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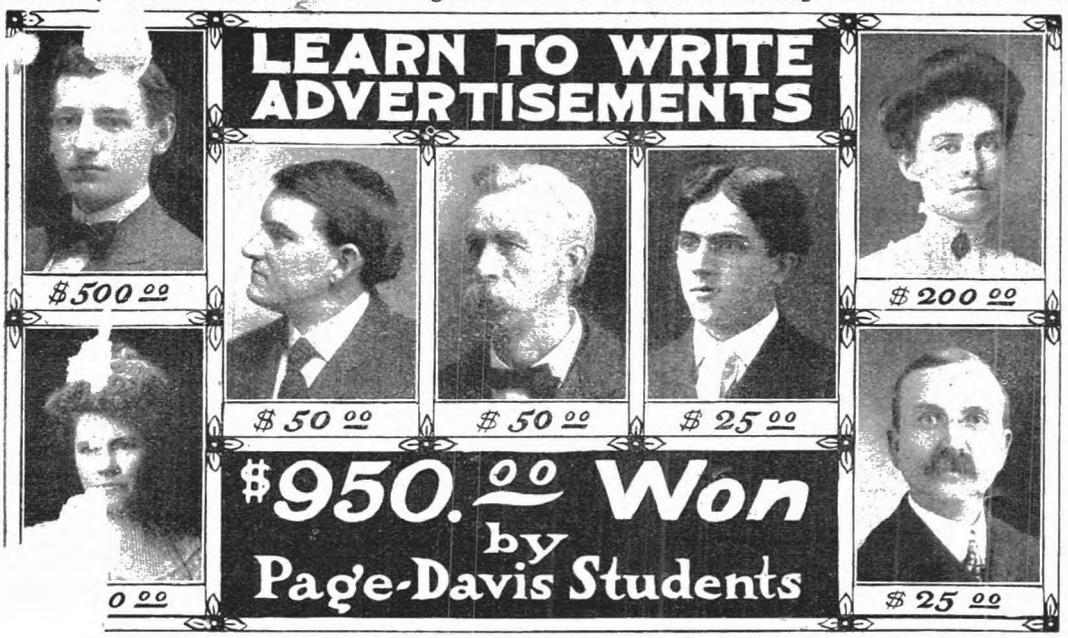

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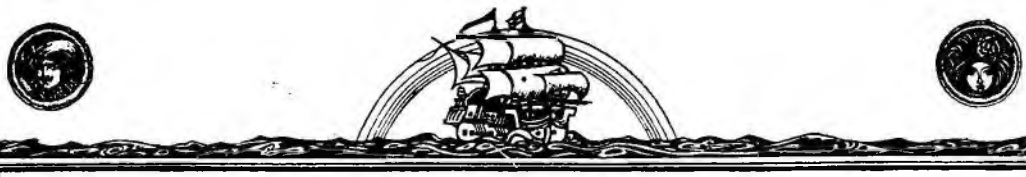

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A5

THE ARGOSY

Vol. LVI FEBRUARY, 1908. No. 3

THE TAIL OF THE LUMBERBEAST.

By SEWARD W. HOPKINS,

Author of "A Prisoner of Luxury," "The Hoodoo Ranch," "An Age of Madness," etc.

Afloat on a strange craft, which brought its passengers, willing and otherwise, into a whirlpool of lively scenes.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS VISIT.

"WEBB—are you awake?"

"Yes. That you, Garry? What do you want?"

"Better come and take a look at the thing. Moon's under a cloud and likely to stay there. We can get out to the Lumberbeast without being seen. The —place is ready."

"I'll be with you in a moment."

Garry, the midnight interrupter of a good man's sleep, quietly sat down on a log and puffed his pipe. Webb, awakened from his slumbers, quickly dressed.

The lantern, by the light of which he hurriedly slung on his clothes, revealed a young man, almost boyish, so smooth and fresh was his countenance, of medium height, but apparently solidly built and strongly knit. He was a fair type of the young man who had had his share in the winning of the West, and his movements, though quick, were devoid of nervousness.

He had on, when dressed, a rough cap, a blue shirt, common trousers, and the legs of these were thrust into the tops of heavy boots.

He slipped a revolver into his pocket and joined Garry outside the hut.

"Did I wake the Chinaman?" asked Garry.

"Never mind if you did. I'll have to take Chin Lee into the game to stock up. We can trust him."

"Great guns, I should hope so. Don't get us all pinched by trusting too many."

"Don't worry. Nobody thinks Tom Collamore is guilty except those who find it convenient. Do you think I'd risk state prison for this thing if I thought he *was* guilty?"

"Yes."

"You—what do you mean?"

"I think you would risk prison, the gallows, or Hades itself for Kate Collamore, and you know you would. You'd be a fuzzy wuzzy if you wouldn't. But never mind whether Collamore is guilty or not. The thing is, the palace in the wildwood is ready, and I want you to take a look at it. Then my part's done, and you can finish the job."

"Come on."

The scene was on the shore of Wigwood Bay, between that arm of the Columbia River and the town of Wigwood, Oregon. It was not far from the log cabin to the shore, but the way lay through a thick grove of firs.

"Better not talk in here," said Webb. "Kane has been spying around a good deal since I hit him. He lied at the examination. You know that."

"I believe it, if I can't prove it," replied the man called Garry. "But you sure did give him one. You almost knocked his head off, and then he banged up against a wall, and his eye is black, and, oh, in his heart he has a spot for you."

"He'd no business to drag Kate's name into the talk. If I hit him again—"

"Sh!" said Garry, and the two made their way in silence to the shore.

To one who had known Dave Webb when he was at school in the East, and who had followed his career since he had taken up lumbering, this midnight excursion might have been surprising had the full significance of it, and the causes that led thereto, been left untold. These will make themselves clear in their own way. We must follow Webb and his trusty Garry.

Within a little pocket of the shore a boat lay hidden, and into this Garry stepped, followed by Webb.

"Where is Jones?" asked Webb, looking at a long, peculiar dark shape in the water.

"Gone into quarters. I'm on watch alone. Jones is as tight as a drum. No squeal to Jones. We're safe enough. I made sure of that before I came after you. Murphy is getting his men together, and half of them need some sobering up, and Watson is with Burke, making out the final pay-roll. To-morrow will see the last log placed on the raft."

While Garry was speaking he was also rowing the boat toward one end of the long black object in the water.

"She certainly is a monster," remarked Webb, looking at the thing with some pride. "Funny Burke & Bayliss never thought of this scheme before."

"Who the mischief would think of it but you?" answered Garry. "The raft Jones took down to 'Frisco in 1902 was only seven hundred feet long, and that tore apart in a storm and was three weeks making the trip. They lost about five thousand dollars' worth of good lumber. But this thing of building a raft like a wasp takes the cake. It'll go, too. Don't worry. It'll go."

As may be gathered from this conversation, the long black object in the water was a raft. But what a raft! As Garry had said, it was the creature of Webb's own brain.

Burke & Bayliss, a big lumber firm in Oregon, had received so many orders for lumber since the great earthquake and fire in San Francisco that the imperfect facilities of transportation had hampered them. They had thought of trying the old raft system, but the danger and almost certainty of loss in case of heavy storms had deterred them until Webb, who was one of their foremen, had advanced his own theories.

This was nothing more than the statement of his belief that the trouble heretofore with big lumber rafts had been their unwieldiness, and their lack of pliability. They resisted the rise and fall of the ocean swell, so he claimed, and their own rigidity had been their undoing.

His plan was to build a raft—as long as was desired, but instead of having it a monstrous thing seven hundred or more feet in length and sixty in width, to build it in swells, or as Garry had said, like a wasp, with wide bodies coming together at the ends in narrower connections, allowing sufficient pliability to give a little with the waves and relieve the strain.

And this was the thing that lay in the water in Wigwood Bay, and this was the thing that the lumbermen of northern Oregon had been for months engaged in building.

Murphy, the captain and owner of the sea-tug Growler, and the commodore of the towing fleet that was to haul the raft to 'Frisco, had christened it the "Lumberbeast."

The raft was composed of five parts, each containing about two thousand logs, seventy feet wide at the belly of each section, and twenty-two feet wide at each "waist."

It was sixteen feet above water at the center of each "whaleback," and a line drawn from this center straight to the bottom would be forty-five feet long.

It was a beauty, as rafts go, and the admiration and wonder of the lumber world.

Three hundred and ten experts out of a possible four hundred had declared that the huge monster would never reach San Francisco "alive." But Burke & Bayliss had learned to trust Webb's judgment, and as their own coincided with his in this instance they were willing to take the risk.

And they had to take it, because no marine insurance company would insure it against loss except by fire.

And it was toward the last section of this gigantic wooden sea-serpent that Garry rowed the boat.

The logs were held together by great chain cables, and to one of these Garry fastened the boat's painter. Then the two men, stepping carefully, began the climb up the slippery side of the Lumberbeast's tail.

"Go easy," said Garry. "Don't fall in the stew and make a mess of it. Hang onto the chains."

"Shut up. Haven't I been on board this craft every day since she was started."

"That's so," chuckled Garry. "I'd got it into my head you were Collamore."

Up they went, till they were within five feet of the top.

"Here it is," said Garry. "Wait till I get a lantern. It's inside."

And as Webb knelt there, hanging to a cable, Garry disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

THE PURPOSE OF IT.

In a moment there appeared before Webb the gleam of a lantern. It came from a hole in the rear of the raft, and behind the light he could see the grinning face of Garry.

"Come," he said. "Try the Jonah business."

Webb laughed as he crawled toward Garry. The aperture was about two feet square, almost regular in its shape, and led straight into the great pile of logs.

It was so arranged that it would scarcely be noticed by an observer who had not been told that the hole was there.

There was a tunnel of about ten feet, and then the walls began to rise and diverge laterally, until the two men, standing on the floor as flat as well-laid logs could be made, had ample head-room.

"What do you think of this?" demanded Garry, swinging his lantern. It lighted up the log sides, the vaulted roof, and showed a small door at the farther end.

"What's that?" asked Webb.

"Well," said Garry, "when you begin the job of transporting a gentleman out of his own State into another, to give him a chance to begin life over again somewhere in the world where he won't be molested by people who insist on hanging him for a crime he didn't commit, there is nothing like being thorough about it. You didn't say anything about economy of space. You insisted that as the old Jones raft was three weeks making the blamed trip, this might be four, and so I went in for comfort. This here floating palace has all the comforts of home. Bedroom, living-room, bath-room."

"What joke is this—a bath-room on a raft?"

"'Tis no joke. Have a look? Have a bath if you like."

Garry led the way with the lantern to the door. An exclamation of pleasure came to the lips of Webb.

Here there was a square room, about ten feet in diameter, and in the center of this a well down among the logs deep enough for the sea-water to have full sweep in and out again, owing to an ingenious method of leaving out a log or two here and there in the construction.

"How did you come to think of this?" asked Webb.

"I didn't think of it. It thought itself into being. Honest, I was arranging the logs and Jones was shoring them into position, and as we were cabling them, some of them slipped and the well was the result. Jones said: 'Leave it there. Collamore won't dare show himself during the trip, and it will be convenient.'"

Webb nodded.

"And this—on this side—another room?"

"Yes," said Garry coolly. "Didn't I tell you? I've built the house. Now, it's up to you to furnish it. I've got to go to the hills to-morrow. Wish I could give you a hand, but if I play any excuses somebody may suspect—especially after Collamore is missed."

"You've done well, old fellow. When this old timber whale is sold and I get my share I'll make it right."

"Take it easy. Invite me to the wedding when you get back, and that'll do. Kate Collamore is worth all this, even as the wife of a friend. By Jove, Dave! I don't know of a girl who deserves you any more, and I don't know a fellow who deserves her as well as you. It's a cinch on Kismet. But I hope everything will turn out well. Are you sure of Byke?"

"Yes, I can trust Byke. The devil of it is I've got to wound him, and I don't like to do that."

"Wound him?"

"Why, yes. You know how strict Sheriff Curtis is. If Byke lets anybody break jail and don't show blood, either his own or the other fellow's, there'll be a devil of a row. And I can't shoot. That'd bring Curtis and all the rest of the gang. Byke is the only one who believes Collamore innocent. Wouldn't it be a shame, Garry, to let the law hang Tom Collamore when we know he never killed Billy Evans?"

"Sure," said Garry, squinting at the well, "especially when we're all in love with his sister."

"Drop that. It's so, though, and I don't care how much you chaff. And I told Kate if she'd marry me when I came back from 'Frisco I'd see that Tom got away—somehow."

"Sure, haven't you told me that a hundred times, and haven't I said it was worth it? Man, your hand. We may never meet again, with me up in the hills, and you on the Pacific with this thing. But you've my love to take with you and my heartiest wishes that everything comes out right. Amen and amen. Now, if you've seen enough, we'll go. Look where I put the lantern, here at the right at the end of the tunnel. See?"

"I see," said Webb, who was already half-way through the tunnel and did not stop to look.

Once more in the boat, Garry cast off, and the long, black, strange looking Lumberbeast in the water was left alone.

Again on shore, Webb wrung the hand of Garry, who had so ably assisted in this half mad undertaking, and then as Garry started off alone in the boat, the builder of the Lumberbeast walked slowly toward his lonely hut.

Now and then some sound would reach his ears and he would touch his revolver. For it was no slight thing, this undertaking, and Dave Webb, boyish though he looked, knew the desperate chances he was taking.

But down in his heart he knew the man for whom he was taking these chances was innocent of the crime of which he had been convicted on the charge made by a man of power, and a jury that stood by power against the young fellow who had seemed, through circumstances, to be the perpetrator of both murder and robbery.

Here is the history of the matter told as briefly as possible, that the reader may know why Dave Webb and the few men he could trust were taking this great risk to help a prisoner escape and cheat the law of a victim.

Tom Collamore and his sister Kate lived in a small house left them by their father, who had been killed in a sawmill. Their mother, an invalid, lived with them.

Tom Collamore worked for Peter Davig, in the hardware business.

Davig passed for a wealthy man, but not a generous one. He was careful, however, to maintain a good standing in the community, and as he made few friends he was also fortunate in having few enemies.

Like many others he filled a position in society not exactly important, but at least respectable.

Tom Collamore was simply the average young man. Strong, and full of animal spirits, he liked the sports to be enjoyed in a small lumber town, but never had the tongue of scandal attached his name to a single evil deed.

The time came when Davig and Collamore could no longer agree, and as Davig had other interests to attend to, he suggested that Collamore buy out the hardware business. This Collamore agreed to do if he could raise the money.

There were some high words between Davig and Collamore over the price, but Collamore appeared at the appointed time, paid the money, and the papers were signed.

Then came the news that Billy Evans had been murdered and robbed.

Evans was the treasurer of a big firm that ran a mill on Wigwood Creek, and it was his habit every Saturday to go to Portland and draw from the bank enough money to pay the hands, and return on a certain train.

And the day the papers were signed between Davig and Collamore the body of Evans had been found on the road from the station to the mill, and his satchel, empty and open, a short distance away.

The body of Evans had been discovered by a young man named Kane, a nephew of Davig, and one of the wilder set of young men known as the Blue Hill gang. Between Kane and his crowd and Collamore, Webb, and their friends, there had long been ill feeling. Kane aspired to the hand of Kate Collamore, and Tom had stood by her in her attachment for Webb.

Kane went at once to Sheriff Curtis, so he said, and reported that he had seen Evans alight from the train as usual, and had seen Collamore follow him into the road through the woods. He had heard a shot and a cry for help, and had run to where Evans lay dead.

Curtis investigated at once. Davig was questioned, and told about the deal with Collamore, and exhibited the money Tom had paid. It was afterward identified by the paying teller of the Portland bank as the same money he had paid to Evans.

Collamore was at once arrested for the murder. At the trial he had testified that he had received the money he paid Davig from his invalid mother. This was corroborated by Mrs. Collamore, but as she was always looked upon as poor and dependent upon Tom, her testimony did not weigh, and Tom was convicted.

Naturally, Webb and others who knew Tom well repudiated the finding of the jury, and felt that the young fellow had not had a fair chance. And they swore that Tom should not be hanged until they had had time to ferret out the truth and place the crime where it belonged.

It was no easy thing to get a prisoner away from Wigwood jail, and Webb was too shrewd to make an attempt before success was certain. He knew one failure meant death to Collamore and imprisonment for his friends.

Therefore, they had worked long and stealthily, and with Webb in charge of building the big raft they found less difficulty in carrying out his plans than would otherwise have been the case.

Webb's idea was simply to build a hidden cabin in whaleback number five, and when it was finished get Collamore out of jail, secrete him in the raft, and take him to San Francisco. When they had reached port they would manage some way of getting him out of the country.

The reader has seen that the first part of the plan had been successful. The next step was to help Collamore escape.

CHAPTER III.

GREAT PREPARATIONS.

THE great floating derrick that was anchored alongside of whaleback number three was sending out noise and smoke while it hoisted into place the last of the logs that were to complete the Lumberbeast.

Men were working furiously, and many eyes were watching, for the success of this great enterprise was vital to many. It was to save Burke & Bayliss from bankruptcy, put several thousand dollars into Webb's pocket, enable him to marry Kate, and it was to carry Tom away from the danger that now hung over his head.

There was activity all around. The fleet of big sea-tugs under Captain Murphy was getting ready for its share in the work. Murphy's men were busy coaling, carrying food supplies aboard, and making general preparations for the greatest job any of these boats had ever undertaken.

Even in the cottage of Kate Collamore there was more than the usual bustle. Mrs. Collamore was too ill to be around, but she knew what Kate was doing.

From the back door of the Collamore home a straggling path wound its way to a gate in the garden fence, and this gate opened onto another path that led to a road through the woods and thence to the shore of Wigwood Bay.

Inside the house, with this back door locked, Kate was busy.

Days and weeks she had spent getting ready for this great day, and a store of necessities had been collected in a way to avoid suspicion.

Near the door a large rug was rolled tightly. There was a chair, to go out with the rest. Then there were boxes and baskets containing all sorts of food and enough clothing for Tom's new start in life.

As no cooking could be permitted on board the raft, there was an ample supply of canned food. There were crackers

and biscuits of various kinds. There were jars of fruits and jellies, tarts, and many other delicacies that would keep at least for a portion of the tedious trip.

Webb had undertaken the matter of fresh water, and two large barrels were ready to be filled at the last moment at a spring and taken aboard the raft under cover of the darkness.

That day was a feverish one in Wigwood, especially among those interested in the building and departure of the Lumberbeast. Everybody who kept a music hall or dance house was preparing for the evening.

Word had gone aboard that the last log would be in place that day, and the great cradles which held the raft would be loosened, and then everybody was going to have a good time. And Wigwood knew what it meant when everybody started in for a good time.

When evening did come, it chanced, fortunately, to be dark. At about half past nine, when the music of the bands could be heard in the town, and the shouts of the merrymakers reached the ears of Webb, he left his log house, and, followed by Chin Lee, proceeded to Kate's cottage.

He knocked in a peculiar manner on the back door and Kate opened it.

"Oh, Dave!" whispered the girl. Now that the supreme moment had come, she was afraid. "Is everything safe?"

"As safe as we can expect," he answered. "The town is having its fun and won't miss me. What's here?"

She showed him what she had done and his jaw fell a little.

"Well," he said, "we'll get it there. It's a good deal like fitting out a steam-yacht for a cruise. But there's plenty of room. Here, Chin."

"Can't I carry some to the boat?" asked Kate.

"No, it would not be safe. If I am seen I can explain that I am going to give Chin a free ride. If you were with me they would know where Tom was afterward."

"All right, Dave. You know best."

Her confidence in this boyish lumberman was supreme.

When they had gone with the first load she sat down to wait.

"Are you there, dear?" called her mother. "The house is so still."

"I am here," said the girl. "Don't be afraid, mother. Dave will be back soon for more of the stuff."

Dave and the Chinaman returned and took the last load. Kate kissed her lover, and then locked the door.

"Now, God be with them," she breathed.

Under the shelter of overhanging boughs there was a big flatboat. This already held the first load, and the rest was packed in. Then the two water-casks were filled and added to the load, and the two strangely united conspirators stepped aboard.

Webb took the oars. Slowly the punt started toward whaleback number five, and Jones, who was on watch that night, heard it coming.

"Come along here," he said in a low tone. "I've a place for you."

The boat was shoved close to the side and made fast to two cables.

The stuff was then unloaded and carried, not without considerable difficulty, up to the opening of the tunnel. It was shoved through this and distributed in the cabin.

"So far, so good," said Jones. "Hanged if you ain't the manager. Now, if everything else comes off right, hurray for us. When do you pull off the big performance?"

"At one o'clock. I can't wait, for Byke is relieved at two. And one o'clock ought to be safe enough. Everybody that drinks ought to be drunk, and everybody who don't drink ought to be in bed."

"Good. What's the next move?"

"Well," said Webb, "Kate and her mother want to see Tom before he comes aboard, and although it's devilish risky I'll have to do it. I'll leave Chin here now. You'd better stay till I bring Tom, or until we start. I'll come and get you. I want to go back to town and prowl round a little to show myself after I get Tom out here."

"Good. You'll do. If you lived in them ancient times you'd have rolled into old Troy in a lemon and had that wooden horse of the Greeks skinned to death."

Webb grunted, stepped into the boat, and shoved off.

He rowed back as rapidly as possible, fastened the boat where it belonged, and then strolled slowly away.

CHAPTER IV.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

In one matter, at least, Webb had not been a good prophet. At one o'clock those who drank in Wigwood were not all drunk, nor were all those who were known as "temperance" in bed.

Every place of entertainment, good or bad, in Wigwood, was still in full blast when Webb approached the wooden jail by a cut through the woods, where he was less likely to meet with acquaintances than on the highway.

The jail was a low, heavily built affair, strong enough for the purposes it might be called upon to serve.

As Webb approached he saw that it was dark, save for one light that shone through a window. He chuckled a little when he saw this light. He had expected to see it in that very window. It was a prearranged signal, and meant that all was well.

Webb felt of two or three little packages in his pockets, and after making a hurried trip completely around the stockade that enclosed the jail on three sides, thus making sure there were no lurking spies, he crept through the shadows of the near-by trees to the door.

He waited there. He did not knock. He gave no signal. Webb did not manage these things clumsily.

But just at the moment of one o'clock the heavy door opened cautiously and noiselessly, and a good-looking face was thrust out toward Webb.

"How are things in the town?" asked a whispering voice.

"Lively enough, Byke," was Webb's answer. "I wish they'd quit sooner, but we had set the time and I must take the chances. Are you ready?"

"Yes. Come in."

"We can't waste time," said Webb as he entered. "The town's alive, and Curtis liable to come. I've brought chloroform for a bluff. The smell lasts a long while. We've got everything fixed. Jones is waiting on the raft. Hold out your arm."

It certainly was a strange scene. Byke extended his arm.

"There," said Webb. "That hurt much?"

"Not so very much," said Byke, wincing at the blow Webb had given him. "Here—take the keys and hurry up. This is no picnic."

Webb spilled some chloroform around and then opened a cell door.

"Come, Tom," he whispered.

The young fellow who stepped out was far from a murderer in appearance. He was more slightly built than Webb, and his face more regular and handsome.

No evil shone from his eyes. He was pale, but it was not the pallor of fright.

He saw Byke with a red-stained sleeve, and rushed up to him.

"Get away," said Byke. "Don't waste time."

Webb seized the liberated man and dragged him to the door.

"You can thank him afterward," he said. "Come this way. I think it is safe. The fools are celebrating yet. Your mother and Kate want to see you."

They ran through the darkest places, and began again to skirt the town. Suddenly the music of the bands stopped and a great shouting arose. The mad rush ceased and the two stood still.

"My Heaven! What shall we do now?" asked Collamore.

Up from the town there came a swelling roar.

"To the jail! Hang Tom Collamore! Kill the man who robbed Billy Evans."

Webb set his teeth.

"This way, Tom," he said. "That's Kane and the Blue Hill gang. You can't go home to-night. They'll have to stand it without seeing you. Keep close and follow me. Step high—there are stones in the way."

With his arms tight to his side, Webb turned, and Tom followed, till breathless they stood on the shore of the bay.

"In with you. Here's the boat," said Webb, as he began to unfasten the rope and pull the craft from cover.

"Thank God, here they are," breathed Jones to himself a moment later as he saw the dark form of the boat start away from shore.

He crept to the lowest logs to give Webb a hand.

In a moment after the boat touched, Tom was on the whaleback.

"You take him to the cubby," said Webb. "I'll have to hurry back and scatter myself in town a bit. I've got to know what's been done. I'll try to see Kate and explain."

"All right," replied Jones. "I'll take care of Tom."

Again the punt scudded back to its place, and Webb, after making it secure, hurried to his shanty.

He quickly took some envelopes and wrote some addresses. Into each envelope he thrust enough folded paper to make a good-sized letter. Sealing the envelopes, he put stamps on them, and then inked his fingers.

He had the look of a careless man who had written much. Then with his letters he started for the town.

It was Murphy he saw first.

"Where'd you come from?" almost roared the captain of the Growler.

"From my shanty," said Webb innocently. "Why?"

"Well, this blamed town's turned crazy," said Murphy. "Everything was going well when a scrap started about Collamore, and the Blue Hill gang set up the cry to lynch him. They are up there now."

"Let's go up and see what's doing."

The two started. They found a silent, wondering throng about the jail, with Curtis in the doorway.

"Here's Webb, now," said the sheriff. "Come in here, Webb, and you, Murphy."

They went into the office of the jail, followed by the crowd. Byke was lying on a lounge, his shirt-sleeve ripped and a physician dressing his wound.

"Gentlemen," said Curtis slowly, "Tom Collamore is gone."

"Gone? Escaped?" gasped Kane, who was in the crowd.

"Gone as clean as a whistle, and Byke lay moaning on the floor, the place full of chloroform and that cut in his arm. Byke says ten masked men attacked the jail. I want to know who hasn't been seen to-night. How about you, Webb?"

"Here is where I've been," said Webb, taking the letters from his pocket and throwing them down. "They are letters to my people I wrote because I am not sure of the safe arrival of the flotilla at San Francisco. You may read them if you like."

"No," said Curtis. "A letter to your mother wouldn't give any information about breaking into jail and stabbing a deputy sheriff. And you surely wrote them. You look as if you'd taken a bath in the ink-pot.

"I'll find Tom Collamore and I'll find the men who took him. And I'll have no more talk of lynching. Understand, Kane?"

Kane mumbled something under his breath.

"Where's Garry? Where's Jones?" asked Curtis, turning to Webb.

"Garry finished his work on the raft yesterday and went up in the hills for Burke & Bayliss. Jones is on the raft, where I ordered him to stay till daylight. Want him?"

"No. But there's something blamed queer in this. I'll be glad when this raft gang gets out of town."

"Dorkins," said Murphy to the mate of the Growler, "gather in every man that belongs on the Growler. You, Captain Betts, and you, Pettison, get your men. The raft begins to move at daybreak, and I don't want a man missing. If any man sees Tom Collamore, report to me. I'll send word to the sheriff. There will be no more shore-leave till we reach San Francisco."

"All right, sir," said Dorkins.

The mob began to melt away from around the jail, and those who were going to San Francisco betook themselves toward the sea-tugs at the wharves.

CHAPTER V.

SAFE ON THE PACIFIC.

WEBB had little to say during the short time that intervened between this interview at the jail and daybreak.

But he was doing a prodigious amount of thinking, studying, and planning.

And he knew that in order to insure safety for Tom Collamore, and success in the undertaking he had thus far carried through perfectly, some sacrifices must be made.

He heard Curtis say that he did not believe Collamore would leave Wigwood

without seeing his mother and sister. He knew Curtis would make an investigation at their cottage, and had also heard him give orders to another deputy sheriff to watch the house to make sure Collamore, if he was there, could not escape, and to arrest him if he appeared.

So far as Collamore was concerned, Webb knew he would not be found at the house.

But there were other things to be considered. He believed it wiser on his own part not to attempt to see Kate before the sailing of the Lumberbeast, for he knew how she loved Tom, and it would be impossible to see her without answering questions, and even the walls, in this case, might have the fabled ears.

He feared the emotional nature of Mrs. Collamore, and knew that one word, at random spoken, would destroy the entire fabric of mystery he had built up.

It was a wrench to leave Wigwood without seeing Kate, but he knew she was a sensible girl and would understand. And he could telegraph from San Francisco when he arrived, and when the great raft had been taken apart by the same men who had built it he would return with money and marry Kate, and everything would go smoothly on, while he worked to prove Tom innocent and some one else to be the murderer of Billy Evans.

So, instead of risking defeat and detection by visiting the cottage, he kept away, and also kept away from Curtis and his men.

He had heard the sheriff say he would telegraph to all near-by towns and send out an alarm. This suited Webb to perfection. While Curtis was waiting for his answers the raft would be gliding down the broad mouth of the Columbia to safety.

So he busied himself in getting his men ready for the trip.

It had been decided by Burke & Bayliss that the same men who had so skilfully built the big raft should take it apart. The number of these made it necessary for them to divide into three parties, Webb and a third of his gang going on the Growler, and the other two parties on the two other sea-tugs in Murphy's fleet.

Daylight saw an unwonted activity on Wigwood Bay. The long row of whalebacks, as each section of the raft was called, lay like some fabulous monster of the deep waiting for the puffing tugs to give it motion.

The only sign of life on the long leviathan was Jones, who placidly sat on the top of whaleback number five and smoked his pipe, waiting for Webb to come and take him off. But Webb did not go.

Webb had no more orders to give, no more responsibility, until the great raft was anchored in San Francisco Bay and the work of dismantling began. He was a passenger, and therefore voiceless. Murphy was in command.

Curtis, having accomplished everything else he could think of as well as he was able, looked long and suspiciously at the steaming craft in the bay. A sudden inspiration had seized him.

Pressing a small tug into service, he, with two deputies, went scudding hither and thither, first visiting one vessel and, after a thorough exploration, scudding to another, till he was assured that the escaped prisoner was not on board of any craft that was going to leave the bay.

And then his tug went down the side of the long five-bellied raft, while he stood in the bow and scanned the hills of well-cabled logs for some sign of the missing man. He might be clinging to the chains, flattening himself against the logs, or trying to squeeze into some crevice till the raft had been pulled out past Fort Stevens.

Down to the tail of the Lumberbeast he went, and Jones still sat placidly smoking his pipe, gazing with a peculiar eye at the little tug and the burly form of the sheriff, and wondering if that officer would pay him a visit.

The tug did steam in close to the very tail of the Lumberbeast, and the sheriff called.

"Have you seen anybody? A prisoner is missing." So called the sheriff.

"I'm a prisoner myself," said Jones. "Why don't they come and take me off? I haven't seen nobody." Which, to speak grammatically, was true.

Jones was sitting squarely in front of the opening to the cache when the sheriff called, and the quick eye of Curtis did not see the spot where there might have been logs but were not.

And then up again on the other long side the tug bearing the sheriff made a trip, but here, as before, all he saw was logs, logs, logs. Thousands of logs, chained fast and close together, and no place for a man to hide.

And Murphy was about ready to start.

"Get your men all aboard," he said to Webb. "I'll send a boat from the Harry B. to take off Jones."

There was no help for it. Webb dared not offer a suggestion, much as he would have liked to see Jones and ask how Collamore was then.

Jones, seeing the boat from the Harry B., looked surprised and said things under his breath. Then he stuck his head in the outer end of the funnel and shouted:

"Don't one of you show a head for your life and mine. Remember Dave. They are coming for me from the Harry B., and I can't tell Dave anything. It's tough, but I can't help it. It's safe enough if you don't show yourselves. The boat—I scuttled that. It's gone to the bottom. I'm off. Remember, don't show yourselves at all till we get to San Francisco. I'll manage then—with Dave."

Some of which might seem a little obscure to those who have been following Dave Webb all night long, and through the morning hours, but was perfectly clear to Jones and those to whom he had shouted in the cache.

"Come on," said the man in the boat from the Harry B. "We're off."

Jones got into the boat.

Murphy had done big things before, and he felt himself equal to the big thing he had to do now.

"You see," he told Webb, as they stood together on the Growler, "the formation of this beast is such as to make the tug-work different than it was with the one that lost some logs. With that one we had to hitch on all forward, for no tug could stand the banging of a big raft.

"This one is built to swing and give like a snake. So the Growler, the strongest tug of all, will go ahead, with a thousand feet of cable fastened to the nose of whaleback number one.

"The Smidge will take the port side of whaleback number two, and the Harry B. will hook onto the starboard side of number three. This will leave four and five free to wiggle, as the tail of all sea-serpents must wiggle to keep the balance even. It'll be a slow wiggle, but God help the thing that gets in the way. If old number five begins to swing in the wash, it'll knock any ocean steamer out of commission the first crack."

"Your arrangements are excellent," said Webb. "I believe we shall get through all right."

"Get through? Why, of course we'll get through all right. We'll haul this old monster into San Francisco Bay, and—what the devil now?"

The Harry B. had taken her station alongside whaleback number three and had signaled that all was ready. Murphy, even while talking, had rung the bell to go ahead slowly, and immediately from every steam vessel on Wigwood Bay there came the wildest screeching and tooting that placid body of water had ever heard.

The steam-yacht of Mr. Burke, which was provided with a cannon and was going to accompany the raft as far as the Pacific, boomed her salute. From the town there came the sound of factory whistles, bells ringing, and the mob on shore, in the ecstasy of their enthusiasm, fired guns and pistols in the air.

And then began that voyage of the Lumberbeast that was destined to make history in the lumber trade and shipping world.

It was slow-going at first, for Wigwood Bay was not the safest navigation for such a monster, but Murphy knew his business, and the leviathan glided slowly on, gradually gathering headway, till at last it glided out on the broader bosom of the lower Columbia.

And here, taking a turn toward the Pacific, Murphy signaled for full speed from all the tugs, and the Lumberbeast began to shove her nose still harder into the water.

A fleet of small vessels accompanied her, making hideous noises in their boisterous joy.

The trip down the river was uneventful so far as this story goes, though every foot of the way was a grand marine march of triumph, and Burke, on the deck of his steam-yacht, thanked his stars for such a man as Webb.

It was daylight the next morning when they sighted the Pacific, so carefully had

they felt their way. They had been saluted at Brookfield on the Washington side, and Astoria on the Oregon side, and then from Chinook in Washington had come the tooting of whistles, and at last, as they crawled out past Port Adams, the guns of Fort Stevens bellowed and boomed their good wishes for a successful voyage.

And Webb, after a good night's sleep and a hearty breakfast, stood smoking a cigar and looking at the long, long line of logs he had chained together, and wondered what was going on in that secret cache in the tail of the monster his genius had called into being.

But they were on the Pacific. That was the main thing. Tom Collamore was safe from prying sheriffs and inquisitive deputies till they reached San Francisco, and then there would be another chance to show his nerve and genius.

But Collamore needed no watching now. He was safe. And Webb's mind turned to the beautiful girl he had left in Wigwood — left without a word of farewell, without a message that her brother was safe.

But it was better so. And Webb knew that he had nothing to regret.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT HAPPENED TO WEBB.

It was fun for Webb to stand on the stern of the Growler and with a glass watch the billows of the Pacific roll up on whaleback number one and break and then roll off on either side. This was, in fact, about the only amusement he had.

Others of his construction-gang played cards either on deck or in the cabin, and, not being under the same restraint as when they were in active service, smoked, drank, and enjoyed the good things Burke & Bayliss had provided as part of the inducement for them to make the trip.

But Webb was in no mood for any such entertainment. That dead-looking long monster that came crawling along a thousand feet behind the Growler was more than a mere raft of logs to him. It was his fortune.

He had never been able to accumulate money. He had earned fair wages, but he was not the penurious kind, and enjoyed such things as his pocket could afford. And he wanted to marry Kate Collamore.

But in that dark long line of logs lay possibilities for him that kept him alert, watching for any danger that might threaten his cherished infant. For so he regarded the Lumberbeast, and so it was.

Five thousand dollars over and above his wages were his when those logs had been taken apart and sold according to the contracts he had saved from cancellation for Burke & Bayliss.

It was no wonder, then, that he watched the slow-moving mass anxiously as the Growler, leaving the mouth of the Columbia and the booming guns of Fort Stevens, went straight out into the Pacific, turning neither to the north nor south till the tail of the great wooden vertebrate was far beyond the shoal-lines of the coast and Point Adams loomed up a misty hill in the distance.

Then the Growler slowly swung to the southward, Murphy taking the gentlest care of the Lumberbeast, not to jostle it nor awaken it from its lethargic sleep, for he, too, was pecuniarily interested in its safe arrival at the Golden Gate, and he, as well as Webb, dreamed dreams of what his share would bring to him in the way of advancement.

And the grim old sea-tug captain smiled as the dull nose of the big raft bowed to him.

"One thing, Webb," he said; "you brought that infant up properly. It obeys well. You deserve credit for that, and you so young."

Webb grinned appreciatively.

"But it's calm now," he said. "If the weather remains like this we'll have no trouble. You see, my little one has never been to sea before, and I don't know how she'll act in time of trouble."

"Oh, she looks pretty gentle," remarked Murphy. "Sort of phlegmatic temperament, don't you think?"

"Yes," replied Webb. "I never noticed any signs of a hysterical nature."

Murphy swept the horizon with his weather-wise eye, grinned again, and went about his business. Webb once more put his glass to his eye and studied the raft.

"I wonder," he said to himself, "how Tom is getting along. Anyway, he's

more comfortable there than in jail, and he escaped being lynched. That meets all arguments. I am really upholding the law."

This was such pleasant reasoning that he laughed a little.

"And, after all," he went on, "Chin Lee isn't bad company. He'll play fantan or something with Tom to kill time."

They were far out on the Pacific when they passed Tillamook Head, and still farther out when they left Cape Lookout behind. In fact, they could scarcely see the cape.

And the tugs puffed and shrieked back and forth to each other as they steadily but slowly pulled the fortune in logs toward its destination.

Webb went to bed one night when they were off Capt Blanco with less easiness in his mind than he had felt since the work of constructing the raft had begun. It looked, according to his own observations and Murphy's assertion, like a nasty night. But Webb was sleepy, and Murphy had insisted on his turning in.

"Can't tell," said the commodore of the fleet, "what this change of wind may kick up. I've seen storms come up suddenly off here. We'll have a blow. That's sure. And sure rain. How bad a sea it'll be I can't tell now. If it gets bad and I need your men, I'll call you. But they'll only be in the way now."

So Webb ordered his force to bed and went himself.

But he did not stay there long.

Inside of two hours the wind had increased to a hurricane. The rain was pelting down on a roughening ocean, and the great choppy waves slammed over the deck and up against the pilot-house in a way that was most unpleasant.

Webb could not sleep. He could not even remain in bed. Risking Murphy's anger, he got up, dressed himself, and went on deck.

He did not see Murphy. Murphy was at the wheel, and Webb had sense enough to keep away from there.

The great tug was plunging and groaning in the stress, but Webb made his way to the stern.

It was almost totally dark. He tried to make out the long black line of the whalebacks, but the weather was so thick he could see nothing.

"I hope Tom won't be frightened," he muttered to himself. "He's safe enough if he only stays under cover. But what else would he do in this storm?"

Webb felt of the two powerful cables that reached from the tug to the raft. He could feel the strain on them, and knew they were holding fast.

They were new, and had been constructed for this very task. He knew there was little danger of either of them giving way.

If the other two tugs could hold their own, and the raft came through this ordeal without injury, he knew the trick was won, and that nothing could stop the raft from entering San Francisco Harbor safe and sound.

Suddenly he saw the outlines of Murphy's form as he came aft, slopping through the foaming seas that broke over the starboard rail, and Murphy himself was examining the steel hawsers.

"I guess they'll hold," said Webb.

"Hello! You here? Couldn't sleep, eh? I don't wonder. But this is a hummer of a storm, eh? Never saw a worse one off the Oregon coast. Well, the cables are all right. They'll hold. Now, if the old behemoth only holds herself together. That backbone business may be all right. It may let her yield a little where too stiff a resistance would smash her."

"Sure," said Webb. "That was my theory. It was to meet just such an emergency as this that I built her that way."

"Wise guy, you. But I must get back. I've got all hands busy. Suppose you stay here and watch the cables. First symptom you find of any strands giving way, let me know. I can't lay to, for the cables would get tangled up."

"I'll stay," said Webb.

He settled himself for a long lone watch over the straining cables, and thought no more of Murphy.

He frequently tried to get a glimpse of the raft or one of the tugs, but even the lights on the Harry B. were hidden by the storm.

Now and then the Growler would let out a weird shriek, asking the others if all was well, and an answering shriek assured him that it was.

Webb had been there perhaps half an

hour, perhaps more, soaked to the skin, when he started suddenly. He fancied he had heard a snapping sound not far from the stern rail.

He quickly reached out and grasped one of the cables as far along its slippery length as he could go. It gave back a solid touch. He felt that this one was safe.

He went to the other, and ran his hand along that. His heart beat more rapidly as he felt one or two loose strands of steel thread.

"By Heaven, she's broken!" he muttered.

Then, grasping the rail with his left hand, and getting onto it, he reached farther out. His position was perilous, but the need of knowing the truth was great.

He felt relieved when there were no more loosened strands, and began to recover his position, but his joy perhaps had made him careless. However that may be, his hold on the rail was precarious. And then a tremendous sea came crashing over the side.

Not a heavy sea alone, but something it had picked up in its angry ravings—a barrel, a log, a hatch-cover, Webb never knew.

But whatever it was, it slammed against him, broke his hold, and with a shout that no one on board could hear above the din of the tempest, he went down into the foam-lashed water, and the cables had lost their watchman.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

WEBB had received a good many hard knocks in his day, and the blow that loosened his hold on the stern rail did not stun him. In fact, it had not hit his head.

It had not apparently done him any more injury than to plunge him helplessly into the boiling sea, and that was injury enough.

He went down like a stone, and it was well he did, for he thus escaped the terrible sucking action of the immense propeller of the tug that would have carved him into sharks' food in no time.

He did seem for an instant to lose consciousness, but it was only for an instant. Which way he went while submerged, or what good his writhing and fighting did, he was not sure, but he did come to the surface.

He could see the tug, her lights dancing a diabolic jig on the waves, and he shouted at the top of his voice. But the raging wind carried his voice another way, and Murphy, at the wheel, steered the Growler as best he could, ignorant that his friend Webb was calling to him to save his life.

Any attempt to swim with the mountains of water tossing him like a cork to suit their demoniac fancy was useless. An effort or two showed him the futility of it all and the necessity of reserving what strength he had left.

He was tossed high on the pinnacle of a thirty-foot wave, and then plunged like a stone far beneath the surface till he thought he would never breathe again.

He made no effort except to maintain his presence of mind and control his almost overwhelming desire to gasp for breath, when a single instant of forgetfulness meant certain death.

If there was any hope of rescue in his mind he did not know it.

Before him there rose a picture of a beautiful girl weeping in a cottage with her invalid mother, but that was all. The tension was so great he could think of nothing except to hold his breath when beneath the waves and store his lungs with fresh air when he had a chance.

Just why he fought so for life he could not have told himself. But he was young and strong, and there was that much animal in him that it prevented him giving up the struggle as many would have done, and as many have done, under the same circumstances.

He felt the littleness of himself, a helpless atom in the grasp of the greatest of nature's giants, but clung instinctively to life.

Sometimes his hand would touch some bit of floating débris, but before he could grasp it, if there was anything to grasp, another wave had dashed it away, and his fist clenched the sea-water that howled its riotous glee in his very face.

The Growler, with nobody on board who knew of this disaster, was plowing and plunging her way along, and the great

raft was laboring on after her, the cables still holding, and shrieks from the other two tugs showed that they, too, were making a gallant and thus far successful fight against the elements.

And so Webb, in his helplessness, was tossed and retossed, submerged and flung on high, for a longer period than he could ever calculate, but not nearly as long in reality as it seemed to his tortured mind.

The Harry B. had passed him, and he had roared away at the top of his utmost lung power, but the men on board the Harry B., like those on the Growler, were deafened by the storm to every other sound.

Even the sluggish tail of the Lumberbeast seemed but a plaything in the terrific grasp of the waves, and Webb thought he saw whaleback number five high in the air, a black, ugly outline, big enough to crush anything that came in its way, and heavy enough to resist anything but this mighty force of the Pacific when it forgets its name and becomes something else.

But he was near the tail of the raft, and now, roused to action by a suddenly inspired hope, he tried to swim. Swim he could not, but he found that every wave took him nearer the tail of the Lumberbeast.

He now gathered all his energies. He knew that one of these monstrous waves was going to pick him up like a toy and smash him against the side of the raft, and unless he could help himself resist the impact, he would roll a senseless or lifeless thing back into the sea, and the struggle for existence would be over.

The great black mound before him took shape in the darkness. He guessed the distance to be about fifty feet. Every wave was leaving him about ten feet nearer, but every wave was taking a fraction of the little strength he had left.

It was a question whether he would have enough to hold on with even if he was not crashed into insensibility when he struck.

Now he guessed the distance to be about thirty feet, and three more waves would take him to the raft. But it was slowly moving past him.

Two more great waves went by, and he seemed almost able to reach the side of the raft. He took a long breath and gathered his energies for the strike.

The next wave caught him, lifted him high above the sullen black thing that wouldn't be lifted more than twenty feet, and dropped him with a roar of rage three feet short.

But he reached and kicked. The next wave would smash him against the side.

After what seemed an endless time, though it was but the interim between two waves, his fingers closed with a vise-like grip on one of the chain cables that held the raft together. He set his teeth hard and reached for the next one.

They were about five feet apart, and with two in his grasp, his arm stretched across the intervening space, he waited but the fraction of a second for the wave.

It came. It struggled with him as some terrible devouring monster might struggle, angry at his feeble attempt to thwart it in its riot of rage. It pulled him almost apart in its frantic effort to break his hold on the chains, but his hands had taken an involuntary grip that would last even if death itself was the end of the struggle.

The wave rose and roared above his head, slammed its angry crest against the logs, carried the raft and Webb up, up, as far as the sodden bulk would go, and then slammed them down again, with Webb the victor.

He had just enough strength left to pull himself, inch by inch, up the side of the whaleback, reaching up with one hand for a fresh grip on one chain, and then lifting himself an inch or so up on the other.

By the time another wave landed against him he had his toes wedged into a crevice between two logs, and lay flat on his stomach and let the mountain of water roll up over him and rend itself in useless railings at his victory.

And then up again, a little farther, and flattening himself for another wave. So Webb crawled up the side of the big thing he had built, until he was on its back.

Then he let himself down on the leeward side and laughed a half mad laugh as the next wave broke against the bare side he had left and only drenched him again after its strength was spent.

Now he began working his way, chain

after chain, toward the opening of the tunnel.

He did not shout. He did not want Collamore to lose his life trying to help him, and Chin Lee was useless.

He knew he had a glorious chance to live now, and his blood warmed, and his heart beat stronger as he felt the new lease of life.

No words of mine can do justice to Webb's emotions as at last he reached the entrance to the cache, and peering in, saw the cheerful light of the lantern.

It might be wet in there. The dirty drip through the logs might have soaked everything that could be soaked, but it was safe. It was safer even than the cabin of the Growler, for nothing could sink it.

If the chains only held together, and he knew they would, not even the strength of the Pacific in a rage could drag them from that snug little room or menace their lives.

With a gloating heart he crawled into the tunnel and crept toward the cache.

It seemed a long crawl, for Webb was weaker than he thought, and now that safety was assured, the reaction after his tremendous effort was setting in.

He reached the inner end. He thrust his head through the opening.

The place was almost dry. The rug on the floor was scarcely soiled.

Chin Lee sat cowering in a corner, mumbling something that probably related to China and his waiting wife. Tom Collamore sat in the easy-chair, and—Webb's eyes started from their sockets—he had not thought of delirium, but now it had come—kneeling at his side, with her hands clasped, and her head raised in an attitude of prayer, was—Kate Collamore.

With a cry that brought everybody to a stand, Webb tumbled to the floor.

"Give me some brandy," he said thickly, and then he knew no more.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETHING THAT WAS UNEXPECTED.

WHEN Webb recovered consciousness he was lying stretched on a bed made by folding the rug, his head resting in Kate Collamore's lap. The girl was sitting on the log floor of the cache; Tom kneeling alongside, watching the effects of the stimulant he had administered.

Chin Lee stood staring in something very like terror at his master, who had come to them in such a mysterious way from out of the terrible storm.

"Thank God, he is awake and conscious," exclaimed Tom. "How do you feel, old man?"

"Pretty fair," said Webb. "A little light in the head. No wonder. I thought I was going off it when I saw Kate. Is it really you, Kate? How did this happen?"

"I think your own sudden appearance here needs an explanation as well as my presence," answered Kate, passing her hand caressingly over Webb's hair.

"My explanation is simple enough, when you know it," he said. "All there is to it is this. I was set by Murphy to watching the cables to report a break, and something came at me out of the sea and whacked me overboard. I was slammed, fired, juggled, and nearly drowned, till I struck this thing, and held on. Here I am, as you see. It doesn't sound quite as exciting as it really was, but I wouldn't want to go through it again."

"I should think not," exclaimed Kate, with a shudder. "You must have had a terrible experience, although you tell it so lightly. My own story has nothing dramatic about it. As you know, you told me you were to get Tom out of the jail at one o'clock. And on the way to the shore you were to stop at the cottage.

"Oh, I did want to see Tom so much before he left. I couldn't help thinking I might never see him again. There was no telling where he would be driven by the officers when they began a search for him. I even feared he might be shot and killed.

"Well, one o'clock came, and I counted the ticks of the kitchen clock, thinking now you were at the jail, now you and Byke were arranging things, and now you were on your way to the house.

"I can't tell you how my heart beat. All sorts of terrors loomed up before me. I thought of you being shot by Curtis, and oh—everything horrible came into my mind and I was almost mad. By a mercy of God, mother went to sleep exhausted.

"Then came that horrible shouting from the streets. I could hear it, and every word was like a knife cutting into my heart. I heard them shout about lynching Tom, and I knew that you would not desert him, and I sat cowering in a corner of the kitchen by the window waiting for pistol-shots. I pictured both of you riddled with bullets and the howling mob of half drunken men dancing round you.

"Oh, I can't tell you what I felt or feared. It was terrible.

"Then came a lull, but no shots. I seemed to feel then that you had got Tom out safely, and I opened the back door to let you in quickly to hide. But you did not come.

"Then I heard men talking of Tom's escape, and ten masked men who had wounded Byke, and men came to the house with Curtis, who looked in every corner. They woke mother, who cried, and almost let them know she expected Tom. But she got her nerve back, and they went away satisfied.

"Then they surrounded the house to catch Tom if he did come near, and as time went on I began to hope you had got away to the raft.

"Then I heard somebody speak of how Curtis had suspected you, but you had been writing letters all night, and that assured me that Tom was safe on the raft.

"But I couldn't let him go like that. You know something of my nature, Dave, and my love for Tom, and you'd understand that I couldn't let him go without seeing him, perhaps for the last time.

"I resolved to be careful, Dave, for your sake as well as his, but I felt that I really must see him before the raft was started. You'd feel that way if it was your brother or sister, only it wouldn't likely happen that way to a girl. Anyway, I just couldn't resist.

"I told mother what I was going to do, and kissed her, and took her loving message to Tom. I put on this dark dress, so that I wouldn't be noticed in the shadows, and crept out the back door like a thief.

"You know that row of spruce-trees along Deacon Fairweather's lot. Well, the shadows are deep there, and I made my way along to a pasture, and crossed that on a run. There was no one there, and no one saw me. Then I got into the old wood-road and went to Jennie Compton's landing.

"You know Jennie and I are partners in a rowboat. It is a light little thing—or was—and I rowed like an Indian around the shore to the outer side of the raft and then to it.

"Mr. Jones saw me and helped me on the raft and showed me how to crawl in where Tom was. It was such a safe and cozy place I just cried for very joy. I don't know how many times I spoke your name, and Tom was petting me and coaxing me to go back to mother, when we heard Mr. Jones.

"He shouted in through the tunnel that he must go, and that I must stay where I was. He said he had sunk the boat. It seemed that some change had been made. Instead of your coming for him, as he expected, some one else was coming. He said he couldn't even get to you to tell you.

"Of course, I was terribly frightened, and anxious about mother, but I knew I must obey. If I got excited and went outside I would spoil the whole thing just when the success of your plan was assured.

"I cried a little. I think I was not so sure this place was so safe when it came to living in it myself, but I had taken the risk, and now I must take the medicine. I couldn't pull you all in danger, so I remained, and like you, here I am."

"Well, there is no use mourning over it now," said Webb. "Still, I will admit that I wish you were safe at home with your mother.

"There is no telling what thoughts your absence, when it is discovered, will give Curtis. Of course you could not be suspected of being one of Byke's mythical ten masked men, but everybody knows how you and I—that we were going to be married some day—and they may—it's no use speculating what they may think or do.

"But we are here, and storm though it may, we are safe, I think. I fancy Murphy will have a fit when he misses me, and another when he sees me again. There. We've done the explaining act. Let that go. How has the old beast acted during the storm?"

"She's superb," said Tom. "Of course we knew we were rising and falling, and there was banging of the waves —there—you can hear them now. But the water doesn't come through enough to hurt, and take it altogether, it's simply great."

"I am glad of one thing," commented Webb; "it doesn't roll like a ship."

"She's steady as a barn floor," rejoined Tom. "Are we far from shore?"

"You couldn't see the shore even if it was daylight and there was no storm."

"Heavens! Are we as far out in the ocean as that?" asked Kate, with a shudder. "I fancied we'd crawl along the coast."

"If we had," said Webb, "we'd never have lived out this storm. Murphy knew his business when he went straight out for several miles. This thing wants lots of room."

Webb's watch had stopped, and Tom had none, everything having been taken from him in the jail. But Kate wore hers, and when they looked at it they found the night had gone.

"It is still raging outside," said Webb. "There's no use running any risk going out now. We are going along all right. How's the grub?"

He was sitting up now, and felt more like himself.

"Grub!" cried Tom. "Why, we are living like the inhabitants of an enchanted castle. An enchanted yacht, I should say. I have only to remark, 'Chin Lee, wouldn't it be nice to have some brandied peaches for breakfast?' and there you are, as fine as a fiddle. I don't think there ever was a refugee as well housed and fed as I am."

"Blandied pleaches," said Chin Lee, "I glet 'em plenty soon. Velly fine here. No cookee anything. No makee coffee. Wine, plenty good wine."

"I didn't dare risk the coffee part," said Webb. "Of course, this lumber is insured against fire, and if it were known that you had a fire on board it would break Burke & Bayliss's insurance, and the smoke would start an investigation. But you can get along, can't you?"

"Get along! Well, I guess. And so can you. A glass of rich Tokay washes down a biscuit first rate. Coffee! Nothing so cheap and common as that in this floating hotel. Chin Lee, suppose we have breakfast."

"Velly good. Bleakfast soon. Makee tlable out of the water blalls?"

"Yes," said Tom, pointing to the two barrels of fresh water, "that will do for a table. Since we have such distinguished company, I suppose we must put on style. We got along without it before."

They enjoyed their meal. At the rate they had traveled thus far, Webb estimated the voyage to San Francisco would take about ten days, or two weeks at the most, and there was an ample supply of food and water for twice that time. They did not stint themselves.

After breakfast they played cards, Tom and Webb smoking, and the morning passed as pleasantly as though they were on a yacht.

Webb felt, down in his heart, rather glad of the adventure.

Every little while he would look out through the tunnel, but the sea was still surging, and it was not safe for any one to go out. And as for that, he was in a quandary what to do.

If he showed himself and shouted to the tugs, he must leave Kate and Tom, or else he must disclose their presence to Murphy, and this meant the crews of the three tugs as well.

Toward evening they could tell by the decreasing motion of the raft that the storm was subsiding.

"It's pretty dark now," said Webb. "I'm going out to take a look."

He went out. He was gone ten minutes. When he returned his face was ghastly white.

"What's the matter?" cried Tom. "What has happened?"

"We are adrift," said Webb. "The tail of the Lumberbeast, whaleback number five, has broken loose. The tugs and the rest of the raft are out of sight."

CHAPTER IX.

ALONE.

KATE sprang from her chair with a cry of dismay. Even Collamore, who had just escaped from one danger, turned white at this suggestion of another.

"What do you mean, Dave?" asked Kate. "How could anything break

loose? Wasn't it built strong enough for the storm?"

"I thought it was," answered Dave with a laugh that had no mirth in it. "I planned the thing to stand anything I thought could happen. But I certainly did not plan on any such storm as that. Even the new steel cables built for the Growler felt the strain. It must have been terrible."

"Terrible," repeated Collamore soberly. "But the Growler is all right. She's got her power."

"Do you mean to say?" asked Kate, "that we are all alone out on the Pacific Ocean?"

"It can be easily proved," answered Webb. "It has stopped raining and the sea is calm enough. There is no danger of being seen, because there is no one to see. Come take a look."

As he spoke he started first through the tunnel. Kate followed, and Collamore brought up the rear. The Chinaman was frightened enough as it was. He remained behind.

"You see," said Webb, when they stood together on the whaleback, "we are certainly alone."

The sky was clear, save for scudding clouds left over from the storm, and the stars were making an effort to cheer the scene. On all sides of them was the sea. The section of the raft they were on was about two hundred and fifty feet long, and lay like a dead thing in the water.

If it had any motion it was imperceptible. It seemed to lack even that buoyancy that permits a ship adrift to rise and fall with the great swells. The waves struck upon it and broke with the same noise as on a solid rock.

"What will become of us now?" asked Kate, as the full realization of the disaster broke upon her. "What can we do?"

"We can do nothing for ourselves," answered Webb, who had regained his coolness. "Of course, we will float with the tides and currents in some direction, but I can't tell what direction it will be. For the present, at least, there is nothing to worry about. So far as sinking is concerned, we are as safe from any such catastrophe as we were before. As long as the whaleback holds together we simply can't sink. And I don't think there is any danger of the cables breaking. Each part was strongly built, and the strength of each was independent of the others. And we are well supplied with food."

"As for food," said Kate, "we could last a long time. And it is almost impossible that this big raft could float in this part of the ocean without being seen. We are too far south for the Alaska fleet, although there are boats between Sitka and San Francisco. We can do nothing but keep ourselves well and wait for a ship to take us off."

"But I have read," said Collamore, "of things floating for months and years. Derelicts, for instance."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Kate. "We might float across the ocean."

"Well," said Webb, "things as strange as that have happened, but I never heard of such a big voyage where human beings were aboard and able to signal. A derelict may be sighted now in one part of the ocean, and in a very distant part a year from now. But it may have been sighted any number of times between, and if there were people on board they could be taken off."

"Anyway," broke in Collamore, noting a look of alarm still lingering on Kate's face, "we haven't been afloat long enough to worry. We've food enough for a long time, and there must be any number of fishing vessels going up and down the coast. I don't suppose there's any danger of rocks."

"I don't know," said Webb. "I'm a lumberman. And I know we are on a pile of lumber that will float as long as the Pacific Ocean has any water in it. If the cables stood the last storm they will stand anything."

"But the blamed thing left the whole raft."

"I know it did, and the fact that it is in good condition proves that my theory of big raft-building is correct. Had the entire raft been built like the others have been before, in one solid mass, it could not have stood the buffeting it received, and the ocean would now be covered with floating logs, and shipping would be in danger.

"As it is, a section has broken away and is just as valuable as before. It

can't be lost. Whoever tows this to port will get big salvage. Oh, my plan of raft-building is all right for the raft. It is specially good for you."

"For me?" asked Tom. "Why, for goodness sake?"

"Well, you know that if we remained with the fleet it was going to be a difficult thing to get you off at San Francisco and onto another ship. As it is now, we may meet a ship that is not able to tow the raft, but will accept you as a passenger to their port of destination."

"Likely thing, that," said Tom bitterly. "A man is likely to have a lot of passage-money after escaping from Wigwood jail."

"I have some money. Fortunately I did not leave it in the cabin on the Growler. I can't trust everybody. I think I've enough to pay your passage—if we meet a ship."

Tom smiled and looked at Kate, and stared as he saw her face turn red.

"But—that's so," he said. "I couldn't go and leave you and Kate on the raft."

Webb looked troubled.

"There is an old law," he said—"at least I've read of it being done—by which a sea captain may perform marriages. If we meet a ship that will take you, we will have the captain marry Kate and me."

"But," gasped Kate, "why can't we all go?"

"For the simple reason," said Webb firmly, "that this raft belongs to Burke & Bayliss and as long as I am on board she is mine. I'll save something for them, and perhaps for myself."

"Then we've settled the policy for all three," said Tom. "Now, I suppose Webb is captain of this craft?"

"No, I think Kate should be captain. I'm purser, since I carry your passage-money, and you are only a passenger, or stowaway, which is worse. Kate is captain."

"Of what? What is the name of my craft?" asked Kate, trying to join the others in what she saw was an effort to be gay and cheerful.

They argued about that, but came to no conclusion. It was finally agreed that as the raft had been only the tail of the Lumberbeast, it was not entitled to the honor of the name. And as the night was wearing on they grew sleepy and returned to the cabin.

"How shall we sleep?" asked Tom.

"Don't ask me," said Webb. "Ask the captain."

"I can easily answer that," replied Kate. "Your coming makes no difference, except that you will be three in a room now. I have the little room, and the lantern placed between in the well-room lights all."

"That's good so far," said Webb. "Now for the watch."

"We've kept no watch," rejoined Kate. "There was nothing to watch for before. I'm afraid I'm a poor captain. I'll leave that to you."

"It is necessary," said Webb, "for somebody to be awake to look out for a passing ship. We don't want to lose any chances. And we don't want to be too quick. We've got Tom to think of. We don't want to hail a ship bound for San Francisco or any of our ports."

"That's so," said Tom. "That would make all your efforts useless."

It was arranged for Tom to take the first watch. With some cigars to keep him company, he went outside. Crouching in the entrance to the tunnel, he sat and looked off across the water.

His mind was busy with Wigwood. He wondered how his mother had stood the loss and mystery of Kate's disappearance. He wondered how Curtis had succeeded in his search.

His watch ended without incident. Webb was to follow him, and when he crawled back he woke Dave.

"Anything?" asked Webb.

"Nothing."

Webb, taking some cigars from the supplies, went out on deck and sat, as Tom had done, in the tunnel.

He was deep in meditation when up from the black line that swept around him came a little eye.

It was a very little eye at first. But it brought Dave Webb to his feet.

CHAPTER X.

BOMBARDED.

INEXPERIENCED as Dave Webb was in matters pertaining to the sea, he knew that the eye of fire that had so suddenly

turned on him was a gigantic search-light.

At first a great wave of pleasure broke over Webb, for here was the very thing he had been sitting outside to watch for.

"Hey, in there!" he shouted, putting his head in at the tunnel. "A ship!"

"What's that, Dave?" came the voice of Tom. "What say?"

"Ship! Ship ahoy! Come out."

Tom was soon outside, and Kate came and crouched at the inner end of the tunnel.

"Tell me what it proves to be," she told them. "Chin Lee and I will wait here."

"We are fortunate, indeed," said Webb. "She is undoubtedly a big one, and seems to be coming this way. You'll get your passage, anyway."

"Let me think a little now," said Tom. "I am not so delighted as I expected to be. What do you suppose she is?"

"I don't know. I can't make out any lights but the search-light. She seems to be going fast."

The light had been swinging in a half circle, and then became suddenly fixed on the raft.

"She sees us!" cried Webb. "Shall we try to show ourselves?"

"I've been thinking about that. We've been comfortable here, and I don't like to take chances. She might be heading for San Francisco, or any of the United States ports, and what will I do there without you to help? We'll not have another opportunity to build a raft, and the chances are that any captain of a big ship would give me up. And now that I escaped, I'd be worse off than ever if recaptured. I've been thinking that my only chance is with some small vessel, some Mexican adventurer, or pirate, or something like that."

"I don't suppose the chance of falling in with a pirate is very great," said Webb. "Still, I think your reasoning is sound enough."

Suddenly there was a boom.

"Get inside!" cried Webb. "It's a war-ship, and she's firing at us."

With a gasp Tom wriggled into the tunnel, and almost knocked Kate over when he emerged at the other end. Webb came tumbling after.

"What's the matter?" asked Kate. "What has frightened you?"

"Whatever it is, it's firing at us," said Webb anxiously. "I can't understand that. What war-shp would waste powder on a raft?"

The sound of another dull boom came in through the tunnel. By this time Chin Lee was kneeling in terror in a corner, and the others stood with blanched faces, looking at each other in consternation.

They had talked over the dangers of hunger and sinking and another storm, and had dismissed them. Nobody had thought of such a thing as being fired at by cannon.

There was a sudden thud and jar that made the big raft tremble.

"My Heaven, we've been struck!" said Collamore. "What next?"

Webb's face went deadly white.

"They send out ships to destroy derelicts sometimes," he said. "I've read of it, but never thought of it as happening to us. And they use dynamite to do it. If they send a charge of dynamite aboard us we are done for."

Not one of the group had ever passed so terrible a moment.

"What can we do?" gasped Tom. "If we go outside we may get struck."

"But it would let them know we are here," said Webb. "I'll take the chance, I guess. We can't get ourselves destroyed without an appeal."

"Don't go," said Kate, who had suddenly become the calmest of them all. "Let me tell you what I think. If this is a boat sent out to destroy a derelict, it is a government boat. To ask help from a government boat means that we have got to explain the whole business. We've got to tell who Tom is and why he is here. Tom would be taken back to certain death, and you to certain imprisonment.

"It is possible that even dynamite will not shatter the raft enough to make it sink or break up."

"It can't sink," said Webb. "All of it will float. The thing we want is to have it float in one piece."

"There!" shouted Tom. "That's dynamite."

A terrific spasm had shaken the raft. Kate was thrown to the floor of the

cabin, and the others were knocked hither and thither. But there was no apparent change in their portion of the raft.

"That's enough of that," said Webb. "You hide in the other room and put out the lantern. I'll fix this."

He began crawling through the tunnel again. The ship was nearer than before, and Webb judged it to be a revenue cutter. The big search-light was still playing on the raft, and Webb fancied he could make out the dark outlines of a group of men hanging along the forward rails.

A lull in the firing had come, and Webb stood up on top of the raft and waved his hands and shouted:

"Ship ahoy!"

The search-light was full on him. Whether his voice carried or not he did not know. The vessel had hove to, and he waited in suspense to see what would happen next.

A long silence rewarded him. Then he saw the search-light swing again. It was now, like a great eye, watching a small launch coming toward him.

"All right," came a voice from the launch. "We'll take you off."

"What ship is that?" asked Webb.

"The United States ship Muskrat."

"Revenue?"

"Yes."

"After derelicts?"

"After one derelict. We couldn't make you out. What sort of craft is that?"

"This is a raft. Belongs to Burke & Bayliss. You nearly blew me up."

"Come aboard. We'll take you."

"But I don't want you to take me. This isn't a derelict. I am in charge of the lumber. We got astray in a storm, but a tug will come for us from San Francisco."

"Do you mean to say you insist on remaining there? I'll take you aboard to the captain."

"You'll do nothing of the kind. I am entitled to remain on board in the interest of the owners. Take me off if you dare."

"Shall we tow the raft ashore?"

"No. Burke & Bayliss have their own tugs. I suppose they'll send the Growler, Captain Murphy. But I shall not desert till he comes."

"Well, you're a plucky fool, at least," was the reply. "I'll report what you say. Got any grub aboard?"

"Yes. I don't want anything."

The launch turned and went back to the ship. The big search-light studied the raft for a time, and then the steamer began to move.

She came nearer.

"Raft ahoy!" came a shout.

"Ahoy yourself," answered Webb.

"What's your name?"

"Dave Webb, foreman for Burke & Bayliss."

"Seen anything of an oil ship floating deserted?"

"No."

"Well, that's what we thought you were. She's around here somewhere. Don't make too close an acquaintance. She's dangerous. I'll report you at San Francisco."

Webb watched the steamer depart and hurried to examine the raft as well as he could in the darkness. He went carefully along the whole length of it, testing the cables.

Two had been shattered, but the logs, after being tossed a little, had settled, and unless the waves came very high they would remain in place.

Then he went back to report. He found an anxious group, but soon relieved them.

"Who but you would have thought of that?" said Tom. "And now we'll wait to see what comes next."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRE SHIP.

It was late the next morning when Dave was roused by Tom nudging his arm. There was something in the way the touch was given that warned Webb, and he simply opened his eyes.

"Kate hasn't showed up yet," said Tom, "and I'm glad of it. I don't want to cause any unnecessary alarm. But come."

In a moment both were outside, and Tom pointed to something not very far away. Webb's face went white again.

A big ship, with sails partly set and certainly on fire, was bearing immediately down on them.

A cry of horror burst from Webb.

"That must be the oil ship the Muskrat was looking for," he said with a gasp. "And she is coming directly our way."

"She is certainly going to strike us," said Collamore. "I don't see how she can miss us."

"Miss us! Not by a hairbreadth."

While they were standing there, perfectly horror-stricken, Kate came through the tunnel.

"What's that?" she cried in a voice that proved she knew well what it was. "We are lost at last. Oh, my mother!"

It was with the most despairing thoughts that they watched the coming ship, a long, low vessel, showing she was heavily laden.

"I can't understand," said Collamore, "why she doesn't burn faster. She makes a lot of smoke, but little blaze."

"So much the worse for us," rejoined Webb. "When the crew deserted her, after discovering she was on fire, they closed all the hatches. There is fire enough, but it is being held in check by lack of air. It will result in an explosion, and then you'll see fire enough. Oh, if we could only move this thing!"

Kate's face was deadly pale and her lips framed themselves to a prayer.

The ship was not moving very swiftly. But the little drift of the raft was made up by her own, and their relative positions remained the same except that the distance between them grew steadily smaller.

"My God," said Webb. "The horror of standing here doing nothing and watching death come down on us!"

"I felt like that in Wigwood jail," added Tom.

"But you had Webb to help you," cried Kate. "I see no hope. Oh, I am not afraid of death itself, but to die like this, out on the ocean, and to suffer perhaps for hours."

Then suddenly a frenzy seized her. She sprang to Webb and threw her arms around his neck.

"At least I can die with you," she said. "Why should I repine when at any time I would die for you. But don't let me suffer. Let me die first. I know you have your revolver in your pocket. Please, Dave, don't let me suffer. I've always had a horror of that."

"Hush, Kate, dear," said Webb. "It is not certain yet. The wind may change or die down and we may drift apart."

"This won't die down," said Tom gloomily. "Dave, I'm like Kate. I'm not afraid to die. If I had a chance to die like a man I could meet it half way. But first I am lied about and convicted of a crime I never thought of committing, and now even the Almighty pens me here to die like a rat in a trap."

"Don't, Tom," pleaded Kate. "Don't speak of the Almighty like that. He has His plans. We should not murmur. But it is hard. I admit it is hard."

Tears were streaming down her face as she spoke, and her arm was still around Webb's neck.

Just then Chin Lee, having missed the others, came out, and he at once grasped the danger.

His cries of terror were so awful that Webb, to save Kate from them, threatened to throw him overboard. But Chin Lee was not one of those Chinamen who die heroically, and he screamed all the more.

Finally Webb and Tom took him and thrust him back into the tunnel, where he lay moaning in abject anguish.

"The only thing about that is," said Tom, "he's in the way. If we want to get in he'll block us."

"I doubt if we shall want to go in," returned Webb. "There are some loose logs over yonder left by the dynamite. The Muskrat did that much for us, anyway. I've a mind to see what we can do to construct a smaller raft of those, and leave this if the fire ship reaches it. I don't like to risk the open sea on a small raft, and we won't leave till we are driven off. But I think it is better than dying here. We'll have one chance more, at least."

"Good!" cried Tom, hugging Kate in his joy. "Something seems to tell me we'll pull through yet. If old Dave only lasts to do our thinking for us we'll fight along a while. Shall we begin?"

"I'll go see," said Dave.

He made his way to where the loose logs lay and waved his hands.

"It's no use," he said as he came back. "I fancied the blast would have broken some of them. But those logs are not to be moved by us. There is not a log

there less than eighty feet long. One would do if we could get it in the water. But we can't."

Kate was breathing hard. The little hope born of Webb's thoughtless words had fled. He should have known, he who had handled logs, that the logs of the Lumberbeast could not be moved by two men and a woman. But in such distress as theirs the keenest mind grasps at impossible straws.

"The wind is increasing," said Tom.

He, like Kate, had relapsed into stolidity.

And the wind *was* increasing. The odor of burning oil was strong on the raft, and there had been no change in the direction of the ship.

The increasing wind seemed not only to increase her speed, but to fan the fire. It certainly was fiercer than it had been before, and the three stood fascinated, looking at it.

Webb turned, for no particular reason, and shouted as if he was crazed.

"We are safe!" he cried. "Safe, I tell you! And now get inside. The Muskrat is returning."

Tom's face was almost blank as he looked.

"The Muskrat?" he repeated vacantly. "The Muskrat?"

With a fury now born of renewed hope that had some foundation, Webb reached in and grasped the feet of the Chinaman and hauled him out. He turned to take Kate's hand to help her in, but she was unconscious in Tom's arms.

"I'll get in and you give her to me." said Webb. "They'll put out the fire; and I don't want them to see you and Kate. I don't mind Chin."

Between them they got Kate in through the tunnel and laid her on the rug in her own room.

"Get some brandy and give her," said Webb. "Don't come out unless I call you. We are all right now."

The accelerated speed of the ship had brought her within two hundred feet, and a pall of black smoke hung over the raft. Webb watched the ship, wondering if it would set fire to the raft before the Muskrat could arrive.

Each decreasing foot of space made Webb's heart beat faster, and finally with a crash the ship struck the raft.

The great pile of logs seemed not to feel the impact. But the effect was different on the ship.

There was a terrific explosion. A mountain of flame, blazing oil, and barrels flew into the air and fell on all sides. Blazing oil fell on the raft, and Webb looked for the Muskrat.

What to do he did not know. There was every reason to believe that the oil would set the raft on fire. There was danger that the suffocating smoke would penetrate to the cabin and kill Tom and Kate. But he was so benumbed by the disaster that he did nothing.

His mind seemed to have deserted him. He gave one hopeless look around, and then as a cloud of dense black smoke rolled down on him he sank to the raft unconscious.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGER ON THE RAFT.

WEBB recovered consciousness as suddenly as he lost it, but not immediately. Just how long he lay on the raft he did not know, but a plunge into the sea restored him.

Floundering near him and clinging to him was the Chinaman, too terrified to scream and too helpless in the water to assist in his own rescue.

Chin had been lying near Webb when something happened, and in his terror he had rolled over to Webb and pulled him into the sea.

That which had happened to add to the terror of Chin should really have lessened it. It was the arrival of the Muskrat.

Webb saw, as soon as he came to his senses, that the government vessel was close at hand and at work on the blazing oil ship, but just what was being done he did not know. In fact, he had little time to care.

The Chinaman in his floundering had got them both some distance away from the raft, and it was no easy task to recover the space with the frightened man in tow.

But Webb managed it, and succeeded in dragging himself and his former cook up to safety.

The work that was being done by the

officers and crew of the Muskrat was wonderful. Men had leaped overboard to reach the raft and put out the blaze, and the fire ship was already being blown to pieces with dynamite.

The booming of the guns, the crackling of the flames, and the black pall of smoke that hung over everything made a thrilling scene of terror at sea.

Webb stood looking at it all, unable to do anything himself, and wondering with fear and consternation how Kate and Tom were faring in the cabin.

It was all over almost before he realized it. There was a final and tremendous charge from the Muskrat, and a great commotion on the oil ship, and with a hissing, seething, and final upheaval of the sea, the flaming hulk sank slowly out of sight.

The relief was so great that Webb let out a shout. Everything seemed changed. The flames that were threatening the raft seemed to feel the loss of the fire ship, and quickly succumbed to the heroic efforts of the Muskrat's men.

And the result of it all was merely the charring of the topmost logs.

The young officer in command of the fire-fighting crew came to where Webb was standing.

"You've had another narrow escape," he said. "Rather worse this time than the danger from our guns. We had not gone far. We were moving slowly, and not in a direct line, and the lookout spied the oil ship. We can't understand how she held her fire so long. She was deserted three days ago, and reported burning. But there was no air, I suppose, and it wasn't the oil that was burning. When she struck you the oil exploded.

"Well, you are a lucky man. But who is this? You had no one with you before."

"That is Chin Lee, my cook and servant. He was asleep in my cabin when we met before. He is badly frightened."

"I don't wonder. Then you have a cabin here?"

"A small one we made by leaving out a few logs. Wish to inspect it?"

"No. I've had enough. Of course, after this experience you are ready to be taken off."

"No more than before," said Webb. "I am here for a purpose, and shall remain. I thank you for your offer."

"It seems foolhardy."

"It is my duty. I will thank you, however, if you report me to Captain Murphy at San Francisco."

"I certainly shall," replied the officer, as he signaled for a launch. "I congratulate Burke & Bayliss on their representative. You are certainly a brave man."

Webb did not wait for the Muskrat to move before he got through the tunnel as speedily as possible. He found both Kate and Tom conscious, and the cabins filled with a dry, smoky air, but not uncomfortable.

"It's all over," he said. "We are safe. The Muskrat put out the fire and sank the fire ship."

"Thank God!" murmured Kate, and in their gratitude they were silent while she whispered her prayer of thanks.

They resumed their mode of life on board the raft, which could scarcely be called monotonous, and resolved to spend no more time keeping regular watch.

"All I want now," said Webb, "is to see Murphy and the Growler. We'll make a clean breast of the whole thing to Murphy, and I fancy the old fellow will help us out."

Tom bowed to this decision. Again that day they saw a ship making, they thought, for San Francisco, but they did not signal.

They ate, drank, smoked, played cards, told stories, and watched the vast expanse of ocean. They saw gulls and porpoises, and all sorts of interesting life in the sea and air, and clouds scurrying overhead, and the ever-changing hues of water.

At times they were very near to being seasick, but a little brandy or lemon or some other thing somebody had heard of helped them, or they thought it did, and they escaped that misery.

The great bulk of the raft kept it steady, and their day was spent pleasantly enough.

When night came they were ready for sleep, and the evening around the lantern in the cabin was a short one, and they all slept soundly.

Webb was the first to awake. It was a queer sensation, awakening in that

place, with the lantern still burning between the two rooms, and the smell of the ocean full in his nostrils, and the soft soughing of the water in the "tub" Garry had provided, and the strongest appetite he had known in months.

Tom and Chin Lee were both sound asleep, and he supposed Kate was, and there was nothing to do but crawl through the long tunnel and see what the ocean would provide as a harbinger of what might befall them that day.

So, treading lightly, not to disturb the sleepers, Webb walked to the tunnel and began his exit.

Peering out through the long narrow space, he could see it was daylight, and there was the Pacific, now almost as quiet as its name implies, and Webb crawled slowly toward the open air.

He was in no hurry, and took his time, giving deep exhalations and deep intakes of the fresher air that was coming in to him. As he progressed, his range of vision grew wider, until, instead of a small spot of ocean afar off, he saw a growing circle of sea, all peaceful and calm and lovely.

But when he went a little farther he stopped, and his face began to wrinkle. His eyes were fixed and staring. Just within the expanded circle of his vision sat a man.

His back was turned toward the tunnel entrance, and he was sitting flat on the deck with his legs spread wide apart. He was dressed like a sailor, and he was smoking a rich black pipe, the odor of which floated back to Webb. In fact, the stranger seemed altogether wonderfully and ridiculously comfortable and well satisfied with himself.

Where had this man come from? Had the broken-off tail of the Lumberbeast been taken in tow without anybody on board knowing it, or was this some fellow who had been afloat from a wreck and saved, as Webb himself had been saved, by hanging to the chains that held the logs together?

As Webb silently gazed, the sailor turned, lay on his back, kicked up his heels in some kind of extravagant joy, and then rose, as if to shout to somebody not within the range of Webb's vision.

Webb gasped again. For this man's face was not the kind of sailor's face he had seen on any of Murphy's tugs, and the short legs and dark, swart, and ugly face was not like any face among Murphy's crews. The many-ringed fingers were not like the fingers of American sailors, and the short knife, or sword, or cutlas, or whatever it was the fellow had hanging to his waist, looked ominous.

And then a peculiar terror came into Webb's heart, not the terror of a coward, but the terror of a brave man who thinks of others before himself, and he crawled back a little so that the evil face could not find him. And then he heard, in a peculiar accent, the strange man bawl out to some one:

"Lash fast, all hands. If we can't kill American seal, we'll steal American wood, and get money anyway."

Webb, digesting this, crept back to the cabin and woke up Tom.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHITHER BOUND?

"WHAT is it?" asked Tom, sitting up, rubbing his eyes, and staring in the gloom at Webb. "Anything the matter?"

"Don't talk so loud," said Webb, speaking in a low voice himself. "What do you think has happened?"

"Run aground? Been run down by a ship?"

"None of these. We've been abducted."

"Abducted! What do you mean?"

"I don't exactly know myself. But I woke up and went outside to take a look. No, I didn't go outside, either. I got almost out, and saw a man—a sailor—sitting on deck smoking a pipe."

"The deuce you did! One of your people? One of Murphy's men?"

"No. I wish it was. He's a wild kind of beast, not an American, evidently, and his aspect is piratical. And, what's worse, there are more of them."

"All alike?"

"I only saw the one. But he shouted something about sealing, and said they'd steal the lumber."

"'M!" said Tom musingly. "That's a pretty good fix. They must have a ship of some kind."

"That's certain."

"And the beauty of it is we daren't go out and look them over. Is that your view?"

"Accurately. If it was a matter for you and me only, we might take the chance. But now we've got Kate to think of. As I understand what I heard, I should say that we have been discovered—not ourselves, but the raft—by a gang of seal-robbers. He said something about not being able to get the seals.

"You know the government keeps two or three revenue-boats up among the islands to keep off just such fellows who know no mercy or humanity, but slay, slay, in and out of season, and kill what they can't use out of pure brutality. I fancy this is such a gang, and perhaps they have been met and defeated by one of our ships, and are mad about it. Now, they see a good thing in this lumber, and are going to make up what they have lost in seals."

"'M! And such a gang is apt to be rough, eh? Not the kind we would care to have Kate meet."

"She can't meet them. We've got to be mighty careful."

"About what?" asked the voice of Kate, who just then came from her own room. "What has made you two so solemn and timid?"

Webb told her.

While she listened to him she was looking at the floor and the roof of the cabin.

"We are being towed," she said. "Don't you feel the difference in the motion? We dip now. It was just like this while we were being towed by the Growler. The motion was endwise with the raft. Then, when we broke loose and drifted, the motion came from the side as the waves hit us, and we rolled a little. There is no rolling now. We have returned to the dip."

"You are right," asserted Webb. "They undoubtedly have a steamer and have taken us in tow. The next thing is where are they taking us? Of course, we can only ask the question. We can't answer it till we arrive—somewhere."

Kate was quite a little disturbed by this new turn of affairs, but said little. She knew that this was an emergency in which she could be of no assistance to her brother and Webb. She was the one for whom they were exercising their care. It was for her they were anxious.

They were both brave, she knew that. Without her to think of, they would have braved the meeting with the strangers.

"I am awfully sorry now," she said.

"About what?" asked Webb.

"Because we did not go on the Muskrat. If I had left you, you would have felt more free to act for yourselves. I know—I understand just what you think and don't say. I am now a burden to you."

"There, there, Kate, dear," said Webb. "None of that. It may not be a bad thing at all, and we may be really the gainers by this. One thing is certain. They haven't hooked on to this thing for fun. They want to turn it into money, and they can't do that out here. They will make as quick a port as possible to sell the logs. Now, we are moving, and something will come of it soon.

"I think the best thing for us to do is to remain in here out of sight till we do reach a port. Then we shall be safer in showing ourselves. No matter where we go, there will be some kind of law and order, and we must trust to luck and our own brains for the rest."

Chin Lee, who had also awakened, wagged his head mournfully.

"Me no savé all dlis. Maybe bimeby come to my countlee. Velly good. All same like yours, velly safe."

"It's a long way to your country, Chin," said Webb. "I don't fancy they will take us there."

There was but the one thing to do, and that was to follow Webb's advice. All day they remained inside, wondering what was going on outside.

The day was very long and wearisome. Every minute they expected to hear some kind of commotion, for if one of Murphy's tugs came after the lost logs there would be a pretty fight. But Murphy's tug did not come, and night found them no wiser than they were before.

"When it gets good and dark," said Webb, "I'll go outside and have a look. I'll be careful not to get caught. Trust me for that. But it will be some satis-

faction to know what kind of a thing is towing us."

And when night had come he did go out through the tunnel to take a look. He went very cautiously, waiting near the end of the tunnel to listen.

But no sound of voices, nor any other sound came to him, and he thrust his head out far enough to look around.

There was nothing in sight save the water and that part of the whaleback, and he grew more courageous. Finally he got where he could crawl up the whaleback and look over the top ahead.

There was no one on the raft. That was something to be grateful for. And ahead of the raft he could see a powerful steamer, churning its way somewhere with the raft in tow.

Webb was not a sailor, but he was a woodsman, and he knew that the same sky and the same stars were above the forest as were above the sea. A glance showed him that they were going northward.

Having looked his fill, he went back to the others.

"There's no one out there," he said reassuringly. "They've all gone back on the ship. It's a steam whaler or something like that, built for heavy work, and she's pulling us along in great shape. We wouldn't win a race for the cup or any other trophy, but, considering the kind we are, we are making good time. But we are going north."

"North!" exclaimed Collamore. "Where in Heaven's name would they take us in the north? They might go ashore on British Columbia. But great Scott, that's where lumber comes from. They wouldn't get any price there."

"I don't believe they are going to British America," said Webb. "I rather think it will be Alaska."

"Well, that's all right. It's our country."

"Or Siberia. I rather favor Siberia for your sake."

"Oh, Siberia!" gasped Kate. "Think of it!"

"Well," said Webb, smiling, "I don't think of it as you seem to. We are not Russian convicts. We have nothing to fear from Russian officials, and I have heard they are very hospitable to Americans. And they are not likely to bother their heads asking questions. Moreover, it is not likely that Siberia has been asked to hunt for Tom."

"That's so," said Kate. "What a comforter you are, Dave! It would be better to go to Siberia. And it would be almost home for Chin Lee."

"He could get there in no time by railroad," said Webb. "Don't worry. We'll come out all right. I feel better now I know there's no one on the raft."

Under the influence of his cheerful talk they grew more contented and less fearful, and the days and nights passed without incident.

Every evening Webb would go outside for observations, and the report was always the same. They were still moving toward the northwest.

They made no count of time, they could not tell the miles they traveled, they knew nothing except that they were still unmolested, and were being towed by men who were blissfully ignorant of their existence.

But this security must end some time and somewhere. And Webb's anxiety increased with each passing day.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHO OWNED THE LOGS?

THEY had been traveling thus for several days and nights, and each observation taken by Webb had resulted in the same report when the change came, as he knew it would.

It was evening. As they had gone farther north the temperature had grown colder, and the nights brighter. But Webb had by this time become accustomed to peering across the top of the whaleback and not being discovered. So, as he left the tunnel on the night in question, and after seeing all things astern clear and safe, had crawled up the rear slope, he expected to see nothing more than he had seen before—the steamer plowing along, and nothing in view but ocean.

But this time he gasped.

Straight ahead, but still at a considerable distance, there loomed a tremendous shape.

It was, without question, the destination of the steamer, but what was it?

If it was land, was it some promontory on the Alaskan coast, or a headland on the Asiatic side? Or was it nothing but an iceberg?

So fascinated was he with this strange sight that he forgot the lapse of time, and was startled at hearing Collamore's voice.

"What kept you?" asked Tom. "We got frightened. You've been out here an hour. We thought somebody had captured you and you were keeping still about us."

"No," said Webb, "but we are getting somewhere. Come up here. I can't see anybody looking this way. Don't show your body. Just peep over the top. See that?"

"Gee whiz! What is it?"

"I've been spending the hour wondering that very thing. At first, I thought maybe it was an iceberg. But they wouldn't tow us to an iceberg. And icebergs move. This thing hasn't changed its relative position with the steamer, except that we are nearer. We are going straight there. There's no mistake about that. I'd like to know what it is and where."

The two friends lay and watched the slowly enlarging mass for some time.

"How long do you think it will take us to reach it?" asked Tom.

"We'll be there before daylight."

"What do you think we'd better do? Get some sleep? Hadn't Kate better get some rest now? There's no telling what there is before us."

"Yes. Go tell her and Chin to go to sleep. I can't sleep. If you feel like it, come back and we'll watch together."

Tom obeyed. Then the two lay and watched the mass gradually take on shape. It was land, there was no question about that, and it was not a part of any mainland.

"It's some island," said Webb. "I don't know much about this region. I know the Aleutian chain stretches across from Alaska to Siberia, but I don't know the names of any of them."

"It wouldn't make any difference if you did. We don't know where we are."

It was quite light, even at midnight, and the island resolved itself into two natural divisions. The great mountain Webb had seen first was one, and from the base of this there stretched away for a considerable distance what seemed lowland.

"It's the most barren spot I ever saw," said Tom. "I don't see a tree nor a house. Do you?"

"No. I wonder if the place can be inhabited. It must be. These fellows wouldn't take all this trouble to haul us to a desert island."

"This may not be their final destination," said Tom. "There may be coal there. There *is* coal on some of these islands. Or they may be out of water. They may stop and then go on again."

"No—see!" cried Webb. "There's a fire. It must be a beacon. And there is somebody walking near it. And another—another. It is inhabited. Now we are in for it for fair."

But they were still far from the island, and the steamer was going at a decreased rate of speed for some reason, and hours passed. When, at last, in the cold, clear dawn they could see the island well, they were amazed.

There were people there, quite a number of them, but of what kind the two on the raft could not determine. They seemed to be gathering near the shore, and were apparently as much perplexed at the sight of the steamer and raft as the two men on the raft were at the sight of the island.

"They've got boats," said Tom, "but I don't see any houses."

"I think I'm getting wise," rejoined Webb. "This is one of the seal islands. Those boats are made of walrus skin, I take it. There is no wood. And those mounds you see scattered, or in groups, are the houses. Fellows who have been up in Alaska have told me of them. They make their houses partly under ground. In the winter they are built of snow. They call them igloos. I've an idea that these people have seals, but no lumber, and the crew of this steamer is going to make a trade."

This was as near as they could come to a decision, and they stopped talking to watch. The water was apparently deep around the island, for the steamer went ahead without fear of shoals.

"They are stopping—they are putting out a boat," said Tom. "Get down out of sight."

But Webb wanted to see what the boat was going to do. He kept as low as he could, and still watch.

"The boat is coming this way," he reported. "Don't stir. I fancy they are coming after the hawsers."

A few minutes of silence followed.

"Yes," added Webb. "They are casting off. They are going back. We are adrift again now."

"If we had a ten-thousand horse-power motor in this raft we could run away," said Tom.

"It hasn't been made yet. They are going ashore. The deal is on."

Tom crawled back again, and they watched the meeting on the island.

The boat ran up on the sloping beach, and one man, wearing a cap and uniform, stepped ashore. He was met by a very tall and heavily-built man, and a conversation followed.

They pointed toward the raft a number of times, and from the absence of any sign language it was evident that they found no difficulty in speaking.

"Hello!" said Webb. "They are coming here. The big fellow is getting into the boat."

"Now, what shall we do?" asked Tom. "Hide again?"

"No, I think not. The deal is on here, and we've got to face whatever is before us. If they sell the logs here, the raft will be broken up, and we would probably fare worse if discovered than if we face them unafraid. Wait, and see if we can catch any conversation."

The boat came out to the raft, and the two men who had been doing the talking got on it. They scrambled up the forward slope till they were almost to the top, and then stood upright. They did not face the two flat figures, and had not discovered them.

"There you are, Bender," said the sailor. "As fine a lot of logs as ever came from an Oregon forest. You want lumber for houses and I want skins and gold. There's at least twenty-five thousand dollars' worth in this raft."

"Where the devil did you get these logs?" asked the man called Bender. "The Bear only chased you a few days ago, and now you come back with logs it would take a year to cut. Where did you get them?"

"Never mind where I got them," said the sailor. "They are mine, and they will be yours for the value in furs and the yellow. Eh?"

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," said Webb, getting to his feet and walking boldly toward the two. "There is some mistake. These logs are mine."

It seemed for a moment as if the sailor was going to fall down and roll over the logs into the sea. He gasped, sputtered, and tried to talk.

He stared at Webb and Tom as though they were ghostly visitants from the mysterious deep. The man called Bender looked on with considerable curiosity.

"Who—who the devil are you?" demanded the sailor. "Where did you come from?"

"I'm the owner of these logs," said Webb. "I'll make this deal with you, Bender."

CHAPTER XV.

WRANGLING FOR POSSESSION.

BENDER was the cooler of the two who were transacting a deal and turned to Webb, seemingly ignoring the sailor.

"Well, young fellow," he said, "you do seem to have the goods. I'll admit I don't understand. Seems like you two were passengers without Hawson knowing it. Howsumever, that ain't my business. The fact is, I'm the boss of this island, and I do want lumber. No mistake about that. Now, I can't dicker with both of you. Let's hear the yarn and we'll come to some decision."

"Look here, Bender," broke in the sailor called Hawson, "I didn't spend coal hauling this raft up here, to get turned down. No, sirree. I am the owner of these logs by law. See?"

"On the contrary, I am the owner by law," said Webb quietly.

"Are you a sailor?" asked Hawson.

"No. I'm a lumberman. I built this raft. I must tell you, Bender, that I am foreman for Burke & Bayliss, of Oregon, and this was part of a big raft we built for San Francisco. This was the tail end of it, and it broke loose in a storm. We were on it, in a little cubby we made. Now, you see, it is mine."

"We don't see nothing of the kind," said Hawson. "It's easy to see you ain't a sailorman. You'd know the law if you was. You admit that you built this raft for Burke & Bayliss. Well, it was their raft, and not yours. See? You wasn't a passenger. You was a hired hand, same as a cook or a fireman or a deckhand on my ship there. You went because you was ordered to go. See?

"Now, by your own statement, this end of the raft broke loose, and when I spied you you was floatin' helplessly on the sea. Nobody was in sight. Ever hear of flotsam and jetsam? That's a pretty good firm, too. Well, you was flotsam. Nothin', I tell you, but flotsam. Well, I hooked into the thing, and pulled you up here. Why? I knew Bender here needed lumber to build houses.

"Why didn't he get it before? Well, Bender's sort of on the outs with governments, he is. Can't do business on the mainland. So, says I, I'll take this up to Bender. I was fired on by the cutter Bear, and couldn't get any sealskins, and now I'll drive a bargain with Bender, who has plenty of seals. See? Now, you shut up. You're only flotsam, that's what you are."

"I'm the owner, or the agent of the owner, of these logs," persisted Webb. "You can't frighten me. I know you are an outlaw. You are a seal-robber. I am on this raft, and I call on Mr. Bender to uphold the legal rights in this case."

"Haw, haw!" laughed the captain of the steamer. "Bender ain't never set up to be a saint when it comes to law. If he was, he'd get lumber from the mainland. He's a outlaw himself, is Bender. He'll deal with me, Bender will."

"It seems to me," said Bender, "that while you fellows do your fighting I'll take the logs. As long as the ownership is in dispute there's nothing to stop me from taking them. You spoke of flotsam, Hawson. The other end of the firm ain't heard from. I'll see about this. More than half this raft is under water, and has been under water all the time. It's jetsam. I'll just jettison the whole business. How's that?"

"You wouldn't do that, Bender," said Hawson angrily. "One thing, you can't. If you don't do business with me, I'll hook on to the raft and take it away again. See?"

"Oh, you will, will you?"

"Yes, I will, will I. I ain't going to waste a hundred ton of coal bringing wood to a market and gettin' turned down like this. No, I guess not. This raft will sail in one hour, Bender, if you don't do business with me."

"I am doing business with you. I'm telling you to get off my raft. It's mine. I've claimed it under the tide-water act. See? Know what that is? Well, when the tide goes out this thing will be restin' on the bottom. I own the bottom and claim everything the tide leaves there. See?"

Hawson stared in disgust at the islander. His face grew purple with rage.

"Bender," he roared, "I've got guns on that ship. I'll—I'll— What the mischief is that?"

His eyes were now bulging, and he was staring toward the rear end of the raft. They all turned and looked.

Kate, accompanied by Chin Lee, was coming up the whaleback.

"We were frightened almost to death," said Kate, smiling and nodding to the strangers. "You didn't come and tell us anything, and we took a look ourselves, and here you were, almost on land, talking away to friends as though it was a reunion. Where are we?"

"Well—by the holy—was that girl on this raft all the time?" gasped Hawson.

"Yes," said Webb. "It was because of her that we didn't let you know we were here. This is Miss Collamore, sister of Mr. Collamore, here. My name is Webb. This is Chin Lee, my cook. Now you know us all."

"Any more in this family?" asked Hawson.

"No more."

Bender was calmly studying Kate's face. She certainly was beautiful, and the flush that had come into her cheeks when she saw land and people made her more so than usual.

"If I'd known," growled Hawson. "If I'd known there was a girl—and *such* a girl—on this raft, I'd been here myself."

"Glad you didn't know," said Webb.

"What sort of a place have you got there to hold four people day and night?" asked Bender in a friendly tone.

While Hawson was growing more angry and more purple, Bender seemed in the best of spirits, and was disposed to be friendly.

"It's an igloo," said Tom. "An ocean igloo."

"A what? A house in there?"

"Yes," said Webb. "As foreman of the construction-gang I had a sort of a cabin made in there, and we were very comfortable. Only it was an accident that Miss Collamore was with us."

"Accident, eh?" laughed Bender, rubbing his chin. "I like some accidents, and this is one of the kind I like. Welcome to Bender's Island, miss. For hospitality, it can't be beat. I'm Bender, I am, and the boss of the island. I'm glad Hawson didn't know you were on board. He's kind of rough, like a sailor, Hawson is. He don't know how to treat pretty girls. And, what's more, he's married. I ain't, and I'm a gentleman."

"What the devil are you driving at, Bender?" asked Hawson, now almost beside himself with rage. "Miss Collamore ain't goin' to stay on no barren rock with that gang of cutthroats of yourn. Not while the Lizzie Hawson has a ton of coal in her bunkers. See? She goes with me to any port she says, and I'll take these logs away, too. See? I'm Hawson, captain of the Lizzie of the same name, I am."

"But you're not the captain of this raft. Hawson, don't make me angry. You know me pretty well. I like these people. They are all right. You're too grasping, Hawson. There's not an honest hair in your head.

"You steal a raft of wood on the ocean and come up here and try to sell it to me at a fabulous price. Now, these people look like nice, intelligent folks. Of course, we will all agree that it looks sort of queer—sort of strange—for a pretty girl to go to sea in a big raft with two white men and a Chinaman. Perhaps one of 'em is her brother, and perhaps he ain't. That's no concern of yours, nor mine, either, for that matter. The thing is, she is here, and I like her.

"This is a hospitable island, and there's law here. I am the law. And there's a missionary here. He's pretty old, and usually looks pretty hungry; but he's a missionary, and qualified to perform things like funerals, weddings, christenings, and such. There's nothing a pretty girl need fear on Bender's Island, while on a seal-robber like the Lizzie Hawson, where there is no law, it wouldn't be right to let her go. I couldn't think of it.

"Then, again, these people, having their own troubles, and probably their own little secrets to keep, wouldn't try to drive such a hard bargain as you would. I think, after all, Hawson, I'll do business with Mr. Webb."

"I'll be hanged if you do!" howled Hawson. "I'll take 'em all away. I'll—"

Bender put his powerful hand on Hawson's shoulder and turned him toward the steamer.

"See the Lizzie Hawson out there?" he asked. "She wants a captain bad. Better go on board. I'll attend to this raft."

"No! You—you—"

Hawson's verbal arguments gave out. He smashed his fist into Bender's face, and the smile left that. Bender reeled a little, but in an instant his great hand had doubled, and it smote Hawson terribly.

With a curse and then a groan, Hawson went rolling down the side of whaleback number five into the sea.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LITTLE ROW.

If there ever was a row anywhere near Bering Sea, it was then.

When Hawson struck the water a howl of curses rolled up from his throat, and his splashing round churned the sea white. A yell of rage came from the deck of the Lizzie Hawson, and the boat sped from the nose of the raft to where Hawson was floundering in the water.

Bender, as if scenting more trouble, turned toward the shouting, yelling crowd on shore, and called for a boat. In an instant there were three manned by a man apiece hurrying toward the raft.

"Get on the island," said Bender to the four on the raft. "This fellow is a loafer of the sea. He will make trouble. I've got to thrash him and his entire crew. But I'll take care of you."

There was nothing else to be done, for there was every evidence that the men on the steamer were preparing for a fight. Webb hurriedly helped Kate into one of the walrus-hide boats, got in himself, and Tom and Chin Lee were taken into another. Then Bender got into the third, and the little fleet was paddled to the shore.

Bender wasted no time in explanation. Webb and his party saw men and women in the crowd. There were men like Bender, either Americans or English, and a horde of natives, and a goodly number of Chinese.

The whole population of the island had gathered, and a dirtier, crazier lot it would be difficult to find.

There seemed to be a disposition on the part of the women, who seemed to be all native Indians, or Aleutians, to grab Kate and make an examination of her features. But Bender had weighty things on hand just then and shouted out orders in a volcanic flow, accompanying them with kicks and blows bestowed where he thought they would do the most good and exact the most prompt obedience.

Among the shouting, hustling crowd there was a very old man, clad in worn and ragged clothing.

"Here, Father Akerman," shouted Bender above the hubbub. "I've got to fight Hawson. Take care of my guests."

The little old man sprang into activity at once.

"Follow me, in Heaven's name," he said to Kate. "There is no telling what these people will do when they get to fighting."

He led the way from the crowd and through a town of mound-built houses, to a spot almost at the foot of the mountain. Here there were several of the underground shelters, and he led them into one that seemed to be clean and well kept.

These houses were all built alike. The entrance was through a hole in the ground covered over by a mound that was hollowed out, to keep out the rain and snow. There was a drop of a few feet, and then a straight passage for about ten feet into the great round living-room under the mound that rose like a dome above.

In the middle was the usual smoke-hole, and this furnished what light and ventilation there was.

"We are safe here till they get through fighting," said the man Bender had called Father Akerman. "I was amazed to see you on the raft, but of course you can tell me your story or not, just as you like."

"I take it you are a priest of some kind," rejoined Webb. "There is no great mystery about us."

He then gave a brief history of their adventures.

"I don't know," said Father Akerman, "whether to congratulate you on what you may consider an escape or not. You have certainly escaped death at sea, and now you have escaped Captain Hawson, who is one of the greatest rascals unhung. But Bender is no better, and you are simply transferring from one rascal to another."

"But what place is this?" asked Webb. "Surely we must be under some governmental law."

Father Akerman shook his head.

"This island is under no law but Bender's," he said. "It may seem strange to you, but I can explain it. When the United States purchased Alaska from Russia, it seems that in the purchase all the inhabited islands transferred were mentioned by name, and their geographical situation made plain. This island was inhabited, but it is so situated that somehow it was left out of the negotiations, and has been either a disputed or a deserted territory ever since.

"It has no name, and on the mariners' charts it is simply a rock. So it seems to be, from a short distance. I am a Moravian missionary, and many years ago discovered the lamentable condition of the poor people on this island, and came here to teach them what I could.

"I found them of low intelligence, but disposed to be friendly and hospitable. At that time we might have carried on trade with other islands, but we had no good sea-boats, for there was no

wood on the island to build them, and few boats on the mainland to be bought. Then Bender came.

"Bender is exactly the same kind of man Hawson is, only, if there is any comparison, he is a little worse because he is more courageous and more intelligent. He, like Hawson, roamed the seas, seeking any kind of plunder, and came here for seals after the law against indiscriminate sealing made it piracy and robbery.

"Something happened to his ship, and he, with his terrible crew of Americans, English, Chinese, and what not, arrived in small boats, and took possession. Bender had committed so many crimes on the high seas that he could not find friends in any country, and as this seemed to be a no man's land, he appropriated it, called it Bender's Island, and made a sort of king of himself.

"He has ruled with a high hand here. All the teachings I had spent years to give were swept away by this ruthless marauder. His men married native women, and went to hunting seals, and the man has an immense fortune in skins stowed away here.

"Then somebody discovered there was gold on the island, and Bender started them mining. They began a sort of insular trade, but instead of carrying it on in an honorable way, and paying for what they got, they robbed, destroyed, and made themselves the most hated horde of rogues in this part of the world. I have performed many marriages here when I knew the women had been stolen from their people; but even so, it was better that way, for I could do absolutely nothing to soften Bender's heart.

"Our food is mostly fish, although there are plenty of seals, and we occasionally get a bear on the mountain, and at times great quantities of migratory birds come here, and we fill our larders. But now Bender has made himself so hated he cannot trade anywhere, and we are entirely cut off from the world.

"So, as I said, I don't know, really, whether to congratulate you on your escape or not. You seem to have gone from one difficulty into another."

"What you say can scarcely be called cheerful news," said Webb, "but we are here, in no danger of starvation, and perhaps we can manage to handle Bender if he defeats Hawson. I hear a gun. You take care of Kate, father, and we'll go out and have a look."

"Be careful," the missionary warned him. "Those men will shoot you with as little conscience as you would kill a crow."

Nevertheless, Webb, Collamore, and Chin Lee made their way outside, leaving Kate, who had been deeply impressed by what the Moravian had said, standing mute and tearful by the little fire that was burning in the middle of the floor.

It was certainly a stirring scene that met their view.

The Lizzie Hawson had gone over to the raft, and several of her men were at work on the hawsers. Bender stood, a grim look on his face, with folded arms, while his men were running and scurrying through the town. They appeared with all sorts of weapons, and were gathering around Bender on the shore.

The boss of the island gave a swift, savage glance over his little army, and then, pointing toward the Hawson, shouted:

"Kill every man on board that ship."

A howl that might have come from a lot of maniacs went up from the crowd, while the women began to chant something that might have been a war-song.

The white men took command of little parties of natives and Chinamen, and a great fleet of walrus-hide boats shot out.

There was a shot from a gun on the Lizzie Hawson, and the water was thrown up where the ball struck, not far away from Bender's boat.

The firing of rifles began then, and a terrific din ensued. The Lizzie Hawson was the storm center of a terrible, cursing, rioting crowd, and as boats were sent close to her, wild and savage men scrambled to her decks, and hand-to-hand fights were going on in every part of the steamer.

"Chin Lee," said Webb, "those Chinamen fight well. They are like devils."

"Chinamen velly blave, all same like heloes," replied Chin Lee blandly.

Two or three of the boats went to the raft, and the long hawsers, which had been cast off the steamer, were hauled on the logs.

Then the tide turned in favor of Hawson, or at least it seemed so, for Bender's men began leaping into the boats, or the sea, any way to get off the steamer.

But this after all might have been to get back to the island, for the screw of the Lizzie Hawson started to turn, and she started away without the raft.

"You wait, Bender," shouted Hawson from the stern. "I'll come back with men enough to wipe you off the map. I'll have that girl and that raft. See?"

Bender merely waved his hand in derisive answer, and walked toward his guests.

CHAPTER XVII.

BENDER'S PLANS.

"THAT was like play," said Bender, with an expression of savage satisfaction, as he joined Webb and Collamore. "Hawson's got a lot of scum he's picked up in every port, and while they are rascally enough, they don't know how to fight. But he'll be back. I know he'll be back. Hawson's a man that don't know when he's licked. I'll have to give it to him again."

"But suppose he returns in force and defeats you?" suggested Webb.

"Then he's got to kill me first," replied Bender. "I'm a fighter and my men are fighters. I suppose you are thinking about the girl and what would happen to her and you if Hawson did win. Well, that is something to be thought of. Where is the beauty?"

"My sister is with Father Akerman," said Tom.

"Your sister. Very good. Stick to that if you like. It does no harm, and sounds well. What do you think of my island?"

"So far it has been a lively place," said Webb, "but we thank you for your hospitality and protection."

Bender smiled. There was nothing reassuring about the smile of this huge islander, who had outraged all laws, and challenged all governments, and then set up laws and a government of his own.

It was a leering, sinister, ill-favored smile, and both Webb and Collamore felt their blood run hot at the fellow's insolent bearing.

"The beauty is safe for the present," said Bender. "I can't tell how long Hawson will be. He can get men at almost any point now, and he'll be back in a day or so. We must be ready for him. I must see to things now. Come with me. Your own status in my community must be settled. I assume that I have your friendship."

"You have done nothing as yet to forfeit it," replied Webb, who felt that something disagreeable was coming.

When a man like Bender wanted to do something, right or wrong, he was not likely to waste any time waiting.

"Because," continued Bender, "we have only two kinds of people here. Loyal ones and dead ones. Of course you can take your choice. The dead ones are thrown out there."

He swept his arm toward the sea, and they understood.

"We certainly do not want to die," said Webb.

"That's what I understood. Young fellows and girls who want to die don't build cabins in rafts and run away from their homes. Of course it's none of my business why you ran away. But I've lived some in this world and I know that all this means that you've done wrong. You are all implicated in some crime. Therefore, we are in the same class, and there need be no sweet words and mealy-mouthed politeness between us. You ran away. The fortunes of the sea brought you here, and I'm glad they did. Get that girl out here. I want to see her."

"But—she isn't feeling well," said Tom. "She has been upset by all this excitement. Let her rest."

"Look here," exclaimed Bender, as his face clouded darkly. "Let's understand each other fully. I'm no saint. I'm as tough as they make 'em, I'll admit. But you are just as bad, only younger, and a little more refined. But you've committed a crime, and you were running away. Down in your hearts you know you are glad that you are here, because no officers of the law can get you. I'm right, eh?" he added, looking shrewdly at Collamore's face.

"We have committed no crime," said Webb.

"Don't tell me. I know. Don't let's have any nonsense between friends.

We've got to stand together when Ben Hawson comes. Now get that girl. I won't eat her. When I attend to a few little matters I want to show you something. I do everything open and aboveboard. You'll like me better if you do as I say."

There was something half menacing, yet half promising in the big man's manner, and Tom started to obey. As Webb did not call him back he decided that Webb felt the same as he did about it.

Anyway, there was no use trying to keep Kate out of Bender's sight. The island was all under his control, and the better way was to conciliate the man and keep him good-natured as long as possible.

When Kate joined the group her eyes were red.

"I see," said Bender graciously, "that my pretty guest has been crying. It's all wrong. It not only makes your eyes red, but it gets you nervous, and all worked up. And, to tell you the truth, I don't know what you are crying about.

"I am not a savage beast. I never left the marks of my teeth in a woman. You need not fear me. I suppose that old fool of a missionary has been telling you things about me. I don't like that man, and he doesn't like me. Yet I let him live. You can see by that that I am not a terrible man."

"But everything is so awful," said Kate.

"Oh, of course," rejoined Bender. "When we are young and make the mistake of committing one crime, we get conscience-stricken at first. You'll get over that. In an hour you'll be laughing and glad you came here. You will even be pleased at something I am going to say to you."

Webb and Kate shuddered, and shot a glance at each other.

"First," said Bender, "I must have that raft anchored. It is too valuable to lose now. I've always wanted wood to build houses here, but the fools on the other islands took a dislike to me and won't trade with me. Funny, too, for some of their women are happily married to some of my Chinamen. But now I've got plenty of lumber.

"I'll have some skins filled with stone, and see if they will hold the raft, but I'll begin at once to take it apart. We want houses bad. It civilizes people more to live in houses and I want to build up a nation of civilized people here. Civilized fighters, you know. I'll have some of the other islands some day. I'll make the moguls at Washington sit up and take notice."

He gave various orders concerning the raft, the boats, and other matters, and it was noticed by his guests that all the people obeyed him with an abject submissiveness that could be nothing but the result of fear. The island had quieted down somewhat, although groups stood here and there talking in loud tones, and many of the men and women had disappeared, either into the houses or farther away on the island, which was a large one.

Webb looked curiously at the men who had fought so valiantly under Bender's command, and now seemed to obey him with scowls and ugly looks, some of them even muttering as they worked.

"Some of your Chinamen don't seem to like you," he remarked.

"Oh, they're a lot of beasts. I've had to shoot two or three, and that makes the others mad. Now, come here. I'll show you something that will make your eyes water."

They followed their strange host into one of the igloos. Here, in a large room, were piled thousands of the finest sealskins. It was a treasure-house indeed.

Whether the killing of the seals was legal or not, the skins were there, an actual asset. The value of the lot was fabulous.

"You talk about your logs," said Bender with a laugh. "Why, the fortune in those skins would buy all the logs you could put into a bridge from here to Alaska. But that isn't all. See here."

He stepped to one side of the room and pulled away a stone slab that covered an aperture.

There, in a bin scooped out in the earth, was a great pile of yellow gold.

"There's another fortune for you," said Bender. "You see, I am not a poor man. There's many a prince and nobleman in Europe who would like to have my wealth to support his rotten dignity. But I am not going to spend all my life

on this island. There is another killing season to come, and some more gold to be got out, and then I'm going to leave."

"Are you going to divide all this among the men who came here with you?" asked Webb.

Bender stared at him as though he had uttered a most absurd remark. Then he burst into laughter.

"Divide! Me divide anything with that mob? Ho, ho! I guess not. There is only one person on the face of the earth who will share that wealth with me, and that is my beauty here. I knew that somewhere in the world there existed just the woman I wanted for a wife. Those native women were all right for the others, but for me—none but a bright American girl.

"Don't shrink from me and look at me with big horror-stricken eyes. I won't eat you. I'm not an ogre. Isn't that wealth enough to tempt you? Are not half the weddings the result of barter just like that? Do you think the daughters of millionaires who marry babbling old idiots with titles love their husbands any more than you do me? Not a bit.

"But the difference is this. They are abused after their noble husbands get the money, whereas you will be treated like a queen with the utmost tenderness and consideration. But it must be. I have never seen so beautiful a face as yours, and I am in real earnest. You'll come to it when you think it over. And to make it easier, I will treat these friends of yours well.

"I didn't know—well, never mind whether one is your brother or not. I'll treat them both well. Now, don't cry. Go back to the old missionary. He must marry us soon, because Hawson will be back, and after I kill him and his gang I want his boat to take us away with our wealth on our honeymoon."

Nobody had had a chance to protest, and the tears that came again to Kate's eyes had no effect.

Webb was studying the face of Bender while he was speaking. We have already seen that in emergencies thoughts traveled in procession-like regularity through Webb's brain, and one of these processions was traveling now.

When they were once more in the open Webb took a deep breath of fresh air.

"I think Mr. Bender is right," he said. "After all, we must look to him for protection, and you as Kate's brother must see the advantage of such a marriage. As for me, if I had any hopes in that direction, I waive them now. I am poor. My little fortune in logs is gone. I can see that with Bender as her husband she will be much better off. You, as her brother, must acknowledge that. Now, you take her back to Father Akerman and talk the matter over sensibly. Chin Lee and I are going to look around a little."

"Spoken like a sensible man," said Bender, grasping Webb's hand. "I like you, old sport. You are all there."

Tom and Kate, after staring at Webb's wooden face in a sort of stupefaction, turned to go.

"Make it soon," said Webb carelessly. "I won't intrude on you again till after the wedding."

"You are a gentleman," said Bender. "Go where you please, you and your Chinaman. You've done me a good turn to-day. I won't forget it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WEBB'S PLANS.

"ME no savé dlis," said Chin Lee reproachfully, after he and Webb had walked a short distance, leaving Bender behind. "Why you tell devil man mally Missy Kate?"

"Chin, look there," said Webb, pointing to something up the mountain.

"Me see. Big hill."

"All right. Keep on looking interested and listen to me. Are you pretty good at arithmetic?"

"'Lithmetic? You mean all same count one, two, thlee?"

"All same. Now, we are going to stroll all around this island. We shall take a look at the varied specimens of mankind on this island. Savé that?"

"Me savé dlat. All same look what evlybody go do."

"Yes. And while I count the white men and natives, you count your countrymen, the Chinese. Understand? You needn't pay any attention to what I am

doing. I'll count everybody but the Chinese. You keep an accurate count of them. Then we'll have a talk. Come on."

The face of the Celestial expressed nothing, but there was a peculiar glint in the slant eyes as the two strolled on.

They found the island larger than Webb had supposed, but the greater portion of it was barren and uninhabited. Here and there where there was a bit of fertile soil lying hard against the foot of the mountain, and warmed by the sun, they found gardens in which corn and a few other vegetables were growing, these gardens all being under the care of Chin Lee's countrymen.

They saw little streams that ran down the mountainside, and in these streams the slaves of Bender were working to add to his pile of gold.

The other occupations on the island were limited. Women were making a feeble attempt to clean such clothing as they had, and everywhere Webb noticed one thing. The Chinese were the workers.

The white men with Bender were few, and they were coarse, brutal, and indolent. They bossed the others well enough, but did nothing themselves. The natives were too stupid for any use, though some could be seen out in their boats fishing.

Here and there Webb saw signs of coal, but he paid this little attention. It was not coal he was after. It was statistics.

It took some time to make the trip around the mountain. Chin seemed to have warmed up to his mathematical task, and kept his count correct by changing pebbles from one closed fist to another. And he seemed to have worked out some kind of a reason for all this, for he frequently stopped and talked in his own language with the industrious Chinamen.

They were in turn stared at by white men, Chinese, and natives. Had they come in a boat everybody could have understood. But coming from inside the big dead thing that lay off the island they were a mystery.

After a time Webb and Chin Lee had made the complete round, and reached their starting-point.

Bender met them.

"Quite an island, eh, Webb?" he remarked.

"It is, indeed," said Webb. "I should imagine existence on it wouldn't be bad if you only had houses."

"That's just it. You see, we never had anything to make houses with. Now we have. That raft was a godsend. I'll get my men at work very soon, and we'll begin building."

"Yes, I was thinking of that too," said Webb. "But wait. You have got several important things to consider. In the first place, there is your wedding coming off. I've done a lot of thinking about that.

"Of course, giving up a girl like Kate Collamore is a good deal of a wrench, but I've overcome that. It will be so much better for her to marry a rich man. You want to leave for a trip, and I, who know more about handling logs than any one here, will remain, and when you return you will see a village of fine houses."

"Good. I like you, Webb. You adapt yourself to circumstances."

"I have learned to. I've always been a poor man and had to fit in any hole where I was stuck. Then again, Hawson will be back here in a day or two, and there will be a fight. He has a cannon, and if you have your houses built he will demolish them. So I would suggest that you leave the raft as it is until you get though with Hawson, and can take his ship. Then I can get to work without being interrupted."

There was just one gleam of suspicion in Bender's glance, but the blue eyes and boyish face of Webb were innocent.

"I like your plan, Webb. I'll do it."

Again Chin and Webb walked together.

"How many of your people, Chin?" asked Webb.

"Tlenty fi'."

"Twenty-five Chinamen," repeated Webb slowly. "Good. You can talk to them, Chin. You have talked to them. Are they good Chinamen?"

"All good."

Chin was very positive about this. He seemed almost hurt at the question.

"Are they good at arithmetic? As good as you?"

"All same like me. Count one, two, thlee."

"Good. There are five Americans, counting Bender, and I saw about one hundred natives. We need not count on them just now. Later on. But now, Chin, listen. The rising of the sun and the shining of the moon depend on you. The life of Miss Kate and Tom and myself are in your hands. Understand?"

"Me no savé dlat Tell more."

"Well, you know Bender has declared that he will marry Miss Kate. We don't want to let him do that. And Hawson will come back with a big gang in his steamer, and Hawson will be as bad as Bender. We've got to lick Bender and his white men first and then get ready for Hawson. Now do you understand? And your Chinamen have got to do it."

There was, somewhere in the mysterious make-up of Chin Lee, a strain of his conquering Manchurian ancestry. For one brief moment there shot from his slanting eyes a fire that told of fighting and blood and conquest and rapine and plunder. Webb saw it and was pleased.

"Chinamen can fight, Chin, if they have something to fight for. You saw those sealskins and that pile of gold."

"Me saw."

"Well, your people got those skins and that gold, and it belongs to them. Make them understand that. Make them see that Bender has made slaves of them and has got rich on their labor. He will take it all away and leave them with nothing. Can you tell them that?"

"Ah-h!"

It was a long breath—only a breath, but Webb understood.

"We have no time to lose. It must be done to-night. Every hour adds to Miss Kate's peril. Go among your people and work with them and get their blood hot telling them what a nice girl Miss Kate is, and how good she has been to you, and then get it hotter by telling how much money they will have—all the skins and gold will be divided among them if they help us defeat Bender to-night and Hawson when he comes. You can do that, Chin."

Chin raised his eyes and looked squarely into Webb's.

"Listen. Me tell as you say, all same. But my countlyman not all same like yours. Maybe bimeby get fight, kill Bender."

"I don't care. The thing is that Kate Collamore must be protected if everybody on this island is killed. Now go—here comes Bender again—and I've got another scheme to work."

"What time begin?" asked Chin.

"Midnight. Make it midnight. Everybody knows midnight."

Chin made a peculiar guttural sound, and his face grew strange even to Webb.

"Evlybody savé midnight," he said, and he sauntered away in the idlest fashion.

CHAPTER XIX.

A LITTLE FEASTING.

"I WANTED to see you alone, Bender," said Webb. "I know it's the rule when a man is going to be married to celebrate a little among his friends. I didn't want to say anything about this before my Chinaman. But when I built that raft and made a cabin in the end section I did it for a purpose, as you say, and I planned well for a long trip.

"I stocked it with good things. In that cubbyhole inside there are wines and liquors as good as you can buy in any hotel. And cigars. And canned meats and fruits. The raft is yours, but in taking it apart the natives might spoil the good things. Accept them from me as evidence of my good wishes."

Bender stared.

"What's that you say? Wine, and whisky, and cigars? And me with a thirst on me a mile long? You can't get any whisky in this accursed part of the world unless you go to Siberia. Can't buy it in Alaska. So there's some in the raft, eh? Good. Webb, I'm proud of you. I'll get the stuff."

It was what Webb wanted him to do. And Bender wasn't going to trust anybody else on this errand. He jumped into a boat and called Webb to join him. Webb did so, and they were soon at the raft.

"I'll manage the boat," said Webb, "and you go get the stuff. There's plenty of it. Help yourself. Bring it all. See that hole? Crawl in there."

Bender did not hesitate. The knowledge that whisky and cigars were so close at hand was all he thought of

then, and he crawled to the tunnel and in it.

Webb began looking round. In the bottom of the boat there was a short harpoon used by the fisherman to kill walruses. It had a long rope of walrus hide attached to it. He cut this off and waited.

He made the boat fast to one of the cables of the raft, and then, with the long walrus-hide rope wound around his waist and the harpoon gripped in his right hand, he went to the mouth of the tunnel.

Peering in, he saw from the moving light that Bender had the lantern and was stirring about.

He waited till the light became motionless and then crept into the passage.

Noiselessly, but swiftly from practise, he crept through till he could peer round the room. Bender stood with his back toward him and a bottle in one hand and a glass in the other.

He chuckled wth delight as he smelled the liquor he had not tasted for so long. He poured out a drink, and did not hear the silent, but desperate, man who, with his boyish face set and his blue eyes cold and hard, was creeping up to him.

Webb hesitated but an instant and then the harpoon swung in the air, and as Bender turned, it struck him with terrific force in the head.

Half stunned, he fell against the logs, and the harpoon fell again, and with a groan Bender dropped unconscious to the floor. To make matters still more secure, Webb gave him another crack, and then unwound the walrus hide.

With this he trussed Bender as few men were ever trussed before. Hands and feet, and arms and legs, head and eyes, Bender was tied and bound, and tied and bound again, till he was the center of a series of Gordian knots that would require an Alexander with a very sharp sword to release.

Webb then took his time and carried all the liquor out to the boat.

With swift strokes he sent the boat back to shore.

"Where's Bender?" asked one of the white men, a bearded ruffian who disgraced the name American. "He went with you."

"He's busy. I've got to go back. Bender didn't know the good things we had on the raft, but he's getting away with some lobster now. There's corned beef and ham there, too. Take these, and you fellows get busy with your mouths. I'll bring back something good."

The four white men gathered and gazed with glee at the bottles.

"Come on. Open 'em up," said one.

With an eagerness that was exactly what Webb wanted, they fell to. They waited for no glasses. Every man put a bottle to his mouth.

Webb returned to the raft, taking his time. He wanted a smoke himself, and sat down and watched Bender while he enjoyed it. Bender was alive. Webb was glad of that.

"The Chinaman can't kill him. It won't be necessary to kill any of Bender's men," he chuckled.

He finished, and, taking some of the good things to eat, he went back. Handing most of it to the white men, he carried a quantity, including some wine, to the missionary's house.

"You here?" cried Tom. "What are you driving at?"

"Don't worry. Things are moving beautifully. Chin is working up a rebellion for to-night. Bender is senseless and tied up in the raft, and his white men are getting gloriously drunk. That's easy. All we've got to think of now is Hawson. And we'll fix him somehow."

"Oh, Dave," cried Kate. "I have been in such terror. And you were thinking of this all the time."

"Sure," said Webb. "Don't worry. Everything will come out all right."

He went back among the white men. Their miserable life on the island had made them ripe for just such a feast as this, and they took no account of the quantity of liquor they drank.

"Whersh Ben—der?" asked one.

"He's drunk," said Webb. "He's asleep. He'll be back when he wakes up."

"Be back? Waz wanna come back? Good heal', ole fel'."

Webb promised, and watched the four human beasts drink themselves stupid.

When night came they were asleep.

Webb had not seen Chin Lee since

that worthy had departed on his errand, and now went in search of him. He found him gathering his forces.

"It's easy, Chin," said Webb, "if the natives don't make a fuss. If they do, knock 'em on the head. The white men are all drunk, and I've got Bender on the raft."

"Velly good. We tie up all same like bun'le. Get guns. All same like sodgers we fight when steamer come back. Chinamen velly blave. Come now."

The islanders knew that something was amiss, and gathered round.

"Do they understand?" asked Webb.

"No savé. Velly stupid. Make un'stan' when see."

Chin told the Chinamen what was wanted, and they marched to the house where the men were sleeping. Tom joined them, and they gathered enough walrus-hide ropes to tie up a regiment.

But the sleep had done some of the men good, and they woke up as one after the other came in.

"What's this? Wake up!" shouted the brightest one, and Webb smote him where he stood and knocked him down.

Then began a fight that was none the less bitter because it was short.

The Chinamen had many an old score to settle. To Chin Lee they explained that long ago they had shipped with Bender at San Francisco for an Asiatic port, with the understanding that he would land them in San Francisco.

But he never let them land anywhere. He kept them on the ship and made them work like slaves without pay, and the five white men got all the booty. It was all Chin Lee could do to prevent his countrymen, when roused, from cutting the throats of the lot.

"That's done," said Webb, when the four were trussed up the same as Bender was on the raft. "Now we'll get Bender, and shut them all in here and wait for Hawson. Chin, explain to your countrymen that we thank them. This wasn't much of a fight, but a big one is coming. Tell them to go through all the houses and gather up all the guns and other weapons, and be ready to fight when Hawson comes."

"Me tell. What me tell 'bout gold?"

"Tell them it is theirs."

The howl of Chinese joy that followed a few words from Chin Lee proved that he had conveyed the message correctly.

CHAPTER XX.

A MEETING AT SEA.

WHEREVER Hawson went, or whatever he did while there, nobody ever knew, and nobody cared enough ever to inquire. The fact was that late in the afternoon on the following day the Lizzie Hawson was sighted steaming at full speed toward the island.

"There's music in the air," said Tom. "I smell a fight."

"Here, too, Tom," added Webb, "but we've got to fight, and, what's more to the point, we've got to win. This is our trump-card, Chin?"

"Me savé."

"Tell everybody to get under cover. Don't let Hawson see a single individual when he lands."

Chin Lee nodded, and went among his countrymen. They, in turn, made the order understood among the natives.

"Get them in houses. Tell them to keep their guns ready, and when you call them to come out," said Webb.

They began disappearing like so many gophers.

"But are you sure Hawson will land?" asked Tom.

"Land! Of course he'll land," answered Webb, with a laugh. "Doesn't he know there are skins and gold here? He may wonder at seeing nobody. That's what we want. We want him to bring his crew ashore for a fight. We don't want to let them get away with the steamer. We'll have to get a lot of Chinamen on board as soon as possible, and the more of Hawson's men that come ashore the better."

Webb and Tom were lying behind a mound, watching. The Lizzie Hawson was a fast steamer, as well as a powerful one, and she came on rapidly.

"I don't see so many men," said Tom. "Perhaps he didn't get the recruits he wanted."

"We'll see soon enough."

The Lizzie Hawson came nearer and nearer, till they could perceive the burly

form of the captain himself on the bridge with a glass. He was evidently much interested in the study of the island, and it must have surprised him very much with its deserted appearance.

As a matter of fact, he was greatly perplexed. He could see the raft. Nobody had gone away on that. Admitting the possibility that a wandering ship had touched at the island, it was scarcely to be believed that it had carried away Bender and his men, the Chinamen, and all the natives.

Had it not been for Kate Collamore, perhaps Bender would have been pleased at the aspect of affairs. But he was, in fact, far from pleased.

Picturesque curses rolled from his thick lips, and he stormed at everybody on board. His trip had not been as successful as he had expected, for the simple reason that Bender's reputation was so terrible nobody would enlist to fight for him.

The Lizzie Hawson hove to, and a boat was lowered. Webb grunted with satisfaction when he saw Hawson himself enter the boat with four men. The boat came to the island, and Hawson stepped ashore.

"Wait," said Webb. "Wait till they get used to things. They are watchful and suspicious now."

It so happened, however, that after Chin Lee had got most of the islanders out of sight, he and a couple of powerful Mongolians had huddled in the entrance of a house near the beach, and Hawson, walking from the shore, and looking about in perplexity, passed close to this.

In an instant two pairs of hands shot out, Hawson's legs were seized in a grip of iron, and he went over backward as if he had been struck on the head by a flying crane. He made one effort to struggle, but before his astonished men could get their senses together to help him, he disappeared from their sight into the hole in the ground.

Then Webb and Tom, leaping up, gave a halloo, and the fight was on.

The men on board the steamer had seen what happened, but did not understand it. But when they heard guns, and saw Chin Lee leap from the ground, and heard a blood-curdling war-whoop, they knew.

Then from every house on the island there poured men and women, and the natives were armed with their own war-spears.

It seemed that these natives had their own little grudge to settle. Hawson was an old enemy of theirs, and before the advent of Bender had made a practise of coming there and robbing them of their seals.

Webb motioned toward the steamer, and Chin Lee shouted his commands. As a boat was lowered from the Hawson, a score of big walrus-hide boats shot out, and every one of them held a half dozen savage islanders.

The women stood in groups on the island and howled war chants, and the Chinamen went into the mêlée with some of the ferocity of a Boxer uprising.

The gun on the steamer was fired, but it hit nothing unless it was the side of the mountain, and after forty minutes Webb and Collamore, somewhat bespattered and tired, but not seriously wounded, shook hands with each other.

Some wounded men lay on the ground, but no one had been killed, all of Hawson's men were prisoners, either on the boat or the island, and the steamer was in possession of Chin Lee.

"Well," said Webb grimly, "all that's necessary now is to get aboard and go home. And don't let's waste any time about it. I don't like the atmosphere about here."

And they wasted no time. Tom ran to the missionary's house and told the news. Kate came out, with Father Akerman, and Webb began what remained as his part of the work still to be done.

"The question is," he said, "what shall we do with Bender?"

"Oh, we've got nothing to do with Bender," said Tom. "Let's get away."

"But we've got to take the Chinamen if they want to go."

It took some time to settle these things. The Chinamen did want to go, and Chin promised that they would be good Chinamen and make no trouble. They would not even try to get into San Francisco. They would do whatever Webb said.

Webb did some thinking.

"Everything plans itself," he said.

"It isn't necessary even to try. You read about people in difficulties being shrewd and working their way out. It's all bosh. Everything works itself out.

"Here we have Bender and his gang who claim the island. As no one else seems to want it, let him have it. We'll leave Bender and his gang here. Now, the engineer and assistant engineer and the firemen of the steamer, and those of the crew who can talk, want to sail with us, and promise to obey orders. Very good. We need them. Hawson we'll take back as a prisoner. The mate says he can run the ship.

"Now, then, the Chinamen can be depended on to keep the crew in subjection. Then we have Tom, who wants to get away, and the Chinamen can't get into San Francisco. Their shares of gold will satisfy them, and they, like Chin, will want to go back home. Good.

"We get to San Francisco, see? Kate and I go ashore. Tom remains hidden. I make my report, and Chin Lee takes the Lizzie Hawson to China with Tom aboard. How's that for a heap of good things?"

"Hoopla!" cried Tom. "But what about Mr. Akerman?"

"Leave me," said the missionary. "I came here to teach these people, and now I shall have a chance. You might have a vessel stop with supplies. And a few logs for a house won't hurt you."

"You shall have them," said Webb.

So, with everything settled so nicely, they started the next morning. The raft was taken in tow again, and the Lizzie Hawson steamed away slowly to the southward for San Francisco.

And everything went lovely for a few days, and it seemed as though all of Webb's statements would be borne out, when lo! one morning the lookout shouted, "Steamer dead ahead with zigzag course."

They crowded to where they could see her, but she had seen them, and with black smoke pouring from her funnels she came straight for them.

"By Jove!" shouted Webb. "It's the Growler!"

Sure enough, it *was* the Growler, with Murphy, red-faced and explosive; Murphy, who had been scouring the seas looking for whaleback number five; Murphy, who could not give a satisfactory account of the disappearance of Webb, and who had, somehow or other, been looked on with some suspicion concerning the escape of Collamore from Wigwood.

But Murphy was happy now, though his face was redder.

"What ship is that, captain?" asked a lumberman who stood near him.

"Blamed if I know. She's a whaler, I suppose, from the looks, or a sealer. But dod-gast it all, where did she pick up that raft? There wasn't a current to take her 'way up north. There's something uncanny about all this. But we'll go aboard and see."

When the two steamers were near, Murphy shouted:

"What ship is that?"

"The Lizzie Hawson, bound for San Francisco with consignment of logs for Burke & Bayliss, and Dave Webb as supercargo and Kate Collamore as passenger," shouted back Webb.

"Glory be!" came back from Murphy. "But it's worse and worse, Jones. What's Kate Collamore doing there? If Kate's there, then they had something to do with Tom's escape."

"Well," said the lumberman, "as long as it's all over, and we know who killed Billy Evans, I'll tell you. Tom Collamore went away in a cache Webb and Garry and I built in whaleback number five, and the ten men in masks were nothing but Webb himself, who stuck a knife in Byke's arm, with Byke's full permission and assistance. Are you wiser now?"

Murphy's face looked as if it would explode, or else go soaring off over the ocean.

"Well—gosh all fish-hooks!" was all he said.

When Murphy went aboard the Lizzie Hawson and Jones accompanied him, Jones looked around for Tom, but Tom was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's Tom Collamore?" bawled the lumberman, as he grasped and almost wrung Webb's hand off.

Webb looked scared.

"You needn't be afraid," said Jones, whereupon Kate rushed to him and stood there, white-faced and trembling. "It's all out. When the news came that Tom

had escaped, and nobody could find him, Kane acted queer, and Peter Davig almost went off his head. Then something was said while Kane was drunk that aroused suspicions in Curtis. Curtis ain't so bad, you know, and he began his investigations all over again, and, by Jove, it was that old whited sepulcher, Davig, who killed Billy Evans. Kane knew it, and was well paid for what he did.

"Davig was arrested by Curtis, broke down and confessed. The story Tom told was true to the half inch. He did give the money his mother had to Davig, but Davig put that away and showed the money he had taken from Evans as th t Tom had paid to him. We've advertised in all sorts of papers, but got no answer. Where have you been, anyway —and where's Tom Collamore?"

"Here," said Tom. "I've heard every word. Ho, for home and Sallie Jackson!"

And Murphy, red-faced still, listened to Webb's explanation, while Kate wept in Tom's arms.

"Cut her loose," chuckled Murphy. "We ain't got nothing to do with the Lizzie Hawson, and don't want to pay her salvage. That's yours. Cut her loose, and we'll take the logs in with the Growler."

So the Lizzie Hawson steered for China, and the Growler took whaleback number five into San Francisco.

When the happy group went home, Webb had fifteen thousand dollars in his pocket, and now there's one unmarried girl the less in Wigwood, which was the point we were trying to reach all along.

THE END.

UNCLE JERRY'S DOG FIDO.

By LEE BERTRAND.

The terrible visitation upon a nephew with a million at stake.

"HERE'S a letter for you, dear," cried Martha as she glanced through the batch of morning mail which the maid had just brought in. "It's postmarked 'Cape of Good Hope,' so I suppose it's from your Uncle Jerry."

My wife handed me the missive across the breakfast-table, and I opened the envelope eagerly, fondly hoping that my very wealthy relative had seen fit to send me a substantial token of his regard in the shape of a check or a money-order.

"Is it good news, dear?" inquired Martha anxiously, watching the expression of my face as I read.

"No," I growled, "it isn't good news. Uncle Jerry is getting to be an awful disappointment and a confounded nuisance. I'd write and tell him so—if he wasn't so alluringly rich."

"He hasn't gone and got married, has he, Gerald?" inquired my wife fearfully.

"Married! Good Heavens, no!" I cried, filled with horror at the suggestion. "Do you think I could sit here so calm and collected in the face of such a terrible calamity? Of course it isn't any such bad news as that, little girl; but it's bad enough. Here, take the letter and read for yourself."

As Martha perused my uncle's characteristic scrawl her countenance gradually cleared.

"Why, this isn't such bad news, Gerald," she declared. "Uncle Jerry simply asks us to take care of his pet dog for a while. Surely we can afford to do him a little favor like that."

"I detest dogs," I growled, "and so do you. Why can't the old fool keep his dog or turn him over to somebody who appreciates dogs, instead of thrusting the little beast upon us? I'll wager that when he arrives he'll turn out to be a little yelping, snarling, yellow mongrel who'll always be in the way and always tearing everything to pieces. I call it a confounded imposition. I'm surprised to see you take it so good-naturedly."

"Well, considering what we expect from dear uncle—some day—it's up to us to do all we can to please him and keep

in his good graces," replied Martha, with a pleasant smile. "After all, he isn't asking such an awful lot of us. It's true I don't like dogs, but I can manage to tolerate this one for a time. Besides, it may not be a dog at all. The letter doesn't say what it is. Uncle simply states that he is sending you his 'dear Fido,' and hopes that you will take good care of him. Fido may be a cat. Cats are not so bad, dear."

"Who ever heard of a cat named Fido?" I grunted, determined to view the matter in its worst light. "It's a dog, sure enough, Martha, and a nasty, detestable little beast into the bargain; I feel it in my bones."

"Well, let's hope that your guess will turn out to be wrong, and that when Fido arrives he'll turn out to be a nice, gentle, quiet cat," declared Martha optimistically. "At any rate, Gerald, whether it's a dog or a cat you've got to go down to the dock and get him when the ship comes in. We can't afford to anger Uncle Jerry by refusing him this little favor."

"No, I suppose we can't," I agreed moodily. "You're right, Martha. We'll have to grin and bear it. If the old man had any sense of decency, he'd have sent along a good-sized check to defray the expense of the beast's board and lodging; but I suppose such a thought never entered his head."

"Uncle's letter says that Fido is to sleep indoors," said Martha. "Where shall we put him, dear?"

"In the kitchen, of course," I replied fiercely. "You don't think for a minute that we're going to make him a bed in the front parlor, do you?"

"Well, you know the letter says we're to treat him as if he were one of the family, and do everything in our power to make him comfortable," protested Martha. "Do you think we'll be doing our duty fully, dear, if we make him a bed in the kitchen?"

"Duty or no duty, that's where he's going to sleep—either there or else in the back yard," I declared firmly. "I admire your conscientiousness, girlie; but there's a limit to good-nature."

"Well, after all, I suppose I can make him pretty comfortable in the kitchen," replied Martha. "I'll get a nice basket and some clean straw from the grocer."

And sure enough, when I arrived from the office that evening I found a big, roomy basket, nicely lined with straw, in the coziest corner of our little kitchen, all ready for Fido's reception.

"Aren't you rushing things a bit?" I asked my wife. "I should think you'd have preferred to wait until the beast arrived before going to all this trouble. He may prove to be too big for that bed, you know."

"Well, in that case I can easily exchange the basket for a larger one," replied Martha, with a good-humored smile. "I suppose it *would* have been more sensible to wait, dear; but you know when once I get an idea into my head I can't rest until I've carried it out. Doesn't this bed look cozy? I'm sure Fido will like it. I do hope that he is a cat instead of a dog. Somehow or other I feel sure that he *is* a cat. I have always wanted a cat."

"And I feel equally sure that he's a dog," I declared. "And, as I said before, an ugly, surly little canine, at that. I know enough of Uncle Jerry to be able to picture just the kind of dog he'd fancy."

A few days later, when the steamer arrived in port, I went down to the pier to get Fido. I was accompanied by Jack Fisher, of our office, a corpulent young man with a perverted sense of humor which was continually finding vent in the most inane, idiotic, and irritating laugh imaginable.

It was not a well-bred laugh—it was one of those loud, coarse guffaws which makes one feel like committing murder every time one hears it.

If I had guessed what was to follow I should not have taken Fisher along with me; but being in blissful ignorance of what was in store, I accepted with gratitude his offer to accompany me, for I knew that he understood all about dogs, and I secretly made up my mind that I would persuade him to carry Fido all the way home.

When we arrived at the dock I espied a surly-looking, red-faced man standing near a gangplank, puffing on a corn-cob pipe.

"Pardon me, my good friend," I said, "do you belong to this ship?"

"Not exactly," he drawled. "The

ship happens to belong to me. I'm the captain."

At this reply Fisher guffawed immoderately. I frowned upon him severely, and turned to the captain with much dignity.

"My name is Owens—Mr. Gerald Owens," I said. "I understand you've got a dog on board for me—shipped by Mr. Jerry Martin, of the Cape of Good Hope."

"Then you understand wrong, sir," he replied. "There ain't any dog for any person by that name."

I breathed a great sigh of relief. It seemed that, after all, my guess had been wrong, and Martha's correct. Woman's intuition was truly a wonderful thing, I reflected.

"Well, then, it must be a cat," I said, with a pleasant smile. "Its name's Fido, so naturally I supposed it was a dog. Have you a cat for me, captain?"

The man took the pipe from his mouth and regarded me curiously.

"No, I ain't got no cat, either," he drawled. "There's an animal for Mr. Gerald Owens, but it ain't a dog and it ain't a cat."

"Neither a dog nor a cat!" I gasped. "Then what the deuce is it?"

"A giraffe," answered the skipper calmly.

"A *what?*" I shouted, my eyes fairly bulging out of their sockets with amazement and horror.

"I said a giraffe," repeated the skipper, with a shade of impatience in his tone. "Don't you understand the English language, or are you hard of hearing?"

"Surely you must be joking. It can't be true," I stammered, and turned to Fisher for sympathy; but that idiot was howling with laughter, his merriment being so acute that it almost doubled him up.

"I'm not joking," grunted the skipper. "There's a giraffe on board consigned to Mr. Gerald Owens, of New York; and if you are the man you'd better get a move on and take away your property."

"But I don't want a giraffe," I protested. "Surely there must be some mistake. My uncle couldn't have played me a low-down trick like that."

Then what I thought was the truth suddenly dawned upon me, and a heavy load was lifted from my heart.

"I understand now," I cried, almost smiling. "It's a stuffed giraffe, eh? A stuffed giraffe, for my front parlor. Of course it is! Excuse my emotion, captain. I was somewhat staggered at first, for I thought you meant that the animal was alive."

"And you thought right. It *is* alive," was the hope-blighting reply. "He's very much alive, my friend, and a deuced lot of trouble he's been to us coming over. I wouldn't ship another giraffe for any cash consideration."

At this information my heart once more became as heavy as lead, and a cold perspiration bedewed my brow.

"This is preposterous," I groaned. "My uncle must be crazy to expect me to take care of such a beast. A dog would have been bad enough—but a giraffe! Good Heavens, it isn't to be thought of. Jack Fisher, you blamed fool, if you don't quit that asinine laughter this instant I'll beat your fat face into a jelly."

"My dear friend," cried Fisher apologetically, between howls, "excuse me—I can't help it—it's too funny for anything. A pet giraffe—ha, ha! Best joke I've heard of! Reminds me of the old rime:

> Gerald had a sweet giraffe,
> With spots as black as ink;
> He had to climb a ladder
> To give his pet a drink.

This improvised parody struck him as being so funny that he straightway became doubled up with laughter once more.

Even the grouchy captain smiled; but I could not see one vestige of humor in the situation, which to my mind closely bordered on tragedy.

If I refused to take my uncle's strange pet from the ship I might with certainty abandon the hope of some day inheriting his fortune.

On the other hand, what the dickens was I going to do with a giraffe? How could I manage to keep such a strange beast in my little suburban home? In my perplexity I took Uncle Jerry's letter from my pocket and reread it carefully.

The first three paragraphs were unimportant, merely expressing my uncle's delight at hearing I was so happily mar-

ried and his desire to meet Martha at an early date. The letter then continued:

I am sailing for Europe to-morrow and, later on, shall visit the United States again and make a long stay with you, my dear nephew and nicce.

In the meantime, I am going to ask a small favor of you. I want you to take care of dear Fido for a time. Naturally I can't take him along with me on my travels, and there is nobody here with whom I would care to leave him, so, it seems to me that the best thing I can do is to ship him to you.

He is a fine fellow and will give you very little trouble, I am sure. He is of a friendly disposition, and I feel confident that in a very short time he will be as attached to you and Martha as he is to myself.

If you love me, you will take the very best of care of Fido. In fact, he should be treated as one of the family. I assure you he is used to it, for, at home, nothing has been considered too good for him.

He must sleep in the house, and you or Martha must take him for a long walk every day—otherwise his health will suffer.

I know that you will do me this favor, so I am shipping him to you without even waiting for your reply.

If, when I arrive I find that Fido is well and happy, you will be rewarded—later; but if I find that you have not been faithful in your stewardship, you need not expect anything of me.

There was a postscript to the letter, informing me how Fido had been shipped and when I might expect him to arrive.

When I had reread this extraordinary communication I felt almost positive that my uncle had gone out of his mind. I would have been inclined to believe that I was the victim of a practical joke, save for the fact that I knew my uncle to be a most serious-minded man, who could never even see a joke and was the last person in the world to indulge in a prank of this sort.

The letter had sounded crazy enough when I had first read it and thought that it referred to a dog or a cat; but it was almost impossible to imagine anybody writing thus of a giraffe.

"Treat Fido as one of the family, and let him sleep in the house," my uncle commanded.

Could a more insane proposition be conceived? Did Uncle Jerry suppose that we lived in a barn?

And according to the letter I was expected to take the beast for a walk every day! I could just fancy myself marching through our streets with a giraffe for a companion!

Perhaps in the Cape of Good Hope it was possible to keep a giraffe as a household pet; but it was a mighty big proposition to try it in New York City, even though I lived in the suburbs and had a garden at the back of my house.

Still, the prospect of forfeiting my inheritance was terrifying. My uncle was well advanced in years, and at his death I might expect to come into a million dollars if I stood in his good graces.

A man will do a whole lot for a million dollars.

After some deliberation, I despairingly decided that I would assume guardianship of that confounded animal.

"Very well, I'll take the beast," I told the captain gloomily.

"Very good," he replied. "But before I hand him over to you, sir, you must furnish me with some proof that you are Mr. Gerald Owens, the party to whom the animal is consigned."

"Pshaw!" I cried bitterly. "You don't think I'd be fool enough to take him if I wasn't the right party, do you?"

"Perhaps not," he replied; "but I'm a careful man. You've got to prove your identity to me if you want that giraffe."

Accompanied by that idiot Fisher, I left the pier in search of somebody who could identify me, and as luck would have it, a block away we met a police captain with whom I was intimately acquainted and who also knew the captain.

He consented to return with us, and vouched for me to the satisfaction of the skipper, and, after a few formalities had been disposed of, the giraffe was transferred from the ship to the wharf, with the assistance of a gang of longshoremen.

The stupid-looking beast was nearly eighteen feet in height from head to hoof, and stood on the pier regarding us out of fearful, blinking eyes, and at sight of him Fisher went into a fresh paroxysm of laughter.

"Stop that noise, you blithering idiot!" I growled at him. "This may be funny

to you, but I assure you it isn't so to me. Imagine having to make a household pet of a thing like that! If you'd stop that unseemly laughter and tell me how the deuce I'm going to get him home you'd be doing me a real favor."

"Get on his back and ride him!" howled Fisher, and only the hasty intervention of the police captain prevented me from felling him on the spot.

"Or you might take him with you on a street-car. Doubtless the conductor would let you ride on the back platform." Tears of laughter were running down Fisher's cheeks.

"Let me get at him," I cried savagely, struggling desperately with the police captain.

"Steady, old man," said the latter soothingly. "Don't lose your temper. If I may venture a suggestion, I think I know the best way to get that animal to your home."

"Then, by all that's merciful, tell me," I cried eagerly.

"Hire an automobile, and hitch the beast on behind," said the policeman.

"Pshaw! I'd look pretty, wouldn't I, sitting in an automobile with a giraffe in tow?" I snapped.

The police captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you've got to get him home some way, and you can scarcely expect to pack him in a dress-suit case. I think you'll find my suggestion is the most practical," he said confidently.

And in the end that was exactly what I was obliged to do. I hired a touring-car, tied a stout rope around the beast's neck and fastened him to the rear of the machine.

Fisher got in the automobile with me. He assured me that he was "going to see the thing through to the very end."

On our way home he informed me repeatedly that he was having the time of his life, and the excitement and curiosity we caused as we rode through the crowded city streets, while extremely mortifying to me, afforded him unbounded delight.

I shall not attempt to describe in detail that never-to-be-forgotten journey. The distance from the dock to my home was over ten miles, and we had to proceed at a painfully slow rate for fear of putting too great a strain upon the giraffe's trotting powers.

I will merely mention the fact that we had not traveled far before the automobile broke down, and it took us half an hour to get it in condition again.

During that time a crowd of nearly a thousand persons gathered around us, attracted by the unusual spectacle of the patient animal.

The crowd hazarded many audible guesses as to what we were going to do with the beast.

Some expressed an opinion that we were a part of a circus, and that the elephants, lions, and bareback riders might be expected to follow in short order. Others were equally sure that we were an advertisement for somebody's breakfast-food, and seemed disappointed that we did not hand out samples.

One sharp-featured woman announced in a loud voice that in her opinion we were burglars and had stolen the giraffe from the Central Park Zoo. She appealed to the crowd to get a policeman at once, before we could get away with our booty; but luckily her appeal fell unheeded.

Several, waiving all formality, boldly asked us outright where we were taking this strange appendage to our motor; but their questions remained unanswered, for I maintained a savage silence, and Fisher was too much convulsed with merriment to be able to make any reply.

At length, after many harrowing adventures, we arrived within sight of home, and at the foot of the road leading to our little frame house I stopped the machine and jumped out.

"Here," I said grimly to Fisher, "you stay here a while. I'll go on in advance and prepare Martha for this surprise. If we proceed right up to the house with that wretched thing in tow, we're liable to scare her to death. And to think that the poor unsuspecting girl has prepared a nice basket in the kitchen for Fido's bed! This is awful!"

But instead of expressing sympathy, the silly fool gave vent to another of his guffaws; so I left him hastily and proceeded to the house.

"Well," inquired Martha expectantly, "where's Fido? Haven't you brought him, dear?"

"Yes. I've left him up the road with Jack Fisher," I replied gloomily.

"Is he a cat or a dog, Gerald?" she inquired anxiously.

"Little girl," I said gently, taking her hand in mine, "prepare yourself for bad news. Fido is neither a dog nor a cat. He's a giraffe."

I expected that she would fall in a swoon, or at least cry out in horror at these words, but, to my surprise, she did nothing of the kind.

"A giraffe!" she exclaimed, clapping her little hands together delightedly. "Oh, Gerald, how perfectly lovely! He'll give such an air of distinction to the house, and that odious, purse-proud Mrs. Ketcham, next door, will be crazy with jealousy. I'll wager she never owned a giraffe in her life. Bring the pretty dear here at once, please, Gerald. I'm dying to see him."

I looked at her dazedly for a second, and then, without trusting myself to speak, retraced my steps back to the automobile.

"Come on," I said to Fisher; "bring the giraffe to the house, Jack. I've told her."

"How did she take it?" inquired my grinning companion. "Was she very much shocked?"

"Shocked? Not a bit of it," I cried. "She's actually delighted at the idea of keeping a giraffe. Women are strange creatures, Jack, and my wife is the most wonderful woman ever born."

When Martha saw the animal she went in ecstasies over him and expressed great delight at the important fact that his coloring exactly matched the shade in which the exterior of our house was painted.

"He'll look fine in our back yard, dear," she exclaimed enthusiastically. "Of course we'll have to keep him there, for, despite Uncle Jerry's letter, it will be a physical impossibility to let him sleep in the house."

"I should say so," I declared emphatically.

"Luckily, the weather is fine, so it won't hurt him to sleep in the open air tonight," Martha continued. "And tomorrow morning, dear, you must get up early and hire some carpenters to build a shed."

With the assistance of Fisher, I dragged the awkward-looking beast into the back yard and tethered him to a tree.

A little later Fisher took his departure, after enjoining me to be sure to kiss the giraffe good night for him; and soon afterward, Martha and I retired.

Exhausted by the excitement of the day, I slept soundly, but was awakened early next morning by the loud and repeated ringing of our door-bell. Hastily I jumped into a dressing-gown, went down-stairs, opened the door, and found old man Ketcham, our next-door neighbor, yanking our bell-handle and almost foaming with rage.

We were not on good terms with the Ketcham family, so I fiercely demanded to know what the dickens he meant by this strange conduct.

"What do I mean?" he shouted. "I'll show you what I mean by the time I get through, you villain. What the devil do *you* mean by keeping wild animals in your back yard?"

"That's no business of yours," I retorted hotly. "I'll do as I please on my own property."

"No business of mine!" he howled, fairly dancing with rage. "Oh, you impertinent upstart. That confounded giraffe of yours has eaten the tops off all my apple-trees. There isn't a leaf left. No business of mine, eh? I'll have you haled to court and show you whether it is or not."

Of course this startling announcement completely took the wind out of my sails and humbled me to the dust.

"I'm sorry," I said meekly. "I promise you that it shall not occur again and that—and that my giraffe shall be severely punished for what he has done."

Even these generous promises did not soothe him, and he went away, leaving with me the pleasant assurance that he would see his lawyer that very morning and make me pay dearly for the damage he had sustained.

Later, upon investigating, I found that Fido, although tethered to a tree in my yard, had managed to stretch his long neck over the fence and derive a substantial meal from my neighbor's apple-trees.

That was not the worst, however. After breakfast Bridget, our maid of all

work, went out in the back yard to shake the crumbs from the table-cloth. Martha and I had neglected to tell her of our new acquisition, and at sight of the beast she uttered a loud shriek, and running into the house, fell in a swoon upon the floor.

When we finally managed to revive her, she announced her unalterable intention of packing her trunks and leaving at once.

In vain we tried to reason with her, and assured her with much vehemence that the giraffe was not his satanic majesty, as she was inclined to believe.

"If he isn't the divil himself, he's one of his craytures," she insisted. "Oi'm sure he's no Christian baste, an' Oi wouldn't drame of shtaying here with the loikes of him around. Ayther you gets rid of the long-necked, polka-dotted spalpeen, or I quits the job. That's sure."

Of course we couldn't fire Uncle Jerry's giraffe, so we had to let Bridget go, and, realizing the difficulty of obtaining domestic help in the suburbs, I groaned with anguish and hurled fierce imprecations upon that spotted beast in our back yard.

Martha, on the contrary, bore it all with surprising good-nature.

"After all," she commented, with a brave smile, "we can afford to make a few sacrifices, dear, for the sake of Uncle Jerry — and the money he is going to leave us some day. And besides, do you know, Gerald, I'm already becoming quite fond of dear Fido. He has such a sad, wistful expression on his face. One can't look at him without feeling sorry for him."

"I'm glad you feel that way about him," I growled. "I don't. I can't look at him without experiencing an almost uncontrollable desire to twist his neck."

That evening Martha's Aunt Jane paid us an unexpected visit and announced her intention of staying with us for a few days.

Aunt Jane, I should explain, was the wealthiest member of Martha's family. As she is an elderly spinster, Martha had hopes of some day inheriting her wealth, and for that reason, although she was a very disagreeable person and very hard to get along with, we always made it a point to be as cordial and attentive to Aunt Jane as we were to Uncle Jerry.

On this occasion her visit caused us much uneasiness, for she was of a very nervous temperament, and we feared that she would strongly object to the presence of Fido in the back yard.

Neither Martha nor myself could pluck up enough courage to break the news to her that night, so she went to bed in blissful ignorance of the fact that there was a giraffe on the premises.

We took care to give her a bedroom in the front part of the house, so that there was no danger of her looking out of the window and discovering Fido.

In the middle of the night we were awakened by loud screams issuing from Aunt Jane's chamber, and, feeling sure that burglars were in the house, I jumped hastily into my dressing-gown, seized my revolver, and rushed to the rescue, with Martha pluckily following in my wake.

We found that the screams were being emitted by Aunt Jane, who was sitting bolt upright in bed in a state of great terror and excitement.

"Oh, Gerald! Oh, Martha! Oh, my niece and nephew," she screeched, "I've had such a terrible experience. A horrid creature just put its head through that window and—and k-kissed me."

"Kissed you?" gasped Martha. "Are you sure, dear aunt, that you were not dreaming?"

"Of course I wasn't," replied the aged spinster very indignantly. "I was asleep when the monster put his hideous head through the window; but I awoke just as soon as his tongue touched my face. I shrieked, and he instantly withdrew his head—quick as lightning."

"Can you describe this creature, Aunt Jane?" I inquired quakingly.

"Not accurately, nephew. You know I can't see very well without my glasses, and naturally I didn't have them on; but it seemed to me that it was some kind of animal with a very long neck. It's a mercy I wasn't killed."

"That confounded giraffe must have broken his rope and got loose," I muttered, and rushed to the back of the house. Peering into the back yard, I found that Fido was indeed missing.

Hastily I donned some clothes and went out to search for him, trembling as

I thought how angry Uncle Jerry would be if his pet was not found.

A sigh of relief escaped me as, by the light of the moon, I espied that giraffe, half-way up the road, standing stock still, contentedly munching the leaves from some tall trees, and with one-half of the broken rope still dangling from his left hind leg.

Stealthily I approached him, and managed to draw near without arousing his suspicion; but as I stooped to grab the rope, he suddenly became aware of my presence.

Never shall I forget the look of terror on that poor beast's face; never shall I forget the quaint figure he made as he stood there as though transfixed, with the moonbeams playing upon his yellow, black-spotted hide; and never shall I forget the rapidity and the unexpected viciousness with which he raised his long leg and dealt me a kick on the left shin which sent me sprawling on my back.

Then he galloped off in the direction of some near-by woods, running as fast as he could; but he could have taken his time, so far as I was concerned, for I was in no condition to pursue him.

My leg felt as if it was broken, and it was with great difficulty and indescribable suffering that I managed to crawl back to the house on my hands and knees.

Of course we had to explain matters to Aunt Jane, who immediately became very angry and the next morning indignantly left us, after declaring that she would never pay us another visit and that when she died she intended to leave all her money to organized charities.

"Now we're in a pretty fix," I groaned to Martha. "I won't be able to walk on this leg for months. Aunt Jane has disinherited you, and Uncle Jerry will surely disinherit me when he learns that his infernal Fido has beaten it to the tall timbers. It will cost me a pretty penny to settle for old Ketcham's apple-trees, and you'll have a hard job getting another girl to replace Bridget. A thousand curses on that giraffe. I wish I'd never seen his ugly hide."

Even Martha's optimism was not proof against this distressing state of affairs. She buried her pretty face in her hands and sobbed bitterly.

"Little girl," I cried hoarsely, "do me a favor and go out of the room. I'm going to say things about Uncle Jerry and his giraffe which no lady should hear. If I don't say them at once I shall burst. Please go immediately."

Martha was about to comply with this urgent request when just then there came a violent ring at the door-bell.

Martha hastily dried her eyes and went to open the door.

A second later a dapper little man stood bowing before me.

"Pardon me," he said, "have I the honor of addressing Mr. Gerald Owens, and have you got a giraffe?"

"More trouble," I thought, groaning inwardly. "I suppose that confounded beast has been doing some more damage, and this fellow has come to demand satisfaction."

"My name is Owens," I replied guardedly, "but I haven't got a giraffe."

"Haven't got a giraffe!" he cried, plainly very much disappointed. "I understood that you had one."

"I did have one," I admitted sullenly, "but I haven't got him now. He's gone!"

"Gone!" he exclaimed in great surprise. "Gone where, sir?"

"I don't know where he's gone, and what's more, I don't care," I shouted. "He's seen fit to leave me, and I want it distinctly understood that I won't be held accountable for his acts. Who are you, anyway, and what the dickens do you want?"

He handed me a neatly engraved card.

"My name is Johnson, sir," he said. "I'm from the Bronx Park Zoological Gardens. I believe a great blunder has been made, by which you have come into possession of a valuable animal rightfully intended for us.

"Mr. Jerry Martin, of the Cape of Good Hope, some months ago wrote us a letter, promising to send us a live giraffe to add to our collection. By a mistake of the shipping-clerks at the other end, the giraffe has been consigned to you, while a pet poodle dog, really intended for you, has been consigned to us.

"We have just received notification of the mistake by cable. We have your dog, and are ready to transfer him to you if you will be kind enough to give up our giraffe in exchange."

"Give him up!" I cried excitedly. "I should say I would. So Fido *is* a dog, after all, eh? Gee whiz, I'm glad! Dear little Fido! Send him round right away, please. My wife and I dearly love dogs. As for that giraffe, you'll doubtless find him somewhere in those woods over yonder. If you can get him you are more than welcome to him. But please be good enough to do me a great favor. If you catch him, lock him up in the strongest cage your zoo possesses—*and lose the key.*"

THE BATTLE OF THE WEAK.

By ELIZABETH YORK MILLER.

Author of "The Score Against Him," "Larry's Luck," "His Automobile or Theirs?" etc.

The story of what happened in one case after riches took to themselves wings.

CHAPTER I.

THE MEN WHO WATCHED.

YOUNG Calhoun, sitting at graceful ease on the edge of the library table, watched Anne Gravestock in amused, tender silence. She was regarding the ring on the third finger of her left hand thoughtfully. It meant so much, this sparkling symbol of their troth. It was the exquisite outward expression of an inward, holy joy. It was the crystallization of hope, the bright sparkle of promise.

He looked very boyish, did Calhoun. His deep-blue eyes were fringed with black, which gave him a pleasantly impish expression, and a limp, disordered bang straggled across his forehead. To complete the youthful ensemble he wore clothes which the tailors designate as "'Varsity."

Yet Dickson Calhoun was not especially young. Not so young as Anne, by several years.

Some misgiving as to his youthful appearance must have flickered across Anne's mind. Her hand dropped to her side and the ecstatic light died out of her eyes.

Suddenly she spoke, with sweet wistfulness.

"You are such a boy, Dick! Forgive me—but sometimes I wonder if you fully realize just what this—means? I can't believe that its seriousness appeals to you. Oh, Dick, true love is so beautiful—so wonderful!"

"Anne!" he exclaimed reproachfully, "you think that I don't understand." He looked at her in silence for a moment, then he said slowly: "Why, Anne, it's only because I love you so much—too much to give you up or to let pride and honor stand in my way—that I asked you to marry me."

"What do you mean, exactly?" questioned Anne, raising her delicate brows with a suggestion of hauteur. "What can you mean, Dicky? That sounded rather—well, crude. Don't you think so?"

"Possibly," returned Dick affably. "But the whole thing is crude—crude on my side, of course. Your father thought so. At least he hinted at it."

"My father has but one thought," said Anne, her eyes shining luminously. "Nothing counts with him in the whole world but me. It is his dearest wish that I should be happy."

Dickson Calhoun smiled ruefully, but did not reply.

"He said 'yes,' didn't he?" she questioned.

Dick slipped from the table and took her hand—the one with the ring. He raised it to his lips, but he kissed the hand, not the ring.

"What if it had been 'no,' sweetheart?" he asked.

For one brief instant Anne hesitated. Then she drew in her breath sharply, threw back her head, and smiled into his eyes.

"I would have married you, Dick—just the same!" she said. "That is how I love you. My father is everything to me—I love him dearly. But not as I love you, Dick. You are the sun, moon, and stars, and all the world besides, to me. That is why I am afraid. If I was very poor—"

"But you're not poor," broke in Dick serenely. "You're as rich as Crœsus. I'm the poor one."

"That's it, Dick," she said earnestly. "My tastes are really very simple—I should love—"

"You mean you wish you had to live on what I make?" He laughed shortly. "Impossible, Anne! And as for your tastes being simple— You don't know what simplicity is. It's a fortunate circumstance that one of us is rich—I'd rather, of course, it was I. It's—not nice to live on your wife's money."

Anne flushed to her temples.

"I've always thought that it wasn't," she said a trifle breathlessly. "I'm glad that you feel that way, too. I shouldn't mind being poor. I really shouldn't," she reiterated.

She waited a moment for him to fill up the gap with a suggestion, but apparently Dick had no suggestion to offer.

"I've always felt that it was as humiliating for the wife as for the husband," continued Anne reflectively. "She wants people to look up to her husband."

"Humiliating? What?" asked Dick.

"To support her husband."

"I've taken care of myself so far in life," answered Dick, "and I guess I can keep it up, at a pinch. I hope you don't think I'm absolutely a beggar."

Anne threw her arms impulsively about her lover's neck and drew his face down until it was on a level with hers.

"Oh, Dicky, forgive me! I didn't mean to hurt you—I really didn't. I'm sorry. And we will be happy, won't we?"

Dick was puzzled. It was plain that he did not quite follow the emotional workings of his fiancée's mind. He kissed her tenderly.

"I hope we will be very happy," he replied softly. "I mean to make you happy, if such a thing is possible, and I think it is. As for the money—well, we've argued about that before. But your father won't consent to have you live on what I make. He told me so. And I think we'll be just as happy as though—as though we were poverty-stricken."

Anne stroked his face gently.

"Dear, dear boy!" she murmured. "If you were only older, Dick—even if you looked older. That would help a great deal, I think."

Ten minutes later, after an exchange of fond farewells, Dick was gone, and Anne stood by the library window alone. She watched his strong, athletic figure lovingly as he strode out of sight across the square.

The street-lamps were lit. When Anne turned away from the window the room was quite dark.

In the grate the fire made a tiny patch of light, but the shadows were thick and closed in about her like a curtain. Anne shivered involuntarily, and put her hand to her throat. For the moment she was suffocated by an undefined foreboding.

Then she fumbled for the button that controlled the electrolier, and the room was flooded with soft, rosy light. The menacing shadows retreated to the corners.

The hands of the tall clock pointed to the hour of six.

Anne looked at it in amazement. She stepped nearer to see if she was not mistaken. Then she murmured to herself: "Six o'clock, and father not home! Why, he hasn't been this late in years."

Again she turned toward the window and parted the heavy red hangings.

The street was almost deserted. A light scurry of snow gave a wintry touch to the air, and the few pedestrians who passed were muffled to the ears.

"What can be keeping him?" Anne murmured impatiently.

To know how methodically John Gravestock ordered his life was to understand his daughter's uneasiness. Her mother had died when Anne was a baby, and since that time her father had made her his one consideration. He had scarcely been separated from her a day in all the twenty-five years of her life.

She had studied at home when most of her companions enjoyed the sedate revelry of boarding-school. She had been shielded as are few girls in these days, and her ignorance of the world was astonishing.

John Gravestock brought up his daughter to have no talent or trade, as even the daughters of millionaires are permitted to have in this generation. Under her father's compelling yet tender hand she had developed into a sedate old-fashioned little lady. She had been taught the art of fine sewing, as it was one of her mother's accomplishments. She sang a little,

possessing a well-trained but slender voice, and she also played the piano indifferently well.

Beyond these few tricks, Anne could do nothing except keep house. She was homekeeping by instinct, and the happiest days she had known were passed with her father at their camp in the Adirondacks, where she could herself take an active part in the domestic routine, limited as it was.

When in town it was John Gravestock's unfailing habit to leave his office at half past four o'clock. The carriage went for him at four. By five o'clock he was at home. Any deviation from these rules was always promptly announced to Anne over the telephone.

Anne had been so occupied with entertaining her fiancé that she had failed until now to notice how late the hour was. Her heart beat fast with an unaccountable apprehension as she stood looking out into the twilight.

She could not understand. It was apart from his usual habit.

What could have happened? Why had the carriage not returned? And why, above all, did her father not telephone?

She was about to question the servants, to find if any message had been received, when a shrill, penetrating cry, far down the street, caused her to start involuntarily.

She pressed her face to the window and listened intently.

Then she gave a half hysterical gasp of relief. It was only a newsboy pedling his papers.

Nearer he came and nearer. Plainly he was extolling something out of the ordinary.

Anne was fascinated by the importance and insistence of his voice, but she could make out nothing of what he said beyond "Uxtra! *Woild! Joynal!* All erbout de—" The rest was an indistinguishable jumble of words.

Her mind was so taken up with trying to make out what the newsboy was saying that she failed to notice two men who had halted in front of the house, until the boy himself came abreast of them. Then she realized suddenly that they had been standing there for some few moments.

Both of the men wore their coat-collars turned up, and stood with their backs to the wind.

One of them halted the newsboy and bought a paper.

Then, unmindful of the wind and stinging snow, they moved over to the curb under the electric lamp and scanned the sheet eagerly.

The shorter of the two, a squarely built young man with a light mustache, held the paper while his companion read it over his shoulder.

Anne could see the great flaring headlines, and she wondered, with some uneasiness, what it was all about.

The men's soft felt hats were white with snow, and the shorter man's mustache was powdered with it. Standing in the patch of light with the falling flakes all about them and the silent street stretching away on either side, with the square in the background, they looked like men in a play.

Suddenly, with a dramatic gesture quite in keeping with the picture, the taller man reached over the other's shoulder and pointed to a paragraph. The other nodded quickly in confirmation. Then, as though with one mind, they both turned and looked straight up at the window where Anne Gravestock was standing.

Anne was too surprised to turn away. A cold horror held her fast, and she could not move to draw the curtains together.

For how many seconds or minutes or hours she stood thus, frozen with fright, it was impossible to say.

But the spell was finally broken.

There came the muffled thud of horses' feet on the snow-covered street, the quick whir of wheels, and the long looked-for carriage dashed up to the curb.

To her great relief, Anne saw her father emerge from the vehicle, followed by Keating, his secretary.

With a half articulate cry of joy she flew to the door to welcome him. But to Anne's amazement, her father, always the soul of affection and consideration, brushed by her with a muttered exclamation of impatience.

His face was gray and his step uncertain. The secretary followed him closely.

Through the open street door Anne saw

that the two strange men who had been watching the house had suddenly disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

THE TRAGEDY.

WITH John Gravestock's home-coming that snowy evening in December the whole house was thrown into a fever of anxiety.

It was plain that something unusual and dreadful had happened.

What it was Anne did not know, and nobody took the trouble to enlighten her.

Her father went immediately to the library with his secretary. Presently other men arrived—his lawyers and two business associates—and they, too, were shown into the library.

Dinner was served and taken away again, untouched.

Anne, crouching miserably in a corner of the reception-room, listened to catch the sound of voices from the library. The constant jingle of the telephone-bell irritated her, and the frightened, puzzled faces of the servants as they moved silently about their tasks angered her without reason.

She must know what had happened.

Her father had brushed her aside. He had told her he was busy—too busy to offer her the slightest explanation. But she must know what it was.

What should she do? She hesitated outside the library door, afraid for the first time in her life to intrude upon her father. With a sob in her throat, she realized that it was the first time such a thing had happened.

No opportunity offered, however, for her to enter the library.

She could hear her father's voice constantly raised in sharp, rasping tones above the others.

But she could make nothing of it except that they were discussing "deals" and kindred terms common to stock-exchange parlance.

It was nearly nine o'clock before she thought of Dickson Calhoun. Then she remembered that she had expected to see him again that evening.

Yet he had not come, and neither had he sent word explaining his absence.

But Dick must know what had happened. He could tell her. Probably he had been delayed and would come later.

Anne was unable, however, to sit calmly under such uncertainty. She waited a scant ten minutes, and then she set out methodically to discover Dick's whereabouts.

She called up the club, his apartment, and the homes of several of his friends.

No one had seen him or could give the slightest clue as to his whereabouts. At his apartment she was unable even to communicate with his valet. Both master and man were missing.

Anne exhausted the resources of the telephone, and turned away from it with the calmness born of despair.

Every nerve in her body tingled. Her face was drawn and old-looking. She was faint from lack of food, and near collapse.

Not knowing exactly what to do next, she started again toward the library, when a peal at the door-bell startled her.

Dick at last! She did not realize until she heard that peal at the bell just how much she had needed him.

She longed to pillow her head on his shoulder and sob out the story of her sufferings. Dick would understand. He would know. Dick would not have brushed her aside, no matter how crucial the circumstance.

She did not wait for the servant to open the door. She herself flung it wide with a cry of welcome to the young man standing in the vestibule.

At her invitation he entered quickly, brushing the snow from his hat and shoulders.

"Thank you, Miss Gravestock," he began awkwardly, and then, to her consternation, Anne saw that he was not Dickson Calhoun.

She had opened the door to the young man with the light mustache whom she had seen standing in front of the house earlier that evening.

A gust of wind from the street blew in and scattered sparkling flakes of snow over Anne's white gown as she stood with her hand on the open door. The flakes glittered like the gem on the third finger of her left hand.

"*You!*" exclaimed Anne confusedly. "I thought—"

"I am sorry I startled you," he replied quietly.

His voice was pleasing, and Anne was somewhat reassured by it.

"Can I see Mr. Gravestock?" he questioned.

Anne looked at him in fluttering silence. So many strange things had happened. This young man was only a part of them.

"My father is very busy," she replied, trying to speak naturally. "Will you give your message to me?"

He looked at her keenly, then he said shortly:

"I—think—so k If you will be so kind."

"What is it you want—what can I do for you?" again questioned Anne.

The voices in the library were plainly distinguishable now, and Anne noted an alert expression cross the young man's face.

"Mr. Gravestock is in there?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Anne briefly. "If you will tell me, please—come in here."

She motioned to the door of the reception-room.

She saw that his eyes traveled quickly about the room, taking in every detail in a manner not affected by one's usual callers. Yet, despite this, he did not seem ill bred—merely businesslike.

"I suppose you understand, Miss Gravestock, why I am here," he said hurriedly. "I would be glad if you could give me a few details—nothing, of course, beyond what you wish to tell. The public is interested—and, I may assure you, sympathetic. Your father is popular—he is one man in a thousand—"

"What do you mean?" gasped Anne, holding to the back of a chair for support. "I know nothing—absolutely nothing! He didn't tell me—nobody has told me. It is the cruelest thing I ever heard of. And as for knowing why you are here—I—I suppose you are a reporter, although at first I had no idea—"

The young man nodded philosophically.

"Yes," he said. "I am Goodwin, of the *Comet*. If you will be kind enough to give me a few facts—"

"But I tell you I don't know what you are talking about," persisted Anne, pathetically. "Please explain. What has happened? My father is concerned in it. I understand that much. He—he is much wrought up about something and the lawyers are here—"

"Yes—yes. Who else? Are his partners with him?"

The eagerness in his voice betrayed him. He had expected to find an easy subject, but Anne developed a sudden stubbornness.

She closed her lips firmly.

The young man flushed as he realized his mistake.

"I hope you will pardon me for asking you such a personal question, Miss Gravestock," he said quietly, "but you are engaged to Mr. Dickson Calhoun, are you not?"

Anne's upper teeth closed over her under lip until it was blue-white.

She nodded affirmatively, but dared not trust herself to speak.

"Did you know that he bought a ticket for Chicago and left town three hours ago?"

He had expected to startle Anne, but he was not prepared for the savage manner in which she answered him.

Like some harried creature who in desperation turns upon its tormentor she flew at him.

"You are not telling the truth!" she exclaimed vehemently. "I will not listen to you—I—please go away or I shall call my father—"

"I am telling the truth," replied the reporter quietly; but I thought, of course, that you knew—"

Anne's face was white.

"It cannot be true," she reiterated passionately. "He—he was here just before dinner. I would know—"

She paused suddenly. The young man was measuring every word and gesture. She must not let him see how perturbed she was.

Her voice was as low and even as his.

"I hope you will pardon me," she said. "I am wrought up, as you must see. Of course it is possible that Mr. Calhoun has gone to Chicago. There might have been some reason. He will let me know. After all, what has that got to do with my father? And you have not told me yet. Can't you see that I am most anxious—"

"It has everything to do with your father," replied the young man earnestly.

"Don't you see the significance of it? With apparently no reason whatever and without leaving word for you, Mr. Calhoun goes away the very evening that—"

He paused awkwardly. Her distressed eyes and quivering mouth had silenced him.

"Yes?" she pleaded. "Tell me, quickly!"

"I—I can't," he said, taking up his hat and moving quickly toward the door. "I am sorry, Miss Gravestock. I am sorry to have hurt you. I wouldn't have done it if it could have been helped."

"But you must tell me!"

Anne laid firm, detaining fingers on his arm, and tried to drag him back into the room.

"I can stand it," she said breathlessly. "I think I can stand anything."

But the reporter gently loosened the clutch of her fingers on his arm, dashed for the street door, opened it and was gone before she could stop him.

Half frantic with anxiety, Anne made her way blindly down the hall to the door of the library. She pushed it open, and a moment later her father's arms had closed around her and they were comforting each other.

"Will you forgive me, daughter?" John Gravestock cried piteously. "I've robbed you of everything—there isn't a penny left for you! And God knows what will become of you when I'm gone."

"Robbed me, father?" said Anne in a shocked whisper. "What can you mean? I had nothing—if I had, it would have been yours, too."

"I mean that I've spent all my life piling up money for you and planning so that you should never have to know the meaning of want. All for nothing! It's all gone—every penny of it, Anne! We're paupers, you and I. We've got to begin the fight all over again. I don't care for myself, but it's you. You'll suffer, Anne—and I meant that you should never—"

He stopped short and caught at his throat, as though it hurt him to breathe.

Anne's frightened gaze swept the room questioningly.

The faces of the others told her that her father was speaking the truth.

She choked a little as she replied.

"Don't—father. Please don't feel so badly. It's all right. I don't mind—not at all. I truly don't," she said soothingly. "Nothing matters very much as long as we have each other. Don't you know that?"

John Gravestock drew in his breath with an effort. Again he caught at his throat. Keating, the secretary, watched him with anxious eyes.

"Yes—Anne, we have each other. And you have Dick."

"I have Dick," faltered Anne, her eyes growing misty with sudden tears. Where was Dick in this hour when she most needed him?

As she spoke she had a quick glimpse of Keating's white face as he darted between her and her father.

The secretary was none too soon. John Gravestock's head had dropped forward on his chest and he swayed back into the chair, with Keating's arms supporting him.

Instantly the room was in confusion. Somebody found a stimulant and tried to force it between the clenched teeth of the dying man.

The unreality of the tragedy held Anne calm. The lights, the frightened voices, the limp form on the sofa, the coming of the doctors, and the hurrying to and fro of the servants, seemed all but a part of some hideous dream.

It was only when her maid had led her gently from the scene and she was in her room that she awoke to the meaning of it all.

A glimpse of her own ghastly face in the glass brought her to her senses. A low, pitiful wail broke from her lips, and she flung herself face downward on the bed to sob out her grief.

"He is dead!" she cried over and over again. "My father is dead—and I am alone!"

CHAPTER III.

ANNE FACES HER PROBLEM.

THE day following John Gravestock's death brought a deluge of letters and telegrams. Anne was too ill to attend to them, and young Keating sent the acknowledgments.

Keating it was, too, who carefully kept the garish newspaper accounts away

from Anne. One paper, in particular, dared to hint broadly that because of John Gravestock's failure his daughter's engagement with a prominent but impecunious young clubman would be broken off.

The failure and sudden death of the banker created a small panic in Wall Street, but by the time he was buried the excitement had nearly subsided. John Gravestock had entered upon the long oblivion of the dead.

But in one heart the death of the banker had left an empty spot that could never be filled. In one heart he was destined to be mourned long and sincerely.

Anne's loss was doubly bitter because of Dickson Calhoun's silence. In a way, one grief took the edge off the other. Yet the misery and bitterness of being absolutely alone, the cruel certainty that the man she loved had proved unworthy affected her deeply.

The once-beloved ring disappeared from her finger. About the corners of her sweet mouth there came new lines, and her eyes shone with a hard brilliance they had never worn before.

It was just a week after her father's death that she received a letter from Dick. It was dated *en route* from Chicago to Colorado Springs, and was brief, but tender.

Anne broke the seal with trembling fingers, though her lips were firm:

> DEAREST ANNE: Have just read an account of your father's death. Am shocked beyond measure and realize fully how deep your grief must be, my darling. I sent you a wire explaining my absence. I had no time to telephone. If my brother is better I shall return immediately, so that I may be able to give you any possible assistance. Keep up your courage.
>
> Always lovingly,
>
> DICK.

Anne read the letter through a dozen times. Then she deliberately tore it to shreds. The lines about her mouth deepened, and the hard look in her eyes was intensified.

"He ran away!" she muttered. "He ran away from me at such a time. I don't believe his brother—I don't believe anything! I shall never see him again as long as I live. And I hope I can learn to hate him as dearly as I loved him."

She rang for her maid.

"Where are the messages that came after my father died, Agnes?" she asked.

Her voice was like ice. The maid shot a frightened look from the corners of her eyes before replying. Then she said in a whisper:

"In the library, miss. Mr. Keating attended to them. He wished to spare you—"

"Thank you," said Anne curtly, dismissing her.

In the library!

She had thought never to enter that room again. It was haunted with mingled memories of happiness and pain.

How vividly she recalled the incidents of that afternoon when Dick had given her his betrothal ring!

Word for word, their conversation came back to her. She shuddered at her stupid optimism with regard to poverty. Her belief that they could be happy—yes, even happier—if they were poor, had been the dream of an ignorant child.

But when Anne opened the door of the library, it was not of Dick Calhoun that she thought.

The orderly room, the serene quiet, the huge pile of letters and telegrams on the mahogany desk, recalled her father. This had been his room; in it he had died, and he was gone from it never to return.

When she had sufficiently mastered her feelings, Anne sat down in the huge leather chair before the desk and methodically went over the messages.

Finally she found the telegram Dick had mentioned in his letter.

It, too, was brief, and quite as unsatisfactory as the letter had been:

> On my way to Colorado Springs. My brother Phil is very ill. Just time to make train. Will write. D.

Anne sat very still for a long time before the desk, her hands folded on the pile of messages. Dick's telegram lay scattered on the floor in little pieces. The tall clock measured off time slowly. Once the maid came softly to the door

and listened; then, hearing no sound, slipped away again.

How long she sat there Anne neither knew nor cared.

Her next conscious act was to gather Dick's gifts—not many—and with her own hands make them into a neat bundle. These, with his letters, she despatched to his town address.

She sent no explanation with them. It was enough. He would understand and appreciate the fact that she did not reproach him.

Anne was thoroughbred to her fingertips. No matter how much she loved or suffered, she could lock the secret behind her lips and keep it there.

Having accomplished the breaking of her engagement, Anne had now the question of her own future to consider. How serious a question it was she had yet to discover.

The estate must be settled immediately in order to satisfy the creditors. The lawyers found a purchaser for the house, just as it stood, furniture and all, and in the short space of another week Anne found herself the possessor of two trunkfuls of clothes and less than one hundred dollars in money.

The servants were dismissed, and Anne, with her two trunks, moved from the north side of the square to the south side, into a cheap but respectable boarding-house.

Keating and the lawyers had supposed she would make her home with some distant cousins up-town. The distant cousins, however, were oblivious to the fact that their kinswoman was near to the borderland of want, and Anne's pride flared at their selfish indifference.

"Anyway," she said passionately, as she surveyed her new surroundings, "I won't be a poor relation who bothers. I'll take care of myself. I'll manage it somehow. But, oh! if I only knew what to do."

For the first time in her life Anne gave voice to a criticism of her beloved father.

"Oh, daddy, daddy!" she wailed. "Why didn't you make me fit to take care of myself? Why isn't there something I can do besides spend money?"

Anne's new room was a sharp contrast to her old one. When the two trunks were brought up there was scarcely room to move about.

But if it was shabby, at least it was clean; and if the smell of cooking always pervaded the halls, the food was palatable.

In fact, Anne did not give as much thought to her surroundings as might be imagined. She spent no time in bewailing the loss of luxury. She was too fully occupied with solving the maintenance problem to find fault with how she had to live.

Every day this problem grew more and more serious.

The hundred dollars dwindled as the weeks went by, and Anne's courage dwindled also. She had cut herself off from every old association. Even Keating, the faithful, did not know what had become of her, and the world is curiously forgetful of the absent.

Every morning she scanned the advertisements in the papers and answered those that seemed promising. Employers, however, put no special premium upon unskilled labor.

In desperation, Anne even joined the ranks of those "Situation Wanted" ladies who politely inform the public that they are willing to assume light duties as visiting secretaries, or "will travel as companion to lady of refinement," or who graciously offer to "read French to elderly persons or invalids," the notion being probably that elderly persons and invalids cannot so readily escape from a bad accent.

Anne discovered that what the world wanted most was experience, and in this useful commodity she was sadly lacking. Experienced stenographers and bookkeepers were in envious demand, and Anne owned to neither of these solid accomplishments. Neither was she "an experienced designer on children's cloaks and dresses," nor could she qualify as "experienced forelady for a silk-skirt factory."

There was only one field that did not demand experience, and this field promised good pay and every inducement possible to lure its workers.

Anne reflected bitterly that had she been seeking the position of housemaid or cook, long ago the matter would have been settled.

In the sixth week, however, after her father's death, Anne Gravestock actually did find something to do. It was clerical work in a real-estate office. The pay was six dollars a week—a dollar less than she paid Mrs. Kidder for board. But in her leisure moments she was to be permitted to address envelopes at one dollar per thousand, and her leisure moments, her employer assured her, would be many.

In this manner she hoped to make up the deficiency in her board bill, and enough besides for laundry and car fare. She could manage for a while with what clothes she already possessed.

Anne's outlook upon the future at this time was not especially promising. It was characteristic of her that she accepted it with a degree of optimism amazing in a girl who had been cherished as tenderly as she.

Possibly her inexperience of the world helped her to see the brighter side. Very probably her youth had a great deal to do with it, for Anne was marvelously young for her twenty-five years.

Anne's former life now dropped from her like a cloak. She was no longer Anne Gravestock, the petted daughter of a millionaire and the fiancée of the popular young clubman, Dickson Calhoun.

The humdrum routine of the boarding-house enveloped her, and during business hours she was to be merely the new clerk in the office of Hardman & Henry.

The trolleys and the Subway greedily swallowed her spare nickels, where formerly she had but to press a button, give her orders, and a carriage was waiting for the asking.

Yet such was Anne's adaptability, and such her wonderful self-control, that not one of these new acquaintances so much as suspected the truth concerning her.

The old gentleman who sat on her right at Mrs. Kidder's table, and who gently prodded her each evening concerning her luck, or lack of luck, in the matter of job-hunting, believed — although she had never directly said so— that she was from the country and had come to try her fortune in New York. Little did he realize that every day, for years, on his way to and from work, he had passed Anne's former home.

Anne had seen him many times. Often, when watching at the window for her father, she had laughingly averred that she could tell the time by the old gentleman who crossed the square every night at precisely five o'clock.

That some day she should be sitting beside him at Mrs. Kidder's, and pouring into his sympathetic ear her tale of the day's discouragements, had never entered her mind.

There were others at Mrs. Kidder's whose attentions Anne did not enjoy as thoroughly as those of the old gentleman on her right.

One of these, a young salesman for an upholstery house, annoyed her constantly by his persistent favors, and several of the women, too, were uncongenial.

But Anne's better self counseled patience with these petty irritations. She told herself that all would go merrily, now that at last she had found a job.

CHAPTER IV.

FACING NEW CONDITIONS.

THE real-estate office of Hardman & Henry was far down-town, almost hidden in that maze of queer streets and oddly assorted buildings which lies south of Fulton and east of Broadway.

The distance to it from the square where Anne lived, as traveled by the "L," was not great, but walking was a far different matter.

Anne's recent pilgrimages in search of work had accustomed her to much tramping. She determined to try the experiment of walking one way to work, as another jealous guard against expense.

Accordingly, on the Monday morning she was to start in at her new employment she rose bright and early, drank a solitary cup of coffee in the dining-room, and was off before any of the other boarders had appeared.

To Mrs. Kidder's thoughtfulness she owed a small package of lunch. With lunch and the car fare she calculated she could save fifteen cents a day.

Fifteen cents a day!

Anne, who often had squandered fifteen dollars on a bunch of violets without a single pang of self-reproach, smiled grimly to herself as she threaded her way

swiftly through the tangled web of dirty streets.

On every side other women were hurrying to work—other women less well-dressed than Anne Gravestock and less hopeful looking.

The thought came to Anne, as she plodded along, that some day she would be like these other women, even as she was now of them. Doesn't each occupation breed its peculiar type?

Furtively she noted their sallow, thin faces, and the unhealthy, blotched texture of their skin, which came, no doubt, from lack of exercise and improper nourishment.

Their clothes, too, fell under her critical scrutiny. Without the least sense of superiority, she noted that for the most part they were cheap and somewhat tawdry.

Sometimes scraps of their conversation came to Anne. These were interesting, too, since, like the complexions and the clothes of her fellow workers, they gave her a glimpse of what the hard trend of years might make of her.

That there was another class of working-girl—a smarter, well-dressed class, she was yet to learn.

The walk down-town was longer than Anne imagined it would be. By the time she had reached City Hall Square she was almost fagged out.

Fortunately, she had an early start. The clock in the City Hall tower told her there remained fifteen minutes before she was due at the office. She hurried on.

She almost ran across the smooth stretch of asphalt pavement which leads from the square into Park Row, anxious to lose no time, but was brought to an abrupt halt at the curb by the stream of cars and vehicles.

A moment later, half timidly, she started to cross.

Suddenly she was conscious of some one at her side. A hand was laid on her elbow to guide her over the dangerous street. Furious at the familiarity, she turned, but before she opened her lips to speak she recognized the man. It was young Goodwin, the *Comet* reporter.

He touched his hat courteously.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Did I startle you, Miss Gravestock? This is a bad place to cross—I suppose you don't often get down into this part of the city."

Anne flushed. In that moment she looked very beautiful and fragile.

Her black clothes set off her complexion and blond hair admirably. She raised her gray eyes to young Goodwin's with disconcerting frankness.

"Thank you—I was startled at first. No. I don't often get down-town, but in the future I expect to—" She stopped suddenly and bit back the words. "I forgot," she said quickly. "I forgot that you are a—reporter."

It was Goodwin's turn to flush now. He did not reply until they had crossed the street safely.

"I am a newspaper man, Miss Gravestock," he said reproachfully; "but, in spite of that, I have no wish to force your confidence. It is only fair to myself to tell you, however, that I was not responsible for that story about—about your engagement being broken off. That was surmise, purely, on the part of the city editor—and I may as well add that I almost lost my job because of what I didn't find out."

The crowd elbowed them on either side, and the noise and roar of the streets beat over them like the boom of the surf, yet Anne and young Goodwin stood as isolated as though on some desert isle.

He looked at her steadily for a brief moment in silence. Then he said, "Do you believe me?"

"Yes, I suppose so," faltered Anne. "Only, I didn't hear—I didn't know about any stories. Mr. Keating, father's secretary, said it was best for me not to read the papers." Her eyes filled with tears. "Please tell me where William Street is—will you?" she exclaimed, changing the subject. "I must hurry."

She glanced back at the clock apprehensively.

"This is Nassau," he replied. "William is the next street east—it runs parallel with Nassau. Can I be of any further assistance to you?" he concluded hopefully.

"No, thank you. I must hurry. Good-by."

Without turning to see that the young reporter still stood where she left him, watching her, Anne plunged into the tide

which surged down the tiny thoroughfare he had indicated.

A few minutes later she reported for duty to Mr. Hardman.

The offices of Hardman & Henry were pretentious, and might even be styled "elegant," since the latter word is so universally misused.

On the floors were thick velvet rugs, costly but disconcerting in their frankly vivid blues, reds, and greens. The furniture was of mahogany, carved elaborately with the grinning heads of satyrs.

These, together with the office-boy in a uniform consisting mainly of gold braid and buttons, the chic stenographer whose Princesse gown of black brilliantine and stylishly coiffed hair proclaimed her not unfamiliar with the latest word from Paris, the leather couches, the highly polished brass railings, and general air of luxury—these all were eloquent testimony to the fact that all was well with the firm in a business way.

Anne's interview with Mr. Hardman in the private office was brief. Yet, brief as it was, it served to show her that the element into which she was about to plunge was even more strange and less easy of adaptation than that at Mrs. Kidder's.

Mr. Hardman himself was a stout, well-fed, middle-aged man, with polished red skin and white mustache. His clothes were as stylishly inappropriate as the office furnishings, and fitted him almost too well.

His hard blue eyes and brisk, businesslike air, bespoke the successful general who has engineered his forces to his own satisfaction. One look at Mr. Hardman and another at Mr. Henry, who was his counterpart except in the matter of years, and you understood how they had marshaled those disordered legions of swampy Long Island land into neat battalions and made the transaction pay.

Anne Gravestock, in her simple black gown, with her smoothly arranged, shining hair and slender ringless hands, was out of place in this garish setting. But no one noticed the incongruity.

Mr. Hardman, seated in a deep leather chair before his desk, his pudgy feet dangling an inch above the floor, scarcely gave her the benefit of a casual glance. It was the first time Anne had ever been in the presence of a member of the other sex who did not grant her the courtesy of rising when she entered the room.

"Miss Jackson will attend to you," said her new employer bluntly. "She'll show you your desk. We haven't many rules in this office—but those we have, we expect the employees to keep."

He paused and turned his hard blue eyes upon Anne, as though waiting for her to agree with him.

"Yes, I understand," faltered Anne, seeing that some response was necessary.

"We expect you to be punctual—to keep your mind on your work, and to dress neatly. The hours, as I told you, are from nine until five—half holidays on Saturday in the summer. When you have finished with your other work, you may address envelopes, for which the firm will pay you one dollar a thousand. That's extra pay—of course; all firms are not so generous—"

Again he paused, and Anne murmured her thanks. The interview was over, and she backed her way confusedly out of the door to seek Miss Jackson and be set at work.

Her embarrassment struck Anne humorously as she made her way from the august presence of her employer. She could scarcely subdue a smile as she recollected that she was not half so impressed and ill at ease when she was presented at court the year before. King Edward was a much less difficult person to meet than Adolf Hardman.

During her interview with Miss Jackson, Anne was conscious of being scrutinized long and carefully.

Miss Jackson herself was pretty, but she had absorbed the showy atmosphere of her surroundings. Her graceful figure was a shade too well outlined to conform to the ethics of good taste, and her pompadour a full inch too wide.

She presented a striking contrast to Anne's slim girlishness—a contrast that young Mr. Henry was not slow to notice. When Anne had been set at her task, the junior member of the firm approached the stenographer and gave her several compliments on her general superiority as a "looker" compared to the new girl.

In this manner Anne, fortunately, gained the friendship of the most influential member of the office force. That

Miss Jackson was a power to be reckoned with she was not long in discovering.

Anne was also to learn that a warm heart and vulgarity are not necessarily incompatible.

CHAPTER V.

ANNE RECEIVES A PROPOSAL.

"A GENTLEMAN called to see you this afternoon, Miss Gravestock," said Mrs. Kidder.

The kind-hearted landlady, stout of form and red of face, laboriously puffed up the three flights of stairs in Anne's wake.

Anne turned abruptly and caught at the banister. Her cheeks looked wan and thin in the semi-light.

"Not for *me?*" she asked incredulously.

She laid a tremulous hand over her heart to still its beating.

During the two months that had passed since her father's death she had tried to put Dickson Calhoun completely out of her mind. He belonged to that other Anne Gravestock—the Anne she had all but forgotten. There had been days and hours when she thought she had succeeded in forgetting him.

Suppose that it was Dick who had sought out her hiding-place? Would she forgive him? Ah, would she? Pray God that she might not forgive him too easily!

Her lips were dry as she framed the next question.

"Did—did he leave a card?"

"Here it is," said Mrs. Kidder, between spasmodic gasps of breathing.

She dusted the strip of cardboard with her apron and held it out to Anne.

"Such a fine-looking young man, too!" she continued triumphantly. "I don't wonder you wouldn't look at Mr. Unger—I never did care for traveling men myself, especially them in the upholstery business . . . and he was so disappointed not to find you in! I told him to come again this evening."

"Thank you, Mrs. Kidder," returned Anne spiritlessly.

To Mrs. Kidder's disapointment her young boarder showed no special joy at sight of the name on the card.

Anne entered her room and sat down forlornly on the edge of her bed. The card fluttered to the floor, and she did not stoop to pick it up.

It was not Dickson Calhoun, after all, who had found her. Only young Keating. Only young Keating, with his melancholy brown eyes and smooth, boyish face, no doubt come to offer her another service.

Keating had been her very willing slave ever since he entered her father's employ, and that was some six years before.

But it was not Keating and his devotion to her interests that engrossed Anne in that moment of keen disappointment.

It was Dick. Dick, the insincere; Dick, the unworthy! And the misery and pity of it was that she loved him, and felt that she always would love him.

Anne was suddenly engulfed by a sick realization of what her life had become. The dreary monotony of the boarding-house, the treadmill of the office, the merciless grind to make both ends meet, and the certain knowledge that she was losing ground, inch by inch, filled her with despair.

During the three weeks she had worked for Hardman & Henry she had been able to earn only two and one-half dollars extra, and that by taking home her envelopes at night.

Little by little her hoard was disappearing. It was only a question of a few months at the most when her wardrobe would need replenishing, for the clothing she possessed was unsuitable for a working-girl. There remained just ten dollars. If she continued living at Mrs. Kidder's, this would soon be gone.

It was absolutely necessary to find a cheaper boarding-place or earn more money. The problem must be faced. She had put it off from day to day, but it could not be put off much longer.

She looked about the bare little room, with its ugly, cheap wall-paper and oddly assorted furniture. At least, it had been a haven. She had no fault to find with it.

Her face was tear-stained when she came down to dinner that evening, and the little old gentleman on her right could scarcely worry through his meal decently because of it.

He supposed she was tired—as indeed she was—and he tried ineffectually to think of something cheering and comforting to say to her.

Anne replied to his sallies with indifferent success, and as soon as she could escaped from the table and the scrutiny of the boarders.

But when she was finally alone in her room she found that she could not force herself to the hateful task of addressing envelopes. There was absolutely nothing to read except the well-thumbed magazines of several months previous, and rather than spend the evening in brooding over her troubles, Anne put on her hat and coat, intending to take a short walk.

All unobserved, as she thought, she slipped from the boarding-house and crossed the square in the direction of the avenue.

An unaccountable longing to be back again in her own atmosphere possessed her. Until now she had allowed herself no time for homesickness, no leisure for grief. Every waking moment had been fully occupied with the stern necessity of making enough to keep body and soul together.

To-night she would be free to flit back for a moment in memory to that other and happier time.

The chill March wind blew against her slim figure with cruel force, but so engrossed was she with her purpose that she failed to notice it.

The double line of lights marching up the avenue enchanted her with a sort of childish delight. She noted the hansoms and the carriages eagerly as the returned wanderer welcomes the landmarks of his old home.

When she had crossed the square she hesitated for a moment, then turned resolutely in a familiar direction. Presently she was in front of the house.

A sob crept up into her throat as she paused briefly. The same red velvet hangings were at the windows; dim lights burning in the rooms touched up lovingly each outline of wall and furniture so well remembered.

Could it be possible that she did not live here any longer?

For one moment of agonized joy Anne was convinced that she was the victim of a cruel hallucination. It was a pitiful dream, perhaps; or, perchance, her mind had wandered.

Everything was as it should be. Her father was not dead. Nothing had altered.

She was the Anne Gravestock of old, returning late from a tea—conscience-stricken, to be sure, for it was past the dinner hour, and her father would be waiting anxiously.

Her hand grasped the iron balustrade. The old Anne Gravestock had never worn such shabby gloves. Nor were her shoes ever as worn as those which now ascended the brown-stone steps. But she was oblivious to these details.

In spirit, at least, she was the gracious embodiment of her old self. Her head was held high with its old-time pride of race, her eyes were sparkling.

She ascended the steps quickly, lest the illusion vanish. The tall young man who was following anxiously behind her had barely time to grasp her hand as she raised it to push the electric button.

"Anne!" he stammered entreatingly. "Miss Gravestock! Please—where are you going?"

The light faded from Anne's eyes. A pitiful cry broke from her lips as she recognized young Keating.

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know!" she half sobbed. "I went for a walk—and I forgot everything. It was the first time I had been near—the house—since it happened."

Hastily she turned and ran down the steps. Mr. Keating followed her.

When she had reached the sidewalk she faced him with her habitual composure. Nothing but the slight trembling of her lip betrayed her inward agitation.

"It was silly, wasn't it?" she said, with an attempt to simulate light-heartedness. "I really did forget. I have been working hard lately. Too hard, I guess." She smiled at him.

But young Keating made no effort to hide his emotion.

"Anne—dear, dear Anne!" he cried, grasping her slim hands and holding them close. "It breaks my heart to see you this way. I—I know you don't think of me as I do of you—but—"

"Mr. Keating!" exclaimed Anne, in a frightened whisper. "Please—don't! It is because you pity me. I understand—"

"It is because I love you!" he broke in vehemently. "It is because I always have loved you. Never before have I had the right to tell you so. But now—"

Anne's gentle eyes filled with tears. She laid her hand affectionately on the young man's arm.

"Thank you—Howard," she said gratefully. "It is good to feel that some one—cares." She choked back a sob.

"Oh, if only—" she exclaimed passionately. "If only I— But, after all, what does it matter?"

"It does matter very much," he replied tenderly, drawing her arm through his. "I understand. You haven't quite forgotten *him*."

He spoke a little bitterly as he referred to Dick.

"I don't expect you to get over that—not right away. But don't tell me it's impossible. I can wait very patiently. Everything I have to offer is yours, Anne, whenever you choose to take it. My heart and all I possess. I can't give you a home as good as you've lost, but—"

"Don't! Please, Howard, I can't bear it. You're too good to me. I wish that I—"

"There. Let's not talk about it any more just now. I wanted you to know that I am ready and waiting, when you call. You may change your mind some day. Who knows? We'll both wait and you can give me your answer by and by."

For a few seconds they walked on in silence.

When he finally spoke again his tone had altered. Again he was the matter-of-fact young secretary anxious to serve the daughter of his employer.

"I think I have some good news for you," he remarked briskly. "But you mustn't set your hopes too high. I'm telling you because I know you're sensible, and if it should be a disappointment—"

He paused a second and Anne filled in the gap.

"I promise not to be overcome by it. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes. Exactly what I mean. Perhaps I ought not to tell you, but somehow I fancy you need cheering up, even if it's only a false hope."

Anne smiled a little sadly and shook her head.

"I do need cheering up, Howard," she protested. "Very much, indeed. Now tell me."

"Why, it's just this. I think we've saved something for you from the wreck. In going over the papers, the lawyers and I discovered a bunch of Baccaras Central. Thought it was worthless, at first—and it is, or very nearly so. Now we've discovered there's a bare chance of its becoming valuable. Fellow from the Northwest, Montana, or some such place—loads of money—name is Derrick, has taken over the road. If he wants to, he can make you rich. Only, of course, it wouldn't be wise to put him onto the fact."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said Anne quizzically. "What am I to do?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Just lay low, say nothing, and hope for the best. If the stock goes up, it'll mean several hundred thousand dollars for you. If it stays where it is, you stay where you are."

"At Mrs. Kidder's, I suppose," she replied, trying to make a joke of it and failing dismally.

If she were only sure of its being Mrs. Kidder's! Anne had come to realize that there were deeps of distress which as yet she had not sounded. The solitary ten-dollar bill which stood between her and disaster seemed pitifully small.

It would not do for Keating to know, however. He would insist upon lending her money. Or, worse still, he would go to those indifferent cousins up-town and enlist their aid.

"You will let me know if you need help—or if there is anything I can do for you," he said insistently, as he held her hand at parting.

"Be sure I will summon you, Howard, first of all," she replied bravely.

But when she was alone in her little room, with the hideous wall-paper and the ugly, mismated furniture, the horrible thought came back to her again with full force.

"Suppose, after all, it came to a final

issue? Suppose she was obliged to face death in this losing struggle of life?

Anne wondered if she would be afraid to die.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. HARDMAN ENTERTAINS A CUSTOMER.

THE question of bread and butter had become so serious with Anne Gravestock that she decided, on her way to work the next morning, either to make a change in her employment or to approach the firm with a request for more money.

Anne was naturally timid, and the mere thought of asking for a raise in salary filled her with panic. Moreover, she had been working for Hardman & Henry only six weeks. It seemed rather early to claim higher remuneration.

Yet in a measure she believed that her request was justifiable. When she entered the employ of the firm it was with the understanding that she would be able to make several dollars a week extra by addressing envelopes. This extra money had fallen far short of her expectations.

Half enviously she watched Miss Jackson's deft fingers fly over the typewriter keys. Miss Jackson was the type of woman eminently fitted to take care of herself.

Well-fed, well-dressed—according to her own standard of what constituted suitability and fashion—and self-assured, she had commanded the admiration of Anne, where at first she had evoked nothing but silent criticism.

It was true Miss Jackson did not shrink from the too obvious attentions of Mr. Henry, but met him good-naturedly on his own ground.

It was plain that an understanding existed between them, but of what nature Anne had no curiosity to discover. She shut her eyes and ears to the stray words of endearment and half-veiled caresses which must otherwise have forced her attention. Since she must continue to endure the surroundings, she would ignore their unpleasant details.

Yet, in spite of her better judgment it was impossible to keep from liking Miss Jackson, whatever faults that complacent young woman might possess.

In time the tight-fitting black dress, the obvious jokes, even the tall pompadour itself, ceased to grate upon Anne. She generously checked them off against the girl's good-humor, her real kindness and her genuine business ability, and decided that the balance was in her favor.

Curiously enough, it was to Miss Jackson that she finally appealed in the matter of more money.

It was the noon hour. The stenographer was carefully arranging her veil over a becoming black picture-hat before her mirror preparatory to going out to lunch. Previously she had manicured her already shining, immaculate nails, and rearranged the elaborate coiffure, with the buttoned office-boy and Anne constituting an admiring audience of two, both of them silently wondering how she so deftly accomplished it.

Mr. Hardman was engaged with a customer in his private office. Mr. Henry had departed, obviously on his way to lunch, but Anne knew that he was loitering down-stairs in the vicinity of the elevator.

The office-boy knew it, too, but since the proprieties were conformed with, nothing else was of special consequence or concern to the office force.

Anne stepped to the mirror back of Miss Jackson with a pretense of making sure that her own hair was tidy.

"I want to ask you something, Miss Jackson," she said nervously. "You won't mind?"

"Sure. Go ahead. Ask me for anything but 'money,'" she replied gaily, manipulating a much-worn powder-rag with the precision of practise.

"But that's just what I am going to ask for." Anne replied.

Miss Jackson whirled around with swift sympathy.

"Not—really. You mean—"

"Oh, no," Anne said, laughing at the unspoken question. "I don't want to borrow. It isn't that." She went on earnestly: "I just wanted to ask you if you thought there was any chance of my getting more—here. You see, I find I can't—I find it's going to be impossible for me to live on what I make—"

She felt her face growing red under the other girl's frank amazement.

"But you don't live on six dollars a

week!" cried Miss Jackson incredulously. "Say, that's tough! Isn't there anybody—I mean, haven't you got any folks?"

"No. There's nobody," said Anne simply. "And I must make more money or find a way to live less expensively."

She could scarcely restrain a smile as she brought out the last word. The irony of it was irresistible.

"That's right, too," agreed Miss Jackson.

The hat, the veil, and the hair were in perfect order by this time. She slipped her arms into the trim jacket which the office-boy held out to her.

"I get sixteen dollars a week," she continued thoughtfully, "and I live with my two brothers and my mother. We keep the flat all together, and we don't have more than we know what to do with at that." She shook her head sympathetically. "I don't see how you can manage it on six."

"I'm telling you that I can't," replied Anne.

"Well, you keep up your heart. I'll tell Henry about it. He'll fix it. Or—" She cast a quick look at the office-boy, and stepping closer to Anne, she whispered: "Ask Hardman yourself. I've got a tip he likes you."

When the door had closed on Miss Jackson, Anne slipped into her corner, and unwrapping her little package of lunch, began surreptitiously to eat it. It was not a dainty lunch. The bread was dry, and the meat between it stringy and tough. Anne forced the mouthfuls down because she knew she must; sad experience had taught her the expedience of taking nourishment whether she wanted to or not.

As she ate her lunch, she puzzled over Miss Jackson's whispered remark that Mr. Hardman "liked" her.

The head of the firm had scarcely favored her with a look since she had been in his employ. Was it possible that he approved of her as a worker?

Anne smiled wryly at the thought. Her personal vanity was small, and as for the work itself, she knew well enough that the office-boy could have accomplished the simple drudgery which fell to her portion with ease, had he the time or the inclination to apply himself.

There was nothing intricate in what she was called upon to do. There was nothing to be commended except, perhaps, her industry. This had been unflagging, because of a set determination to plow through the sea of routine work and so reach the envelopes which, mercifully enough, meant extra pay.

Under present conditions the envelopes represented life itself. No wonder she had worked.

As if in answer to her thoughts concerning Mr. Hardman, the electric buzzer on Miss Jackson's desk rang just as Anne finished her lunch. Tommy had departed on some errand of his own. She was the only one in the office.

Hastily consigning the crumby evidences of her meal to the waste-basket, Anne passed through the corridor leading to the glass door which bore the gilt inscription, "Mr. Hardman." It was the first time she had entered the office since that morning when he had so pompously interviewed her.

Timidly she pushed open the door and entered the room.

Mr. Hardman, dressy as ever, stout and red of face, was dimly discernible through a suffocating cloud of smoke. In one pudgy, ringed hand he held a half-smoked cigar.

Sitting opposite him in one of the luxurious leather chairs which the office boasted, was another man in whose hand was the mate of the expensive cigar.

The other man, however, presented an extraordinary contrast to Mr. Hardman.

He was tall and lank and rather badly garbed—not badly garbed in point of taste as was the real-estate man—but poorly, even shabbily, clad. He wore a long-tailed, loose-fitting frock coat, and a soft hat with a wide brim.

He had a pallid face and drooping mustache. In appearance, he suggested some clever stage conception of a Western gambler; in manner, he was a man distinctly ill at ease in the midst of so much upholstered luxury.

Yet, significantly enough, which did not escape Anne's notice, he was smoking one of Mr. Hardman's dollar cigars and being treated to Mr. Hardman's best and rarely deferential manner.

"Miss Jackson is at lunch," said Anne. "Is there anything that I—"

"At lunch?" repeated Mr. Hardman testily. "It seems to me that this office spends most of its time at lunch. No, you can't attend to it."

Anne murmured a conventional reply and started to retreat, when he recalled her sharply.

"Wait, Miss Gravestock. I want the photographs and description of that Anderson property in Westchester. Do you know where they are?"

"I—I'll look for them, Mr. Hardman," replied Anne confusedly, conscious that the tall, lank man had turned abruptly and was staring at her with a curiosity more frank than polite.

When the door closed after her he remarked, casually, "'Gravestock,' eh? Unusual name—unusual girl. Not old John Gravestock's daughter?"

"Lord, no!" replied Mr. Hardman sententiously.

The other man laughed quietly.

"That's so," he agreed; "one would scarcely look for her here."

Whether he meant the remark for a compliment or not is a matter for conjecture. Mr. Hardman chose to ignore it; and as Anne entered almost directly with the photographs and papers he had ordered, the subject was dropped.

Later, she heard Mr. Hardman speeding his parting visitor effusively, and guessed that one more transaction had been accomplished to the firm's satisfaction.

She did not see the tall, lank man as again he flashed a look of incomprehensible interest in her direction on his way out.

Her fair head was bent low over the pile of envelopes; her stiffened fingers flew with incredible swiftness in their tireless effort to accomplish the impossible.

An hour later her own buzzer rang. Hastily she rose to answer the summons, but stopped short before Miss Jackson's desk.

Miss Jackson, ostensibly at work with her belated correspondence, was in reality dividing her attention between it and the afternoon paper, which was deftly folded beside her typewriter so that she could read or work, as the exigencies of the occasion demanded.

The headline had caught Anne's attention. She stopped and read it deliberately over Miss Jackson's shoulder.

JIM DERRICK DETERMINED TO GAIN CONTROL OF BACCARAS CENTRAL—FIRST GUNS FIRED IN NEW WAR OF CAPITAL, STOCK ADVANCES TWO POINTS—WHO HOLDS THE BALANCE OF POWER?

"Baccaras Central!" murmured Anne incredulously.

"Sure!" replied Miss Jackson. "Now's your time to invest."

"It would seem so," said Anne in a voice not quite her own.

She had forgotten everything but the fact that Keating had said she owned a block of Baccaras Central, and that he hoped it was "going up." She read and reread the headline in an ecstasy of hope.

Then the buzzer summoned again imperatively, and thus sharply reminded of her duty, Anne hurried to Mr. Hardman's office.

CHAPTER VII.

A WARNING AND A REMOVAL.

As she left the office that evening Anne Gravestock's heart fairly sang for joy.

It would seem that her fortunes were mending. Not only had Baccaras Central advanced two points on what promised to be a glorious upward march, but that very afternoon Mr. Hardman, without any request from her, had offered to raise her salary to eight dollars a week.

Anne knew, of course, that the suggestion had reached him from Miss Jackson *via* the junior member of the firm, and she marveled at the ease and dexterity with which it had been accomplished.

The extra two dollars represented an almost living wage. In fact, when she found a cheaper place to board, she could manage to live upon it.

At least she would not starve or go unshod. At the precise moment food and shoes represented the necessities of life to Anne.

There was a fly in the ointment, however. Anne tried to convince herself

that Mr. Hardman's manner during the interview had been merely fatherly. She rejected her quick suspicion of him as wickedly unjust to a really generous nature.

She had shrunk in panic, however, from the familiar, reassuring pressure he had given her arm, and she hated his close, flattering smile. It was the first time she had ever seen him smile, and the sight of his yellowed, uneven teeth repelled her.

He was altogether different from the man as she had previously known him. Yet the fact remained that he had raised her salary and she was grateful.

At the door of the office-building, as Anne came out on her way home that evening, young Goodwin, of the *Comet,* was standing. At sight of her he started forward and his face lighted up with pleasure.

His delight was intensified, perhaps, by the really frank smile she gave him as she held out her hand.

"You!" she cried, and then she blushed a little because she had plainly shown that she was glad to see him.

"This is a surprise," she continued hurriedly, to cover her confusion. "I didn't expect to see you again so soon. It seems we are always meeting by accident."

"It's not altogether an accident this time," he replied. "May I walk to the car with you?"

His matter-of-fact tone and air of having known her all her life unconsciously influenced Anne. She nodded her consent, and he went on:

"You see, it was not an accident this time, because I was brazenly waiting for you."

"Waiting for me?" she exclaimed. "Why, how did you know—"

"That *was* accidental—how I discovered you. I had no idea, Miss Gravestock," he continued earnestly, "that you were—were really dependent upon your own efforts for a living. I could hardly believe that it was you. I thought there were relatives—"

"There *are* relatives," Anne replied simply, meeting his eyes with understanding. "But one does not go even to relatives without an invitation. How did you discover where I am working? I can't believe you followed me that morning."

There was a hint of laughter in her gray eyes as she asked the question.

"No, I didn't follow you," he replied. "At lunch to-day I sat next to two people—a man and a girl—who were discussing you. At least, I felt sure that it was you. The man I knew by sight, and the girl I inferred was his stenographer. I didn't mean to listen to their conversation at first, but I heard your name mentioned—and then I did listen. I couldn't imagine how you came to be mixed up with people of that sort. You'll pardon me for saying it—but you are so—different. The girl was lobbying for a raise in your salary—"

"And I got it," broke in Anne triumphantly, her eyes shining through grateful tears. "Oh, Miss Jackson *is* kind, even if—even if—" She hesitated, confused a little, then went on in a burst of confidence: "It meant a great deal to me. I can't tell you how much. I've been getting desperately poor—" Her voice broke and two tears trickled down her cheeks.

"Oh, I don't know why I should tell you," she continued, "but I must talk to somebody. Mr. Keating—father's secretary—has been so good, and he would do anything for me if he knew. But my life was different when—when he knew me, and somehow I can't go to him even for sympathy. It is too humiliating. And there is nobody else.

"All of our old friends—well, they wouldn't understand, *and they would be sorry for me!* There was only one thing for me to do, and that is what I am doing—trying to take care of myself. Some day, when I learn how, I shall do it better. But now, even a little bit of encouragement helps."

She smiled piteously.

"Why, Mr. Goodwin, I think more of that extra two dollars a week—I'm more proud of it even, than I was when father doubled my allowance because he found that I, and not the housekeeper, was looking after his mending."

The young man's face was troubled. Several times while she was speaking he had turned and looked at her earnestly, as though there was something he wanted to say yet scarcely dared.

Finally he plucked up courage.

"See here, Miss Gravestock," he now broke out eagerly, "you mustn't be angry with me—you've said yourself that there's nobody to look after you. I'm only telling you what a brother would under the same circumstances. But I simply can't stand it—your being with those people, you know. They're not your sort—I mean that firm's no place for you to work."

Her eyes questioned him mutely.

"I don't think I understand," she said. "Of course, the office is dreadful—the furniture and all. Yes, it's really vulgar. But while it is true, as you say, they may not be 'my sort,' surely it's not their fault. I looked for work long enough. It was not easy to find, I assure you."

She bit her lip vexatiously.

"However," he broke in earnestly, "you ought not to stay there. Oh, of course it isn't any of my business, but that fellow Hardman—well, he's not fit to touch you with tongs! You'd be better off doing housework in somebody's kitchen, if you ask my advice."

Anne smiled with haughty sweetness.

"I don't think I did ask your advice, Mr. Goodwin," she replied icily. "Thank you very much. I believe you mean kindly, but I think I am able to look after myself."

"You're not! That's just the point. You're a regular baby," he answered hotly. "Forgive me for seeming so concerned—"

"Oh, certainly," returned Anne, in the same unpleasant tone of voice. "Here is my car. It was kind of you to come. Good-by!"

Afterward she was sorry she had dismissed him so rudely. He had, as she said, meant well. There was no doubt about that, and in her heart she knew that he was right.

She cordially distrusted Mr. Hardman herself. Her anger against young Goodwin was the more violent because he confirmed her own suspicions.

There was something immensely likable about the young reporter. Anne fairly envied him his knowledge of this new world of affairs in which she found herself.

She was a timid swimmer in a strong tide. Young Goodwin understood the currents. Anne compared him for the moment with Dickson Calhoun. With a smile half sardonic, half whimsical, she fancied Dick's ineffectual floundering in the turgid maelstrom.

Dick was altogether of that other world to which she used to belong. He was part and parcel of that old Anne, lost at the same time she lost her costly furs, her maid, her brougham, and all the other essentials of soft living.

But by some trick of misfortune the new Anne had elected to retain the old love, knowing well enough in her heart that she could no more afford the luxury of loving Dickson Calhoun than she could afford all those other things adversity had forced her to renounce.

There were hours, and even whole days, when she truly believed that she had forgotten Dick and that the ache was gone. Then some little thing would recall him and the ache would come back.

He had come back to New York. Anne saw the notice of his return in the society columns of a Sunday paper.

For several weeks afterward she waited hopefully, thinking that he would look her up and compel her to reverse her decision. But no sign came from him, and again through the same medium of information that had heralded his return from Colorado she learned that he was at Palm Beach. He had tarried in New York a scant two weeks.

Anne's lip curled scornfully. She had scarcely expected him to forget so soon, or at least she had expected him to make a pretense of remembering.

The day after the young reporter had delivered his short lecture on the proprieties, Anne received a hastily written note from Howard Keating, telling her that he was going out of town for a few weeks and bidding her keep up her courage. There was every reason to believe, he assured her, that the Baccaras Central Stock was on the upward move. The man Derrick was determined to gain control of the road.

It was rumored that much of his wealth was in Mexican mines, which explained his anxiety. Without Anne's stock he was powerless. She must keep absolutely silent about the matter and wait.

Anne destroyed Mr. Keating's letter,

as he instructed her to do. She wished with all her heart that the stock would advance quickly. Her immediate need of money was terrifying, and with young Keating out of town she felt miserably alone.

Even the distant cousins were in Europe. She had seen the notice of their going about the same time that Dick returned from Colorado, and while she had no intention of ever asking them for assistance, their proximity was a sort of moral protection.

That day she again appealed to Miss Jackson for advice. It was in the matter of a cheaper boarding-place.

Miss Jackson knew of a house on Second Avenue where a friend of hers had boarded once. She could not recommend it highly, but the board was only four dollars a week and the beds were clean, so her friend had said.

Miss Jackson went with Anne to look at the place, and that same evening Anne engaged a truckman to remove her trunks from Mrs. Kidder's.

She said good-by to the kind landlady and to the little old gentleman who sat next to her at table with genuine regret. These people had been her friends, and they were bound to her affections by strong ties.

She pleaded as her reason for leaving that the new boarding-house was nearer her place of employment. She could not confess her dire poverty, even to them.

She knew that good-hearted Mrs. Kidder would urge her to stay a little longer on the chance of her fortunes mending, and she felt morally certain that the little old gentleman would offer to lend her money.

As for the boarding-house on Second Avenue, it was almost unspeakable.

Anne's very soul sickened when she contemplated living there. She had not even a room to herself, but shared her sleeping quarters with two other young women. Each one of them possessed a narrow iron cot and two drawers in the tall, ugly walnut chiffonier. This was the nearest thing to privacy they accomplished.

The walls of their joint sleeping-room were painted a raw, garish green, but the paint was peeling off in spots where dampness from defective plumbing had seeped through. The floors were bare, relieved only by a narrow, soiled strip of carpet before each cot.

Besides the furniture already mentioned, the room, which was none too large, contained two straight-backed chairs and a stationary washstand of ancient and unhygienic pattern.

The house itself was old. On the outside it presented rather a pretentious appearance, as it was built of brown stone and apparently in good repair. But inside it was the last cry of undesirability.

"In story-books," said Anne to herself, as she sat forlornly on the edge of her cot that first night, "the heroine, who has lost all, never descends to such degradation. She chooses death instead."

Anne shuddered and rose quickly to her feet. In the cracked looking-glass she surveyed herself tragically.

There was no one in the room at the time. The other "inmates" were off on pleasure bent.

"Anne Gravestock," she said severely to her image in the glass, "I'm ashamed of you. I thought you had courage. You're nothing but a great big crybaby."

And she was. For the first time in weeks she let down the floodgates of her despair and wept piteously.

The crying spell did her good, however, for when the two other girls came in they found their roommate tucked up in her corner, sleeping soundly. Nor did she awaken while they made their preparations for bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WORM TURNS.

ANNE slept long and heavily.

The next morning when she awakened the sun was shining through the murky window-pane, and the other girls were gone.

She dressed hurriedly, and descended to the basement, where breakfast was being served.

In the light of day the house presented many defects that gaslight had treated charitably.

Everywhere there was dust and grime. The furniture was old and on the verge of falling to pieces; the stairways creaked, and the stale, musty odor which pervaded the entire premises was almost unendurable.

A soiled, tired-looking servant waited on the table, and Anne swallowed a cup of cool, weak beverage masquerading as coffee, and nibbled at a slice of toast with gastronomic reluctance.

None but women were accommodated at this boarding-house, and most of them had departed for the day to their various places of employment. A few grizzled, unhappy-looking old ladies were scattered about at the tables. One and all, they surveyed Anne with frank curiosity.

To them Anne immediately became a mystery which must be solved. She was one more point of interest on their narrow horizon, and they were silently banded together to unravel the details of her secret.

Every woman in that miserable house had her own little story of death, sickness, and loss of fortune. Anne in no wise looked the exception. It is not especially surprising that they stared.

There was hostile politeness in the manner in which they struggled to detain her that morning. Anne parried the adroit questionings with poor skill.

How she had slept, whether or not she was late, had she far to go down-town to her work, did she think she would like it here, were all questions that concerned her indifferently.

The soiled maid handed her a lumpy packet of lunch, which she promptly threw away at the first street-crossing.

It was wrapped with newspaper, tied with a dirty piece of string, and there were greasy spots on it which rendered its contents a matter for dubious speculation. Anne had no curiosity to investigate.

The spotless, shining brass and leather luxury of Hardman & Henry's offices she hailed with relief. How was it possible that she had ever condemned the place, when there were other places so infinitely more dreadful?

It was glorious that her days, at least, were to be spared the odious smells and sights of the boarding-house. Spring would be coming shortly, and Sundays she could stay in the parks.

To Miss Jackson's inquiry about her new quarters she replied evasively. She must not always be complaining. But her tired eyes and listless manner caused inquiry from the kind-hearted stenographer.

"You're sick," she exclaimed sympathetically. "You've been working too hard. Tell Hardman to let you off for the day. He'll do it—I told you he had a 'crush' on you."

Anne roused herself from her apathy and shivered with disgust. She, too, had divined the "crush."

It was impossibe for her to forget young Goodwin's statement that she would be better off in somebody's kitchen than working for Mr Hardman.

Several times that day she was summoned to the senior partner's office on some wholly trivial errand. Each time she answered the summons she grew more diffident and confused.

By the time afternoon arrived there was a scarlet spot on each cheek, and her hands trembled so that she could scarcely attend to her work.

As Anne's embarrassment increased, it seemed almost as though Mr. Hardman himself gained some amusement and satisfaction from the fact. The change in his manner toward her was not to be mistaken.

Yesterday her native modesty had warned her; to-day it resolved itself into a simple matter of common sense. The heavy hand which pawed her arm at every conceivable opportunity could no longer, by the wildest stretch of imagination, be termed fatherly; and the smile which she had hated was almost wolfish in its manner of devouring her.

His tight, fashionably-cut gray clothes, his heavy ornate jewelry, his yellowish-white curling mustache, and his fat, puffy hands were the last cry of offensiveness.

"If he touches me again I shall scream," Anne whispered to herself as once more she answered the summons of her buzzer. "I know I shall scream—or else I'll hit him."

Mr. Hardman wheeled smilingly in his chair as she entered his office.

"Have you finished filing those ad-

dresses, Miss Gravestock?" he inquired with tender solicitude.

Anne held herself rigidly aloof.

"I'm working on them now, Mr. Hardman," she replied quietly. "You only gave them to me half an hour ago."

Her manner said more plainly than her words, "If you'll give me a chance, I'll finish them."

Mr. Hardman laughed. He understood the manner as well as the words.

"Ah, yes—very true. So I did," he answered, favoring her again with the smile that so infuriated her. "Well, take your time. No hurry."

"Thank you," replied Anne briefly, turning to leave the room.

"Wait a moment, Miss Gravestock!" he exclaimed. "What's your hurry—you seem terribly anxious to get away—"

"What is it?" Anne questioned, struggling to maintain her composure.

Her chest rose and fell convulsively, and the scarlet spots on her cheeks deepened. There was an angry glitter in her eyes which should have warned him.

"What is it you want?" she repeated, as he did not answer immediately.

"There are lots of things I want," he replied with heavy humor.

Again there came the smile which displayed his ugly teeth, and again the responsive hatred of it flared in Anne's breast.

"I mean—of me," she said steadily.

The time for equivocations was past. The thing must be settled now for good and all.

This game was a new one to Anne, and she had no notion of its rules, nor is it likely she would have abided by them if she had.

As for Adolf Hardman, the change in tactics rather pleased him.

"You're a handsome girl," he remarked casually, his hard blue eyes watching her steadily.

Anne backed toward the door cautiously, with much the same feeling and manner as a novice in a lion's cage might display.

Never once did she let her eyes wander from Mr. Hardman's shining red face. She forgot her intention to scream or to strike him. She was completely dominated by an overpowering, limb-numbing fear.

She took one more backward step toward the door. Mr. Hardman slipped from his cushioned chair with surprising agility, considering his pudginess and the close fit of his clothes.

"Please sit down for a little—and let's talk it over," he said genially. The hand which yesterday she had thought fatherly descended to her shoulder.

Anne cowered in sickish fear as his lips once more parted in that ugly smile.

Then the other pudgy hand dropped softly to her other shoulder, and somehow, suddenly, all the fear went out of Anne's heart, leaving her the victim of a blind, unreasoning rage.

(To be continued.)

ON THE BORDERLAND.

THE hours of youth are past; and here to-day,
Comrade, we stand, and, looking backward, cheat
Ourselves to prove time rideth not so fleet,
Or, sadly musing to ourselves we say:
"Can lightsome hours so run themselves away,
And sunshine glide unmarked with magic feet,
Nor note the marge where light and shadow meet,
Nor heed the cycles that the suns obey?"
So have they fled, the fund of life and jest,
The holiday of waving trees and flowers,
And every fancy that we claimed as ours
Of streams and birds and varying beauties, wound
About the boyish romance that we found;
Yet who can say the past is always best?

Archibald Douglas.

IN TIGHT CINCH GAP.

By BURKE JENKINS.

What was taken for a vigilant search after gold-bearing quartz skirts a danger-line in rounding out a romance.

OLD SHED removed the two glasses, wiped the wet rings from the oiled surface of his bar, and regarded the strangers with his puffy, red-rimmed little eyes.

"Prospecting?" he inquired tentatively.

Each of the men regarded the other a moment, as though somewhat unprepared for such curiosity.

"No-o-o," answered the shorter one finally, "not exactly."

Old Shed was not ignorant of one detail of the laws governing politeness in the West, but the advent of so out-of-the-way a pair caused curiosity to reach so high a notch that he, perforce, overstepped the bounds set by the code of the locality. He put a further question:

"Not cattlemen?"

"No-o-o," again replied the short one.

The other man gave him a smart dig with his elbow, as though thus to put a period to any further enlightenment. Then he cast a hasty glance about the absolutely deserted barroom, reached into his breast-pocket, and brought to light a carefully folded paper, the edges of which were soiled from contact with the other contents of the said pocket.

The tall man opened this paper out to its full dimension, which was probably some ten by twenty inches, and then, leaning over toward Old Shed and proffering the open sheet for his view, he asked confidentially:

"Do you know anything of the whereabouts of that person signed there?"

Old Shed peered closely at the paper; then adjusted a pair of blurred glasses for a more searching perusal.

He was some time spelling out the wording, for it was in script.

Finally the old barkeeper could apparently no longer restrain himself, for he stuck the fingers of both hands into the lower pockets of his vest, where they shook in exact time to the chuckles which made his whole ponderous person vibrate.

Then his laugh dwindled a bit, and he gurgled:

"Why, stranger! 'Tain't as though I don't know how disappointing this may be to you, but I'm bound for truth to tell you how the land lays. Yes, I know mighty well where that old cuss lives whose name is tharunto inscribed, and I've seen many a one o' just sich papers—"

"Just like this one?" broke in the short man, with interest.

"Exactly! Handwrit neat, just same's that thar. Gentlemen, your trail for gold is some poor."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, I mean that jist sich papers as that thar has been sent out by the hundred by old man Rinehart—'prospectuses,' he calls 'em. And, gentlemen, I reckon, as prospectuses go, they're about as good as any; but, as for the reality and general existence of gold-bearing quartz therein described, I don't believe there's enough to overburden an ant.

"Fact is, gentlemen, I may as well be plain about the matter to ye. Old man Rinehart's head ain't any too good."

Old Shed here tapped his own pate.

"Touched, you understand! Some locoed; and locoed on that very project of 'retrieving his wealth and station,' as he puts it, by just that there claim therein described."

"Retrieving his wealth and station?" asked the tall man, in calm interest.

"Yes," returned the old gossip. "And he shore had 'em to 'retrieve'; for, gentlemen, locoed as he is, there ain't a finer specimen of the true old-time gentleman—and plumb white at that—than Samuel Rinehart, Esquire."

"And where did you say he was to be found?"

"I don't remember as I did say at all where he was to be found—did I?" answered Old Shed slyly. "What does said prospectus say?"

"Why, it merely gives Tight Cinch Gap as an address," replied the other, somewhat petulantly.

"Exactly: and here you are. But it's something of a jaunt out to Old Rinehart's shack; so, if you're listening to me, why, you'll just unlimber here for the night, and to-morrow hotfoot it back home, and sum up this last expedition of yours to experience or profit and loss. Old Rinehart's sent them handwrit papers o' his broadcast over the country for two solid years, to my certain knowledge. 'To interest capital,' he says; but, gentlemen, it may interest you to know you're the first two I've yet seen, or even hearn tell of, as have 'bit' at the project."

While the corpulent old barkeeper was thus throwing the news their way, the two men exchanged glances, but apparently felt little chagrin at being such dupes as the old man represented.

"Well, as long as we've come so far, we might as well see the thing through—eh, Will?" This from the short man.

"My idea," acquiesced Will. "So"—turning to Old Shed—"if you'll tell us how to get there—"

Wheezing, Old Shed puffed his way to the door, signing for the two to follow. The sunlit doorway reached, he blinked for a moment in the glare; then, getting accustomed to it, he pointed with a chubby forefinger up the trail where it snaked west in sandy yellow over a hill.

Far out from the trail itself, and hugging its squatness as close as possible to the edge of a five-hundred-foot drop, they descried a low hut, which showed up plainly enough in the clear air of the region.

"Why, is that it?" exclaimed the short man. "Let's run over before dinner."

At this suggestion, Old Shed again shook to chucklings.

"Twenty mile *don't* look far, does it? Better eat first. Old Rinehart'll look out for ye to-night, I don't doubt."

"Does the old man live up there on that cliff all alone?" casually inquired the man called Will.

"All alone, except for—"

"Hello, Shed!" growled a voice from the doorway, and all three turned to view the newcomer, whose pony's hoofs had been muffled in the thick sand of Tight Cinch Gap's one street.

"Why, hello, Charlie!" cried Shed delightedly. Then his voice dropped, as he became aware of the other's mood. "What's wrong? Rattler bit yer, or what?"

Charlie was apparently in no mood for an answer. He merely cast a grouchy glance at the two strangers, as they passed on back to the dining-room.

"Whisky!" he grunted across the bar.

The two strangers sat at the table alone. They took two chairs that faced each other. When they were seated, the one called Will cast a hasty, furtive glance about; then, leaning over toward his partner, he whispered:

"Well, Tim, it looks like things are getting narrowed down a bit, eh?"

"Some!" agreed Tim.

II.

DURING the entire time the two strangers were eating dinner, Charlie, the cowboy, was plying the bottle and fighting hard to ignore Old Shed's anxious inquiries as to the cause of his perturbation.

When the two men finally grated their chairs back, rose, and sauntered their way on through the bar to the street, Old Shed accompanied them to the door, and with the simplest of directions, "follow your nose," indicated the trail as it led on out to Old Rinehart's shack.

At the name of Rinehart, Charlie's somewhat befogged brain quickened to sudden clearness; and interest in the strangers, which had been dulled, revived. As the men thumped away into dust, he turned rapid questions on Old Shed.

Shed told all he knew. Little had he been able to learn, except that the men were "suckers," caught by one of Old Rinehart's "prospectuses," which all knew so well and good-naturedly laughed at.

"Yes; but, Shed," interposed Charlie, his brain now absolutely clear, "those men didn't look so plumb easy to me.

That tall lad, in particular, had a some steely eye, and one which would look more than once at Old Rinehart's pretty handwritten paper before he'd set out on such a trip. Came from the East, didn't they?"

"Can't say; didn't ask," said Shed.

"Don't need to ask," went on Charlie, pointing through a window to where, up the trail, showed the lessening figures of the two mounted strangers. "Look at the way they 'bob' in the saddle; 'park' riding, Shed, old boy!"

"Oh, well, you certain don't think they really is something to Old Rinehart's claim, do you? Real gold?"

"I don't know what I think," replied the young cowboy, returning to his sullen mood, and, as in accentuation, refilling his glass to the brim.

Old Shed's arm spoke somewhat of his former deftness, as he swept both bottle and filled glass from before the young fellow.

"No more to-day, Charlie," he said authoritatively. "You know, I've always took more'n a keen interest in ye, Charlie, boy; and to see you hit the booze in earnest ain't to my likin'. Now, open up; tell me the trouble. I'll lay you a double X there's 'woman, lovely woman,' behind that uncommon thirst o' yours."

Charlie's first quick flare of anger at the old fellow rapidly gave way to a gentler feeling, as he recollected how nearly this strange old character of a barkeeper had been a father to him through the years he had been growing up in Tight Cinch Gap's somewhat crude environment.

"Well, Uncle Shed," he finally confessed, "I may's well open up that there *is* a woman; and a woman who is sure plumb hard to corral. Now, it isn't like ordinary cases—"

"Never is," chuckled Old Shed. "But ease your chest, Charlie; who is it? Of course, I can't guess, so make it real easy for me."

"Fooling aside, you know how I've been flying around Blanche Rinehart. This morning, out on the hills there, I put the question to her, and she confessed she loves me."

"What's the trouble, then?"

"I can't make it out at all myself; and she says she isn't able to tell me why; but she can't marry me. Loves me, but can't marry me—that's it!"

"'Tain't money?"

"Money! Shed, you don't know her! Besides, since I had sense enough to go into cattle, after making my first strike, why, she couldn't complain, even on that score. No, sir, there's something—" The speaker's mood shifted suddenly. He snapped out the words:

"What were those fellows asking you when I came in?"

"Why, they were asking the way to Old Rinehart's shack."

"Yes; but what else?"

"The short feller, he asked if the old codger lived up there all alone, and—Hold on, there, Charlie! What's the matter?"

But Charlie had reached his pony, and with a leap had attained the saddle, in the first spring of the little pony's lope, which, fast accelerating, bade fair to eat up the distance to the shack on the bluff.

Old Shed wrinkled an anxious forehead as he gazed up the trail.

III.

EVEN the horses of the two men who called each other Will and Tim seemed to resent and grow weary under their miserable riding; and by the time they had reached the bluff edge on which the old prospector's hut stood, they showed every sign of weariness.

Will, the tall man, indicated a halt some hundred feet from the shack, and dismounting clumsily, tied the two bridles together. Tim threw his short leg over, and reaching the ground, followed his partner to the doorway, from which came the wail of a violin played by a master-hand.

"Somebody knows how to fiddle," was Tim's whispered comment.

As the shadows fell across the sunlit streak in the doorway, the music stopped, and a gray-haired old man stepped forward in greeting.

"Good day, gentlemen. Step in!"

He made a grandiloquent gesture, as though ushering them into a mansion.

"You are traveling far?"

"I think we've come about as far as

we shall," answered Will coldly, while Tim, who had been eying every corner of the shack, caught Will's look, and, at a nod, took up his station just outside the door.

Will, inside, lifted the crudely constructed chair the old gentleman had indicated, and drew it up before a table, on which were pen, ink, and a stack of blank paper.

"Mr. Rinehart?"

"Yes, sir," answered the old man, not forgetting, even in his surprise, the Southern "sir."

The tall man once more reached into his breast-pocket, and produced the folded, soiled paper. The old man stepped up beside him as he unfolded it. Then, at recognition of the "prospectus," the old man's eye glinted even more with the fire of the malady which held him.

"So, at last, I've found two men who have brains enough to know a good thing! Sir, our fortunes are made. I would have done it myself, alone, only I'm getting too old and haven't the capital; but, sir, now—"

"Hold on," interposed the other. "A few questions. This is *your* paper?" He held up the soiled document.

"Yes, yes," assented the old man hurriedly. "That's one of the prospectuses. I've sent out hundreds."

"Yes; but it's in handwriting."

"I know. I had no press. I'm too far away from town."

"A very peculiar handwriting."

Swift as a bolt, the old man's face took on a look of a different character. Only for a moment, however, could he keep it there; then back slipped the features, and the old weirdness came again:

"Oh, let's see! Where was I? Oh, yes, the mine. Now, sir, after you've investigated—"

"You don't deny this is your own handwriting, then?" again interrupted Will.

The old gentleman seemed to be struggling in a tangle of thoughts.

"Why—er—I never said it was my hand. It isn't. It's my daughter's. She copies them for me. She's my amanuensis—has been for years. Isn't it a wonderful hand? So well-rounded, legible, and yet has character, true character—"

His enthusiasm checked. Sanity once more showed in him. He passed his hand quickly over his forehead.

"Pardon me, sir," he continued, in an altered voice. "What was I saying? The handwriting? Yes, it's mine. Poor enough, but mine own, sir."

A cough from short Tim at the door was quickly followed by the stamping of a pony outside and the breezy entrance of a pink-cheeked girl, whose face, though glowing from the recent exercise, did not hide the heavy look of those who live with an abiding care.

Seeing the strangers, for Tim had entered before her, she bowed a cheery greeting, though ill concealing a quick fear which leaped to her face.

"My daughter, gentlemen." The old man introduced her.

Tim bowed in acknowledgment of the meeting.

Will walked over and placed his back against the door, outside which stamped the restless pony.

"Miss Rinehart," said he, "you are under arrest."

IV.

"At last!" cried the girl, almost in relief, as she drew herself up to her full height. "I don't know that I am very sorry." She was looking straight into the eyes of her captor, Will.

"Blanchie!" came a hoarse cry. Quickly as she whirled, she failed to catch the old gentleman as he tottered back and fell at his length before the open fire, which flared to a comfortable blaze. His head struck one of the iron dogs.

With woman's knack, she rolled him over into an easier posture; and while the two men were recovering from their surprise she bustled to a cabinet, procured a flask, and returned to his side. But she experienced difficulty in giving him the liquor. She glanced a quick appeal over her shoulder.

Tim, the short man, caught the import.

"If I can help, ma'am—" he said. He raised the old man's head and poured some of the liquor down his throat.

But life had fled before the stroke.

"He's dead?" whispered the girl, in awe.

Tim bowed.

Up she flared in the sudden fire of her moment of emotion, and faced the man, Will, who had remained, unmoved, at his position before the door.

"Yes, you have me!" she cried. "You have me, but you must hear me. The man lying here before you was my father. I loved him. Back there in Virginia all loved him. He was respected. He had birth, station, wealth. Then came the financial strain—the period to be tided over, to save his fortune. He must have money for a week.

"I remember his pacing the floor of the room in which I sat, busy with my lessons for the next day. I was a schoolgirl of fourteen. At one of his turns up and down he came up behind me as I was busy at my copy-book. I had always been wonderfully gifted in my penmanship. It *is* a gift, you know, with some—a knack born, not acquired. I've always had it. I looked up into his face as he stood over me. His features were distorted with what I now know to have been the effort to resist temptation. Then his brow cleared hurriedly, and he smiled as he asked:

"'Will you do me a little copying, Blanchie? I'll bet you can't make an exact copy of what I set before you.'

"'Bet you, daddy,' I answered, in my girlish delight of surprising him with my skill. And I did surprise him. In fact, I've often thought he set me to copying the note, at first, merely as a sort of toying with his tormentor. But my facsimile was wonderful; for, as I say, I have the knack. The result you know. He used the note. The week lengthened itself to two.

"The affair was discovered. Late one night he waked me — he'd been mother to me for years—and I dressed quickly. We ran. He brooded. Finally came the breakdown of his mentality.

"I wondered at it all, until once, during a lucid interval, he told me. We drifted West. Then came this mine idea. His brain set itself thereon. The 'bonanza' would enable him to satisfy the debt and clear me; and for two years, there"—she pointed to the writing-table—"I have slaved in penning those prospectuses. I suppose that was really your first clue?"

"Yes," said Will.

"Well, I'm ready." She stepped toward the officer.

Once more, and quickly, the sharp sunlight as it fell from the open door was blotted out by a new shadow.

The tall man cast a hasty glance over his shoulder, and looked into the eyes of Charlie, the cowboy—those eyes whose steely glitter matched that of the revolver which was ready for a part in argument.

Will sprang back, drew, and glanced at Tim, who was likewise armed. The girl stood her ground, motionless, but her face lit with a happiness which dispelled the care of things.

"Charlie!" she whispered.

The cowboy apparently paid no attention to her. He backed over to the door-frame.

"Two to one!" he snapped out, in the clear-cut, decisive tone of a man of action. "But it's well enough for you to know the state of things. I'm some liked in this locality; so, should the unlikely happen with those little nickel toys of yours, why, the boys will sure make the telegraph-poles hereabouts bear a new brand of fruit. Being acquainted with which facts, maybe you'll hear what I've got to say, eh?"

"Yes," snarled Will, though he betrayed no sign of fear. "Explain yourself, and what you have to do in this affair."

"Why, just this," said the cowboy. "Down there at Old Shed's I got an inkling as to you-all being out of the ordinary; and so I rid on out, to see what kind of devilment you were up to. I arrived outside just in time to get plumb acquainted with enough of the facts to convince me that it was some up to me to have a little say in the argument."

"Well?"

"Well, what I've got to say is this—that any two such low-lived hounds as could take prisoner that girl, after what we all know and in the fix we see her, are too rank even for crow-meat, the which I'm going to try my cussedest to make 'em, if they attempt it."

"You forget that we are officers of the law."

"Officers of *what* law! Not the one

that rules in *this* environment, my son. Where lies the guilt of the forgery? There before you on the hearth—and he's paid his debt, God knows. Her hand did it, you say? Maybe, but *my* hand's going to help undo it. Besides"—he glowed as though in sudden realization of a happy solution—"where's your evidence?"

The tall man once more reached into his breast-pocket and produced a strip of paper.

The crash of Charlie's revolver rang in his ears; there was a flash, directly in front of his face. Into the cloud of smoke before them shot the cowboy's hand, and with a quick twist tore the forged note of evidence from Will's grasp.

"A bum detective," was Charlie's voiced verdict. "You had better now quit this line of business, for this little lay is sure ended.

"By the way, how much was there in it for each of you?" Almost for the first time, Charlie included the short man, Tim, in his address.

Tim hung his head.

"Five hundred dollars reward," said Will.

"Well," said Charlie, the cowboy, "I'm making a proposition. I'm running a ranch hereabout. Which will you have: a *man's* job or the value of that reward? You can have either."

"I'll take the money," said Will.

"The job for me," said Tim, raising his head.

THE TIME LIMIT.

By BERTRAM LEBHAR,

Author of "The Isle of Mysteries," "When a Man's Hungry," "King or Counterfeit?" etc.

A disappearance which seemed to have no explanation but one which was beyond belief.

CHAPTER I.

A REBELLION.

FARMER CRARY stopped in the act of milking Black Bess and glared at his son.

"What's that you just said?" he shouted angrily. "Let me hear you say it again."

"Certainly, father," replied the young man calmly. "I said I'm going to marry Hildegarde Crandall."

As though to express her approval of his resolution, Black Bess waved her tail.

"And I say that you're going to do nothing of the sort. Do you understand that?" shouted the old man. "Whoa, there—you restless fool!"

The latter remark was addressed to Black Bess, who, startled by his raised voice, had almost succeeded in kicking over the milk-pail.

"But why not, father?" protested Max Crary. "What objection have you to Hildegarde? She's the—"

The old farmer cut him short by a peremptory wave of the hand.

"I know," he said sarcastically. "She's the pink of perfection and all that. I ain't got any particular objection to the gal; but I've got a darned big objection to your marrying her."

"But why? I've told mother about it, and she's willing. She says she'll be glad to welcome Hildegarde as a daughter. Why should you—"

"Now, see here, my son," interrupted the old man sternly. "Don't you try to catechise me. You know me, I reckon. When I says no, I means no, and that's the end of it. You and your mother ain't running this farm as yet. What I says goes, and always will go while I'm above the ground. I ain't got anything against Hildegarde Crandall. She's a nice enough gal; but it don't suit me to let you get married just now."

His son heaved a sigh of relief.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "if it's only a question of time, we don't mind waiting, dad. Hildy and I had planned to get married within six months; but if you wish us to postpone the wedding, we'll agree to do so."

The old farmer shook his head.

"It ain't a question of time, my lad. You didn't let me finish what I was saying. I was about to remark that when the time does come for you to tackle matrimony, Hildy Crandall ain't going to be the gal."

"But why not?" protested Max indignantly. "You just said that you haven't anything against her."

"What I meant was that I ain't got anything against her character," explained old Crary. "Hildy's all right, but she ain't the kind of wife I want you to have. She's too full of frills. She's had a good eddication, and too much eddication ain't good for a woman—or at least it ain't good for a farmer's wife. What you want is a good, plain gal—like Si Merriweather's Ruth, for instance."

He paused and darted a searching glance at his son's face. The latter made a grimace.

"Ruth Merriweather!" he remarked scornfully. "'Pie-faced Ruth,' the boys call her. I can't say that I admire your taste, father."

"Si and I were talking it over the other day," went on the elder Crary, ignoring the unfavorable comment. "We came to the conclusion that you would make a good pair, and we decided that you shall get hitched when the proper time comes."

The young man's steel-gray eyes suddenly flashed fire.

"*You* decided!" he cried indignantly. "And you didn't think it worth while to consult my wishes in the matter, eh?"

The old man nodded.

"When it comes to choosing a wife, my son," he said grimly, "you'll do as you're told, same as you've always done."

The other laughed bitterly.

"This isn't Russia, father," he declared. "I've read that they do such things over there; but this is America, the land of the free. I'm over twenty-one, and I guess I've got the right to select my own wife. I don't want to be undutiful. I'm willing to obey you when you're reasonable; but seeing that you can't name any real objection to my marrying Hildegarde, I tell you again that she's the wife I'm going to take."

The old farmer rose from his milking-stool and faced his son with a calmness that was ominous.

"It's several years since I thrashed you, my lad," he said, "but I guess I ain't too old nor too feeble to undertake the job right now, even if you are over twenty-one. Don't you dare talk back to me that way, or you'll get a whipping. Understand that?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

Truly his sire was no physical weakling, despite the gray hairs which surmounted his ruddy brow. Fifty years of hard work on the farm had given him muscles of steel and a constitution as hard as nails.

But, nevertheless, Max did not wince at the prospect of paternal chastisement. He, too, was as sound as a bell. In all of his six feet of body there was not a superfluous ounce of flesh.

"Don't talk foolishly, father," he said quietly. "The day when you could hurt me with your hands has long since passed. You can start right in to whip me now, if you are so inclined. You're my father, and I won't raise a hand against you. But you can't change my determination.

"You've ruled me like a tyrant all these years. I'll bet there ain't another father in America as stern as you've been. I've never had the privileges other fellows have had. I'm a man now, and yet you treat me as if I was a ten-year-old kid. I won't stand it any longer. In future I'm going to have my own way, and you can't stop me."

At these defiant words the old man's eyes blazed with rage. With fist upraised, he advanced threateningly toward his son, and the latter, with folded arms and his jaw set, waited for the blow to land.

But the enraged farmer did not strike. Great as was his fury, he managed to control himself sufficiently to be able to stay his hand.

"Get out of here," he roared—"get out of here this instant, afore I kill you."

His angry roar spread terror among the cows. Black Bess uttered a "moo" of fear; the others nervously shifted their feet.

Young Crary heeded his irate father's warning, and, turning on his heel, left the cow-shed and walked toward the house.

As he entered the kitchen, a gentle-faced old lady greeted him with an anxious look in her eyes.

"Well, dear," she inquired, a shade of fear in her voice, "did you speak to your father about—about Hildegarde?"

The young man nodded grimly.

"Yes, mother, I've just had an interview with him in the cow-shed."

"And it didn't turn out satisfactory? I can read that in your face, my poor boy."

"No, mother. He wouldn't hear of my marrying Hildy—but I'm going to marry her, just the same," he added emphatically.

Mrs. Crary trembled. She was a timid woman, and she stood in considerable awe of her iron-willed husband.

"Do be careful, my boy," she implored. "Don't cross your father. You know what a terrible temper he has when he's roused."

"Yes, I know. He was white-hot with rage when I left him. But I'm not afraid of him. I'm a man now, and it's about time he realized it and let me have my own way. I told him as much in the cow-shed just now."

Mrs. Crary trembled.

"Don't be rash, my dear," she said. "Your father is a violent man, but he's got the best of hearts. Keep your temper and be patient. Maybe, later on, he'll change his mind and consent to your marrying Hildegarde."

Her son shook his head.

"No, he won't, mother. You well know that father isn't the kind of man to change his mind. When he says a thing he sticks to it, right or wrong. Besides, he's gone to work and selected another wife for me. Guess who it is.

"Ruth Merriweather, of all girls! Wouldn't she make a charming wife for me? Why, I declare the cows almost laughed when he mentioned her name."

"Well, Ruth is a good girl," declared Mrs. Crary pacifically. "She ain't much to look at, it's true, my dear; but she's good-tempered and—and she makes pumpkin-pies that can't be beat."

"Pumpkin-pies be dinged!" cried Max irritably. "I want a wife, not a cook. I tell you, mother, I'm going to marry Hildegarde, whether father consents or not. She's the best little girl in the world; and the strangest thing is that she really cares for *me*. Isn't that wonderful, mother?"

Mrs. Crary did not think so. She was very proud of her only son.

"I want to ask a favor of you, my boy," she said earnestly.

"What is it, mother?"

"I want you to take your dinner now and not come to the table at dinner-time. You say your father is angry, and it's best that you avoid him until he cools down."

Young Crary laughed and affectionately kissed his mother on both cheeks.

"You timid little mother," he said gently. "Of course I'll do you that favor. I assure you I'm not anxious to quarrel with father. Give me something to eat now, and I'll go out to the orchard and finish picking those apples. I won't go near dad all day. Don't worry, dear; there won't be any row, if I can help it."

The old lady looked at him gratefully, and he noticed that her eyes were moist.

"After all, you love your father, don't you, dear?" she asked wistfully.

"Of course I do; but he's so unreasonable. He's got to be made to realize the fact that I'm a grown man now and able to think for myself—especially when it comes to choosing a wife."

Mrs. Crary laid him out a tempting meal, and despite the fact that he was in love—and love is generally supposed to be attended by lack of appetite—he ate heartily.

Then he kissed his mother and went out to the orchard, where he was soon hard at work.

Half an hour later the elder Crary entered the kitchen and greeted his wife affectionately.

There was not a vestige of anger on his ruddy face; on the contrary, he appeared to be in rare good humor. Like a good many violent-tempered men, he was quick to anger, but as quick to cool down.

"Well, old lady," he shouted cheerily, "dinner ready?"

"Yes, John, I'll have it on the table in a jiffy."

As she laid the cloth her husband inquired:

"Where's the boy?"

"He went out to the orchard to finish picking those apples," replied Mrs. Crary nervously.

"Ain't he going to eat with us?"

"No. Not to-day, John. He was anxious to finish that job, so I gave him his dinner in advance." She avoided her husband's eye as she spoke.

The old man grunted.

"I reckon he's sulking," he said. "I suppose he told you that he and I had a little conversation in the cow-shed half an hour ago. The young rascal wants to marry Hildegarde Crandall."

"Hildy is a nice girl, John," ventured Mrs. Crary timidly.

"Now, don't you be butting in and trying to help him," shouted the old man. "I tell you, as I told him, that no matter what Hildy is or what she ain't, he ain't going to marry her. He's going to marry Merriweather's gal, Ruth, so understand that."

"You can't make him marry her if he don't want to," declared Mrs. Crary, with a spirit that surprised herself. "He ain't a child any more, John. He's a grown man. Don't you think you ought to let him have his way a little more?"

"Ding bust it!" shouted the old farmer, bringing his fist down upon the table with a bang. "That's exactly the line of talk he was handing out in the cow-shed. I do believe that you've been putting them rebellious idees into his head, Maria. That boy will continue to do as he's told or leave my roof and shift for himself."

CHAPTER II.

A GREAT PLAN.

YOUNG CRARY continued to busy himself in the orchard until darkness fell.

Then, without encountering his father, he went to the house, doffed his overalls and working-shirt, and put on his best suit of clothes.

"I'm going out, mother," he announced.

"To Hildegarde?" whispered the old lady, with a smile both knowing and tender.

The young man nodded and grinned somewhat sheepishly.

"I promised to let her know as soon as I got father's answer. She'll be terribly disappointed at the result, poor girl."

Mrs. Crary sighed sympathetically.

"Well, keep up your courage, both of you," she advised. "Your father may change his mind."

Hildegarde Crandall was an orphan, and lived with her aunt and uncle, Hiram and Sarah Macomber, on a farm two miles away from the Crary homestead.

It was a fine moonlight night, and young Crary decided to walk, instead of hitching up the mare.

He had traversed half a mile of dusty road when he was compelled to step aside to make room for a horse and buggy coming from the opposite direction and apparently bound for his home.

Max recognized the occupant of the buggy as Si Merriweather, parent of the bride his father had selected for him.

He was in no mood to exchange greetings with Si, and he frowned as the latter recognized him and drew up his horse with a loud "Whoa!"

Si Merriweather was a tall, raw-boned man with a hard face and a big shock of red hair which did not tend to improve his appearance.

"Hello, Max!" he cried cheerily. "I'm just on my way over to your house. I've got a message for your folks and for you, too, my boy."

"What is it?" demanded young Crary gruffly.

"It's an invitation. My old lady and my gal sent it. They wants you and your folks to come over to the house to-morrow night. You'll be sure to come, won't you?"

"What's going on?" growled Max suspiciously.

"My gal made me promise not to tell you—she's that modest, you know. But I don't mind whispering in your ear that we're having a little party to celebrate her twenty-first birthday. You won't fail to be there, will you?"

"I can't come," replied the young man almost sullenly. "I've got another engagement for to-morrow night."

Merriweather's face lost its good-humored grin.

"Another engagement!" he repeated blankly. "Gee Whillikens, I'm right sorry to hear that. Can't you break it?"

"Nope," replied Crary curtly.

"Wal—wal—wal! That's too darned bad. My gal will be turrible disappointed. I shouldn't be surprised if it spoils

all her fun for the night. She thinks a great deal of you, Max."

"That's very kind of her," retorted Crary briefly. "Well, I must be moving along, Mr. Merriweather. I'm in a hurry."

The red-haired farmer leaned over the side of the buggy and looked at Max intently by the light of the carriage-lamp.

"You're dressed in your smart clothes," he exclaimed in a voice that was almost a growl. "Where be you going, young man? Not going to call on any gal, are you?"

At this young Crary lost his temper outright.

"Ding your impertinence, you red-headed old schemer," he cried. "It's none of your darned business where I go or who I call on. I tell you right now—you can plot with my father all you like, but you'll never get me to marry your daughter."

This unexpected burst of passion appeared to stagger old Merriweather. For a second he was speechless. His right hand grasped his whip and drew it from its socket as though he intended to use it on the young man.

"Confound your impudence, you ill-bred puppy!" he exclaimed in a voice choking with rage. "I'll teach you to keep a polite tongue in your head before many days have passed. *You* refuse to marry my gal! Why, you ain't good enough to clean her shoes. I'll let your father know about this. He'll fix you."

Apparently deriving sufficient satisfaction from this prospect, the indignant farmer gave up any idea of applying the whip to Max's shoulders, and, instead, furiously lashed his horse.

The animal started off; but, seized with a sudden thought, his master reined him in, and, turning in his seat, shouted after the retreating form of young Crary:

"And you needn't think that I don't know where you're bound for now, you sneaking reprobate. You're going to call on that Crandall gal. You're sweet on her, and you think you're going to marry her. We'll see about that."

Having delivered himself of this parting shot, he whipped up his horse again and drove on to the Crary farm.

Max continued on his way, a frown upon his usually good-natured face.

"I suppose I was a fool to let my temper get the best of me and talk to him that way," he muttered. "I reckon he'll tell father, and I'll have another row with the old man for being fresh to his friend.

"But I never did like that chap Merriweather. He's always struck me as being a sneaky, cunning sort of customer, and now that he's planned with father for me to marry his daughter, I hate him worse than poison."

He tramped the rest of the way in no pleasant frame of mind; but when he reached the Macomber farmhouse, to be warmly greeted by Hildegarde, the frown disappeared from his face and his spirits rose.

It was well-nigh impossible to be gloomy in Hilda's sunny presence, no matter what the provocation.

She was not a girl of striking physical beauty, although Max, with the bias characteristic of lovers, considered her a veritable Venus; but she did possess a face that was good to look upon.

Her features were regular, her cheeks dimpled and rosy, her brown eyes were large and sparkling, and her figure, while not exactly statuesque, was trim and well rounded.

And, to add to her charms, she possessed a vivacity of manner and a sweetness of temper which defied you not to love her.

As old Farmer Crary had admitted, she was a well educated girl.

Hiram Macomber had adopted his dead sister's only child when she was two years old, and he and his wife, Sarah, having no children of their own, had sent her to a good private school, where she had learned the "frills" to which Max's austere father had alluded so contemptuously.

As he now sat in Macomber's snug little parlor and watched her, Max thought to himself that she was perfection personified.

He not only thought this to himself; he expressed his thoughts in words, at which she blushed delightfully and told him that he was a foolish boy.

"But you have not told me what your father said when you asked him about—about our being married," she added eagerly.

Max's countenance fell. In the joy of being in her presence he had quite forgotten the unpleasant scene with his father that morning.

"He didn't take very kindly to the idea," he replied gloomily. "In fact, he said he wouldn't hear of my marrying you; but don't you worry about that, dear. I'm over twenty-one, and I mean to have my own way for once."

The girl sighed.

"Oh, dear," she murmured, "I hate to think of my being the cause of trouble between father and son. It seems so terrible. Don't you think that you'd better give me up, Max?"

"I should say not!" cried the young man emphatically. "Don't you worry about father, Hildy. I've spoken to my mother about you, and she says she'll be delighted to welcome you as a daughter. My father means well, but he's so unreasonable. Why, what do you think — I know you'll laugh when I tell you—he expects me to marry Ruth Merriweather."

"Oh, Max!" cried the girl in a tone of mingled consternation and jealousy. "You're not going to do it, are you?"

"Marry Ruth? I should say not. Of course, the poor girl can't help her looks and her ways, and it's mean to say anything against her, but I wouldn't marry Ruth even if you did not exist."

"Are you quite sure, dear?"

"Positive. Why, the only recommendation she's got is an ability to bake pumpkin-pies. Can you bake pumpkin-pies, Hildy?"

"Not very well," admitted the girl sadly. "But I can learn. You're sure you wouldn't prefer Ruth to me, Max?"

"You wouldn't ask that question if you could have heard what passed between my father and me in the cow-shed this morning, dear. We had a stormy session. Father roared so loud that the cows trembled."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the girl. "Your father is a terribly strong-willed man, isn't he? I've heard my uncle say that when Mr. Crary wants to have his way he always comes pretty near getting it. I'm so afraid, Max, that he'll force you to give me up and marry that odious Ruth Merriweather."

"No, he won't. He can't do it," declared Max grimly.

"And Ruth's father is a bad man to have for an enemy," persisted the girl. "I've heard my uncle say that Mr. Merriweather has a heart as ugly as his face. If he and your father make up their minds that you must marry Ruth, there's no telling what they may do to force you to obey."

Max frowned fiercely.

"They can't force me," he muttered between his teeth. "By Jings, nobody can force me to do anything I don't want to."

He looked wonderfully like his father when he said these words.

But the girl repeated, in a voice from which all the cheerfulness had departed:

"Oh, but I'm so afraid!"

"Well, see here, Hildy, dear," said Max, lowering his voice, "I've got an idea. It's a great big idea. It's only just come to me. Can anybody overhear what I'm saying?"

"No. There's nobody around."

"Your aunt and uncle?"

"They're up-stairs, Max. It's all right. Nobody can hear you. Tell me your plan, dear."

"Well, it's just this. I'll admit that my father and that red-headed schemer will do everything in their power to prevent us from getting married. I know a way by which we can get the best of them, though."

"What is it, Max?"

"It's a great plan, if you've got the courage to carry it out, little girl. Hush! What is that noise outside the window? Sounds as if there's somebody listening out there."

"No; it's only the trees rustling in the wind. How nervous you are, Max!"

"We can't be too careful. I don't want anybody to hear me. You're sure you want to marry me, Hildy dear?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, then, why not get married at once? Secretly married, I mean. Then, whatever happens, they can't separate us. Once the knot's tied they can't untie it, and they can't make me commit bigamy."

"Secretly married!" cried the girl in dismay. "You mean I mustn't tell even my aunt and uncle?"

Max nodded.

"That's my plan," he said. "It's the safest way. We'll get married to-morrow

night. My folks are going to a party at the Merriweathers'. I'll slip over here, and we'll go to the parson's house and get married. Then we'll each return to our homes and keep the marriage secret for a time. Then, if my father and Merriweather try any funny business, I'll boldly tell them that you're already my wife, and that they're too late to part us. What do you think of the idea, dearest?"

For a second the girl hesitated.

"I hate to deceive my dear aunt and uncle. They've always been so very good to me," she murmured.

"Then you refuse?" cried Max disappointedly.

"No, dear. If you think it's for the best, I'm willing."

"You dear little girl!" cried the young man joyously. And their lips met.

There was an interval of silence after that. In certain situations human speech is inadequate.

Then Max spoke.

"Are you sure that noise outside is caused by the wind in the trees?" he asked nervously. "It sounds so very much like somebody stirring."

"No, dear; it's only the trees. They often rustle that way."

"We can't be too careful," explained the young man. "If my father should, by any chance, learn of our intention to get married to-morrow night, he'd move heaven and earth to prevent it."

CHAPTER III.

A GREAT SURPRISE.

WHEN Max arose next morning and went down to the kitchen he found that his father had already had his breakfast and gone out.

"He wouldn't wait for you," his mother explained, with a sigh, "but he left word that he wants to see you as soon as you're through with your breakfast. He don't seem to be in a very good humor this morning, my son. I don't know what he wants to see you about; but I do hope, for my sake, you won't get into any argument with him."

"I'll try not to, mother. Where is he?"

"Out in the barn doing chores."

"I'll go to him right away. I don't want any breakfast. I haven't any appetite."

But Mrs. Crary would not listen to any such proposition.

"You sit right down and eat your breakfast," she commanded. "If you ain't got any appetite you can drink a cup of coffee and eat some buckwheats and sassidges."

Finding resistance futile, Max obeyed.

"Now, mother," he exclaimed, after he had dutifully gulped down the coffee and swallowed a few mouthfuls of buckwheat-cakes, "I guess I'll go and see what dad wants. Don't you worry, dear. Probably he merely wants to give me some instructions about the day's work."

Mrs. Crary sighed again.

"If you only knew how it grieves me to see you two quarrel, my boy," she said sadly. "I know that your father loves you and that you love your father, but you're both that headstrong and quick-tempered that I tremble every time you have words together."

"Well, we won't have words to-day, if I can help it," Max assured her.

"That's right, my dear. Let him talk, and don't answer him back. That's the best way to get along with him. By the way, you told Hildegarde last night?"

"Yes, mother."

"And what did the poor dear say?"

"She was very disappointed, of course. She was glad to know, though, that you approved of the match."

"Yes, I think that Hildy is a dear, sweet girl, and it seems to me she would be just the wife for my boy; but of course your father knows best. What are you going to do, Max?"

Max hesitated. He hated to keep any secrets from his mother; but he realized that if he told her of his plan she would not be able to refrain from telling his father, for there was not a deceitful bone in the good lady's body, and she always told her husband everything.

"I really can't tell you what we're going to do," he said, avoiding her eyes. "Of course I'm not going to give Hildy up. We'll just have to trust to luck, I suppose."

And, to avoid further questioning, he darted through the door and ran toward the barn; for although he fancied he knew what his father wanted to see him

about, and anticipated a stormy interview, the prospect made him less uneasy than did the tender gaze of his mother's faded blue eyes.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" growled the old farmer as his son entered the barn. "I suppose you know that Si Merriweather was here last night, eh?"

"Yes, I know. I met him on the road as I was going—"

Max stopped short, suddenly realizing the danger of completing the sentence.

"As you was going where?" demanded the old man fiercely.

"As I was going for a walk."

"Going for a walk, eh? And where was you walking to, my son?"

"Now, see here, father," cried Max boldly, "you haven't any right to keep account of all my movements. I'm no child. I'm over twenty-one—"

"You told me that yesterday, and I told you that I didn't want to hear any more of that kind of talk from you, didn't I?" shouted the farmer fiercely. "As long as you live under my roof you'll do as I tell you, my lad. No matter how old you be, there's only one boss here, and that's me."

"But that's very unreasonable, father," protested Max.

"Maybe it is. That don't cut any ice with me. Unreasonable or not unreasonable, what I says has got to go. And you don't have to tell me where you was walking to last night. I know. You was going to call on that Crandall gal."

"Well, what if I was?" cried Max defiantly. "It isn't any sin for a young man to call on a girl, is it?"

"No, I guess it isn't any sin; but I don't want you to call on that Crandall gal any more. It ain't fair to her for you to be calling on her and encouraging her to believe that you've got intentions, when you ain't going to marry her. Don't go there any more, my lad."

Max was about to reply hotly that he would call on Hildegarde as often as he pleased and that nobody should prevent him, when he remembered the promise he had made to his mother and held his tongue.

"But that ain't what I want to talk to you about," went on his father. "I sent for you to discuss another matter. Si Merriweather tells me that you was mighty fresh to him on the road last night. What d'ye mean by that?"

"I admit I lost my temper. I don't like Si Merriweather, father, and when he began to ask impertinent questions last night it was more than I could stand."

"Well, you didn't have any right to give him any of your impudence. He's my friend and your elder. Young men must be taught to be respectful to their elders. As for not liking Si, you'd better learn to like him, my son, seeing he's going to be your father-in-law some day."

"So you still stick to that ridiculous idea that I'm going to marry Ruth Merriweather?" cried Max.

"I certainly do. When the time comes for you to get hitched, you'll marry Merriweather's gal, and no other."

"Well, we'll see," declared Max grimly.

"Yes, we'll see," retorted his father. "By the way, my boy, you'll have to apologize to Si for your rudeness last night."

"Me apologize to him? I guess not," cried Max indignantly.

"I tell you you've got to do it. I promised Si that you would. You'll get an opportunity to-night. We're all going to Si's house to celebrate his gal's birthday."

"I'm not going," declared Max, with emphasis.

"What?" shouted his father in a voice almost loud enough to raise the roof from the barn.

"I'm not going to the party. I told Merriweather so last night."

"And I'm telling you now that you *are* going," roared the old man. "Don't you rile me too much, young man, or you'll be sorry."

Max was about to reply defiantly, but he checked himself.

It had suddenly occurred to him that if he defied his father in this matter he ran the risk of spoiling everything. If he refused to accompany his parents to the party, his iron-willed sire would doubtless smell a rat, and would keep him under such close surveillance that night that it would be impossible for him to call for Hildegarde and take her to the parson.

It would be a much better plan to yield

to his father's demand, and consent to accompany him to Si Merriweather's house. He could easily find an opportunity to sneak away while the party was progressing, and could be at Hildegarde's home before they noticed his disappearance.

"All right, dad," he announced submissively; "if you say so, I'll go to the party."

A grin of triumph spread across the old man's features.

"That's the way I like to hear you talk, my son," he declared in a kindlier tone. "You're a pretty good boy, Max; but you've got a rebellious spirit, and it's got to be drummed out of you. Whatever I says and does is only meant for your good, my lad.

"If I'm violent with you at times, it ain't meant in the heart. I think a whole lot of you, you know, son; but, by gum, my word's got to be law on this farm."

He impulsively held out his hand, and Max seized it in an affectionate grip.

There was such a kind expression on the old man's ruddy countenance that the son was conscience-stricken at the thought of what he intended to do that night.

For a brief second he felt inclined to make a full confession and implore his father to consent to his marriage to Hildegarde; but the old man's next words convinced him of the folly of such a course.

"And you'll apologize to Si Merriweather, won't you, my boy? You can't afford to be on bad terms with your father-in-law, and I'm thoroughly determined that you shall marry his gal."

"All right, dad," answered Max, "if you wish it, I'll apologize to him."

Gentle Mrs. Crary was surprised and delighted when, at the dinner-hour, father and son entered her kitchen arm in arm and apparently on the most affectionate terms.

"That's the way I like to see you two," she declared, with beaming face.

"Oh, we get along all right," said the farmer as he kissed his wife. "Don't you worry about us, old lady. The boy is all right. He's a good lad; but he's a stubborn disposition, and it's got to be driven out of him. I can't imagine where he gets it. Must inherit it from your side of the family, I guess."

That evening, after the day's work was done, Farmer Crary, his wife, and Max put on their Sunday clothes, and drove over to Si Merriweather's house.

"Glad to see you all," cried Si, a grin of welcome lighting up his hideous face. "Glad to see you, Max, my boy. Hope you're in a better mood than you was last night."

"He is," declared old Crary. "He wants to apologize to you, Si, for his rudeness."

"Yes, I want to apologize," said Max, looking as if he did not want to do anything of the kind.

"That's all right, my lad," exclaimed Merriweather, holding out a large hand, which the young man took in not a very hearty manner. "Don't say another word about it. Hang up your hat, Max, and come into the parlor; my gal Ruth will be right glad to see you."

Almost sullenly Max followed his parents into the gaily decorated room.

A red-haired, freckle-faced girl, dressed in white, stepped forward awkwardly to receive them.

"Howdy, Mrs. Crary, Howdy, Mr. Crary—so glad to see you, Max," she cried in a shrill treble, and as she held out a large, unshapely hand for the young man to grasp she began to giggle in a manner that was meant to be irresistibly coy, but which filled Max with silent rage.

It was not until other guests had arrived and Ruth Merriweather was seated at the piano, drumming a musical composition which sounded distressingly like a five-finger exercise, that he found an opportunity to effect his escape from the scene.

He was standing near the door, and, noting that nobody's eyes seemed to be on him, he summoned all his courage and stole outside unobserved.

Then he darted through the front door, and did not stop running until he reached the home of Hildegarde Crandall.

"I suppose the dear girl has begun to think that I wasn't coming," he reflected as he climbed the three steps of the front porch and knocked on the door.

The door was opened by Hilda's aunt.

"Good evening, Mrs. Macomber," said Max a little nervously. "Hope you are

quite well. Hildy's at home, I suppose."

And then he noticed the worried look on the good woman's face.

"No, Max," she answered excitedly, "Hildy ain't home. She's disappeared. Your question fills me with fear; I was hoping that she might be out with you."

"Disappeared!" cried Max, in astonishment. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, dear," exclaimed Mrs. Macomber, beginning to sob, "I'm so worried. I'm afraid something terrible has happened.

"Hildy was baking apple-dumplings in the kitchen-stove this afternoon," she went on. "Mr. Macomber has gone to Boston on business, and I was up-stairs fixing up a bit.

"When I came down at three o'clock Hildy wasn't in the kitchen. The apple-dumplings was in the stove, burnt to a cinder; but Hildy wasn't there.

"I searched everywhere, but not a sign of her could I see. She's disappeared without leaving a word behind her. I'm sure there's something wrong."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SURPRISE GROWS.

"SOMETHING wrong?" repeated Max wildly. "Of course there is something wrong. Hildy wouldn't have disappeared like this of her own free will. She expected me to-night most particular, and she wouldn't have gone out of her own accord without leaving me some word of explanation. She isn't that kind of a girl."

"No, and she ain't the kind of girl to go out and leave apple-dumplings in the stove, if she could help it," said Mrs. Macomber fearfully. "You know what a careful girl she is, Max. If she'd intended to go out she'd have waited until those apple-dumplings was cooked and out of the oven. She must have left the house very sudden. Oh, where can she have gone, and what can have happened to her?"

"She may have been taken faint and gone out into the fresh air. She may be lying senseless somewhere outside. We must make a careful search," cried Max excitedly.

"I've done that already," was the reply. "I've searched every inch of our land, and I've been half a mile up and down the road. There ain't a sign of her to be seen."

"Did you call her by name as you searched for her?" inquired Max.

"Yes, I was so excited that I shouted 'Hildy' at the top of my voice every step I took; but there was no answer."

"Did you look down the well?" inquired Max, with a shudder. "She may have gone out to draw water and fallen in."

"Yes. I thought of that; but she ain't there. My husband keeps the well covered over with a board, and the board ain't been moved."

"Well, maybe she went to the barn and got kicked by one of the horses."

"No. I've been to the barn. She ain't been there."

"Did you go to the cow-pasture?" cried the young man, getting more and more excited. "The bull may have got loose and gored her. He's a ferocious brute. He almost got to me as I was crossing the pasture the other day."

"No. I've thought of that, too. The bull's securely tied to a stake. It ain't that what's happened to her."

"And the big ditch, Mrs. Macomber? You looked in the big ditch, I hope. She may have fallen in there."

"No, she didn't. You don't think I'd forget to search the ditch, do you? She isn't there."

"Was it night or day when you searched?"

"It was broad daylight. I could see every inch of our land. I tell you, she ain't on it. She's gone away somewhere."

"I know," cried Max hopefully. "She's gone up to her room and fallen asleep. I'll bet you didn't think to look in her bedroom, Mrs. Macomber."

"Yes, I did," was the disappointing reply. "I've looked in her room and in every other room in the house besides. She ain't anywhere on the farm!"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Max. "Then, where on earth can she have gone to? What's your theory, Mrs. Macomber?"

"I hate to put it in words," replied the good woman, with a shudder. "My idea is that it may be—tramps."

"Tramps!" echoed Max, in horror. "Good Heavens! What do you mean by that?"

"Tramps may have come in here and carried her off by force," cried Mrs. Macomber, sobbing wildly at the terrible thought. "Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me! They may be murdering her even now!"

Max groaned.

"Don't say it, Mrs. Macomber—don't say it," he gasped. "After all, you've no reason for thinking so. It's only a foolish idea on your part. There's nothing to show that she didn't leave here of her own free will."

"Would she have gone out and left them apple-dumplings to burn in the oven of her own free will?" cried Hildegarde's aunt. The thrifty housewife regarded this evidence of wanton waste as an invincible argument. "Would she have done it, young man? You know Hildy. Is she the kind of girl to neglect her duty that way? I tell you she's been carried off."

"Maybe you are right," groaned Max. "I don't think she'd have gone away of her own accord without leaving me some word. Why, Hildy and I were to have been married to-night, Mrs. Macomber."

The words were out of his mouth before he had any intention of uttering them.

Mrs. Macomber gave a shriek of surprise.

"Married!" she cried. "You and our Hildy married to-night! What are you saying, young man?"

"Yes," went on Max, "it was to be a secret wedding, my dear Mrs. Macomber. We knew that you and your husband would not have any objection to my marrying Hildy openly; but my father is dead against the match, and so we decided to get married, secretly, and wait for an opportunity to announce it. That's why I'm here now—to take Hildy to the parson's. It was all arranged last night. You can imagine what a shock it is to me to find that she's vanished so mysteriously."

"And you was going to get married to-night?" exclaimed Mrs. Macomber dazedly. "I never had any idea of it, Max. My husband and I guessed you was sweet on our Hildy, but we didn't think it was anywhere near the marriage stage. So you was going to take her to the parson's to-night, eh?"

"Yes. That's what I came here for. And now she's gone — God knows where."

"Which only goes to show that she never left here voluntarily," cried Mrs. Macomber. "She was taken away by force. Now, I'm sure of it."

"It certainly does look that way," Max admitted. "She's been kidnaped, either by tramps or by—"

He stopped short, suddenly seized with an inspiration.

"Good Heavens!" he muttered. "I wonder if it's possible?"

"If what's possible? Speak out, lad. Don't stand there mumbling."

"I don't think that my father would be capable of it," cried Max, more to himself than to Mrs. Macomber. "I'm pretty sure he wouldn't do a dastardly thing like that; but that scoundrel Merriweather might do it. I'm sure he wouldn't be above it."

"What are you talking about?" cried Mrs. Macomber anxiously.

But without answering her, the young man suddenly darted up the road, and did not stop running until he reached the Merriweather place again.

As he neared the house the sound of a piano fell upon his ear. Somebody was playing waltz music, and through the open windows he caught a glimpse of flitting figures.

Apparently, Ruth Merriweather's birthday party was progressing merrily. He could hear his father's deep bass voice accompanying the piano-player in the chorus of "In the Good Old Summer Time."

Almost blindly, he rushed into the well lighted room.

The dance had just come to an end, and the breathless couples looked in amazement at the wild-looking figure which suddenly burst in among them.

Old Farmer Crary, who was leaning against the piano, uttered an exclamation of mingled surprise and anger as he recognized the newcomer.

Mrs. Crary, sitting on a sofa conversing with Mrs. Merriweather, cried out in alarm when she caught sight of her son's flushed face.

Spying Si Merriweather standing in

the rear of the room, Max, heedless of the astonishment his entry caused, rushed toward him and fiercely seized him by the throat.

"Tell me, you scoundrel, what you have done with Hildy Crandall," he gasped. "Tell me where she is, or I'll —I'll make it the worse for you."

Ruth Merriweather shrieked with terror, and the other girls followed her example. Old Farmer Crary started toward his frenzied son, shouting "The boy's gone crazy."

"No, I'm not crazy," cried Max wildly. "Hildy Crandall has disappeared, and this man knows what has become of her."

"It's a lie!" gasped Merriweather, wrenching himself free. "I ain't seen the gal. I don't know what you're talking about."

The elder Crary seized his son by both shoulders and dragged him backward.

"Stop your nonsense, you young fool," he roared. "Leave this room at once, or I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

"I want Hildy," cried Max, struggling to rid himself of his sturdy father's grasp. "She's been kidnaped, and that man's at the bottom of it."

"Kidnaped!" exclaimed the startled group in chorus.

"Yes—kidnaped!" cried the young man. "She disappeared early this afternoon, and hasn't been seen since."

"I saw her at about three," said May Hamlin, one of the guests. "I was in the village, and Hildy passed in a red automobile. There was a man on the seat beside her, and the machine was going at full speed. But she wasn't being kidnaped. She was sitting upright in the auto, and she waved her handkerchief at me as she passed."

Max looked at the speaker dazedly.

"Hildy in a red automobile with a man—waved her handkerchief at you!" he gasped. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure," replied the girl, with a smile that was intended to be reassuring.

A murmur of astonishment passed around the group.

Everybody looked at Max Crary, whose face had turned deathly white.

"Good Heavens!" he groaned. "What can it mean?"

Si Merriweather burst into a loud laugh.

"Mean?" he shouted. "I reckon it means that Hildy has found the feller she wants and has gone off with him."

"It's a lie," shouted Max furiously, and he struggled to get at Merriweather; but old man Crary held him close in an embrace that was not one of affection.

"No, it ain't a lie, either," broke in Gus Marlowe, a pale-faced young man whose father kept a butcher-store in the village. "I saw the red auto, too. It passed our store this afternoon. Hildy was sitting beside a handsome feller with a long black mustache. He was running the machine, and he didn't seem to be forcing her to go with him, for as they passed our store she recognized me standing in the doorway and waved her handkerchief at me. I noticed that there was a New York license number on the back of the auto. Evidently, the feller came from the city, and the chances are that he's taken Hildy back there with him."

CHAPTER V.

CORROBORATIVE EVIDENCE.

GUS MARLOWE'S announcement completely staggered Max Crary.

His faith in Hildegarde made him absolutely refuse to believe that the girl had voluntarily accompanied the man in the automobile.

And yet the testimony of those two eye-witnesses apparently shattered the theory that she had been kidnaped.

What did it mean? Why had Hildy gone away in this mysterious red automobile when she should have been waiting at her aunt's home for Max to take her to the parson's to be married?

And, still more important question, where had she gone to?

It seemed to Max that there was only one solution to the problem.

May Hamlin and Gus Marlowe had not told the truth. They had not seen Hildy in the automobile under the circumstances which they had described.

They were friends of the Merriweathers; and was it not possible that they had concocted this absurd story to shield Si?

For although he had no proofs that Si Merriweather was responsible for the disappearance of the girl, Max felt certain that such was the case. He believed that Si had caused her to be spirited away with the hope that her disappearance would cause him (Max) to turn his thoughts to Ruth Merriweather.

"I don't believe a word of what you've just said," he declared huskily, glaring at Marlowe. "I don't believe that you saw Hildy in the auto, and I don't believe that Miss Hamlin saw her, either. I think that you've both invented that story."

Everybody gasped with astonishment as young Crary uttered these words. May Hamlin gave an exclamation of dismay, and her eyes filled with tears of humiliation. Gus Marlowe's pale face turned a shade whiter as he heard himself flatly called a liar.

Si Merrimeather scowled and doubled his big fists.

"See here, young man," he said sternly. "I've heard just about enough from you. This is going a little too far. This young lady and this young man are my guests, and you can't insult them under my roof. You get out of here, before I throw you out."

"Yes," roared old Crary. "Get out of here and go home. I'll have something to say to you, my son, when I get there. You're either drunk or crazy."

"No, I'm not," replied the young man. "I mean exactly what I say. Hildy never went away of her own accord, as these people would have me believe. There's been foul play, and I'm going to get to the bottom of it. I'll go now. I don't want to stay here; but I warn you all that if anything has happened to Hildy, those who are responsible will be made to suffer."

Having uttered these words, he shook his fist threateningly in the direction of Si Merriweather and left the house.

But he did not go home, as his irate father had ordered. It was possible that the missing girl had returned to the Macomber farm since his visit there, so he directed his steps thither.

When he arrived, however, his first glance at Mrs. Macomber's white face told him that Hildy had not come back.

"Have you found her?" demanded the good woman eagerly, as she opened the door. "Have you learned what's become of her?"

Max shook his head.

"Dear me!" sighed Mrs. Macomber. "I thought when you went away so suddenly that you must have a clue. Where on earth did you go to?"

"I went to Si Merriweather's. I have an idea that this is some of his work. I tried to force the truth out of the red-headed scoundrel, but he was too foxy. He swears that he don't know anything about it. May Hamlin and Gus Marlowe say that they saw Hildy riding through the village in a red automobile this afternoon with a man from New York."

"A man from New York!" gasped Mrs. Macomber. "Then he must be the kidnaper. We must have him arrested at once."

Max shook his head.

"According to their story, he isn't a kidnaper. They say she seemed to be riding with him of her own will, and that she waved her handkerchief to them as she passed through the village."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Macomber. "Who can the fellow be, and what could have induced our gal to go off with him in that sudden way?"

"I don't believe their story," said Max emphatically. "I think they're in the conspiracy and that they told that ridiculous tale to help Si Merriweather. If you'll let me have one of the horses, Mrs. Macomber, I'll go to the village at once and see the sheriff. He may be able to help us."

"You needn't go," said Mrs. Macomber. "My husband has gone already. He came back from Boston shortly after you left here. As soon as I found that Hildy had disappeared I telegraphed him and he took the next train back. He was terribly upset about our gal's disappearance. He loves her as if she was his own daughter. He swears he'll spend his last dollar to get her back. He's gone to see the sheriff. You might as well wait here until he returns. He may bring news of Hildy."

For two hours they waited, and Max spent the time telling Mrs. Macomber how much he cared for Hildegarde and reiterating his opinion that she would

not have departed voluntarily without leaving him some word of explanation or farewell.

At length they heard the sound of an approaching vehicle.

"I guess that's my husband now," exclaimed Mrs. Macomber excitedly. "I do hope he's got Hildy with him."

But as they ran out of the front door to meet him they saw that he was the only occupant of the buggy.

"Any news?" cried his wife eagerly. "Did you see the sheriff?"

"Yes. I saw the sheriff," replied Macomber very sadly, as he alighted.

"And what did he say? What's he going to do to find our Hildy? Speak quick, man! The look on your face frightens me."

"He isn't going to do anything. The sheriff doesn't think our girl has been kidnaped. He thinks that she left here of her own accord, and, God help me, I'm obliged to think so, too. Our little gal that we've done so much for, old lady, has proved ungrateful after all."

"What do you mean?" cried Mrs. Macomber and Max in a breath.

"I mean that the sheriff and I have interviewed several people in the village who saw Hildy pass through there this afternoon. She was in a red automobile, with a young man, and she waved her handkerchief to those who knew her."

"Good Heavens!" cried Max, white to the lips. "Then that story *is* true. Are you sure that this really happened, Mr. Macomber?"

"Yes, quite sure. I've spoken to at least ten persons who saw her. It was a New York automobile, according to the license tag."

"And what do you reckon it all means?" demanded Mrs. Macomber, completely mystified.

"Means!" The gray-haired farmer gave vent to a mirthless laugh. "I reckon it ain't hard to guess what it means, old woman. Our little girl that we've always trusted has gone off and eloped with some New York scoundrel—probably some dude she met while she was at boarding-school."

Max uttered an exclamation of horror.

"I don't believe it," he cried. "I don't care how much proof there is, I won't believe it. Why should Hildy run off with another fellow when she's in love with me?"

Macomber placed his hand upon the young man's shoulder.

"My boy," he said, "I'm sorry for you. I hate to think it of our little gal, but I'm afraid she's deceived us all."

"I don't believe it!" cried Max hoarsely. "I'm sure Hildy is true to me. I'm sure that there's been foul play. You can think badly of your own flesh and blood if you want, but I'll believe in her. I don't know where Hildy has gone, but I'm going to find her if I have to travel all over the globe to do it."

(To be continued.)

HOPE AND EFFORT.

HOPE is of the valley; Effort stands
  Upon the mountaintop, facing the sun;
  Hope dreams of dreams made true and great deeds done;
Effort goes forth, with toiling feet and hands,
To attain the far-off, sky-touched table-lands
  Of great desire; and till the end is won,
  Looks not below, where the long strife, begun
In pleasant fields, met torrents, rocks, and sands.
Hope; but when Hope bids look within her glass
  And shows the wondrous things which may befall,
  Wait not for destiny, wait not at all;
This leads to failures dark and dim morass;
  Sound thou to all thy powers a trumpet call,
And, staff in hand, strive up the mountain pass.

William Francis Barnard.

KATY'S ACCOMPLICE.

By MABEL GERTRUDE DUNNING.

The signal of the window-shade and the unawaited developments it precipitated.

I PICKED it up carelessly. It seemed only a little piece of paper, but nevertheless, for some unknown reason, I reached down mechanically, and unfolding the thing, glanced over the scrawly, illegible writing.

At that moment I heard the whistle of my train in the distance, and unconsciously thrust the note into my pocket and started for the station on a run.

For six months Margaret and I had reveled in the long-cherished dream of our four years of married life—a home in the suburbs.

There was only one cloud upon the horizon of our country life—the inevitable servant question. Already, during our short six months at Rosemount, we had attempted to train eleven maids, only to lose them as soon as they came to be useful, and sometimes before.

Then Katy came. Our discouraging experiences with her predecessors had made us somewhat pessimistic upon the problem of hired help.

At first she seemed too much of a prize to last.

"A new broom always sweeps clean," I remarked to Margaret as we discussed our new domestic a few evenings after her advent.

But as the days went by, and Katy proved more and more of a treasure, we gradually became accustomed to the idea of having a servant in our home whom Margaret could trust to do things as they should be done.

As I entered the dining-room on the morning of my birthday, Margaret greeted me from behind the coffee-urn:

"You haven't forgotten that we dine with Ed and Clara this evening, have you, dear? I am going over this afternoon, so you had better come right there from the office. I told Katy yesterday that she need not prepare dinner for us to-night."

"Very well, girlie," I answered, as I settled myself at the table to enjoy Katy's luscious breakfast. "I'll try and leave a little early this afternoon, unless Walsh comes in to talk over that patent."

I looked up as I finished speaking and noticed Katy standing in the doorway, scanning the floor anxiously as though looking for something.

"Lost anything, Katy?" I inquired, thinking to help her out.

At the sound of my voice she started abruptly and answered confusedly: "No—oh, no, sir. I was only lookin' over the floor to see if it needed sweepin'." And with that she disappeared through the kitchen doorway.

I thought no more of her strange manner, but finished my breakfast quickly, and it was as I hastened to the gate on my way to the station that I picked up the little piece of paper with the strange writing on it.

Because of my hurry to catch the train, the note slipped my memory until at lunch, when I pulled it from my pocket with my handkerchief. Even then, as the paper fell upon the table, I opened it thinking it some business memorandum, but as I bent over the almost undecipherable writing I soon realized that it was not.

The note had no heading, but simply contained these words: "If you're sure they'll not be home to-night have everything packed, and I'll be there by six."

As I finished reading this screed, wondering for whom it was intended, I suddenly remembered Katy's face as she stood in the doorway that morning looking anxiously over the floor. The note must have been intended for her, and she had lost it.

Probably it had slipped from her waist as she watered the flowers in the dining-room window, and it had caught on the curtains and hung there until a sudden draft blew it out of the window onto the front pathway.

"What did it mean? Who wrote the note?"

As I asked myself these questions an ugly suspicion grew upon me until it assumed the dimensions of a fact—our trusty Katy was going to rob us. This note was from a man, probably her confederate. They intended to pack our valuables and make off with them quietly this evening when they were sure Margaret and I would be elsewhere.

So this was Katy's game in making herself so useful to us; in being such a treasure of a servant. and in gaining Margaret's trust and affection.

Well, her own carelessness had betrayed her. I understood her evident anxiety of the morning quite clearly now, and think that I, too, would have been anxious if I had lost such a valuable and self-condemning note.

I hastened back to the office, quite determined to leave early, so until after four I had no room in my mind for anything except business; but as I boarded the train for Rosemount I had an opportunity to reflect on what I should do.

The mysterious visitor was not to arrive until six o'clock, so until that hour I could do nothing. It was a few minutes past five when I reached Rosemount, where I had much trouble searching for the constable, whom I finally found at the barber's, covered with lather. When he learned my business he addressed a few hurried words to the man attending him, and fifteen minutes later walked up the main street with me while I explained my plan to him.

Six o'clock and dusk found me hidden in the hedge just opposite my kitchen door. As I waited, I wondered if Margaret would be worried at my absence and come home to look for me. I devoutly hoped she would not, as that would spoil my whole plan.

I heaved a sigh of regret as I thought of losing Katy, and could see all our former troubles repeating themselves in the near future. Having to break in a new servant would probably mean much forbearance and patience on our part. In my heart I thought bitter things of Katy.

I then reviewed my plan, which was to enter the house as though nothing had happened and walk into the kitchen, hoping to catch them red-handed; to pull up the kitchen shade as a signal to the constable, sitting on a large stone behind the garden fence, and then — jail for Katy and her friend.

"Remember," I whispered across to the officer of the law, "you are to come when the shade flies up."

"Yis, sir. And ye'll not have toime to say 'Jack Robinson' from the toime thot shade goes up till I'll be schnappin' the handcuffs on thim," he assured me.

At that instant we heard the sound of quick footsteps on the path that led to the back of the house. In another second the slight figure of a man came in sight and made for the kitchen door, which opened from within as though by magic.

Five minutes later I entered the house from the front, and walking into the hall, left my hat on the table, and with my hand closed firmly about my revolver hidden in my coat pocket, went slowly through the dining-room into the kitchen.

When I entered, the room was quite empty, but before I reached the window Katy came in from the laundry. She was quite pale, and when she saw me started, apparently much surprised.

Under the table I noticed a large valise, packed to its uttermost capacity, of course with our silver and Margaret's valuable collection of old laces. The sight of the bag roused my wrath as I thought of the coolness with which the thing had been planned.

Turning to Katy, I exclaimed sharply: "You may as well give up, my good woman. You are found out. The note you lost this morning has betrayed everything to me. Tell your man to come out of that closet, for I know he is hiding there, and unpack that bag—then I'll take care of him."

I remained near the window so that I might send the shade up at the least sign of resistance from them. As Katy silently went to the closet and unlocked it, I grasped my revolver more securely, only to drop it back into my pocket at a pale, slim youth walked out into the bright glare of the gas-light. He seemed not more than twenty years old, and his round Irish face was clouded and sullen.

He did not even glance up, but Katy, pushing her way in front of me began to weep and plead.

"Oh, Mr. Wells, please, sir, don't give him up. He never done it, sir, honest, he never done it."

I cut her short, however, and ordered him to unpack the bag.

"Open that valise at once. Don't you suppose I know what's in it? You've packed it full of our silver. This is your gratitude for Mrs. Wells's kindness to you. You knew we trusted you and you repay us by bringing your accomplice here and stealing our valuables."

"Accomplice is it you say? Well, that he's not. He's my own son," began Katy in great wrath.

But I would not listen and went on:

"Then so much the worse for both of you. I don't care who he is. All I know is that he is the man who wrote the note telling you to have our things packed and ready for him to take off with him. You see, you are found out, and as soon as that bag is unpacked you both go with the constable."

My fears of resistance on the part of my uninvited guest had quite vanished when I saw the dejected boy walk out of the closet, and leaving my post by the window I walked to the table and pulled the bag open, but instead of finding it filled with my own silver, what was my astonishment to discover it packed neatly with men's clothing of ordinary quality.

I looked at the youth who was standing by the closet door with a puzzled, bewildered expression on his face, but finding no explanation there, I looked at Katy.

"What does this mean, Katy? Where is the silver?" I asked slowly, fearing for the moment I might have made a mistake.

"The silver is in the closet, sir, where it is quite safe. You've made a mistake. Micky"—indicating the boy with a nod of her head—"is my son, and he's wanted in Wilmot for a robbery at Ward's, which he never done. He escaped from there and he's been hidin' down by the tracks for two days.

"I knowed you and the missus wasn't goin' to be here to-night, so I got word to him to let me know if he could come at this time for money and clothes I'd got for him, so's he'd be able to get away from this town before any one got wind of his bein' around here.

"Oh, sir, it's hard for him to be locked up for what he never done. He'd never have no chance to be anything if he was once jailed. I thought he could get away and start over. The note was what he wrote, and you thought we was plannin' to rob you. I was only tryin' to get him away safe, but now you'll give him up and he'll be sent to jail for doing nothin', and when he gets out he'll go to the bad," and here she began to weep afresh.

I was undecided what to do. Now was the time I wished for Margaret, but she was absent. Therefore, I had to decide for myself quickly.

Resuming my position at the window, I looked at the boy. Perhaps Katy was telling the truth. He did look dejected enough, although otherwise his face was very pleasing.

Perhaps he *was* innocent, and if so, why shouldn't he have another chance? Katy's grief was evidently very sincere and the bag was certainly packed with the youth's own clothes.

Thinking these things over to myself, I moved from the window, intending to look for the silver in the dining-room, where Katy had said it was safe. As I started forward, a button on my coat caught the string attached to the window shade, and before I could prevent it, the curtain flew to the top, and a second later, the constable burst into the room and grabbed the boy Micky by the arm.

"Come, ye young rascal," he exclaimed, pulling the youth away from the closet door. "I'll see that ye're fixed, all right. Here, now, no fight from ye. Better come along peaceable."

To my surprise, the boy was fighting desperately with his captor.

"I tell you I didn't do it," he cried, angrily. "I wasn't anywhere near Ward's on Saturday. I won't go with you, I say."

"What are ye talking about, youngster? Who said anything about Ward's? I ain't haulin' ye in for that job. I caught the feller who did that this mornin', and he's confessed the whole thing. I'm—" but here I interrupted.

"What do you mean by the robbery at Ward's? Where is it?" I questioned the constable.

"Why, Silas Ward's house in Wilmot

was entered and robbed last Saturday night. The feller that did it was caught this mornin', and, as I said before, he has confessed everything."

"Then, don't you see, sir, that what I've said is right?" broke in Katy. "That's what I meant when I said Micky was wanted at Wilmot. He heard that some one accused him of the theft. Won't you believe me and let the boy go?"

The constable still held the youth by the arm, but after I had explained things to him, he released his hold, remarking quizzically: "Well, if I'm not needed here any longer, I'll go home to me supper."

"Yes," I answered, "that's the best thing for all of us."

Turning to Katy, I continued: "We'll keep Micky here to-night, and in the morning I will endeavor to secure employment for him, but I must be off now to keep my dinner engagement."

As I hurried from the room, and seized my hat and coat, I could hear Katy's confused and broken thanks, but wondering what Margaret must be thinking, I paid no heed, and hastened out of the house.

A MAN'S COUNTRY.

By EDWARD P. CAMPBELL,

Author of "Through Circus Rings," "Floating the Free Lance," etc.

The terrific adventure of the tenderfoot on a visit that was meant to be purely one of pleasure and turned out dramatic to a degree.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Dick Budget, arriving at the Arizona ranch of his friend, Jim Caldwell, finds that Caldwell has just left for the town of Paxatonia, and decides to follow. In passing through an Indian reservation he unwittingly gives the signal for an Apache uprising. Captured by two troopers, he is taken to Paxatonia, and is there identified by the colonel's daughter, who is quite unknown to him.

Under cover of the Indian uprising, the army post has been fired, and Dick is given cause to suspect a plot by Dunbar, the quartermaster, to prevent the discovery of fraud in the commissariat. He rides to the post with the two troopers, both of whom are shot by the Indians. He himself is lassoed and jerked from his horse by Sanchez, a half-breed innkeeper.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

TRUSSED up like a chicken ready for market, with stout rawhide bands about his wrists and ankles, and a stiff gag forced between his jaws, the remainder of that night seemed a century-long reign of horror to the unfortunate Budget.

Ere he had sufficiently regained his senses from his luckless tumble to struggle or put up resistance, his agile adversary was upon him binding him hand and foot, and rendering him powerless to move or utter a cry. Then, with scant ceremony, his helpless form was dragged to the concealment of a little clump of greasewood not far away, and he was left to his own reflections.

That these were scarcely pleasant goes without saying.

Not only was there the torturing physical suffering resulting from his cramped position, and the cutting of the tightly drawn cords into his flesh; but he also had to face a most disquieting uncertainty as to his ultimate fate, for he could not blind himself to the realization that when Sanchez and the quartermaster at last met to compare notes, there could no longer be any question as to where he had stood.

They would recognize, moreover, that he knew entirely too much for their safety; and with men of their desperate

stamp such a realization as that could have but one outcome—the old solution, "Dead men tell no tales!"

Yes; consider the situation in any light he would, he could see no hope for himself. For their own security they would have to make way with him.

But how would they do it? That was the question which agonized his brain, and brought out the cold sweat of terror upon his brow.

He had much to live for, with youth, strength, wealth, and health all his; yet it was not the mere prospect of death alone which so appalled him. He had taken that risk into account when he had joined with the troopers in that reckless dash against the Indians, and again when he had followed the murderous Sanchez single-handed across the brilliantly lighted parade-ground and into the shadow of the shed; and in neither case had he blenched.

But even the stoutest heart will quail at the contemplation of a lingering doom, and it was this haunting possibility which caused the prisoner's flesh to creep and his blood to run cold.

Sanchez had given no intimation of his purpose when he departed. His captive safely disposed of, he had turned without a word, and slipped away in the darkness. And now the question which Dick asked himself with grim foreboding was—when would he return?

Suppose not at all? What then? The answer was simple. An increase of the sufferings he was now enduring, with the added tortures of thirst and hunger, until at last nature could stand no more, and he died of slow starvation.

And how long that might be! Strong and lusty as he was, days must pass before he would succumb—days with every minute in them an eternity of torment!

As imagination drew for him this frightful picture, he strained anew at his bonds, turning and twisting against them in a very frenzy of desperation; but the stout strands of rawhide failed to give a hair's breadth. Impotent and mute as a log, he must lie there until death or Sanchez brought release.

So the slow hours of the night dragged on, while he revolved a thousand schemes of escape or of calling attention to his plight, only to decide each new suggestion to be more futile than the last. Overborne by the fears which possessed him, he would wander in his mind at times for a few seconds; but would quickly be brought back to consciousness by some fresh pang in his sore and aching muscles.

He heard the return of the column which had set out in pursuit of the Indians, the arrival of the officers from the fort—indeed, there were few sounds either near or remote which his straining ears failed to catch.

Once hope flickered up in his heart for a brief period; for an order was given to search the neighborhood of the parade-ground to discover if any stray Apaches might be lurking at hand, and the seekers passed so near that he might have touched them, could he have stretched out his hand.

Unable to attract their attention, he heard them move on, and once more was compelled to resign himself to despair.

At last, though, just when it seemed to him as though time must have stretched itself to its farthest limits, and that the peal of Gabriel's trumpet might be expected at any second, he became suddenly aware that cautious footsteps were approaching his hiding-place. In another moment he was roughly seized and dragged out into the open.

Underneath the branches it had been dark as midnight; but out here he could see that morning was at hand. A faint, gray light was stealing over the world, hardly more than a hint as yet of the coming day, yet sufficient for him to perceive that it was Sanchez who had come back to him.

The half-breed wasted no time in explanations or preliminaries; but stooping down, quickly loosened the bands about Budget's ankles. Then he gruffly bade him get up, emphasizing his order by a brutal kick in the other's ribs.

Dick endeavored to comply, but the long continuance in one position had practically paralyzed his legs, and it was only after repeated attempts on his part, aided by further persuasion from Sanchez's boot, that at last he was able to stand on his feet.

"Now, march!" growled the innkeeper. "And see that you go fast enough to suit me, too, or I'll try whether

TO THE READERS OF
The Argosy

A WORD OR TWO BY MR. MUNSEY ABOUT A CHANGE WE ARE MAKING IN ONE OF OUR PUBLICATIONS.

WE get a bit of fun now and again out of the various changes we put in force in this business, in the new publications we bring out from time to time, and in the experiments we try. The particular change that is pending just now is the conversion of "THE OCEAN" into

"THE LIVE WIRE."

And this is a very radical change—a change from an ALL-SEA-TALE magazine to one that covers all phases of human interest and that is printed throughout in colors. The printing of a magazine in colors is a tremendous stride forward. There has never been such a magazine before—I mean, one printed throughout in colors. In the conventional magazine colored pages have been inserted, but no attempt at what is known as color-printing has ever before been tried in a magazine.

With this color-printing THE LIVE WIRE is in effect like the color section of the New York Sunday *Herald.* It contains a vast variety—comics in colors, battle scenes in colors, fun and fiction in colors, decorations and initial letters in colors, and, in fact, the whole thing is a blaze of color.

* * * * * * *

"THE OCEAN" is our youngest publication. It is a little less than a year old, and, as publications go, has given a remarkable account of itself from the start. It has grown into a very respectable circulation, and has paid a net profit on every issue. But it isn't doing well enough to be particularly exciting.

I fancy there is too much water in the title, and water isn't especially popular just now. A dash of earth might help it. A good many people are very strong for the earth. They are out for all they can get of it. Some of them would like to corral it all.

I wasn't very keen for "THE OCEAN" as a title in the outset. I should have preferred "The Earth," but I found that that name was already being used. There was, however, the bare chance that tales of the sea might

interest a wide circle of readers. The only way to KNOW was to FIND OUT—to put the theory to the test. The experiment has been interesting and profitable—profitable both in actual money and in the development of an established magazine.

"THE OCEAN," however, as the title of a magazine, gives no latitude for wanderings on shore, and there are many scenes along the Rialto and in other choice places of earth that furnish themes for good journalism. It is an inelastic, unyielding term, while our new title is as elastic as a man's fancy. Its scope is not bounded by either the depth or the breadth of the world. THE LIVE WIRE suggests the very opposite of everything that is dull and slow.

If our editors measure up to the dimensions of this title, if they grasp the spirit and scope of it, and can translate their enthusiasm into an acute actuality, we may reasonably expect to find this revivified magazine "going some." In its new and broader field—broad enough to cover everything of interest in fancy and fact—it should set a red-hot pace.

Fiction will still be a leading feature of the magazine—good dramatic stories that have sweep and go to them, not mere studies of fiberless people and colorless scenes and situations, sometimes called stories. And in addition to the fiction there will be a vast variety of human interest matter of the kind that isn't over our heads—that isn't so scientific or abstruse or technical or hidden in its meaning that we cannot understand it. THE LIVE WIRE will be GOOD EASY READING from start to finish—a homely, homy magazine, with plenty of virility and get-up-and-go to it.

I believe we have a conception in THE LIVE WIRE that should develop into a pretty hot magazine, and one that will have its own individuality. It may interest you to know that we scheduled this magazine to appear two years ago. The reason why it was not launched before "THE OCEAN" is that we were waiting for some special machinery with which to print it in colors.

It will require a little time for THE LIVE WIRE to find itself, that is, to get its gait and hit up the pace. By finding itself I mean the process of crystallizing into a distinct type of its own—a type that is in harmony with the title, and is emphatically the outgrowth of the title. But in the first issue, even, the February issue, we are giving you something distinctive and distinctly interesting—emphatically a new creation in magazine-making.

I hope you will get this first number, and judge for yourselves of its merits. That it has defects, and a good many of them, is certain. It is impossible for editors, however clever, to turn out a finished product with the first issue. They must familiarize themselves with a new magazine before they can be sure of their stroke and do really dramatic work. However, I think you will find this first issue quite worth while, both in what it is, and in its possibilities.

On Sale January 15.

10 Cents a Copy. **By the Year, $1.00**

the point of this won't help your speed," producing a long, keen-bladed dirk.

Thus adjured, the prisoner staggered painfully a few steps and halted; but he speedily found that the intimation given him was no idle threat, for no sooner had he stopped than the innkeeper sprang forward with a curse and drove the knife-point viciously into his hip.

A moment before it had seemed to Dick that he could not move his feet forward another inch; but this savage prodding speedily showed him that he had by no means reached the end of his endurance, and thenceforth, although his eyes flashed murder every time he turned them upon Sanchez, he progressed with considerable more celerity.

Still, it was but awkward going at the best; for the gag remained in his mouth, his hands were tied behind his back, and although the cord about his feet had been loosened, it still impeded him so that he could do little more than shuffle along over the ground. Sanchez was evidently prepared to take no chances.

A half-mile or so was thus traversed in this stumbling fashion, and then the pair arrived at a lonely spot on the brink of the cañon some distance below the fort.

The day had considerably advanced by this time, and Dick could plainly make out his surroundings.

On the other side of the river was the road which he had traveled so carelessly only the afternoon before—indeed, the spot where he had crossed the stream was just below the jutting point of rock on which he now stood. To the right and above stood the white buildings of the fort, with a pall of smoke still drifting over them from the ashes of the consumed storehouse, and just ahead of him was the deep abyss of the cañon, a sheer descent of one hundred and fifty feet.

A sudden apprehension came to Budget that it was the half-breed's design to drive him over this precipice, afterward removing the evidences of restraint from his mangled form so as to make it appear that he had strayed from the path and fallen over by accident; and with a stiffening up of his resolution, he determined to resist any such attempt to the last extremity.

If he was to be murdered, he wanted proof of it to show upon his body, so that his friends might take steps to hunt down and punish his slayer.

That he was mistaken, however, in the other's purpose was speedily demonstrated; for by a sudden tug upon the rope which trailed from his shackled feet, Sanchez neatly tripped him up, and then proceeded to tie him quite as he had been before.

"You no doubt thought you were very smart, Mr. Richard Budget of New York," he said, bending over and leering wickedly down into the helpless man's face. "It seemed perhaps a clever thing for you to mix in affairs with which you had no concern; but now you are going to find out your mistake.

"I would have slit your gullet with my knife, or put a bullet through your head, and made an end of it," he went on; "but the captain is more long-headed. 'No, Sanchez,' he said when I told him I had you safely tied up down there under the greasewoods. 'No, Sanchez, this fellow is a friend of Jim Caldwell, and if his body is found, Caldwell will move heaven and earth to discover how he came by his death. Therefore, he must disappear utterly, so that no trace of him is left.

"'Take this to him,' he said, 'and tell him that Captain Dunbar sent it as a recognition of the courtesy shown toward Miss Maynard by Mr. Budget.'"

With a grin of vindictive malice, the emissary drew from his pocket and held up for the other's inspection a small cone of dull, grayish-black material.

Dick gave an involuntary shudder. At last the intention of his ruthless foes was made plain to him. The thing which Sanchez held was a dynamite cartridge!

He gazed with fascinated horror as the innkeeper with businesslike despatch completed the preparations for putting his instrument of destruction into use.

A little hole was dug with the point of the knife-blade almost directly at the prisoner's side, and the cartridge having been deposited in this, a fuse was attached leading a foot or more away.

Then the half-breed turned with a mocking wave of the hand to his victim.

"Ta, ta!" he cried. "Sorry I can't remain for the finish; but really I have

an important engagement a mile or two away. If you happen to see any of my friends in the next four counties, however, don't fail to give them my regards."

With that he ceased his banter, and touching a match to the free end of the fuse, hurriedly made his way off down the hill, while Budget, left alone, lay watching with wide-staring eyes the slow flame as it crawled and sputtered toward him.

It seemed all a dream, a horrid nightmare from which he must inevitably wake up; yet he knew only too well it was dire reality. Five minutes more—ten, at the outside—and the fizzling blaze would reach its goal. Then would come the thunderous crash, an earthquake shock of flame and upheaval, and he—where would he be?

With a sudden realization of the awfulness of his fate, the frozen terror which had hitherto kept him enchained gave way, and he strained and heaved again at his bonds in a frenzied effort to escape.

And as his muscles surged and swelled, a swift flash of hope was born from the blackness of his despair. Was it imagination tricking him, or had the fetters about his feet yielded slightly under the force of his convulsive struggles?

No need to say that he quickly tried again. And this time there was no possibility of doubt; the rawhide loosened so perceptibly that he could stretch his feet apart by a full inch.

How he labored then, straining with every ounce of power at his command, kicking with his feet, digging his heels into the ground, while his eyes persistently sought the sparking train traveling so steadily toward him.

Inch by inch it advanced, while for all his feverish endeavors the progress he made in freeing himself from the knotted cords was terribly slow. And now a muffled groan burst past the gag which sealed his lips; for he saw that he could never make it.

Scarcely a finger's length of fuse intervened between the flame and the cartridge, and many moments must yet elapse before he could gain even a limited liberty of motion.

But even as he recognized the hopelessness of his case, a new expedient suggested itself; and with painful contortions he wriggled and twisted himself around until the dynamite cartridge lay at his feet.

He had thought that he might be able to stamp out the flickering fuse, and thus save himself; but it was laid slightly up the hill from him, and in the experiment he found that he could not quite reach it.

Neither from his new position could he see it any longer; but he knew that it must be about gone. Any second now might bring the explosion.

Had all his passionate struggle and toil been in vain, then? Was there no way in which he could save himself?

As though in answer came his inspiration. He dug his heels down into the ground, and brought away between them the cone-shaped cartridge with the last remnant of hissing fuse still attached to it.

There was no time to drop it and try to stamp out the flame. Instead, he threw his legs high in air, and with a final, supreme effort tossed the morsel of devastation as far as he could send it.

It flew a short distance through the air, weakly and waveringly, as might a ball thrown by a child; then began to drop in a slow curve, while Dick watched it, his heart in his mouth and all his soul in his eyes.

Would it clear the edge of the cliff? Upon the narrow margin of a few inches hung all the difference between life and death for him.

Yes, he told himself excitedly, it would clear. Or, no, he was mistaken; it was going to fall well to this side.

Unable to bear the uncertainty, he turned away his eyes; but even as he did so there came a tremendous crash, the earth rose up beneath him as though riven into a thousand fragments, and—he knew no more.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INTERRUPTED PROPOSAL.

THE officers at the ball, delayed by Dunbar's procrastinating tactics, had been fully an hour later than Dick in reaching the post; and by the time they arrived there the fires were practically

out and things in general restored to quite the normal routine.

There was no denying, however, that the brief flurry had cost dear. The storehouse, with its contents, was a total loss, and a number of other structures had been so seriously damaged that they would have to be almost rebuilt.

This being the result at which the grafting quartermaster had aimed, it might have been expected that he would be in jubilant humor over it in the seclusion of his own quarters, where there was no prying eye to see.

Yet such was very far from the case. In fact, Dunbar was apparently as much upset and out of temper as though the outcome of his plot had been entirely different.

Although alone, he scowled and stamped his foot, and muttered curses as he strode restlessly up and down the floor of his sitting-room.

Presently, however, he halted in his tramp, and gazed quckly up as a new suggestion offered itself to him. Slowly, as he pondered it, an evil smile broke over his heavy features.

"By Jove, it ought to work!" he muttered ruminatively. "With my five days' leave of absence, no one will dream of questioning where I am; while, as for her, the colonel will think she is still at Paxatonia, and her friends there will have no doubt that she is at the fort.

"Yes," he continued, "that part of it is undoubtedly all right; but the more ticklish question is, will she ever consent to a ceremony? By Heaven, she will have to consent," smashing his big fist down upon the table. "Under the circumstances, what else can she do?"

He considered the matter a few moments longer, then stepping to the door with an air of decision, called his orderly and requested that his horse be brought around at once.

"I have changed my mind again, Stanley," he explained, "and have concluded, since everything is quiet here, to start for Phœnix to-night, after all."

As the man withdrew, he snapped open his watch and glanced at the time.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "After twelve? I had no idea it was anything like so late. I can get there and back before morning easy enough, of course, but it will take hustling to do it." And suiting the action to his words, he hurried back into the bedroom and began to change his clothes.

A moment later a subdued tapping on the window-pane caught his attention, and with a snarl of impatience he strode over and threw up the sash.

No one was in sight as he looked out into the night, but a cautious whisper came to him from the surrounding darkness:

"Hey, captain! I must speak to you at once." It was Sanchez, the ubiquitous.

"You?" demanded Dunbar angrily. "What do you mean by coming here? You are liable to spoil everything by such indiscretion."

"Ah, but it is necessary. There is much that you must know without delay."

Impressed by the half-breed's tone, in spite of his eagerness to get started upon his journey, Dunbar interposed no further objections.

"All right," he assented. "Hold on a minute, though, until I douse the glim, Your shadow against these blinds, if anybody happened to be prowling about, might require some explanations which I do not care to give."

The light out, accordingly, Sanchez lithely wriggled through the opening and started immediately upon an excited recital of the various adventures which had befallen him.

Before he had completed a half-dozen sentences, however, the quartermaster interrupted him with a startled exclamation.

"What sort of a looking man was this of whom you speak?" he questioned sharply.

"Big and fine-looking, with light hair and blue eyes. He had clothes, though, to make you laugh—a sombrero like an umbrella, spurs a foot long, and fringe on his chaps like the whiskers on a billy-goat."

"Ha! And his name?"

"Richard Budget, of New York. He says he's a friend of Jim Caldwell, over at the Circle J."

"And you say you took this man for an agent of mine? You discussed with him all our plans and intentions?" start-

ing up wildly and beginning to pace the floor.

"Yes; but there is no need for you to fret your head on that account."

"How is that?"

"Well, for one thing, he couldn't have known very well what I was driving at until after he found out about the burning of the storehouse and the other doings at the fort; and for another, I've got him roped and tied out here under some greasewoods, where he isn't apt to cause much mischief so long as I don't choose to let him."

Then he recounted briefly, for the captain's benefit, the disastrous result of the charge which Dick and the two cavalrymen had made upon their return to the fort.

The captain seemed vastly relieved at this intelligence.

"Still," he objected gloomily, "there is no telling to how many people this Budget may have told his story before he fell into your hands."

"Pshaw!" rejoined Sanchez, "that doesn't worry me a bit. There is no one to whom he could have peached but the corporal and that other trooper; and I can assure you," dryly, "that neither of them is going to do much talking.

"No," he reiterated, "I don't think we need get frightened over what he may have told already. It's to decide what steps we must take to keep him from talking in the future that I wanted to see you. Shall I settle him myself," with cool bloodthirstiness, "or would you like to have a little confab with him first?"

"Oh, handle it your own way," indifferently. "Only see that the job is thoroughly done. Or, stop," struck by a sudden thought, "this man is a friend of Caldwell and we don't want to be too open about what we do, or leave any loopholes which might lead to unpleasant consequences."

He sat a moment absorbed in thought; then rose, with a wicked smile on his face.

"Wait here till I return," he said. "I think I can get hold of just the sort of medicine to suit this case."

When he came back, he brought with him the dynamite cartridge and gave it to Sanchez with minute instructions as to how it must be used.

"Let him know that it comes from me," he directed. "Tell him it is a memento of the Paxatonia ball, a slight recognition on my part of the courtesy shown by him toward my fiancée, Miss Maynard."

"You have won her, then? She has accepted you?" questioned Sanchez with eager interest, for he had long been aware of the trend of his associate's desires.

The captain frowned slightly; then he thrust forward his heavy lower jaw.

"We are to be married to-morrow," he said slowly.

"To-morrow? *Carramba!* but that is soon. And where?"

"At your place. See that the proper arrangements are made, and send one of your men the first thing in the morning to fetch that *padre* of whom I once told you. You know; the one who asks no inconvenient questions."

"Ah!" broke in Sanchez with a new comprehension, "I see. It is to be a somewhat private affair, eh? But," manifesting considerable uneasiness, "are you not afraid? Colonel Maynard is not one to take such a thing lightly. We shall all be in hot water over it the first thing we know."

"Bah!" Dunbar snapped his fingers. "Colonel Maynard, as you know, will acquiesce in any arrangement which suits his daughter."

"Yes," perplexedly; "but I understood from what you said that the young lady is—er—not exactly willing."

The quartermaster lighted a cigarette.

"Perhaps not—now," he answered carelessly. "In fact, I don't mind telling you, Sanchez, that she gave me an absolute refusal not any longer ago than this very evening. But I have a theory that women have not changed much since the days of the Stone Age, when the accredited method of wooing was to seize them by the hair and drag them home. They still like to be coerced; and although Miss Maynard may cut up a bit at the start, take my word for it, as soon as she finds that the situation is inevitable she will settle down and accept things like a lamb."

The innkeeper, it must be confessed, seemed far from convinced; but Dunbar waxed so angry at his dissuasion, and

assured him so solemnly that he should not suffer, no matter what the result, that he at last yielded to the other's wishes and agreed to look after the desired preparations.

This point settled, the two were ready to separate; but a new idea had risen in the captain's scheming brain while they were talking, and he stayed his companion for a moment.

"By the way, Sanchez," he said, "you, of course, have thoroughly ransacked all the luggage belonging to this stranger. Did you by chance find anything among his traps resembling the clothes he wore to-night?"

The half-breed grinned as he caught the drift of the question.

"Oh, yes," he answered, "there is another layout which might have grown upon the same bush. But," with a shake of the head, "you could never pass for him, captain. Pardon, but you are too fat."

"Nonsense," snapped the quartermaster.

His avoirdupois was a rather tender point with him, and he was not overpleased at the reminder.

"There is not so very much difference in our figures. Besides, it is night, and I shall be on horseback.

"Come, we are wasting altogether too much time. Meet me on the trail to your place in ten minutes, and we will ride over and get the stuff. Even with that delay, I still ought to have time to get to Paxatonia and back before morning. I suppose there is no doubt about your prisoner remaining safe until you return?"

Sanchez shrugged his shoulders.

"That lariat of mine has held a thousand-pound steer in its time. I do not think he will be very far away when I want him."

Accordingly, the two, with many jests and much exultation over the success which seemed to attend their plans, rode over to the inn; and then the captain, having accoutered himself in Budget's raiment and decided that on a pinch he could pass for the New Yorker, proceeded back alone, arriving at Paxatonia without incident just as the clock was striking three.

Arousing the friends at whose house Miss Maynard was stopping—people he happened luckily not to know—he sent up word that Mr. Budget was below and prepared to accompany her back to the fort. She was not to be alarmed, but her father had been slightly wounded in a brush with the Indians, and wanted her beside him.

As for himself, he said, he would procure a horse for her to ride, and be back by the time she was ready to start.

In this way he craftily evaded having to show himself to her, or to answer any questions until the very moment of their departure; and then he counted upon her natural agitation at the news from her father, and the excitement of getting off, to prevent any discovery of the imposition he was practising until they were well on the road.

The outcome showed that he had not reckoned falsely. It had been well enough to tell the girl not to be alarmed; but she was, of course, highly wrought up by the news he had brought, and poured out such a flood of eager questions while she was mounting that he could scarcely have had a chance to edge in an answer to one of them, even had he so desired.

Indeed, so completely was she deceived by the big hat, and general get-up of her escort, that there arose no question of his identity in her mind until after the town was left behind them and they were out upon the trail.

Then, as she recognized at last with whom she was traveling, she drew rein sharply with an indignant remonstrance.

"What is the meaning of this masquerade?" she demanded.

He glanced up as though in surprise at her tone; then, seeming to comprehend, said easily: "Oh, my clothes, you mean? I had quite forgotten what an appearance I must present. Why, you see, Budget and I swapped. I had this long ride to take, and as I had nothing with me save my dress uniform, and to get another rig would have had to make a long détour around to my quarters, he very obligingly exchanged with me. In daylight, I doubt if I would have done it even for comfort's sake; but after night, of course, I didn't mind."

The explanation sounded plausible enough; yet she still remained skeptical.

"Why, then, did you send up his name when you came to the door?" she asked.

"Send up his name? I certainly did nothing of the kind."

"Yet that was the message which came up, that Mr. Budget was below, and wanted me to go back with him to the fort at once."

The captain did some admirable acting.

"I simply cannot understand it," he said perplexedly. Then he asked quickly: "Had you spoken of Budget to the friends with whom you were stopping?"

"Yes," she admitted. "I told them of his theatrical entrance at the ball, and described his ridiculous costume."

"Ah, that explains the mistake, then. They saw me in this outlandish rig, and naturally supposed I must be he. The names Dunbar and Budget sound enough alike, you know, to confuse anybody who had just been awakened from a sound sleep."

The argument sounded reasonable, especially since she could conceive of no cause for him to pose as Budget; so, after some further discussion, during which he described in detail the injury supposed to have befallen her father, she began to regard her doubts as foolish, and offered no further objection to resuming the journey.

It was a trifle embarrassing to her at first, for they had last parted after a rather stormy scene at the ball, at which she had been obliged to tell him, in effect, that she would not marry him if he were the last man alive; but, avoiding any reference to this, he led the conversation into indifferent channels, and indeed comported himself so delicately and tactfully toward her that he rose sensibly in her good opinion.

There was, however, but little opportunity for talking; for the girl, naturally full of anxiety to reach her father, devoted most of her attention to getting as much speed as possible out of her mount, and Dunbar, too, seemed equally desirous of making haste.

Nevertheless, for all their hard riding, the dawn was pretty well advanced before they reached the post, and the big gate, with its shield of national colors atop, was plainly visible as Cecilia, reining up her horse, started to turn in.

"No, no," protested the captain, skilfully cutting in between her and the gate. "Didn't I tell you? It is at Sanchez's we will find your father. He was taken there after the skirmish, and the surgeon thought it best not to move him for a day or so."

She merely nodded her head to signify that she understood; and whipping up, led the way on down into the cañon.

Why she came to do it she never could tell; but about half-way down the rocky trail something impelled her to glance back at the portly Dunbar lumbering in her rear, and she thus surprised a look upon his face, so tinged with greedy passion and evil triumph that it made her blood run cold.

She had nothing else to guide her; but she realized immediately with a woman's swift intuition that this man meditated treachery toward her, and she made up her mind that she would not proceed with him another foot.

She therefore stopped and waited until he, his features composed now to a less telltale expression, had ranged up alongside her.

"Captain Dunbar," she said, "it has just struck me that I may have to stay with my father at Sanchez's for two or three days, and that consequently it might be wise for me to go back to the fort now and get what clothing I shall need."

His eyes narrowed quickly.

"Oh, I don't think so at all," he protested. "An orderly can be sent back to get such things as you may require at any time; but just now it seems to me your first duty is to reach your father as quickly as possible."

"No," and she shook her head; "I have decided to go back. My father will be just as well satisfied if you ride ahead and let him know that I am coming."

He frowned darkly, but still strove to maintain a tone of disinterested argument.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," he urged. "In fact, I could not permit you to return to the fort alone. Remember the Apaches are loose."

"Very well, then," she assented, "you may go back with me, if you insist; but whether you do or not, I certainly intend to. Stand aside, please, and let me

pass," for he had wheeled his horse directly across her path.

He made no effort to comply, and she therefore repeated her request a little more sharply, at the same time pushing her own mount forward.

Then Dunbar threw discretion to the winds.

"No, by Heaven!" he exclaimed hoarsely, "you are coming with me! Quietly and peaceably, if you will; but by force, if I must.

"Listen," he went on, as the girl shrank back white-faced and amazed before the sudden change in his voice and manner, "you told me last night that you would never marry me, and I seemed to accept your dictum; but when you know me better you will learn that I am a man who never gives up.

"I have tricked you out here by lies and false pretenses; but I have no excuses to offer. I am determined to have you as my wife, and the sooner you recognize the fact and submit the easier it will be for you."

"Captain Dunbar, you are mad!" she broke in upon the torrent of his passionate declaration. "How do you expect to marry me when I refuse to be married?"

He laughed wickedly.

"Nothing easier, my dear girl. There is a *padre* waiting at Sanchez's who is accustomed to the sight of unwilling brides. And when the words have been spoken, and you have passed a honeymoon with me in that sequestered retreat, I hardly think you will care to provoke scandal and notoriety by proclaiming what has happened to the world.

"Come, what is the use of trying to resist? Let us agree that the matter is settled and seal the bargain with a kiss."

As he spoke, he threw his arm about the girl's waist, and bent his red, repulsive visage down to hers.

Worn out by the fatiguing ride and overcome with terror, she was powerless to struggle; but ere he could exact the tribute, a roaring crash resounded through the cañon, the earth beneath them heaved and trembled under the force of a mighty detonation, and the hillside above them seemed suddenly to bulge out, and then to sweep down in an avalanche of shattered rock across the roadway ahead.

CHAPTER VIII.

BY WOMAN'S WIT.

THE sudden cataclysm was due, of course, to Dick's dynamite cartridge which, just clearing the edge of the cliff, had struck a ledge a dozen feet below, and, exploding, had blown away this entire projection, precipitating tons of earth and rock into the valley and completely blocking up the trail.

Dunbar, however, naturally ignorant of the cause of the phenomenon, relinquished his hold upon the girl and gazed thunderstruck at the devastation which had been wrought, controlling his snorting and trembling steed more by instinct than by any conscious effort at horsemanship.

Miss Maynard, quicker-witted than he, saw in his attitude a chance of escape, and promptly took advantage of it. Jerking her nag about, she pushed by the quartermaster before he realized what she was doing; and then vigorously plying the whip, she made a bold dash for the top of the cañon.

Hardly was she in motion, though, before the captain recognized her purpose, and coming to his senses with a muttered curse, started in hot pursuit.

It was an exciting race; but, despite the advantage gained by the girl and her lighter weight, it bade fair to be a short one, for she was on a livery-stable mount, already tiring as a result of the trip out from town, while the captain was astride a Kentucky-bred charger, able to do his fifty miles a day without turning a hair.

Nevertheless, she urged on her faltering beast to the utmost, swinging in a headlong gallop up the winding road, while her pursuer thundered after her and gained sensibly at every stride.

And now she had reached the last curve of the long climb. Just ahead loomed the summit, with level going at the top, and the possibility of winning a substantial lead upon Dunbar before he could finish the long ascent.

If she could make that in safety, there

was reason to believe that she might approach near enough the post to attract the attention of one of the sentries, in which case her enemy would never dare to offer her further molestation.

Consequently, her eyes were fixed with reviving hope upon the goal as she lashed her horse mercilessly up the slope, when, suddenly, the wretched animal shied, swerved violently to one side, and threw her into a patch of brush along the edge of the trail.

She was not hurt, and was on her feet a moment after she had fallen; but she saw that her chance was gone, for her riderless horse was already disappearing over the crest of the rise, and she heard a short cry of triumph from Dunbar, who had witnessed the accident from a lower level.

Uncertain what to do, feeling only that she must flee as long as she could, she caught up her skirts and started across the road with the intention of running back into the woods, when she was suddenly brought to an amazed halt by the sight of the object which had caused her horse to shy.

"Mr. Budget!" she gasped; for there was no mistaking that bizarre apparel, disheveled though it was and begrimed from the vicissitudes through which its owner had passed.

"Mr. Budget!" Then, as her swift glance took in the details of the gag twisted into his mouth, the hands tied behind his back, and the shuffling motion of his feet still restrained by the impeding strands of rawhide, she sprang forward with an exclamation of pity.

Another woman might have wasted time in wondering what to do or in asking foolish questions; but Cecilia Maynard was a soldier's daughter and prompt to meet an emergency.

Swiftly she thrust her hand into his pockets, and after exploring one or two in vain, finally brought forth what she sought, his penknife, and with a couple of slashes cut through his bonds.

On the instant, too, she realized what must be done to take advantage of this new ally whom Fate had so unexpectedly thrown in her way; for it required but one glance at the Easterner to convince her that he was in no shape to render her active assistance at the moment.

His hands and arms were swollen and practically useless from the long constraint which had been put upon them; the cruel gag had so bruised his lips and tongue that when he attempted to speak he could make only inarticulate sounds; the whole man was exhausted to the point of collapse as a result of the fearful mental and physical ordeal through which he had passed.

It was idle to dream that a person in such a condition, no matter how willing he might be, could serve as an effective champion for her against Dunbar in the full possession of his strength and vigor, and equipped, moreover, with the additional advantage of being armed.

No; if the villainous captain was to be overcome and balked in his schemes, it must be by strategy.

Therefore, catching Dick by the arms, she thrust him back into the shadow of a huge boulder which loomed close beside the roadway, and served as an admirable place of concealment, explaining as she did so in a few terse sentences the plight in which she found herself, and outlining for his benefit the plan of rescue she had formed.

"You must wait here until I have gone," she directed; "and then, when the coast is clear, make your way with all possible speed to the fort, inform my father of the situation, and have a party sent out to my relief."

The young fellow's eye had taken on an ominous flash as he heard the story of her wrongs, and he strove now to enter a vigorous protest to the program she had laid down, mumbling and mouthing excitedly as he tried to tell her that he would face Dunbar there and then, and seeking to break away from the hand with which she held him back.

"No, I tell you," she adjured him sharply. "You must do as I say. Is your silly pride so strong that it would lead you to sacrifice us both? What could you do against this man? Why, I myself can handle you with one arm."

As she spoke, she gave him a slight push, which sent him staggering weakly back against the rock.

"Come," she pleaded, "I have shown you how you can best aid me. For my sake, will you not sink your personal feelings and consent?"

He groaned in bitter chagrin at his own helplessness; but he was bound to recognize that what the girl told him was the part of sound wisdom and common sense. So, after a moment's further struggle with himself, he nodded assent and crouched down obediently in the spot where she had placed him.

And short as had been their colloquy, it was over none too soon, for hardly had the girl made sure that he was safely concealed than the head of the captain's horse appeared around the bend.

Miss Maynard sprang out to the side of the roadway and faced her pursuer with nonchalant defiance as he came spurring up.

"Well," she said, "you have won. But I still believe I could have beat you if that good-for-nothing jackrabbit had not flashed across the road and frightened my horse."

The expression on the captain's face was almost ludicrous at this cool reception. He had expected to find her overcome and weeping, ready to assail him with a storm of prayers, threats, and entreaties; yet here she was, discussing the flight and pursuit as calmly as though it had been a mere ordinary contest of speed between their two mounts.

The vengeful set his face had worn while he was chasing her up the trail relaxed, and he grinned uncertainly.

"Yes," he said, "I win. What are you going to do about it?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Yield to the fortunes of war, I suppose. What else is there for me? You have the game in your own hands. Is it not, rather, I who should ask, What are *you* going to do?"

He laughed complacently. It was as he had thought; once show a woman that you are the master and she will submit without further struggle.

"Come," he said, "that is much more sensible. I see that you and I are going to get along famously."

He dismounted as he spoke, and throwing the loop of his bridle over a jutting point of rock, came toward her.

"The first thing I am going to do, then," he declared passionately, "is to have that kiss I was denied down in the cañon—"

"Oh, look out!" cried Miss Maynard sharply, for a sudden, agitated movement behind the big boulder had caught her ear. "Look out! Your horse is breaking loose!"

Then she had just time to signal an imperative remonstrance to Dick, while the other, with a mutter of impatience, strode over to tether his restive animal more securely.

"Now, look here," she said to Dunbar on his return, "I am in your power, I know; but I am just woman enough not to want to admit it even to myself. In other words, I don't want to be forced into kissing you; and I tell you right now that I will never do so willingly until you have gained the right. Let us make a bargain, then; you refrain from any compulsion now, and I promise you on my honor that as soon as the words are spoken which make us man and wife, I will kiss you freely and voluntarily as much as you wish."

"Really?" he asked, eying her doubtingly. "Or are you just trying to put me off?"

"On my honor," she repeated. "As soon as the words are spoken which make us man and wife."

"I guess I can hold off, then," he conceded. "It won't be longer than an hour, at any rate; for the *padre* ought to be waiting for us at Sanchez's now."

"At Sanchez's?" she questioned sharply. "How do you ever expect to get there with the trail cut off by this landslide? And it is twenty miles around, if you should attempt to make it by way of Valley Forks."

"Ah," and he shook his head knowingly, "but there is another way across the cañon that you have never heard of. In fact, I don't suppose there are more than half a dozen people in this whole country that are aware of its existence. It is through a carefully hidden cavern which extends down through the rock to the water's edge not far below here, and from the mouth of which access can be gained to a deep ravine over on the other side of the stream. This makes a natural roadway from the top of one cliff to the top of the other almost as good as the regular trail.

"Perhaps you have heard that Sanchez has long been suspected of cattle-stealing," he went on, "and that all

sorts of traps have been set to catch him at it; but in vain. Well, it is owing entirely to his possession of this secret that he has enjoyed his immunity. Otherwise, they would have nabbed him long ago."

"And where is this wonderful passage?" questioned the girl eagerly. "How do you get to it?"

Her very tone should have warned the quartermaster to be on his guard; but his suspicions had been completely lulled by her apparent acquiescence to the marriage he proposed. In his fatuous self-conceit he believed that the girl was actually in love with him, her previous refusals merely an exhibition of coquetry.

Moreover, he desired to appear clever in her eyes, a bit more knowing and astute than she had given him credit for.

Even so, though, he did not yield up his guarded knowledge at her first behest; but, having once gained an inkling, it was not long before, through the employment of various wiles and artifices, she was able to extract from him the full details that she wanted.

Then, as he mapped out the secret road, confiding his directions almost in a whisper, she woud repeat them in a high, clear voice for the benefit of the unseen listener.

"Why do you do that?" he broke out all of a sudden, struck by a flash of suspicion. "Is there somebody at hand whom you wish to hear?"

Her heart was in her mouth for the second; but she managed to laugh unconcernedly and naturally. "How likely," she jeered. "Still, if you doubt me, you are at liberty to search. I have often heard people say that 'walls have ears'; but I never dreamed that anybody would cherish such a fear out on a bleak, bare hillside."

"Well," he grumbled, "you can't blame me when you shout out everything I tell you at the top of your voice."

"Was I really so bad as that? It must have been because I was so intensely interested. Go on," she coaxed, "and tell me the rest of it."

"No," he declined shortly. "We have wasted enough time here as it is. You can see the thing, instead of merely hearing about it.

"Come," unfastening his horse and leading it up, "you shall ride, and I will walk along beside you. Here, let me help you up on this," with a nod of his head toward the boulder behind which Dick lay concealed, "and you can mount easier."

"Oh, no," she protested quickly, "I much prefer the other way," and before he could intervene to help her she had set her foot in the stirrup and lightly flung herself up into the saddle.

"You boasted to me that you were a person who always insisted on having his own way, Captain Dunbar," she mocked with a flash in her eyes that he failed to understand. "When you come to know me better you will discover that I am one of the same sort."

For although she had failed to draw from him the full route of his secret passage, she had gained enough to give a very practicable key to any one desiring to thread its recesses, and as she had received a stealthy signal from Budget signifying that he understood, she was full of elated triumph.

Dick lay stiller than ever as she and her escort moved away, proceeding almost directly past his hiding-place. He hardly dared draw his breath for several minutes; but at last, when the pair were distant a couple of hundred feet, he began to creep stealthily toward the roadway.

Just then, however, he was startled by a loud exclamation from Miss Maynard.

"Oh, see the rabbit!" and glancing quickly in that direction, saw her pointing excitedly with her finger.

Dunbar must evidently have asked where she saw any rabbit, for a moment later her voice rang out shriller than ever: "Under the rock and to the right!" And this she repeated twice—"Under the rock and to the right!"

Then they disappeared over the hilltop and out of sight, and the watcher was free to stand erect and hurry on to the fort as fast as she was able.

All the way along the road, however, he kept pondering over that final message from Miss Maynard—if message it was—and trying to conjure what she could have meant.

But puzzle over the subject as he might, he could conceive no possible con-

nection between "rabbits," or "rocks to the right," with the mission he had in hand, so he finally reached a solution that Dunbar had been about to look back, and that she, fearing he might thus be discovered, had given the cry to turn the captain's attention in another direction.

By the time he arrived at this conclusion he was nearing the fort, and perceived with satisfaction the approach of a squad of cavalry; for he could acquaint them with the peril of the colonel's daughter and despatch them to the rescue without delay.

Therefore, he started to run toward them; but as they came on, the sergeant in charge leveled a weapon at his head and ordered him to halt and throw up his hands.

A moment later two sturdy troopers, flinging themselves out of the saddle, seized him upon either side and informed him that he was under arrest.

"What for?" gasped the astonished Budget.

"Pretty near everything from murder down," was the laconic response, "but chiefly for the abduction of the colonel's daughter."

(To be continued.)

STRATEGY TO THE RESCUE.

By EDWARD S. SORENSON.

A story of the Australian bush in which the helpless are pushed to desperate lengths.

EVERY one knew Carrie Radford. She was a pretty girl, pleasant and quick-witted, and as handy as a man on the ranch in Australia.

She was naturally fond of the bush, and knew that weird world almost as well as those who make it their lifelong home. She had many good feminine qualities, too; in fact, her friends asserted, she was all goodness.

Her father, Warren Radford, had taken up the small place called Yantaban many years ago, and, like most beginners, thought he was going to do great things there, starting, as he did, with a few hundred sheep and getting a few acres under wheat. But he very soon found himself in error.

What with dingoes, crows, and drought, he was soon left with neither crop nor flock. He had made a pretty comfortable home, and, had seasons permitted, would have wished for nothing better than to live out his life at Yantaban. But want spurred him from it, and, leaving his wife and Carrie to look after the place, he struck out on a prospecting tour that proved a red chapter in the annals of Australian pioneers.

Radford was an experienced digger, who had known many ups and downs, and had figured on the old fields of Ballarat and Bendigo. With the instinct of an old hand, he made straight for the then little-known mountain gullies away to the north of Yantaban.

He took with him his old farm-hand, Wokaby, who, though a black fellow, was a faithful servant. Another digger joined them at a neighboring station.

This was Uric Jarvers, a man of doubtful nationality and none too good character, who talked glibly of the West Indies and the Malay Archipelago.

His wife strongly opposed that mateship; but Radford held out on the plea of protection against blacks, certain tribes of whom were known to be hostile to whites. So Jarvers went, and bad luck went with him.

For six months nothing was heard of the little party; yet never a morning broke but the woman went to the door and gazed long and wistfully up the track they had gone. The sky away up there looked so pathetic, with a peculiar, sad charm that, to a woman of more imagination, might have seemed the shadow of another and a far-off world.

Its brooding silence reached to the very door. To her all was dead and bare. With a long-drawn breath she would turn away, wondering, as she went back to the house, how Carrie could be

so cheerful when she herself felt the tension so severely.

Gazing out one evening about sunset, Mrs. Radford was startled to see, instead of the monotony that had so long tired her eyes, a small, dark object coming slowly across the plain, and dragging a weary-looking horse after it. She called to Carrie, who came skipping out as light and agile as a 'possum.

"Carrie, what is that? Your eyes are better than mine."

"Why, it's a man leading a horse," said the girl, and without another word she bounded off to meet him.

When they met, the mother, standing out in front, saw them stop for several minutes. Then Carrie came running back.

"Mother," she cried, as she came panting up, "it's Wokaby!"

"I thought as much," said her mother. "What's the matter?"

"His horse is knocked up."

"I can see that, child. You've got a letter?"

"It's from dad. He's—"

"What?"

"He slipped going into a shaft—"

"And broke his neck?"

"No, mother."

"What, then?"

"Only his leg."

"Broke his leg!" the mother cried, aghast, and her face went pale.

"Yes," said Carrie. "Poor father!" she added sadly, fighting hard to keep back the tears.

"Great Heaven! In such a place as that, too—and no one to look after him!" the mother cried, wringing her hands in anguish.

"You forget, mother, Uric Jarvers is with him," said Carrie, trying to be brave.

"As well have no one as a man like Jarvers! He's all for himself, a selfish, ignorant lout! It's to be hoped there's no gold in the camp." And again she looked frightened.

"You distrust Jarvers? Well, so do I. But I don't think he's as bad as all that. Anyhow, dad is doing well, Wokaby says, only he wants some physic and provisions and things. It's all in the letter."

Mrs. Radford had been trying vainly to decipher the note, but now went indoors for her specs. Wokaby came up, and Carrie assisted him to unpack his tired horse and let him go.

Then she took the black in and got him his supper at once, for he told her he had lost his tucker-bag that morning and was "big feller hungry."

That night Carrie gave her mother fresh cause for anxiety.

"Mother, I am going with Wokaby!" she announced bluntly.

"*You*, child! You're crazy!"

"No, I'm not! Dad wants some one to nurse him, and it's my duty to go."

In truth, it was written in the letter: "Send Carrie up if you can spare her. I want some one to nurse me."

But the letter was written by Jarvers, and Mrs. Radford said nothing to Carrie about it.

"A nice pickle you'd be in out there," she replied instead. "Alone with that man! You know what he is! He was always bothering you when he was on the station. What chance would you have against him in that lonely place? It's one hundred and fifty miles away!"

"I don't care if it's a thousand! I have my revolver, and I'm not afraid of Uric Jarvers. I've made up my mind to go, and I'm going. So there!"

Mrs. Radford bit her lips as she scanned her daughter's face. It was a sweet, pretty face, lit with sparkling blue eyes, and tinged with the delicate carmine of youth. A truant curl dropped across her snow-white brow, and her rose-red lips made one long to kiss them.

"Listen to me a moment, mother," she said, more quietly. "They're on good gold up there, as you can see by the parcel dad has sent us. The temptation to possess the lot might work on a man like Jarvers, and he would let father lie there and die. I couldn't stop here now, mother. I'd be always thinking of him, and fancying that he was dying."

"Shut up, child! You'll give me the creeps."

"I've got 'em already, mother. But, listen—I'll see Nellie Swanson in town when I go in for the things to-morrow, and I'll get her to come and stay with you. Then, next day, I'll start with Wokaby for father's camp. It's best, mother. I must save him!"

She twined her arms tenderly round her mother's neck and kissed her, for her mother was crying; and with gentle caresses she at last won acquiescence.

II.

DAWN showed three horses standing before the door of the selector's hut. On one was a goodly pack, and under the necks of all three hung water-bags, fresh filled from the creek. They had breakfasted, and were preparing to start.

Wokaby, with the bridle-reins hanging loosely on his arm, stood lighting his pipe. Mrs. Radford, her eyes red and tearful, came out wiping her hands on her apron.

Carrie was all energy, and went about in a businesslike manner. She looked particularly well in a little straw hat and a plain neat dress.

She put her arms round her mother's neck and kissed her good-by.

"Now, don't worry, dear," she said. "I'll be quite safe, and I'll hurry back."

"I don't like the idea of your going, child. I don't like it."

"A week's journey merely."

"And such wild country! And the blacks!" the mother continued.

Carrie laughed lightly.

"They are friendly, Wokaby tells me. Whether or no, one shot will send them to the right-about like crows. You remember how they used to scamper off when father fired his rifle here in the old days?"

"Ah, yes; but this is different. If anything happened to you, child, I'd never forgive myself for letting you go."

"You imagine dangers, mother. For my sake, don't be worrying. You make it hard. No harm will come to me. And now good-by till we meet again."

"Good-by, my child, and God protect you."

And so she mounted and they rode away. What lay before them they could not guess.

Very rare is the Australian black who can be implicitly trusted; and no wonder the mother was filled with misgivings as she saw the two forms dwindle away into the northern bush. When they had disappeared a great loneliness crept into her heart.

But Carrie knew no fear. She was all eagerness to push on, despite the black fellow's repeated injunctions to nurse the horses from the start lest they should give out before the last stage was completed.

Fortune, however, favored the strangely assorted pair on their journey north, and nine days after leaving Yantaban they sighted the miner's camp.

All that could be seen at first was the face of a ragged cliff with a wall of stubbing at the foot. Behind it were numerous caverns, communicating one with the other by narrow entrances. In these the miners dwelt.

The wall had been built for protection against blacks, who were numerous in the locality, though, for the most part, disposed to be friendly. The country around was wild and rocky, with here and there dense patches of brigalow-scrub. Northward the view was barren and inhospitable, a succession of cone-shaped piles, on which the afternoon sun shone with a blinding dazzle.

Below the cliff coursed the little stony creek, heavily wooded, the bed of which they had followed for many miles. A line of crows was the only sign of life to be seen. These flew off with dismal cries as the horses approached.

Carrie dismounted and began to reconnoiter. Wokaby soon joined her, and led her into the cavern where he had left Radford. A long 'guana rushed out as they entered—a circumstance that chilled the girl.

"Hulloa, boss!" Wokaby shouted.

There was no response save the mockery of echoes. Wokaby peered into the gloom. He could see a rough bunk near the wall, and going closer, struck a match.

"There is no one here," said Carrie, dismayed. "The bed's not been used for some time. See, it's covered with dust. Are you sure this is the right cave?"

"Dis where boss sleep. See clo'es—hat, boot, one feller boot—lace— Them b'long yo' farder?"

"Yes, they're my father's. But where is he?"

"Mine think it boss mend um leg an' go dig um gold."

"I hardly think so, Wokaby. A broken

leg couldn't heal so quickly. Perhaps Jarvers has removed him to another cave. Oh, I hope nothing has happened to him. Where is Jarvers?"

"Up creek. Him look out gold."

"How far away?" asked Carrie, her heart thumping with a growing fear.

"Not berry far. Yo' see track outside. Dat one take um a'right."

She reflected for a minute or two. The dust on the bed had alarmed her. But perhaps that had fallen from the roof since morning. There was crumbling stuff on the walls.

After all, her father might be at the workings. He was a man of strong constitution, hardy, and vigorous; and there was no saying what wonders a fortnight or three weeks would work in such a one.

Probably the bone had knit sufficiently to permit of his going out for sunshine and air. Leaning on his mate's shoulder, he would be able to limp along on his strong leg as far as the diggings. The thought eased her mind for the nonce.

"Wokaby," she said, as they left the caves, "you attend to the horses, and I'll go and look up Jarvers."

She followed the path up the creek. It was nearly sundown now, and she expected to meet Jarvers coming home with her father leaning on his shoulder.

How glad and surprised he would be to meet her there! She stepped lightly along, the water purling over its pebbly bed beside her. Turning a corner of the bluff, she came suddenly upon Jarvers.

He was sitting on the edge of a small hole between the creek and the bluff, where a sharp angle in the rocky wall formed what is called in mining parlance a pocket. His back was toward her, and apparently he had not heard her footsteps.

She stood and listened; she looked around the place, and looked again. The man was alone!

A suffocating feeling of fear crept over her. Something urged her forward. Slowly, quietly, she moved toward him. He was thinking aloud, and presently she could catch his words.

"That's one day's work—not a big day, neither. An' a fortune in it! By gum, Uric, ol' man, yer in clover! It's your'n—ev'ry grain on't! There's no one ter be goin' yer 'alves! No ol' Radford to weigh it, an' measure it, an' ter wrangle over a grain this way, an' a grain that way— No! He don't want no gold now! Wouldn't get it if he did! Blast him!"

Carrie's heart sank and her cheeks turned ashen white.

"My God!" she gasped inaudibly.

She began to retreat, not wishing to let the man know she had heard him, lest it should hamper her future movements. She retreated, coughed, and came boldly forward.

Jarvers started so violently that he fell into the hole. With a hoarse laugh he scrambled out and greeted her shamefacedly.

"I thought, somehow, you'd come. Been expectin' yer. How yer doin'?"

"I'm quite well, thank you. Where is my father?"

"Well, ter tell yer the truth, me gel, that's more'n I know."

"You don't know where he is?"

"Well, yer see, after he was outer danger I went on workin', goin' up now an' ag'in ter see as he wanted for nuthin'. He was in the camp all safe an' snug till five days ago. It was Thursday sundown I missed him. Dunno what become of him. Hunted 'igh an' low, but could find nuthin' 'ceptin' a lot o' naked footprints."

"Whose were the footprints?"

"Blacks, of course."

"Are there many about here?"

"Any gorsquantity."

"Camped near?"

"Thirty miles off."

"And they come *here?*"

"Pretty often."

"I had no idea they rambled so far from camp. What did you think?"

"I dunno. P'haps he was stole, p'haps he was murdered. I dunno."

"Didn't you track them?"

"I follered th' tracks for miles, but couldn't see nuthin' of 'em."

"You didn't go to the camp?"

"Dunno where it is."

"How is it that you know the distance?"

"Yer father told me that. He knows their lingo."

"Why didn't you follow up the

tracks? They would have taken you there. Thirty miles isn't far."

"I lost 'em on the stones. I ain't no artist at trackin', else I might 'a' been speckin' out toe-marks yet."

"How is it," asked Carrie, after a pause, "that they stole nothing?"

"Stole nuthin'!" Jarvers retorted. "Why, they stole his best clo'es, an' the best o' his beddin'. There warn't much. Everythin' else is just as I found 'em. I was expectin' you, an' I didn't care ter meddle with 'em till you come."

Carrie did not believe him. She was convinced of Radford's death. But this version implied doubt.

She said little on the way back to the caves, for she was unnerved and in despair.

That night, when all was quiet, she stole into the next cave, which the black fellow occupied, and shook him gently by the shoulder to wake him.

"Wokaby," she whispered, "do you believe what Jarvers says—that the blacks took my father away?"

"No, missy. He tell um lie. Black fellers good fellers."

"You'll go to the camp to-morrow, Wokaby, and inquire for me?"

"Yes, missy. Mine get up berry early."

"Couldn't I go with you, Wokaby?"

"No, missy. Too far. All wild bush."

"How far is it?"

"Too far for footback. You be a'right 'ere, missy. Mine look out boss an' come back quick."

"Thank you, Wokaby. Good night."

She crept back to her own pallet—the one her father had last occupied in the caves. All night she lay there, tossing from side to side; and when sleep at last claimed her, the dawn-light was spreading through the bush.

Only she and Jarvers were then in the caves. Wokaby had gone—gone for her father, she knew not where.

III.

THE sun was up an hour or more when Jarvers called the girl to breakfast. She came out, tired and sleepy, with a wobegone look on her face. The man glanced at her uneasily.

"Where's Wokaby?" he asked, as he handed her a pannikin of black tea.

"I think he must be after the horses."

Carrie sipped her tea, but ate very little.

"You seem down on it this mornin'," went on Jarvers.

"Have I not good reason to be?" said the girl, with tears in her eyes.

"Yer foolish ter worry over that," the man replied. "We've all got ter lose our mothers an' fathers some time or 'nother. Human bein's ain't everlastin'. It was best so. He couldn't 'ave got over it—simply ling'rin' in mis'ry."

"If you were leaving him uncared for, to lie there and die, it was a mercy," said Carrie.

"I did me best for him," the man retorted. "Of course, you don't b'lieve me. Yer think I'm a liar."

He threw the tinware into a heap on the table and went out. Hours passed, and he did not return. Carrie, in the meantime, had tied up her father's belongings into a neat bundle and placed them in the corner with her saddle.

She explored all the caves she could find her way into, and examined everything in the one occupied by Jarvers, but could find no incriminating evidence against him. Then she set about getting the dinner ready, for inactivity was unbearable.

She began to look for Jarvers, for she felt utterly alone. Even his company was better than none. As for Wokaby, she did not expect him till late the next day. He had gone a long journey over rough country.

At last she went down to the diggings, thinking the man was too engrossed in his treasure to notice how the day was passing. But the place was deserted. She retraced her steps, lonelier and more miserable than ever.

It was late in the afternoon, as she sat pondering at the table, when Jarvers came blundering in. He was in a temper. She could see that plainly enough, and shrank from him.

"Look 'ere, gel," he said roughly, "yer've deceived me."

"What do you mean?" asked Carrie, startled.

"I want ter know what *you* mean. Yer told me Wokaby'd gone after the

mokes; 'stead o' that he's gone to the camp."

"I suppose he's at liberty to go where he pleases?"

"I s'pose he is. But I ain't ter be fooled as you think. Yer sent him ter pump the blacks."

"What makes you think that?"

"I tracked him."

"You seem to be much interested in Wokaby's movements. Did you go to the camp?"

"No. I don't want ter be knocked on the head. That's what he'll get, dead sure. Yer won't see him no more. An' good enough for yer. Yer don't b'lieve wot I told yer?"

"No, I don't. It's highly improbable."

"Oh, it is, is it? Now, look 'ere, me gel, wot I told you is Gorstruth. If yer don't b'lieve it—well, I can't help it. But mind this: There's only me an' you 'ere, in a lonely part o' the bush. If you start playin' tricks, or try ter lord it over me, yer'll about come off second best. So I tells yer. I'm goin' ter be boss. But I don't wanter take no mean advantage of yer. I'll treat yer straight an' square if yer'll let me."

"What?" said Carrie chokingly, with half-awakened fears tugging at her heart-strings. "I've given you no cause to treat me otherwise than in a manly manner. If you can give me no news of my father, nor treat me as you ought, I hope you'll let me start for home to-morrow. This is no place for me now."

"No, me gel. That don't suit my book at all. You an' me's goin' ter pull together."

"I don't understand you."

"In the fust place, my gel, it's no use botherin' about the old man. He's dead an' gone. The nigger is as good as dead. You 'ave yer mother left. Yer wanter see her ag'in, don'tcher? Of course yer do. I ain't objectin', providin' yer do as I want yer to."

"What is that?"

"Go to Coombar an' get spliced."

"To you? Never! I'd drown myself first."

She had risen to her feet, and stood facing him with clenched hands.

"Yer would, eh? Wot a little cat y'are! But—'old on a bit."

Involuntarily her hand had gone to her bosom, where her pistol was carried for safety and concealment. He saw the movement and sprang toward her.

She grappled with him, but her puny strength was as a kitten's against a tiger's. With a savage jerk, he tore her dress open and the pistol dropped to the floor.

"Coward!" she cried, recoiling, her blue eyes flashing.

He grinned in triumph as he picked up the pistol.

"One needs ter be," he chuckled, "when a little vixen like you goes for drivin' daylight through him. Yer only makin' things worse for yourself.

"Now, listen ter me. I got, I reckon, 'bout four thousand pounds' worth o' gold. We can be 'appy on that. I'm not pertic'ler where I goes. I leave that ter you. If yer like, we'll live at Yantaban, an' th' old woman can live with us. Yer'll never get a better offer'n that, Carrie.

"I'm not as bad as you think. I'm rough in me ways, an' I ain't no scholar. But I'd be good ter you, Carrie, an' give yer ev'rythin' yer wanted. I'll be a lovin' 'usband to yer."

"I could never be happy with you. You have treated me as no one worthy the name of man would treat a woman."

"Yer frightened me, Carrie. I seen the pistol ag'in yer dress, an' when yer put yer 'and up I thought yer was on for shootin'. I was scared; but I didn't mean ter be rough. Only trust me, Carrie, an' I'll be good to yer. I'll light the fires for yer in the mornin's."

He sat down, leaning toward her. She was sitting a few feet away, her elbow on the table, and her chin resting in her hand. She did not speak.

"Carrie!" The man's voice softened slightly. "Come with me to Coombar. I'll take yer a short cut 'cross country. Soon's we're spliced I'll take yer straight ter Yantaban. Think of yer mother, Carrie, yer poor old mother. She's no one ter keep her now. An' we could give her all she wants in her old age. Wot d'yer say, Carrie?"

Her cheeks flushed red with shame and indignation. She would have scorned and defied him; but instinct warned her to treat him warily.

"Let me think," she answered. "Give me till to-morrow."

"All right, me gel. I don't wanter 'urry yer. Think it out, an' I think yer'll agree with me it's the best in the long run."

He went into his own cave, and presently returned with a rifle in his hand. He passed out without another word and sauntered off toward the hills. Nor did he return till late that night; and when she heard his heavy step, and the clink of the rifle as he dropped it in the corner, despair laid hold of her fluttering heart, for intuition told her that Wokaby would never return to defend her against this man.

He called out to know if she had gone to bed. She had not; and when he had lighted the slush-lamp she came out. He told her he had been after turkeys, but had not shot any.

"I want yer answer 'fore I turn in," he said; "I can't sleep till I know. 'Ave yer made up yer mind?"

"I'll go."

"An' be my wife?"

"And be your wife."

He made as if to embrace her, but she repulsed him.

"Not now. When I am yours you can claim that privilege. To-night I am free. Leave me so, or I may regret my choice. Good night."

She heard him barricade the entrance to the caves, and make his bed there. Evidently, he expected treachery, and took such precautions to prevent her escaping.

IV.

NEXT morning Carrie looked her last on those lonely diggings. The horses had been brought in and packed, and they had mounted and were away before the sun was two hours high.

They drove two horses before them, on one of which was a big tin box containing the coveted gold. It contained also the tiny revolver Jarvers had taken from the girl and her pouch of cartridges.

Carrie had watched him packing the box, and had noticed the addition of these things with satisfaction.

All day they rode over stony flats and barren clay-pans, passing through belts of mulga, and crossing sandy creeks. All day, too, the sun shone with a pitiless glare, so that the haze gave to the kangaroos and the slowly moving emus the aspect of stalking giants. They seemed like shadowy things that might be ghosts, floating weirdly through the salt-bush.

Once Carrie dismounted to quench her thirst at a little pot-hole; but they made no halt for lunch or to rest the horses. Miles ahead was a big water-hole, known to Jarvers, which he wished to reach that evening.

All the way he rode close beside her or at her horse's heels, never once allowing her to drop behind him. Carrie, for the most part, was taciturn and resentful.

She sat rather stiffly in her saddle, her eyes peering through the dazzle ahead.

Toward evening, a little to the left of their course, she beheld a remarkable sight. A very short distance away was a long lagoon, whose waters looked cool and tempting. On the bank blacks were squatting before their little fires. Many were walking about, others were coming in from the bush with game on their shoulders and boomerangs in their hands.

Apart from all these, limping slowly along the shore, and leaning now and again on a walking-stick, was a broad-shouldered white man with a gray beard, whom Carrie knew to be her father. Her heart beat wildly, and she could have cried out for joy. She was minded to catch up her reins and gallop away to the camp; but Jarvers rode too closely at her side. They would be nearer presently, and the tribe would see them; for, as they were heading, they would pass along the lagoon.

She looked curiously at the great flocks of emus, those noisy birds that were swooping down on the shore, on silent wings and without a single cry. Indeed, no sound whatever broke the deep stillness that reigned there.

She wondered, gazing excitedly at the camp, drawing nearer and nearer, till she could tell that it was a boomerang the old black was fashioning in front of his fire; but, though she saw each blow of the ax, she heard no sound. Some dogs ran out barking: she saw them, but could not hear them.

Had she become deaf? No: she heard the beat of the horses' hoofs, and the lonely creaking of the saddles.

Then why, oh, why, was all sound shut out from that rustic village?

A little mound appeared before them, and she quickened her horse's pace to reach it, hoping there to attract attention. But even as she looked anxiously for some definite sign, the whole scene vanished, vanished as quickly and completely as a whiff of smoke in the wind.

Involuntarily she checked her horse and stared where all that life had been. But she saw only miles of salt-bush, with here and there a clump of grass, no natives, no father, and no sign of water.

She looked at Jarvers. He was watching her, his face the face of death.

"What was that?" she asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"A mirage," he replied.

She scarcely heard him.

They rode on silently until they reached the water-hole. As they dismounted she said: "Why did you tell me my father was dead?"

"Because he is dead," said Jarvers sulkily.

"He is not dead. You saw him this evening."

"In the mirage? That was his ghost."

"Then you *murdered* him, and his ghost has come to haunt you."

Jarvers did not reply. He was in a nervous, sullen mood. Had the horses not been jaded, he would have ridden on through that night.

Carrie was very active, and insisted on getting the supper ready, though he desired her to rest. She put her saddle and pack some distance away, where she intended to sleep.

They ate their supper together by the light of the fire, speaking little; and as it grew dark, they went each to his or her own rough bed and turned in.

Jarvers was soon sleeping soundly, but sleep was far from Carrie's eyes.

V.

THE moon, peeping out from behind a black cloud, revealed a bent figure creeping away from the head of Uric Jarvers.

"God grant me a few minutes more and I am safe," said Carrie, for it was she, striking out for the second and last time from Jarvers's camp.

First, she had taken her saddle and paraphernalia to the end of the lagoon, saddled and packed her horse, and left him tied to a sapling. This time she carried the gold, staggering along a few paces at a time, for the box was heavy.

Stooping down by the still water, in which she saw her white face and straggling hair clearly mirrored in the moonlight, she thrust her precious burden deep down in the mud, then carefully arranged the floating lily-leaves she had parted on the surface. Now she stepped the distance from this tree and from that, noted particularly the surroundings, and finally placed a flat stone on the bank where she had sunk the gold.

Next, she quietly mounted, and rode at a slow walk until far out of earshot of the camp. There were strange things abroad in that darkened bush, and she caught herself peering and listening, even as she told herself that the crisis had passed.

But every footfall sounded clearly and distinctly, and— What was that? Something was running—perhaps some wild animal— No. It sounded like a man running over the dry leaves and brittle twigs.

The horses whinnied, and she jerked her bit roughly as hers attempted to answer. She looked toward them, and there, sure enough, just emerging from a clump of dead-finish and approaching the horses, was Uric Jarvers.

He carried a bridle in his hand, and was hurrying. He had missed her, perhaps had heard and seen her— She put her horse into a gallop, knowing now that it was her only chance.

With her head bent forward and her teeth set, and with only the western stars to steer by, she rode like the wind for her life and liberty. And yet, wild as the pace was, she had covered little more than half a mile when the first loud hoof-beats of a pursuing horse smote her ears.

He was on her track, riding bare-backed on a stronger horse than hers and one that would do its utmost to catch the flying leader. She shook her reins and kicked frantically with her little heels at the horse's ribs. But the poor animal had done a long day's journey, and was weary.

Behind her, as she glanced timidly over her shoulder, she could see the dark form of her pursuer clearly outlined in the broad moonlight, flashing past trees, bounding over ruts and gullies, riding as one hard pressed.

Pounding across the flats and over little ridges, turning from no water-course, brush, or bramble, mile after mile they rode, with no sound but the thud of hoofs breaking on the night air. The moon sailed serenely above them, lighting up the lone bushland and casting swiftly flitting shadows across their tracks.

Now they passed a rugged bluff, and swept along, down a wooded water-course. Here, from the bushy trees, crows and galars flew off with loud cries, and kangaroos bounded away toward the hills.

Onward yet they galloped, but ever more slowly, for the horses were tiring. Then there came a flash and a loud report.

Something whistled past Carrie's head, and she bent low over the pommel of her saddle. A cry echoed through the timber, and she heard him call to her to stop. He was very close.

The horse was already swaying under her, and she knew that the poor brute could carry her but a little farther, and —what then? Taking advantage of a belt of timber, she pulled up suddenly and turned sharply to the right, halting in a clump of bushes.

But escape was impossible; he was too near. He had seen her, and in a minute or two was confronting her. She had dismounted, and even now was gathering up her loosened hair.

"So, me little lady, yer thought ter slip me, did yer? But I've got yer ag'in."

"Yes, you can take me now," she said, and laughed lightly. "You have won me."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes, I am yours."

He thrust the revolver in his belt, and throwing his arms around her, kissed her many times. Bad as he was, this much can be said of him, that he really loved her.

She submitted to his caresses, and even returned his kisses; and she joked and laughed with him about the desperate ride they had ridden.

But while she thus lay in his arms, giving him the kisses he had long thirsted for, with her right hand she stealthily drew the revolver from his belt.

"I'll give you one more kiss," she said, "and then you must let me rest."

He pressed his lips to hers; and holding him there, she pointed the revolver to his side. He seemed to suspect that something was wrong—looked down—caught sight of the weapon, and made as if to snatch it from her. A loud discharge and a groan from Jarvers reached her ears almost instantaneously.

Jarvers reached over and put his hand to the calf of his leg, from which a tiny stream had begun to flow. Carrie moved nervously away. He tried to seize and then to follow her, stumbled and fell, and there she left him. Quickly she mounted her horse, led the other behind her, and rode away.

A few miles from the timber she hobbled the horses out, and slept till sunrise. Then, athirst and hungry, she caught her horses again and rode slowly westward.

Good fortune for once awaited her. That afternoon she met two blacks out hunting, who told her that "old man Radford" was in their camp. They were two gay young knights of the boomerang, who willingly acted as guides to the weary girl.

Slowly they passed on over dreary sand-hills and through lonely belts of bush. Anon they reached those far-spreading downs, waving with Mitchell grass, on the far side of which was the water and the native village which she had seen so clearly mirrored on the plain.

It took them an hour to reach it; the dogs were barking, and presently, with astonished eyes, an old man started up from the dusky circle around the camp-fires, and cried out to Carrie as one demented. Next minute they were locked in each other's arms.

There is no need to dwell on this fierce, glad meeting; we pass instead to the story of Warren Radford.

It was true the blacks had carried him away, but at his own instigation. After

writing the letter to Mrs. Radford, Jarvers had plotted with the blacks to carry off his mate and kill him. But Jarvers was disliked by them; whereas, the old man was a favorite.

Thus it came that they told Radford of the plot, and fearing to remain in his helpless state, he contrived so that Jarvers should think that they had done as he desired. But instead of being killed, he was taken to the camp and well cared for.

"So well," he said in conclusion, "that I'll very soon be as right as ever. But I've suffered and toiled for nothing. I was a rich man, but now I'm poorer than ever I thought to be."

"No, father, you're not poor. You're richer than ever!" Carrie told him.

"Because I've got my little girl?" he said, laughing.

"No! I'm not thinking of myself."

"What then?"

"I've got the gold!"

"*You* have!" her father cried incredulously.

"Yes; but I couldn't bring it. It's in the big lagoon east of here—Connulpa, the blacks call it. I buried it under water, and marked the spot!"

Carrie told how she had daringly stolen it while Jarvers was asleep.

"Good on you, girl!" exclaimed her father with some emotion, "you're the real stump of a digger's daughter! I'm proud of you, child!"

Then looking around: "We've only emu eggs to offer you. They're not bad. Start in, and—God bless you, girl!"

Following her instructions, a party of blacks, leading Carrie's horse for a packer, went to Connulpa Lagoon, and there found the gold and brought it safely into camp.

A week later they left for home, accompanied by a guard of aborigines, for the old man was still weak, and needed a lot more assistance than Carrie could give him. Moreover, they had nothing to eat but what could be obtained in the bush.

Slowly they traveled southward, the blacks hunting, and Carrie beguiling the time recounting to her father the adventures she had met with.

So they approached Yantaban, where, day after day, morn, noon, and night, for weeks, poor lonely Mrs. Radford had watched for their homecoming from the cottage door. Now, for the second time, moving specks in the distance broke the monotony.

Nearer and nearer they came, till the mother could tell that it was Carrie, who came cantering on ahead to give her the glad tidings, and her heart beat wildly in a tumult of gladness. She had not prayed in vain; they were coming home at last, coming now, in the quiet autumn evening.

And Uric Jarvers limped away into parts unknown.

A LOVER'S QUARREL.

In violet sweet woods we stray'd
Together, yet apart; a shade
Darkened my Phœbe's love sweet eyes;
Not one fond look could I surprise,
Though subtle arts I long essay'd.

I storm'd, implor'd, wax'd angry, pray'd,
Until—"That girl," she did upbraid,
"In violet!"

Then, petulant yet half afraid,
She turn'd and fac'd me in the glade.
Old world, grown sick of smiles and sighs,
I'll keep, for I am wondrous wise,
The story of the truce we made,
Inviolate.

Bessie Gray.

A CONFLICT WITH CÆSAR.*

By F. K. SCRIBNER,

Author of "The Eagle of Empire," "The Ravens of the Rhine," "The Eleventh Rider," etc.

A story of the Roman conquest of Gaul, in which one of the barbarians is pitted against another under a vow before witnesses.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Condemned to die as a traitor because he has spared in battle the noble German Prince Harling, of Trevera, a soldier of Cæsar's legions, by name Decius, is aided to escape by one of his comrades, Lucullus. Decius reaches the home of Harling, and is there received by Harling's sister, Alesia. He is insulted and challenged to mortal combat by Ataulf, a lesser noble, and is prevented from killing him only by Harling's interference. Ataulf swears to give up his estates of Elmet if he have not vengeance upon Decius. Harling advances against the enemy and by Decius's aid cuts to pieces a small detachment of Romans. Decius succeeds in saving the life of Lucullus, who is of the party. Word now comes that Harling's young brother, Alaric, has been taken by Cæsar, and is to be made a slave. By Decius's advice, Lucullus is promised life and liberty if he can procure Alaric's release.

Meanwhile, Trevera is attacked and taken by some who announce themselves as Romans. They tell Alesia that they intend to bring her to Cæsar; but she suspects that the men are followers of Ataulf, whom she has just repulsed.

CHAPTER X.

"I HAVE CHOSEN."

OUTSIDE in the courtyard the horses of those who had come against the house were waiting, and to these were added one from the stable of Trevera, which was to carry on its back the sister of Harling.

That the girl had fear in her heart was not to be denied, for she realized that she had fallen into the power of one who had been carried by bitterness and passion beyond the bounds of reason. But of this fear she exhibited nothing, and made calmly such preparations to depart as were permitted her.

She even spoke kindly to the weeping woman who wrapped her in furs and bade her have courage, assuring her that when the Lord of Trevera received word of what had happened he would take such vengeance on her abductor as would fill all Gaul with wonder.

There was even in her own mind hope that, being confronted with this man, she might bring him to reason; then nothing would remain but the indignity and the death of the three attendants. She understood perfectly a part of the thing the Lord of Elmet had planned: that she should be led to think that it was Decius who, having returned to the Romans, had come back to Trevera for the purpose of carrying her off. That the scheme had miscarried was due to the stupidity of his hirelings and her own shrewdness.

Thinking after this fashion, courage returned to her, but she did not realize the bitterness which filled the heart of the master of Elmet, or know of the oath he had taken before witnesses.

Having seated her upon a horse, the cavalcade surrounded her, and in this fashion they rode out of the courtyard, leaving the frightened attendants to unloose the old men and rebolt the gate, if they so desired.

During all the rest of that night, and even through the first hours of the morning, they rode forward briskly, and when they chanced to meet any one upon the road certain ones closed in around their prisoner, so it was impossible for her to cry out or even to remove the furs which partly concealed her face. In this manner they came to Elmet, and pulled up in the courtyard.

* *Began December* ARGOSY. *Single copies* 10 *cents.*

After that the girl was taken into the house and to a room in which a fire was burning; and there she was permitted to remain alone for some time, though food and drink were brought her.

Toward nightfall that which she expected happened, for, the door being opened, Ataulf of Elmet stepped across the threshold.

It was plain the man had been drinking, and the look upon his face was evil, but Alesia arose and from her seat confronted him.

"It would seem," said she coldly, "that I did not judge you rightly, for among other things I did not take you for a coward, who dared not even come against a defenseless house, but employed hirelings through fear some danger might be met in the undertaking. But now that I am here, what is your purpose?"

Then Ataulf began to bite his lips and to scowl; and presently he replied:

"To ask you once more what I would have asked at Trevera, only you ordered your servants to show me the door. Now there are none to whom you may give orders."

"And so you have brought me here to ask that question! Well, you might have saved yourself the trouble and the vengeance which will fall upon you," replied the girl haughtily.

Ataulf bared his teeth so that he seemed to be laughing, though no sound came from between his lips.

"And you answer in that fashion? Well, we shall see presently," said he hoarsely. "Now I offer you my own name and all that is in Elmet—and you might choose even worse; but if you refuse, instead of returning to Trevera, such a thing will happen to you that you will pray for death—and death will be denied you."

Then Alesia began to be really afraid, for his expression was terrible, and upon his lips a thin froth was visible. She even thought she stood in the presence of a crazy man and one whose passion would carry him to any lengths. Therefore, though she spoke sternly, it was with less haughtiness.

"Before you threaten further, remember what is likely to result from this thing. Now you have only insulted me grievously, and for that my brothers will challenge you, when you will have a chance to defend yourself. But if you do not come to reason, and permit me at once to depart, nothing can save you from a dreadful vengeance, for although you sent men to Trevera disguised as Romans, it is known from whence they came and who gave them orders."

Then Ataulf began to smile craftily, and nodded his head several times.

"It appears that you think so, but it will not be the same with every one," replied he. "It is true I sent men to Trevera, but they are not from this neighborhood, and no one knows them; neither has any one but you intimated that I am mixed up in this matter, and you will not be able to testify against me. It is evident you take me for a fool, and do not think I am able to plan things carefully.

"Already those who have brought you here have ridden away with gold in their pouches, and there is no one who saw Alesia of Trevera enter this house; neither is there any one here, except those who are faithful to me, who know of your presence. It is true that I shall probably be challenged by your brothers, but that I will welcome, for I have resolved to fight Harling for the insults he gave me.

"And as to the other thing you mention: was truth forthcoming that it was I who caused you to be taken from Trevera, then might vengeance hover over me, but as it stands there can be nothing beside suspicion.

"Surely you understand the law which holds good among us, and which will be enforced by the priests in all cases. To avenge your carrying off, your brothers might justly follow after and slay me, even were I defenseless, but on suspicion they cannot do it without calling down upon their own heads the vengeance of the law. Now you understand why your words are useless."

Harling's sister indeed understood, and knew the man spoke the truth, for what proof was there that it was he who had caused her to be carried off? Only the words she had spoken when leaving Trevera: that it was to Elmet they would take her; and that was no proof of it.

Then because she remained silent, Ataulf approached a little nearer.

"One of two things is certain," said he, with forced calmness. "Either you must swear that to-morrow you will marry me—and I will bring a priest here for that purpose—or I shall deliver you over to those who will take you to the camp of this Cæsar, and they will tell him who you are. Then, holding you a prisoner, he may send a messenger to Harling, who will speak after this fashion: 'My master has commanded me to say to you that he holds captive the Lady of Trevera, and it is in his mind to send her to Rome that his triumphs may be graced by so noble a woman among your people; but before doing so he is willing to treat with you and the Bituriges concerning her.'

"Such a message Cæsar will send, and you know what he will demand of the Lord of Trevera and of the chieftains as the price of your freedom. And when it is known you are in the Roman camp it will be thought in truth that those who carried you off were indeed Romans; and if there is any suspicion against me, it will pass from men's minds."

After this a great stillness filled the room for several minutes, for the girl remained perfectly quiet, and the master of Elmet gazed at her sullenly. And in the light of the fire her face was both white and red: white by reason of the great horror which had come upon her, and red where the glow from the burning logs touched it.

And her eyes, wide open, were fixed steadily upon the flames, and the crimson light was reflected in them in such a manner that they shone with unnatural brilliancy; even so marvelously that the man began to wonder, and something of fear seized him. But when she turned her head the crimson glow passed from her face, and her voice came to him across the space which separated them:

"And you will do this thing, even to a woman of your own people, the Bituriges?"

"I will do as I have said, for you must either marry me or you will be delivered to Cæsar; I have sworn it before witnesses, and a Biturige noble does not break an oath so given," he answered.

Now, it might seem that there was an easy way out of it, for having married the man she might afterward return to her brothers and see him no more. It would even seem possible that she need not remain an hour at Elmet after the ceremony, for the priest and witnesses would know she was there, and what had really happened to her would be no longer a secret.

But though this appeared to be possible, Alesia knew otherwise. She understood perfectly that the Gallic law gave to the husband unlimited power—even of life and death. A woman might make her choice beforehand whom she should marry, but afterward it was different; she might not return to her own kinsmen, nor had any one the right of offering her protection against her husband.

Therefore her choice lay between two courses. In marrying the Lord of Elmet she must become his property and submit to indignity and even cruelty; or she must face the alternative of being delivered into the hands of the Romans.

Ataulf began to gnaw his mustache, for her long silence did not please him. And first of all in his mind was the revenge he contemplated in either course she chose; though, because she was beautiful and many would envy him, he desired the first, rather than to deliver the beauty over to another.

After a little, when she did not speak, he asked harshly:

"Well, I am waiting, and there is an end to patience. Surely you have not become dumb?"

Then the girl, upon whose face was written determination, looked at him so fixedly that he lowered his eyes; for he saw in hers such a loathing, mingled with haughtiness, that his spirit began to cringe within him.

And when she spoke it was coldly and without sign of fear or trembling:

"Since it is given me to choose between two evils, I will take that one which is the least horrible to me. The first I would avoid as I would living fire; therefore I am prepared to stand before this Cæsar—even in chains."

For a moment Ataulf trembled so violently that the metal links which girded his sword to him jingled together.

"It is possible you think I will not do *that,* but here I swear to you it will not be otherwise," he cried fiercely.

She raised her head with an imperious gesture.

"Your oaths are as many as the leaves which fall in autumn. I have chosen." she answered coldly.

Now, there were seated in the hall below the two men who had accompanied him to Trevera—the same who had seen him wounded in fair fight and also their companion slain by Harling. And as was the custom among the Gauls, these had taken a vow to stand or fall by the fortune which overtook the Lord of Elmet.

For there was an unwritten custom among the Bituriges that any one could unite himself to a noble so closely that what good came to that one turned to the other's benefit, and, on the other hand, misfortune was divided between them, even to death itself.

Into the presence of these two rushed Ataulf like a thunderbolt; and when he had closed the door he stood still, glaring first at one and then at the other.

The Bituriges glanced at each other, and it was as though this unspoken comment passed between them: "He went in to her with confidence in his heart, expecting she could do nothing else than yield; but it is evident everything has not turned out as he desired. Either he has bungled fearfully or the girl has slain herself with a dagger."

And one asked aloud:

"What is it? For it is evident something unusual has happened."

"You have heard the oath I made?" answered Ataulf hoarsely.

"Yes, we have heard it, and what you told us afterward—in private."

"That I might desire you to ride southward—secretly."

The two exchanged rapid glances, and one replied:

"We understood; but surely such a thing will not come to pass?"

Ataulf smote his clenched fist against his sword-hilt.

"It has come to pass," answered he hoarsely.

A shadow crossed the faces of his companions, and each began to move his feet uneasily.

They had sworn to do what the Lord of Elmet demanded of them, having felt certain the girl would yield. Now suddenly something which filled them with fear arose before their eyes: certain persons might be met on the way, perhaps even Harling of Trevera; and in any case it would be necessary to enter the camp of the Romans. In the guise of envoys, it is true, but would Cæsar respect envoys come on such a mission?

Ataulf noticed their silence, and began to frown ominously. Leaning forward, he looked into their faces steadily.

"You do not say anything, but perhaps that is because you understand perfectly what you are to do, without asking questions?" he demanded.

"Then you are resolved to take vengeance after that fashion? We had thought it might be different," answered one of the others.

Ataulf began to smile so fearfully that they looked at him in astonishment, even fearing he had lost his senses.

"It might have been different, but it is not; even here, in my own house, she has insulted me. Even to-night you will take her to Cæsar," said he sternly.

The men hesitated, then one ventured to remark:

"But—you see we were thinking—if it came to that—it would be more simple to take her into the forest and there slay her. No one would know."

Ataulf began to laugh softly.

"So that is what is in your minds? Well, let me tell you. In the first place, I have sworn that she shall be delivered to Cæsar; and in the second, if you took her into the forest you would not slay her, for you do not hate her as I do."

He paused for a moment to regard them, then continued:

"And I expect nothing else than that you will deliver her as I have sworn. You will avoid every one as you would the pestilence; but if any demand to know who is with you, you will deny them, even if it results in combat. But if the girl escapes, I myself will kill you. You understand what I am saying?"

They understood so well that their hearts sank within them, but, being bound by oath, dared not disobey; therefore each nodded sullenly.

Then the Lord of Elmet left them and sought out a man among the servants—a brutal fellow, who had been captured during a former battle with a band of

Suevi, and whose life had been spared that he might become a slave.

This one his master took to one side and began to talk to him not unkindly. And telling him that, for reasons, he was about to send a certain woman to the camp of the Romans, he bade him prepare to accompany those who would take her there.

And he laid strict injunctions upon him that, did the others turn from their purpose or seek to alter his plan in any way, he was to slay them in such fashion as he could. Afterward he was to go forward with the woman and deliver her over to Cæsar.

And as a reward for faithfulness he would, upon his return, be given his liberty, also some money and a horse to do with what he chose.

Having received the fellow's promise, he let him go.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CIRCLE OF STONES.

A FEW hours later, when darkness lay over the earth, those three rode out from Elmet, and in their midst rode Harling's sister—bound to the saddle and her face muffled. She would have taken her own life rather than be carried a captive to the Romans; but Ataulf had seen to it that no means were given her by which she might harm herself seriously.

Because the Suevi knew the roads and the paths through the forests perfectly, the cavalcade went rapidly forward, even in the darkness. But also because it was necessary to avoid meeting any one, they did not proceed in a direct line, but followed a circle, and did not approach human dwellings or much-frequented highways.

Daybreak, therefore, found them not so many miles from the starting-point, and, fearful of traveling at such a time, they selected a secluded spot and remained hidden until night should once more come. And it was during this halt that the girl realized truly that no hope remained to her.

Having built a little fire in the bottom of a deep glen, the men prepared food and set it before her; and that she might eat, they removed the coverings from her mouth. But instead of eating, she began to talk to them, and they, standing by, listened in silence. And after this fashion the mistress of Trevera addressed her captors:

"I know that it is not through your own desire you have brought me here and are taking me, a noblewoman among the Biturige, to deliver over to worse than death in the camp of Cæsar. What reward you have received and what oath you have taken, I do not know; but be assured of this: my brother, the Lord Harling, will reward you tenfold more than this Ataulf of Elmet is able to do, and I myself will add to it even some land, with horses and cattle.

"And, further, I swear to you that in no manner whatsoever will this Ataulf be able to injure you, for his own days will be numbered and he will be slain without pity. Also, whatever oath you may have taken, to serve him in all things, from that I will see to it you shall be absolved by the priests, even by Getorix, who is my godfather and is among the first of holy men. Permit me therefore to return to Trevera, or even take me to the camp of our army, and what I have promised will come to pass."

Then the two companions of the Lord of Elmet looked at each other, and hesitated what to reply; but the Suevi began to frown darkly, and answered:

"It was told me, even before we started, that you would make such a promise, and I was warned against it. Now, I understand perfectly just what would happen. Being at liberty, you would remember only the indignity which has been put upon you, and would consider only that we carried you, bound to a horse, through the forest. What we might have done afterward would leave your memory entirely, or else you would consider us fools and easily deceived by cunning words. Instead of rewards, we should be taken and tortured, for every one understands that the Lord Harling is pitiless."

Then Alesia replied and tried to reason with the fellow, swearing by all she held sacred to do as she promised. But he interrupted her, and the other two, though wavering, shook their heads.

"Even did we believe what you have said, we are sworn to obey the Lord of

Elmet, and the priests would not free us from such an oath. Do not think, therefore, to move us by your good looks, for we cannot be moved in any fashion. We will take you to Cæsar, as we have promised."

After that the girl held her peace and tried to contrive some way by which she could escape, or even commit suicide, and thus avoid the horror which lay before her. But opportunity to do neither was given her, and during the whole of the second night they went forward, slowly and with difficulty, for no one knew the way exactly.

On the second day hope for a moment again sprang up in the captive's breast. Those who guarded her had encamped among rocks on the summit of a little hill, and about the middle of the morning hoof-beats and the voices of men were heard.

After a little these sounds drew nearer, and those hidden behind the rocks, looking down, saw a company of riders halt a little way off and sit motionless upon their horses.

And these riders were plainly Gauls, though not of the Biturige; for their helmets were fashioned after another pattern, and the tunics which showed from beneath their furs were bordered with crimson and black circles.

One of the horsemen was tall and noble-looking, and his fur collar was held together by a heavy gold chain which glistened in the sunlight. Upon his head also rested a burnished helmet of white metal, from either side of which protruded the black wings of a raven; and the richness of his weapons exceeded those carried by his companions.

For a little time he and the others talked together, and Alesia thought it might be possible that one of them would decide to mount the hill in order to obtain a better view of the surrounding country. But this did not happen, and presently the company set their horses in motion and rode on.

Then one of the Bituriges turned to his companions, and said in an eager voice:

"That one was Vercingetorix, the Arvernian noble who has been given the supreme command of our whole people, even all the tribes in Gaul. It is he who will free us from this Cæsar and his legions."

After that, darkness being come, though the stars gave considerable light, they began to move forward once more, and after some hours came to a great open space and halted.

Then Alesia learned that the camp of the Romans lay only a few miles distant, and that they would wait until morning before going any farther. And because she could not sleep, she began to look about her, and presently saw that they had halted near the center of a circle of great stones.

These she knew had been set up by priests, and that it was the *cromlech*, or holy circle, in which they were, and that somewhere near must be an altar.

And as she lay upon the ground, and two of her captors slept while the third kept guard, she began to try to count the great stones that formed the circle. And presently she fancied that she had indeed fallen asleep and was dreaming; for as her eyes rested upon one of the pillars and remained fixed there, she saw plainly the glint of a metal headpiece in the starlight.

And gazing at this thing in some wonder, she even fancied she could perceive the crouching figure of a man.

CHAPTER XII.

A DESPERATE EXPEDIENT.

WHILE these things were taking place, elsewhere Decius and the soldier Lucullus, by means of forced journeys through the forest, had reached the neighborhood of the main Roman camp. And because the country was filled with scouting parties, and there was danger of meeting such at any moment, Decius concealed himself while it was daylight in a ravine; but Lucullus went boldly forward, for he had nothing to fear.

But although Decius hid himself during the day, he had no intention of remaining like a badger in a hole when the coming of darkness would permit him to venture abroad in a district filled with enemies. It had even been arranged between them that at a certain hour he would approach near to the barricade which protected the camp, when it might

be possible Lucullus would be able to communicate with him concerning the young Lord of Trevera.

As for the old soldier, having parted from his companion, he went forward through the forest rapidly, and presently came upon more open ground; and he had proceeded but a few rods farther when he was discovered by a party from the camp. These quickly gathered around him, for it was easy to see that he was not a Gaul, and single soldiers did not venture far into the forest, because it was understood perfectly that death was lurking there.

A centurion coming forward looked into his face and recognized him, and, turning to the others, cried joyfully:

"It is that old dog Lucullus come back again!"

Then seizing the latter by the shoulder, he gripped him in friendly fashion, saying:

"We have thought surely your body was lying somewhere in the forest, for when some days passed and you did not appear it seemed certain it could not be otherwise. Even Cæsar, having sent you to the camp of Atticus, has inquired concerning you, and believes you to be dead. But now I see you were too smart for these barbarians, though you have remained away longer than was expected. You bring word from Atticus and those who are with him?"

Then Lucullus glanced from face to face, and answered soberly:

"I have indeed been in the camp of Atticus, but I bring no word from him; neither is it possible for him to obey such instructions as Cæsar sent by me, for he is dead."

"What is this you are telling us?" cried several voices.

"Only what I have myself witnessed," replied Lucullus.

And he related to them what had occurred: how the barbarians had fallen upon the camp in the morning, and after taking it had put every one to death.

"And you?" demanded the centurion. "If you were there, how comes it that you escaped when all others perished?"

Then Lucullus, because he could not tell the whole truth without betraying what he wished above all things to remain a secret, answered:

"I was struck upon the head by a stone and became unconscious. And when I revived I discovered they had bound me with cords, for it had been decided not to kill me then, but to save me until later, when I should be offered up as a sacrifice to their gods. But after four days I managed to escape and made my way hither. Permit me, therefore, to go in before Cæsar, that I may tell him everything."

After that they accompanied him to the camp, and the news spread that Atticus and all the men under him had been ruthlessly slain. But although great anger and the desire for vengeance seized the soldiers, the face of Cæsar, when Lucullus related everything to him, told nothing of what was in his mind. But having questioned him closely and particularly about what he had seen when a prisoner among the Gauls, he dismissed him without comment.

From others the old soldier learned what had happened during his absence, and particularly about how a handful of barbarians had been ambushed in the forest and three or four taken prisoners. And good fortune favored Decius in this matter, for what Lucullus heard convinced him no great harm could come if the young Lord of Trevera obtained his liberty.

Indeed, it was not known the youthful prisoner was the brother of so great a chieftain as Harling, but only that he was of a noble family among the barbarians, and would therefore probably be sent to Rome, and not slain, as was the custom with ordinary prisoners. And as many captives went every year to Rome, and every one referred to the youthful Alaric as a stripling who could not stand up for long before a strong man, neither the glory of Cæsar would be diminished nor the welfare of the legions jeopardized if he returned to his own countrymen.

The old soldier even went with certain of his companions to look at the prisoners. These were bound separately to chains, and each chain was made fast to a stout stake driven into the ground. Thus it was the captives were permitted a few feet of freedom, for each could drag himself into the hut before which the stakes were placed, or, if he so choose, lie upon the ground in the open air.

And in the midst of this little group of

men, chained even as one would hold a wild beast of the forest, Lucullus saw the young Lord of Trevera, who sat by himself upon the snow and gazed at his captors with sullen eyes.

And indeed he was a youth, for his face was hairless and his slender body seemed ill fitted for the rigors of a fierce campaign. But he looked at the grinning soldiers fearlessly, and the red marks upon his wrists showed where he had strained constantly at the iron bands to which the chains were fastened.

Night fell quickly, and with its coming the Romans retired inside the barricade. Then Decius, who had waited impatiently for this, issued from his hiding-place and came even to the edge of the open space beyond which rose the wall.

But during that entire night nothing happened, and he knew Lucullus had not been able to accomplish anything, and he must still remain hidden in the forest.

But on the afternoon of the second day, when hunger had began to gnaw at his vitals and even the heavy covering of furs no longer protected him from the cold, his patience was rewarded.

A little party of Romans, pushing cautiously through the forest nearest the camp, passed close to the place where he lay; and among them he saw Lucullus. Then Decius, for the thing had been agreed between them, began to chirp like a bird.

The other soldiers, because the cry of snow-birds was not uncommon in the forest, passed on; but Lucullus, pretending to refasten the thongs which held his shoes in place, fell behind. And when the forest had swallowed up the others Decius beckoned from his hiding-place.

Quickly and as briefly as possible Lucullus told him what he had come out to say; and he related how he had seen the prisoners, and how they were bound in chains, so it was impossible for one man to free any one.

Decius understood this, and his heart sank within him, so that for several moments he remained silent.

"Hasten," said Lucullus, "for if I remain too long behind, the others will think misfortune has befallen me and return."

Then Decius raised his eyes and answered:

"There is no other way but I must myself enter inside the wall, and between us we may find a way to free the youth."

Lucullus shook his head.

"For you to enter the camp is impossible, for it is not Atticus, but Cæsar," said he.

Then Decius began to speak rapidly and with great earnestness.

"I have noticed," he said, "that, as is customary, great piles of fagots are heaped up outside the gates; and these are for the fires which burn in the camp."

Lucullus knew this was so, for the fagots were cut in the forest and tied in great bundles, of such size that even two filled an ox-cart.

"It might not be impossible for a man to lie hidden among the fagots, and thus be carried inside the wall," continued Decius.

"But it would be at great risk," Lucullus replied, "for the ox-carts go out in the daytime, and what could you hope to accomplish then?"

"With your help perhaps something, and I shall do as I have said, for to remain here galls me beyond measure," answered Decius shortly.

"Then I will not help you, for I do not desire to see you die miserably. To hide among the fagots is not so difficult, but it is what may occur afterward. As you know, men with axes will break apart the bundles, and then you will be discovered," growled the old soldier.

"That is as you please, yet I know you will not be found wanting. Listen to what I am telling you. By the gate nearest the western angle of the wall the heaps of fagots are greatest; some time to-night I will conceal myself in one of them, and to mark that one I will tie to it a branch of evergreen. You may be able yourself to lead those who go out to carry in the wood, or you may join yourself to them. If you can do this, have that particular bundle of fagots put on an ox-cart, and persuade the driver to carry it to a spot somewhat remote from the fires. It is then possible it will not be broken open until all the others are consumed, and that will surely not be in one day."

"But if I cannot arrange to do what you wish—what then?"

"I must either remain outside the wall or I will be carried in with the fagots

and perhaps discovered; yet one cannot be certain of everything," answered Decius.

The old Roman looked at him in admiration.

"Such courage as is required to hurl oneself upon lance-points is nothing to what you are showing; I am almost sorry I permitted you to go over to these barbarians," he muttered.

"We are not speaking of courage, but what is best to do to free that youth. To accomplish that I have sworn, and I cannot return otherwise. If he remain in the hands of Cæsar my death is certain, but the other thing at least holds out a promise. Therefore it is not courage to choose the easiest way."

"And if you enter the camp safely and remain hidden even until night?" demanded Lucullus.

"Then I shall wait for your coming, and you will know where to find me. If I am inside the walls after nightfall, and can obtain a helmet, no one will readily suspect me, for it is common for men to walk back and forth between the fires. You understand everything?"

"Perfectly, but I do not like the plan. Yet, if you are determined, I will do what I can," answered the other.

Then he placed in Decius's hand some dried meat, which he had brought from the camp, hidden under his garments, and hastened on to rejoin his companions.

For some hours longer the young man remained concealed in the forest, but when darkness again fell he approached once more near to the wall, for he desired to examine the bundles of fagots carefully.

These were composed of great sticks, longer than the body of a tall man, and were tied together at each end by ropes provided for that purpose. To withdraw several of these sticks from the center of a bundle was not difficult for one possessing Decius's strength, and when they were removed there remained an opening large enough to admit his body.

To crawl in and fill up the ends of the cavity with short sticks was all that remained to be accomplished. And this the young man did about an hour before daybreak.

A little while after the sun had risen the creaking of cart-wheels arose in the camp, and the forms of oxen appeared in the gateways. Small parties of soldiers followed the carts, and presently, near every gate, men were to be seen lifting and carrying bundles of fagots. And among these, at the gate nearest the western angle of the barricade, Lucullus directed the laborers.

Taking care that the fagots marked with a sprig of evergreen was loaded upon the first cart, the old soldier accompanied the driver back through the gate. And when the man would have driven near one of the fires, he bade him go on, even until the cart passed the hut before which the four Bituriges crouched in chains.

A little way from this place, but not too near a fire, he ordered the oxen to be halted, and assisted his companion to unload the bundles of fagots from the cart. Then they returned once more to the outer side of the wall.

During the day, when everything was confusion in the camp, Lucullus approached the spot where he knew Decius lay hidden, and asked in a low voice:

"Are you there?"

And Decius, lying in the midst of the fagots, replied:

"I am here, but cramped terribly and perishing with cold. Loosen the ropes even a little, so that I can move my limbs more freely."

So Lucullus loosened one of the ropes, and as he did so he spoke in a whisper:

"As soon as possible after nightfall I will return and bring a helmet and cloak with me. But I warn you to be cautious, for the real danger lies before you. I have done what I could, but if any one takes it into his head to obtain wood from this place I will be powerless to prevent it."

"I understand that perfectly, and night will be very welcome," replied Decius in a muffled voice.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE MIDST OF HOSTILE LEGIONS.

BUT no one came to disturb the fagots during the day, and night had scarcely fallen when Decius pushed aside the sticks which closed one end of the opening. Then listening, in order to be sure that no one was near, he crawled cau-

tiously out of his narrow quarters and began to stretch himself, for the posture he had been forced to maintain for so many hours had rendered his limbs almost powerless.

Now that one great danger was over, the desire to find the place where the prisoners were confined filled his breast. But this was no simple matter.

Besides the four Bituriges in whom his interest was centered, he knew there were many other captives in the camp, and to proceed without the friendly assistance of Lucullus might result in disaster.

Therefore he crouched down behind the piles of fagots and began to run over in his mind the plan he had decided upon when the moment for freeing Harling's brother arrived. That nothing could be accomplished by violence, at least at the outset, he understood perfectly; but just what course to pursue must be determined by circumstances.

Beyond a certain point he could not hope to count on Lucullus for anything, for the old soldier, having given such aid as he might in freeing the prisoner from his bonds, would not venture further.

An hour dragged by slowly. On every side fires were burning, and the glow from the leaping flames reddened the starlit sky. Around these also, silhouetted against the dark background, Decius could see groups of soldiers.

From time to time, singly or in groups, they passed near the bundles of fagots. Once a company, their armor rattling beneath the furs and their lance-heads glistening in the starlight, marched by—the first night-watch on its rounds.

Then suddenly, from around the corner of a hut not very far off, the red glare of a torch flashed across the snow. Looking over the top of the pile Decius saw that the light was carried by one of two men, the torch-bearer walking a little before the other.

They came slowly up the beaten path, and he thought they must pass on, as others had done, when he who walked behind stopped with an imperious gesture. The torch halted not fifty feet away, and at an order from his companion the bearer raised it above his head, so that the light fell full upon the pile of fagots.

Decius, crouching down, felt his heart beat quicker, but it was not wholly because the light revealed his hiding-place. The glare from the burning pitch fell full upon the face and figure of the man who had given the sharp order; and the ex-Roman knew him perfectly.

The man was tall, even to slenderness, but a commanding presence seemed to emanate from his person. The face above the folds of the cloak was dark, clean-shaven, and expressive of unconquerable power and unaltering determination.

The eyes, black as night, were piercing, and gleamed almost unnaturally beneath heavy brows. Every motion, every expression of that stern set countenance, betokened undying pride and a mighty, latent force held in reserve. It was the face of Cæsar, supreme commander of the Roman legions.

Decius had seen this man under many different circumstances, and had served him faithfully, desiring even to die in honor under his eyes. But now, at the unexpected revealing of the stern lined face in the red glare of the blazing torch, a daring idea flashed through his brain. Even unconsciously his fingers closed on the haft of the dagger at his hip.

One blow, delivered without faltering, and the mighty genius against which the united strength of Gaul was powerless would be no more. What the countless hordes of the fierce northern warriors could not do would be accomplished by a knife-thrust at a moment when Cæsar least expected danger.

But although the thought of the wrong he had suffered surged up afresh within him, and he remembered that the man standing a few feet away would have been pitiless, an irresistible power held him back, and his hand dropped from the knife. Though the fierce spirit of his Gaulish ancestors was hot within him, he could not slay the imperious commander whose fortunes he had followed for five years.

Cæsar looked sharply at the dark mass which had attracted his attention.

"It is a pile of fagots; in the morning see to it that the sticks are put with the others near one of the fires," said he sharply, and ordered the torch-bearer to go forward.

Even as the man obeyed, and the impressive figure passed on along the street, Decius felt the pressure of a hand upon his shoulder. Turning sharply, he confronted Lucullus.

"You have seen him?" said the old soldier shortly.

"Even just now, for he stopped and regarded this place," Decius replied.

"And your hand lay upon the dagger's hilt?"

"Even there, but as you see, he has passed on in safety."

"Had you drawn it I would have struck you dead from behind," said the Roman sternly. "But, tell me, why did you stay your hand?"

"Because I could not do otherwise. Let us to that which has brought me here," answered Decius gruffly.

Lucullus pointed to a hut not far off.

"It is there," said he, "but as I said, the youth is bound with chains, and cannot be freed easily. Here is what you desired."

He handed to his companion a Roman helmet and a cloak.

Decius put these on quickly, then once more addressed the soldier.

"There is a guard before the entrance to the hut?" he asked.

"It is so," Lucullus replied.

"Then I will go alone, for it is not fitting for you to be present if the man, who is your comrade, stands face to face with death; and in this case death will conquer."

Lucullus laid a restraining hand upon the other's arm.

"Wait!" said he. "I have not told you everything, and in any case I will not permit you to kill any one. As you know, such huts as these are erected hastily, and the under logs rest on frozen ground; therefore their weight has not pushed them into the soil."

Decius nodded, for he began to understand.

Lucullus continued:

"And although the ground is frozen at the surface, it would not be so very difficult to dig cautiously with a knife-blade. Even a ditch might be made beneath the log, and by means of it any one could enter the interior of the hut without being observed by the guard."

Decius slipped his hand beneath his cloak and produced the stout-bladed knife he carried.

"Take me to that place," said he shortly.

"That is my purpose, for I have promised to aid you; but there is another thing. One cannot break chains easily, or sever them with a knife-blade," answered the soldier.

Then, fumbling in his tunic, he drew out a piece of iron fashioned like a wrench and gave it to Decius.

"It may be that some rivet is not overstrong and with strength can be broken. Come, we will go," he concluded.

Behind the hut, alone and concealed by dense shadows, Decius remained motionless for a moment, listening.

But only the movements of the soldiers around the distant camp-fires, or the dull clank of a chain as one of the prisoners turned uneasily, broke the silence of the night. After a little he took off his cloak, laid it upon the ground, and began to dig with as much caution as possible.

And because the dirt, under the first layer where the frost had hardened it, yielded readily to the knife-blade, he worked rapidly, and the hole grew deeper and wider. After a time he stretched himself at full length in the ditch and began to dig inward, under the log, and as he proceeded the rattle of chains could be heard over him. Then he dug carefully upward, for he feared, having pierced through the surface, the point of the knife might wound one of the prisoners who lay upon the ground in the hut.

The Bituriges, hearing so unusual a noise directly beneath them, were at first greatly astonished, and began to ask each other what it might mean. Then one, who had perhaps more experience than the others, said in a low voice:

"It is surely some creature digging through the ground, and because no animal would do that at this season of the year, it must be a man. Perhaps certain of our countrymen have made a ditch to this place."

Therefore, when Decius reached the surface and broke the ground a little, those in the hut were not greatly surprised. And he spoke in a low voice, saying:

"Be quiet, for I wish to come up to you."

The Biturige answered:

"We are waiting, for we understand."

Then some, even though their wrists were shackled, began to dig also with bare fingers, so the hole enlarged rapidly, and presently Decius crawled through and stood among them.

It was too dark to see anything, and he inquired quickly:

"Where is Alaric of Trevera?"

A voice replied straightway:

"I am he; bid those who are behind you hasten, and the camp may be taken." For the youth thought the opening through which Decius had come must extend beyond the outer barricade, and that it was filled with Biturige warriors.

Then Decius replied, speaking rapidly and in a low voice:

"There is no one with me, and the way I have come does not extend except under the floor of this place. I have come to free you, but above all the young Lord of Trevera; and I have taken oath to Harling not to return without him."

Murmurs of astonishment arose in the darkness, for it seemed incredible that one man could enter the Roman lines and burrow in the midst of a hostile army.

But Decius spoke no further; only went to the spot whence came the voice of Alaric and felt about with his hands. And when his fingers touched the iron bands upon the youth's wrists he examined these carefully, and, grasping with the wrench the place where the chain was riveted to one of them, bade the prisoner brace himself as much as possible.

Then, exerting all his great strength, he twisted the iron first one way and then another, so the rough bracelets cut into the youth's flesh and the blood trickled down upon the floor.

This Harling's brother bore patiently, though he was obliged to grit his teeth, and great beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead. And, after a time, the first link of the chain snapped.

Upon the other wrist Decius did this thing also, and to the rivets which fastened the chains to the ankles. Then Alaric of Trevera, panting with pain, leaned heavily against the side of the hut and rested his head dizzily upon the frost-covered logs.

But though Decius had accomplished what he had come to do, he did not bid the youth prepare to follow him through the opening. Instead, turning to one of the other Bituriges, he ordered him to hold out his hands, and in turn broke the rivets which fastened the chains to his body.

And this he repeated until all the prisoners felt the fetters drop from them.

Then Decius for the space of several minutes rested, for he had exerted himself terribly, and his deep breathing mingled with the low-muttered words of his companions. But when he recovered somewhat he again addressed them:

"I have come to take back to Harling your young lord, his brother, but you others I have also freed from your fetters. You understand perfectly that to leave this place is no easy matter, for we are surrounded by Romans, and we must depend entirely upon cunning. Outside a guard is stationed, and beyond, some two hundred paces, is the wall and the gates; there also are soldiers who would give an alarm and obstruct our passage. But this thing I have planned, because first of all I have sworn to free your young lord, and I know that you desire it also, above everything."

"It is so," muttered a hoarse voice, "for we are bound by oath to serve him, even till death."

"He shall go down through the opening and, because I alone can show him a way to the forest, I will follow after him. But if you were to follow you would either be confused in the darkness and fall again into the hands of the Romans, or, keeping together, we should be discovered, and the young lord returned to captivity," continued Decius.

For a moment no one replied, then a voice answered:

"We can remain here—for we are bound by an oath."

But Alaric of Trevera spoke quickly:

"You shall not remain here, for I will not leave you to death and torture."

Decius broke in upon him:

"No one shall remain in this place, for had I so intended I had not broken the fetters. But this you will do, and if you perish it will be for the safety of Harling's brother and because of the oath you have taken before witnesses.

"When the young lord has descended through the opening and I have gone after him, you will go quickly out of the door and strike down the soldier who is guarding there; then, having taken his arms, you will hasten to the nearest gate and escape through it into the forest. It is true you may be overcome and slain, for the path will not be easy, but one of you at least may win freedom.

"And during the confusion which must arise I will conduct the young lord to a part of the wall where there is no gate and where the guards are fewer. In this manner he will escape and return to take up arms against these Romans.

"Nor would I bid you do these things and I not rush out with you, only I have sworn first to bring Alaric of Trevera into the forest, and for him to escape alone is impossible."

Then Harling's brother stepped among them and said hoarsely:

"It cannot be that way, for I also will throw myself upon these Romans, even though I perish with the others. To do otherwise will be to bring dishonor upon the house of Trevera."

Decius caught him by the shoulder and answered sharply:

"Even Harling, your brother, whose word you must obey in all things, has commanded you to put yourself in my hands; and that I may prove authority in this manner, I wear upon my finger the ring he gave me. I swear it by Hesus, it shall not be otherwise than I have said, even if I bind and carry you from this place. And in this these Bituriges will obey me, for I bring the authority of Harling of Trevera, who is their overlord."

"It must be as you have said, we understand that; and we will go out to the gate gladly. To remain here is certain death, but now if we must die we will have slain a Roman, and what we shall do will not be forgotten, even by Cæsar," answered the Bituriges.

Then because he was a Biturige, and his brother was his overlord also until he reached majority, and he had taken oath before the priests to obey him in all things, Alaric consented sullenly. But the desire was strong within him to rush through the door and, having slain the guard who stood outside, to seize a weapon and fight such as opposed a passage to the gate.

Having gained his purpose by persuading the young Lord of Trevera to accompany him stealthily from the hut, Decius wasted no more time in words. But even had he done so for a while longer, no great harm would have come of it, for the guard stood a little way from the door, and suspected nothing of what was occurring behind him.

Having assured himself that the youth had gone down into the shallow ditch, Decius followed, and in a moment they stood together in the open air. Picking up the cloak and helmet, he gave them to Alaric, but retained the dagger and held it in his right hand.

Then, as had been agreed with those who still remained in the hut, he knocked gently on the logs and, turning, bade his companion follow him.

Scarcely had they gone a dozen yards toward that portion of the camp where the fires were fewest, and by which way they would come quickest to that portion of the wall farthest from the main gates, when the three Bituriges rushed through the door of the hut.

In a moment the unsuspecting guard was seized from behind by the desperate men who leaped upon him like frenzied wolves, and his lance, torn from his grasp, was buried in his body. Even as he rolled upon the snow a hand plucked the slender staff rudely out, and another snatched the heavy, short-bladed sword. The trio then broke recklessly for the gate, beyond which lay the silent forest and liberty.

But the distance was too great to permit a passage undiscovered. When even half-way, a shout of alarm arose from the nearest sentinel. On reaching the gate they found it bristling with lance-points, while from behind ran up the captain of the watch and a dozen followers. Then, under the stars, a short, fierce combat followed. Fierce, because the northern warriors hurled themselves upon the extended lances, brushing them aside as reeds and grasping at the throats of their adversaries. And short, because even supreme courage could accomplish nothing against force of numbers.

He who had snatched the sentinel's sword cut down two men before a Roman

blade was buried in his back. Another fell, his fingers encircling the throat of an enemy, and for hours afterward the soldier lay breathing heavily.

The third Biturige, being of great strength and desperate beyond measure, fought even through the encircling weapons and reached the outside of the wall. There, pierced by lances and cut terribly, he struck fiercely with the broken spear-head which he carried, and wounded in the breast the captain of the watch. Then death touched him on the shoulder, and he sank backward upon the snow.

Even for some time after the three men were dead, and Cæsar himself had appeared among the soldiers, much confusion reigned in that part of the camp. And at first it was not discovered that the most important of the four Bituriges was not among the killed. But when the Romans proceeded to the hut and found the broken chains and the hole dug under the floor, it became plain to them they had been outwitted, and that the three Bituriges had sacrificed themselves so that their youthful companion might escape more easily.

Then a careful search was made everywhere, but the soldiers found only in what manner the young noble had escaped, and what they saw filled them with amazement, for the youth had given no promise of being able to do what he had accomplished.

Of all among the legions, Lucullus alone understood just what had happened; and he blamed himself bitterly because more than one of his comrades had been slain, but his admiration for the cunning displayed by Decius increased beyond measure.

In the meantime, the latter, having taken advantage of the tumult which had broken out near the gate, hurried the young Lord of Trevera to a distant part of the camp, and approached the wall on that side. And as he understood perfectly there were few guards in that place, he moved swiftly, though cautiously, and presently stopped at the inner base of the barricade.

"Mount upon my shoulders quickly and pull yourself up to the top of the wall; then, having fastened the cloak there so I may reach it, climb over and drop down upon the other side," said he sharply.

Harling's brother obeyed and, having fixed the cloak, disappeared in a twinkling, so it only remained for Decius to follow him.

Now, the wall at this spot was twenty feet high, composed of logs set upright and sharpened at the top. Decius reached upward and caught the end of the cloak, which, twisted into a rope, would support his weight easily.

But scarcely had he begun to draw himself up when footsteps came out of the darkness. The sentinel who was stationed a little way from that place had heard the noise and was approaching rapidly.

Decius let go the cloak and turned quickly, crouching like a wild beast that prepares to spring upon its prey. The form of the sentinel appeared before him, and a gruff voice came out of the gloom.

(To be continued.)

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.

HIS VALENTINE CLUE.

By CHARLES B. FREMONT.

The man who had detective work down to a scientific basis, with an account of his great deductions with regard to thumb-prints.

STANLEY FERGUSON had two big ambitions. One was a yearning to become a great private detective, the other was a desire to marry Miss Isabelle Bailey, who was as pretty as her father was wealthy.

Concerning this latter ambition he breathed not a word to a single soul. He felt that the time was not yet ripe.

The young lady, he realized with regret, did not evince any symptoms of being in love with him, and to make matters worse, he was handicapped by the fact that his income was painfully small.

True, her father had money enough to be able to support a son-in-law for the rest of his life without feeling the drain upon his resources; but, unfortunately for Ferguson, Isabelle's father did not hold a very good opinion of him.

They had met a few times and Ferguson had done his best to create a good impression, but despite his efforts in this direction it had afterward reached his ears that the old gentleman had more than once referred to him as "an empty-headed young ass."

This unkind criticism only served to stimulate Ferguson's other big ambition —his inspiration to achieve fame as a great detective.

He felt confident that some day he would succeed in solving a big sensational mystery, after the police and the best detectives in the world had confessed themselves completely baffled and had retired from the case in disgust.

Then the whole world would ring with his praises and Isabelle's father would revise his opinion concerning him.

Ferguson had always felt the detective instinct strong within him. At school, he had won the admiration of his teacher by solving the problem of who poured the contents of the mucilage-pot into the latter's hat.

Later on in life, during his college days, he had earned the undying gratitude of the college *chef* by tracking down the miscreant who had caused a university scandal by inserting sand in the marmalade.

These and several other brilliant exploits in the sleuthing line caused him to decide, when he graduated from college, that he was confronted by a great future as an investigator of crime and mysteries.

He accordingly abandoned his intention of practising law and spent what little capital he possessed in opening up a private detective agency.

This "agency" consisted of an office in a down-town sky-scraper, on the door of which was the legend in letters of gold:

STANLEY FERGUSON,
Special Investigator.

His income did not permit of his hiring any clerical help, and every day he sat in his office, all alone, indulging in pleasant day-dreams of future fame and glory, and anxiously waiting for somebody to drop in to give him his first case.

But nobody ever visited the office except an occasional book agent or life insurance canvasser, and the man who came once a month, with painful regularity, to collect the rent.

This unpromising state of affairs did not discourage Ferguson. He realized that nearly every great career is unsuccessful at the start, and he felt confident that business would "pick up" later on.

"All I want is a chance," he assured himself cheerfully. "Once I get an opportunity to show the world what I can do, clients will come to me in such numbers that I shall have to hire a larger office and employ a staff of clerks. A private detective with a college educa-

tion and scientific methods is bound to make a hit, in the long run."

One morning he picked up a newspaper, and read something which caused him great excitement.

Old man Bailey—Isabelle's father—had been robbed. Some unknown person or persons had broken into his residence during the night and stolen from Mr. Bailey's safe fifty thousand dollars in cash and some valuable documents.

The police had been notified and were hard at work on the case, but, according to the newspaper, there was little chance of their running down the burglars, as the latter had got away without leaving behind a single clue.

Ferguson sighed wistfully. If Mr. Bailey would only send for him and ask him to hunt for the burglars!

But Isabelle's father did nothing of the kind. When, after the lapse of several days, the police proved themselves unable to accomplish anything, he retained the biggest private detective agency in the country to handle the case.

Ferguson read of this step in the newspapers and sighed disappointedly. When, some days later, he learned that the big detective firm had been unable to solve the mystery, he smiled joyously.

"If that man had any sense he would retain me," he muttered. "What a glorious achievement it would be for me to run down these burglars when the best detectives have failed! Mr. Bailey wouldn't consider me an empty-headed ass then, I guess. Isabelle, too, doubtless would be filled with admiration for me. If only I could get a chance!"

So eager was he to show what his latest scientific methods and deductive theories could accomplish that at length he made up his mind to undertake the case without waiting any longer for an invitation from Mr. Bailey.

Luckily he was on Miss Bailey's visiting list, so that he was at least sure of being able to gain admission to the premises, and thereby have an opportunity of making a close inspection of the scene of the crime.

Having come to this resolution, he paid a visit to the fair Isabelle, and after indulging in some small talk, managed to turn the conversation to the subject of the big robbery.

"It doesn't look now as if the burglars ever will be caught," remarked the girl. "The police seem to be all at sea."

"The police are *always* at sea," declared Ferguson, with an air of superiority. "The trouble with the police, my dear Miss Bailey, is that their methods are not scientific. Detective work is a science. A problem of crime is just like a problem in algebra or arithmetic. To get at the solution you have to follow a certain method. Six and six always make twelve—not sometimes, but all the time."

"Dear me! How very interesting!" exclaimed Miss Bailey. "And do you really think that it is possible to catch these burglars, Mr. Ferguson?"

"Certainly," replied the young man. "I don't want to boast, Miss Bailey, but I feel confident that if your father had seen fit to send for me in the first place, the person or persons who stole his money would now be under arrest."

"Dear me!" sighed the girl regretfully. "It's too bad that father didn't do so. He's so very stubborn, you know. I suggested to him, the other day, that he ought to consult you about the matter."

"And what did he say?" inquired Ferguson eagerly.

"He laughed at the idea, and said that an important case like that required the attention of an intelligent detective," replied the girl.

Ferguson shook his head deprecatingly.

"Did you ever hear of such extreme narrow-mindedness?" he sighed. "Just to teach your esteemed parent a lesson, my dear Miss Bailey, I have a mind to heap coals of fire upon his head by undertaking this investigation upon my own responsibility. When I place before him the man or men who stole his money he will realize how he has misjudged me. If you have no objection, I would like to see the room from which the money was stolen."

"Certainly," replied the girl. "The safe is in the library. The burglars broke in through a rear window, you know. I will take you there now, if you like."

Eagerly Ferguson followed the girl to the scene of the burglary. There he conducted an examination which was so im-

pressive that Miss Bailey looked on in wide-eyed admiration.

Not an inch of the room escaped his eagle eye. There was not an article of furniture which he did not subject to a scrutiny that was almost microscopic in its intensity.

He gazed raptly at the wall-paper and at the carpet, as if he could discern important secrets in their tinted designs. He scowled at chairs and tables, as if he suspected those innocent-looking objects of being accessories to the crime.

He strode fiercely up and down the room with his hand to his forehead, in an attitude of deep thought. He sounded the panels of the library door, and as he did so allowed his features to assume a satisfied smile which seemed to imply that he had discovered important clues in the sound made by his knuckles.

All these maneuvers were part of his scientific method of investigation. Miss Bailey was greatly impressed. She would not have been a bit surprised if he had told her the name of the burglar then and there.

Of course, the safe from which the money had been stolen came in for the greater part of Ferguson's attention.

The thorough manner in which he examined every inch of that safe would have made an ordinary detective feel cheap. It was a stirring sight to see him kneeling on the carpeted floor with his eyes glued to the shining handle of the combination.

Miss Isabelle Bailey felt that she was being afforded the rare privilege of watching a master detective at work, and she secretly wondered why her misguided father had not been wise enough to employ the services of this acute young man in the first instance.

Suddenly Ferguson uttered a cry of triumph and jumped to his feet excitedly.

"What's the matter?" gasped the girl. "Have you discovered the burglars?"

"Not quite," replied Ferguson, with a self-satisfied smile. "But I have discovered an important clue which ultimately will lead to their arrest and conviction. Do you see this little smudge on the door of the safe, Miss Bailey?"

"Y-e-es," gasped the girl. "It looks to me like a smear of paint."

"It's blood!" cried Ferguson excitedly. "It's a blood-stain, and by means of it I shall solve this problem."

"But I don't understand," cried the astonished girl. "What can that stain have to do with the finding of the burglars?"

"Everything," replied Ferguson confidently. "If you examine this little smudge more closely, you will notice that there is the impression of a human thumb upon it. The man who made that thumb-mark is the man who broke open the safe. Evidently, he cut his hand, and thus unconsciously left this telltale imprint behind him. Now, all I have to do to complete my case is to find the owner of that thumb. This is what we call scientific detective work, Miss Bailey."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the girl admiringly. "What do you intend to do next?"

"I shall now go to my office for my camera. With your permission, I shall take a photograph of this important thumb-print."

Half an hour later Ferguson returned to the house with a big camera in one hand and a flash-light apparatus in the other.

He reentered the library, focused the camera, and deposited the powder in the flash-light holder.

Then he exploded the flash. The latter went off with a loud roar and amid volumes of dense smoke. Two handsome antique Japanese vases fell from a shelf to the floor and smashed into a hundred fragments.

At the same moment old Mr. Bailey, who had been out for a walk and who had just come in, entered the room and stood coughing and gasping in the fumes.

"What the dickens is the matter?" he demanded angrily, when the haze had lifted somewhat and he was able to discern the startled faces of Ferguson and his daughter. "What do you mean, sir, by firing off cannons in my house?"

"It's only a flash-light. Don't be alarmed," replied Ferguson reassuringly. "There's no damage done."

"No damage done!" roared the old man, suddenly spying the fragments of the bric-à-brac on the floor. "Those vases cost me five hundred dollars apiece,

and you've broken them to bits with your tomfoolery. Why are you taking a flash-light here, anyway?"

"Mr. Ferguson is investigating the burglary, father," interposed the girl. "He has discovered an important clue and was taking a photograph of it. Of course the smashing of the vases was an accident. Instead of being angry with him you ought to be grateful."

But the force of this argument did not seem to strike Mr. Bailey. He not only failed to express gratitude to Ferguson, but he ordered the latter out of the house and told him that he didn't want any hare-brained young idiots butting into his affairs.

Ferguson folded up his camera and strode sadly from the premises.

For the time being he was content to bear with meekness the unkind attitude of Isabelle's father. He felt confident that within a few days he would have the burglars in his grasp, and by restoring to Mr. Bailey the money and important papers which had been stolen he would be able to more than compensate the latter for the five-hundred-dollar vases he had accidentally smashed.

The next day he called at the Bailey residence again. He wanted some further information concerning the burglary, and in order to secure it was willing to brave the wrath and abuse of Isabelle's father.

Fortunately for him the latter happened to be out. Isabelle received him graciously, and apologized for her father's conduct of the previous day.

She was eating candies, and handed Ferguson the dainty-looking box.

"Try one of these," she said. "They're awfully good. To-day is the 14th of February, you know, and some kind person sent me these for a valentine."

Ferguson was about to lift one of the tempting looking confections to his mouth, when suddenly his gaze fell upon the tinted paper in which the box had been wrapped.

The paper and the golden cord with which it had been tied lay upon a small table. Ferguson eagerly seized the paper and, holding it close to his eyes uttered an excited exclamation.

He then drew from his pocket a small magnifying-glass and an unmounted photograph and by means of the glass compared the photograph with the wrapping of the candy-box.

The girl watched his actions in great surprise. She guessed that these maneuvers must be another instance of scientific detective methods, but she hadn't the remotest idea of what it all meant.

Ferguson, however, soon enlightened her.

"Miss Bailey," he cried, "who sent you this candy?"

"I don't know," answered the girl with a smile. "As I have told you, it is a valentine. People don't send their names with valentines, you know. Why do you ask? Is anything wrong with the candy?"

Ferguson pointed to an ink smudge on a wrapper.

"Do you see that mark?" he cried excitedly. "There's a thumb-print on that ink stain, and it is identical with the thumb-print on the safe in the library. The man who sent you those candies is the man who broke open your father's safe and stole the money. This is a most important discovery."

"Are you sure?" gasped the girl, turning pale. "It may be only a coincidence. Surely two people can have the same thumb-print."

"No two persons' thumb-prints are ever identical," Ferguson replied. "I have made a study of finger-tip impressions and I know what I'm talking about. As you will see by using this glass, these two impressions are exactly alike, and they are both made by left-hand thumbs. Therefore, I am in a position to state positively that this box of candy was sent to you by the man who committed the robbery.

"My next step will be to find out who this man is. Then my whole case will be complete. You see now, my dear Miss Bailey, how unwise your father is not to place more confidence in me. Now, who do you think could have sent you those candies?"

"That question is difficult to answer. I have many men friends, of course, and any one of them may have seen fit to send me a valentine, although the custom of keeping the day is somewhat dying out."

"Well, I had an idea at the start that the robbery was committed by somebody who knew the inside of this house and the habits of the family pretty thoroughly. There are several pieces of evidence which lend color to the theory," declared Ferguson. "The discovery of this new clue convinces me that one of your men friends committed the burglary. You must help me to find the guilty party, Miss Bailey."

"I will gladly give you all the help I can," responded the girl. "I am afraid, however, that I cannot be of much service."

"Pardon me, but you can," Ferguson replied. "A bright idea has just occurred to me. You must write a letter to every young man you know, thanking each for the box of candies and stating how much you appreciate his kind thoughtfulness. Of course, the man who sent the candy doesn't know anything about the telltale thumb-marks he accidentally imprinted on the wrapper, and naturally he will reply to your letter, acknowledging that it was he who sent you the valentine. Once you have found out who sent you those candies, I will undertake to do the rest."

The girl thought so well of this plan that she immediately sat down to write the letters. The contents of each letter were practically the same.

She thanked the man to whom it was addressed for remembering her on St. Valentine's Day. She assured him that although the valentine was sent anonymously, she knew that it had come from him, and requested him to let her know if she had guessed right.

So extensive was Miss Bailey's circle of men friends that by the time she had finished writing this letter to each and every one of them her hand ached with writer's cramp.

Ferguson took the letters and deposited them in the mail-box on his way to the office. He was highly elated at the success he had met with thus far.

His joy was increased by the pleasing thought that by finding the man whom the thumb-marks fitted he not only would capture the burglar, but he would also increase his own chances of winning the fair Isabelle by disposing of one of his many rivals.

No doubt the fellow was in love with Miss Bailey, or he would not have sent her the candy as a valentine. Such being the case, Ferguson yearned for the arrival of the hour when he could place his hand upon the villain's shoulder and accuse him of robbing Isabelle's father.

Two days later he paid another visit to the Bailey residence, with the intention of ascertaining what answers Isabelle had received to her letters.

The girl informed him that she had received replies from all the men to whom she had written, and greatly to her surprise all of them, except one, claimed the credit of sending her the box of candy and hoped that she had enjoyed it.

The exception was a young physician named Mortimer. His letter candidly admitted that it was not he who had sent her the candy, and he expressed many regrets that the happy idea of sending her a valentine had not occurred to him.

"What awful fibbers men are!" cried Isabelle indignantly. "It stands to reason that only one of those fellows could have sent me the candies, and yet the others are dishonest enough to claim credit for an act of thoughtfulness which they did not perform. I am disgusted with them."

"So am I," replied Ferguson with a frown. "This makes my work so much the harder. I shall have to go to each of them in turn and find out which one of them really did send the package."

"How will you find it out?" inquired Miss Bailey.

"By making each of them give me an impression of his left thumb. The man whose left thumb corresponds with these impressions is the man we want."

Ferguson was a very energetic young man, and by the end of the day he had visited all the men who claimed to have sent that box of candy.

Many of them demurred when he explained that he was collecting finger-imprints, and requested them to give him an impression of their left thumbs. Some of them rudely bade him "go chase himself," others indignantly declared that they would see him in a very warm place before they would do anything of the kind.

But by dint of much persuasion and

the exercise of great tact he finally managed to induce each to press his thumb upon a lump of soft wax he carried with him for that purpose.

Greatly to his disappointment, however, none of the thumb-prints he had secured matched the thumb-marks on Mr. Bailey's safe and on the wrapper of the candy-box.

Ferguson was in despair. His scientific detective methods were not working quite as smoothly as he had anticipated.

A day later, however, he was seized with an idea. He suddenly remembered the letter which the young physician named Mortimer had sent to Miss Bailey.

The letter was written in green ink. The thumb-mark smudge upon the wrapper of the box of candy was also of green ink.

Unfortunately, the address on the candy was typewritten, so that there was no chance of identifying the handwriting; but nevertheless he deemed it extremely likely that Mortimer was the man he wanted.

The others had claimed that they had sent the candy valentine, and their thumb-marks had proved that their claims were false.

Dr. Mortimer had *denied* that he had sent the candy. Was it not logical, therefore, to assume that his claim also was false and that he actually *had* sent the box of confections.

Thus argued Ferguson. Logic, of course, was one of the main features of his scientific methods.

He reasoned that Miss Bailey's letter might have aroused the young physician's suspicions, and that for this reason the latter had been crafty enough to deny sending the valentine.

Having reached this conclusion, Ferguson paid a visit to Dr. Mortimer.

"Good afternoon, doctor," he began genially. "I am making a collection of finger-prints. Would you mind letting me have an impression of your left thumb?"

The physician appeared to be somewhat startled by this request.

He held up his left hand, thereby disclosing the fact that it was wrapped in a bandage.

"Sorry that I can't accommodate you, old man," he said. "The fact is I burnt my left hand with acid this morning, and if I were to remove the bandage the result might be serious."

This decided Ferguson. He was fully convinced now that Dr. Mortimer was the man he wanted. The physician's nervous manner was, of itself, almost enough to convict him.

He hurried down to police headquarters and held a whispered consultation with the chief of the detective bureau.

The latter was inclined to be dubious until Ferguson showed him the photograph of the blood-stain, and the ink marks on the candy wrapper.

Then he became very much interested, and promised to investigate the matter thoroughly.

Highly-elated by his success, Ferguson hurried to the Bailey residence with the intention of informing Miss Bailey and her father that he had run down the burglar.

When he entered the house and was ushered into the reception-room a great surprise awaited him.

"Congratulate me!" cried Isabelle, blushing prettily. "I am engaged to be married to Dr. Mortimer."

"What?" gasped Ferguson, turning pale.

"I say that I am going to marry Dr. Mortimer," repeated the girl. "He proposed to me some days ago, but I could not make up my mind. His candid, manly answer to my letter concerning that candy decided me. I admire honesty in a man more than any other quality. I thank you so much for suggesting to me the plan of writing those letters."

"Miss Bailey," cried Ferguson hoarsely, "this must not be. Dr. Mortimer is not an honest man. It was he who sent you that valentine, and it was he who stole the money from your father's safe."

"What's that?" shouted old Mr. Bailey, who had entered the room in time to hear this startling announcement. "What do you mean by making an assertion like that? Where are your proofs?"

"Here, sir," cried Ferguson excitedly, producing the photograph and the candy wrapper from his pocket. "This is a photograph of a thumb-mark imprinted in a blood-stain found on the door of your safe

and this is the same thumb-mark found on the wrapper of a box of candy sent anonymously to your daughter. I am convinced that both these marks were made by the left thumb of Dr. Mortimer. I have run down your burglar by scientific detective methods, Mr. Bailey."

"Pshaw!" snapped Isabelle's father irritably. "Your foolishness makes me tired, young fellow. That thumb-mark on the safe was made by me. I recollect cutting my hand the other day as I was examining the safe. That thumb-mark on the candy wrapper is also mine, I guess. I happened to be at the front door when the delivery-boy brought the candy and I signed for the package. I remember that in signing the receipt I inked my left thumb with the pen, and I must have made a smudge on the package. So much for your scientific detective methods. If you'll excuse me for telling you so, you are the most empty-headed ass I have ever met."

On the Brink of the Precipice.*

By FRED V. GREENE, Jr.

What it is like to be accused of an awful crime and find oneself helpless in the meshes of the law.

CHAPTER XV.

SWEPT BY THE TIDE.

"A DOCTOR—quickly!" This was the cry that came from one of the jurors. The court-room was now in an uproar. People were standing upon the benches, in their endeavor to find out the cause of the disturbance. As a physician who had been in the room endeavored to push his way through the crowd the judge rose and, bringing down his gavel repeatedly upon his desk without avail, ordered that the court-room be cleared.

The doctor hastily examined the stricken juror, and looking up, briefly announced: "He is dead—heart-failure!"

There was only one thing to do. The judge quickly declared a mistrial and George was once more taken back to his little cot, so weak now that he almost had to be carried the entire distance, moaning: "What does it mean? What does it mean?"

As the first horror of the occurrence wore off, and after the man's body had been removed, the judge, district attorney, and Elston held a hurried consultation, with the result that it was agreed the trial should take place at the earliest possible date.

Elston hastened over to George's cell to impart the information. But the news did not seem to buoy him up in the least—he had ceased to show any interest in the matter.

As Elston rambled on, George burst out: "I don't care to go through it again. I am ready and willing to die. Let them kill me if they wish."

Even Helen's visits failed to rouse him from his apparent stupor. He ate mechanically, slept mechanically, seemed to live mechanically, paying no attention even to the guards, with whom, before the trial, he had struck up quite a friendship.

The day for the new trial slowly approached, and the morning it was to begin George was helped once more over the Bridge of Sighs and the ordeal was on again.

Even greater trouble was encountered this time in filling the jury-box.

The case, which had been almost forgotten during George's stay in the Tombs, had been revived with greater notoriety than ever when the first trial started. And the death of one of the jurymen had given rise to heavy-typed head-lines and columns of startling newspaper accounts.

It required four full court days to fill the jury-box, and once more the trial was

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on in earnest. George sat through it all, huddled down in his chair, his head sunk deep upon his chest, apparently utterly oblivious to all that was going on around him.

The same witnesses were examined as at the first trial, and once more Helen was called to the chair and proceeded to tell of her engagement to Robert Stedman, of the day set for the marriage, and of receiving the word that he had been murdered.

Here she hesitated a moment as she swallowed a sob.

Turning and looking the judge squarely in the face, she demanded: "Do you men—men of learning and discretion—think for a moment that this poor, sickly brother could commit such a dastardly crime as this? If you knew the Stedman brothers as I know them, you would realize it is impossible. Two more devoted brothers never lived, and the love of this poor, unfortunate invalid for his more fortunate brother was the most beautiful thing upon this earth."

Shaking her finger excitedly, she slowly and dramatically continued: "The —man—who—committed—the crime—is not here—in this room. It's an outrage—a blot upon the reputation of this free country—to subject George Stedman to such a frightful ordeal as this!"

She hesitated a moment to catch her breath. Every eye in the room was upon her as she went on to tell of the early life of the brothers, of their struggles and misfortunes, and finally of Robert's great success.

"Why, Rob was George's life—his hope! Everything in George's life centered about Rob. He was his deity—his god—and the true God who is watching over us at this moment, and who will right this terrible injustice, was never more faithfully worshiped than Robert Stedman was by his brother George!"

For a moment not a sound was to be heard in the room. Then Helen, apparently exhausted by the strength of her emotions, fell back in her chair murmuring, "Water."

Then she continued, her voice coming from a throat parched and dry with excitement: "Rob had not an enemy in the world. But there is one person who should be here to-day—James Manville."

She next proceeded to lay bare her own life, telling of his courtship, her refusal to marry Manville, and his parting words.

"At the time," she continued, "I thought it only an idle threat, made in the heat of anger. Perhaps it was only that, but I feel he should be here. What does our detective force consist of, if they cannot locate a man wanted. They have had plenty of time—for some weeks they have been looking for him—or at least they claim they have—but without results. No!" and she raised her voice almost to a scream, "the police must fasten the crime upon some one, so they wind around this poor prisoner a net of circumstantial evidence and try to drag him to the death-chair!"

She buried her face in her hands for a moment. Then sitting bolt upright, she told the story of meeting Manville upon the street, and of the telephone-call she received later.

As she paused for breath the district attorney questioned: "Are you positive the party who called you was this Manville?"

"Yes—I am," she replied firmly.

"Would you swear to it?"

This was a question for which she was hardly prepared, and for a moment did not answer. Then she replied: "No, I think not. I did not see the man."

"Then you admit you may be mistaken in the matter?"

"No, sir. I *know* it was he; yet I could not swear to it."

"Suppose it was, as you say, this Manville and he did commit the murder. How do you account for his getting in the room? There were no fire-escapes at Mr. Stedman's windows, and the door was locked and the key on the inside."

For a moment Helen was at a loss for an answer. Then she gasped in an almost inaudible tone: "I do not know."

"Then, on the very face of it, your contention that the deed was committed by an outsider is absolutely without foundation."

As Helen did not reply, the district attorney continued:

"The handkerchief that was found, heavy with the odor of chloroform, was one of yours?"

"Yes, sir, one I had about four years ago—at the very time I was in Mr. Manville's company a great deal."

"Mr. Manville is not in the question now," he asserted. "Would it not be possible for that same handkerchief to have been in Mr. Stedman's possession?"

"No, sir," Helen replied positively.

"Why not?"

"Because it was at least three years after I bought them that I met—Mr. Stedman. In that time they were either lost or worn out."

"You are positive you did not have one of those handkerchiefs in your possession when you met Mr. Stedman?"

"Yes, sir!" she quickly asserted.

"Would you swear to it?" came the next question, almost before Helen had finished her previous answer.

For a moment she was again nonplused. He repeated the question and she answered faintly, her lips trembling: "I cannot."

"You say some were lost. Is it not possible that they were only mislaid?"

Picking up the handkerchief and examining it carefully, he continued: "This looks like the usual woman's handkerchief. Would it not be possible that it had been mislaid and had, after one or two or three years, found its way back into the laundry and then into service again?"

"Yes—sir," Helen replied, now completely unstrung, hardly knowing in her nervous condition what she was saying.

"Then would it not be possible that Mr. Stedman might have taken it as a treasure, probably at the very beginning of your acquaintance?"

"Yes—sir."

"And would it not be possible that the prisoner, in hunting for something to use, had hit upon this, either intentionally or otherwise?"

"Oh, I don't know, sir!" Helen moaned, bursting into sobs. "You are cruel—heartless. How can you—"

The rest of her words were lost in her grief as she swayed backward and forward, her head buried in her hands.

Elston was nervously twisting in his seat, unable to stem the tide that was rapidly bearing George to the electric-chair.

Suddenly the district attorney remarked in a low voice, "I think that will do," and Helen was excused. Staggering toward her father, she threw herself into his arms, weeping convulsively.

"Mr. Whitlock to the stand!" was the next order, and freeing himself from Helen's grasp, her father walked nervously to the chair.

His testimony was practically the same as his daughter had given, although not as complete. He was quickly excused without a question.

"George Stedman to the stand!" rang out loud and over the room, as two officers helped the prisoner to his feet and led him to the chair.

All eyes were upon him as he took his seat, a picture of terror and despair that excited the pity of all assembled.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH."

GEORGE was quickly put through the preliminary questions, and with the assistance of the court gave a rambling account of the horror for which his life was at stake, after which the district attorney began his cross-examination.

"Your brother was chloroformed to death, was he not?"

"So they—tell me," George murmured.

"But you know he was, do you not?"

"I only know what they tell me," was the almost inaudible reply.

"Then you could not swear that was the cause of his death?"

"No, sir."

"Could you swear that was *not* the cause of his death?"

"No, sir."

"In other words, you are willing to swear you do not know the cause of his death?"

For a moment George seemed on the verge of collapse, then he replied faintly, "Yes, sir."

The lawyer then switched to another tack.

"You are a student of chemicals?"

"I object!" Elston yelled angrily, jumping up from his chair.

"Objection overruled!" the judge declared.

"I repeat the question," the district attorney continued, paying no heed to Elston's interruption. "You are a student of chemicals?"

"In a small way, yes, sir."

George had apparently recovered his self-control, and was now giving his answers in a plainly audible tone.

"And just before leaving your home, you purchased a large bottle of chloroform at—" The district attorney hesitated a moment as he held up a bottle, and reading the label, continued, "Randolph's drug store?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is this the bottle?"

"Yes, sir,"

"It was only half filled when it was found in your room. What became of the rest of it?"

"I had used it to make some experiments."

"What kind of experiments?"

"I was verifying some of Professor Krotel's theories regarding the effect of chloroform upon the human system."

This announcement almost took away the breath of the people in the courtroom, and those in the rear rose to their feet in their endeavor to catch every word.

"Order! Order!" commanded the judge, rapping upon his desk with his gavel.

"I—see," the attorney gasped, himself astonished at this unexpected declaration. "And how were you conducting these experiments?" he added eagerly.

"I object!" Elston yelled. "This is outrageous—"

"Objection overruled!" the judge declared. Then turning to George, he commanded, "Answer the question."

"Upon cats."

The lawyer hesitated a moment, then continued. "Did you bring any chloroform to the city with you?"

"No, sir."

"Would you swear to that?"

"Yes, sir."

"After your brother retired, you did not enter his room until the morning, when you found him dead?"

"No, sir," George replied, his lips twitching nervously.

"Would you swear to it?"

"I—am positive—I did not."

"Answer the question," the judge broke in.

"No—sir. I have often walked in my sleep."

Referring to some papers in his hand, the district attorney continued. "You were your brother's sole heir, according to his will, were you not?"

"Yes—sir."

"And you made the statement, the day of your arrest, that it was your brother's intention to change it the following morning to his fiancée's favor?"

"Yes, sir," George murmured, showing by the nervous twitching of his face that the ordeal was telling upon him.

"Repeat the statement you made that day."

"I object!" Elston broke out vehemently. "This cross-examination is contrary—"

The judge banged upon his desk. "Counsel, I will not stand this interruption. It must stop! Objection overruled!"

Elston realized now the case seemed hopelessly lost, and settled back in his chair, absolutely discouraged. He knew he had not a single piece of evidence to break down the strong case the district attorney had already built up.

George repeated, almost incoherently, the conversation he and Rob had just before they retired on the night of the dinner.

"Then you realized you would not inherit your brother's wealth, should he die after the will was changed?"

"Yes, sir. But I didn't want his money," George moaned.

"And you also knew that his sudden death, *before the changing of the will,* makes you a millionaire, do you not?"

"I do not—want the money!" George wailed. "I can't use it!"

"Yet you will not object to taking it, when the estate is settled?"

"Yes, sir, I will," George quickly announced. "I only want enough to live on—just as I have always done."

Suddenly turning his questions upon a different tack, the district attorney asked: "Do you not think it possible, in view of the great love you bore your brother, and knowing that another was to take the place you had always filled in

his affections, you may have brooded upon it, and in a fit of temporary insanity committed the act?"

"No! No! Not that!" George gasped in horror. "No! Never!"

"Is there not a possibility that, laboring under an intense nervous strain, you killed your brother?"

"I object, judge!" Elston screamed. "This is infamous!"

"Objection overruled!" the judge quickly announced, as he motioned Elston to his seat.

"Oh, no! That couldn't be!" George moaned, as he broke into sobs that shook his entire body.

"Would you swear that you did not kill him?"

"Oh, don't ask me another question," George pleaded, raising his hands in supplication. "Kill me if you wish—I'll swear to nothing."

Saying this, he buried his face in his hands and broke down completely.

Elston sat biting his finger-nails nervously. Helen buried her face on her father's shoulder, sobbing as if her heart would break.

The lawyer for the State remarked, "That is all," and George was lifted bodily and carried back to his chair as the judge announced an adjournment, the hour already being late.

The spectators, seemingly loath to leave the room, were slowly filing out, as George was lifted into the arms of a big officer and carried back once more to his cell, where he was placed tenderly upon the little bed.

Even the genial guard, as he passed the cell later, after hearing the turn the case had taken and noticing that George was still sobbing softly, sniffled suspiciously as he quickly drew his fist across his cheek.

"Be gorry," he exclaimed, "I'd bet the whole pile the old lady has laid away in the bank, that that poor kid is innocent."

CHAPTER XVII.

HOPING AGAINST HOPE.

THE next morning George had to be carried into the court-room, where he crouched down in a little heap in his chair, apparently utterly oblivious to all going on around him.

The judge entered, and when he had taken his seat the wheels of justice were once more put in operation.

The district attorney arose, prepared to sum up for the State. Turning and facing the jury squarely, he began.

"Mr. Foreman and gentlemen of the jury, in summing up the evidence for the prosecution I do not feel I need dwell to any extent upon it. You heard it all, and I do not think a clearer case was ever presented to a jury before. The motive is apparent—the prisoner's own words prove that had his brother not been murdered when he was, George Stedman would be a pauper to-day, instead of the millionaire he now is.

"You have also heard the detectives testify that there were no fire-escapes to these particular windows, and the door was locked and the key on the inside. Surely this proves the murder was committed by *some one in the room.* And the only person in the room was the prisoner, George Stedman."

As he made this last statement, he turned and pointed his finger dramatically toward George.

"That the use of chloroform fits perfectly to the prisoner you have also heard. On his own testimony you have heard of his study of the effects of chloroform, and of the purchase of a large bottle of the drug before leaving for New York. Why was he noting the effects of the drug upon animals?

"The answer, to my mind, is only too clear. The whole case shows premeditation in the most revolting form. There can be no such thing, as has been spoken of, as temporary insanity. It is premeditation alone; and before leaving his home the prisoner secured the bottle of chloroform, after noting its effect in the experiments he was conducting, and brought the balance of the drug to New York with the express idea and purpose of murdering his brother."

The jury seemed spellbound as they absorbed every word of the lawyer's speech. Helen and her father listened, dry-eyed and anxiously. George alone showed no interest in the proceedings; in fact, gave no evidence that he ever knew what was going on around him.

"The defense has dwelt upon the fact of the wonderful love existing between the prisoner and his murdered brother," the district attorney continued. "Very well; but this fact, coupled with the changing of the will, instead of being evidence for the prisoner is directly the opposite. Besides losing the money, he was to lose his brother—another was to take the place in his affections the prisoner had always held. But there was a way out of it—the way just suited to a weak, delicate constitution, such as the prisoner possesses: the administration of chloroform, while Robert Stedman slept peacefully on, totally unaware of the fact that he was slowly and surely passing into the Great Beyond.

"Then the handkerchief. Here again we find the strongest kind of evidence against the prisoner. The only logical assumption is that it was one of the treasures that almost any young man may gather from a girl with whom he was deeply in love.

"Robert Stedman had undoubtedly taken it as a souvenir, perhaps upon the occasion of their first meeting, and had guarded it carefully, expecting to show it to her some day. And in some unknown way the prisoner, in looking for the necessary piece of cloth with which to administer the drug, came upon it carefully laid away in a bureau-drawer.

"Or, it is even possible that his brother may have shown it to the prisoner, recalling his first meeting with the girl he expected so soon would be his wife. And the prisoner, carefully noting its hiding-place, and realizing that the use of it might tend to throw suspicion from him, secured it later, with the results you all know so well.

"The fact that George Stedman was the only person in the room that night has been amply proven—the motive has been proven—the method has been proven. Surely, Mr. Foreman and gentlemen of the jury, we could not ask for more complete evidence of the prisoner's guilt. A clearer, more perfect case was never before presented to a jury."

He hesitated a moment, evidently to allow the full force of his speech to be absorbed. Then he continued:

"I think that is all," and abruptly turning, took his seat again.

Elston arose slowly, the deep lines in his face more pronounced than usual. He showed only too plainly his lack of faith in his case.

For a moment he stood, silent and erect, then glancing nervously over the assemblage, began in a strangely hollow voice: "Your honor, Mr. Foreman and gentlemen of the jury, you have all heard our learned district attorney speak so ably.

"But after he has finished, what does the testimony amount to? Weigh it carefully—consider it carefully, and then arrive at your own conclusions. What do we find? That there is not one ounce—not a scrap—of practical evidence in the whole case—not one convincing fact in all the testimony.

"We find simply a jumble of suppositions—nothing more. And as it has been put to you, the entire evidence that has been dwelt upon so strongly is strictly circumstantial."

Turning and pointing at the prisoner, who apparently saw nothing, heard nothing, or cared for nothing—crouched down in his chair, his eyes staring and vacant, his face as emotionless as if carved in solid wood, Elston continued:

"Do you think, gentlemen of the jury, that this lovable, sweet-dispositioned, unfortunate boy—for he is little more than a youth—burdened with ill health, and a misshapen form, could conceive—let alone commit—such a crime?

"No! A thousand times—NO! As one witness has explained so perfectly, his brother was his god. Do you consider for one moment, a person, no matter how low or depraved, would consider and carry out such a crime against his god? No! Many times no!"

Elston was waxing more and more eloquent as he continued. He was pleading the case of his life, and had thrown his whole soul and body into it. From the earnest attention he was accorded, it was plain to be seen the effects of his speech were being felt.

"Suppose he was a student of chemistry, and has investigated the effects of chloroform," he continued, "does that prove anything? No!

"Suppose he was the only man in the room during the night—does that prove he committed the crime? No! Does

that prove that some other person did not enter in the night, complete his damnable crime, and then make good his escape? No!

"The State has tried to prove the prisoner brought the chloroform to New York with him. But they have been unsuccessful. If he did, what became of the bottle? No one has found it, and it has been proven the prisoner did not leave his room that night. What could he have done with it? Had he hidden it, or thrown it out of the window, either it or the pieces would have been discovered by the detectives who worked and searched for days to find it."

Elston was now fully warmed up to his subject, and hardly waiting to catch his breath, continued:

"Then the prosecution has claimed premeditation, which on the very face of it is ridiculous. And I'll tell you why. How did George Stedman know his brother's will had been changed? He was not conversant with his brother's affairs. Think of this and realize how impossible it is to consider premeditation.

"There is one person who could undoubtedly help us get at the bottom of the whole mystery. His name is Manville, and you heard the testimony regarding him. But, unfortunately, he cannot be found."

Elston hesitated for a moment, as he stared straight ahead. He had cast aside his notes, and was now evidently speaking directly from the heart—a fact that was noted by every one and which had its effect. Raising his voice louder than before, he went on:

"God knows George Stedman is innocent, and I call upon Him to right this terrible injustice. I call upon you, Mr. Foreman, and gentlemen of the jury, to right this injustice."

Then lowering his voice to a stern, even tone, he added, speaking slowly and distinctly: "Could you go home to your families, your minds at rest and at ease, knowing you had convicted a poor unfortunate boy, upon totally circumstantial evidence?

"No! I am certain you could not. You are all gentlemen of discretion and integrity. You *could* not do it.

"No God-fearing, sane man could, and I only wish it were in Robert Stedman's power to rise up in his grave and stop this awful injustice—the attempted branding of a poor unfortunate boy with the murder of his brother—the brother who since early childhood has been his protector, taking the place of father and mother."

Elston seemed overcome with his emotions, and stopped for breath. Then his mouth worked convulsively, but no sounds came forth.

For a moment he stood, all eyes turned upon him. People scarcely breathed, as they awaited the continuance of his speech, when, without another word, he sank into his chair.

"Is that all?" the judge questioned, after waiting for Elston to resume.

In reply, he only nodded his head.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

As Elston fell back in his seat, apparently overcome by the strength and force of his emotional appeal, a number of eyes were wet with tears of pity for the prisoner. Even the judge's voice sounded guttural, as he rose to deliver his final address.

"Mr. Foreman and gentlemen of the jury," he began, "you have pledged yourselves to give an impartial verdict upon the case before us—you have heard the evidence both for and against the prisoner, accused of one of the most dastardly and vicious crimes in the history of them.

"You have many things to consider before arriving at your final verdict. You have heard the counsel for the defense dwell upon the loving disposition, the ill health and the misfortunes of the crippled body of the prisoner. In arriving at your verdict, these are matters not to be considered.

"Then again the evidence, regardless of how strong it may be, is in many instances purely circumstantial. This, too, must be considered in arriving at your verdict. And let me advise you, should there be a reasonable question of doubt, the prisoner should receive the benefit thereof."

With a few concluding remarks, the

judge finished and the jury slowly filed out into the anteroom.

A great sigh of relief went up all over the room, and there was a rustling of skirts and a shuffling of feet as the entire assemblage relapsed from the positions they had held so intently for some time.

But not a person left the room. Suppressed sobs were plainly heard in different portions of it, evidently caused by the earnest plea that had been made for George's life.

Helen had not moved from the position she had assumed during Elston's appeal.

Mr. Whitlock, leaning over and trying to soothe her, murmured: "There, Helen, don't cry. It will soon be over. We'll wait a little while, anyway."

She seemed to pay no heed to her father, but straightened up, and touching Mr. Elston on the arm, exclaimed fervently: "How can we ever thank you? It was grand—noble, and I know he'll soon be free."

"I hope—so," replied the lawyer hesitatingly.

He realized only too well the strong case against him, and what a lack of absolute evidence he had with which to fight it.

Helen turned away, and stared wide-eyed at the door through which the jury had passed. She was absolutely impassive now—every muscle in her face appeared rigid, and her breath came in little short gasps.

George, who had seemed in a complete stupor since being brought into the room, remained crouched down in the same position he had at first assumed, apparently unaware of anything that had taken place.

Helen still stared at the door. Some moments had passed since the jury had left the room, every second seeming to her an hour, every moment a day.

Suddenly she gave a little scream that was plainly heard all over the court, as the door of the jury-room opened. Every one sat up expectantly as the foreman walked quickly out, staring straight ahead of him. Striding over to the judge, he held a whispered conversation.

Turning slowly, he once more passed through the door, closing it behind him.

A little buzz of conversation started, but quickly stopped as the door opened again and the jury filed out and once more took their seats in the box.

The judge turned and addressed them. "Mr. Foreman, and gentlemen of the jury, have you arrived at a verdict?"

Not a sound was to be heard in the entire room; every ear was strained to catch the result so quickly reached. The foreman had already risen, and in a choking voice replied, "The verdict of the jury is—guilty of murder in the first degree!"

For a second, a hush that was appalling fell over the court-room. Then Helen, with a piercing scream, fell fainting into her father's arms.

Announcing a future date for the sentencing of the prisoner, and thanking and discharging the jury, the judge ordered the court-room cleared. George was hastily picked up by two officers and rushed back to his cell.

He seemed absolutely dead to the world and fell heavily upon his little cot, where he lay in a dull stupor. The guard, who tried to rouse him from it, only elicited the response: "I know—and I want to die."

Helen, who had utterly collapsed, was helped by Mr. Elston and her father to a cab and rapidly driven home, where she remained in a comatose condition for days, refusing to be comforted and practically spurning everything in the way of food.

Elston realized the uselessness of attempting to secure another trial. When Mr. Whitlock broached the subject to him, he remarked: "It's absolutely hopeless. I knew from the first we had practically no chance. Even if we could secure a new trial, it would only be with the same inevitable result."

Every day that passed was now like the preceding one to George. He ate little and only moaned, "I want—to die!"

When the day set for the sentence came, he seemed to revive somewhat and walked quite steadily to the court-room.

As they again crossed the Bridge of Sighs, he looked up into the face of one of the burly officers who held his arm and murmured, as a smile broke over his face, the first in many days, "Well, I

know this is my last trip over here, and I am glad."

As the sentence of death was passed upon him a look of joy spread over George's face, but he made no reply. A short while later, he was being rapidly whirled in an express train toward his last home on earth—the death-cell in Sing Sing prison.

CHAPTER XIX.

MUCH IN A NAME.

It was some days later. A batch of prisoners had just been brought by the patrol-wagon to the magistrate's court, where George Stedman had been arraigned when first arrested.

As Officer John Howard came over and took up his regular position in the chair before the pens, he glanced carelessly at the poor wretches, then turned away and lighting a cigar, seemed lost in thought.

For a moment the only sound was the footsteps of one of the prisoners as he walked back and forth across the cement floor of the pen. Then he stopped at the front, raised his hands over his head and grasped the bars firmly.

"Say, boss," he called faintly, seemingly almost afraid of his own voice, "ye couldn't git a san'wich fer a feller, could ye? I got pinched yesterday afternoon and, on de level, I'm hungry. I've only got two bits, but I'll pay it fer one."

The officer looked kindly at him as he replied: "Oh, that's all right; keep your money. I guess I can get something for you."

Going to the foot of the stairs, he called a boy, who soon returned with a paper bag containing two sandwiches. As he handed them through the bars to the prisoner, he questioned: "What are you up for?"

"Gee!" replied the other quickly, his mouth full of bread and meat, "I didn't do nuttin'. Dat's de rub."

Another huge bite prevented further information for a moment, when with a gulp, he continued: "Ye see, I chust walks into Slattery's 'corner' and de barkeep calls out, 'We's got nuttin' fer you mixed-alers.' Ye see, some of de gang had an argyment dere de odder day. Den I toins quick like, an' he ducks, t'inkin' I was goin' to trow somethin'. But I wasn't, and den a fly-cop rushes in, what Slattery, who was in de back room, had called, and he lands me a belt on de coco and down I lays on de floor. Ye kin feel de bunch on de roof of me nut," and he gingerly rubbed the top of his head.

"I wasn't doin' nottin', and I don't see what dey kin send me up fer. But dey pinched Jim de Dope chust de same way last week, and I t'ink dey chased him up fer five days. Do ye remember him?"

"No, I can't say as I do," the officer replied absently. "What is his right name?"

"Jim Manville," was the announcement that made John Howard's eyes almost fall out of his head.

Evidently this prisoner did not read the newspapers.

"Jim—Manville!" the officer gasped, realizing immediately that this was the man for whom the detectives had hunted so eagerly for weeks.

"Sure—don't ye remember him?" questioned the prisoner, noting the strange look on the officer's face.

"Yes—I do," replied Howard slowly, as he recalled now a prisoner some days before who had been arrested on charges preferred by this same Slattery, but who had given the name of Flynn.

"Where is Jim living now?" Howard asked, endeavoring hard to smother his eagerness.

"Down dere in Holy Alley—why dey ever named it dat I'll never know, because it's de toughest alley in de hull of dat part of de town. He's been boardin' dere for some time now wid Pipey Alice. Dey calls her dat 'cause she's always smokin' de pills—opium, ye know."

"Yes, I understand," the officer agreed, making mental note of all the information he was receiving.

"Yes, and dat's de t'ing wot's puttin' Jim out of business. If he keeps at it much longer, dey'll plant him. Some sez—"

A voice from the top of the stairs was calling a name.

"Dat's me!" the prisoner declared,

as he walked to the door and awaited its opening by Howard.

"Wonder if I'll git de same Jimmy got," he murmured, as he started toward the stairs.

CHAPTER XX.

BACK FROM THE BRINK.

FOR some moments Howard's mind worked rapidly, trying to determine the best and surest method of capturing the man he had so unexpectedly located. At first, he decided he would send a messenger to Manville, saying that a friend of his had been arrested and wished to see him at the magistrate's court.

But, on second thought, he realized this would not be advisable. The man might smell a rat, and, further, Howard was not certain just how closely together this crowd hung. The best way was to go right there and get his man.

But even this plan had its disadvantages, and to safely carry it out required diplomacy. Yet, it was the only one to pursue. Calling another attaché of the court, he inquired: "Tom, will you take my place a while? I've got a job to look after. If anybody asks for me, tell them I've gone to serve a warrant."

"Sure, John. What's up now?"

"Nothing much, but I can land a fellow I've been looking for if I go now." He was talking from the locker-room, where he was hastily getting into his civilian's clothes.

"I'll be back before long," he called, hurrying up the steps to the street.

A trolley-car and a three-block walk, and he was at the beginning of Holy Alley.

A tougher, more destitute part of the city does not exist. The street, just wide enough for a horse and wagon, is lined with large tenements, between which, in places, are stuck, as if by mistake, rickety frame houses.

As Howard stood at the entrance of the alley, pondering for a moment, he took in at a glance the entire situation.

The narrow street was littered with garbage and débris, from which arose obnoxious odors. Little children played in the dirt and muck, evidently thoroughly enjoying the conditions.

Howard realized the presence of a well-dressed person in such a neighborhood causes a stir among the inhabitants, many of whom are constantly on the lookout for the police. But he would try his best to land his man.

There were no numbers on the houses, and he walked slowly, trying to find some one to direct him. Just in front were two dirty-faced urchins, busily digging with barrel-staves into a heap of refuse.

As he approached, he inquired: "Sonny, where does Jim the Dope—"

But he did not continue. The children, at the sound of his voice, gave him one startled glance, and without another word ran as fast as their little legs could carry them into the dark hall of one of the large tenements.

As Howard stood a moment gazing after them, a thick-set man of the toughest type came out of the blackness of the hall and, striding toward him, asked: "Well, what ye want aroun' here?"

"I was looking for Jim the Dope," answered Howard, apparently not noticing the aggressive tone of the tough.

"Don't know 'im, and never heard of 'im," the other replied, leering into the officer's face.

"I must find him," Howard declared, still retaining his cool demeanor.

This seemed to anger the tough, who muttered: "Well, he don't live nowheres aroun' here." Then he continued, as he sized up his man: "Say, young feller, you take a tip from me and beat it. Dis ain't no place fer yez to be hangin' aroun'."

Then Howard made a bold play.

"None of that, now," he said in a firm, determined voice, drawing from his pocket his policeman's whistle. "See this? There are a dozen men just waiting for me to blow it, and if you want to keep out of the coop make no noise, but just tell me where Jim lives."

For a moment the tough was so taken aback he seemed at a loss for words. His jaw fell, as he pointed to a rickety frame building sandwiched between two large tenements.

"Over dere," he gasped.

Howard strode over to the house indicated and rapped loudly upon the door.

At first there was no answer, and after waiting a moment he knocked again. The echoes could be heard reverberating through the barren hall, when shuffling footsteps were heard approaching, and the door was opened by a slovenly, dirty woman.

"Why don't ye break the door down wid yer bangin'," she exclaimed. "What ye want, anyway?"

"I want to see Jim."

"Which Jim?" she questioned, and as she noted the caller's good clothes, her eyes narrowed until they seemed like little slits.

"Jim Flynn," Howard replied. "A matter of great importance to him."

"Well, ye can't see 'im," she announced tantalizingly. "He's asleep."

"Then wake him up," commanded Howard firmly. "I must see him."

"Who are ye?" she demanded.

"I am a lawyer, and I want to see him about something that is due him?"

"Is it money?" she gasped.

"Yes," Howard answered, seeing that she was now greatly interested.

"Gee! Den Jim didn't lie to me. He allus said he come from de big-bugs, and has some cash comin' to him some day."

Turning quickly, she rushed up the rickety stairs, which creaked and groaned beneath her weight, calling, "Jim! Jim!"

A moment later Manville appeared at the head of the flight and painfully descended, step by step.

As he neared the bottom a fit of coughing came on, and he sank to the stairs until it was over. Howard had a good chance to note every detail—the pale face—the sunken cheeks—the wild eyes—the ragged clothes and the dirt that covered him.

As Manville struggled to his feet again, he murmured: "Guess you're too late. I'm nearly gone."

"Oh, no, you're not," Howard replied cheerfully. "Come with me to the office, Mr. Manville."

"Say, Mr.— What's yer name?"

"Howard," the other prompted.

"How'd Mr. Clarkin find out I was livin' here under the name of Flynn?"

"Can't say. He sent me to get you—that's all I know. Come ahead."

"Wait till I get me hat." Looking up, he called: "Hey, Alice! Throw down me dip, will yer?"

As it fell at his feet, he added: "I'll be right back. Maybe we'll hev a blow-out."

Howard helped him down the steps, and in reply to Manville's question, "How much money is there for me?" replied: "I don't know anything about it."

Manville told him all about the fortune he had expected to inherit some day, when his younger brother became of age. He even went on to tell how, up to four years ago, he had been a society man.

"But she threw me down, and I've been goin' down ever since," he added.

A walk of a few blocks, and they were before the green lights of a police-station. Howard's grasp of the man's arm tightened as he led him up the steps of the building.

"Where—ye—" Manville gasped as he realized they were entering the station-house.

"I'm taking you where you belong, Jim Manville," Howard broke in, "for the murder of Robert Stedman."

Upon being taken into the captain's room, Manville murmured, "De jig is up," and proceeded to confess everything.

He had sneaked in through the servant's entrance of the hotel during the night of Rob's dinner, about which he had read in the papers, first getting a friend of his to learn the number of Stedman's suite.

He entered the apartment with a skeleton key, not through the regular door, but through the one which gave directly into the bedroom George had used. This had only a spring lock upon it, and after entering he secreted himself behind a bookcase to await the coming of his victim. When the detectives were looking for clues, this door was not considered.

After completing his crime, using a handkerchief Helen had dropped some years before, and which he always treasured, he went out through the same door by which he had entered, and the hour being late, he met no one, and was soon upon the street again.

"I realized what I am now, and I

guess—mebbe I blamed him for it," he concluded.

The following morning the papers were full of the capture of the murderer of the young millionaire, Robert Stedman, and where, only a few days before, they had not been able to speak harshly enough of George, they now spoke of him as the poor, unfortunate Mr. Stedman.

They also went deeply into the conviction of murder upon circumstantial evidence, declaring that such was a blot upon the justice of the country.

But the State was not forced to administer the death penalty to Jim Manville. From the first, he gradually declined; and while in the Tombs awaiting trial, in a fit of coughing he had a hemorrhage, and died of strangulation before aid could be summoned. His system, undermined by the use of drugs and narcotics, was unable to stand the sudden breaking off of their use and the close confinement.

A few days after George's honorable release from custody—and while he was visiting the Whitlock home—he received word to appear at Rob's lawyers for the settling of the estate.

He and Helen talked the matter over. George did not want so much money—he only wanted enough to live quietly at Highwood for the rest of his days—and she refused to accept any.

"George, I have it!" she suddenly exclaimed. "Let's found a home for crippled children, to be called the Robert Stedman Home."

"Just the thing!" he agreed eagerly.

And to-day, one of the greatest charities of the East is the home named after the young man so brutally murdered upon the eve of his wedding-day.

THE END.

THE TRAMP ON THE CAR ROOF.

By HOWARD DWIGHT SMILEY.

The remarkable thing that happened to a hobo who had the sense to flatten himself out of sight.

AS the Overland Limited came thundering into the station at Delta, Denver Slim flattened himself against the roof of the freight-car that stood on the siding, fearful lest the headlight of the engine should betray his position to those on the station platform.

The passenger came to a standstill with the rear coach just opposite the freight-car, and Slim rose cautiously, waiting until the train should pull out again.

There was some delay. The engine took water, and the conductor remained an unwonted period in the depot; but he finally emerged, waved to the engineer, and the train drew slowly out, whereupon Slim hopped nimbly on to the rear coach and threw himself down flat until the lights of the station were passed. He then drew himself up and sat on the middle of the roof, with a foot on either side of the ventilator, drew a stubby pipe from his pocket and began filling it, chuckling grimly the while.

"Dem cats wot's ridin' de blind'll git ditched before dey've got ten miles," he ruminated. "I'm good up here till daylight, anyway."

The "cats" to whom he had reference were six men, ostensibly hoboes, that he had seen lurking near the water-tank some time before the train arrived. Anticipating that they were trying to beat the same train he intended taking, and that they would ride the "blind," as the front platform of the baggage-coach is called, and surmising that they would be discovered by the train-crew and ordered off, Slim had chosen the top of the car as the safer and more inconspicuous place.

He finished filling his pipe, and was about to strike a match, when he happened to look ahead. What he saw in the dim light caused him suddenly to throw himself forward and flatten against the car roof again.

Slowly making their way over the forward coaches were the forms of several

men. They were creeping along uncertainly on their hands and knees. This at once reassured Slim that they were not the train-crew, who through long practise would have run boldly over the lurching cars.

As they reached the rear end of the car ahead of the one occupied by Slim, they stopped, and Slim counted them; there were six.

"Dey're de cats," he whispered to himself. "Wot're dey doin' up here, I wonder?"

He was obliged to leave the question to conjecture, as the men settled themselves on the roof of the car ahead with the evident intention of remaining there. Fearing lest some of the crew had seen them board the train, Slim swore softly at their intrusion, which would probably result in his being discovered and put off at the next station.

Welds Junction, the next stopping-point, however, was many miles ahead, and Slim had the conciliation of knowing that he couldn't "git ditched" until they reached there unless the train-crew should stop the train, which wasn't likely.

They were on an up-grade now, as Slim could tell by the labored puffing of the engine; the speed had perceptibly slackened, too. Ahead of them the red rim of the moon slowly lifted above the horizon, and Slim grumbled again as he thought of how it would soon be light enough to distinguish objects on the car roof from below, which would make their discovery inevitable.

For upward of an hour the train laboriously grunted its way up the steep grade, while Slim hugged the roof of the car and watched the men ahead, who remained motionless. Several times he had been seized with the impulse to go forward and advise them to return to the blind, as the safer and least likely to be discovered place on which to ride; or to pass them and ride the blind himself.

But the professional hobo's dislike and contempt for the "gay cat," or amateur tramp, in which class Slim had put the six men, as well as an impelling instinct to keep his own presence on the car roof from their knowledge, caused him to smother the impulse.

Suddenly there was a movement among the men forward. At first Slim thought they had discovered him and were coming back to where he lay. This was not the case, however, for one by one they dropped down between the cars to the platforms below, while Slim looked on in dismayed consternation.

"Wot're doin' dat fer?" he muttered angrily. "Dey've queered de hull game fer fair now."

A moment later he started up with an exclamation of fear. The coach on which he was riding began to slacken speed, while those ahead pulled away, leaving a gradually widening breach, and a moment later they disappeared over the top of the grade, leaving his coach alone on the track.

Gradually the car slowed up until it came to a standstill, and then it reversed the forward motion and started rolling slowly down the grade.

II.

When the Overland Limited pulled into Welds Junction, the brakeman made a discovery that threw the entire train-crew into a cold sweat. The private coach, carrying the president of the road and his family, which had been attached to the rear of the train, was missing.

The first thought of the crew was that the car had broken loose from the rest of the train while they were climbing the grade. An examination of the coupler showed it to be open but unbroken, while the air-brake attachment had been torn in two.

"It's blame curious that that coupler should open up like that," said the conductor. "But the car's gone, and we've got to find it quick. Wire Delta, Jenkins. If the car is on the grade it will roll back that far, and ought to reach there about now. It may have stopped somewhere between here and the top of the grade."

Jenkins, the operator, hurried into the station and got Delta on the wire. The reply received was disconcerting. It was:

> Coach has not shown up here. Cannon-ball freight, following Overland, left for Welds Junction about twenty minutes ago.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the conductor, as the vision of that private coach

tearing down the grade, gaining momentum with every rod, and the freight coming from the other direction, flashed through his mind. "If that car didn't stop this side of the grade it is probably smashed to everlasting flinders right now! Put this train on the side track, quick, and we'll run back with the engine as far as the top of the grade."

"Hadn't we better wire the division superintendent for orders?" asked Jenkins.

"We haven't time, man!" jerked out the conductor. "This is an emergency, and we can't wait for orders. Side-track that train, quick!" he ordered.

Three minutes later the Overland's engine, with the train-crew aboard, was tearing back over the line toward Delta. The moon had risen now so there was light enough to see far ahead of the backing locomotive, and the conductor and brakemen, perched on the rocking tender, peered eagerly ahead, urging the engineer to higher speed as no coach appeared.

When they finally reached the top of the grade and the engine had come to a standstill, the conductor was almost in tears.

"She's gone!" he groaned. "She's met that freight by this time, and lays back there in the ditch, somewhere, smashed to atoms, and the occupants killed. The freight-crew are probably dead, too, unless they saw the car in time and jumped."

"Hadn't we better run on and find 'em?" suggested the engineer.

"No use," answered the conductor. "We couldn't be of any use there, and we can't hold the Overland any longer, anyway. The only thing to do is to return to Welds Junction and notify the division superintendent."

When they reached Welds Junction they found that the operator had already telegraphed a report to the superintendent, who was holding the wire until the return of the Overland's engine. As soon as the operator had apprised him of the result of the engine's run, the superintendent wired for the Overland to proceed on its way, saying he would start a wrecking-crew to the scene at once, and it would be due in Welds Junction in about an hour.

The Overland continued its journey, leaving the operator alone at his post. Thirty minutes later he was startled to hear a long-drawn whistle from the direction of Delta, and, rushing out on the platform, he saw the headlight of a locomotive approaching from that direction. To his utter amazement, it proved to be the cannon-ball freight.

"How on earth did you get past that car?" he demanded of the engineer.

"What car?" asked the engineer, in mild surprise.

When the operator explained he was still more amazed.

"Track's been clear all the way between here and Delta," he declared. "If we passed the coach it must 'a' been in the ditch alongside the road."

III.

WHEN the coach parted from the rest of the train and started back down the grade, Slim's first impulse had been to gain the platform and drop off the car before it got under speed.

He crawled to the end of the roof and peered over. What he saw made him change his mind about descending.

On the platform, facing the open door of the car, stood two of the cats, each with a cocked .45 Colt revolver in his hand. Slim promptly retreated.

"It's a hold-up," he told himself. "I wisht I was somew'ere else."

He looked wildly around for some means of escape, and seriously contemplated dropping from the side of the car to the ground; but the coach had been steadily gaining momentum until it was now rolling along at a lively clip, and a drop under such circumstances might mean death or permanent injury. So he flattened himself on the car roof once more and awaited developments.

After about fifteen minutes, during which time the coach continued to gain speed until it was tearing down the grade at a rate that caused even Slim's hair to raise a little, it began to slow up. A short distance farther on it came to a standstill.

Slim surmised that the hand-brakes had been applied, as they had by no means reached the bottom of the grade.

Peering ahead, he saw two men run-

ning forward in the moonlight. They paused at what looked to Slim to be a switch, and after fumbling at it for several minutes they signaled to those on the car to come on.

Slim heard the rattle of the brakes as they were released, and the car started slowly forward again. He felt the wheels bump over a switch, and they rolled away to the right.

There was a perceptible change in the running of the car; the track seemed to be more uneven and rough. Peering ahead, Slim noticed that the rails were dull-colored and did not reflect the moonlight as the ones on the other line had; this he attributed to the fact that they were rusty.

He at once came to the conclusion, and correctly, that they were on an old and unused spur of the railroad.

They had hardly got started on this spur when Slim heard a long-drawn whistle coming from the direction of Delta, and a moment later he could hear the heavy puffing of a locomotive climbing the grade.

"Gee!" he muttered. "It's a lucky t'ing we got off'n de main line when we did."

The car continued to roll down-grade, winding around hills and through gullies, the scenery growing wilder and wilder as they proceeded, for several miles. Then they again came to a standstill.

Slim looked around him. A number of dark, dilapidated buildings showed in the moonlight, but there was no evidence of their being occupied. Once more he crawled to the end of the car, hoping to be able to drop down and escape.

Not that he had any fear of being robbed—he had nothing to be robbed of, but he did not know what the bandits might do to him if they discovered his presence, and he was not taking any chances.

He peered over the end of the coach, but promptly drew back again. The whole six men were congregated there, and the occupants of the car were filing out of the door.

As the party left the car Slim was able to see them. The president, his wife and daughter, and a white-eyed colored porter, were backed up against a shed, and several of the men, who had masks pulled over their faces, confronted them with revolvers in their hands.

"Now, Mr. President," began one of the men, who appeared to be the ringleader. "we've got you right where we want you. So long as you don't make any fuss, no harm will come to you or your family, but the minute you begin any monkey work there's going to be trouble. You've probably sized up the situation by now, haven't you?"

"I can see that we have been kidnaped; but to what purpose?" replied the president.

"Money," answered the bandit shortly. "We're going to perform a regular old-fashioned stunt and hold you and your family for ransom."

The president laughed.

"My friend," said he, "don't you know that the days are past when a game like that can be worked successfully? The loss of that car has doubtless been discovered by now, and proper measures for finding it are being taken. It won't be twenty-four hours before they trace it here and we are rescued."

"Do you know where you are?" demanded the bandit.

"If my guess is correct, we are at the old El Patra mine, which has been deserted for ten years," answered the president.

"Correct you are," returned the bandit. "There hasn't been a train over this spur in that time, either, and it'll be some while before they look down here for you. Anyway, we don't intend that they discover the car here."

He took the president's arm and led him to a spot a short distance away from the shed. Looking down, the president discovered that he was standing on the brink of an old mine shaft.

"See that hole?" inquired the bandit. "It's only about half a mile deep and half full of water. Now, don't think we didn't figure this thing all out before we undertook it; we knew you were coming over the line to-night, and had the whole deal mapped out from the start.

"That car will be found in a very short time, but not so as to leave any clue as to where it has been. Of course, searching parties may reach these diggings before the twenty-four hours are

up, but if they do they won't find any one here; we looked out for that, too.

"Now, you are to write a letter, addressed to the general superintendent of the road, instructing him to raise twenty thousand dollars in cash within ten hours and bring it to a certain point set down in the letter, in person and alone. He will be met by four of the gang, including myself, and after the money is delivered he will accompany us to a point in the hills, near here, you and your family will be released and led to him, and all of you permitted to find your way out of the wilderness.

"In case the money is not forthcoming at the time set, we will at once return here, and you and your family will be dropped down this hole, properly ballasted so you won't be liable to attract attention, and we will proceed to jump the country. In case we do not return within a set period, my men, who will remain with you, will know that we have been captured by the superintendent—if he takes a notion to try any such stunt—and will proceed to drop you down the hole, anyway. So you see, we have you coming and going. Now, make up your mind quick. Will you write the letter?"

The president gazed down into the dark chasm before him. He was not a coward, but he knew only too well that the bandits could carry out their threat successfully and probably never be detected, and he instinctively felt that they would not hesitate to follow out their plan in case he refused.

He had his family to consider, and the chances of rescue were decidedly against him.

"Yes," he answered slowly, "I will write the letter. There is writing material in the car."

The bandit led him into the coach, after giving orders to two of the men in an undertone. These two walked toward another building, from which they shortly returned leading four horses, saddled and bridled.

When the leader of the gang and his victim emerged from the car, the former turned the president over to two of the men, who led him and his family into one of the buildings, while the leader and the rest of the bandits turned to the horses.

Taking lariats from the saddle-horns, they made them fast to the front of the car, and then, mounting the horses, they rode away, slowly towing the car after them.

On top of the coach Slim, who had been a terrified witness of these proceedings, heard the entire conversation with trembling. He could guess now what his fate would be if he were discovered.

The trip back to the switch consumed some time and considerable tugging on the part of the horses, but it was finally accomplished and the car transferred on to the main track again. The lariats were then removed and the car released, while the bandits, after carefully setting the switch in the condition in which they had originally found it, rode away in a direction opposite from that whence they had come.

The coach moved off down the grade, gaining momentum until it was bounding along at a speed that threatened to derail it. Slim, who knew that he was at last alone, quickly descended to the rear platform and applied the hand-brakes, which slowed the car down to a safe speed.

In this manner, a few minutes later, he rolled into the Delta station and brought the coach to a standstill.

IV.

SLIM quickly told his story to the operator, and the two entered the car.

Conspicuously pinned to a curtain, they found the letter. It was addressed to the general superintendent, to be opened by finder and contents wired addressee.

A minute later the operator was at his instrument, telegraphing the contents of the letter to the division superintendent. The directions to the general superintendent were that he deliver the money before ten o'clock next morning, at Colman's Crossroads, an obscure point fully ten miles from the El Patra mine.

In his own handwriting the president had set down the urgency of carrying out these instructions to the letter, and that failure to do so probably meant certain death to himself and family. The operator concluded his report by stating that he had a man who could lead a rescuing party to where the president and family were being held.

The division superintendent replied that the wrecking crew, numbering ten men, were at Welds Junction, and would be armed and sent to Delta on an engine, where they would pick up Slim and then proceed to the mine. In the meantime another party would be despatched to capture the gang of bandits at the cross-roads.

It was just beginning to grow light in the east when the wrecking crew, led by Slim, crept silently up to the building that sheltered the captives and their watchers. Not anticipating a surprise, the latter were sleeping, and were easily overpowered.

The whole party were taken back to Delta on the engine, which had brought the rescuing party to within a mile of the mine. Later in the day word was received that the rest of the gang had been captured at the cross-roads.

That afternoon, as the president's coach pulled out of Delta attached to the rear of another passenger-train, there sat on the observation-platform a ragged hobo, with his feet cocked up on the guard-rail and a fat black cigar between his teeth. On his head rested the president's high silk hat, replacing the one Slim had lost.

In his vest pocket reposed the president's heavy gold watch, the massive chain hanging conspicuously outside, and in his trousers pocket, grasped securely by his left fist, was a substantial roll of yellowbacks. All were gifts of the president.

"Gee!" he ruminated, as he fondled the chain and the roll. "Gee! Dis beats ridin' de blind or any udder place, don't it? An' I'm good fer a free ride to de end o' de line, too. Gee! It's great to be a hero, ain't it?"

THE PRICE OF SILENCE.*

By EDGAR FRANKLIN,

Author of "The Peril of the Paladin," "In Savage Splendor," "The Chase of the Concession," etc.

A Western tale of an awful alternative presented to a man who has reached the last extremity of despair.

CHAPTER XII.

A BIG SURPRISE.

"YOU'VE got to keep up a Harveyized steel front *this* time," Wendel informed Beekman earnestly. "This old Dennison person is a regular fiend, you know. I went to see him in New York, two months or so ago—tried to get what we'd lost out of him, at least. Why, he simply raved! He didn't even wait for *us* to make a claim against him—he started suit to invalidate the title we held and—say, hurry up, Beekman! Will that hat go on over the bandage?"

Down-stairs, there were many objections.

Dr. Wilbur, for one, stated that it was positively dangerous for a man in Beekman's condition to go out in the sun. Beekman replied, thankfully, persistently, patiently, that he was going to travel in a covered carriage.

He announced that he would return by noon for any formalities that might be necessary, and to settle up whatever was to be settled. Meanwhile, he could be found, if necessary, in the court-house.

The ride was short enough.

The clock struck half past nine as they drew up before the home of justice. Wendel shook his head.

"Just about one second to spare!" he observed. "Kinsel reckoned on getting you to the stand the very first thing, Beekman. The other side thinks you've departed for good, and Kinsel wants to get all the effect that is possible on the jury by jamming you into prominence again."

"Yes."

"He's going to swear you, first," the

manipulator hurried on, as they reached the stairs. "Then he's going to read Brown's deposition, to the effect that his testimony was a lie. After that, he's going to ask you a few questions and, as soon as Bentick begins to kick, call you out of the chair again and put in the two boys I've brought from Chicago, to identify you positively, and—"

His voice ceased. They were at the door, and a policeman, recognizing them, opened it. Wendel gripped his companion's arm.

"We'll walk right in quick, and go inside the rail. Kinsel'll spot you and call you and—come on!"

Side by side, they hurried down the aisle. Heads were turned curiously, and more than one gasp became audible.

Wendel grinned covertly. The missing witness—the man whom the newspapers had been roasting for a week—had returned. And *he* had managed it. *He* had brought back the much-mooted Mr. Rogers, even if that individual did have a bandage about his head! He—

"Pst! That's Dennison," he whispered suddenly, as they stepped inside the enclosure before the bench. "The old cuss with the white whiskers and—what the devil's the matter with *you?*"

Wendel stood stock-still.

Beekman advanced a pace—and halted. His lips were working queerly; he stared with the most astounding intentness at the big-chested, handsome old man beside Bentick.

His eyes glazed over suddenly, and one or two of those near at hand were astounded at the sight of two very real tears that trickled down his cheeks.

And then—as the judge droned some cut-and-dried legal matter in Mr. Kinsel's direction—the order of the court was rudely broken, for the old man with the white whiskers had leaped to his feet and was staring at Beekman. And his voice burst out suddenly with:

"Will!"

The cowboy gulped hard. The old man was coming uncertainly toward him now; Beekman's arms stretched toward him in an oddly childlike fashion.

"What—what is it, *father?*" he mumbled.

His honor just then had ceased speaking.

Beekman's words, as a consequence, almost rang out in that quiet space behind the rail.

The effect was almost electrical.

The overwhelming dignity of Venner County forgotten for the moment, the judge half rose from his bench and stared at the remarkable Mr. Laurence Rogers, about whom there had been so much controversy.

Bentick fairly leaped to his feet, his face illumined with an amazed, joyous light. His associates followed his example unceremoniously and stared at the cowboy.

And there were others who seemed to take a deep interest in the little scene.

Kinsel and Cox both gasped aloud and stared, open-eyed, at Beekman. They turned suddenly to Wendel, as well, and on the face of the chief lawyer for the defense there was an expression something less than pleasant.

"If you will be kind enough to tell me—" he began.

Wendel was limp in his chair.

He pulled himself together in a moment. He grinned in a sickly, nearly imbecile, fashion.

"The—blamed fool's taken to drink again!" he whispered. "He—he gets these spells every once in a while, and there's no doing anything with him, or—"

Kinsel's sharp face was growing more and more purple.

"Dennison's not drunk, Mr. Wendel," he observed caustically.

"No, he isn't, but—"

"And this man you've been calling Rogers hasn't any of the earmarks, either," Kinsel pursued. "He looks about as sober as a man need look. What *is* this, Mr. Wendel?"

"D'ye suppose I can tell what it is?" Wendel asked, almost dazedly. "The man's gone off his head with liquor, and—"

His chief lawyer turned silently, and Wendel was privileged to study the back of his well-fitting coat.

For across the enclosure, things were happening which interested Kinsel most deeply.

Rigid, Beekman had waited for the older man's approach, while the crowd near by held its breath.

Dennison had come to his side, trembling, astounded. And then—all in a second—the cowboy seemed to crumple into an almost helpless mass. His arms went round Dennison. Dennison's own arms were enfolded about the big form; and a thick voice, from somewhere in the neighborhood of Mr. Dennison's left lapel, sobbed:

"Dad! I'm—I'm so deuced glad to be back on—on your shoulder that—that—"

The court blew its nose.

Bentick sat back with a grin that threatened to loosen his ears. His associate-counsel fell to chuckling.

Kinsel whirled suddenly on Mr. Wendel.

"It's pretty evident that this man you've brought as Mr. Rogers, of Chicago, is Dennison's missing son!" he observed, almost gaspingly, as his deep color deepened. "Wr. Wendel, I—"

"Hold on!" Wendel's voice came weakly. "There's a mistake here, Kinsel! There's—"

"You'll pardon my saying it, but I believe the mistake is all on your side!" Kinsel snapped. "You've evidently been able to play me for an idiot, Mr. Wendel. It's one of the first times it has been accomplished successfully, and it will be the last, I can assure you. But—"

Bentick was on his feet again. Kinsel straightened up, with what dignity was left to him.

"Your honor!" the former crowed at the top of his lungs.

The judge turned suddenly from the spectacle of father and son and faced him.

"If your honor will forgive it, I believe that I must ask another setting-over of this trial, which we seem to have been adjourning weekly for several months," Bentick pursued. "Circumstances have arisen which—"

"Your honor!" Kinsel began.

"Mr. Kinsel! I think—" came from the bench.

Mr. Kinsel took the liberty of breaking in.

"Your honor!" he roared with such fury that Bentick almost staggered. "If you will consent to my making a statement, I wish to say that I, and all the counsel associated with me, desire to sever our connection with this case herewith, and despite everything that may be urged against such a course."

A subdued murmur ran about the court-room. In Elderford, one reads about such scenes occasionally in the New York and the Chicago papers. But to have counsel as eminent as Mr. Kinsel rise and say—

Kinsel was talking again:

"I believe that I—and the gentleman with me—have been deceived throughout this case, your honor. There are things which I cannot pretend to understand—matters which seem radically to alter every aspect of this case. I ask your honor to believe that we had every reason to believe in the identity of this—Mr. Rogers, of Chicago."

"I have no doubt of that, Mr. Kinsel."

"And I would also ask that Mr. Wendel—"

Bentick was waving his hands again, and laughing almost with the joyous abandon of a boy.

"You hold on, Kinsel!" he called across the enclosure with cheerful informality. "I've got something to ask, myself!"

Kinsel bowed. The judge frowned slightly, opened his lips—and closed them again.

"I believe that it is with the consent of the opposing counsel," Bentick continued, "that I request, your honor, that all parties immediately concerned—counsel for both sides, Mr. Dennison, Mr.—er—" he grinned broadly—"Mr. Rogers, of Chicago, and all the rest, be assembled privately in your honor's chambers, for the purpose of discussing the slightly unusual happenings, and determining upon just the bearing they may have upon this case."

He faced Wendel suddenly, sitting upon the edge of his chair and with glance shifting from door to window.

"And in that invitation," said Bentick, "I *don't* want to exclude Mr. John Wendel."

A little smile hovered over the judge's lips.

"I believe that there are no other cases waiting disposition this morning, Mr. Bentick," he said. "It—it may be

rather irregular, but if Mr. Kinsel concurs in the request, I will adjourn court for one hour."

"Well, Mr. Kinsel concurs heartily, your honor!" that gentleman said tartly. "In fact, Mr. Kinsel is fully as eager for such a session as is the counsel for the prosecution."

The court sitting was ended for the time.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOOSE ENDS GATHERED.

One by one, propelled by the three court officers, the reluctant spectators filed out, chattering breathlessly. Mr. Bentick came close to Wendel and lingered almost lovingly by his side—and with strong fingers itching to grip him by the scruff of the neck at the first sign of an attempt to escape.

Bentick was a "big" lawyer, prosperous and capable and fully able to handle the average man; but Wendel seemed to have given him more trouble to the square inch than any man of recent years. He waited as Dennison and the supposed Beekman filed, arm in arm, through the narrow door. He allowed his own associates to precede him. He watched with heart-whole satisfaction as Kinsel and Cox and the rest of them turned their backs on Wendel and walked through the door.

And he gave Wendel a gentle push, and that small, dapper, wide-awake person arose and fairly stumbled after them, with Bentick behind, keen and watchful and entirely pleased.

The door closed after them. They found seats, Beekman and Dennison side by side, and arm in arm still. Mr. Bentick took the liberty of turning the key in the door and depositing it upon the little desk in the corner of the room behind which the embodiment of justice took his seat.

He thrust his hands in his pockets and strolled cheerfully to a chair—and Kinsel rose swiftly.

"Your honor!" he cried, angrily. "I don't know that we have determined upon the exact nature of this conference, or the method of procedure which we are to adopt; but in the very first place, I want to ask that it be understood that, despite a good many apparent disadvantages in the way of unsupported evidence, Mr. Cox and Wendel and I and the other gentlemen associated with us undertook the handling of this case because—mainly, at least—of the very large retainer-fees paid by Mr. Wendel in person. And I want it also understood that we are now prepared to drop the case and adjudicate matters with Mr. Wendel in whatever way may prove most satisfactory."

He sat down. Bentick's grin grew to a laugh of such loudness and such happiness that the court stared. The complainant's chief lawyer had been studying Wendel for the past forty seconds.

He bowed to the judge with exaggerated ceremony.

"If your honor pleases," he said, "I have only one request to make. On both sides, we have used large sums of money upon a case of exceedingly doubtful merit, as concerns the defense. I believe that the matter can be settled for all time by Mr. Wendel making a frank, full, free statement of the actual facts. Will you ask him to do that?"

His sharp little eyes settled upon Wendel once more. The man who had found the drunken cowboy and impressed him into service shuddered frankly for an instant as they watched him.

And then, rather to the cowboy's concealed admiration, a certain latent sporting instinct seemed to rise within him. His expression hardened; he seemed to be steeling himself for what was coming.

He rose and folded his hands behind his back—and the assemblage waited rather tensely.

Wendel's tongue licked his lips for an instant—and he was ready.

"Gentlemen," he said, almost monotonously, "I should hesitate to say that I have lived a life of crime. The chief reason for that is that I haven't. I have spent a good many years in mining matters, and I have learned a few things.

"When this man Frand approached me in this particular matter, I was more than merely hard up. I was almost impoverished—and I've got a wife and two kids back in Harlem. He had bought an option on the Red Rock Mine, and he had a swell scheme, according to his

own lights, for acquiring the title without paying more than a hundred thousand dollars, or so, for it. The rest of it was to be paid in endorsed notes—and in the course of time, Peter Hanford was going to find out that the endorsements were forged."

He looked about the gathering, and there was something in the gaze which suggested a hunted animal. Curiously, the only reflection of sympathy which he found was in the eyes of the cowboy. It was not exactly enthusiastic sympathy, but it seemed to brace Wendel.

"There is no need of going into the details of that scheme now," Wendel went on. "It looked like money, and—oh, I went into it. That's the long and the short of it. Then Frand took sick, and was laid up for a matter of three weeks, out of his head most of the time. When he came around so that we could talk over matters, the option he had purchased had expired.

"Apparently, the whole thing was off. Just at that time, however, Mr. Dennison, here, bought the mine outright and organized the Red Rock Mining Company. Frand was flush at the time, and he concluded that we could make a tidy little sum out of what we held. He manufactured the deed to the property, and, with the option to back it up, we began work on Mr. Dennison.

"He wouldn't buy our claim to the mine." Wendel's eyes declined to rest on the New York man. "Therefore, he brought suit. Frand happened to have plenty of money, and we decided to try and establish our claim. We—well, we did it, and—and we fell down hard," he concluded, hopelessly.

Bentick smiled pleasantly.

"You did that, Mr. Wendel," he observed. "You also succeeded in fooling some of the most astute counsel in the country. For a while, I was almost inclined to believe you had a case, myself." He laughed a little. "And the Mr. Laurence Rogers business, Mr. Wendel?"

"Laurence Rogers is dead and buried, forty miles from here. Mr.—Beekman, here, helped bury him," Wendel observed sourly.

Rather abruptly, the cowboy arose.

"Not Beekman, Wendel," he said. "My name happens to be William Dennison."

"I had almost guessed it, after that touching scene outside there."

"And what's more, I want to talk to you privately for a minute or two," the late cowboy pursued.

Wendel glanced questioningly toward judge and assembled counsel. Apparently, in the unconventional order of things just then, there was no objection. In some astonishment, the abbreviated sinner walked toward the big, dark man.

The latter led him across the room and to the window. There, while the lawyers chatted and the old man looked toward them, they talked for a minute.

"Wendel," said the cowboy in a rather new tone, "you have tried your level best to send my soul to perdition. You've also tried—although I didn't know it at the time—to swindle my father out of several million dollars. You have also lied to me and made me get up on the stand and perjure myself, although I believe now I'm not going to be prosecuted for it. What shall I do with you?"

"What shall you—what?" Wendel stared at him for an instant. "What the devil have you got to do with it, anyway?"

The cowboy chuckled.

"But you've done two other things for me," the other went on, almost in a whisper. "You've cured me of the booze business, and you've brought me back to the best father that ever walked in shoes—the father of the home I left three years ago, one awful night when I got thoroughly drunk and—and—well, had a fight with him. He's been looking for me for more than a year, it seems, and I—I was never going back, but—"

The cowboy's voice broke suddenly, with a queer little gasp that drew the attention of more than one in the large room. Beekman gripped the other's arm.

"You—you snide little cur," he said, and there was something almost affectionate in the tone, "you can drop from this window and hit the ground without killing yourself. You've got money, too. Go ahead and get clear if you can, and I'll hold back the whole blamed bunch as long as I can. And hereafter—well, perhaps you've had your lesson. Git—quick!"

It was some fifteen seconds later that Bentick rose in his wrath.

"What in the name of common sense have you done, Mr. Dennison?" he roared. "That man's gone out the window!"

The cowboy folded his arms with one of the most peculiar grins it had ever fallen to the lawyer's lot to observe.

"I know he has!" he said placidly. "I also know that I picked up the key of this room as I passed, and that I'm going to help him all I can to get out of town before an alarm can be given. Can't we sit down now and discuss matters calmly?"

Something after midnight a white-whiskered man of sixty and a very brown one of thirty sat together in a certain room of the Elderfold House, ornate with brass bed and almost-mahogany furniture.

The former smoked slowly and beamed upon the latter. There had been a dead silence for some ten minutes. Then:

"Billy boy, are you ready to settle down in life?"

The late Mr. Beekman faced him and held out a long, brown hand.

"Dad," he said, "I'm ready to do anything on the face of the globe that is right and that suits you! I've—I've come to!"

The beam on the older man's face broadened.

"And you've started in the new life by conniving at the escape of one of the most contemptible criminals I ever knew!" he observed.

"Do you blame me, dad?" asked the cowboy.

The great Mr. Dennison of New York broke into a laugh. He leaned forward and patted his only son upon the knee.

"I don't blame you, Will," he said. "And—and I hope to thunder that they never get him!" he added, astonishingly. "That man pulled some twenty thousand dollars out of my pocket, but—it was well worth it."

The electric-light went out—returned to being—went out—returned once more, in the pleasant fashion to which Elderford electric-lights are addicted.

The elder Mr. Dennison yawned a little.

"It will take three or four days—perhaps a week—to get the loose ends of this affair knotted up," he said, thoughtfully.

"And after that?"

The white-haired man smiled.

"Well, what then, sonny?"

The hand of the big brown man closed tightly over the whiter, slimmer one of his father.

"Home, dad!" murmured the cowboy rather hoarsely.

THE END.

A LOST CHILD.

LITTLE Miss Prim in her furbelows,
Like a Dresden china piece is she;
And see, how fast the little one grows,
A woman just out of her infancy,
With the ways of a duchess, the languid air
As of one aweary of all the show;
What scorn on the lip! What a haughty stare!
And she but a baby a day ago.

A thing for dolls and the skipping-rope,
For blind-man's buff, and the tree high swing,
Turned into a creature to strut or mope,
With her pride of feather and peacock wing;
With the mincing step that we see at a play,
And the proper lisp and the curtsy prim—
God gave to these parents a child, and they
Molded a woman, and cheated Him!

Joseph Dana Miller.

WHEN ARCHIE GOT MARRIED.

By DWIGHT SPENCER ANDERSON.

How his wedding-day affected the nerves of one young man, who had to take a journey to meet his bride.

ARCHIE was to marry a girl who lived in Erie, Pennsylvania, and on the morning selected for this event he arose early, packed his suit-case carefully, partook of an early breakfast downtown, and hurried to the Union Depot. It was raining, but this dampened his spirits not a bit, and he whistled cheerily as he paced up and down in front of the ticket-window, waiting for his train.

Archie was very happy. His thoughts were of an elevated, ennobling sort that kings might reasonably envy. But suddenly, in the middle of his lofty meditations, he stopped short, and an icy chill oozed down his backbone.

"What have I done with my suit-case?" he muttered to himself.

He looked, but it was nowhere in sight. Roused to a realization of his loss, he rushed up to a uniformed official who bore the title, "Station-Master" sewed in his cap.

"Where's my suit-case?" he demanded.

The station-master scrutinized him carefully.

"What do I know about your suit-case?" he replied.

"That's what I want to find out," continued Archie, excitedly, "because my clothes and my money are locked in that suit-case, and I've lost it."

"That being true," answered the official gently, "I'd advise you to find it."

And he walked away.

Archie ran after him.

"But I haven't the least idea where it is," he panted, "and I'm going to be married."

"That so?" returned the station-master, pausing.

"Yes, it is. And I can't get married without any money, can I?"

"That depends on the girl," answered the man, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, I might just as well not try to get married!" ejaculated Archie. "We were to go to Niagara Falls, too. Dear me!"

The station-master suddenly bethought himself of a time, long ago, when—but he dismissed the recollection.

"Young man," he said, somewhat kindly, "if your suit-case is in this station, I'll find it. But don't depend too much on me; there's a party of thieves working here, and if they have stolen your property it is doubtless miles away by this time. But I'll do what I can. Have you got your ticket?"

"In my pocket," answered Archie. "I bought it yesterday."

"What time is the wedding to be?"

"At noon."

"Then you've got to catch this next train," said the man firmly; "there isn't another until ten o'clock. I don't believe your suit-case is in this station, but I'll look. Are you sure you didn't leave it in the street-car?"

"Absolutely sure," answered Archie.

Then a horrible thought struck him.

"But I might have left it in the restaurant where I had breakfast," he ventured.

"Go there and see," advised the station-master. "Your train is due in fifteen minutes. You'll have to hurry."

Archie ran all the way up the hill to the shelter-house, where the street-cars stopped, and then he remembered that all his money was in the suit-case, and he couldn't ride. He began to run all the faster now, for it was a full half mile to the restaurant, and he might have to run all the way back again.

The rain was freshening up a little, and seemed to have an unusual predilection for the back of Archie's neck, and several tiny streams were bent on tours of exploration past that point. But Archie sprinted on in his despair.

Wet and heated, at last he bolted

through the door of the lunch-room and inquired of the pretty cashier whether a suit-case had been left there.

The cashier pointed to a corner of the room and said: "There it is."

Archie's heart almost burst with joy. He looked at his watch. Eight minutes left!

He took the suit-case in his hand, and without thanking the pretty cashier, sprang out of the restaurant like a mile runner on his last lap, sped across the street and down the narrow alley leading to the station. He had gone a block when he realized that, now he had the suit-case safe once more, there was really no reason why he should not take a car. So, with the purpose of getting his money, he entered a doorway, and made this novel discovery: the suit-case was not his, but a totally strange and unfamiliar satchel, the property of another man. He might be arrested for theft!

Archie groaned and pulled out his watch. He had six minutes left. If he returned to the lunch-room he would miss the train and—horrible thought—never be married!

This was out of the question. So he ground his teeth firmly and boarded the next car, planting the suit-case carefully on the back platform.

When the conductor approached, Archie almost broke down.

"I haven't any money," he blubbered, "and I'm going to be married, and I must catch the next train that's due in one minute, and all my money's in my suit-case, and I've lost it."

"What do you call this?" asked the conductor, kicking out his foot.

"That isn't mine. I don't know who it belongs to. I thought it was mine when I got it, but I didn't look at it very carefully, and now I am sure it isn't mine because mine was trimmed with pink ribbons by the folks in the house where I room."

The conductor looked at him pityingly.

"You're crazy all right," he said, "but I'll let you go this time, and pay your fare myself." He pretended to ring up a fare on the register. "But I'll keep the suit-case, as it isn't yours."

"I don't care what you do with it," replied Archie, taking mental note of the conductor's number, which was 96, with the idea of befriending him some time in the future.

"Lots of time," said the station-master as Archie ran into the depot. "Your train's five minutes late. And your suit-case is found."

"Thank Heaven!" cried Archie, sinking into a seat, exhausted.

"It's right up at the top of the hill. I'll send a porter for it immediately. Funny, how it happened—just before you got in, I received a telephone message from the shelter-house, saying conductor 96 had just brought in a suit-case that answers to your description."

Archie staggered to his feet. "Don't send for it!" he gasped, "don't send for it! It isn't mine."

"Not yours!"

"No. That's the car I came down on. I—I—saw the suit-case on that car myself, and—and—it isn't mine."

A low whistle reverberated through the station.

"Here's your train, young man," said the officer. "You'd better go anyway."

"Yes," replied Archie, gathering himself together manfully.

He took the man's hand in his.

"I want to thank you for all you've done for me," he whimpered. "I appreciate it very much. But I'm going to get married if I have to do it in my pajamas. And if you happen to find that suit-case of mine, send it up to the office where I work. I've got a card in my pocket somewhere."

And with that he fished out a bedraggled bit of pasteboard.

The station-master looked stunned for an instant.

"That isn't a card, man—that's a baggage check!"

Into Archie's face came the illuminating light of memory.

"Why, of course it is!" he exclaimed. "I remember now. I checked my suit-case!"

Comfortably seated in the train, Archie was at last off for Erie, Pennsylvania, and as farmers' fences flew past the window, and the rails beneath the train clicked sympathetically, Archie sighed in great relief.

"I'm glad a fellow doesn't get married every day," he said to himself.

THE DELUSIVE DOLLARS.

By W. HANSON DURHAM.

The altogether extraordinary experience of a bank teller in connection with a five-hundred-dollar bill.

IT was noon—high noon by every reliable clock and whistle in Holton. Fisk still stood behind the five gilt bars of the cashier's window of the Holton Trust Company and tried in vain to balance his check account. He was just five hundred dollars short.

At first the discovery did not cause him any uneasiness or disturb the usual tranquillity of his mind, for he was positive that in his haste to get out to lunch he had made a mistake in counting, but when he went over it a second time and then a third time and still found that he actually lacked five hundred dollars to make the account balance, he stood still and did some pretty hard thinking for a moment.

He spread the checks out before him and scanned each one carefully. Business had been stagnant during the forenoon and there had been but three checks cashed and to consider anyway, and two of them were for small amounts of a few dollars each, while the third—the very last one he had cashed—was for fifteen hundred dollars, issued and signed by a reputable concern and payable to one Cyrus Hutchins, whose sprawling, well-known indorsement adorned its back.

There had been no other checks presented for payment thus far in the day, and for that reason Fisk knew that his shortage must be due to an overpayment of five hundred dollars on one of the three, but which one he was unable satisfactorily to determine. He knew of no way by which he could locate his error unless the party to whom he had overpaid the money had conscientious honesty enough to return it to the bank, and his knowledge of average human nature was extensive enough to realize the improbability of anything like that.

Furthermore, he realized that since the mistake was due to his own momentary carelessness or negligence, that he was personally out just five hundred dollars, for he knew that the bank would demand that he make good the shortage, which meant not only the sacrifice of every available dollar of his meager savings, but the prospect of the probable loss of his position as well.

He stood still and tried to face the situation squarely. The cozy little home of which they had so often talked and planned for months seemed to slip suddenly away into the dim uncertainties of the future.

The seriousness of his blunder somehow seemed to bewilder and benumb his senses strangely as he endeavored to recall something or anything connected with the payment of each check which might possibly serve to enable him to satisfy himself which one of the three he had overpaid, but the more he tried to think, the more confused he became, and he was finally forced to realize the absurdity of any claim he might make upon either of the payments, unsustained by proof or evidence of any kind. As he realized further the utter hopelessness of recovering the money, he quickly decided that the only thing now left for him to do was to say nothing about his blunder, but to balance the account with his own money and in that way not only cancel but cover his mistake.

For a moment he hesitated, and then, grasping his pen firmly, he seized a blank check and, quickly filling it out for his last dollar, he signed it boldly and slipped it in with the bank's cash; then with a sigh of mingled regret and relief, he quickly balanced the account, and thrusting the cash and check into the vault, he swung to the door and set the combination. Then snatching up his hat he hurried out into the street.

Outside, the air was alluring with the breath of spring and from the trees in the little park across the square came the

subdued twittering of birds. Filled only with that longing to get away somewhere where he could think, Fisk crossed over and strolled into the little park and sat dejectedly down on one of the iron benches near the fountain. Thrusting his hands deep into his penniless pockets, he leaned back and mentally reviewed the whole situation.

His own carelessness had cost him every dollar he had saved, but while he had probably sacrificed it to retain his position, he foresaw a still greater sacrifice before him now that he was practicaly penniless, for somehow he did not feel that he could bring himself to think of expecting Kate to share his poverty with him now.

Suddenly, as he thought of Kate, the thought of some one else came and forced all thoughts of her from his mind. It was Kate's father—Cyrus Hutchins, the very man for whom he had cashed that last check. He sat bolt upright and wondered why it had not come to him before.

It was all plain enough now. While it was not reasonable to suppose that he had paid five hundred dollars too much on either of the two smaller checks that morning, it was possible and very probable that he had unconsciously given Cyrus Hutchins four five hundred dollar bills instead of three. He distinctly recollected that Mr. Hutchins had asked for and had received bills of that denomination when he presented his check for payment.

The more he thought of it, the more convinced Fisk became that he was right. The bills were new, thin and crisp, and might have stuck together, and in his haste he had unintentionally counted out two for one. In this self solution Fisk experienced a sudden exhilarating sense of relief, for although Cyrus Hutchins was known to be close-fisted and grasping, he stood high in the estimation of his fellow townsmen, and there was no question as to his honesty in a matter of this kind. Acting upon the impulse of the moment, Fisk glanced at his watch and then started quickly to his feet with the determination to have an immediate interview with his prospective father-in-law.

He left the park and hurried along until he reached the residential section of the little town. Then turning down a quiet and well-shaded avenue, he walked on until he came to an old-fashioned brick-house of substantial style and structure. Turning in at the gate, he walked straight up to the door and pulled the bell.

As Fisk stood there awaiting an answer to his summons, he tried to form some policy of sudden persuasion, for while he was positive that he was right in his suspicions, he was forced to realize that he had neither proof nor facts of any kind to support the claim he was about to make—absolutely nothing but his own word—a mere suspicion at that. Aside from this he knew that Cyrus Hutchins did not look upon his attentions to his daughter with any too cordial approval, but strong in the conviction that he was right, he resolved to go ahead, see it through and trust to Kate and to luck for the rest of it. The door was abruptly opened and he was admitted into the hall by Cyrus Hutchins himself, a tall, spare-faced man of uncertain age and manners.

"I called to see you personally today," began Fisk briskly, as he stepped into the hall and the old man was about to lead the way into the family drawing-room. At his caller's words, the other turned suddenly aside, opened the door of the library and motioned for Fisk to enter.

"I imagined that your call was meant for another member of my family," remarked the old man meaningly, as he sat before his desk in the center of the room.

"I called to see you about that check you had cashed at the bank this morning, Mr. Hutchins," replied Fisk, coming to the point at once. "You remember about it, don't you?"

"Certainly," replied Hutchins quickly. "You cashed it for me yourself, I believe."

"Yes, sir," admitted Fisk. "It was for fifteen hundred dollars, I believe, Mr. Hutchins."

"Fifteen hundred dollars—exactly!" agreed the old man. "What about it?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Fisk, hardly knowing how to approach the vital point. "Only—that is, I'm five hundred dollars short, and I thought possibly—"

"Humph!" snorted the other. "That's nothing to do with me, has it? I'm not responsible if you are a few hundred short in your accounts, am I? I've heard of such things before. Fast living and—"

"On fifteen dollars a week!" cried Fisk impulsively. "I guess not so very fast on that salary."

"But you admit that you are short five hundred dollars," contested the old man stubbornly. "What do you expect —that I am going to pay it for you?" and he glared at the young man over the top of his gold-bowed glasses.

"No, sir!" retorted Fisk. "I came here because I think—I am quite sure that I overpaid you that five hundred dollars on your check this morning. I'm quite certain of it, and of course, if I did, you know of it and you will—"

For an instant the old man continued to stare strangely at his caller, and then his face grew flushed with rising anger.

"What do you mean by that insinuation? Do you think that I am a fool —a thief, and that I don't know enough to count, and to count straight, too?" he demanded wrathfully. "You paid me just what my check called for and no more. If you think that you can come here and bully me into settling up your shortage, you are mightily mistaken, and the sooner you realize it and get out, the better it will suit me."

Fisk choked back the retort he had half formed for utterance to relieve his own feelings. He knew that one wrong word at this critical moment might mean more than the money to him.

"I am not a thief, Mr. Hutchins," he remarked hoarsely, "and I don't think you are. It is not a question of honesty, anyway, now—it is simply a question of conscience. I have overpaid some one five hundred dollars, and I think it was you—in fact, I am positive of it."

"What proof have you that you paid the money to me?" demanded the old man.

"I have no proof whatever," replied Fisk quickly, "aside from my own conviction that I am right."

"Poof!" snorted the old man. "And you came here expecting to bully me with such a cock-and-bull story as that, did you?"

"No, sir!" retorted Fisk, still standing at the door. to which he had walked. "I came here simply to state the situation to you. I wanted you to know that I have made good the loss to the bank with my last dollar. I—I wanted you to know, too, that I am honest about it, and that I expected you would be. You see, it is my own loss now — not the bank's."

The old man leaned a little farther forward in his chair, and, still regarding him strangely, remarked cuttingly:

"So now that you have cleared your own conscience, you expect me to clear mine, I suppose; but, unfortunately, I have neither mercy nor money for you. That is all, Mr. Fisk!"

As he spoke, Cyrus Hutchins turned abruptly to his desk and began shuffling among his papers in the way of dismissal.

Fisk, heavy hearted, was about to open the door and pass out, when with a sudden resolution he turned suddenly about, walked back into the room, and stood beside the old man's desk.

"Mr. Hutchins," he began, almost desperately, "let us be fair about this matter. I want to ask a favor of you before I go."

"I suppose you want me to promise to say nothing about your shortage, eh?" grunted the old man. "If that is what you want, I want you to understand now that I shall cover no tracks for you, young man. If you—"

"No! It is not that," interrupted Fisk hastily. "It's about Kate. You see, Mr. Hutchins, it took every dollar I had saved to make good to the bank what I overpaid to you, and I shall have to begin all over again, and I wanted to ask you to—"

"To me!" almost screeched the old man passionately. "You—you impertinent young puppy. Do you mean to come here and tell me straight to my face that I am a thief—that I have got what does not belong to me?

"As for my daughter," he added angrily, "she will doubtless be glad to know that she has escaped an—embezzler."

There was a sting in every word as it came from his thin lips which burned and seared the young bank clerk's feel-

ings cruelly, but he simply stood gritting his teeth, and replied:

"Mr. Hutchins, you are wrong. You do me an injustice. If you will look over the money I gave you this morning, you will see that I am right—and apologize."

The old man made no reply, but sat staring straight at the other in an anger too great for words. Then, as his passion began to burn itself out a little, he saw a look of conviction in the face of the young man before him, and an appealing agony in his eyes which struck him suddenly and strangely.

Perhaps he was right—perhaps it was the knowledge that Kate would believe in this clean-cut young man with the honest eyes, even if he did not himself; and for her sake, at least, he would put the question beyond all further argument.

He rose slowly, almost laboriously, to his feet, and turned and opened the door of the little house-safe beside his desk.

"Fortunately, I happen to have the money right here—three five-hundred-dollar bills—the identical ones—just as you gave them to me this morning," he remarked slowly as he pulled open a drawer and began carefully to count the bills before him.

He ran them through his thin, trembling fingers once, and then twice, and again, while a look of unaccountable, incredulous surprise crept suddenly over his thin features, which caused his lips to tighten strangely.

Then slowly, like a man in a maze, he rose deliberately to his feet, turned about, and stood facing the young man standing there beside his desk with plain hope and conviction still written on his face.

"Mr. Fisk," he began brokenly, "we are both of us liable to make mistakes—even you in your youth and I in my age. You are right. Here is the five hundred dollars. I beg your pardon—that is all I can say—now!"

There was a touch of abject apology in the old man's words as he held a single bill toward Fisk.

"It is enough!" exclaimed the young man exultantly as he accepted the bill.

Stopping only long enough to mutter a few heartfelt words of gratitude, he turned and hurried out into the street with the first spark of a wondering doubt smoldering in his mind.

When the front door closed behind him, Cyrus Hutchins stood for a moment at his library window, looking out at the well-set form of Fisk as he passed out of sight around the farther corner.

"Well," he grunted with a self-satisfied sigh, "he's honest enough, I know that."

He let fall the curtain, returned to his desk, and began to fumble aimlessly again among his papers, while a peculiar light gleamed and glittered in his crafty old eyes.

It was too late to think of lunch when Fisk at length reached the bank, and although there was no one to wait upon, he entered, took his usual position behind the gilt bars of the cashier's window, and began to arrange his books for business.

He stepped to the vault and, turning the combination, swung back the heavy door, and drawing out the cash, he slipped the five-hundred-dollar bill he had recovered from Cyrus Hutchins into the pile and withdrew his own check. In grateful glee he tore and retore it to shreds and tossed them into the waste-basket.

"Well, the old man was rather rough on me, but he was honest about it, all right," he mused as he turned and began counting the cash before him.

Something was wrong! He saw it quickly, and with his brain in a new whirl, he counted it all over again. Even now the cash refused to balance—*he was still five hundred dollars short.*

With wonder, he worked. He knew that he was just five hundred dollars short before he recovered the missing money from Cyrus Hutchins, which ought now by every rule and reason to make a perfect balance, but in spite of facts and figures, he was still just five hundred dollars to the bad.

He knew that no one had access to the bank-vault during his absence but the president of the company, and he was confined at his home in the distant part of the town with serious illness. Therefore, any solution of the mystery from that source was entirely out of the question.

In new despair and desperation, Fisk seized another blank check, and snatching up his pen, he quickly filled it out to compel a balance by a second sacrifice of his small savings. Signing his name, he reached aside for his blotter, and as he picked it up and was about to apply it to the damp surface of the check, he stopped short and stood staring straight at it in sudden astonishment and surprise.

There upon the underside of the blotter, concealed from view and adhering by a slight moisture of mucilage from a drop he had sopped up from his desk that morning, was a single five hundred dollar bill.

Slowly separating the bill from the face of the blotter, Fisk proceeded to dry it carefully and cautiously, and then substituting it in place of his second check with the bank's funds, he began confidently to balance his account.

This time a new mystery confronted him boldly—unmistakably. He was five hundred dollars ahead of his own balance.

Wonderingly, he went over it again and again—always with the same result, and then he impatiently swept the cash aside and tried to think clearly, but in vain.

His mind was in a chaos of confusion. The delusive dollars coming and going before his very eyes maddened him with their mystery, and with a growing fear that he was himself unbalanced, he reviewed the situation.

According to developments, he had been five hundred dollars short. That was plain enough, but he had recovered and restored the missing money and was now five hundred dollars ahead, which was not quite so plain to him.

Where did the extra five hundred dollars come from? It was not due to either of his checks, for he had been particular to destroy the first and the second. Where did the money come from?

Like a flash his brain seemed to rally and clear instantly, and he saw all plain enough now and his face grew drawn and white.

"By Jove!" he groaned guiltily as he saw clearer. "I've done it this time. I've queered myself forever with Kate. I've been blackmailing her father for five hundred and didn't know it."

During the rest of the afternoon Fisk kept strict fact and figures on each and every transaction of his, and when closing time came he stopped not even for supper, but with the extra five-hundred-dollar bill safe in his pocket and nothing particular to say in his mind, he made for the residence of Cyrus Hutchins.

His mind was still in a maze of mingled guilt and wonder as Kate met him at the door and admitted him.

"Where is your father?" he inquired hastily as they entered the hall together.

"In the library," replied Kate quickly, and, realizing from the expression on his face that something unusual was before him, she squeezed his arm gently and then opened the library door and followed him into the room.

Cyrus Hutchins still sat before his old-fashioned desk in the center of the spacious room, and he looked up inquiringly as Fisk and Kate entered.

Without ceremony, Fisk stepped quickly forward and placing the five-hundred-dollar bill before the old man, he said slowly, almost shamefully:

"Mr. Hutchins, it is now my turn to apologize. This money is yours. I found the missing bill at the bank when I returned this noon."

"Well, well," grunted the old man almost incredulously, as he picked up the bill and then glanced up inquiringly at the face of the young man before him. "Who was right—you or I?" That peculiar gleam shone brighter than before in his gray eyes as he spoke.

"I—I don't know!" admitted Fisk flatly and in evident confusion.

"Well, I know," retorted the old man shortly. "Here!" he said suddenly, turning to Kate. "Take this and add it to your wedding fund," and as he spoke he pressed the bill into her fingers and then looking up at Fisk, he went on:

"It is all plain enough to me now, young man. I knew that you were wrong all the time, but I happened to have that extra five hundred dollar bill—and I let you think you were right. I thought you were honest, but I wanted to know for certain reasons." He glanced up at Kate's blushing face and grinned grimly as he rose totteringly to his feet and extended his hand cordially to Fisk.

MAKING A BLUFF GOOD.

By GARRETT SWIFT.

The man who vowed to capture a news item, and an account of the exciting things that happened to him in the process.

WHEN I landed in New York I had one half dollar, two quarters, three five-cent pieces, one suit of clothes, and a clear conscience.

I had something more than this. I had a fixed purpose.

Years ago I had known Hendeley. He had been a success because he stuck to one thing and ground away at it year after year till success had come to him.

I was younger than Hendeley, a good many years, and had done a good deal of wandering about the world, with the financial result above quoted.

And now Hendeley was managing editor of the *Monarch,* and I was flat broke.

And my fixed purpose was to go to work for Hendeley and pull myself up to success by sticking at it as he had.

It had not occurred to me that Hendeley might object. Of course, I knew if I wrote to him, if he answered me at all, it would be to discourage me and tell me to do something else. All good friends who have won success do that.

So I had come on to New York to take the bull by the horns. And knowing Hendeley I knew I had a job to tackle.

But at twenty-four, with an empty pocket and a grumbling stomach, one does not hesitate as long as there is nothing dishonorable to be done. And in all my wanderings I had kept from that.

Sometimes I had to go hungry, with plenty of money in sight if I would stoop to it. But I had held myself together.

Whether this pays or not, others may judge for themselves. I am merely telling the facts.

I had never been to New York before, and knew nothing of the down-town streets. But by purchasing a copy of the *Monarch* it was easy to get the address, and I had not whipped through the West Indies without learning how to ask questions in one or more languages.

I'll admit I was rather seedy in appearance, but still I didn't think I was bad enough to account for the supercilious stare I received from Hendeley's office boy when I announced myself and asked to see the managing editor.

"Card?"

"I have no printed card. Tell Mr. Hendeley it is Fred Barrison who wishes to see him."

"Write yer name down an' tell th' business."

I took the pencil and wrote simply my name.

"Now," I said, "if you don't take that to Mr. Hendeley I'll throw you out of the window."

He took it, and I followed close on his heels.

Hendeley had grown stout and prosperous looking while I had been fighting revolutionists, and when he looked up with his frowning, handsome face, it might have frightened a man who had more than a dollar in his pocket. It was evident that he did not recognize me.

"Barrison?" he said, looking at the card. "Not—yes, it is Fred. Sit down. I heard, or understood, or something, that you were killed somewhere."

"I was," I said, "but I've been resurrected. I've wandered some. And I'm broke."

His hand made a slow movement toward his pocket.

"Hold on," I said. "I didn't mean that. I've got enough to buy a meal. But I want work. I've knocked about a good deal, and picked up a little information, and a monstrous gall. I want to go to work on the *Monarch*. That's what I came for."

"But—there isn't any work on the *Monarch*."

"Must be. Somebody must get news and write stuff up."

"Well, of course, we have our regular staff. But we have no vacancy now."

I remained silent a moment.

"I'm sorry, Barrison," he said, "but you see how it is. The *Monarch* doesn't pay well enough to permit me to keep on superfluous help, and all the men we have are old hands. I couldn't very well discharge a good man to make a place for you."

"The deuce, no. I wouldn't have that. But I didn't suppose it was difficult to get work on a paper. I supposed anybody who could bring in good stuff was sure of a position."

Hendeley shook his head.

"We do sometimes have a good story brought in, and pay for it. But most of the stuff submitted by outsiders has already been better covered by our own people. Once in a while we'll pay for the tip and have one of our own people feature it."

"Feature it?"

"Yes. Sometimes there is an affair that makes an ordinary news article, but which has sensational elements that go to make up a good story for the Sunday edition. It requires study and care not to go too far."

"Who does that?"

"Our own people."

"But isn't there something I can do? Look here."

I turned out my little handful of change onto his desk.

"Now, Mr. Hendeley," I said, "that is absolutely all the money I have in the world. I know nobody in New York except yourself, and I wouldn't accept a dollar if you threw it at me unless I earned it. I want work. I don't care what kind—hard, dangerous, or any other. But I came here to go to work for you, and I want a chance."

"'M. You do seem to have picked up some gall somewhere. I rather like it though. I'll tell you what I'll do. I may have a chance to put you on after this month. One of our men is going to marry a rich girl and may give up reporting.

"Now I can't give you any assignment. But there are always things happening out of the ordinary. By out of the ordinary, I mean away from the regular walks of life where we usually look for news. You've seen something of the world, and it makes little difference whether you know New York or not.

"Go hunt up something. Take a few days and get something good for the Sunday edition. I don't care whether it is a New York story or not so that it has a real, live, human interest. Here. Take this as a—part payment."

"Nope," I said.

I was on my mettle. I had borrowed money, and probably might again. But not from Hendeley under those circumstances.

"I'll tackle it, since that's the best you can do," I continued, as he slowly put the bill back in his pocket. "And you won't see me again till I can make good."

"All right," he said. "I like your pluck, Barrison."

"I thank you for the chance."

It was not long before I was on the street with a queer feeling that I had tackled a harder job than orderly to a comic-opera general in a *papier-maché* war in South America.

And I knew that I had little time to dawdle. With a capital of a dollar and fifteen cents I could not visit the opera, go to roof-gardens, and wait for something to turn up. I almost had to turn it up myself.

And Hendeley's words about walks of life out of the ordinary hit me where I lived. I had lived out of the ordinary.

I knew that the *Monarch* had plenty of society reporters, and anyway nobody in society was going to do anything sensational in a hurry just to please me.

My mind naturally turned to the waterfront. I had helped filibuster guns and ammunition out of Baltimore for two revolutions, and had chased other filibusters in other revolutions on board leaky gunboats.

But I was hungry, and no man can tackle a new job on an empty stomach as well as on a full one.

The office of the *Monarch* was not in one of the modern sky-scrapers. It was not even in a building of its own. It was in an old-fashioned structure, in a region that seemed now to be given over to warehouses of one kind or another. Therefore, I could not expect to find a very fine eating-house near

there. And I didn't have the price, even if there was one.

But as I was bent on going toward the water-front, I journeyed along toward the East River and turned into a restaurant that smelled better than it looked.

It was a dingy sort of place, and the windows were filled with custard pie that looked like leather, but the aroma of the coffee that floated out through the door was certainly attractive.

The place was not very well lighted, for the windows were seldom cleaned. And yet there was a crowd there, especially near the door.

I saw a table in a far corner, at which no one was sitting. I went to it, and was about to take one of the chairs when another man stepped alongside of me and took one opposite.

We glanced into each other's face just once.

I fancied I heard a muttered curse, but he sat down. I had learned to control my features, and with something like a fluttering at my heart I sat down, took a paper from my pocket, and began to read.

I felt that my sensation had come to me.

II.

If Captain Pedro Sada, of the old schooner Swanelda, really recognized me, he gave no further sign of it than that first look of startled surprise. If he did recognize me, he knew that I carried the mark of one of his bullets in my shoulder.

There was no necessity for either of us speaking, for we never had passed word of any kind. But once, in a miserable little town, and a more miserable little scrimmage, when I had been called on by the recognized authorities to assist in maintaining peace, Captain Pedro Sada, at the head of a gang of coast-line thieves, had fired and hit me. I bore him no good-will for that.

If he had recognized me and felt inclined to get away quietly before I recognized him, he had no opportunity, for immediately a third man sat down at the table.

"Well," said this newcomer, "what's the job now?"

I did not look up. But I fancied I could *feel* a glance of warning dart from the black pig-like eyes of Captain Sada into the eyes of this other man I had not seen, and whose voice was totally unfamiliar.

"I sent for you, my friend," replied Captain Sada, in a smooth soft voice that told of southern skies and tropical seas, "because I have in this city of New York of yours a very sad duty to perform. It is so sad that I do not feel capable of performing it myself. And as I was well aware of the kindness of your heart and your gentle way of putting things, I sent for you."

"You did well, my dear sir," was the reply, showing that if there had been a warning glance it had been well noticed. "It is true that during my life I have been the bearer of much unpleasant burden for others. I have spent many nights at the bedside of sick friends, and even strangers. I have assisted in the burial of many who had been deserted in the battle of life by their own people. You did well to send for me. Tell me the trouble."

I could feel the eyes of this man on me. I knew they were evil eyes.

"It is a sad tale, my friend," said Captain Sada. "Even now it tears my heart to repeat it even to your sympathetic ears. But listen. Not many months ago I sailed into New York with a cargo of sugar and molasses, the same as I have on board now. I came with a full list of hands.

"It so happened that I was compelled to wait here longer than usual for a return cargo, and not wishing to go back empty, I submitted. But one who spends most of his time on the sea loves to amuse himself on land when he has the opportunity. And I did so.

"And it further happened that during my stay in New York I met a woman. A woman whose husband was killed in the Spanish War. Whose home had been in Porto Rico. Whose means had been swept away by that war.

"She came here to earn her living and give her son, her only child, an education in the free institutions of New York. You follow me?"

"I am deeply interested."

"This young man was strong when he arrived in New York, but he pined for the sunny skies of Porto Rico. And

then the first cold winter of this devilish climate seized him and made a wreck of him.

"I had become—well, attached to his mother, and we talked much about him. He longed to return to Porto Rico. He had had enough of New York. But his father had made enemies there. It would not be safe for him to return—to go back there to live.

"There is no need to trouble you with all we said. But it ended by this young man taking the place of steward on the Swanelda. This we thought would give him not only the balmy southern air he needed and longed for, but also the life on the sea that is so invigorating.

"This young man—this son of the woman I had learned to love, served me well as steward on the Swanelda, and for a time I began to think our plan was destined to be a success. I looked forward, my friend, to that happy day when I might return with that young man restored to health and reap my reward—as you may guess.

"But alas, what happened? I wrote from Kingston that he was doing well. From Georgetown I wrote that he was almost fully recovered.

"Then he became suddenly ill again, and before I knew it he was dead. Shall I try to tell you, my friend, how this wrung my heart? It is needless—it would be useless. And you may well think of my feelings even now."

"So he became food for the sharks," said the strange man in no very sympathetic voice.

"Ah, no. I could not permit that. I went ashore at Kingston and had his body embalmed. It was done by an American there. The Americans, next to the ancient Egyptians, excel in this line. And he is now on board the Swanelda incased in a metallic casket that cost me many good American dollars."

"And what is it you wish me to do?"

"Somebody must acquaint the poor *señora* with the fact of her loss. You may readily guess, my friend, that I cannot do it. After writing twice that the poor boy was doing so well, how can I now face the woman I love with such a story? No. It must be you, my friend.

"And when you have told her, when you have prepared her to receive the remains of her boy, we will have the body removed to her house and then, perhaps, I may have courage to speak to her."

"And where is this *señora?* What is her name?"

"You have finished eating? So have I. Come with me to the Swanelda and we will continue our plans."

They thereupon went away, leaving me half stupefied and wondering. My wits were working now for fame and success.

I knew that every word Captain Sada of the Swanelda had uttered was absolutely false. While I had had no personal acquaintance with the man, save for the bullet that had plowed through my shoulder, I knew his career too well to believe that he had done any of the things he had mentioned.

He was no philanthropist, this Sada. I knew him to be a murderous scoundrel of the worst type—one of the marauders produced by the unsettled conditions surrounding the Caribbean Sea.

I knew that he had not fallen in love with any woman in New York from Porto Rico nor anywhere else. Love was absolutely foreign to his nature.

I knew he had not taken a young man to sea for the purpose of restoring him to health. And if any young man had died on board the Swanelda, it was more than likely that Sada had murdered him.

And Sada was not the man to spend money to have a body embalmed at Kingston in order to bring it to New York. More likely, in a drunken orgy, he would have it swung overboard without a ceremony, and shout with glee at the sight of the hungry, waiting sharks.

Then what did all this mean? Why had he elaborated so upon a story I knew was false? He had a purpose. That much was certain.

Had he recognized me? Had he suspected that I was on his track through motives of revenge? Or was he engaged in some illegal business, and did he believe me to be in the employ of some government to apprehend him?

All these questions surged through my mind, and I found no satisfactory answer.

If Sada had recognized me he would have known that I would not believe a word he said. Was it possible, then, that

he had not recognized me? Yet I had seen his look. I had felt the glance of warning.

It seemed certain that the story had been told for my benefit. But why?

Still pondering on the thing, I paid my bill and left the place. My capital was reduced by twenty-five cents. But I was on the trail of a sensation.

III.

I MIGHT have gone at once to the police and told my suspicions, and possibly have nipped the crime in the bud.

But I was not in the employ of the police. In that case they would get all the credit, and the information would be made public before I could get a story ready for Hendeley.

I confess there was an amount of cupidity in my actions that I had not felt during my years of adventure. But in those days I cared for nothing except the adventure. Now, I wanted a living, and a good one.

I make another confession. That bullet of Sada's had kept me ill for a long time. It could not be punished in New York by law, and governments had changed where the wound had been inflicted and I knew there was little law there. And I felt an unholy desire for personal revenge.

I was young enough to remember and thirst for retaliation. I had not reached the age of forgiveness.

Whatever the business was that had brought Sada to New York, I resolved to ferret it out alone. If I won, I would have the coveted place on the *Monarch,* and perhaps my revenge on Sada. If I failed, the failure would be my own—and the responsibility.

The name of the woman with whom he claimed he had fallen in love had not been mentioned. I regretted this. It would have been a good beginning.

I did not believe there was any necessity for great haste. If Sada was engaged in any unlawful business he would not be precipitate. The first thing I wanted was the name of the steward that sailed from New York last on the Swanelda.

This I knew was not difficult to find. I had knocked around on ships some myself, and it did not take me long to discover the office from which vessels sailing for the West Indies cleared.

I visited that office. It required considerable tact to get any one there to take interest enough in the matter to look it up, for the simple reason that I was not willing to tell just why I wanted the information. Nevertheless, one young man who was particularly good-natured hunted up the date of clearing and the copy of the manifest.

"Here is the list of officers," he said. "She sailed four months ago. She is in the harbor now."

"I thank you," I said, without commenting on the fact of the Swanelda being in New York.

I glanced over the list. The name of the steward was Frederick Delnico.

There was no address given. The next thing for me to do was to hunt up the home of Frederick Delnico. The name sounded rather like a verification of what Sada had said, but there is nothing in names.

Delnico might have been an Irishman, or even a Dutchman, so far as names went. But it was an odd name, and I judged it would not be difficult to find in the directory.

It was not. It was more difficult to find a directory. But I did find one of the latest date after considerable search, and found the name Delnico in it three times.

One was that of a merchant living on the West Side. I cut him out of my considerations. Another was a hotel waiter, and the third, the directory said, was a tobacconist.

There was no Frederick Delnico and no widow Delnico.

I still had something to do, and chose the tobacconist as the most likely to come within the scope of my investigations.

The address given in the directory was rather puzzling to me. It was not a numbered street, nor was it a street that seemed familiar.

But again my skill at asking questions came to my aid, and I found the place.

It was on a street crowded with all sorts and conditions of men. It was a dingy-looking place, and not one that seemed to be particularly thriving.

The proprietor's name as given in the directory was Henrico Delnico.

Mingling with the motley herd that comprised the population of this district, I passed the place and looked in at the open door.

I saw no customers. But behind the counter was a young girl.

I entered. A look of surprise appeared on the girl's face. She was quite pretty; dark, and evidently of a Southern type.

She stepped forward to wait on me with a peculiar manner. I scarcely know how to describe it. It was diffident, doubtful, and I thought showed some fear. I purchased a cigar.

"I notice that the name of the proprietor of this place is named Delnico," I said in as offhand a way as I thought would suffice.

"Yes, *señor*," she replied.

I began to grow warm. It did seem as though there was something in Sada's story, after all.

"You are an employee of his?"

"I—he is my uncle, *señor*."

"Do you happen to know a young man by the name of Frederick Delnico?"

She almost leaped at me.

"Frederick! My brother! Has anything happened to him? Oh—hush, *señor*. Speak low, but tell me if anything has happened to him. Oh, my heart beats so! My uncle may be here at any minute. Tell me quick, *señor*."

"He sailed as steward on the Swanelda four months ago?"

"Yes, *señor*. My God! Has the Swanelda been wrecked? Is my brother drowned?"

"Not drowned. But—I cannot tell you much. I have heard that he is dead. I doubt it."

She looked at me with her eyes opened wide in horror.

"Who are you? What do you mean?"

"I overheard a conversation. Do you know Captain Sada, of the Swanelda?"

"Oh, Heaven, yes. That man!"

"Are you a widow?"

"I was never married, *señor*."

"Then there is a lie somewhere. However, the story is that your brother died on board the Swanelda, and was embalmed in Kingston and has been brought home. I know that Sada is not the man to bother with such a matter, and I believe there is a mystery in the case. Now, I want you to help me."

"What shall I do, *señor*?"

"Hide me in the place wherever you live with your uncle. Is it up-stairs?"

"It is, *señor*."

"It is certain that Sada and his confederate will bring a body here. There is some mystery about it. I don't believe it is your brother."

"Oh, Heaven! And I fear my uncle so. What shall I do? How can I hide you?"

"Where is your uncle? Is he up-stairs now?"

"No. He went away with a man."

"They will return with a body purporting to be your brother's. It may be some insurance fraud. They do these things sometimes to get insurance. Was your brother insured?"

"I think not, *señor*."

"Then it is something else. But I must learn what it is. Is there a closet up there in which I can hide?"

All sense of caution had left me now. I was ready for anything. With less than a dollar in my pocket and no opportunity for work ahead except to make good this story for Hendeley, I thought nothing of the danger, nor of my right to enter the home of the tobacconist.

"There is one. But I cannot leave the store. Oh, what shall I do?"

"Are the doors locked?"

"Yes."

She was so excited that her eyes shone and her lips scarcely met when she pronounced her words. Her mouth was drawn, showing white and even teeth.

"Give me the key."

She shot a hasty and terrified look about her. It was a dangerous, an unheard-of thing to do. She knew that.

"If I do this—if I give you the key—my uncle will kill me if he knows. But—I must know about my brother. He is all I have. And my uncle is so cruel."

"Give me the key and I will protect you from your uncle, and I promise you that if there is any mystery about your brother I will solve it."

She gave another quick, frightened glance toward the door and then handed me a key.

"The first floor—door to the right, *señor*. Oh, God! Now what have I done?"

I did not wait to answer her.

IV.

THERE is danger poking round in dark halls in New York, but with a key I felt safe from any questioning. I soon found the door the key fitted, and entered a neatly furnished room.

It was evident that the tobacconist lived well. Everything was good and well-kept, but the place was too small for the accommodation of a servant.

I surmised that the dark-eyed girl in the store was a slave to her uncle. She probably, I thought, did the housework, and attended the store when he was out.

If any casket containing a body was brought there it would, I fancied, be placed in the front room, or parlor. This was a well-furnished room, and I looked about for the nearest closet.

Just off the parlor there was a small hall bedroom. The furnishings of this indicated that it was the girl's room.

I had no thought of invading the sacred mysteries of the young lady's apartment, but found the little clothes-closet, where the faint perfume showed her taste in colognes, and having arranged the contents to make room for me, I waited.

It was not more than four or five minutes when I heard a rush of light footsteps on the stairs and in the hall. I knew this was not the tread of men bringing in a body and did not expect any one to enter. But the girl herself rushed in, breathless.

"The key!" she exclaimed. "Give me the key. I must lock you in, or my uncle will know."

This was reasonable enough. If the tobacconist came home and found his door unfastened the girl would surely be punished, or at least blamed. I handed over the key and in another moment heard the door locked. No sooner had I heard that lock click than I thought of treachery.

Had the girl become frightened and locked me in to prevent my escape from her uncle? Or was she going to send for the police?

Of the two, I feared the police more just then. I was too eager in the hunt now to fear bodily harm. I had gone through too many encounters and come off victorious to stop now to consider my personal danger.

But the police would make it uncomfortable for me, and spoil my story as well.

But no one came. I continued to wait.

Hour after hour went by. I could picture the girl down-stairs shivering in terror and alarm over her brother, and I wondered why the body of Frederick did not arrive.

I began to get hungry. I supposed, of course, there was food in the house, but dared not go look for it. And I knew the sight of dishes or remnants of food would arouse the suspicions of Delnico at once.

Night came. I wondered if the girl down-stairs never ate. I supposed, of course, she would come up to her supper. But she did not put in an appearance.

It began to look as if I had kicked open a mare's nest and would have to stay there all night for nothing.

But at last I heard them coming. I knew it was the body, from the uncertain but heavy, slow steps of those who were bearing the casket. I heard them lumbering up the dark stairs. I heard voices in the hall and then the key in the lock.

I slipped into the closet and drew the door almost shut. I wanted to hear the conversation.

"By Heaven, Sada," I heard a voice say, "my nephew has grown heavy since he became your steward."

"We feed them well on board the Swanelda."

There was a laugh at this. I felt a cold, creepy sensation. If this were really the body of Frederick Delnico, these were most heartless men. But I knew Sada to be such. And naturally those with whom he dealt were not likely to be angels.

"How many pounds of the stuff have we?" asked the voice of the man I knew was Delnico.

"About one hundred and thirty. Oh, it is a fine invoice, my friend."

My heart jumped. I knew then that this was a great smuggling game I had stumbled on, and that Frederick Delnico was either a party to it or had in some way been made an innocent tool.

I understood the apparent heartlessness of Delnico.

"I wonder where our friend the detective is," said a voice I recognized.

The speaker was the man who had been with Sada in the restaurant.

"I wasted much wind telling that story for him," said Sada. "Yet it would be worth it if he would follow us up. I know he did not believe it. I would like to get him in my clutches just once."

"Not here," said Delnico. "We can have no murders here."

"Here!" said Sada. "How would he be here? Does he love your beautiful niece, then? If so, then doubly do I want to meet him. What? Let him steal my prize-money?"

Delnico laughed.

"There is not much danger of that. The girl does not know our bargain."

"Does she not?" asked Sada. "I thought she did. She certainly gave me a terrified look when I entered the store."

"Juanita did? What could she know about you? She has met you but once."

"Nevertheless, I swear she turned white when I entered, and hurled a frightful look at me. If glances were poisoned shafts, I would have fallen on your shop floor, dead."

"Strange. She has never mentioned you. But perhaps she suspected us."

"How could she suspect? The box was not brought through the shop. And you were to tell her nothing till we had it safely up-stairs."

"We will see," said Delnico. "If she knows anything it is time for us to find it out. I will call her."

He stepped outside. Then I heard his heavy footstep and her lighter one.

"My dear niece," began Delnico, "I have very sad news for you. Very sad news, indeed. I dared not tell you until I had verified it myself. I learned that poor Frederick, instead of becoming well, died on the Swanelda, and our good friend Captan Sada has had his body embalmed and brought here for burial."

There was a moment's silence. The girl was young. She had probably suffered at the hands of this uncle. I could not conjecture what turn affairs would take.

"Let me see my brother's face," she said with astonishing calmness.

I could have choked her. If she had only wept a little, or managed a half-decent fainting-spell, everything would have passed off easily enough.

At least, I suppose it would. I probably could have managed to make my escape somehow.

But the work was done. There was another moment of dead silence.

"Curse you!" said Delnico. "What do you mean? Why are you so calm when I tell you your brother is dead? Who has told you anything?"

"No one. But let me see my brother's face."

"By Heaven, Delnico, some one has been here," cried Sada. "Is it that Barrison, I wonder? Did I lead him here, after all? Wring it from her."

"Tell me the truth, girl," said Delnico. "Tell me the truth, or I will send you to join your brother. Who has been here? Who has made you so calm in the face of your brother's death?"

"Show me my brother's face, alive or dead."

I heard a blow.

"Oh, uncle! Don't—don't kill me," I heard her cry.

Another blow, and I heard her fall.

This was too much for me. I had fought for less than a young girl's life. I ran out from the closet.

Delnico stood over the girl, who was trying to rise. I gave him a blow in the neck that sent him to the floor.

"By Heaven! He is her lover!" cried Sada, and the fight was on.

V.

THE battle was an uneven one from the start. I did not see whether Delnico struck the girl again or not. But I saw her lying prone on the floor, unconscious. Perhaps she had fainted.

Sada rushed at me as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment. The other man seemed dazed at first. This gave me time to get in one good blow at the captain of the Swanelda, and I did it.

But Sada was made of harder stuff than Delnico, and was younger. He struck back.

Delnico joined in the fray.

"No shooting!" he cautioned, in a low but excited voice. "No knife. We must have no killing here."

I knew that with such odds against me I would surely lose. I shouted for help.

Whether there was any one else in the house I did not know. I do know that my cry for help received no response.

Backward, forward, and sidewise I skipped with an agility learned in many encounters, receiving blows and returning them with interest.

The girl on the floor was in the way. It required part of my attention to keep from stepping on her.

I struck Delnico several times, and Sada almost as many. The other man seemed wary. He had not entered into the thing expecting a fight.

"Come, Kashel," said Sada. "Get him behind."

They were careful to make no noise. The sound of the scuffle could reach no one below. The store was empty.

Kashel obeyed Sada. With Delnico and Sada in front of me I was an easy victim. Kashel got behind me and leaped on my back. I went down out of breath. The fight was over.

"Bring me a cord," snarled Sada. "We'll settle with him after."

Delnico brought a rope. My hands were tied behind me. I shouted again, and received a terrific blow in the mouth from Sada.

"Shut up," he said. "There's nobody to hear you. It will be worse for you if you call."

I knew it would. And the uselessness of calling was fully demonstrated.

Delnico was puffing and blowing and his face was white.

"Sit there," said Sada, hurling me into a chair. "If you move I'll kill you."

"After that," remarked Delnico, "we will drink. Then talk."

Sada glowered at me with his eyes flashing hate. Delnico went to another room and brought a bottle and three glasses. I recognized the bottle. It was powerful stuff from Jamaica.

They drank deeply, and stood around the casket.

"Who is this man?" asked Delnico. "How is it he knew?"

"This man," said Sada, "is a devil I've seen and heard of in every port in the West Indies and Central America. He's always mixing up with things that do not concern him. I've met him in a fight once.

"I recognized him at once this morning in the restaurant where I met Kashel. I was a fool for letting Kashel into the game at all. But I had to have a permit to get the casket ashore, and an undertaker had to be engaged.

"Well, I told him a story about Frederick being dead, and me being so in love with his mother that I could not break the news. Frederick dead! I wish he was. I would have killed the young rascal, but he left the ship at Kingston. I knew he was shadowing me. He belongs to some secret service."

Delnico looked at me with an evil eye.

"The question is now," said the tobacconist, "what to do with him."

The captain of the Swanelda laughed.

"Do with him? Is that a question in your mind, my friend? Is it your opinion that I came here with a hundred and thirty pounds of opium simply to be thrown into jail by this dog? There is one thing to do with him. Only one."

Delnico looked at him steadily.

"There must be no killing here."

Sada ripped out a curse in Spanish.

"No killing?"

Kashel was evidently uneasy. He sat down and looked from one to the other. He had nothing to suggest. He seemed to wish as Sada did, that he had not been taken into the game.

Sada reached over and filled his glass again and drained it.

"I tell you, my friend," he said, "that I run no risks. This devil has been in prison a dozen times and always escaped. He seems to bear a charmed life. I fired at him—I who never miss—and did not kill him. I hit him—how I wish now that bullet had gone to his heart. But he must die now. I run no risks, my friend, to please you."

"This is my house," insisted Delnico. "I have chosen to live here. If I smuggle opium and tobacco, very well. But

"I will have no murder committed in this house."

"You are exceedingly good-natured since you came to New York," said Sada with a sneer.

"It is not that. I fear these police. They are not like ours. Commit a murder here and it will be discovered. What happens? You are on board the Swanelda, far away. I go to prison. No, I will have no killing."

"Blast you!" roared Sada, forgetting his caution in his anger. "I say this man shall die. Listen to reason. This casket must surely be buried. One does not bring a lead-lined casket from Kingston and throw it in the street. It has already been under observation. We must put something in to take the place of the stuff. And here, my friend, is another matter for your consideration. I don't know the law. But I suppose before this man is buried—this supposed man in the casket—it must be opened. What then?

"Of course, I have a certificate from Kingston that the man Frederick Delnico is inside. It is forged, but they will not know that. I could not make him die of any contagious disease. I wanted no trouble with the health authorities. It was hard enough as it was.

"There is only one way, I tell you. This fellow must be killed and put in the casket instead of the opium."

It was far from pleasant sitting there listening to these fellows arguing about my fate.

Delnico shook his head.

"I live here," he said. "You need never come again. I'll have no killing. My niece will know."

"Hang your niece. She goes with me on the Swanelda. It was the bargain."

"So! Take her. But I'll have no—"

He got no farther. The stuff Sada had been drinking so freely had heated his brain. He sprang toward Delnico.

But it is hard for one rogue to surprise another. Delnico leaped backward, and in an instant two knives gleamed and flashed in the gaslight.

Kashel sat spellbound in terror. He seemed not to know which one to assist. While he probably agreed with Delnico, still safety seemed to lie with Sada.

And now in that silent house a battle more furious than the one in which I had been beaten took place over the still body of the unconscious girl.

There was the clash of steel, the gleam of murderous hate from black and evil eyes, the quick lithe movements of the West Indian duelist.

Delnico's breath was coming hard. Sada was still under the maddening influence of the drink.

Delnico stepped on the heel of the girl's shoe. He slipped.

The next moment he lay dead with Sada's knife in his heart.

VI.

"My God! What have you done now?" gasped Kashel. "We are in a worse fix now than ever."

Sada reeled to the table and took another drink.

"Curse him," he said. "Why did he object? He would have no killing. Now he is killed. We've two to settle with."

"What shall we do?" demanded Kashel. "The night is passing. Somebody might come."

Sada steadied himself.

"I wasn't paid for the opium," he said. "Curse the fool! And now what shall I do with it?"

"To the devil with the opium," said Kashel. "What shall we do with Delnico?"

"There is but one thing to do. The opium has got to be taken from the casket and Delnico put in. He's dead. Let him be buried as Frederick."

"And then this other."

"Curse him, too! We can't kill him here now. We can't make a double funeral of it. We'll get out the stuff and put Delnico in the casket. Then we'll get the fellow and the girl on board the Swanelda. It's the only thing we can do. Once outside of New York Harbor I'll do the rest."

"Well," said Kashel with a sigh, "if that's the only plan let's get to work. I'm sorry I ever took a hand in this thing. Smuggling—all very well. But murder—not for mine."

"That wasn't murder," retorted Sada. "I killed him in a fair fight."

"Report it, then. See if the police agree."

"What—you, too!" snarled Sada, glowering at his accomplice.

"No, not me, too. I don't want to quarrel with you, Sada. But I'm sick of this thing. I'm in it, though, and want to get out with a whole skin. If we are going to empty the casket let's get at it."

"Come on," said Sada thickly.

He took a screw-driver from his pocket and set to work. Kashel watched him curiously.

It would be difficult to define my own feelings. I had seen a good many fights, and the death of Delnico did not affect me. But I was wondering what effect it would have on my own fortunes.

Certainly, I could not have prevented them killing me if they wished. The death of Delnico had thus far saved my own life. He had actually died in my defense, although for his own interest, not for love of me.

I felt hopeful, at least. There might be opportunities between the house and the Swanelda to escape.

Sada soon had the lid of the casket off, and the two began taking out the packages of opium.

Sada's scheme had been well planned. The lead-lined casket had prevented the pungent odor of the opium from escaping, thus serving two purposes.

"Where shall we put the stuff?" asked Kashel. "Did Delnico have a hiding-place?"

"I don't know. We'll find one."

Opium is heavy, but one hundred and thirty pounds make quite a bulk. They soon had it all out on the floor, however.

"Now," said the captain of the Swanelda, "the next thing is Delnico, curse him. We can carry away the stuff later."

He bent over the body of the dead man, and as he did so I saw the girl move. I fancied I saw her eyelid twitch.

I fell to wondering what her fate would be if she was taken on board the Swanelda. I hoped to escape in time to save her. But there was little prospect of this now.

Sada and Kashel watched me constantly. Kashel with caution and some curiosity, and Sada with devilish malice.

"He's dead," said Sada, as if there had been some doubt about it. "Lift him up."

"The blood!"

"He must have another coat."

He found one, and soon had the tobacconist laid out for burial. Then the lid was replaced and Sada stood upright.

He stepped to the table and filled his glass once more. By this time he was unsteady on his feet. He stood facing me with the glass in his right hand. His left hand hung down by his side, clasping his knife.

He was perhaps ten feet from me. Kashel was on the opposite side of the room.

I was sitting with my feet firmly on the floor. Of course, my hands were perfectly useless.

Suddenly there flashed through my brain an inspiration. Sada gave me one of his blackest looks. Then he raised his glass to his lips.

As he did so he lowered his gaze, as most drinkers do, to look at the glass.

I gathered all my strength. Kashel had been so seemingly afraid of violence that I believed if I could silence Sada I could make some kind of a deal with him.

I dived. I hurled myself head first squarely into the pit of Sada's stomach.

He gave one grunt, dropped his glass on my back and his knife on the floor, and went in a heap under the casket that contained Delnico.

But I rolled on the floor, too.

"Furies at the pit!" came from Kashel's lips.

I saw him eying me savagely but uncertainly. Then Sada moved. I heard him curse.

Kashel made a move forward.

Then I felt something press on my wrists. The cords parted. My hands were free. And into my right hand the knife that Sada had dropped was pressed by the girl, who still lay on the floor, but had all her wits about her.

I sprang to my feet.

"Now, Sada," I cried, "you or I! You or I!"

He rose to his feet, started toward me, and then his face went black, his eyes rolled upward, and he fell again in a heap on the floor.

"Kashel," I said, "move and you are a dead man."

He stood a moment, looking at me with a sort of squint.

"Sada was right," he said. "You are a devil. There's only one move I want to make, my friend, and if you'll let me I'll make it blamed quick. That's out of this house. I didn't come into this job to kill or get killed. I helped Sada smuggle the stuff ashore, but that's all I bargained for, and I won't get paid for that. You've got the call, and the game is yours. Let me go. I haven't hurt you. You've bagged enough and ought to be satisfied."

"Go on," I said, and it took him about half a minute to reach the street.

Sada was not dead. I tied him up well. I trussed him so that he couldn't get free in a thousand years if he lived so long.

"Where is my uncle?" inquired the girl.

"In there," I said, knowing that she felt little love for him, and the news would not break her heart. "Sada killed him in a quarrel. The stuff they brought was opium for your uncle. Where they got it I can't imagine, unless by way of Europe. But Sada is shrewd enough to get anything. I don't know where he sailed from last, and I don't care. But I've got work to do to-night. The thing is what to do with you."

"I have a friend. I can go to her. And my brother? Is he alive, then?"

"Yes. I heard Sada say that your brother left the ship at Kingston."

"Thank God!"

She was soon ready. I stopped a policeman on the street and told him the circumstances. He permitted me to accompany the girl to her friend's house on my promise to return immediately. I did so.

The next day I walked into Hendeley's office with a story for his Sunday edition.

He read it with a grim face.

"Is this a true story, Barrison?" he asked.

"Every word of it. I played the game myself."

"Well—I knew you'd do it. I put you down on the salary list at sixty dollars a week. You're a peach, and I knew you'd make good."

I'm getting the salary all right. But I've often wondered what he would have said if I hadn't been able to make good my bluff.

SO DEAR A DREAM.

I DREAMED last night, and dreaming saw my love
  In all the splendor of her golden youth.
Her eyes serene as yon clear sky above;
  Her face ashine with steadfast light of Truth.
So wondrous and so rare a thing she seemed
I would I ne'er had waked, but still had dreamed.

And, as she stood thus silent by my side,
  Those sterile years, barren of all but pain,
Were swept from memory in the full flood tide
  Of joy that surged into my heart again;
The dreary record of those loveless years
Effaced forever by my happy tears.

And though I woke to dreariness more drear
  To feel the birth-throes of that old new pain,
Yet in my heart that heavenly light burns clear
  To cheer my path until we meet again,
And with the dawn, when life's dark night is o'er,
We two shall meet, to part again no more.

John Henry Dick.

A FREE SHOW.

By ZOE ANDERSON NORRIS.

A performance with two men for an audience, and how one of them came to cut into the piece.

GARDNER had thrown some small logs into the grate. He had drawn up a big chair and was sitting comfortably smoking, gazing into the blaze, when Slaters knocked. Upon an invitation to enter, he flung open the door, crossed the room and stood at the mantel, looking down on the other.

Slaters was young and enthusiastic. Somewhat too enthusiastic, Gardner thought, at times. He was, moreover, just back from Paris after an extended stay which had had the effect of leaving him with a morbid admiration of all things American and home-grown.

He had, as a matter of fact, an attack of Newyorkitis, which developed strong symptoms of becoming acute.

Gardner, who was of a weary and nonchalant disposition, looked admiringly up at the clean length of limb revealed by the light of the logs.

"Bring up a chair," he said, "and take it easy," for there were occasions upon which Slaters threatened to get on his nerves.

"First," began Slaters, "let me take a look at this den of yours. I never tire of it. Bully! What splendid taste you have in furnishing, Gardner, and cigars!"

"Help yourself," drawled Gardner, without moving from the comfort of his position.

"I have taken one, thank you," returned Slaters, and lighting it, he walked to the window and looked out over the roofs.

Below him stretched the flat and even tops of three brownstone houses, cut on the same pattern and of the same height; but past these there arose another flight of an apartment-house, and in the center of this wall there shone a wide window brilliantly alight.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed presently. "Come look at this window, Gardner. I have never seen it so before. You know that girl across the roofs in her apartment. Her blinds are to the ceiling tonight. You can see every nook and cranny of her room. And it isn't dimly lighted, either. It is bright as day. People never seem to think that other people can see into their windows after nightfall. They are like ostriches with their hidden heads. Come. Look!"

Gardner stretched his toes to the fender.

"Tired," said he. "Can't. Tell me about it. Probably a biograph. She's doing it purposely. Somebody is taking the picture from somewhere on the roof. What sort of picture is it? Describe it to me."

"It's a corking den," rejoined Slaters. "Not quite so well furnished as this, but all right for a girl. She is a pretty girl. She is standing by the table now, arranging some flowers in a vase, waiting for some one, evidently—some one she will be awfully glad to see. She raises her head, listening. She makes a sudden, swift little rush to the door. Gad! But she's a graceful creature! She opens it and— Gardner! You're missing things. It is he. Confound it! He has thrown his arms around her!"

"Better come away if it affects you like that," advised Gardner lazily. "He'll be kissing her next."

"He has kissed her," lamented Slaters. "Once, twice, a dozen times. Have they no consideration for people who are looking on?"

"If you'll tell me what affair it is of yours," suggested Gardner, "I'll answer that question. The kissing is part of it, of course. It is to keep the young fellows on Broadway interested while they are waiting for the returns. The more kissing the better. A new biograph for some vaudeville house. What are they up to now?"

"She has taken him by the hand. She is drawing him to the divan she has put in front of the fire. I can't see the logs, only the blaze. A Southern girl, probably, who wants the blaze of the logs, no matter how warm the weather is outside. The firelight is pretty, flickering on them. His face is turned this way. He's a handsome dog and well groomed. Wealthy, I suppose.

"In evening dress. Been out to dinner somewhere. Comes in late. What time is it? Nearly ten by now." Taking out his watch. "Yes, ten minutes of. Pretty late for a call. Isn't it?"

"Photographers weren't ready before now, maybe," explained Gardner laconically.

"She's telling him everything that has happened since yesterday," Slaters continued. "He looks at her, then up at the light. Too light in the room to suit him. She gets up, turns out the gas, and lights a candle in a tall brass candlestick near by. The effect is splendid. The shining brass, the flickering light of the logs on her hair.

"Artistic girl, that. He, too. I can see some tiny sparks on his shirt-front. Do you suppose they are diamond studs? Would a swell like that wear diamond-studs, do you think?"

"Yes, for a biograph," nodded Gardner. "There's to be a burglar soon. Sees the studs, the rich attire, knows there is money in the pocket. Sees him call on the girl often. Watches the house and his chance. What next?"

"They are wonderful, these biographs," ejaculated Slaters.

"I should think so," assented Gardner, "and realistic enough. I saw one taken last summer at Coney. A woman and a baby, strapped to logs, being rescued. Half the people scrambled out to help save them; thought it was real. Couldn't make them understand they were merely posing for a biograph. What are they doing now, those people?"

"Just sitting there talking," said Slaters. "She with her back to me, he with his face. Why doesn't she turn her lovely countenance to me? All I can see is her hair shining in the candlelight. You are right, Gardner. It is early for a burglar, and so bold a burglar; but I think I see a door beginning to open stealthily."

"It is never too early for a biograph burglar," remarked Gardner indifferently. "They sometimes burgle in broad daylight."

"That door in the rear," panted Slaters. "The far-off door. The room is large. There is a screen between this door and the couple in front of the fire. The burglar advances. It is frightfully realistic, Gardner, this.

"He peeps around the screen that separates the two. He makes a rush forward. The man gets up. It is done in a second. He springs erect with a bound, like a tall, straight fir-tree. You know, I believe that was the door of a closet the burglar came out of."

"It ought to be a great success from your description," remarked Gardner casually. "Of course, it was the door of some place he was hiding in. He wouldn't come from the street so early in the evening."

"The burglar makes for him. The girl screams. Why should she scream for a picture?" Slaters wanted suddenly to know.

"So they'll take her with her mouth open, of course," Gardner explained.

"The men wrestle!" cries Slaters. "The burglar is the stronger of the two. Look! Come, look, Gardner!"

Gardner stretched himself, arose, and walked to the window. He smiled admiringly.

"Really, they do these things very well," he said. "They are most realistic. Look, the burglar has thrown him. He pays no attention to the shrieking girl. Nobody ever hears shrieks when they are done in the interest of the biograph.

"Look. The burglar is tearing something from the man's shirt-front. The little diamond-studs, of course. The girl has run to the door. She throws it open. She screams for help, but nobody comes. It isn't time for them to come.

"She runs back. The burglar has gone through the man's pockets. Look, look! That is well done. He tears the pockets in his haste. Now, see! He comes to the window. He opens it and leaps out. He is gone across the roof."

"Yes," exclaimed Slaters, "he has gone down a fire-escape. Look at him!"

"By rights," reflected Gardner, "there should be policemen in hot chase. That generally happens in those biographs."

"But look at the girl!" cried Slaters. "She throws herself on her knees by the man. See how tragically she does it! She looks frantically toward the door for help. Nobody coming to her. She looks toward the window. Nobody there! See! She is coming to the window. She stands there crying out. She sees us. She sees the light in our window. She is crying to us for help!"

"Now, for the love of Heaven," mused Gardner, "she doesn't want to rope us into the picture, too, does she?"

Slaters had gone mad with excitement.

"She is wringing her hands," he sighed. "She is calling to us! Listen! Listen!"

Gardner moved away from the window back to the fire.

"No vaudeville biographs for me," he decided. "My face is a little too well known in New York for that."

"She is still calling," said Slaters wildly. "I am going to her, biograph or no biograph. I am going," he repeated, and stretching a long limb over the sill, followed it by another and leaped to the roof, which was not more than ten feet below the window.

"You are young," remarked Gardner, "and your own master. There are none to hinder you."

He walked slowly back to the window, and stood there watching Slaters as he ran nimbly across the three flat roofs, vaulting the parapets dividing them and reaching the lighted window at last. He watched him climb in, the girl reaching down a white hand to help him.

The girl ran to the man on the floor and knelt wildly by him, looking imploringly up at Slaters, who soon knelt by her side, zealous in his endeavor to resuscitate the unconscious victim of the burglar.

Together they raised him to a sitting posture. Gardner could see the vacancies in his shirt-front, out of which the burglar had snatched the little diamond studs.

The man sighed and opened his eyes. The girl chafed his hands frantically. Slaters hurried for a glass of water and gave it to him.

"Good boy," groaned Gardner. "Beneficent creature. He will appear to good advantage in that moving-picture, but I shall take pains not to be with him in the theater while they are showing it. Here! What's this?"

He frowned and stared as three tall, brass-buttoned policemen burst open the door and made a dash for the man who sat on the floor, surrounded by Slaters and the girl. They raised him up none too gently. They clamped handcuffs on his wrists, the girl standing off as if all at once petrified.

Gardner turned away.

"This biograph is becoming too complicated for me," he muttered. "I shall have to wait until Slaters comes back to explain it."

He strolled to the fire, threw himself in the chair, and put his feet on the fender. He half dozed over the pipe he had relighted, thinking idly of the biograph.

Undoubtedly, it would be a great success, that picture. They certainly threw themselves into the making of it with zest. Perhaps Slaters could get a regular job at posing for biographs, now he had started it accidentally in this way.

Not that he was particularly in need of a job, but it seemed to suit him. Rather cheeky of the girl to drag her neighbors into her biograph, though.

After a long while there were footsteps across the tin of the roof, a scrambling up the side of the wall, and Slaters, leaping into the room, crossed it and stood by the fire, his elbow on the mantel.

He drew his fingers through his hair with a weary sigh, his eyes alight with the reflection of a smile.

"Well," said Gardner, looking up at him, "what was the finish of the biograph? It was too much for me when the cops came in and seized the victim of the burglar. That was rubbing it in. I came away."

"Biograph!" exclaimed Slaters. "That was no biograph. There was never anything more real. I suspected those diamond studs from the first. You remember that. I couldn't see how a gentleman would sport studs that could be seen distinctly across the roofs of three

houses. It was a real burglar who spotted him and hid in the house in order to relieve him of them; as for the man himself, he had been wanted by the police for some months, it seems, for larger thefts, forgery, and what not, and the cries of the girl when the burglar robbed him brought them, it seems. Besides, they had been keeping a strict watch on the house for several weeks, one of them told me."

Gardner knocked the ashes out of his pipe and began to refill it.

"'And the girl?'" he asked with elaborate indifference.

Slaters drew up another chair, threw himself in it, and smiled into the flickering blaze of the little logs.

"It's an ill wind that doesn't blow up the blinds of a lighted window for somebody's good," said he exultantly. "I shall see her again."

WITHOUT A CLUE TO FOLLOW.

By J. F. VALENTINE.

The story of a man who met with a misadventure at a time when he was least prepared to clear himself of suspicion.

"THIS is just great," muttered Fuller sarcastically, as a quick turn of the steering-wheel swung the machine around a large pool of water in the road. "The pleasures of motoring after a heavy shower are certainly boundless."

George Fuller was seated alone in the automobile, picking his way along the country road and leaving tracks in the mud that closely resembled the proverbial "crooked path." He had gone out late in the afternoon, and being overtaken by the heavy shower, had put up at a roadside hotel to await the passing of it.

Night coming on, he decided to stay for dinner, and then, the rain having ceased, he started for home. With the aid of the powerful lamps he was able, by going very slowly, to pick his way among the many puddles the shower had left behind it, and also to avoid the trolley-tracks, which were in the center of the road.

"Confound those trolley-cars, anyway!" he exclaimed, as one approached swiftly. "Those bright lights of theirs almost blind one."

He put up his hand before his eyes to shut out the glare, and as he did so, caught sight of what looked like a bundle of rags in the roadway just ahead of him. A second look and he realized that it was a man.

Jamming down the lever, and shutting off the power, he jumped out of the machine, and bent over the apparently lifeless form, just as the trolley-car whizzed by, leaving him in the blackness of the night again, the rays from his own lamps, as the machine stood, being thrown up the road.

Suddenly realizing that he was alone in the murky night with a person who to all appearances was dead, he yelled with all the power of his lungs at the trolley-car, but his voice was drowned in the noise it made, and it dashed on.

Seeing there were no chances for help from this quarter, he went around to the front of his machine, and removing one of the powerful lamps, directed its rays upon the inert figure in the roadway.

He noted that the man wore good clothing, although he was soaked with the rain and spattered with mud from head to foot.

Placing his free arm under the head, he turned the light directly upon the stranger's face. As he did so, he remarked: "Mighty nice-looking chap. I wonder—"

A shudder ran over him as the head slipped from his grasp and dropped heavily to the road.

"By Jove! I'm not a coward," he remarked aloud, as he reached for the man's pulse. "But to see a dead person slip like that—Heavens! He's not dead. I can feel a beat here." This he almost shouted in a great feeling of relief. "To the nearest doctor now. I know where

there's one—holy smokes! but you're heavy—" as he raised the apparently lifeless body and half pushed, half lifted it into the machine. "We'll get there at full speed, muddy roads and all."

Quickly replacing the lamp he had taken off, he jumped in beside the man and lifted him gently over to the left-hand seat. As he threw on the high-speed lever, the machine, with a leap that almost lifted all four wheels from the ground, sprang ahead and fairly tore down the road toward the scattered lights of the town, visible in the distance.

Drawing up in front of the house where he had often noticed a doctor's sign, Fuller sprang out and, rushing up the walk, pulled the bell.

"Is the doctor in?" he asked excitedly of the elderly woman who opened the door.

"Yes," she replied, slowly adjusting her glasses and scanning him from head to foot. "He is in, but he has retired. He was not feeling well—"

"Then call him immediately," Fuller interrupted. "I have a man outside in my machine who has met with an accident."

"And who are you, may I ask?" she queried, still eying him suspiciously.

"Mr. Hun—I should say, Mr. Fuller. I am living at the Tichnor Cottage. But please hurry, won't you?"

"Who's there, Mary?" called a voice at the head of the stairs.

"Is that you, doctor?" Fuller inquired. "Come down quickly. I—"

"Just a moment. I'll be right there," the doctor called back. "Bring the patient in," he added.

Fuller jumped down the steps, three at a time, and picking up the injured man tenderly in his arms, carried him into the house and deposited the burden upon a couch in the front room, which served both as parlor and doctor's office.

The woman followed, and seeing the pale, rigid face of the injured one, wrung her hands, and was in the midst of a series of exclamations of "How terrible!" "How did it happen?" etc., when the doctor entered, his hair and clothing in a state of disorder.

"Mary, this is no place for you," he commanded.

He strode across the room and proceeded to examine the patient carefully, apparently not noticing Fuller at all.

"I think he must have been struck by a trolley," Fuller ventured. "I found him alongside the tracks."

The doctor stopped in the midst of his examination, and turning his steel-gray eyes upon his caller with a most peculiar expression upon his face, asked: "Who did you say you were?"

"Mr. Hunt—I mean to say Mr. Fuller."

"Well. Mr.—did you say Fuller?" the other questioned, still looking at him with that same peculiar gaze.

Fuller could not help feeling ill at ease, and stammered "Yes" in a confused manner.

"This unfortunate individual," the doctor continued, as he proceeded with his examination. "has not been hit by any trolley-car. He has been struck on the back of the head with some blunt, heavy instrument. In other words," and he turned those small beady eyes upon Fuller again, and added in a peculiar tone, "this man is the victim of foul play."

"You don't say!" Fuller exclaimed, not realizing how serious the matter might turn out to be for him.

"Yes," continued the doctor, as he straightened himself up, "I should say that his skull is fractured. Do you know him?" he added suddenly.

"Know him? Me?" Fuller gasped. "Why, I never saw him before in my life."

"Young man, I am very sorry to inform you that I must detain you for the present. In fact, I place you under arrest—"

"Me? Under arrest?" Fuller blurted out, hardly able to believe his ears. "What for? And upon what authority?"

"Do not misunderstand me," the physician remarked soothingly. "Only as a witness, that is all. I am, besides being the doctor for Egremont, the justice of the peace.

"I must ask you to stay here to-night, and in the morning you will have to go to Granby and give the judge a full account of the affair. Really, it's only a matter of form, but I am forced to do my duty. You say you are the gentle-

man who is living at the Tichnor Cottage?"

"Yes," Fuller replied, utterly stunned by the sudden turn of events. "But I cannot understand—"

Heavy footsteps upon the porch caused him to turn quickly, in time to see a tall, well-built young man enter the room.

"Howard," mildly remarked the doctor, "this is Mr. Fuller, and here we have a patient, whom I am forced to stay up with all night. This is my son," he continued, with a wave of his hand toward the youth.

Before the latter had an opportunity to ask the question that his puzzled face demanded, the doctor added: "Mr. Fuller is to occupy your room with you to-night. Please show him to it."

As he followed meekly up the stairs, Fuller could not find words to object. The turn of affairs had come so suddenly, he was completely dumfounded. Even the motor-car which had been left in front of the house was forgotten.

Reaching the top of the stairs, they turned down the hall and into a small room. Howard lighted a lamp, and Fuller looked around his temporary prison.

Suddenly he seemed to regain his scattered senses. Laughing quite heartily, he exclaimed: "Well, if this isn't an experience! Do the good Samaritan act—suspected by one of your own townspeople—and virtually under arrest, with you for the jailer!" Then he stopped abruptly and added: "What do you suppose they expect to do with me, anyway?"

"Well, I don't really know," Howard drawled, as he prepared himself for bed, "but I guess dad will take you to Marlboro to-morrow. I s'pose he wants you to explain everything to the judge there. But I feel tired. But you haven't told me anything about what happened."

"Why, that's so. But what is your last name? I do not remember."

"Strickland," was the answer.

Thereupon Fuller gave a detailed account of the accidents of the evening, ending up with: "By the way, will you phone my man to-morrow to come and get my machine? It's out front, you know."

"Sure I will. And I think dad's a fool to— Well, I won't say any more." Then, motioning to the bed: "Will you kindly sleep on the inside?"

Fuller crawled in, Howard blew out the light and followed suit, and for a few moments neither spoke. Then young Strickland asked: "What is your business, Mr. Fuller?"

"My business?" he replied. "To tell you the honest truth, I haven't any. I am what they call a gentleman of leisure."

This seemed to finish the conversation for the night, as Strickland made no reply, and in a few moments his heavy breathing showed he was asleep.

Fuller fell to thinking over the situation. After all, it seemed rather a lark. There could be nothing to it. He could easily prove who he was, and that was enough. There always had to be a motive for every crime, and lacking that—The only thing he dreaded was that he might be forced to tell who he really was—and he much desired to retain his "incog."

The next thing he knew there was a heavy rapping on the door, and the doctor walked in, followed by a stranger. The sun was already high in the heavens.

Coming over to the bedside, Dr. Strickland shook Howard, who was still fast asleep.

"Come—come—come!" he commanded. "It is late." Then, turning his attention to Fuller, he added: "This is Officer Shannon, from Marlboro. He wishes you to accompany him there."

"Am I under arrest?" Fuller gasped, realizing that he was now in charge of the law.

"No, sir," Shannon quickly replied. "But you are wanted as a witness."

"Breakfast is ready," the doctor announced. "Please hurry." Then both he and the officer left the room.

After a very simple breakfast—and hardly a word spoken during it—Shannon remarked: "Well, Mr. Fuller, we have just good time for the eight-forty. Let us go. Are you ready, doctor?"

A nod of assent, and the three started for the station.

"Where is the patient?" Fuller inquired as they walked along.

"He was taken to the Marlboro Hos-

pital early this morning," briefly replied the doctor.

"How was he—still unconscious?" Fuller questioned.

"Still unconscious; or, I should say, delirious," returned Dr. Strickland.

Fuller saw plainly that conversation was evidently distasteful to his two companions, so they continued their walk in silence.

The train drew into the station, the little party boarded it, and were soon in Marlboro, quite a sizable town.

They reached the court, where they found Judge Runyon awaiting them. A whispered conversation with Shannon and Dr. Strickland, and the judge ushered them all into his private room.

"Now, Mr. Fuller," he remarked, as they seated themselves around his desk, "tell us your story."

"In the first place, judge, I wish to state that my name is not Fuller."

This statement seemed to be most unexpected, and they all leaned forward, eagerly awaiting further disclosures.

"I came to Egremont for absolute rest," Fuller continued; "to hide myself, as it were, away from every one I knew, and where no one would find me—and assumed that name. My right name is Waldo Huntley."

Had a bomb been exploded in their midst it couldn't have caused them to jump more quickly than they did. For a moment there was dead silence, then Judge Runyon exclaimed: "Mr. Huntley, you are placed under arrest to await the outcome of the man's injuries."

Huntley was absolutely at a loss for words. He opened and closed his mouth, as if trying to articulate, then gasped: "But—I—do—not—understand."

"Then I'll inform you," replied the judge quickly. "The injured man, in his delirium, continually mutters your real name—Huntley."

Huntley sank back in his chair as the full import of this statement dawned upon him.

"But I never—saw the—man before," he stammered, utterly bewildered.

Judge Runyon's tone was peculiarly harsh as he remarked, not raising his head from the papers he was busily making out:

"The law is particularly severe in these cases, Mr."—and he paused significantly as he added—"Huntley."

A sudden inspiration seemed to spring up in Huntley's mind, and he almost laughed as he exclaimed: "Oh, that's all right, judge. I am at least privileged to communicate with my attorneys in New York. They can furnish bail to any amount."

"Unfortunately, in a case like this, a prisoner is not admitted to bail," was the reply. Then the judge added, with a trace of encouragement in his tone: "But you are privileged to communicate with your lawyers. Do you wish to telegraph?" and he handed Huntley a blank form, which he quickly filled out:

MR. JOHNSTONE WITHERELL,
WITHERELL, DEXTER & WITHERELL,
71 BROADWAY, N. Y.
Am in Marlboro jail, rush here quick.
HUNTLEY.

"There," he exclaimed, as he handed the blank, together with a five-dollar bill, to the judge. "I guess that will quickly straighten out things. Tell the man who sends it to keep the change."

The judge had risen from his chair, and at a signal Shannon placed his hand on Huntley's arm to lead him out of the room.

"Just a moment, judge!" Huntley exclaimed, as he wheeled around toward him. "Have you no idea who this injured man is? Had he no papers—no cards—nothing upon him that could identify him?"

"Not a scrap—no watch—no—but we will not discuss that now," and he turned again to the papers which littered his desk.

Shannon led the prisoner away, and Huntley realized that he was now on his way to a cell—a prisoner.

"But, after all," he told himself, "it's only for an hour or so."

He was locked up and left to himself. In a short while his dinner was brought, and by bribing the keeper he was enabled to secure some additional luxuries.

But as the hours wore on and no response was received to his telegram, he began to fret and fume. Always accustomed to having people jump at his com-

mands, this apparent ignoring of his message was annoying, to say the least.

He tried to sleep, but sleep would not come. He tossed from one side to the other, and at last from sheer exhaustion he fell into a doze. But it was of short duration. A "D and D," as he heard the keeper call the man—drunk and disorderly—was brought in, and insisted upon attempting solos for the benefit of all within hearing.

Huntley sat up on his bed, having lost all desire for any further slumber, and awaited the break of day. The minutes seemed hours—the hours a lifetime.

"As soon as I get out of this, back to New York. No more country—or incognito—for mine," he continued.

At last daylight crept in through the grated windows of the little jail. What a welcome sight it was to Huntley! Because to-day—why, the very first train would bring his attorneys post-haste, and they were all he needed.

His breakfast was brought in, and for a wonder he found himself really enjoying it. In fact, the coming of the day had entirely dispelled the gloom of the night before, and when the jailer appeared to remove the breakfast dishes Huntley was himself again, laughing and joking in quite his usual manner.

How eagerly he listened for the trains, the jail being only a short distance from the railroad station!

He heard one finally and listened, straining every nerve—but he was disappointed. As it pulled out of the station he realized it was going to New York, not coming from there.

But a few minutes later another was heard. "That's the one!" he exclaimed aloud, as he plainly heard it snorting westward. Surely this one would bring his attorney.

Presently the clanging of doors announced the arrival of some one. Huntley felt certain it was a visitor for him, and pressed his face against the bars in his endeavor to see down the corridor.

But it was only the keeper, with his dinner. As he came to the cell and passed it in to Huntley the latter saw it was the regular jail fare. There were none of the delicacies that had been heretofore provided.

Huntley looked at it a moment, and then remarked: "Why, don't I get anything else this morning? Has the fruit supply of Marlboro been exhausted?"

"No, sor, not entirely," the keeper replied. "But the money you gave me has. If you want more fancy stuff— Well, you know the game."

He gave a sly wink as he made the last remark.

"Of course I do," Huntley returned carelessly. "I've depleted my treasury at present—"

"You've done what?" the keeper interrupted, not quite understanding Huntley's remarks.

"To be more explicit, I have completely run out of cash. But that's easily fixed," Huntley remarked in a confident manner. "You have some one to go to my house and get me some money."

"Where's your house?" questioned the jailer suspiciously.

"Why, in Egremont, of course," was the reply. "I thought you knew."

"No, I didn't know," was the keeper's sarcastic answer. "Well, I suppose I can get some one to go, but it will cost you all of five dollars. Hov you that much?"

"No, not at present. But he can take it out of what my man gives him. Tell the messenger to hurry. I will not eat at present. I'll wait till he returns."

The keeper's face was changing rapidly as Huntley spoke. Then with a fiendish laugh, he broke out: "You may think you're a foxy one—but you ain't. Wid me it's a case of money first. If you hov none, take yer grub and be glad you can get it."

Huntley could stand it no longer and exclaimed angrily: "You confounded, thick-pated—"

"It's names yer callin' me, is it?" the keeper interrupted, slamming the breakfast on the floor.

He advanced threateningly toward the door of the cell, reaching in his pocket for the keys.

"Wait till I get me hands on you—you impident rogue, you. Sass an officer of the law, will yer? I'll teach you—"

Heavy footsteps coming down the corridor suddenly drew his attention in that direction, and his manner instantly changed. "Will you hov yer breakfast now, Mr. Huntley?" he inquired in the

mildest and most solicitous of tones, as Judge Runyon advanced toward the cell.

"Well, Mr.—Huntley, your attorneys have not arrived as yet, I understand," the judge remarked insinuatingly.

"No," Huntley replied in a voice that was anything but cheerful. "They have not come yet."

"Well, I just received word from the hospital that the patient is conscious, and has sent word to his employers in New York. In the meantime, if you wish, I will assign counsel for you. Take my advice—"

"Now look here," Huntley broke in angrily. "I'm sick and tired of this whole game. I'm innocent, I tell you—just as innocent as you are—and I'll prove it. To think of my being in such a ridiculous position is almost beyond belief. But wait till I get my hands on Witherell."

"Seems very strange that this Witherell is the only friend you have in New York," the judge remarked.

"The only friend I have in New York!" exclaimed Huntley. "Say, what are you trying to get at, anyway?"

"Oh, nothing," replied the judge calmly. "Only it appears odd that if you have other friends you don't try to communicate with them."

"Why don't I—yes, why don't I?" Huntley yelled, his anger reaching a point where he could contain it no longer. "Because in the first place, I have expected Witherell on every train—and in the second place, these robbers you maintain here as keepers have grafted every cent I have on me."

"Do you realize, Mr. Huntley, what you have just stated? Do you know I could make you prove your accusations of bribery? Be careful what you say in the future."

The judge calmly turned and walked away.

A short while later there was another slamming of doors and clanking of chains. Huntley sprang to the cell-door and pressed his face against the bars, hoping it would be Witherell.

But this time it was a prisoner—and a very happy one—from the noise he was making in an attempt to sing a popular air of the day.

After he had been pushed and shoved into the cell and the keeper had left again, the new arrival called out: "Say, neighbor, what you in for? You been celebratin', too?"

Huntley was too disgusted to answer, and besides, he did not feel in a mood to start a conversation with any one.

Again the voice called from the adjoining cell: "I say, ain't there any one here but me?" He waited a moment, and not receiving any reply, continued: "I don't think I'll like it here. I'll be too darn lonely."

All was quiet again, and soon heavy breathing told Huntley that his neighbor had fallen into a heavy sleep.

Again approaching voices and footsteps told Huntley that some one was coming. But the hope that had buoyed him up heretofore had left him now, and he paid no attention whatever to them.

As they came nearer he heard the keeper remark: "We hov no one by thot name. But there is one over here, so drunk he did not know who he was. P'raps you better take a look at him."

There was something strangely familiar in the voice that remarked from the front of the cell next to Huntley: "No, that's not the one I am looking for. It is very, very strange."

Huntley leaped from his cot and pressed his face against the grating, and all the pent-up anger of the past day and a half disappeared as he recognized the familiar face and form of his old friend and attorney.

"Thank Heaven! You have come at last!" he cried.

"Well, of all things!" the lawyer exclaimed as he stepped in front of Huntley's cell. "What in the mischief are you doing in there, Wallie?"

"Waiting for you to come and get me out," Huntley replied sarcastically. "And I've been doing that since yesterday morning. If you can't attend to business, I'll get some one who can."

"I was away from the office all day yesterday, Wallie, and have not been there to-day. But what does it mean? Here I am, with Paine, my secretary, absolutely wiped off the United States—and you in jail."

"What's happened to your secretary?" Huntley queried. "I thought his name was Richmond."

"So it was until the first of the week. But Richmond left me—got a better job—and I took on a young fellow named Paine. Sent him out here day before yesterday, late in the afternoon, with some mortgages to bring to you to get signed, and Lord only knows where he landed. No one has seen him since. I have tried to locate him, but there seems absolutely no clue to his whereabouts. As a last resort I decided to come here. He was a—"

"Wait!" Huntley fairly yelled. "I see it all now. Send for Judge Runyon, quick!"

"Well, for— Say, Wallie, have you lost your mind entirely?" Witherell gasped in alarm. "I thought your trip out here under an assumed name—you claimed you wanted to get away from everything and everybody—a bad sign; but now—"

"Oh, bother your thoughts, Jack! Send for the judge. I know where your secretary is. But get the judge—"

"He is coming," Witherell broke in. "I stopped at the court on my way over, and he will be here any moment. In the meantime give me a quick re mé of the facts as you know them."

Huntley rapidly ran over his tale of wo and was just finishing, when Judge Runyon strode in.

A few moments' conversation with the judge, and Mr. Witherell soon convinced him that a great mistake had been made—that Mr. Huntley was a New York bachelor who, tired of the continual demands of society, had come to the country to seek absolute rest, even changing his name temporarily so that none of his many friends would locate him.

"I cannot tell you how much I regret your commitment," the judge apologized. "You are honorably discharged from this moment. I will get the papers at my office. For the county, state, and country I humbly ask your pardon."

"Oh, that's all right, judge. You only did your duty," Huntley carelessly replied. "But now I'd certainly like to nail the real highwayman. But, hang it all," and he seemed absolutely disgusted that the man had covered his tracks so well. "we're without a clue to follow."

"Well, I've got detectives working on the case," was the judge's reply.

A few moments at Judge Runyon's office and Huntley was made a free man, according to the prescribed legal documents.

This settled, Witherell told Huntley that the latter would have to return with him to New York. "I must have your signature to duplicate documents of the ones Paine tried to deliver to you," he explained.

"Paine?" exclaimed Judge Runyon, jumping up from his chair. "Why, that's the name of the man in the hospital. I received word a little while ago that he is conscious now. Let us go see him."

The judge and Witherell hurried there. Huntley felt he never wanted to hear the name of Paine again, let alone seeing the man.

In a little while they were back, and in spite of Huntley's protests—and clamors for clean linen—they hurried to the train, and were soon on their way to the city.

Amid the hurried events of the day Huntley had not had any explanations of Paine's story. So he inquired as soon as they were comfortably seated in the car: "Say, Jack, what did your new secretary have to say, anyway?"

"That's so. I had entirely forgotten that you did not hear his story.

"He left New York day before yesterday on the five o'clock train for Marlboro, intending to get his dinner there, and then take the trolley out to Egremont, see you, secure your signature, and come back in the evening.

"Very well, so far. While having dinner a terrible thunder-shower came up—"

"Yes, I remember it well," interrupted Huntley.

"And he had to delay coming out to see you till after seven o'clock. He is not just sure of the exact time, but knows it was nearly dark.

"The conductor did not come for his fare till a mile or so out of the town, and Paine drew out a roll of bills—as I told him, a fool thing to do anywhere—and pulled off a ten-spot.

"The conductor got very fresh—remarked about it being an old game. I believe—and as Paine only had four cents in change, the conductor forcibly

ejected him from the car. Believe he claimed they will not change anything over a two-dollar bill.

"It was still raining a little, but Paine walked in the direction he knew the town to be. In fact, all he had to do was follow the car-track.

"During his argument with the conductor he had noticed an Italian across the aisle watch him closely. After walking some distance he thought he heard footsteps behind him, and turned in time to catch a glimpse of a man—and he is positive from the size, build, etc., that it was the Italian he saw in the car—and then he remembered nothing until he came to at the hospital.

"The conductor was located, and remembers an Italian leaving the car a few moments after he put Paine off. Strange story, isn't it?"

Huntley had been taking in every word, and when questioned suddenly burst out: "Jack, I'm going to catch that man. I'm going to turn detective."

Witherell laughed quite heartily at this declaration.

"Really, Wallie, you do amuse me at times. You a detective!"

He broke into another hearty laugh.

"Very well. Wait and see. But, confound it all, there isn't much to work upon."

The conversation drifted to business matters, and the train pulled into Hoboken station before they realized it.

As they left the ferry-boat Huntley remarked: "By the way, Jack, I want to stop in the waiting-room to see about a train back. Come in a moment."

As they were on the rear of the ferry-boat they were among the last to get off, and walked right through the open gate into the waiting-room.

Huntley busied himself studying the time-table that hung to the right of the gate.

"Hanged if I can ever make anything out of these time-tables," he remarked to himself. Then he added aloud: "Come here, Jack; see if you can."

"Surely," the other exclaimed confidently as he sauntered over and gazed up at the mass of figures. "Here is one at thirty-two and—"

"Well, you confounded fool, can't you see where you are going?" interrupted Huntley as a man went tearing through the ferry-gate just as the attendant was closing it. "Hey! Hey!" he called.

But the man was already through the gate. He had given one quick glance back, and seeing he had spilled a part of the contents of his bag, instead of returning for them, rushed headlong for the boat.

"Well, of all darn fools!" blurted out Huntley, as he looked at the scattered pile of clothing at his feet. "As the idiot banged into me the snap on his bag evidently opened and he dumped his apple-cart, as it were."

The gateman was already on his knees, gathering together the stuff.

"Sure, whin he realizes half his clothes are here 'tis a woild dago he'll be," he remarked. "Sure, it's little he has lift here, anyway. Phwat's this—papers, eh? Be gorry—"

But he got no further. Witherell grabbed them from him as he exclaimed:

"A clue, sure as you live!"

Huntley looked back over his shoulder.

"Can't you see these are the papers poor Paine tried to carry to you day before yesterday?" he exclaimed excitedly. "We must get that man."

He rushed into the telephone pay-station, and getting the officer on duty at Hoboken, gave him a hurried description of the party wanted.

The next boat carried two very excited amateur detectives. Arriving in Hoboken, they found the suspect had been apprehended and was now in charge of the officer, awaiting Witherell's commands.

The four started for the police court. At first the Italian denied all knowledge of everything connected with the crime.

But under pressure he confessed, even to the fact that he had not destroyed the papers because he was going to turn them over to a confederate, hoping to get a reward for their return.

As the Italian was taken to his cell to await the arrival of the Marlboro officer, Huntley remarked to Witherell:

"Well, Jack, *we* got him, didn't we? I certainly would never have been satisfied till he was brought to justice. I think I owe him that for all he made me suffer."

THE ARGOSY'S LOG-BOOK.

By THE EDITOR.

How the March complete novel came to be written — Hints on the kind of stories the Editor wants — The wrong way to start and that "fool finish" — How some of The Argosy's authors were discovered — Familiar chat about story-writing.

IT was at a small dinner-party of five. One of those present was a book-keeper in a big corporation. He had been doing the same sort of work there for a period of twelve years, every day from nine to five, simply writing a few lines on sheet after sheet of paper, a merely mechanical act, it would seem, apparently unimportant in itself, but which had to be done, and the wages for which had paid his way through life all these years.

"But some day," he remarked, "I expect the pen will fall from my fingers, and I will be done for."

"What do you mean?" I inquired. "Heart disease?"

"No," was the answer. "Just that," and he held up his right hand.

"What's the trouble?" some one else inquired.

"Writer's cramp," he explained. "I've had touches of it already. It may swoop down on me in mighty force any day, and then good-by to my job."

What would he do then? He had no reserve fund to fall back upon, no wealthy relatives who could aid him. What could he do that would not require his good right hand in the doing?

An interesting problem, isn't it? If you want to see it worked out in one way, read the complete novel that opens the March Argosy. The author has taken this very circumstance of writer's cramp, suggested by the foregoing conversation, in fact, and under the title "His Good Right Hand" has told what befell a man confronted with this particular dilemma.

* * * * *

"How do you get your stories for The Argosy? I suppose they are all written by a regular staff of contributors. The new man has no chance to break in."

How often I have heard this, not only in connection with The Argosy, but with regard to every other magazine that comes from a printing-press. And it is just as untrue to the facts to-day as it was fifty years ago, when would-be contributors started the plaint.

Possibly one of the very best stories in the present issue of The Argosy is the first effort of an author who had no experience in this line of work whatever. As a matter of fact, I am especially pleased to obtain contributions out of the beaten track, as it were, and from those who do not make a business of writing stories. Their work is apt to have a freshness and enthusiasm about it that the man who makes a vocation of grinding out fiction sometimes misses.

I am glad to say that The Argosy numbers quite a list of these "finds" in the outside world. One of them is stenographer and private secretary in one of the leading New York theaters; another is auditor in a telephone company; still another is a police reporter for a big New York daily; another is dramatic critic for an out-of-town paper; another is an actor; another in the real-estate business, and so on.

Some of these people sent their stories in at a venture, among them a lawyer who used to write at night when he got home simply for the amusement of the thing. He sent one of these stories to The Argosy. Nobody knew him in the office; the manuscript went through the regular course and was accepted. This was six years ago. To-day that man is getting two to three cents a word for his work, and has built two houses out of the proceeds of his pen—or I should rather say typewriter. This shows you the big opportunity unknown people have of winning out in the game which so many fondly believe is closed to every new-

comer. As a matter of fact, it would be a great deal easier for me as the editor if more of the manuscripts that came in the regular mail were good enough for print. Then I wouldn't be obliged to go outside and look up possible contributors in the rough, as it were.

* * * * *

I'll tell you right here that one of the biggest drawbacks young authors saddle themselves with is failure to size up the needs of the magazine to which they send their stories. Again and again I have had men admit that they had never read THE ARGOSY. Is it any wonder they failed to give it the kind of fiction that was acceptable? A pathetic narrative about a Swede who comes to this country and goes under in the struggle to gain a foothold following the panic—this might suit the *Atlantic Monthly* or *The Century,* but it would be waste of time and postage-stamps to offer it to THE ARGOSY.

Here at the Munsey offices we receive an average of one hundred manuscripts a day, most of them stories. Almost all of them are sent back, not because we have not room for them, but because they do not prove to be the kind of material we want. So deep-rooted in the mind of the public is the impression that only the "favored few" are the joy of the editor's heart, that I do not expect to be believed when I assert that an editor would far rather print a story by a good new find than one of equal merit by an old hand at the business.

It is out of the question to teach a person how to write a story if he or she happens not to have been born with the gift. But people are not always aware that they possess this ability. For instance, a regular contributor to THE ARGOSY belongs in this class. Perhaps you will be interested in having me tell you how I came to "discover" him.

* * * *

He is the young man—by the way, nearly all THE ARGOSY authors are under thirty—I referred to as being connected with the business department of one of the New York theaters. He had himself had a slight experience on the stage, and had supplied me with anecdotes for my dramatic department in *The Scrap Book.* In one case I could not recall the whole details of the odd experience that had once befallen him, and asked him to jot down for me on a scrap of paper a line or two that would serve as memorandum when I came to write up the incident. The way he wrote the three or four lines suggested that he might be able to write a story.

"Look here," I said, "did you ever try to do fiction?"

"No," he answered, "I never did."

"Well," I went on, "I have an idea you might be able to do so. Would you like to try?"

"Sure thing!" he exclaimed. "Any extra money always comes in handy."

"All right," I told him. "Here is a plot," and I related roughly an incident suggested by the installation of a new instrument in connection with the telephone service.

"You need only write one page on this," I added. "I can tell by reading that whether it is worth while for you to do any more."

Two days later I saw him again.

"See!" he exclaimed. "Here are two pages I have finished. What do you think?"

I read the two typewritten sheets and then turned to him.

"Look here," I said, "if I had not given you this plot myself I should say you had copied this from something that had already been published. That's how good I think it is."

Well, he went ahead and finished the story. I bought it, and published it in THE ARGOSY for May, 1906. Since then he has written some fifteen short stories, and his style has improved with each one of them.

Of course, at first there were many crudities of expression that I had to correct, but each manuscript was better than the one preceding it, until now he has gone far enough to be his own critic, and is consequently able to smooth out kinks in his work before he submits it to the editor's eye.

Now, this fellow possesses the inborn ability to tell a story on paper, and he was quite ignorant of the fact until somebody suggested that he see what he could do in that direction. He has had

little experience of the world in the way of travel. This, in a measure, is in his favor. He is not tempted to weight down his work with descriptive matter. He has never been to college, but his brief experience on the stage has given him the instinct to see the dramatic possibilities in an incident, while his work as a stenographer has added to his equipment facility of expression.

Because you can write a good, gossipy letter does not argue that you would be equally successful as a story-writer. Nor does it follow that because you are able to entertain a roomful of people by relating personal experiences would it be safe to bank that you can secure an income by turning these experiences into story form. Some of the best story-writers are notoriously poor letter-writers, and only the very few can make any showing at all as offhand speakers.

* * * *

"What kind of stories do you want for THE ARGOSY?"

This question has probably been asked of me a thousand times during the eighteen years I have been editor of this magazine. I can only answer it in two ways, either by saying "Interesting stories of every-day life" or "Read THE ARGOSY and find out the sort of stories we use."

Perhaps it will help some if I mention a few of the sort of stories I do not want. I do not care for dialect stories, which puzzle the reader with poor spelling; nor mere character studies, which mean lack of action; nor for stories crowded with descriptions of scenery which belong in an article on travel, but which people who want fiction always try to skip. Nor do I want stories which begin like this: "The sun had just gone down. The glow left the western hills with a tinge of color that would have delighted the heart of a painter."

One man, whose stories have since become a regular feature in THE ARGOSY, started off his first one a year ago in the following style: "Not having seen my parents in some months, I decided that I would spend New Year's with them in the country."

I remonstrated with him on the ground that as the readers knew neither his hero nor his hero's parents, it meant nothing to them where he spent his holidays. So he changed his beginning so as to get nearer the nub of the matter, and started off something like this: "It was really the most embarrassing position in which a man could be placed. What to do I didn't know."

This would pique the reader's interest at once, and after that he would be quite willing to learn something more about the chief character in the story.

And if the beginning of a story is important, so is the end. Some authors, particularly those who believe themselves to be ultra-literary, delight in the so-called "artistic finish," which leaves the reader to guess for himself whether the girl says yes or only promises to be a sister to the hero.

And just here let me tell you of an odd coincidence. I had reached this point in writing up the Log-Book, when I was called off to other work, and put it aside for the day. Not an hour had elapsed when a story came into my hands, written by a young man with considerable ability in this line who has already appeared in the newspapers, and who is now trying to break into THE ARGOSY.

This particular manuscript told about a man who had written a story for a certain publication and received an envelope from the publishing-house to which he had submitted it. He holds the envelope to the light and sees that it contains only one small piece of paper. Is it a check or a slip telling him to call for his manuscript? Which? And with this last word the story ends.

Do you wonder that I turned it down? It was a typical "fool finish" with a vengeance.

* * * *

"Do we have stories written to order for THE ARGOSY?"

This is another question that frequently crops up. No, we do not, I answer. That is to say, we never bind ourselves to accept a story until we have read the whole of it. This means that stories are never purchased on the strength of the author's name. He must "deliver the goods" each and every time.

Very often I suggest themes for the

writers to treat, subject always of course to approval of the finished product. And in this connection I want to tell you of a seemingly singular thing: Stories founded on real happenings very rarely prove acceptable. There is a common-sense reason for it.

As a rule, an author does not consider an actual happening worth treating in fiction unless it is something out of the ordinary, and when he writes it up, knowing himself that it really occurred, he does not take any special pains to make it seem plausible.

"What's the use?" he says to himself. "It happened, so of course it is possible."

But he forgets the saying that "Truth is stranger than fiction," with the result that when the story is finished it is altogether unconvincing. Actual incidents may suggest others to the writer, give him something to build upon. That is quite all right. But there is still another reason why the wary editor wishes to avoid actual happenings in fiction form. To illustrate:

Some two years ago there was an accident in the tunnel they are building under the East River between New York and Brooklyn. One of the workmen was blown by compressed air straight through the roof of the tunnel and through the waters of the river to the surface, where he was picked up by a passing tugboat and set ashore, little the worse for his remarkable experience.

Well, in a little more than a week I received a story founded on this very incident. I turned it down, well knowing what was coming. And, sure enough, a very few days later another yarn arrived, almost exactly similar. You see, both writers had read of the incident in the daily papers, and thought in their ignorance that it would make a fine story. Truth to tell, the thing was story enough in itself as related in the newspapers, and required no embellishments to make it any more thrilling. But more important even than that was the risk we ran, if we published it, of finding a precisely similar story in some other magazine.

Now, do you see the danger in founding stories upon actual happenings that have been described in the newspapers?

Some years ago one man whose story I had printed in THE ARGOSY wrote an indignant letter, claiming that a publication in Boston had appropriated his plot. I investigated and discovered that the Boston story had been bought before I had mine, but not published till afterward. There was no word-for-word similarity, but the idea was the same in each, and it soon came out that each writer had taken his plot from the same newspaper description of a real occurrence.

Charles Reade used to keep immense scrap-books of clippings from the press, from which he obtained all his plots. This may have been all right in his day, when there were comparatively few magazines and authors. To-day I would not dare take a story from Mr. Reade were he alive unless he could assure me that he had not founded it upon some actual happening contained in his book of clippings.

* * * *

THE ARGOSY, by the way, has served to introduce to the public not a few writers who have "landed big," as the saying goes. I well remember the first efforts of Upton Sinclair, whose "Jungle" made the slaughter-pens of Chicago set to work at cleaning house. It was twelve years ago that I used to receive stories signed by this name, accompanied by a letter that stated the writer was a boy of fourteen. The stories were not good enough for print, but I considered them fair work for a boy; so, instead of sending them back with the usual printed form of rejection, I wrote a letter, explaining as best I could just why the contribution was not available. And in course of time, when Sinclair was fifteen, I should judge, came a story that was good enough to accept. It was called "Tommy Junior the Second," and I published it in THE ARGOSY for July, 1895. After that young Sinclair wrote more or less regularly for the magazine, his work including two or three complete novels and a serial or so. They were vividly told stories, but required an enormous amount of editing to whip them into shape for the printer. Perhaps the best of the lot was a complete novel called "The Theft of a God."

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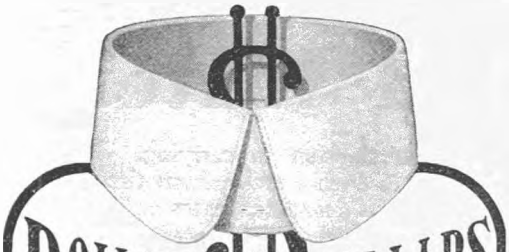

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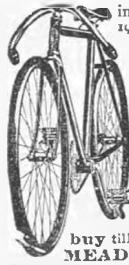

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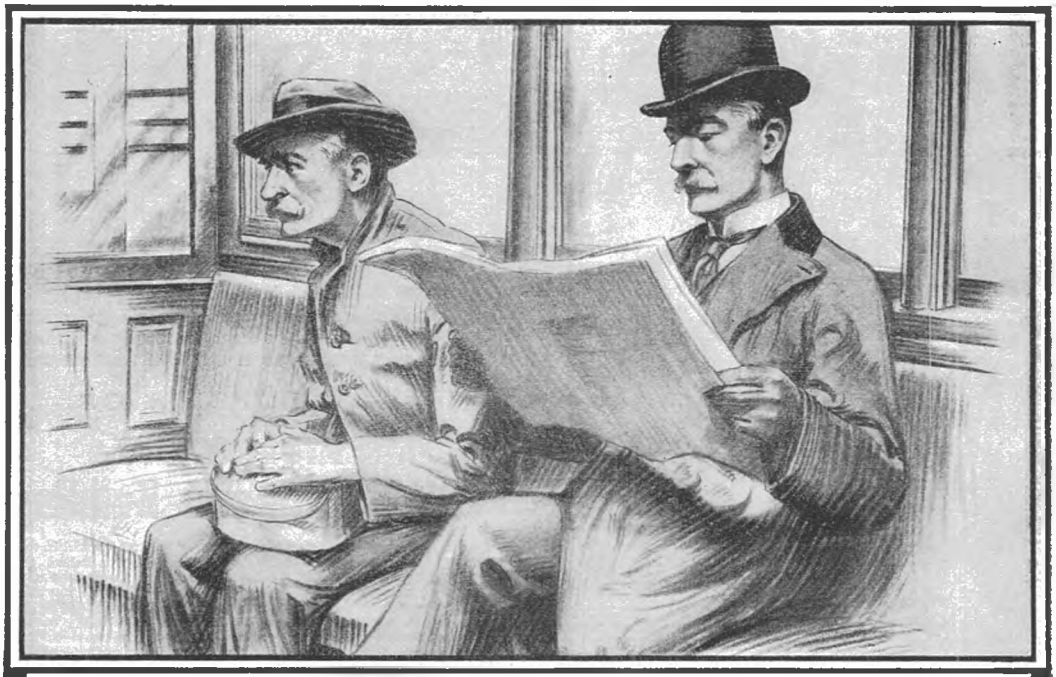

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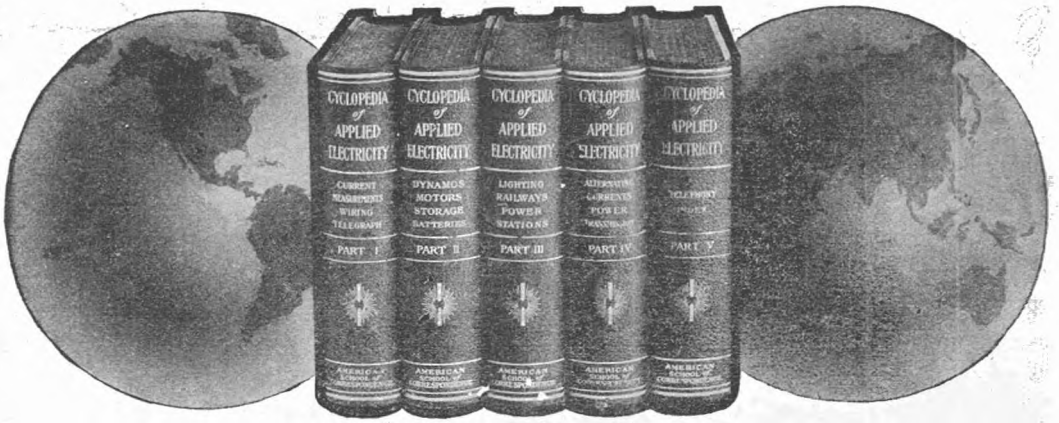

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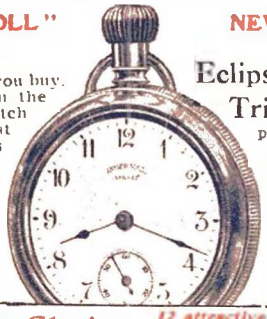

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