ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Tuned Out

by

Rufus King

10¢ PER COPY — SEPTEMBER 6 — BY THE YEAR $4.00

ED. PINAUD

Exquisite Aids to Beauty

YOU can't help being delighted with these exquisite French toilet preparations. They are so different in quality and effect from the ordinary necessities. With supreme quality is combined moderate price.

ELIXIR SHAMPOO
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Perfume and soften the water.

LILAC TALC
Superb Talcum perfumed with French Lilac.

LILAC VEGETAL
The finest toilet perfume for general use.

EAU DE QUININE HAIR TONIC
The original French Eau de Quinine. Popular for generations.

Send 25c for a set of 5 testing samples. Write name and address plainly.

Parfumerie ED. PINAUD

ED. PINAUD Bldg. NEW YORK

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLXII CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 6, 1924 NUMBER 6

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

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

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

You too can make $125.00 a week

"I had no experience in selling before going with GOODWEAR. Now I make $125 a week regularly. I believe that any man who'll work can do the same and would advise every man who wants a fine paying job to write to GOODWEAR."

Peter Birdakis

To earnest men everywhere we offer a wonderful opportunity taking orders for our fine, pure wool suits and overcoats, regular $55 values, all at the one low price of $31.75. Our values are so remarkable they sell on sight. You get your commissions in advance, simply take the orders, and we deliver and collect. Our salesmen are making $50 to $125 a week and even more.

No experience is needed and spare time will do. We teach and train you, supply the finest selling outfit in America, big 6x9 cloth samples and everything else you need, all packed in a beautiful carrying case. If you want to get into a high-class business, make big money, and be independent, write for full information today. Address Dept. 256

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West Adams St. at Peoria Chicago

Please send me complete information about your Line and the opportunity you offer.

256

Name .....

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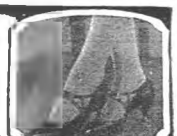
MAKE $95 *Every Week*



You Can Do It Easily! Be our factory representative —take orders for Archer made-to-measure shoes for women. We'll pay you liberally. Easy work—no experience required.

Made-to-Measure Shoes for Women

Regular $15 special made shoes—only $7.50. Every woman interested. Perfect fit guaranteed. Choice of staple or novelty styles. All leathers. Every pair with steel arch support, antiseptic insoles. Leather lined. Prices same as store shoes.

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You collect and keep a good profit in advance from customer. We deliver. Easy fitting instructions furnished; also actual shoe samples. Your chance to make $5,000 a year. Write today.

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$1 DOWN — 21 Jewels

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

Quality and Style

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

Watch Burlington Company

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Dept. 14-56, Chicago, Illinois

Make That Dream Come True!

"Another $50 raise! Why, that's the third increase I've had in a year."

WOULDN'T you like to be able to say that? *You can!* Not by just wishing for promotion or dreaming of it, but by getting the special training that employers everywhere are looking for and are glad to pay for.

One hour a day, spent with the International Correspondence Schools in the quiet of your own home, will prepare you for the position you want in the work you like best.

Yes, it will! Put it up to us to prove it. Without cost, without obligation, just mark and mail this coupon.

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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:

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☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
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Name .....

Street Address 3-6-24

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

Occupation .....

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

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AGENTS: AMAZING INVENTION GIVES TWICE THE HEAT AT HALF THE COST. BURNS OIL IN ANY STOVE OR FURNACE. STARTS WITH TURN OF VALVE. COOKS OR BAKES ANYTHING. PEOPLE EVERYWHERE THROWING AWAY THEIR COAL BUCKETS AND HEATING THE MONEY-SAVING INSTANT-GAS WAY. TATEISHI MADE $200.00 WEEKLY. NO EXPERIENCE NEEDED. FULL TIME OR SPARE TIME. WRITE AT ONCE FOR FREE SAMPLE OFFER AND BE READY FOR BIG FALL AND WINTER SALES. INTERNATIONAL HEATING COMPANY, DEPT. 5029, 119 S. 14TH ST., ST. LOUIS, MO.

TAILORING SALESMEN $150.00 weekly. Liberal bonus and large commission selling $45.00 All-Wool Suits $32.50. Union made to order by oldest tailors on earth. Satisfaction guaranteed. Experience unnecessary. Write today for free outfit, exclusive territory. Wilson Tailoring Co., 950 W. Jackson, Chicago.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. CARNATION CO., Dept. 200, St. Louis, Mo.

CAN YOU SELL FORD SIZE TIRES AT $3.50 EACH? WRITE FOR PLAN. DETAILS FREE. AMERICAN ACCESSORIES COMPANY, DEPARTMENT 101, CINCINNATI, OHIO.

AGENTS: GET INTO THE TAILORING GAME. Make $75.00 to $125.00 a week and up right from the start. No experience necessary. We teach you and supply finest Selling Outfit. $10.00 to $20.00 a day profits easy. You get paid every day. Write Quick. Address, Dept. 108, GOODWEAR Chicago, Inc., Chicago.

$5 TO $15 DAILY (sworn proof) introducing New Guaranteed Hosiery. Must wear or replaced free. No capital or experience required. You simply write orders. We deliver and collect. YOUR PAY DAILY, ALSO MONTHLY BONUS. Free auto offer besides. Elegant outfit furnished. All colors and grades including silks—lisles—woools. MACOCHEE TEXTILE CO., Room 27017, Cincinnati, O.

WANTED several hundred men throughout country to represent manufacturer selling raincoats, sweaters, sheep-lined coats, leather vests. Big commissions daily. Particulars Free. Northern Sales Co., Desk 29, Northern Office Bldg., Chicago.

AGENTS Get our free sample case offer. Build your own pleasant profitable business. Be your own boss. Ho-Ro-Co household necessities sell, repeat quickly. Ho-Ro-Co, 2718 Dodier, St. Louis.

MAN WANTED in each town to wear and introduce C. T. A. suits in spare time. We furnish samples and free suit to hustlers. Write for our great offer. CHICAGO TAILORS ASSOC., Dept 610, Sta. C, 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.

MEN'S SHIRTS. Easy to sell. Big demand everywhere. Make $15.00 daily. Unders ll Sl rts. Complete line. Exclusive patterns. Free Samples. CHICAGO SHIRT MANUFACTURERS, 229 W. VanBuren, Factory 219, Chicago.

AGENTS, HOUSEHOLD NECESSITY, SELLS RAPIDLY. LARGE PROFIT. SQUARE DEAL. PREMIER MFG. CO., DEPT. 811, DETROIT, MICH.

BIG MONEY taking orders for High Grade special made "Consumers All-Weather Coats" Direct from Factory. Special Demonstrating Sample $2.95. Write today. Complete outfit FREE. CONSUMERS MFG. CO., Dept. M 729 Roosevelt, Chicago.

MEN: $50 TO $100 A WEEK guaranteed good hustlers selling world's greatest all wool $31.50 suits and overcoats. We start you without a nickel and train you. Fall line greatest ever. Write for new sales plan. J. B. SIMPSON, Dept. 904, 843 Adams, Chicago.

AGENTS: $50 A WEEK TAKING ORDERS FOR GUARANTEED HOSIERY for men, women, children. Must wear 12 months or replaced free. All styles and finest line of silk hose. Write for sample outfit. THOMAS MFG. CO., Class 207, Dayton, Ohio.

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

AGENTS—WRITE FOR FREE SAMPLES. SELL MADISON "BETTER-MADE" SHIRTS FOR LARGE MANUFACTURER DIRECT TO WEARER. NO CAPITAL OR EXPERIENCE REQUIRED. MANY EARN $100 WEEKLY AND BONUS. MADISON MILLS, 564 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

MEN TO ACT AS DISTRIBUTORS for our "American Princess" auto and furniture polish. Exceptional opportunity to right party. Our selling methods put you on paying basis at once. Must be live wire with executive ability. Ask for territory. American Products Co., South Charleston, W. Va.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

20 ACRES OR MORE OF OUR BEST LAND IN MICHIGAN; close to town of 3000 people. Only $10 down; balance long time. Send postal for 52-page book FREE. SWIGART LAND COMPANY, Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS—SONG POEMS WANTED

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

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 402-J Romax Building, New York.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TAILORING SALESMEN—AMAZING EARNINGS, $75 to $150 WEEKLY WITH CROWN TAILORED-TO-ORDER $21.75 SUITS AND OVERCOATS. ALL WOOL FABRICS. LINEN CANVAS FRONTS. HAND MADE BUTTON-HOLES. UNEQUALED QUALITY—SATISFACTION GUARANTEED OR MONEY BACK. BIG COMMISSIONS DAILY. EXTRA BONUS FOR PRODUCERS. WRITE QUICK FOR OUTFIT AND PROTECTED TERRITORY. CROWN TAILORING CO. ESTABLISHED 1905. RACE, COR. THIRD, CINCINNATI, OHIO.

OUR WONDERFUL NEW PLAN will put you in the $5,000 class. 350 products. Low prices. Supreme quality. Complete outfit free. We furnish automobile. Write quick. American Products Co., 2051 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS—MAKE $15 AND MORE EACH DAY SELLING NEW ALL-WEATHER COAT AT $4.98. FULL OR SPARE TIME. IMPROVED MANUFACTURING COMPANY, DEPT. 159C, ASHLAND, OHIO.

TAILORING SALESMEN. Merchants and Barbers, everywhere, earn $75.00 to $150.00 a week selling our guaranteed all wool suits and extra pants at $28.50 and up—$5.00 to $12.00 profit on each order. We furnish the most complete and attractive swatch line, showing 250 large size samples, together with a durable leather carrying case. Write for exclusive agency, TODAY, and secure our Fall and Winter samples. JAY ROSE & COMPANY, Dept. 400, 411 So. Wells St., Chicago, Ill.

EVERYBODY BUYS new, instant stain and rust remover. For clothing, table linen, etc. Fine premium with every sale. Big, Quick Profits. Free Outfit. Write today. Christy, 56 Union, Newark, New York.

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

BIG MONEY SELLING NEW HOUSEHOLD CLEANER. Washes and dries windows. Sweeps, scrubs, mops. Complete outfit less than brooms. Over 100% profit. HARPER BRUSH WORKS, 101 2nd St., Fairfield, Iowa.

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

AGENTS—You can earn $30 cash extra every week during your spare time and get your own clothes FREE BESIDES, taking tailoring orders. We are the only house that pays you DOUBLE. No experience necessary. Real cloth samples will be sent FREE. Write today before you forget. SPENCER MEAD COMPANY, Dept. J-264, Chicago, Ill.

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

HELP WANTED

ESTABLISH YOURSELF—AT HOME—AS A Photographic Expert. Make $75 a week while learning. Write at once for TEMPORARY offer. INTERNATIONAL STUDIOS, Dept. C-115, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

HELP WANTED—MALE

BE A DETECTIVE—Exceptional opportunity; earn big money. Travel. Thousands of dollars offered in rewards. Established in 1909. Particulars free. Write C. T. LUDWIG, 126 Westower Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

SELL Our All-wool Suits and Overcoats, $25.50. Beginner Salesmen make $75 to $150 a week—easy. **Write Us Now!** STYLECENTER TAILORING CO., 411 Anderson Building, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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

EARN $110 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., Buffalo, N. Y.

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS, START $133 MONTH. RAILROAD PASS; EXPENSES PAID; QUESTIONS FREE. COLUMBUS INSTITUTE, A-6, COLUMBUS, OHIO.

MEN WANTING FOREST RANGER, POSTAL CLERK, INTERNAL REVENUE AND OTHER GOVERNMENT POSITIONS; STEADY WORK. WRITE FOR FREE PARTICULARS. MOKANE, DEPT. A-31, DENVER, COLO.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

WANTED—LADIES TO EMBROIDER LINENS FOR US at home during their leisure moments. Write at once. FASHION EMBROIDERIES, 1520, Lima, Ohio.

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

AMBITIOUS GIRLS — WOMEN — WANTED. Learn Gown Making at home. Make $25.00 week. Earn while learning. Sample lessons free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. F-521, Rochester, N. Y.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

Follow this Man

Secret Service Operator 38 is on the job

FOLLOW him through all the excitement of his chase of the counterfeit gang. See how a crafty operator works. Telltale finger prints on the lamp stand in the murdered girl's room! The detective's cigarette case is handled by the unsuspecting gangster, and a great mystery is solved. Better than fiction. It's true, every word of it. No obligation. Just send the coupon and get—

FREE!

The Confidential Reports No. 38 Made to His Chief

And the best part of it all is this. It may open your eyes to the great future for YOU as a highly paid Finger Print Expert. More men are needed right now. This school has taken men just like you and trained them for high official positions. This is the kind of work you would like. Days full of excitement. Big salaries. Rewards.

Can you meet this test?

Can you read and write? Are you ambitious? Would you give 30 minutes a day of your spare time preparing yourself for this profession? Would you like a life of excitement, thrilling adventures and high pay? Answer "yes" and I'll show you how to attain all this.

Send the coupon and I'll send the Free Reports—also a wonderful illustrated book telling of the future awaiting you as a Finger Print Expert.

T. G. COOKE, Pres.

UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCE

1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 14-56 Chicago, Ill.

University of Applied Science
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 14-56. Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen:—Without any obligation whatever, send me the Reports of Operator No. 38, also your 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.....

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

We've Made You

A unique Shaving Cream
Will you please accept a test?

By V. K. Cassady, Chief Chemist

GENTLEMEN:

Here is a Shaving Cream which millions are discussing.

It does five things which men desire in a surpassing way.

The history is this:

Palmolive Soap, through its effects on the skin, had become the world's leading toilet soap. We desired to bring men those same effects in shaving. So we asked 1,000 men to tell us what they wanted most.

Then we worked 18 months to meet their requirements as no one else had done. We made up and tested 130 formulas to attain the utmost in a Shaving Cream.

The result surprised us no less than others.

Five astonishing results

1—Palmolive Shaving Cream multiplies itself in lather 250 times.
2—It softens the beard in one minute.
3—Its lather maintains its creamy fullness for ten minutes on the face.
4—The extra-strong bubbles support the hairs for cutting.
5—The palm and olive oil content makes the cream lotion-like in its effect.

It has been a sensation.

To add the final touch to shaving luxury, we have created Palmolive After Shaving Talc—especially for men. Doesn't show. Leaves the skin smooth and fresh, and gives that well-groomed look.

There are new delights here for every man who shaves. Please let us prove them to you. Clip coupon now.

THE PALMOLIVE COMPANY (Del. Corp.), Chicago, Ill.

PALMOLIVE SHAVING CREAM

10 SHAVES FREE

and a can of Palmolive After Shaving Talc
Simply insert your name and address and mail to

Address for residents of Wisconsin: The Palmolive Company (Wis. Corp.), Milwaukee, Wis., Dept. B-872. Address for residents other than Wisconsin: The Palmolive Company (Del. Corp.), 3702 Iron Street, Chicago, Ill., Dept. B-872.

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9275A

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

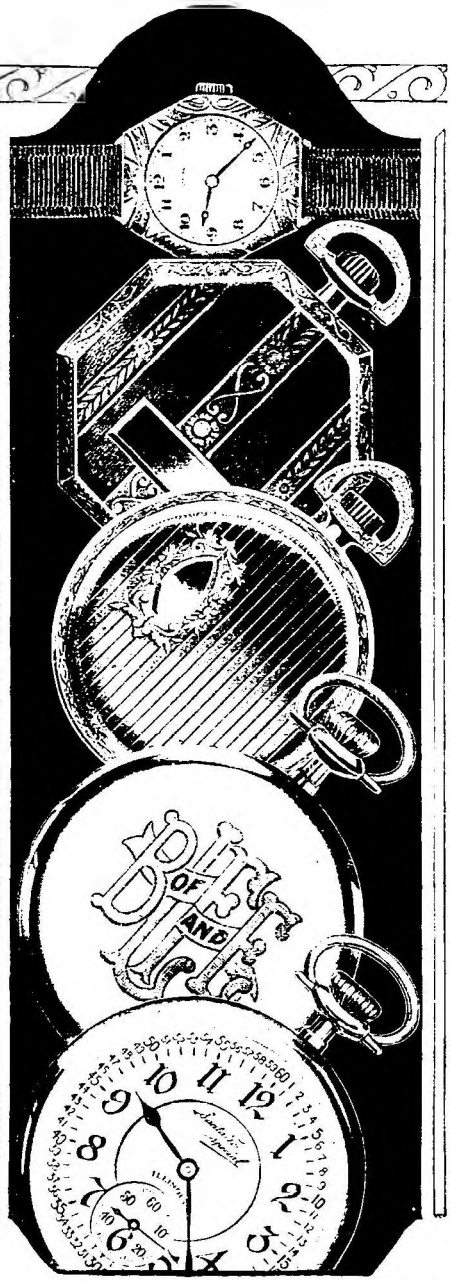
AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

PATENT ATT'YS—TRADE SCHOOLS—TYPEWRITERS

21 Jewel Santa Fe Special

Sent on Approval

21 Perfect Jewels
Adjusted to Positions
Adjusted to Temperatura
Adjusted to Isochronism
Adjusted to the Second
25 Year Gold Strata Case
Your choice of Dials (including Montgomery R. R. Dial)
New Thin Models. All sizes.



WHILE other watch dealers are raising their prices, asking you for larger monthly payments, and making payment terms harder for you to meet, we are offering you our new model Santa Fe Special, no advance in price, no money down, easier terms and smaller monthly payments. We realize the war is over and in order to double our business we MUST give you pre-war inducements, better prices, easier terms, and smaller payments.

Send No Money Without one penny of advance payment let us place in your hands to see, to examine, to inspect, to admire, to approve a real masterpiece in watch creation. Our determination to this year double our sales of the world famous Santa Fe Special and Bunn Special Watches prompts this matchless offer.

Ladies' Wrist Watch—"The New Elite"

This Artistic dependable Ladies' Wrist Watch, fitted with genuine Illinois Springfield movement. A perfect timepiece. Beautiful 14 Karat *white* or *green solid gold* case. Many designs—Ask for New Watch Book showing New Elite case designs in color. Watch sent on approval and sold on payments.

Page 12 of Our Watch Book Is of Special Interest to You!

Ask for our Watch Book free—then select the watch you would like to see, either the famous Santa Fe Special or the 6 position Bunn Special, and let us explain our easy payment plan and send the watch, express prepaid, for you to examine. No money down.

REMEMBER - No money down—easy payments buys a master timepiece—a 21 Jewel guaranteed for a lifetime at about half the price you pay for a similar watch of other makes. No money down. A wonderful offer.

SANTA FE WATCH COMPANY

957 Thomas Bldg. **TOPEKA, KANSAS**

"Home of the Great Santa Fe Railway"

SANTA FE WATCH CO.
957 Thomas Bldg., Topeka, Kans.

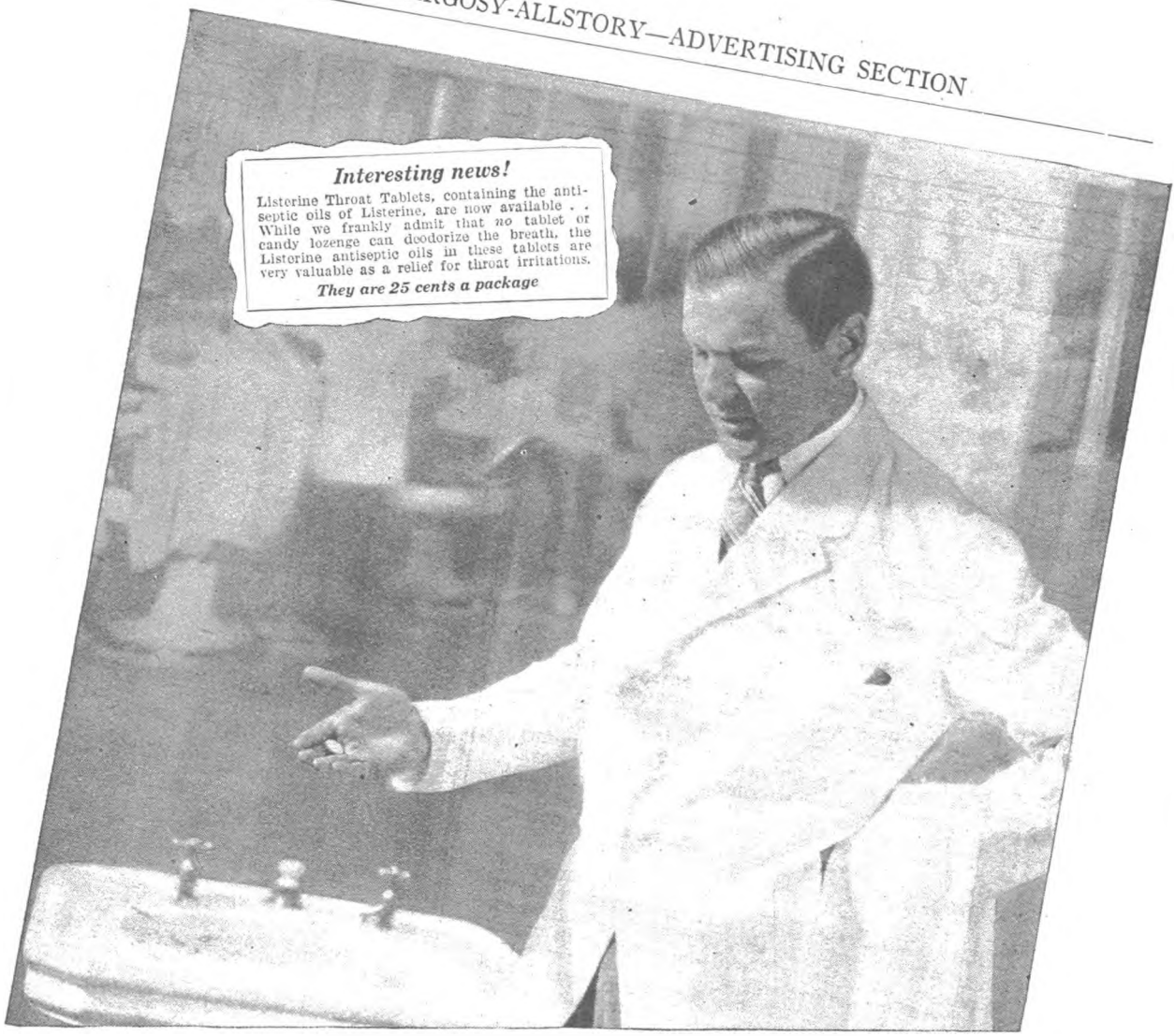
Please send prepaid and without obligation your Watch Book free, explaining your "No Money Down" Offer on this Santa Fe Special Watch.

Name.....

Address.....

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

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



"Another one of those 5 cent tips!"

HE was a good-looking fellow and one of the best barbers in the shop.

He did his best to be agreeable to customers, yet he noticed that patrons often avoided his chair, and many, many times his tip was so small that it seemed almost beggarly.

He was at a loss to understand why.

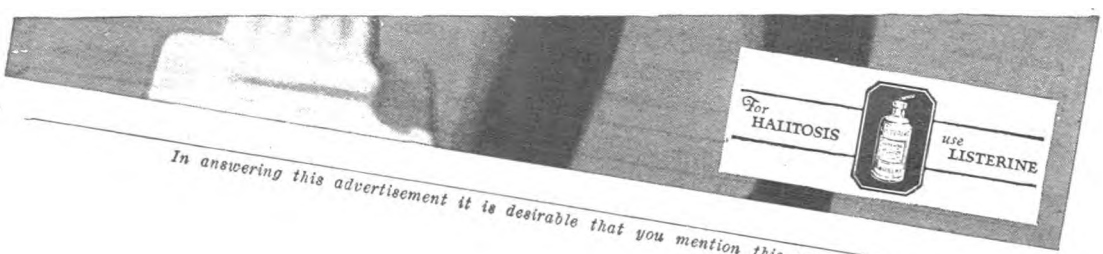
* * *

You, yourself, rarely know when you have halitosis (unpleasant breath). That's the insidious thing about it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

Sometimes, of course, halitosis comes from some deep-seated organic disorder that requires professional advice. But usually—and fortunately—halitosis is only a local condition that yields to the regular use of Listerine as a mouth wash and gargle. It is an interesting thing that this well-known antiseptic that has been in use for years for surgical dressings, possesses these unusual properties as a breath deodorant.

It halts food fermentation in the mouth and leaves the breath sweet, fresh and clean. *Not* by substituting some other odor but by really removing the old one. The Listerine odor itself quickly disappears. So the systematic use of Listerine puts you on the safe and polite side.

This safe and long-trusted antiseptic has dozens of different uses; note the little circular that comes with every bottle. Your druggist sells Listerine in the original brown package only—three sizes: three ounce, seven ounce and fourteen ounce. Buy the large size for economy.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*



ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLXII SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1924 NUMBER 6

Tuned Out

By RUFUS KING

Author of "Dirty Work," "The Silent Command," etc.

BY WAY OF PREFACE.

HUNCHES, premonitions, second-sight, and all that sort of thing, have always appeared to me to belong by right to the province of the weak-minded.

That was before I bought the trunk.

If I hadn't bought the trunk I would never have come across the amazing document, nor would I have met Billy. To have missed the first would have been a serious loss not alone to the world, but, I am sure, to its owner's peace of mind. It is not the sort of document that ought to be left lying about where it might fall into the hands of some unscrupulous person. As to not having met Billy, I do not know.

It is all very well for people to say that contact with youth is good for age. I haven't the least doubt but that it is. If one looks at it from the point of view that the bulk of things that are good for one are either uncomfortable or unpleasant, then the statement is true. I do not want to give the impression by this that Billy is unpleasant. He is quite the reverse, and is one of the most attractive young fellows imaginable. But he is decidedly uncomfortable.

In common with most people who have been intimately connected with some astounding experience, everything that follows it seems tame in comparison, and Billy is always hoping that either the same experience will be repeated, or else that a more exciting one will take its place. I have spent a good deal of valuable time—I say valuable inasmuch as the commodity is invariably reputed to be so—in trying to argue Billy into settling down, and into giving up his expectations of imminent and perilous emotional kicks.

Just because he happened to have been on hand when the experiment occurred and was closely concerned with its thrilling outcome is no reason, as I have futilely told him again and again, for expecting anything remotely like it to recur in either a blue or in any other peculiarly tinted sort of a moon.

Another uncomfortable condition of such a state of mind is an insatiable insistence that others be excited too. There is nothing that youth likes to share quite so much as astonishment. I am personally only too willing to share any amount of it; but I do not like to have to dispense it, and I could tell from the determined manner with which Billy all but unhinged the door to my flat last Sunday morning that I was about to be let in for something or other especially astonishing and that there would be no escape.

"Look here, sir," he said intently, only pausing briefly enough to inspect the pop-overs on the breakfast tray and to decide that he wanted one, "you've got to put this affair in writing. It's not the sort of thing that should be kept mum. I had a long argument with myself last night, and decided that we should—we must—give an account of it to the world."

"I wish you wouldn't stand up while eating," I told him. "I haven't the slightest interest in what it will do to your own stomach, but I have about mine. There is such a thing as sympathetic indigestion and I don't want to get it. I once kn—"

"If y—"

"I once knew a man named Zachary Adolphus Beems, through no fault of my own, who caught a very severe attack of it from his wife just after the good woman had indigestion one morning as a punishment for a startling habit she had had for years of bouncing up from the breakfast table at frequent intervals in order to run to the kitchen and get something."

"I w—"

"Now my watching you stand up there while you eat that pop-over, which I suggest you butter, is enough to disrupt the abomasum—which you may or may not know is the fourth stomach of a ruminant—of a gazelle an—"

"I don't believe a word you've been saying. You're making the whole thing up out of your head just to stall me off. Well, it won't do you any good. I'd write the account myself if I had the time, but I haven't and you have. You ought to be glad of the opportunity instead of flying off like this the minute I open my mouth about it. It will give you something to do. No, I thank you, I do not want any butter."

This was deliberately implied slander. I have plenty of things to do—so many that I scarcely know from day to day whether or not I can get them done. I couldn't say off-hand just what they are, but they keep popping up every instant or so and demand attention. The fact that they never get any has nothing to do with it; the things are there to be done, and if I wanted to I would do them.

"Granting," I said cautiously—one has to go cautiously when talking with Billy, as he has an extravagant aptitude for seizing an inch and making it an ell—"that I were temporarily to become bereft of my senses and write an account of the affair as you suggest, and which I tell you plainly I won't, have you paused at all to consider the effect upon our present-day semi-barbaric civilization were such a discovery to be loosed upon the world?"

"Yes," said Billy, with a disturbing whole-heartedness. "And that is exactly why you must write it."

I failed to see his point, and told him so. I even went so far, in my folly, as to ask for enlightenment.

"It is this way, sir: the thing that happened to Ramier and Drusilla and me is

just as important historically as, well, the Flood, or any other great news event in the earth's history. Now just as there was an historian for the Flood there ought to be one for this. I wonder—"

"But look here—"

"I wonder if you would mind ringing for more pop-overs? You might suggest some broiled kidneys and another pot of coffee while you are about it. I've already had my breakfast, but I can't stand up here like this and watch you eat without feeling hungry."

"I wish you wouldn't," I said hopefully. "If you will only sit down I'll order up anything you like. And I yet don't see that anything you have been talking about goes to prove that I am peculiarly fit for writing up your adventure."

"You will. You said yourself that it would be a dangerous thing for Ramier's discovery to be loosed upon the world. Well, I agree with you."

"I am very glad that you do, as it closes the whole question. We need say nothing more about it."

I hastened to change the subject and fled to the opening up of what I hoped would grow into a heated discussion on baseball—a theme that I have found out will hold Billy enthralled for hours at a time. "Now my personal opinion of the Babe is that—"

"It closes nothing! And I haven't the time now to discuss ball players. To go back to the Flood—"

"Look here, young man, I have read numerous outlines of history," I told him severely, "and if you thi—"

"I do wish you wouldn't interrupt me. You know very well what I mean. The man who wrote up the Flood attacked it exclusively from its pictorial angle. It didn't interest him a bit as a problem in physics in relation to the elements. He was evidently just as unable to explain, scientifically, the cause for such a whale of a bunch of water as is the Man in the Moon. But he made a good story out of it, and an important one, too, in the world's history."

"I still don't see—"

"It will be the same way with you. Your handling of this adventure will be solely dramatic, and such scientific data as you will have to bring in will be quite unintelligible and probably wrong. I doubt whether the most acute scientist in the country will be able to follow your account and then reproduce Ramier's experiment. You are the ideal man for the job."

"If you think," I said indignantly, "that I am going to sit here and supply you with broiled kidneys and pop-overs while you stand up there and spend your time, between swallows, in insulting me to my—"

"I do wish you would stop flying off on a tangent like this, sir. You know as well as I do that I wouldn't dream of insulting you. Besides, I haven't all morning to waste. I am due in an hour to take Jennie to church, and unless I see you properly started at your desk by then I'm pretty certain you will fritter away the whole afternoon, and this affair has been kept from the public long enough."

"How would it be if we were to hire some perfectly good writer to do it?" I suggested weakly. "I'm sure there is any number of them who would jump at the chance. If one can believe half the things that are said about authors, and I more than suspect one can, they are always in a state of being desperate about something or other, generally about food. I imagine we could find a good, honest, capable one with an authentic wife and a few authentically starving children who would look upon the commission as a blessing conferred directly by Providence. We could then put out a very private edition of four copies and everybody would be satisfied."

"Nobody would be satisfied at all," said Billy with confident belligerence, inasmuch as he had just caught sight from the tail of his eye of Hopkins coming into the room with a tray on which were the broiled kidneys and pop-overs. "This story must be scattered to all parts of the earth so that all peoples may know what happened. After you have finished it you can persuade one of the editors you know to print it."

"There you go too far," I said. "I might write it," I added, "but I am certain that no power on earth could budge any self-respecting editor into publishing it."

Billy caught the inch on the bound and at once proceeded to ell it.

"Well, so long as you have decided to write it—I have your word for that—we needn't worry about getting it published until you are through."

"You haven't my word at all. You've nothing but my words; and there is a big difference between the two."

"That is a quibble. I can't tell you how greatly you have relieved my mind. I should have worried about it all during church if you hadn't agreed, and if there is one thing that Jennie doesn't like me to do it's to look abstracted during the service. I'll just polish off these kidneys and then run along. If you've no objections, I'll stop in this evening and check up on how far you've gone. You ought to have a couple of chapters done at least."

As I say, if I hadn't bought the trunk and so chanced upon the document, which is amazing, I would have been spared not alone the above interview with its dangerous potential toward indigestion, but would not be involved in writing this account.

I bought the trunk because of an irresistible passion I have had since childhood concerning the contents of anything that is locked. It was offered for sale at an auction held by the Warden Warehouse, where I had gone to bid on a Daghestan carpet. The trunk preceded the carpet and was going for the price of fifty cents. And the trunk was locked. It seemed little enough to satisfy my overmastering curiosity as to what it might contain, so I impulsively raised a finger and the trunk was knocked down to me for seventy-five cents.

It held, among other things, the document.

The value of the document struck me at once. The facts that it dealt with were so stupendous that I knew it would be a constant menace to have the papers around; nor did I feel that I had any right to destroy them or I should have done so. I made every effort to get in touch with the document's owner by inserting numerous advertisements in all the leading newspapers throughout the country, and eventually my tireless quest was rewarded.

From a certain little place in the West —the name of which I shall not disclose, as Ramier has emphatically stated that he will not be bothered with reporters—came an answer in the form of a letter that was personally delivered to me by an attractive young stranger named Billy Preston. Ramier Bellmy, the writer of the letter, was the owner of the document and had sent Billy East to get it.

Like most geniuses, Ramier is very absent-minded and had been racking his brains for upwards of a year in trying to remember just what he had done with the important document. I could well understand this after I had met him and had come to know him better, as well as from many pertinent sidelights that Drusilla and Billy shed upon his character during the accounts they gave me of the adventure.

Billy's insistence alone would not have been enough to persuade me to tackle the job of writing it. I believe he suspected as much, for when he returned he brought Jennie with him.

Jennie is Billy's wife and, in common with Drusilla, is one of the most charming and lovely girls I know. They have been married a year, and when she saw that reason or entreaties had failed to move me from my determination not to put pen to paper she took me aside and, running a finger over my hair, which is beginning to turn gray, whispered the secret that why she really wanted me to write the story was not for its value or its interest to the world at large, but as a record for Billy Junior, or Jennie Junior—as the case might be.

I kissed her for the second time in my life—the first was at her wedding—and promised that Billy Junior, or Jennie Junior, would have the account in print if I had to threaten with death every editor in the city whom I knew.

All of which explains how this narrative came into being.

And now to our muttons.

CHAPTER I.

CASUAL EXPLOSIONS.

THAT the idea should have originated in five corks, with needles stuck through them, and a bar magnet has never failed to strike me as being absurd,

even though the fact is in keeping with the history of most great discoveries. Witness, if you wish, Newton and his apple. Surely nothing could have been more absurd, or annoying, than that, and yet from it sprang, with great *éclat,* the laws of gravitation.

It is perfectly true that gravitation was doing business a good many millions of years before Newton held his rendezvous with the apple and that people were no more able to hang suspended in air then than they are to-day, but the point is this: until Newton came along nobody had told them why it was they couldn't hang suspended in air or made laws about it.

I cannot see that either act has done any harm, or any good, either to nature or to mankind. If Newton, on the other hand, had gone a step farther and had told people just how they could overcome the laws that he had made, I could see an immense advantage.

There are any number of situations in life when it would be pleasant to possess the ability to hang suspended in air. If the woman sitting in front of you in the theater insisted upon keeping a large hat with feathers sticking out from the top of it on her head, one could then just push up from the seat and remain in a state of suspension at a level where one's eyes just surmounted the peak of the obstacle and so see the play. This is only one example of the numerous advantages that the process would possess. You can imagine for yourself what a crimp it would put in the pastime of lynching.

Now Ramier Bellmy went Newton one better, as we shall see.

Bramwell, the university Ramier attended, is coeducational. The fact is directly responsible for his having met Drusilla Duveen. Knowing Drusilla as I now do, I cannot blame Ramier for having fallen in love with her on sight—even though he failed to recognize the confused state of his feelings for some time.

On the other hand I do wonder very much at Drusilla's having fallen in love with Ramier. If one ignores, as no woman will, his obvious physical attraction—I can confidently state that I have never beheld such an engagingly built and well-modeled young animal as himself—there must have been at least a ten-months' stretch of impossibleness on his part that led up to the moment at his staggering experiment.

I do not see how Drusilla or any girl could have remained in love with Ramier during those ten months.

During the rare instances when I have come into contact with the species, I have found that a scientist with even an ordinary sort of a problem to gnaw at is as touchy as a caged tiger. When one of them is, as Ramier was, busied with gnawing at a problem the solution of which would overwhelm the world, then his immediate or even intermediate vicinity is more dynamic than any mere mortal should be called upon to endure.

But Drusilla is far from being either a mere or an ordinary mortal. She combines an infernally attractive sort of beauty with a really intelligent mind. It is her hair that gives her beauty its infernal quality. It is a vivid red and sweeps like smoldering flame about her pale, clear skin. She furthermore possesses a temper that is only excelled by the one owned, and cultivated, by her father, Judson Duveen, whose career in the world of finance was as meteoric as his own blood pressure, and who retired several years ago with a substantial fortune of a good many million dollars in the bank, or wherever it is he keeps it.

Both Drusilla and Ramier had specialized throughout their four years at Bramwell in chemistry and physics. It was during some particularly violent experiment or other in the class room that they realized they were kindred souls. The experiment, I believed, was not alone spectacular but smelly, and involved a dash of this and that entrapped in a retort. I am unfortunately unfamiliar with the proper chemical terms, but doubtlessly whatever scientist who may happen to be reading this at the moment can fill them in to his own satisfaction and know clearly what I am talking about.

Having mixed and entrapped his this and his that, Professor Kretjz, who was responsible if not accountable for the course, raised his hand impressively for attention, and added six drops of something else.

When Drusilla and Ramier recovered their wits sufficiently to inquire, rhetorically, as to their respective whereabouts, they found that they were in each other's arms with the wreckage of the laboratory draped in occasional dabs about them.

"You needn't be frightened," said Ramier, with the cool calmness that never deserted him, while he released the lower sections of a, fortunately, lightly built chair from about his neck.

"I'm n-not!" said Drusilla, with an imitative but less perfect cool calmness. "If you will push that desk away, or whatever it is that is sticking into the middle of my back, I am perfectly confident that I can stand without further assistance."

"If Snoodgy had only told us what sort of a result we were to be on the lookout for," said Ramier, pushing the desk away from Drusilla's back, but doing nothing else, "we might be able to determine whether or not the experiment was a success."

"The fact that he was quoting from Kossel's 'Über Molekülbindung als Frage des Atombaus,'" said Drusilla, attempting to pry one of Ramier's arms from its encircling position about her waist, and making a mental note of the high efficiency of his muscular development, and incidentally understanding the better how he could be such an expert fullback on the football team and still, at one and the same time, be such a keen and intelligent scientist, "leads me to think Snoodgy expected this precise result."

"I agree with you," said Ramier eagerly, and proved his subconscious dexterity by imprisoning the hand which Drusilla was using as a lever, in addition to her waist. "We must also take into consideration his remarks at the opening of the hour taken from Kossel's 'Über die physikalische Natur der Valenzkräfte' from *Die Naturwissenschaften* of July, 1919."

"Indeed we must," said Drusilla, as she inspected Ramier more keenly through the light sifting of plaster that still floated about them. "On the whole," she added enigmatically, "I should call the experiment a success."

There is no telling how much longer the experiment, or clinch—call it what you will—might have continued, for a groan coming from beneath a heap of light wreckage awoke both of them to the possible fatal aspects of the moment.

The groan originated with Professor Kretjz, alias "Snoodgy," whose main reaction to his own experiment was an immediate and strong distaste for piled bric-a-brac, particularly when piled upon himself, and a keen interest in what anybody was going to do about it. The class was a small one—not over ten students at most—and the laboratory was large. Coming from various parts of it arose eight other groans to swell the volume of Snoodgy's.

Ramier and Drusilla proceeded to organize a relief party. It was shortly augmented by the entire student body of the university and by most of the town's people as well, all of whom had been drawn to the scene by the subconsciously pleasant hope that is ever present in humanity, when an accident occurs, that it will prove mildly fatal.

It proved nothing of the sort. Professor Kretjz and his ten disciples emerged from their individual heaps of debris shaken and plastered, but sound in wind and limb, as well as feeling smugly comfortable in the knowledge that for a good while to come they would be both heroic and in the nature of seven-day wonders.

This latter view was not shared by Professor Kretjz, who was of but one mind as to just how the president and fellows of the university would regard his slight excursion among the valency forces that control atoms.

Parents have, as he knew, a fierce desire that their offspring drink deeply of the cup of knowledge; but parents have an equally strong aversion towards having that selfsame cup knock their drinking offspring for a goal. And the more goals tallied by the cup of knowledge, the fewer would be the number of parents who would send their offspring to Bramwell. And the president and fellows of Bramwell were as heartily attracted towards any one who drove trade from their doors as are the like poles of two magnets which, as I understand it, is little less than nothing at all.

These thoughts passed nimbly through Snoodgy's mind while the last of the table legs was being removed from his neck.

Nor was he wrong.

Nine letters from nine irate and badly worried parents addressed to the president of Bramwell University proved Snoodgy's undoing. He gathered his retorts and his bottles and his what-nots about him and left for the vague section of our vast territory familiarly known as "other parts." He has since become, as I am told, one of the leading scientific lights of our day—somewhere, to put it roughly on a professional basis, around five hundred watts.

There was no tenth letter, as Ramier Bellmy is, as is quite right and natural in a hero, an orphan. Unlike the general run of orphans, however, Ramier is neither downtrodden, the victim of relentless and fiendish machinations on the part of certain capitalists, nor poor. I wish he were. It would make the drama of this account much simpler and more thrilling. He possessed a comfortable fortune in gilt-edged bonds that yield him a very un-orphanish income per year.

The departure of Professor Kretjz left a bad blank in the lives of Drusilla and Ramier. With the laboratory in temporary ruins, they had no opportunity for pursuing their—yes, their pursuit of science. It further meant that there was less reason for their seeing so much of each other, and youth—Cupid alone knows why—when it is in love requires some perfectly definite excuse for contact, no matter how fictitious the excuse may be. They appear to require it as some occult motive for preserving their self-respect.

A frigidly polite and awkward discussion that took place between Drusilla and Ramier on the campus one spring afternoon toward the close of the last term, quickly put a stop to their impasse.

"Good afternoon, Miss Duveen," said Ramier to Drusilla, or words to that effect. "Have you made any further strides in Stock's 'Ultrastrukturchemie' since Snoodgy left us on our own?"

"None," said Drusilla formally, and noted that Ramier's pleasantly stern and not-too-classical-to-be-impossible features were already covered with their first coat of tan. "No, Mr. Bellmy, I have made no strides at all."

Then she sighed.

The sigh, in addition to the ever perennial complications that attend the ushering in of spring, drove all thoughts of the baseball practice to which he had been hastening from Ramier's head. The space left vacant within it by their departure was at once rented and occupied by a large family of singing birds composed exclusively of nightingales, who tried their utmost to force their lyric notes to his lips. What he did manage to say, after concentrating an eye as intelligently as possible upon the tip of Drusilla's enchanting nose, was: "Well, well! That's too bad." And he neither whistled nor sang it, but growled it.

"I was wondering, Mr. Bellmy—I thought that perhaps," murmured Drusilla, removing an indignant pebble six inches to the left of its lie with the end of an excitingly cut sandal, "if you had a free moment at any time, you could help me. I simply cannot catch Stock's allusions to the Periodic System in reference to Döbereiner's having pointed out the existence of 'Triads' in 1817."

This, of course, was a lie. Drusilla is much too clever a girl to be stumped by anything so simple as a group of three chemically similar elements whose atomic weights—as she told me in strictest confidence—are such that one of them is the mean of the other two. On the other hand, she is far too clever a girl to admit it.

"That is perfectly simple," said Ramier, putting his head eagerly between the steel jaws of the trap and blissfully releasing the catch, "and if you have nothing more pressing to do we might drop into the Kitchen this evening and talk it over."

CHAPTER II.

MOSTLY "CERISE SUPREME."

THE Kitchen is a small shop near the university where the students can sit with a fairish degree of comfort at round tables and talk while they ruin their stomachs with basic frozen milk devices

thinly disguised beneath sweet sirups and nuts and fruit.

The establishment is owned and run by a busy, elderly body called Mother Bain. If I have grasped, from hearsay, her character correctly, she possesses an unflagging and never failing inventiveness and her concoctions, whatever else they may lack, are never guilty of the stigma of sameness.

It further seems that Mother Bain is endowed with an unerring intuition as to the probable trend in flavors that the palate of the student body will take for each forthcoming week, and rarely does she find any surplus of stock left souring upon her hands. Her life is not precisely a bed of roses, but inasmuch as she has the advantage of being not only an institution but a monopoly she is succeeding quite well in feathering the nest into which she ultimately plans to retire and sink.

The meeting between Ramier and Drusilla—it was much too formal to call it a tryst, to say nothing of its publicity—took place at the Kitchen the same evening as their discussion on the campus. It was followed at increasingly frequent intervals by others, until the departure of Professor Kretjz was counterbalanced, and Drusilla's and Ramier's respective pursuits of science went on as strenuously as if no such detail as a wrecked laboratory had given them pause.

Nor were they satisfied with mere discussions alone. Ramier, with his income, which was a hundred times too large for any student, was not the young lad to be put out by the blowing up of a laboratory. He arranged to outfit one of his own; one where Drusilla and he could continue their experiments with bases and reagents and whatever cabalistic properties that their desperate thirsts for knowledge might desire.

Mother Bain, as Ramier found out upon inquiry, possessed a back parlor—in the fullest sense of the word—that connected with her shop. It was quite suitable to Ramier's purpose, but Mother Bain was frankly skeptical, and said so, as to whether Ramier's purpose was quite suitable to her back parlor. The persuasive rent of thirty dollars a week convinced her that it was.

All of which brings us down to the statement I made at the start of this digression that it has never failed to strike me as absurd that Ramier's stupendous discovery should have originated in five corks, with needles stuck through them, and a bar magnet.

The five corks were suspiciously easy to supply, as were the five needles, thanks to Drusilla, who kept a package of them for props rather than for sewing—an art with which in those days she had small patience—but the immediate demand for a basin that would hold about a quart of water was more difficult to meet.

The laboratory contained any number of other things, but it did not contain a basin.

Under the spell of the fine fervor of the experiment, both Ramier and Drusilla were impatient at being balked, and Ramier, hastening into the shop portion of the Kitchen, demanded a basin of the very first person whom he saw.

This happened to be Billy Preston, who was engaged in reflectively eating a Darktown Special. This, I believe, is a confection remotely connected with chocolate ice cream—say, a cousinship, many times removed. Billy Preston was furthermore one of the ten students who had been, figuratively speaking—at least at first—sitting at Professor Kretjz's feet when the enthusiastic savant had done his best to blow them to pieces.

"Have you a china or porcelain basin that will hold about a quart of water?" demanded Ramier intensely as he came to a full stop beside the small, round table and glared down at Billy in the manner of one distracted scientist to another.

Now Billy, at heart, was not much of a scientist. I really believe—although he steadfastly refuses to admit it—that he was secretly glad that the laboratory had been wrecked. He certainly had no intention whatever of being interrupted in the consumption of his Darktown Special for anything so trivial as a basin. It was much too expensive a dish to receive anything but the most flattering attention. He scowled heavily at Ramier with the upper portion of his face.

"Go a-glu-way," he said sternly, and waved a just emptied spoon in a significant gesture of dismissal.

"Have you or have you not got a china or a porcelain basin that will hold about a quart of water?" repeated Ramier, more loudly, as he stolidly shoved the spoon to a more comfortable distance from his nose.

"Nu-teaky-waank!" growled Billy, preparing to get up.

"Hah!" cried Ramier, releasing the spoon, whereupon Billy at once impressed it back into service. "This will do."

The "this" referred to by Ramier was a large glass bowl that reposed on a counter and contained a brave showing of lonely cherries at large in a red colored sirup. It represented Mother Bain's single error in judgment throughout her hitherto unbroken chain of successes. For the past three weeks it had in vain made coquettish advances to the student palate. Not a student, not a palate would touch it. It was a signal failure and a total loss.

The mere sight of it had come to be a thorn in Mother Bain's side, and the things she muttered about it under her breath whenever her look plumbed its distressingly unchanging depths were less maternal than such mutters are cracked up to be.

With that perfect single-mindedness which none but a scientist can effect, Ramier at once lifted the offending bowl from its anchorage and vanished with it through the doorway of the laboratory.

Mother Bain happened to come into the shop just at that moment. She was in plenty of time to see her stock of "Cérise Suprême" go bolting out in Ramier's arms. Dud and unnatural child though it was, Mother Bain was not the soul to permit such a brazen kidnaping to pass unsung. Her first intention was to loose a healthy shriek and cry either "Stop thief!" or "Murder!" or both. Similar neat and ungaudy remarks had served her well in the past and had caused many a defaulter to stop, trembling, in his tracks.

Mother Bain's second and cooler thought was to do nothing of the sort. As she instantly reflected, there was her glass bowl to consider. With a determined glint in her beady eye, and a surprising firmness and agility in her limbs, she headed for the doorway through which Ramier and her bowl and her suddenly most precious "Cérise Suprême"—precious inasmuch as somebody so evidently wanted it even to the point of committing a theft in order to get it—had just vanished.

This move on the part of Mother Bain was more than Billy's curiosity could stand. Even the enchaining powers of a Darktown Special could not keep him from witnessing the dénouement of such an intriguing mystery as the startling disappearance of Mother Bain's stock of "Cérise Suprême" in the arms of one of the most prominent members of his class; of one who was now, presumably, a lunatic and at large.

As Billy described it to me, the scene when he arrived at the doorway of the laboratory—*née* back parlor—was one of utter confusion. It was a confusion in which Drusilla, Ramier, and Mother Bain all seemed to be, and were, talking at once. He assures me that Mother Bain held the lead by a pitch of at least twelve notes. The bowl of "Cérise Suprême" was an additional complication inasmuch as it had been converted into a loving cup, equal sections of which were being grasped by three pairs of hands.

"If you break this bowl," Ramier was hissing into Mother Bain's left ear, "you will hold our experiment up for another hour, and I won't be responsible for my actions if you do."

"If you break this bowl," Mother Bain was hissing—much louder and much hissier, as Billy insists, into Ramier's right ear, "I'll charge you the ten dollars it cost me and the five dollars' worth of stewed cherries that's in it."

"If you would both stop talking, and listen to each other for a minute," Drusilla was saying stonily, "we could end this ridiculous situation."

Some word or two of what Mother Bain was hissing must have filtered in through Ramier's ear, because he put an end to the business by releasing one hand from the bowl and fishing about in his trousers pocket until he got out fifteen dollars. He waved these at Mother Bain until she, too, released one hand from the bowl and taking the money managed, with a dexterity that was amazing, to count it. Then, breathing vigorously, she loosed the bowl entirely and,

giving vent to one of her very best beneath-the-breath mutters, left the field.

Ramier's first move as victor was to dump the "Cérise Suprême" into a sink and thoroughly to wash out the glass bowl. This seemed an act of most extravagant wastefulness to Billy, and he made no bones about saying so.

"Nonsense," said Ramier pleasantly. He was feeling much more friendly and jolly now that he had his bowl. "What is the slight matter of a quart or so of 'Cérise Suprême' in comparison with the experiment upon which we are about to embark?"

"I say," said Billy, "have you two eggs been going on like this on the Q. T., as it were, with old Snoodgy's course?"

"We have," said Ramier. "And if you care to sit in, you are welcome. Miss Duveen and I are about to reproduce the beautiful experiments of Mayer."

Billy sat. Regardless of whether the show proved interesting or not, he could at least hold a wake by the sink.

CHAPTER III.

CORKS AND NEEDLES.

THAT the experiments of Mayer should be termed beautiful is an extravagance that none but a scientific mind could go in for. The five corks with needles stuck through them undoubtedly possessed for Ramier some rare loveliness obscure to the eyes of a layman. They would simply have looked stupidly homeless and with no purpose in life to me.

"You will remember," said Ramier, seizing a cork and the manner of a lecturer at the same time, "Professor Kretjz's statement that the atomic theory of Leucippus and his friends, as well as those of the school of Democritus, have been as forerunners of Dalton's theory. They specifically describe the smallest particles of matter as 'atoms' —ἄτομος—which means, as you ought to know if you don't, indivisible. They conceive them as rigid bodies suspended and moving about one another in empty space."

"Very much like the thoughts of a reformer," said Billy.

"We are dealing with facts," said Ramier severely, and continued his lecture, while carefully shoving an agreeable needle through a violently objecting cork. "From such early conceptions to the full flower of our present day knowledge there is no need for us to follow each individual step. I will merely refresh your memory by giving each step the name of its creator—Van Helmont, at the beginning of the seventeenth century —Lavoisier—J. R. Richter, 1792—Dalton; Berzelius, Stas, Richards, Guye, and so forth. Then we come to Avogadro with his molecular hypothesis—and Prout, who in 1815, took the atomic weight of hydrogen as unity and concluded that this element is the primitive substance of which the other elements are built up."

Is it any wonder, as I previously remarked, that I am astonished at Drusilla's having remained in love with Ramier during such cataloguings as that? I can only conclude that, like a sensible girl, she closed her ears to what he was saying and quietly amused herself by gazing upon him as a specimen of splendid young virility and manhood.

"Coming down to the anticipation of the Periodic System," Ramier continued with verve, "we see Döbereiner in 1817 pointing out the existence of 'Triads.' Then we skip to the tables of elements of Gmelin, 1843, based on chemical similarity—to those of Chancourtois, 1862; of Lothar Meyer, 1864; and of Newlands, 1863 to 1866, Law of Octaves."

With this light and frothy introduction, Ramier then proceeded to buckle down to the work at hand—that is to say, to a reproduction of the aforementioned beautiful experiments of Mayer.

These, as I either do or do not understand it, hinge on the regular arrangement of particles left free to move beneath the influence of certain attractive and repulsive forces. Mayer—and Ramier—used magnetized needles mounted in corks that floated on the surface of the basin of water, with all their positive poles uppermost.

The magnetized needles, with a desire for privacy that was all but human, moved speedily away from one another, owing to the repulsion of similar poles. Now Billy assures me that a child can understand

what follows. Perhaps this is true; no longer being a child myself, and not having one within grabbing distance at the present moment, I cannot know.

The negative pole of a strong magnet was brought near the positive poles of the floating magnets. It tended not only to draw them together, but—and this seems to be of an importance called prime—the floating magnets took up a definite grouping in which this attracting force was in equilibrium with their mutual repulsion. So far as I am concerned, you can take it or leave it.

It further seems that bearing in mind this picture of the corks symmetrically grouped about the central magnet, we can visualize the modern conception of an atom. The nucleus is represented by the bar magnet and is positively charged. The electrons can be compared to the floating needles which are negatively charged and which revolve in their orbits around the nucleus in a position determined when the attracting force of the nucleus is in equilibrium with their mutual repulsion.

So much for the prelude.

It is easy to imagine the three young, earnest heads of Drusilla, of Ramier, and of Billy, bent absorbedly above Mother Bain's container for her fatal stock of "Cérise Suprême," with their three sets of highly scientific round eyes fastened raptly upon the five corks.

The spell of the moment was broken by Ramier.

"Suppose," he said quietly, "we were to stretch that equilibrium?"

That was all.

Such were his exact words.

And yet what tremendous achievements resulted from them!

"Well," asked Billy, "suppose you did?"

Ramier answered him through the curious hush that the intent look in his eyes had evoked.

"Even though it retained its solidity," he said, "matter would *apparently dissolve*."

The conception was staggering.

"You mean you could make something vanish and seem invisible even though it was still there all the time?" asked Billy nervously.

"Yes," said Ramier. "With the proper apparatus I could make you dissolve into air and thus become invisible to human sight."

"Do!" said Drusilla huskily, with the cold light of the fanatical scientist in her eyes. "You must try!"

"I shall," said Ramier. "From this moment on I pledge my time—my very life, if need be—to the attempt."

It was all very grand, very inspiring, and most lavishly applauded, except by Billy, who retained the impression that he had somehow or other let himself in for the rôle of experimentee. He planned, as soon as the first flush of enthusiasm should have subsided, to suggest that the experiment take place on, say, a pig. He intended strongly to advocate that a dissolved pig would be just as valuable to science as would be a dissolved Billy.

An immediate celebration was in order, and the three discoverers adjourned to the shop part of the Kitchen where they sealed their pact—there had been, as was natural, an oath of secrecy—and fed their stomachs with a dish apiece of Mother Bain's latest creation. This consisted largely of an ice dutifully subdued beneath anæmic chestnuts in maple sirup, and whose name, Mother Bain proudly informed them, was "morons under glass."

CHAPTER IV.

THE INVENTION.

HAVING thus given birth to his hypothesis, Ramier at once concentrated all his efforts upon the discovering of some invention that would effect an experiment to prove it.

In common with the rest of the country, Bramwell University had gone wild over wireless. The theory of the propagation of wireless waves was an open book to Ramier, and in it he read a means to his end.

His first endeavor was the invention and manufacture of an appliance that would trap the propagated waves as they leaped

from the antenna into space. Ramier's trap caught them, directed them, and rectified them. In other words—principally Billy's—it permitted only their positive or their negative peaks to escape as Ramier wished.

The goal was in sight.

By attaining a state of resonance between the electronic wave-lengths of atoms and the waves that were propagated by the multiple transmitter of the stupefying wireless set that he had constructed—obtaining the said state of resonance through some obscure pact sworn to by the capacities and inductances of its various circuits both opened and closed and oscillatory—Ramier claimed he could either place a stronger negative charge upon the electrons of an atom and so displace them by forcing them farther apart from their nucleus; or else he could place a stronger positive charge upon the nucleus and so draw its electrons back to it again and into their original position.

And all this could be done without seriously disturbing their symmetry or arrangement.

I imagined at first that Ramier's unwillingness to disturb the symmetry or arrangement of the atoms upon which he proposed to experiment arose from a pleasant excess of kind-heartedness in his nature.

I was quite wrong.

It seems that were this much bruited symmetry or arrangement of the atoms of a human body—upon which Ramier intended to experiment—to be disturbed, an explosion would take place whose force would be sufficient to shatter and totally demolish a city the size of New York. A further light was thrown on Ramier's anxiety upon this point when I learned that the person he had chosen for the subject of his experiment was himself.

My admiration for Ramier's bravery knew no bounds. There were two desperate dangers that he would be called upon to face. The first was the disagreeable possibility that he would stretch the equilibrium of the attracting force of the nucleus with the mutual repulsion of its electrons too far, and reach the snapping point—whereupon the aforementioned explosion would take place.

The second danger sprang from his determination that the experiment be made upon himself. There was no uncertainty in his mind but that he could make himself invisible, because up to that instant his own hand would be operating the controls. But the question then arose that, having rendered himself invisible, would he still be able to operate the controls and restore himself to a normal state?

He thought not.

His substance would be temporarily transmuted from flesh and bone into a gas, and his hands would pass through solid matter instead of being able to grasp it.

Ramier was balked for quite a while over this point, but eventually he saw his way clear. He believed that with certain improvements upon the tuning circuits of his receiving apparatus it would not only be possible to "tune in" matter—as he intended to do when having his invisible self brought back to solidity—but that it would also be possible to tune in the sounds of the voice of the invisible subject *while that subject was still invisible.*

Granting that he could do this, it would then be possible for him while in his invisible and hence helpless state to communicate with some assistant, and direct that assistant's hands and movements as if he himself possessed solidity. The maddening part of the hypothesis was that there would be no way to prove it until he had taken the leap. It was a terrible, a fearful risk; but Ramier was willing—eager even—to chance it.

Of course all this did not occur in the converted back parlor of Mother Bain's Kitchen at Bramwell University. Ramier was bound by no ties to any definite spot on earth. He bought, after graduation, a shack that stood on a piece of property adjacent to the Duveen summer home in the Adirondacks. The shack was weatherproof, reasonably large, and stoutly built. It seemed especially suitable for the experimental purposes for which Ramier proposed to use it.

The construction of the shack was curious and deserves comment. It had pre-

sumably been built by an eccentric. Its site was a pocket that formed the termination of a deep bottled gulch in the mountain.

The pocket originally had been the base of a waterfall which had dropped a height of a hundred odd feet or so from the top of the perpendicular cliffs above. The builder of the shack had diverted the stream on the summit that had fed the falls by means of a rock wall. He had switched it into another bed which caused the stream to spill its falls at a point a hundred yards farther up the gulch.

The builder had then utilized the three walls of the original base of the falls for the rear and ends of his shack. Their timbers fitted snugly against the smooth rock and the roof sloped steeply at an angle up from the low front of the shack to the rear wall of the pocket.

The sole approach to the shack's door was a narrow, bracken impeded pathway that struggled to it alongside the stream from the mouth of the bottled gulch. The path was about two miles in length. The stream that carried off the falls was quite deep in places, and its pools were well stocked with trout. It was an ideal retreat for a hermit or for a sportsman. The steep and, in places, inaccessible walls of the gulch were covered with a dense growth of underbrush and timber, and the air was ever redolent with the clarifying, pungent odor of pine.

It was equally an ideal retreat for a scientist whose métier consisted in experiments which, with the accidental or injudicious passage of hairs-breadths, terminated in cataclysmic explosions. Furthermore, no habitation stood within many miles of the shack, so that if the worst should occur and Ramier's atoms should find themselves unequal to the task of bearing the strain that would be put upon them, no one but his assistant and himself would be injured.

It was Drusilla herself who insisted upon being Ramier's assistant. She announced this decision shortly after she and Ramier had become engaged. They had plighted their troth in the grotto at the base of the new falls.

Nor is that plighting a matter to be breezily passed over with few or with careless words. It was much too unique for that.

CHAPTER V.

SKEWERED.

I BELIEVE that Cupid, when given a man and a girl, a sylvan retreat, and a summer's moonlight night, has little to do beyond shooting two arrows and then trotting on about his business to other couples less fortunately surrounded by the trappings of romance.

So the celestial child must have thought on the evening when Ramier and Drusilla plighted their troth; for having shot his darts, he at once decamped without waiting to see whether or not they had taken effect. One can scarcely hold Cupid to blame for this, for the summer is admittedly his open season and he undoubtedly has more jobs on his hands than he can manage with any sort of efficiency at all. A look—a dart—a target—then he must beat it and rush on to his next victims.

"Ah!" murmured Drusilla, as the moon at its full shook free from the fingers of tall pines, and swam indolently up above the crest of the gulch and out upon a starry sea of deep mauve.

"I beg pardon?" said Ramier, twisting to a less comfortable position on the top of the large bowlder from where they were watching the falling waters.

Drusilla pointed a slim finger skyward. "The moon," she said.

Ramier regarded the satellite with distracted eyes. He was feeling uncomfortable; more so than he had ever felt before in his whole life.

Ramier's discomfort had arisen from the moment, then a half hour past, when Drusilla had invited his assistance by giving him her hand as they had mounted the bowlder. The action had surprised Ramier, as he knew as well as she did that her feet, when engaged in climbing, were as agile and sure as are those of a chamois.

"You feeling all right?" he had mumbled, after Drusilla had at last succeeded

in tripping over a projection and tottering a bit toward him.

With perfect courtesy he had instantly straightened her up.

Her answer had been a trifle smothered and might have been either a "damn" or an "I am." With innate politeness and assurance he had chosen the latter. But her strange and sudden tendency toward instability had not ceased with their having found seats on the top of the bowlder. More than once Drusilla's accustomed poise had betrayed her and, had it not been for the quickness of his eyes and the strength of his arms, she might very well have sustained a nasty fall of fifteen feet or so to the ground.

Something indeed, he decided, had gone shockingly wrong with her center of balance. Furthermore, in some amazing fashion, she seemed to have become electrically charged, for he received a distinct and unaccountably thrilling shock every time he caught her and set her up again.

"I wonder," he finally suggested huskily, "if I hadn't better just keep my arm where it is. It might be safer."

It was around her waist.

"It might and it mightn't," murmured Drusilla dreamily, as she sharpened her *estoque*—that heavy, flat-bladed sword which has brought more than one good toreadored bull to an untimely end—for the *estocada*.

It was at this point that she had murmured her "Ah," and "The moon."

"To think," said Ramier with a quickening note of interest in his voice, "that we should somehow feel the moon's influence even—"

Drusilla held her breath during the infinitesimal pause. Would the man—*would* the man, she wondered, wake up now?

"Even," continued Ramier, with more fervor, "though it is two hundred and thirty-eight thousand and eight hundred miles away."

Drusilla expelled her breath. In one less charming it might possibly have been said that she snorted.

"Bother!" she said sharply. "Oh, bother—bother—bother!"

"You *aren't* well," Ramier announced with conviction as, alarmed, he squeezed her tighter.

She tested the squeeze and subsided.

Why *was* he so dear and so dumb? She knew that he loved her, but how, within bounds, was she ever going to make him know it himself?

"You have still to comment on the moonlight on the pool," she said in a small, frigid voice. "It is beautiful—beautiful—and has a mean, if not positively wicked, velocity of one hundred and eighty-five thousand miles per second."

"One hundred and eighty-*six* thousand," corrected Ramier calmly.

And she burst into tears.

Ramier was inexpressibly shocked and at a complete loss as to what to do. He started to release her, but her tears seemed to flow in inverse ratio with the pressure of his arm around her waist. The tighter he squeezed, the less, as he explained it, her tears flew—or flewed—he was really very much mixed up—whereas the slightest letting down of any even recently added pressure shot the tears up whole volumes.

"Stop it!" he said. "For Heaven's sake, Drusilla, stop it!"

The use of her given name—it was the first time he had essayed it—rewarded him with a temporary check in the flow.

"V-very well, Ramier," she said, once more settling her head more firmly against his shoulder.

He looked at her hair; at the brief expanse of forehead showing beneath it. A not uncomfortable luxuriance giddied about inside of him. He wondered what on earth he was doing.

He did it again.

"Do you realize that you are kissing my forehead?" murmured Drusilla.

"What of it?" he growled stiffly.

"Just as you say, Ramier."

"Why shouldn't—Drusilla, why should we not get married?"

"For the sake of—science?"

"We have the same tastes—the same training—we could go on through life together, devoting our combined minds and ideals to great researches—"

Drusilla took the suggestion and gave it a careful once-over.

If nothing else, it was a step in the right direction.

"Well, at least we could consider ourselves engaged," she said.

And there the engagement stood. It was a clandestine and quite passionless affair. A union, as Ramier explained it to Billy, of kindred minds. Drusilla considered it advisable to keep it a secret until after the great experiment should have taken place, lest her father get wind of their work and put an elaborate and speedy end to it.

Duveen was not only a man with good, honest, homely, old-fashioned ideas about women, and about the home, but was proud of it. His confidence in his daughter's ability to take care of herself was almost too great to be flattering. Where it was she went gadding in her car every day was no concern of his, provided she showed up promptly on time for eight o'clock dinner or produced some vigorous excuse for being late. If so much as an inkling were to come to him that his offspring was not alone dabbling, but up to her neck in new-fangled contraptions of science, an explosion would take place before which Ramier's best efforts would seem languishing and faint.

Drusilla well knew all this, and had decided that it would be better not to announce their engagement to her father until after she and Ramier were married.

At the outset Ramier would not hear of Drusilla being his assistant for the great experiment. Billy had been selected and had promised to fulfill the part. But Drusilla overruled him. Tears again, I believe, played an important part in her attack. She also pointed out, quite correctly too, that both her training and her natural aptitude were keener than Billy's, and that the experiment was much more likely to be a success if she rather than he were at the helm. Ramier murmured something quite magnificently grandiloquent about an "immolation of themselves upon the altar of science," and capitulated.

The hour for the experiment was set for nine o'clock of an August morning.

Although none of the three admitted to being influenced by superstition, it came as a shock when the calendar disclosed that the chosen date fell upon a Friday the thirteenth.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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TO YOUR EYES

OH, lying eyes
That smile on me and lie
Again;
Oh, lying eyes,
I know not why
The pain
Goes by,
The pain of life, and all its weariness
To feel your eyes' false, lying soft caress.

Oh, lying eyes!
I ask you only this,
Oh, lying eyes
That droop beneath my kiss,
Oh, lying eyes
Who think that you deceive
Believe that I believe!
Ah, no. I know you lie! Grant but this plea:
Lie not to other men! Keep all your lies for me!
For me!

Mary Carolyn Davies

The Cruise of the Madeline

By RICHARD C. McKAY

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

FOREWORD

SOME years ago, at the close of every yachting season, there forgathered at Krombach's saloon, opposite Tebo's well-known Yacht Basin, Brooklyn, the masters, officers and sailormen who had not only sailed to victory many of the beautiful craft then laid up for the winter, but who had materially contributed in making the American yacht and yachtsmen world famous and happy. It was at one of these gatherings that Hunt, the hero of this story, narrated to the writer this singular adventure of his younger days. An unusually active young looking old man, natty and neat in a perfect fitting yachting uniform, Hunt belied the sixty odd years that had rolled over his head since he first saw the sands of his native Cape Cod. He now pursued the somewhat prosaic career of chief steward on a multi-millionaire's yachting palace, and none of the distinguished social or financial elect who went aboard as guests of the Wall Street magnate ever dreamed that the quiet, unobtrusive, gentlemanly ship's servant, who served them so capably with liquid refreshments, as well as taking efficient care of their personal requirements, possessed a real noteworthy record of seafaring achievement.

IT was in the halcyon days of the Yankee ship and the Yankee crew, in the autumn of 1857, when a neatly dressed, natty looking man picked his way down South Street and across to Pier 12, East River. His nervous, springy step betokened a person in high health, in fact, an athlete; and despite the ultrafashionable cut of his clothes, the air of a deep water sailor about him was not disguised. Many a critical glance he cast aloft at the vessels along the river, with now and then a nod to a passing acquaintance as he leisurely made his way along. At the cross-

ing of Fulton Street he was accosted by a stout, middle-aged man with:

"Hello, there! Where the devil did you come from, Hunt? Glad to see you."

The speaker was a well-known business man and shipping master in New York, who, at that time, enjoyed the unreserved confidence of ship owners, captains, and sailors.

"I arrived yesterday, Mr. Smythe," replied Hunt as they shook hands, "and I was coming to your office by and by."

"Yes, yes, I know; ladies first, of course. you sly dog; but come, we must have a smile now that I have boarded you. Come with me," and, hooking his arm in Hunt's, the shipping master walked him a few steps to the westward and into a large barroom.

It was a prominent resort—the South Street "Delmonico's" of the time, and the rear portion afforded some privacy by having a small room partitioned off in which consultations might be held by its patrons. To this room the two men betook themselves, and as they sat down at a small table, Hunt, looking about, remarked carelessly: "As busy as ever here, I see. Blackbirders were thick enough when I was last in this place, and twenty dollar slugs were flying around like spoondrift off Hatteras in a nor'west squall."

"Yes; Jack Miller, Curtis, and that crowd get here once in a while, and they are well ballasted with coin. It is come easy, go easy, always with some people, and those African traders are spendthrifts of the first class. And now, what will you drink?"

"I'm taking a hot rum," said Smythe.

"That suits me," said Hunt, "for I have been drinking nothing but light wine and other such trash since I was home last."

The toddy was soon sipped and renewed, when Smythe, resuming the conversation, asked: "What the deuce brought you home so soon? You had a good ship, and I am—"

"Say no more about that, please; but, Mr. Smythe, I'm tired of toadying to men who happen to have more money than I, and sick of wet nursing duffers at sea—all, too, for mere bread and butter I can't seem to get ahead. Here I am thirty-three years of age; been pounding salt water since I was ten years old, and got what? Just what I stand in. But no matter. Yes, I quit the old packet in Havre, got to Liverpool, and boned a passage across with an old shipmate, and now I am open to most anything. Do you know anything that would suit me?" he added earnestly.

"How would you like a voyage to the coast?" asked Smythe, very deliberately, as he sipped his toddy.

"Blackbirds, wool and ivory in the hold, eh? Is that what you mean? Why don't you talk out?" Hunt spoke rather petulantly. "I have sailed in most all trades, but have always kept clear of that business."

Reaching across the table and placing his hand on Hunt's arm, the shipping master said slowly and emphatically: "But there is good, bright yellow gold in it, my boy, and nearly all American people maintain there is philanthropy as well. Surely the negro in this country is better off by far, clothed and fed as he is down South, or in the West Indies, than when killing and eating his own flesh and blood as he does in Africa. You want money, you say; I can give you a chance to make more than you ever made before in your life. Come, come, douse your kites and get down to plain sail! We know each other, and now that I've chanced to meet you let me tell you—I want to ship you for this voyage. You know very well that New York is full of men at my command. Look here, Hunt, I'll play no monkey business in this matter. I want you. Ain't I fair?"

The sudden earnestness of his friend staggered the dejected seaman, who, surprised and bewildered, said nothing immediately, but seemed like a man in a cloud.

Hunt wanted money badly. He was proud and ambitious, and had always aspired to a higher class socially than that of his profession, but his income had not been equal to his expenses. Though neither dissipated nor extravagant, he had been a rolling stone—he had gathered no moss. Many things he yearned for; and the image of a brown-eyed, red-cheeked Yankee girl—his lode star through many a silent night watch at sea—and a snug cottage in his native town all his own, flashed across his brain as it often had before—a dream.

And now, its fulfillment was possible. Here at hand was a chance. The business might be repugnant to his feelings, and there was a risk of the fever, and of capture; but beggars could not be choosers. All this flitted through his mind in a twinkling as he sipped his toddy. Finally he replied:

"I have just come ashore, you know, and wish to stay a few days at least. When would you want me to go aboard the ship?"

"You can remain ashore eight to ten days, perhaps longer," replied Smythe.

"That would do me," rejoined Hunt, "for I should like to visit the Cape before I go to sea again; and now, how much money can you advance me?"

"Name the amount yourself, my boy," said Smythe, adding, a bit sarcastically, "anything else you wish?"

"No, no; I don't mean to be finical in this business, Mr. Smythe, but I am in strange water, as you know, and I must take soundings; and besides, financially I'm on my beam ends."

"Well, look here; come down to business. What terms do you want to go as first mate on this voyage? First class vessel, good captain, rich owners, all of which I guarantee."

"I suppose," replied Hunt, musingly, "I should like a week's time to myself ashore, $100 a month and the regular percentage on the profits, about which you know better than I do, and $250 advance which is rather large I know, but—"

"Petticoats again, old fellow! When will you ever learn the folly of that sort of thing? Vanity and vexation all," said Smythe.

"But you are wrong, sir," replied Hunt hastily. "I need that much money just now for my old mother. I am in debt at home, have been dilatory in the past, and must catch up. The gossip I hear galls me. But no matter, I'll—"

"The money is yours, say no more. When do you want it?" asked Smythe.

"As soon as possible. I would leave for the Cape to-night if I could," replied Hunt.

"You can do so, old fellow," and Smythe counted out in crisp bank notes the $250, which he handed over to Hunt, saying: "You are shipped in the schooner Madeline of Baltimore for a voyage to the coast of Africa and return, as her first mate. You are to report at my office one week from to-day—and now we will take a drink. You understand?"

"I understand you, sir," said Hunt. "I'll send my dunnage to your office immediately and then I'm off for home. Keep this thing quiet or I shall be ruined down on the Cape." They shook hands and Hunt started on his trip home.

As Smythe had ingenuously declared, he knew Reuben Hunt well, knew him not only as a good sailor on a square rigged craft but also aboard a fore-an-after; in fact, the sailor par excellence. The Madeline was a large fore-and-aft rigged schooner, aboard which the ordinary deep water sailor, when in a tight place, was like a fifth wheel to a coach. Smythe had had *carte blanche* from the Madeline captain for weeks to find the right man, and soon after concluding the transaction with Hunt he went to a well-known Spanish banking house in Wall Street where, in the rear office he found this captain and likewise owners of the vessel.

"I have shipped you a mate," he said, "and in a week he will be ready to go aboard. He has gone Down East for a short visit. I've been lucky. You have in him the best sailor man I know—and I know lots of them."

"Certain he will be on time, sir?" asked one of the party.

"If he don't drop dead he will," replied Smythe.

II.

"SOLD and got the money," thought Hunt, as he set out for Cape Cod.

For the first time in his life he felt the necessity of sailing under false colors, and it chafed him. His arrival home was unexpected, and he was lovingly greeted by his mother and sister.

It was two years since they had seen him, their idol, and the news soon spread about the little town that Reuben Hunt was back. He had always been a favorite with the young folks, and calls and invitations poured in upon him, to all of which he

answered: "My stay will be short." Mrs. Hunt, his mother, was a bright woman who was prominent in all social affairs, and since his last visit his sister had become pious and joined the church.

The slavery question was agitating the North, and it seemed to Hunt that the negro, torn from his wife and children and writhing under the cruel lash of the slave driver, was served up for breakfast, dinner and supper. It was the all-absorbing topic everywhere, in streets, houses, stores and churches. His opinion, his views, were solicited and oftentimes pleasantly challenged.

All this annoyed him, and, from being conservative on the question, as nearly all seafaring men were at the time, Hunt began to hate his African brother. "Damn the black!" he said to himself, "every one is talking him at me."

He was, it can be seen, on bad terms with himself, but this chief consolation was in recalling mentally the old saw—"Needs must when the devil drives."

When the day came for his return to New York he shook the sand of Cape Cod from his feet with fewer regrets than ever before. About nine o'clock in the morning of the appointed date Hunt stepped into the office of the shipping master and was cordially greeted by Mr. Smythe.

"Glad, very glad, to see you; it is beginning to get a little warm up yonder," said Smythe jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of Wall Street. "You had better put your dunnage aboard immediately. The vessel lies at Pier 15, East River, outside of a bark. Look her over. You'll not find much amiss I fancy, for the old mate has been by her all the time. The riggers, too, have been working lately on her. I'm not exactly giving you orders, Mr. Hunt, but report here again at two P. M. and I'll introduce you to the captain who will then straighten everything out."

"No rest for the wicked. I did hope to have a little time for the exchange of a nod or two with some of the old Broadway stage horses," growled Hunt as he started out of the office to put his dunnage aboard the Madeline.

He soon found her. She was a big schooner of 300 tons, with a flush deck, a deep waterway and high bulwarks. Two houses sat on her deck. The craft had evidently been built for service in the tropics, as both houses were pierced for big windows, and the after one had a large skylight.

In her rig the schooner was a fore-and-after, pure and simple, with a stationary yard at the foremast that carried a sail which brailed in-and-out athwartships to a jack-stay running up and down the mast. Looking down on her from the bark's rail —as Hunt did at first—there was a very little of the clipper appearance to the Madeline, and she showed her age all over.

A few riggers were aboard reeving off some new running rigging. With a step down to her sheer-pole and a swing from the main swifter Hunt dropped on the schooner's deck like a cat. His sudden appearance surprised the vessel's watchman who instantly challenged him, "What in hell do you want? No one allowed aboard here, sir. Have you a permit?"

"Don't get excited, Santa," replied Hunt. "I've got a little business here; I'm mate of this hooker."

"Mate be damned," rejoined the sturdy old ship-keeper as he surveyed the patent leather boots, neatly fitting surtout, tall silk hat, gloves, etc. of the intruder—"you get out or I'll—"

Just then the forward door of the after house was opened and a gray-haired man stepped out.

"Is this Mr. Hunt?" he asked smilingly. "Glad to see you aboard, sir," advancing, and offering his hand. "I heard you say you were the mate. Santa, as you call him, is only obeying orders; for you know, we are not just now open to public inspection," he added with a suggestive smile. "I am the second mate. Sherman is my name."

"Happy to make your acquaintance," replied Hunt as he shook hands. "We shall be shipmates, and I hope good friends besides on this craft."

"Come in the cabin, it's warmer," Sherman invited, and they went inside, where over a glass of toddy Sherman gave Hunt the history of the Madeline. She had been

built for the Rio Janeiro trade, and her patronymic was a famous belle of Baltimore.

"The vessel is fast, very fast," Sherman explained. "I have seen nothing that could touch her by the wind, old as she is. But you know, of course, that our Baltimore craft always have beat the world."

It did not take long for Hunt to find out that Sherman himself was a Baltimorean, a good sailor and a genial shipmate; and that the Madeline was well found. At Hunt's suggestion they adjourned to the opposite pier where a broadside view could be had of the schooner.

In a sailor's eye the Madeline was indeed a "bonnie boat" to view broadside on. Like all vessels of her type she sat low in the water. The sheer of her rail was sufficient to give life to her shapely hull which was surmounted by two tall raking masts and a bowsprit having an airy steeve. Her long cutwater, backed by her sharp bow-harping, gave the bow a graceful appearance, to which the raking stem added.

All over, below and aloft, and from stem to stern, she looked the sentient thing—the ideal clipper of romance.

"A sweet looking craft and we'll see what she is made of," said Hunt as he turned away to walk up the pier. "I must get up to Smythe's to meet our captain: I've not seen him yet."

"Neither have I," returned Sherman, "but I know him very well by reputation. He will not come aboard until the tug is fast alongside, I think."

"Ever been to the Coast, Mr. Sherman?"

"Not since I was a young man," was the reply, "but you know the Rio and Brazil trade now has gone to the dogs, and I have a large family. They must live if I do go to—"

"Oh, yes! I understand," rejoined Hunt; "none of us can control circumstances. We are not free agents in many things, however, we may flatter ourselves. I don't much fancy this African trade myself. 'Tis my first cruise."

"I hope it may not be your last one, sir. The climate there at times is terrible. It is the greatest objection I have to the business."

"With me," said Hunt bitterly, "it is the least. Please take care of my dunnage when it comes down, Mr. Sherman. I will come aboard to-morrow morning," and up the street he started to keep his appointment with Smythe.

III.

"MR. HUNT, let me introduce you to Captain Reed," said the shipping master as Hunt stepped briskly into the private office.

Both men stared at each other as they shook hands, surprised at something, they hardly knew what. Hunt had heard of Reed for years as the king of all African traders, and when he saw a wiry little man, dressed like a clergyman he was, for the nonce, a little set back. Reed was a South Carolinian, and in appearance as meek-looking and gentle as a dove—anything but the thorough sailor and reckless law-breaker that he was. Not till he spoke was the illusion dispelled, and then the man of action showed himself in his quick, terse speech.

Captain Reed looked his mate over rather quizically, and could hardly dissemble his surprise at meeting such a sailor—so neat, and so out-an-out fashionable in his dress—a dandy, in fact.

"What trades have you sailed in, sir?" he queried quickly, as he looked Hunt over from head to foot.

"Every known trade in the world, bar whaling and the African trade," replied Hunt with a snap in his tone, feeling that he was under the harrow.

"How do you like the Madeline, now you have seen her?" asked Reed.

"She is a good old packet, no doubt, sir. These Baltimore vessels are all fast sailers and some of them, they say, are good sea boats, though I never sailed in one."

"I have never sailed in the Madeline," said Reed; "do you think she is in good trim?"

"Tell you all about that when we get outside of Sandy Hook. No man—sailor, I mean, can give an opinion of a vessel he never sailed aboard of, sir," replied Hunt.

"True, true! Very true, Mr. Hunt! I

think, however, she will prove a good ship for us. She has a grand reputation. Anyhow, I see that you have a sailor's modesty; you don't know it all. I knew you were a sailor as soon as we shook hands, but damn me if at first sight I didn't take you for a tailor. No offense, Mr. Hunt."

"None at all, sir," rejoined Hunt, "and if it suits you, I'll report for duty now."

"All right, the crew will be on board to-morrow morning by daylight. I will come aboard as soon afterward as I can get my breakfast, and we will pull out directly the tugboat can make fast to us. The tug will lie at the pier all night."

"Very good, sir. I will see you in the morning; and now, Mr. Smythe, I'll say good-by." Shaking hands with Smythe, Hunt left the office for his hotel, where he intended to pass the night. There were some letters to write home and some lies to tell. "I shall probably," he wrote—"probably" let him out—"make a cruise up the Mediterranean and you will not hear from me until I return."

Bright and early he was on board the Madeline, a sailor once more. The crew and their dunnage soon came down, and the crew were all, for a wonder, sober.

They were a fine lot, picked men, and Hunt put them immediately at work—securing and lashing down things for sea about the deck and overhauling some of the running rigging. While the crew were busy down came the captain and another man with their traps in a carriage. Both jumped over the rail and darted into the cabin. Beckoning Hunt to come aft, the captain introduced him to Senor de Castro, the supercargo.

De Castro was a Portuguese, a dark skinned man with coal black whiskers up to his eyes, out of which he could not look straight.

"Get your lines ready, Mr. Hunt, and as soon as the tug gets here pull out; lose no time, or my friend here"—indicating De Castro—"will go in fits."

This was the captain's order. The tug by that time was alongside, and, taking a line over the bow of the schooner, she whipped her speedily out of the dock and down by Governor's Island. When outside the Narrows the sails were hoisted, the tug cast off, and with the strong westerly breeze and the ebb tide behind her the Madeline slipped down Ship Channel and out by the Hook at a ten knot clip.

Off the Sandy Hook lightship the steward called Hunt into the cabin. There he found the captain and De Castro busy overhauling a mass of accounts.

"We're off now, mate," said De Castro with a squint of his coal black eyes, "and we must have a social glass, and"—passing a bottle to him—"we'll drink to a quick run and—"

"And to our African brother," cut in the captain.

"Yes, yes, and his New England sister," rejoined De Castro.

"Now, Mr. Hunt," said the captain, "we have a good crew, and I don't want them worked up on this run. Of course, there must be discipline, and sail must be taken care of. My friend here is an old African trader and he fears you may be a little too strict, or severe, with the men; and he wishes you to know that anything like the treatment of sailors in the Atlantic trade won't do in this business. You understand, I think. We shall call first at Sierra Leone and we must get there as soon as possible. I expect you and Mr. Sherman to drive the vessel, and if she is not in her best trim take the men and shift the cargo till she is."

"Yes, yes, carry on to her, Mr. Hunt; keep her going," said De Castro, offering him a cigar. "Days mean dollars to us in this run; thousands of them, perhaps. We have spent a great deal of money in fitting this vessel out, and you need not be afraid of her, I can assure you."

"Set your watches, Mr. Hunt, and let her go east-southeast," directed Captain Reed.

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied Hunt, and went on deck. The breeze was fresh from the northwest and the old schooner slipped out to sea like a swallow on the wing.

IV.

THE Madeline made a good run offshore and across the Gulf Stream, the westerly

wind following her for ten days. Then she met a spell of light variable winds and calms as far as the Cape de Verde Islands, thence to the African coast were baffling and sometimes head winds.

Captain Reed took little interest in anything aboard excepting the navigation of the vessel, but De Castro's attentions to Hunt were very marked. The crew showed their dislike toward the officious supercargo in many ways, and the wily Portuguese, it seemed, delighted to sow discord between the captain and the mate. But he overdid it. Both officers saw through his policy, though Hunt had little idea of his ulterior object.

Captain Reed was an old African trader who knew all the ropes. De Castro was jealous of him. The Portuguese had lived on the African coast and was therefore acclimated; and, besides, he was a good physician, particularly for the dreaded coast fever. The crew were Americans, and first class men all; the cook, a Dutchman, was a good man; and the stores were of the best quality with all extras, such as wines, cigars, canned goods, jellies, *et cetera,* in the cabin.

Thirty-five days out from New York the Madeline, under the American flag, dropped her anchor and furled her sails in the harbor of Sierra Leone. She lay about one mile from the shore, and a quarter of a mile from a British man-of-war—a corvette.

"Johnny Bull takes some interest in us," said Hunt to Captain Reed after the sails were furled.

"Yes," replied the captain as he saw the telescopes and binoculars leveled at the Madeline from the rail, rigging, and even from the tops of the man-of-war.

"They will board us, no doubt, pretty soon. Give them every facility to search when they come. Now lower the boat and let me have two men. De Castro and I must go ashore to enter and clear the vessel."

Taking the schooner's papers, Captain Reed and the Portuguese went ashore in the boat, returning in time for supper. The next morning, after breakfast, a boat from the man-of-war boarded the Madeline, inspected her papers and searched her hold.

The British officers were insulting in their behavior, and evidently disappointed in not finding some irregularity so that they might seize and condemn the schooner, which they felt sure was a slaver. But all was regular in her papers and her cargo for a trading voyage on the coast, and Captain Reed and De Castro could not help chuckling at the discomfiture of her Britannic Majesty's servants.

The morning after the search the Madeline weighed her anchor to the chantey "Yankee John Storm Along," and topped her boom for the Congo River, passing close to the stern of the man-of-war and dipping her ensign as she sailed out of the harbor. The schooner's salute was not acknowledged by the corvette, but the Britisher's rail was crowded to get a look at the saucy Yankee.

With a fresh breeze from the southwest the Madeline worked down the coast, and on the morning of the fourth day made Padrone Point. She had a fair wind about halfway up the muddy Congo River, Captain Reed acting as pilot. Thence to Port de Leone, where she was to discharge her cargo, it was tedious work—mostly kedging.

When in sight of the Portuguese factory her destination, a canoe load of negroes was sent out to pilot and assist her, and she was finally moored alongside the bank of the river. The day after she arrived at the factory a large gang of men were put at work discharging her cargo. None of the crew was allowed to work, and all hands were cautioned not to go ashore nor to sleep on deck. In two days the cargo was discharged.

With the assistance of a gang of negroes, Hunt by means of heavy tackles made fast to some palm trees on the bank, hove the schooner down, and then scoured her copper with coconut husks, giving it afterward a heavy coat of palm oil. De Castro had not been near the vessel for some time, but Captain Reed, who had heard from him, told Hunt that he must hurry and prepare the vessel for the cargo which De Castro was about ready to put on board.

The water casks were immediately stowed on the bottom of the hold, bung up, and the dirt ballast filled in and leveled off around them. On top of the casks were

then placed—athwartships—pieces of scantling, and upon these a flooring was laid which made the "slave deck." It left five feet clear space under the beams.

Extra hatches were cut in the main deck, one in the forward house and one under the top-gallant forecastle. Four large wind sails were also made. In short, everything possible was done to afford a good circulation of air in the hold.

"I once lost three hundred blacks in one night for lack of ventilation," said De Castro, and Hunt shuddered as he heard it.

V.

FORTY-FIVE days after she arrived in the river the Madeline was cast off from the palm trees for her voyage to Cuba. She slipped down the Congo River close hauled by the wind like an eel, greased, as her copper was, for the run across the ocean.

During the last few days Hunt had been very busy looking after the work. The crew were about the vessel, but were feeble. The captain was not well and could not expose himself much, and consequently the supervision of the ignorant negroes who performed the labor had all devolved upon Hunt and Sherman.

Hunt had been feeling well all the time. He had taken good care of himself, and began to think that he had escaped the fever. But as the vessel reached the mouth of the river on her way to the rendezvous off the coast to receive her cargo, a feeling of lassitude crept over him, with flushes of heat accompanied by a dull, aching pain in the head.

Taking a dose of quinine, he said he would lie down for a while, which he did. He soon became unconscious, and remained so for four days.

Meanwhile the schooner had taken aboard from lighters off the coast her cargo of men, women and children—"the finest lot of blacks that ever left the Congo River," said De Castro, who superintended the embarkation. De Castro also picked up on the shore, "in the bush," the captain and six sailors of a Spanish schooner that had been captured by a British man-of-war, and two Swedes who had come from a New Bedford whale ship which also had been taken by a man-of-war.

The crews of captured slavers were always put ashore, "to eat or be eaten," as De Castro explained, and were only too glad to get away in any vessel that was leaving the coast. The reënforcement was very welcome to the feeble crew of the Madeline. When all were aboard, the schooner filled her sails and started her sheets for the long run to westward, to make in fact, the historical Middle Passage—standing well offshore out of the track of the cruisers.

On the morning of the fifth day out Hunt came to his senses. He found himself lying in his berth with scarcely strength enough to turn over. The sea breeze was blowing in his window and fanning his feverish face—and it felt good. As he rallied a little he became conscious that the vessel was at sea, by her motion, and he could see that Sherman was sitting in the cabin with his head lying on the table, as if he too were ill. He heard De Castro come in from the deck and ask Sherman what the matter was, then mix and give him something from a tumbler.

With an effort Hunt called "Hello there," and De Castro immediately sprang to the side of his berth. Feeling his pulse, the Portuguese told him to show his tongue, and then exclaimed:

"Ah! *Caramba!* That is good! All you want now is some food."

Sherman then came to his side and grasped his hand, saying:

"Good! Good! Glad to see you again in your senses, Mr. Hunt. We have had hell aboard since you've been sick. But here comes some grub for you that De Castro has ordered. You must eat."

A strange man brought in a bowl and set it on the table.

"Who is that man, Sherman?" inquired Hunt.

"Our new cook. No more talk, old fellow, but get up and eat. I'll tell you all by and by." And Sherman assisted Hunt out of his berth and to the cabin table.

Hunt ate the chicken soup that had been ordered by De Castro, who came into

the cabin again about the time he had finished, and remarked, "You have a good appetite, I see. Good—good! You are all right, sir!" And going to the locker, the Portuguese brought out a bottle of port wine. Filling a large glass in which he put a white powder, he said: "Take this and get back to your berth. Go to sleep. You will feel better in the morning."

The next morning when Hunt awoke he felt ravenous. He crawled out of his berth only to find himself lying flat on the deck, and with scarcely strength enough to pick himself up again. He staggered to a seat in the cabin. Captain Reed came out of his room just then and exclaimed: "Damn it, Hunt—I was never so glad in my life as when De Castro told me you were all right!"

"But what is the matter with *you*, sir?" asked Hunt, noticing that the captain looked feeble, hollow-eyed and emaciated. "You have changed some, it appears to me, since I saw you last."

"Yes; I've been pretty sick, but I have managed to keep about. I am an old hand at this, you know. You must eat something now," and the captain rang the bell. "Pedro," he said to the same man Hunt had noticed before, "Mr. Hunt must have something solid to stay on his stomach. Broil one of those chickens for him right away."

While waiting for the chicken, Captain Reed got some crackers and some port wine, which Hunt took and felt much better.

"Yes," went on the captain, "we have had a pretty tough time so far, but I'll not spoil your appetite with the story."

"No fear of that," said Hunt. "I can eat the chicken and the cook, too. I'll take another glass of the wine. There seems to be life in that stuff."

"It is De Castro's liquor, and is first class. I wish he was as good," said the captain.

Hunt ate the chicken, drank some more wine, smoothed his bedclothes, and crawled back into his berth, and soon fell asleep again. He awoke about five o'clock in the afternoon, feeling much better; and then he began to recall things.

He could recollect coming down the river, but from that time on all was a blank to him. The captain and Sherman had told him what a hard time they had, and he wondered what it was all about. He had noticed two strangers—the cook and a man lying in one of the cabin berths, who seemed to be sick—and, looking out of his windows, he could see four men more who were strangers to him, and a big negro talking to De Castro.

A nice breeze was blowing abeam, and the schooner was bowling off eight knots and going as easy as a rocking chair. With his returning strength came an insatiable curiosity.

"I must learn all about this," he told himself, and got out of his berth. He was pleased to find that he had gained strength enough to stand alone, and he made his way out of the cabin and on deck.

The captain met him at the cabin door, held out his hand to assist him, and said that he was glad to see him once more on deck; that he needed him very much. De Castro came up with a smile and the remark: "Mr. Hunt, glad to see you about again. You have a good constitution, or you would never have been on deck again."

Thanking them, Hunt began to look around the vessel and, with an inquiring glance at the captain, said: "I see none of our old crew. How is this?"

"No," replied Captain Reed—"three of them are gone, poor fellows, and the cook will die to-night; and I fear that Mr. Sherman won't last much longer. The boys had a relapse as soon as we got out of the river, and those alive are very low now; but I hope that Frank and Joe may pull through."

The situation so suddenly imparted flashed upon Hunt like a stroke of lightning, and, sick at heart and weak in body, he staggered back into the cabin to lie down, meditate, and recover himself. He was dejected and gloomy indeed when soon afterward Captain Reed came to him.

"Tell me more about this business," Hunt requested. "Who are these strange men and negroes that I see about deck?"

"The big negro is called Bomba. He is a Krooman," replied Captain Reed, and, like all of his tribe who inhabit the African coast, he has some intelligence. Those negroes following him around are his servants. I call them his bodyguard. They act as a police to keep the other negroes quiet, clean, and orderly. Bomba has great influence with them, and he speaks some Portuguese. De Castro has given him charge over the others, and he is proud as a peacock. What De Castro has promised him, besides an extra ration of rum, I don't know; but the services of Bomba and his bodyguard have been invaluable to us so far. We took on board from the coast 420 negroes—200 bucks, 170 females and 50 children, eight to ten years old. Seven have died already.

"The Spanish captain we found on the coast is very sick. So are the two Swedish sailors we have on board. I wish they would recover, for I don't like the dago sailors we have; though two of them are cooking, and do it very well. De Castro looks after the negroes very carefully. He has rigged an awning abaft the galley underneath which he makes his hospital. He watches their food, and sees that they are kept clean and have all the exercise possible. The women and children sleep on deck nights when the weather is fine. He has cut the old square sail in two, and lays one part on each side of the deck close to the bulwarks, makes the women and children lie down head and foot, and then covers them over. He disinfects the hold every day, and sees that the draft of the windsails is all right. But there, I have talked enough. You are tired and must eat something, and then you had better turn in."

"I'll take a look at Sherman before I do," said Hunt.

The second mate was lying on his back in his berth, unconscious. His eyes were glazed, and his breathing could hardly be noticed, it was so faint.

"He may last till morning," said De Castro, who had just come in the cabin: but he did not. In the middle watch that night Sherman was taken out of his berth dead, carried to the deck, sewed up in his blanket with a weight at his feet, and, at sunrise, dropped into his ocean grave.

VI.

On the morning of the eighth day out, Hunt felt strong enough to go on deck. He found one of the dagoes at the wheel, steering west-northwest with the breeze on the port quarter.

There was a slack, slovenly look to the sails, and Hunt went searching around the vessel to find some men to put things up shipshape. He could see no one. The sailor at the wheel could speak no English, and of course from him nothing could be learned. The cook in the galley, however, could talk a little English, and he said all hands were on deck somewhere, except the sick men.

Hunt finally saw one man sitting on the topgallant forecastle deck with his back against the pawl-bitt. The sailor appeared to be asleep; but when the cook called to him he jumped up and came aft. He was surprised, and looked very hard at Hunt, whom he had never seen before; but the cook explained things—told him who Hunt was and what Hunt wanted—and he then roused three more of the dago sailors out from somewhere.

The cook had made coffee, and when all hands had taken some they went to work under Hunt's direction to sway up the sails. De Castro, coming on deck then, made Bomba and his crew assist the sailors, and Hunt soon had the sails in decent shape and doing proper work. He then set the square-sail, and over it, opposite to the foretopsail, another topsail — or raffee. Bracing the yard up, he presently had the Madeline running off ten knots, which pleased De Castro very much.

Noticing the two Swedes lying under the forecastle deck, Hunt went forward to speak to them. He found one of them very ill. No one except some of the old crew had given them any medicine or paid them the slightest attention.

Between the Swedes and the dagoes there was bad blood. They were at daggers' points when in the bush on shore, and the Swedes told Hunt that the dagoes had

threatened them with their knives since they had come aboard the schooner. But the Swedes were armed with pistols and ready to shoot if provoked.

Hunt went to De Castro to get some medicine for the Swedes. De Castro grumbled some at his request; said he was getting short, *et cetera*, but finally gave Hunt what he wanted. The poor fellows were thankful for the mate's kindness.

"Look out for those dagoes," said one of them. "They are a bad lot, sir."

Hunt then went into the forward house to see how the two sick men of the old crew were getting on. They were lying in their berths, one with his face toward the wall. Putting his hand on his head to turn him over, Hunt found him stone cold and stiff. He had been dead some hours. The other man was fearfully emaciated. Hunt had the dead man taken out and buried.

No one seemed to care a straw about the sick, dying or dead white men; but the black cargo received all attention. Each negro was bathed on deck every morning—the males first, the women and children afterward. They were carefully fed twice a day on a porridge made of beans, peas, or rice, pork, and red peppers in which some hard bread was mixed. Their quarters below were cleaned and disinfected every day, and fresh water plentifully supplied to them.

"We have too many on board," De Castro told Hunt; "and I fear bad weather."

"I shall pray for good weather myself," said Hunt. "There is misery enough aboard this craft already, God knows."

"Good weather will make thousands of dollars difference to me," added De Castro. "Come in the cabin and have a glass of wine and a cigar."

After drinking the wine, and when they were again on deck, De Castro explained confidentially that the captain was not well and certainly could not stand his watch, and that much now depended on Hunt.

"I see that," said Hunt; "but if the two men of the old crew get about again, we will be all right. One of them I can trust with the deck, and one of the Swedes is a good man; the other will die, I fear."

De Castro expressed his dislike of the Swedes to the disgust of Hunt. The next day the Spanish captain died, and the next the younger Swede, who had been treated so cruelly, succumbed. Two of the dagoes gave up work on the day after that. De Castro attended them carefully, but the next day they too were dropped into the sea.

Here were ten white men dead in about as many days, and Hunt began to wonder what diabolical spirit of evil was hovering about the Madeline to make the vessel a floating morgue as she was gliding along so smoothly over a beautiful sea in the soft balmy weather of a marine paradise. Though sick at heart, physically he was nearly himself again and improving in strength every hour.

The day after they buried the last sailor Hunt went into the captain's room to see how he was getting along.

"Shut the door, Mr. Hunt; I must say something to you," was Captain Reed's salutation. "This is awful—the way we are dying off," he whispered. "If it continues, there will be no one but De Castro and the blacks left. I think that damned Portuguese is the devil himself. I shall take no more of his medicine. Give me what you have, and some wine and crackers. I have no fever now, but I am getting weaker every day. Get me some quinine out of the medicine chest, for after this I shall prepare my own doses."

"You don't think he is poisoning you, captain, do you?"

"I do, by Heaven, sir," the captain answered. "If he can get me out of the way and this cargo is landed all right, he is ten thousand dollars better off. Do you see?"

Hunt saw clearly enough, but said nothing.

"He will not try it on you, sir, for he depends upon you now," continued the captain; "but when you get near Cuba, look out—every one will drop off who is not necessary to work the vessel."

Captain Reed's suspicions did not make Hunt feel much better, but he thought that the captain was wandering a little in his mind, owing to his sickness.

The Madeline was now logging off the miles on her course to the westward in good style, and for a few days nothing unusual occurred except the death of three more men—negroes—and a quarrel between the Swede and two of the dagoes. Hunt kept the deck now nearly all the time, so anxious was he to finish the disagreeable cruise. He felt at times as if he would like to drive the "hellish keel" and its freight of misery down to the bottom of the sea.

In about Long. 40 W., one day, "Sail ho, to windward!" was cried by a man aloft. Hunt immediately jumped upon the top of the house with his glass, and made out the stranger, as well as he could, to be a large square-rigged craft. Every sail was pulling on the Madeline except the jibs. The stranger, however, in a little while appeared to be drawing ahead. He was two points abaft the weather beam of the Madeline, and Hunt thought he looked like a man-of-war.

"Whoever he may be, he'll be on top of us if we keep this course," decided Hunt: so he hauled the schooner up a point and a half to make the jibs draw, and in about two hours he could very well make out the hull of the strange ship.

"He will keep his course if he is a merchantman," said Hunt to De Castro, "and cross our wake."

De Castro began to get anxious—and well he might. In an hour more the ship was in the wake of the schooner, when Captain Reed, who had crawled on deck, asked Hunt what he thought of the stranger astern.

"We'll know presently, sir, but I think he is a man-of-war. A merchant vessel of that size would carry skysails; and he shows nothing above his royals. Ah—I thought so! Here he comes," exclaimed Hunt when, like magic, his studding sails were set.

"Well, his size must tell against us, and if he gains on us now what do you propose?" queried Captain Reed anxiously.

"We'll wait and see if he does outsail us," replied Hunt, "and if he does I'll try him on the wind."

"Yes, that's the play. Have you noticed the barometer, Mr. Hunt? It has dropped some two-tenths since morning. There is, too, some dirt around us; and we'll surely have a dark night and a good chance to give him the slip. I must lie down again. I have no more strength than a cat," and the captain went to his cabin.

From his perch on the crosstrees Hunt now considered the ship with his glasses. The breeze was strengthening all the time, and he finally concluded that the man-of-war was gaining on the schooner and that no more time must be lost.

"Call all hands," he ordered; and in a jiffy he took in the square-sail and lowered the yard on deck, hauled down the jib-topsail, luffed sharp, and trimmed down all sheets, and then, close hauled, was dancing up to windward.

As soon as the man-of-war noticed the schooner's maneuver, down came his studding sails on a run, and, bracing his yards up sharp, he stood in hot chase after the Madeline. It was a clinch in earnest now.

Hunt took the wheel himself, and as she felt the weight of the strong increasing breeze on her beam the schooner began to send the heavy spray flying across her deck. She lay a good point higher than the man-of-war and nearly held her own in reaching along.

Beckoning to De Castro, Hunt told him to get the negroes in the hold as close as possible up to windward. The wind sails, of course, had been taken in, but all hatches were open, as no heavy water was coming on board, and there was a good circulation of air in the hold. As night was falling, and the breeze getting stronger all the while, supper was served to the crew early. The wind was howling at sunset, and Hunt never quit the wheel.

He was a helmsman—a born helmsman—and he had steered no such trick as this since he was a boy sailing with his father in competitive tussles back of Cape Cod. It was soothing to his perturbed spirit to feel the gallant schooner under his feet as if she were alive with the strong press of breeze that strained every rope, spar, and sail to the verge of rupture.

Never since she had been launched had she been driven so hard as by Hunt's skill-

ful manipulation of the wheel, now with touches light as a feather, and again exerting the strength of an athlete. She was eased and luffed from wave crest to wave crest, her lee rails buried at times, and the spray constantly flying over the weather rail and streaming across the deck like a mill sluice.

Up to windward she must climb! There were prison, disgrace, and perhaps, the rope if captured; and, with his eye constantly on the luff of the mainsail and the topmasts that were bending like coach whips, he kept the Madeline a-going.

"Something will fetch away I fear," said Captain Reed, who with blanched face was standing in the after door of the cabin.

"I hope not sir," replied Hunt.

"But damn it, you will drown us all, Hunt!" exclaimed the captain as the schooner heeled her lee dead-eye under and the water came rushing aft like a young Niagara.

"Better drown than hang," rejoined Hunt tersely, as he luffed the schooner out with a turn of the wheel.

De Castro's swarthy face was nearly white, as he squatted under the weather bulwarks on the quarter, and scarcely a word could he speak while the Madeline was forging along over and through the mad seas.

"Will they catch us?" was all he could gasp with an appealing look in Hunt's face.

"Not if things stand," answered Hunt, pointing aloft. "They won't catch us on top of water, *señor*," and he smiled grimly as he whirled the wheel to meet a sharp sea that struck the weather side with a thud and nearly blinded all hands with its sheets of flying spray.

At eight bells, satisfied with the weather gage and position the schooner had obtained, Hunt furled the topsails and extinguished all lights on board preparatory to doubling on his course and giving the man-of-war the slip. It was very dark now and he tacked ship. Then he furled the flying-jib, double reefed the mainsail, and hoisted it again. Next he lowered the foresail, put two reefs in it and tied it up with stops in case he should need it quickly. Bomba, with his bodyguard of negroes, rendered great assistance when it came to hard pulling.

"No use now to keep the negroes in the hold huddled together," said Hunt, "as we are under short sail." De Castro was pleased at this. "You may set the windsails too," added Hunt; "give the poor devils down there all the air we can."

Going aloft he could just make out in the darkness the man-of-war on the lee beam. But she had tacked—expecting, apparently, that the schooner would go about in the night and stand down to leeward on her original course.

Hunt slid down a back stay to the deck and calling all hands, immediately doused all sail.

"The ship can't see us now when we are under bare poles," he thought, but he kept his vigil aloft until the man-of-war was out of sight. Then calling all hands again he hoisted the jib, clapped the reefed foresail and mainsail on her, put the hatches on and let the schooner slide off dead before it.

It was blowing a small gale, and as the old craft jumped along down the wind and through the seas, the spray went flying over the bow half-way up on the foresail. Now and then a sea would tumble over on the deck. The hatches, however, had been made in four parts, and with one of these off the windsail could still be kept drawing and not much heavy water get below deck.

With two men at the wheel he scudded the Madeline all night, the old craft quivering as she leaped from sea to sea. At daylight there was not a rope yarn adrift nor any vessel in sight. It was blowing hard though, and to ease her helm Hunt furled the mainsail. Under the foresail and jib she made much better weather, running off twelve knots and shipping no water, except, now and then, a lump of the sea that tumbled over in the waist. De Castro had the negroes up for their bath in the morning as usual.

Captain Reed did not seem to pick up much strength. He would eat no food that was cooked on board, but drank considerable port wine and lived on crackers and sardines. De Castro ceased to bother himself about him, and as far as the vessel was

concerned the captain was of little account; for he only worked the observations that were taken by Hunt for the navigation of the vessel. He was morose to every one and seemed to feed on his hallucination. It was not pleasant on board the Madeline now, and Hunt's experience of the Middle Passage so far had been anything but agreeable. But every day brought him nearer the end.

VII.

Two days after the chase the breeze had moderated, and the Madeline, sailing over a summer sea and under a cloudless sky, was logging off eight knots on her course with her square sail and topsail set. It was just before noon. Frank, one of the old crew, had the wheel, and Hunt, standing on the quarter with his sextant, was about to take the sun's altitude for the latitude.

Quiet reigned fore-and-aft, as if the vessel had been lulled asleep by the glorious weather, the faint swish of the ripples that coursed along the sides and out in the wake accentuating an oppressive stillness.

Hunt heard some loud curses forward, then pistol shots and a yell. Dropping his sextant and drawing his revolver (he was armed all the time now) he ran forward. One of the dagoes was stretched over the windlass, and the Swede lay on the deck with the blood gushing out of his neck. A few gasps and he was dead. The dago had been shot through the head.

The Swede was a good man whom Hunt liked very much, but the dagoes hated him. Joe, one of the old crew, being in the forward house and the door open, saw the fight. It was all over before any one could get near the infuriated men.

The Swede, Joe told Hunt, was leaning over the starboard rail near the break of the forecastle deck when one of the dagoes seized him by the leg and tried to pitch him overboard. The Swede kicked himself clear, and, as he turned, grabbed a heavy iron belaying pin used for the jib sheet and began pounding the dago. The other dago jumped upon the forecastle deck, picked up a hand spike and rushed to the defense of his shipmate, striking downwards at the Swede's head which was about on a level with the dago's feet. At this the Swede dropped the belaying pin and pulled his revolver, which Hunt had put in good order for him, knowing how he was persecuted by the dagoes.

As the dago on the top-gallant forecastle deck rushed at the Swede with the hand-spike uplifted, the Swede fired, and the dago, stumbling as he fell close to the low side chock on top of the rail—tumbled overboard—hand spike and all.

The other dago, on the main deck, having a chance, when the Swede dropped the belaying pin, drew his sheath knife and closed in on the Swede, slashing at his head right and left and cutting him fearfully. Before he could get away, and when he was close to the Swede, the Swede fired again, his pistol almost touching the dago's head. Both men dropped about the same time—the dago across the windlass and the Swede upon the deck. All this occurred in less than a minute.

"Throw them overboard and wash the blood away before the blacks see it," was De Castro's orders to Bomba as he turned away.

"Three more men gone, and we so short handed. This is indeed hell afloat," thought Hunt as, sick at heart, he walked aft to take his noon observations.

Bomba and his crew picked up the body of the dead Spanish sailor and pitched it overboard. Hunt, however, sewed the dead Swede up in his blanket, put some weight at his feet and, at sunset, as became a sailor, dropped him into his ocean grave.

That night it moderated still more, and two days afterward it fell calm, with a heavy swell that made the schooner lurch and roll fearfully. Hunt lowered the mainsail and secured everything about deck.

The captain managed to crawl out about noon and to Hunt he said: "This calm will be short lived. The barometer is falling fast. The swell is abeam, and you see it is getting heavier. There certainly is wind behind it, although it is not the hurrican season."

Captain Reed was an old West India and African trader and Hunt felt that he was correct in his prognostications. The

vessel now had no steerage way, and one could hardly stand on her deck she tumbled about so heavily. But with the assistance of Bomba and his guard, Hunt put two reefs in the mainsail and foresail, then furled them again, and secured the booms with extra tackle.

By this time it began to look black and greasy, so to speak, on the starboard beam. Captain Reed had gone into the cabin to lie down. No one but an able-bodied seaman was of any use on deck now. Hunt went in and reported to the captain the unusual "dirty" appearance.

"Make all your preparations, Mr. Hunt, and expect the worst. You can see that the barometer is still falling."

Hunt immediately got the storm trysail up and bent it on the main, and also bent a small storm jib on the stay and saw that all the hatches, battens, and tarpaulins were ready to make the hold tight at the last minute. In the afternoon watch it began to thunder heavily, with quick intermittent flashes of lightning out of the heavy dark clouds, and the negroes in the hold started to howl with fear.

"Poor devils," thought Hunt, as he looked down the hatchway.

"Those children can't stand it down there, I fear," said De Castro. "Do you object to my taking them up in the cabin, Mr. Hunt?"

"Good Heaven, no!" replied Hunt, "but keep them on deck as long as you can."

The children were passed up on deck by Bomba and later into the cabin.

"Stand by the hatches, boys," said Hunt, and they had not long to wait before the order came: "Clap on the hatches and batten down tight."

It was "feather white" to windward now, and black as midnight. Down came the squall in a smother of spray and rain. It was lively work to get the storm jib set and sheeted home before the squall struck the Madeline. Down she went—down, down, down—lee rail under, and then down to her hatch coamings, as if she never would come up again. All hands climbed up to windward.

"Hard up!" yelled Hunt to the man at the wheel, as he made his way aft under the lee of the bulwarks to assist him.

The gallant old craft struggled to get up, and as the storm-jib filled she slowly fell off and righted herself as she swung around to the pressure of the jib and her helm. Hunt and Frank had all they could do at the helm when he righted to keep the vessel before the wind, which blowing so strong on their backs, fairly pinned them against the rim of the wheel. As it came down with a rush and a roar the blast cut the white crests off the top of the seas, sending the spoondrift down to the leeward like a snow storm and breaking over the Madeline in flying spray it stung the face like heavy hail. Speak one could not! No sound uttered went beyond the lips until the first burst of the squall had passed.

Then Hunt glanced aloft and saw that all was right there. But the vessel had a bad list which, as she was running before the gale, made her steer awkwardly. Beckoning to De Castro, who managed to crawl aft to the wheel from the cabin, Hunt halloed in his ear that the negroes in the hold must be shifted from the side of the vessel where they had tumbled when she was knocked down, over to the other side. She must be righted immediately for her present trim was dangerous.

With the help of the crew Bomba and De Castro managed to get forward to the hatch, lifted it, and got down into the hold among the blacks; and in a little while, amid yells and shrieks, they had the unfortunate creatures distributed equally on both sides of the vessel and the schooner righted herself again.

The old craft felt now, to the men at the helm, like herself, and ran about seven knots under the storm jib, which was not much bigger than a table cloth. But she was going off her course about six points. This was bad, but it could not be helped; for until it moderated the schooner could not, with safety, be brought up and hove to.

About sunset Hunt determined to risk it. He got the men aft and hoisted the main trysail partly up and sheeted it to the quarter. Then he hauled the storm jib in to the mast, put his two best men at the wheel, and the remainder—Bomba and his

crew—at the main trysail halyards, and waited for his chance. Catching, finally, a comparatively smooth period, he motioned to the men at the wheel—" Hard down, and be quick about it."

" Hold on for your lives!" he yelled as the schooner came up in the wind, jumped her bowsprit out of sight under a big sea and threw a few tons of water over the quarter.

" Hoist away on the trysail!" and in less time than it can be told the Madeline was lying to the wind and seas like a Mother Carey's chicken, buoyant and dry, as only an American clipper schooner can lie.

Hunt breathed freer now, and to look about before night came on was his next business. The vessel was shipping no water to speak of, and to open the door and the windows of the forward house was imperative he decided. The stench that came up through the hatchway when it was uncovered was sickening.

" We must do something to help those miserable devils down there," said Hunt, and he set a windsail through a quarter of the after hatch. In the strong gale prevailing the wind rushed down into the hold like the blast of a tornado carrying with it considerable of the spray that was flying over the vessel, but no heavy water.

Then he went into the cabin and opened the lee windows and the after door. The cabin smelled bad, but not so bad as he expected it would. De Castro had got some biscuit for the children to eat, and it was comical to see their little black jaws wag in unison as they munched them.

"*Señor,*" said Hunt to De Castro, " it is about time the men had a drink. We got very little dinner, and the supper will be light."

" Yes, yes," replied De Castro, and he brought out a bottle of old rum which Hunt dealt out to the men, taking a good nip himself.

Bomba now came up from the hold and smacked his lips as he saw the men drinking. He, too, got a dram, and then he reported to De Castro that some of the negroes in the hold had been suffocated, or trampled to death, when they were all tumbled pell-mell down to leeward by the squall. Some sea biscuit was fed to the blacks now. They had had nothing to eat since the morning; and the crew got what they could from the cook for their supper.

The wind hauled to the southward during the night and by daylight the schooner was on her course and then Hunt lowered the trysail and set the foresail. It was blowing a fresh gale now that was backed by the southeast trade wind, and the Madeline jumped along on her course from sea to sea, shipping considerable water. The hatches forward were kept battened down, and the negroes could get nothing to eat in the morning but some more hard bread. A wind sail in the after hatch, however, gave them good air in the hold. At 5 P. M. the seas were running more regular and the deck was dryer, though the breeze had not abated much.

" Get those dead blacks up," said De Castro to Bomba; and assisted by his bodyguard Bomba passed up the after hatch twenty-six bodies. All were examined by De Castro and pronounced dead before the crew tossed them over the rail.

" Too bad," said De Castro lugubriously; " there go the doubloons."

And the black corpses floated past the side and out in the white foam of the wake where they bobbed mockingly, as it seemed, at the receding vessel.

" Horrible! horrible!" muttered Hunt as he turned away and walked forward.

" Yes, I suppose it is," said De Castro, nonchalantly puffing at his cigar; " but, you know, the blacks don't mind it, and it pleases the sharks."

VIII.

HUNT had no appetite for his supper that evening, but lay down instead to try to catch a nap. But he could not sleep, and at four bells he went on deck again, feeling ugly. The schooner was driving before it in grand style with her foresail wide off to port, and fairly leaping from sea to sea. Overhead it was pleasant; for, now and then, the moon shone through the clouds.

" I never sailed with such a freight before. I wonder how much this infernal

craft will stand? So far I have not parted a rope-yarn," he said to himself, and calling the crew, to their surprise he ordered the square sail set on the staggering schooner.

"It is a fair wind, boys, and I'll be damned if I want to see those dead blacks climbing aboard over the taffrail," said Hunt as they pulled the tack down. Under the additional press of sail, and before the following seas, the Madeline now tore along like mad, at times burying her cat-heads and throwing the water in cascades high over her bows. It lulled a little at daylight, and then he piled on the fore topsail and a "raffle" set over the square-sailyard—leaving the halyards aft to serve as a backstay to the over-strained topmast. She fairly smoked along now, but ran as steady and true on her course as if she were in a groove.

Though the breeze the next day was strong the weather was pleasant and the decks comparatively dry. The negroes were bathed and fed as usual.

"We're making a good run, Mr. Hunt," said De Castro.

"We would make a better one if I could crowd more sail on her," replied Hunt.

Two days more of this hard pressing and early in the morning it was—"Land Ho" from the cross-trees. At high noon the Madeline sailed through the passage between Martinique and Dominica into the Caribbean Sea. Hauling her wind a point or more she then set the mainsail and the main topsail, and with breeze still strong, but in smoother water, she stood up for the south side of Cuba.

"Keep your eye skinned for cruisers," said Captain Reed who began now to stay more on deck.

Hunt, was perched in the cross-trees nearly all the time, but no suspicious sail could he see. Every one on board seemed to be happy now at the prospect of landing and the childlike delight of the poor negroes, who were soon to view the Promised Land, was pitiable. The wind veered till it was nearly abeam and the Madeline, with the strong current setting her to the westward, ran along the south side of Porto Rico and Santo Domingo.

A crisis of the voyage was now at hand. The cargo must be landed in defiance of the cruisers that patrolled the Cuban coast. Captain Reed and De Castro began to get anxious. De Castro particularly could not conceal his uneasiness. To fail now—to be captured, or be compelled to lose vessel and cargo in prevention of capture and thereby have the expense, trouble and misery of the cruise come to naught? The thought was harrowing. All went well, however, and on the evening of the thirtieth day from the Congo River, with Captain Reed as the pilot, the Madeline, skirting the bunch of keys close to the coast, furled her topsails and stood boldly in for the Cuban shore between Trinidad and Cienfuegas. Getting no signal from the land, she lowered the foresail at dusk and stood off shore again. When a few miles off Captain Reed hove to for the night. All hands were called at daybreak and coffee served.

"Take your glasses and go aloft, Mr. Hunt," said Captain Reed as the mist began to lift. "Look sharp in the offing, sir."

After a long and careful search Hunt reported nothing in sight.

"Let her run in shore now," directed De Castro and, filling away, the schooner stood in to within a mile of the beach. The sun was up and it was clear as noonday. Many boats—fishermen and pilot boats—were flitting about between the schooner and the shore, and one of them began now to wave a large white flag.

"Run down aboard of that fellow, captain," said De Castro, and in a few minutes the boat was alongside the schooner and a man climbing over her rail.

He was a Cuban fisherman. As he doffed his cap he inquired in Spanish for Señor De Castro, and taking a letter from his bosom handed it to him. Walking aft as he read, De Castro said to the captain:

"It is all right now, sir. There are no cruisers about. We were not expected so soon. I must send a reply ashore." Hastily writing a note in pencil, he handed it to the men in the boat, who immediately put off from the schooner.

"Let her run down the shore now," De Castro said smilingly. "This man," in-

dicating the fisherman who had brought off the note, "will pilot us."

The Spanish stranger went to the knight-heads and gave directions to the captain, who had taken the wheel. The negroes now had their breakfast. All this business was novel to Hunt, but he said nothing. Under her lower sails the schooner traveled down the shore. In about an hour Hunt saw that they were getting into shoal water. Walking aft to the captain, who was steering as directed by signs from the man in the knight-heads, he said:

"There is white water close ahead of us, sir. Do you see it?"

"Yes, I see," said the captain with a laugh. "It does look like it."

A few minutes more and with a shock and a grinding noise, the Madeline fetched up "all standing."

"Lower away everything, Mr. Hunt," and down came the sails on a run. "You may get your dunnage ready as soon as you like now, sir," added the captain to his mate.

Scarcely an hour passed before a large lighter bearing some men and a lot of clothing to cover the nakedness of the blacks was alongside. One of the men brought off some bags of specie, and saluting De Castro went with him into the cabin. The crew were now called aft and the two Americans—Joe and Frank—of the original crew, were each paid one thousands dollars in doubloons and silver. The dagoes that were left were paid two hundred and fifty dollars each for the run across.

"Now, boys," said De Castro, "help us get these blacks ashore." All hands turned to and assisted bundling the poor devils into the lighter and into their clothes.

"Strip the schooner," ordered De Castro as he went ashore with the negroes in the lighter. "In an hour or two I'll be off again."

Under the direction of Captain Reed the sails were unbent, the running rigging unrove, some of the lumber below torn up, and everything of value on board made ready to send ashore. About 5 P.M. the lighter returned with De Castro and a few more men and some combustibles—light, resinous pine stuff. Everything was immediately tumbled into the lighter. Then the dunnage of the officers and crew was taken out and the old bedding, rags, etc., together with the combustibles that were brought from the shore, were scattered throughout the vessel and saturated with kerosene.

"Is everybody ready for shore now?" asked De Castro as all hands gathered at the rail next to the lighter.

"All ready," was the response.

"But hold on," said Captain Reed, "some one must start the fire."

"I'll be damned if I do," said Hunt as he jumped over the rail aboard the lighter.

De Castro and Captain Reed laughed, and one of the sailors went back in the hold and lighted the piles of stuff that were there. When the hold was well ablaze De Castro and Captain Reed lighted the stuff under the forecastle deck, in the forward house, and in the cabin. Kerosene had been poured on the deck, the sides, the rail, the house, and over the spars. The work was well done, and the lighter had scarcely time to get clear of the old craft before she was in flames.

IX.

It was dark when Hunt, De Castro and the captain arrived at the negro quarters about a mile back of the shore. They found the blacks distributed under a large open shed and in some adjoining buildings. The wind had got around to the north, and the night was chilly to the poor creatures who had huddled around some fires to keep themselves warm.

It was as good a lot of negroes as ever landed in Cuba, De Castro said, and Don Pedro Blanco, the millionaire Cuban slave dealer, had taken them all—three hundred and seventy. Of 420 that had left the Congo River fifty had died—a very small percentage.

After making themselves as comfortable as they could for the night in one of the outbuildings, De Castro, Hunt and the captain started early in the morning for Cienfuegos to settle up their business. They arrived there about noon, got something to

eat, and then went to the office of a sugar merchant who was interested in the Madeline's voyage.

"How will you take your money, Mr. Hunt?" asked De Castro, as they seated themselves at a table. "I can give you sight drafts on either Havana or New York."

"I must go home by way of Havana, I understand, and a draft payable there will suit me," replied Hunt.

"Your wages per month comes to three hundred and thirty-three dollars, less your advance, two hundred and fifty dollars, leaves eighty-three dollars wages due you. The head money at ten dollars per head comes to three thousand seven hundred dollars, total three thousand seven hundred and eighty-three dollars due you, as I calculate. How is that?"

"Correct, sir," replied Hunt.

"Now, Mr. Hunt, in view of your personal exertions, that contributed so much to our safety and our short passage and the success of the voyage, I have been requested by my partners here to present you with an additional thousand."

"You are very kind, sir," said Hunt, "I only did my duty as I saw it. Give me the odd money in gold and a sight draft on Havana for the balance, if you please. A coaster leaves here to-night for Havana. I want to go in her. It is much pleasanter than to jolt over the rough country roads."

"Don't leave Havana before I see you," said De Castro. "I may get there before you do, and, if I do, I will wait for you. Leave your address at De Bances', Obispo Street."

Hunt went aboard the coaster in the night, lived on fish and garlic for three days, and, finally, arrived at Havana. There he bought exchange on New York, and had to wait a week for the mail steamer to sail. The day before the steamer left De Castro called on him at his hotel, and over a bottle of wine the Madeline's voyage was sailed again.

"Mr. Hunt," said De Castro as he was about to leave. "I shall make one more trip to the African coast, and in a larger vessel than the Madeline. I and my partners want you to go as master. Of course we will furnish all the money; and we will give you as large an advance as you want, the regular captain's wages and one-eighth interest in the profits. You may purchase and fit out the vessel to your own liking. What do you say to my offer, sir?"

It was a little while before Hunt could reply. Not that he was in any doubt about what his answer should be, but he wished to give no offense. Finally he spoke.

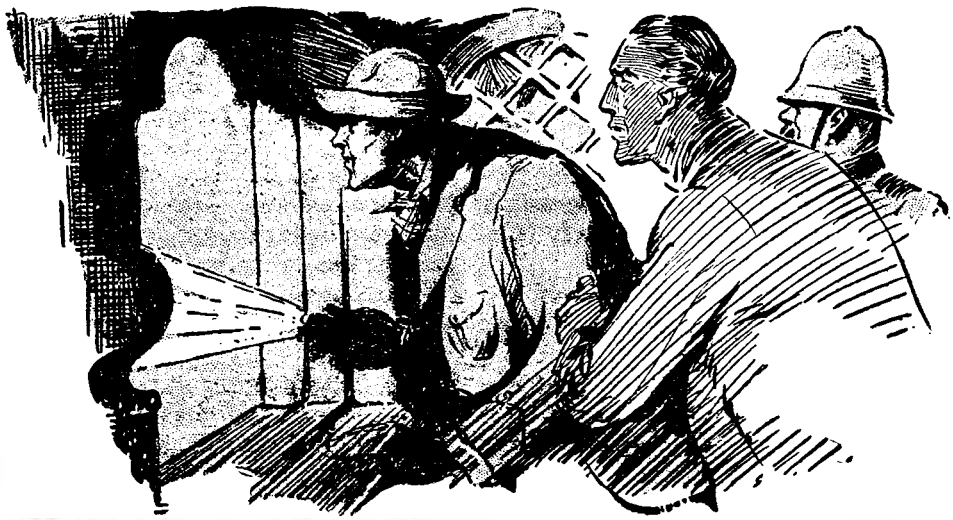
"Your confidence in me is flattering, I assure you, but, De Castro, if you were to give me the weight of every black in Africa in gold I would not engage in the business again," and as he looked in De Castro's face, the Portuguese negro-stealer saw that the Yankee sailor meant what he said.

THE END

"TREAT 'EM ROUGH!"

A CAVE MAN spent a week or two
In carving neatly, "I love you,"
Upon a handy bit of shale—
And needed strong right arm to mail
It *at* the chosen maid;
On whom it such impression made,
That all the old wives—when they wed—
Were jealous of her broken head!

R. E. Alexander.



The Passing of Charles Lanson

By LOUIS TRACY

Author of "Wings of the Morning," "The Token," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

CHARLES LANSON, an international banker of enormous wealth, possessing great influence in Athens and other European capitals, is stabbed to death by a masked man in the library of his home, Sleaford Castle, in a little English town. Superintendent Wood and his superior, Chief Superintendent Winter of Scotland Yard, place a guard about the huge building and grounds to prevent the assailant's escape. Lanson's neurotic daughter, Irene, becomes hysterical.

Meanwhile Felix Glen, a cousin of Lanson who parted from the banker in anger earlier in the evening because he refused to agree to marry Irene, is picked up by the police, in company with Victor Denasch, in connection with the assault on a police constable in the ruins of White Friars' abbey near by. **Winter** questions **Dorothy** Temple, companion of Irene, fruitlessly. He learns from Davidson and Trevor, secretaries, that Lanson's chief secretary, Sevastopolo, a Greek, spoke to the dead man by telephone from London shortly before his death. A frightened footman brings word to Winter that Alice Romer, Irene's maid, has been found dead.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TURRET.

IN physique, Winter was the strongest man in Scotland Yard. As for nerves, in the common meaning of the word, he had none. Yet at that whimpered cry, made eerie by the messenger's affrighted aspect, he could have bellowed with Macbeth:

> The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon!
> Where gottest thou that goose look?

But experienced detectives seldom yield to moods. Still less frequently do they put

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wayward thought into blank verse. Winter dashed to the stairs, nor did he forbid the others to follow; even the placid mannered Davidson rose, closed his notebook, and ran with him. He did not forget, however, to bid Bates and the policeman remain. It was just in such a panic-stricken moment that the hall might be left unguarded.

"Where was the girl found?" was Winter's first question.

"At the foot of the turret stairs, sir."

"Straight up," put in Davidson. "There are only two main stories."

As they crossed the lobby a lighted elevator shot downward past a door of open iron work. It contained two figures. One was hidden. The other was apparently the mid-Victorian housekeeper, Mrs. James.

Winter put a hand on Davidson's shoulder.

"You don't hesitate to do what you are asked," he said. "Will you hurry to wherever that elevator stops, and ascertain who is in it, and why?"

The secretary turned on his heel instantly. Glen seemed to feel a sting of reproof in Winter's words, because he seized the opportunity to display his knowledge of the castle's interior economy.

"This next set of stairs leads to a transverse corridor," he explained. "The turret rises over the center of the building, and is reached by a winding staircase."

Winter nodded. He pretended to be rather breathless, whereas he owned a phenomenal activity of body, an attribute which had saved him from death or disablement in many a tough struggle with desperate evildoers. At that moment the sixth sense which every skilled detective must be endowed with was warning him that Victor Denasch had some motive in lagging behind the remainder of the party. Winter wondered what the ultrapolished young man had in his mind, so he mounted the stairs with difficulty, watching Denasch with ears instead of eyes.

They found Alice Romer laid on a settee near the door of the lift. The butler's squad of searchers had discovered her almost immediately, and the presence of many of the maid servants showed that their bedrooms were situated in this section of the castle.

The girl's body was inert, and her cheeks were ivory white, but Macgregor saw at a glance that she was still living.

"Tell me exactly what position she was in when you picked her up," he said to Mr. Pinkney.

"Almost on her face, sir, with her left arm stretched out. Her head and shoulders were halfway through the open door, and her feet on the stairs."

"Looking exactly as though she had slipped and fallen, pitching forward?"

"Yes, sir."

The doctor's strong and capable fingers had been pressing the girl's scalp meanwhile. Then he tilted her chin, and, holding each ankle in turn, moved each leg at knee and thigh. He tested her arms similarly.

"Nothing broken, at any rate," he announced. "She may be suffering from a slight concussion, though I doubt it. My opinion is that she has fainted, and will soon recover her senses."

Mr. Pinkney sighed his relief.

"That's good news," he said. "We all thought she was dead. You see, sir, she was lying very awkwardly."

"I'm sure of it. The resultant compression of certain arteries would help to keep her insensible. Have you any brandy and smelling salts?"

"Mrs. James and a footman have just gone for some, sir."

A rising light and a slight clang proclaimed the return of the elevator, which now held three passengers, Mr. Davidson having come with the others.

"Where is her room situated?" went on the doctor.

"No. 17, in the left corridor, sir."

"Let us take her there. Then we can remove her shoes and stockings. Massage will help the restoratives. We'll carry her on the couch, just as she is. A couple of you girls come along, too. You can rub her wrists and ankles."

Winter bent close to Macgregor's ear.

"Pay special heed to the first words she utters, and before she has time to gather her wits, find out why she fainted."

He turned to the butler.

"Has the turret been searched?" he asked.

"No, sir. We have done nothing in that way yet. I was explaining to the others just how we were to deal with every room when we saw Alice Romer's head sticking out through the doorway of the turret stairs."

"Shouldn't that door have been locked?"

"It has never been locked, sir, since two gentlemen sitting up there late one evening were shut in, and had great trouble in making any one hear."

"I was one of them," put in Glen. "An eminent R. A. was the other. More moonshine stuff. That time it was a full moon rising over the moors."

"As I am here, I will examine the turret myself," decided Winter.

"May I come with you?" exclaimed Glen.

"Certainly. Here—give me your torch and automatic, and I'll lead the way"—this to the policeman attached to the butler's squad.

"Better let me go in front," suggested Glen. "I am acquainted with the place. There is a tricky turn as you reach the top. With one sweep of the torch I'll tell you whether or not the place is empty, or apparently so, I had better put it."

Winter agreed at once. He wanted this young man to be friendly, not hostile, and here was an opportunity to show complete confidence in him. Glen flushed with gratification, and made at once for the entrance to the turret stairs. The steps were broad, and not steep, running round a solid central column of stone. A handrail guarded both sides.

Winter followed Glen, but squeezed close to the wall to allow the constable to pass. Davidson, who had assumed that no explanation as to the occupants of the lift was called for, came next.

"I want you to go back," breathed Winter, "and keep an unobtrusive watch on Denasch. If, as I imagine, he does not come with us or remains in the corridor, find out what becomes of him."

Winter had to leave it at that. He ran up a few steps, overtook the policeman, and was just in time to press on Glen's heels before the latter halted, with a surprised "Hello!"

"Keep your eye peeled as you come out," he added quietly. "Some one has left a torch on the table, and it's turned on, too!"

Then he touched an electric switch, and the place was flooded with light.

"Don't touch that torch on any account," barked Winter, who felt that, at last, something definite and tangible had emerged out of a maze of doubt and complexities. In a couple of seconds he was standing by Glen's side, and looking about him with those big and prominent eyes which seemed to discern all things within their orbit without dwelling on any object in particular.

The apartment was hexagonal, with small, deeply recessed windows in each of the six walls. All this part of the castle, including a donjon keep and the rooms of ceremony, had been dismantled about the time of the Spanish Armada, to make way for the existing Eliabethan residence. The turret was probably about as high as the battlements of the keep, and served the same principal purpose—to give an uninterrupted view over the surrounding country. To this end the circle of every window was splayed from the interior, a fact which accentuated the thickness of the walls, and, incidentally, increased the field of vision of any one standing in the room.

A square of Turkish carpet was on the floor, leaving four segments of polished oak boards. The furniture was simple—a table and half a dozen Chippendale armchairs. Some tall, narrow bookcases were filled with novels. In effect, this was a place of quiet, where a book and a pipe would be more *de règle* than aimless chatter.

The two rails of the staircase ran up to a convenient height, forming the "tricky turn" Glen had spoken of. Nothing bigger than a mouse could be in hiding. Even the electric torch had probably been left on the table by the girl who had tripped on the steps below, though why she should have gone down in utter darkness was a problem yet to be solved.

Overhead a groined roof ran to a charmingly carved oaken center, to which was clamped a tiny chandelier with four lamps. A tall man could reach them easily. In one

of the sections of the roof a trapdoor was visible.

"There's a space above, then?" said Winter, fastening instantly on to the only possible place of concealment.

"Yes, to give access to the lead covering in case of any leakage. It's bolted from the inside, however, so— No, by Jove, it *might* have been fastened by an accomplice. Let's have a peep-o!"

Without waiting for permission, Glen mounted a chair, shoved back the bolt, which was stiff, and needed a good deal of force and twisting before it would budge, and, by using the top of a bookcase as a ladder, thrust his head and the policeman's torch through the opening.

He reappeared instantly.

"Gee!" he cried. "I've disturbed the dust of ages in there. Do you think it's absolutely necessary to examine such a cock-loft?"

"I fear it is," said Winter. "Still, it isn't your job. Let me or the policeman—"

"Oh, I'm a star performer at this sort of thing, but I don't want to spoil a perfectly good dress suit. It's the only one I own."

Suiting the action to the word, he came down, stripped to shirt and underclothing, and was up again with surprising nimbleness. Soon he vanished, and the two men below heard him passing carefully over the somewhat difficult slope of the wooden roof.

Suddenly the policeman touched Winter's arm, and said in a hoarse whisper:

"Beg pardon, sir, but one of our men, crossin' the Slea bridge soon after eleven, saw a light flashin' from the castle. From what he told me I imagine it kem from this very spot."

Winter admitted afterward that he was beginning to hope the Lanson Murder Case, as the affair was entitled by the newspapers next day, would not develop any more puzzling features before midnight, at any rate, yet here was a country policeman breathing into his ear yet another almost bewildering bit of evidence.

"A light?" was all he could mutter, gazing at the man so fiercely that his informant flinched.

"Yes, sir. That's wot it was—a regular flash light, shown three times. We cuc-cuc-couldn't tell you sooner—never had no chance, we hadn't."

"Not a thing up here except the aforesaid dust," came a hollow voice from above.

Winter sprang to the chair, and thrust his head and shoulders through the trapdoor, thereby greatly surprising the policeman, who had noted his labored breath after mounting the main stairs.

"There's no way out, I suppose?" he said, turning to where the concentrated gleam of the torch lighted a circle of stout timber and sheets of lead.

"No. Not even a ventilation hole, or we should find a thousand bats in residence," replied Glen. "Look here, you'd better not take my say-so. If you can squeeze through that manhole you can lean forward and survey the whole of the accommodation. I've collected nearly all the dust round about the locality."

"I think you would prefer it," agreed the detective, drawing himself up with the ease of an athlete in good training, and thus astonishing Glen in his turn.

The latter, of course, stood almost in darkness, as the queerly shaped inclosure of a dome within a dome reflected no light, and the rays of the torch illumined only a tenth part of the interior at a time. Indeed, a more penetrating radiance came through the trapdoor when Winter's bulk was removed from above it, and Glen then became visible, offering a strange resemblance to a white marble statue.

"We must make quite sure of this place now," said Winter. "I'll tell you why when we go down."

For answer, Glen swept the torch slowly into every nook and angle.

"I'm an old hand at this game," he commented with a half laugh, which he converted into a cough, obviously remembering the nature of the quest he was engaged in. "Searching boche dugouts by candlelight helps a lot, you know."

But Winter persisted. Somehow, he felt in his bones that despite the rusted bolt and the hermetically sealed aspect of the roof there was a sense of mystery about this lop-sided abode of everlasting night. Its vault-like gloom might not have been dispelled for centuries. Though thrust high in air,

with every ray of sunshine from noon till eve beating on it—while the moonlight must now be glistening from its weather-worn facets—within was nothing but the tenebral darkness of a tomb.

"We cannot afford more time at present," said Winter grudgingly, after he had almost convinced himself of the sheer impossibility of the existence of any exit other than by way of the trapdoor. "I'll return later, with a better light. Meanwhile, we'll seal the door beneath."

"You know best," admitted his companion, who was now evidently trying to atone for his earlier brusqueness of attitude and word. "But I can't see what chance you have of getting much forrader here. You'll appreciate the fact better by daylight. Three sides of the turret overlook the courtyard, eighty feet beneath. The other three are twenty feet above sloping roofs—"

"Let us get out of this, quick!" cried Winter, and he thrust the lower part of his body through the square opening.

"Mind how you go! Put your right foot on that shelf!"

But the burly superintendent disdained such aid. He dropped to the floor nimbly as a cat. Glen, not to be outdone, followed in like manner. He grinned amiably at his companions, for his white shirt and light colored undergarments were daubed with brown. He began dusting himself with his hands.

"Never mind that now!" said Winter. "Is this the window which faces due south? Ah, it's unlatched! Now lend me your torch, and switch off those lights! Come here, both of you, and watch. I'm going to signal in the direction of the town. Whatever you do, don't disturb that torch on the table!"

The others obeyed in silence. When the room was lighted only by the somewhat ghostly beam from the bandoned torch Winter opened the window which he had found unfastened, leaned well forward into the circular cavity, and flashed the policeman's lamp three times. The moon, now risen, though not at the full, was strong enough to reveal the roofs and spires of Sleaford, lying snugly beneath the hump of rocks crowned by the castle. Few lights were visible, as the town lamps had been extinguished at half past eleven, so any answering gleam could be discerned without fail. But Sleaford remained utterly unresponsive. Indeed, the only person in the place that night who noted the well-marked flashes was Police Constable Jackson, very much on the alert among the broken arches of White Friars.

Winter hardly looked for any reply. He was merely leaving nothing to chance. He had decided already that Alice Romer had had gone to the turret at eleven o'clock to signal to Denasch, and that the latter could not have received the message, whatever it signified, because he and Glen were arrested the moment they entered the wicket gate.

"That's what I wanted to know," he announced, closing the window again. "Shove on your clothes, Mr. Glen. By the way, what time would it be when the policeman grabbed you and your friend, Denasch?"

"It struck eleven as we were walking to the police station. But—about Denasch—I met him for the first time this evening."

"Ah! That's interesting. He introduced himself, I suppose?"

"Yes. Said he was a pal of Sevastopolo's, and was here to see my uncle on business. Of course, you know Mr. Lanson isn't really my uncle?"

"I understand. It was Denasch who brought you to the ruins?"

"Exactly. He struck me as a well informed chap. His views on art are ultramodern, but pretty sound for an amateur. And, in a country hotel, there are so few people one can talk to. I even gave *you* the once-over early in the evening."

"You flatter me. But I avoided you. Well, all that will be cleared up later. Now, not a word to Denasch, or anybody, about what we have said or done here. We searched the place and it was empty—which is true as far as the literal facts go. Are you ready? We must hurry."

While speaking, Winter had examined the latches of all the remaining windows; but they were properly adjusted. He fastened the south window, and on reaching the corridor locked the door, putting the key in his pocket. Mr. Pinkney was just

emerging from a distant room, having covered a good deal of ground while Winter and his helpers were in the turret. Davidson was at the foot of the second flight of stairs, and when he heard footsteps, looked up. He motioned the others to stand fast, and came to them silently.

"Shall I report now, or later?" he inquired, which was a really admirable way of avoiding offense to Glen in case the detective wished to keep him in ignorance of the secretary's particular mission.

"Now," said Winter, "Mr. Glen is entering thoroughly into this inquiry."

"Well, no sooner had you disappeared than Mr. Denasch hurried to the telephone booth. Bates did not interfere, thinking, perhaps, he was acting according to your orders. However, Denasch came out almost at once, having obviously been refused any wire connection by the exchange. Then he tried to leave the castle, but was prevented, and a row sprang up. Bates and the policeman had to threaten him with arrest before he would give in."

"A determined person, evidently, but not determined enough," commented Winter. "It would be most useful if the local police were to put him in a cell for the remainder of the night. However, it is not fair to expect them to take the responsibility. I'll tackle him myself. Come with me, all of you. I want plenty of witnesses, or observers rather."

Soon he was confronting the pink and white Mr. Denasch, who was trying to mask the anger in his eyes behind a cloud of cigarette smoke.

"Why were voices raised in dispute here a few minutes since?" demanded the detective, who had his own reasons for not quoting Davidson's statement.

Bates explained. Denasch, who at least owned the power of self-repression, uttered not a word.

"With whom did you wish to communicate?" inquired Winter civilly. Denasch was hardly ready for a polite question. He hesitated, but only for a second.

"With Mr. Sevastopolo," he said.

"Why?"

"I suppose you are entitled to ask. I came here on a business mission, which comes to an end automatically by Mr. Lanson's death. I am more than anxious to have Mr. Sevastopolo's advice as to my future movements. Am I to remain here, or return to London?"

Winter glanced at a clock which stood on the wall at the back of the half landing

"It is now midnight," he said. "Surely your anxiety can be dispelled more readily to-morrow morning? A train leaves here for London at 7.30 A.M., I know, but under the conditions would it not be wise on your part to wait until later in the day?"

"I am not in a position to judge. Mr. Sevastopolo could direct me."

"I am really thinking of your somewhat untimely visit to the White Friars ruins, which is not yet explained to the satisfaction of the police."

"What on earth has that got to do with the matter?"

"I want you to tell me—not now, but after Alice Romer has recovered her senses. You, too, will have had time for reflection."

"I fail to understand what you are driving at. Alice Romer? How does she concern me?"

"You know who she is?"

"I heard her name mentioned by you and others. She was missing, and has been found dead—some one said."

"A pardonable error on such a night. She is very much alive. Now, listen to me"—because Denasch was clearly on the point of uttering a more positive disclaimer. "There can be no manner of doubt that your errand to White Friars a few minutes before eleven o'clock needs something stronger than moonlight to reveal its object. I make you a reasonable offer. Go to your room in the hotel, and remain in Sleaford without telephoning or telegraphing to any person anywhere until I have seen you to-morrow morning. Refuse, or break those conditions in the least degree, and you will be arrested, either now or then."

Denasch did not change color, but his red lips showed a bluish tint.

"This is monstrous!" he shrilled. "You have no right to threaten me in this manner."

"I have given you a fair alternative, Mr. Victor Denasch. Of course, if you choose to be treated as a possible criminal I shall frame a charge and enter it up correctly in all particulars."

That cryptic remark seemed to reduce the man to a state of sullen submission.

"Very well," he said. "The best way to prove my innocence of any complicity in this crime is to answer your questions and await your convenience. May I go now?"

"You accept my terms?"

"Yes."

"Let Mr. Denasch leave the castle," said Winter to Bates. "The hotel is only five minutes' walk from here," he added, apparently as an afterthought, but the visitor to Sleaford knew quite well that any further artistic theories he had in mind had better be kept in abeyance if they called for more wandering about the town that night.

Bates opened one of the hall doors, of which there were two, one on each side of a glass portico at the top of the outer steps. Those remaining in the hall listened in silence to the footsteps of the two men as they walked to the main gate. At that instant the clock in the parish church proclaimed the hour at which, according to *Hamlet*, "churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out contagion to this world."

None spoke. What between the music of the chimes and the twelve solemn notes of a deep-toned bell, the postern in the outer gate was opened just as the last vibrations died away. Winter looked around at Davidson.

"That warning click sounds only for the big door itself?" he inquired.

"Yes. The device had merely a ceremonial significance."

"Isn't Victor Denasch that blighter's real name?" put in Glen.

"Why do you ask?" countered Winter.

"Because, while you were reading the riot act I took close stock of him. In the hotel I regarded him as an Alsatian Frenchman. Now, I know he is a Levantine, probably reared in Malta. If his face were well washed it would come out sallow. At present his lips alone can grow pale. Of course, one doesn't expect to find a johnny not on the stage so cleverly made up."

Winter surveyed the artist with new interest. It would appear that this young man had both eyes and brains, and could use them on occasion.

"We'll review all the circumstances in the morning," was what he said, however. "I want to examine the library carefully, and would like Dr. Macgregor's help—and yours too, of course. I wonder how long the doctor will be detained by that enterprising young person, Alice Romer. If you haven't completed your memorandum of the talk with Mr. Sevastopolo, Mr. Davidson, you might give me now a brief—"

A woman's shriek, long drawn out and piercing, came from the upper part of the building. Though two flights of stairs and a long corridor intervened, the little company of men in the hall arrived at the same conclusion simultaneously.

"Alice Romer has either recovered her senses or lost them very thoroughly," was Winter's grim comment. "Thus far, after being here an hour, I have not been permitted to do straight off one single thing I wanted to do. I've never before been mixed up in such a case—never!"

CHAPTER V.

WHEREIN IRENE PUZZLES MR. WINTER.

DAVIDSON volunteered to find out the cause of the hubbub. The explanation was simple enough. The girl had no sooner opened her conscious eyes on a world of reality than memory resumed its sway, and she passed at once into the semidelirium of hysteria. Scotch doctors have a sharp way of treating that ailment, however, and Macgregor flicked her with a wet towel till she cried "Ouch!" so naturally that the other maids in attendance would like to have protested against these drastic methods. Still, she was evidently on the verge of further complete collapse, so the doctor gave her, too, a stiff dose of bromide, and promised to send a nurse to sit by her bedside till morning.

He told Winter these things when they met. Then he drew the detective aside.

"It will save time if I go myself for the nurse," he said. "I'll be back in twenty minutes or thereabouts. Meanwhile you ought to know that Alice Romer's fall down those stairs was caused by fright, in the first instance. That is to say, she was scared into a faint. On regaining her senses she recollected once more whatever the thing was that frightened her, and the vision was so terrifying that she uttered a crescendo of 'Oh's' which passed quickly into a scream. That's all."

"A pity," commented Winter, whose innate kindliness was becoming calloused by the succession of inconclusive if remarkable occurrences in Sleaford Castle since his arrival there. "However, I must not detain you. Mr. Lanson's body will not be removed till you return."

Macgregor hurried off. Bates let him out, and he was not aware of any pedestrian being on the road in front until he almost ran over Victor Denasch in a rock cutting which formed part of the castle approach, a place where the moonlight did not penetrate. It was a narrow escape, such a near thing that after he had passed he thought he recognized the man's figure, and pulled up.

"That you, Mr. Denasch?" he called out.

"Yes."

"Sorry I came so close, but that black shadow was deceiving. Going to the hotel? Shall I give you a lift?"

"No, thanks. I prefer to walk."

"A bit short tempered, I think," mused the doctor as his car sped on again. "Probably I'd feel that way myself if I'd just been missed by a fraction of an inch. Wonder why he's off on his own? I suppose that detective sent him away because he had nothing to do with the affair. Sharp chap, Winter!"

Yet the day was not far distant when Winter ruefully denied his own sharpness, and Macgregor found himself regretting that he had not converted Denasch into a casualty requiring prolonged detention in the local Cottage Hospital. He was not given another opportunity.

Glen seized what he regarded as an unoccupied moment to go and wash off the grime of the turret. He was most keen in the chase, but had to confess that he could make no suggestion of any value. Even in regard to Denasch his evidence tended to clear the man of any well founded suspicion.

Winter waited until the night watchman had come back from the main gate. Then he took Davidson and the policeman who had been with them upstairs to the library, of which, it will be remembered, he had retained the key. To his vast surprise, there was another key in the lock on the inside, and the lock was turned as well. The discovery moved even the imperturbable Davidson to excited speech. He declared that something had happened to him which could not apply to him in this life, and, it is to be hoped, will not be accurate as to a future one.

Winter, thoroughly nettled now, decided to test the first fantastic notion that flitted through his brain.

"Run, you," he said to the policeman, "and bring here the footman stationed outside Miss Lanson's room."

"Surely it's impossible," gurgled Davidson, when the man made off.

"Nothing is impossible to a neurotic," snapped Winter.

Then he realized that the secretary was probably thinking of Dr. Macgregor's free use of bromide, and he went on:

"I've known a crazy woman to have full command of what she called her senses after swallowing twelve doses of bromide each containing ten grains," he said. "How many master keys are owned in this extraordinary place?"

"Miss Irene does not possess one, to my knowledge."

"That is not answering my question."

"I cannot answer it. To the best of my belief, Mr. Lanson and Mr. Pinkney alone had such keys, and even they will not open *this* door. Mr. Lanson himself had the only key for the library, and it is now in your hand. Its presence in the lock outside was a sure indication that he was within, except when one or other of the secretaries went there by his direction."

"Then where did the other come from—that which is now in the lock?"

"I do not know."

The policeman came with the footman, and the latter admitted instantly that Miss Lanson came out of her room and hurried down the stairs soon after he was stationed at the angle of the corridor.

"You had your orders!" stormed Winter. "Why did you permit her to pass, and why, having done so, did you not inform me?"

"Sir," stuttered the man, "Miss Lanson is my mistress."

"You, and every other person in this place, are under *my* control now. Go back to your post. If you allow any other man or woman to open a door once they are locked in, and do not report it, you will be arrested as an accessory after the fact, and that means you will be charged as an accomplice in the crime of murder. Be off!"

He hammered loudly on a panel, and waited a few seconds, but neither he nor his companions could hear a sound within. This was only to be expected, however; the door was solidly built and lay in a deep recess.

After knocking again he stooped, and tried to shout through the keyhole: "No matter who is inside there, the door will be broken open without further notice!"

He was still bent when the key was turned, and Irene Lanson appeared, a tragic figure framed in the bright light of the interior. Far within, a limp form still lay back in its chair.

"Oh, it's *you!*" she cried. "What do *you* want here?"

The chief executive officer of the Criminal Investigation Department had seldom been called on to answer a more disconcerting question. Moreover, he had been caught in an undignified posture. But his blood was up, and, as was his way when roused, he attacked without mercy.

"Miss Lanson," he said, with icy distinctness, "do you want to be regarded as a criminal?"

"How dare you speak to me like that?" she shrilled, though there was a hint of fear as well as of indignation in her voice. Probably never before had she been browbeaten by any one.

"Why do I find you here, sneaking into a place of death, when you had promised to remain in your own rooms?"

"Who has better right than a daughter to weep by the side of her murdered father?"

"You have not been weeping; you have been prying, searching. For what?"

Winter's air was commanding, threatening. His mere physical bulk overawed the frail woman standing in the passage. She backed away from him involuntarily.

"How dare you?" she breathed again.

"I dare more than words!" he almost shouted, springing at her and grasping her slim shoulders. "I am here at your father's request. He knew he was surrounded by traitors. Are *you* one? What is my daring compared with yours, who, with the devilish nerve of all evil doers, disobey the commands of the police, and are ready even to rob the dead? Did you quail before the presence of that blood-stained dagger on the table? Not you! Give me the document, or whatever it is, you came here to rescue. Give it to me, I say, or I'll tear the clothes off your body to find it!"

He shook her violently. Adopting woman's last means of defense, she burst into a storm of tears, and strove to free herself.

"Resistance is useless," said Winter fiercely. "You must confess now, this instant. Women of your type understand nothing but force. Why are you in this room?"

Davidson grasped his right arm.

"Really, Mr. Winter—" he began.

The bigger man's eyes blazed at him in wrathful astonishment.

"Constable, arrest this fool!" came the ready order, and the secretary was torn away promptly. Winter's right hand seized the front of the girl's dress, a demi-toilette affair, cut fairly high in the neck.

"I'll give you no further warning," he growled. "Tell me the truth, and produce the papers you have been searching for, or—"

His grip on the frail material tightened, and it began to yield.

"Please, don't!" gasped the girl. "I came for no papers. I—I have been telephoning."

"To whom?"

"To—to Mr. Sevastopolo."

"Why from this room?"

"Because—because—I heard that man, Mr. Glen's friend—quarreling with the people in the hall."

"And how is it that you had a key?"

"My father gave it to me. He did, indeed. No one was even to know I owned one, and I was never to use it without his permission. Poor darling! He cannot tell me now whether he approves or not."

She faltered on those last words, which had a genuine ring about them. But Winter distrusted her profoundly. Somehow, she never seemed to be natural, but always on the stage. Nevertheless, he released her.

"Did you get through to Sevastopolo?" he demanded, still dominating her by an unbelieving and piercing look.

"Yes. My orders overbore Mr. Pinkney's with the telephone operator. Am I not mistress here?"

"You are mistress in all things that do not concern your father's death. In that respect the law is supreme, and I had most special reasons for wishing that Mr. Savastopolo should not be in private communication with you to-night. What did you say to him?"

"I—I only wanted to hear his voice—to make sure he really was in London."

"In other words, you feared he might be in Sleaford?"

"Yes, yes. Something—not quite that."

"Oh, yes, it was! You knew that your father suspected him of double dealing?"

Irene Lanson collapsed against the table, and would have fallen but for its support.

"No, no. There was nothing really serious!" she almost whispered, apparently yielding to the terror of a half-formed thought. "Father and he disagreed about the handling of some matter of business. Of course, Mr. Sevastopolo gave in. Why shouldn't he? He went to London to rectify his own mistake."

"Miss Lanson," said Winter, cooling down a little, now that he knew the girl was not trying to mislead him at the moment, "you are interfering in grave matters, going far beyond the depths of your knowledge, a fact which you yourself will admit readily within a few days. If your are escorted to your rooms again, will you remain there till the morning?"

"Yes, I will! Indeed, I will!"

He turned to Davidson, still held firmly by the policeman.

"And you?" he said sternly. "Are you acting with or against the police in this inquiry? You must have seen Miss Lanson crossing the main stairs!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Winter," was the immediate response. "My excuse is the footman's. She is my employer's daughter. Nor could I stand by and see violence offered her. That is all."

This young man had the rare quality of reticence, at least. Not by the quiver of an eyelid did he convey to the detective that a few lurid words had revealed to him many things previously hidden.

"Let Mr. Davidson go," said Winter to the policeman. "Remove that key from the lock, and bring it to me. Then take Miss Lanson to her own rooms, the first set in the main corridor on the left, and when you are sure her door is locked, come back here."

The girl, recovering her poise marvelously, swept out. The policeman, being nearer the exit, got there first and secured the key. At that instant Glen appeared.

"May I come in?" he said.

The words were out of his mouth before he saw his cousin. Then he was so surprised that he could only stare at her as she flitted past. The policeman, eager to obey orders, ran to and fro across the parquet floor, which creaked loudly under his weight.

"May I come?" repeated Glen, when the girl and her escort had vanished without any one seeming to pay the slightest heed to him.

"Certainly," said Winter. "Both Mr. Davidson and you can help me greatly."

Glen strode forward, but his eyes were not on Winter or the secretary—they flitted, with an awe deepening into horror, from the cadaver lying back in the chair at the head of the table to the dagger resting where Macgregor had placed it. His pace slackened. He was evidently not prepared for the ghastly appearance of the dead

man's face or the still more unnerving sight of the weapon which had killed him.

"Poor old chap!" he murmured. "Poor old uncle! To think I should find you like this!"

He went nearer, with a curious timidity, as if fearing he might arouse one who slept.

"And to think that you, who were so kind to me all my life, should have spoken so harshly when we parted," he said, still in that low tone of self communing. "If only we could have understood one another. If only— Dash it all! I'll never forgive myself if anything I said upset you! But I couldn't give up Dorothy—not for all the money in the world. It was too much to ask of a fellow. And the alternative! That was not to be thought of either. Oh, damn! Why couldn't things have worked out differently!"

Winter, who missed no phase of these emotional crises, saw that Davidson drew in his breath sharply, and moistened his lips with his tongue at that reference to Dorothy Temple.

"More complications!" he concluded. But he only said aloud:

"This is a bad business from every point of view, Mr. Glen. However, so much time has been wasted already that I must ask you to repress your quite natural sorrow. Please do not touch Mr. Lanson's body—or anything else. When found, he was lying face downwards on the table, though seated just where he is. Now, I take it that during your talk with him, whatever it dealt with, there was no other person present?"

"Not to my knowledge, most certainly," was the answer, given collectedly enough. "My uncle could hardly have wished our conversation to be overheard. He wanted to force me—"

"Never mind that now. What I want conversation to be overheard. He wanted to make sure of is that no one else could possibly be in this room. What time did you leave Mr. Lanson?"

"It must have been after nine o'clock. We all dined together at eight. Then uncle asked me to join him in the library. That would be about ten minutes to nine. He said a good many things, quietly at first, but rather heatedly when he realized I was not going to do as he wished. Then he lost his temper, and ordered me out of the castle. I, too, got hot under the collar, and stamped off. I just grabbed a bag, threw in a few necessities, hopped into a car, and was in the Crown Hotel by 9:15. All rather melodramatic stuff on each side. I thought him one of the best, and he—"

"Not earlier than 9:15?" interrupted Winter.

"I really don't think so."

"Then you didn't go to your room in the hotel, because I saw you at that hour?"

"No. I wanted to cool off, and hated the idea of being alone. So I lounged into the billiard room, and there I met Denasch. I don't know even yet what number my room is. The hotel people said they had one at liberty, and that was all I cared about."

Winter glanced behind the screen, but did not examine that part of the room closely. He would wait for daylight and a magnifying glass. He gave more heed to the nearest suit of armor—that from which the fatal dagger had been abstracted.

"Why," he commented aloud, "any man of average size could conceal himself here. Are they all alike?"

"No," replied Davidson. "Some are complete coats of mail. Others, to save weight, and give greater freedom of movement, protected only the front of the body, and were buckled to pieces of leather. I remember—"

He broke off abruptly, but had the good sense to anticipate the imminent question.

"One day, when Miss Irene came in to see her father about some trivial thing, she was examining an edition of Balzac over there"—he pointed to a bookcase on the right—"and she disappeared suddenly. Neither Mr. Lanson nor I, nor Mr. Trevor, who will recall the incident, missed her for a few seconds, and we were positive she had not gone out. We were puzzled, almost startled, when she laughed at our bewilderment. She had simply picked up her skirts and hidden behind that Venetian suit."

"Is it conceivable that Mr. Lanson himself could have brought some one into the

library after dinner, and secreted him here?"

Davidson weighed the point. Before replying directly he appealed to Glen.

"You came here about five minutes after Mr. Lanson left us?" he inquired.

"Yes. I just finished a cigarette, smoking not being allowed in this room."

"Well, that being so," went on the other, "it is barely conceivable, though wildly improbable, that Mr. Lanson admitted a visitor. I do not believe there was a stranger in the house. In any case, the servants on duty in the hall would know of it—of the entrance of such a person, I mean."

"How was Mr. Lanson occupied when you came in?" said Winter to Glen.

"He seemed to be thinking deeply. His left hand was under his chin, with two fingers extended along his cheek. The right hand rested on some papers."

"Are those papers here now?"

The younger man surveyed the litter on the table attentively.

"I think not," he said. "They were arranged in an orderly way, just as though they had been taken from a file—one of those box things, you know, with a spring clip—but nothing of the kind was visible. There was a richly bound volume lying near, but that has gone, too— You see," he added hesitantly, "I'm an artist, and couldn't help spotting the wonderful picture the old boy made, with his finely drawn ivory-white face partly lighted by the reading lamp, and his black velvet coat. The gold and brown binding of the book showed up vividly. It blended so well with the oak and mahogany."

Davidson walked to the bookcase which held the Balzac volumes. Stooping, he extracted one of a set of books which occupied two shelves about breast high from the floor.

"Was it one of these?" he said, bringing the book to the table, and laying it there.

"The very thing!" exclaimed Glen instantly.

"Well, as it happens, this is the only instance of deception in the room. You will notice the title: *Litera scripta manet, Bac-Cre.* This is really a file, containing current correspondence, which is not cleared to the records room beneath for two or three months after date. It was my suggestion, and Mr. Lanson was amused by it. In a word, it saved time."

"Are you well acquainted with the contents of the whole set of files?" put in Winter.

"Thoroughly, in relation to my own duties, and fairly accurate as to the general appearance of each file."

"Any volume missing?"

"No."

"Will you open each, and say, after a casual glance, whether or not any bundle of papers such as Mr. Glen described, has been abstracted?"

In little over a minute Davidson had examined twenty files. The policeman returned while he was thus engaged.

"These seem to be in perfect order," he announced. Then selecting one, indexed on the cover "Gov—Gre," he took out its contents.

"Is this lot like the papers Mr. Lanson had been consulting?" he asked Glen.

"Exactly," said the other.

"I thought so. This correspondence deals with an application by the Greek Government for a loan—a matter which gave Mr. Lanson a good deal of trouble during the past few weeks."

"Would that be the business Denasch wanted to discuss with him?" said Winter.

"I believe so. Most certainly Mr. Sevastopolo is interested. It was what Mr. Lanson and he spoke of at a quarter past ten. At least, that is what Sevastopolo told me less than an hour ago."

"Ah. Your memorandum will deal with that?"

"Yes. I may as well explain now that Mr. Lanson, after encouraging, up to a point, the notion that he would finance a reform party in Athens, decided suddenly to have nothing to do with it, and was very angry with Mr. Sevastopolo for having tried to pledge him to it. 'Polo,' as we call him, was anxious to explain his position to-night, but Mr. Lanson would hardly listen, and cut him off curtly. The second call arose out of the first. It seems

that the Greek republicans have driven the king into exile, and Polo thought that fact might tend to alter Mr. Lanson's views."

"When did this become known—about the Athens revolution, I mean?"

"Not long ago. Probably Polo would be the first man in England to hear of it."

"Before the Embassy?"

"Oh, yes. We never trouble about Embassies. These big financial deals are all cut and dried long before the diplomats know anything about them."

"You told Mr. Sevastopolo that Mr. Lanson was dead, of course?"

"Naturally. To have withheld such a vital fact would have argued distrust of my colleague."

"He was greatly shocked, I suppose?"

"He was nearly stunned. For a while he could only stammer unintelligibly in Greek, which I do not understand."

"Not a word?"

"Not a word of what he said. I read some Greek at Oxford, but the classical language differs widely from the modern."

"Did Mr. Sevastopolo imply that he was speaking from the Park Lane Hotel?"

"No, but that is his London address."

A sharp click from the wall behind where he was standing caused Winter to turn rapidly. It was the signal from the gate.

"It will take me some time to get used to that wretched contrivance," he cried, with a momentary note of irritation in his voice. "The doctor has returned with the nurse, I suppose?— Mr. Glen, if you are Mr. Lanson's nearest male relative I shall be glad to see you exerting some authority in the castle, not superseding Miss Lanson, of course, but deputizing for her. Will you go now and meet Dr. Macgregor? When he has disposed of the nurse, I want you and him to arrange for Mr. Lanson's body to be removed to his own room. I think he could be carried there easily by a couple of men servants."

Glen hesitated.

"I feel I ought to tell you," he began, but Winter stopped him promptly.

"Mr. Lanson probably said things tonight which he might have regretted later," said the detective. "If he threatened you with total exclusion from his will, for instance, it is most unlikely that he carried out his intention before he died. . . . Is Mr. Lanson's will among the papers filed here, Mr. Davidson?"

"Most certainly it is not. One copy is in a safe downstairs, and another is deposited with his London solicitors. Will it be a breach of confidence if I say that Mr. Glen is one of the trustees?"

"I!" cried Glen, looking astonished.

"Yes. Mr. Lanson had set his heart on seeing all his plans carried out during his lifetime."

"But what on earth do *I* know about finance?"

Winter interfered again.

"So, Mr. Glen, there is literally no reason why you should not do as I request—now," he exclaimed brusquely.

Glen seemed minded to say something, but evidently thought better of it. Once more did the war-time habit of soldierly obedience come to his aid. He walked out in silence.

Winter uttered no word till the door was closed behind him. Then he turned to Davidson, who had sunk listlessly into a chair. Placing a friendly hand on the young man's shoulder he said so quietly that the policeman could not overhear:

"There cannot be the least doubt that Mr. Glen and Miss Temple are an engaged couple. It will save a lot of heart-burning if that fact is accepted by every one concerned. I have faith in you, Mr. Davidson. You have a wise head on your young shoulders. Very well. Let it control your heart. No, no!"—because the other gazed up at him with the blank eyes of despair—"this won't do at all! Pull yourself together. We have important work before us. While you and I are here undisturbed we must search Mr. Lanson's pockets for any papers they may contain. Then, when the body has been taken away, you will help in going through the documents on the table.

"Surely you grasp the necessity of this! Your employer was killed because of some action he had resolved on—an action which was so totally opposite to that which some individual, or a group of people, desired, that his death alone offered the sole means

of success to his adversaries. That is how I read this crime. Oddly enough, I am, perhaps, even better acquainted than you with the circumstances. I'll explain myself later. What I want you to do now is to set aside any dreams as to the future you may have indulged in, and help me in finding Mr. Lanson's murderer. Once we know the motive of the crime we shall not be far from discovering its perpetrator."

"But, Mr. Winter," sighed the other, "I had hoped—"

"Oh, yes. I have sized up the situation. I'm nearly twice your age, and happily married, too, to one of the best women in the world; yet I don't mind telling you she was not the first girl I wanted to call my very own. I'm very glad to have had this chance of a clear understanding with you. And that will be all on the sentimental side just now. Our present job is to ascertain who killed this poor fellow. He, or she, is in this building yet, or I'm a Dutchman."

"She!" cried Davidson, so thrilled by a new thought that the stupor to which he had yielded for a little while vanished.

"Yes. Why not? It is nothing new for a woman to masquerade as a man. They do it much more often than people imagine. Besides, even if a man's hand drove home that dagger, a woman may have inspired the thrust. I take nothing for granted in an inquiry like this. For instance, where was Mr. Victor Denasch at half past ten? And why did Miss Lanson want to assure herself that Sevastopolo was actually in London? Do you realize how amazing her action was? She used that telephone there, while the dagger which pierced her father's heart was actually resting beside the receiver. In this case we have no evidence but a hundred clews. Let us follow some of them now—this instant!"

CHAPTER VI.

A BATTLE OF WITS.

THOUGH skilled doctors and famous detectives have many qualities in common, circumstances have conspired to mislead Dr. Macgregor, else he would never have lost an invaluable quarter of an hour before telling Winter the one definite thing which in its sequel profoundly affected the fortunes of many people concerned in the Lanson tragedy. As it was, he saw to the installing in Alice Romer's room of the nurse whom he had brought from the Cottage Hospital, and directed the removal of Mr. Lanson's body as well. Then he sought a confidential word with the representative of Scotland Yard.

"May I ask why you sent off that chap Denasch in such a hurry?" he said when Glen and he returned to the library together.

"Simply because I didn't want him here, and had no valid legal excuse for arresting him," was the reply.

"Oh, I thought you had ordered him out of the town!"

"Why in the world should you think that?"

"Because he crossed the Slea Bridge in a car half an hour ago, and must now be some miles along the London Road."

"Are you sure of your facts?" demanded Winter, speaking so seriously that Macgregor bent his brows in the characteristic Scottish way which indicates real mental concentration.

"Absolute certainty is a rare thing in everyday life," he announced after a weighty pause, "but it does seem to me that what I have told you is an instance of it. In the first place, I barely missed running over him when I left the castle, so I slowed down, and apologized, offering to take him to the hotel, but he refused. Then I made for the Cottage Hospital. As I anticipated, there being no troublesome cases in hand, every member of the staff was in bed, and I had to wait nearly quarter of an hour for the nurse I wanted. Coming back through High Street, I saw Mr. Denasch, still in evening dress but wearing a light overcoat, enter a car waiting outside the hotel, and drive off. His luggage was on top; I recognized him quite clearly; I knew the car, which came from our local garage; and it has gone along the London Road. The links in the chain of circumstantial evidence are fairly complete, I take it?"

For some reason—possibly by the action of unconscious cerebration, though he set slight store on such occult workings of the mind—Winter was obviously disturbed by the doctor's news. He reviewed the incident in silence for some seconds.

"That fellow has the nerve of the born crook," he said vexedly at last. "Of course, he will end in jail, and I am beginning to believe now that I should have sent him there to-night. I imagine he is not going all the way to London, but making for the nearest town where there is an all-night telephone service."

"That means Derby or Nottingham, to the south," said Macgregor.

Then Winter sent the policeman, who struck him as intelligent, to interview the local telephone operator.

"I don't want the embargo taken off the castle line for some hours yet," he explained, "so ask the Sleaford Exchange to oblige Scotland Yard by circulating a request that if a call is put in for Mr. Sevastopolo at the Park Lane Hotel from any town in the Midlands during the night, the operator who takes it will note all particulars, and listen in if possible, reporting back here without delay. It should not be difficult, because the trunk line night service is confined to so few routes. Give the number of the Park Lane Hotel. Jot it down in your notebook.

"When that stop has been arranged, you personally must ring up Victoria 7000 and ask for Detective Inspector Sheldon. Tell him I'll call later, but meanwhile he is to get in touch with Mr. Furneaux, who ought to drop everything and come out here by the first train to-morrow. Sheldon and he will arrange about other matters in London. Yes, write the exact words of the message. Afterward you can explain in your own way just what has happened here. I make no reservations. Answer Mr. Sheldon's questions fully if you can. In the unlikely event of his being out, speak to the man on duty as though Mr. Sheldon himself were listening."

"Am I to mention—"

"You are free to talk yourself dry," broke in Winter, "so long as you don't go one inch beyond your actual knowledge. I shall look for you here in about forty minutes."

The constable saluted and went out, feeling rather proud at being chosen for what he felt was an important mission. He was an excellent policeman, of the stolid British variety which crowns thirty years of good service with a sergeant's pension, yet that night he became a quite solid prop of the British Empire. Having carried out his instructions to the letter, he found he still had nearly a quarter of an hour at his disposal, so made no scruple about knocking up the local garage proprietor.

Naturally the man growled at being disturbed by the police over so simple a matter, but told what he knew. It was to the effect that the gentleman from the Crown Hotel offered top rates for a reliable car to take him speedily to Birmingham. He and another gentleman might return to Sleaford early in the morning. If not, the car would come back empty.

"Nothing to make a song about in that, is there?" he concluded wrathfully.

"You never can tell," said the law.

"Well, the same gentleman went to Sheffield this morning. I took him there myself."

"Did he now? What was he after there?"

"Not much. Called at a couple of big shops, a jeweler's, and an ironmonger's, and came home after luncheon."

"Made the round quite openly?"

"Well, not exactly that. I drove him to the jeweler's, and he asked me to wait at the King's Head Hotel. I looked in on a friend in High Street, and happened to see Mr. Denasch coming out of the ironmonger's."

"Oh, he told you his name?"

"No. I inquired at the Crown bar this evening."

Winter heard these trivial things with marked interest and approval. In fact, when Birmingham reported an hour later that some one staying in the Queen's Hotel had rung up Mr. Sevastopolo at 2.30 A.M., and that the latter, after a brief conversation in a foreign language, had agreed in English to join the caller by the train leaving London at 6.45 A.M., Winter was so

gratified by the achievements of his humble assistant in Sleaford that the town greeted a new acting sergeant within a week.

Thus it happened, by seeming chance, that a slim, olive-skinned, black-haired man of about thirty had no sooner settled himself in a corner seat of a first-class carriage at Euston next morning at a quarter to seven, he having caught the train by a bare margin of a couple of minutes, than a slimmer and much smaller man, probably ten years his senior, hopped into the same compartment just before the warning whistle signaled the departure of the train.

The olive-skinned person looked slightly annoyed; but the later arrival grinned amiably and said: "Close shave, that! I nearly missed it."

The first man in possession said nothing. He was probably regretting his earlier inability to get the carriage door locked by the help of a half crown, but the train was gliding out of the station already. His diminutive traveling companion, arranging a couple of portmanteaus on the luggage rack, rattled on cheerfully, though his back was turned:

"Queer world, isn't it? Here am I, by the skin of my teeth, in an early train for Birmingham, yet I actually have a seat booked in the Continental Express from Charing Cross to-day for Calais and Athens! Just imagine—Brummagem instead of the Acropolis! A Mid-Victorian town hall substituted for the Parthenon! Don't you sympathize with me?"

Of course, his back being turned, the traveler who had changed routes so curiously could not detect the startled look which flitted across the other man's eyes when Athens was mentioned. But if it were his simple intent to force conversation from unwilling lips, he succeeded admirably. His concluding question, now that he had turned and was seated, brought the instant retort:

"You certainly seem to vary your destinations rather remarkably. Do you know Athens? Would it have been your first visit?"

"No. Yes. You put two questions, and I have answered them in sequence. I have never been to Greece. I am longing to go there, though the wretched country seems to be always in hot water. Some affinity between Greece and hot water, eh?"

"Was Birmingham the only alternative?"

"That, or Sheffield. When dynasties totter to ruin, the dreadful people who fashion guns, big and little, are apt to come into prominence. Birmingham is a place of evil activities. It manufactures articles which are abhorrent to art, but it also provides highly efficient weapons for warfare. What a repute for any city—that it should succeed in destroying mankind in both soul and body!"

This strange little man apparently had it in mind to puzzle, even to worry, one who was an utter stranger. If so, his impish humor was gratified. The tint of olive in his hearer's face passed quickly from ripe gold to a sickly green. Indeed, the most casual onlooker might have concluded that here was one profoundly disturbed, even frightened, by something which sounded like aimless prattle. For a moment he was wholly at a loss for the most commonplace of words. He produced a cigarette case, fumbled over it nervously, took out and lighted a cigarette, and, as a sort of polite afterthought, proffered the case to his *vis-à-vis*.

"Thank you, no," came the prompt reply. "I have many vices, but not that one. Don't think me rude if I say that the smoking habit atrophies the finer qualities of the mind. I believe it clogs certain delicate brain cells. Tolstoy held that it dulled the conscience. Perhaps that is going far, or it may be the theory assumes the existence of some attribute lacking in abnormal mentalities. All of which means that I personally don't smoke, though I have a respected colleague who not only burns choice Havanas all day long, but chews at least half of them.

"So I avoid generalities—beyond this—that scoundrels never positively revel in cigarettes. Nor is that a happy remark, seeing that you are now inhaling a cigarette, and a Turkish one—a prime offender. I'm only a small chap, and talk this way in a vain effort to impress people.

Sometimes I succeed. In any event, I seldom bore my hearers."

It may be taken for granted that the late Mr. Charles Lanson had not amassed his wealth by choosing fools as assistants. Mr. Ramon Sevastopolo was regarded as an uncommonly shrewd young man when he began life in an Athens bank, and his experience of the world had sharpened his naturally keen wits during the intervening twelve years. So he jumped at two conclusions: first, that the diminutive stranger was rattling on thus agreeably in order to put him at his ease after startling him purposely; and, secondly, that he was now face to face with a British government emissary who, by some singular and most uncanny chance, knew more about his—Sevastopolo's—affairs than was either palatable or expedient.

The Greek brain must be comatose if it fails to scent intrigue when it exists, and Sevastopolo's brain was exceedingly active at that moment. He recovered his ordinary poise, of which the outward manifestation was a blend of suavity and frankness. Not even his brilliant eyes permitted the wary mind behind them to reveal any of its secrets, unless, indeed, he were taken completely by surprise, as had been the case while the long platform at Euston was still flitting past the carriage windows.

But the man in the opposite seat had had his back turned then, so Sevastopolo surveyed him now with an expression of friendly amusement. Indeed, why should he fear a clash of wits with this talkative person? Certainly it was strange that the authorities should intrust such a rattlepate with the conduct of grave affairs, but a sharp-witted adversary should be thankful for that.

The little fellow looked more like a professional jockey or a front rank comedian than the representative of a government. He was extraordinarily natty in both physique and clothing. A blue shirt, blue linen collar, and plain brown necktie were in strict harmony with a well-fitting blue serge suit, brown silk socks, and shining brown shoes, of which even the laces were knotted symmetrically. He wore a straw hat, too, with a blue and brown band. A pair of shrewd but distinctly humorous black eyes shone beneath the forward tilted brim from an ivory tinted face, seamed and pallid as a Japanese mask. The notion actually presented itself that the man might really be a Jap.

"Would you mind telling me your name?" began Sevastopolo, the question undoubtedly arising from that last half-formed idea.

"Certainly. It is Charles François Furneaux. Not so French as it sounds. I was born in Jersey, so come of French stock while remaining a full-fledged Briton. Queer race, we English. Made up of all sorts, aren't we? But, then, Mr. Sevastopolo, you understand such divisions better than most, as you are often called on to deal with a witches' caldron of nationalities in the Levant."

It demanded a tremendous effort, but the Greek only permitted himself to look astonished.

"You know me?" he cried without a tinge of falsetto in a voice ready to crack with excitement.

"Solely by repute—the heaviest penalty of greatness."

"Surely you don't regard me as a great man?"

"Oh, I do, really. Of course, greatness is only relative. Certain persons who were classed as great rulers, great politicians, great financiers, before and during the Great War, are now widely and justly condemned as great rascals. You, I take it, Mr. Sevastopolo, have not yet reached the eminence of a precise classification, but you're on the way. I'll see your photograph in all the papers one of these days."

At any other time, Sevastopolo, who did not underrate his own place in the scheme of things, would have resented that explanation as an impertinence, and dismissed the subject forthwith by a careless "Ah, well!" emphasizing the snub by a prompt immersal in the bundle of morning papers lying yet unopened by his side. But in his oval head—it was literally egg-shaped—was hidden some dangerous knowledge which rendered it essential that he should better comprehend this compact philosopher's real purpose in life.

"That is hardly a flattering remark," he said blandly.

"It wasn't intended to be," chirped Furneaux. "Flattery is gross at all times. At seven o'clock in the morning it would be positively nauseating."

"I agree with you there. In fact, I am so disinclined to it, even in the unusual event of its being offered at such an hour, that I had hoped to travel alone as far as Birmingham."

"Excellent!" and Furneaux's wizened features creased in a delighted grin. "It is my good fortune that fate, not unassisted by contriving on my part, should have enabled me to make your acquaintance."

"Ah! That's better. I like candor. Permit me to follow your example. What did you mean just now by speaking of dynasties tottering to ruin? Had you any particular line of kings in mind?"

"That depends on the meaning you attach to the adjective 'particular.' Viewed from many aspects, the Greek monarchy is the least particular in existence. It hardly cares what the means adopted so long as as it clings to power, or even the semblance of it. But you, of course, are well aware that the king of the Hellenes will be requested to-day by his loyal subjects to vacate his throne in the shortest possible time—to stand not upon the order of his going, but git—to go while the going is good."

Sevastopolo, rather suspecting his eyes, put up a smoke screen, and turned to his newspapers.

"I haven't seen any telegrams—" he began.

"Oh, you won't—if you mean in the press? That spicy bit of news cannot leak out till this afternoon, at the best. I don't suppose the king himself knows it yet."

"You are quite well informed as to affairs in Athens, Mr. Furneaux?"

"Yes—yes. I have my sources."

"It will be most helpful to me—as a Greek, and I hope, a patriot—if you tell me what, in your opinion, the probable outcome of this present upheaval will be."

"Oh! If only I could guess!"

"Your guesses thus far have been remarkably accurate."

"But, don't you see, *you* are the man whose judgment on this point is really valuable?"

"I?"

"Yes. Mr. Lanson's death makes such a difference to the world's finances. A man who controls so many fluid millions cannot be murdered without— Pray, pardon me, Mr. Sevastopolo! Have I said anything outrageous? You *know!* You *know!*"

"Possibly. But how do *you* know?"

The protest was out before the Greek realized its vital import. His bloodless lips had confessed to this utter stranger that he, too, shared the deadly secrets of those in high places. For a few seconds he threw caution to the winds, and glared at Furneaux with eyes from which gleamed a lambent fury, because he saw or thought he saw, the threatened downfall of all his plans if the British Government were so accurately posted in them as this fantastic little man's statements implied.

"It is my business to know these things," said his torturer, speaking now with a new gravity which Sevastopolo found more disconcerting than his earlier flippancy. "I am only clearing the ground, as it were—opening a way for that free commingling and exchange of ideas which might throw light on the cause, or motive, of a brutal crime. That is why I am here, and that is why I don't hesitate to say you are guilty of incredible folly in associating yourself with a paltry scoundrel of the Denasch type. Why are you not hurrying direct to Sleaford? Why are you going there by way of Birmingham? Denasch is a thorough-paced rogue whom any man's money will purchase. If you travel with him to Sleaford to-day by road you will lose caste, Mr. Sevastopolo. Believe me, you are descending in the social scale by even accepting a seat in his hired car."

The Greek had the courage of his type. He was no warrior. Not for him the stricken field, the imminent, deadly breach. He would probably shriek in anguish at the sight of lance or bayonet approaching his precious skin. But words were weapons he understood and did not fear. He thought it high time now to attack.

"You have, or think you have, a curiously intimate acquaintance with my affairs, Mr. Furneaux," he said, icily.

"Undoubtedly," was the unlooked-for answer.

"I wonder why?"

"Do you?"

"And I am entitled to an explanation."

"If you knew half as much about me as I know about you, you'd be glad to waive your rights in that respect."

"Surely that is the very point at issue? Admittedly you have thrust yourself upon me, and seek to puzzle if not actually irritate me by parading certain remarkable items of news not yet widely spread, together with a series of assumed facts in regard to my own actions and movements. You must have a reason for such behavior. What is it?"

"In effect, you want me to stop trying to pull your leg and tell you clearly why I am here?"

"Put it that way, if you like."

"All right. You knew—or you ought to have known—that Victor Denasch is the unscrupulous if little trusted agent of a group of German financiers and high politicians who aim at keeping the Balkans inflamed until the Middle-Europe Empire can be set on its feet again. You sent him to Mr. Lanson, who had the good sense not to receive him, and you were as angry with your employer as you dared be because your schemes miscarried. It was not altogether too late. A million sterling can make or unmake any king in Athens. Within a few minutes of the hour when you risked dismissal by pleading that Mr. Lanson should help your precious conspiracy, he was killed. Victor Denasch—shall we call him?—though not bodily in the castle at the time seems to have been well established there in spirit and intent. He acted so peculiarly in Sleaford last night that he narrowly escaped arrest on a charge of complicity in the murder. He was literally in the hands of the police for an hour, and was let off at midnight on a sort of parole, which he breaks instantly, and hurries to Birmingham, solely that he may telephone to you, and you, Mr. Lanson's secretary, scurry off by the first available train to meet Denasch. Now, I ask you, Mr. Sevastopolo, if I have either puzzled or irritated you by what I have said in the pleasant intimacy of this comfortable carriage, how much more thoroughly will you not be puzzled and irritated by similar statements made most aggressively by counsel before a judge and jury?"

Then, at last, far too late, Ramon Sevastopolo took time to think before he spoke. Probably for the first time in his life he was afraid to open his mouth lest he might find himself regretting what he said when it could not be recalled. He was superbly master of his nerves, however, and decided, though not so quickly as was his wont, that the rôle of plaintive protest offered present safety.

"Really, Mr. Furneaux, we are still at cross purposes," he cried, striving after a note of regretful failure to grasp essentials. "What you say is true enough, in a sense. I did endeavor to enlist Mr. Lanson's sympathies in current Greek politics, and, whatever Mr. Denasch's previous record may be, he unquestionably represents most influential people in this affair. A kingdom and millions of money are at stake to-day, and Mr. Lanson's death will turn the scale. Why should I not ascertain Mr. Denasch's views on the changed situation?"

Furneaux shook his head, almost sadly.

"It won't do, Mr. Sevastopolo," he said. "That cock won't fight. It is already in an advanced state of moult. Denasch is far more your man than you his. Even though he does nominally represent a syndicate of respectable Dutchmen who want to sell bulbs to the Thessalians, you know he is dealing in sterner goods."

The Greek had never been, and never meant to be, in a battle, but he felt that he was being pierced with arrows.

"What is behind all this?" he yelled, for his vocal cords yielded at last to the strain. "Who are you? What are you?"

"Why didn't you ask sooner? I told you my name immediately you inquired. Here is my card!"

Sevastopolo was so overwrought with alarm that he had to brush a mist from his eyes before he could use them. Then he read aloud:

"Mr. C. F. Furneaux, Detective Inspector, Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard, S.W."

Drawing a deep breath, but not daring to look up, he went on: "I think I see light now. The people at the castle have appealed to the London police for help?"

"Something of the kind. For once in a while Scotland Yard acted so promptly that my immediate chief, Superintendent Winter, was by the side of the dead man half an hour after the murder was committed."

"But—how could that be?"

"It sounds incredible, yet it is true. When you are calmer you will appreciate the exact significance of Mr. Winter's presence in Sleaford during the past eight and a half hours. He is a big fellow, too, pulls just twice my weight. What chance had Denasch against a man like him? Not an earthly— By the way, have you breakfasted?"

Sevastopolo's pallor—outward and visible sign of an almost complete physical and mental collapse—accounted for that rapid change in the conversation. He seemed hardly able to understand, and gazed at Furneaux furtively, as if searching for some hidden meaning in the harmless question.

"Like me, I suppose," smiled the detective, "you rushed off in a taxi after trying to swallow a cup of tea that consisted mainly of boiling water. Listen, now, to words of wisdom. The train stops at Northampton, and we'll wire from there to Rugby for two breakfast baskets. I would suggest coffee, and kidneys and bacon. Then, by the time we reach Birmingham, you'll be ready and willing to kick Denasch clear across Corporation Street!"

CHAPTER VII.

FURNEAUX MAKES ACQUAINTANCES.

THE train was not due in New Street Station, Birmingham, until ten o'clock, so the Greek had a fair chance meanwhile of regaining his shattered wits. The phrase does not exaggerate the state he was in until he had eaten some solid food and reasoned thought came to his aid.

Then he was all for co-operation with the police, though he resented Furneaux's blank refusal to allow him to provide the sum total of the refreshment room charge at Rugby. Probably, had he appreciated the little man's real motive in stubbornly insisting on sharing the cost he might have felt distressed again, because the explanation was that no detective likes to accept hospitality from any person whom he may have to arrest subsequently. As Furneaux put it: "Such things aren't done, even by members of Parliament."

However, Sevastopolo was far too adroit to remain huffy over so trivial a matter. At first, he was minded to agree with Furneaux, that the wiser course would be to ignore Denasch altogether, catch a Midland train to Derby, and thence reach Sleaford by car long before Denasch could possibly return from Birmingham. But this plan was too straightforward for the subtle Greek mind. He actually smiled as he propounded a truly Machiavellian scheme.

"Have you ever seen Denasch?" he inquired, brightening visibly when the new scheme presented itself.

"I may have seen him, but have never met him," said Furneaux, who had decided to spare his traveling companion any more brainstorms for the moment.

"Well, in the conditions, I think we ought to keep the appointment at Birmingham."

"Why?"

"Because you will then ascertain quickly that the relations between Denasch and me are purely official—strictly related, that is, to the business we had in hand."

"Will you tell me just what that business was?"

Sevastopolo did not hesitate an instant. His active brain had foreseen this question before he suggested an immediate meeting with the man whose visit to Sleaford had coincided so dramatically with Mr. Lanson's death.

"Certainly," he said. "You told me yourself that you were on the point of leaving for Athens to-day. I cannot expect you to reveal departmental secrets, but it is fair-

ly obvious that your mission must have concerned the Foreign Office rather than the Commissioner of Police. Therefore, you must be acquainted with the present political situation, which is almost as unsatisfactory in my country as in Russia.

"Greece was discredited in the eyes of the Allies during the Great War, and she has only lost more ground in the five intervening years. The Hellenic people, like all other peoples, are anxious for quietude, non-interference with their neighbors, and commercial progress, but various groups of adventurers, soldiers and so-called diplomats, have treated the Constitution like a football which is being kicked by half a dozen rival teams at the same time. Now, if Greece is to be saved—and she is worth saving: it is forgotten too often by the rest of the world that Greece is at once the birthplace and the bulwark of modern civilization—it can be done only by a few sincere and able men with plenty of money behind them. Such a party exists to-day. The first fruits of its policy is the enforced departure of the king and his chief supporters—"

"What?" broke in Furneaux, open-mouthed with interest.

Sevastopolo seemed not to have expected this interruption, and was totally unable to guess whether it betokened incredulity or mere surprise. Still, he kept on without a break.

"I ought to explain," he said, "that the men I favor and whom I wanted Mr. Lanson to support with a loan of no less than ten millions sterling, do not form the actual government of to-day, but they inspire its policy, and will soon reveal their true identity if the requisite money backing is forthcoming."

"Am I to understand that they brought about this latest expulsion of the monarchy?"

"Not quite that. They are ready to link forces with either Monarchists or Republicans. Their sole object is to save Greece by pulling her out of the swamp in which she is almost submerged."

"Is Denasch one of them?"

"Ah!" The Greek's well-shaped and remarkably white hands were thrust forward in a gesture of repudiation. "One has to deal with questionable agents when such affairs are in train. The big men will not, they dare not, come out into the open. That is why the new saviors of my country are posing as a commercial syndicate. Indeed, it is more than a pose. They are convinced that the regeneration of Greece lies wholly with trade. They believe that a few barrels of good oil or a few tons of first-rate currants are worth many acres of barren land on the way to Adrianople."

Furneaux leaned forward in his seat, and rested both hands on his knees. His small, intensely bright eyes met the larger, more dreamy eyes of the advocate of a new life for Greece with a piercing scrutiny which appeared to herald a demand for even more intimate details. Yet he only said:

"Where did you learn English, Mr. Sevastopolo?"

The other man's eyebrows rounded. It was evident that he had to focus his wits anew before dealing with this unexpected topic.

"At school, in Athens," he replied rather shortly. Then, bethinking himself that if he were to gain the point for which he was striving he must not antagonize again the strange creature who could strike with such sharp and novel weapons, he added more graciously:

"Of course, I acquired it there as your English boys pick up Greek roots in the preparatory schools, and learn a few passages of Homer and Plato at the universities. But three years in the London bank which acted for Mr. Lanson, plus five years as his secretary, when I met nearly every man and woman of distinction in this country, rounded off the basis of grammar and stupid exercises."

"And Denasch, now? I suppose *he* talks the language fluently. Have you any idea where *he* picked it up?"

"I'm—not—quite certain. You see, I do not know much about him—recently, at any rate. I suppose you are aware he is not a Frenchman?"

"I have heard that his quite precocious childhood was passed in Smyrna, which is a long way from Paris."

"If every Frenchman held that view,

Mr. Furneaux, Europe would not now be bothered with Greece's troubles."

Furneaux chuckled.

"It is a positive delight to meet a man like you," he beamed. "If friend Denasch is only half as well informed I shall have a most agreeable trip to Sleaford."

"So, then, you approve of my notion of meeting him at Birmingham?"

"Certainly, if you care to take the risk."

"Risk? What risk?"

"Of hobnobbing with one who may be concerned in some way with Mr. Lanson's death."

"But, really, that is an astounding thing to say. With all his faults, Denasch would never mix himself with a set of assassins. He may be a bit of a rascal, but I assure you he is not a fool. Don't you see? Unless events take a turn which I, for one, cannot even bring myself to anticipate, this crime shuts and bolts the door which was opening for Greek independence."

"Well, Denasch was arrested last night. He is subject to police surveillance now. He may be in jail under remand before sunset, or moonrise, whichever appeals to him most."

"But—"

"Go on. I keep nothing back. That is an unhappy trick of temperament in a detective."

"Well, I should have imagined, from what Mr. Lanson himself said to me last night—do you know we had a telephone conversation at ten fifteen? That there were other persons in Sleaford yesterday who, no matter how innocent of wrongdoing they may be, might have come under police suspicion far more prominently than Denasch?"

"Who told you this morning at half past two that Mr. Felix Glen was his companion in misfortune a few hours earlier?"

"He did, though I am unwilling to bring Mr. Glen's name into the matter at all."

"Quite right. His actions were aboveboard throughout. You will find him in a position of some authority in the castle. In fact, owing to our roundabout route, lots of things will have happened there before we arrive. Had we gone to Derby by the Midland we would have traveled with Mr. Hassall, senior partner of Hassall, Son and Jenkins—Mr. Lanson's legal advisers in England."

Sevastopolo blanched again. It was not in human nature that he should withstand these repeated shocks and show no sign of their severity.

"So soon!" was all he could gasp.

"Yes. You have not yet sensed the true significance of Mr. Winter's presence in Sleaford last evening. He's a tremendous fellow when thoroughly roused, and he was not only very wide-awake, but distinctly peeved when he spoke to me this morning at five o'clock. You see, I am letting cats out of bags every minute. The reason is that I should be sorry to find you barking up the wrong tree. By the way, have you included that American word 'peeve' in your vocabulary? I love it. It expresses an exact shade of annoyance—a sort of perplexed irritation verging on anger, as it were."

Sevastopolo's complacency had vanished. He felt that the cat chasing simile was faulty. Now, had Furneaux spoken of a rat! Certainly the diminutive detective resembled a keen and aggressive fox terrier in some of his moods. Perhaps he actually had some notion of the kind at the back of his head when he made that peculiar remark.

But it was worse than useless to remain silent. The Greek caught at two straws.

"Yes, I agree with you as to 'peeve,' and 'wise up,' and their like," he said. "They cover so much ground in a syllable. But, I don't quite 'get,' to use another Americanism, what Mr. Hassall's presence in Sleaford has to do with Mr. Felix Glen's assumption of authority, as you put it."

"I didn't mention any 'assumption' on his part. I was only alluding to the position he holds necessarily as a trustee of Mr. Lanson's will."

Then Sevastopolo threw up his hands once more, literally as well as metaphorically.

"Can you—are you—is that statement actually correct?" he gurgled.

"I am told so."

"But—he is an artist!"

"Is that to his discredit?" cackled Furneaux, almost joyously. "Are you Greeks not a nation of artists?"

Sevastopolo seemed to protest rather feebly against this levity. He was accustomed to dealings with all sorts and conditions of men, but never before had he met any one intrusted with the conduct of serious affairs whose mental jerkiness began to compare with this detective's. The man resembled a clown armed with a rapier instead of an inflated bladder. With one hand he tore away an adversary's mask, with the other he adjusted his own. What would he say or do next?

"We shall be in Birmingham soon, and I have not slept much during the past forty-eight hours. Would you mind if I closed my eyes for a little while?" he murmured.

And, strange to relate, he was asleep in less than a minute. He was not shamming. He had reached the end of his tether. This was a new experience for Furneaux. He had reasons, indefinite as yet, but taking shape quickly, for believing that the Greek secretary had been more devoted to his own interests than his employer's. There was even ground for suspicion that the murder might have been the outcome of certain forces which, once set in motion to accomplish a dubious project, had run amuck when an insuperable obstacle intervened. Yet here was this arch plotter, brought face to face with a tremendous crisis in his own affairs, ready to sink into as sound slumber as was ever vouchsafed to any saint in the calendar of the Orthodox Church!

Oddly enough, Furneaux himself found the example admirable. He, too, dozed off, and did not wake up until the train slackened speed as it attained the gloom of New Street Station.

Sevastopolo was still dead to all external conditions. Exhausted, physically and mentally, he had sunk into an awkward position, and some documents in an inner breast pocket were forcing open the left side of his coat. It would have been a quite easy trick to abstract them, and thus, perhaps, lay bare certain facts of which Furneaux very much wanted to have incontrovertible proof. But Scotland Yard has its ethics.

The few minutes' rest seemed to have benefited Sevastopolo greatly. His color returned, and he walked briskly at the heels of a porter who carried his one portmanteau and Furneaux's two to the Queen's Hotel, which has its own entrance under the station's roof. There they discovered at once the elegant and slenderly built figure of Victor Denasch.

"Sorry to have been compelled to dig you out at such an unearthly hour," he said, speaking so loudly that a Birmingham detective reading a time-table in the lobby—obviously a policeman in plain clothes—could not help hearing every word. "But, of course, this dreadful business at Sleaford admitted of no delay. Will you have breakfast? My car is waiting outside."

"I breakfasted on the train, so we can start now," said Sevastopolo, who hardly relished the breezy familiarity of Denasch's greeting, and touched but coldly an outstretched hand. "By the way, I've brought a friend with me, who will be glad of a lift in your car. He, too, is bound for Sleaford."

That was the most adroit move on the Greek's part thus far. In neither naming his companion nor describing his profession, he seemed to say to Furneaux:

"Could any one be more loyal to our implied compact? Here is Denasch at your mercy. Lead him on. He will never guess who you are."

Denasch, who now cocked an eye at Furneaux for the first time, was so thoroughly mystified by the presence of a stranger that he did not note Sevastopolo's failure to use the ordinary form of introduction.

"Oh! I made certain you would come alone," was the only comment he dared to make at the moment, and in that unspoken language which every man who lives by his wits must understand he said plainly:

"Have you taken leave of your senses? It is imperative that you and I should talk most secretly on the way to Sleaford. Why, otherwise, should we have met here?"

The local detective, confronted with three conspirators when instructed to look for two, was compelled to turn and steal a covert glance at the third man.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Incomplete Angler

By DOROTHY WARDWELL

"SAN BERNARDINO!"

The long transcontinental, section one, crawled to a stop in a cloud of cinders, 'dobe dust, and the heat of an August afternoon. Stifling, choking heat! It glinted from the rails, oozed from the panting engine, and hovered over the whole tired, dirty train in a vibrant haze. A grimy trainman limped through the Aztec on his way to ice water.

"San Bernardino!" he intoned. "San Bernardino! Ten minutes here."

No one stirred. The mental torpor in the Aztec was almost tangible. Sewall Wright, seated at the end of the car, opened one eye to watch the exit of the trainman. A rush of heat caught the back of his neck as the door slammed.

So this was Ed's California! Groaning, Sewall settled back into the hot plush. He closed his eyes against the nauseating sights —towels wrung out in ice water and flapping against the screens, wilting collars on dirty necks, women in soiled negligee—and every human being on the car sprawling in utter abandon to the misery of the moment.

Sewall shut his eyes, but he could not shut the hum of that maddening fan; and the native son—God! Could the man still be talking? On and on he went.

"Say, listen, I admit this is a little warm. But it's unusual—very. And, say, *heat!* I've been hotter in Boston, Massachusetts, in May than I've been in the last forty years in California. This is dry heat, healthy heat, finest heat in the world! Now take your Eastern summers—hot enough to —listen, they tell me that one June day on Boston Common, Cotton Mather's face got so thawed out he was able to smile! Fact! In the East—it's the humidity!"

"If he says that again I'll kill him," thought Sewall, but realized almost immediately that he lacked the ambition.

"Now this part of the country we're passing through," continued the Californian, "finest orange growing country in the world. Ideal climate, ideal soil. Sit on

your front porch and let the sun and the soil work for you. Most fertile soil in the—"

Thank God, the train was starting. As it slid along, the voice of the Pacific Pollyanna droned on in endless monotone to the accompaniment of the clicking rails. An occasional phrase floated back: "—finest in the world" . . . "best in the world" . . . "biggest in the world" . . . "say, listen, a long time ago—"

Here Sewall's mind trailed off, spanning some three thousand miles, to the shaded back stoop where Aunt Sarah was probably sitting at this hour in her green wicker rocker, steel needles clicking, left slippered toe tapping smartly in time to her humming:

"A long time ago and a good ways off
A woodchuck died of the whooping cough."

II.

Some twenty years ago, when they were struggling through late adolescence, Sewall Wright and Ed Hodgdon had parted. Ed joined the sanguine throng who, for years, have been acting on H. Greeley's advice to "go West, young man, go West!" Perhaps Sewall didn't know that Greeley died in 1872. At any rate, he registered a passionate vow to join Ed "in a year or so."

But his life had not turned out that way. He had stayed on near Oldtown, Maine, living on the land and in the comfortable house that had been his father's and his grandfather's. No real estate agent had ever buttonholed him with the absurdity of raising crops on this stern and rock-bound coast; nor had he learned to associate the term "barren" with his acres. His farming prospered. The rocky soil yielded wholesome food for him and his "hands"; the barren pastures fed his cattle; Bartlett pears and the finest MacIntosh Reds in the State of Maine ripened on his orchard slopes; and his wood lots furnished lumber for a little sawmill on the Penobscot. This mill laid the foundation for real prosperity.

At thirty-six Sewall was no longer a farmer; he was a lumberman. Tall, strong as a moose, quiet with that calm bred of confidence and modesty, keen with the resourcefulness acquired in years of matching his wit and hands against the fickle seasons—he was the product of generations who had worked hard, lived cleanly, and known a very real heaven and hell.

Aunt Sarah Hitchens kept house for him. His mother and father were lying, in all respectability and peace, in the family lot.

Ed's letter caught him in the lull of midsummer:

> You're wasting the best part of your life—stuck off there in Oldtown. Get out of the rut. Come to California for a few weeks and you'll never want to go back.
>
> You used to like fishing. I'll take you where you can pick up a bushel in fifteen minutes. Ever hear of yellow tail? They'll be running next month. Remember our last fishing trip—the day before I left?

Did he remember! Their first fly rods. Stealing along the banks of the Penobscot; fighting their way through the alders; walking the boom; wading with their pants rolled to their knees. In the big pool just below old man Hodgdon's back pasture, they had tried a Parmacheene Belle. How exactly he could recall the breathless excitement of the first strike! He had watched with open mouth and shaking knees while Ed reeled in a two pound speckled trout.

What was this Ed said?

"Yellow tail? Yellow tail?" He'd never heard of them. They sounded rather uninteresting. But the thought of seeing Ed again, of visiting that West which he had once thought his promised land, had started him. After all, why not? He had a substantial balance in the Oldtown State Bank and logging couldn't be started until fall.

Aunt Sarah's firm old mouth had quivered as she kissed him good-by. "It's a long ways off, Sewall. You ain't got any idea of *staying* out there?"

"I'll send for you if I do, Aunt Sarah," he answered, patting her comfortable shoulder in embarrassment.

"Not for me!" she answered shortly. "I'm not a great hand to travel. I never been west of Albany and I ain't ashamed of it!"

"But you'd come out to keep house for me, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know's I would! I'm not so sure you'll need me. Ed's mother told me yesterday forenoon that Ed's been writing about his wife's younger sister—she's visitin' them now. I set out to tell her there's girls right here in Maine plenty good enough for any man!"

"Don't worry about me and girls. They don't like old farmers."

"Stuff and nonsense! Trouble with you is, you're too slow. By the time you've made up your mind you're good enough for a girl, she's up and married some one else! Some day you'll do it so quick you won't have time to think. Well, you'll find your clean union suits in your grip. Mind, you, don't lose my alligator satchel!"

III.

OFF for the West! The Land of Promise—the Golden Gate—the White Spot of the earth! He was going to follow the old Apache Trail; see the country of the cowboy, the great open spaces, the land where men are men—and two-fisted at that!

Well—here he was, halfway between San Bernardino and Los Angeles. The only open spaces he had seen so far were the hot Kansas cornfields and the Arizona desert, palely obscured by alkali dust. And the nearest approach to an Apache had been a fat, dirty squaw sitting on the station platform at Albuquerque, too lazy to brush the flies off her baby's greasy little face.

Out West!

"I know why they call it 'out,'" he reflected bitterly. "One thousand—two thousand — three thousand — you're out! And the only reason they stay here is because no man could live through Needles twice!"

Three thousand miles to fish for yellow tail!

"Los Angeles! Los Angeles!"

"There he is—here he is! Sewall—you old son-of-a-gun—Sewall Wright! Sewall Wright!"

"Why, Ed—well, well—Ed!"

They were shaking each other's shoulders now, and each, looking through the mists of twenty years, saw something of the chum of his boyhood—something which laid a constraining hand on them and left them for a moment in awkward and wistful silence. Ed was the first to recover.

"I've got a room for you at the Pacific Hotel, old man. Awful sorry we can't take you in just now, but our house at the beach is small and all my wife's relatives are camping there this week. Next week—" The rest was lost in the crowd as he hustled Sewall through and deposited him and his bags in the waiting car.

"Sorry I can't go with you." Ed was shutting the heavy door. "Have to rush back to the office. Burt will look after you. Call you in the morning." Then, as the car was moving off: "Oh, by the way, the yellow tail 'll be running soon—any time now—something to do with the full of the moon—let you know—time of your life—"

"I've got my tackle in my trunk," shouted Sewall, but he felt sure his voice was lost in the growing roar of traffic.

What difference did it make anyway? He was tired and dizzy. His head ached and he was oppressed by that sense of unreality—a sort of sleep walking daze—that is so likely to chain the country bred when they are hustled into the bedlam of a city's noise.

"Room 638, Mr. Wright."

Up he shot. That quiet room—shaded, cool! Through an open door, the smooth side of a porcelain tub resting on green tiles. A bath—the coldest bath in the world—and then sleep.

As deep as quiet thought his sleep was; and through it he moved to a land where he could fish forever on the banks of a glorified Penobscot for yellow tail. He had to throw them all back, however, for they glared at him reproachfully through eyes that looked as Ed's had when he was fifteen.

IV.

IT was nearly noon when Sewall awoke—awoke to the clang of street cars, the roar of the Pacific electric, the smell of the city rising from its hot pavements.

"On the head! He hit her with an ax because he loved her! Read all about it!"

"Bull Montana wins bee-ooty contest! Oh, it's ter-r-r-rible! Read all about it!"

Sewall rushed to the window. The newsboys, of course!

As he pulled on his shoes he grinned sheepishly. How shocked Aunt Sarah would be over this leisurely morning start. Very different from the pictures they had cherished of his activities in the land of the free and the wild! Well, anyway, he had undertaken to see this West, and see it he would. He realized, however, that his original enthusiasm had been largely replaced by determination and a certain amount of grimness.

Twenty minutes later he stepped out into the glare of an August noon in Los Angeles. He was immediately accosted by a fat, earnest little man who popped up at him from beneath a large umbrella, striped red and yellow.

"Free ride, sir! Free supper! See the cowboys ride the wild mustangs! There's going to be a real old Western barbecue. Starting from Pershing Square every hour. Ticket for yourself and your lady friend. Let's go, folks!"

He thrust into Sewall's hand two tickets and a circular; then turned to the next victim. One glance at the circular gave Sewall a confused impression of bucking broncos, real estate, oil units, and barbecues. He tucked it mechanically into his pocket.

After a moment of irresolution he dodged across Hill Street. Halfway up the next block he answered a dazzling summons to eat at the Bush Brothers' Cafeteria. The word "eat" was what drew him.

Once within the swinging doors, Sewall fitted meekly into the system which gave Bush Brothers their reputation. They owned the "largest and most efficiently run eating house on the West coast"—not to say in the world. Inch by inch Sewall shuffled along, making one in the animated human worm crawling toward food

On the other side of a green plush rope, agile young men with very long, thin legs and girls with tipsy hats dodged about among the tables with trays balanced at all angles. There was pushing and shoving, crowding into vacant seats—eating, eating, eating! The din of shouting voices and the clatter of dishes nearly drowned the efforts of the gallant little orchestra leader who, with the help of the saxophone, was foolishly protesting that he had no bananas, though the salad counter plainly gave him the lie.

If there had been any possible retreat, Sewall would have availed himself of it. But the only way he could move was forward—forward with the panting breath of a determined throng of eaters hot on the back of his neck!

This was going to be an ordeal, there was no doubt of that, but Sewall was no coward. He resolved to watch the man in front of him and do as he did. The gentleman happened to be a truck driver with a ten dollar bill and an almost unlimited capacity for food. By the time he reached the cashier's desk, Sewall carried a tray whose contents would have fed about three and a half river drivers. He had everything the truckman had and a few extras by way of proving his originality. He staggered to the nearest empty seat, at a table for two against the wall. Somehow, having the wall there, gave the thing a semblance of security.

Not until he had set his groaning tray on the table did Sewall realize that he was about to sit down opposite an entirely strange young woman. Too late to retreat, however. In any case, the top of her plain straw looked harmless enough. As he took his seat, his eyes traveled to her meager lunch; bread, butter, a glass of milk, and—raspberries!

Raspberries! They must be ripening now, in the wood lot. He wished he could see the face of the girl who had ordered raspberries. But her head was bent; all he could catch was a small pink chin which he fancied was not quite steady.

By the way, why wasn't she eating? Her slim little hands were tightly clasped on the table's edge. As Sewall stared at them, marveling, a tear splashed across the knuckles; and the girl, as if conscious of his gaze, slipped them under the table.

What was she crying for? It couldn't be hunger? Sewall glanced from her frugal meal to his own collation and almost groaned aloud. However, he couldn't go on staring at her this way. They'd put

him out—arrest him! With a nervous cough, he hitched his chair forward. But Sewall Wright's legs were never meant to mingle with those of a cafeteria table for two! They collided violently. The table shook—rocked; the glass of milk teetered precariously near its edge. Sewall lunged, made a frantic grab, and knocked it straight into the girl's lap!

There was a frightened little gasp—or was it a sob?—and the girl lifted to Sewall's terrified gaze a face of the most abject and utter misery he had ever seen. Large brown eyes swimming with tears, tear-stained cheeks, a quivering red mouth—he couldn't bear it! He can't tell you yet how he got to her side of the table, but there he was stooping over her, shaking her gently by the shoulder.

"Good Heaven!" he said. "I'm sorry! Please don't cry. Damn it!"

"Never mind," she whispered. "Don't swear—it's all right." And as her eyes met his he felt his heart shimmying in his throat and his knees go watery.

"Here, stand up," he commanded huskily. Such a little, forlorn, helpless looking thing! "Where's your napkin? Let me wipe your dress—I've ruined it." He kicked the fragments of glass over against the wall, mopped off the girl's chair and forced her gently into it. Then he went for more milk.

By the time they faced each other again over the tiled top the girl had dried her eyes, and Sewall's heart had slipped approximately back into place.

"Hadn't you better drink your milk?" he reminded her. He himself discarded two varieties of thick soup and chose a beef consommé.

"I guess it would be safer," she almost smiled.

"Yes, a whole lot. I can't seem to manage this sort of thing very well. Don't fit—too awkward."

"I should think you'd be glad!"

"What—glad I knocked your milk over?"

"No, glad you don't fit here. Ugh! I hate it! I hate everything about it!" She shuddered a little and her face grew grave again.

"Then why did you come here?"

"Well—because I—I saw the raspberries!" She was a little defiant.

"That's one thing you don't hate, then."

"No—I love them! You would, too, if you'd ever seen them growing wild in the pastures. These are only cultivated, but they make me think a little of—oh, cool winds and wild bees and fields that don't have to be sprinkled to keep green and—"

"And white birches and fresh running water," Sewall added.

"Oh, you've been there! You aren't a Westerner! I'm so disappointed—I thought you were a cowboy or a—a ranger probably. You know you do look a little like—please don't be angry, but, really, you do somehow remind me of Bill Hart."

"Sorry, I don't know Bill."

"It's not that you really look like him—you're just sort of the same type—big and brown and out of doors looking—just a typical Westerner!"

"Well, I hate awfully to be a disappointment," there was real regret in Sewall's tone, "but I'm from Maine, Oldtown, Maine."

"Oldtown! Why, I was born and raised in Bangor!" They fairly beamed at each other.

"Bangor," Sewall chuckled. "I used to get to Bangor once a year when I was a kid—circus day! Bangor was my idea of heaven then."

"It's my idea of heaven right now." The girl choked a little, and Sewall rushed into the breach.

"No wonder they call us 'Mainiacs'! Why in the world did you leave if you're so fond of it?"

A sudden shyness fell on her, but his eyes were very encouraging.

"Well, you see, I won a—a sort of beauty contest in Penobscot County last month. All my friends—a lot of people, in fact—said they thought I'd be—they thought I could get into the movies. So I—I came out here. But I've been here nearly two weeks and you see I'm not in yet. I don't know how to begin to try to get in! And I'm all—all alone and sort of homesick. And to-day these—these—raspberries—"

It was too much for her. She threw an appealing look at Sewall and was answered by a smile of such complete understanding and sympathy that they were both plunged into an awkward silence.

Sewall felt nervously for his handkerchief, and pulled out with it the forgotten pamphlet. The cowboy's mustang was still pawing the air well above the oil derrick.

"Look here," he said eagerly, "how would you like to see some bronco busting and a real Western barbecue?"

"Why, I—I'd love it! It would be all right, I guess. We're really sort of neighbors. My name is Ellen—Ellen Barrett. Father owns the Barrett Dry Goods Store on the corner of Main Street and Maple."

"Of course! And I'm Sewall Wright. My great-grandfather laid out the first road in Penobscot County."

"Too bad he didn't live to finish it! The last time I drove over that road, on my way to the station, our Ford rattled like a separator!"

"I don't doubt it. A man couldn't walk over that road afoot without rattling!" They laughed merrily. Comparatively few people have found the Maine roads so mirth provoking.

"Well, shall we go?" asked Sewall. "It's about time for the two o'clock trip."

V.

THEY found their conveyance just off Pershing Square—a bulging orange-colored bus of the type popularly known as "rubberneck wagon." They took little notice of their traveling companions, a dispirited looking crowd on the whole, but scrambled into the very back seat. Their immediate object was to get as far as possible from the aggressive youth perched beside the windshield, with an official cap and a red megaphone.

The drive from Los Angeles to their destination—a little real estate center and one wildcat oil derrick in the middle of a lonely brown field—was not inspiring. It is doubtful, however, if Ellen and Sewall ever will know the places they passed that afternoon. They were, in reality, about three thousand miles away—walking up Bangor's main street, along the old tote roads through Sewall's wood lots, down by the banks of the Penobscot.

"By the way," Sewall demanded suddenly, "ever hear of yellow tail?"

"Is it a riddle?" she asked.

"No—fish. That's what I came out here for—to fish for yellow tail."

"Well," she laughed, "when do you begin?"

"That's just it; I don't know," he answered. "You see, you have to wait until they run."

"Of course!" She was smiling at him again. "They run and you try to catch them."

And they both laughed; which shows you how silly they were getting.

"Now, then, folks," broke in the raucous youth of the megaphone, "all out! Make yourselves at home; look the proposition over. I've told you all you need to know about it. It's a sure thing—a real money-maker. Stroll around. Ask your questions. Then come back to me and buy your units!"

"Buy your units?" Ellen whispered anxiously. "Do we have to buy something?"

"Of course not!" Sewall reassured her as he lifted her down from the high seat. The pressure of her hand on his shoulder made him feel quite competent to handle this situation, though he was beginning to realize it was not exactly what he had anticipated.

"You stay right here a minute," he told her; and went to accost the young man in charge.

"See here," he demanded, "where is this barbecue and round-up?"

The youth turned and, with a world weary eye, looked Sewall over from head to foot. If he had contemplated an insolent retort, however, he changed his mind.

"The—er—barbecue is in the tent to your right, sir. The bronco is in the corral beyond."

A barbecue—in a tent! Sewall's visions of a trench dug under the open sky and a bullock roasting over glowing coals died hard. But there was no point in lurking in the shadow of the bus. The other passengers had scattered in aimless groups about the fields; so Sewall took Ellen's arm and led her, very apologetically, to the tent.

Inside, people were waiting in line with paper plates or sitting around on rudely constructed wooden benches, munching strips of gray meat and raw cabbage. A grizzled man near the door leered up at Ellen.

"Let's get out of here!" Sewall's voice was harsh.

"Yes, let's," Ellen agreed. "We're not hungry."

They followed the crowd pressing around the barrier which confined the wild Western mustang. Within, three men were making a great show of holding a very small and very tired looking bronco. One held a piece of gunny sacking over the bronco's eyes; another clung around his neck; the third was tightening a bucking strap, pulling with his entire weight, one foot braced against the bronco's all-too-apparent ribs. And all three were yelling.

"Whoa! Whoa, there! Hold him! Don't let him kick you. Whoa, there—hold still!"

At last they were ready. The "cowboy," in a costume that would have done credit to a fashionable charity bazaar, strolled jauntily over from the barrier. The announcer stepped forward.

"Ladies and gents, 'low me t'interduce Buck Bradley. Buck Bradley, of Butte, Montana, will now ride Broken Blossoms. This mustang has never been rode before! Watch him!" Buck sprang to the saddle; the attendants sprang away from Broken Blossoms's head and heels!

Buck's training had not been on the great cattle ranges; his only claim to the plains lay in a boyhood spent in White Plains, New Jersey. But considerable skill may be acquired "on location" around Culver City, and Buck had made the most of his opportunities. No doubt he could have performed his part with skill. Unfortunately Broken Blossoms refused to buck. The attendants scampered about yelling like Comanches; the announcer swore; Buck plied his whip and raked her sides with cruel spurs; but Broken Blossoms, after two feeble, stiff-legged jumps, stood doggedly affixed to the landscape. She was a conscientious little thing, but she had been bucking for oil suckers for six days now, and she simply didn't have a buck left. What's more, she wanted to lie down. And Buck, sensing this, slipped to the ground.

Ellen and Sewall turned away—sickened. They strolled silently from the rest of the crowd over to a sharp rise in the brown fields. What a relief to be alone! Over beyond and high above a wind break of lacey eucalyptus trees, the twilight was fading from violet to deep purple on the Sierra Madre range.

"How beautiful!" Ellen whispered.

"Yes. Seems to me they look like the mountains at home," answered Sewall.

"Of course." And there they stood, hand in hand, loving these hills because to them they looked like Maine.

"Hi, there! What's the idea?" The youth of the megaphone came panting up behind them. He had sold no units and his naturally sour disposition had been bitterly tried in rounding up his passengers for the return trip.

"What the hell d'you think we're runnin'? A honeymoon club for deadbeats?" And right then that young man made the mistake of his career. Advancing irritably, he laid a hand on Ellen's arm.

The next instant he was flat on his back, gazing with unseeing eyes into the sunset skies of California. And over him bent the clenched fists and white face of Sewall Wright.

Several men emptied out of the bus and came running across the field. But their assistance was not needed. Sewell jerked the youth to his feet and started him vigorously on his way. And, dazed as that individual was, he seemed to realize that he was headed in the proper direction and kept right on going. There was a final slamming of doors on the bus, a roar from the engine, and the bright orange horror lumbered off in a brown cloud of dust.

Then, at last, Sewall turned to Ellen. Her face was as white as his had been and her eyes looked impossibly large in this dusky light. She was trembling! Sewall did the only thing he could think of doing at the moment—he gathered her into his arms and carried her down to the boxlike real estate office, where a light shone through the single window.

"I was afraid you'd killed him!" She

whispered it over and over against his coat. How light she was—and how terribly sweet.

Sewall carried her stiffly, hardly daring to turn his head. So fragile she seemed; he mustn't frighten her. Arrived at the office, however, he walked in boldly enough and put her into a chair; then turned to the agent sitting behind his desk.

"Get me an automobile—right away," he ordered. And the agent, who had been an interested witness to the episode on the hill, turned with alacrity to his telephone.

While they waited, Sewall took his stand beside Ellen's chair. Neither talked, for that which was now to be spoken between them was not for any other ears. When he heard the car outside, Sewall again addressed the agent.

"Is there any place around here where people can be married without any—that is, at once—*now?*"

"Sure," grinned the agent, "Santy Ana."

"Tell him to go there." Sewall devoted himself to making Ellen comfortable.

And over the Santa Ana road, lined with living orange blossoms, whose incense was heavy in the dark, Ellen and Sewall drove to their wedding.

"You see"—Sewall's explanation was a trifle sketchy—"I've got to get you home, and I couldn't figure out any other way of doing it. We must catch the night boat. I can't risk your crossing the desert again—not in August!"

Not until the boat was making out of the harbor did Sewall take time to read the message which the hotel clerk had handed him. He and Ellen were standing on the rear deck, watching the last twinkling lights of San Pedro, and he had to strike a match to read:

"Come at once. Laguna Beach. The yellow tail are running."

And the next morning Ed found an answer on his office desk:

San Pedro. So are we!

AN INSTRUCTIVE REPLY TO CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

TO provide accuracy in the printed word is the earnest intention of this magazine. The task begins with the author, and thereafter the burden is carried on by the editors, the copy readers, and the compositors.

Sometimes, a distorted fact or a misspelled word in the manuscript will elude these trained workers, and lurk unsuspected until the magazine is in circulation and some keener-eyed reader calls attention to the error. The editorial department is grateful for such criticism, and prompt to acknowledge it by letter with a confession of fault.

Occasionally, however, what appears to the layman to be a mare's-nest of a mistake turns out to be merely a mirage. A typical example occurred in a recent issue of ARGOSY-ALLSTORY, in a novelette that touched on draw poker, and brought to the editorial desk a surprisingly large number of queries from readers versed in that particular game of cards.

This time, the author's able and informative explanation is printed in lieu of individual answers by mail. It follows, preceded by one of the letters of inquiry:

63 S. Robinson Ave., Newburgh, N. Y.

EDITOR ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY:

Dear Sir—I am writing to you as a regular reader of ARGOSY-ALLSTORY, so I am assuming that you will bear with me unto the end.

In the Saturday, July 12, issue of ARGOSY, there appears a novelette, THE FIRING POINT, by James Henderson.

The editor never passed this story to the printer edited as it was. He was probably on a vacation, or worse yet, ill or indisposed.

On page 508 the author has written:

"Gulping down the raw liquor which the bartender poured out—"

The editor knows that bartenders only in the water front dives poured out the liquor for the patrons.

On the same page, a bit further on, the author writes:

"The youth spread out his cards and looked up triumphant from four aces," *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera,* and then:

"The man at the right laid down a royal flush."

The editor knows that it takes an ace, king, queen, jack, and ten spot of any suit to make a royal flush.

I only call your attention to these errors knowing what a stickler for propriety you are; you have a right to be, too.

Andrew and his ally, Bly, must have been simpletons or amateurs to let the guy with the fifth ace in his royal get away with it, mustn't they?

Well, as a reader I am not blaming the editor, but it would be just as well if the readers were just as particular when the editor is absent as when he is on hand with his powerful "blue."

I thank you for what time I have consumed, and hope you will regard it in the spirit it is written. In glee over the finding of a mistake where mistakes are seldom found.

Truly always, W. T. WHITEHEAD.

1200 Sacramento St., San Francisco,
July 29, 1924.

DEAR SIR:

I have your favor of the 23rd, forwarded to me this date.

It is a compliment to the perspicacity of certain of your readers that they have criticized the mechanics of the poker game in my story, "The Firing Point," in the July 12 ARGOSY. In the light of the modern game of poker, the situation of two hands of high fours and a royal flush, without such palpable crooked work as to be immediately apparent even to the most unwary amateur, is patently impossible.

The story, however, is laid in 1840.

As a matter of history, the development of poker was both local and haphazard. Even the eminent Hoyle deplores this fact. The first treatise on the game was written in 1835, and that in England. Accordingly, in 1840, in America, there were no rules except such as had sprung up by custom in particular localities or such as were agreed upon in advance of a particular round. The game was developing in part from the English game of "brag" and in part from the French games of "poque" and "bouillotte." It followed none of them closely, but the French games were of the twenty card variety; hence the twenty card game which flourished on the Ohio and Mississippi. There were only twenty cards in the game, ranging from the ace to the ten spot. High hands were, therefore, the rule rather than the exception. In view of this fact, and in order to give a certain latitude to chance, I have it on the authority of one of the last survivors of the turbulent river days, a man whom I asked to check the mechanical details of "The Firing Point" against his wealth of memory, that the ten spots were played as optional fillers in many games. They were "wild," in a sense, in that they could be called whatever necessary to fill straights and flushes, but were not "wild" to the extent of making a fourth with threes, or the like. This practice is probably the origin of the practice with regard to wild cards still in vogue in places here in the West, the deuces being often so employed—as the writer knows to his sorrow. It was, of course, this type of royal flush that was laid on the table in "The Firing Point."

The exigencies of fiction writing are responsible for lack of explanation of the above in the story. The particularly high hands were necessary to imply the treachery actually afoot. Any lesser combination of hands than that of fours in two and a royal flush in the winning hand would not have warranted *Andrew Cartier*, rank amateur though he was, in plunging the limit. Yet to have gone into the necessary explanation at the particular point of the story would have so slackened the pace as to render it dead.

As to the six cards in O'Connell's hand when called, the answer is more obvious. Treachery! The situation did not arise in the course of an ordinary call, but on a forced call at the business end of a pistol. It caught O'Connell in the process of substituting a card to fill, such card being, of course, one of several duplicates of those in play kept in readiness for the purpose and which could be employed on signal from an accomplice that he had the mate and would keep it concealed. The only chance of catching O'Connell was in the process and forcing a show-down—which *Bly* did.

Very truly yours,
JAMES HENDERSON.

The Great Outlaw

By CORALIE STANTON and HEATH HOSKEN

Authors of "The Love That Kills," etc.

CHAPTER XII—(*Continued*).

THE GIFT OF THE WHITE HORSEMAN.

MIDGE was struck dumb when Sir John revealed that the man who had saved his life was no other than Drake. The White Horseman had dared to come here, into the midst of his enemies! Fortunately, Elsie covered her inability to speak by exclaiming:

"Oh, but how extraordinarily thrilling! Of course, we remember him, don't we, Midge? He was awfully nice. He left rather suddenly. We quite missed him."

"I have asked him to dine with us tonight," said Sir John.

"Oh, splendid!" cried Elsie. "But I can't imagine Mr. Drake with a revolver. Can you, Midge?"

The girl forced herself to speak.

"Your arm, John? Is it badly hurt?" That was all she could say.

"A nasty wrench," he answered, smiling at her, delighted at her concern. "Nothing to worry about. Hunter has seen to it. I called at his house on my way back. But the extraordinary thing about this fellow Drake was his control over that mob. They were really nasty before he came fighting his way through. Did you know that he knew the native languages like that?"

Again it was Elsie Inglis who answered.

"I don't know that we did. We knew he wanted to write a book about the frontier. He was a bit of an invalid at Banzat and took life very easily."

"Not much of an invalid about him this morning," said Sir John, with a little chuckle. "I liked him very much apart from the fact that he saved my life. A modest fellow. Of course, I made myself known to him. In fact, I asked him to come and stay with me when he said he

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 23

was on his own. But he wouldn't do that. He then told me that he knew you; and so I insisted on his dining to-night."

"Is he coming?" asked Midge.

"Yes, he is coming. I had some difficulty in persuading him. I could see he didn't want any fuss made about what he'd done. But all brave people are like that. I knew you would want to thank him yourself, Midge," he added, with a look of simple and devoted affection.

"Yes, of course," said Midge.

She did not know how she lived through the rest of the day. She prayed frantically that she might fall ill. Anything—anything to escape this ordeal.

The White Horseman in Calcutta, saving Sir John's life, being asked to dinner, to meet her, to receive her thanks!

Thank God she was prepared! She had not been taken unawares.

But how could he come? She raged in miserable fury, and yet her common sense told her that he couldn't get out of it.

How could he take such risks? How could he come to Calcutta, where it was so possible that he might meet men who had known Lord Lovell Beaudesir?

How could she bear to meet him, to speak to him, to touch his hand? In Sir John's house, at Sir John's table.

He would see—oh, what would he not see? Those eyes would see how it was with her. They would read her heart and soul and know that she didn't love Sir John, that she was carrying on a bitter and cruel deception. He would despise her because she was marrying a man she did not love.

As the day wore on, another feeling took possession of her heart—the awful, breathless joy because she was going to see him again. She could not drive it away. No stern measures would stamp it out. It was the unconquerable rebellion of nature.

The moment came. They were assembled in the drawing-room, and Mr. Drake was shown in.

It went off all right. Elsie was exuberant in her welcome and her congratulations. Midge managed to say a few appropriate words. Sir John beamed on them.

The dinner was like a dream to Midge. She was grateful because the guest set up no mental communication between himself and her. He was the quiet, pleasant Mr. Drake of Banzat. He looked better and his voice was a little less muffled. Once or twice, while talking, he took off the tinted glasses and wiped them. Midge trembled at such recklessness. He looked at her and she returned his gaze with an anguished appeal. But the others had no clue, and did not dream that those slaty-gray eyes belonged to the outlaw whom the whole frontier had been trying to capture for years.

Afterwards they sat in the big drawing-room, among softly shaded lights and scents of flowers, and talked. Mr. Drake did not talk much, as a matter of fact; but he was deeply interested in Sir John's account of his trip to China. Sir John had visited some very out of the way places.

Presently Sir John was called away to the telephone.

Mrs. Inglis, who was passionately fond of music, and a very good pianist, went into the smaller drawing-room and began to draw waves of beautiful sound from the Bechstein grand piano.

Midge and Mr. Drake sat silently for some moments. Then the man rose, and on the pretense of examining a curious cabinet, drew the girl to the extreme end of the large drawing-room.

"I want to tell you that I could not help myself," he said in a low voice. "It would have caused suspicion, if I had not come."

"I know," she answered, looking nervously across the room.

But their voices could not possibly reach the player, who was obviously absorbed in her music.

"How can you take such risks?" she asked.

"Less here than on the frontier," he answered. Instinctively they both pitched their voices just above a whisper. "So this is going to be your home! I wonder if you will be happy in it. I can't see you in it—somehow. It's big and grand—but it's a cage."

She looked at him in blind anguish.

"Sir John loves you," he went on. "Is it fair to him?"

"Don't! Oh, don't How cruel you are!"

"I don't mean to be. I know there's nothing for it. It's better for you to marry him, after all."

There was a silence. She looked up at him, wondering how she could have been so blind as not to recognize him from the first.

There was something about his bearing that in a Calcutta drawing-room made him appear like an eagle in a city of sparrows. But also her love-quickened eyes found a difference. It was not the erect, challenging height of the indomitable White Horseman. His shoulders drooped a little; there were lines graven deep about his mouth.

"You—you look—as if something had happened!" she said quite simply.

He held the spectacles in his hand. He turned his eyes on her face; they were dark and sad.

"I have had a shock to-day," he said. "My mother died a fortnight ago. I saw it in a paper."

"Oh!" Midge's heart went out to him in that little exclamation. "You were very —very fond of her?"

"Yes."

"And you can't go home?"

"No."

"I understand," she said. She was lost now in the depth of her feeling for him. Elsie's grand chords sounded like burial music.

"You will go home," he said quietly, "and I never shall. That is the difference."

Just then the door opened and Sir John came back.

Elsie's magic fingers had wandered into that wonderful wave-like melody, the "Daybreak" from the Peer Gynt suite. When she had finished, Mr. Drake took his leave. It was early and he excused himself by saying he was sure Sir John needed rest.

When the two women drove back to their hotel, Elsie was enthusiastic about Mr. Drake.

"Didn't you notice he had changed, Midge? I thought him so much better looking. Of course, I suppose it's his health. And when he took off his glasses, did you see what wonderful eyes he has? He intrigues me dreadfully. I expect it's the story of the revolver and the mob. I'd never have thought it of him. The men at Banzat will be amused. You know, I think they rather laughed at him. I mustn't forget to send him a card for the wedding."

"I think he said he was leaving Calcutta at once," said Midge in her smallest voice.

On the morning of the wedding day Midge was up very early. There was a gray sky, and a wind was blowing in from the sea.

She could not rest in her hotel bedroom. She dressed herself hurriedly and went into the adjoining sitting room, where her ayah was already putting the last touches to the bridal finery. Midge said that she was going out. The little woman was terribly flustered. It did not seem at all the right thing to do. But she implored her Miss Sahib to be back within half an hour to have her little breakfast, for the toilet would take long, and in her loyal, loving heart she was already gloating over every detail of it.

Midge went out of the hotel on to the great broad Square. An army of servants were cleaning and polishing. She walked blindly for more than three quarters of an hour, oblivious of all around her.

As she neared the hotel, a native came up to her, salaamed deeply and held out an envelope. She took it wonderingly.

Midge opened the envelope. There was a single sheet of paper wrapped round a small flat object covered in soft white silk. On the paper were written these words in a handwriting she had never seen, but knew at once:

> This is an amulet that belonged to a holy man of a mountain tribe that few white men have ever seen. It is supposed to confer long life, wealth, health and immortality. May it bring you happiness on this day—and always.

She undid the silk wrapping and found a little golden charm, flat and round, with characters of the finest workmanship embossed on it. The White Horseman's wedding gift.

She went into the hotel and ate her breakfast.

It was still early and Elsie was not yet about. Midge sent her ayah out of her bedroom. She had to be alone.

On a couch was spread her wedding gown —a dream of white and silver and pearls. And the lace veil was on the back of a chair, and on the carpet were her little silver shoes. And on her dressing table was the open case with the splendid pearls.

Midge turned her back on the sheen of satin and silver and the film of lace. She went to the window and looked out at the angry, sullen sky.

Then she dropped on her knees, her head buried in her arms, the little golden amulet held tightly in her hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

"SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED."

"DARLING, you look simply too lovely for words!"

Elsie Inglis stood with clasped hands, surveying Midge clothed in her wedding gown.

"You're awfully white," she added, "but a bride is allowed to be pale. You always took things so seriously, Midge. That Honiton lace on your dark hair is just perfect. And now I must fasten the pearls on for you! Mercy, what gorgeous things!" She lifted the three-stranded necklace from its white velvet bed. "The weight of them, and the glorious pinky sheen! You are a lucky girl!" She snapped the emerald and diamond clasp, and fastened the little safety chain. "Isn't Sir John a perfectly wonderful man?"

"He is," said Midge.

"And the life he'll give you—simply everything you want. I never saw such devotion. Won't he now, Midge, give you everything you want?"

"Everything I want," said Midge in a lower voice.

Everything she wanted! Her heart was like a stone in her breast. What did Elsie mean by everything she wanted? She knew, of course. Clothes, jewels, big houses, luxurious travel, agreeable friends, a life both gay and important, and without a single material care. They were good things all, things she herself had valued and looked forward to before—before that day when she rode up the Banzat Pass alone. Added to Sir John's devotion and goodness, these things might well make up an almost ideal life.

But Midge did not want them now. She wanted the impossible, the unattainable—the moon. An hour ago she had locked the little golden amulet away in her despatch box. An hour ago she had wiped the tears of despair from her face and sworn to herself that she would put the White Horseman out of her mind and heart for ever and make the good Sir John the kind of wife he expected her to be. But the vow was one of those that cannot be kept, and this knowledge stirred terror in her soul. Forces beyond her control were working in her, had, indeed, taken possession of her. She could no more forget the White Horseman than she could add an inch to her small stature. So it meant embarking on the life of an actress: morning, noon and night—everlastingly—playing a part.

Elsie chattered on, while Midge's little brown ayah brought the silver tissue train, sewn with pearls along its edge, and wished to attach it by its pearl tassels to her mistress's shoulders. But Midge stopped her. There was heaps of time.

"It's ridiculously early," she said to her friend. "Muratta couldn't wait." And she smiled affectionately into the ayah's beady, adoring eyes. "Now I'm all ready but the train, I think I'll sit down for a little while."

"Righto," said Elsie, admiring her own grayish-blue frock in a tall pier glass, and giving a touch to the great soft feather that drooped over her wonderful golden hair. "I'll have a cigarette. As you say, there's loads of time. Sir John said he would ring up five minutes before he left for the cathedral and that would give us another five minutes before we need start. By the way, I forgot to tell you I had a note from Mr. Drake."

"Did you?" responded Midge, taking up a hand mirror and staring hard at the reflection of her face.

"Yes, dear, an answer to my card for

the wedding. You were right—he had left Calcutta. He was very sorry not to be able to be present, and asked me to convey his very best wishes to you and Sir John."

"Where did he write from?"

"I'm not sure whether it was Delhi or Lahore. I tore up the letter with a lot of others. But he didn't give any address. Do you know, Midge, I somehow can't get over that man! I don't know what it is, but the last time he was so—well, so mysteriously attractive. Frightfully attractive. He remains with me. Do you know what I mean?"

Midge put down the hand mirror and returned her friend's eager gaze.

"I thought he was just the same, Elsie," she said, with Heaven alone knew what bitter and despairing truth.

Just then the telephone bell rang in the sitting-room next door. Elsie flew to the instrument, crying: "That must be Sir John! No, it's half an hour too early!"

But it was Sir John. Elsie called to Midge to come and speak to him. As she looked at her friend, her face was scared.

"Something has happened," she whispered, as she handed Midge the receiver.

"Is that you, Midge?" came Sir John's voice, quieter even than usual. "Are you ready?"

"Very nearly," she answered. "I was much too early."

"Yes, too early," he repeated. His voice communicated trouble. It had a hollow calmness. "Dear, I am coming to see you at once. I can't explain now. But you had better change your clothes. There won't be any wedding to-day."

"No wedding!" Midge's voice had that high, shrill note of a person on the verge of hysteria.

"No—no wedding to-day," repeated Sir John at the other end. "I can't explain now. I am coming at once. I have communicated with the clergy, and am having all the guests notified. It—it can't be helped."

There was despair in those last simple words. Midge felt it. Something had happened stronger than all the quiet determination that had brought Sir John to his present commanding position. Whatever it was, it had to be accepted with resignation because it could not be fought.

Midge looked at Elsie, who was aquiver with excitement.

"I'm going to change my clothes," she said. "There's no wedding. Something has happened. John has seen to everything. He is coming here at once."

"But, Midge, what is it?" cried her friend. "How can you take it like this? It's too awful! Think of the scandal—the talk! Why, the cathedral will be half filled already!"

"John has seen to everything," Midge repeated. "It can't be helped, Elsie."

Unconsciously she used Sir John's words.

"I must go and tell Laurie," Elsie said, bewildered, flustered, half angry. "He'll be dressed by now."

"Yes, go and tell him, please, Elsie. I am so sorry. It was so kind of Major Inglis to come all the way from Banzat to give me away."

Affection and excitement overcame Elsie. She clasped Midge in her arms, her blue eyes brimming with ready tears. To her it was a supreme tragedy. She could not know that Midge's heart, breaking through her stern discipline, was singing a little song.

Muratta, the ayah, had her share of Eastern imperturbability. She did not question, but unfastened the pearl pins that held the Honiton veil in place, and carefully removed the pretty coronal of orange blossom. While her mistress slipped out of the wedding gown, she brought one of wine color with faint threads of gold, and shoes and stockings to match. It was the going-away frock, but that could not be helped. Everything else was packed.

Midge removed the pearls from her neck and shut them up in their case. Then she went into the sitting room to wait for Sir John.

He came almost immediately. He was quiet, pale, correct as ever. His dark gray suit, with a thread of white stripe in it, his gray tie with the single pearl, the heavy plain signet ring—all were just right and in perfect taste. His kind mouth, his calm, arithmetical brow, his serious, alert and yet

gentle expression—all were just the same. Only his eyes were different. His neutral-tinted eyes were terrible in a quiet way. They were the eyes of a man who has died while he is still alive.

"I don't know what to say to you," he began.

"Say it, please," said Midge. "Something has happened. We can't be married to-day."

"We can't be married to-day. I don't suppose we shall ever be married, Midge. I will tell you what has happened. I suppose I ought to be grateful that it happened this morning—before we went through the ceremony. But it is to be wished that it had happened before—last year; any time but to-day. There is something I have kept from you, Midge. It was wrong of me. It is always wrong to conceal things. In this case it was criminal. I have been married before.'

"Oh!" said Midge in a hushed voice, guessing how her deliverance had come.

"I have believed my wife dead for ten years," Sir John went on. "Until yesterday. I had a wireless from a ship, about ten o'clock last night, signed with my wife's name. It announced that she was arriving this morning. At nine o'clock she came to my house. Last night I was too dazed to communicate with you, Midge. I hoped fatuously that there might be some mistake—up to the very last moment I hoped it."

"But there isn't," Midge put in.

Her voice was all gentleness because of what she saw in his eyes.

"No, there isn't. My wife is alive. She has traveled all the way from England to find me, because she saw in a newspaper that I was being married. No date was given, and she could not find out in England. She did not know that I had a house in Richmond. She went to my business address in London, but through some mistake she was told I was still traveling in China and they did not know the date of my marriage. She would take no risk, so she booked her passage in the hopes of being able to stop me. She was just in time."

"How strange!" said Midge.

"Would you care to hear the story?"

"Of course I would."

"We were young when we married. My wife, as a matter of fact, is three years older than I am. She was a very clever girl, with a great deal of character. From the first we did not get on. I won't go into that, if you don't mind. I was more to blame than she. I see that now. I did not understand women then—not at all. I was too much taken up with my business. My wife and I parted—quite by mutual agreement. We parted good friends. She would not take any money from me. She was self-reliant and full of brains. A little while afterward she wrote to me that she was going to New Zealand.

"On the very night of her arrival the hotel she stayed in caught fire, and there were some casualties. Her name was among them. I read of her cruel death in the paper. It was a mistake, of course; and the trouble was that she did not know she had been reported as dead. After a time she made her way to Australia, and started a girls' school, which is now the biggest and most important in Sydney—in the whole of Australia. She reverted to her maiden name, and is known as Miss Chalmers. She had come back to England for the first time to take a holiday when she read about my forthcoming marriage. The rest I have told you."

"She is not to blame," said Midge in rather a vague voice.

"No; nobody is to blame."

Midge felt as if she were dreaming a perfectly sensible but unnatural dream. A schoolmistress three years older than Sir John—a woman of forty-three—his wife! A woman old enough to be her mother! She felt suddenly choking with nervous laughter. A schoolmistress—such a fitting wife for the matter-of-fact Sir John! So much more fitting than she was. Mists formed before her eyes, and through them she saw a vision—a figure on a snow white horse dashing toward her in a wild mountain country and with a shot laying a man senseless at her feet. And Sir John, and a wife who kept the largest girls' school in Australia!

"There is nothing to be done," Midge ventured. She had to say something.

"No; nothing. My wife is fully conscious of the position. She wants nothing herself. She is quite independent financially—more than that. She and I could never have anything in common now. She confesses it. She merely wished to save me from a false position."

"It was very good of her," said Midge.

The whole thing was so good, so well ordered, so natural, so simple, so matter-of-fact. It was—well, to Midge, strung to such a pitch of emotion by her immense relief, it was screamingly funny.

Sir John's voice became diffident.

"My wife went as far as any woman could, Midge. I have to tell you, though I don't like to speak of it. She—she suggested that she was so anxious for my welfare and happiness that she would—would give me cause to free myself from her legally. But, of course, that is unthinkable."

"Unthinkable!" echoed Midge, horribly shocked.

"In her new world they don't seem to think so much of these things," apologized Sir John.

Again the irresistible desire to laugh seized the girl. Everybody wanted to do the best for everybody else. Such a welter of kindness and consideration! But nothing to be done. Upright, kind, prosperous Sir John and his upright and prosperous schoolmistress wife. Not hating each other—having a great regard for each other. But not being able to get on together. And she, Midge, between the two of them—a bird let out of its cage.

There was little more to say. Sir John had seen to everything in the brief hour or two that had elapsed since his interview with his wife. There would be no scandal and as little talk as possible. Lady Lydd was going back to England, and from there to Australia, to her responsible task of training young citizens of the empire. Her heart and soul were in her work. Sir John would go home because he had to, on business, but not on the same boat as his wife.

And Midge?

Midge said everything depended on her friends.

Sir John wished to see Major Inglis and Mrs. Inglis. He owed it to them. There was something of the hero in him in a quiet way.

Midge rose to call her ayah to ask her friends to come to her sitting room.

Then Sir John broke down. It was a dreadful moment. His face was gray. His head fell on to his hands. A sob came from him.

"My dear! My dear!"

That was all. Only four words, but it was the destruction of a man's dearest and highest hopes; it was watching the light go out of his life.

Midge's tears streamed down her cheeks. She went up to him and took one of his hands and held it.

He looked up; he smiled reassuringly. He was a hero in his own way.

"Forgive me, Midge," he said. "It's very wrong of me to make it more difficult for you."

Yes, but he was a hero in his own way, was Sir John.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT LADY LYDD KNEW.

MIDGE sat in her sitting room in the Calcutta hotel four mornings later, while Muratta, the ayah, padded about busily in the adjoining room, packing her mistress's trunks, which had had to be unpacked after the postponement of the wedding.

Midge looked very small and very white. There was a little line of pain between her dark eyebrows. These three days had been wearing beyond words. Midge was vicariously tortured by Sir John's misery. She had seen him but twice, and only for short periods, and they had discussed commonplace matters and also her business affairs. He had been kind, helpful, giving her the advantage of his great financial experience. But she felt that shattering sense of loss that he had not expressed in words since his first involuntary breakdown. She could feel it all the time, even when he was not with her. It was a dumb, inconsolable despair. Its quietness made

it all the more terrible. And Midge had always that sense of guilt because she could not feel it for herself.

Now all was done and over. Sir John had taken back the pigeon's blood ruby and the wonderful pearls and all the other jewelry. He had behaved admirably and had done nothing to embarrass his former *fiancée*. Major Inglis had hurried back to Banzat, where the tribesmen were giving further trouble. Midge, accompanied by Elsie Inglis, was leaving that same night for her old home in Central India. They were going to spend a few days there, while Midge superintended the packing of her personal belongings and her father's intimate treasures and library, and paid off the servants. She was going to let the house furnished, having received a good offer. She found herself in a very different position from the girl who had been going to marry a rich man. She was now possessed of an income just sufficient to live on, and the letting of the house would add to it appreciably.

She had gratefully accepted the Inglis' invitation to return to Banzat with Elsie and stay with them until the next hot weather. Guiltily she hugged her joy at the thought of going back. She would not allow her thoughts to wander far, but she could not quench that strange warm glow of unreasoning happiness. She could not stop her ears to the sound of a magic voice whispering that her heart was up there among the hills.

She would never see the White Horseman again. He had gone out of her life forever. But she could look up at the great mountains and remember the thrill of those days in the wild, where love was born in her heart without her knowing it.

There was a knock at the door. A servant came in bearing a card on a tray and announcing that the mem-sahib was below and would be grateful if the Miss Sahib would grant her a few moments' conversation.

Midge looked at the card. It bore the name of Miss Chalmers, and in the corner: Graymead Hall, Sydney, N. S. W.

Midge sat upright. Her heart gave a great thump of dismay.

Miss Chalmers! That was Sir John's wife—Lady Lydd.

Sir John's wife wanting to see her!

What was she to do? She felt panicky for a moment, then she pulled herself together. She could not very well refuse. Under the circumstances, if Lady Lydd sought her out, it would be ungracious not to see her. She had behaved so well.

In a few moments a tall woman was shown into the room. Midge stood looking ever so small and white and worried. The woman was extremely, painfully thin. She had a clever face, a dark skin, very prominent cheek bones and deep sunken black eyes with heavy rings round them. One could see immediately that she was full of character. She looked old for her years; her dark hair was plentifully streaked with gray. She could never have been good-looking, but interesting beyond a doubt. She was very well dressed in a severe, tailor-made way.

"It is good of you to see me, Miss Hamilton," she began in a low voice of extreme sympathetic quality. "Sir John does not know anything about it. I must tell you that at once. And nobody here knows who I am, so it cannot make things awkward. Sir John has managed everything wonderfully.

"Wonderfully," Midge said mechanically. "Won't you sit down?"

"Don't you think it better to be outspoken about it all?" asked Lady Lydd. "We can none of us help what has happened."

"That is what Sir John says," Midge put in, with a nervous but friendly smile. "Yes, I think it's much better to be frank. And you are right—Sir John has been wonderful."

"More wonderful, perhaps, than you think. I have an old friend resident in Calcutta for years, and she didn't hear a thing about the postponed wedding. And the announcement in the papers was so clever—just absolutely right. I am sailing for England to-morrow, Miss Hamilton. That's why I wanted to see you—I want to tell you something—something that I am keeping from Sir John."

"Oh!" said Midge. Looking into the

older woman's face, she felt suddenly frightened. She saw something there, some mortal pain, and in the sunken dark eyes some immense passion unfulfilled.

"Do I look strange to you, Miss Hamilton?" the deep, attractive voice asked. "I don't mean only old—"

"You look very ill," said Midge. "I am so sorry."

"That's it—I am very ill, Miss Hamilton. I have known it some time. I saw a specialist in London, and another here this morning. I can't live long. They can't quite say, but six months—a little more, or less. It is one of those things that they can't do anything for."

"Oh, how dreadful!" exclaimed Midge, trembling with awed sympathy. She realized what she saw looking out of those sunken, dark-rimmed eyes—death.

"You are a sweet girl," said Lady Lydd. "You have such brave eyes and such a tender mouth. I'm sure you are loyal. That's why I have told you and not told Sir John. You see, I realize what you are to him—simply everything. There is nothing else in the world. This blow has killed him—all the real him. So I daren't tell him, because he would build too much on it and would hate himself for it. He is so good, so kind. But I want you to know. You are so young—you might have turned your thoughts away from Sir John to others—if you hadn't known that Sir John will be free in about six months."

Midge shuddered. "Oh, it is too dreadful!"

"I know he will be sorry," the low, beautiful voice went on. "And so will you. You must forgive me for telling you. I was so afraid for Sir John, because you are so young." She looked into the girl's distressed face, a flame in her sunken eyes. "You are so like a favorite pupil of mine. She was with me until she was seventeen. You look hardly older. She had just what I think you have—a big spirit in a little body."

She rose and held out her hand.

"We shall not meet again. I am going on to Australia from England. I have to settle my affairs. There is not much time. Don't let what I have said trouble you. Just remember that it is all going to arrange itself. Sir John will not have very long to wait."

Midge wondered after her visitor had gone, why she should have said just those words— "Sir John will not have very long to wait." It was as if she didn't count. Did those strange eyes see though her conventional mask and know that the death of Sir John's wife would not bring liberty to her, but push her back into her cage and shut the door of it again?

CHAPTER XV.

A DESPERATE CHANCE.

IT was more than a fortnight later when Midge and Mrs. Inglis arrived in Banzat.

They found great excitement prevailing. There had been a raid by hostile tribesmen on a station some forty miles to the northeast, and two officers had been murdered, as they drove over the pass on a tour of inspection, and their car smashed to pieces and burned. The murderers had not been found. It was believed that a certain Waziri chieftain was hiding them. In the raid a native woman, an ayah, and her little charge, a boy of eight, the son of an English army surgeon, had been carried away, and no trace of them could be found.

Immense precautions were being taken. Sentries were doubled, and around Banzat was a ring of guards, fully armed. The weather was miraculous for the time of year, as warm as summer at home, with glorious bright days, and at night dense white mists that made search operations very difficult and the escape of the marauders correspondingly easy.

At first Major Inglis did not want the women to stay; but Midge begged so hard to be allowed to that he gave way. To his kindly heart he knew that the girl would dread the gayety and gossip of Khargit, or any other larger and safer station. Elsie was no coward; fear would never drive her away from Banzat, though boredom might.

So life began again, with its mixture of monotony and danger. The nice meals were served, the pleasant talks were re-

sumed. Now and then the men snatched an hour for a game of tennis in the middle of their anxious days. Midge, who had always liked and admired them, now grew to love them for their behavior to her. Never by a glance, a gesture, a whisper did one of them betray his knowledge that anything unusual had happened in her life. She might have gone away for a holiday instead of to be married and to return unwed.

Three days after their return, the English mail arrived. It was tea time. Major Inglis had looked in for his letters. Elsie and Midge were absorbed in theirs. Elsie always received reams from a crowd of women friends; Midge's were mostly duty epistles from relatives she was not much in sympathy with. They were painful reading, because they all assumed she was by now the wife of a wealthy man, although she was still Miss Hamilton when they were despatched. The world's respect for riches informed them one and all.

Suddenly Major Inglis gave an exclamation. The two women looked up. He was standing by the window, a newspaper in his hand.

"By Jove, what an unlucky family!" he said. "The Marquis of Corfe and his eldest son, Lord Poole, have been both killed in a motor smash in the south of France."

"Lord Corfe?" queried his wife vaguely.

"The father and brother of the chap they called the White Horseman, Major Inglis replied.

"Oh, but how extraordinary! Midge, do you hear that? Your White Horseman would come into a peerage if he were alive!"

"Yes," answered Midge very low. "What a dreadful accident!"

"Shocking! The sort of thing you think only happens in books.

"There's another brother, isn't there?" Elsie put in.

"Yes, the youngest — Lord Lennard Beaudesir. He is now Marquis of Corfe."

"Does it mention this son—Lord Lovell, wasn't that his name?" Elsie asked.

"Yes. It does just mention him—only to say that he left England very suddenly and completely disappeared and had not been heard of for twelve years, until his death was announced from abroad quite recently."

Midge sat very still. She alone knew that the White Horseman was not dead. She wondered if he had seen the tragic story. Of course, he could not go back, she supposed. Being Marquis of Corfe made no difference to the dreadful things he had done, to his life of crime and violence.

Where was he? He had given up that lawless life. She was sure of that. This news brought back the sense of his presence with such a rush of reality that he might have been standing by her side. She saw him as he had looked in his tent, the slender, erect form, the merciless face, as if cast in metal, the mouth without pardon, without humor. And the one moment when she had seen in his eyes that tremendous, inconsolable pain.

He loved her. She loved him. She had lain in his arms his lips on hers, carried for a mad moment on the irresistible tide. She heard his voice again telling her he loved her, the magic voice that seemed like a gentle hand touching her heart.

A wave of such intolerable yearning surged over her that she got up, her letters falling to the floor, and took a few steps forward, as if she were following some physical call.

Elsie's words brought her to herself.

"Look at Midge struck all of a heap! Midge, I swear you fell a wee bit in love with that bold bad man!"

The girl picked up her letters and answered mechanically:

"As Major Inglis says, they do seem a dreadfully unlucky family."

That night Major Inglis came back after dinner at the mess with a light of excitement in his eyes.

"There is startling news," he said. "It appears that this White Horseman is not dead at all. He was responsible for the murders of Captain White and young Orme. He has been recognized by several men he once took prisoners. He has been lying low and has changed his quarters—that's all. But now we think we've got him. There's a little party—as big as we can

make it—going out. They're going to wait a day or two to make him think himself safe."

A faint cry from Midge, which fortunately for her was drowned in Elsie's indignant but thoroughly unreasonable exclamation:

"I call that too mean for words!"

"There's more than that," Major Inglis went on. "Some one has told the Home authorities who he is. There has been a despatch from Khargit—from the Commissioner. There are strict orders that he must be taken alive."

"I think it's simply horrid!" cried Elsie. "What will they do with him?"

"Take him home and try him, I suppose. My dear, you seem to forget what the man has done."

Midge felt as cold as if she had been packed in ice.

They knew where the White Horseman was. He had come back to his old life. They were going to surround him and take him prisoner.

Some one had betrayed him. A thought came like a flash of lightning that blotted out the room and its occupants and left her reeling alone in a black and empty world.

He would think it was she who had betrayed him. Only she knew that he was alive.

From that moment Midge became possessed by that one thought. They were going to take the White Horseman; they knew where he was. They were going to surround him and surprise him; they were going to make quite sure of him this time.

Some one had betrayed him. He would think it was she. He must think it. Only she knew that he was alive. She heard his hard, mocking voice again, as they stood together saying good-by in his sitting room in the Green bungalow. "And you are not going to give me away?" Didn't that imply that she was the only person who could?

She was in the grip of a tremendous purpose. She must get to the White Horseman; she must get there before the soldiers. She must warn him of his danger; she must tell him that she had not betrayed him—that she would rather die than do that.

If they took him prisoner, she could not bear it. Back to England—to be tried for that awful crime of betraying his country. How could he have done it? Oh, how? She would never have believed he had, if he had not admitted it to her in those darkly bitter words, "Would I be living the life I live if they were not true?" To be tried!

She could see his erect figure in the prisoner's dock—his dark hawk face, stern and terrible in its imperishable pride, his inhuman slaty gray eyes staring defiance at all around. But he had done that awful thing, and he would be punished for it. What would the punishment be? She did not know. Prison—perhaps for life? She shuddered. Prison for him who was very one with the air, with the hills, with the clouds! It was unthinkable—he in prison, and she in the world eating out her heart.

She forgot everything. She forgot Sir John, the memory of her father, what she owed her kind hosts; she forgot friendship and honor and duty. Her whole being, not only her heart and brain, but her eyes and ears and hands and feet, were put at the service of the outlaw. He had said to her that if he could hold his head up among his fellow men, neither heaven nor hell should keep her from him. And neither heaven nor hell was going to keep her from his side. Only death could have stopped her. Of the company of great lovers was little Midge.

And luck was with her. Colonel Manisty came in after she and Elsie had gone to bed. Midge crept to the door of Major Inglis's little study and listened to what they were saying. They were discussing the plans for the capture of the White Horseman. They had sent for two troops of mounted riflemen and a couple of extra mountain guns. They had arranged with the flying corps commander to act in unison with the troops. They knew the exact place of the White Horseman's present encampment. They discussed it at length, and Midge committed everything to a new and startling memory she had just acquired. The troops were to set out at dawn of the

next day but one, and expected to reach the White Horseman's camp just after dark.

That meant two whole days to Midge. All the next day and practically all the following one in which to get to him and warn him of this treachery.

Treachery! Treachery! Of course, Midge knew in her heart that she had lost her sense of proportion. The man was a bandit, an outlaw, they said a murderer. It was quite right that the king's forces should capture him. But all that meant nothing to her. He was the man she loved, and he had been betrayed.

She crept back to her room, all on wires, a little bundle of taut attention. Sleep was as far away as if she had never known what it was at all. The men sat up late, but ultimately she heard Colonel Manisty go. Then she sat in strained silence in the dark for a couple of hours. It was an agonizing wait. She could make no plans. She could do nothing but go out into the darkness with the one unalterable purpose in her mind.

She lit a candle, not daring to switch on the electric light. She began to dress, holding her breath all the time. She was ready in a quarter of an hour; riding breeches, a long waterproof coat, a tam-o'-shanter, and a heavy chiffon scarf tied round her head. In the pocket of the coat was fifty pounds in bank notes, a sum she had saved during the last few months; under her Shetland jumper she wore the string of pearls worth two thousand pounds that Sir John had first given her, and that he had begged her to keep—begged with such quiet pathos that she couldn't refuse. The money and the pearls were potential payment for the fulfillment of her one absorbing purpose. She would have paid her way to the White Horseman with her life's blood, if need be.

She looked at her watch. It was four o'clock. The men had sat talking until two. Major Inglis was the trouble. Elsie slept like a log. She knew that he would not leave the bungalow until six. She dared not wait until then. The guards would be changing; the station would be astir.

There was nothing for it. Out into the night, all she valued in life in her hands. Again luck attended her. She slipped out onto the veranda, climbed the balustrade, and dropped like a feather to the ground. She stopped and listened. The sentry was at the other end of the mound. She had a horse of her own now that Major Inglis had placed at her disposal. It was an old polo pony that a brother officer had left in his charge while on leave. Ten minutes later, she came out of the stables, risking everything. And, holding her face for a moment against the animal's glossy neck, she breathed a prayer to it not to fail her.

A brilliant moon rode in the heavens, filmed over every few moments by lacelike mists. There was only one thing for it—Midge knew that. She mounted, and with a few low words told Polly that they must get through the ring of guards like lightning. Polly responded. Midge did not know what happened. The horse's hoofs sounded to her like thunder. She saw a brazier on the road; she discerned dark shapes. There were voices, rising to shrill cries. She galloped through them. A bullet whistled past her. She dug her heels into Polly's flanks, and on they went like wind up the road that led to the pass.

Dawn broke. Then came a rosy glow as if all the rubies in the mines of India had crowded into the eastern sky. Midge found herself not far from the spot where she had first met the White Horseman. She felt a strange life in her; her blood flowed quickly; she breathed the pure high air with a kind of fierce ecstasy. But the pony was dead beat. She had given every ounce of herself, as Midge had asked her to.

Now—what was there to be done? Nothing. Despair crept into Midge's soul. Here she was alone in the mountains, miles and miles from the White Horseman's camp. All she knew was the direction of it—over there across the mighty ridge, toward Yarkand.

Her heart failed her for a moment, as she sat there motionless, while the pony drooped her beautiful dark head to the dust brown earth, and around was enacted the daily miracle of the rising sun. And

then more luck. Some riders approached. Natives mounted on small shaggy steeds. She held her breath as they advanced and reined in their horses, staring at her. The yellowish faces, the strange semi-Tartar type, the shapeless gray cloaks. She called to them. One of them dismounted and came up to her.

"The White Horseman," she said in Hindustani. "You are the White Horseman's men!"

The man, taken aback, salaamed and acknowledged the fact. It was another miracle, greater to her than that of the dawn.

"Take me to him!" said Midge. "Take me to him! We must go there like the wind, you understand. I have news for your master. How long will it take?"

The man held out both his hands—fingers extended. He understood her, but she could not understand his speech.

Ten hours; that was what he meant. The other men came up. One of them obviously recognized her, and salaamed to the ground. The men held a rapid consultation. She was mounted on one of their horses, and one man and her tired pony was left behind.

Then followed a journey through the day and the dusk and the dark, a journey of overpowering grandeur of which Midge saw as much as if she had been blind.

It took a great many more than ten hours, and she had not a bite to eat all way.

She was half fainting with exhaustion when the man took her off the horse, and led her into the White Horseman's tent.

This was no encampment like the last one. In the gloom of the small tent, she could hardly see. There were no books or rugs, only one evil-smelling oil lamp, such as the natives use.

But out of the half light the slaty-gray eyes looked at her as a man looks on a vision of Paradise, and with a sob she staggered towards him.

He took both her hands and held them, and he laughed like a man in a happy dream.

"You!" he said. "You! But it can't be you!" Then he laughed again with a kind of suppressed delirium.

"Yes, it's me." Between fatigue and excitement Midge could not speak coherently. "I came to tell you—do you know—they know where you are—they are coming to—to take you prisoner—there are heaps of them—up from Khargit—and guns. They are leaving at dawn to-morrow—they will be up here at night. I—I am in time. You—you can get away."

The White Horseman led Midge to a camp bed—the only article of furniture in the tent as far as she could see.

"You are dead beat, my little love," he said in that voice of magic that she felt would thrill her even in her grave. "Sit down! They are getting you something to eat and drink. As for me, I would like to kiss your little feet, but I suppose you wouldn't care about it. So they have found me out. Do you know how?"

"I was afraid you'd think I told them," said Midge with a sob.

He knelt beside her and took her hands.

"I would never have thought that, Midge. It is among the impossible things. When I've said ugly things to you, it was only because I wanted to tell you I loved you all the time, and knew I mustn't. How did you get here—by a miracle?"

"Yes, I think so. I rode up the pass and met your men. They brought me. But you don't understand—the people at home know who you are. Some one has told them. They want to take you back to England—to—" Her voice failed her.

The White Horseman's eyes looked deadly, as he rose to his feet.

"I think I know who did it," he said.

"Is there anybody who knows beside me?" whispered Midge.

"There are several who know who I am."

"But that the White Horseman was not dead?"

"Yes—one." His face was remote, inhuman. He seemed to withdraw himself into a realm where he would not be followed.

After a moment's tense silence, Midge went on:

"Do you know—about your father and your brother?"

"What about them?"

"Oh, I am so sorry—it is dreadful to have to tell you—they—are dead."

She told him what the account in the home papers had said.

He grew even remoter; in a queer way she seemed to feel him gathering himself together in some secret place where he alone would ever dwell. She felt that she could never really know him, that no one could—not the entire personality that attracted like a strong magnet, and yet itself remained aloof.

He walked to the flap of the tent and looked out into the darkness.

Midge sat on the bed, her whole heart going out to him.

He came back and stood before her.

"They are all gone, then," he said in a strange, subdued voice. "I am alone."

"Your brother?" she faltered.

"My brother—who is mad about dancing and is going to marry a rich woman!" He spoke as if to himself.

Midge wondered how he knew that. There was something so mysterious about it all.

He looked at her, his eyes dark and wild.

"But you—what were you doing at Banzat? You have just been married. Where is—your husband?"

"I haven't been married," she answered in a small voice. "Something happened to—prevent it. I am staying with the Inglises again."

"Not married!" He stood perfectly still, but she could see his hands tremble. She could see an incredible joy creeping into his eyes. "Not married! You are free!"

"Yes—no—oh, don't let's talk about me! Don't let's waste time! You have got to get away."

"You are not another man's wife," he persisted. "You are free. You can never be anything to me, but I love you—I can trick myself into thinking that if things had been different—"

He broke off and stooped down to her, his arms shaking with the passion of longing that possessed him. But he drew himself up and his arms dropped to his side.

The girl looked at him with swimming eyes. That magnificent control awed her. She knew the temptation. Did she not feel it herself? And she glimpsed the danger, though she could not gauge the depth and strength of this man's passion for her, this outlaw who had lived alone for twelve years among an alien race. But his iron will, the self-discipline that he had learned in the wilds reached her very soul, and in that still moment her whole being surrendered itself to him forever, whether she ever met him in this life again or not.

"But things are not different," the White Horseman said in his ordinary voice. "I am always treating you like a monster. You have risked everything to come here and warn me, and I am trying to make you sad. I have no right to ask you even to be my friend."

"I am," she said, smiling wearily. "I can't help myself."

"Good girl!" he said. His face lightened; he smiled his wonderful smile. "Ah, and here comes the food and drink you so badly need!"

CHAPTER XVI.

RENUNCIATION.

MIDGE ate and drank—she did not know what. Those old wild joys had come back. The man's personality was so strong that he even made her forget his danger. To sit there listening to him talking, watching the erect figure in the night-blue tunic, with the bronze hawk face melting into the dark rich turban—she knew again what it was to live. With him she seemed to live a thousand years in a minute; away from him she did not live at all.

He was making swift decisive plans as to how to get her back in safety. As soon as the dawn broke, he would send her off under a trusted escort, and then he would make his way farther into the mountains to some fastness where nobody would look for him.

"Not that I like running away," he said bitterly. "But I don't want to go back to England—not like that."

As he spoke, there were sounds of shout-

ing outside the tent, the thud of horses' hoofs brought to a sudden and violent standstill, and, from the distance, rifle shots.

The White Horseman sprang to the opening of the tent. Midge ran after him.

"Be quiet," he said sternly. "Stay where you are. Don't dare to move."

"They've come," she moaned. "I wasn't in time."

He was gone. She sat there a little bundle of breathless horror. The noises grew louder. There were more shots. The wild shouts came nearer.

The White Horseman came back into the tent.

"It isn't the troops," he told her. "It's some tribesmen who have a quarrel with me. My men have been chased up by them. There are a lot of them, it seems. Sit here quietly. It will be all right. Nobody must guess that you are here."

Something in his voice made her heart leap into her throat.

"Are you going to fight?"

"Of course we are going to fight. They are here. I am sorry. It will be a row—a mess; but it can't be helped."

"Oh!" She gave a little wail. "Why, oh, why didn't you stay Mr. Drake?"

"Surely you are not afraid!" It was his old inhuman voice.

"No—not for myself."

He gave his little callous laugh.

"You needn't be afraid for me. I'm used to it."

"Are the odds against us?"

"They are."

The stark brutality of his answer sent a thrill through her. She rose to her feet. The cries outside stirred her soldier's blood.

"All right," she said. "Don't think of me. Good luck!"

He gripped her hand as if she had been a man.

"Can you shoot?"

"Yes."

"Take this." He put a small automatic pistol in her hand. His voice had a queer light sound. "If anything happens to me—"

"All right," said Midge again. "I'm—I'm not afraid."

He went out. She stood erect, the pistol in her hand.

It was like a dream—the noise, the shouting, the frantic neighing of alarmed horses, the wild yells of the tribesmen. It grew worse. It seemed to the girl that a whole army must be fighting outside. Groans came from wounded men. Once she heard an awful sound—the butt end of a rifle crashing down on a man's head. It was quite close to the tent.

Then a silence—so sudden that it paralyzed her. And then another wild onrush, announcing that more hostile tribesmen had arrived on the scene.

It became pandemonium. She heard the White Horseman's voice all the time, commanding, cheering, quiet and steely even when it rang out in wild words. She heard it lower, fainter. She heard an involuntary groan, and a yell of fury from his men.

But how few voices let out that yell!

She could bear it no longer. She ran out of the tent.

The night was inkily dark. The moon had disappeared. Here and there a man carried a flaring torch. In the flickering and uncertain glare it seemed to Midge that hundreds of men were swaying madly up and down the road. Some were on horseback, others on foot. Knives flashed high in the air; from somewhere sharpshooters must be at work, for she saw three men fall one after the other. There were bodies lying about. She stumbled over one at the entrance of the tent.

She heard the White Horseman's voice, and followed it, fighting her way. An awful excitement took her completely out of herself. His voice was so faint; she felt that he was hurt.

Inside a small ring of his men she found him. He was swaying from side to side, but his voice was raised in encouragement. He had a pistol in each hand.

To Midge it seemed as if a sea of hideous distorted bearded black faces surrounded them. And just as she arrived, a man flung himself at the White Horseman, with a knife in his uplifted hand, while two of his followers threw blazing torches into the White Horseman's face.

Midge felt the world spin round her as she dashed into the small circle, only one thought in her mind, spreading out her arms and throwing her little body between the man she loved and this blazing death. She felt a stinging blow, a sensation of choking, and she knew no more.

On a morning of exquisite opalescent serenity Midge awoke to find the White Horseman's eyes looking into her face with a glowing passion of love and a darkness of overwhelming anxiety.

"Thank God!" he said in solemn thanksgiving as she stirred and tried to sit up. He helped her as tenderly as a woman. She found herself, wrapped in blankets, ensconced among some great rocks on a bare and stony plateau that fell in one vast sweep as far as the eye could reach toward a distant plain. In a sky of the delicate blue of a hedge sparrow's egg the sun shone with a gentle warmth; not a breath of air stirred. A little way off three horses were nibbling at the low growing scrub. Two of the White Horseman's men sat like statues, enveloped in their cloaks.

"What happened?" Midge asked, sorting out her confused thoughts as best she could.

"Wait until we see if you are hurt!" the White Horseman said. "Can you stand? Let me help you. You were so exhausted —I had to let you sleep."

She could stand. Her shoulder ached badly, and one of her hands and her lower arm was bandaged up.

"You were burned," he said. "You saved my life."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes, you did. You took the men's attention for a second. My men were equal to it. There was a stampede; all the torches were trampled out; and these two got us away. We owe our lives to them."

He looked pale under his bronzed skin, and when he walked he limped badly. He had been shot in the leg and had lost much blood. But once on horseback he was all right.

"They are good men, those two," he said almost boyishly. "Splendid jolly men! How they found the horses in that wild mess I don't know. But they did, and I carried you round to the back of the tent while those madmen fought each other in the darkness. They put you in front of me on my white horse, Midge, and I carried you in my arms all through the ride. That will be something for me always to remember," he added to himself.

But there was no time to lose. Something must be done, and at once. By a miracle they had escaped with their lives, but, although in safety for the moment, they could not roam about this desert and dangerous country with a large force of British troops on the road to capture the White Horseman.

"You must get away," Midge said in a frenzy of earnestness. "Don't think of me! You must get away!"

"Not until I know you are safe," he answered.

"But what would be the good of my having come, if you are taken?" she asked feverishly.

"The good of your coming, my heart!" He gave a sigh. "That will always be the best thing in my life."

"But you mustn't be taken!"

"No—I mustn't be taken!" The old hard look came back into his eyes. "For reasons that I can't tell you. I must think." He called to the two natives and held a consultation with them; then turned to her and said: "They know a way back to Banzat which they say is perfectly safe. They are quite sure the troops would never dream of going that way, and our friends of last night have by now gone back to their lairs. Do you know, by the way, what their quarrel was with me? One of my men stole a cup of milk from a cow of theirs that was feeding by one of their stones of worship. A costly drink of milk, wasn't it?"

He laughed, as if trying to make the atmosphere less tense for the parting that was to come.

"I don't want to go back to Banzat," Midge said in alarm. "How can I? What could I say to them? What would they say to me?"

"You must go back to Banzat," he replied gravely. "It is the nearest place

where you have friends. I can't bear to think of you in this disturbed country."

"But what shall I say?"

"You must trust to luck," he answered lightly.

He spoke to the men again, and they went off to prepare the horses. But just then something happened that Midge did not understand. The men and the White Horseman all three stood still, stiff, listening intently.

She could not hear a sound.

The natives dropped down, their ears to the ground.

"What do they hear?" Midge whispered.

"Horsemen," he answered.

One native said something; the White Horseman interpreted.

"One horseman," he says. "I thought there were more. But they hear better than I do. Anyhow, we had better wait. Come behind one of those rocks. Don't move or speak."

They waited, it seemed ages—actually it was a quarter of an hour. Then a speck came in sight, grew into the size of a mouse, a dog, a horse—and proved to be one of the White Horseman's own men.

He dropped from his horse, exhausted, salaamed low, and poured out a mass of words in a voice faint with fatigue. The White Horseman interpreted to Midge.

"This man is my personal servant. He has been with me alone often, and knew of this as one of my secret haunts. He followed us to tell me that the British troops are all over the place and have left a strong guard at my last camp. It won't be safe for you to go back to-day, anyhow. We will push on a bit and give them time to disperse. I'm sorry, but I can't risk their finding you on the way."

Sorry! Midge's heart beat out a happy hymn as they prepared to move on. The sun was high when they halted in a rocky fastness, a miniature of the White Horseman's first camp, only with a wonderful view across to the eternal snows.

They dismounted, and the White Horseman made a seat for Midge out of his own and his men's cloaks. All round was the stony dust-brown desert, with the low tufts of thorn scrub, and just beneath a great circle of rocks a steep precipice dipped down to another level of the bowlder-strewn waste.

The White Horseman looked at Midge with an almost comic dismay.

"Tiffin, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "What do you suppose it will be?"

He called to the man.

They had two filled water bottles—water was a thing so precious that they carried it even in the heat of the fight; they also had managed to seize a few biscuits and some sticks of milk chocolate. They said something to their chief, and he nodded approval. They disappeared, leaving his servant with him and Midge.

"They think they can find something—a desert delicacy," he said, with his rare smile. "Shall we begin or wait?"

"Wait," she answered. "I'm not a bit hungry."

Indeed, mortal hunger could not touch her. Was the hunger of her soul not being fed as if by a miracle in the desert?

The White Horseman lay on the ground at her feet, raised on his elbow. His eyes, dark and violent, were yet filled with a joy equal to her own.

"Midge—your marriage? What happened?" he asked.

She told him in a few words. Also about Lady Lydd's mortal illness.

"So you will be married," he said, with that strange ruthless urge to torture both himself and her. "I must bear that, too."

"She may not die," said Midge very low.

"Of course, she will. That's Sir John's luck!" And he gave his callous little laugh.

The two natives came back, clambering up from below, agile as cats. They carried queer looking green things the size of large eggs. They set to make a fire of the roots of thorn scrub, while the third man rode off on outpost duty in case any horseman came in sight.

The green things turned out to be a cross between a fruit and a vegetable, rather like crumbling bread inside, and, cooked over the fire, they had a pungent, bitter sweet taste. They ate them first and afterward a biscuit and a little chocolate,

and drank sparingly out of the water bottles that might yet mean the difference between life and death, for in that trackless desert they could not find water for days.

There was something solemn about that meal—a dinner of herbs, where love was. Something so solemn as to be almost sacramental, as perhaps all meals are eaten in danger and in the face of farewell.

Midge was in a strange and happy trance. It was primitive, elemental—the fruits of the desert, nothing but their two selves, all that was required.

In the afternoon they walked for a little, and the White Horseman's bitterness and inhumanity came back, as he flayed her with the whip of their imminent parting.

"You will soon forget," he said. "All women do." And the stern, merciless face was like stone, and through all his love for her, she saw the hatred of the world, of her world that she was going back to, of all men and women. She felt the irreconcilable scorn, even of herself, unjust beyond words; and it seared her very soul.

Instead of happiness, the end of the day was torture. They ate again before the dark fell, and the White Horseman's black mood persisted. He was far away, in his unapproachable haunts, where it seemed sometimes that he must have evil spirits and fiends for companions. The grim ruthlessness of his face terrified her.

They watched the sunset together, the most marvelous sunset Midge had ever seen. Last of all it tinged the snows of the mighty mountain chain with violent crimson, fading to lilac, and then to sulphur, and then to the whiteness of death.

And for a few moments the veil lifted from the White Horseman's spirit, and he held her hand, and they seemed to stand in a fairy circle, softened and sweetened by their hopeless love, and in the white heat of their passion all vanished—the world, his fury against it, her fate, their parting, even their sex—and they were fused into one being, living in and only in one another, and in that magic life absorbing all the beauty of the earth and air and sea.

But it was short. The White Horseman let go her hand roughly, as if it suddenly stung him, and his face was as white, as remote and as cruel as the Himalayas themselves.

The darkness fell. Two of the natives rode out when the third came back. All night they would prowl around, guarding that one life that their master had made known to them was sacrosanct.

The other native made up a bed for Midge in the shelter of a great rock.

The White Horseman led her to it.

"Good night," he said. "Sleep well. You are safe."

"Good night," she faltered, her eyes imploring a kind look.

But he remained a stone.

She lay down and tried to sleep, but in vain.

The stars came out. The cold gripped her and began to dull her senses. The native who was left behind crooned a strange monotonous song.

Midge heard footsteps on the frosty ground—up and down, up and down, ceaselessly up and down.

She sank into an uneasy slumber; then woke with a violent start. She jumped up, terrified at the sound of footsteps. She ran round the rock. She saw the White Horseman walking up and down, his head bent, his arms behind his back, a figure of concentrated gloom, hatred, and despair.

She crept back to her blankets and coats.

Nature had its way with her. She slept soundly.

Outside all was silence. The White Horseman stood still on guard, letting his man snatch a little sleep.

The stars watched over them all.

Early the next morning the natives rode back to say that they had met some of their own band, who reported that the coast was clear.

The White Horseman told them to get the horses ready. He took Midge's hand and led her a little way over the stony desert to a place where some huge bowlders hid them from view.

"We must say good-by," he said.

"But you!" the girl cried. "I can't go away and not know what is going to happen to you!"

"I shall be perfectly safe," he answered.

"The moment you are gone my good white horse will carry me in the opposite direction. The British troops will find my camp in a pretty mess, and I dare say they will scour the country, but they won't find me."

"Do you know all this country?" she asked, gazing around the horizon.

"Blindfold," he said. Then he turned to her with anguished eyes, his face drawn with despair. "I would rather die than leave you, Midge. For myself I am not afraid. I would willingly go down with you and give myself up. But I mustn't. I can't. And I can't explain why."

"I believe you," she whispered. "You needn't tell me—I know you are afraid of nothing."

"I am afraid of you," he answered. "Of your dear eyes and your brave heart. To leave you is the hardest thing I have ever done in my life."

Then, suddenly, she was overwhelmed by the great surging tide of her love for him. He stood there, so strong and so lonely, so grim and so pathetic, a man whose whole life of wild deeds meant nothing to him now in his hopeless longing for her. And she turned to him and held out her hands, and in her eyes was her all self-surrendering answer to his dire need of her.

"Take me with you!" she said softly. "Take me with you wherever you go! I would rather be in danger with you than safe anywhere else. You said before how happy we would be in the wilds. I am free now—I am free if I choose to be, and I do choose! I want nothing but to be with you—always."

The White Horseman caught her in his arms with a low cry. He covered her face with kisses of passionate despair; but to her it was as if she had won a battle, and she gave a low happy laugh.

Then he released her suddenly.

"No," he said, "I can't—I can't! You have shown me heaven, but it isn't for me. It would be the lowest thing I have ever done. No, my heart, I must live on the memory of you, and you must go back to the safe place and the good people. I could only make an outlaw of you, too."

"But I want to be one—it's all I want in the world," she pleaded.

He took a few steps away from her, and came back.

"Don't tempt me too far," he said in a voice she did not know. "I am only a man, and you are all my world. But I must leave you. Come, it's time for you to go! The sun is getting high. You have a very long journey."

Again he became remote, and withdrew himself into those strange lonely realms. It gave his love a tremendous, indescribable power. At times he would seem to be one with her; she could read his mind, his heart, his soul. He would make her realize the closest intimacy of spirit. And then he would suddenly remove himself to those distant spaces and become a stranger, a man she still adored but could not understand. It was the touch of mysticism that binds forever.

"I can't go," wailed Midge, distracted. "I may never see you again."

"You will never see me again," he said. "It is better so."

He took her in his arms again. Again they clung together.

Then he lifted her and carried her to the waiting horse.

He stood watching as they rode off, she on one horse, one native on the other, the second native on foot. He stood beside his own white Arab, grim, immovable; to the girl's tear-drowned gaze, verily a king among men.

To her it seemed as if her whole being had been torn in two.

CHAPTER XVII.

QUESTIONS AND A LETTER.

THE story of Midge's life for the next three weeks was a very painful one. She reached Banzat safely after two days' journey. During the second one she was escorted by a small party of mounted rifles, who had unexpectedly made their way up the track whose secret the natives had believed was known to themselves alone. The two men were brought down as prisoners, refusing to give any account of themselves or of how the Miss Sahib came to be in their charge.

The Miss Sahib herself was incapable of giving any account of anything. She was in a state bordering on unconsciousness, which developed into the delirium of fever as soon as she was installed in her bed in the Inglis's bungalow.

Midge felt that all her life long she would never forget the stark horror with which she realized one morning that she might in her delirium have babbled of the things she had seen and done on that terrible and wonderful night.

She was lying weak and inert, slowly emerging from the confused dreamland of fever, her face white and child-like on the pillows, her smoky sapphire eyes very large, haunted by their strange secrets.

Voices came to her from the passage outside her half open door. The doctor's voice first.

"She is still very weak, Mrs. Inglis. I don't think I should question her yet. I wouldn't like her to receive any shock. We must wait for her own account of what happened." Then Elsie's voice answering, low but excited: "The natives are members of the White Horseman's band. That is certain. Not a word can be got out of them. If Midge was really mixed up in it, we ought to know. He must have tried to kidnap her again—that's what we think."

That was what gave Midge sudden strength, what nerved and fed and restored her great spirit that in its turn communicated it to her little body.

Elsie came into the room. Midge feigned sleep, and her friend roused her to see the doctor.

From that moment she made startling progress. All her wits were gathered together to find out if she had given any clue to what had happened.

Apparently she had not. From Elsie's first eager questionings, she found shelter in a most natural answer.

"I can't remember—I feel so queer still."

It was true enough. She wanted time to put together a plausible story. She wanted to find out things herself.

Fifteen days after she was brought down from the pass she was moving about the house, very shadowy in appearance, but growing stronger every day.

One bad moment came the first morning, when Elsie settled her by the fire of pine cones and sycamore logs in the drawing-room. It had turned very cold and dark, and in the mountains there was continuous snow.

Major Inglis came in to greet her and congratulate her, and Elsie began at once.

"Now, Midge darling, do try to remember what happened! Laurie ought to know. You see, you might be of the greatest help to our men. Did this wretch of a White Horseman try to kidnap you again?"

"No," said Midge. She had carefully prepared herself. Elsie's manner grated on her, but she felt awfully mean when she looked into Major Inglis's anxious eyes.

"Tell us as far as you can what happened," he said.

"It was very wrong of me," Midge said mechanically. "But I rode out early in the morning on Polly."

"You had to pass the guards," Major Inglis said. "They said they did see somebody—about four o'clock in the morning."

"Yes; I thought they would know me, or, at least, Polly; but they didn't."

"You know we had to give strict orders that nobody should go out in the dark."

"Yes—oh, I've been an awful nuisance, I know! It was hateful of me, I'll—I'll go away as soon as I'm well enough."

"Don't be absurd, Midge," put in Elsie. "Of course, we were terrified when you didn't come back, and when Polly turned up riderless, it was simply awful. But—what happened?"

"I came across some natives," said Midge. As she looked at them both, she felt that they must know she was lying. "I rode a good way up the pass, and it seems there was fighting going on and they took care of me. They were—very good to me. We had to spend a night in the hills, and when they were bringing me back, we met our men."

"You knew the natives were this White Horseman's men, did you?" asked Major Inglis.

"Yes."

"Do you know what became of him?"

"No. They told me there was fighting, and it wasn't safe for me."

"But what were you doing all that way up there, Midge?" cried Elsie almost impatiently. No doubt, she felt that some secret and thrilling things were being kept from her.

"Elsie," the girl answered in a solemn voice, "I can't help myself. I think I go wild sometimes."

She hated these half truths. But what could she do?

She nerved herself to ask a question.

"Did they capture the White Horseman?"

"No," said Major Inglis, and Elsie chimed in:

"My dear, the man has a charmed life! They found no trace of him, but heaps of dead bodies round his camp. Did you see his camp?"

"No," said Midge. It was another half truth. In the darkness she had not actually seen it. With the eyes of her mind she saw again that marvelously lovely prospect of the next morning over mountains and plain, and her heart failed her because of the lies with which she was forced to stain and sully that hopeless but glorious love.

"But you knew there had been fighting?" asked Elsie eagerly.

"Yes; the men told me. At least, I understood it from them. I don't know their language, you see."

"It appears that some tribesmen attacked this man's camp," said Major Inglis quietly. "Our men found great disorder, and, as Elsie says, some dead. But the tribesmen had had time to make off, taking their wounded. We were in pursuit for a week but did not find him. We can only be thankful that you were brought back safely," he added with that soldier-like simplicity that made her feel unutterably low. "In a measure we must owe that to him, as it was his men who found you."

It seemed that the two natives could not be induced to reveal their chief's whereabouts. Neither punishment nor the fear of death could move them.

"I don't suppose they know," suggested Midge weakly. "They must have got detached from him."

Punishment! The fear of death! It made her blood run cold. Those silent, yellow-faced, beady-eyed men! The care they took of her. To them she was in some way they did not understand one with their chief. They had become dumb as animals at the sight of the British troops. She had realized that they would do nothing because they must not let her out of their sight until she was safe.

Two or three days passed, and then came another bad moment.

Midge and Elsie were alone in the drawing-room after breakfast. Elsie had been forbidden by her husband to go out that day. A solemn gloom brooded over the station. The murderers of the two British officers had been caught and brought down. they were Waziris and had nothing to do with the White Horseman's band. They were lodged in the tiny station jail, waiting for a car to take them down to Khargit on their way to Lahore, where they were to be tried.

There was a chance of trouble. The troops were being closely watched. A native fanatic had been preaching sedition in the neighborhood, gathering quite a number of followers. In Khargit there had been an attempt at mutiny, suppressed only by a prompt and iron hand. The atmosphere was electric enough to satisfy the wildest part of Midge's makeup; but now only the least conscious portion of her was in Banzat. Her real self was away in the wilds, wherever the White Horseman was. He would not take her with him bodily, but he could not help her heart and spirit following, following always.

"Elsie," said Midge suddenly, "I am going back to England as soon as I can. You've been so awfully good to me, but I feel I've caused you so much trouble. It isn't fair."

"But, Midge, how ridiculous you are!" her friend exclaimed. "Laurie says we must go down to Khargit, or even to Lahore. You know what Christmas is in Lahore—awful fun—with the polo and the dances and all that. Why, you'd be an idiot to miss it!"

"I don't think I feel up to it," Midge answered. "I really think I'd better go home. I still feel so queer."

Elsie's beautiful turquoise eyes were fixed very sharply on her friend.

"I say, Midge, you might as well tell me all about it," she said.

"About what?"

"My dear, you've been much too queer, as you call it, for what you've told us! A girl like you doesn't go down with brain fever just because she's spent one night in the open with a couple of natives."

"Elsie, what do you mean?"

"Oh, well!" Elsie shrugged her shoulders petulantly. "I think you might be pally and tell *me!* I'm sure the White Horseman's mixed up in it."

"Elsie!"

"You never did open your mouth about him, Midge. And besides—"

"Besides—what?" asked Midge in a very stiff little voice.

"Well—I didn't tell Laurie, Midge. Only the doctor and I know."

"What?"

"That your left shoulder and arm were one mass of bruises and that your right hand and wrist were badly burned."

Midge was very quiet. There was something almost unfriendly in Elsie's triumphant stare.

"It was nothing," she said presently. "I was so tired—I can't really remember."

"You might tell me," said Elsie in a greedy voice.

"There's nothing to tell," answered Midge. Her voice was very final, and her little body seemed to become encased in invisible armor of steel.

Elsie gave an irritated laugh. She was not out for big issues. She was merely intensely curious because she scented an amorous adventure of sorts. But, after all, she was fond of her friend, so she passed the matter off with a slightly acrid remark:

"Midge Hamilton, I think you're a beastly little cat!"

"The next morning Midge received a letler from Sir John Lydd from Calcutta. She read it through three times; sitting up in bed. It was characteristic of Sir John, short and to the point, and very restrained in expression.

MY DEAR MIDGE:

I have had sad news from England. My wife died a very few days after her arrival there. It appears she was suffering from an incurable disease. So brave of her not to tell me.

I heard this some two days ago by cablegram, but this morning I have received a letter from her, posted a few days before she died in a nursing home. In it she speaks so touchingly of you and myself and expresses her strong hope that we may find our great happiness before long. I did not write to you before because of all the sad part, but now I feel entitled and encouraged to do so.

I had to postpone my voyage home owing to business affairs here, but shall have to go immediately after Christmas.

If you will allow me, I shall come up to Banzat to see you at the beginning of next week, unless you should be going down to Lahore for the week, when I could join you there.

From the news about the frontier I cannot think that Banzat is a safe place for you. The thought of you being there fills me with grave uneasiness.

Please wire me your plans, and believe me,

Your devoted

JOHN LYDD.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

THE CONQUERING HEART

BY MAX BRAND

will be among next week's short stories. Another attraction of the number will be a new exploit of Bill Buddie in the detecting line, related by Wilson Collison under the title "The Third Bottle."

A Market for Stories

By GORTON CARRUTH

AS one approached Taug's Hotel from the maple shaded street it seemed to carry out perfectly the village's general scheme of sleepy restfulness. Half a dozen male guests lounged on the porch in the easiest of clothes and attitudes, and listened to the drawling narrative of Abner Hitchcock. He sat on the top step, his back against a pillar, one long, lanky leg stretched along the crest of the steps, the other sprawling down them until his foot touched the flagstone at the bottom. His hat was in his lap, his entire body was perfectly at rest—except for his lips; peace and the warm sun illumined his features. His voice was produced without effort, seeming to be, in fact, as much a part of his gentle breathing as a cat's purr does of hers.

"I don't doubt for a minute," he said, "that this feller down in Pennsylvany has been able to train his hog like you say he has, it being well known to anybody that has ever studied the hog that he is a mighty intelligent critter; though gen'rally folks neglect his education something terrible, preferring to let him run into pork rather than polish, as you might say. Yes, I reckon there ain't any other animal that has as few opportunities open to him as a hog. He don't enjoy none of the higher advantages. But take a hog and put in a little time training him, as this Pennsylvany man done, and there ain't any reason why he wouldn't make a good bird dog, so to speak, and point partridges or any other birds, though I wouldn't go so fur as to say that he'd always get the kink out of his tail when he pointed.

"Well, now, come to think of it, there was a hog a good deal like that over here to Cotton Hollow a few years back, belonging to Milt Tucker, him that run the tannery and dyed all the trout in Bull Crick the color of shoe leather. But Milt's hog wan't a bird hog, he having been brought up with a litter of bloodhounds and having picked up their knack

for trailing criminals, and being a great help and comfort to Ted Greenaway, constable over to Tutt's Corners. Many's the time Ted would borrow him of Milt and put him on the trail of a chicken thief or some such scalawag, and that hog would just put his nose down to the ground and tear along, never losing the scent no more than a reg'lar bloodhound, and every once in a while h'isting up his snout and letting out a noise that made your hair prickle—sort of a cross between a grunt and a bay and louder than either.

"Well, sir, Todd borrowed that hog one time to run down a feller that robbed the Woodtick post office, and the hog picked up the trail in fine style and went along great until it ran onto the South Mountain Road, where they were doing some repair work after a washout. Just that day they had scooped out the gutters and rounded up the crown of the road for quite a stretch, and when the hog struck that place he was puzzled—but only for a minute. Then he stuck his snout into the loose soil and picked up the scent on the old roadbed underneath, and went right on ahead throwing up the ground like he was a snowplow and making an inspiring sight.

"I always thought it was a darn shame when Milt had to get rid of that hog on account of the neighbors complaining that they couldn't stand the way he got to baying, or grunting, at the moon in that horrible, blood-curdling voice of his every night. He was a real vallyble and int'resting animal, I always maintained."

Abner's voice trailed away into nothingness and he was at perfect peace. There were a few gentle snickers from the guests and then they, too, lapsed into silence as each searched his mind for bait to which Abner might rise again.

Inside the screen doors, however, all was not so serene. Two men in the rear of the dim hallway stirred uneasily. One was Sam Taug, proprietor of the hotel; the other was Tom Gilmore, as yet an unsuccessful suitor for the hand of Salviny Taug. Mr. Taug twiddled his thumbs in front of his vast paunch, sighed until his old easy chair creaked in sympathy, and turned his moon face toward Mr. Gilmore.

That enterprising young man stood with his elbows on the counter across which the business of the hotel was transacted.

"All day long he goes on that way, Tom," mourned Mr. Taug in a melancholy half tone. "All day long he sits in the sun and tells them fairy tales. I ask you, should I make any money on a man like that—I who hired him to learn the business? Again I ask you, should I make a profit on a man like that?"

"Not a cent, Sam," replied Mr. Gilmore with conviction—"not a cent—to say nothing of the hole he's wearing in your top step. And his appetite now, Sam—I bet he can punish the victuals, hey?"

"Punish 'em, is it, Tom?" inquired Mr. Taug with feeling. "Why, I give you my word he can set out there all day in the sun and not even brush the flies off, and then he can stick them long legs of his under my dinner table, and you would think he was training for a prize fight, his motions is that rapid and powerful He's the heaviest eating boarder I've got, Tom."

"What gets me," said Mr. Gilmore plaintively, "is what Salviny sees in a good for nothing lazybones like him. It don't seem right, Sam, her being engaged to him. Salviny's a right smart girl, Sam—plenty of ginger."

"I ain't so sure, Tom," rejoined Salviny's father slowly, "but what she's getting tired of him. But—you can't be certain. You can't never tell about a woman. Anyhow, you see how I'm fixed, Tom. Should I fire the man that's engaged to my daughter? It wouldn't look right, you know it, Tom. And to think I gave him the job here so's he could work into the business if he had any gimp to him! I ask you, Tom, should a man of my age get taken in like that by a—"

A door at the rear of the hall opened, and Salviny came briskly through. She was a pretty girl in a buxom country fashion and was determined to be as modern as ridiculously circumscribed opportunities, including a lot of stuffy old small town gossips, would let her. Her hair and skirt were bobbed to an extreme; her lips were redder than even her good health

could make them; her manner was bold and free. The chewing gum manufacturers suffered no loss by her.

" 'Lo, popper," she said casually; " 'lo, Tom."

She brushed against the young man's knee and proceeded toward the front door. But as she neared the screens she paused and with hands on hips stood looking out. Again the drawling voice of Abner Hitchcock penetrated the hall.

" . . . And the British feller he allowed it was pretty fast travel when the telegraph poles blended together solid like a board fence so the passengers couldn't see the scenery, and he wanted to know if there was any trains as fast as that in this country. Well, Tim Hawkins, from over to Tutt's Corners, spoke up and says that of course that was doing pretty well for a small country like England, where the trains really didn't get a chance to work up much speed before they had to slow down for fear of running into the ocean; but that if the feller wanted to see real speed he'd oughter go out West to the plains country where the trains had a chance to warm up, so to speak. ' Why,' says Tim, ' I was out to Kansas once, and I seen a train come a-whizzing along, and there was a mule standing alongside the track, and nacherly he kicked at the engine, as any mule would,' he says, ' but blamed if the train wan't going so fast he missed the whole caboodle,' he says, ' his hoof just grazing the coupling on the rear end of the last car,' he says.

" And the English feller he says ' Haw!' he says, just like that. ' Quite so,' he says. ' What say to another one all around?' And there wan't anybody missed out so fur as I seen."

For a minute after Abner ceased, Salviny stood gazing out at the peaceful scene on the porch. Then she swung about and returned toward the counter. She was biting her lower lip, but not, it seemed, to repress mirth.

" Well, Tom," she said, rather louder than necessary, " how's tricks?"

For all his bulk, Mr. Taug was not so slow-witted. He heaved himself out of his chair.

" Tom was just telling me, Salviny," he said, " about how good he's making out with that peddling route of his. " Prob'ly you'll be int'rested to hear about it, too. I'm going out to see how the dinner's coming."

He vanished through the door at the rear of the hall.

II.

ALONE in the presence of the lovely Salviny, Tom, the plump and shining go-getter, was not slow to take the hint thus given him. He edged closer to Salviny, who, with a jump, had seated herself on the counter and was swinging her legs with studiously care-free abandon.

" The fact is, Salviny," said Mr. Gilmore in a low, confidential tone, " I am making out pretty good and no mistake. Course, I wouldn't go telling everybody my business, but you—well, I don't mind telling you I'll put fifty dollars clear profit in the bank this week."

" Fine, Tom, fine!"

He warmed to his subject. " And I haven't near worked out the territory yet, Salviny. Every trip I pick up new customers. Course, I'm carrying a mighty good grade of tea and coffee. But there's a lot in knowing how to sell, too, Salviny. If I do say it myself, I can sell five pounds of coffee to a wooden Indian. I jolly the women along, Salviny, and the first thing they know they're reaching for the old teapot on the kitchen shelf and counting out the money to me."

" Yeh, you've got the gift of gab, all right, Tom. You're the frog's fur, ain't you?"

He saw an opportunity. " Maybe I have got the gift of gab, Salviny, but I know how to use it for something besides making folks laugh. I use it to make money." He hastened on. " And furthermore, Salviny, I'm going to branch out. I'm going to get a car. Then I can take in Pottsville, Mill Plain, Kinderogen and maybe Dublin and Woodbury. There's a whale of a lot of business waiting to be picked up in those places, Salviny. And when I've got the car I can add spices and flavoring extracts to my stock and maybe

tobacco for the men. I'm telling you, Salviny, in another year I'll be sitting pretty. Have a touring car, like as not, besides the delivery car."

Salviny was impressed, though she did not want it to appear too plainly. "Sounds all right, Tom," she said, "but you don't want to go peddling all your life do you?"

"Huh, 'course not. Don't you see what I'm figuring on? Sooner or later I'll have a store of my own—a big one here in Windham, maybe; sort of a distributing center with peddling routes all over this part of the State. It's a big thing, Salviny."

She did not say anything and there ensued a slight hiatus. The young man, watching narrowly out of the corner of his eye, saw that she was looking into nothingness with a dreamy stare. The motion of her legs and jaws became less vigorous, more meditative, so to speak. Indeed, Salviny was engaged in a common reverie of her sex. She was picturing herself as the wife of the young man at her side, with the prestige and wealth of that possible store behind her and that possible touring car—nay, a snappy roadster of her own—at her command.

Presently Mr. Gilmore coughed slightly by way of preface to a change of subject. Too long a silence irked him.

"I haven't had a chance yet to say hello to Abner, Salviny," he said, and butter would not have melted in his mouth.

"How's he getting along? I guess he's learning the business fast, ain't he?"

Salviny came back to the present. "Him? Oh, he's getting along all right, I guess." Her pride succumbed to her disappointment. "Don't suppose Abner's quite so good a hand at business as you are, Tom." She laughed nervously and the motion of her legs became erratically energetic again.

"No? Oh, well, we can't all be the same, Salviny. If I do say it myself I saw a good op'tunity and jumped to it. Prob'ly Abner will do well enough when he gets started, though."

"May—like as not."

Another hiatus which the slow, easy voice of Abner Hitchcock drifted in to fill. Out from the dining room tiptoed one of the waitresses, Lucy Wilmer, and stood at the screen door to listen, a dinner bell in her hand. No male person would have denied that she made a very fetching picture whatever may have been the coldly critical thoughts of Salviny.

". . .Wouldn't be surprised if you could get hens to lay more by lighting the coop with electric lights and turning on the lights before sun-up. A hen's an ambitious critter and she wants to be up and doing as soon as it's light, though prob'ly it would be a good idee to have an alarm clock in the coop, too, in case some of the hens didn't wake up prompt when the lights was turned on, on account of being short of sleep.

"But when it comes to getting a flock of hens to lay more eggs I reckon nobody'll ever get any scheme that'll work any better than one of Elmer Toole's did—for a while, leastways. You see, Elmer got at the fund'mentals of the problem, as he said, the same being the hen's mind, though there's many a time when it don't seem that a hen has anything that can rightly be called a mind, like when she crosses the road. But anyway, Elmer studied the hen for a long time and finally he figured out that the reason a hen cackles every time she lays an egg is because she is one of the vainest critters there is, and gets all swelled up with pride over every egg. So Elmer he figured that the way to stimulate the hen to greater effort was to play on her jealousy, pride and jealousy going hand in hand, and the hen being a female anyway.

"So he built an artificial hen, covered with real chicken's skin and feathers, and having a powerful loud cackle, and he filled the bird with eggs and turned on the electricity and set her going, and she'd hop on the nest, lay an egg, then hop off and cackle about it tremenjous for fifteen minutes, and then hop on again, lay another egg, jump off and raise that loud insulting cackle for another quarter of an hour. And so on all day, the other hens getting crazier and crazier with jealousy all the time and just busting theirselves to keep up with that contraption. It was a sight to see them hens crowd up to that nest every time that bird hopped off after laying an egg and peer into it and take a look at the big nest-

ful of eggs the bird had laid that day and then go off muttering and shaking their heads and finally hop onto their own nests and try to equal her record:

"Well, the trouble with Elmer was that he didn't go into the fund'mentals of the problem quite deep enough—that being a way of Elmer's, anyhow—and so he didn't figure out what the effect on his hens would be in the long run. Nacherly they came along to a time when they just couldn't stand that artificial bird's gall any longer and so they organized a mob, just like a lot of humans, and lit into her and just tore her all to pieces, exposing the base duplicity of her electric wires and brass wheels. Then when they see how they'd been deceived they sulked for two weeks and wouldn't lay an egg and looked at Elmer so reproachful that he got scared and didn't dass go into the coop. Elmer he said he was through: hens was too high strung for him, he said. Allowed that the next time he experimented he'd try some easy going sort of a critter—hornets, say."

There were some drowsy murmurs of amusement from the porch, cut short by Lucy's sudden ringing of the dinner bell. Her own giggles were drowned in its clamor. Then the screen door opened and the summer boarders, alive at last, came crowding in. Bringing up the rear, Abner Hitchcock eased himself gently through the door, grinned amiably at Lucy and stopped for a word with her.

"Seems as though you never run out of stories, Abner," said Lucy admiringly. "It beats the Dutch where you get 'em all."

Abner looked at her gravely, but his eyes twinkled. "Well, you see, Lucy," he said, "I've been around a good deal. You ought to get out more, Lucy," he went on; "it broadens the mind."

At the other end of the hall Salviny suddenly jumped from the counter to the floor with a resounding thump. She laid her hand on Tom's.

"Won't you stay and have dinner with us, Tom?" she asked in a loud clear tone. "Popper would be glad to have you, I'm sure, and I want you to tell me more about your plans."

Mr. Gilmore simulated hesitation. "Well, guess I can, Salviny," he answered slowly. Then he went on gallantly: "Sure! Always glad to have dinner with you, Salviny. Business can wait."

They started for the dining room door. Salviny did not look towards Lucy and Abner, but Mr. Gilmore waved an airy greeting.

"Hello, Abner!" he said.

"Hello, Tom."

Lucy shot a hot glance after the reteating pair and her cheeks flushed. Then she glanced at Abner's face. He was gazing at the door through which the two had vanished and there was a slightly hurt look in his eyes.

"Hurry up, Abner," said Lucy briskly. "And say! Take the blueberry pie to-day. It's fine."

He smiled his thanks for the tip and passed into the dining room.

III.

THE engagement of Salviny and Abner had always seemed strange to the village, even when Abner had been working at the sawmill and had, under the force of circumstances, exhibited a fair degree of energy. Still, he was a man of slow and dreamy nature, the scald, so to speak, of the village and a fixed star in the galaxy of local wits and philosophers that nightly gathered about the stove in Seth Doolittle's general store. He seemed a queer match for the ultra-modern Salviny who, in common with her generation, worshiped at the shrine of the fidgety god, Pep. It had seemed to be one of those curious cases of love between extremes.

But as Salviny had gradually become convinced that Abner would never "amount to anything" because of his easy interpretation of his duties in his new job at the hotel, what had been a mystery to the village became one to her also. During the two weeks that followed Mr. Gilmore's eloquent dissertation upon his prospects, she reached the breaking point with Abner. Her change of heart was accelerated by further visits from Tom who interspersed his glowing pictures of his future with softer passages—cautious but none the less unmis-

takable. Her father, too, threw out hints that had their effect.

"Abner," she exploded one day, "aren't you ever going to do anything around here? Popper is getting real provoked at you."

He raised deprecatory eyebrows.

"Well, I don't know, Salviny," he drawled. "'Pears like I'm keeping the boarders contented, anyhow, and that's saying a good deal."

Then he chuckled. "Reminds me of Sam Terwilliger, who used to live over to Tutt's Corners, and his horse, Job. Sam wa'n't exactly what you call a good provider, especially when it came to live stock, he figuring that the less you fed a horse or a cow the better it was, providing the critter just kept a going. Well, Sam was a kind of an ingenious cuss and he got the idee that if he could fool Job into thinking he was getting a real feed when he was only getting a snack it would keep the critter contented and happy and able to do a full day's work. So he put magnifying specs on the horse so's a handful of oats would look like a peck to him and I'm bound to say, Salviny, that it did seem to make the animal easier in his mind though he didn't get any fatter. But one day Sam happened to get around in front of Job when the horse had his specs on and Job thought he saw a forkful of hay coming his way and the starving critter was that eager that he just reached out and took a big mouthful of Sam's chin whiskers. Sam was mighty proud of them whiskers, too—big, bushy crop he had. Well, Salviny, the specs got broke in the fight and it was as much as three months before Sam got those whiskers to looking good again and he never did get to feeling right about it because the S. P. C. A. heard the story and stepped in and made Sam do better by Job."

Salviny heard this extraordinary narrative through in a steely silence. Then she drew a deep breath.

"Well, Abner," she said, "I'm not aiming to marry you and have to wear magnifying specs to see *my* victuals. Here!" She snatched off her engagement ring and thrust it on him. "I'm through! And I reckon that when you see popper you'll be through, too."

She flounced away, giving him no chance to reply. But for once Abner wasn't reminded of anything funny and probably wouldn't have had any reply to make.

Mr. Taug was a fast worker, given an opportunity.

"You know, Abner," he said with every appearance of sorrowful reluctance, a quarter of an hour later, "I think a heap of you, but should I carry you as a free boarder any longer when it don't mean nothing to Salviny? Now, as man to man, Abner, should I?"

"Well, no, Sam," drawled Mr. Hitchcock gently, "not unless you wanted some one around at dinner time to be nice to the beans and the corn—just as if they had come out of the garden—so as to help keep the other boarders sort of quiet and peaceable. Moral effect, Sam. But prob'ly you don't, Sam, and it's all right with me. I'm needing a rest, anyhow, and I guess I'll lay off for a while and go fishing."

Mr. Taug snorted, but Abner did not stay for an answer. He did stop, though, for a word with Lucy, who waylaid him on his way out.

"It's a shame, Abner," said Lucy hotly. "Sam Taug hasn't sense enough to know how much help you was to him."

"Well, Lucy," Abner replied soberly, "guess maybe Sam ain't all wrong either. Prob'ly I haven't got much head for business and I'm obliged to say that real hard work don't seem to be in my line. 'Pears like I've been vaccinated against it, Lucy; it don't catch with me."

"Don't believe it," said Lucy stoutly. "Why don't you get a job and show Sam Taug where he's wrong?" Then she added slyly: "Maybe if you did, Abner, Salviny would make up with you again."

Abner shook his head. "Guess not, Lucy. I—I thought a lot of Salviny, but I guess it was a mistake, her and me getting engaged. Salviny's ambitious, Lucy, and she ain't a going to be satisfied with any man that ain't a nacheral born hustler and can make a pile of money." A twinkle came into his eyes. "And she don't like my stories either. Like as not I'd plague her to death if we was married."

Lucy drew a deep breath. "All girls

ain't like that, Abner," she said softly. "And 'most everybody does like your stories. I do, you know."

Abner was obviously pleased, but he shook his head modestly.

"That's nice of you to say so, Lucy," he replied, "but I guess my stories don't get me anywhere much. And yet I don't know," he went on, brightening. "There was Tunk Hancock. Did I ever tell you about Tunk? Used to live over to Gilmanville and let on that he was an inventor, though so far as anybody could see he done all his inventing sitting in a chair in Nat Quimby's cobbler shop with some other fellers just about as active as he was. Well, one day somebody read a piece in the paper about lightning striking an apple tree and baking all the apples on it, and Tunk he sighed sort of weary like and says he: 'Old stuff,' he says. 'I was about twenty years ahead of that lightning. Why,' he says, 'when I was a boy only eighteen years old, I built me an electric dynamo and rigged her up so's I could shoot the juice into a branch of the old apple tree out back of the house, and just as soon as them apples was ripe we had baked apples any time we wanted 'em,' he says, 'by just pushing a button in the kitchen. And what's more,' says Tunk, 'I grafted some milkweed and sugar cane onto one of the branches, and blessed if I didn't get baked apples with cream and sugar off that limb,' he says.

"Well, Lucy, there was a stranger in Quimby's that day, sort of a quiet feller with a powerful loud vest, and he spoke up and he says: 'Young feller, I need an inventor like you in my business. Do you want to make twenty dollars a week and commissions?' he says; and that being more money than Tunk had ever earned in his life, he says 'Yes' quick, and then asked what he would have to do. Well, it turned out the stranger was one of these here Indian doctors that sells medicine from a street stand with a torch on it, and he wanted Tunk to help him hypnotize the crowd before he took their money away from them for his bottles of sassafras tea or whatever it was. And Tunk tried it and made a hit with his stories, and he's still doing it and making a pile of money. So you see, Lucy," concluded Mr. Hitchcock humorously, "maybe there's hope for me yet."

"Lucy!" shrilled Salviny from the dining room, "are you going to stand there gabbing all day? Don't you know it's almost twelve o'clock and the tables ain't set yet?"

Lucy's sniff was far-reaching, but she could not afford to lose her job. So she paused only long enough to whisper: "You'll get something good, Abner—I know you will."

Then she disappeared into the dining room. And as she set about her work she broke into a cheerful whistle.

IV.

By the end of another two weeks the visible evidence of alteration in the situation was slight, but its significance was large. It consisted in two rings. One, a flashing diamond affair, took the place of Abner's modest gold band on Salviny's third finger. Need it be said that it was placed there by Tom Gilmore, who, when he slipped it on, varied his tender remarks with some statistics about its value and the reduction at which he had obtained it? The other—a much more modest band, decorated with a stone of unknown value, appeared upon Lucy's engagement finger—the first that finger had ever worn. Nor was Lucy in the least ashamed to say that Abner Hitchcock had placed it there. On the contrary, she seemed quite happy about it.

She had need of such armor as her happiness provided, for Salviny's verdict that Lucy's engagement to Abner was a perfect scream met with general approval.

"Should I say anything to her about it?" said Sam Taug to Mr. Gilmore. "No. So long as she stays here and does her work, I ain't got no call to horn in. She can throw herself away on that shif'less feller if she wants to; it ain't no affair of mine. But all the same, Tom, Salviny showed good sense. I always mistrusted Lucy had a queer streak in her."

Salviny, however, was not so reticent.

"'Lo, Lucy," she would say casually.

"Abner still resting?" Or, "How much is Seth Doolittle giving for fairy stories today, Lucy?"

To such sisterly questions Lucy would reply in the spirited manner of her sex. "Anyway," she would observe, "Abner ain't selling old women no twenty-five-cent coffee for fifty cents. There's fairy stories *and* fairy stories, Salviny."

Abner, too, came in for his share of attention, though it was good natured enough.

"Well, Abner," Seth Doolittle remarked casually, "apparently you're going into the restaurant business instead of the hotel business. They do say that Lucy Wilmer's the best waitress Sam Taug has."

"She certainly is," replied Abner stoutly, "and she's a mighty capable girl all around, Seth. Fact is, I reckon she's got more real gumption than Salviny has, though she don't act so jack-in-the-boxy all the time, and she don't set so much store by the dollar and all its relations and friends. And I ain't aiming to go into the restaurant business, Seth, though I reckon Lucy's going to be a great help to me one way or another.

"I ain't making no mistake, Seth, no more than Ned Trumbell did when he married Matildy Jenks. Ned wan't exactly what you'd call fast—courted Matildy for upward of three years and never got up his courage to pop the question. Nacherly, Matildy begun to get nervous, and she done everything normal to encourage Ned, and that's saying a good deal, because a girl can bring a powerful lot of influence to bear in a case of that kind. But nothing seemed to loosen Ned's tongue on the subject of matrimony. So she put her wits to work—she was a pretty cute girl—and begun to train the family parrot.

"Well, one evening Ned called and talked politics and crops and such stuff as usual until almost nine o'clock; and then Matildy went out of the room, leaving him alone with the parrot. Well, just as the clock stopped striking nine, that bird leaned over toward Ned and he says, confidential like, 'Ned, dear, Matildy's willing!' and Ned he seen a great light, and he popped the question when Matildy came back, innocent as a tadpole. And he never regretted it, because Matildy kept right on stimulating him in one way or another when he slowed down, and all in all Ned's getting along fine. Reckon Lucy 'll be a good deal like that, Seth."

Thus matters stood until one evening Lucy unexpectedly discovered Mr. William Samson, traveling salesman for the Weltover Hardware Corporation, seated at one of the tables at which she waited at supper.

"Ah, there, little girl," observed Mr. Samson with easy familiarity, "how's Lucy? Prettier than ever, I swear."

"Same old jollier, ain't you, Mr. Samson?" replied Lucy agreeably; for he was a regular if not very frequent guest at Taug's Hotel. "But what brings you back to Windham so soon? You was here only two weeks ago. Seth Doolittle ain't all out of hoes and eggbeaters already, is he?"

"Huh! No chance! Why," went on Mr. Samson gallantly, "what would I come back for but to see you, Lucy?"

"G'wan! How's the missis and the kids?"

Mr. Samson grinned. "All right. Well, seriously, Lucy you'll be surprised when I tell you what I did come back for so soon. I came a hundred miles out of my way just to see Abner Hitchcock."

Lucy was keenly interested. "Is that so? What do you want to see Abner for?"

"To hear some more of his stories," replied Mr. Samson, with a chuckle. "Why Lucy, that man would make the finest traveling salesman in the world if he had any head for business. I did twenty per cent better business this last trip on Abner's stories."

"Why—how do you mean?"

"Told 'em to my customers. Put 'em in good humor. Abner's got a good line—new. Of course," added Mr. Samson modestly, "I know just when to tell 'em and maybe I dress some of 'em up a little. But I'll give Abner most of the credit."

This intelligence so stunned Lucy that all she could say was:

"Blueberryraspberryapplelemonercustard pie?"

"Blueberry."

Lucy whisked away. In the tumult of her mind indignation was foremost. Here was another who could profit by Abner's gift without compensating him! But she quickly suppressed this feeling. Perhaps she could learn something to Abner's advantage.

She delivered an unusually large wedge of pie to Mr. Samson. "That's the girl," said Mr. Samson approvingly and attacked the tip of it. "By the way, I suppose Abner's here somewhere?"

"No. He don't work here now."

"What?" Mr. Samson laid down his fork in consternation. "You don't mean to say he's left Windham?"

"Oh, no. Guess you'll find him down to Seth Dolittle's store."

"I thought that young man was a fixture here!"

Lucy rapidly sketched the course of Abner's recent history.

"Sam Taug's a fool," said Mr. Samson when she had finished. "But Abner's well rid of the old man's daughter, I should say."

Lucy blushed. "Well, it's all right with me," she said. His practiced eye saw her brief confusion and noted the ring on her third finger. His felicitations were immediate and hearty.

"Abner's all right," he said, "a darn good fellow." Then, his pie finished, he went out to join the circle in Seth Doolittle's store.

Late that evening when he returned he was waylaid by Lucy on the front porch and the two held long and earnest converse in guarded tones. When they finished Mr. Samson was feeling his fatherliest.

"Leave it to me, little girl," he said, patting the back of Lucy's hand. "I'm a great little fixer. And I've got some good friends up there to Crystal Springs."

V.

ANOTHER two weeks rolled by and the date of Salviny's and Tom's wedding was drawing near. They had agreed upon a short engagement, both, perhaps, having a half-conscious idea that it would be well to forestall changes of mind. And Tom had promised a bang-up wedding trip—in nothing less than the new car.

"I'll get one with a convertible body, Salviny," he said, "and after we've had our trip in her I'll use her in my business. And we'll go up to Crystal Springs first off and stop at the Breevort—sweliest house there. How does that strike you?"

It struck Salviny as quite the thing. No Windham girl, so far as she could remember, had ever made so much of a splash with her wedding journey.

Then four days before their wedding day the village was deeply and enjoyably shocked. Lucy Wilmer and Abner Hitchcock disappeared simultaneously and, it would seem, together.

"All I know about it," said Seth Doolittle in his capacity as postmaster, "is that Abner gets this letter from Crystal Springs and he and Lucy read it together over there in the corner and they both seem sort of excited and glad about something, and Abner gives her a squeeze, like, and they goes out together and that's everything I seen or heard."

It was all anybody knew, but that did not still the buzz of scandal. Sam Taug was especially severe.

"Should I have kept her here if I'd known she would do such a thing?" he asked. "No. Nor him either. This is a respectable hotel and I don't want none but respectable people around here. I tell you, Tom, Salviny showed fine judgment when she give that feller the gate. And she was right about Lucy, too. I didn't like to believe her when she told me that Lucy wasn't just the girl to have around the hotel, but now I see that she was right. Trust the women in a case of that kind."

Salviny outwardly took smug satisfaction in the vindication of her judgment, but inwardly she was a little disturbed. She had not thought that Abner possessed the gumption or romantic feeling to elope and his astonishing action caused her a twinge of doubt as to the wisdom of her change of mind. She could not imagine Tom eloping for all his hustle. Perhaps if she had stayed true to Abner—?

But it was too late now and so she and

Tom were married, giving the village a change of subject. With the new car rattling bravely under its weight of trunks they started off to spend the first quarter of the honeymoon in Crystal Springs, quite the fashionable place to spend a honeymoon or any other holiday.

At the close of a long day of dusty and somewhat wearisome travel they rolled into Crystal Springs and came to a squeaky halt before the Breevort. But both put the best foot foremost when they sallied into the cool marble interior and approached the desk.

Suddenly a familiar voice reached their ears. They turned and saw Abner Hitchcock sitting off at one side in a large easy chair, one of a circle of affluent looking men.

A little back of Abner stood Lucy, waiting, apparently, until he had finished his discourse. Both were turned sufficiently away from the newcomers so that they had not seen them enter.

Salviny clutched Tom's arm and drew him behind a pillar. Their bellboy, nothing loath, paused to listen, too. From time to time Salviny peeked, taking in the full details of the new and snappy clothes that both Abner and Lucy wore.

"Yes, that was right smart of a hail storm," Abner was saying, "but still and all I recollect one time down to Cotton Hollow when we had a hail storm that I guess prob'ly was a mite harder than that one. You see, I took particular notice of it because I had a flat roof on the ell to my house and the hail came down so thick and fast I begun to be afraid the weight of ice on the roof might cave it in so I went up to a gable window to take a look at it.

"But, shucks, I needn't have worried because there wa'n't a particle of ice on it —no, it melted just as quick as it hit the roof because it was a-coming down so thick and hard onto the tin that the tin was hot with the friction and there was a stream of boiling water pouring off one corner of the roof. And then by and by the roof got so hot that the solder begun to run and first thing I knew the tin was all loose and the wind was blowing it off across the medders and then I was afraid the house would get pretty wet inside. But no, it didn't, on account of the hail getting so thick about then that the friction of the hailstones rubbing together in the air just nacherly turned them stones into steam and it blew away like a cloud without wetting the house a particle. Yes, take it by and large, I suppose that hail storm was a leetle more severe than the one you speak of."

During the comment that followed this narrative Salviny caught at the bellboy's arm.

"Who's that woman with Mr. Hitchcock?" she demanded.

"Her? Why, she's his wife."

"Are they married?"

"Married?" The bellboy regarded her with some suspicion. "Sure they're married. Didn't I see 'em get married right over here in Judge Bradstreet's office?"

Mr. Gilmore interposed. "But what's Mr. Hitchcock doing here, son?" He slipped the boy a quarter.

"Why, he works here. You see, Mr. Samson had him come up here and see the boss and the boss hired him just to set around and tell his funny stories all day. Funny job, ain't it? But he gets good pay for it, all right. He's going to buy a car. And they's a lot of people come here to listen to him and they write and tell their friends about him—especially the drummers—and the reporters come around and write up his stories and that gets the name of the hotel in all the papers. Say, do you know him?"

Salviny rose and took her husband's arm.

"Come, Tom," she said in a low but determined voice. He went, not unwillingly, and they passed out of the hotel, climbed into their car and rattled off down the street.

In the hotel Lucy also laid a firm hand upon her husband's arm. "That will do now, Abner," she said. "Come on out. I want to show you the car we're going to get."

Abner rose. "All right, Lucy," he replied, smiling tenderly upon her. "Whatever you say goes. You're manager from now on."

Protecting Prue

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

Author of "Suitable for Framing," "A Noise in Newboro," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

SANITY RESTORED.

JUST behind Bartley, the smallest laugh tinkled out.

Young Mr. Greer's teeth came together with a snap! Momentarily a rather familiar crimson haze appeared before him; momentarily also he longed to turn and seize the younger Miss Severn and choke her, as a mild punishment for her latest little coup.

For she had managed it and neatly! She had done it again! By the simplest adaptation of ancient police methods, she had delegated him the task of confirming her suspicions, and he had done it well!

"What is wrong, Mr. Greer?" the voice asked anxiously.

"With Prue?"

"With you," the voice said. "I—I that is, I mean—I—I thought you'd left the phone?"

"No!" Bartley said numbly.

"Prue is—all right?"

"Oh, yes."

"What did you want to tell father?"

"Why—nothing of importance," Bartley said. "Nothing that can't wait until I see you in person."

There was a tiny pause again at the other end of the line.

"Perhaps you'd—better run up, then, if it seems safe to leave Prue?" said Mary. "Good-by!"

"Good-by," muttered Bartley.

He hung up the receiver. A minute he stood quite motionless before the receiver and it was in many ways the most remarkable single minute of his entire life.

That voice of Mary Severn's! It was a brook, rippling through lovely woodland.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 16.

It was heaven's own music, coming through soft night. It was—well, it was Mary herself!

Bartley Greer shut his eyes tight and opened them again and stared at the telephone. A dazzling veil seemed to be lifting swiftly from his vision. It was like the passing of a fever!

And as the veil lifted higher, this liberated vision of Bartley's widened dumfoundingly. Beyond any peradventure, Mary was the sweetest, most adorable woman ever born into this world—destined eternally to be as remote from himself as any planet, of course, but no less adorable on that account. And there was a great and confusing sweetness about Mary's sister, too, and there were as well a number of less lovable qualities which whizzed irresistibly into Bartley's consciousness, and there took their permanent place.

Beyond all sense and reason it might be, but five minutes ago—since the thing could be safely conceded in this remarkable minute—he had been madly infatuated with Prudence Severn; whereas now and for all time to come he owned quite honestly to a liking for that undependable young person so very mild that it verged on pure distaste!

She was laughing again.

Her small and graceful body thrown back on the cushions of the divan, she was laughing loudly and mockingly—and the funny thing about it was that, heard by sane ears, it was anything but a musical laugh.

"Bartley, you poor half witted creature!" she cried flatteringly. "You have no brains at all, have you?"

Mr. Greer shook his head.

"If you mean my falling for that, you're right," he said quietly. "But I warn you of one thing, Prudence; that's my last performance along just those lines."

The girl glanced up contemptuously and shook her head.

"No, it's not," she said. "You fall for any old thing, any old time!"

"I assure you—"

"Oh, but you do! I'll prove it to you: you were simple enough to let my man pick your pockets, just as I'd planned."

"Your man!" Bartley gasped. "Do you mean that I've been fool enough to let Rolf go through me and—"

"Rolf?" the young woman cried angrily. "Certainly not! Why, my Rolf—why, how dare you! No, I'm talking about my pickpocket man now, you know. Don't understand, do you? Well, I'll try to make it so clear that even you will get it," Prudence sighed. "You don't know old Jimmy Waters?"

"I do not."

"I do, though. He's a darling, too. He's been doing night police reporting for twenty years and he knows half the crooks in town. You see, I was pretty sure about you, Bartley, but not absolutely sure; but I knew that if you did come from dad you'd be certain to have a supply of new fifty dollar bills concealed somewhere about you, because that's the way dad always draws money from the bank—always in new fifties.

"Well, then," Prudence pursued, "the object of the game was to discover whether you were upholstered with new fifties or not. I tried to have you buy me something yesterday that would bring out one of them, and that didn't work. And then, this morning while I was trying to make you admit that you were on dad's pay roll, the bright idea came.

"So I had you wait at half past four just where you'd be handy and then I found Jimmy Waters and teased him. He didn't a bit want to do it at first, but—oh, he likes me. He looked up his favorite pickpocket and had him go and clean you out as you stood, Bartley—and he telephoned down not three minutes before you arrived, and, surely enough, you were guilty!" the younger Miss Severn stated, with a grin that was both contemptuous and contented. "Then, to make assurance doubly sure, I had you telephone Mary—and that's that!"

She sat back, shaking her head in sweet amazement that one could be so stupid as had been Bartley Greer. And she was right! Young Mr. Greer neither smiled nor scowled, nor asked a single question nor offered a single comment.

"I have grasped it," he said dryly. "Now if you'll be good enough to tell me how I'm to get that money back—"

"Well, you're consistent to the very last!" Prudence said blankly. "One doesn't get back money when a pickpocket has taken it, you know. Anyhow, I stipulated that the poor chap was to keep whatever he found, just for his trouble. And now, Bartley, your usefulness is over and we part, I think."

"Oh, I hope not, Prue," Bartley said, with amazing good cheer. "I'm not bearing any ill will, if that's what you imply. At least, I know when I'm licked. You're the brightest kid I've ever met—too bright for me, apparently. I was a good deal of a dub not to have known it in the first place."

"What new piece of duplicity is concealed in the lovely bouquet?" the younger Miss Severn inquired.

Bartley smiled, winningly, rather wistfully and with all that earlier boyish effect and the smile found rather wondering reflection on Prue's countenance.

"None at all, Prue. I'd—like to keep on knowing you. That's all."

"Without trying to lure me back to the old homestead?" the girl asked curiously.

"Oh—that!" said Bartley, with a despairing shrug which seemed to banish the whole proposition forever.

The subjugation of the male was strong among Prudence's instincts. Not quite deliberately, perhaps, one of the annihilating smiles flashed up at Bartley Greer.

"Well—I don't know, Bart," she murmured. "Of course, it would be a bit difficult to trust you—for a while, anyway, and—" She paused, lips parted in mingling joy and horror as the door opened. "Oh, *Rolf!*" she cried. "Why—why, my poor little baby boy! What have they been doing to you?"

She leaped from her seat and sped across the studio. Young Mr. Greer, with a suppressed snarl, turned also; the fact was that young Mr. Greer had been just developing a new and rather artful line of attack.

Yet as his gaze fell upon Mr. Armstruther, the snarl departed. Rolf, indeed, seemed to have had something done to him! His face was drawn and dazed and rather gray. His great bulk sagged forward, so that his arms swung, ape fashion.

And his knees were not the knees of the old Rolf; these latter had been inclined to a waddling effect; at present they roved about uncertainly in a sort of weaving stagger. Add to these the details that Rolf's eyes were red, his face dirty and his hair disheveled, and it was utterly clear that something had been done to him.

"Why, poor little lamb!" Prudence was crying excitedly. "Whatever—"

"Work!" came thickly from Rolf's throat as he sagged into a chair.

"You've really been—"

"Dock!" Rolf croaked in further explanation. "S-s-steady—work!"

Momentarily, Prudence could no more than caress his hair. Mr. Armstruther rolled up his eyes adoringly.

"For—you!" he breathed, and closed the eyes. "Worthy—of you, dear! Worthy!"

The younger Miss Severn came suddenly to life.

"Well, if that's the way they've been treating you—Wayne! Haven't we any liquor? He needs brandy—or something! He—why, he's exhausted! He'll faint in another minute! Why don't you answer me, Wayne?

"I'll make you some tea, honey! I'll wash your face and comb your hair, dear! I'll—oh, dear! What have they done to you? Why did I ever let you—"

Here she vanished into the kitchenette, while Rolf moaned faintly and sagged farther down in his chair, and Bartley Greer turned away in overwhelming disgust. All that ailed the clown was that he'd done half a day of real work! And by lumbering in at just the wrong point he had ruined young Mr. Greer's newest attempt at Prudence and captured every last particle of her attention for himself.

Yes, and he'd go on doing that while he was around—eternally.

"Dick!" snapped Mr. Greer.

There was no response at all from the remote corner. Bartley turned in sudden astonishment—and stared in infinitely greater astonishment. There was a curtain, partly draped across that cozy little nook; now, in whatever way, it had fallen, almost shutting off the corner.

Yet space enough remained that young Mr. Greer was permitted to see his old

friend leaning forward and talking, talking, talking in the lowest of undertones to Miss Wayne Leigh—yes, and to see the impossible way that Wayne was gazing back at him. Knowing Richard's views about women, it couldn't be, of course, and yet—

"*Dick!*" Bartley barked.

Richard Flynn seemed to sense his voice, as something coming from afar. He stirred slightly and frowned. He shook himself and looked blankly at Bartley Greer.

"Oh—huh? Yes! Yes, Bart?"

"Let's go!" Bartley smiled.

"Well, yes—but—"

"Let's go!" Mr. Greer repeated, and ceased smiling.

A great sigh made its way out of Richard Flynn's anatomy. He blinked and turned back to Miss Leigh. He murmured. Miss Leigh murmured. A perfectly visible wrench and Richard arose.

"All right—Bart," he said uncertainly.

Wayne was gazing after him with a distinctly strange expression. In his chair Rolf moaned again and then opened an eye by way of learning why the moan brought no more prompt response. In the kitchen Prudence was fairly cackling her anxiety —and Bartley had steered Richard Flynn into the corridor and now they were moving downstairs.

Further, he steered him into the room below and there he demanded bluntly:

"What the devil's the matter with *you?*"

"With—huh—me?" Richard said huskily and then smiled very faintly. "Bart, I didn't—didn't know there was a woman like Wayne on God's green footstool!"

"Wayne!" Bartley gasped. "Did you get to the 'Wayne' stage in fifteen minutes?"

"What? I—say, that is kind of queer, isn't it?" Mr. Flynn admitted. "Y' know, that never struck me, Bart! I—there must be—some women a man gets acquainted with quicker than—he does with other women! It seems just as if I'd known—"

"Say! You're not boob enough to think you've fallen in love with that black little rat?" Bartley asked harshly.

Richard gulped hard and glared at his friend.

"Here! None of that 'black little rat' stuff!" he shouted. "She's no black little rat! She's the most wonderful—" And he ceased his glaring and proffered for Bartley's savage inspection a vast and foolish smile. "No, I'm not in love with her. That's all rot. Only—well, there are mighty few women I've ever liked, even a little, and she happens to be one of them."

He thudded into a chair. He looked emptily up at Bartley Greer and smiled on; and Mr. Greer, with an exasperated snort, slammed another chair to his side and then sat down.

"Get that piffle out of your system and come down to cases!" he said roughly. "I thought I didn't need you on this job. I do!"

"Eh?"

"Yes! That little devil upstairs thinks she has me licked cold. I don't blame her, but she's wrong nevertheless!" clicked from Bartley Greer. "*Now* I'm going to can that tame elephant of hers and put her in her own home, if it's the last thing I do on this earth."

"Tame elephant?"

"Rolf Armstruther! The wreck that just tottered in up there!"

"Yes—yes, I know now who you mean," Richard beamed apologetically. "Just a second there I—I was thinking of something else. I know now. Wayne was speaking of him. Wayne said—"

"Damn Wayne!" Bartley Greer thundered. "Can you pay attention to what I'm trying to say or can't you?"

The words wheezed in his throat. Mr. Greer devoted another ten seconds, also, to glowering at his old friend. Things had indeed changed since their arrival this time in New York. The woman-proof Mr. Greer had passed through a siege of insanity—mercifully ended now in a complete cure—which was bad enough.

But that the invulnerable Richard should have succumbed to an attack apparently more sudden and violent passed all reason. Subconsciously, this last hour, a shaken Bartley had been leaning more heavily than ordinarily on the usually iron-nerved Flynn, and he was swaying like a reed.

"I can!" he said rather shortly, although instantly the smile returned.

"All right, then. Dick, I'm going to bust that romance wide open, if I have to use dynamite!"

"Why?" Richard asked, somewhat sadly.

"Say, have you gone clean daft?"

"I have not, but—what strikes me, Bart: it 'll hurt the kid!"

"Let it!"

"And after all, the only thing she's guilty of is being in love with Rolf," Richard sighed dreamily. "That's no criminal offense."

"What? If the Legislature could look him once over, they'd pass a law making it a capital offense."

"No, Bart, I honestly think that falling in love—"

He subsided, smiling afresh, before Bartley's glare.

"Richard, has your brain really turned to mush or can you pull it together enough to help me?" Bartley snarled.

"I've always been able to do that."

"Very well. I thought that all this was child's play, and it isn't. Now I'm going to wade in on the assumption that it's a man's job. First, I'll get a few hundred dollars for emergencies. Then I want you to—"

Richard Flynn, so to speak, had sobered up with a crash. One jerk, and he was bolt upright and staring.

"How will you get a few hundred dollars?" he rasped.

"I'm going to—get it!"

And Mr. Greer smiled oddly, to Richard's thinking in an evil and ominous way—and there followed a small pause, of a sort that had occurred once or twice before in their association.

These gentlemen, be it recalled, were essentially soldiers of fortune. They had met upon the field of battle and in company of a sort where one asked no pointed questions of the next man's past.

Perhaps each had assumed in the beginning that the other had good and sufficient reasons for being in just that company; perhaps neither of them had assumed anything of the kind. But the solid fact remained that for several years they had been judging each other solely by the deeds of the moment; and Bartley Greer had never inquired as to any acts of Richard Flynn's before their acquaintance began, nor had Richard even so much as hinted at curiosity about the past of Bartley Greer.

All of which, perchance, probably presupposes that each assumed conversation of that character to be of the sort better left unopened.

"Barty, don't do that!" Flynn said earnestly.

"Bah!"

"No—I mean it, old man. We've pulled some rough ones on occasion, but we've never—"

"Will you please let me attend to the money end of this myself?" Mr. Greer snapped. "If I was ape enough to let 'em pick my pockets, maybe I've waked up enough now to fill 'em again! Now, as soon as I've collected the coin, I want you to meet me at—wait a minute! Do you remember Steve Dolton?"

"The crook we met trying to escape—"

"Oh, he wasn't a crook in the ordinary sense; he's a pretty decent chap," Bartley said impatiently, and he seemed to have grown quite liberal in his views this early evening. "Well, Steve's got a restaurant up in Eleventh or Twelfth Street somewhere. That's where I want you to meet me at eight o'clock!"

"That's pretty early."

"Why?"

"Well—you see, I'm going back upstairs for dinner, Bart!" Mr. Flynn explained, and flushed a trifle under the tan. "Wayne asked me to do that and—"

"All right. So much the better. That will give you a chance to keep an eye on the kid until about twenty minutes of eight. Then start up to meet me. Come downstairs with me now and we'll see if we can find Steve's address in the telephone book."

As they parted at the door, the address located, Richard made one more attempt.

"Bart, old man," he pleaded, "we can do without money. We've got forty dollars or more between us, and when you

explain the thing to her father he will come across with more, if you need it. Only *don't—"*

Snorting, young Mr. Greer stepped out into the departing sunshine. Hand on knob, Richard Flynn looked after him as he sped to the corner and around it—and then, with a shrug and a shake of the head, Mr. Flynn appeared to dismiss Bartley altogether from his thoughts. An amazing smile suffused his countenance and he mounted the stairs two steps at a time.

The logical thing, young Mr. Greer reflected bitterly as he sat in the dubious Dolton establishment a little before eight, would be for Richard in his present state to fail altogether to put in an appearance. Not that Richard had ever failed in the good old rip-roaring days, when they had been in the habit of sweeping everything before them—but these, emphatically, were not the good old days.

These thoughts, however, did Richard Flynn a grievous wrong. At that very minute he was hurrying down the unlovely block, looking for Dolton's restaurant; and now he found it and cast an eye almost of approval at its dingy front. It was an odd expression for the ostensibly softened Richard to be wearing; Dolton's hinted—and rather accurately—at nothing more exalted than poor food, some dirt and an ideal atmosphere in which to plot robust crime.

The windows were far from clean and the dingy curtains cut off from the street most effectively all view of the interior; and opening the door and stepping into the haze, one knew that Dolton's clientele had no objections to volatilized grease and that, beyond the things fried in it, cabbage was the next most popular dish.

Further, Mr. Greer himself appeared to have taken some color from the surroundings. There was never a trace of the open, boyish quality in the little smile with which he looked up to greet Richard; rather did low, unscrupulous cunning lurk in Greer's eye—and his hat was pulled down and the cigarette drooped from the corner of his mouth, as he stirred absently at a cup of the liquid known here as coffee.

Mr. Dolton himself, after a mighty handshake for Richard and a few words as to the glorious past they had shared, politely drifted back to his counter at the rear, with its coffee urns and its rows of heavy cups and plates. Bartley, a closer inspection of Flynn over, heaved a sigh of relief.

"Over it already, eh?" he muttered.

"Over what?"

"The mush!"

Mr. Flynn failed to reflect the smile.

"If you're talking about Wayne, no!" he said. "I told you before I never knew there was a woman like her alive, Bart. That sticks. Now leave her name out of the conversation, if you have to sneer over it! Did you get money?"

"I did!"

"How much?"

Young Mr. Greer produced a bulging roll of bills and exhibited it.

"Five hundred!"

"Well, I wouldn't flash it in here. There's a dozen of the worst looking hoboes I've ever seen sitting around and we're not armed."

"Oh, *that's* all right!" young Mr. Greer smiled serenely.

"How'd you get it?"

"Do you mean, how did I get away with it?"

"I do."

"Well—I'm sitting here now, am I not?" Bartley smiled. "That answers everything. Now! How about you?"

"Well?"

"Are you yourself again or are you going to burst into tears when I begin to talk about brutal things?"

"Watch me and see!" the altered Richard said briefly. "And this brutal stuff; that's what I want to talk to you about, because I've been doing some planning of my own. This Rolf!"

"Yes!" said Bartley, in mild astonishment.

"You think he's in love with the little kid—Prue?"

"I've had some such impression."

Mr. Flynn's countenance darkened ominously. He leaned across the table with much the expression of the several gentlemen he had so lately been criticizing.

"Well, you've got the wrong dope!" he snarled. "That's all a blind—that stuff about the kid! It's Wayne he's after!"

CHAPTER XIII.

AND AWAY FROM DOLTON'S.

BARTLEY'S eyes opened amazedly.

"What's he after?"

"Wayne!"

"You're crazy!" Mr. Greer said cheerfully.

"Not me!" responded Richard. "I was there for dinner, you know. I went back upstairs as soon as you'd left. I watched him!"

"And—"

"Oh, he kept up the bluff of making love to the kid, of course, but a man that was looking could see, Bart. He *looked* at Wayne—no, I don't say she looked at him; I don't think she did; I don't think she's got any use for him. But a little girl like that isn't safe with an overfed crook like him on her heels.

"Bart!" Richard added, "they made me carve and I had the knife in my hand, and I want to tell you that I never wanted to stick a knife in a man before in all my life, but when I saw the way he was leering at that—that wonderful girl, I came so blamed near dragging it across his throat—"

Emotion choked Richard for a moment. Bartley stared.

"So the question is—never mind about the Prudence kid for a while, Bart; she can wait—the question is what we're going to do to Armstruther!"

Bartley Greer chuckled happily.

"Well, Dicky, now you're beginning to sound like your old self," he said. You've got the right idea and you seem to be warmed up to it. I'm going to do a few little things to Rolf that he'll remember clearly if he lives to be one hundred!"

"Yeh?" came from the corner of Richard's mouth.

"They've banged me around quite a bit, those two have, and now I'm going to do a little banging myself. You see the gentlemen at the two far tables?"

"Certainly!"

"My hired army!" smiled Bartley. "Every one of them with a criminal record, I understand, and every one with a face that'll scare Rolf into a clammy pulp at first glance. What they'll do to Rolf—"

"*All* of 'em?" Flynn gasped.

Despite himself a little shudder ran through Bartley Greer.

"I'm not taking any more chances with this beastly job, Dick!" he announced. "Three or four of them might have been enough, but Steve says this gang hangs out together and they like to work together—and they're not expensive criminals. Did a boy bring Rolf a letter during dinner?"

"Yes!"

"What did he do with it?"

"Well—I was talking to Wayne at the time; Armstruther opened the door and I didn't pay much attention—he read it and seemed to cheer up a bit, if I remember right. He said something to Prudence about getting a better position and she read it, too. Then he stuck it in his pocket."

"Steve wrote the letter," Bartley chuckled. "It was an art-work, too, by the time he was done with it."

"Well, what—"

"Oh, it said the writer was a stevedore boss and that he'd seen Rolf working on the docks this afternoon and got his name and address from Rooney's timekeeper. By the way, I coached the messenger to explain that he'd been to Rolf's and they'd sent him to the flat. Did he do that?"

"I suppose so. He was explaining something. Go on."

"Well, then it said that Rolf was cut out for better things—I had to dictate that part, but Steve wrote it—and if he'd like a job where he could handle men instead of working with them, to come up here at a quarter past eight. That was all, but it 'll get him."

"And what happens when he comes?"

Bartley nodded toward the astounding group by the wall.

"Those are the men he'll try to handle—that's all!"

"Umum," said Richard, and considered them with undisguised satisfaction. "Youre going to croak him?"

"I'm going to do nothing of the sort!" Bartley snapped. "I may be sore on this job, but I haven't turned murderer. No, when he gets here Steve'll switch out the lights when I put up my hand. When they go on again, there'll be several fewer people in here and Armstruther 'll be among the missing. We've got a cellar picked for him, Dick, and he'll stay there just one week!"

"And Bart, before that week's out, Wayne—" Richard began eagerly.

"Before it's out," Bartley broke in, impatiently, "I'll have little Prudence eating out of my hand and back in her own home!"

"Eh?" said Mr. Flynn, without much interest. "How?"

"With lies and deceit and double-crossing and artificial love stuff and all the tricks she has in her own little book!" young Mr. Greer said quite viciously. "And if I'm not good enough to accomplish that in a week I'll go to the old man and admit it and then quit for the first time! I'll get a truck-driver's job or a good, safe place as janitor of a flathouse and settle down just like any other cold fizzle!"

He lit another cigarette. With the first puff, too, he was grinning again.

"But I'll get away with it, Dick," he said confidently. "All we have to do now is sit back and let him fall into the trap—and I guess we'll move over to that table beyond the counter out of sight of the door. I don't want him to see us and start running before the gang can get him."

Humming pleasantly, he led the way. He tilted back in his chair, comfortably, so that one eye could just range above the counter; and the impossible group of thugs noted the move and shifted their own chairs back a little, by way of being ready for action. Richard Flynn smiled his wicked approbation.

"They're going to muss him up some, Bart?"

"I didn't tell 'em to; they probably will," Mr. Greer said, without great concern. "He may put up a fight."

"Well, Bart, if he does and the lights are out—I don't know that I'd want it to get back to Wayne later on—but if he does you don't mind if I mix in and take just one crack at him?"

"Take a dozen, if you like, Dick," Bartley offered magnanimously. "I was jealous of him myself, once upon a time."

The evening thus happily planned for Mr. Armstruther, conversation languished. Bartley smoked complacently and watched the door.

Mr. Flynn, in a more emotional state just now, tried two cigarettes, bit through both of them and ended by rummaging his pockets for a small, dusty square of tobacco, into which he sank his excellent teeth. Then, eyes narrowed, jaw moving mechanically, he too watched the door, with very much the effect of a tiger about to spring upon its prey.

"That clock right, Steve?" Bartley asked suddenly.

"Plumb on the tick, Bart!" said the gentleman behind the counter. "That gets checked up every night by some o' the boys from the railroad yard when they come in for a bite."

"Just quarter past, eh?" Richard mused. "He's not crazy anxious to nail this new job, is he?"

"He'll be here," said Mr. Greer.

The clock moved on, without the slightest regard for the effect its motion might have on either of them. Eighteen—nineteen—twenty minutes past eight, it announced.

"I told the boy to bring back word, whether he'd care to consider the job or not," Bartley said. "And the boy said the only answer was: yes, he'd be up. Did you hear him tell the boy that, Dick?"

"Well—I tell you," Mr. Flynn confessed. "I was talking to Wayne at the time and maybe—here, hold on! Yes, I did hear Armstruther say that!"

"Well, he—he'll be here, then," Bartley muttered.

"The sooner the better!" muttered Richard and considered his hard fist.

"I've slipped up on a lot of little things on this job, but this one's not going to slip!" young Mr. Greer pursued, with the strangest suggestion of a small boy whistling as he passes the graveyard. "Because I've been nervous, y' know—and *that* was be-

cause there was so much woman in the mess and I'm hanged if I'll ever get used to the woman element. But this is he-man stuff —if you can flatter Armstruther enough to call him that—and it's different."

"Umum," said Richard Flynn.

The thoughtless and inconsiderate long hand of Dolton's clock went on and on. Twenty-five minutes past the hour was recorded now—and twenty-eight and twenty-nine. And the door opened and five chairs creaked at once; and more than five sighs followed as the sighers relaxed again. It was, after all, only a rather stupid looking small boy.

In one hand he carried a letter. He looked about vaguely and, unimpressed by the gathering, shuffled then to the shirt-sleeved Mr. Dolton and proffered the envelope. The restaurateur slit it with a greasy carving knife and for some time frowned heavily over the contents.

"This 'll be for you, Bart, huh?" he observed, as he extended an inordinately thick sheet of rough-edged stationery over the corner of the counter.

Bartley accepted it with a neurotic jerk.

"'Dear Mr. Dolton,'" he muttered "'I have been detained. Will you be so very good as to wait for me until nine o'clock?—R. Armstruther!' Well—"

"Whyn't y' bring that in at first, kid?" Dolton queried.

"What d'ye mean at first?" the boy asked.

"Gwan! I seen you standin' across the street near fifteen minutes before y' came in with it!"

"Ah, how d'ye get that way?" the child wondered pertly.

"Where'd you get this, kid?" Mr. Greer put in.

"I was sent t' deliver it."

"Want an answer?"

"For what?"

Color was rising in Bartley's cheeks.

"Who gave you this letter?" he demanded.

"Gave it t' me?" the child echoed.

"It wasn't a lady, was it?" Flynn hazarded. "A young lady—a dark young lady with—"

"Say, that brat's not as dumb as he looks!" said Bartley Greer, rising suddenly and reaching for him. "We'll get to the bottom of this before we let him go and—"

With one small boy pitted against so many active adults, it verged on the incredible, of course, and still—it had come to pass. Young Mr. Greer had extended a swift and powerful hand; over his counter Dolton had also made a commendably nimble swoop in the child's direction; still more, two of the unshaven, scenting the demands of the moment, had plunged forward quickly enough—yet far from being a captive, the stupid-looking little boy was no longer even of that company!

One brief, derisive laugh had come from him and he had finished across the sanded floor, toward the door and through it. Now, rapidly diminishing, the patter of feet was going up the block. On the top step, which he had reached almost before his hand ceased its grasping, Mr. Greer stared after him and then turned back with a scowl.

"Gone around the corner; couldn't catch him now without starting a riot, I suppose," he grunted. "Steve, are you dead sure that boy was hanging around before he came in here?"

"Why, absolutely, Bart!" said Mr. Dolton. "I lamped him first when he picked up a cigarette butt and lit it, quite some time ago. I was wondering who he was, because I know most of the kids in the neighborhood now—gettin' to be a regular little home body. Seemed to me he was on them steps across the way and watchin' the warehouse clock on the corner, and just about the time it struck half-past eight he got up and—"

"All right—somethin's gone wrong again, then!" Bartley gritted out, with a wild little smile. "Come on, Dick!"

"Well, ain't you waitin' for this bird?" Dolton inquired.

"No! If he should happen to come in, you know what to do with him, Steve. You can't mistake him. Dick!"

Mr. Flynn, in some bewilderment, permitted himself to be dragged from his chair. They reached the street almost at a run.

"But he may—may still be here!" Richard protested, as they sped up the

block. "The letter may be on the level and—"

"Say! That letter's written on Prue's stationery and that's conclusive proof to me that every word of it's a damned lie!" Bartley said, viciously. "I saw her scribbling letters on this same stuff yesterday and wondered why she didn't use cardboard and be done with it. It's probably Armstruther's writing, but it's Prue's paper and that lying little fiend 'd never permit it to be soiled with a word of truth!"

"Even so, you may be wrong," Richard urged earnestly, as they hurried along. "Bart, I think you misjudge that little girl. I think you misjudge all women, if it comes to that. I think—"

"No you don't; you just rave!" Bartley interrupted, bitterly and wearily. "The whole works is shot to pieces again, fast enough! I—I can't get it! Nothing just like this ever happened to me before, Dick. It makes no difference whether I plant a thing or she plants it—I'm the goat just the same in either case. We've been setting there—and across the street that little snipe was waiting to stall us off another half hour."

"But why should Prue—"

"Because she's marrying him, of course!" Bartley raged. "She's marrying him at this minute!"

One commanding hand went up to stay the course of a rocking taxicab. Richard Flynn looked up strangely, his lips pursed, hope struggling in his eye with a certain private fury of his own.

"I don't believe it," said he, "but if it's so I'll work a month to buy 'em a nice present! I'll—hey!"

The last word came as Bartley hurled him bodily into the cab and snarled the address of his temporary home at the driver. After this, Bartley folded his arms and set his jaw and rode, chest heaving, for several blocks in silence. Then:

"That's the end of even relatively gentle measures!" he barked.

"Of—of—" Richard asked vaguely, emerging reluctantly from a new dream.

"That's what I said!" pursued Mr. Greer, and gripped his friend's knee so violently that he winced. "I was willing to lock up Armstruther and work along on the idea that Prudence is, after all, a girl. She's not!

"So far as I'm concerned, she's a sexless devil!" he continued, and it was plain that more recent events had done nothing at all toward softening him or calming him. "I'll deal with her accordingly!"

"How do you—deal with a sexless devil?"

"Well, I was hired to watch this one, and now I'll *do* that! If she happens still to be in that flat, she'll stay there and I'll stay there too! Permanently! I'm going to eat and sleep there, live there, with the door locked and the key in my pocket!

"I'm going to stay until she's ready to go home!"

"She's not sexless enough to stand for all that!" Mr. Flynn said, emphatically. "And anyhow, whatever she is, she's not the main thing in that flat, Bart. She's only a guest of Wayne's and you've got to consider Wayne. The proprieties—"

"We're past all those now. First I'm going to knock Armstruther cold!"

"That's not a bad idea, but—"

"And you'll have to see to getting him to a hospital and scaring him into keeping his mouth shut. Tell him I've killed a dozen men so far and there's no doubt I'll get him if he bleats about his beating. Then I—let's see."

A dreadful sanity was upon Richard Flynn this evening—upon Richard who usually leaped into the maddest adventures with a gay laugh.

"You're talking wild, boy!" he sighed.

Bartley turned and grinned at him, and the grin was a trifle more optimistic and less savage.

"I know it, and it's a darned good thing!" he observed. "All our best stunts have been put over when we went clean wild, Dick!"

The taxi stopped. With a bound Mr. Greer was out of it, with Richard at his heels. The driver, just then consulting the meter and preparing to speak, stared after them and then shrugged and sat back.

The familiar stairs they negotiated more rapidly than usual, and Mr. Greer at least had made several rapid trips up those

flights in the last two days. Past his own little used room they raced and upward, two steps at a time, and stopped momentarily.

For Prudence or Wayne had another caller this evening.

Leaning on his cane with one hand while with the other he pressed the button of the apartment, he was an extremely well-dressed young man, some years short of thirty. His modish hat set perfectly on his well-shaped head; his expensive clothes might not have left the presser's iron ten minutes ago; conspicuously, he wore white spats. There was a chilly and aristocratic quality to his eye, too, as he viewed the approaching pair. Young Mr. Greer looked at him just once and laid his own thumb on the button, and the stranger stepped back and assisted him in listening to the faint, distant bzzzz!

Fifteen seconds and Mr. Greer pressed again. There was no sound of steps within, no sound of chattering girlish voices. The stranger smiled slightly.

"Gone, I fancy!" he observed

"Maybe!" said Bartley Greer, and placed his shoulder most informally against the door and shoved!

It was a big shoulder, with much muscle in the body behind it, and a light door. Straining wood squeaked its faint protest; there was a little crackling of splinters as the nosing of the lock gave way. A jerk at the knob and Bartley Greer had thrust back the door and was striding inward, with Richard just behind and after Richard coming the immaculate stranger, whose eyes had grown round and who appeared to have been stirred out of a chronic apathy.

"Er—just why did you do that?" he asked amazedly. "Why—"

Bartley failed to hear. Bartley was across the studio by this time and looking into the kitchenette. It was empty. The bedroom doors stood slightly ajar and with an extremely perfunctory knock young Mr. Greer stalked into the nearer of them.

It was Prue's. The hat she had worn yesterday lay on the bed, with several other hats. Four gowns of costly and elaborate make had been thrown, helter-skelter, on the same bed—and there seemed to have been a rain of shoes and a mild sprinkling of gloves and waists.

The closet, standing open and empty as the kitchenette, gave the answer. Clothes-hangers tilted at various angles were on the hooks; clothes-hangers lay about the floor of the closet, too, but never a stitch of clothing remained on one of them. Prudence, beyond all question, had left suddenly!

A growl, and Bartley had whirled about, all but upsetting the stranger, who was visibly trying to say something, and tramped his rapid way into Miss Leigh's room and straight to the curtained shelf. No such turmoil had taken place here as in Prudence's quarters, but the effect was quite the same. An ancient smock, a rather worn little silk gown, were all that remained on Wayne Leigh's collection of hangers. She, too, was gone!

"See here, sir!" the stranger shouted. "What the devil d'ye mean by all this?"

"What?" Mr. Greer roared at him. "Who are you?"

The stranger backed three paces with astonishing promptness.

"Well—er—my name is Sneath, of course. Winfred Sneath and—"

"The rich one?" escaped Mr. Flynn.

"What? I suppose so. I—"

"Well, what do you know about that!" mused Richard. "I saw your picture in the paper, once when I was down in Argentine and I wondered how it felt to inherit fifty million dollars. I mean, you didn't look as if it had excited you—"

"Never mind that now!" the stranger snapped. "As a friend of Miss Severn's, I insist upon knowing what you mean by breaking in here!"

At least Bartley Greer had learned a little from the distressing events with which his last few days had been crowded. He did not leap on Winfred Sneath and take out upon him some of the hot fury he felt just then. Nay, Bartley forced a smile.

"Well, if you're a friend of Miss Severn's, so are we," he said, easily enough. "We had an idea that she was in trouble of some sort. That's really all."

Following this, however great the effort, he beamed—and the effect was most satisfactory. The well-dressed person thrust

out a hand and shook Bartley's, himself smiling.

"Er—charmed—all that!" he murmured. "No, Prue's not in trouble—not in what they commonly call trouble, at all events. I fancy she's just gone, she and Wayne!"

"But you don't happen to know where?"

"Why, of course I do," the other said, quite unexpectedly. "She's on my yacht. The Myrma. You've heard of her, I imagine? Bought her two years ago from the good old impoverished Duke of—"

"On your *yacht?*" Bartley cried. "What in blazes is she doing on your yacht?"

Mr. Sneath laughed heartily.

"Sounds odd, I know, but it's quite all right, old chap," he said. "I've known Prue ever since she was a baby and I wasn't a lot more myself. Families have always been more or less friends, of course, but I've always been a bit soft on Prue, even if she couldn't see me."

He hesitated and stayed the flow of confidences. "That is to say, she knows mighty well—and I know mighty well!—that when she begins to wheedle she's bound to get what she wants. So when she asked for the yacht, it was hers!"

"You—you gave it to her?" cried Bartley Greer.

"I lent it to her. She's boss while she's aboard, be sure of that. I gave Ordway, my captain, instructions to that effect and he'll follow 'em. He knows Prue and he is as silly about her as the rest of us, I suppose. One thing about Prue—"

Bartley's hand on his shoulder gave him pause again.

"Friend," Bartley said, somewhat thickly, "you don't happen to know just *why* she wanted a yacht this afternoon?"

"Why—yes, of course I know," Mr. Sneath replied. "She wanted it for her honeymoon!"

CHAPTER XIV.

LOOKING SEAWARD.

THERE were blood vessels in Bartley Greer's temples and a rather prominent vein in his forehead. On very rare occasions these swelled visibly. They swelled now, for it was indeed a rare occasion!

"Prue's—not married?" Mr. Greer gasped.

"To be sure. How the deuce would one have a honeymoon without getting married?" Sneath inquired.

"In various ways; and if she's been listening to the rotten teachings of this infernal Leigh woman she—"

"Hey! Hey!" Mr Flynn put in, angrily.

"Oh, dry up!" Bartley snarled. "Was it—was it Armstruther?"

"Oh, you know him? Yes, naturally, it was Armstruther. Demented about the silly ass, Prue is—she has been for weeks, and that's a long time for Prue to stay demented about any one."

"Yes—yes!" Mr. Greer said, as from a great distance. "When did the ceremony take place, if there was a ceremony?"

"Well, there was, of course, but I'm blest if I know when they ran it off," he confessed a trifle blankly. "In fact, I didn't waste much breath asking questions; and Prue talked pretty rapidly and she's not any too easy to understand over the telephone. Main thing was that she wanted the old tub for her honeymoon and she wanted it quick.

"Sometime or other I must have promised her the yacht whenever she wanted to use it, for she reminded me of that—and the upshot of the whole thing was that when I said she was lying at anchor and could have steam up in an hour, the kid shrieked with joy and swore she'd kiss me a thousand times the next time we met. Reward enough in its way, eh? Well—"

"Wait a minute. This yacht—about its stores. Is it provisioned for a long trip?"

"It is."

"Enough to get to a Russian port?"

Mr. Sneath's eyes opened.

"Why in the world should any one want to go to a Russian port?" he asked.

"*Is it?*" Bartley Greer barked.

"Yes, of course. Or an African port or a Chinese port, if it comes to that. Been contemplating a jolly little ramble around the world with a few friends, for several weeks, and they've got the fresh meat all frozen in the refrigerating plant and—"

"What time did the kid telephone you?"

"Eh? It must have been about four o'clock."

Mr. Greer's eyes narrowed.

"They weren't married this morning, because they were talking then about getting a license. And they weren't married at half past five this afternoon, because, that's when Armstruther came back here—and she hadn't seen him since morning. The license bureau was closed long before that and they couldn't get 'emselves legitimately married without a license."

"Well—no, apparently not."

"So if they're on your damned yacht now, they're there in a highly unmarried state!"

Mr. Sneath considered and shook his head.

"No, you're wrong about that, I'm quite sure. Prue thinks she's advanced and so on, but she wouldn't go to such lengths because—"

"Where is this yacht?"

Mr. Sneath smiled.

"Well, that, of course, is a bit difficult to say. The last week, she's been anchored in the Hudson off One Hundred and Fortieth Street, at the yacht club mooring. But if Prue's moving as rapidly as her room would seem to indicate, I'd say she might be halfway across the Atlantic by this time!" Mr. Sneath chuckled. "Most amazing girl and always was—Prue! Can't ever guess what she'll do, even to a yacht."

"Your captain hadn't clearance papers?"

Mr. Sneath looked somewhat perplexed. "Well, now, let me see. I believe he had!"

"For what port?"

Mr. Sneath, who obviously left the finer details of ocean travel to his subordinates, looked even more vague.

"Why, Southampton, I suppose, old chap. That's where we intended starting for to-day, originally—quite a gang of us, you know. Then old Nesbit tried to shine at polo and snapped a bone in his wrist, and he insisted on sticking in town until the beastly thing had begun to knit properly. So rather than leave him behind—"

Mr. Sneath came to a halt. For the first time, it appeared, he became aware of the emotional hurricane raging just behind Bartley Greer's countenance. His eyes opened widely. "Well, but—look here!" he exclaimed. "It's not possible that you're another one of Prue's victims, is it?"

Bartley laughed shortly.

"Not the way you mean, at any rate!" he muttered. "Not—" and his words died out as he considered thoughtfully the rather savage visage of Richard Flynn. "Had I better tell her father?"

"That she got away from you again?" Richard asked.

"That's true, too!" Mr. Greer muttered angrily. "All right, then! Let's start!"

As concerned Bartley Greer and his friend, the hard staring Mr. Sneath had ceased to exist. The ostensible protector of Prudence made the door with four strides and passed through—and now they were descending stairs again, and at the top Mr. Sneath stared numbly downward after them.

"There's a yacht club mooring somewhere around Riverside Drive and One Hundred and Fortieth Street!" Mr. Greer informed the driver. "Get there!"

Very promptly the taxi clattered into action. Bartley Greer, rather curiously, seemed to have discarded all the tense effect as he landed on the seat. He leaned back easily, thinking hard, until Richard's:

"Getting ready for business this time, eh?"

"Why?"

"There's always something doing when you begin to grin like that," said Mr. Flynn, with a flash of the old admiration that had been one factor in keeping them together.

Bartley hitched about and faced his old friend rather gravely.

"There'll be something doing soon now, or I'll be dead—one or the other. And there's no real need for you to be mixed up in it, either, Dick. We're a lot nearer policemen and prisons than we have been at some other times. I've never floundered and fumbled around any job as I have on this one, and I'm telling you frankly that I won't stop at any thing now short of cold-blooded murder. I'll put that damned brat back in her home now if I hang for it.

I'll chase her from here to Singapore, if I have to, but I'll bring her back and—"

A surge of the old, hot variety of fury clogged his throat. Richard's low laugh vibrated strangely in the taxi.

"You won't be alone on the job, and you won't be hauling back just the kid!" he stated. "You can't see through this, even now, Bart; you get one idea stuck in your head and it crowds out everything else. Armstruther isn't carrying off that kid; he's taking Wayne!"

Bartley only laughed.

"I tell you, he is!" snarled the obsessed Richard. "I saw the way he looked at her—and he knows I saw! And, Bart, if ever I have a knife in my hands when I see him again, I'm going to lose myself. I'll—"

"I wouldn't!" Bartley chuckled. "Anyway, you'd have to get a pole-ax or a saber to prod into a vital spot on Armstruther. What time did you leave the flat when you came up to meet me?"

"About half past seven."

"Umum! Took Armstruther five minutes to write that note and perhaps another five to find the boy. Prue had her packing done by that time, from the general look of things," Bartley mused. "I'm assuming, you see, that the dear child had her whole cheerful plan outlined by the time you were in the street. Then there's next to no doubt that she managed to have a private subway in operation or an airplane on the roof, so it hardly took them more than half an hour to get uptown—and it's quarter past nine now. She's sailed by this time."

"I don't believe it! I won't believe it! I don't believe Wayne 'd ever—" Mr. Flynn began violently and ended with an almost piteous: "Bart, what 'll we do if she really has sailed?"

Young Mr. Greer looked him over calmly.

"We'll bring that kid back," said he. "That's the beginning and the end of the proposition, and everything in between—we'll bring her back if we keep at it until she's a white-haired old woman and we're chasing her in a couple of wheelchairs. And now that that's settled, just get one word of warning into that poor, addled brain, Dick; have all the fits you like between here and One Hundred and Fortieth Street—only be finished by the time we land there. We're going to need our heads."

This delivered, Mr. Greer sat back and hummed a little tune—which by the way was the same little love song. Oddly, he had just caught himself wishing that Mary Severn, instead of her father, had answered the telephone—had caught himself wishing other odd things, too—had caught himself wondering whether, after all, this soldier-of-fortune business was the best one for a young man who, in the nature of things, must settle down some time or other.

One really doesn't work up in the soldier-of-fortune industry to the point of turning one's business into a million dollar corporation or of selling out at a profit to a group of faithful employees. In fact, viewing the proposition in the peculiarly dispassionate way of which Bartley seemed capable this evening, one does not accumulate enough to—

"Is this the place?" the driver inquired, as he stopped near a little flight of wooden steps leading to a plank walk that stretched riverward with the hazy white bulk of a house down at the water's edge.

"This seems to be the place," Mr. Greer responded, as he stepped down and bestowed ten of his presumably ill-gotten dollars on the man.

"You can't get down to the club tonight, boss, if that's where you're goin'. The gate's locked."

"We'll get down," Bartley said serenely. "Farewell."

The gate indeed was locked, and it was a fan-shaped affair of stout pickets, extending forbiddingly beyond either side of the plank walk. Young Mr. Greer gripped the pickets and swung quite easily through the air, meeting Richard as he negotiated the other side in similar fashion. Much as if nobody ever had bothered to build a gate at that particular point, they hurried down the walk—down more steps—down to the wide plank flooring at the water level. And there they halted abruptly as a big form loomed before them and a hard voice min-

gled with the gentle lapping of the river's wavelets.

"Hey, there! You ain't allowed down here!"

"The night watchman?" Bartley queried.

"I certainly am, and—"

"The tender from Mr. Sneath's yacht is waiting for us," said Mr. Greer. "Why did you have your gate locked?"

"The Myrma's tender?"

"Of course!"

"It ain't waiting for you, mister. The Myrma went down the river more'n an hour ago."

"She *sailed?*"

"She sure did!" said the watchman.

"But she can't have done that, you know! She's got our baggage aboard. She—she didn't go without her party?"

"I couldn't say," the watchman grinned, less ferociously. "Couple o' girls and a big man went aboard a little after eight. That's all I seen. I should say they must 'a' had the anchor up about as soon as they did the tender."

Even in the gloom one could sense the vastness of the annoyance that was Mr. Greer's.

"Well, it was done for a joke, of course, but I'm too tired to see the funny side of it to-night," he muttered. "Upon my word, I think we'll let them have their confounded cruise to themselves and—oh, well, we can't do that, of course. I say! Find me a motorboat, will you?"

"To catch Sneath's yacht?"

"Naturally!"

The watchman scratched his head.

"Well, I dunno," he muttered. "That 'd take some boat, mister; th' old Myrma dropped away from here like she was going to a fire. 'Nother thing, this ain't a boat livery. There's nothing but private craft here."

"I don't care a rap what's here! Get me a boat and somebody to run it, I tell you, and it 'll be worth your while. Here! I'd better make it worth your while now, eh? There's twenty to start you moving—and I'll hand a hundred to the fellow that puts me alongside Sneath's boat!"

"Aha!" mused the watchman and smiled. "Well, Madison's Cherokee is tied up here to-night and his mechanic sleeps over the machine shop. I'll see whether he wants to take a chance on getting fired for a hundred dollars. Wait a couple o' minutes."

He hurried away.

Some seven minutes later Bartley Greer and his old associate swirled out into the river, comfortably hunched down behind a windshield, while twenty feet ahead a lean, overalled young man in oilskins went about getting the limit of speed out of twelve cylinders that had been written up repeatedly in the motorboat magazines.

And the limit of speed for these particular cylinders was indeed a thing to set the blood atingle. A wall of water rose on either side of the little boat as she settled down to business and Bartley Greer laughed contentedly.

Flynn failed to laugh.

"What happens when we do overhaul her?" he asked.

"Just exactly what do we do?"

"Yes."

"I haven't a suspicion of an idea," Bartley grinned. "We're going to do just what we've done several times before: get our hands on the goods first and then find out how we make the getaway with them. There's only one thing I can guarantee, Dick: *I'm going to take that kid home!*"

"And Wayne!"

"And Wayne, if you can make her come."

"That's just what I've been wondering," Flynn said feverishly. "How much influence that fat crook really has over her! Y' know, Bart, once or twice I kind of thought he had some sort of hypnotic—"

The Cherokee's driver pushed the throttle to the very top just then, drowning all other sounds in the roar. Mr. Greer sat back with a small sigh of relief.

He was not greatly interested in Wayne Leigh or in the astonishing effect she seemed to have upon his old friend. He was not even interested in the peculiar Prudence, save as a parcel of humanity which he positively was about to return to its proper guardian.

Strange it might be, but even in this,

which should have been a thrilling moment, his thoughts roamed back to Mary Severn —her eyes, her hair, her wonderful voice, her whole wonderful self—Mary—

Richard was amusing himself by pounding one clenched fist against the other palm.

"Bart!" he shouted. "If Armstruther shows his face, whatever else we do, I want one whack at him!"

"All right," Bartley responded wearily. "Where are we now?"

"Just went through the Narrows, boy—forty miles an hour or so. The way she's stepping out now, we ought—what's the engineer pointing at?"

Young Mr. Greer squinted ahead and then stood up.

"Those are the Myrma's lights, I guess!" he cried.

The engine ceased its ear-splitting din quite suddenly.

"Do we run right alongside or do we sneak down on this boat?" the driver asked briefly and intelligently.

"I think we'll do some sneaking," smiled Mr. Greer. "Let's see if there's a ladder or a rope or anything else that 'll get us aboard quietly. You'd better take your money now."

The driver took it. The Cherokee swirled on smoothly, almost soundlessly. The lights came nearer and nearer; they bobbed sharply as they caught the edge of the Myrma's wake and Bartley stared ahead with deepest interest.

Decidedly, she was the sort of craft that might be owned by a man worth fifty millions—and by few less favored. Not a large vessel, she made up in lines what she lacked in size. Infinitely graceful, she was not fifty yards ahead of them now, her white hull moving smoothly as any ghost and—

"Say! *What* do you know about that?" Mr. Greer cried, softly and delightedly, and pointed at the length of Jacob's ladder near the stern.

"Mussy way for a private yacht captain to be leaving port," Richard commented.

"Well, let's not criticize him," Bartley grinned. "Let's regard it as a dispensation. You—whatever your name is!"

"What?" said the driver.

"You stick close alongside and in about ten minutes, if luck's with us, I hope to come over that side again with a lady."

"With two ladies," Richard corrected.

"Right!" said the driver.

Wind whistling softly past him, young Mr. Greer reached out for the ladder and caught it. Teeth visible in a happy grin, he climbed to the Myrma's deck level, peered about cautiously and grinned even more widely.

It was passing strange; perchance it indicated that, more polite methods abandoned at last, fortune had decided to favor him—but the cheering fact remained that, from this point, there was not a soul in sight on the after deck.

A reassuring hand beckoned to Richard Flynn, whose countenance just then was at the level of Bartley's knees, and Mr. Greer climbed on—up to the white rail he climbed and grasped it and threw a leg over it. And there, thunderstruck, he stood stock still as Richard joined him on the Myrma's deserted deck, and stared.

A sufficiently definite plan had formed in young Mr. Greer's head these last five minutes. He would come face to face with Prudence Severn; with a sad smile he would hear whatever initial remarks she might care to make.

And then he would stay her with the news—and he did that sort of thing rather well—that her aged father, sorely tried, had been stricken down at last; that he was at the point of death and calling for his younger daughter— and that he, Bartley, had been sent to fetch her.

And unless the girl chanced to be a mass of purely egotistical adamant, something like that must surely have worked—and now it was all unnecessary, for over there in the wicker armchair, not twenty-five feet from them as they stood, sat Prudence herself, reading a magazine.

Her back was toward them. She wore the same hat she had worn that morning, and the same woolly sport coat Bartley had seen in the studio; legs crossed, one high-colored shoe swung up and down. Whatever the nature of her reading matter, it was claiming all of Prudence's attention.

Eyes sparkling, Bartley Greer removed his coat. He turned and nodded to Flynn.

"Over her head," he whispered.

"Yes—sure!" breathed Richard. "You hold her while I find Wayne and—"

"Say!" Mr. Greer murmured, and the ferocity of his expression was such as to send apart even the lips of the infatuated Mr. Flynn. "My job's capturing that damned young one and taking her home! You can stay aboard if you want to, once I get her into that motorboat, and cook Armstruther and eat him. But if you crab this with your Wayne stuff I'll choke your fool head off! Now shut up and give me a hand if I need it."

And still the younger daughter of the house of Severn, in all her fancied security, read on.

And Bartley Greer, lightly as any cat, tiptoed on and on toward her. He was fifteen feet away now and she had not turned; he was five feet away—and still she had not moved her head.

So near that he could easily have touched her without reaching out, Bartley paused and grinned. He poised, eyes darting all about for an instant. Even now the three were still quite alone on the Myrma's after deck.

And he raised the coat and deftly threw it over Prue's busy little head and drew it tight. From beneath the garment came a small and muffled squeal of terror and amazement. The slim form thrust up two hands and sought in vain to tear away the coat, and then partly rose and strove blindly to give battle.

Young Mr. Greer laughed gayly and caught it up with one great swoop! His powerful arms wound about the girl, pinning her own arms fast. She kicked viciously—and without ceremony one of the arms included Prue's legs in its grasp. Entirely helpless, securely trussed as she could have been with ropes, the form ceased its struggling.

And still not a soul aboard the Myrma had offered interference.

Near the rail, obviously unaware of the daring business that was going forward, the scowling Richard Flynn shaded his eyes and peered down the decks.

"Signal that fellow to bring the boat alongside the ladder again, Dick," Bartley snapped

"Er—"

"And then go over the side first and be ready to steady me. This little devil may begin to fight again and—well, what in Hades is the matter with you *now?*"

"The—the matter?" Richard gasped as he leaned over the rail and turned his peering gaze far, far astern, over the black waters. "Well, say! Certainly that's him! Do you hear his engine? He—he's going back without us, Bart!"

And now he pointed, and Bartley, himself pressed against the rail with his burden tight clutched, assisted with the peering—and there was really no way at all of controverting the obvious truth.

Far away now, becoming farther away with the passing of every second, his familiar lights bobbing, his familiar roar growing ever more faint, their motorboat driver was taking his borrowed craft back to its proper anchorage.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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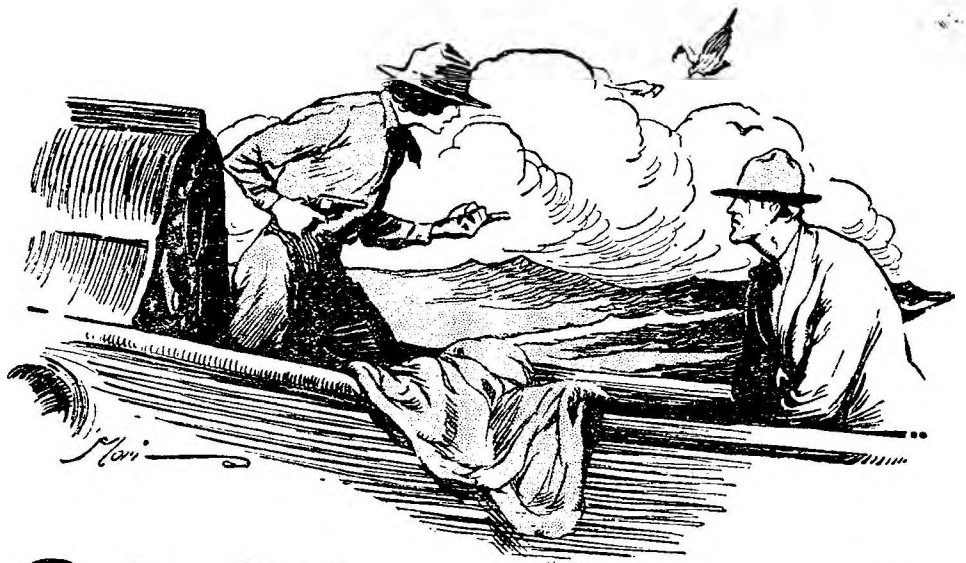
INCOMPATIBILITY

OH, the pulse and the throb of a business career,
The anger, resentment, the greed, and the fear;
No wonder he sighs for the fireside at night,
With the glow of the grate and the warm, shaded light.

But the fireside—the millions of housekeeping cares,
The sameness that harries, the dullness that wears;
No wonder she longs at the end of the day
To thrill with the throng on the Great White Way.

Jane Burr.



The Island of Doubt

By JACK BECHDOLT

JOE, the half-breed boy who acted as general factotum in the establishment of Roscoe Hand, the storekeeper at Hope, brought a budget of news from his early morning round.

While he was filling an oil can at the rear of the store Joe shouted to Roscoe Hand, sitting in his little coop of an office: "Stranger come into town about an hour ago, out of the woods. Don't know his name yet, but he ain't no Coast Timber man, leastwise, I never saw him before. I hear he come clean across the range on foot."

"So?" Hand grunted with amiable surprise that encouraged the boy. "Tenderfoot, eh?"

"Well, now, Mr. Hand, I dunno! Looks kind of like a cruiser to me. Except he's kind of too slick lookin'. But he ain't no forestry service man, 'cause he don't wear any ranger's uniform. Heard him asking Charley Bliss how he could get to Columbia in time to catch the Pacific this trip. Says he had to get to Frisco—"

Roscoe Hand's blond eyebrows, almost invisible like all the hair on the man, raised slightly, and his blue eyes, fishy, filmy eyes, rounded with interest.

"What manner of man is this, Joe?" asked Roscoe Hand.

"Why, I dunno. Big, and blondlike. Got kind of curly hair and wears spectacles. And, say, Mr. Hand, Natalie Reed come over in her boat this morning, too. Seen her up the beach. I guess she's going to Columbia to meet the Pacific, hey? Maybe her old man's coming back, don't you think so, Mr. Hand?"

If Hand heard this last he gave no sign. He was a big man, fat and flabby, and he sat very still at his desk at the rear of the store, seldom waiting on his trade. Men came to him when there was business to be done, but he stirred abroad little during the day. Yet he was busy, for his establishment did no inconsiderable trade and besides that he owned houses and land, dealt in timber claims, loaned money, bought

mortgages, traded an occasional boat and had an interest in almost everything connected with the lonely little settlement on the Oregon coast and a wide range of back country.

Just now Hand had swung his chair about in order to take from the inner drawer of his safe a letter which he reread with deep attention. He nodded over its contents several times and looked thoughtfully out of the open store door toward the beach.

Down on the sands a figure was moving that caught his interest. It was an alert, vigorous figure dressed like a man and yet even at that distance, undoubtedly a young woman. In spite of riding breeches, high boots, flannel shirt and a man's felt hat, in spite of the brisk, vigorous carriage there was the suggestion of grace, of curving, flowing line and fullness of breast that betrayed her sex.

Roscoe Hand stared at her without blinking, his attention concentrated fully on some problem of great importance and as he saw her turn her steps in his direction he smiled unexpectedly and rubbed his chubby hands together.

"I guess," said Hand slowly, "I can fix up that little thing all right—"

"What say, Mr. Hand?" Joe asked eagerly.

"Joe, you hustle those orders and don't talk so much," his employer rumbled. "When I address my talk to you I'll tell you so."

II.

No matter where it began, or how, eventually anything of importance in Hope was completed in the store of Roscoe Hand. It was not in the least surprising that the stranger from the timberlands should find himself there.

He was much as Joe had described him, big and blond. He wore horn-rimmed spectacles which were oddly at variance with his serviceable clothes of khaki whipcord and khaki colored flannel. Though he was big he was also lean, like a man in excellent condition after a hard, outdoor trip.

When he entered the store he saw that Hand was busy with somebody in the little office and leaned against a show case to wait for him. Presently Hand appeared in the office door ushering out the young woman in man's clothes.

"That's all right, Miss Natalie," Hand was saying. "I'll see that the boy gets the stuff aboard the launch for you."

The three of them exchanged glances of appraisal, each in a slightly different manner.

The stranger looked at the girl with plain admiration, but with a gentleman's instinct not to give offense. He found she was well worth that admiration, a girl whose carriage and appearance suggested an intellect as alert as her body. She was by no means a puny woman, nor particularly feminine in manner or action and yet it was impossible to notice the finely modeled head, the handsome, dark eyes or her rich coloring and not acknowledge her, first of all, a woman and entitled to a young woman's homage.

Hand, the storekeeper, stared blandly at the newcomer with filmy, light blue eyes that said nothing.

And the girl returned the stranger's glance, but for a brief space of time, and yet in that few seconds there was in her dark eyes the sudden blaze of a passionate hatred that made the man draw back in alarm, as if she had struck him in the face. Unable to credit the impression he stared again, but saw only an averted head and a darkly tanned cheek glowing with unusual color.

All this was in the minute the young woman was passing. Then Hand was saying blandly: "Well, mister?"

"They all told me to come to you," the stranger began. "My name is Francis—Tom Francis. Came across the range to the coast and I've got to catch the steamer Pacific from Columbia if possible. Important business in Frisco. Can't find anybody with a launch to take me up to Columbia and I couldn't make it afoot under three days. I'm willing to pay any rate in reason for a boat ride."

"H-m, just so!" Hand nodded. "Want to hire somebody with a launch to take you to Columbia. City man, I take it?"

"Well, more or less—"

"Been timber cruising across the range?"

"Not exactly—"

"You ain't a forest ranger?"

"Not me—"

"Working for the Pacific Timber outfit, maybe?"

"No—"

"No? Well, excuse my asking. Few folks come through to Hope that ain't doing one or t'other. Of course your business is your own affair—"

Hand paused suggestively, but the stranger did not answer. "You look like a fellow named Valentine, cruiser, came through here about two years back," Hand went on. "If you hadn't told me different I'd have called you Valentine—"

"My name is Francis—Tom Francis, of Boston—"

"So you said. So you said. Funny resemblance, ain't it?"

"I suppose many men look alike," the stranger smiled. "Now, about hiring a launch. Everybody I talked to seemed to think you were the man to see."

The storekeeper considered the matter with grave deliberation. "Don't know where you could get a launch," he murmured, "unless, of course, somebody happened to be going up Columbia way and would take a passenger. Well, now! Here's Miss Natalie Reed was going to Columbia to meet her father, coming up from Frisco on the Pacific. Why not ask her?"

III.

THE Walrus, Natalie Reed's thirty foot, trunk cabin boat, swung out of the shallow, protected bay that served as a harbor for Hope, though the town had no other commerce than log rafts, an occasional tug and such motor boats as this. Natalie Reed sat in the cockpit steering, and the stranger, Tom Francis, sat close by.

Francis had tried addressing various civil remarks to the young woman with surprising lack of results. Then he gave up conversation and put her down as a queer one.

Queer she undoubtedly was. Even her agreement to carry him in the boat as far as Columbia was made in monosyllables during which she kept her glance averted. She was as unsociable as she was lovely to look at and lovely as—Francis thought of various comparisons for her beauty, but none of them seemed to fit exactly.

The morning had dawned with a thickening along the horizon that slowly filmed over the heavens until sky and sea were the same dull gray, and gathering mist began to narrow the visible world to a little planet that held just a boat and a man and a woman. A gentle drizzle of rain began.

The boat shredded slow, glassy swells of the Pacific with a steady "thrush-thrush" that was soothing. The engine droned. Occasionally a gull screamed as if to emphasize the loneliness.

Tom Francis's eyes began to narrow thoughtfully when more than an hour had passed.

He was an observing man. It was evident he was not unacquainted with the sea and sea ways, even as he knew the wild coast mountains and forest. After that long silence: "Don't you head north pretty soon?" he remarked.

Apparently Natalie Reed did not hear.

"You must have to keep a long way offshore," Francis tried again.

By way of answer she glanced at him and a second time he caught the full force of her anger, her contempt, more, her active hatred as it stared from her eyes.

He exclaimed involuntarily: "What's wrong?"

He got no answer. She only looked him through and now a slight, scornful smile curled her lips.

"See here, what's the matter with you—with us? Why do you stare—"

"Did you ever catch a shark?"

Francis looked his surprise. She went on with sudden vehemence: "I have. A shark is dangerous, but he's a coward. He knows only one way to fight, and when he attacks he rolls over, exposing his vulnerable point. Then you knife him. There are human sharks—but perhaps you know that—"

"I know that you have a mighty queer way of talking!" Francis began to feel that he had fallen into queer hands indeed.

"Perhaps I am too subtle for you, Mr. Valentine—"

"Valentine! That's not my name—"

Again the scornful smile. "It's as good as any other name for your kind. It's the name I prefer to know you by. And whatever the name, you are the shark I've caught this time! I am not taking you to Columbia, since you ask me."

"But you agreed—"

"That was merely my bait to attract a shark, Mr. Valentine—"

"Will you please stop calling me that? My name is—"

"I don't care what your name is. And stop talking. I don't care for your remarks."

Tom Francis sprang up to find himself staring at a small nickel plated pistol she had produced with the skill of a prestidigitator.

He wondered if he was dreaming, yet knew this was a strange reality.

He heard himself say sharply: "Put that away!"

"Steady! As you were! I can use it—I will—"

"Are you crazy? Put that gun away! And head this boat for Columbia—"

She shook her head.

"Up helm, you hear! I've got to catch that steamer—I must get there—"

"You'll not get there—until I'm through with you. You'll go to Walrus Island—"

"Where? What is Walrus Island?"

A short laugh mocked him. "You! You, asking that!"

For just a moment Francis began to think it was he who had gone mad. Or had all the world gone mad? He was blinking and gasping.

Then, because he was used to acting quickly, his hand shot out to seize the threatening weapon. The motor boat was rocking crazily. He was struggling with a woman who had the strength of an active man while their craft swung into the trough of a roller and its crest slopped over the gunwale.

It was a moment of insanity.

They fought in silence, without apparent reason, with extraordinary passion. The crack of the pistol ended it as definitely as a period.

Francis slumped back onto the cockpit bench holding his right hand before him stiffly and staring at a flesh wound that dripped bright red blood over his whipcord trousers.

The girl instinctively grasped the tiller and righted the boat on its course, even before her free hand went to her disheveled hair. She had lost her felt hat and the brown locks fell in ripples about her shoulders.

Her voice roused Francis. "Tie a handkerchief around that hand—better, let me tie it. It's not done any harm. Just through the fleshy part of the thumb."

He found himself holding out his hand to be properly bandaged.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I would very much like to know what all this is about?"

"You will know—when you meet my father, Foster Reed, on Walrus Island!"

Francis groaned. His head was spinning with the absurdity of these startling happenings.

But until they left the motor boat tied to a landing and went ashore on Walrus, seven miles at sea from Hope, he learned no more.

IV.

THE island rose steeply in a rocky ledge about which the Pacific rollers broke with continuous thunder. It was possibly a mile in extent in either direction, partially wooded with cypress and fir.

That strange young woman, Natalie Reed, marched Tom Francis ahead of her, like a prisoner, toward a house near the beach. It was an unusual dwelling.

At first glance it appeared to be a charming bungalow in the pretty, adaptable California style. A second look showed it had never been finished. The sides were bare where the carpenters had stopped shingling. Some of its windows gaped to the weather, innocent of glass. They approached it by a path along which a few dispirited geraniums and nasturtiums grew in wild neglect. The whole place had the air of a home begun with wonderful intentions and suddenly abandoned to despair.

Francis noted that the ground near by had been plowed for planting, but little of

it had ever been used. The rest rioted in beach weeds.

Wondering, but silently he walked before Natalie Reed ignominiously.

He had business of the utmost importance elsewhere than on Walrus Island. He might have been boiling with impatience to be away from the spot, but he accepted what must be with a philosophical shrug of the shoulders. But when his opportunity came he would be ready to act on it.

They went into the unfurnished bungalow and within it was as pathetically incomplete as without. It had started out to be a home and become, instead, only a camp. Yet there was no suggestion of the happy occupations and interests of a camp, merely the confusion, the inconveniences and an air of bitter discouragement; of high hopes gone to smash.

"Sit down," said Natalie Reed. It was an order, not an expression of hospitality.

She stood over Francis, the weapon still in her hand, and studied him through narrowed eyes.

For his part he awaited developments with a calm that concealed a lively curiosity.

"I think you know very well where you are—and why," the young woman began. "But if you choose to keep up this pretense—"

The prisoner shrugged. "Let's assume that I do."

"Very well. I am Foster Reed's daughter. This is Foster Reed's house and the house is on Walrus Island, the island that was sold to Foster Reed by a certain plausible, oily tongued, shameless crook with just about as much conscience as the man who sets false beacons to wreck a ship—"

"And you think I am that man?"

"I know you are that man—"

Francis made a gesture of dissent, but she brushed it aside. "I know you are the man by the best evidence in the world, though I have never seen Valentine before. Don't argue. That's futile.

"You are the man who called himself Valentine. Three years ago you found the sort of prey that gentlemen of your sort must delight in, a city man, middle-aged, whose wife had died recently, whose business had failed through no fault of his own, who had the responsibility of a daughter kept in a fashionable school—a man who was making his last, brave stand against crushing odds, ready for any desperate venture. Very cleverly you showed that man the pleasure and profit in an island ranch and tolled him across the range to this place. You sold him Walrus Island, sold it and gave him a deed—a deed worth less than your promises because Walrus Island was government land, held in the mineral reserve, *and you knew it!* Yet that deed is worth something. We have kept it very carefully against this day, because this is the day my father and I have prayed for, Mr. Valentine! We have asked God to send you back to us, to give us our day of reckoning—and when we're through with you, your own deed, signed with your name will be enough to send you to the one place fit for your kind—a prison!"

Natalie Reed's eyes were flashing. Her breath came fast. The wrongs done her father were hers to avenge and her joy was unholy. Even in this crisis the man who sat listening could not forget her strange beauty.

"God was good to us!" she exulted. "You had never seen me. My name meant nothing to you. How simple that made it to get you into the motor boat and bring you back where Foster Reed has waited almost three years to face you and make you pay—and pay dearly! And when he comes next week!"

The prisoner spoke finally. He said quietly: "All this, of course, being based on the assumption that I am the man Valentine who defrauded your father—"

"Why pretend? You can't expect to fool even yourself into hoping—"

"Listen to me." He spoke quietly, but with a tone that stopped her tongue. "You have been misinformed. I am not this man Valentine."

She answered with spiteful calm that matched his own: "You are a liar!"

His face reddened, but he gave no other sign of annoyance. "I am Tom Francis, of Boston, as I told the storekeeper at Hope. And, I have no doubt it was that man who informed you I was Valentine—"

"Why should Hand lie to me?"

"I suspect that he had a most excellent reason—"

"What reason?"

"I can't answer that question."

Natalie Reed laughed shortly, with a plain implication.

Stung by the laugh Francis exclaimed: "If I was your plausible crook Valentine, don't you suppose I'd have a dozen good reasons to offer you? But I am telling the truth—as much of the truth as I am allowed to tell. I have told you my name. I can also tell you that I must get to Columbia in time to catch the steamer Pacific for San Francisco. It is not a matter of pressing business—it is a question of duty—and make a note of this, *you shan't stop me from going*. Unless you murder me, I will go. And I warn you you are taking a very grave risk in delaying me. Now, will you let me go?"

She shook her head. "Do you think I have waited three years to be put off like that?"

"You're very foolish not to know the truth—"

"But not as foolish as you think!"

"You can't keep me—"

"Can't I?" She raised the pistol suggestively.

"Put away that silly toy!" Francis said sternly. "You act like a child. Let me go. I have warned you. You know who I am—"

"Only who you say you are. Prove it—"

"I am not permitted to prove it!"

"Because you can't! Because it's a lie—another of your lies. But wait—" She crossed the room and brought him a folded paper. It was a deed to Walrus Island signed by the man, Valentine.

"If you are telling the truth," she cried, "let me see you sign that man's name. Here's pen and ink. Prove it! Go on, prove it!"

"My dear young lady!" Francis raised his bandaged right hand deprecatingly. "I couldn't even sign my own name," he said gently.

Sight of that injured hand transformed her. Her dark eyes grew soft and tender. "Does it hurt?" she exclaimed in a stricken whisper. "I am sorry I had to do—that!"

"No, it doesn't hurt—much. But as for signing my name—"

"Bah! A handy excuse. You are ingenious, Mr. Valentine!"

"Very well. You are warned."

"And I'm not afraid—not of your kind!"

He made no answer. Instead he stretched himself full length on the worn cot he had been sitting on, closed his eyes and turned his back to her.

"You can't bluff me!" she cried.

He gave no sign of hearing.

"You hear? Try to escape and you'll get badly hurt next time! I—listen to me—" She stamped her foot. It was no good. The man's breathing was rhythmical and soft. He had fallen asleep as simply as another would take off his hat.

She stood staring down on him and the hatred and excitement gave way slowly to a woman's breathless curiosity. He slept like a healthy child.

V.

Almost three hours later Tom Francis opened his eyes. He was aware of a strange constriction in hands and feet and his first glance showed him he had been bound fast with light rope. He devoted a curious glance to these amateur manacles, then his eyes turned about the room and discovered his jailer sitting watching him with quickening interest.

The man smiled pleasantly at Natalie Reed. Neither by word nor look did he refer to the ropes that tied him.

"I was very tired. All done in by a long, hard, fast trip across the range," he said. "I apologize for my bad manners—but I was too sleepy to be polite."

"It must be lunch time," the prisoner went on. "I'm beastly hungry. Do you mind if I make an omelette? If there are eggs I can show you an omelette without a peer."

He rose, and, glancing idly at his grotesquely bound arms, bent them slowly toward his chest. For a moment he breathed hard, his muscles straining, then "snap" went the light rope and he shook the strands

off his wrists. He stooped down leisurely and undid the hobble on his ankles.

"You must never leave so much slack when you bind a man," he said in the manner of a classroom lecturer. "It is so much easier to break a loosely tied hobble."

Natalie Reed had leaped to her feet. She pointed her weapon at his breast.

Her prisoner walked deliberately into it, until the barrel touched his shirt. He smiled down on her. "Please, please!" he admonished. "You mustn't shoot the cook!"

There was something in his steady glance she could not bear. Her eyes wavered. She gave a little, strangling cry and dropped the pistol.

Francis stooped to recover it and handed it back politely. "Come along," he said, "let me show you my prize omelette."

She watched him messing about the kitchen bewildered by hysterical impulses to cry, to laugh, to fly into a passion. The strange prisoner ignored her tactfully until he had spread a luncheon, adapting himself to strange surroundings with an uncanny intuition where to find what he wanted.

He urged her to eat, and Natalie found herself obeying. More than that, she had to acknowledge that he had not boasted idly about his superlative omelette.

Francis insisted on washing the luncheon dishes, and Natalie found herself helping him, laughing and joking. For the time he had carried her thousands of miles from Walrus Island and leagues away from the memory of her father's wrongs and the vengeance they had brooded on. When the topic came up again it was Francis who mentioned it.

They were sitting in the shade before the house and it was late afternoon when he turned on her impulsively and said: "You've had a tough time of it here. Three years, at your age! And nothing to think about but your troubles!"

Her head turned away to hide her face.

"And your father! I know you love him, any one can see that by the way you speak of him. But in his state of mind—after the swindle—facing eviction from the island, of course—I can see there have been some pretty bad days for you—"

"Don't!" she whispered unsteadily.

"But you are a plucky kid—and I want you to know that I appreciate that, Natalie." His hand covered hers and pressed it warmly. Then with sudden change of manner he exclaimed: "And now, back to business! You expect your father to return by the Pacific this trip, don't you?"

"I am not positive—"

"But fairly sure? Then, why not take me to Columbia, let him prove to you I am not the swindler you think me, and—"

"And let you give me the slip! Oh, no!" She turned on him with the old scorn, the old hatred. She seemed even more bitter as if ashamed of the gentler thoughts the man had inspired. "You will stay—right—here," she declared, fumbling for the pistol.

Francis sighed. "Well, I'm sorry, but—" He rose.

"Stop!"

He ignored the call.

"I'll shoot!" She raised the weapon and then he turned about, returning to her as deliberately as he had left, stern and paler. For the second time he walked directly into the weapon, and before she knew his intention had caught her wrists.

Face to face they wrestled, the pistol their prize.

But now, in the inexorable grip of this man's fingers, her strength was failing her. Slowly her arms bent aside as he willed and the tensed muscles might stretch until they ached, but could not prevail against him.

The hand that held the pistol was doubled back, back—and back, and the wrist itself burned under an ever tightening grip of steel. They struggled silently, breathing hard. A gasp from the girl, low, as if she disdained to show her hurt, but betraying her suffering, then the fingers opened and the pistol dropped.

Tom Francis stooped, seized the weapon and threw it far across the sand. He watched it disappear, then turned back.

"I am sorry I had to do that." He spoke sternly. "Sorry to hurt you. But that pistol might have hurt me. More, it might have ended my usefulness. And my usefulness, just now, is of some importance. Some day you may understand how important. But I am very sorry—"

"You beast!"

"I had to do it—"

"I hate you! I—"

"And another thing"—abruptly he seized her shoulders and made her face him—"you are strong, but you must understand that I am stronger. I do not want you to struggle again, but if you interfere with my duty—"

"Liar!"

Helpless in his grasp she poured out her defiance. "Liar! Your duty! You mean your precious liberty—liberty to swindle!"

When finally she stopped he said quietly: "You have finished? Very well. Now you will come with me in the boat. Unfortunately you've made it absolutely necessary that I prove what I have said. I am sorry, because it will hurt you to know the truth. But—"

"I'll not go!"

He released her shoulders gently and looked down on her.

"You can't make me go. I won't! I—"

"For the last time I ask you if you will come."

"No!"

He stooped, his arms circling her. She was swept off her feet. Ignoring her cries, her beating fists, her frantic struggle, Tom Francis strode serenely down to the float.

He deposited her with little ceremony in the cockpit of the Walrus, slipped the painter and shoved it off.

He gave her no further attention then, busy at starting the engine.

Natalie crouched, her eyes turning from his broad back as he stooped at his task about the boat. She saw and her hand clasped it as she saw it, a heavy wrench. It was weapon enough to kill the man.

Her eyes burned with an insane anger as she raised the wrench for a blow.

Francis did not deign to look behind him.

Even when the wrench dropped from her hand with a clatter, when she flung herself on the bench and began an hysterical sobbing he remained absorbed in his study of the gas engine.

VI.

THE Pacific, bound northward to Columbia her last port of call before the return to San Francisco, slowed down at the hail of a man in a motor boat. The man helped a woman to the ladder, made fast his boat for towing and followed her to the deck where she was now tenderly embraced by a rather elderly, gray haired, anxious passenger.

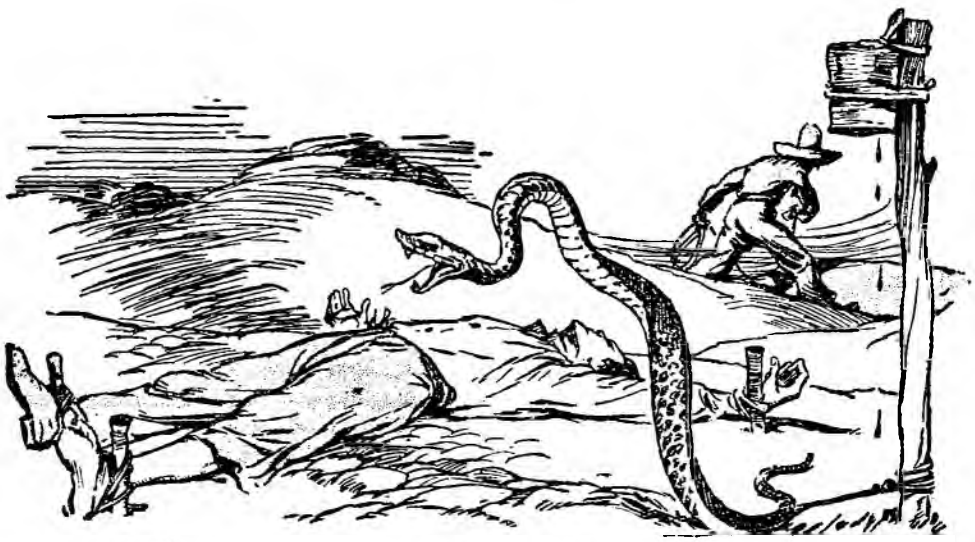
While Tom Francis watched this scene he was hailed by name and turned to clasp hands eagerly with another passenger. It was this passenger whom Francis brought presently to Natalie Reed and her father. Foster Reed knew the man and introduced his daughter to Warren Fenimore, a supervising official of the Federal Bureau of Forestry. "Mr. Fenimore is my boss," Francis added.

"In view of what Francis has told me and the peculiar circumstances of the case," Fenimore smiled, "I'm going to explain him to Miss Natalie. The bureau sent Tom Francis into the timber country behind Hope on a special mission. The Coast Timber Corporation for years has been cutting government timber—stealing it, in other words. Recently in an effort to legalize their stealings they have been asking Congress to withdraw certain lands from the forest reserve. Tom Francis had to get his facts and get them to our Congressmen in Washington at once, if we were to stop the fraud. And Hand, the storekeeper at Hope, has been in the secret employ of the timber people for years. Undoubtedly Hand's instructions were to delay our man—to hinder him as long as possible, for with the present session nearing an end hours meant millions to our timber crooks. I think that will explain to you why Hand identified our man to you as the swindler of your father—and also why Tom Francis could not explain himself."

Fenimore was tactful enough to leave Francis with the girl after that, taking Foster Reed away with him.

"What can I say? What can I really do, to show how ashamed I am?" Natalie sobbed.

"Just this," Francis dictated gently. "Let me come back to you. And never let me go away again. I was your prisoner, dear, from the first moment I saw you—and will always be!"



Poor Little Pigeon

By J. U. GIESY and JUNIUS B. SMITH

Authors of "Wolf of Erlik," "The Opposing Venus," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

DANNY'S QUICK EYE.

QUAGLEY departed with his posse to comb the hills from the point where Pulfer's machine lay a crumpled wreck beside the road.

The *Globe* got out an extra. The north barrel at least of the "two-barrelled city" flamed into swift excitement, evoked by a citizen's disappearance. Gone, the man's absence and the manner of its occurrence lifted him to a prominence far and away above anything his presence had ever caused.

Danny came back from the garage, had a hurried lunch and departed to ascertain the full damage to the car. The condition of the machine seemed uppermost in his mind, though he reported that Pulfer's absence was the sole topic of conversation about the garage.

Jim and I took a walk. There was nothing to be gained, but it was better than sitting about the hotel. We bought one of Judson's extras and read its brief account under flaring headlines, and Bryce chuckled:

"Honest, son, I bet Judson's sorry when we leave. We've given him more copy the last week, I'll bet, than he's had for many days. Ever since he wrote up the Persian Yogi, that lad's been more or less on the job. The only people that ain't gettin' any excitement out of the whole infernal business is us."

"'Patience yet a little longer,'" I quoted Semi's advice.

And he grinned and switched his remarks to Dual. "Can you beat it? *Can* you beat it? Patience he says—when you feel like a race horse, waitin' for the starter to raise the gate. Patience when everybody else is havin' a brainstorm, almost. A man gets

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kidnaped, and a posse goes out to hunt him, an' he sits tight an' says patience, just as though he knew all about it. Well, he does. We don't want to be overlookin' that. But dang it, I came down here cuttle fishin' an' so far I ain't even seen the fish —unless it's Lolita, and then she'd be a fish's daughter—a mermaid I guess. But speakin' of cuttlefish's habits, there's been plenty of cloud—an' it ain't cleared for my eyes yet. And just the same, he says the harvest is about ready, and looks at you with that funny light in his eyes that says he's wise. Well—wonder how Dan's getting along with the car."

"We might walk down there and see," I suggested.

Jim nodded and we set out. It wasn't far. We reached it inside a few minutes and turned in through its open door very much as I had done two nights before.

Cars stood banked against either wall, and at sound of our entrance an attendant appeared.

We inquired for Danny, and he shook his head. "Nothing much wrong with the car except a cracked spark plug," he said. "We put in another one and tuned up the carburetor and he's out now, giving her a tryout."

"Any word about Pulfer yet?" I asked.

He shook his head again and scowled. "No. Nothing. I can't figure it out. It's darned funny."

"Maybe not." Bryce said and drew the fellow's glance toward him. "I understand he had a run in here yesterday morning with a girl and she tried to knife him."

"Lolita?" The garage man shrugged. "Oh—she's liable to make any sort of play she takes a mind to. Stick you one minute and say she's sorry the next. She's that kind. I don't think she's back of this."

"Agree with the rest that it's more likely her cousin Pablo, eh?" Jim suggested.

"Well—everybody nearly seems to think so. Your idea that she put him up to it?" The speaker eyed Bryce directly.

But Jim balked the question. "I reckon I ain't got an idea really. I'm waitin' to find out what Quagley discovers if he discovers anything."

The garage man nodded and glanced around as though to satisfy himself that we were alone. And then he lowered his voice: "I'll tell you who got him in my opinion," he said. "It was whoever's been supplying dope to those negroes out at camp. The way I size it up, Pulfer knew more of the inwardness of that matter than was for his good."

"Yeah?" Bryce threw an incredulous note into his response. "How come?"

"Well," once more the man shot that questing glance about before he answered. "You know there's a sergeant out there that comes down town a lot. I ain't sure, but I think he uses dope and—I've seen Pulfer talkin' to him more than once."

"You mean Stanley—the fellow that has that Red Cross dog?" I asked quickly.

He nodded again. "Yes. That's the one. You know Pulfer's been takin' a big interest since the Rand girl an' her dad and the louie at the camp were arrested. I think maybe he had an idea the negro knew something or could find out."

"But you don't know?" I asked flatly.

"No." Once more he shook his head. "I don't know, but I think the gang got him just the same."

"And that's a new one, anyhow," Jim said, after we had left the garage and stood once more in the street. "At that, the fellow may be right. You were sayin' you thought that fellow Stanley was a hophead yourself, yesterday afternoon. If he was — Well my grandmother's cat's sideburns! Look! Speak of the devil! There's Dan now and see what he's got aboard."

I followed the direction of his eyes and saw Dan driving up the street. And then I actually blinked my eyes and followed Jim's example in staring, because Felipe—the Red Cross dog from Camp Little—was sitting up proudly beside him on the seat. And not only that but the animal was completely tricked out in harness such as he had been trained to wear overseas. The sight was somewhat surprising until I recalled Judson's statement that Stanley sometimes rigged the dog out in such fashion and paraded him about town. Still even that could hardly explain his presence in the machine.

"Hi—Danny!" Jim called.

Dan glanced in our direction, and brought the machine to a stand.

Felipe promptly hopped out.

"Say—stop him!" Danny exclaimed in a tone of tense excitement that carried my glance swiftly to his face contorting into a consternation-struck mask.

"Stop him, what for?" Jim questioned, grinning—and abruptly paused, arrested as I fancied by Danny's expression.

"And now you've done it, darn it," the boy panted. "Watch him! See where he goes!"

For Felice was trotting placidly along the pavement, and a moment or two after Danny's panted suggestion, he turned as one on long accustomed ground, into the entrance to a building—the narrow hallway of what I knew would be a stair leading to an upper story.

"An'," Danny almost whimpered, "I was takin' him to the hotel."

"You was takin' him to the hotel?" Bryce repeated. "What for? See here, young sleuth, what's the matter?"

"You've gummed the whole game. That's what's the matter," Danny gulped. "Because I drove down here to the wire fence to test the car, and just as I turned around to come back, I saw that dog. He was comin' through the gate as nice as you please and I whistled to him and he got aboard, an' you can see how he was all trimmed up—an' I examined that thick, heavy collar—to see what it was like and—Mr. Jim—there was morphine in it—at least, I think so. It was a white powder—an' bitter an' I took some of it out an' left the rest, an' was takin' it back—an' you called—an'—I've got to tell Mr. Dual."

"Go tell him," I said sharply as he came to a half sobbing pause. "Jim—go with him. I'll watch that door. That dog's gone to meet his master. Hurry up."

Bryce gave me a single glance of comprehension and swung himself to the step of the car. "Go on, son," he directed.

Danny took him at his word. The machine leaped ahead literally jerking Jim backward into the seat at Danny's side. I turned my attention to the entrance hallway, I had given my word to watch.

Stanley, the negro sergeant, and Felipe, the Red Cross dog. In a way. The thing was amazing and in another way it was not. We are so apt to overlook the thing that lies directly under our nose. And this—this explanation of the conveying of drugs into the camp, had lain under our noses from the first. We had seen man and dog the first day after we reached town. I had set him down as an addict at the time. But I had thought of him as no more than one of the several drug users in the camp.

Judson had said the negro frequently put the harness on the dog and brought him down town but I had set that down exactly as Judson had suggested, to the negro's known penchant for showing off—attracting attention—a characteristic of his race.

Stanley and Felipe, the dog. I smiled a trifle grimly as I stood on the sidewalk, waiting for one or both to appear. The thing had gone on under the noses of the whole town until Danny had met the dog this afternoon. My smile became a grin. The thing was so natural that it was almost ludicrous. A boy and a dog. The dog had taken a fancy to Dan that first day in camp. And that night at the concert, he had tried to get into the machine, so that Bryce had needed to shove him off. And to-day—Felipe returning from the unconsciously nefarious errand across the line to which he had been trained, had heard Dan's whistle and had treated himself to a ride.

My grin became a laugh. It was funny—and yet in a way it had a tragic side. Here was another instance in which good had been perverted to evil ends. Stanley and Felipe, the dog—the dog trained at a time of human stress to serve as a messenger of mercy, trained to carry upon his back the means of human relief, to aid human suffering. Felipe with his faithful instincts betrayed—turned to the conveying of the means of human degradation from one nation to another—trotting blandly to and fro—through a wire fence—while two men and a woman lay in prison, because of his master's evil schemes.

And suddenly my amusement died and left me a trifle narrow-lidded. I stood on the pavement practically midway of the entrance I was watching and the garage. They

were separated by not more than fifty yards. Pulfer had talked to the sergeant, according to his own employee's words. I wondered if Pulfer had really known—yet had in a measure kept silent because perhaps Lolita and her father and Pablo were mixed up in the thing—if he had sought to free Bernice Rand, the girl he said he loved, while at the same time he sought not to expose the other girl, whom, Judson's statements of the day before might well indicate, he had himself debauched. Truly, I thought as I stood there, life was a twisted strand.

Dual. By now he knew what had happened. There had been time. I wondered what next. Unless the negro watching for his unknowing messenger's return had chanced to see Felipe in the machine, he would not be suspicious. There would be no reason why he should be, even though, as I could see now, there had been every reason for his getting a fresh supply of drugs to the camp that afternoon. That reason lay in Haddon's report that men had shown symptoms of being deprived of their drug the night before. I found myself wondering if Dual had suspected all along. He had met Stanley, talked with the man that first day at the camp—the day Danny had told him about Felipe. Had his subtle mind even then formed the association? I fancied it had. He had said Haddon was engaged on details in connections with the matter which in the end Jim and I would understand. I knew Haddon had been sending telegrams. Dual had been in consultation with him that morning. There had been telegraph forms—messages on the table beside which he sat—when we entered the suite right after noon. Had Haddon then been running down the man Stanley's record through government sources as he best could? I turned my eyes in the direction of the hotel. I wondered how long it would be until some move was made to follow up Danny's latest find—how long I would need stand here until somebody—I wasn't exactly sure who it would be—came.

Abruptly, however, I stiffened. Felipe had reappeared. He came trotting out of the entrance, and then Stanley himself emerged. Here was the thing upon me I had feared. Delay—delay. The need for it drove all else from my mind.

I opened my mouth. "Hello, sergeant," I said.

He started, turned his eyes. There was a furtiveness in the action now that I understood. And then he flashed his teeth.

"Evenin' sah," he responded.

I played for time, for time. "Got the dog all dolled up haven't you?" I suggested. "What's the idea of rigging him out in the harness?"

He glanced at Felipe, and then back again. "Well, sah," he said grinning, "I reckon it's lak this. Dogs is a lil bit lak men. You all teach 'em sumpin' an' keep 'em doing dat t'ing, an' dey can do it right erlong. But you all teach 'em sumpin' an' don' mak 'em do it, an' fust t'ing you know dey's forgot. So 'bout every so often I fixes Felipe up in his regalia, an' let 'im run around. You know he's er Red Cross dog, sah, an' I gotta keep his stuff in his mind."

I nodded. As an explanation it wasn't bad. The only fault I had to find with it was that it wasn't long enough under the conditions.

I stole another glance up the street and my heart leaped into my mouth and stayed my tongue. Two machines were racing toward us—and they were dun of color—the peculiar war time army tan. I knew they were cars from Camp Little, and determined to hold my man.

"Well, that's very interesting, sergeant," I began. But the harm was done.

Stanley had marked the brief turning of my eyes. He turned his own, and then he struck at me, not viciously, I'll admit, more to thrust me out of his way, as it seemed. But I clutched at his arm and caught it—and he struck at me again with the other hand. He was strong, wiry, his muscles like wire springs. His second blow broke my grip. He began to run.

I staggered, heard the roar of motors in my ears. Half blinded by the contact of his fist with my face, I saw dimly a machine in which two officers sat with another man—a second car carrying a squad of men from the camp—saw the webbing belts

about their waists—realized that they were armed.

The machines were slowing. One of the officers hit the ground running. He ran straight toward the door of Pulfer's garage.

"Halt!" I heard his voice raised in a bellow of command. "Stanley! Come out of that!"

The soldiers were piling out of the second machine. I saw them and turned my attention to the garage door into which the officer had vanished.

The non-com officer in charge of the squad spoke to his men. Two of them set off running toward each end of the block. The others stood waiting where they were.

And then Stanley emerged from the garage door, with the officer behind.

"Here—take him," the latter addressed the corporal, and the four men laid hold upon their fellow.

The officer laughed and walked toward the machine in which he had come. "Caught him hiding in a car," he said.

"Easy pickin'." His brother officer returned and called a direction across: "All right, corporal—get him back to camp."

Then, and then only, I recognized Haddon as the third occupant of the first car. He saw me, smiled slightly and got down.

"Well then, that's that, captain," he remarked to the senior officer with him. "You go on back. I'm going to stay down."

He turned and came across to where I stood. "And that clears up that much of it, Glace," he said. "We've been suspicious of that boy from the first, but it took a good deal of time to run him down."

They were loading Stanley into the car. Felipe followed his master. One of the soldiers sought to touch him and he snapped at the black hand. Evidently, I thought, he had been trained to resent advances from all save those he knew as friends.

Haddon watched till the cars had turned and then went on. "We finally did it, however. He was a south side Chicago 'daddy' until the war. I suppose you know what that means."

I nodded. I knew the term—dive-keeper.

"I see you do." Haddon smiled again. "The draft caught him and sent him to France. When he came back, he got into trouble and enlisted under a different name. Oddly enough, we traced him through his dog and to-day it was his dog turned him upside down—his dog plus Dan—funny thing. We've suspected the dog too—that is, Dual has, as the means, from the first day he saw him—but we couldn't check up until Dan turned the trick this afternoon by inspecting that collar. Hello, here he comes now."

He was right. Danny and Bryce drove up in Dual's car. Dan's face was still eagerly strained.

"Did they get him, did they?" he demanded as he brought the car to a stand.

"Yes, Danny, they got him, thanks to you," Haddon told him. "And now that they've got him they'll keep him. He'll do a number of years in Leavenworth."

"Gee!" Dan began and then he sobered. "But I say, Mr. Haddon, what'll become of Felipe?"

"Oh, don't worry about Felipe. I've an idea he'll be adopted by the regiment as a mascot." Haddon smiled.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEPTUNE!

"JUST which door were you watching?" Haddon went on, as Bryce descended from the car. "I told the captain I'd look through the place Stanley's evidently been using as a rendezvous for the dog."

"Up here," I said and led the way to the narrow entrance hall. Haddon and Jim and I went in and up a stairway to the second floor, coming out into an upper hallway cut in two half way down its length by a cross partition in which was a door.

Advancing to it, Haddon rapped. There was no answer for what seemed to me a long time and then a sound of shuffling feet. The door opened slowly. We looked into a yellow face—the wrinkled visage of a Chinese.

"Hello, John," Haddon said. "Where's Stanley?"

"Misser Stanley—no sabe," the oriental grunted.

"All right, we'll come in—take look, see." Haddon thrust a shoulder against the door, forcing it inward and back. We followed him through. The Chinaman made no move to resist. "Watch him," Haddon prompted, and Jim and I drove the fellow with us as we went through the place. There was no one there, but there was a reek in the air of the squalid rooms. I sniffed and glanced at Haddon.

He smiled grimly. "Opium," he said. "Somebody's been hitting the pipe. Looks like this was a regular joint. You can see for yourself. Well, here's where we bust it up for the present at least. Bring the fellow along."

We took the Chinaman with us, back down to the street, loaded him into the car and took him over to the jail. There Haddon arranged for a guard to be set on the place Stanley had used as a hang-out, and we drove back to the garage and stabled the car.

Judson came clattering down the stairs from the rooms we had looked through as we stood on the sidewalk in a little group.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Holy smoke! You fellows are sure keeping me busy. Say—give me your side of it. I missed out on the whole works. Just heard about Stanley's arrest—and that he's been using that place upstairs as a hang-out. Who brought the stuff to him—Lolita?"

"The dog," Haddon said.

"The dog?" Judson's eyes widened.

We explained.

"Clever," he made comment, "darned clever. Nobody suspected the mutt."

Haddon smiled slightly. "As a matter of fact, you know, Judson, our friend Dual has suspected it all the time. The trouble was to nail it down. But Dan here turned the trick this afternoon, without expecting to at the time. Examined the poot's heavy collar after he'd hopped into the machine. Curiosity killed a cat, and Dan's youthful interest in things busted Stanley's scheme. A bit of all right, what?"

"Rather." Judson grinned. Haddon in his satisfaction had dropped momentarily into the somewhat affected manner of speaking he employed at times. "You say Dual suspected it all along?"

"Oh, yes." Haddon nodded. "From the first morning he visited the camp. He spotted Stanley as an addict and he spotted the dog. The possibility was a sufficiently close parallel to the pigeons and they were plainly a plant."

"Well, anyway—I suppose this will take a load off Newton's mind," Judson said.

"In a way," Haddon assented. "Of course I've rather kept Newton informed of the progress of events. This will, however, prove conclusive, I imagine. Now I think I'll go out and see Stanley and tell him a few things he doesn't know I'm aware of yet, and see what he says for himself."

He strolled away, and Judson eyed his retreating back. "Smart chap," he remarked. "And that friend of yours is the limit. Was wise all along and kept it to himself. Talk about throwing dust. Rambled all over the map, so to speak, while they looked up Stanley's record. Well, I reckon Neptune's hardly in a position to harm Miss Rand any longer."

"Neptune?" said Bryce.

"Why, yes." Judson nodded. "If Stanley isn't Neptune, I don't know who is. Didn't Dual say he dealt with drugs, and didn't he say he was responsible for the girl's and Newton's predicament? And now he's grabbed he's hardly in a position to do any more dirty work."

"Admittin' all that, I don't know." Jim narrowed his eyes. "Dual also remarked that Neptune was rushin' toward dissolution. They ain't goin' to shoot Stanley or hang him for this. They'll simply jail him."

"Unless he tries for a get-away," Judson suggested. "That way he might get shot. But at that rate, you think there's something else?"

"I don't know what I think," Bryce admitted, frowning. "I've done a lot of thinking on this thing, but it hasn't got me anywhere. So far I haven't called the turn of a single card from first to last. I'm throwin' no bouquets at myself. From now on I'm goin' to quit guessin'. I'm goin' to wait. Here we start out with pigeons and end up with a coon and a dog."

Judson laughed. "Well, anyway," he

said, "this lets Bernice Rand and her daddy and Newton out."

"Does it?" Jim took him up. "It shows how dope got into the camp, but how does it prove anything else, my son? Just how does it establish their innocence?"

"Haddon said he thought it would," Judson reminded him, frowning in consideration of the point he had raised.

"He said he imagined it would," Jim countered. "I've imagined a lot of things that weren't. If this would clear things up, then why in time did that guy Pablo skip out from Rand's after old Mike was brought in, an' why did he presumably lay for Pulfer this morning and run him off?"

"But if the thing was framed to throw suspicion on Newton, and throw dust in Haddon's eyes, and Pablo was the one who switched the birds, as we think he was now—" Judson began.

"Now you're shouting," Bryce cut him off. "If that was what really happened, then in order to clear this matter up it's got to be proved. Haddon knows it, too. That's one reason why he's gone out to see Stanley now, I'll bet. If it was worked that way, that bird knows—and if he kicks in with the information now that his cake's dough, why, all right. But if he keeps a tight mouth, there's work to be done before the thing can be cleared up. By the way, Dual and Haddon don't seem to have been the only ones who suspected that Stanley was in the know." He went on with an account of our conversation with the garage man prior to the sergeant's arrest.

"Talked to him, huh?" Judson said when he had finished. "Come on, let's dig him out and see if he's got anything more to say."

But in that we failed. The fellow simply stuck to his original assertion that he had seen Pulfer talking with Stanley and knew nothing else.

"Looks like he'd been right, though," he suggested. "He run in here and crawled into that limousine over yonder, and tried to cover himself with a robe. But the lieutenant dug him out, along with a bundle of dope he'd shoved under the rear cushion. Oh, they got him with the goods, all right."

Danny grinned. "The dope was on the dog, in his collar at first," he said. "After Felipe went upstairs Stanley must have taken it off. I guess that's the way they worked it. Felipe was trained to go across the line and get it, and bring it back to him here, and then he hid it on himself and carried it into camp."

"That's about how, young sleuth," Jim agreed with him, nodding. "Well, anyway, you've done a good day's work."

Danny grinned again, and then his face sobered. "The way it turned out. But all I did really, Mr. Jim, was just to look at his collar. Mr. Dual had told me to do that, if I ever found him running around town with it on, and got a chance. I just did what he told me. It was him that ought to get the credit really. I was just an agent."

"And did he tell you to look for that quill over at old Mike's place, too?" Judson asked.

"Nope." Danny's expression lightened. "I did that myself. I just happened to see the red wax it was sealed with, and wondered what it was. Gee, I wonder if Quagley's found any sign of that Injun and Pulfer yet!"

"If he has it ain't general knowledge," Jim said, and lighted a cigar. "Well, let's go back to the hotel." He grinned. "When we started out, we didn't look for anything much to happen, but we've seen quite a lot."

We acted on the suggestion. Judson went off to write up his story of Stanley's arrest. Bryce and Dan and I strolled up the street to the Moctezuma and mounted to our suite.

Dual sat there—simply sat there—in the great chair he had used for days. He was not even working with his charts. His hands were folded. He was leaning back. His attitude and expression were that of one who has finished a task, who has physically and mentally relaxed—of one who merely waited to see the finished outcome of his work. The thing impressed me, struck me as a compelling and at the same time an illuminating thought.

Then he turned his strong, quiet face toward me and smiled.

"The mills of the gods grind slowly their human grist, but they cease not, neither do they pause," he said. "Sit down, my friends—our labors draw to a close. What remains yet to be accomplished requires but small participation upon our part. The harvest is ready. Other hands may garner it as well as ours."

"The harvest is ready." It was so he announced that in all essential details our work was done. I sat down. Suddenly, and for no apparent reason, I felt tired. Bryce mumbled his cigar, puffed out his stubby brown mustache. The thing seemed almost an anticlimax to a situation in which for a time so many vital issues had seemed involved.

There was a sense of let-down about it, a feeling of incompleteness, no matter what the quiet voice of the man in the great chair had said.

Jim cleared his throat, and sat down heavily in a chair.

"Then, Stanley was Neptune," he said. "Judson said he thought it was."

"Neptune? Stanley?" Once more Dual turned his eyes. "Nay, Mr. Bryce—the negro was not Neptune; say Saturn rather, Saturn who tears down, yet who builds up that which deserves to be built up again; erects phœnixlike new and fresher structures from those he has destroyed."

"Then, who was?" Bryce asked the question direct.

"The man Pulfer," Semi told him as directly.

"Pul-fer!" Jim faltered, and paused and added more slowly: "My God!"

Pulfer! It was as though a cold hand gripped my heart, as though a cold breath blew upon my skin. I could actually feel it contract. Pulfer—the man we had worked with, talked with, the man who had sat in this very room and sought to purchase Dual's aid—or had he sought to purchase his aid? I asked myself. Had he not sought rather to bind Semi to him and his interests with a payment—a sort of retaining fee—the check Dual had torn into fragments before his eyes? Pulfer was Neptune—the significator of evil omen to Bernice Rand, her father, her lover.

"Pulfer, yes, Mr. Bryce," I heard his quiet tones. "Pulfer, who perverted all good things to evil ends; Pulfer, who betrayed good to evil, friendship and trust and even love; Pulfer, who in his self-seeking dug for his friend a pit and in the end fell into it himself; Pulfer, who when he had reason to fear me sought to tie my hands with his evil-gotten gold, and so placed an authentic specimen of his handwriting in my hands instead, which specimen now lies in Sheriff Quagley's safe. Not that I needed the sample, as it happens, save as an evidence of his intent, since I had already purchased the car from him and obtained what I sought in his written receipt of its price. Having obtained it, I knew from the first who had sent the anonymous note regarding Lieutenant Newton to Captain Cleland at the camp."

"Then—then," Bryce stammered, "all his roar about getting Bernice out of jail was just a blind."

"Not altogether," Dual returned. "Have I not said he was betraying love itself? And have I not said that he threatened Miss Rand's Venus—since before we came here to prevent that threat from gaining concrete expression? And how may a man of his type threaten a woman more than through herself—her sex—the material expression of Venus, who rules so largely the material feminine plane? Nay, Pulfer was as sincere in seeking her release as he could be in anything. It was for himself he sought it, because he desired her, and were she released and her father held he could well contrive to bring her within his unclean grasp."

"Poor little pigeon," I said on impulse, recalling his own words.

And once more he smiled. "Poor little pigeon," he repeated. "Poor little maid—yet, I think, fortunate little pigeon now, my friends, inasmuch as the hawk no longer flies."

"Pulfer," Bryce said again in a tone of wonder—"Pulfer is dead?"

Again that sensation as of a cold air upon my flesh assailed me as Semi inclined his head.

"Aye, Mr. Bryce. Unless I have read my figures sadly awry, in so far as the flesh

may atone for the sins of the spirit, he has atoned," he said.

"Pablo killed him?" I not so much asked as heard myself saying.

"Pablo?" Dual repeated. "I am inclined to think so—that he was the agent of his death at least. It is difficult at times to be exact. The probable time of Neptune's dissolution showed plainly. The manner of it was less distinct. It would, in so near as I can read the indications, predicate a poison—"

"Poison!" said Bryce, his voice a trifle hoarse.

Poison! I repeated the word in my brain.

"Poison," said Semi-Dual. "There would be an almost sardonic humor about it, would there not, my friends, were the man who has sought for gain by the selling of slow poison, slow death, to his fellows, meet man's final physical end because of some lethal substance in his veins? It were a subtle parallel indeed. Yet it is written that what a man sows he reapeth, and that he who lives by the sword by the sword shall he perish; and I have read—what I have read."

"Anyway, the man is dead?" I remarked as he paused.

"Aye, dead." Once more he inclined his head.

Dead—Neptune—Pulfer. No longer potent for harm. In a sense I dismissed him in such fashion. The hawk no longer flew. The little pigeon was safe, preserved from what fate none knew as yet, save the man who was dead, and perhaps that other girl he had betrayed—Lolita, the dancer in her red and orange and green and purple shawl. I let my thoughts stray rather to Bernice—the poor little pigeon, who was now a fortunate little pigeon indeed. I visualized her wide blue eyes when she should know. I could fancy them clouded briefly and then glad—glad at the prospect of a new, free life with an honest love to round it out and make it a complete thing.

Bryce got up slowly, crossed to a window and stood there looking out. I think both of us were shaken by what we had heard. Dual, and Dual only of the three of us, seemed undisturbed.

But neither Jim nor I doubted. Semi had spoken as he had spoken to us before on more than one occasion, with a positive assurance that mirrored his absolute conviction of the facts he voiced. And so neither Bryce nor I there in that room of our suite in the Moctezuma doubted that somewhere outside its walls, somewhere perhaps in the hills across which the sheriff of Santa Cruz County led his posse to the search, the man we had been discussing—the man for whom Quagley was seeking—lay dead.

And so, because we did not doubt, I sat there, and Bryce stood by the window, and at length Semi spoke again in his mellow voice, quoting Omar the Persian, whose quatrains I knew he loved:

"'I sent my soul through the Invisible
Some secret of that afterlife to spell
And presently my soul returned to me
And answered I Myself am Heaven and—
Hell.'"

Heaven—and hell. Man built them for himself, with his own acts, his own thoughts that led to actions, day by day and year by year. In so much his was the choice—that his was the power to choose good or evil, wrong or right. The dead man had chosen evil, and now he lay dead from poison. Dual had said in so far as he could read the astral indications. There was something eerie in the thought. In a way, it balked the imagination. One struggled to conceive how it had been brought about. For not once as I sat there—not in the faintest measure—did I then suspect the weirdly, horror-compelling truth.

I glanced at Danny. He had pulled a chair to the other window and was straining down at the street. He seemed subdued, his usually restless, active spirit temporarily muted, as it were, by what he had heard.

And then, into the silence that held us, cut the sudden buzz of the telephone on the wall.

I started, took down the receiver, pressed it to my ear.

"Hello," I called into the mouthpiece.

And I heard Judson's voice. It was tense with a half-controlled excitement.

"Hello—Glace?"

"Yes," I said, and waited.

"They've found Pulfer," his words came at once. "I'm down here at Parkin's, the undertaker's, and so is Quagley. Come down if you want to see him—but it won't be a pleasant sight."

"All right," I told him, hung up, and turned and delivered the message.

"Such evidences of man's finiteness are never pleasant; but in this instance let us at least go down and behold how the mills have ground," Dual said as I paused, and rose.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW NEPTUNE DIED.

FIVE minutes' walk brought us to the Parkin undertaking establishment, outside which stood a small inward peering crowd. We thrust our way through, and Bryce tapped on the half glass of the door. Quagley admitted us himself. His face was haggard, dust and sweat streaked, tired. There was a strained look of horror in his eyes.

"Come in," he said. "I found him; but I didn't find that damned Injun. An' I never will, I guess."

He closed the door and led us back to a farther room, where Pulfer's body lay on a wooden table.

I caught my breath. The thing was swollen, bloated almost beyond recognition, as I saw at my first glance. It was still clad in the clothing the man had worn when he went to his death, except that both trousers legs had been cut away as with a knife, two-thirds up the thighs. There was a deep indentation, as though something had been tied tightly about them on both ankles and wrists.

I glanced at Bryce—at Judson, who had been standing beside the table when we came in—at a man I later knew as Parkin—at Quagley, now set-lipped and scowling.

And then I looked at Dual and saw full understanding in his face as he advanced to the table and stood looking down at the horror it held—that dreadful, bloated, discolored thing we had last seen as a strong man full of life.

"Behold Neptune!" Suddenly he spoke in the silence, broken only before by the sounds of our individual breathings.

"What! What's that?" Quagley's voice was harshly challenging—hoarse. The wings of his nostrils quivered. He narrowed the dusty lids over his heat and dust tortured eyes.

"Behold—Neptune—Judas," Dual repeated. "Seducer—betrayer of women—betrayer of friendship and friendship's trust—distributor of body and soul destroying drugs—tricked now himself—destroyed—as ever with those who seek to win and use devil's gold."

"Him—Pulfer?" Quagley gritted. "See here, Mr. Dual, do you mean he's this Neptune you've been talkin' about?"

"Neptune," Dual repeated. "Aye, Sheriff Quagley, Neptune indeed. I have known him from the first."

"But you've worked with him," Quagley said gruffly. "If you knew—"

"Because I knew," Semi altered his meaning, "I have worked not with him, but to defeat his schemes. Tell us how and where you found him. From his wrists and ankles, I would say they had been tied with thongs."

"Rawhide!" Quagley grated and seemingly fought for control before going on "I've heard of it, but I never seen it before an'—I don't want to again. We—we found him up in the hills—maybe five miles from where the trail began. His own men followed the trail. It wasn't very plain. But they're half Injuns themselves an' they managed to do it. We come on him all at once—on a side hill in the sun. And you're right. He was tied—pegged down—spread-eagled—do you understand. An'—an'—off to one side— By God, it makes me sick yet." A shudder visibly shook him.

"Off to one side was another stake or possibly stakes," Dual prompted.

Quagley nodded. "You—you know—that," he said slowly. "You've heard about it too, maybe?"

"I have heard about it. It was an ancient Aztec custom," Dual made answer. "And I knew that this man should die from poison, from my study of this matter, but—I was not sure until this time."

"You—you're right." Quagley breathed deeply. "Poison. Yep it was poison in a mottled skin. Off to one side there was another stick and tied to it was a can—and under that—tied to the same stick, only lower, was a rattler about four feet long. It was tied to the stick by a rawhide thong. It was too short to let the snake at him at first, but the rawhide stretched as the water dripped on it out of the can. An'—an' of course you know what happened. The snake kept trying and trying to strike—pulling on that damned stretching string. An' Pulfer couldn't move. An'—so—finally the snake struck him; that Injun had cut off the legs of his pants. It had struck him in the leg, an' he was dead when we got there. We've been all the rest of the time bringin' him in. Nobody but an Injun would have done it. It ain't—human." He broke off and wiped at his lips with a shaking hand.

For a moment there was silence and then Judson asked a question.

"You say you knew him from the first, Mr. Dual? Would you mind saying how?"

"Not now, Mr. Judson," Dual returned. "I knew him first because physically he agreed with the symbol which, in my figures of Miss Rand's and Lieutenant Newton's lives, as I have said, was evilly posited in regard to both her Venus and his sun. I knew him because at times I read minds, the thought vibrations in human brains.

"Neptune is at times overly enthusiastic in a cause which he sees fit to espouse. His loudly spoken partisanship of her innocence struck me as overdone. I knew him because after I had purchased a car from him and received a receipt in his handwriting, I knew also who had sent the anonymous note that drew suspicion to Lieutenant Newton and his pigeons after Mr. Haddon began his investigations at the camp. I knew him because he practically told me with his own lips—"

"Told you?" Quagley interrupted.

"Aye—told me," Dual gave assent. "The day we drove to the Ramirez place and he carried on the conversation between Miguel, Ramirez and myself, since thinking I did not understand Spanish, he said many things to the man he thought I would know nothing of—bidding him say nothing of having furnished pigeons for the substitution at his orders, threatening his life if he did not hold his tongue. It was because of that largely that I brought Ramirez into town that afternoon, knowing that in your keeping he would be safe."

"You understand Spanish then—speak it?" Quagley's expression lightened for the first time.

"Yes, Mr. Quagley."

"Well—I'll be damned!" The sheriff breathed deeply again, a slow grin creased his weary face.

"Nay," said Semi-Dual. "But you are looking on the damned, Mr. Quagley—one damned by his own acts—convicted out of his own mouth."

Quagley nodded. "Just the same," he rejoined, "this is the first time my hoosgow was ever used as a refuge, I guess. First Bernice Rand and then old Mike Ramirez. Well—he fooled me all right."

"His intention," said Semi-Dual, "was to deceive. Have I not said he betrayed every trust and in the end did he not betray even himself? He desired the girl and so sought to gain her release since, had she been set free, unknowing his designs, he would have probably seized her and made his escape. But failing in his purpose, he waited, hoping to gain it, and so met his fate."

"Bernice?" Quagley stared. "Is that what you meant when you said he—Neptune—threatened her? But see here—" He cut himself off and stood frowning, his glance turning not toward Dual but to the bloated corpse.

"You would say he already had a woman here in town—the girl Lolita," Dual seemingly took up his interrupted words. "Had he not betrayed her womanhood already? And think you he would have balked at betraying her still further, to fulfill his own desires? Neptune is both obscure and lustful, Mr. Quagley, at times."

"Pablo," Quagley licked dry lips. "I don't know. If you're right—and you've sure *been* right thus far—maybe that Injun had cause. But—to do it thataway—"

His words were cut off by a woman's scream—the sound of a commotion in front.

As one, we turned toward it, back into the front room. The crowd still stood outside on the pavement and a woman's body was pressed against the door, upon which she hammered with beating hands.

Lolita! I knew her—recognized her as a matter of fact, with little surprise. Some way her coming here now seemed but a part and parcel of all the rest.

I stood watching while Quagley opened the door and she thrust her way inside.

"W'ere ees he? W'ere ees he?" she panted a question and paused tense in every supple line, her dark eyes sweeping us in a tragic fashion. "W'ere ees he? I deman' to see heem!" She stamped her foot.

"*Nina.*" Dual spoke a single word. I knew its meaning. He had called her "little one."

Her glance leaped to his face. Her own face writhed. "You—you!" she half shrieked. Her hand twitched at her skirt. Her other hand flashed downward beneath its hem.

"Here—Lolita!" Quagley roared, leaping toward her.

"Let be, Quagley." Dual lifted a hand. He went slowly toward the quivering woman. And then he spoke, swiftly, softly to her in her native tongue.

And she listened, listened with her eyes on his face, until finally, piercingly she cried out "*La Muerte de la Culebra!*" and sprang into motion, rushing past us toward that farther room, where lay what Quagley had brought in.

"The Death of the Snake!" Vaguely I understood the words—connected them—understood that Semi had explained.

A scream came again from the farther room, and then softer, lower-toned, caressing words. "Carissimo—Carissimo!"

We trailed back. Momentarily I closed my eyes. Lolita lay half across the corpse—had half circled it with her arms. In a way it was appalling. Whatever she was or had been, she was young, strong, vital, full of a passionate life. It shook one to see her stretched so in utter abandon.

"*Nina,*" Dual advanced and laid a hand upon her dark hair, spoke softly to her again. She lay silent, and presently she lifted dry eyes to his.

"You knew not this was to be, Lolita?" he said.

"*Dios non!*" she faltered. "*Dios! Dios!*" She rocked herself slightly to and fro, in a tearless grief. "I know nozzing—till but now—a li'l w'ile ago I haf heard."

Parkin brought a chair. Dual guided her to it. She sank down.

"But you know—why, Lolita?" he suggested.

"*Si—si!*" she nodded slightly. "I know, *señor*. Eet ees Pablo haf done eet, biccause he lof me—biccause he ees—afraid."

"Pablo loved you?" Semi prompted.

"*Si,*" she said again. "Seence we were boy an' girl, *señor*. Eet ees more or less long story." She began speaking swiftly. "We were to belong one to ze ozzer, teel ze Señor Pulfer come. Zen—everysing change. He say he lof me; he persuade me to be hees. Pablo he get into w'at you call trouble. He keel a man—an' ze Señor Pulfer knows. He he'p Pablo—mak' eet to appear accident. But after he mak' Pablo do as he say so he weel not tell. Eet ees same as slave. But me he take, an' mak' me dancer. I am hees. But I am not all happy. I learn some sings. Ze Señor Pulfer is marry. He haf wife an' babee w'ere he leave befo' he come Wes'."

"A wife and baby?" Quagley exclaimed; and I knew he was thinking of Bernice Rand.

"*Si, señor,*" Lolita nodded and went on. "But I lof heem, I not care so ver' mooch. Zen he get mix up wiz a *sergente* at ze camp, an' ze *sergente* has a dog. Eet ees teach to carry—"

"Sergeant Stanley was arrested this afternoon, Lolita," Dual stayed her briefly.

"*Gracias Dios!*" she said. "Zen you know?"

"Yes, *Nina,*" Semi answered. "The Señor Pulfer was engaged with the sergeant in the selling of drugs?"

"*Si,*" Lolita said. Her accent was suddenly tired. The fire seemed gone out of her. She went on dully: "*Si, señor.* As you know, ze *sergente* use ze dog. Some of ze droog he sell een ze camp. More Señor Pulfer take an' pack, in—how you say?—ze automobeel tire—ze inside."

"Inner tube," Judson supplied quickly.

"*Si,*" Lolita nodded again. "He feex so an' sen' it soomw'ere, I do not know. But he mak' mooch money. Zen ze officiar at ze camp he find out. Zere ees trouble. Ze *sergente* say zey must fin' way to fool ze man who come to see w'ere ze *soldadi* get ze droog. He know about ze peegeon ze Señor Newton haf, an' ze Señor Pulfer know about how he sen' zem to ze Señorita Rand.

"Zey mak' plan. Zey get more bird from *mio padre* lak you know—an' Pablo tak' zem, an' w'en he go for get peegeon for ze *señorita* he mak' change. Ze Señor Pulfer tak' peegeon to *mio padre,* an' zey feex to sen' droog back to camp on zem. Zee peegeon Pablo tak' to Señorita Rand come back to *mio padre.* Zen Señor Pulfer he write lettair to doctor at camp to say he moos' watch ze Señor Newton—an' nex' sing ze Señor Newton an' ze *señorita* an' her fat'er are arres'.

"But ze Señor Pulfer—he try for get ze *señorita* out. He haf anozzer plan. Ze Señor Rand haf mine on hees place—he haf borrow money from ze Señor Pulfer for mak' work een mine. He gif w'at you call mortgage to place for money. Ze Señor Pulfer he theenk maybe eef ze Señor Rand go to jail for long 'nuff—w'at you call Federal preeson—he can tak' ze mine for himse'f. But zen you came, an' he ees alarm'. Zen *mio padre* ees arres', an' you fin' ze message from ze Senorita—w'at he haf overlook'—an' ze Señor Pulfer—" Abruptly she paused and caught her breath and went on: "Señor, he theenk you no spik Spanish."

"I let him think so, Lolita, because I knew, and was seeking to prove these things," Dual returned.

"An' he tol' my fat'er he would keel heem eef he talked too mooch, an' you understand?" she said quickly.

"Yes, Lolita, and so I brought your father back to the jail so that he might not come to any harm," Semi explained.

"*Señor!*" Her eyes lighted with swift comprehension. "You say you knew. You are ver' wise man. But he"—her eyes turned to the body on the table—"he did not know; an' zat night he drive to the Señor Rand's ranch. He tell Pablo w'at have happen'—tell heem he must go away at once. He breeng heem back wiz heem an' tell heem to come across to Messico an' wait. He say he weel do somesing to mak' eet look lak ze Señor Rand ees guilty for sure—"

"That bottle of dope he said he found out there," Quagley exploded. "That was another plant. He wanted to put Rand away along with Newton, and grab the ranch and the girl for himself. You are right, Dual—he was a crook all ways; just a dirty crook."

But Lolita caught at a single word in his gruffly voiced remarks.

"Ze girl," she repeated wearily. "Oh, yes. I know. Her also he wanted, *señor.* Did I not say to you yes'erday mornin' zat you s'ould keep her w'ere she was? An' I go to heem an' tell heem we mus' talk togezzer—an' so—we have talk las' night, Pablo an' heem an' me."

"Where?" Quagley barked.

"At ze place of my fat'er, *señor,*" she told him. "Pablo an' me, we go zere. Ze *señor* drive out. Eet ees no good. He say to-morrow ze *señorita* will be release'—zat you, *señor*"—she turned again to Semi—"haf say so; zat he weel tak' her an' go away; zat of me he ees tired. Zen he drive to hees place."

"Reckon that accounts for the missing three hours," Quagley said, with a grim-lipped smile. "Go on, Lolita."

She spread her hands with a gesture of resignation. "But, *señor*—zat ees mos' all. Pablo an' me we sleep lil bit after a time; zen I wake, an' he ees gone. I wait long time, an' he does not return. Zen I come back to town. A lil w'ile ago I hear. An' now—now—zere ees—nozzing more."

There was nothing more. There was a heart grip in the words. They seemed a fitting end for a sordid story, so simply told. And, too, in a way they seemed a fitting commentary on the thing that lay there on the table—of the spirit which, false to every trust, had brought it in the end to that point where it had died the death of the serpent.

I saw Quagley knuckle his dust-reddened eyes. Judson covertly blew his nose. And

then Dual was speaking again to the girl who had said there was nothing more.

"Nay, child of Miguel Ramirez, there is nothing more between thee and him. But to thee, there is thy father—who, now that there is no longer any danger to him, or any charge to be pressed against him, will be released. He is an old man, Lolita—and did you not say to my friend Señor Glace and to Señor Judson that you had desired to have him with you, to care for him, but the other night? And shall you not now gain your wish? Shall you not take him from the jail and care for him? And who knows, may it not be that some day Pablo shall return and find you both? Sheriff Quagley—can you not telephone to the jail and arrange that she shall be admitted and given her father?"

"I'll—by ginger, I'll do it!" Quagley said, and turned away to seek Parkin's telephone and make good his words.

But Lolita sat without sign for a moment longer, her dark, dry eyes on Semi's face. Before rising swiftly she bent and caught his hand and brushed it with her lips.

"*Boco te mano, señor.* I weel go—to my fat'er," she said.

Some way I thought of the woman of Magdala, and found that my throat ached.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

"*La Muerte de la Culebra.*" It was so Judson headed his story in the *Globe*—a story that brought him even more than a local prominence and was more or less copied far and wide, since, still in the grip of its dramatic quality, its weird horror, he literally outdid himself in describing how Pulfer had died the death of the snake.

Bryce read it in a chair by the window of our room, and laid the paper aside.

"Well, son," he said, "that's the total—the addin' machine delivered at last. An' as usual, it checks. An' this morning the little pigeon an' her dad can fly the coop."

I nodded. Stanley had confessed the night before, and as a result Haddon had instructed Quagley to release his prisoners; had withdrawn even the most technical charge.

He had been waiting for us when we returned from the undertaker's the evening before; had listened to our story, and departed at once to return to the camp.

Faced by the death of his associate and Lolita's story, the sergeant had made a clean breast of the whole matter from first to last, and Newton had been promptly greeted by his brother officers and rather lionized.

"Yes," I said, "this is the end of it, Jim. I suppose about to-morrow we'll be hittin' it back East."

But in so much I was counting without consideration of a certain lady we had met a few days past.

It wasn't over ten minutes later that Danny came in with his usual grin on his face.

"Say," he announced, slamming the door behind him and helping himself to a chair, "you know that Perringer dame what horned in on us right at the first? Well, she just called up—you know she's a friend of the pigeon's. It was in her dump she met her sweetie first. Well—she's takin' the girl and her dad over there to her place to-day, an' she's asked the whole gang to dinner. Sort of a celebration, I guess. Anyway, Mr. Dual talked to her himself just now, and told her we'd be there with bells on, except that as he was goin' away from here to-morrow an' had to pack his turban, he wouldn't wear that. Well, we're let in for the love feast, all right."

I glanced at Jim. He chuckled.

"Wonder she didn't make it another reception instead of a dinner," he said. "Who all's comin' to this here, now, banquet, Danny? Did she give Dual the list of guests or not?"

And Danny winked. He was in high feather that morning, if ever in his life.

"Well, there's me," he informed us, "and Mr. Dual and both of you, of course, and Haddon, and Judson and Quagley. I heard that much at least. She spilled it to me when I answered the phone, before I could shut her off to tell her it wasn't the Yogi speakin'. Naturally, Rand and

Bernice and Newton will form a part of the mob. The way I understand it, now that the performance is over she's entertaining the whole cast."

"And she would," Jim accepted, grinning. "She's that sort. But she's sure a friend to the little pigeon, and—well—true friendship's worth a lot. So he's going back home to-morrow?"

"That's what he said," Danny nodded. "An' see here, Mr. Jim—what's he goin' to do with our bus?"

"I dunno, young sleuth," Bryce said as he lighted a cigar and blew out smoke. "I dunno. Unless he ships it, it looks to me as though our gas buggy was apt to prove a total loss."

"Gee—an' he just bought it! It ain't even broke in yet, not really." Danny sighed.

But there were no sighs at Mrs. Perringer's that night. Or if so, they were sighs of relief rather than sadness; sighs blended with unshed tears of happiness. Judson and Quagley were there; Newton, of course—smart in khaki and brass; and the little pigeon.

"Mr. Dual," she said, and took his hand and pressed it to her breast, "how can I thank you?"

Semi looked down into her lifted eyes, no longer clouded, but wide—lighted with the light of the future.

"By being glad," he said, and smiled.

Dinner was served. Bernice Rand sat between her father and Newton. There was only one topic of conversation, of course. Mrs. Perringer with Dual on her right was in her element.

"It's wonderful—wonderful!" she declared. "To think that Mr. Dual knew that dreadful man for what he was from the first. Oh"—she turned her eyes to Semi—"Mr. Judson told us you did; that you knew he was Neptune—read his mind—knew what dreadful things were in it—just as you did mine the first time we met—and how, just from studying your astrological figures, you knew he was rushing headlong to his death. Of course I have heard of such things—but I never thought I would be privileged to see a demonstration of it myself, even though I have been interested in such things for years. But, even so, I can't help feeling that it's little short of miraculous."

I caught Jim's eye, and he winked.

But Haddon smiled slightly in his quiet way. "And yet, I fancy that our friend Dual will tell you that the whole thing is but a working out of natural law from first to last," he said. "I've known him several years, and worked with him before. That's why I called him into the affair—sent him Miss Rand's and Lieutenant Newton's birth dates in order that he might determine their innocence before he even started out here—"

"Oh, you naughty man!" Mrs. Perringer cried, turning again to Semi. "You'd done that before I met you—you knew already. And I thought what you said at my reception was something you'd worked out after you got here. One never knows, do they? Life's such a funny thing—so dreadfully mixed up! But you really did determine her innocence from a study of her signs?"

"Yes, Mrs. Perringer." Dual inclined his head. "And my announcement at your reception was but the voicing of a known fact—save that it served the purpose of somewhat disturbing the enemy's camp by attracting their attention to the ability I claimed, rousing in their minds a question as to whether or not I would or could go farther into the matter than I had."

"And why did you have me write down the date of my birth, which you already possessed?" Bernice asked quickly. "I know now you had an object in that. You seem to have a definite object in every move."

"It gave me a specimen of your handwriting," Dual explained. "Later that served to verify the message which was found at Miguel Ramirez's place as yours."

"You see. That's what I meant," Haddon spoke again. "If you'll look back, each event followed the other in a natural sequence in the whole thing. It all worked out naturally from first to last. Take the instance of the bottle Pulfer claimed to have found at our friend Rand's. Stanley told me last night that he knew Pulfer meant to bring it back when he went out

there to get rid of Pablo the night after Ramirez was brought in."

"It's hard to believe, though, even yet," said Bernice Rand. "I mean it is hard to believe he was so false a friend. Of course—I knew how he felt—about me. He'd told me; but he knew Phil and I were engaged, and— To think he had a wife and child somewhere back East all along! I—it makes me feel queer—almost numb—now that I know what he really planned."

"And yet now that we know his plan, it's plain enough," her father carried the discussion along. "That mortgage—I gave it to him as a means of protection to him, to secure his loan. I never regarded it as more than a matter of form. I regarded him as a friend—felt sure he would extend it if I had to ask him."

"Just how is the mine developing, Mr. Rand?" Dual inquired.

"Very well, sir," Rand told him. "It's a good thing, I'm convinced."

"Then," Semi smiled, "if you care to entertain the suggestion, I have a friend in Goldfield—a man by the name of Sheldon—"

"McDonahue Sheldon?" Rand asked with sudden interest.

"The same." Semi smiled again. "I see you have heard of him. He is an authority on such things, and never so happy as when he is dealing with them. I was about to suggest that if you desired I would ask him to interest himself in its further development—not in any way for my interest, but for yours, Mr. Rand."

"Why"—Rand's face lighted swiftly—"if you'd do that, Mr. Dual, I guess you'd be heaping even more coals on my head than you already have. I—I guess I wouldn't dare to refuse."

"It's perfectly splendid—like a fairy story," Mrs. Perringer exclaimed. "Mr. Dual's a regular fairy godfather, and everything's coming out right in the end. The princess is out of the dungeon and back in the arms of the prince, and everybody's happy. I am myself."

Bernice flushed, and Newton laughed in a somewhat embarrassed fashion; and Quagley cleared his throat.

"Pulfer left quite some considerable property," he said. "Last night I shook it out of that Chink Haddon picked up in that place where Stanley was in the habit of waiting for his dog, that Pulfer hired him to run the joint. Pulfer owned the building as well as the garage, an' of course there is his ranch. Last night before Lolita took Mike away, she told me where Pulfer's wife lives. I'm going to have her looked up."

"Poor Lolita," said Bernice with a pensive look in her blue eyes—an almost brooding look that hinted she might be thinking of the girl who had not escaped the same betrayal which had so recently threatened herself. "She took her father away, did she, Uncle Dan?"

"Oh, sure." Quagley nodded. "Took him down to the place where she's been rooming. And she's going back to her dancing, she says. She ain't a bad sort as her kind goes. If Guy had been as straight with her as she was with him, he'd have been alive to-day, even if he had been headed for Leavenworth."

"Yet," said Semi-Dual, "the man but lived his atoms, lived in tune with the astral vibrations which were polarized as the keynote of his living at the moment of his birth. He followed them blindly, was false to others and in so much false to himself. For it is true that no man lives to himself alone, that our thoughts and words and acts affect other lives. Life is a current, my friends, that flows endlessly throughout the universe—and he who seeks to stem the current sooner or later finds himself swept down like a swimmer in its flood. But he who is wise synchronizes himself to the pulse of the heart of creation and so lives in tune with the Infinite."

"Isn't that true?" Mrs. Perringer gushed again as he paused. "In tune with the Infinite. I read a book by that title once. It was full of the most beautiful thoughts. And thoughts are things. They must be if they can be read. So we ought to think good things. Isn't it amazing that if we do—if we think right and do right—really forget ourselves in trying to be kind to others—we're really being as selfish as if

we were really selfish? What I mean is that by doing that we do the best thing for ourselves."

"It is a seeming paradox, Mrs. Perringer," Dual took up the thread of her thought as she paused. "And yet it is not. Since he who does right for right's sake exalts his spirit—and a spirit exalted by right doing has nothing to fear and attains to a peace that passeth the understanding of those by whom it has not been attained."

"Life is full of paradoxes, I imagine," Lieutenant Newton declared in a somewhat self-conscious tone. "I know that day you came to see me at the camp you told me that no man need 'travail greatly,' was what you said, if his heart was clean—and you said that even though Bernice was in jail, she was in the hands of friends. I've thought a lot about that since. Haddon's kept me in touch with things more or less, and—lately—I haven't been worrying half so much about my pigeon's being in Sheriff Quagley's cage. It was an amazing comfort to me, and I think now that I understand the whole thing so much better—that you meant it should be at the time."

And suddenly Bernice Rand smiled.

"Poor little pigeon," she said, and turned to Semi with a soft light in her eyes. "But not poor little pigeon any longer, thanks to you and Mr. Glace and Mr. Bryce and Danny Quinn and Uncle Dan and Mr. Haddon. Oh—it's wonderful—wonderful to have found such friends!"

"Friends," said Semi-Dual in his mellow voice. "Ah, yes. Friendship, little pigeon, is one of life's closest relationships—one of the strongest, most sustaining threads in life's twisted strand. Happy indeed is he who wins it, and keeps it because it is merited."

"Doesn't he put it wonderfully!" Mrs. Perringer exclaimed.

As for the car, Dual gave it to the little pigeon as a wedding present. And the next day it was her hands upon the wheel that drove us down to our train.

THE END

LITTLE HOUSE

LITTLE house, keep me warm;
Give me shelter from the storm.
When I pass your lintels, oh,
Let me not forget the snow,
And the sufferers who rove
Far from your embracing love.

Little house, little house,
Covered with enfolding boughs,
Let me not forget the pain
In the world of tears and rain.
When I see my candles lit,
Let me ponder just a bit

On the cities very far
Where the ragged urchins are;
When my firelight, laughing, gleams,
Let me share my happy dreams.
Little house, this I pray:
Do not shut the world away!

Charles Hanson Towne

Suspended Animation

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

WITHIN a stone's throw of the brawling Elwha River a row of olive drab tents marked K Company's camp. Smoke trailed up from the cook tent, and nearby a number of army mules cussed the weather and took it out on one another's person. An unfinished bridge completed the scene, except for lofty peaks and lower mountains covered with fir and spruce.

The very silence of the camp awakened Captain Murphy. He glanced at the clock.

"For the love of Mike!" he groaned, "it's getting worse and worse, look what time it is!" He was speaking to himself and therefore listening to a mighty good man.

Murphy was not merely part Irish as sometimes happens. He was one hundred per cent, the fact that one parent hailed from the north of Ireland and the other from the south made it unanimous. Also is offered possibilities in the way of natural fighting. However, the elder Murphys did not fight. That is, each other.

He thrust his head from the tent and bawled, "Company! Fall in!" He raised his voice slightly. "Company! Fall in! Immediately!"

From each tent came soldiers in various stages of dress, beginning with the lowest and ending with a man all dressed but one legging. He favored them with a frown.

"A fine bunch of soldiers you are. Give you an inch and you'll take a mile. Look what time of day it is? How do you ever expect to get that bridge built, let alone produce amongst you a boxer who can win the division championship? Here I gather together a group of men who call themselves fighters, bring you up here where you can harden your muscles building bridges, breathe God's pure air and catch a trout or two and what do you do? You loaf under the covers until sun-up. What have you got to say for yourselves? Why don't somebody speak up?"

Nobody spoke for the reason nobody dared when the captain was in this mood.

"We've had three buglers here and

they've immediately got transferred. I'm beginning to know why. I'll get a bugler that will put a crust on your slumbers. Now fall out and think that over. Then dress, eat and get to work. Sergeant Ryan!"

Ryan came on the run. "See that my horse is saddled. Also 'phone down to the bridge and tell them to have my car there. I am going to Camp Lewis to-day. And, sergeant!"

"Yes sir?"

"I'll bring back a bugler with me or know the reason why. That's all. All except one thing. See that you are properly dressed after this when you report to me!"

"Yes, sir!"

The sergeant vanished while the vanishing was good. First he ordered the horse saddled that would take the captain down the trail to the Olympic Highway Bridge, next he telephoned to have the car there.

"Another bugler, eh?" commented the cook. "Well, he'll have to be a tough one to stick here long. This is a camp of fighting fools and it's a good thing there's a Captain Murphy at the head of the company or no telling what would happen. Circuses gather all the freaks under canvas and it looks as if we'd gathered all the boxers in the army!"

The sergeant nodded. "Looks like our loafing days are over, because when we have a bugler to waken us we haven't any excuse for not getting up."

"Which is why the boys make a bugler hard to find. It's a wonder the captain didn't get next to it long ago."

"The captain was next. He likes to sleep in himself, but he has to make a showing, you know!"

The cook nodded, but not sympathetically. He had to get up before the others anyway and relied on an alarm clock to do the bugling.

II.

THE captain dismounted from his horse at the bridge and stepped into his car. The driver slipped over and the captain took the wheel. It was a long drive to Camp Lewis and Murphy enjoyed stepping on her. Such was his stepping that he rolled into the camp shortly after noon. Captain Barnett invited him to lunch.

"Glad to see you are alive," he observed; "that's one tough gang you have up there!"

"I'd like to make 'em tougher. They're getting soft lying in bed. I can't get a bugler to stay long enough to get 'em in the habit of early rising, which, as you know, is conducive to health, wealth and wisdom. Nobody wakes up, not even me. Most buglers are little fellows. If I could find a chap with heavy-weight timber in him, I'd make him into a bugler, and then—"

"What?"

"I'd peek out of my tent and watch the fur fly."

"Maybe I can help you," said Barnett. "What is the plot? It doesn't just happen that such a bunch as you have all land in one company."

"Here's the low down. Keep it dark. The colonel as you know is a Meloney. We got into a bit of an argument and in a moment of heat I told him I'd bet him five hundred dollars I'd develop a heavyweight champion within a year. And being a Meloney he took me up and I'm having the devil's own time to save my five hundred dollars. It's the principle of the thing. I'd spend a thousand to save five hundred, just like a woman spending ten cents car fare and an hour's time to save twenty-five cents on a roast." Murphy beamed an Irish smile.

Barnett embraced him. "You've saved my life. I've got a bugler I don't know what to do with! He's not pretty!"

"Can he bugle?"

"He can! Listen, that's him now!"

The sweet notes of the bugle came through the open window:

"Soupy, Soupy, Soupy,
Without a single bean.
Porky, Porky, Porky,
Without a strip of lean.
Coffee, Coffee, Coffee,
Worst was ever seen."

"He can't be much of a man, he's too musical!" observed Murphy.

"I'll send for him!"

A few minutes later the bugler reported. Murphy purred in his approval. The man's name was Grogan. His lips were thin, covering a generous mouth studded with teeth capable of gnawing down trees if need be. His nose had been pounded and rounded in the pounding. One of his ears had stopped something fast, presumably a fist encased in a glove. He had a cut or two over the eyes and a scar here and there.

"Grogan! I have transferred you to K Company. Pack your stuff and be ready to leave with Captain Murphy in the morning."

Grogan saluted, then departed.

He was awaiting orders next morning. His last duty had been to arouse the camp and incidentally Captain Murphy. He had scant equipment aside from a set of light gloves and his bugle.

"It ain't an issue bugle," he explained, "but one I bought because it's got sweet notes. I like music, that is like it next to fighting. There's nothing better than watching a good fight, is there, sir?"

"Nothing, unless it is to be in a good fight!"

"Would you mind telling me just why I was transferred? I ain't kicking. I've felt the mountain air would do me good."

"One reason is the men won't get up in the morning. Another reason is I'm looking for the best man I can find to tackle the division champion. If I can't find one I'll develop one, and you can't get into condition sleeping in the morning."

"You are right, sir, and they won't sleep. I have a method all me own aside from regulation bugling." A faint smile passed over Grogan's battered face. He seemed to be lost in something very pleasant that had taken place in the past.

III.

THE new bugler arrived at dusk. The company looked him over and then buzzed among themselves.

"It's getting harder and harder to keep a bugler out of this man's camp," growled Ryan, "but we aren't whipped yet. The morning will tell."

And the morning told. The last thing Captain Murphy remembered just before dozing was Grogan's whispered query:

"Who's the toughest man in camp?"

"Private Dugan!"

"Which tent does he sleep in?"

Murphy gave exact details even to the cot Private Dugan occupied. Then the captain fell asleep. When he awakened it was to the stirring notes of reveille. He groaned.

"An ungodly time to get up, but still—" he glanced at the clock, "the right time. I hope the boys find ways and means of silencing him, but it'll take some man—heavyweight timber of Grade A."

There was a moment's silence, then, "I blow once and if that don't work, I start pulling 'em out, like this!" Murphy leaped from his cot to the tent door carrying the blankets with him. He saw Bugler Grogan grasp Private Dugan's bare foot and give a jerk. Private Dugan cleared the cot, the tent, and landed on the ground with a grunt. He was up instantly showing fight.

Sergeant Ryan parted them and led the way to the ring erected for just such occasions. Seconds were assigned, the sergeant acting as referee.

"You'd better leave your bugle behind," the sergeant suggested.

"Nope, it's here for a purpose," answered Grogan.

The cook, acting as time-keeper, banged on a dish pan. That was the last bang he gave. Two minutes and nine seconds later Private Dugan stopped a fast one with his chin. He crashed to the canvas face downward. Bugler Grogan regarded his work with a professional eye, then picked up his bugle with a gloved hand. Gravely he blew reveille. There was no response. With equal gravity he blew taps, then he faced them.

"If there's any doubt in anybody's mind over who's boss here, outside of the captain, let 'em step forward one pace and I'll examine and report on their claims. Ah, our friend is coming around."

Private Dugan shook the cobwebs from his brain and dragged himself to his feet. "You're a better man than I, Gunga Din," he proclaimed, then reeled back to his tent to finish dressing.

From his tent, Captain Murphy chuckled. "The king is dead, may the new one's reign be brief, I want a champ!"

IV.

FOLLOWED a painful week. It seemed a bugler's work is not bridge building. While the others labored with heavy timbers Grogan fished in plain sight. Many a trout he jerked from the icy depths of that swirling pool above the bridge. Each struggle was accompanied by shouts of glee. Every morning he was on hand to start the day off right. The tardy ones, and there were sure to be some, were jerked to the ground with accompanying grunts. Speed was his watchword. Those that didn't like it could fight. A couple tackled it when properly aroused and in due time reveille and taps were blown over their prostrate forms.

It was Private Dugan who showed the first signs of restlessness. The captain observed the signs of revolt with high glee. His men were of a fighting stock down to the last man, and their forebears had taken part in every revolution worthy of the name and some of them were still at it.

He forded the river one Sunday morning and wandered into a logging camp. Seated on a log was a blond giant, with blue eyes. He regarded the soldier in silence and without movement except for an occasional blinking of the eyes. Dugan bristled.

"Hello, Suspended Animation, top of the morning to you!"

Animation was no longer in a state of suspension. The blond man unfolded, dropped down, plucked Dugan by the collar and heaved him into the drink. This did not matter much because Dugan had nearly drowned in crossing the river, but his feelings were ruffled. He decided to fight, then as he reached shore he got an idea that beat the original one seven ways from the jack.

"Fair enough! What's your name?"

"Hartvig Yonson!"

"Do you spell the last with a wye or a jay?"

"A yay!"

"I was in hopes that your name was O'Toole, Moriarty or something; it'd made me feel a damsite better. What seems to be the rub? In other words why the gloom?"

"The boss hay yumped me twice! Aye tank I quit me yob!"

"American citizen?"

The blond giant nodded brightly, and straightened up with pardonable pride. "Goin' on three months!"

"Then what's the matter with joining the army? You can see how hard we have to work. It's a cinch. Travel, pay, opportunity, education!" Private Dugan quoted from the advertising supplied by the recruiting service. "Advancement, too! All you have to do is to wade the stream and enlist! Uniform, gun, and all the girls falling for you. You'd look great in a uniform. Send a picture back to Sweden!"

The giant beamed. "Aye go you one!" he announced.

"Then come on before you change your mind!"

Private Dugan escorted the Swede across the river and into the captain's tent. He loomed huge and dripping. "Get this bird, captain, before he changes his mind. He's the man we're looking for!"

"Suspended—" Captain and private's mind ran in the same channel.

"Don't say it, sir, or he'll throw you in the river!" warned Dugan.

The captain seeing a great light worked fast. He took in the Swede's powerful body with envious eyes. Here was a man indeed. There wasn't a uniform that fitted him, so Captain Murphy sent a sergeant at top speed to Camp Lewis for equipment and clothing. The giant managed to split an olive drab shirt and thus wear it. Trousers fared little better. He wore his own shoes for the time being. Shortly after noon he entered the captain's tent without announcing himself or saluting. "Captain, aye like tell old boss go yump in lake!"

"Sure, go ahead, but don't forget to come back!"

He vanished and returned two hours later in a satisfied frame of mind. Grogan sized him up in the offing. The rest of the camp waited in high glee. A few, including the recruit, slept that night. When

Bugler Grogan crawled from his cot the next morning every man but Johnson was awake. Captain Murphy even was dressed, but not in sight.

The bugle called sweetly; silence, then Grogan stuck his head into Hardvick Johnson's tent. "Hey, Suspended Animation, come out of it." He gave a tug, then a harder tug before he dragged the giant to the ground. Johnson bounded up with surprising speed for one of his bulk.

"Yumpin' Yimminy Chris'mus, aye bust you on nose for that!"

As a sort of brother by desire Private Dugan dragged the giant aside. "Listen, Johnson, we never fight with bare knuckles here, nor do we step on their faces when they are down as is the quaint custom of logging camps!" he explained. "Instead we put on the gloves and settle it that way. I'll be your second!"

He hurried the willing Johnson to the ring and forced the gloves onto his huge paws. From across the ring came Grogan's voice. "I'll polish that bird off in a hurry! But when he hits the canvas he'll go right through! I'll box him!"

"How come you can box, Grogan?"

"Have to, if I got slammed in the mush I couldn't blow the bugle."

Then Grogan's second did a mighty unsecondly trick. He slipped around to the enemy corner. "Poke him in the mush, Ole!"

"Hartvig!" corrected Johnson.

"Diagram it for him, Dugan; he can't talk American yet nor understand it!" The second hurried back to his corner. The cook was ready with the pan and hammer.

Dugan was giving his man advice in a low tone. "Don't try to hit him on the head, or you'll break your hands. He's a hard headed brute. I tackled him once myself. Don't hit him in the stomach, that ain't fair! Pop him on the mouth and jaw and do it quick or he'll wreck you. You've got steam, Hartvig, but that's all you have now."

The cook banged the pan and the contest was on.

Grogan was across the ring on the jump. His gloves smacked against the giant's jaw and rocked him to the very foundations. Two more blows that would have dropped any man in the division merely jolted Johnson. His own hands were held close to the body. Then Grogan's glove crashed through the giant's guard and stopped against his stomach. He grunted, then roared. His gloves shot upward, then downward like a hammer; then up again. It wasn't fighting, it was pile driving. Grogan crashed to the canvas and the first round still had two minutes and twenty-five seconds to go.

"Wow!" Private Dugan leaped into the ring and picked up Grogan's bugle. His cheeks puffed out, but only a squawk came. "Oh to be a bugler," he moaned, then hummed a bar of reveille:

"Tum, tum, ta-a-a-ah!
Tum, tum, ta-a-a-ah!"

When he had finished he turned to taps:

"Tum, tum, teedy, um-m-m-m.
Tum, tum, teedy, um-m-m."

Then some one got a pail of water. "Why didn't you hit him sooner?" Dugan demanded. "He almost had you out!"

"Vell, you said it wasn't fair hit in stomach, and he kept yaw covered. Then he hit me in stomach and aye get mad and cut loose!"

"I'll tell the world you did! Well, it's all over even to the shouting and you cracked him where I told you to. The boxer who obeys instructions from his corner will get ahead. Follow me, Ole, and you'll wear diamonds!"

"Hartvig!" corrected Johnson.

V.

THE sun had played on the snow capped peaks for some little time. The river sang merrily in its rush to the Straits of Juan de Fuca, that lay somewhere beyond the lofty portals of the Elwha Valley. Within the boundaries of the camp only two men were awake. One of them was the cook.

He was enjoying a morning cup of Java and that wasn't all he was enjoying. Just across the way a disconsolate figure sat on

a packing box. From time to time he would put a bugle to his mouth and blow. A sort of hissing sound was the only result. This was followed by a period of deep dejection, when the attempt would be repeated. Verily he was of a stock that never quit.

The mules looked around curiously. Something was certainly wrong. Presently the dejected soul wandered toward the captain's tent. He opened his mouth as if to speak, then changed his mind. From a nearby tent came loud snores.

"Suspended Animation," the man muttered, "there's a whole lot of it in this man's camp!" He put the bugle to his lips and made the hissing sound, then hurled it away.

Captain Murphy thrust his head from his tent. "My," he observed cheerfully, "how late the hour is. Bugler!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Sound reveille!"

"I can't, sir, on account of my lips. They've never been swollen like this before. Are you sure a mule didn't kick me when I was down?"

"Just as well you can't blow, Grogan; a division champ slumbers in yon tent, let him slumber with the others. Only it's too bad his name isn't something on the order of Kilberry or the like!"

"But it's the Irish, sir, that's going to whip him into championship material, sir?" said Bugler Grogan.

"It is that!" said Captain Murphy.

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MINNOWBROOK

ALDERS bending close about
Quiet pools where, not a doubt,
One *might* catch a speckled trout.

Minnowbrook—tall rushes wade
Where your shallows, flecked with shade,
Harbor minnows unafraid.

There beneath the wooded hill
Stands a lazy, log-hewn mill,
Whose slow wheel your waters fill.

Minnowbrook—and can you know,
As your lakeward way you go,
All the beauties that you show?

Do you know the very thought
Of your crystal course is fraught
With a blessing magic-wrought?

Minnowbrook—I never knew
What a spell a name can brew
Till I heard them tell of you!

Annie Crim Leavenworth

The Hobo

By HOWARD ERICKSON

A COUNTRY girl of twenty was trailing half a dozen cows through the grass and weeds in the late summer afternoon. She was of rather large body, with hands roughened by labor. A sunbonnet, pushed back over her head, revealed smooth features, a reddish complexion and sun bleached blond hair twisted into a braided knot.

Her brown eyes ranged from the cows to a grove on the edge of the pasture and back across the grazing land to a railroad right-of-way. She stared at the bright steel half hidden by sunflowers overhanging the barbed wire fence, her gaze following the railbed off into the hollow, her ear trained for the screech and rumble of a train.

Edna let the cattle stop to browse among the clumps of ragweeds. She could see the stooping figure of her uncle trudging with his horses from the field. He would be in an ill humor if she were late with the cows and did not have any of the milking done when he was ready to help her with it. Her mother would be angry, not merely at her slowness with the chores, but because of her dallying to " flirt " with the brakeman.

But she would wait for Walter. His train would soon be along. Her mind went rambling back to that sunny day in spring when she first saw Walter, then a brakeman on the Sunday through freight, which stopped near here for the extra engine to pull it over the hill country to the west.

It was morning, the dew so heavy that her shoes and stockings were wet with it as she walked across the pasture to get the family driving horse. A short distance down the track the through freight stood, the engine lazily puffing.

A young man, erect and debonair, in smart mechanic's garb, was sauntering along the railroad fence. He stopped and smiled at her. She halted, too, and looked at him. Somewhere off in a field birds sang.

" Hello," the trainman said in a pleasant voice. She answered " Hello," her face slowly turning red.

It was Walter, her first, enduring im-

pression of him, a good looking youth, with eyes of daring blue, white teeth, and a free and easy air. He talked with a jesting ease strange in men to this diffident country girl. He told her who and what he was, asked her name and where she lived and how she came to be so pretty. She blushed, and listened in silence or answered in a few and stumbling words. And he was gone, hastening away to his train.

Later of Sundays as the freight waited for the reënforcing engine she saw and talked with the brakeman until his image came to fill her thought.

Then he was transferred to the local freight train, and though it passed daily, it did not stop, and Edna could merely wave and smile a greeting.

Impatiently she lingered now, wanting to see Walter, yet reluctant to be late at the barnyard.

Again her mind roved back to that Sunday months ago. She reviewed once more the unforgettable scene of their first meeting, saw the gay sunshine on the vivid green of grass wet with morning dew as they two loitered there while the mating birds sang about them.

A harsh scream resounded over the fields, quiet in the haze of afternoon, recalling Edna out of the past and telling of the local freight's approach.

The great, lowering engine pounded by, the red-faced driver, pipe in mouth, lolling with greasy sleeved elbow on the sill of the cab window, the doubled-up figure of the fireman filling his shovel with coal. The tender and car after car bumped past, here a steel gasoline tank, now a crib crowded with stolid steers, cars with names denoting their assemblage from the ends of a continent, Southern Pacific, Boston and Maine, Chicago Great Western, Grand Trunk, Oklahoma and Gulf, Sault Ste. Marie. Edna stood reading the names, some of which she knew so well and others of which she had never heard, her eyes not alone on the garish lettering, but ranging along above the cars for Walter.

Where was he? The young girl's heart slumped at thought that perhaps he was not aboard, that he had been taken off the local as he had been the through freight. Then her face lighted up at glimpse of a figure erect and jaunty, striding over the tops of moving cars.

He smiled that gay, care-free smile, and waved his cap at her. Edna waved back at him as the train carried him past where she stood.

The brakeman stopped abruptly and his reckless curse rang out:

"Get offa here, you bum!" he shouted. The girl saw the form of a man crawl over the side of a grain car and cling there with his feet on some hold beneath.

The trainman looked at Edna and noted her orbs upon him. Laughing loudly, he kicked the tramp's hands loose. The hobo yelled and pitched off headlong into a clump of weeds along the track, a high crowned hat rolling after him. The brakeman laughed still more loudly and waved again at Edna.

She motioned a good-by and set off for home behind her cows, her mind full of Walter, forgetting the tramp kicked from the train into the sunflowers.

II.

RAYS of a rising sun were shining through the kitchen window of the Gilpin home. Everything was very clean, the polished oilcloth cover of the table, the whitewashed plaster walls, the steel of the range. Edna, in her starched gingham apron, stood bent over the stove, stirring the oatmeal, herself as neat as the rest of the domestic scene.

A stout, elderly woman, neat like the girl, stepped into the room with abrupt motion, her hands full of dishes, which she placed on the table. Her countenance, her tread, her air vibrated energy. Her eyes of animated, kindly brown surveyed Edna with impatience.

"I told you to put on the big kettle for the oatmeal," she scolded in a tone in which harshness and motherly fondness were oddly blended. "You know we have the new man to breakfast."

"Yes, ma," absently replied the girl, still stirring the oatmeal.

Her mother's voice rose sharply:

"I do believe you are mooning over that

brakeman. Of all the foolish girls, getting stuck on a fellow like that because he flirts with you when his train goes by!"

The woman's high-pitched speech was interrupted by the sound of feet on the stoop outside. After a few minutes, during which was heard the splashing of water, the swish of a towel, and the mumble of masculine voices, two men appeared in the doorway.

The first was old Frank Selby, his overalls and shirt wet from lately spilled milk. He was Edna's uncle. A ne'er-do-well approaching old age without money or family of his own he had resorted to his sister, when her husband, of whom he had been even more afraid than he was of Mrs. Gilpin, had died. He helped about the farm for food, shelter, clothes and tobacco.

He shuffled aside with a glance of hostility at the other figure entering the room. This was a young man, rather slim, dark and retiring. He was not nearly so good looking as Walter, Edna observed, and he did not have that easy, dashing manner.

Mrs. Gilpin gave him an appraising scrutiny, greeting him with a sharp "Good morning," though she spoke affably enough to him as the four ranged themselves about the table. He responded in a pleasant, respectful tone. His name was Harry Allerman, he said, and he had been working around the country as a farm hand the last year or so since he left his home in Illinois when his mother died. He smiled as he talked, smiling from the woman to the daughter and old Frank, in spite of the grouchiness of the man, the severity of the mother, or the detachment of the girl.

He praised the food, the cooking and vented mild wonder over the well kept farm and the sleek cattle and hogs. Mrs. Gilpin accepted the compliments with reserve, yet Edna could note an imperceptible softening in her mother's attitude toward the newcomer as the meal progressed.

"I'll have steady work at good wages until snow flies, with perhaps a place through the winter for a good boy who is not afraid to hustle," said the widow, her keen eyes on the young man.

"That's just what I am looking for," he averred.

"Seems like a nice fellow," cautiously remarked Mrs. Gilpin to Edna as the kitchen door closed behind the two men. "If he turns out to be all right you had better pay some attention to him instead of flirting with some good-for-nothing trainman. If you wasn't so stiff and fussy you could have one of these well-to-do farmer boys, but nobody's going to warm up to such an iceberg as you. You'll be a regular old maid the first thing you know, and it's a pity, for you are good looking and smart. Now, this boy, I could tell, seemed to take a fancy to you and it wouldn't hurt for you to be nice to him."

Edna heard but little of this. She was thinking of Walter and she hated to have to listen to her mother's endless scolding about becoming an old maid. It was Mrs. Gilpin's favorite plaint, for she grieved that her daughter did not attract the boys. To the woman's old-fashioned notions nothing was so much of a disgrace to a girl as not to get a man. If a woman didn't get married people would think there was something terribly wrong with her.

The mother continued to talk about the new hand to Edna, for as days passed he showed himself industrious, competent and careful as well as sociable and eager to please. He particularly impressed the farm woman by his gentle treatment of the stock. And as she either liked or did not like a person, she sang Harry's praises without reserve.

But Edna was too much perturbed at sudden failure to sight Walter on his train to pay much attention to Allerman. Then one morning soon after his coming to the farm, she chanced to observe the high-crowned hat he wore, the same kind of a hat as that belonging to the tramp the brakeman had kicked off the train.

The hired man was that tramp!

So he was just a common hobo, this person her mother deemed so fine! Well, maybe she wouldn't hear so much about him when she told what he was.

She opened her mouth to voice her discovery, then turned away with the words unsaid. Somehow she couldn't be so mean. This was a nice boy in spite of her mother's sudden fancy for him, and she didn't want

to have him discharged. He couldn't be just an ordinary tramp, for he was not lazy, his clothes were clean and neat and he carefully washed his face and hands before every meal.

But she did tell her uncle. Stopping at the pump where he was filling a pail with water she whispered to him what she knew of the hired man.

Selby hardly was within the house that noon before informing his sister "That Allerman, he's just a tramp!"

"Who told you?" demanded the woman.

"Her, there."

"I saw them kick him off the train," stammered Edna in confusion, for the hired man just then entered the house. He heard her, understood and flushed redder than his sun tan.

Mrs. Gilpin's face flamed with anger, but Edna was surprised at the direction her fury took.

"Well, of all the dirty, lowdown trash, kicking a nice boy like Harry off the train just like he was a common tramp!"

She flashed a spiteful glance at her daughter.

"I'll bet it was that smart Aleck brakeman you're so crazy about!"

She stormed through the meal at the outrage, not listening to Allerman's stumbling attempts to explain how he came to be "beating his way," assuring him she knew he was all right.

She was so bitter against the trainmen that Edna did not attempt her customary rendezvous with Walter, though she was worried at not knowing whether he was aboard the freight. Thus the chore of going after the cows fell to the grumbling Selby until one afternoon the hired man suggested to Mrs. Gilpin that he would do it if Edna would go along to show him which cattle to leave behind. The woman agreed, glad to see the two young people together.

The girl did not know why Harry wanted her to accompany him. Perhaps it was just desire for her society, as from the first he had paid her a kind of diffident attention. Perhaps it was out of pity to give her opportunity to see her sweetheart.

As they idled homeward through the ragweeds, Edna listening to the whistle of the freight train in the distance, the man remarked that it was too bad her mother was so severe against the brakeman. They weren't bad fellows, those railroad men.

The freight appeared out of the hollow as he talked, and Edna looked in vain for Walter. When it was gone she noted Harry staring after it, a wistfulness in his eyes unaccountably like her own.

For days and weeks whenever it was possible, she went beside the track of afternoons as the train rumbled by, but no trace of Walter rewarded her. Sometimes she went alone, her mother having forgotten about the brakeman, sometimes with Harry, and somehow she felt her disappointment tempered as always she saw the hired man's gaze bent upon the departing cars in sympathy with her grieving.

III.

MONTHS passed and Edna did not see or hear from Walter, and though she did not forget or cease to care for him, she came reluctantly to accept the conclusion that he had just been flirting with her and that she would never see him again. Else why had he not written, if he could not have come to her?

The nice young hired man was quietly attentive, and she did not rebuff him. Indeed, she had liked him almost from the beginning and she suspected that if it had not been for Walter and her mother's partisanship she might have felt affection for him. She was even fond of him in a calm, unemotional way just as she was fond of her mother, her uncle, and the sluggish cows she drove to the milking as the freight train rumbled by without her brakeman.

Harry courted her persistently in his hesitating, matter-of-fact fashion, encouraged by her passive acquiescence and Mrs. Gilpin's open approval, for he was now in higher esteem than ever with his employer. She gave him the easiest jobs and the more responsible trusts while old Selby mumbled and snarled about tramps and bums, fretting at prospect of this Harry lording it over him as boss in the time to come.

The hired man talked little of himself

or of his life to Edna and she liked him the better for it, for what was there romantic about him or his drab past of casual drudge in comparison with her picturesque hero and his adventurous youth? How different, indeed, from Walter, was the dull though pleasant wooer in his washed-out blue overalls and shirt and his face that looked little smoother after a Sunday shaving than it did before!

She saw him plodding along the way that in time would make him as commonplace as old Uncle Frank himself. And then would rise before her the buoyant Walter striding over the tops of the cars, or standing debonair and smiling across the fence from her that first time in the sun and dew of morning amid the hum of mating birds.

Always she thought of her brakeman, always she grieved because of him and his going away without word or heed for her. Though she inclined more and more to the hired man's prosaic love making her mind was subconsciously full of her sweetheart of the past.

And when the diffident Harry, driving her home from a picnic one evening, grew bold enough to press her hand and lightly squeeze her waist she fancied it was the hand and arm of Walter. She was thinking so tensely of him that she did not lose the illusion when the man at her side took her awkwardly in his arms and nervously kissed her.

The night was moonless, starry. The horses, tired from a week of hard work, had stopped at the side of the road a few rods from the railroad crossing.

The girl smiled and trembled in the embrace as the two sat in the buggy with the top pushed back behind them, smiled and trembled in the fantasy of her absent lover's presence and caresses.

"Your mother said she would like to have me stay here always and be one of the family," stammered Harry. "Would you like to have me stay that way?"

"Uh—huh!" Edna murmured, feeling those vicarious kisses on her lips. He put her arms about his neck and she left them there.

A vague scream sounded across the night, grew louder, swelling into a mighty shout. A huge eye of flame gleamed out of the darkness and then rose a din and roar. It was the passenger train warning of its coming to the crossing.

It thundered past, in an earth-trembling moment, the green illumined windows flitting by, and it was gone, leaving but a flare of light and a rumbling groan in the blackness.

Edna followed the train with her eyes and ears and soul. In the moment of its passing she had thought of nothing but of Walter.

She did not expect to see or hear him as she used to do when the freight puffed by the pasture wall. Only this train was a symbol of him and his life, his love and his going, his going away from her forever. She stared with a bitter and measureless yearning into the void which had swallowed up the train.

She turned to the man beside her to see him looking into that gloom. His arms were no longer about her, his lips not pressed to hers. His gaze was charged with a yearning such as had filled her own, such as more than once she had seen in his eyes as the freight steamed past them when they walked behind the cows at milking time.

IV.

Mrs. Gilpin greeted her daughter next morning with such a happy smile that the latter was sure Harry had made known their troth. The girl smiled back and went out with her milk pail. She was not sorry for her decision as she listened to her mother humming snatches of an old love song and heard the hired man swearing in joyous good humor at the horses. It was not last night's decision, not her decision. Her mind had been made up long before by forces outside herself.

Harry's unobtrusive courting, her mother's determination to mate her to him, Walter's desertion, all had combined to deliver her up to this marriage. She might as well mate with Harry, who would be a fine husband, as live an old maid with her mother making existence wretched for her because she had neglected this matrimonial oppor-

tunity or later be dogged into a union with some man she might abominate.

She had often looked forward with terror to Harry's proposal. But she had borne it, fortified in her sad illusion. Maybe she could bear her life, strengthened by something of the same somber memories of the past.

And so Edna Gilpin saw her marriage draw nearer, her head still full of dreams of Walter.

Then one day she saw him!

She was returning alone through the pasture with the cattle as the freight train lumbered by, long and slow. Walking along the top, jaunty as of old, was the brakeman she had given up as gone from out her life forever. He waved and shouted at her as if it were but yesterday when they had seen each other last.

One moment she perceived him above a box car, then saw him clambering down its side as it came abreast of her. He swung to the ground and hurried across the tracks to the fence.

"Why did you go away and never tell me, or let me hear from you in all that time?" she asked.

In abrupt words he explained. He had been called to California where his father was very ill. He had to stay a long time. But always he missed "his little girl," and he returned East as soon as his parent was on the way to recovery.

"Why didn't you write?" she insisted severely, but with forgiveness in her eyes.

"Never was any hand to write," the brakeman explained, then asked, grinning: "You aren't married yet?"

"No," replied Edna, blushing, "only our hired man wants me to marry him, but I don't know."

Walter ran toward the track and caught the rail of the caboose platform, swinging himself upon the step.

He was gone and all at once the flush of the girl's delight turned to a nausea of disappointment. She had told the trainman she didn't know, but she did know. She would have to marry Harry Allerman. She couldn't face him and her mother and tell them she had changed her mind. It was too late.

With a heavy heart Edna set off behind the cows.

V.

Edna Gilpin sat upon a step of the back porch staring moodily into the cloudy twilight. She had just finished washing the dishes after the early Sunday supper. A cold wind whined through the grove, whipping the dead leaves over the yard and down the long, black road.

Somewhere out beyond the pasture sounded the heralding whistle of the freight train, an hour overdue. But Walter was not aboard it, had not been for a week. He was a brakeman on the passenger train, which would not pass for hours, would whirl by in the dark when she could not see him.

She pondered Walter's suggestion made the last time she saw and talked with him, his reckless proposal that she wait for his new train at the siding where it stopped for the St. Paul mail, and go with him to the end of his run and marry him. But she dismissed the notion of eloping as impossible as she had dismissed it every time it came into her mind.

Harry emerged from somewhere. She watched him carrying the last of the milk into the dairy shed, watched him latch the door and walk to where she sat. Stooping down, he put his arms about her and gently drew her to her feet.

"Your coat is all wet from milk you've spilled on it," she grumbled, impatient at this sentimental mooning.

He murmured apologetically, but continued to cling to her, kissing her softly, a pathetic expression in his eyes.

Edna shivered with a violent distaste of him, an aversion that had come upon her all at once after seeing Walter again. Since then she no longer felt her old lover vicariously at hand as her husband-to-be caressed and fondled her. The feel of Harry's arms, his lips was abhorrent now.

She gazed over his shoulder into the dim gray fields.

Revulsion swept her at thought of this marriage. She had delayed it time after time until she could delay it no longer. Even the hitherto complaisant suitor was beginning to show the insistence of her

mother. She shuddered and grew sick of soul at contemplation of living in daily intimacy with a man she did not love.

"Let me alone," she snapped, at the point of screaming.

The hired man only smiled as he held her softly and kissed her with repulsive gentleness.

In her heart sudden resolution flamed. She would bear it no longer. She would run away to-night and marry Walter, elope with him as he had wanted her to do. She could wait for darkness, then make her way to the siding in time to board his train.

She hated this hired man, hated him because he stood in another's place, hated him for his detestable self, for his love thrust upon her.

If her going would hurt him she did not care. But her mother? Yes, she loved her mother, but not so dearly as to sacrifice her own happiness for her.

With a sigh the young man let the girl slip out of his arms. He walked into the house and returned with a pail, then went toward the pump. Edna heard her mother humming where she sat sewing in the kitchen. Her mother was always humming now, happy that her girl was about to get a man at last.

At sound of that murmur of maternal love and gladness Edna's heart wavered. Should she leave her mother, the grumpy old uncle, the home of her childhood, all the old, dear associations, the man who loved and trusted her, though she did not love, but hated him? Should she leave all and flee to a runaway marriage?

She stood irresolute.

Then from the lonely distance above the wail of autumn blast, echoed the whistle of the departing freight train, the train she had always associated with Walter whether he were aboard it or upon some other train here or a thousand miles away. She looked with unutterable yearning in its direction as the locomotive's scream died away. Her gaze strayed to Harry standing near the pump, the water pail in his hand, his face turned toward the mournful twilight fields whence had come the dying snarl of steam.

As the whistle, with all its memories, faded from Edna's ear and heart she thrilled with resolve anew. Her choice was made. She would go.

"Good night, Harry," she said in a constrained tone, placing her hand on the knob of the outer kitchen door. "I'm awful tired and I am going to sleep."

The man did not reply at once, and she turned her face to look across her shoulder at him. He was standing with the bucket in his hand, his head bent forward as if with eyes straining off into the nearing dusk.

Suddenly he dropped the pail, swung about and strode to her upon the porch, taking her in his arms before she could open the door and glide inside. He pressed her to his breast and kissed her with lips that quivered while a tear that was not her own fell upon the cheek of Edna.

It seemed to her that something instinctive, prophetic, was hinting to him that this adieu was good-by forever. She submitted passively, unwilling to yield herself to him even in the moment of eternal farewell, then struggled free.

As she went into the house she heard him walking with nervous tread down the porch steps.

"I'm going to bed, ma. I'm tired," she said as she hastened past the table where Mrs. Gilpin sat sewing, still humming. Edna did not dare to trust herself to look at that fond, intent face.

"All right, Edna, dear, good night," responded the woman, not pausing in her work.

Edna went to her room, just off the parlor, and sat down on the side of the bed. She had but one idea, to get away unseen to Walter's train, to escape for all time from Harry Allerman and his maudlin love. She would not pack any of her clothes. In case she were seen on the road, a grip or bundle would mean exposure.

Tensely, she waited, staring out of the window, waited for darkness. She heard her mother humming interminably in the kitchen. She noted the absence of the sound of the usual evening chatter of Harry and Mrs. Gilpin. The hired man must have gone to his room to bed, though she had not heard his tread on the stairs.

Now it was time to go. It was so dark she could scarcely see the barn a dozen

rods away. Taking her coat from the closet, Edna put it on, opened the window and leaped out into the night.

VI.

EDNA ran through the grove to the road and fled along the dark highway, running until out of breath, and then walking swiftly. She hastened on with many an uneasy glance behind and before her and to either side into the vague November fields. Unreasoning terror gripped her at sight of straggling cattle in cornstalks or the flat bulk of a strawstack against the stubble, and she started in alarm at the barking of a dog in the night.

She saw no human creature until she came to the Roberts' home halfway to the siding. There was a light near the road. Old Roberts was stooped over his gate. But he did not look in her direction as he straightened up and hobbled toward the house with his lantern.

Edna continued on with rapid pace, drawing her coat more tightly about her, not alone for secrecy, but for protection from the wind that screamed its threat of rain and snow from lowering skies.

In less than an hour from leaving the house, she was at the siding, her heart thumping with her haste and excitement. She shivered at sight of the water tank rising faint and sinister in the darkness.

She trembled anew with fright as she glimpsed figures near the tower and heard the low mutter of voices, recalling stories of terrible outrages committed by tramps on people in this lonely place.

She stole into the little waiting room, an old freight car made into the semblance of a station. In a corner a man leaned over a table writing, while a telegraph instrument pounded beside a feeble lamp. With a sense of relief Edna closed the door and sat down to wait. The telegrapher did not know her, indeed, he had not lifted his head to look at her. She was in no peril of discovery through him while his presence was protection from the tramps. Suddenly it came to her that she had no ticket. She was about to rise and accost the man, then decided to leave the detail of her fare to Walter.

There was a roar outside and the passenger train was almost beside the station before Edna could get out upon the platform. It slowed down and stopped with a grind of brakes as a portly man in conductor's uniform descended, swinging a lantern. The girl took a hurried step toward the entrance to the nearest car for the pause here was short and she did not want to expose herself to the view of anybody who might recognize her.

She stopped, still a few feet from the station door, her heart terrifically pounding. Three men were furtively slouching from behind the water tank toward the baggage car just abreast of them. Their forms were indistinct in Edna's vision, but the dim outline of one even in the darkness smote her with inescapable familiarity. The two other men disappeared, but he did not move.

Rays from the trainman's lamp fell on him, a slight person in a workingman's shirt and overalls and a high-crowned hat. Her fascinated eyes took in his frame, his bearing, his features. A scream choked in her throat.

The man was Harry Allerman!

Had he learned of her flight and come to stop her?

The bell clanged, the whistle sounded and the conductor shouted: "All aboard! All aboard!"

For a moment Harry turned his face from the cars toward the dark of dismal, lonely country as toward a mourned, forsaken shrine. Something in the melancholy profile, clear in the lantern's flame, carried Edna back to hazy autumn afternoons when time on time she had seen his wistful, brooding stare bent upon a departing train, bent, she knew now, upon an old lost life of wandering that had claimed him for its own at last.

Edna saw Harry Allerman face about and swing stealthily out of the light into the darkness between the coaches. Dazed, the girl stood there heedless of the final "All aboard." The conductor, with his telltale lantern, disappeared. The cars began to move and the tramp was gone.

Josh Stebbins, Anthropologist

By A. D. TEMPLE

"I SEE," said Link Brown, looking up from his paper, "that Firpo has gone back to South America and fought in Callao with a Peruvian pug, knocking him out the second round."

"That 'll comfort him some for havin' bit off more'n he could chew when he tried to take the belt from Jack Dempsey; maybe after he's licked a few more of them little South American pugs he'll have learned how to use both his mitts and git feeling sassy again, ready to have another tryout with Jack, eh?" said Jed Styles, ex-aviator of the A. E. F.

"Sure he will, and why not?" answered Pat McGoogle, as with a newly lit cigar in his teeth he leaned across his counter, his work over for the day. "But no South American can take the belt from Jack Dempsey."

"Pat, when Dempsey was knocked over the ropes that big Patagonian giant musta thought he had the belt and the boodle in his breeches pocket, but he had another think coming. It was the same way in France, the Heinies said we didn't know how to fight and were breaking all the rules of the game, that we didn't even know when we were licked, but kept on fighting. Dempsey is that kind of a guy himself, that's why I'm for him."

"Jed, what d'ye call him a 'Patagonian giant' for? Ain't he from Buenos Aires in the Argentine? I never heard he was from Patagonia," asked Jeff Tate.

"Well, Jeff, it comes to the same thing.

Patagonia belongs to the Argentine, or part of it, anyhow, and in jography class at school I learned there was giants there in olden times, and from the way he hits with his right, I reckon he must be one of 'em that was left over."

"Mr. Styles, excuse me. In our modern geographies that my pupils study, I have found no mention of giants existing now in any region of South America, nor Africa. Anthropology and archæology have always been a favorite study with me, and I am afraid you have overstated the case in classing this South American pugilist, however large and powerful he may be, as a giant. Scientific research has, as yet, found no existing race of giants on the earth, although fossil remains of a giant race have been discovered in some recent excavations in the far west." This from the schoolmaster who had just dropped in for his daily mail.

"I'll bet when Dempsey picked himself up outside the ropes, he didn't lay the blame on any fossil," came a laughing voice from the crowd around the stove.

"How about that giant that was dug up in ol' York State at Cardiff? I seen him once in Barnum & Bailey's circus, an' he sure was some giant," put in Jeff Fisher.

"There have been many heated discussions, Mr. Fisher, over the authenticity of that famous giant and the question is still undecided among the best informed scientists," replied the schoolmaster.

"Purfesser," interrupted Josh Stebbins, whose attention had been about equally divided between the conversation and a mug of the justly celebrated de-natured cider for which Pat McGoogle's grocery was noted, "these 'ere anterpologists an' archologists half the time don't know what they're talkin' about, an' t'other half them that's listenin' to 'em don't know what they mean, fer they use such big words that a feller needs ter have a dictionary at full cock an' wide open to ketch on to what they're tryin' to tell yer; an' at that, ye ain't safe in believin' it.

"Thar is that feller, Windjammer Stuffemsome, thet went No'th Pole huntin' an' was lost two years in the Arctic; when he come back he wrote a book about some white Eskimos he claimed he'd found up there. Why, me an' my pardner only took six weeks to go from the head o' Copper River to the pole with dog teams. We met up with them white Eskimos he wrote about, an' they wasn't nothin' but a lot of deserters from a whaler in Baffins Bay. They'd bought some squaws from the Eskimos fer four plugs o' navy terbaccer and two forty-four Winchester cartridges a head, an' hed learned to eat raw seal blubber an' keep from freezin' in wickyups thet they built outa snow, so they was livin' jest like any other savages. One of 'em was a bunky of mine when I worked in Eastport in a sardine cannery, an' he told me all about 'em. He laughed fit to split, tellin' about how they put it over on Stuffemsome, workin' him fer twenty pounds o' plug terbaccer on the strength of their bein' a new breed of Eskimos.

"An' then agen, there was that giant they dug up in York State, that the anterpologists an' archologists hed sech a powwow over. Them wise guys, with horn bowed specs on their noses, backed an' filled like a fishin' smack in a gale o' wind with her steerin' gear carried away. Some of 'em said he warn't nothin' but a stone statcher an' a fraud on the public an' others allowed they didn't know what he was before he died an' was buried, but mebbe he hed been a real live giant some time ago, it mighta been ten thousand, or a hunerd thousand years before, they was durned ef they knowed; but, gentlemen, I'm a tellin' you-all thet that thar Cardiff giant was a real, giniwine putrefied giant; I dunno how long he's been dead, but there's live ones o' the same breed cavortin' round right to-day! Yeah, that's what I said, an' I mean it!"

"Josh, ain't you talking through your hat?" suggested Link Brown. "A committee of the wisest bone sharps and antikarians in New York, after giving him the once-over for a month, declared that he had been built to order for Barnum & Bailey's circus, and said they oughta put the law on 'em for swindling the public."

"M-i-s-t-e-r B-r-r-own, I want to tell yer, right now, thet I'm gittin' mighty tired o' havin' you try ter impugn my voracity durned near every time I make a statement

o' scientific facks fer the information o' my feller members an' friends o' the Coonburg Sportsman's Club. It's more'n likely that them wise guys from New York was so soused that they couldn't see the holes in a ladder; I wanter say thet when I saw the Cardiff giant I hedn't drunk nothin' stronger'n circus red lemonade fer two days, an' it was the finest sample of an oversized human putrefaction that was ever dug outa the ground."

" Mr. Stebbins, have you read an account of the recently made discoveries of gigantic human footprints, as well as the tracks of huge horses and cattle on a limestone ledge in the Grand Cañon? These all go to prove the correctness of your theory of the existence of giants at a comparative recent period of the world's history," commented the schoolmaster.

" Purfessor, I never read nothin' an' I ain't got no theories, I am jest a diskiverer of facks of scientific value to them thet knows how ter appreciate what I hev risked my repytation fer voracity, an' my life, ter see an' find out; ye ken judge fer yerself after I tell ye something that happened to me an' my shipmates, an' what we seen ourselves.

" There was four of us sailin' outa Dutch Harbor, in Alasky. We was owners of a little smack built in Gloucester an' sailed round the Horn fifty years before we got hold of her; she'd seen rough weather an' hard times ever since she was launched. We was general salt water hustlers an' beach combers. Sometimes we fished on the banks fer halibut an' cod, then we'd change off to take a cruise round the fur seal islands when we knowed the revenoo cutter was laid up cleanin' her boilers, so we could pick up a few sealskins, or hunt sea otter in the kelp along the coast, ez well ez tradin' hooch to the Eskimos fer furs an' walrus ivory. We was makin' money fast; once we got a sea otter skin wuth five hundred dollars from an old Injun, in trade fer a single barrel muzzle loadin' shotgun.

" But it was on a cruise when we got lost in the fog when we was after fur seals. We picked foggy weather on purpose, ez it was easy to get away from the guards on the island in a fog, only this time we got more fog than we wanted, fer we couldn't find the island, the air was so durned thick thet we couldn't see the mainmast from the wheel. I've sailed the Seven Seas an' I never saw it thicker in all my v'y'ges, but a Cap Cod man, thet was one of us, said he felt right to home on the Cape. He said that he remembered that his granddaddy was shinglin' his barn during a leetle extra heavy fog, an' when the wind blowed the fog away it carried with it ten courses o' shingles thet he'd nailed onto it after passin' the ridgepole without noticin' it. But I always allowed he was exaggeratin'.

" Them Cape Cod men hev all got the name o' bein' the biggest liars afloat, an' I never cared about bein' seen talkin' to one of 'em, fer fear o' damagin' my repytation ez a truthful man, fer ye know ' A man is known by the company he keeps ' an', ez ye all know, I allus strive ter be truthful an' exact in all my statements, fer only by doin' so kin I keep my repytation."

Pat McGoogle knocked the ash off his cigar as he interrupted Josh's remarks with: " Josh, for the luvva Mike! We started off talking about the two biggest prize fighters there is before the public, and you have switched us off to seal hunting in a fog off the Alaska coast. I can't see what that has to do with Jack Dempsey and Firpo; nor that big fraud, the Cardiff giant, neither."

" Lemme git started, Pat. I wanter start right an' tell ye all jest what I have to tell, no more an' no less. Ye see, the fog was so darned thick we didn't dare carry more sail than jest enough to give us steerage way, an' besides the compass in the binnacle had got outa whack, so instead of givin' us the right course it p'inted straight down fer Davy Jones's Locker, leavin' us without a compass in heavy fog to steer by, guess an' trust to luck thet the fog 'd raise so's we could get our bearin's from the sun an' stars; but we drifted fer weeks without seein' a half schooner length ahead. Fellers, it was plumb redic'lous the way thet fog hung on! Sometimes we'd heard the breakers close by, but sheered off in time without seein' them, though we could tell by the sound they wasn't the length o' the jibboom off our forrud beam.

Once we heard the sea lions barkin' all round us an' was expectin' to strike a rock any minute, but luck was with us an' we got through without scrapin' an' soon we was outa hearin' of 'em.

"Then one day the fog lifted an' the sun come out; there was land dead ahead. We ran in on it lookin' fer an anchorage, findin' it was an island with deep water and high cliffs on the windward side, with no good holdin' ground, but we coasted along till we rounded a high p'int, findin' behind it a fine little bay, horseshoe shaped with a sandy beach and as safe as a lake. We dropped our mud hook in about four fathoms an' two of us went ashore in the dory to take a look at the country."

"What was the name of this island that you were so fortunate as to sight after your perilous voyage through the fogs of the Northern Pacific?" inquired the schoolmaster who listened with breathless interest to the account of the perils of the sea.

"Purfesser, ef it has any name I never heerd it mentioned. Ye see we put in there in distress, an' fer circumstances over which we hed no control we left thar in a hell of a hurry; I'll say thet ef we was glad when we sighted it we was a heap gladder when we lost sight of it a while later. It ain't down on any chart I've ever seen, an' I reckon our crew on the ol' fishin' smack are the only white men thet ever laid their eyes on it."

Josh paused, then silently helped himself to a mug of the de-natured cider, a hunk of cheese, two soda crackers and a smoked red herring, after disposing of which slight refreshment he brushed the crumbs from his ragged beard and with a retrospective look in his eyes resumed his yarn.

"From high to low water mark the beach was all messed up with deer an' bear tracks. I'd seen purty big bear tracks on Kadiak Island an' round Dutch Harbor, but they was nothin' but baby cub tracks alongside o' these, fer they was more'n two foot an' a half long an' sunk down deep in the hard sand beach where our tracks didn't hardly leave a sign. We did notice a few cub tracks not over a foot long, so we went back an' got our rifles allowin' we'd shoot ef we run across the little fellers, an' hide or run ef we met one o' them big ones thet made the big tracks.

"Wood and fresh water was what we were lookin' for, so we struck up a dry crik bed at the head o' the bay an' found plenty of good water an' lots of firewood a short way back from the beach. Up the draw a mile further we found placer gold in the crik bed and a quartz ledge showin' free gold cropped out on the ridge above. We staked out our two diskiverers' claims accordin' to miners' law an' then started to take a look over the island. Back from the water it was rollin' country with grassy ridges an' level stretches of meadow land in between an' clumps of trees an' thickets of underbrush scattered over it here an' thar.

"When we first got near the island we seen what looked like some big buildin's that were half tumbled down an' we call'ated to go an' have a look at 'em, but ez we were crossin' a flat we seen some holes that looked like one o' them shell holes that Jed tells of seein' over in France durin' the war, only they wasn't so big ez they were, about three foot deep an' ten foot across; all round 'em the grass was tromped down with the same big tracks we'd noticed on the beach an' at fust we reckoned that the bears hed been diggin' out ground hogs or chipmunks, but we found out different, mighty *pronto*.

"Ez we was projeckin' round at the edge o' one o' them holes kinder wantin' ter kill a big bear an' at the same time knowin' thet our rifles was too small bore fer to do it, ez to jedge from the tracks a three inch cannon was what we'd need, then jest ez we'd allowed thet we hadn't lost no bears that day, all of a sudden something come flyin' through the air an' after boundin' twice on the ground hit my pardner in his breadbasket, knockin' him flat an' knockin' the wind out of him, I let him lay an' grunt while I picked up the ball thet hed floored him. It was the shape of a baseball, covered with raw seal hide, an' more or less, ez big ez an undersized punkin'. It didn't weigh much an' I reckon it was stuffed with deer hair packed tight. Ez I was handlin' it an' wonderin' whar it hed dropped from another one fell

in front of me an' rolled in the hole. I looked up the way it come from an' seen two big black shapes showin' in the brush of a ridge half a mile away. I couldn't see 'em very plain, but took it fer granted they was bears.

" ' Thar comes a couple of bears,' I hollered to my pardner, who was jest gittin' straightened out, and his wind back, ' Let's hide in thet blackberry patch an' watch 'em with our guns ready, ef they see us.' We scooted fer the middle o' the patch an' hid, quicker'n hell could scorch a feather. Arter we got settled down in the thickest of the brambles I felt safer an', stickin' my head up, took another look at 'em with my binoculars. Fellers, what I seen got my goat right there! Ef there'd been a rabbit hole round there handy, I'da crawled into it an' pulled it in arter me, fer they wasn't bears like we thought, but a couple o' the biggest, tallest things in the shape o' human bein's there is on the face of the earth."

" Josh, how big were they?" asked Jeff Fisher.

" Wal, Jeff, I didn't hev a yardstick along with me, an' ef I'd hed one I wouldn't a' felt called on to use it. The more, ez I ain't one o' these scientific guys thet'll risk their lives fer the sake of gittin' exact scientific notes on their new diskiveries. All I ken say is, they was so big thet ef Jack Dempsey an' Firpo hed stood alongside of 'em they'da looked like a pair of rat terriers smellin' round a yearlin' bull calf."

" Did you notice what clothes they wore?" asked Link Brown.

" No, I didn't take much notice, ye see ' safety first ' hez allus been my principles through life, an' I was so flustered with figgerin' how ter git outa the jack-pot we was in, thet all I kin say ez to what they wore, is, thet each one hed a shinny stick in his hands.

" It's a cinch thet they was playin' what I call ' Scotch Shinny ' where ye aim to hit the ball a wallop thet'll land it in a hole mebbe two hundred yards away, but these fellers was making longer shots accordin' to their size, the holes bein' laid out a good half mile apart. One thing I'm sure of is, ef they'd been all dolled up in knee breeches an' rolled top stockin's, with canvas shoes, like I've seen them city folk down at Factoryville in thet country club they've started thar, I'da noticed it, but I didn't, an' don't know to-day whether they wore a gee string or a blanket."

" It must have been a primitive variety of golf that these giants were amusing themselves with; don't you think Mr. Stebbins?" suggested the schoolmaster.

" Mebbe it was purfessor, but it looked ter me ez ef it was what we called shinny when I was a kid an' some of 'em called it hockey.

" Wal, ez I was tellin' you all, we lay scrouched down in them blackberry bushes like a pair o' cotton-tail rabbits hidin' from coyotes while them two giants come down to where their balls was layin'. Right there they started to argy; I reckon the question was whose ball hed dropped in the hole; anyhow, in a little they commenced scrappin', when each one hed broke his shinny stick over the other feller's head they went at it with their dukes. It was a purty fight while it lasted, but the shortest feller, who couldn't hev been more'n eighteen foot high, but was broad shouldered an' thickset, got in a blow under his belt that doubled up the tallest one like a jackknife, knockin' him out fer the count.

" While the winner was dancin' round an' blowin' off steam over havin' downed his man, we made a sneak, crawlin' through the brush an' down the bed of dry crik on our bellies; it was gettin' dark mighty fast, so we hed to move lively; it got darker an' ez we was slippin' an' slidin' over the rocks, all to once our feet went out from under us an' we fell head first into a hole in the crick bed thet was level full of crude petroleum.

" We got out an' made the beach where our dory was. When we told the deck watch what we'd seen an' found they got cold feet. Crude oil an' gold ledges, no matter how rich, didn't cut no ice with them ef they hed to do business with Injuns twenty foot high, we'd better git away from where sech people growed *pronto* they said. So we h'isted our anchor an' steered S.E.E. by the sun an' stars ez near ez we could

guess. After about a two weeks' run we sighted a steamer headin' west, for Japan thet give us a compass in workin' order and our location on the chart. Ten days later we sighted Cape Flattery an' dropped our mud hook in Port Townsend the day after."

"Josh, I wonder if you could find that island again if it was worth your while to look for it," said Pat McGoogle.

"I dunno, Pat; mebbe I could. It is somewhere between Alasky an' Japan out in the No'th Pacific, away outa the course of ships. It would sure pay big, fer the crude oil is right on top o' the ground, while a piece o' rock from thet gold ledge we staked out went three thousand dollars to the ton."

"If I was you, I'd write to Tex Rickard and tell him about those giants you saw. He'd stake you for the sake of having a new attraction for Jersey City and Madison Square Garden. A team of Giant Pugs would be a bigger card than Dempsey and Firpo."

"The trouble would be that he would have to get a half dozen of those giants, so that the champions would have sparring partners," laughed Jed Styles as McGoogle started putting out the lights.

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I'VE written scores of verses to
Full many a fair and dainty maid,
With eyes of heavenly azure hue,
Brown, hazel, black as ace of spade,
In fact, of every earthly shade,
And dubbed them angel, siren, fairy;
But I am more than half afraid
My loves are all imaginary.

I've raved about a certain Lu,
Until I can almost persuade
Myself that all I've said is true,
Instead of just a trick I've played.
The name (a single trick of trade),
Had far more rimes than—well, say Mary,
And so I use it. Why evade?
My loves are all imaginary.

I've prated love till I am blue,
And never yet have I betrayed
The fact that 'twas for revenue
Those jingling verses all were made.
Supply demand, and get well paid,
Demand for verses, tender, merry.
A hypocrite? Do not upbraid—
My loves are all imaginary.

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Some poets, true, can serenade
The maids they love, so gay and airy,
While I do naught but masquerade
My loves are all imaginary.

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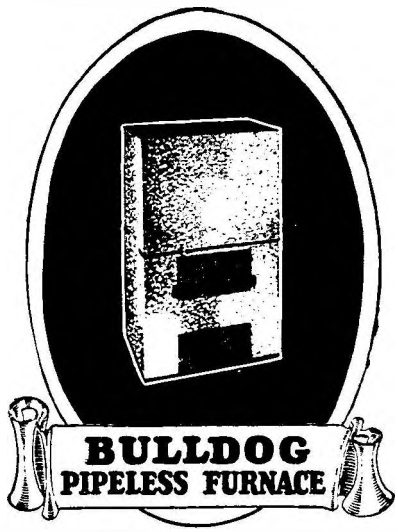

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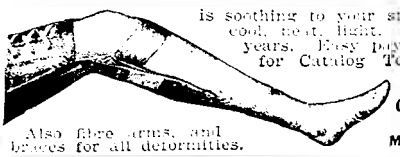

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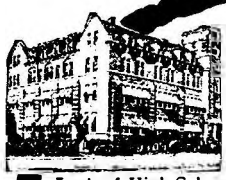

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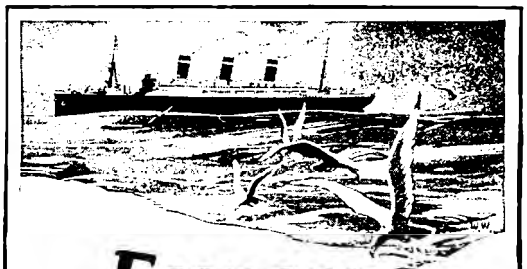

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"HANDY GRIP" AND REFILL

For Comfort, Convenience, and Economy

When we say to you that the Shaving Stick has important advantages over shaving preparations in any other form, we can do so without bias, for we manufacture shaving sticks, powder and cream.

In its attractive nickel box, our "Handy Grip" Shaving Stick is most convenient for traveling. It will not crush when packed, and it makes a wonderful lather for *easy shaving*. It is not uncommon for a Colgate Shaving Stick to last more than a year in daily use.

The famous "Handy Grip", with a trial-size shaving stick in nickel box, sent for 10c. When the trial stick is gone, buy Colgate "Refills" for the price of the soap alone, 25c.

COLGATE & CO. Dept. C, 199 Fulton St., NEW YORK

Truth in advertising implies honesty in manufacture

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