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THE ARGOSY

FOR MARCH

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—For the man who shaves too close, or whose face is tender under the razor;

—For surgeon, and nurse, and patient;

—For the one who seeks only Comfort and Health—or for the one who cultivates Beauty as well;

—For the skin that is loose and lifeless, or skin that is too harsh;

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RAY NYEMASTER
Private Secretary to
Congressman Dawson

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Atalissa, Ia., Nov. 8, 1905.

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The English Duchesses . . . . . Ralph D. Blumenfeld
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Beauty and the Beast	An Amazing Rescue	The Man in the Dark
The Cruise of the Cadis	At the Clairvoyant's	When the Flume Ran Dry
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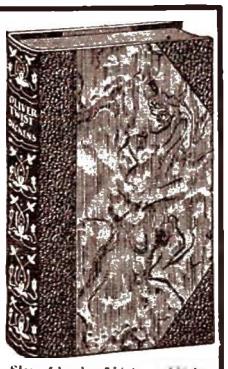

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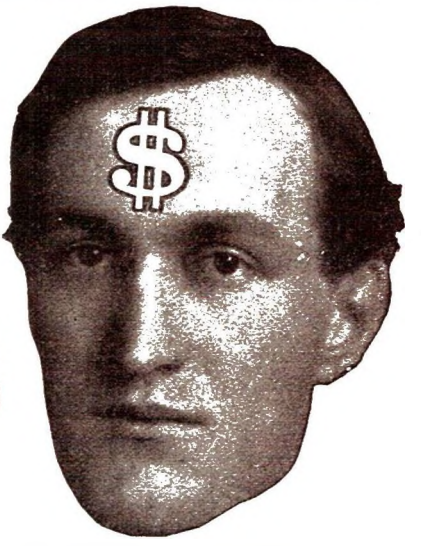

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(*Complete in This Issue.*)

CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE SURPRISE.

"AND what under the sun has brought you two here?" Ferguson asked, as he dropped Carey's hand.

The latter returned to his chair on the stoop of the Carter City post-office and laughed, a little ruefully.

"The main consideration was the stage which bumps one back to the railway and civilization. We supposed that it left at ten, and therefore set forth from the palatial hotel to meet it here. Now it seems that she goes at noon, and as it won't be worth while to drag our stuff back and all that——"

The chair was hard and the sun rather warm Carey ended his sentence in a stretch and a yawn.

Greer, his companion, returned from a study of the rough Western landscape.

"So you're settled out here, Ferguson, are you?"

"Been here for a matter of three years now," the younger man replied.

"Working along the same old lines?"

"Yes. Assaying and all that sort of thing. I report on mines once in a while and take a little trip East once or twice a year, but—oh, it's a good sort of country to live in. I'm not located here at Carter City, you know. I've a place over at White Falls, nearer the mines and twenty miles farther into the wilderness."

"Good Lord!" Carey stared ironically. "Twenty miles farther! Is there more wilderness on earth than right here in this—er—city?"

"Quite a little of it," laughed the assayer. "Between here and the Pacific you'll find several acres more of wild country."

"Well, none of it for mine! Fresh air, large mountains, uninhabited hundred-mile stretches, and so on, are all right for people that like 'em. As for me, poor, benighted little Chicago will do!"

"Pshaw! Once you were used to the quiet and the bigness of things in general, you'd never want to go back. Why, when I was coming across country yesterday—I just rode over for a few things, you know—I looked behind at the mountains and——"

"Went into a sort of heavenly ecstasy, no doubt. Very, very pretty, and I'm glad you like it."

The assayer shrugged his shoulders.

"You're incorrigible, Carey. Well—talk about your beloved Chicago, if you like." He found a chair. "What are you doing? What's Greer doing? What have you both been doing in the three or four years since I came away?"

"What have we been doing?" Carey glanced at his watch and sighed. It was a long way from stage-time. "Well, for the past year or two we've been—er—promoting things."

"Eh?"

"Fact. We seemed to drift into it naturally and together. We happened to put through a big railroad deal some

time back, and the whole affair was so satisfactory that we've let stocks and bonds alone ever since and taken to financing things for other people. It pays."

"But doesn't increase your chances of future salvation."

"Oh, we're endeavoring to be honest," Carey laughed. "So far we have handled only the highest sort of things, and with the best success."

"And why have you come so far West now?"

Carey looked quizzically at his partner.

"Well, Joe thinks, I believe, that we came under the spell of a hoodoo impulse and that the hoodoo's been with us ever since. As a matter of fact, we started out to look over some property in person, and as it worked around were forced to come over here on the stage from Kellogg's to wait for the other stage to town."

"And on a line with everything else," Greer observed, "we even hit this red-hot veranda two hours too soon!"

Carey rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"We haven't had the best luck in the world this trip—that's the truth. Every blessed thing has gone wrong since we started. Train wrecked twenty miles out of Chicago—missed connections at some forsaken spot and had to spend the night in a six-by-nine depot—got lost when we started across the wilds, and that took another two days—then reached the spot we were after and found that our man had left for a month and that we couldn't find out much of anything alone. Therefore we had to trot homeward by this route. To-morrow we shall be well toward home again."

"If the hoodoo doesn't step in again," Greer chuckled sourly.

"It's time we were getting there, too," Carey mused. "We've got a big job on our hands in the next couple of weeks."

"What sort?"

The promoter frowned for a minute.

"Well, it's a sort of skin-of-your-teeth business, Ferguson. Very likely we were foolish to enter it in the start, but it promised so well that I urged Joe into doing his share."

He filled the pipe which was augmenting his dwindling cigar supply and tilted back.

"Here's where we stand—Lord help us! A few weeks back, Ferguson, I struck about the nicest thing in a silver mine that ever happened. It's—well, somewhere in the next State to this, and they call it the Black Bull. Just now it's owned by an estate and isn't operating. More than that, it's for sale.

"So far, so good. I happened across it, found out all about it—and finally got an option on it. I had to pay mighty well for that option, too. It took every last cent we had and—well, we had to borrow about every cent we could borrow, as well."

"And you're trying to peddle your Black Bull?" Ferguson asked.

"We've got a buyer! I made pretty certain of that before I went ahead. We've been doing a good deal of business with Furman, the Chicago millionaire, and he's going to take it off our hands at a good profit."

"We *think* he is," Greer inserted.

"Oh, he is. Furman's a queer Dick in some ways, but we'll put this through all right."

Perhaps there was a false note in his confidence. Greer looked up and sighed softly.

"You know, Ferguson," he said, "we've never tackled a proposition of just this sort before; that is, anything on our own hook exclusively. Hitherto we've been raising cash for other people.

"We're in pretty deep water, all right enough. If Furman decides not to buy us out, we're wrecked, temporarily, at any rate. If he holds off too long and we have to let it drop, we're wrecked just the same. If he makes up his mind to buy within two weeks, we're all right, but——"

To Ferguson it seemed like a very considerable "but." He said nothing, however, and Carey broke in, with forced enthusiasm:

"Drat your pessimism anyway, Joe! You've been harping on one or another such theme ever since we started out on this trip. It's all right! Furman's going to buy us out and get one of the

finest silver properties in the country—that's all there is to it!"

"Well—I hope so."

The assayer from White Falls sought to turn the subject a little.

"Well, if you can't sell Furman your mine, send him out here—there's another one, reputed to be pretty good."

"What's its name?" asked Carey.

"I don't know that it has ever been christened," Ferguson replied. "The place belongs now to a sour old customer named Gratton, who lives in the heart of the wilds, thirty miles or so the other side of White Falls. The mine's a little farther still beyond his house."

"A good one?"

"Don't know the first thing about it. It's supposed to be tremendously rich, but it hasn't been worked for years. About a week ago some one wrote me from the East in regard to it. That's one of the things I came over here for yesterday.

"Caswell, who has the general store, picked up some of the ore several years ago, and it's never been assayed. I got it from him, and it's in my saddle-bags now. To-morrow I shall know something more about it."

"Do you suppose there'd be anything in it for us?" Carey asked idly.

"I don't know. There might be. Wait until I've made the assay and I shall be able to tell you more definitely. Lots of people lately seem to have been interested in it. I suppose Gratton's pushing the property somehow."

"Then he's trying hard to sell?"

"That's what they say, Carey."

"Many been here to look at it?"

"Um—yes, several."

"Did you know any of them?"

"No."

Carey mused over his pipe for a little.

"Now, I wonder if we could do anything with this?"

"See here," Greer put in dryly, "wouldn't it be better to just sort of chew up this Black Bull mouthful before we bite off another?"

"Oh, I don't mean to buy the thing, Joe. I meant—well, if we could interest capital in the mine, Gratton would be likely to pay us a little something, in the natural order of events."

"Exactly, but—we'll wait."

Carey turned to the assayer; the subject of this new silver mine seemed still to be agitating his mind.

"Has it really been kicking up much excitement?"

"Well, I hardly think the price of silver's gone down on account of it," Ferguson smiled, "but certainly some interest has been aroused lately, since Gratton came back from the South, where he was ranching, and settled down up there. I suppose he has been attracting attention to his mine in a quiet way since then."

"But he hasn't closed with any one?"

"Not yet, I think. I don't know though, Carey. By this time he may have."

"Why?"

"A couple of men went through White Falls yesterday on their way up to his place."

"Who were they?"

"Don't know. They hailed from Chicago, I believe."

"Chicago? Um. We ought to know most people in Chicago who would be interested. Wasn't Christy, was it?"

"Oh, no. Christy's a big fellow, isn't he?"

"About six feet."

"These were both small men."

"Were they? Who the dickens could they have been?"

"What did they look like—old or young, or what? Did you see them?" Greer asked absently.

"Yes, I was there when they stepped from the stage. One of them—well, let's see. One of them was a young fellow of thirty or so—light hair, pretty curly. He, I believe, was an assayer, too, or a mining expert of some kind. He had an assaying kit at all events, and I presume that he was going along to examine the ore on the spot."

"Um-um? Well, I presume there are several light-haired assayers in Chicago," Carey observed. "How about the other fellow?"

"Oh—he was fifty or so. Rather short, too, and wore an iron-gray beard, trimmed down pretty well. He seemed very brisk and businesslike, and he hadn't much to say. They simply

stayed overnight at the Falls, got horses in the morning and rode on to Gratton's. That's all I know about them, Carey. They were not back when I left, and they'll hardly return for several days more."

During the description Greer had started a little and opened his mouth as if to speak.

Then a frown had stolen over his face and he remained silent; perhaps he felt that lately pessimism had been over-indulged at his hands.

His partner, on the other hand, was rather whiter when Ferguson ceased speaking. His brow had contracted considerably, and he leaned across to the assayer.

"You said a short man of fifty with an iron-gray Vandyke beard?"

"Yes."

"And the other fellow—the young one. Was his nose rather long and sharp and his chin rather weak? You know the sort I mean. A sort of half-effeminate face, with big blue eyes? Smart enough in his way, but a kind of mincing ass at that?"

"Well, I'm bound to say that the description fits, Carey."

"And this elder man——" the promoter hurried on. "He smoked short, light cigars, held one in the corner of his mouth all the time he smoked it, and chewed it fairly to a pulp before he was done? Did he?"

"He certainly did."

"Oh—jimminy!"

Carey sat back, semi-thunderstruck. Ferguson's voice was rather animated as he asked:

"Who on earth were they, man?"

"Ferguson!" Carey stared at him in some bewilderment. "You never knew many of the Chicago moneyed people?"

"No."

"I thought not. Well, I'll tell you about one of them. Furman's the man I mean. He likes to look into things himself. He occasionally slides off to investigate a piece of property on his own hook. Only three or four days ago we had a letter from town, stating that Furman was away for a week or two. As for the other," he rattled on, "there's mighty little doubt about him. The description fits young Lisser to a T!"

"Why, you mean——"

"I mean that Furman's a short man of fifty with a gray beard! He has had several pieces of mining property lately in view, and has been wavering between them and ours. This cursed Gratton mine must have appealed to him, and he's taken Lisser along and traveled here for a personal inspection! That man was Furman, as sure as fate! It jibes perfectly with what he might be expected to do under the circumstances.

"Then the time he arrived—day before yesterday—fits in just as neatly; and there's no doubt about Lisser, the assayer who has done some work for him recently. Yes, sir! They're there now, and——"

He stopped for a minute and shook his head; when he resumed it was in a lower, calmer tone:

"And if Furman likes this miserable mine, and can get it cheap enough, he'll buy it—and we're done, Black Bull and all! There is no time left to find another possible buyer, and certainly no time to work him in, and the option hasn't much longer to run. It's a certainty—that's what it is! If that property's good and the price low enough to be tempting, you and I are—broke, Joe!"

CHAPTER II.

IN PURSUIT.

GREER stared at his partner with a kind of cynical stupidity that brought a covert smile to Ferguson's lips.

"Well, Billy?"

"Well?"

"The hoodoo seems still to be good for eight hours' work a day, doesn't it?"

"Bosh! The man's Furman, fast enough, but—but——"

"Precisely. 'But' if he doesn't like the property, we're all right. He will like it, hang him! I can feel the blasted premonition in my very bones!"

"Those bones feel too much altogether," Carey responded. "And still—well, it is awkward, Joe. You—you don't know just what the Gratton mine is good for, Ferguson?"

"I don't know the first thing about it, Carey. It's reported to be tremendously rich and worth a small fortune, and they say that it can be bought for a very low figure, all things considered —something like a million for the whole property. To-morrow night I'll be able to tell you all about it."

"Something like a million!" said the promoter. "A good million dollars that might be in our hands, if——"

He relapsed into gloomy silence. Greer drummed upon the porch and groaned aloud.

But presently Carey roused himself.

"Look here, Joe. Do you know the name of the man that wins?"

"What?"

"It's Johnny-on-the-spot! That's what it is!"

"Yes, but this spot——"

"Isn't so devilish far away that it can't be reached!" He turned briskly to Ferguson. "This infernal Gratton and his mine are how far away?"

"Well, it's twenty miles or so to White Falls and another good thirty into the hills to Gratton's place."

"If we rode back with you to-day we could get an early start in the morning and perhaps make Gratton's to-morrow night?"

"Why, I suppose so, but——"

"There are no buts in this hand, Ferguson—we don't deal 'em out just now! Where can we get horses?"

Greer had arisen.

"You don't mean to follow Furman?" he cried.

"Don't I, though! What I'm trying to indicate is just this: we'll get astride any two beasts hereabouts that happen to own four legs. We'll beat it back to White Falls with Ferguson. To-morrow morning we'll make tracks for Furman—and once I get face to face with that wavering and cautious millionaire, I'll talk down Gratton's mine and talk up the Black Bull, if I have to hold Gratton off with a battery of artillery!"

"But how will Furman take it?"

"I'll manage Furman!" Carey's voice rose excitedly. "Good Lord, Joe! Think what it'll do to us if he should decide to buy out this Gratton! He has only a certain amount of ready cash now which he wants to put into a promising silver mine. He's not going to buy two, by a very long shot.

"If he loads up with this Gratton stuff, we're done for! If he doesn't, it's ten to one we sell him the Black Bull and line our little pockets! Therefore, he's not going to! I'll get next to Furman, if he's in the very act of buying this man out, and I'll hand him such a line of mining conversation that he'll dream of Black Bulls all night for a week, and—where can we get horses, Ferguson?"

"I suppose I can raise a couple," the assayer replied slowly.

"And when are you going home?"

"In the course of an hour."

"Then round up your nags!" said Carey, as he thumped the porch rail. "We'll ride back with you, and push on to Gratton's as soon as possible. We've got everything to win and nothing to lose. Hustle!"

Greer was shaking his head as Ferguson walked away.

To the rather more timorous partner the Black Bull proposition seemed distinctly to have gone up in the air.

He knew Furman perfectly for a far-seeing, shrewd maker of money. He rarely haggled, and his reputation was not unknown.

Should this Gratton property appeal to him, should Lisser report favorably, should Gratton's proposition promise a certain number of dollars and cents more than the Black Bull, Furman would figure in his note-book for a little—and render an answer from which there could be no appeal.

That was the worst of it: Furman possessed such an immutable capacity of coming to his own decisions! Had they been able to close with him before leaving, the sale of the Black Bull would have been a certainty. Now it was—well, rather more than an uncertainty.

Carey smoked on in silence for a long interval. His eyes were narrowed and he whistled softly.

He seemed to be planning his campaign, and from the set of his square jaw the campaign promised to be a forceful one.

"Billy, is there any sense in it?" Greer finally muttered.

"Sense! You bet there is! There's just the same sense that there would be in a drowning man clutching a shingle, instead of letting it float by. You see, it might be a particularly buoyant kind of shingle, and unless he took a grip on it he'd have no means of knowing that it wouldn't save him."

"That's well enough, but if Furman really likes this piece of property, and Gratton makes it cheap enough——"

"Then we'll make Furman like our Black Bull better, and we'll come down to the last limit if we have to—even if we make only a hundred dollars apiece! It's better than being wiped out on that wretched option, isn't it?"

"I suppose so."

"I know so, and—ah! Here's Ferguson."

The young assayer had trotted around the corner of the post-office, riding his own horse and leading two more, saddled and bridled.

"Here you are. I took them for a week."

"Good!"

Carey walked quickly over and examined the mounts. They were thoroughly satisfactory. He turned back to Greer, dubious still, upon the porch.

"We'll have to go in there and dig out such of our belongings as we want to take, Joe. Then we'll—vamoose!"

"Billy, what's the use? This trip's queered and——"

"Queered be hanged! Come along."

In something like half an hour the trio were ready for the trip. A word or two of good-by, and they trotted out of Carter City at either side of Ferguson.

Conversation was scanty in the extreme. Ferguson seemed fairly occupied in keeping track of the multitude of packages and bundles with which he had laden himself, and there was an uncomfortably large mass of ore in his saddle-bags which appeared inclined to shift at the slightest provocation.

Greer's head was bowed as he rode along, and Carey still squinted ahead and made plans.

In the main the country was the poor, rough range of a few cattle. Human habitations there were almost none. Ferguson smiled. It was as well that Carey had grown absorbed. He might have compared it all to his Chicago and longed to breathe in the smoky fog again.

A good ten miles had been put behind when Ferguson drew rein with a little exclamation.

"Hold on!"

"What's up?" Carey raised his head. "Lose your new hat, or did the bundle of boiled shirts roll overboard?"

"Neither," laughed the assayer. "I'll have to take that trail and go up to Byrd's ranch-house. I've some mail I promised to drop there on the way over. It's only a short mile."

"And shall we ride on ahead?"

"Yes, slowly. I sha'n't be there more than five minutes. I'll catch up with you."

"Then give us some of that stuff, Ferguson. You can't expect to make time when you're carrying all an ordinary furniture van could accommodate."

The assayer laughed again and unloaded a goodly portion of his purchases. Carey and Greer distributed them as well as possible, and Ferguson, digging in the spurs, galloped away.

He turned and waved a hand, and the partners jogged slowly forward.

Two miles could not consume a great many minutes with a fresh horse. Inside of half an hour at most the assayer would overtake them; until then the way was fairly well defined.

Carey surveyed the scenery and grunted wearily. He searched for one of the few remaining cigars and pulled his horse down to a walk, a little trail of blue smoke floating behind him.

Thus perhaps three miles and one hour went monotonously into the past. At the top of a little ridge Greer stopped.

"He's a deuce of a time in getting here, Billy!"

"He certainly is."

"Wonder if we can be off the track?"

"Ferguson said due west on this apology for a trail. That's where we've been keeping—where we are now."

"Still, it can't have taken him any such time as this."

Carey swung from his saddle and looked back.

"He's not in sight, that's very certain. Get down and stretch, Billy. It's grateful in the extreme."

"And there's some lunch over here."

"We'll eat it," Carey announced. "If Ferguson isn't here to help, that's his lookout."

In the shadow of a bush they made a slow meal, while the horses browsed.

Now and then a glance was cast backward. Not a sign of the assayer appeared. The sun was casting longer shadows now; four o'clock was well behind when Carey finally arose from the ground.

"No use, Joe. We've missed him or he's missed us. This is the road, fast enough, but—well, Ferguson's not here. That's about all."

"We'll make for White Falls, then."

"And pray that we find it!" Carey responded, not too sweetly, as he kicked his stirrup into position. "If there's one thing a little worse than these backwoods settlements it's the stretches of wilderness between them."

The slow trot was resumed. At intervals of perhaps half a mile they paused to survey the country behind.

Ferguson was nowhere to be seen; not a human being appeared in the miles of open country which lay to the rear.

Probably something had delayed him at Byrd's; possibly he had taken another route; at all events they were certain to meet him in White Falls that evening. The chances were that they would find him there ahead of them.

It was nearing six when Carey suddenly raised his voice, and Greer detected a glad note therein:

"A man! Thank the Lord, a man!"

"Whereabouts?"

"Just ahead there—quarter of a mile or so. See him? He's coming this way."

"Ah, yes, and there are three or four more behind him."

"And farther still," Carey continued with some relief, "I'm very much mistaken if that collection of roofs in the far distance doesn't represent White Falls! I was beginning to think we'd have to contrive a camp out here with your military brushes and my safety razor."

The group of five had perceived them now, and the trotting horses were hurried to a gallop.

Nor did there seem a doubt as to the direction the men were taking: their objective point was the men from Chicago, and they made haste to reach it.

"Ferguson's arrived there first, concluded that we were lost and started a searching party after us!" Carey chuckled. "That's it."

"He's not with them, then," said Greer, whose eyes were the better of the two.

"What? Isn't he? Funny, but—that's what happened, nevertheless."

On the party swept, and in a very few minutes the five were pulling in sharply about the two.

Carey stared a little: there seemed to be a profusion of firearms in that crowd. The apparent leader, a thickset, bearded man, wore an imposing revolver at either side of his saddle. Each of the others was visibly armed.

Their expressions were distinctly peculiar, too. Not one face showed relief or pleasure; yet each one indicated a stern determination and a smothered anger.

"Carey? Is that your name?"

"That is my name. What——"

"Is your name Greer?" The thickset man turned.

"It is."

"From Carter City this morning?"

"Yes."

"You rode out with John Ferguson?"

"Of course we did!" said Carey with rising anger. "What the devil sort of spectacular business is this anyway? What——"

"Ride forward!"

The order seemed fairly hurled at the Chicago men. It was more than an order; the very tone contained a curt, contemptuous command, and Carey's anger went up several notches.

"My excellent friend," he said coolly, "we had every intention of riding forward. Now that you put it in precisely that way, however, I don't know whether we'll ride forward or not! It seems to me——"

Some two seconds later he found himself more than merely startled. One

of the revolvers had been whipped under his very nose; behind it, the short man's pale blue eyes glittered at him and a furious voice cried:

"I'm the sheriff of this here county! You'll ride into town, you measly curs, or you'll never ride anywhere! Go on!"

Carey's horse, suddenly prodded, galloped onward. Ahead, two of the party rode; behind, two more; at the side, the amiable sheriff.

When Greer recovered breath Carey seemed also to be making his first normal inhalation since the incident.

"That—that person is—convincing, isn't he?" muttered Carey.

"Billy, what under heaven have we struck?"

"Ask me something easy. The sheriff of the county, according to his own story. But——"

"But what have we done to get this sort of treatment? What earthly right has any one to hold us up this way?" Greer cried angrily.

Carey, not a coward, was nevertheless diplomatic.

"Joe," he said, as softly as the pounding hoofs would allow, "I don't pretend to say just what we've stumbled into here. It's not mistaken identity—that is certain, although I can't imagine how on earth even our names should be known in this unholy spot. But whatever it is, we're not in friendly company, and I don't feel ready to argue with a gentleman who carries a thing like that machine-gun!

"Great Cæsar!" he concluded, with a sidelong glance at the sheriff's holsters. "I never supposed such a contrivance was manufactured!"

"And are we to be driven along like this?" Greer's fury rose as his companion cooled.

"For the present, Joseph," said Carey dryly, "we not only are going to be, but we are. Be quiet. We'll only make matters worse by talking perhaps. It'll all be explained in a few minutes, whatever it is. Here's the town now."

They were at the head of what passed for White Falls' main street. Both men perceived that something unusual was afoot as they looked down the crude way between the crude houses.

People filled the street; men on horseback were about, armed and evidently organizing into some sort of compact body.

But at the sound of the horses the whole seemed electrified. A sudden roar went up from every hand, and a hoarse, sinister note assailed the ears of the astonished men:

"They've got 'em! They've got 'em! Dunmore's caught 'em!"

The note swelled to a roar. The sheriff pulled down to a canter; his party pressed more closely about Carey and Greer. The exponent of law and order stood in his stirrups and held up a hand.

"We've got 'em, all right!" he shouted. "I've got 'em, and I'm responsible for 'em. That's all I'm goin' to say. You men clear the way!"

"No!" Carey started and almost shuddered. As yet the situation had not developed in its entirety, but the details were filling in too rapidly to be pleasant.

"No! No! No!" the roar came again, and the crowd pressed squarely against the horses.

A long arm reached past and sought to grasp Carey. It was dashed down by the little sheriff, and his hard voice rose again:

"Rush 'em, then, the fools!"

Together the spurs were planted. The solid little body of seven swerved forward and pushed at the gathering. Just for an instant it seemed that there would be no giving way; but the sheriff's horse was on his hind legs and ready to drop again.

The little trick made an opening. Through it they pushed like a shot. The crowd parted and broke for the sides of the street, and the men galloped on.

Remarkable, inexplicable as it all was, Carey and Greer knew instinctively that they had had a narrow escape, and a sigh of relief left them. They were free at least from—what? And they were racing onward—where?

That question at least was soon to be settled. Before a small house of heavy logs the party drew rein.

A curt snap of the fingers constituted their invitation to dismount, but they accepted it without question. Their

horses were taken; they themselves were hustled without ceremony into a grim, rough room, furnished with a desk or two and a few chairs.

A brief, breath-taking pause, and Carey sank into one of them. The sheriff slammed the thick door and shot the bolt.

"And now, if you please," said the man from Chicago, "just what does this infernal outrage signify?"

"It signifies that you're in jail. An' yer there for the murder of young John Ferguson!" replied the sheriff.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOODOO GROWS ACTIVE.

CAREY dropped back, almost limp. His partner stared open-mouthed at the sheriff.

"Ferg—Ferguson!" gasped the former. "John Ferguson dead!"

"Yes." The sheriff seemed wholly unimpressed.

"But—why, man, only this noon we rode out of Carter City with him on the way here."

"We know that."

"But—but—why, hang it! It's impossible!"

"Mebbe so. John's body's at Byrd's, with four knife-holes in his back, just the same."

"He was stabbed at Byrd's?"

The sheriff turned impatiently.

"No, he was stabbed half a mile this side o' Byrd's, as you mighty well know."

Carey was on his feet again now. He crossed to the sheriff, who laid a warning hand upon his hip.

"Man," Carey began, rather incoherently, "do you—do you actually mean to stand there and tell me that Ferguson is dead and that we're accused of the crime?"

"Seem t' be much doubt about the main idee—out thar?" He jerked a grim thumb toward the street.

"But——"

Greer stopped helplessly. The sheriff faced him with a hard stare, and his hand remained on the hip.

"Mister, you two've done a bad job!" he said. "You did a fool thing in riding in here, instead o' making tracks north or south. I ain't denying that it'd give me a whole lot o' pleasure to have a grip on the rope that'll go around your necks sooner or later, but——"

"Rope!" gasped Carey.

"But my dooty to this here county's to keep you safe an' sound until the regular processes o' law can be gone through with, an' I'm here to do that same dooty! There's four cells in thar. They're good an' thick, an' mebbe they'll stand in—in case o' trouble. Git in thar!"

"Do you—actually mean to say that we're to be locked up?"

"I'll turn ye loose on the street, if you say so!" the sheriff replied, with unpleasant irony. "I wouldn't ask anything better."

Greer, dazed, merely stared at him. Carey, however, was regaining his senses slowly.

"That crowd wishes to lynch us?"

"That's the way I took it, mister."

Carey frowned at the floor for a moment; then he arose and beckoned to his companion in misery.

"Joe, I'm beginning to take some stock in that hoodoo of yours! This man's right. Until this miserable affair is explained, we'll do best by submitting to being locked up. Come!"

He waited while the sheriff pointed the way through a heavy door and down a rather wide corridor. His partner followed slowly.

A rattling of keys, and a cell door had been opened. The sheriff motioned silently.

For the first time in their lives, Mr. William Carey and Mr. Joseph Greer, of Chicago, entered a prisoner's cell—and, worst of all, upon a charge of cold-blooded murder!

Greer, it appeared, was temporarily too thunderstruck for thought. His companion on the other hand, seemed to be thinking rapidly as he entered the narrow little room and looked about.

On the other side of the door the sheriff snapped the lock, and breathed a sort of grunting sigh. Carey stepped to the bars and addressed him.

"My dear man!"

"What?"

"I'm finally convinced that I'm not asleep, but—is this some asinine trick or mistake, or is John Ferguson actually dead?"

"Jack'll be buried day after to-morrow, they say." The answer was laconic and positive.

"Then may I say that we knew nothing about it?"

"You can say whatever comes into yer mind, mister."

"But—hang it! Do we look like a pair of murderers? Haven't you sense enough to see——"

He snapped his fingers in utter exasperation and faced the officer squarely.

The latter watched him in silence for several seconds. Meanwhile, his expression softened, if only a little.

"I'm bound t' say you don't," he admitted, "but the evidence is all in, I reckon, and there don't seem t' be much doubt."

Carey's voice was very quiet as he continued:

"Perhaps it is useless to say that you are utterly wrong—that Ferguson was an old friend of ours, and that we'd have protected him instead of injuring him; but may I ask just how the thing happened? That's not a great deal, is it, after the treatment we've received in the last hour?"

Again the sheriff studied him thoughtfully.

"Looka here, mister. There ain't any doubt about either of you, I'm afraid. John went out o' Carter City with you, and you came here with all his goods. They found John down near Byrd's, several hours ago."

"He left us to deliver some mail there," Carey interpolated. "He was going to catch up, and we spent hours waiting for him. He didn't follow us, and we were still dallying when you and your friends came to meet us."

"Mebbe." There was a certain absence of conviction in the word. "Well, that's where they found him, anyway. He was 'most dead when one o' Byrd's cow-men came by, all stuck up with a knife and bleedin' bad. Man stopped and went to him, and then he saw who 'twas."

The sheriff's face darkened at the thought.

"Jack was 'most gone, they say. Byrd's man bent over him, an' tried t' find out what had happened. All the boy could say was something 'bout Greer an' somethin' 'bout Carey. He got that far an' then—died!"

"Well, poor old Ferguson!"

"Byrd 'phoned down t' Carter City, a'n got particulars 'bout you ridin' out with Ferguson this mornin'. Then he sent a man here, hot-foot, an' we've been lookin' for you ever since. I jest started out to find you, when—well, when we found you."

"And now——"

"Now you're here, thank the Lord, an' held for trial!"

"There are no other particulars of the affair?" Carey asked slowly.

"Only, from the way the ground was kicked up, that you two must 'a' had a good job gettin' John licked!" the sheriff replied. "I reckon you know more about that than I do. They found his horse, without the saddle. You'd taken the rest of the stuff."

"But we took it when he started for Byrd's! We took it so that he could make better time!"

"Mebbe ye'll have a chance to prove it."

"Maybe! That means——"

The sheriff's head shook. He turned and walked away, and after a few seconds the door at the end of the corridor slammed.

Carey turned to Greer, wide-eyed and breathing hard.

"Well, Joe, of all the tough propositions!"

"I don't want anything tougher—I know that!"

"What the deuce is going to happen to us?"

"I presume that we're to be kept locked up here until the court sits and we're tried—whenever that may be. Possibly, if we can get word to Chicago——"

"We'll have to wire Gregory, and see what on earth he can do in the legal line," said Carey musingly. "It certainly is downright pleasant, and the case, just now, doesn't look over bright for us, but—oh, it's too confoundedly absurd! In a day or so, I presume, they'll catch the real murderer and

we'll be let loose. Until then we'll have to make the best of it."

"And I, for one, am satisfied here!" said Greer flatly.

"Eh?"

"That crowd out there were about the nastiest lot I've ever encountered. The way they yelled, and—all that! I'd give considerable to remain out of their hands until this thing is cleared up. Ferguson seems to have been something of a favorite."

"I suppose, if they did get at us——" Carey broke off. "Well, that's all too utter rot, Joe!"

They were silent for a considerable space, each man, presumably, occupied with his own thoughts.

The pursuit of Furman seemed to have received an unpleasant setback. Where in the morning they had set forth to see the millionaire, neither would now have refused the mere permission to flee Chicagoward.

But they were there, however innocent, and the lock was strong and the crowd without not as friendly as might be desired. There they might stay until the murderer of poor John Ferguson was apprehended or—neither cared to speculate upon possible alternatives.

The door at the end of the corridor opened. Somewhere above an oil lamp had been lighted. The door closed again, and the same stillness settled upon the little jail.

"Small consolation, anyway—that light," Carey observed.

"Something in the supper line would be more to the point," muttered Greer.

"Well, I don't know that I'm worrying altogether about meals. This morning my whole idea was to intercept Furman. Just now, about all I'd ask is a sight of State Street once again."

"But you don't seriously believe——"

"That we're in real trouble? I'm blest if I know what to believe, Joe! We're certainly in the funniest and most unpleasant mess that could well have overtaken us. We know we're all right at the moment, but what ideas the population of this delightful town may take into its head overnight is rather beyond conjecture."

Greer shuddered a little.

"Then please don't try conjecturing, Billy. I—I've been thinking along the same lines myself, and it isn't exactly cheering. That fellow that grabbed for you——"

He shook his head. Then he listened hard, for Carey was in an attitude of keen attention.

"You heard it?"

"I heard some one shout," Greer admitted unwillingly. "It—isn't anything, Billy."

Carey walked to the window, stood upon the stool, and sought to peer out. The narrow space gave upon a courtyard, and he could see nothing; but on his perch several sounds became unhappily distinct.

There was a noise of many feet somewhere without—a muttering and a grumbling from a hundred throats.

There was a loud-toned argument, too, in which Carey seemed to distinguish Dunmore's harsh voice.

Then stillness followed for a little; then a renewed chorus of shouts, swelling to a roar.

"Joe!" Carey turned very white even in the dull light.

"I hear them!" said Greer in a low voice.

"Is it possible—is it even supposable—that they are after—us?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid——"

The door of the corridor opened again. Carey leaped from his stool and crossed to the door, tense and pale.

Down the passage footsteps hurried. Before the door of the cell the sheriff stood. He was breathing heavily and his eyes glittered angrily again.

"You two!"

"Well?"

"There's a mob outside this jail! They're all friends o' Jack Ferguson's, and they want—you!"

"Good God!" gasped Carey.

"I'm doing what I can, an' I'm going to do what I can. It ain't for me t' say whether ye're innocent or guilty, however things may look. I'm on hand to arrest you an' keep you for the law, an' that's what I'm going to do while the breath's left in me, but—here!"

He passed a pair of huge revolvers through the bars. Carey received them half stupidly and stood silent.

"They's all o' four hundred out thar now, an' they mean business! I've sent to Bad Eye for help—an' mebbe it'll get here in time. But if it don't, an' that bunch gets beyond me an' the couple o' deputies, you'll have to take care o' yourselves!"

He handed in a heavy cartridge box and walked away.

Carey turned, thoroughly frightened at their terrible predicament.

"Joe!" he said thickly. "It's—it's too damnably incredible for words, but—why, we're up against a lynching proposition! You and I—think of it! Just two ordinary, harmless business men, away out here, locked up in jail and with a mob after us!

"Billy, I don't dare to think of it! I——"

Somewhere without the roar rose again, more angry and more determined than before. An indistinguishable shout followed, in Dunmore's tones. A pause—the crack of a pistol—then another roar.

Carey, white still, passed a revolver to his companion with steady hand.

"All right!" he said. "If those fools want us, Joe—if they get us—we won't go into the next world alone! It's the craziest nightmare the mind of man ever dreamed; I can't believe now that it's all actually occurring, but if they get in here—by thunder, we'll give 'em a scrap they'll remember!"

He stood at the rear of the cell, the gun in his hand. Greer, cooler now, examined his own weapon.

And a crash came from the front!

With a clatter—and each man knew too well that the outer door had given way—the shouting rose to a perfect pandemonium. There was a sound of tramping feet, too, and the voices were exultant. The jail door, at least, had been passed by the mob!

"It's up to us, all right, Joe!" Carey cried.

The din grew with each passing second. Pound, pound, pound! It was the corridor door now, and when that had been shattered—well, the game would be on in good earnest!

It seemed to be giving, too! A sudden, tremendous blow, and the wood could be heard splintering. Another, and something creaked ominously and the splintering grew more marked. A third crash—and the door banged inward!

Down the corridor a screaming chorus greeted the imprisoned men. The thunder of feet followed, and a crazed mass of humanity swept down on them.

Before the door of the cell a dozen frenzied men fairly piled atop of one another. The leader held a key, and fumbled excitedly with the lock.

"Good-by, Joe!" Carey muttered. "Now, damn 'em! Let 'em have it!"

He leveled the revolver and fired. The bullet flattened against the bar and fell to the floor.

Greer, too, had pulled the trigger, and a yell from without told of the finding of a mark. Through the sudden haze of smoke Carey sighted his weapon again.

And then it was over.

The cell door swung inward upon its hinges. The crowd surged into the little space. Carey and Greer were down—disarmed and flat upon their faces.

Afterward happenings came rapidly.

Dazed, semi-conscious of what was taking place, the two men were hustled forth. Down the corridor, through the rough room, filled with frenzied men, they were pushed and shoved.

Somewhere toward the door a coiled rope was swung above the heads of the crowd, and another shriek greeted its appearance.

"String 'em up! String 'em up!"

Through the door they went and into the street. Helpless, hopeless now, the men were borne along to death. A block or so they traveled; and the furious gathering swayed to a turbulent, shouting standstill.

"This here pole!"

It was the flagstaff in the little public square. Dim, gruesome in the moonlight, a slim figure coiled one end of the rope about his arm and began to climb upward. Carey, momentarily beside his partner, drew a sharp breath.

"It's all up, Joe! This crazy gang's going to do for us!"

"Good-by, old man!" Greer was desperately calm now. "If—if you should get out of it, tell my wife——"

"We're going together, Joe."

The other covered his face. Carey bit his lip. From somewhere above the noose had floated down, and the loose end of the rope as well. Their captors shoved the men toward the pole.

Then—a horse galloped down the street. His rider's wild shout rose even above the turmoil as he pounded through the gathering.

"Stop! Stop! Stop!"

In an instant the din ceased. The man rose in his saddle.

"Stop it! Let 'em loose!" he roared. "They found the man that killed Jack! Byrd's people shot him up just at dark!"

* * * * * *

Toward midnight Carey and Greer were alone in White Falls' solitary tavern, shaken, weary, and worn.

The town had made amends, according to its own lights. They had been shaken by the hand, they had received the apologies of the population, they had been fêted in a wearisome, rude way. Now they were permitted solitude and—safety.

"Billy," Greer was saying, as he prepared for rest, "we're done on this trip. If everything else could be passed, this taste of Hades is an omen. We'll turn back and leave Furman to himself. Poverty's better than death."

But Carey, standing by the window and staring thoughtfully outward, said:

"Joe, I don't pretend to understand it. I don't know why John Ferguson was murdered, and I don't know why we had to go through this. But one thing I do know. We're alive yet, and to-morrow morning we're going right straight on after Furman!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE RIDE AND ITS END.

Carey, as not infrequently happened, carried his point.

In the half hour that passed before the two men dropped off to sleep they talked across the rough room. Greer's pessimism, perhaps not without warrant, had risen anew and gained strength in the rising.

"I tell you, the whole thing is hoodooed!" next morning he recalled saying. "If we go on——"

"We'll get hold of Furman!"

"But even if we do——"

"Furman is only a human being, and therefore uncertain," Carey interrupted again. "Whatever this mine of Gratton's may be, I'll bet my hat that I can point out at least six separate and distinct points in which the Black Bull beats it all hollow!"

"I'd drop it now, just the same."

"And go back home—licked?"

"Yes."

"And then learn that Furman has closed with this fiendish thing and that our option will have to drop!"

"I know. It's better than risking our necks in this forsaken country any longer."

"And do you quite realize that if we returned without making a fight, if Furman throws our Black Bull over—as he is more than likely to do, if he's interested enough in this other one to come away out here—we're dead broke, Joe?"

"Yes."

"Not only dead broke, but we'll owe several thousands besides. We might very likely be knocked clear out of business; at the very best, we should queer ourselves temporarily with every one, and go through the hardest kind of a year. No, siree, Joseph! We're here yet, and fit for another scrap before we quit. If that rope had happened to tighten around our necks, it might be otherwise, but—it didn't!"

Not long after sunrise they were awake and ready for the long, hard ride of thirty miles through the mountains.

The trail, it seemed, was rather difficult to follow. White Falls, remorseful still, volunteered almost to a man for guide service. Carey picked one of the crowd—and the chase was under way.

Energetic probing after information did not prove of great avail.

Indeed, about all Carey was able to establish from the guide's replies was what he already knew: that a man, so perfectly answering Furman's description that there could be no doubt, had passed through town two days before on the way to Gratton's, and that he had been accompanied by a younger

person, who could hardly have been other than Lisser.

Also, it seemed a matter of general information that they had gone to inspect the Gratton mine. Beyond that their companion knew little or nothing.

Both men tried hard to get definite information upon the richness of the deposit—and they tried in vain. Gratton claimed that the mine was immensely valuable, and there seemed no reasonable way of denying his allegation.

The ore, so far as was known, had never been assayed, save by those connected with the mine; and while the reports that had filtered out from such sources were lurid, they were still very indefinite.

"And this Gratton?" Carey asked. "Who is he?"

"Gratton!" The guide chuckled. "Oh, you'll like Gratton, mister."

"Decent fellow?"

"The worst that ever walked on two legs!"

"Tough customer, then?"

"Gratton's about the sourest thing that ever happened! He's a man just a little short of fifty, big and muscular, and as ugly as the Old Scratch! He used to be down in Texas, they say, before he came here—and before that he hailed from the East somewhere. Most likely they chased him out this way for his sheer darned cussedness."

"And this is the person we're going to buck up against!" murmured Carey.

Not long after noon their guide turned back.

The rest of the way, it appeared, was clearly marked, and they would be able to make the trip without danger of losing the trail.

Greer rode silently, and now and then Carey glanced across at him with more than a little impatience. Gloom sat heavily upon Greer's brow—so heavily, in fact, that his companion finally burst out:

"What the dickens is it, Joe?"

"Eh?"

"You look as if the last hope had vanished and you were riding on to certain death."

"I'm not sure that I don't feel rather that way, Billy. I was thinking about poor Ferguson."

"Um." Carey nodded somewhat solemnly.

"Who murdered him, do you suppose?"

"I've forgotten the fellow's name, Joe. Byrd's people made a finish of him, fast enough, when they found him with Ferguson's saddle and the knife with specks of blood on it. Jimminy! That was a narrow squeak for us!"

"But why do you suppose he was killed at all? Certainly, Ferguson couldn't have had many enemies. His friends seemed legion, back there at the Falls."

"I should say they did! Why was he killed? Well, for what he carried, I presume. The fellow took what money he had in his clothes and the few other things of value he was packing."

"And still it doesn't seem as if he had enough to warrant a man in murdering him. By Jove! I'm almost inclined to believe that we communicated that hoodoo to poor Ferguson and——"

"Say, look here!" Carey yelled, wholly exasperated.

Greer smiled sourly, shrugged his shoulders and fell silent again.

Their way, easy to follow, was wild in the extreme. Great hills rose all about; they descended now into a valley, silent and shadowy; they climbed again up a long ridge and came into the hot sunshine.

But as they progressed, their altitude became steadily greater, and the breeze cooler and more crisp.

"We must be mighty near there!" Carey remarked finally, as he pulled in and swept the high, rolling plateau.

"Within a mile or two, any way. This is nature, with a big N, isn't it, Billy?"

"Rather! It was a fool trick for a man like Furman to come here."

"Why?"

"Why! Well, can you conceive anything simpler than getting a man into this solitude, butchering him, removing the two or three thousand Furman usually has somewhere about him and—puff! That would be the finish!"

"Of our Black Bull, too. Come on."

Twenty minutes' going brought them to a rude road. They hurried the horses along for a little.

And quite abruptly, they had reached their destination! Coming about a turn, a little house of logs appeared ahead—a place, probably of some five or six rooms.

It was as bare and desolate a dwelling as could well have been imagined. One or two small outbuildings were there; to the rear, a stable stood several hundred feet from the house; at the side, a wood-pile, wretchedly put together, completed the forlorn air of the whole.

Not a soul was in sight; no smoke appeared from the rude brick chimney. Carey shook his head dubiously.

"Pleasant little home, isn't it?"

"And no sign of Furman about."

"He's probably over at the mine, Joe. It's still several miles beyond, you know. I wish we knew where the thing was located. We could just as well push on to it now!"

"And we could just about as well wait here!" said Greer, wearily. "I've had all the riding I want for one day. Furman and Lisser must sleep here. They'll probably be back soon."

"Well——"

Carey looked the place over doubtfully again and slowly slid from his saddle. A grateful moment of stretching and both men walked to the house.

The heavy front door seemed to be secured from within.

Carey tried it several times, and ended by knocking hard upon the rough panels.

There was no response. He tried again, and with no better result.

"All out, I guess."

"There's a rear to the place."

"But very unlikely any one's there. However—come along. We'll see, at any rate."

He led the way round the corner, pausing once or twice in an endeavor to peer through the shutters.

At the rear they found a kitchen, open to the air except for the roof. Carey sighed.

"Not a soul about, Joe."

He walked into the little enclosure—and started. Before him, sound asleep on the floor, lay a figure.

"A Chinaman, by thunder!"

At his exclamation, the figure roused, shifted, opened its eyes and finally sat up and stared stupidly.

"Ah!" said Carey. "That's some satisfaction, at all events. Wake up, you! Hey!"

The Oriental was upon his feet now, smiling placidly and with considerable inquiry.

"This Gratton's place?"

"Glatton? Yes."

"Is he here?"

"No, not here."

"Where's he gone?"

"Gone to mine."

"Coming back soon?"

"Oh, yes. He be back now."

"And look here!" Greer put in, quickly, "is any one with him?"

"Two man."

"Good!"

Greer's ejaculation seemed too enthusiastic. The Chinaman appeared to stiffen slightly, and a curious suspicion appeared in his eyes.

"When will the two men be back?" Carey pursued.

"I don' know."

"But where are they now?"

"I don' know."

"They were here—when?"

"Day 'fore yesterday."

"And you haven't seen them since?"

The Chinaman shook his head solemnly.

"You wait, see Misser Glatton?"

"You bet we will!" Carey exclaimed.

A glance at the sky and the Chinaman fell silent and set about the making of a fire. Supper-time was near at hand.

By turns, the two men tried hard to draw a detail or two from him. It was entirely useless.

The man had lost his tongue; he would smile occasionally and wag his head. But as for gleaning further particulars of Furman's whereabouts or what had been done, hope seemed to have vanished.

"Drop it!" Carey said at last, pulling disgustedly at his pipe. "He's afraid of something or other. Don't waste breath on him."

"I suppose they'll be back soon, any way."

"Misser Glatton, he come right now!" the Chinaman put in, suddenly.

The visitors followed the direction of his pointing finger. Just emerging from the woods beyond, they saw a horse trotting toward the house.

The figure astride his back appeared rather startled at the sight of company. He shadowed his eyes for an instant and pushed on quickly.

Beside the kitchen, he descended. Both men caught their breath; Gratton had not been painted falsely, to judge by externals.

Sour he certainly seemed to be, sour to the utmost limits of human acidity. A face less amiable could not well have been imagined, nor an expression more unfriendly; even the ragged, drooping mustache seemed to bespeak a tart tongue somewhere in the vicinity.

For a little space he gazed in silence. Carey had arisen and stepped forward when he spoke.

"Who's this, Lee?"

"I don' know, Misser Glatton."

The frown turned back to the newcomers. Carey met it with a smile.

"My name is Carey."

"Um!"

"We just arrived here this evening, you know—my friend, Mr. Greer and I. You are—er—Mr. Gratton?"

"That's m' name."

"And you have a silver mine here, somewhere in the neighborhood?"

"Eh? What o' that?"

The man from Chicago thought for a moment. Dealing with such a creature as this, he might as well be direct.

"Why, you see, there are a couple of gentlemen here from Chicago. They came to look over your mine, I think, or something of the sort."

"Well?"

"We have some very pressing business with them, Mr. Gratton. You'll realize that when I tell you that we have ridden in from White Falls today." Carey's smile grew positively charming. "Where can we see them this evening?"

Gratton stared dubiously from one to the other and was silent for minute after minute. Carey and Greer waited patiently. Plainly, Gratton was no person to be hurried; and much depended upon him just now, in one way.

"So ye want t' see them two, eh?"

"Yes."

"Yer business 'll wait some time, I reckon."

"But—er—why?" Carey's eyes opened. Gratton faced him with a malevolent stare.

"Why, eh? 'Cause both them darned fools is dead!"

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO WHO DID NOT RETURN.

GRATTON'S ugly stare did not falter, as Carey stood before him, fairly gasping with horror and amazement.

"Did you—did you say—dead?" the Chicago man finally managed to gasp.

"Deader'n a doornail!"

"You're sure?"

"I oughter be. I buried 'em last night."

"Where?"

"In the woods where they were found."

The visitor returned slowly to his partner's side and sat down.

Furman dead! Furman! Not only a good, whole-souled sort of man and one of the biggest capitalists of the Middle West, but—their only hope for the Black Bull.

Carey felt a little self-contempt at allowing the thought to enter his mind, yet even at the moment it seemed unavoidable.

"Will you—tell us about it, please?"

"Ain't much to tell." Gratton seemed to grudge the very words he spoke. "They come day 'fore yesterday. Something 'bout my mine they wanted to see. Told 'em to stay about and I'd take 'em over this morning. Couldn't wait, it seemed. They started off yesterday alone. Hit the side of a gulley where the bushes covered it and went over an' got smashed. That's all."

"But—why, it's absolutely incredible!"

"Mebbe so."

"Were both men dead when they were found?"

"Yep."

"And you buried them right where they were?"

"Deep, too!"

"But why?"

A momentary evil grin twitched the corners of Gratton's mouth.

"Wolves!" he said.

Carey shuddered a little as he stared at the owner of the mine.

He could not realize it, even now—Furman dead! Why on earth had the millionaire ever ventured into these wilds? Why had he undertaken alone to find the miserable mine?

"Just about how far from here are the bodies?"

"Half a mile."

"Will you take us there?"

"Now?"

"Yes."

Gratton seemed to think for another moment.

"No."

"But——"

"Too late," said the sour voice. "Wouldn't do no good to-night. Be dark when we got there."

"But we could take torches!" Carey persisted. "Why, it's barbarous to think of them there and——"

"Better there'n here."

Carey had taken to striding up and down the kitchen enclosure. The Chinaman pottered deliberately over a frying-pan and an unsavory mess of bacon, and Gratton watched him with a rather absent and wholly unpleasant expression.

"We'll go in the morning," Greer murmured. "That will be just as well, I suppose."

"Well—perhaps," said his partner. "We may stay with you overnight, Mr. Gratton?"

"Can't fire ye off, I suppose," said that person, cordially.

"But——" Carey paused somewhat helplessly and ended by throwing up his hands in exasperated fashion.

"I'm sorry to inconvenience you," he murmured, "but I'm afraid that it will be necessary this once."

Gratton addressed a word or two to the Chinaman and entered the rough house alone, without further comment.

The Chicago men looked after him with some bewilderment as they heard the slow tramp of his heavy boots within.

Greer, at the end of a minute or so, arose and took Carey's arm, and they walked away. Neither had as yet sufficiently recovered from the shock to talk much and several hundred yards lay between them and the house before Greer remarked:

"Pleasant person, this Gratton."

"Decidedly. Never mind Gratton, though. He may go to blazes, so far as we're concerned. Think of Furman, Joe!"

"It's—it's beyond me! It's the infernal hoodoo that is on this whole business!"

"Well, I don't know that I'm not beginning to believe in this hoodoo of yours, after all," Carey muttered sadly. "All the bother we had in the early part of this trip—then poor Ferguson being slaughtered as he was—then that lynching bee, and now Furman gone as well."

"That last means a great deal, Billy," said Greer, gravely.

"Means that our Black Bull proposition has gone higher than a kite for all time now among other things."

"And that, when it becomes generally known back home, there'll be fine doings in money circles. With Furman out of the way, several people will have several things just about as they want them."

"But we won't be two of the several." Carey stared back through the dusk at the house, and rubbed his chin thoughfully. "Well, that's the way things go, I suppose. We're done for, Joe, and there is a cold winter coming!"

"You mean that we may as well turn around and go back to the city?"

"In the morning or as soon as we are able to see to the bodies—yes. We'll find out what we can do, and have some one in White Falls attend to them properly. Then we'll skip back and try how it feels to begin life over again without a cent and owing several thousands of dollars."

Carey, it seemed, had undertaken a new line of thought.

"Billy, do you suppose that Furman and Lisser were *put* out of the way?"

"It certainly isn't impossible," Carey said dryly. "Gratton emphatically

doesn't look above murder or anything else. He's a queer customer."

"But if we could get evidence against him——"

"We'll have to try—that's all." Carey yawned wearily. "It's a devil of a business all around."

An uneventful hour passed as they strolled around the place. In his open kitchen the Chinaman worked on, slowly and methodically, and the odor of cooking floated to them.

When finally they approached the house, the somber Gratton had just emerged, and Carey spoke the thought just then uppermost in his mind.

"Mr. Gratton, where are their effects?"

"They didn't have none."

"You mean that they carried no baggage?"

"Nope."

"But what was in their pockets?"

"I didn't look."

The sour individual turned away. Carey placed a hand on his arm.

"You're not giving us to understand that you buried those men without searching them?"

Gratton looked at him and smiled sourly.

"Come up here!" he grunted.

He turned back into the house and the visitors followed in some astonishment.

Through the rough lower room they went and up a stairway of undressed lumber. Behind Gratton, they felt their way down the short, narrow upper hall. At the end a door opened, and the owner of the premises could be heard fumbling with matches.

Presently a lantern was lighted and Gratton beckoned them in.

"Thar!" he remarked.

Carey stepped forward quickly. On the bed lay a collection of clothes—two full suits, as it appeared after a moment's inspection.

They were plentifully spotted with mud and loose earth, and they bore several marks of rough usage.

"These belonged to the men who were killed?"

"Them were taken from the pair o' durned fools thet tried to find their way around these parts after dark!"

"But—do you mean to say you don't know who they were?" escaped suddenly from Greer.

"No!"

The answer came with such astonishing promptness that the more timorous partner caught himself quickly. Carey flashed a warning look at him.

"They gave no—er—names?" he asked.

"Not to me, mister."

Gratton faced them stolidly.

"Well, look over them duds if ye want to. Hurry up."

Carey turned them over and felt in one or two of the pockets. A matchbox and an empty card-case, a handkerchief or two and a pair of eyeglasses were all that rewarded his search. He arose from the operation to find that Gratton's fish-like stare was still directed upon him.

"Done?"

"For the present, yes," said Carey.

"Come down and eat."

He blew out the lantern and stalked down the corridor. His guests were left to feel their passage as best they might; and, all things considered, they followed in a sort of stupid mental haze.

Gratton was an odd proposition, even in these wilds. A more unamiable, uncouth, inexplicable individual could hardly have been evolved for use upon the stage; to find him existing in what seemed a natural state was a little more than merely astonishing.

His evening meal was on a par with all other things and happenings in the establishment.

A bare, wooden table served to hold the villainous repast. Bacon there was and potatoes and bread that passed mere sogginess. Something faintly resembling coffee was served, too; in tin cups. It was a meal—and that was all.

Men less tired or less nearly famished than Carey and Greer could hardly have managed it. As it was, they did their best to glean a little satisfaction for the inner man.

Gratton munched and drank in sphinx-like silence. Not once did he raise his unpleasant eyes nor vouchsafe a remark.

A vivid curse or two served to enliven his Chinaman: beyond that, he seemed

incapable of speech. To the occasional random sentences of his guests, he replied with a grunt or a shrug as best served the occasion.

At the end he glanced at a silver watch, lighted an unwholesome-looking pipe, placed his muddy boots unceremoniously upon the table and dozed.

Or did he doze?

Carey had taken to speculating on that phenomenon; Greer had not. The latter was on the point of plunging into a discussion of the situation, when the former's eye held him up again.

Under cover of the board, in event of Gratton's possible peeping from beneath the shaggy brows, Carey motioned his partner for silence and kindled his own pipe.

The Chinaman glided in and removed the tin service of the meal and dabbed the table with a dubious dish-cloth; and still Gratton dozed on, unsociable and uncommunicative as ever.

When half an hour of utter silence had passed, the owner of the house dropped his feet, arose and stretched.

"Goin to stay here?"

"Yes," Greer answered evenly.

"Want to go to bed?"

"Why—yes."

"Come."

He piloted them up the stairs once more, and pointed to a door, by the light of a match.

"In thar!" was his cordial direction.

He waited at the stair-head until the two men had entered and managed to strike a light of their own.

Then, as they saw through the crack of the door, he turned and lumbered down-stairs again, with an expression that was a little less than strictly happy and hostlike.

The candle finally lighted, Greer turned to his partner.

"Billy, what under the sun have we struck this time?"

Carey held up a hand.

"Hush, Joe!" he whispered.

"But——"

"Don't talk! There's something infernally queer about this whole business, that's sure. And we can't discuss it here—that's just as certain. Throw a big bluff of going to bed—and do it quick."

He himself tramped about the room for a minute or two; he yawned loudly.

With some gratification, upon seating himself, he found that the bed creaked furiously. He removed a shoe and flung it hard upon the floor. He essayed another prolonged yawn.

"Now, get the light out!"

Greer puffed out the candle and crossed the room on tiptoe. His partner arose cautiously and listened.

"Now we're in bed, theoretically, at any rate. Keep quiet. We'll have to see just what happens next."

Fifteen minutes of silence passed. Then a low murmur of talk rose to them for a minute and died away again.

A door shut softly, and Carey glided to the window.

Down below, across the clearing, Gratton's form moved rapidly along toward that continuation of the trail which led, as they were bound to suppose, to the root of all the recent evil—his silver mine.

He paused to look back for an instant at his dark residence. He took his way again, hurriedly.

"He's gone!" said Carey. "Come out of this den!"

"Where?"

"Anywhere," replied the other, "so that that incarnated vinegar-bottle isn't likely to be about and hear. Hustle!"

CHAPTER VI.

A MAN IN THE MOONLIGHT.

Boots hurriedly donned, the two men tiptoed cautiously down the stairs.

At the foot, however, just as Carey laid a hand upon the outer door, the figure of Lee came silently from the rear. He wore a doubtful smile as he interposed himself between Carey and the portal.

"Where go, mister?"

"What?"

"Where go—out?"

"Yes. Get out of the way."

"Er—Misser Glatton——"

"Well, what about him?"

"He say you no go out."

"Did he, really?" muttered Carey, in some exasperation. "That's too bad. Get out of the way!"

"No can let you go," the Chinaman persisted, gently.

Carey's overtired nerves gave way. He reached forward and removed the obstruction and deposited it in a heap upon the floor. He pulled open the door and stalked forth, and Greer followed.

Looking backward, they perceived a somewhat rumpled person in the doorway, looking after them. Carey laughed a little.

"One more fact. Let's go down this way."

They took the White Falls trail by which they had arrived, and hurried along for a good quarter mile in the wonderful stillness of the mountain night.

Once or twice they listened for possible following footsteps, but none were heard. Here, at least, it was evident that they were to be alone, and Carey selected a big boulder for a seat and stretched himself wearily along it.

"Well, Joe?"

"Well?"

"What on earth do you make out of the whole confounded affair?"

"I—I'm blest if I know precisely what to make of it, Billy."

"It's a mighty queer mix from end to end," Carey pursued, thoughtfully. "We're done for—that's the only sure thing in all of it. We and our little Black Bull are clean out of the game."

"For—Furman's dead!" the other muttered.

"Yes, Furman's dead, too, poor chap. Joe, that man never was unmitigated idiot enough to start wandering around this country at night. That's as sure as fate."

"I'd thought the same thing."

"In fact, this Gratton's whole tale is the fishiest thing of its kind I ever heard. I—well, I believe that our appearance took him so utterly by surprise that he cooked up the first lie that came into his head. It happened to be a mighty poor one—that's all."

"And you are thinking just what I'm thinking—that he was killed for the money he had on him when he arrived?"

"That and nothing else, Joe. It's the only explanation. Gratton's natural crook enough for anything. I'll gamble on that part of it with my last dollar. I'd like to feel sure that he hasn't made up his mind to despatch you and me as well!"

He smoked and stared at the moon for a little.

"Oh, the whole thing's as thin as air!" he broke out again. "Take that bluff of not knowing their identity. There is one chance in a thousand that he didn't. Furman may have been wandering around incognito and Lisser as well—but it's almighty doubtful. Furman wasn't a person to travel about under false colors, for any sort of purpose."

"And even if he had been killed accidentally and Gratton was all right, surely there would have been something left in the pockets of those clothes of theirs to furnish——"

Carey sat up suddenly.

"Those togs, too! There's another point! Didn't you recognize that gray suit of Furman's?"

"I can't say that I recalled it."

"Well, I did! That was the very suit he had on when I saw him last—and it was one that he wouldn't be traveling around these wild diggings rigged up in, either!"

"There may be something in that."

"There's a whole lot in that, Joe. Moreover, as it occurred to me while walking down here, I'll guarantee that he hasn't had those clothes on for a week at least!"

"What!"

"Fact! It's a cinch! Why? Because, in the first place, even a millionaire would be out of his senses to ruin a hundred-dollar suit on one of these Western saddles. Second, Furman almost always wears corduroy shooting clothes when he's jogging around away from civilization."

"True. I remember that."

"All right! Third—just about three days ago Furman was in White Falls, wearing his shooting clothes!"

"You're sure of that?"

"It was one of the few facts which our esteemed guide was able to furnish, Joe. He noticed particularly that the elder man was rigged for emergencies, and he told me."

"But this gray suit——"

"Hold on! We're probably thinking along the same lines, but I'm coming to the point. This gray suit was neatly folded up in whatever sort of grip he carried. And——"

Carey paused triumphantly.

"Those mud spots—or some of them—were damp!"

His partner faced him with considerable animation and excitement.

"Billy, I noticed that identical thing myself!"

"And that signifies, my boy, that they were not acquired by that particular gray suit any twenty-four hours ago!"

As a sort of clinching period to his arguments, he knocked his pipe out sharply on the boulder. He hitched around to face Greer more fully and went on in a rather quieter tone:

"Now, all this funny business is leading in a very definite and mighty interesting direction, Joe. There cannot be any doubt of that."

"Not a particle, Billy."

"All in all, and accepting it as a certainty—which it must be—that Gratton was lying when he denied knowing Furman, I'll stake my last cent that the true story runs something like this:

"Primarily, somehow or other, Gratton interested our man in his mine."

"Yes."

"Furman resolved to come out. He did come out and he brought his assayer with him. Gratton received them—and I hope it was a little more cordially than in our case."

"Hoping to sell his mine, it was likely to be."

"However that may be, Furman and Lisser got there. Now, from that point we're a bit hazy, it seems. The chances, to my mind, are just about this way: You know what a chump Furman is about money. It's as likely as not that he had anything up to seven or eight thousand in his pockets. He may not have had a hundred, but we're bound to suppose that he did.

"Very well. What happens? Probably, by accident or otherwise, Gratton spied the roll! That man's a born criminal, if one ever existed. Mine or no mine, the sight of the money was too much for him. Either he shot them or he killed them in some other way captured the cash and—prepared to forget all about it, I suppose."

"And when we came along this evening——"

"He was startled, and he showed it plainly enough. That's unquestionable. His first thought was that we were looking for the two men. We verified that very shortly. His next was that he must cover himself somehow—and he concocted that cock-and-bull story to account for their absence. We seemed to accept it, and he tried to clinch the matter by that mud business."

"But the suits——"

"Were their spare clothes, of course, which had been packed away somewhere about that cheerful house. The rest of their things are secreted somewhere else under the roof!"

Carey shook his head grimly as he concluded:

"There you are, Joe! Does that fit your reasoning out of the case?"

"Too well altogether," sighed Greer. "It seems to be a sort of open-and-shut affair, in which everybody loses but Gratton."

Carey took to whistling thoughtfully into the bit of his pipe.

"And now the question arises, just what we are going to do next?"

"Find the bodies, Billy! That for a beginning. If we can get any evidence from them that would serve to implicate Gratton——"

"Find them!" said Carey, rather sarcastically. "Just how?"

"Well——" Greer stopped.

"It's a certainty that this man Gratton will never show them to us, isn't it? It's just about as easy to figure out, too, that we ourselves couldn't locate them in five years, unless chance favored us tremendously. No, I'd like mighty well to have a sight of them myself, Joe, but it's not feasible."

"But we can't simply drop the whole affair, man! Why, it's murder of the worst kind!"

"Undoubtedly, but we'll have to use a bit of tact in handling it, my boy. Let's see. I suppose, as a matter of cold fact, that about all we can do is to stay about that house for another day, do

what investigating we can, keep a sharp eye on Gratton and that Mongolian person and then make tracks for White Falls. Our excellent friend, the sheriff, can then have the case."

"But suppose that Gratton smells a rat and realizes that we haven't swallowed his yarn entire?"

"I presume that Gratton may have his own doubts upon that subject even now, Joe. He doesn't appear to have a really child-like trust in us as it is. You observed that he even left orders with Mr. Lee that we were to stay in the house. We'll have to be wary and do the best we can—that is all."

They fell silent for a time. Greer took to dozing; Carey stared at the brilliant sky and pondered ruefully upon the whole disastrous affair.

Jack Ferguson dead; Furman dead; Lisser dead; their own lives probably in very real danger every moment they remained near Gratton's domicile; and the Black Bull proposition eternally smashed!

It was not exactly pleasant food for thought.

At the end of another fifteen minutes, Carey arose rather suddenly.

"Come along, Joe. There's no particular reason for spending the night here."

Greer stretched wearily.

"I suppose it's better to return. One of us can keep watch while the other sleeps. If Gratton's back, it won't be any too safe."

"Well, wherever he went, he may be back again by this time, and as he evidently wishes to entertain us strictly under his roof, we don't want to stir him up unduly as yet."

They walked slowly along the trail to the lonely house, each man with a keen eye upon such spots as offered a chance of an ambush.

There was no sign of human life, however, and they came about the last turn without adventure.

Ahead stood the house, illuminated only by a single dim light somewhere down-stairs. Gratton was not in evidence, nor the Chinaman.

"Old Amiability's still out, I presume," murmured Greer. "We'll be able to retire unperceived."

"Yes, if——"

Carey's lips closed suddenly. His hand reached forth and gripped his partner's arm, and he drew rapidly into the shadows.

"Look!" he whispered.

Greer stared toward the dwelling.

The front door had opened, and Gratton appeared for an instant. He stepped out into the clearing and looked about, and stood for several seconds in an attitude of listening.

"Come on!" they heard him say, softly.

A second figure passed quickly from the house out into the clearing. For a minute the two chatted in an undertone; then Gratton returned abruptly and slammed the door.

The second man walked slowly across the clearing toward the woods.

A glance about on his own account and Carey was stealing after him, Greer at his side.

Gratton's visitor hurried forward. Carey's foot slipped upon a twig, and the other, coming down suddenly, made a slight scrape.

The man ahead turned for an instant; his steps quickened remarkably, and he very nearly broke into a run.

"Quicker!" Carey whispered.

His partner strode more rapidly. The man ahead turned again for a brief space; he gathered himself and took to running for the woods!

"Thought so!" muttered Carey.

The two men followed suit. The figure of the visitor bent low and raced onward, fleeing without apparent reason from the silent pursuit.

"Hey!"

The man did not turn. Carey redoubled his efforts and left Greer behind in the clearing.

"Stop!" he called more loudly. "Hold on! I want to speak to you for a minute!"

An excited pant was his only answer.

"Hey! Stop! It's Carey! It's Carey, of Chicago!"

The information was wholly without effect.

The runner sped on toward the woods, all unheeding. At the edge of the thicket he paused for an instant and seemed to gather himself. A leap, and

he had plunged into the heavy undergrowth.

Carey, coming finally to the beginning of the woods, stopped short. Pursuit in those unknown shadows seemed rather foolish.

Greer was at his side before he had fairly halted, and Carey turned to him.

"You knew him?"

"Well, no—I can't say that I did."

"But you saw his hair?"

"Of course."

"And you're able to believe, under all the circumstances, that there's another head of precisely such light curly hair, combined with a suit of that cut around these diggings, then——"

"By Jingo! I—I believe you're right!" Greer broke in.

Carey listened for a little to the steps, far away now, crashing through the thicket.

"Joe," he said, quietly, "I know I'm right. So far as an actual identification is concerned, we couldn't make it in a court of law. But if that fellow had once turned his face in to the moonlight, despite the fact that he's supposed to be dead and buried somewhere out there—well, we should have seen the youthful and lovely countenance of Mr. Lisser, of Chicago."

CHAPTER VII.

A NIGHT OF SECLUSION.

Off in the woods, the running crashes died away. The man was out of hearing, and utter quiet reigned again.

Carey gave over the bootless task of listening and shook his head.

"Well, that—that beats the dickens!"

"It certainly does. You didn't see his face, Billy?"

"No. I wish to goodness I had. I'm certain as it is, but I'd like to be even a bit more certain."

"But Lisser—why, Lisser's dead!"

"Lisser's supposed to be dead, you mean, Joe. We didn't get a glimpse of that fellow's face, but I'd be willing to gamble my last cent that it was Lisser."

"Then Gratton didn't make away with him, after all."

"If he did, he's about the liveliest sort of ghost I ever heard of," said Carey dryly. "No, no. There was nothing much dead about a man who could make the racket he did getting through those bushes."

He looked contemplatively toward the house for a time.

"And if Lisser's alive and kicking, there's a mighty good chance that Furman is, too!" he muttered.

"But why should they be apart in such a wild as this?"

"I give it up. We don't know that Furman is alive. We don't know anything about it, in fact, save one thing. Gratton's as big a liar as he seems."

"His motive——"

Greer stopped rather helplessly. Carey shrugged his shoulders.

"You've got me there, Joe. There are about a thousand and one possibilities, it appears. However, one thing's absolutely beyond question. Something or other entirely crooked is going on in these forsaken parts, and Gratton is able to explain it fully if he can be made to do it. He's a thoroughly bad character, and whatever he has under way is likely to be as bad as himself."

Greer's eyebrows went up a trifle.

"I'm afraid that getting Gratton to explain is a hopeless sort of task, Billy. His likeliest explanation would be a bullet from one of those guns he carries."

"All right!" Carey laughed shortly. "We still have the dainty weapons our excellent friend, the sheriff of White Falls, presented to us only last evening. If he wants to make it necessary—well!"

"You think we'd better tackle him?"

"I do, most emphatically, and the sooner the better, at that. Come along, Joe. We'll find the rascal and see what can be made out of him."

"A bluff counts for a whole lot sometimes," Greer murmured. "If we had anything substantial on which to base a charge, we might get at him and learn the truth. As it stands—well, trying can't do much harm."

"And if we don't succeed in scaring him, let's hope he won't be able to scare us." Carey smiled grimly.

He started slowly toward the house and Greer fell into step alongside.

"What are you going to say to him?"

"What? Well, I'm hanged if I know just now. Perhaps one good, hard jab at him would be better than approaching the matter gently and diplomatically. We might accuse him flatly of murdering Furman and of having Lisser for an accessory. I've never had any particular use for that tow-headed young person, any way."

"He's not quite up to murder."

"I hardly think it myself. But—oh, it might stir Gratton into saying something. We'll have to see what's best. Now for an interview in his ornate little home."

He laid a hand upon the knob and sought to turn it. It did not yield, and he thumped unceremoniously upon the heavy boarding of the door.

Some seconds passed in silence, both men listening for the harsh tread of Gratton. It did not come.

They were a little startled then when, without warning, the door swung open and the poor light from within suddenly shone upon them. The figure of Lee appeared on the threshold.

His smile was suave and oily once more as he surveyed the pair before him in silence.

"Misser Gratton——" he began.

"Yes, Mr. Gratton's the man we want to see. Is he in there?"

"No, sir."

"Where is he, then?"

"Outside, in stable. He likee see you."

"Really? What for?"

"He no likee you go out."

"Too bad, isn't it? Well, we'll find him and apologize, my friend. In the stable you said?"

"Yes, sir. 'Way out back. He lookee after horse."

"He was here a minute ago," Greer suggested.

"Just go out, sir," the Chinaman smirked.

They walked around the house and struck off through the moonlight toward the stable, some distance away.

Through the open door of the crude structure a faint light, as of a lantern, indicated that Lee's information had been correct.

Some one was out there—and it was quite as pleasant and as satisfactory a place as the house for the coming interview.

Side by side, the Chicago men marched up to the door.

A glance within revealed Gratton emerging from one of the stalls. Carey advanced with rather more assurance than he felt.

"See here, Gratton!"

"Huh! You here again?"

"We've returned. We want a little talk with you, my man."

"All right."

"Primarily," began Carey, "what the devil do you mean by lying to us?"

"Hey?"

"At least one of the men you claimed had died was in your house not ten minutes back. You saw him, said good night to him and walked half way across the clearing with him as well!"

Gratton seemed frankly startled.

He glanced furtively at Carey and looked away.

"You're not going to deny it, Gratton?" that person put in.

"I'm—say, you're cracked!"

"Possibly. I saw that man, though, and Mr. Greer saw him as well. What's more——"

Gratton held up a hand.

"Shut up a minute." He walked toward the entrance. "Wait till I close the door. That damned Chink noses into everything and——"

He was outside now and reaching for the leathern thong which served as a handle.

Carey perched upon a box and indulged in a wink in Greer's direction. He felt rather satisfied with the opening of the interview, and fairly confident of making it profitable through sheer aggressiveness.

Gratton had plainly been more than a little astonished, and with an assumption of even further knowledge, tactfully handled, he might be made to reveal the truth of the whole puzzling situation.

The owner of the premises seemed to have a little trouble with the door. He pulled once or twice on the thong—

then stepped outside and appeared to be attending to something on the wrong side of the portal.

And then—the door slammed! And Gratton was without.

For the instant, Carey stared at his partner and then at the entrance. In that instant a grating and a click sounded from the other side.

"By thunder! He's padlocked her on the other side!" gasped Carey.

He bounded from his box and to the door. He pushed hard against it. The thick iron hasp gave a little as the wood pressed down; but as a barrier between themselves and the outer world, the door remained perfect.

"See here! Open that up!"

There was no reply.

"Open that up, or we'll batter it down!"

"You go on and try it!" chuckled Gratton's unpleasant voice.

"You blasted crook, you! If——"

Carey's voice had risen almost to an angry scream. The answer came from Gratton in an angry, snarling undertone.

"You shut up in there!"

"What?" roared the furious man.

"You shut up, and do it quick!"

"If you don't open that door——"

"And if you don't close that mouth and keep it closed, I'll blow you full o' holes! Hear that? I want you quiet an' ye're going to stay quiet—dead or alive, too!"

"Gratton!" screamed Carey. "I——"

Crash!

The report was from one of the man's heavy pistols. The wood of the door splintered a little and a big bullet flattened upon a bit of iron across the stable and dropped to the floor.

Greer made for the corner, and Carey followed suit very hastily.

"If ye didn't git that, ye'll get the next!" remarked the man without. "You can take it fer Gospel, or ye can keep on trying for more!"

"I think," murmured Carey, as he dropped to the floor beside his partner, "that we'll take it for Gospel!"

A matter of minutes they sat still. There was no sound of Gratton outside. He might be there and he might not, but —well, trying to verify the fact was rather too risky just then.

"Well, that's the time we were stung!" Greer observed in an undertone.

"Stung! It's not the word!" Carey's voice was deeply disgusted. "We were just led in, like so many sheep into the slaughter-pen, and locked up! Bah!"

"Do you actually suppose that it was premeditated, Billy?"

"There is nothing else to suppose. It suited our friend's purpose to lock us up—why, heaven only knows! Perhaps it had something to do with Lisser's call, if it was Lisser. Yes, it must have been that, but—why?"

"Whatever the reason, he's anxious enough to keep us here. If that bullet had happened to plant itself in your anatomy or mine—phew!"

"Yes, it wouldn't have been exactly pleasant to be locked up here with a corpse, would it?" Carey said dryly.

Greer bit his mustache thoughtfully as he looked at the poor lantern above.

"And Gratton wouldn't mind a little bit making either or both of us into corpses!"

"Not a particle! He's an extremely pleasant person to be associating with, thirty miles from even the nearest apology for a town."

Carey listened for several minutes. All was quiet outside; not a sound indicated that Gratton or his revolver were in the neighborhood; yet there he probably was, waiting for the first sign of disturbance within.

Greer stretched wearily upon the uneven floor. His partner arose and walked softly about the place.

He glanced into the stalls and into the corners, and having satisfied himself that they were without human company, desirable or otherwise, he returned to the door.

Here there was a stout hook inside. He secured it carefully and wedged it in with a thick splinter of wood. He returned to the corner and settled himself once more.

"Joe," he said, hardly above a whisper, "we're shut up here like a couple of mice in a trap. There's no particular sense in trying to smash down that infernal door while such a splendid

chance remains of being shot. All we can do is to keep quiet."

"But do you suppose that Gratton's going to pass the night outside there with his gun?"

"It's beyond supposing, Joe. Why he wants us here or how long he'll keep us here, are matters beyond speculation just now. We're bound to assume, however, that he's just on the other side of that partition, and that, if we decline to keep quiet, he'll begin pumping lead in here as fast as he pleases. I'm not ready to receive any of it unnecessarily just yet."

Greer turned over with a tired groan.

"And if he sees fit to keep us here for a month?"

"He won't. At least I don't think he will. The man doesn't really want to slaughter us. If he had, he could have stood out there in the dark and peppered inward before he ever closed the door. No, I believe we'll get out, sooner or later, without any great trouble. What's worrying me is this: what the devil's going on while we're here?"

"I give it up!"

"It's something queer—it's something queer!" Carey muttered. "The only certainty is that we're to be kept locked up here and to be killed if we don't take it peacefully." He scratched his head. "Why? And was that man out there really Lisser? And if it was, what on earth was he doing here with Gratton, and why did he run away from us? And if he's alive, why isn't Furman, and where is he now?"

"Do you know, it struck me very strongly that, if the man was Lisser and he was so infernally afraid of us, very likely he had something to do with putting Furman out of the way?"

"I'd thought of that, too. And yet—we know nothing whatever about it, Joe. That chap may have been some one else altogether; whoever he was, though, he didn't care to stop for an interview—but that doesn't tell us a great deal. Oh, thunder!"

Carey groaned wearily and stretched.

"This thing's making my head whirl like a merry-go-round!" he sighed.

There was a little pause. Greer roused himself.

"Billy, do you know that we've ridden thirty miles to-day and twenty yesterday, and that last evening we went through an experience that would entitle most men to a month in a sanitarium?"

"I know it only too well, Joe. We'll go to sleep. They can't get through that door with the hook on it without rousing us. That much is certain."

"And in the morning?"

"We'll have to see. If we're able to get out, we'll skip back to White Falls as fast as the law'll allow and turn the matter over to the authorities. We're justified in that, at all events. If Furman's alive, we may get at him in that way. If he's dead, we'll probably have the satisfaction of having Gratton apprehended and punished properly. As for the other details—I don't know. They'll have to work themselves out. Good night."

He rolled over with a grunt and was asleep within a matter of five minutes. Utter weariness gave him almost immediate companionship in slumberland; Greer, too, fell to snoring vigorously.

It may have been a proceeding slightly hazardous, yet exhaustion and the foregoing events perhaps justified the risk.

Had Gratton wished them out of the way, he had not been without opportunities to accomplish the end. He might have ambushed them returning to the house, and there would have been no witness against him. He might have opened fire upon them as they approached the stable, yet he had refrained.

Again, as they had already considered, he might have shot them down as he stood without—yet again he had not taken the advantage.

All in all, Gratton's purpose seemed detention rather than extinction, and the night proved the correctness of the idea. There was no sound from without, and only the regular snoring from within. The padlock remained as it was and the inner hook had no strain put upon it.

Once or twice Carey woke for a moment and glanced about. The lantern burned low and sputtered, but here and there, in the cracks of the walls and

ceiling, pale streaks of gray told that the early dawn was at hand.

At the next awakening Carey sat up rather sharply. A moment of listening, and he shook Greer gently.

"Joe!"

Greer stirred uneasily. Carey put his mouth down to the other's ear.

"S-s-sh! Don't speak! Is your gun ready?"

"I—I—yes." The other, too, was erect now. "What has happened, Billy?"

"It's not what has happened so much as what's going to happen in the next minute or so. Listen!"

They arose noiselessly and waited. From without came a soft scratching, as of a key being inserted in the rusty padlock.

The men from Chicago exchanged a glance in the gloom; their weapons were ready.

"It's friend Gratton!" Carey muttered. "He's come to renew the conversation of last evening!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOODOO PERSISTS.

WITHOUT, the scratching was renewed; a long creak told that the padlock had been drawn from the thick staple.

Carey and Greer stood well back from the door, watchful and ready for trouble.

Had Gratton come to release them, or merely to add some new problem to the mass of mysteries? Was his errand peaceful or otherwise?

With nerves tense, they watched the door, moving at last after what seemed minutes.

A ray of sunlight entered and Carey's gun came up into position. Then—he dropped it, with a little grunt of astonishment.

Not Gratton was revealed in the doorway, but the grinning, apologetic visage of the Chinaman.

He seemed not overanxious to enter; indeed, at the sight of the drawn weapons he dodged back a little and the apology in the grin increased.

"No—no shootee!" he ejaculated.

"I'm not going to shoot you," Carey said. "Where's Gratton?"

"S-s-sh!"

The man stepped into the stable and away from the door. A cautious glance at the house across the clearing, and he approached the prisoners.

"You be velly quiet. You get away now!"

"You mean that Gratton has condescended to allow us to leave?"

"He no know. He think you all locked up now."

"Is he around?"

"All asleep, over there in house. You saddle horsee quick."

"So you're releasing us on your own accord, are you?" Carey asked curiously.

"Yes. Go quick."

The Chicago man scratched his head.

"Perhaps we've misjudged this almond-eyed problem, Joe," he muttered.

"Well, whether we have or not, it looks as if the chance had come to get off with a whole skin, Billy! Hustle!"

He turned quickly to the stalls and brought forth their horses, the only ones in the place.

Carey hurriedly brought the saddles from their corner, and set about the preparations for their departure.

The Chinaman watched the operations with his benevolent smile, now and then putting in a word. He eyed the house carefully, but no sign of the amiable Gratton was manifest.

The saddles in place, he stepped forward once more.

"You know how go?"

"No. Only by taking the trail that brought us here."

"No go that way—have to pass house. You come here."

Carey stepped to his side.

"You see path, down there?"

"Through the woods? Yes, a little one."

"You go there. Take you plitty soon on trail."

"Good!"

"No makee noise. Misser Glatton wakee up——"

"We'll make as little as possible, certainly."

Both men swung into the saddle. Greer regarded the Chinaman with a

quizzical smile. After a little contemplation he put a hand in his pocket and produced a bill of small denomination.

"Here, my man," he said. "I must say that we weren't precisely infatuated with you before, but this—this is downright white!"

"Thank you!" the Oriental responded happily and with a bow.

Slowly, softly, the horses were walked across the back of the clearing and down the path. Three or four hundred yards and the gait was increased, and Carey heaved a long sigh of relief.

"Good—Lord!" he cried. "We're out of it! Joe, I'll never sneer at that hoodoo of yours again. It seems to be fond of hitting back. Hereafter I'll try to humor it and respect it!"

"You'd better," Greer laughed grimly. "It's evidently not the kind to play with."

"Hardly, but if it will kindly let up now for a litle—phew!"

They swung into the trail again and pushed on rapidly.

"That was a blessed impulse that sent the Chink to release us, Billy!"

"Yes. Why on earth did he do it?"

Greer shrugged his shoulders.

"Not because he loved us, I'm afraid, after the jar you gave him last night. Probably Gratton's been thrashing him, and that was his way of getting even."

"Well—whatever the motive, the deed itself was all to the good!" Carey pursued thoughtfully. "Even if we're shy on the breakfast question, we've got the world before us again, and no Gratton to poke a gun through the knotholes and exterminate us!"

"Billy!" Greer turned in his saddle. "What earthly reason did he have for locking us up at that hour of the night?"

"Also, was that man in the clearing really Lisser? And if it was, what was he doing there? And then, is Furman alive or dead and just where?" Carey said dryly. "Seems to me we've been asking ourselves and each other those questions for several hours back. Give it up, Joe! There's no way on earth of answering them here and now. We'll get to the Falls, start the sheriff out this way, and then—well, either return with him or wait there. That's all for the present and there's no particular use in consuming good brain matter trying to figure out what we have no means of knowing."

"But if Furman's in trouble——"

"Hang him, anyway!" Carey said, in some exasperation. "I can't feel that the man's dead; but if he's up there and in trouble, it serves him right! What right has a person of his importance to come into this wilderness with no other companion than a namby-pamby fool like Lisser?"

"It was foolish, but it's the sort of thing that Furman does, Billy. He probably wanted to see this Gratton mine in person, and simply went ahead and did it!"

"Well, I hope he was satisfied," Carey growled sourly. "If he had just had sufficient sense to stay at home in Chicago, sign his name to a fat little check and acquire the Black Bull, he'd have been all right now."

"The—the poor Black Bull!" sighed Greer.

"The poor Black Bull—sure enough! He's gone by the board now, fast enough, Joe. We've got about money enough between us to buy a good meal after we return. The rest we'll have to make, and a thundering old job it's going to be! Ten to one, unless a miracle of some kind occurs, the pinch we're in will be noised all over town, and we'll have a dickens of a time maintaining any credit. The Black Bull was a fool animal—and it was all my fault that we ever got the option on him."

"Well, don't gloom over it, Bill," Greer said, with a faint effort at consolation. "We never know what's going to turn up. If something extraordinary——"

"Halt!"

The "something extraordinary" had emphatically turned up and at that very instant.

From contemplating the ground ahead, both men shot bolt upright in the saddles and stared. Their horses were reined in almost to their haunches and they pawed the air for a moment before settling down again.

For just ahead, revolvers leveled at the two men from Chicago, sat three horsed figures.

They were as rough and wild a trio in appearance as either man had yet encountered in the mountains. The foremost of them, a bearded fellow of forty or thereabouts, chuckled hoarsely into his beard as he sighted along the extended blue barrel of his weapon.

"Put 'em up!"

Carey and Greer, too stunned even to exchange glances, elevated their hands without question. He of the beard trotted forward and deftly extracted their sole means of defense, and he chuckled again as he dropped them into his empty holsters.

"Unexpected pleasure, hey?" he remarked.

"What the—the——"

"Now, don't git to cussin'! 'Tain't goin' to do any good."

"But, my dear man," said Carey, more calmly, "under the circumstances, as you must be aware you're quite welcome to anything we're carrying. Only we're not armed now, and if you wouldn't hold that infernal thing so close——"

The pistol dropped to the man's side, and he broke into a laugh.

"All right. Just mind this, though: either of you try to make a break, and ye'll get a taste o' the finest real shooting you ever heard of!"

As if by prearrangement, the other two trotted up and ranged alongside the pair of dazed travelers. The seeming leader of the trio, his laugh quieted into a satisfied grin, fell in behind.

"Git along!"

"But where—where are we going?" Carey turned and faced him as his hands went back to the reins.

"Where I say. Go on."

For the second time in their disastrous trip Carey and Greer seemed to have been unceremoniously "gathered in."

The horses were urged along for half a mile or so, the captors exchanging jocular remarks the while.

Then the leader trotted to the front, surveyed the ground for a brief space, and parted the bushes.

"Right!"

He crashed through the thicket beside the trail. Carey and Greer, willy-nilly, followed along the rough way; and very shortly they came upon a poor apology for a path.

Whither did it lead? Carey opened his lips to ask, and shut them again.

It was quite fruitless, he was well aware. As simple was it to save breath and await developments, whatever new insanity Fate might now have in store for them.

Another mile suddenly brought them to a wide natural clearing. Both men stared in amazement at the magnificent prospect before them.

The spot overlooked a vast, wild valley; across, some two or three miles, the gray, towering mountains rose again and literally vanished in the clouds. Far below the distant roar of a mountain stream reached them through the still air.

A more utterly isolated, a more savagely beautiful location could hardly have been imagined.

And now, instead of hurrying along the White Falls trail, they were here and—in captivity!

The rough trio went methodically to work.

Saddles were removed and piled; the horses, save one, were turned out to graze; to all appearances, preparations were being made for an extended stay.

Carey, recovering from his bewilderment, finally stepped forward to the leader.

"Pardon me!" he began dryly.

"Hey?"

"I'm not personally acquainted with the conventional methods of the hold-up men, but isn't this a little out of the ordinary?"

"It—mebbe so." The slow grin reappeared.

"We have business elsewhere, you know," Carey pursued easily. "If it's all the same to you, would you mind taking what you want and allowing us to depart as soon as possible?"

The bearded man's head shook.

"Not this trip, mister."

"You mean that we are to be held here?"

"Little while."

"About how long?"

"Week or two."

"What!" escaped the Chicago man.

"Mebbe three. We'll have to see."

"But what in thunder——"

"Now, there's no use butting up against a stone wall, son. You're here, and here to stay. See? You've got no guns. If you had it wouldn't make no difference anyway. We're three to two. Then, if you got all three of us out o' the way, you'd never get back to that trail in a year. Give it up and settle down."

"But I want to know why——"

"Then go off and guess over it!"

The bearded man turned away abruptly and waved a hand across the clearing.

"Dick!"

"Yeah?"

"You can scoot off and get the grub now. Take your own hoss. Pack a mule, if there's too much. Go on!"

Ignoring Carey, he walked off unceremoniously. The former returned to the side of Greer, sitting bewildered upon a pile of saddles.

"Joe," he said softly, "we're here for a week—or two or three weeks, as suits our friend over there!"

"A—what?"

"I don't pretend to know what this means," Carey sighed wearily as he dropped to the ground. "It's all beyond me now, just as it has been right along. We're alive and awake, and the Lord knows I can't believe we're gone crazy! But—oh, I'll pass!"

"But—why, robbery doesn't seem to be their motive! They haven't made a sign of an attempt to go through us, little as they'd get. And we seem to be settled here for a while. Why?"

"Confound that why! Have we been saying anything besides why, ever since we met poor John Ferguson?"

Carey's head dropped into his hands and he groaned. Greer smoked and stared across the great valley. When he looked up, it was with an odd expression.

"See here, Billy!"

"Well?"

"Is this a trap of some sort?"

"It's a trap of some sort, undoubtedly," said Carey grimly. "Question is—what sort?"

"Gratton locked us up there last night because he wanted us out of the way. Well—we're still out of the way."

"Emphatically!"

"Is it Gratton's doing still, Billy? Did he send that Chinaman to release us in that somewhat inexplicable manner and to steer us here?"

"I——" Carey looked up, with a momentary animation in his eyes. But it died down again almost immediately. "I'm eternally blest if I know, Joe!"

"In other words, did I pay that man real money for the privilege of being steered straight at this gang?"

Carey's head took to shaking again.

"Try me on something easier, Joe. I'm all in, so far as coherent reasoning's concerned. Events may appear to show that you're right, and they may appear to show that you're wrong. Don't ask me. We know that we're here and unarmed, and likely to stay here as long as these gentlemen say."

"At night, perhaps——"

"At night, my boy, you may wager your chances of eternal happiness that one or another of them will be wide awake and in possession of his miniature cannon. There's no hope in that."

"But, while we're sitting here, anything on earth may be happening to Furman!" Greer cried, a little wildly.

"Hang Furman!" Carey's voice was sour. "It's his own lookout, Joe, and his own fault. Meanwhile, about everything on earth seems to be happening to us."

He laughed shortly; the laugh dropped to a growl and died away, and Carey found his own pipe and blew morose clouds into the still air.

Save for a little watchfulness their presence appeared to be quite ignored by the trio.

The man designated as Dick chatted for a little with the others, and ended by trotting out of the clearing and into the thicket. He, it appeared, had departed for the provisions which were to keep them during the indefinite stay.

The others loitered about at a little distance. The bearded man, too, took to smoking as he lounged on the grass, his heavy belt and holsters removed. The other, a slighter fellow, younger and heavily mustached, yawned lazily not far away.

"They're not worried!" Carey observed in an acid undertone.

"They've nothing in particular to worry about, it seems to me. They—why, great—great Cæsar's ghost!"

Carey sat up quickly, as a quiet voice reached him.

"I'm sorry to do it, Tom, but you'd better lie right still!"

The youngest of the trio was covering his bearded partner with a gun held in a steady hand and pointed squarely at his head.

CHAPTER IX.

TABLE-TURNING WITH A VENGEANCE.

Carey started to his feet.

"What the—what's struck now?" he gasped.

"I—I——" Greer gave over the effort at speech and stared at the queer tableau ahead.

There was no doubt whatever of its significance. Wholly unexpected, utterly amazing as it all was, the younger man had obtained the deadliest of "drops" upon his leader; and that person's weapons lay a dozen yards away!

The latter, incidentally, lay, open-mouthed, upon the ground seemingly quite as astounded as the rest. His comrade smiled a little.

"No use, Tom. I've got you dead to rights!"

"You—you blasted fool! Are you——"

"Off? Not a little bit!"

He sprang lightly to his feet and stepped across to the other's pistols. He caught them up and passed them, belt and all, to Carey, who came forward uncertainly to receive them.

"My—my dear man!" he muttered, dazedly.

"It's all right. Wait."

He turned back to the leader.

"You'll have to mosey over to that tree, Tom."

"Say, you go to the devil. I——"

"Move!"

The men faced each other for an instant. The leader moved. Sullenly, in bewilderment, he walked peacefully enough to the tree the other had indicated. He turned and faced him with a black scowl.

"Say, when he gets next to you for this——"

"He's not going to get next—or if he does he'll be sorry for it. Back up against the trunk. Now, Mr. Carey, that rope, please. Mr. Greer, will you kindly get that blanket from my saddle over there?"

Too thunderstruck to remark the odd fact that this latest human enigma was acquainted with their names and was using them correctly, the Chicago men obeyed.

On a run, Carey brought the rope; with like alacrity Greer hurried for the dilapidated blanket.

"Put your hands back, around the trunk!"

"Say, you——" burst in a roar from the captive.

"Tom Dobbins, you put those hands back or I'll kill you! It'd be no crime!"

The hands were thrust back and the arms wound about the tree.

"Now, Mr. Carey, you'll just knot the wrists good and tight. If there's enough left over, make his arms thoroughly fast to the trunk."

With eager, nervous, inexperienced fingers, Carey nevertheless managed a very fair job.

"Tie the blanket around his feet and around the tree, too!"

Greer undertook the task with more vim than he had been able to infuse into anything for days.

The work consumed but a few minutes. At its end the three men stood away and surveyed the captive. Within hardly more than seconds—incredible as all other recent happenings—the leader of the hold-up band had been converted into a helpless captive and lashed hard and fast to a stout tree.

But if Carey and Greer were dazed, the younger man was not. He turned quickly and beckoned them.

"We haven't any too much time as it is, gentlemen. Get on your saddles and I'll attend to mine. Oh, don't worry about that cuss!" he said impatiently. "The other man'll be back in a matter of three or four hours and cut him loose."

"I—I wasn't worrying about that man," Carey stammered. "What I want to know is this: who on earth are you, and why under the sun have you done it?"

"Who am I?" The man seemed in turn astonished. "Why—I supposed you knew me all along and were too wise to let on."

"Knew you?"

The man glanced at a big silver watch and took another step.

"It's the mustache, I suppose. I hadn't thought of that. Gentlemen, do you remember Briggins, the kid who used to run the elevator in your building, back home in Chicago—the one that was threatened with lung trouble and had to get out in the big hills and live in the air?"

"Eh?" Greer stepped forward and looked sharply at him.

"I'm Briggins—that's all. Come along!"

Carey's eyes, too, verified the fact as the young man strode across the clearing. The promoter laughed and thought that he detected a distinctly crazy note in the laugh.

"It's the same kid, Joe! It's the very same! Come on. He seems to know what he's about. Down there in the woods we'll probably find the Emperor of Germany playing cards with a muskrat, or something of the sort, but—oh, we're loose again now, and that's all that matters."

He caught his own horse and threw the saddle over. He slipped on the bridle and put a foot in the stirrup.

Briggins was already astride and Greer very nearly ready to follow suit. The younger man, after a last look at the furious face by the tree, turned unconcernedly and trotted to the edge of the clearing.

"Ready?"

"Yes."

"Come along, then! We'll have to hustle if we're going to make the Falls in time."

Carey hurried his own steed to Briggins' side.

"In time for what, boy?" he asked.

"Eh?" Briggins stared hard for an instant. "You don't know? But of course you don't—all, at least."

"All of what?" Carey craned hard to catch the answer, for Briggins was galloping recklessly along the rough path. "What are we rushing to the Falls so like fury for?"

"What for?" Briggins reined in for an instant. "Mr. Carey, it's to smash the life out of the biggest swindle that's been tried around this part of the world since I landed, five years ago! Hurry! I'll tell you as we go along."

CHAPTER X.

A RACE AND A FINISH.

THREE horses pounded abreast down the widening trail. Some two miles ahead, in the rather lower country, the roofs of White Falls once more came into view.

Harder breathing, worse lathered horses, perhaps, rarely came down that trail. The animals were thoroughly tired with almost merciless going for twenty-five miles; their riders dusty and weary with long-continued pounding in the saddle.

But they had a very definite purpose in view—a purpose which interested at least two of them as strongly as had any purpose in many years. They were after game, and if they caught it——

Carey pulled in his mount at the turn and surveyed the long stretch of road visible. He shaded his eyes then, and a low whoop escaped him.

"There!"

"Eh?" Briggins' gaze, longer accustomed to distances, followed keenly.

"Ah, I see."

"Just going into the woods?"

"Yes, that was the white horse the man Lisser was riding when they left. Good! We'll make 'em a mile this side of town, if Gratton isn't fool enough to try a race and smash his own game."

He dug in the spurs again, and they were off once more at a dead gallop.

Neither of the city men spoke; their whole attention was devoted to keeping the pace and still maintaining sufficient breath for the continuance of life. Briggins pounded on beside them until the edge of the patch of woods was reached.

He slowed down again, and the others turned questioningly.

"Go ahead by yourselves, Mr. Carey. It's better so. You'll take them up in five minutes easily. Have your fun, and I'll loiter on behind. You may

need a witness in a little while, and—well, I'll be on hand."

Carey nodded and galloped ahead with Greer. A grim smile had changed the promoter's lips to a thin, almost white line. He chuckled angrily now and then as he glanced at Greer.

"We've got 'em, Joe!" he muttered triumphantly. "We've got 'em at last, and we've got 'em nailed down, too!"

"And—and there they are!" burst from Greer.

Carey looked forward.

There, in the sunshine, three mounted figures were waiting, staring backward with lively curiosity at the furious hoof-beats.

One was plainly Gratton, uncomfortable in the unaccustomed elegance of a "boiled shirt." His face was a study of complex emotions as the promoters finally came into view.

The second regarded the oncomers with white face and open month; two trim, slim hands ripped the reins convulsively: Lisser was frightened, it seemed.

For the third, he was a short man of fifty or so, sharp of eye and wearing a shooting suit and a close gray beard. The third man, alive and well and in full possession, as it appeared, of all his faculties, was—Furman, the capitalist!

Carey and Greer, with a final burst of speed, drew rein in a dust cloud before the trio.

Furman's face was contracted in a wonderfully puzzled form. Lisser edged his horse to one side. Gratton drew a long, whistling breath and caught up his own reins, but Carey was at his side.

"You, Mr. Gratton, and you, Mr. Lisser, are *not* going to run! Understand that, please. Greer and I have been attending Wild West shows so often these last few days that we're quite up in the game. You try getting away and you'll get what—well, what you tried to pass through that stable door last night, my friend!"

"But—Carey! Greer! My dear fellows!" burst from Furman. "Where under the sun did you drop from? What the dickens is up, anyway? Have you gone mad, or what?"

"What, I think," Carey chuckled. He reached over and shook hands with the man of money. "No, we're not quite mad yet, Furman. We've had reason enough to be, several times over, but I think we've survived."

"But—why, you're supposed to be in Chicago, and still you drop down on us here in this meteor fashion."

"But not exactly from heaven, you know. Our last stop was a quiet little spot somewhere in the hills above. We dropped, Furman, for the sake of entertaining you with a little story—thought the long ride might have tired you; also for the sake of shattering what faith you still retain in human nature."

"My dear Carey!" Furman looked at him solicitously.

Carey swung from his saddle and stretched.

"Suppose we dismount?" he said. "It's cool, comfortable, and quiet here beside the trail. I've a good deal to say, and you'll be decidedly glad to hear it before I'm done."

Furman stared again. He ended by following to the ground. Carey looked meaningly at Gratton and Lisser.

"Gentlemen, you can't get away. Will you dismount?"

Gratton licked his thick lips and obeyed. The assayer, shaking violently before Furman's amazed eyes, followed the example and stood beside his horse, staring at the ground.

"But — Lisser!" Furman cried. "Have you all gone suddenly insane?"

"Never mind Lisser. There's a soft patch."

One by one the party dropped to the ground, Carey's sharp eye ever upon the miner and the blond youth.

He ended by squatting comfortably before them: one hand rested with apparent carelessness upon the revolver in his pocket as he scratched a match and lighted his pipe with the other.

"Well—the story's all for you, Mr. Furman," he began. "The rest will enjoy it, doubtless, but it is really for your own personal benefit. It runs something like this:

"Some few weeks ago you decided to invest in a silver mine, did you not? Quite so. You looked around for various properties, our own among others.

You came upon this immensely rich silver property of Mr. Gratton's, too. So far, quite correct?"

"Quite so, Mr. Carey." Furman's face was rather grave now. "Go on, please."

"It's a pleasure, my dear sir. Well, Gratton's mine looked first-class. You decided to come out and see it in person, and to bring Lisser here, with his little portable laboratory, to assay the various samples of ore on the spot and report upon them. That, of course, would give you the most perfect idea possible of the mine.

"You got here. Gratton took you to the mine. It looked very well, and Lisser set to work on his assaying. He reported that the ore was incredibly rich, and you were more impressed than you usually are with anything. Well, Gratton knew you well, knew that your check was as good as a greenback. He told you the truth—that he was more than anxious to sell, and to sell quick. For that reason he was willing to give you what, all things considered, was a really big bargain.

"You wanted time to think; he urged you on. You hesitated over such a rapid-fire deal; he made things still more attractive, until at last, knowing what a perfect mint of money you were taking up, you consented to buy. You started off for White Falls early this morning. At the register's office, I believe, the property was to be transferred, and you were to pay over the cash."

"Well, I don't pretend to know just how you've gleaned the information, Mr. Carey, although you're telling a perfectly true story," said Furman. "But I happen to know it already."

"Patience!" Carey held up one hand smilingly. "I didn't stop gleaning there. There's something you don't know. Mr. Furman, I believe that there may be something queer about that mine!"

"Why——"

"For one thing, an old friend of ours, John Ferguson, had some of the genuine ore in his possession. He was going to assay it yesterday morning. Instead, he was killed out on the range, and the ore stolen. It's going to be a pleasure, a little later, to show in court that Gratton here despatched a man for the express purpose of getting that ore, whether he had to slaughter Ferguson or not!"

"Carey!"

"Wait, all of you!" thundered the promoter. "That's not all! We wanted to see you, Furman. We came after you from Carter City out here. We hit Gratton finally. He was more than cordial. He informed us that you were dead, and even showed us the clothes you died in! He locked us up in his stable, too, and sent a bullet or two through the door, in the hope, I think, of hitting us!

"Furman, that scoundrel would rather have murdered us, too, than have us reach you. He didn't know us—he didn't know how much we knew about his wretched mine. He did know, though, that if we reached you the game was probably up for him.

"Therefore, to continue with Mr. Gratton for a little, he had us lured out of the way this morning. We were to be detained, away from other society than the three congenial gentlemen he furnished, for two weeks or so."

Carey paused for an instant.

"That, Furman, was about the length of time it would take for your check to travel to Chicago and back, be paid to the bank at White Falls, enable Gratton to withdraw the money and—vanish! Neat, wasn't it?"

Gratton sat motionless and breathing hard. Carey smiled at the stupefied gaze on Furman's face.

"Even that isn't all," he pursued quietly. "There's Lisser still to be accounted for. I'll tell you just what Lisser did. He and Gratton cooked up a pretty little deal. The mine isn't worth ten cents an acre as a mine. Lisser, nevertheless, was to report it as incredibly valuable and take his own little share—if ever he was lucky enough to collect it from that ugly crook over there!"

His finger pointed at Gratton.

Lisser, trembling, leaped to his feet.

"C—Carey! Mr. Furman! I—I——"

"Don't worry. It's all substantiated."

"I tell you, he made me do it!" screamed the youth. "He gave me the choice of doing it or being shot! He made me do it! He—damn him! He frightened the life out of me!"

"Not a difficult task, I think, and hardly an excuse," Carey observed.

There was a long, ominous pause. Furman's eyes sparkled angrily as they rested upon Gratton. Lisser appeared to be beneath his notice.

"Well?" said Carey.

"What have you to say in answer to this, Gratton?" Furman inquired in a low voice.

The unprepossessing man of the hills drew a long breath; he straightened up and stared defiantly at them all.

"Say!" he growled. "I'll say it's the craziest mouthing of a born fool I ever heard!"

"Unsubstantiated lie, eh?" smiled Carey. "No witnesses or anything else?"

"Wit——"

"Hold on! Look up there!"

Around the curve the figure of Briggins trotted slowly into view. Gratton seemed literally to wilt.

"Thought that all your five men—tough characters, ostensibly working your fake mine—were to be trusted, did you?" Carey laughed. "Well, there was one mistake, at least. That man I helped to a couple of jobs as a youngster. He was forced to come out here for his health. He made the bad break last month of engaging with you. He's been waiting for his pay to quit.

"When you allowed so much to be known to your esteemed foreman, Thomas, you should have made sure that Briggins was out of hearing. When you told off three men to hold us up this morning, you should have omitted Briggins. And you should either have had Tom carry the provisions that first trip, or have instructed him to send Briggins. Easy to cook up a lot of regrets, isn't it, Gratton?"

He smiled again as Briggins walked calmly up and stopped before the group.

Furman had risen.

"Our deal is off, Gratton," he remarked tersely. "But I think you'll accompany us into White Falls, nevertheless."

Late that evening the best meal in White Falls' power steamed gloriously before three tired and hungry but very appreciative men.

Gratton reposed in jail. Lisser had been allowed to disappear, and he had taken the chance, assured that his professional future was forever broken while he retained his own name or sought to work where his weak features were familiar to men in mining circles.

For Furman, he seemed deep in thought; as the roast appeared, he looked up.

"I say, Carey. That mine of yours, you know."

"Our Black Bull?" The promoter smiled easily.

"We'll look into that when we get back. I think it'll fill the bill, all right."

"I know it will, my dear sir. I told you that long ago."

And then he made a remark, rather enigmatic to the capitalist:

"Joe, in regard to that hoodoo of yours——"

Greer poised a delicious mouthful for one tantalizing second. He smiled lovingly at it and moved it an inch nearer his waiting lips as he grinned and muttered:

"That poor hoodoo's dead. Billy! Overwork was what did it!"

THE END.

FROM CUPID.

WHEN lights burn dim and the words come low
In a whisper sweet and strange,
'Tis plain to see that the twain have bought
A seat on the Heart Exchange.

The Recognition of Catherine.

BY CLIFFORD HOWARD.

The aftermath of an audacious wager with an automobile annex.

"HEIGHO, Catherine!"

The motor girl halted her machine in response to the salutation and turned to greet the rider as she wheeled about and drew up to the auto.

"Why, hello, dearie! Where do you come from, and whither away? How are you?"

"Perfectly lovely, thank you; and how's your sweet self? Don't you know, I came within an ace of passing without recognizing you? Really, Catherine, you ought not to disguise your beauty under a veil like that. But how are you? Charming afternoon, isn't it? Too bad we can't have a little chat together, but I must be off; really, I ought not to have stopped at all. I promised Morton I would meet him at the club at four for a ride over to Rockville, and I haven't the least doubt in the world that I am already dreadfully late."

The motor girl glanced at her clock.

"Only twenty minutes after," she announced.

"Dear me!" returned the other, as she faced her horse about; "and Morton, you know, is so punctilious about appointments. I mustn't stop another moment. So glad to have had this glimpse of you, Catherine. By-by; fare thee well," and with a wave of her whip she was off on a canter.

The girl in the auto tossed her valedictions lightly after the rider and watched her until she turned into the driveway of the country club on the outskirts of one of the suburbs of Washington. Then, starting her machine, she went forward slowly for about a hundred yards, when she again came to a stop, apparently for the purpose of readjusting her veil.

"Wonder who she is? An angel with a red devil—not a bad suggestion for some modern Dante."

Thus declaring himself, Harry Walcott shifted his position in order to gain a better view through the clump of shrubbery that screened himself and his two companions from the roadway, as they reclined upon a shadowed knoll on the edge of the golf-links.

"Looks to me as if she was having trouble with the machine," commented Clarke, as he leaned back on his elbow and fixed his gaze on the automobile a short distance down the road.

Hawley, the third member of the group, gave his attention to the careful rolling of a cigarette.

"Why not go and offer her your assistance?" he suggested.

"Thank you; I'm not acquainted with her," returned Clarke. "The prospect of being turned down with an icy stare is not to my liking."

Hawley laughed quietly and struck a match. "The same argument, probably, that the Englishman used for declining to notice the appeals of a drowning man to whom he had not been introduced."

"What was it that the girl on horseback called her?" put in Walcott. "It was 'Catherine,' wasn't it? Well, there's all the introduction you need, Clarke. Call her Catherine. Remind her of the days you used to slide down the cellar door together; and if she doesn't recognize you—well, that's for her to be sorry about, and in the mean time you can fix the carbureter and start her on her way, with the satisfaction to yourself of having done your duty as a gentleman."

"An excellent idea, Walcott, upon my word; but don't let me appropriate the credit for it. What do you say, Hawley, do we delegate Walcott to present himself to the fair stranger as an old-time friend come to the rescue?"

"Sure thing," assented Hawley, striking a second match. "She certainly does seem to be having trouble with that gaudy monster of hers, and

I don't see but that it's up to you, Walcott, to put your ingenuity as a gentleman to practical test."

Walcott smiled and tapped his shoes lightly with his walking stick.

"Clarke's the man who discovered the lady's predicament. I merely offered the suggestion for his benefit."

"Very good of you, I'm sure. But I assign all my rights in the case to you. I couldn't play the part, and, besides, I don't know anything about the anatomy of these infernal machines, and Hawley here is a mechanical ignoramus."

Walcott got up and slowly shook the wrinkles from his trousers.

"That's right, old man," commented Hawley; "you go out there and call her 'Catherine' and ask about the folks, and while she's coming out of her daze you start her balky steed for her, like a true cavalier."

"And what's your bet?" asked Walcott dryly.

"A dinner in your honor at the St. Charles," interjected Clarke. "You play the rôle of forgotten friend—a polite bunco game, as it were—and fix the machine for Catherine, and if you get back here without being frozen stiff or enjoying a taste of feminine jiu-jitsu, we'll stand for the best the St. Charles can put up in the shape of a dinner for a party of six, or a dozen, if you say so. Is that right, Hawley?"

Hawley said it was all right, and Walcott adjusted his glasses and looked down the road.

"You don't know human nature as I do," he remarked philosophically, "or you wouldn't be so rash. You can make anybody believe you know them if you go about it in the right way, and Catherine out there is no exception to the rule. Anyhow, the dinner's on me if she calls me down; so here goes."

He made his way out through an opening in the bushes and walked deliberately down the road toward the automobile.

As he drew near he more than half regretted his rash venture. The girl in the auto bore the unmistakable marks of style and high breeding, and in her unsuccessful efforts to start the machine was now adding a heightened color to her rosy beauty and making herself appealingly charming beneath her veil with a petulant biting of her lips, deliciously suggestive of mute appeals to naughty words.

When he agreed to undertake his little frolic for the amusement and consternation of his companions, he had not reckoned on meeting with any so delectable a victim of his roguishness as this. However, the streak of obstinacy in his nature would not permit him to give way to his momentary sense of fear, but, boldly approaching the car, he determined to win in spite of his misgivings.

With an assumption of surprise and delight that would have done credit to a finished actor, he snatched off his hat and came forward with eager haste.

"Why, upon my word," he exclaimed, extending his hand in hearty greeting, "if this isn't Catherine! By George, but this *is* a surprise, I do declare, and a most unexpected pleasure!"

The girl instinctively drew back, startled and confused. Then a flash of anger and haughty resentment swept across her flushed face, followed at once, however, by an apologetic expression of puzzled curiosity as she started to make answer.

"You don't mean that you have forgotten me—that you don't recognize me?" persisted Walcott, anticipating her protest, and, with a show of injured feelings, withdrawing the hand she had declined to accept. "Don't you really remember me, Catherine?"

He asked the question with a plaintive earnestness that assured him his cue for a graceful exit, for, if she would not recognize him, he, in turn, would not enlighten her as to his identity but, martyr-like, would go his way, simply craving pardon for having allowed their one-time friendship to prompt him to obtrude himself upon her.

But the expected cue was not forthcoming. With a radiant smile of sudden revelation, the girl in the auto reached forward impulsively and grasped his hand.

"Harry! Harry Walcott!" she cried, gazing delightedly into his astonished countenance. "Why, bless my heart! Where under the sun do you come from? Why, I'm awfully glad to see

you, Harry! But, dear me, how you have changed!—that mustache, and the glasses, and that Bostonese accent—you had not attained to the dignity of any of them when you left home, you know, and is it any wonder I didn't know you?

"Still, I have no right to be making excuses; you recognized me at once, didn't you? And time has never wrought greater changes in any human mortal, if I am to believe father's recollections and some of the photographs of myself in the dark ages of my existence. But, tell me, Harry, how has this miracle occurred—your materializing suddenly out here on the road after, lo! these many years of unkind silence? Where have you been all this time? What are you doing in Washington? How has the world been treating you?"

"Oh, I've been pegging away," he floundered, groping desperately for his mental bearings. "Are you living in Washington now?" he asked abruptly, in a blind effort to lead up to some evidence bearing upon the identity of "Catherine," for a hurried inventory of his memory failed to disclose a single instance of that name among his schoolmates or former friends.

She clucked in teasing surprise at his question.

"Dear me, Harry, where *have* you been? Yet, alas, such is fame! Yes, we are living in Washington; father's been in Congress for nearly four years."

"You don't tell me," responded Walcott. "How are all the family?"

If she mentioned some of the names it might give him a clue.

"All of the family?" she echoed jokingly. "There is no more family now than there ever was. Mother's in the best of health—grown quite stout, you know—and father is growing younger and better looking every day. They'll be delighted to see you. Can't you ride back with me to town and take dinner with us?"

"Thank you very much; that's very good of you. I am sure; but you will have to excuse me; I—I really couldn't manage it to-day."

"But why not. Don't tell me you have another engagement, for I won't believe it, and father and mother will never forgive me if I let you off."

Walcott looked around and beheld Hawley and Clarke sauntering down the road. In all probability they had concluded to add a little spice to the game by putting in an appearance and suggesting an introduction.

"If you are quite sure it will be perfectly convenient I shall be delighted," he decided quickly; "especially as you seemed to be having some trouble with the machine, and I may possibly be of assistance to you."

"Oh, can you drive a car?" There was a note of thankful assurance in her question. "This machine has been acting shamefully for the past half hour, and I'm a perfect coward when I think anything is going topsy-turvy with it, for I haven't the remotest idea what ought to be done. Now you see how dreadfully selfish I am in asking you to ride with me."

"Not at all," Walcott assured her as he restarted the power which she had turned off at the beginning of the conversation. "I am only glad I happen to be familiar with this make of machine;" and jumping in beside her as she changed to the other seat, he succeeded after a moment's difficulty in getting the car under way.

He experienced a distinct sense of relief as he felt himself moving out of reach of his companions; yet he could not resist the temptation to give them a furtive backward wave of the hand in expression of his momentary feeling of triumph at the thought of their astonishment in thus beholding him making off with Catherine.

At her suggestion, he took one of the roads leading through Rock Creek Park, and as soon as they were running along smoothly he set himself earnestly to the task of unraveling the mystery into which he had plunged himself.

Here he was, riding with an undeniably charming girl, the daughter of a United States Congressman, evidently a person of wealth as well as station, and glorified with the modern spirit of self-reliant womanhood, who was familiarly addressing him as Harry and hurrying him into the city, to be presented at home as an old friend and in all likelihood introduced pell-mell into Washington society.

And his only cue as the chief actor in this extravaganza was the single fact that the girl's name was Catherine.

And who under the moon was Catherine? He tried to fit her nose, her mouth, her hair, her eyes, her voice, her gestures to one of the many girls he had known in his younger days. It was no use; each feature was cut to a far more stylish and handsome pattern than any within his stock of remembrance.

He scanned his memory for a possible "Katy" or "Kit," or a "Kate" or "Kitty," but though he had three sets of girls from which to choose (for three towns in Indiana had been his home at different times before he defied the injunction of Horace Greeley and went East at the ambitious age of nineteen), he failed completely and miserably to unearth a Catherine, either in whole or in diminutive form.

Nor could he recall any girl that had been his especial boyhood friend and who might have been expected to be as glad to see him again as this Catherine apparently was, unless perhaps it was Sue Anderson. He and Sue had indulged in some very romantic talks in their high-school days together, and he had had a boyish fancy that he and Sue would fall in love some day and be married in due course of time; and though he had lost all sight and knowledge of her after going to Boston, the recollection of her had a habit of arousing a sentimental belief that had he remained in Danville she would now be Sue Walcott.

But, alas, she was Sue, a slender mite of a girl, with straggly flaxen hair, while the young woman by his side at the present moment was Catherine a well-rounded, muscular somebody of a distinctly brunette type.

These and a score of other worrying memories and reflections whirled through his head as he gave ostensible attention to the auto and made perfunctory answer to her rapid-fire questions and her running comments on motoring and golf and graft and a host of other fragile topics, all equally irrelevant to the question that was churning his brain.

At every opening in her chatter he made a dash for light. But each time he missed it. His carefully worded questions and his adroit reference to the past, to her home town, to her girlhood days, to her family name all failed of their purpose.

The unsuspecting victim of his deception declined to be drawn into reminiscences or personal affairs. She not only evaded every ambush he laid for her, but, after a few interested queries regarding his own career during the past eight years, she forced him out into the open field of impersonal and present-day converse. It was markedly a one-sided conversation, and it was not until the speed of the automobile began noticeably to slacken that the thoughts of its two occupants were brought into a common channel.

"Hello! Looks as if the gasoline were giving out," remarked Walcott, feeling for the oil lever.

"How dreadfully ill-behaved," commented his companion philosophically. "I suppose that means we shall have to resort to the humiliating expedient of walking home."

"No, not necessarily; it is just possible that something else is wrong. At any rate, we won't bother to get out now. We can make this hill by gravity, and if the machine hasn't righted itself by that time we can investigate when we get at the bottom, and we'll be that much nearer home if worst comes to worst."

As he spoke the machine crawled lazily over the brow of the hill, and a moment later was waking up and responding readily to the invitation of gravity.

"I believe this is the hill that Lieutenant Müller, of the German embassy, once told me was a 'kilometer' long," she remarked, deftly catching into place a flying corner of her veil. "I haven't the faintest notion what a 'kilometer' is; but I do know that it makes a charming coast."

"Yes, I came down this way on a bicycle last Thursday," he responded, as he swung gracefully around the first curve in the road and took a firmer hold on the wheel. "These sharp curves, though, make it a little risky with a car."

The air was already brushing their faces with a force that bespoke a rate of speed that would have delighted a diligent bicycle officer.

"Ah, this is glorious!" she ejaculated as they skirted a picturesque bend through the woods and began the descent of a long straight-away stretch of the smooth road.

Walcott pressed his foot lightly on the brake; then forcefully; then desperately. It was without effect. There was no responsive diminution in the speed of the car, which had now attained an obviously unlawful rate.

Releasing his right hand from the wheel, he clutched the emergency brake. Through the roar of wind in their ears came a sharp snap from beneath the body of the machine. The girl turned her face quickly to his with a look of startled inquiry.

"The brake's gone," he answered coolly. "Don't scream, and don't jump."

The muscles in his hands grew tense and rigid as he gripped the steering-wheel and fought to hold it steady after his partial release of it. There was absolutely nothing to do but keep the machine in the road and trust to Providence that the way was clear of other vehicles.

Down the smooth incline it rushed with ever-accelerating speed, splitting the air with the fury of a hurricane and lashing the roadside bushes with its trail of wind. It was a giant demon, thunderous with exultation at its freedom and plunging to destruction in mad heedlessness.

Every revolution of the wheels seemed to give it added speed and more furious energy. Faster and still faster it shot downward, gaining greater momentum with every instant that it drew nearer to the curve around a jutting bank of earth and rock that marked the end of the straight length of roadway. On the opposite side the bank shelved down steeply for a distance of twenty feet or more.

To the girl, as she held to her seat with the instinctive clutch of self-preservation, it seemed impossible that the heavy, on-rushing car could round the curve without swinging over the edge of the road. With a gasp of horror, she shut her eyes tightly and strove to steady herself for the impending catastrophe.

How Walcott managed to avoid it was more than he was himself able to explain. He, too, felt that death was waiting in the shadows of that merciless curve; but, with a fighting determination to stake his brain and muscle on the one chance in a hundred that fate offered him, he kept his nerve and his grip, and as if by sheer will power compelled the wild and insensate machine to submit to his guidance.

As he turned the steering-wheel sharply at the crucial moment the car slid wildly across the road in a great cloud of dust and upripped stones. There was a moment's sensation of being jerked into the air; the wheels on the inner side had left the ground, and for an appreciable second the uplifted machine trembled on the brink of the ravine. Then, with an on-bounding leap, the red monster righted itself and dashed forward again in reckless response to the blind force of gravity.

The chief danger-point of the road was safely passed. Walcott felt now that he could guide the machine successfully to level ground if he could have the road to himself; and by rare good fortune the end of the hill was reached without encountering anything more serious than two startled horseback riders, whose steeds accommodatingly shied into the bushes and stood on their hind legs as the automobile whizzed by.

A short distance beyond the foot of the hill, however, the road turned sharply to the right, following the course of the creek. The machine was still traveling under tremendous momentum, and ere either of the occupants realized fully what had happened it left the road at the curve and crashed into the woods toward the water, bounding over stones and hillocks and compromising direct collisions with the trees by numerous bumps and jolts.

Only after it reached the edge of the stream, where the wheels buried themselves in the mud and thus restrained it from plunging into the water, did it

finally come to a standstill, abruptly and unexpectedly.

Several seconds passed before either spoke. Their brush with death and the realization that they had come through the encounter whole of body and unscathed affected them both with a mixture of mute bewilderment and thanksgiving. It was Catherine who broke the silence:

"Harry"—she strove bravely to steady her voice—"was it not indeed a miracle that caused us to meet again to-day?" With unaffected consciousness she brushed a tear from her cheek. "It would be trifling to attempt to thank you or repay you: I owe you my life," she added simply.

As she spoke Walcott turned toward her with a start. There was a tone in her voice he had not heard before. It was the voice of a girl he had known in his boyhood days; and as the realization of it forced itself home, the features, the expression, the personality of the girl beside him merged suddenly into the image of his memory.

Her veil, which had become unfastened, was now thrown back over her hat, and with a quick, impulsive movement he laid his hand on hers and gazed into her face. An exclamation was on his lips, but he allowed it to go unuttered. Only his eyes betrayed the illumination, the surprise that had come to him.

"Yes," he said earnestly, reverting to her first remark, "a miracle of good fortune for me. But, tell me, why have you changed your name?"

She returned his gaze with a look of mild astonishment. The question was so totally unexpected and out of place.

"Why, I changed it years ago," she answered wonderingly. "I took my second name——"

"And your hair?" he broke in—"it used to be light."

"A memorial of typhoid fever," she responded. "But why these trivial questions at such an inappropriate moment as this?"

"Oh, I just happened to think of them," he explained.

Then getting up and clasping her daintily-gloved hand in his preparatory to assisting her, he added blithely: "If we are going to walk home, Sue, don't you think we had better be getting on to solid ground?"

A MARINE IN A MILLION.

BY CONSTANCE BEATRICE WILLARD.

An enlistment under strange conditions and which brought the recruit over troubled waters into an unlooked-for haven.

CHAPTER I

BURNING HIS BRIDGES BEHIND HIM.

ELDRED gazed, fascinated, at the object lying in the dingy pawnshop window, an object which gleamed in the rays of the afternoon sun as only a blued revolver can.

"It is cowardly, but it seems the only course I can take," he muttered, half aloud, as he thrust his hands deeper into his pockets.

"It's not hard to die; the tug of war comes in living," he continued in his musings; then suddenly, turning, he stepped forward, intending to enter the pawnshop and buy the deadly gun which attracted his attention.

With his foot upon the sill, however, he stopped, his eyes falling upon a large poster in an adjoining window, and he began to read.

As his eyes ran down the printed words, his figure relaxed a little, and a saner light dawned in his eyes.

"I wonder if I could," he thought; then leaving the door of the pawnshop he drew closer to the poster.

"Able-bodied men wanted, eh? Well, I'm able enough. It's about all college did for me: developed my muscles. It's a pretty long fall, and yet, why not? Surely a man whose forefathers fought in every battle in which this country has engaged ought to prove his patriotism."

Then his thoughts concentrated themselves upon the gaudy bit of paper, and a sigh escaped his lips.

"At least, it is braver than putting a bullet through my brain," he continued, his lips moving in unison with his thoughts like one who had passed a good deal of time alone. "I'll do it, and see if my country will protect me, as I will try to protect her. Thomas Bennington Eldred, you die right now, and in your place springs up a much more worthy man, Tom Eldred, a member of the Marine Corps of the United States of America; that is, if a grateful country will accept you," and the young man gave a harsh laugh which did not accord with his frank blue eyes or open face.

With a firmness born of his decision, he noted the address of the nearest recruiting office, and then started off, walking with a spring in his step which had been absent from it for some days. On his way he entered a drug store, and going into a 'phone closet, connected himself with a well-known banker, opening the conversation rather abruptly:

"Hello, Mr. Grafton, this is Eldred."

"Oh, hello, Eldred, where are you?"

"I cannot tell you, Mr. Grafton, but I want to ask a couple of favors from you."

"Ask ahead, my boy; your father's son can never ask too much, for to him I owe all I am to-day, and my prosperity and that of many like me is the best monument his memory can have."

There was a smarting in the eyes of the young man as he cleared his throat before answering:

"Thanks; I know. Well, the time has come when you can make a big return to my father's son. You have heard about the Mrs. Maltby affair?"

"Yes."

"I'm not guilty."

"I know that. Your father's son could not be."

"Yes, but I cannot clear myself."

"Nonsense."

"No nonsense about it. Oh, I say, Central, don't cut me off. Yes, I'll put in another coin. There, all right. Hello, Mr. Grafton. As I was saying, I cannot prove I am not guilty and so I'm going to get out of it for a time. I know you can't understand, but that is one of the favors I have to ask. Believe me innocent, and let me go my own way. I am going to do what I never did before; earn my own living. I want you for a reference."

"And you can have me, sure thing," came the comforting reply over the wire.

"I knew I could, for I appreciate you," was the young man's quick return, "and I want you to say I was a clerk for you or something like that. Don't ask any questions, no matter who asks about me, and do not make any attempt to see me. I died a little while ago. No, I'm no hero, just a very cowardly man, I'm afraid, who prefers to vanish to staying on the ground and fighting against circumstantial evidence."

"It is useless to try to make you change your mind, I suppose?" asked the banker, real concern showing in his voice.

"Utterly. I'm now Tom Eldred, from nowhere, bound for an unknown country, with no past, a hopeless present, and a future so devoid of anything that I don't dare look into it. But, hello, Mr. Grafton, another thing. I have a little money with you."

"You can have as much as you need, no matter what your account."

"Thanks again, but I don't need it, for I'm going to earn my own living, you know. Still, I mean to mail you a check with an address. Send me two hundred dollars by an A. D. T. boy, and turn the rest (only a few hundred in all, you know) over to my sister. That's all, only good-by."

"Oh, my boy," came hurriedly from the other end, "this won't do. Come back and face trial. It isn't like you to turn and run this way."

"I know, but a fellow's a queer thing at best, Mr. Grafton. Adversity develops some queer traits, you know. Just do these things for me, and your account will be more than square with regard to anything dad may have done for you."

"And I can do nothing more?"

"Nothing, thank you, only keep your eye on sis, and see that she isn't

abused too much. If she needs help at any time, look after her, if possible." The young man's voice was very husky.

"Come back for her sake, my boy," pleaded the banker.

A peculiar expression flashed into the blue eyes of the young man, and a smile of strange import quivered for a moment about his clean-shaven mouth, but his tone was steady as he replied:

"No use, my friend, and now it's good-by, perhaps for good."

"Good-by, my boy. God bless you," returned the banker earnestly.

"Thanks. I'll need all the blessings I can get," was the quick response. There was something touching in the cadence of the voice, which made the banker clear his throat and start once more to remonstrate with the son of his old friend and benefactor, but his words met with no response.

Tom Eldred had hung up the receiver and left the 'phone, and Mr. Grafton was as utterly separated from him as though they were in different worlds.

The white-haired man of finance looked much troubled, and sighed deeply as he turned to his desk, trying to explain to himself certain damning circumstances, and to comprehend the motive which turned the brave, dashing young man he had known, into a skulking coward, who, wrongly accused of a crime, preferred to disappear rather than face the music like a gentleman.

"There is something under the surface that no one understands or appreciates, of that I am sure," was Mr. Grafton's final conclusion, and having reached that, he resolutely put the young man and his affairs out of his mind, and bent his energies toward the management of his business.

Several hours later, however, young Eldred was brought forcibly to his attention once more, for he was summoned on his 'phone, and questioned as to the reliability, responsibility, integrity and general standing of a certain Tom Eldred, who had referred to him.

With pleasure the banker gave his friend an excellent recommendation, and then asked:

"Who is making these inquiries?"

His astonishment can better be imagined than told, when he heard coming over the wire the words:

"The recruiting office of the United States Marine Corps."

Mr. Grafton gave a gasp, letting the receiver drop from his hand, and muttered:

"Bennington Eldred, son of Homer Eldred, and heir of John Eldred, a candidate for the Marine Corps! Impossible. I'll stop it at once," and he reached out for the receiver, then he paused.

"Perhaps it is just as well. Bennington will make an excellent marine, for he is honest, in spite of circumstantial evidence, faithful, and I believe brave. With a warrant out for his arrest, it is better he bury himself under the name of Tom Eldred beneath the uniform of one of his country's defenders, than to waste away in jail, and perhaps be condemned to wear stripes at Joliet.

"I can't understand it though," he kept thinking. "The fellow never was dissipated, although a little wild, and while his uncle never made him a generous allowance, I thought he could live within it. Certainly there was no need for him to commit a theft, and he didn't either, no matter what they are able to prove against him. I'm as certain of that as I am that I am myself innocent of the crime. God bless him, wherever he is, for he's his father right over again," and with a heavy heart, the banker turned once more to his own affairs.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH ELDRED'S TEMPER IS TRIED.

TOM ELDRED sat in the outer office of the recruiting station, gazing like one in a dream at his unusual surroundings, and wondering if he would so ill become the uniform as one of the men there.

"I always did hate livery of any kind," he told himself as he looked at the man who did not seem to belong to his clothes. "Strange that I have always objected to the difference in shade between the trousers and coat. Now why didn't they make both the same color, I wonder, instead of having

the former about six shades lighter than the latter?"

As he thought, he smiled, for it was amusing that in this crisis of his life, he should be annoyed by such a trifle.

As yet he did not understand that these little matters often come as a relief in the midst of great anxiety. Still, for the moment, he was seriously influenced by the thing, and had half a mind to leave without seeing the lieutenant, but his better judgment came to his aid, and he muttered to himself:

"Tom, my lad, two shades of blue are better than that revolver and the morgue. You have never accomplished anything worth while, now see if you're worth saving," and while he was still engaged in bolstering up his waning determination, he was summoned to the inside office.

The recruiting officer saw a handsome, well-built young man, whose general appearance and shapely hands denoted that he had never been forced to earn his living by manual labor.

"Name?" asked the officer.

"Tom Eldred."

"I understand you wish to enter the marine service?"

"Yes."

The recruiting officer gave the applicant a keener look. That "yes" was spoken as one equal to another. Usually the word was followed by a "sir" and both were very servile.

"What makes you think you are fitted for it?" came in crisp tones.

"I want honest work, and I'm willing to give my services to my country."

"Yes. How old are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"Married?"

"No."

The officer frowned.

"Perhaps you might as well learn right now, young man," he said sternly, "that a man in the service answers his superior in a more respectful manner!"

"I beg pardon," Tom said quietly. "I will try and remember."

The frown deepened. For a moment the officer was tempted to turn this handsome young fellow away, anxious as he was to secure good men, then he remembered five recruits waiting to be sent on to Mare Island.

To-morrow was the last of the six days they could be detained, and he wanted to enlist another man before he sent his squad on. Therefore he continued:

"Ever been in the service, in any branch before?"

"No, sir."

"Are you willing to go to the Philippines?"

"Yes, sir; although I would prefer being on a ship."

"Then you have no objection to long cruises?"

"None at all."

The officer paused a moment. Keen, a good judge of men, he felt sure that there was some strong motive prompting this young man, so infinitely superior to the position he was seeking, to take this course.

As a rule, he did not want to enlist one whom he knew to be above his work, yet in Tom Eldred he saw a man who would do his duty, and develop into a model servant of Uncle Sam.

"The term of enlistment is four years. If you desert, in time of peace, it means jailing for a couple of years: in war, it is death."

"If I enlist, I will not desert," was the quiet answer.

"So they all think," was the sharp retort. "I am just stating facts."

"Thank you," Tom said courteously, and the officer stared. It was certainly against his better judgment, to take this man, but he felt a liking for him, and so he continued more pleasantly.

"The pay is thirteen dollars a month, payable every thirty days. Everything is found for you. The rations consist of a rather plain fare, the government allowing the paymaster thirty cents a day per man while you are afloat, and twenty cents a day when you are on land. The latter is regular army rate. The bluejackets fare better, for they get thirty cents all the while."

"You seek to discourage me," Tom said with a smile which lit up his whole face.

"No, I only want you to know that this isn't any cinch. Men come here thinking that all they have to do is to enter the service and be kept in plenty evermore, without any exertion on their

part. It's like a good many things, nicer to read about than to be."

"I understand, but I do not think I am afraid," Tom said quietly and yet convincingly.

"All right. Know anything about a boat?"

"I have made a number of cruises on a yacht," Tom said, not explaining that the vessel belonged to his rich uncle, John Eldred.

"That's good. Like the water?"

"I am very fond of it."

The next question astonished him, for the officer asked:

"Are your teeth in good condition? Have you lost many?"

Tom laughed as he opened his mouth and showed the lieutenant as perfect a set of teeth as that gentleman had ever seen.

"Why is it necessary for a man to have good teeth?" Tom inquired.

Once more the officer frowned, then he answered:

"If you'd use your common sense, you'd understand. A man on a long cruise is away from a dentist; perhaps for months he cannot get his teeth fixed, so it is necessary that he start out with good ones. We insist upon our men having at least twenty-four, because with less a man cannot properly chew his food."

"That's a good point," Tom said approvingly, and wondered why the tone of severity came back into the officer's voice as he answered:

"Of course it's a good point. Our regulations are all good."

Realizing that he had blundered, Tom kept quiet, and the other continued:

"I suppose you can refer to some one as to your reliability, honesty and respectability?"

"Yes, sir, to Mr. Grafton, president of the White City National Bank."

All this time Tom had been kept standing, but now the officer relaxed enough to indicate a chair, and his voice was almost cordial as he said:

"If you can pass the physical examination, I think you'll do," and Tom felt his heart leap with relief, for every moment he was taking awful chances, in spite of the fact that he was now clean shaven, his heavy mustache and vandyke beard having been sacrificed.

"Oh, by the way, what's your height?" asked the officer.

"Five feet eleven."

"You look taller."

"I'm not."

The officer looked at the broad shoulders, the deep chest, and flat back, and understood that it was the man's perfect proportions which made him appear taller.

"Weight?"

"About 180, I think."

"Very well, we'll see," and with that the officer began his physical examination by measuring the applicant. He also weighed him, and then came the test of his eyesight.

As the various cards, which he was supposed to read at sight from a distance of twenty yards were put before him, Tom could not but remember the days spent in happy idleness on board the yacht Isabella, when his eyes always sighted the sail before those of the outlook, and he smiled as he passed with flying colors through this ordeal.

He also experienced no difficulty in distinguishing the various colors of yarns given him for inspection, and said quite genially as he made delicate distinction between shades:

"My eyesight is my strong point, lieutenant. I am very sensitive to differentiation in shades," remembering, as he spoke, the annoyance he had felt over the contrast between the trousers and coat of the uniform he was expected to wear, if he were accepted.

The lieutenant stared. Never had such a man appeared before him. After a couple of moments, he asked:

"Is there a woman in the case?"

"What the devil do you mean?" Tom asked angrily.

The officer smiled, but there was sternness in his voice, as he returned:

"I am afraid that you will get into fourth class all right, if you don't remember that your superior officer is entitled to the utmost respect. I mean, are you leaving home because you are afraid of some woman?"

"No."

The officer turned to his desk, with a smile hovering about his lips.

"I bet it is on account of some woman," he thought, and he was not far from right.

Tom, his anger dominating him, was about to leave, when the clear, biting tones of the officer came to him, almost as though from a great distance:

"You have stood these tests very well, and now you will be examined by the doctor," and he left the room, to return a moment later.

"Come in here," he commanded, and Tom obeyed, entering the adjoining office, where the physician awaited him.

At the order to strip, the young man rebelled in his heart, although he showed nothing of his wrath in his actions, but deliberately removed his clothing, and stood before the men, perfectly nude, as perfect a specimen of young manhood as either of them had ever seen.

His powerful muscles, developed as stroke oar on the Harvard crew; as right half on the university gridiron; as pitcher on the diamond, and as an all-around athletic young man, quivered beneath the pink skin, and roused admiration from both the physician and the recruiting officer.

"I'd hate to stand up against you, Eldred," laughed the physician, as he made his examination. "Ever put on the gloves?"

"Occasionally," Tom said aloud, thinking to himself:

"I'd like to put them on with you," so outraged was he by what he considered the indignity of his examination.

"You'll become the uniform," the recruiting officer said in what he meant to be a pleasant tone.

"More than it will me," Tom snapped out.

The lieutenant's face clouded, and he said testily:

"You have one big defect."

"What is it?" Tom asked.

"Your temper. However, double irons for ten days a couple of times, will take the fire out of you, I imagine. Eh, doctor?"

"Rather," the physician laughed, and Tom resolved to hold his tongue, no matter what happened, and so he said nothing, but answered all questions quietly, and was very thankful to be allowed to resume his clothing.

Taking him back into his own office, the lieutenant allowed Tom to resume his seat, and made out the regulation enlistment blank.

After he had written in the particulars, he raised the receiver of his 'phone and called for the number Tom gave him. Within a moment, he was talking with Mr. Grafton, and Tom listening and watching, could see by the man's face that his old friend had loyally carried out his promises.

"Guess you're all right, Eldred," the lieutenant said finally, hanging up the receiver, "and you may sign this," pushing the blank toward him.

Tom took up the paper, and began to read it slowly.

"It's the regular form," snapped the officer.

"Excuse me, but I prefer to know what I am signing," Tom said quietly, his eyes lingering over the oath of allegiance.

He could truly take that, for he had been reared as a loyal American, a believer in his country's institutions. Tracing his descent back through a long line of ancestors, he was much prouder of the military achievements of certain individuals than he was of his uncle's financial success, and in a certain way he felt glad that he was to bear his part in the defense of his own land.

A slight smile was on his face as he read the next clause relating to himself. He had given his age, and stated the facts about his unmarried condition, as well as those relating to his never having served his country before, truly, and so he did not object to writing his signature at the bottom of the sheet.

"Named just Tom?" asked the lieutenant.

"Just that."

"All right, and now Eldred, my man here will take you over to Dearborn Street to our hotel, where you will remain until to-morrow, when you will be sent with five others to Mare Island. Good luck to you."

Tom smiled, as he held out his hand. For an instant the lieutenant hesitated,

then he grasped it warmly, but at the same time he cautioned the new recruit:

"Don't offer your hand, Eldred, to your superior officer."

Again Tom swallowed his natural indignation, as he replied:

"Thanks. I'll try to remember," but his heart was sore within his bosom as he was led away by the very man whom he had criticized for wearing his uniform so poorly.

Before dark that night, he held two hundred dollars in his hands, and knew that his sister would profit by the remainder of his money, for Mr. Grafton had sent him a very kindly note, full of remonstrances, but also of assurances of friendship and fidelity. So it was that Tom Eldred, now a member of the United States Marine Corps, slept soundly upon his hard bed, and looked forward, almost eagerly, to his long and uncomfortable journey across the continent on the morrow.

CHAPTER III.

THE BIG BILL IN THE LITTLE HANDKERCHIEF.

THE Maltby family is one of the oldest in Chicago, a Hiram Maltby having bought land in the vicinity of Fort Dearborn as early as the latter fifties. His grandson, also Hiram, now owns one of the lake shore palaces, and his wife and children are among the society leaders of the city. Whenever that palace is thrown open for any social event, every one fortunate enough to receive an invitation, flocks to it, for to be at a Maltby function confers a distinction. It was on the eighteenth of October, 1904, that Mrs. Maltby gave one of her celebrated balls, just ten days before Tom Eldred enlisted in the United States Marines, and he and his sister, Isabella, the wife of Gerald Carrington, were among the guests.

They were late, and Tom therefore hurried, for he had a dislike of even appearing discourteous. He wished to pay his respects to his hostess as soon as possible, so that he arrived at the door of the ladies' dressing-room before his sister appeared.

Standing idly in the hall, he noticed several servants, in the brown and gold livery of the Maltby household, hovering about, and then forgot them, although he was to remember all about them later on.

The door was open, and he could not help hearing and seeing what was going on inside. As he stood there, his attention was attracted by the shrill voice of Mrs. Nathan Goldmyer, as she said with the strong Semitic accent years of training had not been able to alter:

"Yes, he paid me the money just as I was leaving the house, twenty thousand dollars, in thousand-dollar bills."

"And you have the money with you?" Tom heard another voice ask.

"Of course. It was the last day of grace. To-morrow I would have closed him out. I brought the money with me, but, my dear, I can't carry twenty bills with me all evening."

"Give it to Mrs. Maltby and have her put it in her vault," suggested the other lady, whom Tom knew to be a Mrs. Tremaine, the wife of a big board-of-trade man.

The Jewess threw out her hands with the gesture characteristic of her race. In moments of excitement she was very apt to forget her desire to be taken for anything but a Hebrew, and exclaimed tragically:

"Oh, no. Mrs. Maltby thinks it disgraceful to make money. If she knew that I turned over my money to earn an honest penny, she'd cut me dead. No. I'll hide it here."

Tom knew from the expression on the other lady's face, that she was wondering how it was that this rather vulgar woman was always to be seen at all the Maltby entertainments. Neither he nor Mrs. Tremaine understood fully all the ramifications of society, nor what an important part wealth plays in every walk of life.

The good-natured looking Mrs. Goldmyer babbled on, unfastening a five thousand dollar sunburst and taking it from her corsage:

"I'll just open a place in my cloak, slip in this money, and no one will be any the wiser," and with very skilful fingers she deftly picked out a few stitches with the pin of her bauble,

her aptness suggesting that perhaps the time was not so far distant when she had had more than a passing acquaintance with different branches of dressmaking.

Having opened the ermine lining, she slipped a little packet between it and the broadcloth of the cloak, and then returned her sunburst to its original use.

"Now none will be any the wiser," Mrs. Goldmyer declared, "and I will be lots easier. That fellow might just as well have paid me before the bank closed. That's the way, one never meets with any gratitude. He actually kicked at my rate of interest," and still chattering, Mrs. Goldmyer lead the way from the room, followed by Mrs. Tremaine.

As they passed out, they saw Tom, and both bowed, and forgot for the moment that he was on hand.

From his position, Tom could see nearly all of the room, and knew that it must be nearly empty, so he knocked lightly on the door, saying pleasantly:

"Time's up, Isa."

For a moment there was no answer, then from behind a screen there swept a beautiful woman who bore a very startling resemblance to Tom.

"I'm not quite ready, Ben," she said in a low tone. "Come back in ten minutes."

"We're pretty late, sis," Tom remonstrated.

"I know. Be patient, dear," and she smiled the famous Eldred smile.

Although inwardly fuming, for he made a hobby of always being on time, Tom turned, and again faced the two servants he had seen before.

Brushing past them, he returned to the gentlemen's dressing-room, where he remained exactly ten minutes by his watch, and then returned for his sister. She was waiting for him, but even to his careless glance, did not appear herself.

In reply to his question, she said a little hurriedly:

"I'm not exactly myself to-night. Please leave early, won't you?" and he gladly replied that he would, for to a man loving outdoor sports as he did, these social affairs were a good deal of a bore. He had only attended to please his sister anyway.

After they had spoken to their hostess, and strolled about the rooms for a few moments, they returned to the dressing-rooms, and a few moments later entered Mrs. Carrington's carriage, and resumed a conversation their entrance to the Maltby house had interrupted.

"I've been thinking it over, Isa, and honestly, I'm at my wits' end. You know I'd do just anything for you, but Gerald's such a pup."

"I know, Bennington," Mrs. Carrington answered steadily.

"I hate to say anything," Eldred went on, "but I'm just about cleaned out. Uncle John sent me a thousand last week, you know, and that's all I have in the world, and a little of it's gone. I owe considerable, for I've been letting things run to help you folks out."

"Yes, dear."

"I just can't make uncle forgive you, and I have to be careful about exciting his anger. If he gets the idea that I'm going the pace or anything like that, he'd throw me over without any compunction. It's a shame to bring up a fellow as I've been, surrounding me with luxury, training me to spend millions, and teaching me nothing that's useful."

"It *is* cruel," came in a very low voice from the sister.

"Now if I were thrown upon my own resources to-morrow, I'd starve, I suppose, for I can't do anything to earn a cent, and it isn't exactly my fault either."

"I have ruined you," Mrs. Carrington said with a sob in her voice.

"No, Isa, not that. It's just unfortunate that I have so little influence with uncle. He can't forgive your marriage."

"Who can wonder at it?"

"Sis, does he abuse you?" asked the brother anxiously.

"No, not that, at least not bodily, but it is very hard for a wife to see her husband lower himself each day in her estimation, and then there's the boy."

"Yes, the boy," Tom answered, a tender light coming into his eyes. His

whole heart was given to his nephew of three years.

"For him, I'd do almost anything," the young mother cried. "I hate myself for taking your money, for keeping you in pinched circumstances all the time and yet I cannot see him suffer; and, Bennington, Gerald would let us starve sometimes rather than deny himself anything."

It was an old story. A young girl's marriage with a handsome, unprincipled, brilliant man, ending with disillusion and almost hatred. For years, Tom Eldred had sacrificed himself for his sister, and as he saw the tears on her dear cheeks, he took both her hands in his own, as he said gently:

"There, sis, don't cry. I'll give you a check for five hundred and go East, and make a personal try at Uncle John. Suppose I take the boy with me; that might help things. Unfortunately the old man seems a little bitten with the endowment idea, and is just as likely as not to leave everything to some fund or other."

Mrs. Carrington seemed a little embarrassed, as she said gently:

"Keep your money, dear, and settle some of your debts. I'll try and get along."

"But, dear girl, you said not three hours ago that you must have some money. You told me that you owed all the servants; that the rent was nearly a year back; that the grocer and meat man refused credit, and that you were in a bad shape."

"I know, but I'll try to manage somehow. I won't take your money."

Tom smiled tenderly:

"That's all right, little girl. I'm a man and I'll get along somehow. Anyway, I'm tired of this kind of life, and I'm going to start in to earn some money."

Mrs. Carrington smiled, a weary little smile, as she asked:

"How do you propose to do it?"

"Don't know yet, but here I am a man of twenty-six, in fine health, with a Harvard certificate, and it's funny if I can't earn my salt. Anyway, I'm going down to talk matters over with Grafton, of the White City National, to-morrow."

"I hope, dear, you will be successful," Mrs. Carrington murmured.

"I must," Tom said decidedly, for he remembered the words of his uncle's letter, which distinctly stated that he could expect nothing for six months at least.

"And I owe more than that thousand right now," poor Tom thought.

Still, so devoted was he to his sister, that he asked again:

"Then you won't take a part of what I have, dear?" and she replied gently:

"No, Ben, I will manage somehow," and he felt very much relieved and happy, although he wondered how she would do it.

When the carriage drew up before her home, Mrs. Carrington asked hesitatingly:

"Will you come in?"

"No, thanks," he returned, thinking that she feared to find her husband at home.

"Then good night," she said, stretching out her hand.

Tom took the dainty little white thing, and obeying a sudden impulse, bent his head, and pressed his lips on its snowy surface.

Mrs. Carrington started slightly, and dropped her fan and handkerchief. As he picked them up, Tom was astounded to see a roll of bills in the handkerchief. The one on the outside was for one thousand dollars.

He was astounded, but he was a gentleman; so as his sister had not confided in him, he did not show her that he had seen the money, but placed her belongings in her hand, and lifting his hat, left her, turning in the direction of his own home, a suite of rooms in an exclusive bachelor apartment building.

He did not go there immediately, however, for he was worried about the money.

"The little girl is borrowing, and I don't like it," he thought again and again, as he walked miles, trying to work off his uneasiness, but not a shadow of the shame, already in sight, came to him, although he was worried enough, trying to see a way out of his own difficulties.

These difficulties were not of his own making, but, nevertheless, he had

to face them, and the added ones he felt his sister had raised up for them both, by accepting a loan from any one outside her own family.

"That Carrington has been the curse of us both," he told himself bitterly.

Then there came to him a memory of two innocent eyes, a pair of chubby arms, and a baby voice which spoke his name in a delightfully lisping way. The boy was worth all he had sacrificed, the young uncle reflected, and it was with a smile upon his lips that he finally returned home, to fall into the last easy sleep he was to know for many a long day.

CHAPTER IV.

MISFIT ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

WHEN Bennington Eldred awoke the morning following the reception at Mrs. Maltby's, he felt wearied, and his face looked drawn to him, as he shaved. However, he was possessed of a cheerful disposition, and so he laughed back at the reflection in his mirror, and muttered:

"You lazy chap, I'm going to put you through a course of sprouts. The idea of being twenty-six years old and not being able to earn a cent." Then his face became graver through the lather, and he continued:

"It is a shame that a man is brought up the way I have been, utterly dependent upon the whim of a cranky old man. Oh, well, never mind; I'm going to turn over a new leaf, and earn money," and he began to whistle.

Although thoughts of his sister's strange behavior came to him, he put them aside.

"Isabel knows what she's doing, I guess, and I'm not going to bother with her affairs," he said resolutely, and tried to forget the money he had seen in her handkerchief.

Dressed and shaved, he went out. He looked every inch what he was: a good specimen of American manhood, as he was admitted to the private office of President Grafton of the White City National Bank.

Years before, Eldred's father had given this man, now such a power in financial circles, his first start, and the banker had not forgotten, but held a very warm place in his heart for the son of his benefactor.

After the two had exchanged morning greetings, Eldred began abruptly:

"I came to see you about an important matter, Mr. Grafton. I want to earn some money."

The banker could not help laughing. He had known young Eldred from boyhood, and realized all his capacities, and also his utter lack of business training.

"Laugh," Eldred said, his own face breaking into a smile, "but I mean it."

"I suppose you do, but, my lad, what do you propose to engage in?"

Eldred thought for a moment, then he said slowly:

"That's just what I don't know. I came to you to tell me. I'm sick and tired hanging on to Uncle John."

"He makes you a pretty fair allowance, doesn't he?" the banker asked.

"Oh, yes, plenty large enough, but I want some more money."

"Thinking of getting married?"

"Not yet," this with a heart-free laugh. "No, as yet I have to meet my ideal."

"Been plunging any?"

The young man turned a pair of clear, honest eyes upon the banker, as he replied:

"No, I haven't, but I need money. I'm in debt, and I want to clear myself, and start free."

"I'll lend you any amount you may need, within reason," the banker began, but Eldred stopped him.

"No, thanks, I'm young, strong, and as things go, pretty well educated. Surely I ought to be able to earn my own living."

The banker thought deeply for a few moments. According to his own idea, Eldred was not extravagant, and he knew if the young man said he had not been gambling in any way, he had not, and yet he was in debt. The banker had no idea of the amount his friend had given the sister, and so could not account for the debts.

"I'm sorry to hear you're in debt, Eldred, and I wish you'd let me clear you," he said slowly.

"No, thanks, I'll earn what I need," was the prompt reply.

"How?" the elder man asked, shifting some papers.

"Why, by working."

"At what?"

"I don't know and that's what I want you to tell me." was the frank answer.

The banker frowned, and spoke with real annoyance in his voice:

"That's the trouble with you idlers. You have the notion that you have only to step from your high position to open the door to the inrolling dollars. Why, Eldred, to tell you the truth, there isn't a position in this whole bank I'd give you. You couldn't earn a dollar a week at any of them."

"Couldn't I learn?" the young man asked, his face flushing and then paling under the banker's denunciations.

"In time, yes, but why take the trouble to teach you when I can get perfectly trained men?"

"They have to learn sometime," Eldred persisted.

"They began learning in their cradles. While you were spending a youth of enjoyment, they were learning with each hour the necessary lessons of business life. No, Eldred, it takes a lifetime of training to fit a man for business lif '

"But I want to earn some money," Eldred said slowly, his bright dreams dropping away from him.

"A good many want to do that, but wanting is not accomplishing."

"How do you know that I cannot work?"

"Because you can't. For one thing the confinement would kill you. Then how are you in figures?"

'Bad," Eldred returned promptly.

"How do you write?"

Eldred smiled, drew a block of paper toward him, and scribbled a few lines. The banker looking over his shoulder read:

"My sister says that I ought to go into a Chinese laundry, for my penmanship is about on a line with the marks they make there."

"As I thought, I can scarcely read that scrawl. Is it your best?"

Eldred nodded, saying cheerfully:

"I never was strong in penmanship."

"Yet it is one of the first requirements of a bank clerk. No, you are not fitted for anything in my line. Can you teach?"

Eldred shook his head.

"No." he said slowly, "I can't feel that I know enough to teach anything."

"Could you pass an examination?"

"Probably not."

The banker adjusted his eyeglasses, and spoke with a slight degree of severity:

"Then, if you want to go into business life, you will have to fit yourself for some particular line. However, I advise that you go on to New York, and tell your uncle frankly your financial state. He will not refuse to put you on your feet again. Then, if you wish, you can take up a profession."

"Thanks for the advice, but I cannot follow it, for he would want to know where my money has gone, and I cannot tell him."

The banker pushed back his chair.

"I thought you said you had not been plunging," he said sternly.

"I haven't been gambling in any shape, but there are other ways to spend money, I suppose, and I do not intend to take my uncle, or you either, into my confidence."

"Then I do not know what to advise," Mr. Grafton said rather coldly.

"All right," Eldred replied, still with a smile on his face, "I will have to try and work the thing out for myself. Much obliged to you for showing up my shortcomings."

"You are welcome to the money," the banker insisted.

"I am not asking for charity," was the quick answer, "simply a chance to make something of myself, but if it is not within your power to give me that, I'll have to solve the question for myself. Good morning," and the young man left the office, his shoulders squared, and his bearing almost defiant. The banker worried all morning. He would have liked to take on the young fellow, but he had just been through several very annoying experiences with young men of society, sons of directors, and he felt that he knew well of what he was speaking.

Eldred left the bank, fuming, and yet readily acknowledging the truth of the banker's criticisms.

"I ought to be ashamed to be so ignorant just where I ought to know most. Now, if it was in the classics, in philosophy or in political economy, I might do something," he mused.

Once more he laughed, as he walked along, and muttered to himself:

"If any one wanted to learn how to play ball, row a boat or put on the gloves, I rather expect that I could put them next, but when it comes to adding figures, or writing so anybody can read what I put down, that's another thing."

Accepting the banker's decision as final, the young man began to try to think up other ways and means. He was favorably impressed with the idea of entering a profession, and decided to take up the study of medicine.

"First, though, I must pay what I owe, and keep that thousand for emergencies, and to give Isa if she needs it."

He knit his brows trying to solve the problem, and while he was thus thinking, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and turning with a start, he saw one of his friends, Salisbury Verham, beside him.

"Hello, Eldred," the young man said. "You were staving ahead like a house on fire. Come over to the club."

"Can't, I'm busy." Eldred said with a smile.

"I say, that's good: you busy!"

"I am, though."

"Thinking up what?"

"Lots of things."

"I wish while you're thinking, you'd try and evolve a horse for me like your Princess."

A light came into Eldred's face, but he asked slowly:

"Like her, do you?"

"I do," very emphatically.

"Want to buy her?" Eldred inquired.

"Tired of her?"

Something clutched Eldred's heart. Tired of that beauty, whom he loved almost as though she were human? Scarcely, and yet the money he could obtain for her would go very far toward discharging his debts.

"Oh, one gets tired of most everything," he replied evasively.

"If you're game, I'm ready," young Verham replied, his eyes shining, for he had wanted this horse for a long time, ever since he had seen Eldred astride her galloping along the Midway.

"What's your price?" he continued.

"One thousand," Eldred answered.

"Done," was the quick answer. "Come up to the club a minute and I'll write you a check."

Eldred, his heart aching and yet strangely light, for he knew that he was on his way toward financial freedom, went with his friend, emerging a few minutes later with a check in his pocket, and leaving behind him a bill of sale for his horse.

A new idea had come to him, and he made his way in a cab (for he had not yet learned how to economize) to a collector of antique articles of all kinds.

"I want to sell some of my things," he said frankly, and the collector, who had sold him some of the curiosities with which the young man had decorated his rooms, was glad to go with his visitor, and within an hour, another check for a thousand dollars was placed in Eldred's hands, but his rooms were very bare.

"It's a clear steal," he muttered, "for those things were worth three thousand at the lowest valuation, but when a man's in debt he has no right to load himself down with luxuries."

Feeling specially virtuous, he returned to the White City Bank, and deposited two thousand dollars in the shape of two one thousand dollar bills. Before going to his bank he had stopped at the two banks upon which they were drawn, and cashed the checks, not caring to have his business known to the world.

Having thus increased his balance, the young man went home, and drawing toward him a big sheaf of bills, began writing checks, thinking to himself as he did so:

"My penmanship may be bad, but I don't hear of any one objecting to it on a check." Then he smiled his old frank smile, and kept at work, until he had cleared off every indebtedness.

The bills were not anything terrible, after all. He need have felt ashamed of none, for there were no dreadful secrets hidden in them. If he had not been so severely taxed by his sister

there would have been no need for contracting any of these debts, but because of her, they had been allowed to run.

Now he was rejoiced to know that he was free of them, and able to face the world unashamed.

Writing a check payable to currency for two hundred dollars, he cashed it at the office of his hotel, and went out handsome, happy and light-hearted, bound for his sister's home.

One hundred of the two in his pocket he intended for her, for in spite of what he had seen the night before, he felt that she could not have much money.

"Poor little girl, how I hate that fellow," he muttered between his teeth, "and how I wish she were free of him, she and the boy!"

As he drew near the house he was astonished to see an awning over the steps, and realized that a reception was in progress.

"Funny sis said nothing to me about it," he thought as he ran lightly up the steps, and entered the door, passing from his happiness of youth and an untarnished name into the greatest misery he had ever known, and which changed him from a careless man of society to the desperate creature who seized upon an enlistment in the United States Marine Corps as the only alternative to taking his own life.

CHAPTER V.

THE REASON FOR FLIGHT.

ELDRED entered his sister's drawing-rooms, a smile upon his lips, a pleasant word for every one. Isabel Carrington's face flushed slightly as she saw her brother, but she managed to whisper:

"I thought it best to give this reception, for I was afraid some one would guess that things were not just what I wanted them."

Eldred nodded, still smiling, and then crept away to the nursery, where he knew he would find his nephew, little Bennington, whom he loved with all his heart.

After a merry romp with the little fellow, Eldred descended to the drawing-rooms, and went from one to the other of the guests doing his best to make the affair a success.

Suddenly the calm was broken in upon by the arrival of a very much flushed personage, who had forgotten her long training and spoke with a very strong Semitic accent. Mrs. Carrington swept across the room to greet the new arrival, and Eldred was very much surprised to see his exclusive sister holding the hands of Mrs. Goldmyer and welcoming her as though she were a guest of honor.

"Thanks, my dear," Mrs. Goldmyer said, speaking through her nose, "but I am in great trouble."

Eldred had no idea of what was coming, but he felt his heart suddenly contract.

"In deep trouble?" Mrs. Carrington murmured sympathetically.

"Yes, such trouble. I've lost my money."

"What money?" asked several.

Eldred, pale and shaking, drew back into an alcove filled with palms.

"The money I put in the lining of my cloak last night. When I started for home, I found it gone."

Many voices seemed to merge into one to Eldred's strained ears.

"Yes, you can exclaim. I lost it, and I have put the matter in the hands of the police. They have a number of keen detectives on the trail, and the man will be tracked down."

"I hope so," Mrs. Carrington said gently.

"Mrs. Maltby is furious," Mrs. Goldmyer went on, waddling over to a comfortable chair and sinking into it.

"You lost it then at her house?" one lady asked.

"Of course. A man paid it to me last night just as I was leaving for Mrs. Maltby's, and I took it with me. He gave me twenty thousand dollars, and it was too much to carry about with me all evening, so I ripped a place in my cloak and stuck the roll in. When I came back to put it on, the money was gone."

"It must have made a terrible big roll," one lady exclaimed. "Twenty thousand dollars!"

"It was in one thousand dollar bills.

so it wasn't so big after all, but it was more than I want about me," was the quick answer.

"Did you take the numbers?" asked one of the few gentlemen present.

"Of course not. How could I? I just had it paid to me when I was leaving the house."

"I suppose suspicion will rest upon any one having thousand dollar bills," suggested another gentleman.

"I suppose so. I think it was a man. The servants saw a man lingering about, and one swears that he saw a gentleman leave the room not long after I did."

"That's good."

"Oh, I expect to get hold of the money," Mrs. Goldmyer said with a vicious snap of her teeth.

"Will you prosecute?"

"Of course I will. I want to see the person who stole my money behind the bars," and she gave a cruel laugh.

Eldred shrunk back, utterly crushed. He remembered with terrible distinctness his sister's strange manner, and that she had been alone in the room after the money had been secreted. He recalled with painful accuracy all she had said relative to her needs while they were driving to the reception, and how she had stated that she had no further wish for help upon their return to her home that very same evening.

"Merciful God!" he whispered to himself, remembering that he had seen at least one of the fatal thousand dollar bills in Isa's handkerchief.

How many more there were in that little bit of lace he did not know, but he firmly believed that he had discovered the person who had robbed Mrs. Goldmyer. The realization turned him faint.

Not so very long before he and a party of friends had visited Joliet, and he had a horrible recollection of the prisoners. His sister among that crowd of degraded women! He shivered at the bare conception.

Suddenly a recollection came to him. The servants had seen him apparently coming from the room, and not long after Mrs. Goldmyer had left. Was it possible that they thought him guilty?

Then another illumination flooded his mind. He had deposited two one thousand dollar bills that very afternoon. He, who the day before had seemed penniless, had been able to pay all his bills the day after the robbery.

Bennington Eldred came of good stock. The men of his family had never shirked duty, but had responded to any call made upon them. The blood of gallant and heroic ancestors ran in his veins.

He had been taught to honor and revere womanhood, and especially to protect his sister, for whom he had always had, and had still, the deepest love. Not for a moment did he doubt her guilt. The proofs were too strong.

He realized that the contaminating influence of Gerald Carrington, her husband, was very powerful. Yet, although guilty, she must be protected. There was the boy to consider as well as his sister.

Eldred set his teeth and remembered the family motto:

"Shut your teeth tight and die hard."

Just then he heard two ladies talking. They had evidently seated themselves just outside the alcove in which he had hidden himself.

"I wonder who is guilty?" one said with a rising inflection.

"I wonder too."

"There is another thing I am wondering about, and that is where does Mrs. Carrington get her money."

"Why?"

"Her husband is absolutely worthless, you know."

"No, I didn't know."

"Oh yes. Isabel threw herself away on him, and her uncle has never forgiven her."

"Pity. Her brother is a fine young fellow."

"Oh, yes, but I believe rather wild."

"No, is he?"

"Yes. Awfully in debt, so my husband says."

Eldred clenched his fists. He was not in debt, thank God.

"For me to pay my debts the day after such a robbery is rather questionable," he reminded himself, his honest heart slowly turning to stone. The talkers continued.

"I wonder if they will catch the thief?"

"Of course they will. Mrs. Goldmyer says that they have put Pinkerton men on the case, and you know they never let up."

"I pity the man."

"Do you? I have no sympathy for a robber."

Eldred did some quick thinking. Mrs. Goldmyer had spoken of the thief as a man, and so did these women. There was no doubt in their minds but that a man committed the crime.

Suddenly a way for his sister out of all this dreadful tangle came to Eldred, but he must not be blamed if at first he shrank back.

He was brave, honest and true-hearted. Never had there been a stain on the family name, and it was hard to think of assuming the crime of another, but even that was better than to have his sister dragged down.

Suddenly he drew himself up, and with his teeth shut tight, said to himself:

"I'll do it. Poor little girl, she must have been sorely tempted! If I disappear, they will think I am guilty and that will divert suspicion from her. She couldn't go into hiding, and I can," and with this resolve strong within him he watched for an opportunity, slipped from his hiding place and once more mingled with the fashionable crowd.

His sister looked worn, and her face was unusually pale. Not for a moment did he blame her, although he felt as though his trust in human nature was sadly shaken. He laid all the blame upon the shoulders of the worthless husband, and perhaps it was well that he could do so.

It is a terrible thing for a man to discover that the woman he has deemed pure and spotless has fallen into the mire.

Trying to maintain his self-possession, he moved about among his sister's guests, unconsciously pleasing all, for he was a great favorite.

Suddenly he resolved to end it all, and leave. Once more he crept up to the nursery, and astonished the nurse by clasping the little boy in his arms and kissing him almost wildly. The woman did not hear what he whispered into the child's ear:

"It's for you, my lad, as well as for mama," he said, his heart feeling as though it were broken, and it hurt him to have the little fellow laugh and jump anticipating another romp.

"No, laddie, not to-day," he said gently, striding from the room, leaving a much disappointed child behind, and a maid who expressed her opinion of folks who came up into nurseries and made trouble for other folks.

As he descended the stairs for the second time, Eldred felt faint with warring emotions, and the heavy perfume of the flowers with which the house was decorated nauseated him.

"All this cost a pretty penny," he reflected, looking down upon the assembled guests.

It was the last time for many a long day that he was to gaze upon such an assembly, but he did not think of that; all he could realize was that his sister had been guilty of a horrible crime, and that he must deliver her from the consequences by casting suspicion upon himself.

Slowly he went up to her, as she stood, for the moment, alone, and said in a very low tone:

"Sis, I have always loved you more than anything on earth."

"Have you, dear?" she returned gently.

"You know it; good-by," and he held out his hand.

She came as near staring as her good breeding would permit, then laid her little white hand in his, and was startled when he raised it to his lips.

Hastily she glanced about to see if his action was noticed. Evidently it was not, and she said with a light laugh:

"Silly boy."

"Do you love me, Isa?"

"Of course, dear," was the light answer. This grave-faced man, with dark circles about the eyes was not the brother to whom she was accustomed.

"Perhaps I am silly, but I love you," his lips barely uttered, then he gave way to some one else, and was lost in the crowd.

With many emotions struggling within him, the young man almost stag-

gered from his sister's home, and hailing a cab, jumped into it, and was driven rapidly toward his apartments.

Reaching them, he gravely considered the situation, then began packing what he regarded as necessities. He decided to take his traveling bag and dress-suit case with him, and was thankful that he had always kept his things unmarked. It had been a fancy of his, and now he could carry anything and not be bothered by the name.

Carefully he selected several suits of a serviceable character; some linen, handkerchiefs and underclothes, and tucked them away as best he could, but the bags were very heavy when he turned the key in the door and slowly made his way down the stairs.

Calling a cab, he had himself taken to the Rock Island depot at the foot of La Salle Street, and after sitting for a few minutes, he left, walking rapidly along Van Buren Street until he saw a hotel which suited his purpose.

Entering, he registered the name of John Roberts, and carried his bags upstairs himself, to the stuffy little room that had been assigned him.

The next morning John Roberts went away, but it was a different John Roberts from the one who had registered and paid his bill in advance. This John Roberts had a smooth face, and looked some years younger.

Each day Eldred changed his place of lodging, growing almost desperate, until the tenth day after his disappearance he saw what he had been expecting in the morning papers.

His picture appeared, although it was nothing like him, and several columns relative to his supposed crime. Eldred learned how easy it is to give a dog a bad name, for he saw himself accused of drinking, gambling, horse racing, speculating on the board of trade, and there were strong hints made that he was wasting his money upon some unworthy woman.

The proud young head bowed at these unjust accusations, and the care for life went from him. The article said that a Pinkerton man had several traces of the missing one and expected to arrest him before night.

This news drove poor Eldred to South Clark Street for a weapon with which to end an existence already unbearable, and he would probably have blown out his brains had his eyes not fallen upon the poster asking for recruits. Thus it was that the young society man became one of the marines of the United States, and buried Bennington Eldred, as he believed, forever, so far as his former life and associations were concerned.

The future was to him as a blank wall—a wall hard and pitiless.

(To be continued.)

THE LILY.

THERE grew a lily in the dark green wood ;
It shone a vivid scarlet through the gloom.
Erect upon its slender stem it stood,
And heeded not that it was there alone.
A weary poet, friendless, poor, and sad,
Passed through the wood and saw the flaming flower ;
To him its radiance 'mid the somber shade
Was like a God-sent message, needed sore.
The lily needed neither friends nor hope—
It bloomed far hidden from the haunts of men,
But was not the less bright because unsought,
Or less erect because it stood alone.
The wanderer took the lesson to his heart
And wrote a poem, which seemed so inspired
That often it has done the lily's part
Since then, in cheering souls hard-pressed and tired.

L. N. B.

AN OPEN-FACED OPERATOR.

BY EDGAR WHITE.

A gold brick game that disdained to skulk behind a mask.

THERE being no ordinance against putting up a fine gilt sign in the night-time, the citizens of Sunnydale were intensely interested when they came down-town one bright morning and noticed for the first time the evidence of a new concern in town.

There wasn't a business guide-post in the place that could compare with the latest announcement in artistic effect and general solidity of character. The lettering was not large, but upon the dark, velvety background it was wonderfully easy to read.

Aside from its classical aspect the audacious name of the new enterprise furnished material for contemplation and suspicion. This is what the citizens read:

THE CRESTON COUNTY GOLD BRICK CO.

Not another word of explanation or direction.

The sign was over the entrance of the stairway leading to the second floor offices in the Mineral Valley Bank building. Even though Sunnydale was but a village, in a comparative sense, there was not a man in the crowd who was unaware of the deceptive characteristics of a gold brick, and they smiled derisively as they commented out of the store of their knowledge.

"Thinks we don't read the newspapers," said Editor Jones of the Sunnydale *Beacon Light*.

"Of course he'll say his bricks are different," remarked Tom Ballou, a hardware man who had made a fortune by thirty-five years' diligent attention to business, but who felt too young to retire.

"Wonder if he isn't the fellow that's been sending those green-goods circulars here?" said Marshal Andy Buttom, meditating on the possibility of doing a little detective work for Uncle Sam. "They most generally go together."

The proprietor of the bank building came along and told them he had rented the front suite up-stairs to one Darius Appletree, a middle-aged man from Central America, and that he had collected his rent for six months in advance. The new tenant seemed to have plenty of money.

"Of course; they always do," said the sage-like Ballou.

"As to whatever scheme he may have, gentlemen," observed the owner of the building, "you will have to find that out for yourselves. I know nothing more about him than I have told you."

For about a week the newcomer was the most rigidly inspected man that ever put foot in Sunnydale. The wonderment about him was there was nothing in his appearance to excite a breath of suspicion.

All the gold brick men they had read about or had experience with were well-dressed, oily fellows, who could out-talk a street medicine vender. Darius Appletree dressed in the most common of business clothes, wore a dark, negligée shirt and slouch hat, and generally looked about a day late with the barber. He had great, dark-brown eyes, and a mouth that would have made him fame as a comedian.

He drawled in his speech, and seemed to grasp situations slowly. If a stranger at Sunnydale were asked to pick out the most honest and inoffensive-looking man in the town the prize would certainly have gone to the gold brick man. His open, good-humored face seemed fraught with upright living.

The first citizen to beard the tiger

in his lair was Uncle Johnnie Holderman, who had accumulated more wealth than he and his family could hope to spend in several lifetimes, and who was now comfortably reckoning up the growing sums less fortunate beings were owing him.

Since he had become a money-lender Uncle Johnnie had lost all interest in his fellow man save as a machine to toil for him at the per cent mill. Secure in his mighty knowledge of holding on to the dollars, Uncle Johnnie experienced no apprehension as he entered the office of the gold brick man and took a chair.

Appletree was in his shirt-sleeves, polishing something with a chamois cloth. He had a short, corncob pipe in his mouth.

"How's business?" asked the visitor.

"Middlin' fair; ain't opened out yet."

Appletree went on about his work, now and then diving into some shelves under a show-case and bringing out trinkets that glittered, and afterward arranging them on black velvet cloths.

"What *is* your business?" asked Holderman, taking a nigh cut to the object of his visit.

Without looking at him or ceasing his work for an instant, Appletree replied:

"I'm selling gold brick."

Uncle Johnnie grinned.

"I bought one onct," he said.

"Yes?"

"Paid a cool thousand for it. When I got home with it I found it wasn't worth a dollar. You got any them sort?"

"My bricks are bogus," said Appletree, candidly, as he bent to the floor to pick up a tiny golden cross he had dropped.

"Oh, come now! You don't mean that?"

"Yes, they ain't gold, but I'm selling 'em for just what they are."

"You mean you're getting 'em up for fellers what's working the old dodge?"

The operator suddenly straightened up, and turned his dark brown, honest-looking eyes sternly on the caller.

"No, sir," he said severely. "I'm sellin' 'em for just what they are—bogus gold bricks. I don't care if the whole world knows it! I want 'em to know it!"

The old man stroked his stubby gray beard.

"I didn't mean to make you mad," he said.

"Oh, that's all right," said the bogus gold brick maker, returning to his work. "I know there are people who think because a few scoundrels have made money deceiving honest men that every stranger is a rascal."

Uncle Johnnie cheerfully lied about his sharing the general opinion.

"You see," said Appletree, taking a seat, and all the while industriously polishing a heavy chain that looked like gold, "when I was in Panama an old Spaniard there, whose life I'd saved at no risk whatever, but was grateful like all them fellers of the real Castilian blood—he showed me a process for treating oroide so as to make it good as gold—only it ain't gold, mind you, and I never let a brick go out except what's plainly stamped 'oroide.'"

"Humph!"

"Now, take this watch-chain, for instance," handing it to his visitor; "I'll defy any jeweler living to tell me where it differs from gold. Yet it is nothing but oroide treated according to the old Spaniard's formula."

Uncle Johnnie took the chain and examined it intently.

The links were large and well constructed. It was a finer piece of workmanship than even the banker had been in the habit of wearing.

"Now," said Appletree, "you have some idea of what that chain would be worth if it was real gold."

"About twenty-five dollars," returned Uncle Johnnie.

Although Appletree knew he had under-appraised it, he said:

"Well, say twenty-five dollars, though I believe your jeweler will tell you it's worth more—that is, if it was gold. But being of the stuff it is, what do you suppose it can be sold for?"

"Five dollars?"

Appletree smiled.

"That's the way most people put it," he said, good-naturedly. "We can sell

that chain for a dollar and make fifty cents profit on it!"

The old man jumped from his seat.

"You don't mean that?"

"Indeed I do. Oroide is wonderfully cheap. There are tons upon tons of it in the shale beds around here."

"But this looks exactly like gold!"

"Yes," returned Appletree, carelessly, "but I imagine you're not an expert. Now, just to have a little fun, suppose you take it over to one of your jewelers —a man you have confidence in— and ask him to examine it by every known test. But don't tell him what it is made out of."

In half an hour Uncle Johnnie was back, pale with excitement.

"Ferguson says it's almost solid gold! That there can't be any doubt about it!" he exclaimed.

Appletree chuckled.

"It fools the best of 'em," he remarked.

Uncle Johnnie looked hungrily at the lavish assortment of dazzling jewelry on the black trays.

"If that was the real stuff," he said, "you'd be worth thousands of dollars!"

"Wouldn't I? But it's only oroide, you know."

Uncle Johnnie's crafty, avaricious face suddenly began working with an idea. He walked over to where Appletree was and laying his skinny paw on his shoulder, whispered:

"I've got a farm with oceans of that shale on it; why couldn't you and me work this thing so's to make something out of it?"

"I don't understand?" drawled Appletree, as if puzzled.

"I mean that I can furnish you the stuff to make them bricks with, and we'll sell 'em for the genuine article."

Appletree jumped up.

"What you propose, sir," he said hotly, "is infamous! I would never become a party to any such rascality! I don't have to make my money that way, thank heaven!"

The old man ran to cover. He put up a lamentably weak apology, but it seemed to be strangely effective in mollifying his companion.

"I know these are evil days," said Appletree, somberly, "when every man suspects his neighbor and holds his pocketbook with firm grip. And I don't blame 'em, with all the sharks and fly-by-nighters there are. That's why I say I won't be a party to any scheme that has even a suspicion of trickery about it. I was brought up in Connecticut by good old Puritan parents and they said to me:

"'Darius, whatever you do, always tell 'em the truth; don't lie even to save your life, and never deceive a man as to what he's gettin' from you, for that is only beatin' the devil around a stump and worse'n lyin'.'"

While delivering the dissertation, Appletree sat down and meekly folded his hands in his lap. At that moment a narrow halo would have completed the picture of a saint.

Uncle Johnnie took the indirect lecture like a schoolboy who needed it, and said he approved the principles of the ancestral Appletrees.

This seemed to please the spotless gold brick man, and he piloted Uncle Johnnie into his operating-room. There were several large tables on which were furnaces, crucibles, chemicals and small boxes of yellowish stuff marked "oroide."

The visitor saw the chemist take some of the oroide, treat it with his chemicals and run it through the furnace. It came out in the shape of a slender, glittering bar. Appletree handed it to Uncle Johnnie.

"You may keep that," he said, "as a sort of souvenir. Of course, it isn't costly, yet it may be put to any purpose for which gold is used and not an expert on earth can tell the difference!"

Uncle Johnnie sought Ferguson, the jeweler, and showed him his slender bar.

"It's sure enough gold," he said, after making the test. "Where did you get these things you've been showing me, Uncle Johnnie?"

The old money-lender smiled craftily.

"You're sure this is gold?" he asked.

"Certainly, and so was that chain you showed me. If you think I'm mistaken I'll make you an offer of eighteen dollars cash for that chain."

"But suppose it ain't gold?"

"I'm taking that risk," said the jew-

eler, quietly; "you bring me that chain you showed me this morning and I'll plank down eighteen hard dollars."

Here was a chance to call the gold brick man down if he was only bluffing. Uncle Johnnie hastened back to the rooms over the bank.

Appletree was still at work with his trinkets.

"You said that chain could be sold for a dollar?"

With eyes intent on his work, the oroide man answered:

"Yes."

"Here's a dollar for it," tendering the money.

"I said it could be sold for a dollar," returned Applegate, carelessly, "but that it only cost fifty cents to make it. I don't care to ask a profit from you. If you want it for fifty cents, take it."

"What!"

"Why, certainly. It's only oroide."

Appletree produced the chain, laid it in a plush box and handed it to Uncle Johnnie. Then he reached in his pocket and passed over fifty cents in exchange for the dollar.

Uncle Johnnie went back to the jeweler, who after a brief examination of the chain opened his safe and counted out eighteen dollars.

The next day Uncle Johnnie went to see Appletree again. As the old man seemed curious, the slow-talking gold brick man explained his plan.

He was making brick out of the oroide, treating them with the old Spaniard's process, which made it impossible for any one to detect the difference; yet he was very careful to mark every brick so there could be no charge of subterfuge.

The bricks were sold to jewelers and others engaged in the fine arts at such a price that competition by real gold was out of the question.

"As to how the jewelers represent it is a matter for their own conscience," said Appletree, piously; "as for myself, I don't wait to be asked what it is; I tell 'em right at the start. In a few years from now, I venture to say, every man and woman in this State will be wearing my oroide in the shape of rings, chains and brooches, and real gold will be at a discount."

"And I've got a farm full of it," remarked Uncle Johnnie.

"So has other people."

"But it's no good without knowing the process?"

Appletree smiled.

"I'm going South soon. I might be willing to sell the formula and right to make it in their State to a company."

"Company nothing! Sell it to me."

"Y—e—s?"

"I'll give you ten thousand dollars cash!"

"I do not doubt it," said Appletree, calmly.

Uncle Johnnie gasped. Ten thousand dollars looked like a world of money to him, though he was worth several hundred thousand in land and securities.

"This State ought to be good for a million dollars the first year," went on Appletree, musingly. "I calculate on selling Arkansas for a hundred thousand. That's where I go next. You see, Mr. Holderman, each State is thoroughly protected. An oroide maker in one State is not allowed to sell in another State, so the whole thing is yours. Your revenue will only be limited by your capacity to turn out the bars."

"Twenty thousand!——Thirty!——Forty!——Fifty!"

The old man shook with excitement.

For a long while Appletree smoked viciously on his strenuous corncob pipe. Suddenly he turned to Uncle Johnnie.

"Will you promise me, on your solemn word of honor, outside of anything which may be mentioned in the contract," he demanded, "that every bar you sell will be plainly marked 'Oroide'?"

"Y—e—s."

"Then I'll let it go. An expert chemist will come to-morrow and instruct some home man you may pick how to pursue the formula. You've purchased the biggest thing of the age, Mr. Holderman, and I congratulate you."

He got up and warmly extended his hand, while affection and good will beamed from his honest brown eyes.

The chemist came, the home man was instructed and Uncle Johnnie paid over that fifty thousand dollars with a

lighter heart than he would have given fifty dollars for some town improvement. Appletree went South to confer further benefactions.

The successor to the gold brick man put a force to work in his shale beds and before long had a ton or so of dazzling oroide in the operating-room, where it was deftly turned into beautiful bars by the chemist. Uncle Johnnie took an armful over to Ferguson.

"What do you think of that?" he asked, triumphantly.

The jeweler examined the offering.

"It's oroide," he said.

"Yes," returned Uncle Johnnie, honestly, but somewhat chagrined at the artisan's ready diagnosis; "it's oroide."

"What about it?" asked the jeweler.

"Why—er—don't you see—it's the same as gold."

"Not by a long jump; why, you can tell that's oroide a mile off."

Uncle Johnnie felt the earth sinking under his feet as the jeweler indicated the points of variation.

"Didn't you tell me that chain and bar I showed you were gold?"

"Yes."

"Well, they were made out'n the same stuff."

"That's where you're off, Uncle Johnnie," said the jeweler, who began to understand something was up. "That chain and that bar were thousands of miles from anything like this stuff. Come, now—what's happened?"

But Uncle Johnnie didn't have the heart to go into details with the jeweler. He hunted up the prosecuting attorney.

"I don't know that we can do anything with him, Uncle Johnnie," said the officer, "even if we do catch him. Your contract calls for a process to make oroide resembling gold, and you say it does."

"Yes, but it don't fool the jewelers."

"Did you want it to do that?" asked the prosecutor, sternly.

"N—o——no, but you see it was to look so near like gold nobody could tell the difference."

"I'm afraid, Uncle Johnnie," said the attorney, gravely, "you've become a party to a scheme that wouldn't look well in print."

Uncle Johnnie had a big brother out in the country whose name was Thad. Thad was tall, raw-boned, awkward as a broken wind-mill and just as demonstrative.

Thad listened to a hurried and rather incoherent tale of the gold brick man's iniquity, and Uncle Johnnie handed him a hundred dollars to pay his expenses to Arkansas.

"You'll find him in some town about the size of this," said Uncle Johnnie, "and when you come up with him maul his head until he gives up that money—you're plenty big. I'll give you half you get back, which is too much, but I feel like I'd be willing to part with it to have him well licked. If you need any more money, why, just draw on me. Here's a letter of introduction to the banker at Little Rock."

A week later Uncle Johnnie got this report from his big brother Thad:

MY DEAR JOHN:

Almost the first man I met in Little Rock was your friend Appletree. He recognized me first, by the family resemblance, he said, and was tickled to death to see me; took me up to his hotel, then around town, to theaters and everything. He wouldn't let me pay a cent.

Next day he introduced me to a Colonel Jefferson—fine old Southerner—and we formed a company to manufacture a metal that looks exactly like gold. We had it assayed and if you'll believe me every jeweler in town pronounced it the real thing. Appletree calls it 'oroite' or something like that. There's tons upon tons of it in shale down here, and Colonel Jefferson and I have acquired the rights for Arkansas for a mere song.

It seems an old Spaniard gave Appletree the process for having saved his life in a snowstorm, Appletree said. One-half interest, being I was your brother, Appletree said, will only cost me five thousand dollars. And, think of it, John, inside a year it'll make us a cold million! Jefferson had to put up twenty thousand dollars for his share, but I promised Appletree not to tell that. I've drawn my three thousand dollars balance out of the bank at home and, in accordance with your authority, have got your Little Rock banker to cash a draft for two thousand dollars on yourself. I lost no time in closing the deal, you may be sure.

Colonel Jefferson is now in St. Louis arranging with architects to build him a summer home down here. Appletree has run over to Helena to meet a gentleman who is figuring with him for Louisiana rights, but will be back to-morrow and start our chemist to work. I'm awful glad you sent me down here, for it means 'Easy Street' from this on.

Your affectionate brother,

THAD.

IN THE LION'S MOUTH.*

BY ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE.

A tale of Americans in Venice, and their connection with the plot to wipe this show-city of the world off the tourists' map.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

GEOFFREY HART, a newspaper-man, meets in Venice Anice Goyne, his one-time fiancée, with her brother Michael, and a companion, Signorina Rizzi.

Hart has discovered a plot of some unknown conspirators to destroy the city, and determines to investigate it for his paper. He has no sooner reached Venice than he receives a warning to leave—a rough sketch of a lion with open jaws, the old symbol of the Council of Ten. To his surprise, his Chino-Italian valet, Torello, seems to understand the warning, and begs him to go away at once, telling him that a second one means death.

Shortly after, Erne Mackay, who bears a slight resemblance to Hart, joins the party as an assistant to the newspaper-man.

Hart receives a second warning when in company with the signorina, and he accuses her of being an agent of the plotters. That evening, while they are floating quietly on one of the canals, the tranquillity of the night is broken by a shriek of terror from the gondolier.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BUFFOON.

AT the instant of his cry the practised oar of the gondolier nearly lifted the boat from the water and sent it whirling to the right at an angle of ninety degrees.

Even while the gondola was performing this highly unusual evolution, there was a tremendous splash, not two feet from the gunwale, and the trio of Americans were deluged with a high-thrown shower of spray.

The boat lurched dangerously; the passengers clutched at the sides, while the barefoot gondolier was well-nigh hurled from his perch in the stern.

A section of coping—perhaps a half-ton in weight—had become detached from the moldering parapet of the old *palazzo*, beneath whose walls the gondola was passing, and had toppled over into the canal. Nothing but the gondolier's skill and his instinctive quickness and presence of mind had prevented the huge mass of stone from crashing into the center of the boat.

"In which case," commented Mackay, recovering his nerve and helping Hart brush the water from Anice's dress, "we four wouldn't be numbered at present among Venice's 'floating' population."

It was a very poor joke, but they all laughed; more to relieve the strain and from reaction than for any other reason.

"It was as close a call as any of us are ever likely to have," said Geoffrey gravely, "and we owe our safety to the gondolier. Mac, I begin to agree with you that this city is too medieval and picturesque to be the ideal place for modern Americans. I'm not sure that that trolley scheme of yours and a general modernizing and tearing down of these artistic old ruins mightn't be a good thing. Back to the hotel, Gondoliero!"

"Yes, I must change my things," assented Anice. "They're wringing wet. But I don't mean to lose my evening on the Grand Canal just the same. I'll change and be back by the time the rest of you are ready."

"You've got splendid nerve, Miss Goyne," said Mackay with strong approbation. "Another woman would be in hysterics after an escape like that. The others have disappeared around the bend. We can catch up with them and explain, and then meet them later on the Grand Canal."

**This story began in the February issue of* THE ARGOSY, *which will be mailed to any address on receipt of* 10 *cents.*

"I thank God," murmured Geoffrey, leaning toward Anice and speaking under his breath, "that you are safe! Your welfare means more to me than I can say."

The girl's eyes drooped and her heart beat fast; but, affecting not to hear, she began talking rapidly, almost incoherently, to Mackay. Geoffrey sank back to his former seat, ashamed of himself for the emotion that had forced such words from his heart.

As he and Mackay were donning other clothes in their rooms at the Danielli, Erne was unusually silent. At length he said, as though afraid of being laughed at:

"Old man, you'll think me foolish, perhaps, but—well, I was lying on my back in the gondola, you know, and looking up at that measly old ruin at the time the coping caved in. And I'll swear I saw the heads of two men peering over the edge of the parapet not five seconds before the stone fell. Of course, my eyes may have gone back on me; the light was dim, but——"

"You're quite right," interposed Geoffrey. "I saw them myself. Two men."

"Do—do you suppose they shoved that loose stone over into the water on purpose? It's a crazy idea, but——"

"I not only suppose it, but I *know* they did."

"But what grudge could they have had against us? They must be madmen!"

"They had no grudge, that I know of, against any one but me. And they are madmen, in a sense. They're fanatics. At least they serve fanatics. But why even fanatics should try to kill four people for the sake of killing one is more than I can understand. That's what's puzzling me."

"But, man alive!" burst out Mackay, "what have these Dagoes against you? Why not go to the American consul about it? For heaven's sake——!"

"Nothing can be done. Say nothing about the matter to any one. It can hardly happen a second time. I can't explain just now. Come on, if you're ready."

Silenced but by no means satisfied, Erne followed his friend down the stairs to the gondola-landing, where Anice Goyne was already awaiting them.

The three embarked and their gondola pushed forth on the Grand Canal. Erne Mackay, in the bow as before, was silent and wondering; Geoffrey, his head full of this new turn of affairs, also said little. The burden of talk thus fell on Anice.

"See," she exclaimed, "we're just in time to join the fête. There comes the first boatload of musicians. Where are Michael and Aïda? Oh, there they go, just ahead! Let's try to get next to them in the line."

The Grand Canal was full of pleasure-seekers whose gondolas, after idling about with no especial destination, were now lining up in semi-military precision, their close-packed ranks stretching across the canal from bank to bank, forming a sort of pontoon.

Neighbors chatted from one boat to another; gondoliers drew in their long oars and leaned on them with an air of boredom; overdressed gallants ogled seemingly unconscious maidens; men and women alike leaned back lazily to hear the forthcoming concert.

In a barge, ablaze from end to end with Chinese lanterns, sat the musicians, five in number. Two carried mandolins, two guitars; the fifth—an obese, middle-aged man with aspiring mustachios—had no instrument. He was the *primo* or soloist of the group. He it was who sang, to the fourfold accompaniment, the others joining loudly and enthusiastically in the choruses which were often taken up by the spectators until the chant of a thousand voices rose and swelled on the still night air and lost itself in the black distance of the Lagoon.

"The professionals don't sing well. Their voices are harsh and are injured from long exposure to night air. But out here under the stars, in a gondola, it all seems very beautiful," observed Anice Goyne, as the last strains of "Santa Lucia" died away.

"Queer ideas of the fitness of things these Italian musicians have!" chimed in Mackay. "One of the saddest, most mournful airs I ever heard goes with a song about the rise in the price of

macaroni. And one of their jolliest airs—'Margherita di Parete'—tells the story of a girl whose heart was broken and who died in a convent. Then——"

"Hush!" interrupted Anice, as the guitars began a prelude and the soloist rose to his feet, "he's going to sing the *cavatina* from 'Cavalleria Rusticana.' What a time and what a place to hear it!"

"The *cavatina?*" echoed Mackay. "Isn't that the song—the serenade—that *Turiddu* sings to *Lola* just before the curtain goes up? The deuce of a serenade it is, too! All fire and dark-red language and something in it that takes one by the throat! It's more like the sublimated serenade of a back-fence cat than the orthodox——"

"Hush!" repeated Anice, "he's beginning."

At the first note of the prelude, Geoffrey Hart was in a land of visions. The Mascagni opera always had a strange effect on his brain and nerves. He was no musician and he was wont to say that "Cavalleria Rusticana" was the only grand opera he could understand and enjoy.

When the song ended, a ripple of applause greeted the perspiring tenor as he sat down heavily and mopped his face.

An instant later a laugh ran along the bridge of boats. A barge full of clowns, tumblers and Columbines swung into view and began a vigorous performance. Roars of laughter greeted the buffoonery and cries of "*Ancora! Ancora!*"

Suddenly one of the buffoons, dressed in white and masked in powder, leaped lightly from the barge's prow where he had been pirouetting, to the nearest gondola in the line. He waved a tamborine above his head and with mad gestures and grimaces ran from boat to boat collecting coppers in his cap from the groups of interested and amused onlookers.

With wondrous dexterity he kept his balance among the swaying boats, until he reached the gondola next to that occupied by Anice, Hart and Mackay. Here, by some misstep, the buffoon lost his equilibrium, threw out his arms wildly, scattered the capful of coppers all over Hart's face and body, and then stumbled into the latter's gondola almost at Anice's very feet.

Hart jumped up and threw out an arm to steady the falling man. The buffoon clutched the arm near the shoulder and lurched awkwardly against Geoffrey.

The impetus swept Hart off his balance. Close-locked in an unwilling embrace, he and the buffoon reeled over the gunwale into the canal.

As they did so, Hart experienced a hot sting of pain along his left side and felt the buffoon's grip shifted from his shoulder to his throat.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

At the splash of the two bodies into the waters of the canal, confusion spread amid the line of close-crowded gondolas.

The floating bridge broke up at once into its component parts. Dozens of gondolas circled aimlessly about and hundreds of voices were raised in inquiry, startled ejaculation and useless advice.

"Shall I dive for him, signorina?" called Anice's gondolier.

"No!" answered Mackay before the frightened girl could speak. "stay where you are. Mr. Hart can swim like a duck. He'll be on the surface in a second. I only wonder he's staying under so long. I suppose he's had trouble in shaking off that curséd clown's hold. The fellow got scared and gripped him by the arms."

The water was whipped white with the oars of many craft. The gondolas crowded about in an irregular circle, leaving an open space of blackness where Geoffrey and the buffoon had sunk.

Into the dark void Anice Goyne was staring, lips parted and an agony of fear in her big eyes. Even Erne Mackay, who had swum with Geoffrey at the Lido every morning since his arrival in Venice, was more troubled than he dared confess: for the few moments since the two close-gripped men had

fallen overboard seemed an interminable interval of time.

* * *

Geoffrey Hart, like most men of athletic build and tastes, was an expert swimmer. A mere detail like tumbling into the lukewarm waters of the Grand Canal would not, under ordinary circumstances, have entailed any worse effects for him than a thorough wetting.

With true swimmer's instinct he had drawn a deep, full breath as his body struck. But, even as he disappeared beneath the surface, he felt that sharp needle of pain shoot through his side; and, ere he could fully realize what was happening, the buffoon's bony fingers had fastened crushingly about his windpipe.

Down they sank through what appeared to be illimitable space; the clown's grip close and increasing; Geoffrey struggling ineffectually to free himself.

"He's frightened out of his senses," was the American's first thought, "and he is clinging to me with the idea of saving himself. I must break his grip, or we'll both drown."

Then, as in a flash, the truth dawned on him. The tenacious, motionless, bulldog hold the buffoon maintained bore not the least resemblance to the frantic struggles a panic-stricken man makes when he finds himself drowning. Moreover that hot sting of anguish in the side——

All at once Geoffrey Hart became perfectly calm.

"He is an agent of The Ten!" he said to himself. "The whole thing was part of their plot to murder me. When he fell against me he intentionally shoved me overboard and at the same instant he stabbed me. Now, on the chance that the wound was not fatal, he is strangling me, down here under water."

The thought, the very words, passed through his brain in the briefest instant: and close after came the equally calm plan of self-defense.

Bringing up both hands to his throat, Hart caught the buffoon's tense fingers in a double jiu-jitsu hold he had learned years before in Japan, and bent his strength to breaking the deathlike grip.

One twist and the irresistible leverage of the athlete's two hands did its work. The murderous fingers relinquished their grip; but before they were fairly loose, the buffoon's other hand was where its fellow had been, deep in the soft flesh of Geoffrey's throat.

Again (and this time more violently, for he was growing faint and dizzy and his lungs seemed bursting), Geoffrey tore away the fellow's hold and swiftly twisted his own head to one side in order to avoid a repetition of the dreadful grip.

Baffled, the clown wound his long arms about Geoffrey's body, pinioning the American's arms to his sides. Then he twisted his legs around Hart's, paralyzing the latter's every effort to rise to the surface.

Apparently the assassin was resolved, if need be, to die with his victim. Even in the full horror of the moment Hart was aware of a vague admiration for a band which could command such fidelity and obedience in its agents.

But there was time for nothing now but action, unless he wished the agony that both brain and lungs were suffering to end in speedy death.

Summoning all his presence of mind and his memory of the wrestling tricks wherein he had excelled in his old New York Athletic Club days, he managed to work his right arm inch by inch out of the vise-like clutch of the buffoon. As he did so he noticed that his opponent, too, was evidently feeling the effects of the long stay under water and the violent exercise; for his hold, once irresistible, was now a shade less tenacious.

Freeing his right arm with one last jerk, Geoffrey reached for the other's face. Running his fingers down the convulsed countenance he found the jaw, caught it in the palm of his own hand, and, gathering all his remaining force drove the buffoon's head sharply backward and slightly to one side; at the same time driving his thumb into the other's Adam's apple.

This is a double maneuver which few, unless prepared for it, can withstand. Back went the man's head and Geoffrey

increased the pressure, lashing his own failing powers to a final rally. The pressure was more than mortal man could endure.

Slowly the buffoon's arms relaxed, and loosened their deathlike grip.

Freeing his left hand, Geoffrey laid its palm against the clown's chest and shoved him backward, out of his reach, through the sluggish thickness of the water.

Both, though they had not realized it, had been standing ankle deep in the soft mud and ooze at the bottom of the canal. Geoffrey stamped his foot, sinking still deeper in the slime as he did so, and thrust out and downward with both hands.

In that dense blackness he knew his opponent could not find him again unless by chance; and he had no intention of risking further combat with the fanatic.

Upward shot his body, through the green-black water, impelled by his first motion. For now Geoffrey was too far spent to make further effort in his own behalf. His entire energies were occupied in resisting the impulse to draw in a full breath to ease his tortured lungs.

Swiftly he rose, but through no present effort of his. The journey to the upper world and to air seemed ages in duration. Hart did not, like the traditional drowning man, watch his whole past life revolve before his eyes, but he thought madly of wind-swept decks and of whole universes full of air—fresh air.

Something struck glancingly against his head. Something hard and sharp. Next it struck his shoulder. Feebly his uplifted hands closed about the object and he felt it drawn upward.

Up with the gondolier's oar he had seized, he came. Dimly he was conscious of stars, of lights, of many excited voices. With a mad joy—the more exquisite because blended with unendurable anguish—he sucked in great drafts of the still air in the summer night.

Feebly as a child he felt Mackay's arm about him and knew he was being lifted into the gondola.

Then a cloud—a soft, beautiful, shimmering cloud—blotted out the stars. No, not all the stars, for two of them—bright, glorious, full of heavenly pity—were gazing down on him.

And the cloud brushed lightly against his cheek—and—and it was not a cloud, but the masses of Anice Goyne's gold-red hair as she leaned above him.

And the stars—the twin stars whose beauty and pity had pierced even to his numbed senses—they were her eyes! Of course they were. He might have known that from the first, he drowsily told himself.

But what was Anice Goyne doing down here at the bottom of the Grand Canal? Or was this heaven? He was too weary to care much which of the two it might be. Anice was there. That was enough.

"I love you," he muttered drowsily.

And then he fell asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ODD DISCOVERY.

THE "first-aid" treatment in use for the drowning was not at all necessary in the case of Geoffrey Hart.

He had swallowed no water. He was simply exhausted beyond measure from his long stay beneath the surface and by the strange battle he had fought at the bottom of the Grand Canal.

By the time shore was reached his natural strength and recuperative power began to assert themselves. When Mackay and the hastily summoned Torello had carried him to his own apartments in the Danielli he was quite himself again, except for a great weakness and lassitude.

The valet and Ernc placed Hart in a big chair and began to divest him of his outer clothes. A doctor had been sent for, but had not yet arrived.

"Easy with the coat there, Torello!" directed Mackay. "Over the shoulders now and—— Hello! What's the matter with this vest?"

The oddly frightened tone of his friend recalled Geoffrey's strayed senses. He opened his eyes and glanced down, at first idly, then in wide-awake interest, at his waistcoat.

"What's happened to you?" queried the wondering Mackay. "Hey there,

Torello! he's turning faint again. Give him another drink."

And indeed the sight that greeted Hart's eyes had, in his weakened condition, caused a momentary return of the cerebral dizziness which had attacked him on his rescue from the canal. A generous swallow of the flask's burning contents quickly braced his nerves and cleared his brain.

He noted that Torello's hand was trembling so violently that he could scarcely hold the flask and that the fellow was also gazing, wild-eyed and pallid, at his master's waistcoat.

Once more Geoffrey leaned forward and looked at the vest.

Down the left side of the soaked and muddy garment ran a long cut, as clean and as regular in shape as though made with a razor. The shirt beneath was cleft with a similar cut, whose sides were tinged with a double line of red blotches.

"Stabbed!" excitedly croaked Torello, forcing the words with difficulty from between his parched lips. "He has been stabbed!"

Hart recalled the sting of pain he had experienced as he and the buffoon fell overboard. Later and more urgent events had driven this from his memory. Now the recollection returned and with it a smarting soreness along the line of the cut.

"Wait!" he interposed as Torello was about to lay bare the wound. "It is nothing serious or it would have bled more freely and would be a good deal more painful. I want to follow its course if I can."

He ran his fingers along the cut. It terminated at his watch pocket, just under his heart. Geoffrey drew forth his watch, or rather the useless battered lump of metal that had once been a watch, and he held it up for inspection.

"Not much to look at now, is it?" he commented. "You'd never think that an hour ago it was worth a couple of hundred dollars, would you? But it's been worth a lot more than that to me this evening, for it saved my life. Don't you see, Mac? I was stabbed, as Torello says. The dagger was aimed at my heart, and a good, strong thrust it must have been.

"The point caught me square in the middle of the watch, crumpling the gold, crystal and works into one useless jumble, and exhausting the chief force of the blow. Then the knife-point glanced off and ran along my side, cutting my clothes and probably scratching me. That was the pain I felt when I went overboard, and it still hurts me a bit, but it's nothing serious."

Mackay had listened in open-mouthed bewilderment, a thousand questions rushing pell-mell to his lips. Torello had silently dropped into a chair as though too weak to keep his feet, and had covered his face with his hands.

At this juncture, before Mackay could speak, the doctor arrived.

The medico made a hasty examination of the patient. Being a prudent man he did not ask questions, but he was none the less profoundly mystified.

For, not even in Italy is it common to see a well-dressed man with a long knife-cut in one side of his drenched clothing and finger-mark bruises all over his throat.

As Geoffrey had predicted, the wound proved to be nothing more dangerous than an ugly scratch, for which an antiseptic wash and a strip of sticking-plaster proved ample remedy. The doctor found no other ills that a good night's rest would not heal.

While Torello was showing the physician down-stairs, Mackay's hardly restrained curiosity found vent in a torrent of excited questions. Hart, briefly and without emotion, told him the history of *I Dieci* of the two warnings he himself had received and of his subaqueous battle with The Ten's agent.

Mackay listened, dumfounded and incredulous. At the close Hart said:

"Look over there in the side pocket of the coat I wore to-day and you will find the second warning! I put the paper in there as I left the Doges' Palace."

Mackay crossed the room, ransacked the coat and turned out the two side pockets.

Both were empty.

"Old man," he said, gently, "you've been out in this hot southern sunlight too much. Your brain's a little dis-

ordered and you need rest and change. Try to forget all this nonsense about assassins and Councils of Ten and become your old, normal self. I saw that clown grab you to-night and fall into the canal with you. But it was an accident and your clothes probably caught on a nail or a piece of projecting ironwork of the gondola and that caused the rip.

"It's all a coincidence, Geoff. Try to believe that. And remember we're not living in the Middle Ages. The Council of Ten—if it ever existed, which some historians doubt—is as extinct as the dodo bird. Get some sleep. You'll feel differently about all this in the morning. Good night. Call me if you want anything."

Geoffrey bit his lip to keep back an angry reply to his friend's self-complacent and well-meant advice, and he watched impatiently Mackay's leisurely progress from the room.

Seen from behind, the reporter bore an exact similarity in looks to Geoffrey himself. This also irritated Hart in his present nervous condition; and he recalled, almost in the light of a personal insult, the many comments that had been made of late on their peculiar likeness to each other.

Torello came in on noiseless feet and began to prepare his master's bed. Hart noticed the valet's expression of utter misery, his frightened manner and shaking hands.

"What ails you?" he asked with some sharpness. "Haven't you got over your scare about me yet? I'm all right now. There's no more danger."

To his surprise, the stolid valet, after a fruitless effort to speak, broke down and wept hysterically.

Touched by the fellow's devotion and yet annoyed at the exibition of unmanly tears, Geoffrey slapped his servant on the shoulder with a sort of jocular familiarity, exclaiming:

"Oh, be a man, can't you? I had a narrow escape, but it's all over. I appreciate your solicitude and all that; but, hang it——"

"I ask your pardon, excellenza," said Torello, trying to collect his lost self-control and speaking in semi-coherent gasps. "I should not have behaved so. But I am undergoing much. I had thought at first it would be easy; —and it was a matter of duty—and I did not know you were concerned in it, signor. And I had my oath to remember; so——"

"Your oath? What oath?"

The question checked the Chino-Italian's rambling, hysterical talk. He looked up, startled, as one who wakes with the knowledge he has talked indiscreetly in his sleep.

"No oath at all, sir," he mumbled. "Did I speak of an oath? I—I am not at all well, sir. Will you permit me to go to my room? I should be in bed. I—indeed, sir, I am not well."

In truth, the man's ghastly face and the look of absolute misery in his eyes bore out the excuse. He was manifestly unfit for further talk, just then; but Hart mentally resolved to question the valet more closely, as soon as better occasion should offer.

"All right," he assented. "Go to bed. I hope you'll be better by morning."

Torello left the room, walking as though to the gallows. Geoffrey stared after him with a frown of bewilderment.

"Now what the deuce did he mean by all that talk of oaths and 'duty,' I wonder!" muttered Hart. "And what's got into him lately? He looks as if he'd committed a murder or some other crime for which conscience and the law are both hunting him down. I wonder if he has. I've a great mind to go to his room and ask him."

But, on second thoughts, he dismissed the plan. Which was perhaps just as well; for Torello was not in his room.

CHAPTER X.

A MIDNIGHT MISSION.

When Geoffrey Hart awoke, late the next morning, his first thought, oddly enough, was not of his peril of the preceding night nor of such future attempts as he felt certain *I Dieci* would make against him.

His mind, on the contrary, flew by some inexplicable process to the scene in the gondola, just after he had been lifted out of the water.

He vaguely fancied that he had seen Anice Goyne bending over him. After that he had had no clear mental perception until he had found himself in his own rooms at the hotel. Yet he had imagined—or else he had dreamed during the night—that he had said something—to somebody—about his love for Anice Goyne.

As the sleep-mists gradually receded and left his brain clear, he decided that his declaration had been part of some fantastic dream whose other details he had forgotten.

"It's lucky I wasn't fool enough to say that to any one," he muttered as he rang for Torello, "least of all, to her."

He rang again. One of the hotel servants answered the bell.

"Torello is ill, signor," explained the man. "He begs that you will excuse him from duty to-day and he has sent me to take his place until he is better."

Remembering the valet's pitiable condition on the previous night, Hart was by no means surprised at the news. He dismissed the messenger, saying he could care for himself until Torello's recovery.

On rising he found himself somewhat sore and stiff: a slight constriction of the lungs served to remind him of the long time he had spent under water, but otherwise he was none the worse for the previous night's mishaps.

As for the scratch on his left side, it was healing readily and caused him little or no inconvenience. The cut did not merit the title of flesh-wound. It was scarcely more of an abrasion than might have been caused by the scratch of a long pin. The bleeding had been very slight and had ceased even before the plaster had been applied.

Hart descended to the party's private dining-room to find the others already assembled there. The two women looked up simultaneously as he entered.

In Aïda Rizzi's dark eyes he thought he read remorse and mute appeal for forgiveness. In Anice's he read a nervous, eager question which before his gaze of studied unconcern changed to a look of trouble—even perhaps of keen disappointment.

"Hello, old chap!" called Michael Goyne from the table. "We hardly expected a sight of you after your ducking last night. You look a bit done up. I was coming to look after you as soon as I'd finished breakfast. Mackay said you were fast asleep when he came down."

"I'm all right again, thanks," answered Geoffrey, taking his seat, "or I will be as soon as I've had something to eat. I——"

"Yes, you're yourself again," observed Mackay, who sat opposite him. "It takes more than a dive in a Dago canal to put a New Yorker out of the game. But I was worried last night.

"Why, Goyne," turning to Michael and laughing reminiscently, "I never knew whisky to queer Geoff's hard old head before; but last night, after we'd tried to brace him up with a couple of drinks, he began babbling most entertainingly to me about medieval conspiracies and Councils of—Ouch! what's that for? You nearly broke my leg!"

"Oh, did I kick you?" asked Hart with childlike innocence. "I thought it was part of the table. I had a cramp in my foot and——"

"We were discussing an invitation when you came in, Mr. Hart," interposed Aïda, changing the subject with apparent unconcern; "an invitation to a dance to-night at the Palazzo Vensoli. It is an informal affair, got up on the spur of the moment in honor of Count di Vensoli's daughter who has come home for the summer from the convent at Fiesole. The countess's note has only just come, and we can't decide whether the romance of dancing in a thousand-year-old ballroom is worth the exertion in this hot weather."

"This one of us," corrected Mackay, "has decided without a moment's hesitation. It isn't worth while. I wouldn't dance, even at Coney Island, in weather like this. Besides, I don't care for dancing, anyhow."

"Don't care for dancing!" echoed Anice. "I didn't suppose any one was so blasé as that. I don't believe you know how to dance. Now confess. Do you?"

"Well," said Mackay, doubtfully, "there has always been some difference

of opinion on that subject between my partners and myself. Personally, I think I dance very well. I still live in hopes of getting some one to share that belief. It's true I only know a few dances——"

"But you know the waltz, don't you?"

"Only by reputation."

"And can't you do the two-step?"

"I don't know. I never tried. I refuse to be catechised further. I'm——"

"The witness is prejudiced," decreed Michael. "His testimony on the question of going or not going to the Vensoli dance should be thrown out. What do the rest of you say? I for one am in favor of it."

The motion was carried, despite Mackay's vehement dissent, and Geoffrey rose to leave the table.

"If you'll excuse me," he explained, "I'll run up and see how Torello's getting on. The poor fellow's sick."

"Sick?"

It was Signorina Rizzi who spoke and the monosyllabic query seemed wrung involuntarily from her lips. The next moment she had recovered herself and went on in haste:

"I'm so sorry. Is there anything we can do for him?"

"Nothing, thank you," answered Geoffrey, puzzled by her interest. "Or if there is I'll let you know."

Going to the servants' quarters, he found Torello in bed and evidently suffering.

"It is a touch of fever, signor," responded the valet to his inquiries. "I shall be myself in a day or so. I thank you for coming to ask. And I trust my illness may not inconvenience——"

"Don't worry about that. When you're better you can have a vacation, if you want one."

Torello turned his head away, with a sudden emotion of some sort. When he again looked up at his master his face was expressionless, though yellowish-white in its pallor.

"Send for a doctor if necessary," suggested Hart, as he left the room, "and let me know if you need anything. I'll drop in again during the course of the day."

On his way to the street he glanced in at the big reception-room facing the Grand Canal. Anice sat there alone.

"Where are the others?" inquired Hart, as he paused on the threshold.

"Mr. Mackay has gone across to the Lido for a swim and Aïda and Michael have gone out together on the lagoon."

Anice sighed as she spoke and there was a troubled expression on her delicate face.

"You are unhappy," said Hart, coming into the room. "What is the matter?"

From the look he had surprised in her eyes when he had entered the breakfast-room a vainer man might readily have guessed her chief cause of sorrow. But it was of quite another matter that she spoke; woman-like, hiding the greater grief behind the lesser.

"The same old story," she replied. "Michael is so—so different lately. This morning at breakfast he was like his old self, and I hoped that the cloud—whatever it may be—that has seemed to overshadow him of late, had passed. But after breakfast he and Aïda talked together in here for a few moments and I saw the same look of unhappiness and bother settle down on his face again.

"He and Aïda have gone somewhere. They told me they were just going for a sail on the lagoon. But I could see from their manner that they were keeping something back from me. Oh, I hate mysteries!" with a stamp of the dainty little foot and a filling of the sorrowful eyes. "I hate them; and a horrible mystery of some kind seems to have been creeping over us, more and more, since the very day we reached Venice.

"Tell me," she asked with quick irrelevance, "have you heard anything further of the particular mystery you came here to ferret out? That gruesome one about the Council of Ten?"

"There is nothing new," he answered with easy mendacity. "When there is I'll tell you."

He had said nothing to her of the warnings he had received, nor did he intend to let her know that his misadventure of the preceding night was anything more than a clumsy accident.

The fear of bringing fresh sorrow

or anxiety to her heart was far stonger within him than his natural longing to confide, to this woman he loved, the tale of the perils that so thickly beset his path.

"It's odd," he went on, "but I got somehow a sort of confused impression last night—when they hauled me into the gondola—that you were bending over me and that your glorious hair brushed my cheek. I even seemed to hear you say to me—or else heard myself say to you——"

"Mr. Hart!"

She had risen indignantly to her feet, her face aflame.

"Don't be offended," he urged, astonished at her vehemence. "I only repeat it to show what queer fancies a half-senseless man can have. I was practically unconscious at the time and——"

To his astonished chagrin, she turned from him and went swiftly from the room. Nor did he see her again until the others returned from lunch.

* * * *

"I've had about all of this I can stand," plaintively remarked Ernie Mackay, as he came upon Hart at the refreshment buffet while the Palazzo Vensoli dance was in full swing. "I've wilted two collars and I've torn three women's trains, and I've fractured the toes of I don't know how many partners and I've split the shoulder-seams of this open-faced suit—it belongs to you, Geoff, too. I've done all this in the cheerful effort to have a good time and to try to dance in a measly old thousand-year-old ballroom. That's where the trouble is! It's the age of the ballroom that's queered me. Now if it was at Coney——"

"Poor chap!" laughed Geoffrey, "you've done nobly. Have some champagne and then——"

"And then," supplemented Mackay, "I'm going to get out of this. Make my excuses to the others, won't you? It's a gorgeous night and I'm going to walk home. It's right along the Grand Canal all the way, so I can't get lost.

"Say good night for me to the countess, won't you? Or else go up to her twice and say good night. She'll think it's you one time and I the other. I've been mistaken for you no less than six times this evening. It's disgusting to think any man can look as much like me as you do. I feel as if I was twins. So long, Geoff! Hotel and bed for mine! Be it ever so tumbled there's no place like bed."

Hart returned to the ballroom and dutifully waltzed with three successive Venetian damsels, two of whom did not know how to reverse: while the third asked him if it were true that all Americans lived in wigwams.

When at last the Goynes and Aïda and himself started for home he was well-nigh as disgusted with the evening's entertainment as Mackay had been. His dissatisfaction was increased by the marked fashion in which Anice avoided walking alone with him and attached herself to Michael and Aïda.

Geoffrey Hart felt himself much aggrieved. Anice's alternate coldness and kindness was a continuous strain on his nerves.

He felt certain she cared nothing for him and the certainty hurt him more than he cared to confess even to himself. His own stubborn pride and the silly oath he had so long ago taken that he "would not marry her as long as she had a dollar in the world"—all this and her seeming indifference were rendering him miserable.

Then, too, his failure to discover anything whatsoever concerning the alleged plot of The Ten to destroy Venice: and the very urgent interest The Ten's agents were taking in himself, combined to swell his irritability.

The night was breathlessly hot: and the notion of retiring to a stuffy hotel bedroom quite within earshot of Mackay's sonorous snoring, did not allure him.

"Aren't you coming in?" asked Anice as he halted at the hotel entrance.

"No," he said sulkily, "I'm going for a stroll. Good night!"

Hart realized that one of his very rare fits of ill-humor was upon him; and he knew that brisk exercise is nature's sovereign remedy for such an attack. Hence he had resolved to walk himself into a happier frame of mind.

He knew that The Ten's agents were very probably on the lookout for him; but the canals and byways were not yet deserted or dark, and, besides, he carried in his hip pocket a serviceable revolver.

He strolled along the Grand Canal for some distance; then retraced his steps and turned into the Piazza di San Marco, on the side nearest the Campanile. There he discovered that his cigar had gone out and he paused in the shadow of the *logetta*, or vestibule, at the base of the huge tower, to relight it.

While he was fumbling for a match, a man passed within ten feet of him, just outside the wide bar of shade. A certain sly haste and furtiveness of manner in the pedestrian attracted Hart's notice.

Then, the light of the sinking moon touched the man's face and Geoffrey recognized him.

It was the valet Torello.

Torello, who was supposedly stricken with fever, and too ill to leave his bed. He was walking with the firm step of perfect health.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN HUNT.

HART'S cigar dropped from his nerveless fingers and he strained his eyes through the darkness for a second glimpse of the man's face.

But the moon had sunk behind the housetops and only its uncertain afterglow and the feebler glimmer of the stars illumined the great square.

Still, there was no mistaking the figure and gait of the Chino-Italian as he sped silently along past the façade of San Marco's, toward the center of the city.

"It's—no, impossible! But—yes, it *is* Torello!" muttered Geoffrey, "and he walks like a well man—he who was so weak this afternoon that he could scarcely raise his head. What is he up to? He told me once he had no friends in Venice. Where can he be going? He slinks along like a fugitive."

Almost without premeditation, impelled by a powerful curiosity, Geoffrey Hart found himself hastening along the nearly deserted square in the valet's wake. Keeping to the shadow, dodging occasionally behind pillar or portico, he maintained the pursuit, never once losing sight of the gliding figure in front of him.

Around corners, through dark lanes, over bridges, along narrow footpaths and across little squares sped Torello; and Geoffrey with more or less difficulty maintained his distance behind him.

During the first few moments the valet repeatedly turned as though to see if he was followed. Each time Hart succeeded in burying himself in the shadows and standing there without motion until his quarry again moved on.

To cross Venice on foot or to explore its mazy interior, without the aid of a boat or a guide, is a feat wholly beyond the capability of a stranger. No one unfamiliar with the waterside byways, the crooked alleys, the countless short-cuts and bridges could continue his course for fifteen minutes without becoming hopelessly lost.

Yet Torello, who had said this was his first visit to the city, made his way without hesitation, and, without a pause, glided around turning after turning, traversed tiny bridges and entered the blackest alleys.

The average man could not have followed the valet's flitting, indistinct figure with any degree of certainty.

But Geoffrey Hart had not trailed moose through the trackless Maine woods for nothing. He was an ardent sportsman and had more than once won the reluctant admiration of North Woods guides by his unerring instinct for topography, his almost superhuman keenness of vision and his ability to fix permanently in his memory the salient points of any landscape.

There are a thousand woodsmen who have this power, but it is granted to few city dwellers. His long months in the forest now stood Geoffrey in good stead.

He followed, with eye and body, the flight of Torello as he would have followed that of a wounded deer; and, semiconsciously he was at the same time stamping upon his memory the various landmarks he passed.

They had penetrated into a section of Venice hitherto unfamiliar to Geoffrey himself. Judging the general direction as best he could and recalling Baedeker's "bird's-eye view" of the place, he concluded that they must be nearing the vicinity of the great Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista. Beyond that, he remembered reading, lay the lowest quarter—the Ghetto—the resort of thieves and bravos—a manifestly unsafe part of the town for a foreigner to visit alone and at night.

Out of the darker shadows slipped Torello, moving like some queer black creature of the canals, and started across a narrow bridge that spanned one of the smaller *condotti*. Arrived at the middle of the bridge he paused and looked back.

Geoffrey, now barely fifty feet distant, dropped on one knee behind the waterside parapet. At first he fancied Torello had seen or heard him and he remained still and almost without breathing, in the hope that the valet might continue his mysterious journey. For by now the hunter's instinct surged high in Hart's breast and he tingled with the excitement of the chase.

The valet, however, continued to stand in the center of the bridge. Once Geoffrey saw him glance at his watch, in the faint starlight. He evidently awaited some one.

Thus pursuer and pursued remained stock still in their tracks for perhaps five minutes.

The streets and canals were void of human life. A seal of silence had settled over the city of the sea.

At last, passing so close to Hart as to brush against his clothing where he crouched in the dense shadow of the parapet, came a second figure, from out of the maze of byways behind them. The black form mounted the bridge. Torello stepped forward to meet it.

The two stood for a moment in apparent conversation. Then, side by side, they sped on, across the bridge and into the darkness on the farther side.

And Geoffrey Hart, stooping double and running along under the shelter of the bridge guard-rail, followed hot upon their track.

"I don't see what's the use of my keeping up this ridiculous chase any longer," he told himself. Nevertheless, he continued the pursuit.

"The interest is gone now. There's nothing mysterious. Just a common or garden variety of love-tryst. Oh, to think of poor, yellow, slit-eyed old Torello having a sweetheart! What a joke!"

He had crossed the bridge and had entered the narrow street into which the two ahead had vanished. Now he saw them once more walking rapidly. Geoffrey slackened his pace and prepared to turn back.

"No use in my spying on the poor chap's love affairs," he muttered, as he came to a stop.

Then, with a stifled cry of consternation, he again leaped forward.

"By all that's wonderful!" he gasped, "this is a mystery with a vengeance!"

For a ray of light from one of the windows along the byway had penetrated the oaken shutters and had fallen directly athwart the path of Torello and his companion. And in the fraction of a second during which the yellow ray illuminated the woman's face Hart recognized her.

It was Signorina Aïda Rizzi!

Hart stumbled along in pursuit, his amazement almost making him forget all caution.

Aïda Rizzi in the slums of Venice, at midnight, and in company with his Chino-Italian valet! It was incomprehensible—incredible!

Yet that interval of light had shown Hart her pale, classic features beyond all possibility of mistake. And now, too, her figure and her walk were as familiar to him as were Torello's; and he marveled at himself for not having sooner recognized her.

His mind in a jumble at this strangest and newest development, Hart mechanically kept the path and sought to form some sort of a clue to Aïda's presence there.

Surely she could not be in love with Torello! Then he recalled that when they met on the bridge no kiss or other embrace had been exchanged. Why, then, were they together?

A moment's uncertainty—and in a flash the whole matter was plain to him.

Aïda Rizzi, he knew, was an agent of the Council of Ten. On sight of Torello at the railroad station she had fainted. Later he had fancied he saw a signal pass between them. Torello had shown strange familiarity with the symbol of The Ten.

"Chang-Sha Torello—my paragon of a valet—is an agent of the Council!" muttered Geoffrey, half-aloud. "What a fool I was not to see it all along! He's been set to watch me. He—yet he could not have known beforehand the reason of my coming to Venice, for when I told him of the warning he begged me to go at once from Italy. The fellow's fond of me, in a way, I suppose—or he used to be. And now it's my turn to shadow him.

"He and the Rizzi must be on an errand of some sort for The Ten. Come! My visit here isn't as barren of results as I feared it might be. I may be on the track, even now, of some big development."

Talking feverishly to himself as was his custom when he wished to let off steam, under strong excitement, the American redoubled his precautions, and hastened on as rapidly as the man and woman whose steps he was dogging.

The fugitives turned into a somewhat broader street whose low-topped houses did not shut out the starlight so completely as did the taller buildings in most of the thoroughfares. The canal, running sluggishly through the broad expanse of the highway reflected back the sky's light in a faintly luminous shimmer.

Hart could now see Torello and the woman more plainly. He could also see some distance ahead of them; and along a byway, perhaps a hundred yards in front, he made out a man walking in the same direction as themselves.

If Torello and Aïda also saw the man in front they took no pains to avoid him.

The man paused before a doorway, stood there a moment and then disappeared.

"Is it an ambush for my worthy valet and his companion?" wondered Hart.

The others had slackened their former rapid pace and no longer looked behind them, nor gave other evidence of fearing pursuit. Geoffrey took advantage of this fact, and of a chance of concealment behind a long line of barrels and boxes, to get within hearing distance.

The two reached the doorway before which the stranger had paused. Here they came to a standstill.

Hart, not thirty feet away, again dropped to one knee and waited. This chase was far more absorbing than any big game hunt; for man is man's natural prey, and the hunting of him is a primal instinct that has never been wholly smothered by civilization.

Torello rapped twice, once on the upper, once on the lower panel of the door. Each rap, owing to some peculiarity of the wood of the panels, gave forth a different sound.

From within, after a brief interval, came a muffled voice that spoke one word. The night was still as the grave and Geoffrey plainly heard the low-breathed name:

"Dandolo!"

The musical tones of Aïda's rich contralto voice reached the listener still more clearly as she replied without hesitation:

"Faliero!"

The door swung inward and the valet and Aïda entered. The portal closed behind them and the click of a bolt was audible.

"Dandolo! Faliero!" murmured Hart, emerging from his hiding-place. "Names of two Doges, dead centuries ago. The names must form a password! But to what? The man ahead of Torello and Aïda evidently used it, too. There must be a meeting or rendezvous of The Ten's agents in that dilapidated-looking old hovel."

A wild, insanely rash impulse seized and mastered the American. His curiosity and his newspaper instinct swept away every trace of sanity or good judgment.

Resolutely he approached the door and struck it twice with his clenched fist—first on the upper, then on the lower panel.

(To be continued.)

WHEN SHORTY INTERFERED.

BY ANNA STEESE RICHARDSON.

The advertising man's guardian angel and how he waved the green flag of warning.

"HOW is Cartwright doing?" inquired James Graham, president of the Graham-McKean Newspaper League, as he lighted a fresh cigar and leaned back in the most comfortable chair the business office of *The Planet* afforded.

"Rotten," was the terse reply of Kingsley, business manager of *The Planet*, which had been established recently in Omaha and which promised to become one of the league's most profitable properties.

"Wh-what's that?" thundered "the old man," as he was popularly known throughout the offices of the Graham-McKean League.

He sat up very straight and allowed his cigar to go out.

"Why, a likelier cub we never ground out at the Cleveland offices! I thought he was just the chap to make things hum in the advertising line for you fellows down here."

"Oh, he did very well for about ten weeks, then he went bad. Girl in the case."

"Nice girl?" inquired "the old man," as if sparring for time in which to recover from the shock.

"Well, rather," answered Kingsley dryly. "Judge Crump's only daughter."

The president of the league leaned back in his chair and roared with laughter.

"Bet the boy wins her out—and her grumpy old father, too. By Jove, the nerve of him! And it was just that cool nerve, combined with a certain 'win-or-die' method of going at things, that made me think he was just the right man for this office. A newspaper needs an advertising man with something more than mere nerve—a hang-on-by-the-throat chap, you know."

"That's all very well," said Kingsley testily, "but he can't win both the girl and big advertising contracts for this paper. One or the other is bound to suffer—and just now it is *The Planet*. There's a big contract hanging fire with the Fair people—a new firm opening up with all the latest wrinkles in bargain sales to exploit. We want half a page from them for the evening edition and a full page for the Sunday, and we'd get it, too, if Cartwright would cut out lunch and pink tea dates with Miss Crump—and get down to business."

"The old man" looked grave.

"Well, if it has come to that pass we will have to take a hand in the game. I'll have a talk with the boy in the morning, and, by Jove, if he lets this Fair contract slide through his fingers for a girl—he'll have to be 'broken,' that's all. It will be a Los Angeles or Salt Lake sheet for him, as a lesson in business ethics."

The two men turned their attention to other matters and dismissed Cartwright, the delinquent, from their minds.

Not so the only other figure in the big office.

This was a thin, sharp-featured lad of thirteen, bending over a box on the other side of the partition which separated the business offices proper from the circulation department. Evidently the box had been serving as a table. It was placed where the full strength of the single gas-jet fell upon it, and scattered over its rough top were books, sheets of copy paper and stubby pencils.

Up to the time Cartwright's name had been mentioned on the other side of the partition the sharp-featured boy had worked scowlingly over the task of computing interminable columns in compound interest.

Not that he had any compunctions about eavesdropping, but he felt no particular interest in office politics or

in the big man in the adjoining office who came around once in so often to make sure that the league was drawing its full share of profits from *The Planet*.

But in Cartwright he felt a vital, an abiding, an alert interest, so as Graham and Kingsley drew on their overcoats and passed through the great front door, the lad sat with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his shrewd mind turning over and over the conversation which he had just overheard.

Shorty Donovan was the mascot of *The Planet* offices. He had been the first "newsy" to grab copies of the first edition of the sheet, and he had beaten all his fellows to the nearest corner, yelling like mad.

The head of the circulation department, who had started as a newsboy, had become interested in Shorty, and when he had found that the boy had neither parents nor guardian, and just "lived 'round any old place," he had seen to it that Shorty was adopted with due ceremony by the entire staff of *The Planet*.

Shorty had accepted gratefully the invitation to sleep in the bunk provided for him in the steam-heated circulation-room, but he had viewed with suspicion certain appliances, including half a dozen new towels, a nail brush and a cake of soap which the typewriter from the front office had informed him were placed in the cabinet over the wash-stand for his especial use.

The business manager had given him a new suit of clothes on condition that he attend night school three evenings in each week. The young lady who "did" society and women's clubs had stopped one day on her way home to present him with some very nice underwear, which he considered highly unnecessary, and the suggestion that she would allow him twenty-five cents a week with which to take a bath at the barber shop around the corner.

The exchange editor had contributed a brand new pair of shoes and the advice that a boy who expected to succeed in life ought to learn to clean his teeth. Shorty had just about decided to cut it all and go back to hogsheads filled with straw, which always stood in the rear of a certain chinaware store, when Cartwright had loomed upon his horizon—and for Cartwright's sake he had stayed and washed and taken a weekly bath, and finally bought a tooth-brush.

Cartwright had given him a number of neckties for which the well-dressed young advertising man had felt no further use, and instead of good advice he had given his promise that tickets for the vaudeville house would be forthcoming each week, adding the suggestion that "Peg" White, who had stolen two of Shorty's customers one day while the latter was doing special errand duty for the business manager, stood in line for the licking of his life.

Since that auspicious day the supply of neckties had grown until Shorty had been obliged to "swipe" an empty shirt box to keep them in good shape, and the weekly visit to the vaudeville theater had never failed.

Hence, anything that affected Cartwright interested Shorty, and the thought that his idol might be removed to another paper in the league's chain struck the lad's soul with dismay.

First, he would miss the off-hand good humor and ready sympathy of the young advertising man. Then there was the girl!

In a vague way Shorty realized that the girl meant more to Robert Cartwright than everything else in the world combined. For one long evening Shorty had studied that girl as she sat between her father and Cartwright in a box at the theater.

Shorty had been located in the front row of the gallery, but he had said to himself that he needed neither "op'ry glasses" nor a closer inspection to "spot" the girl as a "queen."

To-night the two were at the theater again. Shorty knew, because Cartwright had sent him to the box-office for the tickets. And after the play they would go to a certain restaurant, where big plants stood around the door and the candle shades glowed redly.

Shorty glanced up at the office clock. In ten minutes the curtain would fall. There was not an instant to waste.

He polished his shoes with a piece of

waste, washed and rubbed his face until it glowed, jerked a clean shirt over his close cropped head—and then hesitated.

The shirt box filled with neckties in various stages of semi-dilapidation presented a momentous question. In the evening Mr. Cartwright always wore what Shorty considered a very cheap tie of white wash stuff, but he had neglected to include this sort in his protégé's equipment, so Shorty fell back on a silk tie of Alice blue as the least somber of the lot, and with many screwings and mouthings of his sharp, sallow face, he tied it into what he considered a knot worthy of such a great occasion.

Then dusting his derby (a gift from the sporting editor) with the underside of his coat-sleeve, he turned down the gas and slipped out into the blustry blackness of the night.

"Bobby, do look at that funny boy sticking his head into the door every time any one comes in. I do believe he is trying to attract your attention. Oh, just see, the head waiter is driving him away."

By the time young Cartwright had swung around at the table, the head waiter had flung Shorty, scowling and muttering, into outer darkness, but the boy managed to make one frantic signal to his idol.

"By George, that's Shorty. Must be something wrong at the office if he's looking me up. Would you mind——"

"Certainly not. Do go and see what he wants. I remember now that he was the boy who watched you instead of the stage at the theater the other night."

Cartwright had risen and was reaching for his hat. Miss Crump flung him a mischievous glance.

"Oh, do bring him in here and give him a real after-theater supper. It would be such a lark."

Cartwright hesitated.

"What would people say?"

"Oh, they would think it just one of your funny stunts. Do, please! Send the head waiter for him. It will teach the disagreeable old thing a lesson."

So it happened that Shorty, with widening eyes, but no other sign of perturbation, suddenly found himself sitting beside Cartwright's "queen."

Some one tugged at his hat and he tugged back. Looking up, he met the supercilious stare of a waiter.

"I'll keep me lid," said the boy shortly, and suiting the action to the word, he slid his precious derby under his chair.

"The queen" was saying something to him in a voice which, despite his embarrassment, he compared mentally to "peaches an' cream goin' down."

"Yes'm," he replied mechanically, and then he looked imploringly at Cartwright.

This was not fair. Here he was, trying to save his idol's job, and said idol was placing him in a position so uncomfortable and unexpected that Shorty felt the very chair sliding out from under him and the ceiling closing down upon him.

The soft, "peachy" voice at his right was rippling on again.

"Yes'm," he replied, and reached for his hat in a wild desire to flee the scene.

"Miss Crump is asking you what you'd like for supper, Shorty," explained Cartwright, his eyes dancing.

"Me? Supper?" gasped Shorty, and his grip on his hat loosened. "Say, I jes' come to tell you——"

"And now that you're here, what shall it be?"

"Oh," replied Shorty, looking helplessly at the red shades, "beans an'—or steak with French fries——"

Here his knowledge of delicacies failed him.

"How would some fried oysters strike you?" suggested Cartwright, "and the French fries and some cold slaw?"

"Gee!" almost shouted Shorty.

Then he caught the gleam of laughter in "the queen's" eyes, and jerked the knot in his Alice-blue tie until it almost choked him.

When the waiter had taken Cartwright's order trouble broke out afresh for the unhappy youth.

"And now, Shorty, what's wrong at the office?"

"De ol' man's here," said Shorty, looking very hard at the red shades.

"Oh, is that all?" said Cartwright lightly.

"Naw, it ain't all, an' you kin bet yer everlastin' life——"

Shorty's glance roved from the red shades to a slim white hand on which three or four rings sparkled. It rested on the table so close that he could touch it with his elbow. It was a pretty hand and he wondered if Cartwright had bought one of the "shiners."

"Well, go on. The paper isn't going to shut down to-night, is it?" inquired Cartwright chaffingly.

The boy looked at him in dumb misery. This was worse than he had dreamed. Why couldn't Cartwright come out like a man and talk it over on the sidewalk?

"No, it ain't, but——"

Shorty swallowed something round and hard that had risen in his throat and reached for his hat again. He would rather forego the joys of real oysters and French fries and cold slaw than endure this inquisition a moment longer.

The hand with the sparkling jewels was withdrawn from proximity to his elbow, and the "peachy" tones floated over the table to Cartwright so softly that Shorty could not hear just what she said.

"I think, Bobby, that if you had to talk to some one at the telephone right away, and used about two calls, don't you know, I might do something."

Cartwright gave her an adoring glance. Her gentle femininity had been Helen Crump's chief attraction to this self-made young man, and when she adopted this tone he could refuse her nothing.

To Shorty he flung an "Excuse me, old chap; back in a minute," and then the bewildered boy watched him disappear in the direction of the men's café.

"That is a very pretty tie you have on, Shorty."

"Yes'm, *he* give me this."

"You are very fond of Mr. Cartwright?" were the girl's next words.

Shorty twisted his legs tightly about the rounds of the chair, and raised his eyes to her face.

"You bet. Say, he's white clear through. Why, ef I had a pape of me own——"

"Well, why don't you tell me what the trouble is at the office? Sometimes, you know, we women understand such things."

If she had asked Shorty to knock down the offensive head waiter, he would have essayed the task without hesitation. Another individual had passed into Shorty's personal pronoun class. Hereafter "the queen" would be "she" to the boy, as Cartwright had always been "he."

"De ol' man says ef he don't get that Fair contract to-morrow, it's out to Utah or Californy fer him."

"The Fair contract?" echoed the girl wonderingly.

"Yes'm—de page ad outen de new store on Sixteent' Street."

"Well, why cannot he get it? Can you tell him how?"

Shorty looked straight into her eyes. They were nice eyes, and now they were not laughing, but they looked grave and troubled.

"You're on de square, ain't you?"

The girl nodded.

"An' I'm tellin' you how it is, see? De ol' man says as how *he* can't chase petticoats an' pink teas an' wiolets an' the-ay-ters, an' get de ads, too, an' now it's de ads or de gran' bounce West, see?"

"Petticoats? What do you mean by chasing petticoats, Shorty?" inquired the girl, a faint glimmer of amusement in her eyes.

"Petticoats is goils, see? But you ain't no petticoat—you're a queen, take it from me."

"Does—does Mr. Cartwright chase many—many petticoats, Shorty?" she inquired in a tone which the boy had never before heard her use.

It had a tiny ripple of laughter in it, and yet there was something very like a tear, an anxious tear there, too.

"Naw," was the prompt and scornful reply, "but didn't he take you out fer lunch to-day, an' drive wit' you to de country club dis afternoon, an' to de the-ay-ter? How'se goin' to get ads, I want t' know? Do youse want him bounced to Los Angeles?"

"Mercy, no," replied the girl impul-

sively, and then she flushed in a way that made Shorty's eyes open wider than ever.

Never had he seen a girl who could look so many different ways in such a bewilderingly short space of time.

After that came silence for a full minute, then Shorty heaved a mighty sigh. *She* was so quiet that he decided he had made another mistake.

"Guess I'll mosey 'long. I hadn't oughter butt in."

The pretty white hand with its sparkling rings rested just a few seconds on his arm.

"Oh, no; you must stay for supper. But if I were you, I would not tell Mr. Cartwright about this—until—until to-morrow."

"All right: jes' as you say," replied Shorty, reseating himself for the third time, just as Cartwright strolled back.

After all, it was not such a bad evening for Shorty. It was somehow borne in upon him that *she* would straighten the matter out.

To be sure, Cartwright might get sore and withhold both the neckties and the theater tickets, but one must sacrifice something to save a friend. So Shorty ate his real oysters and French fries and slaw in philosophic happiness, and incidentally watched Miss Crump picking daintily at some creamy white stuff in red paper cases that matched the candle shades, while Cartwright, curious but happy, watched the girl and wondered why she kept her eyes on her plate.

Shorty held open the carriage door, while Cartwright helped Miss Crump across the sidewalk, now a glare of frozen sleet.

The girl paused at the door and gave Shorty her hand.

"Good night, Shorty—and thank you!"

The boy walked away slowly, turning his hand this way and that as if expecting to see this useful member transformed by the magic of its brief contact with hers.

A gust of wind tossed the Alice-blue tie into his face, and he ducked into a friendly alley which ran straight to the back door of *The Planet* offices.

In the Crump carriage an odd quiet prevailed. For once, speech failed the light-hearted, quick-tongued Cartwright.

He felt that the air of the cozy coupé was charged with something more vital than the perfume of the violets which the girl was fingering nervously. For lack of something better, he was just about to remark that the weather had changed suddenly, when the girl broke the silence.

"Bobby."

Her voice was a trifle tense.

"Funny little chap, isn't he?" interrupted Cartwright volubly.

Why had he not thought of Shorty before, as a topic of conversation?

"Bobby," persisted the girl in a voice that had turned appealing. Or was the note one of embarrassment?

"If you really meant—what you said the other night, don't you think it is about time we—we were more business-like? Don't you think you ought to spend less time—amusing me—and more time working for me—for us—for our future, I mean? I never realized until to-night—that—that I had been playing with you like a child—and I'm a woman."

"Helen, dear girl, do you mean this?"

He was groping for her hands and his voice had broken strangely.

The girl raised her eyes to his. It was a pity that Shorty, sitting disconsolately on the edge of his bunk in the circulation-room of *The Planet*, could not have seen what followed.

It was five the next afternoon before Shorty caught a glimpse of *him*. The boy was calling the first sporting extra on a windy corner when the familiar figure swung toward him.

Cartwright's hand came down on the boy's shoulder and Shorty dug his toes into a mound of half-frozen slush.

It was coming—the caution not to butt in again.

"Shorty." There was the old ring in his idol's voice. "Shorty, I thought you'd like to know I just closed a big contract with the Fair people."

The boy looked up, but something in Cartwright's face paralyzed Shorty's ready tongue.

"I thought, Shorty, you would like to know it first—even before I telephoned the news to—her."

And then he was gone.

Shorty, standing stock still, was suffering with an emotion and an ailment which had never beset him before. A most annoying blurr had come before his eyes and some organ of whose existence he had never known was pumping and climbing up, up, into his very throat.

"Golly, but ain't *she* the queen? She done it all right," was all he said, when his normal powers of speech had been restored.

THE RAVENS OF THE RHINE.*

BY F. K. SCRIBNER.

A war-time story of France in the year of the Prussian invasion, and of the tight corner an American non-combatant elected to occupy.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

JOHN BOSWORTH, American, leaves Heidelberg, where he is a student, at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. He arrives at the château of the Marquis de Luynes, across the French border, just in time to assist the marquis against a band of *Franc-Tireurs*, who have come to loot the château, on the pretext that Bosworth is a Prussian spy in his protection. The marquis is killed, but his daughter, Heloise, and Bosworth are saved by the arrival of a band of Uhlans, among whom is Von Werner, a student friend of Bosworth's.

The following morning the château is again attacked by French regulars, but Bosworth, in disguise, escapes with the Uhlans. A sharp battle is fought, after which Captain de Luynes, Heloise's brother, is brought as a prisoner to the camp. Bosworth learns that she had joined her brother in Sedan. The captain is anxious for her safety on account of an enmity between him and Le Bête, the leader of the *Franc-Tireurs*. Bosworth promises his protection and after a perilous journey reaches the outskirts of Sedan the following morning. Possessed of the name and uniform of a French soldier he makes his way into the French lines until halted by an officer.

CHAPTER X.

STRAIGHT TO SEDAN!

"WHAT are you doing here, and why are you not with your regiment?" the officer demanded.

For a moment Bosworth was nonplussed for an answer, but he realized that to hesitate might result in serious consequences.

Touching his cap, he replied:

"I have been detailed to the hospital corps, sir, and——"

"And your regiment?" demanded the officer sharply.

"Fourth of the Guard," answered Bosworth boldly.

One of the riders, who accompanied the first, and who was evidently an aide, said something in a low voice. The officer nodded.

"You know something of surgery?" said he sharply.

Bosworth was surprised, almost into betraying himself. How could this gray-haired Frenchman, who was an utter stranger, know his profession? By an effort he mastered his astonishment, and replied in the affirmative.

"Well, I hope there is no mistake, for there will be plenty to do before sunset. You may report at once," jerked out the officer, and touched his mount with the spur.

Bosworth had no idea to whom he was to report, but he began to understand that he had blundered on to an excellent piece of fortune.

It seemed some one was expected to report to some hospital corps in the field: some one who had been selected from the fourth regiment of the Guard. His reply to the officer's first question, a reply given in a moment of desperation, had been satisfactory beyond his wildest expectation.

**This story began in the January issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of* 20 *cents.*

The officer and one of his aides were already some distance off, but the second aide was busy with a loosened strap. Bosworth looked up at him.

"Can you tell me where the hospital staff is at this moment? In this infernal tumult I have been unable to place it," he said easily.

"Back there," replied the aide, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "Let me tell you, it's lucky you didn't ask General Bassoigne that question; you'd have got something worse than a spell among the litters."

He spurred after his companions, leaving Bosworth to gaze at the receding gold-braided cap which covered the head of the French commander.

A chill crept along his spine. What if he had given an unsatisfactory answer when asked why he was not with his regiment?

He turned and followed the direction indicated by the aide, for he proposed to unite himself with the hospital corps until a favorable opportunity presented itself to push on through the French lines. It might be unwise to risk too many challenges just then: a little later, when the Germans gave the soldiers around him something to occupy their attention, he could follow his own devices with less danger.

It did not prove an over-difficult task to locate the hospital staff which he was expected to join. Having passed several regiments, he made out the red cross flag flapping in the early morning breeze.

A grizzled old surgeon greeted him with a grunt, which might mean almost anything.

"What do you know about this business, young man?" he asked gruffly. "Any one can shoot a man full of holes, but what you're expected to do is to patch up those same holes. I've asked for an experienced man from each regiment. What do you know about it?"

Bosworth replied that he had had considerable experience with surgery in one way and another.

The old surgeon put half a dozen questions, nodding in approval at each answer. Then he came out with a statement which almost took Bosworth's breath away.

"I've orders to send the first batch of wounded into Sedan, though God knows the city is overcrowded with the poor devils already. You seem to be better up in this business than most of the men who have reported, and I'll detail you to go with the first convoy and lend a hand over there. You won't get any sleep for the next forty-eight hours, I'll warrant."

He bustled off, leaving Bosworth to reflect on the queer turns taken by the wheel of Fate.

Instead of sneaking into Sedan like a criminal, he bid fair to go there in the capacity of an assistant surgeon of the French army, with the red cross badge as his passport.

He understood now why the man whose place he had usurped had found it convenient to take an early morning bath when his regiment was waiting under arms the command to close in with the Prussians. M. André Doury had been detailed to assist in the care of the wounded, so his work was not to begin until after the fighting had started.

It was extremely lucky for him (Bosworth) that M. Doury was addicted to personal cleanliness, else he might at that moment have been sitting in his hiding-place on the bank of the Meuse.

The sullen boom of a cannon rolled through the valley. It was far away from where Bosworth sat, puffing at his pipe on an overturned box, but he knew that presently other and nearer guns would reply.

A second, a third, a fourth deep intonation shook the ground; it was the Prussian cannon, opening the battle from a distant ridge, where the night before had been planted a battery of the long, smooth guns.

The clamor of a drum sounded a little to the left. Looking that way Bosworth saw a regiment of red-legged soldiers shouldering their chassepots; in another moment they had taken up a long, swinging stride and were hurrying forward, across the valley.

A young surgeon, with the red cross badge pinned upon his arm, began to gather up a little bundle. Thrusting it beneath his blouse, he turned to the American.

"There's where my work lies: over yonder where that regiment is going; they'll be in the thick of it in a quarter of an hour," said he coolly, and followed in the wake of the marching men.

Another regiment, a squadron of light horse, then a body of heavy chasseurs, the dim morning sun reflecting from their shining breastplates, swept past, up the valley. The single crashes from the guns changed into a continuous roar.

As yet nothing of the conflict was visible, but an inferno of noises seemed to have broken out just out of range of vision.

The whole plain of the valley became suddenly alive with men, all moving in a common direction; as yet these men wore the uniform of France, but presently others would appear; for the deep booming of the cannon was but the prelude to the descent of the Prussian forces upon the army of the Rhine.

Bosworth began to wonder how soon it would come, and a sort of impatience seized him. He did not stop to think what would be the meaning of longed-for activity on his part; he was only wishing for the moment to arrive when he might continue his journey to Sedan.

He bit savagely upon the stem of his pipe: it seemed as if the tide of battle would never drift that way—the ghastly load be ready for removal from the battlefield.

Then, as if a grim Fate had answered his silent wish, the tumult around him grew greater. Scarcely a quarter of a mile away a battery went tearing over the uneven ground, making straight for the river.

Bosworth turned to a soldier who was standing a little distance off.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"Only to give the Prussians hell: it will be over by the bridge yonder," he answered.

The bridge was scarcely a mile away; from a little elevation near at hand it could be plainly seen.

Bosworth knocked the ashes from his pipe, and moved toward the hill. Presently he reached the top, already crowded, and looked in the direction of the bridge.

The battery was half-way there; the bank of the river was black with soldiers. Everywhere red-legged men were running, fixing their bayonets as they ran. Several men on horseback were dashing about, issuing orders.

Bosworth looked beyond the bridge, across to the other side of the river. There were masses of men there too: drawn up in line. These had their backs to the bridge and seemed to be waiting.

A mist had settled over the more distant part of the valley: a mist which seemed to exude from the pale, watery sky. Suddenly from out of this drifting vapor burst a dark mass: a body of horsemen, which swept straight toward the waiting Frenchmen.

Bosworth's heart gave a great bound, for he recognized the daring riders. The Ravens of the Rhine—perhaps even Von Werner and the men with whom he had ridden and eaten not many hours before.

A line of fire swept along the front of the first French line; a cloud of white smoke united with the mist and blotted out everything beyond the further end of the bridge: the crash of the musketry rolled back across the hill.

The battery had reached the bridge and the drivers were pushing their horses among the mass of men. Bosworth saw them wheel the guns into position, and the artillerymen take their places.

Scarcely had this happened when a mob of frenzied, red-legged troopers broke from out of the mist and crowded the further bank of the river. Behind them tore a compact line of Uhlans—thrusting with lances, striking with naked sabers; straight up, to the seething mouth of the bridge.

Suddenly the latter seemed to be on fire. A sheet of flame, bursting forth, swept from parapet to parapet. The entire structure, the swaying mass of men, the charging, crowding riders were hidden by a dense volume of whirling smoke.

And from out of this smoke rolled across the valley of the Meuse a terrible discharge.

After a little the sound of cheering reached the ears of those upon the hill. The smoke, drifting upward, revealed what had happened. The discharge of the battery had checked the onrush of the Prussians, and the Uhlans were sullenly retreating.

Bosworth turned and retraced his steps down the hill, to the spot above which fluttered the red cross flag. He knew that his work was about to begin.

All about him were signs of grim preparation. The surgeons and assistants had removed their coats and waited with arms bared to the elbow. Certain ones were laying out rolls and strips of white cloth; others arranged carefully pieces of oilcloth across the tops of long, low tables; a few examined critically shining instruments, which they removed from little cases.

Bosworth removed his jacket and laid it upon the ground. One might have imagined that he was preparing to take his part in some familiar game: that those around him were waiting their turn, with bared, muscular arms.

Only, unlike the preparation for a game, an ominous silence brooded over the players; save now and then a low-spoken word, nothing was heard from the little group under the fluttering flag.

Presently, from the direction of the bridge, appeared men carrying between them inert bodies, or things which writhed and moaned as the bearers stumbled over the uneven ground. These burden carriers increased rapidly, deposited what they bore upon the grass and returned to the bridge again.

Bosworth went to one of the little black cases, selected what he desired, and approached an oilcloth covered table. The old surgeon, who was standing near by, watched him silently; then he nodded, and moved on to another table.

All along the course of the Meuse the din and thunder of gigantic conflict filled the valley, but Bosworth, working silently, scarcely noticed what was taking place around him. From somewhere several straw-filled carts approached the grim workers, and into these were lifted those who had lain upon the tables. As each cart was filled it moved away and halted that those behind might form a line. On the flanks of these carts cavalrymen took their places; sitting motionless in the saddle and looking down at those who lay on the straw.

The old surgeon touched Bosworth on the shoulder.

"The first convoy is ready; you are to make straight for Sedan, monsieur," said he.

Bosworth laid down the instrument which he held in his hand.

For three hours he had labored incessantly; at times he had almost forgotten how it was that he came to be among the red cross workers in the valley of the Meuse. The words of the old surgeon recalled him to his errand; the surgeon, zealous in his chosen work, became the man once more.

He replaced his jacket, and looked in the direction of the wagons.

"Straight for Sedan!" he repeated.

"Such are my orders," said the old Frenchman; "you will see that the wounded under your charge are bestowed in as comfortable quarters as can be obtained. You will find the city crowded: a hell of tumult and misery, but you must do your best when you reach there."

An officer of cavalry rode up.

"The wagons are ready," said he.

"*Nom de diable!*" cried the surgeon. "I had forgotten, for my head is filled with many things. Monsieur here has no horse: do you expect him to walk all the way to Sedan?"

The officer turned in his saddle and beckoned to one of his command.

"Dismount! it is necessary that Monsieur le Chirurgien takes your horse; you may remain here and make yourself useful," ordered he sharply.

Bosworth climbed into the empty saddle. He could almost have smiled at the queer freaks Fate sometimes delighted in playing. He had hoped, at the best, to reach Sedan with a whole skin; now he was to ride thither at the side of a French officer.

The latter had pushed his horse to the head of the convoy of carts, and the first was already in motion when excited voices behind drew Bosworth's attention.

A little way off several soldiers and a few of the surgeons were gathered around some one who had come out of the zone of smoke and conflict. The newcomer was gesticulating violently, and appeared to be trying to explain something.

A queer sensation shot down Bosworth's spine. From his elevation he could plainly see the person who was creating the commotion—a man clad in the garments of a civilian. It was M. André Doury.

At that moment the American would have given all he possessed to be anywhere but on the back of the trooper's horse. To him it appeared that he towered above the entire French army: a single figure, set on a high place, that the man whom he had robbed of his clothes and his mission might single him out.

Then the self-panic subsided, for he remembered that Doury had never even seen him; the fellow had been choked into unconsciousness while his head was under water. Yet that particular locality might at any moment become uncomfortable, and Bosworth edged his horse toward the head of the column.

Behind, the loud words of the excited sub-officer of the guard arose above the noise made by the creaking of the carts.

"*Mort du diable!* and you doubt what I am telling you. *Mon Dieu!* it was a Prussian spy who has stolen my uniform that he might move among you undetected; if you do not believe me——"

Something broke in upon his speech: something which Bosworth had heard frequently during the past two hours, but never quite so near: the shrill screaming noise made by a shell in full flight, passing above one's head.

The Prussian battery beyond the river had got the range of that portion of the field where was situated the hospital corps.

An angry voice followed the noise made by the passing shell.

"Go to the devil with your tale about a Prussian spy; fright has turned your brain, *mon ami.*"

Some of the soldiers laughed. It is probable that more than one took the infuriated M. Doury for a newspaper correspondent from Paris, who was getting his first taste of whistling lead and iron. One of the surgeons interposed.

"Save your story for another time and place: can't you see there is enough here to attend to without having a fool push in and raise the devil of a row. You are only in the way; go to the Prussians—they are over there."

The last of the carts was in motion: carrying its load of groaning men. Bosworth looked back at M. Doury, gesticulating fiercely. Then, all in a moment, he saw something else.

A shell from one of the distant Prussian guns struck just beyond the edge of the circle of which the sub-officer of the Guard was the center. There was a flash of fire, a deafening report, and the little group was hidden in a cloud of white smoke.

The drivers of the carts pulled up instinctively; the cavalry escort wheeled their horses and sat staring at the spot where the shell had exploded. From half a dozen points soldiers, surgeons, attendants rushed forward toward the writhing mass upon the ground.

The officer in command of the convoy pushed his horse past Bosworth.

"*Mon Dieu!* you saw that? As if the wagons were not crowded already," he cried, and flung himself from the saddle.

Bosworth, the perspiration bathing his body, slid to the ground. Fifty feet farther and the shell must have exploded right among the carts and their helpless burdens.

The officer, who had pushed his way into the group about the fatal spot, returned.

"Six have been killed outright, and three or four will be dead in five minutes," said he grimly.

"But surely," began Bosworth, "there are some——"

"Yes! five more poor devils, to fill up the vacant corners in the carts. It's time we got out of here: another shell may finish the business."

Bosworth went slowly forward and looked over the shoulder of a cursing soldier of the line. Where the shell had exploded the ground had been torn dreadfully; eager hands were lifting the wounded from among the dead.

The second to be laid upon the ground was M. Doury. His face was covered with blood. Where the right arm had been was nothing—only a few shreds of cloth, near the shoulder.

The surgeon who was dressing the wound looked up.

"He can go in one of the wagons, but you'll have to keep your eye on him all the way to Sedan; if the bandage slips he'll bleed to death in five minutes," said he.

Bosworth nodded. It seemed Fate was playing queer pranks that day. The man whose place he had usurped would owe his life to his vigilance.

The carts drew slowly away, passing on toward Sedan. From time to time other convoys joined them, until a ghastly procession crept past dust-stained battalions and groups of waiting horse. All along the valley men moved forward or backward, to the music of whistling shells and the roar of the fire-arms. Mile by mile the line of carts and wagons crept onward, with Bosworth riding from one to the other, noting each form which lay huddled on the straw.

Then, late in the afternoon, the journey came suddenly to an end. The long convoy approached a high stone wall, crossed a bridge, and crept through an entrance between two rusty iron gates.

Bosworth, looking ahead, saw a street choked with wagons, horsemen, cursing foot-soldiers; from windows heads appeared and with white faces looked down at the burdens lying on the blood-stained straw.

He slid from the saddle and stretched his cramped limbs. He was in Sedan; somewhere, perhaps near by, behind one of those windows, was Mademoiselle de Luynes.

CHAPTER XI.

CORRALING THE CLUES.

SEDAN was crowded with wounded soldiers and panic-stricken citizens, but quarters were found for the occupants of the wagons which Bosworth had escorted through the valley of the Meuse.

He attended to those whose condition was the most pressing, and, under ordinary circumstances would have snatched a few minutes' repose, but he had not entered Sedan for the purpose of nursing the injured soldiers of the empire. His first desire was to locate the whereabouts of Mademoiselle de Luynes.

The house in which he had found quarters, and in which he had placed some of the wounded, M. André Doury among them, stood some distance from the gate through which the convoy had entered. Descending the flight of steps which led to his chamber, he stepped out upon the street and remained motionless for a few moments, studying the scene before him.

The French army was yet in the field, gallantly combating the hammering of the legions from across the Rhine, but Sedan was already full to overflowing. Bosworth knew, what doubtless two-thirds of the French officers comprehended, that it must only be a matter of hours before the forces of the tottering empire must fall back upon the fortress, there to make a last desperate stand.

The crisis might be postponed for perhaps forty-eight hours, or it might come with the rising of another sun: in any case, no time must be lost in discovering the whereabouts of the girl whom he had risked so much to succor.

One night, during which she had been unprotected, had already passed, and another was close at hand. If Le Bête was watching, he must know that Captain de Luynes had failed to put in an appearance, and Le Bête was not one to let the grass grow under his feet.

Bosworth stopped a passing soldier and inquired if he could direct him to the Place d'Armes.

The Frenchman made a violent gesture.

"*Mon Dieu*, monsieur!" answered he excitedly. "I have been but two hours in this devil's nest and have seen nothing but suffering and white faces. Just now I am looking for a morsel of bread and a drink of pure water; God is my witness, neither is to be had, and I must go to bed supperless."

He passed on, and Bosworth encountered another: an officer of chasseurs, who carried his arm in a sling.

"The Place d'Armes? I have just passed through it; if you are looking for a place to sleep, or something to eat, seek another quarter, my friend," said the cavalryman gruffly.

"I am seeking neither. Can you direct me?" replied Bosworth shortly.

The chasseur pointed down the street.

"This is the Avenue du Collège; five minutes' walk will bring you to the Place d'Armes. You are a stranger in Sedan, monsieur?"

"I came in with a convoy of the wounded, from beyond La Moncelle. I have been here scarcely an hour," Bosworth replied.

"It is an hour too long. I have been here since yesterday. To-morrow! Well—we may expect the Prussians; is that not so?" the officer said grimly.

Bosworth nodded.

"Their pounding is harder than we can bear: only Sedan is left to us," he answered.

The chasseur shrugged his shoulders.

"*Dame!* and how long may we hold it? We have been fighting for two days on empty stomachs. Already the city is in a state of famine, and what will happen when the army pours in? *Mon Dieu!* and we thought to push these Prussian dogs back across the Rhine."

His face darkened and he struck his fist heavily upon the hilt of his saber.

"Is it as bad as that?" Bosworth asked.

"Worse!" cried the Frenchman fiercely. "I see you do your work under the red cross, and you know what is happening to thousands of us. But well, there is going to be an end. We have been betrayed, and half the army know it. To-night Sedan is filled with the groans of the wounded; to-morrow it will be something else you will hear—a mob shouting: '*A bas l'Empereur!*'"

And Mademoiselle de Luynes was in such a place! Bosworth thanked the chasseur and hastened in the direction of the Place d'Armes. It was bad enough in the daylight: what might it be when the city was plunged in darkness?

He had no difficulty in finding the square he sought. Approaching a house he looked up at the number—it was 5.

Hastening on, he counted the houses, one by one, then stopped and looked carefully at a two-storied structure right before him. It was No. 5, Place d'Armes, the house where the captain of chasseurs had said his sister might be found.

Bosworth hesitated. Should he knock boldly at the door and inquire for Mademoiselle de Luynes? The thought that Le Bête might be watching decided him. He went quickly up the three steps, leading from the street, and struck the panel of the door sharply.

A moment's silence followed, then the shuffling of feet sounded inside and he heard a bolt drawn. The door opened a few inches.

"What do you want?" asked a woman's voice.

Bosworth knew that to be too abrupt might cause the door to close again. It might be possible that Captain de Luynes had left orders that should any one inquire for his sister, entrance would be denied. He began by uttering a very commonplace remark.

"Have you room for a lodger, my good woman?"

"This is not an inn, monsieur," replied the French woman coldly.

"But in such a time as this—you see, I have just come in, in charge of a fresh convoy of the wounded: those who have fallen while fighting for France. It may be possible——"

The woman interrupted:

"Are you a surgeon, monsieur?"

"Yes," said Bosworth, speaking the truth.

The door opened wider.

"And you have just come from the valley, where they are fighting?"

"But an hour ago: as I have said—with those that were wounded."

The woman looked searchingly into his face.

"Perhaps monsieur can tell me: perhaps he has heard if Captain de Luynes, of the 40th Chasseurs, is in a bad way?" was her unexpected question.

Bosworth experienced momentary surprise: then he reflected that the question was natural.

De Luynes had doubtless promised to call at the house that morning, but

had failed to do so. Naturally the inmates feared he had been killed or wounded. The conversation had taken a most desired turn.

"When I last saw Captain de Luynes he was not wounded: in fact, he asked me to call, that I might assure the mademoiselle of his safety. You see, it was impossible for him to return to Sedan to-day," he answered easily.

He did not doubt that the woman would wish to convey the news to the girl, who was probably waiting upstairs; that in another moment he would be shown into Mademoiselle de Luynes' presence.

But the other did not move; instead she asked a question.

"When was it monsieur last saw Captain de Luynes? Will you tell me that, monsieur?"

"Not four hours ago: on the field before the Prussian infantry," Bosworth replied, lying deliberately.

"And the captain was unhurt? Do you say that, monsieur?"

"Certainly; have I not told you so?"

The woman's face changed suddenly, and she moved back into the hall. Bosworth was just in time to prevent her slamming the door in his face.

"What do you mean?" demanded he sharply.

He was trying to think what he had said to alarm the woman.

Her answer was certainly unexpected.

"I mean that monsieur is not a good liar—that he did not come from Captain de Luynes. It is the first time such a thing has happened."

Bosworth blocked the door with his foot, and his face flushed angrily.

"Look here," said he sharply, "you are making a mistake. What reason have you to believe that the captain did not direct me here?"

"For the simple reason that over six hours ago Captain de Luynes was seriously wounded and brought into Sedan," said she calmly.

Bosworth stared at her. He began to understand that the lie he had told was bearing bitter fruit, but he did not comprehend what the woman was talking about.

He knew it was impossible that De Luynes had been wounded, unless he had escaped from the Prussians and rejoined his regiment. And that was extremely unlikely.

Suddenly a sickening fear seized him.

"In God's name tell me: is Mademoiselle de Luynes inside?" he asked excitedly.

"And what business is that of yours?" demanded the woman.

Bosworth felt as though he could hurl her out of his way, but mastered his impatience.

"Because," said he, "it is necessary I see mademoiselle at once. I understand your suspicions; you think I am one of those who have been watching this house, and against whom her brother warned you. On the contrary I am here in his place to proffer mademoiselle assistance. Can't you understand?"

His earnestness evidently carried weight, for the hard look left the woman's face.

"What am I to believe?" she asked sharply. "At one moment word comes that the captain is wounded; in the next you appear with a story of having left him unhurt. I tell you there is a lie somewhere."

The sickening fear in Bosworth's heart became a certainty: the woman saw the expression upon his face and understood he was not feigning.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she cried, "is it possible that what monsieur tells me is the truth?"

Bosworth pushed his way across the threshold.

"Mademoiselle?" he demanded hoarsely.

But he did not need to hear the answer; it was an old game, so very old that a child could understand it, but it had duped two women.

"Mademoiselle has gone. In the name of heaven, do not tell me it was a trick, monsieur," she cried.

Bosworth had suddenly grown calm, now that he realized that his fear had became a reality.

"Tell me," said he, "just how it happened. How long has mademoiselle been absent from the house? Perhaps you can understand it is necessary you tell me everything, and that time is precious."

The woman's face wore a frightened look. Suddenly she burst into tears.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she sobbed, "and the captain had warned me so carefully. I knew the danger, for I have watched them prowling about in the garden. Yet it was so natural; how were we to know it was a trick, monsieur?"

Bosworth closed the door behind him.

"Stop crying, and tell me just what happened. I understand a message came for mademoiselle, saying her brother was wounded and that she must go to him. It has been worked before; the story-books are full of just such tricks, but, as you say, it seemed natural—with a great battle raging outside. Who came for her, and how long ago? Tell me everything."

The woman dried her eyes.

"God knows, monsieur, I have been careful," she whined.

"I do not doubt it, but you have told me nothing, and every moment has its value."

"What is there to tell? Only this, monsieur. It was four or five hours ago a note came for the mademoiselle; it told her that her brother was wounded—by a Prussian shell. She to accompany the bearer of the note to the house where Captain de Luynes lay."

"And who brought this note: a man?"

"He was little more than a boy."

"But outside? Did you see no one waiting there? When mademoiselle left the house did no one join her and the messenger?"

"I saw no one, but then I was terribly disturbed. It was only the day before yesterday the captain said to me: 'See that no one is admitted to Mademoiselle de Luynes and I will make it worth your while.' He need not have told me that, for mademoiselle is very dear to me."

"You have known her before—before she came to Sedan?"

"Even before she left the cradle I was in service with the old marquis. Is it likely then, I would willingly see harm come to one who was so dear to him?"

Bosworth believed that the woman was telling the truth; that not wittingly had she taken part in the deception which had been practised upon Mademoiselle de Luynes.

That this deception had proved successful, and the girl lured into the power of Le Bête and those who were in league with him was only too evident. Bosworth saw a difficult task before him; more difficult than he had yet been called upon to face.

It would have been bad enough had Sedan been in its normal condition; but filled, as it was, with wounded and frenzied men, with a tottering army struggling before the walls, and a stern foe pressing it remorsefully back upon the overcrowded city, the task of finding Mademoiselle de Luynes appeared to be almost hopeless.

Yet the more difficult the task appeared the more was he determined to accomplish what he had left the German lines to do. And his first request was to be shown the room which the girl had occupied.

It overlooked a little garden, connected with the Place d'Armes by a narrow gate, cut in a high brick wall which ran at right angles to the square outside. But just then Bosworth gave little attention to these conditions; his first care was to examine the contents of the table, standing at one end of the room.

As he had hoped, his examination bore fruit; for lying there was the note which had summoned mademoiselle from the house.

Bosworth mastered its contents at a glance.

It stated briefly that Captain de Luynes had been wounded by a Prussian shell, and was lying in a critical condition in one of the houses in the city. The writer of the note, who signed himself "M. Armand, a surgeon," requested the girl to accompany the bearer of the message.

It was, indeed, a poor clue to start upon, for it told him no more than he already knew, but Bosworth put the note in his pocket, without a clear idea why he did so. Further examination of the room showed that the girl had left in haste. He turned to the woman.

"And mademoiselle was dressed in what manner?" he asked.

"In black, monsieur; for the marquis, her father. You know how the marquis was murdered, though a brave man tried to save his life. Who would have dreamed——"

Bosworth cut her short abruptly.

"If it should happen that mademoiselle return, do not fail to send me word at once. A line addressed to M. Jean Plantier will reach me."

He gave the number of the house which he shared with the wounded under his immediate charge.

He descended the stairs and stepped out into the Place d'Armes. Where he should begin, what course he must follow, was as blank as the brick wall under which he stood. A feeling of despair almost overmastered him; it was as though he was in the middle of a vast sea, without compass, sail or rudder.

Suddenly he heard an exclamation at his elbow. The woman had descended the steps quickly and darted to his side.

"Monsieur, oh, monsieur!" she whispered excitedly.

Bosworth turned sharply. Her face was flushed and the hand with which she pointed trembled.

"Look, monsieur, there across the square. It is the one who brought the message to mademoiselle!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE CRAB.

THE words came to Bosworth as a reprieve might to a man condemned to die. His gaze followed the direction indicated by the woman's outstretched finger.

Along one side of the Place d'Armes a number of persons were walking—soldiers and civilians.

"Which?" he asked sharply. And then: "Don't point in that manner; the fellow may take alarm."

He did not propose to let so invaluable a clue escape him: next to locating the house to which Mademoiselle de Luynes had gone, the discovery of the person who had brought her the note was what he most desired.

"He is there; walking alone behind the two soldiers who are carrying their arms in a sling. Do you not see him, monsieur?" the woman whispered excitedly.

Bosworth saw the fellow plainly: a slouching figure, unkempt, poorly clad, with the air of one who is about to run away. The gamin of Paris transplanted to Sedan.

"You are sure there is no mistake?" he asked curtly.

"*Mon Dieu*, no!" the woman answered.

The next instant Bosworth was walking across the square, assuming a carelessness he did not feel.

He comprehended fully just how delicate was the task which lay before him. To excite the messenger's alarm by addressing him in too unguarded a manner would prove fatal; and, to follow the fellow, unobserved, would require a care beyond measure.

The French gamin has as many eyes as a fly; by instinct he is ever on the watch; a quick glance in his direction will breed suspicion.

But Bosworth had thought of a way which, if it did not prove successful, could at least do no harm. He desired, first of all, to learn one thing: if the youth before him was a creature of Le Bête's, or if the *Franc-tireur* had only hired him to take the message and conduct Mademoiselle de Luynes to the place where he was waiting for her.

If the former, the greatest caution and tact were necessary; if the latter, he hoped to accomplish something before the day was many hours older.

The messenger was only a few yards in front of him; slouching idly over the pavement, from time to time casting a sharp glance right and left. Bosworth quickened his pace, passed the fellow, and walked on a few feet before him.

When exchanging clothes with M. Doury, he had transferred what money he carried, his pipe and tobacco to the stolen uniform. As he strolled along, a few paces before the watchful gamin, he slipped the brierwood from his pocket and allowed it to drop to the pavement.

As it struck the stones he stopped and turned sharply. As he did so he saw the fellow behind swoop downward

like a hawk. When he straightened himself the pipe was in his hand.

Had Bosworth turned three seconds later the briarwood would have disappeared; but, caught with it in his fingers, the gamin's face became distorted with a grin.

"It is monsieur who has dropped it? *Dame!* it must have been broken had I not caught it as it fell."

He extended the pipe toward its owner.

"*Mort du diable!* and I have carried it through the campaign; not for twenty francs would I have parted from it." Bosworth took the pipe and examined it carefully.

"You have saved it, my good fellow, and that is worth something," he added.

The other grinned. He was perhaps eighteen years of age, with the face of an old man.

"Did monsieur say twenty francs?" he asked brazenly.

Bosworth dropped a silver piece into his palm. The fellow bit it, rubbed it upon his coat sleeve, and dropped it into his pocket.

Bosworth seemed to be hesitating; the gamin eyed him sharply.

"Is it anything that monsieur desires?" he asked.

It was not every officer who gave up a silver piece so easily, and he saw that Bosworth was debating with himself.

"You know Sedan?" asked the latter abruptly.

The grin upon the fellow's face extended.

"*Tiens!* as monsieur knows the whistle of a Prussian bullet. It is possible that monsieur desires to know something?"

"That is just it," replied Bosworth carelessly. "I have been in Sedan scarcely three hours; you see, I am a surgeon, who has come in with a wagon train of wounded. It may be necessary to send messages, to know one locality from another, to save as much time as possible. Even now, I have been obliged to ask my way half a dozen times."

His companion nodded. Bosworth continued:

"I will give five francs a day, with lodging and three meals, to one who can assist me in these matters. It may be possible you know of such a one: some one who is familiar with the city, *mon ami*."

At mention of five francs the gamin's grin broadened; at three meals a day his face assumed the aspect of a gargoyle.

"Is monsieur speaking the truth?" he asked doubtfully.

"And why not?" replied Bosworth carelessly, though inwardly he was terribly excited. "To carry messages and perhaps assist a little with the wounded. If you do not know of such a one, I can seek elsewhere."

"There is no need for that, and if monsieur would say six francs——"

"Five is sufficient; there are many who would take less. It is even possible I may find some soldier who——"

"Monsieur can do no better than permit me to serve him; though I have received as much as five francs for carrying a single message."

"Well, what is your name?" demanded Bosworth, scarcely able to conceal his satisfaction at the course events had taken.

"The Crab," answered the gamin, with a grin.

"And you offer to carry messages? *Mon Dieu!* even the wounded will laugh at that. Will you come with me now? I am quartered in the Avenue du Collège."

The Crab answered with a grin. It was plain that the satisfaction was mutual.

Nothing less than a wall of bayonets would have separated him from a man who offered five francs and three meals a day for running errands. Had the boy but known it, Bosworth would have offered him all the money in his possession rather than let him get out of his sight.

As he walked along he was planning how he might safely broach the subject of the message which had been taken by his companion to Mademoiselle de Luynes. He felt reasonably certain that the Crab was not concerned in Le Bête's plotting; yet, even so, caution was necessary. But it was also necessary to learn something within the next few hours.

Bosworth was racking his brain as, with the Crab at his elbow, he walked along the Avenue du Collège until he came opposite the house he occupied.

Several of the lesser wounded, with head or limb bandaged, were sitting before the door; inside, the whole dwelling was crowded with sufferers. M. André Doury occupied a cot in Bosworth's own room, which in truth was little more than a closet.

The Crab looked at the soldiers before the door, and then at the house.

"Is it here monsieur lives?" he asked abruptly.

"Since a few hours ago. What are you staring at?" Bosworth replied.

The Crab's eyes shifted to the house adjoining.

"Perhaps monsieur has charge of the wounded in there also," he ventured.

"One is enough; and so there are wounded in there. Well, it is not surprising, for they are everywhere," rejoined Bosworth carelessly.

He was wondering just where to begin; hesitated, and put a question.

"I suppose you have done some running about before, *mon garçon*; perhaps even have been among those brought in from the battlefield. Now, I would give something to find a friend of mine; one who was wounded this morning."

The Crab shuffled his feet together.

"It might be possible, monsieur, provided one did not have to search on an empty stomach," quoth he.

Bosworth knew well enough that the larder was limited; there was not sufficient at hand enough for a full meal for three men—only some boxes of crackers, which had been brought in one of the carts. These belonged to the wounded, but it seemed necessary that the Crab should have something. He motioned that he follow him.

They entered the little room which Bosworth occupied. André Doury, lying pallid as a corpse upon his narrow cot, opened his eyes and looked at them.

Bosworth bent down and examined the blood-stained bandages. The Crab watched the operation through half-closed lids.

Bosworth straightened upright, a serious look upon his face.

"Do you know where I could get some brandy? This man is terribly weak from loss of blood; something must be done for him, and that instantly," said he sharply.

For the moment the man had given place to the surgeon again, for he saw the wounded sub-officer was in danger of dying from sheer weakness.

"Is it brandy monsieur desires?" asked the Crab.

"Yes, brandy; surely there is some place in the city where it can be obtained," Bosworth replied.

The Crab scratched his head.

"Such a thing might be procured, even at some risk," he ventured.

"Even a little will be better than nothing, and, see here."

Bosworth pulled a box of the crackers from under his bed, tore off the lid and pointed to the contents.

"For a pint of brandy it is yours. What are you staring at? Don't you understand?" he demanded.

All signs of inertness vanished from the Crab's manner. He bolted through the door, clattered down the stairs, and gained the street in a twinkling.

Bosworth ran to the window, for no sooner had the fellow disappeared than fear seized him that he might not return. For the moment he forgot the wounded man whom he had resolved to save.

Looking from the window, he saw the Crab dart through the lower doorway and turn to the left. He had gone but a few paces when he again turned suddenly, hesitated for a second, and disappeared through the entrance of the adjoining house.

"What the devil is he doing in there?" thought Bosworth.

Then an idea seized him. The Crab had asked if he had charge of the wounded in there also. Evidently the adjoining building was occupied by disabled soldiers, and the Crab reckoned what he sought might be obtained there.

But was it likely those in charge would deliver the precious liquor to a street gamin?

The question was answered suddenly. Even more rapidly than he had entered, the Crab darted again through the adjoining doorway. In one hand he car-

ried a bottle which, even at that distance, Bosworth could see was half filled with an amber liquid.

But it was not this which brought an exclamation to the American's lips, but something which happened, even as the Crab leaped to the pavement and turned in his direction.

A second figure hurled itself through the adjoining doorway and dashed after the flying gamin; a man who was cursing violently and calling upon the Crab to stop.

Bosworth thought he understood the situation. The pursuer was the owner of the brandy, and the Crab had stolen it; though how the latter knew just where to lay his hands on the desired article was a mystery.

The noise made by rapid footsteps dashing up the stairs announced the Crab's approach. The next moment he bolted into the room, slammed the door behind him, and twisted the key in the lock.

Without a word he thrust the bottle of brandy into Bosworth's hand, and, leaning his back against the door, grinned ferociously.

"*Parbleu!* it is not so very difficult, as monsieur observes," he panted.

The sound of other footsteps came from the hallway, then an angry voice from beyond the door. The grin upon the Crab's face broadened, but he kept his eyes intently fixed on the door as though he were trying to measure its strength.

At that moment some one struck heavily against the panel; the noise aroused the half-fainting Doury. With an exclamation of anger Bosworth reached for the key. The Crab pushed his hand away.

"If monsieur desires trouble he will open the door; anyway he will lose the brandy, and I shall receive a beating for having obeyed monsieur's orders," he whined.

A second blow shook the panels of the door.

"A thousand devils! Will you not let me in?" cried the enraged owner of the stolen brandy.

"And who are you? Cease your bawling. Cannot you see the house is filled with wounded?" replied Bosworth sternly.

(To be continued.)

THE VILLAINY OF STOCKTON.

BY BURKE JENKINS.

The desperate expedient of a leading man when confronted by a crisis in his career.

THE theatrical season was nothing short of desperate. The Rialto was thronged with sad-eyed actors flying signals of distress. Not the least conspicuous of these was Stockton, Ben Stockton, the immaculate.

And this was one time, too, when the woe of the actors was equally matched, if not overtopped, by that of the managers. The public, that illusive personality, had proved itself, as it often does, the spoilt child. One by one the toys of comedy, farce, extravaganza, and scenic marvel had been cast aside, and the managers were at their wits' end for a new bauble to hold before the eye blasé.

And so Ben Stockton leaned elbow back to the brass rail before the Hotel Cavilton and slowly selected from among its fellows a cork-tipped Egyptian. The pose, as no one knew better than he, was becoming; and not even his enemies denied that he was handsome.

While he was fingering for a match a slap on the shoulder turned him toward the newcomer, who proved to be none other than Whitfield, of Moss & Whitfield.

"Looking for an engagement, Stockton?" queried the manager.

"If it's in my line, I might consider it," drawled the subtle Ben, suppressing with consummate art the shout of ecstasy. "What is it?"

"Why, Moss and myself are going to try the public with something of the old style. The fact is we've got hold of a play after the old hero-villain-heroine type, pretty much punk it seems to me; but anyway there's a chance in it.

"You see, we kind of imagine maybe the old matinée idol business could be revived, so we thought of you. What do you say? Of course, it all rests with the one part, the handsome hero, so you'd have to play up strong. How about it?"

"What's there in it?" asked Stockton calmly.

"Well, Moss and I thought that two hundred per was enough to start you on until we saw if the thing made good."

Ben grasped the rail behind him for support.

And so the deal was made.

The rehearsals went on apace, and the managers had no cause to complain of their selection of the redoubtable Ben Stockton. The way he could hug that heroine to his throbbing left and square his manly right shoulder villainward left nothing to be desired.

The opening night was booked for a Monday; and, rare occurrence, Moss & Whitfield had even the temerity to whirl it right away on Broadway, without first trying it on the dog.

In further enlightenment of the reader perhaps it would be well to state that Ben Stockton had attended a university in the not-distant past; that is, he had played football. And he had loved it, too. And here's where the complication came in.

During the week before the opening of "His Claim," the new play, Stockton's old football coach had tracked him out.

"Ben," said he, "we're getting up a post-grad match with old Eli. You'll play your old position and we'll buck 'em up strong. Nearly all the old fellows are already in line."

"When's the game?"

"Saturday."

"This Saturday?"

"Yep."

"Not much time for practise, is there?"

"No, not much, but time enough to put up a pretty good scrap with that old line-up, eh, Ben?"

"Well, I should say," warmed Ben.

And the game came off Saturday afternoon. The score held even for the first half.

The second half started with a fierce scrimmage. It was a pretty play, but some one was hurt, for when that wriggling mass of mole-skinned masculinity resolved itself into its component parts, it was found that one part did not rise from *terra firma*, and that part was Stockton, our friend Ben.

Fifteen minutes after he had been borne away for repairs Stockton came to and called lustily for a mirror.

One gaze into the quicksilver sank him back in horror. That face of Apollo was no more. Instead, the physiognomy breathed horror. The face was one to shrink from.

So Stockton fell back, weeping excusable tears, for was not his whole life, his very trade, centered in that handsome face that was no longer his? It was nobody's now: it had vanished.

As he lay that evening in recovery from the shock, Stockton did some thinking. The result of this thinking was a telegram to Templeton, the actor who was to play the villain in "His Claim."

The telegram read:

Come to my quarters. Bring your part. Important. Keep mum. BEN.

And an hour afterward Templeton was announced.

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Templeton when he caught sight of Stockton's face. "What — what has happened, old man?"

Ben explained.

"See here, Temp. I've just got to hang on to this job. But of course I can't with this face."

"Well?"

"Well, did you bring your part in the play?"

"Yes, here it is," answered Templeton, producing a blue-backed manuscript.

"Good. Well, Temp, here's my plan: 'I will a villain be.' Catch the drift of my idea? You'll play my part of hero, I'll play yours of villain; and I

won't need much of a make-up," he added bitterly.

"But, Ben, have you seen Moss & Whitfield about all this?"

"Not much, and I'm not going to. Furthermore, that's why I wired you to keep mum. We've got no more rehearsals till the opening, so I'll keep low. Then at the last minute we'll spring this on them and they won't have time to get anybody else. Won't you do it for me, Temp? You know how hard up I've been until I landed this engagement. We'll make good, and maybe they'll keep us at it. Besides, it's to your advantage, too, for if you succeed, why, you're starred. See? I'll have to be content from this on with such parts as will adapt themselves to this phiz."

"Of course I'll do it, Ben," answered the warm-hearted Templeton. "But I know the thing won't last; for the only thing in the piece was your good looks as hero. As Whitfield says, the play, as a play, is pretty much punk."

"Well, we'll see," said Stockton with a strange smile. "Meanwhile, get word-perfect on that hero part, Temp, and look out for me Monday night, for I'm a villain and no mistake."

In this cheerful mood Templeton left him.

Monday night came. Whitfield, with his eye to the little hole in the curtain, counted the house.

"Good enough," he muttered. "A good deal of paper, to be sure, but enough of the solid to justify hopes.

"Jenks," he added aloud to the stage manager who was passing behind him, "everything ready?"

"Everything and everybody but the most important."

"What d'you mean?"

"Stockton isn't here yet."

"Why, he's usually on time."

"I know it. That's what makes me so uneasy."

At that moment Stockton arrived and they both turned toward him.

"What! Who?" they exclaimed as they caught sight of that face of disfigurement. "What has happened?"

Stockton explained not only his accident, but the arrangement he had made with Templeton.

Their sympathy with Stockton could not outweigh their disgust at this new change, and Whitfield grunted:

"It's a mighty good thing we only engaged the house for a tentative week."

Twelve minutes late, the curtain rose before a distinctly non-committal audience, but when Templeton entered and swung into *Jack Burbank*, the hero, a rustle of programs could be heard through the house as they scanned the *dramatis personæ*.

"That's not Stockton," and "I wonder what's the matter," were heard all over the house.

It would be well if truth would permit otherwise, but it must be admitted that Templeton acted a perfect stick. Things began to look dark.

Then the lights were dimmed as the sun set upon the scene; the shudder music crept to the marrow, and Stockton's cue was given.

Ben's life was in it. He'd lived a lot during those two days since he'd lost his good looks and acquired that face. He realized that he could no longer bask in the sunlight of favor by looks alone.

And he suddenly realized, too, that he had more in him than that. This new part was his; it fitted him.

Like a flash it came over him that he had at last found where his true work lay, and he breathed all the vanished interest of the past years into it.

And the result? Backbones straightened when he sprang from the wings. He was quick, lithe, with all the sinuousness of a snake. He put into the part a new meaning; a new order of villain crept to view; a fresh phase of the dastard; and it was all Ben's.

The interest jumped, of course, to the villain. Though the audience was bewildered by the change of part, it marveled at Stockton's acting.

"It's a trick of the management," said some.

"Marvelous, I never would have believed it the same man that I saw last year in 'Vancely.' What a make-up!"

And so the exclamation went, and the curtain fell only to rise its half way for four times to Stockton's bows; for they called for Stockton, not Templeton.

Whitfield's "punk" play had made good.

Tuesday morning Stockton reached for his paper and, over his rolls and coffee, read the following:

In "His Claim" Messrs. Moss & Whitfield have sprung a trick on us, and Mr. Benjamin Stockton has found himself. A more complete surprise than the really superb performance of Mr. Stockton could hardly be imagined, for, although we have long known him as of the genus matinée idol, never before has he given us any inkling of that other side which the solid population so vigorously applauded and approved last night.

There can be no doubt that Messrs. Moss & Whitfield have seen fit to cinch Mr. Stockton for a long run. In fact, we have been informed that the play is to be moved to the Royal Theater for the rest of the season, as the present playhouse could be secured only for this one week.

Laying down the paper, Ben picked up a new spoon that lay beside his plate and, looking into its shiny bowl at his new face, he smiled.

JIM DEXTER—CATTLEMAN.*

BY WILLIAM WALLACE COOK.

Author of "Rogers of Butte," "The Gold Gleaners," etc.

A story of the plains in which chivalry and trust are pitted against trickery and deceit.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

JIM DEXTER and his ward, Roy Burnham, are the owners of Clearwater Ranch. While Roy is away in the mountains, a bunch of their cattle is rustled by Kalispel, a rival ranch-owner. Dexter presents a bill.

On his way to talk the matter over with Kalispel at Siwash City, Dexter rescues a girl from the attack of a dangerous steer. Her name is Orah Lee, and he finds that she is on her way to his ranch, expecting to find Roy there.

Dexter accompanies her to Siwash City to wait until Burnham returns, and as he does not find Kalispel, goes up to the latter's ranch, where, at the point of a pistol, he collects his money.

He returns to find Roy at the ranch, but has hardly greeted him when the sheriff appears with a warrant for Burnham's arrest. Kalispel's son has been killed, and the money for the pay-roll, which he had with him, stolen. Kalispel suspects Roy, as he and his son had lately quarreled. The sheriff searches the house and finds Kalispel's pay-bags in Dexter's violin case. Roy has escaped. To prevent further pursuit of Burnham, who he is sure is innocent, Dexter confesses that he killed Nate Kalispel. He is easily tripped into acquitting himself at the trial.

Kalispel plans to attack Dexter while he is in the hills hunting for the wild steer "Old Blazes."

Orah and Jim, on their way to the hills, visit the scene of Nate Kalispel's death. The ground is trampled with many hoof-marks. When "Old Blazes" is despatched, his hide is found to be stained with the red paint which Kalispel was bringing to the ranch. Other evidence seems to point to the steer as Nate's murderer.

Returning from the hunt, Dexter receives a bullet from a hidden foe. During his illness Orah cares for him and finds greater proof of Roy's rascality. Dexter's faith in him is unshaken, and upon his recovery he starts to look him up. While in Chicago the Black Maria passes him on the street. In it are two prisoners, one of whom proves to be Roy Burnham.

CHAPTER XVII.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

AFTER the storm, a calm. So with Dexter when he comprehended the uselessness of the outburst into which his overwrought spirit had beguiled him.

Events of the past week, especially of that day, had played havoc with his self-control. It needed but a supreme moment to cause him to throw off all restraint, and that moment had come with the sight of Roy in the Black Maria.

In the police captain's office Dexter got his temper in hand and explained. The unprovoked attack on the officer was the matter that most concerned the captain.

There was nothing of the ruffian in the stalwart, well-dressed and gentle-

**This story began in the December issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.*

manly Westerner. The captain was inclined in his favor from the start.

"I came from the West to find a young man who is very dear to me," said the cattleman, after telling his name, business and place of residence. "I have been a week in the city without so much as getting a trace of his whereabouts. When I suddenly saw him among the criminals in that caged wagon, I forgot myself. I'm sorry for what I did, and if money will make it good, draw on me."

The captain was willing to let bygones be bygones, and to drop the matter. His attention turned to the young man in the Black Maria.

"What is the name of the youth you are trying to find, Mr. Dexter?" he asked.

"Roy Burnham."

"Ah!" exclaimed the captain, in surprise. "We have had word from the chief to look out for a young man of that name. Have you been to headquarters?"

Dexter knew that this was Orah's work, and made the matter clear to the captain.

"Where have they taken the boy?" he asked, on finishing the explanation.

"That whole load went over to the police court for a hearing."

"Then I must go there without delay," said Dexter, on his feet.

"Just a moment," interposed the captain. "Are you quite sure you are not mistaken, Mr. Dexter? It is so easy to confuse faces——"

"I could not possibly have been mistaken."

"There was no one in the wagon by the name of Roy Burnham," and the captain sent for the desk sergeant.

This latter official, on having Roy described to him by Dexter, declared that the young man was one Eddie Fitzgerald, brought in for larceny. The case against him was not very clear, but he had been arrested in company with two notorious "dips," and it was thought that the three were partners.

"He is no thief," averred Dexter stoutly, "and his real name is Burnham and not Fitzgerald."

"The case looks bad for him if he has given a fictitious name," observed the captain. "If you are going over to the police court, Mr. Dexter, I'll walk along with you."

The court was only a few blocks distant. A feeling of disgust shot through the cattleman as he followed his guide into the low-ceiled, foul-smelling room, packed with its lawless offscourings of a great city.

What woful misfortune had betided to bring Roy into such a place as that? Dexter halted and peered about him with a shudder.

"Wait here," said the captain. "I'll go and find out when the young man is to have a hearing."

In a few minutes he was back.

"We are too late," he reported. "Fitzgerald was discharged a quarter of an hour ago. The two who were taken with him were sent up."

Dexter's heart sank, then rose again with hope.

"Roy saw me," he said, "and he knows very well I'd come here after him. He must be waiting for me—let's look and see if we can't find him."

They did not find Roy—in fact, they were told by an officer that he had left hurriedly as soon as he was discharged—but Dexter came face to face with some one else whom he knew.

"Jenkins!" he cried, and hurled himself at the gambler like a tiger.

The astounded blackleg was taken by surprise and overborne.

"Here, here, Dexter," said the captain sharply, pulling the cattleman away from Jenkins, "that won't do. What have you got against the man?"

"I have no means of knowing just how much I am in his debt," answered Dexter, glaring at the gambler. "but I shall find out some time and make full payment."

Jenkins was calmly arranging his disordered coat and tie.

"The Honorable Jim Dexter," said he smoothly, "is known to be a man who always takes care of his obligations, but he is not just now in my debt, whatever he may think to the contrary. It will be easy to get him on the debit side of our account, however."

These observations were general, addressed to the cattleman, the captain and two or three other officers who had

To the Readers of
The Argosy

WE are bringing out another magazine. I want you to get the first number and see what you think of it, and the first number will be on sale at all newsdealers' on February 10th. Don't fail to get a copy. It will interest you and every one to whom you show it. It has vastly more reading in it than there is in any other magazine in the world. If you should like it, and I think you will, you will certainly wish to begin at the beginning the four serial stories that start in this first number.

We are putting out an edition of **Five Hundred Thousand (500,000)** of this first issue. This shows what I think of THE SCRAP BOOK. No such first number of a magazine has ever been issued before in the history of the world—nothing to compare with it.

Read what I have said about it on the following pages. It will give you a good idea of THE SCRAP BOOK. **The price is ten cents (10) a copy or one dollar by the year.**

FRANK A. MUNSEY.

THE SCRAP BOOK.

Vol. I. MARCH, 1906. No. 1.

Something New in Magazine Making.

HE SCRAP BOOK will be the most elastic thing that ever happened, in the way of a magazine—elastic enough to carry anything from a tin whistle to a battleship. This elasticity is just what we should have in magazine-making, but it is precisely what we do not have and cannot have in the conventional magazine, such, for example, as *The Century, Harper's,* MUNSEY'S, and *McClure's.*

A certain standard has grown up for these magazines that gives the editor comparatively little latitude. Custom has decreed that they shall carry nothing but original matter, and that it shall be dignified and tremendously magaziny—so magaziny, in fact, that often it is as juiceless as a dried lemon.

To republish, in successive issues of a magazine of this type, a considerable proportion of the gems of the past, or the best things printed in current publications, or to swing away recklessly from convention in the illustrations and make-up, would be to switch the magazine out of its class and into some other which the public would not accept as standard.

In THE SCRAP BOOK we shall be bounded by no such restrictions, no restrictions of any kind that come within the scope of good journalism. With our average of two hundred pages of reading matter, we shall carry the biggest cargo of real, human-interest reading matter that has ever been carried by any magazine in the wide world.

In size alone it will be from forty to eighty pages larger than the standard magazines, and by reason of the fact that its space is not taken up

by illustrations, and that we use a smaller, though perfectly distinct type, the number of words in THE SCRAP BOOK will be a good deal more than double that contained in these other magazines.

With such a vast amount and such a wide variety of reading, there is something in THE SCRAP BOOK for every human being who knows how to read and cares at all to read. Everything that appeals to the human brain and human heart will come within the compass of THE SCRAP BOOK—fiction, which is the backbone of periodical circulation; biography, review, philosophy, science, art, poetry, wit, humor, pathos, satire, the weird, the mystical—everything that can be classified and everything that cannot be classified. A paragraph, a little bit, a saying, an editorial, a joke, a maxim, an epigram—all these will be comprised in the monthly budget of THE SCRAP BOOK. We are starting off with four good serial stories, and next month another will be added, and then another, so that we can maintain an average of six.

There isn't anything in the world just like THE SCRAP BOOK—nothing, in fact, that compares with it at all. There are review magazines, and small weekly reviews, and there are, or have been, eclectic magazines; but never before has anything been attempted on the scale and magnitude of this magazine. It is an idea on which we have been working for several years, and for which we have been gathering materials. We have bought hundreds and hundreds of scrap books from all over the country, some of them a century old, and are still buying them. From these books we are gathering and classifying an enormous number of gems, and facts and figures, and historical and personal bits that are of rare value.

Furthermore, we have a corps of people ransacking libraries, reading all the current publications, the leading daily papers, and digging out curious and quaint facts and useful facts and figures from reference books, cyclopedias, etc., etc.

This first number is but the beginning of what we have in mind for THE SCRAP BOOK. It is so voluminous in the number of its words, and so varied in its subjects, that in arrangement and matter it necessarily falls short of the perfected magazine at which we are aiming. Our purpose, in a word, is to give the public a greater quantity of first-rate reading, on a wide variety of subjects, than has ever before been presented in any single periodical, and to give this magazine at the lowest possible price.

To the Scotchmen of America

THERE is an article in MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE of great value to you—an article you can not afford not to read. It is on THE SONS OF SCOTLAND IN AMERICA, and is a romance of Scottish brains and Scottish pluck and Scottish achievement. It shows the constructive genius of the race, and the tireless energy and fighting qualities of the race.

The Scots, like the English and the Irish and the Dutch, were basic in our civilization. Five Scotchmen were among the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and of the four members of George Washington's original cabinet, three were of Scotch blood—Alexander Hamilton, Knox, and Randolph. Eight of our Presidents have been of Scottish or Scotch-Irish blood.

A Great Series of Race Articles

This is the second paper in a series of race articles now appearing each month in MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE. The first was on THE JEWS IN AMERICA. The third will be THE GERMANS IN AMERICA. Then follow THE IRISH, THE ENGLISH, THE FRENCH, THE DUTCH, THE CANADIANS, THE SCANDINAVIANS, THE ITALIANS, and finally THE AMERICANS IN AMERICA.

This is a great series of articles which should be read by every one who is of the blood discussed, and every one of any blood at all who is enough of an American to wish to know who is who and what is what. This article on the Scots in America appears in

Munsey's Magazine

For February

Illustrated with 18 portraits of leading Scots in America

It was the romantic Paul Jones, a Scotchman, who founded our navy. It was a Scotchman who founded Princeton University. It was a Scotchman, James Gordon Bennett, who gave us our modern American journalism. And it was Andrew Carnegie, a Scotchman, who first organized our steel industry upon its present colossal scale, and who, beginning his career as a messenger-boy in Pittsburg, became in a short span of life the greatest ironmaster of the world and the second richest man in the world.

The February MUNSEY is one of the finest and most finished numbers in all that goes to make a high-grade magazine that we have ever issued. In the dignity and quality of its contents, in its press-work, including color printing, and in the excellence of the paper on which it is printed, there is no better magazine of the month at any price—none better anywhere.

On all news stands 10 cents; by the year $1.00.

FRANK A. MUNSEY, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York

gathered around. The gambler now turned to Jim directly.

"I take it that you are looking for Burnham, Dexter?" he supplemented.

"Yes," replied Jim. "Do you know anything about him?"

"I got here too late to be in at the hearing, so I don't know where Burnham went after being discharged, but he and I lodge together, and possibly he may have gone directly to our rooms. If you wish, Dexter, I'll take you over there."

Roy fraternizing with this reprobate! Had even taken lodgings with him! Dexter swallowed his indignation and anger, and signified that he was ready to accompany the gambler.

"If I can do anything more for you, Mr. Dexter," said the captain as the cattleman was leaving, "you know where to come."

Jim thanked the officer for his courtesy. A ten minutes' walk brought the cattleman and the gambler to a squalid drinking resort in South Clark Street. Over the saloon were two rooms, reached by a narrow stairway, and here they came to a halt.

"These apartments are humble, Mr. Dexter," said Jenkins, watching his companion covertly, but with the eye of a hawk, "still they are comfortable."

The first of the two rooms contained a table, covered with a green cloth and having a slot cut in its center. There were many chairs, and a reek of stale tobacco smoke hung over everything.

Roy was not there. Dexter passed to a curtained doorway and looked into a rear room containing two beds. This room was also empty, and Dexter faced about disappointedly.

"He's not here," said he.

"He may come at any moment," rejoined the gambler. "Sit down and make yourself at home. Have a cigar?"

Jenkins reached out a weed, but Dexter refused it with a curt gesture.

"I have cigars of my own," said he, "if I care to smoke."

Jenkins smiled, disposed himself at ease in a chair and coolly lighted the cigar himself. Jim likewise took a seat.

"How long have you and Roy been together?" he inquired harshly.

"About a month now."

Motives of policy were actuating the gambler, and he seemed disposed to frankness and amiability. Yet men of his sort are never to be trusted, and Dexter made allowances in that direction.

"Did Roy come East with you?" was the cattleman's next question.

"No."

"Was there any sort of an arrangement between you for meeting here in Chicago?"

"No. Our meeting was an accident, entirely unpremeditated."

"You are at your old trade, I see," and Jim fixed his eyes on the poker table.

"Well, yes. Generally speaking, pickings are better here than they are in Lamark. But the authorities are somewhat more—er—officious. One has to proceed with caution."

Dim conjectures were taking form in Dexter's mind. As they grew his fingers itched more and more to take the oily Jenkins by the throat.

How had Roy fallen under the spell of this blackleg? What devilish arts had Jenkins exercised to bring the boy beneath his unholy influence?

"What has Roy been doing since you met him here and shared your lodgings with him?"

"Keeping shady for the most part. You know his reason for going into retirement, Dexter."

"That was why he changed his name?"

"Yes."

"Why was he herded with jailbirds this morning?"

"That was a mistake, pure and simple. He happened to be——"

Steps were heard on the stairs outside. Jenkins broke off his remark with the words:

"There he comes now, Dexter. He will be here in a moment to speak for himself."

Dexter's heart was heavy. Events that day had gone far to prove Orah's estimate of Roy, but Dexter still hoped that the boy could explain.

With labored breath he waited, listening to the approaching footsteps.

A hand was laid on the knob, then

the door was hurled open and a man stepped into the room. The man was not Roy, but Kalispel, and Kalispel's right hand was under his coat, at his hip.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAKING TERMS WITH KALISPEL.

DEXTER was astounded at this unexpected appearance of Kalispel, and the sight of Dexter seemed no less surprising to the vengeful rancher. The two remained staring at each other in mutual bewilderment.

The first shock passing, Dexter was moved to something akin to pity for the man before him.

Kalispel's face was ashen, the red scar on his forehead burning horribly against the unhealthy pallor. The hatchet features were thinner and more revolting, the eyes peering from their dark hollows like burnished jet.

Desperado though he was, it was evident that his son's death had gripped hard on Kalispel's soul. The man was merely a shadow of himself, albeit an evil shadow.

"Well!" exclaimed the gambler. "You are encountering quite a number of old acquaintances, Dexter. Take your hand from your hip, Kalispel. This is Chicago, not Siwash City."

"Dexter!" ground out Kalispel, but making no move to comply with the gambler's command. "I didn't come here after you, but to find Burnham."

"I came here to find Burnham myself," returned Dexter, "but he is not here."

"Don't lie to me! He's in that other room, and you know it." Kalispel leveled his shaking left forefinger at the curtained doorway.

"Look for yourself," spoke up Jenkins.

Kalispel darted to the curtain. As he stood with his back to the gambler, the latter sprang at him, there followed a brief struggle and Jenkins withdrew with a six-shooter.

Kalispel leaned pantingly in the doorway, sputtering profanely.

"This is the only gun about him," remarked Jenkins. "It's best to take it, for there's no telling what the fool would try to do. Old Kal is a wreck. A ten-year-old boy could handle him now."

"Go down-stairs and get a policeman, Jenkins," said Dexter.

"A policeman?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"That's my business. Do as I say."

"Shall I bring the policeman up here?"

"No. Have him ready in the hallway below. I may not need him; if I do, it is well that he should be within call."

Jenkins hesitated, then got up slowly and went out, laying Kalispel's revolver on the table. Dexter picked up the revolver and turned it on Kalispel.

"Sit down," said he. "This isn't the first time I have looked at you over the point of a gun, and I'm more set on having my way now than I was out at your ranch some months ago. Will you take that chair?"

"Curse you, Dexter!" whimpered Kalispel as he sat down. "I knew you were in Chicago, but I have kept out of your way up till now. I'm saving myself to give that whelp of a Burnham what he deserves and what the law refuses to mete out to him."

"You have reached the end of your trail in that direction."

"Not if you let me live! I have but one ambition in life, and that is to destroy the man who cut off my son."

"You will have to smother that ambition, Kalispel. This harping on revenge is foolish, and you have got to acknowledge that Roy Burnham has been cleared of guilt in the matter of your son's murder."

"Cleared!" ejaculated the old man, choking with fury. "You and your cowboys manufactured the evidence to clear him. I know! You can't tell me."

"That is false, Kalispel," retorted Jim hotly, "and you know it to be false."

"How do I know it to be false?" sneered the other. "Because you tell me so?"

"No, but because you were in the Whiplash Hills and saw Old Blazes killed!"

Every word came like a bullet and the old man stiffened in his chair.

"Another lie!" he cried, coming out from under the baneful spell of the accusation. "I was not in the Whiplash Hills the day Old Blazes was killed. I was at the home ranch—two of my boys have sworn to that."

"Two of your boys have committed perjury, Kalispel. I can put one of your own men on the stand and prove that you were in the Whiplash Hills and that you shot me."

Kalispel tried to speak, choked and moistened his dry lips with his tongue. He was shaking as with an ague. Plainly he was but a shattered wreck of his old self; his iron nerve was gone. Grief had broken him in mind and body.

To menace such a pitiable object with a revolver was little short of cowardly. The instant he realized this, Dexter flung the six-shooter on the table.

With a tremulous cry Kalispel staggered to the table, picked up the weapon with both hands and stood reeling in front of his enemy. Dexter watched him steadily, calmly, making no move to interfere.

"If I ever read death in a man's eyes, Kalispel," said Dexter slowly, "I read it in yours. But it is your own doom, not mine. Give some thought to yourself, man. At such a time as this you should turn from the evil of your past life and not try to blacken your soul with further crime."

Kalispel sank into a chair.

"You were always one too many for me, Jim Dexter," he said huskily. "For years you have been a thorn in my side and could I have had the drop on you from safe ambush any time since our fight in the Legislature I could have pulled trigger and put you out of the way without a qualm of conscience. I'm not what I was, or I'd do it now."

"If you were the same Kalispel I knew on the range," said Dexter, "I should not be trusting you as I am."

"If you know I shot you in the hills," went on Kalispel, "why haven't you had me arrested? I suppose I could be sent to the penitentiary for that."

"I was sorry for you, Kalispel, and——"

"Your sorry!" The old man gave a mocking laugh.

"And I also wanted to use you," finished Dexter. "It was my desire to find Roy Burnham. When your detective ran the boy down I knew you would start on your trail of revenge, then I could follow."

"Well?" returned Kalispel, staring fiercely at Dexter. "Here is the end of the trail and what is to come of it?"

"You are to go back to your ranch," said Dexter.

"Not until I have done the work that brought me East!" flung back the other with morbid insistence.

"And you are to take the first train," proceeded Dexter, with placid assurance.

"The Honorable Jim was always a good hand at bluffing." Something of the old light was smoldering in the rancher's hollow eyes.

"If you do not," warned Dexter, "I shall give you into the hands of the policeman who is waiting down-stairs. It is not yet too late to send you to the penitentiary, Kalispel."

The rancher's weakened will gave way. His hands clenched and unclenched spasmodically as they lay over the revolver on his knee and he fell limply back with his chin on his breast.

"That boy was all I had in the world," he said at last, a plaintive under-note in his voice at strange variance with the harshness of his old nature; "he was a better man than I, and he would have made his mark and redeemed his name. I had made my plans for him, and all I wanted of the Legislature was the power it would have given me to advance them. Nate was brave and honest, true as a die—just a little headstrong, that's all, but he would have outgrown that. I should have lived to be proud of Nate, and to have him struck down as he was has proved a living death for me."

The chin went down on his breast again and Kalispel's eyes stared vacantly at the floor.

In reality, Nate was a young ruffian, always brawling and at odds with some one. He had superb physical strength, but had never been known to use it creditably.

Dexter wondered how Ol Kalispel

could have been so deceived in his son. Had Nate been like Roy, high principled, generous and of good stock, Kalispel could have builded his hopes on a firmer foundation.

Pity for the rancher grew in Dexter's heart. While he knew how to be just, and to stand for his rights, it was impossible for the Honorable Jim to cherish a feeling of animosity against any one.

"I repeat again, Kalispel," said he, "that I am sorry for you. I mean it and I would like to overlook the past and be friends with you. The evidence that cleared Roy was not manufactured by me and I am confident that you know it. Yet, even if the boy were guilty, you are far wide of your trail in attempting to take the law into your own hands. Will you go back to the ranch?"

"I am going back," muttered Kalispel, rising unsteadily and putting the revolver away.

Without another word he started for the door.

"Here," said Dexter, stepping after him and holding out his hand.

Kalispel peered into Dexter's face and turned aside with a bitter laugh.

"I am no friend of yours," he said, with a quivering oath, and went out.

Standing in the doorway, Dexter heard him stumbling down the stairs.

"Have you any use for the officer, Dexter?" called Jenkins from below.

"Not now," Dexter answered.

The gambler hurried up-stairs and found Dexter pacing the room.

"That was not old Kal," commented Jenkins, "just the ghost of him, that's all. Who'd have thought Nate's death could have dragged him down like that?"

Dexter did not reply. After a few moments he halted in front of the gambler.

"I should like to know more about your dealings with Roy, Jenkins," he said sternly; "there may be a story back of those forged due-bills——"

"The I. O. U.'s were not forged," interjected Jenkins.

"They were!" cried Dexter fiercely. "I'm not going to listen to anything more from you. Roy will come and tell me the whole story himself and I shall stay right here until he does come."

"Make yourself comfortable then," said the gambler. "You are welcome to stay."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE JUDGE ARRIVES.

JIM DEXTER haunted Jenkins' rooms for a week, sat out nights in which a roistering crew gambled at the poker table and bore with other incidents that chafed his spirit, all to no purpose. Roy did not return.

Finally the cattleman relinquished hope. Not another question did he put to Jenkins concerning Roy, and when he left requested that if news came the gambler would communicate with him at his hotel.

The months that had passed since Nate Kalispel's murder had brought Roy to his majority and his guardian had no longer any authority over him. There was no estate or legacy of any sort coming to the lad, for his father had died poor; it had been Joe Burnham's desire that Jim should take charge of the boy, treat him as a son and mold his future as it ought to be.

Dexter had endeavored to do his duty. The passing of his legal authority in the premises could not mean the passing of his interest in his ward, for his love and faith were still strong.

The cattleman put in another gloomy week at the hotel, missing sadly the sympathetic presence of Orah and waiting and hoping for news. Still none came.

To ease his mind, Dexter fell back on his old line of argument. Disgraced by even the suspicion of wrong-doing, Roy was continuing to hold himself aloof from his best friend.

To be seen and recognized in the Black Maria was another stigma and the boy had not the heart to come to Dexter. Weak though this reasoning was, the cattleman held to it unwaveringly.

A letter arrived from Orah. Although in New York, she was with Jim in spirit and trusted with all her heart that his search might be successful.

He did not answer the letter. There

was no news to write and he feared that some chance word might betray the real state of his feelings toward the girl.

What if she had divined his budding passion for her? A woman's wit is quick in such things. And what if that had had anything to do with turning her against Roy?

Such thoughts preyed upon him continually. Regret made him misanthropic; it likewise had the indirect result of doubling his hostility against the serpent of doubt.

If he had been lured into unwitting disloyalty to Roy, he would atone for it by an increased devotion to him in the face of his misfortunes.

In this evil time fate brought upon the scene no less a personage than Judge Givins. There was a providence in this for Dexter.

The judge, securing Dexter's address from Haverstraw, had sent two or three letters but had made no mention of a projected trip East. His coming was a surprise, and a pleasant one.

The cattleman was in his room, solacing himself with a cigar and reading messages in the smoke-wreathes. Givins flung open the door and floundered in with a wheezy shout.

"Jim, you old maverick!"

"What!" cried Dexter, starting up. "Why, it's the judge."

"You can't shake me!" And they greeted each other like brothers.

"Gad-hook it, Jim," beamed the judge, rolling into a chair, "it's good for the blues just to set eyes on you. You and I ought to have been born in the same family, although I don't mean to say that such a thing could twine the tendrils of my friendship any more firmly about yourself. I'll be Damon to your Pythias as long as——"

This was the judge's stock quotation. It aroused memories in Dexter, and he hastened to cut short the flowery period.

"What in the world has brought you to Chicago?" he inquired.

"I just got hungry to swap a few words with you," returned the judge diffidently.

"There was something more than that," said Jim, studying his friend's telltale face.

"Now don't get mercenary, James," laughed Givins. "It has been four years since I crossed the Missouri, so I took a notion to travel this way for the holidays."

"What else?" demanded Jim. "You haven't given me the whole of it yet, judge."

"I reckon you've been taking a course in mind-reading," said Givins. "You're not looking well, Jim, honest. Had any luck hunting for Burnham?"

"Not much." Dexter hesitated to tell about the Black Maria incident.

"Yes, you had," said the judge. "I'm something of a mind-reader, too. Don't act like a hired man instead of a friend."

Thereupon Dexter unbosomed himself, the judge listening attentively.

"It was a mistake, of course," said Dexter, when he had finished with the story.

"Yes?" came tentatively from the judge.

"Of course," bristled Jim. "The fact that the police magistrate discharged Roy proves that."

The judge became thoughtful.

"You're close to that call-bell," said he, in a moment; "give it a push, Jim. I want my grip sent up; there's something in it that will interest you."

"Now we're getting at the business end of your Eastern trip," remarked Jim, pressing the electric button. "How long since you struck town, judge?"

"About two hours. Came right here and didn't lose any more time than was necessary to get the dust out of my clothes and have my boots polished."

At that moment the boy arrived and presently the judge had his old-fashioned carpet bag in his hands. Resuming his chair, he took the bag on his knees.

"You heard, didn't you?" he observed, "that Ol Kalispel had crossed the divide?"

"No!" exclaimed Jim. "Ol Kal is gone, is he?"

"Yes; it happened a week ago Monday."

"What was the cause?"

"The killing of Nate was responsible, I think. The old man's health declined until he just naturally flickered

out. Hunt said that grief had killed him, although how any sort of a sentiment could lay such a rough proposition as Kalispel by the heels is more than I can understand."

"You can never tell anything about the kernel by the husk," said Jim, his mind reverting to his last interview with the grim old rancher.

"Generally speaking, no," answered the judge. "When close to his end, Kalispel sent for me and I rode out to his ranch. 'Take this,' he said, pulling something out from under his pillow and handing it to me, 'and give it to Jim Dexter. Tell him I found it in the road near where my boy was killed.'"

"What was it?" queried Dexter, deeply concerned.

The judge opened the carpet bag and took out an object carefully swathed in newspaper. Without speaking, he unwrapped the small parcel.

A quirt was disclosed, the handle eighteen inches long and ornamented with sterling silver trimmings. A nameplate, on one side, bore the letters "R. B." The end of the handle was stained and discolored.

A sharp breath came through Dexter's lips.

"You recognize this, Jim?" asked the judge.

"Yes," was the reply with forced calmness. "I gave it to Roy three years ago."

"I asked Kalispel why he had not produced it as evidence before the coroner's jury, and he said that he was holding it as warrant for his own private vengeance. You know how notional the old man was in some things."

Dexter took the whip and examined it. He even rubbed some of the stain off the silver trimmings with a corner of his handkerchief.

"I don't believe that's paint, Jim, do you?" said the judge.

"No."

"If you're through looking at it, you might give it back to me."

The cattleman returned the quirt and went over to a table and poured himself a glass of water, the judge watching him narrowly.

"Did Kalispel say anything else when he gave you that?" queried Dexter, coming back and standing in front of his friend.

"He said it would explain why he didn't take any stock in that Old Blazes theory of yours."

"What are you going to do with the quirt, judge?"

"Nothing. We'll consider the incident closed."

"For the present, only," qualified Jim. "Roy will yet be heard from."

The judge had nothing to say to this, but the impatient way in which he returned the quirt to the bag and tossed the bag on the floor spoke volumes for his feelings.

"Got any objections to my tagging you around for a spell, Jim?" said he.

"I shall be delighted, judge," answered Dexter, "but I'm afraid I'll make rather a poor companion."

"I'll furnish the animal spirits," chuckled Givins, "and all I ask is your society. Any good shows in town?"

"Can't tell. I'm in no mood for shows."

"Kind of partial to 'em myself. Remember that 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' troop that gave a performance in a tent opposite Lon Dobbins' tavern, in Siwash?"

Jim smiled.

"Couldn't forget that," said he. "Shorty Burke got excited and shot one of the bloodhounds that were chasing Eliza. Got all harrered up, he said afterward, and couldn't stand it."

"Who was it jumped up on the stage to have a round with *Legree?*" rippled the judge.

"That was one of Prender's men. He didn't go much on the colored population, he said, and never did, but he'd be hanged if he'd see a brother human cowhided."

The judge lay back and roared.

"And which one was it that gave way to unrestrained grief when *Eva* died?" he asked, when he had calmed a little.

"That was Brazos Bill," said Dexter.

One reminiscence led to another, the judge artfully beguiling his friend out of the heavy mood in which he had found him. In the end, Dexter agreed to go to a show that night, and they went and enjoyed themselves.

The companionship of a whole-souled fellow like Givins was exactly what the cattleman needed. Several days of the judge brought the brighter side of life prominently before Dexter.

Finally came Jenkins with a letter from Roy, parts of which he read aloud.

Roy had left Chicago for New York, going directly to the train from the police court. He merely wrote to inform Jenkins that he was well.

"The boy is all right, Dexter," said Jenkins. "He had no more to do with the killing of Nate Kalispel than you, or I, or the judge there."

"Have you any objections to letting me read that letter?" asked Dexter.

"Well, yes. Some private matters are mentioned and I think best to keep them to myself."

"Where can Roy be found in New York?"

"He hasn't given any address, but says he will write again when he is permanently located."

"Does he mention me in any way?"

"No."

Dexter walked over to the gambler and stooped to peer into his face.

"Jenkins," said he, "you lie!"

"If that is all the thanks I am to get," snapped Jenkins, springing up and starting for the door, "I'm done with helping you."

He stalked out. With a quieting look at Dexter, the judge followed him. He returned shortly, looking grave and perplexed

"What did you find out, judge?" the cattleman inquired eagerly.

"You had him pat, Jim. He wasn't telling the truth. Burnham gave his address and I secured it. Do you want to go on to New York?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"By first train."

"All right, we'll go."

That night they were on the road.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GHOST OF A MEMORY.

Dexter's search for Roy seemed fated at every turn. The New York address which Givins had secured from Jenkins carried them to a boarding-house where the young man had remained for a time, but he had left suddenly only the day before the cattleman and his friend called.

"Mr. Fitzgerald received a telegram," the landlady said: "it seemed important and he left immediately."

"Jenkins must have sent that telegram," observed Dexter moodily, when he and his friend had reached the street. "He sent it to warn Roy that I was coming."

"And Burnham is still sailing under the name of Fitzgerald," returned the judge. "That looks bad for him."

"He seems to be keeping out of my way," said Dexter.

"Seems like it," commented Givins.

They returned to their hotel, Dexter more cast down than he had been at any time since leaving the West.

"Reckon we'd better begin on the shows," suggested the judge.

"No more shows for me," said the cattleman, resolutely.

"No?" said the judge. "Then I'll cut them out, too."

"Do you believe in heredity, judge?" queried Dexter suddenly, fixing his deep eyes on his companion.

"In other words," responded the judge, readily catching the cattleman's drift, "can a young man come of good stock and yet go wrong? Is that it?"

Dexter nodded.

"I believe he can," proceeded the judge. "I've seen it demonstrated too many times. By the way, didn't you tell me that Miss Lee lives in New York?"

"I do not know whether I told you, or not, but that is the case."

"Suppose we call? I can't begin to tell you how much I admire that girl. She earned my gratitude by the way she took care of you last summer, out at the ranch."

"I'll never forget that," said Dexter, "but——" He hesitated.

"But what?" persisted the judge.

"Well, I don't care to call."

Givins gave him an earnest glance and then picked up a newspaper. Plainly, Dexter wanted to be alone and the judge was undecided whether to go or stay.

"What hold can Jenkins possibly have on Roy?" said Dexter, after a time. "Can you imagine, judge?"

"I can imagine," replied Givins, laying aside the paper, "but I may be a good way from the mark."

"Tell me what you think."

"Before Jenkins' wife died he used to be a respectable hardware merchant in Lamark. His wife had a long siege of sickness and Jenkins' business went to the wall. In order to recoup, he tried the cards, made a success of it and has been a gambler ever since."

"What has that to do with it?" asked Dexter.

"I'm coming to the point, Jim. Jenkins has a daughter, and she disproves your notion of heredity. She is a fine girl and has always been highly spoken of."

"I don't catch your meaning yet, judge."

"Roy was a frequent caller at Jenkins' house, during that time last summer when you thought he was in the mountains——"

"Not another word!" cried Dexter. "You think he would fall in love with this gambler's daughter when—when ——" The cattleman was flushed with anger.

"I thought you'd take it that way, Jim," said the judge.

"You would make Roy out a consummate scoundrel, a man I would scorn to speak to, or even notice. Don't, judge, for God's sake."

Dexter was cut to the heart. The judge got up and went over to him.

"Letty Jenkins is a noble girl, Jim," said he, "and if any one can make a man out of Roy, trust her to do it."

"But Miss Lee—Orah——"

"Possibly Roy was mistaken and did not care for her as he thought he did. Brace up, Jim. Fate usually works out these problems in human life in a way that leaves little to be desired. You were blind to the boy's faults and too indulgent with him, but there is a higher power that looks after these things and corrects our mistakes."

Dexter did not look up, or make any response. After waiting a moment, the judge quietly left the room.

Then followed a long succession of hopeless days for Jim. He became taciturn and resisted ever attempt of the judge that seemed to have the aim of diverting his mind from Roy.

There was one occupation of which Dexter never seemed to tire: He would walk the streets in all sorts of weather, with or without the judge, his keen eyes peering wistfully into the crowds that hurried past him.

The day before Christmas found him and his friend abroad. There had been a fall of snow during the night, but the day was bright and cold.

As Dexter and Givins stood near the curb, in Fifth Avenue, watching the sleighs skim up and down the fashionable drive, a pair of thoroughbreds drew to a halt in front of them.

"Why, Jim! Jim Dexter!" murmured a voice, clear as a bell and throbbing with surprise and pleasure. "I can't be mistaken! Is it possible you have forgotten me, Jim?"

A pair of bright blue eyes were looking at the Westerner and a woman was leaning from a sleigh holding out a gloved hand. Dexter started in surprise.

"Helen—Mrs. Ramsey!" he stammered. "Can it be possible?"

"What a queer meeting for you and me!" The blue eyes flashed dazzlingly. "Have you been long in New York? Yes? And you never came to see me! I dare say you never even gave me a thought. Get in here this minute and explain as we ride. The sleighing is simply delightful. Come, Jim! Oh, it is so good to see you again and I am not going to take 'No' for an answer!"

The judge, astonished beyond expression, had been hovering in the background. Jim now caught his arm and drew him forward.

"Mrs. Ramsey," said he, "my friend, Judge Givins."

"Your most obedient, madam," said the judge, making acknowledgments in his best style. Then, to Jim: "Don't let me interfere, Dexter. I'm for the hotel now, any way. You've tired me out."

"You can spare Jim for an hour, judge?" smiled Mrs. Ramsey. "We are such *old* friends, you know."

"Hardly old friends, madam," the

judge demurred chivalrously, "although your acquaintance may be of long standing. I can spare him for an hour, or a day—as long as you will."

Then he helped the half-reluctant Dexter into the sleigh and stood back and lifted his hat as the thoroughbreds dashed off.

"My, my!" the judge murmured. "Sly dog, my friend Jim! He never said a word to me about *her*. She'll divert his mind, all right, and the ride will do him good."

It was two hours before Jim got back to the hotel. His face was rosy and his gray eyes unusually bright.

"It's up to you, Jim," cried the judge. "Who is she?"

"A ghost from the past, judge," smiled Jim, "merely an awakened memory."

"Was there a romance?"

"Yes."

"Before she became Mrs. Ramsey?"

"Some one has been telling you."

"No, I'm guessing, that's all."

"Her husband has been dead for more than a year," remarked Jim, absently.

"Oh, ho!" said the judge, and looked wise. "If you hang up your stocking to-night you're liable to get something in it."

"Your judicial acumen is shy about two chips, Givins," said Dexter, and pleased the judge with a good, hearty laugh.

"First time on record then, Jim," guffawed the judge. "Weren't looking for such a surprise party, were you?"

"Not at all."

"Carried off your feet?"

"For a moment."

"Pulse ran up, breath grew short, a general feeling of lassitude and——"

"See here, judge," and Dexter said it earnestly, "my heart wasn't overworked in the least. Queer what an eye-opener a reality sometimes proves! As long as I was shut out, I could beat my hands against the door until they bled; now, when the door is flung wide, I am disillusioned and turn away."

Dexter lighted a cigar and adjusted himself for comfort.

"Getting old, I guess," he added.

"Oh, Lord!" muttered the judge. "We're only as old as we feel."

"Then I'm a hundred; but I'm going to be young again all day to-morrow."

"Going to cut loose?" said the judge, startled.

"Yes, and you are going to cut loose with me. All day to-morrow you are to be in my hands."

"Treat me kindly," pleaded the judge; "I have some dignity left and I don't want it impaired."

They smoked their cigars in silence, a jingle of sleigh-bells reaching their ears in muffled harmony. The shadows of evening wrapped them in, relieved only by the gleam of a distant arc light that stole softly in through a window.

"Christmas Eve," murmured the judge, as he cast away the remains of his cigar. "How it carries a man back, Jim. If you were going to get a present to-night, what would you rather have more than anything else in the world?"

"Roy," was the instant answer.

"Good night, Jim, and God bless you!"

The judge's voice was husky and he groped for his friend's hand, pressed it feelingly and went off to bed.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHRISTMAS.

NEXT morning the judge found a red morocco case on his table. The case contained a richly carved meerschaum pipe, and there was a card with the words: "Dear old judge, from Jim. May you load all your troubles into the bowl and whiff them out through the stem."

Dexter found a gold match-case on his table, engraved with the monogram, "J. D." A beveled pasteboard bore the legend: "Dear old Jim, from the Judge. Matches may be made in heaven, but most of the brimstone is scraped off here below. Look well before you leap."

After they had felicitated each other, the two friends went down to breakfast, remembering substantially every employee of the hotel who got in their way.

"Now what?" queried the judge as they came out into the rotunda and fell back on their cigars.

"Wait a minute," said Jim.

Stepping to the desk he spoke a few words to the clerk and that beaming individual took a canvas sack, heavy and jingling, from the safe and laid it on the counter.

"All right," said Jim, picking up the sack. "Come on, judge," he added, when he had reached his friend.

They went out, buttoning their overcoats and drawing on their gloves.

"Where are you going?" asked the judge.

"We'll just drift and scatter coin," answered Jim. "I made arrangements for this yesterday."

They drifted and gave liberally out of the silver in the sack as they went. When a couple of men start out through a crowded city, blazing a trail with halves and quarters, their following is liable to grow beyond peaceable bounds.

So it happened in this instance.

"Hang it, Jim!" cried the judge, elbowing his way through a clamoring rabble of bootblacks, newsboys and beggars, "we'll get mobbed the next thing we know. Cut for it."

They dashed down a side street, raced into an alley, turned at the next block and doubled back. The judge was puffing like a porpoise and Dexter was laughing as gleefully as a schoolboy out on a lark.

"This is the most fun I've had since that 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' show struck Siwash!" he declared.

"Don't make it so strenuous," wheezed the judge; "that is, if you want me to hang on and keep up with you."

"Suppose we try the slums, judge?" suggested Jim.

"All one to me, Jim."

They drifted over on the East Side. Feeling the need of official pointers, they rounded up in the Eldridge Street police station.

"We're here to see the holidays out," said Jim to a sergeant. "Can you head us in the right direction for a little enjoyment?"

"This is the Honorable Jim Dexter, of Siwash City," explained the judge. "He's running wild, officer, and it's best to humor him."

The sergeant started in on a list of the various places of amusement.

"Cut out the theaters, please," spoke up Jim. "If possible, we'd like to get into some of the Christmas games that are going on."

About the only Christmas games the sergeant knew about were the ones that took place in various charitable institutions where poor children received presents of toys and things. Jim thought that would just about suit them and he and the judge were sent to the Bowery Mission, near Canal Street.

Here the Westerners got right into a mob, but of another sort. There was a line of several hundred German, Irish, Italian, Hebrew and colored children, ragged beyond description, jostling, pushing and pawing to get into the building.

Others were coming out in steady flow, their arms filled with toys and bags of candy.

Then Jim and the judge began handing out dimes and the crowd grew to such proportions that policemen had to come and clear the street. The Westerners went inside and were assigned to places of honor while the children sang:

God rest you, noble gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay.

"That's a message for us, judge," Jim whispered. "Let's be off again."

"Hold up, Jim!" returned the judge, who was resting comfortably. "Don't this beat anything you ever saw? Look at those crippled children in the front seats. I'd like to give every last one of them the run of Siwash for a year. They'd chirk up amazingly, I'll bet."

The music, the hilarity and the present-giving proved too much for one little girl among the number just designated by the judge, and she fell writhing to the floor. In a trice, Jim dropped his depleted bag of silver on the judge's knees and sprang to catch her up in his arms.

An ambulance was called and the cattleman carried the little unfortunate out and laid her tenderly away in the vehicle.

"Where are you going to take her?" Jim asked of an ambulance attendant.

"Gouverneur Hospital," was the reply.

"I'll pay for her care if she hasn't got any friends," said Jim.

The overworked officer stared at him.

"That won't be necessary," said he.

"Buy her something with this, any way," and Jim tucked a five-dollar bill into his hand.

With a clang, clang, clang, the ambulance whisked around the corner into Canal Street.

"Pretty tough, eh, Jim?" said the judge, joining his friend.

"I should say so!" exclaimed Jim. "What a lot of good a man can do in this world if he only knows how."

"And has the money," said the judge.

They walked soberly away, their Christmas spirit somewhat dashed by this touch of misery. In Canal Street they found the ambulance halted beside the curb. An officer was holding up the head of a man who lay on the sidewalk, both being nearly hidden by the gathering crowd.

Jim dashed forward.

"What's the matter?" he asked of the ambulance surgeon.

"A vagrant, that's all."

"What ails him?"

"Hunger, more than anything."

"Can't I help him?"

Again the official stared.

"You're too late," said he.

The limp form was bundled into the ambulance and the vehicle clanged away.

"On Christmas Day, too," sighed Jim. "Say, judge, I'm not having so much fun as I thought I was going to have."

"Want to go back to the hotel?" queried the judge.

"No, I haven't got through drifting yet."

So they drifted on until a fire-engine bell smote on their ears. A big crowd flocked after the engine through Eldridge Street to Houston and there the firemen were at work on a big tenement house.

Women were crawling down a fire-escape with children in their arms. Jim tried to break through the fire lines and go to their aid, but was forced back.

A little girl came wandering aimlessly through the crowd, disheveled and weeping piteously over a broken doll. Jim asked her some questions and from her sobbing replies gathered that the maimed rag of a doll was the cause of her grief. Accompanied by the judge, he took her down the street and paid two dollars for another doll, smartly dressed in blue silk.

After consigning her to the care of a policeman, Jim kissed her begrimed and tear-streaked face, now aglow with delight. She lisped her thanks and called him "Santy Claus."

The judge leaned against a hydrant and laughed softly.

"I'm beginning to enjoy myself again," said Jim.

"Get out!" chuckled the judge. "Do you remember that old saw about a fool and his money?"

"Yes, and I remember another that says something about 'bread upon the waters.'"

"That's you," said the judge. "Still going to drift?"

"Yes."

"So am I, but back to the hotel. I'm not built for the part you've cast me for, and I'm clean tuckered."

"You've done well, judge," answered Jim. "I'll show up at the hotel by and by."

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when he got there. His bag of silver was gone and a mild happiness pervaded his soul. Charity, for the moment, had drawn the sting of his secret grief.

Rest and refreshment freshened the cattleman for another foray. He was eager for the purlieus after dark. The judge wouldn't hear to his going alone and so went along, but against his better judgment.

They roamed at random, Dexter setting the pace and turning his companion into every dark and dismal street that took his fancy. Strangers in the city, they hardly knew whither to direct their steps to get close to the seamy side of the great metropolis. Instinct, however, guided them and, as it happened, unerringly.

The night was clear and cold—not the sort of a night for loungers, yet they passed many who gave them hard

looks as they went on. By eleven o'clock they were back in the Bowery, and close to Chinatown.

The judge was tired and they dropped into an oriental restaurant and had tea and chop suey; thence they continued their wanderings, passed from Pell Street into Elizabeth Street and were engulfed in dark corners behind the Bowery.

Dexter was not talkative. What wild whim was goading him onward his companion could not guess, but it was a queer way to spend Christmas night.

Elizabeth Street was a gloomy canyon between lofty warehouses and tenements. The judge quickened his steps, but Dexter hung back, seeming to court the obscurity.

From a black cranny in the canyon wall two dark figures suddenly emerged and crowded close upon the Westerners. The strangers halted to let them pass, but they did not pass.

Quick as a flash the hand of each shadow flew upward. Dexter cried a warning to the judge and leaped forward and dealt one of the threatening forms a smashing blow. At the same instant, a heavy missile caught the cattleman on the shoulder—but for his sudden leap he would have been felled by a blow on the head.

"Help!" roared the judge; "police!"

The man struck by the cattleman's heavy fist had fallen. Dexter whirled with fierce energy to engage the other but, not anticipating such vigorous resistance, the second rascal turned and fled—vanishing into the night as suddenly as he had appeared.

The judge was down on the fallen man and had him by the throat.

"Don't let him escape, judge!" panted Dexter. "There's some one coming up the street—it must be an officer."

"I've got him, Jim!" returned the judge excitedly.

A groan came from the prisoner.

"What!" burst from the judge. "By heaven, I believe— Here, Dexter, strike a match."

Wondering at the wild surprise in the judge's voice, the cattleman scratched a match and held the flickering flame over the prisoner's face. A tortured cry escaped Dexter and he reeled back, the match dropping from his nerveless fingers.

"Roy! My God!"

(To be continued.)

Forty-One Nights of Mystery.

BY GUY CHASE HAZZARD.

The story of how the people ran mad when the celestial powers went on strike.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN THE LIGHTS FAILED.

WE were at dinner in the Japanese Garden, in the court of the new Fifth Avenue Hotel which had recently raised its twenty stories of marble and bronze upon the site of the second structure of that name, destroyed by the disastrous fire of 1909.

Jernym suggested it and I was delighted to see that Mrs. Bob was taken with the idea. Mrs. Bob was our chaperon, and without her kind offices Alice and I would never have a word together.

"Come on!" Jernym said, in his usual boisterous way. "There's nothing doing in all New York to-night. The town is positively dead. We might as well study astronomy, and I'll warrant you girls haven't even looked at the comet. It's really a wonder."

"Oh, I remember seeing one in '98—when I was quite a little girl," declared Mrs. Bob, who seeks to make her age apparent in speech, if not in appearance. Otherwise she admits she might lose any number of good times, for the position of chaperon is a cinch.

"I saw that one," she added, reflectively; "but I've been so busy—you

know, there's been so much going on in our set of late—that I really haven't had time to look at this. Is—is it really worth the climb to see it from the roof?"

"Climb!" snorted Jernym. "The elevators are running. At least one of them is at this hour, and I know the superintendent of the building. We can stay up as long as we like."

"Why, that is nice," declared our chaperon, her flimsy doubts dispelled. "I suppose it won't be easy to find. I know once that a—er—young man tried to show me a particular star in the firmament—a real nice, scholarly young man he was, too; a professor, or something like that—and I had to fib to him finally and tell him I saw the one he mentioned. There seemed so many, you know," Mrs. Bob added, helplessly.

"What color were his eyes, Mrs. Bob?" demanded Grace Hoskins, who has no reverence for either age or chaperons.

"Blue—the loveliest shade——"

"What, the star's eyes?" grunted Jernym. "I swear, I don't believe Mrs. Bob knows whether a comet has rings like Saturn, or a tail——"

"All ready!" cried Mrs. Bob, jumping up with a laugh. "We will go and see Mr. Jernym's ring-tailed comet. You said it was ring-tailed, didn't you?"

Jernym groaned, but I made reply, as I laid Alice's wrap carefully over her shoulders: "It is Stangler's Comet, Mrs. Bob. Professor Stangler discovered it sixteen months ago and predicted its present close approach to the earth."

We came out into Broadway and there, spread across the eastern sky over the trees of the park, was the vast nebulated streak—like a single stroke of a monster whitewash brush—with the glaring red "eye" of the comet at its southern extremity.

"Don't you see it up there?" I said to Mrs. Bob. "That great, broad, whitish streak?"

"Where do you mean?" she asked, helplessly, staring at me.

"Sam hasn't blue eyes," Grace observed. "His are green."

"Oh, up there!" cried Mrs. Bob, as I blushed. "Why! I thought that was the milky-way!"

Jernym exploded and tucked her hand into his arm.

"Come along, Kitten!" he said. "You are as green as a seven-year-old," and he headed for the twenty-eight-story building on the southwest corner of Twenty-Third Street and Fifth Avenue—right across from the hotel.

Jernym had his offices on the twentieth floor of that great structure, and it was from its roof that he had proposed viewing the famous comet which, for more than a year now, had made such a stir in the scientific world, and for a month or more had astonished ordinary people residing upon the upper half of our hemisphere.

The ladies had been to a matinée and all three were armed with opera-glasses. They had paid for their own tickets; therefore the distance of their seats from the stage made opera-glasses a necessity. When she pays for it herself, a fifty-cent seat is good enough for a woman who would turn a man down dead cold if he refused to give up three-fifty per seat to a speculator.

Jernym said he had a fine pair of binoculars in his office, and that he would stop and get them on our way to the roof. But as we came to the corner of Twenty-Third Street, he stopped with a sudden exclamation, dropping the arms of Grace and Mrs. Bob.

"By Jove! I *am* a man of ideas," he cried, in great good humor with himself. "Look at that."

He pointed to a man with a huge telescope mounted on a tripod, who had established himself at this point with a painted sign: "10 Cents a Peep at Stangler's Comet."

"That's a good machine. I've looked through it," declared our guide and mentor. "Let's take the outfit with us. We'll be above the haze and smoke, up there on the roof, and it will be worth the price of admission."

"Isn't that nice!" cried Mrs. Bob. "We'll have an astronomical observatory of our own. Can you get him, Mr. Jernym?"

Jernym is one who usually gets what he sets out for—that is, he gets whatever money can obtain. In five minutes

the street astronomer had his paraphernalia unlimbered, and he procession moved across the street and into the deserted lobby of the big office building which, although already built some years, topped every other structure in the vicinity of Madison Square.

Jernym had to tip the night man before he would allow the telescope and its owner to be packed aboard the single car running at that hour: but we were soon upon the roof of the lofty building. A view from this spot was well worth the trouble of mounting to it at any time, day or night.

Now, however, there was presented to our eyes a most brilliant panorama. The city, from which the hum of traffic rose like the droning notes of a great organ, lay all about us, garlanded with lights, sparkling, iridescent, spectacular!

Ten years before the reflection of the city lights upon the sky would have been yellowish because of the abundance of gas lamps. Now the D'Alvord light had superseded gas entirely, and even the old-fashioned Edison electric lights were going out—no pun intended!

The new light, with its pleasant lilac radiance, was much softer to the eyes than either gas or the Edison lamps. Some provincial people still clung to their old-fashioned electric lights; but the gas-houses all over the country had been pulled down, or devoted to other uses. The new application of electricity to the D'Alvord system had put the so-called "gas trust" out of business quite five years before.

Even in the torch of the gigantic figure of Liberty in the harbor a lilac flame burned steadily. Indeed, D'Alvord had first displayed the value of his invention to the people of New York by begging the privilege of illuminating the torch free of cost for a term of years.

The beauties of the night view of the city took my mind from the comet which blazed, red, threatening, evil-eyed, above us; but I heard the ladies exclaiming in wonder at the clearness of the view they now obtained of the heavenly phenomenon, even with the naked eye.

Some three hundred feet from the street level, we were above that haze of smoke, dust, and nimbus matter which hovers over our city at this season of the year. Here the atmosphere was so much clearer that the brilliancy of Stangler's Comet seemed nearer.

The street astronomer adjusted his glass and Alice looked through it first after it was properly focused. The man droned his usual little speech with which he ordinarily timed the "peeps" of his patrons, part of which went about as follows:

"It is called Stangler's Comet because first discovered (or, at least, first recognized in its present erratic orbit around the sun) by Professor Josef Stangler, at St. Louis, on the night of July 3d-4th, 1911.

"Professor Stangler prophesied its nearer approach to us at that time, although the apparent orbit of the comet was bearing it away. After three months other astronomers agreed that the comet would probably pass very near the earth's surface and, for a time, extremists declared that it might seriously affect certain portions of the earth north of the equator.

"It has now been decided that the comet has reached, or will do so within a few days, or hours, its nearest point to us. Soon it will begin to wane and will shoot off into the illimitable spaces of the universe, as so many of its erratic companions have done before it."

Alice came over to me with her handkerchief hiding the smile upon her lips.

"Where do you suppose he learned all those big words?" she whispered. "Come, Sammy; let's look at the town. It's lots more interesting than the old comet."

We walked away from the others who were gathered about the big telescope. Peering over the balustrade we tried to see the sidewalks near by; but all we could view on this side was the roof of the pigmy Flatiron Building. The lights in Madison Square sparkled through the trees like fireflies.

It was a gorgeous October night, although in the dark of the moon. The exceeding brilliancy of the comet and its long aureole of flaming gases dulled the star-shine.

I led Alice toward the south side of the building, where we would be entirely out of earshot of our friends. There was something which I had been eager to tell her all the evening, and now I poured it out like a schoolboy reeling off a hard-learned lesson.

It had come to me at last, the thing I had been working for, and praying for, for months. That very day I had received my appointment as one of the divisional superintendents of the great D'Alvord Ray Company—the corporation which controlled two-thirds of the light, heat, and power of the United States, and had set its mark likewise upon Canada and other adjoining countries.

Until I had secured this standing with the corporation which I had served almost since its beginning in '06, I had feared to tell Alice something else—a greater Something Else than a mere advance in position and salary.

But before I came to this second division of my monologue, and while yet she was warmly congratulating me upon my good fortune, she suddenly broke off to call my attention to something far south of us.

"Look!" she cried, pointing at the torch of Liberty where the lambent flame had shone so clearly every night for month upon month.

The torch seemed to flicker for an instant; then it shot upward in a long streak of lilac flame, and then was snuffed out as though one had pinched out the wick of a tallow dip!

"How strange!" she murmured, while I was transfixed myself, for the moment, in surprised silence.

"Something must have happened to the plant at St. George, Staten Island," I said, at last. "Liberty Island is supplied with the ray from that station. I—don't—understand——"

Alice uttered another startled cry, and as I moved nearer I saw in her eyes a look of undefinable fear.

"See there! and there!" she whispered, pointing farther east. "The glare has disappeared above Coney Island. All the lights south of Brooklyn seem to have gone out, Sam. Isn't that odd?"

"It's more than odd!" I cried. "Why, Coney's lighting comes from quite another plant. What can have happened to the system, any way?"

For now, faster than we spoke of them, entire sections of lights through Brooklyn and Long Island City suddenly disappeared, leaving those districts in darkness. There was not a street gaslight within the confines of Greater New York, and our company controlled the lighting of all the near-by Long Island towns. Edison had no hold over there.

I turned swiftly and ran to the other side of the roof to look at Hoboken and Jersey City. We had been unable to drive our rival company from those strongholds.

But to my amazement half of Jersey City seemed covered by a pall of blackness—a blanket which had been dropped suddenly over the town.

Farther north I saw the lights of a car climbing the causeway built against the face of the Palisades. Suddenly its lights disappeared, and all that part of Jersey was likewise left in impenetrable blackness!

Something was happening—something utterly inexplicable to me—at the various lighting and power houses of both the D'Alvord and Edison companies. I felt that I should hurry down to a telephone and call up night headquarters to learn what this all meant.

Then Jernym and his companions at the northern end of the roof began to shout to me. I turned and was amazed to see the whole of Harlem and the Bronx smothered in the same inexplicable cloud which seemed to have fallen upon the outside districts.

"For heaven's sake, Sam, what's the matter with that company you work for?" Jernym was shouting. "I understood they had put the price for lighting up to the City Council. Looks as though they were forcing their demands in good old piratical style."

"Nonsense," I returned, hurrying over to the group with Alice. "Something must have happened at the several stations——"

"Every light is out in Brooklyn!" interrupted Grace Hoskins. "My goodness, Mrs. Bob! let's hurry home. Suppose the lights go out over here?"

"Wouldn't it be funny!" exclaimed the lively chaperon.

"Wouldn't it be awful!" murmured Alice, in a serious tone.

I think her words brought us all to some realization of what it might mean if this great city were left without light at night—what misery, crime, and sorrow would ensnare us all within a very few hours of pitch darkness!

"I really guess we'd better be going," Jernym said, and his voice shook a little. The man with the telescope was already unlimbering his instrument.

"Come, come!" I cried briskly. "Don't scare the ladies. We'll go down if you all say so; but like enough repairs will be made in a short time."

I led the way to the door opening into the box where the electric elevator stopped. There were two incandescent lights in here, and I was grateful to see them burning, although the patent belonged to the Edison company.

Suddenly, from deep in the bowels of the building, far down in the basement, I believed, sounded a dull crash—a smothered explosion. The incandescents went out instantly and the ladies screamed.

"Don't be alarmed," I said. "A cylinder has blown out in the dynamo, that's all. We'll soon be out," and I fumbled for the elevator call button.

Then I remembered that if the lighting plant of the building had gone wrong, the elevators could not run either!

CHAPTER II.

THE CITY OF DARKNESS.

WOMEN are such uncertain creatures that I did not know whether these specimens would take it laughing or crying. And to make matters worse, I heard Jernym bawling outside on the roof:

"By Jove, Sam! this is too bad. The whole upper West Side is in darkness. How the dickens am I ever to get home?"

"Oh, what does it mean?" cried Alice, clinging to my arm.

"Why, it's only some momentary disturbance at the power houses, of course," Mrs. Bob declared, in a most matter-of-fact tone, and I blessed her in my heart for her calmness and good sense.

"Oh! the lights are out!" squealed Grace Hoskins.

"For pity's sake! Not over the whole building, I hope?" demanded Jernym, coming into the lobby too. "I wanted to get something in my office on the way down."

"I am afraid that we shall be in darkness as long as we remain in the building," I observed, trying to speak cheerfully.

"Well, punch the button for the elevator. Let's get out as soon as we can."

He suited the action to the word and played a staccato measure upon the voiceless electric button. I knew that this was useless.

"I tell you a cylinder has blown out, you ass!" I growled in his ear. "These elevators can't run. The entire electric plant of the building is probably out of commission."

"Thunder! was that the noise I heard?" Jernym demanded. Then, in a moment, he exclaimed: "Well, they've got an auxiliary dynamo down there. Why don't they start it up?"

"I can't tell you that. Perhaps they have forgotten that we are up here. Don't keep punching that button, Jernym—it's a fool trick. The bell isn't ringing, nor is the signal mechanism working inside the cars."

"By Jove! that's so, I suppose," he admitted.

"What shall we do?" wailed Grace.

"Why, I really think we shall have to walk down the stairs," I said, hesitatingly.

"Twenty-eight flights!" gasped Mrs. Bob.

"Oh, oh!" moaned Grace. "This is worse than being up in the Liberty Statue. I went there once, and I was in bed for three days afterward."

"Oh, but you don't have to climb the stairs here, my child," said Mrs. Bob, recovering her cheerfulness.

"But it's the going down that hurts the worse," responded Grace, wofully. "You'll just feel as though the joints behind your knees were all creaky before you are half way down. Oh, dear!"

"This can't be helped, ladies," I said. "Unless you desire to spend possibly the night up here, you will have to descend by the stairs."

"Then it might as well be at once," Alice observed, trying to be brave, I knew.

She advanced to the top of the first narrow flight behind the elevators. There was barely enough light in the lobby for us to see each other; but when the poor girl looked down into the illimitable blackness of the well, she shrank back with a little cry.

"Oh! it is so dark!" she whispered.

"I've got some matches here," Jernym said. "Let me go ahead and light the way. This is a confounded nuisance, ladies, and I'm terribly sorry; but you must blame Sam Husted. His company's at fault, I have no doubt."

"Rot!" I muttered. "I'd give a good deal to know just what has happened." and curiosity suddenly drove me out on the roof again.

The district of New York, over which I had that very day been put in charge, was the lower East Side of the island of Manhattan. I wished to see if anything had happened to the lights in that section.

I bumped into our telescope man, just coming in with his chattels.

"What is the matter? The lights out?" he cried.

"Yes, and the elevator has stopped running. We've got to walk down," Jernym told him.

"But I can't carry these things down all those flights. They are heavy, gentlemen. Won't the elevator start again?"

"You can wait and see," J. growled. "Come on, folks!"

Meanwhile I had cast my gaze about at all four principal points of the compass. Most of the upper portion of the city was in gloom; likewise Jersey and the Long Island shores. In the south——"

I was just in time to see the pall fall, in an instant, upon that section of the city over which I had been given control by the D'Alvord Ray Company that day!

This whole mysterious occurrence had aroused my surprise and wonder already; but it had not really touched me personally until this moment. Something dreadful had happened in my own district!

In that instant I began to appreciate what this thing meant. It was a catastrophe the like of which no man had ever dreamed!

A great city—the greatest city in the Western hemisphere—was threatened with pitch-darkness. Parts of it were already submerged in a dense gloom.

Not a street light shone; the lights in the buildings had gone out; it was black, black darkness—a gloom that might almost be felt.

The mystery I could not fathom. It might only last for a short time, but during that time what might not occur among the people of the town, groping and tumbling about like blind puppies in a sack.

My own district was peopled by the poor and the vicious. The greatest agent for honesty and decency in any big city is not the police force and the fear they inspire, but the street lighting system. Crime would be rampant in my section, I foresaw, if this state of affairs continued for long.

"Sam!" I heard Alice calling, and I ran back into the lobby. She lingered at the top of the flight, waiting for me to come. The others had already started, and I heard their boots clattering on the iron steps of this upper flight.

Our unfortunate friend, the man with the telescope, was still in the lobby, and well-nigh in tears. He was a timid man and did not care to be left alone at the top of the building; yet he feared to quit his instrument.

"You had better set it in the corner yonder and, when we get down, see the superintendent or janitor about it," I advised him. "I don't think any harm will come to it here tonight."

So he followed us. Jernym and I took turns lighting matches to illuminate the way, and we kept close together. Mrs. Bob was so nice about it, and cheered up her charges so well that, despite the toil of descending so many

steps, they were all in a gale of laughter before we had gone far.

Only I could not join in this gaiety. I felt that I ought to hurry ahead and seek my division to learn what had happened to our machinery.

The most improbable and far-fetched theories to explain the phenomenon darted through my mind. A secretly arranged strike among our workmen—and those of Edison as well—was first suggested to me; then I feared anarchists and bomb throwing.

Yet all lights in the several districts affected seemed to have gone out, too; and many buildings, like this one in which we were marooned, were supplied by their own private plants.

We knew what was the matter here. A cylinder had blown out. But cylinders could not have exploded simultaneously in all these places!

These thoughts consumed my attention as I trudged down the stairs. Jernym was scolding away like an unducked hussy, while Mrs. Bob was making fun of him, and the girls were laughing at the chaperon's sallies.

At the twentieth floor J. insisted upon our stopping to rest in his offices.

"If we take the whole dose at once we'll be subjects for the hospital when we arrive at the street level," he declared.

The ladies were nothing loath, for the pace had already begun to tell upon them. I was staggering myself, for going round and round the circular flights made one dizzy as well as lame.

Our friend the telescope man begged to be excused. He had matches of his own, and he said he would go on down to the street. He was in a hurry to reach terra firma. This playing blindman's buff on the stairway of a twenty-eight story building had no charms for him!

But really, when I saw him go, it seemed just as though we were noting the departure of one-sixth of the inhabitants of the universe! We six people were alone in the dark, and there was not really a sign nor a sound denoting the presence of any other living soul in our world!

But I said nothing like this, you may believe. I tried to jolly the crowd along, too, and shouted after the telescope man, as he scuttled down the next flight, to be sure and tell them down below that we were coming.

Jernym had by this time found the main door of his offices, unlocked it and ushered us in. The shutting of the door put out the match which I held, and we were in pitch-darkness again.

"Thunder!" grunted Jernym, cracking his shins against some article of furniture as he prowled about. "I never saw it so dark in my life before."

"Why, Sam, the lights are out in the Flatiron Building—and in the hotel too. Did you ever see the like? Come over here to the window, all of you!"

Even Mrs. Bob grew silent at his words. The situation was no longer laughable. They waited while I scratched another waxlight.

"Come on!" cried Jernym, who had thrown up the window sash. "Why—why—it's dark everywhere, folks! Did you ever?"

Grace began to weep audibly. Alice clung tightly to my arm as we crossed the room.

"Oh, I guess there's light somewhere," I said, encouragingly. "Ha! there's the stars—and the comet. They're bright enough."

"Oh, I hate that old comet!" sobbed Grace. "If we hadn't been foolish enough to go up on the roof to see it, we'd all be at home now."

"Well," growled Jernym, "as your confounded corporation doesn't supply the stars and Stangler's comet with light, naturally they haven't been put out. I tell you, Sam, your directors ought to be strung up for this—and I'd like to help do it!"

By this time we had all reached the window and my match went out. I leaned over the broad sill and stared down into the square. Jernym's rooms were on the Twenty-Third Street corner.

The lights in this section of the town must have just gone out. Rising to us out of the impenetrable gloom, came a sudden burst of human voices—cries of fear, shouts, exclamations of wonder,

shrieks of laughter, and the tooting of automobile horns.

It was as though we overhung a veritable pandemonium.

CHAPTER III.

BLIND LEADERS OF THE BLIND.

JERNYM whispered in my ear: "This is terrible, old man! What the devil will we do with the women?"

He was coming down to cases now, and had stopped talking foolishness. He saw that the situation was really serious.

"We'll take them home, of course," I answered back. "And just as quickly as possible, too."

"But I don't hear or see a car running. The power stations must have broken down—or been shut down—too," he observed.

"I don't know what is the matter," I said; "but I don't want you to say anything more about the D'Alvord Company. Suppose that feeling should get abroad—that the company had intentionally brought about this calamity for the purpose of making the city fathers meet their demands? Why, the people would mob the plants! Murder and bloodshed would follow. Stop it!"

"Well, I'll keep my private opinions to myself, then," he grunted. "But wait! Don't go out until I find something."

He went stumbling away into some inner office, and I tried to speak sanely to the ladies.

"I haven't the least idea what has caused this sudden darkness," I admitted; "but we are in no particular danger, and I beg of you not to lose your heads."

"I think I shall lose my l—my lower extremities first!" gasped Mrs. Bob. "I never knew I had so many joints in 'em before."

The girls giggled hysterically. I could have hugged the dear woman for keeping up their spirits the way she did.

"But how shall we ever get home?" quavered Alice. "Our people will be so worried, if they see that the lights have gone out."

"I reckon they'll have to *feel* that the lights are out," said our chaperon. "Goodness knows, a cat couldn't see in this state of affairs."

"I tell you!" I exclaimed, a brilliant idea hitting me. "We'll telephone and tell 'em all we're safe."

"Good for you, Sammy!" Grace cried, chirking up at once. "Just tell mama that I am alive and well, and she'll be content until midnight."

Jernym's match appeared in the distance and he came back to us. He held something out of the ladies' sight behind him, and when he sidled up to me, thrust the article into my hand.

"Pocket it!" he murmured. "I've got its mate. No knowing what we'll run up against when we get out on the street."

It was a revolver, and I was thankful for his thoughtfulness. From the sounds which rose to us from below, we might expect to have to fight our way through a howling mob to get our charges to their homes.

"Where is your 'phone, J.?" I asked. "We'd better send word around that we're all safe, and will be home slowly but surely."

"Good idea!" he exclaimed, in a much relieved tone. "Here's the operator's desk here. What's your numbers, ladies?"

"Waist measure, or—or size of shoes?" murmured Mrs. Bob.

"1-0-0-7-0 Bryant," Grace Hoskins said, quickly. "Do tell mother that we are all right. Better say that we are still at the hotel, you know."

"And I think that is where you had better take us until this business is over, Sammy," whispered Mrs. Bob in my ear. "Do you suppose we could find a conveyance now?"

"Why, there are always plenty of electric cabs here in the square. We might have J. call up a cab station and have one come to the door for us, while he's telephoning," I said.

At this juncture, unless I was greatly mistaken, Jernym began to mutter some very unparliamentary language. He had been banging away at the call button for several minutes. I went over to him, guided by sounds, not by sight.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Hades!" he whispered, fiercely. "I can't get a sound out of them. They won't answer——"

"Let me try that receiver," I said, hastily, taking the instrument from his hand.

I placed it to my own ear. Instantly I knew that there was something radically wrong with it. There was no current transmitted along the wires. The telephone system seemed entirely out of commission!

"Your wires have been cut," I declared. "You're not connected with Central at all."

"By Jove! who's tampered with them since five o'clock this afternoon?" he exclaimed.

"Sh!" I said, warningly. But the ladies had heard him.

"Oh, can't you reach mama?" cried Grace, stumbling across the room to us.

"Not with this machine," I said, briskly. "It's out of order. Let's go right down—if you ladies are sufficiently rested. There's a public booth in the lower lobby, and if it is locked, doubtless Jernym can get the janitor to open it so that we can communicate with our friends."

"Let us go at once," begged Alice, nervously, and lighted by another wax-light, we found the office door and got out into the corridor.

The silence throughout the building assured us that we were the only people on these upper floors, at least. There was little laughter or conversation now, as we continued our toilsome descent toward the ground.

"I declare!" Mrs. Bob groaned, "I'll never trust myself so far above the earth again—elevator or no. This is a lesson to me; hereafter I shall remain a humble female *Uriah Heep!*"

But nobody laughed, and we plodded on. Flight after flight we descended, and our matches were getting wofully few. I know I only had three or four, and Jernym scratched his last one with an imprecation.

Suddenly from somewhere below us (we had descended perhaps to the tenth floor—I am free to say I had lost count myself) we heard a human cry. It brought us all to a panting stop, and Alice and Mrs. Bob clung to me tightly, and I judged that Grace did the same for old J.—at least he dropped his match and we were in utter darkness again.

That cry had sounded so weird and eerie-like that there was reason for our trembling. It echoed up the well and through the hollow corridors like a voice from the grave.

"What the devil was that?" blurted out Jernym.

"It was, I think," stammered Mrs. Bob. "I never heard his satanic majesty before——"

"Listen! the creature's weeping, whatever it is," I declared, having bent over the well to hear better the sounds from below.

Then a shrill, but half-muffled cry rose again: "Help! for God's sake——"

It started old J. into life.

"Here!" he exclaimed, and I knew that he had thrown off Grace's clinging arms. "Lemme go ahead. Somebody's in trouble down there. You keep the women back, Sam. Gimme a match!"

We obeyed his quickly given commands, and heard him clattering down the iron steps before us. Grace began to cry in earnest now, and Mrs. Bob left me to grope for her and take the girl in her arms.

"He's all right," I said, soothingly. "He's got a pistol——"

"Then he'll get shot—or shoot somebody!" wailed Grace.

I thought the former was quite unlikely. I'd bet on J. shooting first, even in the dark, and coming out unscathed himself. He was a crack-a-jack with a revolver.

Another shriek rose from below when our friend, I judged, had descended about two flights. Then sounded J.'s voice—I though in disgust. Soon he shouted up to us:

"Come on, folks! Nothing the matter. This blooming fool astronomer dropped his matches, lost count of the flights, and got scared. Thought if he went much lower he'd reach Hades. I s'pose."

We could not help laughing, although I could pity the man's condition. To be alone in this awful darkness was enough to break the nerve of any man.

We four clung to each other's hands and descended to Jernym and the telescope man.

"I—I thought I had gone down enough stairs to bring me to the ground twice over," he explained, still shaking.

"Never mind," Mrs. Bob said, comfortably. "Give me your arm. We will go down, two by two. Do light another match, Sammy."

"I've only a couple left," I objected, obeying her.

"Mercy! People have accused me of being a terrible matchmaker; but I'm no good at this juncture," declared Mrs. Bob, in mock seriousness.

"For pity's sake keep one of those waxlights," begged Jernym, still leading the way. "Here! let me have that one in your hand."

It was half consumed, but I passed it carefully to him. He dragged a cigar from his pocket, bit off the end, and quickly ignited the weed at the dying flame.

"You'll have to excuse me for smoking without asking permission, ladies," he said, dryly. "But we'll have a steady headlight now. You can follow me by this."

"Why, you are really smart, Mr. Jernym," Mrs. Bob declared. "Come, how human that tobacco smells! I don't think I shall be so frightened now that I can smell smoke. I remember that half the time the only way I knew Bob was in the house was by the odor of his cigars."

Mrs. Bob's spouse had been gathered to his ancestors—a long line of silent, unobtrusive, but money-making men—so long ago that he was considered something of a joke. Secretly, however, I believe Mrs. Bob remained single because she had never seen another man half as worthy of her admiration as the dead.

Once we stopped to rest again, sitting in a group on the stairs. Jernym gave us each a guess as to which flight we were on, recording our various numbers on the back of an envelope with a pencil, and in the light of his cigar point.

"The one furthest from the right number will pay for a drink all round as soon as we can get across to the hotel dining-room."

"But the lights are out over there, too," said Grace.

"They'll find some way of lighting up—candles, or lamps. Trust a hotel manager for taking advantage of this situation. Every shack in town will be overrun with people who will want to remain until morning—or until the streets light up again."

"We'd better hurry, then," I said, for I remembered what Mrs. Bob had said up-stairs. The hotel would be the best place for the ladies while that mob was in the streets, for sure.

When our guesses were all recorded, Jernym told us that we were two flights from the bottom, and so it proved. The drinks were on me—if we ever got to the hotel.

Once in the lobby of the building, the darkness seemed worse than ever. We had all come, by this time, to distinguish the outline of objects through the gloom; but we seemed here to be at the bottom of a terrifically deep well.

We groped our way to the outer doors. They were shut and locked; but through them we could hear the roar of human voices, and the surging back and forth of a great multitude. The sounds were absolutely terrifying.

CHAPTER IV.

A PEOPLE RUN MAD.

"Now, girls," Mrs. Bob said, coming to the rescue, "we have had quite enough tears. I'd like to be home as much as you, but we must not play at being weaklings when the men are probably quite worried enough trying to plan some way for us to get out of the fix—and for pity's sake let me sit down again! Those stairs have been the death, of me, I do believe."

"I told you so," mourned Grace, with a sniff.

"Where's that telephone booth?" I asked J.

"Somewhere over in this corner," he replied, and I followed the glow of his cigar down the corridor.

"Let us shout," suggested the nerv-

ous astronomer. "There must be somebody in the basement of the building."

"Well, we'll telephone first, and then see if we can find the janitor or any of his helpers. His family lives somewhere in the building, I believe."

We discovered the telephone booth, and fortunately there was no lock on the door.

"You try your luck with the machine and I'll go down-stairs," Jernym whispered. "Say nothing to the girls."

I must admit that I hated to see him go; as it had before, the feeling came over me that we six should not separate. Even the sidewalk astronomer, weak as he was, added to the population of our little community.

I took advantage of J.'s light to smoke a cigar of my own, and possibly the ladies thought that the glow of my weed was his, for he crept away to the far distant end of the hall where the stairs led into the basement, without arousing any comment from our fair friends.

When I tried to call up Central, however, I forgot all about Jernym's errand below. The confounded telephone acted differently from any machine I had ever sat down to before.

Not a murmur came over the line. My oft-repeated "Helloes!" brought no answer—not even a buzzing of the electric current.

"Why!" I gasped. "This district telephone service must be out of commission, too! For heaven's sake, what does it mean? No lights, the cars probably stopped, elevators crippled, and lastly the telephone service knocked out. This—this is more than an accident!"

I could no longer believe that chance had anything to do with the series of mysteries. For some cause, and by some means, all these things had happened almost simultaneously, and some Power had planned and performed it all!

Could a foreign nation, suddenly at loggerheads with the United States, have brought this terrible thing to pass by the efforts of spies and secret agents?

My perplexed reverie was brought to a sudden close by a flash of light from the basement stairway. Jernym was returning, and he brought with him a smutty-faced and perspiring man in overalls and jumper, who carried a smelly oil-lamp.

"This is the engineer's assistant," J. said, in explanation. "When the lights went out the janitor was wise enough to shut and lock the doors. Otherwise the building would have been overrun with that mob outside. They're scared to death. The lights have gone out all over the city and there's bound to be a riot."

These facts he told me; but when we walked to the door he spoke cheerily to the ladies.

"We'll soon be on our way home now," he observed. "This man will let us out."

When the workman reached the big doors, however (they were double and the heavy plate glass of the outer leaves was defended by an iron grill-work gate), he hesitated. By the sounds and the shadows we distinguished outside, we saw that the lamp in the engineer's hand had attracted instantly a mob of clamoring people.

Cries of "Let us in! Let us in!" reached our ears distinctly. The darkness seemed actually to have driven the people insane.

"Why, gents," said the workman. "I don't darst open these doors. They'd overpower us, an' there's likely bad people as well as good in that mob. The boss didn't know it was like this, or he'd never sent me."

"But, man alive!" cried Jernym, in exasperation, "we wish to get out."

"Come down-stairs then—all of ye. Perhaps the boss will open one of the hatches and send ye up on the ash-lift."

"Oh, how romantic!" exclaimed Mrs. Bob, clasping her hands drolly. "Why, it's as interesting as a dime novel."

"And maybe as bloody before we get through," whispered Jernym in my ear. "Those poor fools out there are actually mad. I don't know but we'd better stay in the building, after all."

But I shook him off and got next to the assistant engineer.

"What's the matter with your dynamo?" I asked him.

"It blew off a cylinder."

"But you've another, haven't you?"

"Sure, sir, that blamed thing always was a cranky piece of machinery, and it refuses to work. We can scarce git a spark from it. I never in all my life saw the juice act so as it does to-night."

I was deeply puzzled. The accident to the main dynamo of this building, and even the crankiness of the auxiliary, did not mystify me so much. The old system of generating electricity was very faulty, as D'Alvord's invention of the lilac ray had shown.

But, just as the workman said, the "juice" itself seemed to be on a strike to-night. It was not a fault of the machinery, for I had seen the lights go out in entire sections of the city governed by the D'Alvord Company.

We followed the assistant engineer into the sub-cellar, for that was where they were working upon the machinery. The trouble at the main doors was explained, and our desire to leave the building.

"I can let you go up through one of the ash-lifts, if you insist," the chief engineer said. "It's too bad you didn't rouse the janitor as you came down. He lives on the top floor, and like enough he and his family have all gone to bed. He doesn't know anything about this."

"Can't you ring him up?" asked Jernym.

"Why, even the storage battery yonder, that we can connect with the signal system, won't work. I never saw such actions with the juice in my life. Here! see that snapping over there? We can generate it—to a certain extent: but we can't hold it. It's dissipated almost instantly. It won't turn a wheel."

"The trouble is atmospheric, then," I declared.

"It must be. They say the lights have gone out all around in this part of the city. No wonder folks are scared on the street."

"Well, we'd better try to get across to the hotel, at least," said Jernym, with decision. "Let's try your sidewalk elevator, sir."

Fortunately it was worked by hand, and the two men left their dynamoes and led us to the Twenty-Third Street side of the building. There we all six got aboard the platform and the mechanism began to send us up the shaft.

"The hatch is automatic and lifts itself," said the engineer. "It will close itself, too. Please step off the platform as quickly as you can when you reach the sidewalk level, so that we can run it down again. We don't want a lot of hoodlums tumbling in on us."

"We're going through the stage floor like imps in a pantomime!" cried Mrs. Bob. "How do you feel, girls? Grace has always been stage-struck."

"I feel a good deal worse than an imp could feel," returned Miss Hoskins, mournfully. "Do you suppose we can get into the hotel without being mobbed, Mr. Jernym?"

"Why, the side entrance is almost directly across the street from this," he rejoined encouragingly. "And I don't believe the crowd is near."

My opinion coincided with his, for I heard no sound of voices. The dull roar which had rung in our ears so loudly when we stood in the front lobby of the building, now seemed to reach us from a distance. All the people in the neighborhood seemed to have run together at the square.

Soon we rose above the first basement level, and then the two-leaved hatch above our heads began to open slowly. Instantly the volume of voices increased. Our heads began to rise above the sidewalk and for the first time we realized how very black the night was.

We had become quite used to the thick gloom of the interior of the building: but out here in the open it really seemed worse! Far, far above, the stars winked solemnly through the haze. The red eye of the comet blazed as though behind a fog.

Here in the tunnel of Twenty-Third Street, between the high buildings, scarcely an object was to be distinguished. As the hatch opened widely and we rose from the depths, a [illegible]

screamed near by, and I heard a man's voice soothing her. We could not see them, but doubtless they had observed the slow opening of the hatchway and our eerie appearance from the depths.

I was too disturbed in my mind regarding our own charges to pay much attention to other sufferers from panic. Nor did I scarcely give my attention to the sidewalk astronomer who, the instant he stepped off the lift, darted away into the darkness, crying out something about rescuing his camp-stool which he had left at the corner of the hotel building when Jernym engaged him to accompany us to the roof with his telescope. We did not see him again.

As requested by the engineer, we stepped off the platform instantly, and I shouted down to him to lower away. Almost at once the hatch cover was shut and we were left in the outer darkness, and without retreat.

"Come on!" exclaimed Jernym, and possibly it was the light at the end of his cigar which revealed his figure so plainly to us. "Bring the ladies along, Sam. We'll get across to the hotel and see what's doing, any way."

I can't explain intelligently how strange and weird everything appeared at that time. The fall haze, which had become almost a fog at this hour, added to the opaqueness of the atmosphere.

As we moved across the sidewalk we bumped into a strange couple—perhaps the man and woman we had formerly heard—quite unexpectedly. They shrank away from us, as though in fear.

From the square came the boom of voices—the guttural cries of the frightened mob interspersed now and then with the honking of auto horns. But there seemed to be vehicles moving.

Such a thing as a public carriage drawn by horses was almost unknown—at least, in the congested parts of the city. On some streets at certain hours of the day horses were forbidden, because of the space they occupied when the traffic was heavy.

Now we did not see a single headlight, or sidelamp, of an automobile. Occasionally a match would be lit by somebody, and we saw the yellow glow of it; or a glowing cigar point revealed the presence of some smoker.

The entire upper portion of the great hotel across the street was in darkness. Not a light appeared. But through the dining-room windows we began to see a few feeble points of flame. Evidently candles were taking the place of the electric lights on each table.

"Thank God! candles will burn," grunted Jernym, and he seized Grace and stepped off the curb.

With Mrs. Bob on one arm and Alice on the other, I followed him. We came near bumping into a cab in the middle of the street.

"I say, my man," called up Jernym to the driver, the outlines of whose figure we could distinguish above us, "is this cab engaged?"

"No, sir," returned rather a faint voice.

"Can you take us to Forty-Fifth Street?"

"I could, sir, an' be glad of the job, if I could make the thing work. It's stopped, sir."

"Try it again," I said.

Instantly a faint sputtering came from the mechanism under the cab; but not enough electricity was generated to electrocute a fly. I was more than ever convinced that the trouble must be atmospheric.

It was fortunate for us that the crowd remained in the square, and that almost every person whom we passed was bound in that direction. The side entrance to the Fifth Avenue Hotel was almost deserted, although as we came near we bumped into several gentlemen who had evidently been refused admission. We knew this last to be the fact from their language.

The dull glow of an oil lantern shone from the hall when we reached the glass doors, and by its light we saw two husky porters, evidently set there to keep everybody but the guests of the house outside.

They shook their heads when Jernym laid his hand upon the door knob and found it locked. The manager plainly did not propose to have his hotel overrun with people whom he did

not know, and whom he could not control if a panic arose.

"But, I say!" cried Jernym. "We've got ladies with us. You *must* let us in."

"Against orders!" one of the porters bawled through the closed door.

"You send Mr. Suydenham here!" commanded old J., who hates to be opposed in anything. "We're going to come into this shack, or I'll have it down over your ears. You hear me?"

"The whole street will hear you, Mr. Jernym," warned Mrs. Bob, as several people stopped behind us, evidently quite interested in the situation.

"I tell you, they've got to take in us five," he growled, shaking his head.

"Not me," I said, in a low tone. "No. I've got to leave the ladies in your care, Jernym (that is, if you get into the hotel), and go down-town at once. I must see what has happened at the power houses in my division."

"You surely won't try to find your way through these dark streets to-night?" gasped Mrs. Bob, while Alice seized my arm more tightly, and with a little cry.

"Why, I must," I declared. "It's my duty. This is the first emergency which has arisen since my appointment. I must be on deck."

At this point Jernym began to argue with the porters again. They would not call the manager, it seemed. The crowd behind us increased.

Finally J. got one of the men to agree to take his card in to Suydenham, whom he knew very well. They opened the door just far enough for J. to slip the pasteboard through.

But J. is a husky lad, and his life in the West has made him bold beyond most city men. He thrust his foot into the crack, and with his shoulder forced the door open against the combined efforts of the two porters.

"In with you!" he panted. "Quick, ladies! Come on, Sam!"

"Not me!" cried I, knowing very well that, once inside, nothing under heaven could force Jernym and the girls out again. "I'm off. Take care of them, J."

Grace and Mrs. Bob had darted inside. Alice clung to my hand a moment, her face uplifted to mine.

"Don't run into danger, Sam, dear!" she whispered, before following the others, and that was my unsatisfactory parting from the girl whom I had hoped to become engaged to on this very night!

The door was slammed and locked in the faces of the crowd that now surged up the steps.

"Hey! why didn't you keep that door open a minute longer?" demanded one big fellow, shaking his fist in my face. "D'ye expect we like this being shut out in the durned dark? I've a good mind to——"

"I wouldn't," I said coldly, and showed him my revolver in the faint light of the lantern.

He subsided and I pushed through the crowd and set out in haste, eastward.

It looked indeed as though the people had run mad; but I scarcely realized then what it would mean to try to force my way into the eastern district.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT THEY THOUGHT.

THE turmoil which had first burst forth in the square when the lights were extinguished, and the cars and cabs had stopped running, had been much greater, of course, than it was now. We had escaped the worst of the riot by being upon the roof at the time.

But it was still quite noisy enough. There was as much shouting and as great a hubbub of conversation as would be heard on the main thoroughfares on any New Year's Eve. It lacked only the horns and explosion of fireworks to make the volume of sound as great.

And can one who did not hear it imagine how mysteriously the voice of the vast throng in the square came to me through the darkness? It was a most gruesome thing.

Here vehicles of all descriptions had stopped for lack of the power which drove their wheels. Against the advice of many, some of the drivers or chauffeurs of these autos were trying

to "repair" their machines, refusing to believe that a universal calamity had overtaken us.

Policemen appeared now and then, but they lost each other in the darkness almost immediately, and could not work concertedly to make the throng "move on." There was no night-shift of mounted police, and we learned later that every signal system in the city was out of gear, so that reserves and specials could not be called together for riot service.

Here and there shone an oil-lamp, most of them taken from vehicles which did not depend upon the electric current or the new lilac ray for light. There happened to be none of the old-fashioned gasoline engine machines in the square, and no vehicle was moving.

Wherever a light appeared people ran together like moths about a flame. They did not seem to know enough to go home; perhaps most of them were afraid to do so. The darkness here had already continued three-quarters of an hour.

As I pushed on through the throng I heard the most astonishing ideas put forth to explain the mystery. Some I had thought of myself; some I could not for an instant have believed, although they seemed to take hold firmly upon the minds of many.

I bumped into one intelligent appearing citizen who clung to me (he had been drinking a little and felt the need of companionship) and insisted upon explaining lucidly his reasons for believing that Professor Crympe, who had been stirring people so of late by his lectures, had done this to exhibit his power of "dematerialization."

"He's just blown the lights out, sir—snuffed 'em out like candles!" he reiterated.

"How do you account for the cars stopping, too?" I asked, before shaking him off.

"Humph! ain't they always breaking down?" he grunted. "I hafter walk home almost ev'ry night, any way."

This was the single humorous view which came my way. There was little to laugh at in the situation.

One man who was going east as I was, and who walked shoulder to shoulder with me through Twenty-Third Street, told me he had been riding in a Broadway car when the thing happened.

"The lights went out in an instant, and the car came to a jarring stop. I had been looking out at the park and first I saw the big D'Alvord lights on the tall poles disappear.

"The higher lights on the street were first extinguished," he added. "Then came the panic on the street and in the cars. Everybody rushed for the doors, believing that something threatened our safety.

"I saw one woman knocked down and trampled upon; and before I could help her a brute of a fellow stooped and tore the rings from her ears, and a brooch from the front of her dress.

"Oh, that crowd yonder is full of thieves; they are 'working' it systematically. I could almost believe that this darkness was brought about by the thieving fraternity, that it might reap a harvest."

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed.

"Well, what do you think is the matter? Surely, this is not a plot of Germany to send a fleet into the harbor and bombard us? The papers said this afternoon that conditions were strained over the Greenland matter, and that the Kaiser was getting ugly."

"I do not believe that, either," I said.

"Then, do you think it a trick of this D'Alvord Ray Company to make the city come to terms on the lighting and traction questions? We've fought several of these piratical corporations before and beaten them; but this would be a most daring trick."

"That is the worst guess yet!" I cried. "Why, man alive, I work for the D'Alvord Company. I'm a district superintendent, and I have no more idea of what has happened than you have. Besides, don't you see that the Edison lights are out of commission, too?"

"Pshaw!" he said. "You know as well as I that there is a working

agreement between the two companies, despite the law against such things."

"But look at all the private plants that have been put out of commission, too," I exclaimed. "And the telephone service isn't working, either."

This amazed him, and he threw up the sponge. But I saw danger in this feeling against my employers.

I parted from this man a minute later, for he crossed the street, intending to walk up Madison Avenue, where the crowd was less. I walked steadily eastward, and was soon out of the thick of the throng myself.

I had been hearing, now and then, the hoarse tooting of whistles on the river. Evidently much of the shipping had gone astray in the darkness, too.

I remembered that every ferry system on the East River below Thirty-Fourth Street was supplied with power from my own power houses. Could it be possible that those heavy craft were floating about helplessly in the stream? If so the damage done to piers and other craft would be enormous!

Suddenly, just before I reached the subway stations at the corner of Fourth Avenue, a big light suddenly blazed forth in the middle of the street. It was the head-lamp of a gasoline machine—a truck owned by some brewery, and run under the old patent of a gasoline engine with no generator.

This turned the corner into the cross street and steamed steadily toward me, undisturbed by the general calamity which had overtaken most vehicles. It was crowded with a lot of young roughs from, perhaps, my own section of the town, and when it reached the throng at the square, I saw that there would be trouble.

All manner of wickedness would be let loose about the town if this darkness continued much longer. I loosened the revolver in my pocket again, and hurried on.

I glanced into the subway as I passed; it was black and empty, like the mouth of a great pit. Of course, every train had stopped, and the people were doubtless stalled, in many instances, between stations.

All electric currents, above or below the ground, were affected in the same way. And yet, as far as I could observe, there was positively no change in the atmosphere, except the chilliness incident to the lateness of the evening.

I determined to go as far as Third Avenue before turning down-town, and had just crossed Fourth, when an eruption of humanity burst from the subway stations on this side of the street.

They piled out, women and men, half maddened by fear, shrieking or laughing according to how deeply impressed they had been by the stoppage of their up-town train and the blackness of the tunnel through which they had walked to reach this exit.

The instant they flowed out upon the street, and found the whole world seemingly shrouded in gloom, their voices were hushed by awe. Laughter and cries of fear, joking and weeping, all died away.

They stood in a group, perhaps a hundred of them (I had been forced against the wall of the near-by building by the rush and could make some guess as to the number) smitten with unexpected silence. Suddenly a voice, clear, high, hysterical—a woman's voice, I knew—rang out, shattering the weird silence:

"Oh, God, help us! Down on your knees—all! all! It is the end of the world—it is the end!"

Such a shriek I hope I shall never hear again. And its effect upon the frightened people about her was most awful.

Others joined in with sobs and moans, with groans of anguish and pleadings for mercy. The thought suggested—the thought that this was the end of the course of the sphere, and that the Almighty Power which created it in the beginning was about ruthlessly to destroy the work of His hands, gripped them as a veritable certainty.

Down they fell upon their knees, crying and pleading. A man near me went into a spasm of epilepsy, falling and foaming at the mouth. Others began to shriek verses from the Scriptures—words which, to my mind, sounded only blasphemous.

Meanwhile the woman whose voice had first suggested this horror, continued to pray and beseech the Almighty as though He were a blind and unforgiving human judge! I covered my ears and fled from the place, unable longer to listen to such blasphemy.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMMERCIAL SIDE OF IT.

I HAD been in the dark so long now that it was easier for me to distinguish objects—especially bulky ones—as I ran, and I dodged several pedestrians and a barrier across the walk left by some contractor who was rebuilding the dwelling which here fronted upon the street.

My case was exceptional, however, for pedestrians were falling down, or bumping into each other, all about me. And from the hole in the sidewalk some unfortunate was begging for release.

A police officer was here, but he had quite lost his head, having been unable, as he assured me, to call up either his station or the hospital. The man in the hole was undoubtedly seriously injured.

"If you're on this beat you must remember some doctor's office near. Let us get the man out, and we can take him there," I said.

He seized this suggestion with alacrity, and in ten minutes we managed to raise the poor fellow out of the ditch. But he fainted and I discovered that one of his injuries, at least, was a badly fractured limb.

A doctor resided up Lexington Avenue a little way, and, after much trouble and at the expense of many matches, we found the office, and placed the injured man in his care.

But I saw that if I stopped to help every person I found in trouble, I would never get to my destination. And I felt that my company would expect me to show up at the power houses as soon as possible.

Something might be done to quickly counteract this strange influence which seemed to have drawn all the electricity away from us.

Although the D'Alvord ray was so much superior to the old Edison light, it was only another application of electrical science, pure and simple. We were dependent upon the generation of the "juice" for power and light, just the same as our competitors in the business.

The most northern station in my district was between Third and Second Avenues, on Fifteenth Street. I was already in the district controlled from this point, and not an electric light showed on the street or in the houses.

In the saloons and eating-houses, the drug stores and candy-pop places, along Third Avenue, an effort had been made to supply light with candles and oil-lamps. But since the lilac ray had been made so cheaply by our company, people had quite given up the use of oil, and candles had been used for little but ornamentation for a score of years, or more.

Stores were being closed and tightly shuttered. I passed a saloon that already had been sadly gutted. A gang of roughs had entered under cover of darkness, held up the barkeeper, and removed most of his stock of bottled goods.

Some of these whisky places, which were scarcely closed day or night, were at the mercy of the ill-disposed throng.

Several gangs of young ruffians I dodged: but now and then I heard the screams of women who were either scared, or actually maltreated by the scoundrels. It was a time for honest citizens to keep to their homes and bar their doors.

Here and there the light of a hand-lantern—some antediluvian affair which had been hastily resurrected in the emergency—flitted along the street, marking groups of people returning to their homes under its escort.

Under the elevated structure it was so dark that I could not see the surface cars which I knew were stalled there: but I could hear the motormen and conductors shouting back and forth to each other.

Above, the trains were of course stopped, too, and all the lights on the elevated structure and at the stations

had disappeared. The passengers, as in the subway, were leaving the trains and walking to the stations.

Fortunately the old third rail had been displaced by the D'Alvord traction system, and there was no danger to the people in doing this, even had the current been turned on.

But I could see signs of no electricity anywhere. The traction system was dead, not a glow came from the globes atop the tall street poles, and saving where the proprietors had found lights and candles, the stores and dwellings which I passed were in utter darkness.

As I walked on it seemed to me that the vapor, or haze, increased, and it grew darker. Possibly light clouds were obscuring the sky and shutting off from us the faint light of the stars. I bumped into other pedestrians more frequently, and some of them cursed me, while others were frightened and fled, weeping.

It was very easy to lose one's bearings, as I found after passing the Eighteenth Street station of the elevated. I lost count of the streets and had to climb a corner post to get near enough to the sign to read it.

I noticed a cigar store open, illuminated with two good lamps. It was crowded with men, and some women, and the proprietor was doing a thriving trade, especially in matches. I paid him fifty cents for a box of lucifers which ordinarily would have been sold for five!

I had become so interested in the change this sudden darkness had made in the city and its inhabitants, that I did not turn directly through Fifteenth Street when I reached that corner. Instead, I kept on to Fourteenth, which is always, at Third Avenue at least, a glare of electric lights.

Here congregate nightly the sporting element of the lower East Side, the pleasure-seeking and the vicious together. Half a dozen theaters and music-halls are within stone's throw of this corner, and they were all well filled when the visitation of darkness came upon the city.

Held from panic by the assurances of the managers that there was no danger, and that the lights would go up again in a few minutes, the audiences had waited for a while; but at length, learning that the streets, too, were dark, fright drove the people from the various houses of entertainment.

The situation savored of a city smitten with an earthquake. Nobody seemed willing to remain in the houses. Everybody possessed a desire to rush into the street, and because of that thieves were looting many dwellings and stores.

And so, when once the outrush from the theaters began, the people had fairly vomited forth and filled the wide thoroughfare with just such a crazed mob as occupied Madison Square. Most of these people, however, had found refuge in partially lighted restaurants and hotels, or had melted away into the side streets, before I reached the corner.

There were enough left to make progress uncertain along the sidewalks. And although the voices of the street hawkers, newspaper venders, and barkers were hushed, there was a loud hum of conversation from the almost invisible throng.

There was little laughter, for the people had all become serious now. Groups of total strangers anxiously discussed the phenomenon, and upon one corner a company of the Salvation Army was holding an impromptu religious service—to my mind fitly conducted and with reverence.

No wild talk and weird prophecies did I hear from this devoted little band; but earnest, comforting words for the thrilled listeners who crowded about them. It was marvelous how unexpectedly this calamity affected different people.

The beggars and riffraff of the street had either slunk home to their holes, or were plying less honest trades in the crowd. But one incident I marked as very strange.

I heard the sharp rap, rap, rap of a steel-shod cane upon the walk and then a droning voice cried: "Pity the blind! pity the blind!"

This unfortunate and sightless human being passed me so near that I could have touched him, and every few

steps his mournful cry rang out, hushing the eager voices of those about him. He did not realize what had happened to the world, nor did he appreciate the advantage he possessed over his fellow men.

He had learned to find his way about certain streets, at least, without eyesight. He was the only man in that great crowd then who was sure of his locality; yet he plodded on with his beggar's cry:

"Pity the blind! pity the blind!"

"Pity the seeing, oh, God!" I muttered. "Pity us all!"

And I turned about and wended my way warily to the Fifteenth Street corner and soon found the power and light station of the D'Alvord Company.

I had some difficulty in getting into the building. The men were overhauling the machines, working like imps in the light of several smoky oil torches; and even Jefferson, the overman of the house, had scarcely a word for me.

"What's the matter? The devil only knows—I don't. Since I came to work for this company I've never run up against anything like this—and you know Mr. D'Alvord's first machines were pretty crude affairs."

"You think the fault lies in the mechanism?" I asked, in surprise.

"Where else? We've overlooked something—that's what. Don't spring any fake hoodoo business on me, sir. I don't believe in such stuff as these men are gabbling about."

"I don't know what they're gabbling," I observed. "But I do know that the Edison people are affected the same way as ourselves, and the lights are out over the whole city, and in Jersey and on Long Island; that cars have stopped, automobiles can't run, ferries are floating about the river in a helpless condition, and that the telephone system is knocked out——"

He threw up his hands and shouted an oath at me.

"Shut up!" he bawled. "I don't give a rap if you are super of this district; don't you come here and tell me such stuff as that—and rattle my men, too! Lemme alone for another hour and I'll either find out the trouble, or I'll blow the confounded plant up."

"You're an obstinate fellow, Jeff," I returned, quietly; "but you won't do that, I know. Struggle with it if you like; but I warn you that your time is being wasted. This difficulty with the electricity is atmospheric."

"Go talk to Mr. Shurtleff: he's in the office," groaned the boss of the station. "I don't know anything about the science of the thing; but I swear I know my machines, and I know how to handle the 'juice.' You can't fool me."

I was convinced that I could learn nothing helpful from him. He was keeping his entire gang at work overhauling the machinery, expecting to find some fault therein; while I knew, as well as I knew that it was dark, that the trouble did not lie there at all.

I went up-stairs to see Shurtleff. He was one of the principal officers of the company and had been in Mr. D'Alvord's confidence for years. He was an inventor of no small parts himself, and a scientist to his finger tips.

To my surprise, when I opened the door of the office room I found it brilliantly lighted. I was dazzled by so suddenly coming into the illuminated place, and really, after more than two hours of darkness, it is no wonder that the light so strangely affected me.

The windows were curtained so that I had not noticed the light from the street; and it was not our lilac ray, either. It was a perfectly white light, not particularly pleasant to the eyes, I thought; although that effect may have been caused by the fact of my having been so long in darkness.

It was neither oil nor candle light; and, of course, electricity was out of the question. But Shurtleff sat there, comfortably reading, and did not even look up when I blundered into the room.

I stared about to see whence the light came. All I could observe was a luminous vial upon the table beside him—a vial perhaps an inch and a half high and half an inch in diameter. So brilliant was the mysterious light which came from this that I had to turn away my eyes in haste.

"What is it?" I gasped, and then Shurtleff looked up and nodded to me.

"Oh, that you, Sam?" he said, coolly.

"For heaven's sake, where did you get that light? And is there any more of it?" I cried. "Do you know the whole world has gone dark?"

"Come, come! Do you believe that?" he asked me, cheerfully. "I guess Jeff will get the machines to working before long."

"Great Scott, man! do you mean to say that you do not know how widespread this disaster is?" I cried.

"Why, Jeff says the whole district is in darkness and that the cars have stopped——"

I told him hastily the real state of affairs, and what I had seen during my pilgrimage down-town. He had been in a near-by restaurant when the lights went out and had found his way at once to the station to make inquiries. Here he had been sitting quietly all this time, waiting for "repairs" to be made so that he could go home!

"My God, man!" I said, earnestly, "you will have to wait for somebody to repair the universe. Something has gone wrong with the laws of nature. The entire electric system of this part of the country, at least, has gone on a strike.

"And what's this light?" I repeated. "Where did you get it?"

"Oh, it is some of Burbank's foolishness," Shurtleff replied, scarcely appreciating the full meaning of my statements, I could see.

Burbank was my predecessor as superintendent of this district. He had made his headquarters at this station, and I saw his desk open in the corner. Shurtleff was evidently well acquainted with the man who had resigned, as I understood, to devote his time entirely to investigations in chemistry and kindred subjects.

"What the dickens is that?"

"In the bottle?" Shurtleff repeated. "Why, it's a particle of radium, I believe. Old Burbank has been monkeying with that stuff ever since M. Curie discovered it in 1898—or thereabouts. He even went to France to talk with the discoverer about the stuff. He believes that he will in time invent a way of cheapening its production so that its uses may be popularized. He believes he can make a light and furnish heat from this radium that will knock Mr. D'Alvord's lilac ray into a cocked hat."

"Well," I said, with a sigh, "it's the only decent light I have seen for hours."

"And I don't know how much I'm deteriorating this lamp in the bottle by having it out here. You see, it's wrapped in some sort of foil inside the flask. He told me the other day that this lamp was worth several hundred dollars. But gad! a man can't sit in the dark and twiddle his thumbs."

"A good many of our fellow citizens are doing just that, I reckon. The lamp stores will be mobbed if this keeps on long."

And then we settled down to an earnest discussion of the conditions arising from this era of darkness. When once I had convinced him by my report that such a vast territory had succumbed to the plague of darkness, he set his mind to the task of theorizing on the subject.

Its commercial side appealed to me, however. I foresaw that the national pulse would be at a standstill on the morrow if these same conditions prevailed over a large extent of territory.

The telegraph and telephone systems would be entirely out of commission; even the wireless could not work. The railways—that is, most of them—must already have their trains stalled upon the tracks. Electricity, or the D'Alvord system, had taken the place of steam almost entirely in railroading.

Many boats could not run, and even the ocean steamships, if in the zone affected by this mysterious power which had so benumbed our electric currents, would be out of commission—for how could they light and heat the vessels?

Had I not, with my own eyes, seen so large a territory blotted out by the curtain of darkness, I might not have given my mind to these possibilities. But it seemed to me as though the difficulty must be very far-reaching indeed.

All communication between towns and cities must cease; the newspapers could scarcely be printed; trains and boats would be stopped; the marts of trade closed; tradesmen would be afraid to open the doors of their bazaars. The situation—and Shurtleff agreed with me in this—was beyond compare the strangest which had ever visited the earth since the birth of history!

CHAPTER VII.

THE GHOULS.

SHURTLEFF began cross-examining me about what I had observed from the roof of the Madison Square building when first the plague of darkness descended upon us. He was a shrewd and careful theorist, and I had confidence in his ability to see as far through a stone wall as the best of them. But this——

"It certainly seems a deep mystery," he admitted, after I had told him all. "The lights and traction power stopped almost instantly, you say?"

"In the various sections—yes."

"Then the trouble must surely be with the power machines and dynamos, eh?" he said.

And he could not get over that fact. Indeed, this point, which was well attested, made the true explanation of the mystery so hard to find. It really looked as though all these electricity generating machines had, by some strange mischance, simultaneously broken down.

Shurtleff went to the window and raised the curtain to look out. But the street was now in deeper gloom than ever. He threw up the sash and the air which blew in felt damp and heavy.

"There's a storm coming," he declared. "Perhaps this is merely some electrical disturbance, after all. Let us go to the roof and view the clouds."

My legs were fatigued after descending the long flights of stairs in the other building, but I dragged myself up to the top of the house after him.

I was as anxious as he to find some reasonable explanation for the difficulty, and if some strange manifestation of nature had drawn all the electricity out of our atmosphere, I wished to be convinced of that fact, and so have my mind relieved of more maddening suggestions.

We reached the roof of the power house. It was not a tall building as structures are builded nowadays; but we could overlook a goodly portion of the city.

Or, rather, we could have overlooked it had there been light enough to see. But up from the west were rolling great masses of vapor which blotted out the stars completely.

"Thunder-heads" led the van of clouds and already the lightning played about their edges. There was certainly *some* electricity left in our atmosphere; yet it struck me that these flashes were not commensurate with the angry appearance of the clouds and the amount of rainfall which was plainly falling over Jersey.

Swiftly the storm approached, and as the clouds brooded lower and lower over our stricken city, the voices of the frightened people came up to Shurtleff and me like the bellowing of a vast herd of frightened cattle. The coming gale was increasing the panic below in the streets.

The wind began to moan about us. Suddenly a wide white streak marked the North River—a ghostly looking strip which assured us that the downpour had reached that boundary of the city.

Over our heads the stars and the comet were quickly blotted out, and then came the rain—a beating, lashing storm such as had never afflicted the city before. Yet neither Shurtleff nor I would leave the roof.

We were both too greatly interested in the phenomenon. Aside from the torrents of rain which fell, and the force of the wind, I had never imagined such a play of lightning.

A continuous glare lit up the clouds, and during those few minutes the city was lighted enough in all good conscience! It was a terrifying, ghostly light, and it served a good purpose in that it forced all those who could to take permanent shelter within their homes.

Only the mad, and those far from home, or the wickedly inclined, were left in the streets. The electric display lasted perhaps ten minutes.

And now for the mystery of it: Not a bolt of lightning fell earthward! Not a streak of the electric "juice" shot downward from the clouds!

We saw the glare of its continual play, but the "thunderbolts" were performing their mimic war above the clouds. The earth no longer acted as a magnet for the precious fluid which had, during the past century, done so much for mankind.

It seemed, indeed, as though the earth had suddenly become a negative pole, instead of a positive, for electricity. It seemed to repel the lightning instead of drawing it.

My early belief that this awful disaster was atmospheric was proved even to the satisfaction of a scientific doubter like Shurtleff. He looked at me, nodded his admission, and then clutching my hand, dragged me inside the hatchway out of the beating rain.

"You are right!" he shouted in my ear. "It is not a fault of our machines. You've hit it! The electric currents seem to be on a strike!"

But it was no joking matter. We descended to the office again in silence, for we were both deeply impressed with the enormity of this calamity which had befallen the earth.

"Sam, we've certainly lighted on marvelous times," Shurtleff said, shaking his head. "Earthquakes such as that which wiped the eastern slope of Mexico off the map and opened the natural canal through Panama, and the hurricane which shaved the Bahamas as clean as one's palm last year, aren't in it with this business!

"Lord! There's old Stangler been prophesying that the nearness of his comet to the earth might cause convulsions of nature; but he never dreamed a dream like this. He was all for the poor old world being burned up.

"And now to think of all the electric juice being squeezed out of our atmosphere—for that's what this amounts to. Why, it's the most awful calamity that ever happened! It will wreck the whole world, financially and all!"

"We got along without it before Ben Franklin's day," I remarked.

"We did nothing of the kind. We had just as much electricity in our atmosphere then as ever, only we didn't know how to use it. But now that pretty nearly all the civilized world is adjusted to its use—why, man, we shall drift back into a condition similar to man in the Stone Age!

"What of the arts and sciences? How can civilization and industries continue without electricity? What of war? There'll be no more wars. Our navies are so much scrap-iron without electricity. Why—why——"

"But you talk," said I, "as though you believed this condition of things would last?"

"Why not believe it to be lasting, as long as it *has* happened? We have no reason for believing that it is but a momentary convulsion," Shurtleff declared.

"It's only the weak man, or the timid, who will not look at the blackest side of the shield at once——"

"By the way, how black is it out now?" I observed, and went to the window and lifted the shade again.

Almost instantly a roar of voices broke out in the street, and with this sound a hail of missiles and several pistol shots rattled against the building. A pane of glass in the casement was broken, and I sprang back with the blood flowing from a cut in my cheek.

Instantly Jefferson dashed into the room. He stood blinking in the powerful light of the bottled radium.

"For God's sake, what is the matter out there?" Shurtleff demanded, dropping the thick curtain over the window again.

An answering roar—a sound like beasts who smell raw flesh at feeding time—rose again from the thronged street. While we had been coming down from the roof and the storm had passed, this mob had gathered almost silently before the power station.

"They're mad! they're mad!" cried Jefferson, finally getting his voice. "They believe we have shut off the lights and power—all over the city.

They blame the D'Alvord Company for this breakdown."

"They blame us?" cried Shurtleff, to whom this phase of the matter had not appealed before.

"Yes. Think we've shut down all over town purposely. They say we're trying to force the city to pay us more for heat, and light, and power. Some blamed demagogue of an anarchistic agitator has started 'em going. . . . Got any guns, you fellers?"

I produced my weapon, but Shurtleff cried: "For heaven's sake, gentlemen, don't shoot them."

"Then they'll shoot us—and blamed soon, too! Hear that?"

Indeed, we could hear little else the next moment. His voice was drowned in the crash of a battering ram against the lower door. Again and again the blows were repeated, and the building trembled.

"Let us talk to them—explain—convince them," groaned Shurtleff.

"You might as well talk to wild animals. That mob is after blood," Jefferson declared. "People in a panic don't use reason, nor listen to reason. What they want is cold lead; and if I had a few guns I could arm my men and beat off the whole cowardly pack."

"It would be awful!"

"It *is* awful already, Shurtleff," I cried. "This must stop. If somebody must die, let it be those fools who have attacked the place."

I ran again to the window, having stanched the blood from my cut.

"Here's another revolver—in Burbank's desk," Shurtleff said, slowly.

Jeff grabbed it instantly. Then he ran after me and dragged me back.

"Don't make a target of yourself, sir!" he cried. Then to our companion: "Douse that infernal light, will you? What is it—that devilish stuff of Mr. Burbank's? Put it away. That's what has made them so wild out there. They declare we have got light inside, and we must give it to them."

Shurtleff seized the vial in which the lump of radium was confined, rolled it in its wrappings, and thrust it into a drawer of the desk, closing the desk top hurriedly. We were left in pitch-darkness.

Jeff ripped aside the curtain and threw up the sash. The blows upon the door continued while the shouts of the mob increased. There was a flare of red torches in the street, and by this light I saw many faces which I knew could not belong to honest, if mistaken citizens.

The mob was ready to loot this, or any other building, which it could enter. A shot or two from honest men might do more good than harm!

At the moment the door gave way below, and then I aimed at the ugliest face I could see. But before my shaking finger pressed the trigger, Jeff's gun barked twice in rapid succession.

The most fiendish yell which had thus far assailed our ears rose from the mob, and a dozen guns popped. The flash of his weapon revealed us to them.

I am frank to say I dodged aside without firing. Jeff went down in a heap, and without a moan.

"He's dead!" I gasped.

This seemed to awaken Shurtleff. He seized the revolver from the poor fellow's nerveless fingers, leaned out of the window, and emptied the remaining chambers into those struggling to enter over the broken door.

Then he dashed back to the other end of the room and double-locked the only door giving entrance to the office.

But I still clung to the window frame. No further shots were sent in my direction. Instead, I heard a new tone in the voice of the rioting throng—the voice of fear.

Shrieks of terror rose from all parts of the mob, and there suddenly came a rush of feet as many of the ghouls stampeded toward Third Avenue. I dared thrust my head out of the window once more.

And then I, too, screamed in terror. God help me! I hope never to see such an awful apparition again.

What I had already seen and suffered this night had served to put my nerves on edge; this, I am frank to say, chilled me to the very marrow, and I fell upon my knees, staring with bulging eyes out of the shattered casement.

There, striding down the street from

the east, and driving before it the shrieking, horrified people, was the luminous figure of a headless man—a figure which loomed seemingly eight feet high as it moved steadily onward.

It was just the trunk and limbs of a creature in human shape, and from every part of the headless body exuded a flickering, almost phosphorescent glow!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAY DAWNS.

I CAME as near to madness at that moment as a man can and escape raving delirium. Had I been of an hysterical temperament, I should probably have fled, quite as panic-stricken as any individual in that mob.

As it was, I seemed held to my place at the window, fascinated by the approaching phantom.

So much that seemed inexplicable had happened during these past few hours that a headless and luminous being walking through the darkened streets of our stricken city did not for an instant impress me as being imaginary.

One phase of the vision was plainly delusion, however, and my stunned senses grasped this detail after a moment. It was the strangely pale light exuding from the walking monster that made it look so tall. The headless body was not really taller than that of an ordinary human being's.

The apparition came on swiftly, directing its steps obliquely across the street toward the wrecked door of the power house. Before it was half-way along the block from Second Avenue, the street was completely cleared of the frightened mob, saving for two groaning men upon the steps below my window—the victims of Shurtleff's frenzied fusillade.

The latter had been kneeling beside the fallen foreman. Now he spoke to me:

"He's not killed. A bullet grazed his head, Sam. Help me lift him up. What's the matter with you, man?" he added, as I did not move or speak.

He sprang up and came to the window, shaking me by the arm.

"For God's sake! are you hurt, too?"

I pointed feebly at the luminous being, now almost at the steps of the building. Shurtleff craned his neck out of the window.

"What in heaven's name is that?" he gasped. "Who is it? Why—why—— By Jove! it's Burbank! He's coming up. He'll be needed if those crazy fools return."

The eerie figure was so near now that I, too, saw its head. That was the only portion of the body that was not luminous.

All the man's clothing seemed to have been dipped in some preparation like phosphorus. Little wonder that his appearance had set the mob beside itself with terror.

We heard his footsteps on the stairs, and Shurtleff hurried to admit him. The instant he entered the room, the apartment was made light.

"For pity's sake, Burbank!" cried the director. "What have you got on? What does this mean?"

"Lucky I was working in my laboratory, and had these clothes on," he replied. "Otherwise I couldn't have found my way over here. What you fellows been doing to the street lights? And it looks down-stairs as though you'd had a battle."

"The clothes!" I demanded. "What makes the light?"

"Ah-ha!" he cried. "It scared you, too, did it? It's nothing. I always wear these things in my laboratory, and I've worked and experimented with radium so much that it's a wonder I have not become impregnated myself with the marvelous element, as M. Curie and his wife were. I noticed some time ago that these clothes shone in the dark. . . . Where's your lights, Shurtleff?"

"Don't you know?" we asked him, and then together poured out the story of the mystery of darkness that had befallen the earth.

"I heard that the district had gone dark and the cars had stopped running, so I came out hurriedly, thinking I might be of some use to you here," Burbank said. "But I didn't know the calamity was so far-reaching."

I related some of my experiences in coming down to the power house; but he was particularly interested, as Shurtleff had been, in the details of the first loss of the lights.

"Ah! when I get my radium light perfected, we'll have no such trouble as this," Burbank declared, with the enthusiasm of the inventor.

"But how about this strange calamity?" Shurtleff asked. "What, in your opinion, is the cause of it all? Why can't we generate electricity? Why does the earth no longer attract the electric fluid?"

"Why, your question answers itself," Burbank returned. "Merely because the earth does *not* attract electricity."

"But why? Why this sudden change? Why has the earth become a negative instead of a positive pole?"

"Because there is an influence much stronger than the earth's drawing the electricity from us. That is simple."

"Oh, confound it!" exclaimed Shurtleff, with disgust. "Talk sense. Don't spring any old folk tale like the Martian scare we had some years ago. I don't believe Mars is inhabited at all."

"Am I saying anything about intelligent beings on other planets having aught to do with this change?" demanded Burbank calmly. "I simply state that it is my belief that some greater magnet than this earth has suddenly attracted all the electricity out of our atmosphere.

"As fast as our machines generate it, it is dissipated. You say that the storm we had an hour ago was a wonderful electrical exhibition; yet all the lightning seemed above the clouds. Mark my words, gentlemen: the 'juice' is being drawn away from us by some very powerful magnet——"

"What magnet?" I demanded.

"Ah! that is *your* question. Answer it yourself, sir," he said, shaking his head reflectively, and although I believed he had a theory already he refused to express himself further upon the subject.

But there was a very practical side to the character of this dreamer and inventive genius. After we brought Jefferson back to a knowledge of his surroundings, Burbank really took the lead in barricading the power house against further attack from the mob.

We could expect no help from the police, for the entire department was disorganized by the failure of the signal systems. The fire department was better governed, for although the ordinary alarms could not be rung, the firemen saved the city that night from several disastrous conflagrations.

Several times before daybreak I saw the red glare of flames against the now clouded heavens; but all these fires were quenched before dawn.

And that was the dawn of a day long to be remembered by New York, by America at large, and, indeed, by the entire world. How much of the earth's surface had been affected by the strange power that had deprived us of electricity we did not know until long afterward. News, even of happenings within the limits of the greater city, was very vague.

The only papers that were issued that day were three small sheets printed by old-fashioned methods. Their plants happened to include old-style steam-engines, and the presses were run with that now antedated power.

The columns were filled with little fact and much speculation. Telephone and telegraph communication was nil. All traveling was done afoot or in vehicles drawn by horses. As predicted, business was at a complete standstill.

But the daylight—such as it was, for heavy clouds obscured the sun, and it was a clammy, sticky atmosphere which we breathed—gave the people courage. Organizations were formed in the different wards for the protection of life and property.

The trained police were massed in the worst sections of the town; suspected criminals were arrested by wholesale, and the jails and prisons were filled. Troops of the National Guard were placed under arms, and before nightfall plans for the posting of armed sentinels at every corner were perfected.

On the other hand, much was done toward combating another term of darkness. Oil-lamps were erected, and

some private gas plants were levied upon for street illumination.

Citizens were warned to remain in their homes after sunset, for as night approached neither the D'Alvord Company's dynamos, the Edison patents, or any private electric plants were able to generate sufficient force to turn a single wheel!

News dribbled in slowly from the more distant sections of the city and of neighboring municipalities. Steamboats on the Hudson and coastwise steamers of the old-fashioned types brought the more distant tidings.

Far out at sea, eastward as far as Boston, up State as far as the Mohawk Valley, from as far south as Cape May, and as far west as the Delaware River, it was reported that the same conditions as those noted in New York City prevailed.

How much farther away darkness had descended upon the earth, we were left in doubt for many days. Wealthy people bought up most of the equipages drawn by horses, and thousands started upon overland pilgrimages to try to escape from the zone of disaster.

After a few days just one steamship, which happened to be supplied with acetylene gas machines, by which her cabins could be lighted, sailed for Europe. She was recklessly laden with people who could afford to pay enormous sums for passage.

Incoming vessels dared venture landward only during the day. Many of the lighthouses fitted with electric lights could resurrect the old oil-lamps but slowly.

No news of these ships could be obtained until they were actually sighted from the land. There were many collisions and wrecks because of the inability of steamships and sailing craft of the larger class to show sufficient lights.

Never had the world passed through such a terrible experience. Yet the very fact that so few of these horrors were known until long afterward saved the public from going utterly insane.

Most newspapers—even the greatest among them—became little better than local newsmongers. Information from distant points came to us by relays, and it was more than a week before any word reached New York from as far west as the Mississippi.

Lines of stages were established, and the post was carried on pony back, as it had been seventy-five years before. Relays of fast horses transferred mail to and from the larger cities, and we learned that everywhere scientific men had congregated to study the situation.

Then finally word came east from St. Louis. Professor Stangler had issued a statement after the first night of darkness, coinciding almost exactly with the opinion that Burbank had expressed to Shurtleff and me that awful night in the power house.

Many other scientifically educated persons scoffed at the astronomer's suggestion; but Stangler's opinion has finally been established as the actual and only explanation of the "strike" of the electric fluid over more than half a hemisphere of this world of ours.

Astronomers have, for ages, pointed out the danger threatening our earth from some of those erratic gaseous bodies which we call comets. Stangler had already predicted that the monster which had so filled the public eye for months would draw very near to us.

Its orbit finally brought it so close that, being formed of some highly magnetic mass, it positively drew from our atmosphere (or from that portion of it surrounding a greater part of the northern hemisphere) every particle of electricity generated by both natural and mechanical means.

In other words, the Stangler comet, for a period of forty-one days, or until it passed out of this juxtaposition to the earth, acted as a huge pole and, had its orbit not then carried the monster away from us, in time it might have affected the earth's entire surface.

As it was the phenomenon lasted long enough to warn all thinking men what peril lay in such absolute dependence as we had begun to put in one element. We found that much-lauded servant, Electricity, might become master; that in using it so widely we had become dependent upon it.

Burbank's inventions of the radium light and radium power and heat naturally took a mighty boom at this time.

Before the period of darkness was over he had managed to interest capital in his inventions, and had our corporation not seen the wisdom of going into the game with him, he might have built up a formidable rival company.

Now that radium has been found elsewhere than at the state mines at Joachimstal, Bohemia, and its production has been so cheapened by Burbank's process, this new element may become in time equally common with electricity. The warning of the visitation of darkness has been taken seriously by most nations, so that more than one method of heating, lighting, and power must now be in use at one time.

The effect of the forty-one nights of darkness, and the utter and complete disorganization of business and government in the United States and Canada thereby, is still observable to-day.

Many small towns were given up to loot and rapine. The ill-affected rose against employers and taskmasters, and great manufacturing properties were destroyed by fire. Several penitentiaries vomited forth their inmates because of the stampede of the officials. Crime increased fourfold and only vigorous action by the government saved the whole land from anarchy and complete disintegration.

There was one terrible night, I remember, in this city itself, when a mob of thousands threatened to burn down churches and to loot the mansions of the rich. I had abandoned my work for the company then, for we could do nothing; and I was with Alice at her father's home.

We defended ourselves with such arms as we had, and blood flowed in that aristocratic thoroughfare. The horror was so deeply impressed upon my mind that I can never pass that way now without a shuddering remembrance.

But for us—Alice and me—the visitation of darkness was not a little beneficial. During that period I obtained her consent to our marriage, so, for all the fearful remembrances which rise in my thought at the mention of those forty-one nights, my real happiness dates from that time!

Jernym, my old friend, says the same. He characteristically observed that the experience "jogged him awake."

"I was getting dead stuck on that little Hoskins girl," he confided in me. "I might have been stuck *with* her, if it hadn't brought Mrs. Bob out so strong. I tell you, Sam, that woman is a whizzer! She's just the cheery sort of a woman for a man like me to marry."

But if Mrs. Bob is married forty times, I believe all her friends will still speak of her as "Mrs. Bob." Jernym has my best wishes, however.

NO WAY OUT.*

BY BERTRAM LEBHAR.

A loan shark's threat, his victim's burst of temper, and the tragedy that supervened.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. JARVIS HAS A VISITOR.

BENJAMIN ASHER, clerk to the late Mr. Meyer, jeweler, sat in his one scantily furnished room, which was all the home he had, a prey to the deepest melancholy.

"What am I going to do?" he groaned. "Did ever a man have such bad luck as I? It isn't hard enough, I suppose, that I nearly lose my hearing; but I have to lose my job, as well. Now I suppose I'll starve to death.

"I don't see how I'm ever going to get another job. I've answered two dozen 'ads' and, the result is always the same. Nobody wants a half-deaf, gray-haired clerk. I was getting along

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so nicely, too, with poor Mr. Meyer! He didn't mind my being hard of hearing. I was cheap, and that counted in my favor with him. If only I could find another situation like that."

He shook his gray head sadly.

Suddenly he became conscious of a faint tapping on the door. In reality it was a loud and persistent rapping; but to his imperfect hearing, it did not sound so.

"Come in," yelled the old man, hastening to throw open the door.

At a glance he recognized the man who stood without as Detective-Sergeant Connaughton of the Central Office.

"Ah, there, my hearty," said the policeman, as he entered. "I'm glad to see you looking so well. Let's take a little walk."

"What's that you say?" asked the old man, putting his hand to his ear.

"I say, let's take a little walk," yelled the detective. "The boss wants to see you."

"Wants to see me? What for?" inquired the old man wonderingly. "I suppose he wants to ask me some more questions about poor Mr. Meyer's murder. I've told you everything I know. I've nothing more to tell. You people bother a person to death."

"You mustn't mind a little thing like that," shouted the detective in a voice that could have been heard a block away. "Come on, old fellow, get your hat."

They went to Mulberry Street together. The detective at first attempted to utter one or two pleasantries on the way, for he was never averse to a cheerful chat with a man under arrest; but finding that he had to repeat each remark three or four times at the top of his lungs, he soon gave up any attempt at conversation, and the greater part of the trip was conducted in complete silence.

Arrived at headquarters the detective knocked on the door of the inspector's private office and, receiving permission to enter, conducted his prisoner into the great presence.

Mr. Cartwright, of Cartwright & Wheeler, was there by appointment and nodded to the detective whom he knew.

"This is the man you wanted, inspector," said Connaughton to his chief.

Cartwright surveyed the little old clerk with keen interest.

"Ah, yes," said the inspector. "This is Benjamin Asher, the dead jeweler's clerk, eh? Asher," and he turned suddenly to the old man, "I want you to tell us why you killed Mr. Meyer?"

"What's that?" asked the clerk, putting his hand to his ear once more.

"You'll have to shout at the top of your lungs if you want him to hear, boss," suggested the detective.

"I want you to tell us why you killed Mr. Meyer," roared the inspector.

"I don't understand you," said the old man, with a puzzled look.

"You heard what I said, didn't you?" shouted the inspector once more.

"Yes, I believe I heard what you said, sir, but I don't understand you."

"What was your reason for killing him. That's what we want to know," shouted the inspector.

"Killing him—killing Mr. Meyer! I kill him! I don't understand you," protested the clerk.

Cartwright jumped up from his seat and went over to the old man's side.

"You were seen!" he bawled in his ear. "The secret is out! Confess and we'll make it easy for you."

The old man shook his head.

"I don't know what's come over you all," he said almost pityingly. "You're talking very foolishly. I've told you who committed that murder and how it was done."

"You've been lying to us. We've discovered your lies. You'd better tell the truth, now," shouted the inspector fiercely.

"What lies have I told you?" cried the old man indignantly. "You've all gone crazy here."

The inspector went to a closet and brought out Arthur Ladd's sword-cane.

"You killed your employer with this weapon," he roared. "Don't attempt to deny it. We have proofs."

"Proofs! How can you have proofs.

I never saw that weapon until I discovered it sticking in the body of poor Mr. Meyer. At least I didn't know it was a weapon until then. I saw it, of course, when that young man took it with him into Mr. Meyer's private office, but I never guessed at the time that it was more than an ordinary cane; if I had, this terrible tragedy might never have happened."

"You'd seen that cane before, or one like it. Come, don't deny it," shouted the lawyer. "Tell the truth, old man."

"No, sir. I've never handled a sword-cane that I know of. I've handled all sorts of curious things in my time; but never a sword-cane."

"Then if you had never seen one before, Mr. Asher, how did you know how to open this one?" shouted the lawyer, hoping to take the old fellow off his guard.

"I never opened this one. Ain't I telling you I never saw it until I rushed into my poor master's office and found him lying on the floor with this blade sticking into his heart? Oh, it was horrible! horrible!" and he shuddered.

"You see," whispered the inspector to Cartwright after they had hurled several more questions at the clerk, "he tells a straight story. You'll have a hard jog trying to make even the coroner's jury believe Ladd's word against his. Does this puny little old man look like a murderer?"

"Looks are deceptive," observed the lawyer. "He keeps up a bold front. He's a crafty old boy; but I'll trap him yet."

"You'll have your work for nothing," said the inspector. "I think it's a shame to hold this old man. However, we'll detain him until the coroner's jury has sat if you wish. Take him below, Connaughton."

The detective motioned to the gray-haired clerk to follow him, and saw him safely locked in a cell.

"It's a shame to treat the poor old boy that way," he mused as he came up-stairs.

Then he took a paper from his pocket and read eagerly:

> Ten thousand dollars reward will be paid to any person who can supply information which will prove that Arthur Ladd did not murder Jacob Meyer, of 915 Nassau Street.
>
> Address, R. A., *Star* Office.

"I presume R. A. stands for Robert Adrian," he mused. "Well, ten thousand dollars is a mighty lot of money. I shouldn't be averse to earning it myself."

The detective folded the newspaper and put it back again in his coat pocket. Then he boarded a car and rode up-town to the select boarding-house of Mrs. Obadiah Jarvis.

That good woman was startled almost to the point of fainting when she learned that the visitor down-stairs was a detective sergeant from the Central Office.

"He's sitting in the parlor, as large as life," reported the servant girl, "and he said as how he hopes it won't be disturbing you too much to ask a few minutes' conversation of you, ma'am."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! He's come to arrest me for helping poor Arthur Ladd to escape," Mrs. Jarvis groaned. "I know it. I'm sure of it. Oh, what shall I do?"

"Better go down to him, ma'am, or he's liable to come up here," suggested the maid. "You know what bold, audacious fellers them policemen are, ma'am."

So Mrs. Jarvis, quaking at every step, descended the stair.

"Mrs. Jarvis, I presume," said the detective, as she entered the parlor.

The landlady cast a look of terror at the big, square-jawed man before her. His manner seemed friendly, however, whatever his mission.

"Yes, I'm Mrs. Jarvis," she admitted. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"If I'm not mistaken, you're the lady who accompanied Mr. Arthur Ladd and Miss Adrian to the train the other day, aren't you?" inquired the detective.

"I knew it. I knew it," thought the panic-stricken boarding-house keeper. "He's come to arrest me as an acces-

sory, despite his pleasant way." But she determined to put on a bold front any way.

"And what if I did?" she asked defiantly. "It's a free country, isn't it? There's no harm in seeing a friend off on a little trip, Mr. Policeman, is there? That isn't a crime, is it? It may be a crime in Russia, but surely not here."

"Crime! I should say not, Mrs. Jarvis. I merely mentioned the fact in order to assure myself that you are kindly disposed toward Mr. Ladd. Is not that the case?"

"That's for you to find out," retorted Mrs. Jarvis, suspiciously. "You can't prove anything by me."

"You don't understand, my dear lady," said the detective suavely. "If you are a friend of Ladd's you naturally would like to see him a free man, wouldn't you? Ah, I thought so. Well, so would I, for reasons I need not enter into here. Well, with your help, I hope to accomplish it."

"With my help? How do you mean, sir?" asked the good woman eagerly. "If there's anything I can do, you can count on me, for if ever there was a nice, clean young man, it was Arthur Ladd. A little behind in paying his bills now and again, but nevertheless a perfect gentleman, both in manners and looks."

"He always dressed like a gentleman, too, I suppose," remarked the detective.

"Yes, indeed, sir. I've never seen him shabby-looking or wearing soiled linen since I've known him. One of these real refined young chaps, sir."

"Generally wore a gray suit, didn't he?" said the detective carelessly.

"Sometimes he did, sir, I believe. Gray seems to be a favorite color with the gentlemen here. There's Mr. Strauss: he generally wears gray clothes. Mr. O'Brien: he has a gray suit. Mr. Perriam sometimes wears a gray, though generally black, and Mr. Lansdale: he always wears gray, too. All well-dressed gentlemen they are, sir. Gray seems to be the fashion in men's clothes this season."

The detective put two fingers in his vest pocket and drew out a small ragged-edged piece of cloth—of grayish mixture.

"Ever remember seeing Arthur Ladd in a suit of that material," he asked.

"I remember seeing one of the young men in a suit of that sort, sir; but which one it was I've clean forgot. It may have been Arthur Ladd, but I ain't certain."

"Think hard, Mrs. Jarvis," suggested the detective encouragingly.

The good woman knitted her brows, but finally had to declare her inability to make a positive statement.

"I see by these handsome cushions on this sofa, Mrs. Jarvis, that you are quite an expert at needlework" remarked the detective, evidently desirous of changing the subject.

"You flatter me, sir," remarked the good woman, blushing.

"I suppose whenever any of the boarders need any repairs made in their clothing, you sometimes accommodate them, eh?"

"I should say not, sir," was the indignant reply. "I never would sew buttons on, even for Jarvis; and I certainly would not stoop to doing repairing for my boarders. When they want their clothes fixed they take them to the tailor."

"Any particular tailor?" asked the detective.

"Why, some of them have their repairs done at the little shop up the street, I believe."

"Does Ladd have his clothes repaired there?"

"I believe he does, and Mr. Perriam, too. The girl takes the trousers there to be pressed; that's how I know."

"Very good, Mrs. Jarvis," said the detective, rising. "I hope you won't mention this little conversation to anybody. Not a word to any one. Particularly not to Mr. Perriam; do you understand? He's a reporter, and I don't want this to get into the newspapers—at least not yet."

Mrs. Jarvis gave her promise readily.

"Though what there is to go into the papers, is beyond me," she mused, as she watched her visitor depart. "All he spoke about was clothes; and

what on earth clothes has to do with Arthur Ladd's innocence I can't imagine."

Detective Sergeant Connaughton sauntered leisurely toward the little tailor shop "up the street" and spent about five minutes with the proprietor during which the little piece of gray cloth was again brought into evidence.

As he came out of the store, the detective smiled a complacent smile: "Ten thousand dollars is a nice fat sum," he said softly. "I hope it will give Mr. R. A. as much pleasure to part with it as it will give me to receive it."

CHAPTER XIV.

THOU ART THE MAN.

APPARENTLY well satisfied with the results of his visit to Mrs. Jarvis, Detective Sergeant Connaughton stood at the street corner, awaiting the arrival of a down-town car.

There must have been some hitch on the down track, for it was at least ten minutes before a car hove in sight; but even when it did arrive the detective did not board it.

He was just about to do so when suddenly an up-town car came along and stopped on the opposite corner. A man alighted, at sight of whom Connaughton dodged quickly into the nearest doorway.

"By Jove, Perriam!" he exclaimed. "I won't let him see me. I wonder what brings him home so early in the evening. This ought to be a reporter's busiest hour in the day, I should think. Now I suppose that gossiping boarding-house ma'am will tell him all about my visit, even though she promised not to. A woman of her caliber couldn't keep her tongue still if she tried."

And if the detective could have listened to Mrs. Jarvis five minutes later he would have known that his supposition was correct.

As soon as Perriam had let himself in with his latch-key Mrs. Jarvis spied him.

"Gracious, Mr. Perriam, you home at this hour of the day!" she exclaimed in genuine surprise. "Who'd have thought it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jarvis. I accidentally left some important business papers in my room this morning and, finding that I need them to-night, I had to come back to get them."

"Anything new about poor Ladd?" asked the boarding-house keeper.

Whenever she saw Perriam she never neglected an opportunity to inquire as to the latest developments in Ladd's case, looking upon the reporter, by virtue of his profession, as a perfect budget of current information.

"Nothing particularly new, Mrs. Jarvis," grunted Perriam," except that I hear they've just locked up a poor old clerk of the murdered man and are trying to place the crime upon him. It's a trick of those rascally lawyers, Mrs. Jarvis. That old man is no more guilty than you are, and they know it. They're putting this shame and suffering upon a poor gray-haired man in order to try to save the head of the man who really committed the crime."

"So they've arrested a clerk, have they?" gasped Mrs. Jarvis, talking more to herself than to Perriam. "I wonder if that's what that detective meant, when he spoke about clearing Arthur of the crime?"

The reporter regarded the woman with sudden interest.

"What's that you're saying, Mrs. Jarvis," he said quickly. "What detective are you talking about? What detective spoke about clearing Ladd of the crime?"

"Goodness, I wasn't to tell you anything about it, and now you've got it all out of me, haven't you? He said most particular that I wasn't to tell you, too. He said he didn't want anything about it in the papers."

"When was he here—this detective?" asked Perriam eagerly.

"He left only about ten or fifteen minutes ago. A very nice gentleman he was, Mr. Perriam. I didn't think a detective could be so nice spoken. His name was Connaughton."

"Connaughton!" exclaimed Perriam. "What was he doing here—what did he want, Mrs. Jarvis?"

"Blessed if I can tell you, Mr. Perriam, for I don't know what he wanted. He spoke real important first of all and said how it was in my power to help him save Arthur Ladd, and then when I'd told him that I was willing to do anything I could to help him, which I am, he spent the rest of the time talking about clothes."

"About clothes, Mrs. Jarvis?"

"Yes, sir, about clothes. He wanted to know how many of my gentlemen here wore gray suits, and where they had their repairing done, and then he took a small sample of cloth from his vest pocket and asked me if any of the gentlemen here wore a suit like that."

"Ah!" exclaimed Perriam, "and what did you tell him, Mrs. Jarvis?" He put the question as though he were not particularly interested in the reply.

"I told him I'd seen a suit of that sort on one of the gentlemen, I was pretty sure, but for the life of me I couldn't say which one it was."

"And you told him where we had our clothing repaired, eh?"

"Yes, I told him that some of you gentlemen go to the little tailor store up the street. Isn't that right?"

"That's perfectly right, Mrs. Jarvis. Well, I've got to get back to the office. I'll run up-stairs and get those papers."

"What do you think that detective could have meant by asking all those strange questions about my boarders' clothes?" persisted the landlady.

The reporter shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows?" he answered. "Detectives are queer fellows, some of them. It's impossible to account for the things they do. By the way, Mrs. Jarvis, I'm going out of town to-night and may be gone indefinitely."

"Very good, sir."

Five minutes later Perriam came down-stairs from his room carrying a bulky package under his arm. He walked briskly westward.

Mrs. Jarvis' house was only two blocks from Riverside Drive. The reporter did not stop until he had reached the Hudson and then descended one of the steep paths which led to the river.

At the river's brink, he stopped and attached a big stone to the package. He was just about to hurl package and stone into the swiftly-flowing waters when a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he turned in angry surprise to confront—Detective Sergeant Connaughton.

"Hello there, Perriam," said the officer cordially. "I saw you come out of Mrs. Jarvis' boarding-house and I trailed you, wondering where on earth you were going. What in thunder are you going to do with that bundle? Not going to throw good clothing into the river, are you?"

"Clothing!" gasped Perriam, his face livid. "Then you do know——"

"That that package contains a light gray suit which you sent to the tailor shop only yesterday to be repaired; of course I know that. I suspected that that gossiping woman would tell you about my visit and I guessed what you would do, so I waited and trailed you. What's more, old man, I can show you a perfect sample of the very goods that suit of yours, in the package, is made of."

As he spoke, Connaughton produced the little piece of cloth from his vest pocket.

"Where did that piece of cloth come from?" asked Perriam calmly.

He had recovered his self-possession by this time.

"That piece of cloth came from the coat of the murderer of Jacob Meyer, the jeweler."

"From Arthur Ladd's coat, eh?" sneered Perriam.

"No, not from Arthur Ladd's coat," said the detective.

"From the gray-haired clerk's then," snarled the reporter.

"No, not from his, either. I said from the coat of the murderer of Jacob Meyer, didn't I?"

"And you mean ME, I presume. I don't pretend not to understand you, Connaughton. We'll dispense with the melodramatic setting and all that. You think you've traced the crime to me, because you've found this little piece of cloth, eh? I suppose you con-

sider yourself a Sherlock Holmes in real life."

"I confess I'm inclined to feel a little proud of my work on this case," admitted the detective.

"Oh, you've done good work, I'll admit," said the reporter. "You've shown that you possess more brains than I've ever given you credit for, but that's as far as it goes, Connaughton. Of course, as an experienced detective you must see that for yourself. That little piece of cloth and the fact that you have caught me here, trying to destroy the suit the piece came from, may firmly establish in your own mind the fact that I killed that jeweler, but how are you going to prove it? You've got no case, Connaughton, you must admit. You'll make a laughing stock of yourself if you try to put this crime up to me."

"Do you know where I found this piece of cloth, Perriam," asked the detective.

"Know? Of course I know.

"You found it attached to a nail projecting from the wall of a clothes closet in the private office of the murdered jeweler. I remember my coat catching and tearing as I came out of the closet. What of it?"

"You're a cool customer, Perriam," said the detective admiringly.

"Cool! Why shouldn't I be cool? I'm in no danger. I'm perfectly ready to admit to you that I was in that closet. I'm perfectly ready to admit that that piece of cloth you hold in your hand did come out of the coat that is in this package, which I was just about to throw in the river, because I'd heard from Mrs. Jarvis that you'd been around to the house making some alarming inquiries about a gray suit. I knew right away, then, that you had caught on; that that little piece of cloth had given away my secret.

"That was one mistake I made, Connaughton, and I'm ashamed of myself for having made it. I should have gone back right away for that little piece of cloth dangling on the nail. But after all what does it amount to? What have I to fear? You can never convict me by that slight link. You would need a whole chain of such evidence. I'm safe enough, Connaughton, and you know it."

"Don't be too sure," drawled the detective. "There are other links, my boy. I've got two men who saw you going down the fire-escape at the time of the murder. They can identify you. They work in the building back of the Nassau Street office where the jeweler was murdered and they saw you coming down the ladder."

"Good," said the reporter with a ghastly smile. "That's a pretty good link, I'll admit, Connaughton; but, after all, you've got to prove motive, you know. Now you can't do that, can you? What motive did I have for murdering that jeweler?"

"That question is easier answered than you may suppose," replied the other. "In the first place, you owed that jeweler and money lender four hundred dollars, and the money was overdue. The books of the dead man prove that. You were broke and this was an easy way to avoid meeting your obligation. The old fellow was working the screws pretty tight on you, too.

"You see, I know everything, Perriam. The game is about up. But the main motive you had for committing this murder was jealousy. You are in love with Miss Adrian, Arthur Ladd's sweetheart. You saw a good opportunity to put all the suspicion on young Ladd and benefit yourself at the same time, and you took advantage of it to kill two birds with one stone."

"You're a real detective, Connaughton," said Perriam. "Let me congratulate you upon the skill with which you've handled this case. How did you manage it, may I ask as one interested in crime and its detection? How did you come to suspect me of all persons?"

"I did not, first of all. I always make it my business when I'm called in to investigate violent deaths, which occur within doors, to examine all closets. Even when there does not seem to be any doubt as to who committed the murder, I, nevertheless, never leave the room without looking into the closets.

"Well, when Meyer was killed, I followed my usual habit, and as a reward found this small piece of gray cloth adhering to a nail in the clothes closet in his room. I didn't attach much importance to it at the time, for all the evidence seemed to show clearly that it was a simple case and that Ladd committed the murder. Nevertheless, I put the piece of cloth in my pocket, and practically forgot all about it.

"Then, somehow or other, I began to think that Ladd might be innocent. He didn't exactly act like a guilty man. His adhering so strongly to his improbable story when he could have invented a more plausible one, was itself in his favor. The marks of violence on the dead man's body proved that the jeweler actually had received a severe beating before he died and confirmed fully that part of Ladd's tale.

"Then his sending that money order to the dead jeweler helped convince me of his innocence. That act didn't look like a bluff to me, although you tried to make me see it in that light. These doubts caused me to remember the piece of cloth I had found, and I went back to the jeweler's office and studied the situation.

"I saw then how easily somebody could have been hiding in the closet when Arthur Ladd had his interview and subsequent quarrel with the jeweler. I saw how this man in the closet could have rushed out, as Arthur Ladd fled from the office, after having felled the jeweler to the floor. I saw how this same man could have seized the sword-cane that Ladd had left behind him in his haste, could have opened it quickly and stabbed the jeweler as he lay writhing on the floor.

"Then the question arose: How did this man make his escape after doing the deed? Obviously he could not have fled through the front office, as Ladd had done, for the clerk would have seen him. I went to the window and saw the fire-escape and that furnished me with the solution of the problem."

"But how did you discover that I was the man in the closet?" asked Perriam with interest.

"I didn't have any idea of it first of all, Perriam. Gradually, however, I got suspicious of you. You seemed so unduly bitter against Arthur Ladd, more bitter than your reportorial duties called for, that I started investigating the reason out of sheer curiosity, and found that you were in love with Ladd's fiancée. That opened my eyes. Then I happened to be looking at the books of the dead man and found entries there disclosing that you were in his debt for four hundred dollars. That was point number two against you. Again you were the only man likely to know how to open that sword-cane of Ladd's. You roomed in the same house, and the chances were he must have shown it to you some time or other, and explained how it worked. That was point number three against you, for I was looking for a man who would have known that cane the instant he set eyes on it.

"I then made an exhaustive canvass of the buildings at the back of the office where Meyer was murdered, and at last succeeded in finding two men who had seen a man go down the fire-escape of 915 Nassau Street at the time of the crime. The description of this man, as given by these witnesses, tallied closely with you, and I subsequently managed to let them get a look at you and they positively identified you as the man.

"Then of course, as you know, I went up to Mrs. Jarvis with the piece of cloth and she gave me the address of your tailor, who identified the scrap as coming from a suit he had repaired for you only yesterday. How's that for a pretty good case, Perriam?"

"Oh, you've a stronger case than I thought. I'll admit that. But, nevertheless, you'll never convict me on it, old man; you can make your mind easy as to that. Of course you've hit upon the truth. I don't deny it. I was in that closet and I did rush out and kill the jeweler as soon as I saw him fall to the floor from Ladd's beating, and saw Ladd rush out of the office, like the fool he is.

"As for motive, you've got me about right, I guess. I swear, though, I

had no intention of committing the murder when I went into the closet. The idea came to me suddenly. I'll swear that's the truth, Connaughton."

"How did you come to be in the closet then, Perriam?" asked the detective.

"You see, it was this way. I called on that old Shylock because he had sent me some ugly letters threatening me with all sorts of things, if I didn't pay up that four hundred I'd borrowed. I didn't have the money, so I had to go to his office to explain. Well, while I was in talking to the old skinflint, I heard Arthur Ladd's voice in the outer office, asking the half-deaf clerk if Mr. Meyer was in.

"I said to the jeweler, 'I don't want that fellow out there to know I'm carrying on any transactions with you. I don't want him to see me here. I'll hide in that closet,' and I stepped into the closet, intending to stay there until Ladd's business was transacted.

"I had no intention of eavesdropping, you understand. I just wanted to prevent Ladd from catching on to the fact that I had any dealings with this old usurer. I couldn't leave the office because Ladd was right outside the only door to the place, you see. That's why I went into the closet.

"Well, while I was in there, I heard everything that Ladd and the jeweler said. I couldn't help hearing. I heard that Ladd had bought an engagement ring of the money lender on the instalment plan and couldn't pay his dues. I heard then for the first time that Ladd was engaged to marry Rosa Adrian. It was a blow to me, for, as you've discovered, I love the girl, and I'd proposed marriage to her and been thrown down before Ladd ever saw her.

"Well, pretty soon I heard the young man and the old skinflint start quarreling. The jeweler threatened to appeal to Rosa's father and to tear the ring from the girl's finger if Ladd didn't pay up by that night. Then they came to blows, and I opened the closet door an inch or so and saw Ladd beating the old Shylock with his sword-cane—he beat him so hard, too, that the jeweler finally fell groaning to the carpet.

"Then Ladd ran out, dropping his cane as he went. The sight of that cane brought an idea to my brain like a flash. I'm a quick thinker, you see. If I rushed out, opened that cane by touching the secret spring, and stabbed old Meyer as he lay groaning there—stabbed him with Ladd's sword-cane, there was nothing to prevent Ladd from going to the chair for it. I think the cleverness of the thing was what first made it appeal to me.

"I wasn't so bitterly sore on Ladd, but he had crossed my path with this girl, and if he was out of the way I imagined I might still stand a chance, if I persisted in my suit. Then again, as you've discovered, this jeweler's death would settle that four hundred matter, in the simplest possible way.

"Well, I'd no sooner thought of the thing than I proceeded to carry it out. I plunged the sword-cane into the heart of the prostrate man, and dashed for the window, reaching the fire-escape before the terrified old clerk ran into the room to find out what had happened to his master. I scaled a wall, ran to the *Star* office, reaching there just in time to get the assignment from the city editor to go around and investigate the murder.

"I returned to the scene of my crime by the front door, as you know. That's how the thing really happened, Connaughton. I don't mind telling you all this—for your private information, you know."

"Gee! But you're a cool proposition," said the detective, admiringly. "There's one little point that I've got to clear up, Perriam, and that is how it was that the clerk in the outer office didn't know that you were in with Meyer when Ladd came in? I shall see the clerk to-morrow and get that point settled?"

"I'll save you the trouble. That's easily explained. When I called at the office the clerk was out to lunch and I walked right into Meyer's private den. When the clerk came back from lunch the door of the private office was closed, and he being half-deaf, as you know, couldn't hear our voices inside. He had orders never to enter the private office unless called, so you see

he had no idea that there was anybody with his employer when Ladd came in.

"Now you know about everything. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to take you to the nearest station-house, Perriam. I'm sorry, old man, but duty is duty. I arrest you for the murder of Jacob Meyer. Come along."

He laid his hand heavily upon the reporter's shoulder.

Perriam laughed bitterly.

"It's like the last act of a melodrama," he sneered. "What a fine scene it would make for a lurid play, wouldn't it? You arresting me right here, at the edge of the classic Hudson! I suppose, to carry out the conventionalities, I ought either to hurl myself into the eddying water at our feet, or, better still perhaps, seize you around the waist and throw you overboard.

"Don't be alarmed though, old man. I'm going to do neither. I recognize the fact that you've got a gun in your hip pocket and have your hand on the butt of it at this very instant. I'll go along with you quietly, never fear.

"I'm not worried the least bit. You can't convict me. There isn't a jury would send me to the chair on the circumstantial evidence you have—not unless I confessed before witnesses, and I'm not going to be fool enough to do that. Come along, officer, I'm your prisoner."

CHAPTER XV.

A REWARD CLAIMED.

"Rosa, my girl," said Mr. Adrian, "why won't you be reasonable and give up this fellow Ladd once and for all? He is not worthy of you, believe me. Take your old father's advice. He knows what is best for you. Your adherence to this young scamp is obtaining for us all sorts of undesirable publicity in the papers. Be sensible now, and give him up.

"Even if Cartwright & Wheeler succeed in getting him off, which they may do, for they're tricky fellows, he'll always have the stain of murder on his name. The world will always accuse him of the crime under its breath. You would be known as a murderer's wife if you married him. You wouldn't relish that, would you, Rosa?"

"I should relish being known as Arthur's wife—and he is no murderer," replied the girl.

"You speak without reason," said the old man impatiently. "You see, even his own lawyers think him guilty. Be a good girl, Rosa, and do as I say. I hate to think of your making this sad mistake and being miserable for the rest of your life. There is no doubt in the mind of any sane person that Ladd is guilty. Give him up, Rosa!"

"Give him up—never! Not until he is proven guilty—and perhaps not then," she added softly.

"There are many young men, much finer fellows than Arthur Ladd, who would be glad to have you for a wife, Rosa. There is that chap Perriam, for instance. I've mentioned him to you before, haven't I?"

"Yes, and therefore it is unnecessary to mention him again. The subject is disagreeable to me, father," she replied haughtily.

"Well, well, there's no accounting for tastes. Perriam is a much finer man than this young fool Arthur Ladd. He's a man of character, Perriam is. He's a little cold in manner, I'll admit; but that's because he's sincere. It isn't always the demonstrative person that means the most. If you knew the world as well as I know it, Rosa, you'd know that for yourself."

The girl gave vent to an impatient sigh.

"Why pursue this subject further," she said. "It can do no good. If there was not another man in the world I wouldn't marry Perriam. I don't like him."

"That's where you make a mistake, my girl. He's as true and honest as the day is long. He'd make you a good husband. See how accommodating he is, too. See how hard he worked to bring you and Arthur back when we thought, as everybody thought, that you'd eloped."

"He is doubtless entitled to our deepest gratitude," said the girl, with

a sarcastic smile, "but please let's not discuss him."

"I guess he isn't worth much money. Those reporter chaps never are; but if you and he were to get married I'd settle a fortune on you."

Rosa was about to reply angrily when the maid servant came up-stairs to announce that a man who said he was Detective Sergeant Connaughton, of the Central Office, was below and desired to see Mr. Adrian."

"Detective Sergeant Connaughton?" repeated Rosa. "He must have something to do with Arthur's case, I guess. Bring him up here, Marie."

"Yes, miss," said the maid.

"No, no. I'll go down," said Adrian hastily. "You can't tell what he wants to see me about, Rosa; it may be something private. You stay here."

"Let him come up here," insisted Rosa. "I want to hear what he has to say. If you don't let him come up, I'll go down and listen at the keyhole. You can take your choice, father."

So the detective was ushered upstairs to the library.

"Mr. Adrian, I believe," said the policeman as he entered.

"Yes, sir," answered Adrian bruskly. "What can I do for you?"

"And this is Miss Adrian, I presume?"

"This is my daughter, sir!"

"You put an advertisement in the papers, the other day signed R. A.?"

"I did."

"You offer a reward of ten thousand dollars to anybody who can prove that Arthur Ladd did not kill Jacob Meyer, jeweler. Is that right?"

"My advertisement was worded to that effect. You see, while I agreed with you fellows that Ladd really did commit that murder I wanted to give him ever opportunity in order to please —certain persons."

The detective looked knowingly at Rosa, who blushed.

"Let's make no mistake; you offer ten thousand dollars to anybody who will furnish you with satisfactory proofs that Ladd did not commit that crime."

"Yes. I reckon my money is safe enough though, isn't it, Mr. Detective?"

"No, sir, it isn't," said the detective calmly, "for if it's all the same to you, I've come to claim it."

"What!" cried Adrian in surprise.

"What?" screamed Rosa joyfully.

"Yes, I've obtained satisfactory proofs that Ladd did not murder that jeweler. I've got satisfactory proofs that another man did. The other man has, in fact, confessed to me in private (although, of course, I can't use the confession against him, having no witnesses) that he's the guilty party. We've sufficient circumstantial evidence against him to send him to the chair. Ladd will be free in a day or two."

Rosa unable to contain her delight any longer threw her arms impulsively around the detective's neck.

Old Adrian turned first red and then white.

"Ladd not guilty!" he gasped several times in succession. "Another man confesses the crime! Who is this other man?"

"A reporter named Perriam," announced the detective quietly, and smiled at the look of surprised horror on the old man's face, and the expression of dazed astonishment on the face of Rosa.

"Perriam!" gasped the old man at length. "This must be some crazy joke. How could Perriam have done it?"

And then Detective Sergeant Connaughton proceeded to explain the full details of the reporter's confession.

"Of course, as I said before, I can't make use of the confession," added the detective, "for his word is as good as mine and he will deny that he made it: but I've got all the evidence a jury will require, and I trust all the proofs you'll require as a fair-minded man, to induce you to hand over that ten thousand. You look all broken up, Mr. Adrian. I know ten thousand dollars is a whole lot of money——"

"It isn't the money," groaned the old man, mopping his perspiring brow. "It's the thought that just before you came in I was trying to persuade my daughter to marry—a murderer."

"And not to marry Arthur Ladd, because there is no doubt in the mind

of any sane person that he must be guilty," said Rosa with radiant face. "How long will it take to free him, Mr. Detective?"

"Oh, a day or so, Miss Adrian," replied Connaughton. "There's a little legal red tape to be gone through, of course. He'll have to appear before the coroner's jury to-morrow. We've arrested a third man, too: the old clerk of the murdered man. The three accused men will have to appear before the coroner's jury and the jury will decide which one to hold for the murder."

"But what if they should hold Arthur, after all?" asked Rosa in dismay. "Jurors sometimes make mistakes."

"They won't in this case. Don't you worry about that. Perriam will be the man held, when I present my evidence. Your young man and the old clerk will be freed all right, as they deserve to be."

The detective's prediction proved correct. Arthur Ladd and the old clerk were exonerated and the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of guilty against Perriam, who was held without bail for trial.

It would be gratifying in the interests of law and society to be able to record that he, in due course, suffered the penalty of his crime, but truth compels mention of the fact that such, alas, was not the case.

Perriam was put on trial three separate times for the murder of Jacob Meyer and each time the jury disagreed. Throughout each trial he preserved his wonted coolness and self-possession which amazed everybody in the court-room.

After the third trial the district attorney became convinced of the futility of trying to get a jury to convict him and allowed him to go free, on bail. He skipped his bail and disappeared suddenly and never has been heard of since.

But in the *Star* office even unto this day, when members of the staff wish to describe a case of perfect self-possession, they will use the phrase "As cool as Perriam."

THE END.

Professor Jonkin and His Busier Bees.

BY HOWARD R. GARIS.

What happened when an up-to-date scientist monkeyed with the natural order of things and neglected to hang out the red danger lamp.

IT was some time after the adventure with the cannibal plant that Professor Jeptha Jonkin determined to devote his scientific energies to a new line of industry.

His little misadventure with the American fly-trap, which he had cultivated to a gigantic size, had in no wise disconcerted the professor. He always maintained that it was by accident, rather than with malice aforethought, that the plant tried to devour him.

In the mean time the professor had successfully grown strawberry vines that produced fruit the size of apples with the flavor of an orange, and had propagated a thistle-weed to the point where it gave forth luscious peaches without stones.

But these achievements were as child's play to the professor, who was ever on the alert for new fields of scientific research, and marvelous indeed were the results of many of his experiments.

One day, while the professor was out walking in the country, he chanced upon a small farmhouse, the owner of which maintained a few hives of bees. The scientist paused and looked over the hedge into the apiary.

"What next, professor?" asked a voice at his elbow, and the professor turned to see his acquaintance, Addison Kimball, who had just alighted

from a big, throbbing automobile. "Trying to plan a way of growing potatoes on trees, or figuring on a scheme to raise roses and violets on the same bush?"

"Neither," replied Professor Jonkin a little shortly, for he did not like the way his friend sometimes joked about his work. "Neither, sir. I was watching the bees."

"Ah, yes," went on Mr. Kimball. "'How doth the little busy bee improve each shining hour,' you know. I suppose we'll soon hear of your raising bees that are as large as chickens, and will give a pound of honey a day. That would be something worth while."

"I beg of you not to joke upon such things," said the professor, and his voice was somewhat stern. "What you speak of is not impossible. I have often thought improvements might be made in the animal as well as in the vegetable kingdom."

"Deliver me from being stung by a bee as large as a hen," laughed Mr. Kimball, and the professor had to smile at the idea in spite of himself. "But, professor, can't I offer you a ride back to town in my machine?"

"No, thanks," was the answer. "It is flying in the face of nature to use such rapid means of locomotion. I'll walk."

And walk the professor did. All the way home he was busy thinking over something. He would mutter strangely to himself.

"'How doth the little busy bee,'" he repeated. "I wonder why people think the bee so busy? Is it as busy as it might be? I must make a note of that," and he pulled out his book and jotted down: "Look into matter of the industry of bees."

Then he fell to musing again. Suddenly an idea seemed to come to him. He gave a start, and exclaimed:

"Why wouldn't it be possible? Then indeed we might boast of our bees!"

He sat down on the grass beside the road, the better to do his thinking, and was there when dusk fell. He was aroused from his reveries by a flash of light in his face.

"Goodness! What was that!" he cried.

Then he saw it was only a lightning-bug and he laughed at his momentary fear.

He rose to his feet and started down the road, which in the dusk, was dotted with hundreds of illuminating insects flashing here and there. His brain was busy with an idea that he could not seem to work out. At last he exclaimed:

"By Jehosaphat's jumping junebug! I'll do it! It's the greatest idea yet!"

For the next few weeks Professor Jonkin was a busy man. He gave over experimenting in his greenhouse at making hybrid plants, and even his beloved fly-trap was neglected while he spent much time in a little shed he had erected at the end of his garden.

From the shed, and from a little box just outside the door of it, there came a queer buzzing, humming sound. It was like a miniature sawmill in operation.

Mr. Kimball, happening to call on the professor one day, approached the little box.

"What you have there, I suppose," he began with an assumed air of gravity, "is a new species of ant, one that will gather the farmer's wheat for him and store it in the granary."

"What I have here," said the professor in a stern voice, "is a particularly vicious species of centipede, as big as a bear, and——"

But Mr. Kimball had jumped back about eight feet.

"Don't be alarmed," went on the scientist. "It's only bees."

"Then you are going to produce those chicken-size, as I suggested?"

"No, not that, exactly," replied the professor, with a smile. "I don't mind telling you, however, that I am experimenting to improve bees generally, and I am on the point of succeeding. Come and see me in about a month, and I may have something queer to show you."

Mr. Kimball promised, and left. That night had any one been watching the professor he might have thought he had gone into his second childhood.

He was racing back and forth over his garden, like a boy at play. In his hand he held a large bottle into which after many frantic clutches in the air, he poked a little firefly.

"Blamed if he ain't catchin' lightnin'-bugs!" said the gardener. "Puttin' 'em in a bottle, too, jest like I used t' do when I was a kid. Well, of all things. Maybe he calkalates on growin' the insects large enough so's we won't need lights in the house. Queer man, the professor."

And shaking his head at his inability to understand his master's whims, the gardener proceeded to lock up the barn and hen-house.

As the days passed the professor spent more and more time in his little shed. He hardly came to his meals and refused to receive any of his friends.

"He's workin' on a new scheme," said the gardener in answer to all inquiries. "Whether it's to make chickens that swim or produce sunflowers ye kin eat I don't know, but it's suthin in them lines."

A month after he had received the invitation, Mr. Kimball paid the promised visit to Professor Jonkin. He found the scientist walking about among his flowers in the lower end of the garden.

"How about the busy little bees?" asked Mr. Kimball.

"All right," said the professor, squinting at his friend through his spectacles. "It's the greatest work I have yet done. Come along."

He led the way to where the small box stood outside the shed door. The queer buzzing sound that had been noticed before was audible.

Around the box at the front of the narrow, slot-like opening in it, and in the air all about were bees, flying and circling. The insects had been off in the fields and woods gathering honey, and now were returning to the hive.

"There they are," said the professor. "There are the first ever produced of Jonkin's Fly-by-night Bees. The busy little insect of song and story is outdone, for my bees never cease working."

"Fly-by-night bees?" repeated Mr. Kimball. "Are you crazy? Whoever heard of bees going out at night? Bees only work in the daytime. They couldn't see to gather honey after dark."

"Of course ordinary bees couldn't," admitted the professor, "but these are not ordinary bees. Just wait until it gets dark, and you'll see."

"You don't mean to say that you're going to make those bees go out after nightfall?"

"That's just what I do," replied the professor.

Wondering what strange results his scientific friend had achieved, Mr. Kimball waited for darkness. The professor, smiling in pleased anticipation of what was to happen, walked back and forth.

As dusk descended, the air about the beehive began to glow with a soft radiance. Little specks of light floated down and entered the hive, while from the small box other points of fire sailed out, and buzzed their way over field and meadow.

"What are you doing, training lightning-bugs to gather honey?" asked Mr. Kimball in amazement.

"No."

"Sending trained lightning-bugs out with each bee so the honey-gatherers can see by night?"

"Not that, either."

"Then what in the name of the sacred lump of beeswax are you doing?"

"Those are lightning-bees. Jonkin's Fly-by-night Bees. After much labor I have succeeded in crossing a bee with a lightning-bug, and now I have bees that work night and day."

"When the sun shines the lightning-bees go forth from the hive as ordinary bees do, sucking the nectar from the flowers and bringing it back to their box. Then, after it gets dusk, when ordinary bees, following the instinct that has prevailed since the formation of the world, go to bed or spend the dark hours in lazy idleness, my bees, enabled to see to work by the glow from their own bodies, go forth and continue their labors. They labor night and day."

"Well—" began Mr. Kimball, but he was too astonished to say more.

"Great, isn't it?" continued the professor. "The waste time the bees used to have on their hands is now fully utilized. The proverb about the little busy bees is fully realized.

"They improve each 'shining hour,' just as the song says, only every hour is shining now. No more waiting in the hive for the morning dawn to break and the sun to rise. No more small crops of honey.

"With a few swarms of these lightning-bees I can produce more honey than with twice the number of ordinary insects. For they can see the flowers by night as well as by day, because of the lights they carry.

"These bees can do more work at night, too, for then there are no other bees flying about for them to gossip and talk with, and so lose time. Yes, sir, in a few years there will be no other bees but Jonkin's."

The air around the hive was now quite illuminated, as thousands of the improved insects were flying about, some coming back from the fields, their pouches laden with honey, and others going out to gather a crop.

Each bee bore with it on the underside of the body, a glowing light, similar to that carried by the lightning-bug. Only the light of the bees was larger and stronger, due to the care Professor Jonkin had exercised in crossing the insects.

It was a beautiful sight, to see the lightning-bees circling around the hive, and the number of insects was so large that a newspaper could easily have been read by the light which emanated from their bodies.

"It was a difficult problem to solve," went on the professor. "The first of the improved insects I produced were too much like lightning-bugs and wouldn't gather any honey. The next were too much like bees and didn't give any light. But the third time I struck it."

Just then there came a series of yells from the fields back of the professor's garden. The cries increased in volume and number, and seemed to be approaching. At the same time there was a glow in the darkness off to the left.

"What's that?" asked Mr. Kimball.

"I can't imagine," said the professor. "It looks as if a lot of my lightning-bees were there, however."

The next instant there came the rush of many feet toward the professor's house. At the same time there were angry cries.

"It's that professor!" shouted some one.

"That's who it is!" exclaimed another. "The idea of making lightning-bugs with stings that pounce on people in the dark! He ought to be arrested!"

"I wonder if they are referring to me?" asked Professor Jonkin mildly.

"Sounds like it," replied Mr. Kimball. "You'd better go in the house. Evidently persons who were strolling in the fields this pleasant evening mistook your bees for lightning-bugs, with—ah—painful results, very likely."

"You mean they tried to—um—to capture them in their hands?"

"That's what I imagine. You can guess what happened. Look out! Here they come!"

The gate at the bottom of the garden was thrown violently open. In came a crowd of young men and women.

"There he is!" shouted a fellow, catching sight of the professor, made visible by the light of his bees circling around. "That's the chap that makes lightning-bugs with stings!"

"You're mistaken!" shouted the professor, bound to vindicate his science at any cost. "Those are not lightning-bugs with stings. They are bees with a lighting attachment!"

"Why didn't you take out the stings while you were at it then?" demanded a chorus of angry voices.

"That's what we want to know," went on an excited man, rubbing his nose, which was swelled to twice its natural size. "Here we are, plain people, strolling in the fields on a summer evening. Some of us see the big lightning-bugs, on the flowers. The girls want us to catch some for 'em, and we boys started to do it. What happened?"

"Well, what happened?" asked the professor, as if he was really curious to know.

"We all got stung and we got it good and proper!" went on the angry youth. "Look at my nose if there is any question about it!"

"And look at my eye!" shouted another.

"My ear is as big as an elephant's," broke in a third, pointing to the swelled member.

"All because we tried to catch some of those improved lightning-bugs of yours," howled the chorus of stung ones, making a concerted rush toward the professor.

"Look out!" exclaimed Mr. Kimball suddenly. "Here they come! You run for the house, I'll attend to them!"

"But they aren't lightning-bugs I tell you," began the professor as he started for his quarters on the double-quick.

Mr. Kimball made a sudden motion with his foot. There was a crash, a sudden burst of light, a great buzzing sound, and the air was filled with Jonkin's Fly-by-night Bees.

The angry insects, maddened by the overturning of their hive, settled down upon the intruders.

The howls of anguish which arose from those who had previously caught the supposed lightning-bugs floated out on the night air. There was a stampede to escape from the garden.

When Mr. Kimball, crouching low to the ground to avoid a chance insect that might follow him, joined the professor, those who had been bent on doing mischief to the scientist were far away, running with might and main, while little sparks of light followed them, darting rapidly and viciously here and there.

"Well, I flatter myself I got rid of that delegation rather neatly," said Mr. Kimball, after he had recovered his breath. "They were bent on doing you mischief."

"But my improved bees, my poor lightning-bees!" wailed the professor.

"They'll come back," said Mr. Kimball.

But they never did. Whether they found wild life so alluring, or whether they could not stand improvement and died off one by one, was never found out. But Jonkin's Fly-by-night Bees never returned to the hive of their inventor.

And if, some summer night, you happen to see a particularly large lightning-bug, hesitate before you attempt to capture it, for it may be a descendant from the lightning-bees. The professor was inconsolable for a time but soon became absorbed in a problem to make his hens lay three eggs a day each.

A FAIR RELATION.

WELL, well, this is a sweet surprise!
Who thought that I had such a cousin?
One glance into her roguish eyes
Makes plain my absence was unwise,
Why, I've lost years—at least a dozen!

Well, now I'll make up wasted time,
Proceed at once to woo and win her;
What *chic* she has, what grace sublime!
When next I stray to foreign clime
She'll go along, or I'm a sinner!

Two weeks of coquetry—and this:
"Haste, answer, sweet, I cannot parley!"
One moment of suspense, of bliss,
Then perishes my lover's kiss—
"I'll be a cousin to you, Charley!"

THE OUTCAST.*

BY W. BERT FOSTER.

The lure of false hopes that paved the way to tragedy, hedged with doubt, and girdled by remorse.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

RAMON BURRESS returns to his native village possessed of nothing save his medical degree and some debts, which his uncle has given him to understand he will settle. He finds Leslie Searle, his boyhood sweetheart, betrothed to his chum, Seymour Lloyd, and his uncle refuses to settle his bills save by a legacy.

His uncle's taunts, his disappointment and the demands of his creditors half madden Burress, and when, while out hunting, he comes upon his uncle in the woods, he impulsively shoots in his direction.

As his uncle falls dead, Lloyd rushes from the underbrush, crying out that Ramon is a murderer. In his haste he falls and stuns himself. Burress returns to his own home, and later on Lloyd is brought in, discovered by Orrin Paddock, the old herb man. The young doctor does his best to revive him, knowing the while that with his friend's returning consciousness his own doom will fall. When Lloyd awakens, it is with a mind as blank as a new-born child's, but slowly he acquires the habits and abilities of a man. He evinces a great devotion to the doctor and a violent aversion to Leslie. He spends much time with Orrin, and on one of these expeditions, near the scene of the murder, Lloyd discovers Burress' rifle, and Orrin takes it home with him.

Burress is put in charge of the hospital founded by his uncle and Lloyd assists him With the aid of a powerful drug Burress succeeds in temporarily reawakening Lloyd's primary individuality. In that interval he is so stricken with the fact of Ramon's crime that the latter fears again to attempt the experiment.

In the meantime, rumors have circulated that Lloyd is responsible for the murder.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WHEEL OF TORTURE.

AFTER a little Burress put on his outer wraps, and left the hospital.

It was growing toward night of a bitterly cold January day, and the snow crunched under his boots as he walked out of the grounds surrounding the uncompleted institution.

The hospital had been built upon the edge of Larkin village, and to the west was the unbroken stretch of the Big Woods, which masked most of the countryside between this village and Barrowsvale.

Past the hospital, which was on the long side hill, led the driving road to Barrowsvale. At one side, and cutting down at a sharp tangent, was a bridle path into a deep hollow.

The doctor crossed the highway and the bridle road, and followed a beaten path up through the woods, which path he knew would be his alone at this hour.

It was a "short cut" to Matteson's Camp, some miles into the woods. A great stretch of timberland which had once been Solon Burress' property, and was now in the hands of his administrators, was being denuded of the trees before being sold for farming lands, and half a hundred lumber-jacks were at work on the section.

This beaten path through the snow led past the hospital to Larkin, and was the single tie binding the camp to civilization and to liquid refreshment as furnished at the bar of Larkin's tavern.

The moon was already in the sky when the sun set, and her light, with the glare of the snow, made the way plain before Burress. He strode on with little regard for the shimmering beauties of the moonlit woods, however.

His mind was enwrapped by one thought only: How should he save Seymour Lloyd?

True, at once to step forward and admit his own guilt, acknowledge his crime and suffer its legal punishment,

* *This story began in the November issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The four back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of* 40 *cents.*

would end it all. Lloyd would be freed of suspicion; but under what conditions?

Nobody aside from Leslie herself had the interest in poor Lloyd that he felt; and she was incapable of giving him the care, or controlling his unfortunate proclivities, as he could.

Professor Oglethorpe, with all his knowledge and ability, did not believe Lloyd could be successfully returned to his normal mind by any known method of therapeutics; nor did he have any personal sympathy for the afflicted man.

If the truth were told now, and Burress were seized and imprisoned, what would become of Seymour Lloyd? Leslie had no influence over him; no other being but himself could control the irresponsible personality which now occupied his old friend's body.

Burress was necessary to Lloyd's continued existence out of a madhouse! The physician, after the incident of the quarrel in the hospital dining-room, was convinced that, unrestrained, Lloyd would surely be confined in an asylum as hopelessly insane.

Public opinion—as expressed by Barrowsvale gossip—was busy tearing Llyod's reputation (and incidentally his own) to pieces. Would it go farther than that? Would some officious busybody undertake to set the wheels of the law in motion, and an attempt be made to dig up the facts surrounding the death of Solon Burress?

His own testimony, and that of Oglethorpe, would surely convince any court that Lloyd was irresponsible, and that he could not testify as to circumstances previous to the birth of his present personality; but what would be the effect upon the man's high-strung nervous system of arrest and preliminary court proceedings?

Never since the beginning of the chain of circumstances which had bound him to this wheel of torture, had Ramon Burress been so torn by doubt and conflicting emotions. He could map out no plan for the future; he could merely wait, ready to seize the first straw of safety which drifted within his reach.

His disturbed mind drove him into the forest as far as the path led. Suddenly he found himself upon the verge of a large clearing which the lumbermen had made, in the middle of which stood the camp buildings.

He would have turned back then had he not been hailed by a man who observed him from the door of the long bunk-house. Burress recognized him as Matteson himself.

"Hi, doc! Ye come like an angel—jest w'en I was thinkin' of sendin' over to the horspital ter ask your advice. Come in, will ye? One of the boys is ailin'."

The interruption to his beclouding thoughts was welcome. The physician crossed the open space quickly and entered the bunk-house.

He was greeted vociferously by the crew, most of whom he knew by name. The contrast between these rough and burly choppers and the rather ascetic looking Burress, with his dark, lean face and whitening hair, was so marked that the physician looked like a foreigner among them.

The only actual foreigner there, however (for mixed as was their breed, Matteson's crew were native to the soil), was the sick man. Burress found him in a temporary bunk in the little closet of a room at one end of the shack, dignified by the name of "Mat's office."

The sufferer was a young French-Canadian who had made his way to the camp the week before. That afternoon he had lain down in the snow and the boys had brought him back to camp on a sledge.

"I didn't know whether to lick him into shape, or git a doctor for him." growled the logging boss. "Think he's playing 'possum?"

"His fever is high," returned the doctor, quietly, "but it may amount to nothing. The first symptoms of most fevers tell little, you know. Keep him quiet to-morrow. I'll speak to the cook and have an infusion made of something which you'll easily find. I have no medicine with me. If he's worse to-morrow night, send over."

Burress' eyes dwelt upon the flushed face of the stranger lingeringly as he spoke. Something about his condition

troubled the doctor's mind; but he put it aside when he went out.

At once his brain took up its former train of thought, and he went back through the moonlit forest with no suspicion that any further interest lay for him in the French-Canadian tossing on his bed of fever.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

ONE peculiarity regarding Seymour Lloyd's condition was that after his outbursts of temper, he seemed to suffer a partial lapse of memory; not as he had suffered after his fall, but the incident itself—that which had led up to the paroxysm—was almost obliterated from his mind.

On the day following his attack upon the attendant who had teased him, Lloyd went about the hospital discharging his usual duties, apparently having forgotten the trouble altogether. Indeed, he even asked for the man with whom he had quarreled, and who had been immediately discharged.

He seemed incapable of feeling either sorrow or confusion because of his lapse into barbarism; he shrank not at all from the observation of the other employees. On this evening which Burress had chosen for his lonely walk in the forest, Lloyd was an excited member of a coasting party made up of some of the male attendants, and the nurses at that time off duty.

Both the highway and the bridle-path passing the hospital made excellent coasting courses. The highway was the gentler slope; the bridle-path dipped at a perilous angle into the deep hollow opposite the entrance to the grounds.

Landers, Dr. Burress' assistant, had secured a big sled—"a double runner" as they are called in the country—which would seat the entire party. It was governed by a wheel in front and Lloyd claimed the position of steersman.

He had tried the hill several times already, and had proven himself able to manage the sled. Leslie, who was one of the party, and who remembered former occasions when Seymour had taken her coasting, supported him in his request.

They coursed the highway slide several times without mishap, and Lloyd grew more wildly excited at each performance. There was something in the rush of the wind and the rapidity of the motion to which his poor brain was attuned.

By and by he declared that the highway was too tame. They could not slide far enough, nor did the sled go swiftly enough. He wished to try the steeper hill.

The girls chorused their objections at once; but Lloyd lacked all chivalry for the sex and, from his station at the wheel, snarled at them angrily. He was going down the bridle-path slide, and nothing should stop him.

The men, remembering vividly the recent occurrence in the dining-room, did not care to cross him. Without Burress at hand to control him, or Dr. Landers to forbid the reckless use of the double-runner, Lloyd had it his own way.

But the men as well as the girls refused to accompany him. Leslie was the only person who took a place upon the long sled in response to his reiterated commands for them to get aboard.

The others tried to dissuade her; but she knew that the more weight there was on the sled the less danger of its running off the track. She urged the other men to humor Lloyd for a single trip down the steeper grade; but they would not.

Suddenly the tempestuous fellow kicked his heels into the hard snow and started the sled. A turn of the steering-wheel aimed it for the stiff grade into the hollow, and the runners a moment later struck the steep descent.

The onlookers voiced their alarm, for with its light load the sled swayed dangerously. One of the men ran beside it for a few steps and begged Leslie to throw herself off while there was yet time.

But the girl shook her head. The sled jumped dangerously as it was, and her weight upon the rear runners seemed all that kept them on the snow.

And after they had started she could not have slipped off without risking injury.

They sped down the hill and, at the first "thank-you-ma'am," the sled leaped its entire length into the air. For a moment not a hand's breadth of runner touched the snow.

The frightened crowd on the hill-top shrieked a useless warning; but Leslie's lips did not part. As for Lloyd, he vented his wild delight in a yell which echoed uncannily from the wood close by.

And this shriek brought upon the scene an unexpected actor. Out from among the trees darted Burress, returned from his walk to the logging camp. His path led across the steep slide, and he was below the flying sled on coming out of the wood.

His first glance explained the situation. He saw the approaching sled with its two passengers—Lloyd's excited features in front, and the blank white mask of the girl's terrified visage behind.

The half-maddened steersman clung to the wheel, his feet braced against the footholds. He was still capable of guiding the craft; but a sled cannot be properly steered when it is acting the part of an aeroplane! It was in the air oftener than it was upon the snow.

The path Burress was on crossed the bridle-road obliquely and on the downward slant. Otherwise he never could have reached the slide before they shot by, the snow being knee deep outside the beaten track.

Lloyd, still clinging to the wheel, was whipped past him at terrific speed.

"Let go, Leslie!" Burress shouted, his arms outstretched to catch her.

Perhaps she heard his command and had the presence of mind to obey; perhaps her hold upon the side-bars had already slipped and she would have fallen from the sled had he not caught her.

However it was, she was swept from it by Burress' prompt action and he fell beneath her upon the hard packed snow. They scrambled to their feet, unhurt, intent only upon the outcome of the tragic slide.

There was a sharp turn at the foot of the course and Lloyd could not make it. The runners slewed and the sled pitched upon its side while he was thrown high in the air, but fortunately off the course.

"He will be killed!" gasped Leslie, running down the hill.

Burress reached the spot first and was kneeling beside the reckless fellow when she, and the others, arrived.

Lloyd had fallen in a bank of soft snow; but his head had hit upon a stub which stood a few inches above the drift. There was a cut in his scalp from which the blood flowed freely, and he was senseless.

Burress sent two of the men for a stretcher and upon this the insensible victim of his own rashness was transported to the receiving ward.

The flow of blood was stopped at once; but the wound was deep and needed several stitches. Burress gave his instructions to the matron and hurried to his own room to change his clothing and prepare the necessary instruments.

When he returned to the operating-room he found that Leslie had insisted upon performing the duties of the nurse in charge. The wound was washed and she was already shaving the scalp about it.

All trace of the great bruise upon his crown, received more than a year before, had disappeared. The hair had grown out again; Lloyd was blessed with a particularly thick growth of hair.

There were several small scars, the result of the minor wounds he had suffered upon the day of Solon Burress' murder; but this present cut was nearly two inches in length.

Burress watched Leslie's dextrous hand wielding the razor. The tears welled in her eyes and ran silently down her pale cheeks; but her hand was firm and her nerve unshaken. She smiled faintly when she noted the doctor's observation.

"Don't send me away, Ramon," she whispered. "Let me have this poor satisfaction, at least. You can trust me, can't you? I shall not be weak. Now that he is insensible, he will bear me near him. . . . You do not be-

lieve this cut serious, do you, doctor?"

"Anything happening to him in his present state may prove serious," returned Burress. "But as far as I can see, there is nothing to fear from this. It was a glancing blow, rather than a direct one; therefore the cut, instead of a bruise. He should come out of it all right."

Suddenly he noted a change of expression in Leslie's face. She had completed the shaving process, and now stooped to more closely examine the injured man's head.

"What do you see?" he asked, tying his apron in place.

"This is a strange mark, Ramon. I never knew Lloyd had such a scar. It looks like an old wound. Do you remember his being hurt here when he was a boy?"

The doctor glanced at the livid mark running down into the thick hair at the base of the brain. Shaving the hair about the cut had revealed a part of this old scar.

"I never heard that he was so hurt," returned Burress. "I'll look at that later. Just now——"

He gave his attention to the work in hand, and stitched the lips of the recent wound together. Lloyd was then removed to a quiet bed and revived.

"You'll have to remain here for a while, old man," Burress said to him. "Don't fret, and don't try to get up."

As usual the patient seemed to remember only hazily the circumstances which had brought him to his present condition. He was willing enough to go to sleep without asking any questions.

Burress prepared to leave the room; then remembering Leslie's remark about the old scar, he parted Lloyd's hair and examined it. It seemed to be the result of a wound made the year before when he had fallen.

At that time Burress and his advisers had paid little attention to any of these cuts and abrasions excepting the great bruise on the crown.

This particular wound was of a nature to attract no second glance. The skin had probably been but little broken. There seemed some slight indention in the skull under the livid scar.

Burress shook his head in perplexity as he set his finger lightly upon the spot for a second time. Lloyd moved and opened his eyes drowsily, muttering some objection at being disturbed.

So the physician turned away. In his own room, however, he could not forget the matter. He sat at his desk for some time, his eyes fixed upon vacancy, his thoughts revolving about that apparently innocent mark.

Finally he got down a surgical treatise, turned to a certain page, and read carefully for some moments. Gradually there came into his countenance an expression which betrayed a growing idea of such magnitude that his mind seemed appalled.

He threw down the book at last, sprang from his seat, and began pacing the floor. His sallow face flushed dully while his lips writhed with half-audible phrases. His mental state became highly excited.

Finally he stopped at his door, listening for any sound from without, and then opened it carefully. The dim, shaded light revealed the passage deserted.

Burress stepped swiftly back to his desk, seized a magnifying glass, and went softly from the room. He met nobody in the hall or on the stairs. At this hour the night squad was in control of the wards.

The room to which Lloyd had been carried was otherwise unoccupied, and he needed no watching. It was Leslie's night off and she would surely be asleep in the nurses' dormitory.

Burress slipped into the room and found that the night lamp had been extinguished. But the moonlight streaming through the window revealed the bed and the table on which the lamp stood.

Lloyd's regular breathing proved him soundly asleep. With trembling fingers the physician ignited the wick of the lamp, and moved the shade so that the light was thrown upon the back of the patient's head, his face being turned away.

There was revealed the freshly ad-

justed plaster over the new wound and likewise the dead-white mark which had first attracted Leslie's, then his own, scrutiny.

Burress parted the hair carefully, adjusted the glass to his eye, and peered closely at the old scar. Lloyd moved uneasily, but did not awake.

At last the physician raised his head and wiped the moisture from his brow. Amazement—indeed, fear—plainly marked his features. The discovery he had made, totally unexpected and almost unbelievable as it was, overwhelmed him.

For more than a year he, and those physicians and surgeons who had examined Lloyd and had consulted regarding the case, had been theorizing from an entirely erroneous premise! They had discussed the affliction, and he had treated the patient with an utterly wrong understanding of the cause of Lloyd's loss of memory.

Upon the occasion of that first consultation at Barrowsvale, the day following Lloyd's fall, both Dr. Munhall and Professor Oglethorpe had accepted—as did Burress himself—the bruise upon the patient's crown as the cause of his strange state of mind.

The minor wounds, already covered with adhesive plaster, or other dressing, had attracted only passing attention from the old practitioner and the scientist. Neither of the three had observed the slight indention at this place in the skull.

The angry appearance of the contusion upon the crown had misled all medical opinion. Burress' studies and his theoretical experiment had been along a line which, he saw now, was sure to lead to no satisfactory conclusion.

It was true that, first stimulated by the fever and afterward by the use of the drug, Lloyd had recovered his original personality; but in the light of what Burress had now discovered he knew that, under the most favorable circumstances, return to that primary state could have endured but a short period only.

It was not a clot of blood upon the brain which had brought about Lloyd's affliction. Here, in this old scar, the truth was revealed. The blow had broken and depressed the skull.

A bit of the bone pressed upon the man's brain, and there lay the cause of his loss of memory, his change of personality, and all his physical and mental metamorphosis.

By a simple operation of trepanning—an operation known since the earliest annals of surgery, and one which, in ninety-nine cases out of one hundred, is successful—Seymour Lloyd could be restored to his primary state and, with little doubt, would recover all the functions of his brain and all the mental attributes which had been his before his first injury.

The suddenness of the discovery staggered Burress. Unlike the experiment with the drug, trepanning was sure—it was certain! There could be no doubt or quibble about it.

Within twenty-four hours Seymour Lloyd could be translated into his own sane self! His sleeping memory could be awakened, and its functions revived at the exact point where the fall had put them to sleep.

And if Burress revealed his discovery and performed the operation, he would fasten the hangman's noose about his own neck!

CHAPTER XX.

ONE FURTHER SACRIFICE.

SHOULD he do it? Could he, now that all this time had elapsed, and the horror of his crime was no longer fresh upon his soul—could he do that which would surely make him a fugitive from justice, if not actually a felon under legal sentence?

When hope gave him no insight into the future, when discovery and denouncement as the murderer of his uncle seemed absolutely certain, Burress had bowed to this apparently irrevocable fate.

For Leslie's sake he had remained at his post when he expected to be immediately denounced by Lloyd. But the result of the crime in his tortured mind had not then been soothed by the passage of time.

Now, after more than a year, it was

different. The months which had elapsed had brought many changes.

Ramon Burress, the fledgling practitioner of the country village had become the temporary—possibly the established—head of the county hospital, and his researches and experiments in the field of nervous disorders were known and talked about in a much wider circle than that influenced merely by his position in this institution.

He had infinitely much more to lose now. To do that which, in awful desperation, he had accepted as necessary at the earlier time, would now call for the exercise of vastly more self-control and demand a much greater sacrifice.

Had his own feeling toward Lloyd, too, changed somewhat during these months? If it were so, it is not to be marveled at.

The friend and comrade of his youth, and the first years of his manhood, had been so totally lost in this irresponsible individual who now controlled Lloyd's body, that it was almost impossible to feel the same sentiment toward him. Sometimes, Burress had thought of late, even Leslie found it hard to retain her old attitude toward the afflicted man.

If he hid this thing he had so strangely learned, the revelation of the truth about Solon Burress' murder might never come to light. The stories connecting Lloyd with it would blow over in time; nothing could be proved against the latter as long as Orrin Paddock kept his promise.

But, on the other hand——

Burress' head sank upon his breast. Before his mind's eye rose a vision which he might never forget. It was that of Leslie kneeling beside Lloyd's couch that terrible day, clinging with one hand to the insensible man, and with the other clasped in the doctor's own.

The entreaty in her eyes, the faith in him which her features revealed, he saw again. Hopeless as his love for the girl was, it was that love which now spurred to life again his better and nobler nature.

He raised his eyes and, as though his thought had called up her spirit, Leslie's countenance confronted him across Lloyd's bed!

"What is it? What have you discovered, Ramon?" she whispered, and not until she spoke was he convinced that it really was Leslie in the flesh.

"I could not sleep," she explained brokenly. "I feared—well, I don't know what I did fear. Is anything the matter with him?"

"There is nothing wrong," replied the doctor, recovering his voice. "He will awake all right in the morning."

She approached the door which had opened so gently that his ear did not catch the sound; but her face displayed some doubt.

"Go back to your bed, Leslie," he said soothingly. "Mrs. Creighton must not learn of this. She would not approve. Come to me in my office after the morning reports. I shall have something to say to you then."

"Something about Lloyd?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes. Something about Lloyd."

"Is—is it good, or bad, doctor?"

"God knows!" he returned, desperately. "But it is something which I must tell you."

He waved her from the room; then, after putting out the light, he went back to his own chamber to wait for the new day.

His thought dwelt chiefly upon the effect his discovery would have upon Leslie. Doubtful of her own heart until pity for Lloyd's injury prompted her love, the girl had remained faithful to the man who, in his present mind, cared nothing for her.

What would have been the effect upon her had Lloyd been the unhappy criminal and Burress in his place? It was a thought which he had never dared contemplate.

She had frankly given him her friendship—the love of a sister, indeed. His safety had lain in ignoring the fact that, under other circumstances, her heart might have warmed to him instead of to Lloyd.

But now the end was nearing him, and he let slip the leash of his thoughts. What would Leslie say did she know that to bring Lloyd back to himself meant the total annihilation

of all Burress' hopes for the future—indeed, that there would be no future for him?

Alone with these thoughts, is it strange that his mind became morbid? Dangerous as the experiment was, he was inspired with an uncontrollable desire to put the query to her.

If she knew that to give Lloyd back his memory would be to sentence Burress to ruin—perhaps to death—would she sacrifice her old and tried friend for her lover? And would she devote him to such sacrifice without a pang?

The morning came, and he had not slept. But he removed such traces as he could of the sleepless night, and appeared at the breakfast table as calmly as ever. Landers made his report, and Burress went through the wards before returning to his office.

He received the reports of the night nurses, and then stepped in to see Lloyd, to whom he had sent word to remain in bed.

"I'm all right, doc," his old friend declared. "My head's a little sore, that's all. I must have got a good, hard knock."

"You did," Burress told him. "I wish Professor Oglethorpe to see you before you get up."

He gave Mrs. Creighton instructions for Lloyd's diet. The matron was curious.

"Do you intend to operate, Dr. Burress?" she asked.

"I may. Professor Oglethorpe will come for consultation first."

He went back then to his office and sitting down at his desk wrote the telegram to summon Oglethorpe for the important conference. But he did not send out the message. Instead he sat there with it in his hand until Leslie appeared.

When she came she saw instantly the stern repression in his countenance, and drew from it that some serious and unexpected harm threatened Lloyd.

"Tell me what it is quickly, Ramon!" she cried. "Don't keep me in suspense. Is the cut dangerous? What has happened?"

"His injury of yesterday is of little moment, Leslie," he replied. "There is nothing wrong with Lloyd which cannot, I believe, be easily set right."

For a moment she did not appreciate the full significance of this speech. Then she started violently, looking at him with wondering eyes.

"What do you mean, Ramon?"

He still spoke calmly, but his eyes held her glance enthralled. He had never looked so old and worn before, yet there was power in his very attitude as he stretched forth his hand to her and spoke.

"Courage, Leslie! It is good news, not bad. I have made a discovery which changes the entire face of affairs for Seymour."

"You told me last night, Ramon, that you did not know whether it was good or bad," she whispered.

He shook his head slowly, and the smile that dawned for a moment on his countenance was so sad that tears came to her eyes.

"But that was last night; I have had time to think since then," he said.

"What is it, Ramon? Tell me!"

"We have all done our best for Seymour; but we have not understood the cause of his trouble."

"What! You tell me that after all this time?"

"I do. Confession is good for the soul. We medical men have many sins and many mistakes to confess. This is a great one: I repeat, we have not understood the cause of Seymour's trouble."

"You mean—you mean he can be cured?" cried the girl, clasping her hands and starting from her chair.

"That is what I mean."

"When, Ramon? How can it be done? Tell me what you mean!"

And all this was for Lloyd! Burress' morbid mind fastened upon the thought. Her anxiety was centered in the man whose recovery meant *his* ruin.

The physician's face did not change its expression, however; his voice was still calm.

"A simple operation will bring Seymour back to his right mind—will establish him in his original personality—will give him back his memory," he said.

"Oh, my God, Ramon! is this true?"

"Be composed, Leslie. It is true. I will stake my professional reputation upon it. See! here is a message asking Oglethorpe to come here and perform the operation."

"He will recover? You are sure? There is no danger?" cried the excited girl.

"No danger at all—for him."

"Oh, Ramon! Ramon!" She clasped him about the neck and pressed her lips to his forehead. "My more than friend—my brother! You will be his salvation. How much—how very, very much you have done for him and for me!

"Think of it! Think of the months you have cared for him and taught him. Oh, he will worship you when he understands all you have done for him. And you saved my life last night, too! I—I couldn't thank you for it then. I had no words, dear Ramon! But now——"

He put up his hand in a gesture to silence her, and thrust her away almost roughly.

"That is not all I have to say, Leslie," he went on, hoarsely.

Something in his face at last quieted her. She sank into her chair, her eyes fixed again upon him, one hand upon her heart as though to stifle its beating.

"That telegram," the paper shook in Burress' hand, "calls Oglethorpe here to perform an operation which will give Lloyd back his memory. But——"

He hesitated, fearing to speak the words. The blood rose in a wave under his sallow skin, and then receded, leaving his countenace almost livid. The girl was frightened by the change, but she could not speak, waiting for the completion of his sentence.

He leaned forward, still staring into her eyes, and when his lips again opened Leslie did not recognize his voice. It seemed to be that of a stranger.

"Lloyd will recover his memory; he will be given back to you as he was," the voice said. "But to me the operation will bring ruin—perhaps death!

"Do you understand?" Hoarse and excited rose the tones, until Leslie shuddered, shrinking from him as she listened. "The price of Seymour Lloyd's memory is *my* ruin. I lose everything—every hope I have of life, every promise of good, every anticipation of advantage and prosperity to come!

"I tell you Lloyd's recovery will mean my downfall—my utter and complete defeat! As his sun rises, so mine sets. The price of his cure is my undoing."

While the torrent of words poured from him, the girl had slowly risen and pushed back her chair. She looked down upon him now with dawning disgust and horror in her face.

"Ramon Burress, is this you whom I hear speak? Are you the man whose friendship I have been so proud to claim? Are you no better, no nobler, no more courageous than this?"

Her words seemed to quiet the physician. He gradually collapsed into his chair and his eyes wavered from her countenance. He did not raise them again to look at her throughout her further remarks.

"My God!" burst out the girl, wringing her hands, "have I given you any reason at all—any reason in the world—to suppose that my affection for poor Seymour has wavered? How *dare* you insult me so?

"I thought you above the smaller meannesses of mankind, Ramon—I did indeed! I believed I might show my heart to you—make you my dear friend—show my faith and trust in your character—without being misunderstood.

"How could you deceive yourself into believing, if Seymour remained in his present condition for a lifetime, that you could usurp his place in my regard? Am I a girl to be blown about by every wind? Am I fickle? Is that your judgment of my character?

"Oh, Ramon! Ramon! why have you said this? Why did you not let me go on believing you the noblest of men?"

She was in tears now, and wrung her hands despairingly as she gazed through the falling drops at Burress' drooping head.

"You may give me back Seymour,

but you can never give me back yourself as I believed you to be—unselfish, noble, unmarred by the meaner vices of mankind. To think of your putting your passion for me before Seymour's well-being!"

She had misunderstood him; but he had received his answer. The morbid desire which had prompted the trial of the girl was bitterly satisfied. He stretched out his hand with the telegram in it.

"Send this to the office," he said, without looking up. "Oglethorpe will come this evening to perform the operation."

"And you? Will you desert your post at the last moment and leave Seymour to be dealt with by strangers?" she demanded.

He slowly shook his head.

"I will remain. I will stay to the end," he murmured. "But—I dare not trust my hand. Oglethorpe must perform the operation."

She took the message ungratefully from his hand and left the room. He watched her go in silence; he saw the paper flutter as she closed the door—that paper which might have been the warrant for his execution.

CHAPTER XXI.

"MURDER WILL OUT."

PROFESSOR OGLETHORPE arrived at the hospital late in the afternoon. By that hour Burress had regained his self-control and appeared only to be interested in the unexpected discovery which he had made.

The scientist examined the patient, while Burress and Leslie both stood by awaiting his decision. The girl tried to catch the younger physician's eye, and her face plainly showed her sorrow for what had occurred at their last interview; but Burress did not look at her.

Oglethorpe's opinion agreed with that of the younger man. The seat of Lloyd's trouble was surely that bit of bone pressing upon the brain. Trepanning would positively solve the problem which had been puzzling them for so many months.

Indeed, the scientist showed all the eagerness which Burress might have felt under other circumstances. He listened to the report of the head nurse regarding Lloyd's condition, took his temperature, felt his pulse, and ordered him to the operating table.

"You have performed this operation under my eye before, Ramon," he said to the younger man. "It is your right to claim this privilege——"

Burress stopped him with a negative gesture. "I have called you here for that purpose, sir. You must wield the saw yourself."

Leslie's glance at him showed disappointment. In her opinion his refusal to operate on his old friend betrayed the unhappy condition of Burress' mind.

The patient was not made ready until after dinner. Then there gathered in the room beside the operating surgeon and Burress, Mrs. Creighton and Leslie. The matron had made ready the crown saw and the other delicate instruments.

At the very moment when Oglethorpe was about to begin, a message was sent in for Burress. One of the men from the lumber camp had called and asked him to come over again. The Canadian lad was worse.

The young physician hesitated. Here was an opportunity for him to escape the ordeal of the operation.

It was a question how Lloyd would come out from under the anesthetic—whether his mind would be calm or, awakened suddenly in his own identity, his memory would revert instantly to the last mental impression before his injury?

If the latter were the case, his first words would be the continuation of his broken denouncement of Burress. The physician must face this awful trial before the audience now in the room.

His care for Lloyd's welfare had forced him to bring Oglethorpe here to perform the operation. He could have done it secretly himself and so overcome the danger of Lloyd's first words arousing the suspicion of others.

But suppose his nerve had failed him at the last moment? As he had told Leslie, he distrusted his own hand.

And should he play the coward and escape now? He glanced at Leslie's face and saw that she was watching him. He turned to the messenger and sent back word that he would be unable to visit the camp before morning.

"We are ready, professor," he said quietly to Oglethorpe, and they gathered about the subject upon the operating table.

It was over shortly, the professor explaining while he worked as though he were before his class in the "pit" of the hospital theater. Lloyd was removed to his bed and Leslie was allowed to take the chair beside it.

"She would not be worth much in the general ward just now," Mrs. Creighton observed, patting the girl's cheek tenderly.

But if Leslie was anxious to be near when Lloyd awoke from the deep sleep into which he had fallen, how much greater was Burress' desire to witness the awakening.

Oglethorpe caught a late train home; Burress was expected to take full charge of the patient now. He could not keep away from the room. He was in and out a dozen times during the following two hours.

Leslie saw his state of mind, and her heart warmed toward him. She had chided herself greatly for her cruel words that morning. All he had done, all he had been to her, was recalled to her mind and she forgave him freely for his lapse from the standard which had heretofore governed his conduct.

But Burress gave her no opportunity of speaking. He did not even look at her during his visits to Lloyd's bedside. When the restless movements of the patient showed that he was likely to be soon aroused, the doctor remained in the room standing at the foot of the bed that Lloyd's eyes might first rest upon him when they opened.

His face was livid again and he trembled as though with an ague. Leslie could not dream of the riot of emotion which possessed him. She did not know that Ramon Burress was standing in the dock waiting for sentence to be pronounced upon his guilty soul!

And when finally Lloyd did arouse, it was not upon the physician that his glance first fell. He turned his head as his eyes opened and their gaze rested full upon Leslie's face.

For a moment he looked at her dully; then struggling intelligence appeared in their expression.

"Leslie—Leslie," he whispered. "I—I had something to tell you."

"I know, I know, dear," she said, soothingly, taking his hand. "But never mind it now. Go to sleep again. You will be better in the morning."

"Something has happened. I ought to tell you ——"

His vague words trailed off into silence. His eyes closed. He slept again, and he had not seen Burress at all.

But it was proven that, although Lloyd had come back to his own sane self, the matter of the murder was not uppermost in his thought. The accusation was postponed.

But it could not be for long. Burress was sure of that. He might have crept away from the hospital.

But the long-tortured man had no desire for flight now. His spirit was broken. Confident of being denounced by Lloyd when the latter should have fully recovered his memory, he took no steps to escape the punishment for his crime.

He slept some that night, for nature demanded it; but he was awake again at dawn and went into Lloyd's room. Leslie had been sent to her own bed by the night nurse. She, in turn, gave up the chair beside Lloyd's bed to the doctor.

When the patient opened his eyes this time he knew Burress at once.

"What's the matter with me, Rame?" he asked, evidently puzzled by the appearance of the plainly furnished hospital room. Then he noted the change in Burress' appearance:

"What's happened to you, Rame? Why, you look frightful, old man. I—I must have been ill a long time. Didn't you tell me so?"

His mind had received that impression from the brief conversation they had held on the occasion when Burress had experimented with the drug.

"When was I taken sick? What's the matter with me?" repeated the patient.

"Try not to think of that at present," said Burress kindly. "You have been very ill. You have sustained a severe shock. Your only hope of coming out of it all right is by keeping quiet and not exerting your mind at first."

"All right, old man," Lloyd returned, quite contented, it seemed, to let matters drift. "But tell me: did I dream that I saw Leslie Searle here?"

"She has been nursing you," Burress said, turning his face away.

"Ah!"

Lloyd remained silent after that. His eyes finally closed. Burress stole from the room and nodded to the nurse to take his place. Lloyd's awakening to sanity, and to his own real self, had been successfully accomplished.

The doctor could not meet Leslie then, and the routine of the hospital work appalled him. He remembered the promise he had made to visit Matteson's camp.

He left Landers to attend to the reports and set off briskly for the clearing in the forest. The keen air upon his face was grateful. He could breathe out here in the woods, whereas he seemed stifled within the walls of the hospital.

The logging boss betrayed his relief when the physician appeared at the bunk-house.

"I dunno what I'd done purty soon if ye hadn't shown up, doc," he said. "This feller's as crazy as a loon, an' he's burnin' up with fever. That stuff the cook made him doesn't seem ter do much good.

"We've all been takin' turns nursin' him; an' last night the only way to keep him in bed was for cookie to sleep with him and hold him from floppin' out on the floor! Hang these Canucks, any way!"

"I don't understand it," Burress said doubtfully, looking at the lad thrashing about in the bunk with a puzzled expression. "The fever seems rather inflammatory. I'll leave you some medicines and you must find somebody to watch him and administer them as ordered."

"All right, doc. I hope you kin bring him around in a few days. I'm short of men as it is. I'll go out and find one of the boys to sit with him. Cookie's busy jest now."

Burress removed his gloves and stooped over the patient. The man rolled his head incessantly and muttered gutturally in his mother-tongue.

His flesh was burning, his pulse high. The physician had difficulty in properly taking his temperature. He thrust the tube under his armpit, not daring to thrust it in his mouth.

As he withdrew the thermometer he noted a slight eruption on the man's chest. He stooped closer to examine it, and then ran his hand lightly over the place. It felt to the touch as though there were innumerable little shot beneath the skin.

He started up suddenly, and pale as his face had been, it grew infinitely more pallid now. The test-tube fell from his shaking fingers and was shattered upon the floor.

For some moments he stood there, gazing down upon the muttering patient, while gradually his self-control returned.

When Matteson came back with the man selected to act as nurse, the physician was quite calm again. Nothing in his manner or words suggested that the illness was out of the ordinary catalogue of fevers.

"Keep him well covered," he said, after explaining how the medicines were to be used. "And hang something over that window. The darker it is in here the better he will rest. I'll be over again to-night."

"Think it's serious, do ye, doc?" queried the logging boss.

"Why, it's always worth while to try to save a man's life. He has a high fever," replied Burress, drawing on his gloves.

As he went out he halted a moment to ask a curious question of Matteson:

"Are all your men here, Mat?"

"All I could git. I sent word over to Larkin yesterday for some more; but nobody's showed up."

"Who went for you?"

"Older—Cal Older; you know him. There he is yonder drivin' that sledge."

"Anybody else left the camp within the last week?"

"No; nor for two weeks. Ain't nobody been here but you, nuther. What's the matter?"

The doctor smiled and wagged his head.

"That's a little secret of mine," he said, and turned away.

But the instant his face was hidden from Matteson its expression was anything but jovial. He stopped to pass the time of day with Older.

"Where did you go besides to the hospital last night, Cal?" he asked.

"Oh, I dropped in to Tommy Birch's for a while. That's all. I had word to leave for Mat."

"Any strangers in town?"

"Not a soul that I heard of," declared Older, looking at him curiously.

The physician hurried away. When near the hospital, and just before crossing the bridle-path, he spied a man from Larkin who had been gunning. He knew the man well, but he stepped back among the trees and hid until he had disappeared.

When he entered the hospital grounds one of the male attendants was in sight. He called to him; but when the man approached, he waved him away to a respectable distance.

"Go in at once and tell Dr. Landers to meet me here. At once, mind!"

The man ran in and the assistant physician came out, hatless, to learn what his superior's strange actions meant. Burress told him quickly, and in a low voice. Landers turned pale to the lips.

"Keep your nerve, young man!" Burress exclaimed. "Do exactly as I tell you. Bring me a change of clothes throughout into that basement room. I'll fumigate myself there.

"Take the usual precautions yourself, but don't lose your head. Say nothing to a soul about this—not even to Mrs. Creighton. Everything depends on how much we can accomplish before the truth is suspected.

"I will not even trust to the telegraph to bring what we want. Telegraph messages sometimes leak out—especially in a country office.

"You must go to town yourself. Catch the next train, don't fail. I will give you a note, and you must go to Oglethorpe and bring him back if possible. Now, be quick!"

An hour later he was in his office and had sent Landers off with the letters. It was not until then that his mind reverted to Lloyd.

He first went the rounds of the wards; then he came to the private room in which his old friend lay.

Lloyd was awake and Leslie was with him. They had been talking and it was evident that much of that which had happened since the killing of Solon Burress had been related by the girl to the invalid.

"Here is Ramon now, Seymour," she said, as the physician entered. "Would you know him? Hasn't he changed vastly? And that change is due, I verily believe, to his application to study and—to you."

Burress was silent. He saw his old friend's features darken as the girl spoke. Memory, in its full tide, had come again to Lloyd and, without doubt, he was keenly aware of the incidents connected with Solon Burress' death.

"He never gave up hope of recalling you to yourself, Seymour," the girl continued, looking at Burress and therefore unaware of the change in the invalid's face. "And it was Ramon who finally discovered what was the real cause of your trouble."

She had risen and as Burress passed her, she caught his hand in both of hers.

"He is the dearest, the most faithful friend one could wish; I have tried him and found him true!"

It was plain that she was covertly asking pardon for her outbreak the morning previous. Afterthought had softened the vexation which the physician's words first roused in her mind; telling Lloyd what Burress had done for him had brought all the better qualities of the physician's character again to her remembrance.

He smiled down upon her.

"It is good of you to say that, Leslie, whether I deserve it or not," he responded.

"Deserve it! you deserve more than I can ever give you, Ramon, dear!" she

cried, looking with honest eyes into his own.

Suddenly Lloyd's voice, hoarse with emotion, interrupted them:

"He is certainly bold to remain here now that I am myself again."

Leslie turned swiftly and looked down at the speaker in amazement. Burress stepped back, dropping her hands; but he said nothing. Lloyd's next words were addressed to him:

"You know what I mean, Rame. I haven't forgotten—nor have you, I'll be bound! Do you think for a moment I shall hide the miserable secret?

"You have evidently taught Leslie to plead your cause with me; but it's no use, I tell you—it's no use!"

(To be continued.)

IN LOVE WITH A MILLION.

BY EDWARD P. CAMPBELL.

A strange case of a race to the altar for money with Cupid in the driver's seat.

"WORK, Everhart, was made for slaves," announced Keeney from the Moorish couch where for the last half hour he had been reclining in a scowling reverie.

As he spoke, his glance swept enviously over the pictures, hangings and luxurious appointments which surrounded him; for these rooms—a suite in one of the most fashionable and expensive apartment houses in New York—were not his except for a very limited possession.

The real owner was a wealthy cousin and namesake who had permitted George and his chum, Billy Everhart, to occupy them as caretakers during his own absence on a yachting cruise to the Mediterranean.

Familiarity with such unwonted splendor, however, had only served to arouse in the new tenants a feeling of bitter discontent at the thought of ultimately returning to a routine of hall bedrooms and cheap eating-houses; and it was something of this which Keeney now expressed in his grumbling declaration.

"Yes," he repeated defiantly; "in this day and generation, the man who works for his living is nothing more nor less than a blithering ass. As for me, I am going to cut it out."

"Very good," assented Everhart with bland satire; "but what, may I ask, are you going to take up in its place—second-story work, or playing the ponies?"

"Neither," shortly; "I am going to get married. Oh, you needn't grin; I mean just what I say, and it's no sudden determination, either. Lots of chaps, with no more to recommend them than I, have succeeded in hooking up to heiresses; and why can't I do the same? It seems to me the one method of escape from my present serfdom.

"Look at me," he cried, springing to his feet, and pacing up and down the floor in a passion of revolt; "twenty-five years old, not bad looking," pausing to cast an appreciative glance at his well-knit figure, and clean-cut, youthful face in the mirror over the mantelpiece, "full of snap and vigor, capable of enjoying life at its fullest and best; yet what, pray, do I get out of it? I grind away at a desk ten hours out of every twenty-four for merely enough to board and clothe me in the simplest fashion, and in my brief periods of leisure I am so dog-tired that I have no inclination to enjoy myself, even if I could afford it.

"Is there anything in the future?" resentfully. "Am I toiling to any purpose? Not on your life. All that looms ahead of me is an interminable stretch at the same old treadmill. Why, an oyster at the bottom of the ocean gets a thousand times more pleasure out of existence; he at least is not continually chafing against the bars."

"Perhaps you would find more in your work, if you applied yourself to it a bit more conscientiously," exhorted Everhart significantly, but not

unkindly. "I don't want to preach, George; but you must realize yourself that you've been growing pretty slack of late. You'd better drop this silly dream of jumping into a fortune, and get down to business, if you ever expect to earn a promotion."

"Pah!" sneered Keeney. "There are gray-headed old codgers down at the office who have been waiting for promotion for twenty years, but like me they lack 'pull,' and so stay on just where they are. Nay, nay, Pauline; I have a plan in view which beats that old 'plodding-industry' game more than a city block. To-morrow I lay aside my virtuous pen, and start out as a gay butterfly of fashion, my one purpose to corral a wealthy wife."

"Surely," interposed the other incredulously, "you are not thinking of throwing up your job to embark on any such wild-goose enterprise?"

"Am I not, dear boy? Well, that is just where you are mistaken. This is a business proposition with me, you must understand, and I intend to handle it in business fashion, giving up to it my entire time and attention. I have a little property left me by my uncle which if turned into cash will probably net me about $2,500. With this for the sinews of war, a presentable appearance, and a sufficient share of nerve, I expect inside of six months to land my bride. Youth and beauty naturally preferred, but not absolutely essential; an abundance of 'scads' the imperative requisite."

"And how about the little god with the bow and arrows?" questioned Everhart mockingly. "Remember, you have a somewhat susceptible heart."

"Rot!" scoffed George gaily. "I could love any woman that had a million."

Everhart sucked thoughtfully at his pipe for a moment or two.

"Have you anybody in mind?" he asked at length.

"Well," admitted Keeney slowly, flushing a bit under his fair skin, "there is that extraordinary pretty girl who lives with her mother over on the other side of the house. We came up with them in the elevator this evening, you recollect. Her name is Matthews, Miss Marian Matthews; I found that out from the clerk down at the desk. And jiminy crickets, isn't she a beauty, though?" with a sudden glow of enthusiasm.

The other man smiled quizzically underneath his mustache.

"But I thought that beauty didn't count," he teased; "that the 'long green' was all you proposed to take into consideration?"

"Oh, that part of it must be all right in this case," averred George easily; "they wouldn't be living in a house like this, if they didn't have money. What is bothering me is how the dickens I am going to get to meet her."

By a singular coincidence, a discussion of very similar purport was in progress that same evening over on the other side of the house; for Mrs. Matthews, despite Keeney's confident conclusion to the contrary, not only was not rich, but like himself was seeking fortune through the medium of the marriage tie.

She was too old herself to contemplate matrimony a second time, but she had long since determined that her daughter should make a wealthy alliance; and with this end in view she had year by year laid out her slender means in providing the girl with every advantage of travel and education.

Now, as a culminating step, she had come on to New York and secured apartments at this house, which she was informed contained more eligible *partis* than any other in the metropolis.

It was a desperate hazard she was taking, for she had pledged practically every cent that she was worth to accomplish it, and if she failed she realized that little less than penury stared her in the face.

Nevertheless, she could not but believe that the transcendent beauty and charm of her daughter would win the day. How could any man, she asked herself, no matter though he had all the world to choose from, be indifferent to such blithe attractiveness?

Her chief source of uneasiness, indeed, had been the girl herself, for Marian, unconscious of her mother's schemes, and ignorant of their desper-

ate financial straits, had shown herself as ready to encourage a poor clerk as his haughty employer, or, if she did not like him, to snub a bank president as quickly as the man without a penny.

At last, Mrs. Matthews, harassed and worried almost to distraction, decided that to achieve results she must acquaint her daughter with the situation, and secure her cooperation in the enterprise. Marian had always been a dutiful child, she assured herself, and once she understood the true conditions she would no doubt lend herself readily to her mother's wishes.

She failed, however, to take account of a certain steel-like obstinacy of temperament which the girl concealed for the most part under her complaisant and generous disposition; and she was therefore ill-prepared for the storm which broke when she made her revelation.

Marian stamped her foot, and declared stoutly that she would never lend countenance to any such proceedings. She had no particular aversion to marriage, she admitted, and she was willing that her husband should be endowed with a sufficiency of this world's goods; but she revolted at the idea of stalking down a man merely because he was rich, and insisted on her right to bestow her hand according to her own inclinations, whether it were on a millionaire or a coal-heaver.

Moreover, she upbraided her mother bitterly for having brought them to such a pass, and eagerly urged that they relinquish the costly lodgings in which they were now installed.

"Let us drop this foolish idea, and go to some quiet place within our means, mama," she begged. "You have educated me well, and I can certainly get something to do which will help eke out our income. It would be a delight to me to work for you."

But Mrs. Matthews had a trace of stubbornness in her own composition, and although she wept and freely acknowledged her past errors, she refused to be dislodged from their fashionable abode or to be diverted from the purpose which she had so long and so tenaciously held.

Mindful, too, of the old adage about continual dropping wearing away a stone, she lost no opportunity to impress upon her daughter the precariousness of their state, and to point out the advantages which should accrue from a match with this or that wealthy bachelor of their acquaintance.

Marian had been accustomed to receive these suggestions either in scornful silence, or with a contemptuous sniff; but to-night for some reason when the older lady ventured an observation of the sort, she gave none of her usual indications of impatience.

"Did you notice those two young men who came up with us in the lift this evening, Marian?" asked Mrs. Matthews, attempting to speak casually, but with a quiver of excitement in her voice. "Well, have you any idea who the fair-haired one, that stared so hard at you, is?"

"No," returned Marian shortly, yet not in such a way as to repel further revelations.

"That, my dear," impressively, "is George Keeney, and he, as I happen to know, is one of the richest men in New York. I did see some time ago that he was off on a cruise to the Mediterranean, but his presence here is evidence that he must have returned. Ah, my dear, the girl who gets him will be a lucky woman!"

Marian bent low over some fancy-work she had in her lap, and made no answer, but her mother observed that a faint, delicate flush had stolen into her cheek at the unmistakable suggestion.

Wise in her generation, however, Mrs. Matthews, in order to verify her suspicions, alluded no more to the affluence of their neighbor, but began cunningly to cast disparagement upon his personal appearance.

To her great delight the girl swallowed the bait without suspicion, and rose recklessly to the defense. They wrangled for nearly an hour over the shape of George's nose, and almost came to the hair-pulling stage while arguing the comparative merits of blue and brown eyes; but at last Marian put a stop to the discussion by remarking with a shrug of the shoulders, that they were really exciting themselves unnecessarily, for although Mr. Keeney

lived so close to them, it was extremely improbable that they would ever meet him.

Yet, since if she shrugged her shoulders, she also gave a little sigh at the end of her sentence, Mrs. Matthews was not as those who are utterly without hope.

Moreover, the good lady, as she believed, had at last discovered the line of action which would best subserve her aims. If she was to bring about the union for which she hoped, her policy must be opposition—bitter, deadly opposition to the very end.

Accordingly, although she at once began to string her wires to achieve an acquaintance between her daughter and the young man she had deceived herself into believing "Crœsus" Keeney, she kept all knowledge of such efforts from Marian; and when her object had finally been attained through the good offices of a friend in the house, waxed even more caustically critical of poor George than before. To hear her, one would have imagined him the most blundering oaf alive.

Truth to tell, though, there was small necessity of fanning the flame which had been kindled in the girl's breast. It was a case of love at first sight with her, and as Keeney was equally smitten, there would have been, if either had been what the other supposed, nothing more to it but orange blossoms and wedding cake.

On Marian's side, indeed, no thought of mundane considerations did intrude; but George, deeply in love as he was, still hesitated cannily and hung back. He had not yet fully assured himself that the Matthews' fortune was what one might judge from their style of living.

While he lingered in his miserable state of indecision, it happened one day that Marian, having several errands to make, sent word to the desk to call her a cab, and when she came down to the door found awaiting her there a beautiful brougham with driver and footman in spotless livery.

As a matter of fact, the equipage was a private one sent around by its owner to take out a lady temporarily stopping in the house; but Miss Matthews, ignorant of this circumstance, and not sufficiently accustomed to New York cabs to understand that this was far from being a public conveyance, hopped gaily in, while the coachman and footman, never having seen their prospective passenger, were on their side equally deceived.

In response to the obsequious "Where to?" as the carriage door closed, the girl gave a list of the places where she wished to stop, and then leaning back luxuriously against the cushions, resigned herself to a child-like enjoyment of the rapid, easy motion.

Coming out of the last stopping-place, she ran squarely into Keeney, who was sauntering along, his mind full of her at that very moment, trying to decide whether or not to run the risk of a proposal, or indeed if he could bring himself to give her up even though her wealth might not be so great as appeared.

"Can't you give me a lift?" he asked laughingly, as he led her out to the door of the waiting carriage. It is a beautiful morning and the Park seems to beckon. I can fancy no more profitable way of putting in the time, especially with such a smashing turnout as you have here," glancing admiringly at the satin coats of the horses and the stylish lines of the trim vehicle.

"Ah, you like it then?" cried the girl, adding as a joke: "I just bought it this morning, and so far am immensely pleased with it; but am willing to defer to your more expert judgment. Of course, I will take you through the Park, and you shall tell me what you think of my purchase."

She had no idea that he would fail to recognize it as a hired cab, and so spoke jestingly; but George took her words in sober, deadly earnest.

If she could afford a carriage like that, he hastily reflected, there could be no question of her money. Consequently, his indecision vanished, and when he took his seat beside her, his mind was fully made up that before the end of that drive he would learn his fate.

While they were leisurely tooling

along the east drive, he made his avowal, and as may be imagined there was no lack of real feeling in his protestations. He realized at last that she was the one woman in the world for him; and as he told her of his love, he forgot all the sordid considerations which had hitherto governed him

The carriages besides their own were few, the soft autumn breeze swept in at the open windows, the squirrels hopped about among the falling leaves, and they two were foolishly, idyllically happy.

But at last a disturbing thought obtruded itself upon Marian's consciousness.

"Oh, George," she exclaimed, "what will mama say? For some reason she has taken the most violent prejudice against you, and she is sure to object."

Keeney was dashed for a moment, then he rose Napoleonic to the situation.

"I'll tell you," he proposed; "there is no earthly use in our hanging on through a long engagement. Let us go and get quietly married this morning, telling your mother nothing about it until after the knot is safely tied. Then it will be too late to object; for I have found out in my experience that there is nothing which so quickly silences opposition as the realization that a thing is inevitably accomplished."

Marian naturally demurred. No woman likes to be hurried to the altar. But George proved so persistent, and fortified his arguments with so many loving endearments that in the end she yielded.

Keeney scarcely waited for the word of assent to reach his ears before he had jerked at the check-strap.

"To the Little Church Around the Corner," he directed; and so it turned out that when the pair a half hour later alighted from the brougham at the entrance of the apartment house, they were as fully Mr. and Mrs. George Keeney as bell and book could make them.

"Pay the cabman, dear, will you?" said the bride with a pretty little air of wifely dependence, as she turned toward the steps.

"Pay—what?" stammered George, mouth and eyes both falling wide. "I—I thought you said that you had bought this rig?"

"I?" she laughed gaily. "Why, I supposed of course you knew that I was fooling. How could I afford such a luxury?"

"But you are rich, are you not?" pressed Keeney, a terrible sinking at his heart.

"Rich?" she laughed again. "Why do you want to tease so, George? Don't you know that I have not a penny wherewith to bless my name?"

There were some painful explanations and excuses before a much flustered and very haughty coachman drove loftily away up the street; but at last Keeney was free again to turn his attention to the woman he had just promised to love, honor and cherish as long as they both should live.

There was an angry accusation upon his lips, a feeling of wrathful bitterness at his heart; but as he gazed at her glowing, flower-like face upraised to his with perfect trust and love, his ignoble sentiments died. In that moment George Keeney became a man.

He crushed back the taunting words he had intended to speak.

"I have got something better than mere money," his pulse throbbed exultantly. "I have a woman that one might well be glad to sweat and slave for. If I ever let her know what led me to marry her, or if I ever fail to do my duty by her, to support and care for and cherish her, I shall indeed become the poltroon and coward that I tried to make myself."

These were his thoughts; aloud, he merely said gently to her, as he extended his hand: "Come, Marian, let us go and tell your mother."

Small opportunity, however, was granted to them to divulge their secret, for hardly had Keeney set foot within the room before Mrs. Matthews bounced toward him with fire in her eye, and revilings upon her tongue.

"You dare to come here?" she cried excitedly. "You still attempt to carry on your game of deception? Oh, you impostor! You swindler! You cheat!"

"What on earth is the matter

now?" demanded George amazedly, taken completely aback at this unexpected assault. "It is true, madam, that I have married your daughter; but I am at a loss——"

"You have married my daughter?" shrieked Mrs. Matthews, almost on the verge of hysterics. "Oh, my poor, unhappy child! But it shall never stand. Her consent was gained through fraud and imposture. I will drag you through the courts for this, you villain, you crawling, treacherous viper!"

"Look here, Mrs. Matthews," broke in Keeney sternly, "I stand ready to accord you all due respect as the mother of my wife; but I flatly decline to endure any more of this unmerited abuse. If this outbreak is not sheer insanity will you kindly tell me wherein I have ever deceived or imposed upon you?"

"Did you not gain admission here by representing yourself as George Keeney?"

"I certainly did, for that is just who I am."

"Ah," she cried triumphantly, "then perhaps you can explain this?" snatching up from the table a paper she had just been perusing, and shaking it in his face. "It is distinctly stated here that George Keeney accidentally fell overboard from his yacht in the harbor of Naples yesterday, and was drowned."

It was now the young husband's turn to display excitement. Seizing the paper out of her hands, he ran his eye hastily over the item she had pointed out.

There seemed no good reason to doubt its accuracy; a positive averment was made that the body had been recovered, and that the noted millionaire was dead.

"Mrs. Matthews," said George, turning to her with quiet dignity, "you have made a very natural mistake. It was my cousin who met such an unfortunate end; and since he left no other relatives, the probabilities are very strong that I have become his heir."

"Oh, my dear George," hastily cried Mrs. Matthews, coming forward and putting her arms about his neck. "What a stupid error for me to fall into! And so you and Marian are married, dear boy? Let me welcome you into the family with a motherly kiss."

BROWN FURROWS AND GOLDEN GRAIN.

THE spring-time's early dawns are o'er,
The summer's burning suns have set,
And high above the ripening vales
The cooling autumn winds are met.

We bare our brows, our idle hands
And weary feet find rest at last,
And from the height, with dreamy eyes,
We retrospect the eager past.

Where once the long brown furrows lay,
Where erst we plodded, faint and slow,
And sowed the seed so wearily,
Now lies the golden harvest's glow.

No more we see the furrows brown,
No more we feel the burning noon;
To ripened sheaves our wheat has grown,
And life hangs out its harvest moon.

Maud Meredith.

BLOCK TOWER SEVEN.*

BY JARED L. FULLER.

A railroad story of a signalman's thrilling experiences in ferreting out the mystery of his predecessor's murder.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

A WRECK occurs on the A. & C. R. R., from which Dr. Lester, Captain Payne Howard and his daughter Belle are rescued by Dan Crompton, an employee of the road. Captain Howard is in litigation with the railway company at this time.

It is discovered that Raddigan, the signalman in Tower Seven at Coldspring, is murdered, and that the signals were changed to cause the wreck. There is no clue to the murderer.

Crompton is promoted to Raddigan's position, and takes up his quarters with Mrs. Corrigan and her idiot son, Billy, sister and nephew of the murdered Raddigan. It is not long before he receives a warning of personal danger, and while returning home at midnight is attacked by a couple of men who get aboard a slow freight. He starts in pursuit of them and enters the car where they are hiding. They gag and bind him and make their escape. At the top of a steep slope the train breaks in two. Crompton's car, with several others, rolls backward. At the end of the slope there is a sharp turn, and the car in which Crompton is confined, jumping the track, rolls into a ravine. He escapes serious injury and is discovered by Belle Howard, who braves a forest fire to free him.

During an illness of several days Crompton obtains information which leads him to think that this last series of accidents was due to Ike and Jase Howard and that Silly Billy knows more of the doings at Tower Seven than is generally supposed.

Crompton is still confined to his room when his substitute, Markell, brings him a key to the new lock on the tower door. As a test, Crompton gives Billy a chance to steal the key. Billy takes it, and when he leaves the house, Crompton follows him, convinced that some valuable information is going to come his way.

At the tower Billy escapes him, but he discovers Raddigan's pistol, which the boy evidently had buried there.

Dan receives a second warning and shortly after another big wreck occurs a few miles above Tower Seven, in which he traces the hands of the Howards.

He returns from the wreck in the baggage car of a delayed train. As it rounds the sharp curve approaching the trestle, Dan, from the door of the car, sees in the gray morning twilight a sight that sends his heart into his month.

CHAPTER XXX.

A CLOSE CALL.

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the sharp shriek of the whistle, Dan made out the figure of a man moving between the rails on the trestle.

Midway of the bridge it was, and the startled signalman saw plainly the indecisive movements of the endangered one. The engineer gave her air—all she would stand on so sharp a curve; but it was too late, or the trackwalker was badly confused.

He might have leaped to the other track, but there were wide interstices between the cross-beams, and had he done so the probability was that he would have fallen through. He did the most foolish thing of all—as one is apt to do under like circumstances.

He stepped off the track, but upon the narrow outer edge of the bridgework. And so near was the pilot to him, that the flagstaff hit him.

Dan saw him stagger, throw up his hands as though to clutch at the empty air, and then, as the locomotive thundered past, he pitched headlong over the end of the timber.

The black river received him as the train ground to a nerve-racking stop on the trestle.

In his excitement Dan had pushed the sliding door of the baggage van wide open, and a broad band of lamplight was flung out upon the trestle's edge and the hurrying water below.

As the cars came to a full stop the signalman saw the head of the victim bob up within the expanse of light gilding the troubled river.

The shrill tooting of the whistle aroused most of the passengers, early as it was in the morning, and despite the fact that many of them were in their berths, the trestle was quickly thronged by the crowd from the cars.

There was much shouting and an enormous amount of advice wasted; but few really knew what to do. It was plain to Dan that, although the fellow in the water was not yet in the swiftest part of the river, he could not escape to the shore without help.

Possibly he had been so dazed by the push from the pilot, or otherwise injured, that he was unable to exercise his swimming powers. He sank several times, but only a little way, coming quickly to the surface again and adding his bubbling cries to the general tumult.

"What are you going to do, you darned fool?" shouted Hendricks, as he saw the signalman stoop.

Dan tore off his low shoes; then he slipped out of his coat and vest.

"You'll both be drowned!" declared Hendricks, with his hand on Dan's shoulder. "He's being carried toward the main channel. The current's terribly swift."

"Chuck me the end of a rope from the other side of the trestle!" cried Dan, and, tearing away from the restraining hand, he leaped out from the car door.

He cleared the end of the trestlework and dropped, feet first, into the current. He was somewhat nearer the center of the span than the man already struggling in the water, and the moment he rose to the surface felt the grip of the fierce tide which swept under the bridge in the deeper channel of the river.

He fought against this suction for some moments, seeing the bobbing head of the other not many yards away. Suddenly, like a leaf in an eddy, that head swung about in narrowing circles.

It must have made the struggling man dizzy. Dan heard faintly an agonized cry. Then the head went under.

He knew this was for the last time, unless by good fortune *he* could reach the victim of the accident and drag him to the surface. Dan dived like a trout, curving his body half out of the water, and disappeared.

The force of the current seemed to be lessened beneath the surface. He struck out mightily for the eddy in which the other had sunk.

Blindly he swam up stream and suddenly his hand struck against some object. Was it a snag attached to the river bottom, or——

It was the sleeve of a coat! He seized it desperately and then, his heel striking the firm bottom of the river, both he and his burden rose straight through the water, cleaving the surface at last to the blessed air.

But the fight was only now begun. Dan felt that they were in the full grip of the current.

Batted from side to side, like shuttles in a loom, he and his burden were flung from wave to wave. In a breath they were swept beneath the shadow of the trestle, and Dan was faintly conscious of a roar of voices overhead as he and the man he clung to disappeared.

Beneath the bridge was the blackest of black night. Once Dan was heaved against a pier, but he saved the other from injury, and his own back took the blow.

The half-drowned man struggled but little.

Dan could hear him, now and then, breathe gaspingly, as though his lungs were half filled with water. Yet he was not unconscious nor did he cling recklessly to the signalman.

But it was like fighting in a pit, here under the trestle. Dan himself could scarcely breathe between the dashes of cold water in his face. The river boiled about the piers, and the eddies reached out strangling hands for him.

Dan's one thought was "If Hendricks finds that rope we're all right."

But where would the express messenger get a rope? Dan had seen none in the baggage car.

A long enough line to fling to him from the edge of the trestle would seem hard to find on a passenger train.

Not far below the bridge was the place where he and Belle Howard had taken to the river when chased by the flames. He remembered how strong the current was there, and how it had carried them down to the ferry.

Once well in the grip of that power,

and nothing could save him and his present companion in peril. He could not fight against the flood to the ferry again—that was impossible.

He bumped into another pier and almost lost his grip upon the man for whom he risked his life. With one arm he held him above the surface; with the other hand he struck out despairingly.

Suddenly there was a shout above him. The voices seemed to reach his ear from a great distance.

He was coming out from under the bridge, and had been seen by those who had run to this side of the trestle. Lights flared above him, and half a hundred voices shouted advice and begged him to "hold on!"

There seemed nothing to "hold on" to but the man he had sprung in to save; and Dan had no intention of dropping him yet. He tried to swim, however, across the fierce current which was steadily dragging them down the middle of the stream.

It seemed to the signalman as though an hour had passed since he jumped into the water.

To those above, the moments passed with terrifying swiftness. It appeared impossible to aid at all Dan's bold fight with the flood. He was likely to lose his own life in making the foolhardy attempt to save the stranger.

Hendricks had heard Dan's last words plainly enough. But where was he to find a rope to fling to the signalman as he came out from under the trestle?

Everybody was excitedly yelling orders, but doing nothing of practical value. That is, everybody excepting the engineer and fireman.

They had leaped from the cab and were now taking down the headlight from the front of the locomotive. The conductor sent a man ahead with a red lantern and the flagman was guarding the rear of the halted train.

About the time the two struggling men were swept from beneath the trestle, the driver and stoker brought the huge lamp and reflector down from the machine. They turned this light upon the roughened surface of the river, and quickly caught the position of the two in the flood.

Meanwhile Hendricks had been hard at work, running from one end of the train to the other.

"Tell 'em to hang on a minute!" he had shouted, and these words were repeated again and again to the men in the water.

And what did Hendricks expect to do? He sprang off the middle car at last with a long rope looped over his arm. He had bethought him of the bellcord, and had cut off a generous length of it.

"Stand out of the way! Gimme room!" Hendricks bawled.

In the light of the big lamp, which the engineer and fireman had brought to the edge of the trestle, he saw the bobbing heads of the two men in the water.

The current seemed to grip them suddenly, and they darted out, straight away from the piers and down the middle of the stream.

The coil of rope whistled through the air and—*splash*, it fell into the flood. Was it near—was it far? Could Dan reach it?

Queries like these shattered the strained silence which had followed Hendricks' yell. Then one fellow uttered a mighty roar:

"By heaven, he's got it!"

It was plain to all that Dan *did* have it, and a cheer echoed this single shout. The crowd went mad with joy, as though every one there saw in the sinking men his own brothers, or his closest friends.

Some laid hold with Hendricks—but carefully, carefully. The bellrope was a linen-covered cord, and strong; but whether it would withstand the weight of two men, and the suction of the current into the bargain, was a matter of some doubt.

Dan, however, had taken a turn of the stout cord around his wrist. It cut deeply into the flesh, for the strain was terrific; but he stifled the groan between his teeth, and shouted:

"Haul away! Easy!"

Meanwhile two agile fellows had climbed down upon the bracework under the level of the trestle. One of them had removed his overcoat, and each holding an arm, they dropped this down until the skirts were near the water. The men above had drawn Dan and his burden in to the trestle.

They all were shouting to the signal-

man, telling him what to do. He knew well enough, however.

His companion seemed utterly exhausted, and was now a dead weight upon him. Besides, the water had chilled him to the marrow.

He was scarcely able to keep a grip upon the other's coat collar with his stiffened fingers.

But he knew what he had to do. He couldn't give up yet. After fighting the battle to this point he could not lose his head.

This cord he had grasped must be passed under the arms of the man he sought to save. He did this quickly; but it took every ounce of strength he possessed to tie a knot—and one that would not slip—in the cord.

This was something that Hendricks, had he not been so excited, should have done. There should have been a noose at the end of that bellrope.

But Dan accomplished it at last, and shouted up to those above:

"Haul away! For God's sake, haul!"

"Catch hold of this coat yourself!" came the answer, and the skirts of the garment dangled just over his head.

Indeed, had it not been there when he let go of the bellcord, he would surely have been swept away from the piers. But he transferred his clutch from the rope to the coat.

He could not draw himself up; nor could he hang to the coatskirts while those above raised him. He was rapidly losing strength.

He saw the supine body of the man he had leaped into the river to save rising in the air above his head. Could he wait for that precious rope to be lowered again for him.

His limbs seemed paralyzed. His blood was chilled. The pressure on his chest was as though a block of granite lay there.

The cries above him grew fainter and fainter in his ears. The glare of the headlight became dim. The outline of the trestle piers and the dark forms stooping over him were receding from his dulled vision.

The strangest fancies possessed his mind. He forgot time and place, and believed he was again floating down the river, bearing Belle Howard in his arms. They reached the ferryman's rope. He felt it rub against his bare chest.

He fought to hold to the line—and to hold her up, too. Her weight seemed bearing him beneath the surface, but he labored like a giant to raise her and himself upon the sagging cable.

Then suddenly, as it seemed, the ferryboat had come to them. Belle was drawn into the craft. He put up his own hands to seize the gunwale and to crawl aboard.

But he was thrust back; his hands were unclasped from the rough wood and again he was pushed into the current.

He screamed aloud at this. He begged and prayed to be saved.

He called on Belle's name and prayed her to take his part—to save him from the death which yawned for him.

And then—of a sudden it seemed, as though in the unexpected illumination of a flash of light—he saw the face of the man who was thrusting him back into the flood.

It was not the ferryman, although in even this extreme moment Dan remembered how afraid he had been of that brutal individual.

The man's distorted countenance was close to his own. His white, firm hands snatched Dan's from the gunwale of the boat, and with a curse, he flung him into the swift tide.

And this monster of his fancy was Dr. Adrian Lester!

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CANKER OF SUSPICION.

DAN CROMPTON was first conscious of the rumbling jar of the train and the bumping of the wheels over a switch. He was warm and dry, and somebody was trying to force some hot liquid between his teeth.

Being naturally obstinate, he locked his jaws tighter than before and opened his eyes.

"Glory to Jehosaphat!" yelled Hendricks, grinning as well as he could for the plasters on his face. "I thought you were a goner, old man!"

"How—how——?"

The express messenger understood the faint and unfinished query. To open his eyes anywhere but in the next

world was certainly an astonishing experience for Dan Crompton.

He had felt his fingers slip from their hold upon the skirts of the coat. The current of the river had been tearing at him like a sentient being, and the chill of its waters was fast dulling his every sense.

And *now*, to awake in the light and warmth of the baggage car—well, he just couldn't understand it.

To hear Hendricks tell it, however, it seemed the simplest thing in the world. He and those helping him had raised the other man to the trestle and cast off the bellrope from about his body.

Hendricks made a running noose in the wet, stiffened rope, and had it ready just as Dan's hands slipped from their final hold of the coat.

"I flung it over you as you threw up your hands and was sinking," he said, with pride. "I didn't punch cows in Montana two years for nothing, you bet!

"The noose slipped over both of your raised arms, and I pulled it tight across your chest. By thunder! I'd ha' caught you, if need be, around the neck," and he grinned.

"And choked me to death," murmured Dan.

"Well, you wouldn't have drowned. I made up my mind to that—and after you'd made such a plucky fight to save that boy."

"Boy—boy?" queried Dan. "Who was it? Is he all right?"

"Oh, we've got the water out of him. He'll be all right, I guess. But he's not sensible yet."

"Who is he?" repeated Dan, earnestly.

"Why, one of the boys seems to know who he is. He's not quite right in his head——"

"Silly Billy!" exclaimed Dan, half rising on his couch.

"That's what they call him, I believe. He's the nephew of the old fellow who was murdered up there in Block Tower Seven before you came on, Crompton."

And this was how Silly Billy came home. When the train reached the Coldspring station, a carriage was sent for and both rescuer and rescued were driven to the Corrigan cottage.

Dan was all right by that time, but he had the carriage stop for Dr. Lester, and the physician came over at once to attend Billy.

The boy was in a bad way. Not only had he grown thin and very worn since last he had been seen about the Coldspring tracks and the block tower, but his bath in the cold river induced a slight attack of what seemed to be pneumonia.

But the doctor cheered the widow by promising to pull the boy through. Really, Dan forgot half his dislike for Dr. Lester as he watched him working over poor Billy.

Mrs. Corrigan was volubly thankful to Dan for saving her boy from the river; but without the doctor's science and attention Billy would surely have died. It was some days before he could talk, or was allowed to talk, of where he had been.

It was not to Dan, then, that he spoke. At first he was frightened when he saw the signalman in the room.

But Dan knew this would never do, so he sent the widow out on an errand and took Billy's hand kindly in his own.

"Don't you be afraid, my boy," he said. "Nobody's going to hurt you. You just get well, and then you can tell us all about it."

"I—I can't, Mr. Crompton!" gasped the boy. "I—I don't dare."

"You needn't be afraid," repeated Dan. "Those fellows won't hurt you. I won't let them."

Billy didn't look as though he understood, and shook his head weakly. "I can't tell ye nothin', Mr. Crompton."

"All right, then. We'll let it go at that," the signalman said, with a smile.

But he wondered much at the power the Howards seemed to have over the boy. Through his mother, Dan learned that fear had sent him *away* from the Howards, if it had not drawn him *to* them.

Billy knew something about the wreck of Train 78. The first night, in his delirium, he raved about it, for Dan watched with him, having arranged for a substitute to take his place at the tower.

It was plain that Billy could give much hurtful evidence against the Howards; but would he not be too frightened

to do so? And, indeed, would his testimony be accepted in a court of law?

Dan knew that Alonzo Pebble was following up the matter of the train wreck with a tenacity of purpose that boded ill for the perpetrators of the deed. Railroad men did not talk much about it, but it was understood that if the guilty ones were discovered they would be punished to the full extent of the law.

It was generally understood by outsiders that the Howards were suspected. Even Captain Payne was looked at askance on the streets of Coldspring. His own testimony that "we Howards hang together, right or wrong," served to bring him into bad odor now.

Nobody dared speak to the old man on the subject; but the whisper went broadcast that the net of suspicion was at last tightening about his relatives in the hills, and that the railroad company was preparing to send Jase, Ike, and some of the minor members of the clan "over the road."

Perhaps the reason the matter was delayed so long was because the corporation lawyers hoped to catch Captain Payne himself in the general haul.

The old man had made them a lot of trouble with his suit at law, and promised to continue in the same way for some time to come; for on that last day in court at Arkane, Captain Payne's lawyers had found a technicality upon which to demand a new trial.

But the old man went his way, head up, flapping hat pulled over his sharp eyes—flaunting his Confederate uniform in the faces of his neighbors, who had never forgotten "the bloody shirt" any more than had Captain Payne himself.

Dan did not know what to think. He had written briefly to the superintendent regarding the home-coming of Billy Corrigan, and received an acknowledgment even more brief.

But Alonzo Pebble was not likely to take a signalman into his confidence.

Crompton's thoughts were vastly disturbed, however. Billy was still in bed, and even when he should be well enough to get about again, Dan doubted if it would be best to sound him regarding the night in the signal tower, when Billy stole his door-key, and when Raddigan's old pistol was found by him and Markell.

It all depended upon just how foolish Billy really was. He knew a great deal about Raddigan's death, and about the connection of the Howards with that crime, and with the wreck of Train 78. But would he ever tell?

Dan was not unmindful of other matters, either. He had not forgotten the second warning note, which he had found attached to the tower door the night of the wreck. He had sent this to Pebble, too.

And Lester's warning regarding his eyesight was another keen trouble to him. Every time he saw the doctor looking at him, he knew what the physician thought.

"He believes I ought to give up my job and clear out," ruminated Dan. "I'm not fit to hold a position of responsibility, if I am troubled, even intermittently, with color blindness.

"Poor Raddigan! he suffered from the same defect. There was reason enough in *that*, if he felt as I feel, for him to have committed suicide!"

One morning he was in Billy's room, jollying the poor chap before he went over to the tower, when the widow came up-stairs with much bustle.

"Well, now! who d'ye think has come ter see ye, Billy, bye?" cried the proud Mrs. Corrigan, dusting a chair with her apron, and setting it by the bedside.

Billy smiled wanly and shook his head.

"Ye can't guess!" pursued his mother.

There was a quiet step outside and the door was pushed open a bit farther. Belle Howard stood there.

Dan had a sudden feeling that he was all hands and feet—that he possessed many more of these latter members than by right should belong to anything but a centipede. He was aware that he blushed painfully, too.

After that first moment of hesitancy, Belle was quite self-contained; perhaps wickedly so. Seeing a man confused is always a steadying tonic to a girl.

"Good day, Mr. Crompton," she said, inclining her head, but not offering to give him her hand.

Then she turned to the bed with a smile. "Well, Billy! I hear you have been giving Dr. Lester a lot of trouble. You'll soon be up and out, I hope."

The boy put his hand out to meet hers, eagerly. His face shone.

"Begorra!" exclaimed Mrs. Corrigan, with a lapse from her company manners. "Why don't ye put out th' *right* paw of yez, ye omadhaun?"

For the first time Dan noticed that Billy had shaken hands with his left—indeed, it now impressed the signalman that the boy always used his hands awkwardly.

"Shure, Oi could niver break him of it. He was always a 'squaw-paw,'" pursued Mrs. Corrigan, in disgust. "And his Uncle Jim was the same before him. Jim l'arned to write wid his right hand, but he did a'most iv'rythin' else wid his left."

She was bustling about the room as she talked. And Dan was glad she continued her chatter. It gave him opportunity to recover a measure of his self-possession.

Now he said good-by to Billy, bowed and spoke briefly to Miss Howard, and went out. In spite of himself he could not choke down the thought:

"Has she come here as a spy for her father—or for the others? Do *all* the Howards 'hang together'?"

It was an ignoble thought—he hated himself for it, and switched his mind to something else.

How sweet she had looked, bending over Billy's bed and taking the poor boy's hand into her own clasp.

So Billy was left-handed, was he? And Raddigan had been left-handed, too, Mrs. Corrigan had said. The old signalman must have been ambidextrous, for he wrote with his right hand.

And then, of a sudden, the thought smote Dan that when he found the old signalman lying dead in Block Tower Seven, his right hand had been stretched out toward the lever which had set the signal tolling the Fly-by-Night to collision with the freight.

Raddigan evidently had used his right hand in manipulating the levers, even if he *were* left-handed. His right hand had dropped from the lever as the bullet tore its way through his brain.

Then the murderer had seized the fatal lever and pushed it over, setting the signal for "clear track."

These thoughts wandered through his mind without making any particular impression. Suddenly, however, he was brought up standing in the middle of the sidewalk, his eyes wide open as though he saw some startling picture before him.

Raddigan had been left-handed, and *that* hand was free when the fatal mistake with the signals was made. The old signalman could have held the revolver in his left hand and shot himself after he saw that the Fly-by-Night was running past the signal, and that there was bound to be a collision!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THREATENING PERIL.

BELLE HOWARD went home that afternoon, after spending several hours with the convalescent Billy, in a very serious frame of mind.

In temperament, Belle was a most cheerful body; she had need to be to bear the snarling of her father. His ill-temper was chronic.

And of late he grew almost daily harder to endure. His suit against the railroad company seemed to have soured the last drop of the milk of human kindness left him.

Poor 'Tilda Armet was in a continual state of drizzle. Her tears flowed until it did seem as though their fount must at last dry up.

To mention any of his family to the captain (aside from Belle) was to send him at once into a violent rage. Yet he would not admit that anybody by the name of Howard could be so totally bad as his neighbors believed.

Unreasonable as are most hot-tempered men, he forgot that his own treatment of the Howard clan plainly showed the low opinion in which he held them. Forbidding them his house did not exhibit fine family feeling on his part.

But when people said they had wrecked a train—indeed, that it was believed they were the cause of the wreck of the Fly-by-Night at Block Tower Seven, as well as of Train 78 on the grade below Gridiron—he denied it vigorously.

That they were guilty of the death of old Raddigan, he likewise denied. He even refused to listen to Belle when she

told him of the attack made upon the present signalman at the tower.

"Jeffers pelters!" he had yelled. "Hev I gotter be dragged inter ev'ry dog fight in th' county—heh? What if Jase an' Ike air scrappin' with this dam' Crompton? He picked the row with them himself, I understand. They was all drunk at John Stabel's together——"

"That is not true, father!" declared Belle, firing up as she sometimes did, for she possessed a bit of his temper, and he sometimes went too far.

This was after Dan had saved her life in the forest. She was as hot in defending him as a tigress fighting for her whelps. She said little about Dan, but nobody could speak ill of him in her presence and go unchallenged.

Dr. Lester, calling on her one day, said something sneeringly of the railroad men in the neighborhood, and then applied his remark to Dan Crompton in particular.

"Doctor," she said, rising quickly, "Mr. Crompton is a *man*. Nothing you could say, or that any one else could say, would cause me to change that belief in the smallest particular. Good evening, sir!"

And she swept haughtily from the room, leaving the doctor feeling a good deal like a whipped puppy, and with nothing to do but take his hat and go home. He had not been invited to call at the Howard house since.

Belle needed some confidant at the present time, if ever she had in her life. But she dared not broach the subject which laid most heavily on her mind to her father.

She was much disturbed during the remainder of this afternoon; and when it came evening was little more composed.

She could not sit contentedly in the parlor, in her own room—indeed, in any room in the house. Her father went down-town immediately after dinner, and she was alone but for 'Tilda Armet.

Even 'Tilda's drawling voice would be better than the oppressive silence of her own apartment, Belle concluded, and she slipped down the back stairs, intending to sit with the woman a while in the kitchen.

There was a door at the stair bottom, opening directly into the kitchen, and before she reached the foot of the flight she became aware that 'Tilda already had a visitor.

This door was just ajar, and a feeble ray of light shone through. As Belle hesitated, she suddenly learned that 'Tilda was crying—not sniveling as she usually did when Captain Payne took her to task for something, but the woman was heartily sobbing.

It was not her voice she heard first speaking. It was Sade's.

"Now don't ye go for ter bawl like that, marm!" the girl was saying, and with some feeling, too. "You gotter brace up an' do it."

"It don' do no good, honey. We can't scar' that man erway. He ain't th' scarin' kind—'deed he hain't!"

"But he's gotter go!" and Sade's voice was strident, with a note of actual fear in it. "Ike is wuss'n Uncle Jase. They're agoin' ter pot him—sure!"

"Oh, oh! Whatever shall I do?" groaned 'Tilda, and Belle, held spellbound upon the stairway, heard the rockers of her chair squeak as she swung back and forth in a mental paroxysm.

"You know what ter do!" exclaimed Sade, seemingly with some disgust. "Ye gotter make it stronger than before. Write it, marm! Oh, glory, I wisht *I* could write. Pippin's goin' ter teach me some time. He said he would. But *you* write be-a-utiful, marm."

'Tilda sniffed, but her tone betrayed pride.

"I had advantages w'en I was young," she admitted.

"Never you mind about that," Sade exclaimed. "If that feller wasn't a crazy fool he'd lit out o' that signal tower b'fore this. But now you gotter make the letter a strong one. I tell ye, Uncle Jase an' Ike mean ter 'do' him this very night. I ain't a lyin' to ye, marm."

"I know ye hain't. But what can I do? An' s'pose they find out we been a-warnin' him against 'em?"

"We ain't said nary word who it was. An' even Ike wouldn't suspect *me*—you betcher! Now, marm, hurry! They're in town now, an' mebbe they won't even wait for him ter go home."

Belle crept back up the stairs, tiptoeing softly, and gained her own room.

There she sat down weakly and tried to quiet her turbulent mind.

Her unintentional eavesdropping had revealed a most surprising condition of affairs. She knew at once what 'Tilda Armet and her child were talking about.

Silly Billy had told her, the evening Dan Crompton was sandbagged, that Sade had wanted him to deliver a letter to the signalman with his supper pail. And Belle had good reason to believe that Sade later delivered it in person.

From Dan, when they were in the burning forest, Belle had learned much about that evening; he had mentioned receiving the warning letter. The captain's daughter had been very sure all along that the men who attacked Dan were not ordinary tramps.

But to learn that the warning letter had been written by 'Tilda Armet, certainly was a surprise. She knew 'Tilda could write very well indeed, if she so wished; she was quite proud of her proficiency in this direction.

Evidently Sade learned of the intended attack on Dan by her uncle and cousin, and with her mother's help had tried to warn the signalman without revealing the identity of the mountaineers.

Now, this very night, Jase and Ike having come to town, and possibly having filled up on bad whisky, proposed to make another attack upon the towerman. Their feud with Dan still rankled in their hearts.

How Belle wished that her father were at home! She knew he would have stepped into the breach and held the renegade Howards from attacking the signalman.

She knew Dan Crompton well enough to believe that nothing 'Tilda could write him in an anonymous letter would drive him away from the tower. He would refuse to accept the warning as *bona fide*.

If Jase and Ike laid in wait to shoot him on his way home that night—or if they came to the tower and broke in——

She remembered poor Raddigan's fate. She had never believed the mountaineers guilty of the old signalman's death; but if they attacked Dan, the public would quickly ascribe Raddigan's murder to them, also.

And yet, did she care so much for Jase and Ike Howard? By some trick of fate they were distantly related to her father and herself.

"All the Howards hang together," he often said.

But these renegade mountaineers were not worthy of being named in the family history which had once been so honorable.

Intermarrying had weakened and impoverished the blood; and the John Howard who had followed Daniel Boone would never have recognized these lawbreaking rascals as members of his family.

It was only her father's obstinacy. Oh, why did he not come?

But Captain Payne might not be at home before midnight. Then it would be too late. She began to pace her room, and wrung her hands silently, in her troubled mind.

She must not let this go on! The Howards might go to prison—aye, better if they did, perhaps.

But she could not remain idle, knowing that Crompton was in imminent danger. He must be warned—he must be saved.

Had he not risked his life for her in the forest fire, and in the river? And there was the time he had stopped the freight and saved the auto from wreck, and the work he did when the Fly-by-Night was in collision at Block Tower Seven.

She could not forget these things. On each occasion he had interposed, as the hand of Providence, between her and possible death.

Dan Crompton was something more to her than a mere acquaintance. She owed her life to him. Was he not worth saving, then?

She could not allow matters to go on. 'Tilda's letter, whatever she managed to write, would not drive Dan away from the tower. It might warn him to be on his guard—and then, it might not.

For love of her "folks," and with a desire to keep them from a crime that might shut the prison doors upon them, 'Tilda had tried to thwart the plans of the mountaineers against the signalman. Should *she*, Belle asked herself, be less courageous?

Stopping in her walk at last, she

seized a coat and hood. But when she had put them on, she still hesitated.

Oh, this meant a deal—a great deal! She was not merely running over to the railroad to warn Dan Crompton of the danger which threatened him.

If she went to him now—this night—for this reason, what would be the outcome?

The red blood rose in her cheek, and her eyes filled with tears. She was a proud girl, and she must trample on pride to appear before the signalman.

There was a barrier between her and Dan Crompton. If she went to the signal tower this night, that barrier would come down.

She had turned out her light, and there in the darkness she stood with clasped hands, looking into the future, seeking to fathom the outcome of the proposed meeting.

(To be continued.)

MR. DESKIT'S WILL.

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

A spur-of-the-moment conspiracy that might have succeeded but for the possession of a sound limb by the chief conspirator.

THE ringing of the telephone bell called my attention from the book I was reading. It was late at night, and I knew of no one who would be likely to want me at such an hour, especially in this region.

I had not been a resident of the neighborhood long, and had chosen it because I loved the sea and the open country. My office was in New York with my uncle, and I had rented the little cottage in Sandycliff because it suited my fancy, and the sparsely settled country was what I liked best about it.

I lived there alone with an old servant, my dog, and my books. Sunday was to me a glorious day. I roamed through the woods, sat by the sea, and read in the shade of my own trees.

I had but just entered upon a legal career, having graduated from the law school a year before.

While I am explaining this I am going to the telephone.

In reply to my questions as to who had called, there came in a querulous voice the answer:

"This is John Deskit. I live in the stone house that stands remote from the road overlooking the sea about half a mile from your place. I take it I am talking to Mr. Krumm, the lawyer."

"Yes, my name is Krumm, and I am a lawyer."

"I am an invalid, and feel quite miserable to-night. In fact, I fear the night—the later hours. I wish to have my will drawn at once. I know you will be put to great inconvenience, but there are reasons why I do not wish the matter postponed."

"I will come, sir. I will be there as soon as I can walk it."

I hurriedly took the necessary paper, and calling the dog, started at a brisk pace. I remembered the house, a gloomy old pile of gray stone, always apparently closed, and forbidding in aspect. I never knew who lived there.

The walk was a pleasant one, the night being cool and clear, and I turned in at the gate a few minutes before midnight.

As I walked along the path I could see that the place had been neglected.

I mounted the stoop and rang the bell.

The door was immediately opened by a man I judged to be about fifty. He was rather thin, but not emaciated, and his figure was erect.

"Are you Mr. Deskit?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, looking at me questioningly.

"My name is Krumm. I am the lawyer you telephoned for to draw a will."

"Ah! Krumm?" he said quickly. "Yes, that was the name."

"I came as soon as I could after receiving your message."

"You were very kind. Come this way, sir."

He led me into a small library, and turned the light higher.

It was a well furnished room, and no evidence of poverty could be seen. The furniture was old style, massive, and as good as the day it was purchased.

"Sit down, Mr. Krumm. The night is not so far spent as to call for haste. This is a very important matter, and I wish to be very careful. Strange that we have been neighbors, and have never met before."

"I start for the city early, and do not come this way to the station."

"True. And now that you have come, at so unreasonable an hour, permit me to offer such hospitality as my house affords. After that tramp—I suppose you walked it, as I saw no horse—a nip of something will not go amiss."

"I thank you, but I am not in the habit of using intoxicants."

"I will not urge you then. But a cigar, perhaps, and a cup of coffee?"

"Yes, I will join you there," I said, knowing the coffee would keep me awake, but not wishing to show too much reluctance with a man who would soon owe me a goodly fee.

He left the room, and was gone about five minutes. I could hear voices in muffled conversation, but no words could be distinguished.

When he returned he brought out a box of cigars, and we lit up.

Surely, for a man who was fearing the early morning hours he was taking things pretty easy.

"It may surprise you, Mr. Krumm," he said, "that a person who is apparently enjoying fair health should send for you at such an hour. But I assure you that I am not in as good a condition as I look. I am troubled with a peculiar valvular disease of the heart, which the doctor assures me is liable to carry me off at any time.

"He has given me a thorough examination to-day, and found that my malady was gaining on me rapidly. I suppose his assurance that I must die, and that any moment may bring on a sudden waning of power, has had a tendency to make me feel worse through imagination. But in the midst of life we are in death, and I do not wish to leave so important a matter as my will till it is too late.

"I have, Mr. Krumm, considerable property, which, if I die without making a new will, would go to persons who are not now to me what they were five years ago, when I signed the present existing document. Family quarrels have broken the calmness of my life, and the death of legatees brings undesirable persons in line for wealth I do not wish to bestow upon them. My property is largely in stocks and bonds, the only real estate I own being this place and a tenement house in New York.

"I have a brother, Mr. Robert Deskit, not at present with me, to whom I wish the bulk of my property to descend. My former will left a large portion to cousins. My brother was then wealthy himself. Now the cousins and I are estranged, and my brother has lost much of his property.

"There are a few bequests, such as a small amount to support my two faithful old servants, and a like sum to go to found a home for old men. All the rest is to be Robert's, and I also wish him to be named as executor of the will, without bond. Is it advisable to enumerate the items of my estate?"

"In the matter of real estate, yes. If your brother is sufficiently familiar with your affairs to know what you have and where to obtain possession, you could leave a memorandum."

"Very well. That will suffice. Now, for my two servants, who are man and wife, I think the interest on twelve thousand dollars will be ample, the principal to revert to the estate—that is, my brother, when these two are dead. They are William Carmak and Mary, his wife."

I made a note of the names.

"Then I wish twelve thousand to go toward building a home under my brother's direction, he to select the site at his pleasure. He will have enough, so there is no fear that the terms of the will will not be carried out."

This, too, I made a note of.

I had my fountain pen in my pocket,

and set to work. It was not a long nor difficult will to write.

"I also wish a clause inserted to stop all attempts to break the will. My cousins knew of the former will, and might make trouble."

"I do not see how you gain by that," I answered. "You are leaving them nothing. The only way to prevent them contesting the will would be to direct that in case of contest the person bringing the protest forfeits whatever share he might have. But as there is nothing to forfeit, there would be nothing gained by such a threat. I do not think there is any danger of breaking such a will. It is not the same as though you left your fortune to a stranger. Your brother is next of kin, if you have no children."

"I have no children. I was never married."

"Then the will is safe enough."

I finished the document, read it to him carefully, and he signed his name, John Deskit, in a rather unsteady hand.

The conversation took a general turn.

"If I should happen to wake up in the morning," he said, "I think I shall take a short trip for my health. I have a small yacht at anchor in the little harbor, and I think I would enjoy a leisurely sail somewhere."

"I should advise that by all means," I said. "The expense to a man of your wealth would be nothing. Now before I forget it, we need two witnesses."

"Will my two servants do?"

"Yes."

He called them in, and the woman brought steaming and well-savored coffee.

"These are William and Mary Carmak," said Deskit.

I explained what was required of them, and they seemed to appreciate the matter. I instructed them where to sign to witness the signature, and they retired.

We sipped coffee, smoked again, and drifted back to our interrupted conversation.

I remained an hour longer, and, as I started to go, he asked about my fee. I named a fair price, and he paid it in cash from his pocket.

It was nearing dawn when the dog and I reached home, and I knew there was a seedy day in store for me.

I was detailed by my uncle upon a difficult case involving the searching of old records and the rushing from one place to another, some at great distance, searching for missing heirs.

This required considerable time. I spent a week in White Plains looking over records concerning some Bronx property, that being the county seat of Westchester before the Bronx became part of New York City.

I then went to Baltimore, the estate holding some property there.

Among other parcels there was a summer resort hotel at Far Rockaway, and a gambling resort near the city of Marseilles, France.

I made arrangements with a French attorney, and met him at Marseilles. We got through that business all right, and I went to my hotel for the last time, for I was in a hurry to get back to New York.

I was passing through the dining-room when I was struck with a feeling of curiosity at the sight of a man and woman who sat at a table near the one I had been using during my stay.

The woman was remarkably handsome, very fashionably dressed, with wavy, straw-colored hair, and eyes that to me seemed decidedly dangerous. She was evidently prone to jewelry, for she wore plenty of it.

The man was John Deskit.

It was then about two months since I had drawn his will, and he was much changed. He was better and more expensively dressed, his face had taken on the satisfied look of a man who lives well, and he was chatting gaily with the woman.

I stopped at his side.

"We meet again, Mr. Deskit."

He glanced up at me and then rose to his feet.

"I am very happy to have it so," he said. "I acted upon your advice, and you see I am not dead yet. My dear, this is Mr. Krumm, with whom we shall have business when we return. Mr. Krumm, my wife."

He laughed at my evident surprise.

"Yes," he said, "everything is dif-

ferent. I got tired of always waiting to die, and never doing it, so I just threw care to the winds and went in for a good time. I had moped too long, and that was all there was to my trouble. I met Mrs. Deskit at a hotel at Nice, and we formed so agreeable an acquaintance that a week ago we were married."

"And I suppose now there will be another change."

"Yes, although there is no hurry. My brother Robert is dead He died in Switzerland. I understand that he fell over a precipice. I will notify you when I return. The old house will seem brighter now, and you must come and see us often."

"I should be delighted," I replied.

He did not ask me to sit at their table, and his wife did not seem inclined for conversation except with him, so I went to my own, and the next morning was on the way home.

Nothing about the Deskits concerned me much, but during the hours on deck, when I was walking around alone, smoking, musing upon various topics, they came into my mind.

"That," I said, "was a remarkable recovery. He certainly got a handsome wife, but what I should call a dangerous woman."

It was about a month afterward, when, during a long wet spell, I contracted a heavy cold, and was compelled to remain at home from the office. I had never required the services of a physician much, and did not know any in Sandycliff. I inquired at the post-office who was a good one.

"There is only one," was the reply I received. "That is Dr. Henderson, who lives at the end of Hemlock Lane in the big white house."

I found Dr. Henderson at home, and he proved to be a man about forty. He treated me for my cold, and we sat enjoying a chat when the fact struck me that if he was the only physician in the place he must have been Deskit's doctor.

"By the way, doctor," I said, "I believe I met an improved patient of yours in Marseilles a short time ago. I was there on business, and at the hotel I met Mr. Deskit."

"Did you, indeed? How is the old fellow? I knew he went away suddenly for his health. If he wasn't such a stubborn brute he would have been dead long ago."

"What you say tallies with his ideas when he was here. It did not seem to me that he was as ill as he feared. I drew his will."

"I knew he intended having it done. He had or has—for the devil himself couldn't kill Bob—a brother who was good for nothing from birth. John was perpetually haunted with the idea that Bob would get some of his property."

"That seems queer," I said. "The will was decidedly favorable to Robert. But he is dead, so John told me. Fell over a precipice in Switzerland."

"That was the best thing he ever did, only he delayed it too long. But I am surprised that John should have mentioned him as a legatee. They hated each other royally, and had not met in years."

"I could not take stock in that fear of his," I said. "He telephoned me one night and I went to his house. He seemed spry enough, walked as blithely as I do, and now he is married to a handsome straw blond, and is enjoying life."

Henderson looked at me thoughtfully.

"Do I understand you to say that John Deskit is married again?"

"I was under the impression he was never married before. I think he told me so."

"And you say he walked as blithely as you?"

"Yes. He was spry enough."

He fixed a most peculiar look on me.

"You are a professional man, sir. I like your appearance. But you are either much mistaken or you are telling me something that is far from the truth. John Deskit hasn't walked blithely since the Civil War. He had his right leg shot away at Antietam, and he has of late become so decrepit that a hag wouldn't marry him, let alone a handsome woman."

I stared.

"What you say amazes me. I saw no evidence that he has but one leg."

"Well, they make artificial limbs now almost as good as the original ones. But I can't understand. Are you sure you are not mistaken in the man?"

"How could I be? He telephoned from the house, and signed his name. Surely there couldn't be anything wrong about that. His two servants, John and Mary Carmak, witnessed the will."

"What!" roared Henderson, leaping to his feet. "The only servant John Deskit ever had to my knowledge was a negro as old as himself, who was his servant through the war. John Deskit, if he is alive, is seventy-nine years old."

A creepy chilliness rushed over me.

"This must be looked into," said the doctor. "My horse is hitched. Let's go see that negro Tom."

We drove to the gloomy old house, and found an aged negro fussing around working, but accomplishing nothing.

"Good day, Marse Doctah," he said.

"Tom, where is your master?" asked Henderson sternly.

"Golly! I lak know dat, too. I ain't get no pay nowadays, him er gallivantin' off lak a boy."

"About how long ago was it that you drew that will, Krumm?"

"Three months."

"Tom, was there a man here three months ago, and another man and a woman?"

"Yassah. Dat good fur nottin' Marse Rob, he jest cum in an' a man an' a woman."

"Were they his servants?"

"Dey was nottin' ob day kin'. Dey occerpy de bes' room."

"Did your master know they were here?"

"Yas. Ole marse done git excitement on him an' say he wan' make will. He telerphone, but nobody didn' cum."

"Now we are in a fix," said the doctor. "There has been murder and robbery done. Robert Deskit has made a will in his own favor and forged his brother's name. And two grandchildren of John's are ignorant of the fact that they are rich—or should be. Krumm, we've got to find that man and drag him back to justice."

"I should say so," I answered, the sweat pouring off me.

"But how could he manage it?" asked Henderson. "Could the will be probated?"

"Why, it might, with perjury. But it was not necessary to use the will if he kept out of the country and transacted business in John's name."

"Come. I have nothing of importance this morning. Let us see this thing through."

We took the horse back, and hurried to the hall of records. Upon payment of a dollar we were permitted to examine the will.

It was filed. Upon inquiry we learned that it had been filed by the executor, who was the only living relative of the testator. This was sworn to by Robert Deskit.

The obscurity of the men had been such that no suspicions were aroused. No notice was sent to anybody, as there was, apparently, no one to send to. The usual notice by publication had met with no response.

We next made a search of titles, and found the name of John Deskit, and the property he owned. We went to the house and found it to be a large tenement. The janitor informed us that it had been sold by the brother of the former owner, who had died abroad.

We next went to the bureau of vital statistics. There was the entry of the death of John Deskit at sea.

There was but one thing to do and that was to see the police as soon as possible. The commissioner listened attentively. I described Deskit and the woman. The cables were hot with messages sent to Europe.

Word was returned that such persons had been at this place or that, but they could not be located. The descriptions were all the same, but the precious pair seemed to have taken a new name at every hotel.

We advertised for the grandchildren. These were a young man and woman who lived in Georgia and had not kept up any communication with the old

man. After considerable search we found them.

They were pleasant, and assisted us in the fight. Deskit was not their name. The man's name was Torton. He and I rushed off to Europe, and with a detective raced through the various countries like madmen.

We kept hearing of a pair that answered the description, but could never catch them. They always stopped at seaside hotels.

"Now I have an idea," I told Torton. "They are skipping about in a yacht. We'll take the record of stops and trace them from that."

We haunted every place where there could possibly be a record of yachts. It was not likely that Deskit would publish his arrivals, but we found that the steam yacht Cameo cleared from the same ports where the pair had been seen and about the same time.

We hired a yacht, and telegraphed for information concerning the Cameo. We found that she had cleared from Naples for Athens, which, of course, was the one place where she would not go, the clearance papers probably having been planned to throw pursuers off the track. But we had something tangible to go by now, and we kept on after the Cameo until, following her out of Palermo with only a few hours' start, we sighted her late in the afternoon. Ours was the faster boat, and we were soon near enough to the Cameo to keep her in sight.

She steamed into Algiers, with us tight on her wake. As we anchored we saw preparations on the Cameo for landing. We hurried, and the two launches were at the wharf at the same time.

As Deskit was assisting the woman ashore the detective stepped to his side.

"Robert Deskit, I arrest you for murder."

Like a flash Deskit whipped out a revolver and fired. But while the smoking pistol was still in his hand ready to be fired again, the detective ducked and struck the rascal a sledge-hammer blow. The woman screamed and reached for the revolver, but I caught and held her.

Scarcely any one saw the capture, and in a short time we were speeding back to New York on the Cameo, having returned the hired yacht to its home port.

With all the evidence against him, Deskit confessed. He claimed that he had not murdered his brother, but that John had died at sea and had been buried there. Henderson said this was probably the case, but knowing the extreme hatred he had for Robert, it was a mystery how he had consented to go.

Robert explained. He had arrived at the house that very night intending to obtain money from his brother in some manner, as he was down to his last resources. He did not know that I had been sent for, but, having lived by his wits so long, he was ready for the opportunity when it offered.

He had covered his confusion, and kept up a string of talk while he planned. It was the chance of his life, and he was willing to risk all.

Having left me in the library he went, ostensibly to the kitchen to order coffee, but really to see the Carmaks, his boon companions.

Hastily the plan was drawn, and the Carmaks posed as the servants in the house.

Had I, upon my arrival, simply acted as though I had been there before, he would have been puzzled. But my first question was whether he was Mr. Deskit, and he knew that his brother and I had never met.

Having so neatly and easily led me into the trap which was worked up in a swift moment's thought, he and Carmak had drugged the old man, and, without rousing the negro servant, had carried him to the yacht and steamed away.

There would be no search, for he had spoken to me of going, and, as it proved, according to Henderson, even John had spoken of the same intention.

The greatest surprise of all was that the woman was really his wife, and perfectly innocent of any knowledge of the crime. A shrewd examination by the commissioner convinced him of this, and she was not held.

The Carmaks were chased over half

the world. They were wanted to give evidence of the manner of John Deskit's death. They were never found. It was rumored that Carmak had killed himself in Algiers, but it was never an established fact.

Deskit was tried and convicted of everything but murder, and is now in Sing Sing prison, where he is trying to obtain a new trial, but this will probably not be granted.

Torton gave me the charge of affairs, and I recovered enough of the fortune to turn over to him and his sister, Mrs. Meakum, one million dollars each.

The family history was easily traced. John Deskit's daughter had married a man named Torton, and had two children, a boy and a girl. The mother died. The girl married Meakum, a poor man.

So, after one of the most daring pieces of rascality on record, John Deskit's fortune went where it belonged, and where he had often told Henderson he wanted it to go.

Of course the legacy to the Carmaks and the old men's home were added to give me the best reasons for having no suspicions. Of course the home would never be built, and the Carmaks would have been rewarded, anyway.

Torton proved to be a first-class fellow, and he and I are the closest friends.

He is in Europe, and wanted me to go. But I don't want to do any more traveling until I have rested up, and that will take years.

THE MANIFOLD VISION OF LOVE.

I.

My heart was a pool in the cool of the wood,
Where the light of love was dim,
But summer has come, and the gods are good,
And there blooms a rose at its brim!

II.

My heart was the sweep of the deep-red west,
Where the clouds of doubting are,
But the gods are good, and the gods know best,
And it cradles the evening star!

III.

My heart was a lawn and the dawn not yet,
Gray were the skies above,
But I know that the gods did not forget
To waken the lark of love!

IV.

My heart was a ship in the rip of the sea,
With no port whereto to glide,
But the gods are good and the ship fares free
To the mouth of a haven wide!

V.

The rose's delight, and the white of the star
And the lark that gains the blue,
And the sure, safe shield of the harbor bar—
What should these be but you?

Guy Wetmore Carryl.

THE REASON WHY.

BY LEE BERTRAND.

The woman with an object and the man who objected.

HORATIO BANKS, lawyer, was brushing his hat, preparatory to leaving his office for the day, when the door of the outer room opened suddenly.

It was Saturday afternoon. Banks had allowed his clerk to depart at noon; he himself had stayed behind to finish up some work.

Banks heard the door open, and stepped into the outer office to greet the visitor.

It was a woman. She was stout, past middle age, had red hair, and was not at all beautiful. One glance revealed that much to the lawyer.

"Good afternoon," said the woman. "I want to see Mr. Banks—Mr. Horatio Banks—on some very important business. Is he in?"

"Yes, madam," answered the lawyer, bowing. "I am Mr. Banks. Won't you please step into my private office?"

He led the way into the cozy inner room and motioned her toward a chair.

"Now, madam," he went on, seating himself at his desk and assuming his most professional pose, "you can speak unreservedly. We are quite alone."

"You are sure that nobody can hear us?" asked the woman nervously.

"Absolutely, madam. You can set your mind at rest on that point. Whatever you wish to impart will be treated as strictly private."

"I should not like to have anybody overhear our conversation," persisted the woman.

"It is impossible, madam," the lawyer assured her.

"It is a very confidential matter," pursued the woman.

"I am prepared to treat it as such," said the lawyer.

To himself he was thinking, "I wish she would hurry up and tell me what she wants. That's the trouble with women. They always beat around the bush so."

"I want you to feel perfectly at your ease," he added aloud. "Speak to me frankly and unreservedly. Tell me everything. Conceal nothing. You will find it the best course, madam, believe me."

"I'm afraid you'll think me very bold and audacious," tittered the woman.

"Not at all," said the lawyer, wondering what all this hesitancy portended.

"Well, Mr. Banks," went on his caller, apparently plucking up courage. "It is a delicate errand that brings me to you, but one that concerns you personally."

"Concerns me personally!" gasped the lawyer, for the moment taken aback.

"I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before, Mr. Banks," said the woman, "but I have heard much about you."

"Thank you, madam," replied the lawyer, bowing. "During my ten years' practise of law I think I can venture to hope that I have acquired something of a legal reputation."

"Oh, it isn't of your professional reputation I've heard," said the woman, with a smile.

"What then?" asked the lawyer anxiously.

"It's your personal reputation. I've heard that you are a most exemplary man, so far as character is concerned."

"Thank you, madam," said Banks, with a blush.

"I've heard that you are the kind of man any girl would be glad to marry," continued the lawyer's visitor.

"What on earth is she driving at?" thought Banks.

"And therefore I have come to ask you a very delicate question—you will excuse my boldness, please. Why don't you get married, Mr. Banks?"

"But, my dear madam!" protested the lawyer, flushing to the roots of his hair.

"But my dear nothing, Mr. Banks," interrupted the woman quickly. "You think you are happy now, per-

haps. Well, you don't know what happiness really is until you get married. A nice young man like you has no right to stay single. Excuse my boldness, but really you ought to marry."

The gaze of the astonished lawyer rested on the calendar on his desk. It was 1904 and Leap Year. He realized the truth with a thrill. Woman's one chance to propose in four years!

This woman was merely taking advantage of the privilege of her sex. As has been said, she was fat, past middle age, red-haired and homely. Banks looked at her and shuddered.

"Can't you picture to yourself how nice it would be to have a nice, cozy little home to go to when you leave this office?" she continued.

"But, madam——" protested the lawyer again.

"And a nice affectionate little wife to cheer you when you are downcast. To share your sorrows with you and double your joys."

Banks sat staring at the woman before him, his breath taken away by her audacity. He was afraid to speak for fear he should laugh in her face.

It seemed so exceedingly humorous to hear this corpulent, plain-looking creature actually proposing marriage to him and describing herself as a "nice, affectionate little wife." Little! Ye gods and little fishes!

"I am sure that I can supply the want," went on the woman. "I feel sure that I can be of great help to you."

She moved her chair a trifle nearer his. Banks felt that it was high time to rouse himself to say something. In another minute, he feared, she would be throwing her arms around his neck and murmuring into his ear that it was all so sudden.

"If I were thinking of getting married, madam," he said gently, "I should be glad to avail myself of your offer. I am sure that you would make me an excellent wife. I am sure that you would be a great help to me; but——"

The woman interrupted him with a shrill laugh.

"I make you an excellent wife!" she cried. "Why, bless you, man, I'm a married woman with a husband and three children."

Banks breathed a great sigh of genuine relief.

"Then may I ask, madam, what you intend to do with another husband?" he gasped. "This isn't Utah."

"Of course it isn't, my dear Mr. Banks. I wasn't proposing marriage to you for myself at all, when I spoke of a nice affectionate little wife."

"To whom were you referring then, madam?" asked the lawyer anxiously. "To your daughter?"

"To my daughter! No. Why, bless you, man, my eldest child is only six years old. I was referring to another young lady, altogether. In fact I have several young ladies on my list, any one of whom is guaranteed to make a charming wife for any man."

She opened a chatelaine bag and handed him an engraved card.

Banks looked at the card and read:

THE JOHNSON MATRIMONIAL BUREAU.

Husbands and wives of all variety. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money cheerfully refunded.

Banks breathed another sigh of relief. It was not a personal matter after all. It was a purely business transaction.

This stout, red-haired woman was talking business to him. He felt at once at his ease. The timorous, blushing man gave way to the clever, suave lawyer once more.

"I am sure the girl I have in mind would just suit you," said the woman. "She is tall, vivacious, and not yet twenty-four years of age. She is thoroughly domesticated and a good cook."

"What color is her hair?" asked Banks, with interest.

"Dark brown," replied the woman.

"No good, then," said Banks decisively. "I had trouble with a girl with dark brown hair ten years ago, and I swore then never to look upon any other brown-haired girl again."

"Then perhaps I can interest you in another girl. We have a very nice blond. A really tempting proposition, my dear Mr. Banks," and the woman spoke in the tone of a drummer trying to sell a new line of haircombs.

"She is only thirty years old and is a very charming young girl. If she didn't have one eye missing, she would doubtless have suitors by the hundreds. As it is, you get a real bargain."

She leaned forward and whispered confidentially: "There is ten thousand dollars goes with this girl. Her father is a rich brewer. What do you say?"

Banks seemed to be impressed.

"Ten thousand dollars thrown in with the girl, eh? That sounds tempting," he remarked.

"I should certainly advise you, Mr. Banks, to avail yourself of this chance while it is open. You can never tell how quickly this bargain may be snatched up."

"What business did you say her father was in?" inquired Banks with interest.

"Wealthy brewer," replied the woman.

Banks shook his head.

"That would never do, I am afraid," he said. "You see I am the president of the Prohibitionist League. What would folks say if I were to marry a brewer's daughter?"

"Very true," rejoined his caller. "Then perhaps I can interest you in another proposition. A nice young woman with a fortune of fifty thousand dollars in her own right."

"Fifty thousand dollars, eh!" cried Banks. "And is this young woman pretty?"

"Quite nice looking."

"And how old is she?"

"I am afraid she may be a little too old for you. She swears she isn't a day more than fifty-three. She is well preserved. Fifty thousand dollars is a good round sum, Mr. Banks. I should advise you to think this over."

"Pass on," said Banks firmly. He was beginning to enjoy himself immensely. "I couldn't stand for a fifty-year-old bride, not even if she had a fortune of fifty thousand dollars. Pass on to the next."

"How would you like an auburn-haired girl?" said the woman eagerly.

"I have got one on my list. She's only twenty-six years old. She can sing and dance beautifully and is really expert at beadwork."

"How much money comes with her?" asked Banks.

"Her father is willing to pay ten thousand dollars to see her happily married."

Banks thought hard for a minute.

"You say she is fond of dancing?" he inquired.

"Very," said the woman. "When I come to think of it, Mr. Banks, I feel sure that she is just the girl for you."

"On the contrary," said Banks, "I am afraid that she would not do at all. You see, I do not dance, and if I married a girl so very fond of dancing she would be running out all the time to balls and parties. That would be too dangerous an experiment. I am afraid we will have to pass her."

"I suppose you wouldn't take a deaf-mute?" asked the woman.

"Well, silence in a woman, especially in a wife, would be no disadvantage at times; but it might get monotonous to have a wife who is always dumb. What inducements do you offer with her?"

"A fine house and lot," said the marriage broker.

"In this city?" asked Banks.

"No, in Philadelphia," replied the woman.

"I wouldn't live out of New York," said Banks. "Pass on to the next."

"I've got another girl in mind," said the woman. "She's young and pretty and she has a house and lot in her own name right in New York City; on Madison Avenue, too."

"That sounds good," said Banks. "Let's hear some more about her. What color hair has she?"

"Well, she's got brown hair," the woman admitted, "but surely if everything else is all right that won't really make any difference, Mr. Banks," coaxingly. "Just because you've had trouble with one brown-haired girl doesn't mean that you

should refuse to look at any girl with brown tresses."

"Ah, no," sighed Banks, "I shall never look upon another brown-haired girl. The one I had the trouble with ten years ago was enough for me."

He took a framed picture from the desk and held it in front of him at arm's length, gazing at it musingly. He became so wrapped in the picture that he appeared to have forgotten that the woman in the room was there at all.

She brought him to himself again by laying a hand gently upon his arm.

"You mustn't, Mr. Banks. You mustn't," she said. "I know what you are doing. You are thinking of the brown-haired girl. You are looking at her portrait. You must destroy that picture forthwith. You must forget all about her. There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out, you know. I'll find you a girl, so fine in every respect, that it will make you laugh to think that you could ever have wasted a thought on this brown-haired creature. You must not think of her any more, Mr. Banks, you really must not."

"On the contrary, madam," replied Banks, "I really must. I don't want to forget this girl with the brown hair. You see, I married her ten years ago. You must pardon me for not having mentioned it before."

THE EDITOR'S VALENTINE.

THE editor sat in his old armchair
(Half his work undone, he was well aware),
While the flickering light in the dingy room
Made the usual newspaper office "gloom."

Before him news from the North and South,
A long account of a foreign drouth,
A lot of changes in local ads,
The report of a fight by some drunken cads;

And odds and ends, and smoke and talk—
A reporter drawing cartoons in chalk
On the dirty wall, while others laughed
And one wretch whistled and all of them chaffed.

But the editor leaned for back in his chair;
He ran his hands through his iron gray hair
And stole ten minutes from work to write
A valentine to his wife that night.

He thought of meter, he thought of rhyme,
'Twas a race between weary brains and time.
He tried to write as he used to when
His heart was as young as his untried pen.

He started a sonnet and gave it up,
A rondeau failed for a rhyme to "cup,"
And the old clock ticked his time away
For the editor's mind *would* go astray.

He thought of the days when they were young
And all but love to the winds was flung,
He thought of the way she used to wear
Her wayward tresses of golden hair.

He thought of the way she used to blush,
He thought of the way he used to gush,
And a smile and a tear went creeping down
The face that so long had worn a frown.

And this is what the editor wrote,
No poem—merely a little note,
Simple and manly, but tender, too—
Three little words. They were, "I love you."

Tom Hall.

THE ARGOSY.

VOLUME L.

DECEMBER, 1905, TO MARCH, 1906.

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INDEX TO VOLUME L.

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SHORT STORIES.

SHORT STORIES—Continued.

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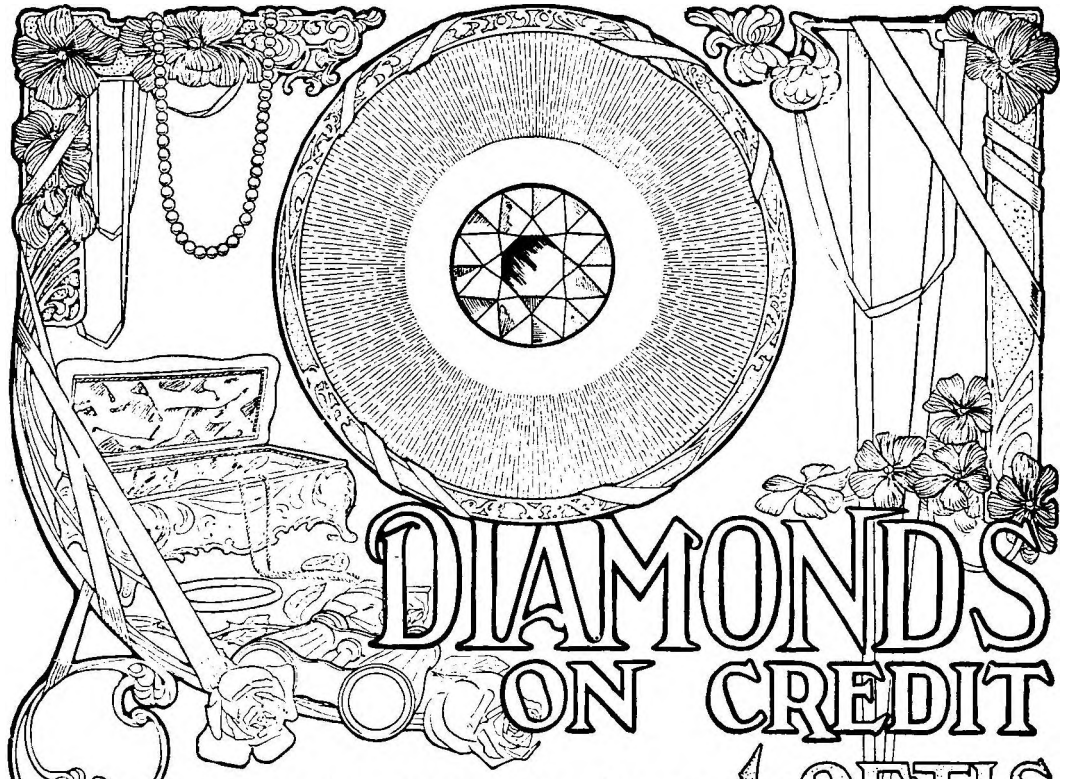


DIAMONDS ON CREDIT

LOFTIS SYSTEM

YOU ASSUME NO RISKS
When Dealing With Us

We Are Ready to Send On Approval

Any Diamond, Watch or other piece of Jewelry you may select from our Catalog. Examine it carefully. If not entirely satisfactory, return it. We pay all charges and take all risks. We have absolute faith in our goods because we know they are the very best quality and Highest Grade of workmanship. **Write for Catalog Today.**

Your Credit is Good with Loftis If you are honest, it makes no difference where you live or whether you are a modest employee or wealthy employer, all we ask is honest intentions and good faith. The Loftis Credit System makes your Credit Good by adjusting the terms of payment to meet your income. It is the most popular and successful Credit System in the world because it is Prompt, Simple and Confidential. We ask

No Security—No Endorsements—No Interest

We were awarded the Gold Medal, the Highest Award, at the World's Fair, St. Louis. No stronger endorsement could be given. **Write for Our Big New Catalog Today.**

Write for Our Big New Catalog The Finest ever issued, 66 pages, 1,000 illustrations of Beautiful Diamond Rings, Pins, Brooches, etc., ranging in price from $25.00 to $500.00. High Grade Elgin and Waltham Watches, Ladies' and Gents' size, from $10.00 to $100.00, and all other kinds of Jewelry, Silverware, etc. Select any article you wish and it will be sent on approval. If entirely satisfactory retain it, paying one-fifth cash and the balance in eight equal monthly payments. Remember there is *no interest* to pay. **Write for Catalog Today.**

Our Guarantee Certificate as to quality and value given with every Diamond is the broadest and strongest ever issued by a responsible concern. We also guarantee complete satisfaction and our exchange system is the most liberal ever devised, for it permits you to return any Diamond bought and get the full amount paid in other goods or a larger Diamond. **Write for Our Big New Catalog. Write Today.**

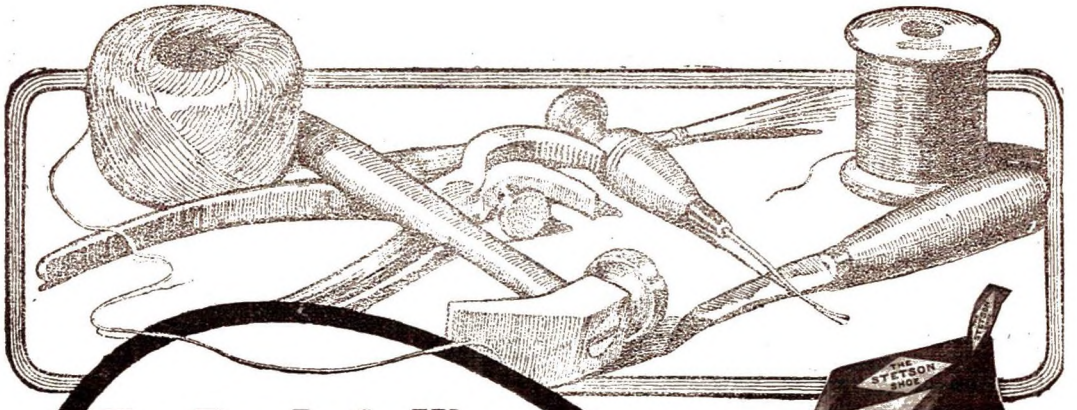
Diamonds as an Investment are better than a savings bank because they pay four times the rate of interest. They are increasing in value from 15 to 20 per cent each year. They are better than real estate because you can realize their full value at any time at the highest market price.

Write Today For Our Big Catalog—Prices Lowest, Terms Easiest

THE OLD RELIABLE DIAMONDS ON CREDIT HOUSE

LOFTIS BROS & CO. ESTD. 1858

DIAMOND CUTTERS
WATCHMAKERS - JEWELERS
Department C 63, 92 to 96 State Street
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, U. S. A.



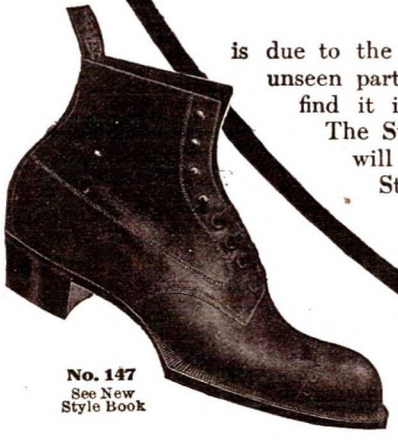
The Ready-to-Wear Custom Shoe

No. 145
See New Style Book

"Custom" because in material and workmanship. The Stetson Shoe possesses every essential of custom excellence. It meets the insistent demand for the best. The extra care expended in every operation of manufacture means that The Stetson Shoe holds its shape and affords the maximum of style, service and comfort. Stetson Shoes are built upon custom lasts, designed by masters of shoe craft and sell for **$5 to $8.** The individuality of

THE STETSON SHOE

is due to the minute attention to details in the hidden and unseen parts. Men who look for the best in footwear will find it in this shoe. If your local dealer does not sell The Stetson Shoe write us, giving his name and we will see that you are supplied. Send for the Stetson Style Book.



No. 147
See New Style Book

TO THE DEALER

If you want the men's fine trade, write us and we will send a sample line to any reliable dealer in the United States, express prepaid.

THE STETSON SHOE CO.,
South Weymouth, Mass.

OSTERMOOR
Special Mattresses
Annual Clearance Sale of Surplus Stock

OUR surplus of especially fine French Edge Ostermoor Mattresses of *extra thickness, extra weight,* and exceptional softness, in the highest grade coverings, regular price being $30.00, will be closed out regardless of cost, to make room for regular stock, at the extremely low price of $18.50 each.

These mattresses are the very softest we can make, and are in every way fully as desirable and as great, if not greater bargains than the Special Mattresses we sold last year and the year previous at the same price. If you were fortunate enough to secure one of the same, you will fully appreciate the present sale.

The mattresses are all full double-bed size, 4 feet 6 inches wide, 6 feet 4 inches long, in two parts, with round corners, five-inch inseamed borders, and French Rolled Edges, exactly like illustration.

The filling is especially selected Ostermoor sheets, all hand-laid, and closed within ticking entirely by hand sewing. Mattresses weigh 60 lbs. each, 15 lbs. more than regular, and are far softer and much more luxuriously comfortable than regular.

The coverings are of extra fine quality, beautiful Mercerized French Art Twills—pink, blue or yellow, both plain and figured, or high-grade, dust-proof Satin Finish Ticking, striped in linen effect; also the good old-fashioned, blue and white stripe Herring-bone Ticking.

Mattresses are built in the daintiest possible manner by our most expert specialists. They represent, in the very highest degree, the celebrated OSTERMOOR merit of Excellence and are a rare bargain both in price and quality.

Price, $18.50 Each

We pay Transportation Charges anywhere in the United States.
Offered only while they last; first come, first served. The supply is limited.
Terms of sale: Cash in advance; none sent C. O. D.
Order direct of us or through your Ostermoor dealer.

Note:—Ostermoor Mattresses, regular stock, same size, two parts, cost $15.50 each. They have four-inch border, weigh 45 lbs., and are covered with A. C. A. Ticking. These French Mattresses cost $30.00 each, finish fully two inches thicker, weigh 15 lbs. more, have round corners—soft Rolled Edges—close diamond tufts—and beautiful high-grade fine quality coverings, and are much softer and far more resilient. Even if you do not wish a mattress now you should know all about the "Ostermoor" and its superiority to hair in health, comfort and economy. Send your name on a postal for our free descriptive book. "The Test of Time," a veritable work of art, 136 pages in two colors, profusely illustrated; it's well worth while.

OSTERMOOR & COMPANY

110 ELIZABETH STREET, NEW YORK

Canadian Agency: The Ideal Bedding Company, Ltd., Montreal

When ordering, please state first, second and even third choice of color of covering, in case all you like are already sold, as there will be no time for correspondence.

Solid Comfort in Regals

In a Regal store—or by mail—your money buys a pair of shoes that are as comfortable when you first try them on as the worn shoes they replace.

It's one thing to make a lot of claims about true shoe fit and it's another thing to show you the shoes and *prove* them. Regal shoes are made up in every model—to fit every combination of foot measurements, and made in *quarter-sizes* right through. Solid comfort in a new shoe is nothing in the world but a matter of *exact* fitting.

And the beauty of a Regal fit is that it is *permanent*. The shoe gets its "breaking in" at the factory and it doesn't lose its shape.

STYLE-BOOK ON REQUEST

The Regal Style-Book is a good book to have at hand—wherever you buy your shoes. It shows photographs of all the new styles and tells all about every stitch that goes into them. How to order by mail, how to get fitted, and how you are safe in doing it—the Style-Book has it all. Send in your name and address.

EARL—$3.50

One of the 75 Regal Styles

Style 4B12—Most popular model in entire Regal list; an all-round shoe, made of the finest all-round leather ever tanned—the famous Regal King Calf. It is the business man's shoe, the professional man's shoe, the student's shoe—a shoe for the man of work or leisure. Double sole of Regal oak-bark-tanned leather with moderate extension, and inside and outside backstays.

Style 4B14—Imported Patent Leather.

Seventy-five Regal Styles—and the regular price, right through the whole list, is **$3.50 as usual.** But to meet an insistent demand, we have made up 15 special models at $4 per pair. All of the leathers and other materials in them are the *best* of the *best*—and few genuine custom-made $12 shoes equal their handsome appearance.

Regal shoes are delivered, carriage prepaid, anywhere in the United States and all points covered by the Parcels Post System, for 25 cents extra to cover delivery charges.

102 REGAL STORES NOW. 38 NEW ONES IN 1906

The Regal Shoe Stores—Men's

BOSTON, MASS.—113 Summer St. 169 Tremont St.

NEW YORK, N. Y.—165-167 Broadway, below Cortlandt St. Cor. Ann & Nassau Sts. Duane St. & Broadway 785 Broadway 1211 Broadway 1341 Broadway 166 W. 125th St. 507 Eighth Ave. 6th Ave. & 21st St. 150 E. 14th St.

BROOKLYN, N. Y.—351 Fulton St. 1003 Broadway 111 Broadway 466 Fifth Ave.

JERSEY CITY, N. J. 66 Newark Ave.

PHILA., PA.—1218 Market St., 739 Chestnut St. 1224 Market St. S. E. cor. 8th & Race

NEWARK, N.J.—841 Broad St.

CHICAGO, ILL.—103 Dearborn St.

ST. LOUIS, MO.—615 Olive St.

DETROIT, MICH.—122 Woodward Ave.

WASHINGTON, D. C.—1003 Pennsylva'ia Ave.

CLEVELAND, OHIO—69 Euclid Ave.

LOUISVILLE, KY.—346 W. Market St.

SAN FRANCISCO, CAL. 820 Market St. 17 O'Farrell St.

ST. PAUL, MINN.—383 Robert St.

MILWAUKEE, WIS.—212 Grand Ave.

CINCINNATI, OHIO.—429 Vine St.

PROVIDENCE, R. I.—252 Westminster St.

ATLANTA, GA.—6 Whitehall St.

MINNEAPOLIS, MINN. 526 Nicollet Ave.

PITTSBURG, PA.—439 Smithfield St.

BUFFALO, N. Y.—364 Main St.

BALTIMORE, MD.—6 E. Baltimore St.

LONDON, ENG.—97 Cheapside, cor. Lawrence Lane

UTICA, N. Y.—138 Genessee St.

NASHVILLE, TENN.—515 Church St.

ROCHESTER, N. Y.—40 E. Main St.

NEW ORLEANS, LA.—631 Canal St.

SYRACUSE, N. Y.—364 S. Salina St.

KANSAS CITY, MO.—1019 Main St.

RICHMOND, VA.—611 E. Broad St.

OAKLAND, CAL.—22 San Pablo Ave.

NEW HAVEN, CONN.—878 Chapel St.

LOS ANGELES, CAL.—302 So. Broadway

DENVER, COL.—528 16th St.

SEATTLE, WASH.—1211 Second Ave.

MEXICO CITY

SAN LUIS POTOSI, MEX.

PARRAL, MEXICO

CANANEA, MEXICO

SAVANNAH, GA.—118 Whittaker St.

GUADALAJARA, MEX.

LYNN, MASS.

NORFOLK, VA.—8 Granby St.

NEWPORT, R. I.—176 Thames St.

ALTOONA, PA.—1124 11th Ave.

TACOMA, WASH.—11th & Commerce Sts.

PANAMA, SO. AM.

MANILA, P. I.

ILOILO, P. I.

TAUNTON, MASS.—7 Main St.

HARTFORD, CONN.—65 Asylum St.

E. WHITMAN, MASS.—opp. P. O.

WILKES-BARRE, PA.—12 S. Main St.

TAMPA, FLA.—714 Franklin St.

BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

HAVERHILL, MASS. 97 Merrimack St.

SCHENECTADY, N. Y

The Regal Shoe Stores—Women's

BOSTON, MASS.—109 Summer St. 169 Tremont St.

NEW YORK, N. Y.—785 Broadway 1239 Broadway 166 W. 125th St. 6th Ave. & 21st St.

BROOKLYN, N. Y.—1003 Broadway 466 Fifth Ave.

NEWARK, N. J.—841 Broad St.

PHILADELPHIA, PA.—1218 B Market St.

JERSEY CITY, N. J.—66 Newark Ave.

CLEVELAND, OHIO—69 Euclid Ave.

MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.—526 Nicollet Ave.

ST. PAUL, MINN.—383 Robert St.

SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.—820 Market St. 17 O'Farrell St.

BUFFALO, N. Y.—362 Main St.

PROVIDENCE, R. I.—252 Westminster St.

BALTIMORE, MD.—6 E. Baltimore St.

CHICAGO, ILL.—74 Washington St.

SYRACUSE, N. Y.—364 S. Salina St.

NEW HAVEN, CONN.—878 Chapel St.

RICHMOND, VA.—611 E. Broad St.

OAKLAND, CAL.—22 San Pablo Ave.

LOS ANGELES, CAL.—302 So. Broadway

DENVER, COL.—528 16th St.

SEATTLE, WASH.—1211 2d Ave.

MEXICO CITY

SAVANNAH, GA.—118 Whittaker St.

NORFOLK, VA.—8 Granby St.

NEWPORT, R. I.—176 Thames St.

ALTOONA, PA.—1124 11th Ave.

TACOMA, WASH.—11th & Commerce Sts.

PANAMA, SO. AM.

TAUNTON, MASS.—7 Main St.

MONTERREY, MEXICO

E. WHITMAN, MASS.—opp. P. O.

WILKES-BARRE, PA.—12 S. Main St.

TAMPA, FLA.—714-16-18 Franklin St.

HAVERHILL, MASS.—97 Merrimack St.

REGAL SHOE CO., Inc., MAIL-ORDER DEPT.: BOSTON, MASS., 509 SUMMER ST

Sub-Station: 820 Market St., San Francisco

REGAL SHOES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Largest Retail Shoe Business in the World

The Seven-bladed "Ever-Ready" has revolutionized the Safety Razor business of the world. *Making* and *selling* innovations have made the $5.00 "Safety" of yesterday a dollar razor to-day.

We've dared to fix a retail price that meant a "square deal." "Ever-Ready" Safety Razor Sets are **complete at $1.00.** Seven perfect blades—a nickel silver safety frame and stropping handle, all compact in a handsome box.

It's the safest safety razor in history. Everybody becomes an expert barber with the first shave—*it's impossible to cut the face.*

"Ever-Ready" blades are guaranteed to the limit—they are the keenest, finest tempered and easiest shaving of all razor blades. The blades can be STROPPED like the ordinary razor, and will last for years—that is something that isn't possible in any $5.00 razor made. For those desirous of doing away with rehoning and resharpening, *we will exchange seven new blades for seven dull ones and 25c.*

"Ever-Ready" Razors are by no means an experiment. We have manufactured Safety Razors under other brands during the past 21 years and the "Ever-Ready" is the best that skilled workmanship and experience can produce at any price. "Ever-Ready" Seven-bladed dollar razors are now on sale in thousands of CUTLERY, HARDWARE, JEWELRY and DEPARTMENT STORES throughout the world.

If your dealer doesn't sell them it is because he's profit-greedy. If you have the least difficulty in purchasing, send to us direct (one dollar) and you will receive your set, prepaid. Do it now.

THE AMERICAN SAFETY RAZOR CO., 60 to 68 Duane St., New York

NOTE TO DEALERS—Send your orders for quick delivery direct, or to the nearest of the following distributors: Norvell-Shapleigh Hdw. Co., St. Louis—Wells & Nellegar Hdw. Co., Chicago—Belknap Hdw. & Mfg. Co., Louisville—John Pritzlaff Hdw. Co., Milwaukee—VanCamp Hdw. Co., Indianapolis—Farwell, Ozmum & Kirk Co., St. Paul—Marshall-Wells Hdw. Co., Duluth—Lee-Glass-Andreeson Hdw. Co., Omaha—Wyeth Hdw. & Mfg. Co., St. Joseph—The Bronson & Townsend Co., New Haven—Iver Johnson Sptg. Goods Co., Boston—Bubl Sons Co., Detroit—Luthe Hdw. Co., Des Moines—Richards-Conover Co., Kansas City—Kelly-How-Thompson Co., Duluth—Caverhill-Learmont & Co., Montreal, Canada—Frothingham & Workman, Montreal, Canada—Marshall-Wells Hdw. Co., Winnipeg, Man.—Dunham-Carrigan & Hayden Co., San Francisco—Supplee Hdw. Co., Philadelphia—A. Baldwin & Co., New Orleans—Wood-Vallance & Co., Hamilton, Ont., and others.

The "Invasion of the West" is typical of the invasion of the North, South and East by the

OLDSMOBILE

Here are facts: We are today shipping Oldsmobiles to nearly every civilized country, and some half-civilized ones. Russia, for the last three years one of our best foreign markets, is taking more cars today than before the present trouble broke out. We have met European manufacturers on their own grounds and have "made good."

Our Palace Touring Car Model S is the "top notcher" of 1906. It is a genuine American car, discounting European product at Wall Street rates. Send for booklet telling how we have packed more style, speed, stability *and brains* into **Model S for $2250** than can be found in any car in the world for anything like the same money.

The Double-Action Olds is a car with two working strokes for every revolution of the crank. It's the latest—the new thing—in automobiles. It is free of valves, guides, springs, cams, and the other mysteries that usually terrify the uninitiated. Its motor has *only three working parts.* It's a giant for hill climbing and difficult roads. Its price **$1250.** Write for our "Double-Action" Booklet.

OLDS MOTOR WORKS (*Member of Association Licensed Automobile Manufacturers*) **Lansing, Mich., U. S. A.**

CATALOG COUPON

Kindly send me information regarding cars checked. I am interested.

Model B..... Delivery Cars.....
Model S..... Passenger Traffic Cars...
A. A. Model L.....

Name.....

Address.....

CALENDAR COUPON

Enclosed find 10 cents, for which send your large Art Calendar (free from advertising and suitable for framing) for 1906. Design by George Gibbs. A. A.

Name.....

Address.....

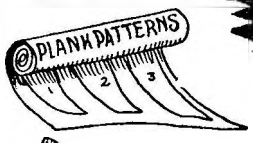
MOTOR TALK COUPON

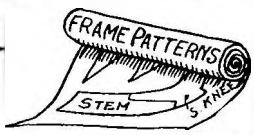
Enclosed find 25 cents, for which have MOTOR TALK, a magazine devoted to automobiling, sent to me for 1 year. A. A.

Name.....

Address.....

BUILD YOUR OWN BOAT





BY THE BROOKS SYSTEM.

There is no reason why you cannot own as good a boat as the best boat factory can produce if you will use your leisure time to advantage and build it yourself.

The fact that anyone using the **Brooks System**, no matter how inexperienced he is in the use of tools, can build his own boat at the cost of a little lumber and a few nails, has brought boats within the reach of all. All the boats built last year, by all the boat factories in the United States, combined in one fleet, would not equal the number of boats built during the same time by novices using the **Brooks System.** Our catalog gives pages of testimonials with photographs of the boats built by amateurs using the **Brooks System.**

The BROOKS SYSTEM consists of exact size printed paper patterns of every piece that goes into the boat, a complete set of halftone illustrations showing an actual picture of each step of the work properly done, detailed instructions to build, covering the entire construction of the boat, and an itemized bill of all material required and how to secure it.

We tell you how to lay the pattern of each particular part on the proper piece of material and exactly how to cut—you cut. We then tell you how to fasten each part in its right place—what kind of a nail to use—how to drive it—you drive it.

You need no mechanical ability, the **Brooks System** supplies this—how is shown in the catalog. Many professional men are taking up the **Brooks System** for mental relaxation—for the pleasure of working with their hands and for exercise.

We have started hundreds in the boat building business. One man built sixteen boats from one set of patterns last season—another built ten—the materials cost very little—we furnished the design—they did the work and sold the boats at a big profit.

You need buy nothing from us but the patterns. We have them of all kinds and sizes, from small row boats and canoes to Sea-going Yachts. We have over 50 styles and sizes of boats and boat patterns, each one perfect in design for its purpose. Our catalog illustrates the product of the best staff of designers in the world.

Over ten thousand amateurs throughout the world successfully built boats by the **Brooks System** in 1905.

When so ordered, Patterns are Expressed, Charges Prepaid, C. O. D., Allowing Examination.

KNOCK DOWN BOATS

complete from keel to cushions and fittings. We send you a complete Knocked Down Boat, even to the paint, at a cost of very little more than the cost of the raw material.

Illustrated Catalog of all Our Boats Free.

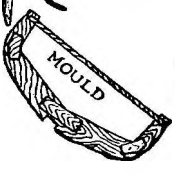
Books We Publish.

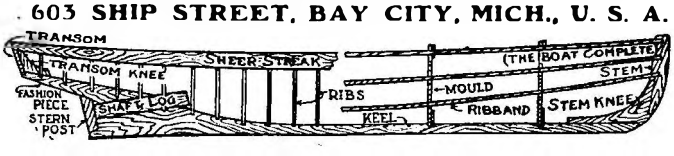
Useful Information for the Amateur Yachtsman and Boat Builder. Price 25 cts.
The Principle and Operation of Marine Gasoline Motors. Price 25 cts.
Book of Designs for Practical Boat Builders. Price 25 cts.

BROOKS BOAT MANUFACTURING CO.

Originators of the Pattern System of Boat Building.

603 SHIP STREET, BAY CITY, MICH., U. S. A.





Beach scene, Atlantic City, 11 minutes from Pleasantville Terrace.

Pleasantville Terrace

Atlantic City's New Suburb

EVERY word of this advertisement will interest the ambitious person who wants to get ahead in the world. It points the way to wise investment and a comfortable fortune by showing you how to invest your savings—as little as $1 at a time—where they will be absolutely safe, and where they will grow into large profits.

How $700 Grew to $50,000

Few people outside of the Eastern cities know about the wonderful growth of Atlantic City. A lot 50x100 that cost $700, was sold there a short time ago for $50,000.

A property that was bought five years ago for $6,000 was sold a few days ago for $150,000. These are only two examples. There are innumerable others of just this kind.

Within the past twelve years, Atlantic City real estate values have risen over 800 per cent. It has practically outgrown the boundaries of the island on which it stands.

Its nearest and only desirable suburb is Pleasantville Terrace, the place that has attracted thoughtful investors and home-builders from all over the world.

FRANKLIN P. STOY, Mayor of Atlantic City, says:

"I regard Pleasantville Terrace as the natural suburb of Atlantic City."

11 Minutes to Atlantic City

The main line of the Atlantic City Railroad (Reading System) runs directly through this property, with the famous Atlantic City Boardwalk only 11 minutes from Pleasantville Terrace depot (see Reading R.R. time-table), or one may go to Atlantic City by trolley for five cent fare from Pleasantville.

Natural Advantages

Pleasantville Terrace is the highest natural ground in or near Atlantic City. There is no swamp land on the property. The State Geologist's attest shows Pleasantville Terrace is 55 feet above Atlantic City.

The climate is ideal, combining ocean breezes with the invigorating air from the pine and oak trees growing there.

It adjoins Pleasantville, with churches, schools, and all city conveniences.

Special Conditions

Unlike many real estate operations, this Company agrees to develop Pleasantville Terrace, and make it an ideal suburb. Building operations are now under way in every section.

We offer special premiums, and assist those who will build at once.

Free excursions are run frequently from Atlantic City to enable lot owners to see the character of improvements.

We make no charge for deed. No mortgages. No taxes until 1907. If you die before lot is paid for, we issue deed to your heirs, without further payments.

An Exceptional Opportunity

Every one who knows anything about Atlantic City knows that land there for building purposes has grown exceedingly scarce. We anticipated this condition a number of years ago by purchasing the General Doughty Estate—the present site of Pleasantville Terrace.

If we had to buy this land to-day we would have to charge many times the price we now ask for Pleasantville Terrace lots. Just think of it, a building lot, eleven minutes from the country's greatest resort, at from **$25 to $55** (according to location), payable in easy weekly or monthly amounts, within the means of the person of most moderate circumstances.

This is Your Opportunity

This message will be read by thousands of people, yet it is a personal one for you. No matter how small your income, take advantage of it now. Do not let it escape you; such an opportunity may never come your way again. Sit right down and write a postal for a copy of our illustrated booklet to-day, or, better still, send $1 and we will reserve lots until you can investigate. If not entirely satisfied, your dollar will be promptly refunded. Do it now; the lots are selling rapidly, and there will never be another opportunity like this.

ATLANTIC CITY ESTATE CO.

VICTOR J. HUMBRECHT, President

MAIN OFFICE:
1037 Drexel Building, Philadelphia, Pa.

ATLANTIC CITY OFFICE:
410 Bartlett Building.

A CLOSE SHAVE GIVES A FEELING OF DELIGHT TO EVERY MAN

"THE GILLETTE" gives a **CLOSE SHAVE** without discomfort, without roughening the skin, without irritation, without creating rash, without cuts, and without loss of time.

"THE GILLETTE" is the way to escape from barber shop waiting, wasting and torture.

TRADE MARK
SAFETY GILLETTE COMPANY
BOSTON RAZOR MASS.
PATENTED U.S.A. NOV. 15, 04

12 BLADES, 24 SHARP EDGES. EVERY BLADE WILL GIVE FROM 20 TO 40 CLOSE, SMOOTH, COMFORTABLE SHAVES.

Triple silver plated set, with 12 blades
Quadruple gold plated set with monogram,
Special combination set with brush and soap holders,
} In Velvet-Lined Cases

10 EXTRA BLADES 50 CENTS. AT THIS NEW LOW PRICE, NO BLADES EXCHANGED.

Science has reached the acme of skill in the fusion, tempering, hardening and sharpening of these blades. The process is one of the wonders of the 20th century. The steel is of a quality as fine as a Damascus sword.

The most simple and durable shaving device in the world. **NO HINGES, NO CLASPS, NO SPRINGS,** and nothing to learn or adjust. Simply lather and shave in four minutes time.

Our new combination set with razor, soap and brush holders in box is now ready.

SOLD BY LEADING DRUG, CUTLERY AND HARDWARE DEALERS

Ask to see them, and for our booklet, or write us for our special trial offer.

Gillette Sales Company, 1154 TIMES BUILDING, NEW YORK CITY.

Gillette Safety Razor

NO STROPPING. NO HONING.