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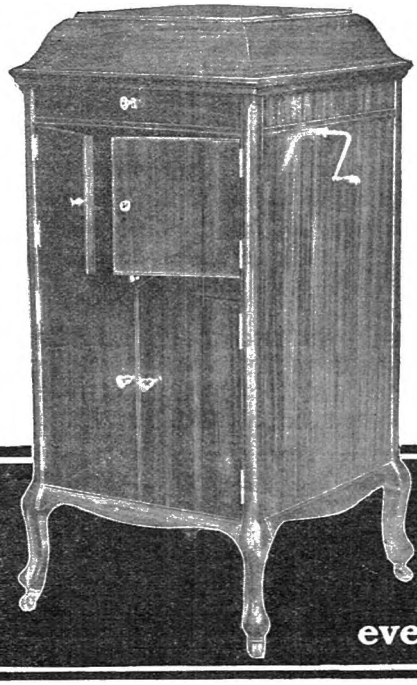

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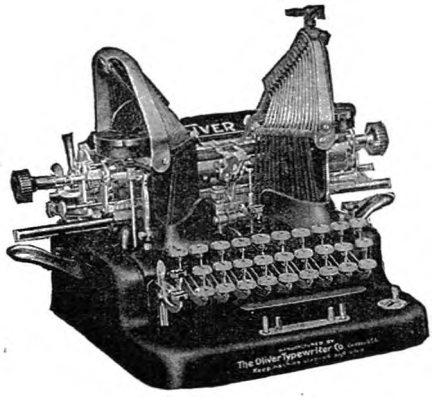

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(53)

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FENCING WITH VILLAINY. Part II. A partnership with death in which a live man becomes a serious handicap to the game..SEWARD W. HOPKINS 106

THE BIG OBSTACLE. Part II. The thing a man did when he didn't care what happened to him and why he had cause to regret it later BERTRAM LEBHAR 121

MIND OVER MATTER. Part IV. A story of strange goings-on in a town wherein the hero does not appear for several chapters..BROOKS STEVENS 143

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THE JANUARY ARGOSY

will have for its Two Complete Novels "**Her Hero From Savannah**" and "**At Thieves' Paradise,**" while there will be the start of Two New Serials, viz., "**Roy Burns's Handicap,**" a tale of persistent hard luck, and "**The Woman He Feared,**" an account of queer promotions. Among the graphically told Short Stories will be "**The Attack to Save,**" a tale of Arabian days, and a New Year's Eve yarn of stirring experiences.

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(96)

THE ARGOSY

Vol. LXV DECEMBER, 1910. No. 1

A COLD DEAL.

BY GARRETT SWIFT.

Author of "A Submarine Enchantment," "Tracking It Down," "Guarding the Treasure," etc.

A Cooling-Off Process That Engendered High Hopes, Capped by a Sudden Unwelcome Frigidity in All Quarters Save One.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

THE LAST HOPE.

"IT'S a dingy enough looking place," I said to myself half aloud, as I stood looking at a sign that stretched itself across the front of an old building in Front Street, "but it's about the only business I haven't tackled yet. I'll make a try at it. They must use chemists."

I had little time to waste in contemplation now. My money was running short; so I dived into the grimy-looking doorway and mounted the stairs to the second floor. Here, on the glass of a door, I saw the same words that were painted on the sign:

THE BRADMAN MEDICINE COMPANY.

It certainly was not a place that held out any great hope. The building was old, and showed little for the care that was expended on it to keep it clean. But I was not fastidious that day. My days of being particular when looking for work in New York had passed.

I opened the door and walked in.

A small boy sat in a chair near a small oak table reading a paper novel. He looked at me superciliously, for my clothing was not quite what it was when it was new.

"Well?" he said interrogatively.

"Is the president in?"

"The—which? Is it Roosevelt or Taft you want?"

"I want to see the president or manager or superintendent or whatever you call the head mogul of this place. I want to see the boss. And don't you get too fresh about it or I'll change the map of your face so you couldn't find an ink-spot with a piece of soap."

"Oh, gee!"

"Well, my red-headed infant, are you going to introduce me to the man who pays you your salary for reading about Blunderbuss Dick?"

"Aw—er—got a card?"

He leered at me, for he knew that a request for a card embarrasses nine out of ten persons looking for work.

"I have," I answered blandly. "You will observe, if you are sufficiently well educated to read, that the name on the card is Robert Crawfort, and under that you will kindly take notice there is a word—chemist. Now, convey that card to your employer without delay, or there may be an extra session in which you play the part of a Congressional bill being torn to pieces by opposing factions."

He stared at me and disappeared with the card.

He returned in about two minutes.

"The boss is out to lunch, but—come in."

He jerked open a little gate and I passed through. He led me through an office where there were two desks littered with papers that showed recent work, but there was nobody at work at this time. From there we went into another office, well furnished, large and comfortable.

Here, sitting near a window, was a wonderfully pretty girl, dressed neatly and becomingly, with no ostentation or evidence of wealth.

"Here's the gent," said the office-boy.

The girl laid down her book and swung her swivel-chair so that she faced me.

"Well, Mr. Crawfort, what can I do for you?" asked the pretty girl.

"I—I—"

For the first time in my life I felt awkward, embarrassed, humiliated. How can a man ask a pretty girl for a job?

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Crawfort?" she went on in a sweet way. "You look tired."

"I am tired," I said honestly. "I did not expect to find a young lady here. The truth of the matter is that I am tramping all over New York looking for a job, and this is one of the few places I haven't struck."

Her eyes expressed surprise and wonder.

"You don't really mean to say that you have been to nearly every business house in New York?"

"Well, possibly that would be rather too much to say, but not very far-fetched. When you consider that I have spent every week-day for three months, and from seven in the morning till it was too late to get in anywhere, you may think I've made a few applications."

"Why—I should say so. And haven't you had any luck at all?"

"None. I have met all kinds of men. I have been hustled out of offices as though I had a contagious disease. I have met men who sized me up and actually made overtures with the object of getting away from me the last few dollars I possessed. I have left my name and address with hundreds, and listened to the story that if a vacancy occurred they would notify me. Nobody has, therefore I assume there never is a vacancy in New York."

"In a measure," she said, "you are right. If a man dies, or leaves a place to better himself, or gets too old to work, there is another man in his place before night. There are so many out of work, you know. Do you live in New York?"

"No; my home is in Connecticut, on a farm."

"But you say you have tramped New York for three months."

"Just that."

"But how did you live? I know there are men in New York who do live without money and without work. But you are not that kind."

"I had a little money when I came here. I have a little now. But not much. You see, our farm is a poor, miserable layout, and will just about support my father and mother and sister. My grandmother died a few years ago, and left me two thousand dollars. She left my sister the same amount. Well, I took mine and paid my way through college, taking up chemistry as my long suit. And when I graduated and came here to find work, I had some of that two thousand left."

"My! You did well. So you are a chemist?"

"Yes. I have my diploma in my pocket."

"And have you spent three months looking for a position as chemist?"

"Oh, no."

"What else did you look for?"

"I spent three days looking for a job as chemist. Then I began looking for a job as bank clerk. Then I began at the trust companies. Then I went after the big stores. Finally, I was just looking for a job."

"But how did you happen to come here?"

"Well, when I was eating breakfast this morning I saw a half-page advertisement of the Bradman Medicine Company. There were, I think, about six different remedies well written up. There was a headache cure, and a cure for lung troubles, and a remedy for liver complaint, and one for the kidneys. Now, I am not over and above fond of patent medicines, but, leaving entirely aside the efficacy in all cases, the fact remains that if they are any good at all they are put up after a chemical formula."

"Yes—I suppose that's true."

"Now, a novice could not go on compounding a certain medicine year after year and always have it the same. He might follow the formula so far as words are concerned, with an honorable exactness. But he would never know whether the drugs and chemicals he was using were of the proper strength, and therefore one bottle of the medicine might do good, another harm. So I knew that the Bradman Medicine Company, if it put out all the remedies it advertised, must have a number of chemists in its employ, so I came to see if there was a place for me."

I will admit that it hurt a little down

deep, out of sight, for me to be sitting there telling all this to a pretty girl. But I supposed a typist, or office-girl, who earned her own living, would not despise a man who was trying to do the same.

"I'm sure I don't know," she said.

I noticed that her eyes were brown, and they were bent on me with a keen, penetrating look. Her pretty face was sober. The book lay forgotten in her lap.

"I suppose you could tell me the name of the person I ought to see."

"Mr. Bradman is out at lunch just now. And he was to stop at the bank on the way back. But he ought to be here soon. Almost any minute. And I'm sure I wish you good luck."

"It would be good luck if I landed here," I remarked. "I am willing to work hard. But you don't seem to be killed by overwork."

She laughed, and her cheeks reddened a little.

"I—oh, I—but here comes Mr. Bradman."

A heavy step sounded, and a portly, good-looking man came in.

"Here—was I very long?" he asked in rather a husky voice. "I met Thornton and stopped to talk. Here's your money. The car is at the door now."

"Thank you," said the girl. "And, papa, this is Mr. Crawfort, who wishes to see you about a position as chemist in your laboratories."

I stood like a ninny, shocked. It was the daughter of the boss I had been talking to. Then, as she passed me to reach the door, she put out her hand.

"I am Georgia Bradman," she said. "I hope you will land here, as you put it. You have my very best recommendation."

She floated gracefully through the door, and I turned to find the portly gentleman staring at me with eyes that were filled with wonder.

CHAPTER II.

PERSEVERANCE.

"WHAT did you say—I mean, what did Miss Bradman say your name is?"

"My name is Robert Crawfort. My card is there on the desk."

He picked it up and frowned.

"So—you're a chemist."

"Yes, sir."

"Graduate?"

"Yes, sir. I have my diploma in my pocket."

"Where and when did you make the acquaintance of Miss Bradman?"

"I can't really claim that I ever did make her acquaintance, sir. I came here intending to apply for a position, and sent in my card by the boy outside. He returned and told me to come in, and Miss Bradman was here. I had never met her before."

"And I suppose she went into all the details of your case, sympathized with you, and all that."

"No, there were no decided expressions of sympathy. I told her the truth about my circumstances, but I was then under the impression that she was an office employee."

"Well, that's her way. Now, let's go at it in a business way. What is it you want?"

"If I can get it, a position as chemist."

"Who sent you here?"

"Nobody. I have searched all over New York without success. I saw your advertisement in this morning's paper, and the thought suggested itself to me. I knew you must employ chemists."

"Well, that is true. But there is no vacancy at present."

"That was the trouble everywhere."

"And I'm afraid it always will be. The commercial life of New York is not much different from that of smaller cities, only it is on a much larger scale. There is always somebody's son who has got to be put in a position. So that a young fellow like you stands very little chance. Still, the case is not hopeless. Boys without backing have found places in New York and have become rich men."

"But you say that to let me down easy. You won't give me a chance."

"H-m. You've got it right, mostly. It is true that I employ chemists. But every position is filled, and there is a long waiting list. The head chemist is old, and his boy is slated for a place the minute he drops out. And he isn't so very old, either. He's a good chemist, keeps his mouth shut, and is good for twenty years still. You see, even his son has no chance as yet."

"But if the business increases you will want more."

"The business will not increase. A business like this is built up by a vast expendi-

ture for advertising. This was my father's business, and he brought it to its present dimensions by advertising. Even if I spent as much for advertising as he did I would not increase the bulk of the business to the extent I would need to reimburse me.

"Every month you will see a new company or a new remedy flashed on the market, and page after page of newspapers and magazines given over to it. People who believe in and use patent medicines try them all, and if by judicious advertising we can keep about even by gaining enough new custom to take the place of what we lose to new rivals, we are doing about all that is possible. But I'm sure I don't know why I'm sitting here gabbling away the secrets of the business to a stranger. How do I know you are not a spy from a rival concern and will not report that old Bradman is going to pieces?"

"There is no fear of that. I am not in that line. If I can't earn my living honestly I don't want any. I'll go back to the farm."

"Take my advice, and go back. Where is it?"

"In Connecticut."

"Abandoned?"

"No, my father and mother and sister are living there."

"Go back and help the old man run the farm. He needs you a blamed sight more than New York does."

"It is a small farm, and my father has help enough. He has two men as old as he is who have worked for him many years. And he would lose his farm rather than discharge one of them."

"There!" he exclaimed, boring a hole in the air with his fat finger as he pointed it at me. "There you have the same situation you found here. We simply don't want to get rid of faithful employees to make room for new ones."

"But I didn't ask you to do that. I wouldn't take a job if I thought you had discharged an older man to make room for me."

"You wouldn't?"

"No, sir. I wouldn't."

"Well, I admire your spirit, whatever I think of your good sense. But this is a waste of your time and mine. I'll keep your card and—"

He stopped, and laughed.

"I was going to give you the old gag. But you've heard that a few thousand times. I won't write you. But you might run in some time in the future, and you might possibly strike a day when I needed a man."

"I will, sir."

I left him. Somehow the turn down by Mr. Bradman did not chill me or make me feel discouraged, as most all the other refusals had. He had not been stern or cold. He had promised nothing, yet there had been throughout our interview a friendliness that few business men in New York had shown me.

And perhaps the memory of Miss Georgia Bradman's sweet face and honest brown eyes had something to do with my sanguine spirits as I walked along the street.

I was so deep in my recollections of that office and the two persons I had met in it, that I made no attempt all the rest of that day to find any position.

I went to the expense of three magazines and a few cigars. My feet were sore from much tramping for weeks, and I needed a rest. I went to my boarding-house and, after a refreshing bath, sat down to enjoy the day in a reposeful manner.

And now see what a gigantic ass a man will make of himself for so small a reason as a pretty face.

I left my boarding-house the next morning again to seek work. Where would be the place for me to go with the least chance of success? Why, of course, to the Bradman Medicine Company. Yet that is the very place to which I went.

I found the same red-headed boy in the anteroom. He had no comment to make this time. He took my card into Mr. Bradman's office.

"Go on in," he said when he returned.

Mr. Bradman was alone. He turned and looked at me with an amused, half-questioning look on his face.

"Well, Crawfort," he said pleasantly. "Have any luck?"

"I didn't try after I left here. I took a much-needed rest. I bought some magazines and read. One article I read with much interest was on perseverance. It said in effect that if a man persevered honestly he must eventually arrive at his goal."

"Yes? And so—"

"So I came again. I don't know whether I expected one of your chemists to die during the night, or what. But anyway I'm here."

He frowned a little, as though he preferred me to try out the virtues of perseverance on somebody else.

"Well, the situation remains the same. There is no more a vacancy to-day than there was yesterday."

"Very well, sir. I trust I did no harm in coming."

"N—no, but don't waste too much time. I may say confidently that there will *not* be a vacancy to-morrow."

"Oh, you can't tell. If there is I want to be around."

"But, man! you carry your theory of perseverance too far."

"It isn't my theory. It's the author's. I'm simply giving it a trial. Good day, sir. I hope I'll find you in good health to-morrow."

I heard a decided grunt of dissatisfaction as I closed the door behind me.

CHAPTER III.

A LITTLE TOO MUCH.

If Mr. Bradman was dissatisfied, so was I. Just why I hoped I would find Miss Georgia Bradman in her father's office again I don't know. It was clear as though I had been told so, that she had come on the previous day for no other purpose than to get some money to go shopping with.

The appearance and manner of Mr. Bradman did not indicate him to be a man who would make it necessary for the ladies of his family to go to his dingy building to get money every time they went shopping. It had been some sudden notion with Miss Georgia that day. I might never see her again.

But somehow I could not get the picture of her beautiful face out of my mind. Her friendly brown eyes seemed to be looking at me all the time.

And I found myself dreaming fool dreams in which Miss Georgia Bradman was always the central figure.

Of course, I knew that the owner of a patent-medicine manufacturing establishment was not on the pinnacle of social heights in New York. But the possession of wealth is a barrier between those who would, minus that barrier, be social equals.

I didn't know how rich Mr. Bradman was. He had a very prosperous look. But I knew that looks are not always indicative of the facts.

I throw this in to show how my brain had been affected by the sight of a lovely face and a few kind words from its owner.

I reached the conclusion that I had gone to the medicine company's office at the wrong hour. I recalled that when I met Miss Bradman it had been at noon, or just a little after, when she was evidently taking care of the office for her father while he went to lunch.

"Now," I reasoned to my fatuous self, "it may be that Miss Georgia does this frequently. It may be that Mr. Bradman will not trust anybody else to take charge of his office while he is out. I'll try it about one o'clock to-morrow."

And, as another evidence of what the infatuation for a lovely face will do, I found myself looking eagerly forward to that noonday visit to the medicine company's office, and the burden of my hope was that Miss Georgia would be there. I thought more about meeting her again than I did about getting a job.

And the queer part of it was that there seemed to be nothing wrong—nothing incongruous—in all this. I was simply following the line of least resistance in my mind.

So, after another day of rest and a good sleep, I spent the morning fixing my wardrobe a little, hauling over my stock of neckties, getting a real polish on my shoes, and hunting for a pair of cuffs that did not show fringe on the society edge.

After a hearty lunch I took the Elevated down-town, and made my way to Mr. Bradman's office.

The red-headed office-boy stared with wide-open eyes. He did not ask for my card. He did not even give me time to get out my card-case. With a solemnity and politeness that surprised me he got up and opened the gate, at the same time making a formal bow.

It was an invitation to walk in, without the formality of sending my name to Mr. Bradman.

I walked into his office without much ceremony, and once inside the door I stopped, the blood rushing to my face.

Mr. Bradman was not there, but Miss Georgia Bradman sat again by the window, reading.

As I entered the door she looked up slowly, as though not particularly interested in the identity of the person entering. When, however, she saw me, she jumped to her feet and clapped her hands together.

"I've won!" she cried. "I've won! You are splendid!"

Her enthusiasm was in such contrast to my own confusion that I felt rather stiffened by it, and my courage rose.

"By the which—er—you mean—"

"I knew you wouldn't desert a poor young damsel in distress."

"*Nevaire!*" I laughed. "What is it? Have you seen a mouse? Did some dock-hands chase you and threaten to hurl you into the East River? Tell me how I can display the heroism you demand, and I'll try to make good."

"Why," she exclaimed, "*you have* made good! I knew you would."

"But," I said, recovering my usual composure, "I fail to remember having any stunt put up to me to do. Given no stunt, having done nothing, how did I make good?"

"Why, you see, papa came home last night and told mama and me about your call here yesterday, and what you said to him about perseverance. And he laughed. He said he had given you a cue not to come to-day by telling you there would be no vacancy. He laughed about it. He said he guessed he was rid of you for a while. Then I said you would surely come to-day. He said he'd bet you wouldn't. That's a common bluff with him, but this time I took him up. I said I'd bet him a box of good cigars—his own brand—against a box of the best candies that you would put in your appearance to-day. And here you are, and the bet is mine."

"I'm so glad you'll have the candies, you know," I observed.

"And—but how long are you going to keep this perseverance stunt on the boards?"

"Till I get a job or—"

"Or what?"

"Get kicked out, land on my head, and break my neck."

"As long as that? I don't believe my father would know how to go about kicking anybody out. He's the softest ever. But, anyway, it will be fun, won't it?"

"What? Getting kicked out or breaking my neck?"

"No—coming here every day to look for a job."

"Well, there are pleasant circumstances connected with it. But I fancy I can see an end to the fun. It would arrive about the same time as the end of my money."

She laughed.

"But you would get so accustomed to seeing each other. If you came here every day, and after a while didn't ask for a job, but dropped in about this time to have a chat and a smoke, and then began asking if there were any extra orders to-day, I'll bet papa would forget you were not on the pay-roll; and if you asked him for your salary, he'd ask how much it is, and give it to you. He's that easy."

"You encourage me. That's much simpler than knocking a man down in the street and taking his watch and pocketbook."

"Yes, and makes less fuss. But you *are* persevering. And it will count in the long run. And I'm going to see the fun. I'll tell papa I feel the need of a change from an idle life, and I'll be here often at about this hour to see how you get along."

"Your presence will inspire me to greater perseverance."

"Hush! Here he comes. Don't speak till he does."

She picked up her book and went to reading again as demurely as though she did not know I was alive. The heavy step of Mr. Bradman was approaching the door, and in he came. He stopped, and gazed in amazement from me to the girl and back again.

"Well!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I won that candy!" she cried, closing the book and laughing at him. "Here he is—Old Perseverance."

"Now—didn't I tell you yesterday there would be no vacancy to-day?" asked Mr. Bradman. "What is this? What sort of a job are you two putting up on me? Why—I might just as well have hired you for a week as pay the price for the box of candy she'll pick out. Give a man a chance. She won't. If I bet with her every day on the chance of you being here I'll be ruined. And there would be a combine between the two of you, so I'd lose all the time. This won't do."

"Well, isn't there a chance to-day?"

"No; the situation has not changed."

"Then to-morrow—"

"No! If you come here to-morrow, I'll throw you through the window. I said I'd let you know when there was a vacancy."

"No, you didn't, Mr. Bradman. You started to tell me that, but stopped. You said I had heard it often enough."

"Well—I will *send* for you when I want you."

"But—it is such a pleasant place to drop in," I suggested.

"You go back to that Connecticut farm. Hang it! I won't have Georgia meeting you here days when she comes down, and I'm out to lunch. I don't know anything about you."

"I know you don't, sir. And I am doing the best I can to give you an idea of my qualities."

"Eh? Oh, yes, I suppose you are. But—"

"I'm off," I broke in. "I feel greatly encouraged, sir. I'll see you to-morrow."

He stood staring at me, and I could see now that anger was really gaining the ascendency. But this did not abash Miss Georgia. She sprang up.

"The car must be at the door by now," she said. "Suppose I give you a ride home?"

"Do!" said Mr. Bradman explosively. "Take him out to that Connecticut farm and leave him there. He's too—too—nice for New York. He'll spoil here."

CHAPTER IV.

AN ATTRACTIVE OFFER.

To say that I enjoyed the ride with Miss Bradman in the big automobile would be stating such a tremendous truth in such a mild way that it would lose all significance.

When it was over I sat in my room and smoked at a cigar without knowing whether it was a good cigar or a roll of cabbage-leaf.

I was rapidly losing my senses, if I ever had any. She was so different from any girl I had ever known that I was put to it to classify her. I knew girls who were pretty. I knew girls who were gay and witty. I knew girls who had money. But never before had I been brought within the personal glow of a star possessed of all these charms.

My own intelligence told me that this girl was not for me. She moved in a circle or on a plane the altitude of which I could never hope to reach. If I found her fascinating, so must a hundred others who were in a position to ask her to marry them while I was looking for a chance to earn my daily bread.

But as the moth continues to nose the candle until he is scorched to death, so it seemed to be my fate to continue to think of and try to see Georgia Bradman until the ruthless hand of the fitness of things should thrust me aside as an obstacle in the way and make room for some man who could stand at Miss Georgia's side as one whose grasp on the good things of earth was equal to her own.

So it was that I did not seek elsewhere for work that afternoon, but dreamed day-dreams in my fool's paradise and thought of Georgia.

The next morning broke excessively warm. It was not yet July, but June had been exceedingly torrid. The summer heat had leaped at us so suddenly after a miserably cold and rainy spring that everybody suffered. And this day the city was a scorching oven.

The sky was leaden in hue. There was not a breath of air stirring. The atmosphere hung like a sodden blanket over the city.

The sun looked like a great ball of fire through the haze that lay above the housetops.

I had slept little the night before, and left my bed but slightly benefited for having been in it.

I was irritable and uncomfortable. So was everybody I met.

I spent the morning doing as little as possible, except to take a bath, which I drew out to such a length that all the rest of the people in the house who did not go to work wanted to lynch me.

By noon there were prostrations and deaths in the city streets, and those who could afford it were scurrying out of town.

I even found myself longing for the shade of the old apple-trees up on the Connecticut farm. But the lure of the city held me fast and I would not give in.

Instead, with the conviction that I might be deliberately walking into disaster, I went down to the Bradman Medicine Company's office to look for a job.

Mr. Bradman was there, and alone. My heart went out in pity for him as soon as I entered the door.

I have said that he was a portly man. As a matter of fact, he was a fat man. His fat neck fell over in a roll on his collar. His partly bald head was huge in size, though fortunately it was symmetrical in shape.

His hands were big and pudgy. He wore coat, vest, and trousers all built on a generous plan. It might almost be said he wore a wardrobe built for two.

And he sat at his desk with the perspiration rolling from him in oceans.

He held in one hand a handkerchief, already soaked, with which he was mopping his face, neck, and head. In the other hand was a large palm-leaf fan which waved lazily to and fro, and swept hot blasts of air into his florid countenance.

His coat and vest were off, his collar and tie were on his desk, and his suspenders hung loosely about his waist. Oh, he was in misery. He was probably as uncomfortable a man as could be found in the city of New York.

He looked at me when I entered, and an angry glare blazed in his eyes.

"Demmit!" he roared, "didn't I tell you not to come here to-day?"

"Why—no," I answered innocently. "What made you think you did?"

"Didn't I say I'd throw you out the window?" he demanded, wheeling his chair around.

"Yes, you did say that. But then you didn't know that to-day would be so hot that the exertion would probably kill you."

"Look here, Crawfort, how long have I got to stand this?"

"The heat? I don't know. You go somewhere in the summer, don't you?"

"Go somewhere!" he snapped, his new cause for anger making him forget my undesirable presence. "Go somewhere! I have done so for years. But now the summer starts in to be the hottest we've had in a century, and I've got to stick here till October. It's Hades. There I've got a steam-yacht up at Morris Heights, almost ready to go into commission. And I've got a bungalow out on Long Island. Yet I've got to stick in this suffocating hole all summer."

"Why?" I asked. "Broke?"

"No," he exclaimed, slamming his desk with a ponderous fist. "It isn't that. But I'm not the only Bradman in this business. My brother, the doctor, is the senior partner. And it's an understood thing—an agreement, in fact, that one of us shall always be here to see that things go right. Well, he has been away since January third, and he was to be back here in time to let me go on my summer vacation. Is he back? Look around you? Do you see a tall, thin, long-drawn-out, peaky-faced man who looks like an Egyptian mummy?

"You don't see him? There is a reason. He is not here. He is somewhere in Brazil making experiments with some new plants he has discovered. He is to put a new remedy on the market. And he, upon whom the heat of the equator has no appreciable effect, is there, while I, who swelter and sweat when the thermometer is at freezing point, must sit in this black hole of Calcutta till October."

"Can't you put in an electric fan?"

"What good is an electric fan? It doesn't cool the air in a room. It simply stirs it up. Instead of breathing clean, still hot air, you gulp down hot waves of turbulent air loaded with the dust of the year picked up from cornices, over doors and windows, picture-moldings, books, and any old place where dust can lodge.

"I've got to grin and bear it, only it makes me so mad I can't grin. I'd give anybody ten thousand dollars to make this room sixty degrees Fahrenheit all summer."

"As much as that?" I asked, with a feeling of pity again for the man who had the money to reach a cooler temperature and was pinned to a heat-wave by the whims of his partner-brother.

"As much as that? That isn't so much. It may seem like a lot of money to you. In fact, it *is* a lot of money. But my health is worth ten thousand dollars to me. But what's the use? If anybody could cool the air of a room in summer it would be done everywhere."

"It is done," I said. "Hospitals have cooling apparatus for the summer."

"Some do. Some do not. The newer hospitals have such apparatus, I believe. But then it is built in with the building. How could you put such a contrivance into an old ramshackle like this?"

"Nevertheless," I said, "I can win that ten thousand dollars."

"Eh? What's that? You! *You!* A farmer from Connecticut. A regular Connecticut Yankee can win ten thousand dollars? Fudge!"

"Well," I said, "a Connecticut Yankee invented a wooden nutmeg."

"What the deuce has that got to do with cooling a room from a hundred degrees to sixty?"

"Nothing. But it shows that you must not despise the Connecticut Yankee."

"But seriously. Do you mean to say that you can really cool the air of this room?"

"I think so."

"And not make it so damp that everybody within a mile of it will get rheumatism?"

"If I succeeded it wouldn't be damp at all."

"A cool, dry, delicious atmosphere in the hottest weather?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are a liar! Go back to your Connecticut farm."

CHAPTER V.

A CERTIFIED CHECK FOR TEN THOUSAND.

JUST then there were voices outside. I heard a girl laugh. It was Miss Bradman, but she was not alone. I heard a man's voice.

The door opened, and Miss Bradman burst into laughter when she saw her father. As for herself, she looked as cool as though she had just come from a cave of ice.

"Why, what do I hear?" she exclaimed, glancing at her irate parent and then at me. "Did you call Mr. Crawfort a liar, papa?"

"He *is* a liar."

"Oh! And isn't any of the pretty story he told us true?"

"P—pretty story!" sputtered Mr. Bradman. "What pretty story?"

"Why, about the farm in Connecticut, and his being a chemist and all that about perseverance, you know."

"Oh, I suppose that's all true enough. He certainly is persevering when he comes here on a day like this to look for a job."

"I don't want a job now," I said, looking at Miss Georgia. "I want a contract."

"A contract! What kind of a contract?" she asked wonderingly.

"Look at your father. See how he suffers from the heat. He just made an assertion, and I took him up on it. I said I could do a certain thing, and he said I was a liar. That's what you heard."

"He *is* a liar. Nobody could do it."

"Do what, papa? But I am so rude. Mr. Crawfort—Mr. Callader."

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Callader," I said, extending my hand. He put out his in a gingerly way.

"Do what, papa?" she asked again. "What did Mr. Crawfort say he could do that threw you in such a rage?"

"Rage! Crawfort didn't throw me into any rage. I was in the rage before Crawfort got here. I've had a cablegram from your Uncle Jim that he won't be back from Brazil till October."

"Oh, that keeps you sweltering in town all summer!"

"Yes, when he, the shriveled old cadaver, wouldn't feel the heat if it was a hundred. And then in comes this skylark and says he can keep the office cool all summer."

"He's a cool card," ventured Mr. Callader. "He would chill you by visiting you every day."

Mr. Bradman did not answer. He mopped the perspiration from his head and puffed vigorously.

"How would you do it? What would it cost? I suppose you would use quantities and quantities of ice," Miss Georgia said, turning to me.

"No ice at all," I answered. "Mr. Bradman doesn't want the air to be damp."

"But how much would it cost to try it?"

"Nothing if it failed. What your father offered if it succeeded."

"What did you offer, papa?"

"Why—he took me unawares. I was slowly — not very slowly — melting away, and said offhand I'd give ten thousand dollars to anybody who could keep the temperature of this room at sixty all summer."

"And Mr. Crawfort said he could?"

"Yes."

"And you don't believe him?"

"No. If that could be done, everybody would have done it long ago."

"You might just as well say," I put in, "that if a man can go through the air for a hundred miles with an aeroplane, everybody would have had an aeroplane long ago. There must be a beginning to everything."

"But you didn't really mean that you could do it, did you?"

"Well — yes, I think I did mean it. You see, I wasn't speaking entirely in the dark. I did a little experimenting during my last year at college; but since I left I have had no opportunity. I had some success."

Mr. Bradman stopped his mopping.

"Let me know something about this scheme."

"I don't want to say anything about it now. I am willing to make the experiment. If your offer was not meant to be

bona fide, then it is all off. It is a chance for me to prove a theory of mine, and a chance to make some money. But there is some work to be done, and I don't care to undertake it unless the money is forthcoming."

"That's fair enough. Name your terms. I don't mean the money part. If I took out the yacht and spent the entire summer hunting for a cool place, it would cost me more than ten thousand dollars. Now that I am compelled to remain here and make more money, I can afford that much for a comfortable office. But you may have doubts—I would in your case, as I have in my own now. I don't think you can do it. You don't think I would pay you if you did do it. Now, I'm willing to give you a chance. I don't want to suffer like this all summer."

"Well, I will be fair," I said. "You have a machine-shop here, have you not?"

"No, we have no machine-shop."

"Well, I can have what I want turned out somewhere. I don't know that I can think of any exactions I want to ask. I want to be sure of the money, though."

"And I want to be sure of the comfort. I'll tell you what I'll do. Can you think of anybody you and I can both trust?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"It isn't a he. Miss Bradman."

"Huh! But she's on my side. She—"

"I'm not, papa. You ought not to say such a thing. I don't know just what you want somebody you can trust for, but I am sure Mr. Crawfort can trust me as well as you can. I'd be perfectly fair and impartial."

"I still name Miss Bradman," I said.

I saw that Mr. Callader was not feeling very much interested in the conversation. His glance toward me was not exceedingly friendly.

But I cared little for Mr. Callader. I had a chance to put ten thousand dollars in my pocket, and I was going to do it or fail miserably and go back to the farm.

"The idea is," said Mr. Bradman, "that a middle person—a third person—acts as a safeguard to both sides. Now, Crawfort doesn't know whether I am an honorable man or not. He wants some guarantee that if he keeps this place cool and comfortable all summer, he will get his reward.

"On the other hand, I can't hand a check for a large amount over to Crawfort until the job is finished and proves a success. But—here the third party comes in. Crawfort has named you, Georgia, which is not quite according to the code. But if he is satisfied, I am sure I am. I will, therefore, place in your hands a check for ten thousand dollars. You, to make it safe against any shortness of funds on the part of the company, have it certified, and the money will be laid aside against the amount of the check. You will then remain the custodian of the check until such time as Crawfort demonstrates that he has the ability to do as he says and has done it. Then you hand the check over to him."

"How nice! I'm to be sort of a stakeholder, then."

"That's about it."

"I'll want the run of the office at any time," I said. "I may even want to be here alone."

"I'll give you a key to the office. Any time you want me to get out, tell me so."

"I won't be here for a day or so."

"Thank Heaven!"

"When I do come I'll do some changing of things. I'll want an electric wire put in."

"Have anything you like put in."

"Very well. I see myself ten thousand dollars richer in a short time."

"I'd like to bet you can't do it," said Mr. Callader.

"How much?" asked Miss Georgia.

"Oh—er—"

"Don't crawl. Be a sport. You see how my father and Mr. Crawfort do things. I'll bet you a box of good cigars against a pair of gloves."

"Oh, I'll take that!" said Mr. Callader.

I excused myself and walked out. The street was no longer hot. I did not see or feel the hot waves that came from the pavement.

I saw but one thing. That was a certified check for ten thousand dollars, and it was mine—mine!

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE JOB.

I WENT direct to my boarding-house, and, throwing off my coat, vest, and collar, sat down at a small table with a pencil and some sheets of white paper. I began to draw plans.

I had always marveled at the fact that there was not in general use a small apparatus that would cool the air in a living-room or bedroom in the summer months for those who could not leave the city. I had a notion that such a thing was feasible, but had no idea what the entire machine would cost. I knew, also, that to follow out the plan I had in my head would require power, and that is always a matter of expense and inconvenience.

I knew that the old way of cooling water with ice for soda fountains and drinking coolers was to drop chunks of ice in the water itself, a most unsatisfactory method as well as unsanitary one. Then had come the long, coiled pipe through which the water ran without being in actual contact with the ice, and the result, so far as coolness was concerned, was as good, with the insanitary dangers left out.

And I had an idea that the air of a room could be cooled the same way. The manufacture of an apparatus for cooling air by driving it through a long coil of pipe encased in broken ice was, to my mind, a comparatively easy problem.

This, however, was not what I wanted. It necessitated constant care, the emptying of a pan which caught the water of the melting ice, the carrying of ice into the room to be cooled nobody knew how many times a day, the number of fillings depending, of course, on the size of the ice-box of the machine, and sundry details I desired to eliminate.

The problem to me, then, was to find something that would cool air that was forced through it without sending off any odor or stifling fumes.

I knew that if the fumes could be done away with there were plenty of refrigerants.

So I drew, and drew. I had little money to spend. What I needed done at a machine-shop or tinsmith's would of necessity be the cheapest work and material that would answer the purpose. When I once had a machine that would cool the air according to the specifications, I could go to more expense, and make a more ornamental as well as a more perfect machine.

I dreamed of wealth that night; and the next morning, filled with the brightest hopes, went out to find a tinsmith. There happened to be none just where I walked, and the question came to my mind:

"Why not just experiment with things you can buy and put together?"

It was a good enough idea, but that would not be an invention.

And I had visions far beyond ten thousand dollars as I trudged along looking for a tinner's shop.

At last I found one.

I had heard or read of disasters that overtook inventors. It would seem that there are people in the world whose chief occupation is lying in wait for inventors, and then stealing their patents.

So I did not intend to let any one man know the entire plan of my apparatus.

To the first one I said this:

"I want you to make me a cover such as they place over the top of a chimney when they put up a whirligig to increase the draft. It must be four feet long and two feet wide. Instead of terminating at the apex in a pipe that runs to the whirligig, this must have a pipe that has a perfect elbow, and from that elbow a pipe two inches in diameter must fall over the edge of the cover, and reach about sixteen feet straight downward. I will send you the exact measurements for that. Do you understand now just what I want?"

"I'd know better if you'd make a drawing. What do you want it for?"

I had no intention of telling him what I wanted it for. I made a drawing.

"I'll make that," he said.

"And make a model. A smaller one—say, on a scale of one to ten."

"All right."

"And have it done as soon as possible."

"Give me two days."

This was satisfactory, and I went on a hunt for another tinner. To this one I said:

"Follow me as I make this drawing. I want you to make for me of good, but light material, a cylinder that size — one foot across. I want it to be a foot in diameter and a foot in length."

"Yes, sir."

"I also want you to fix for me a square box in which forty feet of one-inch tubing is coiled."

"Yes, sir," he said, watching the box-drawing as I made it.

"Then I want a cover made for this box with some style to it, and yet not expensive; and I want it to be perforated in such a way that air forced through the tubing will be thrown out at the top and sides of the cover to the box. And the perforations must be such that the air forced through the tubing can escape at once, and not crowd the box."

"I see. What do you want this for?"

"To play with."

He nodded and grinned.

"And I want you to make a model on a scale of one to ten."

"I'll do that."

"Have it done in two days?"

"I think so. Three, anyway."

I next went and bought two electric wheel fans, the brass propeller kind, enclosed in a wire frame.

I was now prepared to make an experiment in my own room, but there was the question of power. This caused me little mental disturbance. But all I wanted was power enough to run the smallest of the wheels, and an ordinary storage battery would do that. I purchased the battery.

The next day I had nothing to do, so I loafed and read. But on the following day thereafter I went down to the office of the Bradman Medicine Company to take measurements.

"Well, how goes the machine?" asked Mr. Bradman. "By the way, Georgia has the check, certified and ready for you when the cold of Greenland's icy mountains chases away the heat of India's coral strands."

"The machine is progressing," I said. "I'm having it made in sections, so nobody can steal the invention."

"Good. There's some brains in your head, after all. Gee, but it's hot! Do you know who that Callader chap is?"

"I do not," I answered.

"Well, he's the fellow I told you was first on the waiting-list. He is the son of our head chemist."

"Is *he* a chemist?"

"Well, his father says he is, and he has a diploma. But he couldn't keep the atmosphere in this room down to sixty all summer."

"I will—down to fifty, if you want it."

He sighed.

"I'll believe it when I feel it," he said.

I sent the measurements to the tinner making the long pipe, and then went and bought sundry chemicals.

I wanted to try several combinations. I knew that, with the use of water, ammonia was a refrigerant, as was sulfuric acid or niter. But I did not wish to use much water, if I could avoid it. I bought a number of new cans such as painters keep turpentine in, about one quart or two quarts capacity, and had them sent to my house.

I experimented with various mixtures till far into the night.

It was about two o'clock when, with the gas in my room turned low, I felt, when I touched one of my cans filled with an experimental mixture, a decided chill. I placed a drop of water on it, and the drop of water expanded into a thin wafer of ice. I had reached the point I wanted to make.

I went to bed a happy man.

CHAPTER VII.

READY FOR A TEST.

It took me some little time to collect all my various appliances in my room. I would find, after I believed I was almost ready to turn on the electric current, that I needed some tool I had not thought of, and I would go out to buy or borrow that. So, by the time the current was actually turned on the day was practically at an end.

I am not going into an exhaustive detailed account of my apparatus. There are several reasons for this, most of which will be obvious to any one who has tried to put a patented invention on the market.

I will simply say in a general way that the construction was based, as I hinted before, on the plan of cooling water by running it through a coil of pipe buried in ice. With this difference—that no ice was used in my machine, but a chemical compound, the component parts of which I shall not place before the public. I have had trouble enough about the formula, as you shall see.

Above the machine—in fact, up against the ceiling of the room—was the inverted pan. From this a pipe ran from the apex, over the side, and under the machine. When the current was turned on, the rotating wheel inside the box acted through the suspended pan as suction-power, drawing the hot air from the top of the room, where of course everybody knows the temperature is highest.

This air, after being drawn into the box, was forced through forty feet of small tubing coiled inside it, and cooled by contact with cans or "cartridges" of the chemical compound I had brought to a condition of refrigeration that exactly suited my purpose. The cold air was then forced out at the top and sides of the cover of the box, which had to be locked to withstand the pressure from the interior, to take its course in the circulation of air in the room.

The thermometer stood at eighty-two

when I had finished setting up the machine and turned on the current that kept the invisible wheel spinning. There was no noise, nor any vibration to make the presence of the apparatus unpleasant. After it had been running a full minute I placed my hand over the top of the box. A steady stream of cold air rewarded me.

Now, it must be remembered that the machine I had set up in my room was only the little model made on a scale of one to ten. That is, for a dimension of any part in the big machine that would be ten inches, in the small one it would be one inch.

I had no expectation of getting much of a reduction of the temperature from the small machine. All I expected that to do was to prove that my general theory was correct, and this it was doing splendidly.

I kept it running an hour, and in that hour the thermometer in the room had dropped from eighty-two to seventy-four.

Another thermometer I had against the front of the house outside my window showed eighty three when I started the machine, and at the end of the hour it showed eighty-four, showing that the general temperature was rising for a sizzling night, while inside my room my machine was making for coolness and comfort.

I was never much given to demonstrativeness. Nevertheless, I felt a little like hurrahing for myself just then.

If the little model would do that, what might not be expected from the large apparatus?

I turned off the current, and went out in the stifling heat to my restaurant. Here they had the old-fashioned ceiling fans, long wooden blades whirring round, sending a volume of stirred-up foul air down on top of everybody's head.

I had come to know the proprietor of the place very well, and as I was going out, after paying my bill, I said:

"In a short time I am going to revolutionize your place. I am going to put on the market a machine that will keep this room at any degree of cold you may desire."

"Nothing in it," he replied, shaking his head. "I've tried them all."

"You haven't tried mine."

"Oh, I'll try it, because it is the one thing a small restaurant wants. Of course, there are schemes for cooling the air in big hotels. But they are built in with the house, and, anyway, such a place as mine could not afford it."

"Well, you can afford mine, and it will work."

"I hope so, but I don't believe it," he said.

But his unbelief did not bother me, and I bought a couple of good cigars and went back to my room. Turning on the current again, I sat in the most comfortable spot there was in the entire city of New York, and read the evening papers.

The next day I found an expressman, and loaded all the parts of the big machine into his wagon.

"You take this stuff to the office of the Bradman Medicine Company, on Front Street," I said. "I'll be there to receive the whole business."

I hurried down-town. I found Mr. Bradman sweltering. It was a close, muggy day, and with the humidity about seventy-nine and the thermometer in the street ninety-six, his plight can well be imagined.

"Oh, is it you at last?" he bellowed, as he mopped and fanned and mopped again.

Two saturated handkerchiefs lay on his desk, and the one he was using had about reached the end of its usefulness.

"I'm here at last," I said quietly.

"And failed, I suppose."

"How can I have failed when I have done nothing? I would like to have the use of this room for a few hours."

"Eh? Why, where is—"

He looked at me. My hands, of course, were empty.

"It is coming in an express-wagon. I want an electrician."

"There's one around somewhere. Tell the boy to look for him."

I stepped out to the red-headed office-boy.

"Go find an electrician," I said. "Bring him here."

His eyes bulged, and he got his lips in shape to make a reply.

"Who—"

"Hurry up about it, too," came the voice of Mr. Bradman.

With a stare of surprise, the boy departed on his errand.

"Now, Crawfort," said Mr. Bradman, "about how long will you want to be alone?"

"It may take me an hour or two to get everything in shape. The parts have been made to rule, and ought to fit, but I may have to tinker a little. Then I shall want an hour to run it and get it to working

smoothly. That depends on how soon I can get the electrician and have a wire connected to my machine."

"Well, now, what is your honest opinion —will the thing work?"

"I think it will."

"Then, if it does, your fortune is made. And as it is a triumph for you after a series of bitter disappointments, I want my wife and Georgia and one or two others to see and enjoy it. I shall send word to my house, and at two o'clock we will have luncheon. If this contraption of yours is a success, and we can really eat here in a comfortable atmosphere, we will have a spread. If it fails, we will eat somewhere else and hope for better luck next time."

"Take my word for it," I said, "and send your order for a luncheon in this room."

"By Jove, if you are as confident as that, I'll do it."

About ten minutes after Mr. Bradman left, the expressman arrived. I knew that some of the parts of the machine were frail, as it was merely an experimental affair, so I insisted on carrying the parts from the wagon myself.

And such clerks as were in a position to see me looked on wonderingly, and I heard the buzz of conversation when I closed the door.

I was setting up the base when the electrician arrived.

"Mr. Bradman wants me?"

"No," I answered. "Mr. Bradman is out. I'm the one who wants you. I want a wire run in here to this connection. See?"

"I see. I'll have that done in no time. What is it?"

"This is the Crawfort Air-Cooling Machine."

"Is it any good?"

"Come around in two hours from now. I'll show you."

He grinned. I kept on at work, glad to be let alone again.

In an hour I had the parts fitted perfectly. It was not an uncouth looking thing, and occupied little more room than a steam or hot-water radiator, and not so much as an ordinary stove.

The big, inverted pan I suspended from the ceiling with stout wires.

I had two thermometers. Both were registering ninety-three in the close atmosphere of the room. I hung one outside the window, which I closed. The other I hung on the wall on the opposite side of the room from the machine. Then I turned on the current.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ENTHUSIASTIC FAT MAN.

If there is any more pleasing sensation possible to the human mind than that of success after long discouragement I have thus far failed to know what it is.

When my fingers had left the switch key, and the big wheel inside the round box or cylinder began to revolve and the slight whirring sound it made at the start died away as it settled down to a steady and swift motion, a calm descended upon my heart such as it had never known before.

The cold air that came from the perforated cover was a force that would, if permitted to escape in one stream an inch in diameter, have blown my hand away from the pipe. But forced, as it was, through a myriad of small distributing holes covered with a fine wire mesh, there was no blast, but a steady radiation of cold air that almost immediately made its influence felt upon the atmosphere of the room.

I saw a box of fine cigars on Mr. Bradman's desk and calmly lit one and sat near the machine to gloat over my success.

At the end of an hour I compared my two thermometers.

The one on the outside, in the shade, registered ninety-four. The one inside the room registered seventy-eight.

Here was success. I now wished Mr. Bradman would return, although even seventy-eight was not cool enough to win for me the ten-thousand-dollar check. Another hour ought to do that.

It was growing perceptibly cooler all the time in the room, while the outside thermometer was rising.

The door opened, and the pop-eyed, red-headed boy looked in.

He came in and stood staring at the machine.

"What is it?" he asked. "Why, it's hot as punk out there. An' ye can almost see icicles formin' in here. What's done it?"

"That, son, is the Crawfort Air-Cooling Machine. It will soon make New York a very desirable place to remain at home in during the summer."

"Gee! Put one out there, will ye?"

"When Mr. Bradman tells me to do so. But perhaps you had something to say when you came in."

"Gee! I forgot all about it. There's a guy out there says he's a waiter an' says he's got a luncheon fur some people."

"Yes. Tell him to bring it right in."

"Gee! Are you the boss here now?"

"Not quite the boss. But on very friendly terms with him."

"Gee! It'll be good skatin' in here soon. Talk about the seashore fur comfort!"

He went out, and the waiter came in.

"O-o-o-o-o!" he exclaimed. "'Oh iss eet, that eet iss so 'ot in the strit, an' so cool in here?"

"Because the Crawfort Air-Cooling Machine is in operation," I said. "You will observe the apparatus at the end of the room. Feel for yourself by placing your hand anywhere near the cover."

"O-o-o-o-o!" he said again, as he held his fingers in the steady stream of cold air. "The great thing! Every restaurant will have eet."

"Sure thing. Now we'll have these two tables together, and you can get the luncheon ready."

"Ah, such a comfort of a room!"

He soon had a snow-white cloth over the two tables, and then began to appear sundry well-known and well-liked dishes among those who can afford them.

It was just about quarter to two when I heard Mr. Bradman's heavy voice and heavy step, accompanied by the voices and steps of others.

"Honestly," I heard him say, "if Crawfort hasn't got a cool spot for me to haul myself together again I'll kill him. I am melting in my shoes and running out at the lacings."

"You won't be hard on Mr. Crawfort if his machine does not work," I heard Miss Bradman say.

"I won't be hard! I'll kill him, I say, and then I'll go to Brazil and kill that uncle of yours. But we'll see. We'll—"

He opened the door and they all trooped in. There was Georgia and Mr. Callader, and Mrs. Bradman, who proved to be a very handsome woman, and very stylish, and another woman whom Mr. Bradman introduced as Mrs. Holmes.

"By cracky!" exclaimed Mr. Bradman. "What! Is this a fact or am I dreaming?"

He had been mopping his head, neck, and face. He stopped and stared at me in amazement.

"Why—why—it's like passing from an oven into a refrigerator," he said. "Stepping in one step from the equator to Alaska. What is it? What is it?"

"*It*," I said, "is the Crawfort Air-Cooling Machine in full operation."

"By Jove!"

He stepped over to the machine and placed his hands in the diffusing current of cold air.

"Come here," he said to the others. "Feel this. And no odor. Not like those fans in a restaurant. They blow the odors of another fellow's lunch down your throat. This cools the air and purifies it. What is the temperature in this room now?"

I looked at the thermometer.

"Fifty-eight," I said.

It had dropped twenty degrees since I had looked before.

"Fifty-eight, Mrs. Bradman, think of that. I wish I knew what it is outside—nearly a hundred, I think."

"I can tell you," I said, stepping to the window. "It is ninety-four."

"Think of that!" he roared. "A difference of thirty-six degrees. It is almost beyond belief, but we are here to testify to the fact. Now the question is how long will that machine maintain the coolness?"

"As long as you want it to. There are certain improvements to be made, such as some way of regulating the speed of the wheel, and thus preventing the place getting too cold."

"It is almost too cold for comfort now," said Mrs. Bradman.

"I will turn off the current and leave the window open. A little of the outside air will warm this, and then it will remain about the same."

"Now, you've got something in that box. Is it ice?"

"No, there is no ice. But the compound mixture that is in there would make ice if it was placed in a circular tank with a central compartment for water. It would freeze the water."

"Well! But let's eat. We can talk. This is glorious. I am willing to stay in New York now. I'll have the laugh on Jim when he comes back."

"What about my job?" asked Miss Bradman.

"Your job?" queried her father.

"Why, yes. Haven't I a check for ten thousand dollars?"

"Gosh! I was so tickled over the machine I forgot all about the check. He has unquestionably earned the check. Have you got it with you?"

"Yes."

"Hand it over to Crawfort. It's his. Now, Crawfort, you don't want any job as chemist. What are your plans regarding the machine?"

I was looking at him tenderly—so tenderly, indeed, that my eyes were wet, and little rivulets were coursing down my cheeks.

"I thought—" I began— "since you have been so generous—and there is no mistaking the fact that the machine *is* a success, that we might go in as partners, form a company (you know more about that than I do), manufacture the machines and put them on the market. There should be a big demand for the machine. I believe there is big money in it."

"Big money! It's a bonanza! Why, thousands of those machines can be sold in every city in the United States. The only difficulty I see is that the poor can't have them."

"Why?"

"Well, there is the power. A poor family living in a tenement could never afford to pay for the electricity."

"I had not thought of manufacturing a cheap machine," I said, "but there is no reason why it could not be done. Of course your idea in regard to the poor is the bedroom or sick chamber. Now, a cheap machine can be made to run with a storage battery, or even by hand with a system of multiplying cog-wheels. And, as the dispensaries now give out medicines, and the physicians and surgeons of the poor use their instruments free, the addition of one of these machines to a physician's outfit would not be a burden to him."

"Right you are. Well, we will organize. It's great. Tell that boy out there to bring Mr. Callader's father, the head chemist. He must have a taste of this Greenland air."

I told the boy. In a short time Mr. Callader came in from the laboratory. He was a thin old man and seemed far from strong.

"What's this?" he asked in amazement. "A cool room to-day? What magic stroke has brought this about?"

"Crawfort, here, is the magician," said Mr. Bradman. "Sit down and enjoy a comfortable luncheon."

CHAPTER IX.

A FALL TO EARTH.

ALL the next day I spent making more drawings and perfecting my plans. I had done all I could with the crude machine I had made for experimental purposes, and now, if Mr. Bradman was to invest his money in the enterprise, I was determined that my apparatus should not have a flaw.

There was no trouble about the check, and I left it on deposit in the same bank. If it was good enough for Mr. Bradman, it was good enough for me.

The possession of ten thousand dollars brought my own sense of my importance to a higher notch, although I did not permit myself the luxury of a swelled head. To me ten thousand dollars was a fortune. But it was a mere bagatelle to what the air-cooling machine could bring if properly placed on the market.

I had resolved to send a good share of the ten thousand home to my father and mother. I did not hurry to do this. And perhaps, as matters turned out, it was a fortunate thing I did not.

Having worked hard that day and far into the night, I slept well. I went out in the morning to get my breakfast, stopping at the corner for my paper as usual.

I did not open it till I was seated at the table in the restaurant, and when I did I opened my eyes as well.

The first thing that struck my gaze were the words in great, black head-lines:

KILLED BY COMFORT.

The idea was so new that I read on to see how in the world anybody could be killed by comfort.

The article under the head-line was as follows:

> A most amazing cause of death was disclosed yesterday when Mr. Richard Callader, the head chemist of the Bradman Medicine Company, died from the effects of a severe congestive chill he incurred during a luncheon given by Mr. William Bradman, the business manager and junior partner, in the offices on Front Street.
>
> It appears that Mr. Bradman, who is a very stout man, and who suffers greatly from the

excessive heat, has been in the habit of spending his summers on his steam-yacht, the Wanderer, while his brother, James Anthony Bradman, the well-known physician, takes active control. But this summer Dr. Bradman, who is in Brazil making exhaustive studies of various newly discovered plants to determine their medicinal values, decided to remain in South America till October. This necessitated on the part of William Bradman a departure from his usual custom.

He suffered, however, from the heat to such an extent that he entered into a contract with a young inventor named Crawfort, by which Crawfort engaged to keep the temperature of the Bradman offices down to sixty degrees all summer.

Crawfort's efforts, put forth by way of a machine of his invention, the secret of which is not known by Mr. Bradman, were successful, and in an artificially cooled room several persons sat down on Wednesday, to a luncheon provided by Mr. Bradman, in the offices of the company. Mr. Callader was among the guests. He came direct from the laboratories, which were excessively warm, to the lunch-room, which was at a temperature of fifty-eight. The marvel of the thing so enthralled him that after the luncheon was over and the other guests had gone, Mr. Callader remained some time examining the air-cooling device.

He complained while there of being chilled, and went to his home. He took to his bed upon his arrival, and never left it. It is rumored that his son, Frederick Callader, of this city, is to marry Miss Georgia, daughter of William Bradman. Another rumor is that the engagement is broken off and that Frederick will sue Mr. Bradman for causing his father's death.

It may well be imagined that I did not enjoy my breakfast. But I had ordered a substantial one, and I felt like eating it. Anyway, I did not believe Mr. Bradman would be at his office so early. I finished my breakfast and then went down to Front Street.

I found Mr. Bradman sitting at his desk. He had on a clean stiff collar, a clean white shirt, and there was no mopping nor fanning. He was perfectly cool and comfortable. He nodded when I went in.

"Have you seen this about Callader?" he asked, holding up a paper.

"Yes. Isn't it terrible? I feared perhaps you would suffer, too."

"No. It takes more than fifty-eight degrees to hurt me. He was a spindly sort of fellow, anyway."

"I also feared that this accident might prejudice you against the machine. I thought maybe you wouldn't want to have anything more to do with it."

"My dear Crawfort," he said, swinging about in his chair, "did you ever hear of a railroad being abandoned because one of its first surveyors got killed by Indians? Did you ever hear of a mine being closed down because a bucketful of miners dropped to their death?

"No. While I regret the death of Callader as much as any one can, I cannot see that it was really anybody's fault. Nobody else was affected by the cold. If you invite a friend to go skating and the ice breaks, his drowning is not attributed to any lack of care on your part. If you invite a party of friends on your yacht and a storm blows one of them overboard, you are not held.

"It was simply a most lamentable affair. Fred will take his position, as I told you, at the foot of the line of chemists."

"The paper I read stated that it was rumored that he was to marry Miss Georgia," I ventured to remark.

"He *wants* to marry Georgia. Whether Georgia wants to marry him or not is a matter thus far concealed from my observation. Georgia is, as perhaps you have noticed, a young person of views. If she wants to marry Callader she will. If she doesn't want to she won't. I have nothing to do with it."

There was a noise at the door and the boy came in.

"Mr. Simpson," he announced.

"Show him right in."

A tall, rather pale-looking man entered.

"Mr. Simpson, permit me—this is Mr. Crawfort, the inventor of the Crawfort Air-Cooling Machine, the one I sent for you to put through at once. Mr. Crawfort can give you the details of the thing much better than I, and his being here saves the trouble of sending for him."

"I understand," said Mr. Simpson, "that you have a wonderful invention."

"The wonder of it is that somebody has not thought of it before."

"There is always a first. Now, have you drawings of the machine?"

"Yes; complete drawings."

"A model?"

"I have a working model without the improvements I shall make."

"Well, does the model really produce results?"

"Certainly. The principle is all there."

"Then we will begin at once, and take care of the improvements as they appear. When can I have the drawings and model?"

"In two hours. I have them at my boarding-house."

"Well, to-morrow will do. Bring them here. I will be here."

"It may be cumbersome for you to take away. There is a pipe ten feet long. The same as that one reaching to the ceiling, only not of that diameter."

"I will bring a man with me."

"I will have it all here."

Mr. Simpson departed.

"I think, Crawfort," said Mr. Bradman, "that we will manufacture this ourselves. We don't need any outside capital, so what's the use organizing a company and dividing our profits with somebody else? If we want a third party we can find one—take Callader, for instance, if he proved to be all right. What are your plans now?"

"Well, there is no use doing much till Mr. Simpson gets his application in for the patents. I will look around for some cheap land where we can build our factory."

"I'll have papers drawn. We go in on even terms—that is, I furnish the capital and you do the manufacturing. We divide the profits equally."

"You are generous, sir."

"Not at all. I would never have invented the thing. And there is no possibility of loss."

"I shall probably spend a week or two while I can on the old farm."

"Good. You've worked hard. Get yourself in good shape. And I shouldn't wonder if you could pick up some good factory land in Connecticut cheap."

"I'll keep my eyes open."

We bade each other good-by. I hurried out to the farm. My father and mother were overjoyed to see me. My sister was equally glad, but the fact that she had just become engaged to be married rather softened her enthusiasm.

But I had a glorious time. I visited old friends. I talked over my good fortune with my parents. I was already, in their estimation, a rich man. When I unfolded the possibilities of my air-cooling machine, they gasped.

"You'll be a millioner," said my father, pronouncing it almost as if he was speaking about the maker of women's hats.

"I hope so, dad. And then—you won't have to follow a plow any more. It will be the easy chair and a cigar for you in that case."

"Do ye hear that, mother?" he asked.

"I hear. And I suppose another easy chair for me?"

"You bet."

"I suppose we can stand it; but it will seem strange—very strange."

In this way we spent the time dreaming of the great days to come. We lived, as it were, in the clouds. There was nothing to dim the horizon. Our sun was rising, and the aurora of golden glory was beautiful to look upon. Then I received a telegram:

CRAWFORT, WINGATE, CONNECTICUT:
Come here at once. BRADMAN.

There was something about the telegram as chilly as the air from my own invention. I hurried to New York.

I burst into the office. Mr. Bradman and Mr. Simpson and another man I did not know were talking together.

"I'm here," I said. "What is it?"

"What is it!" roared Mr. Bradman. "You cur! You thief!"

He leaped at me and, seizing me, hurled me toward Simpson.

"You tell him," he said. "I'll—I'll—"

"Papa!" came a voice at the door.

CHAPTER X.

MISS BRADMAN'S ARGUMENT.

SIMPSON'S face was red. He made an attempt to grab me. I sent him plunging into a big armchair. The other man was calm and looked at me with a cold, ironical expression.

"Now," I said, as I collected myself and stood with folded arms facing Mr. Bradman, "if you can calm yourself into something like a gentleman, I'd like to know what I've done to cause any such reception as this to be offered me."

"You are a swindler."

"I am not a swindler. But for the purpose of letting some light on the subject, I would like to know in what matter I have been a swindler."

Mr. Bradman turned and pointed to the Crawfort Air-Cooling Machine.

"You see that machine?"

"I see the machine."

"Didn't you claim that you invented the machine?"

"I did claim I invented the machine.

Not only that, but I actually *invented* the machine."

"You are a liar as well as a swindler."

"Papa!"

"I forgot you were here, Georgia. But I am glad we have unmasked the fellow before he did any more damage."

"Damage!" I echoed. "I thought you did not consider the death of Mr. Callader an important matter."

"We are not concerned now with the death of Mr. Callader. I will let Mr. Simpson and Mr. Grant explain the matter to you. You doubtless know all about it, but you dissemble well."

"I know nothing about it. My only guess is that you have kept the office comfortable and gone insane with the heat outside."

"Not so," broke in Simpson. "Of course you knew when you gave me the drawings and plans and the model of the air-cooling machine, that you were not the inventor, and therefore not entitled to any patent."

"I knew that? Absurd. I knew nothing of the kind, Mr. Simpson. I know that *I am* the inventor. I was careful to let nobody into my secret. I had different parts of the machine made in different shops. And of the parts I bought nobody knew their purpose.

"I don't understand all this abuse and violence. It would seem to me that somebody is trying to frighten me out of the fruits of my labors."

"No," spoke up Grant, "it is quite the other way. I am a lawyer, in the same line as Mr. Simpson. And I represent Mr. Frederick Callader."

"The son of the man who died?"

"The same. It appears that Mr. Callader is the real inventor of the air-cooling machine that you claim as yours. I had his drawings and application for a patent filed in Washington a week almost before Mr. Simpson had yours.

"Of course the priority of Mr. Callader's application will give him the patent. Under ordinary course of procedure we would have a warrant for your arrest, but Mr. Callader has not yet given me his decision. Mr. Bradman could have you arrested on the charge of procuring money under false pretenses."

"I did not receive money under false pretenses," I gasped.

My usual calmness was deserting me.

"Yes, you certainly did," said Mr. Simpson. "I don't know what Mr. Bradman may decide to do. But you certainly obtained ten thousand dollars from him under false pretenses."

"It's a lie."

"Violent talk will not serve you. The mystery we would like to clear up is how you obtained access to the model Mr. Callader had working."

"Where did he keep it?" I asked with a sneer.

"In a room he hired for the purpose. He was very secretive about it."

"He was here when my machine was demonstrated the first time. He was as much amazed as anybody else."

"He appeared to be. He was so amazed he scarcely knew what to do. He feared if he denounced you, you would beat him anyway, for he had not yet reached a point where he wanted to apply for patents. But you made him hurry in order to protect himself."

"I made him hurry in order to rob *me.*"

"Oh, no. Any such bluff as that would be laughed out of court."

All this time Miss Bradman was standing looking on with an amazed, yet with a pained look on her lovely face.

"Papa," she said, "you don't believe that Mr. Crawfort stole that invention any more than I do."

"Don't you believe it?" asked Mr. Bradman, turning to her quickly as a man seeking relief.

"Certainly I do not."

"But Miss Bradman," interposed Simpson, "it stands without doubt a fact that either Crawfort robbed Callader or Callader robbed Crawfort. The models, while not being exactly alike, carry out the same principles, and the drawings and descriptions are almost identical."

"That proves nothing. I sometimes do a black and white for an illustration for a magazine, or a cover scheme. And I've known it to occur that an artist brought in almost the same thing and we had never seen each other before. And in this case a coincidence might happen. I suppose there are at least a thousand brains working on the problem of cooling the air of a room. It is not a wonderful thing that two should hit on the same idea."

"It could happen," said Simpson.

"I must admit the argument is sound," put in Grant. "But even admitting that, the priority of our application must stand."

"I acknowledge that," said Simpson.

"Then you see, this fellow has ten thousand of mine which—" stammered Bradman.

"Which he will return," I broke in angrily. "All this stuff is hatched up. It is a clear attempt to steal my invention, and, with the exception of Miss Bradman, every person in this room is involved in it. But I am no thief. I will return the ten thousand dollars. I have improvements to make on the air-cooling machine, and I can get plenty of capitalists to back me up now that an attempt to rob me has been made."

Mr. Bradman was staring at me like a man in a trance.

"I will give you a check for the ten thousand dollars," I went on. "It is in the bank. It has not been touched."

"But, papa," said Miss Bradman, "I was a witness, if you remember, to the agreement you made with Mr. Crawfort."

"Well?"

"He did not obtain the ten thousand dollars under false pretenses even if the patent goes to Fred."

"He didn't? Explain what you mean."

"You said you would give ten thousand dollars to anybody who could keep the temperature of this room down to sixty all summer.

"You offered no bonus for inventing anything. You made no stipulations that the man earning the ten thousand dollars should use his own ideas or some other man's ideas. You didn't say anything about starting a company or investing money. There was nothing said about making a profit for anybody but the man who cooled this room. Mr. Crawfort took you up on your offer, and has cooled the room."

"But," said Grant blandly, "does it not occur to you that by taking Mr. Callader's apparatus to win the ten thousand dollars Mr. Crawfort has practically stolen ten thousand dollars from Mr. Callader?"

"You see even a smart lawyer steps in a hole sometimes," rejoined Miss Bradman. "You happen to be wonderfully ignorant of the facts in this case. When my father made this offer of ten thousand dollars to anybody who could cool the air of his office he undoubtedly was suffering tortures from the heat. Mr. Callader was present. If he had a perfected model doing good work why did he not speak up and claim the right to win the ten thousand dollars? He had as much right to do so as Mr. Crawfort."

Mr. Bradman blinked, and stared at his daughter.

"Hanged if you ain't a better lawyer than either of 'em," he said. "This will be looked into, gentlemen. So far, Washington has two models. I have the only machine in actual use. I am the owner of that. I shall have injunctions against both Callader and Crawfort preventing them from making any more until this is settled. My daughter's argument is a good one. My office is cool and comfortable and it was Crawfort and not Callader who made it so.

"I will take this matter into my own hands. I do not make such moves often. But when I do I generally reach pay dirt. Mr. Crawfort will retain the money. I will retain the machine. Until I send for you I desire to see none of you again. Good day, gentlemen."

I was the first one out of the office, and even then I took time to thank Miss Georgia. She warned me with a glance.

CHAPTER XI.

ACROSS THE AIRSHAFT.

THE more I thought of the matter, the more chagrined and enraged I became. I felt like kicking myself for not handing Mr. Bradman the check for ten thousand dollars and standing on my dignity.

But as he had accepted Miss Georgia's view of the matter, and insisted that I keep the ten thousand, and I had no check-book with me, this was impossible.

I felt sure that Fred Callader had in some way possessed himself of the secrets of my invention, and I almost felt that Mr. Bradman knew it.

I recalled that glance Georgia had given me as I left the place. What did that mean? Was it a warning against Callader? Or was it a warning not to say too much myself? That it was a warning of some kind, I had no doubt.

All the way home, or to my room, which was the only home I had in New York, I studied the change in my prospects. There was nothing inspiring in it all. I could not see a ray of hope.

I had made a bluff in the office about finding plenty of capital. As a matter of fact, I did not know where I could unearth a man with a thousand dollars to back a manufacturing enterprise.

I resolved to return the ten thousand dol-

lars. Then, with no standing obligation to Mr. Bradman, I would be at liberty to carry out any plan to defeat Callader, if, indeed, any plan suggested itself to me.

Reaching my room, I wrote the following letter:

DEAR MR. BRADMAN:

I am returning herewith the ten thousand dollars which you paid to me under the impression that I had solved the problem of air-cooling for individual rooms.

The fact remains that I did solve it, and the invention now doing service in your office is my own. I am not yet in a position to say just how Callader obtained possession of the drawings from which he undoubtedly had a model made. But I shall do all that is within my power to run him down.

I have none but the friendliest recollections of your generous treatment of me, but I cannot retain your money unless I have your confidence as well. Yours very truly,

WILLIAM CRAWFORT.

I enclosed my check for the ten thousand dollars with this and sent it to Mr. Bradman.

I was now under obligation to nobody. I could go about my little detective work without feeling that I was perhaps committing an act that would be disliked by a patron.

I sat down after I had dropped the letter in the box on the corner, and smoked two cigars while I watched the fountain playing in the square, meantime pounding my brains for some light on the very dark subject that had enveloped me.

Mr. Callader, the elder, had been stricken with a chill the very day the air-cooling machine was installed in Mr. Bradman's office. He had not left his bed from that time until he was lifted from it to his burial-casket. So all thoughts of his being a fellow conspirator with his son were out of the question.

The death of the elder Callader had of course kept Fred away from social functions. This would give him time to work on my plans without causing any remark, for his friends and associates would naturally suppose that he was in the seclusion of his home.

The model I had given Simpson had been in his hands until he sent it to Washington. Therefore, it was not from the model that Fred Callader had made his drawings. It had been from the machine that was set up in Mr. Bradman's office that Callader had stolen his plans.

Had he finished his work? Would he rest on what he had accomplished, or would he try to improve, using my machine as his base of operations?

With a half-formed idea in my mind, I went back to Front Street.

Up to this time I had paid very little attention to the buildings on either side of the one occupied by the Bradman Medicine Company. But now I was beginning to work out a theory that might lead to developments or might only eat a hole in the little money I had left. But it was worth a trial.

On the side of the Bradman building where Mr. Bradman's office was, there rose a larger and more modern structure. This was a brick building, and I saw a sign that looked like a perpetual one: "Offices to rent."

I found the man in charge of this building.

"I want," I said, "a small office, on the south side of the building, on the second floor. Have you such an office vacant?"

"On the south side of the building, second floor? Why—not much of an office. Yet there is just one. I'll explain. The building was divided in office suites. The parties who rent the front offices on the south side, second floor, did not need this extra room. It is little more than a closet, anyway, and opens on an air-shaft.

"I am using it now, but the understanding is that if I can rent it I am to move out, and go to the regular office in the basement."

"Will you let me look at it?"

"Certainly."

He led me up one flight of stairs and into a room that was just a little wider than the window at the end. I went straight to this window and looked out.

I drew back at once, for straight across the air-shaft was Mr. Bradman, sitting at his desk. He did not see me, and I was glad.

"This is all right for my purpose," I said.

"Well, if the rent is satisfactory, I'll move my stuff down to the basement."

"Don't be in a hurry to do that. You see, I have not yet started my business, and for some little time will want the office more as a sort of headquarters, a place to write letters and receive mail, than anything else. Some days I may not be here at all, and if I am, you will not interfere with me in any way. Leave your desk where it is. I'll get another one."

A light shone in his eyes.

"In that case I'll tell you what I'll do. I won't put you down now as renting this office. It is not rented. I will cut the rent in half, and that will make it less expensive for you. You will not need to get a desk. When you are here, use mine. It is never locked."

"Very well," I said, glad to save what I could.

I had no doubt that the amount I paid went into his own pocket, but I was not much concerned about that. I was trying to take care of my own pocket to the best of my ability.

The deal was made.

"I suppose the building is closed at night?" I remarked.

"There is a watchman here."

"Suppose I should take a notion to come here after six o'clock. How would I manage that?"

"Well, you will have the key to this room, and I will give you a key to the front door, and will acquaint the watchman with the facts in the case. You will have no trouble. Of course, it is not customary, but by no means a rarity. I knew one man who had two offices for two separate lines of business. He was in one office during the day, and in the other part of the night."

"Everything is satisfactory."

And it was. My plan had gradually assumed clean-cut lines. I would watch from the window of my office night after night. If Fred Callader was engaged in any crooked work, I would soon know it. Then I felt that I would be in a position to make things warm for him.

That very night I started in. I took my position near the window and opened it. I noticed that the window of Mr. Bradman's office was also open.

But, though I sat there hour after hour, I saw no one. My own room was dark, and so was Bradman's. No one came into it, so far as I could see.

And another night I put in like that, only to be disappointed. I was beginning to think I had made a mistake, and that Callader was not doing any work on the side. But on the third night I had my innings.

It was about nine o'clock. I had sat at the window since seven. Everything was dark and still.

Suddenly, about nine o'clock, the electric light in Mr. Bradman's office was switched on, and I ducked my head lest I be discovered. But, I reflected, the light was in the office across the air-shaft, and while I could see the interior there plainly, I was quite in obscurity.

Nevertheless, I drew away from the window and watched.

Standing in the center of Bradman's office was Fred Callader, talking with a man I had never seen before.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WITNESSES.

I PAID more attention to the appearance of the man with Callader than I ever had paid to that of any man before.

He was tall, extremely well dressed—rather over-dressed, I thought—and there was a foreign look about him, with a touch of craftiness that would have repelled me had I met him under ordinary circumstances.

As it was, my suspicions were regulated by the tension of my feelings, and no accusation could have been made against the man that would not at once have met with my indorsement.

I remained standing in the middle of my office, watching.

Frederick Callader made a gesture, the end of which was a direct snapping of his fingers, and then he pointed to the air-cooling machine, which I could plainly see. He made some remark that caused his companion to laugh.

Then Callader stepped forward a little and turned the switch. As both windows were open, I could hear the preliminary whir the machine made while it was getting under way.

The face of the stranger took on an expression of surprise. He placed his right hand over the cover, and I saw him nod; and his lips moved as though he was saying something in praise of the apparatus.

Then Callader turned off the current and unlocked the cover. He lifted this off the machine, depositing it on the floor. Then he reached down and lifted out one of the chemical cartridges.

Here, really, was the main secret of the entire apparatus. Anybody could think of an air-blower. But it required a chemical education, and a practical working knowledge, to make up the formula that would cool air and at the same time keep it dry and devoid of odors.

Here was an act, the purloining of my cartridge, that constituted a penal offense if I could prove it. But I was alone.

The watchman was somewhere in the building. I would get him. A witness was necessary, and the watchman was no fool.

I scurried to the basement, where I found him smoking a pipe.

"Jackson," I said, "I will tell you something. I am using that little office for detective purposes, and the man I am after is in the next building now. I am not an officer of the law. But I invented a machine which is set up in Bradman's office, and another fellow stole the invention. He is there now, and I want a witness."

"Sure, I'll take a look at him," replied the watchman. "It'll be no crime to tell the truth. And how did he get in there, sir?"

"He is an employee, and probably has a key to the building."

Jackson returned to the little office with me. The stranger was standing almost where he had been before, and Callader had joined him.

"Ah, ha! I understand," said Jackson.

Callader was tapping the cartridge of chemicals, and the other man was listening to something he was saying.

Then Callader left the room. The stranger took his watch from his pocket and looked at it. Then he slowly lit a cigar and sat down in Bradman's armchair. There was something about his manner, an air of patient resignation, that indicated his opinion that he was destined to sit there for some time.

"He don't expect the other fellow back for some while," I said to Jackson. "He's gone to the laboratory to make some chemical tests. Now—say! Where is there a telephone in this building I can use that can't be heard by that man in there?"

"Well, there's a telephone in the office on the next floor and on the other side. The door is open, for I looked in when I came on duty."

I quickly went up to the next floor and found the telephone. I hunted in the book for Mr. Bradman's house call. I then took up the receiver.

I gave the telephone number and kept the receiver at my ear. It was not long before I heard an answering voice, but it was not the heavy voice of Mr. Bradman.

"Is this Mr. Bradman?" I asked.

"No; Mr. Bradman is not at home."

I recognized the silvery voice then as Georgia's.

"This is Miss Bradman, is it not?"

"Yes—Miss Georgia Bradman. Is there any message you wish to have me give Mr. Bradman?"

"Don't you recognize my voice, Miss Bradman?"

"I seem to. It is—why—yes, Mr. Crawfort."

"Right. Now, Miss Bradman, I want to catch your father at once—even if he is at one of the most sacred functions of his favorite club."

"Why, what has happened?"

"It is happening right now. I am in the building on the north side of the Bradman building. I rented a small room, from the windows of which I can look into your father's office. I suspected something would turn up, and it has. Its name is Callader. He is in there now with a stranger. He has taken the cover off my machine and taken one of the cans, or cartridges, of chemicals away. The other man is waiting, so I suppose Callader is in the laboratory making tests."

"The wretch! I wish—oh! Mr. Crawfort, I haven't the slightest idea where papa is. Hold the wire till I ask mama."

There was an interval of silence.

"Hallo, Mr. Crawfort!" again came Georgia's voice.

"Well, Miss Bradman?"

"Mama doesn't know where papa is any more than I do. He said he was going to meet a man at one club, but from there was going somewhere in New Jersey to see another man. Mama doesn't recall what place. Mama is as much worked up over this as I am. And, since we can't get papa, I am coming right down myself."

"But, Miss Bradman! Front Street at night isn't quite the place for you."

"Oh, I'll be safe enough. I'll come down in the car, and I'll have Wilkins with me."

"But where will you leave the car?"

"I'll manage. I'll leave it around the corner. Don't worry about me. My father must be represented in this matter."

The connection was closed, and I went back to the little office.

"A lady will be here soon—Mr. Bradman's daughter," I said to the watchman.

"Then I'd better be down waitin'. I'll come back when the young fellow shows up, or when the young lady gets here."

The stranger in Bradman's office was still occupying the armchair. He did not seem to be impatient. He did not seem to be interested in anything much. He puffed away at his cigar as though he enjoyed it, and when that one was smoked down pretty short, he lit another.

It was tiresome work, standing back in the darkness to avoid being seen, but striving to see everything, when, as a matter of fact, all there was to see was a well-furnished office and a well-dressed man smoking cigar after cigar as fast as he could.

Callader must have been making exhaustive tests of my chemical compound. The second cigar was consumed and a third one lighted.

The minutes dragged along, and it became about time for Miss Bradman to appear. I left my post and went to the door downstairs. Jackson was standing there waiting.

"I think she's here, sir. I heard the chug of a machine, and it stopped around the corner."

Even as he spoke, there appeared at the corner a man and woman. The man stood still, while the girl started toward us.

She saw me under the glare of the street-lamp, and signaled back to Wilkins, her chauffeur, that everything was all right.

"Have they gone?" she asked.

"No, not yet. They seem to be prepared to make a night of it."

"Well, so am I, then. We'll have something to tell when we see Mr. William Bradman again."

"Will you come up-stairs? Come, Jackson. You can be chaperon."

"This bein' a strictly business affair, no chaperon will be needed," said Jackson with a chuckle. "But, all the same, I'll come, for I'm a witness already."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SAFE-BREAKER.

THE scene in Bradman's office had changed. Callader had returned, and now stood near the desk, while the other fellow sat reading something on a piece of white paper.

"Why—that is Remsen Mondale!" whispered Georgia Bradman.

"You know him, then?"

"I have seen him. He is not much good, fancy. He is a rival of the Bradman Company."

"A rival?"

"Yes. You have no idea how sharp such rivalry is. You see, the only stock in trade a medicine company has is either a patent on a compound or a secret drug or mixture. The Bradman company protects itself as well as is possible under the present laws. But as every law can be broken, so I fancy that every invention can be stolen if the right person goes about it. I can begin to understand, now, something that has been a mystery."

"About the company?"

"Yes. Old Mr. Callader told papa something once. It was not long ago, either. Of course you know that it had been agreed that Fred should be appointed chemist when Mr. Callader died or retired. Well, Mr. Callader called papa's attention one day to the fact that whenever a new appointment was made to the chemical staff he was fully instructed in the business, so that every member of the staff knew the formulas employed in the work.

"Mr. Callader told papa he considered this unnecessary and unwise. He said that among so many men it was almost certain that one would be found who could be bribed.

"He suggested that in future the head chemist and a personal assistant be the only ones made fully cognizant of the ingredients of the various medicines, and that they portion out the drugs and sirups for the others.

"Papa thought this was a strange suggestion for a man to make, when the next appointment was bound to be his own son. Still, there was so much in the suggestion that was good, that papa decided to act on it. Now I can see through Mr. Callader's caution. He probably knew that Fred was intimate with Mr. Mondale, and suspected that everything would not remain as it should when he was gone."

"Very probable," I said, "and it would seem that he was right."

The two men in Bradman's office now entered into a discussion that seemed to grow warmer. Mondale appeared to be laying down some sort of argument, which Callader did not seem to regard with favor.

He thrust out his hands, palm upward, in a gesture expressive of helplessness.

"I wish I could hear their conversation," I said. "But there is enough light that comes from the room to reach the sill of my window, and if they saw me the jig would be all up."

"But surely, Mr. Jackson here, as the watchman of this building, can look out of a window a moment."

"Bedad, ma'am, but it's a great head you've got. I'll pry open my ears so they'd hear a pin drop in the moon."

He walked away, filled and lit his pipe, and then, while Miss Bradman and I drew back farther where there would be no possibility of being seen, Jackson sauntered leisurely to the window and stood leaning against the casing in a nonchalant way, as if the hours of the long night hung heavy on his hands. He remained there about five minutes, and then came back.

"It'll be time you looked now," he said. "Let me tell you, there's a couple of fine jailbirds in the makin' in that office. Well, I didn't hear everything. But from what I did hear, the situation is this: This man Mondale has plenty of money and the other fellow none. Mondale, it seems, has agreed to put up the money to manufacture the air-cooling machine, provided Callader gets him the formulas of the remedies put out by the Bradman company. It's a fine game that the other is willin' to fall for, only he don't know the formulas. That's where the hitch is now. They know all they want to know about the machine, but Callader can't deliver the other goods."

"Wretch! And he wanted to marry me. Ugh!"

We stepped out again where we could see what was going on in the Bradman office. Mondale had thrown away his cigar, and was rummaging through the desk of Mr. Bradman, and Callader was fussing with the combination of the safe.

"Ah! He is certainly making a fine nest for himself," whispered Miss Bradman.

She had, in her excitement, clutched my arm with her fingers, and I could feel them contract as her excitement grew in intensity.

"That is an old safe," I said. "Almost anybody ought to get it open."

"They are certainly bold enough, after the watchman showing himself."

"They are too interested," said Jackson. "Neither one of 'em looked my way."

"Now, Miss Bradman," I told her, "we have reached a point where we must come to some decision. Those men are in that office for the purpose of robbing your father. Shall we shout and prevent it?"

"No. I know just what my father would do, and we will do the same. My father is one of the softest, easiest marks in the world, up to a point where he knows or thinks he is being imposed upon very wrongfully. Then he is apt to be the most vengeful man on earth. It is often that way. In this case he would say, let them have plenty of rope. They will save us the trouble of hanging them by doing it themselves."

"Ah!" came from Jackson.

I looked into the lighted office. Callader had the door of the safe open.

"Mark the time," whispered Miss Bradman.

Callader began to ransack the safe. We saw him with a handful of bills. He turned with these displayed and spoke to Mondale.

Mondale made a gesture of impatience. He swung his hand outward and said something, while his face wore a scowl. Callader put the roll back in the safe.

"He's foxy," I said. "Mondale knows a thing or two. All they are after would never be discovered if we were not here. But the loss of money, of course, would cause an investigation. Callader is a fool."

"Mondale is an older and more experienced criminal," remarked Miss Bradman.

There was a sudden exclamation from Callader that reached even to us. He leaped to his feet. In his hand he held some yellow papers.

"He has found them," said Miss Bradman.

Now both men got busy. Mondale looked over the documents, of which there were a dozen or more, and handed them back to Callader. Then, drawing some paper toward him, he dipped a pen in ink, and Callader began reading from the papers while he wrote.

Jackson again went to the window.

He remained there while Callader read off each paper, and then Mondale folded the copies he had made and put them in his pocket. He then motioned toward the safe.

Callader returned the yellow papers to the safe, and then Mondale rose. Jackson came back to us.

"They are going to the Green Parrot for a bite and a drink," he said.

"Where is the Green Parrot, and what is it?"

"It's an all-night café on Fulton Street."

"Saloon?"

"Well, it's a restaurant, too."

"Is it a fit place for a lady to go?" asked Miss Bradman.

"I wouldn't see any harm in it, especially

on such business as this. Ladies *do* go there. The cashier is a lady, some relative of the night superintendent. And there are women who work nights somewhere or other, telegraph operators, telephone girls, or newspaper women, or something, who eat there. I've seen them."

"Then we'll go there, Mr. Crawfort. You may take me to supper."

"But that will give us dead away," I objected. "They will know we are on their trail."

"No, not necessarily. Let us think up a good story. We can account for being out. I'll think of something. You see, there is no way of disguising ourselves. If there was I'd do that, and not let them know. But you see how impossible it is to get a disguise here."

"Still," I persisted, "I can't really see what we are going to gain. Surely they will not say anything of value while in our presence."

"No—I know that. But they won't know that we saw all this, and will not dare to act suspicious of us. And papa may be home."

There was something in this, though her purpose was still unspoken. Mr. Bradman's safe was closed again, and the two men left the office.

"Now, before we go, Jackson, let me know where we are sure to find you whenever we may need you."

"The surest place is here. I have no settled home, but I'm here every night."

"All right. Come, then, Miss Bradman."

And we left the place.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE GREEN PARROT.

"HURRY up," said Miss Bradman. "I've got a scheme."

We were peering from the door of the brick building and could just see the backs of the two conspirators as they walked slowly away from us.

"Well, I'm ready. You needn't call the roll. If you want murder committed, I suppose Wilkins will help me."

"It isn't murder. It's more fun. Come! We've got to take a chance. I want to be *in* the restaurant and sitting at the table when they come in."

"Why? What's the difference?"

"Oh, you! With a brain that can invent an air-cooling machine you are the most stupid—hurry! Why, it makes all the difference in the world! If we are there, waiting for our supper, they cannot suspect that we have been watching them. Then, again, we invite them to eat with us, and can keep them as long as we like."

"So far, so good. Then, what are we going to do with them?"

"We've got to get hold of papa somehow. Wilkins could go to Jersey City while we are at supper, but who knows which railroad he will come home on? If I only knew just where he went it would be easy."

"If he went on business, perhaps Callader would know."

"That's so. Perhaps he will know. We'll give him a chance to tell if he does know. Then you must keep things going at a lively clip while I make some excuse to leave the table and speak to Wilkins. Oh—you'll have to spend a lot of money. Mondale likes wine, and so does Fred Callader."

"Do they?" I asked, with a laugh. "But I have no wine money, Miss Bradman. My last money went for the rent of that office."

She turned toward me and I saw, in the light of a street-lamp we were passing swiftly, a look of astonishment on her face.

"Why—have you used ten thousand dollars so soon?" she asked.

"Miss Bradman, I did not break into the ten thousand dollars. I sent that back to your father."

"You did! Why did you do that?"

"I did not care to keep it under the circumstances. When it is proven that Callader is a thief I will accept the money, provided your father still intends to manufacture the machines."

"It is already proven that Callader is a thief."

"But your father doesn't know that."

"No, and I wish I knew how to let him know it. Now—let's think over this a little. Suppose Callader does know where papa went, and where he could be met in Jersey City. Shall I invite him and Remsen Mondale to accompany us in the car?"

"M-m! I don't think I would."

"You think it would make me appear too anxious to have them near me, or to meet him?"

"Partly that. But my main objection to the invitation is that it would take them out of the State. They have right now in-

criminating proofs on them. We don't want to let them get out of our sight once we meet them at the Green Parrot. And if they suspected us, and decided to remain in New Jersey, we could do nothing to-night."

"That's so. Well, isn't it true that two heads are better than one. But now look here. We've got away from the entertainment question. You are my escort, and must keep them interested while I do the thinking. This is now more my affair than it is yours. I want money spent, and since you were honest idiot enough to return money that was rightfully yours, you must take some of mine. When the Crawfort Air-Cooling Machine Company is paying dividends we can square accounts."

It galled me to accept money from her to spend, yet what she said was true. We were not only on the trail of the man who had stolen my invention, but also on the trail of two men who had entered the office of the Bradman Medicine Company and opened the safe and stolen various valuable formulas with the intention of profiting thereby. I took the roll of money she thrust into my hand.

She had told Wilkins the route she wanted taken, and though it was a little farther than the one presumably taken by Callader and Mondale, we reached the Green Parrot first. As they were walking slowly and we were riding at good speed this was an easy matter.

Miss Bradman and I entered, and went at once to an unoccupied table near the door where the two would surely see us as they came in. Mr. Bradman had been shrewd enough to tell Wilkins to drive on and not let Callader see him, for Callader knew the chauffeur, and for some reason I had not time to fathom, Miss Bradman did not want Callader and Mondale to know we came in an automobile.

"Why did you send Wilkins away?" I asked, as we sat down at the table.

"Hush! Here they come."

Mondale entered first. Callader was but a few steps behind him.

"Why, how do you do, Freddie?" said Miss Georgia. Both turned.

Mondale bowed politely. Callader's face turned a shade paler, I thought, and he seemed confused. Miss Bradman, on the contrary was as composed as though she was in her seat at the opera and no thought of conspiracy and crime had entered her head.

"Don't you see Mr. Crawfort?" she asked.

Then she introduced me to Mondale, who shook hands with me in a formal but extremely polite manner. Callader bowed. "You are not apparently overwhelmingly pleased to meet Miss Bradman's friend," said Mondale with a smile, although I knew the words were meant as a reproof and warning.

"I?" replied Callader. "I certainly am pleased to meet anybody who is a friend of Miss Bradman's. But—I rather fancied that Crawfort would not be pleased to meet me."

Georgia's foot touched mine under the table. I leaped to the conclusion that she had signaled me that this was my cue. I seized upon it.

"To prove the contrary," I said, with a laugh, "you and Mr. Mondale will please sit down and have supper with Miss Bradman and me. You are both older friends of Miss Bradman's than I am. In fact, were it not for the unfortunate accident that has made it necessary for Mr. Callader to remain in seclusion, so far as society is concerned, I would not be here now. Mr. Callader, I fancy, would be Miss Bradman's escort."

"I could have waived the seclusion business to serve you, Georgia," said Callader. "But I am amazed to see you down here at all. What under the sun brings you to Fulton Street at this hour of the night?"

"Well," said Miss Bradman, "there is no great mystery about the matter. In the first place the Subway has a station at Fulton and Broadway. In the second place we got here too early to meet papa, and in the third place I was hungry. Hence, the Green Parrot. Hence this meeting. Now, Mr. Inquisitor, are you satisfied?"

"Oh, perfectly," said Callader, laughing. "I didn't mean to be an inquisitor, really. But, Heavens, Georgia, your father won't get home before twelve-thirty. He'll probably come on that Congressional train. I don't suppose his business in Washington will keep him there till to-morrow."

"No, I expect him home on that train," said Georgia calmly. "And he always uses the Pennsylvania."

By this time they had comfortably seated themselves. The waiter was standing near my chair, having gathered from the conversation that I was playing the host.

Georgia ordered first, and as she slowly

and carefully scanned the *menu* I knew she was killing time like an expert.

And when she ordered, it was a list of dishes that had to be prepared, taking still more time. I followed her cue and did the same. I knew Callader and Mondale would not leave us until we were ready to go too.

Mondale seemed a little surprised at my prodigality, but Callader did not know I had sent the ten thousand dollars back to Bradman. To him I was simply a living exponent of the fact that a fool and his money are soon parted.

CHAPTER XV.

A LONG SUPPER.

"I WONDER if there is a public telephone here," said Miss Bradman.

"I believe so," answered Mondale. "Almost every restaurant of any importance has a telephone that can be used by guests."

"I don't feel like going home again in that stuffy Subway," she went on, "and as it is a lovely night I am going to have a —'joy' ride. I'll telephone for Wilkins to meet papa with the car and come here after us, and we'll go home together. We can drop you gentlemen wherever you like, and papa and I can go on home together with Wilkins."

Callader looked a little disconcerted, but nothing seemed to have the power to cause Mondale to change countenance.

Miss Georgia excused herself, and went to the desk. She held a short conversation with the cashier, a young woman with fluffy hair, and then with a rather loudly expressed "thank you" disappeared altogether.

Inasmuch as Wilkins was probably within fifty feet of the entrance to the Green Parrot with the car, it puzzled me some to guess what Miss Bradman was going to conjure up to "get away with it," as the current slang expressed it.

But Miss Bradman, I knew, was a young woman of ideas, and I could rely on her doing about the right thing at the right time.

She was gone about ten minutes, and returned as she had gone, through a small door at the side of the dining-room, and at once resumed her seat.

There was a slight flush on her cheek that made her seem more beautiful than ever.

"Where do you intend to spend the summer, Mr. Mondale?" she asked.

I started as though somebody had stuck a pin in me. Of all the questions requiring nerve and loaded with irony that was the worst.

And her lovely demure face was turned toward Mondale with so simple and innocent an expression that the Evil One himself would have been duped by it. Asking a man where he intended to spend the summer when her efforts, aided by my own, were to have him spend the summer in jail! It was going some.

"I haven't decided yet," he answered. "I did think of the White Mountains, but I received an invitation to join Jack Carberry's yachting party, and I fancy that would be more fun."

"He always has a gay party on board. That yacht of his could tell—but then I won't if the yacht cannot. I think, as long as papa must remain in town all summer, mama and I will content ourselves at a hotel near enough so that he can go back and forth every day in the yacht. He is so stout, and *so* uncomfortable in the cars in warm weather, I feel real sympathy for him."

"That's a good scheme," said Mondale. "And he will derive much benefit from the sea air. Where will you go, Fred?"

"Where will I go? To work, I suppose. I haven't got a father earning six thousand a year now. I'm earning two. And I don't suppose a fellow gets a vacation the same summer he gets a job."

"I don't know about that," said Miss Bradman, rushing in again so that I trembled. "You see, Freddie, your father was entitled to his vacation. And as you took your father's place, or at least filled the vacancy made by promotion along the line at his death, you ought to be entitled to his vacation. I'll speak to papa about that. I'm sure he will give you a holiday."

There was no doubt in my own mind that Mr. Bradman, after he had been put in full possession of all we had seen that night, would be extremely glad to give Callader a vacation. As to where he would spend it, that was another question.

"Suppose, Fred," said Mondale, "that I get you asked on board Jack's yacht. You know him, don't you?"

"Only slightly. And I don't think I'd

care for a second-hand invitation like that," replied Callader irritably.

"It wouldn't be second-hand. You play good cards, and a good player is always welcome on a yacht, especially on rainy days. I would like to have you go."

In this way the conversation dawdled along and the time sped rapidly. It required no effort on my part to keep Callader and Mondale. The supper itself took till after twelve, and Miss Bradman seemed only to have begun to liven up.

She seemed in a mood to make a night of it, and as it would soon be time for her father to arrive we sat there, we three men smoking by permission of Miss Bradman.

Half past twelve came at last.

"The train must be at Jersey City now," said Georgia. "I hope papa hasn't been detained. He hates to stay away from home overnight unless we are all together. I never saw a man like him."

"He is devoted to his family. Is that what you mean?" I answered.

"Yes. Most men are anxious to break away once in a while."

"I wouldn't be," said Callader. "If I had a wife — the right kind of wife — I would be just like your father."

"Freddie, you couldn't be like my father any more than you could climb up a sunbeam. My father was made in a large mold, with plenty of material of all kinds. When the frame was made it was discovered that the brain and heart that was used for ordinary men would never do for his size, and a larger heart and better brain were turned out to suit the special features of the perfect mechanism thus far projected. A man was put on earth who had brains to think with and a heart to love with. One beat of my father's heart is worth ten beats of the heart of an ordinary man. That big heart is at the mercy of all unfortunates who know him, and half the scamps. I know he is the victim of impostors, and frauds, but all warnings are useless. He is so afraid that he might do an innocent person an injustice that he takes the chance the other way."

"I have heard of sleeping lions," remarked Mondale.

"He is one," said Georgia promptly. "If it is brought home to him surely, indubitably, that he is being dealt with unjustly, or robbed, then all that big palpitating heart turns to a terrific engine of fury, and the knowledge that he is generous, is open-handed to all who need help, and has been victimized on that account, makes him all the more implacable and relentless."

"It is frequently so," said Mondale, and Callader seemed to be uneasy.

I wondered if her description of her father did not apply in great measure to Georgia herself. I could tell by the glow on her cheek and the gleam in her eyes, that she enjoyed this baiting of the victims of their own miserable conspiracy. She knew she had them in her power, and like some beautiful, sleek cat she was playing with them—torturing Callader till I almost fancied he wanted to throw up his hands and cry enough.

"It is quarter to one," said Georgia presently. "They will be here soon."

"They? Do you expect your father to bring somebody home with him?"

"He might do that, but it wasn't what I meant. By 'they' I meant papa and Wilkins. Wilkins, you know, is a human being."

"I suppose so," said Callader.

"The train may have been delayed," observed Mondale, looking at his watch.

He would have to turn to see the clock on the wall of the Green Parrot, but Georgia could see it without moving her head.

One o'clock came. I feared the two would consider it a late hour for an automobile ride. But I realized that Miss Georgia was a magnet. I knew Fred Callader was in love with her. I judged from the expression in Mondale's eyes whenever he spoke to her that he was smitten with her beauty, and. whether he was capable of an honest love or not, he liked to be with Georgia Bradman. So time amounted to nothing with either of them.

At seventeen minutes past one the door opened and Mr. Bradman entered.

CHAPTER XVI.

A VERY OLD FRIEND.

"WELL, well!" exclaimed Mr. Bradman heartily, as he mopped his face with his handkerchief. "Did I keep you waiting long?"

"Oh, not to our distress," answered Georgia. "We have enjoyed our little dip into bohemia. Won't you have a glass of wine? It is Mr. Crawfort's treat."

"Wine? Crawfort's treat? Must be

money in the old Connecticut farm yet, then, Crawfort. I've a bone to pick with you concerning that—but we won't go into that now. It was very thoughtful of you, Georgia, to send the car and save me a trip up-town in the Subway or on the Elevated. I do so dislike riding on the railroad in warm weather. What puzzled me was how you knew I was in Washington. I told nobody where I was going."

"Oh, of course you did, papa. You have forgotten."

"Miss Bradman knew," said Callader.

"Why, yes. And even Freddie knew. He said you were in Washington. He knew what train you would come home on as well as I did."

"How did you know?" asked Bradman, turning to Callader. "I am sure nobody around the building knew."

"It was on—I heard somebody say, I can't remember who," said Callader.

His face flushed. I saw a startled look come into Mondale's face and he flashed a quick, warning glance, full of suppressed anger, at his dupe and accomplice. It was the first time that Mondale had shown any emotion.

To tell the truth, I was considerably surprised at the way matters were turning, myself. Miss Bradman, when I had telephoned to her from the building in which I was hiding, had said that she did not know where her father had gone, and then after a talk with her mother she had said that he was in New Jersey.

When Callader had told her that Mr. Bradman had gone to Washington I had thought he was assuming a knowledge he did not have. But here was Mr. Bradman a little late, but that he had been met by Wilkins in Jersey City was certain.

How, then, just as he had asked, I asked myself, did Callader know he had gone to Washington?

"I'll have a glass of wine," he said, "and we'll go. I see Georgia hasn't put a veto on your smoking, so we'll take it easy, and enjoy a cigar while we ride up-town."

The waiter poured out a glass of wine all around, and Mr. Bradman drank his as though he was thirsty. Then he bought a dozen cigars and we left the Green Parrot.

To my surprise, and to the surprise, apparently, of all the others in our party, there was another man in the automobile. He sat there smoking, seemingly at rest and contented with himself and the world in general.

"Ah!" said Mondale, and I detected a quick, indrawn breath as of startled surprise. "You are already a host. I suggest, Freddie, that we do not intrude on Mr. Bradman to-night, but go up-town on the Subway and enjoy Miss Bradman's joy ride some other time."

"Very well," rejoined Callader.

"Fudge!" exclaimed Mr. Bradman, getting his portly form between the two, and clutching each by the arm. "Think of dropping out on account of my old friend Elton. Here, Elton, two friends, Mr. Mondale, and Mr. Callader. Elton has been a friend as long as Callader has been on earth."

"That is a fact," said the comfortable Mr. Elton. "We've seen a few things together, eh, Bradman? But you should have told me you expected to pick up a crowd."

"Crowd? This no crowd for the car. And Callader is one of our best chemists."

Mr. Bradman introduced me as though I was a mere unimportant fungus on the outside of the party, and Miss Bradman wasn't introduced at all. She gave a little laugh, and after shaking hands with Mr. Elton seemed to forget all about me, and sat down alongside of him.

"It is quite a long time since we have met," she said.

"Yes," he replied slowly. "Quite a long time. It seems to me that I should see a little girl, but I find my old friend Bradman has a young woman for a daughter. Well, time flies. We old fellows don't like to admit it, but we *are* old. Now, I'll bet Bradman will say he feels as young as when he was twenty-five and weighed a hundred and sixty."

"It's a long time since I weighed a hundred and sixty," said Bradman.

Wilkins did not wait for any instructions, but started off.

As we passed the street-lamps I got from time to time a good look at the features of Mr. Elton, and I must admit that Mr. Bradman's friend seemed to me about as bad a misfit for an old chum as I could imagine possible.

Mr. Bradman's face was large, round, smiling when he was not growling at the weather. Mr. Elton was grim, somber, and his eyes were devoid of friendliness.

We swung into Broadway and passed the post-office.

"Broadway in this part of the town at this time of night is very different from that portion of it called the Great White Way," remarked Bradman.

"Is it?" queried Elton. "I have heard of the Great White Way. The buildings are all marble, I suppose."

"Well—er—I'll take you there. We old fellows must have our fling once in a while, Elton."

"Yes, yes. But no mischief, now, friend Bradman."

We passed the City Hall, then the old Stewart Building, and then corner after corner skipped to the rear as Wilkins sped the car to the legal speed limit. At the corner of Grand the great car swung to the right and went eastward.

"Where are you going?" demanded Mondale with an expression of alarm. "Jump, Callader! We have been tricked!"

"What!"

Mondale had risen, and Callader followed his example.

The car was going at terrific speed. To jump was almost certain death.

"Sit down," said Mr. Elton quietly, and there was the gleam of metal in his hand. "You are both under arrest. Sit down or I shall put the handcuffs on you."

"What does it mean? What are you going to do?" wailed Callader, now thoroughly alarmed.

"You will learn," said Mr. Bradman coolly.

The car swung into Centre Street and stopped before 240, which is police headquarters.

"Don't make a scene and cause unnecessary trouble," said Mr. Elton, Bradman's old chum, who was a man Bradman had never seen until that night, nor Georgia either. "There are enough around to handle you and to make a fuss would only hurt your own chances."

"My God," I heard Callader breathe.

Then a ray of hope came to him.

"Georgia! Dear Georgia! What's all this about?" he asked, his voice trembling. "I haven't done anything—committed a crime—have I?"

Georgia did not answer. She wiped a tear from her eye.

We were marched before an inspector.

"These are the prisoners," said Elton, whose right name was McGraw. "Mr. Bradman will make his own charge."

"The charge I make against these two men, this one Remsen Mondale, and this one Frederick Callader," said Mr. Bradman, and his voice now was hard and cold, bearing out the statement of Georgia concerning him, "is breaking into my office and place of business illegally, opening my safe illegally, and purloining from there certain valuable documents used in my business, the same being formulas for the manufacture of remedies known as the Bradman Specialties, put up by the Bradman Medicine Company, of which my brother and myself are the proprietors. This man has copies of the formulas in his pocket now." He pointed to Mondale.

"It's a lie!" cried Mondale.

"Search him," said the inspector.

Mondale made a little struggle, but two men soon had the formulas spread out before the inspector.

"Are you employed by the Bradman Medicine Company?" asked the inspector.

"No," said Mondale.

"Then how does it happen that you have these formulas written on their letterheads?"

"They were in my office," said Mr. Bradman. "Callader knew I went to Washington, and the only possible way he could know it was to see a memorandum on my daily calendar on my desk. I told nobody where I was going. I went to Washington to see about a patent for an air-cooling machine of which Callader claims to be the inventor, but of which I know now Mr. Crawfort here is the only inventor and owner. Callader has in his pocket the secret formula of the cooling preparations he obtained by making tests in my laboratory in Front Street after breaking into my office and taking a chemical cartridge from the air-cooling machine. He has that in his pocket."

This was found after a search.

"Now, to make the matter absolutely beyond contradiction, here are two witnesses, my daughter and Mr. Crawfort, who witnessed the entire performance from the window of the next building on Front Street, and who knew that these two fine gentlemen were going to the Green Parrot on Fulton Street to eat. They hurried there in my automobile and invited the two rascals to supper when they entered.

"My daughter wrote a note and sent the chauffeur to meet me, and I came here and you sent a detective with me to make this arrest."

"The case is clear enough," announced the inspector. "Caught with the goods. Take them away."

"Oh, my God!" cried Callader. "Wasn't I a fool? It's your fault! You got me into this, Mondale. Now get me out."

Mondale sneered.

"It was like this," almost shouted Callader. "He's got money. He put me up to stealing the air-cooling machine and promised to finance it if I would give him the formulas of your medicines. But you did not tell me the formulas and none of the other chemists would tell. A new rule, they said. So I was led by him, and look at the scrape I'm in."

"You were welcome in my home," said Mr. Bradman. "You ate my bread. You sailed as guest on my yacht. You even aspired to the hand of my daughter. I shall have no pity on you, not even for your father's sake. I am through."

"Take them away."

A heavy hand was laid on the shoulder of Mondale and on Callader. Two more crestfallen knaves I never saw.

"Oh, take me home. I am—"

Then Georgia proved she was a woman.

We got her home and her mother put her to bed.

That was not so very long ago. But today I have my ten thousand dollars again, and I am president and manager of the Crawfort Air-Cooling Machine Company, of which Mr. Bradman is treasurer and secretary. The factory is being run wisely on a small scale at first while improvements are being made.

And a fine residence is being built about ten minutes' ride in an automobile from the factory and here Georgia and I are going to live when she becomes my wife—one month after the day on which I am finishing this last line.

Mondale and Callader were both convicted.

THE END.

HI AND THE BADGER.

BY HOWARD DWIGHT SMILEY.

The Game That Involved a Lariat Trailing Out from Under an Inverted Kettle and What Happened When the Man from Wisconsin Took a Hand in It.

ZEKE JOHNSON sat with his feet cocked up on the window-sill o' Judge Finley's "court o' last resort," as the judge called his two-story, red-front thirst an' amusement emporium, gazin' out across the Idaho landscape with an expression denotin' that there wa'n't a blessed thing left in the world to live for, an' less to die for.

The rest o' us were bunched together at the other end o' the room intently observin' the judge give Ike Walters a divorce from his money, on faro grounds. Zeke had got his thirty minutes before, complete an' absolute, an' without alimony, an' he had retired to the window with remarks that would 've fetched him not less'n four pellets o' lead from a .45 Colt for contempt o' court, if the judge hadn't been good-natured an' discriminatin'.

"The court finds," the judge was sayin', "that the deuce wins an' the jack loses, an' as the plaintiff for the defense coppered the deuce with his last argument, which same is found to be irrelevant, immaterial, an' incompetent, the decision is handed down in favor o' the court, who appropriates the proceeds an' the cases close."

"Shut your mouth, an' wait till I get through, can't you?" says Ike, irritable like an' without the slightest reference to the dignity o' the court. "Here's a two dollar bill I had tucked away for tobacker money, an' that goes on the king to win. Now do your dealing an' you won't be so rich an' happy."

"Which, in view o' the fact that the four-spot wins an' the king loses, this same tobacker money is assessed by the court as alimony for the gentlemen o' the jury, who will kindly step up before the bar an' absorb the same," says the judge as he dealt the cards.

"I say," called Zeke just then, "if you onregenerate sons o' iniquity'll just tear yourself away from your sinful pastime for a minute an' step this way, you'll have an

opportunity o' viewin' a spectacle that comes less than once in a lifetime to most folks."

Everybody stepped over an' looked out the window.

Up the road comes a cow-critter—not the kind you see around these parts, far, far from it. Wa'n't a long-horn nor a short-horn; as a matter o' fact, her horns furnished a square meal for argument all in themselves. They shot straight out from either side o' her head for about eight inches an' then turned about on a downward curve, an' shot straight back again, the tips endin' where the horns started, so that they looked for all the world like a ribbon-bow on the head o' a Boise biscuit-shooter on dance night.

In the matter o' height she'd 'a' made a range-bred cow look like a burro alongside a plow-horse; an' when it came to breadth, a razor-back hog would 'a' hung his head in shame an' humiliation. As for her legs —well, I never saw her try it, but I'll bet four bits that she could 'a' stepped over a six-strand ba'b-wire fence an' cleared it clean without humpin' her back more'n four inches.

An' that wa'n't all. She was loaded fore an' aft like a freight barge. Well forward, on her shoulders, was cinched on one side an old hair trunk, an' on the other a box o' correspondin' size, while appended here an' there an' everywhere was fryin'-pans an' kettles an' tin pails an' a stool an' other household appurtenances enough to set up shack-keepin' without any further additions than a bunk an' plug o' tobacker.

An' that wa'n't all, either. On the after-deck sets a passenger with his elbows restin' on the pack box an' trunk, an' his long limbs danglin' most to the ground an' swingin' time to the critter's hind legs.

Mounted on about six inches o' neck was a little head, all out o' proportion to the rest o' him, with a fringe o' chin-whiskers around the bottom, an' topped off with a battered old straw hat that was never raised this side o' the Mississip.

Up the road they come, their heads swingin' in unison as they took in one side o' the street an' then the other, until they winds up in front o' the judge's place.

"Gee!" says the old man, an' the critter obediently turned an' walked up to the hitchin'-post.

"Whoa-up!" says he, an' slides off, while we all pile out onto the sidewalk to get acquainted.

"Haow-de, folks," says he with a nasal twang that would 'a' broke the back o' a bass viol. "Mount I inquire whereabouts I'm inhabitin' just naow?"

"You mount," answered the judge, him bein' the only man present who seemed to have any words to use. "You're just at present abidin' in the small but growin' town o' Redwood Junction, with both railroads buildin' this way an' due to arrive any minute, seein' they've been fourteen years on the way so far. Thinkin' o' settlin' hereabouts, stranger?"

"Waal, naow, I cain't say thet I be," says t'other, grinnin'. "Yeou see, it's this way: My name's Hyram Ryder, an' I've come all the way from Hick'ry Corners, Wisconsin, on my way tew Spokane, Washin'ton, tew help my darter Lizzie pick apples an' make my home. She an' her husband hev over four hundred trees planted aout thar, an' they writ me thet they got a bumper crop this year."

"You don't mean to tell us you've rid that critter all that distance?" says the judge in astonishment.

"Waal, I reckon! Jest let me tell yeou that S'mantha's some caow! I hain't seen nothin' on the way here thet kin compete with her, nohow."

"No," agreed the judge, "I don't believe you have. I guess Samantha stands alone an' without equal—leastwise she does so far as my experience goes."

"Yeou bet she dew," says Hi pridefully.

"But, say, kin any o' yeou folks tell me what o'clock it mount be?"

"Quarter-past six," says the judge, consultin' his watch.

"Dew tell!" exclaimed Hi, apparently very much consternated. "I swan, it dew be fifteen minutes past milkin'-time, an' I allus aim tew milk S'mantha at six sharp every night! Be yeou the landlord hyer?"

"I be," says the judge. "Like accommodations for the night?"

"If yeou kin put up me an' S'mantha, I'll be glad tew pay."

"Billy," says the judge, turnin' to me, "show Hiram around to the corral, an' help him put up his critter, while I get grub started."

While we're goin' through the yard on the way to the corral we passed a big iron soap-kettle, turned bottom side up on the ground, an' with a piece o' lariat trailin' out from under it. Hi paused an' gazed at this with a look o' strong disapproval.

"Thet's a dern shame," says he. "Thet kettle's gettin' all rusted up, an' ought tew be put under cover whar it'll be pertected from the rain. Them things cost money."

"Oh, that's all right," I answered. "That kettle's kept there regular an' all the time for a purpose. You see, that's our badger-pen."

"Yeour what?" says Hi in a puzzled tone.

"Why, that's where we put the badgers when we catch 'em. Keep 'em in captivity there until we're ready to use 'em. You know what a badger is, don't you?"

"Waal, naow, I reckon," says Hi indignantly. "Daon't I come frum Wisconsin, the Badger State? Young man, I've been personally 'quainted with them thar varmints ever since I was knee-high tew a grasshopper. I kin tell yeou more abaout badgers than yeou could git aout o' a book o' l'arnin'. I know 'em all the way frum the front fence tew the back forty."

"Is that so!" says I, plumb tickled at this news. "Ever see 'em fight?"

"Waal, I reckon! The dern things hev kilt six good dogs for me on an' off sence I hev been livin' on my farm. They're p'ison on dogs."

"Now, that's good news," says I, tickleder than ever, "'cause we're goin' to pull off a badger-dog fight first thing in the mornin', an' are mighty glad to have an expert present for judge. We've got a big badger under that kettle right now."

"Dew tell!" exclaimed Hi, lookin' at the kettle with renewed interest. "Ketch him wild?"

"We sure did. The boys brought him in early this mornin'."

"Let's hev a look at the critter."

"Not much!" says I, considerable startled. "He's the ugliest, meanest, chewin'est animal I ever bumped into. Why, it took four o' us to get him under that kettle, an' we near got our legs bit off at that! I ain't takin' no chances on his gettin' loose before the fight."

I hustled him along to the corral for fear he'd get insistent an' lift the kettle on his own accord. He seemed satisfied, however, an' got busy right off. Out o' his collection he digs up a stool an' milk pail, an' goes to milkin' Samantha like he'd never been away from home.

I had particular reasons for not wantin' him to look under that kettle, for be it known badger-dog fights are for tenderfeet pure an' simple. Any man who belongs to the West can tell you all about 'em, or, if he can't, he don't properly belong to the West.

It ain't likely that a real, live badger was ever used in one o' these fights. That would take away half the fun, which ain't legitimate where fun is scarce.

They always use a real dog, however, an' in our case it was Jumbo. Jum was a lop-eared, overgrown hound-dog, with a cast o' countenance as gloomy as a rainy day in Death Valley, an' a sense o' humor second only to Bill Nye or Mr. Dooley.

He understood an' enjoyed a badger fight as well as any o' us, an' always did his darndest to carry out his part o' the program with a go an' vim that generally made the tenderfoot travel a hundred yards in eight flat.

Our badger was one o' Pete Boyle's old cast-off cow-hide boots, an' Jum knew it like a brother. When he connected with that boot there was doin's, I'm tellin' you.

This is the way it works: A tenderfoot comes along an' we get him interested right off. Everything is explained to him in detail; how we've just caught the badger out in the hills, an' he's just naturally the rip-snortenest, ugliest, ferocious animal that ever traveled on four legs, an' liable to bite one o' your legs off with one snap.

The tenderfoot is invited to yank the badger out from under the kettle, which he generally accepts when we explain that it is considered a high honor an' privilege. O' course, we impress on him some particular that when he yanks he wants to jump, an' jump quick, 'fore he gets his leg bit off.

Then everybody adjourns to the kettle. Two o' us get hold o' Jum, who r'ars an' tugs an' growls fit to tear the insides out o' a mountain, while two others line up on either side o' the kettle, ready to lift it at the proper time. Then the end o' the lariat is placed in the tenderfoot's hands an' he's cautioned to yank, an' yank quick, the minute it's lifted, an' then jump out o' the way in the liveliest manner possible.

We lift the kettle on the "One, two, three, go!" order; the tenderfoot yanks, an' out comes the old boot, which Jum grabs right prompt an' commences to shake, rippin' an' roarin' an' raisin' a cloud o' dust like a cow stampede, while the tenderfoot, without stoppin' to take in details, goes leggin' it across the country like a scared coyote runnin' for home an' cover.

An' that's the signal for everybody to cut loose an' make a noise, which we all proceed to do with a whoop an' a yell as only a bunch o' cowpunchers can, while Jum drops his boot an' prances 'round on his hind legs, yelpin' an' grinnin' as hard as any o' us.

We hadn't had a dog-badger fight for quite a spell, owin' to the scarcity o' tenderfeet; an', therefore, you can see how we were particularly anxious to draw Hiram into the game. I'd already started proceedin's, an' was now dependin' on the rest o' the gang to work up interest when we got back to supper.

So I didn't make any more remarks, but waited patiently while Hi milked his cow, an' then helped him put his luggage into the saddle-house an' feed his critter, after which we returned to the court o' last resort, where we found the gang an' grub waitin' for us.

"Boys," says I, with a gentle wink all 'round, as soon's we'd got set down, "Hiram here tells me that he's considerable shucks at the badger game. He's lived next door to the whole badger family all his life."

"Is that so!" exclaimed Zeke, takin' the cue quick. "Now, that's plumb interestin'."

"Yes. I was tellin' him that we're goin' to pull off a fight first thing in the mornin', an' I'm thinkin' we ought to get him to do the yankin' for us."

"That ain't a bad idea," says Zeke. "Ain't none o' us here had much experience with the critters, seein' it was Bill Wilkins who always did the yankin' before, an' poor Bill died only last week."

We looked at Hiram to see how he was takin' this talk, but that gent was absorbed in his grub, absolute an' complete, an' puttin' it away with a knife at the rate o' a plateful every three minutes. He wa'n't interested in badgers just then.

We tried to draw him in to the bar after supper, but that wa'n't no go either; for as soon's he'd finished he riz up an' addressed the judge.

"Waal, naow," says he, "I reckon I'm filled up, an' I'll go tew the hay, if yeou'll show me the way. Mr. Landlord. I'm moughty tired, an' I got a long way tew travel to-morrer."

"Better come in to the bar an' have a snort or two for a night-cap 'fore you turn in," suggests the judge.

"Thankee very kindly," answers Hi. "I daon't never take no licker o' any kind. I reckon I'll jest turn in, if yeou daon't mind."

An' that settled it. The judge showed him out to the bull-pen an' fixed him up in a bunk, an' then came into where we were waitin' at the bar.

"He got plumb tactuturn all o' a sudden," he remarked as he passed out the Monongohela without bein' asked. "I 'low we'll get him in the mornin', though."

"We've got to," says Zeke earnestly. "Why, he'll be the best badger yanker that ever hit Redwood. We can't offord to miss it. Little drops o' amusement ain't drippin' 'round these parts so plentiful that we can offord to let any get by."

So we all turned in that night with the understandin' that everybody'd be on hand early to encourage the game an' get Hi interested.

Howsomever, when I opened one eye shortly after sun-up next mornin' an' took a peep at Hi's bunk, I saw it was already empty, which opened up the other eye an' landed me on my feet some prompt.

I gave Zeke an' Ike a kick to call their attention to our friend's absence, an' in three minutes we had the others up, an' were pilin' out o' the bull-pen to look into the matter.

Hi was at the corral, an' had just finished cinchin' on his packs when we found him.

"Where're you goin' so early?" inquired the judge.

"Waal, I reckoned I'd be moseyin' 'long," answered Hi. "I got a long way tew travel, an' want tew cover all I kin while it's cool. Much obliged for yeour hospertality; I 'lowed that the milk I left in the wash-tub would pay for aour lodgin'."

"Oh, sure, that's all right," says the judge magnanimously; 'but ain't you goin' to stay to breakfast?"

"No, I daon't reckon so. I had a little snack o' cold vituals thet fixes me aout till we get tew dinner-time. Thankee kindly, though."

"But ain't you goin' to stay an' see the badger fight?" asked Zeke anxiously.

"No, daon't reckon I be. There won't be nothin' tew it—a badger kin lick a dog any day o' the week."

"Don't be too sure o' that," says Zeke. "Jumbo is considered some shucks when it comes to fightin' badgers."

Hi looked Jumbo over with a speculative eye.

"Huh!" says he, sourcastic-like. "That dog cain't lick no badger. He ain't built right, nohow."

"Is that so," says the judge. "Let me tell you something, Hiram; if you've got any money to back up that statement, you'll find plenty to cover it at odds o' two to one."

"No, I ain't no bettin' man; but I'd be takin' yeour money if I did bet. There ain't no dog o' thet size livin' thet can lick a badger."

"Oh, shoot!" says the judge, turnin' away disgustedly. "You ain't got no money; that's what's the matter with you."

"Naow, I want tew know!" flared up Hi indignantly. "Yeou kin jest understand thet I ain't no pauper by a long ways! I sold my farm up in Wisconsin, an' I had a auction sale o' the tools an' stock, an' I've got the money right here, an' if yeou daon't believe it—"

He reached into his rear pocket an' hauled out a buckskin bag that would 'a' answered just as well for a grain sack, an' pulled out a roll o' bills that would 'a' choked Samantha.

"Dew thet look like I ain't got no money?" he demanded.

"Why don't you do a little bettin' then?" jeered the judge, his eyes bulgin' at the roll. "You say you're so blame wise on the subject o' badgers an' all that, but you don't seem to have the nerve to back it up with a little real money. I don't believe you ever saw a badger. You're just a big bluffer."

"Naow, say—why—darn yeour hide—" spluttered Hi, r'arin' up like an insulted schoolmarm. "I daon't 'low no man tew talk like thet tew me! I ain't no bettin' man, as I said afore; but if yeou daon't think I know a badger, an' what he kin dew, I'll jest bet yeou fifty cents ag'inst a quarter thet I dew!"

"Huh!" grunted the judge, who saw he had him comin'. "Fifty cents! We don't make bets o' less'n ten dollars in this country, an' that's considered small. You must be one o' them Eastern cheap skates we read about in the papers."

"Who, me?" roared Hi, mad plumb through by now. "Young feller"—the judge is fifty-four—"if I wa'n't so old, I'd take off my coat an' thrash yeou good for thet. I ain't no cheap skate by a long ways; an', jest tew prove it, I'll take the limit off'n thet fifty cents an' cover all the money yeou kin put up at the odds yeou offer."

"Now you're talkin'," says the judge. "Get your money down."

"Billy," says Zeke, edgin' up to me, "I'm plumb broke. Lend me a ten-spot till I get a slice o' this."

"Sure thing," says I, handin' over the ten.

Ike saw this an' sidled over for his. He got it.

Inside o' ten minutes the money was down—down in the bottom o' Hi's old straw hat—for he had insisted on bein' stakeholder, which was all right, seein' that he was due to lose at any angle you wanted to look at it.

My forty-two dollars went into that hat, an' with it every dollar in the camp, includin' the contents o' the till, which the judge accommodatin'ly emptied.

"Naow, be yeou all done?" demanded Hi.

We admitted we were done. We were more truthful than we knew.

"Then trot aout yeour dog, an' git it over with. I want tew be moseyin' 'long."

"O' course you'll do us the honor o' yankin' the badger," says the judge.

"Waal, I ain't particular; but, seein' yeou ask it, I'd jest as soon."

So we all bustles over to the kettle, where the end o' the lariat was trailin' out from under, same's it always did, an' everybody except Hi knew that there wa'n't nothin' but Pete Doyle's old cast-off boot on the other end.

Old Jumbo was right there, fully aware o' what was comin' off, an' eager to do his share, as usual. Me an' Ike collars him, an' pretends to hold him tight, while he pretends that he's goin' to tear things up generally. The judge an' Tommy Flannery get on either side o' the kettle, an' the rope is placed in Hi's hands with the customary warnin's.

"The minute we lift the kettle you want to yank, an' yank hard," cautioned the judge. "An' you want to jump lively, too. Don't let him get hold o' you."

"Jump nothin'!" snorted Hi. "I ain't afeared o' no badger thet ever walked a rail-fence. H'ist up yeour kettle, naow."

The judge an' Tommy h'isted, an' at the same time Hi gave a tremendous yank.

Well, out it come with a rush, an' in jumped Jumbo, ready to chaw the heel off'n that boot.

Howsomever, he didn't do it, for the next second the air was so full o' yips, yelps, an' plumb surprised howls that you couldn't

hear yourself think. For the time bein' we didn't know what the hotel *was* comin' off; for, what with the dust Jumbo raised an' the general confusion an' the steppin' out o' the way o' something or other that was whirlin' 'round there like a bobcat with its tail afire, we were just naturally too kerflumaxed either to see or to think anything.

Then the dust began to settle, an' the first tangible thing I get was recedin' yelps; an' away down the road I could see Jumbo, boundin' over the landscape in ten-foot jumps, with his big tail between his legs, an' his head over his shoulder, lookin' back with eyes as big as tomaters, while he emitted a series o' the most astonishin' sounds that ever came out o' a scared dog's throat.

An' just then something comes prancin' out o' the cloud o' dust, spittin' an' hissin' an' snortin', an' I side-steps some prompt, seein' that it's headed for me. I didn't get a chance to fully identify it until I'd scrambled up on top o' the wagon-shed, along with Zeke an' the judge an' the rest o' the gang. Seems that the critter had chased 'em all up there, an' that I was the last of the bunch to rise.

"Well!" the judge was gaspin' as I flopped down unceremoniously beside him. "Well!"

An' that was all he could say, which was a blame sight more'n the rest o' us were capable o' speakin'.

Down on the ground beneath us was a real, live, sure-'nough, full-grown badger, prancin' round with his tail straight up an' his teeth showin' while he glared an' hissed at us an' dared any an' all o' us to come down an' fight it out like men.

Over to one side was Hi, calmly transferrin' his winnin's from the hat to the buckskin bag. It wouldn't hold all the money, an' he had to put some o' it in his pocket. He didn't pay no more attention to us than's if we'd never roosted up on top o' a wagon-shed.

"Come here, Jimmy," says he, when he'd finished sortin' and storin' away the boodle. "I reckon we'll hev tew be moseyin' 'long now."

The badger obediently waddled over, an' Hi carelessly picked him up just as though it was an everyday occurrence, an' chucked him onto the box that was cinched on Samantha's back.

"Waal, boys," says he, lookin' up at us for the first time, "I reckon yeou must 'a' come tew the conclusion by naow thet I dew kneow something abaout the badger tribe. Yessir; I was raised right amongst 'em. I've toted this here one all the way from Hick'ry Corners, Wisconsin, an' he's licked every dog between here an' the Miss'sippi River. I reckon thet I've had this here badger game sprung on me at every town for the last thousand miles; an' while I'll admit thet I got caught, all right, the first time, frum then on I knew my bus'ness, an' if the game holds aout, I 'low to hev enough to buy a farm by the time I get tew Spokane. Waal, so-long, boys. Sorry we can't stop longer, but business has got to be 'tended to. So we got tew be moseyin'."

An' with that he hops onto his cow-critter an' away they goes, leavin' me an' the judge an' the rest o' us settin' up there on top o' that wagon-shed like a passel o' turkey-buzzards.

We never said a word, not even good-by. We couldn't.

SWORD, GO THROUGH THE LAND!

Sword, go through the land and slay
Guile and Hate, Revenge, Dismay!
Now where is such a sword, you say?

Sword, go through the land, but spare
Love and Hope and Peace and Prayer!
Now who, you ask, that sword shall bear?

Sword, go through the land, and youth,
Prime, and age shall cry: "Forsooth,
How mighty is the sword called Truth!"

Clarence Urmy.

IN TREASON'S TRACK.

BY ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE,

Author of "When Liberty Was Born," "The Spy of Valley Forge," "From Flag to Flag," etc.

A Story of Revolution Days Which Brings in the Figure of an Enemy for Whom All Cherish Only the Kindliest Feelings.

CHAPTER I.

THE GIRL IN THE BOAT.

I WAS the most miserable man in the thirteen colonies!

I wanted to get away, to be by myself, to ponder over the cruel way fate was using me. If I stayed around headquarters another minute I knew I should be picking a quarrel with some talkative fellow officer.

Then, hey! for drawn swords, an exchange of thrusts, and—a fortnight in guard-house by way of penalty.

So it was that I stalked away from General Benedict Arnold's headquarters at the Beverly Robinson house below Cold Spring, and made my aimless way southwestward toward the river.

As I walked I drew out again the tinted, perfumed little letter the morning courier had brought me. I read it once more, though I already knew it by heart, and as I read my anger boiled afresh.

I nursed my thousand grievances as a peevish child might perversely bite hard upon a sore tooth.

The Hudson, at last, flashed blue and gold at my very feet. Scarce a hundred yards beyond stood the Robinson boat-house. A long row might well bring me to my senses, or at least show me a solution to my wretched perplexities.

Toward the boat-house I turned my steps. But, as I reached it, I halted with a scowl. There was seemingly no end to my ill luck this day. Where six skiffs, large and small, usually lay, there was now not one. Every boat had been preempted by earlier oarsmen.

As I stood there, I noted the last skiff of the lot, just making its way out of the tiny dock. In the nearest rower's bench sat a girl—slender, tall, graceful—handling the heavy oars with more than usual skill.

She was plainly clad in gray homespun, but the sunbeams nestled lovingly in the uncovered masses of her soft yellow hair.

She was backing the boat out from the slip when first I saw her. But as the craft cleared the dock, she turned. Then I recognized her. She was Mistress Edith Bliss, the new governess that Madam Arnold had employed to teach her young stepson.

I had met the girl but once, for a moment, a few days earlier. Madam Arnold (with a mischievous twinkle in her merry eyes at forcing me to speak to a mere dependent) had introduced me to her. I had but mumbled a word of stiff acknowledgment and passed on.

Now, the sight of this provincial governess abstracting the only remaining boat and thus robbing me of my coveted row, was well-nigh too much for my self-control.

I was, for the instant, minded to growl out an order to her to come back and turn over the boat to me, chiding her for daring to take what her betters might need.

But ill-tempered as I was, I could scarce bring myself to do so churlish a thing. Moreover, though I knew Edith Bliss to be merely the over-educated daughter of a Cold Spring farmer, there was something so daintily aristocratic about her bearing, as she manipulated the heavy oars, that I somehow could not speak the words of reproof that I should have used to an ordinary servant.

Just then her eyes met mine. Her face flushed with genuine pleasure, and she waved a hand to me in gay salute. It was as though a lonely child had all at once seen a welcome playmate.

I glowered sulkily back at her. But my scowl had no lessening effect upon her bright smile of greeting. Indeed, she quite misinterpreted my look.

"Good morning, Captain Wayne," she called pleasantly. "I don't wonder you

look so glum. You came down here to go rowing, didn't you? And here I am running away with the very last boat."

"It's of no consequence," I grumbled, with all the suave courtesy of a sick bear.

"Oh, but it *is*," she retorted laughingly. "You want to go rowing. So do I. There is only one boat. Hence, there is only one way out of the difficulty. We will go together!"

I stared down at her with a cold haughtiness that went wholly unobserved. She was again turning the boat and backing shoreward.

"Wait till I bring it alongside the slip," she cried, panting with the exertion. "One more stroke will do it. *So!*"

The boat was cleverly maneuvered so that its gunwale was at my very feet. Mistress Bliss's face smiled a bright invitation to me. I was busy coining some phrase of crushing reproof when—all of a sudden I found myself actually stepping down into the skiff.

No, I have not the remotest idea how it happened. Whether the girl's glance mesmerized me, or whether the odd childlikeness of her nature made me hesitate at hurting her feelings.

The moment I was in the boat I was mightily minded to scramble out again. But, such a course would have fitted ill with my sullen dignity. I seated myself at the central thwart and quickly caught up the oars.

Mistress Bliss, with the happy little laugh of a child who is being taken out for a holiday, settled herself in the stern and leaned back with ineffable content.

I hoped none of my snobbish fellow officers would see me thus playing carpet knight to a governess in homespun. The thought irritated me. I bent to the long oars with a series of strokes that sent the boat fairly dancing along the river's placid surface.

The month was September, in the year of grace 1780. Across the sunlit stream loomed West Point, crowned with its grim line of fortifications. To north and south on either side frowned the rampart-lined Highlands of the Hudson.

In the distance somewhere a regimental band was playing. The sound reached us clearly through the warm air.

"How beautiful everything is!" sighed the girl in dreamy rapture, "and how wonderful. Oh, it is good to be alive!"

I made no answer, but dug my oar-blades harder into the water.

"How well you row," she commented. "I never was rowed so fast before. You must have the strength of a giant."

Breathes there a man so deaf to flattery that a compliment to his strength does not touch him in a tender spot? If so, I am not that man.

I still spoke no word, but I slightly relaxed my sulky scowl of haughty aloofness.

The girl was really pretty. And she had a grace of manner that any woman might well have envied. It was a pity that she was a governess, a farmer's daughter.

"Isn't this delightful?" she murmured. "Just to lean back and be rowed so fast on the loveliest river in the world, and on a day like this! It isn't every girl who could get the famous Captain Philip Wayne to take her rowing."

I glanced suspiciously at her from under my frowning brows. Was she making fun of me? Would she dare?

No, her flower face showed only childlike pleasure.

"Why do you frown when I call you 'famous' Captain Wayne?" she queried. "You *are* famous, you know. Madam Arnold told me all about you. She told how you won a lieutenancy at Ticonderoga, how you saved General Arnold's life, by cutting down the *voyageur* who was attacking him when he was wounded at Quebec; how you charged at his side in the glorious battle of Saratoga, and won there a captaincy through sheer bravery. Yes," she added, "and the havoc you played with the pretty Tory girls' hearts when General Arnold was in command at Philadelphia that winter, too. There was one girl, Madam Arnold says, who—"

"If you please," I broke in harshly, "I would rather not discuss my private affairs with a stranger. I—"

"A stranger?" she echoed. "But *we* aren't strangers. Madam Arnold introduced us very formally, only last week. Oh, look! There, away to the south. There's a sloop of war. I didn't know—"

"It's the Vulture. A British war sloop. It has run up from New York two or three times. No one knows why."

I checked myself. I had not meant to unbend so far as to converse with this very forward governess. I was angry at my own breach of silence, and I cast about me

for a few well-chosen words that should teach her her place.

"Look out!" she warned. "Hard-a-port! *So.* You nearly ran into the red buoy. It lies so low and the glare on the water is so strong that I didn't see it till we were almost right on it."

I scowled at the low-floating globe of scarlet, with its crisscross of chains. Then I rowed on.

"You are rowing so fast," she commented, "that if we had struck the buoy, our prow might have been stove in."

"Then, just think of what might have happened! A full mile from shore and not a boat in sight to rescue us. Could you swim a mile, Captain Wayne?"

"No," I snapped.

It had always been a sore point with me that, strong as I am in other respects, I can never swim more than half a mile at most without cramps.

"How lucky, then," she laughed gaily, "that we didn't have an accident! *I* can swim a mile—I *think* I can—but I'm quite sure I couldn't carry *you* all that distance. Wouldn't we look funny—you a great giant of an officer, being towed into port by a girl like me? You would have to marry me out of gratitude. People always do, in books, you know."

Her utterly innocent speech, born of high good humor and a youthful spirit of fun, ripped out my last barriers of breeding. Still pulling away at the oars with all my might, I burst forth angrily:

"Mistress Bliss! When you chose, this morning, to forget our widely different positions and to presume on my good nature to make me take you rowing, I overlooked it. But surely a woman of discernment should have seen by now that I do not care to converse with you. I have tried to spare your feelings by indicating this instead of putting it into plain words. But when your speech becomes impertinently familiar as it did just now, I must—"

"*Oh!*"

There was a world of meaning in the soft-gasped little monosyllable that cut short my brutal tirade. There was infinitely more in the flushed face that met mine in such pained wonder.

Dumb amazement, a poignant incredulity, grief—all battled for expression in her one word and in her big pansy-colored eyes.

All at once, I felt as if some laughing five-year-old child had come running toward me with a gift and as if I had struck the advancing youngster with my clenched fist.

This girl was so innocent, so immature! She had hailed with joy the prospect of a row on the river with a man whose few paltry war deeds she had magnified into heroism. She had done her best to entertain me, ignoring my black looks, until, (with no provocation that she could understand) I had rebuked her as I would scarce have rebuked a swearing, drunken trooper.

Oh, I assure you, I felt like a cur. Had she flamed into wrath or even burst into loud weeping, I should hardly have felt less badly.

But she only looked at me in anguished, amazed disbelief. I racked my brain for something to say that might soften the blow. But I sat there tongue-tied.

It was she who spoke first. Very quietly, in a subdued crushed little voice, she said:

"I am sorry. I didn't understand. Will you please take me back now? I wish to go home."

I tried to mumble some sort of an apology, but again my tongue refused its office. Putting the boat about, I headed back for the eastern shore, throwing even greater force into my strokes, as I sought for words to excuse my crass brutality.

Now, as is usually the case when it is too late—I saw the utter harmlessness of all the girl had said and done. And I saw how my own ill-temper and misfortunes had led me to vent upon her the rage that fate's repeated bad treatment had aroused in me.

She was so young, so pretty, so childish! And she had been having such a beautiful time there on the river, during the brief interval of leisure from teaching young Arnold. I had spoiled it all.

"Mistress Bliss," I began, "I—"

Then I stopped. She was sitting with averted head. I could have kicked myself. I gave one desperate tug at the oars that embodied all my self-contempt. And then—

A quick jar. The boat stopped with a thud. The prow jumped high out of water. The port gunwale careened sharply. A cry from the girl. And I pitched overboard.

I had a momentary glimpse of a net-

work of rusted chains just beneath the surface. Then my head smote the nearest one with a whack that sent my five wits a scattering.

CHAPTER II.

MAROONED.

I FELT my body lurch into the cool water and sink.

Dully I knew I had rowed at full speed into the red buoy that I had so narrowly missed on the outward trip. But this time Edith Bliss's eyes had been too tear-filled to note the danger.

The impact of my head against the chain had not wholly stunned me. But it seemed to have jarred some nerve center. Momentarily helpless to move, I was none the less well aware that I had fallen overboard, that the heat of the upper air had been replaced by a delicious wet coolness, that I was quietly sinking down—*down*.

In due time, I incoherently knew, I should begin to rise again. When I should reach the surface I might be able to shake off my numbness and strike out.

In the meanwhile I was drowsy and cared little what might happen. I wonder now that I had the sense to hold my breath.

Down I went, a million miles or more—seemingly. Then my body paused (the force of my plunge being at length counteracted by the upbearing power of the water) and started slowly upward.

It had risen but a foot or two when it came to a grating stop, neatly caught under one of the projecting chains that ran down to the shoal at the river bottom.

There I hung, helpless. My only strong sensations were a yearning to breathe and an instinct that I must not. My senses were coming back. But my power to move was still in abeyance.

And there, caught under water like any soaked bit of driftwood, I bade fair to remain until I should drown.

I probably had not been immersed more than thirty seconds. And a man can hold breath much longer than that. But, to my returning consciousness, it seemed an eternity. And my lungs ached to bursting.

No, I did not review in lightning panorama every event of my past life. I was too much stupefied. I merely realized the full peril of my plight and tried in vain to rid my memory of the haunting vision of two big gentle tear-filled eyes.

Then through the green coolness of the water something flashed. It seemed a quivering maze of brown and white and gold.

I had a fleeting, brief glimpse of a little face from which a pair of pansy-colored eyes gazed weirdly at me.

A wrench from some unseen hand and my body, freed from its helpless position beneath the chain, shot upward.

To the surface I popped, sputtering and drawing in great breaths of the warm sunlit air. My strength, too, was beginning to come back, and I began to struggle with feeble inefficiency.

But, even as my eyes cleared of the water and I glanced about me, a golden head shot above the surface, not far from my side.

And in the dripping, glowing mermaid who swam up to me I recognized Edith Bliss.

Already my weak efforts to move were pulling me once more below the surface. With one strong white little hand, Mistress Bliss caught hold of my collar and held my head above water.

"Can you move?" she asked.

"A very little," I gasped. "I'm—"

"Turn over on your back and lie rigid!" she ordered.

With difficulty, and chiefly by her help, I obeyed. With a twist of her lithe body, she got one shoulder under mine. Bearing me up thus, she struck out strongly.

"You—you can't swim all the way to shore with me," I murmured.

"I am making for the boat," she answered between strokes.

A moment later her arm flashed out of the water and caught the side of the skiff. We had risen a bare ten feet from the gunwale, but my back had been toward it.

Clinging to my shoulder with one hand and to the boat with the other, she rested for a moment.

"I don't understand," said she. "The skiff ought to careen under this weight, but it is as firm as a rock. Oh, I see now! The bow is so firmly jammed between two buoy-chains that it can't stir. You were rowing fast, and the impetus wedged the boat tightly among the chains. Do you think you are strong enough now to hold on to the side?"

"I'm all right again," I announced, seizing the gunwale.

And I was. As is often the case with temporary paralysis to nerve centers, my strength was returning as suddenly as it had left me. I was still a trifle shaky, but in moderately full possession of my big muscles.

"I'll get aboard and help you in," I volunteered, beginning to wriggle across the gunwale.

But she did not wait for me. She was over the side and in the boat before I had half accomplished the same task. Then she turned to help me.

Ordinarily it is no easy feat to board a rowboat in midstream, but so securely was our skiff caught in the angle of two big chains that it did not so much as move as we scrambled aboard. The prow was high out of water and the stern almost awash. The deep keel near the bow was the part wedged in the chains.

I dropped into the tilting bottom of the skiff and looked up at Edith Bliss, who had perched on one of the slanted thwarts.

Her hair had come loose from its fastenings and flowed in a mass of shimmering gold nearly to her knees. Her face glowed with her violent exertions. Her wet clothes hung about her like antique drapery. Never had I beheld so wondrously beautiful a sight.

"You were thrown out," she was saying. "So was I, but I caught the gunwale and saved myself from going under. You didn't come up. I remembered the chains, and I guessed what had happened. So I dived for you."

"You—you saved my life," I muttered.

"Oh," she said lightly, "even impertinent strangers have their uses."

"Forgive me," I cried, all penitence. "What could have made me speak so to you? I could almost wish I had stayed under water, now that I remember what I said—and what you have done in return. Believe me, I am not a boor always."

At my first words of bungling contrition her face brightened as does a child's when a peevish schoolmate "makes up" a quarrel.

"You don't have to apologize any more," she said gently, "but I'm glad you're sorry. And I'm glad — very, *very* glad — I was able to help you out of the water. Now, we're good friends again, aren't we?"

Her utter simplicity no longer jarred upon me. Instead, I found something vaguely delicious in it.

Our eyes met. To both of us came all at once the realization of our sopping, bedraggled condition, of our isolation there in a tip-tilted boat in mid-river.

I do not know why it was, but suddenly we both broke into loud, uncontrollable laughter. The sound of our mirth rolled out over the silent, bright waters. We laughed until the tears rolled down our cheeks, until we were panting and weak.

Partly, perhaps, it was reaction; partly the sight of each other's weird aspect, partly—I know not what. But this I know: that wave of wholesome laughter cleared the mental air like a thunder-storm and left us far closer together, in acquaintance, than a whole year of ordinary intercourse could have done.

At last I rose, cautiously wiping the tears of merriment from my eyes, and looked about me. On every side the shining river stretched out under the hot September sun. No sign of craft anywhere.

"We are marooned," I announced.

"I don't understand," she answered.

"We are stuck here," I explained, vainly probing at the chains with an oar, trying to shake the boat free. "We can't get off. We can't swim as far as the nearest shore. We are south of the military posts, and, even if we weren't, I doubt if a hail from us could be heard by any one on shore. I can't see another boat. Here we are, and here we stay—indefinitely."

"But surely," she laughed, "we will be seen from land."

"Our boat will be seen perhaps, but what good will that do? At such a distance it will seem as if we are anchored here, fishing."

"But some other boat will come along—"

"In course of time, doubtless; but the Hudson, just below West Point, is not the Hudson just below Wall Street in New York. There may be a boat that will pass in hailing distance during the next ten minutes. On the other hand, there may not be one that will come near enough to notice us within three days. That's what I meant when I said we are marooned. Luckily the weather is so hot we aren't likely to take a chill from our wetting."

I set to work stripping off my uniform coat. I rigged it to the blade of a long oar and managed to fasten the oar-handle upright between two cleats.

The impromptu signal-flag hung limp and dripping under the hot sun.

"Our vigil has begun," I remarked.

"We are shipwrecked mariners on a desert island," she answered gleefully. "Isn't it fun?"

"After the first day or two the humor of it may begin to pall," I ventured to suggest.

CHAPTER III.

A STORY OF ILL LUCK.

THERE we sat, as helpless and as merry as a pair of truant babies, chatting away as though we had known each other all our lives.

Meantime our clothes slowly dried upon us, and at intervals I rose to scan the river for sign of approaching boats. In circumstances like those one cannot be formal, try as ever so hard. And I did not try. We talked of a dozen indifferent topics, and laughed at things that were not of deep wit.

For the moment I had forgotten my myriad woes, my grievance against fate, my hopeless future. I was content to be *young* with this childlike girl. It was she, at last, who brought me back to the memory of my own worries.

"Captain Wayne," she said a little timidly, "I don't want to be impertinent, but I wish I could help you."

"Help me? How?"

"When I saw you at the boat-house this morning," she went on, still a little shyly, "your face was so sad, so troubled! It made my heart ache for you. That is why I asked you to come rowing. I thought maybe it would cheer you up. And while you rowed you looked so miserable; I tried to get your mind off your bothers by talking nonsense. Then you reproved me. And—"

"That is cruel," I interrupted; "you forgave my boorishness. Won't you try to forget it?"

"It *wasn't* boorishness," she contradicted prettily. "It wasn't even bad temper. I see that now it just meant you were unhappy. And you were too miserable to bear being disturbed. So when I spoke—"

"You are sweet and charitable," said I. "but I *was* a boor, just the same."

"Have it as you will," she conceded with a smile. "If it comforts you to misjudge yourself, pray continue to. But—you were unhappy. Cannot you tell me about it? I might help."

For a moment the old resentment at her familiarity swept across me, but we had passed the stage where non-acquaintance rears formal barriers.

Besides, no man at heart can deny that there is a temptation to pour one's woes into a pretty woman's ears. And Edith Bliss was looking at me with a tender—almost motherly—appeal that I could not withstand.

Thus it was that I found myself talking in a horribly confidential way to a lovely girl whom I scarcely knew, telling her things I had never thought to reveal to any one.

I make no excuse for this. Let him who has never confided impulsively in a woman judge me. I think I shall then go unjudged.

"It is no *one* annoyance," I said lamely, "but the accumulation of a dozen. Here is the tale in brief:

"When the Revolution began, five years ago, I was a rising young lawyer in New York. I was of good Tory family. I had bright prospects. I was barely twenty-five. I threw over everything to take up arms for my country."

"Good!" she cried. "My father did the same thing. He—"

"If he regrets it as much as I do," I said, "he has my pity."

"He *never* regretted it," she answered softly. "He—he died at Valley Forge—not fighting a mortal enemy, but starving and freezing for liberty's sake. Yet he felt no regret."

Her simple words of faith touched me. Yet, with memory of my own misfortunes, I hurried on:

"I cast in my fortunes with Benedict Arnold. He was my family's friend. He liked me. He promised that as he rose, so should I rise. And to the best of his ability he kept his word. But what can he do for me—for *any one?*"

"He is a friend of General Washington. The dear friend. He—"

"That is his chief misfortune," I said bitterly. "Conway, Gates, and the rest, who hate Washington, vent their spite by injuring Arnold, his friend, knowing in that way they can strike most cruelly at the chief's great heart. Washington's enemies in Congress, too, are forever seeking means of disgracing Arnold so that they may pain Washington. It has been so since the very beginning. Until I have wondered that

General Arnold endures it. A less gallant patriot than he would long ago have broken his sword, or might even have gone over to the British."

"Shame!" she cried. "You do not mean that. No one but a traitor—"

"Perhaps you do not know the whole story as I know it," said I. "From the very start it was so. Arnold was sent to take Ticonderoga. I went with him as a sub-lieutenant. On the way Ethan Allen and his 'Green Mountain Boys' joined us. The whole expedition was Arnold's idea. Yet Allen was given command over his head, and to Allen went the chief glory of the victory. Arnold made the fearful wilderness journey to Quebec.

"Again, Congress's lack of cooperation robbed him of victory and of reward. Five junior officers were made major-generals, while he went for months unpromoted. At Saratoga, while Gates was wrangling with his staff in his own tent, it was Arnold who led the victorious charge that crushed Burgoyne's army. Yet to Gates did Congress give the whole glory, and Arnold is still unrewarded."

"But he was made commander at Philadelphia that year. Surely that—"

"That was the direct work of General Washington in opposition to Congress's wishes. Scarcely had Arnold assumed command in Philadelphia when his enemies set secretly to work. They trumped up vile charges of dishonesty against him and forced him to trial. *Him*—the hero of Saratoga! Every serious charge was disproven. Yet Congress was not content, but ordered General Washington to insult Arnold by a public reprimand."

"I remember," she answered; "but the chief made that reprimand so gentle that it was almost a compliment."

"Yet the shame of it remained. To make up to his friend for such bitter injustice, Washington has put Arnold here in charge of West Point — the strongest fortress we have, the key to our whole strength, the place on whose safety our fate hangs. But even now the foes in Congress and the army are at work to harm him. And Arnold has borne it all. He is the true hero of this Revolution of ours. No other man, save Washington alone, deserves so highly of his country, and none has been so ill-used. I marvel that he does not seek revenge. It is scarce in human nature not to."

"Captain Wayne," said she suddenly, "you have been most eloquent in your commander's behalf. Yet we have strayed far afield in our talk. Methinks it was *your* grievances, not General Arnold's, that we began to speak of."

"Mine are his," I retorted. "In more senses than one. Not only do I resent the injustice done to my friend and leader, but, as his fortunes are my fortunes, I have shared in his ill luck. I have been in the army five years. I threw away a good profession for my country's sake. Other men who have done less service, and who have risked far less, have risen high in rank. Because I am an Arnold man I am still a mere captain, with no hope of further promotion. Five years thrown away!"

"No, no," she protested hotly. "Five years of glorious service in liberty's cause. Yet," she added more softly, "I scarce wonder you grow bitter at times. Still, in the end, when our country at last is free—"

"Free?" I scoffed. "It will never be free. The Revolution is doomed. Arnold himself secretly admits that. For five years we have fought on with varying success. And victory is farther away from us now than it was in 1776 when we signed our useless Declaration of Independence. We shall struggle along hopelessly a little longer. Then we will be forced to yield to—"

"*Yield?*" she cried, her face aflame. "Never, *never!* Not while George Washington leads us."

"Fine words," I muttered. "But the end is in sight. Even Arnold sees that. We cannot hold out much longer. We have no money. We have few men. Before long, by sheer force of numbers, England will force us to our knees. For my own part, I am half inclined to do as my parents begged me to, and go over to the enemy. In a year or so, at most, that is what all of us will have to do."

"*Horrible!*" she panted. "How dare you speak so?"

Already I was ashamed of my pettish outburst. Angry and discontented as I was, yet in my heart of hearts I knew I would shed the last drop of my blood for my stricken country sooner than turn a traitor.

Yet, after the way of angry men, it just then pleased me to talk like a fool. And the girl's indignation served but to make me the more stubborn.

"It is easy for you to chide me," I

sneered. "You are a woman. You have not fought and hoped and planned and toiled for five years as I have—and all for nothing."

"No," she returned, "yet my father died for liberty. And my two brothers fell, one at Bunker Hill and one at Saratoga. The Revolution has left me penniless and—alone. Perhaps, in a way, this glorious struggle for liberty has cost us women as much as it has cost you men. But I know you cannot mean what you say about betraying your country by going over to the enemy. I should as soon think of suspecting General Arnold himself."

We fell silent for a space, while again I scanned the waters for passing craft. It was she who first spoke.

"I thank you, Captain Wayne," she said, "for telling me all this. I wish I might help you to bear it as so gallant a man should. But—if I am not mistaken—there was more than a mere chronic grievance against fate that so darkened your brow to-day. Was there not? I may be wrong, but I have a foolish womanly intuition that you have not even touched upon your chief trouble."

I looked at her half in resentment. And again something in those big, childlike eyes impelled me.

"I spent the winter at Philadelphia," I said awkwardly, "on General Arnold's staff. It was my first glimpse of civilized life since this wretched war set in. We had a gay, care-free time. The general kept open house, especially after he married Mistress Shippen. There was much social gaiety. Also, there was a girl—"

"I *knew* it!" proclaimed Edith Bliss.

Yet in her announcement there was less triumph at her own prophetic powers than might have been expected.

"A Mistress Dorothy Cary," I resumed. "Of the Chestnut Street Carys, a great Tory family of Philadelphia. Half the officers of the staff were daft with love for her. So was I. She—she favored me Or so I dared hope. There was no betrothal. Yet—I dreamed of success. Last month I took heart and wrote, beseeching her to be my wife."

"Yes?" queried Edith as I paused; and once more I noted a strange lack of life in her sweet voice.

"I weary you with my stupid love-tale?" I asked.

"No," she denied. "No. Go on."

"And," I answered, fishing from my waistcoat pocket a damp, crumpled scrap of tinted, perfumed paper, "this morning the answer came."

Edith was leaning forward, her lips slightly parted.

"How women dote on hearing of a romance!" commented I fatuously.

Then, more seriously, I added:

"The gist of the letter is this: She esteems me highly. She likes me better, she says, than any other man she knows. She might even readily learn to love me. But—"

"Ah!"

"But she would die before she would wed an enemy of her country."

"She is English?"

"No," I said; "a Tory. She regards England as her country, and deems all Revolutionists base rebels who merit hanging. Her verdict is this," I continued, glancing again at the wet note, "if I will renounce the patriot cause and join the English army she will be my wife. Otherwise she desires never to see me or hear from me again."

"Oh, *poor* Captain Wayne!" cried Edith in quick, warm sympathy. "The cruel, unjust woman!"

"No," I contradicted, "she is but loyal. And—the choice she offers me is very tempting. I scarce know what to do."

"You well know what to do!" she retorted. "You will do your duty as a valiant, true man. Your heart may break, but you will stand by the cause."

She looked very lovely—like some Norse goddess of old—as she thus bade me obey conscience and turn my back on love. A wild, insane, wholly inexplicable impulse seized me as I gazed on her.

Something of my feelings must have shone from my eyes. For a red flame leaped to her cheeks.

"Edith—Mistress Bliss," I began, "I—"

"Skiff ahoy!" roared a voice not fifty feet away. "What's amiss?"

A fisherman's shallop was bearing down upon us.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE NEUTRAL GROUND.

Of course, it was my lot that the rescuing fisherman's boat should set us two ashore at the Robinson boat-house at the

precise moment when no less than five officers of the post and a couple of my fellow-staff members happened to be passing.

They doffed their hats in ironically low salutes as we walked through their parted group. And they eyed with merry wonder our bedraggled condition.

Their gaze and their thin-veiled amusement served to bring me back to my senses with a shock.

For an hour or more I had been babbling like a garrulous schoolboy, telling this almost stranger-girl the most secret and sacred things of my life. I, who was ever reserved as regards my own affairs, had let an unusual situation and a pair of pansy eyes turn my private history inside out.

Nay, worse. I had done a monstrous imprudent thing. I had openly babbled mutiny to her. I had prophesied the Revolution's failure. I had said I was sick of my profession as a Continental officer. I had spoken as though I actually intended to desert to the enemy.

Now, were she by any chance a spy (and there were perforce many such on both sides in those days) she might well ruin me by repeating one-half of what I, in my peevishness, had blurted out.

The idea was not pleasant. One so often says things to a woman that he would find hard to account for were they repeated later to men.

I waxed troubled. I glanced covertly at the tall, gaily-chatting girl at my side, as we both wended our way toward headquarters.

The moment's glamour—the midsummer madness—were quite gone. Once more I was the somewhat arrogant, birth-proud Philip Wayne, spoiled by a winter of Philadelphia gaiety and by subsequent alternate petting and neglect.

The girl beside me was no longer the bewitching mermaid—the Norse goddess companion of my marooning—but once more a farmer's daughter, a dependent of my commander's wife.

And it was to this mere employee, this daughter of the soil, that I had unburdened my heart! I felt sick and ashamed. For a man's nature does not wholly and permanently change in a single hour.

Edith seemed to notice my alteration of manner. It puzzled her at first. Then, with sudden concern, she cried:

"You have caught cold? The wetting was too much for you? And here I am making you walk slowly to keep pace with me, when you ought to be hurrying on to your quarters to get a change of clothing. How careless of me!"

With a bright smile and a nod of friendly farewell, she slipped through a gap in the hedge, struck a footpath that led direct to the Robinson house, and ran on, leaving me to follow the main road to the officers' quarters.

I stared after her a moment. Her grace and her utter friendliness again threatened momentarily to upset my stiff ideas of our relative positions in life. But, even as I, half shamefacedly, made as though to follow her, a voice at my elbow checked me.

"So might the dripping river god stare after the flying wood-nymph!" intoned some one with mock solemnity. "Now, out and alas! that the high-born and most severely punctilious Captain Philip Wayne should stoop to cast sheep's eyes after a pretty governess!"

I turned. A slender, gaily-dressed young man stood laughing pleasantly at my frowning surprise. I had not expected to see him here. He was Alexander Hamilton, General Washington's own secretary.

Washington had gone two days earlier to confer with the Count de Rochambeau at Hartford, and Hamilton had gone with him. So had the young French Marquis de la Fayette. None of the party were expected back for another fortnight.

"You are on leave?" I asked, ignoring Hamilton's mischievous grin.

"On leave?" he echoed. "We of his excellency's personal staff get scant 'leave,' I can tell you. No, I was sent back with papers of his for General Arnold. I arrived half an hour agone; only to find Arnold is making a tour of the Catskill forts and will not be back for a day or so. I was just starting to rejoin his excellency when I beheld a fish-boat drawing toward shore laden with a cargo of two youthful and beauteous creatures; very wet, but seemingly very happy."

"Have done!" I begged. "I—"

"I thought to see shepherd and shepherdess," he went on, unheeding. "Then I recognized your worthy and dignified self. 'Forsooth,' thought I, 'the maid he has deigned to honor with his companionship must sure be a countess at very least!' But alack! I was wrong. 'Twas a simple governess in homespun clad. Lad, I rejoice to see you so human. You have shown

excellent taste. She is most fair. And, Madam Arnold tells me, she has a brain as well. When are the nuptials to be?"

With a growl I turned on my heel and stalked away. I sought to look dignified and stately, but a dripping uniform, wet hair, and boots filled with water are but poor aids to stately dignity.

I was far from being at the end of my persecutions. All that day and the next I was the butt of every hare-brained officer in the whole messroom. More cheap wit was lavished at my expense than I had thought the entire Continental army possessed.

Because I refused to give any reason for my appearance with Edith, in the fisherman's boat, every man had a theory of his own to account for it.

One portly major gravely suggested that Edith had fallen into the water off the boathouse; that I had plunged in to her rescue; that I had then been so much in love I had forgotten on which side of the river I belonged and had forthwith swum with her across the Hudson to West Point and was on my way back when we were picked up.

A pert subaltern vowed that I had leaped into the river with her in my arms and that I had refused to bring her ashore until she should promise to wed me.

"And," added the subaltern, "since she had too much sense to accept, there they would have stayed until the Hudson froze over, had not sanity, in the form of an honest fisherman, saved them from an eternal bath."

These were but two of a dozen lame jests I was forced to endure. I have spoken of them so that it may be understood to what pitch of mind I came. Like every other man on earth, I can never abide a joke at my own expense.

And, being a young fool, all these gibes made me but the angrier with the innocent cause of it all—Edith Bliss. That was why, as you shall see, when the time came, I once more behaved like a cur.

And—as you will still later see, I was to be well punished.

It was two days later that Madam Arnold invited a half dozen of us officers and as many ladies from the neighborhood, to a picnic at Garrison's Spring, a picturesque, romantic woodland spot some few miles south of headquarters, and on the edge of the wide strip of territory known in those war-times as the "Neutral Ground."

The British held New York City and the land for some miles to the northward of it. The Americans held the West Point region and on both sides of the river. Almost the whole eastern tract of the Hudson country from our lines to those of the British was a sort of No-Man's Land.

It was debatable territory, the scene of many a raid and skirmish. And it had taken the odd title of "Neutral Ground."

The picnic formed a jolly little break in our daily routine. We were a gay crowd, and Madam Arnold was the liveliest of hostesses. Edith Bliss was there. It was the first time I had seen her since our ducking in the river.

She bowed in laughing, inviting fashion across the heads of a dozen other guests, and beckoned me to join her. As she did so, I caught the amused glances of one or two officers.

I stiffened, bowed frigidly in reply to her friendly salute, and paid no attention whatever to her invitation.

Yes, I was a boor. A poor cad who feared ridicule from devoting himself to the loveliest woman in all that party.

I know that now. Dimly, I knew it then.

I was but a poor sort of hero. I misdoubt me you have discovered that for yourself ere now. But I have here set down my faults in crass frankness that you might the better understand the need of the fiery iron trials that later were to crush and efface the worst of those same faults.

Luncheon over, I strayed through the grove alone, for a quiet smoke, and to ponder afresh the cruel ultimatum Mistress Dorothy Cary's letter had offered me.

Somehow, to my bewilderment, I began of late to find myself less heartbroken over that fair maiden's coldness than I had once thought. I wondered at this.

I was perhaps a furlong away from the others when I threw myself down on a mossy mound, beside a woodland bridle-path, and relighted my pipe.

I could still hear the voices and laughter of the picnickers, although a screen of foliage wholly shut me off from their view.

I was drowsy, perhaps I dozed for a moment. I felt, all at once, that some one was looking down at me. I opened my eyes with a start. There, in the bridle-path before me, stood Edith Bliss.

I know not why it is that a man is always ashamed to have been caught sleeping. But so it is.

"Oh!" exclaimed Edith, "I woke you! I didn't mean to. You looked so big and so comfortable, all sprawled out there asleep. And you were actually *snoring!* As loudly as—"

"I beg your pardon," I growled, angrier than ever at this latest charge, "I regret that I should have made a spectacle of myself. I regret still more that you should have felt bound to seek me out to tell me so."

"There!" she complained in mimic fright, "you are cross again. As cross as can be. Please don't scowl," she went on appealingly. "I stole away from the rest for a chat with you. Isn't that a compliment?"

"I am sorry you took such trouble on my poor account," I muttered ungraciously.

"Trouble? Why, it was no trouble at all. I *wanted* to come. I would rather talk to you than to any other man at the post. Honestly, I would."

"I am afraid Madam Arnold will miss you," I began, straining my ears lest some wandering officer might come upon us and thus add a new chapter to the tale of mockery that had lately been my portion.

"Oh, she won't miss me," Edith reassured me. "I told her where I was going. She called me as I left the luncheon board. And I called back that I was going to look for you. They laughed. I wonder why?"

"Probably," I snarled, unreasonably stung by this new source of ridicule, "probably they laughed because it is not customary for any woman—even be she a provincial governess—to run in search of a man who has not sought her society and who does not—"

I stopped. She shrank back, with that same look of childlike dismay that once before had shamed me.

I was sorry. My lips were parted to tell her so, to say I did want her with me, that she was the loveliest and most innocently bewitching woman I had ever seen.

But, before the first eager, stammering word could be spoken, a man (who seemed to drop out of nowhere) quietly stepped between us.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN OF MYSTERY.

THE stranger had evidently advanced toward us along the bridle-path. He was leading a big roan horse. His steps and the footbeats of his mount had been muffled by the soft mold of the path.

He stepped between us, I say, without a word and in a manner of lofty authority that I vaguely resented.

He was of middle height, youthful, strikingly handsome, and with the unconscious, graceful air of a French aristocrat.

He wore civilian's riding-clothes, and a court sword dangled at his side. He would have seemed more in place (riding-clothes and all) in a ballroom than on this lonely by-track of Neutral Ground.

His face looked as if it was oftener gay than grave. But just now it was set and stern. He turned to Edith with a courtly bow.

"A thousand pardons for my intrusion," he said, "but as I drew near I heard this brute speak to you in a way that seemed to call for chastisement. Have I your gracious permission to punish him?"

His voice was pleasant, low-pitched, without the faintest trace of excitement. It was as though he had seen her trying in vain to manage a vicious dog and had offered to thrash the animal.

My face went scarlet with fury at his calm offer and his open contempt.

"No. No!" begged Edith, in panic, instinctively moving nearer to my side as though to protect me.

This finished the loss of my sanity. Whirling about on the stranger, I shouted hoarsely:

"Zounds! How dare you speak like this of an officer of the army? I'll flog you with your own riding-whip. If—"

"I had the honor of addressing this lady, sir," he answered, unruffled. "It pains me—as it must pain any man of breeding—to be forced to exchange speech with a yokel who can sink to speaking to a woman as you did just now. I do not force you to apologize to her. For you are probably ignorant of the word's meaning. And as she intercedes to save you a thrashing, I have no redress but to let you go, though," he sighed gently, "it irks me to do it."

"How—I—"

"You spoke of yourself, I think," he went on, in that same soft, emotionless tone, "as an officer. The words 'officer' and 'gentleman' are ever supposed to go together. I grieve that, in your case, they can never hope to do so. No man with the remotest claim to decency could speak to a woman as you did. She seems in-

clined to submit to the insult. I cannot punish you against her orders, much as I long to. But be warned, I beg. Next time, some less considerate man than I may chance to overhear you. And then you may not escape the horsewhipping you so strongly need. Madam, your most obedient, sympathizing servant!"

Again he bowed low with the grace of a true courtier, and made as though to mount his horse. But by this time my brain had cleared somewhat from the chaos caused by his mildly breathed words. Each gentle sentence had been worse than a kick to me.

The divergence between his speech and manner had momentarily dazed me into dumfounded silence. But now, boiling with rage at the man's treatment—and 'rebly so because Edith Bliss had been witness to it—I leaped forward with a cry to intercept him.

My saber was out. In one bound I was face to face with him, ablaze with hate, forgetful now of Edith's presence, mad to wipe out the memory of his insolent treatment.

"Draw!" I yelled. "Draw, or I'll split you like a fowl!"

He sighed. A genuine melancholy tinged his handsome face.

"I regret," said he sadly, "to soil my sword by contact with a boor's. I had hoped ever to keep it for gentlemen. Also, I am ashamed to brawl in the presence of a lady. I pray you let me pass on."

"You coward!" I raged. "You think to insult me and ride on alive? *Will* you draw, or will you take the flat of my blade across your face?"

"I see it is of no use," he said in sorrowful resignation, as he drew his sword. "Madam, in advance I crave your pardon. I shall not harm him."

Before the words were well out of his mouth I was upon him. A little cry of fear from Edith. Then our blades met with a clash.

I disengaged, and lunged ferociously for his throat. As he easily guarded the blow, his slender sword made a lightning-quick motion.

My heavy saber flew from my hand as though impelled by a catapult. I staggered back, my right arm numb to the shoulder.

The stranger bowed a third time to Edith, sheathed his sword, vaulted lightly onto his horse, and cantered out of sight down the bridle-path.

"Oh," gasped Edith, running toward me in dire fear, "you are hurt! You are wounded? Where?"

I made no reply. Instead, I bounded furiously down the path in murderous pursuit of the unknown man who had insulted, humiliated, and then outfought me.

CHAPTER VI.

TREASON!

It was late afternoon when I reached headquarters. General Arnold was expected back that evening. And I returned to the Robinson house ahead of the other picknickers in order to prepare some reports for him.

I had run in blind, raging pursuit of the mysterious stranger until my breath had given out. But I had caught no sight of him along the winding aisles of the woodland bridle-path. Nor had I so much as heard the distant beats of his horse's hoofs.

He had appeared between us like a ghost. He had vanished like one. There was something uncanny about it all. Who or what could he be?

That wilderness was the last sort of place where one would expect to encounter a lone stranger, in elegant civilian garb, with the manners of a Versailles aristocrat, and superhuman skill as a swordsman.

He had dropped, seemingly, from the clouds, had spoken to me as though I were a rebellious black slave, had bested me (good fencer and strong man though I was) as easily as if I were a schoolboy; and had ridden away into—*nothingness.*

Through all my baffled rage I had a feeling of unreality, a chill of apprehension at such a mystery; yet this but fanned my hate.

Never before had I hated anyone as I hated this stranger who had so readily put me in the wrong, chided me, and then put me to rout in fair fight—all in the presence of a woman.

"He took me by surprise," I muttered to myself as I sat in the library at headquarters compiling my reports. "If he had not, I should never have been disarmed by a cheap French trick of sword-play. Next time—"

I stopped and rubbed the muscles of my right arm, still aching from the wrench that had hurled my sword from my hand.

The library door swung open and Edith

Bliss hurried into the room, closing it softly behind her and advancing in haste toward me. I rose, confused. Now was my chance to make the apology that the stranger's advent had cut short.

I was ashamed to meet her eye, remembering how despicably ludicrous a figure I had presented when last she had seen me.

But she gave me no time for hesitation. Her manner was one of ill-repressed excitement. Her big eyes were alight with fright.

Running up to me, she thrust into my hands a slip of folded paper.

"Read this!" she panted. "I found it but now behind the rack where the cloaks hang. It was open. It had fallen from some pocket. Since the general is not yet back, I brought it to you. You will know best what to do with it."

Wondering at her eagerness and fear, I took the folded paper. It seemed an enclosure such as might have slipped from some sheaf of documents. Its contents were brief. They were written in a grotesquely cramped, evidently disguised, hand, which withal seemed somehow not wholly unfamiliar to me:

MR. JOHN ANDERSON, *Merchant:*

W. goes to H. for a month on the date named. Tell C. that next week appears to me best time for commercial enterprise. Must have personal interview. Tell C. I stipulate for safety and release of persons named in subjoined list. Dare not trust plans of W. P. to post. You must receive them in person. Set date.

GUSTAVUS.

The stilted, disjointed screed filled me with a sudden terror that had never been mine in the fiercest battle. Under the formal language I read the sinister intent as though in letters of flame.

"W. goes to H." That was Washington, of course, who had but just lately departed for Hartford. "W. P.—West Point."

Some one familiar with all our arrangements had, then, written to notify one "John Anderson" that Washington was out of the way, and that an enterprise—against West Point, no doubt—would now be safe.

In another paper, according to the letter, was a list of persons to be spared in case of an attack. And the plans of our great fortress were to be turned over by "Gustavus" in person.

Who was "C."? Who but Sir Henry Clinton, commander of the British forces in New York?

I raised my eyes in dumb horror to Edith's. She was watching me with nervous intentness.

"I was not mistaken, then?" she cried. "I see by your face I was not. Oh, the *shame* of it! To think we have a traitor here! A man with whom we are perhaps in daily talk. A man we trust. A man who seeks to betray West Point to the enemy. I—I can't believe it."

"It cannot be doubted," I returned, dazed with the shock. "The letter is only too clear. So much for General Arnold's foolish faith in his fellow men! This letter is from some one he trusts, some one who knows the plans of West Point. A spy of the British who has wormed his way into the general's confidence."

"Can you guess, from the handwriting—"

"No. It is palpably disguised. Yet I seem to have seen it before. I wish I could think where. It must be some one on the staff; or else some one whose correspondence the general has given me to answer."

"Is there any one you suspect?"

"There is not a man in Arnold's whole army that I believe capable of such a thing. There is no date to this. It was written before his excellency left for Hartford. That is all we know. Since then—"

"Since then the traitor may well have met this 'John Anderson,'" she exclaimed. "The fortress plans may even now be in General Clinton's hands."

"Oh, if only Arnold were back! *He* would know what to do. He always knows," I groaned. "I would set out at once to meet him if only I knew which road he is to take. He will be here to-night, though. We must wait till then."

"If West Point falls, it will be our heaviest blow since we lost New York," she murmured. "Oh, if—"

"Our '*heaviest*' blow? It will be our *death* blow! West Point and its Highland forts not only give us the mastery of the upper Hudson, but, if we were to lose them, the New England Colonies would be cut off from the rest of the country, and the British could subdue each unsupported section at their leisure. The whole Revolution's fate hangs on West Point. The man who seeks to betray *that* is ten times the traitor that the betrayer of any of our other strongholds would be. His name deserves to go through

the ages linked with Iscariot's. For he is bartering *liberty.*"

I could scarce hold my voice steady. Forgot were my own discontent, my half-formed thoughts of mutiny. In face of this new horror I stood aghast.

"I have not spoken to any one else of this," went on Edith. "I was afraid of inadvertently warning the traitor. I wish—"

Again the library door flew open. A portly, fine-looking man limped in. His cloak and boots were dusty from long riding.

As he entered I drew myself up and saluted. For this was my commander, Major-General Benedict Arnold.

Less than forty years old, of a splendid presence that even his lameness (caused by a wound in the left leg, received at Saratoga) could not mar, the general was a figure to draw attention in any company.

He was the bravest of the brave, a born commander and strategist, a man in every sense of the word.

As a mere boy of fifteen he had run away from home to fight in the French and Indian Wars. Later, when he was a rich and respected physician of New Haven, he had thrown away wealth and home in order to serve his country.

Since the day when news came of the battles of Concord and Lexington, he had ever been foremost in the field.

George Washington was his dearest friend. And the men to whom Washington gave his full friendship were few and of high merit.

Gallant, hot-tempered, full of magnetic charm, burning with wrath at the cruelly unjust treatment accorded him by Congress, Benedict Arnold was in those days my ideal of all that was greatest and best in man.

The general glanced with amused surprise at Edith and myself as we stood close together, facing him. He uncovered and bowed to her. She courtesied and slipped from the room.

"Well, lad!" he cried playfully, "is this the way you do your work in my absence? Flirting with my son's dainty governess is far pleasanter occupation, I doubt not, than poring over musty reports."

He threw aside his cloak as he talked, and flicked at his dusty high boots with a cambric handkerchief.

"General—" I began.

He glanced quickly at me.

"Why, lad!" he cried in sudden concern. "Are you ill? You're white as a sheet. And you look fifty years old. What is amiss?"

I handed him the letter without comment.

He glanced over the single sheet with its burden of cramped handwriting. I watched him. The ruddy color ebbed from his face, leaving it haggard and gray.

His dark eyes glowed as though a fire burned behind them. His strong hand fell a-shaking, so that the paper slipped from between his stiffened fingers.

"Mistress Bliss found this abominable thing," said I, stooping to pick it up and returning it to him. "She found it but now, behind the cloak rack. Mayhap it has lain there for days. She brought it to me and—"

"Has she shown it to others?" he broke in, his voice harsh and cracked. "Has she, think you? To Madam Arnold, or to—"

"To no one. I am certain. Have you any suspicion what man—"

"Suspicion?" he roared. "Not I! If I had I would kill him with my bare hands. Have—do—do you recognize the scrawl?"

"No. Yet there is a sort of familiar look to it, as in the face of a friend when that face is distorted and swollen out of shape."

"It is none of *my* officers. Of that I make oath. Wayne, give me a pledge to speak of this to no one."

"Willingly, sir. I ask but to help you discover—"

"Not even to Mistress Bliss. Should she speak to you again of the matter, keep silence. You promise?"

"Certainly," I assented, in wonder. "But who—"

"You think she will hold her tongue? She will not babble to everybody?"

"To no one. I am sure of that."

He was pacing back and forth, up and down the library, his long, limping stride oddly like that of a stage tragedian. His handsome face was livid and twisted. His gray lips uttered incoherencies.

Never had I seen the fearless leader so utterly devoid of self-control. I sought in vain for words to console him.

Full well did I realize what this must mean to Arnold. Robbed of the honors that were rightly his, placed on trial for

faults he had not committed, publicly reprimanded by Washington, wrongfully deprived of his Philadelphia command—and now in danger of losing, through treachery, the all important fortress entrusted to his care! It seemed the very climax of a life of unmerited misfortune.

"It is not yet too late," I ventured. "The British may perchance have the plans of West Point, through the treachery of one of our men. But West Point itself still stands. There are brave arms ready to defend it to the death. And the words 'Arnold' and 'Defeat' are still strangers to each other."

The general smiled wanly.

"Dear lad," he said, "you are the most loyal friend I have. And my friendship has been almost as bad a handicap to you as his excellency's has been for me. I wish for your sake my fortunes might mend."

"Yet you are in high favor just now, general. As commandant of West Point—"

"As commandant of West Point I am accountable to every scoundrel who hates me. And my ruin is but a question of time. They'll trump up new charges against me before long. I half wish I had never thrown in my lot with this hopeless revolution. If I had taken service in the British army—"

"General!"

"Pay no heed to my growls, lad. This vile news of treachery has upset me. But I have a feeling that the next few weeks may see the end of 'Arnold Ill-Luck.'"

CHAPTER VII.

A NIGHT ADVENTURE.

It was the next morning that I saw Edith Bliss again. She sought me out to ask for further news of the treason letter and to inquire how Arnold might be setting to work to catch the traitor.

Mindful of my promise to the general, I told her nothing. I was monstrous civil this time, but coldly refused to say one word of the subject so near to her heart.

After an unanswered question or two she noticed the odd restraint and confusion in my manner. And I could see she misread it.

Her frank friendliness suddenly gave way to an equal reserve; I almost thought, to a tinge of suspicion. And she walked away, leaving me standing miserable.

Nor from Arnold could I get another word on the theme. In reply to a guarded query on my part, a day or two later, he replied curtly that he had reliable agents at work upon the case, and reiterated his order that I keep my mouth closed.

Nevertheless, to my superheated imagination the very air throbbed with secret treason. In every messmate I sought to detect a spy.

A dozen meaningless happenings I distorted as having a bearing upon the treachery. Altogether, I was in an overexcited, suspicious frame of mind, and neglected my work and my meals alike.

It is no comfortable sensation to know that among a group of your seemingly honest comrades, one is a criminal, and to wonder if perchance it is your own roommate or the man who sits next you at table.

I took to avoiding my fellows, and to spending much of my time in prowling alone about the surrounding country, pondering on the terrible secret that was mine and vainly seeking means to solve the mystery.

Once or twice, as I slunk off on such walks, I saw Edith Bliss's big, grave eyes watching me with troubled doubt. Yes, and with some other expression I could not fathom.

She kept out of my way nowadays. I had no speech with her. And this, too, vaguely set my heart to aching. I knew not why.

One evening, I was returning late from one of my solitary rambles. The moon was up, but the skies were close clouded. An elusive gray light rested over everything.

I chanced to pass near the Robinson boathouse on my way to headquarters. As I approached it I dimly saw a skiff shoot out from the little dock.

I could just make out a single shrouded figure at the rower's bench. Also, from the absence of sound, I knew the oars were muffled.

Now, who at headquarters would set forth close to midnight in silence? Also why, on so breathlessly hot a night, should the mysterious rower go wrapped in a cloak?

Instantly to my suspicious mind leaped the thought of treason. Was this the writer of the "Gustavus" letter? Was he going, perchance, to that "personal interview" his letter had demanded? The idea fired me with eagerness.

In vain I told myself the rower was probably some soldier from the West Point bar-

racks who had overstayed his leave on the east bank of the river and was hurrying secretly back to duty.

Even as that possibility occurred to me, he shifted his course southward. Such a direction would land him far south of West Point.

I remembered then that in the afternoon I had once more seen the British sloop of war Vulture lying at anchor some miles down-stream.

Was this midnight oarsman bound for the sloop? It was certainly worth while to follow in the hope of recognizing, if not stopping, him.

Quick as thought, I ran silently down the bank toward the boat-house. I had scarce reached it when, from the shadows a second rowboat darted out into the stream.

I halted in my tracks to note this new apparition. In the faint, elusive gray light, I could see the second rower was also cloaked, and that he bent to his oars with absolute noiselessness.

Yes, and more. The second boat was unquestionably following the first, and with the caution of a panther stalking its prey.

It was very evident from the second oarsman's maneuvers that he was eager to escape the observation of the first and to stick close to the latter's tracks.

Decidedly, this was well worth following up. The quick fever of the man-hunt was upon me.

I entered the boat-house, noted that but four of the six skiffs belonging there were in their slips, and stepped into the lightest of these.

I ripped off my neckcloth, tore it in two, and muffled both oar-locks. Then I pushed out into the stream.

The first boat was scarce visible in the dim light, almost wholly hidden by the low film of mist that lay over the river. The second boat was half concealed by the mist.

I ventured to follow, rowing with infinite caution, and taking good care not to approach near enough to attract notice.

Ordinarily, this would have been impossible. But the second rower was so intent on watching the first that he apparently did not trouble to safeguard against being trailed. I had merely to keep my distance and to avoid making the faintest noise.

An odd scene we must have presented, we three, each rowing silently and swiftly along in the weird gray gloom, each unaware that he was being followed.

I had lost sight of the first man, and was now forced to guide my course wholly by that of the second.

Who was the first rower? Probably the traitor. And the second? Perhaps one of the "trusted agents" Arnold had spoken of. In which case it was of course no concern of mine to join in the chase.

But two heads are better than one. And I had, moreover, a morbid hope of being able to discover something that might chance to escape the agent's vigilance.

I was Arnold's closest friend. It irked me and surprised me that he should choose other persons than myself when such a desperate venture was afoot.

I longed to outdo the agent in the matter of discovering who the traitor might be.

It is an eery sensation to row alone at midnight over a quiet, misty river. It is doubly so when one is following out a quest, like mine. Where and how the chase would end I could not guess.

I wished I had chanced to be wearing my sword or carried a pistol. I was quite unarmed. And it was not likely that either of the men I pursued was in similarly defenseless state.

Yet, I counted on my mighty strength, if it should come to a question of violence. And, besides, was I not fighting for liberty?

The row was longer than I had expected. Southwesterly we moved. I seemed to have been tugging at the oars for an eternity.

Once or twice I lost sight of the second boat, but ever found it again.

At last I neared the west bank of the Hudson, some miles south of West Point. The skiff I was following ran in among the shadows of the woods that sloped down to the very beach.

I stopped rowing. Then, faintly, I heard the grating of a keel upon the shore-gravel. And I knew my quarry had landed.

For a full minute longer I remained motionless, to give him time to tie his boat and climb the bank. Then softly I rowed ashore and brought my skiff to a standstill close beside his.

The first man's boat I could see nowhere. Nor did I trouble to look for it. The second was doubtless hard upon its track.

My present task, then, was to follow the second man, knowing full well he would soon or late guide me unconsciously to the first.

I only hoped he would not scare his prey prematurely and turn him from his mission.

I wanted the scoundrel to be caught red-handed.

I had had no possible means of identifying either of the oarsmen. Not only was the light bad, but both had been too far away from me and too completely hidden in their big cloaks.

Up the wooded bank I stole, moving soundlessly as any Iroquois. I reached the top, and could just make out a narrow, twisted path running inland.

Along this, probably, the two men—pursuer and pursued—had just passed. If not, I dared not risk noise by crashing through the adjacent undergrowth trying to pick up their trail.

The path seemed the only probable clue to my vanished quarry. And along the path I cautiously started.

For two or three minutes I walked. Then, just ahead of me, I saw an opening in the trees. I reached it and found I was at one end of a wide glade. At first glance I could see no one.

Then, as I stepped forward, sick at heart with the fear that I had lost the trail, I managed to discern two shadowy figures, perhaps a hundred feet ahead of me.

Crouching low, and taking advantage of each bush and rock, I crept toward them. Presently I could catch the sibilant sound of whispers.

I could see the two shapes a little more clearly than before. One of the two—the shorter—was evidently the rower of the first or second boat, and still wore the enshrouding cloak.

The second, however, did not seem to be one of the oarsmen. He wore no cloak, and had not the general appearance of either of the persons I had been following.

Again stooping over, I stole forward until I was a bare twenty feet from them. I had noticed for some moments that the night had grown lighter. Now, all at once, the full moon tore its way through the mass of scudding clouds, making everything in the glade dazzlingly bright.

I sprang to my full height. The cloaked figure quickly turned as a twig snapped under my foot. Then I halted in crass amaze.

It was Edith Bliss!

Edith Bliss here, at this hour of night. A sting of jealousy shot through me. I shifted my bewildering gaze on the man beside her.

Then the moonlight falling full on his face, I knew who it was.

Something seemed to snap in my brain. With a half animal snarl I sprang at him.

(To be continued.)

THIS WAY OUT.

BY FRANK WILLIAMS.

The Tale of a Struggling Architect, a Rich Man's Daughter, and Cupid.

WHEN, after a year in New York as an architect with a degree, Bob Lawrence hadn't built as much as a henhouse, the residents of Pine Manor indulged in Homeric laughter—all except Muriel Tyler. The former sweethearts of the ambitious Robert congratulated themselves on their fortunate escapes, while their husbands joined more or less heartily in the celebration.

Muriel Tyler curled her lip with scorn at the scoffers, looked at his picture on her dresser a trifle more tenderly than usual, and resolved that he, she, they both, in fact, should disprove this contumely. A thrust at him was a stab at her, she felt.

"A man who is an architect might as well be a monk as far as marrying is concerned," gloomed Bob one Sunday night during their walk under the trees. "A young fellow in my line has about as much chance of buying a license as an angel has to steer an aeroplane. I'd rather drive a truck and come back to a wife at night than be unable to do either as I am now."

They had left the Tyler grounds on the hillside and were strolling down the main street of the little town. On the opposite corner, flooded with moonlight, stood the public library of Pine Manor, square, gray, and handsome. It was the pride and pet of the independent citizens of Pine Manor.

"Just look at that building," exclaimed Bob impulsively. "One or two of those and I would be on my feet. I would have a tangible something to work for, an inspiration and encouragement to look back upon. Then, when things had thus brightened for me, I could, I could—"

"Yes, yes," breathed Muriel, looking up into his face, "you could—you could—what?"

"I could do what I have dreamed of doing so long, the thought of which has kept me buoyed through all these months of trial and failure, the hope of which has made life worth living—"

"Yes, yes; tell me more, Bob."

"No, I can't; it wouldn't be right, Muriel. I have scarcely allowed myself to think of it, and resolved that never until the time was ripe for action would I mention it to any one. Please, be a good girl, and don't ask me any more."

"All right, Bob," and Muriel seemed to sink back into her normal quiet self at his side.

But there was a lingering resentment at this exclusion of her who had received all of his confidences, and a little sting of disappointment. Still there was, too, the painful throb of a suppressed hope—a hope she scarcely acknowledged to herself.

Bob Lawrence and Muriel Tyler were not engaged, and the reasons why they were not formed the titbits for gossip by the rocking-chair brigade on many a front porch during afternoon tea hour. The Tylers, owning the best house in town, were very wealthy, while Lawrence was in humble circumstances. Rumor had it that he loved her but she had refused him; she loved him but he couldn't see it; they both loved each other but either was too modest to start anything; Judge Tyler disapproved; and so on till the air of Pine Manor was rank with gossip.

Meanwhile the two concerned were the best of friends, and allowed these Jovian shafts, born of the idle hours of others, to strike harmlessly around them.

But of late Muriel had felt a change. The transition from the Platonic to the Sapphic in her affections had occurred and from all the signs of the times that a woman's instinct tells her to watch, Bob Lawrence had crossed the Rubicon and was with her on the up grade toward Elysium. The rocking-chairs on the porches creaked thirty to the minute instead of twenty-four, the Tyler servants were questioned closely whenever they appeared at market, and the sewing circle had already decided on the doily for the bride and the color of the wedding decorations.

When Capricornus, the July goat, finished butting the mercury in the thermometer that year it stood at ninety-six in Madison Square with a bonus of three degrees in the Subway, and August came in slowly like a weak, wet cat after an enforced plunge in the river.

Bob Lawrence's office in the West Twenties was like a vacuum bottle—it never let the heat go. The welcome sign on the doormat was still unscratched by the foot of man, his squares and triangles swung uselessly from the wall, and his India ink dried up of inertia.

Early in August, after a particularly trying day with his creditors, Lawrence closed the office in utter disgust and was departing for Battery Park to catch a breath of air, when the postman handed him a slim envelope, bearing printed matter in the left hand upper corner. With the languid eye of one weary of receiving just that sort of missive, he tore it open, unfolded what seemed like a circular inside, and read:

> The trustees of the Pine Manor Public Library announce that a prize of $5,000 will be given for the most original decorative doorway design to ornament the library building received on or before August 30.
>
> Competitors are at liberty to use any style of architecture they choose, providing the result will beautify the library building if actually constructed.

Then followed several paragraphs of rules describing the proper method of submitting the drawing.

That night Bob had supper by way of celebration, borrowed a cigarette and a match, and at just eight-thirty officially entered the contest.

A month later various rotund gentlemen might have been seen one afternoon seated about the mahogany table in the directors' room of the Pine Manor library, smoking cigars and growling about the heat.

Their wilted collars made a neat pile in one corner, while the back of each chair supported the enervated remains of what had at one time, doubtless, been a waistcoat. Tobacco smoke billowed forth from every angle and floated gently out of the draftless open window.

In front of the judges were stacked some twenty-five sheets of drawing paper upon which were set forth designs for the new ornamental door. These had survived two preliminary slaughterings and from among them the final choice was to be made this very hot afternoon.

"To my thinking," remarked Chairman Judge Tyler, "there is only one design worthy of that $5,000, and that belongs to Mr. Robert Lee Lawrence of New York. Compared to it these other things on the table look like the impressionistic daubs of a six-year-old. If you will all make a last selection with this in mind, I think we can adjourn within ten minutes. James, pass the collars."

Exactly what happened in the West Twentieth Street studio the next morning has never been chronicled and shall not be here. Among those who remember the day are the rent collector, the wash-lady and the waiter at the 75-cent *table d'hôte* across the street. Later in the day followed a raid upon a tailor, a haberdasher, and a purveyor of walking sticks.

That night when Bob Lawrence mounted the porch of the Tyler house, a perfectly cool, soft-haired young lady met him at the top step with an outstretched hand and a smile. A pale-blue, flimsy gown gathered trimly with a white belt at the waist and open at the throat reflected the sea in her eyes, or the sky of midday, or the flash of a turquoise, or whatever blue appeals to you as the most beautiful. Her cheeks were pink as a wild rose at five o'clock of a summer's morning, and her laugh was like the even song of a wood-thrush.

"Oh, Bob, I'm so glad, so glad! Father told me last night at dinner. Every one I have spoken to is just as pleased as can be. And to think of your winning when there were some of the best known architects in New York entered in the contest! It's almost made you the hero of Pine Manor."

"It's generous and sweet of you to say that, Muriel, and I appreciate it," said the young fellow slowly, striving to prevent a note of exultation from creeping into his voice. "I felt that I should win as soon as I saw the announcement of the contest. Oh, I'll tell you, things are changed now. No more days of half-starvation, no more nights of sleepless worry. That's all over with, and I'm so foolishly happy I don't know what to do. I can't tell you what encouragement it gives me!"

For an hour they talked, or rather Lawrence did. Then Muriel asked:

"Do you remember one night, a couple of months ago, when you said just one tangible encouragement would permit you to bring to realization the dream of years?"

"Yes," replied he.

"Well, boy, I want you to tell me that ambition. We've been friends a long, long while, and have always told each other everything. I want to know your dearest ambition now that it is within your grasp."

She twisted her hands tightly together and looked up at him with shining eyes. His shone, too, when he bent toward her.

"I'll tell you, Muriel," he replied. "You've stuck to me through everything. Listen. It has been my ambition in life for the last three years to study in Paris. I felt that I could never amount to anything with just my university education, and I was morally certain that a couple of years at the School of *Beaux Arts* would round me into perfect shape—Mary, Mary, bring a glass of ice water. Miss Muriel has fainted."

"It was funny about that library door," said Mrs. Sempronius Shook, the minister's wife. "I overheard my chambermaid, who used to be the Tylers' third-floor dust-maid, talking to the coachman. She said that one night after dinner Muriel climbed on her father's lap and begged as the favor of a lifetime that he offer a prize for a decorative library door. Then, but I hate to say this for I didn't hear it very well, she told him that a certain person she had in mind just must win."

Whereat the porch chairs creaked forty-seven to the minute and some one asked:

"What's the news from Paris?"

SPECULATIONS.

Love is a god of fancies; a glance, a whisper low
May wake to life that idol which we hold.
And I have thought sometimes, in certain hearts I know,
That Love was wakened by the chink of gold.

Flavel Scott Mines.

BLOOD WILL TELL.

BY GEORGE M. A. CAIN,

Author of "The Bates' Household Furniture," "His Risen Past," "Devil's Own Island," etc.

The Tumultuous Series of Happenings That Resulted from Taking a Short Cut Across Black Swamp to Catch a Train.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

A HURRIED START.

"IS Mr. Hadley staying here?"

It was the carrier of the rural free delivery who asked the question of Mrs. Mudgely.

Walter Hadley leaped from his chair on the porch and ran down to get his letter.

"This is Mr. Hadley," said Mrs. Mudgely.

Walter stood for an instant looking at the typewritten address, corrected from "920 West 70th Street, New York," to "care Mrs. J. Mudgely, R. F. D., Panther Lake, Houston, New Jersey." Then, with trembling fingers he tore the end from the envelope and tried to control himself while he read.

At last it had come. He could hardly believe it.

A year before he had been getting nicely started as a vaudeville actor. He had risen to the place where he got bookings for the whole season; also to the opulence of fifty per week. His eyes were turning to the goal of his life, the legitimate stage, when—

His voice had given out in the midst of an act.

The doctors gave the trouble a long name. Hadley knew it had been some nerve which had gone wrong. His Latin education did not enlighten him as to what nerve it was. From the effect of its failure to work, he concluded that it was a nerve connecting with the vocal cords.

Six months of complete rest, the medical man had prescribed. Walter Hadley had been fairly economical, and had a little money in the bank—quite a lot for a thespian. He had taken the six months' rest at very quiet, unheard-of Jersey resorts where prices were low. He had got back his voice as good as new. But—

His career on the stage had been too brief for the making of a very big dent in the theatrical world. What little impression he had given had been blotted out of the memories of those managers who had insisted upon getting him. He was gently forgotten.

At the desks of the agencies which had once started him off, and which had later sought the privilege of booking his acts, he was kindly told day after day, week after week, that there was nothing doing. The agents were sorry. So was Walter Hadley.

From cheap resorts, he went to cheaper ones. Mrs. Mudgely's place, on the lake two miles out of Houston — you can find Houston on a big wall-map of Jersey—had been recommended to him by some one who had been there. Mrs. Mudgely's prices had especially appealed to Hadley.

Hence it was that he had come thither a few days before. He had dropped a card to Carson's agency, the only one in which he placed any hope, giving his new address. The only other person who knew it was Ethel Wood. Ethel was, of course, the one and only girl.

When he had leaped from his chair at the postman's inquiry about his name, he had thought it was a letter from Ethel. The typewritten address had undeceived him, but left him puzzled as to why it had not been sent direct from Carson's to Mrs. Mudgely's.

But the contents more than consoled him for his sweetheart's delay in writing, and made him drop the question of the address as of no importance.

MR. WALTER HADLEY. 920 WEST SEVENTIETH STREET. NEW YORK CITY:

DEAR SIR—Mr. Horace Wendel wires me that he needs a man for his summer tour. You know his troupe. I think it might hit you. He will pay you twenty-five per. He

wants you to be in Philadelphia at four-fifteen day after to-morrow, ready to start for West. Give him enclosed card and tell him I sent you. Have written him to take you. Yours truly, JOHN CARSON.

Limelight Building, Thirty-Ninth Street and Broadway, New York City. June 17, 1910.

At first reading Hadley stopped with the signature of the booking-agent. He read the letter again. There was no reason why he should have done so. He knew it by heart after the first reading. But its contents were, in his esteem, well worth a second perusal. Then—

"Day after to-morrow," he muttered happily. "That means—let's see—the 17th it was written. Why, good Lord! That means to-day—this very afternoon."

There had been a deal of animation in his heart from the moment he began to read the note. But animation was no word for that which he now exhibited. Steam, gasoline, electricity, greased lightning at full throttle and advanced spark—he seemed to have all these motive-powers at once.

If any one doubted that Walter Hadley's brain could work under high tension, he should have seen the way that young actor solved the riddle of the Lackawanna time-table and found out that the next train to New York would leave Houston in precisely twenty-seven minutes. It takes real ability to find out anything like that from a time-table in fifteen seconds.

If any one questioned his quick-change ability, or thought he might hold up a scene in order to get into different make-up, that person should have watched him get out of the shabby clothes in which he had loafed about Mrs. Mudgely's and into full Broadway regalia. It took him fifty-three seconds. Thirty seconds more saw his suit-case packed.

Of course, most of the things in it had been there all the time, since they were for professional use and not especially designed for self-entertainment at a farmhouse.

But it took Mrs. Mudgely five minutes to hunt up the eight dollars change she had to give back as Hadley tendered a ten-dollar bill in payment for his three days' board. Had there been another ten-dollar bill, he would have told her to send the change after him.

"Isn't there some way of cutting across?" he asked of Mrs. Mudgely as he took his change.

By the road it was two miles and a half to the station. But, as Walter knew, the road to Houston and the station turned twice to the right, taking one around three sides of a square.

"You'd better let Willie drive you over," offered Mrs. Mudgely. "It's bad going through the woods across the lots."

Hadley had seen Willie Mudgely get his horse hitched to the old buggy. Also he had seen the horse go—

"I've got to make the ten-eight," he told her. "I can't wait for the twelve-twenty-eight."

"Well, if you're careful not to lose that path through the swamp, you might make it. It cuts off more'n half that way," explained Mrs. Mudgely, pointing out a break in the trees at the back of the field behind her house.

"Thanks. Good-by," Walter shouted over his shoulder as he started off on the run.

For the first quarter-mile the going was easy. Hadley sprinted the whole of it. He almost stumbled down the steep hill which brought him to the edge of the swamp. Right there the trail seemed almost to disappear.

He hesitated for only an instant. Then a track, like that which rabbits make through all thickets, seemed to him the way across. He plunged forward along this trail.

It appeared that he was right in the direction he had chosen. Although the path had been almost completely overgrown with blackberry-vines, it was still firm footing. He thought regretfully of what the thorns and brambles were doing to his trousers, but there was no other way of getting to Philadelphia at 4.15 that afternoon.

He began to perspire freely. He was exerting himself rather more violently than he had done in many a moon. Quite out of breath, he paused once and remarked to himself:

"What a consummate idiot I am to be killing myself for a job like that. If it were a part in a real play at twenty-five per, there might be something in it. But Wendel's summer campaign! Gee! But, incidentally, it's bread and butter for one Walter Hadley."

Whereupon he sprinted a little harder.

It seemed to him that he had gone through about two miles of swamp. He glanced at his watch, not pausing in his walk, and saw that he still had seven minutes. He wondered where the end of the path would come.

At last rising ground showed over the tops of the scrubby stuff lining the path through the swamp. He recalled that he had seen this same swamp just as he was leaving the edge of Houston on the night of his arrival. At the rising ground the road would cross his path, not more than four minutes' run from the station.

Putting on all the steam he had left, he dashed toward that rising ground. As the path came to one of those shapeless heaps by which Jersey gets rid of her stones and acquires fences at the same time, he saw the road.

At the road he halted.

As I come to think of it, I do not recall a single authentic instance where a lone man, suddenly finding himself looking down the muzzle of a double-barreled shotgun, hasn't paused. If I were to come across an account of some one keeping right on under those circumstances, I should feel almost certain that I was reading fiction.

It was exactly such a shotgun that faced Walter Hadley as he reached the dirt road a quarter of a mile out of Houston. To the young actor it looked more like a Siamese Twin Gatling-gun.

From behind the gun there faced Hadley a rusty-looking farmer whose beard was fairly gray except directly beneath the center of his mouth, where it was a yellowish brown. The farmer shifted a bit of the cause of this exception in his jaw before he could speak.

"If you move, I'll blow your danged head off."

Hadley hadn't any intention of moving just then. A quarter of a minute later he almost wished he had taken the chance.

"I've got him!" yelled the gunner. "Caught him red-handed!"

Hadley could not tell to whom the farmer was calling. But the trite phrase the man had used to suggest certain guilt made the actor glance at his fingers.

His eyes seemed about to pop from his head. His face went pale. He felt a sickly dizziness.

His left hand was almost completely covered and dripping with blood!

CHAPTER II.

RURAL JUSTICE.

THE sight of blood had always been sickening to Walter Hadley. The most vividly horrible memory of his childhood was that of a slaughter-house upon which he had stumbled in a ramble from home, and at which he had waited, curious to know what the business of the place was, until the unpleasant work was started. Then he had fled pell-mell, three miles, to his home.

A crowd on the street was always a signal for him to go around as far as possible lest it be an accident which had gathered the throng. He dreaded even a shooting scene on the stage if it was made more realistic by the use of red dye.

He held his hand as far as he could from his face, but he could not take his eyes from it. Already, he could see, the red was beginning to congeal. It was no less sickening in one state than another.

Where had it come from?

He could not imagine. He had felt no sting of a brier as he made his way through the bushes in the swamp. He had seen none, so far as he could recall, which was high enough to scratch his hand. The thorny bushes had been those of dewberries lying close to the ground.

He was utterly unconscious of having touched anything red or bloody. Such an object would have attracted his attention, but would have done everything else than induced him to touch it.

He was too thoroughly taken up with the horrid sight to notice the crowd which had now gathered. It was not until he was roughly seized by the shoulder and shaken that he became aware of the fact that he was surrounded.

"You infernal, darned rascal, what's the matter with you?" was the question addressed to him by one of the group who wore an enormous nickel-plated badge on the suspenders which were the only outer garment he had on above the belt.

"I—I don't know," Walter stammered, still gazing at the red-stained hand.

"Well, I know, consarn ye," snarled a raw-boned, stoop-shouldered man with a hedge of whiskers beneath a shorter cut lawn of the same on his chin. "You kin take that for my yearling heifer."

As he spoke his right hand caught Hadley under the ear. The young man would have fallen in a heap, had not he of the nickel badge supported him.

"He's my prisoner now," growled the constable—for such his badge proclaimed him to be. "You keep your hands offen him, Si Lucas."

The words were spoken half-heartedly. They were accompanied with a jerk at Hadley's collar which was hardly less painful than the blow of Lucas had been.

"Prisoner—thunder an' lightnin' an' darnation! Prison's too dinged good for anything like that," broke in a short, thick-set bully, emphasizing the fact of his presence directly behind Hadley by a well-directed kick. "Jest take that as part payment on my calf."

"You quit that, Lem Whittaker, I tell you. This is my prisoner," croaked the constable again, at the same time stepping out of the way of a gaunt individual of enormous stature.

"I jest wanter take a look at him," this individual drawled malignantly, "to see if he's the one—Well, by gosh! He ain't even washed his hands since he done it! My Cheshire sow—dern him. You tarnation son of Satan, take that!"

Walter Hadley's head wobbled unsteadily for a moment after he had received what purported to be a memento of the gaunt man's Cheshire porker. His run had tired him, the sight of blood had nauseated him. He could not get up enough real energy to resist the onslaughts of his tormentors.

But, at this instant, he was aroused from his momentary stunned condition. It was not the half-hearted reproval the officer of the law proceeded to administer to the gaunt farmer which brought the actor to. It was the shrill whistle of a locomotive.

He suddenly recalled his urgent need of catching the ten-eight train.

With a quick swing of the suit-case to which his right hand still clung automatically, he knocked aside the muzzle of the shotgun which had never ceased pointing at his head. A continuation of the same swing brought the heavy leather affair into contact with the constable's forehead. It was as though Walter had touched a spring to release the grip on his shoulder.

He swung the clumsy weapon around in the opposite direction, succeeding in bumping a brass-bound corner into the yellow-brown spot in the whiskers of his original captor, and catching the Cheshire-hog man under the ear.

The third swing did not hit any one. The thin ranks of the farmers parted before it. Walter made a few flying leaps in the direction of Houston.

The constable fairly howled, "Stop thief."

Considering his authority, he had very little influence upon Hadley. But the farmer with the gray and yellow beard lost no time in training his double-barreled instrument of destruction upon the actor's coat-tails.

Fortunately the gun was loaded with bird-shot. Walter felt as though he had sat down in a nest of hornets. Also, he felt as though he had had enough. He stopped before the second barrel should unload in his direction.

"You come back here, dern you," yelled the constable, the while a dozen stalwart toilers of the field pounced upon the hapless prisoner and bore him to the ground.

Walter Hadley had played center on the high school football team a few years before. He could not remember any scrimmage quite as lively as that of which he now formed the foundation. If he had doubted it before, he now became convinced that he had in some way way become unpopular with the farmers about Houston.

"Let him alone," cried the arm of the law. "He's my prisoner."

Just at that moment the short, thick-set bully was sitting upon Hadley's stomach and bouncing up and down as if with intent to break any springs the prisoner might have inside. The constable's warning did not cause him to lose a bounce.

The Cheshire-pork man was kicking at Hadley's shins and calves. He did not miss a kick.

Mr. Simon Lucas was stooping over in front of Lem Whittaker, rapidly punching at the actor's ribs. There was no break in the punches.

The yellow-and-white bearded owner of the shotgun was using the point of that formidable weapon as a prod upon the small spaces between Si Lucas's and Lem Whittaker's bases of operation. He seemed quite unconscious of having forgotten to lower the one hammer over its undischarged barrel. And he prodded on earnestly and vigorously.

Others of the throng strove to get in an occasional kick, punch, or slap. Walter began to think of all the wrongs he had done in his life.

Suddenly an incisive voice broke over the general row.

"What in thunder are you men doing?"

All paused.

"If you imagine there's going to be any lynching around here while I'm justice of

the peace, you have another guess coming," snapped the voice.

"Get off of him."

There was a general rising. The men who had formed the center of the group seemed to acquire a longing for its outer fringe.

"Now, constable, is that your prisoner?" demanded the justice.

The wearer of the nickel badge swelled up again.

"He is. I caught him red-handed," he announced boastfully.

"Well then, take him to jail. One of a constable's duties is to protect a prisoner. What's he done anyhow?"

The constable's chest resumed its natural size. His voice was almost apologetic.

"He's the feller what's been killin' all the cattle around here. We got him with the blood of Jim Harper's Cheshire sow on his hands."

"All right, fetch him along to the jail. I'll have a doctor to look at him," spoke the judge.

"A doctor?" burst from the lips of all. "We ain't hurt him as bad as all that."

"He's probably insane," said the justice. "Well, let Dr. Blake take the first look at him, anyhow."

Walter Hadley had by this time regained his feet with the assistance of the constable. He felt that his face had become grimy where he had first struck the ground with it. His right arm being gripped by the hand of the law, he raised his left to wipe off some of the Jersey soil.

Then he saw it again. The blood had mingled with the dust to form an unsightly brown paste. Once more the spectacle did more to turn him sick than all the kicks and blows he had received.

So, it was the blood of Jim Harper's Cheshire sow. It seemed that the lady pig had met a violent death. But, how in the world had her blood come to be upon him?

From the fascinatingly hideous hand, Walter glanced at the face of the judge. He wondered whether, after all, that official's statement that he was probably insane might not be quite true.

CHAPTER III.

HOUSTON JAIL.

TIME was when Houston was a place of some importance, the county-seat if you please. The consequence of this is the possession of an institution of which few villages of Houston's size can boast—a jail.

Originally it was of brick, with some dozen and a half of cells and heavily-barred windows. But the prison went with the rest of the old disused court-house in a fire years before the beginning of this tale.

But, having possessed a jail, Houston was loath to forego such a distinction. Despite the removal of the county-seat, the old village still held a charter enabling it to maintain the equivalent of a city station-house.

The citizens, in town-meeting assembled, had readily agreed that the jail ought to be maintained. Most of them had pointed to the prison with pride for years. They were enthusiastic for its reerection.

Their enthusiasm waned when it was explained to them that the town itself must pay for the rebuilding, since the county had already as much of a jail as it needed.

"It don't look to me as if we'd orter spend a whole lot of money on a jail, bad as we need one," one of the citizens had remarked, expressing the sentiments of all.

"What do we need one for?" another had inquired.

All looked at him as at an arch-heretic. He had not lived long in Houston, however, and somebody condescended to explain to the newcomer.

"Wa-al, I reckin Houston's allus had a jail, an' it don't look right for her to give it up now."

Eventually common sense and civic pride compromised on the present structure. It contains but one cell. It has one small window. It is of frame construction, exactly eight feet by ten, outside measurement.

It accommodates one prisoner decently. If its value is to be measured by that fraction of the period it is filled, it cost some sixty times too much. It holds its quota of the lawless element about twelve hours out of each month.

Its present chief reason for existence is the preservation of the life and limbs of one Hugh Digbee. Hugh certainly regards the institution as a benefit to the community.

In former days Digbee used to go home on the occasions of his monthly sprees. Mrs. Digbee used then to take him in hand. For a woman she owned a powerful hand.

One night, about eight years ago, he got into an altercation just about the time that he should have started homeward. Silas Warner, keeper of Houston's thirst-parlor,

was the other party in the little debate. He grew peevish, and eventually shouted for the constable to arrest the disturber of his peace.

The result had been a peaceful night in jail for Hugh Digbee. In the morning he had managed to get off with a light fine, and had gone about his work. He went home sober to a wife whose anger was spent, who never could be aroused to her very best efforts by anything but the sight of him drunk.

He reflected upon the matter afterward. A month later he suggested to the constable that he ought to be arrested for getting drunk. He spent another peaceful night in jail, paid a dollar fine, went about his work, reached home sober the following night, and met only modified conjugal wrath.

After a few repetitions of this, the constable grew weary of the late-hour task of arresting Digbee. He adopted an easier plan, namely, that of handing the keys of the jail over to Hugh and letting the prisoner arrest and lock himself up. Digbee liked this better, for he could get out in the morning without paying an extra, hard-earned dollar.

By the time of our story, he had come to regard the jail as his own private property. If the jail could have felt anything, it would have felt as though it belonged to Digbee. He was the only person who ever occupied it. Frequently the constable did not call for his keys months on end.

Across the street from the Houston jail was the little shed which aroused even Houston's sense of humor when it was called the police-station. To this building, a single room about eight feet square, almost half filled with a desk and rickety swivel-chair, Walter Hadley, guided by the constable, and followed by the judge and most every one else from Houston's vicinity, was taken. Of course, most of the citizens remained outside for the obvious reason that they could not get inside.

"Now then," began the justice, "what is your name?"

Hadley gave the desired information with a sickening sense of shame.

"Where do you live?"

"Until I arrived at Mrs. Mudgely's three days ago, my residence had been at 920 West 70th Street, New York," replied Walter.

"What is your occupation?"

"I am a vaudeville actor."

"What have you been killing the cattle around here for?" suddenly demanded the representative of justice.

"Er—what?" Hadley cried in astonishment.

"You are accused of cutting up a number of remarkably fine domestic animals in this neighborhood. Why have you been doing it?"

"I never killed anything bigger than a mouse in my life," the actor replied in a tone of honest indignation.

"What were you doing in the swamp this morning?"

"I was hurrying across from Mrs. Mudgely's to catch the ten-eight train. I received word to meet a man for an engagement at four this afternoon in Philadelphia."

"And you mean to tell me that you didn't enter Mr. James Harper's barn-yard by the back way, get into his pigsty, cut the throat of his finest Cheshire sow, and then, alarmed by the squealing of the other pigs, make a break for the north edge of Black Swamp?"

The voice of the judge was stern, and he pointed each clause of his long question with weighty emphasis. Walter stared at him in open-mouthed amazement as the details were presented.

"I mean to say that I left Mrs. Mudgely's fifteen minutes before I was met by this excited delegation at the road," Hadley spoke stoutly. "As for killing Mr. Harper's porker, or any other beast, I would just as soon eat a live cat."

The justice of the peace eyed him curiously. There were signs of hesitation in his face, as if he were more than half inclined to believe the prisoner's denial. Then his eye fell to Walter's left hand—

"Will you please explain to the court how your left hand comes to be smeared with blood?"

Walter hesitated an instant. If he admitted that he did not know whence the blood had come, it would be considered an absurd evasion of the truth as they all believed it. It flashed upon him that he had some excuse for being more or less banged up. The objection to this explanation of the blood on his hand did not occur to his mind until he had spoken.

"Your honor, I was knocked down on the road back there. It is hardly surprising that my hand was bruised."

Instantly the howl that arose showed him his mistake, had not his own tardy brain done the trick for him.

"His body was bloody when he came out of the swamp," cried all the bystanders at once.

The judge himself joined the sardonic laughter which spread through the room and around the door.

"You may be an excellent actor," he grinned; "but you lack the ability to invent anything plausible enough even for the stage. Constable, lock him up till Dr. Blake sees him and I can decide whether to send him to the county jail for the grand jury, or put him under observation at the insane asylum."

There was a sudden titter through the crowd.

"Where did the constable go?" snapped the justice.

"He's gone to find Hugh Digbee to borrow the keys of the jail," vouchsafed one of the throng amid a general guffaw of laughter.

CHAPTER IV.

LOOKING OUT.

THE constable's search was speedily successful. Hugh Digbee was not the sort of man to be absent from such excitement as Walter Hadley's arrest had occasioned. In a moment the officer was back, his chest well out, as he seized the prisoner's shoulder once more and started through the passage made by the spectators.

Apparently, Hadley could not arouse himself to a realization of his predicament until the jail-door was opened and he looked within. Evidently the cleaning of the prison was not a part of the constable's duties.

The floor was covered with grime, until it was hard to tell whether it was made of boards or of earth. All about was evidence that the prison's chronic occupant was addicted to the use of the wicked weed as prepared for mastication.

The cheap cot in a corner was covered with an indescribably dirty mattress and a pair of moth-eaten blankets whose color had turned from gray to something suspiciously darker. A rickety chair, with all of its back gone except a single upright post at one corner, completed the dingy furnishings.

"Good Lord, man," Hadley exclaimed in horror, "you aren't going to put me in here to stay all night."

"Huh?" grunted the constable, seemingly surprised at any protest.

"Do you expect me to stay in this hole?" Walter repeated with rising voice.

"Didn't suppose I was goin' to put you up at a hotel, did you?" snarled the constable.

"But, great Heavens! This place isn't fit for a pig. I won't stay here," cried the actor.

"We'll see about that. Get in and shut up," was the reply, accompanied with a thrust that sent Walter half across the squalid bed.

He drew back, loath to touch the filthy coverings. As he wheeled about, he saw the strong arm of the law pulling the door shut behind him. Then he realized that he was alone in the wretched den.

Walter Hadley had held positions that he did not like. He had been in many situations from which he had wished to escape. But never in his life had he so earnestly desired to get out of any place as he did at that moment.

He had put up at second-class hotels, and at third-class. He had slept in day-coaches of trains and in shanty stations. He had learned to take such things philosophically, as part of the beginnings of his profession.

For all of these things he had a ready vocabulary of adequate expletives which had never failed to help him bear the hardships they entailed. But Houston jail was beyond his previous experience, beyond his worst dreams, beyond words.

For an hour he paced the narrow floor, three steps and back, like a beast of the forest fresh caged. For sheer rage, disgust, misery, he could have butted his head against the wall.

But his walking took him no farther than the three steps and led him back each time to where he had started. He realized that there was no use in attempting to break out of the wretched place during the afternoon. He could hear the farmers discussing his case outside. Occasionally one of them peered in curiously, to gloat over his wretchedness.

Finally, after carefully wiping off the chair with a handkerchief which he promptly discarded, he sat down to think things over. He began by pinching him-

self a dozen times in the hope that he might wake up and find it was all a case of a late cheese sandwich.

He didn't wake up. Finding that he couldn't, he concluded to assume that the present experiences were real, and dope out their meaning if he could. He now possessed some data for the solution of the problem as to how he came to be where he was.

Apparently some one had been butchering the cattle of Houston township. It seemed that the last offense had been perpetrated upon Mr. James Harper's lady pig. From the question the justice had asked him, Walter had learned that the criminal had taken refuge in the Black Swamp.

He guessed correctly that the farmers, aroused by the loss of their cattle as no mere murder could have aroused them, had been beating up the swamp at the time when he had unluckily taken that short cut across it. He realized that his appearance among those on the road, in evident haste, more or less disheveled by the run through the briers, with his hand covered with blood, certainly pointed to his identity as the man who had run to cover on another side of the swamp.

Where in the world had that blood come from anyhow? This was the one thing which puzzled him, which had so startled and bewildered him as to stop the working of his brain along the lines that might have helped provide him with a defense.

He forced himself to look again at the dark member. It took him longer to bring himself to touch it with his other hand. He felt all over it.

The task sickened him. It gave him no clue to the source of the blood. He was not sure that one particular point on his wrist did not sting a little when touched; he was not sure that it did.

He had no way of washing off the mixture of clotted gore and gravel. Hugh Digbee had never been wont to complain of the lack of water in the jail. Walter could only sit and wonder whence the red had come. He knew where he had acquired the gravel.

At length he gave up the solution of this problem. A weightier one was more pressing, namely: how could he get out of Houston jail and his present predicament?

When he thought of the real proof of his innocence, he called himself a strongly qualified fool for having let things get as far as he had. Mrs. Mudgely could have testified that he had left her house fifteen minutes before his capture.

What had been the matter with his brain? Why had he not put this up to the judge in the first place?

The only excuse he could offer himself for his stupidity was the bloody hand. That had unnerved him, hypnotized him; and he had let them put him in here, missed his train, and a season's engagement.

"Never again will I consider myself the mental equal of a jackass," he muttered disconsolately.

But it was not yet too late. Plenty of people were within call. He could get one of them to go to the judge, who would undoubtedly send some one to Mrs. Mudgely's to inquire as to the truth of his statement.

Walter went to the barred window and looked out. His appearance there attracted instant attention. All eyes turned toward that window. There were at least forty pairs of them.

"Say," Hadley shouted.

"What yer want?" several voices replied.

"Will one of you be kind enough to ask the judge to send and inquire of Mrs. Mudgely what time I left her house?"

"What would we do that for?" somebody asked.

"It might help me out of considerable difficulty." Walter spoke in the most winning tone he could command. "Mrs. Mudgely will tell you that I left her place exactly fifteen minutes before you caught me. I think that would convince any one that I could not have killed Mr. Harper's sow."

No one replied to this for a minute or two. It seemed to have put a new idea of the affair into some minds. Then—

"Young feller, we may be farmers, but we ain't green enough for that. What was you comin' through the swamp for? And how did you get that bloody hand?"

A loquacious member of the group put these questions.

But Walter Hadley was not ready to give in so easily.

"I was coming through the swamp to cut off the way around the road," he told them. "I don't know how my hand came to be bloody. If I had some water here to wash off the blood, I might be able to find out if there is a cut or bruise on it. But won't one of you please ask the judge?"

His tone was so pleading that it seemed to win over one or two of the group.

"Mebbe he ain't lyin'," a gray-bearded patriarch ventured hesitantly. "We'd oughter give him a chanst if he be innocent."

"Ain't no use botherin' Judge Wilson," the loquacious member put in. "I seen him drive off toward Branchtown right after he left the court."

"When d'ye reckon he'll be back?" asked the patriarch.

"I dunno," said the other, with indifference assumed to conceal his satisfaction with things as they were.

"It'll be a shame to keep him in there if he ain't guilty," still maintained the old man.

"Aw, it's some durn trick of his," sneered the talkative one. "But, by gosh, I've a mind to drive over to Widder Mudgely's an' see if she does know anything about the cuss."

"Go on. Why don't you?" the aged farmer urged.

Several others seconded the urging.

"I'll go with you," one of them offered.

"I only got a sulky," the volunteer ungraciously objected.

But he strode away from the group. Walter's hope went up to some extent. He put his hand in his pocket to take out his watch and see what time it was getting to be. The thought presented itself that he might telegraph to Wendel to arrange a meeting place farther on.

From his watch-pocket he put his hand in the opposite side of his vest. Then he tried several other impossible pockets. His watch had been lost in the scuffle.

It had not been such a valuable watch. But its loss made him melancholy again. He reflected that he had not enough money for getting far to another meeting-place with Wendel. He looked over his suit of clothes, the best he owned, and realized that they were not good advertising in their present condition.

But, though life might not be entirely rosy, it would not be quite so entirely hideous if he could once get out of Houston jail. The more he looked about his quarters, the longer he waited, so much more anxious did he become for the message of freedom.

At length he heard some one walking toward the door. The steps turned aside, however, and come around to the window.

It was the station-agent of Houston. In his hand he held a yellow envelope.

"Are you Walter Hadley?" he called through the bars.

"I am," responded the owner of that name.

"I heard you had given that name. Here's a telegram addressed to you at Mrs. Mudgely's. I guess it'll be safe to let you have it."

Walter took the envelope through the bars. He tore it open without waiting to sign the book which was offered at the same time with it.

His heart leaped with hope.

"Sent letter wrong address. Meet Wendel Philadelphia, Broad Street, noon twentieth," the message read.

Around the grimy floor Hadley performed a dance upon which he had spent weeks of study and practise. There was still a chance. Wendel must have changed his schedule. The night-train from Houston, even an early morning train, would get the young actor to his new job.

If he had been impatient for the return of the messenger from Mrs. Mudgely before, he was deliriously so now. He alternated between staring anxiously from the window and stamping nervously about the room.

At length the loquacious individual drove up. An antiquated two-wheeled sulky behind an unusually fine horse constituted his means of travel. But Hadley's attention was taken up with the wise grin on the fellow's wrinkled face.

"Say, young scoundrel, you're about the cutest thing that ever landed in this town. I'll be durn glad when they get you out of it," he spoke by way of preamble.

Confounded, Walter stared at the man.

"W-what do you mean?" he stammered.

"You left Mrs. Mudgely's at a quarter to ten by her clocks, didn't you?"

"I left by my watch," replied Hadley, still unable to see what was coming.

"Perhaps you set your watch on a hour the same as you done with her clocks," grinned the messenger. "It wuz a pretty cute scheme for throwin' her off as to time, though."

Without waiting for any protest from the prisoner, the man turned to the crowd to give them a more detailed account of his own clever detective work.

"I was satisfied all the time that he had some game he was workin'. Only, I should have thought he'd have sprung it onto us to

once, instid of waitin' till we'd got him behind the bars. Sure enough, the widder says he scooted out of her place 'cross lots to make the ten-eight train. It was a quarter to ten, sez she, when he left.

"'Did you look at the clock?' sez I, just to make sure she knowed what she was talkin' about.

"Wall, she wasn't sure whether she'd looked or not.

"'How'd you know then what time it was?' sez I.

"She guessed she must have looked at the clock, she sez. You know how Hetty Mudgely allus was about stickin' to a point once she's said it.

"Well, sir, when I looked at that there clock, you could have knocked me down with a feather. It was just fifty-five minnits fast. Then I showed her my watch an' told her how we'd caught her young man boarder; an' I guess you could have knocked her down by jest blowin' at her.

"She's that upset, I had to stop an' get her a drink of water with a little Jamaica ginger into it. She sed she'd noticed how the young feller went out a good bit by himself, but hadn't thought nothin' of it. Wasn't never gone more'n an hour or so to a time, so far as she knowed, at least not in day time. Of course, she didn't know where he was at nights—he might have stole out an' gone anywheres."

"But," some one now objected, "I don't see yet what he wanted to set the clocks ahead for."

"Why," exclaimed the narrator with a condescending smile upon the possessor of such obtuse stupidity, "it was so that he'd allus have her to fall back on an' say he was home just when things happened."

The stupid member gaped speechless for a moment. Then—

"Well, by gosh a'mighty!" he exclaimed in a tone of complete awe. "What some of them fellers don't think of!"

For the second time that day, Walter Hadley was confronted with a baffling mystery. When last he had noticed Mrs. Mudgely's clock in the parlor he had remarked that it was five minutes slow.

CHAPTER V.

DR. BLAKE.

BEFORE Walter Hadley could settle his mind upon any possible solution of the mystery of Mrs. Mudgely's clocks, he saw the constable stalking toward the jail in company with a black-coated individual who looked almost as pompous as himself. The door of the jail was opened and this heavy person admitted.

"If he's crazy, doc," some one called out, "he's the cutest lunatic you ever seen."

"Want me to stay in here with you, doc?" asked the constable.

The physician looked doubtfully toward Walter. Somehow he gave the actor the impression that he was decidedly nervous.

"Well—well," the medical man repeated in a stage whisper, "I don't know. It's hard to tell in these cases. Of course I haven't much as yet on which to base a diagnosis. But, perhaps it would be just as well for you to stay."

As he spoke he glanced about the room, let his gaze rest for an instant upon the broken chair, for another instant upon the bed. He decided to remain standing.

"Now, young man," as he turned to Hadley, "would you mind telling me your name?"

Walter told him.

"Ah, yes—yes—Walter Hadley—yes. That is the name he gave to the judge, is it?"

The question was addressed to the constable.

"The same name," replied the officer.

"Ye-es," murmured the doctor ponderously, as though he had already begun to delve deep into something profound.

Having thought things out very carefully, he propounded another important query.

"Your business is—"

"I'm an actor," snapped Hadley, already disgusted with the interview.

"Ah — yes — an actor," breathed the physician.

He seemed completely lost as to what to do next. At length he fell back upon his regular first move with a patient.

"Just let me feel your wrist."

Hadley had been in the hands of physicians enough of late so that he naturally extended the left wrist.

"Why," exclaimed the doctor, "what's this?"

The answer was so obvious that Walter did not feel he could make it clearer. But the constable vouchsafed enlightenment.

"It's the blood of Jim Harper's Cheshire sow. We caught him before he had time to wash it off."

"It's nothing of the kind," Hadley now spoke up. "I never saw Jim Harper's sow. I never looked at a pig in my life any longer than it took me to look away."

"Let me have your other hand," the doctor requested.

He took out his watch and counted, with a wise pucker of the eyebrows, as though he were performing some unusually important task.

"Just a trifle accelerated," he nodded ponderously, clicking the gold lid of his watch shut and stuffing the timepiece into his pocket.

"Let me look at your tongue. Um-m-m-m—coated a very little." He paused, stood staring into Hadley's eyes for several seconds, then remarked:

"I think I had better take some scrapings of the blood from that hand for analysis, to determine whether it is that of a swine or human blood. Have you been wounded on that hand recently?"

"Not that I know of. I might have been scratched, I suppose. If we could wash off some of the mess, I might be able to see whether I was scratched or not." Walter spoke crisply, his tone betraying his impatience.

"That might possibly be a good idea." The doctor seemed to weigh his words with great care. "I'll just scrape off a little of it first, and, after I am gone, Constable Garrabrant will bring you some water. Just now I would like to ask you some questions.

"Have you ever been injured in any circus acts you may have performed?"

"I am not a circus performer," Walter fairly growled with hurt pride, "and I have never been injured, save in my pocketbook."

"Ah, some one has injured your financial standing?" slowly uttered the medical man. "Do you fancy it was some one, or several individuals of this neighborhood?"

"I don't fancy anything of the sort. The only injury done my pocketbook was that occasioned by the failure of my voice a year ago," Walter still spoke venomously.

"Ah, I see—I see," the doctor murmured patiently. "What was the malady which destroyed your voice?"

"It didn't destroy my voice. My voice is as good now as it ever was. There was some temporary derangement of the nerves about my vocal cords, I believe."

"O-o-oh," circumflexed the physician. "It was a nervous affection. I see."

But we will not put the reader entirely to sleep by recounting more of Dr. Blake's profound queries and observations. At length he got out a small case from his pocket, took from this a scalpel, and scraped some of the dry, grimy blood from Walter Hadley's hand.

"I'll just examine this as soon as I have time," he announced with his leisurely pomposity.

"Can't you examine it now?" Walter demanded.

"I'm afraid not. It is barely possible that I shall find time this evening. But there is a prospect of my having an important case to attend to-night. Ah—there comes Tuttle now. I must make haste. I shall, no doubt, see you later from time to time."

Wrapping the brown results of his scratching on Walter's hand into a piece of prescription paper, Dr. Blake solemnly and with great dignity took his departure.

Hadley sank disconsolately upon the broken chair.

"Well," he mourned, "I guess I'm up against it. That old fool won't know whose blood that is for a week. Mrs. Mudgely hasn't helped me out. I—guess—I'm—up—against—it—good—and—proper."

About an hour after this the constable opened the door once more and appeared with a soap-box.

"There's your supper," he announced gruffly, without troubling to set out any of the cold viands within the box.

A glance at the contents caused Walter to call him back.

"Aren't you going to give me some water to wash my hands?"

"I forgot it. Guess I won't have time to git it before mornin' now," the officer growled.

Hadley grew distinctly angry.

"Look here," he snapped. "The doctor told you to bring me some water for my hands. If you don't, I'll report you to the judge. And I want some drinking water as well. I intend to find out whether a prisoner isn't entitled to the decencies permitted a mongrel dog."

"Now, don't get sassy," sneered the constable. But a moment later he appeared with a rusty bucket of water.

"There," he growled. "I hope you're satisfied."

"Thanks," curtly replied the prisoner.

Half a minute later he was staring at

a little stream of red flowing swiftly from a puncture in the skin so small he could hardly see it. He made out that he had reopened the tiny wound in his efforts to remove the clots of blood and gravel. The little stream was clearly able soon to cover his whole hand with gore.

For a time he was so interested in his discovery that he did not become nauseated as usual at the sight.

"I must have scratched it on a brier without noticing," he concluded. "Well, that solves the bloody mystery so far as I am concerned. But, why in the dickens couldn't that old fool doctor have found this without making his silly analysis?"

CHAPTER VI.

A FELLOW PRISONER.

EVENTUALLY he stopped the flow of blood with the cold water from the pail. From the untasty mess in the soap-box, he succeeded in getting down enough to stifle somewhat the gnawings of an all-day hunger.

Slowly the darkness settled upon the surrounding country. Weary, aching in every bone, Walter wondered how he was to find any rest. He could not bring himself to lie down on the bed. The floor was no better. The chair offered no support to his head.

"No sleep for Wally to-night," he groaned. "Well, if the bad place is any worse than this, I am ready to take a pledge to be good for the rest of my natural life."

He knew that he had the immediate neighborhood to himself. From the window he could see the lights of the village go out one after another. In the deep silence there came the occasional click of pool and billiard balls from the Houston Hotel, a block and a half away. Sometimes he heard sounds of loud laughter.

It occurred to him that he might possibly get out of the jail now without arousing any disturbance.

He went first to the window and tested its bars. They were rusty, but there was a plenty of solid metal left in them. They were secured to heavy oak beams at top and bottom with nuts which had corroded beyond all hope of any unscrewing.

Already he had noticed that the door of the jail was of heavy construction, and the lock also stout. He felt all over the dirty bed in the hope of finding some piece of iron which might possibly turn the lock. Nothing which could substitute for a key presented itself to his touch.

He tapped gently at the panels of the door. None of them was at all loose. He walked about the walls, striking at the bare, heavy boards with his fist. All were solidly fastened.

No, there was no chance of escape. He had only half hoped for one.

Again he went to the chair and sat down. With his head in his hands, he thought and thought and thought upon the hopeless situation. Suddenly he had to catch his balance, and realized that he had nodded into a doze.

He tried for a better position. Once more he caught himself as he was about to topple over. He repeated this process several times before he succeeded in going to sleep and maintaining his sitting posture.

He was dreaming that he had managed to saw away a piece of the planking of the wall. Swiftly his blade had gone through a second board at one end of the hole he had made. He was working on the other end. Three more strokes would finish his task—two more—one—

He was awakened by the sound of the turning of the lock in the door. He nearly fell from his uncomfortable perch. He heard voices, and went into a panic of unreasoning fear.

Then, more thoroughly awakened, he calmed himself to listen.

"No, Hughey, I wouldn't dast let you have them keys to-night. I got to keep my prisoner in there. He might pick 'em out of your pocket. Then where'd I be?"

The voice was that of the constable. Walter breathed a sigh of relief. The constable would not be coming to lynch him. But, what did some one else want of the keys to the jail?

"I—don' give a—doggone," hiccuped a heavy, thick voice, "about th'keysh. You—c'n come an' lemme out in—th'mornin'. But don't you—tell th'judgsch 'bout it. He'd f-fine me. An' I—ain't got th'dol-lar. Y'shee-ee?"

"No, sir, Hugh Digbee," solemnly asserted the officer of the law; "I'm constable of this town. If I make a arrest, I've gotter make a record of the fact, an' I got to bring my prisoner before the justice. That's the law, Hugh Digbee; an' I got to abide by the law, seein' I'm elected to preserve the peace."

While his voice was not so utterly thickened, nor his speech so very laborious as that of his prisoner, there was clear indication that the constable himself had been mildly celebrating the thrilling events of the day.

Digbee remained silent for a few moments.

"Then, damfigohome," he growled eventually.

"All right," assented the constable. "I dunno as it's just the thing anyhow, lettin' you use the jail to sleep off jags in, without my givin' any account of the fact. I'm jest as well satisfied to have you go home to yer fambly."

Again there was a pause.

"Damfigohome," perversely asserted the town drunkard.

"Take your choice, an' be quick about it," grumbled the officer. "I don't want to be all night gettin' home myself."

Probably habit is never so binding upon some human beings as when they are befogged with the fumes of a drug. Occasionally it works in the other way. Some very pious people will swear like pirates as they emerge from the influence of ether. But they are much more apt to pray violently, leaving the profanity to those who swear all the time anyhow.

For eight years Hugh Digbee had lodged in the town jail when his condition made lodging at home undesirable. To-night he might quite safely have lodged under the open heavens, and the air would have done him real benefit. But his brain refused to carry him so far out of the habitual.

"Lemme in," he grumblingly commanded the constable.

The door was pushed open a crack. Evidently Houston's police department was not going to take any chances on a sudden rush of his important prisoner. Firmly holding the heavy iron hasp, the constable shoved Digbee into the room and drew the door shut with a bang.

"There," he muttered outside. "I hope that young devil inside don't murder poor Hughey before morning. He hadn't oughter got drunk to-night."

There was really little danger. Walter Hadley drew back into the farthest corner of the cell, as loath to touch his fellow prisoner as he would have been to handle Mr. James Harper's Cheshire porker.

Mr. Hugh Digbee was not a highly desirable companion in a room of that jail's size. He reeked with adulterated alcohol. He muttered strings of ribaldry. Frequently he spat copious mouthfuls of distilled tobacco with a noise like the first turning on of a hot-water faucet.

He seemed to forget that the place was already occupied until he had managed to bestow himself upon the bed. He had already started to snore when he suddenly sat up.

"Hallo zhere!" he roared huskily.

Not feeling highly companionable, Walter did not reply.

"Hallo zhere!" repeated the inebriate in a higher pitch.

Still Walter made no response.

"Shey, where the dickens are you?" came in groggy gurgles, followed by a splash of brown fluid upon the floor.

The continued silence seemed suddenly to alarm the drunken man.

"Gee whillaker!" he stuttered. "Bet he'sh gone an' c'mitted shooside. Gosh!" he continued in what became a wail of terror, "I want t'git out of here. I want t'git out. Bill— Hey, Bill—*Billy—Billy Garrabrant*—I wanter g'home — I wanter g'home."

Hadley did not feel desirous of any more visitants that evening.

"Stop your noise there, and go to sleep," he snapped at the drunkard.

"Well—why didn' you shay so be-fore?" grunted Digbee in a tone of great relief.

Two minutes later his stertorous, alcoholic snore was fairly vibrating the sides of the tiny room.

In spite of his utter disgust with the situation, in spite of the worry and distress of the day, in spite of the roaring and odor of Hugh Digbee's breathing, Walter Hadley dozed frequently through the remainder of the night. At length he realized that it was gone.

He awoke from a particularly long nap to discover that the sky was already turning gray with the coming of the early dawn.

As things grew yet a little lighter, he turned to look at the besotted individual upon the bed. Digbee was not snoring so loudly now, having settled into a more natural slumber. There was every indication that the slumber would last for several hours.

Suddenly Hadley straightened up. Tiptoeing to the side of the bed, he examined its wretched occupant.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Just about my size and color-scheme—I wonder if I

could do it? What would I do if I succeeded? Eight dollars— No, it wouldn't do. But — why, great Scott! He's got a bundle with him."

All of which may seem highly unintelligible to the reader, but was of vast significance to the speaker.

CHAPTER VII.

A TASTE OF LIBERTY.

WALTER HADLEY had to gulp several times to swallow his gorge at the task he now set himself. But he recalled that the farmers about Houston were early risers, and finally braced himself to make haste.

Hugh Digbee wore no coat. The upper half of his body was encased in a very soiled bosom shirt which had been meant for white. Under this was a red flannel undergarment.

The outer shirt was secured with a button behind. Walter managed to work the button open without disturbing the sleeper. Then he proceeded very carefully to rip down the back of the garment. Its age and dilapidation made this fairly easy of accomplishment.

Having thus opened the garment, it was a comparatively simple matter to get it off, since it was not necessary to draw it over the owner's head. Removing Digbee's trousers and shoes was still easier.

The next task was a little more difficult. It was that of putting on the unsightly garments. But Walter forced himself to make the change.

"Now," he muttered, "it remains to fix up my substitute. I don't quite see how it's to be managed if I get off with my own clothes."

He studied things for a while. Finally he drew the gray blanket clear up to Digbee's chin; then, by gently tickling the sleeper, made him turn over with his face to the wall. Hadley shook his head.

"Just about one chance in five thousand," he thought. "But hanged if I don't take the chance."

To add to the disguise of Hugh Digbee, Walter tumbled his own hat carelessly upon the sleeper's head in such a position as it might have fallen into had it been used to cover the face.

Next he gave his attention to Digbee's bundle. It contained a pair of jumpers. These he removed, and into the soiled newspaper wrapped his own suit tightly.

"Now I'll see how much of an actor I really am," the Thespian whispered to himself. "The first thing is the mental coloring."

"Mental coloring" was a phrase of Walter Hadley's own invention. It expressed to him what was partly his own theory of the true art of acting. By it he meant the study of the exact frame of mind of the individual who was to be impersonated.

In the few sketches in which he had managed to get parts, he had carefully examined all that the play seemed to indicate of the character of the persons represented. He had rehearsed to himself every circumstance which could be supposed to modify the mental attitude of each person. These things he now set before him in the case of Digbee.

"A countryman—works at odd jobs on the farms around—has a wife he's afraid of —clodhopper sense of humor—just getting over a periodic spree—probably mournful and grouchy—thirsty—I wonder if I can look all that?"

It was part of his theory that one could make himself look like any person whose character he could sufficiently assume inwardly. He went again to the bed and studied Digbee's features for further points.

"His hair is dark like mine," he remarked. "Probably his eyes are, too. That's a queer twist to his nose and mouth. Most of the coloring seems to be nicotin. Wonder if there's tobacco in his pockets?

"Here's a bottle of whisky with about ten drops in it. That will give me a breath. And—ah, here it is—Honest Long Cut."

The next ten minutes he spent in soaking some of the tobacco fibers in water. This gave him a sticky pigment, which he applied to the corners of his mouth. He kept this and his nose twisted to one side in the hope of getting them to stay there.

Several times he was on the point of giving up the scheme. Once he had made a strike on the vaudeville stage by impersonating various public characters. His fellow artists had congratulated him on his unusual ability in assuming disguises. On a bet with one of them he had gone to a bank where that one was known and cashed a check which the other actor had signed for him.

But then he had had the advantage of unlimited resources in wigs and paints. Now he had practically nothing except a general resemblance in the shape of body and face and natural color to work with.

He needed no glass to tell him that his complexion was a failure. Hugh Digbee's countenance was of a red which takes patient years of drinking to acquire.

But there was a possible way to get such a color for a time. Walter tried it first on his hands. By pinching them with the nails, he could bring out a vivid red that might pass for the real alcoholic variety. He altered the method in doctoring up his face.

This he accomplished by rubbing his cheeks, nose, and chin vigorously upon the rough boards of the jail's wall. At length he undid the parcel of his clothes and got from his coat-pocket a little mirror.

The results of his efforts were more than gratifying. A few extra touches of the tobacco pigment, a little harder muscular effort in drawing his nose and mouth to one side, a little more mental effort to imagine himself really the drunken wretch upon the bed—and he was ready to pass through a casual inspection by Hugh's lifetime neighbors.

"By George, it does work!" he exclaimed in admiration. "Now for my friend's voice."

He had to practise this in a whispered undertone. In the practise he followed his theory that a man's habit and mental attitude affected his whole outward manifestation, that face and voice were largely the expression of the character behind them. He kept on imagining himself Hugh Digbee, and tuning his ear to expect from his own lips the voice he had heard from the drunkard last night.

Only when he saw the robust figure of Constable Garrabrant swinging across the way did he tip the whisky bottle to his lips, then stuff a large wad of the fine-cut tobacco into his mouth. With joy he observed that the Houston police-force was a little unsteady upon its legs, before he threw himself upon the dirty floor where his body must block the doorway.

"Get up, there, Hugh Digbee," growled the constable, pushing the door against Hadley's ribs.

"Go on—get out of here. Lemme alone," Walter muttered in his new rôle.

"Come on, now. You'll be a hour late to Whittaker's at that. Judge Wilson is waitin' for you in the station. Get up," argued the officer.

"Goldarn you—you told old Wilson I was here?" snarled Hadley.

"That wuz my duty—an' now it's my duty to take you before him. Lemme get in. I want to give that other rascal his breakfast."

Walter almost forgot his assumed voice.

"Let him alone," he cried; then was quick enough to add: "He's the devil. Him an' me had a fight about who was to have the bed. Durn him."

With a good show of stiffness, Hadley had got to his feet. He rubbed his eyes savagely with his doubled fists.

"Guess he c'n get his breakfast when he wakes," Garrabrant decided, thrusting a rickety shoe-box on to the floor.

"Ain't no coffee in there, Billy?" Walter questioned eagerly. "I got a headache."

"I drunk all the coffee there wuz to our house this mornin'," sourly responded the constable. "Mebbe some of this would suit you better."

He drew forth a quart flask, in which remained about six tablespoons of reddish fluid. Walter hated the very flavor of whisky. But he tried to imagine he liked it as well as he knew Digbee did.

With a half prayer that it would not make him forget to play his part, he pushed the open neck of the bottle to his lips.

"Don't take all of it," growled the constable. "That's enough."

Hadley was ready to agree with him. He handed the bottle over. Garrabrant drank up the rest and threw the bottle behind the jail building.

"Now, come on," he ordered.

Walter shuffled sullenly across to the court-room, whose door stood open to receive him and his guard. Garrabrant fulfilled his duties by holding firmly upon the actor's shoulder.

Justice of the Peace Wilson sat behind his desk, a judicial scowl upon his brow. He stared straight into the eyes of the prisoner from the moment of the latter's entry into the room.

Walter quailed before the gaze, but did not fail to note that eyes void of spectacles were more terrible than when sheltered behind glass. He recalled that the judge had worn glasses yesterday.

"So, Hugh Digbee, you are drunk again?" began the justice.

So completely terrified was the actor lest that piercing stare should discern his disguise that he could think of no word of response. His own eyes refused absolutely to meet those of his accuser.

"What do you mean by coming before me in this condition?" the squire resumed. "Didn't you promise me the last time you were up here that you would never drink again? I suppose you have been keeping perfectly sober ever since then?"

"Yes, judge," faltered the accused.

"Haven't drunk a drop in the last five years?" The judge's voice rose to the tone of thunder. "Last night was your first spree in all that time, I suppose?"

"That's right, judge."

"How—dare you—stand before me and tell me such a lie?" roared Squire Wilson indignantly. "Do you suppose I don't know that you've been using the jail for a sleeping-place periodically for all these years? And I've been tolerating it right along with the hope that you would yourself see the evil of your ways and reform them. Now I shall take a different course."

From the conversation between Digbee and the constable at the door of the jail the previous evening, Walter had gathered that a dollar fine would be the result of the drunkard's appearance before the justice. Now he trembled lest he had stepped from the frying-pan into the fire.

"You are a disgrace to this community. It is always a disgrace for a man like you to live in any town. It is a disgrace to that town, even when it keeps such people behind locks and bars. It is a double disgrace when it leaves such men free, as if the town itself had not sufficient moral sense to resent such conduct.

"Houston cannot avoid the disgrace of owning you as one of her citizens, but she can save herself from appearing to wink at your wickedness. I am going to sentence you to a year and a day in the county penitentiary at hard labor."

Heartily did Walter wish that he had not mixed himself up with Hugh Digbee. He reflected, however, that his own case would really be little the worse when his disguise was discovered. Nor could it hurt his cause to put up a little plea for mercy.

"You ain't a goin' to send me up for a year, judge? You wouldn't do nothin' like that?" he pleaded, still endeavoring to maintain a semblance of Digbee's voice. "What'll my wife and—" Hadley paused. He wasn't sure about there being any children. "What'll my wife do? She ain't able to do no hard work, judge—not anything harder than washin' and ironin'. She couldn't make a livin'. You ain't going to send me up, are ye, judge?"

"You're only making things worse, Digbee, when you talk about your wife and family, as if I didn't know that she has earned a far larger share of the living for them than you ever have. You are sentenced to a year and a day at Branchtown prison."

"Oh, judge—judge, you don't mean it! You're foolin' me. It'll kill me. I ain't strong enough for it," Walter managed to blubber in a most effectual imitation of maudlin misery.

"Well, I am going to give you another chance. I shall suspend your sentence. But understand that it still hangs over you. If you are brought before me again for drunkenness, I shall let the sentence fall and add to it for another offense. Now, go about your work, and don't let me see you here again."

Hadley could hardly realize that his ruse had worked. He had continued to play his part simply because he had begun it and wished to see how far he could carry it out. It seemed almost a miracle that he had escaped recognition.

He risked only a mumbling word of thanks and a promise never to get into trouble again. Then he hurried forth, his step accelerated by the fact that the judge had picked up his glasses and was beginning to polish them.

"B'gosh, I'd hate to be in your boots," the constable muttered sympathetically. "So long, Hughey!"

"Where you goin' now, Bill?"

"I'm goin' to wake up that dern cuss in the jail and make him eat his breakfast so's I can take the dishes home t' the old woman to wash."

Walter was not sure how soon the next train would pull him out of Houston.

"You better let the varmint alone," he cautioned. "He's a devil of a fighter."

"Guess I c'n take care of myself," the constable boasted, turning toward the little jail.

Hadley concluded that it was time for him to get away. Trying to maintain his shuffle and make good speed, he tramped straight from the station.

It was not until he arrived there that he discovered how early justice had been at work that morning. It was only a quarter after seven. He knew that the next train would start for New York at seven-forty.

He took his seat upon one of the wooden benches in the darkest corner of the room, and continued to look like Hugh Digbee with all his might, until it seemed the muscles of his face would break under the strain.

He could scarce control his laughter. Merely being out of jail seemed the most wonderful boon he had ever possessed. That he had succeeded in fooling two of Hugh Digbee's old neighbors by his cleverness tickled his fancy immensely.

"Who says Walter Hadley hasn't the making of a star?" he said to himself. "Gee, I wish old Marlinson could have seen me do that! I wouldn't need to book with Wendel for the darned summer-tour game."

Alas for his boasting! Hugh Digbee in jail was not out of the ordinary. Hugh Digbee up before the judge might be expected to do certain things, and Walter Hadley had guessed those things with fair accuracy.

But Hugh Digbee in a railroad station, waiting for a train, was an entirely unusual spectacle. The station-agent came in at that moment to open up the little office as was his wont just before time for the trains.

"Why, hallo, Hughey!" he grinned. "Going away somewhere?"

"Goin' up to Branchtown to see my folks," Hadley spoke with a resumption of Digbee's deep voice.

"Didn't you forget to dress up for the trip?" laughed the agent.

"Guess they won't mind," Walter returned, squirming under the unlooked-for query.

"Hughey's going up to Branchtown to see his folks." The young man passed the joke on to another person who entered at that moment.

"Gosh, he's all togged up, ain't he?" jeered this other, taking the package of mail handed to him.

Slowly, slowly the large hand of the wall clock crossed the bottom of its circle. With the appearance of infinite weariness, it crawled upward and made the figure seven.

Walter heaved a sigh. He was beginning to worry lest his trick should have been discovered and search for him begun.

Tick-tock-tick-tock. Would that hand ever reach the "8"?

Only four minutes left. Again the sigh of uneasiness escaped from Hadley's lips. Four minutes seemed an eternity, when every second brought closer the danger of rearrest and reincarceration in Houston jail. His hands twitched nervously. His breath came in pants. Perspiration began to stand out on his forehead.

Three minutes more—two minutes and a half—two minutes—one and a half—one and a quarter. Those quarters were amazingly longer than some hours he had passed.

At last—the screech of the locomotive whistle. He arose slowly and started for the open door. As he did so, the stalwart figure of Constable Garrabrant burst through it and confronted him.

"I got you, you devil's imp! Now you can wear these while you walk back with me."

A pair of old-fashioned, heavy handcuffs were added to the apparel of "Hugh Digbee."

CHAPTER VIII.

BACK TO HOUSTON JAIL.

"WELL," Walter Hadley thought ruefully, "I guess that about settles any tour with Wendel's crowd."

Like the watch he had lost, the position with Wendel was not of such tremendous value. But, on two or three occasions, the watch had secured him meals when he must otherwise have gone hungry, through the simple expedient afforded at all pawnshops. And, likewise, the Wendel tour had seemed to come as a life-saver when he was close to the edge of his last dollar.

"Maybe I can get a job around here as a farm-hand when they find out that I haven't been butchering their confounded cows and pigs. And, until then, I'm in for free board and lodgings, such as they are."

These things he told himself with a philosophy he was far from appreciating in his heart. He was not the sort of chap to express his miseries, even to himself. He could not quite fight off a feeling that some malign occult influence, some evil fate, was working out his undoing.

"If Carson had written to the address I gave him last—if the postman had given me time to go by the road—if I hadn't scratched my hand—if I hadn't lost my watch, or, if Mrs. Mudgely's clocks had been any good—if that train had gone at seven-thirty, instead of seven-forty—if—if— Oh, the deuce! I'm up against it—

that's all. I'm in for a dose of the fast-cure, the simple life, dirt baths, the devil generally.

"I've heard a lot of chumps talk about the bad luck which kept them from thousand-night stands on Broadway. I never thought there was anything to that line of gabble. I thought that, if there was anything to a man, he would come out some time. Well, maybe there's nothing to me. But, if this doesn't look like a dose of rich black luck, I'd like to know what does."

With those consoling reflections, he reached the jail. He glanced about contemptuously at the crowd, which seemed already to have grown quite as large as that of yesterday.

"A little sensation lasts them some time," he snarled half aloud.

"What's that?" grumbled Garrabrant.

"Nothing," snapped the prisoner.

"I guess mebbe Hugh Digbee won't do nothin' to you when you get inside," the constable announced more cheerfully than he had spoken before in Walter's hearing.

Digbee was, indeed, in belligerent humor. The monologue to which he treated Hadley showed the young actor that he was utterly incapable of doing justice to a personification of the town drunkard.

With the unprintable portions left out, there would be nothing left to print. Wherefore we refrain from any attempt at its reproduction.

"I'm sorry to have made you lose any time," Walter apologized in cool politeness, having gathered from the stream of blue issuing out of Hugh's mouth that Digbee had been made an hour late at his work.

"Oh, I don't give a cuss for the time. But, havin' to wear them things after a man like you has had 'em on! By gosh, I could lick you for a half a cent!"

At this Walter smiled in spite of himself.

"What you laughin' at?" roared Hugh.

"I was laughin' at a joke I heard just now," Hadley replied.

By this time Digbee had received his borrowed garments and put them on. Walter was half arrayed in his own clothes again. Constable Garrabrant had left them inside.

Suddenly the door was opened. Walter supposed that it was the police force again, come to take Hugh Digbee up for a repetition of the lecture of which he had deprived the inebriate earlier in the morning. He stood with one suspender-strap swinging, too utterly amazed to fix it in place, when he saw that a third prisoner was being brought into the tiny room.

And such a specimen as this was!

Hugh Digbee had been a very undesirable roommate. But Walter Hadley concluded that Digbee was immaculate, beautiful, acceptable as a blood brother, a person to love and to cling to, after he had taken the first glance at the newcomer.

There was only one spot of grease and filth upon the rags which this individual wore by way of clothing. That spot spread over the whole of them. His hands and face looked as though they had assiduously collected dirt for a lifetime.

His hair was matted in an unsightly shock. A beard which showed no trace of past or present use of razor or comb hung ragged over the hideously hairy chest that appeared through the open coat.

But, worst of all were the eyes of the man. Large, protruding, shifting, staring — they were the eyes of a madman. And beneath them drooling lips muttered only half-intelligible curses.

"Great Heaven, man!" Walter almost shrieked in terror. "You aren't going to put that in here with us?"

"The judge wants to see you," Garrabrant announced sourly, laying his hand once more upon Walter's shoulder. "He says you can go on about your business, Hughey."

Digbee required no second invitation. He seemed in a hurry to get away from the new prisoner.

Walter Hadley hastily finished dressing, and was led before Judge Wilson. The justice arose as the prisoner was brought into the little room.

"I wish," he began, "on behalf of my fellow townsmen, to make apology for an error which was, under the circumstances, hardly avoidable."

Hadley looked at him in astonishment.

"Perhaps I should have begun with the statement that we find there is no reason whatever to connect you with the deeds lately perpetrated upon the cattle hereabout. The poor unfortunate whom all have hitherto regarded as harmless was caught this morning in the act of committing another of the crimes for which he is not, of course, responsible.

"Two slight mysteries remain to be cleared up, though neither of them warrants me in detaining you longer. We have not yet accounted for the blood on your hand—"

"Your honor, I found a slight scratch

when water was given me to wash with. The wound still bled quite enough to have covered my hand again with blood," Walter vouchsafed the explanation.

The tremendously dignified figure of Dr. Blake now edged its way into the door. He was puffing slightly from exertion.

"Ahem!" he began solemnly.

"Have you made an examination of that blood, doctor?" asked the judge.

"Your honor, I have not had sufficient time at my disposal for an exhaustive analysis. But I—ahem!—beg your honor's permission to state that a casual microscopic examination of the corpuscles lead me to venture the opinion that they may be regarded as more probably those of *sanguis humanus* rather than of *sanguis porci*."

"That is sufficient. Prisoner, you are discharged," announced the judge. "With the very regretful apologies of the community for what has so unfortunately happened."

And right here his tone lost its judicial solemnity.

"I think, if you'll all come over to my place, we'd better have a little celebration of this outcome. And, if Mr. Hadley has the time, I'd like to have him perform a certain stunt which nearly got him out of my jurisdiction before I was ready to let him go. Mr. Hadley, will you be able to entertain us?"

"I have nothing else to do now," Walter replied rather mournfully.

His joy in liberty was much tempered by his sorrow at being yet out of a job.

"Won't that ten-eight train you were trying to get yesterday do to-day?" asked the justice.

Walter shook his head.

"The seven-forty was my last chance."

"Why, you can get that yet, if you hurry," broke in the voice of the loquacious individual who had ferreted out the mystery of the clocks the day before.

"I'm afraid not," Judge Wilson corrected. "It's half past eight now."

The loquacious person looked long at his watch. Then—

"Well, by gosh, if that wouldn't jar you!" he exploded. "There I went an' made Widder Mudgely set all her clocks back most a hour, an' all because I let my watch stop, an' didn't notice it had stood still an hour when I set it goin' again."

There was a loud laugh through the crowd, most of which had heard the loquacious man's clever exposition of a criminal's methods for hiding a crime.

The assemblage made its way from the court-room to the gates of a large private park. Approaching the house, the judge called for his butler, who got busy on something for the inner man.

"Now, gentlemen," the justice called out when the glasses had been emptied all around, "you all know that I used to be an actor, and that my brother is now in the theatrical business.

"But this morning I witnessed a piece of acting which in some respects went a little ahead of anything I've ever seen. I want you all to see Mr. Hadley's impersonation of one of our citizens. I'm quite willing to go once more through the part I had in the play."

"But I haven't the make-up now," Walter protested.

"We'll wait while Burton shows you up to my room," Judge Wilson insisted.

Fifteen minutes later Hadley and the justice were giving a public performance which they had rehearsed once that day. Walter realized then that he was playing with no mean actor in the judge himself.

He saw that the whole dramatic lecture to Digbee had been carefully prepared beforehand and spoken with previously weighed emphasis. The crowd, which had been roaring with laughter upon Walter's appearance, grew serious under the stress of that terrible verbal flaying of the judge.

"Might I ask," Walter ventured when their play was over, "how you came to let Digbee go without giving him that?"

"Well," the judge spoke regretfully, "you see, I had to leave the stage because I haven't the nervous energy to stay through a play. I had already got that thing off once. I—didn't quite feel that I was up to doing it three times in one day—and I wanted my brother— Ah, here he is. Mr. Hadley, John.

"You see," he resumed, "we've a play on for this next season, and have been looking about for a man to take the main rôle. It's a sort of 'Ten Nights in a Barroom' affair, only brought out for the Broadway stage. After I realized how you had got away from me, I couldn't think of anything else but getting you over here to let John see you—

"What did you think of it, John?"

"Mr. Hadley, will it be possible for you to get released from any contracts you have for this winter?" was Brother John's way of

replying. "If two hundred per week would be any inducement for you to take up legitimate work, why—"

"Why," Walter took up the thread, "I'd like a pen and some paper to sign on for that before you change your mind."

"There is no danger of our changing," quietly remarked the judge. "We know a good thing when we see it."

Half an hour later Walter looked up at a British subject who was doing his best to accomplish the valet act in getting him straightened out. Walter Hadley was not as thoroughly trained a subject as Judge Wilson.

"Could you get me some writing material?" he requested.

Then to himself he muttered while the valet politely bowed himself out to bring the things:

"Ethel Wood owes me a letter; but I guess I've got about all the news there is to write."

THE END.

HIS CHRISTMAS BURDEN.

BY LEE BERTRAND.

A Snowy Night Errand of Good-Will Interrupted by an Ugly Encounter on the Rear Platform of a Street-Car.

MADGE WORTHING turned away from the telephone with an exclamation of annoyance.

"Now wouldn't that make you mad? They're all out of boys, too. That makes the fifth district messenger office I've called up and the answer has been the same in every case. The Christmas business is so unusually big this year that they haven't a boy available this evening. What am I going to do? That candy must reach the orphan asylum to-night."

"Why not send it by express?" suggested George Stilling, Madge's *fiancé*, who was spending Christmas Eve with her.

"No, that wouldn't do at all," she answered. "The express companies are so unreliable at this time of the year. Probably they wouldn't deliver it until next week. That candy must get there to-night. It's for the Christmas-tree, you know, and I wouldn't disappoint those poor little kids for anything."

"What a pity your brother isn't here!" remarked her mother. "I am sure he would have been glad to do the errand for you, Madge. I wonder where he has gone. He left the house immediately after dinner without giving a single hint of his destination."

"Martin is never around when he's wanted," grumbled Miss Worthing. "Dear me! Whom can I get to take that candy?"

"Let George do it," chuckled her father.

George winced. He had been fearfully expecting this suggestion, but hoping against hope that it would not come. It was a long trip from Brooklyn to Central Park West, Manhattan, where the orphan asylum was situated, and a blizzard was raging outside.

Besides, George wanted to spend Christman Eve with his betrothed. This errand would take him away from her side for three hours at the very least.

Nevertheless, there was no way of backing out now that it had been put directly up to him.

"Of course, if there is nobody else to go I shall be glad to offer my services," he declared mournfully.

"I'm afraid there isn't anybody else, George," said Madge. "It is sweet of you to offer to go. Of course I shall hate to lose your company; but, after all, dear, we must not be selfish. It is our duty to think of others—especially on Christmas Eve. We must not let our own desires stand in the way of the happiness of those poor little orphans."

George looked out of the window at the snow falling furiously and listened to the howling of the wind: he felt like making a few remarks decidedly uncomplimentary to "those poor little orphans."

Madge went into another room and returned with a suit-case so heavy that she could scarcely carry it.

"Here it is, George. I thought I would put it in here so as to make sure that it wouldn't get wet. There are two hundred separate boxes—one for each little orphan. You will deliver them to the sister in charge and bring the suit-case back with you. Don't mention that I sent them, as I wish my donation to be anonymous."

George seized the handle and staggered toward the door.

"Why didn't you have this stuff sent to the asylum direct from the candy-shop?" he grumbled.

"Because they said they couldn't guarantee that it would be delivered to-day. They have so many Christmas orders to fill, you know. Of course, George," went on Madge stiffly, noting the frown on his face, "if you don't want to go you've only got to say so and I—I'll go myself. I didn't think that you'd make a fuss about such a little favor."

"Little favor!" repeated George to himself. "Traveling all the way from Brooklyn to Harlem on such a night as this she calls a little favor! Ye gods!"

But aloud he said: "Don't be foolish, Madge. I'm not making any fuss. I don't mind going at all."

It was six blocks to the Subway from the Worthing residence, and George felt like an Arctic explorer by the time he arrived there. It was bad enough under foot even without the handicap of a heavy dress suit-case, and the hard flakes of snow were blown against his face with such force that they felt like the lashing of a whip.

When he had boarded a well-heated Subway train and deposited his burden on the floor, however, he felt a little more cheerful, and even began to glow with a sense of elation as he reflected that he was doing a kindness to poor little orphan children, which, after all, was about the best possible way of spending Christmas Eve.

When the train reached Columbus Circle he decided that he would leave the Subway there and take a Central Park West surface-car which would bring him directly to the door of the orphan asylum.

After the warmth of the tunnel, the sting of the tempest felt twice as sharp as he emerged into the open air and staggered across the snow-covered sidewalk, suit-case in hand.

To add to his troubles there was no street-car in sight; the storm had played havoc with the company's schedule and cars were running at irregular intervals. He had to wait for over twenty minutes exposed to the full fury of the elements, and all the tender feelings he had begun to entertain toward those poor little orphans vanished.

"If Madge had any sense she'd mind her own business and let the proper authorities provide for those little brats," he growled. "I've a good mind to throw this confounded candy into the gutter, suit-case and all, and go home. This weather isn't fit for a dog to be out in. If Madge really loved me she wouldn't have permitted me to make this wretched trip. I've caught a bad cold already, and I'll probably have pneumonia by to-morrow."

A car came along just then and put an end to his pessimistic views—for the time being. He climbed aboard and deposited his burden at his feet.

At first he found the warmth of the electrically-heated vehicle very pleasant, but pretty soon he began to feel uncomfortably hot.

"Guess I'll stand outside and smoke," he said to himself. "It isn't healthy to change from one extreme of temperature to the other too abruptly, so I might as well prepare for getting out by cooling off gradually."

He went to the rear platform and lit his pipe, placing the suit-case just within the doorway.

The car was empty at the time, but gradually began to fill up and soon was so crowded that there wasn't a seat to be had.

The conductor went inside to collect fares and then came out to the platform.

"Did I get your fare?" he said to George, holding out his hand.

"You certainly did," replied the latter indignantly. "I paid you when I was inside."

"I don't remember your being inside," growled the conductor, who was a man of very short memory. "And, anyway, cut out that smoking. Don't you see that sign up there?"

"Most conductors don't object to smoking on the rear platform," protested George with a scowl.

"Well, I happen to be one of those who do," snapped the man, whose temper was even shorter than his memory. "Take that pipe out of your mouth, or I'll throw you off the car."

"You will, eh?" shouted George, glad

to have somebody to work off his grouch on. "You're pretty fresh. Let me have your number and I'll report you to the company."

A little later on George had plenty of cause to regret this quarrel with the conductor.

Although it went sorely against his grain to have to give in, he did not continue smoking, for he knew that the man was backed up by the rules, and that he was in danger of arrest if he persisted.

A few blocks further on a stout woman got off the car. She had just alighted, and the car was going ahead again when a man inside shouted: "Hey there, conductor! Call that lady! She's left her suit-case behind!"

The conductor pulled the bell-cord, and he and several of the passengers yelled to the woman, but she appeared to be deaf and kept right on. By the time the car had come to a stop again she had disappeared around a corner.

"Funny that she should have gone off without her satchel," remarked the man who had shouted to the conductor. "It was standing right at her feet, too. She surely ought to have seen it. Must be terribly absent-minded."

"Some women are so careless," remarked a woman in the car severely. "She deserves to lose it."

"What are you going to do with it, conductor?" inquired another passenger.

"Turn it into the company's lost-property office, of course," he snapped. "What d'yer suppose? Think I'd steal it?"

He stepped inside and came out to the platform with the suit-case in his hand.

George looked at it curiously, and then uttered an exclamation of astonishment. "Why, that's *my* suit-case!"

"*Your* suit-case! Ha, ha! That's pretty good." The conductor laughed scornfully.

"Why, you thick-headed mutt!" snarled George. "I tell you it does belong to me. Didn't you see me bring it on the car?"

"No, I didn't see nuttin' of the sort. I guess I'd have to have had pretty good eyes to see that. Say, whacher think I am, anyway? You can't work no game like that on me."

"I'm not working any game on you, you addle-pated low-brow. I'm telling you that's my suit-case. I'm getting off at the next corner, too, so you'd better hand it over to me."

"Oh, I had, had I? Well, you've got a long wait comin' if you think you're goin' to get it. You've got an awful nerve, young feller, to try to swipe a lady's suit-case. I guess you're a professional crook."

They had reached the orphan asylum corner by this time, and George pulled the bell-cord to bring the car to a stop, and then tried to wrest the satchel from the conductor's hand.

The two men struggled all over the rear platform; but George triumphed. With a dexterous twist, he managed to tear the disputed article from his opponent's grasp.

He was just getting off the car with his property when the conductor grabbed him by the coat-collar.

"No, you don't. You ain't goin' to get away that easy. You're a thief, and I'm goin' to hand you over to a cop."

He appealed to the passengers.

"Will some of youse gents help me to hold this feller?"

Several men stepped out on the rear platform and seized George's arms. A woman shouted "Police!" at the top of her voice, and an officer came running around the corner.

"What's the trouble here?" he demanded, wiping the snow from his face.

"Officer, this fellow is a crook," panted the conductor, "and he's tryin' to get away with a suit-case a lady left behind."

"No such thing!" cried George indignantly. "This suit-case belongs to me. The woman never had anything to do with it. It's all a fool mistake on the part of some of these people, who would be doing much better if they minded their own business."

The policeman addressed himself to the passengers:

"Now, how about this? Can any of youse ladies and gents straighten this out? Is this man a thief or not?"

The man who had first called the attention of the conductor to the suit-case spoke up:

"I believe he is, officer. I am pretty positive that it belonged to the woman who got off. It was standing right in front of her, and this fellow was out on the platform."

"Did you see the woman bring it on the car?" demanded the officer, who was a pretty intelligent fellow.

"Well, no, I can't say that I did. She was already on the car when I got aboard."

"Humph! Did anybody else see the lady bring it in with her?"

There was nobody who could answer this question affirmatively, for the reason that the woman had boarded the car earlier than any of the other passengers except George Stilling.

"Well, how about you, conductor?" demanded the policeman. "Are you ready to swear that it was the lady who brought it on the car and not this man?"

The conductor hesitated.

"Well, I can't honestly say that I remember seein' it in her hand when she got aboard; but then I don't remember seein' it in this guy's hand, either. I'm satisfied in my mind, though, that this feller is a crook."

"You see, officer," exclaimed George triumphantly, "there isn't anybody who is in a position to accuse me. The darned fools have all jumped at a wrong conclusion. Just because I happened to leave the suit-case inside while I—"

"You shut up," interrupted the policeman. "I don't like your looks, anyway. You look like a crook, and I wouldn't wonder if they've got you right, after all. I'll wager that your picture is in the gallery in spite of all your bluffin'."

"How dare you?" cried George. "You're an impudent fellow, and I'll report you to the police commissioner."

"Aw, go on! That's what they all say. What's your name, anyway?"

"My name is George Stilling, and I'm a reporter on the *Evening Star*. I can get a hundred people to prove that I'm a reputable citizen."

"You can, eh?" retorted the policeman. "Well, if you're a newspaper reporter, you'll need at least a hundred people to convince me that you're reputable. I don't like newspaper men. And, anyway, if your name is George Stilling, how do you account for the fact that the initials on this suit-case are M. W.?"

"I can easily explain that," replied George. "You see, the suit-case doesn't belong to me. It belongs to a lady—"

"Ah!" exclaimed the conductor, turning triumphantly to the others. "He's coming around now. You all heard him say before that it belonged to him, and now he admits that it don't."

"You idiot!" snapped George. "When I said that it belonged to me I merely meant that I was carrying it."

"Then you admit now that you was carryin' a suit-case that don't belong to you?" cried the conductor, who prided himself upon his logic.

"You fool! Of course I admit that," spluttered George. "That is to say, of course, I had a right to be carrying it. The young lady it belongs to loaned it to me to take some candy to that orphan asylum over there."

"You mean to say that this suit-case is full of candy?" inquired the policeman.

"Sure. Candy for the little orphans. Two hundred little fancy boxes—one for each child. Say, it is very easy to prove that I am telling you the truth, and that the suit-case belongs to me."

"You admitted a minute ago that it doesn't belong to you," interrupted the conductor.

"Say," growled George, "if somebody doesn't keep that idiot quiet I'll murder him in a minute. What I was going to say was that it is very easy to prove that I'm no thief. Let this policeman accompany me into the orphan asylum and see for himself that the contents of this suit-case are exactly as I have described."

"That sounds like a fair proposition," agreed the officer. "I guess I'll go with you and give you a chance to make good."

The conductor was satisfied with this arrangement, and, as several of the passengers were beginning to complain about the delay, he gave the motorman the signal to go ahead and the car continued on its way.

George and the policeman entered the orphan asylum, and the former inquired for the sister in charge.

That good woman smiled appreciatively when he informed her that he had brought the children candy from an anonymous friend of the institution, and she and the policeman watched him with great interest as he busied himself with the straps of the satchel.

"I want you to understand, boss, that I'm only doing my duty by looking into this here matter," remarked the officer, now so impressed by George's confident manner that he thought it well to assume an apologetic attitude. "I hope there ain't any hard feelings on your part, as far as I am concerned."

"None at all, officer. I must say that you were somewhat rude in your manner toward me; but I'm willing to overlook it and put it down to overzealousness on your

part. It won't do to carry any grudges at Christmas time, you know."

George smiled cheerfully. His good nature had returned again, now that his troubles appeared to be at an end.

He threw open the lid of the suit-case, and the smile froze upon his lips. He uttered an exclamation of horrified amazement, which was accompanied by a grunt from the policeman and a gasp of surprise from the sister in charge.

"So you *are* a crook, after all!" growled the bluecoat. "Well, I'll be jiggered! You came pretty near foolin' me, I must admit."

"I—I can't understand the meaning of this!" gasped George, beads of perspiration rolling down his face. "It's—it's very queer."

"Isn't it, now?" sneered the policeman. "Some bad person must have taken the children's candy out of the suit-case and put in clothes instead."

"Yes," assented George. "That is what has happened—but I can't understand how it could have been done."

"Can't you, really? Well! Well! That's too bad! Suppose we take a little walk around to the station house and see if the lieutenant can throw any light on the mystery. The "lieut" is a great feller for throwin' light, you know."

The policeman closed and strapped the suit-case and turned to the astonished sister.

"I suppose you won't mind, ma'am, if I take this along. Your little orphans can't eat clothes, so it's no use leavin' 'em here."

"But won't you please explain what this all means," begged the good woman, looking from one to the other in complete bewilderment.

"Sure! It's easily explained. This young rascal, who is about as nervy a crook as I've ever met, thought he'd bluff his way out of a desperate situation by bringin' me in here. Just how he expected to get away with it I don't know, because he must have realized that the game would be up as soon as this grip was opened and his lie exposed. Maybe he thought I wouldn't bother to wait until it was opened, or maybe he was merely sparrin' for time and trustin' to luck for a chance to escape."

"Nothing of the sort," protested George wildly. "I am absolutely honest, and the victim of a most extraordinary and inexplicable mistake. Sister, have you a telephone here?"

"Yes, over there in the corner."

George started toward it with the intention of calling up Madge and getting her to corroborate his story; but the policeman detained him by grabbing his coat-sleeve.

"Never mind the phone, young feller. I've wasted enough time with you already. Can't you see that the game is up, and that it ain't no use to keep up the bluff? Come along with me now, without any more nonsense. If you want to communicate with your pals, you can send them messages from your cell in the station-house."

He grabbed the suit-case with his free hand and, still keeping tight hold of George's coat-sleeve, marched his prisoner out into the street and to the precinct house.

"We'll hold him as a suspicious person for the present," declared the lieutenant behind the desk, scowling at George. "We'll try to find the real owner of this grip before court time, and then she can make a direct charge of larceny against him."

While the prisoner's pedigree was being entered in the blotter, a patrolman opened the suit-case and scattered the contents on the floor in an effort to find some clue as to the identity of the owner.

George watched like a man in a dream as he saw collars, shirts, masculine underwear, and two suits of clothes produced from Madge Worthing's grip which was supposed to contain candy.

Suddenly the patrolman gave vent to an exclamation of surprise as he unearthed from the suit-case, wrapped up in an old shirt, a small bronze statue of a Roman gladiator.

"Look what's here, lieutenant. Queer sort of an article for any one to be carryin' around with 'em, ain't it?"

"Yes, 'tis kind of queer," replied the man behind the desk. "Pretty heavy, too, ain't it? Guess that's why this crook tried to get away with the grip. Thought, from its weight, that it had something valuable inside. I'm through with the prisoner now. Take him back."

George was led to a cell, and the barred door closed with a clang.

For two hours he sat there vainly trying to think of a solution to the mystery. He couldn't even hazard a guess as to how the candy in his *fiancée's* suit-case had been transformed into masculine wearing apparel and a bronze statue of a Roman gladiator.

That it was Madge's satchel, and no other, he could not doubt, because her ini-

tials, "M. W.," were plainly marked on the lid. There was no chance, therefore, that somebody else's baggage had got mixed up with his while on the Subway train or the car.

George didn't believe in the supernatural, as a rule; but he was almost inclined to imagine that he must be the victim of black magic — that some evil spirit which owed him a grudge had maliciously transformed the contents of the grip.

He thought of sending a message to Madge, imploring her to clear up the mystery if she could, and, at all events, to bear witness that he was not a thief, and persuade the police to liberate him.

Upon reflection, however, he decided that it would be a mean trick to bring her all the way from Brooklyn on Christmas Eve in such wretched weather, and, besides, she would no doubt be very much frightened if she learned that he was locked up in a police cell.

It was better, therefore, to wait until the following morning, when he could get a chance to prove his respectability and innocence.

Two hours after his lodgment in jail a street-car conductor entered the police station and inquired of the lieutenant: "Say, boss, can you tell me what happened to that guy who had trouble on my car this evening on account of a suit-case?"

"Sure," replied the man behind the desk, pointing toward the cells. "He's in there."

"He is, eh? So the cop did lock him up after all, then? That's too bad."

"Why is it too bad? What do you mean by that?"

"Well, I've discovered that we done him an injustice. I've found out since I handed him over to the cop that he was tellin' the truth when he said that the suit-case belonged to him and not to the lady we thought left it behind her."

"Humph! How did you find that out?"

"Well, when we got to the end of the line I happened to mention the matter to the motorman of my car and the motorman says that he distinctly remembers the feller gettin' on at Columbus Circle and noticed that he had a suit-case in his hand.

"I didn't notice it myself; but since the motorman remembers seein' him with the satchel there can't be any doubt that the feller was tellin' the truth. I don't feel any good toward him, for he was pretty fresh to me; but I don't like to see anybody locked up wrong, so I thought I'd drop in and inquire."

"Well, why the divvle didn't the motorman open his mouth at the time the arrest was made?" growled the lieutenant.

"He didn't know anythin' about it until we reached the end of the line and I was explainin' to him what caused the delay. From his place in the front he couldn't see what was goin' on on the rear platform, you know."

"Well, I don't see that we can do anything now," snapped the lieutenant. "He's down on my blotter as a prisoner and I can't let him out without changin' the entry. I'm a neat feller and hate to make erasures. As long as he's in he'll have to stay in till morning."

"Won't he go to the night court?" inquired the conductor.

"No, they don't take such cases there. They only handle misdemeanors. Anyway, it won't hurt him to spend the night in jail. He's beastly intoxicated. You ought to have smelled his breath.

"And besides," went on the man behind the desk, advancing all the arguments he could think of for holding the prisoner, in order to keep his blotter-entry intact, "I'm not, by any means, so sure that he ain't a thief, even if that suit-case does belong to him. There was a bronze statue wrapped up in a shirt inside the grip and that's a queer sort of thing for a feller to be carryin' around. Maybe he stole it."

"Maybe he did," agreed the conductor. "He certainly impressed me as looking like a crook and besides, I remember him sayin' that there was candy in the suit-case. He didn't say nothin' about no bronze statter."

The captain of the precinct, who had entered the police-station during the latter part of this conversation, now inquired eagerly: "Whom are you speaking about? Who had a bronze statue wrapped up in a shirt?"

"A prisoner Officer Foley brought in a couple of hours ago on suspicion of stealing a grip, captain," replied the lieutenant. "When we opened the bag to try to learn the identity of its owner, we discovered the bronze figure inside."

"Where is it?" demanded the captain excitedly. "Let me see it, quick."

His subordinate unstrapped the grip and

produced the bronze from beneath the clothing.

The captain took one look at the figure of the Roman gladiator and then dashed madly to the telephone on the wall.

"Hallo, headquarters! Give me Inspector Murphy, quick! Hallo, that you, inspector? This is Captain O'Brien. Say, I believe I've got the statue. Yes, I mean the missing Pierrepont statue, of course. Can't be quite sure, but it looks as if it's the right one. Send some detectives who can positively identify it up here, will you?"

As he left the telephone he turned with a self-satisfied grin to the lieutenant.

"Say, McKenna, you're pretty slow. It ought to have occurred to you right away, as it did to me, that this might be the famous gladiator statue that was stolen from the private collection of Oliver Pierrepont, the millionaire, a month ago."

"I never gave it a thought," admitted the lieutenant sheepishly. "Do you really think it's the one, captain?"

"It certainly answers the description that was sent out from headquarters," replied the captain. "If I'm right this will be a great feather in my cap. That statue is one of the rarest bronzes in the world. Old Pierrepont paid a hundred thousand dollars for it when he bought it in Italy a couple of years ago."

"Good Heavens!" gasped the lieutenant, gazing incredulously at the gladiator standing on his desk. "Can it be worth that much? It certainly don't look it."

The car-conductor snorted:

"If old Pierrepont paid all that money for that thing he was badly stung," he declared. "I've got a pair of statters on my parlor shelf at home which my old woman's first cousin give us for a weddin' present which have got that there figure beaten all holler."

The captain frowned at this interruption.

"I guess we don't need you any more, my man," he said sharply to the street-car employee. "You can go."

But as the conductor was leaving the station-house, the captain changed his mind.

"Wait a minute! Perhaps we'd better hold you here for a while. We may need you. Have that prisoner brought into my office, lieutenant."

The lieutenant summoned the turnkey, who unlocked the door of George's cell and notified that miserable young man to follow him.

"Where are you taking me?" demanded George. "Have they discovered that I am innocent and are they going to let me go?"

"You'll see," was the grim rejoinder.

As soon as George was seated in the captain's private office, that official pounced upon him.

"Now, young feller, you had better tell me the truth. Where did you get that statue?"

"The statue!" gasped George. "I don't know anything about it. I can't understand how it got into the suit-case. It is a baffling mystery to me."

"That's a lie!" shouted the captain. "Cut out that stalling at once and be on the level with me. Tell me where you got that statue or it will be the worse for you."

"I tell you I haven't the slightest idea where it came from," insisted George.

"You're a darned liar!" shouted the policeman shaking his fist in the prisoner's face. "You know very well that it came from the private museum of Mr. Oliver Pierrepont. You know very well that it was stolen a month ago. Either you're the thief or you know who is. If you don't tell me the whole truth, it will be the worse for you."

George had turned deathly pale.

"Do—do you mean to tell me that that is the famous one hundred thousand dollar gladiator that was stolen from Pierrepont?" he gasped.

"You know very well it is. Don't try to act innocent with me, because the bluff won't go."

"Great Scott!" George felt so sick and dizzy that he thought he was going to faint.

He was thoroughly familiar with the details of the disappearance of the famous Pierrepont bronze which had caused such a world-wide sensation only a few weeks previously.

He had worked on the story for his newspaper and had interviewed the millionaire art collector who had explained to him how the valuable curio had been discovered missing, one morning, without the slightest clue to the identity of the thief or the manner in which it had been stolen.

But what caused him to be so completely

staggered now was the knowledge that his *fiancée,* Madge Worthing, was the private secretary of old Pierrepont.

Madge had been in the millionaire's employ for five years, and he trusted her implicitly.

When the loss of the statue had been discovered and the servants and employees of Mr. Pierrepont submitted to a grueling examination by the police and the Pinkertons, the old gentleman had refused to allow them to ask Madge a single question.

He had declared that his faith in his secretary was such that he would not permit her to be insulted or humiliated by a cross-examination, although the detectives pointed out to him that inasmuch as she had access at all times to the museum there was good reason for suspecting her.

And now the statue had been found in a dress suit-case which belonged to Madge Worthing! The proof of her guilt seemed to be conclusive! George was so horrified that he could not suppress a groan of anguish.

Mistaking his emotion for a sign of weakening, the police captain increased his efforts to extort a confession from the prisoner.

He seized George fiercely by the throat and growled: "If you don't tell me right away how you got that statue, darn you, I'll choke you to death."

There was but one idea in the unfortunate young man's mind now. He must do everything in his power to shield the girl he loved. He inwardly congratulated himself that at no stage of the game had he revealed the name of the owner of the suit-case.

The police had no idea that the satchel belonged to Madge Worthing, and he made up his mind that he would go to prison for the rest of his days, if need be, rather than give them that information.

He regarded it as a fortunate circumstance that his engagement to the girl had not yet been publicly announced. There were family reasons why the betrothal of the couple had been kept secret so far, and consequently the police would not connect her with his present predicament.

In order to make absolutely sure, however, that suspicion would not be directed toward Madge, George decided upon a course of action which, while it would seal his own doom, would enable him to carry out his purpose of saving the girl.

As his inquisitor seized him savagely by the throat the prisoner gasped, "Stop! Stop! Let go of me and I will tell you the truth."

"Ah!" exclaimed the captain, with a smile of satisfaction. "That sounds better, young feller. Go ahead and tell it."

"That suit-case never belonged to me," gasped George. "I lied when I said that it did. The street-car conductor and the passengers who accused me were right. The satchel belonged to the woman who got off the car."

A savage scowl replaced the expectant smile on the policeman's face.

"No, you don't," he growled. "I see your game, young man, and I want you to understand that it won't work. You're clever enough to be willing to confess yourself guilty of a lesser crime in order to save yourself from conviction for stealing that hundred-thousand-dollar statue, eh? Just wait a minute."

He opened the door of his private office and yelled: "Send that street-car conductor in here."

The conductor entered the room, and the captain snapped, pointing to the prisoner: "This fellow says that he stole the suit-case from your car. Is that right?"

"No, it ain't," was the reply. "He didn't steal no suit-case—at least, not on my car."

"What!" gasped George, completely taken aback by this astonishing vindication from his former enemy. "What on earth is the matter with you? When I saw you last you were positive that I did steal it, and now you say I didn't. I am willing to confess that you were right and that the grip did belong to that woman."

"And I say that it didn't," retorted the conductor. "The motorman saw you bring it aboard the car, so it ain't no use trying to tell no such lies."

George was stunned by this unexpected statement. He decided that he was the most unfortunate fellow ever born. When he had tried to prove that he hadn't stolen the suit-case, nobody would believe him, and now that he was endeavoring to convince his accusers that he had stolen it, here was his most emphatic former accuser refuting his confession.

Further argument on this point was interrupted by the arrival from the Central Office of three detectives who had been working on the famous statue case since the day of its disappearance, and who were thoroughly familiar with all its details.

They examined the statue closely and, by

means of certain marks of identification with which Mr. Pierrepont had furnished them, were able to state positively that the bronze figure in their hands was the one which had been stolen from the millionaire.

"The old gent will be delighted to learn that we have got his statue," remarked one of the detectives. "We'll notify him right away. He's spending Christmas at his country home up State; but no doubt he'll be glad to come back to town to prosecute the case against the prisoner. Guess we'll take this feller along with us down to headquarters, captain."

"All right," agreed the precinct commander. "You fellers ought to be able to sweat the truth out of him down there. I ain't been able to get much from him. He's a pretty foxy individual, all right."

George was taken down to police headquarters and submitted to another grueling examination.

In spite of all the rigors of the terrible third degree, however, they were unable to get him to utter a word which incriminated Madge Worthing.

He stuck resolutely to his statement that he had stolen the suit-case from the unknown woman on the car, and that the motorman's statement to the contrary was false.

When his tormentors gave up the battle of wits in despair, for the time being, the prisoner was thrown into a cell at headquarters and locked up for the night.

The following morning he was led out to be photographed for the Rogues' Gallery, measured by the Bertillon system, and looked over by every detective connected with the Central Office in the hope that one of them might be able to recognize him as an old offender.

"And this is Christmas Day," groaned the unhappy young man. "Gee whillikens! What a Christmas!"

These proceedings had just been gone through when police headquarters was thrown into a stir by the sudden arrival there of Mr. Oliver Pierrepont.

The great millionaire had been notified by telegraph of the recovery of the gladiator bronze and the arrest of the supposed thief, and he had come all the way from his country home in his touring-car.

Mr. Pierrepont was accompanied by a good-looking young man who carried in his right hand a dress suit-case which bore on its lid the initials "M. W."

This suit-case resembled so exactly the satchel in which the bronze had been found that Inspector Murphy, chief of the detective bureau, gazed at it in astonishment.

"Inspector," began Mr. Pierrepont, "this young man is Mr. Martin Worthing, a reporter on the *Evening Examiner*, and a brother of the young lady who is employed by me as a private secretary.

He has an interesting statement to make to you, and when he gets through I think you will release with apologies the young man you have locked up on the charge of stealing my statue.

The young man introduced as Martin Worthing cleared his throat nervously, and said: "Yes, inspector, I am sure I can convince you that poor old George is innocent of any wrong. The fact that he is in this trouble is all due to my carelessness.

"Let me begin by explaining that this suit-case I hold in my hand belongs to my sister, Miss Madge Worthing, and the satchel which has got poor George into all this trouble belongs to me."

"Ah!" exclaimed the chief of detectives excitedly. "Then it was in *your* suit-case that the bronze was found, eh? Have you come to save the man we accuse by confessing that you are the thief?"

"Well, not exactly. I am not a thief; but I must admit that it was I who placed the statue in the suit-case. My motives were perfectly honorable, however. It was merely my zeal to land a big story for my paper and to get a beat on poor old George's sheet which caused me to do it.

"This is how it all happened. I was rummaging around a second-hand shop in Brooklyn yesterday when I discovered the gladiator statue offered for sale for four dollars.

"I recognized it immediately, being thoroughly familiar with its description. When I questioned the proprietor of the store I found that he hadn't the slightest idea of its identity. He told me that a man had come into his place a couple of weeks ago and sold it to him for a dollar."

"For a dollar?" exclaimed the inspector incredulously.

"Yes, I know it sounds absurd that any one should have disposed of that treasure for such a paltry sum; but maybe the person who stole it did not realize its value—or perhaps the thief got scared by the publicity which followed the theft and the world-wide efforts made to recover it, and,

realizing that he was in danger of discovery, was willing to get rid of the thing safely at any price.

"At all events, whatever the reason, it *was* sold for a dollar, and the second-hand man was offering it for sale at four dollars. I didn't lose any time in handing him the four dollars and taking the precious statue home.

"My first intention was to hand the thing over to my sister and let her return it to her employer. But I got thinking what a great beat it would be for the *Examiner* to be able to announce exclusively that the missing statue had been recovered, and I determined to take it to Mr. Pierrepont myself.

"I didn't mention anything to my sister or any one else about my find, because I was afraid she would mention the matter to her sweetheart, poor old George. He and I are on rival sheets, you know; and, of course, as soon as he learned that the famous statue had been found he would have given the story to his paper.

"Therefore, without saying a word to anybody, I packed the statue in my suit-case and, sneaking out of the house, took a train to Mr. Pierrepont's country home.

"Imagine my surprise, when I got there and had informed him that I had brought him his statue, to open the suit-case and discover that it contained nothing but little boxes of candy.

"It immediately occurred to me what had happened. My sister Madge's initials, you see, are the same as my own. We both bought our satchels at the same store. They were both standing in the same closet.

"By mistake I had taken hers, with its load of candy for the orphan asylum, and left mine behind.

"I was explaining the mistake to Mr. Pierrepont when your telegram arrived informing him that you had recovered the statue and had a young man named George Stilling under arrest.

"Naturally, I guessed right away what had happened, and Mr. Pierrepont and I hurried to town to rectify the blunder."

Of course, this explanation resulted in the immediate release of George Stilling, and he was able to get to Madge's home in time to enjoy a good Christmas dinner.

"And those candies are still undelivered to the orphan asylum," remarked Madge, after the meal was over. "Even though they are too late for the Christmas-tree, somebody ought to take them to those poor little kids."

"Let George do it," chuckled Madge's father.

"I'll be hanged if I will," declared George firmly.

An Exhibit That Walked Away.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS,

Author of "A Slippery Battle in Oil," "The Border Rider of Broken S," etc.

The Remarkable Disappearance of a Valuable Relic, and the Far-from-Merry Chase Its Recovery Led Those Who Went in Pursuit.

CHAPTER I.

FLOWN IN THE NIGHT.

IT was gone! The dinosaur had vanished! The huge skeleton, sixty-five feet long, whose ugly head, if upreared, would have touched the ceiling, twenty feet from the floor, had stepped from its stand in the night and coolly walked off.

At least, that was the only explanation which occurred to Raymond Mills that morning, as he threw open the door of the prehistoric room in the Parker Museum and saw a great vacant space where the monster had stood the evening before.

The door had been locked, and Mills, whose special duty it was to take care of the invaluable relics in this department, found the lock in the same condition as he had left it when he secured everything for the night. There were no marks to suggest that it had been tampered with in any way.

"Professor!" called out the young man, in terror-stricken tones.

"What's the matter, Mr. Mills?"

Prof. Philetus Noyes, curator of the museum—a spare man, of about fifty, iron-gray, spectacled, of studious mien, and with a deep, solemn voice—asked this before he reached the open doorway. Then he uttered a gasp, and as his knees shook under him, he clung convulsively to his assistant, and faltered:

"This is impossible!"

"It seems so, professor, but—seeing is believing. The dinosaur is not here."

"It was here last night."

"Yes; I left it all safe when I locked up."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"Quite. Why, I remember, you were here when I closed the door."

"So I was. So I was," admitted the professor blankly. "We looked at the dinosaur together. I noticed that the cement at the back of one of its hind feet, where it had been restored, was a little cracked, and I said I must have it attended to. Yes, yes; of course it was here."

He leaned against the door-post, with one hand covering his eyes, and groaned. Professor Noyes was at the point of collapse.

Raymond Mills went to the platform, raised a few inches above the floor and covered with a dark-red cloth, on which the gigantic creature had stood. He examined the holes where the iron supports had been uprooted. The brass railing that had surrounded it had been torn away and thrown carelessly into a corner.

"They even took the heavy iron work that held him in place," remarked Mills.

"Did they?" said the professor wearily.

He was so dazed by the calamity that his mind could not grasp details as yet. He was trying to determine how he was to face the board of directors, and particularly what he should say to Orton Parker—also, what Orton Parker would be likely to say to him.

Mr. Parker was the multimillionaire steel magnate who had endowed the museum which bore his name, and presented it to the city of Millburytown. He was very proud of the museum and took the keenest personal interest in its affairs, although he left the immediate management to a board of directors and to Prof. Philetus Noyes, whose fame as a paleontologist was world-wide.

The dinosaur was Orton Parker's special pet. About a year before, he had heard that Mesozoic relics had been unearthed in Wyoming, and had sent Professor Noyes, together with Raymond Mills, to investigate. After some months of hard work in the desert, they had come across the bones of an enormous creature which the professor pronounced to belong to the order of *Dinosaurus brontosaurus*, of the Jurassic age. This dinosaur had doubtless lived and enjoyed himself in his own way several millions of years ago.

Orton Parker was delighted. He paid cheerfully the thousands of dollars it cost to have the bones taken from the sandstone in which they were embedded and conveyed half across the country to Millburytown.

Professor Noyes, with Raymond Mills's assistance, put the skeleton together and mounted it, and when at last it stood in the Parker Museum, in what the professor declared was a lifelike attitude, its long neck stretched one way, and its twenty-foot tail the other, not only Mr. Parker, but all Millburytown, felt that the presence of the antediluvian stranger shed a luster upon the city such as it never had enjoyed before.

The great dinosaur became a lion of the scientific world, and learned men from many cities of Europe, as well as from all over the continent of America, had journeyed to Millburytown to see it before this unlucky morning when Professor Noyes leaned against the door-post, endeavoring to comprehend the full import of this horrible and inexplicable misfortune.

"There are strong iron bars to all the windows, and they haven't been disturbed, so it couldn't have been taken out that way," observed Raymond Mills in deep reflection.

"Wasn't the watchman on duty in the halls?" suddenly asked the professor.

"That's so—Dan O'Keefe, the special officer. He ought to know something about this matter."

Mills began to feel a little hopeful.

But honest Dan could tell them nothing except that he was sure no one but himself had been inside the building all night. As for such a thing as the "big skilinton" being taken while he was in charge—well, he'd like to see the man that could do it, that was all.

"I wint on juty at a quarter av noine o'clock," he said, "an'—"

"Quarter to nine?" interrupted Raymond. "Your hours are from seven to seven."

"Yis, sorr. But ye see th' professor he guv me th' concission to come at noine fer this wanst, on account av me darter bein' married, an' me tellin' him Oi'd shtay till after noine this mornin'."

"That's true," confirmed the professor. "And I remained in my office until nearly half-past eight, so that the building should not be left alone too long. My door at the end of the main hall was open all the time, and no one could have gone up or down the stairs without my seeing him."

"All the attendants had gone home, I know, and the cleaners had swept out before I locked this door at six o'clock. Baglin, the janitor, went with them, so that there was no one in the place but us two from that time until O'Keefe came at a quarter to nine."

"It seems so. The whole affair is an awful mystery."

The professor did not wring his hands—because people don't usually do that sort of thing in these days—but he walked up and down by the side of the empty red-covered platform, his face the picture of utter despair. Raymond had got over the first shock, and his fighting blood was up.

"The first thing is to search the museum from top to bottom," he said, decidedly. Then, with an inquiring look at the professor: "There's no use keeping Dan here, is there?"

"No. Let him go home to bed. He's told all he knows."

"I hope yez don't t'ink Oi'm t' blame fer this here muss," said Dan.

"We don't blame any one yet," answered Raymond. "You won't be late tonight, will you?"

"Indade Oi won't. Oi'll come at six or sooner," was Dan's promise, as he went down-stairs.

As soon as O'Keefe had gone, Mills and the professor began a careful examination. They went into every room on the three floors, including Professor Noyes's private office, the large general office, where the umbrellas and canes were checked, and the big laboratory, in a wing of the main edifice, where animals and birds were "mounted," fossil bones articulated and "restored," and the many other operations performed which the casual visitor to a museum seldom thinks about.

All was as usual, save in the room on the top floor whence the dinosaur had disappeared, carrying his half-ton or so of iron garniture with him.

On the professor would fall the cheerful task of explaining, if he could, to Orton Parker, how a dinosaur's skeleton, weighing five hundred pounds, the bones clamped together and to the floor with a ton of iron, had silently disappeared from a locked room, with iron-barred windows, descended two flights of stairs and escaped from a closely-guarded building, under the very noses of three or four people.

This would be hard on the professor, no doubt, but, on the other hand, Raymond Mills had particular and personal reasons for desiring to stand well with Orton Parker, and had hoped that his careful work in the museum was causing him to rise in the millionaire's favor. Now, here was this awful thing—surely the work of some vindictive demon, since it seemed impossible to lay it to mere human agency.

Raymond had been in immediate charge of the dinosaur, and, of course, would be blamed for its loss actually, although technically, Professor Noyes was responsible.

"I'm done for," muttered the young man. "Unless I can find that big, ugly brute, and bring it back undamaged, I may as well give up—Hallo!" he exclaimed as he ran to the top of the stairs, and stood, listening. "There's some one coming in at the side door below."

"It's only Keeling or Dodson, or Miss Minturn," said the professor uninterestedly. "It's just about their time."

The three persons named were the clerks and stenographer who made up the office force of the Parker Museum, and who were supposed to report for duty at half-past nine.

"They're making more noise than usual," commented Raymond.

"Want me to know they are here on time," returned Professor Noyes, with a shrug of the shoulders. "But never mind about them. Come down to my office and let's try to think what to do. I can't imagine that the dinosaur is far away, and we must get it back before Mr. Parker finds out that it is gone."

Professor Noyes stood in wholesome awe of the big magnate, who was accustomed to rule everybody in his employ, from general manager to errand boy, with a strong and rather rough hand.

It was at this moment that a stentorian voice from below roared: "Professor Noyes! Professor! Where are you?"

The professor, who had gone down a few stairs, clutched the banisters and looked at Raymond Mills with a gray-white face.

"It's Mr. Parker!" he groaned. "What brings him here at this time in the morning?"

"Professor! Mills! Raymond! Mr. Noyes! Where is everybody?" bellowed the angry voice, which was indubitably that of Orton Parker.

They could hear him stamping along the marble-floored hallway, and then his footfalls sounded heavily on the stairs.

"Better not let him come up yet," whispered Raymond. "Let's go down and head him off."

But Orton Parker was not to be headed off. He was not that kind of man. If he had been, probably he would not have possessed a hundred million dollars and been at the head of the great steel manufacturing plant, with its thousands of employees, which was the backbone of Millburytown prosperity.

He came steadily on, puffing and growling all the way, until his red face, snapping blue eyes and white beard showed around the corner from the second-story landing, then he began to mount the flight of stairs at the head of which stood Professor Noyes and Raymond Mills.

"What's broken loose here?" shouted Mr. Parker, as he caught sight of them.

"Broken loose?"

The professor's tone was apologetic, and involuntarily his glance turned toward the open doorway of the prehistoric room.

"I mean, what's the matter?" went on Orton Parker. "I got a telephone message an hour ago to hurry down to the museum, and I should hear something that would surprise me. I asked whether it would be a pleasant surprise, and the answer was 'No.' Then I heard a chuckle, and the party rang off."

"Who was it?" queried Raymond.

"How do I know?" was the testy rejoinder. "It was a man's voice, and it didn't sound like one I'd ever heard before. Still, you can't always tell over the phone, and—"

Orton Parker had been laboring up the stairs as he talked. Now, as he reached the top, he was opposite the open door of the prehistoric room.

One glance told him that the dinosaur was not there. Raymond and the professor instinctively drew back to let the excited steel king rush in and jump madly upon the platform where his gigantic pet should have been.

For a few seconds Orton Parker was speechless with astonishment and rage. Then he turned slowly to the two museum officials with a vacant expression, and, in low, trembling tones, like those of a man speaking in his sleep, asked:

"Where is it?"

"I—er—don't exactly know," answered the professor.

This seemed to bring the magnate back to himself, for it was in a fierce voice that he rejoined:

"Don't know? Do you mean to tell me that you've allowed it to be removed from this room and can't tell me where it is? Why, this is unbelievable. Is it in the laboratory?"

"No."

"But—confound it! It must be somewhere in the building. What sort of child's play is this?" he howled. "Do you suppose I will stand anything of this kind? Surprise, eh? Well, I won't be the only person surprised if you don't show me that dinosaur in five minutes. Mills, you are in charge of it. You must know where it is. You've *got* to know. Go on. Show me the place. Show me!"

Raymond Mills, hardly knowing what he was doing, went down the stairs, with the millionaire at his heels.

CHAPTER II.

FOUR LETTERS.

DIFFICULT, indeed, was it for Raymond to convince Orton Parker that the dinosaur had actually gone from the museum. The hard-headed steel manufacturer, accustomed to deal with solid facts and clear business propositions, declared that he couldn't and wouldn't accept such a preposterous story.

"Why," he snorted disdainfully, "you might as well tell me that two and two don't make four."

As Mr. Parker had rather more respect for the multiplication table than for the Decalogue, this would have been unanswerable but for the empty platform up-stairs.

Even that evidence puzzled, rather than

convinced, him. The dinosaur was of unwieldy length and height, and, with its ponderous iron framework, weighed not less than a ton and a half. To put it in place in the exhibition room had occupied two men, under the supervision of Professor Noyes, more than a month.

Yet Orton Parker was asked to believe that the huge mass of bones and iron, which could not be pried loose without sledge-hammers and crowbars, had been carried away, secretly and noiselessly, in one night.

"It doesn't seem to be here, but's got to be found," he said at last, after going carefully over the whole building and satisfying himself that not even a fragment of the dinosaur was to be seen. "It's up to you, professor. You are responsible for the safety of the collection, and it is to you that the board of directors will look for the restoration of this specimen."

Professor Noyes bowed his head in silence, but Raymond Mills broke in, impetuously:

"Mr. Parker, it isn't fair to blame the professor. He depended on me to take care of the prehistoric room. The head of a big institution like the Parker Museum can't watch every detail. I lost the dinosaur, and I'm going to find it."

The steel magnate scowled. He wasn't used to being corrected by any one.

"Oh, you are?" he grunted. "Well, hurry up and find it, before I go to the police. In the meantime, let me tell you that I'm the best judge of whom to blame in this matter. When I need your advice I'll ask for it. Professor, I'll call a meeting of the board of directors to-morrow afternoon if you don't get the dinosaur back to-day."

Orton Parker stalked out by a side exit just as the big doors of the main entrance were thrown open for the admission of the public. It was ten o'clock.

Raymond Mills had shut and locked up the room in which the dinosaur should have been, fastening to the door one of those terse announcements common in all museums, and which always provoke resentment — "Closed."

He was familiar with the psychology of museum visitors, and he knew that if the strange loss were to become generally known, the people would want to crowd into this room all at once. The empty platform would have more interest for them than all the rest of the costly contents of the museum put together.

It was nearly noon, as Raymond Mills, after going about the city for two hours, in the vain hope of hearing something which would give him a clue, sat, dispirited, in his office, adjoining the professor's, and tried to lay out a plan of action.

He had questioned every one about the building, from Baglin, the janitor, to Thompson, the taxidermist and chemist in the laboratory, but no one could help him in the least. Baglin slept ouside, and Thompson, with his two assistants, had left the laboratory at half-past five the previous evening, without looking into the museum proper at all.

"It's a nightmare. That's what it is," decided Raymond. "But I've got to shake it off. I wish the professor would wake up. He seems to be actually paralyzed."

The young man glanced through the half-open doorway, just in time to see Professor Noyes get up from his chair with a jerk, and bow to a richly-dressed young lady who had swept in from the general office.

Raymond instinctively felt his necktie and collar, smoothed his hair with his hand and glanced down at his shoes to make sure they were presentable. He was twenty-seven, and the young lady was remarkably pretty. Moreover, she was not a stranger to him.

"Miss Parker," murmured the professor, as he placed her a chair.

"I won't sit down, Professor Noyes, thank you. I want to see Mr. Mills, if I may."

Raymond Mills was in the professor's room like a flash, and as the girl offered him her perfectly-gloved hand and smiled into his face, his heart gave a great throb and a weight seemed to be lifted from it.

For Alice Parker, daughter of Orton Parker, "liked" Raymond, and the personal and particular reasons the young man had for desiring to stand well with Orton Parker were connected with this very handsome and dashing young woman.

He had half-feared that when she heard her father's version of the loss of the dinosaur, she would regard him as untrustworthy and, in his own words, "no good." But evidently she still believed in him.

She and Raymond were not lovers, but they had been tending that way, and the young man had secretly resolved to make an avowal very soon, and, if her response warranted it, go to her father and tell him all about it.

"He may knock me down with a chunk

of pig-iron," had been Raymond's reflection. "But I'll make him listen first."

Now this trouble over the dinosaur seemed likely to destroy even the slight chance he might have had with the choleric millionaire.

"My father has told me about the dini—dino—what's it's name," said Alice, when Raymond had led her into his own office and persuaded her to sit down. "I telephoned him at the steel mill to ask what was the matter at the museum. He said the —you know—was stolen, and that it was your fault."

"Yes?"

"His voice sounded dreadfully angry."

"He *is* angry," observed Raymond, feelingly. "But how did *you* know there was anything wrong here?"

"I was with him when a telephone message came, early this morning, saying there was a surprise for him at the museum. He ordered his motor-car at once, and said he would come here first, and then go to his office at the mill. I came here now to see whether I could not be of some assistance to you."

"You are of assistance to me. Your presence puts life and resolve into my being. To think that you would take all this trouble on my account. Why, I—"

"Yes, yes, I know. Men always think they must talk that way to girls," interrupted Miss Parker. "But listen to me. This is business."

Standing there, by the large window, silhouetted in the golden sunshine, Alice Parker looked to Raymond more like a fairy—the gossamer incarnation of midsummer—than a sober young woman, prepared to talk about business. Her light, fluffy frock, her loosely-clustered dark hair, her flower-bedecked hat, and her slim, youthful figure, were all the antithesis of anything so sordid and prosaic as business, and, since Raymond Mills was in love with her, naturally every attractive feature was intensified to him again and again.

"What is the business?" he asked mechanically, at last.

"Just this," came in clear and decided, but low, accents, "I think I can tell you how to find this—this—"

"Dinosaur?" he almost shrieked. "Good Lord! Miss Parker, if you can do that, why—"

"Yes, I know. But listen to me. I—shut that door first."

Raymond rushed to close the door communicating with Professor Noyes's room, and came back to her eagerly.

"Go on, please!" he urged.

"That—er—skeleton *has* been taken away, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes, of course. There's no mistake about that."

"It's that enormous sprawling creature that used to live around swamps four or five million years ago—the one my father had brought from Wyoming in the spring?"

"Yes, that's the one. You've been here to see it several times," answered Raymond, in an agony of impatience.

"I wanted to be certain it *was* that great big bumpy skeleton," she continued with maddening deliberation. "Because, if it were not, there would be nothing in what I am going to say."

"What *are* you going to say?"

He was struggling desperately to be calm.

Miss Parker did not want to cause Raymond Mills pain. In fact, she had taken considerable trouble and risked her mother's disapproval by coming to the museum this morning while out ostensibly on a shopping expedition. But she could not deny herself the pleasure of enhancing the value of her information by holding it back for a few moments.

Besides, she liked to see Raymond frown as he did now. She thought him particularly handsome when his temper was ready to give way with a bang. She had confessed that to herself more than once. Alice Parker had no other confidant so far as this favored young man was concerned.

"Won't you tell me what it is that will help me to find the dinosaur?" he pleaded. "It means so much to me."

"Yes, of course it does," she answered. "You'll forgive me, though, won't you?"

"More delay," thought Raymond.

But when she asked him so prettily to forgive her, what could he do but tell her he had nothing to forgive? All he had to say was that he was deeply grateful to her for coming.

"Yes, but I must tell you why I came. This morning, early, when it was just getting light, I could not sleep, for some reason or other, and I went and sat by my window, looking at the red streaks in the sky slowly becoming wider and mingling with the yellow, and thinking what a pity it was that I did not always see the sun rise in summer,

"Yes, and then—?"

"I heard a great rumbling down the avenue, as if some very heavy wagons were coming."

"Yes, yes?"

"You know, we live on what used to be the old pike to Windsor City, and although we call it South View Avenue now, there is still a great deal of traffic there, even all night."

"Yes?"

"I sat there watching, as it gradually grew lighter. Then all at once, I saw, under the trees that arch the avenue, what looked like a house being moved along the road, it was so big. But I soon made it out to be one of those very long trucks they carry scenery on. You've seen them, haven't you?"

Raymond nodded, and she continued:

"There were four horses, and on the truck was something very high and lumpy, and about as long as the main hall of this museum—at least, it seemed so to me. It was covered with an immense canvas, fastened down at the sides and ends. I had not heard then about the—"

"Of course it was the dinosaur!" fairly shouted Raymond, as he jumped from his chair and paced up and down the office. "It was a scene-truck, and going toward Windsor City? I wonder—"

"It was painted red, and I made out, on the narrow side of the flat wooden bottom, just above the wheels, in black paint, the letters 'I. A. M. S.'"

"'I. A. M. S.,' did you say? Well, that's a coincidence. Look at this."

He took from his desk a small pad of paper passes, such as are carried by theatrical and circus managers, and showed that they also bore the letters "I. A. M. S.", and further, that the initials stood for "Imperial Amalgamated Marvin Shows."

"I found this pad this morning in the room where the dinosaur stood up to last night. It was under the brass railing which had been torn away from the platform," said Raymond. "Let me see," he went on, looking at his watch. "Windsor City is about forty miles from Millburytown."

CHAPTER III.

IN THE DARK TENT.

WHEN Raymond Mills dropped off the train in Windsor City, at three o'clock that afternoon, the "Imperial Amalgamated Marvin Shows" were in the midst of their matinée entertainment.

Raymond saw the wide-flung spread of white canvas, which, with its many fluttering flags, showed up bravely in the sunshine, while the bray of the brass band in the main tent, or "big top," where the circus performance was going on, told him, in fitful gusts, that horses were racing around the ring, with men and women turning somersaults, vaulting over banners, or leaping through hoops, from their backs.

The Collins Hotel, toward which Mills made his way, was only a block from the railroad station, while the circus lot lay a quarter of a mile to the left, near the track. Nearly half the population of Windsor City was at the circus, and the other half, now at work, intended to go at night.

The two coal mines and the steel works, which employed most of the available labor of the district, were short-handed, as they always were when there was a circus in town.

"I see you're from Millburytown," remarked John Collins, the lean, grizzled landlord of the Collins Hotel, as he swung the big book around to look at the page on which the young man had registered. "Did the Marvin Circus show there?"

"No."

"It must have come right through from Braysville, then. Joe Marvin was in Millburytown yesterday. Said he was around town most of the day. Well, he has some good men working for him, an' he don't have to stay with the show every minute. Know Marvin, Mr. Mills?"

"I've heard of him."

"Smart man! Knows all about the circus business and a lot of things besides. He's got a museum tent—with mummies an' fossils an' stuffed critters in it—that beats anything I ever seen. You ought to see it."

"I will," answered Raymond briefly.

"You want a room, I s'pose?"

"Yes. I'd like to go to it now."

"Ah, yes; to wash up. A feller does get grimy in the cars, even comin' from Millburytown. I'll put you in number seven. The boy'll show yer an' carry yer grip. It's on the second floor, right across from Mr. Marvin's. He always sleeps an' eats with me when he comes to Windsor City. He says it feels good to get into a real bed once in a while, instead o' bein' cooped up in a bunk in his private car, an' he never eats in the cook-tent if he can get out of it."

Once in his bedroom, Raymond Mills set himself to think out a definite plan.

That the dinosaur had been stolen from the Parker Museum by Marvin and some of his employees he did not doubt. There was a perfect chain of evidence: The pad of passes which no one but the manager would be likely to carry, and which Marvin must have dropped by accident in the museum; his admission to Collins, the hotel landlord, that he spent most of yesterday in Millburytown, and, finally, the actual carrying away of the skeleton on an "I. A. M. S." truck, as seen by Miss Parker from her window. What more proof could he require?

The four horses could have had no trouble in covering the forty miles from Millburytown to Windsor City long before this time, and unquestionably the big scene-truck was in the circus lot at that very moment.

Raymond had hastily packed a suit-case and taken a train to Windsor City after hearing Alice Parker's story, but without any clear idea of what he would do except that he meant to get back the dinosaur.

"Poor Professor Noyes!" he said, half aloud. "He certainly is down in the mouth. Well, no wonder; I am, too. Or I was till that dear little girl gave me this lucky tip. One thing is sure, I'm going to make Mr. Marvin tell me how he managed to get that sixty-five foot skeleton out of the museum without taking it to pieces—either the museum or the skeleton."

He strolled to the window and looked out on the large open space known as Market Square, as he continued his musing:

"Even when they got it down the two flights—which until now I should have said was an impossibility—how did they negotiate the corner at the foot of the staircase, so as to get to the side door? They couldn't have gone out by the main entrance, facing the stairs, for the door was chained and bolted inside, as well as locked. Besides, we found marks of muddy boots at the side door, but none near the front."

Mills bent forward suddenly to look with more intentness through the window.

"Hallo! There's a prosperous-looking man. By Jove! I remember seeing him in the museum yesterday."

A tall, broad-shouldered, black-mustached individual, of about forty-five, who wore a large diamond in his necktie and another on each hand, and who was crowned with a high hat so shiny that it looked as if it had been greased, was strutting across the square as if he owned the town.

"That's Marvin, for a hundred dollars. I'm glad I've seen him, but I don't want him to notice me just yet."

Raymond Mills was right in his conjecture. It was Joseph Marvin, owner of the "I. A. M. S.", who was coming to the hotel to lounge about till supper-time. There was a half-smile on his rather flabby face, but whether that was his regular expression, or one called forth by his success in stealing the dinosaur, Raymond did not know.

Supper was served at six o'clock, and, as the large, low-ceiled, shadowy dining-room was full, on account of so many people coming into town for the circus, Mr. Marvin did not seem even to see Raymond, although the latter studied the manager closely throughout the meal.

The evening performance in the main tent would not begin until eight o'clock, but Raymond found plenty going on in the sideshows when he arrived at the circus lot before seven. All the old-time attractions were there—the fat lady, the Circassian beauty, the giant, the dwarfs, the dog-faced boy, the three-legged girl, and so on.

Then there was the lovely snake-charmer, with her repulsive pets around her neck, and the man with the iron skull, who submitted smilingly to the breaking of paving-stones on his head with a sledge-hammer. In addition, there was a moving picture show, a sleight-of-hand performer, who was also a juggler, and lemonade and peanut stands.

In front of nearly all of these places was a loud-voiced "barker," vociferously calling to the people to "step inside," and promising them all kinds of entertainment.

What attracted Raymond particularly was a suave gentleman who was introducing two powerfully-built, half-naked Japanese wrestlers and sword-swallowers to "the intelligent and discriminating American public," as he put it. The wrestlers were not very tall, but their broad shoulders, muscular limbs and square jaws suggested enormous strength and activity.

As an inducement to the people to pay ten cents apiece to enter the tent, the two athletes gave a brief free exhibition on the outside platform. As they pulled and hauled each other about, their muscles could be seen gliding about under the brown skin like loose ropes, tightening with a snap

at intervals when the men fell into a "lock" and put forth all their mighty strength in a supreme effort.

"As strong as bulls and active as cats," was Raymond's verdict as he moved away.

It is not to be supposed that Mills was sauntering about, staring at the front of sideshows, merely for the fun of it. He was looking for the museum tent, and also for the big scene-truck, with the dinosaur upon it. So far, he had not come across either of them, although he believed he had made a complete circuit of the grounds.

He had gained an inside view of the "big top," where men, women and children were pouring in, after a more or less tempestuous visit to the red-and-gold ticket wagon; had paid his way into the menagerie, where the cages of wild animals were neatly ranged in a circle, so that he could see at a glance there was no dinosaur there; had gazed at the gorgeous band-caravan and three other ordinary-sized wagons, all bearing the cabalistic letters, "I. A. M. S.", and had inspected the rows of horses, in care of half a dozen hostlers, waiting to go into the ring at the cue, or to haul the animal cages to the railroad as soon as the circus performance should begin.

Then he saw something that he wondered he had not noticed before.

"What's that tent over there in the dark?" he asked one of the hostlers.

"The cook tent," was the short reply.

"What made him lie?" muttered Raymond.

The cook tent, where the clattering of tin cups and plates mingled with the gruff voices of canvasmen taking it down, was at Raymond's left, but the silent and dark tent about which he had asked the surly horse-tender, and which he was convinced was the museum tent Collins had told him about, was on his right, some little distance away.

"I'm going to look at that tent as soon as the show begins," he decided.

He had not long to wait. Circus patrons demand promptitude, and at exactly eight o'clock the "grand entry" took place, with much blaring of brass, thumping of drums and crashing of cymbals. Simultaneously the side-show tents began to come down, and as the walls of the menagerie were removed, horses were backed up to them to take them to the railroad siding, where the flat trucks, baggage-cars and "sleepers" belonging to the "Imperial Amalgamated Marvin Shows" were ready to start as soon as the circus performance should be over and the paraphernalia of the "big top" loaded on.

All the roustabouts were busy, and Raymond saw that no one was watching the dark tent where he believed the dinosaur was hidden. Swiftly he glided over and listened. No sound came from within, and in the black darkness he began to grope along the canvas for some way of entering.

He began to think of taking a chance and striking a match, when suddenly he came to a place where a large flap of cloth almost filled an opening in the canvas wall not more than three feet wide. The flap was tightly fastened by ropes, but Raymond was not to be beaten by a few cords, and being a well-built young fellow, in fair athletic training, he forced his way in by main strength.

The first thing he observed when he got inside was a lighted lantern hanging to the center-pole. Then, by its dim rays, he made out a mountainous shape, which he hastily estimated to be about seventy feet long, and the sight of which sent a thrill of joyful excitement through him that made his very fingers tingle.

The dinosaur!

Yes, it was something covered by an immense cloth and resting on a long vehicle such as Alice Parker had described—a scene-truck.

"I'm going to lift that cover somewhere and make sure it is there," he muttered. "Then I'll get help and take care it doesn't go out of Windsor City till I go with it. My! This is luck!"

Stealthily he crept across the intervening space, his eyes fixed on the outline of the canvas-shrouded monster on the scene-truck.

"I didn't think it would be so easy," he said to himself.

He stretched out one hand to clutch a corner of the canvas, when—two sinewy, naked arms were flung around his neck, and he was on his back on the muddy ground, with an awful weight on his chest that seemed to be stopping not only his breath, but his very heart-beats as well.

CHAPTER IV.

THEW AND SINEW.

RAYMOND MILLS knew his assailant was one of the Japanese wrestlers he had seen

outside of the side-show even before a few guttural words in a menacing tone were breathed in his ear. The bare arms, the wiry hair scratching his forehead, and the enormous power which forced him back helpless for the moment, could belong only to that square-built man of Nippon whose strength and agility he had admired such a short time before. The two wrestlers were fused into one personality in Raymond's mind.

"You thief!"

Out of the confusion of fierce Japanese expletives came these two English words with a most insulting intonation. They stung Raymond into superhuman strength, and, grasping the shoulders of his foe, he forced him to break his hold.

As Mills slipped away and gained his feet, the brown man, with an oath in his native tongue which outdid in virulence all the others he had uttered, crouched for an instant, arms outstretched and fingers bent like the claws of an angry tiger, then hurled himself forward bodily, as if he would crush his enemy by sheer weight.

Raymond Mills, American though he was, had seen enough of Japanese wrestling to know what to expect, and he kept his own hands ready to repel the lightning onslaught which came at last without warning. He met the rush in the approved Yokohama style, with his hands pressed against those of his antagonist.

Having braced his feet firmly on the soft ground, he not only did not fall before the attack, but, returning push for push, compelled his opponent to give way slightly.

At this point the latter seemed to abandon all idea of wrestling in the comparatively harmless manner of his own country, and, ducking in a way that would have been pronounced "foul" by any white referee, he smashed his bullet head into Raymond's face, and again tried to get his arms around the young man's neck.

But Raymond was too wary. Eluding the attempted embrace, he secured a Græco-Roman grip on the slippery Asiatic, and almost succeeded in putting him down. The Japanese managed to save himself, however, and, as he broke away, ran to the opening in the tent wall and called out, in a shrill tone, but not so loudly as to disturb the performers or audience in the circus, the names or nicknames of several of the hostlers and canvasmen: "Bill! Martin! Tommy! Shorty! Gash! Murph!"

There was immediate response. Half a dozen horse-tenders, tentmen, and side-show employees came running toward them, just in time to hurl themselves upon Raymond as he came plunging out of the museum tent, with the Japanese endeavoring to hold him back.

"What's the trouble, Yaka?" queried one of the men, as he kept a watchful eye on Raymond.

"He thief! Came into museum tent. I stop him stealing," replied the Jap.

"Will you let me explain?" broke in Raymond.

"Naw! Explain nothin'! I seen you sneakin' about the lot all evenin'," volunteered the surly hostler who had lied to Raymond about the tent some time before.

The fellow thrust his face in grinning derision so close to that of Mills as to give him the full—and foul—benefit of his tobacco-laden breath, and, for his insolence, was promptly knocked down with what writers on pugilism call "a snappy left hook."

Raymond Mills was an impulsive gentleman, not inclined to weigh consequences when he considered that he had been insulted or imposed on. If he had been less hot-blooded, he might have hesitated to strike one of a gang of rough men who would be sure to take the part of the floored one, and most of whom, as he had observed, were armed with stout clubs, about two feet long, known as "tent-pins" or "toe-stakes."

In the old, rough circus days, when the battle-cry, "Hey, Rube!" accompanied many a desperate fight between the show attaches and the men of the town, the "toe-stake" played a murderous part, for it was heavy enough to fracture a fairly hard skull when heartily applied. General engagements of that description seldom occur now, but when there does happen to be a collision between circus men and an outsider, the former are pretty sure to fly to their familiar weapon.

So it was that these canvasmen and hostlers nearly all flourished "toe-stakes," and were only too eager to use them, even though there was but one man opposed to a dozen.

The hostler on the ground, as soon as he could gather his scattered wits, reached for the club which he had dropped when knocked down, and getting up, aimed a vicious blow at Raymond's head. But it did not land. Mills sprang aside, and at the same time

wrenched the "pin" from the frenzied man's grasp.

"Down with him!" yelled some one, and as the crowd advanced in a solid mass, Raymond Mills felt the lust of battle rising in his soul. He uttered a nervous laugh as he swung his "tent-pin" around his head and "sailed in."

The odds against him were practically invincible, but he cared nothing for that. All he wanted was a fight, and it must be confessed that the circus men were quite willing to let him have a good one.

There is a technique in the use of a club as a weapon, and this covers defense as well as attack. Indeed, the former is perhaps of more importance than the latter, especially where there are many against one.

The combatant cannot afford to rush in at random, giving all his attention to knocking the other fellow on the head. He must, at the same time, protect his own skull. Thus, a good swordsman, with a strong guard, has an inestimable advantage in such a contest.

Fortunately for Raymond Mills, he was fairly skilful with the foils. He could parry and thrust with lightning rapidity, and it was rarely that his opponent's button ever touched him in the fencing academy he frequented in Millburytown.

It is true, he had to strike instead of lunge, now that he was battling with a club instead of a foil, but all the other tactics of the fence could be employed effectively, and he was quick to appreciate that fact. So well did he defend himself that, for a few minutes, he did not receive a blow of any consequence, although one glancing stroke sent his straw hat spinning far away into the darkness.

He might have been able to fight his way out eventually—for he knew he must get help before he could hope even to see the dinosaur—had it not been for Yaka. The wily Japanese had slipped into the tent when he saw Raymond place his back to it, and just as it seemed as if the young man were about to escape from the rain of blows he was meeting so valiantly a knife slit the canvas behind him and his hands were pinned to his sides by the muscular arms of the wrestler.

"Now!" croaked Yaka. "I hold him. Hit him hard!"

But the spirit of fair play which, in the white man, a hard fight brings out as quickly as anything, made the attacking party stop when they saw their man was helpless.

All except the surly hostler, who, in recognition of his remarkably large mouth, was generally called "Gash."

"What's the matter with you dubs?" he snarled.

Snatching the "toe-stake" from Raymond, he was about to bring it down with a crash upon the head of the powerless but undaunted prisoner, when a girl's voice rang out loud and clear behind the excited circus men:

"Stop!"

"Who's that?" growled "Gash," as he looked around. Then he added: "It's none of *her* durned business. Ain't that right, boys?"

"Don't hit him!" cried the girl, running to get between the infuriated hostler and his intended victim. "It will be the worse for you if you do."

Raymond Mills looked gratefully toward this unexpected friend, and, as the long cloak she wore flew open, he saw that, underneath the cloak, her dress consisted of the short white gauzy skirts, pink tights, and white slippers of a circus rider.

That was all he did see just then, for "Gash," afraid that he might be deprived of his revenge on the man who had knocked him down and made him ridiculous in the eyes of his associates, dealt him a terrific blow with the "toe-stake," and stretched him senseless on the ground.

CHAPTER V.

A STRETCHING TRAIL.

"WHERE am I?" were the first words spoken by Raymond Mills when he came to himself. Then he added, with a feeble smile: "That sounds like the heroine of a melodrama when she comes out of a faint and finds herself in the power of the villain, doesn't it, professor?"

Yes, the professor was there. He was sitting by the side of the bed on which Raymond lay, and which that bruised and sore young man perceived, as he looked around, was in the room on the second floor of the Collins Hotel which his landlord had said was a good room, and was right across from that of Joe Marvin, proprietor of the "I. A. M. S."

As Raymond began to speak, the professor bent over the bed with a startled but

relieved expression on his face. Then he smiled and, taking the hand that happened to be nearest to him lying on the counterpane, he pressed two cool fingers upon the hot wrist.

"Going a little fast," he murmured. "But that will come down. Mr. Mills, I can't tell you how pleased I am to see you are better."

Professor Noyes spoke in measured tones, as he always did; but there was a quiver in them that betrayed strong emotion, and Raymond Mills, who knew him pretty well, understood that.

"How long have I been lying here?" he asked.

The professor looked at his watch and calculated deliberately before he answered.

"Six hours and seventeen minutes."

"What? Have I been unconscious all that time? It's a wonder I ever came to my senses at all."

"You have been asleep. Of course, that's unconsciousness in a way, but not the kind you mean. It was a question in my mind whether you would wake up clear-headed, but evidently you are quite yourself mentally, and there was no concussion, after all."

Raymond Mills moved impatiently, and groaned as a sharp pain shot through his shoulder and seemed to travel up the back of his neck to the crown of his head.

"Ah! You must not stir too suddenly," the professor warned him. "Those contusions will be painful for several days. You see, the hammering you got at the circus was rather severe, and if it hadn't been for that young lady who interfered it might have been worse."

"I remember something about her. One of the performers, wasn't she? Nice-looking girl, I thought."

"A very beautiful young lady," said the professor so enthusiastically that Raymond looked at him quickly. "Somebody knocked you down with a violent blow on the head, but she stopped any more of it, and just then the manager, attracted by the disturbance, came up and wanted to know what it was all about."

"You mean Marvin?"

"Yes, that's his name, as I learned afterward. He had you carried into the men's dressing-tent, and they brought you partly to your senses. Circus people are used to tumbling about and being knocked unconscious, and they know how to deal with ordinary cases of that kind as well as a regular surgeon."

"But—how do you come to be here?" queried Raymond, who had been wanting to put that question from the first.

"That's told in a few words," answered the professor. "After you had gone from the museum yesterday, Mr. Parker came back and talked so unpleasantly about the loss of the dinosaur that I felt I had no alternative but to accompany you in running down the thief. Mr. Parker agreed with me. He said he'd spend most of his time at the museum in my absence, and, with Keeling and Dodson to help him and the well organized force of attendants we have, he believed he could keep things straight."

"Did he find out who telephoned him that he would be surprised if he went to the museum?"

"Yes."

Again Raymond started up in bed, and for the second time he groaned as his bruised shoulder twinged. He was so curious to hear more, however, that he hardly minded the pain.

"Who was the man?"

"Mr. Blake, the big coal-mine owner and coke man. He told some one at his club—who repeated it to Mr. Parker—that he was going home in his motor-car late on the night the dinosaur was stolen. In fact, it was two in the morning. He had been playing cards at the club. As he passed the museum grounds he noticed a light twinkling among the trees. When he turned the corner, so that he had a side view of the building, he saw a door wide open, a light inside, and a man standing at the bottom of the staircase. Then the door closed."

"Didn't he investigate?"

"No. He said it was none of his business. Between ourselves, Mr. Mills, it is whispered that Mr. Blake drinks a great deal, and perhaps he wasn't in a fit state to do anything."

"Everybody knows about Adam Blake," said Raymond. "It must have been Marvin's men at work. I guess Blake was too drunk at the time to realize that there might be something crooked going on, but when he woke up it occurred to him, and that was when he telephoned."

Professor Noyes nodded, and then explained that when the circus people partly revived Raymond in the dressing-tent, the manager, Marvin, remembered to have seen

him at the Collins Hotel, coming down the stairs, and surmised that he had a room there.

"Mademoiselle Lulu heard him say this," continued the professor, "and she ran all the way to the hotel to tell Mr. Collins to send a hack for you. I was in the office when she came in, and introduced myself to the young lady, whom I found most charming."

"Evidently," was Raymond's dry response. "Mademoiselle Lulu is her name, then?"

"That's her professional designation. Her real name is Lucy Jessup, and her mother —she hasn't any father—teaches music in Philadelphia. Miss Jessup sends half of her salary home every week."

"She seems to have been rather confidential with you, professor."

"Well, she rode back to the circus in the hack with me, because she had to go into the ring again, and we talked all the way. After the performance, when you were asleep here, she came to see how you were, and stayed until it was time for her to get on the train. The Marvin shows are going straight through to Omaha. After that they will be in Cheyenne for a day, and then will travel through Wyoming, on their way to the Northwest, working down the Pacific coast to San Francisco."

Professor Noyes related all this with much glibness, suggesting that he had paid close attention to everything the "charming" young lady had said, so that he was able to give the route of Mr. Marvin's "Amalgamated Shows" with absolute accuracy.

"I'm glad you found out all this," said Raymond thoughtfully, "because we must follow Marvin and the dinosaur until we get back our property, if it leads us around the world."

"I agree with you," declared the professor emphatically.

"Yes. It will be a longer journey than I expected, but that confounded Japanese is to blame for it. Did you try to find out what Mademoiselle Lulu knows about the dinosaur?"

"Yes, indirectly. I asked whether there had been any new features added to the Marvin shows lately, and she said Mr. Marvin had something in the museum-tent that no one knew anything about except himself, Major Butler—who is the general director and ring-master — and 'Doc' Sloane, as she called him, who lectures in the museum and looks after the Japanese wrestlers. All she knew about the mysterious 'feature' was that it was very large, and had been brought to Windsor City on a wagon, carefully covered up. She said everybody connected with the shows was forbidden to go near it."

"That proves it is the dinosaur," almost shouted Raymond, half rising and suffering another agonizing twinge. "And here I am, flat on my back, while it is rushing away to Omaha. Professor, I *must* get up!"

He slowly dragged himself to a sitting posture, but the deathly paleness of his face and the fact that his teeth clenched so tightly on his lower lip, as almost to draw blood, testified to the awful pain the exertion caused him; and when the professor gently put an arm around him and told him he must lie down again he yielded in silence, convinced that—for the present, at least—he could not follow the trail which he had hoped would end in success when he forced his way into the dark tent on the Marvin circus lot.

"How long am I to lie here?" he growled disgustedly.

Professor Noyes regarded him with a reflective eye for more than a minute.

"Three days will be enough," was his verdict finally. "This is Wednesday. We will start for Wyoming on Saturday. You will have about two days' more rest on the train, in a Pullman sleeping-car, and by the time we catch the circus you ought to be as well as ever."

Raymond did not enjoy the prospect of being a prisoner in this cheerless bedroom in the Collins Hotel for three days, but there was nothing else for it, and, anyhow, the practical certainty of recovering the dinosaur when they did reach the Marvin shows in Wyoming, or wherever they might be, was a consoling thought that would help him to bear the miserable delay. How much worse it would have been if he had not known where the dinosaur was!

Then he ought to be glad that the blow on the head with the "toe-stake" had not caused concussion of the brain. As the professor had just told him, it had been an even chance whether he would wake up delirious or in his right mind. Yes, Raymond was obliged to confess that he had considerable to be thankful for.

"By the way, Mr. Mills," said Professor Noyes suddenly, as, unwilling to leave his patient alone, he was about to lie down

by Raymond's side on the bed for an hour or two of sleep, "I forgot something."

"Did you? What is it?" asked Raymond drowsily.

"A message for you from Miss Parker."

"What?" fairly yelled Raymond. "From Miss Parker?"

He was wide awake in an instant, and he didn't care how much his shoulder hurt as he turned eagerly to look at the professor.

"Yes," answered the professor in his usual deliberate manner. "She told me to say—"

"Yes, yes! What did she say?"

"Why, she said—she told me to tell you —that—that—"

"Oh, yes. Tell me, won't you?" pleaded Raymond piteously.

"It wasn't very much, only—"

"Yes?"

"Only that she would like to see you as soon as you get back to Millburytown—"

"Yes? Did she? Wants to see me? Me—me? Sure you're not mistaken, professor?" blurted out Raymond, hardly able to articulate in his delight.

"With the dinosaur," added the professor, quietly finishing his sentence, without heeding Raymond's rhapsodies.

Raymond Mills's jaw dropped in dismay. He had not anticipated this ending to the message. Then, as his teeth closed with a snap, he said, deep in his throat:

"She's right. I've got to bring the dinosaur with me."

CHAPTER VI.

RUN DOWN AT RAWLINS.

It took Raymond Mills longer to recover from the effects of his battle with the circus men than either he or Professor Noyes had thought it would. He had taken desperately hard knocks many, many times in the course of the mêlée that he had not noticed at the time, but which insisted on their toll in sore tissues, aching joints, and stiffened muscles long after the young man expected to have forgotten them.

It was more than a week later, therefore, when Raymond Mills and Professor Noyes found themselves rushing through Wyoming, on the Union Pacific Railroad, to catch up with the "Imperial Amalgamated Marvin Shows." The shows had already appeared at Cheyenne and Medicine Bow, and were booked to give an afternoon and evening performance at Rawlins, on the edge of the rough cow country, on this particular day.

"I'm glad we shall get into Rawlins early in the day," remarked Raymond as he glanced out of the dressing-room window of the Pullman at the rapidly shifting scenery.

"Yes, I hope we shall have proved our claim to the dinosaur and have it in our possession before the afternoon," answered the professor. "We shan't have to employ the police, shall we?"

"That depends on Marvin. He may try to bluff it out. If he is foolish enough to do that, we shall have to meet his bluff with a detective or two, and perhaps a court hearing. But I don't think Marvin will force us to that. He's too shrewd a man not to know when he's licked."

A white-jacketed porter sauntered through the car, chanting something unintelligible with evident enjoyment of his own voice.

"Hurry up, professor," urged Raymond. "There's the first call for breakfast. We may as well have it on the train. Then we can buckle right down to business as soon as we get off at Rawlins. I heard the porter say we are an hour late, but we'll be in soon after nine, even at that."

Raymond Mills's prediction was correct, for it was only five minutes past nine when he and the professor, both fortified by a good breakfast, stood on the platform at Rawlins Station, grips in hand, and inhaled the sweet, unsullied breath of the early day that swept down from the Yellowstone through the foothills of the Rockies.

The "I. A. M. S." train was on a siding a few hundred yards away, and the process of unloading was going on with the saturnine celerity which characterizes all manual labor done in connection with a circus.

"There's the dinosaur!" cried Raymond excitedly.

He was looking at three flat-cars, obviously part of the Marvin shows train, although detached from it, which stood on a separate spur of track. On the middle car was the red scene-truck, with its enormous canvas-covered burden overlapping the other cars at either end.

"Where is it?" asked the professor. "Do you mean under that big canvas over there? Is that the red wagon Miss Parker saw passing her home that morning?"

"Yes; and it's the one that was in the tent in Windsor City the night I bumped into that fight. We'll check our grips and

then get over to it. You don't mind a short trot along the railroad track, do you?"

"I'd climb to the top of Pike's Peak to get back that dinosaur," was Professor Noyes's emphatic reply.

Their suit-cases were soon safe in the parcel-room, and they were coming out, pocketing their checks, when a burly man, in loud clothes and a high hat, with a black mustache shadowing his red face, and more and larger diamonds scattered about his person than good taste prescribes for a gentleman, came swaggering along the platform.

"Marvin," whispered Raymond.

"Yes, I know him," was the professor's low response. Then, aloud: "Good morning, Mr. Marvin."

The circus proprietor glared at both of them before he growled, truculently:

"What can I do for you?"

Raymond was inclined to answer, "Give us back the dinosaur you have stolen," but he said, instead: "Professor Noyes and I have come to see your performance this afternoon."

"You've traveled a long way just for that," was the gruff rejoinder. "My show has a strong attraction for you."

Then, changing his manner from one of surly disapproval to blustering rage, he bellowed: "Look here! I'm on to you two guys. I had my suspicions when you"—pointing a fat forefinger at Raymond—"were caught snooping about in my museum tent. Since that I've heard enough to know that you're just what I thought you."

"What do you suppose we are?" demanded Raymond, his fingers itching to close up into a hard ball and slam against the insolent showman's chin.

"Who are you?" roared Marvin. "Why, you're spies from the Cooper & Jones show. That's what you are. It didn't take me long to find that out. You are trying to steal ideas from the Marvin shows, because you haven't any of your own. That professor, as he calls himself, has all the ear-marks of a third-class circus-man. You couldn't mistake him for anything else. I'll bet he's a played-out clown. That's what he looks like, anyhow."

The dignified Professor Noyes gasped.

"As for you," went on Marvin to Raymond, "you got what was coming to you that night in Windsor City. If it hadn't been for that girl Lulu, I guess you'd have been done up for keeps."

"All this is nothing at all," broke in Raymond impatiently. "We've come to Rawlins to see what you are hiding on that flat-car over there, and we're going to do it."

"Oh, you are, eh?" sneered Marvin. "It was kind of you to tell me, but I knew that was your game as soon as I saw you."

He broke off suddenly, for just then a man, who had been hurrying down the railroad toward them without being observed till now, stepped upon the platform, breathless.

"Well?" asked Marvin sharply.

"It's all up, Mr. Marvin," answered the newcomer, who was none other than "Doc" Sloane, whom Raymond had last seen lecturing on the Japanese wrestlers in Windsor City. "We've lost him, I'm afraid."

"We haven't lost him, and we won't lose him, Doc," growled the manager. "We had too much trouble to get him to let him go now."

Without another word Marvin jumped from the platform and, with Sloane just behind, ran up the track at a good round pace, heavily built as he was.

"Did you hear that, professor?" exclaimed Raymond. "He confesses he had trouble to get him, and he's afraid he's going to lose him. That means either that he knows who we are—although he pretends to believe we belong to a rival circus—or there is some one else getting the dinosaur away from him. Hurry!"

Glancing over his shoulder to make sure the professor was following, Raymond dashed up the track after Marvin and Sloane. All four reached the flat-cars together.

Marvin plunged in between two of them, and immediately hoisted himself up to the scene-truck, under the canvas.

Raymond Mills had already seized a corner of the canvas, intending to go in too, when Sloane, on one side of him, and Yaka, the Japanese wrestler — who had suddenly appeared from behind the cars—on the other, dragged him roughly back.

"That's private in there, sport," said "Doc" Sloane coolly. "When Mr. Marvin wants you to go in, he'll invite you."

Yaka said nothing, but he kept his eye on Raymond, as if ready to resume hostilities at any moment. If the Japanese had not been giving his exclusive attention to Raymond he might have observed Professor Noyes unostentatiously slipping around the end of the cars, as if to see what there might be on the other side.

The professor was only just out of sight when Marvin, bouncing down from the scene-truck, looked at "Doc" Sloane blankly.

"You're right, Doc," he grunted. "He's gone!"

"What do you mean by 'gone'?" asked Raymond.

"It's none of your business, that I know of," was Marvin's snappish rejoinder. "But I mean just what I say. He's gone—dead."

"Dead?" echoed Raymond. "Why, of course he's dead—been dead for about four million years."

Mr. Marvin advanced a step toward Raymond, so that he could look him straight in the face, as he inquired with sarcastic politeness:

"Say, Mr. Cooper & Jones, are you crazy, or only just pretending, in the hope that you can get the best of me?"

"My name isn't Cooper & Jones," replied Raymond. "As for being crazy, it seems to me that *you* are talking like a maniac."

"I call you Cooper & Jones, because you're from their show. But you're fooled now, for the thing you want to get at is dead, and I'm going to have it boxed up and sent East, to be got ready for my museum. Meanwhile, you'll keep away from my cars and tents, if you know what's good for yourself. Yaka, do you hear that?"

The Japanese inclined his head respectfully.

"And now, will you let me say something?" asked Raymond. "Professor Noyes and I are not attachés of the Cooper & Jones or any other circus. We are representatives of the Parker Museum, of Millburytown, from which was stolen the specimen you have under that canvas."

"Parker Museum, did you say? I never was in the place in my life."

"You were there one day last week. I have proof of it," said Raymond.

For a few moments the circus proprietor looked at him defiantly. Then, as if he remembered, or pretended to remember, he broke out, defiantly:

"Well, if I was? What, then?"

"That was when you took away what you are hiding on that car."

"Bosh! I got that in Braysville. I hauled it by wagon to Windsor City, because the rest of my show had gone ahead by train. Why, man, you're crazier than I thought you were if you say I stole anything from that museum. I don't know what the museum people have lost, but I can swear I haven't got it."

"What a magnificent bluffer he is," was Raymond's unspoken thought, ere he said, aloud: "If you are telling the truth, let me see what's on that scene-truck."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," exploded Marvin. "I don't believe any of your yarn about the Parker Museum. You are a Cooper & Jones man. So is the other fellow with you—that professor—and— Why, where is he? What's become of that old—"

The wrathful manager had suddenly missed Professor Noyes, and he darted around one end of the three flat-cars, while Sloane bolted around the other.

Raymond Mills was a quick-witted young man, and the chance was too good to throw over. As the two circus-men vanished, he dashed over to the middle flat-car and, before the Japanese could get to him, had drawn himself up to the scene-truck, inside the canvas covering.

At last he was in the actual presence of the thing the circus manager had guarded so vigilantly.

(To be continued.)

THE KEY TO THE PAST.

He wrote his memories with eager zest,
  And said: "I have them fast—may live again
  Each joy if I but read!" He read in vain;
The words were but chirography, no more;
Rekindled naught to life. Then he forbore,
  Left his dim chamber, put away despair,
  And sought the open. Lo, through sunlit air
His happy past flew homing to his breast!

Grace H. Boutelle.

When He Tasted the Water.

BY LILLIAN BENNET-THOMPSON.

Selling the Horse-Shoe Farm and What the Mare's Stumble in the Creek Had to Do with the Profit Therein.

"WAIT a minute, Nell; I've got it somewhere. I think I put it in the right pigeon-hole of the desk. Yes, I've found it. Look here."

Lawrence Barton pulled out a packet of papers, selected a yellow, faded letter and turned away from the desk. His wife rested one hand on his arm and looked over his shoulder as he unfolded the sheet and read aloud:

MY DEAR LAWRENCE:

This is to let you know that your Uncle Neil passed away last week. He has left you the Horseshoe Farm. If you want to come down and see the property, Martha and I will be glad to have you stay with us.

The farmhouse on the Horseshoe is small but in good repair, and most of the furniture is pretty fair, too. There is a barn with two stalls, a loft for hay and room for a wagon. I was with Neil when he died; and almost his last words were: "Tell Larry not to sell the Horseshoe Farm; it will be a gold-mine some day."

Let me know whether you mean to come on or not. Your affectionate uncle,

DAVID BARTON.

"That's all," said Lawrence, as he refolded the letter and put it back in its place in the old-fashioned desk. "And we haven't found that gold-mine yet, Nell, although we've been here four years."

"I'm not so sure that we haven't found it after all, dear," Nell replied, with a little laugh. "We've found health—and happiness, Lance; and those are worth two or three mines."

Lawrence smiled down upon her.

"Perhaps they are," he said gently. "And yet, Nell, I can't bear to see you working so hard. Squire Jones has made me a pretty fair offer for the land, and I believe we'd better close with it and go somewhere where it will be a little easier for you and where I can raise something besides stumps and stones. Those are the only crops we'll ever get here."

He sighed a little as he turned away.

A little over four years before, Lawrence Barton, then fresh from college and law school, had received the letter from David Barton, telling him of his Uncle Neil's bequest.

At that time young Barton was engaged to a sweet and charming girl, Eleanor Johns; but there appeared to be little prospect of their being able to marry for some years to come.

A lawyer was not very much in demand in the small country town in which they lived. The Horseshoe Farm offered one solution to the problem. The young man's father had owned a farm; and until he went away to college, Lawrence had helped every year with the plowing, planting, and harvesting. So he was not exactly a novice in the field of agriculture.

If he made up his mind to go to the Horseshoe Farm to live and work the land, he could get married at once; and then, when he had made a little money, he could return to the practise of law. Of course, it meant that all his ambitions must be indefinitely deferred; but he was young and hopeful and very much in love.

When the matter was laid before Eleanor Johns, she promptly elected to give the farm a trial. And the upshot was that a quiet wedding took place in the old stone church, and Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Barton went to live in the quaint little farmhouse on the Horseshoe. All this without even seeing the place.

Yet, after a single season, Barton was reluctantly forced to admit that perhaps they had been too hasty. The land was anything but fertile; and he was obliged to toil early and late to wring the barest living from the unfriendly soil. There was no thought now of saving money.

They were too poor to afford a servant, and Nell was compelled to do all the housework herself. She did not mind it; in fact, she really enjoyed it. But Barton felt

that it was too much for her to do alone. She had not been brought up to it; and he chafed against the poverty that would not permit him to give his wife the little luxuries with which he wanted to surround her.

This was the situation when Squire Jones made his offer to buy the farm. Lawrence was for selling at once; but Nell demurred. Uncle Neil had said it would be a gold-mine some day; and while she did not for a moment misunderstand his figurative language, she felt that they might regret it if they were in too much of a hurry.

"Don't imagine that I'm killing myself with work, Lance," she said. "I'm perfectly well and entirely comfortable; and there's a big question mark in my mind whether we should be as well off if we went away from here and you shut yourself up in a stuffy office all day, after being so much in the open air.

"It would be different if you had money enough to afford to wait for clients to come to you. But if your practise didn't go well from the start—and it probably wouldn't—you'd be worrying all the time. And that would be far worse for you than a little hard work is for either of us."

Barton patted her shoulder.

"Well, well, dear, we must think it over thoroughly," he said. "Suppose we go out and look at the sunset. It's going to be pretty fine to-night."

They went out on the little porch, now bathed in the last golden rays of the sinking sun.

The Horseshoe Farm lay in a little valley, shut in by towering, pine-clad hills. The land stretched to the base of Clover Hill on the east and Pine Mountain on the west. On the south and north it adjoined respectively the farms of Squire Jones and David Barton.

Running north from Squire Jones's farm, a narrow wagon road cut through the property just in front of the house, skirted David Barton's farm on the north and disappeared like a thin, yellow ribbon between two broad, parallel ridges.

"It's so beautiful, Lance, I should hate to leave it," Nell said softly, as the western sky changed from gold to crimson and then flushed to rose.

"Yes; but we can't eat the beauty of it, unfortunately," Barton replied, a trifle impatiently.

"Whose carriage is that?" he added, looking down the road. "Somebody from Jones's place, perhaps. But it isn't the squire, unless he's got a new horse."

A moment later, a buggy drew up at the front of the path, and a tall, stout man alighted and approached the porch, hat in hand.

"Mr. Barton?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes," answered Lawrence; "that's my name."

"Mine is Keyes, Marvin Keyes," went on the stranger. "May I have a few minutes' conversation with you?"

Barton assented; and the two men went into the tiny sitting-room, while Nell adjourned to the kitchen to prepare supper. In a few minutes she heard the front door close; and then Barton, hurrying into the room, seized her in his arms and swung her off her feet.

"Hurrah, little girl!" he cried. "Mr. Keyes offers me three thousand, a whole thousand more than Squire Jones. What do you think of that?"

"It sounds very well indeed," said Nell, as he set her down again. "But," she added practically, "why this sudden boom in real estate? What does this man want the place for?"

"Quarrying," explained Lawrence. "He belongs to a big company, and they want to get out stone to use for building purposes. This is our gold-mine, Nell. It's a good thing I waited to think it over before I told Jones he could have the place."

"It's a pretty poor mine that isn't worth more than three thousand dollars," remarked Nell, testing the potatoes with a fork. "Did you give him a definite answer?"

"I did not," answered Lawrence. "I told him it looked good to me, but that I wanted to talk it over with you first. He said all right, that he'd come in again to-morrow morning. He's staying over at the village. I just told him that as a matter of form though. Of course, we must close with the offer at once."

"Of course we must do nothing of the kind," Nell said decidedly. "There's something behind all this, you may be sure. First, Squire Jones, then this Mr. Keyes, wanting a piece of rocky ground, that needs to be plowed with a steam-shovel. If you take my advice, you'll hold off until you find out why these people are so anxious."

Barton frowned.

"Jones wanted the south pasture because it joins his farm and is about the best of

all the land, anyway," he explained; "and Keyes wants to quarry rock."

"And cart it six miles over a bad road," said Nell. "No; he doesn't. You ride over and see what Uncle Dave has to say to this before you decide definitely."

She set the supper on the table, and Lawrence ate, almost in silence.

He was a little troubled about Nell's stand. Of course, he did not want to go contrary to her wishes. He had long ago discovered that she was a shrewd, far-seeing young person; but Keyes had intimated that his offer was for a limited time only; and if not promptly accepted, would certainly be reduced and perhaps withdrawn altogether.

Still, it would not do any harm to consult David Barton; and after the meal was over, and Nell was busy clearing away the dishes, Lawrence saddled the horse and started off.

Although the sun had set some time since, it was still bright daylight; and in order to save time, he took a short cut across the north meadows. Some of the late crops were still in the ground; but they looked badly nourished, as indeed they were.

As he rode on, Barton became more and more determined to close with the quarryman's offer. There was no chance for a farm here. Better give it all up, take the money, and start somewhere else. Anything would be better than just existing and no more.

He sighed. Another such season as the last would probably see a mortgage on the farm.

The mare half halted as they came to the brink of a wide, shallow stream that brawled noisily along over the boulders that strewed its bed.

"Go on, girl," said Barton. He shook the reins.

The mare put one foot gingerly down into the water, started, shied, and plunged violently to one side. So unexpected was the movement that her rider was thrown from the saddle, and lay half in the water, half on the sloping bank, while the mare, as if ashamed of her fright at a mere scurrying rabbit, stood quietly looking down at the prostrate figure.

"That's a nice trick to play a fellow," Barton said ruefully, as he scrambled to his feet. "I— Oh!"

He suddenly toppled over again, his face gone white with pain, as an agonizing twinge through his right ankle told him that he had not escaped unhurt.

He felt just a little faint; the pain had been so sharp, so unexpected; and bending over, he scooped up a handful of water and lifted it to his lips. It had a peculiarly disagreeable taste; and Barton wondered what had polluted the usually fresh and pure stream.

He glanced down; then he uttered a cry of surprise. For on the surface appeared a thin, multi-colored film, that swirled and eddied in the current. The reason for Keyes's wanting the farm was plain as day. *There was oil on the land!*

Scarcely noticing the pain in his injured ankle, Barton climbed into the saddle again, and turned the mare's head toward home. He had completely forgotten that he was on his way to see his uncle. The wonderful discovery he had just made drove every other thought out of his head.

Nell would be so pleased; and that rascal Keyes had wanted to give him a miserable three thousand dollars for good oil lands!

When he reached the house, however, his ankle was so swollen that the pressure of his shoe was almost unbearable, and he was obliged to enlist Nell's assistance before he could dismount. She helped him into the house and brought some hot water; and, after bathing and bandaging the ankle, which seemed to have sustained quite a severe strain, she unsaddled the mare and put her in the barn, before returning to Barton, who lay on the bed.

"I've changed my mind about selling, Lance," she said. "We've tried here for four years, and it seems to me, now that I've thought it over quietly, that you are right. Tell Mr. Keyes to-morrow that you accept his offer, and—"

"I've changed my mind, too," chuckled Barton. "If he wants to multiply his figures by ten, he can have the place and welcome."

"What do you mean?" cried Nell. "I thought you didn't see Uncle Dave?"

"I didn't; but I found the gold-mine when I fell into the brook," Barton laughed. "To-morrow when Keyes comes, you just come into the room and hear what he says."

"But aren't you going to tell me now?" she asked curiously.

Barton shook his head.

"Nope. It's going to be a surprise to you, too," he declared.

The next morning Barton's ankle was still in such a swollen condition that it was necessary for him to stay on the couch; and while at any other time the enforced idleness would have occasioned him a great deal of anxiety on account of his unharvested crops, the prospect of disposing of the Horseshoe Farm had put him above any immediate worry.

When Keyes called, just before noon, Nell showed him into Barton's room; and after her husband had introduced the visitor, she sat down in a low rocker, intensely curious to hear what the great secret might be.

"Well, Mr. Barton, I hope you've considered my proposition favorably," said Keyes, when he had expressed his regret at the young man"s mishap.

"I've thought it over—but not favorably," returned Barton.

"You mean, I presume, that the offer is not large enough? I understood from you yesterday that you considered it a very fair one."

"Well, considerable water has run under the bridge since yesterday," remarked Barton dryly. "I know a thing or two more than I did when I last saw you. For instance, you don't want to quarry here at all."

Keyes looked perplexed.

"May I ask what your price is, then?" he queried.

"Thirty thousand dollars," said Barton coolly.

"You're joking!" exclaimed Keyes.

"Not at all, sir. I want thirty thousand dollars, and I won't take a cent less."

Keyes shrugged his shoulders and rose to his feet.

"In that case, there's no use wasting time," he said coldly. "I'll bid you good day, Mr. Barton. If you are later disposed to think and talk of this matter on a common-sense basis, I shall be at the hotel in the village for a few days."

Without waiting for a reply, he strode from the room. Nell, her pretty brows drawn together in a puzzled frown, accompanied him to the door. As she opened it, Barton called out something.

"Did he speak to me?" asked Keyes. "I did not hear what he said."

"He says to tell you that he knows what you wanted the land for; that he found out last night,"' she answered.

"Oh, he does?" said Keyes. "All right. Good morning, Mrs. Barton. Will you kindly tell your husband that the offer I made him is withdrawn. I shall be going back to the city immediately, I find, instead of remaining here, as I told him just now. Thank you."

Nell watched him as he got into the buggy and drove away; then she turned back to Barton's room.

"What did he say?" the young man asked eagerly as she entered.

Nell hesitated for a moment before answering, a troubled look in her eyes.

"He said to tell you that the offer was withdrawn, and that he was going right away," she said finally. "I don't understand, Lance. Why did you not accept what he wanted to give? What is this that you are keeping from me?"

"Nothing, except that there is oil on our land!" he cried, with an exultant laugh.

"What!" exclaimed Nell. "Oh! it can't be true!"

"It is, nevertheless; and Keyes knows it. His remark was all bluff. He'll come back; he's bound to come back."

"I wouldn't bank too much on it, if I were you," said a new voice, and a white-haired and bearded man came into the room. "I found the door open, so I came right in," he added. "Where under heavens did you get the idea that there was oil here, boy?"

Barton explained his accident of the evening before, which had led to his astonishing discovery.

"So I knew why he wanted the farm, and I told him that I knew, and that the price was thirty thousand dollars. High finance, eh, Uncle Dave?" he laughed.

Slowly David Barton shook his head.

"Lance, you've made the mistake of your life!" he declared solemnly. "You'd have done well to take the three thousand he offered you. There isn't any oil within a hundred miles of here, unless it's in a can."

"Then, where did that oil come from that I saw in the creek?" demanded Barton, with heat. "I saw it, tasted it, and smelled it. I couldn't possibly have been mistaken."

"I guess it was oil, right enough," said the old man. "But it came out of one of those cans, just the same."

"Please explain," demanded Barton impatiently.

"Well, one of the big reapers went wrong yesterday, and I told Pete to oil it up. He

brought a big can of oil down, but when he was working he upset it, and most of it ran into the brook. There's where your oil came from, Lance."

Barton's castles in Spain came tumbling down around his ears. He had manufactured a profit of twenty-seven thousand dollars out of a can of machine oil and the carelessness of a farm-hand, and now he was face to face with the realization that he had, by his precipitancy, lost not only this, but the original offer of three thousand dollars as well. It was a severe blow.

When David Barton had gone, and he was left alone with Nell, they talked it over in subdued tones.

Somehow, now that they could not have it, the three thousand dollars which Keyes had been willing to give for the Horseshoe Farm seemed a large sum. With it, they could have taken a little place somewhere, and had a tidy little balance in the bank to fall back upon until Lawrence should have established a practise in law.

Of course, there remained Squire Jones's offer; but it was an even third less. And if they did not take it, there was left only the unfruitful farm and more years of unremitting work with scant reward.

"Oh, if I'd only stuck to the road, instead of taking that short cut!" Barton exclaimed for the twentieth time. "Then I never would have seen that confounded oil. I wouldn't have been laid up with a sprained ankle, and I should have closed with Keyes's offer. Was there ever such infernally ill luck?"

And Nell could only sympathize with him. Her own disappointment was keen, but she forbore to reproach him for his hasty and ill-considered action. It would have done no good, and she was not the sort of woman to indulge in useless recriminations.

Barton told himself that his regrets were purely on Nell's account; but all the hopes and ambitions which he had for years manfully put aside, and to which he had given free rein for the last few hours, clamored for recognition and would not be repressed.

Altogether, it was a pretty miserable day; and the evening promised little that was encouraging. They were sitting silently together, pretending to read, but in reality each busy thinking of how much they might have done, and how little they now could do. A knock sounded at the door, and Nell went to open it.

A dark figure stood on the porch, and in the roadway the girl could make out the dim outlines of a horse and buggy.

"Good evening, Mrs. Barton. Is your husband at home?" said the caller.

Nell's heart leaped.

"Yes, Mr. Keyes. Will you come in?" she answered, striving to keep her voice calm and unemotional.

He had come back!

Keyes walked into the room, where Barton lay propped up with pillows.

"Well, sir," he began, "I've had a talk with my colleagues on the telephone, and they have authorized me to make you a proposition. We don't understand how our plans have leaked out in this manner; but, as long as they have, we shall have to make the best of it, and request you to keep what you know entirely to yourself. Can we rely upon you for this?"

"You may," he said.

As long as he knew nothing, the condition was an easy one.

"Then," continued Keyes, "we want to negotiate for a right of way merely, instead of your whole property. We have secured the land lying to the south from its owner, Squire Jones, and a franchise to run across the north road through the Notch, skirting the farm-lands at the north.

"This, of course, is not news to you. But we do not feel that the concession of a strip on the western part of your farm is worth such a sum as thirty thousand dollars. However, you seem to hold the key to the situation, and we propose to pay you fifteen thousand dollars for enough land to run a two-track line.

"If you can see your way clear to accept this, we can do business. Otherwise, we shall simply have to go around Pine Mountain. Frankly, we do not want to do this; but we shall not submit to being held up by any unreasonable demands on your part."

He paused. Barton moistened his lips once or twice, and passed his handkerchief over his face to hide his confusion and blank amazement. It was not oil. It was the railroad that Uncle Neil had meant when he spoke of a gold-mine!

The shrewd old man had realized that one day the growing towns to the north and south would demand and receive transportation facilities, and that the Horseshoe Farm, lying as it did in the center of the valley, and extending across from the base of Pine Mountain to that of Clover Hill, was the key to the whole.

Lawrence Barton looked over Keyes's head and caught Nell's eye. Then he turned to the railroad man and, after a slight pause:

"I have no wish to seem unreasonable, Mr. Keyes," he said, with what calmness he could muster; "and I think your proposition is extremely fair. By merely ceding you the right of way, my own land along your proposed line becomes more valuable, and therefore I am willing to reduce my price, which was what I asked for the whole Horseshoe."

"Very well, then," Keyes rejoined, rising. "I will call upon you as soon as the necessary surveys can be made and the papers drawn up, ready for signatures. I hope by that time you will be entirely well, Mr. Barton. It was very unfortunate that you should have met with such an accident."

"Unfortunate!" cried Barton as the door closed upon Keyes. "He said my fall was unfortunate, and it has brought us fifteen thousand dollars, and given us a chance to make three times as much as soon as the railroad comes through! I'm thinking that tumble was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me, little girl!"

Fencing With Villainy.*

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS,

Author of "Because of the Green House," "A Blow to Liberty," "The Road to Misfortune," etc.

A Partnership with Death in Which a Live Man Becomes a Serious Handicap to the Game.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS **PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.**

WHILE stopping at Dattleton, in Texas, one John Dale, assists a stranger set upon by a gang in the bar of the Gray Wolf Hotel. Ralph Hennon comes to his aid, but the victim of the assault dies later, first, however, arranging a partnership in a mine between Dale, Hennon, and his daughter at school. The mine, which is on the Red Fork, proves to be very successful; so successful, in fact, that Hennon becomes the target of his uncle, Caleb Hennon, in charge of Ralph's little boy Robbie, in the East. An attempt is made on Ralph Hennon's life, which inspires him with the idea of playing dead in order to see the hand of his rascally uncle. Dale takes him to a monastery in the hills, then arranges with Lawyer Dalton, Coroner Murray, and Sheriff Hicks to bury a casket filled with stones in the Red Fork cemetery. Uncle Caleb then comes on and demands to have the body exhumed for identification; when this is refused and the will read making John Dale guardian of the boy Robbie, he denounces Dale as the murderer of his nephew, and demands his arrest.

CHAPTER IX.

IN JAIL.

THE effect of Uncle Caleb's denunciation was something after the fashion of what might be expected if a bomb was thrown into a church and exploded near the pulpit.

Everybody looked at everybody else.

I sat stupefied. But the faces of the other four in the game were quickly raked back into something like rigidity.

And not one said a word in my behalf.

"I demand his arrest at once."

"I'm sorry, Dale," said the sheriff, rising, "but I guess I'll have to do it."

I looked into his face for some evidence of humor. It was as grim as though he was catching a Mexican cattle thief.

I looked at Dalton. He turned away.

"This is outrageous!" I cried. "You know I didn't kill Ralph Hennon. You know—"

"Shut up," said Hicks roughly, and before I could say another work he yanked me out of the room as though I was a bag of flour.

"What the deuce are you doing?" I demanded angrily, when we had reached the street. "You're not going to put me in jail."

"That's just what I'm going to do, my

* *Began November* ARGOSY. *Single copies,* 10 *cents.*

boy," he said with a chuckle. "Do you think we're all going to wilt now and let this fox beat us out? Not on your holy tin-type. You got us into this scrape and you've got to take your medicine till we can get out again. You played your bluff right, and the way it worked out is simply great.

"There is no question in my mind that this fellow is the one who shot Hennon. But if I arrest him now on suspicion, how the dickens am I going to prove it? His simple denial will set him free and then we'll never get him. You'll have to go to jail, that's all."

"Well, it's a real nice way this game has doubled up on me," I exclaimed. "I wish Hennon would play his own tricks on his own relatives. Here I am trying to help him prove that his uncle shot him and I go to jail."

"To jail you go. There's no getting out of it. And keep your mouth shut, too. Of course there's no danger of anything happening to you. If the old fellow has money enough to bring a change of venue, or draw other lawyers here, all we've got to do is to let Hennon walk in and say it was all a mistake, that he went away somewhere without the formality of telling you."

"Yes," I said. "But how about the box of stones? How are you going to explain that away?"

"Oh, Jackson can you help us out about that. And then there is always the chance that we'll get the old fox yet."

It may be imagined what the effect was upon Dattleton when its inhabitants saw me dragged through the streets by the sheriff.

"What's the matter with him now?" asked some one.

"Tell you later," answered Hicks.

Well, I was soon in the jail. It wasn't a splendid place architecturally considered, being built mostly of adobe blocks, but it was cool and airy, and they gave as good a room as there was that could be called a cell.

"Will I be fed on prison fare?" I asked.

"Prisoners accused of murder, and not yet convicted, can have what they want—if they pay for it," answered the keeper, with a grin.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Dale," said Hicks as he left me. "We will do our best."

I raved at the situation. There was no more comedy in it. The picture of all the people of Dattleton staring at me, the head one of Dale, Hennon & Co., being led through the streets like a common criminal! Me, the owner of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars!

It was monstrous.

My next visitor was Dalton. There was one chair in the room, and a bed. I was sitting on the chair, and as Dalton came in his face got red, and he rolled helplessly on the bed in screams of irrepressible laughter.

"Oh, ha! ha!" he roared. "Wasn't it great? You did that in the greatest style ever. You should have been an actor. By gad, I didn't think it was in you. Honest, I never did."

"Well," I said angrily, "will you sit up like a real man and tell me what you see so funny in all this? I fail to comprehend the joke."

"Funny? Funny? Why, it's the greatest mystery on the face of the earth. Funny? Ho! Ha! Ho!"

"There's no murder mystery. But there will be murder done if I'm not out of jail pretty soon."

"Keep quiet," he said, smothering his laugh. "It's the best thing that could have happened. It is diamond cut diamond. He played a mighty good game—a mighty good game. But you played a better one. Now listen. We have been talking this thing over, and we agree that the best thing to do is to let him play the game out. See? Let him go as far as he likes, of course not to such an extent as to have anything happen to you worse than a spell in jail.

"But the fact that you are kept in jail will disarm him. Don't you see? If we had all set up a holler that you didn't do it, he would have smelled a whole nest full of mice. But he calmed down and got into his end of the game in the richest style. He's a good one, he is. I am going out to see Hennon, and learn how far he wants to go in the case.

"It may be he'll want to drop it. If he does, why all he's got to do is to show himself. But he's a stubborn brute, and any way, it's no joke to have an uncle always ready to take a shot at you. I don't see that we can do anything but go ahead with the thing unless Hennon wants to stop. Anyway, you were the salvation of the whole crowd. If you hadn't played your

part that box would have come up, and there would have been a fine time."

"Well, I deserve a good dinner when I do get out," I said.

"The best the Gray Wolf can give. Now, sit quiet while I go see Hennon."

Then he departed.

As Hennon was forty-five miles away the task of sitting quiet while Dalton went to see him was something to be considered. But I did sit quiet a long time. And then Murray came in.

"You're a brick," he said. "You've got the nerve! You did that fine."

He awaited my reply.

"Well, I seem to be the hero of an occasion in which I got the worst of it," I remarked. "I certainly didn't expect affairs to take this turn."

"Nobody did. But don't you see, it was the best thing that could have happened. Now old Hennon will give himself away."

"But all this may be for nothing. If Hennon is not seriously wounded what does it amount to?"

"Well, it amounts to a pretty good term in prison. I wouldn't want to be convicted of shooting a man from ambush with intent to kill. No, thanks. And if I don't make a mistake in human nature Hennon will prosecute for all he's worth."

I did not see Dalton again till late the next afternoon.

"I saw Hennon," he said, then as he came in, looking grave. "He is in bad shape. His neck is inflamed, and he's gone to bed under the care of Brother Somebody up there, a doctor, and he's in a deuce of a fever. Altogether he's used up. I asked him if he wanted to go on with the matter and he swore at me. He says he'll put the old codger in prison if it takes his last cent. He begs you not to weaken but to stand firm and give us a chance to see what can be done on the outside. And he says when he can get out he'll come and see you. I fully agree with him."

"Come and see me! And give the whole thing away?"

"No, he won't give it away. You want spiritual comfort, don't you? And he's one of that kind. He's smooth-shaven, had his head shaved, and wears the habit of the order. His own mother wouldn't know him."

"Well, go ahead," I said with resignation. "I'll stand it. But see that I get all the papers and magazines that come to Dattleton."

"Oh, that's easy," and this cheerful lawyer walked out.

CHAPTER X.

OUT OF THE PAST.

AFTER this I received a number of visitors. Some of the men in Dattleton refused to believe that I killed Hennon; while others, who had known of feuds between partners over the division of the profits, were as firm in their conviction that I did kill him.

There was one paper published in the place. The editor was a young man fresh from some college in the North, and his paper was filled with denunciations of the dastardly crime.

Two partners, one trusting and honorable, the other burning with a thirst for more gold, and the inevitable result—murder.

Of course, knowing the facts, these things did not frighten me; but my anger rose with each day I remained in jail.

It was becoming unbearable.

Of course, also, those in the secret did all they could to make my life comfortable. Minus the sense of guilt and fear, my life in the Dattleton jail was far from being what it would have been if I were the regulation prisoner, with the authorities against me instead of being my friends. But the confinement was very irksome, even under the best of circumstances.

I missed the activity and work to which I was accustomed. Old Caleb Hennon kept such a close watch that it was impossible for me to enjoy any freedom.

"It's all very well for you to talk," said Dalton one day when I complained bitterly of the inactivity and monotony of the life; "but if you stuck your nose outside day or night for a horseback-ride, as you would like, the old fox would know that your arrest was merely a farce and the game would be all up. We've simply got to keep you here until we know."

"But you don't seem to be knowing. You are doing nothing, while I am in misery," I answered.

"Why, yes, we are. We are all working. But the old fox seems to have covered his trail well."

This was about all the satisfaction I got. The days passed.

And then one morning I did read some *news* in the Dattleton *News*.

A BEAUTIFUL NEMESIS.

Coming close upon the heels of the murder of his partner, Ralph Hennon, at the lonely mining-camp on the Red Fork, John Dale now seems in a fair way to be convicted of another, and equally atrocious murder.

Everybody in Dattleton will remember the killing of Thomas Whitten at the Gray Wolf Hotel one year ago.

At that time it was generally accepted as a fact that Whitten, who was a stranger in these parts, and had come to Dattleton the very day on which he was murdered, had been set upon by some gamblers who claimed to have come from farther north. It was also generally accepted as truth that the prisoner now in the Dattleton jail sprang to the assistance of Whitten.

And it also appeared to be the truth that Ralph Hennon, the partner of Dale, got into the fight to save both Dale and Whitten.

At that time, in the heat of things, we were not careful to con the circumstances very closely. The result was that the supposed gamblers got away, Whitten *was* killed, and the two men, Dale and Hennon, became heroes and were lauded to the skies for their bravery.

And what followed? From two strangers, both apparently poor, Dale and Hennon leaped into the limelight of prosperity as the owners of a gold-mine on the Red Fork, which paid prodigiously from the start.

We in our blind hero-worship never questioned the honor of these two men, and received them among us with that fawning friendship that goes to those who have gold.

But now there is being developed a story of crime that is as remarkable as it is horrible.

There arrived yesterday from the North the most beautiful young woman Dattleton has ever seen. She is Miss Nellie Whitten, of Chicago, the daughter of the man who was killed in the Gray Wolf one year ago. And Miss Whitten brings with her one of the best-known and most skilful detectives in the United States. And for a purpose.

The editor of this paper interviewed Miss Whitten at the Gray Wolf immediately after her arrival, and will let her tell of her suspicions in her own words. Miss Whitten is tall, of a striking kind of beauty, with wavy brown hair, and lovely eyes that light up with intense anger when she speaks of the man now languishing in the Dattleton jail.

"This man," said Miss Whitten, "is certainly one of the worst scoundrels who ever lived. You, men of Texas, supposed to know bad men when you see them, have undoubtedly been taken in to a marvelous extent by this man who has committed two murders.

"One year ago I was a happy girl, receiving letters from my father, than whom no better or more honorable man ever lived. And he was always hopeful, always fairly successful, and kept sending me money sufficient for my wants.

"Suddenly I heard from him no more.

"And then, a year ago there came a letter from this man Dale telling a remarkable story. The story he told is the story that you men of Dattleton have believed for a whole year. That my father was set upon by gamblers, and that Dale and Hennon tried to save him.

"It was one of the most skilfully concocted schemes two rogues ever succeeded in. As a matter of fact, in the light of new events, it is certain that my father was murdered and robbed by these two men you have honored for a year as being heroes.

"I have gone over the circumstances with the best police authorities, and they agree with me that everything about the case is suspicious to the last degree.

"Let me point out some of the peculiar incidents that escaped the minds of the people of Dattleton at that time.

"The first thing to be noted is the fact that in the excitement following the shooting and stabbing of my father, the supposed murderers, who were probably hired by Dale and Hennon to begin the attack, got away and no effort was ever made to apprehend them.

"Then again, owing to the glamour of false heroism they had thrown around themselves, these two men, the very ones who had murdered my father, were permitted to be with him while he breathed his last.

"And there they robbed him.

"It was my father who discovered the gold on the Red Fork. These men had learned of this in some way. They took this possession from the man they had killed.

"This man Dale wrote me a letter, giving in a sympathetic way his version of the death of my father, which is the same as what the people of Dattleton have believed.

"He said that my father had given them the mine, and laid upon them a sacred trust that one-third should go to me. As a matter of fact *all* belongs to me. Not only was my father murdered and robbed, but I have been robbed of two-thirds of my inheritance.

"And now the truth shall be known. The two rogues have fallen out, as rogues will, and one has killed the other.

"I shall prove, with the assistance of Mr. Keene Burns, one of the best detectives in the United States, that my father was murdered by these two men. And if the man Dale is not convicted and executed for the

murder of Hennon, we will see to it that he will be convicted and punished for the murder of my father."

When I had finished reading this article I had to pinch myself to see if I was awake. It was all so astounding, so like a bolt from the blue, that I almost fainted.

Fortunately, just when I was trying to convince myself that it must be all a horrid dream, Hicks came in. And his face was grave.

"Well," he said, "I see you are reading the *News*."

"Yes," I answered; "I am reading one of the most atrocious lies ever told. Is the man who runs this paper insane? Is the girl insane?"

"I don't know," he replied. "But tell me—*did* you get that mine from Whitten?"

"Yes. He gave it to us and stipulated that one-third should go to his daughter."

He sat down on the bed, and rested his head in his hands.

And this strong man of the southwest swayed to and fro as if in agony.

"Great Heaven, Hicks," I cried, "you don't think we put up that job, do you?"

"Don't ask me now, Dale. Don't ask me now. But it's a hellish charge and the logic is there. The only thing is that Hennon is not dead. We'll straighten it out if we can. But I've had to swear in some deputies from among your friends, or the people would mob the jail and hang you to the nearest tree."

CHAPTER XI.

ENTER THE GIRL.

HICKS left me a shivering wreck. That was all he had come for, to ask if Hennon and I had obtained the mine from Whitten. And if any man ever cursed an act of his own I cursed my own secrecy in the matter of that mine.

If we had told then that Whitten had given us the mine, or if there had been a witness, the thing could have been explained. But now, after a year had passed, I could see no way out of the darkness.

I could not understand how the fact that Hennon was alive was going to help either one of us. If Hicks and Dalton and Murray turned against me they would also turn against Hennon. They might secure evidence enough to convict Caleb Hennon of shooting Ralph, but that crime paled into nothingness beside the one with which we were charged by this young woman from Chicago.

And then Dalton came.

"Has Hicks been to see you?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes," I said. "He has apparently deserted me. I suppose you think I killed Whitten, too, don't you?"

"No, I do not. But keep quiet. It isn't likely they will do anything while our case is in process of investigation. I have had a talk with Burns. It may be necessary to tell him, but for the present he must not know that Hennon is alive."

"Why?" I asked angrily, "if the knowledge that Hennon is alive will help the greater matter, why must he not know?"

"It won't help—now. If we bring out Hennon the case against his uncle will fall, and then you will both be arrested for the murder of Whitten. Of course, I knew that Whitten gave you the mine. Hennon told me that when I drew up his will."

"I didn't think of it at the time. It did not seem to be an important factor. And anyway, there is no way to prove for or against your statement. If they bring the charge legally we'll have to fight it. That's all we can do. But don't worry now. The jail is surrounded by deputies, and Hicks swears nobody shall harm you."

"But, great Heaven," I cried, "there were dozens of men in the Gray Wolf that night."

"Yes, I know there were. But there are more dozens of men in Dattleton who never go to the Gray Wolf, and who think that any man who gets tangled up in a barroom row must be a bad man. Those men in the town who are not in the habit of going to the Gray Wolf are your enemies now. We've got to get a line on those who were there that night. Do you know any of them?"

"I don't know whether I do or not. I had just entered the place and had not spoken to any one except to buy a cigar."

"Well, it's pretty much the same crowd all the time, only a good many have left Dattleton during the year. Of course some wise guy has plugged this girl's ears with the idea that she ought to have all the money."

"Then, by Heaven, she'll have it. I know Ralph Hennon, and I rather know myself. She shall have her money—every dollar. Tell her so."

"I fancy you'll have a chance to tell her yourself. She and her precious detective are coming to see you."

"I don't know whether I want to see her or not."

"You'd better see her. It is always better to know your enemies. We can't tell how far this thing will go. And you'd better see them both, but don't tell them that Hennon is alive—not yet. We can't show all our cards at once."

"This game that looked so comical seems to have lost its funny side," I remarked.

"Yes, there doesn't seem to be so much humor in it now. But how the mischief were we to know this blamed thing was coming up? But don't worry. I only came to tell you that if they do come to see you, not to say a word about Hennon. That is, don't tell them he is alive. If they ask about him give as graphic a description of his death as you like. I'll vamose now. I don't want them to see me talking to you."

He had not been gone ten minutes when the keeper came in.

"That girl from Chicago and her detective are here," he said. "There is no compulsion about your seeing them if you don't want to. They have no warrant, or papers, and are not on this case of Hennon's. You can refuse to see them if you want to."

"No," I said. "Let them come in. I'll see them."

He brought in two more chairs, and then ushered in my visitors.

Even after the description of the girl in the Dattleton *News,* I was surprised at her beauty. I will not attempt to describe it. But she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen.

The man was small, but he had an eye like a gimlet. He was as bald as a coot, and he dressed in a negligent, comfortable fashion.

The girl stopped at the threshold and looked squarely at me.

"I came," she said in low, even, cutting tones, "to see the murderer of my father."

"You are mistaken," I said, rising and trying to maintain a gentleman's demeanor while she came in and took a chair. "I did not kill your father. The account I sent you was absolutely correct."

"I thought so then," she said, with her bright eyes flashing. "And I thought that you were an honorable and upright man. But I am now better advised."

"I suppose," I went on, "that you mean, by what has occurred, the death of my partner, Hennon. I did not kill him either."

Her lips curled with scorn and doubt.

"I wish further to say," I continued, "that your unjust statement as given in the Dattleton *News* this morning, about Hennon and myself robbing you, was worse even than the charge that I killed your father. I have in the bank here just about the same amount of money as what I have sent to you. The division was in equal thirds, and I have had few expenses. Now, I am not a criminal nor a lunatic. I will give you a draft on the Dattleton bank for the entire amount. That will dispose of one part of the charge, anyway."

"It was not money I came for," she said hotly.

"I thought that was part of it," I told her. "Whether you came for it or not, it is yours. Whether you take it or not, I shall never touch a penny of it. You shall have the draft at once."

I could see the detective's sharp eyes studying me all the time.

"Perhaps,'" he said, "Miss Whitten, before we go any further, you had better let me ask a question or two."

She did not answer in words, but settled back in her chair and stared fixedly at me as though some horrible fascination had seized her. She was convinced that she was looking at the murderer of her father.

"Now, look here, Dale," began Mr. Burns, "you'll admit that these two murders look bad for you. I suppose you'll admit that."

"I admit nothing. I simply state positively that I killed neither Mr. Whitten nor Mr. Hennon."

"But everything is against you."

"Possibly, on the surface. But I am as sure of being pronounced innocent as I am certain that I am sitting here."

"You are very confident. There may be circumstances of which I am still ignorant. I will not ask you to tell of the death of Mr. Whitten. I prefer to look into that myself. I see you have certain friends here who are powerful in Dattleton, and who affirm their belief in your innocence. And there is also an element, I may say the better element, who are as eager the other way. I have no wish to leap at conclusions. I have been a detective a good many years, and I have learned not to trust too much to circumstantial evidence."

"There is no necessity for resting on circumstantial evidence," I replied. "When Mr. Whitten was attacked in the Gray Wolf there were dozens of men there. I can't say just who they were now, because I had but that moment stepped into the hotel, and had just come from the train. I knew nobody in town. And I have spent little time in Dattleton since."

"It should not be difficult to find some of those who witnessed the attack. But I can't understand why the murderers escaped so easily."

"In the first place, everybody was stunned by the suddenness and the ferocity of the attack. Nobody knew Mr. Whitten, nor what the fight was about. And, when they left the hotel, Mr. Whitten was not dead. Moreover, nobody knew who began it, Mr. Whitten or his enemies."

"Then how did you come to jump in?"

"Because it was one man against half a dozen, and Mr. Whitten was getting the worst of it. Hennon was a stranger to me, and jumped in when I was getting the worst of it as well as Whitten."

"H-m. What you say sounds reasonable. Now—"

"Are you going to turn over to him?" demanded Miss Whitten angrily.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Whitten," said the detective smoothly. "I am a detective, and not a lawyer. A lawyer engaged by any person, whether right or wrong, will fight for that person's case. I am a detective, and my occupation is to learn the truth of things. If this man killed your father, I'll know it, and he shall be punished. If he did not kill your father, I shall not present a false charge against him."

The rich color mounted to her cheeks.

"Perhaps I have been unjust in my judgment," she said. "I know you will learn the truth."

"Truth or no truth," I broke in, "you shall have the money you charge me with stealing. I have nothing to do with Hennon's share. When I can get out of here to attend to it, you shall have the deed to the mine."

I had my check-book in my pocket. Referring to the stub I found, I had on deposit $150,020. I drew a check for the amount and handed it to her.

Her fingers trembled as she took it. She held it fluttering in her hand a moment, and a series of varied expressions crossed her face.

The face of the detective, which had been absolutely inscrutable up to that time, relaxed in an amused smile as he looked at her.

At this moment the keeper came in.

"Padre José and Brother Michael, from the monastery, to see you," he said. "I've brought them in."

CHAPTER XII.

STILL IN JAIL.

HERE was a situation. Of course, there was no danger of either of my two visitors recognizing Hennon. I knew at once that the Brother Michael who was coming to visit me was Hennon.

The girl rose to go. So did the detective.

But before they had time to stir the two monks were in the room, the keeper had gone, and the door was shut.

I got up and gave my seat to Padre José and sat on the bed. Hennon, after a quick look at the girl and detective, sat down by my side.

"Pardon this intrusion, son of mine," began the jovial *padre*. "I had no suspicion that you had visitors. I would not have intruded with Brother Michael. Perhaps it would be better if we withdraw while you finish your conversation."

"I should say, rather," said Detective Burns, "that we are the ones to go. Our visit had come to an end, anyway, and we will not disturb you."

I determined suddenly that Hennon should know who the girl was, so that he could study her.

"There is no need to hurry," I said. "Padre José is a good friend of mine, and does not believe I would commit murder."

"Murder! John Dale commit murder! Impossible! I know he is charged with the murder of his partner Hennon, but I cannot believe it. I knew them both. They never quarreled."

"The murder of Hennon is insignificant now," I said. "Have you read the Dattleton *News?*"

"No," replied the *padre*.

"Well, this is Miss Whitten, the daughter of that man who was killed in Dattleton a year ago. She has come on to convict Hennon and me of murdering and killing her father."

Hennon leaped to his feet.

"What!" he cried.

"Sit down," said Padre José sternly. "Will you never learn to curb your sudden emotions? You shall do penance for this exclamation. And so the young lady believes that you and poor Hennon did kill her father?"

Hennon sat down, but I saw the keen eyes of the detective studying him.

"What else could I believe?" asked Miss Whitten.

Her manner was uncertain now, and her voice was not the cold, firm voice that she had when she entered.

"I had believed for a year that these two, Dale and Hennon, were honorable men," she went on. "I was perfectly satisfied with the arrangements they made. They sent me a remittance every month, telling me that it was my third of the proceeds of the mine, according to the trust reposed in them by my father.

"But when I read of this other murder, a most atrocious one, just as my father's was, and that one of the partners had killed the other, I wondered that such a thing was possible. I consulted with others, a lawyer who is a friend, for one, and he said that the probability was that the attack on my father had been a put-up job, and that the two men had arranged it in order to rob my father of his mine."

Hennon's fingers were working nervously, and I saw a quick, warning glance pass from the old *padre's* eyes to his. And I also saw that the keen eyes of the detective caught that glance.

"I can agree with you that this news made things look dark," said the *padre.*

He spoke in a low, soothing tone, with a peculiar but very slight accent that made his speech seem soft and pleasing, and now he was very earnest.

"I can see just how you, far away in Chicago, and knowing nothing about Texas except that it is a big State with a reputation of being pretty much all cattle and rough men, would at once jump at a conclusion like that," he continued. "But you must take into consideration, my dear daughter, that there are circumstances that do not always get into a newspaper account of things.

"Now, let me ask you this. If you had never read of the arrest of Dale for the murder of Hennon, would you have gone on, year after year, believing in Dale, even if Hennon were dead?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And now, if it be proven that Hennon had been murdered by another, and Dale is released without even being brought to trial, would it restore your confidence in Dale?"

She hesitated.

"I suppose, to a certain extent, it might," she said. "Of course, after studying into the matter, and seeing all the little circumstances to which I had paid no attention before, it might be that I should require some proof."

"And I believe then, if those two men robbed your father, it would imply that they robbed you also."

Again that confused flush rose in her face.

"She did make that charge," I said.

Hennon moved uneasily.

"I made the statement in a milder way than it was printed in the paper," said Miss Whitten. "Mr. Dale has resented that to such an extent that he has given me a check for the full amount of his deposit."

"And did he not give you a check for the deposit of Hennon, as Hennon's executor?"

"Why, no. He said he had nothing to do with Hennon's money."

"Did you not, as executor, have that right?" asked the *padre,* turning to me.

"I am not yet executor," I replied. "The will of Hennon has not been filed for probate, and cannot be until I am acquitted of the charge of murdering him. No court would make a man executor of his victim's will and guardian of his boy."

"Ah, no! Certainly not."

"Furthermore," I went on, "I have a right to do what I please with my own money. Should I be acquitted of the charge of murdering Hennon and became his executor, I should then feel a responsibility to the boy, and could not feel compelled to return money that was his through no fault of his own, even if his dead father rested under an imputation."

"Just so," said the *padre.* "And now, my daughter, let me ask of you this question: Did your father ever write to you that he had discovered gold on the Red Fork of the Brazos?"

"No, he never did."

"Then you did not know, until you received this letter from Dale, that your father had discovered the mine?"

"That was my first intimation."

"Then does it not appear that, if Dale and Hennon did kill your father and rob him of the mine, Dale was taking a mighty

big chance in writing to you and giving you one-third, when he could have remained silent and robbed you of all?"

"I—I never thought of that. Yes, he could have robbed me of all."

"If your father had died at the hands of ruffians, such as is claimed attacked him, and there had been no honest men at hand to whom he could have given his confidence, you would not now be in a position of comparative wealth? Would you have the money you have now?"

"N—no—I would have to work for a living."

"Perhaps I blunder," said the *padre*. "I am not a lawyer, but I love to see justice done. Then the truth of the matter is that if Dale and Hennon had really been the terrible fiends you have pictured them, and had — as would be natural to murderers and robbers—kept the whole thing to themselves, you would be poor now."

"Yes. But there is another side to that. They may have feared an investigation. They might have thought that by sending me the letter they did, and one-third of the proceeds of the mine, they would hoodwink me and stifle all suspicion. I thought—I think—I—don't—"

She looked wild and scared. Her hands went to her head.

"She's had too much," said the detective. "I'll get her to the hotel. I will see you all again."

They left the cell. On the floor, where it had fallen from her hand, was my check. I picked it up and put it in my wallet.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MIDNIGHT RIDE.

"WELL! Things *are* getting warm," said Hennon when the door had closed upon Miss Whitten and Detective Burns.

I could see that the meeting with the girl and hearing her charges had considerably upset and unnerved him. He did not look well. His face was ghastly white, and he did not show any of that vigor that had made me almost envy him in camp.

"You saw only the mild part of it," I replied. "When that young woman came in here I thought she was going to eat me up. She was very much like a young tigress. She said she wanted to see the man who murdered her father."

"*I* would like to see him just about now," said Hennon savagely. "Why, this little picayune business of trying to prove my uncle gave me a bullet in the neck isn't a patch on a green frog's trousers to this charge. Great Scott! We are accused of killing Whitten, when we almost lost our own lives trying to save his. And we are charged with robbing this young girl when we were as rigid as possible in seeing that she got her share. This is the limit."

"She dropped the check," I remarked. "I've got it."

"Keep it till I can sign mine. We will march up to that young captain's office and settle. It will go blamed hard with Robbie. And old Uncle Caleb won't get anything next time he takes a shot at me. But I don't propose to rest under the charge of robbing a woman."

"You are both rather hasty in the matter," said Padre José. "As a matter of fact, you have robbed no one. You have acted like honorable men. You have saved an inheritance for the girl which she otherwise would have lost. But she is excited now, and a little injustice must be expected. And then, too, she has had bad advisers.

"Even had she received from her father a description of this spot on the Red Fork of the Brazos, what would she have done with it? Somebody else would have stolen it from her and given her nothing. The man did not give you a *mine*. A mine is a place that is being worked. He gave you a location, or the description of a location where he had seen gold, and, acting upon his own words, you bought it.

"Rest easy in your minds. You have wronged nobody, and the matter will soon end with credit to you."

"I don't see any end to it at all," I said. "They don't seem to be learning anything. Dalton is all to the good as a lawyer in a town like this, but he isn't a detective. Hicks, as a sheriff, is all right; but he can't go out of his own sphere of action."

"That fellow Burns is a detective," observed Hennon.

"You bet he is! See him look at you? I'll bet he thinks you are Hennon. Goodness knows what'll turn up next. I'm ready for anything."

"I wish our affair was over, so we could get at the other. Even if I am left broke giving up the money, I'll find out who killed Whitten."

"And so will I. We'll have nothing to

begin on but our names, and we've got to clear them."

"Be calm, I tell you," interposed the padre. "It will all come right."

"If it doesn't come right soon, I'll be so stiff I can't walk," I said. "Here I am shut in all day, when I was accustomed to an active life in the open air. It is killing me. There is no mob around the jail, is there?"

"No, no mob; but there are deputies. Say, how will it do to fix it up with the keeper to let you out about midnight some night and we'll take a horseback-ride? He knows you are innocent. He is on to the game."

"Yes, he knows all about it. I suppose he would do it."

"Yes, late at night when almost everybody is in bed. We needn't make a big stir about it. Just sneak out on the road and gallop a few miles and back."

"It would do me a lot of good," I remarked.

"It would do you both a lot of good," said the *padre*. "Leave it to me. Things will quiet down in a few days, and I fancy I can arrange it without anybody but the keeper knowing it. As long as he knows the truth he cannot object when he understands that you will come back."

They left soon after this, and I spent a nervous and restless afternoon. And the night that followed was worse.

The face and eyes of Miss Whitten were constantly before me. I did not dream about her. I saw her while I was wide-awake.

To be accused of murder was bad enough. But to be accused by a girl, and such a girl, was a thousand times worse.

After that Dalton came a few times, and Hicks put in an occasional appearance; and once Murray came to see me.

All I knew, and all they seemed to know was that Burns had left Dattleton. They did not know exactly where he was going. Miss Whitten had accepted an invitation from Mrs. Murray, and had left the Gray Wolf to become her guest.

Caleb Hennon was still in Dattleton, clamoring for me to be brought to trial. And Dalton had offset that by telling the justice the truth, and whenever Dalton moved for a postponement on the ground that I was ill the motion was granted.

Then one evening, when the keeper brought me in my supper, he said:

"Don't go to bed to-night. It has been arranged that you and Hennon shall take a ride for exercise. I've got the horses ready, and they'll be saddled about midnight."

I waited with feverish impatience for midnight. Then the keeper came to me.

"Everything's ready," he announced. "The horses are in the yard, and Hennon is waiting."

I hurried out.

"Good thing it's a dark night," chuckled Hennon as we got into the saddles. "Fancy a prisoner for murder taking a midnight ride with the man he killed!"

We left the jail-yard and, keeping away from the lighted streets, were soon beyond the limits of the town. We did not race our horses, but jogged along, talking.

"I wish," said Hennon, "we could think of something that happened that night at the Gray Wolf that could be used as evidence. Owens has kept that hotel long enough to know how to lose his memory. I can't think of a single thing."

"Don't you remember," I replied, "when one of the gang that was attacking Whitten called out that he stacked the cards, and somebody in the crowd around the tables laughed and said, 'Imagine Mexican Pete telling a man he cheated at cards,' or something like that?"

"Why, yes, I do remember that now," said Hennon, getting excited. "I remember now. That was before I got in the game. I'd remember that fellow if I saw him."

"And if we could only get onto the feud between Whitten and this Mexican Pete. There must have been bad blood. Don't you remember Whitten saying, 'You think you've got me this time, but I'm a good man yet'?"

"Yes," exclaimed Hennon, getting more excited. "I remember that, now you mention it."

"We've got to get that Mexican Pete. He is evidently one of the toughest of the last tough characters in Texas. I don't know where he got his name. I don't believe he was a Mexican, for I don't think there was a Mexican in that crowd."

Chatting thus on the peculiar chain of circumstances that seemed to surround us and hem us in, we rode on for a few miles beyond the town; and then, dismounting, fastened our horses and sat down to enjoy a smoke and stretch our limbs.

We spent probably an hour in this way, and were just about getting ready to return when we heard the pounding of horses' feet on the road.

"Something's up," said Hennon. "Perhaps somebody has discovered that you have escaped and this is a mob in pursuit."

We drew our horses as far away from the road as we could, and then crouched down where we could not be seen, but where we could see who passed.

Four flying horses, their riders lying low on their necks, with great saddle-bags filled out with something bulging, swept by like a tornado.

"What the deuce was that?" asked Hennon as we stood up again.

"What the deuce is *this?*" I added.

We looked around.

Another horseman was coming toward us, but not on a gallop. He had almost reached us, when we heard a change in his horse's gait.

Then the horseman fell to the road with a thud.

We ran to him.

"What is it? What's the matter?" I demanded.

"I'm shot," he said. "I'm Joe Webb. The bank has been robbed—cleaned out—every dollar—by Mexican Pete."

(To be continued.)

A Letter to Post.

BY FRANK CONDON.

The Strange Commission Entrusted a Man on His Way to Boston, and the Stranger Happening that Interfered With Its Execution.

WHEN the Indian Rubber Company expressed some curiosity over the condition of an importation of motor-tires that had recently arrived in Boston, the head of the tire department frowned in disgust.

"That means," growled Fraser, "that I'll have to hike up there and spend a day or two, and I am frank enough to admit that I hate to do it."

"You'll enjoy it," replied his assistant. "Go down to Revere Beach and buy yourself popcorn and a red cane, and if you're good to me I'll tell you the names of two places where you can buy a drink after midnight."

"I won't go if I can possibly escape it," Fraser announced.

He was unable to escape it, but he postponed his going until the last possible moment, and at eleven o'clock Thursday night he left his cheerful home, and the Subway conveyed him with celerity to the Grand Central Station. He was under light marching equipment, carrying only his travel-stained suit-case in which he had packed a few toilet articles, some miscellaneous underwear, and a magazine or two as fillers.

He dallied in front of the terminal a moment and looked at his watch. It was within twenty minutes of train-time, so he idled along slowly and thought of the prospective trip with displeasure.

"It seems to me," he complained, "that for a man who is head of a department, Kenneth Fraser gets a whole lot of rummy assignments. I wanted to attend that six-round fight in the Bronx to-night. Curses on 'em."

He sauntered into the station and found a surprisingly large number of people. A political delegation from Utica was coming on a delayed train, and a proper reception had been prepared for the up-Staters. Fraser watched the budding statesmen with interest, and his absorption was so great that he failed to notice the flight of his twenty minutes. When he did look at his watch, he thrust it hastily into his pocket and galloped down the concourse with thirty or forty seconds left.

His train was surrounded by a roistering crowd—members of the reception committee, and he fought his way to the steps of a Pullman.

"First coach—right behind the engine," said the porter, glancing at Fraser's tickets, and, with a growl of annoyance, the motor-tire man ran forward.

As he did so a hand was laid on his arm and he stopped.

"Are you going to Boston?" inquired a short, heavy-set individual.

"What's that to you?" retorted Fraser indignantly.

He turned and glared at the intruder.

The crowd thickened about them. Fraser saw before him a smooth, round face from which peered a pair of steel-blue eyes. The interrupter of his progress was a man of forty, powerfully built, with sparse gray hair, and a ragged, short mustache.

"Don't get mad, friend," continued the stranger. "I'm not trying to butt into your business at all. Only if you are going to Boston, you can help me in a matter of life or death. You won't help me so much as you will some other people, and it's too long a story to tell before your train pulls out. This is the last train to-night, and here's a letter that's got to be mailed in Boston to-morrow morning."

"Why don't you mail it in New York?" replied Fraser, his curiosity at the strange request overcoming his irritation at being stopped.

"It can't be done," replied the other. "It's got to have the Boston postmark, and it involves the future of an entire family. If you won't do it for me, say so, and I'll try to find some one else taking this train—but there isn't much time; there's scarcely a second left. I tell you, stranger, you'll come pretty near saving lives if you'll just drop this in a Boston mail-box in the morning."

The long train groaned and rumbled from end to end. The wheels slowly turned, and Fraser stepped forward toward his Pullman. The stranger drew from his pocket a long, wide, white envelope and extended it toward the traveler.

"All right," exclaimed Fraser. "It's a mighty funny proceeding, but I guess I can mail a letter for you without any particular inconvenience. When I get back to New York, perhaps I'll meet you and let you tell me the story connected with the thing."

"I'll be glad to do it. My name's Joe Cary—Cary's saloon on Grand Street."

Fraser took the missive and thrust it, with some effort, because of its bulk, into his coat-pocket. The stranger faded out of sight, and the night-run to Boston was on. The express was scheduled to stop only at Springfield before reaching the Hub.

Fraser found his way through the long coach. The berths were made up and he bumped into projecting arms and knees down the length of the car until he came to the smoking compartment.

The porter took his grip and indicated Lower Seven as his abode for the night.

"Ill stay awake an hour or two," he informed the dusky servitor. "If you hear me ringing the bell, don't come to ask what I want, but simply bring me a large drink."

The porter grinned. Fraser stretched his legs comfortably and unfolded an evening newspaper. He was the sole occupant of the smoking-room, and for a time he pored over the late ball scores. Then the paper dropped in his lap and he gave himself up to thinking of the man who had stopped him and his mysterious request.

"That's positively the oddest affair I ever heard of," he mused. "What difference can it make whether a letter is mailed in Boston or New York? He said it was a matter of life and death, and if it was, why didn't he hop into the train and take it to Boston himself? Why is it a matter of life and death? Who is the entire family whose future depends upon my mailing the thing to-morrow? If it's so beastly important, why would any one but a perfect fool entrust the letter to a stranger?"

He puzzled over the situation, rolling it about in his mind, but reaching no conclusion.

The lights of the metropolis flitted by the window and disappeared as the train picked up speed. The electric engine was superseded by the big steam mogul that would poke her nose into Boston five hours later.

Fraser had no desire for slumber. Once he started to his feet, determined to undress and seek his berth, but he fell back upon the cushions.

"It's a cinch I won't sleep if I do hit the feathers," he muttered. "I wish there was some other night-owl up so that I could talk. Doggone those trips and doggone the Indian Rubber Company, and double doggone Boston and strange idiots with mysterious letters."

He pulled the cause of his perturbation from his coat and regarded the address with speculative eye. It was directed to a woman in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. The handwriting was small and regular. Beyond the address and the six two-cent stamps affixed, the envelope was bare.

"It looks as though it might be the writing of a woman," Fraser thought, holding the heavy envelope closer to his eyes. "And it isn't even addressed in ink."

He moistened the tip of his finger and touched the "Pa.".

"They surely are a strange lot of nuts," he continued. "The most important letter in the world, evidently, and yet the address is put on with a pencil."

The "Pa." had blurred slightly under the rub of his finger.

Fraser turned it over and noticed its form. The heavy, white envelope was completely filled, and the object inside was of a smooth, hard material, slightly rounded at the ends. It gave under his pinch, and as he toyed with his burden, his curiosity grew until he flung the thing from him in disgust.

It dropped on the seat beside him, address side up, and he glared at it as though it had delivered a personal affront.

"I never can sleep on these cursed trains, anyway," he said moodily, and, in addition to that handicap, some fool somes along and hands me this business to fill my noddle full of conjectures; it's like a picture-puzzle. I don't see why I should worry about it. What do I care about the future of some family in Allegheny? Yet, here I am sitting up and losing my good night's rest, watching over a letter as though it contained seven million dollars."

Fraser closed his eyes with determination and attempted to sleep, pulling despondently now and then at his half-lighted cigar. The express boomed along through the night, and the steady roar of the compound engine directly in front of his coach poured in through the open windows and smote him soothingly upon the ear.

"I'm goin' to bed in a minute," he muttered.

The cigar fell from his lips, and he touched the fleeting verge of a doze. His left arm lay beside him on the cushioned seat and his fingers caressed the puzzling white envelope. Then, without warning of any sort, a veritable avalanche of cold water whirled in upon him.

Fraser scrambled to his feet, gasping and shivering. The water was still pouring through the window, and with an exclamation of rage he jumped into the narrow passageway beside the smoking-room. In another instant the downpour ceased as abruptly as it had begun, and Fraser, shaking in his drenched garments, poured forth maledictions upon the railroad company.

It is customary for express-trains to "take water" on the fly. To maintain express speed, it is undesirable to stop at water-tanks and slowly fill the tender, so geniuses have devised the track-tank, which is nothing more intricate than a long, narrow, iron box placed between the rails and kept full of water. The flying locomotive passes over this, a chute is dropped, and in a moment or two the tender-tank is filled.

A train traveling at a high speed and striking a track-tank is unconcerned about what happens so long as the tank is filled; and as all track-tanks are not perfectly arranged, it is sometimes possible to create a miniature Niagara.

It was such a cataract that descended upon the windows of the Pullman smoker and its irritated occupant. Being directly behind the locomotive, Mr. Fraser received a full and complete measure of the flying moisture, and his remarks indicated that he was fully aware of that fact.

The porter came, following his insistent ringing, and brought the ordered drink. It was then that Kenneth Fraser made a horrible discovery.

Lying upon the floor of the smoking-room in half an inch of water was the letter. It had fallen from the seat, and when its bearer picked it up and examined it, the address had completely disappeared.

The markings had become thoroughly blurred and blended into one large, irregular blotch, absolutely impossible to decipher. The small character of the handwriting had aided in this catastrophe, and, as Fraser studied the result, the full force of the disaster came over him. *It would be impossible to mail the letter in Boston*—or anywhere else.

He held it before him, dumbly and stupidly. The porter regarded him with curiosity and thrust the drink before him.

"How can I mail that letter now?" Fraser asked idiotically enough.

The porter took it and examined the purple blotch.

"I don't guess you ain't goin' to mail it nowhere at all, boss," he retorted cheerfully. "Das a pretty bad stain; dat ain't no address, nohow."

"And this cursed railroad of yours did it," Fraser went on wrathfully. "I'm going to sue for this. I can't mail that letter, and the future of a family depends upon it."

"What's in yo' letter, boss?" asked the porter placatingly.

"I don't know what's in it!" Fraser roared. "All I know is that it's got to be mailed in Boston."

"Ah'm sorry it's did, mister; yo' better take yo' drink and go to bed."

He deposited the glass and left the smoking-room, glancing at Fraser as though undecided whether the latter was intoxicated or merely crazy.

The hours passed like snails. Wet and uncomfortable, the irritated letter-bearer sat in his seat and blinked at the electric lamps above him.

What was he to do? Again and again it occurred to him to open the envelope and attempt to discover a clue to the rightful owners, but he reflected that he had no right to tamper with a letter that did not belong to him, and his belief in the tremendous importance of its contents restrained him.

The first dim light of the breaking day crept in through the Pullman windows before he reached a decision. In vain did he strive to recall the name he had read earlier in the evening, and he profaned his incompetent memory with harsh words.

"There's nothing to do but to open it," he muttered. "The name may be inside."

Slowly he ran a knife-blade under the flap, and the white envelope bulged wide, displaying a soft morocco case. Fraser took it in his hand and turned it over. A spring clasp held the two sides together, and he found three heavy initials in gold letters. They were "F. X. P."

He pressed the spring, and the case opened without effort. The two sides fell apart, and inside were a number of small articles, including a stained silk watch-fob, a large photograph, a bunch of keys, a small pearl-handled knife, and a soft, rubber tobacco-pouch.

To the silk fob was attached three twined letters, which he made out as "F. X. P.," and the same initials were stamped into the keys and imprinted upon the pouch.

There was not a line of writing in the case, nor a bit of paper.

The photograph represented an elderly, rather prepossessing man, whose eyes were set far apart. He wore a heavy, square-cut beard, and a pair of old-fashioned "side-burns" fell in a gentle curve from his cheeks. Fraser turned the photograph over hopefully, but there was not the scratch of a pen on it.

"If some one will come along and tell me how this bunch of junk is going to insure the future welfare of an Allegheny family, I will be much obliged," he muttered. "This discovery is worth all of a nickel. And yet, maybe there is something about it that I can't see. Maybe it's the connecting link in a suit for divorce or the breaking or non-breaking of a will involving a million bones. Maybe it's to identify the party of the first part when she walks up to the judge and demands her share of the ancestral estates. It might be any one of a thousand things, but to me it it plain junk and nothing more."

The words of the man who had given him the letter still rang in his ears, and try as he might he could not shake off a sense of responsibility and a feeling of hot rage toward the railroad that had destroyed the address.

It was broad daylight now, and the train was approaching Boston. The fortunate ones who had slept through the night were prowling about the Pullman in various stages of irritation and undress.

Fraser sat in his seat and glared out moodily at the passing scenery. From time to time he fumbled with the morocco case and growled over his own vexation.

Why, after all, should he allow the incident to take such a strong hold of him? Why should he begin the day miserably because he didn't know where to mail a photograph, a bunch of keys, and some assorted trifles that were obviously valueless?

Three times he raised the window under a sudden impulse to throw the case out, but he hesitated each time; the third time he left the window open.

"If I keep worrying about this fool thing," he argued, "I'll simply waste my own and the company's time. I'm a business man, and not a childish dabbler in affairs of mystery, and I think I'll just end this little matter right here and now."

The train was screeching under the brakes. It scurried through a long railroad yard and entered the dim light of the monster train-shed. Boston was at hand, and the passengers were struggling with suitcases and umbrellas. Fraser laid the troublesome morocco case on the window-sill for an instant, and then pushed it off.

"Now I can go to work with a clear mind," he told himself with satisfaction.

The train came to a halt, and for a moment Fraser sat in his seat, expecting the

crowded aisle to clear. The moment lengthened into five minutes.

"What's up?" he asked of a fellow traveler.

"Something wrong ahead," replied the one questioned.

Eventually, after what seemed a wait of hours, the passengers moved slowly forward, and when Fraser reached the platform he found an amazing situation. Instead of hurrying away through the portals of the station, the entire train-load—every passenger frothing with indignation—was lined up between a double row of policemen.

"Now, then, get in line, everybody!" bellowed a sergeant of police. "It'll be over as quick as we can do it."

Boiling with honest rage, Fraser was pushed into the line, which passed on like a huge snake. At the very end, nearest the gates leading to the street, stood a cluster of plain-clothes officers and detectives, and as passenger after passenger sifted through and to them, the detectives instituted a search, hurried but effective.

The women passengers and children were not subjected to this indignity, nor was every man.

The searching-party paid particular attention to the bags carried, and Fraser observed, as he came nearer the head of the line, that perhaps one man in every five was forced to raise his arms, while a detective went skilfully through his clothes. During this procedure another minion of the law opened his grips or suit-cases.

"Certainly they won't put me through this silly thing, whatever it is," Fraser opined.

The man directly before him was passed on to freedom immediately. The officers made no comment, asked no questions.

Fraser was stopped with a brief command: "Hold up your arms."

He did so mechanically, and a black-eyed young detective "frisked" him with a speed that was as amazing as it was complete. The nimble fingers of the officer went into his every pocket, and in the meantime his suit-case lay gaping under the search of another.

"Pass on," said a gray-haired member of the outfit.

Fraser, wondering and insulted, walked ahead a few steps and stopped. He remained where he was until the entire train-load of passengers had gone through the ordeal.

Then he followed one of the searchers, and asked:

"Would you mind telling me what in blazes you examined us for?"

"It's a little Boston pastime," replied the other calmly. "We do this to every train that comes from New York."

Fraser grunted a subdued insult, and started out of the station. It occurred to him suddenly that he was very tired and exceedingly hungry, and without further wait he boarded a car for his hotel.

A half-hour later he walked into the dining-room of the Clinedon and ordered a hearty breakfast. While it was being prepared, he sent the waiter for morning newspapers, and as the attendant returned and dropped them on the table before him, Fraser's glass of water, which at the moment was at his lips, fell to the floor with a crash.

Staring at him, in five columns of space from the front page, was the man whose photograph he had dropped from the Pullman window an hour before—the same elderly, prepossessing individual, whose eyes were set far apart, whose beard ended in the square cut, and from whose cheeks fell the "side-burns"; and across the top of the page, in monster letters, ran the caption:

MILLIONAIRE NEW YORK BACHELOR MURDERED.

Fraser picked up the paper with hands that trembled, and sought through the mass of type for the murdered man's name.

It was there, plain enough—Francis Xavier Penroth.

"That's what the 'F. X. P.' stood for," Fraser muttered dazedly. "Great Heavens, what did I get into, anyhow?"

He read on breathlessly. Penroth, an eccentric and wealthy flour manufacturer, had been stabbed to death in his own home in New York at noon the day before. His servants had found him a few moments after the crime was committed, and the subsequent search of the police revealed that thousands of dollars' worth of jewels had been stolen, bonds and stocks in unknown amounts abstracted from the millionaire's rooms, and, as he invariably carried large sums on his person, it was presumed that the murderer had made away with considerable cash booty.

The despatches went on to tell of the work of the police. They had found that a morocco case, in which the dead man kept his money, was missing, and late in the day the New York sleuths had stumbled upon a clue

which had led them to the door of the murderer. He escaped them by a hair's breadth, and after a devious pursuit was lost at the Grand Central Station.

The last train for the night pulled out before the officers could round up the crowds in the station, and full information was at once telegraphed the police of Springfield and Boston and orders were given to search every passenger on board the train for objects that might identify him as the criminal.

Fraser sat back in his chair, and rubbed the cold sweat from his brow.

"And to think," he muttered huskily, "that I almost brought in that cursed morocco case for the detectives to find on me; to think that I raved at the railroad for sousing its address with water last night! As that murderous fiend told me when he gave it to me, it was going 'to involve the future of a family!' You bet it was, and it missed doing it by a mighty slim squeeze, and the name of the family is Fraser. In the words of the wise old prophet, 'Never again!'"

Then the waiter came with two sizzling eggs and a roll.

THE BIG OBSTACLE.*

BY BERTRAM LEBHAR,

Author of "The Odds Against the Banner," "His Handicap Mate," "The Isle of Mysteries," etc.

The Thing a Man Did When He Didn't Care What Happened to Him and Why He Had Cause to Regret It Later.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

COWPER ROUSEY, after four years' absence in Australia, returns to his native land, penniless and shabby. His Uncle Philip, a stock broker, refuses to do anything for him because Cowper had declined to go into business and preferred to follow the career of an artist, of which he has now made a failure. Cowper's own friends also turn him the cold shoulder, but the worst blow of all is when he chances to see the girl he loves, Margaret Adair, whirl by him in bridal array to a church, which his deadly rival, Oscar Harmsworth, also enters in the garb of a bridegroom. After that Cowper cares not what happens to him so is in the mood to take up with the plan of a red-haired stranger who offers him five thousand dollars to marry a girl and leave her at once after the ceremony. After assuring himself that the girl will do her share of the bargain willingly, he accompanies the man in an automobile blindfolded, and after over an hour's ride, finally reaches a house where the bandage is removed from his eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

HIS VANISHING BRIDE.

COWPER ROUSEY found himself in a dimly lighted room in which were four persons who stood regarding him with great interest.

Needless to say, Cowper looked at them with even greater interest. His gaze traveled from one to the other of the little company and his curious glances took in every detail of their appearance.

There was a little old man who wore a ridiculously tight-fitting cutaway coat which doubtless had once been black but which had turned green with years. This man's nose was very red and his face was bloated—the unmistakable marks of one addicted to the liquor habit.

There was a middle-aged woman whose figure was inclined to corpulency and who possessed coarse features and a mass of blond hair arranged with none too much tidiness.

In pleasant contrast to her was a young woman dressed all in white whose face was quite beautiful and whose figure was tall, slender, and graceful.

This young woman was a brunette. Her hair was very dark and most tastefully dressed. Her brown eyes were large and bright. She appeared to be about twenty-five years of age.

The fourth member of the group was the

man who had brought Rousey there—he of the red hair, big nose, beady eyes, and outstanding ears.

Taken as a whole, it was not a company to inspire either admiration or confidence. Its only prepossessing member was the young woman in white.

Cowper stared at her with particular curiosity, for he felt sure that it was she who was to be his bride. He refused to permit himself to believe that the slovenly, middle-aged woman with the untidy mass of blond hair could be destined for that rôle.

Cowper eagerly scanned the young woman's face in search of some signs that she was being forced into this queer affair.

As he had announced to his traveling companion, he was thoroughly determined to back out of the deal and hand the fellow back his roll of bills if he could detect the slightest evidence of coercion or undue influence.

But the young woman appeared to be happy enough. Her full red lips were parted in a half smile as her big bright eyes met his gaze unflinchingly. She seemed to be perfectly cool and at her ease—much cooler than most brides generally are, even under the most conventional circumstances.

"I can't understand it at all," he mused. "Why is such a fine-looking girl mixed up with such people as these and why is she willing to enter into such an extraordinary marriage? It is certainly a most marvelous adventure. I wouldn't have believed that such a thing could happen in these matter-of-fact days."

Having completed his inspection of the occupants, he turned his attention to the room itself.

It was a large chamber and in a very dilapidated condition. The woodwork appeared to be badly in need of paint. The plaster ceiling, which was low, was dirty and cracked. The floor was uncarpeted and its boards were rough and loose in several places.

The paper on the walls was in no better condition. An old-fashioned imitation marble fireplace was thickly incrusted with dirt.

A couple of chairs and a plain wooden table were all the furniture the room contained. There were no gas fixtures. Large tallow candles, which stood in empty beer bottles, furnished the light.

The appearance of the room amazed Cowper almost as much as did the strange company assembled there.

"What a queer place in which to pull off a wedding!" he thought.

Thus far nobody present had uttered a word. Now the man with the shock of red hair and the small beady eyes spoke.

"Friends," he said, pointing to Cowper, "here is the bridegroom. He knows the conditions and is ready to go ahead. If you also are ready we will summon the minister and proceed with the wedding ceremony without delay."

"I will go get the clergyman," announced the little old man in the tight-fitting coat, and he hurried out of the room.

"You said that I would be permitted to talk with the bride," Cowper whispered to the red-haired man. "I presume that is she, over there?"

The man nodded.

"Yes, that young woman is to be your wife. You can exchange a few words with her now if you wish."

Cowper stepped over to the young woman in white.

"You are fully aware of the fact that I am to be married to you in a few minutes?" he inquired in a low voice.

"Of course," answered the girl, perfectly self-possessed. "That is why you have been brought here."

She smiled at him as she spoke. Cowper noted that her voice was refined and musical.

"And do you mean to say that you are entering into this thing of your own free will?" he demanded earnestly.

"Of course I am," was her answer.

"You are willing to marry me, although you have never seen me before and don't know anything about my character or antecedents?" he exclaimed, incredulously.

"Yes. I am willing to marry you without knowing anything at all about you."

"Will you tell me why?"

"No, I cannot do that. Haven't you already been informed that no explanations can be given to you?"

"Yes, I have been told that; but it is inconceivable to me that a nice-looking young woman like you can be taking this mad step of her own free will. If any undue influence has been brought to bear upon you, you have only to say the word and I—"

"No undue influence has been used," she assured him. "I fully realize what I

am doing and am perfectly willing to do it."

"You are going into this with your eyes wide open?"

"Do they appear to you to be closed?" she asked, with a laugh.

"You don't want more time to think it over? If you have not yet fully made up your mind I am ready to insist upon a postponement of this queer wedding," he assured her.

"No, I do not wish any postponement," was her answer. "My mind is fully made up. The sooner it is over the better."

Cowper shrugged his shoulders helplessly and turned to the red-haired man.

"I am convinced against my better judgment that this young lady is not being forced into this," he said. "I am therefore willing to go ahead, according to our bargain."

"Good!" exclaimed the fellow. "Here comes the minister now. We will proceed with the ceremony immediately."

The door had opened and the little old man in the tight fitting cutaway coat entered, escorting a man who was attired in the conventional garb of a clergyman and who carried a black, leather-covered prayer-book in his right hand.

He was a very old man—so old that his hair was snow white, his body was bent, his steps were halting, and his eyesight appeared to be somewhat dim.

Cowper had a shrewd suspicion that it was essentially because of these very infirmities that this elderly man of the cloth had been chosen to officiate at this ceremony. It was probable that these queer people realized that a younger and more observant clergyman would have been suspicious of the extraordinary surroundings and circumstances and would have refused to have anything to do with such a strange wedding.

This old clergyman did not seem to detect anything out of the ordinary about the proceedings, for he bowed courteously to the little group and declared with a pleasant smile that he always considered it a great treat to have the privilege of joining a young couple in holy wedlock.

"After all, there is no institution, my friends, which is quite as splendid and as glorious as marriage," he said. "In these days, it has become the fashion, I fear, to sneer at matrimony and to exploit its abuses; but I am old-fashioned enough to remain an optimist on the subject. I believe that most unions turn out happily, especially where the couples marry young."

The old clergyman delivered these remarks in a quavering voice and smiled benignly upon the little group, apparently under the impression that this was a most ordinary and conventional wedding.

The red-haired man introduced Cowper as the bridegroom and the minister shook him enthusiastically by the hand. Then the bride was presented and the benevolent old gentleman patted her on the shoulder and whispered in her ear that he very much admired the bridegroom's good taste.

He then asked them their names and announced that he was ready to proceed with the service.

The ceremony was brief. Cowper could scarcely believe that he was not dreaming when he found himself responding to the question. "Do you, Cowper Rousey, take this woman, Jeannette Smith, to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

"I do," he answered and could not repress a shudder at the uncanniness of the proceeding.

The bride made her responses in a firm, even tone. She was perfectly cool and collected throughout the ceremony.

The red-haired man produced a plain gold ring from his coat-pocket and Cowper slipped it upon the finger of the girl.

When it became necessary for him to kiss his bride Cowper hesitated. He knew that such a step was customary—that it was part of the wedding service; but he felt instinctively that under the peculiar circumstances it would constitute an outrage.

The young woman, however, appeared to entertain no such scruples. She raised her pretty head and puckered her lips expectantly. If it had been a real love-match she could not have appeared more willing to receive his kiss.

Cowper put his lips to hers obediently and without enthusiasm, the old clergyman, availing himself of a traditional privilege, kissed the bride with much greater relish.

After the service was over the red-haired man put a ten-dollar bill in an envelope and passed it to Cowper, who handed it to the minister as his fee.

After the customary congratulations, the latter departed. As soon as he had gone the red-haired man turned hurriedly to Rousey.

"Come," he said. "It is time we were returning. I must once more place this bandage over your eyes."

"Do you really mean to say that I am never to see my bride again?" inquired the young man incredulously.

"Certainly. Those were the terms on which you entered into this marriage. You must not even speak to her now. Come, let me blindfold you."

Cowper obediently inclined his head while the other adjusted the bandage. Then he was led to the automobile, which had been waiting outside.

"Go ahead!" shouted the red-haired man to the chauffeur. The motor thereupon started off at a lively pace.

Only once during the journey did Cowper exchange a word of conversation with his traveling companion.

"I thought you said that I would never learn the maiden name of my bride," he remarked interrogatively.

"I did—and I spoke the truth," was the reply.

"But I *have* learned it already," declared Cowper. "You must be forgetting that her name was divulged during the wedding ceremony. Didn't I hear the clergyman address her as Jeannette Smith?"

"Pooh! That was not her real name. That was merely a name which she assumed for the occasion," replied the red-haired man.

"Doesn't that make the marriage invalid?" inquired Cowper eagerly.

"Not at all," replied the other. "A marriage is perfectly legal even when both parties use assumed names."

These were the only words that passed between them. About an hour afterward the automobile came to a sudden stop. Cowper's companion told him that they had come to the end of their journey and assisted him to alight.

As Cowper's feet reached the ground he heard the motor start off again.

He struggled with the bandage and tore it from his eyes.

He discovered that he was standing on a bridge—the same bridge on which he had first encountered the mysterious stranger with the red hair and homely countenance.

The automobile had disappeared as completely as if it had fallen into the river, and with it had gone his queer companion.

Cowper stood there rubbing his eyes as though he had just awakened from a deep sleep.

Indeed, so extraordinary had been his experience that he was half inclined to believe that he was the victim of a particularly vivid dream.

He found it difficult to believe that these things had really happened—that he was actually the husband of a beautiful young woman whom he was never to see again.

"It *must* have been a dream!" he muttered.

Then he put his hand in his coat pocket and drew out the big roll of bills.

There was five thousand dollars in that roll, and the money was certainly real!

CHAPTER VII.

PLENTY OF MONEY.

FOR some time Cowper stood regarding the fat roll of bills in his hand with conflicting emotions.

It was pleasant to be the possessor of five thousand dollars. The sum was certainly big enough to enable a fellow to live in luxury for a good many days to come. It might also enable him to get a start in some good business where he could win his way to success by hard work and perseverance.

And yet, he asked himself, what did luxury or success mean now that Margaret Adair was forever lost to him?

He had yearned for success only as a means toward winning the girl he loved. Now, not only was that girl the wife of another, but he also was a married man. His chances of making Margaret Adair his wife had been rendered doubly remote by the events of the past few hours.

Was the five thousand dollars in his hand worth the price he had paid for it? He asked himself the question anxiously. Had he acted rashly in saddling himself with the yoke of matrimony in order to earn a roll of bills?

After some deliberation he answered his own questions with a laugh.

"What an unreasonable fellow I am," he mused. "There can't be any doubt but what I have acted wisely. Margaret was lost to me, anyway. Even if I had remained single I never could have had her.

"Of course there was a slight chance

that Harmsworth would die an early death —in which case I might have wooed and won his widow, but Harmsworth is one of those disgustingly healthy fellows who is likely to live to be a hundred years old, so that hope was a mighty slim one and not worth banking on.

"And as far as the yoke of matrimony is concerned, it doesn't seem to me that it is likely to be particularly oppressive in my case.

"I have made a most advantageous marriage in that respect. Married men all over the land would envy me if they knew of it. I shall have nobody to give me a tongue lashing if I stay out late of nights. There will be nobody to go through my trousers-pockets while I am sleeping and nobody to fly into a passion with me for mussing up the parlor curtains with tobacco smoke.

"This matrimony on the absent-treatment plan certainly has its advantages. For a married man I am just about as free as I could be. I ought to consider myself a very lucky fellow.

"This money will enable me to put up a good front and have a fine time. That red-headed chap was right. I must show Margaret and that fellow Harmsworth that I don't care a fig about their marriage. I won't give them the satisfaction of seeing that I am hard hit. I'll make them think I am enjoying life to the utmost."

The very thought of enjoying life caused him suddenly to realize that he was very hungry.

It was a great relief to know that in his right hand he held the means of satisfying his appetite with the most tempting of viands.

He regarded the thick roll of bills almost lovingly and stuffing it into his trousers pocket set off at once in search of a good restaurant.

He soon found an eating-place high class enough to satisfy the most fastidious of tastes.

Although the hour was late the place was full of well-dressed people, who looked at him curiously as he entered and seated himself at one of the small tables.

He gazed rapturously at the menu and ordered such an array of expensive dishes that the waiter eyed him with some suspicion.

Cowper Rousey, with his shabby clothes and unshaved face, did not look like a man who could afford to pay for the luxuries he had picked out. The waiter shook his head dubiously and went off in search of the head waiter.

The latter was a man who prided himself on his tact. When he had approached Cowper's table and had sized up the shabby looking young man seated there, he decided that it was an occasion for great diplomacy.

"I beg *monsieur's* pardon," he said, politely but firmly. "Perhaps he is not aware that the dishes he has ordered are very expensive—very expensive indeed, *monsieur*."

"I don't care about that," replied Cowper. "Hurry up and bring them on. I'm hungry. The price does not worry me."

"Perhaps *monsieur* would be satisfied with a less costly meal," went on the head waiter, looking at Cowper meaningly. "Perhaps *monsieur* would care to order something a little more simple, eh? A nice dish of crackers and milk, for instance, or a small oyster fry. I really think that *monsieur* would be better satisfied with something like that."

"Confound your impertinence!" Cowper growled. "Do you presume to tell me what I should eat? I know what I want and I don't require your advice. Bring me what I have ordered or I will have you discharged."

"I beg *monsieur's* pardon," said the man, undismayed by this threat. "I really mean no offense; but unless *monsieur* can show us that he is able to pay for what he has ordered I am afraid that we cannot accommodate him."

"Ah!" exclaimed Cowper, "I understand you now. You think that I look like a dead beat, eh?"

He flushed with mortification as the truth dawned upon him. Strange to say, he had actually forgotten, until now, how disreputable was his appearance.

"Well, I suppose you are not to blame," he continued in a quieter tone. "I realize that I look like a tramp. If I had remembered that such was the case I would not have dreamed of entering such a fashionable restaurant. You should not always judge a man by his appearance, though, my friend. You are likely to err sometimes. I will show you that I am fully able to pay for what I have ordered. See here."

He pulled from his pocket the roll of bills and held it in front of the head waiter.

"There's five thousand dollars here," he

said with a smile. "I guess that will more than pay my bill—high as your prices are."

The head waiter's eyes bulged as he gazed at the money. Then he mumbled an abject apology and hurried off to personally superintend the filling of Cowper's order.

Within a short time the tempting dishes were placed before the young man, and he proceeded to devour them with great relish.

While he was thus engaged a short, thick-set man entered the restaurant, and stood leaning against the cashier's desk carelessly surveying the diners.

The head waiter stepped over to this man and whispered something in his ear.

As he whispered he pointed toward Cowper. The man appeared to become greatly interested. He stared at Rousey long and critically. The latter, unaware of the attention he was receiving, went on eating with the zest which only a half-starved man can display.

When he had finished he paid the check with one of the twenty-dollar bills of his roll, and strolled out of the restaurant, puffing contentedly at a fifty-cent cigar.

"There's certainly a whole lot of enjoyment to be got out of money," he reflected, with a sigh of satisfaction. "That meal was superb and this smoke is perfect. Now for a Turkish bath, a shave, some good clothes, and a decent place to sleep."

A hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned to find the short, thick-set man at his heels.

"Say," said the latter, "don't I know you, my friend?"

"I don't think so," replied Cowper coldly.

"Well, I think I've seen your face before," the man persisted. "Perhaps you can tell me where?"

"No. I can't," retorted Cowper shortly.

There was something about the fellow's tone which angered him.

"Maybe it was at the Rogues' Gallery at police headquarters, eh?" suggested the stranger.

"Guess again," said Cowper. "My photograph doesn't happen to adorn that interesting collection."

"Well, maybe it ought to. I think it's extremely likely that it will be put there—unless you can explain."

"Explain what?" demanded Cowper indignantly.

"Explain where you got that big roll of bills you're carrying in your trousers-pocket," said the man. "Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me how you happen to have possession of such a large sum of money."

"I'll be hanged if I will," growled Cowper. "What business is it of yours? Who are you, anyway?"

"I'll show you who I am," replied the other, pulling back his coat and revealing a gold police-shield pinned to his vest. "Guess you recognize that badge, eh?"

Cowper nodded.

"So you're a policeman? A detective from headquarters, I presume. Well, even so, what right have you to ask me such questions? I am a law-abiding citizen. Do you think I stole the money?"

"Well, I don't know about that," was the cool reply. "My candid opinion is that you didn't come by it honestly, young feller, but of course I ain't sure. If I was I'd march you to the station-house mighty quick and without any words. I think you'd better explain where you got it."

Cowper hesitated. He knew if he told the truth he would not be believed. Besides, he did not feel like taking this man into his confidence. And yet he realized that he must offer some explanation, otherwise the detective was likely to place him under arrest as a suspicious character.

"Well, the fact is," he said hesitatingly, "I—I met a friend to-day who has owed me five thousand dollars for some time. He was feeling pretty wealthy, and so he settled the debt. That's how I happen to be carrying so much money with me. Understand?"

"Oh, is that how it is?" exclaimed the detective. "That sounds plausible enough. Why didn't you say so at first? Excuse me for bothering you."

The detective turned on his heel and walked off in the other direction. Cowper proceeded on his way, chuckling at the ease with which he had settled the policeman's suspicions.

"Our police force is getting worse every day," he said to himself. "Imagine a man who calls himself a detective being satisfied with such a flimsy explanation as that."

As a matter of fact, he did the policeman an injustice, for the latter was by no means satisfied with Cowper's reply.

He waited until Rousey had proceeded several paces, and then stealthily wheeled around and followed him.

He took care to keep out of sight, but he took equal care that Cowper should not get out of his sight.

Consequently the young man proceeded on his way in blissful ignorance of the fact that he was being shadowed.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STAGGERING DISCOVERY.

THE detective saw Cowper Rousey enter a Turkish-bath establishment. He followed, still taking good care not to be seen by his prey.

The latter paid in advance for a bath and a private bedroom out of the five thousand dollars he carried, and then deposited the rest of the roll in the little black tin receptacle for valuables which the cashier placed at his disposal.

He hesitated for a few seconds before doing this, not liking the idea of leaving so much money in the office safe; but finally decided that it would certainly be more secure there than if he left it in his pocket while taking his bath.

After Cowper had disappeared through the door leading to the dressing-rooms the detective approached the cashier's desk.

"Guess I'll take a bath and a private room," he said. "Did that young feller who just went in leave any orders about being called in the morning?"

"Yes, sergeant," replied the cashier, who was acquainted with the policeman. "He left word that he wanted to be called at nine o'clock."

"Well, you can call me at a quarter to nine prompt. Don't forget, now."

"No, sergeant, I won't."

"And be sure to give me a room near to his, so that I can hear if he goes out during the night. Understand?"

"Yes. I'll give you room 56. That's right alongside of his," said the cashier. "You'll be able to hear every move he makes; the partitions are very thin."

"That's good."

"Is he a crook, sergeant?" inquired the cashier with great interest. "I suspected as much when he flashed that big roll of money on me. I thought it looked queer that such a shabby fellow would have so much dough. What has he done?"

"I don't know yet," answered the policeman. "I'm only shadowing him on suspicion. I don't know who he is, or what he is, but I've got an idea that it will be worth my while to watch him for the next few hours and see if I can get a line as to where he got all that money."

"That's right. It certainly looks mighty queer. I'll wager that he didn't come by all that dough honestly."

After the subject of this discussion had gone through the various courses of the Turkish bath he retired to his private bedroom and sank into a sound sleep.

The next morning he was awakened at nine o'clock by an attendant, in accordance with his instructions.

He was shaved, shorn, and shampooed by the barber employed on the premises; and, although he was forced to wear his shabby clothes for the time being, he looked so much improved when he stepped into the office to claim the money he had deposited that the cashier began to think that perhaps, after all, he had been hasty in judging him to be a criminal.

Cowper visited a ready-made clothier's in the neighborhood and purchased a new outfit from head to foot.

He donned this in the store and walked out, feeling and looking like a new man, his step jaunty, a gold-headed walking-cane in his hand.

When he reached the entrance of the Clarendon Hotel, he stepped inside and approached the desk.

"Guess I'll hire a room here for a week," he said. "A nice front room, with a bath."

The Clarendon was an expensive hotel, but this fact did not deter Cowper. He realized that five thousand dollars was by no means a fortune; but, in his present reckless mood, he was determined to have a good time while the money lasted.

There was nothing about his appearance now to excite suspicion or mistrust, and the smiling room-clerk received him courteously. Even the fact that he had no baggage occasioned no comment, for Cowper offered to pay for the room in advance.

He signed the register, and proceeded to the hotel restaurant in search of breakfast.

When he had finished that meal he again said to himself, with a sigh of content: "The possession of money is certainly a fine thing. I have had no cause, as yet, to repent of the bargain I made with that red-haired man."

He strolled through the lobbies of the hotel, viewing the handsome wall decorations with an appreciative eye.

A magnificent oil-painting claimed his attention, and his gaze was fixed upon it as he walked, with the result that he bumped into a young woman who was sauntering toward him.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. Then their eyes met, and each gave vent to an exclamation of surprise.

"Cowper Rousey!" exclaimed the young woman in joyous astonishment.

"Margaret!" gasped the young man.

"This—this is so unexpected," said the girl; "I—I did not dream that you were here."

Her manner was very confused. In the first shock of meeting him she had forgotten the circumstances under which they had parted, and the expression of her beautiful face had betrayed her pleasure at seeing him again. Now she suddenly recollected their quarrel and a rosy blush suffused her cheeks at the humiliating thought that she had made the first advances.

Cowper understood and gallantly endeavored to put her at her ease.

"It is a great pleasure to see you, Margaret," he said. "How you have improved in looks during the four years that I have been away. I did not think then, that it was possible for you to grow more beautiful; but I see that I did nature a grievous wrong."

He spoke in a quiet, even tone. The girl's self-possession quickly returned to her. She regarded him smilingly. Then she said:

"Thanks for the compliment, Cowper. What a very pretty speech! But then you always did say pretty things except—except when you were horrid."

"I—I was a brute and a fool ever to have been horrid," he answered with emotion.

"Don't you reproach yourself," she rejoined softly. "If you are alluding to that—to our last meeting, Cowper, I am willing to admit that it was I who was at fault."

"No. I was to blame," he insisted. "I had no right to say the things to you that I did. But then, it is all over now, of course."

"You are willing to let bygones be bygones, you mean? We are friends again, eh, Cowper?"

"Of course—if you really wish it," he answered.

"Of course I wish it. I shall always value your friendship. You have been abroad, haven't you, Cowper?"

"Yes—to Australia."

"When did you return?"

"Yesterday."

"And you are stopping at this hotel?"

"Yes, for the time being. I registered here a few minutes ago."

"Why did you not write to me while you were in Australia?" she asked reproachfully. "I expected to hear from you. I expected a letter from you every day. Why did you not send me a word?"

"I wanted to forget you," he answered grimly. "I—I tried hard to do so."

"And did you succeed, Cowper?"

She looked at him coquettishly as she asked the question. There was a distinct challenge in her beautiful eyes.

The hot blood surged to his face. His eyes met hers reproachfully.

"Do you think that is a fair question, Margaret?" he demanded sternly.

"I don't know," she answered with a laugh. "Perhaps it isn't; but I—I very much want to hear your answer."

"You have no right to hear my answer—now," he said. "And I have no right to give it to you. Surely, Margaret, you are forgetting."

"Forgetting what?"

He did not answer. He felt that she was mocking him, and the cruelty of her act shocked him.

"I suppose I am presuming in calling you 'Margaret,'" he said after a pause. "I have no right to do so now, of course."

"Why not?" she demanded. "You have called me by my first name ever since we were children. Why should you not do so now?"

"Because circumstances alter cases," he retorted with a bitter laugh. "*He* might not approve of it. In fact, I feel sure that he would not."

"*He?*" she repeated, looking at him in astonishment. "Whom do you mean?"

"Whom should I mean?" he answered, almost roughly. "Your *husband,* of course."

"My husband! Cowper Rousey, what is the matter with you? Are you crazy? I have no husband."

He looked at her in blank amazement.

"No husband!" he gasped. "What are you saying, Margaret? What, in the name of Heaven, do you mean? Is he dead?"

"Is who dead?"

"Your husband."

"I tell you I have no husband," she exclaimed impatiently. "Are you joking with me, Cowper, or did you really think that I was married?"

"*Think* you were married!" He laughed bitterly. "Surely it is you who are joking. I know only too well that you are married."

"You know nothing of the kind," she cried impatiently. "I tell you that I am not married. Don't you dare contradict me, Cowper Rousey!" She stamped her little foot with indignation.

He stared at her in blank astonishment. His face was deathly pale.

"I don't know what you mean by this," he said in a hard, metallic tone. "You always used to be a truthful girl, Margaret. You would never stoop to a lie. Why should you do so now? I saw you go into the church yesterday. Will you dare to deny it?"

"Of course I won't deny it," she answered. "Of course I went to the church yesterday. I went there to act as bridesmaid at the wedding of my friend, Sophie Hunt. She was married yesterday to Peter Stillwell, and Mr. Oscar Harmsworth was the bridegroom's best man. Is that what you refer to, Cowper?"

He did not answer her. His face was ghastly, his eyes were dilated, his hands opened and closed convulsively. He reeled like a drunken man.

"Cowper!" cried the girl, viewing his condition with alarm. "What is the matter? Are you ill?"

"What have I done?" he groaned. "Oh, what have I done? What a blithering idiot I have been! I am the most miserable wretch in all the world."

"What is the matter?" pleaded the girl fearfully. "Won't you please tell me, Cowper, what has happened?".

"The very worst that could has happened to me," he answered brokenly. "Oh, what a fool I have been. I have sold my life's happiness for a few miserable dollars."

Before the frightened girl could repeat her demand for an explanation of these, to her, absolutely unintelligible sentences, a short, thick-set man stepped up to Cowper and laid a hand heavily on his shoulder.

"I want you, Cowper Rousey," he said, "I know you now. I saw your name on the hotel register. You are under arrest."

"Under arrest," gasped Margaret Adair. "What for?"

"For the larceny of ten thousand dollars," replied the detective. "Come, young fellow, it is no use making any scene. I charge you with stealing ten thousand dollars from the safe in the office of your uncle, Philip Rousey. You'll have to come with me to the station-house."

CHAPTER IX.

UP AGAINST IT.

MARGARET ADAIR regarded the detective with an incredulous, horrified stare.

"Cowper Rousey a thief!" she gasped. "I'll not believe it. It is not true! It can't be true! There must be some mistake."

"I guess there ain't any mistake, miss," replied the policeman, his hand clutching Cowper's right sleeve. "Leastwise, the only mistake was that made by this young man in not skipping out of town while he had the chance. He was a fool to stay here."

"But Cowper Rousey couldn't be a thief," persisted the girl loyally. "I know him too well to believe him capable of stealing. What proof have you, officer, that he took that money?"

"Quite a lot of proof," replied the detective, with a grim laugh. "Besides, miss, his manner now shows his guilt plainly enough. You don't hear him denying it, do you? He knows that it is no use. He hasn't got a word to say."

Poor Cowper had been so much dazed by the discovery that Margaret Adair was not the wife of Oscar Harmsworth that he had become oblivious to all other things and had scarcely been aware of the fact that the detective had placed him under arrest.

He stood there in a state of abject apathy, making no attempt to shake off his captor's hold and evincing no more interest in the words that passed between the girl and the detective than if their conversation had been conducted in a foreign language.

Margaret turned to him appealingly.

"Don't you hear what this man says, Cowper?" she cried. "Aren't you going to tell him that it is not true? Aren't you going to deny that you stole your uncle's money? Oh, surely you must have something to say! You must be able to explain away this infamous charge. Cowper, why don't you speak?"

Aroused by her words, the wretched young man suddenly awakened from his lethargy

and made a fierce attempt to release his coat-sleeve from the policeman's clutch.

"Let go of me!" he panted. "How dare you lay a hand on me? Of course I am no thief. I have not stolen any money from my uncle or from anybody else."

"Aw! Go tell that to the marines," sniffed the detective scornfully. "Your denial comes too late to make any impression on me. Quit your struggling now and come along quietly or I'll change that face of yours so that your best friend won't be able to recognize it."

As Cowper, despite this threat, continued to struggle, the policeman, who was quite an expert at the gentle art of jiu-jitsu, twisted his right arm behind his back in such a manner that the slightest move on the prisoner's part caused the latter acute agony.

"Stop, man! You'll break his arm," gasped Margaret fearfully. "How can you be so brutal? Don't offer him any resistance, Cowper. Please go quietly with him to the station-house. It's the best way."

"That's what I call sensible talk," declared the detective approvingly. "It won't do any good to make a scene in this hotel. I assure you, miss, that I haven't any wish to be brutal. If this young feller will come along nice and peaceful I won't hurt a hair on his head.

"By the way, miss, perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me just where you fit in. What is this young man to you, I mean? Are you his sweetheart?"

At this direct question Margaret blushed vividly.

"I—I have known Mr. Rousey ever since he was a little boy," she stammered. "I—I know him too well and think too much of him to believe him guilty of theft."

Cowper shot her a grateful glance.

"I assure you that your confidence is not misplaced, Margaret," he said in a low voice. "I am not a thief. I have not stolen a single cent. But you are right. It is no use struggling, or even arguing, with this fellow. I'll go with him to the station-house and prove my innocence."

"I'll go along with you," declared Margaret, and although Cowper tried to dissuade her from this course, she insisted on having her own way.

"Can't we take a cab?" Cowper asked the policeman.

"Yes. I haven't any objection if you're willing to pay for it. I suppose you'll pay the cabman with some of the money that you stole from your uncle. I don't know as I ought to allow you to use up part of the evidence in that way, but I'm willing to stretch the point for the sake of the young lady."

"Won't you please tell us, officer, just what this charge means?" asked Margaret, after the trio had seated themselves in a taxi and were being driven to the police station. "Why do you accuse Mr. Rousey of stealing money from his uncle? What proofs have you?"

"I'll tell you all about it, miss," replied the detective confidentially. "I hates to see a nice young lady like you made a victim by a young scalawag such as this fellow. I'll show you that he ain't worthy of your faith and confidence. He's a thief beyond doubt and you're foolish to stick to him.

"Last night I was strolling around town, and I happened to drop into Mocardo's restaurant. Probably you know the place. It's one of the swellest eating-places in town.

"This young man was in there. He was orderin' the most expensive dishes and eatin' his fill like a feller who hasn't tasted real food for a month.

"The head waiter pointed him out to me. He wasn't dressed up like a dude, the way he is now. His clothing was shabby then and his face was hairy enough to give any barber an epileptic fit. He looked like a tramp.

"The head waiter told me that this fellow, in spite of his shabby appearance, had a roll of bills in his pocket as big as a prize-fighter's fist. Of course, I was suspicious right away. I thought it looked mighty queer that a feller of his appearance should be carrying so much money. I decided that he would bear watching. So I shadowed him.

"I saw him go into a swell clothier's this morning and exchange his rags for these fine duds. I saw him come to this hotel and hire a room for a week.

"Then I went to a telephone and got into communication with headquarters. I inquired if any big larcenies had been reported since I was there last.

"They told me, over the phone, that a wealthy stock-broker, named Philip Rousey, had reported yesterday the theft of ten thousand dollars in bills from his office safe.

"The money had been missed shortly after Mr. Rousey had received a visit from

his nephew. The safe was in the broker's private office. It was in this office that the interview with the nephew took place. Under the circumstances it looked extremely likely that the nephew was the thief.

"As soon as I heard this report from headquarters I at once suspected that this young man might be Mr. Rousey's nephew.

"I consulted the hotel register and found that he had actually signed his right name —'Cowper Rousey.' Then I knew right away that he was the man I wanted and I at once placed him under arrest. Don't you think now that I've got a pretty good case against him, miss?"

"No, I don't," replied Margaret indignantly. "Do you mean to tell me that you have dared to accuse him of stealing just because he happened to pay a visit to his uncle yesterday?"

"Well, not exactly, miss. That's only a circumstance, of course. The strongest point against him is the fact that he's got nearly five thousand dollars in his pocket at the present minute."

"Well, supposing he has?" cried the girl, her blue eyes flashing scornfully. "What right have you to assume that the money in his pocket is part of the money stolen from Mr. Philip Rousey? In my opinion this arrest is an outrage."

"Oh, no, it isn't," retorted the detective with a laugh. "It's a mighty good arrest. If he didn't steal the money, let him explain where he got it."

"Of course he can explain that," replied the girl confidently. She turned eagerly to the prisoner. "Tell him where you got the money, Cowper. You can do so, of course. I am sure that you have nothing to conceal. Explain to this man how you happen to be carrying such a large sum in your pocket and show him how mean and unjust his suspicions are."

Her words and her expectant manner increased the wretchedness of the unhappy Cowper. He felt that he could not tell her the truth. He would rather go to prison for life than confess to her that he had sold himself in marriage to a woman he did not know, for five thousand dollars.

He could well imagine the scorn with which this glorious, high-minded girl would receive such a confession. He realized how she would shrink from him in horror if she should learn what he had done.

He knew that if he had really stolen his uncle's money his offense would have appeared much less heinous in the eyes of a girl of Margaret's caliber than the manner in which he had actually come into possession of the cash.

He would not tell her, and so he remained silent. His silence caused the girl to gaze at him wonderingly—fearfully.

"Why don't you speak?" she demanded. "Aren't you going to explain where you got that money? Surely you *can* explain, Cowper Rousey? Why don't you tell us?"

"I earned it," he answered, almost sullenly.

"Ah! I knew it," she exclaimed, darting a triumphant glance at the detective. "He didn't steal it. He earned it—every cent of it. And you earned it honestly, too, didn't you, Cowper?"

"Yes." His answer was scarcely more than a whisper.

"Tell him how you got it, Cowper," insisted the girl. "Show him that his suspicions are outrageous."

The detective chuckled and regarded his prisoner's ashen face with a grin. He could see how poor Cowper was suffering.

"Yes. Tell us how," he sneered. "Let us have that by all means, young feller. I should very much like to hear it."

"Well, you need not sneer," cried Margaret, looking at him witheringly. "You *shall* hear it. Tell him please, Cowper. Tell him how you made that five thousand dollars. Was it very hard work?"

"It was the hardest work I have ever done in my life," answered Cowper earnestly. "I wouldn't do it over again for a hundred thousand dollars."

Margaret clapped her hands joyously at this answer.

"There you are," she exclaimed, turning to the detective with scorn and triumph on her prety face. "Now, I hope you are satisfied. Surely it is no crime for a young man to carry five thousand dollars which he has earned by the sweat of his brow. I hope that you will now be man enough to admit your mistake and allow this gentleman to go free."

"Not exactly," retorted the policeman with a laugh. "This young scamp tells us now that he earned that five thousand by hard work; but last night he told me that he had got the money from a friend who owed it to him. He isn't even smart enough to stick to the same story right along. He'll be telling a different yarn to-morrow, to

account for the possession of that roll. He's the most careless crook I've ever had dealings with. Well, here we are at the police-station. Let me assist you to alight, miss."

"No, thank you," replied Maragret haughtily, "I do not require any help from you. I think you are the most hateful man I have ever met. I did not suppose that even a policeman could be so brutal and unreasonable."

Having delivered this stern rebuke, she jumped from the cab and followed the detective and his prisoner into the station-house.

Cowper Rousey's pedigree was taken, and he was searched and removed to a cell in very short order.

As he was being led away Margaret ran to him and tenderly squeezed his hand.

"Don't worry," she whispered. "Everything will come out all right in the end. I am going to do all in my power to help you. I believe in you absolutely, dear boy."

The term of endearment, the tender pressure of her little fingers and her sympathetic manner caused Cowper to wince and filled him with despair.

One day previously these would have made him the happiest man in all the world; but now the knowledge that his own rash act had rendered it impossible for him to win the girl he loved, caused him to wish that he had never been born.

CHAPTER X.

HARD TO BELIEVE.

THERE were tears in the eyes of Margaret Adair as Cowper Rousey was marched off to a cell. The police official seated behind the big desk regarded her sympathetically.

"Is that young man a relative of yours, miss?" he inquired.

The girl shook her head.

"He is a very dear friend," explained the detective, with an expressive wink at the man behind the desk.

Margaret turned upon him angrily.

"What a contemptible fellow you are!" she exclaimed scornfully. "There is a sneer in every word you utter. Believe me, you will be very sorry for what you have done before long."

"My dear young lady," protested the detective depreciatingly. "I assure you that you are doing me a great injustice. I have no personal feeling against that young man. It was my duty as an officer of the law to arrest him and I had to do it. You really shouldn't feel bitter towards me for it. And as for sneering at you, I swear that I had no such intention. If you'll excuse me for saying so, I think you are a very fine young lady and that young feller is mighty lucky to have such a friend to stand by him in his hour of trouble."

"You had no right to arrest him," declared the girl severely. "Your doing so was an outrage. He didn't steal the money. Oh, it is terrible to think of his being locked up here in a dirty, horrid prison cell."

"Well, I must admit that the cells here ain't any too pleasant," said the detective; "but then, he won't be kept here long, miss. I'm going to take him to court soon."

"To court," exclaimed Margaret eagerly. "Is he to be tried so quickly?"

"Oh, no! He won't be tried. He'll merely be taken to a magistrate's court for a preliminary hearing and then remanded. His real trial won't take place for several weeks to come."

"And will he have to stay in prison in the meantime?" asked Margaret, with a shudder.

"Not necessarily. If you can find somebody to go on his bond the magistrate will let him out on bail."

Margaret's eyes sparkled with new hope.

"Of course I must get bail for him," she said. "He isn't going to stay in a horrid prison cell for more than a few hours if I can help it. How much will the bail be?"

"Well, that's entirely up to the magistrate. He can make the bond any figure he wants to." The detective turned to the man behind the desk. "What do you think the bail is likely to be in this case, Bill?" he inquired.

"I should say about twenty thousand dollars," was the reply.

Margaret gasped. "Twenty thousand dollars! Mercy! Where am I going to get such a lot of money?"

"You don't have to put up the cash, miss," the man behind the desk explained. "Real estate will do just as well. Get somebody with property to go on your young man's bond."

The policeman's reference to Cowper Rousey as *her* "young man," might have summoned a flash of resentment to Margaret's expressive eyes, or at least a wave of color to her cheeks under other circum-

stances; but now she was so much worried that the fellow's insinuating phrase passed unheeded.

Her mind was filled with but one idea. She must find somebody immediately who would consent to offer the necessary bail.

Being positive of Cowper Rousey's innocence, she was quite confident that he would be acquitted when his case finally came to trial. She was not at all uneasy as to the outcome; but the thought of his having to languish in a prison cell for several weeks awaiting trial unless she could procure a bondsman, distressed her so much that she found it difficult to keep the tears from her eyes as she walked out of the police station.

It is by no means easy to find a friend who is willing to risk twenty thousand dollars as a guarantee that a young man charged with a felony will show up in court on the day his case is called.

Margaret discovered this when she appealed to several of her friends who, she knew, were in a position to go on Cowper Rousey's bond if they had so desired.

In each case she met with a polite refusal. Some of those who declined to come to the young man's assistance frankly explained that they were afraid the prisoner would take advantage of his temporary freedom and leave the country before the day of his trial; in which event, of course, the bond would be forfeited.

In vain Margaret tried to argue with them that Cowper Rousey was absolutely innocent of the crime with which he was charged and, therefore, had no reason to run away. They shook their heads knowingly and declared that the proposition was too risky.

Margaret's heart was as heavy as lead as she walked along the street trying to think of somebody who would do her this favor.

A tall, slender, somewhat flashily-dressed youth came sauntering toward her, languidly swinging a gold-headed cane.

At sight of her the young man doffed his hat and his face displayed a more animated expression than its owner seemed capable of.

It was Reggie Dingwall. Margaret knew him well. Under ordinary circumstances she would have regretted this encounter exceedingly, for Reggie's languid manner and insufferable airs always "got on her nerves"; but now she returned his greeting effusively. She realized that this young man could help her if he wished; for his father owned considerable property. It was a case of "any port in a storm."

"How do you do, Mr. Dingwall," she exclaimed with a bright smile. "This is really a most fortunate meeting. I was just thinking about you. You are the very person I wanted to see."

"Is that really so, Miss Adair?" simpered the youth. "In that case it must have been your good fairy who suggested to me that I take advantage of this fine weather to take a little stroll along this thoroughfare. Beautiful day, isn't it?"

"Yes, lovely. The fact is, Mr. Dingwall, I am in trouble, and I thought perhaps you might be able to help me."

"Beauty in distress always appeals to me," remarked the young man. "I am sure, Miss Adair, that I shall be very glad to give you any assistance I can. What is the matter?"

"You know Cowper Rousey, do you not?"

"Oh yes—of course I know him."

"Well, it is for him that I want your help. You know that we were practically brought up together as children and that he is just like a brother to me. You can imagine, therefore, how unhappy it makes me to see him in trouble."

"Is he is trouble?" inquired Reggie, with languid interest.

"Yes—in very great trouble. The fact is he—he has been arrested."

"Arrested, eh? By Jove, that's too bad. Nothing serious, I hope, Miss Adair?"

"Yes, it is very serious," she answered with a sigh. "They are horrid enough to accuse him of having stolen ten thousand dollars from his uncle."

Reggie expressed his surprise by a low whistle.

"Ten thousand dollars, eh?" he exclaimed. "Dear me, I should say that *was* serious. So poor Cowper Rousey has turned out to be a thief?"

Margaret glared at him indignantly.

"Of course he hasn't turned out to be a thief!" she said. "They are making a terrible mistake. Certainly he is innocent. I am surprised at you, Mr. Dingwall."

"Well, if he is innocent, why have they arrested him?" demanded the young man. "I don't like to knock anybody, Miss Adair, but generally there is fire where there is smoke, you know."

"How ridiculously you argue," exclaimed the girl impatiently. "Poor Cowper is by no means the first man who has been accused unjustly. Just because he happened to have

five thousand dollars in his pocket this morning, they insist that he must be the person who robbed his uncle's safe yesterday. Isn't it perfectly absurd?"

"Do you mean to say that they actually found the money in his pocket?" he said. "They caught him with the goods, as the saying is, eh, Miss Adair?"

Margaret stamped her little foot angrily upon the sidewalk.

"How very stupid you can be sometimes!" she exclaimed. "Of course they did not find *the* money in his pocket. They found five thousand dollars there; but it was not the stolen money. It was money which Cowper had earned by hard work."

At this the languid youth burst into laughter.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Adair," he simpered, "but it is you who are stupid, not I. How very simple your sex is, to be sure! Do you mean to say that you actually believe that Cowper Rousey *earned* that money?"

"Of course I do," replied the girl indignantly. "And I think you are acting like a horrid boor, Mr. Dingwall. I didn't believe that you could be so ungentlemanly. I thought that perhaps you might be willing to help me; but since you choose to be so very rude and intolerable, I don't think I will detain you any longer."

"Excuse me, Miss Adair," said the youth contritely. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings by laughing at you, really I didn't, and I apologize most profoundly for calling you stupid. Don't go away angry with me, please don't. I swear that I meant no offense to you, and I would very much like to help you if I can."

"Well, then, don't let me hear you say another word reflecting on poor Cowper," rejoined the girl relentingly. "You used to be his friend, Mr. Dingwall, and you ought to believe in him. I am positive that he is innocent."

"Well, Cowper Rousey is a lucky man to have your faith," said Reggie. "But you are making a mistake, my dear Miss Adair, really you are. I don't like to knock poor Rousey or to shatter your confidence in him; but I happen to *know* that he didn't get that money by hard work. If they found five thousand dollars on him, he must have stolen it."

Margaret's face had turned deathly pale. She regarded the youth with horrified amazement.

"You say that you *know* that he didn't earn that money by working for it!" she gasped. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, Miss Adair," went on Reggie cheerfully, "it was this way. I met Cowper Rousey in the street yesterday. He was shabbily dressed and very much down and out—so much so, that when he hailed me I didn't recognize him, and took him for a confounded street beggar. Yes, upon my honor, I did, Miss Adair, and I was going to have him arrested for annoying me.

"After I had recognized him he braced me for a loan, and when I refused because —er—because I didn't happen to have any money with me, you know, he asked me to vouch for him at my tailor's, so that he could get some decent clothes on credit.

"Now, it stands to reason, Miss Adair, that he couldn't have had the five thousand dollars in his pocket then, and it is ridiculous to suppose that he could have earned such a big sum over night."

"That is very strange," she said. "Are you sure that you are telling me the truth?"

"'Pon my honor, Miss Adair. I wouldn't lie to you, you know. It happened just as I have told you. Rousey looked so awfully seedy that it really doesn't surprise me to hear that he has turned thief. The poor fellow really looked desperate enough for anything, you know."

Margaret was silent for a moment. She was striving desperately to reconcile what Reggie had just told her with Cowper Rousey's assertion that he had earned that five thousand dollars honestly.

She found it a difficult task. Her sense of logic told her that if Cowper really had been seedy and penniless the preceding day, it certainly looked as if he must have stolen that money. It was difficult to imagine any kind of honest work that could have brought him such a large sum within a few hours. And yet she could not bring herself to believe that Cowper Rousey was a thief.

At length she turned to Reggie Dingwall with fine scorn and indignation in her glance.

"I don't believe it," she said. "I don't believe a word of what you have told me. I don't believe that Cowper asked you to loan him money yesterday. I think you have invented that story to suit some particular purpose of your own, and I despise you for it."

Having delivered herself of these scathing words, she walked away in high disdain.

"What an extraordinary girl!" gasped the astonished Reggie, looking after her as she disappeared up the street. "She can be a regular fire-head when she wants to. I pity the poor chap who gets her for a wife. And I used to think she was such a nice, quiet, gentle sort of a creature, too."

CHAPTER XI.

A PAINFUL PROPOSAL.

MARGARET'S eyes were so blinded with tears that she could scarcely see where she was walking.

What young Dingwall had told her had made her very miserable. Despite the apparent positiveness of her parting words to him, she was, in reality, by no means so certain that he had not told her the truth.

She realized that his statement coincided to an alarming degree with what she had already learned from the detective.

The latter had stated that he, also, had seen Cowper Rousey in rags on the preceding day. It was very hard to understand why a young man should choose to go around in such shabby attire if he were worth five thousand dollars.

Then, too, a sentence which had escaped from Cowper's own lips during their conversation that day in the corridor of the Clarendon recurred to her now with a fearful significance.

"Oh, what a fool I have been! I have sold my life's happiness for a few miserable dollars!" Cowper had cried just before the detective had appeared and placed him under arrest.

What, she asked herself, could Cowper have meant by those strange words? They certainly sounded like the cry of a remorseful man. Cowper, "for a few miserable" dollars, had evidently committed some act which he now bitterly regretted. What could that act be if not the larceny of the money from his uncle's safe?

Although she was angry with herself for doubting him, she could not dispel the fear which now gripped at her heart as these thoughts presented themselves.

Suddenly it occurred to her that it would be a good plan to proceed immediately to the office of Philip Rousey, her guardian.

There she could learn the details of the robbery, and by so doing might perhaps be able to convince herself of Cowper's innocence.

Perhaps, also, she might be able to persuade Cowper's uncle to refrain from pressing the charge against the unfortunate young man, or, at least, to consent to go on Cowper's bond.

She did not have much hope of prevailing on her guardian to drop the complaint; for she knew that Philip Rousey was the kind of man who would not hesitate to send to prison his own flesh and blood if he believed that the latter had done him a wrong; but she thought that she might be able to persuade him to release his nephew from confinement until the day of his trial, in view of the fact that the young man's guilt had not yet been proved.

Philip Rousey received her cordially, for he was very fond of his dead partner's daughter; but when she broached the subject which had brought her to him his manner instantly became quite violent.

"Not a word about that fellow!" he shouted. "Not a single word. Don't you even mention his name to me again, Margaret; and don't you ever again think of him, either. I want you to promise me to forget that such a person ever lived."

"But why should I do that?" protested the girl. "I think a whole lot of Cowper. I am really very fond of him, and—hasn't it always been your wish that I should marry him?"

The color rose to her cheeks as she asked the question, but she met her guardian's glance bravely.

Philip Rousey scowled.

"That was in the past—in the days when I believed that he was a promising young man who would make you a good husband," he said. "It was the dearest wish of my heart, then, to see the pair of you united. But now I would sooner see you dead than married to him. He is not fit to shine your shoes for you. He is a thief and a scamp, and I am through with him entirely."

"But really you are very unjust to him, dear guardian," protested the girl. "I am sure that he did not steal your money. You are judging him before he has been tried, and surely that is not fair."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Philip Rousey indignantly. "It is no use talking in that strain, my dear girl. There isn't any doubt at all but that he is the thief who stole my money.

"The detective who arrested him told me over the telephone that the scoundrel had nearly five thousand dollars in his pocket

when he was searched in the station-house. When the scamp visited me in this office yesterday he didn't have a single cent, and he was as ragged as a tramp. Where could he have got all that money within a few hours, unless he stole it from that safe?"

Margaret winced at the question—that disturbing, logic-laden question which was continually bobbing up to force her to doubt when she so much wanted to believe.

"He—he says that he earned the money honestly, by hard work," she faltered. "He told me that it was the hardest work he had ever done in his life, and that he wouldn't do it over again for a hundred thousand dollars."

"Pshaw! That's too ridiculous to be worthy of consideration. Surely you are too sensible a girl, my dear, to believe such a statement. What kind of honest work could a fellow like him do to earn all that money in less than a day?

"I tell you he is a thief. He stole the money from that safe over there in the corner. Through carelessness on my part, the door of the safe was not locked while he was here talking to me. He must have noticed that such was the case, and availed himself of the opportunity."

"Did you leave him in here alone for any length of time?" asked Margaret with a sigh.

"No. That's the queerest part of it," replied Cowper's uncle. "I didn't leave him for a single instant. I was in here from the time he entered until the time he left."

"Ah!" exclaimed the girl, her heart beating joyously at these words. "Now I am absolutely positive of his innocence. You didn't leave this room while he was here, and yet you accuse him of stealing money from that safe. For shame, guardian! How can you be so unjust?"

"Pooh! Don't talk foolishly, my dear. The detectives who were here to investigate assure me that it was not at all impossible for him to have taken the money, even though I was in the room. They are experienced in such matters.

"You see, he was standing very near the safe during our interview, and there were times when I was not watching him particularly close. The police think that he could have pulled the door of the safe slightly ajar, and inserted his hand and pulled out the roll of bills without my noticing what he was doing.

"He must have done it very stealthily, of course. I give him credit for being a very skilful thief. I am convinced, however, that he *is* a thief—that he stole that money."

"And are you really going to press the charge against him?" inquired Margaret anxiously.

"Certainly. I am determined to send him to prison. He has disgraced my name by becoming a thief, and he shall suffer the penalty which the law provides."

"Won't you drop this charge as a great favor to me, dear guardian?" asked the girl pleadingly.

"No, I won't. Not for you, or for anybody else, either," snapped the old man. "Not even his own father, if he were alive, could persuade me not to press that charge."

After some pleading, Margaret gave up the task. Then she tried to persuade him to go on his nephew's bond; but Philip Rousey was equally firm in his refusal to do this.

"Let him stay in a cell," he growled. "It's the best place for him. He'll have to occupy a cell, anyway, when the jury finds him guilty, so he might as well get used to his surroundings in the meantime.

"And, besides, if I were foolish enough to go on his bond, he'd probably skip out of the country, and I'd lose my property in the bargain. Let him stay where he is, my girl. Take my advice, and don't worry about him."

Margaret did not follow this counsel, however. She left her guardian's office in an exceedingly worried frame of mind.

She still refused to believe that Cowper Rousey was guilty, despite the evidence against him, and she was still determined to procure his temporary release from prison, despite the difficulties she had encountered in her search for a bondsman.

There was one person to whom she had not yet appealed, although she was certain that he was able to help her if he desired to do so. That person was Oscar Harmsworth.

She had thought of him several times during her hunt for some friend who would come to the rescue of Rousey; but each time the law clerk's name had arisen in her mind she had dismissed it peremptorily.

She was well aware of the fact that Harmsworth was in love with her; for on more than one occasion he had tried to persuade her to marry him, and had appeared to be greatly depressed by her refusal.

Intuitively she realized that he must be

bitterly jealous of Cowper Rousey, and her sense of fairness, as well as a very natural delicacy, caused her to shrink from appealing to him to help his rival.

But now, in her despair, she decided that she would do so. She would ask Harmsworth to come to the assistance of Cowper Rousey for her sake. Perhaps, if she put the matter to him in that way, he would not refuse.

Having decided upon this course, she hurried to the law-offices of Sampson & Bowers, where Harmsworth was employed as managing clerk.

As she entered, Harmsworth, handsome, debonair, faultlessly attired, looking, in fact, as if he had just stepped out of a tailor's fashion-plate, rushed forward to receive her.

"Why, Miss Adair!" he cried joyfully. "This is indeed a pleasant surprise! What good fortune brings you here?"

"No *good* fortune at all," sighed Margaret. "I am here on a very painful errand. I have come to ask you to help me."

"Help you, Miss Adair—to be sure I will. I shall be delighted to do anything I can for you. Great Scott! How sad and worried you look! What on earth has happened? Come over here and sit down and tell me all about it."

Margaret sank into the proffered armchair and broached the subject hesitatingly.

"A—a friend of mine is in great trouble," she faltered. "He is—he has been arrested as a thief and is now locked up in a cell."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the law clerk sympathetically. "That is too bad. We must do what we can to get him out of his predicament. I suppose it is my legal services that you require?"

"Not only your legal services," replied the girl. "Of course, poor Cowper will require a good lawyer to defend him when his case comes to trial; but what I am looking for now is somebody who will go on his bond and get him out of that horrid cell."

As she said the words "poor Cowper" the expression on Harmsworth's features underwent a lightning change. The sympathetic smile disappeared. His face grew stern.

"Cowper," he said. "Cowper Rousey, I presume you mean? Is it he who is in trouble, Miss Adair?"

She nodded.

"Yes, it is Cowper Rousey. They have arrested him on a charge of stealing ten thousand dollars from his uncle's safe. Of course, he is absolutely innocent. Cowper would not steal."

"And you have come to me for help. You want me to assist him?" said Harmsworth grimly.

"Yes. I felt sure that you would know of somebody who would be able to give bail for him. I have been to everybody else I could think of, and have been unable to find any one who would do me this great favor."

He laughed softly.

"That isn't a very gracious speech, Miss Adair," he said reproachfully. "It is scarcely flattering to a fellow to tell him that you have only asked him to help you because you could find nobody else."

"It is the truth," she answered simply. "I shouldn't have come to you at all if I could have avoided doing so. I don't wish to say anything ungracious, Mr. Harmsworth, but—the fact is I happen to be aware that you and Cowper are not the best of friends, and under the circumstances it is painful for me to have to appeal to you to do *him* a favor."

Harmsworth did not make any reply for a few seconds. He was doing some rapid thinking.

Suddenly the expression of his face softened. The sympathetic smile which had vanished at the girl's first mention of Cowper Rousey's name now made its appearance again.

"I don't want you to feel that way about it, Miss Adair," he said gently. "It hurts me to think that it should be painful to you to ask anything of me.

"It is true that Cowper Rousey and I have not been the best of friends. I don't mind confessing that I have always been bitterly jealous of him—I guess you know why. On his part, he has always disliked me, and has never hesitated to evince his dislike. Why he should entertain that feeling toward me I cannot understand; for Heaven knows he has no reason to be jealous of me.

"But the fact that we dislike each other has nothing whatever to do with the present situation. I shall be glad to give him all the help I can. I shall do all in my power to get him out of his trouble. I am very glad that you have come to me, my dear Miss Adair."

This frank and generous speech surprised Margaret exceedingly. She had never really liked Oscar Harmsworth until this minute. She had always suspected that there was a

mean streak in the man's nature. Now she felt that she had done him a great injustice. She turned to him with a smile kinder than any she had ever previously bestowed upon him.

"Oh, how very good of you!" she cried appreciatively. "You are perfectly splendid, Mr. Harmsworth. How can I ever thank you enough?"

"I don't want you to thank me at all," he answered. "To be able to serve you, my dear Miss Adair, is the greatest pleasure I can ever know. Even the knowledge that, in this case, by extricating my successful rival from his predicament I shall be clearing him in your eyes, and thereby detracting from my own chances, cannot rob me of the pleasure and pride I feel at being able to do something for you."

"I assure you that I appreciate this more than I can tell you," said Margaret softly. "I shall never forget it. And you really mean to obtain a bondsman for poor Cowper?"

There was so much eagerness in her tone that Harmsworth could not repress a sigh.

"How terribly anxious you are, Miss Adair," he said with a pathetic smile. "Cowper Rousey is indeed a lucky fellow. I can't tell you how much I envy him. Yes, I expect to be able to procure a bondsman for him without much difficulty. I know several men who own valuable property. I will call one of them on the telephone now, and ask him to oblige me."

He went into the telephone-booth, and after a few minutes' conversation on the wire returned to Margaret.

"It is all right," he said. "That part of the business is settled. Mr. Charles Wertheimer, a wealthy brewer, who is under obligations to me, has consented to go on Rousey's bond. He will be here in a few minutes, and will bring the deeds of his property with him. As soon as he arrives we will go right to court and have the prisoner released."

"That is indeed good news!" cried Margaret joyfully. "You have certainly made me a very happy girl, Mr. Harmsworth. I was terribly grieved at the thought of poor Cowper having to stay in prison."

"Of course, you understand that this will be only a temporary release for him, don't you, Miss Adair?" asked the lawyer. "He is simply being let out on bail. If the jury finds him guilty he will have to go back to prison again. You realize that, of course?"

"Oh, yes. I understand that," answered the girl. "But then I feel confident that the jury will not find him guilty. They are bound to acquit him."

"I hope so," said Harmsworth gravely. "Although I have good cause to be jealous of Rousey, I should not like to see him convicted of a felony. I am not mean enough to wish that. If I thought that he was really guilty I might feel different about it, but I feel as positive as you do that he is innocent. Cowper Rousey is not the sort of fellow who would become a thief."

At this unexpected tribute the tears sprang to Margaret's eyes.

"How noble of you to say that!" she exclaimed. "Your magnanimity is sublime, Mr. Harmsworth. I can't tell you how much I admire you for it. Of all the men I have appealed to to-day, you are the only one who has expressed a belief in Cowper's innocence. I am afraid I have never really appreciated you until now."

"Tush, Miss Adair! I am really not deserving of such extravagant praise," retorted Harmsworth modestly. "You make me feel quite embarrassed by talking in that strain. There is no particular merit in speaking the truth, and a gentleman must give even his hated rival his due. I am only saying what I believe to be true. Although Cowper Rousey and I are not good friends, I cannot say that I believe him to be a thief when I realize, in my heart, that he is the very soul of honor."

Margaret now thought Oscar Harmsworth the finest fellow she had ever met—with one single exception. She bitterly regretted the cold attitude she had assumed toward him in the past, and inwardly resolved that in future she would class him among her dearest friends.

Mr. Charles Wertheimer arrived soon afterward, and Harmsworth summoned a cab and, accompanied by Margaret and the bondsman, hurried to the magistrate's court.

Cowper Rousey was just being arraigned when the trio entered.

The prisoner looked very dejected and miserable as he stood in front of the judge's desk, the detective who had arrested him at his side and his uncle, Philip Rousey, near by.

"I am positive that he took my money, judge," Cowper's uncle was saying. "And although he is my own flesh and blood, I am determined to teach him a lesson by prosecuting this case."

"Very well," replied the magistrate. "I will hold the prisoner in twenty thousand dollars bail. Have you a bondsman, young man?"

"No," answered the prisoner in a dull, indifferent tone.

"Well, you had better try to procure one," the magistrate advised him. "If you don't, you will have to stay in confinement until your case comes to trial, and that may not be for months."

Harmsworth, thoroughly versed in the procedure of the court, was about to address the magistrate when Margaret rushed toward the rail which separated her from the prisoner, crying excitedly: "I've got a bondsman! Here he is! You won't have to stay in a horrid cell, Cowper! We're going to get you out right now."

At this breach of decorum the magistrate banged the desk with his gavel and frowned upon the impetuous young woman, greatly to her surprise.

"Order in the court!" he commanded sternly.

"Order in the court!" cried several court officers very fiercely.

"I hope that your honor will pardon this young lady," said Harmsworth, addressing the magistrate with a deprecating smile. "She is not familiar with the etiquette of the court, and, consequently, did not realize that she was slightly out of order just now."

"That's all right, Mr. Harmsworth," replied the magistrate, nodding pleasantly to the law clerk, with whom he was well acquainted. "Are you personally interested in this case?"

"Yes, your honor. I have been retained by this young lady. I would like to offer bail, if your honor pleases. Mr. Wertheimer here is prepared to furnish real estate worth half a million dollars."

"Very good," said the court. "Mr. Wertheimer's bond will be accepted. The clerk will fill out the necessary form right away. By the way, Mr. Harmsworth, who is this young lady, and what is her interest in this case? Is she related to the prisoner?"

"No, she is not," broke in old Philip Rousey before Harmsworth could answer the question. "She is not related to this young scamp, your honor. He is absolutely nothing to her. She is a very foolish girl to have disgraced herself by coming here and mixing up in his affairs. I advised her to have nothing more to do with him; but it seems that she has not seen fit to listen to me."

He scowled and shook his head reproachfully at Margaret.

The latter met his gaze unflinchingly.

"I couldn't follow your advice, guardian," she said. "I couldn't see poor Cowper in this terrible plight without doing my best to help him. And you are not telling the truth when you say that he is nothing to me. On the contrary, he is *everything* to me—I am going to be his wife.

"Yes," she went on in a loud, clear voice, "I am not ashamed to announce it publicly in this place. I believe in Cowper Rousey. I know that he is innocent, and, whatever the outcome of this cruel charge against him may be—I am going to marry him."

"If she does," said Cowper to himself, with a groan, "I'll be committing bigamy. Oh, what an unfortunate chap I am! What glorious happiness I have lost by my rash step!"

Everybody in the court-room was staring at him, expecting, doubtless, to see his face light up with joy and gratitude at the brave words Margaret had spoken.

But his features remained pallid and drawn. Not a vestige of a smile came to his lips. His aspect was so mournful and forlorn that Margaret flushed with mortification.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the magistrate, regarding Cowper in great surprise. "For a fellow who has just received the promise of such a charming bride, you don't look very cheerful, young man."

(To be continued.)

LIFE.

It might have been better, it might have been worse,
But is what it is, and it's no good to grumble
And envy the getter, or fear a reverse,
But enjoy what we have, be it never so humble.

Anonymous.

THEIR WHITE LIE.

BY IDA JACKSON BURGESS.

The Fact that This Tale Has a Moral Will Be Self-Evident to Those Who Read It, So Why Rub It In?

THAT a telephone can occasionally, through some mysterious complication of its inner mechanism, give a fair imitation of a phonograph is a fact that has doubtless been noticed by every one who has had an intimate acquaintance with that sometimes exasperating but most indispensable adjunct to modern life. Such a phenomenon had, that hot afternoon, afforded Alice Welton some faint amusement, since it had made her an enforced listener to the dialogue which ensued whenever Delia, the loquacious genius of the kitchen, engaged a distant friend in conversation.

Now, as Mrs. Welton trailed her lacy skirts across the floor in response to its shrill ring, her husband, luxuriating in the coatless comfort of home after a broiling day down-town, distinctly heard Marion Adams urging Alice to come over for a game of bridge.

"It will do Tom good," he heard her say. "He'll forget how hot it is if he should happen to win the rubber."

"Bridge be blasted," growled Tom.

Alice put her hand over the mouthpiece and turned her head.

"Sh-s-s!" she said warningly, "she'll hear you. This telephone acts so queerly. What shall I say?"

"Any old thing so we won't have to go," returned her husband sulkily. "Tell her I'm sick — no, not that, for she and that mother of hers would be over with hot-water bags and good advice. Tell her I'm out of town."

Alice made a grimace, but obeyed.

"I'm so sorry, dear," she cooed sweetly, "but Tom is out of the city. He was called away on business quite suddenly. He expects to get in to-night. The poor dear! Think of being shut up in those stuffy cars such a night as this."

Alice turned her head to make a little mouth at her husband.

"Whew!" he exclaimed admiringly, "where did you learn to do it so well?"

"That's all the more reason why you should come over here instead of moping by yourself," he heard Marion say in reply. "I'm sorry Tom is away, but we'll ask Dr. Richardson to come in, and Larry will come right over for you."

Tom scowled. Dr. Richardson was his pet aversion. Alice looked at him inquiringly.

"Tell her you're waiting here for a message from me and can't leave," he suggested.

"That's easily arranged," returned Marion when Alice had repeated her husband's words, "we'll ask Central to have the call sent to you here at our number. No, not a word! I'll attend to it myself and Larry is coming right over. Aren't you, dear?"

This evidently to her own husband. "Now, I'll ring off and call up Dr. Richardson. Good-by."

Alice hung up the receiver and faced her husband wrathfully.

"See what a mess you've made of things by lying," she said.

Tom chuckled.

"We'll pass over your reflections on my truthfulness. I'm really shocked to find you so glib at it yourself."

"But what are you going to do about it?" his wife wanted to know.

"That's easy. When Larry Adams shows up to get you, I'll skip into the kitchen and stay there until you go. Then after I've had a cool drink and a rest, I'll telephone you that I've just got in and I'll come over for you. There's the bell and here's to luck."

Airily wafting a kiss to his wife, Mr. Thomas Welton fled to the rear of the apartment. Alice, furtively patting her shining brown puffs with that instinctive gesture of the pretty woman, opened the door, not only to Mr. Lawrence Adams, but to Mrs. Wetherbee, that gentleman's distinguished looking, but really most subdued, mother-in-law.

"Mrs. Wetherbee is going to wait here for

that message from Tom," he explained. "Marion found out that you can't get long-distance messages forwarded without going through a lot of red tape and she thought it would be easier and much more satisfactory for you for her mother to come over. She'll telephone you just as soon as Tom rings up, so it will be all right."

"But I could not dream of putting you to so much trouble," protested Alice to Mrs. Wetherbee.

"It is no trouble at all, dear child," said that lady, who had been too long under her daughter's domination to make any objections even if she had wished to. "You and Larry must hurry right along so that Marion won't be kept waiting. I shall make myself quite comfortable here with your books and magazines, and as soon as I get that message from Tom I will call you up."

"Then I'll get my hat. It's very good of you," and Alice went to her room.

From there she sped noiselessly down the narrow hall of the apartment to the kitchen, where her husband, seated on a wooden chair with his feet on the edge of the sink, looked up inquiringly.

"Don't delay on my account," said he with mock politeness. "I can fancy a more desirable place in which to spend a hot night than this kitchen."

Alice giggled maliciously.

"You'll probably have to spend it here," she said. "Mrs. Wetherbee is in there waiting for that message from you, and she is going to stay there until it comes."

"The deuce she is!" said Tom.

"Sh-s-s! Don't let them hear you. I must go now. I hope you won't be too uncomfortable, but you'll have to keep quiet or she'll hear you. You won't be able to get that drink you spoke of, for you can't risk cracking ice, and you couldn't turn on the water without making a noise, anyway. Oh, Tom Welton, why will you lie so?" and Mrs. Welton, with her most virtuous expression, implanted a chaste kiss on her husband's brow.

"Oh, the deuce!" he muttered.

Presently the closing of a door announced the departure of his wife and Larry. He could hear Mrs. Wetherbee moving about the little living room, evidently in search of something to read. The click of an electric light button indicated that her quest had been rewarded. Then deep silence brooded over the apartment.

Mr. Welton stared moodily at the bare painted walls of the kitchen, counted the aluminum saucepans hanging in a row back of the gas-stove and read the advertisements on the gaudy calendar that the grocer's boy had presented to Delia at New Year's. It displayed a cheerful April countenance, but though it annoyed his business-like spirit, Tom did not dare to tear off the slips necessary to bring it up to date.

The hard wooden chair was fast becoming an instrument of torture. He grew intolerably thirsty, and his very position in front of the sink served to remind him of how much he wanted a drink of water. Then he had a bright idea and tiptoed over to the back door, hoping to escape that way; but it was locked, and Delia had taken the only key with her.

He edged softly back to his seat and resumed his silent communion with the water faucet. Then he heard a noise in the living room.

Evidently Mrs. Wetherbee was wearying of her own cooler comfort. He heard her coming down the hall. There was only one other door out of the kitchen. It led into the servant's bedroom and Tom opened it just as Mrs. Wetherbee came in.

Apparently that good lady was also thirsty. Tom heard her turn on the water faucet and then to his eager ears came the cooling sound as the water gushed out and splashed against the porcelain.

As it flowed she moved about searching for a glass. Tom moistened his parched lips and remembered Tantalus.

Suddenly a horrible thought came to him. Suppose Mrs. Wetherbee, feeling safe from detection, should take this opportunity for inspecting such parts of the flat as were not usually accessible to the Weltons' guests. Suppose she should find him in the maid's room! Instantly he dropped to his knees and crawled under the bed.

Mrs. Wetherbee, being a faithful follower of the dietary school which commends deliberate mastication, conscientiously sipped her glass of water. Between sips she also inspected the row of saucepans, walked over to the gas-stove to make sure that the Weltons' cook kept it as immaculate as Marion's, felt of the top of the table from a similar motive—in fact, did all of those things which a refined but somewhat curious elderly person may do when alone without feeling that she is transgressing the laws of good breeding.

Meanwhile the master of the apartment

lay sweltering under his servant's bed, which, being of the ordinary white iron variety, afforded slight space for his athletic frame. The conviction was being borne in upon him that while Delia might be a fair cook there were places where her broom did not penetrate, for the perspiration that ran in rivulets from his face was thick with dust.

At length, when suffocation seemed inevitable, he heard Mrs. Wetherbee put down her glass and go back to the front of the apartment. He was just emerging from under the bed when Delia opened the back door and came straight to her room.

At the threshold she stopped, just for one instant, transfixed with horror. In the dim light she failed to recognize the head and shoulders fantastically draped with the fringe of the bedspread as those belonging to her employer, and, with a wild scream, she dropped her parcels and rushed down the hall.

"Help! Police! May the saints preserve us! Murder! Thieves! Ow-w-w-w!" Her exclamations trailed off into an hysterical shriek.

Coatless, with disheveled hair, bits of lint clinging to his clothing, his face scarlet from heat and streaked with dust, Tom Welton rushed to the back door and down the long flight of stairs that connected the second-story apartment with the ground. As he sped he could hear Mrs. Wetherbee's screams, mingled with those of Delia, and he could conjecture the fear that had the two women in its grasp.

At the basement door he stopped to brush the dust from his trousers and to smooth his hair as well as he could. He could not remember ever having been so warm before, and for a few moments the physical discomforts of the situation absorbed him completely.

He sat down on the stone steps, grateful for their coolness. He would have lighted a cigarette, but he had left his case behind. Nothing of what might be happening overhead reached him in his lonely position, but presently the wild clamor of a gong brought him to his feet.

"By Jove! They've sent for the police," he exclaimed.

It occurred to him that it would never do for him to be found by an officer on the rear steps of an apartment house without coat or hat and with every indication of a hurried departure. Even with his identity safely established the necessary explanations might be embarrassing.

He crept away around the corner to a little barber-shop which he occasionally patronized. From there he telephoned to his house. Alice answered it, and Tom surmised that Mrs. Wetherbee had summoned to her aid not only the police, but the occupants of her own home.

"Oh, it's you, Tom. Wherever did you g—" Then, remembering the phonographic tricks of the telephone, Alice stopped, praying that Tom would remember also.

He did not.

"I'm over here at the barber-shop. Is the coast—" He was going to ask if the coast was clear that he might venture home, when Alice interrupted him. "You're just in? At the station?" She strove to make it appear that she was repeating Tom's words after him. "Please come home at once. There's such a dreadful thing happened. Delia found a man under her bed, and she's packing her trunk, and she's such a good girl. And Marion and Mary are here, and two policemen, and Mrs. Wetherbee, and—Tom Welton, you're laughing."

But he was not. He, too, had remembered the queer tricks of their telephone, and just in time. How was he now, without taking every one else who might be in the room with his wife into his confidence, to explain to her that he was at the barber-shop around the corner without hat or coat? How was he to present himself in that condition when he was supposed by the Adamses and Mrs. Wetherbee to have just that moment arrived in town? How was he to get his hat and coat without first going after them or asking Alice to send them to him, and how was he to tell her this without the others hearing?

He mopped his moist brow and spoke as he imagined a man should speak to his wife when she tells him of the presence of thieves in his house, but he suspected that his words lacked sincerity. Telling her he would be at home presently, he hung up the receiver and stared moodily into the barber's face.

His hand sought his pocket, but his fingers touched coin too inadequate for the occasion.

"See here," he said, "you've shaved me occasionally and cut my hair, but that's all you know about me, and I suppose it is not enough to vouch for my honesty and sanity. But here's my watch. If you'll

lend me your coat and hat you can keep it until I return them, which won't be long."

Luckily the barber was a stolid soul who was not inclined to speculate on the vagaries of his patrons, and Mr. Welton will never know just what he thought as he handed over a flannel coat somewhat the worse for wear, and a bicycle-cap.

"It's all I have here, sir, but you're welcome to them. I'll ride home bareheaded and in my shirt-sleeves."

Mr. Welton was six feet one and proportionately broad. The barber was a little man whose occupation had not developed his chest. The coat stopped five inches above Tom's wrists and drew his shoulder-blades together, while in front it displayed a wide expanse of crumpled negligee shirt. Also it was of a cheerful plaid that, under other conditions, would have caused Mr. Welton to shudder. The cap perched at a jaunty angle at the extreme top of his head.

"They don't look just right, sir," said the barber critically.

"They'll have to do," answered Mr. Welton grimly, and strode out.

At the entrance to his apartment he stepped into a blaze of light. Every electric-bulb was burning. Every closet-door stood open. From the rear came the hysterical cries of Delia, asserting her intention to live no longer in a place where burglars could hide themselves under the beds of honest working-girls.

Mrs. Wetherbee was pale but self-controlled. Marion and Larry looked interested, but Alice was plainly puzzled. The policemen had gone, following the trail of the intruder down the back stairs.

Tom hastily removed his cap. He would have taken off his coat, but in the presence of his guests he dared not. He saw Larry look at it with an appraising eye.

"New cut, eh?" he queried presently, with a cheerful grin.

"Where in the world did you get it?" demanded Alice.

"Some one exchanged coats with me in the smoking-room of the Pullman. Nice fit, isn't it?" and Mr. Welton turned slowly about.

In doing so he looked straight into the eyes of Mr. Lawrence Adams, and that gentleman rose to the occasion. If there were things that plainly could not be explained now there was promise of a good story in that wink, and Larry straightway set about getting his wife and mother-in-law out of the way. As the door closed upon them, Tom turned the key and leaned wearily against the panels.

"For the love of Heaven," he said, "get me a drink of water."

MIND OVER MATTER.*

BY BROOKS STEVENS.

A Story of Strange Goings-On in a Country Town Wherein the Hero Does Not Appear for the Space of Several Chapters.

CHAPTER XV.

A FRIEND TO THE RESCUE.

WHEN Benner looked up it was in time to see the flash of a pair of steel handcuffs.

"Sorry, Benner," said the chief, "but I'll have to slip these on you."

Benner shuddered.

"I won't run away," he said proudly.

The captor and the captured started for the street, where a great crowd was waiting to see the cashier who had once stood so high, but had fallen so low.

Swazey was so upset by the happenings of the past few hours that all business was neglected. No one thought to stand guard over his office or store, and had any light-fingered gentry chanced to drop down on the little New Hampshire village that day they would have been well-rewarded for their trip.

One person was missing, a young woman. All the citizens of Swazey were as much interested in her almost as they were in the suspected cashier.

"Oh, I feel so sorry for Miss Mary Benton!" said one woman to another.

* *Began September* ARGOSY. *Single copies, 10 cents.*

"It will be an awful shock to her, poor thing!"

"Such a sweet girl, too," replied the second woman, "and she set a powerful store by young Benner. The sun rose and set in him. She never did run with any other fellow after he began to court her."

"She certainly did stick to him," said the first speaker.

"Yes. They were always together. On Sundays at church, Thursday evenings at prayer meeting, and many a time I have seen them sneaking a stroll just after banking hours, when old man Benton was out of town."

"Too bad about old man Benton not liking Benner," said some one else.

"Too bad!" remarked a listener. "It seems that the old man knew what he was about, after all. Just look how that fellow Benner has turned out now! I am sure I wouldn't want a daughter of mine to be engaged to a burglar."

"She was really engaged to him, then?" asked one curious person.

"Indeed she was," said the Widow Brown, who now proceeded to take a hand in the conversation.

The widow had been pretty quiet after the discovery of Professor Gray's unworthiness. She fainted several times upon learning the startling news, and refused to believe it at first.

"You can't tell me nothing more about men," she said now. "After what I know about the professor, who was such a gentleman, there's no trustin' any of 'em. So poor Mary has had a narrow escape. She was lucky. But I know it's hard to get over."

"I hear old man Benton was dead set against his girl marrying Benner," remarked Seth Holcomb. "What did he have against him?"

"He didn't have anything against him," said the Widow Brown. "It wasn't Benner any more than any other man. Benton wanted his daughter to be an old maid, and she was just as determined to marry Benner. When the old man heard about the engagement — that is when Benner asked him for Mary's hand in marriage— he put his foot down and said his girl was too young to marry anybody. He ordered Mary to break off the engagement then and there."

"So they were not engaged, after all?" asked Holcomb.

"Well, I don't mind telling you now," replied the Widow Brown. "They pretended not to be; but they were, all the same, for Mary told me so herself. She had to keep it secret from the old man."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the group of listeners.

"Sh!" cautioned some one, "here she comes now. She's been crying. Anybody can see that."

A pretty young girl came quickly down the street. Her brown eyes looked heavy and swollen, and her dark hair had not been any too carefully arranged.

"Oh," she exclaimed, as she caught sight of the Widow Brown, "I have just heard the terrible news. I slept late this morning, and mother wouldn't wake me. She hated to tell me."

"Too bad, Mary; too bad," said several.

The girl tossed her head in the air.

"It will all come out right," she affirmed. "He is not guilty."

With these words, she hurried on down the street in the direction of the bank.

"Of course, she will believe he is innocent," remarked several. "She's the kind of girl who would stick to a fellow, no matter what he did, provided she loved him."

In the meantime Mary reached the bank, and ran quickly up the steps.

The chief of police was just starting down the hall with his prisoner.

"Oh, Albert!" exclaimed Mary, bursting into tears, as she threw her arms about Benner's neck. "This is terrible! But why are you accused of this crime? I have just heard that you were arrested, or I would have been here before. I—I—" she hesitated and blushed—"I have just got up," she explained.

"Mary," said Benner, "I am innocent of this charge."

"I know that," she rejoined, throwing her arms around him again. "You don't have to tell me that."

She turned impulsively to the chief of police.

"Will you grant me a favor?" she asked.

"If it is in my power," he replied, for he felt sorry for the young woman, and liked her well enough to stretch his official authority as far as possible.

"Oh, it's a simple matter," said Mary. "All I ask is that you will not take Mr.

Benner to"—she hesitated—"to that awful place?" she added at last with a sob.

"But, Miss Benton, I've delayed long enough as it is," said the chief.

"Please do this for me?" begged the girl. "I will appreciate your kindness more than I can ever tell you."

The chief began to weaken.

"I know you will grant my request when I inform you that I have something of importance to say to the president of the bank," continued Mary. "It may help Mr. Benner. I have a theory about this affair which may be important."

"Mary," implored Benner, "please do not mix in this. I could not bear to have your name brought into it in any way."

"Now, Albert," replied Miss Benton, "surely there's no harm in giving the president a few ideas which will assist him in running down the proper criminal."

But Benner refused to be convinced.

"Won't you go home?" he asked.

"No, Albert, I won't," replied the girl emphatically. "I feel that I am on the right track. No one has ever thought of the explanation which I can offer the president. It is most important. I must speak to him."

"Oh, do nothing rash!" exclaimed Benner, casting an imploring glance in the direction of the girl he loved. "I am unable to protect you now, but I insist that you have absolutely nothing to do with this matter."

"There, Albert, don't worry about me," she answered. "I can take care of myself; and I think I can help you, too."

The president entered the room at this moment.

"What has caused the delay?" he asked. "I thought you were well on your way by this time, chief."

"I am the cause of it, sir," bravely replied Mary, going up to the president. "May I take up a few minutes of your time before Mr. Benner is—is taken away," she finished with a choked voice.

"Why," began the president, hesitating as he wondered at the reason for her request, "I shall be pleased to grant you the desired time. Step into my room. You are interested in Benner, I believe."

"Indeed, indeed, I am," replied Mary. "He is innocent. I know it, and everybody else will know it before I get through. I mean to devote my time and energy to proving his innocence."

"You are a brave little woman," said the president. "You have lots of pluck. I would like to help you if I can, but Benner is in bad. Everything points directly to his guilt."

"I love him," said the girl, "and I believe in him."

"Many a woman has been mistaken in a man, and yet believed in him just the same," answered the president.

"It isn't that," persisted Mary. "I know he didn't do it."

"You were engaged to him once, weren't you?" asked the president.

"I was, and still am," was the reply. "My father objected, but we kept on being engaged just the same."

"I see. Now what can I do for you?"

"Tell me why you seem so certain that Albert committed the robbery?"

"Because everything under the sun tells emphatically that he did. Most conclusive of all is the proved point regarding his actions between twelve and two o'clock last night. If he were able to establish an alibi, it might be different."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mary. "Between twelve and two."

"Yes. The fact that he left his lodgings with a traveling bag and returned about two with the same bag spotted and muddy—"

"But," protested the young woman, "it seems to me that that proves nothing. How did you find out that he wasn't home between twelve and two?"

The president looked at her in surprise.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "you express no astonishment at learning about this matter. It was amazing to me. Only this morning—to further point the finger of conviction at him—I received a note from him stating that he was leaving unexpectedly, and—"

At this moment the telephone bell rang.

"Excuse me," said the president.

Then he began talking to some unknown person.

"Come right over," he directed.

Miss Benton stood for a moment looking out of the window. Suddenly her glance fell on a man who was leaving the house opposite.

"Who is that?" she asked.

The president looked out of the window.

"That is the man to whom I was just speaking over the phone," he said. "He is the inventor of our safe. He is com-

ing over to see me. Now," he continued, "you were about to say—"

"I have a great many things to say," she replied. "I have some information which I think will astonish you and shed a new light on this intricate mystery."

"Indeed," remarked the president. "What do you know about it?"

"I know more than you would think," declared the young woman. "I have a woman's wit and can reason things out, besides I have a statement to make of my own accord."

"I am ready to hear it," said the president.

"Then," said Miss Benton, pointing to the door, "you will find that the next man who enters that door is the guilty one."

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEW TURN IN AFFAIRS.

THE president gazed hard at Mary Benton as if fearful that she had taken leave of her senses.

She, apparently, did not notice his peculiar look, but still sat facing the door.

"You will see," she added, "that I am right."

The next instant the door of the office opened and the man who had crossed the street a moment before and whom the president had described as the inventor of the safe, entered the room.

"Good morning, Mr. President," he said. "This is a horrible tragedy."

"Yes, and *you* know all about it," exclaimed Miss Benton rising and pointing an accusing finger at the inventor.

"I—I—don't know what you mean," stammered the man.

"Miss Benton," said the president who began to feel sure that the fate of the young woman's *fiancé* had seriously affected her brain, "this is the inventor of our safe. You are mistaken."

"Oh, no, I'm not mistaken. I know exactly what I said, and I repeat it. This is the guilty man, Mr. President."

There was an awkward silence for a moment or two. Finally the inventor himself spoke.

"Why do you accuse me of this?" he asked.

"For several reasons," replied the young woman. "In the first place, a safe of this kind—and I know it well because Mr. Benner has told me of all its superior points to other safes—could not have been invented by an ordinary person."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the president, "Mr Groves, here, is far from being an ordinary person, but I fail to see the connection."

"I mean," continued Mary, "that to be able to invent a burglar-proof safe, such a safe must be invented by one who knows all the tricks of burglars."

"Oh!" exclaimed the president with a deprecating gesture.

"'Mr. Groves,' as you call him," continued Miss Benton, "is well versed in such affairs."

She gazed steadily at the man before her.

Much to the surprise of the president, Groves seemed to quail before her look. When she spoke again he started as if in fear.

"He was able to invent this safe," she went on, "for the simple reason that he is a burglar himself."

"My dear young lady!" exclaimed the president, horror-stricken at her words.

"Oh, I won't say anything I am not sure of," continued the girl. "I know that this man is a burglar. Deny it if you can."

She faced Groves accusingly.

"I—I—" he began, but could get no further.

"You see!" triumphantly exclaimed the young woman. "Guilt is written all over his face."

Groves at last found his voice.

"I am not a burglar," he declared raising his eyes and looking his accuser full in the face.

"Perhaps not now," replied Miss Benton, "but you were five years ago."

Groves did not reply.

"My dear young lady," said the president soothingly, "why do you make such a damaging statement?"

"Because I know, Mr. President," she replied. "One day I visited a prison in New York together with some charitably inclined ladies. This man was one of several they took an interest in. He made such an impression on my mind that I have never forgotten his face. I thought it a pity that one who looked so good should be so bad. He was completing a sentence for safe robbing then."

Groves hung his head for a moment, then raised it again.

"I will explain—" he began.

"One moment, please," interposed Miss Benton, "let me finish. Certainly since he is at present at liberty, he has reformed—temporarily at least. But once a burglar, often a burglar. I remember the day at the prison, the warden told us that very thing. He said that once the fever got into a man's blood for breaking safes it was almost impossible to completely cure it. That must have been this man's case. I would know him in ten thousand. Wasn't your name Buck Nelson? Oh, you see what a good memory I have!"

The fellow did not reply. He seemed too utterly stunned by the girl's accusation.

"Now," continued Miss Benton, "knowing every turn of the safe, what more natural for a former burglar than to succumb to temptation when the chance presented itself?"

The president stared at the speaker in open-eyed astonishment.

"Surely, Miss Benton," he said, "there is some mistake." Then, to the inventor, he added: "Mr. Groves, deny this accusation at once, and let us have an end of the disagreeable matter. How absurd a fancy! I would suggest, Miss Benton, that you go home and rest. I am sure you are quite unstrung by recent events."

"I'm nothing of the sort," declared the young woman.

Mr. Groves sat silently by. He did not attempt to defend himself.

"Come, Mr. Groves," went on the president, "pull yourself together; don't let the imagination of a foolish, love-sick young woman worry you. I know what you are, and what you have done for us in perfecting this wonderful bank."

"'This wonderful bank,'" repeated Miss Benton. "That's just it. If this bank were an ordinary one, the whole robbery might not seem wonderful. But it isn't. It's a burglar's bank, I tell you, and only a burglar would know how to get into it!"

"She's clever, all right," said Groves at last, gazing with admiration at the girl.

"Oh, no," she replied, "not exactly clever. Only, I can put things together and get results. I don't mean to say," she continued, "that you alone were responsible for the robbery. There were two other men connected with the affair — both of them found dead. I do say, however, that you were the accomplice of those men, or at least of one of them, and that you should be accused of the crime, and not Mr. Benner."

The president was so astounded at the audacity of the girl that he was no longer able to protest against her arguments.

"Professor Gray was mixed up in the crime," she went on. "He paid the forfeit with his life. The question is, what part did he play? He was a medium, not a burglar. No one, by any chance, could ever mistake him for a burglar."

"Why not?" asked Groves. "He was caught with the goods."

"Yes; but he must have been persuaded into it. He was too great a coward to risk his life unless he was sure of aid from trustworthy sources. He was made to understand that he would be well protected before he agreed to go into the thing. Mrs. Brown told me that the burglar who was found inside the safe spent the whole afternoon in company with the professor at the Brown cottage. They were supposed to be talking about his dead wife, but Nick heard them planning a trip. That unknown caller was responsible for the professor's part in the affair."

Suddenly Miss Benton gave an exclamation of triumph.

"I have it!" she cried. "The burglar had an idea, perhaps, that the professor could call on the spirits to help them."

The president looked at Groves doubtfully.

"I am sure of it," continued the girl. "That was the professor's business. Burglary was the other man's. The burglar persuaded the professor to help him through the aid of spirits. Believe me, if the truth ever becomes known, it will be found that the medium played quite a part."

"Do you believe that the safe was opened and closed by spirits called down by the professor?" asked Groves.

"I believe nothing of the sort," answered Miss Benton. "I believe that it was opened and shut by yourself, and no one else. Only human power could budge that door. It is perfectly true that Mr. Benner knew the combination; but what use would it be to him when he wasn't within a dozen blocks of the bank at the time the robbery was committed?"

She looked about her triumphantly.

"Mr. Benner was not at home between twelve o'clock and two," said the president. "A most suspicious fact. He will not give an explanation of his whereabouts at that hour, so there is no other conclusion to be drawn except that he is guilty. His mud-

stained satchel, his extraordinary letter to me, are proof positive of his complicity in the crime."

"But if he could prove an alibi?" suggested Miss Benton.

"But he can't."

"You mean he *won't*," replied the young woman. "He refuses because of his love for me."

"I don't understand—" began the president.

"If *he* refuses to tell where he was last night between twelve and two, *I* will explain for him," declared Miss Benton.

"You!" exclaimed both men in amazement.

"It is the simplest thing in the world, once you know the reason," said the girl. "I—I—" She hesitated, and blushed furiously. "Really, it is a delicate thing to speak of, since it turned out so badly; but I will save Albert. Father will be very angry when he hears; but last night we had planned to elope."

"To elope!" exclaimed both Groves and the president.

"Yes. We have been secretly engaged for some time, because father forbade me to marry just now. Albert and I got tired of waiting. You see, father had no real objections to him. He just didn't want me to leave home. Albert and I arranged that he was to call for me about twelve, and wait until the coast was clear. Then we intended to take the two o'clock train."

"Really!" exclaimed the president, too astonished for further expression.

"Yes. But everything seemed to go wrong. Father received a telegram calling him to the city, and up to the last moment he was undecided whether or not he would go or stay home. Then, it poured rain, and everything seemed against us. Of course, it wouldn't have done for Albert and me to take the same train with father; so we didn't know what to do until, at the last moment, father decided he would go. That broke up all our plans. Now, you understand, don't you? That explains his letter, too."

The story had the ring of sincerity in it.

"Albert stayed in the summer-house just below my window from before twelve until after two. I know, because I was talking to him off and on all the time. You see, I had to let him know how things were going inside. The poor fellow went home very wet and unhappy. No wonder his traveling bag was muddy and spotted. It stood in the rain long enough. Now, have I proved an alibi for him?"

"Yes, you have," said the president.

"I hesitated to tell about the elopement before—" began Miss Benton.

"And I understand now why he would not explain," said the president. "But how are we going to clear up this other mystery?"

"I don't know," replied Miss Benton, "but since Albert knew nothing of the crime, I am sure this man does. There can be no one else. I don't know what happened to prevent him from carrying out his plans at the bank, but he's the guilty one, believe me."

At this point Groves rose from his chair and nervously paced the floor.

"Mr. President," he said, "the young lady is right. I admit that I do know more than I have told in regard to the crime. If you will send for the chief of police I will make a clean breast of everything."

CHAPTER XVII.

GENERAL EXPLANATIONS.

THE bank president lost no time in complying with the inventor's request.

The chief of police entered the room shortly afterward.

"I brought my prisoner along," he explained, "for I can't afford to let him out of my sight for a minute."

He motioned Benner to a seat, and Mary lost no time in going up to him.

"Have courage," she whispered. "Everything is coming out right. It won't be long now before you will be free."

But her *fiancé* merely shook his head. After the extraordinary web of evidence which had been spun around him since the discovery of the crime, there seemed little to hope for unless he could establish an alibi.

And he had at once dismissed the thought of explaining his whereabouts of the evening before on account of the annoyance it would bring to Mary. He hoped that some other way would be found out of the difficulty, but none had presented itself.

Neither the cashier nor the chief of police suspected the latest developments in the case.

"Anything new?" asked the chief, as he looked from one to the other members of the little party.

"Yes. Something very unexpected," replied the president briefly. "The inventor of our safe and this young lady can perhaps explain matters better than I can. I must confess it's an amazingly tangled affair at present."

"You sent for me—" began the chief.

"He did so because I requested it," replied the inventor, stepping forward.

"This young lady, Miss Benton," said the president, "has accused this gentleman of being an accomplice in the crime — of burglary and—of murder as well."

"I *do* accuse him!" cried Miss Benton unflinchingly, as all eyes were turned in her direction. "This man five years ago was serving a sentence for burglary in a prison in Sing Sing. I recognized him at once. His name—"

"Was Buck Nelson," interrupted the inventor calmly.

"Buck Nelson!" exclaimed the chief, going over to the inventor and staring hard at him.

"That's me!" declared the man. "Or, rather, that *was* me."

"Well, of all the—" exclaimed the chief, speechless with amazement. "Buck Nelson, the man who was sentenced to the chair for that crime in Connecticut?"

"You've got it! I see you know something about me!" And the inventor seemed rather pleased that the police chief had such an excellent memory. "That would have been rather a clever affair if it hadn't been for the blundering of my pard at the last moment."

"Buck Nelson! Well, I can't get over it!" repeated the chief.

"You see—he confesses," remarked Miss Benton to the president.

"Buck Nelson was one of my names," observed the accused man with a smile.

"Let me see," began the chief. "That wasn't the one you were using at the time of the little visit you paid that bank in Connecticut?"

"Oh, no! I was known as Stubby Martin then."

"That's it. Stubby Martin. Well, Stubby, I thought they had you for fair that time, although you were counted as one of the cleverest in the business. I've forgotten how you got away. How was it?"

"That's just what I am about to tell you," replied Nelson.

"Before we go any further," interposed the chief, realizing that, in his interest over the man's identity, he had strayed from the main issue. "What have you to do with this little affair of last night?"

"A great deal," declared Nelson, without a tremor in his voice.

"Ah!" exclaimed Miss Benton, with a sigh of relief. "He's going to confess."

"First," went on the chief, "let me ask you, are you guilty of this crime?"

"I am and I am not," replied the inventor. "I meant at first to keep quiet for the present and say nothing about my share in the evening's work. I was dazed. Then I determined to own up. This young lady was too much for me."

Mary glanced triumphantly around the room.

"So you intended to let an innocent man suffer!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"No, miss," replied Nelson; "only for a little while."

"Then you acknowledge that you do know all about the crime?" demanded the young woman.

"Yes."

"And you also know that Mr. Benner is innocent?"

"He is," replied Nelson. "He knew nothing about the matter."

"What?" exclaimed the chief.

"Oh, yes," said the president. "I was confident of that before Mr.—Mr. Nelson's statement. This young woman here has provided a conclusive alibi. She satisfactorily explained Mr. Benner's absence from his lodgings."

Mary blushed.

"Why did you do that?" asked Albert, reproachfully.

"I may say that the explanation left no room for doubt," said the president, and he repeated Mary's story of the elopement.

"In that case," said the chief, "I may as well relieve you of these bracelets, Mr. Benner."

"Oh, Albert!" exclaimed Mary. "You're free!"

She threw her arms around his neck regardless of the presence of the others.

"Now, Buck," went on the chief, "shall I transfer these ornaments to your wrists?"

He held out the handcuffs.

"Not until you have heard my story," replied Nelson, with a shudder.

"To go back to Connecticut. As you know, I was sentenced to die because of the murder of the cashier in the bank up there. I didn't kill the man. I had nothing to do

with it. My pard, Bill Blake, was the guilty one. He pulled off the whole thing. When the detectives got on his track, he, to save himself, told them that I was the one. There were a number of clues, all pointing to me. The circumstantial evidence was too strong against me, and he had taken good care that he got out safe. Then he skipped the East and went West. Just before what I supposed would be my last day on earth arrived, some lucky evidence turned up that cleared me."

The man shivered at the recollection.

"It was a narrow escape, I can tell you, and it taught me a lesson. It made a new man of me. I never knew how awful the thought of a horrible death was before it stared me in the face."

Drops of perspiration stood out on his face as he spoke.

"That was enough! I turned square, never to be a crook again as long as I lived, so help me God."

"And you kept your oath until this little chance of last night offered a temptation too great to resist," observed the chief.

"No, no! You are all wrong. When I got out into the air again from prison I determined to earn an honest living, if it was only a meager one. But the question was, what could I do? I had been a burglar most of my life. Before that I had worked in a factory where they made safes.

"Studying safes so long made a thief of me. I wasn't always bad. So it was natural that when I was set free I should think of safes again.

"I got a notion that I could make a safe with a lock which would be really burglar-proof. I knew others had tried and failed, but they didn't know as much about safes and locks as I did. So I picked up odd jobs here and there, working all the time on my invention. At last I was successful, and I got a big firm interested in it."

"Yes, but what has all this got to do with the crime of last night?" asked the chief.

"A great deal. You see, in order to install this new safe of mine in Swazey, I was obliged to come here myself. I was just about to leave again, when, yesterday afternoon, I caught sight of a man going down the street, whose figure seemed very familiar. It didn't take me long to recognize my old pard, Bill Blake—the man who sent me to prison, and who thought me dead some months ago, or he would never have dared return East."

"Then, he didn't see you?"

"No. I wondered what he was doing in Swazey, and decided to keep my eye on him. He went to the Widow Brown's. I wondered why he should go there. Then I heard him talking to the medium, Professor Gray. At once I concluded that the professor was one of my old profession. But I was mistaken. I made it my business to learn their plans."

"Well, what I want to know," interposed the chief, "is, what part did the professor play in the trouble?"

"The plot was," explained Nelson, "that the professor was to use his powers as a medium in entering the safe. He agreed to '*dematerialize*' the lock—and open the thing by a sort of hypnotic power."

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed the president.

"Yes; only one thing was needed—the spirit of a dead burglar who was thoroughly at home in breaking banks, and who would furnish what the medium called his 'control,' and so enable them to enter the safe. And who do you suppose Blake suggested as the spirit control?"

No one could suggest a reply.

"Why, myself," returned Nelson. "Blake thought me dead for some time, so he said he might as well make use of me."

"I never heard of such a scheme," remarked the chief.

"As soon as I thought I had learned enough," continued Nelson, "I made up my mind what to do. I knew they intended to rob the safe at midnight; so I went to the bank, and was able to fix the time-lock for that hour, on account of my relations with the bank. I watched and waited until the pair of them set out on their journey. I followed at a safe distance. They never suspected a thing."

"What beats me is, how did you get in the bank?" interjected the chief.

"Oh, that was simple enough," replied Nelson. "The professor took the Brown cat along. The cat meowed. The night watchman opened the window to see what the noise was. The professor hypnotized him—easy enough, for he is a simple fellow—and then ordered him to open the door. He also commanded that he close it again in two hours' time. That would allow them to obtain the plunder, get away, and leave no trace.

"They were having a great time of it. Everything seemed dead easy. My old pard,

however, began to get nervous when he thought of seeing my spirit there, in the dead of night, in a bank. He didn't like the idea at all.

"Then they heard a noise, and flashed the dark-lantern directly on me. Blake went all to pieces. When he saw what he thought was my spirit, he thought the professor had played a trick on him, and he pulled his gun, and killed the medium, who was trying to slip out with a bag of gold.

"Then Blake rushed into the safe to get more money. In his excitement he lost his balance, and accidentally closed the door of the safe on himself before I could prevent it. Then all was silent."

Every one drew a deep sigh at the conclusion of Nelson's story. It was an amazing recital of events, but there was no doubt of the truth of it.

"But how did the safe open at its usual time this morning?" inquired the president.

"Easy enough," replied Nelson. "Before I left the bank I set the time-lock for nine o'clock. That, gentlemen and Miss Benton, is all I know. I was so panic-stricken after the whole thing was over that I did not know what to do. I hoped that matters would adjust themselves without an explanation on my part. Naturally you can understand that I feared my miserable past would be brought up if I came forward and told what I knew. But I had no intention of letting an innocent man suffer any longer."

"Well, what's to be done?" asked the chief.

"Do you intend to expose me now," asked Nelson, "just when I am beginning life all over again and am determined to be an honest man?"

Mary Benton rushed forward to the chief. "No, no," she begged; "don't injure him. He doesn't deserve it. No one here suspects who he is. I shall never tell."

It was agreed that Nelson's past should remain unknown.

A few weeks later, when old man Benton decided that there might as well be a marriage or there would be another attempt at an elopement, Nelson was one of the invited guests.

THE END.

On the Brink of Destruction.

BY JOHN WILSTACH.

How a Night Stroller Rescued a Fellow-Man at a Pier-End, Listened to a Tale of Crime, Put in Some Days of Anxiety, and Then Had the Surprise of His Life.

FOR years I had been on the verge of prosperity without ever attaining it. Now, since an obliging uncle had died, leaving me a handsome income, without the slightest advice as to how I should spend the money, I started to enjoy a period of uninterrupted leisure.

Being idle is an art, but I prided myself that I did nothing gracefully. My business acquaintances said my performance was disgraceful, but I did not care.

I whiled away the days acquiring fantastic accomplishments, and allowing myself to be led into a number of queer scrapes by my venturesome nature.

So it must not be a matter of surprise that, on a certain night in June, I was lounging near wharves along South Street, smoking a villainous pipe, and keeping a lookout for the unusual.

A spell of silence hung over the East River, cast by a dark, lonely sky, bereft of the moon and her train of twinkling stars. The lights on the sluggishly moving boats were shrouded in mist: the gloom was sullen and depressing.

I stood for a while wrapped up in my own thoughts, when I noticed a man who lounged perhaps half a dozen paces from me, looking down at the flowing depths with a fascinated gaze.

Suddenly he glanced around with a startled air. I prided myself on the fact that he didn't notice me, though I wasn't sure; my interest was aroused in what he might do next, his manner was so secret and mysterious.

Nervously he took several envelopes from his pocket and tore them into bits. Then he took off his coat and threw it to the ground;

then it seemed an expression of intense suffering flitted like a cloud over his face.

Perhaps I should have minded my own business—though I was not aware of having any occupation other than that of a spectator—but as I divined the fellow's object, I quickly approached, and caught him by the arm.

He turned on me with a snarl.

"You're a fly cop, I suppose," he growled, "but you've got no call to pull me in this time."

"I'm not a plain-clothes man," said I, "yet neither am I in the mood to see you cash in your chips while I'm looking on."

I moved to such a position on the pier that he couldn't reach the water without passing close to me.

"You've let yourself in for some trouble, then, for I have determined to make an end. I am tired of my wretched existence, and it'll take more than you to make me drag out another night of torture."

He eyed me curiously for a few moments, noting, no doubt, my indecision, and hoping to take advantage of it.

"Well," he said finally, "and what are you going to do?"

That was a question I was asking myself. We were alone on the pier, and there was not much chance of the intrusion of a nocturnal prowler. To be sure, I might engage in a struggle with this would-be suicide, but he looked as if he might give a good account of himself—and I was not in training for a fight.

As I came to the decision that force was out of the question, I was seized with what might be called a brilliant idea.

"Will you listen to me for a moment?"

"Sure, boss, anything you like," he grunted shortly.

"Well, if your life is as bad a mess as you hint, what do you say to giving me an hour of your time, and telling me your story? Perhaps I'll agree to your making a fade-away finish?"

"All right, what's the odds? I don't mind rehearsing my woes."

"Then, what do you say to our adjourning to some near-by tavern?"

He nodded an affirmative response.

Shortly I was letting him guide me away from the river, until I found myself seated at a table in the back room of a tawdry café, ordering from a waiter who looked like a bouncer in disguise.

My new acquaintance soon leaned over the table in a confidential way, and, eying me closely to see that I was giving proper heed to his words, began his remarkable confession.

"Two years ago I was a prosperous business man—I'm aware that I don't look as if I ever filled the picture—the partner of a man who had made quite a hit in his line. We were getting along well together, when he decided that he wished to strike out for himself, and brought the connection between us to an end.

"Suddenly he became my rival, instead of coworker, and I found that the business of my concern fell off considerably. My former partner had a wonderful head for details, and, disdaining the aid of important helpers, attended to most of the work himself.

"Finally several deals that I undertook failed to go through, and for me the season proved a disastrous one. He was ahead of me in every move I made. With all my resources exhausted, I had to swallow the bitter pill of defeat.

"One night I determined to take a desperate chance, which might, if successful, be the means of staving off bankruptcy.

"I called upon my former partner late one evening, and persuaded him to take a walk with me. I need not repeat our conversation — but will only tell you that we strolled to the river-front, where the lights are as few and scattered as the police. On the pretext of showing him a boat of mine, anchored near the shore, I got him to a deserted pier. I had long known that he couldn't swim a stroke. When, with a wresting twist of the arms, I flung him head first into the river, I knew that by the time I brought rescuers to the spot the strong tide would have carried him down-stream, and his cries would be lost until the depths claimed him for their own."

I dropped my pipe as, in a whispered voice, the fellow reached this point in his story, and the tobacco scattered over the table and floor.

"Everything turned out as I expected," he continued. "After I threw him into the river I ran wildly from the spot, calling for help. By the time I had found a couple of night watchmen it was too late for anything to be done in the way of rescue.

"I was never suspected of the crime. We had been chums for years, and our business break had not, on the surface, raised any hard feelings. When the body was found,

I appeared before a coroner's jury, and satisfactorily explained everything.

"After he was out of the way I expected that my business would pick up, but things went from bad to worse. I lost first in one venture, then in another, and after the smash came—well, I took to drink, in a vain attempt to drown my troubles and forget the horrible stain on my conscience.

"In a short time I had lost all my friends and become a physical as well as a mental wreck. Misfortune claimed me for her own, and I became a derelict, wandering in the lower streets of New York, at the mercy of chance, never laying my head twice in the same place. I have no money, home, or future. It is better that I call an end to my empty days, and be at rest.

"There is no use in trying to persuade me to try to live a better life—or to confess my crime. All my better instincts have been blotted out, and the one brave act left me is to take the plunge to oblivion."

We rose and left the inn, and as we stood in the doorway I turned away from him with a shudder.

We had parted without another word, and like one in a trance I saw that he was headed toward the river.

I made no effort to follow him. I was stunned, dumfounded by the ghastly confession I had just heard from him.

I made my way homeward, trying vainly to fling off the gloom that encompassed me. I spent a sleepless night, and next morning rose early and had the morning papers brought me.

Perhaps they would contain some information concerning the suicide of the man I had met the previous evening.

I searched every page, but found not a single item about the finding of a body in the river.

Several days passed, and though I bought every edition of both morning and afternoon papers, I found no lines to tell me that an unknown had leaped to his death in the depths.

In the course of a few days I had somewhat quieted my mind on the subject. It was possible, I told myself, that the man was mad or drugged when I had come upon him, and in a state of delirium when he had related his strange tale. Or else his nerve had failed him at the last moment.

Meanwhile, there was no use of my further troubling myself. That, at least, was very plain.

On the Monday evening of the following week there was a new play billed at one of the theaters on Broadway. It was called "The Suicide."

In the frame of mind I had been in it was natural that I had some curiosity to see it.

So I purchased a seat several days in advance, and when the time came for the curtain to rise at the opening I was on hand to make one of a representative New York audience.

My interest was not keenly aroused before the middle of the third act, as the story until then had been quite a conventional one.

In this third act a man whose business had been ruined, through the efforts of a former partner, enters late at night the home of a former employee, confesses to him that he had murdered the partner by flinging him in the river, and adds that he might as well commit suicide himself.

Then, what was my surprise to hear, through the lips of this character on the stage, nearly the identical story that had been told me the previous week in that dive near South Street by a down-and-out tramp of the streets!

What could be the meaning of it all? I could easily have taken the words out of the man's mouth, for they were branded into my memory.

After the close of the act, when the supposed murderer, who has determined to kill himself, receives news that his victim had been rescued by a sailor, I was wild with excitement.

I rose from my seat, eager to have a word with the manager, with whom I was slightly acquainted. Then I heard repeated cries of "Author," and the latter came before the curtain to speak a few words of acknowledgment of the enthusiasm with which his play had been received.

I gave one look at him, then fell back in my seat, stunned beyond the power of expression.

The man who had strolled out before the footlights was the very one whom I met on the South Street wharf, and whose horrible story had been the means of giving me so many troubled hours.

Of course, his appearance had undergone a decided transformation in every particular, but he was the same man — I could have sworn to it before a court of justice.

Without waiting for the applause to die

down, I rushed up the aisle back to the lobby and in a hoarse voice demanded to see Mr. Newton, the manager.

When the latter appeared, calm and self-possessed, though elated by the success of his production, I had hardly the heart to shatter his peace of mind.

But without hesitation I drew him into an alcove.

"Do you know," I said slowly, "that the author of this play is a self-confessed murderer, who has used the material of his crime in the third act?"

The manager did not seem to understand me.

"You mean that this isn't original stuff?" he exclaimed.

"It is original enough," I replied, "for it is taken from the closed chapters of that man's life. The dramatist is unveiling his terrible past before an audience unconscious of the real truth."

I stopped for a moment to let this sink in.

"Only last week I met him down near the river on the brink of taking his own life.

"After I had stopped him he told me the story I have just seen enacted on the stage and said that it was his own experience."

Suddenly, to my surprise, Mr. Newton burst into a loud laugh and thumped me on the back.

"What's the matter?" I cried. "Do you think I have gone mad?"

"No, my boy, you're in your right mind. The fact is that you have been the victim of a hoax."

"I don't understand," I stammered.

"Well, it's like this," he explained. "When the rehearsals for this play started I was sure that the big speech in the third act, which you have just heard delivered with such dramatic effect, was artificial, and would never strike home. The author of the play disagreed with me, and to prove that the lines were realistic he agreed to try them on some person who would have no reason to doubt that he was being told the truth. So—"

"So—" I exclaimed, "he rigged himself up as a tramp, and when I happened along in the location he had chosen, he picked me for his audience of one."

"Yes," replied Mr. Newton. "And, as you swallowed the story whole, I gave in to leaving it as he'd written it, with the present pleasant result. By the way, wouldn't you like to go behind and meet the author again?"

Needless to say, I went.

The Worst Is Yet To Come.*

BY GERALD N. COE,

Author of "The Clown's Mate."

This Summer's Tale of the Comedy Happenings in a Unique Boarding-House Is Streaked with the Possibilities of Tragedy.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE TRAIL.

BREAKFAST was a haphazard meal that morning. The boarders were too excited to eat, and Hartley had to spend his time talking to them and assuring each one separately that his pet possession would be returned without delay.

He had no clue to the thief. The thing had occurred so suddenly that Hartley was at a loss to figure out how the thing could have happened.

Surely Dunham's play and the barber's flute could be of no possible use to an ordinary thief. The motorcycle could be sold, but what could be done with Dr. Honeycomb's crime detector?

It might be that the thief had taken that along to make sure that he would not be found. But that did not seem plausible, as no one would know what the clumsy-looking machine was to be used for.

In order to make quite sure that the things had been stolen, Hartley advised each of his boarders to hunt carefully through his belongings.

As long as the stolen articles possessed

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little value, Hartley was inclined to think that one of his boarders might be guilty. The theft of Honeycomb's Crime Detector made it look as though some one on the inside had perpetrated the crime.

It might have been done for a practical joke. Hartley saw no joke in the affair, but it occurred to him that one of his boarders might be possessed of a perverted sense of humor. That was hardly likely, however, as they were none of them given to fun.

The thing seemed inexplicable. He could hardly think that one of the boarders had done it, because each one had lost something.

In talking it over with his wife after breakfast, Hartley suggested this to her, while the boarders were ransacking the house and grounds in an endeavor to find their lost articles.

"That couldn't be possible," his wife replied, when he suggested that one of the boarders might have stolen the articles. "Miss Perkins is the only one who did not really lose anything and even she reports an attempt at the kidnaping of Rob Roy."

"It's beyond me," sighed Hartley.

"Maybe that tramp you talked with in the woods—the one who scared the cook—was responsible for it?" suggested Mrs. Hartley in an illuminating flash.

"No," Hartley rejoined. "He's not in that line of business. Besides, he's left these parts."

"Could it be the escaped lunatic, then?" queried Mrs. Hartley, snatching at straws in her endeavor to help untangle the mystery.

"Impossible. No trace has been found of him and he is probably hundreds of miles from here now."

"Well, I give it up; unless it was this new boarder Dunham. You know all about him, the tramp told you something. Did that have anything to do with the fact that he might have stolen these things?"

"No, Dunham wouldn't do it. Besides, he was one of the sufferers, too. He lost his precious play. He's not the kind of a fellow who would steal."

"Of course not," agreed Mrs. Hartley, "but one can't keep from thinking up all sorts of possibilities when a thing like this occurs."

They talked over each boarder separately, but came to no conclusion. Hartley finally rose and went up-stairs to Dr. Honeycomb's room.

"Have you found your crime detector, doc?" he asked.

"Great Heavens! No! It has been stolen, and I'll hold you responsible for it, Mr. Hartley."

"You're sure you haven't misplaced it?"

"Of course not," the other fairly bellowed. "It isn't likely that such a big apparatus could be lost. It hasn't been out of the room since I came here and it surely isn't here now." He swept his arm around the disordered place, and it was clear to Hartley that the thing had disappeared.

He racked his brains for some suggestion which would make the doctor's loss less keen.

"I tell you, doc," he said in a low, confidential tone, "if we could recover this great invention of yours it would mean the greatest advertisement of the age."

"How? What do you mean?"

"Why, if we can locate the machine we will round up all the possible suspects and try it on them. Then we will be able to ascertain just which person is guilty, and we will have him arrested, show the machine to the police, and tell them how you caught the thieves by it. The papers will have a big story and you will come into the fame you deserve."

The inventor's eyes glowed as this idea was unfolded to him.

"Great! Great!" he cried. "Let's do it at once. It is just the right kind of advertising. An actual test! Nothing could be more valuable to me."

"Yes, it's a good idea," answered Hartley, his enthusiasm wearing off the least bit as the doctor urged the necessity for an immediate trial of the thing.

"Well, then, let's do it at once," went on the inventor. "Let's try it out and become famous."

"It's a good idea, doc," Hartley replied, "but in our eagerness and enthusiasm we mustn't forget that the machine hasn't been found as yet."

"Oh—I'd forgotten that," the inventor collapsed and looked up at Hartley with a pained expression.

"But of course we will find it," Hartley hastened to assure him.

"We must. We must. Will you help?"

"Of course," agreed Hartley, "I will do all I can. I am deeply chagrined that

this should have occurred in my house and am naturally anxious to do everything possible to set matters right."

"And get the fame and advertising I need for my crime detector," added the inventor.

"Exactly."

Hartley feared that the machine would never be found and did not want to get in too deep, so he excused himself from the inventor, telling him to extend his search out-of-doors, and hurried in to see the little barber.

Poor Barone was rocking back and forth in agony, moaning for his stolen flute with the mouth organ attachment.

Hartley debated well before he interrupted the dirge Barone was singing to himself.

"You haven't found your flute yet?" Hartley inquired in the most sympathetic tone he could summon.

"No-o-o-o-o-o-o-o—" cried Barone, jumping to his feet as though he were attached to a strong spring.

"Have you looked thoroughly?"

"I have looked everywhere. It is gone. I will hold you responsible. On account of you I have lost my job, I have been locked up in the insane asylum, and now I have lost my flute. Oh, I will make you pay dearly for this." The fellow's little black eyes were flashing with fury and Hartley realized that it would require a great deal of tact to handle this fire-brand.

"It will all be well. It will all be well," he hastened to tell the barber, spreading out his arms with a motion like that of throwing oil on troubled waters.

"When will all be well? When will my flute be returned? I cannot make another like it. There is not another like it in all this world. I say, when? When?"

"As soon as we find Dr. Honeycomb's crime detector," replied Hartley.

"Yes," sneered the other, "but when will that be?"

"Whenever you people get together and concentrate your search on one article and make that the crime detector."

"Exactly," agreed Barone. "That is a good idea."

"Then go and help Dr. Honeycomb find his crime detector. That is the quickest way for you to recover your flute."

"I believe you are right," replied the barber, his anger changing to enthusiasm over the new idea.

"Then hurry up," cried Hartley. "Dr. Honeycomb is starting out on his search now."

The barber rushed off at once to join the inventor and Hartley went on to young Dunham's room.

He found the playwright mourning for his lost MS. and managed to rouse him the same as he had the barber, and finally got him out of the house, bound on a quest of the crime detector.

Miss Perkins rushed up and wanted to know what was going on and where all the boarders were bound. Hartley told her and she joined the pilgrimage.

When all had left and organized the search for Honeycomb's Crime Detector, Hartley dropped weakly on a couch in the hall and endeavored to collect his thoughts.

Before he managed to get them in order, however, Polly Washburn dashed in through the front door and shouted at him:

"Has anybody found anything yet?"

"No," answered Hartley wearily.

"Where are they all?"

"Gone to search for Honeycomb's Crime Detector," explained Hartley. "If we manage to find that the rest of the goods will be returned when we prove with the invention who stole them. It's very simple."

"Did everybody go?" asked Polly, with a blush which informed Hartley she wished to know particularly if Mr. Dunham were with the searching-party.

"Yes, everybody. Even Mr. Dunham and Miss Perkins," he replied.

She turned abruptly and raced off in the direction Hartley indicated, to join the party.

Hartley dropped back to rest by the parlor window, where his wife shortly joined him.

They held an anxious conversation, to which Aunt Gertie lent her presence.

It was a crisis for the "Do-as-you-please House," and those most interested sat by the parlor window, exchanging theories and waiting in breathless suspense for the return of the searching-party.

As they sat there Hartley suddenly looked out of the window and turned pale. His hand on the sill trembled, and he stared through the pane at a horse and buggy which had suddenly stopped in front of the house.

A man had leaped out quickly, and Hartley immediately recognized him as the pale-faced attendant from Dr. Cummings's asylum.

It looked like more trouble, and he dodged back from the window abruptly, whispering to his wife and Aunt Gertie the cause of his alarm.

Hartley watched through an edge of the curtain, and was surprised to find that the pale-faced attendant merely stepped to a tree in front of the house and proceeded to tack up a red sign.

Hartley was greatly puzzled by the action, and vastly surprised when the fellow, having finished his task, leaped back into his buggy and drove with great rapidity down the road.

"What can it be?" queried Hartley in alarm.

"Go and see," his wife suggested.

With anxious eyes and nervous haste, Hartley rushed from the house and planted himself before the red sign the asylum attendant had tacked up.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT THE SEARCHERS BROUGHT BACK.

THE sign Hartley gazed at with amazement read:

500 DOLLARS REWARD

$500 will be paid for the return of a violent lunatic, dead or alive, who escaped from Dr. Cummings's Insane Asylum on June 26.

Description: Height, 6 feet 1 inch. Red hair. Blue eyes. Prominent nose. Scar on lip. Wore gray asylum costume when he disappeared.

The public is warned. The escaped lunatic is dangerous and may resist capture with firearms.

(Signed) DR. CUMMINGS.

Hartley looked about fearfully. It would never do to leave that sign where the boarders could see it.

The buggy with the attendant in it had disappeared, and there was no one in sight, so Hartley reached up and quickly jerked the sign from the tree. Then he carried it into the house, tore it up carefully, after showing it to his wife, and threw it into the fire in the kitchen.

Having done that, he returned to the front parlor, and sat anxiously awaiting the return of the searching-party.

"Aren't you afraid you'll get into trouble for tearing down that sign, Harvey?" asked his wife, the least bit anxiously.

At that minute the same buggy stopped in front of the house and the pale-faced attendant's face peered out. Hartley dodged back from the window and watched through the edge of the curtain as the fellow jumped from the carriage, inspected the spot from which the poster had been torn, turned to the house, shook his fist at it, jumped into his buggy again, and drove off quickly in the direction of the asylum.

Hartley was almost as pale as the attendant when he looked up into his wife's anxious face.

"Now you *are* in trouble!" cried Mrs. Hartley.

"Looks that way, doesn't it?"

"You had no right to tear down that sign."

"He had no right to tack it on a tree in front of my house!" objected Hartley.

"Dr. Cummings will be sure to make trouble."

"Let him. I don't see what he can do. I am in the right in this matter!" cried Hartley.

"But public signs, particularly warnings, cannot be torn down ruthlessly in such a manner. The State will back up Dr. Cummings. The public must be warned of anything so important as a lunatic who has escaped."

"But he escaped over a week ago."

"That's no excuse," his wife replied. "You see if you don't get into all sorts of trouble over it."

"It would certainly be just my luck," replied Hartley glumly.

"I don't see what possessed you to tear it down."

"It's bad enough to have the boarders worrying about the things that have been stolen without having to be in perpetual fear of an escaped lunatic. The man is far away by now, and there is no use warning them about him now that the scare is all over. I don't want to run the risk. One piece of hard luck at a time."

"But you've been getting your bad luck in bunches."

"Luck can't always be against me," muttered Hartley.

"Well, it's established a pretty good long-distance record already," rejoined his wife.

Hartley turned and looked out of the window in a vacant gaze as his mind revolved around the many troubles which had been thrust upon him.

Suddenly he stiffened up and stared down the road.

"What is it?" cried his better-half. "Is Dr. Cummings sending somebody from the asylum to settle with you for tearing down that sign?"

"No," answered Hartley; "he'll probably telephone."

"What is it, then?"

Hartley had jumped to his feet and was peering through the pane. His wife stood beside him, and tried to find out what he was gazing at so intently.

"Can't you see?" he queried.

"No. What is it?"

"It's the searching-party returning, I think."

"But what are they carrying?"

"I was wondering about that myself."

"Can it be the inventor's crime detector?"

"I hope so," answered Hartley.

"But it looks too large for that."

"Maybe it's Polly's motorcycle?"

"No," objected Mrs. Hartley. "If it were that, they'd be wheeling it along."

At that moment the little party was hidden by a group of trees.

"Well, we'll know in a minute, anyway," sighed Hartley.

"I do hope it's the inventor's machine, and that it's in good shape."

"That's too much good luck to happen to us all at once," replied Hartley.

At that moment two of the figures broke from behind the trees. They were near enough now so that Hartley could see what their burden was.

"Great Heavens!" he cried to his wife. "Where on earth did they get that?"

Mrs. Hartley was as excited as he.

"Who is it?" she cried.

"Dunham and Honeycomb are doing the carrying. There come the barber and Miss Washburn and Miss Perkins," exclaimed Hartley, pressing his nose against the cool pane like a curious small boy. "What can it all be about?"

"But who is the man they are carrying?" was Mrs. Hartley's question.

For the burden between Dunham and Dr. Honeycomb was a struggling human being.

"It can't be the barber?" cried Mrs. Hartley.

"No. Silly!" her husband replied. "See, he's walking behind with the ladies."

Unable to restrain his curiosity, Hartley dashed out of the door hatless, and his wife followed.

"What on earth have you got there?" queried Hartley, as he met the party on the front lawn and saw that their human burden was a young man, long and angular, with red hair and wide-open blue eyes.

His hands and legs were bound, and he looked like a living skeleton.

"We found him!" cried Dr. Honeycomb triumphantly.

"But who—" Hartley was just about to repeat his question, when in a flash he remembered the sign posted by the asylum attendant.

He turned to his wife. Her eyes told him that the same suggestion had entered her mind. She, too, had remembered the description on the placard.

"Can it be?" she whispered to her husband in an agitated tone.

At that moment the prisoner struggled and made a frantic effort to bite Dunham's wrist.

Dunham dropped his side of the burden and turned to Hartley with a frightened yell.

"That's what he's been trying to do ever since we started carrying him," he declared. "He's certainly a very vicious fellow. I found him in—"

Dr. Honeycomb cut Dunham off with an imperious gesture.

"*I* found him in—"

But the barber leaped to the front at that moment and cried in an angry tone:

"I found this man in—"

Polly Washburn, at his side, now broke out, her eyes flashing fire at the barber:

"You did no such thing. *We* found him, Mr. Hartley, in a deserted barn on a vacant farm about a mile from here. It was pretty well hidden. It was my suggestion that we search the barn to see if the thief had concealed Dr. Honeycomb's crime detector there."

"I see," answered Hartley vaguely as his wife looked at him with horror in her eyes and whispered:

"Can it be the escaped lunatic at last?"

"He answers the description perfectly," Hartley whispered back.

"We thought there was something wrong with the fellow," Dunham went on, "so we brought him home. He had a lot of chicken-bones around him, and he tackled the barber when he first saw us entering the barn."

Hartley thought of the five hundred dollars' reward for the escaped lunatic, and considered the catch lucky. On examining

the fellow's face he saw the scar referred to in the advertisement, and was perfectly sure that the man was the escaped lunatic.

Giving orders to have him carried into the house, Hartley joined his wife, and said in a low tone:

"It's the lunatic, all right. What'll we do about the five hundred dollars' reward?"

She did not reply immediately, and Hartley continued:

"Of course, they haven't any idea who it is. I suppose I could keep the reward myself."

"But you didn't catch him," his wife objected.

"But I'll return him, and that's how the advertisement read," he replied.

"I think you'd better wait till Dr. Cummings pays the reward. We can decide better when we have that in our hands, don't you think?"

"Yes. There's no hurry."

By this time they had reached the stairs, and when they crossed the threshold behind the searching party Aunt Gertie rushed up with the news that Hartley was wanted on the telephone.

"It's that Dr. Cummings again," she explained.

Hartley smiled to himself as he gave orders for Dunham and Dr. Honeycomb to watch the escaped lunatic until he returned. Then he went to the phone and replied to the doctor's call.

"Why did you tear down my advertisement for the escaped lunatic?" demanded Dr. Cummings in a belligerent tone.

Hartley had the answer ready:

"Because your lunatic is caught. He was captured just now in a vacant barn, surrounded by chicken-bones. He's been living there ever since he disappeared."

"You mean you've got him safe over there?" cried the head of the insane asylum excitedly.

"Yes, and I'll deliver him when you send the five hundred dollars' reward."

"I'll be right over," answered Dr. Cummings, and Hartley heard the click as he slammed up the receiver.

CHAPTER XXI.

MANY THINGS HAPPEN.

An hour later the boarders had finished their lunch and started out again in a body to search for the crime detector. The success of their morning's venture made them optimistic, as Hartley had told them that he imagined the man they had caught was an escaped convict, or something on that order, and that he might be able to secure a reward in exchange for their trouble.

Hartley was glad that they were out of the house when a carriage from the insane asylum drove up and Dr. Cummings stepped out.

Hartley took him at once to the little closet on the first floor where he had confined the captured man. Dr. Cummings recognized him instantly.

"It's the fellow we're looking for!" he exclaimed. "You're sure you haven't had him here all the time?"

"Why, of course, doctor," declared Hartley. "Some of my boarders found him in a deserted barn this morning. I'll have them take you there and show you his lair if you wish."

"That won't be necessary," replied the doctor, convinced of Hartley's sincerity. "I'm glad enough to get him back under any circumstances."

"And the five hundred dollars?" Hartley asked quickly.

"That is yours for delivering him over to me," was the prompt reply, as the doctor took out a check made out in Hartley's name.

Hartley thanked the doctor and helped place the lunatic in the asylum carriage.

"I'd still like to get hold of that man Dunham," said the doctor in parting.

"But that's impossible. You remember what I told you about him?"

"Yes. Of course, I suppose he isn't insane; but I hate to have a man escape me before I have made a complete examination."

"You'd get yourself into a lot of unnecessary trouble if you took Dunham away again. Remember what the man said to me in the woods, the fellow who was looking for Dunham and scared my cook. It's best to leave well enough alone."

"I suppose you're right."

Mrs. Hartley overheard this conversation, and as soon as the carriage had driven away she turned to her husband.

"Harvey," she said, "I wish you would tell me all that tramp person said to you about Mr. Dunham."

"I will in good time, Helen," he replied. "For the present it's safer that I alone should know it."

Then they fell to discussing their luck in having received the five hundred dollars' reward.

"It's great!" cried the enthusiastic little wife.

"It will probably come in handy in settling with the boarders. If they make any more trouble about the stolen articles, I will simply flash the money on them and offer them a hundred or so apiece to settle everything."

"Of course, it is theirs by rights."

"But we have a little interest in it," he told her. "We delivered the man over and collected the reward. We ought to share in the prize-money."

"Of course," Mrs. Hartley agreed. Then she switched suddenly to the question: "Do you think we'll ever discover who stole all the pet possessions of the boarders?"

"I hope so."

Something in his tone caused her to ask quickly:

"Do you suspect anybody?"

"Well, not exactly. But I'm going to keep my eyes on this man Dunham. He may be to blame."

"But you said he was rich. What motive would he have in stealing these things?"

"That's just the point," smiled Hartley. "The articles aren't worth so much themselves, with the exception of Polly's motorcycle. It's only that which makes me think somebody might have stolen them from some eccentric notion or other."

"But Dunham seems to be fascinated by Polly. He wouldn't be apt to steal anything from her."

"No. It certainly seems that he wouldn't. Maybe I'm mistaken," admitted Hartley. "It might be Dr. Honeycomb?"

"But there's a lack of motive there."

"Oh, well. The thing will have to work itself out," he decided abruptly. "I hope the searching party will find something."

But the afternoon's search did not prove as profitable as the morning's hunt. Nothing was discovered, and the little party returned home quite disappointed.

Hartley did his best to cheer them up, and Mrs. Hartley suggested that he divide the prize-money among them; but Hartley preferred to keep the money for a crisis. He was on uncertain ground, and his footing was not sure. The five-hundred dollars, which his boarders did not know was due them, was a weapon—and a powerful one. He decided to hold it in reserve.

That night Miss Perkins came to Mrs. Hartley with a little gossipy story about Miss Washburn and Mr. Dunham.

"She doesn't act like a girl who had lost her dearest possession on earth. She doesn't seem to think of her motorcycle when that Mr. Dunham's around. You wouldn't know she had lost anything by the way she smiles at him."

"No," Mrs. Hartley rejoined, "they do seem to be rather fond of each other."

"They certainly are," went on Miss Perkins, with a wise shake of her head. "Do you know, I just overheard something out on the porch."

"What was it?"

"I heard them talking together and making plans for eloping."

This was like a bomb exploded at Mrs. Hartley's feet.

"Eloping!" she cried.

"Yes. They are making all the plans."

"What did you hear?"

Mrs. Hartley was now on the *qui vive*. It was only a little after eight in the evening, and she hoped that if there was any such plot brewing, she and Hartley would have a chance to block it in order to keep these two boarders in their establishment.

"They said they were going to elope at dawn to-morrow," went on Miss Perkins in a flush of excitement. "I was sitting at the end of the porch, behind the vine. It was dark, and they didn't notice me."

"At dawn to-morrow?" repeated Mrs. Hartley.

"Yes, and she's found her motorcycle, because he said he'd have it brought around to the back of the house and they could have that to elope on."

"Good gracious! This is interesting," cried Mrs. Hartley. "You are sure you are correct?"

"Every word of it is true," insisted the other.

"Where are Dunham and Miss Washburn now?" asked Mrs. Hartley in breathless suspense.

"They've gone for a little walk to talk over the plans," was the reply.

"Maybe they've eloped already!" Mrs. Hartley exclaimed. She sprang up and rushed off to hunt up her husband, whom

she found in an earnest conversation with old Dr. Honeycomb.

She managed to get him away from the inventor for a few minutes without arousing suspicion.

Hartley was amazed by her story.

"You say he agreed to have the motorcycle at the rear of the house at four o'clock in the morning?" he asked when she finished.

"That's what Miss Perkins says."

"Then they must know where the other stolen articles are?" he went on rapidly.

"It looks that way."

"Well, this puts a new light on affairs. I was just talking with Dr. Honeycomb, and he says that Dunham tried to keep them away from a certain place all afternoon."

"What was the place?"

"The corn-crib, out back of our barn."

"It's never used any more, is it?" his wife cried.

"No."

"And you think that Dunham has stolen the things and hidden them there?"

"It looks that way; now that we know he has knowledge of the whereabouts of Miss Washburn's motorcycle, and the fact that he tried to keep them all away from there this afternoon, certainly seems suspicious."

"Let's go and search the corn-crib at once." Mrs. Hartley was restless with desire for action.

"That would be foolish. We can learn more by waiting."

"But we don't want Mr. Dunham to slip off with these things under our very noses."

"I don't think he'd do that," said Hartley. "Dunham has plenty of money, and if he has stolen those things it has only been for a joke on the people who were so fond of them."

"I don't see any joke in it."

"Neither do I. But it's possible he does," replied Hartley, tugging at his coat and clapping his hat on his head as he started for the door.

"Where are you going at this hour, Harvey?" queried his wife.

"I'm going over to town and telephone," he answered.

"But can't you telephone from here?"

"No, somebody would overhear me. I can't run any risk. Things are coming to a head."

"But who on earth are you going to telephone to at this hour of the night!"

"It isn't nine o'clock yet," he replied.

"But that's no answer to my question. Who are you going to call up so secretly?"

He leaned over with a smile, and whispered in a mysterious tone:

"I'm going to call up the tramp who scared Jane—the fellow I talked with over in the woods."

"But what good will that do? What connection has he with all this?"

"You'll see," he replied briefly, hurrying out and closing the door behind him with an energetic jerk.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CRIME DETECTOR DECIDES.

At twelve o'clock that night Hartley heard a scratch on the back door. It was repeated three times, and at the end of the signal he opened the door slightly, turned on a tiny electric lamp, and extended a welcoming hand to the trampish-looking man who had frightened Jane.

At one o'clock a soft patter of sock-incased feet descended the back stairs, and Dr. Honeycomb slipped into the kitchen beside the trampish man and Hartley. Barone followed the inventor, and greetings were exchanged.

"Everything ready?" asked Dr. Honeycomb in a husky voice.

"Have you got guns?" queried the barber in an excited tone.

"No need of those," smiled Hartley. "It'll be perfectly safe. Mrs. Hartley is going with us."

Mrs. Hartley appeared, clad in a tight-fitting black gown of a serviceable nature, and with her was Miss Perkins, her eyes very large and luminous, and Rob Roy under her arm. The parrot wore a muzzle that Dr. Honeycomb had invented to keep him quiet, and Miss Perkins had allowed him to put it on; for there must be no slips that night.

Hartley was worried over the size of the party. But it was necessary to let them all in on the excitement, in order to keep Dunham and Miss Washburn from suspecting. Miss Perkins had spread the story, and there was much fear that the whole thing would get out, and the elopement would be postponed unless all of the innocent boarders were allowed to participate in the plot.

"It reminds me of going out to look for the escaped rhinoceros," smiled Mrs. Hartley to her husband as they all lined up like children on Hallowe'en, waiting for Hartley to give the signal and open the door.

At two o'clock all was in readiness, and Hartley slowly and noiselessly opened the door. It was a jet-black night, and the timid boarders felt their way through the darkness, holding to each other for fear of getting lost.

The tramplike man and Hartley escorted the two ladies, and Barone brought up the rear with Dr. Honeycomb.

The little party stole softly through the grass until they reached the barn, some distance away. Then Hartley got his bearings, and led the way to the corn-crib.

He felt of the door cautiously, and found that it was held shut by a log tipped up against it. There was no lock on the door, and he had not examined it since receiving Dr. Honeycomb's report concerning the suspicious circumstance of Dunham having consistently avoided the corn-crib.

With great care they placed the party around the shed, about twenty feet away from it. Three groups were formed. Mrs. Hartley and Miss Perkins were placed together near Hartley and the tramplike man, and Barone was with Dr. Honeycomb, farther off.

Then the wait began. It was hard at first. Everybody found great difficulty in holding his or her breath and keeping perfectly quiet. But in time the thing grew easier.

To be sure, each person grew stiff from waiting in the one position, but the muscles became trained to that attitude, and they managed to resist fatigue by conjuring up the excitement to come.

Three o'clock passed, and there was not the slightest murmur from any of the waiting party. The weather was fine, and the only trouble came from the dew on the grass; but that was hardly noticed.

All strained forward and instinctively faced toward the Do-as-you-please House as the darkness began to grow even greater. It was the darkness before dawn, and while they could see nothing, not even the corn-crib, all faced the house and tuned their ears to catch the slightest step that might come from that direction.

It was almost dawn; fifteen minutes only remained. In that interval of time it would be necessary for Dunham to go to the corn-crib and extract the motorcycle he had hidden there, take it to the back porch, and wait for Polly.

Suddenly there came the slight sound of an approaching step. It was heard by all of the anxious little party. They pressed together closer in their places and waited anxiously.

The step was slowly approaching the corn-crib. Every muscle in the waiting party was taut. Every eye was fixed toward the sound, though nothing could be seen in the impenetrable darkness.

There came a slight scratch at the corn-crib door. The tramplike man gave Hartley a poke as a signal, and they moved toward the crib in well-measured silence, having worn felt slippers for the occasion.

The log of wood against the door was heard to drop on the ground, and there was the creak of a hinge.

It was clearly time to act. All awaited the signal as one man.

Flash!

Hartley's finger had pressed the button to his electric night-stick, and a circle of bright light was thrown on the head and shoulders of a man standing against the door.

"Get him!" cried Hartley, and Dr. Honeycomb and Barone pounced toward the figure.

But at that moment the man turned, and surveyed the little party with a toothless grin.

It was a strange face to every person there.

Hartley fell back in surprise, and the tramplike man stared at the face brought out by the flashlight as though it were a ghost. Dr. Honeycomb and Barone, alarmed by the unexpected happening, stood frozen to their places.

The stranger blinked at the light, and reached into his breast-pocket, bringing out a little white note.

"Is Mr. Hartley here?" he asked in a ringing tone.

"Yes—I'm Hartley," came the reply, as Hartley tried to wet the dryness in his throat.

"Mr. Dunham hired me to come here and deliver this note to you, providin' you was here," was the stranger's next remark.

Hartley's trembling hand reached out and seized the note. He started to turn the electric stick on the paper, when his tramplike companion told him to keep the light trained on the stranger, and he himself supplied a

new light by which Hartley read the following communication:

DEAR MR. HARTLEY:

This is to inform you that Miss Washburn and I are married by this time. We made remarks to put Miss Perkins on the scent and off it at the same time.

From the strange air around the boarding-house we realized we were successful. This afternon I knew you were suspicious of me, so I steered clear of the corn-crib to make Doc. Honeycomb think I'd stolen the things and hidden them there.

I did steal the things. It was the final outcropping of my kleptomania. I told Polly about it and she forgave me. I have promised to take a treatment for kleptomania and I am going back to live with the old man, give up writing plays, and be good.

The man who hands you this letter knows nothing at all about the whole thing. I picked him up this evening and gave him ten dollars for the job.

Each article I stole has been returned to its original place with a little present from me to make amends for the trouble I caused. You will find everything O. K.

If that detective who looks like a tramp and inquires about me from cooks at back doors is around when this is read, kindly tell him to go back to my father who hires him, and report that he won't be needed any longer, as I'm married and reformed.

Good luck to all of you.

P. T. DUNHAM.

Hartley read the letter aloud. Everybody was stunned. But the man who took the news hardest was the tramplike fellow, who, Hartley explained to his wife, was the same man he had talked with in the woods.

He was a detective hired by Dunham's father, a famous millionaire, to find his son, who had run away from home, and who had always been eccentric. It was the power of the older Dunham which made both Dr. Cummings and Hartley fearful of having the fellow in their keeping.

Hartley had kept the information from his wife that their new boarder was the son of the rich Dunham, for fear that she would worry about it and insist that he be given up. Hartley had managed to get rid of the detective by assuring him that Dunham was not there.

But when the news of the elopement came to him he immediately went out and telephoned to the address the detective had given him.

Naturally each boarder now made a rush for the house. Dawn was breaking as they entered their rooms. True to his word, Dunham had returned the barber's flute, the inventor's machine, and in his own room was found the play that he had pretended to steal from himself. On it was a note presenting it to Hartley, and between the leaves was a fifty-dollar bill.

A fifty-dollar bill was also discovered tucked in the barber's flute; and another fifty in the inventor's crime detector.

It was a very happy little party at the Do-as-you-please House that morning. The detective rushed back to break the good news to Dunham's father that his son had married and reformed, and Hartley, in a long speech of interest to his three remaining boarders, Miss Perkins, Barone, and Dr. Honeycomb, told them of the five hundred dollars reward.

He divided the check into five parts—one hundred for each of the three boarders; the two hundred remaining was for his wife and himself, in lieu of the disappearance of Miss Washburn and Dunham.

All were enthusiastic. The barber started an orchestra with his savings and the easily earned one hundred and fifty dollars. The inventor and Miss Perkins pooled theirs and got married; while Hartley and his wife saved their share toward paying off a few old bills and living while Hartley hunted for a new job.

A few days later the boarders returned to their own homes, and the "Do-as-you-please" sign was taken down, the cook discharged and the house finally closed to all guests.

Then Hartley looked for a new job. It would be impossible to try and run a mild insane asylum in opposition to Dr. Cummings; so he searched for different work.

A few days after the boarding-house was closed he received a happy letter from the eccentric old millionaire Dunham. It read in part that he was pleased that his son had been cured of kleptomania and happily married while in Hartley's charge. He asked Hartley to call personally and receive his thanks.

The thanks proved exceedingly substantial. Hartley was placed in an agreeable position at five thousand dollars a year, and old man Dunham bought the Do-as-you-please House for a summer home, at a figure far higher than any one else would have paid for the legacy left to Mrs. Hartley by her uncle.

"It wasn't so bad, after all," smiled Hartley, when the deal was completed. "Out of failure comes success. But I would like to get even with that Dr. Cummings for butting in and spoiling business."

"It was a fortunate thing he did," replied Mrs. Hartley. "Look what good luck the trouble eventually brought you!"

"I know it. But I would have liked to get something out of that Dr. Cummings."

"You did," smiled Mrs. Hartley. "The five hundred dollars reward. I'll bet it hurt him to pay that. It evened up for the trouble he caused the barber and Dunham."

"To be sure. I'd forgotten about that," smiled Hartley.

THE END.

Two Telephone Calls' Worth.

BY GEORGE MARIANO.

A Dash for a Steamship Pier That Was Checked by a Trivial Matter of Forty Cents.

IF ever a letter looked good to a man, the note from Ned Thorne which reached Bert Hopper by the eight o'clock delivery did.

Bert was in a hole. This has no reference to Elizabeth, the town in which he lived. It refers simply and solely to Bert Hopper's financial condition.

The postman's whistle had stopped him in the act of throwing up his last dime to decide whether to part with his one real asset, four thousand shares of U. & P. stock, quoted on that day and date at precisely fifty cents per share. He had paused to see what the mail might bring. The mail brought the above-mentioned epistle from Ned Thorne.

The letter read:

> DEAR BERT:
>
> If you can meet me at the Hoboken pier of the Hamburg-American Line to-morrow morning before the Pennsylvania sails at ten o'clock, I would like to let you have that long due five hundred. Have struck luck at last —but will tell you about it in the morning.
>
> Yours the same as ever,
>
> NED THORNE.

Four months previous to the date of the letter, Bert Hopper had been manager of the Elizabeth branch of E. Halsted & Co., members of the New York Stock Exchange, brokers of stocks and bonds. Precisely three months and twenty-seven days before the receipt of that letter, E. Halsted & Co. had gone into the hands of a receiver. Since that time the Elizabeth branch had been wearing a "To Let" sign in its window.

Bert Hopper had not been wearing any sign. But he had gone about letting everybody know that he was to let until he was beginning to realize that a few more weeks would make him look like an "Employment Wanted" advertisement. And his landlady was threatening to put another sign up in the window of his room every time she saw him first.

Not that he was entirely without assets. There was this debt that Ned Thorne owed him.

He had loaned Ned the five hundred when that foolish young man had "gone broke" in the office which Bert managed. The next day Ned had lost it, and there had been about the same prospect of realizing on the debt as there usually is of the sun's rising in the west.

Beside that, there was the U. & P. stock. It was the one venture Hopper himself had ever made in the market. He had bought it outright with the only money he had ever inherited. At that time it had been selling at two and a half.

It had occurred to his mind that the tiny bit of track laid across a piece of swamp in northern New York State would be of great advantage to some one who might be seeking to merge the two big roads whose nearness made it almost worthless. It might become the key, and, as such, of high worth to the interests that should desire to unlock the situation.

But nobody had as yet seemed to desire the key. It had never been a very active stock after its first four months of existence. Of late there had been occasional

sales of a hundred shares at steadily declining prices.

Bert had held on to his four thousand shares. He could not quite make up his mind to part with the only chance of fortune he had ever owned. Many a privation he had endured rather than sell out for two thousand what had cost him ten.

This morning he had reached his limit; also, the conclusion that something must be done.

This state of mind was not induced by the landlady's assurance that she could not wait longer than evening for her pay. He had grown accustomed to that announcement, so that it hardly troubled him more than the Jersey mosquitoes in whose society he had been born and reared.

His determination to sacrifice his U. & P. stock had not been instigated by the threatened suit of his tailor for the price of an overcoat he had bought the day before the Halsted failure. He had become hardened to that threat, too.

Even the fact that his last dime had no mate was not the cause of his intention to act this very day. He still had a silver-cased watch, which ought to bring a couple of dollars at a pawn-shop, and that would last him a day or two at the rate he was now spending money.

No, the thing which had aroused him to activity was the sight of a certain motor-car which had raced past the window of his boarding-place the previous afternoon.

In the motor-car had sat Mr. Stephen Garth and Mrs. Morton Haverford—*and*—Miss Ethel Haverford. There had also been a chauffeur on the front seat, but he didn't count.

For that matter, Mrs. Morton Haverford did not count, either. Furthermore, Mr. Stephen Garth would not have counted if he had motored clear around the world without stopping, if Miss Ethel Haverford had not been in his gas-wagon.

Which brings us to the point, namely: that Miss Ethel Haverford counted a whole lot. Before Bert Hopper's affairs had got into their present sorry condition, she had been able to count on about three afternoons and four evenings per week in his society.

Since the crash in Hopper's finances, she had counted principally in his dreams, waking and sleeping. No matter how you try to manage it, paying due attention to a young lady is bound to cost money.

Of late Bert had kept away from the Haverford home. His pride had been too great to permit him the pleasure of offering court to a girl of wealth until he had at least a decent position with which to back up his claims on her regard.

But seeing her in Stephen Garth's automobile had put a different face on things. Altogether too young to regard himself as a down-and-outer, absolutely confident that a turn in the tide of his affairs must come soon, he now resolved to hold his position in Miss Ethel's affections by using the money he could realize on those stocks at the sacrifice of the future fortune they might win him.

Now I guess we can go on with the doings of Mr. Bert Hopper immediately after the receipt of the letter from Ned Thorne.

The first thing he did was a Highland fling, which lasted thirty seconds, or until his soft-slippered toe came into contact with the corner of his trunk.

Then he shouted for the landlady, and told that haughty dame that he would be able to render her what he was owing and pay some in advance that very evening. In the face of her doubts he thrust the note from Thorne.

Then he got into the one decent business suit he had left, clattered joyously down the stairs and into the street. He had put one-half of his money into the box on the platform of a street-car before it dawned upon him that he had not a ticket to Jersey City.

He was disconcerted for only a moment. He knew where a little pawn-shop stood just around the corner from the railroad station. The silver watch would have to repose there for a day.

"How much will you let me have on this?" he asked of the pawnbroker, as he hurried into the shop, having discovered that he had only four minutes before train-time.

The pawnbroker examined the watch carefully, opening the case and studying the works for nearly a whole minute before he offered—

"Seventy-five cents."

"What! Seventy-five cents for that watch!" Bert expressed his amazement without thinking that seventy-five cents was rather more than he actually needed.

"Well," the proprietor of the hock-shop grunted reflectively, "I make it eighty-five."

By this time it had come to Bert's mind that he required only the price of a ticket to New York, and that the less he received

over that the less interest he would have to pay the next day.

"That will do," he snapped out.

He had barely time to pocket his receipt and the three silver coins and run for the Pennsylvania Station. The train was rolling in as he reached the ticket-office.

"Excursion to New York," he shouted at the agent, flinging down the half dollar he had just realized on his timepiece.

"Right," nodded the agent, as he shoved the oblong piece of cardboard under the bars of his window.

Bert caught the train as it started to move.

"How long," he asked of the conductor, "does it take to reach Hoboken on the Subway?"

"About six minutes, allowing for waits," the conductor informed him.

"Rats!" Hopper grunted. "I could have made it with the next train."

He soon got over his chagrin at the wasted haste. An inspiration had come to him. As soon as he reached the Jersey City Station he ran for the telephone-booth.

"432—X—Elizabeth," he said to the operator without consulting a directory.

"432—X—Elizabeth," she repeated immediately; then, a moment later, repeated it again, adding: "Number 4."

Bert entered booth No. 4 and jerked the receiver from the hook.

"This is Bert," he announced upon hearing the voice at the other end of the wire.

"Oh, how are you? It's a long time since I've seen anything of you," the voice came back.

"I've been—er—awfully busy of late," Bert stammered, the unexpected need of an excuse bothering him much more at a telephone than it would have done had he met his sweetheart face to face.

"So you didn't find any difficulty securing another place after the failure of Halsted & Co. I was sure you wouldn't," she replied. "But what in the world are you at that you can never get to see us any more?"

The young man hesitated for a reply before it came to him.

"Why, I'm in Jersey City now—at the railroad station," he stated. "Of course I don't have much time now. I'm in hopes I can get next another broker position soon. It's been pretty hard not to see you—er—any of my friends any more.

"How are you?" he finished, eager to change the subject.

"Oh, mama and I are quite well. How are you?"

"Feeling fine," he laughed. "And, say—I've got this afternoon off. Couldn't you and your mother come in and meet me here about—why, come on that twelve-fifteen—Pennsylvania—and we'll take lunch somewhere and go see a show—anything you like. How about it?"

The message was the concrete form of the inspiration which had stopped his worry over having hurried for a train too early. The answer brought delight to his ears.

"Oh—I've been dying to see 'The Man in the Moon.' I'll ask mama—I'm pretty sure she'll come. Just hold the wire—and there was something else she wanted to speak to you about. Let me see. What was it?

"It was something about some stocks. Dear me—I can never think of anything when I'm talking in a phone; can you?"

"Well, it depends," he answered, recalling the lameness of his last excuse.

"Isn't it funny? I can't think of that matter for the life of me. Well, just hold the wire, and I'll call mama here to talk for herself," spoke the voice to which Bert Hopper would gladly have listened for the rest of his days.

He held the wire.

He had often sat with his elbow crooked up to keep a receiver at his ear while some one got somebody else to speak to him; so he was quite calm in the knowledge that seeming hours were only half minutes.

By and by, as he sat thus, he reached his free hand into his watch pocket, wondering a little if he were not going to have to hurry to meet Ned Thorne after all. Then he laughed at himself as he felt the empty pocket.

"It isn't as long as that," he muttered. "I've half an hour yet at least. The tube-trains make it in six minutes. It's not over five or ten minutes from the tube station to the pier."

Just then Miss Haverford's voice sounded in the telephone.

"Here comes mama. I'm awfully sorry to keep you waiting so long. She was away up in the attic, and I had to hunt the whole house over for her. But—we will be on hand all right—or on the twelve-fifteen train."

"Fine—I'm awfully glad—never mind about the wait," Bert responded cheerfully.

But, at that instant, a thought which was anything but cheerful flashed into his brain. He felt almost sure that he was already rather beyond the end of the five minutes which, he well knew, costs twenty cents when one is using a pay-station telephone from Jersey City to Elizabeth. He was almost equally certain that forty cents was the full extent of his cash capital.

As he responded to Mrs. Haverford's "Hallo," he dug down into the little side-pocket of his coat.

"Ethel told me you were on the wire," said Ethel's mother, while Bert Hopper examined a quarter and a dime.

"Yes—here I am," he faltered, searching through his trousers pockets for more coin, wondering if it could be possible that he had not even enough to pay for two calls, wondering still more how he could manage to settle for them and get up to the Hoboken pier of the Hamburg-American Line before ten o'clock.

Surely he had had four coins when he bought his railroad ticket. He could not reach the bottom of his left pocket with his right hand. He shifted the receiver to his right ear, breaking into the words Mrs. Haverford was speaking.

"I didn't quite catch that," he stammered, shoving his left hand into the as yet unexplored depths of the one pocket.

"You have been trying to see me for two or three days? Yes?" he answered, fishing up another coin.

Mrs. Haverford was saying something about a broker. He didn't know what it was. The thing that he did know was that the coin he had just found was a nickel.

"I—I beg your pardon—there's a lot of —noise here," he gasped.

The noise was the pounding of the blood in his ears.

A nickel, with a quarter and a dime to back it up—forty cents—twice twenty is forty—two telephone calls at twenty cents is forty cents—and they charge five cents to ride on the tube-trains from Jersey City to Hoboken—and, if he hadn't already run into the second call, he must be at the end of the first—and he couldn't shut Mrs. Haverford off—and he couldn't tell her that she must have the calls charged to her account—and he couldn't walk to the Hamburg-American pier in twenty-five minutes —and he had asked them to join him at twelve-forty-eight, to go to lunch and the theater—and—

"Your brokers suggest what?" he managed to speak into the phone.

"That I buy U. & P.—five or ten thousand shares—I said. Did you get that?" Mrs. Haverford was fairly screaming into her end of the line.

"Oh, Union Pacific?" he answered, trying his best to get his mind away from that forty problem.

"No," was the plainly impatient response. "Not—Union—Pacific—but—U. — & — P. — Uptown and Pikeville. I thought you might know a little about it, but I guess you don't. Anyhow, I can't seem to make you hear now. I'll see you this afternoon—I guess that will be plenty of time. Good-by. Thank you for inviting Ethel and me. Good-by."

If he had heard the little click three minutes earlier it would have been sweet music to his ears. Now he tried to call her back.

"What's that? — Mrs. Haverford — What's that about U. & P.? Mrs. Haverford—Hallo—Mrs. Haverford—*Mrs. Haverford.*"

He shoved the receiver back on to its hook and began to work it up and down to request the number again. Then he stopped and let it hang. He had already used up all the calls his money would pay for.

And he must get up to the Hamburg-American pier in Hoboken. Before he stepped out of the booth he searched once more through his pockets. He found the three coins—the nickel, the dime, and the quarter. He cast over the account of his morning's expenditures. Forty cents was all he could possibly have left.

Again he sought his watch in vain. Then his eye fell upon a clock at the end of the long waiting-room. It said twenty-two minutes of ten.

Any man who has stayed long in the Wall Street game has learned to think and act quickly. Bert Hopper decided that he must try to get past the telephone operator without paying at all. He could come back and pay her after seeing Ned Thorne.

He darted out of the booth, stuck his hand into his vest pocket and took it out as if he held a watch, glanced into its empty palm, muttered an exclamation, and started to run past the girl with the black steel band over her head.

"Hold on there," he heard her cry, but he did not hold on.

"Hold on there," a gray-uniformed

policeman commanded, confronting him—and Bert held on.

"You forgot to pay," the telephone-girl called, while he tried to act surprised at being halted.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "So I did."

He fished out the quarter and almost flung it toward her, as though his seconds were worth dollars.

"Keep the change," he shouted magnanimously, again starting away at a run.

"Wait a minute," called the girl again.

"Wait a minute," ordered the special policeman.

"What's the matter now?" Bert growled with a great show of disgust.

"You used up two calls," the girl coolly informed him.

It was not much information. He could have told her as much himself. But—

"Two calls?" he cried indignantly. "How do you make that out?"

"You were talking nine minutes and a half—it's twenty cents for each five minutes or part thereof."

Bert looked again at the clock. It was twenty-one minutes of ten. All of his assumed indignation collapsed. He looked at the girl. It was a humiliating thing to do, but he was desperate and—

"Excuse me," he said in tones of earnest appeal. "But if you'll let me keep back five cents of this for a couple of hours—I've got to catch a man at the Hamburg-American pier before the steamer sails at ten—to collect some money from him. And forty cents was every bit I had in my clothes—I changed them just before coming out, and didn't think to put any money in them."

A sardonic grin spread itself over the plain features of the telephone-girl.

"Say, bo," she directed, "go try that on some one else. If you hadn't tried to get by me without paying at all, I might believe you. But you're just a cheap skin, that's what you are. And you'll pay me before you get out of here or leave in company with a cop."

Bert Hopper paid his last fifteen cents.

He turned away with a flushed face and started down the long concourse toward the exit for the Jersey City street. Half way down he looked back at the huge clock. Then he shook his head and sank upon a bench.

He knew he could not walk the two or three miles to Hoboken's piers in the time that was left. He knew enough about ocean steamers to feel sure there was no hope of one of them starting late.

It was no use. He could not get his five hundred dollars. It must go with Ned Thorne—whose gambling propensities would get away with it inside a week from the time he reached England.

Five hundred gone. At the time Bert had lent it to Ned it had seemed of no great importance. Now it looked a fortune to him. It might have carried him through until he could find another position, might have enabled him to hold his place with Ethel Haverford—and it was gone.

A great anger swept over him, and he ground his teeth and shook his fists and whispered very unkind remarks about the world in general and telephone companies in particular. A porter began to eye him sharply, and he got up to walk away. Another man was bawling that the train for Elizabeth and Perth Amboy was about to start.

Bert still had his return ticket. Why, he chided himself, had he not offered it as security to the telephone operator? It was too late now. He might as well go on home.

And then Ethel Haverford and her mother would come in on the twelve-fifteen train, expecting to meet him here. He had promised to take them to lunch and the theater. Making the promise had cost him five hundred dollars. Without the five hundred dollars he could not keep it.

Yes, he could. He must. He could not give up Ethel forever. There was his U. & P. stock, last quoted at fifty cents per share, now probably down to forty and ready to drop still lower the moment any one offered any for sale.

Mrs. Haverford's brokers had advised her to buy the stock. He knew that her brokers always gave her the best information they had.

If it was time to buy U. & P., it was the worst possible time to sell it. That infernal conversation over the phone must have cost him several possible thousands.

Well, there was nothing else to do. While he was about it, he might as well sell it all. He would then have enough to keep him for a time. Maybe, before it was gone, he would get another position like his old one.

He would start with nothing, just as he

had begun eight years ago when he left high school. Perhaps, when he had grown gray, forty years or so older, he would have reached the position where he could ask a girl like Ethel to marry him.

He still had the coupon for the downtown tube which had been attached to his railroad ticket. It would take him across the river. Then he would go up in the Terminal Building to Jimmy Brett's office and see what Jimmy could do with the U. & P. shares. And there would be plenty of them, nice and cheap, for Mrs. Haverford to buy.

Five minutes later he was walking out of the elevator on the seventeenth floor of the huge building. As he paced the hall toward Jimmy Brett's little office of Hammerman & Son, his head hung, his eyes stuck to the floor, his heart was yet farther down.

He was throwing away a future fortune for a few immediate dollars wherewith to entertain a girl who had just unwittingly cost him five hundred. She was unquestionably worth it—but he hated to pay the price.

"Hallo, Bertie," Jimmy greeted him cheerfully.

It still wanted a few moments to time for the opening of the exchange. There was no crowd yet in the office. Jimmy's helper was sorting the numbers for the board.

"Jimmy, I want you to turn a few shares of U. & P. into a very few dollars for me." Bert got the unpleasant words out immediately.

"Guess I can do that all right," Jimmy announced with the same cheerful smile. "How many you got?"

"Four thousand—I might as well—" Bert began dolefully.

"Four thousand!" echoed Brett in a yell. "Four thousand shares of U. & P.? Do you mean to say that you've got in for four thousand of them?"

"I bought the darned stuff two years ago," assented Bert. "I thought the Van Plank or the Hannigan interests might want it some day. But I'm—"

"My Lord! I wish I could ever think something like that. How in the world did you dope it out?" still shouted the excited Brett.

Bert Hopper began to realize that Jimmy Brett was wrought up.

"What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

Jimmy looked at him critically.

"Well," he exclaimed, "you're a cool one. Why, if I had all that I'd be bumping my head against the ceiling."

"What are you talking about? Come out of it. I said U. & P., not U. P. This isn't any railroad magnates' deal. It's a little piker losing something like eight or nine thousand dollars in order to get the cash to live on," Bert growled.

Jimmy looked at him still more critically.

"Say," he finally inquired quietly, "are you crazy or just ignorant, or are you doped? Do you know at all what you're talking about?"

"I'm talking about four thousand shares of U. & P. stock I want you to sell for me as quick as you can and give me a little money."

"So I understand. Do *you* understand that U. & P. stock was being bid last night at seventy dollars a share, and not a share could be got at the price. Do you know that your little four thousand shares would mean control to either Van Plank or Hannigan, and that either of them would give you over a half a million for them. Where are they? Let me show you what I can do with them?"

Bert listened to this without turning a hair. The fact was that he did not believe it until it was all spoken and he began to realize that Jimmy was not grinning but simply staring as if at a mint of gold.

"I have it at home in Elizabeth," he said, still doubting. "But I just heard it was time to buy U. & P."

"It *was* time to buy—up to yesterday morning. Now it's time to sell quick," snapped Jimmy eagerly. "Shall I go ahead?"

"Sure," assented Bert, just beginning to realize that something half-way good might be going to happen. "Do your worst."

For answer Jimmy took down the telephone receiver and asked for a number.

"Rothstein?" he said a moment later. "This is Hammerman & Sons. I have four thousand shares U. &. P. What will you give for them?"

Bert could not, of course, hear the reply. What he next heard was Jimmy's cool:

"Not enough."

"Not enough," repeated the young broker again, and a third time he spoke the words.

"Best you can do, eh? Well, I'll just try Bartow's," he finally announced.

Bert could hear the rattle of the disk as the reply came back.

"Taken—Good-by," was Jimmy's brief response to whatever was said.

"Bertie, you just run along home and get those stock certificates over here before two o'clock," Brett said with a smile to Hopper.

Bert hesitated a moment.

"You'll have to lend me car-fare—could you spare me ten till I get back?" he faltered. "I've got some ladies to meet at a quarter of one."

"I hate to lend money to a millionaire," laughed Jimmy. "But, seeing it's you, why I guess—"

"How much did you get for me?" asked Bert as he pocketed the bill Brett offered.

"Eleven hundred thousand," calmly stated the manager of the office. "I would have held out for more, only I was afraid those two would get together somehow if I did. I've just spoiled a nice combination which would have been pulled off in half an hour. The two old foxes had arranged a meeting, and if you hadn't showed up with that stock just when you did, they'd have dumped U. & P. on the scrap heap. Now Van Plank can beat Hannigan, and the combine won't come off."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Bert Hopper. "If I hadn't been stuck by those two telephone charges this morning I'd have got just five hundred dollars. Now—I'd like to do some more telephoning."

But he didn't stop to do it. He hustled as fast as he could to Elizabeth, and back again with those stock certificates. He just managed to reach the Jersey City Station in time to meet Mrs. Haverford and her daughter—she is now Mrs. Hopper, by the way.

It was on the return trip to New York that he read a special delivery letter which had been left at the boarding-house during his morning absence. It was from Ned Thorne.

DEAR BERT:

Don't try to meet me on the Hoboken pier. I'm awfully sorry to ask you to wait longer for that five hundred. But I thought it would be a good plan to sell U. & P. short while the price was up. Now I can't take the trip to Europe—nor pay you.

Yours—as big a fool as ever.

NED THORNE.

FARCE-ADVENTURE STORY No. 4.

A NIGHT OF RIDDLES.

BY R. K. THOMPSON.

What Happened Between Ten-Thirty and Two to the Man Who Eagerly Snapped Up a Suddenly Vacated Room in a Crowded Hotel.

I WANT to know what you'd have done? Here it was, raining cats and dogs, the worst sort of a night to find yourself a stranger in town, and half past ten when I turned in at the hospitably lighted doorway of the first hotel on the way from the railroad station.

I sloshed up to the desk with the water in my rubbers squirting a shower-bath up my ankles at every step, and this is the reception I got from the clerk:

"Sorry, sir, but there's not a room in the house!"

Luck, I made a mental note, parted company with me when I was a child of seven. But I set my two heavy bags down on the tiling of the floor and tried the power of persuasion.

"Couldn't you tuck me away, old man, somewhere, anywhere, till morning? I'm a Mason, a brother Elk. All I want's a bed. Couldn't you—"

The clerk shook his head.

"Impossible. Quite impossible. We're crammed to capacity here to-night. There's not a room to be had for love or money. If

you doubt that we're full up, you have only to look around you to satisfy yourself that I'm telling you the truth."

I looked around me.

The lobby was crowded with people sitting, standing, or loitering about. Through their ranks bell-hops hopped. At one side two elevators rose and descended busily. The switchboard central had all she could do to plug in the connections for the house phones fast enough.

I was satisfied.

"Well"—I stooped and lifted my bags by their wet handles—"then, I suppose I'll have to toddle along somewhere else."

I turned away.

But just at that moment an undersized man with gray side-whiskers, a suit-case in one hand and a dry umbrella in the other, bustled up and threw down his key.

"I'm getting out of here right now!" he told the clerk.

Here was my chance.

In two bounds and a shower of raindrops I was flattened up against the desk again.

"Then I get this gentleman's room!"

The clerk paid no attention.

"Why, what's the matter, Mr. Brinkerhoff?" he asked anxiously of the other man. "Aren't you satisfied—"

"Yes, I am. I'm satisfied, all right," began the latter.

"Say, look here!" I butted in a second time. "If this party's giving up his room, what's the reason I can't have it?"

This time the clerk jerked his head around impatiently.

"Oh, go ahead up, if you want to!" he flung at me offhand. "Front!" he called mechanically, more out of force of habit than anything else, turning back once more to the departing guest.

Now, what would *you* have done? Dug the pen through the paper in your eagerness to get your name down on the register quick? If you had been as I was—ignorant that a million cold cash should not have tempted me to take that stranger's room if I valued my future peace of mind — you probably would have snatched the key, turned your grips over to the waiting bell-boy, and followed the latter up to "348."

That was what I did.

As I pushed my way through the packed lobby, rode up in a well-filled car, and walked along the third floor corridor lined with lighted and occupied rooms, all the way to my own door I noticed the time was just 10.45 P.M.

Ten minutes or so later I was in bed and fast asleep.

It was one o'clock when I woke with a thumping, jumping headache. I went to the telephone to order a pitcher of ice-water. There was no answer. All my "Hallo-ing" into the instrument failed to provoke a sound through the receiver which I held glued to my ear.

Finally I gave up, took my splitting head in my hands, and walked the floor. The pain grew worse. A piece of ice for my racking brow, or a headache-powder from a drug-store across the street, I *must* have. But how could I get one or both of those things, shut off here in a room with a telephone that was out of order?

Obviously, I would have to run the errand for myself. There was nothing else to do. So I climbed into my clothes and stepped out of the room at quarter past one—into a pitch-dark hall.

Economizing lights at this hour in the morning! What kind of a cheap-John joint was I in, anyway? The idea of a hotel leaving its corridors as black as ink for a man to risk breaking his neck by tripping over a pair of shoes—or bark his shin by running against a fool of a potted palm—and lose his reason trying to find the elevators—where in Sam Hill was—

I bumped into the grille-work doors.

I rang the bell and waited for the sounds that should have followed—the clatter of the door closing down-stairs, the whir of the motor, and the rattle of a car coming up for me.

Instead, I heard—nothing.

The bell wasn't out of order. As I rang it again, and yet a third time, I distinctly heard it peal out two flights below at each pressure on the button. Still dead silence followed.

If it hadn't been for the humane thought that it wouldn't be right to make a disturbance and wake the other guests sleeping in the rooms all around me, I would have shouted down the shaft to know what was the matter.

"I'll go down," I told myself, with difficulty holding my temper in check—"I'll *walk* down and find out why I'm getting this kind of treatment."

Groping for the stairs, I began the descent. The second-floor hall was dark, too. And all the lights were out in the office.

"Gone to bed!" I muttered in disgust, as I looked about me in the gray gloom that filtered through the street-door and saw that the clerk at the desk, the switchboard operator beyond, the bell-boys and elevator-runners were all absent. "The whole kit and boodle of 'em gone off duty at this hour. I must say I like the way this hotel is run —*not!*"

No wonder my ring for the elevator hadn't been answered. And the deserted office explained why I had been unable to get a sound out of the telephone in my room.

But now that I was down here, I'd go out and hunt up that drug-store, although I could hear the rain still swishing over the sidewalks, and I knew I was going to get soaked again.

Before the street-door I paused. The door was locked and bolted!

I turned and shouted for somebody to come at once and let me out. There was no response to my call.

There must be a watchman around somewhere, though. Surely the clerk and the rest would not have left their posts without putting some one in charge of the place?

Feeling my way along the wall with one hand, I encountered the electric light switch, and turned a button. A single bulb flashed out high overhead, and by the dim light I peered here, there, everywhere, and saw no one.

As I stood looking around the shadowy space before the vacant desk, I began to have a queer feeling—as though something was going to happen. I don't know why, but I felt a prickling at my scalp.

By an effort I threw the feeling off.

The clerk must be asleep in some room up-stairs. I walked across the lobby, the sound of my footsteps ringing loud and hollow. I meant to wake that clerk and have him come down and open the front door for me.

Before the first door I came to as I reached the second floor I tapped gently at first, then louder and louder, and finally as hard as I could pound. No answer. I took hold of the knob, meaning to rattle it. The thing swung inward, I stepped across the threshold, and found the room—empty.

Backing out, I went to the next door. *That* opened easily at my touch, and I stepped into another empty room. It was the same with the next, the third, and the fourth door that I tried. They all swung open, revealing each room unoccupied.

How was this? If the house was full to capacity, why were those four rooms empty? In about the same time that it takes to tell it, I had gone from end to end of that corridor, opening doors on both sides, and looking into rooms that were as vacant as empty barns.

Was it possible that all the second-floor guests had departed in the middle of the night?

I ran up-stairs to the third floor. Here my investigations disclosed the same state of affairs—not a soul in a single room. More, not a stick of baggage, barring my own two satchels in "348," was left in any of the apartments.

Dashing to the fourth and last story, I rushed into room after room. All vacant. And then it burst upon me that *from cellar to garret the hotel was deserted!*

Springing out of the last room on the top floor, I stood looking wildly up and down the dark hall.

"Hallo! Hallo!" I cried.

The echo of my own voice, in mockery, ricochetted from room to room around me, thrown back in diminishing tone from the floor below, the one underneath that, and the empty office far down-stairs.

I *was* alone. Alone, at half-past one in the morning, in a hotel that had been emptied, in less than three hours, of every guest but me.

Where had they all gone?

More to the point, *why?*

That was it. Why should a hotelful of people pack up their belongings and, taking the entire working force of the establishment with them, depart from the place with the silence and stealth of a band of Arabs?

In no empty room had I seen anything to suggest that its occupant had left in a panic of flight. Instead there were signs of a most orderly departure on every hand.

Each piece of furniture in every room had been left in its place. Bureau-drawers were neatly closed. Not a room looked as though it had ever been tenanted. In fact, all the beds were made up.

It was as though I had dreamed that I came into the place at half past ten and found it crowded to the doors.

And yet I tell you I had *not* dreamed I entered out of the storm to find myself in a lighted and thronged hotel, pushing my way through a jammed lobby, and going to bed past room after room that was unmistakably occupied.

Three hours before this had actually happened.

And now—I found myself that hotel's solitary tenant. In the wholesale evacuation I had been left behind. Forgotten, I knew.

I remembered how indifferent had been the clerk's manner when he told me I could take that stranger's room. It had slipped his memory that there was a man in room 348 when the others had left.

What had driven them out? There had been no fire. I would certainly have heard the uproar attendant upon that, and, besides, in a fire do the menaced occupants of a building stop to put their rooms in immaculate order, and make their beds before they leave?

But if you think that all the rest of my recital is going to be engaged with clearing it up, you are mistaken. I have something more to tell you than the reason why that hotel emptied itself of people between 10.45 and 1 A. M.

Another mystery, though I did not know it at the time, was about to follow close upon the heels of this one. So close, in fact, that it took my breath.

II.

As I stood there in the dark, nerves on edge, confronting the fact that I was locked in in a hotel where the strangest, most uncanny situation on record had come to pass, I had only one thought.

To get out of the place and put as many city blocks between me and it as breath and legs would carry me.

My headache, which had started me to prowling through the empty building at the dead of night, was forgotten now. My brain was unusually clear. And a theory had occurred to me to account for the departure of all my fellow guests.

Suppose that the presence of somebody with an infectious sickness had been discovered in the house? A lodger might have been stricken with scarlet fever, smallpox, cholera, and everybody else in the building in danger of contagion. A general alarm might then have been sent out.

That was certainly plausible. It would explain the simultaneous leaving of all the guests and employes. And it would explain, too, why the place had been left in such order as made it look as though it had never been tenanted.

Anybody known to have been in the same building with a person who had a catching disease would be hunted down by the Board of Health and put to no end of inconvenience. To save the guests this sort of trouble, after they had gone the place might have been fixed up in a way that left no trace behind of their having been there.

By a bit of carelessness, I, and I alone, had been left behind in a house where might lurk the germ—

I caught hold of the banister beside me on the stairs which I had started to descend. A gasp of awed horror at my plight was wrung from my throat.

Locked in this hotel I was being subjected every minute to the danger of some terrible disease. Perhaps I had already been here long enough to become inoculated with it—

My headache!

Very likely I was down with typhoid, diphtheria, even now! Maybe I had begun to show the first symptom when I waked up with that pain at my temples. *Was* I sick?

I never felt worse in my life than right at that moment. My headache had swooped down upon me again with redoubled force. A million sparks danced before my eyes; my mouth was dry and hot—I felt that I was a fit candidate for a hospital if ever a man was.

I must get out of here at once!

With a broken moan, I plunged headlong down the stairway and found myself fighting at the fastenings of the front door in the next minute. The door was locked from the outside.

I was indeed a prisoner. But there must be a side-door. I ran and found it. This side-entrance, too, was securely fastened from without.

The cellar!

Perhaps I could find a way out through the basement. Hunting for the door that led below, I stumbled on it and hastened down into the subterranean depths whose darkness, even greater than that I had just left, rose up and seemed to smite me in the face.

Going blindly forward along the cement floor, past coal-bins, wine-cellars, and the like, I strove to steer a course that might, by dumb luck, bring me up against a door that I could open and get through—to freedom.

Suddenly my foot encountered something. That something was soft, slightly yielding to the touch of my shoe, and it stirred a trifle as my foot pressed against it.

A body!

The blood in my veins turned to ice; stood there, frozen. Then I groped with trembling fingers for a match. As I searched my pockets the thought came to me—

Was I going to come upon the first of all the bodies of the guests who had left their rooms up-stairs?

Striking the light, I held it out at arm's length and stooped to examine the form at my feet. It revealed itself as a man, cuddled in whose arms was a long-necked bottle that had presumably been filched from the wine-bin nearest at hand.

In the parlance of the day, the stranger was "spiflicated."

Before the match went out and burned my fingers, I had noted a gas-jet on the wall, which another match lighted. I peered around me and could see nobody else in the cellar. So I turned my attention to the man lying on the floor.

"Hanh!" he snorted, waking up as I bent and shook him.

"What are you doing here?" I threw at him eagerly. "You aren't—are you a guest in this hotel?"

The jagged party sat up.

"'Lone the warrior stood in grandeur deep,
Upon his brow a frown 'gan slow to creep.'

Lord Byron," he said gravely. "Am I a—a guest of the house, you ask? I am."

"Then why did you come down here?" I cried. "And where are all the rest of the folks who left their rooms some time before or after midnight with all their belongings? Tell me quick!"

He winked at me.

"The rest—the rest—

'I would that mine answer, good sir, could confess
The truth that I know by a simple said "yes."'

Alfred Tennyson. Where are all the other guests? That's what you want to know?"

In impatience, I stepped nearer.

"I do!" I snapped. "Can you tell me where they've gone?"

"Oh, yes," he said indifferently.

I gasped.

"Where are they?" I fairly whispered in the knowledge that I stood on the brink of discovering the real truth of this mystery. "Quick, tell me—I'm the man who's been left behind in 348!"

The fellow's eyes on my face widened.

"Who—who'd you say you were?" he asked.

"The man in room 348," I answered. "Will you tell me at once, and put me out of this suspense, where every living soul but you and me has gone—"

He scrambled to his feet, still clutching the bottle in his arms.

"It's all right now!" he said. His tone was soothing, the reassuring one that a person uses in talking to a child. "It's all right. Don't you be worried. It's all right," and he seemed to be groping in his mind for something to do or say that would completely calm me.

His face lighted up as he decided to try more poetry.

"'Never, never dear and dearest,
Shall you lose your best and nearest;
Angels watch, and watching keep
Dangers many—many—'

William Wadsworth Longfellow," he finished uncertainly. "Everything's all right now," he added, smiling inanely. "The guests, you know, have gone out."

"I know that!" I blurted. "What I want to know is where, and why, they've gone?"

"Just to have a good time."

"What the—"

"They've all gone to the theater."

My eyes bulged.

"All—all of them together?" I gasped.

"Yes, sir, all in a little party. Great hotel, this. Family atmosphere, and all that, you know. Never do anything without the others here, you see. One goes to the theater—all go. Family—"

What kind of a wishy-washy lie was this?

"Look here. It's almost two o'clock," I said sternly. "These people aren't at the theater at this hour, certainly. Where are they?"

"Huh?"

"I said where are they?"

"Oh! Getting a little bite of supper after the play, of course."

"All of them together?"

"Yep. Great little family feeling—"

"They certainly haven't got the clerk, the telephone operator, the bell-boys, chamber-

maids, cooks and all with them at the theater and restaurant?"

"Sure, sure. Equal'ty rules at this hotel, you know. One man's as good as another. As Shakespeare says:

'Every little body is a brother underneath;
Every little brother is a body—'"

"That will be about all!" I broke in. "I know you're lying to me, you inebriated idiot, and—"

What else I was going to say I never finished.

Before I could stop him, before I rightly understood what was under way, the man before me leaped suddenly sideways, took a bound around my left, and the next minute had run out of the cellar, up the basement stairs, and was out of my sight in a twinkling.

I stood looking in the direction he had gone, my mouth hanging open.

Here was that second mystery I spoke of. This man I had found lying around on the cellar floor in a condition of driveling imbecility knew the reason for the departure of the guests and employees of that hotel in the middle of the night.

I was sure of it. And I was equally positive of another thing.

He had tried to keep the truth from me.

Why?

I started toward the cellar stairs, meaning to pursue the fellow, catch him if I could, and wring the answer from him.

Little did I know (as the novel-writers say) that, when I got up-stairs again, I was going to come face to face with still another mystery—as though I hadn't had enough of them so far!

And this third enigma in a night of riddles was the most strange and baffling of any that I had confronted so far.

III.

WHEN I came up through the basement door and stood again in the lobby on the ground floor, I found that the one electric bulb which I had turned on was turned out.

That must have been done by the soused individual who had run away from me, found that he was locked in the hotel with me past getting out, and had put the place in as much darkness as possible so that I couldn't find him where he had most likely hidden himself.

But I thought I heard his footsteps on a floor above.

My sole desire being to get hold of him and settle once for all the strange disappearance of everybody else. I gave chase up the stairway.

Snapping on the lights as I went, so that there would be as few dark corners as possible into which my quarry could hide, I investigated the second floor. It took me ten minutes and more to go into every room, look in all the closets and under the beds, to satisfy myself that the fellow wasn't there.

Then I spent an equal time on each of the two floors above. The man wasn't to be found. He must be down-stairs then. I had come away from the dark ground-floor too quickly; it was there he must have concealed himself.

Stealthily I crept down to the office again. As I reached the lobby I heard the voice of the fellow for whom I was searching. I had him!

But where was he? He was talking—in behind the desk at the telephone switchboard, I suddenly realized.

I made one dash for the spot. Evidently he heard me coming. His voice ceased; there was the rattle of dropped plugs; he turned on the stool before the instrument and faced me.

By the light of another bulb which I turned on at the end of the desk, I made out a silly smile on his countenance.

"Well?" I panted. "What did you run away for?"

"Exercise," he told me. "My circulation's awful poor. My doctor tells me to take a short, brisk run every twenty minutes. Time was up when you were talking to me down-stairs. I had to—"

"I don't think you're potted as much as downright nutty!" I exploded.

"Nutty?" he repeated. "Nutty—oh, yes."

"'Twelve chestnut burrs, gold-brown burrs,
Were hanging on the tree-top, where—'"

"Stop it!" I barked. "You'll have *me* crazy in another ten minutes if you don't cut those jingles of yours. Now, you know where everybody who was in this house has gone, don't you?" I cried, taking a quick step toward him

He slid off the stool.

"Now—now!" he stuttered. "Now

they're all right. You'll see. Don't you be uneasy—"

He paused for breath.

Looking at him, reading the unmistakable eagerness shown in his face and speech not to have me think what a brainless fish would have thought—that there was anything unusual in this whole unearthly situation—I felt again that prickling at my scalp and the sensation of being up against something weird, creepy.

Why was this fellow trying to conceal the real reason for the hotel's desertion? He evidently had something to do with it. If not, he undoubtedly *knew* something about it.

Just then he took another bound past me.

But I was on my guard. He wasn't going to get away from me again.

Jumping after him, I wrapped my arms around his waist. He struggled in vain to free himself. As we fought across the tiles of the lobby, there came an interruption.

It was an insistent banging at the street-door.

"Lemme go!" The fellow panted. "They're here—they want to get in. I'll have to open the door on this side—"

I dropped my hands, stepped back, and stared, breathless, at him. In a twinkling he had crossed to the door from which the pounding came. He slid back the bolt. There was the rattle of a key from the outside. And then—

Then there marched back into the hotel the first of the returning guests!

Two men, escorting a woman, all of them with their suit-cases, hand-bags, and satchels, crossed the threshold of the door, walked toward the desk, and the woman sat down in an upholstered chair under the shade of a potted palm.

I recognized them as a trio of guests I remembered distinctly to have seen sitting and standing about the lobby when I first came into the place that evening.

They had come back, with their bag and baggage, and at a quarter-past two in the morning. I looked at them, speechless.

Their eyes showed traces of sleepiness. On their faces was a look of disgust and the expression of doing something unpleasant much against their wills. If ever three people looked sore—and *sore* is the only word that describes it—those three looked it then.

My attention, however, was speedily distracted from them.

Through the street door that was now open another group of guests entered. Four men, sleepy, disgusted, sore, carrying with them their bags. All of them the four people whom I had seen in the lobby when I came into the place at half-past ten.

More and more folks now arrived, all loaded with their baggage, all sleepy, unhappy looking.

Was it possible that they had actually been off on a theater party? They didn't look like a gathering returning from an evening spent in any pursuit of pleasure.

Besides that, they wouldn't have gone to a show burdened with their clothes and suit-cases. And—

Would they have left for the theater at the time most performances are over, getting out of their beds to do it, to say nothing of making up those beds before they left?

Either I was going stark, staring crazy and seeing all these things in a delirium, or—

Here came two bell-boys. They were followed by a couple of men, who went over to the elevators and sat down on the leather-covered bench in front of the cars.

And now appeared the clerk.

He bustled in at the door, looking sharply around him on all sides, went to the desk, vaulted over it, and then turned to face the gathering in the now crowded lobby.

"What's the meaning of all this?" the clerk demanded. "What have you all come back here for at this hour of the night—morning, rather? And why was I sent for?"

Could I believe my ears?

The people around me surged forward angrily, noisily. They lifted up their voices, masculine and feminine, in a babel of sound. I couldn't make head of tail of what it was they were all shouting at once. Then—

"I sent for all of you!" It was the voice of the intoxicated man. I looked around for him, but he was hidden out of sight in the crowd. The clerk's voice rose alone on the sudden hush that followed.

"Is that you, Drake?' he called.

"Yes, it's me, Mr. Hopper."

"You say you telephoned all of these people and me to come back to the hotel at once, bringing baggage with us, and to act as though we had only left the place for a little while—"

"Sh-h!" warned the voice of the souse. "Not so loud, or you'll give the whole thing away. He's *here!*"

"He? Who're you talking about?" cried the clerk.

The voice of the other rose in a stage whisper.

"The man in 348."

That meant me.

"The man in 348!" exclaimed the clerk. "Why, Brinkerhoff's left. There's nobody there—good Lord!" he broke off. "That fellow I let up when Brinkerhoff got out—"

He stopped and looked around the lobby. His eyes failed to encounter mine.

"Drake!" he called to the unseen fellow in the crowd. "Speak up, my man. Talk right out as though you had nothing to conceal. Tell me just what has happened since we left this place. Did you do as I told you—act as watchman while we've all been away?"

"I—I did, Mr. Hopper," replied the other. "Around twelve o'clock I thought —I thought I heard a noise down in the cellar. So I went down. I was going to protect things, you see. But there was nobody there.

"Well, I—I came across a bottle of '89 while I was nosing around. I—I thought there wouldn't be any harm in sampling it. And I did. I—I sampled quite a lot of it —the whole bottle, if I must come out with it. And then I fell asleep.

"I was waked up, only an hour ago, by a stranger. But he said he was the man in 348. I didn't know what Brinkerhoff looked like. But I knew he'd been stopping in that room these last two days. This must be him, I thought.

"And at once it came over me that a dreadful mistake had been made. This man Brinkerhoff, that we've been trying to sell this hotel to for two days, hadn't tumbled that we people who were crowding the house were only stockholders in the hotel, trying to make the place look as though it was doing a rushing business. You told me he had got on to the whole thing tonight, given up his room, and gone, Mr. Hopper. But here was the man himself—he said he came from Brinkerhoff's room—and I knew he hadn't left at all.

"He wanted to know where all we—we guests had gone to. I was in a hole. He mustn't discover that we'd been tricking him. It was up to me to save the day. But how?

"Then I thought of telephoning you all to come back. I told him some little stories that I made up on the spur of the moment, and finally I broke away from him. Running up-stairs, I telephoned to all of you to come back—"

The clerk broke in.

"Oh, you fool!" he wailed. "You poor, poor rummy. Brinkerhoff *did* leave. He *was* on to our game. You've made a mistake, thought you were alone in the hotel with the wrong man. And you've roused forty of us up out of beds at our own homes at this hour—made us come here to try to rope Brinkerhoff in on the dying hope that he had come back—eh, let me get my hands on you!" he ended, leaping back over the desk again.

But he was too late. The inebriated Mr. Drake, realizing what he had done, had taken to his heels and escaped by the front door.

Were you ever in the midst of a mob baying for the life-blood of the man or men who had brought that aforesaid bloodthirsty mob out of bed at two o'clock on a stormy morning?

If you have ever been, you'll understand the process of thought by which I arrived at the conclusion that *I* would be blamed as much as anybody else.

And *you* won't blame me, I'm sure, for doing what I did under the circumstances. That was to make a center rush through the lobby, out at the door, and up the street in the flying footsteps of the escaping Drake.

What else would you have done?

THE SNOW.

BEHOLD how God with pitying eye looks down
On forest bare and meadow sere and brown;
And over hill and valley, ridge and rent,
Alike o'er grace and o'er disfigurement,
Spreads the broad mantle of the patient snow.
So we, who seek His guidance from below,
May learn true charity knows peak nor plain,
And naught so mean that it must ask in vain.

Edwin L. Sabin.

The Hawkinsambulator.

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN.

The Amateur Inventor's Wheels of Wo in a Try-Out Upon Men of Wealth and Station.

"IT certainly is a shame—the way the old things have to go!" Hawkins sat back and stared dreamily at my library ceiling.

"You bet it is!" I replied hotly.

I assumed that he was speaking of the half-inch hole he had just dug in my decidedly valuable old library table with his screw-driver thumb-nail. The ostensible purpose had been to determine whether the finish was a real French finish or merely prepared wax rubbed; and Hawkins seemed satisfied.

"And if you'll kindly send a first-class cabinet-maker to have that miniature well refilled as well as may be," I was adding warmly.

Hawkins stared at me for a moment; then his benevolent gaze returned to the ceiling.

"I wasn't talking about your table, Griggs," he said with some annoyance. "I was thinking of the old houses—the old mansions that have disappeared, one by one, around New York."

I think I must have been estimating how many pounds of colored putty would be needed to fill that hole, and whether varnish would complete the job, or whether a steam-roller would have to be called in, or—

"The—old—mansions, Griggs!" banged into my ears.

"Well, what in blazes about them?"

"I say, it's too bad to see them disappear, to make way for flats and suburban boomers and all that sort of thing, isn't it?"

"Since you make me realize it that way, Hawkins," I said acidly, "I may as well admit that it's a matter I shall not forget to my dying day. The pathos, the heart-rending misery of seeing those hallowed old—"

"The Covrington place is going next!" the inventor asserted mournfully.

"Is it?" I said with some interest.

For I recalled that splendid old mansion quite clearly. It stands, you know, away up at Two Hundred and something Street. It has been the home of the Covringtons for a century and a half, and the Covringtons, if not spectacularly wealthy, are at least exclusive to the verge of isolation.

To be sure, since old Mr. Covert Covrington gave the place to his son James as a wedding present—and himself spent a million or so on a new home on the Sound—there have been rumors that the old mansion was dropping to pieces; but I have long cherished a desire to look through the ancient house and its treasures.

At which point in my meditations Hawkins sighed:

"Yep. Going to pull it down next year and put up an apartment hotel. Jim told me yesterday."

"Jim who?"

"Jim Covrington, of course," said the inventor airily.

"Do you *know* him?" I inquired.

"Know—Jim?" Hawkins demanded superciliously and amazedly. "Do I—" He sat back again. "Yes, I know Jim Covrington, Griggs! I'm going to take a run up there to-morrow morning."

"Ah!"

"Take you along and show you through the house," Hawkins condescended. "They won't object to a friend of mine trotting through the old place!"

And I—I think I thanked Hawkins with real humility.

He called for me next morning.

I was ready and anxious to go, too. I had hustled through breakfast, which was a sacrifice, for on Sundays I breakfast about noon. I believe I thanked Hawkins again as we made for the car, and Hawkins poohpoohed me haughtily.

But once settled down, with the Covrington mansion at the other end of our ride, a change seemed to come over Hawkins. He shifted occasionally; he bit off a finger-nail that really did not seem in need of biting, and when the conductor came along for our fares, he started violently.

"I suppose you've known Jim for a long time?" I hazarded, after a protracted period of silence.

"Eh? Jim!" Hawkins stared at me.

"Your old friend, Jim Covrington."

"See here, Griggs," said Hawkins sternly. "You haven't much sense, you know. When we get up there and I introduce you, you needn't begin calling Mr. Covrington 'Jim' at once. Just remember that he's a mighty exclusive and wealthy person, and he doesn't take much to strangers."

I said nothing.

"Yes, he's — he's devilish exclusive!" Hawkins pursued uneasily. "Why, if I meet him when a stranger's with me he's very rarely as—er—sociable as when we're alone. So—so don't try any 'Jim' on him!" the inventor concluded sharply.

"I will call him Rudolph or Augustus," I murmured.

Hawkins apparently did not hear. Instead, he glanced out of the window and frowned impressively at the sunlit, late-spring landscape in Harlem; and somehow the idea struck me that, last evening, Hawkins had possibly exaggerated the merest trifle his intimacy with Mr. Covrington.

Hawkins does get these little fits of inflation—and I deduced with some accuracy that if Covrington wished to attract the gifted inventor's attention, he would hardly call "Bertie!"

"Is this just a social call?" I inquired, after another endless period of stillness.

"Oh—I run up occasionally," said Hawkins lucidly. "Keep quiet, Griggs, will you. I have an idea."

I kept quiet. Indeed, I kept quiet until we were among shanties, rather cheap-looking flat-houses, and many open fields and trees—and at last Hawkins rose with a brisk:

"Four blocks' walk from here, Griggs!"

We swung off and hurried along a path that would some day be a sidewalk. And at the beginning of the last block the stately old Covrington mansion loomed up, and I regarded it with something like awe.

I could imagine our being escorted into a huge, dim drawing-room by some white-haired servitor of the Covringtons. I could see pre-Revolutionary furniture all about, and old, old family portraits of warriors—and some newer ones, for the Covringtons have been prominent in four wars! I could see—

Well, about that time I could see that we were not headed for the main entrance at all, but that Hawkins was leading a humble way to the drive, at the far side! At the end of that drive, I remembered, were the big, white-painted stables.

"Are we going to call on the horses first?" I asked rather crisply.

Hawkins turned and transfixed me.

"Say, Griggs! From now on you give your perfect imitation of a deaf and dumb man, until you're told to speak! Understand?"

"I understand, but—"

"There aren't any 'buts' about this understanding," Hawkins laid down flatly as he turned back. "You keep the cover on your little box of flippant comments till I tell you to take it off!"

I suppose anyone who had not known Hawkins for years would either have turned on his heel and departed, or impressed his clenched fist upon Hawkins's nose, according to his inclination and breeding. As for me, I trudged on silently behind.

I had not been mistaken. We were indeed going directly to the stables, and Hawkins's eye was carefully avoiding the house proper. And when we got to the big open door of the stable a young groom was standing there, polishing harness with his hands and directing a hostile stare at Hawkins with his eyes.

"Look here, you!" he said distinctly, this evidently being the proper form of address to a friend of the family. "You!"

"Well?" said Hawkins icily.

"You'll have to get that thing right out o' here quick! Gaston was tellin' me last night you orter put it in the garage. He says if anything'd happened in here, the boss wouldn't 'a' got no insurance—and it'd 'a' been up to me!"

"That—is—sufficient!" said the inventor.

"It may be sufficient for you, but it ain't for me!" announced the groom, with no suspicion of murmuring it under his breath, as he rolled a little victoria to one side. "There she is. Get her out, mister. And this is the last time I ever take a chance on losin' my place with a family like this!"

I have an idea of what Hawkins would have said. It was in his face—but it was far from being the sort of thing that goes into print. However, he entered the great stable and tramped heavily to a far corner; and I, trembling, frozen, looked after him.

Was such a thing an earthly possibility?

Had Hawkins managed to plant an invention even here?

The doubt was settled in about three seconds.

Hawkins did not appear in person; but out of the gloom rolled the weirdest object that ever bore wheels!

Close your eyes and imagine a huge Saratoga trunk of the old type, knocked somewhat into the shape of a perambulator. Or, again—imagine the sort of baby-carriage you might meet in your travels through a lobster nightmare; a baby-carriage with front wheels a little smaller than rear wheels, and all wheels fitted with four-inch automobile tires. Then fancy that the whole thing is painted scarlet, with ornate vermilion-leather upholsterings—and you will come close to the picture I viewed in that stable doorway.

And then Hawkins appeared, rolling the nameless horror into the open by means of an ordinary baby-carriage handle.

As he turned it in coming toward me, I saw a rather comfortable-looking little leather seat behind, with one or two shining levers beside it, and—

"*That* is perfection!" Hawkins informed me calmly, albeit his face turned a brilliant purple as the groom smiled audibly.

"That's what it is, old man!" I agreed heartily. "So, now, good-by, and—"

Hawkins's fingers gripped straight into my arm!

"You'll stay now until Mr. Covrington gives me permission to kick that lout off the premises forever—and that'll be in about two minutes!" he hissed, although he contrived a quiet, dignified smile to go with it. "And it is simply the Hawkinsambulator I spoke about," he concluded more loudly.

I wet my lips. For a hopeless moment I thought I might break for the stable and ask the groom to hide me somewhere under the feed—but Hawkins held me a little more tightly and continued:

"The Hawkinsambulator, as you see, is merely the *twenty-first* century baby-carriage—a perambulator, power-driven! The nurse sits here, in perfect comfort and security. She controls everything by one lever—here. And although a girl of only ordinary intelligence could take the motor to pieces and rebuild it in ten minutes, she has nothing whatever to do with the machinery!"

He paused for breath.

"In a way, it is a solution of the whole child problem," he pursued modestly. "No tired, impatient nurse-girl to vent her weariness on the child, thus ruining its delicate nervous system for life—for the nurse is given no chance for physical exertion. No danger of toppling over—the Hawkinsambulator is steadier than an automobile. No violent jars to wrench the child's spine—springs and tires, Griggs! No wild race home, if rain comes on; the speed is merely increased a trifle—and baby is home without a drop!"

He smiled benignly at me. The groom, behind him, had lighted a cigarette and was sitting in the stable doorway. The groom had pointed one forefinger to his temple, and was revolving the finger, while he looked significantly at the coachman.

"And when the newspapers noise the fact about that Covrington's youngest is traveling the streets with his French maid in a purple Hawkinsambulator with a gold monogram, there is going to be a boom in Hawkinsambulators among the rich that—well!" Hawkins broke off with a broad smile. "Old man Covrington himself is interested in it as an investment. The maid may take the baby up to his place on the Sound this morning."

"What?" I gasped. "Put a—a live child in *that?*"

"Possibly they will kill the child, if you suggest it," Hawkins said as he trundled his baby-elephant perambulator toward the house.

Either we had been watched from here, or we were expected at precisely that second; for as we came alongside the side veranda with the monstrosity, a wide-eyed girl appeared. And I say wide-eyed advisedly, for as that nurse looked at the Hawkinsambulator, her eyes literally bulged from their sockets and a steady stream of rich fur robes dribbled from the pile in her arms.

She was followed by an older woman, severe and very plainly dressed. She looked at the Hawkinsambulator as if daring it to do something, and I was afraid it would take the challenge, until she shot out:

"Is *that* the patent baby-carriage? I'm Mrs. Boggs, the housekeeper."

Hawkins removed his hat with a sweep.

"That is indeed the patent baby-carriage, Mrs. Boggs," he said. "Is the little sweetheart ready?"

"*No!*" replied the lady. "And she won't be, if I have anything to say about it!"

She gave a last glance at the machine and walked into the house. The girl stared on;

and Hawkins, when breath returned, looked at her savagely.

"Well, you came to prepare the carriage, didn't you?"

"A—baby-carriage, *m'sieur*, but—" the girl faltered.

"Prepare it!" roared the inventor.

Slowly, fascinatedly that stricken maiden gathered her cargo of soft furs and came down the steps. Slowly—standing at arm's length—she arranged the strange vehicle, until probably five or six hundred dollars' worth of beautiful robes were in place.

"Come nearer, my good girl," said Hawkins patronizingly. "It won't bite you, you know. Just hop up here. Here's where you are to sit."

"I—there?" the girl cried in sheer terror.

"Certainly. Come along."

Hawkins extended an encouraging hand—and the girl's lithe limbs had taken her to the veranda and she was safe behind the railing, chattering.

And just here a deep voice, approaching from within, called to some one:

"It's only that inventor fellow, Hawley, with the automatic baby-carriage."

Hawkins started, frowning. From the house came a tall, black-mustached, aristocratic man, dressed for motoring, and with a little annoyance in his smile.

"Good morning, Mr. Covrington!" said the inventor obsequiously.

"Good morning, Mr. Hawkshaw!" said the other rather mockingly.

"Hawkins!" corrected the inventor.

"Hawkins, I mean," said Covrington. "Well, where's the great contrivance, eh? They told me somebody'd brought up something last night and left in the stable, but—"

His eyes, for the first time, fell full upon the Hawkinsambulator.

Mr. Covrington started violently; his jaw dropped for an instant and his eyes opened.

"Is *that* it,' Harkins?" he gasped.

"My name—" said the inventor to his old friend.

"Is that thing actually intended for a *baby-carriage?*" the aristocrat gurgled.

And at that point speech failed Mr. Covrington. His mouth opened wide; one long whoop of thunderstruck mirth escaped him! Then Mr. Covrington began to shake and—yes, to emit yell after yell of Simon pure, care-free laughter!

He braced himself for a moment against a column and shrieked; he reeled backward and leaned against his substantial mansion and hugged his sides and rocked, until perspiration poured down his red countenance and he seemed likely to explode!

"When that ass is done bellowing—" Hawkins began.

"Why don't you get clear while he *is* bellowing?" I suggested.

"Because I came here to show him—" Hawkins was grinding out between his teeth—when Covrington slowed down at last.

By a sort of diminuendo series of gasps he returned to a condition where speech was possible; and then he drew his final gulp and leaned on the porch rail and stared down at Hawkins with watery eyes.

"Haskins!" choked Mr. Covrington. "Is that—*that* really what you were talking about all the way up on the 'L' after Benson introduced me to you?"

"This, sir, is—" the inventor began throatily, but with something of the Daniel Webster air left.

"But I supposed it was some new kind of baby-carriage when I told you you could try it out up here in the loneliness," Covrington choked merrily.

It seemed to me that possibly Hawkins might have exaggerated his intimacy with the Covrington family the night before. Such things had happened in the past; but in this case it seemed that Hawkins was making a particularly choice idiot of me as well, and I was searching for an easy means of escape when:

"This is not only *some* kind of baby-carriage, Mr. Covrington. It is *the* kind of baby-carriage—the perambulator which solves all problems of—"

"Give it one in geometry, Hankins!" Covrington suggested happily.

"My name is Hawkins!" the inventor rapped out. "I am pleased to amuse you. When you have seen what the Hawkinsambulator *does*—"

He grabbed the crank at the side and threw it over—and a series of ear-splitting reports burst forth and gave the quiet Sabbath morning more than a passing resemblance to the Battle of Gettysburg!

The maid screamed and held her ears, black eyes glaring with terror from her white face. Even Covrington backed away hurriedly—and the noise stopped in a second, and Hawkins was standing erect, rather pale but smiling.

"I forgot that the muffler was cut out," he said hoarsely. "You observe that there

isn't a sound now and the motor is running perfectly."

"But they wouldn't allow that blamed thing to run on a sidewalk—it's an automobile, you chump!" said Covrington. "You've got a motor in it that—"

"Let me give you a little demonstration!" Hawkins yelled at him wildly.

He did.

He climbed into the rear seat of the affair and went to work. Slowly, delicately, without anxiety, exertion, or sound, he backed away from the veranda and almost to the stables. He came down again at the same perfect, noiseless glide.

He paused for a second—he turned the thing in a circle thrice; he stopped and backed it around an even smaller circle; he stopped again and began to turn right-angled corners without a tilt—and at last he stopped short and bowed.

"Why—good enough control, I guess," Covrington said with a hint of a yawn. "It's—I'm not interested in it, Hawes. It—oh, it wouldn't carry any weight or—"

"Sit down in this, Griggs!" commanded Hawkins.

"*What?*"

"Mr. Griggs, who weighs nearly two hundred pounds, will jump in and sit down," Hawkins explained with a light in his eye that dragged me nearer.

Plainly, it was get in or be run down and macerated.

I got in—rather, I tried to. Getting into an oversized baby-carriage is a trick I had never tried before. I recall sprawling across the fiendish thing at the first trial. At the second effort, I slipped and went down on my knees with a thud that jarred every tooth; and Covrington was shaking again.

At the third attempt, I jammed one foot into the rugs, hauled myself after, and settled with a crash which I sincerely hoped would end the Hawkinsambulator then and there.

It did nothing of the sort. On the contrary, the wretched thing received me gratefully! It bounced and squeaked a little, but it was perfectly plain that an extra ton of scrap iron would have to be dumped in on top of me to make any impression on the structure.

Precisely how I felt just then, with Covrington and the maid on the veranda and three women—identity never established—looking down from three open windows upstairs, is not to be recorded.

Suffice it that I had very little time to worry about minor matters; the Hawkinsambulator was in motion. Very slowly it took me down the path; very slowly it backed to the starting point; and Hawkins remarked:

"Now, if you'll bring the little dear; and you, miss, will sit here, I—"

"*Mais, non! Non!*" the girl screamed suddenly, and ran nearer to Covrington and poured a torrent of French at him.

He waved her away and spoke to Hawkins:

"If you imagine that a child of mine is ever going to get into that affair, or that I'll tell this girl to—" He broke off with a laugh. "Take it up and show it to my father, Atkins. He seemed interested, you know. I'm not! And—"

Hawkins held up a stern hand with a haughty gesture.

And the gesture did it—somehow.

There was a roar underneath me! The Hawkinsambulator backed straight away and hit the stone wall at the other side of the drive. I heard a yell from Hawkins.

Personally, at the crash, I merely slid down to the bottom of my spine, and my legs went into the air—and a new roar came from Covrington!

And it was cut very short, because the affair shot straight at him, and crashed, head-on, into the veranda!

Mr. Covrington ducked very nimbly indeed. The unhappy French maid emitted one long, piercing scream, thrust out her arms, and dropped back resoundingly, flat on the veranda floor! I believe she fainted.

But I was not considering her much at the time. I was trying to scream at Hawkins and tell him to stop the thing, while my feet fluttered in the air, and sables and martens and other natural history specimens were climbing down my throat.

It was, to put it mildly, a difficult trick to turn; but after a second or two, success began to come my way. I writhed out and hitched to a semiupright position, and kicked the furs down in a pile at my feet and—

The Hawkinsambulator was bouncing straight up and down on the drive like a great rubber ball! Covrington was dragging the maid away, and Hawkins was cursing like a madman.

And then we started on a straight course!

With a speed that was never under forty miles an hour, we whizzed down the drive!

The end, of course, would come when we hit the gigantic oak across the street, and I dragged out a little prayer and began to mutter it!

And the end did not come at all, for with a jerk that all but hurled me over the stone fence, we whizzed around the corner and up the sidewalk!

Yes, we took to that sidewalk like a bullet coming out of a gun! We were going north —and Heaven alone knew where else! We were coming to a curb now, and we struck the middle of the street and bounced straight over to the walk again!

By this time I was getting a slight grip on the situation. My hat was gone, to be sure, and I seemed to be bruised all over, and my open coat was allowing a stream of polar breeze to caress my never-too-strong chest; but I saw my part clearly—settle down and hang on like grim death until the crash came!

And I managed to do it—even as a lone pedestrian saw us and screamed, and tried to climb a tiny sapling that broke under his weight and landed him in the gutter!

I slid down into the reclining posture of the seat and braced my feet. I let my head back slowly until it touched a cushion—and there was Hawkins glaring down at me and not six inches above!

I shrank from that face. I conceived a notion that he was going to bite me, or press the button that exploded the gasoline tank, or something similar. Instead, though, he seemed to be speaking, for I caught:

"Get up! Get up!"

"What?" I screamed.

"Get up! Stand up, Griggs! Your whole weight is on—"

There I laughed wildly—and Hawkins popped out of sight again and, I presume, sat erect at his throttle.

In a way, I found mad amusement in that command to "stand up." If a trainman, well experienced in walking the tops of freight-cars, could have been boiled down with a tight-rope expert, a thoroughly experienced acrobat, and a bare-back rider, the combination might possibly have "stood up" in the Hawkinsambulator.

As for me, as another "loop-the-gap" bounce told of perhaps the tenth crossing, I merely smiled insanely and looked ahead.

And there, legs spread and club raised, was a policeman standing squarely in the middle of the sidewalk!

I have often wondered what happened to that brave officer. There was nothing about it in the papers. I know that he stuck to his post to the last fraction of a second—I know that a roaring something in blue struck the driveway—and that was all, save the heavy night-stick he left in my lap as a memento!

I gripped it and caressed it with my free hand. I wondered if I could reach back and fracture Hawkins's skull with it. It was a chance in a million, but it was worth it.

If the Hawkinsambulator merely blew up or overturned, I had still a hope of life; if Hawkins guided the thing into a concrete cottage or a stone church, I had none at all. Therefore, I slipped my hand through the leather and wound my fingers around the club and—

"Hang on!" Hawkins screamed into my face.

I obeyed! The club flew from my wrist, and I gripped the sides and shut my eyes tight.

And the crash came! For an instant the Hawkinsambulator shuddered and crackled and seemed about to drop in bits; then, with a roar of pure malice from under me, we whizzed ahead again—we left ground altogether—we struck it again with a force that would have wrecked a locomotive. There was a violent twist—and we shot on, this time, apparently, on a road that knew no crossings.

I opened my eyes.

Hawkins was looking down again, and I shrieked:

"What was it?"

"Drawbridge gate!" roared the inventor.

"Did we smash it?"

"The—bridge—was—opening!" Hawkins bawled down at me. "We—just—cleared—the—gap!" He choked against the wind. "*Get up! Get up,* Griggs!"

He disappeared again, and—well, I honestly did try to get up! With a brace on the sides, I lifted myself a little and looked around.

The move seemed to have no effect on the Hawkinsambulator, but it had a marked effect on me!

We had left behind everything connected with the city! We were on a country road now, and here and there to the right I caught the sparkle of the Sound in the sunshine!

And we were bounding and banging, too, for the road was none too good! We shot up to an automobile; positively, I do not know whether we bounced past it or over

it! I remember that a hardened, weather-browned chauffeur shouted at us and twisted his wheel, as if a train was bearing down upon him!

We passed on merrily, and a buggy came into sight, jogging along quietly in our own direction. In not more than two seconds I saw the horse stand respectfully on his hind legs; I thought I saw the buggy fly backward into my cyclonic prison—and then I knew that we had merely clipped off one wheel, and that the gentleman who had started to topple on me was just about touching ground, half a mile back.

And it was almost immediately after that that I saw the big iron gates.

Doubtless, the road turned sharply at those gates. I didn't notice that. But the gates absorbed me fully. They were large, and built of heavy bars; they were just ajar, and they led into somebody's large private estate; they were the sort of gates that a true Hawkinsambulator would naturally tackle when out on a ramble of this kind.

And—we were through them!

Yes, they whanged back with one awful clanging and rattling, and we were burning up somebody's beautifully shaded, billiard-table driveway!

We managed a turn, and I caught a glimpse of a huge house somewhere in the trees. Somewhere, too, there was a hint of a long, shaded drive, inclining down to a splendid dock, where a trim steam-yacht was moored and little motor-boats bobbed prettily on the sunny Sound.

There were perfect lawns and a heavy iron flower-urn, here and there. In the distance flitted the picture of a tall, stately old gentleman in frock coat and silk hat, tapping his cane airily as he took a placid Sabbath morning walk through his beautiful domain. He seemed familiar, too, in an odd way, and—

Did you ever turn a double somersault without knowing that you were due for such a performance?

It is really a remarkable sensation, when one is absorbed in trees and flowers and such things.

I turned one just as the old man located himself definitely in the path ahead. Then a tremendous urn of flowers rushed at me—and just to spite it, as it were, I turned a double somersault over it and landed on the lawn beyond—*on my feet!*

For about ten seconds I was reasonably certain that we had reached a new planet. Then I perceived that the Hawkinsambulator was standing with its nose rubbing peacefully about the urn; and that Hawkins, in his seat, was mopping his brow and gasping.

Further, I saw the old gentleman hurrying toward us, smiling brightly and with evident recognition of Hawkins. He was a splendid-looking chap, too, dignified and elevated as mortal may be, perfectly clothed and with bristling little white mustache; and as he came within a dozen feet he cried:

"Why, it is Mr. Hopkins! How do you do, sir; how do you do?"

He shook Hawkins's hand with vague warmth. Hawkins was gaping amazedly at him, and he was trying to place Hawkins; and he did so, just as I noted his own powerful resemblance to young Mr. Covrington in the mansion farther south.

"And so this is the newest thing in baby-carriages — quite so! You seem rather breathless, Mr. Hopkins?"

"My name is Hawkins," the inventor contrived, as speech finally came to him. "Yes, we traveled—rather swiftly, Mr. Covrington. I—er—wanted to show *you* the thing, too, you know!"

"But, my dear sir, you're too kind," stated that misguided gentleman. "Why, you've come twenty-two miles from the city in that thing! Tut, tut!"

"I am always glad," Hawkins began faintly.

Then he pulled himself together, and the old enthusiasm glittered in his eye; and I am bound to say that I admired his nerve, whether it hails from a weakened brain or whatever.

"Your — er — son examined it a little while ago. I'll just show you, now. We'll see if it's not the ideal perambulator for your little granddaughter!" Hawkins chuckled.

And may I be hanged if he didn't actually back the thing away from the urn, as slowly and carefully as could have been desired! To be sure, the Hawkinsambulator scratched and creaked a little somewhere in its interior; but, to all intents, it was in nearly as good condition as when we started.

Old Mr. Covrington leaned gracefully on his cane and smiled approval, as Hawkins turned little circles jerkily and backed up and down. The Hawkinsambulator was not quite behaving, and I thought—

"Mr. Covrington!" I cried gently. "If you'll step a little to one side—"

Hawkins heard it and glared at me; and the Hawkinsambulator heard it, too!

This I can swear to, because not one second elapsed before it shot straight at that handsome, erect old man!

It went at the job with a distinct purpose, too. It rammed Mr. Covrington the elder amidships—it tossed him lightly into the air—and it landed him in my own place in the Hawkinsambulator before he could even grab his hat!

That article flew one way—the cane flew the other—and I regarded neither. For the instant, it seemed that my sole mission on earth was to save poor old Covrington from violent death. I dashed at the Hawkinsambulator, with the idea of dragging him free.

The Hawkinsambulator was not there!

Nay, it had passed far beyond my reach even then, with Mr. Covrington's spatted feet kicking in the air, and Hawkins bending into a knot and pulling at something, the while he screamed meaningless things.

Palpably, the Hawkinsambulator was beyond his control once more—and this time it had taken everything into its own hands!

It turned at right angles and banged out a tongue of fire behind. It darted across the lawn to the inclined drive I had noticed. It described one long, awful curve and turned into the drive to the wharf, going, I will swear, sixty miles an hour!

And then—why, it all seemed to happen in the winking of an eye!

The drive was passed. The pier rumbled for a second or two as the Hawkinsambulator shot down its length; and then—out, out, out over the water whirled the fiendish affair! And out and out and out, until I began to believe it would reach the Long Island shore—and then, with a tremendous upheaval of white foam and a frenzied chorus of shouts—the Hawkinsambulator vanished in the bright waters.

It was all over!

I remember crying out wildly as I went pell-mell for the dock. I remember a big racing-car shooting past me, and stopping at the very edge of the water.

I remember that Covrington junior leaped out of the machine and, hurling away his duster and cap, dived headlong into the Sound; and then I gripped the side of the quivering car, and the chauffeur gripped me, and things turned black for a little.

When my eyes opened the chauffeur was at the edge of the wharf, lugging up the elder Mr. Covrington as his son hoisted him with one arm and clutched a pile with the other. And when that old man finally stood erect on the pier, and his son clambered after him, between them they said things which, aristocrat or no aristocrat, I cannot recall without blushing.

I looked around for Hawkins.

He was alive! He was treading water, out about fifty feet from the dock and coming no closer, and his face much resembled that of a dog from whom the lethal flatiron has come untied.

"I'll — be right in!" he called tentatively.

"You try to land, and I'll kill you!" the younger Covrington bawled at him. And he added: "Gaston! Go to the stables and have them bring down the wolf-hounds! If that man tries to come ashore, set them on him!"

"But I've got to land!" the inventor wailed splashily.

"You won't land on these grounds!" And I'll be blessed if Covrington didn't turn on me with a glare of the fiend himself!

"You — cheap — crooks!" he screamed wildly, for he was apparently lost to any astonishment at finding us here. "You came up for more loot!"

He struck at me. I ducked, and he missed me.

"Crooks!" I gasped.

"Crooks!" he shrieked. "A man concocting a game like that to steal a few hundred dollars' worth of furs!"

I gasped aloud. He struck at me again. I ducked, and he missed me.

"And now you'll take yours while your choice friend drowns!" he bellowed.

He struck at me once more. I ducked once more, and he missed me. It was the only real thing I ever learned in my three months' course in boxing, and it served me well.

But I could not keep on ducking forever. I might have slipped or miscalculated or something. A brilliant tactical move occurred to me.

Covrington was soaked through, and couldn't run. I had suffered nothing worse than a few fractured ribs, and could. Therefore, disregarding Hawkins, I turned and dashed toward the distant gates, and no one followed; and as I went I heard old Mr. Covrington roaring:

"My grounds extend a quarter of a mile away, you criminal! And—I hope you drown before you can make a landing."

Yes, I managed to get Hawkins ashore, more dead than alive, on a deserted beach farther down. The first thing he breathed was:

"You ass! Couldn't you understand that that wasn't built for a beer-truck?"

I merely gulped.

"With a horse like you in it, you bent that little, light gear-case until the gears engaged at the third speed—and I put the throttle out of harm's way underneath and—"

He fainted there.

Two men came along, and I left them working water out of him while I went to telephone for an ambulance. When the telephoning had been finished, what was left of me climbed on a suburban train bound for New York.

Hawkins, incidentally, returned at midnight, dry, and in a taxicab; and his wife, who had been fully informed by myself, greeted him with—but never mind how she greeted him.

There were two happy results, however, which I must mention.

One was that the Covrington abhorrence of notoriety let Hawkins off by paying for what he had ruined.

The other was—and is—that, even to this day, I can generally bring Hawkins under my control by quietly mentioning "Jim" and "Jim's mansion."

And that, indeed, is much!

The Count Against Him.

BY BURKE JENKINS.

The Caldron of Mischance into Which a Luncheon Festivity Plunged a Prospective Bridegroom.

I DON'T believe that I ever saw the future in a more rosy light than at the very moment I sat down to lunch that day at Martinelli's. And I still believe that I had a perfect right to be mighty well pleased with myself.

I had accomplished what I had set out from Germany to do, and more. So that I think it was but natural for me to expand a bit when I thus found myself once more in company with three of my old, duel-scarred fellow students of my university days who had recently come to America on a visit.

Nobody could have foretold the outcome; that I know, so I attach no blame to myself.

One by one the tables were vacated as we sat there cheerily recalling old times, until the place seemed all but deserted. Having things to ourselves thus, we joked and chaffed each other merrily.

"So you have, what you call it—'made good.' Otto?" cried Karl. "You must have lost no time; for you have been over here scarcely two years."

"I have been very lucky," I admitted; "though I have done some mighty hard work, too. And, fellows, I'd as well let you in on the entire lot of my good fortune, the sum of which has been reached this very twenty-four hours, eh?"

"Absolutely!" they answered, "let's have it all."

"Easy told," I offered. "To begin with, then, the directors of the bank have just advanced me to the position of cashier. I received the announcement this morning."

The boys drank "*prosit*" to this.

"You know the bachelor quarters to which your letter was forwarded?"

"Aye!"

"Well, I'm about to buy a lot more furniture and I've rented a nice little flat up on Riverside Drive. Fact is, that when I leave you chaps I'm going to take the final step of signing the lease."

It was Karl, I believe, who was first to catch the inference.

"Which means a far more important final step, eh, Otto?"

"Yes," I admitted, "the cat might as well be out; for I'm as happy as a clam since last night. I got her father's consent then—rather a reluctant one it's true, but still enough."

"So you've decided to be numbered among the ones who have fallen victims to American beauty?"

"On the contrary, she's the sweetest kind

of a little German girl; though I must say her father is the crustiest old cuss I've ever struck. Why, darn me, if he didn't question me from the cradle to the grave. Thank the Lord I didn't have anything to conceal and he finally was won over."

"Nothing to *conceal,* eh? How about that five year term of yours, Otto? Did you tell him about Diedelhof Prison?"

It was Karl again who here burst out into a hilarious laugh and blurted out the old joke that used to pass current during our college days.

"Oh, I guess that won't go against me over here in the land of the free!" I cried and we all laughed heartily. Then I glanced at my watch only to find that it had stopped.

Craning my neck about the room in search of a wall clock, I caught, out of the tail of my eye, the figure of a man leaving. He was the last but ourselves to quit the place.

Then I spied the clock and jumped to my feet.

"Well, fellows, I've got to leave you for the rest of to-day. But call me up and we'll make it a show for to-morrow night."

Whereupon we sang out good-bys and I left Martinelli's. I was booked for something I little realized, but it began soon enough.

II.

I RETURNED immediately to the bank where I was employed. I noticed that the president had already returned from his own lunch and was seated at his desk behind the glass partition of his private office.

He nodded cordially as I entered, and beckoned for me to come in to him.

"I want to congratulate you, Mr. Hoest," said he warmly. "I was only too glad to give my heartiest approval to your promotion."

"I'm open to still another congratulation, sir," said I, and then I told him of my approaching marriage.

"Better and better!" he cried cheerily. "That'll hold you down snugly to work. I'm delighted. Nothing better in the world for the right man than the right woman!"

"She certainly *is* the right woman," I enthused; "which reminds me, sir, that, if it could be arranged, I should like to attend to a couple of matters this afternoon."

"Yes?"

"Fact is, sir," I stumbled on confusedly, "there are the matters of a ring to be bought and a lease to be signed."

He laughed good-humoredly.

"Well, I should say!" he agreed, "take the rest of the afternoon."

"Oh, I won't need that much time," said I, "there are a few matters that I must catch up in my books before I enter on my new duties. I'll only be gone the matter of an hour or so."

"Suit yourself entirely," he replied and once more shook me vigorously by the hand.

I drew out a couple of hundred dollars from my own account which I had running in the bank, nodded a cheery thanks to the paying teller, my confrère, and left the building.

I caught a car that took me near Tiffany's where I bought the engagement ring, using as a guide to size a little plain silver ring Gretchen had given me for the purpose.

Then I struck out for Coon & Swanson's, the real-estate firm of whom I was renting the Riverside apartment.

As I entered the office I noticed that Mr. Swanson, the junior partner, looked up with a violent start.

"Well," I began lightly, "now for formalities, Mr. Swanson. I've come to sign the lease and pay my first month's rent."

He rose and, ignoring my outstretched hand, replied: "We have decided not to rent the apartment to you."

"You have decided not to—what?" The thing had been so badly said that I couldn't adapt myself to the meaning. I blurted out repeated mystification.

Then I recovered myself and caught up my dropped dignity.

"I should like to know the meaning of this, sir!" I exclaimed. "I have an idea my references were of the best!"

He looked at me meaningly and replied in a voice that was equal parts scorn and disgust:

"I guess you know best, Mr. Hoest, where the trouble lies."

"Where the trouble lies?" I cried. "Look here, Mr. Swanson, I demand an explanation."

But just at this moment a lady came into the office to make some inquiry; whereupon the man Swanson turned his back upon me in the rudest effrontery and entered into conversation with her. I saw

there was nothing more to be got from him.

I strode from the place, well knowing that if I stayed another minute I would do the man physical violence.

Once outside though, I began to cool off as I thought the thing over. Aha, I had it. Coon & Swanson had repented of the terms I had managed to talk them over to and were going to rent the place to some sucker who would pay more; that was it.

"Well, there are plenty of other apartments in the city, I guess," I murmured to myself as I started back to my desk at the bank.

And by the time I reached the door, I had won back my good humor with thoughts of Gretchen whose ring in its box bulged my vest pocket.

But the very second I entered the vestibule of the bank I was in some subtle fashion conscious of a certain chill that came over me.

Watkins, the paying teller, looked at me from his grating in a startled sort of way and the next instant I heard my name called sharply:

"Mr Hoest!"

I whirled and confronted the president from whom I had parted so genially not an hour since. His face now was ice.

He had, at least consideration enough to take me once more into his private office.

"I guess this is not quite such a surprise as your face lets on, Mr. Hoest," he began deliberately. "It only remains for me to tell you that your connection with this institution ceases at this moment."

I was absolutely too stunned to voice the slightest word. But I must have looked my protest, though he gave it scant shrift.

"Good afternoon!" said he decidedly.

I staggered from the place in the most complete daze of my life, and it was bare instinct alone that guided me over to a near-by park. I must think this thing out.

III.

On the park bench that I had managed to reach in some bewildered fashion I strove to get a thread of idea as to the meaning of this thing that had overtaken me.

What was against me? But I couldn't piece anything together. My brain was absolutely numb. I reached for my handkerchief to mop my forehead and my wrist brushed by the bulge that spoke of Gretchen's ring.

"Ah," I muttered, "she will help me, and God knows, I need counsel."

Herr Klein, Gretchen's father, had a solid, brown stone house on the corner of Madison Avenue and one of the thirties. I would make my way there immediately.

A Lexington Avenue car took me within a block which I walked. I came within sight of the house before which, I noticed, there stood a waiting motor-car to which was strapped a trunk.

As I neared the house there rounded the corner from Madison Avenue the slouching figure of a man of uncouth mien; but I would never have paid any attention to him in my own worried distraction had things not framed themselves into hurried events from that very instant.

The door of the dwelling opened and Gretchen and her father started down the stoop toward the waiting motor.

Half way down, the dear girl spied me and strove to reach me, but Herr Klein wrenched her to him.

On the moment the slouching man called me by name:

"Otto Hoest!"

But the cry was scarcely out of his mouth when a policeman swung around the corner and collared him in that effective way they have.

For some seconds we held our positions. It was a surprise for all.

It was Herr Klein that spoke first.

"Stop a moment officer," he said, "just a word."

Then he turned to Gretchen.

"You see I am right, daughter! You heard that scoundrel there speak to him familiarly? Do you believe me now? Nothing could have been more fortunate in occurrence. What was the man doing, officer?"

"Second-story work; we've been looking for him two weeks."

Then it was I caught control of my voice at the same time that I managed to bring back to clarity who and what the arrested man was. It had been some time since I had seen him.

"What in the name of the world does it all mean!" I cried passionately. "I seem to have stepped into a very caldron of mischance."

"You know well enough what it means!" answered Herr Klein in wrath.

"And I thank God some providence sent me to Martinelli's to lunch to-day to be the means of saving my daughter."

"Saving your daughter? What in Heaven are you talking about, sir?"

"What!" he cried, "you have the nerve to brazen it out? Didn't I learn there—where you and your boon companions talked out so freely—what you have managed to keep hidden so well and so long?

"And now, now—at this most opportune moment—this thief accosts you familiarly. It is the clinching point."

I lowered my tone.

"What did you find out at the lunch at Martinelli's," I asked quietly.

He fairly bubbled over with righteous rage:

"I found out that you have been living the life of a lie. I found out that you are an ex-convict. I heard you admit, with a laugh on your lips, that you had been in a penitentiary in Germany for five years. And now I find that another thief knows you familiarly. Now, do you see? Now do you understand how I have saved my daughter? How, more, I have saved my own reputation by withdrawing my recommendation of you from both the real-estate men and the bank. And now I am taking her where she can forget."

"You certainly lost no time," said I.

"No, that I didn't!" he snapped.

"You see, I did spend five years in a penitentiary. You are right there. And more, I do now recognize this fellow as one of the prisoners in the institution at the time—"

"Aha, so you admit that he's a fellow prisoner!"

"No, that old college joke we recalled to-day and laughed so heartily over, has gone far enough. You see, sir, I certainly was in a German penitentiary for five years; but it happened when I was very young."

"Very young, eh? No excuse."

"And," I continued, regardless of his interruption, "it further happened that my father, old Simon Hoest, was long the superintendent of prisons at Diedelhof—a very honorable post, by the way. You see, mother and I lived with him in the prison for a while."

THE COME-ON.

BY LILLIAN BENNET-THOMPSON.

A Loud Knock, Two Softer Ones, a Rat-Tat-Tat on the Panels, the Pool-Room Door Opens and the Victim Is Led to Sacrifice.

JIMMIE DICKSON strolled slowly down Broadway, his hands in his pockets, his hat tilted a little back, and stopped for a moment to look at the bulletins displayed on the board of the *Sphere*.

He was a youngish chap, tall and broad-shouldered, with smooth dark hair and big, honest brown eyes. His clothes, though well made and of good material, seemed somehow different from those of the other men with whom he touched elbows in the crowd.

There was nothing definite, nothing obtrusively unlike; but some subtle distinction set them apart. A close observer would have said that here was a young man from the suburbs; and the healthy, wholesome color that glowed on Dickson's cheeks might have been a factor in leading to this conclusion. He looked like a man who has spent much of his life in the open air.

He stood for a few minutes, dividing his attention between the crowd and the bulletin boards, his feet wide apart, looking frankly interested and entertained.

The mighty tide of humanity that ebbs and flows along the city's Great White Way is always full of possibilities—full of novelty to one unfamiliar with the metropolis.

A youth came out upon the narrow platform below the bulletin-boards and posted some news items. Dickson watched him as he pasted up the long white slips.

"See that fellow right there—the one in the gray suit and the felt hat?" exclaimed a low voice in his ear.

He turned toward the speaker, and beheld a somewhat undersized young man, flashily dressed, with sandy hair and pale blue eyes. In his brilliant tie a diamond winked, and on the little finger of his right

hand was its fellow, set in an elaborate ring.

"Were you speaking to me?" asked Dickson.

"Yes," said the other. "D'ye see that chap right in front of you — the one just taking out the little red note-book?"

"Yes, I see him," said Dickson, his eyes following in the direction in which the other pointed. "What about him?"

"He's Hopkins, Mike Dolan's betting commissioner. Gee! I wisht I knew what he was betting on!"

"Mike Dolan? Who's he?"

"You mean to say you don't know who Mike Dolan is? Gee! You must be new in the city. He's one of the big political bugs, and a great racing man. They say he won ten thousand yesterday on the fourth race."

"Race?" said Dickson blankly. "Oh, you mean he's out in California."

The other laughed.

"No, I don't," said he. "But, gee! Wouldn't I like to know what his commissioner's betting on to-day! Say, ask him, will you? There's a good fellow."

"I don't know him," he said.

"Oh, what difference does that make?" urged the sandy-haired young man. "Maybe he'll tell you. He can't do more than refuse, anyway. Go ahead."

"I tell you, I don't know him," protested Dickson. "I couldn't ask a stranger a question like that."

At this moment the man in the light suit turned.

"I beg your pardon," he said, speaking in a quiet, pleasant voice, and addressing himself to Dickson, "have you a pencil?"

"I'm sorry—" Dickson was beginning; but the sandy-haired young man thrust one into his hand, whispering excitedly:

"Here—give him this, and ask him what horse he's betting on."

Dickson mechanically passed the pencil to the man who had asked for it, while the youth at his side continued to urge him to "ask him what he's betting on."

"Ask him yourself, if you want to know," said Dickson impatiently. "It's none of my business. I don't care."

The betting commissioner looked round with a smile as he returned the pencil.

"I've just had a pleasant surprise," he said. "I thought I was seventy-five dollars out, but, since I've figured up my bets, I find I'm a hundred dollars to the good. Much obliged for the pencil, sir."

"It belongs to this gentleman," Dickson said, indicating the man who had accosted him.

"You're perfectly welcome to it," said "this gentleman," hastily pushing his way forward. "Perfectly welcome I'm sure, Mr. Hopkins."

The man in the light suit looked surprised.

"Why, how did you know my name?" he said.

"I've heard it," said the other with a grin. "I've seen you before. You're Mike Dolan's commissioner. What'd you win on —the ponies?"

Hopkins nodded.

"Sure," said he. "I've got a pretty good thing on the fourth race, too, I believe, and I ought to win quite a bunch of money, Mr.——"

He paused expectantly.

"Hervey—Walt Hervey," said the sandy-haired man promptly.

Then he nudged Dickson again.

"Ask him what the good thing is," he whispered hoarsely.

But Dickson shook his head.

"Why don't you ask him?" he said; and then, in the next breath, he added:

"What horse have you picked?"

"MacGregor," replied Hopkins obligingly. "It'll be a walkover for him, and the odds are ten to one."

Hervey breathed a long sigh.

"Gee! I wish I had some money up on him," he said.

"I wouldn't mind a chance to win a little myself," said Dickson, looking enviously at Hopkins. "But California's quite a walk," he added.

"Don't have to go as far as that," rejoined Hervey. "I know a place—"

He checked himself suddenly.

"Not a—a—poolroom?" asked Dickson in an awed tone. "Why, I thought they had been all closed up."

Hervey shook his head emphatically.

"Not all. This one ain't," he said; "but it's run strictly on the q.t. I believe I'll just drop round and put on a tenner for luck. Want to come?"

Dickson hesitated.

"I'd like to," he said, "but—"

"Oh, don't come on my account," Hervey said sarcastically. "I know the way alone. I just thought I'd wise you up, seeing you didn't know where to place your bet."

"If you don't mind, Mr. Hervey, I'll

walk along with you," remarked Hopkins, putting his note-book back into his pocket. "I've got all Mr. Dolan's bets on, but MacGregor looks so good to me that I think I'll take a chance on my own."

"Glad to have you," answered Hervey, obviously proud of being seen in the company of the great plunger's betting commissioner. "You ain't coming?" he said to Dickson.

"Well—yes, I will!" Dickson suddenly decided; and Hervey led the way down Broadway for a couple of blocks and turned into a side street, not far from the Square.

"This is a dead secret," Hervey told Dickson, as they walked along. "The police has closed up most of the good places, and it's a hard job to get your money down. But I come here sometimes when I've got a tip. Here we are."

He paused in front of a house that differed outwardly from none of its neighbors, went up the front steps, and rang the bell. A colored man opened the door, and Hervey leaned forward and whispered something in his ear. Then, Hervey still leading the way, they went on up-stairs to a room on the third floor at the back.

A loud knock, two softer ones, a *rat-tat-tat* on the panels, and the door swung open, revealing a small, square room, in which a young man, in his shirt-sleeves, with a telephone-receiver strapped to his head, sat behind a grated window and wrote down various figures on a racing-sheet in front of him.

There were two or three other men lounging round the room, one of whom nodded to Hopkins, and, calling him by name, asked if the report that Mike Dolan had won ten thousand dollars on the fourth race the day before was true.

Hopkins smiled and confirmed the report, but made no effort to continue the conversation.

There were a couple of cane-bottom chairs and a telegraph instrument in the room, which was otherwise bare of furniture. A large blackboard at one side bore the names of the horses which had won the races, the returns of which were already in.

The telegraph wire went no farther than the staple which held it to the wall; the telephone instrument was but a blind; the returns of the races chalked up on the blackboard had been copied from the bulletin-board at the Square, and the men in the room were simply there to give the impression that the place was a genuine pool-room, doing a regular business.

In reality, the whole thing was nothing but a cleverly devised stage-setting, that the unsuspecting victim brought in by the two men stationed in the Square for the purpose might bet on a horse which had no chance to win, but which he had been assured would be an easy victor.

The details of the race originated in the fertile brain of the young man behind the grating, but the actual result was telephoned over to him by a confederate, in order that the "come-on" might have no ground for complaint when he read the returns for himself.

Hervey stepped to the grating and shoved a bill underneath.

"On MacGregor, fourth race, to win," said he.

"Two hundred to twenty, on McGregor, to win," the young man said.

"I think I'll just take a little of that myself," observed Hopkins stepping forward. "It's too good a chance to miss, and I can use the money."

He pushed a little roll toward the shirt-sleeved youth, who droned out:

"Five hundred to fifty, MacGregor, to win."

Dickson stood uncertainly, fingering the roll of bills in his pocket. If he risked the hundred dollars he carried and won, he would have eleven hundred dollars. If he lost—but Hopkins had said it was a sure thing, and he and Hervey had both bet.

How could Dickson be expected to know that both of these affable gentlemen had decided on him as an "easy mark," and that the money which they had bet on the horse would be handed back to them again?

"Better hurry up, if you want to get down on this," advised Hervey. "After the start, he won't take any bets."

Still Dickson hesitated; and then, pulling out the money from his pocket, he stepped quickly forward and said in a low voice:

"On MacGregor, to win."

The telegraph began to click.

"Thousand to one hundred, MacGregor to win," repeated the shirt-sleeved one. "All bets closed. They're off!"

There was a pause, broken only by the tapping of the instrument and shuffling of feet on the bare floor, as the men straggled forward.

"At the quarter, MacGregor leading,

Brookline second, Tymon and Buster coming up," resumed the operator. "Tymon coming strong, Brookline creeping up on MacGregor. Coming down the stretch, Tymon leading, Brookline falls back. Golden Girl coming up. MacGregor leading."

"Come on, you MacGregor!" cried Hervey excitedly.

Dickson said nothing, only leaned forward with wide eyes, listening intently to every word that fell from the operator's lips.

"Tymon falling back—Buster down!—MacGregor going strong—*Golden Girl wins by a nose!*"

A curse burst from Hervey's lips, and there were exclamations from one or two of the men. Someone had bet on Golden Girl and was jubilant in consequence.

Dickson said nothing. He merely shoved his hands deeper into his pockets and thrust his chin a little forward. Hopkins came to his side and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Hard luck, old man," said he sympathetically. "I'm down-right sorry I let you in for this, but you can see it wasn't my fault."

"I'm not blaming you," muttered Dickson, his eyes on the floor.

"That's the right spirit," exclaimed Hopkins. "You're a good sport. Oh, stow it!" he added, turning to Hervey, who was loudly bemoaning his ill-fortune.

"That's all very well for you to say," snarled Hervey. "It was my last twenty."

"Well, I lost more than you did," Hopkins said. "And this chap lost more than both of us put together. But he isn't making a howl."

"No," said Dickson, rousing himself, "I want to be a good loser. I've got enough left to buy, if you gentlemen want to walk down to the corner with me."

Hervey looked doubtfully at Hopkins, who nodded shortly.

"That's the stuff!" exclaimed the latter, clapping Dickson on the back again. "You're a gilt-edged sport!"

They went down-stairs together, and the colored man let them out. There was a saloon at the corner of the street, and toward it they bent their steps. Just outside the swinging doors stood a patrolman. He looked at Dickson and Dickson looked at him.

"All ready, Pat?" asked Dickson.

"All ready, sir," was the reply.

"Then go ahead," said Dickson. "There's half a dozen of 'em up there. The chap put the marked money in the drawer."

He gently insinuated one hand through the arm of each of his amazed companions, as a second patrolman stepped into view from around the corner.

"Have you got the place surrounded?" inquired Dickson.

"Yes, sir," said the newcomer.

"Third floor, remember, at the back," went on Dickson. Then he led his late advisers along, past the inviting portals.

"Come on, boys," said he genially, "the captain wants to see you."

Jimmy Dickson, the cleverest detective on the Central Office force, strolled leisurely up Broadway, in the direction of the nearest patrol-box, a prisoner on each side of him.

THE PASSING OF A MIRAGE.

As some lone traveler in desert ways
  Thrills at the sight of palms—how green, how fair!—
So I, when deep into your eyes I looked,
  Thrilled at the love-light softly gleaming there!

And as he, springing to the promised shade,
  Finds in a moment that it fades away,
So have I found the light all false, untrue,
  That glimmered in your eyes and made my day.

'Twas but the picture of some happier spot
  That mirrored on the burning desert shone;
'Twas the reflection of my own heart's fire
  Deceived me. Tears have quenched the flame. 'Tis gone!

May Stayton.

NEW-SKIN

IN A NEW PACKAGE

Hereafter New-Skin will be sold in a new package which has many features that will make it more attractive than ever.

SANITARY GLASS ROD

Sanitary Glass Rod. No more stiff or lost brushes. Attached to every cork is a round-end sanitary glass rod. Aseptic, cleanly, ready for use.

Aluminum Screw Cap. Each bottle is tightly sealed with a silver-finished aluminum cap. This prevents evaporation and leakage. Bottle can be carried in the vest pocket or purse.

GLASS BOTTLE

Packed in Glass. The new package is the most sanitary made. No metal comes in contact with the liquid or wound, as with metal tubes.

New Carton. Instead of the outside tin box, we will use a folding carton, which is easier to open, lighter, and more convenient in every way.

ALUMINUM SCREW CAP

Remember, New-Skin was the original liquid court plaster. It has been before the public for a long period of years, and has always given satisfaction.

For all kinds of cuts, scrapes, scratches, and burns, it is antiseptic and healing. For chapped lips, chapped hands, chilblains, corns, etc., it is unsurpassed, forming a tough flexible water-proof film or "new skin" which protects the damaged part against irritation, dirt and infection.

10, 25 and 50 cents per package at all druggists

"Paint it with New-Skin and forget it!"

NEW CARTON

NEWSKIN COMPANY

DEP'T S, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK CITY

Your Wasted Time Turned to Account

Hanging out with the boys on the corner may be harmless enough; there may not be much amiss in being a "good sport;" but this sort of thing will not make your pay envelope any fatter, nor will it boost your position. It's ***so*** easy putting in all your spare time enjoying yourself—***but every moment so spent will exact a bitter reckoning later on—when it's all too late.***

Make a change NOW—just as thousands of men, just like yourself, have already done. Devote ***some*** of your wasted time to qualifying yourself for a better position and salary. Don't forget that hours wasted on the corner or in the poolroom are worth thousands of dollars to you if properly applied.

There is an easy way for you, by which ***you can*** succeed as well as others. Have you enough ambition to find out about it?

First of all, read how some of these men have "made good" in spare time through the help of the International Correspondence Schools. These men were just like you—they liked a good time—they were poorly paid—some of them hadn't much schooling beyond the ability to read and write—some lived thousands of miles away. But the I. C. S. ***went to them*** and trained them in their own homes and spare time. They "won out" just as ***YOU CAN.***

John E. Quigley moved up from section hand to trainman; Frank H. Foote from lineman to superintendent; Charles A. Harmon from night engineer to chief engineer; Victor Haney from bookkeeper to civil engineer; O. H. Wagstaff from night overseer to superintendent at two and a half times his former salary. And so on—ever the story of up, up, up—from "good time" days to good salary and good position days, which, after all, bring the greatest happiness. ***You can*** be helped in just the same way. If you wish, we will give you the addresses of these men and a thousand others, so you can ask them yourself.

Will Fit You For a Big Position

Simply forget who you are, what you do, where you live, what schooling you have had, how little you get on pay day, or what your age. Just mark the attached coupon opposite the occupation in which you would like to succeed. Then the I. C. S. will remove all obstacles by telling you of the very way by which ***you can*** become an expert without leaving home or your present position. Marking and mailing the coupon costs you only a postage stamp, and places you under no obligation. The I. C. S. method is the one by which ***you can*** succeed and this is your opportunity to learn how ***you can*** succeed.

Do it now. Don't put it off. "Some other time" never comes. Get that lead pencil out of your pocket, mark the coupon and mail it ***now.*** You're facing a mighty serious life-problem if you only knew it. Are you going to master it, or let it master you?

You can succeed. ***You can*** join the thousands of successful I. C. S. students who at the rate of 300 a month VOLUNTARILY report advancement in salary and position, due wholly to I. C. S. help. 316 heard from during September. ***You can*** get out of the rut. ***You can*** win a place in the world. Are you really ambitious enough to find out?

Then do it NOW—MARK AND MAIL THE COUPON.

International Correspondence Schools,
Box 858 SCRANTON, PA.

Please explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for the position, trade or profession before which I have marked X.

Automobile Running	Civil Service
Mine Superintendent	Architect
Mine Foreman	Chemist
Plumbing, Steam Fitting	Languages—French, German, Italian
Concrete Construction	Banking
Civil Engineer	Building Contractor
Textile Manufacturing	Architectural Draftsman
Stationary Engineer	Industrial Designing
Telephone Expert	Commercial Illustrating
Mechan. Engineer	Window Trimming
Mechanical Draftsman	Show Card Writing
Electrical Engineer	Advertising Man
Elec. Lighting Supt.	Stenographer
Electric Wireman	Bookkeeper

Name_____

Street and No._____

City_____ State_____

Round Shoulders Make Weaklings
and Prevent Proper Breathing

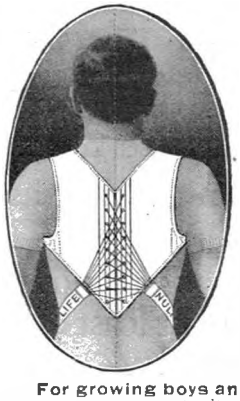
Nulife
Straightens Round Shoulders Instantly
and Compels Deep Breathing

You can't buy a new body, but you can improve the one you have by wearing Nulife. —***Prof. Charles Munter***

Nulife makes every organ of the body do its work properly. For perfect health this is necessary. Nulife expands the chest from two to six inches, straightens round shoulders instantly, reduces the abdomen to symmetrical proportions and compels you to walk, stand and sit correctly all the time. You owe it to yourself to consider these facts.

The greatest vitality comes from the greatest chest expansion. Nulife expands the lungs to their fullest capacity and holds them open to receive all the air that continued deep breathing draws into them. You may realize the importance of deep breathing, but without Nulife you forget to breathe deeply when your mind becomes absorbed in other matters. With Nulife you will unconsciously breathe deeply and regularly all the time; that is the secret of the great success of Nulife. It acts like a watchman over your breathing organs.

You must use all of your lungs all the time if you wear Nulife, causing a continuous internal massage with nature's tonic, *fresh air*. This is a positive preventive of all throat, lung, nasal and many other internal disorders arising from improper breathing.



Prof. Charles Munter's
Nulife
For Man, Woman and Child
Trade (**PATENTED**) Mark

Nulife has displaced all other antiquated and useless braces and is the only scientific body support which rests the back and relieves fatigue.

Nulife is not made of steel, buckles and rubber—it is a light-weight, washable garment, so simple that any child can put it on. That buoyant spirit, so necessary to success in any calling, always comes after wearing Nulife. It holds the spine and head erect, inducing regular blood circulation and filling the brain cells with pure blood at every heart beat.

For growing boys and girls Nulife is invaluable. It holds them erect and gives every organ an opportunity to work. They grow into vigorous adults, able to resist the germs of disease. Many children are born frail, delicate and deformed, and with the least assistance during their childhood, become strong and healthy afterward. These children in their youth may have no visible deformity, but are continually ailing from some unknown cause. By Nulife all this is eradicated and prevented.—It compels the deepest breathing, the real vital force of life. Deformities and diseases disappear.

Women's physical beauty is impossible without physical perfection of form. With Nulife they get that grace, symmetry and poise which no steels can give, allowing the body to be flexible and comfortable and not restrained in the vise of metal supports, which most corsets contain. It is worn with or without a corset.

This Guarantee Goes With Every Nulife

I guarantee that Nulife will straighten round shoulders, expand your chest two to six inches, increase your height and compel free, regular, deep breathing as Nature wants you to do. **The price of Nulife is now $3.00.** Go to your furnisher, druggist or department store, and if they cannot supply the genuine **Nulife,** send direct to us and it will be sent prepaid to your address, and I know you will be well pleased and recommend Nulife to your friends after you receive and wear it. To order correctly give Chest Measure (close up under arm pits and completely around the body), with your Height, Weight and Waist Measure, and state whether for male or female.

Send Your Name For My **Illustrated Book** FREE to You

I will send you free the Nulife booklet which tells you all about Nulife, what it has done for others and will do for you. This booklet is filled with illustrations and reading matter that clearly describe the efficiency and benefits of this wonderful garment. You ought to know these facts whether you ever expect to purchase Nulife or not. Send your name and address, plainly written, to

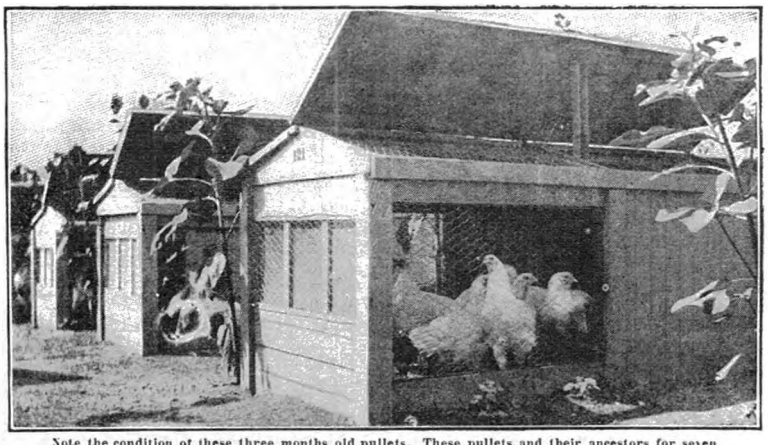
Prof. Chas. Munter, No. 24 Nulife Building 13-15 W. 34th St. (near Fifth Ave.) **New York**

A LIVING FROM POULTRY

$1,500.00 from 60 Hens in Ten Months on a City Lot 40 Feet Square

TO the average poultryman that would seem impossible, and when we tell you that we have actually done a $1500 poultry business with 60 hens on a corner in the city garden 40 feet wide by 40 feet long, we are simply stating facts. It would not be possible to get such returns by any one of the systems of poultry keeping recommended and practiced by the American people, still it can be accomplished by the

PHILO SYSTEM



Note the condition of these three months old pullets. These pullets and their ancestors for seven generations have never been allowed to run outside the coops.

THE PHILO SYSTEM IS UNLIKE ALL OTHER WAYS OF KEEPING POULTRY

and in many respects just the reverse, accomplishing things in poultry work that have always been considered impossible, and getting unheard-of results that are hard to believe without seeing.

THE NEW SYSTEM COVERS ALL BRANCHES OF THE WORK NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS

from selecting the breeders to marketing the product. It tells how to get eggs that will hatch, how to hatch nearly every egg and how to raise nearly all the chicks hatched. It gives complete plans in detail how to make everything necessary to run the business and at less than half the cost required to handle the poultry business in any other manner.

TWO-POUND BROILERS IN EIGHT WEEKS

are raised in a space of less than a square foot to the broiler, and the broilers are of the very best quality, bringing here 3 cents a pound above the highest market price.

OUR SIX-MONTH-OLD PULLETS ARE LAYING AT THE RATE OF 24 EGGS EACH PER MONTH

In a space of two square feet for each bird. No green cut bone of any description is fed and the food used is inexpensive as compared with food others are using.

Our new book, **THE PHILO SYSTEM OF POULTRY KEEPING**, gives full particulars regarding these wonderful discoveries, with simple, easy-to-understand directions that are right to the point, and 45 pages of illustrations showing all branches of the work from start to finish.

DON'T LET THE CHICKS DIE IN THE SHELL

One of the secrets of success is to save all the chickens that are fully developed at hatching time, whether they can crack the shell or not. It is a simple trick, and believed to be the secret of the ancient Egyptians and Chinese which enabled them to sell the chicks at 10 cents a dozen.

CHICKEN FEED AT FIFTEEN CENTS A BUSHEL

Our book tells how to make the best green food with but little trouble and have a good supply any day in the year, winter or summer. It is just as impossible to get a large egg yield without green food as it is to keep a cow without hay or fodder.

OUR NEW BROODER SAVES 2 CENTS ON EACH CHICKEN

No lamp required. No danger of chilling, over-heating or burning up the chickens as with brooders using lamps or any kind of fire. They also keep the lice off the chickens automatically or kill any that may be on them when placed in the brooder. Our book gives full plans and the right to make and use them. One can easily be made in an hour at a cost of 25 to 50 cents.

TESTIMONIALS

MY DEAR MR. PHILO— Valley Falls, N. Y., Oct. 1, 1910.

After another year's work with your System of Poultry Keeping (making three years in all) I am thoroughly convinced of its practicability. I raised all my chicks in your Brooder-Coops containing your Fireless Brooders, and kept them there until they were nearly matured, decreasing the number in each coop, however, as they grew in size. Those who have visited my plant have been unanimous in their praise of my birds raised by this System.

Sincerely yours, (Rev.) E. B. Templer.

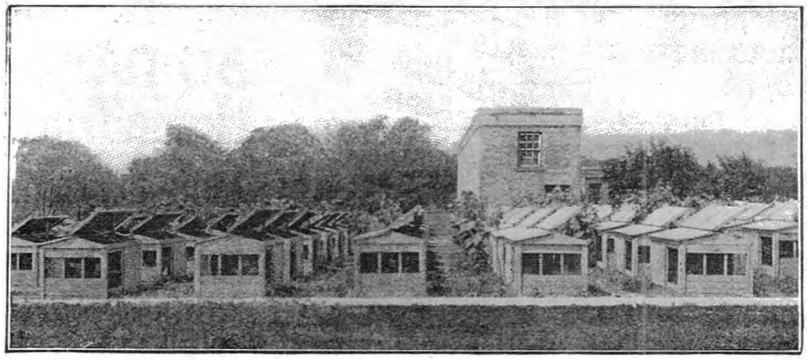
MR. E. R. PHILO, Elmira, N. Y. Elmira, N. Y., Oct. 30, 1909.

Dear Sir:—No doubt you will be interested to learn of our success in keeping poultry by the Philo System. Our first year's work is now nearly completed. It has given us an income of over $500.00 from six pedigree hens and one cockerel. Had we understood the work as well as we now do after a year's experience, we could easily have made over $1000.00 from the six hens. In addition to the profits from the sale of pedigree chicks we have cleared over $960.00, running our Hatchery plant, consisting of 56 Cycle Hatchers. We are pleased with the results, and expect to do better the coming year. With best wishes, we are Very truly yours, (Mrs.) C. P. Goodrich.

MR. E. R. PHILO, Elmira, N. Y. South Britain, Conn., April 19, 1909.

Dear Sir:—I have followed your System as close as I could; the result is a complete success. If there can be any improvement on nature, your brooder is it. The first experience I had with your System was last December. I hatched 17 chicks under two hens, put them as soon as hatched in one of your brooders out of doors, and at the age of three months I sold them at 35c. a pound. They then averaged 2½ lbs. each, and the man I sold them to said they were the finest he ever saw, and he wants all I can spare this season.

Yours truly, A. E. Nelson.



Photograph Showing a Portion of the Philo National Poultry Institute Poultry Plant, Where There Are Now Over 5,000 Pedigree White Orpingtons on Less Than a Half Acre of Land.

SPECIAL OFFER

Send $1.00 for one year's subscription to the Poultry Review, a monthly magazine devoted to progressive methods of poultry keeping, and we will include, without charge, a copy of the latest revised edition of the Philo System Book.

E. R. PHILO, Publisher
2598 Lake St., Elmira, N. Y.

LESLIE SAFETY RAZOR

AND SPIRAL STROPPER

The Shaving Outfit of the World

stands in a class by itself, at the very pinnacle of safety razor invention.

'I never knew before the **luxury** of a perfect shave," is the message coming daily, from hundreds who use the **Leslie Safety Razor.**

We have demonstrated to thousands the *par excellence* of this superb shaving outfit—the acme of shaving comfort.

The Spiral Stropper

No one would question the practical value of a safety razor if he **knew** the blades could be **kept sharp.** It is the missing edge that makes pessimists. Dull blades thrown away by the dozen tend to discouragement.

The **Leslie Shaving Outfit** supplies what no other razor does—a perfect, rapid, automatic means of stropping the blade, creating and preserving the keenest possible edge, conquering the toughest and most obstinate beard.

The Public Has Been Waiting for a Real Safety Razor

one having a perfect blade which can be kept in condition, and **here it is.** The **Leslie Holder** with its smooth, straight guard without teeth, so arranged that you can adjust a blade in a twinkling, has called forth expressions of delight from thousands who have used it.

The Leslie Blades are made from the most costly imported razor steel, and in connection with our improved secret processes of manufacture embody results **far superior** in shaving quality and durability to any razor blade hitherto produced.

Six blades are intended to last for years with proper treatment, and they will do it—the **Spiral Stropper** takes care of that.

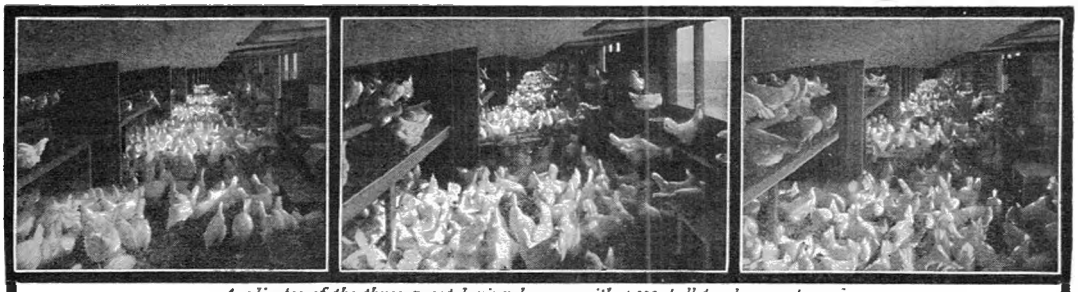
Get converted. Ask your dealer to show you the **Leslie** to-day. Take it home and try it all you like for 30 days Take it back if it doesn't suit. If your dealer doesn't carry it, or will not permit this trial, write us.

Send for handsome booklet and testimonials.

Leslie Manufacturing Co.
Boston, U. S. A.

The initial cost of the Leslie Shaving Outfit—Holder, 6 Blades and Spiral Stropper—is $5.00.

HERE'S the place where two egg-raisers make $12,000 a year.



A glimpse of the three great laying houses, with 4,500 pullets always at work

READER, if you want to know how two city people, in poor health and without experience, have in a few years built up an egg business that clears over $12,000 a year, subscribe **now** for the

FARM JOURNAL

and get with it the **CORNING EGG-BOOK,** which tells all the secrets of their success, and describes all their methods. (*See offer below.*)

Talk about "best-selling novels"! Why, nearly 100,000 copies of this book sold in less than six months! You see, these men discarded old methods, and in spite of many failures, stuck at it until they learned the secret of making hens **LAY THE MOST EGGS IN WINTER.** That discovery marked a new era in poultry raising, and others are eagerly studying their methods.

Their success opens up to thousands a new money-making business of unlimited possibilities. With this book for a guide, men or women living in or near cities can raise eggs the year round, and sell them at high prices, or eat them and *save* the high prices. The demand for fresh eggs, especially in winter, is never satisfied. Learn how to supply rich customers *regularly*, and they will take all you can raise, at high prices. Egg-raising is much simpler than poultry raising. The hard work of killing, dressing, and marketing fowls is left out. The rest can be done by men in poor health, women, school-boys, girls, and others not qualified for regular business.

The publishers of the **Farm Journal** saw the immense value of a book that should describe the proved and tested methods of the Cornings. So, after careful investigation, they decided to publish the **CORNING EGG-BOOK,** and offer it to all subscribers to the **Farm Journal,** to make the paper better known to all people, in city or country, who are interested in *growing things*.

The FARM JOURNAL is made for every one, in town or country, who GROWS poultry, eggs, fruit, vegetables, milk, butter, honey, etc., as well as grain and cattle. It has the LARGEST CIRCULATION OF ANY FARM PAPER IN THE WORLD—over 750,000. It has departments devoted to housekeeping, dressmaking, recipes, and bright, fresh reading for boys and girls. It is brief, crisp, condensed and PRACTICAL. No long-winded essays. "Cream, not skim-milk," is its motto. It is now running a series called "Back to the Soil," true stories of city people who have changed to country life, intensely interesting. It never prints a medical or trashy advertisement, and its columns are an absolutely reliable guide in buying. Most of its subscribers pay FIVE to TEN YEARS AHEAD. It is a special favorite with women. Every one who has a garden, yard, flower-bed, or even a kitchen, ought to have this bright, cheery, useful home paper. Those who exist in city flats ought by all means to get it, for it brings a whiff of outdoor life into their prisons, and may help them to break out and escape to the country.

SPECIAL OFFER: We will send, postpaid, the Farm Journal for FOUR FULL YEARS, and the Corning Egg-Book,

both for $1.00

cash, money order, check, or stamps. Book and paper may go to different addresses, if desired.

FARM JOURNAL, 138 Clifton St., Philadelphia

Cut out and send this Coupon

FARM JOURNAL, 138 Clifton St., Philadelphia

Enclosed find $1.00. Send the Farm Journal for four years, beginning with the December issue, and the Corning Egg-Book, to

Name_____

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Velvet

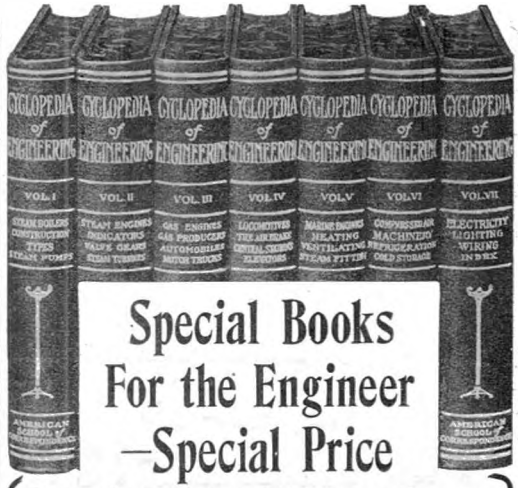
THE SMOOTHEST TOBACCO

Christmas, and then the question, what to give father—what a man really likes? A pound of Velvet is *sure* to please him. It's the kind of tobacco that makes a man feel good. Velvet is Burley tobacco. Not the ordinary tobacco but the choicest leaves of the plant cultivated, cured and mellowed right. It smokes cool—it smokes smooth and it tastes fine. Nor does it burn the tongue. It's in a special, handy tin, with a humidor top—an ornament to any smoking table. He'll be pleased—more than that—enthusiastic. Get a can today—now. It's a ripping good surprise.

Spaulding & Merrick
Chicago, Ill.

In handsome pound and half-pound packages with humidor tops. Also in pocket size cans

10 cents
At any dealers



Special Books For the Engineer —Special Price

Every Engineer must read if he would progress—the biggest men in the field can't go around telling what they know—but they can write it. And you can read it—in our New Cyclopedia of Engineering—the most valuable set of books on this subject ever offered to Engineers. This Cyclopedia has just been revised—this issue came from the press only a few days ago.

As you will see from the synopsis below, these books cover every subject you are likely to meet in practical engineering. They are interestingly written by well-known authorities and are not only valuable for studying, but also as permanent reference books.

The seven books contain 3,200 pages, size 7x10 inches, and over 2,500 illustrations, full page plates, diagrams, etc. The regular price of these books is $36.00, but as a special introductory offer we have put the price at $18.80.

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This price and these terms make it easy for any engineer to secure the valuable set of books. Read the brief description below and see what you will get when you mail the coupon.

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Send for the Cyclopedia of Engineering, examine it carefully and if, at the end of five days, you see that you need it, send us your first $2.00 and $2.00 each month thereafter until the total, $18.80, has been paid. If the books are not satisfactory, —don't send us a cent—we will pay all charges. Use this coupon.

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Construction of Boilers — Boiler Accessories — Fuel Economizers — Mechanical Stokers — Steam Pumps — Steam Engines — Indicators — Valve Gears — Steam Turbines — Gas and Oil Engines — Fuels — Automobiles — Carburetors — Locomotive Boilers and Engines — The Air Brake — Single-Phase Electric Railway — Elevators — Marine Boilers — Marine Engines — Heating and Ventilating — Compressed Air — Transmission — Absorption and Compression Refrigeration — Ammonia Machines — Direct Current Dynamos and Motors — Management of Dynamos and Motors — Electric Wiring — Electric Lighting, etc.

For a short time we will include, as a monthly supplement, for one year, the TECHNICAL WORLD MAGAZINE. This is a regular $1.50 monthly, full of Twentieth Century Scientific facts, written in popular form. Also contains the latest discussion on timely topics in invention, discovery, industry, etc.

FREE EXAMINATION COUPON

American School of Correspondence
CHICAGO, U. S. A.

Please send set Cyclopedia of Engineering for 5 days' free examination. Also Technical World for 1 year. I will send $2.00 within 5 days and $2.00 a month until I have paid $18.80; or notify you to send for the books. Title not to pass until fully paid. ARGOSY, 12-'10

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

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Time in its flight falls lightly on the face that is daily cleansed with

DAGGETT & RAMSDELL'S Perfect Cold Cream

This has become the STANDARD of the world. Refined women in every country depend upon it as the ONE indispensable toilet requisite. They have reason to believe in it, for they have used it constantly for 20 years. They know that it improves their personal appearance. They have used it as a cleanser, as a complexion beautifier, as a soothing healing emollient for all skin troubles and for massage. We guarantee that it will not make hair grow. It is "The kind that keeps" in any climate under any conditions. Tubes 10c, 25c, and 50c.; Jars 35c, 50c, 85c and $1.50, everywhere.

TRIAL TUBE and care-of-the-skin book, entitled, "Beware the Finger of Time," **MAILED FREE.**

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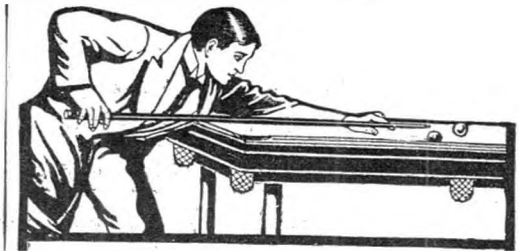


BURROWES BILLIARD AND POOL TABLES

$1.00 DOWN

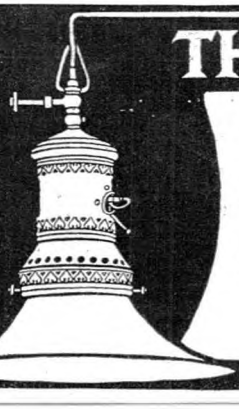
Puts into your home any Table worth from $6 to $15. $2 a month pays balance. Higher priced Tables on correspondingly easy terms. We supply all cues, balls, etc., free.

BECOME AN EXPERT AT HOME

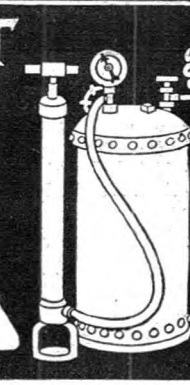
The BURROWES HOME BILLIARD AND POOL TABLE is a scientifically built Combination Table, adapted for the most expert play. It may be set on your dining-room or library table, or mounted on legs or stand. When not in use it may be set aside out of the way.

NO RED TAPE—On receipt of first installment we will ship Table. Play on it one week. If unsatisfactory return it, and we will refund money. Write to-day for catalogue.

E. T. Burrowes Co. 23 Spring St. Portland, Maine



THE "BEST" LIGHT



Has been so successful it is widely imitated, but has never been equalled. Enables you to own your own gas plant which operates any number of lights. Pure white light, 100 to 1000 candle power. **Casts no shadow.** Odorless, greaseless, smokeless. Absolutely safe. Cheaper than any other form of lighting. Best for Homes, Stores, Hotels, Churches, etc. Over 200 styles. Every lamp warranted. Agents wanted everywhere. Write for catalog, now.

THE BEST LIGHT CO.

231 E. 5th St., Canton, O.

$70.50 Buys This

Lowest cash store prices as follows:

No. 429 Buffet with Beveled French Plate Mirror,	$42.00
No. 428 China Cabinet,	42.00
No. 345 45-in. Pedestal Table, with 3 leaves, top and pedestal lock included,	47.00
No. 100 Carver's Chair,	5.50
Five No. 100 Diners,	22.50
Dealer's price,	$159.00
"Come-Packt" price,	70.50

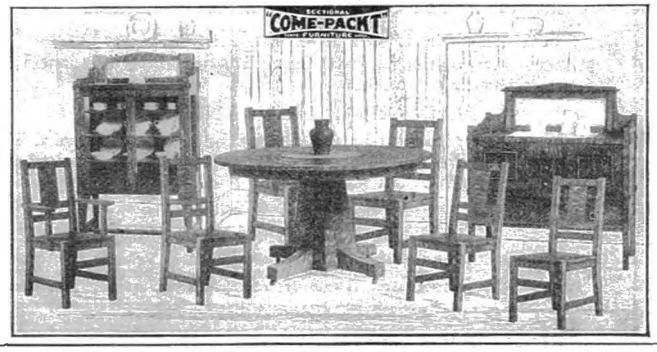
Two Xmas Books Mailed Free

Send for our big catalog and new supplement, full of Christmas suggestions, showing over 200 splendid pieces of Mission and Bungalow furniture, any one sold alone at half store price. Write today to

COME-PACKT FURNITURE CO.

1234 Edwin Street, Ann Arbor, Mich.

$159 Dining Suite in Quartered White Oak



Get $1200 OF THIS $500,000

Next Month

$500,000 to change hands

One cent starts you

Any honest industrious man or woman can enter

Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!

Thousands of dollars already distributed—

Going on Daily. Listen!

10 people receive over $40,000.00

One penny started each. They tell you how to get rich yourself.

WINNERS

$2212 in 2 weeks, went to Korstad *(a farmer)*.
$1200 one month *$1100* another, to Stoneman *(an artist)*.

M. Stoneman

$13,245 IN 110 DAYS

Credited to Zimmerman *(a farmer)*.
$3000 in 30 days to Wilson *(a banker)*.
$1685 in 73 days, received by Rasp *(an agent)*.
$800 in 11 days and *$4,000 to date* received by Oviatt *(a minister)*.
$2800 to Rogers *(a surveyor)*.
$6800 to Juell *(a clerk)*.
$2200 to Hoard *(a doctor)*.
$5000 to Hart *(a farmer)*.

These are just a few—hundreds are sharing similar prosperity. Reads like fiction, yet it's gospel truth. **Proven by sworn statements—investigation—any proof you want.**

H. Juell

DON'T ENVY THESE PEOPLE—JOIN HANDS—WIN A FORTUNE

Dr. D. Hoard

Do as they are doing. Let us give you the same high grade opportunity, supplying farm, town, and city homes with **Allen's Wonderful Bath Apparatus.**

Something new, different, grand.

Rev. C. Miller

Wonderful but true—**gives every home a bath room for only $6.50:** excels others costing $200. Think of it! So energizes water—one gallon ample; cleanses almost automatically; **no plumbing—no water works**—self heating. Could anything be more popular? Agents, it's simply irresistible. **Used by U. S. Government.** Beem writes: "I averaged

$164.25 weekly for 3 months."

Wilson sold **102 in 14 days**; Hart **16 in 3 hours**; Langley **$115 worth the first day**; Reese solicited **60 people—sold 55.** No wonder Cashman says "Men who couldn't sell your goods couldn't sell bread in a famine," and Lodewick, "Lucky I answered ad; it's great; **money coming fast; 17 orders today.**"

Sectional View

$500,000.00 worth will be sold easily this season. 75% profit for you. **Experience unnecessary. FREE SAMPLE AND CREDIT TO ACTIVE AGENTS.** Be first—get exclusive rights—own a rip roaring business.

Make $8000 this year

Spare time means $15 daily. **One cent starts you—a mere postal** containing just your name and address **—that's all.** Get our amazing offer—**it's free.**

The Allen Mfg. Co., 2075 Allen Bldg., Toledo, O.

Brass-Craft

Outfit FREE

Every one will be doing Brass-Craft this season—it's the best and most popular New Art Work of recent years. All articles (except shades) are wood beautifully covered with brass, stamped with design ready for the artist. Satisfaction guaranteed.

We Give Away a Complete Outfit

consisting of **Tool for Stippling,** polished maple combined **Mallet and Modeling Tool, Package Coloring Powder, Steel Wool** and **Polishing Plush,** and also complete materials for handsome **Brass-Craft Calendar** worth **$1.00** when decorated (see illustration), includes **Brass Hanger, Round Head Tacks, Calendar Pad** and full directions. All sent **Free** and prepaid to any one sending us 25 cents to pay cost of packing, shipping, etc. **Write today.**

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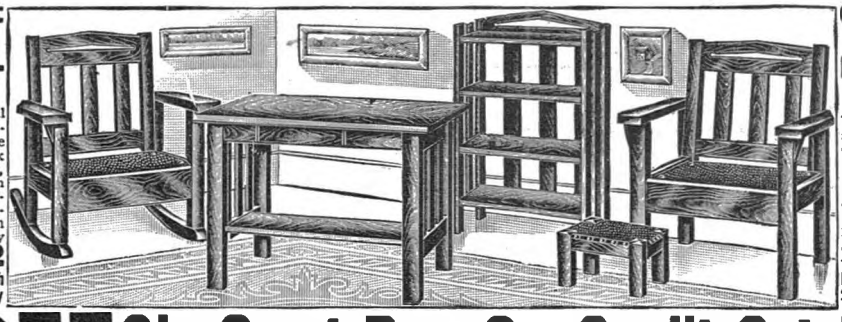
This beautiful five piece Mission Set, made of solid oak throughout, early English finish, upholstered imitation Spanish leather, only **$14.50**

Pay $2.50 Cash
$1.25 Monthly



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DOES IN ONE OPERATION THE WORK OF WASH BOARD, WASHING MACHINE and WASH BOILER.

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See How Simple—DIFFERENT, EASY—Put on any stove, add water, then soap, then clothes—**move knob occasionally.** In 5 to 8 minutes first batch clean—next batch same way, same water—in 30 to 50 minutes family wash clean. **No labor, no injury to clothes. Cleans woolens, flannels, blankets,** or colored clothes, as well as white goods, finest laces, curtains, bed clothes. **Saves time, fuel, labor. Saves money.**

EASY WAY in 30 to 50 minutes cleans washing which before took entire day. All metal, strong, durable, sanitary, light in weight. Easily used, cleaned, handled—always ready. Child or weakly woman can use it. Saves washday drudgery.

Users Praise the "Easy Way."

J. McGee, Tenn., writes:—"One young lady cleaned day's washing in one hour with Easy Way—another in 45 minutes." Mrs. T. Bullen, Canada, writes:—"I washed bedding, heavy quilts, curtains, etc., without rubbing." Lauretta Mitchell, O., writes:—"Done a big washing in 45 minutes—sold three already." A. D. Poppleton, N. Y.:—"Gives perfect satisfaction. Washed bed quilts, greasy overalls and fine clothes. Greatest thing on earth." F. E. Post, Pa., writes:—

TWO WEEKS WASHING IN 45 MINUTES.

Clothes cleaned without rubbing." J. H. Barrett, Ark., after ordering 38 Easy Ways says:—"You have the grandest invention I ever heard of." J. W. Myers, Ga., says:—"Find check for 12 Easy Ways. Greatest invention to womanhood, forever abolishing miserable washday. Sells itself."

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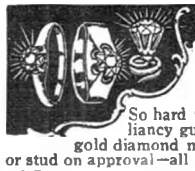

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325,000 Escape Curse of Deafness

Little Invisible Sound Transmitter Does Wonders for the Deaf

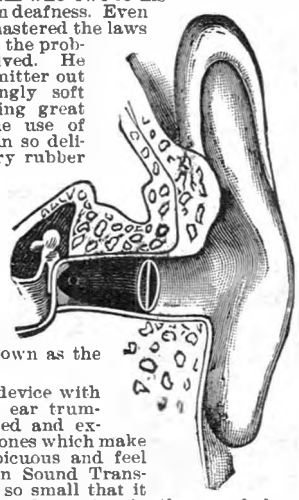
Nearly half a million victims of Deafness have escaped from the Prison of Silence.

How did they do it?

By the use of a marvelous little Sound Transmitter, made of Vibratory Rubber.

Nobody but a deaf man would have had the infinite patience and dogged determination to study and experiment for years—to perfect the tiny Transmitter. That deaf man was Geo. H. Wilson.

Today, he can hear as well as anyone and is almost idolized by the thousands who owe to his genius their escape from deafness. Even after Mr. Wilson had mastered the laws of sound transmission, the problem was far from solved. He must make the Transmitter out of something exceedingly soft and light, yet possessing great vibratory power. The use of metal was impossible in so delicate a device. Ordinary rubber did not possess the necessary vibratory qualities. Mr. Wilson began experiments with rubber and finally succeeded in producing what is known as Vibratory Rubber.



This made it possible to perfect the Sound Transmitter which is commonly known as the Wilson Ear Drum.

Do not confuse this device with the speaking tubes or ear trumpets, or the complicated and expensive portable telephones which make the wearer look conspicuous and feel ridiculous. The Wilson Sound Transmitter or ear drum is so small that it rests completely **out of sight** in the ear holes.

So soft and comfortable that the wearer forgets all about it. So magical in its results that it makes the deaf hear distinctly, **and instantly.** So many deaf people have written to Mr. Wilson for information in regard to the Sound Transmitter that he has written a little book about it. And just to make the story complete, he has put in several hundred letters from people of every station in life who are using his Sound Transmitters.

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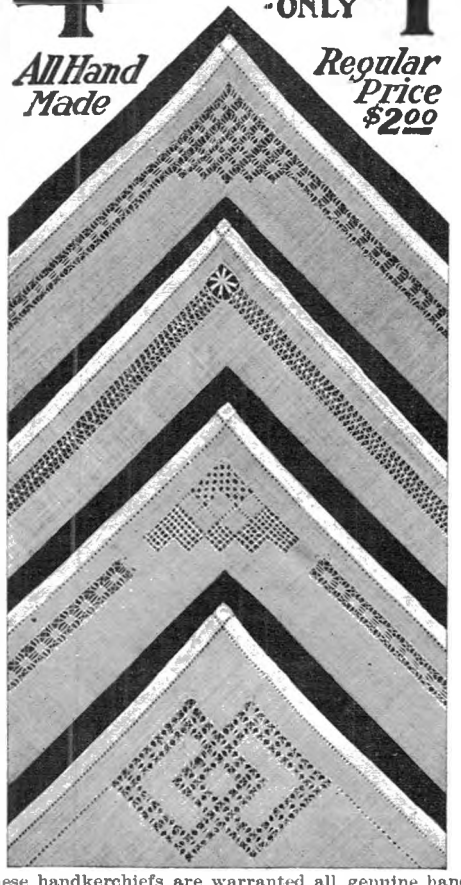

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Pabst Extract
The Best Tonic

"brings the roses to your cheeks"—that it is a perfect blending of richest malt and choicest hops into a natural reconstructive agent and builder of health, strength, vigor and vitality—a malt tonic that enriches the blood and tones up the entire system.

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