for he also was wondering as he straightened the car on its return journey.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT HEADQUARTERS.

ANOTHER corner still would have to be turned before Phelim's saloon would be within sight when Denny, evidently on the lookout, came running swiftly toward the approaching car. Jack slowed down, and Denny sprang on the footboard.

"Did ye hear aught av Jimmy Wilson?" instantly demanded Phelim.

"Nope. Nothin'. Nobody can find out a thing. It don't seem like he can be on earth," replied Denny, succinctly. "There was a phone message came while you was away. I answers it. A guy wanted to know if you was in the store. I tells him, no, and though you'd be back, I couldn't say how long it'd be before you went out again. He says, 'We'll be right down, and you tell O'Rourke, if he comes in, to wait till we get there—if he knows what's best for himself.' Then, before I can answer, he hangs up."

"Did ye know what ut was—by the voice or annythin'?" asked Phelim, his face flushing with anger.

"Not then I didn't—no more'n the dead. But a little while after he shows up—him and his side-kick. And say! Who would it be but Wash Dunning and that guy what owns the paper—the *Courier*, ain't it?—name of Allen. That's what. They're there now—waitin' for you."

If Denny had counted upon creating a sensation with the news that he brought, he had no reason for disappointment, even though the sensation did not appear conspicuously upon the surface. Phelim whistled with surprise, then motioned Jack to stop the car while it still was out of sight of the saloon, and when this was done, sat for a moment, frowning thoughtfully.

"They—sayin' I'll be waiting for the likes av them 'if I know what's best!'" he exclaimed, after a little. "Them—and their bluffin'!"

"Bluffin' they are, I think meself," agreed Denny; then went on to remark: "But all the same, I think they're scared, if you ask me. Plumb scared. Scared enough, very like, to be dangerous."

"Frightened cowards are dangerous—loike rats," observed Phelim. "But if they're scared now, it's nothin' to what they will be when we've finished wit' them—plaze the pigs! Dinny, where's the reports av them trials, what Miss Sophrony wants us to get?"

"I told that mouthpiece of yours to get 'em. He put four stenographers on the job. They ought to be ready by now. I told him I'd push his face in if they wasn't. I'll go and do it, if you say so."

"'Tis but a step. Yes. Go and get thim papers. Bring 'em here, to us—to this car—where it stands now. Don't be rough wit'out ye have to; we may need thot lawyer. But get the papers!"

Denny departed, at a swinging dog-trot. Turning, Phelim addressed himself to Jack.

"If bluffin' is the game what them two buzzards want to play—well, I'll sit in wit' them for a little," said he. "We may learn somethin'. But me bluffs must be good wans—an' I want to think them up."

He turned his back, and bent his brows and his thoughts upon the game he had presently to play, while Jack respected his desire to remain undisturbed. Presently Denny returned, bearing with him the transcripts of the trial, neatly typewritten. Phelim waved them into Jack's hands.

"Divvle the worrd av thim wud I understand," said he. "You be lookin' over 'em whiles I do be shootin' off me mouth. If me bluffs gets called too harrd, come you in an' back me up. Bechune the two av us, we'll somehow manage to hould the foort till Miss Sophrony tillyphones. For 'twas her who ordered them papers. *She'll* know what to do wit' thim. And now let's beat it back to me store!"

So they went. Denny was sent back on reconnaissance. As the other two, walking more slowly, approached Phelim's saloon, he returned to report.

"They're at the bar," he told them, with a glow of excitement. "Dunning, the district attorney, has bit into two jolts of ginger ale. The other guy, Allen, is a tank, I guess. Still, his Plimsolls is above water yet, though if the D. A. wasn't on hand to hinder him from h'istin' 'em aboard too fast, he'd 'a been submerged to the periscope by now."

"Good!" exclaimed Phelim. Then he grinned somewhat as a bull-terrier grins just before his collar is slipped as he issued certain terse directions.

Jack found himself quickly hustled into a back room adjacent to that in which Phelim had established his headquarters. To prevent intrusion, the doors between this room and the barroom, and also those which opened without, were closed and fastened. But between the two rooms there was what Phelim called a "buttery hatch;" in other words, a small wicket, intended for the passing of drinks, which was left carefully ajar, so that any one in the inner room could both see and hear all that passed in the outer. As soon as the visitors had been ushered into Phelim's official sanctum, the young lawyer was joined by Denny.

Both men promptly placed their eyes close behind that crack of the wicket door. Jack felt guilty in doing this, for he knew that he should have been looking over the transcript of those cases, that he might be ready to back up Phelim's play, whatever that play might be, when the time came. But the temptation to view these men when they might fancy themselves unobserved, and to form a more accurate estimate of them, was strong, and he yielded to it.

Instantly he classified Dunning among the human Ophidia, cowardly, slinking, but deadly. Allen, he concluded, was simply a bully, with few brains and a natural tendency toward evil. As Denny's highly figurative language indicated, he had been drinking, but not to excess. His alcoholic courage, however, was some degrees above normal, and he looked with open contempt at his companion, who, frankly uneasy and troubled, slumped in his chair.

"Oh, brace up and make believe you're a man!" Allen sneered. "We're here—ain't we?—to tell this mick booze-slinger, O'Rourke, that he's got to get back on the band-wagon and get back quick. That's all. What is there to be scared at?"

"That he won't get back on the band-wagon. That's what. And enough, too!" was the sullen reply.

"But he'll have to get back."

"Will he?"

"What else can he do?"

"I don't know. I don't want to know. For if he doesn't—well, we may be able to put him on the blink. But if O'Rourke won't be good, and we get through this election with undamaged hides, it'll be by taking chances that send cold shivers a-chasing each other down my backbone—and if you had the sense that God gave mosquitoes, you'd feel the same. Now shut up; somebody's coming!"

As Phelim entered the room, Dunning straightened in his seat, and his face took on an expression that was grave and severe, even threatening. Phelim, however, was quite unimpressed. He neither liked nor desired the presence of these visitors, and as he saw no reason to dissemble, he allowed the fact to become apparent. His attitude was that of a mildly antagonistic dog in the presence of two cornered rats. Jack grinned as he noted this, and turned to his typewritten transcripts, but the ensuing conversation still came clearly to his ears.

"Well," demanded Phelim. "What in blazes are you two fellys doin' here?"

"Now, O'Rourke, listen!" returned the district attorney. "You were sent for by the big boss himself—"

"M'anin' Chapin—or Horton—or both?" interrupted Phelim.

"Don't mention names!" snapped Dunning.

"Why not?" asked Phelim. "Both Chapin an' Horton sint for me to go and see them—and I wudden't go. Divvle a bit I care who knows ut. You've come here to tell me that I've got to back the old crowd in this election. I won't do ut—the ould crowd is to lose the election—and then go to jail or to—well, wherever it is things loike the ould gang go to. And I don't care a whoop who knows that, either. Do you catch the drift av me remarrks?"

"And if you double-cross us, do you know what will happen?" demanded Dunning.

"I do," responded Phelim. "Some of it's due to happen now. To begin with, this man Allen, here, is a-going for to sell Mr. Jack Ayres that newspaper that he's been stallin' about. He's going to do it—"

"Not at all—at no time and not for any price that can be offered," Allen interrupted. "He has decided not to sell."

"In thot case," returned Phelim, evenly, "he has another decision comin' to him. He will make that decision roight now—or rather, it's made for him. Listhen, Allen: we'll dhrop this foolishness now. You are to sign a transfer—a bill of sale will do for the presint—and receive the check which Mr. Jack Ayres will make out an give ye. Otherwise—" he broke off and called, "Masther Jack! Dinny!"

The two men appeared. It was to the former that Phelim addressed himself.

"Ye have the transcript av them two cases concernin' this man, have ye not?"

"Yes," answered Jack. "One four years ago—a conversion of trust funds. The other, two years before that, concerns itself with Lysander Q. Allen as the executor of a will drawn by his aunt. The verdicts—"

"Niver moind the verrdicts," Phelim broke in. "We all know what the verdicts *was*. But whin them cases are reopened, what *will* the verdicts be? That's the question!"

Phelim paused impressively. With his strong, yellow teeth bared in a snarl and his heavy jaw thrust menacingly forward, he stood glaring from one to another of the two visitors. Jack saw that Allen's forehead was beaded with sweat. His jaw dropped loosely, and the hand that he raised to wipe his forehead was trembling. Never was there or could there have been a better picture of a man overcome by fear caused by the consciousness of guilt.

Dunning saw this also, and in consequence his own face began to assume the sickly, greenish white shown by cellar-grown potato sprouts. Then, from without, there came a slight diversion. It was nothing of any apparent consequence: just the sound of hoofs that stopped at the side door of the saloon, and a buzz of excited surprise from divers loungers that congregated there.

Still, such as it was, it served to recall Dunning to the courage like that of the cornered rat; which courage, for the moment, had deserted him. He straightened, and snapped his fingers with an assumption of angry contempt.

"Good lord, O'Rourke, what devil's bluff are you trying to slip over on us now?" he cried. "What good on earth would it do you even if those cases were reopened? But they won't be—they can't be—and you know it!"

If Phelim at first had won an advantage in this verbal battle, the case was now reversed; his flank had been fairly turned—his bluff called. He was not one of the sort to surrender weakly. He would go down to defeat still fighting, but he realized that his fight was a losing one, for he was now fighting in the dark. He smiled and sniffed, as though with a supercilious consciousness of knowledge that his adversaries did not possess.

"So you—*you*, who calls yerself a lawyer—says to me that them cases can't be reopened!" he exclaimed.

"I tell you again that those old cases against Allen wouldn't do you any good if they could be reopened," repeated the district attorney. "I tell you also that they can't and won't be reopened, and that you know it just as well as I do."

"*They can't be reopened?*"

It was another voice that spoke—a voice that made every man there gasp with surprise. It was followed by the appearance of Aunt Sophronia herself as, for the second time in her life, she entered a saloon. In one hand she held a sheaf of folded papers which she had just extracted from her black-satin reticule, and her eyes, fixed upon the luckless district attorney, flashed like blue steel as she advanced toward the table by which he was sitting.

"They can't be reopened?" she repeated. "If the missing testimony is found—if the perjury can be proved because the perjured witnesses confessed—and swore to their confessions—and if I have those confessions here—you tell me that those trials can't be reopened? I always knew, Wash Dunning, that you're not much of a lawyer—but you know better than that!"

As she spoke, Aunt Sophronia laid the sheaf of papers on the table. Prominently to be seen on the uppermost paper was a notarial seal. Instantly, with an oath, Dunning reached for it. Phelim brushed his hand aside, and picking up the papers, gave them to Jack.

"Put those in yer pockut," he said. "We'll use thim later if we have to. But I don't think we will. Set down there, Masther Jack, an' dhraw up a bill av sale of the *Courier*—lock, stock an' barrel—plant, good-will an' all else—from this man Lysander Allen to you. Make out a check, too. When you've done our little fri'nd Allen will sign the bill av sale an' take the check in payment. Just as soon as ye've done, that's what he'll do."

"He'll sign nothing!" cried Dunning, half rising from his chair.

"Won't he?" cried Phelim, as Jack sat down and began to write.

He looked, not at Dunning, but at Allen, as he spoke. Dunning also looked, and saw plainly enough the reason for Phelim's grin: Allen's face now expressed a state of panic beside which his former fear was nowhere. No resistance to coercion was to be hoped for from him. Dunning glanced furtively around.

Aunt Sophronia watched the district attorney exactly as she would have watched any other reptile which happened to be at large in her presence. She saw Dunning as he sprang from his chair, but had no time to utter a warning. It was Dunning's own words that betrayed him.

"It's blackmail!" he shrieked, darting for the outer door. "Help—police!"

It is doubtful if his cries reached outside those swinging doors. It is certain that Dunning himself did not. Reaching gracefully forward, Denny caught his arm and swung him backward into the capacious hand of Phelim. Catching him by both sleeves, above the elbow, Phelim reseated him in the chair he had just left. The chair smashed under the impact.

"Set there!" growled Phelim.

Owing to the dispersal of the chair's legs, Dunning was sitting on the floor, but he sat there obediently, notwithstanding. Perhaps he was too much shaken to rise, and

in any event it was the safest course to pursue. Aunt Sophronia shook her head in mild deprecation of the violence, but refrained from other comment. Jack signed the check and finished the bill of sale.

"Sign!" commanded Phelim. Allen signed.

"We'll need witnesses," said Jack.

"Have all the witnesses you want—a signature obtained by coercion is void," sneered Dunning, incautiously.

"Is this paper signed by your own free will, or is it not?" instantly demanded Phelim, of Allen. "Moind, now! Spake up an' take care what ye say? Is it—or not?"

Allen hesitated. In an apparently absent-minded way, Jack drew the sheaf of papers from his pocket. The notarial seal once more obtruded itself upon Allen's sight.

"Was ut signed by yer own free will—or not?" again demanded Phelim. This time the sound of his voice, backed by the sight of those papers, goaded Allen into a desperate attempt at self-protection.

"If I say 'yes,' do I get those papers?" he asked, with weak defiance.

"Ye do not," answered Phelim, before Jack could reply.

"Then look here—and it's my last word if you kill me for it. You write another agreement—you Ayres. An instrument stating in unequivocal words that you haven't any evidence that will warrant reopening those cases against me, and that on your honor you won't try to do so. Also that this agreement is a part of the purchase price of that paper of mine. Write that agreement, sign it and give it to me. If you don't I'll holler blackmail and fraud so long as I have breath left to do it with!"

"Which will not be long," observed Phelim, grimly. "You are not among yer little fri'nds, Allen, as ye soon will—"

"Phelim," interrupted Aunt Sophronia, "be quiet! Mr. Allen, are we to understand that if you have the agreement you ask for, you'll sell the newspaper to Mr. John Ayres, here?"

"Yes," answered Allen, sullenly. Dunning groaned aloud, but prudently refrained from speech.

"Very well," said Aunt Sophronia. "Write the agreement, Jack, and sign it. Then have the bill of sale properly witnessed."

Being a lawyer, Jack knew, of course—as Dunning also knew—that from a legal point of view such an instrument would be worth infinitely less than the labor required to write it. But in that instrument Jack was required to pledge his personal honor; and this was a very different affair. He could not even guess what Aunt Sophronia could mean by these latest commands of hers, but had every confidence in the fact that she knew. Therefore, he did as she told him. Dunning witnessed his signature to the agreement. Allen pocketed it and the check.

"Dinny," said Phelim. "Sign you this bill av sale as a witness. So. Good. Now call Patsy, Hugh, Peter and Mike and have them also sign, wan afther the other."

The four bartenders were called, and signed; and as each did so, Allen was required to repeat in his presence his declaration that he had sold the *Courier* without coercion—of his own free will. This was not necessary, but Phelim desired it, and was allowed to have his own way.

"Now," said Phelim, with a sigh of relief, as the business was finished, "you two chumps had betther beat it—and do ut now!"

So they did. Jack sighed with relief, as the door closed behind them.

"I don't suppose these are much good now," he said, taking once more the sheaf of papers from his pocket. "Still—one never can tell."

Opening the first paper he glanced at it, frowned and took the second—the third—all of them, while Aunt Sophronia smiled with weary amusement to see the astonishment dawn and grow on Jack's face. The first paper was the only one bearing an official notarial seal.

"Great snakes!" cried Jack, waving this paper in the air. "This is nothing but a power of attorney giving Sophronia Herondene the power to act for Lavinia Wilson—for old Libby. It's dated over a year ago. And the other papers are nothing but lists of some sort."

"Yes," admitted Aunt Sophronia. "That's so."

"Then the evidence against Allen that you said you had—"

"I never said I had any, Jack," she gently contradicted. "The evidence exists and I thought I could get it; that's the reason I wanted the transcripts of those trials. But I couldn't get it, though I tried my best. If Mr. Allen thought I had succeeded—why, that was just his guilty conscience, I'm afraid."

She paused, with unwonted hesitation. The full magnificence of her bluff, so quietly made, which had deceived Phelim himself, they could not appreciate in a moment. Before they spoke she resumed, her face hardening into almost fierce determination.

"You see, we'll need the *Courier* more than ever now, and other newspapers besides," said she. "What we're to do is this, Phelim. I'm not satisfied with the acquittal of Phil and Mr. Ayres. Not by a great deal. I want vindication—and I'll have it! I want Mr. Ayres nominated for Governor of this State, and Phil for the Mayor of this town. And I want 'em elected. And because you've got to help me, I came here to tell you just as soon as the idea struck me. And now I've told you, so I'll go."

CHAPTER XIX.

PRACTICAL POLITICS.

"MAY all the saints in Heavin guide us! But *phwat* do ye think of thot?"

This was Phelim's first remark after Aunt Sophronia left his saloon, and he and Jack were alone together. Jack never forgot, and in the days that followed often laughed over his recollection of those words. The words, and more especially the tone in which they were uttered, expressed a world of bewilderment, but above all, an infinity of admiration for her who had prompted them.

Phelim lapsed into a silence so thoughtful that his honest face shortly began to glisten with moisture brought forth by his concentrated effort. Jack also was thinking, though to less effect because he lacked the other's definite knowledge of conditions. His thoughts, however, were running on lines roughly parallel to those of his companion. It was Phelim who broke the silence.

He looked up into Jack's face with a wonder on his own that was greater than ever. On his lips was the one oath which, for some reason unknown, he permitted himself to use only on the most serious occasions.

"By the Sainted Pigs av Ballylannon and the Spurs av Saint Pathrick, but she's not far wrong at thot!" he cried.

"You mean that that my father and Phil—in their present position—could be elected?" Jack asked incredulously.

"I mane thot there's a chance—and a chance that's all the betther for them same circumstances," Phelim replied. "Listhen, Masther Jack. I can swing this disthrict all roight—can deliver ivery vote—and more. The respectable elimint av the place has always been ag'inst the ould gang, and now there's plinty av the other sorrt—men loike me—who'll be only too glad to slip a knife in their back, wance there's someboddy to show them the way. And as for the Township—well, you yourself know how Miss Sophrony stands there, I expect."

Jack did know, in a general way. The Township, so called locally, was simply a certain very large district within the city limits, but lying outside what was considered the city proper. It held many villages. These villages were officially rated as the centers of city wards.

These villages, as well as the open spaces between them, were still inhabited by descendants of families who had known the Herondenes for generations. Most of this land was owned by Aunt Sophronia.

This much was known to Jack—was known to everybody. But what generous slices of the Herondene income had been devoted to the relief of these people in times of need or how often that old carriage and its fat horses had borne Aunt Sophronia herself to their doors—these were things that could be told in part only by men in touch with the poor, like Phelim, and could be told entirely only by Aunt Sophronia

herself—and therefore they were never told.

"Aunt Sophronia's candidates could carry those wards," admitted Jack. "But there aren't many of them."

"They'll help. And then, yer father and Masther Phil, bein' people av good standin', bein' framed by the gang, will pull down any amount av votes t'rough pure sympathy. But to think av Miss Sophrony knowin' all these things—as she must have knowed! Ain't she the wonder?"

Jack agreed that she was. He listened attentively to Phelim's swift and sketchy outline of headquarters to be secured, lieutenants to be enrolled, and the thousand and one moves that had to be made in opening a new campaign; and in this case had to be made at once on account of the shortness of the time. But all through the conversation another question was continually in the back of his mind, and when he rose to go he brought it forth.

"Phelim," said he, "I've learned some things about this gang of political thugs that we're up against. I've seen the sort of thing that they're apt to do even to people who haven't specifically opposed them, in order to gain their ends. But now we're starting to fight them outright—and I'm scared. Scared for Aunt Sophronia. I don't believe they'd hesitate even to do bodily harm to her, if they thought it would help them to win out against her."

"I know mighty well they wudden't," answered Phelim, without hesitation. "But I've no fear for Miss Sophrony in thot way. Suppose they did harrm her? What wud happin? Why, their own men wud lynch them, and the vote they'd get wud be as little throuble to count as the Republican vote in a South Car'lina local election. No; ye can let yer moind rest easy, there."

Somewhat reassured, Jack went home in order to combine with his evening meal the luncheon he had forgotten. Aunt Sophronia's household was more than ever subdued in spirits that evening—and naturally so. It was tired—very, and, besides, the body of old Libby, lying for the last time in the room where for so many years it was accustomed nightly to lie, seemed to bring the shadow of death very close to them all.

Jack's fear for Aunt Sophronia's safety, despite Phelim's confident assurances, once more began to stir within him. Still, he resolved not to broach the subject of the coming campaign that evening, nor to discuss it if he could help doing so. He soon found that he could not help it. Peggy had heard of this last move, and perhaps the very sadness that had fallen on the house rendered her more feverishly enthusiastic over the news even than she would otherwise have been.

Aunt Sophronia insisted upon having a full report of his conference with Phelim. She made few comments while the report was in progress. When it was finished, she rose and laid her hand on Peggy's shoulder.

"I'm going to send this young woman to bed, Jack, dear, and I'm going there myself," said she. "There'll be a lot to do to-morrow—a lot to do every day. Usually I'll be in touch with you, but I can't be to-morrow until the afternoon. There's Libby's funeral, and after that I want to meet Dr. Gray at the train he's coming in on. So if there's anything you want before then—"

"Not a thing in the world—except to be sure that you won't wear yourself out," he answered.

"You can be sure of that," she answered. "It's been a good many years since I began to work and worry, and I'm not going to begin giving out at my time of life. Good night, Jack, boy."

She smiled, kissed him, and went upstairs. Peggy also smiled before leaving, but though Jack considerately offered her every opportunity, she omitted the remainder of the little ceremony.

Soon Jack also went to his rooms, but not to bed. He felt that he could not sleep; he had too much to think out and plan for the following day. So far as the morning was concerned, he need not fear for Aunt Sophronia. Attending the funeral of an old servant, and afterward meeting one's family physician at the station were as nearly riskless activities as she could engage in.

Jack did not switch on the lights, but seated himself in an easy chair by an open window, resting his feet on the sill. He

began to arrange his plans for the following day. The first thing to do, was to take charge of the *Courier,* and attend to any formalities necessary to render his title perfect? He wasn't sure. There were so many things to do.

He tried to make a mental list, but in some way it eluded him. The various items mixed themselves exasperatingly and then faded gently away, leaving only the oblivion of slumber behind.

Jack woke to find himself standing, every muscle tense, beside the armchair in which he had been sitting. In his mind was the remembrance of a flash so bright that it had penetrated both his closed eyelids and sleep-dulled senses. Before he could decide that it had not been a dream, the sound of a crashing roar, that was not thunder, rolled, echoed and reëchoed from hills and buildings. In the street men began to run, and the sound of their footsteps came closer and closer. Almost instantly a yellow glow began to rise from a certain spot in the city, growing brighter and redder with each second that passed.

For a moment Jack stood, recalling to his mind the topography of the town below, and endeavoring to locate the fire. Then, as a sickening fear gripped him, he turned, and ran swiftly down the stairs and out of the house. With hands that fumbled in their haste, he unlocked the garage, and started the engine of the roadster, sounding his horn as he rolled into the drive.

Jack selected the less frequented streets, to avoid the obstructions of jingling fire apparatus, which was coming from all directions. And even now, when his anxiety so far outstripped the utmost speed to which he could force that semi-racing car, he found time to contrast the promptness with which the firemen were answering the present call with their delay when old Peter's cottage burned.

Turning a corner on two wheels, Jack ground out an oath as he shut off the power and threw on his brake. The end of the street, opening, as he knew, into a square, was lighted by the glare that he had seen from his window. The glare, however, was all that he could see of the square. Various vehicles showed in silhouette and blocked the narrow street. To get through was hopeless. Even the sidewalks were solidly jammed for many feet back from the corner. Jack swore again as he began cautiously to back, preparatory to turning.

"You ain't missed nothin', buddy!" shouted a man who had left the crowd and was apparently on his homeward way. "The fun's all over now—nothin' but a little blaze in the ruins."

"Ruins of what?" asked Jack, quickly.

"Why—didn't you hear? The ruins of the *Courier* buildin'. It was blowed up, and knocked into matchwood; then the ruins ketched fire, like I said."

"Blown up, you say?" cried Jack. "Who blew it up—is it known?"

"Oh, I guess so," laughed the other. "They're spreadin' a tale that them Bolshevickerists done it—but that's all bunk. It's said that the Chapin-Horton gang lost control of that there paper to-day, and—well, we all know how practical politics is played in this here burg! Good night; I got to beat it."

The man passed on. It was difficult to back that machine around in so narrow a space, and Jack made the task longer than it otherwise might have been because his mind was not upon it. He was thinking of what that man had said. He had not been joking. He had stated a fact which he evidently supposed to be a matter of such general knowledge that it offered no chance for argument.

This matter of the *Courier*—this matter of dynamite and arson—was simply "how practical politics is played, in this here burg." And it was against this kind of politics, and against men who played them in this way that Aunt Sophronia had pitted herself, in a certain childlike innocence that had persisted throughout her years despite the keenness of her mind. This aspect of the case troubled Jack as he returned home and found Aunt Sophronia, in wrapper and nightcap, waiting for him at the head of the stairs.

"Is it the *Courier*?" she asked.

It had been sometime since Jack had vowed to himself that nothing that Aunt Sophronia might do or say would ever again surprise him. Now he had reason to

revise this vow. For a moment he looked at her in blank amazement.

"I thought it would be," she continued, quite placidly, when he failed to reply. "It's just the sort of thing those political people *would* do, and just the time that they'd do it. For the purchase price had been paid, but the property wasn't yet taken over, and because the *Courier* is an evening paper, there'd be fewer people in the building now than at any other hour; I know that because the son of a family I'm interested in used to work there. I suppose there isn't much of the plant left, is there?"

"Nothing," answered Jack. "Nothing of the plant, that is."

"But there's the organization, and the Associated Press franchise, and the circulation, and all that," Aunt Sophronia's eyes kindled with the light of battle. "I own a lot of empty buildings in the town. Take any of 'em—take all of 'em! Buy more plants. Telegraph for 'em, and have 'em sent by express or special train, or whatever's the quickest way. Get the *Courier* going at once; and if you can't buy any more newspapers here, start some—quick!"

Jack shook his head. "I know what you told me about not sparing money, Aunt Sophronia," he said. "But have you any idea of what such a move will cost?"

"No," she answered. "And I don't much care. Is there anything left of the money I deposited in your name?"

"Yes. A fortune. More than two hundred thousand dollars."

"Well, there's a dozen more such fortunes ready to jump in when that one's gone—and another dozen—and more still—and even then I won't sell a foot of land Nor leave Phil and Peggy paupers when I die. Politics—practical politics—are war; my Great-grandfather Sophronius said that more than a hundred and fifty years ago. And he said that money is the lifeblood of all war. Well, no war of mine is going to lack its lifeblood. So don't hesitate to let it flow, Jack—and flow swift!"

Ordinarily this speech would have gratified Jack's nethermost desire—would have fired every fiber of his being. Now those words, "practical politics," left him in a cold fear.

"This is all very well, Aunt Sophronia," he cried. "But suppose that some of those blackguards try playin' their 'practical politics' on you, personally, and—"

"They won't," she interrupted, speaking very positively.

"They might. And the possibility scares me stiff. So won't you promise to stay out of this business—in person, I mean—and let Phelim and me and—"

"I will not," interrupted Aunt Sophronia. "No one will dare harm me. The whole country-side would be down on them if they attacked an old woman. And even if they did—no Herondene ever was a coward yet, and I'm not going to be the first one. Not if I know it! But they won't, Jack; you needn't fear. You'll be in ten times the danger I am. Now go to bed, for you've got a bigger day before you to-morrow than you ever had before in all your life."

She turned and left him. Jack sighed. He was somewhat reassured, however. Aunt Sophronia's words had been almost exactly the same as those used by Phelim, and those who knew the community as he did not.

Just then a sound—it was like a half-smothered sob—caused him to stop and turn. It was Peggy. She stood between two portières, one hand on each, as she had parted them. She was swathed in some loose and fluffy pink garment. Her eyes were suspiciously bright, as though from unshed tears, and her hair fell in tumbled masses far below her waist. Never, to him, had she appeared so beautiful.

"Peggy," he demanded, "what in blazes are you doing here? You ought to be in bed."

With an impatient gesture, she waved his remark aside.

"Jack," she said, "I heard what Aunt Sophy was saying about the danger you're in. I know it's true. And I want you to promise me what you wanted Aunt Sophy to promise—"

"What nonsense!" Jack cut in, forcing a laugh. "One would think, to hear you talk, that I was going to lead a forlorn hope against entrenched machine guns. But—" he hesitated, then went doggedly

on—" would you really care so much, Peg, if I—"

"Would I care!" cried Peggy, herself breaking in. "Would I care if, after all that's happened, there was another horrible tragedy in this household? What do you think I—"

"Peggy!"

This was Aunt Sophronia's voice, from above. Peggy's words, tumbling over each other in their eagerness to come forth, had reached a higher pitch than she realized.

"Peggy, are you there?" called the voice from above, once more.

"Yes, Aunt Sophy," was the meek reply.

"Then listen. It just came to my mind that Mr. Lamb—the rector—must have carried away a book of mine; my great-grandfather's diary. Telephone in the morning, will you, and tell him to bring it back; I may forget to do it."

"Yes, Aunt Sophy."

"Don't forget! Now go to bed, and let Jack go to his—where you both belong."

"Yes, Aunt Sophy."

Aunt Sophronia's door could be heard to close. Peggy turned her face once more toward Jack. Smiling shyly, she held out her hand, and he took it in his.

"Good night, Jack," she said, softly.

"Good night, Peg."

For an instant she hesitated; then, with a sudden access of determination, her hand gripped his with nervous strength, and she deliberately raised her lips to his. Perhaps this was in the nature of a bribe. Though he had kissed Peggy many times before, it was different now; both Peggy and he somehow seemed so much older.

Then Peggy vanished and the portières fell together behind her.

CHAPTER XX.

STILL MORE POLITICS.

IT was against the local law for saloons to open so early in the morning, and with the machinery of justice in the hands of his relentless enemies, Phelim was far too wise to allow even the most trivial and purely technical violation of it. But there were ways and ways of evading both the law and detection. Dawn had scarcely broken when Jack's car drew up beside the saloon. The saloon itself was obviously and even ostentatiously closed, but the back room—three back rooms, in fact—were not.

In these rooms there now was conventional office furniture. More telephones were being installed, and stenographers were waiting for their duties to begin. Jack parked his car among several others, all powerful ones, and all with chauffeurs. Several motorcycles, valeted by as many lean and hard-faced youths, stood ready without the door.

"Messengers," explained Phelim, with a wave of his hand toward these latter, as he met Jack outside the door. "There'll be manny toimes comin' very soon, whin it'll be a lot safer not to use the tillyphone. An' what d'ye think of the signs, Masther Jack?"

Jack had noticed the sign in question while still he was some distance away. It was, in fact, a feature of the landscape so prominent that it would be most difficult for any one not to notice it. It was made of cloth, tacked upon a stretcher, and in huge, flamboyantly colored letters it read:

For Governor
EDWARD F. AYRES

For Mayor
PHILIP HERONDENE

Then, underneath, and in smaller letters:

Temporary Campaign Headquarters for Independent Nominations.

"We can get other headquarters whin there's toime for to bother with ut. And as there's only wan other tickut in the field what counts, 'tis betther to tie to no parrty, or a lot of votes will be scared away." Phelim went on to expound. "We've made out a full slate, for all the offices—"

"Who has?" asked Jack.

"Well—me," admitted Phelim, with a grin. "But as soon as we can get hould av Miss Sophrony, an' make sure she loikes ut, 'twill be the offishil set av nominations. As soon as that's settled, I'll see that enough names is signed to a petition—and signed

in jig-toime—for to have all names printed on the ballots. We'll make our platform a short one—three worrds—no more: 'Dacency in Pollytics!' That's all."

"Good!" assented Jack. "But even so, we'll have to get out some literature. We can put up posters, mail circulars and send out dodgers by boys, until we can get a printing plant to going. The staff of the *Courier*, now that their other jobs are temporarily gone, can attend to that sort of work.

"They can," agreed Phelim. "And they will. I've sent for thim."

"You did! But are you sure they'll come?"

"I am."

"How do you know?"

"Faith, Masther Jack, I made bould to spake in your name. I tould thim their wages wud be doubled whoile this worrk lasted if they showed up an' made good, an' that ivery wan av thim wud be fired if he didn't. Also I have an opshin on a small printin' office. 'Tis not much av wan, and its owner was scared for to sell—but he's more scared not to; I seen to that. But even so he wants twice what the thing is worrth—four thonsand. Does he get ut?"

They were in the inner and private office by this time. Without verbal reply, Jack sat down and wrote a check and handed it to Phelim.

"Let the lifeblood flow!" he cried.

Phelim did not understand this allusion. But neither did he waste precious time in idle curiosity. "Dinny!" he roared.

Denny appeared as though by magic.

"Take this check, get a lawyer, go buy Samuel's shop, chase it full av *Courier* printers and then come back here to report."

The matter was settled. Denny vanished even as he had come. Other matters promptly arose.

Phelim, to quote his own expression, had "played no favorites" in summoning the *Courier* employees. The staffs, editorial, business and other, all had been called on and all came. With an administrative ability and a quickness of decision hitherto unsuspected even by himself, Jack took charge of the campaign, so far as the literary and business aspects were concerned, assigning heads of departments and subdepartments.

So the hours passed. It was only occasionally that Jack found time to note their flight. These were occasions when a desire to confer with Aunt Sophronia caused him to think of her, and a thought of her always implied one of Peggy, as well. He hoped that the latter had been spared the necessity of attending poor Libby's funeral. There was quite enough to depress her, he thought, without having to undergo that ordeal.

But Jack's hopes in that regard were vain. All her life, Peggy had loved Libby only less than did Aunt Sophronia herself, and never for a moment dreamed of failing to pay this last tribute of affection and respect. She and Aunt Sophronia had seen Libby's coffin duly laid in the little graveyard near a farm upon which Libby was born. Then Peter turned the heads of his fat horses toward the railway station, which stood on the flat lands between the Township and the city proper.

It was not the usual carriage which had been used on this occasion, but the great coach of ceremony, only a trifle smaller than some dwelling houses, and only a little younger than Aunt Sophronia herself. This coach always had been sacred to weddings and funerals. The thought that passing years might have rendered its ponderous antiquity somewhat conspicuous in the eyes of irreverent observers was one that had never crossed Aunt Sophronia's mind.

At the station Aunt Sophronia met Dr. Gray and rode back with him in his limousine.

Peggy, in the old coach, was driven to the City Prison, for it had been arranged that she should visit Mr. Ayres and her brother, should take them the cheering, if somewhat astonishing, news of their recent nominations, and should also explain Aunt Sophronia's absence.

The streets through which the equipage had to pass were filled with children, more or less ragged and dirty, at play. They shouted derisively at the old coach as it passed. Peggy noticed it only subcon-

sciously. Such children always behaved in some such way on the rare occasions of the coach's public appearances, and her thoughts were elsewhere.

Then a cadenced chant of childish voices, repeated with wearisome iteration, gradually recalled her to the present. Glancing out of the window she found that the chant was sung by a group of young hoodlums of tender age and both sexes, who easily kept up with the moderate gait of the horses. It was not much of a chant, to be sure; but such as it was, this inspiration of an embryo poet among their own number had caught their fancy, and they had no immediate intention of overlooking the opportunity of trying it out:

"John Brown's Body in the Old Maid's Hearse!"

That was all the song; the poet's inspiration had apparently become exhausted before a second line was achieved. But those eight words accompanied Peggy the entire way to her destination. When she opened the carriage door, she saw that the singers had gathered close by, plainly with the intention of favoring her with another choral escort whenever she should resume her journey. As she ran lightly up the path and up the steps of the prison, they gave her a cheer, by way of helping to pass the time—and Peggy laughed.

She was laughing still when the warden, Mike Kilrannon, met her at his office door. His surprise at seeing her, evident from his expression, instantly chased the laughter from hers.

"Why, Miss Peggy, how is it that you've come?" he asked, before she had time to speak. "Mr. Ayres and your brother ain't here. There's been a special grand jury empanelled, and they're before it this blessed minute. I s'posed that of course you folks would 'a knowed that."

"They're where? Where did you say?" gasped Peggy.

"Before a special grand jury," answered the kindly warden. "Don't look so white, Miss Peggy! There's nothin' to be scared of in that. It's a move of that gang of crooks, of course. That's the way they play the game of practical politics. They figure that they've *got* to rush things. But a grand jury—why, it'll indict, of course—'find a true bill' and all that sort of thing. That's its job—but that's all it *can* do."

Peggy felt faint and queer. She was only dimly conscious of being helped to a seat; yet she lost not a word of what he was saying.

"'Indict'—'true bill'—what do they mean?" she asked, brokenly. Those words, with their legal sounds, were all the more terrible to her on account of their unknown meaning. But the warden laughed, and this somewhat reassured her.

"Why, they don't mean such a much," he replied. "You see, Miss Peggy, in law affairs they've gotter go through certain motions. When a grand jury indicts, it's just sort of an official way of makin' charges against certain people for the courts to act on. It's the court what does the real business."

"What charges—what sort of charges—will this grand jury make?" she asked.

"Why," he hesitated, trying to spare her, "that's kinder hard to say. The indictment ain't been made yet."

"But what do you think?" Peggy insisted.

"Well, so far as people can guess, it'll be murder for Phil Herondene, accessory for Mr. Ayres, and embezzlement of public funds for both," he reluctantly admitted. "But it's only the charges that's made now, you understand," he hastened to add. "They'll have to prove them charges—up to the handle—before they can make 'em stick. And that must be done in court."

"When will that court be held?"

"Why, the reg'lar session—" Kilrannon began to equivocate. Peggy stopped him.

"I mean—and you know I mean—the court that tries Mr.—Ayres and—my brother."

"I dunno, Miss Peggy—honest I don't," he answered. "There is some talk of a special session. But I know nothin' for certain."

Peggy asked no more; she knew that she had learned all that she could. She realized now that she was sitting by a window in the warden's office, and that the warden himself, his honest, ugly face full of anxiety,

stood before her, fanning her with his cap. She noticed the group of children across the street, and saw that some young men, flashily dressed and of unprepossessing appearance, were in conference with their ringleader—the youthful poet himself. A small, red package and a small coin, passed to him.

Kilrannon, following the direction of her eyes with his own, also saw them. He snorted disgustedly.

"Ward heelers—about the worst we breed," he muttered; and then, as Peggy thanked him and started to leave, he accompanied her down the steps.

Instantly, as Peggy appeared, the chorus struck up once more, this time with a new chant, longer, but as lamentably lacking in originality as the first had been:

"Monkey courted the jailbird's sister . . ."

"Beat it!" roared Kilrannon.

The children obeyed. But first the poet, who had undone his package, lighted its contents, which were firecrackers, and threw them under the feet of the two horses. Even the most sedate horses could not stand this. They reared and backed. Old Peter, who had paid no attention to the children and who, of course, had heard nothing, flung the stinging silk into the flank of the near horse—but too late. The coach, its wheels jammed against the curb, tilted with a sudden jerk. Flung from his high box, he flew through the air and fell, sprawling, on the flags of the sidewalk. He lay there, very still, a trickle of blood spreading over the stones.

Peter was not dead. Kilrannon, with a sigh of relief, announced that he could feel that his heart was still faintly beating. With the assistance of some of the keepers, at Peggy's command, he was lifted into the coach. Peggy was very cool. She wondered at it herself in a vague sort of way. It seemed as though a personality, quite apart from her, had taken charge of her body.

Aunt Sophronia would not have reached home by this time. Peggy had no idea where she could be found. The only person on earth who could be found was Jack. To Jack, therefore, this stranger who had taken possession of Peggy's body, ordered that she be driven. The other personality had given the order and then basely deserted, leaving just Peggy, a badly frightened little girl in a hearselike old coach, with the bloody head of the senseless ol' coachman pillowed in her lap.

"Oh, Jack!" Peggy cried, flinging her arms about him as she found him outside the headquarters. "A grand jury has taken your father and Phil—and Peter's so hurt I fear he'll die—and they'll send them to prison—for murder—and the horses' legs are all burned by firecrackers—and, oh, I don't know what to do!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

EASTER FANCY

THESE are trumpets, you call jonquils, on a window sill;
Golden horns without their players, waiting, still.
And those are bells, blue hyacinths, perfuming all the air,
But hush your heart and voice enough, then comes—the blare!
Through curtains—cloud and space—the high and sweet, sweet note,
So tunes made by the little angels, gently and softly float!
On bells the baby angels play,
And on bright trumpets that this day
Smile upon earth!

Oh, little angels, sweetness yours! And sweetness you have lent!
I hear your tunes, I kneel to them. But to my friends,
"How sweet your flowers!—their scent!"

Katharine Haviland Taylor.

Exploits of Beau Quicksilver

By FLORENCE M. PETTEE

VI.—BLISTERING TONGUES

WHEN Beau Quicksilver, known as that "damned dude hick" to all crookdom, arrived at the scene of the mystery, the belching chimney smoke had long since feathered out to nothingness. The Amesbury homestead was indeed peculiarly well situated for any dark deed. It was set in a clump of pines which poked dark, melancholy prongs against the clotting dusk of eventide. And rank vegetation ran riot beyond the trees. For Mark Amesbury had been an erratic, odd stick, who cared not a tinker's dam for public opinion or the uncomplimentary epithets that spattered like hail about him.

The huge bulk of Chief Cartman of the C. I. D. heaved itself cumbersomely to its feet at Quicksilver's ring.

As the sleek, immaculately clad back of the dandified figure was gulped into the grim interior of the silent house, a chauffeur in the Amesbury garage turned an excited, adulatory glance toward a mechanic.

"Golly, Dick—that's the guy all right! That's the fellow, Beau Quicksilver—regular 1923 model, racy lines, twelve cylinders, aluminium engine! And believe me, old stick-in-the-grease, he's the master mechan' when there's a hurry call from police headquarters for a real trouble shooter. Hits on

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all twelve cylinders all the time. Not a miss. And speedy! Well, say, he's the Tommy Milton on the crime raceway here. Regular self-starter, he is! And as fussy for decent fuel as the niftiest carburetor that ever pushed a buzz-wagon. Something doing here, O. K. When old Amesbury passes in his checks, there's sure to be hell to pay."

While this panegyric was being mouthed in the garage, Beau Quicksilver lounged in a chair in a compact, denlike room flanking the entrance to the sprawling Amesbury domicile. Chief Cartman squatted excitedly on a leather upholstered chair which shrank to pygmy lines under his elephantine bulk.

The famous crime chaser in the smartest of gray, from fedora to spats, lolled nonchalantly, idly twirling a heavily chased ring on the little finger of his left hand. To the casual observer he appeared eaten up with ennui as he awaited Cartman's explanation for the hurry call that had brought him to the somber house of the eccentric Mark Amesbury.

Cartman cupped a knee with a squat, spatulate hand. He leaned far forward. He spoke with staccato brusqueness—a characteristic he always displayed when mentally excited, and when the onus of much responsibility fell suddenly on his Atlaslike shoulders. For Cartman held a superlative respect for the mighty dollar; and Mark Amesbury possessed very great wealth.

"Chinese puzzle, all right, Quicksilver," the chief spat out vehemently, giving his knee a resounding thwack.

Beau Quicksilver crossed a slim, elegantly creased leg. His deep-set gray eyes seemed oblivious of the eager, pudgy face watching him with doglike fidelity.

"Well?" he drawled, for there had been cases where Cartman's preliminary enthusiasm had petered out to some common crime. "Well? Swing in the facts from the start. Cut the frills."

Cartman shrugged his shoulders. But confidence that a real mystery awaited the master hand of the finical Quicksilver still lighted his features. Full well he knew that bludgeoning butchery or ordinary mystery spelled anathema to the fastidious supersleuth facing him.

Cartman cleared his throat and pulled his words together. "Got a call half an hour ago from here. Caretaker on the line. Scared voice full of horror. Stated that Amesbury was locked in the Egyptian Room. Refused to hear repeated calls for supper. Dead silence within. Only two windows in the room. High, cell-like affairs, barred and bolted. The Egyptian Room carries a collection worth a king's ransom. So the defunct Amesbury took no chances. The servant was afraid to break in. So I beat it in the roadster along with Olmstead, who's guarding the room now. The door refused our shoulder third degree; so I shot my way in. And, gad, Quicksilver, 'twas some dope dream I stumbled into."

Beau Quicksilver's tempered steel glance gouged the chief's countenance. The mystery sleuth sat as immobile as a Ming mandarin. He might have been carved from joss. Not unmindful of Quicksilver's flattering attention, the chief ran on.

"Queerest hole I ever stumbled into, that room. It's like a chamber out of a museum. Cluttered up with heathen stuff, moth-eaten and old enough to grow whiskers. Idols, statues, mummies— Well, you'll see. And Amesbury, Quicksilver—where in hell do you suppose we found the guy?"

Still, Quicksilver sat motionless, his basilisk glance boring the chief's face.

Cartman shot a fist into his hand. "As you're a dick, Quicksilver, Mark Amesbury lay deader than a doornail, flat on his back in an Egyptian mummy case that was as old as Methuselah before Noah launched the ark."

For another second Quicksilver regarded him. Then like the ping of a .45: "Any mark of violence—any sign of foul play?"

"That's the hell of it. Body's smooth as a smelt. Nothing wrong with it, even through a microscope."

"What about the eyes?" shot out Quicksilver.

"Closed," retorted Cartman. "But examination of the pupils shows neither enlargement nor contraction. Not a hazy hint of any kind of poisoning."

Quicksilver smiled suddenly, boyishly. The expression transformed his usually ascetic features into a look of intense eagerness and benignity. He was like a boy who suddenly glimpses a coveted hour's swim in the old pool—with the woodpile some hours off.

The slim sleuth brought out a monogrammed silver cigarette case. Deftly he selected a tiny imported roll and lighted it.

"Ah, Cartman," he approved. "Smells good. Trot out some more."

"I thought you'd warm up a bit when you knew the details," observed Cartman. "There wasn't a thing amiss in the room that I could see. No sign of a struggle; not a finger print; not a suspicious mark or clew. Moreover, Amesbury was hermetically sealed in the room, so to speak."

"Any expression of fear or pain on the feautres?" inquired Quicksilver.

"Not a line. He might have been asleep."

"What about the skin?"

"Nothing."

"You spoke of two barred windows, high in the wall. Were they open?"

"Yes, both of them."

"Was the mummy case with Amesbury's body under the open windows?"

"No. On the south side at right angles to the windows."

"Did you give the ground outside the windows the once-over?"

Cartman sniffed disgustedly.

"Say, while I'm no Beau Quicksilver, I'm not quite a green-goods man in crime. Sure thing, I went over the ground. Nothing there. Not the sign of a footprint. The grass is freshly seeded. So it would show up the slightest suspicious thing. If you're trying to hint that some crafty Borgia stood outside and shot in some lethal lemon from a liquid gun or some other newfangled, diabolical gas shooter—spear the idea. Nothing to it. That was my first thought."

Quicksilver shrugged his gray shoulders disdainfully. "Bah, Cartman! You have missed a sign on the wall that's as big as a barn door. I've heard enough. Let's see this mysterious Egyptian Room and what it contains."

Almost joyously Quicksilver snuffed his cigarette and darted from the room with Cartman stepping smartly in his wake.

II.

THE chief had spoken without flamboyance. The death chamber *was* a bizarre place—significantly suited for any black mystery carrying labyrinthian details. It needed but a glance as he stood inside to tell Quicksilver that a vast sum of money was represented in that grim, silent and stealthy interior, whose collector now lay a stark, cold thing gripped to the heart of one of the most priceless curios—the mummy case which had once jealously hoarded the shriveled, brown body of an Egyptian king.

The chamber was large, even for an ordinary residence—high-posted and paneled throughout in rich, time-stained walnut. With the exception of the aforementioned dungeonlike windows high in the wall opposite the door which offered the only ingress, the room was lighted by a powerful overhead electrolier. In fact, the gloomy, stygian atmosphere of the room must have made artificial illumination necessary most of the time when the owner of Amesbury House delved among the dust of the ages.

Quicksilver's lightning glance played about the room with its hodge-podge of relics. He saw a magnificent squat statue of Vishnu dominating the center with its slant eyes staring balefully, almost malevolently, upon the intruders. From object to object Quicksilver's steely gaze coursed. He was like some superbloodhound, nostrils aquiver for the first scent of the truth.

Then his eyes went directly to the grisly, long, brown shape which, like an ugly, venomous cocoon enwrapped Mark Amesbury in the last embrace of death.

The mummy case was a magnificent example from the reign of Theti I. The dusk of the ages was heavy upon it, toning down the garishness of yellow ocher and red clay. Yet, as Quicksilver walked slowly toward the brown sarcophagus there was nothing sinister or mysterious in the outlines of the thing. He had seen countless others, none finer perhaps, but all fashioned along similar lines.

Reluctantly, yet eagerly, Quicksilver's eyes abandoned their acute examination of the mummy case. His glance fell on the white, still face of Mark Amesbury already gripped in the winding sheet of old Egypt without the services of a modern mortuarian.

Cartman had spoken with exactitude. The face appeared placid, untouched by any signs either of external or internal violence.

Quicksilver swung about. "You said you examined the body. Since the mummy case sheathes it up to the armpits, you had it out?"

Cartman nodded affirmation.

Quicksilver frowned. "You know," he stated succinctly, "that you shouldn't have done that. It may have spoiled a dozen indicative signs. Maybe you have bungled the most vital clew. I have half a mind—"

But as Quicksilver's petulant glance swung about the room he shrugged his shoulders. With the motion his quick choler at the possible destruction of vital evidence was whisked into thin air.

"Lend a hand here," he said, almost good-naturedly. "But, by Jove—"

Quicksilver stood riveted. His eyes glowed as though illuminated by some sudden, blinding light from within. His flashing glance was no longer on the mummy case with its gruesome contents. His enlightened look seemed to be directed toward the wall immediately behind the death case.

Cartman followed Quicksilver's blazing scrutiny. "If you think that that paneled wall has any secret contraptions, you're barking up a wrong tree," he remarked. "There is not a hollow panel in the room."

"Blistering tongues of Hades!" Quicksilver murmured *sotto voce*. But to Cartman he said aloud: "The paneling doesn't interest me; but the radiator does."

With a quick, terse gesture he indicated the gilded outlines of the steam pipes which glimmered out richly against the dark paneling directly behind the mummy case.

With a ludicrous effort Cartman studied the radiator. For long association with Beau Quicksilver told him that here was a vital symbol, the first thread in the snarled skein of the puzzle.

With a bovine, incredulous expression Cartman's triple glances alternately included the dynamic sleuth, the dead face of Mark Amesbury, and the incriminating steam pipes.

"I pass," he murmured. "I don't get you, if you mean— Nope. It's Greek to me. What's the answer?"

Quicksilver raised his shoulders. "It's only a glimmer at present. I need further facts. But it has given me a whale of an idea. And if I can corroborate it—well, Cartman, it will be a *rara avis* that we've netted—a real, honest-to-goodness, black crime. Glory to Allah! Mayhap all the criminals haven't turned politicians yet. Now, let me get this household doped out right. You've mentioned the caretaker who sent in the alarm. What other members have we?"

Cartman considered. "That's the dickens of it. Amesbury lived the life of a recluse, an anchorite. He has a caretaker and a serving man. There is nobody else."

"Are there no relatives?"

Cartman shrugged his ponderous shoulders. "I have a hazy idea there is a brother—a nut on fungi—a professor in some small Limburger university. But the idea will have to be verified. Motive is decidedly clouded at present. Where do we go from here, Quicksilver?"

"I want a few moments in this room by myself," rejoined the detective. "I desire to verify, or try to prop up that blistering radiator notion of mine. And you, by the way, while I am closeted here, ask Olmstead to interrogate the caretaker. I wish to know if there was a fire in the furnace this afternoon. I am practically positive that there was, because the radiator has been recently gilded and I can still faintly detect the odor of banana oil commingled with heat."

"A fire in the furnace!" ejaculated Cartman. "And on a summer afternoon! What an idea, Quicksilver! Listens leary. Unless Amesbury was a victim of rheumatism and required much heat. He was a thin, bloodless-looking beggar, and looked as though he might run to rheumatics."

"I see no indications of rheumatism," retorted Quicksilver curtly. "But get that

dope on the furnace fire. I'll be through here in a few moments."

Then the huge, dark-stained door shut Quicksilver's further investigations from the chief's disappointed gaze.

III.

THIRTY minutes later Olmstead, the man from headquarters, knocked diffidently on the dusky door of the silent mystery room. There was a funereal pause. Just as the bluecoat raised gnarled, knuckled fingers for a more vehement summons, the door yawned.

Beau Quicksilver stood on the threshold. His gray eyes glowed with flashing fires—the light of successful inquiry into an obtuse crime. Olmstead knew the expression. It portended well for the criminal investigation already swinging into momentum.

"Come in, Olmstead," invited Quicksilver affably.

He indicated an odd, mildewed stone bench in a corner facing the sinister sarcophagus in which lay the lifeless body of the Egyptologist.

"There *was* a fire," asserted Quicksilver. Yet there was no interrogation in his voice. He spoke as one having authority.

"You've said it," retorted Olmstead. "Both the caretaker and old Hepplewhite have verified the fact. There was a terrific fire in the furnace this afternoon."

"Who ordered that fire?" shot out Quicksilver.

"Amesbury himself."

"Why?" demanded the sleuth. "What reason did the erratic Egyptologist give for a consuming heat on a hot summer afternoon?"

"Old Hepplewhite declares," answered Olmstead blankly, "that Amesbury wanted the heat as a drier. He said he had been doing a bit of painting in the Egyptian Room and wanted to speed up the drying of it."

Quicksilver's eyes flashed. "Excellent. Perfect corroboration."

Olmstead's eyes, however, continued to encircle the dark and mysterious interior. The headquarters man even got up and examined the room, aided by the powerful electrolier. Finally he paused before Quicksilver.

"Do you know," he began falteringly, "I've got a hound of a nose. But I can't get a whiff of fresh turpentine or linseed in these diggings. And I don't see a sign of fresh paint. These paneled walls are walnut, highly waxed and unstained by pigment. *What* did Mark Amesbury paint, Quicksilver? The thing grows blacker every minute."

"Ah," smiled Quicksilver. "That's because you are trying to light the wrong tunnel in this underground riddle. Blistering tongues of hell," he repeated.

Still Olmstead gazed at him as though he spoke in the heathen jargon of ancient Egypt, whose relics surrounded them and whose temple of death wrapped Mark Amesbury in an inescapable winding-sheet.

Alertly Quicksilver strode to the door, a cigarette clamped between his teeth.

"I'm off, Olmstead. All we need now is the culprit. The case approaches its climax."

And leaving a highly curious and deeply puzzled policeman on guard before the death-chamber door, Beau Quicksilver rejoined the chief who was interrogating Hepplewhite in the little den near the entrance door.

"Ah, Hepplewhite," greeted Quicksilver. "I want a word with you, with your permission, Cartman."

"Fire away," agreed the chief, mopping a beady brow and settling back in the chair with an air of baffled resignation.

"Who was your master's intimate confrère—associate in the study of Egyptian relics?" inquired Quicksilver.

"Professor Malotti," instantly responded Hepplewhite.

"Ah," commented Quicksilver softly, almost purringly, "the assistant curator at the museum here. I know the name well—its owner indifferently by reputation."

"A great scholar and a learned gentleman," answered Hepplewhite with awestruck accents.

"When was Professor Malotti here last, Hepplewhite?"

The old man pondered conscientiously. "He was here yesterday morning, sir."

"Ah," exclaimed Quicksilver. "Very good. Was he closeted with your master in the Egyptian room?"

"Yes, sir. They always kept their investigations to that room."

"Where does Professor Malotti live?"

"Number 12, Upton Terrace."

"Very good. Cartman, step on the gas. It's No. 12, Upton Terrace, in a hurry. The erudite scarab chaser and palimpsest hunter is now deep in the throes of museum duties. The time is ripe for a quick glance over his lodgings. Then we shall see how the land of the Borgias and Machiavelli has joined hands with the Kingdom of the Ptolemies and the Sphinx."

Cartman's face was sponged of any enlightening expression. "Malotti," he protested. "Why, the professor is a great authority and a scholar — the discoverer of much valuable data concerning ancient Egyptian civilization. What has he to do with it?"

Quicksilver held up an arresting hand.

"Not yet, but soon," he answered joyfully. "Let's go."

And old Hepplewhite, concealed behind the heavy damask curtains, watched with puzzled, frowning eyes the big roadster eat up the distance on the broad highway to the startling truth.

IV.

A PRECISE and dignified landlady protested against the sacrilege of police investigation in the sacred precincts of the Egyptian authority.

"It's all very strange," she murmured. "Is there anything wrong? Professor Malotti is a most courteous gentleman and very prompt in paying for his rooms."

Considerately Beau Quicksilver silenced her perturbation.

With a skeleton key the two investigators soon stood within the coveted interior.

Professor Malotti did himself well, very well. He occupied three large rooms and bath at the rear of the second floor. The largest of the three chambers was a combination workshop and curio container. The room was high posted and displayed many rare relics from ancient Egypt.

Beau Quicksilver stepped instantly to a big safe hidden by a curtain in a corner behind a miniature replica of the Sphinx. The detective knelt alertly. Immediately his slim, sensitive fingers began their skillful manipulation of the dial. For Beau Quicksilver was as expert in the unlocking of the modern safe as he was in the unraveling of cryptic crime. He brought out from a leather case a tiny stethoscope, whose diaphragm was most delicately constructed to reproduce each indicative sound from protesting safe tumblers.

The magic hand of the master sleuth soon accomplished its purpose. The door of the strong box gave forth a telltale click. Quicksilver flung the steel barrier wide. Like an eager ferret he bored into the interior. Cartman continued to stare at him as though hypnotized.

Not until Quicksilver had searched several pigeonholes was his investigation rewarded.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, holding up a packet of papers. "Excellent! We're 'most there, Cartman."

The chief strode to Quicksilver's side. His bucolic glance swept over the mass of manuscript.

"Looks like a copy for a book," he vouchsafed tentatively.

"It is," retorted Quicksilver. "It's a treatise on certain unknown facts revealing the secrets of the Nile. It will revolutionize present day fallacies concerning the lost land of the Pharaohs."

"But what," began the chief, "has it to do with Mark Amesbury's mysterious death?"

"Much," rapped out Quicksilver laconically, placing the script in his leather portfolio and swinging the safe door shut.

Then the mercurial mystery master stood stock still in the middle of the professor's chamber of historical horrors. His lightning glance played about the room. From object to object it flashed with a searing, ferreting scrutiny from which nothing could escape.

Suddenly Beau Buicksilver plunged toward a small mummy-case which enwrapped the shrunken, leather-like body of a tiny Egyptian princess. Cartman, clumsy

though he was, was shortly at Quicksilver's elbow.

To the police head's amazement Quicksilver brought out a powerful lens and studied the exterior of the mummy-case with extraordinary care.

At first disappointment was plainly discernible in his features. But finally he gave an exultant shout.

A slender digit pointed at a yellow ochre hieroglyphic near the foot of the mummy-case.

"What do you see?" inquired Quicksilver with boyish enthusiasm.

Doggedly Cartman took the microscope and examined the indicated cryptic figure staring out in dull ochre from its dead brown background.

Persistently Cartman scrutinized the chrome hieroglyphic. At last he shook his massive head futilely.

"I see nothing but a heathen sign, Quicksilver, like the others."

"Examine the one by it," demanded Quicksilver. "Don't you notice anything different?"

Scrupulously Cartman complied.

"I see," he answered slowly, "that the hieroglyphic about which you are so excited appears blistered. The others do not."

"Precisely," agreed Quicksilver. "*Blistering tongues of hell,* Cartman. They licked out the life of Mark Amesbury. Now to the museum. At double quick time."

"Say, Quicksilver," remarked the chief, when they were en route to the curio zoo in the big roadster, "you've blistered my curiosity all right. But for the life of me I haven't the glimmer of an idea. Can't you drop a spark or two?"

Quicksilver smiled enigmatically.

"The whole diabolical drama will certainly be unrolled in a few moments. Now wait."

Not another word passed between the two until the big car stopped before the white marble pile of the museum.

After some parleying the satellites of the law were shown into the sumptuous private office of the assistant curator, Professor Malotti.

The noted Egyptologist was a man of Amesbury's age, tall, cadaverous, stoop-shouldered. His close-set, black eyes glinted out from the bridge of a high-arched, thin-nostriled Roman nose. His mouth made a straight line beneath it. From his shining, hairless head to the pronounced Adam's apple in his throat the skin appeared like yellowed, wrinkled parchment—as though he had delved so long in the must and the dust of the ages that he had assimilated it into his very physiognomy.

"Well, gentlemen," his suave, carefully modulated voice greeted them, "a most unexpected pleasure. I am, however, at a loss to understand the reason for your visit to me, a stupid old fellow, who knows little of contemporary affairs or those pertaining to criminal investigation."

"Professor Malotti," cut in Quicksilver, without preamble, "Amesbury's death was clever, but *not clever enough.*"

"Sir!" responded the Italian without batting an eyelash. "That is an odd statement for a criminal investigator to make to a harmless old Egyptologist."

"Professor Malotti," retorted Quicksilver, "subterfuge is useless before blighting facts. I know how Amesbury came to his death, hastened there by the diabolical intention of a rival investigator into the secret history of old Egypt. The motive has been easy to establish. Mark Amesbury knew too much concerning ancient Egyptian lore for the peace of mind of a rival investigator. Professional jealousy and a fanatical greed to possess alone certain facts of Egyptology sent Mark Amesbury prematurely to his death."

"Indeed!" commented the professor. "May I ask why my poor, deluded, half-crazed friend crawled within an old mummy-case to die?"

"Amesbury was queer, a bit of a fanatic, I judge. To him the relics of old Egypt were sacred. He liked to bury himself in an aura of the ancient Nile. So it was his custom to take a late afternoon nap inside a certain mummy-case—as you know, Professor Malotti. His servants have so testified."

"And what if I did know it?" inquired Malotti evenly. "Really, sir, I cannot

fathom the purport of your rather insinuating remarks to me, Amesbury's most intimate friend and associate."

Quicksilver shrugged. "You soon will," he answered. "Now that I have established *motive,* let me indicate the diabolical *means* by which Mark Amesbury came to his death. The thing was clever. But sometimes even tongues of hell can tattle. They did in this weird drama. And they left tiny blisters to whisper the criminal truth."

Professor Malotti's control was admirable. But the line of his jaw assumed a bluish tint.

"Blisters?" his thin lips echoed without sound. His beady, black eyes clung to Quicksilver's stern, implacable face.

"Blisters," repeated Beau Quicksilver. "For the hieroglyphics on that ancient mummy-case had been repainted, retouched by an admixture of yellow ochre and Pompeiian red—*blended with cyanide of potash.*"

Cartman gave a mighty start. Then he sat very still.

With unblinking eyes Malotti still stared insolently at Quicksilver.

The detective turned to the chief. "You get the idea? Yellow ochre and red powder mixed with cyanide disguised the potash's indicative white character and gave a fair imitation of the ancient pigments affected by the artisans of prehistoric Egypt. The admixture was daubed onto the mummy-case to freshen up the blurred outlines of the original hieroglyphics. Amesbury was a zealot in such symbolism. Also he was near-sighted. So he strove to brighten up the dim characters on the death case. He had expressed this desire to the only other great living authority on Egyptology. And this master subtlely suggested the ochre and Pompeiian red, both of which had been previously doctored by the insidious addition of cyanide of potash."

"B-but the blisters," protested Cartman. "And how could cyanide of potash daubed onto the *exterior* of the mummy-case affect the erratic crank on Egyptology?"

"Tongues of hell," repeated Quicksilver again. "For Amesbury's adviser on the retouching stunt told him to have a terrific furnace fire started—that quick drying was necessary in order to reproduce the dull, dingy character of the ancient hieroglyphics—to tone them down so that the modern tampering wouldn't be noticeable even to an expert."

"Yes, but—" still protested Cartman, blankly.

"The mummy-case occupied its usual dais against the big radiator. Under the terrific heat from the radiator a deadly and powerful quantity of cyanogen was generated and released from the cyanide of potash. There is nothing more sure. But simultaneously with the letting loose of the death-dealing gas by the high heat, the torrid atmosphere likewise caused the cyanide of potash—salt that it is—to blister. And that whispered the crafty truth. I have analyzed the doctored hieroglyphics on the mummy-case. They contain cyanide of potash which has been subjected to blistering heat."

"I still fail to see," commented Malotti sarcastically, "why you are telling this to *me.*"

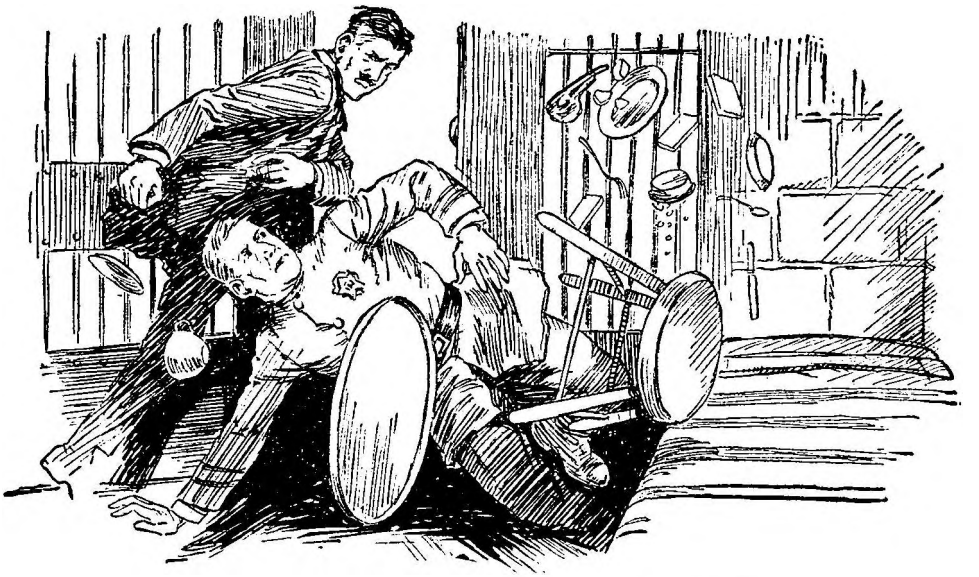
"Because you are the murderer of your rival for Egyptian honors. You plotted Amesbury's death, to which he, credulous dolt, played into your hands with child-like gullibility. You can't dodge the guilt, Malotti. For in your own curio room you previously tried out your diabolical death plan on a single hieroglyphic upon the little mummy-case inclosing an Egyptian princess."

Professor Malotti shrugged and reached swiftly toward an odd paperweight on his desk.

"None of that," cried Beau Quicksilver with a quick gesture. "I see you have neglected nothing, professor, even down to a poisoned paperweight—if the need should arise."

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Cartman, staring dazedly from Beau Quicksilver to the blanched, guilt-written face of the professor. "Can you beat it? And in the twentieth century, too! Well, I'm golblasted! Hanged if I'm not! Tongues of hell with a vengeance! Whew!"

Next Week: "MURDER INCOGNITO."



The Double Chance

By J. S. FLETCHER

Author of "The Middle Temple Murder," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

A QUEER FIND.

THE two police officials watched Marshall Stead carefully as Inspector Cortelyou uttered the word which signified so much. Each, in his separate fashion, was wondering how the cashier would take the news.

Illingworth, having had but a limited experience, and not being over imaginative, was full of curiosity. The man from Scotland Yard had seen too much of life, as it related to his own profession, to attach much importance to the first signs shown by a man suddenly charged with a serious crime, but on this occasion he watched the effect of his announcement with lynxlike eyes. He was prepared to see anything.

What the two watchers did see was first a blank stare of utter astonishment and next a rapidly increasing look of incredulous wonder pass across the accused man's face. He looked from one to the other, as if he could not comprehend the meaning of what Inspector Cortelyou had said. Then he smiled, as if some joke or trick were being played upon him.

"You don't mean that?" he said.

Inspector Cortelyou regarded him steadily. "That is exactly what is meant, Mr. Stead," he replied. "We don't deal with these things in a joking spirit."

"But this is nonsense!" exclaimed the cashier. "Utter nonsense! I suppose you've got some definite charge against me?"

"It would be utter nonsense if we

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 10.

hadn't," replied the detective. "We not only have a definite charge but a definite warrant—you'd better charge him," he continued, turning to Illingworth, who immediately produced a document from a drawer. "Sit down, Mr. Stead—there's no need to stand."

The inspector himself sat down, and, producing his cigar case, began to smoke. But Stead, noticing everything without seeming to do so, observed that the chair which his captor dropped into was between the door and himself. And he knew that he was as safely trapped as if he were locked up in the big safe at the office.

Illingworth, solemn and stolid, gave the prisoner the usual warning, and read over the charge. It was not a lengthy one, and the terms were plain and simple—perhaps too much so to the man who listened to them. Stead was charged with forging a check for seven hundred and fifty pounds, purporting to be drawn by Sir Robert Mannersley, and with converting the proceeds to his own use. The date of the transaction was about ten days before the murder.

Inspector Cortelyou watched the accused man's face very closely while Illingworth's monotonous tones were heard. He saw a subtle, almost indefinable change come over it, and for one brief second he detected a flash of genuine surprise in Stead's eyes. And the man from Scotland Yard said to himself: "He's surprised at the thing's coming to light, and, by Heaven, he's guilty!"

Stead coughed slightly as Illingworth came to an end. He had taken a seat at Inspector Cortelyou's invitation, but he now rose and began slowly, but with steady fingers, to button his light overcoat.

"Of course, that's all nonsense!" he said. "Well, I suppose I shall have to appear before the magistrates?"

"And without doubt before a judge," replied Inspector Cortelyou dryly.

Stead pulled the last button into place, and moved a step toward the door.

"Very well," he said, "I shall be there whenever you want me."

Inspector Cortelyou, without moving from his chair, smiled sardonically. "I don't know whether you think you're trying to bluff us or whether you're charmingly simple, Mr. Stead," he remarked. "Don't you understand that you're a prisoner?"

Stead looked from one to the other, and changed color. "That I—that I am to be detained?" he asked.

"Certainly! You are going to be locked up, after you have been searched," answered the inspector.

"I wanted to go to my lodgings," said Stead slowly. "Can't I go if you, or both of you, accompany me?"

"No!" answered Inspector Cortelyou. "I'm going there myself—I hold a search warrant."

Then Stead showed the first sign of collapse. He dropped into the chair from which he had just risen and became silent. The detective nodded to Illingworth.

"Get through with the searching," he said in a low voice. "I want to see what he has on him and then to get off."

And within five minutes Marshall Stead, having been relieved of his papers and anything which it was considered undesirable for him to have in his possession, found himself locked up, to reflect upon recent events.

Inspector Cortelyou hastily looked through the papers in Stead's pocketbook. They were few in number, and to an inexperienced eye would have seemed quite unimportant. There were two or three letters of a private nature, a few receipts, and some newspaper cuttings. But on the newspaper cuttings being opened out they all proved to be in reference to betting transactions on current races, and Inspector Cortelyou smiled grimly.

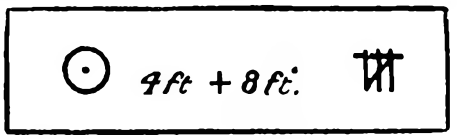
"Appropriate sort of literature for a Sunday school teacher and church warden, eh, Illingworth?" he said.

"A bit queer, certainly," agreed Illingworth.

"You'd have looked to find a few tracts, eh?" continued Inspector Cortelyou. "Well, that seems all. Hullo—here's something else! What's this?"

He drew out from an inner pocket a scrap of paper a few inches square, which had been folded up in the shape of a triangular note. On opening this some curious hieroglyphics appeared, at which both officials gazed with wonder and speculation, not see-

ing any reason in them. An oblong frame had been drawn on the paper and in its midst were three signs, thus:



"That refers to something or other," said Inspector Cortelyou. "Here, I'll make a sketch of that, Illingworth, and then you can lock all these things up. Not much, but those betting figures suggest a good deal, and this diagram may yield something."

With his sketch of the diagram in his pocket, and his cigar in his mouth, Inspector Cortelyou went out into the street and set off in the direction of the house where Stead lodged.

As he came to the outskirts of the mining village he encountered Mark Quinton, who, having seen Phillipa Mannersley safely into her carriage, was on his way to consult somebody, he scarcely knew whom, about the cashier. His face brightened at the sight of the little man with the wrinkled face and queer attire.

"Ah, inspector," he said. "I'm glad to meet you. I was just wanting some one to whom I could turn for advice. The fact is—" and he gave the detective a concise account of what had occurred at the offices that morning, including Phillipa's story of the events of the previous evening.

Inspector Cortelyou listened in silence and with an imperturbable countenance.

"What do you think of that?" concluded the manager. "Queer, isn't it?"

Inspector Cortelyou flicked the ash off his cigar. "I think," he said, "that it's just what I expected to hear, or something very like it. However, there is no need for anybody to be concerned about Mr. Stead at present. We've got him."

Quinton looked his astonishment. "You've got him?" he said. "Got him where? "

The detective poked his old umbrella in the direction of the police station.

"There!" he said. "Locked up."

"Locked up!" exclaimed Quinton. "But —on what charge?"

"At present," replied Inspector Cortelyou, "on the charge of forging Sir Robert Mannersley's name to a check."

"Ah! Then you have discovered something?" said Quinton.

"Yes, and a good deal," replied the detective. "I'm just going on to the house where Stead lodges. If you'll walk a little way I'll tell you all about it.

"You see," he continued as they turned back together, "as I told you the other day, I had suspicions of Stead for strong reasons. Now, a very little accident yesterday afforded an immense illumination on the case. You will remember that from the night of Sir Robert's murder until now the study and library have been rigorously sealed up, so that no one should have access to them but the police, which means practically Illingworth and myself.

"For many reasons this was necessary, but especially for one—that the mass of papers lying in, on, or about Sir Robert's desk should not be touched. Now Illingworth and I have carefully gone through all those papers as we have found time to do so, but it was not until yesterday that we came to the end of our search—an end in a double sense. We found what I had been certain we should find—a clew. And where do you think we found it?"

He paused and, lighting another cigar, gazed up at the tall manager with a quizzical expression.

"I haven't the remotest idea," said Quinton. "Where?"

"In the big waste paper basket that stood on the right-hand side of Sir Robert's chair," answered Inspector Cortelyou. "Likely place, wasn't it? But I've known less likely—lots of 'em, in fact."

"And this clew," asked Quinton, eagerly; "what was it?"

"It was two clews, as a matter of fact—a sort of two corroborations of one undoubted fact," answered the detective. "As I say, we had examined everything—Illingworth, as you may be aware, is a bit new to such a job and required watching—and had found nothing, and so I began an inspection of the contents of the waste paper basket, which, as you know, is an extra sized one."

"Just so—just so!" exclaimed Quinton,

excitedly. "And there, no doubt, you found something which you pieced together?"

Inspector Cortelyou laughed. "No, no!" he said. "And I'm glad I didn't—it takes a long time to piece scraps of letters together. No—I found two letters, enveloped and sealed; one of them was stamped for post, the other was not. The stamped envelope was addressed to the manager of the Stelford Banking Company, Limited; the other to Mr. Marshall Stead. That one was indorsed: 'To be handed to Mr. Stead on his arrival.'"

"Go on—go on!" said Quinton eagerly.

"I took it upon myself to open those letters," continued Inspector Cortelyou. "The one to the bank was a brief letter of a few lines; that to Stead was a lengthier document, and it contained a Bank of England note for one hundred and fifty pounds. And in those two letters, Mr. Quinton, unless my professional experience is at fault, I learned what I believe to be the truth of all this strange mystery."

"And that is—" said Quinton.

"That Stead is a consummate scoundrel," answered Inspector Cortelyou, ambiguously. "I won't say more at present. But I have copies of the letters in my pocketbook. I'll read them to you."

Drawing out his bulky, much-worn pocketbook, the detective produced and unfolded two sheets of paper. "This," he said, "is the letter to the bank manager. It runs:

"Mannersley Castle, June 2, 199—.

"DEAR SIR:

"Until I call upon you personally, which I shall do within the next three days, be pleased not to honor any check drawn upon my private account bearing date later than May 28 inst.

"Yours faithfully,

"ROBERT MANNERSLEY."

"And this," he continued, "is the letter to Stead, from the same address and of the same date. It's a sad letter, in my opinion.

"DEAR MARSHALL STEAD:

"Although I telephoned to you requesting you to call here to-night, I feel that I cannot see you, and I am therefore writing this note, which will be given to you. I have suddenly discovered by accident, but on the most indisputable evidence and surest proof, that you have forged my name to a check for seven hundred and fifty pounds. There is no doubt of your guilt, and my discovery has led me to a train of sad thought. I am not sure whether the hand which forged this check may not have been the same which forged that in respect of which my unfortunate nephew has suffered.

"For the sake of your dead father and mother, I cannot bring myself to prosecute you. But you must go. I inclose a bank note—why, I don't know, for I daresay you have feathered your nest well. Go at once—anywhere—and try to be honest because I have been merciful. I felt for you as a father, and I am trying to act as your own father would have acted—mercifully.

"ROBERT MANNERSLEY."

Inspector Cortelyou folded up these papers amid his own and his companion's silence. Each man felt as if he had listened to a voice from another world.

"If Miss Mannersley hears that letter," said Quinton at last, "it will almost break her heart."

"Aye, sir, but it will soon be mended," answered the detective. "Joy is stronger than sorrow, and love than grief. And now I must get on with my duty. You'll see and hear more before the day's over."

Then he went forward on his mission, and Quinton turned back to the village.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER MYSTERY.

THE woman in whose house Stead lodged—an old-fashioned farmhouse, which was one of the few ancient abodes left in the valley—looked askance at Inspector Cortelyou when she answered his knock at her front door.

His rusty tall hat, his unusually old-fashioned garments, his Mrs. Gamplike umbrella, made her consider him a suspicious character, and she only opened the door to the extent of a very few inches as she inspected him.

"Good morning, ma'am," said the detective blandly and genially. "It is a beautiful morning. Mr. Stead, of course, is not at home?"

"No, he isn't," answered the landlady.

"Just so, ma'am," said the inspector. "I

did not use those words, ma'am, in the form of a question, but as an assertion. Mr. Stead is not at home. The fact is—though I don't want to shock your nerves, and I am sure I shan't, as I see you are a sensible woman—the fact is, Mr. Stead is locked up."

The landlady looked her scorn and disbelief, and made as if she would shut the door in Inspector Cortelyou's face. But the detective, after a fashion peculiarly his own, had already insinuated himself as far as the door mat, and the woman, suddenly seeing him determined, drew back.

"I don't believe it!" she exclaimed. "The mere idea of a highly respectable gentleman like Mr. Stead being in prison—a church warden!"

"Ah, my dear lady, I've seen a good many church wardens sent to prison!" said the detective. "Yes, and clergymen, too. Mr. Stead, my dear madam, is arrested and is locked up at the police station till he can be brought before the magistrates, and, in the meantime, I've got a warrant, which you can see if you wish, to search his rooms in your house. I'm Inspector Cortelyou, of Scotland Yard—here's my card."

The landlady sank into a chair close by and grasped her apron convulsively. "You're the detective, then, that—that came down about the—the murder?" she said, gazing at Inspector Cortelyou with frightened eyes. "You—you don't mean that he's arrested for *that?*"

The inspector gave her a kneen look. "Why, is he anything to you?" he asked suddenly.

"No," she said, shaking her head, "no—nothing. But I knew his mother—I served under her at the castle. Oh—I hope it isn't that—Sir Robert was always so good to them both, and especially to him."

"Well, it isn't that—yet," replied Inspector Cortelyou reassuringly. "He's arrested for forgery, that's all. And, of course, he might get off, so there's no need for you to distress yourself. And now let me have a look at his rooms, there's a good soul."

The woman led him along the hall to a sitting room at the rear of the house—a room of some size, from which two French windows looked out upon a garden and an orchard. It was a pleasant room, furnished after the style of an old-fashioned farmhouse parlor, and had little attempt at ornament or decoration.

There were a few old steel engravings and some older colored prints on the walls, and a few books were arranged in a glass-fronted bookcase in one corner, but the detective looked in vain for any particular signs of personality or for the things which a bachelor likes to gather about him. Everything was very neat, formal, and precise.

"I expect everything in here is your property?" he said, turning to the woman, who stood in the doorway holding the corner of her apron to her mouth, and watching him wonderingly as he looked about him. "Furniture and so on, I mean?"

"Oh, yes, sir," she answered. "At least, all but that desk there in the corner. Mr. Stead brought that with him when he came. All else is ours—my husband's and mine."

"Then I'll look at the desk," said Inspector Cortelyou. "And as I see it's your washing day, I won't detain you. I'll leave the door open, so that I can call you if I want you."

The woman looked at him wonderingly again, and went off down the passage. Inspector Cortelyou drew out a bunch of keys which had been taken from Stead's pocket during the search, and approached the desk—an American roll-top desk of good make and some capacity, which was fitted with a patent lock. He found the key and threw the top back, and began his search.

At the end of an hour Inspector Cortelyou, relocking the desk again, had to confess to himself that, with the exception of one object, he had found nothing. The desk was a model of neatness, and whatever papers were in it were all docketed and arranged in the most precise order. But those papers threw no light on the matter which concerned the detective.

There were private letters from friends; there were receipts for accounts paid; there were memoranda relating to church and Sunday-school matters—everything was of this simple sort. There was nothing that gave him any clew.

The object which he thought worthy of attention was the deerstalker hat, of which

Stead himself had told him. He looked it over, and found that it corresponded exactly to Stead's description of it. Yes—just the thing that Stead said it was, and there was the maker's name which he had mentioned—" Heath, Oxford Street."

" He told me the truth there, any way," muttered the detective, and laid the hat aside to take away with him.

Then he looked around the room. With the exception of a sideboard there was nothing in which anything could be hidden, and that contained nothing but the usual silver, glass, and china necessary for a bachelor.

In deep thought, Inspector Cortelyou approached one of the French windows and looked out. It gave upon a kitchen garden in which things were looking bright and promising. He passed on to the next window; that opened on a little orchard with a tumbledown wicket-gate, a wealth of much too overgrown grass, and an old draw-well, surrounded by a low, moss-covered wall.

" Pretty place, pretty old place," mused the inspector; " but I'm doing no good here."

He went out into the passage and called for the landlady, who at his request took him up to Stead's bedroom. He looked all over that, examined Stead's personal belongings, looked into drawers and cupboards, and came out no more enlightened than when he went in.

Saying good-day to the landlady, and taking the deer-stalker hat with him, he went off to the cottage where Stead had told him the man whom he had rescued from the quarry was lying ill. He was revolving certain problems within his own mind as to that matter, and he wanted to find out two or three things for himself.

From his first observations there was no doubt that Stead had told him a true story with respect to the beginnings of this second mystery. For here was the deer-stalker hat in his hand, and there was the quarry from which Stead said the man had been carried.

He went to the edge at the spot where the broken fence was, and looked over; it was a fairly deep drop to the bottom of the quarry, and it seemed to him a wonder that the man had not been killed outright, until he espied an outgrowing bush of bramble, which had doubtless broken his fall.

Still ruminating on the event, and wondering if Stead really did find the hat in the library at the Castle, he went forward to the middle cottage in the little row of three.

If Inspector Cortelyou had found it a fairly easy task to enter Stead's lodgings, he found it a very difficult one to get into this cottage. Mrs. Hardacre happened to be standing at the open door of her dwelling as he entered the little garden, and she immediately prepared to play the part of faithful watchdog, which Stead had impressed upon her. She was a big and brawny woman, of undoubted muscle and sinew, and she planted her hands on her hips and glared at the detective as he came up the path. Inspector Cortelyou scented trouble.

" Good-day, ma'am," he said, with great suavity.

" 'Day," responded the guardian, with asperity.

" You have, I understand, a man lying here who is ill," said Inspector Cortelyou.

" Well, and what if I have?" demanded Mrs. Hardacre. " What business is it of yours, I should like to know?"

" Merely," replied the inspector, assuming a more professional tone, " merely, ma'am, that I have called to see him."

Mrs. Hardacre snorted with defiance.

" Have you?" she said, decisively. " Well, then, you can go back to wherever you came from, 'cause you won't see him. There!"

The inspector gazed at her. Most people felt cowed by that special look. Mrs. Hardacre did not.

" I am a detective officer from Scotland Yard," he began, " and it is my duty to—"

" I don't care if you're the Duke of Scotland; you're not coming into my house!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardacre. " And you're not going to see my patient. And here's the doctor coming this blessed instant, and if you don't go he'll make you."

Inspector Cortelyou turned with relief to see Dr. Hibbert, whom he already knew, driving up the lane in his dog-cart, and he at once went to meet him. A short colloquy at the garden gate, during which the irate lady in the doorway perceived the

young doctor to show several signs of surprise, resulted in the two men approaching her.

"Good-day, Mrs. Hardacre," said the doctor. "This gentleman is Inspector Cortelyou, of Scotland Yard. I am going to take him upstairs with me to see our patient."

But the wardress still showed signs of disapproval.

"It's against orders, doctor," she said, grumblingly. "Mr. Stead gave the strictest orders, as you know very well, that there wasn't nobody whatever to come in to see this man without his permission."

"Quite so," agreed Dr. Hibbert; "but I'm afraid Mr. Stead can't be relied on any more. The fact is, Mr. Stead's in prison."

Mrs. Hardacre's manner underwent a sudden change. "Stead in prison!" she exclaimed. "Well, and I'm none surprised after his mysterious goings on. Lawks-a-massy! And who's going to pay me in future, I should like to know, for keeping this here strange feller in my cottage? To be sure, Stead's paid up to now, but who'll do it till he can be moved? And I'd like to know who he is, an' all?"

"That, ma'am, is precisely what I am here to find out," said the detective. "And as to your being paid, you needn't distress yourself about that."

He followed Dr. Hibbert up the staircase and into the bedchamber, where the nurse whom Stead had secured came forward to meet them. She raised her hand.

"He's sound asleep, doctor," she said. "He'd a restless night, but he's been sleeping beautifully since noon."

"Let him sleep as long as he can," said the doctor. "Has he spoken of remembering more yet?"

"No, sir," replied the nurse.

Dr. Hibbert signed to the detective to go up softly to the bed. Inspector Cortelyou went there with the softness of a cat, and gave the patient a swift inspection. Then, beckoning to the doctor, he went downstairs again to the garden, where a moment later Hibbert joined him.

"Well?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, that's Dr. Julius Steinthal," said Inspector Cortelyou. "I recognized him at once. He was once called as an expert in a case in which I was concerned. I'll wire to his people at once. Now about his loss of memory; what is it exactly? A temporary loss?"

"Exactly," replied the doctor. "A temporary loss caused by some sudden violent shock."

"Do you think that fall over the quarry caused it?" asked the inspector.

"I don't know, because the injuries to his head were slight, very slight indeed," replied the doctor. "It may have been the result of a great mental shock."

"In either case," asked the inspector, "do you think his memory will come back to him?"

"Yes, certainly," replied Dr. Hibbert. "I fully expect that it will come back just as suddenly as it went. A sudden shock might possibly restore it. But it will come."

"Then see that these women keep a strict watch, and make them see that they must communicate with you and me immediately he shows any sign of the return," said Inspector Cortelyou.

He then said good-day to the doctor and set off toward the village. But he had scarcely crossed the waste land on which the cottage stood, when he saw Perrett running toward him. At a few yards' distance Perrett cried his news—

"Come to the station as quick as you can, sir!" he exclaimed. "Stead's made his escape!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A TEMPORARY REFUGE.

MR. MARSHALL STEAD, left to himself and his own thoughts in the solitude of a not too spacious or comfortable cell, felt that the situation in which he now found his hitherto confident personality placed was one which had great disadvantages.

Until that moment he had never upon any occasion known what it was to be nonplused; full of resource all his life, he had invariably converted every situation to his own good. He was sure now that he could

make something out of this, if only he could regain his liberty. But the walls of his cell were as thick as those of the old castle, to all appearances. The window was a mere pane of dull glass covered with iron bars. The door looked as if it would never open again under any circumstances. Obviously, Mr. Stead was in what is vulgarly called a tight place; but being philosophic, he sat down on his stool—which was all that was provided to sit on—and considered matters.

And, after all, he reflected, with a species of interior mirth, they could not get at his money. He had always had too much sense to keep any considerable sum of money in any local bank. Beyond a sum of about a hundred and seventy pounds lying at call in the bank not twenty yards away from where he was sitting, a captive, all his worldly wealth was in London and elsewhere—in other names.

If he could only get out and get away from Mannersley— He felt inclined to curse or to kick himself for not clearing off immediately after the scene with Phillipa. But how could he know what was coming? Even now he could not understand how these confounded people had found out.

While he sat there meditating, the door of his cell, after the loud turning of a key, was suddenly opened, and a young constable, whom Stead remembered as a boy, looked in upon him somewhat shamefacedly. Stead saw that this youthful person was full of amazement and wonder to find the cashier of Mannersley Mine, the church warden of Mannersley Church, locked up like any common drunk or casual criminal. Indeed, from force of habit, the policeman touched where his helmet should have been.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but the superintendent he said as how I was to ask you if you'd like some dinner ordered in from somewhere. I could slip across to the Grapes, sir, and get you a chop or something, if you like."

"Yes," answered Stead. He put his hand in his pocket, in which they had left him such cash as he had about him, and drew out half a crown.

"Yes, I should like a chop and potatoes and a little cheese and a glass of ale. Get yourself a drink with the change."

"Thank you, sir," said the officer, taking the money. "Sorry to see you in this place, Mr. Stead," he added, with a clumsy attempt at sympathy.

"It's all a foolish mistake, for which somebody will have to pay heavily," replied Stead. "By the bye, is Mr. Illingworth anywhere about?"

"No, sir," said the officer. "There's nobody about just now but me and Constable Stevens in the office — they've all gone to dinner. Is it anything Stevens could do, sir?"

"No, no, it doesn't matter," answered Stead. "I only wanted to ask Mr. Illingworth a question. I'll see him this afternoon."

The young officer went away, promising to bring the chop as soon as possible, and Mr. Stead resumed his meditations. What a thing it was, he thought, to be so near liberty and yet so far from it, and what a difference a locked door made! If only he could get outside that door!

And then a sudden thought came to Mr. Stead, which made him jump from his stool and begin to pace the narrow confines of his cell with rapid strides. He knew the exact geography of the police station, for he was friendly with the architect who built it, and had often been over it with him in the process of building. He knew that the cell in which he had been placed was the last of a series of four in a passage which terminated with a door at the back of the police station; if he could once get out of his cell into that passage the opening of the door would be a simple matter. And once outside—

The thought of liberty, even though he had only lost it for little more than an hour, was so alluring that it braced his nerves like a strong tonic. He buttoned up his coat and prepared for action, reckoning up his plan of campaign. To leave that cell was the thing, but to leave the young constable within it was the step to be achieved. Once out of the cell he would be safe—for a while. Constable Stevens in the office in front would know nothing and hear nothing —for a while. He would try.

The young constable was coming back at last. Stead heard his feet on the flagged

floor of the passage. He took up a position behind the door, and braced up all his nerve and strength. He heard the rattle of glass and silver on the luncheon tray; he heard the key turned in the lock. He knew that the officer was leaving the key in the lock, and that, being encumbered with the tray, he was pushing the door open with his knee.

In another instant he appeared—and in that instant Stead leaped upon him, sent him and the tray rolling in hopeless confusion on the floor of the cell, darted out, turned the key in the lock, and in another minute was outside the rear of the police station.

He stood for a moment to regain his breath, and then, pulling himself into his usual cool and calm manner, and following out the plan which he had determined upon, he deliberately turned the corner of the police station, and, emerging into the main street, walked boldly into the little local bank, which occupied the next building. Just as he had surmised, there was nobody there but a clerk, who greeted him in all innocence.

"Good day," said Stead, replying to the youth's salutation. "I want some gold, and I find I've forgotten my check book. Just give me a blank form, please."

His hand was quite steady as he wrote out a check for one hundred and fifty pounds, and he chatted pleasantly to the clerk as that sum was counted out and handed over. He dropped the two paper bags into which he had directed the gold to be put into his pockets, and with a quiet farewell walked calmly out of the bank and into the main street again.

"Lucky for me it's dinner time," he thought. "That's step number two. Now for number three."

Mr. Stead's step number three was to walk round the corner of the bank, and to make a sharp turn into a cul-de-sac of red-brick cottages which lay at its rear. There was not a soul to be seen in the forlorn little street, and without a moment's hesitation he went straight to one of the first houses, and, dispensing with the ceremony of knocking, opened the door and walked in.

This cottage was one of several which belonged to Stead in Mannersley. It was a typical miner's cottage, having a living room in front, a kitchen at the back, and two sleeping chambers upstairs. Such a cottage, in the hands of home loving and careful tenants, not overburdened with children, could be kept neat and clean, as was the case with the great majority of the cottages in Mannersley.

But this cottage was tenanted by one of Mannersley's greatest ne'er-do-wells — a miner who was known by no other name than Dogger Tandy, probably because, whatever the state of his worldly affairs might be, he could always show a good greyhound, which he fed on mutton chops while his unfortunate wife munched a dry crust. And Dogger Tandy was in Stead's debt, and was a desperado, and his cottage was handy, and Stead was a firm believer in the saying that if you want to hide the best hiding place is next door to the man who is seeking you, and so to Dogger Tandy he came.

When Stead walked in it was to survey a scene which, if not absolutely squalid, was sordid in the extreme. The carpetless living room, though not destitute of furniture, was nearly so, and there was scarcely an article which had not suffered such primitive repairs as can be effected by tying up broken limbs with string or driving a nail through parts where nails should not be required.

A primitive meal of bread, cheese, and pickled onions was set out on a clothless deal table, and was flanked by a can of ale. There was an odor of onions, of cheese, of acrid tobacco smoke in the place that smote keenly on Stead's nostrils. For one moment a sense of degradation in having to seek shelter in such a house smote him, but it left him just as quickly. He closed the door behind him and faced the occupants of the cottage.

Dogger Tandy, a big, bony, red-haired, sharp-eyed, sharp-nosed man, with a thin beard and ragged mustache, through which protruded ugly yellow fangs of teeth, sat on one side of the table with a greyhound at his knee. He was eating bread and cheese with a clasp-knife, and now and then applying his lips to the ale can.

His wife, a poor, washed-out, downtrodden-looking creature, whose face bore more than one mark of her lord and master's fist, appeared to be chiefly solacing herself with dry bread and weak tea, drawn from a pot which had doubtless stood on the hob since breakfast time. Both started at Stead's abrupt entrance. It was not his practice to collect his rents in person, and they could not think of any reason for his presence there. And the man scowled, and his scowl was very suggestive of the way in which a vicious dog shows his teeth. He half rose from his chair, and regarded Stead with anything but friendly eyes.

"If so be as you've called about that bit of rent, master," he began, "it's not—"

Stead stopped him with a lifted hand. "I've not come about any rent," he said. "You're welcome to what's owing. I want to talk to you. Send your wife out of the room for a few minutes."

"Get outside!" commanded Dogger Tandy to his spouse, pretty much as he might have ordered a cur to its kennel.

But Stead barred the way.

"Not outside," he said. "Can't she go into the back place, or upstairs?"

Mrs. Tandy retired hastily into the back place and closed the door. Stead glanced at it suspiciously.

"There's no way out of that, is there?" he asked.

"As they're your houses, guv'nor, you ought to know there's no door in 'em except such as you're a standing against," answered Tandy. "'Course there isn't!"

Stead came further into the kitchen and took a chair close to the miner's, who continued to watch him furtively.

"Look here," said Stead, eying Tandy keenly, "do you want to earn some money? Not a pound or two, nor twenty pounds, but a nice lump."

Dogger Tandy regarded him with the eyes of the naturally suspicious man. He kept silence for a minute. "What's the game, guv'nor?" he asked. "You can speak free—she'll not hear."

Stead explained matters, not caring in his present predicament to mince them. He knew his man—knew that Dogger Tandy's cupidity and greed would make him keep a still tongue in his head; he also knew that Tandy was not a drinking man, so would not talk in his cups; he also knew him to be a master of craft and ingenuity. And he told him everything, while the miner listened in silence.

"Now listen, guv'nor," he said, when the fugitive had made an end of his story; "this here is a ticklish job, but you've come to the right man to do it. It's a thousand to one against their ever looking for you here. You did it smart in coming next door, as it were. But they'll set all their wits to work on you, d'ye see? They'll watch the station and the roads. Now, I'll tell you what must be done. Do you stop here quiet this afternoon, while I go out and about and keep my ears open and my mouth shut. That's the ticket. And then we can see what to do."

"But supposing anybody comes in?" said Stead. "And then, what about your wife?"

Dogger Tandy smiled at these difficulties with great contempt, and solved both a few minutes later by interviewing his wife in the back place and locking her up there, after which, bidding his guest help himself to the bread and cheese, and further producing a bottle of stout for his delectation, he took his greyhound and locked up the house behind him, leaving Stead a prisoner for the second time in one day.

It was dark when Dogger Tandy returned, bringing with him some eatables which he thought Stead might fancy. He looked grave, and he shook his head.

"It's a bad lookout, guv'nor," he said. "I thought they'd kick up a rare shine over it. They've got the bills out already, and they're watching the station here and all around. There's only one thing I can see of."

"What's that?" asked Stead, eagerly.

"Well, guv'nor, it's this," replied the miner. "You know the old Wellington working, what hasn't been used for a couple of year? I know a way into that from our seam, and you could lie snug there for a day or two in the old underlooker's office, with plenty of grub and so on. I can rig you up like a collier, and get you down there with me on the night shift—they'll never dream of looking for you there. It's

the only way, guv'nor—you'll have to hide below ground for a time."

And Stead saw no other alternative.

CHAPTER XX.

A PROBLEM IN DIAMONDS.

IN the whole course of his professional career Inspector Cortelyou had very seldom lost his temper and allowed himself to be startled out of an equanimity which came naturally to him, but when he fairly grasped the fact that Stead had made good his escape, he became so angry that his subordinate felt thankful that he himself was not to blame.

"Knocked down the man who carried in his dinner, locked the cell door on him, and walked quietly out!" vociferated the little man. "Fools—asses—idiots! Where had they all gone to?"

"Don't know, sir," answered Perrett, with a discreet cough. "I heard something about them being away at their dinners—they do things so queerly in these country places, sir."

"Dinners!" exclaimed the inspector, with deep scorn. "I wish their dinners had choked 'em—I haven't even thought of mine yet. Come on!"

He marched off to the police station at a rate which obliged Perrett, who was nearly twice his height, almost to run in order to keep up with him, and fell upon Illingworth and his myrmidons as if he meant to slay them there and then.

"Here's a nice state of things!" he said, coming into their midst. "I take the trouble to catch a man and turn him over to you, and then you let him go as soon as my back's turned!"

"It's all this man's fault," said Illingworth, pointing with lowering brows at the youthful constable, who, half confused with fright and shame, and with a bandaged forehead, consequent upon his having received a nasty cut from the broken crockery into which Stead's sudden assault had pitched him, stood close by, "all his fault. He should have had more sense."

"Well, sir, you told me to get him his dinner, sir," pleaded the culprit. "I only obeyed your orders, sir. I never expected that a gentleman like Mr. Stead would behave in that way, sir. I'd got my hands full with the tray, sir."

"Bah!" said Inspector Cortelyou. "What's the good of all this? Get to work, Illingworth, and let's see what we can do. He can't have gone far—it's impossible."

Never, from the time it had been a police station, had that of Mannersley known such activity as it was there and then plunged into. All its available men and Inspector Cortelyou's three satellites were pressed into service and made to move at a rate they had never known. The telephone was never at rest; the neighboring railway stations were all warned, the neighboring police notified, and by the middle of the afternoon the billposters were posting up small bills all over the place. And soon after they had made their appearance in walked the bank clerk who had paid Stead the gold, and told his story of that episode of the day's proceedings.

Inspector Cortelyou heard him in silence. "And pray what time was that—to the minute, if you can be sure of it?" he asked.

The bank clerk was sure of it—absolutely sure—for he happened to notice the clock as Stead walked out. Twenty-five minutes to two to the minute by the bank clock.

"And what time was it when you let him get away?" demanded the inspector of the unfortunate young constable, who by virtue of his wound had been permitted to remain in the police station instead of being hurried about. "Can you be sure? Don't go making any mistakes, now!"

"It was just half past one, sir," answered the constable.

The inspector glanced at Illingworth.

"He's a cool customer," he said. "He must have walked straight into the bank as soon as he got out. I suppose you don't know which way he went," he continued, turning to the clerk—"up street or down street?"

But the clerk knew nothing as to that. And as the hours went by no news came in of Mr. Marshall Stead; and the wounded constable, who was very sore in more ways than one, gave it as his private opinion to a sympathetic comrade that Stead had had

a confederate somewhere at hand waiting with a motor car, and had took his hook on the instant.

Inspector Cortelyou was fuming and fretting in Illingworth's office that evening, waiting for news of the fugitive which seemed to be never coming, when a policeman ushered in Fisher, the footman from the castle, and intimated that he had brought a message.

"Yes?" said the inspector, who was in no mood to be disturbed. "What is it?"

Fisher, who had been regarding with wonder the unusual surroundings in which he found himself placed, made the great man from Scotland Yard a formal bow.

"Miss Mannersley's compliments, sir, and would you be kind enough to come up to the castle, sir?" said Fisher. "I have brought the brougham down for you."

Inspector Cortelyou growled a little. He had the greatest respect and even affection for Miss Mannersley in a fatherly way, but when he was on one job, and concentrating on it, he did not like to be called off to another.

"What is it?" he said. "Anything really important?"

"Miss Mannersley said, sir," answered Fisher, "that it was of the highest importance."

"All right, I'll come," answered the inspector. "I'll get back as soon as I can, Illingworth," he remarked as he went out. "They'll drive me back."

It was nearly dark when Inspector Cortelyou reached the castle. His mind had been fixed the whole day on the problem of Stead's disappearance. He had no idea that he was to be brought face to face with a further mystery.

Fisher led him straight to the morning room, where, sitting round a table on which stood a small box of japanned tin, such as men of law are supposed to keep deeds in, sat Miss Mannersley, Quinton, and a gray-haired gentleman whom the inspector had never seen before, and who was introduced to him at once as Mr. Barnwell, the late Sir Robert's solicitor. Phillipa pointed Inspector Cortelyou to a seat by her side.

"I am so much obliged to you for coming, inspector," she said, "because you are so clever at solving mysteries, and another has sprung up this evening which I cannot solve. You see, Mr. Barnwell and Mr. Quinton came to see me on business, and it was necessary to see if there were any of my dear father's papers which had not been examined yet. I knew of nothing except this box, which he always kept on his dressing table. I had not liked to open it. You will understand why.

"But these gentlemen thought it had better be opened, so I fetched it down here and opened it. The first thing I saw was this letter, which, you will see, is addressed to me, and was written only a month ago. I have so much respect for you and so much confidence in you, inspector, that I will give you this letter to read. Mr. Barnwell and Mr. Quinton have both read it."

Inspector Cortelyou took the letter with one of his old-fashioned bows, and, putting on his goggle spectacles, went over to the hearth to read it. And this is what he read:

MY DEAREST LOVE:

For some time, I do not know why, and it may be a mere foolish fancy on my part, I have had a strong premonition that I have not long to live, and that the end may come suddenly. Everything then, will, of course, fall into your hands, and I have seen enough of your good qualities to know that you will faithfully and well and wisely administer the very great wealth which will come to you.

As you know that the small deed box which I always keep on my dressing table contains my most private papers, I apprehend that in the event of my sudden death you will open it without delay. That is the reason why I am placing this letter in it. I pray God for both our sakes that there may never be reason for you to find it! But the premonition I have spoken of is there, and I must make proper provision.

What I want to tell you is this: About six months ago I purchased a collection of diamonds, which were once the property of a famous French queen—never mind which. There is no ill fortune attached to them. My object in buying them was to give them to my dear daughter on her twenty-first birthday. Now, it is naughty to tell the price of a present to the person to whom the present is given, but you will understand that I must tell you —well, not the price, but the worth of these diamonds, as determined by the best experts. They are worth thirty thousand pounds.

Now, if anything should happen to me suddenly, wear these diamonds, and remember

the pleasure that it gave your father to buy them for the dearest daughter in the world.

The diamonds are in the drawer marked "A" in my safe in the library. They are as safe there as they would be if they had been lodged in a bank.

My Phillipa's loving

FATHER.

Inspector Cortelyou came quietly back to the table, and as quietly laid the letter by Phillipa's side.

"Thank you, Miss Mannersley," he said. "Well?"

"Well, inspector," said Phillipa, "you may be sure that this letter was a great surprise to me. I immediately showed it to Mr. Barnwell and to Mr. Quinton, and they agreed that the first thing to be done was to open the safe in the library.

"As you and Mr. Illingworth have now removed the seals from the doors that was possible, and we went there at once, and I opened the safe with the key which was found in my father's private bunch. We opened the drawer referred to—the one marked 'A.' And we found it empty."

The solicitor and the manager were watching the detective narrowly. But Inspector Cortelyou showed no sign except one of polite interest, and it was a full minute before he spoke.

"Well, Miss Mannersley," he said at last, "it is highly probable that your father transferred those diamonds elsewhere. He may have reconsidered matters and sent them to his bank."

"In that case," said Phillipa promptly, "I should have learned of the fact from the bank before now."

Inspector Cortelyou smiled.

"True," he said, "so you would. But there are other places to which your father could have transferred them."

"That," said Mr. Barnwell, "is precisely what I said to Miss Mannersley. There are safe deposits, for instance, in which Sir Robert may have placed them."

But Phillipa shook her head.

"No," she said with decision. "For in that case my father would have altered the last paragraph of this letter. He was the most methodical of men. No, those diamonds have been stolen—stolen!"

What was the queer-looking little detective thinking of? His face had suddenly grown animated; his eyes began to blaze; he clapped his right hand to something in his breast pocket and jumped to his feet.

"Let me see that safe," he said. "Come—quick!"

They all set off to the library. Quinton got there first and switched on the electric light. Inspector Cortelyou hurried up to the safe, and Phillipa brought out her bunch of keys. But the detective almost pushed the girl aside.

"No, no!" he said. "No—wait!"

He drew out of his trousers pocket a bunch of keys and, selecting one—a curiously fashioned thing—inserted it in the lock. The safe door swung slowly open amidst the exclamations of Phillipa and the two men.

"There!" said the detective. "Those keys were taken from Marshall Stead this morning. He's got the diamonds, and I've a pretty good notion now, though I hadn't five minutes since, where they are."

CHAPTER XXI.

A THEORY UPSET.

THE inspector set off for the hall door and the motor brougham which was awaiting him there with such haste that he had already taken his seat when Quinton caught him up.

"May I come with you?" he asked. "I dare say I shan't be in the way, and, in any case, you are going in my direction."

"Come, by all means," answered Inspector Cortelyou. "I have told the man where I want to go. You may come with me if you like."

"Yes," said Quinton. "Where is that?"

"I am going to Marshall Stead's lodgings," replied the detective. "And I hope I may find those diamonds there."

"You do?" exclaimed Quinton half incredulously. "You think he got them?"

"Certainly. I figure it out this way," said the inspector. "Stead, from all I can learn, was very much in the late Sir Robert Mannersley's confidence. In fact, he seems to have treated him more like one of the family—almost like a son, in fact."

"Yes," said Quinton. "Yes, that is so."

"What more likely, then, than that the baronet should take him into his confidence about those diamonds?" said the detective. "It is extremely likely that he would do so. What is absolutely certain is that Stead provided himself with a duplicate key of the safe, as you have just seen. All this is only serving to elucidate a mystery which is apart from the murder."

"You said just now that you knew where the diamonds were," said Quinton. "Does that mean—"

"Ah, I spoke rather hurriedly," interrupted the inspector. "I ought to have said that I have a very good idea where they will be found; as Stead was arrested and locked up very suddenly, I don't think he'll have had time to move them. I believe I shall find them in the orchard at his lodgings."

"What, planted?" said Quinton.

"Just so," replied Inspector Cortelyou. "And I believe that a certain diagram now in my pocketbook refers to the exact spot. It's a very curious thing, but a lot of men like Stead, if they secrete something of value, cannot refrain from making a more or less elaborate diagram of its whereabouts and preserving it instead of trusting to memory. Now, in this case—"

And he proceeded to tell Quinton about the diagram, and by the light of the carriage reading lamp showed it to him.

"In that orchard," he said, "there is a disused well; that circle evidently represents it. The orchard has a tumble-down wicket gate; these strokes evidently represent that. I believe we shall find the diamonds hidden between the well and the wicket-gate."

Quinton made no answer to this; it seemed to him that Stead might have found a much more likely place wherein to bestow the stolen diamonds, and that he was more the sort of man to place them in a bank than in a hole in the ground. But he reflected that Inspector Cortelyou was an astute man, who had good grounds for whatever he believed, and he looked forward with interest to the next stage of the matter.

The inspector had ordered the motor brougham to stop at some distance from Stead's lodgings. He wanted, he said, to approach the house quietly.

"There ought to be a man of mine somewhere about," he said, as they drew near the garden in front of the house. "I've had the place watched ever since I heard of Stead's escape, because I'd an idea that he might come here. And now that I know about the diamonds. I shouldn't wonder if he does."

A man's figure suddenly rose out of the darkness from behind a clump of laurel.

"That you, Perrett?" asked Inspector Cortelyou. "Anything happened?"

"No, sir," replied Perrett. "Nothing's happened."

"Well, I'll send some one to relieve you presently," said the inspector. "I must have an eye kept on this place all night. In the meantime you can borrow a lantern from the house and bring it round to the orchard at the back. There's something there I want to examine. Come this way, Mr. Quinton—we needn't trouble the house people."

The inspector led the way round the house to the little orchard which lay in front of the windows of Stead's sitting room.

"Now, here's the gate," he said, laying his hand on the crazy wicket. "You'll see when Perrett brings that lantern that—"

He stopped suddenly, grasping Quinton's arm. In the darkness, soft and clinging, of the summer night they saw a man rise as it were out of the ground in the center of the orchard and move swiftly away.

"Stop him—stop him!" exclaimed the detective, rushing forward. "Get to him, Mr. Quinton—you're more active than I am. Hi, Perrett, Perrett!"

The figure in front crashed through the fence at the opposite side of the orchard and was gone. Quinton, at the first word from Inspector Cortelyou, had darted forward; strong, athletic, and in good trim, he meant to run the fugitive down. But in the darkness he caught a foot in the hedgerow and fell heavily. When he rose, the quarry, judging by the sound of his footsteps, was a long distance across the field behind the orchard. He ran on, the inspector and Perrett toiling in his rear.

The field ended in a long, narrow wood, beyond which, as Quinton knew, lay the river. It being then the height of summer, the trees were in full leaf, and would have made excellent cover even in broad daylight; at that hour it was, of course, impossible to see anything. The three men paused at the edge of the wood and listened intently.

"There's not much chance of getting him here," said the detective, peering about him in the darkness. "He can hide easily enough among these trees. Did you hurt yourself in that fall, Mr. Quinton?"

"I dare say I've barked some skin off my leg," answered Quinton. "It feels like it. I should have had him if it hadn't been for that hedge."

"Do you think it was Stead?" asked the detective, still hanging about the edge of the wood as if loath to leave it.

"No," answered the manager. "It was not Stead—I'm certain of that. It was a much bigger man than Stead in every way."

"Well, we might as well go back and see what he was after," said Inspector Cortelyou. "He was up to something, and we can't do any good here. Hurry on, Perrett, and get that lantern."

When they reached the orchard Perrett had procured a lantern, and Inspector Cortelyou proceeded to examine the ground lying between the little wicket-gate and the old well.

"Here you are!" he suddenly exclaimed, drawing his companions' attention to a small cavity in the soil, by the side of which lay a small gardening trowel. "What luck! If we'd only been ten, even five minutes sooner. That's where those stones have been planted, Mr. Quinton, and whoever the man that we followed just now is, he's in collusion with Stead and knows where Stead's got to. Confound it—I'd have given a pension to lay hands upon him!"

At that moment a voice sounded from the road outside the orchard.

"Is Inspector Cortelyou there among you?"

"Yes," answered the inspector. "Who's that?"

"Mr. Illingworth sent me to find you, sir," replied the voice of the young constable upon whom Stead had successfully carried out his plan of escape. "Dr. Hibbert wants you urgently at the cottage, where the strange man's lying, sir."

Inspector Cortelyou muttered something to himself and left the orchard, followed by Quinton and Perrett.

"Where is Dr. Hibbert?" he asked the constable.

"Gone on to the cottage, sir. He begged you would join him there at once," replied the man.

"You don't know what he wants?" asked the detective.

"Well, sir, I heard something said about the man's having come to his senses, and something about a confession, but Mr. Illingworth hurried off," the constable said. "I think they're going to take his deposition, sir, because Mr. Chalmers, the magistrate, has gone down."

"All right," said Inspector Cortelyou. "You can come with me if you like, Mr. Quinton; it's only round the corner of the waste. Now, Perrett, you know what you have to do, and where you can find me if you want me."

He moved swiftly away in the darkness, and Quinton, after a word to the driver of the brougham, whom they passed at the end of the lane, followed him. Inspector Cortelyou was unusually quiet, but he spoke on coming within sight of the lights in the cottage window.

"I wonder what we are going to hear now?" he said. "I have come across this man Steinthal before. I was once mixed up in a case with him. He is a bit of a crank, and I should say not too well balanced, and, like all of a certain class of inventors, he could be awkward to deal with."

"I have heard of him, of course," said Quinton. "He used to pester Sir Robert a good deal."

Dr. Hibbert was awaiting them at the cottage door. Within stood Illingworth and an elderly gentleman whom Inspector Cortelyou recognized as one of the magistrates whom he had seen on the bench. Hibbert came forward.

"I am glad you have come," he said.

"The patient has come to his senses, and wants to see you. By some means or other he managed to fall out of bed this evening in the momentary absence of the nurse, and the shock has restored his memory. But there is another complication—his heart is seriously affected, and I am afraid of collapse. He is very urgent that a magistrate should take his deposition, and Mr. Chalmers is here, ready to do so, but the man won't speak until he has seen you. So will you come up with me?"

Inspector Cortelyou followed the doctor upstairs to the sleeping chamber which he had previously visited. The sick man was lying in an attitude which suggested indifference as much as weariness. He looked apathetically at the detective as he walked gently up to the bed, and greeted him in an unconcerned voice.

"They told me you were here, Cortelyou," he said, "and I thought I would rather speak first to you of what I have to say than to strangers. You know how I came here?"

"Yes," answered the inspector. "You fell over a quarry, and had a nasty accident, and lost your memory."

"Yes," answered the patient, with a grim smile, "and this evening I fell out of bed and bumped my head, and that has brought my memory back. Oh, yes, I remember everything now. But I want to make a deposition before a magistrate, Cortelyou—it will clear matters up."

"But why such haste?" asked the inspector.

"Simply because I am going to die," answered the man. "You look incredulous; but I know! Now, there's just one thing I want you to do for me. Hand me that waistcoat, if you please."

The detective handed him the garment he pointed out, and from one of the pockets he took a piece of folded paper, from which he produced a pawnticket. This he passed over to Inspector Cortelyou.

"This refers to a case of mathematical implements of some value; you will see where they are pawned," he said. "But inside is the formula of a new explosive. As I am going to die, you can hand it over to any of your chief men interested. It will revolutionize warfare. Now let me see the magistrate."

At the detective's signal Dr. Hibbert fetched up the three men waiting below, and at the sick man's wish Illingworth immediately began to take down his deposition. It was not long, but to those who heard it it possessed a deep significance, and it made Inspector Cortelyou think a good deal about certain conclusions to which he had come.

"My name is Julius Steinthal, and I hold several degrees from German and English universities," dictated the patient. "I have taught science in both countries, and at one time was well off. Lately I have been extremely poor, and, having no friends, I have lived in the Rowton lodging houses. I have no property.

"During the last year or two I have vainly endeavored to sell to some great colliery proprietor a new patent of immense value. I particularly brought this invention before the notice of Sir Robert Mannersley, with whom I have, in better days, stayed as a guest. I considered that he treated me with neglect. Finally I raised money and came to Mannersley, to make a personal appeal to him. I chanced to meet him near the castle. He absolutely declined to entertain my offer, and was very haughty toward me. I wandered about in the fields until nightfall, and then, being desperate, resolved to make a last appeal to him. I approached the castle by the lawn, and knowing the place, I entered by the open library window.

"I entered his study; he received me coldly, but on hearing that I was in want, sat down to write me a check. I was standing behind him; a dagger which he used as a paper knife lay close by. I was suddenly seized with ungovernable fury, and I picked it up, plunged it into his back, and rushed from the house. After that I do not remember anything until this evening. But this is the truth. I killed him in a fit of sudden madness."

There was a deep silence while Steinthal made this confession, and it lasted until after he had formally signed it. And when that was done Inspector Cortelyou, making a sign to Quinton, went quietly out of the

room and into the night. A certain theory of his had been upset, and he was now on the edge of a new field of discovery.

CHAPTER XXII.

TRIUMPH—AND AN EXPLOSION.

BOTH Quinton and the detective were very quiet as they went back to the brougham, and for some time neither man spoke. Then the manager said:

"I suppose you do not wish to go up to the castle again to-night, and I don't think I shall. It's getting late, and there's no need to trouble Miss Mannersley with all these horrors before morning."

"Just so," agreed Inspector Cortelyou. "There isn't."

"Then we'll get the driver to take us to my rooms, and you shall have a whisky and soda and a cigar," said Quinton. "You look tired."

The detective made no secret of the fact that he was tired, and when they reached the manager's rooms he dropped into a chair as if glad to rest.

"I'm not only tired," he said, as he took the tumbler which Quinton had mixed for him, "I'm disappointed. I fully expected to hang Marshall Stead."

"That's a truculent remark, isn't it?" said Quinton, smiling.

"Not from a professional point," answered the inspector. "No; I had fully made up my mind that Stead was guilty."

"You quite believe Steinthal's confession, then?" asked Quinton.

Inspector Cortelyou nodded as he lighted a cigar.

"Quite," he said. "Quite. Oh, yes, that's the truth. And now, of course, putting a lot of things together, I begin to see how things really were, and how skillfully Stead turned them to his advantage."

"You mean that you can reconstruct the crime and the surroundings of that evening?" asked the manager.

"I think so. Stead doubtless arrived in the library immediately after Steinthal rushed from it," answered Inspector Cortelyou. "The open window and the deerstalker hat gave him an idea that something was wrong. My own belief is that Steinthal left the study door open, and that Stead saw what had happened and closed it. I also believe that it was during the next few minutes that two things happened. One was that it was then that the fingerprints were made on the secret staircase, into which he looked to see if anybody was concealed there; the other, that it was then that he abstracted the diamonds from the safe in the library."

"What! After Sir Robert's death?" exclaimed Quinton.

"Certainly! It was a grand double chance for Stead. Sir Robert's murder relieved him of an always possible danger—the danger of detection as regards his figures—for I have no doubt we shall find that he has been a most accomplished hand in that direction—and it also gave him the opportunity of annexing the diamonds, which Sir Robert had doubtless shown to him. I have no doubt whatever that Stead had those diamonds in his pocket, Mr. Quinton, when he came into the study in response to your call for help. Ah! I wish I could lay hands on him."

"He surely can't be far away," said Quinton. "He can't have got off from any of the neighboring stations, and if he's walked across country he's sure to be recognized."

"Aye, if we could only have caught that fellow who was in the orchard to-night!" said the detective. "Or, rather, if we could have followed him, I'll wager anything he'd have led us straight to Stead. Stead's lying hid somewhere about."

"Until he can get off, I suppose," said Quinton. "Of course I don't know anything about such things, but it seems to me that it's quite easy for a man to wait until nightfall and then to go quietly away from a place."

"It all depends on his appearance, his behavior, and his supply of ready cash," replied the inspector. "But Stead hasn't gone away from Mannersley yet, sir—he's somewhere about. We shall find him yet—and those diamonds, too. That's all I care about now—I've lost all interest in the other case."

"Dr. Hibbert, sir," announced Quinton's

landlady, ushering the young doctor into the sitting room.

Hibbert came in, looking tired and fagged, and nodded to both men. He drew off his gloves and laid them on the table.

"Help yourself to whisky and soda, Hibbert," said Quinton. "There are cigarettes. I know you don't smoke cigars."

"I'll smoke a pipe," said Hibbert. He mixed himself a drink, and swallowed half the contents of the tumbler absent-mindedly. "I say," he continued, looking round at the others, "Steinthal's gone!"

Inspector Cortelyou showed no sign; Quinton looked perplexed.

"Gone?" he said, inquiringly. "Gone?"

"Dead!" answered Hibbert, laconically. "Just after you left."

The detective puffed out a cloud of cigar smoke and looked at the doctor attentively.

"How was it?" he asked.

Hibbert sat down and lighted his pipe; it was plain that he had been upset.

"After you went," he answered, "Chalmers and Illingworth and I went downstairs. Of course, Illingworth knew Steinthal couldn't move or anything, and he wanted to consult with Chalmers about some formality or other. I didn't understand, but they wanted me. I wasn't away from him more than seven or eight minutes, but he was just dying when I got back. Suicide, of course."

"Suicide?" exclaimed Quinton.

"Cyanide of potassium," answered Hibbert. "It was impossible to do anything. He must have had it concealed somewhere, but I can't think where, unless it was in a hollow tooth."

Inspector Cortelyou thought of how the man's clawlike hands had fingered the old waistcoat, and he said nothing.

"Well, I'll go," said Hibbert, finishing his whisky and soda. "I thought I'd just drop in and tell you."

There was a short silence after the young doctor had gone. The detective seemed in no mood for conversation, and Quinton watched his wrinkled face with some curiosity.

"I suppose this will lead to Sir Clinton Mannersley's release, inspector?" he remarked at last.

"Oh, yes," answered the detective. "Of course—of course. That was only a question of time."

"It is a pity that the other affair—you know what I mean—still hangs over him," said Quinton.

Inspector Cortelyou smiled oracularly. "When I catch Marshall Stead," he said, "that charge won't hang over Sir Clinton. Stead was the man."

He rose to go, saying that he still had work to do.

"Well, matters are clearing up, at any rate," said the manager, shaking hands.

"Wait till I catch Stead," answered Cortelyou.

But on the morrow, and the next day, and the next, no news came to him which brought him any nearer the fugitive. The Mannersley mysteries were by that time noised abroad all over the country, and vigilant watch was being kept everywhere for Stead, but Stead had apparently disappeared as completely as if he had been caught up in a flying machine and carried off to Central Africa.

Inspector Cortelyou left no stone unturned in Mannersley itself. Certain that the cashier had some accomplice or confederates in the place, he turned his attention to the two colliers whom Black Moses had heard in conversation with respect to rebutting Ginger King's evidence. But those gentlemen had disappeared.

The detective was not surprised to learn that their disappearance, so far as he could ascertain, had taken place on the afternoon or evening of the day on which Stead had effected his escape from the police station. They were both single men, living in lodgings; from all the police could ascertain, they had simply disappeared suddenly, without reason or excuse, and nobody in the village had noticed their departure. Inspector Cortelyou felt that this had a good deal to do with Stead's disappearance, but the two men seemed to have vanished just as inexplicably.

The detective had no reason to complain of want of help—the fact was that every man in the colliery village seemed to imbibe the idea that he was specially gifted with detective powers, and began to take

upon himself duties for which nature had not quite fitted him.

Several bold spirits, considering that it would be a pity to waste the opportunity of exercising their undoubted gifts, stayed away from their work for shift after shift, and instead of going down into the bowels of the earth to get coal, went about the surrounding country trying to catch Stead. Most of these expeditions wound up at some roadside inn, where theories were ventilated and methods explained, and none of them ended in the triumphant capture of the cashier.

On the evening of the day before that on which Sir Clinton Mannersley was to be again brought before the magistrates, Quinton came to Inspector Cortelyou looking somewhat disturbed.

"I have just called on Mr. Illingworth," he said, "but as he has gone out into the country and won't be back until late, I came to see you, inspector."

"Yes?" said Inspector Cortelyou. "Anything wrong?"

"I am afraid there may be to-morrow," answered the manager. "You know I get to hear a good deal of what the men are thinking, and what they mean to do, through sidewinds. And I have heard something this afternoon which rather alarms me."

"About the hearing to-morrow, I expect," said the inspector.

"Yes," replied Quinton. "I don't suppose more than one-third of the men will go down to-morrow. There'll be a tremendous crowd to give a welcome to Sir Clinton. Some of the men are for stopping the cab and taking the horses out and drawing the cab to the court in triumph."

"Oh!" said the detective. "Then I'm afraid they'll be disappointed. There won't be any cab. And—this is a secret, of course—Sir Clinton's here already. He was brought over quietly this evening, and he's at the police station now. Of course, he knows that he will be discharged to-morrow. So does everybody know it. The more intelligent of the men know it."

"Yes, but—it's the other affair," said Quinton, diffidently. "That's where the danger is, inspector."

"What danger? What other affair?" asked Inspector Cortelyou.

"The previous affair—and his escape," explained Quinton. "There is an idea—a report—among the men that Sir Clinton, after his discharge, will be immediately re-arrested and sent back to complete his term of penal servitude, and they are determined to prevent it."

Inspector Cortelyou stroked his chin.

"Why, certainly, there will be some little amount of formality in that respect," he said, "but as a matter of fact, it only will be formal, because I have already got things so far completed in the evidence against Stead on the point of forgery that the authorities have decided to grant Sir Clinton a free pardon—that's the official way of saying that there's nothing to be pardoned for," he added, with a smile. "But why are your men always so very ready to interfere?"

Quinton laughed and shook his head.

"It's their way," he answered. "They have very rough-and-ready ideas of justice, and if they get an idea into their heads that anybody is being badly treated they resent it to the point of actual interference. And I don't want any rows, inspector," he added. "So far, all our men have behaved well."

"There's no need why they should behave otherwise now, sir," replied the detective. "Haven't you got one or two trusty men to whom you could say a word or two, giving them the hint to spread the news among the rest of their fellow workers that everything's all right?"

Quinton reflected; then he thought of Black Moses Pogmore, and said he would go and find him. The result was that the crowd which gathered around the court next morning, though much bigger in dimensions than at the first hearing, was quiet and orderly, and chiefly concerned in giving Sir Clinton a rousing reception when he came out—a free man.

Inside, the court was packed to the doors. The bench was again filled; there was no room at the solicitors' table nor anywhere in the well of the court; the galleries and back benches were filled to their utmost capacity. Of all the people who had been

there before only Marshall Stead was missing.

The merely formal proceedings which led to Clinton's discharge from custody were soon over, and then the court became a pandemonium from which the police and officials found it difficult to make a way for the released man and his cousin. And suddenly Phillipa, as in a dream, found herself standing on the steps outside the court, with Clinton on one side of her and Quinton on the other, and in front a vast-stretching crowd of men in their Sunday best, who were shouting as if at a popular St. Leger winner. The men would have a speech—Sir Clinton must speak to them — they must and would hear his voice! Then they cheered again, until he laughingly showed signs of obeying their will by climbing to the balustrades and removing his hat.

"Friends and neighbors!" he began.

But what he was going to say was never said. At that moment a mighty reverberation, as of the loudest thunder, burst as it seemed all around them; and looking round with blanched faces men saw a gigantic column of smoke break from the mouth of the colliery shaft, and in the moment that followed a sudden shrill cry pierced every ear:

"The pit! The pit! An explosion at the pit! And my man's gone down!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

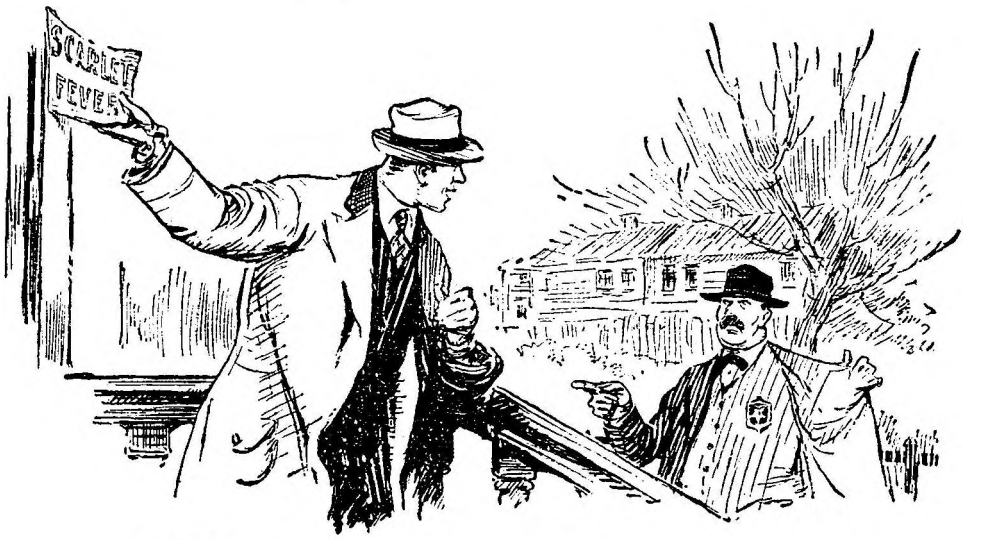
WHEN ALL THE WEST IS LIKE A ROSE

WHEN all the west is like a rose
Upon the sunset's bush that grows,
I close the office, lock the door,
And to your arms come home once more.

And if your kiss you shorten to
Inform me that the rent is due,
Or that the cleaner spoiled my suit,
Or that the latest jar of fruit
Fermented; or the cellar door
Won't shut and *stay* shut any more,
The lock's worn out, or something—or
The neighbor's hens ate up our peas—
Do you suppose that all of these
Can make me wish for other days
When nothing—such are lovers' ways—
When not the world or all its powers
Could interrupt a kiss of ours?

Do you suppose I'd wish once more
To have things as they were before?
Before I knew what married life
Could be, before I had a wife?
But though oppressed by all the woes
Of wedded life, do you suppose
That I would change things if I could?
You bet I would, you bet I would!

Mary Carolyn Davies.



Quarantine

By APPLETON WAYNE

ARTHUR ASPINWALL gazed meditatively across the soft-boiled egg in front of him at his wife. It was several seconds before he spoke.

The morning sun, streaking over the breakfast table, outlined a thoughtful face—dark hair and eyes. About the mouth, however, there was a suggestion of something else; the twitching of the lips insinuated a sense of humor.

It was this that gave him away now, even while the eyes tried to be serious. Aspinwall sat poised, pencil in hand; then he picked up a piece of paper in front of him, upon which he had been writing, and began to read:

". . . And, Aunt Edith, dear, while the water company hasn't officially retained me as yet, that will come almost any day now, I feel sure. Still, if other business keeps up as it does, I don't know whether I'll be able to take on anything more or not.

"Have been so busy so far that I haven't even been able to join the country club, much as I realize June needs the diversion.

"As I've said before, I can never be grateful enough to you for the success you've made possible.

"Your affectionate nephew,

"ARTHUR."

The dark eyes glanced up from the paper. "There, how's that?" he concluded.

"That," replied his wife, salting her own soft-boiled egg, "shows that shortened rations haven't dulled your imagination." She laughed easily, showing her white teeth to advantage. She was silent for a second, as she adjusted the tips of her blond bobbed hair, which obstinately refused to remain in curl.

"Still," she went on, her blue eyes twinkling, "some of what you said was true; about the amount of your business making it impossible to join the country club, for instance. If you'd had to depend on what you've earned, you couldn't have joined the Red Cross."

"True, true," Aspinwall admitted.

"I wish you didn't think it was necessary to lie to your aunt that way," the girl went on; "after all she's done for you."

Aspinwall smiled. "It's for her own good," he said. "If she thinks I'm a failure she won't put me in charge of her business, and thus she'll be deprived of my services. We want to make her think I'm doing well, if we ever expect to look to her for any help." The young man paused an instant for breath.

"Anyhow," he continued, "that about the water company wasn't an absolute fairy tale. Martin did say something about it to me one day, you remember; said they needed a bright young man in the legal end of their business, and that they were considering me. I'll admit he hasn't mentioned it since, and of course professional ethics forbid my suggesting it.

"Still—you can never tell; he may come around here some day next week with a proposition that 'll mean real, hard money—think of it, five-dollar bills, ten-dollar bills, twenty-dollar bills, all you want. The very first day they pay me I'm going right down town and buy that platinum solitaire you liked."

His wife laughed. "The first day I see any real money floating around I'm going down and buy a tenderloin steak—if we can stand such a feast when the day comes." She toyed with her spoon for several seconds. "What was it that last dozen of eggs cost?"

"'Nevada Divorce Cases, 1916-1917,' I think," the man replied reflectively. "I'll have to get rid of the 'Ohio Penal Code' to-day. You know, really, there's an awful discrepancy between the original cost of law books, and what you can get out of them." He smiled thoughtfully.

"That was an awfully good idea of yours about pawning the wedding presents, though; you're not expected to keep what's given you nowadays, anyway, are you? Just imagine how much worse off we'd be now if I'd been successful right away.

"At the present moment we'd have two sets of mission book ends, three desk lamps with parchment shades, a pair of brass andirons, copies of all last year's best sellers, and who knows how many assorted vases? We can tell your friends that our first maid was very careless of vases. Maids are supposed to be, you know; never can hold a—"

Aspinwall's reflections on the servant problem were interrupted at this point by the ringing of the front door bell, so we shall probably never know what else he had to say on the subject.

II.

When he returned to the breakfast table, all trace of a grin had left his face. "This," he said, indicating a yellow sheet of paper in his hand, "is going to make me do what I supposedly went to law school for, but what I haven't been called upon to do since I was graduated—and that is to *think*." He glanced dramatically at his wife.

"It's a telegram from aunty, crisp and to the point. 'Arrive in Bryon four o'clock this afternoon. Meet me at station. Aunt Edith,' In other words, the fairy godmother swoops down on her protégés, finds they haven't been telling her the truth, and promptly disinherits them."

"It isn't really as bad as all that, is it?" June cut in.

Aspinwall nodded solemnly. "I'm afraid it is," he said slowly. "If we had enough left to pawn I might be able to keep her away from the office while she's here, and make some show of prosperity around the house, but when aunty makes a visit she does the job up properly—stays for weeks and expects the fat of the land. If she'd only given us some warning we might have told her the house had burned down, and for Heaven's sake not to come, but as it is, she's probably on the train now."

He drummed on the table with his fingers. "It looks remarkably as if the theoretical successes of the famous lawyer were over—possibly as if he'd prevented any real ones in the future; that is, any by way of aunty."

June crossed to her husband's chair, and let one arm slide about his neck. "Why don't you tell her the truth?" she asked. "There's nothing very disgraceful about it—you haven't been able to find a case yet, but you will in a week or two. You've written her letters about successes just because you didn't want to make her feel badly. She'll understand; I'm sure she will."

Aspinwall shook his head dubiously.

" Not Aunt Edith," he said evenly. " Aunty doesn't possess a forgiving disposition. Anyhow, she wouldn't mind the letters so much as she would the simple fact that I'm a failure.

" You see, aunty worships success; it's a sort of religion with her. She positively eats up all these magazine articles on ' How I Made a Fortune in the Safety Pin Business ' and all that sort of stuff.

" When she married, her husband had a small fruit farm in California. Well, they'd been married only about a month or two when he conceived the idea of raising grapefruit in quantity. At that time, people said it couldn't be done, that the grapefruit was a monstrosity, something to adorn the Christmas breakfast of the rich, but that the country as a whole would never take to it.

" Uncle stuck to his ideas, though—didn't see any reason why the poor people shouldn't enjoy their grapefruit, and he went ahead—sort of a pioneer, you understand. Now, the poor people did like their grapefruit, and the first thing uncle knew he was worth almost a million dollars.

" Aunt Edith didn't play Lady Bountiful to the rest of the family, though—not on your life. Dad never could hold onto any money of his own, and she didn't see any reason why she should waste any of hers on him.

" Then I came along, and dad thought he was doing something exceedingly clever and original in giving me the middle name of Harvey, the same as Aunt Edith's. He didn't fool aunty, though; she was onto that. It was old stuff, and she knew it.

" She watched me grow up, and held on tight to uncle's money. It must have tickled her in a way, though, for when I made pretty good grades at law school she got the idea that I was going to be a second grapefruit king or something of the sort, and in a fit of generosity she fitted out my office, and gave me a thousand dollars. She let me understand at that time, too, that if I made good I could expect a job from her later.

" You see, aunty was a wise old girl, and she wanted to be sure I had something in me before she trusted me with her precious grapefruit. Well, that job's what I've been working toward ever since, for it means real money, and lots of it. Otherwise, I'd never have followed aunty's suggestion and come to a jay town like this.

" So you see, it just amounts to this—we've got to sidetrack aunty until I make my first ten thousand. If we can't, I haven't anything more to expect from her or her grapefruit, either," he added.

June watched her husband thoughtfully for several seconds. " Then, in other words, you mean something's got to be done."

Aspinwall smiled blandly. " Your intelligence under the circumstances is most remarkable, my dear. However "—swallowing the last remnant of his soft-boiled egg—" we can talk that over later."

He arose from the table and began to remove the breakfast dishes to the kitchen.

" You know," he went on, " they say one can't think well on a full stomach, so we ought to have plenty of ideas on the subject. Now in a case of this sort my legal training suggests that we examine the evidence and then look for a point of attack."

" And the evidence," his wife caught him up, " boils to the simple fact that aunty arrives at four. We've got to accept th' I guess, for we can't wreck the train."

" Admitted."

He removed his coat and tied a blue kitchen apron about his waist. " Furthermore "—turning on the water in the kitchen sink—" we can't very well persuade aunty to stop at the hotel after she gets here. She preaches economy, along with her other ideas, and she practices it, too. Nothing short of sleeping sickness or leprosy would keep her out of this house—"

There was a sudden crash as a coffee cup dropped from Aspinwall's hand and went smashing into the sink.

III.

" ARTHUR ASPINWALL!" his wife ejaculated. " When china costs what it does at present, I should think you'd try to be careful of what little we have left."

Aspinwall held up his hand. " Be calm, my dear," he said soothingly. " I think I'm on the track of an idea. Come here."

He drew aside the white chintz curtains

at the kitchen window and pointed at a heap of refuse in the alley behind the house.

" Do your eyes see what mine do?"

June nodded. " Yes, but—"

" Well," he interrupted, " unless I'm mistaken, that yellow card out there is a *Scarlet Fever* sign taken down from the house in back of us yesterday morning. Now, you follow my idea, I hope. The gods have given us just what we need. I'm going to get that sign, and tack it up on the house.

" Then, when aunty arrives, I'll walk her past, point to the sign and say you're sick in bed. Result: aunty goes to the hotel, and of course pays her own expenses there. Then, when I assure her that the case isn't serious, she'll go right home and we won't be bothered for a month or two. And inside a month, I'll surely have that job with the water company; it may not mean much money at first, but it 'll be something—"

Aspinwall said no more. After planting an enthusiastic kiss on June's surprised lips, he hurried out the back door, without even bothering to take off his apron. A few minutes later he returned with the sign.

" This," he remarked, holding it up to his wife for inspection, " is quite the alligator's adenoids."

June smiled. " It looks quite official, all right—especially down there where it says all about ' warning ' and ' twenty-five-dollars fine.' That ought to keep aunty away, if anything will."

He laughed as he divested himself of his apron. " Now, my dear," he said, " if you'll come out on the porch with me I'll put this right up."

It was perhaps ten minutes later that Arthur Aspinwall kissed his wife good-by and set off for his office, whistling blithefully. This business of going to his office, every day, was becoming more and more an empty formality. Six months out of law school and six months into matrimony had meant so far nothing but bills. As he ex pressed it to a friend, " he sat in his office in front of the telephone, day after day, but no one had called up to offer him a case."

When Aspinwall inserted his key into the frosted glass door of his office on the third, and top, floor of Bryon's newest office building, A. D. 1880, he involuntarily threw out his shoulders with a little show of pride. It tickled his vanity just the least little bit to see his name there in large black letters.

Once inside the office and seated in a comfortable chair, he rolled a rather emaciated cigarette. He had long since given up the practice of smoking the fat, senatorial cigars he liked so well at first. The pale smoke from the cigarette encircled his head in a blue wreath.

There were times when it had begun to occur vaguely to Aspinwall that perhaps Bryon, with its ten thousand inhabitants, was not exactly the place for a young man who had concentrated chiefly in corporation law. The small town idea had been one of his aunt's pet notions, though, and he had realized that he had to do what she wanted if he were ever to expect anything more of her.

She said it gave a man a chance to show what was in him—if he accepted the New York offer with an established firm he would be nothing more than a cog in a wheel. Aspinwall smiled whimsically, there might be some truth in her statement, but on the other hand, cogs never went hungry or did without luncheon in the middle of the day because they couldn't afford it.

It was at a little after three that Aspinwall was startled from his reverie by a knock at the door. He sat up hastily and brushed the ashes from his coat. He almost hated to hope that the knock would mean a client, for he had been disappointed so often. Still, he reflected, it didn't sound exactly like a bill collector's knock.

" Come in," he called, settling back at his desk over a pile of papers in the attitude of profound reflection.

The door opened and a youth in a blue uniform entered the room.

" Special delivery letter," he said.

Aspinwall sighed. He signed for the letter, and ripped it open.

After he finished reading it he let loose a series of expletives.

The letter was from his aunt, and it ended:

> . . . And although I always had the idea that you would make good, these overtures from the water company make me certain, for large corporations always choose good men.

Don't accept them, however, under any circumstances. Will leave for Bryon to-morrow to make you a better proposition, I am sure. It's been my idea for a long time to put you in charge of my fruit interests in California, and now I've decided definitely. Get ready to leave immediately, for I intend to be in Bryon only one day, leaving the next, if you can settle up your affairs upon so short a notice. Will wire the time of my train to-morrow. Love.

AUNT EDITH.

IV.

ASPINWALL allowed no time for contemplation. Within five minutes after reading the letter he was well on his way home. Upon reaching his modest, white frame mansion he mounted the steps two at a time and made at once for the sign he had tacked up in the morning.

Aspinwall had scarcely seized the yellow cardboard when he heard a voice from the sidewalk.

"Hey, what you think you're doing?"

"Nothing special," he answered docilely. "I was just trying to get rid of this—this—"

He halted in the middle of his sentence to find himself gazing at the silvered badge of a quarantine inspector. He smiled foolishly.

"I've just been looking over the neighborhood," the gruff voice proceeded. "We've wondered just why the epidemic's spread so much around here lately, and now I've got a pretty good idea. It's on account of people like you who haven't any respect for what that sign means. I'm going to make an example out of you for the benefit of the neighborhood."

Aspinwall tried to force a smile. "Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed unnaturally. "That's awfully funny, really. You see, the joke's on you because no one's sick here. I just thought my aunt—"

The quarantine officer did not join in Aspinwall's evident mirth. "Joke," he interrupted, "I can't say that I see any joke here; I'm afraid you'll have to go along and explain it to the judge. If he thinks it's funny—why, maybe he'll let you go. When this sign is tacked up it's tacked up to stay until the proper authority takes it down."

With that the officer removed a hammer from his pocket and carefully tacked back the corner Aspinwall had ripped loose.

Aspinwall's grin froze on his face. "Yes, but my aunt," he interrupted; "you see, my aunt was coming to visit us, and I thought it would be an awfully good joke— Oh, June, June," he called, "come out here and tell this man you're not sick!"

He finished by rapping on the window pane and his wife soon appeared at the door.

Aspinwall's face lit up on sight of her. "Listen, June," he said, taking her by the hand and leading her forward, "this is a quarantine officer, and he won't let me take down the sign. Let him feel your pulse, quick. You see, aunty isn't coming—that is, she is coming, but she isn't going to stay—we're all leaving for California tomorrow to take care of the grapefruit—I just got this letter, special delivery"—he turned to the officer—"And I've got to meet her in half an hour, so you'd better let me go or—"

The officer had remained stolid and taciturn throughout the whole discourse. At this point, however, he lost his patience. "Listen," he said, interrupting brusquely, "I've got to phone for a cop to take you to the station, and that's all there is to it. While you're gone I'll look over the premises, and you can make your own report to the judge. Now, if you'll kindly step inside, I'll phone from here."

Aspinwall cast a helpless glance at his wife. "You talk to him, June," he said.

June did attempt to talk to the officer, but in the course of fifteen minutes another uniformed individual arrived to take them both to the police station.

They were confronted by a staid, long-faced police court judge who read them the charge. Aspinwall grinned sheepishly.

"Really, your honor," he began apologetically, "you see no one was sick." His eye darted to the clock on the wall which said ten minutes to four. "I tacked up the sign myself; found it in the ash heap this morning, and did it just as a joke. You see, my aunt—"

"Yes," his wife cut in eagerly, "you see, his aunt—"

The judge rapped for order.

"H-m!" he said, stroking his chin meditatively. "Well, if no one was sick, don't you realize it was a misdemeanor to tack up the sign in the first place? You're a member of the legal profession, aren't you, Mr. Aspinwall?"

The hands on the clock indicated five minutes to four.

Aspinwall nodded.

"Well," the judge went on gravely, "how much respect for the law do you think other people are going to have if members of the bar respect it so slightly?"

Aspinwall gulped. His eye darted to the clock again. "Why," he wavered, "of course, I hadn't thought of it in that light, but—"

The judge drew concentric circles on the desk blotter.

"Well," he said sharply, "since you seem to think this is so funny, I'll just fine you twenty-five dollars. Bryon stands for law and order and in this day and generation I'm afraid most people take their responsibilities in that line too lightly. Now, back in the nineties—"

"Please, your honor," Aspinwall interrupted, when he saw that the judge's remarks were about to develop into a sermon on the standards of the present day, "I appeal."

The judge frowned. "The facts of the case seem to prove you guilty without question. Appeal refused."

Aspinwall shoved his hands into his empty pockets. "And what if I refuse to pay the fine?" he demanded.

"You go to jail for a week."

"Well, then, you can send me to jail," Aspinwall concluded dramatically. "It's the principle of the thing, you understand; the principle of the thing, only, your honor," he added. "I'd like to meet a train first; it's five minutes past four now, and my aunt—"

"If you want to meet a train, you can pay your fine."

Aspinwall studied the floor philosophically. "June, oh, June," he called, adding in a whisper when his wife came over to him. "Go home, and for Heaven's sake pawn something quick—before aunty finds out. It's our only chance. If she waits at the depot instead of taking a taxi to the house, we may get out of this yet. Now, hurry—"

V.

AFTER June had left the room, Aspinwall addressed his remarks to the judge again.

"Your honor," he began impressively, "I demand my constitutional rights as a citizen of the United States of America. Any man has a right to meet his aunt—"

The judge peered questioningly over the top of his spectacles. "All you've got to do is pay your fine," he remarked dryly, "I'll give you half an hour to think it over."

Aspinwall gazed out the window. He was beginning to feel faint on account of having skipped luncheon. It was twenty minutes past four now and the timepiece kept clicking off seconds. He wondered vaguely just how he was going to explain his absence to his aunt. And the quarantine sign—suppose it were still up—

It was at this juncture that the quarantine officer who had made the arrest suddenly entered the room, followed by an elderly lady of about sixty-five. Her clothes were the ultimate in severe tailoring and her features were as severe as her clothes. The mouth was firm, the dark eyes, quick.

"Why, Aunt Edith," Aspinwall gasped, "what are you doing here?"

The old lady sniffed. "When you didn't meet me at the station I came right up to the house, and this gentleman told me I'd find you here."

"Why, yes, of course," Aspinwall interrupted as he collected himself, "you see, I was detained by an important case here and couldn't get to the depot. At the time, I didn't think it was going to take so long or I'd have sent June. She wasn't at the house when you got there, was she? I told her to go back and wait for you about ten minutes ago. You must have just missed her."

The expression on his aunt's face did not change. "No, she wasn't," she said evenly. "You seem to be through now, though; suppose you take me back to the house? I should have thought you'd have shown your aunt a little more consideration when she came all the way from Cleveland."

"Yes, yes, of course, all the way from Cleveland," Aspinwall parried evasively. "Think of it, your honor, my aunt came all the way from Cleveland."

It was the judge who cut the Gordian knot.

"He can't leave here, madam, until he pays his fine."

This last remark was like a thunderclap.

Aspinwall bit his lip as he watched the expression upon his aunt's face change. He tried to force a laugh. "You see, it's this way, aunty, dear," he began, "I don't want to pay it on account of the principle of the thing; I'm going to jail, and be a martyr."

His aunt frowned. "Well, you want to get those foolish notions out of your head. Now pay it, and come along with me; we're leaving for California in the morning." There was a crisp note of command in the old lady's voice.

Aspinwall clenched his teeth in desperation. "Pay m-my f-fine!" he stammered. Then he drew himself up and faced his aunt resolutely. "To tell you the truth, aunty," he said simply, "I'm going to jail because I can't pay my fine."

A puzzled expression came over the old lady's face. "Can't pay it!" she ejaculated. "After all the cases you've been winning?" She turned to the judge. "How much is the fine and what's it for?" she asked.

The judge appeared bored. "Twenty-five dollars for tacking up a quarantine sign on his house—he said it was just to play a joke on somebody."

The old lady wrinkled her brow. "I'm beginning to see through things I missed at first," she said slowly. Her mouth tightened. She faced her nephew squarely. "In other words, none of your stories about cases have been true and the quarantine sign was to scare your aunt away so she wouldn't find out."

Aspinwall attempted to interrupt, but she cut him off. "No, Arthur Aspinwall," she said firmly, "I might have known you were no better than your father. If you've lived successfully on love so far, see how well it will work out in the future. I'm going back to Cleveland to-night."

Aspinwall flushed crimson. "I didn't want to come to this old town in the first place," he flared up, "the whole thing was your idea. I'm not quite such a good-for-nothing as you seem to think, though; you remember what I told you about the water company—" He was grasping feebly at the last straw he could find on the troubled stream of events.

His aunt sniffed. "That made a very good story and it nearly got me, but you certainly don't expect me to think there's any truth in it now, do you? If there was, we might talk businesss; as it is, I'm through."

With that she turned on her heel and started to leave the room. She had only progressed a few steps when she stopped, though. The outside door swung open, admitting June.

VI.

ASPINWALL came forward to meet his wife. "Well, deary, what luck?" he asked. He patted her arm tenderly.

June's upper lip trembled and she lifted her handkerchief to her eyes before answering. "No luck at all," she said, sniffling, "I was just ready to go out with some things, when a horrid man came around to see you from the water company. I tried to get rid of him, but he wouldn't leave. He followed me all the way here and he's waiting outside now."

At this point, Aspinwall's aunt suddenly began to evince an interest in the conversation. "The water company?" she inquired.

"Yes, the water company," Aspinwall replied with dignity. "Tell him to come right up here, June; I'll see him now. Aunty wouldn't believe me and now I'll accept this job, just to show her."

June gasped. "No—please; you don't want to see him, really."

By this time the old lady had crossed over and had placed her arm on June's shoulder. "Certainly not, Arthur," she said, "your wife is quite right; your first duty is to your family. Since there does appear to be something in the story, I might be induced to negotiate with you yet."

Aspinwall shook his head deliberately. "No, Aunt Edith," he said proudly, "you said you were through with me. It was your suggestion that brought me to Bryon in

the first place and now that I'm here I intend to stay. If the water company needs me, it's my duty to take the job. I'm going to show you that these six months haven't been spent here in vain and that my fellow citizens appreciate me, even if you don't. I'll pay back all the money you ever gave me and then I intend to live my own life."

His aunt had controlled herself with difficulty up to this point. Now she cut in, impatiently:

"But, Arthur," she began, "don't you realize that I'm growing older and that some one must take over the grapefruit interests for me? Doesn't a start at three thousand sound good to you?"

June gulped. "Certainly, it does, aunty; all you said is very true, and Arthur's first duty is to his family, I'm sure."

Aspinwall interrupted. "No, not for three thousand," he said.

"Say, I'm from the water company, and I'm looking for a man by the name of Aspinwall," a voice floated in from the corridor.

Then the reply. "He's busy now; you'll have to wait."

Aunt Edith spoke more timidly now. "For five thousand?"

Aspinwall shook his head.

"Six thousand?"

"Of course he will!" It was June speaking again. "Don't let him joke with you that way, aunty. Really, he will, I'm sure."

Aspinwall scratched his head meditatively.

"And a block of a hundred shares of stock?"

Aspinwall smiled. "Possibly," he said, "if you'll forgive me, and pay my fine."

His aunt immediately produced two tens and a five. "You 'tend to that," she said, "and I'll get a notary to draw up the papers right away before you change your mind. You and June can meet me at the hotel in half an hour."

After she left Aspinwall and his wife stared at each other. Then June let out a long sigh. "I was so afraid you were going to turn aunty down," she said.

"What difference would it have made if I had? After the way she talked to me I'd have just as soon worked for the water company as Aunt Edith."

June smiled mischievously. "All the difference in the world," she said.

They had reached the corridor now, and Aspinwall felt a man tug at his arm.

"Say, is your name Aspinwall?" the stranger demanded. "I'm from the water company. Your wife gave me the slip, but I followed her here, and I want to see you. If you don't pay your bill to-morrow wer'e going to shut off your service."

Aspinwall gulped, then collected himself. "Go to it," he remarked loftily.

A SECRET

I'LL keep my love for you a secret thing
Lest you not understand.
No sudden word of mine shall let you know;
No trembling of my hand.
I'll watch each smile—each eager upward glance—
To guard against surprise.
But, oh my dear!—I cannot hide from you
The gladness in my eyes.

Edith Loomis.

The Doom Dealer

By DAVID FOX

Author of "The Super-Swing," "The Man Who Convicted Himself," etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOUR GHOULS.

"ASIDE from this almost incredible theory of foul play, doctor, the loss of Miss Wyatt's heirlooms is a concrete fact and a most distressing one." Frank Dilworth tilted back his swivel chair and regarded his visitor gravely. "What did your mechanical expert think of the safe in which she kept them and how did he figure they could possibly have been abstracted?"

Henry gazed back with a humorous twinkle in his small eyes.

"I guess what he thought of it wouldn't sound respectful to the late Mr. Wyatt's judgment, since I understand he used it for years, but Phil—Mr. Howe—did remark that the jewels could have been lifted by a one-eyed five-year-old with infantile paralysis! We've got reason to believe the substitution was made a year ago last spring. While we haven't doped it out yet why the original thieves tried so hard twice last July to get the fakes back after waiting so long for Miss Wyatt to discover the fraud, that can be the only reason why her house was broken into, Mr. Dilworth. Phil's driven out now to see Cliff—"

"Why does Mr. Nichols stay out there in the country all alone?" Dilworth interrupted.

Henry looked slightly uncomfortable. He had called by prearrangement at the office of this new ally who had been thrust upon them through Mary Jane's unfounded accusation, but he had no intention of taking him any further into his confidence than necessary.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for February 24.

"We've got other principals and agents scattered all 'round," he responded vaguely. "There's George Roper now."

The shabby, attentuated figure of the ex-professor was shambling by along the street. Henry beckoned eagerly through the wide window and he glanced that way, then entered. His bow of deprecating inquiry was almost ludicrously at variance with the lofty sarcasm in his tone as after greeting Dilworth he turned to his colleague.

"What's the idea, Henry? Think I didn't see you as I passed, just as half the town will see me and know I'm not here to buy any real estate? They'll be questioning Mr. Dilworth and he won't find it pleasant to deceive his friends."

"I can stand it," Dilworth said very soberly. "I don't want to interfere with your plans or be too curious, but I'd like to help. There isn't anything I wouldn't do for Miss Wyatt, gentlemen."

At the wistful sincerity of his words, George's ill-humor vanished, but there was still a shade of anxiety in his voice as he responded:

"We are all convinced of that, sir, but the slightest rumor as to our real purpose here would be fatal now. Henry, I've been out there and although there was no sign of the person we are interested in I was in time to see another party leave bag and baggage. I thought his face looked familiar to me and to make sure I stopped at the drug store."

He took from his pocket a cake of soap on the bright purple wrapper of which a smug, familiar countenance appeared. Henry exclaimed:

"Avery Yates! If he and perhaps others as well known were there I don't see how anything could have happened last night and yet I tell you I'm worried. If one patient, supposedly violent, could be kept in a wing unknown to the rest God A'mighty knows what could have been done!"

Dilworth had been staring from one to the other and now he could contain himself no longer.

"You're speaking of Dr. Weir's place! Have you an agent there, too? He was Ogden Ronalds's intimate friendd. He took charge of the body and as a physician he would surely have known had there been any foul play and been the first to demand an inquiry! That is one of the principal reasons why I haven't been able to credit Miss Wyatt's fears. If you've ever met him you must know what a thoroughly estimable man he is. Darned if I could help liking him myself!"

"You were naturally prejudiced—" George paused.

"Because he introduced his friend among us? No, I'm a little bigger than that, I hope." Dilworth shook his head slowly. "It was long before that, when I first met him. His eyes—there's something queer about them. Haven't you noticed it yourself?"

"How queer?" asked Henry.

Dilworth laughed in an embarrassed sort of fashion.

"You'll think I'm foolish for a hard-headed business man, but the doctor's eyes gave me an uncomfortable feeling at first; they don't match the rest of his makeup. They're as dark and bright and inscrutable as an Indian's for all he's almost tow-headed—Hello! Somebody'll have the constable after 'em, driving like that along Main Street!"

The roaring of a high-powered car had almost drowned his voice. Henry and Georgie looked at each other in swift premonition. The next moment the Francetta came into view and stopped with a jerk that almost threw Phil through the windshield. He motioned violently to some one within, the door was torn off and Cliff, whitefaced and all but inarticulate with consternation precipitated himself into the office, ignoring Dilworth.

"He's gone! Escaped!" he cried hoarsely. "Those precious rascals of Pink-Eye's let him go!"

"What!" George exclaimed, but Henry rose to the occasion.

"Sit down quietly, Cliff, or we'll have every passerby staring in the window. George, tell Phil to drive slowly around the square and back. Now, Cliff, when did this happen?"

"Last night while I was at Miss Wyatt's." For all the freezing weather beads

of perspiration had gathered on Cliff's brow and he wiped them away unsteadily. "It was my fault! Luce asked me why I hadn't cleaned out that damned cellar! I didn't look down there last night when I got back, but I opened the door and listened. When I heard snores and low muttering I thought everything was all right; that our man was asleep and the two guards talking together. They acted oddly this morning, surly and furtive and would scarcely touch their breakfast when I called them up, one after the other.

"I didn't suspect the truth, for they took some food down, supposedly for that fellow, but I thought they were turning ugly and rebellious—I told George they were getting enough of the job two days ago—so I got my revolver and kept it handy. It wasn't long before I heard a scraping noise at one of those boarded up cellar windows and I covered it just in time to prevent them from making a getaway.

"They would have finished me, I imagine, if I hadn't taken them by surprise. But they're a couple of cowardly rats and when they saw the game was up I got the truth from them. While I was away last night they explored the cellar and found some demijohns of hard cider. Long before I got back they must have been dead to the world; it was their snoring and muttering that I heard.

"They swore to me that the last they knew our man was lying there securely tied hand and foot. This morning when they woke up he had disappeared. The ropes that had bound him were left in a frayed heap beside the rusty, broken blade of an old saw and some boards loosened at that window through which I found them trying to escape.

"I'm inclined to believe them, for their chief fear seems to be of Pink-Eye's displeasure. When I promised to put in a word for them with you they submitted willingly enough to being tied up in place of their former charge until I could get in touch with you. I take it that they want to get as far from Pink-Eye's reach as possible. Though he's running straight with the police and the higher politicians half the crooks in town are under his thumb and they'd give short shrift to any one who double-crossed his friends, among whom we seem to have the honor of being. It's a safe wager they won't talk if we let them go, but that's small consolation now. What are we going to do?"

"Work fast." Henry rose and took a wallet from his pocket. "Mr. Dilworth, can any express trains for the West be flagged at the junction that won't stop to let off passengers this side of—Cleveland, say?"

Dilworth nodded.

"I'll give you a note to the station-master—there's one due at noon."

"I wish you would, please."

Then as Dilworth wrote hastily and handed over the order Henry added: "Here, Cliff, you and Phil can just about make it without being run in for breaking the speed regulations. Get those two guys, frisk them for gats, see that they haven't a cent in their jeans and put them aboard that train with one-way tickets. Then send Phil back to me at the hotel with the car. Don't you show up in this town again to-day, but meet us to-night out at the Millerstown cemetery at ten o'clock. Thank the Lord there'll be no moon!"

Cliff and George looked at each other and then the former departed as Dilworth exclaimed:

"The cemetery!"

"Yes. I can't explain to you now what has happened nor what it means to us, but it has forced our hand. You said you would do anything for Miss Wyatt, sir. Are you prepared to be a party to a highly illegal proceeding? Your presence isn't absolutely necessary, but being a well-known, reputable citizen of this town you may be valuable as a witness later if my hunch—if my hypothesis is correct."

"I'll go just as far as you will, gentlemen!"

Dilworth's ruddy face had paled, but he spoke with dogged determination. "You intend to—to exhume—"

"I intend to find out to-night once and for all whether Ogden Ronalds was murdered! We can't afford to wait for an official permit, for one of us may be in desperate danger. Even if what I suspect is

true only absolute secrecy afterward can save him until we can work a certain trick I have in mind.

"We'll leave you now for I have a lot to do and the less you are seen in our company the better. I'm sure I needn't warn you to tell Miss Wyatt nothing if you call on her to-day. She will receive instructions from us later. You will meet us to-night?"

"At ten o'clock, and—may I make a suggestion? I have a small, light, open truck which the landscape gardener I employ for the estates in my charge sometimes uses. I can bring an assortment of picks and shovels."

He shuddered, but went resolutely on: "The ground is frozen hard, of course, and it won't be any easy work, but fortunately that—that grave is covered with a flat marble slab—"

"I noticed that when I inspected it," George interrupted. "Do you know who placed it there? It is rather unusual."

"Miss Wyatt, I believe." A look of pain came into Dilworth's mild eyes. "She and Dr. Weir and Judge Tompkins made all the arrangements."

"Well, it is doubly fortunate for us, for if we can replace it there will be less chance of our work being discovered to-morrow." Henry held out his hand. "Thanks for your suggestion about the truck and the implements, Mr. Dilworth. We'll count on you, but be sure you take a roundabout way along back roads and keep your lights out."

An hour later George intercepted Phil just before the latter reached the Quincey House. Motioning down a side street he stalked on with his brief case knocking against his gaunt knees. Considerably mystified, Phil turned the Francetta in the direction indicated and drove slowly until he came to a lumber yard, where a cautious whistle which emanated from behind a huge pile of boards made him pause. Henry emerged beckoning and when the other joined him he announced:

"Phil, something has gone wrong with Luce or we should have heard from him in code before this. I needn't tell you the showdown has come now, and you are the only one of us who can be spared. There's danger, but you can take care of yourself, and you mustn't fail, for everything depends on you now. Put up the car, change your clothes and beat it to New York on the first train; there's a fast one at two if you can make it.

"Go to Gideon Ormsby—here's the address and a note to him—and tell him Rex needs him. Don't bring him here by train—we don't dare risk it on his account—but make him beg or borrow the swiftest car he can get and start at once. Drive him yourself, Phil, and go as though you were back in the old road-racing days! Take plenty of spares with you and trust to luck about speed traps and the State constabulary only *get him here to-morrow!* You'll do it?"

Phil's face shone.

"You know me, Henry! I'll have him here with bells on! But, say, what do you think became of that guy without ears? There's a hard crust on the snow all around Cliff's shack, so he didn't leave any tracks. It's a cinch those two roughnecks we just put on the rattler for the West don't know anything about his getaway. They're scared stiff and cryin' with gratitude for the chance to beat it where Pink Eye's gang can't reach 'em. Gee, this is some hefty letter you've written to Ormsby!"

"I'm taking some chances myself!" Henry remarked grimly. "There's an enclosure inside that I want him to deliver to the receivers of a certain bank before he starts back with you. I tell you, Phil, the Shadowers are either going to pull off the biggest case on record or they'll face jail on about a dozen counts!"

"Well," Phil grinned irrepressibly. "I guess it wouldn't be the first time for any of us! Where'll I bring this Ormsby swell to-morrow? To the hotel?"

"Yes. Good-by, my boy, and good luck!"

That night a small, light-running truck without lights stood half-hidden in the dense frost-coated undergrowth beside a seldom-used cart track. The solemn hush of the sleeping cemetery was broken by the dull grinding probe of levers and the ring of pick and shovel on frozen ground. Four obscure figures bent and strained above a flat slab of marble, their labored breathing coming

in great gasps which sent puffs as of steam out into the darkness, but only the surrounding monuments, ghostly beneath the shrouded sky, looked on in aloof unconcern.

"There, it's coming now!" muttered Henry. "Sure that padded seat from the truck is placed just right to catch it? Look out! There it goes!"

Impelled by the powerful levers thrust beneath it the slab moved, tilted slowly and then, as four pairs of hands thrust at it, rose, wavered, and fell over with a soft, heavy thud on the cushioned support waiting to receive it.

An infinitesimal spark of light winked for a moment down into the aperture beneath where it had laid. George uttered a low exclamation:

"Isn't the ground unusually sunken for so short a time?"

"Dig!" Henry commanded in a fierce whisper. "Mr. Dilworth, if you'd rather wait over there—"

"I'm going to see this through!" panted Dilworth doggedly. "Here's a lighter pick-ax, Mr. Nichols. We ought to strike it soon."

The work continued until the picks were discarded entirely for shovels, and dark blotches of earth were heaped up on the white surface of the ground. Then after an interval there came a metallic, grating sound which struck hollowly on their ears.

"We've reached it!" Cliff's teeth chattered uncontrollably. "Henry, the top of the casket is loose! I could swear it moved!"

"Scrape off the dirt carefully," Henry ordered, his own tones trembling with excitement. "We'll dig around it a little and see if the lid can be unfastened and pushed aside even a crack."

George was shuddering. Dilworth had set his teeth, but the grisly task went on until at last the harsh scraping ceased, a lever was brought into play once more, and Henry's electric torch flashed down into the excavation. A smothered cry emanated from three throats. His companions staggered back in horror and amazement.

"Empty!" George was the first to find his voice.

"The—the body is gone!" Cliff whispered hoarsely. "What does it mean?"

"Grave robbers!" Dilworth wiped his reeking face upon his sleeve. "Ghouls!"

A grim chuckle issued from Henry's lips.

"We're ghouls ourselves, Mr. Dilworth, all four of us, and the sooner we cover up our tracks the better! Every moment we linger here is dangerous, and not only to us. Our work here is done."

CHAPTER XX.

ETHEL BREAKS A PROMISE.

THE following morning when Ethel presented herself at Wyatt Manor it was the housemaid who admitted her and led her upstairs to the dressing room, where she found the mistress of the house pacing the floor restlessly.

"Good morning, Miss Wyatt." The childlike blue eyes held a mischievous twinkle. "Isn't Mary Jane feeling well today?"

"You did not come to me yesterday, Miss Jenks." There was a note of reproach in the gentle voice. "You know what happened the night before, though, do you not?"

Ethel nodded.

"I kind of thought Mary Jane wrote those letters," she admitted naïvely. "If I'd said so, you would have bundled me out of the house, and besides it wasn't my place. Mr. Nichols is our handwriting expert, you know, and nothing but proof would have convinced you. I could only slip a specimen to him and leave it to him to do the rest. Dr. Corliss told me. You wanted to find out who wrote them, didn't you? Wasn't that part of our—our job up here?"

Miss Wyatt regarded her thoughtfully for a moment, and then smiled faintly in acknowledgment.

"Yes, my dear, and I am afraid you are right; I would not have believed you! Poor Mary Jane acted from a dreadfully mistaken sense of loyalty, and she is heartbroken. Yesterday she insisted upon going to her sister's at Buffalo for a time. As I saw she would really be happier, I agreed, but I am quite lost without her. None of

your employers communicated with me, and although Mr. Dilworth, when he called in the afternoon, said that he was working with you all now to help me, he would tell me nothing. Have you news for me?"

"Only just something that they—the Shadowers—want you to do, Miss Wyatt," Ethel replied noncommittally. "Dr. Corliss told me to say they must have your coöperation to-night, and—and you are not to ask any questions first, nor say one word to a soul except just what I've been instructed to tell you. He says everything depends on it, and it is important that none of them are seen coming to you to-day. I was to ask you a few things first, if you don't mind."

"Sit down, my dear. Of course I don't mind, and I shall be only too glad to do anything I can," the older woman assented eagerly. "Somehow Mr. Dilworth's manner was so mysterious yesterday afternoon that I felt something was being kept from me, and I was afraid. I—I don't know why."

"There isn't anything to be afraid of unless you believe in spooks," remarked Ethel. "Do you know anything about spiritualism, Miss Wyatt? Have you ever been to a séance, where the stool pig—I mean the medium puts himself to sleep and lets somebody who is dead make him talk or write things he don't even know himself?"

"I have read much of such things lately, but I have never attended a meeting," Miss Wyatt replied in surprise.

"Do you remember talking with Mr. Roper—Professor Ranny—in the cemetery last Sunday afternoon?" Ethel appeared slightly at a loss how to proceed.

"Of course."

"Well, you've met him a number of times since—" She plunged.

"Oh, no. I—"

"Excuse me, Miss Wyatt, you have," Ethel contradicted firmly. "You kind of like the poor old man, and in your talks with him you've found out that he's a spiritualist—a medium—with an awful lot of power through his go-between—his control—to bring folks back from the other world and receive messages from them. He's got you going—I mean you are convinced that he can fix it for you to get in touch with Mr. Ronalds once more— Oh, please!"

She broke off as her hostess covered her face with her hands. "Don't you understand this is all part of the plan? It's what Mr. Roper and Dr. Corliss want you to tell two people who are friends of yours. But they wouldn't come unless they thought it was for your interest, that maybe Professor Ranny was a fraud or a lunatic and not a real spiritualist at all. They're your best friends, except Mr. Dilworth, and they'll be wanted dreadfully as witnesses because of—of other people who'll be here after you're gone."

"Here!" Miss Wyatt half rose from her chair.

"Mr. Roper wants to hold a meeting in your parlor to-night and pretend to go into a trance, as the old professor, of course. Dr. Corliss and Mr. Dilworth will be in the circle with you, and they know all about what's going on, but Mr. Roper wishes your other two friends to come, thinking only what I have told you to say just now. Have you seen Judge Tompkins lately?"

Miss Wyatt shook her head, and her gaze was troubled.

"No. He is deeply hurt after his long and faithful guardianship of my property that I should have called in an efficiency expert, as though I were dissatisfied and ungrateful. Don't tell me, Miss Jenks, that I must deceive him further!"

"Only to telephone and beg him to come to this meeting and—what was it Mr. Roper said? Oh, yes—to listen with an open mind. He'll be perfectly wild that you've gone in for this, but if you tell him that Mr. Dilworth is coming too, and—and make him think you are really serious, nothing can keep him away!"

Ethel clasped her hands in earnestness. "Please, Miss Wyatt! You want the truth, don't you? So will he, but more even than the judge, your other friend will be interested."

"Who is this other friend?"

"Dr. Weir. When did you see him last?"

"Let me see." Miss Wyatt paused. "He called a week ago last Saturday. I

remember telling him that I was going to New York on the following Monday to do some shopping. But why must he be present? You say that others are coming later. May I not know—"

"I don't know myself," Ethel responded in perfect truth. "I do know, though, that Dr. Corliss wants Dr. Weir on hand for his opinion about something, and also because he was Mr. Ronalds's best friend. Please call him up with the same story you are going to give the judge, only make it stronger—that you just had to beg Professor Ranny to come here, and you are sure he is a wonder. If Dr. Weir is too busy or has another engagement, act kind of hysterical, if you have to, only make him come. I was to tell you that afterward he would understand."

"I am afraid that is more than I do!" Miss Wyatt exclaimed in dismay. "I gave my word to the head of your organization, however, when I placed my case in your hands, and I shall do my best to carry out these instructions. But what am I to do myself?"

"Send your cook and laundress out for the evening, and tell your housemaid that when she has let in Professor Ranny—he'll arrange to be the last—she can go to the movies. Maybe you don't know it, but she's a fan.

"You are to take your place with the others, but see that a warm cloak of yours is in the hall. The lights will be out, all but two candles on the professor's little table, and he'll pretend to go to sleep—I mean in a trance. Don't move until you see him begin making faces. Then while they are watching him, slip out and get your cloak. Mr. Nichols will be waiting for you halfway down the drive leading to the gate, and he'll take care of you and bring you safe home."

"This—this is all absolutely necessary?" Miss Wyatt asked slowly as her visitor rose.

"It means everything!"

Ethel added a few minor instructions and took her leave. Returning to the hotel, she spent a lonely and profitless day with a box of chocolates and a mediocre romance from the local library. She had been peremptorily ordered to do nothing more, and it irked her energetic spirit. However, they couldn't keep her from thinking, and her thoughts centered upon Rex Powell, growing more and more depressed and anxious as the hours passed and early darkness fell. The shrill whistle of an incoming train from the tracks near by seemed like a note of vague, occult warning, and a grim foreboding, a nameless dread, gripped her until her healthy spirit rebelled.

Lucian Baynes was in New York, Clifford Nichols would be taking charge of Miss Wyatt, and the rest sitting in at that séance. No one would know if she went once more to that sanatorium. Hadn't she stolen a ride there already, picked Henry Corliss's pocket for Rex's letter, and broken into George Roper's room to lift his flash light? There wasn't much more she could do to get herself in wrong, but it would be worth it all just for a sight of Rex's face—to know that he was safe, even though later he dismissed her in disgrace from the service of the Shadowers!

With characteristically swift decision she dressed in warm, dark clothing, slipped the purloined flash light and her own small but effective automatic into convenient pockets, and, leaving the hotel, made her way along Main Street toward the town limits and the open country beyond.

It was darker than she had anticipated, and lonelier even on the edge of town. She shied like a nervous horse when a man lurched past her from the opposite direction, running in ragged spurts and with the whistling breath which told of exhaustion. The girl noted only that he was small and slight. Then he passed completely from her mind at the thought of the long miles ahead of her and the faint hope which might after all be doomed to disappointment at her journey's end.

Since her first clandestine visit huddled on the floor of the Francetta, Ethel had made discreet inquiries as to the location of the sanatorium. Now she kept to the highroad, avoiding the devious byways which Phil must have chosen. She had been told that a bridge over a millstream marked the halfway point between the town and her present destination. Just as the lights twinkled around a sharp turn and

the rushing swirl of waters came to her a new sound smote upon her ears from behind.

It was an oncoming car, swinging helplessly from side to side of the road and careening around the turn as though a very madman were at the wheel.

"The bridge! Look out for the bridge!" Ethel had only an instant to leap out of the way. Sheer instinct made her cast caution to the winds and shout her warning, but somehow the shrill voice carried above the noise of the motor—not the purport of its message, but a familiar note, a heaven-sent enlightenment as to her identity.

The little car slowed jerkily, to halt with a perilous tilt on the edge of the ditch. A cry broken with pain echoed back to her.

"Ethel! Ethel! Thank God!"

For an instant her heart stood still; then she dashed forward to peer at the man slouched over the wheel.

"Mr. Baynes!" she gasped.

His face was ghastly and drawn, with vivid spots of color in each cheek. The eyes which stared at her from hollow rings were bright with fever, but he tried to smile.

"Good girl, Ethel! Never knew you when you—weren't on the job!"

"Mr. Baynes, you're sick! Something terrible has happened to you!" she stammered. "I thought you were in New York!"

"Stabbed—knifed in the shoulder coming from Yohalem's house last night!" He seemed striving desperately to collect his wandering thoughts, to drive the fast-descending clouds from his mind. "Woke up—vacant lot in Bronx this morning. Hospital—too much red tape. Taxi—went to rooms; told janitor holdup; no time for doctor. He fixed me up himself—but not very skillful. Tried to reach Ormsby for message—some misunderstanding. He—he had gone. Strength failing, got train—arrived an hour ago—"

"I remember the whistle!" Ethel shivered. "It seemed to be calling to me somehow! If I'd only known!"

"No one at hotel—you, Henry, George—must reach Shadowers; tell them I'd failed! Then Vito Colucci—"

Suddenly Lucian straightened with an effort which forced a groan from his white lips. "Ethel, what are you doing here?"

His voice was stronger, stern, and Ethel hung her head.

"Breaking my promise," she confessed. "I know Mr. Powell's out at Dr. Weir's bughouse, and I've been worried about him all day. I don't know why, but I gotta see him! I gotta be sure he's all right."

In her confusion and distress she had reverted to the vernacular of a few short months before, but neither was concious of it.

"We've both got to see him, Ethel, but—but I'm almost all in. Can you drive?"

Lucian's tones had weakened once more, and his body slumped.

"I can start and keep goin' if nothin's in my way," Ethel announced grimly. "I don't know how to reverse, and when I stop we're both of us liable to go through the windshield, but at that I guess you won't be takin' any worse chances than you were comin' along! Whose car is this, Mr. Baynes?"

"Haven't an idea. I stole it—front of the drug shop. Must reach—Rex."

The weak, whispering voice failed utterly, and Ethel dared not shake him for fear of renewed injury to his shoulder. Switching on the dashlight, she saw a miscellaneous array of bursting parcels on the seat and floor—meat, a tin of Cayenne pepper, a bag of flour, two flatirons, a set of kitchen knives, a cracked bottle of vinegar and several smaller ones in the torn white paper of a druggist's package wedged carefully between a coil of new clothesline and a roll of lint.

Picking up the dripping vinegar bottle, Ethel poured some of its contents into her cupped hand and applied it to Lucian's forehead and wrists, dousing and rubbing until he revived with a sputtering start. Then she flung the bottle into the ditch and turned doubtfully to the white package.

"Mr. Baynes, I don't know if any of this will do you any good or not, but it looks like medicine. Can you tell?"

"Let me see." Weakly by the aid of the dashlight he examined the phials. Then with an exclamation of relief he drew the

cork from a tiny brown one and shook out a tablet or two on his hand.

"Strychnine!" Ethel read the label over his shoulder and gasped in horror. "Mr. Baynes, that's poison!"

"Not in this quantity." He swallowed the tablets and fumbled to place the bottle in his coat pocket. "It's a stimulant, that's all; just what I need. Now, do you think you can take the wheel?"

He swept the packages off the vacant seat beside him and dragged himself painfully into it.

"Do you feel you gotta go?" the girl asked anxiously. "I could get in that place alone better than the two of us could, maybe, and if you've got any message you want me to try to slip to Mr. Powell—"

"No!" Lucian gestured peremptorily. "You should not be here at all, but since you are—drive, Ethel! Drive like hell!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SÉANCE.

"DR. WEIR, I hope you won't be annoyed at my insistence in begging you to come to me to-night, but I need you more than any of your patients possibly can, and I feel that you were so close to—to *him* that if there is any sane credence to be placed in such things you may be a link to draw him back to us, if only for a moment."

Miss Wyatt's low voice was hesitant, and her soft brown eyes lifted for only the fraction of a moment to her guest's face.

"The dear judge is frightfully upset by my inclination toward what he calls this tomfoolery, and Mr. Dilworth has merely consented to be present, I am sure, because he is convinced the poor old professor is a fraud and he means to unmask him, but I knew you would understand."

"I do, my dear Miss Wyatt, but you are trembling! Your hands are icy cold! You must be careful or you will make yourself really ill!"

The doctor's tones were filled with warm, friendly concern. "Psychology has entered largely into my practice, and from that standpoint alone I should be interested in this experiment in spiritism apart from the desire to serve you. But from the little I have heard of this professor he appears to be just a harmless eccentric; goes about collecting epitaphs, doesn't he?"

Miss Wyatt nodded.

"I met him in the cemetery copying inscriptions, and I thought as you do at first, but during my later talks with him, when I learned of his belief in spiritualism and his sincere conviction that he is in direct communication with—with another world, I asked him to come here to-night and see if he could obtain a message for me. He absolutely refuses to accept any remuneration, but he seemed almost pathetically glad to find some one in sympathy with him. Shall we go into the parlor? The others will be here at any moment."

She led the way, and Dr. Weir followed, but as his eyes fell upon the five chairs drawn up in a semicircle a short distance from that which would be occupied by the medium, he asked:

"You expect another guest besides the judge and Mr. Dilworth?"

Miss Wyatt laughed a trifle nervously.

"Only Mr. Cortland, the efficiency expert who has come up from New York to reorganize the management of my mills. He is brusk and rather revolutionary in his methods, but I insisted on his presence. He is the most practical, hard-headed man I ever met, and if the professor can really obtain results, I am sure Mr. Cortland will be fair enough to admit it. His opinion will be valuable should any manifestations appear."

"Then your professor promises us a materialization?" Dr. Weir smiled as he seated himself beside her. "This is really interesting, Miss Wyatt! He has made no preparations, I see, installed no paraphernalia?"

"Oh, doctor!" she begged deprecatingly as the door bell sounded through the house. "Please try to be open-minded about this and not so dreadfully skeptical as the others! The professor promises nothing, but his faith is almost childlike in its simplicity, and I could not bear to have him hurt when he is coming here out of the goodness of his heart! Good evening,

Uncle Junius!" she added as the judge entered, accompanied surprisingly enough by Henry. "Mr. Cortland, I don't think you know my friend and physician, Dr. Weir."

"Ah-ha, doctor!" The judge's thin, old voice was high and tremulous with exasperation. "Don't tell me you approve of this ridiculous notion Arabella has taken into her head! Even Mr. Cortland here agreed with me when he over took me coming up from the gate that it's all hocus-pocus; but there's no use arguing with a woman!"

Dr. Weir shook his head smilingly.

"I could not subscribe to such a sweeping assertion as that, judge. In fact, we physicians are learning more and more every day that there are so-called phenomena; but here is Mr. Dilworth. Miss Wyatt tells me that you are skeptical, like the judge and Mr. Cortland. I have just been explaining that I am—er—on the fence, so to speak; I am open to conviction."

Frank Dilworth clasped Miss Wyatt's hand warmly, but it would have been obvious to a close observer that he scarcely met the eyes of Judge Tompkins or the other man as he greeted them. When he replied to the doctor he returned the latter's gaze with a look of quizzical understanding.

"I can't say that I'm very enthusiastic, doctor. The fact is, Professor Ranny has about pestered the life out of me as well as Judge Tompkins for the family history of every one whose epitaphs he's copied in the churchyard. While he refuses to take up any collection for to-night's exhibition, I've tried to convince Miss Wyatt that it is just part of his game to work up a following among our neighbors."

"Hush!" Miss Wyatt admonished as the bell rang for the third time. Her tremulous voice had steadied with a note of unexpected firmness and strength. "Now we shall learn the truth! Professor Ranny, you know all my friends, I think, except Dr. Weir."

The old professor had left his brief case out in the hall, together with the shabby overcoat and hat. His stooped form in the threadbare frockcoat with slightly frayed cuffs showing at the sleeves looked more gaunt and frail than ever as he bowed ceremoniously to the rest and then peered near-sightedly at the physician through his horn-rimmed glasses.

"How do you do, sir? I trust that we have not all gathered here to-night to wait without response from the unseen world about us, but all day, while I have been preparing myself for this hour, warring influences have beset me, and I feel that a strong and not altogether benevolent spirit is seeking to oust my familiar control. I promised this lady, however, to attempt to bring her into communication with some one who has passed on, and I shall do my best."

His deprecatory manner was lost in a new dignity, and the stammering, apologetic voice had given place to well-rounded, almost oratorical tones.

"Your familiar control, professor; did you know him or her on this plane?" Dr. Weir spoke in faintly amused accents.

"No, my dear sir. Oddly enough for one who has lived always in an academic atmosphere the spirit which has heretofore chosen to make itself manifest through me is that of a man who in the material world occupied a position of force and action. He was dominant, masterful, and presided over the ultimate physical destinies of many fellow creatures.

"Will you all be seated, please, and I shall endeavor to summon him. I see you have placed the two candles on the table before my chair as I requested, Miss Wyatt. Now, may the other lights be extinguished? I scarcely dare hope for the manifestation known as ectoplasm, but all things are possible."

A sudden hush had fallen upon them. Only Judge Tompkins's asthmatic breathing and the creak of the chairs broke the silence as Henry, at Miss Wyatt's nod, pressed the electric button in the wall plunging the room in darkness. He then seated himself at the end of the semicircle beside the doctor. Frank Dilworth came next, then Miss Wyatt, with the judge at her right completing the little group.

Facing them, George lighted the candles and sat with his back to the ruddy gleam of the dying hearth-fire. The twin, flick-

ering flames before him played upon his gaunt, ascetic countenance with a weird, uncanny glow and cast deeper shadows above and behind him.

He folded his hands upon the table's edge, closed his eyes, and remained immovable for what seemed an interminable period. The judge snorted, Dr. Weir shifted his position slightly, and Miss Wyatt gave a little quivering sigh. When at last George's immobile lips moved, his face became contorted as though in the throes of acute agony and his whole form stiffened. Then it settled into a pose at once commanding and majestic, an expression of deep solemnity rode upon his features, and his eyes opened, staring unseeingly before him. In the tense pause a faint rustle, an almost inaudible footfall seemed to pass wholly unnoticed by the group.

"Why do you call me here?" The resonant tones, weighty with reproach, filled the high-ceilinged room. "Seek you upon your own plane for him who is lost to you. He has not passed on to us! Clad in the flesh he and two others walk the earth though mourned as dead!

"One robbed his fellow men and fled the consequences, another tired of his life and the vows he could not keep, while the third filched from a woman that which her ancestors had left to her through generations, won her trusting faith, and would have despoiled her of all her worldly goods, but nemesis was upon him for a past wrongdoing and he was forced to avail himself at the eleventh hour of the same means of escape which the others had taken, an escape wrought by devilish fraud and chicanery with callous indifference to the suffering of those bereft, forsaken!"

"Extraordinary!" The low ejaculation of intensest interest might have come from either Frank Dilworth or the doctor, a mere toneless breath that died sibilantly on the darkness stabbed by those two darting points of candle flame behind which the strange, unseeing eyes stared from the solemn, cadaverous face.

"Three men died, yet they still walk the earth," the measured tones went on all the more impressive for their level monotony and utter lack of emphasis. "Each walks the earth not in freedom, in safety, but as a fugitive, a pariah, fearful that at any moment a hand be laid upon his shoulder, at any turn a face from the past confront him and a voice call out the name which once he bore! Each died and the *living semblance* of each lay in a coffin, was lowered into a grave, and that grave heaped with flowers and marked with a stone. Yet that semblance was a sham, a waxen mask and mold of folded hands upon a living form—*the same form* in all three dramas of deceit and villainous conspiracy!"

The voice ceased. Dr. Weir touched Dilworth's arm.

"The poor fellow is mad, as I thought," he whispered. "An interesting study, but should we not bring it to a halt in Miss Wyatt's presence?"

He paused. Dilworth was gazing stonily ahead, but the muscles beneath the coat-sleeve which the doctor touched had flexed involuntarily. Glancing beyond him the latter saw in the wavering gloom that Miss Wyatt's chair was empty. Smiling slightly he settled back in his seat and the medium's stern lips moved.

"He who is sought, for news of whom you have summoned me from the plane upon which I linger earthbound, is not far from here as you count distance among the living. He has returned, for close upon his trail appears the nemesis who was not deceived and who has come for a final reckoning.

"Faithful woman and credulous man saw that semblance in the casket, saw that casket lowered into the grave and went their ways in sorrow. They did not wait a few brief hours until night fell to see the grave opened and the imposter released by his master, the dealer in counterfeit death!"

"Good God!" Dilworth exclaimed in low, inexpressibly shocked tones. Judge Tompkins was breathing raucously as if on the verge of apoplexy. The doctor's smile had frozen upon his face. The efficiency expert seemed to be paying scant heed to the revelations of the medium's control. One pudgy hand was thrust into the pocket of his coat, but his head was turned slightly toward the door in an intently listening attitude. In the flickering candlelight anx-

iety was plainly manifest upon his countenance.

His distraction appeared to communicate itself to the medium even in his trance for a change of expression flitted for a second over the solemnly judicial features, and the vacant eyes turned in an instantaneous flash of keenly alert questioning in the direction Henry's attitude indicated. The next moment, however, his rounded, resonant tones filled the room once more.

"To those who have passed on yet linger because they have a mission to fulfill, the curtain of the past is lifted, and that to which no living witness can bear testimony is revealed as though enacted again in the presence of those who are gathered together in earnest search for the truth. I see three men who have trafficked with this purveyor of sham death, but your minds are fixed upon one only, the last. As your will has called me back, so your thoughts have enabled me to lift the veil. A strange scene is before me, beneath this very roof; a strange scene leading to others far more strange, more tragic in their import. Shall I disclose the vision?"

He paused, but no one responded, for Henry sat as though he were himself entranced, anxiety deepened to poignant dread upon his face. The medium's tones were raised slightly with a faint suggestion of very human asperity.

"Would you know more, you seekers after truth? Shall I reveal unto you that which I see?"

"Don't you think that this has gone far enough?" Dr. Weir looked beyond Dilworth to the judge. "The man is suffering from a form of dementia, and as a physician I can assure you that he may shortly become violent. Should we not put a stop to this?"

"No, by Jiminy Christmas!" Unknowingly and unrehearsed Judge Tompkins saved the situation. "Professor, or whoever 'tis that's talking through you, go right along! Cracked or not, we're listening to you, and there'll be order in this room till you finish! We're seeking the truth, don't you make any mistake about that, so tell us what you see!"

The gaunt, ascetic face appeared to twitch convulsively, but it might have been the effect of the fitful shadows for the measured notes of his voice were still lower and more evenly controlled than before as he continued.

"I see jewels, a multitude of colored gems, and among them a huge, glittering oval, blue as the skies! There are pearls, too, the pearls that bring tears, and beside them a man and a woman are standing. Again I see the jewels, but this time the man is alone, he takes them from a receptacle behind a door in the wall and places them in a bag which he drops from a window.

"Once more the man, the jewels, but what is this? The stones are not the same, they are false—as false as he who is putting them in the safe from which he took the others. A name! There is a name which comes to me in connection with these false gems, but it is not clear!"

The medium raised a slender hand to his forehead. "Ah, the initials! 'F. G.' He made the jewels for a price; find F. G. and he will tell!"

Dr. Weir moved a trifle impatiently in his chair, but the medium went on:

"The man has planned to make the woman his wife to despoil her of her riches and then seek freedom as those other two had sought it, through feigned death. But he is forced to forego the greater treasure, to be content with the jewels and what they might bring him, and play out the grim comedy at once if he would indeed remain in the flesh! On a journey to the city from whence he came the nemesis which has trailed him vainly for years confronts him at last—the stranger with the scar!

"In a panic the man returns to his friend the doom dealer, and to them another comes, a maker of masks!" Again the thin, veined hand was lifted to his forehead, and then the medium cried in a loud, ringing tone:

"Colucci! Vito Colucci! It is he who makes the life mask, who takes a plaster impression of the hands, and in removing it cuts a gash in one wrist! Colucci and one they call Mike, both in the pay of—"

"Stop!" Dr. Weir sprang to his feet. "Judge Tompkins, I forbid the continua-

tion of this painful spectacle! The ravings of a madman—"

"They sound mighty strange, doctor, but they're not so painful I can't listen to them!" There was a savage gleam in the old jurist's eyes. "I'm commencing to see a few things myself, eh, Frank?"

"Then I must ask you to make my excuses to Miss Wyatt." The doctor was evidently controlling himself by a supreme effort. "As a physician I cannot be a party to this—"

"Sit down, doctor," the efficiency expert suggested in a tone of friendly advice. "You needn't worry about your responsibility in this little affair. We'll assume that. Be a sport and let's wait and see if there's anything in this ectoplasm business."

Dr. Weir turned upon him, but the significant bulge in Henry's coat pocket caught his eye, and with a shrug he dropped into his seat once more.

"I have registered my protest!" He laughed uneasily. "What else does our friend from the spirit world behold?"

George had not moved a muscle during this interlude, but now, as if in unconscious reply, he continued:

"Again the man and the woman are together, this time in a garden! He raises his eyes, he sees a face over the wall—the face of his nemesis! In fear lest the woman behold it also, and in the hope that his chief accomplice may be summoned to his side, he falls in a pretense of insensibility. The accomplice comes, the death monger, and he removes his confederate to the same hidden place as before, where their scheme is perfected.

"Now I see a church, massed with flowers filled with people in gay attire. The man and the woman are standing before the altar. But again the scarred face of fate implacable looks on, this time through a half-opened window of stained glass, the colors of which are reflected on his visage.

"The man before the altar falls, the woman is borne away, and the death dealer removes his client, and resuscitates him after the superficial examination of a coroner in whose receptive mind has been implanted the auto-suggestion of death from heart disease. So dominant is this idea that he does not detect traces of the drug which has produced an effect not unlike asphyxia, easily and quickly remedied by artificial respiration.

"By night the man, completely recovered, leaves secretly for a far place. In his stead a substitute lies in his coffin, a strange, grotesque creature whose hands are encased in the waxen mold fashioned by Colucci, who wears the life-mask upon his face and the false ears affixed to his own which had been previously mutilated in order that he might twice play the part of a corpse!"

A faint scraping sound, so slight that it would only have been heard by one listening with keen intensity for it, came to Henry's ears and his position relaxed a trifle. The medium, too, seemed to have become aware also of that wary crunch of feet on frozen turf, for the voice of his control mounted in apparent anger, yet with a strangely exultant note.

"You have called me on a false errand, for you have no need of me here! Seek you on your own plane for the three who are missing, and among you who are gathered here for the one who is guilty of all these tragic frauds—the death dealer!"

He sank back in his chair as though overcome, then instantly lunged forward and blew out the candles just as the glare of electric light flooded the room, and Phil appeared in the doorway accompanied by a stranger.

At the sight of their two grave faces Henry and George cried out in consternation, but the former turned quickly, pulling the automatic from his pocket and covered the man at his side.

Dr. Weir shrugged.

"Why the dramatic display?" he demanded. "I knew you for detectives from the first, of course, but you cannot prove fraud nor conspiracy, for no crime has been committed except perhaps the jewel robbery, and I had no knowledge of that. There has been no injury to person nor estate, and every one concerned coöperated willingly—"

"'No injury?'" Phil advanced upon him. "Ogden Ronalds is lying stone dead this time out in the grounds at your place with a half-healed wound in his throat and

a curved knife stuck through him! Everybody else has been pinched, and that bruiser William will tell all he knows!"

"Pardon me." The stranger stepped forward while the judge and Dilworth sat transfixed. "My name is Gideon Ormsby, and I arranged to place one of the investigators in your establishment, Dr. Weir. Last Tuesday I received a letter from China, from a friend whom I believed I had seen in his coffin nearly two years ago—Harmon Bigelow. He was on his actual deathbed and explained in detail your fraudulent scheme. Moreover, in my rooms in New York your accomplice, Mike, who came to me last evening posing as an agent of these gentlemen, has been very thoroughly jiu-jitsued by my servant Matzu. He only awaits arrest to turn State's evidence, and this was found upon him."

Turning to Henry, Ormsby placed in his hand a glittering blue jewel of enormous size, and the judge became suddenly galvanized into life.

"The Merrington Diamond!" he cried. "You black-hearted devil! Frank, call up the sheriff!"

"There's another little matter," Henry remarked grimly as Dilworth stumbled to obey. "The grave of Ferris Tower who wrecked the North Atlantic Bank and 'died' in your sanatorium is empty, Weir, and the Federal authorities are out for him—"

"He is in Cairo, broke, if it will do you any good to know." Dr. Weir rested his head upon his hand, covering his eyes, but an ironic smile wreathed his lips. "I am quite at your service, gentlemen."

Even as he spoke something dropped tinkling to the floor and his body stiffened and then collapsed, the hand swinging inert and the head lolling on his shoulder. Henry jumped to his side, fiercely thrusting away Phil, who had stooped to pick up the shattered bits of a medicine dropper. He straightened the doctor's head, raised his drooping lids, and then stepped back with an expression of deep solemnity.

"Weir is dead!" he announced. "Don't you smell that odor of bitter almonds? As a physician he knew that a single drop of the pure hydrocyanic acid injected into the eye would kill instantly! He apparently guessed that we were closing in on him and came prepared in case the evidence against him was too conclusive to fight. I suppose we might have taken precautions—"

"Perhaps it is better so, on Miss Wyatt's account, since now she, and incidentally ourselves, can be kept more or less out of it!" George wiped his forehead, which had grown suddenly damp. "Phil, for the Lord's sake, where is Rex?"

"Gone!" Phil produced a torn scrap of paper covered with brownish marks. "This was left for you, I guess. Mr. Ormsby and I can't make anything out of it."

Henry glanced through the two lines of letters roughly printed in seemingly incomprehensible gibberish and a slow smile broke over his face as he handed the message to the erstwhile medium.

"It's from Ethel!" he exclaimed. "That little devil frisked me for my note from Rex, after all, for she's used the same code. Read it, George!"

"'House three lanterns mail box quick. Rp Lb safe. Ethel.'" George did not echo the smile. "That's Cliff's farmhouse, and we're needed quickly! Rex is there safe and Lucian, too, somehow, but the child says nothing about herself and, boys, I don't need any handwriting expert to tell me that these letters were printed in blood!"

CHAPTER XXII.

ETHEL TAKES A VACATION.

"MY Christian aunt!" Cliff burst into the back door of the farmhouse and paused blinking to survey the scene before him. "Will somebody tell me what this all means? I drove Miss Wyatt around for a couple of hours and took her home as you directed. to find Weir there dead and the judge and Dilworth like two gibbering maniacs trying to explain to the sheriff that he'd committed suicide It was ten minutes before I could get it out of either of them that Ormsby had caught a train back to New York and you were here!"

Ethel, dishevelled, but inordinately subdued, was lying on a couch covered with

Henry's expensive coat and she made no effort to reply. The other five Shadowers grouped about her raised their voices in unison, then halted and looked at each other. Rex waved toward the medical expert.

"It was Henry's case; let him tell it," he suggested. "How he ever guessed the truth—"

"I had the inside dope before Mary Jane came for us that first morning," Henry interrupted modestly. "Ethel said the earless guy who had been following her 'looked like something that had been dug up,' and she hit it! All through Miss Wyatt's story about her jewels and her bridegroom's supposed death I could see Weir and Ronalds working together, but I didn't know how the trick was pulled."

He told the story as George had pretended to reveal it in the trance, but Cliff still looked bewildered.

"Do you mean to say that Weir faked all that with the aid of Colucci?" he demanded. "Miss Wyatt said the lips of that—that mask seemed warm when she kissed them in the coffin, if you remember, but the hands were cold and rigid—"

"Special vacuum processes between the living substitute and the false covering." Henry nodded. "Specially constructed caskets with air chambers, and a quick exhumation for the poor devil who let himself be buried alive three times for a thousand a throw! The old coroner here was easily fooled and there was never a suspicion except in Miss Wyatt's mind about Ronalds's murder and that was because of the man with the scar.

"When Guardini began yelping for his share from the stolen jewels last July, Weir sent Colucci and Mike to steal the fakes in order to remove the evidence of that little game, but they failed, for Miss Wyatt had them with her at Albany. The second time they came across our circular and warned Weir. He sent the Merrington diamond to Guardini again to keep him quiet—Ronalds must have entrusted the negotiation of it to him—and then watched Miss Wyatt. He knew when she came to New York and tried to keep her from reaching us for just a few days because Ronalds had come back for protection from the scarred man, Edward Fenn, but Fenn had followed, too. You'll hear his story later. Weir couldn't turn Ronalds out for fear Fenn would get him, the body be found and recognized, and the devil to pay!

"Then Rex, as Parr, breezes up to the san. Although a new patient is about as welcome as smallpox, under the circumstances Weir takes him all unsuspecting because of the Ormsbys, uncle and nephew. Colucci got there an hour ahead though, after arranging time fuses according to instructions to burn up his farm over at Haynes Corners. When he had told Weir about the earless man's phoned information that we were gentlemen and all that Weir smelled a rat, drugged Rex that night and searched his things. He didn't find anything incriminating, of course, but Rex was wakened in spite of the drug by a cry in the night—you tell him, Rex."

"It was Ronalds," Rex explained. "I learned all this from Colucci last night. There was soon to have been a fourth faked death—a fellow patient of mine named Vanderpool, who wanted to skip before an investigation that's coming in international steamship control—and Saturday night Weir told his rough-worker, William, that as the usual substitute had disappeared they would use Ronalds—but *kill him first.*

"Ronalds overheard them and taking a chance on Fenn he tried to escape, but the police dog got him by the throat and nearly finished him. It was him whom I heard Monday night muttering in his delirium when I explored the left wing of the house. The voice came from the right and I thought it some insane patient, for I didn't attach any significance to his cry:

"'I tell you I'm dead! Why can't you let a dead man alone!'

"You got my report Tuesday night all right, but Wednesday Weir caught me putting out my signal and he and William locked me in the left wing. Last night Colucci came to me with his paraphernalia *to take my life mask,* to determine the vacuum space possible between my face and Vanderpool's!

"They'd found out that Fenn had left town. Ronalds was recovering from the

fever brought on by the dog's attack and they planned to spirit him away to-night, getting rid of me later in Vanderpool's coffin. But Colucci wasn't as hardened as all that and he secretly balked at murder. He took the mask, but whispered the truth and I persuaded him to get word to one of you at the Quincey House to-night."

"He reached me," Lucian took up the story. "Henry sent me to New York Wednesday to find out from Gideon Ormsby what he had wanted to see Rex about—it was that letter from Harmon Bigelow, of course—but another letter was on my mind, the one George got possession of at Haynes Corners from Guardini to Colucci."

He described in detail his visit to the house of the Cellini Ganymede and then added:

"Florio said of his customer for the fake jewels, whom he had encountered only once, at Vito's farm when the bargain was made, that he was 'w'at you call—a pretty man—beega eyes, brows lika pencil stroke, long, curling lashes, lips of a woman and a deemple een hees chin.' I recalled Rex's impression of Ronalds's pictures in the papers at the time of his supposed death and realized that he was the jewel thief. Right there I began to suspect something of the rest, but when I left the house with the Merrington diamond somebody knifed me—"

"It was Mike!" Phil interrupted irrepressibly. "He kept you doped all day yesterday in some tenement, arranged to have you dumped in a vacant lot this morning, and took a chance last evening on posing as one of us to Mr. Ormsby, for he'd trailed you to your apartment house from the train Wednesday night and listened in on your phone conversation.

"He hadn't reckoned with that little jiu-jitsu champ, Matzu, though! Henry sent me to Ormsby yesterday when no word had come from you and I found him laid up with a broken arm from an accident at a hockey match the night before, but you ought to have seen Mike! Matzu had spotted him for a spy, thrown him and trussed him and found the Merrington diamond on him. I guess he'd worked a few stunts on him that roughneck hadn't been up against before, for he was limp as a rag and ready to come clean with everything.

"He'd trailed George and me with the earless freak from our offices to Pink-Eye's place, beat it up to Haynes Corners to report to this Colucci, then back to watch Pink-Eye's.

"He was following when we left with that guy and the two muggs on Sunday afternoon to come here, but he lost us at the Poughkeepsie ferry by a second. He spotted the big car and George and Henry and me in Millerstown the same morning Miss Wyatt recognized him as the driver of the car that had smashed her taxi in New York. Where do you suppose that earless guy is? There wasn't any trace of him in the battlefield Mr. Ormsby and I found at the san to-night and I'll bet he's a million miles from here and still going! He hated Weir and was afraid of him. Do you remember, Luce, what he kept muttering when we were getting him doped up at Pink-Eye's for the trip?"

Lucian shuddered.

"'Damn you, I don't trust you! Some time when you don't need me any more you'll forget and leave me there!'" he quoted. "We know what he meant now! Colucci abhorred Weir, too. When I reached the Quincey House early this evening I couldn't find any of you, but I heard him inquiring for 'Mr. Cortland' and recognized him. I took him to my room and in return for his warning of Rex's danger I—I promised I'd get him safely out of the country with Florio.

"I thought it was worth it and besides, there isn't a chance that Miss Wyatt will recover any of her jewels except the great diamond. Colucci had seized his opportunity when Weir went to attend that séance you arranged and he ran practically all the way in from the san, passing Ethel on the road, though she didn't know who he was then."

There was a sudden movement beneath the overcoat on the couch, but Ethel remained discreetly silent and Lucian went on.

"I stole somebody's car and started out, light-headed from loss of blood myself, to try to get Rex, but I met Ethel on the road

and collapsed. The rest of the game was in her hands. There were a lot of packages in the car and she used the contents of every last one of them, although I didn't know what she was getting at when she wound a new clothesline around her, stuck a set of kitchen knives in it till she bristled like a porcupine, and emptied half the flour out of a bag to drop two flatirons in and tie it up again! There was a big piece of beef, too, and a box of pepper.

" Ethel drove straight to the doors of the san, and when that police dog you've been hearing about came for us she tried to tempt him with the meat. He was too well trained for that. Then she dashed the pepper full in his eyes and I wouldn't be surprised if he was going yet! William came to the door to see what all the howling was about and she held him up very expertly with that automatic of hers—"

" You had to keep on covering him while I got myself out of that clothesline so's I could tie him up, Mr. Baynes, and gag him with lint from that roll," a meek voice reminded him and Ethel sat up. " Then an old guy with a long face came out and I—I slugged him with the irons in the flour bag!"

" It was Vanderpool, as it turned out, and he richly deserved it!" Lucian exclaimed with relish. " An attendant appeared and a distinguished, elderly chap whom I recognized instantly as Senator Underton. While Ethel covered the attendant I explained matters to the Senator, and after that it was all over, for it appears that he'd begun to suspect something crooked was going on and he sided with us. The rest of Weir's household decamped in a hurry, realizing the game was up. Ethel went through that place like a young cyclone, screaming for Rex!"

" She found me, too." There was a very tender note in Rex Powell's voice. " The Senator broke open the door for her, but she cut me loose with her array of kitchen knives and we went down to get poor Luce, who was all in. Ethel had sliced her finger in freeing me, but before she would let me bandage it she dipped a hairpin in the blood and left a little note which she seemed to think would fall into Henry's hands, telling him we were coming here. We did, after leaving the Senator at the Quincey House."

" Mr. Ormsby and I brought that note to Henry," Phil remarked. " How do you read the thing, anyway?"

" Ask Ethel," responded Henry dryly.

" It's the third letter in the alphabet from the one you really mean, that's all." Ethel was regaining her self-possession and her tone was demure. " If you want to use ' a ' you write ' d ' and so on. I doped the code out from the first note that I stole from Mr. Corliss after I rode out to the sanatorium with you two the first time, on the floor of the big car."

Phil stared, but before he could speak Cliff asked very seriously:

" What is the story about Edward Fenn, and where is Ronalds?"

" Dead for fair, this time," Phil replied to the last question first. " Mr. Ormsby and I fell over his body. Then we pushed open the door of the san. and found William and the other attendant bound and gagged, and Vanderpool out for the count. William was only too anxious to talk when we took the lint out of his mouth. He said Ronalds had tried to slip away an hour before you came, while Hector the dog was still tied up. He'd heard a horrible, choking scream and then nothing else, but hadn't dared to investigate for fear of alarming the two patients, Vanderpool and the Senator. My opinion is that he was afraid, for he guessed what had happened; that Fenn had got his man at last.

" You remember that wedding ring I found in my room which Fenn had occupied at the hotel? It was marked: ' E. F. to I. B. Sept. 4th, 1910.' While Ronalds was delirious after the dog tore him last week he'd raved more than Rex heard, but William got it. Ten years and more ago Fenn and Ronalds were pals, members of a gang who robbed banks.

" Ronalds was never caught—he was the advance guy, used to get a job in one for six months or longer, map out the lay of the land for the rest and then be working in the next crib while the last was cracked, so his alibi was always ready. Down in Texas he and Fenn fell in love with the same girl—William thought the name was

'Ilse' or something—but she married Fenn, so Ronalds framed him and had him sent up for eight years.

"The wife died heartbroken and I guess we know the rest. Ronalds must have expected Fenn to come after him when he got out. That's why he lived so quiet in New York in that apartment with two exits so he could make a quick getaway if it came to a showdown. I can't figure why Fenn didn't croak him a year and a half ago when he first had the chance, and I don't believe he'll ever be caught to tell us! Gee! This case has been a knockout, but I've had enough of graveyards and corpses and I'll be glad to hit the bright lights again! Won't you, Ethel?"

"I'm not so sure," Ethel responded slowly. "Mr. Corliss, when you first let me come in on this with you, you said I'd have to do exactly what I was told and nothing else or—take a vacation. I've done about everything I oughtn't to, so—so can I have that vacation now, please?"

"Ask Rex!" Henry's double chin drooped with surprise. "He's boss once more!"

"Why, my child!" exclaimed George reproachfully. "What would the Shadowers do without you? And that reminds me; since we're breaking training, so to speak, here is a little present for you!"

He proffered a package of wintergreen chewing-gum, but Ethel waved it away with a soiled, bandaged little hand.

"I'm off it!" she announced solemnly. "I've canned the flip talk, too, and the flash get-up. It's been kinder nice, pretendin' I was a lady, and I wanna go somewheres to learn to be an honest-to-Gawd on "

"There isn't a braver, finer little lady in all the world—" began Lucian in all loyalty, but Rex stopped him with a gesture.

"Is that the only reason, Ethel?" he asked gently. "Are you deserting us?"

She ran her fingers through her mop of nutbrown curls and smiled up at him, whimsically.

"I'm no quitter, but if you wasn't a man you wouldn't have to ask for the other reason! Don't you know that in a couple of weeks my head's gonna look like something that's run in the wash? I wanna hide somewheres till my hair goes back!"

THE END.

HORIZONS

YOU have your horizon,
I have mine;
Yours is home and fireside
In a city fine.
Walls all about you,
Friends at each turn,
When you think of me, dear,
Why should you yearn?

I have my horizon,
You have yours;
Mine is wilds unlimited,
Space that endures.
Mountain trails and plumed pines,
Winds singing through;
Why should I grow wistful,
Thinking of you?

G. G. Bostwick.

The Mysterious Disappearance

By WILLIAM THOMAS GILLILAND

THE wagon hugged the pavement, in obedience with police regulations for slow traffic, while faster vehicles impatiently skated past it—an open dray bearing large fat glass jars carefully packed in straw and held together by chains. They were carboys of some chemical liquid.

" In any civilized city," remarked Bently, who hated the unsystematic, " no dray would be allowed on a main artery of traffic between 8 A.M. and midnight."

He was seated in the sunny bay window of a Fifth Avenue club, behind the glass. The hour was ten o'clock. It was unusual for Bently to be at the club, especially of a morning, because he had no political convictions, and despised idle lounging. However, he had a reason for this occasion. The man he was with was high in political circles, and Bently wanted certain governmental consultant business.

In a select and exclusive Fifth Avenue club one is not supposed to discuss, solicit, or even breathe the word business. It is not supposed to be done, but it *is* done—indirectly. Impecunious scions of the aristocracy sell automobiles, yachts, shares, pictures and antiques inside the sacred precincts of old-established clubs. Bently had no scruples about infringing etiquette. Moreover, he belonged to two political clubs —one Republican and one Democratic—and used them according to whichever party happened to be in power.

The politician, following the offending dray with one eye, suddenly observed:

" That's curious! Look!"

Bently looked. A most extraordinary phenomenon was taking place on Fifth Avenue. The passers-by were weeping. Handkerchiefs fluttered. Tears were streaming. No funeral could have produced such a lachrymose effect as the passage of that lumbering dray.

" Whatever is the matter?" thought the politician aloud, and opened the window to help solve the mystery.

He quickly closed it and reached for his own handkerchief.

" Formaldehyde," explained Bently. " It

is popularly called formalin. Carboy leaking. Disgraceful! Call this a civilized city!"

All along Fifth Avenue the trail of the dripping formalin was smearing the air with pungent vapor, invisible, but highly odorous and tear-compelling. No concentrated essence of onion, no phenyl mustard oil, could have produced a more ridiculous effect. A whole street full of people was weeping, and, since they were a good-humored crowd, also laughing. Eventually a traffic officer ordered the dray to "clear out" up some side street, anywhere. He did not take the driver's name and address, because the accident was unprecedented and outside the realm of existing police regulations. He said "Clear out," and returned to his exacting duties.

Half an hour later Bently left the club and walked along Fifth Avenue. The odor of the formalin still lingered. He covered his nostrils with a handkerchief, screwed his eyes tight, and impatiently hailed a taxi.

The late edition of an evening paper yelled startling tidings:

JUDGE SLADE HAS VANISHED!

Bently had no confidence in newspapers, especially late evening editions. He resisted the appeal of four sheets until a fifth, one of sober appearance and announcing

"Alleged Disappearance of Mr. Slade,"

induced him to buy and read as he went to his motor launch. This was his customary mode of conveyance between his city laboratories and his home in Pelham.

The newspaper dealt with the affair soberly and guardedly. The judge had left his house on Riverside Drive that morning at nine o'clock, on his way to his chambers in the county courthouse. He had taken a taxi, his usual habit. He had not arrived at his offices. Nothing had since been heard of him. There was a rumor of kidnaping. Judge Slade was known to have been an intense foe of the radical element. The newspaper rather smiled at the rumors it was honoring in print, pointing out the absurdity of a public man's disappearance in broad daylight in well-policed New York. No doubt there was some simple explanation, which would be found in the morning papers. They disapproved of sensationalism, and were insistent on the word "alleged."

The caution of the newspaper affected Bently more than any glaring headlines or emphatic statements would have done. His temperament was to oppose other people's opinions. He disbelieved the "alleged," and as his launch cut swiftly up-river he reflected on the possibilities of the story's genuineness. On the west side of the river were docks, warehouses, and a huge area of underground cellars; to the east side were factories, some in use, some closed and deserted, awaiting fresh tenants. What finer area could be imagined for the concealment of a kidnaped man? And then, one dark night, he could be slipped on board a barge or tramp steamer and smuggled out of the country.

Even at dusk, as at this moment, the procedure would be quite possible. Judge Slade was notorious for a weakness of physical and mental disposition. He was one of the few magistrates who did not play golf. He was essentially a man of compromise, of studious hesitation—an excellent subject for a kidnaping.

"Stop!" hailed a voice. A police launch shot out of the gloom.

Bently threw off the power and reversed with a flail of spray and soapsuds of angry water.

"What's this?" he demanded.

"Orders to search," answered a sergeant briefly.

"Looking for Judge Slade?" deduced Bently.

"That's it, sir."

They quickly satisfied themselves that no concealed body was aboard, and backed away with apologies. Bently proceeded homeward. His thoughts underwent a radical change. If the police were combing the docks and waterfront, it was ten to one that the quarry was elsewhere.

He began to place himself in the shoes of the kidnapers, and to imagine how a thoroughly successful affair could be carried out. They had taken their man in broad daylight, and apparently in the heart

of New York traffic. That argued unusual resourcefulness. Therefore it might be assumed that they would pass over the obvious hiding-places of the docks and the deserted factories, and the obvious smuggling out by river. Something newer, more up-to-date, more criminally scientific, must be looked for.

On the following day the newspapers were full of the story. The evening papers seized on the humorous side of the situation. Mr. Slade was fair game for jesting, being a magistrate of justice, and yet he had allowed himself to be taken in ridiculously easy fashion.

But the next day public feeling, as expressed in print, changed. A telephonic demand for ransom had been made. Fifty thousand dollars was the sum asked, to be increased ten thousand dollars a day. The police seemed to be helpless. They could find no trace of Judge Slade from the moment he left Riverside Drive at 9 A.M. in the taxi. He had vanished utterly. Every taxi driver in the city, thousands of them, had been questioned and cross-examined. Every one of them was ready to account for his movements on the morning in question, going from one cab stand to another. Public opinion began to mutter angrily.

As the days went on, and the telephonic demands for ransom were increased, the city became roused to indignation. They could afford to sacrifice Judge Slade, but they were not going to pay blackmail. It would establish a precedent, of all things most to be avoided.

Then came a letter from the unfortunate man, reproduced by photography in the newspapers. He begged pitifully that the ransom should be paid. Otherwise he would inevitably die. If the public could only realize the daring and cleverness of those who had kidnaped him!

A newspaper asked tentatively in what form the ransom was demanded. Quickly came the reply through the too convenient telephone. It was not wanted in bank notes or in gold coin. It was wanted in radium. A hundred thousand dollars' worth of radium could be carried in a waistcoat pocket, and could be disposed of in driblets in any part of the civilized world. That was essentially up-to-date. And further, the manner in which it was to be delivered was carefully specified. The material was to be guaranteed as to amount and radio activity by two public analysts mentioned by name. Bently was one of them. He was at once indignant at the coolness of the kidnapers and flattered by the advertisement they gave him.

Again, the certified radium was to be attached to four carrier pigeons which were forwarded to the office of a leading newspaper, and were to be released in a flock of fifty others. The innocent little birds suggested no clew to identity. Thousands of people in the city trained pigeons. And being released with a flock of others, the movements of the birds would be practically untraceable. It was a plan of which the ingenuity took one's breath away.

Three more days were given for decision. After that, Judge Slade would be quietly disposed of, and they would proceed to kidnap some other prominent man.

The point that most roused indignation was the demand for the ransom to be paid in radium. Gold could be spared, or bank notes, but radium would have to be collected from hospitals and medical men. Sufferers must be sacrificed for the releasing of a county judge. It was an atrocious demand. Even if Judge Slade's family managed to collect the necessary hundred thousand dollars from friends and sympathizers, public opinion would actively resent the payment in precious radium. There seemed nothing to be done but to sacrifice Judge Slade.

Bently went to call at the house of mourning on Riverside Drive. Relations and friends were there, despondent and despairing. He was gladly ushered into the family council. They clutched at a straw of hope.

"I have been investigating this case on my own account," announced Bently.

"If you can only get him back," said the red-eyed Mrs. Slade eagerly and entreatingly, "there is nothing we wouldn't do to repay you!"

"I don't need monetary payment," replied Bently. He was looking, indeed, to the governmental business for his recom-

pense. That would be sure to follow success.

"What have you discovered?"

"Merely a direction for inquiry, as yet. But I have hopes. Now, let me suggest this: you will announce through the newspapers that you cannot pay the ransom in radium; on the other hand, you are ready to pay double the amount in gold. You will send the sum to a deserted island—or to any place they like to name. You pledge your honor not to attempt to watch that gold; in other words, you must let those men think they are winning easily."

The family council would have agreed to any proposal. Immediately they set to work to draft out an announcement for the newspapers, the medium of communication between the blackmailers and the blackmailed.

When Bently stated that he had been investigating, that somewhat overshot the facts. He had been pondering very deeply over the peculiar problem; had kept himself in touch with the activities of headquarters—where he was *persona grata* through his assistance in former cases—and had thought out a new line of attack. This he now proceeded to enfilade, and his first move was to compile from directories a list of firms handling formaldehyde in bulk; to telephone for appointments; to call on them in rotation. He wanted to trace a consignment of that chemical carried in a dray down Fifth Avenue on the morning when Judge Slade disappeared with such magic swiftness and ease. Since Bently's name and status were well known to dealers in chemical products, he had no difficulty in obtaining the information he asked.

Formaldehyde is not an article of popular consumption in its pure state. The form in which it is retailed to the public, for the annihilation of flies and other objectionable insects, is a forty per cent solution in water. A carboy of concentrated formaldehyde would only be sold to manufacturers in very specialized lines, and its sale and conveyance would be easily traceable.

After some elimination of obviously genuine purchases about the date in question, Bently unearthed this fact: three carboys of acids, one of ammonia and one of formaldehyde had been sold to a man who sent his own wagon to cart them away. He had stated that he needed them for some industrial research work in aniline dyes, and since he offered spot cash payment the firm had not troubled to verify his status or ask for trade references. They had sold him the chemicals, and there the matter had ended. What became of them afterward was not their affair.

Yes, they had certainly read in the papers an amusing paragraph about the leakage of a carboy of pungent chemical on Fifth Avenue. They had expected that the purchaser would have sent for another carboy to replace it. However, he had not done so. Perhaps he had bought it elsewhere.

"And now," said Bently to the head of the firm, "I want a description of the man who ordered and the driver who carted away the stuff. A close description."

"Any special reason for asking, Mr. Bently?"

"A very special reason. In fact, if your employees can give me sufficiently accurate portraits, here's fifty to distribute among them."

He passed over a bank note, which the business man placed smilingly in a box marked "Staff Christmas Fund," and answered: "We'll do all we can for you."

How few people can describe human beings! How few people observe and register observations! The staff could tell nothing about the driver of the dray except that he looked like a driver and spoke with a hoarse voice. Of the man who had ordered and paid for the chemicals, the summary of several defective memories was this: he was tall and looked "a gentleman." He either had a dark mustache or he didn't have a mustache—opinions differed. He either wore a signet ring on the finger of his right hand or he wore no rings at all. He had a rather prominent nose, aquiline. He had two eyes, of color either brown, blue or gray. He wore a dark suit of some kind.

But one bright little office girl did manage to convey an impression. She said: "He looked like a straight line."

"How?" asked Bently, delighted to find some one with a sense of description.

"He parted his hair in the middle, sir, and it came down on his forehead in the middle—"

"A little bald toward the temples?"

"Yes, sir. And then the line went down his tie and chest."

"Pigeon-chested?"

"Not quite that, sir; but he looked to me just like a straight line."

"How would you describe myself?" asked Bently, to test her accuracy of description.

"All reddish bristles," answered the girl promptly.

Bently laughed at the truthful portrait, patted her on the shoulder, and turned to the head of the firm. "This girl will be a fine little business woman some day. Keep an eye on her."

He proceeded to police headquarters and interviewed Detective Inspector Hinkson, with whom he had collaborated on many former cases.

"I have a description of the man who arranged for the kidnaping of Slade," announced Bently, and repeated the details given by the observant office girl.

Hinkson ran over a mental portrait gallery for some moments. "That sounds like Freddie Clegg, who ran a gambling joint we raided last year. A touch of Mephistopheles about him. Looks like a line, as you say."

"Where does he live? What does he do now?"

Hinkson conferred with other officials of the department. The impression was that he lived from the race courses. He had not come in contact with the law since the raiding of his resort of chance, and on that occasion he had been let off with a fine. He would be found around Times Square or along Broadway, was the general thought.

"Find him at once," suggested Bently. "Trace him home. But for Heaven's sake don't let him suspect he's being shadowed."

"Trust us for that," returned the detective.

Bently went home. Shadowing was not in his line. He awaited developments.

They came speedily. Mr. Freddie Clegg had been recognized in the Apollo Grill, engaged in the quite lawful business of discussing winners. He had been followed to other sporting resorts, and finally home to his chambers. These were situated in a bachelor hotel in the middle of the theatrical district, and were on the top floor.

"The intervening floors?" asked Bently.

"All chambers. Broadway johnnies live in them."

"The kind of people who wake up about midday and get out of bed about two," commented Bently.

Hinkson smiled. "The early risers do. The others are not quite so energetic."

"I'll see the chambers for myself," announced the scientist.

"If your suspicion is right," warned the detective, "you'd better be careful. Freddie Clegg is not a man I should care to tackle myself without a revolver and a police whistle."

"If I'm not back in two hours, you'll know where to find me."

But Bently had no intention of foolhardiness. He merely wished to examine the layout of the building. He found the usual narrow side entrance, marked Belvidere Hall; and inside the hall, an elevator. The porter was not visible. He lived with his wife in the basement, and was available on ringing.

Bently rang for him and asked: "Any chambers to let here?"

"Third floor, furnished; one hundred a month, sir."

"Show me over."

The flats at Belvidere Hall were small, ridiculously so. Bently complained of it.

"Look at the location!" retorted the porter. "One hundred a month is really dirt cheap."

"Haven't you anything larger on the top floor?"

"That's occupied. It's a double flat."

"Who lives there?"

"Mr. Clegg and Mr. Mitchell."

Bently grumbled a little further, but agreed to take the vacant flat and move in at once. He offered the hundred dollars in cash and references, and received a key in return. At Belvidere Hall they were not particular about the status of tenants as long as they paid in advance.

Late that same night the third floor held Bently, Hinkson and several police officers in dress of ordinary citizens. The scientist had also brought a couple of large suit cases, which he proceeded to unpack. The one held chemicals for raising fire and abundant smoke; the other held fire extinguishers.

They watched at the keyhole of the door until both Clegg and Mitchell and a man who looked like a valet were inside the apartment. They waited a further two hours to allow slumber to settle down upon the occupants of the top-floor chambers.

Then they proceeded to clear all the furniture and carpets out of one room and raise fire. For a scientist it was a simple matter to create an abundance of smoke and steam without much danger of conflagration.

Leaving one man to handle the fire extinguishers, Bently and the police officers rushed out on the landing in night attire and shouted "Fire!" at the top of their voices.

The sleeping chambers roused like an ant hill. Men, young and old, scurried out of rooms and down the hall, clutching their belongings and valuables. Bently himself pounded at the door of Clegg's flat, yelling "Fire! Fire!"

The maneuver answered perfectly. The pyjama-clad Clegg and his partner and the man who looked like a valet all came out, scared and half asleep and completely at a disadvantage. Before they realized what was happening they were in the custody of the police. Bently strode into the empty top flat, peered about, threw open a door of a room, and found the judge bound and gagged and looking remarkably like a stoutish, ruffled hen.

"Don't kill me!" implored Judge Slade through the muffle of his gag.

Bently ripped the bonds with a stout knife.

"What are you going to do with me?" whimpered the judge. He had been scared out of his senses by the events of the past week of terror.

"Put you back on the bench again," answered Bently with a tinge of irony.

"It was extremely neat, extremely simple," explained Bently to Mrs. Slade at the romantic hour of four o'clock in the morning.

"The gang ran a leaking carboy of formaldehyde along Fifth Avenue. That had a fourfold purpose. The first was to cause Judge Slade to pull up the windows of his taxi. Then the chauffeur stopped, and the judge called through the speaking tube for him to go on. At that, the chauffeur discharged concentrated ammonia through the tube full into your husband's face. The tube was arranged for it. You will note that they didn't use chloroform; they were too up-to-date for that. Chloroform acts slowly; a man would have time and senses to call out and raise an alarm. But ammonia, concentrated, paralyzes instantly. It suffocates. The chauffeur drove on, and at the entrance to Belvidere Hall, Clegg and Mitchell were patiently waiting to open the taxi door, and it was the work of but a minute to carry the unconscious judge inside.

"Second reason for the formaldehyde: to have a whole streetful of people bathing their eyes and entirely concerned with their own troubles.

"Third reason: to overpower the smell of the ammonia.

"Fourth reason: to combine chemically with the ammonia vapor inside the taxi and so remove the traces of it. The chauffeur drove his empty cab around for a little to clear it, and then returned to a Broadway cab rank. It was the safest place for him. The smell of the formaldehyde persisted for at least half an hour. No other smell could live against it.

"Who would have thought of searching for a kidnaped man in the heart of the busiest parts of New York? Who would have thought of searching for that taxi right on Broadway?"

Bently pursued the monologue to which the circle in the judge's home was listening in awed silence:

"There was only one contingency they failed to guard against."

"And that was?"

"Myself," answered the scientist with entire complacency.

IZZY KAPLAN'S KOLUMN

Received via W. O. McGEEHAN

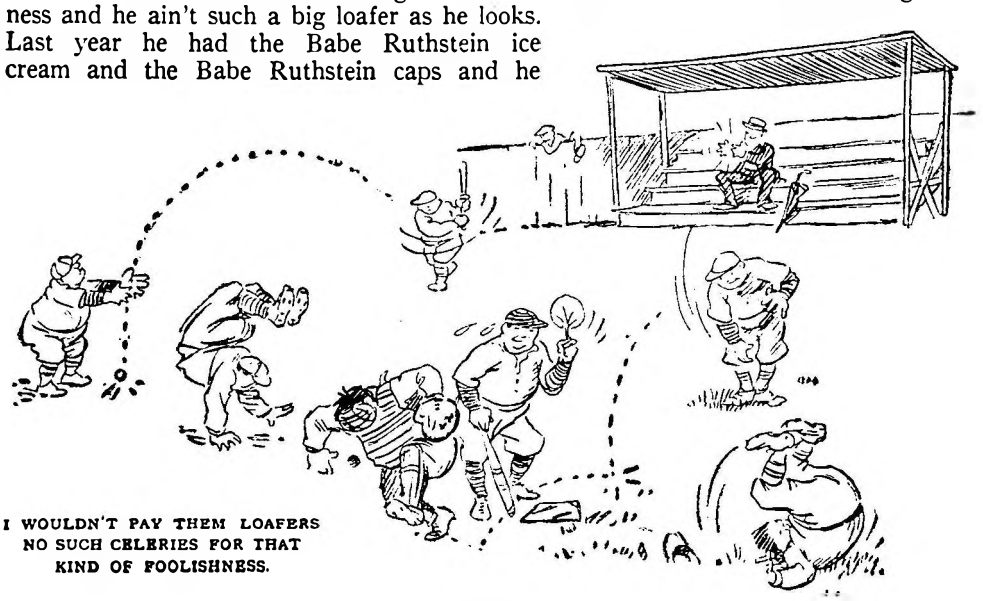
SPRING TRAINING IS LOOSE

ME and Baby Ruthstein, which he is the champeen run-home hitter for the Yankee baseballers, is doing our sprink training so that we would be ready for the customers when the season starts to commence. I give you my word that it is like being a loafer only Baby Ruthstein is getting paid for it. Personally, I don't need no sprink training on account I never do nothing but brain work, and brains couldn't be trained. You got to get them natural like I got mine.

Me and Baby Ruthstein is just like that, and I am on the trip so he could get the benefit of my experience and listen to a lot of good adwice which it never hurt nobody even if you wouldn't listen to it. Baby Ruthstein had a rotten year last year, and business by me was not so good, neither, so in a way me and the Baby is boids with the same kind of feathers, and misery loves miserable company, and it is chust as easy to turn over two new leafs as one, which we are both going to do it.

Baby Ruthstein is listening to my adwice, too, and is going to go into business for himseluf like me on account I am tolding him that there ain't nothing at all working for a celery which him and the President of the United States is getting the same, but neither one of them would have a cent safed out of it. Mr. Ruthstein made a lot of bum inwestments which they was mostly on the first race at some treck, and there is nothing in the horse business, anyhow, unless it is in the hides and glue.

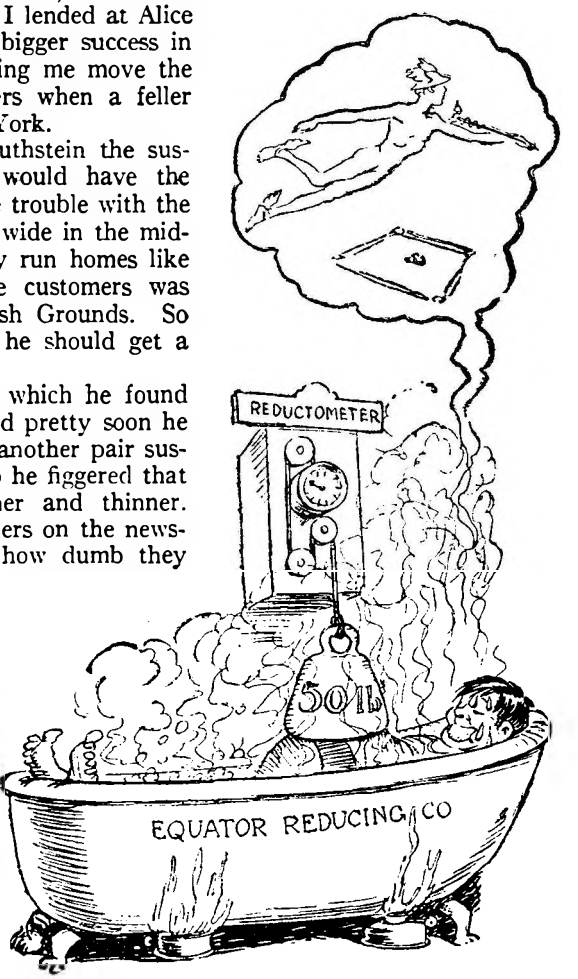
Of course Mr. Ruthstein has got it a lot of sidelines besides the baseballing business and he ain't such a big loafer as he looks. Last year he had the Babe Ruthstein ice cream and the Babe Ruthstein caps and he



I WOULDN'T PAY THEM LOAFERS NO SUCH CELERIES FOR THAT KIND OF FOOLISHNESS.

did a little chob for the moving pictures, something like this here Eyetalian feller which his name is Walentino, and then he does a lot of stories for the newspapers when he is resting himseluf at nights and don't have nothing else to think about.

Right now he is starting to commence to go into the suspender business, which is something I could told him a lot about it, on account it was the first business I had after I lended at Alice Island, and I would have made a bigger success in it only the politz was always making me move the pushcart. Politz is always knockers when a feller is starting out in business in New York.



It was me who gave Baby Ruthstein the suspenders ideer. Nobody but me would have the brains to think it out. You see, the trouble with the Baby last year was that he was so wide in the middle that he couldn't knock so many run homes like he done the year before, and the customers was starting to quit coming to the Polish Grounds. So all winter Mr. Ruthstein is trying he should get a reduction in the middle.

He started wearing suspenders which he found an old pair of them in the farm, and pretty soon he was not so wide. Then he bought another pair suspenders, and he got thinner yet. So he figgered that suspenders was making him thinner and thinner. That gave me the ideer. These fellers on the newspapers which you know yourseluf how dumb they are is always writing edwertisements about Baby Ruthstein, so he is a pretty well-known feller all over the country.

Well, my ideer is that Baby Ruthstein should go into business selling suspenders. I don't mean he should start it with a push cart, neither, on account all summer he has to be waiting on the baseball customers. But he could go in the suspender business in a big way with his own fectory and his own salesmen on the road. I would be the silent partner, which that ain't quite right, neither, on account I wouldn't be exactly silent. All he would have to do would be to write it his automograph like he does it on the baseballs, which they are selling them for soufinirs, and baseballs won't hold up nobody's pents like suspenders would. Suspenders is a lot more useful and a lot of people which they couldn't afford it baseballs would buy a pair of Baby Ruthstein's suspenders to remember him by.

Personally, I think the ideer would make suspenders come beck again even you hardly see a pair of them no more. You know how it is when a feller is well known by big people. The customers see him with suspenders and they run right into a store and buy it a pair. I am going to have a store right in the Yenkees' new baseballing park, and I bet I could sold more suspenders than Harry M. Stevens could sold hot dogs, on account Baby Ruthstein told me himseluf that he would wear suspenders with his baseballing suit.

With me pushing the suspenders it wouldn't be long before Baby Ruthstein could sold out his baseballing business, which is haluf of a loafer's work, anyhow, and settle down to be the biggest suspender man in New York. Then he could take up a side line of pents, too. If a feller could corner the pents market in New York and then

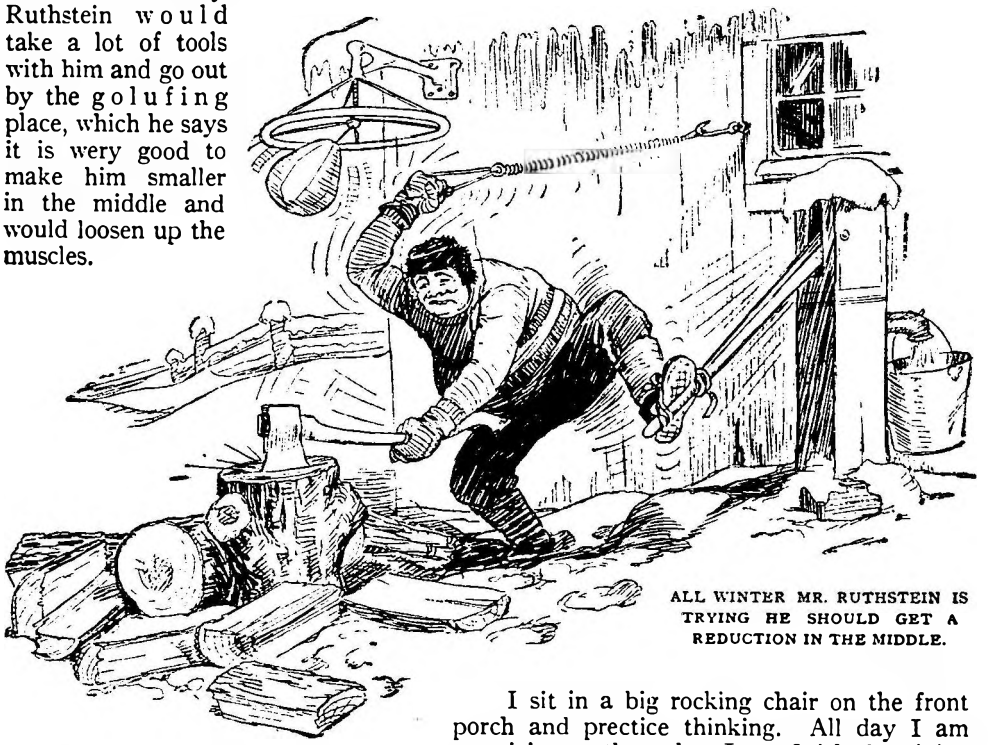
sell them so you could use nothing to hold them up but suspenders he would be making big money. Also it wouldn't be so long before the ladies is wearing them, too, which some of them are doing it already.

Our business cards would read like this:

BABY RUTHSTEIN & IZZY KAPLAN

Pents and Suspenders for Ladies and Gents. Our Pents is Well Acquainted with our Suspenders and is Dependent on Them for Support. Do not Trust your Pents with Suspenders which They ain't Well Acquainted with to Avoid Being Emberressed in Society.

Me and Mr. Ruthstein is training in different ways. Every morning we would get in a bathtub and a colored feller, which his name is Sol, would rub us with a brush. Then Baby Ruthstein would take a lot of tools with him and go out by the golufing place, which he says it is wery good to make him smaller in the middle and would loosen up the muscles.



ALL WINTER MR. RUTHSTEIN IS TRYING HE SHOULD GET A REDUCTION IN THE MIDDLE.

I sit in a big rocking chair on the front porch and prectice thinking. All day I am precticing so that when I am finished training I ought to be better than ever. There ain't nothing to think about in these places so the brains ain't wery tired at the end of the day like they would be in New York where a lot of other fellers is thinking in competition with you, and most of them is thinking how they could skin you so that you got to think fester than they do it.

A lot of other baseballers is in this place, and no wonder most of them is done. All the time they are out running on the road or they go into a beck lot and throw it baseballs around. Honest, some of them ect more like customers than fellers which is in the business perfessionally. And how they could lie about it to their bosses. They would come in and say: "I had it a fine workout to-day," and all they would do would be to play baseball from morning till night when it is a pinochle game, but them ball players hold the cards so close to their wests that even a feller like me couldn't hardly make expenses playing with them.

Personally, I wouldn't pay them loafers no such celeries for that kind of foolishness. What is the use of it? Customers go to the parks to see Baby Ruthstein hit it a run home and the rest of the show is nix with most of them. They could have cheaper players in the other chobs and safe a lot of money. Also they should have the run home in the first inning so that customers who has got business could leaf early if they wanted to.

It is my opinion that the Baby will hit it more run homes than ever before this year on account now he knows that the more run homes he gets the better is the chances for the suspender business. A lot of people think that he is a little dumb, but I know he is almost as smart a business man as Benneh Leonard. Even Benneh was not smart enough to think up about a side line like suspenders which they might have made him a fortune. Instead a champeen belt he could have inwentioned champeen suspenders and had the ideer patented before anybody could steal it.

Lest night me and a lot of the baseballers went out hunting for snipes in the woods. They saw I was the smartest feller in the crowd, so they said I could hold the beg while they would chase the snipes. You know how it is hunting for snipes. The smartest feller stays out in the woods with a beg and a light and the other fellers chase the snipes into the beg.

I told them I could hold two begs chust as easy as one, and we would get more snipes. So we went way out in the woods and the other fellers went to round up the snipes while I am holding a beg in each hend.

Mr. Ruthstein told me to be careful when the snipes started to come as they would fly wery fest into the begs and they might knock me over. But I told them I was too smart to be fooled by any snipes. So they went off and left me holding the begs. Would you belief it them fellers was so dumb that they got lost in the woods. In the morning there was no snipes and no baseballers, and I falled asleep with the begs in my hand.

It was a wery long walk beck to the hotel, but I had a good laugh at them fellers for getting lost which showed how dumb they were. To-morrow night we are going hunting for snipes again and I am going to hold three begs on account they say that the snipes is wery thick in these parts. I couldn't trust nobody else to hold the begs. Always they are telling me it is the smartest feller who is picked for this chob and even I wasn't the smartest I wouldn't let nobody say that a baseballer had to hold the begs for Izzy Kaplan. Holding the beg chust comes natural to me and everybody spoke about how nice I held them.

P. S.—Don't mention the ideer about the suspenders to that feller Moe Koenigsberg. It would be chust like him to try and steal it. You can tell him, though, that I been electioned to hold the begs in all the big snipe hunts. That would make the loafer chealous.

ʊ ʊ ʊ

WAITING

THE sun has answered to the morn,
The sea responded to the breeze,
The hills vibrate the hunter's horn,
The lark finds echo in the trees.

The dews have satisfied the rose
In nature's sweet antiphony,
The world responds to daylight's close—
But not a word from you to me.

The night has hushed the cypress moan,
The stars the vault of heaven supplied;
Lest you should move in space alone,
They hold their lamps your feet to guide.

The trembling earth accords in tune
As zephyrs lull the murmuring sea
In sweet communion with the moon—
But not a word from you to me.

Margaret Severance.

See How Easily You Can Learn to Dance This New Way

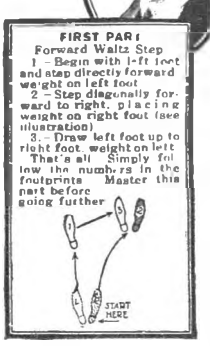
If you can do the step illustrated in the chart in lower corner, there is no reason why you cannot easily and quickly master all of the latest steps through Arthur Murray's method of teaching dancing right in your own home.

NO matter how skeptical you may be about being able to learn to dance by mail, this new course will quickly prove to you that you can easily learn without a teacher on the ground to direct your steps—and without music or partner—right at home.

Even if you don't know one dance step from another, these new diagrams and simple instructions will enable you to learn any of the newest dances in an amazingly short time. You don't need to leave your own room—it isn't necessary to go into a dancing class—or to pay large fees for private instruction. All you need to do is to follow the instructions as shown on the diagrams, practice the steps a few times to fix them in your memory and there is no reason why you should not be able to dance on any floor, to either band or phonograph music, and to lead, follow and balance correctly, no matter how expert your partner may be.

Learn Any Dance in a Few Hours

Arthur Murray, Dancing Instructor for the Vanderbilts.



Whether you want to learn the Fox Trot, One Step, College Rock, Conversation Walk, Waltz, or any of the newer steps, you won't have the slightest difficulty in doing so through this new method. Then, the very next time dancing starts you can surprise your friends by choosing a partner and stepping right out with perfect confidence that every step you make and every movement is absolutely correct. Arthur Murray guarantees to teach you, or your lessons won't cost you one cent.

More than 60,000 people have learned to become perfect dancers by mail. In fact, about five thousand people a month are becoming wonderful dancers through Arthur Murray's amazing new method.

Courtesy Metro Pictures Corp.
Scene from the famous screen version of "The Four Horsemen," showing Rodolph Valentino in one of the wonderful Tango steps.

FREE Tango Lesson

Arthur Murray has diagrammed the principal steps in the famous Tango as danced by Rodolph Valentino in such a simplified way that you can quickly and easily master this fascinating Tango, after you have the Murray foundation to your dancing. Send for this Tango today and you will soon be able to amaze all your friends with your ability to perfectly dance it

Good dancers are always the most popular people in their set—they never lack partners and are invited to every social event because dancing is the most popular form of recreation, and good dancers are always in demand. But besides this, good dancers always have perfect mental and physical control, ease of manner, poise, are never embarrassed, shy or timid. Very often they meet influential people in this social way who are very helpful to them in business.

New 16-Lesson Course Only $1.00 —FREE: The Fascinating Tango.

Simply send one dollar and Arthur Murray will immediately mail to you the complete 16-lesson dancing course. He will also send you FREE the complete diagrams for teaching you the tango that was danced in "The Four Horsemen." You can test the course for five days and if within that time you are not positively delighted in every way, just return the full course and your dollar will be promptly refunded to you.

Send the coupon today; enclose one dollar and you will receive FREE the Tango steps diagrammed out in simple form so that you can quickly master them and dance them as Valentino did in "The Four Horsemen." The dollar will pay for the complete 16-lesson course of dancing instruction. This offer may soon be withdrawn, so you must act quickly.

ARTHUR MURRAY

Studio 711, 801 Madison Ave., New York

Arthur Murray, Studio 711,
801 Madison Avenue, New York.

I enclose $1.00 for which please send me your 16-lesson course. You are also to send me absolutely FREE the steps of the TANGO as danced in "THE FOUR HORSEMEN," all diagrammed so that I can quickly learn this fascinating dance. If I am not satisfied with the 16-lesson course I may return it within five days and you agree to promptly refund the dollar I am now sending to you.

Name.....

Address.....

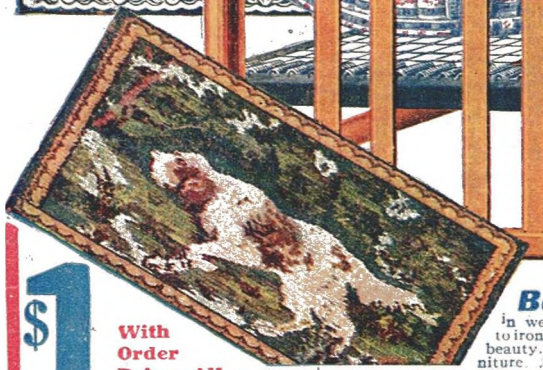
City.....State.....

Would You Like to Teach Dancing?.....

FREE! A Fine Lace Curtain and a Velvet Hearth Rug With this Complete Bed Outfit

FREE! I make for a Limited Time this Wonderful Offer:—If you will be PROMPT, if you will send your order for the Bed Outfit QUICKLY I will send you absolutely FREE a Velvet Hearth Rug and an attractive Lace Curtain. The Rug is made of All Wool Velvet, in true-to-life colors. The size is 27 inches by 52 inches. It is desirable for many places in the home; especially by the fire or at the bedside. The Lace Curtain is 50 inches wide and 2½ yards long. The Quality is very satisfactory. The design is richly elaborate and artistic. Takes the place of a pair of curtains and comes with a hemmed heading ready to place on pole. See illustration for details of design.

Ivory Enamel or Gold Bronze Finish— Be Sure to State Your Choice



$1 With Order Brings All—Bed, Mattress and Spring with Free Rug and Curtain

Bed: Cold rolled burnished steel. Strong and solid, very light in weight. Electrically welded. Superior to iron beds. Colonial design of grace and beauty. Harmonizes with any bedroom furniture. See picture for details. Diameter of posts is 1½ inches; cross rods 1 1-16 inches. Oval filler rods are 1⅛ by ½ inches. Full double bed size only. Finishes: Ivory Enamel or Gold Bronze. Finishes baked on and will not peel or flake.

Spring: Made in one piece with side rails attached. A high 6-inch rise guarantees sleep-comfort. 60 powerful helical coil springs hold the fabric to the angle steel ends and the oval tubular side rails are much stronger than the old style round type. Spring is thoroughly tempered for strength and flexibility. It is noiseless, sagless, and rustproof. All parts solidly made; they fit perfectly.

Mattress: Weight 50 pounds. Interior: clean basswood fibre of long wearing quality that prevents sagging. Outer layers (top, bottom and all around edges) are thick, clean, excellent quality cotton felt, much more felt than average combination mattress. Covering is a durable floral art ticking in blue and pink. Mattress is deeply tufted, resilient and fluffy—extremely comfortable.

30 Days' FREE Trial

Send for this Complete Bed Outfit today. Use it a month. Compare its value with the value given in your home-town stores for more money on cash in advance terms.

Then if you are not entirely satisfied, return it. I will refund your first payment and all freight charges. You will not be out a penny. My Money-Back Offer is exactly as stated. I have made it for years. It is the foundation stone of confidence that exists between hundreds of thousands of my customers and me. A small first payment of $1.00 brings complete outfit—Bed, Mattress and Spring—right to your door. If you decide to keep it, send us the little, never-missed payment of $2.50 every month. You enjoy use of outfit while paying. **Order No. PA350. Terms: $1 with order, $2.50 monthly. Special 30th Anniversary Sale Price only $33.85. Ivory Enamel or Gold Bronze Finish. Be Careful to state your choice. If no choice is stated we will ship Ivory Enamel Finish.**

NATHANIEL SPEAR President

SPEAR & CO. **Dept. W-5 Pittsburgh, Pa.**

Send for My Big Free 30th Anniversary Bargain Catalog. It gives 30 to 50% Savings on Everything for the Home—Thousands of Bargains.

SPEAR & CO., Dept. W-5, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Send me at once Bed Outfit No. PA350 as described above and the Free Hearth Rug and Lace Curtain. Enclosed is $1.00 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of the 30 days' trial I decide to keep it, I will send you $2.50 monthly. Total price $33.85. Title remains with you until paid in full. Send me your Big Free Catalog also. Please write or print name and address plainly.

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