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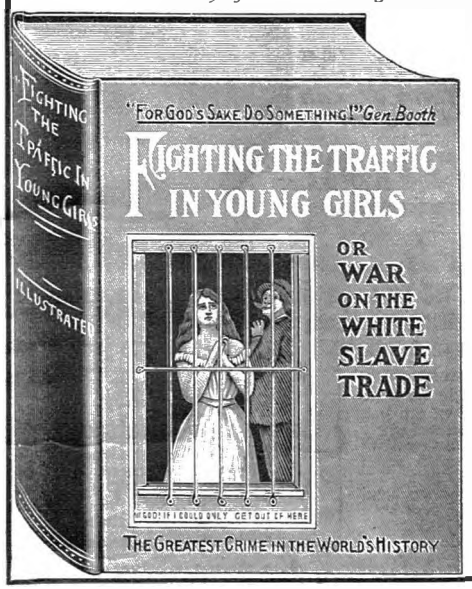

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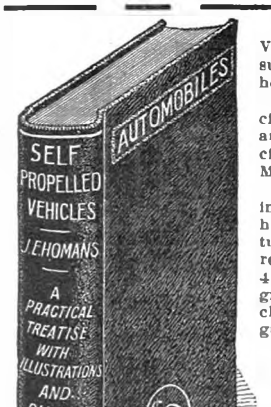

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. LXIII MAY, 1910. No. 2

A Night with a Million.

BY R. K. THOMPSON,

Author of "Twelve Good Men," "Not Interested," "When Minutes Were Precious," etc.

The Troublous Experience Meted Out to a Man in an Adventure that Started with a Joke and Ended in Several Kinds of a Jolt.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

"ONE YEAR AT HARD LABOR."

"IT'S a shame, that's what it is!"

The young man in the swivel-chair beside the open window crossed his feet upon the extension ledge of the oak desk with an impatient vehemence which scratched the varnish.

"It's a crime—a low-down, mean, stealing-candy-from-an-infant crime!"

He puffed hard on the cigarette stuck between his lips, as he scowled out across the sky-line of smoke-plumed buildings on a level with his vision.

"I'm twenty-six years old, a strong-bodied, live-brained fellow—and what am I worth?"

Impetuously he snapped the red-hot stub of his cigarette into the hammered-brass bowl beside the chair.

"Nothing! I'm as worthless a lump of human clay as ever was modeled into the semblance of a grown man—and the worst of it is, I know it!"

He shrugged himself farther down in his seat, while a deepening of the frown between his brows indicated a continuance of his unpleasant ruminations.

"I'm twenty-six years old, a stenographer earning eighteen dollars a week—and here I am!"

He looked about him.

The spacious room was luxuriously, sumptuously, furnished. Rare rugs covered the floor, on which was a set of office furniture that would not have been out of place in the library of some millionaire's home. The walls were hung with costly prints and engravings. The chamber radiated an air of lavish comfort.

"Here I am," the young man repeated—"sitting in the boss's office! I'm trespassing after hours in my employer's sanctum sanctorum; poaching on another's preserves by enjoying the pleasure these surroundings give to him who has a right to them."

Slowly he lighted another cigarette, smoked an inch of its length without relish, and threw it away.

"Jack Wilton, you're a failure! A miserable fizzle of what should be the live wire of a real success! And you've nobody to blame but yourself.

"Look at the man who hires you—Judson Clarke. He's not more than five years older than you are. If he is, he doesn't look it. Yet you and he are at the opposite poles of the business world—success and failure.

"Here you sit, in the private office of your boss, who's a tremendous success with only a five-year start of you—face to face with the realization that you're a rotten failure.

"And you know mighty well why the other man's up and you're down. Judson Clarke is a millionaire because he's worked, and worked hard. You're a despicable failure, not worth more than eighteen dollars a week in your twenty-sixth year, because you've loafed instead of really working."

Again, with angry force, he recrossed his feet upon the desk ledge.

"Work!" he sneered. "Why, in all the seven years I've been in business, I don't believe I can lay honest claim to eight consecutive hours of real, genuine, blown-in-the-bottle toil. Drat it all, I don't think I know the meaning of the word, even!"

He gnawed at his lip, running his hand nervously through his thick hair.

"Lord, how I hate myself!" he muttered. "What a disgusting mess I've made of my life! I've held down seven jobs a year, for seven years—all at as many indifferently small salaries as I'm years old—simply because I've paid more attention to having a good time than I have to buckling down to business.

"I've gone in for fun instead of work; built up a reputation for being a life-of-the-party in any sphere or circle, instead of acquiring a name as a reliable employee where I've drawn wages; and I've accumulated laughs instead of dollars. A fine record—I don't think!

"But, what are you going to do?" he asked half aloud, a comical grimace of despair upon his countenance, "when you're a fellow named Jack?"

Slowly, sadly, he wagged his head at the misfortune of his christening.

"I've had to live up to my name, like every other poor fool of Fate who owes his parents a grudge for labeling him with the name that's been the brand of good-fellowship since the first free-handed sailor came ashore—I've had to make a fool of myself, by acting as the village tease, because my name made people expect it of me.

"And, instead of really working at any one of the many jobs I've had, I've butterflied after a good time during business hours. It's been a constant round of frivolity, mirth, and laughter with me, ever since I drew down my first pay-envelope with the office-boy's salary of three dollars in it—steadily the same old story, right up to to-day.

"With what result? That I find myself now down and out, facing the prospect of being downer and outer—now, when I ought to be well on my way to a decent place in the respect of decent people, through a responsible position in the financial world.

"It's easy, too, to trace back over the road I've slipshodded over. It's a cinch to look back and find out just where I've made the different mistakes that have brought me where I am.

"Take the job I had with the Editha Paper Company last year. If I'd behaved myself there, I might have climbed the ladder right up to the top, where a position worth big money in a few years was waiting for me.

"But, instead of putting my brain to work in pushing myself ahead of a small-salary job and into a fat position, I made myself the most popular man with 'the boys' that ever came into the office—three months after I was hired.

"Then, there was the job I had before that, with the Smiley people. I was doing fine there—been raised from fifteen to eighteen dollars a week within five months of going on the force, which shows what I could do if I got right down to it and stuck to business.

"And, then what happened? April Fools' Day—my birthday, I guess—came along. Of course, I had to prove myself Johnny-on-the-spot when it came to putting the smile that won't come off on the faces of my fellow workers.

"So I sent all the office-boys and petty clerks who would take orders from me away from their work on all sorts of humorous searches for left-handed monkey-wrenches, stone-crushers, harness-oil, and the like.

"And then, when I had pretty nearly the whole office force hysterical at these side-splitting stunts, the boss sent for me, and I was put upon the carpet before him.

"Politely, but firmly, I was informed that another calling than that of the strictly business one of the Smileys' beckoned compellingly to me, and that I'd better hasten to it. So I was bounced again."

He turned around to the desk suddenly.

"But, by ginger," he exclaimed, "now I'm through!

"From to-day on, I'm going to cut out the fooling, and settle down to business!"

He struck the desk before him with clenched fist.

"I know I've got the brains to make good at almost anything I tackle." He smiled grimly. "Being clever enough to

get discharged so many times all for different reasons proves that, I guess. And I'm going to begin right away—right here in this job I'm holding down now.

"Judson Clarke pays me eighteen dollars a week for just about four dollars' worth of labor per.

"Question—how much would my salary be if I really got right down to work and started in to produce results? Well, I'm going to find out the answer to that.

"Hard work and no fooling is the way to set about solving the problem—and I'm going to solve it or bust an artery!

"I hereby sentence myself to one year at hard labor. In that time I'll find out, one way or another, where I'll stand if I really try to succeed."

His eyes lighted with the fires of ambition, his chin firmly set, and his whole figure erect with the solidity of his purpose, Jack Wilton made a picture of aggressively determined youth not out of keeping with the office in which he sat—that of a man who had won his success.

"No more cutting-up, no jamborees during business hours. I'm going to get down to hard pan, and work. I'll never play the clown again, nor see the humorous side of things in a stronger light—"

He stopped abruptly.

The private-office door had opened with a faint rattle behind him.

Jack wheeled around from the desk and looked toward the doorway. Standing on the threshold, silk hat in hand, peering at him through the half dusk of the late afternoon shadows, was a stranger.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Clarke!"

The young man started at the words. Then he rose slowly to his feet. The stranger had mistaken him for his employer.

It now flashed through Jack Wilton's mind that the offices outside the one in which he stood were deserted, it being Saturday afternoon and a half-holiday.

No doubt this caller seeking Judson Clarke had come straight through these empty rooms unhindered.

And now, in the dim light, he had mistaken the stenographer for that young man's chief.

"Mr. Clarke, I want a word with you."

The man on the door-sill moved forward. He was a white-haired, pompous-figured, elderly person of sixty or sixty-five, with a bearing and address strikingly authoritative.

In silence Jack waited till the caller stood before him, expecting the latter's mistake to be easily apparent at close range.

And then, as the stranger looked at him unmoved, a slow smile twitched at the corners of the young man's mouth.

"What a lark!" he thought amusedly. "He takes me for Clarke himself—and, by George, I'll see where the joke leads to!"

Graciously he waved his hand toward a chair and stepped back to his former seat.

"Sit down, sir," he said. "Sit down, and have your word with me."

CHAPTER II.

TOO LATE TO RETREAT.

THE old gentleman, with a bow, placed his hat on the table beside the desk. Then he sat down in the chair Jack had indicated.

"Just got into the city fifteen minutes ago," he remarked, drawing a handkerchief from his pocket and mopping his brow. "Phew—I hurried to catch you before you left."

Jack nodded gravely.

"It's warm work," he said pleasantly, "hurrying in this kind of weather. If you'd been ten minutes later, though, you might have missed—er—me. I intended leaving then."

"Well," snapped the elderly gentleman, "you're here, and I'm here; so there is no need of going into what might have been if I hadn't found you. And now let's get down to business, if you please."

Wilton shifted in his seat. What *was* the business of this stranger with Judson Clarke, he wondered?

"What did you wish to see—er—me about?" he hesitatingly inquired. "Anything important?"

The visitor dropped back in his chair.

"You ought to know I wouldn't chase into the city in the middle of August on a half-holiday," he reminded Jack impatiently, "if my business wasn't important."

"I don't suppose you would," assent-

ed the young man agreeably. "No, you probably wouldn't."

"No, sir," continued the other. "I have called to see you, Mr. Clarke, about that matter I spoke of to you on Tuesday."

From the manner of his announcement, it was plain that the stranger considered this explanation as to the nature of his business quite sufficient.

"Ah, yes," Jack sparred for time. "That matter—I see. You have—er—made up your mind to—that is to say, to—"

"To act, sir!" barked the old gentleman impetuously. "To act—and at once. If you have done as I requested, when I met you for the first time last week, you will have studied the market carefully with an eye to the facts I mentioned. Therefore, you must see that we have not a day to lose in putting my plan in operation."

So, thought Jack, his visitor had met Judson Clarke but once—that, with the gloom of the room, was reason enough why he was taken to be his own employer by this man, who might, through the infirmity of age, be less sharp of eye than he should be.

"What do you say to that—eh?" exclaimed the unwitting blunderer.

"What do I say?" repeated Jack, with an air of measured deliberation. "I can only say this: I still think as I told you on Tuesday."

His caller gave an exasperated click of his tongue, accompanied by an impatient shrug of his narrow shoulders.

"Of course, though," Wilton hurried on—"of course, I am open to conviction. Now, if you will state your case again, arguing the facts of the matter at length with me—"

"Rubbish!" interrupted his caller. He leaned forward in his seat. "What could be plainer than the situation as it now stands?" he cried vehemently.

Jack's lips tightened as he thought of the startling reply he could give to that question, having no knowledge of the business or identity of the other.

"You know where the five stocks in question are now," went on the white-haired gentleman rapidly. "You certainly must know, too, after any kind of an investigation, that three of the five, at the least, are certain to drop ten to fifteen points below their present quotation in the next month.

"Is there any reason, then, why I should not act now, before the break comes, and I lose this opportunity which is unmistakably golden?"

Wilton cleared his throat.

"As I understand it," he said, reaching forth his hand to pick up a pencil and tap lightly with it on the desk-blotter—"as I gather your idea, you want to take the bull by the horns, rush in, as it were—"

"Clarke, you're talking like a fool!" cut in the stranger excitedly. "I told you Tuesday that you didn't understand this thing—that your attitude in the matter was wrong because you weren't in possession of the facts of the case. I told you then to study the situation closely, carefully, completely. And now, after you've done that, how you can sit there and stand by what you've said—well, it's a mystery to me."

Jack glanced quickly out of the window.

"Me, too," he thought amusedly. "Whatever the old boy's deal is, it's a deep and dark mystery to me—and so is his name. Wish I knew it." Aloud he said:

"Well, I may as well be frank with you—er—sir. I have neglected to follow your advice, and I have not studied the market in respect to your business.

"Now, if you will please explain this matter to me as though I were, as I am, in ignorance of your view-point—"

To himself Wilton thought: "That ought to fetch out of him an explanation of his dealings with Clarke. If it does, I'll soon know where I stand in this joke of the season—and it's a daisy!"

Impulsively the stranger rose.

"I've had enough of this nonsense!" he snapped.

Quickly Jack looked up to meet his caller's irate gaze.

Did the old man at last suspect the trick that was being played upon him?

"There's nothing to this transaction, Mr. Clarke," went on the latter, "that you can't easily understand. I want you to invest for me in five stocks—the ones I told you of at our previous meeting—and that is *all* that I want you to do for me."

The young man gave a sigh of relief. He was not detected in his jesting imposture—yet.

But the scare he had just received in thinking he was had now sobered him, as had the other's words, into a serious view of the situation.

This man, who had mistaken him for Judson Clarke, wanted him, Jack Wilton, to make an investment in five stocks in his behalf. That was serious business, and there was no room for further fooling about it.

Clarke was a stock-broker: this stranger to Jack appeared to be a person of decided consequence—a good customer for the house.

He must not be offended—driven away—as he was sure to be if he found out that Jack had been making sport of him.

"I simply wish you to take charge of my investments, Mr. Clarke," the caller was saying. "You will incur absolutely no responsibility if my estimates of the situation go wrong and I lose by my venture."

With unassumed gravity Jack bowed again.

"How much do you wish to invest?" he inquired slowly.

Somehow, some way—and soon—he must get himself out of his false position.

And he must extricate himself without letting slip a hint to his visitor that he was not the man the latter took him to be. If the stranger found out that he had been hoaxed, there would be trouble—trouble in bunches—for Wilton.

"I am not ready to say just yet how far I will go in investing on my judgment of present conditions," said the important-looking gentleman. "It will all depend on the state of the market how far I will go—that's all I can say at present."

"I see," remarked the young man absently.

Should he take a chance on his joke being forgiven by this stranger, and tell him the truth—that he had been "jollying" him into the belief that he was somebody else? Was that the only way out of the predicament?

If he took that bold course, what would happen? Might not he bring down the caller's righteous wrath upon his defenseless head—so thoroughly arouse the latter's ire that he would report the affair to Judson Clarke himself, and so bring about Jack's discharge from still another good job?

No—the fear of incurring the stranger's scorn for his childish trick decided him—he would not make a clean breast of his imposition. Instead, he would keep on the mask, and trust to luck to worm out of the affair without harm to himself.

But, if he kept up the deception, how was he to carry it through without spoiling a good business prospect for his firm?

He could not undertake the business the stranger asked of Clarke. Yet, neither could he turn it down.

He spoke, inspired by a sudden idea.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, sir," he said slowly. "You give me till Monday noon to think this matter over once more. Then call in here for my decision—and you'll get it."

"Mr. Clarke!"

The stranger advanced a step toward Jack, his eyes flashing.

"I understand your attitude, sir, to be prompted by a spirit of fair dealing," he said sharply. "You are a reputable stock-broker: you do not wish me to place in your hands a large sum of money to be invested by you in a series of stocks in which you have no faith. Is that true?"

"Perfectly," Jack replied, for want of something better to say.

"Very good," the gentleman bowed. "Then, this is my own attitude: I reserve the right to make my own investments, where I will, as I will. It is my money I am speculating with. Now, I don't make any bones about telling you, in all frankness, that you are the broker I want to have handle my plans. But—there are others to whom I can go. Do you understand?

"If you do not agree at once to take my business as I dictate—I will take that business elsewhere."

There was no way out—it was up to Jack to act the part of the man he had jokingly impersonated, and act it out to the finish; either to accept or refuse this man's business for his firm—at once.

Which should he do? Which would Judson Clarke do, in possession of facts in the case of which Wilton was ignorant, if he were here?

To tell the stranger the truth—that he was talking to the wrong man — might send him away, in his present half-angry mood, to another firm. To reject his business would certainly do that. And if he accepted the caller's proposition, on behalf of his employer, that acceptance could be vetoed by Clarke later, anyway.

"Very well," said Jack firmly, taking the step which was obviously in the direction of the least possible danger to all concerned, "I—er—we will act as your representative with pleasure."

"Good!" snapped the other.

Then, before Jack Wilton's wondering eyes, he drew from his pocket an oblong package, which he deposited on the table from which he swiftly swept up his hat.

"You can go ahead on that, Mr. Clarke," he said, nodding toward the package as he walked briskly to the door. "As for the work to be done—you know what I want. Do it."

Startled, Jack rose to his feet, his glance playing from the stranger to the package on the table.

"But—hold on!" he faltered. "This bundle you are leaving with me; what—"

"Everything is ready to your hand," explained his visitor, one foot across the threshold. "I'll look you up, if nothing happens before, in a month. Good day."

The young man took a quick step toward him.

"Wait!" he cried.

"I can't," replied the stranger briefly. "My train leaves in ten minutes—I've got to run to catch it. Again—good-by."

The next instant the slender figure of the old gentleman had disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

A SURPRISE PACKAGE.

"WELL, now I'm in for it!"

Jack Wilton stood, stupidly staring at the doorway which, a moment before, had framed the form of his strange caller.

"This is certainly a fine prospect," he thought ruefully. "Here a stranger of an old fossil comes romping into this room, hails me as the boss, still believes I am it when I start to string him along with his mistake, and then forces me to play Judson Clarke's part in a transaction which, to say the least, sounds as if it might be as important as the very deuce."

Slowly he lighted a cigarette.

"What did I get myself into this fix for, anyway?" he muttered, dropping into a chair. "I hadn't any more than just finished promising myself that I'd stop fooling and settle down to business, when I turn around and leap at the first chance that comes along to play the fool again.

"Here I've agreed, on behalf of my esteemed employer, to invest a batch of money in five stocks about which I'm as ignorant as a babe unborn. If I let the chief know what I've done, there isn't a chance on earth that he'll ever forgive me.

"And yet he's got to be told. And it's up to me to tell him."

For a moment or two Jack Wilton sat there silently, looking out of the window, watching the twinkling lights that flared into being in the black walls of the buildings around him as the darkness grew, striving with all his might to find in the blankness of his own dark thoughts a single sparkle of an idea of how he was successfully to extricate himself from his peculiar position.

Suddenly he brought his hand down upon his upraised knee with a resounding slap.

"By George!" he exclaimed, "I never thought of it. There's one way I can get out of this—if it'll work.

"I can tell Clarke — wait a minute, now—yes, sir; I can tell him that this old geezer came in here looking for him. Without explaining that I jumped into the breach in my usual light-hearted fashion and impersonated him, I can tell the chief that the caller was in a hurry, stated his business to me, and went off, leaving me to explain the purpose of his call to the boss on Monday morning.

"Then I can get around my acceptance of the trust by saying that his proposition looked good to me—that I, in my ignorance, but with the interests of the firm at heart, undertook the handling of the stranger's investment.

"At the worst, I'll only get a calling down from Clarke for butting in in that high-handed way. At the best, my zeal in looking out for the house may be praised.

"And then, if Clarke doesn't want to

take the business, he can write to the old fellow, placing his identity from my description, and cancel all previous arrangements."

Decisively the young man got to his feet.

"There may be complications that will crop up to put my story on the blink. But that will be later on—if they happen at all. And, anyway, I'll be no worse off if my yarn is disproved than I would be if I told the whole truth about the matter at the start.

"And about that package? Well, that will fit in with my story, all right. I'll simply tell the boss that the visitor left it for him. He can do what he wants with it."

He looked toward the table on which the bundle lay. And, as he glanced at the thing, a puzzled frown again clouded his brow.

"Wonder what's in it?" he asked himself. "Ought I to open it up and find out before I turn it over to Clarke, or—no, I guess I'd better keep my fingers away from what doesn't belong to me.

"All the same," he continued, reflectively rubbing his chin as he stared at the bundle, "I'd just as soon find out what that crusty old codger left behind him."

He walked slowly to the table, and took the package in his hand.

"What if there's cash in it?" he muttered, a trifle worried. "The old man wouldn't be carrying money around with him, wrapped up this way, I imagine. Yet—he was a queer old duck at that.

"He's keen on making some stock investment that Judson Clarke evidently didn't enthuse over when the two were together at their first meeting. I'd back the boss's judgment in a matter of this kind further than I would any other man's. So, on one count, the old boy with the weak eyes is a bug.

"Then there's the fact of his not tumbling to my bluff at being the man he was after when he saw me. There *must* be something the matter with a man who couldn't spot me for a fake, despite the fact that it was dusk, that I'm nearly the same age as Clarke, and that he'd only met the latter once before."

Again Jack Wilton cast a curious glance at the package he held—and returned it to the table.

"I wonder if there *is* money in it?" he murmured. "Didn't the old boy say something about Clarke not wanting to be entrusted with a large sum to invest?

"Well, whatever there is in the bundle," he decided abruptly, "it's not up to me to open it. I'll leave it as it is for Mr. Judson Clarke to find on Monday.

"Only," he added fretfully—"only, what if there was something inside that—that—"

He turned suddenly away from the table, plunging his hands deep into his trousers-pocket, with a short laugh.

"I'll be untying the string and snooping into it, if I keep on," he said self-contemptuously. "This seems to be my big day for falling down on the simple task of minding my own business."

He walked half-way across the office, and stopped. Slowly he turned to look behind him at the package.

"There's no use talking!" he exclaimed suddenly, returning swiftly to the table. "I've simply got to find out what's inside this—I can't wait till Monday—by George, I'm just going to *open her up!*"

Picking up the package, he hefted it curiously.

"It's not very heavy, and it's not very light—it might hold anything," he commented thoughtfully.

Once more Jack sat down in Clarke's chair, depositing the bundle on the desk before him. Taking out his pocket-knife, he weighed that, too, in his hands.

"Shall I open it?" he pondered indecisively. "Shucks—I know what I'll do. I'll flip a coin—heads, I rip her up; tails, I don't."

The quarter he spun in the air fell with a faint thud upon the blotter—tail-side up.

"Humph!" grunted Wilton, disappointed. "I'm not to find out, after all, what the old duffer left behind him."

He opened his knife with a quick gesture. Instinctively, he looked behind him and around the room.

"Well—here goes, anyhow!" he muttered.

Deftly he snapped the string. Swiftly he spread open the paper wrapping.

And then, as his eyes fell upon the contents, he sprang out of his chair with a cry of amazement.

Before him on the desk lay two oblong piles of gilt-edged, handsomely engraved, folded parchment.

"Holy mackerel!" Jack Wilton ejaculated. "They're stocks or bonds!"

Approaching the desk, he bent over the twin stacks of papers. A single, narrow strip of ordinary letter-paper lay atop the two piles.

He picked it up and read these finely penned lines:

NEGOTIABLE SECURITIES.
FIVE-PER-CENT BONDS
WORTH $1,000,000.

The scrap of paper fluttered unheeded from his trembling hands.

"One million dollars!" he gasped. "A fortune — an oil king's ransom — in negotiable, same-as-money paper!"

At a puff of wind from the open window Jack sprang wildly forward and fell upon the package, twining his arms protectingly about it.

Then, standing erect, the bundle hugged to his frantically beating heart, he staggered weakly to a chair.

"Alone with a million!" he whispered, dropping limply into the seat—"a million that isn't mine, that nobody knows I've got!"

CHAPTER IV.

BUT ONE THING TO DO.

One minute—two minutes—ticked off on the little rococo clock over his head, while Jack Wilton sat silently holding the untied bundle of bonds clutched tightly to his breast.

What was he to do with the bonds?

They did not belong to him—and he could not give them back to their owner, because that person's name and whereabouts were absolutely unknown to him.

It was Saturday, a holiday after one o'clock, and Jack's employer had left the office, bound the stenographer knew not where, and certain to return only on Monday—not before.

What was he to do with the bonds meantime?

For every minute that they were in his care he was responsible for them.

Think of it! Here he was, a fellow who had never been responsible before in his life for anything to any one but himself—a young man who had never had more than one hundred dollars at any one time — now suddenly and unwillingly made responsible for a cool million!

Drops of perspiration stood out in profusion upon his brow as he realized, more and more fully, the gravity of his position.

"What am I going to do with this—this fortune?" he gasped. "Great Cæsar's ghost—what *can* I do with it?"

He looked helplessly around the room.

"Well, there's one darn sure thing—I'm going to get it off my hands, and quick, too! I'm not going to carry this around with me till Monday morning, worried sick over what may happen to it, sitting up all night by it like a true friend to an invalid—"

He stopped, struck by a sudden, unpleasant thought.

"Monday morning!" he repeated. "What will happen Monday morning when Clarke finds out that this package was left with me, after he sees what's in it—good Heavens, what *won't* happen!"

He groaned aloud.

"I've got to get this off my hands some way, somehow," he muttered. "That much is certain. I'll put these bonds away safely somewhere around the office, close up, and go home.

"Monday morning can take care of itself," he added, turning away from the table, "and maybe by that time I'll be able to do the same for myself and my job."

He ran his eye speculatively over the room, seeking a suitable hiding-place for the treasure in his charge.

Ah, there was a small safe! He crossed the floor to it, and dropped quickly to his knees before the steel receptacle.

It was locked.

There was the larger, stronger safe in the cashier's office outside, he remembered. Maybe that was locked, too—it probably was. But he must find out.

But not a safe in the place was open. No desk offered the guarantee of a safe storage-place for the wealth. There was no crack nor crevice nor square foot of space in the entire office where Jack dared trust the bonds for thirty-six hours.

At the end of a half-hour's conscien-

tious canvass he returned dejectedly to Clarke's private room, where he stood in the center of the floor, amid the glare of the lights he had turned on.

"There's nothing else to do," he suddenly decided. "I've got to find Clarke. I can't keep this bundle of wealth with me; I can't put it safely away, hide it, nor trust it to anybody on the face of God's earth but the one man for whom it was intended."

He struck the palm of one hand with the fist of the other.

"That's the one way out!" he exclaimed aloud. "I don't know where the boss has gone, how to find him, nor which way to start looking him up. But before I go mad with the responsibility of taking charge of a million I'll find Clarke, if it takes a leg."

CHAPTER V.

JUST THE CLUE.

"But it's going to be no easy job to get on the chief's trail," Wilton told himself as he began to pace the floor. "I haven't the faintest idea where he's gone over Sunday—and I don't know what to do, or where to go, to find out."

He gnawed nervously at his lip.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed abruptly. "Why didn't I think of it before? For all I know, he may not have intended to leave the city at all; he may be at his rooms right now, within easy reach by telephone.

"I hope I'm not kidding myself that he must be in his apartment," Jack prayed, going swiftly out into the main office and sitting down before the switchboard. "But if he is there, I'll run right up to the hotel, turn the whole bundle over to him—

"Hallo!" he broke off. "Is this the St. Nicholas?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want to speak to Mr. Clarke—Mr. Judson Clarke—if he's there."

"Hold the wire a minute, please, sir."

Jack drummed out the chorus of a popular ditty upon the ledge of the switchboard; then—

"Hallo!" at last a voice came to him.

"Well?" he eagerly questioned.

"Sorry, sir, but Mr. Clarke isn't here."

Jack groaned.

"Can you find out for me where he has gone?" he inquired anxiously.

"Nobody knows, sir. He hasn't been seen here since this morning, and I believe he went out of town. At least, he took a bag away with him."

With a muttered imprecation, Jack returned the receiver to the hook.

"Gone out of town!" he snapped impatiently. "That's a fine lot of information to work with. Whereabouts out of town, I should like to know?"

Back in the private office once more, he again strode up and down the room, in a vain effort to decide on what to do.

"I'm up against it," he muttered ruefully. "There's no way on earth that I can find out where he's gone. I wish—"

He stopped. His wandering glance had fallen on the desk-calendar, resting on the blotter of Clarke's desk.

"I wonder," he began slowly, moving toward it; "I wonder if I could find a clue to his week-end destination from this?"

He bent over and looked down at the first sheet of the calendar.

"Praise be!" he exclaimed, with a start of glad surprise. "The chief's been careless—he's left the whole of last week's sheets on the pad!

"Now, let's see what good that does me. Maybe he's noted an engagement for to-day and to-morrow on the memorandum-slip of some other day. Hurrah!"

Jubilantly, Jack Wilton caught up the pad, and read again the line, scribbled across the page of "Friday, the 4th":

> Visit Dwight at Meadowmere, Sat. and Sun.

"*Now*, I know where I'm at!" Jack cried exultantly. "The boss is at Meadowmere, stopping with old Dwight. I've seen that gentleman dozens of times around the office—and, by gum, I'll go off after him barefoot!"

Swiftly, Wilton lifted the bonds and carefully retied the bundle. Then, with the package representing the immense fortune under his arm, he fairly ran from the private office.

Snapping out lights as he went, he reached his typewriter-desk in the main room, caught up his hat, threw one look around him to see all was in order, then stepped into the hall and locked the door.

"Seven o'clock," he muttered, looking at his watch as he turned toward the stairway, down which he would have to walk, since the elevators in the building were not running at this hour.

"I haven't got a time-table," he reflected, hurrying in the direction of the Subway; "but I guess there'll be a train or two leaving for Meadowmere by the time I get to the Grand Central. And if there isn't," he added grimly, "I'll walk. For Judson Clarke gets this million, and gets it quick, or I don't know myself."

Jack was not driven to the necessity of putting into effect his feat of pedestrianism, for a train was leaving for his objective point very shortly after his arrival at the terminal.

And, within a half hour of leaving the office, he was being comfortably hauled toward Meadowmere, sixty-odd miles up the Hudson, in a parlor-car.

"One thing I'm sure of," Jack told himself, "and that is I'm going to make a clean breast of this whole affair, once I get into the presence of my boss.

"There's no use lying myself into the thing any deeper; and, besides, in confidence with myself, I'm not ashamed to admit that this million I've got tucked away under my coat scares me, and scares me good and plenty.

"So, I'm going to tell the chief the whole story, from start to finish, when I see him. I'll be fired, I know. But that's a darn sight better than being suspected of something crooked I haven't done, if he finds out that any fairy tale I told him about how I came by this million dollars' worth of colored paper isn't worth the breath it took to utter it."

At nine-thirty the train deposited him on the dim-lit platform of Meadowmere.

Inquiring the way to the Dwight estate —one of a number in the ultra-fashionable colony of summer residents—Jack found that he had a mile-and-a-quarter walk before him.

It was a dreary journey, trudging along the deserted road in the pitch darkness, punctured ever and anon by the snorting, evil-odored passing of automobiles running at top speed, yet he kept manfully on.

Finally, arrived at Meadowmere, he found the ghostly quiet, shadowy surroundings and Stygian darkness of his tramp from the station not only duplicated, but intensified.

For the spacious, fenced-in grounds of the Dwight manor-house were as gloomy, deserted, and fearsome as a cemetery.

However, drawing in a deep breath of the balsam-laden air, Jack walked under the arch of the grille-work gate and hastened up the path that led to the house.

But the sound of his footsteps on the hard gravel smote unpleasantly upon his ear in the weird stillness. He took two swift paces to one side, and walked on the soft, soundless sod.

Then his heart bounded into his throat. He heard distinctly the crunch, crunch of footsteps upon the walk he had just deserted.

Somebody was following him!

Who was it? Some one, he decided, who knew what he had under his coat; who knew that in that package was a fortune.

Then, as suddenly as the sound of the footsteps had come to his ear, it ceased.

Did that mean that he was no longer followed? In breathless suspense, he halted in the shadow of a tall, heavily branched pine, waiting—for he knew not what.

Then, peering into the surrounding gloom, he caught a fleeting glimpse of a misty figure skulking past the trees over the grass, on the opposite side of the path, some fifty feet farther down toward the gate by which he had entered.

But, even as he gazed at it, the figure stopped abruptly.

Silently, cautiously, Jack stole forward a dozen paces, in the direction of the house—and stopped.

Looking over his shoulder, his blood ran cold as he saw his mysterious companion in the grounds flit onward a corresponding number of yards, and also halt.

Seized with sudden panic, Wilton slipped back among a denser clump of shrubs, doubled around them, gained the path once more, a hundred yards ahead, looked back down the gravel walk—and discovered no sign of his follower.

Turning, he broke into a dog-trot, which swiftly carried him to the house. He sped up the steps, and reached forth his hand to press the bell.

Then, before his fingers touched the button, the door opened.

A blaze of light struck him blindingly in the eyes. He staggered back a step, staring at the figure of the liveried man servant who had thrown open the portal in his face.

"Good evening," he stammered.

In unmoved, stony-faced silence the butler looked at him.

"Is Mr. Judson Clarke here?" Jack inquired breathlessly.

The package under his coat slipped an inch out of his grasp, and Wilton plunged his other hand inside the front of the garment to steady it.

To his surprise, at the sudden movement, the man before him leaped back into the vestibule.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the fellow gasped, and paused.

From the shrubbery at the foot of the steps sounded a sharp whistle — once, twice.

Turning his head toward the unexpected interruption, Jack peered out over the veranda into the darkness.

And the next instant he received the surprise of his life.

A heavy weight was hurled against his half-turned back and shoulders, two strong arms twined themselves around his own, a vigorous knee was forcefully planted in his spine, and a voice—the voice of the butler—called excitedly past his ear:

"I've got him, Mr. Stevens!"

The young man threw himself forward, in a desperate effort to break loose. All he accomplished, however, was to drop the bundle from under his coat to the floor of the porch.

"Let go of me, you—you—" he spluttered. "Are you crazy? What does this mean?"

"Hold fast there, Jordan!" called a second man, who came hurrying up the steps from the gloom of the shrubbery.

In his hand he held a little silver whistle. "Hold him there till I can slip the handcuffs on him!"

"Handcuffs!" gasped Wilton wildly. "Handcuffs! What is the meaning of this—this bughouse business, anyway? Take your hands off me, you big—"

"Steady, Jordan!" said the man with the whistle. "Hold him—so!"

He stepped back. The butler disentangled Jack from his fierce hold.

And the astonished young man faced them both, his hands bound tightly behind him by two bands of locked steel.

"Look here!" he choked. "I want to know by what right—"

The man called Stevens took a brisk step forward.

"Don't try to bluster it out, my friend," he said coldly. "You robbed the Whitcombe house, the De Peysters', Madderns', and Phillips's, and got away with it. You're the slickest *Raffles* that ever worked any millionaire's colony, I'll admit. But, when you came skulking around here to-night, you didn't know that the slickest detective that ever snapped the darbies on a second-story man was laying for you—and you're caught at last."

Another step and he was at Jack's side. He gripped his arm.

"I'll trouble you to come along with me, Mr. Mitchell, alias 'Smooth' Charlie Hodge, the 'gentleman burglar!'" he added.

For one breathless second Jack Wilton stared at the sleuth. Then he swallowed a lump in his throat with a painful gulp.

"Suffering cats!" he told himself; "for the second time in six hours—I'm somebody else!"

CHAPTER VI.

JAILED!

Impulsively, Jack turned to the butler.

"Is Mr. Judson Clarke here?" he demanded.

The servant glanced at the detective.

"What's the game, Jordan?" the latter asked sharply.

"I don't know, sir," replied the butler, with a faint grin. "That's what this—this fellow asked me first when I opened the door. I was just coming out on the veranda for a breath of air, the servants' quarters here, I must say, being stuffier than one ever finds in England or—"

"Who's Judson Clarke?" interrupted Mr. Stevens. "Know anybody of that name?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir!" answered the butler. "Mr. Clarke is a guest here for the week-end. A pleasant gentleman, Mr. Stevens, sir, he is; not above a kind word, here and there, to those unfortunately not his equals—"

"What do you want with Mr. Clarke?" demanded the detective of Jack. "Let's hear your cock-and-bull story."

"I want to see Judson Clarke," replied Wilton, with measured coldness, "because he can prove to you that I am not the man you accuse me of being. I demand that you call him out here, or take me in to him at once."

Stevens grinned.

"This is rich," he chuckled. "But you can't bamboozle me, Hodge—or 'Mr. Mitchell,' if you like that name better."

Jack gritted his teeth.

"No, I suppose you can't be bamboozled, *Sherlock Holmes*—or Mr. Stevens, if you prefer. All the same, you call Mr. Clarke out here, and I'll let you jail me, or hang me, if he doesn't tell you at once that I'm not a burglar, but one of his employees."

The detective cackled delightedly.

"You *will* have your joke!" he snickered.

"Stop!"

Jack advanced a step threateningly toward the man, who had released his arm to laugh.

"If you mention the word 'joke' in my hearing again," he hissed menacingly, "I'll give you something to arrest me for that will be worth while. And with my hands tied behind my back at that," he added with a glare.

Stevens stared. Then, turning to the butler:

"Go inside," he ordered, "and announce—'Mr. Mitchell, the burglar, to see Mr. Clarke.'

"Now, young fellow," he said sneeringly, wheeling on Wilton, "we'll soon see where this dodge of being acquainted with a guest of the house will land you."

"Beg pardon, sir!" said Jordan.

"Well?" The detective wheeled on him.

"Mr. Judson Clarke is not in the house at present, sir."

"What!" snapped Jack. "Where is he—where has he gone?"

The servant turned, looked Wilton over with superciliously lifted eyebrows, then:

"The gentleman has gone out in the motor," he explained to Stevens. "A party of them left two hours ago, and there's no telling when they will get back."

"Is Mr. Dwight at home?" inquired the other.

"No, sir; he went along."

"Well," he remarked, turning to Jack, "I thought he might like to look at the 'gentleman' who's been cracking open so many of his neighbors' houses lately. But he can come down to the jail in town tomorrow morning and see him in his proper setting—behind the bars. Come along, you!"

His hand fell once more on Wilton's arm.

"You—you are going to take me off to jail without giving me a chance to prove you're wrong?" Jack queried anxiously.

"That's a good guess, my friend," grimly agreed the plain-clothes man. "You're going to jail, and you're going there just as quick as I can lug you to it. So, move along now!"

Roughly he jerked him forward a staggering step or two. Wilton's foot struck against something on the veranda, and he looked down at—the bundle of bonds he had dropped in the moment of his capture.

Heavens! He must get that precious package at all hazards.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Stevens, sighting the object against which his prisoner had stumbled. "Dropped your kit of tools, hey? Well—gather up the jimmies; they'll make good evidence against you at the trial."

Jack backed a step away from the bundle at the hideous thought the detective's words flashed into his brain. He could not take the bonds with him to jail.

The sleuth had just said that his "tools" would make good evidence at the trial—and what would the real contents be when the package was opened but conclusive proof that he had robbed somebody!

Yet he could not leave the precious bundle behind him.

"Come, come!" snapped the officer. "Pick up your kit and come along with me."

Bending, Jack picked up the bonds. There was nothing for it—he must take them with him to jail. At the worst, he would not be more than temporarily affected by their detection on his person; Judson Clarke would free him instantly

from the false charge on which he would be detained, once he got word to his employer of his plight. And he could not leave the fortune there on the veranda.

"Look here," he said to the detective as the latter again jerked him forward, "I want to tell you before you go any further with this that you are making the biggest mistake of your—"

"All right, all right!" snapped Stevens, pushing him ahead more vigorously. "I've heard that kind of talk before from your kind. You just keep your mouth shut and come along with me—or I know a way to make you."

In tight-lipped silence, Jack allowed himself to be led off without more remonstrance.

Half-way back to the town, along the dark, deserted road, he broke his moody silence, however, to question the detective more closely as to the reason for his arrest.

"What makes you so certain I'm the man you're after," he asked, "when you have no further evidence than that I was found coming through the grounds of the house back there?"

"Come off, Hodge!" the sleuth scoffed. "Drop the bluff and talk sense—you're caught, and you may as well admit it."

"But what makes you so sure you've got the right man?" Jack persisted grimly.

"Oh, I'd know you anywhere, young feller!"

"Do I look like the burglar you're after?"

"That's a good one!" laughed the detective. "You know, as well as I do, that there's nobody ever seen your face when you were on a job. You've been too clever before now."

"Then, how do you identify me as the burglar?"

"Why, look here, Charley," impatiently explained the other; "you can't hold out from the evidence against you—you might as well drop your hot air and stop kidding. I knew that you were going to crack Dwight's house to-night. I was tipped off, see? And I caught you, good as red-handed, when you came skulking through the bushes up there in the yard. The whole thing's as plain as the nose on your face—you can't get away with that 'mistaken-identity' gag."

Jack bit his lip.

"I pity you," he muttered hotly, "when you find out what a mess you've made of this thing through your fat-headed—"

"Save your pity," snapped Stevens gruffly. "Here's the jail—mind your step!"

He pushed Wilton before him up the narrow, short flight of stairs of a squat, stone building they had almost run into in the dark.

"Here's a prisoner for you, Mr. Justice," announced the detective proudly. "Let me introduce 'Mr. Mitchell'—"

A little old man, bespectacled and chin-whiskered, popped up out of his seat behind the high desk across the room, and interrupted in a cackling treble:

"You ain't caught that *Raffles* feller!"

He stared at Jack, his head perkily tilted to one side, his little raisin-like eyes sparkling over the rims of his bone spectacles. "We-el, I'll be teetotally jiggered!" As though he had been contradicted, he threw his body violently forward and snapped again: "I said, I'll be teetotally jiggered!"

"Yep," laconically agreed Stevens. "Here he is. I told you, Mr. Justice, I'd bring him in."

Wilton advanced toward the desk.

"Just a minute, please," he said.

"Thet will do!" shouted the justice of the peace. "I don't want to hear a word out o' yew—not a word! Seth!" he cried. "Oh, Seth—come here!"

Another and still older "yap," in a constable's uniform of faded blue and tarnished brass buttons, shambled into the room, putting on his helmet—the badge of official business.

"They've caught that burglar who's been robbin' all the rich folks up to the summer colony," the man behind the desk informed his assistant.

"Well, now, *would* ye believe it?" wonderingly ejaculated the constable. "I swow, I never—never in all my life—"

"I want to say a word here—" again broke in Jack.

"Constabule!"

The justice wildly addressed his chief officer.

"Take him to a cell—quick!" he shouted excitedly. "Get him locked up, safe and sound. Hurry!"

The old man in the helmet advanced hobblingly to Jack. He laid one withered claw upon his arm.

"Come this way," he ordered. Then, as an afterthought: "In the name of the law!" he added.

With a short laugh, which escaped him involuntarily, Jack Wilton allowed himself to be led away.

Down a short flight of granite steps his jailer guided him to a tier of cells. The door of one he threw open laboriously, and shoved Jack hastily within.

As the door clashed shut again, the bolt sliding back into its socket with an ominous clank, Wilton dropped down wearily upon the cot beside him, sighing:

"Jailed!"

Scarcely had the word escaped his lips before he was again upon his feet. His ear had caught a disturbance in the court-room beyond.

"Here's a bunch of 'joy-riders' fer ye, yer honor!" a voice announced.

And, following on the last words, came the sound of an unmistakable tone—one that brought a thrill to the prisoner who heard it.

"This is an outrage!" the speaker stormed. "We have been held up on the public highway—and I, for one, don't purpose to stand for any such treatment—"

The voice was that of Judson Clarke.

CHAPTER VII.

BRIBERY AND DISMAY.

WITH the voice of his employer—the man he had been seeking under such troublous circumstances—ringing in his surprised ears, Jack stepped forward to the bars of his cell.

Peering anxiously out into the darkness, he could see nothing but the gray shadow of the corridor's opposite wall.

Yet plainly, clearly, he heard the voice—the unmistakable, excited tone of his chief—arguing with his jailers.

"I won't submit to this outrage!" Clarke was shouting. "And I won't permit the ladies with me to be 'held up' in this unpardonable fashion. I demand that you let me go—at once—without further annoyance to myself or friends. The charge you bring against me is ridiculous—absurd—asinine! And, I tell you, I won't submit to it!"

Jack withdrew a step into his cell.

"It's the boss, all right," he told himself. "I might not be able to recognize his voice without seeing him if he wasn't jawing somebody. But I've heard him talk in that tone too often not to remember it when I hear it. It's about the *only* way, as a matter of fact, a good-for-nothing dub like me was ever spoken to by him!"

For a moment or two Wilton listened eagerly to the row in the court-room.

"If I could only reach him," he reflected dismally. "Isn't it just my luck, though—to be put out of sight and reach in a cell not two minutes before the man I want to see is brought into court.

"Oh, it's maddening!" he continued, gripping the bars of the door. "Think of it—there's Clarke, not ten yards away from me, and here am I, within speaking distance of the man I'm carrying around a million for—and we can't get together!"

"It's an outrage!" Clarke was still thundering in the court-room. "And I won't submit to it, I repeat! I demand that you instantly let us all go!"

Jack Wilton struck his arms against the bars with a groan.

"He mustn't get away—I've got to see him! If they let him out of this jail before I have a chance to turn over to him this cursed bundle—before he identifies me, and get me out of the hole I'm in—Oh, he simply *can't* get away from me now, when he's so near!"

"I'll pay no fine to you, sir!" Judson Clarke bellowed at somebody outside. "We were not exceeding the speed limit—you're quite wrong; you have been grossly, maliciously misinformed!"

"Oh, shut up for a minute, will you?" muttered Jack, as he shook and rattled at the door of his cell. "How can I attract anybody's attention to me if you keep up that uproar—"

"This is robbery!" went on the angry voice of his unseen employer. "I absolutely refuse to pay one single cent of blood-money to—"

"Help! Murder! Fire!" Wilton lifted up his voice and yelled at the top of his lungs. "Fire! Help! I'll call for everything but 'police' until I make

somebody come to me!" he muttered through his clenched teeth.

Absolute silence followed his violent outburst.

"It's that burglar feller," he heard the voice of the aged justice remark. "He's a desprite character, he is; maybe he's trying to escape."

Jack heard a feminine scream or two, the rustle of skirts, and a scuffle of light shoes in the other room.

"What if he *should* escape!" cried a sweet soprano voice. "Oh, we must get out of here, Mr. Clarke—"

"Help!" shouted Wilton. "Oh, they mustn't get away before I see the boss!" he groaned. "Help! Help!"

Again silence. Then the voice of the justice, uttering words forever blessed in Jack's ears, came to him.

"Go out and see what's the matter with him, Seth. Tell him to be quiet—he's annoyin' the ladies!"

There was the rattle of a door being opened at the end of the corridor. A blaze of light burst in, radiating from the lamp-lit court-room.

Then the ancient jailer came hobbling forward to the barred door to which Jack Wilton clung.

"What's the matter with yew?" he asked sharply. "What are yew making all this noise fer—hey?"

"Look here, Mr. Constable," Jack whispered excitedly. "You've simply got to let me out of here—quick! Understand?"

The old man peered at him curiously.

"Yew *air* the craziest loonatic that ever I see!" he commented. "Let yew out? Why, what kind o' liberties do yew think we folks here in this jail 'lows our prisoners—hey? P'raps yew're accustomed to loose rule in the other prisons yew've been in, but yew can't expect that here; no, sir! Let yew out? Well, I'll be—"

"Yes, I said let me out!" broke in Jack impatiently. "I don't expect that you'll release me for good. But I want to see that man outside who's been arrested for joy-riding. I've *got* to see him, do you understand?—before he gets away!"

"Now, will yew tell me," requested his keeper in the lowered tone of one inviting a confidence—"will yew tell me what yew want to see that gentleman fer—hey?"

Jack bit his lip.

"Oh, it doesn't matter to you what I want to see him for; but I *want* to see him—I've got to see him, I tell you—before he leaves this building. He can identify me. Take me to him—I'll promise to come right back here to this cell with you, and let you tuck me in, safe and sound, if you'll only take me out to the door of the court-room—"

The aged constable shook his head.

"You're crazy!" he said slowly, preparing to depart. "Crazy as a March hare!"

The perspiration stood out thickly upon Wilton's brow as he grasped the bars before him in his nervous grip. Out of his sight, the argument was noisily proceeding in the court-room — he might have called out to Clarke from his cell, if his boss had not been making so much noise.

"Look here! Did you ever see one of these before?"

Through the bars, Jack held out to the constable a five-dollar bill, stripped from the lean roll of the week's salary he carried in his pocket.

"I'll give you this," he added, "if you'll take me by the arm and lead me to the door of the next room."

A gleam of pleasure lit the watery eyes of the old man.

"This is bribery!" he murmured, shuffling a step nearer the cell.

Jack bit his lip once more, and again plunged his hand into his pocket—

"*This* is ten dollars," he retorted. "Where's the key to this—this trap? Open up—quick!"

"Well," hesitated the constable, "I don't know about doing this—"

"What harm is there in just taking me to the door of that room?" pleaded Wilton wildly. Outside, the argumentative voices of Clarke and the justice rose and fell. "Oh, Heavens!—here; there's fifteen dollars—will you let me out now?"

"Make it twenty!" whispered the jailer, taking out the key. "I—I don't want to break the law for less. Come on—you must hev the money; a feller like yew, that's been robbin' them rich folks right and left for weeks—"

Jack gnashed his teeth.

"This is what Clarke gets for paying me so miserly a salary as eighteen dollars a week," he thought bitterly. "For the lack of a dollar or two, he himself may lose a million!"

He held out through the bars five bills, on which lay a small handful of silver pieces.

"There's seventeen dollars and twenty-eight cents," he explained desperately. "It's every solitary penny I've got in my clothes—and I'll give it all to you if you'll take me out of this cell and lead me to the door of the court-room. If you don't—well, you're seventeen twenty-eight out, that's all!"

The constable took the money.

"It's cheap," he quavered, fumbling the key in the lock—"but I'll do it just this once."

"I'll never ask you again, honestly!" Jack promised with bitter sarcasm, picking up the package of bonds from the cot behind him and stepping out into the corridor. "Here—if you're afraid I'll escape, take hold of my arm. Now, come on!"

With the jailer hobbling beside him, he moved swiftly up the corridor to the half-open door of the court-room.

He pushed open the portal—and stopped with a gasp.

The room was deserted, save for the justice seated behind his desk.

"Where's Clarke!" Jack shouted in an agonized tone.

"De-lil-ah Josephine!" cackled the justice amazedly, wheeling to stare at Wilton in the doorway.

"Where's the man you just arrested for speeding?" demanded Jack frantically, bounding into the room. "Has he gone—"

His question was not answered by the justice. An easily recognizable, ominous sound from the outside of the jail replied to his feverish query instead.

The sound was the chug-chugging of a motor-engine.

With a rush, Jack Wilton sped across the wide chamber to the street door. He flung it open and stared out into the night.

And a cry of baffled rage escaped his lips.

Judson Clarke, in an automobile, with three stylishly dressed ladies aboard, was being whirled rapidly away before his eyes.

He was too late!

CHAPTER VIII.

A PURSUIT AND A CAPTURE.

"STUNG!"

Jack stood on the top step of the jail and hurled that one, heartfelt word after the red tail-lights of the rapidly vanishing car.

And the next moment he was caught in the arms of the two old men.

"Hold him, Seth!" screamed the justice of the peace.

"Consarn his buttons!" piped the constable angrily. "Yew bet I'll hold him! He gave me seventeen dollars and twenty-eight cents to be took out of his cell for a minute, and he promised he wouldn't try to escape."

"He's a desprite character—" began the justice.

"Oh—stop!" ejaculated Jack.

Peering out into the darkness, his anxious eyes had caught sight of something that held his interest. With a not too vigorous shove, he pushed the two relics of political splendor from him. "You two old women stop squabbling a minute, and let me go!"

Lightly he ran down the steps of the jail toward the dark bulk which had caught his gaze, standing at the curb of the sidewalk.

And, arrived at the object, he gave a low whistle as he recognized its shape. It was an automobile!

"And I don't know how to run one of the darn things!" Jack muttered disgustedly. "Yet it's the only way I can follow Clarke—and I'm bound to go after him!"

He shifted the bundle of bonds to his other hand.

"What shall I do?" he asked himself. "How can I get anybody to run the thing for me?"

"Hold on, thar!" panted the constable, running down the steps, followed by the frantic figure of the justice, screaming, "Stop! In the name of the law!" at the top of his lungs.

With great impatience, Jack jumped violently toward the waiting machine

(whose, he never found out) as the sound of hurrying footsteps came from around the opposite side of the building.

"What's up here?" called the voice of Stevens, the detective.

The next moment he came running into dim view.

"Here goes!" murmured Wilton desperately.

Hurling the package into the rear seat of the car, he tore open the side door and hastily followed it.

"I'm in the wrong end of the thing," he muttered. "Up in front—over the seat—into the driver's place—so!"

"What's the matter, you fellows?" asked the detective, rushing up to the justice and Seth.

"Quick!" screamed the constable. "That Mitchell feller—the society burgular—he's broken jail! He's just got in that auto there—see him?"

"Stop!" shouted the sleuth, breaking away from the steps. "Stop—I'll fire on you, Hodge, if you make a move to run off in that car!"

Jack groped out blindly toward the levers at his side. By dumb luck, he gripped the right one—and yanked open the throttle. The car plunged forward with a whining roar.

"Shoot, then!" Wilton yelled wildly, nearly torn from his seat by the jolt of his abrupt start. "If I stay in range."

The next instant there was a loud report—followed, in swift succession, by five more.

"Missed me clean!" Jack shouted triumphantly in the teeth of the wind that whistled past him. "Now," he grated between his locked teeth, "catch me if you can!"

The open road stretched out before him, a dull-gray ribbon between the inky-black banks at either side. He was out of sight and hearing of the jail in less than a minute.

"Two things to remember," he told himself, head bowed over the steering-wheel. "Stay on the road, and catch up with Clarke!"

A half-mile was eaten up—three-quarters—a full mile. And still he caught no sight of the longed-for red tail-lights on the car he was following.

"If I miss him now!" he groaned. "What will I do—what *can* I do?"

He bent still lower over the wheel.

"Come on, you cup-winner!" he pleaded to the car. "Hit her up; hit her up! I don't know what to do to make you go faster—but please, please get a wiggle on and let me catch the car ahead!"

With nerve-taking suddenness, Jack swerved to the right, down a turn in the road, narrowly escaping the wrecking of his hopes and the stolen machine against the high bank.

And then, looking ahead with watering eyes, he half rose in his seat with a joyous shout.

"Hurrah! There they are—I'm on the trail, all right; and, by jingo, I'll catch 'em, too!"

A quarter-mile before him shone the red lights he was pursuing.

"They must have been scared out of putting on speed by their run-in just now," he decided.

Nearer and nearer drew the tail-lights; higher and higher soared Jack Wilton's spirits.

"Great Scott!" he cried suddenly. "They're not running at all—they've stopped! Must have broken down—yes, sir; they've had a puncture, or something!"

He saw the figures of one or two long-robed people standing in the road beside the dark bulk of the motionless car—saw them more clearly each second as he bore down upon the party.

And then the young man gave a gasp of despair as he realized his painful position—

He could not stop his own car!

"Whoa!" he screamed at the inert mass of swift-racing metal beneath him. "Oh, darn the luck—how do you make one of these things stop?—what string do you pull?—what—"

He was only fifty yards away from the car ahead of him now—only twenty-five—fifteen!

Desperately he pulled at the lever he had grasped to start the machine at first.

And the car gave a snort, reared up on its hind wheels—and dashed forward at double speed!

The next second, and he was a hundred feet down the road, past the motionless motor beside which stood his employer, and around which he had barely swerved.

"MrclearkeIwanttoseeyou!" he shouted as he flew by his chief—the words jumbled thus unintelligibly in the wind of his flight.

Looking over his shoulder the next instant, he discovered himself almost out of sight of the group in the road.

"That's the last straw!" Jack gasped brokenly. "I'll give up. Fate's against me; I'm not to turn over this million dollars to the boss. and I may as well make up my mind to it.

"And if I don't want to add a broken neck to my list of hard-luck happenings," he finished grimly, "I had better get busy with this contraption and stop it quick!"

But the automobile refused to stop. It plunged ahead along the fortunately straight road at more than railroad speed, jolting over ruts and stones, bounding from bank to bank like an intoxicated race-horse — seemingly increasing speed with each half-mile it covered.

Doing two things at once—endeavoring to steer a safe course, and fumbling desperately for the means of bringing the car to a halt—Jack was fast becoming bewildered, his strength exhausted.

"This is fierce!" he muttered. "How I'm going to get out—"

The words were jerked from his mouth by a sudden, unexpected jolt.

With a forceful jar—not unlike that experienced by a train passenger in a wreck—the racing automobile was brought to an abrupt stop which tore the steering-wheel from Wilton's hands.

"What the deuce—" he cried stammeringly.

"All right, Bill!" shouted a voice from somewhere near him in the darkness. "He's caught."

"Get out o' that car, mister!" ordered another gruff voice from Jack's other side. "Quick—git out!"

A hand was laid roughly upon his shoulder.

"What—what is this?" stuttered the young man. "A hold-up?"

One of the two men now revealed before him laughed shortly.

"That's what all you fellers call it," he answered slowly.

Turning back the front of his coat, he shoved a gleaming bit of metal into Jack's face.

"You're under arrest—fer speedin' on the public highways!" he added.

Wilton collapsed in his seat.

"Fate," he murmured—"Fate, you're getting all tired out with kicking me around. aren't you? You must be—or I wouldn't be arrested twice in succession."

CHAPTER IX.

TO THINK OF IT!

"THE trap worked pretty good, first time out, didn't it, Bill?" one of his two new jailers remarked jovially to the other.

"Shore did!" responded his companion. "She absorbed the shock, stopped the auto, and didn't kill nobody—a pretty decent showin'!"

"Do you mind," inquired Wilton, "telling me how you managed to stop the —the thing without more damage?"

"It's a secret, mister," grinned the man called "Bill." He took Jack's arm and escorted him ungently from his seat to a place beside him on the road. "If I told you how the trick was done, you might be able to dodge the next trap of the kind you went up against when you're racin' your toy."

"Come on, the jail's right around the next turn in the road," directed his second captor, fastening himself upon Wilton's other arm. "We'll leave your car here where you can git it after you pay your fine."

"Fine?" repeated Jack, grabbing up the bundle of bonds and allowing himself to be led off in the direction of the second prison he had personally inspected that evening. "After I pay *what* fine?"

"I don't know how much the justice'll tax ye," retorted Bill coolly. "But, whatever it is, you'll have to foot the bill—or sleep till mornin' in a cell."

Dazedly, Jack stumbled up the steps of the small building into which he was conducted by the two officers.

"Prisoner for ye, yer honor!" announced one of them to the official behind the desk.

That gentleman listlessly folded up the newspaper he had been reading, and looked down at Jack, standing between his two captors.

"What's the charge?" the justice said.

"Exceedin' the speed limit, sir."

"Name?" The man behind the desk snapped the question at the prisoner.

"Wilton — John Wilton," answered Jack indifferently.

He was crushed — absolutely — by the series of mishaps that had befallen him. Here he was, arrested, and facing the prospect of spending a night — perhaps longer—in a cold, stony cell.

"Fifty dollars!" the voice of the justice broke in upon his reflections.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Jack surprisedly.

"Pony up!" whispered one of the two men holding him. "Come on — you're fined fifty."

"I—I haven't got it," stammered the young man tremblingly.

Indeed, he was penniless—without a cent in his pocket—since he had given up the last dollar he had for the chance of a word with his boss in the Meadowmere jail.

"Got a bondsman?" asked the man behind the desk.

"What?" questioned Wilton stupidly.

"You've got to give bond, young feller," Bill, the second officer, informed him in a whispered aside. "If you can't pay yer fine, ye have to go to a cell—unless you can give bond to reappear in court to-morrow morning."

Jack started violently.

Here was an idea—why not give the package of bonds to the justice?

If he did that, he would go free—could avoid a night in prison. And, besides that—what, too, was more important—he could get rid of the responsibility of the treasure he held until he could see Judson Clarke, and tell the latter the whole story of the affair.

What softer spot could he find for the bonds than this jail? Here the package would be kept under lock and key, behind brick walls and steel bars, until he could bring his employer to claim it.

"There's bond for you!" Jack exclaimed, suddenly drawing himself up haughtily. "Take this package—open it up—and if you are satisfied with what you find in there being valuable enough to bring me back in the morning—let me go."

He handed the bundle over to the justice, and then went on:

"I was hurrying this into the city—which is why I was perhaps exceeding the speed limit, as these men say—and I will now leave the entire package with you as a guarantee of my reappearance, and go on without them."

The justice of the peace was counting the bonds, his eyes fairly out upon his cheeks with amazement.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Wilton!" he gasped. "This will—will be quite satisfactory, sir—entirely so. And we will see you in the morning. Say at half past eleven—if that's not too early," he added solicitously, escorting his prisoner to the open door quite graciously.

"At half past eleven," agreed Jack.

The next minute he was walking off down the road.

"It's me for Meadowmere," he told himself determinedly. "There'll be no sleep, no anything, for me to-night till I get to Clarke."

Grimly he began his three-mile march back to the suburb from which he had just escaped.

"I've got to take a chance on not being caught by those musical-comedy policemen who had me in a cell," he reflected, discovering an hour later that he was on the same road he had traveled two hours before.

Stealthily he entered the grounds of the Dwight place.

"My goose will be cooked if Stevens, the original *Hawkshaw*, is still doing duty," he muttered. "Well, here's the house—and how do I get in, with that English butler on the job at the door?"

His question was immediately answered—in a most satisfactory fashion. Judson Clarke, alone, without a hat, came out upon the veranda, smoking a cigar.

Crouching in the shadow of the shrubbery bordering the steps, Jack called hoarsely to his employer:

"Mr. Clarke!"

The other started and looked down at the dark patch beside a bush which was his overworked employee.

"Did somebody call me?" he asked.

"Sh-h!" cautioned Jack. "Can you come down here for a minute, sir? It's I—Wilton, your stenographer!"

"Hallo!" cried Clarke in amazement, acting on the suggestion. "Anything wrong at the office, Wilton?"

"No, sir—nothing is wrong there that I know of."

"Well?" demanded the other sharply. "What do you want to see me for—why are you here? Speak up!"

Thus invited, Jack began a recital of his adventures since his meeting with the irascible old stranger who had mistaken him for his chief—sparing himself not at all in the narrative, omitting no detail.

"And the bonds, sir," he finished, "are in jail in the next town. I'll get them out to-morrow morning at eleven-thirty."

Clarke laughed loud and long.

"Wilton," he said, "it would be capital punishment for your foolish joke at the start of this affair to make you serve out a sentence at that jail for speeding. But you've been through enough—I won't insist upon your doing that.

"So," he added slowly, "we'll forfeit the bonds by your non-appearance."

Jack Wilton stared at the man.

"What!" he gasped. "Do I understand you to say, sir, that you will forfeit a million dollars rather than see me go to jail?"

"You do not," his chief retorted smilingly. "I said that we would forfeit the bonds—which, I may as well tell you, my boy, aren't worth the paper they're printed on!

"The old man who mistook you for me is a crank—a man who lost a fortune in Wall Street and his reason at the same time—and the bonds he left with you, labeled by him to be worth a million as negotiable securities, are bonds of a railroad out of business for twenty years."

Jack Wilton rubbed his wrinkled brow.

"So I've had all my trouble for nothing!" he gasped. "And I've been worrying myself sick for nothing — over a stack of certificates that couldn't be redeemed anywhere for a box of cigarettes."

Judson Clarke laid his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder.

"You haven't exactly worked in vain, Wilton," he said. "You've proved to me by this night's doings of yours that you are a pretty valuable employee—you've gone through fire and water, however mistakenly, in my service.

"Now, there's a position of secretary to the general manager of our Chicago office that's been puzzling me a long while to find the right man for—er—at a salary to start of two thousand dollars—"

"Mr. Clarke!" ejaculated Wilton. "For the love of Heaven—don't keep me in suspense. Do you mean that I've proved myself fit—"

His employer shook his hand.

"Not yet," he said. "But I'll give you a chance to begin proving to me—that you're worth two thousand."

THE END.

INSIDE INFORMATION.

BY C. LANGTON CLARKE.

Incidentally Introducing a Street-Railway Ogre and Telling what the New Conductor Did to Him.

IT was the slack hour in the car-barns of the Capua street-railway. The extras for the evening rush stood ready on the sidings, and a dozen or so of motormen and conductors lounged moodily with their backs against the brick wall, sullenly awaiting their time to be called to duty.

They were a dull, dispirited-looking lot. There was little conversation, occasionally an oath or a low-voiced curse bestowed on the company. Most of them were chewing tobacco, and spitting across the sidewalk into the gutter.

Standing on the curb on the opposite side of the street, a young man stood watching them. He was a clean-built, athletic-looking young fellow, well above the middle height, with a frank, open countenance, a clear blue eye, and a determined set of mouth and jaw. He was dressed in a shabby but well-brushed suit of tweed, and a brakeman's cap sat jauntily on one side of his curly head.

Presently, as he watched, a big man strode heavily out through the wide doors, hurled a volley of profane abuse at the waiting line, and vanished again. The men humped themselves clumsily away from the wall and slouched into the barns, whence, a few minutes later, a string of cars rattled and clanked over the switches and streamed away to various sections of the system.

Of the vanished group only one remained, a tall, thin, anemic-looking fellow in the uniform of a conductor, with a weak, mobile mouth and straggly wisps of flaxen hair and whisker. With his hands deep in his trousers-pocket and his shoulders against the wall, he stood staring in a hopeless fashion at his square-toed boots, occasionally pursing up his lips to whistle a few bars of a cheerless little tune.

The young man crossed the street with a brisk step and addressed him.

"Say, mate," he began breezily, "excuse me, but can you tell me what chance a fellow has to get a job here?"

The other raised a pair of watery-blue eyes, and regarded his questioner drearily for a full minute. Then he broke into a thin, cackling laugh.

"Oh, yes," he said, "you've come to the right place for a nice, easy job—big pay and next to nothing to do, and a nice, civil-spoken gentleman to tell you how to do it."

"Come," rejoined the young man sharply, "I don't want any of your cheap wit. I asked you a civil question, and I want a civil answer."

The other pursed up his lips again as if to whistle, and then, thinking better of it, replied:

"Young man, can you dig?"

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded the other impatiently.

"Because," went on the conductor, "if I had your years and strength, I would sooner dig sewers from morning till night on a corporation gang than work for this rotten, blood-sucking, slave-driving company. Some day," and he cast a glance of mingled hatred and apprehension at the yawning portals to his right, "there'll be blood spilled in that shop. Either I or one of the other fellows is bound to do it."

"And, why the mischief," inquired the young man easily, falling into a lounging attitude beside his companion, "don't you quit it if you don't like it?"

"Are you married?" queried the other.

"No," with a laugh. "Not yet."

"When you've got an invalid wife and a family of six children to support, you won't be so ready to ask, 'why don't you throw up your job?'"

"What's the matter with the job, anyway?" persisted the young man.

"It's hell," replied the conductor. "Simply hell. That's what it is. When the old man, President Vandevort—Alberic C. Vandevort, you must have heard of him—was alive, matters wasn't so bad. He ran things pretty much himself, and the men had a show for fair play; but since he died, six months ago, and that—that vampire"—he shook his fist stealthily in the direction of the barn-doors—"got the strings into his own hands, it's been hell and worse."

"And who is this vampire?" asked the young man. "Is he president?"

"President?" The conductor spit contemptuously on the sidewalk. "Him president? No, but he might as well be."

The young man drew a couple of cigars from his vest-pocket and handed one to his companion.

"Tell me all about it," he urged. "I like to know how the land lies before I apply for a job. In the first place, what's your name?"

"Harris," replied the conductor, as he slowly bit off the end of the cigar. "Albert Harris. What's yours?"

"Jackson — William Jackson. You can call me Bill. Twenty-five years old, and seen better days. Now, that's enough about me. Spin your own yarn."

"Well, it's this way," said the conductor slowly, between puffs. "Six months ago old man Vandevort, who owns pretty near all the stock in the road, croaked. His son, young Alberic, who was away traveling, and hasn't come back yet, became president; but what's the good of a president who ain't on the job? Mr. McIntyre is vice-president and general superintendent; but he's an old man and a weak one, and he's just so much putty in the hands of the fellow who calls himself assistant superintendent, and runs the whole shooting-match—James Grim-

shaw, may the devil's curse blight him—the biggest bully, the biggest liar, and the biggest thief in these here United States."

"I suppose," ventured Jackson, "that the man who came out just now and cursed was this Mr. Grimshaw?"

"That's him," replied Harris curtly. "He couldn't wish you a Merry Christmas without an oath tacked on to it."

"Why don't some of you fellows give him a good hammering and knock some manners into him?" inquired Jackson, critically examining a hard, white fist.

"Hammering!" replied the other. "You'd ought to have seen one or two as tried it. He beat 'em up something awful, and then he had 'em up in court and fined. He stands in with the gang that's running this city. No, sir."

He shrugged his lean shoulders and settled himself at a more comfortable angle against the wall.

"Why aren't you working?" demanded Jackson abruptly.

"I'm laid off," replied the other with a mirthless laugh. "Laid off my regular run for three days because some woman said I sassed her. Me sass anybody? Grimshaw says he'll teach us civility, if he has to take a pick-handle to do it. He's a nice teacher of civility, he is. I'm hanging around now on the chance of an hour or two on relief."

"Well," said Jackson briskly, "much obliged for the information. I suppose Grimshaw is the man to apply to?"

"You don't mean to say," rejoined Harris, "that you're going to take a job here after what I've told you? Well—don't say I didn't warn you. You'll find Grimshaw in his cubby-hole of an office to the right just after you get inside the gate."

At the door of a small room, partitioned off in an angle of the barn, Jackson knocked with a firm hand, and a hoarse voice within roared out an order to enter.

In a battered old chair, beside a battered old desk, littered with papers, timetables and fare-boxes, sat a man of appearance so repulsive that his visitor experienced a sudden shock of aversion.

He was a very big man, weighing two hundred at a low estimate. His scanty hair, his bushy eyebrows, and two little dabs of whisker were of a pale, lusterless red. His red, bloated face and bulgy neck were eloquent of animal indulgence; determination sat in every line of the thick but closely compressed lips and massive jaw; while arrogance, cruelty, and love of oppression gleamed in the little pale-blue, sunken eyes.

"Well," said the man in the chair to the man standing with his hand on the door-knob, "what in blazes do you want?"

"I want a job with this company," replied Jackson crisply.

"And what kind of a job," rejoined Grimshaw bitingly, "do you suppose this company can find for a white-handed tailor like you? Sewing buttons on the car-cushions?"

Jackson flushed.

"I guess I can hold down a job as well as the next man," he said.

"Suppose," continued Grimshaw with his bulldog chin on his chest and his keen little eyes scanning the other's countenance—"suppose you was conductor of one of my cars, and a tough was to get on and start a rough-house—what would you do?"

"Throw him off," replied Jackson coolly.

"You would, eh?" said the other. "Bring that here."

He pointed to a section of girder-rail weighing some hundred pounds, which did duty as a door-prop. Jackson stooped, raised it easily with one hand, crossed the room in a couple of strides, and laid it by the table.

"Humph!" muttered Grimshaw. "Name?"

"William Jackson; address, at present, 151 Cato Street."

"Any trade?"

"None," answered Jackson; "but I'm a bit of a carpenter."

"Read, write, and cipher?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. William Jackson," said the other, "I'm going to give you a trial. But, you mind what I'm saying now. I'm a Tartar—that's what I am. When I say 'jump,' you jump, or there's trouble. No back talk. No man back-talks to me twice, as you'll learn if you try it. Hours, ten a day; pay, thirteen cents an hour. Do you want the job?"

"It's good enough for me," was the reply.

"I reckon it's a blanked sight too good for you," rejoined Grimshaw coarsely, "but I'll take a chance on you. You can't be much worse than some of the slab-sided fat-heads I've got now. Report here at six to-morrow morning, and now get to Hades out of this!"

With a parting glare at his new employee, the autocrat swung around to his desk; and Jackson, his blood tingling to the tips of his fingers, left the office without another word.

Outside, he found Harris still lounging despondently against the wall.

"Well?" queried the latter gloomily. "Did he throw plenty of mud at you?"

"Rough words break no bones," replied Jackson cheerfully. "He gave me a job. That's what I was after. I report here to-morrow at six. It looks to me"—and he shaded his eyes with his hand—"as if there was a lunch-room at the corner of that street. What do you say to taking a bite with me?"

Harris made a faint show of resistance as Jackson slipped his arm within his, but suffered himself to be led away.

In the modest eating-house Jackson learned some more of the interior economy of the street-railway company.

He heard instances of physical and verbal brutality by his new employer which made his blood run hot. He learned that the men were overworked and underpaid; that an attempt to form a union had been nipped in the bud by prompt dismissal of several of the leaders, and the prosecution of one or two on trumped-up charges; that Grimshaw had instituted a system of fines which was rigorously enforced without appeal, and which considerably reduced the size of the pay-roll.

He also learned that the assistant superintendent had within the last month established the rule that all fare-boxes must be turned into him at the barns, instead of at the central office up-town, whither he himself conveyed them twice a day.

"And it's my belief," added Harris, "that he milks 'em. And I'll tell you why. A week ago a young fellow dropped a dime into my fare-box. Then he raised a holler that it was a pocket piece, and wanted me to give it him back. I looked at it through the glass on the side of the box, and there was a monogram A L sprawled on it. I told him he couldn't get it back unless he went to the office, and he quit kicking.

"Well, that evening I was in here, when one of our fellows comes in and chucks a dime down on the counter. 'Gimme a couple o' cigars,' he says. I spotted the coin at once as the one the young chap had dropped into my fare-box.

"'Where'd ye get this?' says the cigar man. 'That's one of old Grimshaw's love-tokens,' says the fellow with a grin. 'He give it me just now to buy him a couple of cigars.' 'Give it to me,' I says; 'that's a lucky piece,' and I hands him a dime for it. I've got it stowed away at home. Some day, maybe I'll find a use for it."

"What good is it going to do you?" queried Jackson, eying the other keenly. "You can't prove anything. You don't even know the owner's name."

"Don't I?" rejoined Harris. "That's where you make a mistake. The young fellow was on my car next night, and I spoke to him about it, and said I'd try to get it back for him. He give me a card, and wrote the date on it. I got the lunch-room man to write the date down, too. Oh, I'm a detective, I am. I'll get him yet."

Jackson rose and stretched himself.

"Well," he said, "if the man's a thief I don't see as it's any business of ours, and if you'll take my advice you'll keep it to yourself. So-long."

He paid the check, strode out of the place, and bent his steps up-town. Opposite the portals of the leading hotel, he paused a moment and looked in.

In the well-lit rotunda well-dressed men and women were moving about. He set his foot on the lower step, and then, with a laugh, shrugged his shoulders, thrust his hands into his pockets, and continued on his way.

At the next corner he bought an evening paper, and carefully scanned the advertisements. He was not long in finding what he wanted, and, having made a note in a pocketbook, he flung the paper aside.

Half-way down Main Street, he paused

before a small office with a large, gilt-lettered sign, and, after a hasty glance to right and left, entered. Half an hour later he emerged and, with head bent in thought, struck off into a side street.

Brisk walking brought him to a row of two-story brick cottages. Before one of these he stopped, let himself in with a latch-key, and ascended to a clean but sparsely furnished room. A well-worn overcoat hung on a hook behind the door, and a battered old suit-case stood in one corner. He glanced over his surroundings, and laughed almost boyishly. Then very leisurely he stripped to the waist, disclosing the arms, shoulders, and torso of a gladiator.

From his suit-case he extracted a pair of light dumb-bells, and for the next fifteen minutes devoted himself to physical development, stopping occasionally to pinch and pound his muscles with an air of appreciation. This ceremony over, he completed his toilet.

"I guess that's enough business for one day," he muttered. "To-morrow"—and he broke into a laugh—"I shall awake as a street-car conductor."

He turned out the light and sprang into bed.

II.

THE following three days Jackson, habited in blue and brass, spent on a street-car, under the tutelage of an experienced conductor, learning the run of his duties. Being possessed of an excellent memory, a good eye for faces, and an equable temper, he found the work much less trying than he had expected, and even earned the grudging encomiums of his tutor, a lean, hatchet-faced little man, who nursed a hatred of the assistant superintendent even more bitter than that entertained by Harris.

From this man Jackson learned more of the brutality and overbearing temper of his superior. He heard that Grimshaw's own family stood in terror of him, that Mrs. Grimshaw had been frequently seen with a black eye, and that Vice-president and Superintendent McIntyre stood in such awe of his assistant that he hardly dared call his soul his own.

Jackson heard more of the same thing around the barns during the lunch-hour, and when he came in from his runs, and was present on more than one occasion when Grimshaw treated some unlucky subordinate to what he called the rough side of his tongue.

Once he himself was the victim. He was standing on the outside of a small group at the entrance to the barn, when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder and he received a thrust which sent him reeling several feet away. He wheeled sharply round with clenched fists, and encountered the baleful glare of Grimshaw's swinish little eyes.

"Get out of the gangway when you see me coming, you lubber!" growled Grimshaw savagely. "What do you take this place for? A society club? I'll learn you different before I've done with you."

It took all Jackson's self-restraint to bite back the retort which sprang to his lips and to check the instinct which impelled him to dash his fist into the bloated face; but he thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and, biting his lip, turned away.

Grimshaw regarded him for a moment with an evil smile, which showed his yellow fangs; and then, kicking open the door of his office, disappeared. The other men laughed.

"That's nothing," said one. "Two weeks ago he kicked Bill Simmons half across the barn because he told him quite civil that he didn't ought to talk to him in that way. Bill 'u'd have quit there and then, but he'd just bought some furniture on the instalment plan, and jobs ain't so plenty just now."

"Some day," added one of the others, "he'll hit some feller with a short temper, and get a knife slipped into his inwards. I'd like to do it myself."

There was a chorus of low-voiced approval of this sentiment, in which Jackson could not help silently joining.

It was on the tenth day of Jackson's bondage that matters came suddenly to a crisis. It was the noonday lunch-hour, and several men were grouped about the car-barn portal. Grimshaw, with his back to them, was giving some instructions to a furtive-eyed roadmaster.

Presently to the group came Harris's eldest daughter, a slim, pale-faced child of twelve years, carrying a dinner-pail.

"Where's my father?" she asked of one of the men.

He pointed to the further end of the barn, and the child turned away. As she did so, she swung the pail, and brought the lower edge into sharp contact with Grimshaw's ankle.

In a moment the big man had wheeled, his face aflame with rage; and with the flat of his hand he struck the girl a heavy blow on the side of the head.

"I'll learn you manners!" he said viciously.

The child dropped the pail with a clang, staggered a few steps, and fell half dazed on the planked floor.

From the group by the door Jackson sprang forward, and raised the sobbing girl to her feet.

"Let the brat alone, drat you!" cried Grimshaw fiercely.

For a moment Jackson made no reply. He dusted off the girl's dress with a gentle hand and passed her to one of his companions, bidding him see her safe from the premises; then he stepped forward and faced the assistant superintendent.

"Mr. Grimshaw," he said in crisp, clean-cut tones, "I should like to take this opportunity of telling you that you are the biggest ruffian and the dirtiest blackguard I ever came across, and I have seen a good many."

While a man might count ten slowly, Grimshaw stood and gazed upon the mutineer, with his little pig's eyes blazing and the veins in his coarse forehead swelled almost to bursting. Then he found his voice and poured forth a flood of invective, in which Jackson's parentage, antecedents, moral character, manners, and appearance were passed upon in a blast of mingled blasphemy and obscenity.

He paused to take breath, and then there came a sound like that made by a fish-dealer when he slaps a nice moist fish on his counter; and the big man staggered back, with the white imprint of four fingers and a thumb slowly fading away on the unwholesome red of his left cheek.

There was a gasp of astonishment from the little knot of spectators as Jackson whipped off his uniform-coat and flung it to one of them.

"Hold this," he said authoritatively, "and stand back. Don't butt in if you value your hides, and I'll show you something worth watching."

Then he turned to meet the rush of his employer, who sprang at him with a howl like a wild beast.

Between the first car-track and the front of the office there was a clear space of planked flooring about twelve yards wide, and running back into the barn for some distance. Across this space came Grimshaw, his red fists brandished and his mouth pouring curses and vengeance. About the middle of it he was checked suddenly, with a white fist planted between his eyes. His head went back with the impact, while a companion fist caught him under the jaw and sent him sprawling on the boards.

In a moment or two he was on his legs again. The one-time champion rough-and-tumble scrapper of the Third Ward was not to be daunted by a knock-down, however paralyzing in its mental and physical effect.

And then began an exhibition which brought unalloyed delight to the hearts of the conductors and motormen, who watched it open-mouthed. Never once did those huge fists light on the elusive foe. Never once did those cumbrous rushes and clutching fingers succeed in gathering him into an embrace.

To right—to left—backward—forward, moved the agile figure of Jackson, a smile on his lips, and the light of battle shining in his eyes, avoiding, blocking, countering; and every time he sent a blow home it sounded as though some one had kicked an empty tub.

Gasping, choking, his mouth and nose streaming blood, his eyes fast closing up, Grimshaw strove in vain to come to close quarters. At last the one-sided battle was brought to a sudden termination.

Ducking under a wild swing, Jackson sprang back half a pace to get his distance. Grimshaw, half turning with the force of his futile blow, left his side unprotected. Crash, clean and square on the angle of the jaw, came Jackson's fist with the whole weight of body and spring of leg behind it; the big man's legs doubled under him like those of a pole-axed steer, and he collapsed, an insensate lump on the planking.

A low hum rose from the spectators, and they gazed on the form of their

fallen tyrant with awestruck eyes. Their feelings were akin to those of a band of savages who have seen the idol of some evil god they have been accustomed to propitiate tumbled from its pedestal by a reckless and sacrilegious hand. Then their personal interests began to rise uppermost.

"I guess this means the sack for the bunch of us," remarked one. "He'll never stand to have the fellers around who've seen him licked like that."

"I don't care," said a younger man. "I'd lose three jobs sooner than have missed it."

Jackson, taking his coat, swung himself into it. Then he went up to the prostrate figure and applied his toe none too gently to its ribs.

"Get up, you lump of carrion!" he said.

There was no movement in response, and he picked up a pail and disappeared into the office, returning in a few minutes with it half full of water. This he emptied roughly over the head and neck of his victim.

"That ought to bring him around in a minute or two," he remarked. "And now—I guess it's me for the outside world."

He glanced over the line of anxious faces.

"And look here, boys," he added, "you needn't be afraid for your jobs. I know what I'm talking about. There are only two people who are going to lose their jobs over this. I'm one, and the other is our friend here on the floor. If anybody else wants to take a crack at him when he recovers, he don't need to be scared of the result. His time has come, and none too soon."

He nodded confidently, repeated his good-by, and strode away.

III.

Two days later Grimshaw, with a pair of badly discolored eyes, and his face decorated with several strips of adhesive-plaster, entered the private office of Superintendent McIntyre, and stood scowling on its occupant, a frail-bodied, gray-haired man, with stooping shoulders and a weak mouth.

"You sent for me," said the assistant superintendent in abrupt tones. "What do you want?"

Mr. McIntyre, leaning back in his chair, his long, thin fingers playing nervously with a paper-weight, returned the other's stare.

"Yes," he said, "I sent for you. I understood from your wife that you had sufficiently recovered from that—er—little accident to be able to appear. I trust"—and there was a suave malice in the tone which cut the other like a knife—"that you have not suffered severely."

Grimshaw's red face became redder yet.

"Never you mind about that," he responded coarsely. "Stick to your own sufferings. You talk enough about them. Get down to business. What do you want?"

"I have received," said Mr. McIntyre, picking up a paper and studying it to hide his nervousness, "I have received a serious complaint against you. I am told that you bully and abuse the men, and that your treatment in general of the employees of this company is not to its advantage. I have sent for you to ask an explanation."

"And suppose—" replied Grimshaw, with one heavy fist on the desk and his bulldog jaw thrust out—"suppose I won't give any explanation. Suppose I tell you to go to Hades. What then?"

"In that case," replied McIntyre, looking straight into the angry eyes of his subordinate, "I am afraid that your connection with this company will cease very abruptly."

For answer, Grimshaw thrust his hand into his pocket, produced a greasy old pocketbook—from which he extracted a folded paper—flicked the document open with a dexterous twist, and banged it down on the desk.

"You cursed old fool!" he said. "Do you see that? Is that a note? Are those figures five thousand, or ain't they? Is that your signature? You can't pay it. You know you can't. Do you want me to smash you? Do you want me to sell you up, and turn your wife and family out in the street? Talk to me again like that, and, by Heaven, I'll do it!"

McIntyre, paling slightly before the other's violence, opened a drawer in his desk with a hand which trembled slightly, and took out another paper.

"This," he said, "is an accepted check for five thousand five hundred dollars, the amount of the note, and a year's interest. It is made out to your order. I think you will not find it quite so easy to smash me as you seem to think, Mr. Grimshaw."

He leaned back in his chair again, and eyed with unconcealed satisfaction the disconcerted look on the other's countenance.

"However," he continued, "this private arrangement between ourselves is neither here nor there. Let us get back to the main point. An explanation of your conduct. I may say that in this I am acting under instructions."

"Instructions?" said Grimshaw in a less violent tone. "Whose instructions, I'd like to know?"

A door leading into an inner office opened suddenly, and a young man came out — a well-dressed, well-set-up young man, with curly hair and a bright eye.

He advanced to the superintendent's desk and stood beside it, his hand resting easily on the back of Mr. McIntyre's chair.

"By my instructions, Mr. Grimshaw," he said easily.

The assistant superintendent stared at him with fallen jaw and startled eye.

"Jackson!" he cried.

"No, Mr. Grimshaw," interposed McIntyre pleasantly. "Not Jackson. Allow me to introduce you to Mr. Alberic Vandevort, president of this company, who has returned to his native city after a very long absence."

The president and the assistant superintendent gazed steadily into each other's eyes. Vandevort's look was cool and contemptuous; Grimshaw's that of a cornered bull.

"So," said the latter at last, recovering his speech, "you've been playing the spy, Mr.—Mr. Jackson."

"Yes," replied the other, "if it pleases you to call it by that name. And I regret it the less that it enabled me to administer a sound thrashing to the biggest blackguard of my acquaintance. The only possible appeal to your feelings, Mr. Grimshaw, is through your hide."

Grimshaw growled an inarticulate curse by way of answer.

"It may interest you to know, Mr. Grimshaw," continued Vandevort, "how all this came about. When my father died I was shooting big game in the interior of South Africa, and only learned of his death when I reached the coast, some two months ago. I came straight home to take up his duties. It occurred to me, though, that I should be able to run this road a good deal better if I knew something about it from the inside.

"Ten years had passed since I was last in the city—ten years spent in schools, universities, and travel abroad — and no one would be likely to recognize me. The opportunity was not to be lost. I first informed my lawyer of my intention. He was the only man who knew of my presence in the city, and then I applied to you for a job. The rest you know."

He paused for some comment; but Grimshaw, still regarding him malevolently, kept silence.

"Of course," continued Vandevort, "I need hardly tell you that your connection with this company ceases from this moment. It can scarcely afford to keep so thorough-paced a ruffian as you on its pay-roll."

Then Grimshaw opened the sluice-gates of his eloquence and poured forth a flood of abuse and profanity.

"So I'm fired, am I?" he cried, shaking his fist furiously. "All right. I'll quit. But don't you think, you and this mealy-mouthed, pasty-faced widdlestraw here, that you've heard the last of Ned Grimshaw. I'll get even with you if I have to spend my last cent. I've got a few friends who help to run this town. Wait till I get them busy. I can afford it—I've made money."

"Yes," said Vandevort meaningly, "I know you have."

He rapped thrice on the desk. The door of the inner office opened again, and another man came out—a hawk-faced, sinewy man—at the sight of whom Grimshaw's ruddy face paled.

The newcomer stepped silently across the room and took up his position with his back to the door leading into the hall.

"I know you have made money," repeated Vandevort, "and I also know how you made some of it. I got the tip from one of your own conductors. I learned that the fare-boxes were being tapped, and within two hours of the time

you engaged me I had visited a detective agency and set the dogs on your trail.

"Not a fare-box has gone into your office but what had marked money in it. Not a dime or nickel have you paid out that the detectives could get their hands on but has been examined. You can guess the result. An auditor has been going through the books at night, with what result you can also guess. Two hours ago the cashier was arrested, and here in this office he made a clean breast of the whole thing.

"His confession, signed, is in that drawer. In it he tells how you tempted him, prevailed over his scruples, and pocketed half the illicit gains. You are a grasping person as well as a blackguard, Mr. Grimshaw. No wonder you made money."

With every vestige of color shuddered out of his cheeks, his legs trembling under him, and a glare of apprehension in his eyes, Grimshaw presented a pitiable spectacle.

"I don't think," continued the president, "that we need delay these gentlemen any longer. Mr. Warriner, may I ask you to bring this little scene to a close?"

The detective advanced, and something jingled as he drew it from his pocket.

"Sorry, Mr. Grimshaw," he said, "but duty is duty. I have a warrant for your arrest. May I trouble you?"

Grimshaw gazed at him in a dazed fashion.

"What do you want?" he gasped.

"Your hands, if you please, Mr. Grimshaw," replied the detective briskly. "Thank you."

There was a sharp, double click, and a shining steel band encircled each of the great red wrists.

And then, without another word spoken, the two men left the office.

"Faugh!" said Vandevort as the door closed behind them. "The presence of a thing like that pollutes a respectable atmosphere. And now, Mr. McIntyre, it seems to me that if some of the officials have been robbing the company, the company has been robbing the men. That must be remedied. Wages must go up, and, if possible, hours reduced.

"I was long enough in a conductor's uniform to find out one thing, at least. If this company is going to give an effective service, we must make it worth our men's while to help us. That"—and he drew a chair to the superintendent's desk—"is one advantage of getting your information at first-hand, and from the inside."

THE ROAD TO TROUBLE.

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS,

Author of "A Blow to Liberty," "The Secret on an Island," "Done Brown," etc.

A Hunt for Big Game which Unearthed Something Altogether Different and Far More Serious.

CHAPTER I.

LOST IN THE WILDS.

WHICH path led to the camp?

Simple as the question might seem, it was a most momentous one to me as I asked it almost aloud, standing on a knoll and studying a crossing of almost indistinguishable trails.

There was nothing that to my inexperienced eye could afford an answer. I had never been in that region, the Grayhorn Range of mountains, until, a week previous to this opening of a history of some peculiar incidents in my life, I had joined a small party of friends and gone there to hunt big game, if there proved to be any, or any other game to be found.

And now I was lost! Lost in a region that to me seemed almost desolate.

From where I stood I could see stretches of wild and rugged country that offered plenty of lairs and hiding-places for beasts that might be shot if they were there, but little enough in the way of food to bring or keep them there.

As a matter of fact, our party had met with but little success. A scrawny wild-cat or two, one deer that was too surprised at our presence to run, and a few tough-feathered denizens of the *mesas*, were all that had come to our guns.

We had relied wholly upon Moreton to lead us, he having once before visited the region with his uncle and a guide.

But Moreton's experience, with old heads to plan for him, and our experience, with only Moreton to direct, were two different matters.

One or two of the younger members of the party, myself being the leader, probably because I was the youngest and knew the least, had become disgruntled over Moreton's failure as a guide, and his stubbornness in refusing to move farther up in the hills where we could see, even from our camp, thick forests that looked as though they might give shelter to better game than we had thus far encountered.

But Moreton was obstinate; and after a few hot words the evening before, and a night of sleepless rage, I had taken my rifle and left the camp early in the morning before any one knew that such was my intention. I had tramped away with a bold resolve to show Moreton what I could accomplish without his inefficient aid.

I had not yet shown him, because I didn't know where he was. But I had shown myself to my utmost satisfaction, even if not my gratification. I had got myself lost.

It is a great thing for a young man to have confidence in himself. But once he has it, it is a still greater thing to know when to curb it.

I had tramped through brush, wandered aimlessly through trackless forests of a scrub-pine, scratched my skin, and almost torn my eyes out through shrub and cactus; and now, without having emptied a single shell, or seeing an animal any bigger than a rat, I stood like a ninny on a point slightly higher than the immediately surrounding country, trying to decide which way to start from there to find the camp.

The day was too far spent to permit of any more search for game. I had come off without breakfast, but with some ground coffee, a little sugar, and some bread, expecting to feast on venison, or perhaps a brown-bear steak, before noon. At three o'clock in the afternoon I had not even run across water fit to make coffee with.

I make no boasts of any superfluous courage. I had seen little hardship, knew nothing of the wilds; and now, as I felt and saw the unmistakable approach of night, I confess I was a little worried.

The slight trails that crossed the spot where I was standing were too indistinct to tell me what had made them. Whether they were old paths of former hunting-parties, or short cuts between towns far distant from each other, was a matter far beyond me to determine.

And, to add to my discomfort and anxiety, a storm seemed to be rising. I had not seen a drop of rain, nor felt a strong breeze since coming into the region, but Moreton had told us that the storms were sometimes very severe, and days in duration.

Naturally, added to my hunger, thirst, and weariness, this took away about the last vestige of courage I had left.

It was not mere physical fear. I knew there was little likelihood that any person would pass that way, either friend or foe, during the night, and I had hunted long enough for wild beasts without finding one, to assure me of safety even if I went to sleep.

But there was the ridicule of my companions for me to face when I returned to them empty-handed. Worse—if I did not return until they came to search for me.

The fear of discomfort from hunger and thirst was great. I had never suffered anything of that kind. In fact, I had spent my life in school, and this hunting-trip was a sort of recreative break between school-days and work-days in my father's office.

But while I stood there and worried, the shadows of the pines were lengthening, and the clouds that had gathered were growing blacker.

I had no idea how far I was from camp. I had undoubtedly turned and twisted, doubled on my own track, as strangers in the wilds will always do, and the distance I could see from where I stood was not great. To shout or call out would have been a waste of breath.

But I thought of shooting. Of course, there was only a chance that my companions would even hear the report of my rifle. And if they did hear it, they would be just as likely to think I was firing at an animal as making a signal of distress. Or, they might believe it to be some stranger, and pay no attention at all.

Nevertheless, it was the only thing I could think of at that moment, unless I wished to remain there all night, and I fired two shots in the air.

Then, after the echoes had died out among the rocks, I listened intently. I had some dim remembrance of having been told that men who were lost as I was had a certain system of shooting that was understood by those trained to the wilds. But what the system was I had forgotten, or else I had never known.

I listened for three or four minutes, but no sound came to my ears that could possibly be a reply.

In desperation I fired two more shots, and listened again.

My heart leaped into increased action, as from some distant place there came what seemed to be the report of a gun.

I had been heard. I was receiving a reply.

But now, to my inexperienced ears, the sound gave no indication of direction.

I stood for a moment, irresolute, disappointed, and uncertain how to act. Then, as another shot came faintly to me, I seemed to catch the sound floating to me on the breeze that was blowing; and, shouldering my rifle, started as rapidly as I could walk, in the teeth of the wind; for here, I felt sure, was safety and food.

It proved to be a wearisome tramp. I found nothing in the landmarks to remind me of any portion I had come through before; but then, I reasoned, I was now traveling in a straight line, whereas before I had wandered here and there without any thought of direction.

While I tramped on the darkness deepened. I quickened my steps. Finally, to my great joy, I struck into a trail that was wide, and showed that at some previous time it had been a wagon road.

I almost sang. As a matter of fact, I did whistle. I remembered that just before we had pitched camp we had been on just such a road as this.

This, coupled with the fact that my shots had been answered, cheered me on. I turned toward the part of the road that led nearest where I believed the shots to have come from.

My thirst was excessive. I began to think I would have to camp for the night after all. But suddenly, as I turned a little bend, I saw a building, and hurried to it.

When I reached this promise of shelter and food my heart sank within me again, and this time almost with a thud.

There was no sign of food here. What I had discovered appeared to be the ruins of an old fort. There were the old crumbling towers, the bastions—of no possible service now, a ruined stockade; in fact, a picture of useless decay and desolation.

Yet, even while I stood there in dismay, looking at it, and wondering how many years, or possibly centuries, had passed since human footstep or soldiery had entered there, and for what purpose it had ever been built, the clouds opened and let down the rain.

I had need of shelter, whether I had food or not. Taking my rifle from my shoulder, and holding it in readiness for firing, though goodness knows why, I walked up to the old sally-port of the fort.

Nothing stopped my entrance. Nothing could. The heavy doors hung on rusted and broken hinges. The silence was solemn.

It was not yet so dark but what I could make my way about, and now that I was secure from the rain I felt like examining the entire interior before resting. I wanted to make certain there was no lurking beast to cause me trouble.

When the old fort had been deserted it had been shorn of everything that could indicate occupation. This, or the contents, had been carried away since.

The old, crumbling walls gave out no story for me to turn into a romance of the olden time. The dead floors gave back no answer to my footsteps nor my thoughts.

I peered into various rooms, not grown musty with age, for there was ample ventilation about the place, but grim and gruesome withal, and, passing from one to another, I stopped suddenly.

I had heard a groan. Not a loud groan. It was not the sound of somebody calling,

or making any attempt to cry for help. It was the groan of a badly wounded human being, or some beast who made sounds just like one.

There was no superstition about me. I was too young to see, feel, or believe in anything that was not absolutely material.

Gripping my rifle more tightly, I stepped to the door of the room from which the sound had seemed to issue.

At first I thought I was mistaken in the apartment. It was darker than the others, the only light coming from the narrow loopholes that once had perhaps spit death into the attacking enemy.

But I heard the groan again. Then, stepping farther into the room, I saw, huddled in a corner, on a blanket, the figure of a man.

CHAPTER II.

TAKEN FOR AN ENEMY.

THERE are things more terrible than a sick or wounded man, yet I doubt if I could have stumbled upon anything that would have dazed me more than finding what I did in that place. For a moment I stood still. Then my reason took charge.

Why should there be anything strange about the presence of this man in the old fort? Was I not there myself looking for shelter? And if his presence was a surprise to me, undoubtedly mine would be as great a one to him, if he could ever realize it.

"What's the matter, friend?" I asked. "Are you ill—wounded—hungry?"

I smiled grimly as I waited for an answer. It was a fruitless question for me to ask him if he was hungry. Was I not hungry myself? What could I offer him?

But there came no answer. I bent over him, and tried to discern his features. It was by this time grown too dark to distinguish anything, and I struck a match.

Even before I had brought this miserable flicker over his face I saw a lantern resting on the floor near him. I had almost kicked it.

I soon had this lit, and then examined the man more closely.

The face that lay upturned on the old blanket was so white and still that it might have belonged to a dead person. But there was breath and life in him. He looked to be about forty-five or fifty, rugged, and yet with a certain appearance of refinement.

He was—or had been—well dressed, but his clothing was now soiled. He did not look like a man who had suffered illness at all until the present stroke, whatever it was, had come upon him.

I lifted one of his hands. It was cold, but not with the peculiar chill of death, or approaching death. Yet the man was not far from his end.

And then I found the cause of it all. There was a red stain on the blanket where he was lying. And his coat had been slit, and a wound well and skilfully dressed and bandaged.

I know nothing—at least, at that time I knew nothing—about the materials of which bandages are made. But there was a whiteness about this one, and a newness, that caused me to wonder.

I tried to get the man to speak. But he did not even moan. The groan I had heard was the last he would probably utter unless I could revive him. And what means had I with which to perform that miracle?

I remembered the coffee I had taken from camp. If I had water I could make him a stimulating cup of it. I took up the lantern, and gave the room a sweeping survey. On the floor, scattered about, were crumbs and remnants of food that proved the man had eaten since his arrival in the old fort.

I stepped into the next room to continue my inspection. There was an indefinable feeling in my mind that this man was not the full extent of the adventure upon which I had stumbled.

And I found indications that I was right. In another portion of the fort I found the ruins of an old fireplace, with the built-up ovens of long ago, and on an old bench near the fireplace were cups and cooking utensils all distinctly modern.

And, counting the cups, the knives, the forks, and the spoons, I discovered a complement for two persons.

Now, what was the mystery? What crime had been committed here? Had two friends quarreled? Had one gone off leaving the other to meet an unexpected foe, or had he turned enemy him-

self and shot down, for revenge or gain, the man who had been his comrade?

My discoveries were not yet ended. I found a bottle of brandy, and two of wine. Two loaves of bread untouched, and a portion of a third. Coffee, sugar, condensed milk. Then a can of corned beef.

I did not wait to make coffee, although I wanted some. I had first to find a supply of water that was used for this purpose.

I took the brandy to the wounded man and poured some down his throat. I chafed his wrists. I rubbed some of the liquor on his temples.

I was holding the lantern in my left hand, still keeping one of his hands in mine, when he opened his eyes. He looked straight up into my own.

For a second or two he seemed puzzled. Then there shot into his eyes a gleam of hatred that made me recoil.

"So—curse you!—you've found me again, have you?" he muttered in a hoarse whisper.

He struggled to rise, and before I could guess his intention he had whipped a revolver from his pocket.

"None of that, friend," I said, and, reaching out quickly, I grasped his wrist and turned the revolver upward, just as it was fired.

"Don't fire again," I told him. "It won't do you any good. I don't know the man you take me for, but I am not here as an enemy. Still, I am not yet friendly enough to let you shoot me. Now, that you have your senses back, be reasonable and let us talk matters over.

"Who are you? What brought you here?"

He relinquished the revolver, and his look of hatred turned to one more like fear.

"I—I—where is—where is—"

He was groping for thought and for words.

"Where is what? Who is it you want?" I asked.

"Annie. Where is—"

And then he wandered off into a lot of mumbling that meant nothing.

I saw his eyes close, the handsome head dropped backward, and although his heart was stronger now, I knew that he had fainted again.

So, there was an Annie. I had always liked the name Annie. It seemed somehow to be associated in my mind with a little mother. I mean the kind of a girl who, by reason of good sense and womanly nature, is the one to take the place of the loved mother gone, and to help to bring up younger sisters and brothers.

I don't know where I got this peculiar idea. I suppose from some book I have read and forgotten.

I certainly had never conjured up the picture of an Annie connected in any way with a ruined fort in a desolate region like this, and a man who was going to shoot me because I had saved his life.

But Annie or no Annie, I was hungry, and there was food. I went back to the old kitchen and helped myself.

Fortunately for my comfort, I had taken along some cigars when I left the camp; and now, after my feast in that strange place, I lit one, and wandered out to the old sally-port, leaving the lantern in the room with the wounded man, but carrying my rifle with me.

It was a wet, gloomy night, but the storm had not proven so severe as Moreton's stories had led me to fear. I fancied I could hear the howl of some wild beast at a distance; but in the entrance to an old ruin, with a wounded man you never knew, and a deep mystery surrounding it all, you might imagine anything.

I was pondering on the strangeness of the situation, when I was startled by the sound of a galloping horse, approaching along the old wagon road.

I was in a quandary what to do. If this was a friend of the man inside, he might not prove to be a friend of mine. If he was an enemy of the man inside, I did not want him for a friend.

I withdrew inside the sally-port. The rider might pass by.

But, no. Somewhere out in the darkness some one said, in the voice of a frightened woman: "Whoa!"

The galloping ceased. And then somebody rushed past me into the old fort.

CHAPTER III.

FIGHTING FOR TROUBLE.

EVEN before I had cleared my mind, and come to some reasonable determina-

tion as to how I should act, I heard a girl's voice cry out in alarm. There was no further hesitation or uncertainty.

Whoever she was, whatever the cause of her presence there with the wounded man, she should have what assistance I might be able to give. I hurried back to his room.

Standing near him, evidently in great excitement, stood a girl. The light of the lantern was very poor, but even by that feeble aid I could see that she was young and of fine form. Her face, partly in gloom, looked to me as though in the daylight it would prove to be beautiful.

I made a sound. She turned.

"Who are you?" she cried, leveling a rifle at me. "They haven't come yet. Who are you? What do you want?"

She was panting. Her bosom rose and fell, and her eyes shot fire.

She was like a lioness brought to bay protecting her mate.

She was dressed in a costume I can scarcely describe, as I've never seen any other like it. She was certainly picturesque, a veritable queen of the wilds. Yet she was not of the wilds. I knew that at a glance.

"I am Harry Vail, of New York, at your service," I said. "You may safely lower your gun. I was hunting, got lost, and found this place. I entered, came across a wounded man, and gave him what assistance I could."

"You are not a—oh! Here they come! They followed me. Help me now, and wait for explanations. Don't you hear them?"

I heard horses galloping and men shouting, and then I heard three rifle-shots in rapid succession.

"Keep them out!" she cried. "I'll hide him somewhere."

She seized the unconscious man, dragged him to a spot where he could not be seen from the door or any of the port-holes, and threw the blanket over him.

At that moment a man rushed to the door.

"Hands up!" he cried; and then, as he saw me with my rifle leveled at his breast, he shot back out of sight.

"There are more of them!" I heard him shout.

Then to my ears came a hum of voices.

"I'll guard the door," said the girl. "They will hardly shoot me, and you try to hit them through the windows. Don't kill them—I don't want blood on our hands. But keep them off."

The windows she meant were the narrow loopholes. I went to one, and sticking my rifle through, without trying to aim in the dark, I fired.

There was a scream of pain from a horse.

"Better get away!" I shouted. "We are armed to the teeth, and outnumber you. Get away, or we'll kill you all."

A volley of rifle-shots was the answer, and I could hear the bullets rattling against the old wall.

"We've got to make 'em think there are more of us," I said. "It will take some dancing. I'll rush around and shoot from various loopholes, and you do the same. We'll take care of the door between us."

I made better time around than she did, but between us we kept up a scattering fire from various loopholes. There was no change in the result.

We heard plenty of cursing outside, and yet nothing that gave us any indication whether our firing was having any effect or not. The fire from the attacking party had done us no harm.

The girl was panting, and at times something that sounded like a prayer would come bubbling from her lips, accompanied by a groan.

It was entirely without reason that we continued to fight as long as we did. There was not, from the very start, the slightest hope that we could defeat such a force as was arrayed against us. We might hold them off for a time, but surely when daylight came we must be overcome.

"Who are these men? What do they want? What have you done to them?" I asked. "Can't we parley and buy them off?"

"I—they—my father—" she answered in jerks, as she kept on firing.

"Is that wounded man your father?"

"Yes."

"What is his name?"

"Jim Taylor."

I reeled against the wall of the room, and a bullet pinged on the wall alongside my head. It was the first shot that had come inside, and the long muzzle of a rifle was now thrust through a port-hole.

"In the name of the law, hold up your hands! Drop that rifle, or you'll be a dead man in three seconds. Annie Taylor, drop your gun. We want you all."

My rifle fell from my nerveless hand. My head began to throb. I saw visions of all sorts of trouble ahead, even to the pleasing one of myself dangling at one end of a rope, the other end of which was thrown over the limb of a tree.

I had heard the story, and although I was acquainted with none of the details, I knew that Jim Taylor was looked upon by the eyes of the law as one of the worst murderers in that section of the country.

It was the sheriff we were fighting.

"Now," said a tall, stern-faced man, entering at the door with two revolvers leveled, "we'll take care of you all. Handcuff that girl and this fellow together. I suppose they're lovers. Where's Jim Taylor?"

"I don't know. He ran," replied the girl, and before she could be suspected or held back by any of the sheriff's men she had given a leap and, with a kick, smashed the glass in the lantern and sent it flying.

"I'll fix you for that!" cried an angry voice. "Bar that door—men! If she ever gets with Jim Taylor, we'll have another time to find them."

I wasn't sure whether the girl made any effort to rush out or not. But there was no outcry. Whatever happened, she was firm and true to her father, and while one of the posse struck a match she and I were handcuffed together.

What was I to do in the matter? That question burned a hole in my brain.

I was innocent of any intentional wrong. Whether I could prove it or not remained to be seen. I could go a long way toward this by making a full declaration of the facts, and disclosing the presence of Taylor under the blanket.

But, right or wrong, there was something unpleasant to me in the thought of turning against this girl who had been so brave and reckless in the defense of her father.

As I say, I knew nothing about the real circumstances. Nobody seemed to know. I did not even know the name of the man Taylor had killed, or the reason for it.

He lay unconscious under the blanket. and unless some one happened along the next day there was little doubt that, by his own death in the old fort, he would expiate his crime. I resolved to say nothing.

"Loomis," demanded the same commanding voice that had spoken before, "where was Taylor hit?"

"In the back."

"Do you think the wound was dangerous?"

"It would have been instantly fatal for any other man."

"Well, he's only flesh and blood. He can't stand so much more than any other flesh and blood. Get torches somehow and search this ruin. He's here somewhere."

And just then, probably disturbed by the tumult, Jim Taylor sent out a groan from under the blanket.

CHAPTER IV.

LOCKED TOGETHER.

"WHAT was that noise?" thundered the voice of the man in command.

"Sounded like a groan, sheriff," came an answer in the dark.

"Who's got the two prisoners? Was it the girl?"

"Wasn't the girl, sheriff. She's right here by me."

"Was it the young fellow? Who's got him?"

"I've got him, sheriff," replied the man, who certainly had me, with one hand gripping my throat. "I'll wager he ain't made a sound."

"Then, Jim Taylor's in this room. Make a light, somebody. Look out, you fellows at the door. Don't let even one of our own men pass out. It might be Taylor."

"Here he is. I stumbled over him," said a voice. "He's under a blanket."

"Yank him up," directed the sheriff.

"Sheriff Bannon," spoke up the girl, and I was amazed at the coolness and the soft sweetness of her voice, "please have your men get a light, so that they can be careful of my father. He is dying."

"H'm! Don't you think you ought to have thought of that before you broke the lantern?"

"He is my father, sheriff. I thought

I might save him. And he is innocent, you know."

"Innocent be hanged!" said a voice I had not heard before. "He's a—"

"Shut up, Catworth. The girl is right, and for a plucky girl she's welcome to anything she wants—within the law. Make a light there, somebody, and don't hurt Jim."

Suddenly some one struck a match and lit the wick of the lantern which he had found by stepping on it. The flame was smoky and grimy, but we could see. Two men were bending over Taylor.

"He *is* bad," said one. "He's unconscious, sheriff. Bad shot in the back somewhere."

"Lay him out on the blanket, and four of you carry him. Who is out there with the horses?"

"Greeter."

"Where's that horse you took from the wagon, Annie?" asked the sheriff.

"I left him without fastening, but he won't be far," she answered.

"We'll have to find him. We'll want the wagon now, anyway, for Jim."

"March!" came the order.

I saw at once that the girl walked with difficulty. She rested her weight, as well as she was able, on the shackling steel with which we were bound together. It cut into my wrist, but I braced myself to carry her along.

When we reached the open the rain had about ceased, but the night was as black as ever. Only the ill-smelling wick, still burning as a torch wound around a rifle-barrel, sent a bit of light into the gloom. By its weird rays I saw the horses of the posse, and by the same illumination they sought the horse the girl had ridden.

"Can you walk to the wagon, Annie?" asked the sheriff.

I felt the weight increase on my wrist, and she fell forward. I swung toward her and caught her in my free arm.

"She has fainted, sheriff," I said.

"Two horses here, side by side," he called.

"Can you hold her up straight?" he asked of me. "Who the deuce you are, and what you've got to do with this mess, I'll be hanged if I know. But you've got to hold her up."

"I could not hold her up with a cuffed arm on another horse," I said. "Give me a strong animal, and place her so that the wrists fastened together are outside, and I can take care of her."

"Sure," said a deputy, with a laugh. "Gives him one arm to hug her with, and looks like holdin' hands with the other."

"Hold your fool jaw," cried the sheriff angrily. "When I want a clown I'll hire one. Let's get started."

The girl was placed sidewise in front of me on the horse they gave me to ride. I placed my free hand around her. Our shackled hands rested in her lap. Her head leaned against my shoulder.

"Forward!" commanded the sheriff.

No one had to walk, for the girl's horse had been captured, and the one I had hit was not severely hurt.

Silently, except for a few remarks made in an undertone by some of the deputies, who evidently had great respect for the sheriff's anger, we rode through the darkness, the hoofs of our horses making a sound that showed how soft the going was.

Once or twice the girl moved as though she was coming back to consciousness. Then she would sink back again.

"Ah!" I heard her breathe, as if sighing.

"Are you awake, Miss Taylor?" I asked, in a low tone.

"Yes," she replied. "I am glad they let me ride with you instead of one of them."

"Here's the wagon," said the sheriff, who was ahead. "Bring that horse around here."

"The harness is all here," replied the deputy who had ridden the horse.

Somehow in the dark, with the aid of men holding matches that would scarcely burn, they managed to get the horse harnessed again to the wagon.

"I couldn't drive on," said the girl to me. "I had to take the horse away in order to get to the fort in time. And then I was too late," she added bitterly.

"Here, bring Taylor here," directed the sheriff. "Is he still alive?"

"He's alive, all right," was the answer.

They put the unconscious man in the wagon.

"Now, you two get in," said the sheriff.

We stepped from the back of the horse into the wagon. It was an ordinary long-

bodied vehicle, lighter than an express-wagon, and yet heavier and roomier than a buggy.

The girl and I sat with our backs to the tail-board.

"Come on," ordered the sheriff. "We don't want to be all night on the road."

"What must you think of me?" asked the girl, after we had resumed our march.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know what to think about the whole business. One thing seems to be moderately certain, though. We are probably in a bad situation."

"And now that we have failed I am—so sorry—*so* sorry—that I dragged you into it."

"As to that," I answered, "I am not sure that you did. It seems to me rather that I stumbled into it."

"Into the fort—yes. But I should have explained the situation. Then you could have declined to fight."

"I would not have done that. I would not leave you alone like that. But, now that we are in the mess together, I'd like to hear just the truth—the truth, remember. Then I will know how to act."

"Yes, you have earned the truth, and I will tell you as we go along. I wish I could make them all believe it. But they don't, and probably you will not."

"I can listen to it, at least."

"Yes, there is plenty of time. It will take us several hours to reach Serena."

CHAPTER V.

MISS TAYLOR'S STORY.

I RECALLED Serena. It was the town at the end of the stage-road. Our hunting party, under the luminous guidance of Moreton, had left the stage at Serena because it went no farther, and had gone on with our outfit and some hired horses.

Serena was not a town that loomed up as a probable, or even a possible, metropolis of the future. It's rude wooden houses and stores were built along wide but very muddy streets. The most brilliant lights were those in the saloons on the corners—but they are that almost anywhere, I happen to remember.

"What was it you said your name was?" Miss Taylor inquired.

"Vail—Harry Vail."

"And didn't you say you came from New York?"

"I said so, and it was true."

"And isn't it in New York where the Unconditional Life Insurance Company has its offices?"

"It is," I answered, feeling a little startled. I was a stockholder and policy-holder in the Unconditional myself.

"Then," she said, "you will understand more about this matter. My father and I once lived in New York. My father, however, was away from the city much of the time, leaving my mother and me together in our home, which was merely a flat on one of the streets—I think Forty-Ninth or Forty-Eighth, I forget which.

"My father was never a wealthy man, but from several industries—of which he was, I believe, the promoter, as they called him—he derived income enough to keep us in comparative luxury.

"He kept extending his journeys and the length of his absences until I began to feel that I did not know him at all. Then my mother died.

"You must remember that I knew very little about my father's business—in fact, any business at all. I went to the New York schools, and the high school, and my father would not permit me to go to work. I lived much as other girls live who are more the companions of their mothers than of younger people.

"When my mother died, my father had just entered into a business partnership here with a man named Roland—Stephen Roland—also from New York. My father gave me the choice of going to a young ladies' seminary or coming with him. I had been my mother's companion, and I resolved to be his.

"It was necessary for him to live in Serena, and he had a comfortable house built, bought me a horse, and did everything he could to make me happy. We had a housekeeper, and really all I had to do was to enjoy myself.

"The business that my father and Roland went into was something connected with mining. They were not miners, but they organized mining companies, and floated stocks and bonds, and all that.

"Then came the hard times. Roland was married and had a family, but they would not come to such a place as Serena.

And instead of keeping within the limits of their income, as my father and I did, they thought everything was going to last. But, as I say, the hard times came. You know about that — how everybody suffered some.

"Papa suffered the same as the rest, and Roland suffered still more. Papa had made provision for my future, and had invested some money—his own income—for himself. On the other hand, the crash found Roland penniless.

"He appealed to my father, who aided him as far as he could; but he had found Roland out in two or three crooked deals, and they had had words. At last Roland, who was addicted much to liquor, made an extravagant demand, which my father refused to meet.

"Then Roland got drunk and became abusive and threatening. He said he'd have money from my father somehow.

"He did no work, while my father went right on and tried to build up a new business, but refused to have Roland for a partner.

"That is the history of the relations existing between them up to two months ago. My father had opened a new office in Serena, which is building up quite rapidly, and was beginning to be prosperous again, when Roland demanded that, as his former partner, he was entitled to half the proceeds.

"My father flatly refused to consider this. They had a terrible quarrel, and even came to blows. That my father admits. And others have sworn they saw the two fighting, and they were the only persons in papa's office where Roland had gone to enforce his demand.

"My father told me about it that night, and I begged him to be careful. I was afraid of Roland.

"The next night — it wasn't exactly night, but toward the close of the day—Roland came again, and said he and his family would starve unless papa helped him out.

"Papa said he told Roland he could not give him money, but that he had a little mining property he had no time to work, and if Roland wanted to go in on that, without any share in any other business, papa would supply the capital and let Roland manage the work. To this Roland agreed.

"They started off in a buckboard to see the property, and only papa came back. He said they had reached the mine before dark, and everything was satisfactory, and they started home again in the buckboard.

"But, on the way home, Roland said he was too ill to continue, and must stop at the house of Michael Soro for the night.

"Michael Soro is a half-breed who lives on a farm on the road from Serena to Veltna. Veltna is a smaller and rougher place than Serena. It was a little out of the way, but papa took him there, and he did act quite ill. Papa left him with Soro, and came home.

"A week after that, papa was arrested for the murder of Roland."

"And—" I began.

"Wait. Roland did not live in Serena. His friends were in Veltna. Papa protested against his arrest. He said he had not seen Roland since the day he left him at Soro's. Nobody in Serena did see Roland, dead or alive. He was taken from Soro's house to Veltna, where he died. He died of a bullet-wound, and told his friends in Veltna that papa killed him."

"And your father denies the charge?" I asked.

"Of course, my father denies the charge," she said, with some little indignation. "Why in the world should my father kill Roland? Roland had nothing. My father wanted nothing. Had it been the other way—had my father been asking Roland for money and been refused—there might be a motive. Father had nothing to gain by killing Roland.

"He had—and still has—one or two friends in Serena who do not believe that he killed Roland. When he was committed to jail without bail or trial, these friends helped him to escape. But the escape was discovered in time for a deputy to shoot papa in the back. He got away, though, and hid in caves, or up in the hills, but he couldn't take care of his wound.

"Of course, all this time I was distracted with terror. Then one morning he managed to crawl into the old fort, and I, while scouring the country looking for his dead body, found him alive and suffering.

"I nursed him as well as I could, but

you know they were watching me, and if I went to a store to buy what he needed most, they would follow me.

"To-day I did make up my mind to take him some stuff, and had some clean clothing and food—they are up at the other end of the wagon. I also brought my rifle. I thought I might have trouble. But Sheriff Bannon had been watching me, and brought his posse. I saw them coming, jumped out, unhitched the horse, and rode to the fort. You know the rest."

"I know that, whether you have the right story or not, you are a mighty true girl, and I'm going to stand by you. You spoke of the Unconditional Insurance Company—what has that to do with it?"

"I don't know—I am not sure that it has anything to do with it. But, somehow, I think Roland was killed for that, but not by my father. I have heard that his wife was in Veltna a short time before all this happened. And I've heard that Michael Soro had money to gamble with afterward.

"If there is any—"

"Come on!" called the sheriff. "Unlock these two. They've come to the end of their ride and conversation. Hurry up, there."

In a moment the handcuffs were unlocked, and I was hustled out of the wagon and into a building, while Miss Taylor was taken another way.

I did not see what they did with Taylor.

I had heard enough, however, to furnish me food for thought.

CHAPTER VI.

WORSE THAN MURDER.

It was evident that the ends of justice did not call for any examination of me that night. And I was pleased at this fact.

I wanted time to think. The story Miss Taylor had told with such evident sincerity had moved me strangely. And her final argument had sufficient meat in it to cause me to reserve a decision on my own actions until I had digested the entire narrative a little more.

The girl's question had the true ring. What reason *had* Taylor for killing Roland, unless it was in self-defense? And that was not a crime that called for punishment in the region where it happened.

I regretted that we had arrived at the jail before I found out what idea Miss Taylor had concerning the insurance company.

I did not sleep. The lockup at Serena was not a formidable thing, as jails and prisons go. The worst thing about it was the filth. A good kick would have demolished the door or broken a rusty lock.

But to escape without finding a way to help Miss Taylor was not, just then, the thing I was resolved upon doing. Always in my mind was that girl's courage and her devotion to her father.

The peculiar part of my position, even though I was locked in jail, probably with a serious charge against me, was that there was no one with whom I could feel angry.

Taylor, the man in the case, knew nothing about me at all, or what I had done. In the natural agony of anxiety the girl would feel for her father, innocent or guilty, she would be likely to call on me, or whoever else she might have seen in the old fort, to defend her and her father, even if the pursuing party was the sheriff's posse.

And it was no more than right that the sheriff should arrest me and lock me up after I had fired at him from the fort.

What did bother me was, what would they do with me now they had arrested me? I knew it was a serious matter to assist a prisoner to resist a sheriff, and the whole thing depended on how strong my argument could be made that I knew nothing about the case and thought the girl was being pursued by bandits.

But if I took that line of argument, I would get the girl in a worse fix. She knew she had no right to resist the sheriff by force of arms, and no right to ask me to do it.

If I explained that she did it without telling me the circumstances, I would add to the heinousness of her offense.

I had no inclination to remain long in jail, and certainly no desire to dangle playfully at the end of a rope.

I had received scant courtesy thus far, and had no reason to think my treatment would be any different until my case was disposed of.

I knew nothing about the methods in vogue for dispensing justice, but did not presume to think that the court procedure here would be carried on with the dignity of the Supreme Bench at Washington.

A man with a dark, grizzled face came to my cell about eight o'clock in the morning.

"Well, young feller," he said, "had any sleep?"

"None," I answered. "I wasn't very sleepy."

"Don't say? Well, be ye hungry, then? Most always my boarders git hungry."

"Oh, I don't care much whether I eat or not."

"Don't, eh? Well, by gum, ye've got to eat. We git paid fur feeding prisoners. We git so much a head from the county. But we don't git no commission from undertakers fur starvin' 'em. You'll eat *some*. I'm honest. I won't charge the county fur grub I don't serve."

Yes, I reflected with a smile when he had gone to get my breakfast without asking me what I wanted, justice has a peculiar way of asserting itself in Serena.

My breakfast came, and it really tasted good.

"Before whom will I be taken for a hearing?" I asked.

"Why, the judge, of course."

"Is there only one?"

"Well, this ain't no county seat. We have a justice of the peace. He'll make what they call a perlumanary examination. Anybody held after that goes to trial at Bangton."

Later in the morning he came again, accompanied by a raw-boned deputy. I was conducted into a court-room that was over a livery-stable.

The judge sat there, smoking a pipe. He merely glanced at me, and proceeded with a conversation he was holding with a powerful-looking man.

"That's Bannon," explained the deputy who had me in charge.

I studied with some interest the man at whom I had been shooting in the dark.

He looked like a man who feared nothing. He had a square jaw, a heavy fist, and great mountains of shoulders. But when he turned to look at me I saw he had the soft, blue eye of a woman.

"Bring that prisoner here," he said.

There was no vindictiveness in his voice or manner. The justice took his pipe out of his mouth and stared at me.

"I don't know this man," said the sheriff. "Whether he is Annie Taylor's sweetheart, and just wanted to help her out, or didn't know I was the sheriff, I don't know. I'll let him tell why he fired about a dozen shots at me and my men when we went after an escaped murderer."

He had stated the case so that I could not avoid making a straight answer.

"I did not believe he was guilty," I said.

As I spoke, Annie Taylor herself was brought in.

"You—what's that?" yelled the justice. "*You* didn't think he was guilty. Are you the judge and jury and the hull people of the commonwealth? You didn't think he was guilty, eh?"

"Judge," said Annie, coming forward with the deputy, "he did not know that my father was an escaped prisoner when we fought the sheriff. He did not know my name was Taylor. He did not know my father was ever charged with a crime. He was with a party of hunters, and got lost, and went into the old fort, where he came across my father. I found him there, and begged him to help fight; but I said nothing about the case. I told him all about it while we were on our way here to Serena."

"I guess that is right," remarked the sheriff. "They talked enough all the way."

By this time the judge was leaning forward and his eyes glared right into mine.

"A hunter, was ye?" he howled. "I thought yer face was familiar. Where's my hoss?"

"Your—your horse?" I stammered.

"Yes, sirree, my hoss! Ain't forgot, I hope. Where's my hoss?"

"I haven't any horse of yours."

"His honor runs the livery-stable down-stairs," said the sheriff, accompanying the information with a grin.

"Oh," I exclaimed, a light breaking in upon my darkness. "I—"

"Yes. Your crowd came and hired some hosses of me, and you had one. You didn't ride a hoss into that old fort, did ye?"

"Why—no—I—"

"Sure, you. I want that hoss inside of three days, or you'll be taken out and strung up. When I'm here I'm justice of the peace. When I'm down-stairs I'm a hoss-dealer, and we won't have no hoss-thieves around here. Take him back to jail till I git my hoss."

Marveling still more at the peculiar ways in which justice displayed itself in Serena, I went back to the prison with the deputy sheriff.

(To be continued.)

A Joke On the Neighbors.

BY HUGH A. SMITH, Jr.

How the Man Who Once Had Ungratified Dramatic Aspirations Assisted in a Humble Way at Preparing a Scene for the Stage.

TO become an actor had been one of the unfulfilled youthful dreams of William Backus. Consequently, when he had an opportunity to send his house on the stage, he took it gladly, even though it included a daylight burglary.

It was this way. Jimmy Cantwell was an old friend of Billy's. He also was one of the human ingredients of the International Kinetoscope Company, Incorporated.

To his ingenuity and tireless activity were due many of the thrills dished up to the populace on ever-increasing miles of moving-picture films.

On one of Manhattan's first spring days, Billy was beating a hasty retreat from advancing pangs of hunger into one of lower Broadway's crowded quick-lunch emporiums, when he encountered Jimmy bent on a similar mission.

"Well, look who's here!" cried Jimmy. "I never supposed that William Backus, bloated real-estate king, would deign to feed his sleek countenance in this hash-house."

"If you feel that way about it, I will feed on you," laughed the other. "That ought to lift the curse, hadn't it?"

"You're on, Bill. I tried to get you on the phone this morning, to have you do me a good turn, and this will make it easy. So, go as far as you like. I guess you can't break me in this place."

Accordingly, the two deposited their feet under a marble slab, and Jimmy explained thus:

"My latest spasm is entitled, 'Burglars and Their Didoes,' or words to that effect. I am going to hatch up a bunch of fake burglaries of all the varieties known to old Mulberry Street in its palmiest days, and take their pictures. Most of these will be interior scenes, which we can frame up at the shop; but, for the sake of our porch-climbing artists, we will have to borrow an empty house somewhere. Are any of your shacks vacant now?"

"No, sir; my shacks, as you call them, are all full, and I wish I had as many more to fill. We are only living in half of one ourselves. But why has the place got to be empty?"

"Well, it would take some crust to ask any one for the privilege of robbing his own domicile while he is domiciled. I'm a seasoned New Yorker, all right, but my hide is still penetrable in spots. Of course, though, if you have any offers to make, we are in a receptive mood."

"Why, sure, you can take a crack at our place any time you want to. My wife is away on a month's visit. She can't kick. I'll send the maid out, so she won't tell, and I'll enjoy the circus." Billy had waxed enthusiastic.

"The wife's got some old silver plate out there that will make pretty likely loot," he added with a laugh.

"I'll send men I know well, who are warranted Sunday-school A1," the picture-man assured him. "Tell me something about the place. It's out at Bensonhurst, where I went once, isn't it?"

"Yes. We are living only in the upper half now, though."

"That doesn't matter, if you can pa-

cify your friends below. It's the upper half we want to attack. If I remember rightly, there is a broad front porch with an upper balcony, just made to order for our game."

Billy gave his friend the number, and arrangements were completed. On Tuesday of the following week, Jimmy was to send to his friend's home one of his photographers, a man by the name of Johnson, with two assistants to do the villainous part of the work. He would notify the police captain of the precinct, so that the "burglars" might be immune from entanglements with the law, and Backus was to tell such neighbors as he deemed advisable.

As they were going out, Billy suddenly slapped his friend on the back.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I'll have some fun with the neighbors."

He then unfolded a scheme of deluding Bensonhurst householders into thinking a burglar gang had gone mad and attacked a house boldly in broad daylight.

The humorous householder did not go into town Tuesday morning. He hunted up the officer on that beat to make sure he was "wise to" the situation. The latter told him Cantwell had phoned the station-house the night before.

"Yiz can bet I'll be on the job, Mr. Backus," the grinning officer assured him. "It will be fun to stand by and watch a job like that once without having to get busy and run the chance of getting a dose of lead in the chist."

Cantwell had told Backus that day in the quick-lunch room that his men would probably reach Bensonhurst about three o'clock. It was barely two, however, when there came a vigorous whistle on his front-door tube.

"This is Johnson, from the International Kinetoscope Company," said a voice at the other end. "I'll come right up, if you are ready."

A trooping of heavy steps on the stairs and Backus confronted Johnson, a decent enough looking fellow, at the door. His two companions also had the faces of respectable citizens of Uncle Sam, but the make-up they put on at once converted them into two of the likeliest-looking "thugs" that ever blossomed in the Rogues' Gallery.

They had with them two large sacks, the contents of which rattled as they came up the stairs.

Mr. Backus looked out of the window. The wagon with the camera had taken a position in the next street, with two vacant lots between, offering an undisturbed view.

He chuckled contentedly. This position had been the very one he was about to suggest, as it would divert the neighbors' attention for a few minutes, and it would not be immediately apparent which house was being taken. That would make his joke climax the more complete.

He turned to the "thugs," and explained his little scheme of playing with the neighbors. The actor-burglars laughed immoderately at this suggestion, and entered at once into the spirit of the occasion.

They took a swift survey of the lay of things, placing their stage loot of bits of scrap-iron under the window they were to force; and, with their empty sacks in hand, they followed their host down the back stairs, hiding in the rear yard with a ladder Mr. Backus had provided for them.

Meanwhile, a small crowd of the curious had collected around the wagon in the other street, speculating as to its purpose.

The portly patrolman, who was answering an occasional question from some of the more favored neighbors, was master of ceremonies. He was kept busy warding off the persistent clamors of a swarm of youngsters and shooing them away from the vehicle.

Hither Backus accompanied Johnson. It took the latter only a few moments to mount his big camera and adjust the film. He turned it about one way and another, as if uncertain just what view to take.

No one seemed to think the Backus house in particular was to be in the picture. Nor had any one seen a moving-picture camera before, or realized that this was such an instrument.

"Some real-estate advertisers snapping a view," ventured one.

That seemed to satisfy the crowd's curiosity.

Backus, who was engaged in good-natured chaffing with his neighbors, added

to his own apparently ingenuous speculations.

Just as the machine began to run, the two villainous-looking "thugs" crept stealthily but swiftly across the Backus lawn, casting furtive stage-glances about them. Placing the ladder against a corner of the upper veranda, one clambered up with the sacks under his arm, while the other remained on guard at the ladder's foot, an "accessory to the crime."

Some one in the crowd around the machine discovered this performance first, then all stood for a moment silent with astonishment.

The man on the roof produced a jimmy from his inside pocket and proceeded to open one of the big front windows, through which he quickly disappeared from sight. His pal on the ground was meanwhile keeping a sharp lookout, peering first up the street and then down, casting frequent glances at the half-open window.

Just as the man disappeared, a woman in the lower part of the house discovered what was going on for the first time. She thrust her head from her front door and screamed. Almost simultaneously her neighbor next door made the same discovery and joined in the outcry.

The neighborhood awoke in an instant. Feminine heads appeared in every direction.

That broke the spell which had for a moment held the crowd about the machine, and they made a dash across lots toward the Backus house, some of them fairly dragging the grinning policeman along with them.

The "thug" on guard suddenly turned and, with a great show of bravado, drew a revolver and faced the oncoming crowd. For a moment it looked as if there would be a lynching.

All this time the machine was humming industriously. Johnson and Backus stood by, laughing gleefully at the success of the joke.

Now the porch-climber, who had been inside of the house a reasonable length of time to accomplish his fell purpose, appeared in the window with his first sack of "swag." He placed it carefully on the roof, and went back for the other.

At this point some one in the crowd noticed that this performance was not causing the householder any alarm. Others looked back and saw the grinning men about the machine. Then the joke dawned on them, and they ceased their murderous advance before the sentinel suffered any bodily harm.

The people in the windows, however, less favored spectators, were still in ignorance, and kept up the clamor. The onrushing crowd quickly swallowed their own chagrin and waited to enjoy the discomfiture of the women when they discovered the trick.

A moment later the "desperado" upstairs appeared with his second loaded sack, which he followed through the window. As he handed the two bags down to his anxiously awaiting pal, and half slid down the ladder himself, the crowd yelled its approval in a grand chorus of "April Fool!" and kept it up while the two "criminals" grabbed their "loot" and the ladder and made a hasty exit.

As the facts dawned on the rest of the neighborhood, there was a sudden disappearance of disgusted feminine faces and a chorus of banging windows.

"Well, that was realistic enough to suit anybody," remarked Backus to Johnson, as the crowd closed in around the picture-machine.

"Yes, that looked like the real thing, all right," put in the officer. "I came near running them guys in meself when they skinned away with the goods."

A moment later Johnson had packed up his machine and driven off with his two assistants.

Billy Backus was still lingering in front of his house, chatting with the officers and one or two neighbors, when a one-horse wagon containing three men pulled up at the curb.

"Does Mr. Backus live here?" asked one of the trio.

"He sure does, and here he is," was the reply of the genial householder.

"Well, we came out from the International Kinetoscope Company, to frame up that burglary stunt on your house. Mr. Cantwell said you would understand."

"What's that?" ejaculated Backus and the policeman.

The spokesman repeated his statement in perfectly plain English.

"Somebody must be bughouse up at your place, or else you have got your wires

crossed," said Backus. "How many burglars does Cantwell think I am going to entertain for him in one afternoon? He's had one gang up here already."

It was now the visitor's turn to look surprised.

"Somebody is bughouse besides me, then," he declared. "Cantwell told me about this job last week, and he didn't have any other gang he could have sent out, anyway. Did the guy give you his name?"

"Sure; it was Johnson," replied Backus—"the man Cantwell said he would send."

"Johnson!" cried the other. "That's my name, and I am the only original around our shop."

"What's your game, young fellow?" demanded the officer, now becoming extremely suspicious.

"Somebody else trying an April-fool dodge, I guess," said Billy Backus. "I'll go up-stairs and phone Cantwell."

As the householder entered his dining-room, where the telephone hung, he stopped in consternation. He was confronted by a gaping silver-cabinet absolutely empty, while on the floor in front still lay the pile of junk his early visitor had dumped there.

Sticking up conspicuously from the top of the heap was an old scrap of paper with some rude hieroglyphics scrawled on it. Backus picked it up as a possible clue, and this is what he read:

> April Fool, William! Next time don't lay your plans at a quick-lunch table. Better take a private dining-room.
>
> Yours,
> THE REAL CROOKS.

THE CAD.

BY CASPER CARSON,

Author of "From Stripes to Shoulder-Straps," "In the Lap of Luxury," "When Reuben Came to Town," etc.

The Man Who Vowed in Public that He Was Going to Marry a Certain Heiress for Her Millions, and How He Justified Himself for the Act.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

"I MET a dream of a girl last night," observed Goodrich suddenly, at breakfast.

His companion, Mr. Dempsey St. John, did not seem especially impressed. He merely lifted his eyebrows, and continued serenely spooning out the interior of his grapefruit.

Then, somewhat leisurely, he rinsed his fingers, and prepared to glance at the morning paper. Mr. St. John was refined, worldly-wise, and inclined to be a trifle cynical.

"I say, I met a dream of a girl last night," repeated Goodrich aggressively.

"Chorus or vaudeville?" queried Mr. St. John, his eyes upon the headlines.

"Neither, by George!" Goodrich banged his fist down on the table with a vehemence which made the dishes rattle. "But a regular top-notcher, I tell you—a Newport and Lenox and Tuxedo beauty."

"My dear Cadmus"—Mr. St. John always called the other this, probably because his name was David J.—"my dear Cadmus," with a slight frown, "there is no need to call the attention of the whole dining-room to us by such emphasis; nor, I may add, in trying to lie to me. Where, pray, could you meet any respectable people, unless I introduce them to you? And I certainly was not out with you last night?"

"Well, I met this one all right without you," boasted Goodrich. "And you can take it straight from me, that she's got

all the dames you ever steered me up against looking like a hunch of also-rans. Looks, position, money — any way you want to play it—she can give the flag to all Fifth Avenue."

Mr. St. John made no remark, but the very way he poured out his coffee was evidence of his skepticism.

"Think I'm trying to string you, eh? Pass it up for a line of bull con, do you? Well, just to prove I know the sterling mark when I see it on the goods, I'll hand you out her name. It's Natica Sherman. Now, maybe you'll sit up and take notice."

Mr. St. John did more—he fairly gasped, for Natica Sherman was the acknowledged belle of the season, the most beautiful, exquisite creature that New York's smart set had produced in years.

Neither could there be any question as to her standing in society. She traced her descent through lines of the purest Knickerbocker blood. The Sherman fortune represented the accumulated millions of three generations.

"You met Miss Natica Sherman!" St. John exclaimed, with an incredulity which was hardly flattering. "Did she talk with you?"

"Sure, she did. Oh, we got as chummy as a sore back and a porous-plaster. She's asked me to come up to the house and see her."

The other man studied his face hard for some evidence of a joke, but was finally forced to accept the statement at par.

"Oh, never fear; it's all on the level," Goodrich went on, rightly interpreting the analytic glance bent upon him from the shrewd gray eyes behind the gold-rimmed eyeglasses. "I met her last night at the rehearsal for that Charity Bazaar I've been rung in on. She's in the 'Old New York Minuet' they've got up, you know, supposed to be limited only to swells. But young Art Osborne, who was Natica's partner, minuetted so much like a grasshopper that Mrs. Yeats took him out and promoted me from being an Indian chief in the tableaus to the vacant job.

"I'm to be Aaron Burr, whoever he was," he added complacently.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated St. John helplessly. "Good Lord!"

Why not pick out Chuck Connors to enact the courtly, polished Aaron, and be done with it, he thought?

"Yes," went on the other, unheeding the interruption; "and maybe you think I didn't get Osborne's goat with a chance like that? Oh, you kid! Did I land? Say, I was the one best bet before we got twice around. And now, as I tell you, there's 'Welcome' wreaths hanging all over the front door of that big house up the avenue, whenever I choose to stroll around."

"She probably looks upon you as a freak," observed Mr. St. John thoughtfully, "and wants to study you at her leisure. But, never doubt, your shrift will be over as soon as her curiosity is satisfied. No girl of cultivated instincts could possibly stand long for you, you know."

These two never hesitated to tell each other home truths, no matter how unpalatable. Their intimacy, extending over a period of three years now, was a strange one, inexplicable to most people.

Why, it was asked, should Dempsey St. John, the esthetic dilettante, whose word was the final authority on art, literature, and the stage—why should he, lonely though he might be in his confirmed bachelorhood, have taken up and made his constant companion this raw, uncouth cub, who must have set his teeth on edge a dozen times a day?

Perhaps it was, as Dempsey sometimes averred, smiling cynically under his short, grizzled mustache, a penance for his sins, like the haircloth shirt which the monks of old used to wear next their flesh.

Perhaps the association was due to the attraction of unlike temperaments; perhaps, because the older man saw, or thought he saw under Goodrich's rough exterior, something fine which needed but to be developed, a glint of gold in the forbidding quartz.

If this last were true, certain it was that no one else had been able to discern it. Goodrich was a cad, a boor, a primitive savage, and bade fair to remain such to the end of the chapter.

Why he consorted with St. John was equally incomprehensible. It might have been supposed, for the purpose of improving himself, and gaining a knowledge of polite practises. But he openly

flouted the advice and instruction of his mentor, ridiculed the other's dignified punctilio, and went his own objectionable way.

"Mrs. Verrage told me to-night not to bring you to her house any more," observed St. John on one occasion, with that outspoken candor which distinguished their alliance. "She says you are not a gentleman."

"Well, she's right," retorted Goodrich, entirely unabashed; "I'm not. I am David J. Goodrich."

That was the keynote to the fellow, an insufferable and abounding conceit. He was David J. Goodrich; take him or leave him, as you choose. He intended to change neither his ways nor his manners to suit anybody.

As for the rest, he had come up to New York some five or six years before from a little village out in New Jersey, seventy-five or a hundred miles away, and after a season of searching for a job had finally landed as porter at a big art store.

Shrewd enough in a way, and naturally observant, he soon recognized that the artists who came there to dispose of their wares were, as a rule, poor business men, unequal to driving a hard bargain, and usually taking whatever price the dealers saw fit to give them. Therefore, since he had begun to tire of hard work, as well as to cherish certain aspirations for a higher niche in the world, he proposed to one or two of these, whom he had come to know, that he should sell their output for them on commission, and happening to make good, was able to take this up as a regular means of livelihood.

His association with the artists led him into Bohemian haunts, and an acquaintanceship also with writers, singers, and actors, with the result that he gradually extended the field of his operations and took these, too, under his wing.

Besides his "stable" of painters, as he called his original clientele, he also had a "stable" of authors whose work he disposed of to the magazines and newspapers. He made it his business to get acquainted with theatrical managers, and for a consideration could generally secure a position for an actor temporarily "at liberty," or for a singer whose voice was wasting its sweetness on the desert air of a boarding-house.

There are all sorts of occupations followed in New York which would land a man at starvation anywhere else in the country. Goodrich's was of this character. He toiled not, neither did he spin, in the ordinary acceptation of the term.

He had no profession or specialized knowledge of any kind. He was even ignorant concerning the literary and artistic values in which he dabbled, except for a certain intuitive sense of knowing what would "go."

Yet he managed for all that to live at a fashionable hotel, dress stylishly, and comport himself generally as a man of wealth and leisure.

His curious friendship with Dempsey St. John—originating in the course of some of his art dealings, and continuing, as already said, nobody knew why—had thrown open doors to him others would have given their ears to enter, and had made free to him New York's aristocracy of brains. But if Goodrich felt any gratitude for such privileges, he never deigned to show it.

He flatly contradicted critics upon their own ground, sneered at the claims of noted men to their faces, introduced the language of the "street" into the most select assemblies, and made himself generally offensive wherever he went.

Nor, with all he had gained, was he in any way satisfied. He was constantly grumbling over his lot, complaining at the happy-go-lucky shiftlessness of his craftsmen. He would have driven them like slaves had he been able; but the artistic temperament is naturally procrastinating, and only so much work could he wring out of his unwilling serfs—not enough, he realized, no matter how largely his business might expand, to give him the automobiles and steam-yachts and country places and houses on Fifth Avenue, and other luxuries of the millionaire he was determined to have.

Hence he had unblushingly announced his intention of marrying for money.

"What's the use of slaving and sweating for the big bank-roll, when there's such an easy short cut to it as that," he used to say to St. John. "The first skirt I see tagged with the million-dollar mark, me for it, and I don't care who knows what I am up to."

"Nothing less than a million would

do, I suppose?" St. John would query derisively. "And, of course, the lady herself will have nothing to say in the matter. Indeed, how could any woman decline such an honor?"

"You're jolly well right," Goodrich would grin in reply. "A million is my figure; more if I can get it, but not a darned cent less. And as for the girl"—with braggart self-confidence—"the one I pick out will toe the mark all right; never fret about that. I get what I want, when I want it, son. Put it down on paper, if you want to."

"By Jove, I will!" cried St. John; "just to catch you once in your conceited impudence."

And, accordingly, he drew up the following statement, which both of them duly signed:

> David J. Goodrich hereby pledges himself to marry within one year from date a girl worth not less than one million dollars, or in default thereof to pay for a dinner for Dempsey St. John and six friends, which shall be held at a time and place, and with a menu to be selected by Dempsey St. John.
>
> And in case David J. Goodrich does redeem his said pledge and marry a girl worth one million dollars within one year from date, then Dempsey St. John agrees to provide a dinner for him and six friends upon similar terms and conditions.

That had been months before, however, and as Goodrich had not recently referred to the subject, nor managed to make the acquaintance of any heiress, St. John supposed the fellow had seen the futility of the attempt, and was preparing to pay for his boasting.

Now, though, when the other scoffingly observed that Miss Natica Sherman was probably only interested in him as a freak of which she would soon tire, "Cadmus" looked up at him from across the table with a peculiar expression of triumph.

"No," he said. "To tell you the truth, St. John, I'm rather banking on her to win that dinner for me."

Even St. John's usually impenetrable calm was shattered by so audacious a declaration.

"You mean—" he gasped.

"I mean that I think I shall marry her. She's got ten millions, they say, and that's ten times more than I agreed to show up; so you've got no kick coming."

"You fool!" St. John had somewhat recovered himself by this time. "To say nothing of the absurdity of her possibly considering you, don't you know that Natica Sherman is already practically betrothed to Arthur Osborne?"

"To Art Osborne, eh?"

"Certainly. Why, that is an understood thing, settled almost from the time the two were in their cradles, and a highly appropriate arrangement, too, in view of the long and extremely close intimacy between the families. Judge Osborne was Mr. Sherman's executor, and has had entire charge of the estate ever since the latter's death, twelve years ago."

"What's that?" demanded Goodrich with a start. "Judge Osborne has charge of all that mazuma, you say?"

"He has, indeed. What's the matter?" mockingly. "You are surely not afraid to have your prospective dowry in his hands, are you? Why, idiot, big as the Sherman fortune is, it is not a drop in the bucket to Judge Osborne's wealth."

"Oh, I don't need you to tell me how old Osborne's rated," interrupted Goodrich impatiently. "Everybody in New York knows that he's in the Rockefeller and Morgan class all right; but, just the same—"

He paused, and frowningly contemplated the remains of breakfast on his plate.

"Yes?" suggested St. John. "Just the same—"

"Ah!" and Goodrich favored him with an enigmatic wink; "I think I'll wait to tell you that, my boy, until—" Again he paused.

"Well? Until what?"

"Until the Sherman millions belong to me," concluded Goodrich, with a boisterous laugh, as he rose from the table.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHALLENGE.

For several days thereafter, Mr. St. John saw little of his loutish "side-partner." Goodrich was evidently engaged on some affairs which occupied the most of his time; and, although it was his custom to blow and bluster about any

transactions in which he was concerned, he remained in the present instance strangely secretive.

Sometimes, when he came in at night, or on the rare occasions when the two now took their meals together, he would speak swaggeringly of having been up to "Natica's house," or of having been to this, that, or the other place with "Natica," thus showing that he was not neglecting his wooing; but, for the most part, he was preoccupied and thoughtful.

Once or twice St. John ran into him outside, sitting in a restaurant in close conference with fellows the older man did not know; but, as he showed no inclination to include his friend in the party, and did not afterward refer to their meeting, the other felt a certain delicacy in alluding to the matter.

In truth, he really thought very little about it. Goodrich was always picking up with new people, or starting some fresh scheme which, as a rule, ended in smoke; and St. John's curiosity in regard to whatever new ventures might be in contemplation was, consequently, a trifle blunted.

Besides, there was a wonderful exhibition of Spanish paintings just come to town which engaged about all of the critic's interest and enthusiasm, and left him scant opportunity for any detached or separate reflections.

However, the two got together on the night of the big "Charity Bazaar"; for, like almost everybody else in New York, St. John felt this was an event he could not well afford to miss, and had drawn himself away from his beloved pictures to be in attendance.

It was held in the Metropolitan Opera-House, and the chief event on the program was to be the minuet presenting characters famous in the history of old New York, the different parts being taken in many cases by direct descendents of the personages portrayed.

St. John had looked forward with a good deal of quiet amusement to seeing Goodrich in the rôle of Aaron Burr; for he could not conceive of "Cadmus" answering in one single respect to the requirements of the character.

Yet, when the minuet was finally danced, he was bound to admit that the woman who picked Goodrich out had been wiser than he. Whether it was the Colonial costume — the black silk coat and knee-breeches, with the ruffles and powdered hair—or whether it was the excitement of the occasion rousing him up to the demands of his part, the chap undoubtedly made good.

Courtly, dignified, debonair, he moved through the stately figures of the dance with a grace and ease which would have done credit to the real Aaron himself.

Ordinarily, too, Goodrich was a decidedly commonplace-looking person—the type of which one sees hundreds on Elevated or Subway trains, or about the streets, and never thinks of giving a second glance; but to-night he looked positively distinguished. There was a flash in his eye, a poise in his bearing, a firm set to his lips which had worked a veritable transformation in his appearance.

There was no question but that he and his partner scored the hit of the spectacle. Miss Sherman was cast as Theodosia Burr, and in her sweet young beauty and slender grace, as she swayed to the rhythm of the music, the spirit of that traditional belle seemed again to live and breathe.

Each time the measures of the minuet brought this pair to the footlights, they were greeted with rounds of applause; and at the conclusion they were called out again and again to stand bowing to a house which rose at them as to a Caruso or a Melba.

It was not, however, the success of their pageantry, or even the unexpected gallantry of Goodrich, or the loveliness of his companion, that held St. John's glance riveted upon the twain, and caused his eyes to narrow slowly behind the gold-rimmed glasses.

It was rather a significant downward flutter of Natica's dark lashes every time her gaze turned in the direction of her partner, the coming and going of a deeper color upon her cheek than that of the rouge which her make-up demanded.

"By Jove!" St. John said to himself in amazement. "Incredible as it may seem, she has fallen in love with the beggar! Good Heavens! In love with 'Cadmus'! A beautiful, exquisite creature like that! And he, the soulless clod, only values her because she is worth ten millions!

"It must not be permitted," he asserted fiercely to himself. "I should have stepped in and put a stop to it long ago. I must do so now. I must find some way to prevent so flagrant an outrage. Yet," and he frowned, mindful of how often interference in a love-affair will provoke the very result one is seeking to avoid, "what shall I do? What can I do?"

St. John saw little of the rest of the performance. Seldom had he been so disturbed and upset over a matter which did not directly concern himself, and for which he was in no way responsible.

He was given, too, to attending strictly to his own business. But failure to intervene in this case would be nothing less than a crime. The girl must be saved from so monstrous a sacrifice.

He knew Goodrich, he told himself—none better; and on no account could he be considered a worthy or even permissible mate for Natica Sherman.

Ignorant, clownish, totally mercenary in his aims, what hope of happiness could there be for her in such a union? The fellow cared for nothing except her money. She might be drawn to him now by a girlish infatuation or whim; but when she came to know him, she would not be able to stand him for a minute.

Yes, St. John decided, tugging at his mustache; ticklish though such a proposition was, he must interpose and stop the affair at any hazard.

A dozen plans to that end suggested themselves only, upon consideration, to be discarded. He knew he must be wise, wary and tactful if he were to avoid rousing the girl's spirit and thus playing directly into Goodrich's hand; and, consequently, he put aside all such ideas as that of appealing to her mother, or endeavoring to have any compulsion brought to bear.

He also knew it would be idle to protest to Goodrich. The latter would only tell him impudently to go to the dickens, and continue, unheeding, in his purpose.

Indeed, the more St. John pondered the situation the more puzzled he became. He was still as uncertain and at sea as ever when the entertainment came to an end, and he wandered out with the crowd so absorbed in his meditations that he did not notice at least a dozen bows of recognition extended to him.

There is a rather famous chop-house a short distance down Broadway where one can usually get a quiet and undisturbed corner to himself, and thither St. John decided to go and thrash out his problem over a light supper.

He had hardly thoroughly settled himself, however, and given an order for grilled bones, before the quiet of the place was invaded by a noisy crowd of young fellows, performers from the bazaar, with Cadmus among them.

The latter was manifestly preening himself over his triumph, blatantly exultant and vainglorious. He spied his comrade immediately, and, rushing over to St. John's corner, seized him by the arm, loudly insisting that he must join their party.

It was on the tip of the critic's tongue to refuse with the curt announcement that he preferred to be left to his own company when, raising his eyes, he observed that Arthur Osborne was one of the crowd with Goodrich, and an inspiration flashed into his mind. He rose without a word, and followed over to the big table around which they were seating themselves.

"Here"—Goodrich roughly pushed two of them aside to make room for St. John, and thrust him forward—"I guess most of you chaps know old Dempsey here without having to be introduced; but to such of you as don't, I'll simply say that he's the duck who tries to play the part of guardian to me.

"Yes," he went on, gleefully slapping St. John on the shoulder, "he thinks I can't do anything right, you know, and is always telling me how the game should be played according to Hoyle. But I guess I handed him one to-night that'll make him be good for a while. Eh, old sport?

"He thought I couldn't play Aaron Burr, if you please," he went on. "Did I show him? Well, say! Wasn't I the goods? If I'd been any more Aaron-y, I'd have been old Aaron himself!"

Nobody made any reply to this boisterous bit of self-glorification, but all looked a shade disgusted.

Finally St. John broke the silence.

"My dear Cadmus," he said dryly, "far be it from me to attempt to belittle your triumph of this evening. In-

deed, after this, I am ready to believe almost anything of you; even—" He paused; then, speaking more distinctly, added: "Even your threat to marry a girl worth a million dollars!"

Goodrich started, and shot a quick, questioning glance at St. John, but the latter met it with absolute composure.

"What's that? What's that?" rang out a half-dozen voices. "Goodrich is threatening to marry a girl worth a million?"

"Why, certainly," St. John smiled around upon the group. "Do you mean to say none of you had heard about it? Well, I am surprised. It is the truth, though. See," opening his pocketbook and producing the fateful dinner agreement, "I have the documents to prove it."

The "kidding" and "joshing" of Goodrich that followed! He was far from popular, and none there but welcomed the chance to take the wind out of his sails, puffed up with conceit over his success at the bazaar.

One wanted to know when the "open season" for heiresses started; another asked him what methods he should follow in his hunting, and whether he intended to capture his prize with a net or in a trap. They dubbed him "Roosevelt"; and one fellow, with a turn for drawing, executed a sketch on the back of a menu-card in which he was represented as stalking his game through the jungles of Central Park.

Goodrich, however, took all their teasing with arrogant indifference.

"Well," he drawled at length, "laugh if you want to. I don't deny that I have declared myself, as St. John tells you; and, what's more," with a bang of his fist on the table, "I intend to make good. As for how I'm going to get my heiress, I've got her already."

A perfect roar of derision went up at this announcement. Nobody believed him for a moment; they merely supposed that, in order to hush them up, he was making a colossal bluff.

"Rats!" scoffed one of the leading tormentors. "Don't tell us that any girl with a million is overlooking the fine line of foreign dukes and counts to take up with a bargain-counter remnant like you, Goodrich. You'll have to produce evidence on that score, my boy."

"Yes, that's it," chimed in the rest lustily. "We're from Missouri. Name her, if it's so. Name her."

"Oh, that's easy," sneered Goodrich, flinging back his head. "Since you're all so bent on knowing, it's my partner of to-night—Natica Sherman!"

A dead silence succeeded his words for a moment. They had no other idea than that his words were intended as a joke, but this was carrying a joke too far.

Somebody attempted to give a half-hearted laugh, and turn the subject; but the sentence he started ended abruptly, for Arthur Osborne had sprung excitedly to his feet, and was leaning across the table.

Always a handsome young fellow, St. John thought he looked like a demigod as he stood there, towering pale and stern over the other, his blue eyes flashing indignation, his yellow hair swept back from his brow.

"Goodrich," he said, his voice choked by passion, "you are a liar!"

David J. never changed his careless, insolent pose for a second.

"So!" with a glance up at Osborne, "in what way, please?"

"In daring to assert that you are engaged to Miss Sherman, or that she—"

"Hold on, there," interrupted Goodrich. "Hold on. Don't put any words into my mouth that I never used. I'll leave it to anybody here that I never made any such claim."

"You did," insisted Osborne wrathfully.

"I did not. All I said was that I already had my heiress; and by that I stand. Maybe we're not engaged; but I guess a fellow knows without having to be told when a girl's so stuck on him that she's ready to snap him up the minute he says the word."

"And do you dare to say that such is the situation between—"

"Between me and Natica? Sure, son. I've got her lashed to the mast."

Osborne's face was dark with rage, but he managed to control himself.

"Look here," he said, "the young lady whose name you have been using so freely has no brother or natural champion to resent your conduct; but, as a friend of the family, I take the duty on myself. I don't know whether this is your clownish

idea of humor, or whether your overgrown conceit has led you into the belief that you are speaking the truth, but, whichever it is, you are going to apologize right here and now, or else take a thrashing that you'll remember to the day of your death!"

"That's right!" joined in a chorus of the others. "And we'll help you! Don't wait for an apology; soak him, anyway. He deserves to be licked within an inch of his life, the dirty cur!"

St. John alone attempted to pour oil on the troubled waters, but his voice was lost in the tumult. It was growing late, and their party was alone in the little restaurant, except for the presence of a hovering waiter or two. He began to fear that his associate might be roughly handled before the impending fray could be stopped.

"Boys, boys," he protested, "don't let this affair degenerate into a vulgar brawl. Apologize, Cadmus. Apologize at once, I tell you."

"Shut up!" growled Goodrich, struggling to his feet and facing the ring of menacing faces. "There ain't going to be any scrap, and there ain't going to be any apology, either.

"What are all you fellows butting into the game for, anyhow?" he demanded of the crowd. "This is a private matter between me and Osborne, and I guess we can settle it for ourselves.

"He's stuck on the girl himself. Ah, touched you on the raw there, didn't I, son?" as Arthur flushed and then went pale again. "He's stuck on the girl himself, I say. Well, so am I, or on her money, which amounts to the same thing; and is a question like that to be settled by all of you jumping on me and pounding me into a jelly? Not by a jugful."

"Then, settle it with Osborne," urged the crowd vociferously. "Stand up to him like a man and take your medicine."

"No." Goodrich shook his head. "He is bigger than I am, and would probably do me, although I fancy I could give a fair account of myself; but how would that help matters?"

"He's afraid! He's afraid!" they yelled. "Make him fight, Arthur. Smash him!"

"Yah!" Goodrich thrust out a derisive chin at them. "You chaps claim to be gentlemen, and I don't; but I've got just enough consideration for this girl not to want to see her name dragged into a police-court scrap and flaunted in the head-lines of to-morrow morning's yellows. It wouldn't look well for the future Mrs. David J. Goodrich," he added impudently.

"No," he reiterated, "I won't fight, and that goes as it lays. It ain't fair to the girl, and it wouldn't settle a thing. Osborne would be just as much stuck on her as ever, and I would be just as much stuck on—her money.

"What I say is, leave it to her. That's the way to prove whether I'm a liar or not. Osborne's got everything on me. He's a *gentleman* born and bred. He's got looks—I've heard St. John, here, call him a Greek god, and an "Apollo Belviderey," and a bunch of other art-museum things.

"He's got money, too, and family, and he's a cotillion leader, and been through Harvard College. I'm just David J. Goodrich, a one-hundred-to-one outsider.

"Then, let him leave it to the girl, if he dares. He's out to marry her—he won't deny it; and I'm out for her ten millions. My hand's spread out on the table; now let him play to it, and see which she chooses.

"That'll do a dern sight more toward settling the question of who's the liar than a couple of bloody noses and a pair of fines down at Jefferson Market in the morning."

Arthur Osborne hesitated a moment, then picked up the gauntlet flung down to him.

"I may be wrong in demeaning myself to your caddish level," he said contemptuously, "but perhaps it is the best way to teach you the lesson you deserve. I accept your challenge, not on the terms that Miss Sherman will accept me, but that she will certainly refuse you; and until that time I am willing to defer the thrashing I have made up my mind to give you."

"All right," Goodrich nodded carelessly: "you're on, any way you want to frame it up. Are you coming, St. John?" as he rose and swaggered to the door, followed by the black looks and muttered execrations of the entire party. "I guess this bunch is a bit too select for a razor-back like me."

Outside the door, he paused and laid a hand upon his companion's shoulder.

"Very cute of you, Dempsey," he said —"very clever indeed. You think now that when the girl hears of this affair to-night, as she's sure to, all bets'll be off, eh? Well, let me give you the tip, my son. It was just what I wanted."

CHAPTER III.

ONLY A FORTUNE-HUNTER.

THERE was a stiff, square, white note, addressed in angular feminine handwriting, awaiting Goodrich when he returned to the hotel the following evening.

"H'm," he grinned, as he tore it open and ran his eye over the contents. "Just about what I expected. I could have come pretty near dictating it in advance."

"Is it from her?" queried St. John.

"Of course."

"What does she say?"

"Oh, just a bunch of guff—ducky-daddles, and sweetie-weetie, and all that sort of thing—with a string of round O's down at the bottom for kisses. Like to see for yourself?" And he flung the missive over with a teasing laugh.

Long as St. John had known Goodrich, he was never able to tell just when the other was joking and when in earnest. So it was with considerable relief he saw the note was not the described "bunch of guff, with a string of round O's," but a very formal little epistle requesting the recipient, if he could possibly find it convenient, to call that evening at Miss Sherman's home.

"Evidently the wireless is in good working order," commented Goodrich. "Late as it was, I'll bet we hadn't been gone fifteen minutes last night before she had a C.Q.D. message from that chop-house, with a full account of all that had taken place. Trust to little Arthur for that."

"Nothing of the kind," demurred St. John quickly. "I'll wager my life that if she's heard anything it never came from Osborne. He's a clean-cut, manly young fellow—not at all the kind to carry tales, no matter how much it might be to his own advantage."

"Sure, he wouldn't," sneered the other —"not in a case like this, anyway, where he knew he had a dozen good friends only too anxious to do the dirty work for him, without any need of him soiling his lily fingers.

"However," he broke off, "it doesn't make any difference how it got to her. It was bound to, anyhow, sooner or later, and it's a cinch that she knows now. The weather predictions for me, I guess, are squally, with sharp thunder and lightning and heavy rains."

"You are going to call, then, as she requests?"

"Surest thing in the world. But not to-night, bo—not to-night. She'll have to sit on the anxious-stool for a while and wonder what I'm up to. Maybe, if I feel like it, I shall saunter around there to-morrow afternoon."

"But you can't do anything like that," protested the horrified St. John. "A request of this kind from a lady is like returning a partner's lead of trumps at whist. Only sudden death or an absence of trumps in one's own hand can excuse the failure to comply. You must either go or consider your acquaintance with her at an end, and break off any semblance at cordial relations. You can't—"

"Well, I can," asserted Goodrich imperturbably, "and what's more, I'm going to. I'm playing this hand, I tell you, and if she wants to see me she'll have to wait until I am good and ready to drop around."

St. John could only throw up his hands in the face of such utter insensibility to the demands of propriety.

"Well, there's one good thing, at least," he remarked. "When you do go, you'll find the door shut in your face."

"Not on your life," rejoined Goodrich easily. "On the other hand, I'll lay you ten to one she'll be watching for me so close that she'll be down to open the door for me with her own hands."

And, it must be confessed, that is just exactly what happened when David J. finally decided that the time was ripe for him to pay his postponed visit. There was, however, a certain angry luster in the girl's dark eyes, a proud set to her fair young head, a touch of hauteur in her manner as she admitted him—which boded, indeed, the squally weather he had predicted.

The visitor seemed, though, to take no

note of these danger-signals. He entered the drawing-room jauntily and at ease, carrying his hat and stick with him, and, after an observation or two upon the beauty of the day, started to describe an amusing street incident he had seen while on the way up there.

Quite uninvited, he had drawn forward a chair and seated himself in it while she remained standing; but he was not able to proceed far in his funny story before she stopped him with a quick, impatient gesture.

"Mr. Goodrich," she said icily, "I did not ask you to come here to entertain me, but to put to you a very serious question."

"A serious question, eh?" he returned flippantly. "That generally means money in the crowd I train with. Is it possible that you want to make a touch?"

He drew out a handful of small change from his pocket, and gazed at it with mock melancholy.

"Only one dollar and thirty-seven cents left," with a shake of his head; "but you can have half of it if you really are in need. Come, I'll be generous. I'll do without the new diamond tiara I was thinking of buying, and give you the whole thing."

She, however, was evidently in no mood for foolery.

Her foot tapped impatiently on the carpet, a quick, ominous frown gathered on her brow.

"Oh," she broke out angrily, "I told you I wanted to consult you on a serious matter. Will you not, then, please cease this frivolity, and—and—"

"Get down to business?" he supplied. "With all my heart. But, first, won't you sit down? It makes me nervous to see you fidgeting around on your feet that way, when all these chairs are going to waste."

She hesitated an instant, but finally somewhat reluctantly took the seat toward which he waved a lordly hand, although he still did not offer to rise.

"Now," he said, "we can talk. If I am not mistaken, you want to ask me in regard to a little incident which took place the other night?"

"A little incident!" Her eyes blazed. "Is that what you call the entirely unwarrantable use of my name you made in a public place? If I had any male relative capable of acting for me, instead of having to take the matter up myself, I think you would find it a pretty big incident. A little incident!"

"Why, yes," assented Goodrich, "that is all I should term it if you had been out in a crowd of girls and happened to make casual mention of my name. I wouldn't go threatening to call in all my sisters and my cousins and my aunts on account of it."

"Casual mention!" she stormed. "Casual mention! Did you not openly assert— Oh," she broke off, "I cannot repeat it! It is too degrading, too insulting to me!"

"Let me help you." Goodrich's voice was bland, his expression unchanged. "You were about to ask me if I didn't say that I expected to marry you, and thereby win an agreement with St. John that I would have a wife worth a million inside of a year? That was about the substance of what Osborne reported to you, was it not?"

"You are mistaken, sir," she denied sharply. "Arthur Osborne did not tell me."

"What?" His eyes narrowed skeptically. "Are you prepared to say he did not mention the matter? Honor bright, now?"

"Well," she confessed, "not until after I had heard it from another source. Then, when I asked him the pointblank question, he could not help, of course, but admit that it was so."

"Ah," commented Goodrich, "a good game, that. Have another fellow do the tattling, and then appear merely to corroborate his statement."

Natica felt that this would never do. By an ingenious twist of the conversation, the main issue had been side-tracked, and she and Arthur were being put in the wrong.

"After all," she said hastily, "it matters little who told me. What I want to find out is whether you have any excuses to offer?"

"None," returned Goodrich.

"You admit, then, that you said these things?"

"That I want to marry you? Yes."

"That you wanted to marry me—for my money," she amended, with dignity.

"Well," and he smiled slightly, "I raise no objections on that score."

"Oh!" She flung out her hands with a passionate gesture. "What a creature! He sits there and calmly admits that he is a sordid, scheming fortune-hunter. Admits it, and feels no shame!"

"Exactly." Goodrich leaned forward and spread out his hands, palms upward. "I lay my cards face upward on the table for you or anybody else to see. I have no cuffs to deceive you, and nothing up my sleeve. I'm a regular Pure-Food-Law article, with everything printed plainly on the label."

"Ah, that's just it," she cried half hysterically. "I mistook your bruskness and uncouthness for honesty of character. I thought there was something fine in you underneath your rough shell; but now I find you are only a cheap, pitiful excuse for a man—a fortune-hunter who has not the brains to conceal his true purpose, a cad who mentions women's names in public places and boasts of the courtesies they may have shown him.

"How dared you?" She turned on him suddenly. "How dared you assert such a thing as that I was in love with you—ready to jump into your arms the moment you chose to give the word, was the expressive language you used, I believe? How dared you say it?"

"Because," he answered coolly, "it is the truth."

"What!"

"It is the truth, and you know it, Natica. Oh, a man doesn't have to be the seventh son of a seventh son and born under a veil to see a thing like that. All this stuff you read in novels and stories about the uncertainty of lovers is pure slush. When a chap is Mr. Right, he doesn't have to be told about it. Yes, sir, you are in love with me, and you can't deny it. You are in love with me, just the same as I am with you."

A wave of color swept over her face.

"It is not true!" she protested hotly, and demanded again:

"How dare you! How dare you!

"Why, that very word, love, is a profanation from your lips," she blazed out at him, her voice trembling in scorn. "You, who have openly bragged that your aim in life was to marry a rich wife, who have even had the audacity to admit it to my face! Pah! You in love with me? You are in love with my money!"

"No!" He rose to his feet at last, and stood before her, but his voice did not change from the even, composed tone he had maintained throughout. "You are wrong. As I told you, I have no objection to your money. Ten millions would make things very pleasant for a chap like me, with automobile instincts and a street-car income. But, just the same, if the ten millions were on one side and you on the other, I'd take you every time, Natica. I'm a poor man, and money means a lot more to me than it does to folks like you and Art Osborne, who have never had to hustle for it; but that would be my choice."

The earnestness of his speech caught her attention for a moment, and she half wavered; then there rose within her a surge of bitter scorn. He was weakening, she thought—trying to placate her with this cheap appeal.

"A very easy claim," she sneered, "since there is small danger of the choice being offered. I do not think I shall give away my fortune just to test your sincerity, Mr. Goodrich."

"Hardly," he granted; "and yet the choice may come to me all the same. Many a time have I traced the line, 'Riches have wings,' in my copy-book at school, and although I'll admit ten millions is a pretty heavy load to lift, this is the day of air-ships, remember.

"Mind you, I am not expecting any such streak of bad luck to fall your way, I see no immediate necessity for you to apply for admission to the poorhouse. But should such a day ever come, should those dollars of yours ever flutter away, you'll find that I am still Johnny-on-the-spot, ready to pay a dozen dinner wagers to St. John for the sake of claiming you."

An ironical smile curved her lips.

"As you say, Mr. Goodrich, there is scarcely any necessity to discuss the remote contingency you name. However, I am willing to give you the benefit of the doubt, and promise that if the time ever does come when I am penniless, you shall have the opportunity to prove your disinterestedness.

"In the meanwhile, though"—she spoke with considerable spirit—"I trust you will understand without further explanation that we must be absolute strangers—our acquaintance is at an end."

"You mean—"

"I mean just what I say. I neither care to receive you any longer at my house, nor to recognize you, or be recognized by you, should we meet outside."

Goodrich gazed at her a long moment without speaking, but he could see no sign of relenting in her proud bearing or in the firm set of her jaw.

"The outer darkness for mine, eh?" he said at last. "Well, our motto is, 'We strive to please.' Since such is your wish, so be it; but don't forget the contingency. If the ten millions does the Wright Brothers' act, I shall surely be around—unless, in some unguarded moment intervening, another girl with a million comes along and gathers me in."

She made no answer to this bit of persiflage; and so, after another moment of waiting, he picked up his hat and, with an airy bow, jauntily left the room.

She heard his steps pass through the hall, and the closing of the front door.

"He is utterly mercenary," she muttered through her tightly compressed lips. "He merely said what he did in order to save his face. He has not real heart enough to go upon the point of a cambric needle."

Then she flew to the window, and watched with straining eyes his form as it receded down the avenue.

"I wonder," she murmured—"I wonder, if I should actually become penniless, what he would do?"

CHAPTER IV.

RICHES TAKE WINGS.

ST. JOHN mercifully forbore to "rub it in" on Goodrich over the cropper which the latter had come with his vaulting ambition to get rich quick via the matrimonial route; still, he was sorely tempted on more than one occasion to do so, for, instead of appearing cast down by the fiasco, Cadmus became, if anything, more insufferably bumptious than ever.

"Washington and Napoleon and all the other great men of history got it in the neck at the start, my boy," he said; "it's the finish that counts. That agreement of ours has still three months to run, and I wouldn't advise you to order the dinner on me until the very last minute of the very last day. I'm apt to hand you a surprise at the eleventh hour."

In the same way he took every opportunity, too, to annoy and exasperate Arthur Osborne. The latter had consistently refused to speak to him since the scene in the chop-house, and tried to appear oblivious to his existence; but Goodrich, with a sort of diabolical ingenuity, was forever getting seats close to him in restaurants and places of public resort, and there repeating in tones which could not fail to reach the other's ears such homely proverbs as, "He laughs best who laughs last," and "The winner is the man who wins."

St. John, shocked at such undignified conduct, and made miserable by being constantly dragged into it, sought vainly to protest; but Goodrich only laughed at his exhortations and upbraidings.

"You all call me a cad," he would say; "and if I am to have the name, I might as well get the game."

He also continued the mysterious business—whatever it was—which kept him away from home so much, and which required so many conferences with unknown young men.

Indeed, his whole behavior at this period was so enigmatic that St. John's curiosity was considerably piqued. However, as already stated, it was not the critic's habit to pry into others' affairs; and since Goodrich did not seem willing to give him his confidence, he made no effort to find out what was in the wind.

When his associate came to him, though, with the request for a line of introduction to a certain great financial magnate whom St. John was in the habit of advising upon art matters, the older man felt justified in inquiring what was wanted.

"Mr. Soderberg is a very busy man, you must understand, Cadmus," he said, somewhat reluctantly handing over the desired passport. "He is not only head of the clearing-house and president of two or three banks, but he is connected with nearly every public institution of any note in the city. His time is really so thoroughly taken up that I shall feel I have done wrong in giving you that note unless you have something of actual importance to present to him."

"Something of importance?" exclaimed Goodrich. "Well, I guess he'll think so, all right, when he's heard what I have to spring on him. Say, do you think you can keep a secret, St. John?"

"Of course I can. Did you ever know me to breathe anything which was told me in confidence?"

"All right, then; but, mind you, not a word to any one until the deal is pulled off."

St. John was by this time all attention.

"What is it?" he questioned breathlessly, as the other seemed to hesitate.

"You know this corner down below here?"

"Yes," with visions of some prospective big transaction in real estate.

"Well, it has struck me that there would be a most desirable point for a peanut-stand, and I was wondering if old Soderberg didn't want to invest."

And that was all St. John could get out of him; for, laughing in high glee as though he had perpetrated some stupendous joke, he stuffed the credentials into his pocket and made off without vouchsafing any information as to his true mission.

That it must have been something of weightier concern than the location of a peanut-stand was evidenced, however, by the fact that the great magnate gave him a private interview a full hour in duration, and also made an appointment with him for the following day.

Moreover, at this second conference, other financiers of high standing were called in and paid eager heed to the airy young man, who talked to them with as much *sang-froid* and absence of timidity as though he had been holding forth to a bunch of his submissive writers or painters.

A week or ten days later, St. John came rushing excitedly into the room, waving an afternoon extra, and roused Goodrich from the nap he was always in the habit of taking before dinner.

"Good Heavens, man!" he cried. "I never expected to find you here quietly sleeping. Don't you know what has happened? Why, the whole town is in an uproar!"

"What has happened?" repeated Goodrich, sitting up and sleepily rubbing his eyes. "No. Has the Black Hand kidnaped the mayor, or has the Metropolitan Tower collapsed?"

"Neither; the Invincible Trust Company has failed!"

"Oh, is that all? I thought, from the way you came bursting in here, you had some news."

"But surely you don't understand? I tell you, the Invincible Trust has failed, closed its doors, gone to smash!"

"Yes, yes; I understand, all right. It's no particular surprise to me. I heard at noon that there was a run on down there, and that they probably wouldn't be able to weather it."

"But think of it, Cadmus. Why, it's a public calamity. The Invincible Trust gone. One would as soon have expected the Rock of Gibraltar to collapse."

"H'm," commented Goodrich dryly; "but the Rock of Gibraltar, you see, hasn't had all its underpinning and foundations carted away to bolster up a lot of wild-cat schemes. Anybody with an eye in his head could have told what was going to happen to the Invincible."

"What are you talking about? With a financier like Judge Osborne at the head of the concern, and a dozen big fortunes back of him, who could have dreamed of such a thing? Why, all the papers say it came as a complete surprise."

"The papers never do get hold of anything until after it is all over. Let's see what they have to say about it." Goodrich picked up the extra which St. John had brought in and ran his eye down the column.

"'Fifth Avenue hard hit,'" he read. "You bet it is. Old Osborne worked his society pull for all it was worth, and there'll be several of the smart set that won't be buying any new automobiles this season."

"That's so." St. John glanced suddenly over at him. "And, by the way, the Shermans are included in the list, aren't they? They must be; for Judge Osborne had the entire handling of the estate."

"By Jove," exclaimed Goodrich, as though the thought had just occurred to him, "so he did! Well, well. However, since we can't help it, St. John, suppose we dress for dinner?"

"You seem to take the affair pretty coolly," the other remarked with a puz-

zled frown. "I expected to see you go clear up in the air. Didn't you carry a deposit in the Invincible yourself?"

"Well, never so much," laughed David J., "but what the teller would have my account looked up before he would cash me a five-dollar check. Besides—" He paused to struggle with a refractory collar-button.

"Besides what?"

"I drew out the little I had on deposit there over a week ago."

CHAPTER V.

"I DID IT!"

DESPITE the show of indifference which he manifested to St. John, that astute observer noted that Goodrich was far from being as unconcerned as he strove to appear.

For one thing, he dressed with extreme and unusual care, betraying marked irritability over every little detail of his attire which went wrong, and appealing constantly to his friend for advice on such moot points as the style of collar most becoming to him, and the preferable choice of sleeve-buttons.

Then, too, at dinner he seemed absent-minded and preoccupied, eating little, although some of his favorite dishes were on the bill of fare; and immediately the repast was over, he announced his intention of going out.

"Any particular place in view?" inquired St. John.

"No," snapped Goodrich, as though fired with suspicion at the innocent question. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing," glancing up in surprise at the tone. "I merely thought if you had nothing especial on hand, I might go along with you. This is a sort of off-evening with me, as it happens."

"Well, you can make it an 'on' evening, then, with somebody else besides me," scowled the other. "I am not hunting company to-night, if you are." And, without further explanation or enlightenment, he snatched up his hat and coat, and made a hurried departure.

The critic could only gaze blankly at the door which had slammed behind his friend and scratch his head in utter incomprehensiveness.

"Is the fellow going insane?" he muttered to himself. "Surely, I said nothing to provoke such an outburst. No, there's been something wrong with him ever since I came home. I shouldn't wonder if he had been caught in that Invincible smash after all, and doesn't want to let me know for fear of being teased."

St. John, it must be remembered, was a bachelor of long standing, and had, perhaps, forgotten the fantastic effects which a certain microbe shaped like a little boy with bow and arrow can produce in the hot, impetuous blood of youth.

Besides, he knew of no girl toward whom Cadmus seemed attracted, since the close of the Natica Sherman affair; and that, of course, he regarded as definitely off the boards. He had never been informed of the "contingency," you see.

Goodrich, however, was not unmindful of it. Indeed, it had been the one thing in his thoughts ever since he had learned that the Invincible Trust Company was trembling to its fall; for, well he knew that when that great financial structure went down, the Sherman fortune would be buried in its ruins.

And now the thing he had prophesied had come to pass. Natica was penniless. Her ten millions had vanished as easily as a child might wipe the figures off its slate. The chance had come to him to prove the sincerity of his claim that it was not alone her money he was seeking.

No wonder, then, that he did not desire St. John's society that evening; for he had determined to waste no time in redeeming the pledge he had made, but to present himself before her that very night.

As fast as he could transport himself, therefore, he made for her house. When he reached it he saw that all the windows were dark, not a light visible; and for a moment he hesitated, wondering if it were possible the family were away.

There came over him, too, a strange feeling of diffidence very foreign to his usual cock-sure self-confidence. It had been three months since he had descended those steps with her sentence of dismissal ringing in his ears, three months since he had seen her; and in all that

time there had been no sign or indication of relenting on her part.

He had affirmed that she was in love with him, and he had believed it; but could he be sure? Certainly, this continued silence and indifference did not tend to bear him out.

And now he was risking all his chances upon this one throw; for he knew if she declined to see him to-night, all was over. It would mean his final and definite rejection.

Whether she would receive him then, or not, was a momentous question. Was he perhaps pushing the game too hard, he asked himself? Was he coming too soon? Might it not possibly be better to wait, and let events shape themselves?

For a moment he wavered, seized by the temptation to run away and hide himself in the park across the road; then, mastering the inclination, and frowning down his coward fears, he boldly mounted the steps.

He had anticipated some trouble at the door, and had ready a bill in his hand wherewith to bribe any uncomplaisant servitor who might appear; but, to his surprise, the portal, as on a former occasion, was unbarred by Natica herself.

In his confusion over this circumstance and the difficulty of getting his money back into his pocket, he permitted her unresistingly to catch him by both hands and draw him inside, albeit wondering at the warmth of her unexpected greeting.

He was speedily undeceived, however, of any idea that pardon and absolution were so easily to be won; for, as he came within the full circle of radiance from the chandelier in the hall, she gave a sudden gasp, and dropped his two hands as though they had been live coals.

"You?" she demanded, recoiling wide-eyed before him. "You?"

"Why, yes," he stammered. "You don't mean to say you took me for somebody else?"

She had somewhat recovered herself by this time.

"Naturally," she said with frigid poise; "since, in view of our last interview, I could hardly have expected—"

She broke off in sudden agitation, her eyes falling, a wave of color sweeping across her cheek.

She had evidently just recollected the terms upon which their parting had been made, and the change which this day had wrought in her worldly condition.

"I was waiting for Arthur Osborne," she explained hurriedly. "I thought you were he when I saw you come up the steps, and hastened to open the door. I sent for him in the hope of getting some understanding of this terrible thing that has happened."

"Strikes me you applied at a rather poor shop," said Goodrich slowly. "Artie could give you some very wise tips on waistcoats and ties, I have no doubt; but I hardly think he would shine as a heavy-weight financial oracle. Why didn't you tackle the old man?"

"I did, but he told me he was very busy and would send Arthur in his stead."

"Probably hasn't got his little story quite fixed up yet, and is trying to stave you off. Art, of course, can't do him any harm, because he doesn't know anything to tell."

"Then, do you mean I must remain in this state of uncertainty," she cried, "not knowing where I stand, or anything about the condition of my affairs? This blow has fallen on me like a thunder-clap out of a clear sky, and I seem absolutely unable to get any information in regard to it."

"I guess I can tell you all there is to know," Goodrich suggested; "perhaps a straighter story, at that, than you would get from Judge Osborne himself. I happen by chance to be pretty well on the inside."

She never thought of doubting him. In her present panic-stricken state she would have listened to a hobo if he had claimed to have information; but Goodrich's assured tone carried absolute conviction.

With a look of quick relief, she motioned him toward the little reception-room.

"It is very good of you," she said gratefully. "Won't you step in here, and speak low, please. Mama has one of her attacks of heart-trouble to-day, and I am trying to keep the news from her until she is a little better. That is why I was so anxious to meet Arthur myself."

Goodrich followed her into the room, and stood facing her.

"Well," he asked, "in the first place, how much do you know already?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing, except that the papers say the Invincible Trust Company has suspended."

He gazed at her thoughtfully in silence.

"Have you grit enough to stand some bad news?" he said at length.

"How bad?"

"Pretty bad."

"Try me."

He paused a moment.

"Do you remember what you said to me the last time I saw you?"

"Yes," she faltered; "I told you, if the day should ever arrive when I was penniless, you might come back."

"Well"—he threw out his arms significantly—"I am here!"

"You mean—"

"Exactly what my words imply."

She grew pale to the very lips, but she did not flinch.

"There will be nothing left?" she demanded.

"That I cannot say. It depends entirely upon how slick old Judge Osborne has been in his manipulation of accounts. I hope for your sake he can be forced to disgorge, but to recover will be a long and difficult process at best. As things stand, you are, as I tell you, penniless."

"But," she gasped, "I do not understand. You seem to insinuate that Judge Osborne has made away with our funds dishonestly. Surely, surely, that cannot be. Why, everybody knows that he is a man of the strictest integrity. My father trusted him absolutely and—"

"I can't help what your father may have thought about him. He is a thieving old crook."

"Oh, no, no!" she protested. "I cannot believe that. I am sure you must be mistaken. And if mistaken on that point, why not also in regard to my losses?

"Ah!" A sudden suspicion flashed into the look she bent upon him, and her tone changed. "Are you sure, Mr. Goodrich—forgive me if I am wronging you, but does not the past give me reason to doubt?—are you sure that you have not taken advantage of the opportunity to appear more of a friend to me than you really are?"

"You mean, am I stringing you on this 'down-and-out' gag, so as to take the spot-light myself and show up as a nice little matinée hero, eh? Is that the way you've got it sized up?"

She nodded reluctantly.

"I'm sorry, but I am afraid I shall have to ask you for stronger proof of what you tell me than your mere unsupported statement."

"Better proof?" he demanded. "What better proof do you want than that I am here? What kind of a play would it be for me to come here and tell you a pack of lies, only to have them nailed when the facts come out? Then, you would be justified in throwing me down good and hard."

"But you may be mistaken," she urged more gently. "Even granting that you honestly believe what you have told me, you may be mistaken. How can a young man like you, of no particular position or standing, know the inside of these great financial deals, and tell things which the newspapers have not even hinted at?"

"How?" he cried. "How? I'll tell you how. See here," snatching up an evening paper which lay upon the table. "What does this say? 'The run upon the Invincible and its subsequent suspension was precipitated by rumors which got abroad early in the day and was subsequently confirmed, that the clearing-house had been closed to it, and that in consequence a number of other banks were making heavy withdrawals. On behalf of the clearing-house, President Soderberg stated that action had been taken as the result of very damaging reports which had come to them, and which the Invincible seemed unable to explain.'

"Very damaging reports," repeated Goodrich grimly. "And do you know where those 'damaging reports' came from? Why, right from little old me. I may be a white chip financially, as you say; but, just the same, I proved to President Soderberg and the New York Clearing-house that old Osborne was a thief and his concern rotten to the core; and if my proof was good enough for them, it certainly ought to be good enough for you."

"You did that?" Her eyes were slowly dilating. "You wrecked the Invincible with your malicious stories, making me a beggar, and then have the hardihood

to come here and tell me about it—nay, to boast as though it were something you were proud of having done?"

"But, my dear girl," he attempted to interpose, "don't you see that it was for your good, that you were already—"

"For my good?" she broke in. "For the sake of your own paltry, pitiful revenge, you mean. Oh, I see your whole conscienceless scheme! Angered by my refusal of you, and the exposure of your purpose to marry a rich woman, you deliberately set out to wreck this great institution, heedless of the ruin and misery and suffering you would cause, caring only to humble and get even with me.

"And now you come here to gloat over your success!" she stormed on. "You gained admission and imposed on me at first by your show of hypocritical sympathy; but you could not keep up the deception long. Your expanding self-conceit led you to blurt out the truth!"

It was useless for Goodrich to attempt to justify himself, or to argue with the angry girl. She recognized only that he had admitted his responsibility for the downfall of the Invincible and the loss of her fortune, and she poured out upon him the full vials of her resentment.

She seemed to imagine, too, that he had come to her with some ulterior aim in view—to enlist her on his side as against the Osborne party with the plea of being able to recover some of her money for her; and she indignantly scorned the supposed proposition.

"No," she asserted proudly. "I do not believe you or trust in you for a single instant; but, even though I did—even though I knew you could make good your promises—I would not listen, or turn against those who have befriended and stood by me in the past. Understand once and for all, sir, that I thoroughly despise and abhor you, and will have nothing to do with any of your shady schemes.

"The Invincible Trust Company may be the wreck that you say, and I as penniless as you insist; but I would sooner beg in the streets and eat the crusts thrown out to the dogs than accept one favor from a man who by his own confession has shown himself so malicious and revengeful!"

There came a sudden gasping cry from the doorway, which caused both of them to turn and stare in that direction. Mrs. Sherman, white-faced and horrified, stood there clinging to the lintel for support.

So absorbed had the two been in their own affairs, that they had failed to note her entrance when she was drawn to the scene by her daughter's high-pitched, excited voice; and she had stood there for some minutes, taking in all that was said.

"Natica," she quavered now, "what is that you are saying? That the Invincible Trust Company has failed, and we are penniless? Oh, it cannot, cannot be true!"

The girl hurried forward with fond, eager denials, and sought to support the invalid's tottering form to a couch.

"It's all a mistake, mama," she urged. "You don't understand, dear, and you are exciting yourself unnecessarily. There is nothing to get alarmed over, and—"

But, as she guided her mother's steps past the table, Mrs. Sherman's eye fell upon the newspaper spread out there with its flaring head-lines clear across the top of the front page.

She stopped abruptly, stared, pointing at the legend, "The Invincible Goes to Smash!" then, with a shrill scream, toppled to the floor in a swoon.

Goodrich would have rushed forward to pick up her inert form and carry it to the lounge, but Natica fought him off.

"No," she cried, "you shall not touch her. If she is dead, it is you who have killed her. Ring that bell, and then go. Leave the house. I say. I never want to see your face again!"

CHAPTER VI.

TROUBLE BREWING.

MRS. SHERMAN neither died nor sustained any ultimate bad effects as a result of the shock she had received.

Goodrich, although obeying Natica's injunction so far as to leave the room when the servants arrived to give her all the assistance she required, waited outside in the hall until assured by the hastily summoned doctor that there was no danger of serious results. Then, recognizing that in the girl's present excited state of mind it would avail him little to remain, he quietly took his departure.

Natica, however, was ignorant of this. She believed that he had run away at her command, and she despised him for the desertion. Innocent as he was of causing her mother's disability, she blamed him for it, and blamed him the more that he had not, as she thought, stayed afterward to render any help that might be in his power.

In fact, there was very little she failed to blame him for as she sat thinking over his visit after the invalid had been taken back to her room and made comfortable and quiet, and the house had once more become composed.

And while she sat nursing her displeasure, piling up accusation after accusation against Goodrich, Arthur Osborne was announced. His tactful, courteous greeting seemed to the hurt and resentful girl like the application of some soothing balm to a raw and angry wound.

"Oh, Arthur," she cried, warmly clasping his hand, "it is such a relief to see a gentleman again! That terrible Goodrich man has been here, and I feel as though a troop of cavalry had swept through the house."

"Goodrich?" Arthur drew back with a frown. "But I thought he had been forbidden the door?"

"So he was; but, nevertheless, he pushed his way in here to-night, to roar and exult over us, because he said we were ruined, and he has half killed mama and set the whole place by the ears. I have only just now been able to get rid of him."

Natica was a truthful girl, extraordinarily so; but even the most scrupulous feminine tongue, when craving sympathy, is always inclined a bit to overstate the facts.

Osborne, however, willing to believe anything discreditable of his dearest foe, never doubted for an instant that the affair had been exactly as she described.

"The dirty cad!" he commented fiercely. "If it were not for your sake, Natica, and the notoriety it would bring you into, I should certainly give him the thrashing so richly his due."

"Oh, don't mind about me!" she urged. "Give it to him, Arthur, and make it a good one. A sound beating is the only rebuke that a boor of his sort could understand."

But Osborne, finding that she was so eager for the fray, began to back down from his pugnacious attitude. He was bigger and heavier than Goodrich, yet he had a sneaking suspicion that in a fistic argument the latter might readily get the better of him.

To himself he used such arguments as that a man of David J.'s caliber would never fight fair, and that a gentleman had no right to soil his fingers on such carrion; but his real reason, just the same, was a disinclination to try conclusions.

"No," he said firmly now. "No, Natica. My fingers fairly itch to get hold of him, and it is all I can do sometimes to restrain myself; but I am forced to hold back on your account. You don't realize the lengths to which such a creature might go. Nothing would please him better than to give it to the papers, making a huge sensation of it, representing it as a duel which he and I had fought for your favor.

"Come," deftly veering from the subject, "tell me what he was saying that so stirred you up, and caused this shock you speak of to your mother."

Accordingly, Natica recounted the doleful tidings which Goodrich had brought, adding perhaps a little by way of emphasis to the disconcerting character of his disclosures.

"But it isn't true, is it, Arthur?" she questioned. "We aren't quite paupers, are we, and matters are not as bad at the Invincible as he tries to make out?"

Now, young Osborne, as Goodrich had shrewdly suggested, knew nothing concerning the situation except what his father had told him; and, since it was the latter's purpose, as Goodrich had again surmised, to allay the apprehensions of the Shermans for the present, a report emanating from that quarter was bound to be consoling.

The old man had been caught, as it happened, with several matters — which he did not care to have known about—at loose ends, and the less investigation or inquiry he was put to in the next few days the better chance would he have to tuck the said loose ends out of sight. He was, therefore, quite anxious that his old friends and clients, the Shermans, should be lulled into a feeling of security, and

the representations he had made to his son were given with that purpose in view.

So Arthur, although perfectly honest, was far from the truth when he indignantly pooh-poohed Goodrich's revelations as outrageously false and misleading.

"No, Natica," he asserted positively, "there is not the slightest need for you or your mother to feel the least alarm or uneasiness. The governor told me to warn you that you would see all kinds of sensational reports in the newspapers for the next few days, and would probably hear a lot of exciting rumors, but to pay no attention to any of them.

"Of course, he is issuing no public statement as yet; but he told me I might give such old friends as you a positive assurance that the Invincible is perfectly solvent, and will resume business practically at once. Your funds, he says, are only slightly involved in the failure, anyhow, and consequently the loss to you could only be trifling at the worst.

"He, therefore, hopes that you will not press him for a detailed statement just now when his hands are so full of other matters; but he promises that you shall have a full accounting just as soon as he can get down to it, and hopes in the meantime that you will rest easy in the knowledge that everything is all right."

"Why, of course," assented Natica unhesitatingly; "tell him to take all the time he needs. I did wrong, I suppose, in bothering him at all at a moment when he has so much else to annoy him, nor did I really entertain much fear until that Goodrich man came here with his vile accusations and inuendoes. Still, it is a comfort to know that everything is all right. I can never thank your father enough for sending me such prompt and satisfactory guarantees.

"Oh," she broke out vindictively, "it is a shame that so good and upright a man should have to suffer for the spiteful lies that have been told about him! Can nothing be done to punish the perpetrator of such an outrage?"

"That's just it," Arthur assented heartily. "Here a great financial institution has been wrecked on the strength of utterly unfounded and baseless reports, and yet we can do nothing.

"It would be a different matter, of course, if we could find the man responsible for starting the rumors; but as they sprang up all over town, seeming to come from a dozen different sources at once, that seems practically impossible."

"But don't you know who is responsible?" cried Natica excitedly; "or, at least, who claims to be?"

"No," and Arthur shook his head ruefully. "Father says he would almost give his right hand to find out; but, so far, we—"

He broke off suddenly, struck by the peculiar expression on Natica's face.

"What?" he gasped. "You don't mean—"

"Yes," she nodded her head; "it was Goodrich."

"But that is impossible. How could a fellow like that—"

"So I would have said, too. But he boasts that he did it, and for once I believe him. You would also, Arthur, if you had heard him bragging of his success; there was a ring of truth in his voice which was not to be mistaken."

"But how could he contrive to do such a thing?"

"Why, he says he went direct to the officers of the clearing-house."

"The officers of the clearing-house?"

"Yes. He got a hearing from them in some way, and succeeded in making them believe his story. Oh, he can be very convincing, if he wants to, as I know myself. With that blunt, honest-seeming style of his, he can almost persuade one that black is white."

"But the officers of the clearing-house?" Arthur repeated. "The idea of their being hoodwinked!"

"Nevertheless, he did it. He had proofs, he says, which he presented to them. What proofs, I don't know; probably forged papers or something of the kind, since I believe he is capable of anything. At any rate, he declares they credited his story, and on the strength of it came down on the Invincible and forced the suspension."

"But why," stammered Arthur, "why did he go to all that trouble? What had he to gain?"

"Revenge! A mean, cowardly revenge upon you and me. It was the way he felt he could strike at us most surely.

Besides, he had, no doubt, some deep-laid scheme of benefiting himself.

"Perhaps," as her eyes flashed, "he calculated on inducing me to marry him by making a seemingly chivalric offer when I believed myself penniless, and before I should learn that his representation of my losses was only a hoax."

"Sure enough," agreed Osborne. "He might have thought that, and a low, underhanded trick of the sort would have been just to his liking.

"But I must let father know of this at once," he added excitedly. "I don't know whether he will want to take any steps in the matter or not, but at least he should know who is to blame."

Hurriedly, he rushed to the telephone, and began clamoring for the number of Judge Osborne's residence.

CHAPTER VII.

A CALL ON THE TELEPHONE.

Old Judge Osborne sat in his luxurious library, his head bowed on his chest, lines graven deep on his crafty, old face—thinking, thinking, thinking.

And, as he thought, the frightened, hunted look grew more desperate in his eyes. He raised his hand from time to time to stroke his chin, in an effort to control its unsteady trembling.

Time was what he wanted. Time! He must have it. This crash had come upon him so suddenly that he had had no opportunity to clear his decks, as it were, and there was all sorts of loose litter lying about which would not bear inspection.

He had long known, of course, that the day of reckoning must come, but he had not expected it so soon—oh, not for months yet. Here it was, though, and, as it happened, at about as inopportune a moment as could possibly have been conceived.

A dozen transactions were on the stocks—desperate hazards in which he had engaged in the wild hope of retrieval—and none of them could be covered up. Given a few more weeks, and he could have faced the situation with equanimity. Win or lose at the speculation into which he had plunged with other people's money, he could then have emerged with little damage to his personal pocketbook, and no more than he could stand to his reputation.

If he won, everything would be all right, the money of his dupes would be returned, and the Invincible Trust Company be once more on a solid foundation; while if he lost, although the great institution of which he was the head would fall, and the funds he had misappropriated be gone, still he himself would have been able so to manipulate matters and cover up his misdeeds as to escape scatheless from the ruins.

But now he was caught with the goods, so to speak. He did not dare face the investigation which must come. He quailed at the thought of the public scorn which would follow upon an exposure of his methods.

Before his mind's eye rose painfully distinct the vision of a prison cell, with himself inside, shorn of his respectable white side-whiskers, and garbed in the striped suit of a convict.

He shuddered, and his hand crept nearer and nearer the locked drawer, on the right side of his desk, wherein reposed a loaded revolver.

He controlled himself, however, and drew back. That was only to be used as a last resort, and he still had not entirely given up.

Had he not many a time in the past few years, with the aid of his scheming wits, wriggled out of holes almost as tight as this? Alone and unaided, he had maintained the credit of that rotten shell, the Invincible, when if he had once weakened or relaxed his pose as a great financier and pillar of integrity, all men must have known the truth.

Was his inventive faculty to fail him now, when he most sorely needed it? Was he to give way at the crucial moment of his career? Taken unawares as he was, he yet surely could devise some method of escaping from the toils, and throwing dust in the eyes of his pursuers.

It was for this reason he had retired to the seclusion of his library to-night, and caused himself to be denied to even his closest associates and advisers. He felt that he must thrash out the situation alone; he could trust to nothing now but his own talents for craft and cunning. Would they be able to deliver him?

Yes, as he brooded and schemed, he saw a dozen artful strategems by which he might be saved. But the trouble with them all was that time was required for their execution.

"Time!" he groaned. "If I had but a week at my disposal I could foil them all. They could investigate and be hanged to them, for all they would ever find out. But I have not a week, nor even a day. To-morrow morning they will be down on me like a pack of wolves."

In vain he racked his brains.

"If there was only some way of turning the newspapers and the public off on a false trail," he muttered, "I believe I could manage the rest. But there is no chance of doing it. The late evening editions show that the reporters have already caught the scent of blood, and they will never rest until they have dragged me down."

Lower and lower sank his head upon his chest; deeper and deeper grew the lines in his face; more and more frequently his hand crept toward that fateful drawer on the right side of his desk.

At last he reached in, and took out the shining toy which lay inside. The reflection from the shaded electric lamp overhead gleamed and twinkled on the barrel, and seemed to hold him fascinated.

For a long time he sat staring at it, motionless, spellbound; then his finger curled around the trigger, and he started to raise the weapon slowly toward his temple.

At that moment the bell of the telephone on his desk rang out a sharp, imperative summons.

He frowned, hesitated a second, then, laying down the pistol, drew the telephone instrument toward him. The call, as he knew, came from his private secretary down-stairs; for, not wishing to be annoyed, he had directed that the extension to his library be cut off that night from the main wire running into the house.

"Vernon," he therefore chided, "I thought I told you I was not to be disturbed upon any pretext."

"I know, judge," came back the answer, "and I wouldn't have dreamed of doing so for any ordinary reason; but Mr. Arthur has just phoned in, and insisted on it. He seems very much excited, and says he has news of importance which he must talk over with no one but you, at once."

"Oh, it's Arthur, eh?" returned the old man. To himself he muttered: "Probably wants to tell me that even the Shermans can't be put off, but are standing on their rights and demanding an immediate accounting."

He considered a moment, then, with a sigh, instructed the secretary to switch him onto the wire, and a second or two later was listening to the sound of his son's voice.

"Eh? What's that?" he demanded sharply; for, in his agitation, Arthur proved a trifle incoherent at the start, and the old man could make neither head nor tail of what he was trying to say.

"I tell you, I've located the man who spread the damaging rumors about the Invincible, and started the run on us today."

"You've done what?" The father's tone was distinctly incredulous.

He regarded Arthur very much as he might have a show-trotting-horse, or a prize-winning bull-terrier—something to be proud of in a way and to spend money upon, but never to be looked to for any practical help or assistance.

"I've found the chap who put out those malicious lies about the Invincible's condition."

The old man could hardly refrain from a grim, cynical smile at the other's innocence. Lies, indeed! The stories rife that day had been only too well founded on fact, as the consequences of the run had so speedily shown.

"H'm!" he grunted. He still was not taking any especial stock in his son's alleged discovery. "Well, who is he?"

"David J. Goodrich."

"Don't know him. Never heard of him before. What does he do?"

"Oh, yes, you do know of him, father. Don't you remember that cad I told you of once, who bragged that he could marry Natica? I pointed him out to you afterward on the street. As to what he does, I think he is a sort of agent for artists and writers."

"Oh!" The judge's tone showed a tremendous fall of interest. "That sort of a young fellow, eh? I guess you must be mistaken in regard to him, Artie. It

took somebody of bigger caliber than that to set off the bomb that exploded under us."

"That's what I thought, too, dad; but Natica believes that he is responsible all right. At any rate, he has been up here boasting to her that he was the one."

"Eh? The old man seemed struck by a sudden idea. "What's that? You say he has been boasting of it?"

"Yes, sir. He takes the entire credit to himself for what has happened, and claims that he induced the clearing-house officers to act through the proofs he was able to present to them."

"Hah!" The judge leaned forward, and with his free hand thrust the revolver back into its drawer.

A gleam of malicious triumph shot into his eyes.

At last he saw a possibility of gaining the time he so urgently needed for the development of his plans.

A scapegoat he had needed—some one to draw the hue and cry of public clamor away from himself, and to occupy the attention of the newspaper men. He had needed a scapegoat, and here was one ready-made to his hand. He could not have had the circumstance fall out better, if he had planned it himself.

Instantly his cunning old brain recognized the advantages to be derived from the story. At present he was the target for all the rage and indignation of the defrauded depositors; but suppose he could say to them:

"Why, I am not to blame for your losses. The Trust Company would still have been solvent and doing business today had it not been for the reports spread abroad by this irresponsible fellow. He caused the run on us. Call him to task for it."

Immediately their resentment would be switched, and they would rave at the new victim, leaving the judge to burrow underground and perfect the artifices by which he could eventually secure his own safety.

The newspaper writers, too, would find such ample material for their facile pens in this new development that they would have no space to devote to him.

Why, it would be a bait that no reporter worthy of the name could think of passing by. He could already see the head-lines in which they would splurge over the sensational details:

Unknown Agent for Writers and Painters Wrecks the Mighty Invincible! Fiction-Pedler Deals in His Own Wares!

What zest, moreover, would be added by the introduction of a love interest, by ascribing the act of this David J. Goodrich to revenge against Arthur, his successful rival in the contest for Natica Sherman's hand.

Judge Osborne shared none of his son's compunctions against bringing the name of the girl into notoriety, it was evident. Indeed, the more melodrama he could pile on, the better he would be satisfied. With him it was anything to divert the public eye from himself and his projected designs.

"Tell me more about this fellow Goodrich, and what he said to Natica," he demanded of Arthur over the wire; and while he listened he ran over in his mind the expedient which had suggested itself to him, testing it at every point, and fitting in new details to the general scheme as he gathered them from his son's revelations.

He did not for a moment believe the claims put forth by Goodrich. Better acquainted with the methods of high finance than his son or Natica, he regarded it as practically impossible for a rank outsider to set the agencies in motion which had wrecked and ruined the Invincible.

He considered it rather a concerted movement on the part of certain jealous rival concerns who, acting more on suspicion than actual knowledge, had managed by striking in the nick of time to lay bare the big institution's weakness.

As for Goodrich's assertion that he had presented the proofs which had led to the interference of the clearing-house, the judge put that down to mere theatrical vaporing on the part of a bumptious boy desiring to impress an ignorant girl with his importance.

But it was not a question with Judge Osborne as to whether or not he himself believed the story. It was whether the public and the newspapers could be induced to take it up and accept it as true; and from his experience in various times

of panic and popular excitement he had an idea that they would.

There was one point, however, which bothered him not a little, and which he was afraid might prove fatal to the whole project.

It would be necessary, in order to give proper *éclat* and importance to the story, for him, as president of the trust company, to have Goodrich arrested on a charge of wilfully and maliciously disseminating slanderous statements calculated to affect the standing and credit of a financial institution.

But he had no evidence to support such an accusation beyond the young man's own unsupported statement that he had done so; and he had, as already stated, a doubt amounting almost to certainty that any such testimony could be obtained.

Was it not more than probable, then, that when the prisoner protested his innocence, and averred that he had only been "fooling" in his boasts to Natica, as he was almost certain to do when arrested, the magistrate before whom he should be brought would discharge him with a reprimand, and thus knock the attempt to create a sensation in the head?

There was only one way to get around this that the judge could see, and that was by introducing perjured witnesses, a thing he disliked to do not only on account of the immediate danger involved, but because the men he might suborn would forever after have him in a blackmailing grip.

It was Arthur who again came to his rescue, and furnished him a solution to the problem which he was not slow to seize upon.

The son was just concluding his narrative.

"I know this must all sound like insanity to you, dad," he said; "but Natica is so firmly convinced that the fellow did just what he says, I thought I ought to report it to you."

"Perfectly right, Arthur, my boy. Perfectly right. And insanity— Ha!" He gasped at the inspiration which came to him. "Of course, it is insanity. But insane people who cause such damage by their wild statements should be put out of the way where they can do no further harm."

He had got all that he wanted out of Arthur now, and cut off the connection with a jerk. Then he waited a second, and again lifting the receiver, called up the private secretary in the room below.

"Vernon," he said, and his tone was almost joyously exultant, "order the motor around at once, will you, and you yourself get ready to accompany me to police headquarters."

CHAPTER VIII.

"FOXY GRANDPA."

SOME people, both in and out of the magazines, contend that there is no such thing as telepathy, or thought-transference.

Be the real facts as they may, it was a peculiar coincidence well worth narrating, although it has no especial connection with the present narrative, that St. John, dreaming that very night that he was just about to commit suicide, should have had his hand suddenly halted by a ring on the telephone.

Why St. John, as sane and serene a human being as ever was determined to live out his allotted span of days, should have been the recipient of such a psychic flash—if that be what it was—and why the peculiar dream should have come just at the moment the real telephone in his chamber gave out a clanging summons, may be left to the explainers and critics of such phenomena.

The incident has no other concern for us than that St. John was wrapped up in his "downy," sleeping the sleep of the just, and that he was awakened by the shrill ting-a-ling-ling from the little black box on the wall.

Still but half aroused, and rather puzzled to know what had become of the dream-revolver he had been clutching in his hand only a moment before, he struggled out from under the covers and made his way to the instrument.

"Hallo!" It was Goodrich's voice which hailed him. "Is that you, St. John?"

"Yes," with drowsy indignation. "What do you mean by waking me up at this time of night? I shall probably toss around now for an hour or more before I get to sleep again."

"Well, at that you haven't got anything on me, bo; I shall probably toss around all night, and not get to sleep at all. And while we're on that score, I'll bet you can't imagine where I am—not even if I give you three guesses."

"You're in jail," hazarded St. John crossly; "or, if not, you ought to be."

"No, you're wrong; but you're getting warm. I'll have to admit, my boy, that you're very warm. However, I'll not keep you in suspense any longer, St. John, out there on the cold floor, with no protection but your pajamas. To tell you the bitter truth, I am now on my way to the observation pavilion at Bellevue, to undergo examination as to my sanity."

"What!" St. John had no other idea than that he must be in the midst of another of those fantastic dreams, and solemnly swore that he would exclude mince pie from his dinner menu henceforth and forever.

A good, hard pinch upon the calf of his leg, however, produced no other effect on his mentality than that usually resulting from a pinch, and convinced him that he must be awake; while Goodrich's voice over the wire continued to give him assurance that what he had heard was nothing less than the cold, unvarnished truth.

"But it is absurd," protested St. John eloquently. "One could understand it if you had been taken to an institution for the feeble-minded; but to have you under examination for losing your wits, when you never had any to lose, is without rime or reason. Who had it done?"

"Ah"—Goodrich's voice had a curious snap to it—"that hasn't been told me; but I have quite a shrewd suspicion—a very shrewd suspicion, indeed. However, I don't think I'd better mention names over the wire; I'll wait for that until I see you."

"And what can I do to help you?" inquired St. John, who, for all his propensity to rail at this companion of his, would have taken the coat off his back at any time to aid the latter if in trouble. "Shall I come right over there?"

"No, it would do you no good; they wouldn't let you get within gunshot of me before to-morrow, anyhow. What I called you up for was to ask you to get hold of that young lawyer, Ned Pembroke, and chase him around here the first thing in the morning. And you come along yourself, prepared for a council of war.

"They're after me now," he broke off; "so I'll have to say so-long. Don't forget; get hold of Pembroke and come around here with him the first thing in the morning."

At that the connection was cut off, and St. John burrowed down once more under the covers, although not to sleep. The news he had just received was sufficient to banish slumber effectually from his pillow; for, cudgel his brains as he might, he could glean no satisfactory reason why Cadmus should be taken to a madhouse, or why any one should have gone to the trouble to put him there.

Nor did morning bring any light on the subject, until he reached the breakfast-table and saw in the paper a lurid account of how Goodrich, by insane maunderings, had stirred up unfounded apprehensions among the depositors of the Invincible Trust Company, and thus succeeded in creating the run which resulted in suspension.

"I wonder if he could possibly have done it with some of his foolish chatter," questioned St. John—"some remark, for instance, like that idiotic one about getting Soderberg to invest in a peanut-stand? By Jove! come to think of it, he'd better not call me as a witness to prove his sanity. If I should tell half the silly things he has said to me at one time and another, nothing could save him from a strait-jacket."

However, he wasted small time upon conjectures. The main thing, he realized, was to give what aid lay in his power to the luckless captive, and the only way he could do that was by carrying out the other's behests of the night before.

With a hasty swallow of coffee and a bite or two out of a roll to serve him in lieu of breakfast, he was off; and, having succeeded in getting the young lawyer down-town a full hour earlier than his usual time, the pair presented themselves at the gate of Bellevue at the very first minute allowed for visitors.

When audience with Goodrich was granted to them at last, it was plain to both of them that he, too, had passed a

sleepless night. His face was pale and wan, and he had deep, black circles under both his eyes; but, nevertheless, he bore himself with an air of suppressed elation.

"I'll never doubt that I am sane to the longest day of my life!" he exclaimed with a sigh of relief as he grasped the outstretched hands of his two friends. "Any man who can go through all the stunts that I've been put to, and still retain his senses, is a copper-riveted, blown-in-the-bottle Solomon, and no mistake. They tried to get me to bail out the bowl of a wash-stand, instead of pulling the plug in regular fashion, and they've had me doing Marathons round and round the room to get on to my gait and knee-action, and they've pinched me and stuck needles into about every square inch of my anatomy, and they've talked Invincible Trust Company and Arthur Osborne to me until I am plumb wuzzy. But," he cried triumphantly, "they didn't get me! I registered up rational on every test they tried.

"But you needn't think it's any joyful cinch to keep your head when they're after you that way. I tell you, the temptation which comes over you to cut loose and jump out of the traces is something fierce. And, gee!" he added with emphasis, "you don't know how good it is to talk to some one again who isn't watching you out of the corner of his eye and making a note of every twitch to your fingers.

"But enough of that for the present," he broke off sharply. "I'm only allowed a half-hour with you fellows, and I've got too much to say to be wasting any of it. Tell me, what is doing outside? Have they got anything about me in the papers?"

"Have they?" cried the lawyer, taking it on himself to answer. "Why, my dear boy, there is hardly anything else. But look, you can see for yourself."

He drew a morning paper from his pocket and handed it over for the other's inspection.

Goodrich hurriedly ran his eye over the two or three columns devoted to him, occasionally smiling at some passage which tickled his fancy, or indulging in short, broken ejaculations, but making no extended comment until he had completely finished.

"Oh, what a 'Foxy Grandpa' the old beggar is!" he said then with unconcealed admiration. "I thought I was ready for him on every play he could possibly make, but I'll have to admit he had me faded when it came to this. He is certainly a tarnation cute one, the hoary-headed old sinner; but we'll get him just the same, Pembroke; we'll get him, just the same."

"Who is this that you're calling 'Foxy Grandpa,' and 'hoary-headed old sinner'?" frowned the lawyer. "Judge Osborne? As I understand it, he doesn't claim to have had any first-hand knowledge of your case, but simply had you taken into custody on the strength of information which had been furnished to him that you were responsible for the wild reports which caused the run upon the bank. What is there especially foxy or Machiavellian about that?"

"Ah, but can't you see the clever scheming back of it all?" protested Goodrich. "He doesn't really believe that I had any more to do with busting his old bank than you, or St. John, or three million nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety of the other inhabitants of New York. All the information he has about me is what he got from little Arthur regarding what I said up at Sherman's last night, and he naturally thinks that was only hot air.

"If he don't think so, and really has any idea that I was the one to start the bank troubles, why didn't he have me arrested for it in the regular way, as he could easily have done.

"But, no; he figured that I stood too much show to get away on a deal like that. Either I would be turned loose on a squeal that I was only joking when I claimed to be the villain of the piece, or else I could give bail.

"Now, that didn't suit his program at all, don't you understand? What he wants is a goat—a good, big goat to fill up space in the papers, and keep the public talking, while he is down in the cellar feeding incriminating evidence into the furnace and doctoring up his accounts.

"That is why he framed up this insanity charge; and, to give him his due

credit, it is certainly a peach. Here I am, cooped up with no chance to talk, or any one willing to listen to me so long as I am supposed to be dotty; and he gets all the chance he wants to fix up things while the doctors are making up their minds as to whether I've got depressomanic mulligrubs, or just plain brainstorms. An ordinary criminal case would be rushed to a head right away, but a thing like this can be held off for weeks. And, best of all, I am good for one or two columns a day, with nothing said about anybody else, nor any inconvenient prying into the question of 'How old is Ann?'

"Him not a 'Foxy Grandpa'!" he concluded vehemently. "Why, he's got all the others who ever existed rushed to the ropes."

"Well," questioned Pembroke, after a pause, "what are you going to do about it? I suppose you've sent for me in order to get you out of this place?"

"You surprise me," grinned Goodrich. "How did you ever guess it?"

"Then answer me one question, please. Did you say anything to anybody which might have resulted in causing this failure?"

"Did I say anything? Why, man, I said it all. I am 'it,' the coon in the wood-pile, the whole show. If it hadn't been for me, the Invincible would be doing business right now at the same old stand."

Pembroke glanced at him as though he, too, were fast being converted to a belief in his insanity; but, after a somewhat embarrassed pause, evidently concluded that he must at least pretend to regard his client as rational and accept his statements at face value.

"All right, then," with a shrug of the shoulders; "the only advice I can give you is to take your choice between the asylum and the penitentiary. If you are not crazy, then, according to your own confession, you have been guilty of disseminating damaging and slanderous reports against the credit of a financial institution, and that you will find is a pretty serious offense."

The prisoner, however, seemed in no way disconcerted.

"Ah," he demurred, "but it makes a big difference to whom the reports are made, and whether or not they are backed up by competent evidence."

"True," admitted the lawyer; "but you surely don't make the claim that your statements were of that character, do you?"

"Well, you can judge for yourself," grinned Goodrich. "The reports I am accused of spreading were charges of illegal conduct, supported by sworn affidavits, and the persons to whom they were made were President Soderberg and the other officers of the clearing-house."

Pembroke could only express his relief and chagrin by seizing the other across the shoulders and giving him a sound shaking.

"You worthless scamp!" he scolded. "Why didn't you tell me that in the first place? And now, I suppose, you want this inquest in lunacy pulled off just as soon as it can be managed?"

"Yes, and still sooner. There must be no delays or postponements, Pembroke. I look to you for that."

CHAPTER IX.

ST. JOHN PLAYS CUPID.

THE morning paper was also rather eagerly perused in another quarter that day.

Natica Sherman's attention was caught the moment she came down-stairs by the sight of her own name staring up at her from the printed page. Snatching up the sheet, she never relinquished it until it seemed to her as though every word of the long article was burned into her brain.

Rage, resentment, hurt and angry pride filled her as she read, and this time her indignation was not directed against the hapless "boor," but against those patrician paragons, the Osbornes, both father and son: for, knowing what she did, she could not well doubt whence had come the reporter's inspiration.

Surely, she thought with writhing shame, Goodrich would have had to try hard before he could have brought her into more distasteful notoriety, or more thoroughly distorted the facts to her disadvantage than had these so-called old friends.

Friends? She began to wonder if they ever had been friends. Was it possible,

perhaps, that they were enemies? A woman's intuition, if she chooses to follow it, will sometimes lead to surprisingly accurate results; and all of a sudden Natica, she knew not exactly why, felt certain that Judge Osborne had been defrauding her.

That "piling on of the melodrama," upon which the old schemer had so plumed himself, was possibly not the wisest move in the world, after all.

And with the conclusion that Judge Osborne was deceiving and plundering her, followed, as a necessary corollary, the conviction that Goodrich had been trying to act the part of an ally and helper.

Free from outside influence, and trusting only to her own clear vision, her sentiments veered squarely around from those she had entertained the night before.

Then she had been filled with animosity toward Goodrich, and a sense of gratitude and partizanship toward the Osbornes; now the conditions were exactly reversed.

Her pity and sympathy were aroused, too, by reading of the plight into which the poor literary agent had fallen. She looked upon it as a martyrdom he was enduring for her sake, and in her thoughts enthusiastically raised him to the pedestal of a hero, while the Osbornes assumed the guise of cruel and heartless monsters.

For all her intuitions, however, a strain of caution warned her that she might perhaps be going too far. She had swung far out on one false and exaggerated estimate the night before. Might she not now be in danger of swinging too far to the other extreme?

She began to be doubtful, uncertain, distrustful of her own judgment. If she only had some one to advise her. But there was no one.

Then the thought of St. John suddenly popped into her mind. She did not know him very well, it is true; but she felt that she could trust him, and certainly no one was in a better position to give her counsel on the very points she wished decided. He knew both Goodrich and the Osbornes well and intimately, and he was not a man to have his judgment warped by either friendship or dislike.

Acting upon impulse, she sat down and wrote him a hurried note, asking him to call on her at once, if convenient; and, before she could repent of her purpose, sent it off by a messenger.

St. John had just returned from his visit to Goodrich at the hospital when it arrived, and, although he could not imagine what in the world Miss Natica Sherman might want of him, he lost no time in responding to her summons.

"Mr. St. John," she said apologetically when the greetings were over and they had both settled down in their respective chairs. "I have no possible claim on you, and the only excuse I can offer for inflicting my troubles upon you is your own well-known chivalry and kindness of heart."

He bowed gravely and bade her go on, assuring her that he would be only too happy if it lay in his power to render her any assistance.

"You see," she explained further, "hitherto I have always carried my problems and perplexities to Judge Osborne; but in this case I am debarred that recourse, for Judge Osborne himself is the problem and perplexity. Is it asking too much of you, Mr. St. John, if I should request you to tell me your honest and candid opinion of Judge Osborne?"

St. John reflected a moment.

"Miss Sherman," he said, "yesterday I would have declined to answer such a question, or, if I pretended to answer it, would have put you off with vague and unmeaning generalities; but I have learned some things this morning which persuade me that I would be playing a base and unmanly part if I failed to satisfy your curiosity.

"I will not answer you directly, or in so many words, but I will give you a suggestion from which you may draw your own inferences."

"Yes," she queried eagerly, "and what is the suggestion?"

"Simply this, that I would advise you to lose no time in demanding an accounting of your estate, and in withdrawing your affairs from Judge Osborne's hands. If I were you, I would consult an attorney in regard to the matter at once."

"I thank you, and I will follow your recommendation to the letter; but," she broke off, struck by a new difficulty, "I don't know of any attorney to consult. I have always gone to Judge Osborne, of course, when I needed a lawyer."

"Let me suggest again, then, that you try young Ned Pembroke. I am sure you will find him perfectly satisfactory; and, in addition, he has the further advantage of being already retained in a matter somewhat connected with this, so with him you will not be required to go into any lengthy explanations."

Natica very gracefully thanked him, and promised that she would communicate with Pembroke without delay; and then, there being apparently no reason to remain, St. John picked up his hat and prepared to go.

Still she detained him, however, and continued to do so on one pretext or another whenever he started for the door, although each time after he resumed his seat she would apparently have nothing more to offer than the ordinary banalities of conversation.

At last he rose with a determined air, and announced that he really must depart: and then she finally spoke what had been uppermost in her mind all the time.

"Oh, just a moment, Mr. St. John, if you please," she said with an air of pretended indifference. "You have given me your estimate on one of the men in the affair of which to-day's papers are so full, and I am curious to know your opinion of the other before you go. Tell me, what do you really think of Mr. Goodrich?"

St. John turned and looked at her so quizzically with his shrewd, gray eyes that, in spite of herself, her own glance faltered and fell in confusion.

"What do I think of Goodrich?" he repeated. "Why, I think exactly as you do."

"Exactly as I do?" she stammered.

"Yes: that he is a cad, and a boor, and—"

"And what?"

There was no faltering now of the dark eyes with the violet shadows. They were raised steadily to meet his own, and in them was the light of a cold and astonished disapproval.

"And what?" she challenged.

"And," finished St. John with a smile flickering across his lips, "the best friend, and the truest, straightest, squarest fellow that ever lived."

"Oh!" she gasped, and, turning, fled from the room, leaving the amused bachelor to find his way out as best he could.

CHAPTER X.

BEFORE THE COURT.

Ned Pembroke was a hustler. There was no draw-down on that proposition, as Goodrich breezily observed in expressing approval of his efforts.

Despite the utmost endeavors of the crafty old complainant in the case to gain delay, the inquiry was set for two o'clock that same afternoon; and when, in a final attempt to have it deferred, Judge Osborne sent word that he was ill, Pembroke went to his house, accompanied by a physician appointed by the court, and compelled him to put in an attendance.

During the preliminary stages of the hearing the old man sat glowering at the young lawyer like a storm-cloud; but presently his expression changed to one of wholesome respect, if not of fear, for during a short lull in the proceedings Pembroke took occasion as the attorney for Natica Sherman to serve upon him a demand for an immediate accounting of her estate.

The aged banker's face turned ghastly pale as he glanced at the contents of this paper, and his hand trembled perceptibly. A few moments later he arose and, addressing the bench, asked for permission to go home on the plea that in his haste to come away he had overlooked a very important matter, which required his immediate attention.

As he declined to explain the nature of the "important matter," the court refused his request, and ordered him to resume his seat. Thenceforward, he apparently paid no heed to the proceedings which he had invoked, but sat preoccupied and distrait, his head sunk upon his breast in the same despondent attitude as he had sat while alone in his library the night before.

The case of the prosecution progressed with little delay. The lawyer who had been engaged to conduct it evidently relied chiefly on the testimony of Natica concerning Goodrich's behavior at her house, in order to substantiate his contention; for the only other witnesses called

were Arthur Osborne and the crowd of young fellows who had been at the chop-house on the evening of the Charity Bazaar, and St. John, who was required merely to produce his copy of the famous dinner agreement.

The claim attempted to be set up was that Goodrich had long been demented, as shown by his overweening egotism and conceit, and that brooding over his rejection by Natica had produced an acute stage of the mania which caused him to regard the Osbornes as his enemies, and induced him to circulate his damaging rumors against the trust company.

"We have not bothered, if your honor please," said the lawyer representing the other side, "to introduce any persons to whom these rumors were actually repeated. This is not a criminal prosecution against the prisoner for wrecking the bank, but a lunacy inquiry, and we believe we can amply show this man to be insane."

He had, however, rather a rough road to travel in doing so; for his main witnesses were openly sympathetic toward the prisoner, and Arthur Osborne was the only one of the entire array who would unreservedly admit that he believed Goodrich actually crazy.

The question was put to St. John, if he did not consider it evidence of mania for a man to sign such a pledge as was contained in the dinner agreement?

"Well, scarcely," replied the critic, "since my own signature graces the same document."

The answer created a laugh, for St. John was on the face of him as sane and rational an individual as could be found in a day's travel.

Natica, also, handed the prosecution something of a solar-plexus jab; for when she was asked if she did not consider Goodrich's conduct at her house as that of a lunatic she replied with a fine show of spirit:

"No, I should call it the conduct of a true and faithful friend," a retort which caused the prisoner to look up with a suddenly transfigured face, and brought a great wave of red to her own cheeks, although she bravely repeated the statement when the lawyer, thinking to catch her at a disadvantage, pretended to be unable to hear.

This, except for the expert medical testimony—which, as usual, was contradictory and divided—practically completed the case against the accused, and so little harmful had it been to his client that Pembroke had scarcely taken the trouble to indulge in the most perfunctory sort of a cross-examination.

Indeed, there is hardly any doubt but that if he had asked the court to dismiss the complaint upon the showing made by the Osborne party the request would have been granted; but that would not have suited Goodrich at all. He had other fish to fry than merely the clearing himself of an unwarranted stigma.

"If your honor please," said Pembroke, rising and addressing the court, "I shall make no introductory statement of what we expect to prove on our side. That I believe will be better presented in the rather startling evidence which I propose to submit.

"My first witness for the defense, if your honor please, will be the defendant himself. Mr. Goodrich, please take the stand."

CHAPTER XI.

THE STORY OF A "CAD."

THE prisoner, having been duly sworn, was left to his own devices by Pembroke, except for a general direction that he might tell his story in his own way.

He had hardly started, though, before everybody in the court-room who had previously known him turned and stared in utter amazement; for his familiar boorish manner and bearing had dropped from him like a garment. His speech and demeanor were both marked by an easy grace and perfect aplomb.

"If your honor please," he began, "I have been described here as a creature utterly devoid of manners and scoffing at all the proprieties; but I may explain that this has been merely a pose with me. When I came to New York I had my own way to make in the world, and I saw that I would never get ahead by being one of the crowd. I had to make myself distinctive in some way; and, since I had neither brains nor good looks, I chose this method. I do not recommend it to others; it has caused me

some pretty uncomfortable moments at times, but neither do I entirely regret my course. It has served one good purpose, at least, as you shall hear later.

"I do not believe my impersonation has ever been suspected by but one man, Mr. St. John, and I am positive he was never really certain until this moment.

"I, therefore, ask your honor to consider whether the consistent assumption of a character not my own for a period of seven years, and for a rational and reasonable purpose, is not in itself evidence of a pretty shrewd quality of mind.

"Having explained this point, and assured you that my dinner agreement with St. John was not intended in earnest, but merely as carrying out my general scheme of impersonation, I will now pass on to matters which have been brought out here in testimony.

"I should, however, first relate, I suppose, an incident which has considerable bearing on what will follow. Some months ago I was calling on one of the writers whose wares I handle, and happened to hear his roommate, a young clerk in a down-town office, announce that he had signed a note that day for two hundred thousand dollars.

"That struck me as rather peculiar, for I knew he had no other resources than his salary of fifteen dollars a week, so I started to question him.

"'Oh, we do that for Foxy Grandpa all the time,' he told me. 'Whenever he needs any money in his private business, one of us slides a note into the Invincible, and they fork out the long green to him, or rather he forks it out to himself. We never even get a bowing acquaintance with it, it goes by so fast.'

"'Yet you are supposed to be responsible for it,' I said. 'What would happen if one of those notes failed to be paid?'

"'Well,' he laughed, 'they'd have a healthy time collecting it off me.' Then he added: 'I suppose it is a kind of off-color proposition, and liable to get one of us into trouble some day; but, by Jove, if we want to hold our jobs, we've got to stand for it.'

"'Who is Foxy Grandpa?' I then asked him.

"'Oh,' he said, 'that is our pet name for old Judge Osborne.'

"That, if your honor please, ended the conversation; and, as it was no concern of mine, other than offering a rather interesting side-light on methods in high finance, I thought no more of the matter until some time later.

"I had then become—er—had fallen—had—" He faltered confusedly, then suddenly threw back his head with a bold, assertive gesture.

"I am not ashamed to say it," he cried, "and, since so much has been told here, what need is there of any petty evasion?

"To resume, then, I had by this time fallen deeply in love with Miss Natica Sherman, and, being naturally on the lookout for her welfare and interests, I was horrified to learn one day that her entire estate was under the control of this same Judge Osborne I had heard irreverently designated as Foxy Grandpa.

"I was satisfied from what I knew that her funds were in jeopardy; yet, what could I do? It would be idle for me to warn her against him—me, practically a beggar, and he the great financier and head of the Invincible Trust Company. Besides, I could see that she trusted him absolutely.

"Nevertheless, merely to satisfy myself, I determined to find out what actual basis there was, if any, for my fears. I, therefore, hunted up the young clerk of whom I have previously spoken, and, by chumming with him and others of the same kind to whom he introduced me, was soon able to learn all I wanted.

"It is no exaggeration, your honor, to say that the results of my investigation fairly appalled me. The conditions were far worse than I had ever dreamed or imagined. The outstanding loans, made ostensibly to these twelve-dollar and fifteen-dollar-a-week clerks, aggregated into the millions. It did not take me long to decide that the Invincible, for all its flaunting appearance of prosperity, was a looted sham, bound eventually to fall; and when the crash came I knew that the Sherman millions would have vanished.

"I resolved then to pit myself against the great Judge Osborne, and save for Miss Sherman what I could. I recognized that it was a David-and-Goliath fight; but I knew the right was on my side, and I did not despair.

"From that time every step I took,

which you have heard described here as evidences of my insanity, was a carefully planned move in the game I was playing. I deliberately provoked that scene in the chop-house in order to blind the eyes of the Osbornes and keep them from suspecting me.

"Finally, when I had the proofs I wanted in hand, and felt that the time was ripe, I was ready to act. I played Samson, I admit; I pulled down the mighty structure of the Invincible. But it was time for it to come down. The money was gone, and only by the institution's fall could the little that was left be saved for those to whom it belonged. Had I withheld my hand, the result would have been the same, only Judge Osborne would have had time to feather his nest.

"I deny, though, that I spread damaging rumors abroad on the Street. I carried my proofs to those who had a right to see them; and when they realized the true situation, they agreed with me that it was time for the Invincible to close its doors.

"This, your honor, is my story. If to track down and expose villainy in high places, and to protect the interests of the orphan and fatherless, is insanity, then, your honor, I humbly plead guilty to being insane."

He halted; and Pembroke, turning, nodded to the other lawyer.

"Cross-examine," he said.

But the attorney for the prosecution had about lost stomach for his task. He already saw plainly the handwriting on the wall.

He glanced questioningly over at the frowning, silent figure of the old man on the other side of the table, and breathed a sigh of relief as he received in return a quick, negative shake of the head.

"We have no questions to ask the witness," he said.

CHAPTER XII.

HUNTED DOWN.

"Our next witness," announced Pembroke, "is President Soderberg, of the clearing-house, who will corroborate the statements of the defendant in regard to the reports made by him concerning the condition of the Invincible. Does your honor desire to hear him?"

But "his honor" did not desire to hear President Soderberg. In fact, "his honor" made it pretty plain that he did not care to hear any more testimony at all, but was quite ready to render his decision.

"Just one more witness, your honor," pleaded Pembroke. "There is a matter I want to bring out in justice to the defendant."

"Very well," assented the judge reluctantly. "But cut it short."

Pembroke turned around.

"Judge Osborne, take the stand," he said.

The silent, shrinking figure, which had sat seemingly insensible to all that went on except for that one brief shake of the head, roused up at the summons of the magistrate.

He half rose in his chair, his shoulders shaking, his lean hands clutched together, his eyes wide in appeal to the court.

"No, no," he protested. "I cannot be a witness for that side. I am the complainant in the case."

"Nevertheless, we call him," asserted Pembroke, "and I insist that he take the stand."

The court hesitated a moment.

"What do you want to prove by him?" he finally asked. "He does not even know this defendant."

"But he knows something else that I want shown up," thundered Pembroke. "He knows that the arrest of my client, and the bringing of this insanity charge, is a fraud and a conspiracy plotted by him in the hope that thereby he might escape the punishment impending over him for his many crimes.

"I want to ask him about that. And"—the lawyer paused an instant—"I want to ask him, too, what he thinks of the sanity of a man who, being entrusted with the estate of a dead friend, should deliberately rob the widow and orphan child, hypothecating their valuable securities, and blinding them for years by paying their alleged interest and dividends out of the principal in his hands. That, if your honor please, seems to me more like the insanity of an avarice-mad demon than the conduct of a sane and normal human being."

The denounced man bent and quivered before this accusation. Then he suddenly flung up his arms.

"I will not go on the stand!" he shrieked. "I will not testify! I withdraw the complaint!" And with a dash toward the door, he fled from the court-room, as though he feared the officers of the law were already at his heels.

He flung himself into the gorgeous motor-car waiting outside.

"Home," he directed with a terrified glance behind him. "Home, as fast as you can go."

Up-town swiftly glided the fleet vehicle; yet, fast as they went, he kept urging all the time more speed. He was desperately afraid that he might be forestalled, that he would find the detectives waiting for him on the door-step.

But, no; his big, showy house just off the avenue was as yet uninvaded. He hurried inside, and stole, panting, up the stairs to his library.

At last, safe there, and with the door locked, he felt that he could breathe freely once more. He threw himself into the big chair before his desk, and dropped once more into his familiar brooding attitude.

Hark! He started. What was that? A step coming along the hall toward his door?

No. It was merely a sound from the street outside. The tension relaxed, and his head sinking to his breast, he fell once more into his bitter reflections.

Slowly his hand crept along the desk, nearer and ever nearer to that locked drawer on the right-hand side.

At last he turned the key with a click, and drew out the shining weapon which lay inside, his gaze, seemingly spell-bound, fascinated by the gleam of the polished barrel.

Once more, as on the night before, his finger curled about the trigger, and he started to raise the weapon toward his temple.

This time the telephone-bell did not ring to interrupt!

It took weeks to straighten out the tangle in which Judge Osborne's affairs were involved, and for a long time it looked as though Natica and her mother would recover absolutely nothing from the wreck of their estate.

Goodrich, however, had fallen squarely on his feet, the interest of President Soderberg having been aroused in him—for millionaires do sometimes take penniless youngsters under their wings, even in real life. So, since he was amply able to care for a wife and mother-in-law at once, and had still brighter prospects for the future, there seemed no sense in delaying the wedding.

Accordingly, it was celebrated very quietly, but very happily, none but the very closest friends of the pair being in attendance.

St. John was there, of course; but Pembroke, who had also been invited, was very late, and did not show up until the marriage ceremony had actually been started.

He came in strong on the congratulations, however, seeming almost more enthusiastic in extending his good wishes than anybody else, and at an early opportunity took occasion to draw Goodrich aside.

"Old man, I didn't want to tell you or Miss Sherman before. Excuse me; Mrs. Goodrich, I mean—for fear of only causing you unnecessary disappointment; but for a considerable time back we have been hoping to realize quite a sum of money from certain mining-stocks which we found among Osborne's effects, and which we had at first listed as absolutely worthless.

"At last, though, I am free to tell you; for very opportunely a deal was closed to-day, and as a result your bride comes to you with a dowry of one million dollars."

"What?" gasped Goodrich, unable to believe that he was not in the embrace of a dream.

Then he caught sight of St. John across the room, and, making a wild dive in that direction, caught the other by the arm.

"Bo," he said with the old twang, "you're elected to pay for a dinner for me and six; and it doesn't go on the cheap, either. You can bet your bottom dollar on that. Not with the husband of a millionairess. Well, I guess, nit!"

THE END.

The Toughness of Bill Kelly.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS.

The Enmity Incurred at Rehearsal, and How It Was Paid Back on the First Night of the New Play.

"CAN'T you stop that hammering?" Bill Kelly, driving nails into a platform to go behind a set rock in the mountain scene of the third and fourth acts, pounded away noisily without replying.

A rehearsal was in progress, and the young stage-manager, Russell Howard, who also played the "heavy" in the new piece, "For Love of Gold," repeated his admonition in a sharper tone:

"Quit that racket, will you?"

Bill looked up with an insolent grin, his hammer poised for another clanking blow, as he replied:

"I've got to do my work. You can't have no mountains wit'out platforms—not if you want 'em practical. Wot's de matter wit' yer?"

And, as if this settled the matter, Bill resumed his hammering, louder than ever.

"Great Heavens, Russ! Can't that din be shut off?" snapped Marshall Easton, the leading man, who, having recently escaped from a sick-bed, on which he had lain for five weeks, was little more than a sheaf of wire-edged nerves in a fragile frame. "I can't hear myself or any one else. It's an outrage to have a carpenter disturbing a rehearsal in this way."

"Aw! Cut it out!" interjected Bill Kelly. "Youse actors makes me tired." And he kept on hammering.

This was too much for the choleric Easton, and he made a quick dash for Bill. But Howard got in his way.

"No, Easton; you're not strong enough for that sort of thing just now." Then, turning to the defiant carpenter, he added: "Kelly, I've told you to quit."

"Dat's all right. I heard yer, but I ain't goin' ter do it," replied Kelly without looking up.

Then something happened. To Bill Kelly's angry surprise, he was abruptly lifted by both shoulders and swung violently into the wings. It was the stage-manager who had done it.

For a moment it looked as if Bill were about to spring on the young man with the hammer. But if he had such an idea, he changed his mind, and, stalking to a flight of winding stairs in a corner, was soon lost in the gloomy shadows of the "flies."

Russell Howard went on with the rehearsal.

The play was in four acts. The scenes of the first and second were in New York, while the third and fourth showed a mining-camp in Nevada. This afternoon they were running through the Western scenes; and Easton was in a bad temper over the stupidity of half a dozen supers who represented miners, because they seemed to have no comprehension of the breezy demeanor required of them. They were as wooden as only inexperienced supers can be.

"These fellows are not a bit like it, Russ," grumbled Easton. "They're nothing but city Hooligans, and they look it. I wish we had one or two who knew something about Western mining-camps, even if they'd only picked it up from dime-novels. These sticks are going to ruin the third act."

"Oh, no, Marsh," Howard assured him cheerfully. "It'll be all right. We'll have the dress-rehearsal to-morrow and straighten things out. We'll give a good performance on Monday night."

Easton moved toward the wings unconvinced, leaving Howard alone in the middle of the stage.

Thud!

A heavy bag of sand, one of the counterweights of a "drop," came shooting down from the wilderness of ropes overhead and struck the stage with a sullen slam. It had missed the stage-manager's head by a few inches.

Sixty feet above, Bill Kelly knelt on

the "gridiron," rigging-lines. It was he who had let the thirty-pound bag fall.

"My! That bag might have killed you, Russ!" cried Easton, glancing up with a pale face at Kelly. "I believe that's what he meant to do."

"Aw! Can dat!" snarled Bill. "I couldn't help it. De bag slipped."

"I'd like to thrash that scoundrel," declared Easton in a lower tone. "Stage-hands generally are decent fellows, but he looks like a thug."

"They call him 'Tough Bill'—mainly on account of his hard face, I suppose," remarked Howard indifferently.

Bill Kelly's visage was *not* prepossessing, it must be confessed. He had a protruding jaw, high cheek-bones, a short nose—which had been broken in a scrap—wicked little eyes, outstanding ears, and a complexion like a yellow boot.

"He's well named," said Easton. "What's more, he hasn't forgiven you for throwing him off the stage. You'll have to look out for him, Russ."

"I can take care of myself," laughed Howard. "I'm more concerned about our bum supers than anything Bill Kelly may do to me."

But the stage-manager was not allowed to forget that he had incurred the enmity of Tough Bill. At the dress-rehearsal the next day — Sunday — there were many evidences that Mr. Kelly was seeking vengeance.

For example, a "flat" suddenly shot out from the wings, hit Howard behind and nearly knocked him over on his face. It was an "accident," of course. A row of border-lights, tin shades and all, came swooping down to the stage in the middle of his best scene with Easton.

A kitchen wall, with saucepan-lids, brooms, and mops hanging on it, appeared as part of a gorgeous drawing-room. Worst of all, a pot of green paint was left on a sofa, half hidden by a newspaper, and the leading lady, in her costly white-silk gown, would have plumped into it if Howard had not chanced to see it just in time.

Bill Kelly could not be actually connected with any of these characteristic bits of mischief—except as to the pot of paint, which Elsie Jordan, the ingénue, had seen in his hand a minute before it was found on the sofa.

But Miss Jordan, a very pretty girl, was the fiancée of Marshall Easton; and she said nothing about it, because she did not want to excite him. He was near collapse as it was. As she had told him that very day, he had no right to be trying to play so soon after his illness, for the rehearsals had almost worn him out.

The third act, with its mining-camp in the mountains, was about to begin. The stage-manager had been drilling his supers all the morning, and was rather hopeful of them.

Before the curtain rose for the act, he lined them up and looked them over. Then he called forward one of their number, whom he had chosen to speak a line in the play.

The line was short, but important in its bearing on the action of the story, and Howard had selected this particular super to say it because, although his intelligence did not seem to be of a high order, he had a loud voice. His daily occupation, when not at the theater, was selling vegetables from a wagon.

"Now, Martin," said Howard briskly, "you know what you have to say?"

"Sure!" callioped Martin, as if he were shouting "Potatoes!" to a fifth-floor window.

"All right. But you needn't speak quite so loud. When Mr. Easton points to me and says, 'What shall we do with him?' that's when your line comes in, 'Hang him, and we'll all pull the rope.' Got that?"

Martin nodded energetically, while the other supers listened open-mouthed, and perhaps envied their gifted associate who was about to become a real actor.

"You know, Martin," went on Howard patiently, "*Sam Blacklock*—that is myself—has been caught in the act of trying to carry off the wife of *Roy Esmond*—who is Mr. Easton. Understand? Well, Mr. Easton has me a prisoner; and he turns to you men, who are his pards in the mining-camp, and, after talking about what a rascal I am, he asks: 'What shall we do with him?'"

"Aw! Hang him, an' we'll all pull de rope," roared Martin out of the corner of his mouth.

Only that the theater doors and windows were closed, he might have been heard a block away. But, at least, he had

spoken the line, and Howard thought it better to have it too loud than inaudible. The audience could not fail to catch the words, and that was the important point, after all.

So, after causing Martin to repeat it twice, to make sure it was in his memory, he rang up the curtain and the rehearsal proceeded. Martin took his cue promptly in the scene, and Howard decided that if he did it as well at the regular performance, the incident ought to go without a hitch.

It was late on Sunday night when the rehearsal ended, and the few friends of the management who had been privileged to witness it filed out, predicting a success for the new piece.

Bill Kelly, "striking" the last act and piling the scenery out of the way against the rear wall of the stage, looked with evil eyes at Russell Howard, who stood talking over the darkened footlights to the manager of the theater.

"Dat fresh guy's goin' ter git his afore de curtain falls ter-morrer night," growled Bill to his assistant, Jim Morris, as they stacked away the last of the flats. "He can't shove me off'n no stage wit'out me gittin' hunk, an' dat's no lie."

"What are you going to do to him, Tough?" asked Jim. "Put a head on him?"

"Never mind. You jest watch me," replied Kelly darkly.

"I'm betting he'll wish he hadn't been so gay with you," responded Jim Morris, humbly admiring Tough Bill's aggressiveness.

Then, as he saw Marshall Easton stagger across the stage and fall weakly into Russell Howard's arms, he said curiously: "What seems to be the matter with his leads?"

"Dat's nuttin'. He's been sick, an' he gits a swimmin' in his nut when he's been workin' hard. I seen him dat way two or t'ree times since de rehearsals begun," was Kelly's careless answer.

Kelly had diagnosed the trouble with Easton correctly. Howard helped the half-unconscious leading man to a chair, and told him to stay there while he got a taxicab.

"Where's Marsh?" asked Elsie Jordan, in an anxious tone, as she met Howard near the door of her dressing-room. "I heard one of the stage-hands say he was sick."

"It's only one of those dizzy spells of his. He'll be all right soon. See! He's looking over at us sensibly enough. A night's rest will bring him around all right."

"I don't like that wild glare in his eyes," replied Elsie. "He's not himself. I'll go with you to get the cab, and then you'll take him home, won't you?"

"Of course I will. Poor old Marsh!" rejoined Howard sympathetically.

The two went out together, Easton watching them with lack-luster eyes as they disappeared. Howard fortunately found a taxicab just outside the theater, and, helping the exhausted leading man into it, he took him home and put him to bed, waiting till he saw him in a calm sleep before going to his own room in the same hotel.

The next day Easton was as well as usual, and when night came Howard was satisfied that the leading man would give a good performance of *Roy Esmond,* whatever might be the fate of the new play.

There was a good house, with the usual gathering of well-dressed regular "first-nighters" in their places. Those who were there merely for entertainment chatted gaily, while the newspaper critics, somewhat ostentatiously weary of playgoing, crouched low in their aisle seats and yawned over their programs. The manager of the house, in evening dress, welcomed those he knew in the lobby, and the ushers, full of business, banged down the chairs noisily.

On the stage, Russell Howard, made up as the villain, *Sam Blacklock,* with heavy, black eyebrows and mustache, stood with his back to the curtain, inspecting the first scene—a library in *Roy Esmond's* home in New York. As the orchestra finished the overture, Howard gave the order, "Clear the stage," and touched a button in the first entrance. Up went the curtain, and "For Love of Gold" was on.

It was toward the end of the first act that Howard was reminded that Bill Kelly still "had it in for him." As the villain, Howard had just come to the climax of a tempestuous interview with Easton, and, with a fierce, "I'll leave you

now, but you'll hear from me, *Roy Esmond!*" dashed to the door R. 2 E.—right second entrance—which was supposed to lead to the street, intending to fling it open dramatically and rush out. It was to be what is known in stage parlance as a "strong exit."

But the door wouldn't open! It was firmly secured with a button on the other side. Howard rattled frantically at the handle and banged on the panels, but without avail.

The audience began to titter, and there was nothing for it but to cross the stage and go out by a door on the left, which, as had been made perfectly clear, belonged to the bedroom of *Esmond's* exceedingly prim maiden aunt. In fact, the good lady had gone in there not more than ten minutes before.

It couldn't be helped, however, and Howard, with a hasty "gag-line," "I'll let myself out of the window," went into the bedroom and slammed the door, the titter out front becoming a gale of laughter. The exit, if not the scene, was completely spoiled.

Bill Kelly was not to be found just then. Afterward he declared he knew nothing about the door being fastened, but he winked slyly at Jim Morris as he made the denial to Howard.

The second act, a drawing-room, went through without interference by Bill—probably because Howard directed every member of the company to keep an eye on him. But the setting of the third act gave Tough Bill another chance.

Most of the characters had to make their entrance down the steep side of a mountain. At the last moment it was discovered that one of the platforms was missing, leaving a gap in the "run" six feet wide, so that it was impossible to get down to the stage from above.

No one knew where the platform was except Bill Kelly, and he had gone under the stage for something. When they got hold of Bill, it took ten minutes to find the platform and set it in place, and then Howard noticed a trap open behind a set rock, just where he would have to walk.

"Another of your tricks, eh, Kelly?" he remarked. "You and I will have an important ten minutes together after the show to-night."

"I was fixin' dat trap when you called me up," returned Bill in a surly, defiant tone. "You don't have ter fall down it 'less yer careless. As fer de talk arter de show, why, I'm wit' yer if yer wants ter start somet'in'."

Howard did not reply to this, but told him bruskly to go down and shut the trap. Bill went, and then there was more trouble.

One of the supers reported that Martin had been arrested an hour before "for holdin' up a souse in de Bow'ry on Sat'day night," and was at that moment in a cell at police headquarters. Thus there was no one to go on in this act and shout "Hang him, an' we'll all pull the rope."

"Good Lord, Russ, what are you going to do?" cried Easton wildly. "None of these men can speak that line."

"Don't worry, Marsh; I'll manage. Keep yourself quiet. You're all unstrung."

"I know it," replied Easton, passing his hand across his forehead. "I hardly seem to know where I am. I wish this night were over."

Easton went to his dressing-room, and Howard looked disconsolately at his hopeless crew of supers.

"Can any of you stage-hands go on and speak a line?" he asked suddenly, addressing Jim Morris.

"Sure! Bill Kelly can do it. He's a mighty good actor," replied Morris, without hesitation.

The stage-manager knew Bill Kelly had been trying to ruin the performance, and that he was not called Tough Bill for nothing. But the curtain had been down nearly twenty minutes, and, although first-night audiences are used to unconscionably long waits, there is a limit even to their patience.

"Where is Kelly?" he demanded in a loud tone.

Bill came up from beneath the stage at this instant, and the scowling look he gave Howard would in itself have made the young stage-manager decide not to ask his services if there had been any alternative. As it was, he called:

"Kelly!"

"Well?"

"Will you go on in this act and the next as a miner, and, at the cue, say, 'Hang him, an'—'?"

"Dat's 'nough. I know dat line back-

wards," interrupted Bill. "I'll do it fer ten plunks."

"I'll give you the ten dollars."

Bill Kelly had one great ambition, and that was to be an actor—notwithstanding that he often expressed his scorn for actors in general. He had gone on many times as one of a mob and in similar insignificant characters — as stage-hands often do in an emergency—but never had he made a speech by himself in a play.

He still "had it in" for Howard, but his vengeance could wait. He'd play this part, and show what he could do. Besides, there was the ten dollars.

So he hustled to the supers' dressing-room, and, just as Howard rang up the curtain, reappeared in traditional Western miner's costume, with a big revolver and bowie-knife hanging at his belt. All the other men in the play, including Easton and Howard, carried similar weapons.

The act was a lively one, with plenty of "hyars" and "thars" and other Western "atmosphere." Bill Kelly got his line over the footlights in good style, his toughness fitting well into the part.

He pulled and hauled Howard around with much more violence than seemed necessary, and at the end of the act, after *Blacklock* had escaped by dashing up the mountainside, with every one blazing away at him with blank cartridges, Howard went to Kelly in the wings and told him about it.

"Don't do it in the next act, Bill," he said quietly. "You've gone as far as I'll let you."

"Aw! Who cares for you?" snarled Kelly.

"Well, don't do it. I'm giving you sound advice. Understand?" replied Howard as he turned away.

The next instant Howard felt a sharp pain in his shoulder, and, as Bill Kelly hissed a fierce oath behind him, he knew he had been slightly cut. He swung around, and there was Bill, with a bowie uplifted in one hand, struggling desperately with Marshall Easton.

"Gee! Bill's getting hunk with him. I knew he would," shouted Jim Morris, rushing forward with the others who had been attracted by the noise of the fray. "Look out, Bill! You've give him enough!"

"Wot's de matter wit' you?" was Bill's response, as, still holding the knife, he thrust Easton back savagely.

"Oh, Howard! He'll kill Marshall!" cried Elsie Jordan, running toward the excited group with her hands out imploringly.

"No, he won't!" shrieked Easton—and the voice was nothing like his own. "He won't kill me. But I'll rid the earth of the scoundrel who has been trying to rob me of you. He didn't think I saw him hanging about you, but I did. And you, too. I'll kill both of you. I almost had him then. Give me that knife!"

The leading man, obviously stark mad, tried to snatch the bowie from Kelly's hand, but his false strength gave way, and, with another awful scream, he lay flat upon the floor in convulsions.

"Why, who struck me with that knife?" asked Howard, bewildered.

"He did," answered Kelly. "You see mine is in its sheath in my belt. This one in my hand I took away from him. I don't care nuttin' about you, Mr. Howard, an' I'm goin' ter git even wit' yer fer shovin' me off'n de stage on Saturday. All de same, I ain't tough enough ter see no man bein' killed from behind wit'out him havin' a show fer his life. Dat's all."

"It was a sudden attack of insanity," said the doctor who had been called in hurriedly from the front of the house. "It's a common thing when excitement and overwork follow too closely on convalescence after a fever. Mr. Easton must rest for at least a month. He'll get over his delusion probably by to-morrow."

Russell Howard went before the curtain and announced that, in consequence of the sudden illness of Mr. Easton, his understudy, Mr. Roberts, would play the part of *Roy Esmond* in the last act. Then he bowed and retired, after acknowledging the sympathetic attitude of the audience.

The first person he ran against as he stepped back was Bill Kelly.

Howard held out his hand, saying:

"I owe you a debt of gratitude, Kelly. Will you shake?"

"Aw, g'wan!" growled Tough Bill, walking away.

INSANE ISLAND.*

BY CROMWELL KNOX.

The Riotous Proceedings, Set to Music and Otherwise, that Took Place in Latitude and Longitude Unknown, After Some of the Orienta's Passengers Left the Ship Not Wisely but Too Soon.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Aboard the liner Orienta, bound from San Francisco to Australia, is a certain German band that helps pay its passage by making night hideous for the passengers. The only one of the latter who appears to enjoy the sort of music it discourses is one Lewis Sping, an American acrobat, earning a huge salary on the vaudeville stage, and now bound to fill a ten weeks' engagement in the antipodes. In the midst of one of the deck concerts, while Sping is telling Schweitenheim, the leader, how much he admires the band, there is a crash and all the lights aboard the ship go out. Feeling that the vessel is sinking, Sping calls to the musicians to follow him aboard one of the life-rafts, which they drop over the side, and to which the acrobat and all the members of the band, plus their instruments, transfer themselves and cast off. A little later they discover that nothing serious has happened to the steamer, which, after vainly trying to pick them out with its search-light, steams away and leaves the castaways to their fate.

After enduring an unpleasant night of storm, they are landed gently the next morning, amid sunshine, on some unknown shore. Here, after discovering that there is nothing eatable to be found, the members of the band announce that they have decided to eat Sping, as being directly responsible for their plight. But Hagenbusch, the emissary, has barely finished the delivery of this ultimatum when a huge spear whizzes through the air from some mysterious source and neatly carries Mr. Hagenbusch's cap out to sea on its point.

CHAPTER V.

HOSTILITIES AND COURTESIES.

FROM the sixteen remaining members of the band, as they gathered together and came for the quartet on a run, came a sudden shout.

From Mr. Schweitenheim, as he dropped back on the sand in a rather shaky sitting posture, came a faint squeak. From Mr. Sping came a gasp of sheer astonishment.

He side-stepped nimbly as the cannibalistic musical aggregation came upon him. They, however, seemed to have lost their evil intentions, for they huddled in a group and stared about, chattering wildly in German the while.

"Did that thing come out of the skies, Hagenbusch?" Sping asked somewhat tremulously. "Or did—"

He was answered suddenly. From the thicket on the little hill a second spear hurtled through the air—passed within an inch of him and stuck, end up, in the sand.

The acrobat's lips opened—and closed again; for the spear seemed but to be the first of many more. They began to whiz through the air, and arrows as well. One of the latter passed through Mr. Hagenbusch's sleeve without in any way injuring him; another tried hard to remove Mr. Winkleburger's ear without damaging the rest of his portly anatomy—and missed its goal by the barest fraction of an inch.

Still another flew for Schweitenheim's ample back and, being mercifully spent, dropped away harmlessly—and brought a wild yell from the seated bandmaster.

Faces, too, began to appear among the leaves — ten of them, then twenty and thirty.

They were queer faces, regularly formed and hardly negro-like. The skin upon them was of a sort of *café au lait* shade, too dark for a white man and too light for a colored person. The hair was thick and bushy, the eyes bright and eager, the arms that appeared were bare.

And, above all, the arms held spears

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in reserve, and the eyes seemed to be searching for places to plant them effectively; and while the band clutched their instruments in helpless terror, the spears waved thoughtfully and—the master mind of the assemblage sprang into action.

"We're up against it," Sping said rapidly. "This ain't any more a desert island than Broadway. The bunch here's as full of man-eating instincts as your band, Schweity. And if we don't make good in quick order, we're due for steaks and chops at to-morrow morning's breakfast and—play, play, *play, play!*"

"Vot?"

"Play! Play!" repeated the acrobat. "Something—anything—only *play!*"

With a flourish the cornet went into position. Instinctively, the band brought their instruments into action.

"Try 'Vot You Goin' To Do Ven Der Rent Comes 'Round?'" commanded the bandmaster chokingly.

With a blast the brass went into action. With a leap, Sping went into action as well.

Heads were rising from the bush now in greater numbers. Spears were waving still, but palpably with not so hostile an intent. The savages, or the islanders, or whatever they might be, were growing distinctly confused.

They took to flocking down from the beach as the first few bars of music tortured the air. They took to staring, too.

For, with one leap, Mr. Sping had given his body a violent jerk. The body obligingly performed three distinct somersaults—and landed upon its head without apparent discomfort.

For a tense instant it remained thus, while the band blared on furiously. The acrobat's hands found the ground. On them, he began to walk—and straight toward the tall and imposing person clad in feathers and skins who appeared to head the attacking band.

Slowly, solemnly, as the band walked behind him as if rehearsed in the part, Sping came upon the semiclothed gentleman, heels in the air, grave face turned upward and firmly fixed ahead.

The islanders were there now to the number of some three dozen. They grouped closely, and watched and listened, their mouths open, and their eyes open wider. One by one, they paled as the acrobat advanced upon them.

A tall person at the border of the group gave a scream then, and fell flat upon his face. His nearest neighbor followed the example briskly, and prostrated himself on the sand. Again, the man next to him seemed to find the thing worthy of imitation, for he, too, went down, and with something of a crash, for he was armed with a heavy shield and several spears.

The band played on madly. Mr. Sping walked forward solemnly until he was within half a dozen yards of the imposing leader of the strange crew.

They were succumbing rapidly, these partially clothed persons of the island. One by one, two by two, they were dropping flat, some silently, some crying aloud. Fear or amazement or admiration was conquering them.

The big man, however, seemed to prefer his feet. The band neared the close of its fifth rendition of the beautiful ballad, and still the big man gazed at it in pale and haughty fashion. The last strains were coming now, and—

Mr. Sping shot into the air again. For a moment he hurtled thrillingly. Then he landed on both hands. A pause, and he had spun to his feet and seemed to have turned inside out; for, while he walked on both hands and feet together, his head was somewhere between his legs and facing the chief of the band with a grin a little more than hideous, and he was still advancing steadily.

A chorus of shouts went up. The acrobat kept on—and he conquered.

For the chief of the strange crowd cast away his spear, and threw up his hands as he dropped flat.

With a sigh of relief that fairly whistled, Mr. Sping regained his normal posture, and murmured:

"Chuck the toot-toot business, Schweity! Cut it out! I've got to give 'em the cold and dignified steer now."

The music died away. Mr. Sping straightened up frigidly and surveyed the prostrate figures on the sand.

"Say, if you could get that bunch to Coney Island for just one season, what a hot little collection of coin you could carry off!" he intoned impressively. "Hey, Schweitenheim!"

"V-vot?" asked the bandmaster.

"They're takin' it all in, the way a blotting-paper eats up ink," the acrobat chanted monotonously. "Now pass 'em out something dismal — something to make the chills chase up and down their back-bones. Go on."

Mr. Schweitenheim gulped.

"She is der Chopin 'Funeral March,' I guess. Ve know it good enough. Go ahead, boys."

The dismally beautiful strains began. Mr. Sping folded his arms and bowed his head slightly, frowning profoundly the while. From the prostrated three dozen came occasional wails as the melody proceeded, with such variations as musical ignorance suggested.

And then it died away, and Mr. Sping unfolded his arms and met the eye of the leader as it was raised from the sand.

The acrobat's hand went out haughtily. He said sharply:

"Lobster! Arise!"

The islander seemed in doubt. Mr. Sping reached to his pocket, produced a half-dollar, and tossed it to the sand before him. The imposing gentleman snatched it and caressed it as he rose nimbly to his feet and stood with bowed head.

"Never saw a darky yet you couldn't move with a tip," Mr. Sping observed complacently. "What's next, Schweity?"

"By *Himmel!* I dunno," replied the bandmaster dazedly. "You vant more music?"

"Um—yes—no—never mind. I'll try this freak on some high signs and see whether he's wise," said the acrobat thoughtfully, as he turned to the person of feathers and skins.

He considered for a moment or two; then, with a sweet smile, he asked faintly:

"Could you direct me to a restaurant?"

The islander bowed low and made strange sounds. The acrobat scratched his head and turned to Mr. Schweitenheim.

"What was that last thing he said?"

"Hoolah, woolah, goolah, I guess."

"That's vhat I made out of it, too. D'ye understand it, Schweity?"

"Vot?" inquired the bandmaster indignantly.

"Well, we'll have to forgive him—he's a foreigner," sighed Sping. "Anyway, I suppose it's all rot trying to talk English to him, ain't it? I—"

"Wah hoo hee falookah," remarked the islander with a profound bow.

The acrobat started — and looked at him—and smiled.

"Thank you, brother. Thank you very much for those kind words. You haven't any idea how touched and proud we are to be here, and to be received in this fashion by so many eminent citizens of your delightful city, but—oh, rats! Say!" His voice rose to a roar. "I—we—want something to *eat.* Eat! Understand?"

The chairman of the reception committee bowed again more profoundly than before, until his long and well-shaped fingers scraped the sand. He made further remarks, too, of the same lucid character as his first. Sping gritted his teeth.

"Aw—what's the use!" he muttered angrily. "Here, you! Get up there! Hike! Stand up and look a man in the face. There—that's right! Now!"

He worked his jaws energetically, staring at the islander the while with a concentration which was meant to accomplish some telepathic results, even if they were of different tongues.

And apparently the results came on time; for the big man bowed low to the little one and remarked:

"Ong foh hollah, googah!"

He arose and, with one arm, pointed energetically inland. Mr. Sping bowed wearily.

"Thank you," he said politely, as he turned to Schweitenheim.

The tall man also turned to his own followers, and, with a brisk word or two, brought them to their feet. Swiftly, in snapping fashion, he spoke to them, and a dozen disappeared suddenly into the undergrowth. The acrobat paid little or no attention to them.

"He says dinner's served in the black-oak grillroom from six to nine," he explained to the bandmaster. "One dollar with music, a dollar and a half without. If you want anything to eat before six, you'll have to order *à la carte.* Say, Schweity!"

"Yes?"

"How the dickens are we going to make an impression on it?"

"I dunno," said the bandmaster gravely. "Der vay it looks to me, he is making impressions himself. He speaks pretty brisk to dem fellers—yes?"

"But—"

"Dey are doing somet'ing in dem bushes, I bet you," pursued Schweitenheim sagely. "Also, he iss making anodder speech to der rest of der bunch. You see it?"

"I see it," said the acrobat pensively. "But I wish I could see the way to putting a dent in his brain to the effect that we're in line for the large feed."

"Dot comes, maybe. Meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile, we can pull our little belts four notches to the windward and make a noise like roast lamb, eh? Bah!" snapped Sping. "I want some *chow!*"

"Und now I bet you you get it," said the bandmaster seriously. "Dot big feller ain't make a foolishness with all dot talk. He has got business on der brain, und don't you forget it. Whatever it is he is saying, he is saying somet'ing."

Sping's hands went into his trousers-pockets, and he watched the large gentleman with the corners of his mouth down-turned.

The islander did, in fact, seem to be engaged with something far from flippant. At the very top of his lungs, he was haranguing the rest of the gathering, waving his arms the while and wagging his head.

He seemed to be talking to eager ears, too, and minds open to conviction; for, after a short while, joyful shouts arose from the scantily clad gentlemen. Spears were thrown into the air and deftly caught again. Shields were tossed aloft: feather head-dresses also went skyward.

And at last they lined up in almost military fashion, and approached the acrobat and the band.

There was a dramatic pause. The big man cleared his throat and bowed low before Sping. He rose then, and began to speak.

It was doubtless a remarkable bit of oratory. At least it was sonorous and thrilling in its intonations, and very evidently grave in import, for the faces of the islanders were funereal to the last degree. At the end of it the entire aggregation fell prone before the acrobat, and remained thus.

Mr. Sping scratched his head and groaned.

"Friends," he said, "fellow citizens—members of the twenty-third election district—I thank you. From the bottom of my heart I thank you for the honor you have tendered me this evening. I don't know what is it, but it looks like an honor; so I thank you, anyway. And I want to state that— Say! I want to state that we're hungry, and that we want *something to eat!*"

The big man arose with alacrity, smiling. The rest followed suit more slowly. The big man bowed low, and pointed toward the woods.

"Der restaurant's up dot vay, Mr. Sping," Hagenbusch observed facetiously. "Dot's der vay he always points."

"Quiet!" said Schweitenheim. "Dere's somet'ing going on."

That, too, seemed to be the acrobat's opinion. The group of islanders was all around him now, and a man or two from the thicket had joined them. They bore flowers and vines, and some of the former had been woven into a wreath.

The big man took it tenderly in his hands.

Slowly, impressively, he walked toward the acrobat and gave his familiar imitation of a jack-knife in the act of closing. He rose with dignity, and, as his associates broke into a chant, he placed the wreath upon Mr. Sping's somewhat abused derby hat.

It tilted rakishly as the acrobat caught his breath and balanced the thing aloft. The assemblage fell prone once more, and the chant went on—until at last it seemed to have reached its logical conclusion, and the whole gathering rose slowly.

"Well, I'm dummed!" observed Mr. Sping. "They've handed me something! What is it, Schweity?"

"I gif it up," muttered the bandmaster.

"Dey haf got you spotted for a Maypole," observed young Mr. Fluegel.

The acrobat regarded him severely.

"Say, look here—" he began.

"Und den some more!" cried Schweitenheim under his breath. "Um *Gottes Willen*, look at dis!"

From the thicket some five or six men were issuing, bearing between them what looked like a sagging stretcher made of

flowers—or, possibly, a floral palanquin. It was seven or eight feet in length, and palpably newly made of the saplings and vines of the undergrowth, wonderfully decked with tropical blossoms; it was capable, too, of carrying a man or two in comfort.

It bore down straight on Mr. Sping.

It was halted before him and laid upon the ground. The big man came forward and bowed as he motioned toward it.

"Me—me for the—the luxurious ride, Bill?" the acrobat inquired wonderingly.

"Dot's vot he means—it's for you to get into!" said Schweitenheim breathlessly. "You haf made der big hit here, —yes!"

"I *always* make a big hit, Schweity," murmured Mr. Sping. "I always take the whole business by storm; but this—this is the limit!"

"Well, hurry up! He's vaiting for you."

"Would you do it, Schweity?" asked the acrobat as his last doubts began to waver.

"Vot? Get in? Sure!"

"Will you fellows stick by me, and stick close?"

"Sure."

"Done!" said the acrobat as he stepped gingerly into the palanquin.

It was a limber sort of contrivance. It sagged so promptly that Mr. Sping seated himself without ceremony, his crown of flowers toppling down over his eyes.

But the thing seemed really comfortable then, and he essayed a stretch. It was wholly satisfactory. The acrobat reclined at full length and lighted one of his few cigarettes.

"Schweity," he called blissfully, "at last I'm being appreciated without having to work for it!"

"Dot big feller wants somet'ing," contributed the bandmaster curiously.

Mr. Sping raised his head and studied the waving arms for a moment.

"He wants you to play something, old man," he said as he sank back. "Sure. That's the idea. We're going on a march, and he wants a little music on the side. Aha! See that!"

He raised himself slightly once more, as the palanquin was picked up bodily and the group of islanders formed in line and headed slowly toward the thicket.

"That's it. We're going to do the walking act, and we have to do it to music."

The group halted expectantly. Their leader turned to Schweitenheim and motioned almost impatiently.

"What'll we give 'em?" asked the bandmaster.

The acrobat sank back in his luxurious palanquin and inhaled a deep puff of cigarette-smoke.

"Oh—give 'em 'Everybody Works but Father,'" he yawned.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MUSIC-MARCH AND THE NEW MAN.

THE band struck up brilliantly.

Apparently, they were going somewhere, and wherever that was, there might be food; and, since even a horse will move in more lively fashion when headed toward home and the stable, the enthusiasm of Mr. Schweitenheim's band was not without its own reason.

The more or less melodious strains rending the air, the native bearers of the palanquin started off briskly, keeping a certain measure of time. In the palanquin, Mr. Sping crossed his feet and squinted at the slowly fading blue of the sky through a veil of cigarette-smoke.

Straight into the thicket they moved without hesitation. Here there seemed to be a trail of some description, for the bearers headed unerringly up the slope, chattering softly in their musical tongue. Behind them came the big man and the band, which was beginning to perspire freely in its thick uniforms. Behind the band came some twenty or more natives, who, in their light attire and with their lithe muscles, jogged up the slope without a hint of effort.

Schweitenheim seemed bound to the faithful performance of his part. Three times did he put the band through its paces before he stopped—and, when the last note died away, a little prayer of thanks went up from the musical aggregation; and—

"If dey vould haf a inclined railroad up dis way, I bet you business vould be

better!" puffed Hagenbusch. "As it is—"

He ceased speaking, and looked about with the rest, in some wonderment. The entire procession had halted, their faces directed inquiringly toward the band in general and Mr. Schweitenheim in particular.

The acrobat partly rose and gazed about in some annoyance.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Something busted?"

"Dere's a ice-wagon crossing der line of march!" suggested Winkleburger.

"Huh? What is it, anyway?"

Smiling in deprecatory fashion, the big man came to the side of the palanquin.

He pointed animatedly toward the band. He raised his hands to his mouth and imitated their playing. He pointed anew and waited humbly.

"Oh, that's all, is it?" asked the acrobat. "Pump 'em out some more tunes, Schweity. I guess that'll move 'em on."

Hesitatingly, wonderingly, almost reluctantly, the bandmaster raised his cornet. A faint rumble of protest came from the perspiring musicians—and Schweitenheim shrugged his shoulders.

"Dey ain't heard der newest pieces dis year, I guess. We'll gif 'em some more, anyway."

"But it's so derned hot—" began Fluegel.

"Nefer mind. We gif dem 'San Antonio.'"

The blast of brass broke forth anew. As if worked by automatic machinery, the bearers of the palanquin resumed their burden and jogged steadily ahead, up the hill. The big man fell into step behind the band—and the latter was forced to climb more rapidly.

A bare one-eighth of a mile was covered, tramping through the hot thicket, when the last musical selection was finished and the band thankfully removed their instruments from their lips and gasped for breath through the rain of perspiration that had started on every brow.

And the parade stopped short.

Not more than ten seconds had passed since that last note, yet they were once more at a complete standstill. Mr. Sping, who had gone more than half-way to dreamland, roused and stared about.

"What's wrong now?" he inquired.

The big man pointed impatiently to the hand, where handkerchiefs were mopping up superfluous moisture from faces and foreheads.

"Tooty-tooty-tooty-toot?" asked the acrobat wonderingly.

The big man bowed low. Sping laughed aloud.

"Hit her up again, Schweity!" he called back. "We've got to have the music to travel by."

"By *Himmel!* I tell you, it's too hot, Mr. Sping!" came forcibly from the bandmaster. "It ain't possible to blow out dem tunes und climb dis mountain at der same time, und—"

"Oh, forget it!" was the retort. "It has to be done, Schweity. Go on. Imagine you got to Australia all right, and you're out on a practise march now. Let her rip!"

"But—"

"Say, try that 'Watch on the Rhine' thing over again," the acrobat suggested diplomatically.

The eyes of the islanders upon them, the band hesitated for a last instant.

Then Mr. Schweitenheim's cornet came to bear again, and slowly the other pieces followed until the full measure of melody floated forth on the hot, late afternoon air.

Nimbly the procession took up its way once more.

The gentlemen of the island, apparently having grown to like music, declined to walk without it. They may have fancied that it was some personal attachment which Sping carried with him habitually; they may have loved it solely for the pleasure it gave them.

Over and over and over again the band blew forth the inspiring notes, and punctuated them here and there with exhausted bursts of breath. At last, however, human endurance came to an end. The band stopped short in the middle of a piece.

The procession also stopped abruptly. Mr. Schweitenheim, his face purple to the point of apoplexy, tottered forward, gripped the side of the palanquin, and gasped:

"It ain't no use, Sping. Ve can't do no more."

"What?"

"No, sir, by chingo! Eferyt'ing has a limit, und we've got to der limit of dis. Tell yer frient to go on, if you vant to. Me und der band is going to haf a rest."

"But—"

"Dere ain't any buts here!" the bandmaster declared angrily. "Dis is vere ve go on strike!"

Mr. Sping took a final puff of his cigarette and sat upright. He considered matters for a minute or two; then he motioned the big man to proceed.

The big man smiled and bowed.

Also, he took to imitating the band again and to pointing at Schweitenheim. The latter burst into a torrent of German profanity, stayed finally by the acrobat with:

"You might as well drop it, Schweity. You're going to play, or we're going to stay here."

"Den ve stay here!" shouted Mr. Hagenbusch.

"But don't you see what a blamed nonsensical thing it is?" demanded the acrobat sharply. "This crowd wants the music, and they won't move without it. You'll have to pass it out."

For answer, Mr. Schweitenheim selected a rock, and sat down with a violent puff. Several of his band followed the example.

The big man smiled and bowed further, and, finding a rock of his own, seated himself upon it complacently. One by one, too, his islanders imitated the action until at one side of the trail were some three dozen calm and smiling half-clothed men, and at the other seventeen red-hot and scowling uniformed men.

Matters, it appeared, had reached a deadlock.

From the palanquin came a shout of anger:

"Look here, Schweitenheim, you start that band going, or there'll be trouble!"

"Dere couldn't be no more trouble dan if we were going up dot hill und playing some more."

"Und dese are musicians, not carthorses!" Hagenbusch contributed savagely.

"Und, furdermore, dey are hungry musicians, dot don't vork ven dere stomachs is empty!" called young Fluegel.

Mr. Sping rose in his wrath.

"Well, d'ye suppose anybody's going to bring you a ten-course dinner here, you chumps? D'ye see anything to eat around here? No, of course you don't—and you won't, either, until we get to wherever this crowd lives. Is that horse sense, or isn't it?"

Slowly Mr. Schweitenheim's hot face came up, and there was a distinctly mournful expression in his eyes as he muttered:

"Dere is a certain amount of sense in dot, Mr. Sping. I—I guess you got it right."

"Then, you suit yourselves about when you want to start," snapped the acrobat. "Take your time. I'm comfortable."

A long, long five minutes dragged by. From the region of the band came murmurs and mumblings in all the German gutturals. There were swear-words galore, too, rich in letters and probable significance.

From the other side of the road came a series of soft remarks, peaceful, and not altogether unlike the cooing of doves.

Then rose a prolonged groan, as Schweitenheim struggled to his feet and the rest followed.

"If we stay here, we die because we don't eat nuddings. If we don't stay, we die because we blow out of us der last breath. Are you retty, boys?" choked the bandmaster. "'Hail, Columbia, Happy Land!' und blast der whole bunch!"

A frantic blare of sound came instantly. Galvanized, the islanders were on their feet and moving—and again the procession proceeded.

Mr. Sping crossed his legs and blinked anew at the sky as he smiled. It was hard on Schweitenheim and the rest of them, he reflected; but some of us are bound to do the hard work of life, and others are bound to have the easier side—and he was entirely grateful that the islanders had chosen him for the latter rôle. It was fitting and proper, and it satisfied the acrobat thoroughly.

He had been going to Australia to be hailed as the greatest contortionist of the age, just as he had been hailed all over America and Europe. Now that he had landed on a desert island, the same old enthusiasm over him had broken out.

"Hail, Columbia," was over with. Mr. Schweitenheim's field music was engaged with "Marching Through Georgia"

now, and if the notes were becoming slightly tangled, through sheer exhaustion, traveling underfoot was at least growing rather easier.

The procession had reached the top of the incline. They were jogging along now upon a wider, more level road, running, as it appeared, along the ridge of the island. The trees were higher and more numerous, the undergrowth less heavy.

Far, far ahead rose another hill, which amounted almost to a mountain, and toward it the bandmaster and his men were throwing occasional fearful glances.

That hill, Sping opined, would end the band forever, and he prayed gently that their course might not lead over it.

"America" came in shrieking gasps, from end to end. Willy Fluegel was tottering along unsteadily, with one hand on the shoulder of the hardier Hagenbusch, as Schweitenheim, with a dismal word or two, struck up "Nearer, My God, to Thee," and slowed down the pace.

It was a bright little inspiration, that hymn-tune. The first selection was followed by others, and the band began to breathe again, after a fashion; and the gait became so slow that Sping was about to rise and command a change of tactics, when his eye happened to travel ahead.

A wild shout left him and rose above the sound of the band.

"Schweity!"

"Vot?" The cornet was swiftly removed.

"There's the city of Chow-chow-whang-ho-punk!" cried the acrobat. "There's where we *eat!*"

"Hey?" The bandmaster landed beside him in a leap and shaded his eyes.

There, some five or six hundred yards ahead, to be sure, were houses. They were strange affairs, built of rude logs, interlaced with vines, thatched with the bark of trees, as nearly as one could judge.

But they were houses, and they signified human habitation—and that, in turn, signified food. And the band had broken ranks, and was upon the verge of a dash forward when Sping cried:

"Here! Hold on! Hold on! That won't do! The big guy doesn't approve of it. Wait!"

The big man was frowning apologetically and motioning toward the field music. They halted. The islander approached the palanquin and gave a further imitation of music, and Mr. Sping nodded calm acquiescence.

"You'll have to do the final toot, Schweity," he said. "There's no help for you and yours. Pass out something red-hot, too. Oh—give 'em 'Poor John' for the finish. You do that fine, anyway."

For the last time in that amazing march the band struck up, faintly and irregularly, to be sure, but with a certain fluttering hope that had not been present in their former selections, and the walk was resumed rapidly.

Three minutes, and a startling vista opened before them.

They were at the edge of a huge clearing, natural or otherwise, dotted with a hundred of the huts and thronged with fully two hundred people. There were children, hanging back by the dwellings or fleeing together; there were women by the score, and tall men who stared in awe, and—

"Get onto the chorus of village maidens," screamed the acrobat suddenly.

He seemed to be entirely right on the first estimate. Some twenty young women were dancing toward them in double column, bearing baskets laden with flowers and chanting melodiously as the band stopped.

At a little distance, tom-toms began to beat and other voices to rise. Flowers suddenly fluttered into the air, and came down in a shower about Mr. Sping, who straightened his wreath and smiled graciously.

The village maidens fell prone in adoration as the procession came up with them. On every side the example was followed until, as they reached a halt in the center of the clearing, the entire village, bearers and all, were prostrate upon the ground.

The acrobat's intake of breath was a long whistle.

"Well—well—I—this—say, this beats New York!"

"By—by chingo! I—I—tell you, ve are popular people in dis burg!" stammered Mr. Schweitenheim.

"We?" The acrobat's voice went up

indignantly. "This is *my* celebration, Schweity! This all belongs to *me!*"

"Vell, didn't we—"

"That's all right. Nobody's been planting any flowers on your head, have they? Nobody's been chucking a whole conservatory at you, have they? All right, then. This is my show."

"Vell, dot's all der same to me," responded the bandmaster wearily. "So long as ve get somet'ing to eat soon, und—"

"Here she comes, old man," said the acrobat more gently.

He was right again: for from a little distance a new line of girls was approaching. They bore what appeared to be deep gourds; also the rudest of earthenware pots and jugs and wooden plates and huge leaves heaped with mysterious dainties.

But, more than all, they came swiftly to the band, which seated itself about the palanquin; and with much low bowing, with many prostrations and more curious glances, real food was put into their hands.

It mattered very little just what its composition or original source might be: it was something to go between anxious teeth and be masticated and passed to yearning stomachs. Furthermore, it was all distinctly good, from the nameless little brown cakes to the wild, wet hash in the gourds.

Heads down and the world forgotten, the eighteen men fell to, almost unaware of the steadily chanting crowd about them, wholly unconscious of the flowers that still rained upon them, save when it became necessary to flick one of the tropical blooms from the soup.

And at last the chanting and the meals came to an end together: and very abruptly the palanquin went into the air again. Mr. Sping stared around in some uneasiness, for divers motions toward the band indicated that it was to stay behind.

"Well, here's where your fond pap's going to be torn from your side, Schweity," he remarked. "I don't like this one little bit, either. I—say!"

"Yes?"

"Don't start any rumpus about it, but just keep your eye on where I'm going, and don't forget the street and the number. If—"

The jog-trot had carried him out of anything but shouting distance. The acrobat gazed back regretfully as he was hurried across the clearing — and then gazed no more, for he had been carried bodily into one of the largest of the huts.

Swiftly the palanquin was lowered for him to step out. More swiftly, palanquin and bearers vanished together.

The tall master of ceremonies allowed himself several more elaborate bows before the visitor. He motioned to the couch of small skins—he indicated the chair, woven of vines, and the big earthenware bowl and water-jug in the corner —he encompassed the whole; then, with a final wave of the hand, he vanished.

Weakly, the acrobat sat down upon his couch.

Dazedly, his eyes wandered from one corner of the dusky little place to the other, settling finally upon the little patch of gray sky revealed in the small opening above him.

For a long time he regarded it pensively. Then, with much deliberation, he removed the ornate diamond pin from his necktie and thrust it into his thigh. The yell that followed satisfied even himself of the realness of things in general.

It also caused the flap of the door to be raised, and a new, dark face to appear questioningly. It remained there for a moment, and, seeing that all was well, seemed on the point of vanishing, when Sping called suddenly:

"Hey—you!"

The man entered and bowed low.

"Please give my card to Professor Schweitenheim, and inform him that I wish to see him here and—bosh! You can't climb around that, can you, little bright-eyes? Well—let's see. Um. Toot, toot! See? Tooty-tooty-tooty. That's right. The large, shiny cornet. Also—some of this."

He indicated a rotundity of girth which none on the island but Schweitenheim could claim.

Further, he pointed at the door and beckoned toward himself. And the man seemed to understand, for he bowed again and vanished; and the acrobat seated himself somewhat wearily.

He had not long to wait for developments. Some three or four minutes

passed; and a heavy tread approached from without, accompanied by a whistled version of some Wagnerian bits. As the flap was lifted, there was a grunt; and Mr. Schweitenheim stood within the shack, blinking amiably.

In leisurely fashion he made his way to the couch and settled down with divers puffs, removing a toothpick from his mouth and remarking:

"Spingy, I tell you, dot was *good* soup!"

"Eh?"

"Und for dot chop-suey stuff — dot stewed hen hashed with green-gages, or whatever it was — a feller could leave home for dot without regrets," the bandmaster purred on contentedly.

"Well, never mind that now," the acrobat said in some irritation. "We can forget the eating part for a while and talk things over."

"So."

Mr. Sping snorted a little.

"Schweitenheim, what are we going to do?"

"Do?"

"Yes, do."

"Vell, I dunno," said the bandmaster, somewhat wonderingly. "Vot iss dere to do?"

"Vell, do you suppose we're going to spend the rest of our natural lives in this place?" Sping demanded sharply.

"Vell — I dunno!" muttered Mr. Schweitenheim.

"Say! Don't look so much like a blasted block of wood with a bunch of features painted on it. How the dickens are we going to set about getting away?"

His tone was so incisive that the bandmaster suddenly stiffened out of his sleepy state.

"Mr. Sping," he said with colossal dignity, "I like to haf you understand dot I haf nefer been in such a similar position before. I am not so schmart as you. I am not so bright dot people make me der crowns of flowers und sling rosebuds at me ven I am brought along der street. I pass up."

"Then, you're going to leave it all to me?"

"You haf been elected district leader by dis bunch. Go on und manager it in der vay you like best."

Mr. Sping rose to his feet, his hands upon his hips. His eyes sparkled in the gloom with real anger.

"Schweitenheim!" he began.

And there he stopped, for a new voice had intruded itself into the situation with an amazing nasal:

"Waal, gol durn yer measly hide, ye consarned runt! *That's* you, is it?"

With a jump, both men turned toward the doorway.

There, wholly visible in the light from the upturned flap, clad in an aged linen duster and the remnants of a straw hat, his hands also upon his hips, stood the chin-whiskered incarnation of the middle-aged hero of a typical New England drama.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INTERVIEW EXTRAORDINARY.

"VELL, by *Himmel!*" and Mr. Schweitenheim collapsed limply upon the couch.

"Well, by—" began Sping, as he stared toward the strange figure in the doorway.

And there he stopped, and contemplated the phenomenon.

Of all things that floated back out of his varied past, this figure suggested only the typical Massachusetts or Vermont backwoods farmer, arriving at the county fair after a twenty-mile drive through the harvest country.

His broad-brimmed straw hat was shredded by wear. His ancient duster, dear to the heart of the bucolic gentleman with his Sunday-go-to-meetings beneath, was only a little better. Here and there huge holes had been worn; elsewhere extensive slits appeared.

The chin-piece, too, was extremely familiar; and the remains of a pair of heavy shoes brought back bygone times to Signor Luigi Spingara, nominally of Turin, actually of Patagonia, Maine.

All in all, the apparition was neither more nor less than astounding; and Mr. Sping stared at it steadily, and was almost disinclined to believe in its reality until:

"So *you're* the one, eh?"

The acrobat braced himself.

"Evidently I am."

"Um!" said the apparition.

It walked into the shack swaggeringly. It came within ten feet of the acrobat

and surveyed him critically. And then, with a sniff, the nasal twang proceeded:

"Waal, by gum! I thought they had bad taste when they picked me; but you go about six points over the limit."

"Yes?" muttered the acrobat questioningly.

Dizzily he reflected that this was another white man—a man of his own country. A man also who should have fallen into his arms with tears of joy at seeing again one of his own color and nationality.

According to all tradition of fact and fiction, this freak should have rushed at him and begged for news of home and a chunk of tobacco or a cigarette, or something of the sort. He should have evinced that wildest of friendliness which a man can feel only under such circumstances.

And yet—well, to put it baldly, this particular gentleman seemed very nearly on the verge of a fight.

The acrobat was staggered. Slowly he retreated to the couch and sat down heavily beside Mr. Schweitenheim, whose lower jaw refused steadily to return to its proper place, and whose eyes bulged as he stared and stared at the visitor.

Slowly, too, he gathered himself as, with a snort of suppressed indignation, the stranger made for the chair and seated himself. He tried to speak, and found that the words stuck in his throat. He tried to think—and, somehow, the cogwheels of his mental machinery refused to revolve. The stranger must open the conversation, if conversation there were to be.

And the stranger, on his own part, seemed to be searching for a point of starting.

For a time he considered Mr. Sping solemnly in the gloom. His gaze shifted then to Schweitenheim, and he grunted suddenly.

"Who's the fat one?"

"Vot?"

"What's yer name?" rasped the visitor.

"I am Chulius Schweitenheim von Wiesbaden!" replied the bandmaster.

"You're the fat one that has the band I hear about?"

"I am a bendmester!" announced Mr. Schweitenheim icily.

"Hum!"

The caller seemed to have lost interest in Schweitenheim. His gaze turned again to Mr. Sping.

"What's *your* name?"

"My name's Sping, but it's none of your blamed business!" the acrobat rapped out with a sudden return to consciousness. "Who the dickens are you, and why do you walk in here in this fashion? What?"

"Hey! Heigh-ho!" The stranger laughed cacklingly. "Got our head reel swelled up, ain't we? Waal, waal, waal!"

"Eh?"

"I'll bring that swellin' down putty soon, sonny."

"Dot feller's bughouse!" whispered the bandmaster.

"I guess you're right there, all right," murmured Sping.

"Iss it safe mit him?"

"Eh? Oh, sure! I've got the gun, if he gets gay. It ain't much, but it'll do to scare him."

"Yes, but if he should maybe haf—"

"I guess that'll be about enough o' that private conversation business, gents!" the visitor broke in sharply. "Look here, I want you to listen to me for jest about seven minutes."

"I'm willing," said Sping gently.

"All right." The stranger crossed his legs and cleared his throat. "Jest keep yer ears open then, an' I'll try to enlighten ye a little bit."

The acrobat selected a cigarette, and lighted the second he had enjoyed upon the island. The visitor regarded it rather enviously, made no comment—and then proceeded:

"My name is Hiram Hodge."

"That's a real nice name," Mr. Sping commented flippantly.

"I could write a tune about dot name," added Mr. Schweitenheim. "Somet'ing on der order of 'Oh, Mr. Austin, since I came to Boston—'"

"Psst!" commanded Mr. Sping.

"What's more, I'm king o' this here island!" pursued the visitor impressively.

"Eh?"

"Straightest thing ye ever heard!" snapped Mr. Hodge. "This bunch here elected me king mighty nigh onto four year ago, an' I've been rulin' 'em to the best o' my humble ability ever sence."

"Ah?" Sping rubbed his eyes. "And how did you get here?"

"That ain't any pertic'ler concern o' your'n, but I s'pose I may as well tell ye. I was on the Chiny Queen, bound fer Singapore eventual, when she went down near four years ago. I reckon we must 'a' blew about for four days before she sank. They all went down but me, an' I hung on to the captain's empty medicine-chest an' floated here."

"Got sort of a water-cure out of the empty box, eh?" asked Sping.

"What?" Mr. Hodge stared hard at him. "Waal, I got here, and—"

"And where the dickens is *here?*"

"How do I know? It's somewhere in the South Pacific, ain't it? That's all I'm able t' tell ye. It's a durn nice island, an' mighty nice people, only they ain't no ships seem to pass this way." He cleared his throat again. "Anyway, I got here, an' these here citizens got stuck on me an' made me king."

He paused impressively. Mr. Schweitenheim was suddenly convulsed with tactless laughter.

"By chingo! You look der part!" he wheezed. "If I should efer see a man vot didn't look like a king—"

"That'll do! That'll do!" cut in Sping. "Go on, Hodgy; go on."

"Kin that Dutch sassidge keep quiet?" asked Mr. Hodge raspingly.

"Say, vot—"

"Shut up! Sure. He'll keep quiet. Go on with the story."

The stranger glowered for a minute.

"Waal, I guess they ain't much more to the story, young feller—Sping, did ye say yer name was? They ain't much more to the story of the past, anyway. What I came here t' see you about was the present."

He cleared his throat again with a long whistle. He leaned forward and glared at the newcomers with:

"Young feller, your game ain't goin' to go."

"Eh?"

"I say, it ain't goin' to go!" snarled King Hiram. "I'm the boss here, an' I'm goin' to stay boss."

"Meaning?"

"Jest what you know."

"Well, that's nothing at all. I'm glad of it. Thank you."

"Are you intendin' to insinuate that ye ain't wise to what this gang means to do?"

"I'm about as sure about what they mean to do as I am about your sanity," murmured Mr. Sping.

Mr. Hodge rose to his feet. His hands went back to his hips and his teeth bared savagely.

"This here crowd, Mr. Sping, intends to make *you* king."

The acrobat got onto his feet.

"What?"

"Yes. An' I ain't goin' to stand fer it."

"Well—"

King Hiram sat down again, and talked on rapidly.

"Oh, ye needn't do the innocent-baby act," he snarled. "They's one or two o' these natives that I've drilled down to talk putty good English, these last four years. I've got a full report of all that's been going on this here afternoon. I know all about 'em findin' ye on the far beach thar, an' bringin' ye here. I know all about the hand an' the rest of it. An', more'n all, I know all about the scheme to make ye king of the island."

"Well, that—" the acrobat began.

"An' I tell ye, it won't go," Hodge roared excitedly. "I tell ye, I've been the whole squeeze here too long to be made city chamberlain, er whatever it is they're intending, under you. Ye hear that? I ain't goin' to play no second fiddle under a pint o' dishwater like *you*, an' the quicker ye get yer mind made up to that fact the better."

He sank back, puffing angrily. For a little time Mr. Sping considered him in silence. Then:

"Now, as I take it, the gentle populace of this *café parfait* colored community intended to ask me to rule over them?"

"That's the idee, an' I came to kill it before it was born."

"Ah! And you object?"

"I not only object, but I'll hang yer everlastin' liver on top o' my shack two days after ye try it!" said King Hiram pleasantly.

"Hey?"

"If ye could be alive, ye'd see it," snarled the New Englander. "That's business, too."

He folded his hands across his knees, bared his teeth again and fixed his pale blue eyes upon the acrobat.

"Now, I've got jest one proposition to make to you," he went on.

"Yes?"

"I ain't saying that this bunch hasn't got stuck on you, mister. They're a lot o' simple-minded kids, an' I guess this band o' music I hear about must have struck their fancies. An' I wish I hadn't been off huntin' when ye was found, er I'd have smashed the hull notion quick," he added savagely.

"Well, go on with the proposition," said Sping calmly.

"You bet I will. As I was sayin', they ain't no doubt but what you've made a hit. All the samey, they's some o' these tall gents that'll stick to me through thick an' thin; an' if you start to takin' possession o' the kingly dignities o' this island, they's goin' to be bloodshed, an' somebody's comin' out second best—an' that somebody ain't old King Hiram Hodge. That all clear to ye?"

"Passably—passably."

"All right. Now, here's what I propose: You take yer band and git over to the north of the island. That's the nearest to the steamship course, anyway, as I take it. You kin live the best way you can. Mebbe some day you'll find a ship to take ye away from this place. Ontil then—"

He paused dramatically.

"Waal, ontil then, ye keep yer feet an' yer fingers distinctly offen my preserves here, er ye'll get into trouble that'll result—um—er—fatally."

He set his jaw and contemplated the acrobat. The acrobat also set his jaw.

"You're a United States citizen?" he queried.

"I uster be."

"Nice, friendly one, aren't you?"

"That's accordin' to the way you look at it."

He frowned anew.

"Jest now, I'm king of this here island, an' I say, in plain English, thet ye've gotter go!" he finished.

"And if I don't feel that way about it?"

"Heaven help ye!" murmured King Hiram.

(To be continued.)

A Matter of Twenty Dollars.

BY RALPH ENGLAND.

What Came of Accommodating a Lady, with Side Remarks by the Switchboard-Boy and the Hotel Detective.

I WAS standing near the public telephones, in the lobby of the Plymouth Hotel, when she stepped into the end booth, carefully closing the door behind her.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed to the young man at the switchboard. "What a stunning girl! Who is she?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I've never seen her before. She isn't a guest of this hotel. I reckon she just dropped in here to use the phone. She's a peach, isn't she?"

"She's the sweetest girl I have ever seen!" I declared enthusiastically. "What eyes! What a pure, innocent face! She looks like a saint."

"Yes," said the telephone operator, with a broad grin. "That's the only thing against her."

"*What* is the only thing against her?" I demanded in surprise.

"Her innocent face. She looks much too good for this wicked world. Beware of girls who look that way. They're generally the most knowing and the most dangerous kind."

"Nonsense," I replied angrily, for the young man's cynicism jarred on me. "Don't talk that way, my friend. It isn't at all funny."

"If you knew as much about the other sex as I do—" he began, with an air of superiority.

I could not refrain from laughing. This smooth-faced chap could not have been more than twenty years old at the most, and I was fifteen years his senior. His cynical, worldly-wise air, so out of keeping with his youthful appearance, was vastly amusing.

"So you know a whole lot about womankind, do you, my son?" I chuckled.

"Yes, sir," he answered earnestly. "Holding down this here job makes me pretty wise concerning the other sex. All sorts and conditions of women come here to use the phones, and I gets a good chance to study 'em."

"And it is your opinion that those who look the most innocent are really the very ones who are to be most feared, eh?" I laughed.

"Yes, sir. You take the girls who look as if they know a thing or two, and they're generally all right. It's the baby-faced, butter-wouldn't-melt-in-the-mouth kind that mostly causes all the trouble. They ain't to be trusted. They assumes that innocent air as a mask to hide their real characters. Take it from a man who knows."

I laughed again at this funny youngster. The girl who had been the cause of our conversation, having finished her telephoning, stepped out of the booth just then and approached his desk.

"How much do I owe you?" she asked in a sweet voice.

"Ten cents, miss," he answered.

As she took the coin from a green leather hand-bag and handed it to him I studied her face intently, and was even more impressed with it than I had been at first.

"She is innocence personified," I reflected. "That young man ought to be thrashed for suggesting otherwise. *His* knowledge of the other sex, indeed!"

I noticed that the girl carried a stamped and addressed envelope in her right hand. She was just walking away, when she seemed to recollect something, and turned to the young man at the switchboard again.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but do you happen to have a twenty-dollar bill in exchange for small bills? I want to put it in this letter."

"No, miss," he answered readily. "I'm sorry, but I ain't got any big bills at all."

I was amazed to hear him say this, for I had been standing at his side when he had opened his cash-drawer a few minutes before, and I had noticed several twenty-dollar bills in plain view.

I glanced at him reprovingly, and he returned my look with a knowing wink.

The girl was walking away, so I postponed asking him what he meant by such churlishness, and ran after her.

"Excuse me," I said, doffing my hat; "I overheard you asking the telephone operator for a twenty-dollar bill just now. Perhaps I can be of service. I have some twenty-dollar bills in my pocket, and I shall be glad to accommodate you."

"Oh, thank you so much," she answered gratefully. "I want to send some money to a friend immediately, and I haven't time to buy a money-order. If you could let me have a twenty for small bills I should be ever so much obliged to you."

"Certainly;" and producing my wallet I selected a yellow-back of the desired denomination. "Here it is."

She took the bill and placed it inside the stamped and addressed envelope, which she sealed with her tongue. It was a very pretty little tongue, and she looked so enchanting as she moistened the flap with it that I quite envied that envelope.

Then she opened her hand-bag and took therefrom a roll of bills which she began to count.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, with a frown of dismay. "This is very unfortunate."

"What's the matter?" I inquired sympathetically.

"I find that I have only eighteen dollars with me," she explained. "I thought I had more. I'm afraid I will have to tear open that envelope and give you back your twenty-dollar bill."

"Not at all," I answered quickly. "I won't let you do any such thing.

"I will give you my card, and you can send me the missing two dollars by mail, when you get home."

She shook her head decidedly.

"No. I am afraid that would not do at all. I could not think of placing myself under such obligations to a perfect stranger.

"I think I know, though, where I can

get the necessary two dollars," she added, with a smile of relief. "I have a girl friend who is employed in an office in the building across the street, and I am sure she will lend it to me. Perhaps you wouldn't mind waiting here a few minutes while I go and ask her?"

"Not at all," I assured her. "If you like, instead of waiting here, I will accompany you across the street."

"No," she answered hastily, "I would prefer that you stay here, if you please. Here is the letter. You can hold it until I return. I'll be back in a couple of minutes."

She thrust the sealed envelope into my hand and departed before I could say another word.

I sauntered toward the young man seated at the telephone, with the intention of asking him why he had told the girl that he did not have a twenty-dollar bill, when, as a matter of fact, he had several in his cash-drawer.

He greeted me with a grin.

"Gee whiz! You were dead easy!" he exclaimed. "How much did she sting you for?"

"I beg your pardon," I retorted, with a frown of displeasure. "I don't quite understand you, my young friend."

He laughed boisterously.

"Jumping Jehoshaphat! You don't mean to say you don't realize yet that you've been trimmed?" he demanded in surprise. "I sized her up for a grafter right away. That's why I refused to let her have that twenty. I can tell 'em at a glance. They can't fool me. I would have tipped you off, only I thought you was surely wise. You certainly was a fool to fall for that game. How much did she get out of you, sir?"

"Not a cent," I answered angrily. "You are a very bright young man—I don't think. If you dare to say another word reflecting on that young lady I shall report you to the management and have you fired."

"Oh, very well!" he muttered sullenly. "I was simply tryin' to put you wise—that's all. It ain't any of my business, of course, but perhaps it ain't too late yet to run after her and catch her before she gets away with your money."

"I have already told you that she hasn't got away with any of my money!" I cried indignantly, and I walked off, thoroughly exasperated.

For half an hour I waited patiently in the hotel lobby. The girl did not return. I wondered exceedingly what could be keeping her.

I glanced at the stamped and sealed envelope in my hand. It was addressed: "Mr. Harry Mortimer, care Flaherty's Hotel, Helen Street, Providence, R. I."

The superscription was in a neat, decidedly feminine handwriting. In the left-hand lower corner of the envelope was written, "Strictly Personal." These words were heavily underscored.

"I wonder who Mr. Harry Mortimer is, and why that fair creature is sending him twenty dollars?" I said to myself.

An hour went by, and still the girl did not come back. I began to grow very uneasy. I felt sure that something serious must have happened to her.

I went in search of my friend Flannery, the house detective of the Hotel Plymouth.

"You haven't heard of any accident happening in front of the hotel within the past hour, have you?" I inquired anxiously.

He shook his head.

"What kind of an accident?" he asked.

"I'm waiting for a lady," I explained. "She should have returned long ago. I am afraid she must have been knocked down by a street-car, or something."

And I explained the circumstances to him.

To my surprise and indignation he received my story with derisive laughter.

"Well, I'll be hanged if you ain't a joke," he chuckled. "You don't mean to say that you really expect that gal to return, do you?"

"Of course I do," I answered. "Haven't I got her letter here? Unless something serious has happened to her she's bound to come back for it."

"She'll do nothing of the kind," asserted Flannery, with positiveness. "How green you must be. You've been up against one of the oldest swindles known to the police. It used to be a good game years ago, but it finally became so well known that they ain't been workin' it for some time now. I supposed that every man, woman, and child in the United States had heard of that bunco game, and would know enough not to bite."

"It wasn't a bunco game," I insisted. "I haven't been swindled. I am willing to bet every dollar in my pocket that that young lady is honest. Unless she's met with an accident she'll be back soon."

"Take my word for it, you'll never see her again, nor your twenty-dollar bill either," he declared, with a laugh.

"You're talking through your hat," I retorted angrily. "How can you say that I have been swindled, when I have my twenty-dollar bill right here in this envelope? Where does the bunco game come in, I should like to know? The young lady was so very honest that she insisted on my holding her letter until she returned."

"Ha, ha!" he laughed. "Do you really mean to tell me that you believe your twenty-dollar bill is in that letter?"

"Of course it is," I retorted. "I saw her put it there. She inserted the bill and sealed the envelope right in front of my eyes. You are making a mistake this time, my wise friend."

"Not a bit of it," answered he. "It is you who are making the mistake. That's where the bunco game comes in. Your lady friend was a clever sleight-of-hand performer. She switched envelopes on you and gave you a duplicate in place of that in which she inserted the bill."

"Nonsense," I answered indignantly. "Do you take me for a fool? I tell you, I was watching all the time. She couldn't have done it without my noticing it."

"Oh, yes, she could. The quickness of the hand can deceive the eye, you know. Haven't you ever witnessed a shell game at a county fair? Those crooks are mighty clever with their fingers. She's got your twenty all right, and you've got a lemon."

"You're wrong," I declared stoutly. "I flatter myself that I'm a pretty good judge of faces, and I am confident that that girl is thoroughly honest. She was a perfect lady. Why, as a matter of fact, she need not have handed me this envelope at all. I offered her my card, and told her that she could pay me the two dollars at her convenience, but she wouldn't agree to that."

"Of course she wouldn't," answered the house detective. "That wouldn't have suited her at all. Can't you see that if she had allowed you to trust her for the two dollars she was short she wouldn't have had any legitimate excuse for not handing you the eighteen dollars she had in her hand-bag? She would have made only two dollars by that transaction, and this way she has done you out of the entire twenty. Of course, she refused to consent to that proposition."

I could not help seeing the logic of this argument. As Flannery had stated, the girl would have had to give me the eighteen dollars which she had in her hand-bag, if she had consented to owe me the two dollars she lacked. She wouldn't have had any excuse for owing me the entire twenty when she had eighteen of it with her.

"It's too bad you didn't insist on holding her eighteen one-dollar bills while she went across the street to get the remaining two," said the house detective regretfully. "You would have lost only two dollars then."

"It never occurred to me to make such a demand," I replied. "I thought then, as I fully believe now, that the girl was thoroughly honest—every inch a lady. And, besides, why should I have asked her for any security when I had my own original twenty-dollar bill in my hands, enclosed in this envelope?"

"And you still think that that envelope contains your twenty dollars?" he chuckled.

"I am sure of it," I replied emphatically.

"My word, but you are an obstinate fellow. Well, it is very easy to convince you. Tear open the envelope and see for yourself. If there's any money inside, I'm willing to resign my job as house detective of this hotel."

"What!" I cried indignantly. "Do you suppose for a minute that I am cad enough to open a letter which is marked 'Strictly Personal'—and a letter written by a lady, too? I should say not, indeed. No man with gentlemanly instincts would do that."

He gave vent to another coarse, derisive laugh.

"Say," he exclaimed, "if you ain't the very limit I'll eat my hat. Gentlemanly instincts is all very well, my dear sir, but they're quite out of place when you've got crooks to deal with. If you don't open that letter, how the divvle are you goin'

to convince yourself that you've been stung?"

"If I were sure the young lady was really a swindler, I should not hesitate to tear open this envelope," I said. "But I am still firmly of the opinion that she is honest, and therefore I can't open it. Suppose I should tear it open, and she should return here soon and hand me the twenty dollars in small bills and ask me for her letter? Just think of the painful position in which my act would place me."

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"I tell you there ain't any more chance of her comin' back with that twenty than there is of me bein' elected President of the United States. You can take my word for it, she's a crook. As a matter of fact, I think I recognize her from the description you give me. It sounds very much like 'Baby-face Blanche,' whose picture is in the rogues' gallery of nearly every big city. If you like, you can go down to police headquarters and look the pictures over. Perhaps you'll be able to identify your lady friend."

"I guess I'll do that," I said. "It's a good suggestion. If I find her picture there, I'll open this envelope and convince myself that I've been swindled out of twenty dollars."

"And if you don't find her picture in the rogues' gallery, you'll not open the letter, eh?" he chuckled.

"Of course not."

"Well, in that case, what do you intend to do with it?"

"Hold it, of course, until I hear from the young lady."

"But, if you really believe she is a lady and strictly on the level, have you any right to hold on to that letter?" he inquired, with a mischievous smile. "Didn't she tell you that it was very important—that it should be mailed at once? Have you any moral right to delay its delivery? Surely, as a man of gentlemanly instincts, you must see that it is your duty to drop that letter into the nearest mail-box right away."

His tone was sarcastic; but it struck me, nevertheless, that his words were laden with a great deal of truth.

If, as I still firmly believed, the sealed envelope which I held in my hand really contained my twenty-dollar bill, I should be placing that money beyond my reach by dropping it in the mail-box; but I was fortunate enough to enjoy a good income, and, while twenty dollars was by no means an insignificant amount to me, I felt that I could afford to sacrifice it rather than disappoint and cause inconvenience to a lady by withholding an important letter.

"You are quite right," I declared to Flannery. "The point you have raised is a good one. While, I suppose, I have a perfect legal right to hold on to this letter, inasmuch as it presumably contains my own money, I don't believe that I have a moral right to do so. I am going to drop it in that mail-box over there."

"Well, I'll be hanged if you certainly ain't the very limit!" he ejaculated. "I was only joking just now, of course. I didn't think that you'd take my suggestion seriously. If you mail that letter, how the dickens are you ever going to find out whether your twenty-dollar bill was or was not inside? You ought to open it just to satisfy yourself as to the lady's guilt or innocence."

"It really is too bad that I can't settle that point," I sighed. "I'd like to do so—for the young lady's sake. I can't help despising myself for entertaining even the slightest suspicion concerning her."

"Well, take my advice and open that envelope," urged the house detective. "That will convince you that you've been done."

"I've got an idea!" I exclaimed joyfully. "Perhaps if I hold this up to the light I may be able to see my twenty-dollar bill through the envelope. The paper is pretty thin."

I walked over to a hanging incandescent globe and proceeded to carry out this plan; but was disappointed to discover that the thickness of the folded letter inside prevented me from discovering whether my money was or was not enclosed.

"It's too bad," I sighed. "Well, it can't be helped. I suppose I must go on having faith in the lady without being able to prove that my faith is justified. Here goes."

With these words, I walked over to the mail-box in the hotel lobby and dropped the letter inside.

A few hours later I went down to police headquarters and looked over their collection of rogues' photographs.

It was with great relief that I discovered the girl's picture was not among them.

I saw the photograph of the notorious "Baby-face Blanche"—swindler, forger, and diamond-thief; and it needed only one glance at it to assure me that she was not the sweet-faced girl who had borrowed the twenty-dollar bill from me.

I returned to Flannery, with a light heart and a triumphant air.

"You're quite mistaken," I exclaimed. "They haven't her photograph at police headquarters. That picture you mentioned doesn't look anything like her. Now, will you admit that you're wrong, and that my twenty-dollar bill was in that letter I dropped in the box?"

"Not by any means," he retorted stubbornly. "Of course, they haven't got every female crook's picture down at police headquarters. The young woman who victimized you has evidently been fortunate in eluding the police camera so far. She's probably too slick an article to allow herself to get caught. Maybe she doesn't take any chances, and only tries her game on exceptionally easy marks like you."

My face flushed at this taunt.

"We shall see," I replied angrily. "Probably time will tell which one of us is right. I feel confident that that young lady will return and pay me the money she owes me. By the way, if she should come back while I am not around, will you kindly take the money and hold it for me, Flannery?"

"If she returns to pay you that money, I sha'n't be able to take it from her—I shall drop dead with surprise," he answered with a laugh.

A week passed without my hearing a word from, or of, that sweet-faced girl.

I could not get her out of my mind. Her face haunted me night and day. The thought that, after all, she might be a thief distressed me exceedingly. It wasn't, of course, on account of the twenty-dollar bill from which I had been separated. I would have given ten times that amount to know positively that she was honest.

I couldn't help having misgivings on that score. I found myself beginning to believe, much against my will, that Flannery had formed the right estimate of her character.

My doubts concerning her were increased by an item I found in my morning newspaper, which read as follows:

AN OLD SWINDLE REVIVED.

Many Persons Victimized by Bunco Game So Played Out That It Should Deceive Nobody.

That there is a sucker born every minute is proven by the fact that for the past few days police headquarters has been visited by many sad-looking persons with a tale of wo to tell.

These unfortunates have been victimized by the ancient "stamped-letter swindle," a bunco game which was worked quite extensively in this town years ago, until people got too wise to make it safe.

During the past few days, it seems, the old swindle has been revived, and, judging by the reports at police headquarters, the perpetrators seem to be reaping a rich harvest. The police believe that the game is being worked by an organized gang of swindlers, which includes women crooks as well as men.

The article went on to describe how the swindle was managed. The details appeared to be very much the same as in my own case.

After reading this article, it seemed unreasonable to refuse to believe any longer that I had been the victim of a female sharper.

And yet I could not bring myself to feel positively that that girl was guilty. I wanted so much to believe in her.

I began to regret exceedingly that I had not opened that letter and ascertained whether my twenty-dollar bill was inside.

I think that if I had had that chance over again I should have yielded to the temptation. But the letter was gone, and doubtless, by this time, in the hands of the person to whom it was addressed.

Suddenly I had an inspiration. Although I had dropped the letter into the mail-box, I fortunately still remembered the name and address written on the envelope.

It occurred to me that it would be a good plan to take a train to Providence,

Rhode Island, and pay a visit to Mr. Harry Mortimer, care Flaherty's Hotel, Helen Street.

He, of course, could tell me whether or not he had found my twenty-dollar bill in the letter addressed to him. Doubtless, he also could tell me the name and address of the girl, and give me some information concerning her character.

When I mentioned this plan to Flannery, he laughed at me.

"Take my word for it, you'll have your trip for nothing," he said. "You won't find any such name or address in Providence. That letter is probably in the dead-letter office by this time. It ain't reasonable to suppose that that young woman would go to the trouble of putting a real name and address on the envelope when a fake one would answer.

But he was wrong. When I reached Providence I found Flaherty's Hotel on Helen Street without much difficulty. It was situated in the most squalid section of the town, and was a very disreputable-looking sort of place.

In response to my question, the dirty-faced proprietor informed me that a young man named Harry Mortimer had been stopping with him for some weeks.

"Ah!" I exclaimed excitedly. "Can I see him?"

"No, you can't," he snapped. "You're too late. He ain't here any more. The police arrested him to-day."

"Arrested him! What for?"

"Swindling," he answered. "They say he's one of a gang of crooks, and I guess they're right, for he owes me five weeks' board, to say nothin' of a phony check he passed on me. He's a mean crook, and I hope they give him all that's comin' to him."

I returned home with a heavy heart.

"You win," I said sadly to Flannery. "I'm willing to admit now that I've been done. It's awfully hard to believe anything wrong of a girl with such a sweet, pure face; but I am satisfied now that she belongs to a gang of swindlers."

"At last!" he chuckled. "Gee, but it took you a long while to get your eyes opened."

II.

FOUR years later I went to spend a few weeks with my married sister down South. Bob Graham, my brother-in-law, met me at the depot with the rig, and drove me to the house.

"How are the kiddies getting along?" I inquired. "It's three years since I last saw them. They must be fine children by this time."

"The greatest ever!" he answered proudly. "They've changed so, old man, that you won't recognize them. They're the prettiest kids you've ever seen, if I do say it myself. And they're as sharp as needles, too. You ought to see how advanced they are in their studies. By the way," he went on, "we've got a new governess.

"Had her two months. She's a peach, too. She's the best governess we've ever had, and, in addition, she's awfully good to look upon. I shouldn't be surprised, old man, if you fall head over heels in love with her while you're with us. She'd make you a good wife, too, I think. Beatrice considers her the most charming girl she ever met.

"I guess she comes of a good family, too, although it's hard to get her to tell anything about herself—she's one of the reserved, quiet sort, you know."

When I reached the house, my sister added to her husband's enthusiastic praise of the new governess.

"She's truly wonderful," she exclaimed. "If you don't lose your heart at first sight I'll be very much surprised. She's so pretty and attractive that if Bob wasn't such a dear, devoted husband, I'd be afraid to have her in the house. The children just worship her."

"Where are the kiddies now?" I inquired eagerly.

"Out taking a walk with Miss Birdsall—that's the new governess's name, you know. Wait until you see her. I'm sure you'll be staggered."

When I saw Miss Catherine Birdsall I was indeed staggered—but not in the way my sister meant.

She came in a little later, and as soon as I saw her I realized that I was face to face at last with the girl who had done me out of a twenty-dollar bill four years previously.

My cheeks turned white as I acknowledged the introduction. She appeared to be calm, and met my gaze boldly; but I fancied that I detected a puzzled look

in her eyes, as though she found my features familiar, but could not remember where and under what circumstances we had met before.

I did not enlighten her, nor did I make any reference to the fact that this was not our first meeting.

She was indeed good to look upon. She had grown even more beautiful than she had seemed when I met her in the lobby of the Plymouth Hotel. Her face was serene and almost Madonna-like in its purity.

Oh, it was hard to believe that such a girl could be a sinner. And yet I knew that that innocent face was but a mask.

"Well, what do you think of her, old chap?" inquired my brother-in-law a little later, when he and I were alone in the smoking-room. "Isn't she superb?"

"Yes," I answered slowly. "Where did you find her, Bob?"

"Through an advertisement. We inserted an ad in the local papers, and she applied for the job."

"Did she give you good references?" I asked.

He laughed.

"As a matter of fact, old chap, we didn't look up her references at all," he said. "She gave us the names of some people she had worked for; but we didn't bother to write to them. Beatrice and I pride ourselves on being good judges of faces. There couldn't be anything wrong about a girl with a face like that, you know."

"Appearances are sometimes very deceptive," I answered gravely. "Bob, you've got to fire that governess. You must get rid of her at once."

"Good Heavens!" he gasped. "What's the matter with you? Have you taken leave of your senses? What can you know about Miss Birdsall?"

"Not very much, I must admit; but what I do know concerning her forces me to speak as I do. I assure you, Bob, that it is painful for me to have to say anything against the character of any woman; but I deem it my duty to tell you what I know about your governess—for the sake of my nephews and nieces. I couldn't reconcile it with my conscience and my love for those children to allow them to continue under her care when I know that she is a professional swindler."

My brother-in-law was so amazed at this that he allowed his lighted cigar to fall to the floor and burn a hole in the rug, unheeded.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed. "You must be crazy. You don't know what you're talking about. I'll bet every dollar I've got that that girl is no swindler."

"You'd lose your money," I assured him sadly, and thereupon proceeded to tell him of my experience.

To say that he was astonished would be to put it mildly. He was inclined to believe, though, that I had made a mistake—that Miss Birdsall was not the young woman who had swindled me, but somebody who closely resembled her.

"Don't say anything about this to Beatrice," he begged. "I am sure that it would distress her exceedingly. Give me a week to think it over, old man. I don't want to act rashly. Perhaps by the end of that time you will have convinced yourself that our governess is not the same girl who buncoed you."

I shook my head decidedly.

"I am sure I have made no mistake," I insisted. "I couldn't forget that face, Bob, nor mistake it for another. It was just as hard for me to believe her guilty four years ago as it is for you to do so now; but after I had visited Providence, and learned that that fellow Mortimer was a member of a gang of swindlers, I could believe in her innocence no longer."

That night, when I retired to my bedroom, I found a sealed envelope lying on the bureau.

It was addressed to me, and there was something strangely familiar about the handwriting. I tore it open eagerly and read:

> I knew that I had met you before; but at first I was puzzled to recollect where. Now I have suddenly remembered. For Heaven's sake, be merciful, and don't say anything about that letter.
>
> CATHERINE BIRDSALL.

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "I knew that I was not mistaken. Poor little girl, your appeal comes too late."

I began to wish then that I had not said anything to my brother-in-law. If I had not already done so, I think I should have complied with that pitiful appeal and kept her secret. Perhaps,

after all, the poor girl had reformed, and was trying to lead a straightforward, honest life.

I was sitting with the letter in my hand, regretting that I had been so hasty in exposing the girl to Bob, when there suddenly came a loud knocking at my door.

"Open, old man!" cried my brother-in-law's voice excitedly. "Let me in. Something serious has happened."

I threw open the door, and Bob rushed into the room.

"All Beatrice's jewelry has been stolen!" he cried. "She's just discovered that her jewel-box is missing. We've got to find the thief."

"Miss Birdsall!" I said with a groan.

"Impossible!" he retorted. "I'll not believe it of her. I tell you, you must be wrong about that girl. She couldn't—"

"Read that," I said grimly, and thrust the letter into his hand.

"Good Heavens!" he gasped. "That settles it. I doubt no longer; and, since she admits that she swindled you, there is every reason to suppose that she has stolen Beatrice's jewels."

"Yes," I murmured sadly. "If the jewels are missing, I am afraid there can be little doubt that she is the thief. What are you going to do, Bob? Will you call in the police?"

"Not unless it is absolutely necessary. I am sure Beatrice will not want to prosecute her. I will give her a chance to return the jewels and leave the house first thing in the morning."

"Where is she now?" I inquired.

"In her room," he answered. "She retired an hour ago. She's probably fast asleep. I hate to waken her. It seems so deucedly brutal."

"Why not postpone the matter until to-morrow morning," I suggested. "She's probably got the jewels in her room, and she can't very well get rid of them during the night. I'm a light sleeper, and, if you like, I'll sleep down-stairs, so that she won't be able to leave her room without my hearing her."

He agreed to this plan, with a sigh of relief. It was easy to see that he shrank from the ordeal of charging that sweet-faced girl with such a serious crime.

Miss Birdsall made no attempt to escape from the house during the night. In the morning she came down to breakfast looking a trifle pale, but otherwise composed.

We were waiting for her in the library, Bob and I; and as she passed the door my brother-in-law called to her somewhat nervously:

"Miss Birdsall, if you don't mind, we should like to have a few words with you."

As she entered the room we both rose and stood confronting her sadly.

"Miss Birdsall," began Bob, "this—er—this is a very painful duty. We—er—we desire to be merciful. If you will restore my wife's jewels, we will allow you to go free."

"Your wife's jewels!" she gasped. "What do you mean?"

"Come, that won't do!" Bob exclaimed more sternly. "It is useless to dissemble, Miss Birdsall. I don't want to call in the police if it can be avoided; but my wife's jewels are gone, and—you must have stolen them."

"How dare you?" she cried indignantly. "I am not a thief. How dare you accuse me of stealing?"

"I tell you this won't do!" exclaimed my brother-in-law angrily. "I would not for worlds question your integrity, Miss Birdsall, unless I had good cause. The fact that your character is not above reproach is well known to us. This gentleman here—"

"Ah," she exclaimed, looking at me scornfully, "he has told you about that letter, after all."

"I had to," I explained, half-apologetically. "I deemed it my duty to do so. And, besides, I had told my brother-in-law all about that letter before I received your note begging me not to."

Before she could make any reply to this, my sister burst excitedly into the room, brandishing a red-leather box.

"It's all right," she cried joyfully. "The jewels were not stolen, after all. I have found them. They had fallen down behind my dressing-table."

"Thank God!" exclaimed the governess fervently. "And to think that if they had not been found you would have accused me of taking them! It is terrible. I swear to you that I am honest. I have never in my life stolen anything."

"How can you say that?" I said re-

proachfully. "Surely you are not going to pretend that you dealt with me honestly four years ago when we met at the Hotel Plymouth."

"I can't see that I did anything dishonest," she answered boldly. "I didn't steal a cent from you, did I?"

"No," I answered grimly. "You didn't steal a cent, my dear young lady—you stole a twenty-dollar bill."

"That is not true," she replied angrily. "Your twenty-dollar bill was in that letter, and I left it in your hands. How can you say that I stole it from you?"

"What!" I gasped. "Do you mean to tell me that that twenty-dollar bill *was* in that letter, after all?"

"Of course it was!" she cried. "Don't you know? Didn't you open that envelope and find it there?"

"I certainly did not," I answered. "I mailed that letter, unopened, to your friend, Mr. Harry Mortimer, at Providence, Rhode Island; and I have been under the impression all along that it did not contain my money."

"You mailed the letter *unopened!*" she exclaimed joyfully. "Oh, how good of you—how very kind of you! Then you did not read what was inside?"

"Of course not," I replied indignantly.

"I can scarcely believe it," she said. "I thought for sure that when you found that I did not come back, you had opened that envelope in order to get your money out. And I did you the injustice of thinking that you also read the letter it contained, and thereby learned my terrible secret. That is why I wrote you that note last night. I have been so happy in this place, and I didn't want you to tell my employers about my poor brother."

"Your brother?" I gasped, regarding her with astonishment.

"Oh, dear," she sighed. "Those words slipped out. I suppose I would better tell everything now. Yes, that envelope in which I enclosed your twenty-dollar bill was addressed to my unfortunate brother at Providence. He was going under the name of Harry Mortimer then.

"He has been wayward ever since he left school, and he got in with bad companions, who ruined him and made him a bad man. He wrote me that he was in great trouble and must have money immediately, and that was why I was sending him that twenty dollars. When I went out to borrow two dollars from my friend to make up the twenty, and left the letter, meanwhile, in your hands, I was unavoidably detained from getting back to you, and so I felt sure that you had opened that letter in order to get out your money.

"I didn't dare come back later to claim my letter, for I was afraid that you had also read what I had written to my brother, and I was naturally ashamed to face you."

"And that was what you referred to in your note of last night?" I said.

"Of course," she answered, with tears in her eyes; "I was afraid that my employers would not care to have a governess whose brother is a criminal."

"Miss Birdsall," said Bob gently, "we shall be proud to have you stay with us, if you will consent to do so in spite of my brutal conduct toward you."

But now that I know she did not swindle me out of that twenty dollars, she is not going to stay with them very long in the capacity of governess—not if I can help it.

A WARNING.

DAN CUPID, was a bow upon four strings,
  Begins a wondrous witching little air;
Ah, when such soft, illusive music wings,
  Good sirs, beware!

  But when the fair
Dorinda (with four beaus upon a string)
  Assumes a wondrous witching little air—
This is yet more heart-ensnaring thing!
  Good sirs, take care!

Millicent Catell.

IN THE WRONG SHOES.*

BY GARRET SMITH,

Author of "On the Brink of 2000," "Riches Thrust Upon Him," "A Peck of Trouble," etc.

What Came of a Friendly Attempt to Smooth the Path for a Railway Seat-Mate Temporarily Incapable of Looking Out Satisfactorily for Himself.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

MORRIS APPLEBY, just appointed head-chemist for the United Wood Pulp Company, is starting out to spend a two weeks' vacation with his friends, the Powells, at Hampton Lake, before entering on his new duties. The only vacant seat in the train is next to a young man rather the worse for liquor, who becomes unpleasantly chummy with Appleby, tells him that he is David Grant, from Horton, on his way to teach school in Milton Center. He even shows him the picture of a pretty girl, explaining that she is Eloise Donnell, to whom he has been engaged for a long time. He is about to tell more, when the brakeman calls out "Milton." Appleby precedes Grant with his bag, thrusting the photograph into his own pocket. But Grant, too fuddled to care, remains on the cars, leaving Morris, with Grant's luggage and the picture, on the platform. There is no other train that night.

Pitying the girl, and eager to save her the humiliation of having her fiancé's condition exposed, Appleby resolves not to correct at once the mistake of being taken for the new school principal when the stage-driver deposits him at David Graham's house in Milton Center, where he is evidently expected. Here there is a sort of reception, and, half for the adventure of the thing, Morris suffers the masquerade to continue, feeling that it will give the real David Grant time to sober up, although he is made rather uncomfortable by the piercing black eyes of a Miss Mercer, who is introduced as one of his assistant teachers.

For one reason or another, Appleby is compelled to continue the deception, until finally he makes a desperate break and gets away, only to discover that, for some inexplicable cause, his family have thrown him over, and he has been deprived of his position. Feeling that his impersonation of David Grant is at the bottom of this, he decides that he must return to Milton Center and continues his masquerade a while longer, in order to straighten out the tangle.

CHAPTER IX.

UP ON CHARGES.

SO it came about that the Saturday morning stage arrived in Milton Center, bearing as its only passenger Mr. Morris Appleby, more firmly than ever bound by the chains of Fate to the little village to which he had first come only four days before, and from which he had twice vainly sought to escape.

This time he was back to regain the reputation which, in some mysterious manner, he had lost. He had stayed the first time to save the name of another. He returned to rescue his own.

"Howdy, professor!" greeted the old stage-driver. No hint of hidden scandal there.

"Ain't seen nothin' of that cousin of yours," announced the station-agent.

"Well, if he comes, gives him my note, please, and tell him to call me at the Center," replied Morris; "and here's that box of cigars I promised you. They're good ones, I'll guarantee, though I don't suppose a school-teacher ought to know anything about such things."

As they trundled into the Center, at last, several acquaintances greeted him pleasantly. Apparently his reputation was still good with the villagers.

Mrs. Graham welcomed her boarder warmly, and asked anxiously regarding his bad tooth. She learned that heroic treatment had reduced the ulceration almost immediately, and did not express any surprise at such a remarkable cure.

Nor did the official head of the school board, when he arrived at dinner-time, seem to be harboring any secret knowledge of his boarder's identity.

* *Began March* ARGOSY. *Single copies, 10 cents.*

That afternoon Morris, once more "Professor Grant," spent in the school building, busily preparing for next week's class-work against the possibility of having to "bluff it out" in the school-room a day or so longer. All the while he kept an ear open for the telephone, hoping, but in vain, for a call from the long-lost Grant.

Mr. Graham was late at supper that night, and when he did arrive something was plainly wrong.

He had been most hearty hitherto in all his greetings of the "professor." Now he merely nodded coldly as he sat down, and ate in embarrassed silence, the emphasis of which seemed only intensified by the well-meant conversational efforts of Mrs. Graham. Then she, too, seeing her attempts were lame, grew perplexed and embarrassed, at the same time losing the use of her generally nimble tongue.

Morris grew momentarily more scared and uncomfortable, as there was little doubt in his mind that he was vitally interested in this change of official temperature.

"Exposed at last!" he thought; "but how like a countryman to hold off till he's good and ready to spring his charges, and in the meantime not be able to keep from exhibiting his intent in his manner!"

Appleby was seized with an impulse to excuse himself for a moment, go to his room, escape by the window, and depart hence, never to return.

That unworthy project dwelt in his mind for only an instant, however. No, indeed, he would act the man, whatever the penalty. Why not make a clean breast of the whole thing and depend on the local sense of humor to let him off lightly? Then he might make a plea for the absent Grant and offer to continue as substitute till he appeared, or he might modify the tale in some way so as to excuse Grant. Possibly he could leave Grant out of the affair altogether; not mention that he had seen him, or he might tell the story that he was planning to have Grant tell, namely, that he had come out as a supply on account of Mr. Grant's illness, intending to act entirely on the square; but, being taken for the duly constituted principal, he had enjoyed the joke so well that it had gone further than he had intended.

Then there was another possibility. He might refuse to talk until he had seen Bronson, before whom he would put the whole story. He hoped to be able to win his protection, inasmuch as he had got into all this trouble in a well-meant effort to square Bronson's friend, Grant.

Morris even thought of pretending that, by a reasonable coincidence, his own name was really David Grant. All these things flashed through his mind while the uncomfortable meal was dragging to a painful conclusion. He found himself unable, however, to settle on any definite campaign.

At length, supper was ended. Mr. Graham pushed back from the table, coughed two or three times tentatively, then confirmed Morris's worst fears.

"There's going to be a board meeting to-night, professor, that we'd like to have you attend. A little matter has come up that we want to talk over with you, and we'll meet at eight in the school building."

There was no hint of the purpose of the meeting in what Mr. Graham said, but his manner was sufficient for Appleby.

A half-hour later, Morris, attempting to keep an outward appearance of calm —but inwardly, it must be admitted, badly scared—accompanied Graham to the school building. Had there been any way of bolting at the last moment, without complete loss of dignity, he would have done it; yet he felt that, after all, the only thing to do now was to sift the matter to the bottom and, if possible, put himself in a true light, rather than to allow what he believed must be a distorted story to be going around the country, injuring his reputation beyond what was justified.

As they entered the office where the meeting was to be held, Appleby paused for a moment, astounded. He saw a great light. There, in the room with the members of the board, was the disapproving old lady he had noticed that evening on the train when he and Grant first made their unfortunate acquaintance. She was looking as disapproving as ever.

"Evidently," thought Morris, "this is

the person whom I have to thank for all my trouble of yesterday, and I have been slandering Miss Mercer outrageously. Apparently the old girl grew suspicious through what she overheard on the train. investigated a little, and in so doing the story got around among my friends before she saw fit to expose it here."

Morris braced himself and prepared for the shock.

The president solemnly called the meeting to order, as though he was presiding over the funeral obsequies of a public man. "Professor," he began, "we have a very serious charge to bring, I am sorry to say. Perhaps you'll be able to explain it in some way, so it won't look quite so bad as it came to us. It has to do with the conditions under which you arrived in town first, last Monday night. Do you think that everything was just as it should be? We'd like to hear what your idea is, and if you have any explanation."

For a full moment Morris thought again of the different possible methods of defense. None of them seemed adequate, and at length he decided that the simplest thing was to tell the whole truth.

"I shall have to admit, gentlemen," he said, unconsciously omitting the lady in his address, "that my manner of coming here was not as it ought to have been, but I think I can make an explanation which won't make it appear quite so bad as it seems on the surface."

"What!" exclaimed the old lady, breaking in at this point. "You think, young man, that you can easily explain coming here as principal of our school in an intoxicated condition? Do you believe that anything that you might say would make that kind of an example for our innocent children anything but the most heinous offense?"

Mr. Appleby's jaw dropped. He stared at the good lady in the utmost amazement. He intoxicated! Then he was not going to be accused of imposture, after all!

Mr. Graham here saw it was necessary gently to take the floor, while the good lady calmed herself. He interposed, and in a few words stated the specifications brought against Professor Grant, who, it became apparent, was still supposed to be that for which he had been first taken, but who, in that capacity, was seriously under suspicion.

It seems that Morris's accuser was a Mrs. Amos Richardson, president of the local W. C. T. U. She had come out on the train that Monday evening, and, according to her story, two young men—apparently great cronies — occupied the seat ahead of her, and both were in a shamefully intoxicated condition.

She noted that one of the young men got off at Milton Station. She observed that he was so intoxicated that he stumbled about, seemed uncertain where he was, then appeared to change his mind about getting off there at all, and made a mad dash after the train, as though he thought he could catch it when it was already well under way to the next station.

What was her horror to find that the young man was her fellow traveler in the bus as well, and that he had turned out to be none other than the new principal of their high school.

At this point Mr. Graham interposed other evidence. The stage-driver had been interrogated after the complaint of Mrs. Richardson had been received, and the old man had admitted that his passenger had acted very queerly. Mr. Graham himself, now that he thought of it, had noticed that "Professor Grant" seemed uncertain and dazed that evening at the sociable, but at the time he had only thought of it as embarrassment.

To cap the climax, the board president produced the telegram which the genuine Grant, in a really intoxicated condition, had sent from Brandenburg to explain his being a day late at Milton Center. The telegram read:

> MR. GRAHAM,
> President Board of Education,
> Milton Center, Canasagua County,
> New York.
>
> I wish to explain regretfully, that I have been unavoidably delayed from assuming my arduous duties in your village. I have met some friends here and am very unwell, otherwise am enjoying myself.
>
> Most sincerely yours, and regretfully,
> DAVID GRANT.

Morris laughed loud and long as he read this most remarkable telegram. It was a semihysterical relief from the ten-

sion under which he had been for the last hour.

The circumstantial evidence was all very much against him. He rather wondered that this telegram had not been used as an accusation before. Then a bright idea occurred to him, and he plunged into another ingenious lie.

"It certainly was unfortunate that I should be late in taking up my work, and that I should be involved in this disturbance on the train, but, as I said, I can explain. I don't wonder you thought I was somewhat irresponsible when you received this profuse wire. As I said before, I was suffering from an ulcerated tooth, and stayed over a day with a cousin of mine in Brandenburg, who was very much of a practical joker. I asked him to wire you, and told him what to say. This is what he actually sent.

"As for what Mrs. Richardson saw on the train, that is easily explained. The person with whom I sat was, indeed, very thoroughly intoxicated. I never saw him before in my life; but he at once claimed my friendship, and succeeded in attracting a great deal of attention to both of us before we reached Milton Station. I was perfectly sober myself, however, and refused his offers of a drink.

"I did try to overtake the train just as it was starting, and in doing so stumbled over my coat. I discovered, in hurriedly leaving the train, I had taken with me a photograph which the young man had urged upon my attention, and, in the course of the excitement of trying to keep him quiet, I'd forgotten it for the moment. Any other strange actions of mine you may have observed, I shall have to lay entirely to my embarrassment and natural curiosity."

This explanation was listened to attentively by the board, apparently with every inclination to give the young man the benefit of the doubt.

The face of Mrs. Richardson, however, was adamantine. At the close of Morris's burst of inspiration Mr. Graham said:

"We're very sorry, professor, that this thing has come up. Of course, we couldn't afford to have a principal here with such habits as that. Even if this was a rare exception, and you didn't get drunk during school hours, this story has gone around among the mothers in town, and we'll have to look into it. We have great confidence in what Mrs. Richardson tells us, but we can see how the mistake might have been made and lead to misconception.

"We have also great confidence in Mr. Bronson, and don't think he would have recommended you if you had been a man of such habits. Yet you must have made things look a little queer, and if you will retire now and let us go into executive session, we will talk the matter over by ourselves."

Morris spent a half-hour pacing back and forth in front of the building, his amazement and amusement growing at every pace.

"Talk about poetic justice!" he reflected. "Here's a young scapegrace endangers his future reputation by going on a jag at an inopportune moment. Fate thrust me into the breach, and for the time being I perjure myself and stand in the young man's shoes to give him a reputation for sobriety. Now, as a punishment, I, as a representative of the inebriate, am accused altogether falsely of the very thing from which I have been attempting to shield the man who committed that breach of propriety.

"This, then, must be the story that in some other still mysterious version got around to my friends and my dear parents. I'm caught for fair. I can't expose myself further here, or anywhere else, until the real David Grant appears on the scene, frees me from my involuntary alias, and at the same time restores my reputation for sobriety."

A moment later the board meeting broke up. As Mr. Graham joined the accused man, who had remained on the outside, he said:

"Well, professor, I don't take any stock, between you and me, in the story of our good W. C. T. U. president. As far as I'm concerned, I'd drop it right there with your explanation. But some of the board seem to think that, just to satisfy the mothers of the town, you'd better get your friends in Brandenburg, with whom you stayed over last week, to write us and testify as to your sober condition when you took the train that afternoon."

"And that," thought the dismayed

Morris, "is a thing which, under the circumstances, I stand a swell chance of doing."

CHAPTER X.

LETTERS FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

THEN dawned the Sabbath.

It is probable that never did human heart so long for Sabbatical peace and rest as did the much-harassed organ within the bosom of Morris Appleby. His four days in Milton Center had nearly wrecked that sturdy young man. The church-bell was tolling a last call to the pious villagers as he was ushered by Mr. and Mrs. Graham into the family pew. He flushed red, and seemed to feel the accusing eyes of all the congregation. There could be no doubt that the austere Mrs. Richardson had spread throughout the town the story of his alleged debauch.

At length came the sermon. Leaning impressively over the pulpit and looking directly at Morris, as if to give point to his theme, the pastor announced as his text:

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

Appleby felt the hot blood rush to his temples. It was now impelled by indignation. The service was, then, to be for the express benefit of himself. Had the parson preached a violent denunciation of fraud and deception, Appleby, amateur impostor, would have shrunk with consciousness of guilt.

Now that he found himself placed in the pillory for an offense of which he had not even dreamed, his heart was filled with defiance, and for the time being he forgot that he was in reality a most guilty person, none the less worthy of denunciation because his true crime was undiscovered.

In his defiance he must have flattered the clergyman that he had at least one attentive listener, for he sat bolt upright through the whole sermon, his eye never leaving the speaker's face.

Still breathing to himself words not at all in keeping with the reverential themes, Morris heard the benediction pronounced, and the little congregation was astir.

Several persons whom he had met earlier in the week came up and greeted him pleasantly. Some of them were parents, and found remarks to make about their young hopefuls. It was evident, after all, that the report of his misdeeds had not yet attained universal circulation.

One elderly man came up and introduced himself as superintendent of the Sunday-school.

"It is customary, Professor Grant, for our professors here to help us out with the teaching in the Sunday-school, too. Professor Killup left a very fine class of boys when he went away so suddenly, and I hope you will be willing to take them up for us."

The superintendent beamed upon his prospective assistant, and certainly seemed to have no idea that he was trying to enlist in a pious cause a young man who had a reputation of looking very attentively upon the wine when it was red.

But Morris was saved making a decision. An elderly lady at that moment stepped up and touched the elbow of the superintendent. Morris recognized her at once as Mrs. Richardson. She gave Morris only a curt bow, and then said to his companion: "Deacon Lamb, may I speak to you just a minute?"

She drew the good deacon one side, and Morris turned away to make his escape. A moment later the deacon, somewhat embarrassed in manner, stepped up to him again with: "Well, Professor Grant, I find we have a teacher already supplied for this Sunday for that class, and perhaps you would rather wait until you're a little better acquainted before you help us out."

Whereupon Deacon Lamb sidled away quickly, evidently not anxious to converse further.

Morris turned on his heel and walked away. If the Milton Center folk did but know it, they were fortifying the nerves of Morris Appleby to continue, without further vacillation, his campaign of imposition upon them, and to harden his conscience to the point where he felt no further qualms at any deceit he might practise on them. As he walked back to his boarding-house, he felt a secret exultation at having tricked this most unjust community, and swore to himself

that he would stay among them till he had proved their charges false, no matter if the real David Grant never came back.

There was one Sunday afternoon train each way at Milton Station, and Morris had hoped that on one of these Mr. Grant might appear. The stage made no Sunday trips from Milton Center; but he kept a lookout down the road that afternoon, watching every carriage that entered town, but in vain.

Toward evening he remembered he had in his room a little stack of mail, mostly circulars and business communications to the principal of the high school. He had got them at the post-office after the board meeting the night before, and hadn't yet examined them. Now he looked them over, more to pass the time than anything else. Among them was a personal letter, addressed to David Grant.

Morris gazed at it for a moment, and almost opened the envelope, so accustomed had he become to making free with the principal's business correspondence. He realized, then, at once that this was a private letter for the real Grant, with which he had no right to tamper.

As he looked at the fine feminine handwriting, however, it had to his mind a certain vague familiarity. The suspicion of the truth suddenly dawned, and he wondered that he had not thought of it at once, the thing was so obvious.

He opened Grant's suit-case and took out the photograph of the girl. He compared the writing on the back with that on the envelope. It was the same, of course. Wherever Grant was, and whatever had happened to him, he had not notified his fiancée of any change of address.

Reflectively, Morris turned the cardboard over, and looked at the sweet face imprinted on its surface. The first fascination that had come to him on the train five days before, and had been the motive behind his quixotic conduct in allowing himself so long to be taken for Grant, returned to him in full force.

"Poor little girl!" he said to himself. "Perhaps all this time you've been getting ready for that long-planned wedding with that worthless scamp, and now he has no doubt lost his chance of providing for you the home he has promised. Well, I'm doing the best I can for you."

Again he looked at the envelope, and the temptation was strong upon him to open it and learn more of the girl of the photograph. It was postmarked, "Pineville, North Carolina."

"A little Southern girl, perhaps," he thought. "Maybe only visiting there, however."

The letter had been delayed, for the postmark was ten days old.

Resolutely he tossed it into the suit-case. Opening another man's private correspondence was a depth to which he had not yet sunk, thank Heaven.

All the rest of that afternoon and evening, however, despite every effort to put it out of his mind, he kept thinking of the belated letter and wondering about its sender. The temptation to read it kept growing stronger and stronger. He resisted it, however.

The next morning, after opening school, the thought suddenly occurred to him that the girl might become worried over the failure of Grant to reply, and be writing again. What he could do about it he didn't know; but he felt impelled, nevertheless, to go to the post-office and see if by any chance there was a letter.

He thought it would pay him, at any rate, to keep close watch of the mails for any warning of unexpected danger that might come from that source. So, telling his preceptress that he was going out to the post-office for a few minutes, he left the building, promising to bring her mail also, if there was any.

Morris was just leaving with a small handful of letters and circulars, some for himself and some for Miss Mercer, when he suddenly stopped short with a gasp. In his hand was a postal-card, addressed to David Grant in the same unmistakable feminine hand that he had seen on the letter the day before.

He had no qualms in connection with a postal, so turned it over and read this brief message:

> I do not understand your failure to reply. Am starting for Milton Center Will be there Monday afternoon, the date we agreed on. ELOISE.

The postal had been sent the Tuesday before, and had also been evidently delayed a little. The postal service at

Milton Center was notoriously bad. The card had arrived only a little before the time when its sender herself was due.

This was, indeed, a grand climax to his little farce of a week! Here was the mysterious lady of the photograph about to appear in person, and he must therefore make a sudden exit from the scene.

All the way back to the school he debated in his mind whether he should meet the unfortunate little woman at the station and break the news to her that her fiancé was missing, or let her come to Milton Center and find it out for herself.

Miss Mercer was in the office when he returned, and began going over the mail at her desk, while Morris stood looking vacantly out of the window and continuing to debate the matter that was so perplexing him. At length he turned with decision just as Miss Mercer was folding the letter she had been reading.

"I shall have to try your patience again, Miss Mercer," he said. "I am expecting a friend on the train at Milton Station whom I will have to meet, so I will ask you to take charge of the school for the afternoon."

At that moment his eye caught the envelope, which the girl had dropped on the desk while she read her letter. He had not noticed it when he had brought it in, as it had been with several others addressed to her. Now, as he looked at it, he started with surprise.

Was it imagination or merely a strange coincidence? He could swear that the writing on the envelope, addressed to the preceptress, was in the same handwriting as that on the postal-card he had just read.

Could it be possible that Miss Eloise Donnell was writing to Miss Mercer? What in Heaven's name could it mean? For a full moment he stared at the envelope without speaking.

"That is pretty writing, isn't it, Professor Grant?"

The voice of the preceptress broke in upon his daze. She was looking at him with that same inscrutable glance he had seen the first evening he had met her the week before. It was only for a moment. She picked up the envelope and restored the letter to it.

"I hope you will meet the lady all right, Professor Grant," she remarked, and her tone had a strange, sarcastic emphasis.

Then she turned and left the room, Grant staring after her helplessly.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PHOTOGRAPH MADE REAL.

As Appleby paced the platform at Milton Station that afternoon, waiting for the Brandenburg train, he fought with himself a furious moral battle.

In the first place, that real or imagined coincidence of the handwriting on Miss Mercer's letter worried him greatly. It might be only fancy. Could it be, however, that by another queer coincidence Miss Mercer had all along been acquainted with Miss Eloise Donnell, and likewise presumably with her fiancé, the real David Grant? He recalled all the suspicious circumstances of the week, and saw them in a more suspicious light than ever.

Yet the extreme probability of the woman knowing he was an impostor, and not exposing him at once, seemed a conclusive denial of his theory. Probably there was nothing to the letter incident but an unusual similarity in handwriting. Yet there was her parting remark, "I hope you will meet the lady all right."

He tried in vain to remember whether he had spoken of his friend as "a lady" whom he was expecting to meet. He could have sworn he hadn't; yet, if not, how did Miss Mercer know, unless she had just heard from the lady herself?

But all that was, after all, a little beside the point, as it was not clear to him how he could return to Milton Center again, after the arrival of the girl who certainly knew David Grant.

How he should meet that girl, and whether he should meet her at all, was the main issue of the battle. The two afternoon trains from each direction passed at that station. On the train from Brandenburg would be Miss Donnell. Why could he not board the other and depart to points unknown?

That would mean leaving his reputation forever shattered and, as far as he could see, cut him off indefinitely from any future association with his friends, as he had depended entirely on being

able to remain in Milton Center till the mystery was all cleared up, and he could go back to his own circle with a satisfactory explanation of the perplexing charges against him.

Then, too, it seemed like a particularly unfeeling and cowardly thing to do, to leave the helpless girl to face alone the shock of finding that her fiancé had disappeared. No, he must meet her at all hazards, make the best explanation he could, and then trust to getting away before he was exposed. Perhaps she would credit his generous impulse and help him in the matter.

He had just come to this conclusion when the train arrived. The only young woman who alighted stepped off at the other end of the platform. She wore a veil, and for a moment Morris was undecided as to whether she could be the girl of the photograph.

At that instant she turned to the station-master, and to his dismay he heard her ask: "Is Mr. David Grant here?"

Appleby rushed forward to avert what seemed an inevitable catastrophe and romantic exposure then and there. The girl had raised her veil as she spoke.

There was no doubt about her being the girl he was expecting, but she was even more attractive than the photograph had promised.

Before Morris could interpose and prevent an answer by the station-agent, the man turned to him with a wave of the hand, and said: "Right there, miss."

Morris froze in his tracks, helpless. The girl looked at him a moment, blushingly; but to his surprise, instead of a scene, she stepped quietly forward and, holding out her hand hesitatingly, said, "How do you do?"

Morris, in a daze, took the little hand in his for just an instant, then it flashed over him what had averted the scene.

The girl, seeing a strange person pointed out, had supposed the station-agent meant that he, Morris, was some one whom Grant had sent to meet her, probably thinking that her fiancé could not leave school at that hour, so Appleby allowed himself to breathe again. Here was a respite that would enable them to get away where they could talk alone.

Nevertheless, he stood there feeling quite helpless, unable to think what move he should make next. The girl, for some reason, was evidently as embarrassed as he, but she recovered her self-possession first.

"Is it far," she asked, "or can we walk? Hadn't we better start?"

That roused him.

"Yes—it—is quite a way; I'll have to get a horse," he replied, suddenly possessed with a bright inspiration. "The livery-stable at the hotel is just up the street, and you can sit on the porch there, where it is quiet, while I engage a carriage."

He took the girl's suit-case, which the station-agent brought up at that moment, and they started out, Morris in embarrassed silence, and his companion feverishly trying to bridge over the awkwardness by talking volubly about her trip and incidents along the way.

It occurred to Appleby as strange that she should think it necessary to be sociable with a man who was a mere messenger, as it were, from her fiancé—a fellow who had not yet introduced himself, and who, for all she knew to the contrary, might be merely the village hostler.

"Isn't it all so strange?" she said as she sank into a chair on the piazza of the village inn. "How queer we should meet for the first time like this!"

Morris stared at the girl in amazement. She was certainly bent on making herself acquainted with him. Such forwardness did not seem in the least in keeping with her evident refinement.

"Why—yes—I suppose it is," he stammered. "I'll be right back," he added hastily, "after I order the carriage."

When he returned, the girl looked up pensively and, to his still greater surprise, remarked: "I suppose we ought to feel better acquainted than we do. You seem almost as scared about it as I do."

Morris gained a little time while he selected a chair from the two or three rickety pieces of furniture on the piazza and sat down. She was certainly a puzzle. She was now looking at him so strangely that he began to wonder if he was dealing with a young woman who was not altogether in her right mind.

Perhaps it would be just as well for him to humor her and lead the conversation into general lines while he made

up his mind. Accordingly, he launched off irrelevantly on a description of the town and the school, to which she listened with apparent impatience.

The only horse available was out at the moment, and it might be some little time before they would be able to get away. He prepared, therefore, to fill it in by dodging personality. He did not wish to have any scene until they could get well out on the road, where they would be unobserved.

In a moment when his inspiration for topics of conversation flagged, the girl broke in with: "Do you know, it's strange, but you look exactly as I expected you would. I've been forming a picture in my mind of what you would be like. Perhaps I should say, of what I wanted you to be like; but, all the while, I was a little afraid that you might turn out to be just the opposite. But here I find you just the kind of man I wanted you to be."

Appleby, who had been about to make some commonplace remark about western New York weather, stopped and stared at her with obvious astonishment, and his mouth open.

At that instant they were interrupted by the announcement that the carriage was ready. And nothing more was said until they were well out on the road, Morris all the time painfully silent, and wondering what this strange girl would say next.

"David," she suddenly broke in, "why don't you talk to me? I'm afraid your disappointed in me. You had my picture long enough to know what I looked like, and we've certainly written to each other so long that we ought to feel at least a little acquainted, and not have to begin our strange courtship all over again."

Appleby was thunderstruck. Twice he tried to speak, but could only stare at her.

What in Heaven's name could the girl mean? Was it not enough that he should come to Milton Center and have every one in the village take him for another man? Now the one person in the world who should know that other man best had also mistaken Morris for him.

There could, of course, be only one conclusion. The girl was insane. He wondered if she had been so long. What could he do about it?

He could not take her to Milton Center, nor could he drive around the country aimlessly with an insane woman. He must meet her whim at all hazards while he devised some means of getting out of the difficulty. She was looking at him expectantly; so he said:

"Yes; isn't it all strange? Of course I've seen your picture, and I'm not in the least disappointed in you. You're much more beautiful, in fact, than your picture promised. I never knew, in fact, that you had such pretty auburn hair and attractive brown eyes. How did you come to think of me as looking the way I do? Hadn't you ever seen my picture?"

"Why, David Grant, you know I've never seen your picture. Haven't I tried for years to get you to send me one, and you've always replied with some nonsense about being so homely that you didn't dare send me a photograph. You just allowed me to imagine how you looked. You know mother hadn't seen you since you were a baby, and grandfather, naturally having nothing of the sentimental in his nature, never wrote anything about your appearance.

"Isn't it queer and unfortunate that we never managed to see each other," she went on; "and yet, perhaps we'll like each other just as well when we get really acquainted. It seemed like an awful thing for a nice girl to come clear up here to the North Woods to marry a man she had never seen, but what can I do? I've no home any more, and no one to care for me; and you know the reason as well as I why we cannot wait any longer, and how important it is to do as you agreed."

As she talked, Morris looked at her searchingly. There was, to all appearances, a calm light of reason in the girl's face. She spoke in a quiet and logical way, which would never have suggested insanity had it not been for the remarkable things she said.

"David," she exclaimed suddenly, "I believe you've been falling in love with another girl. You haven't written to me lately, and—and—what shall I do if you have—where can I go? I can't blame you for not caring for a girl you'd never

seen, and—and— David, who is Katherine Mercer?"

The girl thereupon burst into a passion of tears.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW COMPLICATION.

"WHO is Katherine Mercer?"

The girl repeated the question again, after some moments of hysterical weeping. Meanwhile, Morris had sat, overcome with astonishment and apprehension, unable to say or do anything either to check the torrent of tears or to make any explanation, being himself utterly in the dark as to what he was expected to explain.

Indeed, who *was* Katherine Mercer? And how did she come to be injected into the life of this little Southern girl at this time?

Appleby recalled the surprising similarity in the writing on his letter and the one of his preceptress, now convinced that the similarity had been due to the fact that the addresses were written by the same person. But why had Eloise Donnell been writing to Katherine Mercer, if she did not even know who Miss Mercer was?

The theory that had come to him while he was waiting for the train, that she might be an old friend of Grant's fiancée, was now exploded, unless, indeed, Miss Donnell's mania had also made her forget another old friend in the same way that she had taken an utter stranger for her fiancé.

One thing was certain; there was no longer any doubt but that Miss Mercer possessed some mysterious information about the affairs of David Grant, even if she did not know Mr. Grant himself. Could it be that she knew Grant intimately? If so, would not Grant have told his fiancé about her before coming to teach in the same school?

On the other hand, there might be some reason for his not wishing to tell her.

While Appleby was thus trying to get his bearings, the girl, now dry-eyed, was looking at him tensely and awaiting a reply.

"David, why don't you answer me?" she demanded. "Is there some reason why you can't? That's what I suspected; and yet I do not understand why that girl should write to me as she did."

So Miss Mercer had first written to Miss Donnell. Morris now recalled his vain theory of a week ago, that his preceptress had been in danger of falling in love with him.

Could it be possible, after all, that Miss Mercer really thought him David Grant, and, having learned in some peculiar way that the real Grant was engaged to Eloise Donnell, had become violently jealous of that innocent young woman? He recalled, also, the strange look she had given him that very morning, after reading the letter he now knew had come from the girl at his side.

Morris stole another look at that young woman. There was a sign of return of hysteria in her face. Anyway, there could be no doubt but that she was suffering from an insane delusion.

Had it been caused by something written to her by another jealous woman? Appleby had heard of such things before. He must humor the girl, at any rate; though just what he was going to say to her must depend entirely on some kindly inspiration, if he was not to make matters even worse than they were.

He would act just as though he were David Grant, and, meanwhile, devise some plan for getting her away.

"Why, my dear—" he began.

"Don't! Don't call me that—yet."

Morris drew back, and was silent again. He had made a false step. But when one is unexpectedly taken by a strange young lady for her fiancé, how is he to know how to act if he wishes to oblige her?

"Don't call me that yet," she repeated. "That's all right in a letter—at least it seemed all right when we were only letter-lovers; but we seem to me to get better acquainted now that we have met. It seems so different from what I had ever thought. I had looked forward so long to seeing you, and learned to believe I cared so much for you from reading your letters. Then the moment I met you, and found you were as I dreamed, it seemed that I cared more than ever; and, now, you may not care for me after all. I come here alone, with nobody else in the world to care for me, and find that another woman has come between."

This ended in another flood of tears. Appleby pulled himself together, resolved to use the utmost diplomacy at his command, if he ever possessed that quality.

"Why, let me tell you who Miss Mercer is," he began in a tone that was meant to be soothing. "She's simply the preceptress of my school. I never saw her before in my life until a week ago to-night, and have only seen her around school a little over three days since. I don't care in the least for her; so don't mind in the least about that. What gives you the idea? What has she been writing to you?"

"I have the letter in my suit-case," was the reply. "If you will get the case out, I will show it to you now. It is just as much of a puzzle to me as I hope it is to you."

In a moment the letter was at hand. Morris found it to be in the handwriting of Miss Mercer, and dated last Monday, the very evening that he arrived. It read as follows:

> Miss Eloise Donnell:
>
> I take the liberty of asking if you have heard from David Grant lately? If I am correctly informed you are engaged to him. It will be to your interest, if that is the case, to come out here at once. Something very strange has taken place.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Katharine Mercer.

"Now, David Grant, what on earth can that girl mean by writing me such a letter? You tell me you do not care for her at all. We will grant that that is true—then does she care for you? If she does, why should she write such a letter as that? Why should she take such an interest in you if she doesn't?

"If you had never seen her before, and do not knew her at all well, as you say, how does she know anything about me? If this letter does not concern herself, is there any one in town in whom you are interested? Tell me the truth now, David. The happiness of our whole future depends upon it. If you do not care for me, and do care for some one else, what a horrible thing it is! We are bound to each other, in any case."

The girl had dried her tears again while she was talking, and seemed to have recovered her self-possession. She was now speaking in a quiet tone, and her reasoning seemed so logical that Morris could hardly believe he was listening to the wanderings of a lunatic. Yet she persisted in believing that she was talking to her missing fiancé.

"Well," he said, "this is all as much of a mystery to me as ever. More of a mystery than ever, in fact. I—"

In his haste to say something, Morris had started in to remark that he had been surrounded all the week by mystery, but caught himself in time as he realized that he had been about to confess his unfortunate situation in Milton Center, and he knew that the young woman was not in a state of mind to listen to such a confession.

Instead, he proceeded to give a guarded report of his week in Milton Center, ostensibly telling all he knew about Katherine Mercer. His companion listened eagerly to the recital, which lasted till they were far out in the open country. When he stopped at length the girl said, with pointed emphasis:

"I must see Katherine Mercer at once. I will find out for myself what all this means. There is something behind it you have not told me. How far is it? Are we on the way now?"

This was an unexpected blow. Morris had thought of all sorts of possibilities in the last half hour, in the way of humoring the girl, till he could get her somewhere where she could be cared for. He thought of taking her back to Brandenburg, and inducing her to go to a sanatorium for a few days, in the hope that this was only temporary aberration.

How could he do that? How could he explain his interest in a strange young woman, in the town where he was so well known? There was no other place to which he could take her. To go with her to Milton Center seemed impossible. What could he do?

And now she was making a demand that seemed to him the very last thing in the world that he could comply with. What sort of a scene would follow in the little village if the two young women were brought together? Yet, if he refused to grant her request, she was likely to become violent at any moment.

"Are you sure," he asked hesitatingly, "that you want to see Miss Mercer to-night? Hadn't you better wait till you are rested a little?"

"At once!" she exclaimed.

An emphatic little stamp accompanied this ultimatum. Appleby, in a panic, saw that he could not trifle with her any longer, and turned his horse's head toward Milton Center, wondering what, in Heaven's name, would come of it. They were just entering the village, when a possible compromise occurred to him.

The week before he had met and had a long conversation with Dr. Milton Spencer, a kindly old gentleman, who had been the village physician for twenty-five years. Morris decided to take his charge at once to the doctor's home, explain to him privately that the girl was a cousin of his, who had evidently been seized with dementia, and ask him to take her in for a few days, and keep her under observation.

"This is my town," he said to Miss Donnell. "I know a very pleasant home, where I think they will take a boarder, and I will drive you right around there now."

He halted in front of the doctor's office on the next street, and left the girl in the carriage while he went in and explained the situation to the physician. The old gentleman readily agreed to the arrangement, and in a few moments Eloise Donnell; apparently all unsuspicious of the fact that she was in a temporary sanatorium, was established in a comfortable little room.

"This is all very pleasant, David," she said, as he turned to go, explaining that he would have to attend to his school duties. "Now, if you will tell me where I can see Miss Mercer immediately after school we will have that unpleasant interview over with at once."

There was no hint of insanity in the steady gaze of those brown eyes. Morris saw rather a look of quiet determination, and knew that he must do something to satisfy that demand or there would be unpleasant consequences.

As he entered the school building the afternoon session was just closing, and a moment later he met the preceptress in the office. She gave him a searching look.

"Miss Mercer," he said finally, "there is a young lady in town I met at the train this afternoon. You know to whom I refer, though I do not understand at all your interest in her, or what you know about her. Some recent shock, I fear, has affected her mind. You are concerned in it. She wants to see you at once. What the result will be I do not know, but I must ask you to come over to Dr. Spencer's, where she is staying, and see her."

Morris braced himself, expecting an outbreak and an unmasking of Miss Mercer's position. He was disappointed. She looked at him in astonishment for a moment.

"Do you mean to say that Eloise Donnell came up to Milton Center with you? The only thing that can astonish me more than that is your unbounded nerve in asking me to go to see her. Will you accompany me, or is this a ruse to give you an opportunity to escape?

"I suppose you think that I am in no position to speak. I cannot account for your unparalleled audacity otherwise. I am simply a woman, and all alone. You have powerful backing. If this goes much farther I *shall* speak, though I know what the consequences to me will be. It is all very well to act the part of a spy, but I have gathered evidence, too. There is such a thing as a spy overstepping the law."

The girl turned and swept out of the room, leaving the astonished Appleby in a complete daze.

(*To be continued.*)

FIREFLIES.

THE flowers of maiden Spring are flung aside,
So fair and frail they lasted but a day;
And in their place is set this brave array
Of jewels the matron Summer wears with pride.

Anonymous.

Another New Panama.

BY GEORGE M. A. CAIN.

What Happened When a Hatter Made an Exchange of Goods, and the Subject Thereof Called Soon After on a Usually Complaisant Uncle.

"HANG that hat, anyhow," Billy growled as he took his Panama from the rack in the tiny hall.

"To think that I could buy a hat like that only six weeks ago—and now we haven't got enough to pay the rent."

"Didn't you sell anything yesterday?" his wife asked sympathetically.

"Not a five-cent iron-holder. The stores seem to be just lying dead. Don't want a thing. I never saw such business in my life."

"And Blumberg called yesterday. I told him I'd have it ready by to-morrow."

"You don't need to tell me that. I never knew Blumberg to get here a day late yet. But we had it for him before. I guess I'll have to go see Uncle Tom, and touch him for a little more."

"Oh, dear — I hate so to borrow money. It's awful. But we've got to have that rent. Blumberg said he couldn't wait any longer than to-morrow."

When Billy and Louise were married, six months before, they had taken that venturesome step upon a long-expected raise of Billy's salary as salesman for the novelty concern, Barrows & Field. Since then there had been so many things to get for housekeeping—those thousand and one little things nobody guesses he needs until he tries to do without them—that the salary had had to go week by week.

The Panama hat had been one of the unexpected things. It was one of the least expensive of its kind. Billy had got out his old, last year's straw when other straw hats became numerous on the sidewalks.

"You can't wear that," Louise had expostulated. "You look like a tramp. You must get a new one."

Billy had taken the hat off and examined it, and concluded that she was right.

"And get a Panama," Louise advised. "Father bought one four years ago, and it's as good as new yet. They're economy in the end. We can do without something else for a week."

They had not known how many things they would have to do without, nor how many weeks they would be obliged to do without them. The very day after Billy bought the Panama, the manager of Barrows & Field told him that he would have to work on a commission basis from then on if he wished to work for them at all. And working on a commission basis in those times was little better than not working at all.

He had worked hard, though. Part of his time he looked vainly for a new job. In the rest, he had managed to earn enough to pay the butcher, the baker, and the grocer—also the milkman. But when Mr. Blumberg, the rent-collector, came around, Billy had had to pay a humiliating call upon his Uncle Tom and borrow the money.

And here they were again—without the wherewithal to keep the roof over their heads. All week, Billy had seen it coming. He had started early, let his lunch go, worked till late—but he had sold just enough to give him a commission of eight dollars and seventy-five cents.

Uncle Tom had expressed some willingness to help Billy again if he needed it. But Billy would rather have gone hungry all next month than go back to Uncle Tom.

Yet, he must keep some place for Louise to live in. And he didn't know of anything that would be much cheaper than the eighteen-dollar flat. Anyhow, moving would be more expensive just now than paying the rent.

"Well," he said, "I'll keep on the job till noon, and if I don't make a sale, I'll have to go see Uncle Tom again."

"Don't put on that hat till I brush

the dust off the band!" Louise exclaimed as she took the Panama from the rack.

"Why, Billy, look here," she went on. "Your new hat is breaking. What do you suppose has caused that?"

Billy took the hat from her, and looked at the spot on the crown to which she pointed. Sure enough, there was a crack about an inch long.

"A Panama ought not to do that," Louise insisted. "You're supposed to be able to roll them up and put them in your pocket without breaking them. It's a shame. You ought to take it back and make them do something about it."

"I believe I will. Stewart & Phelps are good hatters, and I think they will be on the square about it."

It was with some misgiving, however, that Billy went into the hat emporium and stood waiting for one of the busy clerks to come to his aid. When one did come, he sent Billy over to the aisle-man. The aisle-man went to consult some one else.

"Give this gentleman another hat of the same price," he said to the clerk when he came back.

Billy felt pleased. This was fair treatment indeed. He resolved to patronize Stewart & Phelps for all his hats in future. Of course, that was exactly what Stewart & Phelps wanted him to resolve to do.

"I'm afraid I haven't any more of your size in those very large styles," the clerk said apologetically when he had looked over his stock for a few moments. "They are wearing much smaller ones this year."

Billy remembered the trouble he had had in getting the broad-brimmed affair that had taken his fancy before he bought. Since then he had frequently realized that his hat was not quite as fashionable as he wished.

"Well," and he spoke dubiously, "I liked that big brim, but let me see some of the others."

He saw some of the others. When he left the store he was wearing a hat of distinctly different style from that with which he had entered it.

He glanced at his watch, and saw that it was already noon; so he hurried straight down to the office of his uncle. There was no business to be done after noon on Saturdays in summer.

He knew that he could depend on his uncle to stay a little late at his office. His uncle was the kind who always work a little overtime.

"Ah, hallo, Billy," Uncle Tom greeted him.

He looked at Billy's new hat as he spoke. Billy tried to raise his courage to answer heartily.

"Good morning, Uncle Tom."

"Came in to pay that little loan, did you?" Uncle Tom went right to the point. "I'm glad you're doing so well."

He still eyed the new hat as Billy laid it down on the corner of the desk and took the chair at the end.

"I wish I could pay you up, Uncle Tom," Billy said fervently. "But I've earned just thirty dollars and sixty cents this month."

The older man puckered his lips into a whistle of sympathy, but his eyes wandered to the hat on his desk.

"I'm afraid—if it won't inconvenience you—of course, you know I don't like to ask it—but I've got to pay the rent this evening. I hope I won't need to trouble you again," Billy continued. "I can get along, if you'll just let me have fifteen."

Uncle Tom's lips had lost their pucker. They had drawn down into a very thin, neat line across the lower center of his face. He looked coldly at his nephew.

"William," he said, "I'm afraid you and Louise have not learned how to economize. I suppose it will seem like a pretty hard lesson, but you will thank me for it some day. I had to learn it in a hard school, and it has put me where I am.

"I want you to succeed—to get to the point where you will have plenty. But, in order to do that, you must learn the value of every penny. You must find out how to get along without extras. Excuse me now, please. I have several things to do before lunch."

Now, if you ever found yourself in a position where, you absolutely did not have something you absolutely had to have, and, instead of getting it, were handed out a nice, stern bit of avuncular advice—you know how Billy felt.

He picked up his hat and started for the door without a word. But, as he

reached it, something impelled him to offer one more plea.

"Uncle, I don't know how Louise or I could have economized any more than we have. We've done without everything. We haven't spent a cent for a thing we didn't positively have to have."

Billy's Uncle Tom was the sort of honest man who grows very angry when he thinks any one is trying to deceive him. He got up from his desk, and walked swiftly toward Billy and the door.

"Don't try to fool with me, young man," he snapped. "You leave me, and do it quick."

Billy got outside.

"But, Uncle Tom—" he cried.

"A man that can afford two Panama hats inside of two months can afford to pay his own rent," Uncle Tom growled through the crack of the door as he shut it and turned the key.

Thunderstruck, Billy walked away. He did not put his hat on, but gazed at it abstractedly as he moved to the elevator. He was having the struggle of his life to keep from throwing it down on the tiled floor and trampling on it.

Finally, however, his better judgment prevailed, and he put the hated headgear where it belonged as he went down the six flights to the street.

He was so blue that he wanted to pour his tale of wo into somebody's ears, so he chose Fred Horton, who, he knew, would be leaving the office of Sternberg & Co. at about this time.

Fred lived up Billy's way. He was poor enough to sympathize with Billy's present misfortune.

It was old Mr. Sternberg himself who came forward, sleek and plump and prosperous, to tell Billy that Fred had already gone home. The president of the company was somewhat acquainted with the salesman from Barrows & Field, because the Sternberg line of novelties sometimes crossed the Barrows-Field line.

Mr. Sternberg looked at Billy's hat while he spoke.

"You're doing a fine business for Barrows & Field these days, ain't it?" he said.

Billy's salesman instinct prevented him from telling the truth.

"Yes; it's a good line we carry," he answered noncommittally.

"But I think it was also a good salesman what sometimes make the good business for a good line, don't it?"

Billy smiled good-humoredly at the flattery, in spite of the bitterness in his heart.

"How much salary do you get by Barrows & Field?" Mr. Sternberg asked suddenly.

"I'm on commission," Billy replied, trying to keep the misery out of his voice as he made the confession.

Mr. Sternberg took another admiring glance at Billy's new Panama.

"That's a new hat you got, ain't it?" he said, growing rather personal, Billy thought.

At all events, it did not seem to Billy that it was any of the old man's business how he had got the hat, so he merely said: "Yes, it's a later style than the one I had at the beginning of the season."

Mr. Sternberg was thoughtful for a moment.

"I need a good salesman," he said finally in a tone quite impersonal, but still looking admiration at the hat. "I like your looks," he added, with his gaze fixed on the new Panama.

Billy smiled. He was wondering what on earth might be up. But, whatever it was, he felt sure that the new hat had something to do with it.

"Maybe you don't like to work for a salary?" Sternberg spoke again with an interrogative drawl.

"It would depend on the salary," Billy said, suddenly seeing a rift in the fog of Mr. Sternberg's conversation.

"How would twenty-five dollars a week look?"

Twenty-five dollars a week looked like a small fortune to Billy just then. But it flashed into his mind that it was a new Panama hat that was at the bottom of the deal—the second in a season. He must live up and demand up to a proper financial basis for two new Panamas a summer.

"I would have to have forty-five," he said, after pretending to do some mental calculating.

"Well, you come in by my partner, Mr. Marks. Maybe we can talk some business," Mr. Sternberg spoke still more admiringly, now that Billy had set a good price on his services.

"Did Uncle Tom let you have the money?" Louise asked when he got back.

"No," he shouted. "But look at this. It's the kind of a contract I've been dreaming about."

After a while he told her the story of his interview with his uncle.

"But we can't pay the rent this evening," Louise still mourned.

"Don't worry about that, dear. Blumburg will not turn us out if I show him this. And what do you suppose it was really got it?"

Louise could not guess.

"Well," Billy told her, "as I was leaving, after signing this paper, I said something about doing my best to make good. And Mr. Sternberg looked at the hat I had on, and said: 'You'll make good. A man that can buy two Panama hats, working on commission this year, would make good anywhere.'"

A Submarine Enchantment.*

BY GARRETT SWIFT,

Author of "Tracking It Down," "Guarding the Treasure," "Mrs. Curtis's First Husband," etc.

The Search for a Dangerous Derelict, and How It Came to Result in a Case of the Hunter Hunted.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

CAPTAIN MERRILL, of the United States navy, who tells the story, is sent out in command of the Otter to look for a dangerous derelict, but in a fog his vessel rams this same derelict, is wrecked, and the crew put off in the small boats, while Merrill remains with the Otter until she goes down, and then escapes at the last moment in the cutter. After a period on the open sea he sights an island, whereon he sees a woman, dressed in the height of fashion, standing on a rock. But the girl suddenly disappears, and Merrill can find no trace of whence she came or where she went. He lands and finds himself among a queer lot of people, little, if any better, than pirates, under a rough fellow, Huggers, whom they call king, and who has a ship on which he makes frequent cruises. Huggers gives Merrill to understand that he is a prisoner, and places him under guard, Merrill, it appears, having once tried to arrest him in the course of his duty.

Meantime Merrill receives a note signed "Mildred Symes," which he realizes must have come from the mysterious woman. This note bids him get away as soon as he can contrive to do so. But there is no hint of where the writer keeps herself concealed.

Finding a short iron bar on the shore one day, Merrill conceals it in his trousers-leg, stuns therewith the two men who keep guard over him, possesses himself of their pistols, and wriggles his way through a small hole he has discovered at the back of the cave.

This leads him through a long passageway to caverns sixteen fathoms under water between two islands, where Mildred Symes, and her father, have lived since they had come there on a small yacht, with two sailors, to view their possessions, for these islands belonged to Mildred's grandfather. Huggers had captured the two seamen, and Mildred has been in concealment with her father ever since, Mr. Symes's back having been sprained. Their oil gives out, and Merrill hopes to replenish it by going to the surface. There are two exits to the tunnel, and Mr. Symes is placed on guard with a rifle at one of them. Meantime, Ben Hake and another of the bandits make their way into the retreat, and are captured. Later on, Mildred is missing, and Hake, wriggling loose, seizes a gun, while Merrill is bemoaning the girl's absence, and springs up with the cry: "Now we'll have another story to tell!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A LITTLE FRACAS.

HERE, indeed, was the very mischief of a situation. Symes unconscious, Hake at liberty and armed with the only gun in the place, the other fellow sitting up and wriggling himself free of the ropes, and myself standing there perfectly helpless, with the muzzle of a rifle pointing at me, about six inches from my nose.

"Now, Mr. Smart Guy, from Washington," went on Hake, "we'll see what

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the boss has to say to this. You'll be in the hands of Jim Huggers in about ten minutes."

"It would appear so," I replied.

I maintained, with difficulty, I admit, some semblance of calmness. I also admit that my inward emotions were far from calm.

"Yes, you'll be the prisoner of the cruelest man on the Atlantic Ocean in ten minutes," added Hake gloatingly.

"Alive or dead?"

"Alive if you obey me; dead if you don't. But it won't make much difference—a day or two."

"That's encouraging. But, at least, you will permit me to attend to Mr. Symes."

"Mr. Symes nothin'. He'll be killed, anyway. Huggers won't stand for no such nonsense as this. We're two of his best men."

Hake knew nothing about what had taken place since he had been struck down.

"Ah!" exclaimed the other wretch, as he struggled to his feet. "So — we haf him good. Now we kill. Good! In ziz place where nobody see we shoot—stab—kill! Is it not so?"

"No, it ain't so," snarled Hake. "See here, Banilla, this is my affair, not yours. The boss'll take care of him."

"What cares I for ze boss? He knock me just when I kiss ze pretty girl. I kill him sure."

"I say no. He's my prisoner, and if he obeys orders he'll go to the boss. Whatever revenge you and I want we'll get watchin' the boss. He knows more ways to kill a man by inches than you or I could guess in a year."

"No—no. It would be ze boss's revenge—not mine. He strike me down, I tell you, when I go to kiss ze pretty girl."

"Well, didn't he knock me, too? And I wasn't tryin' to kiss his girl. I was only tyin' up that poor devil there. Guess he's got his all right. Looks kinder dead now. Have to drag him out somehow."

"Drag out? Why? Zis just as good tomb as any. Save trouble burying."

"Look here, Banilla!" cried Hake in exasperation. "I tell you I'm boss of this affair. Get a move on and drag that man toward the hole. We'll shove him through."

"U-r-r-g-h! You know I do not like to handle dead men. Do it yourself."

"You'd turn a saint into a devil," growled Hake. "You ain't got your nerve back to handle a gun, and I can't uncover this man. He's not hurt. He's strong as a bull. I know what he is."

"Hah! Like a bull? Strong like a bull? Well, we kill him like a bull."

Hake cursed roundly.

"I tell you no. That crack you got on the nut has made you crazy. What would the boss say if we went back and said we killed him, when we could have taken him in alive just as well. The boss wants his own revenge."

"And I tell you I care nothing for what ze boss wants!" Banilla almost screamed. "I will kill him. He struck me when I was—"

"Will you shut your jaw about kissing that girl? You didn't kiss her, did you? I'll be rewarded when I tell the boss that. I wonder where she is now. Say—you spy—where is she?"

"Find out," I answered.

"Oh, don't worry. I'll find out all right. I don't really blame Banilla for wantin' to kill you. It ain't because I really *love* you that I don't let him do it. But I know the boss, and he'd like as not kill me if he knew I had you as foul as this and didn't bring you in alive. He's great on bein' his own executioner."

"I will be ze executionair," said Banilla, stupidly persistent in his one idea to have his own revenge.

And he did not seem to want to kill me so much because I had knocked him senseless, as because I had prevented him from kissing Mildred.

I could not quite make out the fellow's nationality. But the nationality in this gang made no difference. The Americans among them were as criminal and brutal as any of the others could be. There was not a spark of true manhood or honor in the lot.

Of them all, Grover, the New Jersey criminal, seemed the best; and that, perhaps, was because he had the restraining influence of two daughters. And even these were completely under his domination.

"Will you do as I tell you?" demanded Hake of Banilla. "Drag that man to the hole."

"No! I will not touch a dead man. I touch a live man to kill him."

"Well, then, I'll do it myself. Merrill, you'll have to go first. March straight to that hole and climb through. You did it coming this way, and you can do it goin' back."

"How do I know you won't shoot me in the back?"

"Aw! Didn't I just tell you? I don't need to shoot you in the back. I could pump lead into you right now if I wanted to. I don't. I want to take you to the boss and then see the fun."

I started. There was nothing else to do. The rifle had been kept at that six-inch distance from my face all through the colloquy with Banilla, and I knew if I made any attempt to fight the rascal would shoot me anyway.

As I started toward the opening to the cave Banilla let out a snarl like a wolf.

"No!" he said shrilly. "I'll kill him. He strike me when—"

He drew a long-bladed knife and raised it. Hake was taken by surprise. With a curse, he leaped toward Banilla, forgetting in his sudden rage to keep me covered with the rifle. With a powerful blow he sent the weaker man reeling against the wall, while his knife rattled down the steep incline. Banilla fell.

Seizing this—my only chance—I sprang at Hake, and let drive for his exposed jugular with all the strength I could put into my right arm.

He went down like a log. The rifle was once more in my possession.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALONE AND UNARMED.

HAKE'S blow had not been as effective as mine, and Banilla struggled to his feet again, with mighty curses, and began feeling around for his knife.

All feelings of humanity had been forced out of me by this time and, swinging the clubbed rifle, I smote him as I would a mad dog, and he fell across Hake. The two lay there, either dead or unconscious. I neither knew nor cared which.

I next turned my attention to Mr. Symes. While listening to the angry talk between Hake and Banilla I had heard a groan escape him.

A brief examination showed that he was still alive. The lantern was burning low, and I knew the oil must be about exhausted.

I took this and placed it handy, with the rifle. Then I lifted Mr. Symes, and threw him over my shoulder.

He was a light man, and I was a strong one, and his weight was no more to me than carrying a deer I had shot.

Then, picking up the lantern and rifle, I returned down the incline to the cavern.

Here I placed Mr. Symes on the bunk I had occupied, and began with all the skill I had to resuscitate him. I knew there was wine; and I supposed, being a sporting Englishman, he had brandy somewhere, though I had not seen it. I rummaged around in old wooden cabinets and shelves, and finally found some.

The water used for cooking and drinking had to be brought from a rippling spring, about a hundred feet from the Najoid mouth, and what there was in the cavern was stale. I used it, however, rather than take the time to go for more, to bathe the old man's face and hands. Then I rubbed some brandy on his lips. After a time I had the gratification of seeing him open his eyes.

At first he looked at me blankly, as though he either did not recognize me or did not see me at all. Then a little intelligence came into his glance.

"Oh, Merrill—you here? How did you reach Christiania?"

I was startled. It seemed certain the man's mind was gone completely.

"This is not Christiania, Mr. Symes," I answered. "Don't you remember? This is the cavern between Faljford and Najoid."

"Oh, yes! True. And I was watching the hole to the outer cave. Why—why am I back here?"

"I brought you back, Mr. Symes. Things have happened, you know."

"Yes. Things—they happened. Two men looked in. I fired. I don't know whether I hit them or not. I heard nothing."

"You fired at two men in the hole?"

"Yes—they looked in. They swore terrible oaths."

"Did they see Hake and Banilla?"

"The two men you brought? One did, I fancy. He had a light."

This was unpleasant news, indeed. But the tunnel was well known by this time, and it really made little difference.

"Take a little of this brandy, Mr. Symes," I said, pouring him out a drink.

He gulped it down.

"I feel better now," he said. "What came over me? Was it hunger, do you think?"

"Hunger might have been a factor. But I told you about Mildred, don't you remember?"

"Mildred? Where is Mildred?"

"She is gone. Judging from signs, I think the men from Faljford have discovered the Najoid end of the tunnel and have taken her away."

"My God, Merrill! What will they do to my poor girl?"

"Nothing, if I live to prevent it," I said. "We have got away with several of their dastardly crowd now. I can count seven. Now, if you hit even one of the two you fired at that makes eight; and giving Mildred, who had a revolver, credit for one, that makes nine."

"Nine. And how many men did you judge Huggers had with him?"

"Oh, I should say about fifty—perhaps sixty."

"Heavens! And only nine? My poor girl—my poor girl!"

Weakened by almost everything that could happen to a man, he began to weep.

"Don't give way, Mr. Symes," I begged. "We need all our fortitude and our strength and our wits now. Mildred must and shall be saved. Take a little more brandy."

He drank this more slowly, and the color came back to his cheeks, and he seemed to brace up in spirits.

"You spoke of hunger, Mr. Symes," I said. "I'm half starved myself, and we must eat if we expect to accomplish anything. I'll cook a meal for us."

After the strenuous night I had put in a good meal certainly would be very gratifying. But here a new difficulty arose.

Symes could not leave his bunk. The oil-stove was outside the tunnel on Najoid. We had only one rifle. If I took the rifle with me to the oil-stove Symes was left helpless and unarmed against attacks from Faljford. If I left the rifle with him for his protection I was at the mercy of anybody who came to Najoid. It was a pretty fix to be in.

"I'll leave the rifle with you, Mr. Symes," I said, "while I go bring the stove. It won't matter now. They know we are here, and if they smell the cooking it will make no difference."

I made all the speed I could up the slope to Najoid and, seizing the stove, put back down the slope as fast as I could carry it without falling.

I was not an adept at cooking, although I had got many camp meals when a young officer.

I went at it, however, and with some deer meat, some potatoes left over by Mildred, and some good steaming coffee and white bread, we made a decent meal.

"What about the two fellows up there?" asked Mr. Symes. "Are they dead?"

"I don't know," I replied. "I had to knock them down again."

"Even if they are enemies it seems inhuman to starve them, Merrill."

I made a gesture of impatience, but knew he was right. So I fixed up a decent bite for the two, should I find them alive.

I arranged Mr. Symes so that he could command, as well as his crippled condition and weakness would let him, the entrance from Najoid. Then I started, with the lantern still getting lower, to the Faljford end with the food.

When I got there neither Hake nor Banilla was to be seen. I stood stupidly looking at the hole. Then, realizing that I was in danger, I made my way back to where I had left Symes.

I fancied I heard the report of a gun echoing through the tunnel, and hastened my steps.

When I reached the big cavern Symes and the rifle were gone. I was left alone and unarmed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOPE DEFERRED.

THE situation was now worse than it had been at any previous time. Not only were Mildred and her father prisoners in the power of Jim Huggers, but I was deprived of all means of giving them any assistance.

Even with one rifle left, I would be

but one against half a hundred; but by using craft and stealth I might do some damage, and possibly kill Huggers himself. If that could be accomplished, I believed the rest of the malodorous crowd would not be so bloodthirsty.

But I had absolutely no chance of getting at Huggers.

It was with a heart like lead that I sat down and pondered over the horrible predicament.

It was not so much for myself I feared. The broad sea was around me, and there were ways by which a sailor could rig up some kind of craft and make at least an effort to save himself.

But I did not propose—in fact, the idea did not enter my head—to save myself and leave Mildred to any such fate as now seemed in store for her.

And yet—there I was—as helpless as the rude piece of wood on which I sat.

One thing was perfectly clear, and it was the only clear idea I seemed able to scrape up. That was the danger of remaining in any portion of the tunnel.

The report made by the crew of the launch, or presumably made, that I had been drowned among the rocks, would be refuted by Hake and Banilla if those delectable gentlemen should prove to be alive. For it certainly was no dead man that gave them the last knock-outs.

Huggers, I could easily imagine, was now exasperated almost to the verge of real insanity, if he had not been insane before. He had Mildred, but I knew his nature so well that I felt sure his boiling hate would keep him from sailing until he had me in his clutches as well.

This I knew would be fatal to all three of us. To Symes and me it meant death, while to Mildred, compelled to marry such a wretch, it meant worse.

The thing I must do for a time, until some plan asserted itself, or providential relief came, was to keep myself hidden so that I might be free to take advantage of whatever opportunity offered.

I left my seat and wearily paced the large chamber. I felt the dragging need of sleep, but sleep just then was out of the question.

The Norwegian peasants, if Mildred had pictured them correctly, were practically useless. If they had taken no further interest in her plight than to sell her foodstuffs at a profit, they would probably take no interest in mine at all.

I knew there was plenty of game in the woods, if I had a way to get it. But this was not like a tropical, or even semi-tropical, forest where I might gather yams, or papaws, or bananas, or other fruit. There was nothing wild but animals, and they must be trapped or shot.

There was good fishing, and by some mistake the invaders had overlooked some tackle. I would not starve on Najoid—if I was let alone. But this was too much to expect.

The first thing to be done was to make my camp somewhere on the island away from the mouth of the tunnel. I would then have some chance of running away from pursuers. Whereas, if they entered the tunnel both from the Faljford and Najoid ends, there was no possibility of escape.

It was an easy move. All I had to do was walk out. I left the tunnel with an aching head, and a heart even worse, and wandered about Najoid with the idea that I was hunting a safe place for a camp. But I wasn't.

I suppose I passed a dozen suitable spots, well shielded from view and near clear cold water. But I don't remember that I even thought of them. My mind dwelt constantly on Mildred.

What was she doing? Had she been harmed when attacked in the cavern? Had Huggers been cruel to her? Had she found a friend in Sally Grover?

These questions presented themselves in rotation time after time, and my inability to answer any of them almost drove me wild.

I finally broke through the forest and came out on a little headland from which with the naked eye I could see, at the very limit of vision, what appeared to be an inhabited island. I seemed to be able to make out masts of fishing-boats, but Mildred had said the peasants there had no boat that could make the mainland. I felt that I could make the mainland in any kind of a boat, and especially in one large enough to carry a sail.

Then another thought came to me. What good was I to Mildred, unarmed, skulking through Najoid's forests, trying

to hide myself? And the end could only be capture. I was merely prolonging the agony.

Mildred, unless she had heard otherwise from Hake, probably was under the impression that I was drowned.

Suddenly I saw a boat—I judged about twenty-two feet long—evidently a cabined fishing-boat, shoot out from the distant island. It was carrying a lug sail, and was bearing toward Najoid. Involuntarily I let out a shout of triumph.

Here was a craft in which I felt myself quite capable of making the trip to the mainland. Once there, it ought to be easy to enlist the sympathy of the authorities and bring back a force sufficient to rescue Mildred and drive Huggers, with his gang of criminals, from Faljford.

I waved my hand to attract the attention of the fishermen. The boat continued to draw nearer, but slowly, and nobody in her seemed to be paying any attention to me.

I took off my coat and waved that. I waited till they were within hearing distance and shouted. One man in the bow heard me, and turned to see who called. I beckoned, and the boat headed my way.

When it came near enough the man who had seen me spoke, but it was in Norwegian, and I could not understand.

"Don't you talk English?" I called.

"Little, yaas," came the reply.

"I want to hire your boat."

"My boat? For what you want?"

"I want to go to Christiania."

"Boat too small."

"No, it will do. I'll buy it. I'll pay you a good price, and sail it myself."

"Wait. I see you."

The boat was steered in my direction. My heart beat fast now, for there was no danger of Huggers leaving until he had me, and Mildred would be comparatively safe until I returned with help.

Suddenly something struck me in the head, a ringing shout of triumph smote my ears; then there came another blow, and I sank unconscious on the rock.

CHAPTER XXV.

CAPTURED.

THE blows I had received had evidently been intended merely to stun me, for when I returned to consciousness the only reminder I had of them was a splitting headache.

I was lying in the bottom of the launch, which was speeding toward Faljford.

"See, the conquering hero wakes," said one of the crew with a shout of glee. "The great United States spy has come back to life."

"Well, spy, how dost feel?" asked another. "This is your wedding-barge. We are taking you to see the fair lady."

At this the entire six burst into loud ribald laughter and jokes.

"He'll see his lady-love, all right—in Jim Huggers's arms," said one.

"Huggers is well named," added another.

"See here," I broke in, knowing that, no matter what I said or did, my fate would be none the worse, "you fellows don't like Jim Huggers any better than I do. You stick to him for what there is in it, and you have each committed some crime that made you run away from America. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll pay you well, better than Huggers, and promise you immunity from all punishment, if you will take me to Christiania instead of Faljford."

"Ha! You! A sailor? Even a captain in the navy couldn't pay us what our share with Huggers comes to."

"But I have more—a great deal more—than my pay as captain in the navy," I replied, feeling hopeful from this answer. "My father is a rich man. I can promise you any reasonable sum, and he will make good."

"What do you call a reasonable sum?"

"Well, you can name your own figure."

"Say, Blaker, shut up!" bawled the man who seemed to be in command of the party. "What's the use parleying? You know blamed well nobody is going back on the boss."

"Why not?" asked the fellow called Blaker. "He'd go back on us quick enough if he could gain anything by it."

"Shut up!" roared the other. "I'll report you."

"But listen to reason," persisted Blaker. "I don't know how it is with you fellows, but I've got a wife and two kids back home. I skipped out because I didn't want to go to prison for forgery.

I heard of you chaps through another like myself, and, knowing you kept free from the law, I joined you. It was a sorry day. I might better have served my term, and then joined my family and have begun over again. Heaven knows if I'll ever see them now. But this man is an officer, and knows what he's talking about. He offers immunity from all punishment. Is that what you meant, Merrill?"

"That is exactly what I meant. If you will take me to Christiania, not one of you shall ever be punished, and I will give you money enough to set you all up in business."

"Hear that?" asked Blaker. "Think what it means to be a free and decent man again. I'm for taking the offer."

"Oh, you are, are you? Well, take that instead, and the boss'll give you more."

The speaker struck Blaker with an iron fist and laid him flat in the bottom of the launch with me.

"That's the way we deal with traitors," commented the brute. "Anybody else want to take up the offer of this hound?"

Evidently nobody did, for no one spoke.

The launch rounded the end of Faljford, and ran into the same cove where I had moored the cutter. I was kicked, yanked, and hustled ashore; and then, aided by kicks and prods, marched toward the town.

Huggers was sitting with Grover outside the latter's house when he saw us approaching. He stood up and folded his arms.

There was no explosive jubilation. He simply stood there with folded arms, waiting.

I was marched up in front of him, with a blackguard on either side.

His face was hideous in its leering grin of triumph. His eyes glared with a hate that no words could possibly express. Murder was written in every line of his face. His lips curled. He showed his teeth, which were like the fangs of a wolf.

He spoke at last.

"So, Sydney Merrill, we stand face to face," he said, and there was a husky rattle in his throat from suppressed emotion. "After giving me all the trouble you could, and disabling nine of my men, three of whom have died, I have you in my clutches. You'll die a living death for every man you've hurt."

I had no reply; it would be useless.

"But here's something, captain," broke in the boss of the launch. "He offered us a bribe to take him to Christiania instead of bringing him here. And Blaker was for accepting. I knocked him down."

"Blaker!"

Blaker stood within five feet of Huggers. The boss, chief, or king, whatever he chose to call himself—and he was evidently all three—took one stride, and a blow from his mighty fist sent Blaker unconscious to the ground.

"See, Merrill, the way I treat a traitor? But I wouldn't use you that way. I know that mere physical pain wouldn't make you wince, and you ain't afraid of death. So, before you die—oh—before you die—you'll see something. Bring out the girl?"

Grover rose. In a moment Sally and Minerva Grover appeared. Sally looking at me with tears in her eyes. Then came Grover with Mildred.

The poor girl's eyes were red with weeping.

"See," said Huggers, putting his arm around her, "she will be Mrs. Jim Huggers as soon as we can get somebody with full power to marry us. Before you die you shall witness the ceremony. That will be worse than death to you. Ha! Ha!"

His maniacal laugh rang out on the frosty air, and my blood ran hot with lust for murder.

"Will you spare his life?" asked Mildred, turning to him. "Will you spare his life if I become your wife willingly?"

A great roar came from Huggers.

"Spare *his* life! What do I care whether you're willing or not? Why should I bargain when I've got you both? No, by Heaven! I'll spare neither his life nor yours unless you obey me. Take her back. And put him where he can't get away. We sail in two days."

Mildred was led back into the house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNDER GUARD.

"WHAT'LL we do with him, captain?" asked the boss of the launch-crew.

The half-crazed, bloodshot eyes of Huggers swept the group.

"Here, you, Crabbe; and you, Smythers, take him with you. You ain't got any women folks to bother. One of you stand guard all the time."

"All right," said a young, stalwart fellow, stepping to the front.

He was followed by another, a good many years older, who had one of the most villainous faces I ever saw.

"Come along," said this last one.

I judged by the order in which they had responded that the young man was Crabbe, and the older one Smythers.

As I turned to follow them, my hands still tied together behind me, I saw Blaker standing in the center of a group, and fancied that he, as well as the rest of those near him, expressed in their faces either sympathy for me or dislike for the methods of Huggers.

I was led to one of the smaller houses, where these two unmarried rascals lived together, and shown a room.

"In that room you'll stay," said Smythers, "till the ship sails. We'll not starve ye. But just try to escape and see how quick we'll shoot."

I had no doubt of their willingness to do this.

The reaction was setting in after the exciting and trying experiences I had gone through, and with my excessive weariness I could have gone to sleep on a live wire.

There was a bed in the room—a ship's bed from a single stateroom — and I threw myself on this without a word.

I lay on my side to avoid hurting my hands and wrists, and was soon in a deep slumber, in which no Huggers came to threaten me. I slept for hours, and it was nearly night when I woke.

I was much refreshed, however, and felt ready for anything that might come along if I only had my hands free.

"Want some grub?" asked Crabbe, who did not seem as savage as Smythers.

"I could eat," I answered.

"I ain't had no orders to starve anybody," muttered Crabbe as he walked away.

He soon returned from one of the neighboring houses — one, I presumed, where he himself ate when ashore, and the two stood over me while, with my hands temporarily released, I made a hearty meal.

When I had finished they gave me a cigar, and sat grinning at me while I smoked it.

Then Smythers stood guard, after my hands were tied again, while Crabbe went to his supper. When he returned, Smythers went. Soon they were both back.

I lay on the bed for hours, listening to their conversation. It was not very comforting.

First, they spoke of the coming trip of the ship. Huggers had decided to have the name "Mildred" painted on the stern. The plan was to sail to China and take on opium and a cargo of tea as a blind. But both were valuable; and tea, being free from customs duties, could easily be disposed of in chests to Chinese merchants, with a tin of opium in each chest.

I cared very little what the plan was thus far, but presently the talk switched to me.

"The boss ain't going to do anything with him," said Crabbe, "until he's married to the girl. He wants this fellow to see the ceremony. Foolish idea, to my mind. He thinks it'll be a terrible punishment. Why, he ain't known the girl only a few hours. What kind of love can be fired up in that time?"

"Not the kind like that of you an' Minerva, eh?" replied Smythers.

"We've known each other years."

"Sure. But the old man don't seem to cotton to you with much enthuseeism," remarked Smythers.

"Oh, well, if this voyage turns out all right I'll have a good rake-off. I'm to do the shore business with Yow Kee in Hong-Kong. The captain promised me a double share."

"The deuce he did!"

"That's what—and that ought to satisfy Grover. Anyway, why should he stand in the way? What chance has either of his girls got to marry? We ain't in Jersey City now, where he had all those high-toned friends he hollers so much about."

"N-no," said Smythers slowly, with another chuckle. "Nobody would really think this was any city in the States. But it's the metroperlis of Faljford."

"Of all the islands, I guess," added Crabbe.

"When's the boss goin' to marry the girl?" asked the older ruffian.

"Well, for a wonder, he's on the square about that. It's about the first time I've known it to happen."

"Well, she's a dern pretty girl. He can afford to be on the square. But that ain't an answer to my question."

"Oh, you asked when he would marry her. Well, if we stay at sea till we get to Hong-Kong, I suppose it'll be there."

This interested me. If that was true, and Huggers adhered to his scheme of having me witness the marriage of Mildred to him, then at Hong-Kong I might find a chance to escape.

"What's he goin' to do with the girl's father?"

"Oh, I don't know. He seems almost dead now. He ain't worth talking about."

It was growing late, and the stillness of the straggling village seemed to indicate that the people were asleep.

There came a slight tapping at the door. Crabbe opened it.

"Why—Min—"

"Hush," she cautioned. "I wanted to see you. Can't you come for a walk?"

"Yes," replied Crabbe.

He came in for his hat, and Minerva followed him. The door of the room I occupied was open. She looked in.

Coming close to me, she whispered:

"Sally sent her love. She says keep a stiff upper lip. Dad's coming to have a talk with you."

She whisked out with Crabbe, leaving me wondering what was in the wind now.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GROVER'S PROPOSITION.

I HEARD old Smythers grunt as the two young people went out.

"Fool!" he mumbled. "Old Grover'd cut your throat before he'd let you marry his daughter."

This made little impression on me, although it did cross my mind that for a man who would cut another's throat for loving his daughter Grover was a mighty careless fellow.

But there was, I learned, some method in his seeming carelessness this time.

There was a knock at the door again, and this time Grover himself appeared. From the low-spoken salutations, I judged there was some kind of bond between these two. Then Grover spoke loudly:

"Where is he?"

"In there."

"Well, if you've got anything to do, go and do it. I want to ask him a few questions."

"Ho! That explains some things," said Smythers; and I heard the door shut.

Then Grover came into my room.

"Asleep, Merrill?" he asked.

"No, I had a good sleep all day."

"Glad to hear it. I'll drag a chair up near you. I wanted to have a little talk with you."

"So your daughter—"

"You needn't stop. I sent her to get Crabbe out of the way. I can handle Smythers, but not Crabbe—not yet. Now, there are several points I want to bring up. The first is your own situation."

"It's bad enough, isn't it?" I replied.

"It's mighty bad. Of course, you know there ain't a ghost of a show for you with Jim Huggers."

"We are not affinities—that's certain."

"He'll kill you, sure's you're born. He's a—but I'm coming to that later. What I want is to have you feel certain you ain't got no show."

"While there's life there's hope."

"Not on that ship. Why, he's got a cage built in there he uses as a brig—a prison—that no human bein' could get out of. And nobody'd dare help you on board, for there he *is* king. What do you want to throw your life away for?"

"I wasn't aware that I had shown any unwarranted desire to do so," I replied.

"But that's what you are doing. Now, say, are you in love with this Symes girl?"

"Yes."

"And she with you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're two blamed fools. There ain't no more show for you to marry that girl than—than me."

"I don't want to marry you."

"I ain't jokin'. I mean, for me to marry her. I tell you when Jim Huggers wants a thing, he gets it, and human life don't stand in the way. Not it."

"Well, but what's all this leading up to?" I asked. "Everybody seems to be anxious to have me understand that I must die and she must marry Huggers."

"Well, there ain't no question but what she's got to marry Huggers. It ain't quite so sure that you've got to die."

I opened my eyes wide and stared at him.

"What *do* you mean?" I demanded.

"Speak low. There may be listeners. I can count on you, because you ain't got nó call to like Huggers."

"No overwhelming call, I should say."

"Neither have I. I hate him. But he's got the gang now. I s'pose a few knocks like Blaker got would turn some against him, and he's gettin' worse all the time. I think Jim Huggers is crazy."

"Acts so," I assented.

"Well, these islands could be made profitable. He won't do it. He talks, and talks, and talks. And there it ends. But if I was boss here, I'd have wheat and rye and things like that growin'.

"They do grow here. And I'd have decent houses. I'd have horses. I'd have a boat runnin' from here to Christiania. I'd do a lot of things that he only talks of."

"Well?"

I was wondering how all this concerned me.

"Now, you could help me a lot. You've got education *and* brains, which ain't always the same thing. And if I was sure of you, I could cut that cord and let you go right off."

I pushed myself into a sitting position.

"What's that you say?"

"I mean it. I could cut that cord and take you into my house, and Jim Huggers wouldn't dare say boo."

"You ordered me to stay away from there. I thought you were afraid of Huggers."

"Things has changed. I hadn't made up my mind. But now I'm goin' to do him out of what he calls his kingdom. A pretty kingdom this is, not a decent house to live in. I'd *make* it a kingdom, I would."

"And what price," I asked wonderingly, "have I to pay for this sudden effusion of friendship?"

"No price. Just marry my Sally. She loves you."

I was stricken dumb for some minutes. All I could do was stare at the man.

"Yes, she loves you. You see, Merrill, she is lonesome. She wants a man like you—not one of these bums. They think they're sailors. Huh! Huggers knows how to handle a ship, and a few others. But my girl loves you. Me and you could manage this place all right."

"I appreciate your kindness, but it is impossible."

"You'd sooner die?" he asked angrily.

"I don't say that. But I shall marry Miss Symes unless she herself tells me I cannot."

"Then, by gum, she shall tell you!" he cried, and rushed out of the house.

I was dumfounded at all this. Things were not as harmonious as I had thought. I had no doubt that Sally would make somebody a good wife; but I had not yet given up hope of saving Mildred.

My bed was just alongside the one window in the room. As Grover went out, I heard a peculiar noise.

"'St!"

I lay perfectly still.

"Merrill—the boss hit me once too often. Put your hands this way—I'm Blaker. Crabbe is mooning with Minerva Grover down toward the cove. Smythers is over with Jake Munnora, drinking whisky, and now Grover's gone. Go along around the left shore to the big rocks. There's a queer place there. Take this."

I felt the tug of a knife at my wrists, and my hands were free.

Then a revolver was thrust into one of them.

I rose to look out of the window.

Blaker had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ESCAPE.

THERE was no time to plan—not even to think. I simply scrambled through that window with the greatest rapidity possible.

Landing on my feet, I glanced ahead and to the right and left. Dwellings there were in plenty, but I saw no human being.

I peered around the front corner of the

house in the direction of Grover's. There was a light in the only window I could see, and I pictured Grover and Mildred in secret conversation.

While I had no doubt of Mildred's love for me, I had no more doubt that she would resolutely tell me—if she saw me—that I could not marry her.

Conditions such as were existing on Faljford, and the exciting events Mildred and I had been through, were enough to produce love between us. But there was that stiffness in the girl's nature that I felt sure would induce her resolutely to renounce me and sacrifice herself in order to save my life. And I did not want my life saved at any such cost.

All this takes time to write; but I lost no time thinking about it. Finding myself alone, and evidently unobserved, I struck off along the left shore, as Blaker had advised.

At first I skulked in such shadows as I could find, but when I had cleared a few hundred feet and dropped down from the bluff to the narrow stretch of shingle along the water's ege, I ran.

Life on a ship is not good training for a runner—especially an officer's life. But I had taken considerable interest in athletics, and, until I became a commander, had joined in many contests. I was, therefore, something of a runner.

I was now screened from the view of the village by the bluff that ran almost evenly along the shore. But if the bluff ran evenly, the shingle did not, and at times I was almost knee-deep in the water. But I went on almost blindly.

Once I stumbled over something and fell flopping into the sea. But I was soon on my way again. I had noticed, however, that the object over which I had fallen was a boat. It was a small boat, and appeared like a dingey.

I gave it no thought then, my only idea being to find the place spoken of by Blaker.

It may well be supposed that I had no very well-defined ideas. The sudden transition from the condition of a bound and hopeless prisoner to a free man armed with a loaded revolver was so great that I had not yet begun to plan. All I knew was that I had escaped; that I was armed and held the lives of six men in my hand, and that I was to look for a "queer place."

It was no difficult task to find a queer place on Faljford. The entire island was itself queer. Like many of those in that region, its formation was almost beyond analysis. Caves, crannies, tunnels, holes that were like small, extinct craters, rocks that didn't seem to belong where they were—all these features were to be found on Faljford and in other places nearer the main coast, and even on the main coast itself.

I passed several places that might with no exaggeration be called queer, but none seemed to warrant being judged *the* queer place referred to by Blaker.

At last, having slowed down to a walk, I found a hole in the side of the bluff that seemed black enough, as I looked in, to run through the entire island. The only difficulty about it was that the floor was covered with water to the depth of two feet, and the tide was then gradually rising.

It was probably Blaker's queer place, but it was a bit too queer for me to make a haven of it. If, as I judged from the evidences around me, the tide was but half high, the yawning hole would be filled at high water.

I sat down on a boulder to ponder it out. I could think with some calmness, for even if Grover returned only to discover my escape, he would probably say nothing about it, having gone to see me on business traitorous to Huggers. It would remain probably for Crabbe, whenever he got through making love to Minerva Grover, to give the alarm. And as it was a beautiful, cold, clear night, and Smythers had been left in charge, I did not think the love-making, for which opportunity came seldom, would end in a hurry.

Of course, the only question was what to do. I was free, it was true; but how long would I remain so? Once Crabbe gave the alarm, Smythers would be called to give an account of his actions, and perhaps be shot by Huggers, who was by that time wildly insane with fury toward me.

Then there would be another complete search for me over the two islands made twins by the tunnel.

I could not remain to be recaptured,

and there seemed no way for me to escape. The tunnel was, of course, the most unsafe place I could choose. Then I remembered the sunken boat over which I had stumbled.

I had no doubt it had been discarded as useless. There were other small boats near the village, but I dared not go back there. I resolved to see what use I could make of the sunken dingey.

I went back to the spot, and, exerting myself to the utmost, overturned the boat and then hauled it, bottomside up, out of the water.

An examination showed no injuries, and if there had been any wide-open cracks or seams, the long soaking it had received had so swollen the wood as to make them imperceptible.

I shoved the boat into the water, and found that it did leak. But I believed I could make the short run across the channel to Najoid, where I could calk the largest seams with grass and mud, and thus have a boat that would carry me to the Norwegian fishing-village on the more distant island.

The question was, how to propel the thing. I had neither oar, paddle, nor sail.

I settled that question in a hurry.

I took off all my clothes, made a compact bundle of them, and put them in the rear thwart. Then I stepped into the water, rested my hands on the stern, and made a propeller of myself.

I could have swum to Najoid with ease in my clothes, but I wanted possession of the boat.

It was, as I have said, but a short distance from Faljford to Najoid, and I was soon there. The boat leaked considerably. I hauled it out, emptied it, and dressed myself. Then I went to work calking it.

The grass and mud wouldn't serve for this. I ran to the mouth of the tunnel, and, at the risk of being captured again, hurried to the big central cavern. Here I found plenty of bits of old rope. And as I was going out I glanced toward the cove where Mildred's boat had been kept, and saw, on the high ground, the blade and a portion of the shaft of an oar.

Filled with joy, I grabbed this up and went on to patch my boat.

I was not disturbed. In two hours I had a craft that leaked a little, but which would carry me, and in this I set out toward the Norwegian village.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NEGOTIATING FOR A BOAT.

My rope-calked boat behaved even better than I had dared hope, and, by taking the shortest route, which led me between many small islands on which I might find a temporary resting-place if my little vessel sank, I made good time toward the fishing-village.

Propelling a leaking boat, however, with a broken oar, is no child's play. I put all my strength into the task, working the oar like a single-bladed canoe-paddle, and had the satisfaction of seeing Najoid far behind me, and the inhabited island Mildred had not named loom up ahead.

It was about six o'clock in the morning when I drew near enough to the large island to see anything on it.

There were farms that showed some care. Just what prosperity there could be in a community that had no intercourse with any mainland I could not understand.

But I saw cattle that were well fed, and at least two sleek little Norwegian horses.

The houses were mere shacks, and none too large. They had roofs thatched with hay, and the chimneys were of rough stone built outside.

There were but few people in sight. I don't remember now how many, but I think I saw three women on different farms. They moved about in a stolid, indifferent way, and, if they saw me at all, gave no sign.

The fishing portion was along the shore, and the houses were even less comfortable-looking than those on the farms.

These houses apparently had no land attached to them. I did not see anything like a store.

I could understand how, by interchange, these people could keep body and soul together; the fishermen giving their catch for milk, butter, potatoes, wheat to make bread, and all that. But where they managed to get tea and coffee and sugar and such things was beyond me.

The matter was solved to my satisfaction later. They didn't get them. They went without.

There was poultry in sight, so they had fresh eggs. After all, life in the Norwegian village was not so bad — for a Norwegian villager.

As I paddled in among the fleet of fishing-boats that were moored off the village, I found one almost exactly like that for which I had tried to negotiate. I paddled up, examined it, and then climbed aboard.

I felt like turning pirate, slipping the moorings, and stealing the thing. But even before my conscience got to working, a huge Norwegian came running out of one of the houses, shouting something unintelligible to me, and making the wildest kind of gesticulations.

I stood up in the boat and looked at him. He did not stand on shore to parley. He rushed to a small boat on shore, shoved it into the water, leaped in, and rowed toward me with the strength of a giant.

I sat down in the stern of the boat and waited.

"Begin in English, if you speak it," I said. "I don't talk your language."

To my surprise, he spoke mine. It was not the purest English I had ever heard. I had to stop and think, and sometimes make him repeat before I understood what he said. But we got there after a while.

"What you want with my boat?" he asked.

"I want to hire it."

"For why?"

"I want to use it."

"For what?"

"Well, there's a young lady on Faljford I want to take away from that gang."

He shook his head.

"Is it the English girl?" he asked.

"Yes—she's half English."

"She say she own these islands?"

"Yes."

He shook his head again.

"What's the matter with you?" I demanded. "She *does* own the islands. Why haven't you been men enough to drive off that gang of robbers and help her get her rights?"

Again he shook his head.

"They do not trouble us," he said. "We pay never any rent to them. But if she get back the islands, she make us pay rent."

"Oh, then your seeming indifference isn't indifference at all!" I cried angrily. "It is simply your selfishness. You'd sooner see the girl robbed of her inheritance than pay rent for your houses and farms."

"It is better. It is money for us. Yaas?"

"Well, you're about as bad as Huggers and his gang. But I don't agree with you. I want this boat. If you won't rent it or lend it, will you sell it?"

"How much will you pay?"

Money was the key to his brain and what heart he had. I was staggered. I had spoken boldly about buying the other boat. But I had practically no money with me.

"I'll pay you anything you ask, but I can't pay you now. You will have to trust me."

He opened his eyes wide, and a huge grin appeared on his stupid face.

"I'll not do that."

"But I am an officer in the navy of the United States of America. You don't think I would steal your miserable boat, do you?"

"How do I know? I need my boat. I'll keep it."

I was in despair. I wanted that boat worse than anything else in the world except Mildred. And I saw no way of getting Mildred without the boat.

Yet, as the huge bulk of the fisherman loomed up beside me, I knew I was no match for him physically, and I had not quite reached that stage of desperation where I could shoot an innocent man and take his property.

My old dingey lay alongside, with the broken oar lengthwise in it.

"I keep my boat. You go. We don't want any owner that makes us pay rent," said the fellow.

I was filled with rage. He did not wait for me to leave, thinking his command was sufficient, but turned to go himself.

He leaned over the gunwale of the big boat, and had one foot poised in the air to step into the small one. I reached over into mine, grabbed the broken oar,

and whacked him with it as he was balancing himself.

He pitched head first in the water, and I began to haul up the anchor.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN OCEAN RACE.

HAD a huge bull, in full and glorious possession of all his faculties, been plunged precipitately into a blazing fire for a barbecue without the preliminary killing, the bellowing and general turmoil and racket could not be worse than that which followed the involuntary plunge into the sea taken by the big fisherman when I whacked him with the flat of the paddle-blade.

A roar came from his great throat that might, I judged, almost be heard on distant Faljford.

While I was hauling in on the anchor rope, I turned to give him a glance. I had no wish to drown the fellow. But it did seem just then that I had gone about the business in a fair way to accomplish that undesirable end.

Big as he was, fisherman that he was, it was perfectly evident that he could not swim a stroke.

He thrashed around in the water, kicking up a lot of foam, floundered like a wounded porpoise, and, when his head was above the surface, let out that terrific roar for help.

He managed to grasp the gunwale of his small boat, and nearly upset it trying to climb aboard.

I got the anchor of the lugsail seaboat inboard, and then gave its owner some attention.

"Don't try to climb in," I told him. "You'll tip the boat over. I have no time to bother taking you ashore or to fish for your dead body. If you will do as I say, I will help you."

The reply was a wild string of Norwegian that I did not understand. But I judged from their rapid-fire character that the words were curses.

"Do you have a desire to live?" I asked, beginning to enjoy the situation.

"Yes," he sputtered. "You knock me overboard. Now you help me."

"Well, I am willing, on certain conditions," I replied. "One is that you swear allegiance to Miss Symes, the lady of the islands."

"We don't want pay no rent," he retorted.

"That's her business, not mine. But you must not refuse to help her if she asks you."

"Help? How help?"

"I don't know yet. It may be necessary for me to call on every man here to help save her from the gang of robbers on Faljford. If I do, will you stand by and help?"

"Yes," he answered sullenly.

I glanced toward the shore. In response to his great bellowing, about a dozen men, some still completing their dressing, were hurrying to the water's edge, and I could see them staring out at us, and pointing and gesticulating as if perplexed at what was going on near his boat.

Then, as I hauled his smaller craft around and held the bow as he climbed over the stern, I saw the whole crowd making for boats.

"Tell them it's all right—tell them you are safe," I said.

Instead of obeying, he seized his oars and shot away from me. Then he shouted something in Norwegian. The result of this was that the small boats in which his friends were coming made for the larger sailing-boats anchored in a row.

The sail was easily hoisted, and, as there was a good breeze, I soon cleared the line and stood off to sea.

I had no definite purpose just then except to get away with the boat. I knew I would be pursued, and had no knowledge of the sailing qualities of the craft I had borrowed so unceremoniously, as compared with the others.

I could not, of course, go to Faljford or Najoid then. I would simply sail into a trap where they could catch me, or where I would be recaptured by Huggers while trying to escape from the fishermen.

If their boats proved the faster, I was in hard luck again. If mine was the better, I had some chance of jockeying them off the trail.

I was not mistaken in their purpose. I had not sailed far when I saw sail after sail go up, and in a few minutes the entire fleet was in hot pursuit.

I had chosen a course away from their island, directly opposite to the direction of Najoid. I had the clear, open sea ahead and a good wind astern.

I soon saw that it was going to be a hot race.

At first one of the pursuing fleet appeared to be gaining on me. It was manned, so far as I could judge, by four men. These about filled it, and they seemed to carry a larger sail than some of the larger boats. She heeled over to leeward a good deal; yet, in the strong wind, the crew seemed reckless of danger.

It was a marvel to me that men who did not hesitate to sail a boat with the lee rail under water would be afraid of venturing on the trip to Christiania. But in those boats the trip would be a slow one, and rough weather would be almost surely fatal.

I settled down to a long lead in a race that seemed destined also to be a losing one for me. The crazy, over-canvased boat came on with increasing speed, and what seemed to me increasing recklessness on the part of the crew.

Whether they had had a jovial night and had been drinking, or this was their usual way of sailing, I knew not. But I did know that if they could keep it up I should be overtaken.

I still had my loaded revolver, the one handed to me by Blaker, but I did not want to shoot any of these men. They were merely doing what anybody else would have done under the circumstances, and even in a time of such stress I did not feel like shooting men who were doing nothing but trying to save the property of one of their fellows.

I turned my prow sharply to port, getting the wind for a tack, and they did the same. But, alas! Their boat was already so far heeled to starboard, running almost before the wind, that when they came about on the port tack, instead of righting to a level keel, as soon as the wind struck her port broadside she went completely over, and her crew floundered in the water.

There was some more shouting and jabbering, and I saw the other boats steering toward them.

My most dangerous pursuer was now out of the race, and I breathed more freely. With a comfortable feeling of security, I came about again and, running freely before the wind, sailed away from the entire fleet toward the horizon.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TRAPPED.

I HAVE no definite idea how long I sailed before the wind. I am not sure whether I looked at my watch and found it run down, or forgot to look at all. Anyway, I had no real conception of time.

All I knew was that the fishing fleet had lost time saving the men of the capsized boat, and I was drawing away from them rapidly, and there was sufficient satisfaction in that for me.

Their hulls were finally out of sight, and their sails growing beautifully less. That was the first time in my life that I had ever felt thankful that the earth was round and had a three-mile horizon on the sea.

How many nautical miles I sailed before I finally lost sight of them altogether I had no means of knowing. Probably from twenty-five to thirty, and the hours were passing with their usual swiftness and regularity.

When I found that I could no longer see the tops of their sails, and knew they could not see mine, I swung to starboard a little and made a wide détour. Once I got so near the enemy I saw the tops of their sails again, and immediately put about, hoping that they had not seen mine.

Once more I was below their horizon, as they were below mine, and I gaged their position at about due west from me, and still going north.

This was just what I wanted; but I knew they would eventually give up the search and return without their boat. And I wanted to plan out my own campaign while sailing away from them.

One thing was easy. I had a clear sea to Christiania, and could make that port (if Mildred had been correct in her statement of the distance—eight hundred miles) in about eighty hours, supposing the wind held good. But with a reverse breeze, or none at all, there was no telling how long the trip would take me.

Then there would be the delay of acquainting the authorities with the situation, and the equipment of a rescue-party.

Altogether, the business might require two or three weeks before I could return to Faljford. And what might not happen in that time?

Huggers would search all the islands for me. He would learn from the fishermen that I had taken a boat and sailed away. He would know that I would return to Faljford with an armed force, rescue Mildred and her father, and take him prisoner.

He would sail without me. Undoubtedly he would murder Mr. Symes and carry Mildred away in his ship. And I would have all the trouble for nothing and lose Mildred.

I gave up the Christiania plan.

I could turn back and sail to the Faroe Islands, which belong to the Danes. I knew these fellows had communication with Denmark, and would sail anywhere in anything that floated. But this plan had the same objections that the Christiania idea had.

I could sweep around Faljford, and lie in the pathway of steamers between New York and Christiania, and appeal to the captain of the first that came in either direction. But I did not know just when to expect one, and had no method to determine my position. I might miss the steamers.

I knew that whatever the frightful rage Huggers had been in before was a mild sort of humor compared to what he must be feeling now.

It was different when he had me in his power. It was different when he believed I had been drowned. I was now a living menace to him, and he might be expected to act as soon as he found that I was off in a seaworthy boat.

Whatever was to be done had to be done by myself, and without delay.

Setting myself to the task, resolved to save Mildred Symes or die with her, shutting my eyes to everything except the fact that I loved her and would give my life to save her, I kept on to the southward, trending far enough to the east to avoid being seen from the fisherman's island if any one was watching.

Judging the distance as well as I could by the time elapsing while going before the wind, and the greater time consumed in tacking against it, I kept on until I thought I was near Najoid, where I wanted to make my first landing.

I had no small boat to take me from Najoid to Faljford. This mattered little to me, as I could swim the distance in ten or fifteen minutes, even with my clothes on, but if I succeeded in spiriting Mildred away I must have some means of getting her to Najoid and into the boat.

Guiding myself entirely by guesswork, I brought the island into view, and soon sailed into a little bay surrounded by high bluffs, on the north side of Najoid.

I remained in the boat for a few minutes, expecting a surprise. But no one disturbed me. I then got the boat near a steep, rocky escarpment, and clambered up the face of the bluff, with the end of a long rope in my hand. I left the sail up, so if I succeeded in getting Mildred and her father there I could shove out in the wind and start without delay.

I now had the hardest work of my life before me. Every move that had been made since I landed on Faljford had made the situation worse. It had reached such a pitch that if I failed this time there would no longer be any hope.

I fastened the end of the painter to a tree, not trusting to an anchor, as it took too long to haul it aboard.

I then stepped cautiously toward the woodland, peering in every direction, on the outlook for watchers.

Long before this I knew Huggers must have discovered my escape, and had begun the search for me. I would have given much to know the exact situation on Faljford, and what the enraged sea-robber was doing.

I was in a fair way to learn.

I entered the forest of firs and pines and spruce with the revolver in my hand. I had not gone more than three hundred feet when I heard:

"Halt where you are!"

I stopped involuntarily. From each side, and straight before me, a rifle was aimed at me from behind a tree.

"So you returned to us, spy," said a chuckling voice. "The captain wants to see you bad. Put down that pistol!"

(To be continued.)

Their Agent at Colebrook.

BY FRED V. GREENE, Jr.

A Real-Estate Transaction that Seemed the Surest of All Sure Things, the Color of Actual Money Profit Sealing the Bargain.

"IS Mr. Northrup about?"

The old storekeeper looked up over his glasses at the dapper young man who had entered, and paused in the act of weighing sugar long enough to reply, "Thet's me."

The stranger advanced toward him with a quick, confident step, and a smile of assurance on his face.

"Mr. Northrup, my name is Brewer," he announced. "I came up here to Colebrook to see you on a matter of business—a matter that I know will prove of great interest to you."

The old man eyed his caller with a gleam of suspicion, and surveyed him from head to foot, while the other fumbled in his wallet for a card.

"Wal, I kin only say thet I ain't interested in books, lightning-rods, or spavin-cures," the storekeeper remarked finally.

The stranger laughed lightly.

"Neither am I, Mr. Northrup," he said.

He had already found the card for which he had been searching, and, extending it to the other, added: "That will prove it, I guess."

Mr. Northrup looked at the card an instant before raising his eyes, the stranger meanwhile studying him keenly. Then the old man thrust the card toward his visitor.

"Don't see ez it's of any interest to me," he said.

"But it is, Mr. Northrup," the other insisted. "Just let me explain—"

"Ain't got the time," Northrup interrupted. "I got these orders to git out."

"That's all right," the stranger persisted. "I can talk while you work, and neither of us will lose any time."

With a grunt that plainly showed his disapproval of such a proceeding, the old man turned to his work, while the other leaned carelessly against the counter.

"As you saw by my card, Mr. Northrup," he began, "my name is Brewer, and I represent the New York City Realty Mortgage and Investment Company. They sent me up here for one express purpose—to see you."

"Wal, if ye've got good eyesight, ye kin do that easily," the old man slyly chuckled.

Brewer laughed good-naturedly.

"Very true," he replied; "but I was to do more than see you. I was to extend to you an invitation to visit us and our properties as our guest—to return to the city with me, and stay a few days, my company paying all your expenses."

Northrup looked up quickly at this, but he did not reply instantly—he was busily searching the face of the man before him.

"Let me explain more fully," Brewer went on quickly. "In the first place, our company is one of the wealthiest of its kind in New York. In fact, we'd have to be, or we could not make the invitation I have just extended to you."

"But what's the ketch?" Northrup wanted to know.

"The catch?" the other repeated blankly.

"Thet's wot I said. I mean—"

"Now, let me explain matters fully," Brewer interrupted. "Then you'll understand how we can make such a generous offer. In the first place, we were fortunate enough to secure one of the most valuable pieces of acreage on Long Island; we had the ready money, and, as the owner had to have cash, we secured it on practically our own terms.

"Now is where you enter into the matter," he went on, and in saying this he noted that his words had as yet brought forth no indication of interest on the part of the man he was seeking to impress. "We have planned out, and are developing, an entirely new idea regarding the

selling of this land, and its success has proved that we are giving greater value than any other company to-day."

"I don't want to buy no land," Northrup burst out, glancing up from his work.

"That may be," Brewer remarked. "But let me explain further."

He paused an instant to give the storekeeper an opportunity to reply; but he did not do so, so he continued:

"Our plan is to cut out entirely all forms of advertising, which, you know, is one of the biggest expenses of any realty company."

Northrup had no such knowledge; but it pleased him to know he was credited with it. He nodded approvingly.

"Our idea is to appoint agents," the other explained. "Appoint a man in every community — a man well known and with a recognized standing among the people in his district—a man whose success in this world has made him looked up to when matters of weight are in question. You, Mr. Northrup, are the man we've selected for this district, after going over the matter very carefully."

The storekeeper's interest in his business had suddenly ceased—the stranger had played successfully upon his vanity —and he leaned against the counter thoughtfully.

"Wal, so far so good," he remarked, his chest swelling with conscious pride.

"These agents, being our representatives, should naturally see and study the land, its present and future possibilities. So that's why we extend our invitation to you. Come back with me as our guest. We will pay all your expenses, putting you up at one of the best hotels, and the entire trip will cost you nothing. We wouldn't let you spend a cent if you wanted to."

The gleam of interest in the old man's eyes told more plainly than words his ideas regarding the matter, yet he curbed his feelings as much as possible, realizing, with his customary sharpness, that he should not appear over-anxious.

"How does the proposition appeal to you?" Brewer asked.

"Oh, I guess the thing's all right," the storekeeper replied slowly, with a well-feigned attempt at thoughtfulness. "But what do I git out of it? What do I do?"

"Now, we'll get down to business," Brewer went on. "In reply to your first question, you get fifty per cent—one-half —of all the money you receive for lots that may be sold through you. Answering the second, you will give us a list of names of people in Colebrook who might be open to a good investment. We write them personally, stating the case exactly as it is, and refer them to you as our local agent. Then, if you sell them, they pick out the lots they want from the map we furnish you, and you send on half of the purchase price. If it's four hundred dollars, two hundred is—"

"I understand that all right," Northrup broke in, "but s'pose the lot they want is already sold?"

"In that case, we'll give them the one nearest the one they had chosen. But that is a mere trifle in comparison to our present arrangements. Tell me frankly what you think of the proposition."

"Why, it looks fair to me," the storekeeper drawled.

"Only fair?" Brewer queried.

"Wal, pretty fair," the old man said.

"Fair enough for you to take it up?"

"Wal, if they's money in it, I ain't the one to throw it down," Northrup laughed. "I'm allus out to make a few dollars whenever and wherever I kin."

"And that's the only way to be in this present-day world," Brewer contended. "But as to any definite decision on your part, that is not asked for at present. My object in coming here to-day is to get you to go back with me—that's all —and then, after seeing who we are and what we have to offer, you can make your own decision. Will you return with me?"

"Wal, I might do that," the old man answered slowly.

"When?"

"Oh, I dunno! When would you want me to?"

"The sooner the better. This afternoon, if you could."

"Couldn't do that," Northrup averred. "I'd have to git another clerk to take my place here in the store, an' I couldn't git him now till mornin'."

"That's plenty of time," Brewer assured him. "We could start early tomorrow."

Suddenly Northrup broke through the restraint in which he had held himself.

"I'll go ye!" he exclaimed eagerly. "An' we'll take the first train, if thet's agreeable."

"Perfectly," Brewer responded. "In fact, the earlier the better. Now, where shall we meet?"

"Why, I dunno," the storekeeper replied blankly. "Wot ye goin' to do between now an' then?"

"I had no definite plans. I suppose I'll just hang around town and kill time."

"Where ye stoppin'?"

"Nowhere as yet. I came direct from the train to your store. But there's a hotel in town, isn't there?"

"Yes, they's one, but they won't see you, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Brewer."

"Mr. Brewer," the old man continued, "yer goin' to spend the night at my house. I allus believe that one good turn deserves another. An' I'm goin' to show ye thet yer firm ain't the only people what kin extend hospitality. I kin do a little of thet myself."

"Now, here, that's too much—"

But the other cut Brewer short.

"No, 'tain't one bit too much, an' I insist on doin' it. My clerk'll be back soon, an' then we'll go over to the house fer lunch. Ye don't mind waitin' round the store a few minutes, do ye?"

"Not in the least," Brewer replied, a faint smile settling about his mouth that was unnoticed by the other.

II.

THE sun was just showing above the horizon the next morning when a heavy rapping on his door roused Brewer from a sound sleep, and in a half-awake tone he called: "Well?"

"Time to git up, if we're goin' to take thet early train," a voice, which he recognized as Northrup's, informed him.

"Be down in five minutes," he answered, and with a haste that was unusual for him, he threw himself into his clothes, smiling the while to himself as he recalled the success that had attended his trip to Colebrook.

All the previous day and into the night far beyond the storekeeper's usual bedhour, the two had talked over the future of Long Island real estate, until Mr. Northrup was as enthusiastic over it as the salesman himself, who cited case after case where small fortunes had been made by judicious investments.

Northrup had arranged matters at the store so that he could absent himself for a few days, and he looked forward with suppressed glee to his trip to the city—and the increased income Brewer assured him would be certain to follow.

The real-estate agent had dwelt well upon the character of the men behind his concern, and Northrup rejoiced inwardly at the prospect of meeting them face to face and upon an equal footing.

He had brought up the question as to how he had been heard of by them, and the other had replied, with a most reassuring smile, that they were in a position to get the names of every one known in their locality as a representative man and successful one.

The storekeeper's wife had already prepared a hearty breakfast for the two when Brewer descended to the dining-room, and the two men attacked it with a vim, the real-estate agent surprising himself at the appetite he had acquired.

But not so with Northrup. The excitement and anticipation of the approaching trip, and the subsequent results that were promised, robbed him of his usual interest in the first meal of the day; but he did such justice to it as he could, and soon arose from the table to hurry to his room, where his packed bag awaited him.

At the railroad station Brewer secured the tickets, even going so far as to give the storekeeper the one for his return trip. Then they boarded the train, and the start was made for New York.

The trip was an interesting one to the old man, who had not been to the metropolis for some years.

As they passed through the crowds at the big terminal, Mr. Northrup showed his confusion by gripping his friend's arm nervously. Then, when they reached the street, the noise and din of it all added to his distraction—it was so different from the quiet serenity of Colebrook—and it was with a sigh of relief that he found himself comfortably seated in a street-car.

"Here's where we get off," Brewer informed him presently.

When they stood upon the sidewalk the

real-estate man pointed to a majestic, imposing-looking structure.

"That is our building," he said.

Northrup stared up at the mass of stone and cement.

"Do you own thet?" he gasped.

"No, I didn't mean that we own it," the other smiled. "I mean that is the building where our offices are located. And, just to give you an idea as to what has been made from real-estate—the fortunes that have followed judicious investment in that direction—fifty years ago the land that building stands on could have been bought for a few thousand dollars. To-day you couldn't buy it for a million."

"Is that so?" the old man whispered in awe.

"It certainly is," Brewer assured him, a broad smile spreading over his face at the amazement his remarks had caused. "But, come on," he added quickly. "Let's go up to the offices."

Northrup followed obediently, completely awed by the massive entrance, the tile-work, and, last of all, by the elevators, which, as they shot upward, caused him much apprehension as to their safety. But before he could decide as to what would happen in the event of their falling, the car came to a sudden stop, and, as the door opened, Brewer stepped from it, and the old man followed after him.

"That's us," the salesman remarked jocularly as he pointed down the hall to a door upon which Northrup read in big gold letters: "The New York City Realty Mortgage and Investment Company."

Brewer led the way inside, and the old storekeeper found himself in a room that was plainly but well furnished, and as the door slammed behind them a gentleman came out of an inner office.

"Hallo, Mr. Brewer!" he greeted, then stopped short as he caught sight of the countryman.

"Mr. Northrup, shake hands with Mr. Harris," Brewer said. "Mr. Harris is our vice-president."

The other grasped the hand the old man extended.

"Very glad to meet you, Mr. Northrup," he declared.

Before the countryman could voice his pleasure at the meeting, Brewer added: "Mr. Harris, Mr. Northrup is to be our agent at Colebrook. He's very much interested in real estate as an investment."

"I'm glad to hear that," the other said. "You certainly are on the right track to future wealth; and, if you're interested now, wait until you see our development on Long Island. It will open your eyes." He turned quickly to Brewer: "When are you going down?"

"Why, I thought right away," was the reply. "There's a train at eleven-fifteen we can get, and be back in the city in time for a late lunch. What do you say to that plan, Mr. Northrup?"

"Suits me," replied the storekeeper.

"Very well. Just leave your grip here. Mr. Harris will take charge of it, and we'll hustle down on the island. He turned to the vice-president: "We'll see you when we return, Mr. Harris?"

"Yes, indeed," the other agreed, with a bow to the old man.

The ride across town was a silent one for the two men. Northrup was completely engrossed in all that was going on about him, and gazed wide-eyed from one side of the car to the other, much to Brewer's amusement.

At length the station was reached, and after procuring the tickets Brewer led the way to the forward part of the ferry-boat, from which vantage-point he explained to the other the various points of importance along the water-front, all of which were new and of interest to the storekeeper.

Leaving the boat they entered the train, and were soon being rushed across the level stretches of Long Island, in which Northrup showed a decided interest. As they passed various hamlets and villages, Brewer told him about each one, explaining the development that had been made there in the past few years, and dilating particularly upon the fortunes that had been derived from the rise of the real-estate values.

He did not lose the slightest opportunity to dwell upon this subject, and had the old man attempted mentally to figure the profits of it all, according to Brewer's statements, he would have had a Herculean task upon his hands.

"The next station is ours," the salesman told him finally, and Mr. Northrup watched with renewed concern the town into which they were drawing.

He noted the size of it and the class of

residences, which indicated there was much wealth in the community.

"Pretty slick-looking place, isn't it?" Brewer remarked.

"Certainly is," was the other's enthusiastic reply.

"Our property is just five minutes' walk from the center of the town," Brewer continued. "In the very finest part of it, and when you see what has been done there it'll open your eyes."

The two stepped from the train, and, taking the old man's arm, Brewer led him through the crowd and around to the main street, which was quite a pretentious business thoroughfare for a Long Island town.

"Pretty lively around here," the salesman chuckled. "More going on here in a day than in a year at Colebrook."

"I should say so," the other assented.

They were walking rapidly, and after a few blocks the houses became more scattered, until before their eyes opened up one of Long Island's prettiest real-estate developments. For nearly a mile in each direction stretched long, straight streets, curbed, and with wide sidewalks, while in the center of the main avenues were flower-gardens in full bloom, among which were artistically mingled shrubs, which, with their different-shaded leaves, added to the beauty of the scene.

All this struck the old man's eyes at once, and it bewildered him. And, as he stared blankly from one to the other of the fine houses that were scattered over the district, he marveled at the greatness of the project.

"Some class to this," Brewer said at length—he had hesitated to break in upon the thoughts that showed so plainly in Mr. Northrup's face.

"And now to business," he added decisively. "Those lots over there"—he indicated a corner a short distance away—"are worth two thousand dollars apiece. But we're selling them for a thousand."

"A thousand dollars!" the old man gasped.

He could hardly realize it, when he considered that in Colebrook that sum would be sufficient to buy many acres.

"Yes; and you ought to buy those two corner ones. You get both of them for the price others pay for one."

"But that seems a lot of money for such a little bit of land," Northrup objected. "It's—"

"Not at all," Brewer broke in. "Now, I'll tell you what we'll do. You keep these lots in mind, because I want to sell them to you.

"We'll go over to the other side of town, where another development has been made, and we'll pretend to be purchasers. No one over there knows me, and we'll look up the agent and get his prices. Then you'll realize what a bargain these two lots are at a thousand dollars."

The two men turned, and, walking rapidly, soon reached the property of which Brewer had spoken. The minute the old man cast his eyes over it, he saw that it was not to be compared with that at which he had just looked.

Everything seemed chaos. Teams were at work plowing out streets—some sidewalks were laid—and a few trees had been set out.

But the whole had the effect of disorder, and the general outlook was anything but tempting to the average buyer.

"Do you see any difference?" Brewer smiled.

"I should say so!" the old man exclaimed.

"Now, we'll find out their prices," the other went on. "That's their office over there. Come along."

They picked their way across the rough ground, and, as they neared the little building, a man who was standing in front of it turned toward them.

"I'll do the talking," Brewer whispered to the countryman. "Don't you say anything.

"Good morning," Brewer began, as they reached the little office. "Is there any one about who can tell me the prices you're asking for these lots?"

"That's what I'm here for," the other smiled.

"Well, I wanted to get two corner lots," Brewer continued. "Two in an excellent location."

He faced about, and, indicating with his finger a corner only a block away from where they stood, he added: "Say that corner over there. What are those two worth?"

"It's not what they're worth," the salesman replied, with a knowing smile. "It's

what we'll sell them for, that interests you. Those lots, when we finish our development, will be worth six or seven thousand dollars. They can be bought now for fifteen hundred dollars—three thousand for the two."

This information seemed to throw Brewer into a depth of thought; but he suddenly roused himself. "I'll think it over," he said.

"Better decide to-day. The prices advance as the development work goes on."

"I'll think it over," Brewer repeated, and walked away with the old man.

When they were a few feet off he said in an undertone:

"Are we offering bargains?"

"I should say so," Mr. Northrup declared with great enthusiasm. "If his is wuth three thousand, yours is wuth—oh, near ten."

"Right you are!" the salesman exclaimed. "I think I've proven to you what we're offering. And, take my advice—buy these two lots. As friend to friend, I promise you'll quadruple your money in six months."

"Wal, mebbe I might take 'em," Northrup replied slowly. "I'll decide when we git back to the office."

"Fine!" said Brewer warmly. "And, after looking over our property, don't you think you can sell some of it in Colebrook, particularly when they know that you, with your customary shrewdness and insight into investments, had purchased yourself?"

"I suttenly do," the old man rejoined; then repeated thoughtfully, "I suttenly do."

III.

THE return trip on the railroad was anything but a quiet one for the old man, with whom Brewer kept up a rapid fire of conversation, bringing out with full emphasis every point that he could relative to real estate and the possibilities it offered for making money. Northrup listened attentively, but all the while his mind was revolving the question as to the advisability of purchasing four lots instead of two.

"I just want to see Mr. Harris a moment," Brewer told him when they reached the offices of the company again. "Then we'll go for luncheon."

Just then Mr. Harris appeared—there was no one in the outer office—and, carefully closing the door after him, drew the other aside.

"Brewer, you recall those two corner lots we admired so the other day?" he said in a guarded tone, but one which was plainly audible to the old man.

"Yes."

"Well, I've got a man inside who wants them. He's our new agent at Durham. You haven't sold them yet, have you?"

"Well, not exactly." Brewer hesitated, and glanced toward Northrup. "I think our agent at Colebrook wants them," he added, with a smile.

"Then, that's different," the vice-president declared. "What price did you quote Mr. Northrup?"

"One thousand dollars net for the two," Brewer replied.

"And this fellow"—Harris jerked his head in the direction of the closed door—"this fellow will pay twelve hundred." He advanced toward Northrup. "If you want to turn them over to him, you'll make two hundred dollars, Mr. Northrup."

"But I—I—" The old man was completely dumfounded at this sudden turn of events.

"Our word is our bond," Brewer put in. "And we expect it is the same with those with whom we do business. You said you'd buy those lots, so they are yours.

"And if you've a chance to sell them and make two hundred dollars, it's your good fortune. In fact, it only shows how money can be made in Long Island real estate."

"Then, you'll sell them to this gentleman?" Harris queried before the storekeeper could collect his scattered thought sufficiently to reply.

Northrup nodded his consent.

"All right," the other remarked. "Wait here a moment and I'll bring your money out to you. This fellow is paying for them in cash, so I can give you the two hundred in currency."

Without another word Harris disappeared through the door that led into his office and closed it behind him.

"I guess that's bad," Brewer laughed. "Two hundred dollars without putting

up a cent. But it only shows you—proves to you, I should say—the high plane on which we conduct our business."

Before anything further could be said, the door to the inner office opened, and Harris came out with a roll of bills in his hand, which he held out to Northrup.

"Your profit," he smiled. "I'll see you later in the day," and again retired to the inner room.

"Thet's what I call workin' on the square," the old man exclaimed. "I see I've got with the right people, and we're goin' to do a heap of business together. An' I'm so derned anxious to begin it, I'm goin' to git right back to Colebrook an' git at it."

"Oh, not so soon," Brewer protested. "Stay a few days, now that you're down here."

"No, I'm goin' back," the other insisted. "The noise and racket gives me a headache, an' I want to git back an' sell lots to my friends afore they're all gone. But afore I leave, I want to buy four lots myself."

At this Brewer's eyes lighted up.

"You mean it?" he said.

"I sure do," the other returned. "And —no, dang it all, I want six. Pick me out six near thet corner where I made two hundred dollars. I think thet's a good-luck corner."

Brewer hurriedly procured a map, and, although the old man could not make the least thing out of it, he studied it carefully and then decided upon six lots which the other advised him to take.

"All right, I'll buy them," Northrup declared enthusiastically. "How much are they?"

"Let me see," and the other drew out a pencil, and as he figured on a sheet of paper he continued:

"Those lots are worth nine hundred apiece—a hundred dollars less than the other ones. Six times nine is fifty-four, and a half of fifty-four is twenty-seven." He looked up at the old man. "Those six will cost you two thousand and seven hundred dollars."

"And wuth every cent of it," the old man asserted. "I'll give ye my check right now," and before he had finished speaking he drew out his book and filled out a draft for the required sum.

Brewer took it eagerly.

"We'll mail you your deed in a few days," he said. "It takes a couple of days to get it recorded, you know."

"Oh, thet don't matter," the storekeeper assured him. "As long as I got the lots, thet's all I care about. An' now thet thet's done, I'm goin' home."

"I wish you'd stay a couple of days," Brewer demurred.

"No, I must git back, so if ye'll git together yer maps and prices, I'll begin doin' business ez soon ez I arrive there."

Brewer hunted about the office, and, finding a large map, he spread it before him, and proceeded to write in on it the prices of each lot, and when he had completed the task the old man folded it carefully and placed it in his pocket.

"Thet'll be hung in a prominent place in my store," he remarked. "An' me an' you is goin' to do a hull lot of business. Knowin' ye as I do, I kin recommend ye to all my friends. An', by gorry! I'm goin' to do it! Now, I'm for home!"

"I'll go with you to the railroad station," Brewer insisted. "But I'm sorry you're leaving. I'd like to have you stay down for a few days. We could get better acquainted."

"An' I'd like to, too, but I can't," the old man returned. "An' as you say you're goin' to the depot with me, let's start."

And the two men left the office, Brewer affectionately taking the old man's arm.

IV.

TWENTY-FOUR hours after Northrup had arrived home, with rarely an exception every one for miles around knew of the old man's interest in Long Island real estate, and how without even paying one cent on a purchase he had sold his property within an hour at a big cash profit. As to the exact size of this profit, opinions varied, as in the passing along of the news the exact amount had been very much swollen.

But it set people to talking, with the result that Northrup's store became a gathering-place for folks who had grown real-estate mad.

When a community becomes wildly enthusiastic over one special thing, and that real-estate investments, there is only one result—so Northrup found it.

He also found that he was selling more real estate than groceries; but this fact did not disturb him—a sale of one lot meant profits as big as two or three months' sales of the commodities stocked upon his shelves.

And the fever to buy seemed to be spreading. Every day he was sending a good-sized check to the New York City Realty Mortgage and Investment Company, and every day people were coming to him from some distance—people he did not know, but who had heard of his real-estate deal—and investing their money in Long Island soil.

For three weeks this condition of affairs kept up, and the old man rubbed his hands with glee as he saw the figures of his bank-account rapidly increasing. And he thanked his lucky stars that a kind Providence had seen fit to beam upon him sufficiently to send Mr. Brewer to him. He whistled to himself constantly as he busied himself about the store, his entire mind riveted upon the subject that was on it—real estate.

He had sent his clerk to the post-office for the morning mail one day, and as he sauntered in Northrup took the four or five letters handed him and sorted them over carelessly. Then all of a sudden he became rigidly erect, and his eyes bulged from their sockets as he held an envelope before him and stared at it, speechless with amazement.

It was unnecessary to tear it open—the contents he knew well, as it was the last letter he had sent to the real-estate company in New York, enclosing his check for the last sale.

But the envelope told the story, as stamped across it was the information that the United States government was holding up and returning to the senders all mail addressed to this concern.

It was fully five minutes before the old man could collect his thoughts sufficiently to realize what it meant to him—how he had been the means of getting his friends to buy the property, and now if anything was wrong—but he quickly checked this train of thought, and insisted to himself that there must be some mistake.

He *knew* that Mr. Brewer was all right, and—

"I'll do it!" he suddenly exclaimed.

Then, turning to his clerk, he added: "Thomas, I'm goin' to New York, an' you'll hev to 'tend store fer the rest of the day. I may be back to-night, an' I may not. I don't know."

Without further words, he hurried to his home next door and acquainted his wife with the fact that he was going to town on the next train.

But he carefully avoided telling her why, simply adding that his business might keep him till the next day.

It didn't take the old man long to prepare for his trip, and he was at the station impatiently awaiting the arrival of the train when it pulled in. Before it reached New York the storekeeper was quite beside himself with nervousness and apprehension.

Once arrived, by dint of asking a policeman he quickly reached the large building he remembered so well. He dashed into it, and was soon before the gold-lettered door behind which, only a few weeks previous, he had felt himself started on the road to wealth. Turning the knob, he pressed against it, and as he did so the color left his face. The door was locked!

The storekeeper pushed desperately, then rapped loudly, waited a few seconds, and repeated his knock. But there was no reply—and, with a heart heavy with misgivings, he turned away.

Then suddenly a thought occurred to him—how foolish it was to take the matter so seriously. All his friends who had purchased had their deeds, so they were protected.

Then it occurred to him that undoubtedly Mr. Brewer and Mr. Harris were both out at the property, and he resolved to go there at once himself.

When the town to which Brewer had taken him was reached, he hurried through it in the direction of his land.

When it came into view, the beautiful development caused him to smile to himself as he realized that a portion of all this really belonged to him.

At sight of a man walking in his direction, Northrup hurried to meet him, thinking it might be Brewer. But he soon saw he was mistaken.

"Looking for any one?" the stranger queried as they came face to face.

"Wal, yes, I am," replied the store-

keeper. "I'm looking for Mr. Brewer. Ye ain't seen him, hev ye? Or Mr. Harris?" he added before the other could reply.

"Don't know the gentlemen," was the answer. "Who are they?"

"They own all this land here," and as he spoke Mr. Northrup waved his hand in the direction of the property about them.

The stranger looked at the old man quizzically before replying, then he queried:

"You say they *own* this land?"

"Yes, of course." Northrup was rather nettled at the other's manner. "Thet is, the New York City Realty Mortgage and Investment Company owns it, and they's with thet concern."

"Why, that's impossible!" the other burst out. "This entire piece of land is owned by Saegar & Jordan. I never heard of the firm you mention."

The old man was too taken aback to speak.

The other stared at him questioningly, then asked:

"But what gave you the idea this other concern owned this land?"

"They did!" Northrup insisted. "They brought me down here an' showed it to me, an' there's six lots over there by thet corner thet's mine. I bought 'em an' paid for 'em."

The other man now felt certain he had an insane person to deal with, so he remarked soothingly:

"Of course, if such is the case, I'm wrong; but, to the best of my knowledge, these lots are unsold. In fact, I did not know anything right in that spot had been bought."

"Wal, I should say they has," Northrup insisted. "An' I am the one who has sold 'em." He fumbled in his pocket, and, drawing out a huge wallet, pulled from it his deed. "Guess thet proves my ownership of 'em."

The stranger took the paper, and gazed at it intently a moment; then looked up at the storekeeper.

"Why, do you know what property this is a deed for?" he asked.

"Guess I do," the old man declared. "Them lots right over there."

"No, it isn't," the other told him. "And now that I see what it is, I recall hearing of this firm into whose hands you have fallen. The property this deed represents is over about two miles from here, on the marsh-flats, and the whole thing is under water at high tide. This concern was crooked as they make 'em, and pretended to sell you this property, when in reality the stuff they sold you isn't worth five dollars an acre."

Northrup staggered back. "Isn't what?" he cried.

"Just what I said. This stuff you've bought isn't worth five dollars an acre. And you can thank your lucky stars they didn't rope you in for any more than they have according to this deed."

"Any more than that!" flashed through the old man's mind as he thought of all his friends had bought, and how they had done so on his recommendation.

V.

"But they must be some mistake," Northrup declared, at last recovering from his daze. "They must be!"

"There was a mistake, all right," the other rejoined; "but you made it—not the people from whom you bought."

"But what kin I do?" the old man asked excitedly. "Surely, they's some law an' justice in this town. They suttenly don't allow one man deliberately to steal another's money and make no attempt to punish the criminal."

"Indeed they don't," the other returned emphatically. "An' if they catch them, they'll quickly prove it to you. But there's the point—catch 'em. They're probably well under cover by this time. What made you suspicious of them?"

The old man ruefully drew from his pocket the envelope that had been returned to him, and the other studied it intently for a moment. Then he said: "Well, you can gamble that just as soon as they learned a fraud order had been issued against them, they hot-footed it for parts unknown."

"Then they ain't much chance of my catchin' 'em," the storekeeper murmured sadly.

"Not of *your* doing so, that's certain. But I'd put the case up to the police. In the first place, I'd go down-town to the county clerk's office and see him. Explain all the details, and he'll put you on

the right track of how to proceed. That's the best thing for you to do. The office is just across from the railroad station."

"I'll—I'll try that," Northrup said thoughtfully, and with a parting "I'm much 'bliged to ye," he faced about and retraced his steps to the town, leaving the other staring after him, to murmur, when the old man was out of hearing: "What a mark!"

The storekeeper's steps lagged as he neared the center of the town—he dreaded the confirmation of what this stranger had told him—and, after a query as to where to find the office of which he was in search, he entered it timidly and briefly told the story of his troubles.

It took very little time, and very few words of the clerk in charge, to convince Northrup that he had been duped by a clever gang of swindlers. Totally unable to decide what course to pursue, he was about to leave the place, when he faced the clerk again, a look of despair on his countenance that excited the other's pity.

"Are ye sure it's all just as ye say?" he pleaded.

"Just as sure as I am sorry for you," the man returned. "The deed shows for itself, and I have recorded a number of them in the past few weeks, and wondered why any one would buy that waste land. But wait a moment," he added, and, reaching for a large map, he traced it with a lead-pencil, and said: "This is the spot, and here's the creek that runs through it. And I also recall that the deeds were lumped—that is, the sales were kept together."

"An' I made 'em," the old man wailed.

"*You* made them!" the other repeated in astonishment.

The storekeeper nodded his head sadly. "I was their agent at Colebrook."

"Well, the only thing for you to do is to consult the authorities," the other told him. "These sales are right along the creek, on both sides. But as for ever being used for building lots, that's an utter impossibility. There's nothing there but white sand, and plenty of it; but pretty sand isn't worth much, particularly when part of it is covered with water at high tide."

"What'll I do?" the old man groaned. "My neighbors'll blame me for it, an' I *am* to blame." Then he added: "But I'll make it good to 'em if it takes me the rest of my life to do it."

With a nod of his head, he turned about and, leaving the office in a dull, dazed way, directed his footsteps toward the station; and, when the train came in, started on his return journey to the city. But this time he did not see the country through which they were passing—instead, his head was dropped to his chest in an attitude of absolute despair.

He had not reasoned as to what step to take next when he reached Manhattan again, and for a moment he hesitated; then a decision came to him—one that had a semblance of hope in it—and he acted accordingly.

He would go back to the offices of the company—it was just possible that Brewer or Harris might be there, and it was also barely possible they might be able to explain matters.

He stepped from the elevator and walked down the hall to the door embellished with the imposing gold letters; but when he placed his hand on the knob, the portal still failed to open. All hope was now gone, and he stood there, a man crushed beneath a weight of misery.

His limbs seemed to refuse to support the load of trouble he was carrying, and his knees became soft and wabbly. He seized the door-knob again to steady himself, and as he did so his head dropped to his chest as it had on the train.

For a moment he remained in this position, his eyes closed. Then he opened them again, and was about to turn away, when the corner of an envelope just protruding from beneath the door caught his attention.

Mechanically he reached for it. But it didn't come out instantly—it seemed wedged; and, with a new hope that it might contain some news, he pulled desperately, determined to see what it was.

The old man heard the thing tear; but this did not stop him—he pulled the harder, and it suddenly yielded to his force. But when it came out the bigger part of the envelope had been torn off. It was addressed to Mr. Harris, and bore no stamp, proving that it had been delivered by messenger.

Northrup didn't consider it wrong to read the letter under the circumstances.

So, with a pull, he drew the sheet out of the torn envelope and held it before him.

Slowly and carefully he read the contents, and of a sudden a great light suffused his countenance. Once more he was a man again, blessed with a new life that was overweighted with excitement. He turned and literally ran down the hall to the elevators.

"Where's—where's Number 102 Twentieth Street?" he asked breathlessly of the operator, as that individual opened the car-door for him.

The man gazed at him an instant before replying, somewhat taken back at the suddenness of the question; then he gave the old man full directions, and he started off at a pace that was far faster than the one to which he was accustomed, and soon reached his destination.

Northrup rushed up to the clerk at the desk, and drawing the crumpled letter from his pocket — the one he had taken from under the door of the real-estate office—he demanded: "Did you write this?"

The man addressed was somewhat taken back by the words and manner of the old countryman, but, after glancing at the letter, replied: "Mr. Snowden did."

"Then let me see him, quick," the storekeeper went on. As the clerk disappeared, he paced the room nervously, ever and anon glancing toward the sign on the door, which read: "The White Sand Brick Company of America."

The clerk quickly returned, and, beckoning to Northrup, ushered him into the private office.

"You want to buy some land on Long Island?" Northrup burst out, holding the letter out to the man he found there, who stared quizzically at him.

"Why, yes, we do. But what have you to do with it, and where did you get that letter?"

In as few words as possible the old man explained the whole circumstance that had led up to his call, ending with the information that he and his associates owned the land these people desired to purchase for the establishment of their plant, where they intended to manufacture bricks from white sand under a new and patented process.

Then came the dickering as to price; and, although the first offer was very low, the old man realized it was only a feeler, and stuck out for a larger one—one that would show a profit to those to whom he had sold. He managed to raise the other man somewhat, but could not secure a bid that would show a substantial gain to the present owners of the land.

Here they haggled for some time, and at length Northrup realized the other was weakening. So he held out, and eventually received a bid that, together with the commissions he had received, showed a fair profit to all. After getting it in writing, he explained the entire case, with the resultant understanding that the offer would hold good for two days.

Overjoyed by the unlooked-for turn of events, he hurried from the office and to the train which would land him in Colebrook late that evening.

VI.

It was hardly daylight the next morning when Northrup arose, and immediately after breakfast started out to see the people to whom he had sold Long Island sand lots.

Without telling them of the way things stood, he advised them to sell and take a fair profit. He did not tell them how nearly they had come to being swindled, nor how he was going to return to them a large part of the money he had made by the sales; but, receiving the power to sell—they all placed implicit confidence in his judgment — he started for New York just after lunch, and arriving there before his buyer had left the office, the transfer was quickly made.

With a light heart, he again turned his face Colebrookward.

While on the train he figured up the profits each one would receive by reducing his own, and rejoiced inwardly at the fact that they were not losers through following his advice.

"But I'm through with buyin' real-estate," he murmured aloud. "They's a sharp bunch. But thet Brewer an' Harris—I'll bet they'd bite one of their fingers off they knew how their agent at Colebrook so effectually turned the tables on 'em."

The Man Who Ran Away.*

BY BERTRAM LEBHAR,

Author of "His Handicap Mate," "When a Man's Hungry," "The Isle of Mysteries," etc.

Discord in Bachelors' Hall, Followed By a Tragedy which Precipitated Mystery of the Deepest Dye.

CHAPTER XIX.

"YOU'RE MY PRISONER."

TOMLINSON was about to state his name and the nature of his business; but, happening to think that by assuming an official rôle he might be better able to gain his point, he whispered significantly: "I'm from the station-house."

"Ha! A policeman!" exclaimed the little man in a much less fierce tone. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Your name is Marx—H. Marx—and you have a jewelry-store at 509 Sixth Avenue, I believe," said Tomlinson.

The other nodded.

"Well, we're investigating a little case—nothing wrong as far as you're concerned, I assure you; but we want you to help us."

"I'm always glad to do anything within my power to help the police," said the jeweler pleasantly.

"That's good. Well, I want you to tell me whether you have sold any goods recently to a young man named Fred Hanson, of Winsdale, New York?"

Mr. Marx appeared to be lost in thought.

"Let me see," he murmured, his eyes fixed on the ceiling. "Fred Hanson. No, I can't say that I recall that name. But then, of course, I have many cash customers whose names I never learn. This young man may have been among them."

"Humph! Yes. That's so. Well, did you sell any young man a diamond sunburst yesterday?"

"No," replied the jeweler without hesitation. "I can answer that question offhand. Business has been very bad of late, and I haven't sold anything as elaborate as a diamond sunburst in a week."

Tomlinson heaved a sigh of disappointment. He had hoped that his visit to Mr. Marx might result in the disclosure that Gaines, after murdering and robbing Hawthorne, had sold the sunburst to this Sixth Avenue jeweler, and that Fred Hanson, desiring to purchase a birthday present for Miss Willis, had, by an unfortunate coincidence, dropped into Marx's store a little later and innocently purchased that very sunburst.

Of course, this theory was not very plausible; but it appeared to be the only way of explaining how Hanson could have come into possession of the sunburst without being guilty of foul play, and, therefore, Tomlinson was willing to accept it.

Mr. Marx's positive statement that he had not sold a diamond sunburst to anybody within the past week effectively knocked this hope on the head. Of course, the jeweler might not be telling the truth; but Tomlinson had no means of proving that such was the case.

But suddenly another inspiration came to him.

"Have you sold any article of jewelry recently to a young man named Clarence Gaines, of Winsdale, New York?" he inquired eagerly.

Again the jeweler thought hard.

"No, I don't recall that name either," he replied. "But, of course, it's possible that he also may have been among my cash customers.

"To the best of my recollection, the only sale I've made recently to any party living in Winsdale was to a Japanese gentleman named — named — well, the name has slipped my memory; but he lived in a house called Bachelors' Hall.

* *Began January* ARGOSY. *Single copies, 10 cents.*

I remember the address perfectly, because it is such an odd one."

"Wasn't his name Kanako?" cried Tomlinson eagerly.

The jeweler nodded.

"Yes. That's it. Mr. Kanako, of Bachelors' Hall, Winsdale. He came to my store a couple of weeks ago, and purchased a pair of gold cuff-buttons for seven dollars. The buttons had to be engraved, and so he didn't take them with him. I sent them to him by express."

"Ha!" shouted Tomlinson excitedly. "And you sent those cuff-buttons in a little blue pasteboard box, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir, of course. We always send our orders out in such boxes. Why, what's wrong—"

"Nothing wrong. Everything is all right. I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Marx; you've given me a very valuable piece of information."

And, greatly to the jeweler's surprise, Tomlinson abruptly turned on his heel and rushed down the stairs.

For a few seconds the jeweler stood in the doorway of his apartment in a daze. Then he muttered, with a shake of his head: "That fellow may be a policeman; but there ain't any doubt in my mind that he's stark crazy. Otherwise, why should he have run off like that?"

But Tomlinson felt that he had good reason for his haste. He wanted to get back to Winsdale as soon as possible in order to interview Kanako, the Japanese steward.

The jeweler had supplied him with an important and surprising clue. The pasteboard box in which the sunburst had been enclosed had doubtless belonged to the Jap.

And what did this mean? Could it be possible that Kanako had had a hand in the murder of Hawthorne and in the sending of that sunburst to Miss Willis?

"Good Heavens!" he gasped. "I ought to have suspected that Jap before now. Funny that I never gave him a thought. He may not have committed that murder alone and unaided; but the fact that that little blue box was his property certainly makes it look as if he took part in the crime. I must have a talk with him at once."

He walked hurriedly toward the Subway, but at a street corner he collided violently with a man hastening in the opposite direction.

"Careful there, you blithering idiot! Can't you look where you're walking?" he cried; for the other man had bumped up against the arm which had been most severely burned, and the pain which resulted was excruciating.

"Blithering idiot, yourself!" retorted the other indignantly. "It was your—Why, hallo, Tom!"

"Good Heavens!" cried Tomlinson, staggering back with amazement. "It's Fred Hanson."

"Sure," replied the other with a smile. "I'm sorry I bumped into you, Tom; but it was your fault. You were violating the rules of the road and— Hallo! See who's here! Chief of Police Hodgins and Coroner Weston. What the deuce are you fellows doing in New York at this unearthly hour?"

Chief Hodgins and Dr. Weston had managed to keep closely on the trail of Tomlinson without his having the slightest suspicion of that fact, and now that they saw him conversing with Fred Hanson, they eagerly hurried toward the pair.

"Young man," exclaimed Winsdale's chief of police, hastily producing a pair of handcuffs and deftly adjusting them on Hanson's wrists, "you're my prisoner! We've got you good and proper, and it ain't no use struggling."

"Your prisoner!" gasped Hanson, tugging frenziedly at the handcuffs. "What on earth for?"

"For the murder of Stanley Hawthorne—and for the crime of arson besides," replied the chief grimly. "Reckon it don't surprise you much to hear that. Take hold of this other young villain, please, coroner. We might as well put him under arrest, too."

CHAPTER XX.

HANSON EXPLAINS.

"STANLEY HAWTHORNE murdered! Good Heavens, man, what are you saying?" Hanson was apparently aghast.

"You know darn well what I'm saying," growled Chief Hodgins. "Don't try to palm off the innocent act on us, young feller, because it won't work.

Come along now, the pair of you. It won't do any good to stand here talking. If you've got anything to say, you'd better save it until you get your day in court."

"Tom," cried Hanson, turning toward his friend, "is there any truth in what this fellow says? Is Hawthorne really dead?"

Tomlinson nodded grimly.

"Yes, it's true, Fred. I hope it's equally true that you didn't kill him."

"I kill him! Good Heavens, man, why should you suspect that? You don't mean to say that you think me capable of committing murder?"

"Why did you run away?" groaned Tomlinson. "For Heaven's sake, Fred, if you've got any reasonable explanation to offer, hurry up and tell us why you left Winsdale so hurriedly and so mysteriously this morning over an hour before your customary time."

"Sure, I can easily explain that," replied Hanson. "I got up earlier than usual this morning, because my watch had stopped. I woke up suddenly and looked at my watch, and saw that the hands pointed to ten minutes after seven. I didn't know that the watch had stopped at that time the night before; and thinking that it was really past seven o'clock, that Kanako had forgotten to waken me as usual, and that I had overslept myself, I hurried into my clothes and, without waiting to take any breakfast, rushed out. I have been getting down to the office pretty late the past few weeks, as you know, and the boss had cautioned me about it.

"I ran all the way to the station. A train was just in, and I just caught it by the skin of my teeth. It wasn't until I arrived at the Grand Central Depot that I discovered my mistake, and found that I had taken an earlier train than usual, and was more than an hour ahead of time."

Chief Hodgins received this explanation with a guffaw of incredulity.

"That's the silliest, weakest story I've ever heard put up by a man accused of murder!" he roared. "Ran away because your watch stopped, eh?

"And if you was so darned anxious to get to your office on time," he went on. "perhaps you can tell us why it is that you ain't been near your office at all, all day. That fact doesn't tally with the rest of your story at all, you young liar."

"Yes. How can you explain that, Fred?" cried Tomlinson anxiously. "Your employers say they haven't heard from you all day. Where have you been, and what have you been doing?"

"I can explain that also," replied Hanson quickly. "When I stepped out of the Grand Central Depot, and realized that I was so early, I was wondering what I was going to do with that extra hour; and had decided to stop somewhere and get some breakfast, when suddenly I espied a man walking along Forty-Second Street, at sight of whom I almost fell over with surprise and excitement.

"It was a fellow named Towers. You may have heard me speak of him, Tom. He and his wife are important witnesses in one of the biggest cases our office has ever handled. They are unwilling witnesses, however, and thus far have been successful in dodging our process servers.

"For the past three weeks we had lost track of them altogether, and had heard that they had left the State, and therefore were beyond our reach.

"Our case comes up next week, and without the testimony of this man and his wife we stand no chance of winning it.

"Consequently, when I saw that man on Forty-Second Street, I realized that there was only one thing to do.

"I couldn't serve him with a subpœna then and there, for the reason that I didn't have the papers with me; but I could follow him around all day and find out where he and his wife were stopping, and then get into communication with the office and have them send somebody up with the necessary documents.

"That's why I haven't been near the office. I've been trailing that fellow and, either intentionally or unintentionally—I don't know which—he's led me a pretty chase."

"And do you mean to say that in all that time you didn't get one chance to communicate with your employers—not even by telephone?" sneered Chief Hodgins.

"Yes, sir, I do mean to say that; and I'm telling you the truth, too. That fellow kept me constantly on the jump the whole day. I never saw such a busy man.

He must have visited a hundred places, and I came near losing him twenty different times. I've been riding all over town on surface cars, Elevated trains, and the Subway. I tell you, I had my work cut out to keep on his trail."

"Didn't he go in anywhere to get something to eat?" sneered the chief of police.

"Yes. He had dinner in a restaurant on Fulton Street."

"Well, couldn't you have telephoned your office while he was eating?"

"Yes. I did have an opportunity then, and I tried to take advantage of it. When I saw that he was safely seated at a table, eating a portion of roast pork, I thought I could take a chance, and I went into the telephone-booth in front of the restaurant and called up my office."

"But they say they haven't heard from you all day!" exclaimed Tomlinson in surprise.

"I know they haven't. As luck would have it, Central informed me that their wire was busy. I waited in the booth about fifteen minutes before I could get a connection; and then, just when I did get it, the man I was trailing rose from his chair and walked out of the restaurant. Either he was a mighty hasty eater, or else he didn't have enough appetite to finish his meal. At any rate, I saw him leaving, through the glass door of the telephone-booth, and I had to throw down the receiver and rush out after him before I had a chance to speak a single word into the phone.

"That was the only opportunity he gave me. Since then he's kept me constantly on the go. I haven't even had a chance to get a bite to eat.

"I was following him just now, when I bumped into Tomlinson here; and now, of course, all my day's work has gone for nothing. You've made me lose the fellow."

"That's a very ingenious story, young man," remarked Dr. Weston, who up to this time had not uttered a word: "but there is something else you will have to explain. You sent a diamond sunburst as a birthday present to Miss Winifred Willis?"

Tomlinson, watching Fred Hanson's face keenly, noted that it turned first pale and then a fiery red at the coroner's question.

"Well, supposing I did," he snapped defiantly. "What about it?"

"Where did you get it?"

"I bought it, of course. You don't suppose I stole it, do you?"

Chief Hodgins greeted this indignant retort with a boisterous laugh.

"We don't *suppose* you stole that diamond sunburst, young man. We *know* you stole it."

"That's a lie!" cried Hanson hotly. "I bought it yesterday afternoon from a jeweler on Maiden Lane, and I can easily prove it."

"How much did you pay for it, Fred?" cried Tomlinson eagerly.

"Twenty dollars," replied the other.

Chief Hodgins gave vent to another boisterous laugh.

"Twenty dollars!" he roared. "Gee whiz, doctor, that's pretty rich, ain't it? Why, that sunburst is worth every penny of three thousand."

"Worth three thousand dollars!" cried Hanson. "Bah, you're crazy, man! It was a plain little pin, consisting of one small diamond, surrounded with pearls, and it wasn't worth any more than I paid for it. What are you fellows trying to get at, anyway?"

Greatly to his surprise, Tomlinson gave a shout of joy, and became very much excited at this answer.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "I see it all now. Tell me, Fred, when and where did you mail your present to Miss Willis?"

"I didn't mail it myself. I gave it to Kanako to mail yesterday evening. Of course, I didn't know at the time that —that Winifred was engaged to Stanley Hawthorne. When I learned that I asked Kanako for the package again, intending to throw it away, but he told me that he had already mailed it."

"Ha!" cried the excited Tomlinson, and produced from his pocket the lid of the little cardboard box which Winifred Willis had given him.

"Fred," he said eagerly, "take a good look at this, and tell me if it is the lid of the box in which your sunburst was enclosed."

"No," replied Hanson, without an instant's hesitation. "It was a white box, and only half the size of that."

"Ah!" cried Tomlinson again. "That makes everything as clear as daylight.

Instead of mailing your package, the treacherous Jap kept it himself; and this morning, after he had murdered poor Stanley and stolen his jewels from him, he opened the package and, taking out the cheap little pin you bought he inserted in its place the valuable diamond sunburst which he stole from Hawthorne.

"The original cardboard box in which your pin came wasn't big enough to hold the other sunburst, and so the Jap used this larger box which he happened to have in his room. Then he came to New York and mailed the package to Miss Willis, so as to throw suspicion upon you."

His three listeners gazed at Tomlinson in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Say," growled Chief Hodgins, in a tone of deep disgust, "you ain't going to try to make out that that poor Jap committed the murder, are you? Do you take us for fools, young feller?"

"That Jap killed poor Hawthorne and set fire to Bachelors' Hall as sure as we stand here," declared Tomlinson, and he proceeded to tell what he had learned from Marx, the Sixth Avenue jeweler.

Coroner Weston was a broad-minded man, and he listened to Tomlinson with great interest. There was something about Fred Hanson's manner which, to the coroner's mind, bespoke his innocence.

"I wonder if it could have been the Jap after all?" he muttered.

"Not a bit of it," cried Chief Hodgins impatiently. "This chap here committed that murder, and this other rascal was his accomplice. Don't let them string you, coroner. We've got the real murderer under arrest now, and it will take more than a piece of blue cardboard to convince me to the contrary."

Tomlinson shrugged his shoulders.

"Have it your own way, chief—for the present. Take us back to Winsdale and throw us into cells; but, for goodness sake, don't fail to get hold of that Jap before he has a chance to leave the country."

Tomlinson and Hanson were duly taken back to Winsdale and locked up in the strongest cells the jail boasted, and Chief Hodgins went around for several hours afterward with his chest thrown out and his head held high.

"Guess the Winsdale police department ain't so slow, after all," he remarked proudly to Coroner Weston. "Here it is less than twenty-four hours after the murder, and I've already got the murderer and his accomplice behind the bars. Guess that isn't such rotten work, eh, doc? I don't think the New York police could have done so well. The newspapers will be singing my praises to-morrow."

It was not until, at Dr. Weston's earnest solicitation, he set out to find Kanako, and discovered that the Japanese steward was nowhere to be found, that he began to experience a slight doubt as to the success of his work.

CHAPTER XXI.

A REMARKABLE CONFESSION.

CHIEF HODGINS was forced to admit that the Jap's disappearance did "look sort of funny," and he went about Winsdale with a somewhat worried air for several days afterward.

He refused to believe, however, that Hanson and Tomlinson were innocent, and insisted upon keeping the two young men in jail until the next meeting of the grand jury.

Dr. Weston, on the other hand, was more than half inclined to believe that Tomlinson was correct in accusing the Jap of the murder.

At the formal inquest the jury, at his request, brought in a verdict to the effect that Hawthorne had been wilfully murdered by some unknown person.

The coroner visited Tomlinson in his cell, and had a long talk with him. The newspaper man expressed his belief that the Jap would go back to his own country, and suggested that the police of San Francisco be notified and requested to keep a sharp lookout for him.

As a result, Kanako was arrested in Frisco a week later. He was captured in a pawn-shop in the act of trying to raise money on a single diamond earring; and when it was found that this earring was one of the pair which had been stolen from Hawthorne, the authorities had no difficulty in having him extradited.

When he arrived in Winsdale, in the custody of two of Chief Hodgins's men, the Jap for a time vehemently protested his innocence and denied that Hanson had given the package to him to mail.

But, after much cross-examination, he finally broke down and admitted that he had killed and robbed Hawthorne and set fire to Bachelors' Hall.

His confession did not surprise Tomlinson, of course; but the latter was very much amazed at the motive for the crime which the Jap revealed.

"I did not kill him because I wanted those diamonds," the fellow declared. "I killed him because he was going to marry the beautiful lady who lived next door.

"I loved the beautiful lady; but, because of my yellow skin and my race, I knew that I stood no chance, and therefore I did not dare to speak of my love to her.

"But, I thought to myself, some day I will win her, even though I am not of her race; and, therefore, when I heard Mr. Hawthorne tell the other gentlemen that he was going to marry her, I became crazy with jealousy and despair, and that night I crept into his room with murder in my heart.

"He awoke as I entered, and was going to shoot me with the revolver under his pillow; but when I spoke, and he recognized my voice, he was reassured, and I was able to reach his bedside and strangle him before he had any idea of my intentions.

"A little later I heard Mr. Hanson moving around in the next room, and soon afterward saw him run out of the house.

"I didn't know why he had left the house so early; but immediately I conceived the idea of making him appear guilty of the murder.

"I was jealous of him, too; for I knew that he stood high in the favor of the beautiful lady next door, and I said to myself: 'With these two fellows out of the way, maybe I shall stand some chance, even though my skin is yellow.'

"Mr. Hanson had given me a package to mail to the lady the evening before, and I had not mailed it because I was so madly jealous that I did not want her to receive any gifts from him.

"After I had killed Mr. Hawthorne and taken the jewelry from under his pillow, and after I had seen Mr. Hanson run out of the house, I conceived the idea of placing that sunburst in the package and mailing it to the lady, so as to throw suspicion on Mr. Hanson.

"The sunburst would not fit the box, and so I went to my room and got a bigger box, which I had got with a pair of cuff-buttons I had bought on Sixth Avenue some days before.

"Then I went down into the cellar of Bachelors' Hall and started a fire there, placing near the spot where the fire started a silver match-box of Mr. Hanson's, which I had picked up on the porch that night, so as to throw suspicion on him still more.

"Then, after the house had burned down, and we were all examined in the office of his lordship the coroner, I went to New York and mailed the package containing the sunburst.

"The earrings I intended to keep, and expected to sell them later, or in order to pay my passage back to Japan; for I intended to return to my own country for a time, so that, in case I was suspected after all, I should be out of danger.

"But I dropped one of the earrings somewhere, and couldn't find it. The other one, as you know, I was trying to pawn when I was arrested.

"Mr. Hawthorne's revolver is at the bottom of Winsdale Creek. I dropped it there. I wish to say again, and most emphatically, that I did not kill him in order to rob him—I killed him out of love for the beautiful lady who lived next door."

This amazing confession, of course, resulted in the thorough vindication of both Fred Hanson and Tomlinson.

It also resulted in a reunion of the surviving members of the ill-fated Bachelors' Hall, for Tomlinson and Gaines exchanged mutual apologies for having suspected each other, and became very good friends again.

Gaines and Corbett also made profuse apologies to Fred Hanson for having believed him guilty, and the city editor of the *Star* apologized to Tomlinson for having threatened to fire him for protesting his friend's innocence. He welcomed the reporter back to the staff with open arms and the increase of salary he had promised.

As for Chief Hodgins, he didn't offer any apologies to anybody; but for months afterward he went around with a pitifully abashed and hang-dog air. He studiously kept out of Tomlinson's way for fear the

latter should remind him of his rash promise to resign his position if he couldn't send Fred Hanson to the electric chair.

But Tomlinson, as a matter of fact, had no desire to insist upon his pound of flesh. He was too happy at the satisfactory way in which things had turned out to bear any resentment against the corpulent chief of police.

Tomlinson's views regarding matrimony and the other sex also underwent a surprising change.

So much so that when, several months later, Fred Hanson requested him to be his best man, he willingly consented.

THE END.

MY JONAH DAY.

BY GERALD N. COE.

A Yarn By a Ship's Cook, in Which Game-Cocks Play a Part Not Set Down in the Menu.

"ABAFT and belay! Man the starboard after-braces! Up anchor! Heave round the capstan! Smash that lazy Chink a wallop on his howlin' ear! Off nippers! Hook the cat! Haul the bowlines! Now let her go, you ignorant, Fourth-of-July, fire-eatin' sons of demons!"

Them was the words Captain Blink, of the freighter Kafloozalem addressed to the mongrel crew as he was getting under way at Frisco.

I was standing abaft the binnacle, or in some such seagoing spot, and looking a little nor'-nor'east, as I recollect it now. It was to be my first voyage, and I was somewhat expectant.

"By the livin', bleedin' lee-scuppers," I says to myself, the same being a hideous seafaring term, "this is real life. This ain't no pastel—it's the goods. Ain't I glad I quit cookin' hash for them dagoes in Simmy's cellar on Market Street!"

It was rather soft for me. I had shipped as cook on the Kafloozalem. It's a gentleman's job. I had a kitchen-boy to peel the potatoes, and all I had to do was to put them in the pot.

Besides, I had a little private scheme. I'll let you in on it right now.

Somebody'd tipped me off that fighting-cocks was in great demand in Singapore. being admitted to the best circles. I'd bought two dozen from a colored friend that used to hang around Simmy's cellar and supply us with broilers. I got them at a bargain—a dollar apiece.

I figured they'd be worth twenty apiece to me at Singapore. They was fancy bred, and as anxious as the captain for a scrap.

"By the blinkin' buntline toggles," I sighed happily as we skipped out of the harbor under full sail, "this is something like!"

It took three hours for the novelty to wear off; then I got seasick, and began to remember my sins. I got the kitchen-boy to cook the meals and feed my game-cocks; he gave the mess-food to the chickens and the corn to the crew. But the men was just starting out, and they didn't notice the difference, not being over-hungry.

Well, I was on my legs before the captain got word that I'd been on my back, and I soon turned out meals that made the mongrel crew look like aldermen. I used a lot of stuff, and did the thing right.

"I say, you miserable, sneakin' scoundrel of a half-faced cookee," Captain Blink remarked pleasantly to me one day, after we had been out two weeks, and when we was having an after-dinner chat, "ain't you feedin' these blame landlubbers a bit too heavy, as it were? I'm afraid the bloomin' devils'll get the pip. How's the wet chuck holdin' out?"

"By the reeftackle-pendant, captain," I replies, "maybe I am goin' into the stores a bit too heavy! You see, in Simmy's cellar I used all I wanted, because there was a grocery right around the cor-

ner all the time, where it couldn't run away."

"Let down on that squeal about Simmy's cellar," he told me. "There ain't no grocery-story in these parts. Go down an' see how much you got on hand. We've had bad weather, an' I'm afraid somethin'll break loose before we get to Singapore. Bestir your stumps to the after-hold, see what you got left in the way of wet an' dry provisions, an' then trim the sails on the eats."

I was tame as tripe in a minute, and I went to the after-hold with fear and trembling in my seafaring legs.

There I got the shock of my life. The provisions was almost run out. I'd bit in too heavy on them; besides, two hunks of beef had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared.

I suspected a little heathen Chinee, who said he'd had his left hand hit off by a man-eating shark in the waters around Singapore; but he was pretty nifty with the right hand he had left.

As it was, I found we had just two cans of hardtack, a tin of ox-tail soup, six boxes of salt, and a bottle of mustard in store.

I went and got down on my knees to the captain and told him, along with the complete story of my innocent and guileless life, that somebody'd been stealing the provisions.

I won't repeat what he said. His language wasn't fit to eat.

He did remark, however, that I stole the provisions myself, and he was all for throwing me overboard to the sharks; he said he'd boil me in oil, only the supply was running short, and the crew liked fried stuff better.

Then he got an inspiration.

"You've got two dozen game-cocks on board, haven't you, you squint-eyed, turtle-nosed half-sister to an eel?" he bawls out suddenly.

I would have lied—for the first time in my life, mind you—but I knew he had the goods on me. I could see what he was after in a second.

"Yes, sir," I answers, "but I'm afraid the flavor would be a bit too gamy for the crew."

It didn't go down. He looked at me scornfully, and says:

"Never mind that, Sinbad. You've used up or stole the provisions. Kill two of them scrappin'-chickens of yours each day an' serve 'em in small particles with *maitre-d'hotel* sauce."

Them was the orders. With tears in my eyes I went below and sighed out my soul to the kitchen-boy. It was sad to think that I must make hash out of my twenty-dollar chickens.

I'd figured the profit on them game-cocks beforehand. Yes, it was a case of counting your chickens—but mine had already been hatched, and I was pretty sure of them.

I'd let the kitchen-boy feed the cocks for the last five days, and when I went out to say a final fond farewell to two of them for that day's meal I let out a cry that woke the barnacles on the ship's bottom.

There weren't two chickens left to say good-by to.

The feathers had been left for souvenirs, and there was a few claws and beaks lying about, but that was all.

I turned on the kitchen-boy, and he dissolved in tears. Then he told the story. I knew it was straight, because his face was white, and he looked as though he'd seen a Chinaman's ghost.

For five days, he explained, the chickens had been disappearing in bunches.

He was scared I'd blame him, and so didn't say anything about it to me before.

I started to grab the kitchen-boy by the neck, and then I suddenly changed my mind. Instead, I collared the last game-cock between his head and shoulders and carried him flopping to the deck.

I told the captain, and accused the one-armed Chink that had told the story about the man-eating shark.

"There's a stowaway aboard, or I'll be stem-sterned, guzzled, and sold for a marlin-spike," gurgled the captain. "Search the ship, you limpin' lumps of overfed fat, an' find the stowaway what's been eatin' us out of house an' home."

There was a general scurry at this order, and we all turned the ship upside down, looking for that there stowaway.

But we found nothing.

I cooked the last squawking creature aboard that night, served up the last two tins of ox-tail soup, and made a *purée* of the salt and mustard, which disguised the taste of the hardtack.

How we lived the next two days I don't remember. I still thought that one-armed Chink was to blame, but I couldn't get no proof.

Things got desperate. I cooked up an old life-preserver for soup, and still the storm raged—for we were some days from Singapore—and the mystery of the missing provisions remained unsolved.

Things went from bad to worse, and on the third day I saw the kitchen-boy trying to lick the varnish off a hand-rail for nourishment.

That touched my tender heart, and I went to the captain with tears in my eyes.

"Captain," I says, "something has got to be done. Somebody stole and et them two hunks of beef an' my twenty-three chickens. I move that we eat the man what did it, even if he has got only one arm."

"Don't come around bothering me about that heathen Chinee any more. You're a human bulkhead, an' if anybody's et it will be you."

I didn't say no more, for obvious reasons, but I set out by myself, having no cooking to occupy my mind, to look for that stowaway.

I was crawling through the coal-hole when—bang! I got it right across the eyes. Then the lurking fiend scratched my face to codfish shreds.

I yelled for help, and when they dragged me out by one leg I was nearer dead than alive, and the ship's doctor—also a first-class seaman—found that I'd swallowed a chunk of soft coal in my fright.

Then I told them about finding the stowaway and being attacked. They organized a rescue-party and went into that coal-hole.

For ten minutes you never heard such a howling in your life. Then the little Chink I had suspected—he was one of the rescue-party—came bu'sting out from the hole with a long, furry animal dangling from his only fist.

"By all the reef-knots and butt-slings from here to Singapore," roared the captain—"so that's the stowaway!"

The rest came trooping out with scratched faces and wild eyes. Altogether they dragged four adult cats and seventeen kittens from that old coal-hole.

The rest of the feathers was found there, and the strings on which the beefs had hung.

We had a swell menu that night. It was "chicken-fed kitten," a great delicacy for us starving men, and "cat-tail soup."

The feline family lasted for two days' grub, and then we were up against it again.

Before we got down to "sock soup" I had made a vow, and that was to quit the sea the minute I got back to the United States.

It had been a trying voyage on me. I had started out with all kinds of chances. I was going to make money off those cocks in Singapore; I was going to make good as a ship's cook. I prayed that I'd get back that job in Simmy's cellar if I ever lived through the voyage.

It was pretty tough; I seemed to be blamed for everything. I had fed them too fast at first, and then the cats had got my chickens. Besides, the captain had an ugly look around his mustache every time he passed me, and began to show his teeth like a mad dog.

I still suspicioned that Chink a little, although it had been proved that he didn't steal the stores. I didn't like his looks, and besides, that story of his about the man-eatin' shark that bit his left hand off always seemed a bit fishy to me.

Well, the crew finally mutinied, and we all set around in dejected heaps, licking the enamel off the bunks and waiting for death.

It was all up with us. We were only two days from Singapore, but the storm still raged, and the men were too weak to work. The captain spent his time watching the log-line.

The boat was drifting, and he'd become a bit daffy from hunger, so he kept talking about how many knots we were making, and pulling up the log-ship every now and then and reading off the speed.

It was all in his mind, hut it was a harmless amusement, and the mutinied crew was too much used up to object to his amusing himself any way he liked.

The log-ship is a piece of wood about a foot high—a sort of triangle that dangles at the end of a line and catches hold of the water so that when the boat moves it registers the speed. I never learned

just how to calculate knots, but I watched the captain spending all his time pulling in that triangle of wood and throwing it out again.

I almost laughed once. It looked so blame funny, just as if he was trolling for whales with that piece of wood whirling through the water for bait.

It was in the afternoon when it happened. I felt the jerk myself, and heard the captain yell.

"Man overboard!" cried one of the crew, jumping to his wabbly feet in the excitement as a quiver shot through the rickety old freighter.

"Nothin' of the kind, you dod-gasted old bobstay collar, you!" the captain shouted, giving a jerk at the log-line, which was stretched straight out from behind the ship.

I got up and hurried to the stern.

"What is it, captain?" I called in his windward ear.

"It's a whale. Somethin's swallowed the log-ship."

"You mean that funny-lookin' board you was usin' for bait?" I asked, not understanding the situation.

"That's what. It's stuck on somethin'. Feel the pull on this here rope, you home-grown hemp hawser!"

I took hold of the log-line and felt a lot of quick jerks, like there was a trout at the end of the rope, only magnified a thousand times; it pretty near jerked my arms out of their sockets.

By this time all the crew had gathered in the stern, and we were rubbering a long way back to see what we could see. Suddenly a fin cut the water at the end of the rope, and then we saw as pretty a sight as most see off in the China Sea.

It was a shark, and he cut clean out of the water. We all realized at the same second what had happened. That log-line was sticking out of the shark's mouth. He'd snapped at the bit of wood, and Mr. Shark never knew it was the log-ship until it had got wedged between his jaws and was pulling him along.

Maybe he didn't put up a plucky fight. We all got a hold of that rope and pulled. It looked like food, and all we was afraid of was that the rope would break.

It took two hours to land the fellow. He was as pretty a "nurse" as I ever saw. Big and gray, with a soft, white belly and the nastiest mouth.

The crew took new heart when they saw the big thing landed on deck. I made a speech.

"Mates," I says, "we ain't done for yet. Here's food. I'll cook it in ten different styles. The captain says we're only two days off Singapore, and I'll make this fish last out, or my name's not Sinbad."

Of course, my name isn't really "Sinbad," but the captain had called me that, and the crew had picked it up; though they'd begun to change it to "Jonah" of late.

I was true to my promise. The speech put a little cayenne into the bunch, and they all fell to at the sails. The sea was just as heavy, but they worked hard and with a will, for there was food in sight.

Some said shark wasn't good to eat, but I laughed them off, and told them I could dress even a rhinoceros so it would be palatable to the sweet tooth.

Meanwhile, I was busy in the kitchen cutting that fish up. It was almost a young whale, over seven feet long.

I cut two feet off the tail and began on that, frying the steaks to the queen's taste, while the kitchen-boy kept running up on deck with steaming plates of the old "nurse."

It was great fun; I had them all fed full, and had only used about two feet and four inches of the shark. It would hold out easily, and everybody picked up hope.

That night we sat around the mess-room and talked about our lucky catch. It was just once in a lifetime that such a thing could happen, and it had come at the right minute. In another day we'd either have been dead, or not strong enough to pull the fish in.

Everybody had a different theory about how the fish had come to snatch at the log-ship, but I was satisfied that it did. The details didn't bother me much, with my stomach full of good shark meat.

I didn't care at all whether Mr. Shark had thought the board was a pumpkin pie thrown overboard by a dyspeptic mate, or whether he hoped it was one of the starboard lights what had joggled loose. A shark and a Harlem goat will try to swallow anything, they say.

Well, I was so tickled over that store of food we'd taken on board in one chunk that I couldn't go to bed that night without going to have another look at it.

I took my lantern and went down into the galley. The moment I got through the door, which was open, I felt that there was something doing.

I sneaked up cautious to the pantry, where I had left the shark. Inside. I heard a funny noise, like a knife scraping through fish-bones. I couldn't mistake it.

Somebody was trying to steal a chunk of that precious fish. It was more than I could stand.

I threw the door open, held the lantern firm, and took a flying leap onto the neck of the little yellow fellow, who was stooping over the fish with a long knife in his hand, dissecting its stomach.

It was a five-minutes' fight before I got the knife away from him. The man, the shark, and myself were all mixed up in that little pantry when I finally landed on top, secured my lantern, which had been kicked to a corner, and flashed it on the face of the fellow I had caught.

Yes, it was the little heathen Chinee who had told the story about a man-eating shark lopping off his left arm.

"What were you trying to do, you lump of yellow mud?" I cried, taking a look at the precious fish. He had slit open the stomach and spread it out on the table.

I didn't wait for his answer. My eyes bulged out of my head like the red lights over an "exit" door. There, in the fish's stomach, which the Chink had been exploring, was a miscellaneous collection of bones, bolts, and odds and ends that would have brought joy into the heart of a ragpicker.

But what made my eyes bulge was the sight of a skeleton hand, lying on top.

On the third finger of that hand was a diamond ring. Not an ordinary ring. A regular, real Tiffany, with three huge sparklers in it. I inventoried it at once as being worth between one and two thousand dollars.

The Chink was following my eyes.

"Ring belong to mlee," he said.

Great Heavens! The thought chilled me; I was froze to the spot.

"You confounded Chink!" I cried. "Do you mean to lie there and claim that that skeleton hand was the one you got nipped off by a shark around Singapore here, and that had on that ring at the time?"

"Mlee not lie. My ling!" he shouts back.

I reached out, grabbed a rope that was lying handy, and tied his right arm close to his side.

His claim was preposterous. How he had come to sneak in and rip open that shark's stomach I don't know, but I did know that he had never possessed such a wonderful ring.

His claim seemed good; for, of course, the ring *might* belong to him.

I didn't know what to do; but first I roped him to the pantry-door, and went out to lock the one in the kitchen. This was no affair for outsiders.

Then I went to where he had laid out the fish's stomach, and I picked up the white skeleton hand with the sparkling ring on the third finger.

I tried a bluff at first. Holding the clean bones before his eyes, I said:

"Chink, you lied. This is not your hand. Can't you see it's white. Not yellow, like yours. It's a white man's hand."

"The sklin all gone," he replied.

The argument was convincing. It had been a rotten bluff on my part, but I had to convince the dope for fear he'd make trouble. I dropped that suggestion, because it didn't stand to reason that his bones were yellow just because his skin was.

Then I turned to the shark's stomach on the table again, after putting the skeleton hand with the ring far out of the Chink's reach. I pawed over the miscellaneous collection of buttons, pocket-knives, and bones.

Suddenly I started back.

"Good Heavens!" I cried, picking out another hand about the same as the one on which I had found the ring, but this was nipped off a little above the wrist, *at exactly the same spot where the Chink's arm stopped.*

It was a gruesome business, but I felt morally sure that here was my proof. I pulled out this second skeleton hand; it was smaller and whiter than the other, and I held it before the Chink's half-closed eyes.

They opened like a shot. He tugged at the ropes and tried to break away. I knew in that instant that he had recognized the skeleton hand to be the one he had lost.

Flesh knows flesh. Something within him told him truthfully that I was holding before his eyes the skeleton of his own hand.

His story, then, about the shark had been true. Here was the proof. And it was also proof that the ring was mine, being treasure-trove and belonging to the person that found it—if he could keep it.

But the Chink tried to lie, and claim that this smaller, whiter hand was not his own — that the one with the ring belonged to him.

It was a pretty pickle for me. If the story got to the captain, he would appropriate the ring. I must satisfy the Chink in some way so he would keep his mouth shut.

I saw clearly in his mean little eyes that he had recognized his own hand, and I tried to tantalize him with it. But he broke out, saying that he'd tell the captain the story and get the ring that belonged to him.

Then I had the glimmering of an idea. I took the two skeleton hands and laid them side by side, *the thumbs pointed toward each other*. In that second the flash of an inspiration came to me.

"It's your left hand that's missing, isn't it, Chink?"

"Yes; and there it is!" he cried, pointing to the one with the ring on it.

I looked squarely at him and laughed in his face for fully half a minute.

"Well, whala matter?" he cried, his face going white as my accusing glare did its deadly work.

"Can't you see, Chink?" I asked.

"No," he replied with a grouchy growl.

"*The hand with the ring on is a right hand.*" I sprang my bomb at just the right time.

His face fell, then he grew like a madman. He saw that the thumbs were pointing together, and that the hand bearing the ring was on the right side. It was too much for him. He had lost, and he tried to get at me with his teeth.

I choked him back to his normal condition, and he blurted out:

"It was the right hand I lost."

That was too thin. The evidence was right before me, and he realized his mistake the second he had made it.

He tried another tack.

"The hand with the ling on it is left hand, too," he said.

I had to hold up the hands the way they would hang on a human being, and prove to him conclusively that the hand with the ring on it was a right hand and nothing else.

But he didn't give up, not Chink. He still claimed the ring hand. It was two hours later before I had him pacified. I brought out forty silver dollars—all I had—and paid him that for silence, and he went away.

Just before he passed through the door I called to him and asked him if he would like his own hand for a souvenir.

"You demon, Sinbad; you demon!" he shouted back between clenched teeth, and then disappeared.

I hid the ring, and threw the other contents of the shark overboard so no one would suspect. The ring was mine; I had found it, and I intended to keep it.

It wasn't hard for me to see how the hand with the ring had found its way to the fish's maw when I remembered that the Chink's story of losing his left hand had been verified.

As I had hoped, the forty-dollar "hush money" I had given the chap did its work. He never said a word, and disappeared mysteriously the minute we got to Singapore.

I never left anything so gladly as I did the Kafloozalem, the shark having held out for food.

Diamonds have a good value in China, and in three days' time I succeeded in selling the ring for fifteen hundred dollars in American money.

I didn't care to stay longer in that chop-suey town; there was only one thing I wanted to find out, and that was the price of fighting-cocks. Just before I sailed I managed to get the market rate. It was nine cents a pound; my birds would have netted me between twenty-seven and thirty-six cents apiece, and I had paid a dollar for them.

I wasn't so sad after I learned that. I began to figure the whole thing out.

If my cocks hadn't been eaten by the

cats we would have had them for food, and the crew would never have mutinied. If the crew hadn't started a mutiny the captain wouldn't have had time to play with the log-ship; and even if we had picked up a shark, we wouldn't have eaten it, because the meat is only relished by starving seamen.

It was a sort of "house that Jack built"; but it wasn't hard for me to figure up profit and loss and decide that I had been very lucky in losing my gamecocks after all.

I always call the day I found the ring my Jonah day. Everything had been against me till that shark came aboard, and then that hand of some Jonah he had tried to swallow came into play and fixed my destiny for me, as they say in storybooks.

I suppose there'll be some Doubting Thomases that won't believe this story. I'm not much at writing, but I am truthful.

If a choice was given you between a dictionary definition and my word for a thing, you'd be wise to choose the latter —not that I'm going into competition with Webster, or questioning his authority on language.

THE ESCORT.*

BY MARIE B. SCHRADER,

Author of "On a Secret Mission," etc.

The Strange Fashion in Which Fenton Came to Meet the Young Woman at the Hotel, and the Remarkable Experience They Went Through Together.

CHAPTER XIII.

ISABEL ASSERTS HERSELF.

GEORGE TRACY stared at his fiancée as if he believed she had suddenly taken leave of her senses. He couldn't speak for a moment, so overcome was he by her declaration.

In the meantime the young woman stood facing him, waiting for his next words. She returned his fixed look with a quiet, steady glance.

"Why, Isabel!" exclaimed Tracy at last. "Surely, you don't know what you said. You are joking, aren't you?"

"Not at all," replied Miss Grayson; "I was never more in earnest in my life."

"But, dearest, you said that you were in that house when Fenton was arrested."

"Correct," answered Isabel.

"But you were at home at your hotel," persisted Tracy.

"What makes you think that?"

"Because you said nothing to me about going out."

"That is true; but, you see, I changed my mind," replied Miss Grayson, not at all disturbed by his questioning. "When you left me in the afternoon I had no idea of doing anything more exciting than reading a novel. But things turned out differently, it seems."

Still, Tracy refused to be convinced.

"The idea of you being in such a place as that deserted house at such an hour is absurd," he said.

"Then you mean to insinuate that I am not telling the truth?" Isabel looked him full in the eye.

"I — I," stammered Tracy, "don't know what to think."

"You said just now that there was a woman in the Fenton case. I told you that I am the woman."

Isabel paused to watch the effect of her declaration, but Tracy said nothing. He only shook his head in disbelief.

"You showed me, as proof of the existence of a woman, a satin slipper which you found in the wistaria-vine. Isn't that right?"

"Yes," answered Tracy, casting his eyes on the article in question which he had dropped to the floor in his astonishment.

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"Will this convince you that I am the woman in question?" And Isabel produced an exact duplicate of the dainty feminine slipper.

Tracy gazed at it in amazement. Mechanically he held out his hand for the slipper and compared the two. There could be no question about their being mates.

"I lost the one you found," continued Isabel, "as I went down the fire-escape in the rear of the house. I am glad it was not discovered until this morning. If it had been found last night, it might have got me into serious trouble. I am so glad it was you who picked it up, George."

Tracy did not reply. He was trying to figure the whole thing out.

"If one of those detectives had seen it—" she began.

"Then you knew about the detectives?" he interposed.

"Know about them?" she repeated. "Wasn't I standing behind a door as they passed through the house? I thought sure they would find me there. I was almost afraid to breathe. But they went on."

"How many of them were there?" asked Tracy.

"Two," was the prompt reply.

"That's right," answered Tracy, still wondering.

"They had a dark-lantern, and how I ever got out unnoticed was a mystery. I had to wait quite a while before I dared venture. If there had been others stationed below, I would surely have been seen, and my unfortunate part in the affair would have become public property."

Tracy understood at last that she was telling the truth.

"I overheard the entire quarrel between you and Jack Fenton," she went on.

"You did!" exclaimed Tracy, his face brightening as if he had learned something which pleased him.

"Yes, from first to last. I was in the window overhead. You thought you heard some one, but afterward you decided you might be mistaken. Do you remember that?"

"Yes, I remember," answered Tracy. "That was why I sent two detectives to make sure there was no one. I couldn't go through the place myself, because I wanted to deliver up the prisoner as soon as possible."

"But you were disappointed, after all," remarked Isabel.

"Yes," answered Tracy.

"Mr. Fenton was too smart for you."

"Great Heavens, Isabel!" cried Tracy angrily. "Any one would think that you were glad he got away."

"I am," was the cool reply.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Tracy. "I must confess, Isabel, that your conduct and remarks since we parted yesterday afternoon are exceedingly mysterious."

"I will try to give you a faint idea of my meaning," said Miss Grayson in the quietest, most irritating manner. "In the first place, as I told you a few minutes ago, Mr. Fenton must be proved guilty before he can be considered anything else than innocent in the eyes of the law."

"Oh, bosh! He's guilty enough, all right," gleefully remarked Tracy. "We'll have very little trouble proving that."

"I don't believe he is," answered Isabel in a tone which left no doubt regarding her sympathy for Fenton. "And I think you are going to have a hard time with your proof. I don't mind telling you that, judging from what you said last night when you arrested him, you were too severe and took things too much for granted."

"There was nothing to be taken for granted," retorted Tracy. "All I had to go by were the plain facts. You can't get past facts in the shape of powerful evidence."

"That is true," answered Isabel, "but I don't believe you have secured the facts in the case. You have gone entirely on circumstantial evidence. You haven't got at the real trouble."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Tracy. "Don't talk in riddles, please."

"I mean that you are accusing and arresting Mr. Fenton on mere surface details."

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Tracy, who so far forgot himself as to lose his polite manner before his fiancée.

"The time for convicting a man on circumstantial evidence has long gone by," continued Isabel in the best of humor, quite in contrast to his. "In the

present day a jury must have something more certain than bare appearance."

"What do you know about it?" growled Tracy. "Women are too smart these days. You're all wrong."

"I know that things look rather black for Mr. Fenton," continued Isabel, "but I believe he will be able to get out of the trouble all right.

"Why," exclaimed Tracy, "you're actually defending the scoundrel!"

"He hardly deserves that term," answered Isabel. "I do not believe Mr. Fenton *is* a scoundrel."

"You don't!" cried Tracy in amazement.

"No. I think he is a gentleman, and I have always thought so from the first time I saw him. He could not have done what you have accused him of doing."

"Couldn't?" repeated Tracy.

"That's what I said," replied Miss Grayson. "No. He did have the Holt child in a taxicab this afternoon, but he was merely taking him home."

"How do you know that he had the boy in a cab?" inquired Tracy.

"Because I saw him myself," quickly replied Isabel.

"Where did you see him?" asked Tracy.

"On Fifth Avenue, going up-town. The child was fast asleep, leaning confidingly against him. Mr. Fenton is a splendid fellow. It isn't often that a man with his appearance proves to be equally as fine in character."

"Why," exclaimed Tracy, mystified, "you speak as if you knew him."

"I do," retorted Isabel.

"Then you must have met him since yesterday afternoon," replied Tracy, "for you told me while we were walking behind him down the street that you did not know him."

"Well," answered Isabel, "as I remarked a few moments ago, a great deal has happened since then. I have not only met Mr. Fenton, but I believe in his integrity as a man and a gentleman absolutely—no matter what others may say," she added.

Tracy winced at this thrust.

"So you saw him with the child yesterday afternoon, and you overheard our conversation last night."

"Here is the proof of that part of it," answered Isabel, pointing to the slippers. Evidently she did not catch the drift of his reasoning, or she would not have been so prompt in her replies.

"I am afraid, Isabel," said Tracy, "that I will not be able to withhold the important information you have just given me regarding this case."

"What do you mean?" she demanded quickly.

"What you have just said is most necessary to the evidence against Fenton," continued Tracy.

"I can't see it that way," she said.

"But I do," retorted the other. "It is a disagreeable duty for me to have to call on you in this matter; but I need assistance, and you can help me. I may be compelled to summon you as a witness."

"Oh!" exclaimed Isabel, as the true import of his words dawned upon her.

Tracy started toward the door.

"There is one important thing you have forgotten to mention," he said. "I would like to know why you went to that house and what you were doing there."

"All that will be explained in due time," answered Isabel.

CHAPTER XIV.

ISABEL HEARS NEWS.

TRACY endeavored to persuade Isabel to explain the meaning of her last words, but she refused to do so.

"As your fiancé," he declared, "I have a right to know everything that pertains to your share in this Holt case."

"Just a few moments ago," retorted Isabel, "when I asked you to explain certain things to me, you informed me that 'a business man didn't have time to tell his fiancée everything.' I didn't insist upon knowing. I didn't remind you that I, as your fiancée, am interested in anything which concerns you. Since you haven't taken me into your confidence regarding your part in this kidnaping affair, why should I explain my movements to you?"

"But as my fiancée—" began Tracy.

"Then, if you insist upon knowing on account of that claim, you'd better consider our engagement at an end."

"Why, Isabel," protested Tracy, "you don't know what you are saying!"

"Oh, yes, I do! I am quite conscious of the importance of the step I am taking."

"Very well, then," exclaimed Tracy angrily, as he seized his hat and cane, "but you will explain; and it won't be so very long until you do, either."

With these words, he walked out at the door and hurriedly left the hotel.

His thoughts were anything but pleasant ones. Any one who had seen him enter the place a short while before would have found it difficult to believe him the same man.

The look of exultation and pleased triumph had been replaced by one which plainly bespoke determination and revenge.

"It's all the fault of that scoundrel, Fenton," he muttered. "I'll settle him. He won't bother me much longer. If he hadn't butted in, none of this would have happened. Now, it's all off between Isabel and me."

He resolved to leave no stone unturned in his search for the fellow.

"He sha'n't escape me," he told himself. "I'll see that he is brought to book for what he has done, if it takes every cent I have in the world."

With this firm decision, he hurried on his way to keep his appointment with the detectives.

In the meantime Isabel was left alone with her thoughts. They were far from pleasant ones; still, she was calm and self-possessed.

The fact that she had broken her engagement upset her. She had done it impulsively, and it took her some time to realize that she was no longer pledged to the man she had once looked upon as her future husband.

She recalled the plans they had made about the house they were to live in, and how she had cautioned Tracy not to be extravagant. He had certainly loved her, and she thought she loved him; but now it was all over. For during his last call she had seen Mr. Tracy in an altogether different light.

All this trouble, too, had been caused by a stranger, a man whom she had known only one day. That was the remarkable part of the affair.

"What shall I do now?" Isabel asked herself.

She confessed that she didn't know which way to turn.

While she sat wondering over the strange development of affairs, the telephone-bell rang.

Some one was asking to speak to her; but the operator wanted to be sure that it was Miss Grayson at the phone, and no one else.

The next moment a manly voice bade her good morning.

There was a familiar ring to the tones.

"Who is it?" asked Isabel.

"I can't very well tell you," replied the voice, "but I think you will understand when I ask how you reached home last night."

"Oh!" exclaimed Isabel, as she became convinced that the speaker was none other than Fenton himself.

"Why, I thought that you had left the city," she added.

"No. I have been right here all the time."

"But," protested Isabel, "aren't you afraid to talk to me over a public phone? Isn't it dangerous?"

"Don't worry about that part of it," answered Fenton. "I want to know about you. How are you?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Then, you are none the worse for your experience of last evening?"

"Not at all."

"I can never forgive myself for taking you there," went on Fenton reproachfully. "I should have had more sense."

"You had absolutely nothing to do with the trip," answered Isabel. "It was my fault. It was I who suggested the investigation; therefore, please don't think of me at all."

"But I have been imagining a thousand and one things which might have happened to you," continued Fenton. "And I stood the suspense as long as I possibly could. I felt that I must learn of your safety. You must have been frightened to death."

"Of course I ran a terrible risk," answered Isabel, "especially as two men decided to examine the house. I stood behind a door as they passed. Then I managed to make good my escape by means of the same way we entered."

"Then no one knew of your part in the affair? Thank Heaven!"

"Yes, it was a lucky escape—at least, so I thought last night. But this morning a new development has arisen. Unfortunately, in getting down the fire-escape I lost one of my satin slippers. It fell in the wistaria-vine. This morning Mr. Tracy was telling me about a new clue—the discovery of the woman in the case. As proof of his argument, he produced my lost slipper."

"Oh!" groaned Fenton. "If they should find you!"

"They have already done that," answered Isabel. "When he showed it to me I brought out the mate, and told him that I was the lady in question. He wanted to know a great many things; and, when I told him they would be explained later, we had a disagreement, with the result that my engagement has been broken."

"You don't really mean it!" exclaimed Fenton, a note of delight in his voice he was not able to suppress. "But," he continued, "Tracy wouldn't drag you into this unpleasant affair?"

"I don't know," replied Isabel. "Now, tell me about yourself."

"There isn't very much to tell, except that every one agrees that I am a dangerous criminal, and was actually kidnaping the child when I took him home in the cab. You are about the only one who believes in me. I would have had a hard time in getting away if it hadn't been for the accident. Fortunately, my hands were free, else I couldn't have gone very far. As it was, I took advantage of the excitement occasioned by the smash-up, and made off as fast as I could. I'm afraid I can't talk longer," he added. "It is really a risk; but I determined to find out about you, no matter what happened."

"That was very thoughtful of you," answered Isabel, "and I do hope things will come out all right."

"Only a miracle can accomplish that," rejoined Fenton. "Appearances are against me, it seems. Fortunately, there was no eye-witness to the deed itself."

"You are forgetting that *I* saw you in the cab with the child."

"Yes; but I am not worried about that, for no one knows about it."

"Tracy does," answered Isabel.

"He does!" exclaimed Fenton in consternation. "But how can he? You wouldn't have told him, and—"

"Not intentionally," replied Isabel. "I didn't mean to tell him; but, in the excitement of the discussion, I lost my caution, and before I knew it he had learned the truth."

"That is bad," commented Fenton. "But," he continued hopefully, "Tracy will never call on you to appear."

"I am afraid he means to do so, though, especially now since our engagement is broken."

"Then it does look black for me."

Just then a bell-boy reported that there was a messenger waiting to see Miss Grayson on important business.

"I'll have to ring off," she explained. "By the way, where is the child now?"

"Oh, he's safe and sound," answered Fenton; "the police have him. Good-by!"

The next instant he was gone, and Isabel opened the door for the messenger.

A strange man appeared.

"Miss Isabel Grayson?" he inquired as he placed a paper in her hands.

"Yes," replied Isabel.

"You are subpœnaed as witness in the Holt case," said the man, who proved to be a deputy from police headquarters.

"I shall report at headquarters at once," she told him, with an effort concealing the shock the summons caused her.

CHAPTER XV.

THE INVESTIGATION BEGINS.

THERE was an air of unusual interest in the movements of the employees gathered around the door of the room in which Police Commissioner Grady expected to hold his inquiry into the Holt kidnaping case.

Whispered conversations, wise nods of the head, and glances down the hall betokened the excitement occasioned by the latest sensation. It wasn't long before dozens of newspaper reporters, all eager for some word regarding recent developments, found their way toward the same spot. Curiosity-seekers of a varied assortment, too, joined the throng.

But, try how they would, they were unable to secure admittance to the covet-

ed consultation. If the outcome proved to be such that it was necessary for the whole world to be taken into police confidence, then all might enter. But, until then, Commissioner Grady decided that he would satisfy himself regarding some peculiar features of the case.

The commissioner himself was the first on the spot. He had come down-town at an early hour in order to go over certain papers, and had given orders that the various persons connected with the affair should be present.

It lacked some minutes of the appointed hour when George Tracy rushed into the room.

"Have they captured Fenton yet?" he asked.

"I have heard nothing which would lead me to believe that there are any prospects of their doing so," answered the commissioner. "I have a number of men on the lookout, and we should have had some news of him long ago. He seems to have made good his escape, although all trains and boats are watched."

"I have good reason to believe that he is right here in New York," said Tracy.

The commissioner looked interested.

"What makes you think so?" he inquired.

"Because a little while ago I called up a certain hotel in order to speak to a young lady friend of mine. The operator told me that she was busy talking. I tried to get her a number of times, but still the conversation continued. Once, while endeavoring to make the connection, the operator must have crossed the wires, for I caught just enough of the conversation to realize that it was none other than Fenton himself talking to the young woman."

"You say you know this young lady?" asked the commissioner.

"I know her very well," replied Fenton.

"Then she knows something about the case evidently?" continued the commissioner.

"She knows a great deal about it," answered Tracy; "more than I think she cares to divulge. I overheard Fenton tell her that there was no eye-witness to his having been in the cab with Bobbie Holt."

"What did she say to that?" asked the commissioner with an unusual display of interest.

"She said that she had seen him. This corroborates what she accidentally told me a short time before her telephone conversation with Fenton. I couldn't locate the place from which Fenton was talking, but suppose it must have been a public booth. I have men out looking for him now."

"Then this young woman will prove a valuable witness," said the commissioner.

"She knows more than any one else," Fenton assured him.

"She must be summoned then," decided the magistrate.

"Your honor, I have already attended to that," replied Tracy with an air of being proud of his foresight.

As if in answer to his remark, the door opened and Isabel Grayson entered. She bowed coldly to Tracy, and respectfully to the commissioner. That gentleman seemed to understand without explanation who she was.

"I believe it is to you I owe the honor of being called into this affair," began Isabel, eying Tracy steadily.

He mumbled something about her appearance being necessary in order to convict Fenton.

"I have no objections at all to telling all I know of this unfortunate matter," went on Isabel. "It is not very pleasant for me to figure in so much notoriety; but I have made up my mind to do my duty, no matter what happens."

Before Tracy could speak, the door opened and, to the consternation of all three, Mr. Jack Fenton himself entered.

"Fenton!" exclaimed Tracy, who couldn't credit his own eyes, for evidently the accused man had come of his own accord. No officer was with him.

"Yes, it is I," answered Fenton, "and I am here to insist upon this case being sifted to the bottom. I demand a thorough investigation. Your honor, I escaped from the detectives, for my first impulse was to get away. Since then, however, I have thought things over, and saw in what a peculiar light I had placed myself by such an action. I return of my own accord, and shall remain to the end, no matter what the result."

At this moment Mrs. Holt and the kidnaped child, Bobbie, entered the room.

"Why, Bobbie!" exclaimed Tracy, going over toward the boy and trying to lift him up in his arms.

The heir to the Holt millions, however, had a will of his own, for he struggled and kicked himself free of Tracy, who at last let go of him.

"I don't like you," he said flatly. "Go away."

The next instant he ran over to Fenton and climbed up on his knee.

"Me so glad to see you again," he said, laughing as he patted Fenton on the cheek. "Nice man. Bobbie like you."

Fenton stroked the child's curls, while the horrified mother looked on at the unusual spectacle of confiding trust in a man who proved himself such a villain.

"Bobbie!" she exclaimed indignantly. "Bobbie! Come here!"

"Me want to stay right here," replied Bobbie, contentedly leaning his head against Fenton's coat. "Nice man. Good to Bobbie."

Mrs. Holt gazed appealingly at Tracy.

"Bobbie," said the latter, "come away."

But at this moment the child caught sight of Isabel.

"Pretty lady!" he exclaimed.

"Bobbie," said Fenton, "this is Miss Grayson."

Isabel then began to try to amuse him, and he laughed and talked with her. Suddenly he looked from Fenton to Isabel.

"Is you sweethearts?" he asked in his innocent childish fashion.

Isabel blushed furiously, while Fenton looked the other way to hide his embarrassment. Tracy scowled on all three.

"So you got home safely, Bobbie," said Isabel.

"Me not hurt," replied the child. "Me like this man. Me no like woman."

"What woman?" questioned Tracy.

"Woman in house," answered Bobbie.

Tracy looked significantly at Isabel, for she had told him that she was in the house. He knew of no one else there.

"So there was a woman in the house?" went on Tracy.

"Mean woman," answered the little fellow. "She no like little boys. She make me cry."

"Where was the child found, madam?" asked the commissioner.

"An officer found him on the street near my house this morning," replied Mrs. Holt. "He was all alone, although the detective did say he thought he had a clue. He is following it now in hopes that something will result from it. I presume he doesn't know that this man," referring to Fenton, "is already here."

Fenton looked frankly at her, but did not offer to defend himself.

"I will tell my story at the proper time, madam," he said.

Just then the commissioner called for order.

"We will now get down to business," he announced, "and try to arrive at some definite conclusion."

There was silence in the room, and the commissioner was just about to begin his questioning when, to the surprise of every one, Isabel stepped forward and asked him if she might have a private word with him.

He granted her request, and for a few minutes there was a low conversation between them.

The commissioner looked up in amazement. Evidently the young woman had given him some startling information. However, he did not impart it to the others, but asked Isabel to resume her seat.

"Now," he began, "we will begin. John Fenton, I ask you whether you are guilty or not guilty of this grave accusation?"

"Not guilty," answered Fenton without hesitation.

CHAPTER XVI.

ISABEL TELLS THINGS.

THERE was an impressive silence, lasting several seconds, during which the eyes of all were fastened upon Jack Fenton.

He faced Commissioner Grady, and gave his answer in a clear, ringing voice, which carried with it every indication of truth.

George Tracy, however, cast one scornful glance at him, and, turning to Mrs. Holt, remarked with a sneer:

"Of course he says he's not guilty.

Whoever heard of a criminal owning up to what he has done? Not on the preliminary hearing, at any rate."

Mrs. Holt nodded her head approvingly. She always accepted Mr. Tracy's views without much discussion.

"He must be very clever," she whispered, "to assume such an innocent air."

"He is," answered Tracy with emphasis. "He couldn't have secured possession of Bobbie as he did if he hadn't been. He's a dangerous character. I know all about him."

The commissioner studied the accused man's face attentively.

"The evidence points very strongly against you, Fenton," he said finally.

"I know that," replied the other. "I understand that I am fighting against great odds; but I mean to make the fight, nevertheless. When I have told my story I feel sure you will see that a serious mistake has been made."

"What have you to say for yourself, then?"

"Merely this: that I found the child crying on the street. He was absolutely alone. It was almost dinner-hour, and there were practically no passers-by at the spot where I found him. I don't think he had been there very long. But he was afraid and wanted to go home.

"Thinking that his nurse had stepped out of sight for a moment, I tried to comfort the little fellow until her return. No one came. At last it was getting very late, and I had about decided to take him to police headquarters, when I found an address on a slip of paper in his pocket. Naturally, I carried the child to that address, which proved to be the house at which I was arrested later."

"But what were you doing there at eleven o'clock at night when the detectives found you?"

"I had left the child at the house with a woman whom I presumed to be his mother," he replied.

"Later, when the newspapers came out with accounts of the alleged kidnaping, I learned that the Holts did not live there. In order to satisfy myself regarding my own actions, I went to the house, which proved to be the one to which I had taken the child. Inspection of it, however, proved that I had been the victim of a mistake in some way, for the place was deserted, and had not been occupied for months."

"A strange story," remarked the commissioner, looking hard at Fenton. "Is there any one who can prove what you have just told me?"

"There is—" began Fenton, and hesitated. He looked quickly at Isabel, then answered:

"There is no one."

Isabel started to rise from her chair, but a motion from the commissioner restrained her, and she resumed her seat.

"You surely know, Mr. Fenton, that your mere word, without corroboration from an eye-witness, can hardly be given great value. Now, if some one had seen you—"

"There was no one," struck in Fenton, determined that nothing would cause him to drag Isabel into the matter.

If Tracy persisted in having her as a witness, that was Tracy's affair. As far as he himself was concerned, he intended to do everything to shield her.

"A very fishy story," remarked Tracy in an audible tone to Mrs. Holt.

Fenton went over all the details of his knowledge regarding Bobbie, the woman, and the house. But his story, while apparently a frank declaration, carried no weight with it.

"That will do, Mr. Fenton," said the commissioner finally, and Fenton sat down with the feeling that things were mightily against him.

He was still more firmly convinced of this by the testimony of the witnesses who followed.

The detectives who had figured in his capture related in detail how they had caught him, and told of his subsequent escape.

"You say you went through the deserted house?" inquired the commissioner.

"Yes, your honor, and there was no one there, and there hadn't been anybody there for months. Not a sign of any person or anything."

"Please allow me to speak," interrupted Isabel at this point. "I must tell what I know."

"I believe you are called as a witness," said the commissioner, "through Mr. Tracy."

"Yes," replied Isabel, "but it was not

necessary for him to have given my name here. I intended to appear without being called."

Every one was greatly surprised by this declaration, and no one more so than Tracy himself.

"Mr. Tracy has stated that he believed there was a woman in the case. He was not mistaken. I am the woman he referred to. I can prove a number of statements made by Mr. Fenton, which I believe will convince your honor that he is telling the truth despite apparent circumstantial evidence."

Tracy winced beneath her clear-cut statement. Her interest in Fenton was certainly remarkable when it would lead her to a police court.

He began to feel uneasy, and half wished that he had not had her called as a witness, although he intended to prove by her things which would convict Fenton.

"Mr. Tracy has in his possession a pink-satin slipper, which he has kept as proof positive of the presence of some woman in the deserted house that night," went on Isabel.

Tracy nodded in affirmation in answer to an inquiring glance from the commissioner. At the same time he took from his pocket the slipper in question.

"Here," continued Isabel, opening her hand-bag, from which she produced a duplicate slipper, "is the other. Both belong to me. The one Mr. Tracy has was lost by me as I came down the fire-escape in order to get away from the detectives who were searching the house. Two of them passed right by the door behind which I stood."

"Well, I'll be—" remarked one of the sleuths under his breath to his companion. "She's a slick one."

"I wore these slippers that night—proof positive of my part in this story. I will testify to the fact that I saw Mr. Fenton in a taxicab on the avenue as it turned out of the side-street he mentioned. The child was asleep. That same evening Mr. Fenton accompanied me to the theater."

Tracy was on his feet in an instant.

"Your honor," he protested, "I left Miss Grayson at her hotel late yesterday afternoon. She didn't even know Fenton's name at that time. How could she permit an utter stranger to be her escort to the theater—especially as she was engaged to me and didn't accept attentions from any one else?"

"Strange as it may seem," continued Miss Grayson, "I met Mr. Fenton shortly after Mr. Tracy left me. I sought an introduction to him, in fact, and purposely placed him in such a position he could not refuse to take me to the theater.

Every one exchanged glances at this.

"It was I who called his attention to the extras about the kidnaping. It was I who insisted that we go straight from the theater to inspect the deserted house. It was I who found this."

She held up a child's cap.

"Bobbie's cap!" exclaimed Mrs. Holt.

"Yes. The child had been there, just as Mr. Fenton had said. It was I who was the cause of his being captured by the detectives, for if I hadn't taken him to the house they wouldn't have got him."

"But why did you evince so much interest in this matter?" asked the commissioner. "Why did you wish Mr. Fenton to accompany you to the house at such a late hour?"

"Because," replied Isabel quickly, "I had heard from Mr. Tracy here some statements damaging to Mr. Fenton's character. Consequently, when I saw him in the cab with the child I became suspicious of his motive."

"Yes, but young ladies do not usually go to such extreme lengths in their curiosity," observed the commissioner.

"It was perfectly natural in my case," responded Isabel quietly.

Once more she reached into her bag and brought forth a shining object, which looked like a silver shield.

She offered this to the commissioner for examination.

"I am a detective," she said simply, "and the case interested me for the reason that I have recently been employed by the executor of the Holt estate to do some private work for him.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

If a bomb had exploded in the commissioner's office the police there could not have been more amazed.

"A detective!" murmured every one simultaneously.

Tracy looked triumphantly at Fenton. For a moment the latter felt sick at heart. Could he have been deliberately lured to the house by Isabel? It was too awful.

"After a thorough investigation of the case," she went on, "I am firmly convinced of Mr. Fenton's innocence."

It was now Fenton's turn to cast a look of exultation at his rival.

While all were speculating over the latest development an officer appeared, accompanied by a rough-looking man.

The moment Bobbie caught sight of him he began to cry.

"The bad man," he sobbed. "He mean to Bobbie. He take Bobbie away."

The child ran over to Fenton for protection.

"Oh, I'm not a goin' ter hurt youse," said the man, as he noticed the child's fear.

"This man has a story to tell," explained the officer to the commissioner. "I think he can show who the real parties to the crime are."

The commissioner seemed surprised, but told the newcomer to state what he knew.

"It wasn't this man at all what done it," began the man, looking at Fenton. "It was this one," and he pointed to Tracy.

"It's a lie!" shouted Tracy.

"Oh, no, it ain't! I'm a goin' ter tell the truth. You know very well that it was you who promised a thousand dollars if I would steal the child and keep him over night until the parents would find out he was gone and offer a reward."

Tracy winced.

"The nurse turned her back on Bobbie for a minute while she talked with another girl," went on the man, "and that was when I got him away. I was a walkin' down a side street with him when I found a detective was behind me. I got worried, fer I didn't know whether he suspected me or not. I didn't mind takin' the child, provided I could get away safe, but I wasn't a goin' to put myself in the pen for keeps. So I writes down the address that Mr. Tracy give me and trusts to luck that some kind-hearted person will find the kid a cryin' and take him to the place where Mr. Tracy had arranged to have me deliver him to some woman."

"I lost the cop, but afterward, when all this kidnapin' was in the papers, he got on me trail onct more; so here I am to make a clean breast of it. That's the man what planned the whole dirty business," he concluded, looking hard at Tracy.

Every one else now looked at him also. There was no doubt about it. Guilt was written all over his face.

"I only meant to keep the child for a few hours, Mrs. Holt," he said. "I wouldn't have had hurt him for the world."

But Bobbie's mother turned from him.

"I am sorry you have figured in so unpleasant a situation through an act of kindness to my child," she said to Fenton.

"Then, George Tracy will be made the defendant in the case," announced the commissioner in a crisp, businesslike tone. "Will you consent to prosecute him, Mrs. Holt?"

"Certainly," replied Bobbie's mother in tones which left no doubt regarding her changed relation toward Tracy. "He well deserves his fate."

"What have you to say, Tracy?" asked the commissioner.

"Nothing," replied Tracy. "Only that I wouldn't have come to this if it hadn't been because of my love for a woman."

"A poor way of showing it, I must say," coldly remarked Grady, as he directed that Tracy be held.

As the room was cleared of people, only Fenton and Miss Grayson remained.

"How can I ever thank you?" said Fenton.

"Please don't try," answered Isabel.

"May I prove to you that all men are not scoundrels?" But before she could reply he went on:

"Miss Grayson, I want to start my friendship with you by telling you the truth in all things. I don't wish to conceal anything. In the first place, my name is Fenton; but, owing to family disagreements for some years past, I have not added the remainder of my rightful title. I am glad, however, that I figured in this trouble under the name of Jack Fenton. My full name is John Fenton Stuart Phelps."

"Why," exclaimed Isabel, her face lighting up with excitement, "you are not in earnest?"

"Yes."

"And your name is really Phelps, instead of Fenton?"

"There is no question about that."

"Then you are the man I have been looking for ever since old man Holt died," continued Isabel. "Do you remember my telling the commissioner that I had been employed to do some private work for the executor of the Holt estate? Well, that was the work to which I referred. I was instructed to find the missing heir of one-half of the fortune. Bobbie Holt only gets one-half when he comes of age. If you are *the* Mr. Phelps, *you* are entitled to the other."

"It's too good to be true," remarked Fenton. "I knew that there were distant relations by the name of Holt, but they weren't millionaires then."

"We will set to work to establish your identity at once," continued Isabel in an animated tone.

"That's quite easy," answered Fenton. "I have all sorts of papers in my possession which will prove my claim."

"I will attend to everything for you," said Isabel.

"You're a wonderful little woman," replied Fenton, gazing at her in admiration. "Do you remember how you told me that you were planning your wedding that day when you caught sight of me?"

Isabel nodded.

"I've been thinking it over," said Fenton, "and I think it would be a shame not to have the wedding just as if nothing had happened. Only"—he hesitated—"only—maybe you don't like the name of Phelps?" he asked.

"It means a great deal to me," replied Isabel, as she held out her hand to him. "I think I have proved that."

THE END.

That Private Interview.

BY JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE.

What Happened When the Stripling Unburdened His Heart to the Stalwart Captain.

CAPTAIN STAPLES, well-to-do bachelor and society man, set out from his club after dinner reverently, to call upon Alice Bryton, a slip of a girl, fifteen years his junior, and the only woman, he told himself, he every truly adored with adoration amounting to a religion.

She was not of his set, he thanked God. She was a being too divine to be classified in the social scheme. Her family would be called bourgeois, and her mother was a rather impossible old bore, but she was untouched by them, a being apart from all things of the earth earthy.

The captain had fallen in love with Alice on sight, and wooed her for a time with all the dignified ardor of forty years, but lately he had been overcome with awe. The white purity of the girl, her unconscious aloofness from the world, frightened him.

She trusted him, he felt, as she did her father and her mother; and when he looked into her clear blue eyes, which had never taught their lashes to droop, or so much as flicker, he blushed with hot shame for himself, his sex, and the world.

It had been marriage at first in his mind, but now he put the thought away from him as unworthy. She might marry some day—the devil has a way of bringing such things about soon or late—but she was not for the like of him. He must learn to be content with the thought of her always with him, and with rendering such service as he might to her.

She might marry that idiotic young cub, Jack Busley, a second cousin or something like that, who seemed always to be trailing at her skirts, and whose name she pronounced with an inflection that made the captain almost cry out in anguish; but even that would have to be endured, and

youth is plastic. She might make a man out of the young ass.

From all this it may be gathered why the popular bachelor, Captain Staples, about this time became an insufferable bore around his club, and why he was no longer sought after for dinners and cards and coaching.

When the captain entered the Bryton house he heard the rasping tones of young Jack Busley, and he sighed to himself.

Some men would have cursed and muttered into their mustaches, but the captain only sighed. He was in the temple of his divinity. They received him very cordially—Alice, Mrs. Bryton, and Cousin Jack. They always did, and he was admitted to their intimate discourse with encouraging familiarity. But he continued to sigh inwardly, and felt old and *outside*.

Mrs. Bryton chattered to him almost brilliantly. She was his senior by fewer years than her daughter was his junior; and Alice talked with Jack Busley, and seemed to enjoy his inane jokes. She was full of graciousness, as usual, and asked the captain all about his horses and his Southern shooting-trip with bright-eyed interest, but he noted, with a pang, that her manner was easiest in conversation with Cousin Jack.

"It is quite late," said the captain, after a long time. "I must go this instant. I offer you my humble apologies, ladies. I have imposed upon your gracious good nature for two solid hours. You must forgive me. It has seemed no more, to me, than as many minutes."

"You're a consummate courtier, Captain Staples. You'd have made the Raleighs and their like look sharp in the old days," rejoined Mrs. Bryton, taking much of his compliment to herself.

"If you're going down-town, I think I'll run along with you," remarked young Busley; and though the captain was surprised, he felt some relief in the thought that the boy was not tarrying for a farewell which he might not witness.

The captain took a hansom, and inquired of Jack where he wished to be dropped.

"Oh, I don't care," was the reply. "Just drop me any old place. I'm in no hurry for bed. I don't sleep, you know. I—I can't sleep, Captain Staples."

"Dear me, that's too bad," said the captain. "Overwork? Liver out of order?"

"N-no," sighed the young man dismally; "it isn't that. No."

The hansom stopped at the apartment-hotel where the captain lived.

"I stop here," he said. "Will you come in and smoke a cigarette with me?"

The young man looked at him for an instant.

"Thanks; I'll do that," he answered impulsively. "It's very good of you."

They sat in the captain's library and smoked. The host did not offer to bring the decanter from the buffet—the other seemed so young to him. Jack smoked hard and glared at the fire which blazed in the grate until his silence grew to be uncomfortable.

"These blue devils are tough on us, aren't they?" ventured the captain kindly at last. "I have them myself. Far too often, you know."

"May I talk to you, Captain Staples?" said the boy suddenly, jumping to his feet nervously and beginning to pace the hearth-rug. "May I talk to you freely, man to man?"

"Why, certainly, my dear fellow," cried the captain, not knowing what to make of the odd behavior of his guest. "I shall be flattered more than I can tell by your confidence."

The youth stopped and faced his host, his back to the fire.

"You look upon me as a mere kid, I suppose, Captain Staples?" he began.

"Oh, now, really—" protested the other.

"Wait. Please hear me out," went on the boy solemnly. "I am quite young. Every man has to be that for a while, you know. You are a man of experience and position. You'll think I have a lot of nerve to say what I want to say to you; but I tell you, Captain Staples, a man's love doesn't take account of years or circumstances."

"Ah!" said the captain, with a heavy gasp. "It's Alice!"

"My Heaven, yes, it *is* Alice!" cried the youth, and turned his face to the fire.

The older man got up, went to him, and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Please go on," he said softly. "You have all my respect and my attention."

"I can't talk as you probably could," said the boy, almost sobbing. "I can't argue or philosophize, you know, but—I—well, all there is to it, sir, I've loved Alice since we were little tads, and I only want her to be happy. I don't care what happens to me, you know. What I want to get at is this—what do you mean to do? What are your intentions, Captain Staples?"

"What do you mean?" cried Staples. "What wild talk is this?"

"That's the way you men of the world always take things," wailed the boy. "*Wild talk*, you call it. You don't think it's anything to flirt and amuse yourself with an angel like Alice, and let her eat her heart out over you. I knew it would be so."

"Stop!" shouted the captain. "If you say any more I'll strike you. Great Heavens! *Amuse myself with Alice! Let her eat her heart out for me?* What do you mean, man? Do I seem like a trifler? Tell me, what am *I* eating my own heart out for? Is it to trifle with her. No, you are wrong, boy. You are insane with jealousy. Alice is indifferent to me. She is too beautiful, too young, too perfect for me! And you dare come to me and call me a trifler?"

"Heaven help me!" groaned the boy, "she cares for nobody but you. Indifferent, you say? Why, the poor girl has been trying for weeks to forget you and learn to live without you. You have been so cold to her. You, you polished, comfortable man of the world, are her king and hero, and I am only a slave at her feet."

Captain Staples groaned aloud and sank into a chair.

"This is almost more than I can bear," he said. "Have I really been so blind? Have I caused that angel a moment's unhappiness?"

The boy came close to him and looked into his face.

"If you are speaking honestly," he said brokenly, "I am glad. I think my heart will break; but I will respect you as the man Alice loves, if you can be worthy of her."

The captain seized the other's hand.

"My friend," he said, "do you know—can you begin to know what this is that you have done?"

"Do I know?" cried the youth. "Do I! Does a man know when he is cutting his own throat?"

"Mr. Busley," said Staples, as he would address a superior, "when you are forty, you will know better than you do now what an act you have done. Men rarely do such things outside of novels and plays. You are a nobleman, sir. I will not try anything so vain as thanking you for this blessing, but you'll be happy some day, sir; you have a soul that is not often found on this earth."

The boy sat down and leaned his head upon his arms.

"Don't say any more, please," he said. "I don't care anything about heroics and all that; I don't know anything in this world but Alice. I must go. I must be alone. Good night, Captain Staples. God bless you. You have finished my poor heart, but you've made me happy, sir. Good night."

He was out of the door like a flash; but the captain ran after him, and caught him near the elevator.

"I want to shake your hand again, Mr. Busley," he said thickly. "I hope we shall be friends always. You are a great man; you're a youth only in years. Continue to be true to yourself."

II.

It was very late that evening; the Bryton family were about retiring, when young Busley surprised them by returning.

"You're a most unconventional person, Jack," observed Mrs. Bryton, "coming in here at all hours. Has your father locked you out of your own house?"

"Oh, no!" said Jack. "I just dropped in again, Aunt Elizabeth, to see if you might not change your mind and lend me that fifty. Honest, I've got to get that money before to-morrow night."

"Jack, you are positively indecent," declared Mrs. Bryton. "No! If your father will not let you have the money, I certainly shall not."

"Well, I think you ought, when I tell you all I've done for you this evening," he said with a suspicion of a grin.

"Now, what have you done, you awful boy?" cried Alice, coming forward.

"Tell us; tell us the worst, Jack; you

are capable of anything!" added Mrs. Bryton anxiously.

"Dear aunt, I have cinched Alice's captain for her," replied the young scapegrace. "You and she have worked over the poor duffer all winter, and only succeeded in scaring him off. You lack skill. I—your worthless nephew—have devoted a paltry half-hour to the gallant captain, a few tears and attitudes, and lo! I have him lashed to the mast, ready for delivery. If he isn't here on his knees by ten to-morrow morning, I'll forfeit the fifty."

Alice stood looking at him during this recital, half incredulously, but as he finished she sprang upon him, enfolded him in her arms, and kissed him rapturously on both cheeks.

"Jacky Busley," she cried, "you're the naughtiest, craziest, darlingest boy in the world!"

"I only hope, Jack," said Mrs. Bryton conservatively, "that your dramatic display aroused no grave suspicions in the mind of the urbane and affable Captain Staples."

DEFYING HIS FATHER.

BY JOHN GARRETSEE.

About the Farmer's Son, the Storekeeper's Daughter, and an Apparently Unaccountable Shift in Sentiment on the Part of a Whole Family.

"YOU leave them Winthrops alone or leave me!" roared old Benjamin Martin.

He shook his milking-stool in front of the handsome young face, which smiled back impudently at him.

"You know, George Winthrop has set up nights to do me dirt," the old man went on. "Now you're gettin' the idee you'd like to wear a b'iled shirt every day in the week and be in the store business down to the station too. Think yer a leetle better'n us farmers. So yer shinin' round the storekeeper's daughter."

That shot was so near the mark that it broke through young Horace's armor of disdain.

"Father," he blazed back, "I won't listen to such talk from you. I'm over twenty-one, and I'm not as dependent as you seem to think."

"Hark now to me, ye darn little fool," choked the old man, rage struggling with amazement. "Ye think ye kin git along without yer dad, do ye? Well, ye kin try it a spell. Jest pack up an' git. When ye git good an' sick of it, an' kin do as I say, come back."

Horace walked away without a word, but there was a superior smile on his face that baffled his father.

"Wonder what the young smart Aleck has in his hat anyhow?" he growled as his son disappeared.

As a matter of fact, the ambitious Horace had something very definite "in his hat." Mary Winthrop, daughter of the head man of Burton's Station, was fair to look upon, and young Mr. Martin really thought he was very fond of her. So successful had been his suit that Mary had just secretly promised to marry him as soon as her father would consent.

It must be noted, however, that Horace's aspirations for the hand of Mary Winthrop had taken bud simultaneously with his ambition to forsake the soil and connect himself with her father's business.

To his surprise, Mr. Winthrop did not oppose young Martin's aspirations to his daughter. As a matter of fact, the storekeeper eagerly welcomed an opportunity to end, if possible, the ancient feud that had for years kept from his trade the richest farmer in the township and one who influenced a large following.

Hence, when he came home earlier than usual one evening and surprised the bold son of his enemy sitting on his door-step, he greeted him kindly, and before the interview was over Horace had ventured to confide in him his desire to get into the store business.

"I want just such men as you," responded Mr. Winthrop promptly. "If you ever decide to quit the farm, come

around. I'll give you a good job, and be glad to teach you the business. Your father'll find I ain't so bad."

He meant it, too.

Therefore, when Benjamin Martin sent his heir out thus rudely to hustle in the cold world for himself, that young hopeful stepped forth blithely, confident that he had already prepared for himself a table in the midst of his father's enemies.

"Winthrop'll sure take me into the business, soon's I marry Mary," he reflected, "and I guess he won't kick much at that either. Anyhow, I'll play careful, an' keep a good job. Won't dad be sore, though, when he finds I jest drop down to town an' live in a clover-bed, and perhaps git to be part owner of Winthrop's store in a year or so?"

Thus pondering, he tramped the three miles to town, and the more he thought them over the more contemptible and amusing seemed his father's views.

He registered at the Eagle Hotel, and went in to see Mr. Winthrop. That worthy was busy with customers, but greeted him cordially, and asked him to drop in the store later in the evening. So, more confident that ever, Horace had his supper, and started for a stroll to kill time till it should be proper to call on Mary.

It was still lacking half an hour of eight when Horace, overcome by impatience, turned for the fifth time to walk past the house where the lady lived. As he swung off the main street past the hotel-sheds, he almost ran into his father, who had come to town for the Saturday night trading and had just put up his team.

The old man's face showed clearly under the street light, but Horace was more in the shadow, and for the moment he thought his father did not recognize him. Just after the two passed, however, the younger man heard a rapid step behind him, and a hand was placed on his shoulder.

So the old man wanted to reason with him, after all. Perhaps he wished to take back his former harsh words.

This was too good! Well, he'd show him how independent he was. So Horace, boiling over with much rehearsed anti-parental oratory, turned and poured it forth before the other could get in a word.

The pitch darkness at this point on the walk gave him courage. He would hardly have dared express quite such extreme sentiments to his father's face in broad daylight.

"Take your hand off me!" he shouted. "You thought a little palaver would bring me over, but I fooled you. I know your game. No Martin ever licked another's hand, and I won't lick even yours. You haven't got anything I want, so leave me alone."

Horace stopped then, frightened at his own words. He had a momentary impulse to run. His father was still pretty lusty, and might forget that the son could no longer be taken over the parental knee.

Nothing happened, however. The other merely stood there speechless for a second in the darkness, then hurried on. Horace breathed a sigh of relief and continued his walk, more than ever pleased with himself.

Half an hour later he rang the bell at the Winthrops'. He was met by Mary's mother.

"Mary won't see you, young man," snapped that lady.

Horace nearly fell to the floor in surprise. Mrs. Winthrop had hitherto been most affable.

"We don't want you coming around here again," she went on. "Of all the impudence!" and she started to slam the door in his face.

Horace, angry in a flash despite his bewilderment, thrust his foot into the crack and retorted:

"You can't tell me that. I know better; and I'll see Mary in spite of you. What's the matter, anyhow?"

"No, you won't see me," replied Mary's voice from somewhere in the interior. "I don't want ever to see you again."

Horace was so astonished that he permitted Mrs. Winthrop to close the door, and stood on the steps there in the darkness, wondering what it all meant. Had they heard of the break with his father, and decided he wasn't worth cultivating?

But he had intimated that possibility to both Mary and her father before, and they seemed unaffected.

Horace went at once to the store to find out what could have got into the heads of the Winthrop household so suddenly. Mr. Winthrop was at his desk in the rear. Several village loafers were gathered about.

The moment the proprietor saw who his caller was, he turned white with wrath and started for him. Before the thunderstruck young man knew what had hit him, Mr. Winthrop had grasped him firmly by the collar and propelled him through the doorway.

"So you tricked me!" he shouted, as he gave his would-be son-in-law a final shake and literally dropped him, too astonished to resist. "If I ever see you around here again I'll horsewhip you!"

With that Horace, the ambitious, was again left in outer darkness, both mental and physical.

Could his father, in that brief time since supper, have said or done something that would produce such an effect, he asked himself?

The old man boasted that he hadn't spoken to George Winthrop for years, and wouldn't. Besides, anything he would say against Horace to the storekeeper would only increase that person's regard for the young man, as far as Horace knew. Anyhow, he had only enough money to pay a week's board, and he had no job after all.

He would probably be glad enough now to get anything he could, regardless of "boiled shirts."

Thus disconsolate, he at length wandered back to the little hotel. As he entered the tiny lobby he was pounced upon by some one who grabbed his arms and dragged him across the passageway to the privacy of the sitting-room, there to pump his hands gleefully and repeat a dozen times:

"Well, well! Ye did fool the old man, an' ye done George Winthrop good an' proper!"

It was his father, but was he crazy?

What he could be talking about Horace could not imagine. After the first outburst they left the hotel together in silence. Outside, Horace ventured to ask:

"Where we goin'?"

"Home, boy, home!" and he trailed off into a prolonged chuckle.

Something portentous had happened, but Horace did not dare betray any more ignorance.

His father evidently had forgotten or forgiven the outbreak of the hour before.

Out on the road the old man turned to the son and chuckled again.

"So ye was on to 'em all the time, an' I thought ye was a befuddled young fool. If I'd known the game, I might 'a' spoiled it.

"Why, that feller had been braggin' fer a month that his girl was leadin' you on, an' he was goin' to hev ye workin' in his store an' me feedin' out of his hand in a week.

"Then, to-night, after he tells the boys to gather round and watch him gather ye in, ye meet him on the street an' tell him what ye think of him.

"'No Martin ever licked any man's hand,' ye told him. An' wa'n't it luck that Jim Morse heard ye say it, an' told it all over town?

"Ye ought to waited till they was a lot around; but it turned out all right, and ye made him liable fer assault, too. A dozen told me ye never touched him back in the store when he lit on ye. Yer a clever one! Guess we kin fix things up so ye kin have easier times after this."

Suddenly Horace saw a light.

"Father," he broke in, "didn't you see me by the hotel-sheds this evening?"

"No, I ain't seen you nowhere before to-night," was the reply.

Then Horace was sure of it. George Winthrop had been hurrying after him in the dark just as he met his father.

When his prospective employer had put his hand on his shoulder, Horace had assumed it was his parent, and had poured out the vials of his wrath.

The enraged Winthrop, at first too surprised to speak, had hurried on home and reported to his family. Meanwhile the talebearer had peddled it around town. This Horace saw clearly from putting the circumstantial evidence together, but decided it was unnecessary to tell as much to his father, and he'd never know. For a few moments they rode on in silence, then Martin, senior, cleared his throat.

"Horace," he began hesitatingly, "Bigsby's store is goin' to sell out over 'cross the railroad, an' I made a dicker a week ago to buy it. I made up my mind you wa'n't fit fer farmin'."

THE CURRENT OF LIFE.

BY FRANK CONDON.

The Junior Banker Rescues a Maiden in Distress, Forms One of an Interesting Circle, and Gets the Shock of His Life on the Morning After.

A JUNIOR banker is a young man who is not allowed to do a great many things he earnestly desires to do: but in time a junior banker becomes a senior banker, and forgets that he ever wanted to do anything that he was not permitted to do. There are ethics about the profession—the same general species that forbid a physician to advertise above a double cut-off rule, although he may crawl under street-cars and administer opiates to a dying East Side child.

Young Mr. James N. Haggin was a junior banker, and a bonding company regulated his morals and suggested his entertainment. It frequently occurred to Mr. Haggin that a junior truck-driver had a happy lot, and, as he walked across Seventy-Fourth Street toward Central Park, he was immersed in sad reflection.

If he could, only for one evening, go to that festive little joint up near the Harlem River, where the dancing never ceases till three in the morning and introductions are *de trop,* he felt that life might be worth boosting along.

He tossed his cigarette into the street and increased his pace. He would, at least, stroll beside the stone park wall, and later he would return to his brother and sister and retire early, because the bank people were fidgety about office-hours.

Seventy-Fourth Street is the most proper and respectable street in New York. On either side are brownstone houses, plate-glass outer doors, curving stone steps, and diminutive areas for the tradesmen. People who have lived in Seventy-Fourth Street for generations count from the corner, because all entrances are identical, all doorways are duplicates, and all grilled-work comes from the same factory.

Suddenly, near a lamp-post, James N. Haggin stopped short. A few paces away, between the edge of the sidewalk and the curb, stood a young woman, and, even in the uncertain light, James divined instantly that she was exceedingly well dressed, exceedingly beautiful, and in exceeding trouble of some sort.

As he halted, the girl swayed unevenly, and her head dropped forward. She would have fallen, but he reached her as she toppled, and she crumpled limply in his arms.

Her broad hat hid her face, but young Mr. Haggin finally turned her toward him. He saw distinctly that she was a feminine miracle of beauty.

"I am dying," she whispered. "It is my heart. Take me in somewhere."

He lifted her clear of the pavement and looked about him hastily. There were no other pedestrians on the block, and in many of the houses the entry-lights had been turned out. Directly before him, in the basement of the house nearest at hand, an electric lamp glowed redly; and without further hesitation he stepped into the area, carrying the girl in his arms, and hammered at the iron grating.

The girl's face was white as death. Haggin was panic-stricken at the thought that she might die in his arms before he could get her into the house, and with renewed energy he shook and pounded at the gate. Finally he discovered the bell, and the clamor he sent up might have aroused an entire street.

In what seemed a thousand years, he heard footsteps coming down a stairway, and an inner door unclasped and jangled back. An individual in livery opened the outer door and stared at the young banker and his burden in amazement.

"This girl is dying or dead!" exclaimed Haggin breathlessly. "I caught her as she fell. Something will have to be done for her instantly. Push that door wide open and help me in with her."

Two minutes later the fair victim lay

on a couch in the front basement, and young Mr. Haggin, the butler, and two others were standing before her inert body. Haggin chafed her hands, which were quite cold.

"Have you brandy?" he asked.

It was brought at once, and he forced a few drops between the girl's clenched teeth.

The other two were an elderly man, with a short white beard, and a slender little woman, evidently his wife.

"My name is Haggin, James N. Haggin," explained the young banker rapidly, and he repeated the story he had told the butler.

"Do you know this young woman?" inquired the elderly gentleman.

"Never saw her in my life till five minutes ago. She was about to fall, and I seized her. She said it was her heart, and then she fainted."

They stood before the couch, anxiously watching the white face.

"We will get a physician at once," said the lady. "William, telephone to Dr. Mott, and ask him to hurry over. The girl may die."

Suddenly the victim moved. Her hand slipped up to her face, and she pushed her disordered hair back.

Haggin marveled at her beauty for the tenth time. Then she opened her eyes, and slowly raised herself to a sitting position.

"No," she whispered, "no doctor. I loathe doctors. I can't have them near me. Besides, I'm better now, much better."

She shook her head earnestly, and the butler halted at the foot of the stairway.

"It was rather a bad attack, wasn't it?" she continued, smiling up into the strange faces. "I've had them before, but never so severe as this. Don't let me bother you, I beg. I think I shall be all right presently."

Suddenly she looked directly into Haggin's eyes, and that young man experienced a distinct shock. He had not observed her eyes previously, for they had been closed.

Now, as he saw them, he felt a strange and inexplicable longing to keep this girl alive. Such eyes should never close for the long sleep, he found himself saying to himself.

"Please help me to a chair," the patient asked, and he stepped forward with alacrity.

She seated herself by the table, and Haggin found to his astonishment that his hand was clasped tightly in hers. He looked down at it wonderingly.

"Let me take your hand also," she said, addressing the butler, and that solemn functionary thereupon stepped to the table and gave her his hairy fist.

She sat in silence for several minutes, her slim fingers gripped firmly over the two hands.

She breathed deeply, and then settled herself more comfortably in her chair.

"I feel better," she said. "You must not think this strange. My heart is a poor little heart, without much strength, and that is why doctors are useless. When I get these attacks, I must derive strength from others, and by holding your hands thus I absorb vitality from both of you. You don't mind making this sacrifice, do you?"

She smiled slowly, looking again into young Mr. Haggin's eyes.

"Indeed I don't," he replied hastily. "I'm glad, if it will do you any good."

He felt that he could willingly sit down and let them saw off his right leg, if it would help. The butler was non-committal.

"If it would not be asking too much," she continued, in the soft, low tone that sent creepy chills down Haggin's spine, "would you mind adding your strength also?" She looked expectantly toward the elderly couple. "It will hasten my recovery. If you will take each other's hands and form a circle, the stream of vitality will be much stronger. I'll be perfectly well again in a few minutes."

"Indeed we will, and gladly," replied the old gentleman. "Martha, you sit there. I'll take this chair. It's something like an old-fashioned table-knocking party, isn't it?"

The girl smiled and nodded. Haggin sat down; and the butler, being a proper butler, remained standing. The circle was complete.

For a long time no word was said. The girl's eyes had closed again and she leaned back in her chair, drawing her breath in slowly through parted lips. Haggin watched these lips. He could

see the blood returning very slowly. The pallor of her cheeks was giving way to a rosier hue. He had never heard of this stream-of-life treatment, but it was evidently effectual.

What he was keenly aware of was that a soft, warm hand was clasping his own, and that he liked the sensation absurdly. He could feel his pulse throbbing in his wrist, and he was overcome by the insane notion that he would like to have this ordeal continue indefinitely. He was afraid the girl was getting well too quickly.

Wrists ached from the stern grip of a neighbor's hand and from the stiffened position, but there was no complaint. More than half an hour had passed since Haggin brought the girl into the room. The butler had changed his position twenty times.

Finally, with a long sigh of relief, the pretty patient dropped the hands on either side and pushed her chair away from the table.

"There," she murmured, "I am better. My heart has stopped its fluttering, and I shall be perfectly well before I reach home."

"Are you sure you're all right?" Haggin asked solicitously. "Perhaps you had better remain here quietly for a while."

"No, indeed. I am better already. See here."

She rose and walked firmly up and down the room.

"I'm not the least bit unsteady. I can always tell when I'm better, for, you see, this is not the first time I have been taken ill in this way. I want to thank you all for helping me—for giving me part of your strength.

"I am sorry to have come into your home," turning to the elderly couple, "and disturbing you in this manner. Especially I desire to thank you for coming to me on the street"—this to Haggin. "I might have fallen and died out there."

Haggin begged that she would refrain from thanking him. He was overjoyed to think that he had been on hand at the right moment.

"And if you will wait, I shall get you a cab—" he added.

"No, please don't," she protested. "I have taken up too much time in this lovely home already, and I must stay no longer. I will go with you. There are plenty of cabs in the neighborhood."

It was vain to argue. The girl thanked her hosts over and over. She thanked the butler, and that worthy blushed with pleasure.

"My name is Miss Morrison," she concluded. "Perhaps you have heard of the Morrisons, of Kentucky. The family is well known."

Then Haggin took her arm, and they passed out through the same doorway by which they had entered. The old people bade them good night, and urged the girl to be very careful and to avoid excitement.

"Here's a taxicab," Haggin said ten minutes later. "I'll go home with you. It isn't right for you to try it alone."

"No, indeed, Mr.—Mr.—" she protested.

"Mr. Haggin — James N. Haggin, Prospect National Bank."

"No, Mr. Haggin, you must not come with me. I have already taken up hours of your time. I want you to know that I am grateful to you, but I cannot ask more of your attention to-night. I hope to see you again. Surely, we are acquainted now, although it has come about in rather an odd manner."

Again the girl had her way. With many objections, young Mr. Haggin lifted her into a taxicab. He gave the driver the number she mentioned, and the cab whirled away up-town.

Mr. Haggin went home slowly, deliberating upon the fact that strange things happen even in New York. He tossed about considerably that night before he finally dropped off to sleep, to dream of weak hearts and warm hands, in which his own was clasped tightly.

At breakfast Haggin's brother came in with the morning paper in his hand.

"Here's a clever bit of work," he commented. "I think I've met old Montaigne, too."

He handed the paper to Haggin. On the first column was an article describing in detail the robbery of the private residence of Mr. Bertram Montaigne, the mining engineer and capitalist.

"The burglars," said the story, "en-

tered the Montaigne residence, at 99 Seventy-Fourth Street, through a door in the roof, and leisurely looted a mahogany safe which was kept on an upper floor. It contained over sixty thousand dollars' worth of jewels; and the thieves, instead of breaking the lock, puttered with it patiently until they had found the combination, indicating that they had reason to believe they were secure from interruption. The Montaigne family were in the basement dining-room during the robbery, and knew nothing of it until a late hour last night."

Then followed a list of the stolen gems.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Haggin's brother, suddenly looking at him over the coffee-cup. "You're shaking like a leaf."

Haggin dropped the paper to the floor. He regarded his brother with blank amazement, and totally ignored the question.

"By gad!" he muttered half aloud, "I gave Montaigne my name. The question confronting me is, what's the proper thing to do?"

Speculating On a Sure Thing.

BY ANTHONY WRIGHT.

The Grocer Clerk's Heritage and the Bank Clerk's Advice, To Say Nothing of the Part the Dictionary Played.

I CASHED the check.

It's needless for me to try to palm the thing off as an every-day occurrence. To tell the truth, which I sometimes do, I'd never cashed a check in my life before. I'd never even had a check to cash.

My employer, John Hind, as square a grocer as ever sanded the sugar, always paid me in cash. Twelve dollars a week it was in those days, for I was pretty good, as grocery clerks go.

The check came from a relative who went out West and made his pile in gold-mining. Then he made his will and died, leaving each of some seventy cousins a hundred dollars apiece.

When I got the check it didn't look big to me. It couldn't compare with real money.

I showed the thing to my roommate. He was a newcomer at our boarding-house, and we'd only roomed together a week; but I knew he worked in a bank and ought to be wise about such things.

Occasionally I took checks from customers in payment for goods; but old John Hind always looked at them askance, and told me he preferred cash. That's one reason why I was a little bit suspicious of the pink paper.

Real money was always green or yellow; I had never seen any pink before; and, from what I had learned from John Hind, half the checks in the world were good and the other half were only worth the paper they were written on.

Well, my roommate looked at the thing, and I asked him what it was worth.

"One hundred dollars," he answered confidently.

"How do I get the money?"

"Go to some one who knows you and ask him to cash it."

"But who would have a hundred dollars lying loose? Mrs. Perkins wouldn't be able to give me that much."

"No, I don't imagine a boarding-house keeper would have as much cash as that," replied the bank clerk. "Tell you what: I'll take it to the bank with me in the morning and have it put through for you."

It was a very professional offer, but I didn't know Jeffson very well; and as long as he said it was worth a hundred dollars, I began to get optimistic.

I've always been a bit shrewd; and it seemed to me that if the thing was worth a hundred dollars to him, I might be able to get even more money out of it.

"No, I guess I'll get my boss to cash the check," I told him.

"Oh, suit yourself," he said in an off-hand manner. "But I can get the money for you if you wish."

He seemed a little too eager. I remembered reading newspaper stories about bank clerks who had run away with money, and I figured if the thing were worth while at all, I might as well get all that was coming to me.

To tell the truth, I didn't trust him. I have to know a man pretty well before I'll let him carry my money around in his pockets.

That night I read an advertisement in the paper about some stock that was selling cheap. I'd always skipped through such matter to get to the joke page; but, feeling now more or less like a financier, I perused the financial columns and read about the stock.

I didn't know any more about stocks than I did about checks; but the advertisement said I could buy shares at a dollar apiece, and in a month's time they would be worth at least double that amount.

It looked good to me. It was stock in some mine, and I suddenly remembered that was how my uncle had made all his money.

Casually, I mentioned the thing to Jeffson.

"I wouldn't do it," he advised. "Let me take the money and bank it for you. We pay four per cent in our savings department."

"But that would only be—let's see—four dollars a year," I figured—having studied percentage in school.

"Yes, but it's sure money with no risk attached to it," he replied. "It's the best thing to do with it."

Jeffson seemed so anxious to get his fingers on my inheritance that it made me all the more determined to buy that mining stock.

I sat up late figuring the thing out. The advertisement said the price would be three times as much inside of a year and it would pay fifty per cent.

That sounded a bit big, and I was a little suspicious of it on that account. I figured the thing out carefully, and found that my hundred dollars would amount to four hundred and fifty at the end of a year if I bought the stock.

It seemed pretty clear to me. The figures took my breath away, and I felt that Jeffson had advised me to put it in his bank so they could deposit it in buying this same mining stock and make the money instead of me.

That didn't look at all good. I wanted to pick the plums myself.

"You're sure you don't want me to cash that check for you?" asked Jeffson the next morning.

I thought his tone was a little too solicitous, so I told him that I'd get John Hind to do it.

"Well, I was only going to do it for your convenience, anyway," he replied, shrugging his shoulders. "All you have to do is to sign it on the back."

"Oh, I know that perfectly well," I answered calmly.

"Are you going to buy that mining stock?" he inquired.

"Yes, I guess so," I replied.

"Better think it over. It will be safer with us at four per cent," were his last words as he went down to breakfast.

Every word he said seemed to make me more nervous about that check, and more anxious to invest it in the mining stock.

Jeffson was an early bird, and often went for a walk before going to the bank; and when I got down to breakfast, he had already finished and left the house.

I was rather glad, because I didn't want him to worry me about investing the money. I had determined on my own course.

Old John Hind's eyes stuck out when he read the check I presented to him.

"Ain't been robbin' anybody, have you?" he asked.

"Nobody but the customers," I answered promptly.

"That's a good boy," he answered, patting me on the back.

I explained to him where the check came from, and he advised me to be very careful with the proceeds of it.

I was about to tell him of the mining stock, but I felt it was none of his business; and he might offer to handle the money himself, as Jeffson had.

That didn't interest me in the least. I wanted the satisfaction of doing as I pleased with the coin.

When he sent to the bank for change that morning he had my check cashed, and I held my breath as he counted into my hand ten crisp ten-dollar bills—bills

are always crisp when they come in big bunches like that. I'd never noticed it before.

"What are you going to do with all that coin, Bill?" he asked me later in the day.

"Oh, I don't know," I answered grandly; "maybe I'll go into business for myself."

That tickled him. He liked me pretty well, and wanted to see me get along.

"Whatever you do, don't get mixed up in any mining stock," he went on.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Well, if you want to throw your money away, you might as well go down to Tampa and bet on the races. Tell you what I'll do for you. You put that hundred dollars into my business here, and I'll see that you don't lose anything by it."

That didn't sound at all good to me. I wasn't offering anybody any Christmas presents, and I muchly preferred to handle all of my own wealth myself.

I thanked him out of decency, and hurried home that night to read the mining-stock advertisement again. It looked even better to me than it had before.

I paid Mrs. Perkins ten dollars for back board and stuffed the other nine ten-dollar bills deep into a trousers-pocket. I felt very affluent. Every once in a while I would seek the privacy of my own boudoir to count and thumb over the shiny new bills.

I wanted to have one framed and stuck up where I could look at it every minute.

Jeffson came home and asked me if I had succeeded in cashing the check.

"Oh, easily," I replied.

"I hope you didn't buy that mining stock," he went on.

"No, not yet. But I'm going to, first thing in the morning," I replied, feeling more sure that I had picked the proper investment just because everybody advised me against it.

"Better let me take that—"

I cut Jeffson off before he could offer again to deposit the money for me. He was altogether too zealous of my welfare, it seemed to me.

There was one other reason why I didn't want to go into details with Jeffson about that money. In expectation of getting the cash on my check, I had gone out and bought an overcoat, paying five dollars down and promising to pay the remaining fifteen the next morning.

I needed that coat, and the dealer said he wouldn't hold it any longer than the next day.

So, having paid the landlady ten dollars, and having fifteen yet to spend, I would have only seventy-five dollars to invest anyway.

It's funny how a man figures money.

If he has a certain amount coming to him, he's always sure to count on the whole bunch, forgetting his debts. Then, when the currency is in his hand, it begins to dwindle; he suddenly remembers a score of bills unpaid, and other little things which eat up the principal and cause it to resemble thirty cents.

Before going to bed that night I tried fifty different places in which to plant my ninety dollars. I was going to buy the mining stock and pay for the overcoat the first thing in the morning. I began to wish that I'd done both that evening; then I could have gone to sleep with a safer feeling.

First I thought of putting the money under my pillow. Then I remembered that Jeffson slept with me, and might get the money without my knowledge.

Of course, I didn't think he'd steal; but I am cautious by nature. He was a bank clerk; I hadn't known him long; and it wasn't like me to take any chances.

Jeffson was out for the evening, so I had the room all to myself. I scouted around and tried a dozen places where the money might be safely hidden. But there was some objection to each one.

At length I decided that the safest thing to do was sit up and hold the money all night.

I started with that idea in mind, and immediately fell asleep. I didn't snore long; for I remember waking with a start, and staring down at the roll in my hand.

Jeffson wasn't home yet. That decided it. I stepped over to the table, picked up my Webster's Dictionary, a relic of school-days, and placed the nine ten-dollar bills in between the leaves. Then I looked at the book, and found that nobody could possibly tell where I had hidden the money.

Dead tired, I went to bed. A few minutes later, while I was half asleep, Jeffson entered the room, slipped off his clothes, and went to bed without saying a word, thinking I was full asleep, I guess.

I listened to his steps, and was greatly relieved that he did not go near the table where the dictionary lay, fondling my money between its leaves.

That night I dreamed about mining stock—my particular brand. It soared to a thousand dollars a share, and paid two hundred per cent dividends for ten years.

That made me more than a millionaire, and when I awakened I was just signing checks for a thousand dollars apiece to present to each of my cousins, with the advice that they invest it in mining stock.

The minute I was fully awake I glanced around the room. Jeffson had gone. It was nothing unusual, as he got up earlier than I, in spite of the fact that he kept banker's hours.

Then the thought of my ninety dollars occurred to me. I would rush through with breakfast and hurry to the office where they were selling the stock, buy seventy-five dollars' worth, and then clinch that overcoat on which I had paid five dollars deposit.

With a happy smile I leaped from bed and rushed over to the table.

I opened the dictionary at the page where I had hidden the money.

At that moment I was seized with some sort of a mental spasm, and nearly fell to the floor in a fit.

The money was gone!

I turned the book upside down and shook it. Nothing dropped. I began going crazy—everything whirled before my eyes. When I came to I found myself sitting on the floor going through that dictionary, fingering each page separately.

The money was gone. There was no trace of it anywhere. I searched the room. All the time my subconscious mind was accusing Jeffson.

With feverish haste I jerked on my clothes and rushed down to breakfast, hoping against hope that I would find Jeffson at the table.

But he wasn't there. I didn't want to tell Mrs. Perkins the trouble. I thought it would be best to keep the thing under my hat until I had worked out some solution.

As I choked down a little breakfast horrible thoughts kept crowding in upon me. I thought of all the money I would lose by not being able to invest in that mining stock. I also thought of that perfectly good overcoat and the five dollars I would have to forfeit.

Oh, I was up against it for fair!

Of course, the only thing to do was to find Jeffson. I dashed out to a telephone at the corner and called up his bank.

No. Mr. Jeffson hadn't showed up yet that morning.

I saw it all in a flash.

Jeffson had been out late the night before. Doubtless he had been robbing the bank. Then he had come home for my ninety dollars and a little sleep, having taken the first train out of town that morning.

It was all perfectly evident.

Hurrying back to the boarding-house, I asked Mrs. Perkins if Jeffson had been down to breakfast.

"Yes, he was here quite early and went out for a walk in the park," she answered.

That settled it. He had gone—with my money. I should have been more careful.

Again I searched every corner in my room. It was a small room we shared, and when I finished I was absolutely sure that the money was not there.

Then, it being late, I started for the store, but stopped on my way to explain things to the man who held the overcoat for my five dollars.

He was very sorry, but said I would have to give up the coat. He couldn't hold it any longer for me, and it wouldn't be business for him to return my five dollars deposit.

That saddened life a little more for me. I went to work with my jaw hanging down at least a foot.

How differently everything had turned out. Here I had expected to make the profitable stock investment and redeem my overcoat. Now I had no overcoat, and not a cent's worth of stock. No wonder I had to stop occasionally and wipe away a surreptitious tear.

Finally, John Hind noticed it and asked me what the trouble was. I gave him the whole story, and he called me down for not having invested the money in his business.

I called up the bank again and asked for Jeffson. They said he wasn't in; and I hung up the receiver with something like a groan. I was absolutely sure now that my money was gone, and I tried to resign myself to my fate.

Hind rubbed it in all morning that I ought to have a guardian. He said it was better that I had lost the money than to have put it into that mining stock, anyway.

At noon I rushed home to lunch, in the hope of getting some trace of my roommate, Jeffson.

What was my surprise when he met me at the dining-room door, dived a hand into his pocket and handed me a roll of bills.

"Then you've relented? You've reformed?" I gasped.

"What do you mean?" he queried.

"You stole my money and decided to give it back. You've come back to give yourself up."

"Oh, dry up!" he growled. "I was looking up a word in the dictionary this morning when I came across your roll. I didn't want to waken you and make you keep better care of it, so I stuck it in my pocket, to give you a scare. That's no place to put money. You ought to have more respect for the stuff. If you worked in a bank, as I do, you wouldn't leave it lying around like that. It's the first place a thief would have looked."

I swallowed like a gasping fish out of water. It hardly seemed possible that his story could be true. I counted the money. It was all there.

Then I suddenly remembered his absence from the bank when I had called up.

"But why have you quit your job?" I demanded.

"You need a little peruna," replied Jeffson facetiously. "I haven't left the bank."

"But I called up, and they said you weren't there."

"At what time?"

"Ten o'clock."

"Oh, they sent me on an errand!"

"But why didn't you give me this money back sooner? Didn't you know that I'd miss it?" I demanded.

"Yes. I expected to get back from my walk while you were eating breakfast; but I went too far and was late at the bank, so I decided to wait about the money till this noon."

The explanation was all right. I knew he was telling the truth. But I was a little sore about it. I had lost the opportunity of investing in the mining stock that day, and it might be too late to get the overcoat.

"I wanted to invest that money in stock this morning," I said in an injured tone of voice.

"Well, it's a good thing you didn't," replied Jeffson, with a smile. "That's one reason I didn't call you up and tell you I was taking care of your ninety dollars."

"Why?" I asked curiously.

"That concern went into the hands of the receiver at eleven o'clock this morning. We got the news at the bank first thing, and I smiled to think of your luck in staying out. If I hadn't taken your money out you'd have put it in the mining stock and been cleaned out. It was a fake concern all the way through, as I told you, and they won't pay two cents on the dollar."

My surprise overwhelmed me. I reached out and grasped Jeffson's hand. He had saved me. I woud have been seventy-five dollars out if it hadn't been for his little joke to frighten me for trying to hide money in such a poor place.

I gasped my appreciation, and told him I'd be his brother till my dying day. Then I dashed off, and was just in time to secure the overcoat.

When I reached the store I rushed up to John Hind and, with trembling hands, thrust the seventy-five dollars into his palms.

"There!" I said. "Put it in your business and give me a receipt for it. I'm done with speculating. I want to speculate on a sure thing after this."

He looked at me and smiled, while I hurriedly explained how my roommate's thoughtfulness had helped me out and saved my seventy-five dollars.

He invested the money in his business, and as I got to doing better he took my savings and put them in the same place. Now I am a full partner with old John Hind.

I often smile and think what I would have been if Jeffson hadn't picked up my money that morning.

OBSTINATE BENJAMIN.

BY FRITZ KROG.

A Tale of the Farming Community in which Hogs, Law, and Wedding-Bells Are Oddly Commingled.

"HANNAH," said Horace Cole, laying his paper on the table, "pork's eight cents on the hoof, and that settles it. I'm goin' to sell Benjamin."

"What?" Mrs. Cole exclaimed, stopping her knitting in astonishment. "Sell Benjamin? The children will never get over it."

"Benjamin is the only hawg big enough to go," Horace replied. "If the children can't stand it, they'll have to lump it. A pet hawg is all right when he's jest a little porker, but a pet hawg as big and fat as Benjamin, and as sassy as he's got to be, is better off hangin' in a butcher-shop than playin' with kids. I'm goin' to ship him south to-morrer night."

"Horace," said Mrs. Cole, "you're gettin' harder all the time. I think it's mean, I do."

"What's eatin' you, ole woman?" her husband answered. "Do you reckon I can afford to keep a nine-hundred-pound hawg for fun, with corn up to eighty cents a bushel, and me with a big family to feed?"

"The family would be a bit smaller," Mrs. Cole said, "if you'd let Annie marry."

"Now, don't start on that," Horace almost shouted, jumping up from his chair. "Don't you drag Sam Beale into this argyment. Sam's son Jim will never, so long as I live, put foot in my house, much less marry my dorter. Hear?"

"Horace," said Mrs. Cole, laying her knitting down, "I'm goin' to have my say. You and Sam Beale are a couple o' fools to be lawin' and lawin' one another all the time, year in and year out. And what good comes of it? You ain't any closter to a settlement than you was ten year ago. And you're ruinin' your dorter's happiness."

"Aw, shucks!" cried Horace in disgust. "It can't be settled. It ain't women folks' business, anyhow."

"I know Annie's very unhappy," Mrs. Cole persisted, "and I know it's a shame for neighbors to carry on the way us and the Beales has been a doin'."

"There ain't no use talkin' now," Horace replied obstinately. "I ain't got no more to say. I'm goin' to bed."

The next evening he carried out his plan to sell Benjamin. Mrs. Cole's protests had produced no results other than to persuade her husband not to tell the children about the hog's sale and to drive him to town after sundown.

This program was not altogether objectionable to Horace, because the steamer which was bound to Memphis landed at Eton, three miles away, at nine o'clock at night. Hence, just at dusk, he proceeded to the meadow where the hogs were kept.

He found Benjamin peacefully asleep in the mud at the edge of the pond. Horace was feeling just a little put out about driving a hog three miles at night, and so he rudely interrupted Benjamin's sleep by kicking him vigorously a few times in the ribs.

Horace wore cowhide boots, and Benjamin was quite agile in leaving his bed. He had very little time to think the situation over, however, because, in preparation for the drive, Horace had armed himself with a long hickory stick, first cousin to a club, and he wasn't slow about laying it on Benjamin's flanks.

"Dod gast you!" cried Horace, "a mile an hour is record time fer a hawg, but you're goin' to make it!"

Poor Benjamin! Before he could gather his wits—if hogs have wits—he found himself out of the meadow, out of the lane, and on to the country road. Even there, if he strayed right or left to investigate a tuft of grass or a rotten apple, he would feel that hickory stick on his back and hear Horace's angry, "Soo, boy; soo!"

Even a hog will turn. For, after about an hour of this business of being beaten, Benjamin began a few stunts.

He suddenly darted from the roadway through an open gate into a field. Putting a thread in a needle standing on one's head is a simple trick compared with driving a hog through a gateway which he doesn't care to enter.

Benjamin would allow himself to be chased in a gallop right up to the gate, and then he'd swerve gracefully off to the side. Horace would follow and drive him patiently along the fence, fondly calling him "Honey boy," and other sweet names.

In passing the gate, Benjamin looked out on the road and then went on. And finally, when Horace was ready to give up, and prepared himself to spend the night in the field, Benjamin suddenly rushed out on the road and started madly for home.

It was a lucky circumstance for the man that Horace could beat him running. He caught up with the runaway before he had got very far, and presently Benjamin was properly headed for town again.

Although it was a cool night in late September, Horace was soon perspiring freely. He hit the hog so often and so hard that his right arm was growing very tired.

"Benjamin," he said, as they neared the little town of Eton, "you've overworked yourself and lost about fifty pounds. If we miss the boat, I'm goin' to kill you to-night."

During this speech, though Horace punctuated it freely with the hickory stick, Benjamin stopped, probably to listen. And he didn't move until he got good and ready, and then he started in a surprising gallop.

As it happened, the steamboat was still lying at the wharf when Horace and his hog arrived. The boat was the usual, big, dirty Mississippi packet plying between St. Louis and Memphis. A gang of colored roustabouts were at work unloading freight by lantern-light, and laughing and singing.

Horace went up to the mate and told him he wanted to ship a hog.

"All right," the mate replied; "but you'll have to wait until the last before we take him on board. Hogs is sometimes troublesome."

Horace went back to Benjamin and entertained himself until time to drive the hog on board by heading off Benjamin's countless attempts to wander away. Finally his turn came.

"All aboard!" the mate sang out. "Bring on the hawg!"

With the help of three roustabouts, Benjamin was driven up to the gangplank, but that was as far as he would go. No amount of persuasion in the form of soft words or hard blows could induce him to put so much as one hoof on the plank.

"Shove along! Shove along!" yelled the mate. "We can't stop here all night playin' tag with a hawg."

Idle words. Benjamin merely grunted twice and took a more determined stand. Horace, furious and almost exhausted, could barely do himself justice with the hickory stick, and the roustabouts stood by helplessly.

"Say, Mr. Saunders," the captain's voice suddenly called out from the upper deck, "what's the matter down there?"

"It's a hawg, sir," the mate replied. "He won't come on board."

"Mr. Saunders," the captain went on sarcastically, "do you mean to tell me we are tied up here trying to teach a hog to be polite?"

The mate made no reply, but took a hand himself in the business of moving Benjamin.

"I've moved fellers like you before," he muttered grimly. "Now, Bill, you take one ear. And, Tom, you take the other. Mr. Farmer Man, when I says, 'Heave to,' you kick him on one side, and Jim, you kick him on the other side."

The five men silently took their posts. The mate himself took a firm, business-like grip on Benjamin's nicely curled tail.

"Ready, boys?" asked the mate.

"Yassir," the negroes replied.

"Then, heave to!" the mate shouted.

What with having both ears twisted and pulled, the same occurring at his tail, and being kicked simultaneously in both sides, it must be admitted that Benjamin was being thoroughly urged to move. Move he did. He rose right up

in the air as though, among other things, a stick of dynamite had been exploded under him. Then he charged up the gangplank with such vigor that both roustabouts who had been hanging on to his ears were knocked into the river.

But there was too much precipitation in Benjamin's rush for his own safety. At the edge of the boat he stumbled, rolled over, and fell into the water, where the current carried him swiftly beyond reach and sight.

The two roustabouts, sputtering, coughing, and swearing, crawled out, none the worse for the ducking. The mate laughed and went aboard. The bell on the boat rang, the gangplank was lifted, and in a few minutes the steamer went churning down the river.

"Ye dod-gasted, blithering sap-heads," Horace yelled, shaking his fist at the disappearing boat, "I'll have the law on ye, losin' my hawg for me!"

Then he gazed mournfully at the black river, threw his hickory stick in the current, and turned his face homeward. It was after midnight when he got to bed.

At breakfast the next morning he broke the sad news to the family. The children set up a loud wail when they heard of their pet's tragic end.

"Benjamin is drownded! Benjamin is killted!" they cried.

"Keep still!" growled the father.

"It's a judgment," said Mrs. Cole solemnly.

"Judgment be danged!" exclaimed Horace, rising from the table and hurrying out of the room.

He went to the meadow, whence he had driven Benjamin, in order to examine the fence at the lower end. That fence had to be kept in tip-top condition, because it divided the Cole farm from the Beale property.

Horace was surprised when he came near the pond to see a man standing there, and when he got near enough he was thunderstruck to find that it was his enemy, Sam Beale.

"What are you doin' on my land?" Horace demanded at once.

"I'm lookin' for one o' my Berkshire hawgs," Sam replied, pointing to a hole in the fence.

"Well, he ain't here," retorted Horace, eying the hole with surprise.

"No, I see he ain't," answered Sam. "But my son seen you drivin' a hawg to town last night."

"What do you mean?" Horace shouted. "Have you got the cheek to claim that I stole one o' your razor-backed scrubs?"

"I don't see any o' your hawgs gone," said Sam.

Horace looked over his drove, and there, sure enough, happily wallowing in the mud, lay Benjamin!

"Why—why—" Horace said weakly. "I drove your hawg to town by mistake. He must 'a' wandered over here. He looked like Benjamin, and the night was very dark.

"So he did," Sam replied. "They might 'a' been twin brothers. But, say, where *is* my hawg?"

"In the bottom of the Mississippi," Horace explained, and told the whole story.

"Well, Horace Cole," said Sam. "You made a mistake—aren't you sure that you did?"

"So I did," Horace admitted. "But I'll pay for it."

"Old man," Sam went on, "do you remember ten year ago, when you thought my dog killed two o' your sheep, and I said them same words to you: 'I'll pay for the sheep'?"

"I do," Horace replied.

"And you refused," Sam continued, "and had the law on me. Since then both of us has spent a fortune lawin' one another."

"That's right, I'm sorry to say," Horace answered.

"Well," said Sam, "now I won't say anything about this hawg business. You don't even have to pay."

"Do you mean that?" Horace demanded.

"You bet I do, Horace," Sam replied.

"Then we'll settle that lawsuit right here," Horace went on; "and, Sam, you gotta take my Benjamin for a present. I want you to take him."

For the first time in ten years the two men put out their hands, and, palm to palm, buried their quarrel and revived their boyhood friendship.

Horace and Sam then proceeded to the Cole house together, and Mrs. Cole and Annie almost fainted when they saw the

two men together. Horace explained quickly what had happened.

"Benjamin ain't killted! Benjamin ain't killted!" cried the children, dancing around in joy.

"Oh, paw, ain't I the gladdest girl!" cried Annie, glancing at Sam Beale with a blush.

"Paw," said one of the many little Coles, "now you'll never kill Benjamin, will you?"

"I don't know," Horace answered. "One can never tell what might happen. We might kill him to buy a wedding-dress for Annie."

Annie blushed again, and the young ones set up a fresh howl.

About a week later, when preparations for the wedding were in full blast and the story of the hogs had been carried to the farthermost ends of the county, Horace received the following letter:

HORACE COLE, Esq.,
Coon Hollow, Ark.
DERE SUR:—
Yure hawg which was nockt in the river 10 daise ago did not drownd as all conserned are thinkin. He was caut in driftwood and I fisht him out. He is in my pen with other hawgs which is mine. I wisht you wud git him as soon as you can. He is eatin' me outn house and home.
efectinately yours truly,
SILAS BLINK.

When Annie and Jim were united in the holy bonds, among other wedding-presents were two hogs, to have and to hold against allcomers but the butcher.

While the Dog Barked.

BY LILLIAN BENNET-THOMPSON.

An Apple-Tree Refuge in a Time of Stress, and a Maiden Whose Stern Dictum Was Not Proof Against Threatened Danger to the Scorned One.

CHADWICKE tossed his straw hat on the ground and flung himself disconsolately beside it.

"Confound women, anyway," he muttered. "You never know what they want. They don't know themselves. Nobody knows. Nobody ever will know."

There was a slight movement in the branches of the tree above his head. A glint of white caught his eye.

"Who's there?" he demanded, rising to his feet. "What are you doing up that tree?"

"I believe I have a perfect right to be sitting in my own tree, Mr. Chadwicke," replied a feminine voice in acid tones.

"Well, by jolly! Aline Marston!"

Chadwicke parted the leaves and peered through them. A few feet above his head, on a wide board nailed between the trunk and a thick branch, he saw a very attractive young woman, gowned in white, her feet resting on a lower limb.

"Eh—ah—good morning," he added awkwardly, as he met the haughtily inquiring gaze of a pair of angry brown eyes. "I—I've just been up to the house to see you, and you weren't there."

"Obviously not, since I am here. And now that you have seen me, will you be good enough to go away?"

"But I say—I wanted to talk to you."

"Did you?" The young woman's eyes were fixed on a spot a few inches above Chadwicke's head. "I do not share your desire for conversation."

"But, Aline—"

"Miss Marston, if you please."

"Oh, all right, if that's the way you feel about it. As I was going to say, I think some explanation is coming to me—"

"Do you?"

"I certainly do. Why, I—you—I—I say, Aline, why did you return my ring?"

"Because I wanted to."

"And every time I've called you've been out."

"That was my privilege."

"Well, I don't know that it was. When you're engaged to a fellow—"

"Pardon me. I am not engaged to you."

"Well, you were. You meant to break the engagement?"

"I did."

"Will you please explain—" he began.

"I have nothing to explain," unyieldingly. "This conversation is entirely useless, Mr. Chadwicke. It is luncheon-time, and I am beginning to grow hungry. Kindly go away and permit me to get down."

"Oh, let me help you," he begged eagerly. "I can talk to you so much better. I'll walk back to the house with you and—"

"I prefer to get down without your assistance, thank you, and I don't want you to go back to the house. *Will* you go?"

"And you won't say a word—or let me? I don't see—"

"Evidently not," she interrupted. "I'll tell you again, for the last time. I have nothing to say to you, nor do I want to hear anything that you may have to say to me—now or later. I sent back your ring, and the matter is closed. I want you to go away immediately, and cease annoying me. Do I make myself clear?"

"Quite," said Chadwicke huffily. "Now, see here," he went on with the air of one addressing a refractory child; "I'm jolly sorry it happened, but how was I to know you were jealous—"

"Jealous!" flamed out the girl, half starting to her feet. "How dare you? Mr. Chadwicke, I've stood enough from you—too much. If you do not go at once, I'll—I'll call for help."

"It wouldn't do you any good if you did," he said. "Nobody's home. I rang and rang, and no one came. Oh, I'll go," he continued, as the girl's eyes flashed ominously. "I thought you would understand. You weren't there and Florence was, and— Oh, what's the use? I'll go."

He picked up his hat and stood twirling it.

"Aline," he said presently.

No answer. Miss Marston was gazing with absorbed interest at the blue sky through the branches above her head.

"Aline," he repeated.

Still no answer.

"All right, then," he said. "I see you mean to throw me over. Good-by, Aline. I'm sorry."

The brown eyes never moved from their celestial contemplation; but Chadwicke thought he saw a quiver of the girl's lips, whether from anger or a more tender emotion he could not tell. Another instant, and he had gone.

Aline bent forward and, pushing the leafy screen aside, watched him striding through the daisy-starred grass.

"I don't care—I don't," she said, half aloud.

But somehow this assurance was not altogether satisfying. She could not see him so well now. Perhaps the reason may have been associated with the two big tears that crept into her eyes and down her cheeks. The branch slipped unheeded from her hand and rustled back into place.

"*Yap! Yap! Yap!*" A series of sharp barks and blood-curdling yells made her start up, the tears undried on her cheeks.

Wonderingly, she pulled the branch aside again. A strange sight met her eyes.

Chadwicke was tearing back toward her on a dead run, the tails of his coat streaming in the breeze. His hat had fallen off, and his hair stood up straight from his head, as he strained every nerve to regain the spot he had just left.

Hard on his heels galloped an enormous brindled bulldog, his open mouth bristling with rows of sharp, white teeth, his red tongue lolling out. Aline clasped her hands in terror.

"Run, Jack; run!" she screamed. "Don't let him catch you!"

A fresh burst of speed was Chadwicke's response to her encouragement. He dashed under the tree and pulled himself into the branches just as the dog's teeth snapped within an inch of his heels.

He climbed to the wooden seat and sank down breathlessly.

"Jack, oh, Jack!" gasped Aline. "Thank Heaven, you're safe! If that awful beast had caught you!" She shuddered.

The dog was leaping about the foot of the tree, snarling and growling in an ecstasy of rage.

"He didn't even touch me," Chadwicke assured the girl. "It was a close call, though, wasn't it?"

He slipped his arm around her waist and drew her to him.

"Oh, but if he had! Where did he come from? What made him so angry? He nearly caught you!"

"Well, he didn't," said Chadwicke. "He started after me so suddenly that I didn't know where I was at. He was between me and the house, or I shouldn't have come back here."

But Chadwicke had committed a grave breach of diplomacy. Aline jerked away from him so suddenly that he nearly tumbled from his perch.

"What's that for?" he demanded, as he regained his balance. "You nearly dumped me out of the tree."

"How dare you touch me?" she blazed. "You — you *beast!* And you call yourself a gentleman! You — you took advantage of my—my agitation. I told you that your presence here was distasteful to me. It is more so now than before."

She faced him stormily.

"Very well, then; I'll go. I'm that much of a gentleman, anyway."

Chadwicke rose and began cautiously to descend the tree.

The dog, at his first move, leaped high in the air, and began careening frantically around with angry growling.

Aline caught Chadwicke's arm.

"There—there is no need for you to risk your life," she said hastily. "Sit down—wait. Maybe he'll get tired and go home. Go away! Shoo! Shoo!" she cried, flapping her hands.

"Scat!" hissed Chadwicke. "Scat!"

The dog snarled.

"Oh, sit down!" urged Aline.

Chadwicke sat down. So did the dog.

"I'll wait, on one condition," said the young man. "And that is, that you tell me why—"

"I have nothing to tell you."

"All right. Good-by." He got up.

The dog rose and stood expectantly, his whole body quivering, his wicked little eyes blinking balefully.

"Don't, Jack!" gasped Aline. "He may be mad. Don't you see how he is frothing at the mouth? They always do when they are mad. Why, he *is* mad!"

"Very probably. It's been frightfully warm. But it doesn't matter," Chadwicke said gloomily. "You won't have anything to do with me. What difference does it make?"

He stepped down another limb.

"Would you go down to be torn to pieces before my very eyes?" cried the girl.

Chadwicke paused.

"I'll go unless you do as I ask," he announced firmly. "Perhaps when you see my mangled body—"

Aline burst into tears.

"Jack—oh, Jack!" she wailed. "Come back. It was all my fault. I *was* jealous. I *was* hateful. Forgive me!"

"Aline!" said Chadwicke softly. "Aline!"

He took a quick step or two upward and sat down by her side, gathering the sobbing little figure in his arms. The brown head dropped confidingly on his shoulder.

"*Yap! Yap! Yap!*"

"Oh, Jack! That dog! He's still there. I'd quite forgotten him."

"Well, forget him again," said Chadwicke.

At the end of another half-hour the besieger at the foot of the tree once more made his presence manifest by energetic yelping.

"Bless the dog!" said Aline. "Do you know, Jack, if he hadn't chased you up here, you'd never have had a chance to explain and—"

"And we wouldn't be up here together now," finished Chadwicke. "But, I say, what time do you suppose it is?"

"I don't know. But I'm frightfully hungry."

Chadwicke looked at his watch.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "It's nearly three. Let's go home and get lunch."

"But the dog!" cried Aline. "He won't let us."

"Eh — why — ah — perhaps he's only playing," suggested Chadwicke hesitatingly.

"Only playing!" echoed the girl scornfully. "Yes—he looked as if he were having a beautiful game. Why did he chase you if he was playing?"

"Well, you see—I'd almost forgotten."

He put his hand into his pocket and drew out a tiny kitten, a small ball of gray fur that yawned prodigiously and stretched out its velvety paws, as if resentful of the interruption to its nap.

"You see, he was chasing the cat, and I took the cat away, and—"

"And then he chased you."

The dog seemed imbued with fresh activity at the sight of his ancient enemy. He promptly became seized with a desire to turn himself inside out, and made wild endeavors to climb the tree.

"How are we going to get down with him there?" Aline asked.

"Well," said Chadwicke bravely, "*I'll* go down; and then, if the dog doesn't eat me, you come, too."

"No, no, no!" cried the girl. "You mustn't. Look at him! Oh!"

"I'm not afraid. I'll just get down on one of the lower limbs and look fixedly at him and command him to go home. You know, Aline, none of the lower animals can withstand the power of the human eye. See—I'll take this, too."

He broke off a dead limb from the tree, and put the sleepy kitten back into his pocket.

"If you mean to go down, I shall go, too." Aline gathered up her skirts determinedly.

"Well, I'll go first," said Chadwicke.

Holding his improvised weapon firmly in his hand, he began the descent of the tree, Aline following as closely as circumstances would permit. On the lowest limb he paused. The dog stood quiescent, regarding him with a bloodshot eye.

"Go away!" cried Aline.

"*Miaou!*" came protestingly from Chadwicke's pocket.

The dog growled. Aline screamed.

"Go home!" Chadwicke commanded.

The dog looked doubtful.

"*Home—home!*" bawled Chadwicke, menacingly brandishing his club.

The dog stood still for an instant. Then he turned tail and trotted quietly off through the field, from time to time casting a meek glance over his shoulder.

When he was out of sight, Chadwicke dropped to the ground and held out his arms. Aline slipped into them.

"How brave you are!" she said admiringly, turning her face up to his. "How brave and—and how daring!"

"Not at all." Chadwicke deprecated.

"But I say you are! Why, just as soon as you looked at that dog he ran away. It was *wonderful—wonderful!*"

"Oh, no, it was nothing," he insisted, with becoming modesty.

"Well, then, why did he mind when you told him to go home?"

Chadwicke cleared his throat.

"Well, you see," he began desperately, "he—I—that is—you see"—he tightened his arms around her—"you see, dear, he's my dog!"

THE PASSER.

SWEET Spring trips by my door,
I see her go;
The blossoms in her hands
Are white, like snow.

Her smile hath that warm gold
The great sun hath;
It sheds a wonder light
Along her path.

And, oh, her peerless eyes,
How blue they be!
As fathomlessly deep
As the deep sea.

"Stay!" unto her I cry;
In vain! In vain!
I keep my heart until
She comes again.

Clinton Scollard.

When Hartshorne Napped.

BY J. F. VALENTINE.

Why the Salesman Missed the Man He Wanted, with an Account of the Mystery that Developed Out of His Effort to Remedy the Mischance.

"IS Mr. Bernheimer in?"

Hartshorne handed his business card to the hotel clerk as he put the question.

"He was, only a few moments ago," the other replied. "I'll have him paged."

Hartshorne turned from the desk and, walking across the lobby, sank into one of the deeply cushioned leather chairs that lined the opposite wall. He leaned back, the pliable springs gave way to the pressure upon them, and, in doing so, brought a feeling of rest to the salesman, whose system craved the sleep of which it had been deprived.

His eyelids slowly drooped, while his thoughts reverted to his sick brother, beside whose bed he had sat for the past two nights, watching him as he tossed about in a delirium of fever, and giving at regular intervals the medicine the doctor had prescribed.

Suddenly Hartshorne drew himself together with a jerk, and rising painfully to his feet—every muscle and joint seemed stiff and aching—he stepped over to the desk again.

"Can't you find Mr. Bernheimer?" he inquired, and as he did so he saw a gleam of recognition in the clerk's eyes.

"Why, yes, I found him. He was here; but we couldn't find you. Where did you go?"

"I was sitting over there," Hartshorne replied wonderingly.

"Then you must be deaf," the other retorted. "We paged the entire hotel for you."

Then the truth dawned upon the silk salesman—he must have fallen asleep.

"But—but can't you get him again?" he stammered.

"I'd have to take a long trip to do so," the clerk answered.

"Why?" There was a trace of concern in Hartshorne's voice.

"Mr. Bernheimer left nearly an hour ago. He took the St. Louis Limited, and is already well started on his way to Terre Haute."

Hartshorne did not reply. For an instant he stared helplessly at the clerk, then his eyes rested on the clock behind the latter. He saw that it was over an hour and a half ago since he first appeared at the hotel, so he must have been asleep all that time. With this realization, he faced about and strode toward the door.

The salesman was plainly agitated over missing this Western dry-goods dealer, who ranked as one of the merchant princes of Chicago. According to rumors floating about in the dry-goods district, he was preparing to open a large branch store in Terre Haute, Indiana. These rumors became actualities when different salesmen told of the large orders they had sold him at his hotel.

Hartshorne's employers had heard, the previous evening, of Bernheimer's buying; and upon Hartshorne's arrival at the store that morning, he was directed to see the man at once, and "sell him, even if you have to shave prices a little."

And Hartshorne was very anxious to do so. His sales so far this season were far below the average, and must be brought up, or it would mean a reduced salary for the coming year, as all wages were based upon "past performances."

He walked now with a halting step until he reached the corner, where he stopped to deliberate upon the next course of action. But his mind refused to solve the question; the only thing left for him to do was to return to the firm orderless.

So Hartshorne boarded a car, and, soon reaching the building in which his concern was located, he entered the offices with anything but a light heart to meet the angry look of the senior partner.

"Well, where have you been?" the latter demanded.

"Why, I went up to see Bernheimer," Hartshorne faltered.

"I know you were supposed to go there," the other stormed. "And I also know you did go there; but why did you leave without an order?"

"Because I didn't see him," the salesman replied evasively, wondering, meanwhile, at the source of the information the other evidently possessed.

"I know that," was the angry retort. "He phoned me a while ago, saying that you had called, but had left before he saw you. Now, where did you go?"

"I didn't go anywhere. I stayed right there in the lobby."

"That's the funniest thing I ever heard," his employer scoffed.

"I don't—understand you," Hartshorne faltered.

"Then I'll make myself plainer. Over an hour ago Bernheimer telephoned here and said you had been there, but had gone away without leaving any word. He said he would have given you a nice order, but as he was starting in a few minutes for the new store he was opening in Terre Haute, it was too late to send another man.

"I offered to send some one out to Terre Haute to see him, and he immediately grew indignant. Said it would be useless, as he would do no business with a house that employed salesmen who were so lax. So you see the hole in which you have landed us. Now, what excuse have you to offer?"

Hartshorne realized just what his nap had cost him, and in as few words as possible he explained what had happened.

"I'm very sorry," he concluded. "I realize now what it has cost both you and me. But isn't there something I can do to straighten out the thing? Why couldn't I jump out to Terre Haute—"

"After what Bernheimer said over the phone?" the other interrupted.

"I have a good explanation to offer," Hartshorne insisted. "My brother was so much better this morning that I'll not have to stay up with him to-night. I could catch an afternoon train, and be out there to-morrow morning."

"From the way he spoke, I don't think he'd even see you; and if he wouldn't, the best excuse in the world wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel."

"But I can try—"

The employer's face showed his extreme disgust as he broke in hotly: "At the firm's expense? I guess not!"

Hartshorne's mouth set in grim determination.

"Let me go out there, and if I don't get an order I'll pay my own expenses," he said. "If I do, they're on the firm."

This suggestion appealed to the other, but he did not reply instantly, and Hartshorne saw that he was weighing the thing carefully.

"It isn't worth the trial," his employer finally replied. "You didn't have Bernheimer on the other end of the wire. If you had, you'd realize how useless the trip would be. And you can't afford to spend your own money on such a hopeless quest."

"I certainly can," Hartshorne maintained. "I not only can, but I want to do so."

"Well, if you feel that way, go ahead. But remember, it's your funeral if you don't land him. The expenses will come out of your own pocket."

"I know that," Hartshorne answered. "But I'm not thinking of that—"

"I'll remind you of it when you return," the other interrupted.

"I'm only thinking of the fact that I'll sell him a bale of goods," the salesman continued.

"I wish you luck," and, turning on his heel, the "boss" strode in the direction of his private office.

For half an hour Hartshorne worked at good speed getting together his samples and packing them into the two trunks he would take with him. This completed, he directed one of the office-boys to call an expressman and see that they were sent immediately to the railroad station.

Hartshorne then hurried home, where he found that his brother had improved greatly since morning. Briefly explaining that he was forced to take a few days' trip to the West, he hastily packed his suit-case and hurried off to the railroad terminal.

As he stepped to the station platform in Terre Haute the next morning, he wondered in just what part of the city the new store was located. But he decided that everybody would certainly

know of it and be eagerly awaiting its opening.

Hartshorne had already been in Terre Haute a few times, and, recalling the name of the hotel at which he wanted to stop, he walked toward one of the omnibuses, and was about to step in when a newsboy hurried toward him.

Hartshorne halted long enough to buy a paper, and scanned the pages, expecting to see a large advertisement of the new store. But no announcement of the sort met his eyes, and his brow wrinkled in surprise at this fact.

"I must have bought the wrong paper," he said under his breath, and a smile of reassurance chased away the puzzled expression. "I recall now that there are two dailies in this place."

At this juncture the omnibus backed to the curb, and Hartshorne stepped out to enter the hotel. As he stepped toward the elevator after registering, his glance rested on the news-stand at the other side of the lobby. He walked over to it and purchased another paper—the rival to the one he had bought at the station.

The first thing he did after reaching his room was to spread the paper open before him in a search for Bernheimer's announcement. But to his surprise there was none in this paper, either.

It was a well-known fact among the trade that Bernheimer's success in Chicago was due to his strong belief in advertising, and people sometimes marveled at the newspaper space he used. Knowing this, Hartshorne was greatly taken aback at not finding at least a page in each paper devoted to the announcement of the coming opening.

But he quickly dismissed the matter from his mind, reasoning that it was undoubtedly due to some new and sensational advertising which Bernheimer was planning. Throwing the paper aside, he descended to the hotel-office and went directly to the desk.

"Is Mr. Bernheimer stopping here?" he asked of the clerk, feeling certain that if the merchant was in town, this would be the hotel at which he would put up.

"No one here by that name now," was the reply, which caused Hartshorne to conclude that the man had friends in town and was visiting them while completing arrangements for his new store.

"Well, you can surely tell me where his new place of business is located," Hartshorne went on.

"Place of business?" the other repeated blankly.

"Yes," the salesman said, a slight trace of impatience in his tone. "Bernheimer, of Chicago, is opening a new store here in Terre Haute. Don't you know where it is?"

"That's news to me," the clerk replied. "I must have missed something."

"Then, you know nothing about it?"

"Not a thing."

"But who would know about it?" Hartshorne persisted. "I must find Bernheimer. I've come all the way from New York to see him."

"I don't know where to tell you to go. But—"

The clerk turned to the cashier, who had stepped from his window and now stood beside the other, a quiet listener.

"Do you know anything about Bernheimer, of Chicago, opening a store here?" he asked.

The cashier shook his head.

"I've heard nothing of it," he replied.

"I may be letting the cat out of the bag," Hartshorne said. "But perhaps you can tell me if there are any unoccupied buildings in town that could be used as a department-store."

The clerk smiled good-naturedly as he gave his answer.

"That's far beyond me. But you could quickly find that out by going across the street."

He pointed toward the opposite side, where Hartshorne saw a large real-estate sign.

"They're the largest in the city, and can tell you just what you want to know."

"All right, I'll go over."

Hartshorne started to cross the corridor, but stopped abruptly and returned to the desk.

"Evidently Bernheimer isn't ready to tell Terre Haute what he's about to do, so please say nothing about it just yet," he requested. "If the news gets out, and he could trace it to me, you can readily see where I'd get off. And, particularly, as I'm out here to sell him a big bill of goods."

"We'll say nothing," was the response in chorus from the two men, and Harts-

horne hurried in the direction of the real-estate office.

He entered it confidently, feeling certain that here he could get the information that would bring him in contact with the merchant he sought.

An office-boy's inquiry as to whom he wished to see brought forth Hartshorne's card as well as, "I wish to see one of the members of the firm."

The youth disappeared through the doorway that led to the private offices, and quickly returned to conduct the stranger inside.

"I called to ask regarding a department-store which some one has rented here in Terre Haute," Hartshorne began. "I was referred to you as being the largest real-estate agents in the city, and was assured that if you did not happen to handle the transaction yourselves, you could certainly tell me something about it."

"A department-store?" the other repeated. "I don't quite gather your meaning."

"Then I will make myself perfectly clear," Hartshorne went on. "You surely have heard of Bernheimer, the dry-goods merchant of Chicago?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Well, he is going to open a branch store here in Terre Haute. Did you know that?"

"I certainly did not," the surprised agent responded.

"He was in New York up to yesterday, buying stock; and, as those I met who sold him told me, he bought for immediate shipment. So he must have the store ready to open before long."

"Why, this is news to me," the other declared. "I can't understand it. I know of no such transaction—I have the renting of buildings that would be suitable for such a business—and, if there had been a deal of this sort, the chances are ninety-nine to a hundred that we would know of it."

It was now Hartshorne's turn to be amazed.

"That's most singular!" he exclaimed. Then he added: "But, even so, it might have been arranged quietly, and the agent is keeping it to himself. But can you think of any vacant store that might be suited to such a business?"

"There is not one in the city, and hasn't been for five years. Stores are always in demand here."

Suddenly, Hartshorne gave a sigh of relief.

"I'll bet I know the answer," he cried.

"What is it?"

"I'll gamble that Bernheimer has bought out one of your department-stores and is restocking it, but will run it under its old name just the same."

"That might be," the other agreed. "In fact, to me it's the only solution of the matter."

But the look of satisfaction on Hartshorne's face speedily disappeared.

"Even if that's the solution, I may have a job finding him," he said. "If it hasn't been given out that he's bought one of your stores, it's plainly evident that he doesn't want it known. And, in that case, I might inquire at every shop in town for him, and get no satisfaction."

"That may prove to be the case."

"I know what I'll do," the salesman continued. "I'll phone his office in Chicago, and explain why I'm here. I think I can get the information I want there."

He then asked the real-estate man to pledge him his secrecy in the matter, and returning again to the hotel was walking across the lobby in the direction of the telephone booths, when a bell-boy stopped him to tell him the clerk at the desk wanted to see him.

"Did you learn anything across the street?" the clerk inquired.

"Nothing at all," Hartshorne replied.

"Then, I'll tell you what you do. That's the editor of the *Star*," indicating one of three men seated in earnest conversation. "He might be able to give you some information. He certainly can, if any one can."

For a moment Hartshorne hesitated.

"No, I've got a better plan," he declared, realizing that every one he questioned in the matter meant one more person aware of what Bernheimer undoubtedly wanted kept a strict secret. "I'm going to call up Chicago."

In his anxiety to solve what had now taken on all the evidences of a mystery, the delay that followed the giving of the telephone call seemed most unnecessary. But at length the connection was established and he entered the booth..

"Hallo, is this Mr. Bernheimer?" he asked.

"It is," came back over the wire. "Who is this?"

"Hartshorne. Don't you remember me? I called to see you at your hotel in New York yesterday."

"What's that you're saying?"

"I say that I missed you yesterday morning. I was there in the lobby all the time—"

"Who is this, anyway?" the man at the other end interrupted impatiently.

"Hartshorne. I thought you were coming direct to Terre Haute, so I came here, too. How soon will you arrive here?"

"In Terre Haute?"

"Yes."

"Never that I know of. But what—"

"But what about the store you're opening here?"

"I'm opening no store in Terre Haute," came over the wire, and as it struck Hartshorne's ears he paled perceptibly.

The rest of the conversation was abruptly ended by the man in Chicago curtly informing Hartshorne that he had no idea of what he was talking about, and before the salesman could question further he realized the other had hung up, and that the connection was cut off.

The case had now taken on a more complicated aspect than ever, but as he counted out the money to pay the operator Hartshorne realized that if Bernheimer wished the matter kept secret, as he undoubtedly did, he would hardly give out any information over the telephone, not being certain as to who was on the other end of the wire.

"Learn anything?" the clerk asked as Hartshorne neared him.

"Yes. That I've got to go to Chicago immediately. How soon does the next train leave?"

"Right now," the other informed him. "The bus is about to start for it."

A glance toward the street showed the driver climbing to his seat, and with a "Send my trunks to my room," called over his shoulder, the salesman dashed out and sprang into the vehicle.

It was late that afternoon when the train pulled into Chicago, and Hartshorne started at a quick, nervous pace in the direction of Bernheimer's big store. Arriving there, he experienced some difficulty in getting to the proprietor, who at first sent out word that he was too busy to see any one.

But the salesman explained the case to the merchant's secretary, and at last he was ushered into the important man's presence, and he briefly stated the object of his call.

"I was in New York!" Bernheimer exclaimed in astonishment. "Why, man, you're crazy!"

"You certainly were," Hartshorne persisted. "I called at your hotel, and they said you had just left for Terre Haute."

"And what would I go there for?" the other demanded.

"To arrange for the opening of your new store."

This was too much for the dry-goods merchant, and the salesman saw the suspicious glitter in his eyes as he reached for his phone.

"Now, let me explain," Hartshorne burst out, and speaking rapidly he related the incidents that had taken place in New York the previous day.

"Some one is evidently passing himself off for me," the other said. "And it isn't the first time, either. I haven't been in New York for a month, and have no intention of opening a store in Terre Haute. But the thing that interests me is catching this fellow. I'll give a thousand dollars for his apprehension."

"He's probably in Terre Haute now," Hartshorne suggested.

"No fear of that," the merchant rejoined. "He's too clever for that, I'll bet. He's had all the goods, as received, forwarded to some other city, where he has already disposed of them." Then he added sarcastically: "Go after him. If you catch him, I'll give you a thousand dollars."

The interview was cut short abruptly, and Hartshorne left the office, realizing that his trip had turned out a fool's errand. And the most bitter part of all was that he would have to acknowledge his failure to his employer.

It was nearly midnight when he reached Terre Haute again, and he went directly to his room, but not to sleep. The whole case had such an air of mystery that it weighed heavily upon him. His eyes refused to close.

He rose early the next morning, and while trying to force himself to eat an idea occurred to him. He finished breakfast hurriedly, and hurried to the railroad station.

"I want to find out about some goods that were shipped here by freight from New York," he told the ticket-agent, and as that individual directed him to the freight depot he hastened toward it.

"Have you received a number of cases of goods here for a man named Bernheimer?" he asked excitedly of a clerk here.

"Yes, sir," was the prompt reply.

"Are they still here?"

"Only those we received yesterday."

"And there were others?" Hartshorne questioned.

"Yes, sir. We shipped nearly a carload of stuff day before yesterday."

"Where to?" was the salesman's breathless inquiry.

"Jasonville."

"Where is that?"

"About forty miles south of here. But—"

The clerk paused as he caught a glimpse of a man approaching down the tracks, and he added: "Here comes Mr. Bernheimer now."

Hartshorne's eyes narrowed as he studied the man, and then he stepped aside as the other ordered the goods which had just arrived reshipped as the previous ones had been.

As he turned to go Hartshorne stepped before him.

"Mr. Bernheimer, my name's Hartshorne," he said, and as he spoke he noted the look of astonishment on the other's face.

"I don't want any of your goods," Bernheimer snapped. "I won't even talk to you. I told as much to the head of your firm."

"You say you don't want any of our goods," Hartshorne repeated, and there was a significance in his tone that did not escape the other. His look of agitation proved that, but he quickly regained his self-composure as he snapped:

"That's what I said. I wouldn't have them in my store."

"And you've a very good reason, Mr. Bernheimer. I wouldn't sell you at any price, except for spot cash. And I think some people have been stung. You're a swindler."

"Hold on, hold on!" the other cried angrily.

He was standing close to Hartshorne, and the words were hardly out of his mouth when he threw himself upon the salesman, and in a fit of rage bore him to the ground, where he secured a grip upon the other's throat.

Hartshorne tried to struggle or call out, but the fellow had him completely in his power. Then suddenly three men rushed from the freight-house and pulled Bernheimer off the salesman.

At this juncture a policeman appeared, and although Bernheimer struggled to get away, the men held him until the officer came up and, at Hartshorne's request, arrested him for assault.

The salesman accompanied them to the police station, and after Bernheimer was safely lodged in jail he called up his employers on the long-distance telephone and explained to them all that had taken place.

At first the "boss" interrupted once or twice, and his words were curt. But as Hartshorne kept on with his story the other's voice suddenly changed.

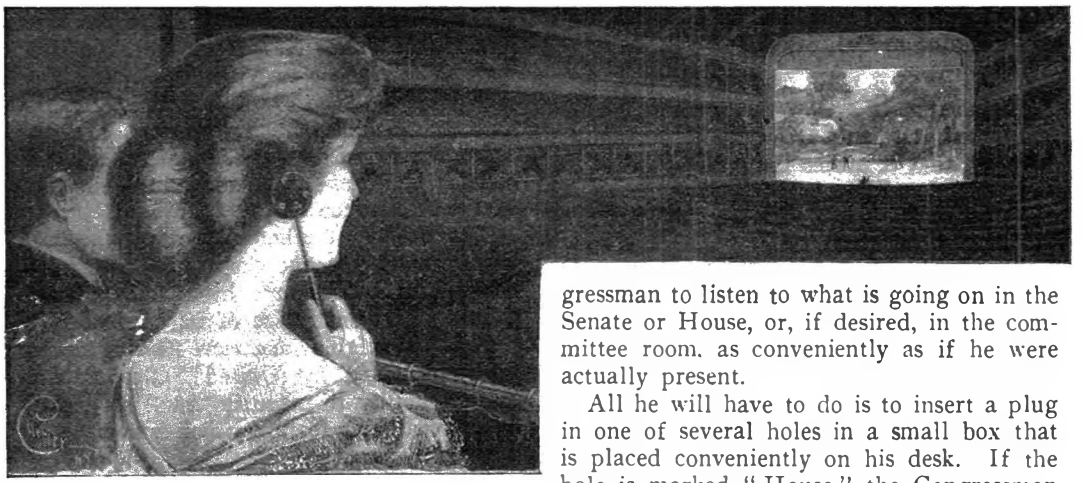
"By Jove, Hartshorne!" he exclaimed finally. "This is the time it paid to go to sleep. If you had sold him, you wouldn't be in Terre Haute now, and the rascal might have got away with those goods beyond recovery. And, look here, Hartshorne, you stay there and press the assault charge, so that he doesn't slip out of our fingers, while I'll try to find out what firms have sold this fake Berheimer. You stay there an—"

"But it's costly," Hartshorne answered back.

"Not to you. The firm pays all your expenses, even if you have failed to make a sale."

As Hawthorne hung up the receiver he said to the operator: "Now, get me Mr. Bernheimer, of the Bernheimer Company, Chicago."

"This thousand dollars from the Chicago Bernheimer makes this a pretty profitable trip," he mused, and a smile of satisfaction passed over his face as he added. "They say only the wide-awake succeed, but this case proves the exception."



The Wonders of Magnified Sound

By Walter W. Griffith

THIS electric age seems to be productive of a new wonder every day. In fact, we shall soon cease to marvel at anything, from very surfeit of surprises. Yet it is a succession of steps, one discovery leading directly and naturally to another.

Electricity is benefiting mankind in so many directions and ways that there would appear to be no limit to its possibilities, and, certainly, in its capacity for transmitting sound is this peculiarly true.

The development along the lines of telephony has produced nothing more interesting than the "Acousticon." With it, there is no need to speak directly into the transmitter, as it gathers the sound from the air for itself. For that matter there is no necessity for placing the receiver to the ear, although this is usually done. The speaker may be twenty feet from the transmitter, may speak in his natural voice, and be distinctly and clearly heard over the wire, at practically any distance.

INSTALLED BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

The Acousticon Transmitter was recently installed on Speaker Cannon's desk in the Capitol at Washington, and speeches made in the House were distinctly heard in a distant room. It is now proposed to equip every office of the new Capitol buildings at present under construction with the Acousticon, which will enable the Senator or Congressman to listen to what is going on in the Senate or House, or, if desired, in the committee room, as conveniently as if he were actually present.

All he will have to do is to insert a plug in one of several holes in a small box that is placed conveniently on his desk. If the hole is marked "House" the Congressman can hear what is going on on the floor of the legislative chamber, and his time may be utilized for other purposes until his actual presence on the floor of the legislative hall is required.

This result is produced by a new invention, a most important detail of which is a highly sensitized microphone, which magnifies sound so greatly that the feeblest of sound waves are transmitted through wires to a considerable distance, yet are distinctly audible at the other end throughout the room.

A Congressman will also be able, by aid of the Acousticon, to dictate letters, instructions, etc., to his secretary at the Capitol, from the Annex, or any other point in Washington; this without the use of a telephone receiver -- he may talk from his easy-chair or while walking about his room, just as successfully and satisfactorily.

(The *Saturday Evening Post* of October 12, 1907, contains an editorial article which fully describes the installation at Washington.)

By aid of the Acousticon a New York business man could sit in his office and listen to the pleading of his attorney before the Chief Justice of the United States in Washington. Equally, telephone subscribers in Chicago could, as it were, "tap" the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, and hear whatever opera was being performed. The "shut-ins," those myriads of unfortunates, perpetually confined within doors by invalidism, could enjoy opera, concert, lecture, speech, or play, no matter where taking place.

It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Dr. Parkhurst, speaking in his new and magnificent church, which has an Acousticon equipment, may preach to an audience

of one hundred thousand people, scattered from Maine to California.

THE DEAF TO HEAR!

This suggests one of the greatest benefits conferred by this remarkable invention, namely, that it makes the deaf to hear. It not only amplifies, or *magnifies* the sound 400 per cent., but it clarifies and accentuates the articulation.

Hundreds of churches and public halls are now equipped with the Acousticon after thorough and practical tests, with the result that a deaf person sitting at the extreme rear is enabled to hear as well as those not so afflicted. The receiver is small and light in weight. It is held against the ear by a small head-piece, no more noticeable than a spectacle frame.

The success achieved by the Acousticon in making the deaf hear messages sent over a telephone wire inspired the inventor to extend the idea and apply it in a more general way. He succeeded, and now has a portable Acousticon, one which can be worn without inconvenience, and so arranged as to be much less noticeable than any of the usual ear-trumpets, speaking-tubes, etc., yet *far more effectual*.

There is the transmitter, or "gatherer of sound"—a small circular instrument, which can be made of any color to suit the costume; a neat receiver, or "ear-piece," and a tiny battery. The latter is easily carried in the pocket, and is therefore quite out of sight. By means of this portable Acousticon those who have not lost entirely the sensitiveness of the auditory nerve are not only able to hear, but by its constant use the stimulated action of the working parts of the ear in some instances restores the natural hearing.

WHAT IT IS DOING

It is bringing happiness to multitudes of deaf people throughout the world—some of them in the houses of royalty. It enables thousands of religious people to attend church and listen to the services, enjoying a privilege of which they have been deprived for perhaps many years. It opens the doors of theatres and of lecture halls to many who have heretofore found it useless to enter them. It keeps corporation presidents at the head of the directors' table, enabling them to hear all that is said along the board, and it helps hundreds to make a livelihood in business, from which they would otherwise be debarred. Thousands of letters on file from men of highest prominence testify to all this and more.

Great American newspapers like the New York *Herald*, the New York *Sun*, the New York *World*, the New York *Times*, the New York *Journal*, the Detroit *Free Press*, the Chicago *Tribune*, St. Louis *Post*, and the *Scientific American*, have contained editorial articles confirming the unfailing efficiency of the Acousticon.

The failure of other devices for the deaf should not make one skeptical, because the Acousticon has always been sold after a thorough demonstration of its merits.

It is the original electrical hearing device fully protected by United States Patents and its ability to magnify sound so greatly is the particular feature which is completely covered by these Patents.

So many people suffer from deafness, to whom news of possible relief must come as a renewal of hope, that we would suggest to such that they address Mr. K. M. Turner, 842 Browning Bldg., Broadway and 32d Street, New York, who will willingly send particulars.

The home instrument is especially efficient, for the reason that receivers of various grades are made, so that the condition of the respective ear to which it is to be applied may be exactly suited.

The Acousticon is very inconspicuous and probably will not impress any one, no matter how sensitive, as likely to attract undue attention. Much greater notice is drawn to the deaf when the speaker, in order to be heard, has to shout; not to mention the annoyance of those who can hear what is being said only too well.

The deaf business man is perhaps more seriously handicapped than others, in this respect, as it is impossible, except in writing, to transact private matters privately.

While the men interested in the Acousticon are not putting out the instrument on a charitable basis, yet they express themselves as ready and willing to demonstrate its efficacy by permitting a thorough test of it in every way before it is considered as purchased. They claim and with truth, that one dissatisfied purchaser may do more harm than many times the profit on an instrument, and they therefore particularly request that where a few days' use does not prove it entirely successful, it be returned. In view of this statement it would follow that they must have thorough faith in its merit, and the claims made for it by them; and, so long as they pursue this policy, they will doubtless enjoy the confidence of the public, especially those whom they serve.

Ask the agent: "How heated?"

People are fast learning the difference between a house equipped with old fashioned heating methods or inferior apparatus and the home-making qualities of a house fitted with ideal heating. They shun one and seek the other. The living, renting and sales value of any building, large or small, is vastly increased by

Look into the Heating Question before you rent or buy.

AMERICAN RADIATORS & IDEAL BOILERS

The several hundred thousands of these outfits installed all over America and Europe are so comfortably, economically, cleanly and healthfully warming the occupants of all classes of buildings that buyers and renters are now insistently demanding them. These outfits of IDEAL Boilers and AMERICAN Radiators save so much in coal and cleaning, in time and temper, in health and happiness, and without rusting or repairs, that they quickly repay their cost. In all the world they have no equal—hence the wide use by and high endorsement of all eminent engineers and architects in every civilized country where heating is needed.

ADVANTAGE 16: The phenomenal success of IDEAL Boilers is also largely due to the fact that they are made in sections so that even their largest parts can be carried through an ordinary size doorway. For this reason they can be quickly put in old buildings without disturbing the occupants. In fact, in unmodernized or old types of houses they can be erected, including the necessary piping and radiators, without the necessity of removing the stoves or hot-air furnace until the new heating outfit is ready to fire up. They can be quickly erected in wintry weather when the old, crude heaters get badly worn or collapse. Ask for catalog "Ideal Heating" which tells *all the advantages*.

A No. 22 IDEAL Boiler and 240 ft. of 38-in. AMERICAN Radiators, costing the owner $115, were used to Hot-Water heat this cottage.

A No. C-241 IDEAL Boiler and 555 ft. of 38-in. AMERICAN Radiators, costing the owner $250, were used to Hot-Water heat this cottage.

At these prices the goods can be bought of any reputable, competent fitter. This did not include cost of labor, pipe, valves, freight, etc., which installation is extra and varies according to climatic and other conditions.

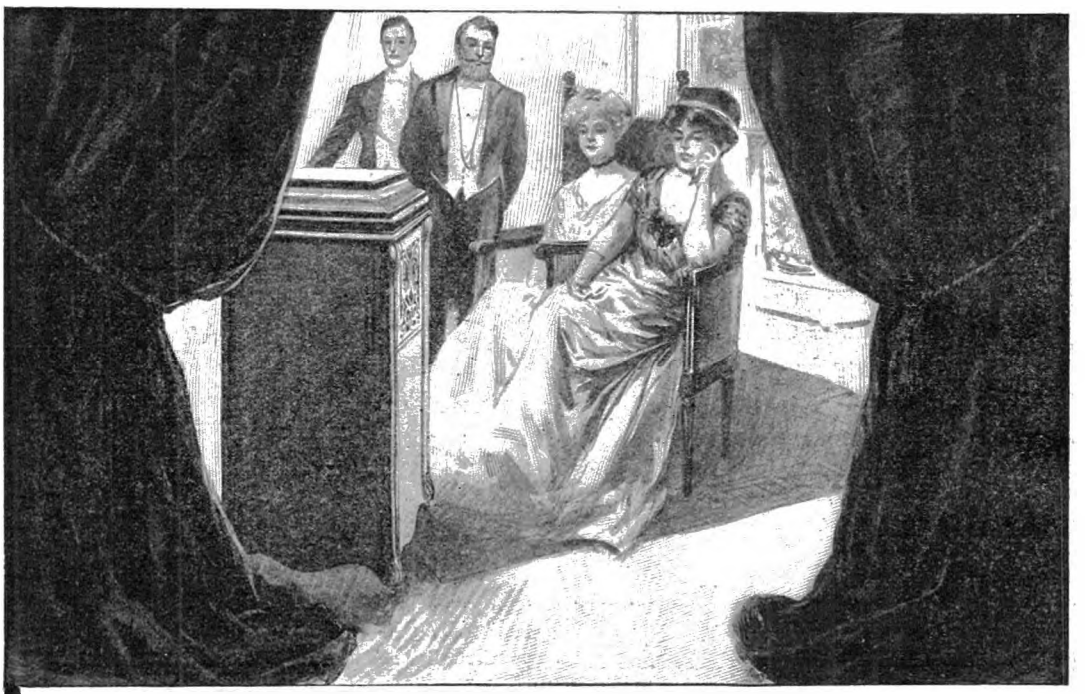
Prices are now so attractive that no one can longer afford to put up with the nuisance or run the risks of old-fashioned heating methods. Tell us kind of building you wish to heat—*old* or new—*farm* or city—inquiries cordially welcomed—and put you under no obligation to buy. Every prominent architect and every heating engineer recommend exclusively the IDEAL Boiler and AMERICAN Radiator. They cost no more than inferior apparatus. Accept no substitute.

IDEAL Boilers and AMERICAN Radiators keep a new house new and cause an old house to have its life and value prolonged.

Showrooms in all large cities

AMERICAN RADIATOR COMPANY

Write to Dept. A 34 CHICAGO



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The Amberola would still be the final and greatest expression of the Edison Phonograph without Amberol Records.

Amberol Records would still be the greatest triumph in Record-making without Slezak and the other Grand Opera stars.

But when you can get Mr. Edison's own Phonograph invented and perfected by him,

and when you get in addition to that the Amberola, the finest form of the Edison Phonograph,

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and when you can get upon Amberol Records such singers as Slezak, the giant tenor of the Metropolitan Opera Company, and other stars

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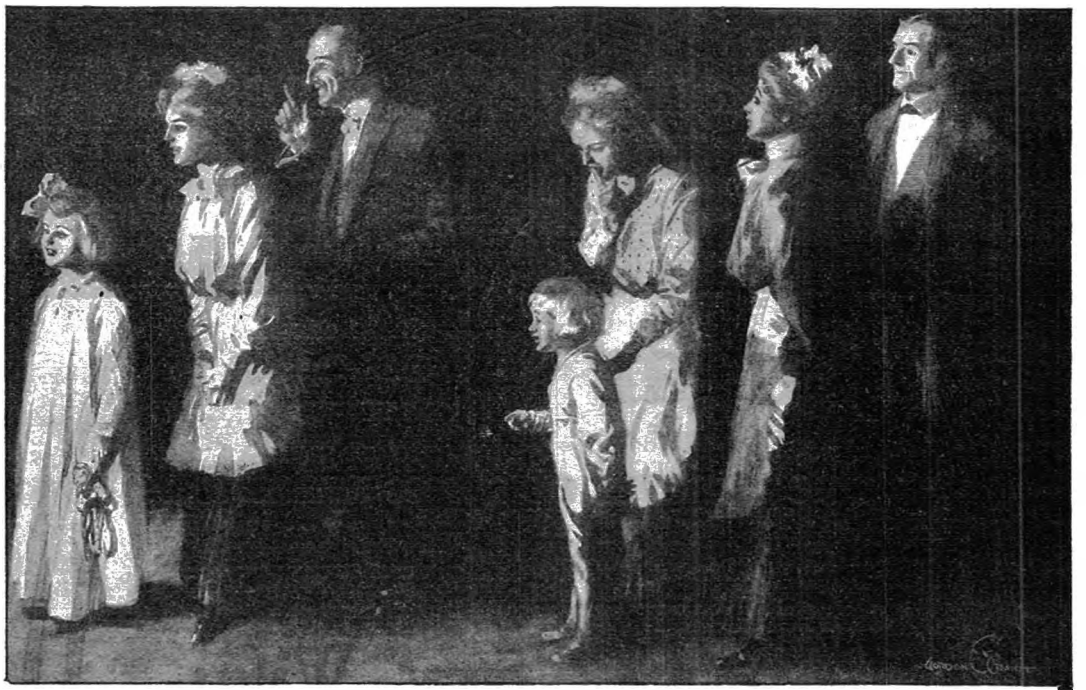

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With the Edison Business Phonograph you dictate at your convenience, and the typewriting department does the rest

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TRY CHOCOLATE TOKENS — Another unique confection enclosing the enticing goodness of Nabisco within a shell of rich, mellow chocolate.

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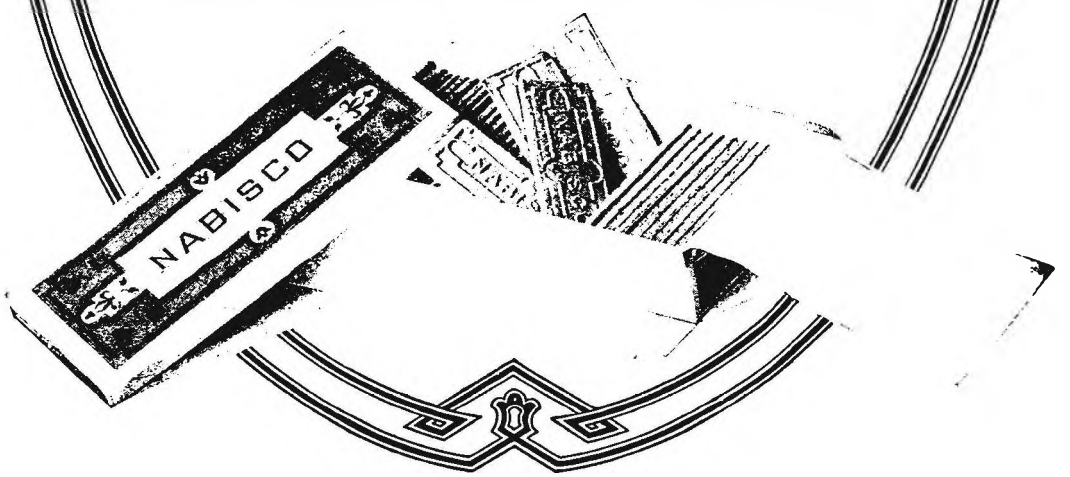
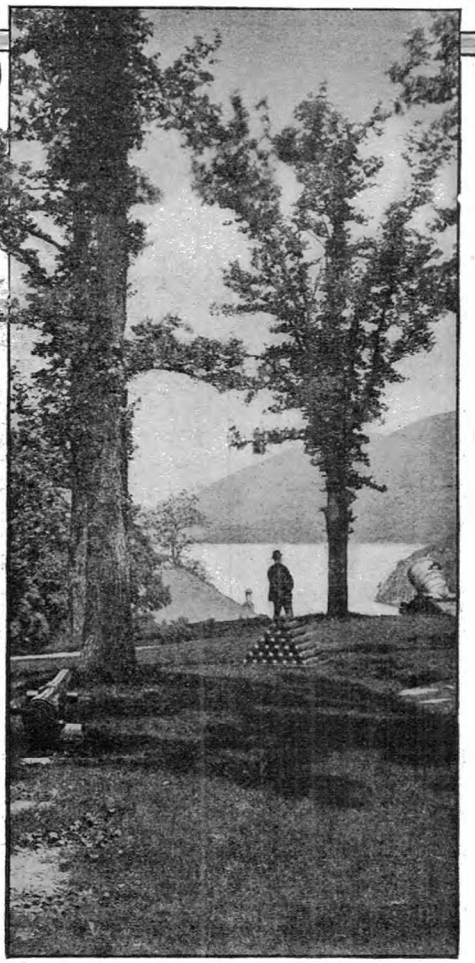




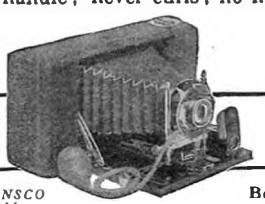
IN outdoor photography, with its innumerable lights and deceptive shadows, The Ansco Film shows its superiority in marked fashion.

It portrays all tones with fidelity and shades them softly.

It gives clear detail in the high lights, and a charming transparency in the deepest shadows.

The "ANSCO" Film

enables you to make more faithful photographs, more artistic pictures. For, having accurately interpreted its subject, the Ansco Film retains, through the process of developing, every delicate tone gradation, every element of clearness and sharpness, thus offering ideal printing possibilities. It reduces uncertainty; it minimizes chances of failure by its remarkable speed and latitude. Easy to handle; never curls; no halation, no "fogging" or off-setting. Fits any film camera



No. 10 ANSCO 3¼x5½

To get softer, clearer, deeper prints from your negatives, make sure they are printed on Cyko Paper. If others do your printing, insist that they shall use Cyko Paper.

Independent dealers everywhere sell the Ansco line of Cameras, Film, Paper, pure chemicals and all supplies needed by amateur or professional. Look for Ansco Sign.

Beautiful Camera Catalog, also Two-Volume Photographic Library — Free. At dealers, or write to

ANSCO COMPANY, Binghamton, N. Y.

To Keep Your Floors Beautiful

Every woman knows how annoying it is to have unsightly spots, water stains, dirt stains and foot-tracks spoil the beauty of her floors, stairs and woodwork. They ruin the beauty of her entire home.

Will you test, at our expense,

Johnson's Kleen Floor

the *only* preparation for immediately removing all these discolorations? With Johnson's Kleen Floor any woman can keep her floors bright and clean—like new.

Simply dampen a cloth with Kleen Floor and rub it over the floor. Instantly, all spots, stains and discolorations disappear—without the slightest injury to the finish.

Johnson's Kleen Floor rejuvenates the finish—brings back its original beauty—greatly improves the appearance of all floors, whether finished with Shellac, Varnish or other preparations.

Johnson's Kleen Floor is quickly applied—two hours is ample time in which to thoroughly clean the floor, wax it, and replace the rugs.

We want to send you, free, sample bottle of Johnson's Kleen Floor and a package of Johnson's Wax to be used after Kleen Floor is applied

Johnson's Prepared Wax gives the floors that soft, lustrous, artistic polish which does not show heel-marks or scratches and to which dust and dirt do not adhere.

It is ideal for polishing woodwork, furniture, pianos, etc. All that is necessary is to occasionally apply it with a cloth, and then bring to a polish with a dry cloth.

Your floors receive harder wear than any other part of your woodwork, hence require special treatment. Kleen Floor will keep them always in perfect condition.

We want to send you, free, prepaid, samples of our Kleen Floor and Prepared Wax, together with the latest edition of our handsomely illustrated book on the "Proper Treatment of Floors, Woodwork and Furniture." We attach a coupon for your convenience.

S. C. Johnson & Son
Racine, Wis.
"The Wood Finishing Authorities"

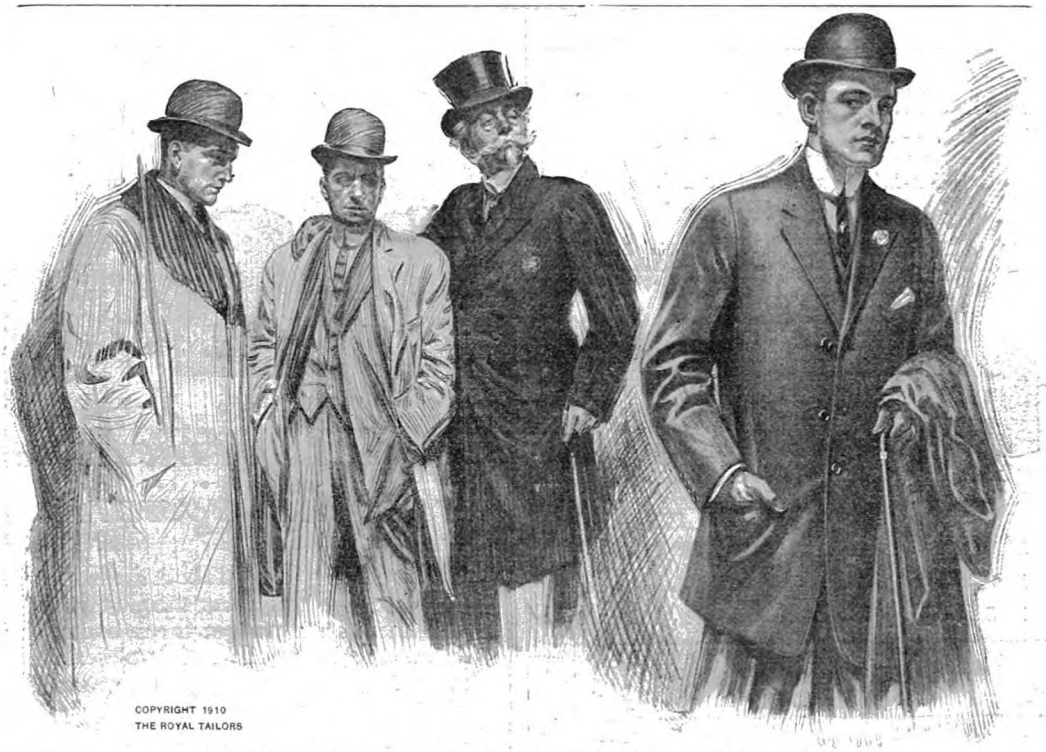
Please use Coupon—Cut on dotted Lines.

S. C. Johnson & Son
Racine, Wisconsin

I accept your FREE offer of samples of Johnson's Kleen Floor and Prepared Wax, also booklet Edition A. R. 5. on Home Beautifying. I agree to test the samples; and, if I find them satisfactory, will ask my dealer to supply me.

Name.....

Address.....



In Every Walk Of Life - The Well Dressed Man - Is Tailor-Dressed

Deep down in your heart, you have always coveted tailor-made clothes—every man has. Some men may perhaps have smothered Pride and accepted a factory-made substitute because of a fancied economy. But the envy of the man with a good tailor lies inrooted in the soul of every untailored clothes wearer. That envy need no longer remain ungratified in you.

Here is a tailoring service that because of its enormous output, its national field, is bringing the best hand tailoring within purse-reach of all $20, $25 and $30 brings you the utmost in a hand tailored Spring suit or overcoat. All Pure Wool and a legal guarantee attached warranting your satisfaction or your money back.

Over 5,000 dealers — merchants, haberdashers, and branch stores are ready to take your measures for Royal Tailor clothes and show you 500 beautiful All Pure Wool Spring patterns. But if you do not know the Royal dealer in your town—write to us to-day. Better still, send two red stamps for our beautiful book.

The Royal Tailors

PAY LESS AND DRESS BETTER

Chicago

Joseph Wechan

President

PAY LESS AND DRESS BETTER

New York

Elbert Hubbard Says:

"Hit your Ostermoor before ten-thirty (at night) or it is you for the toboggan."

Good Advice to Follow!

Look for the label and the name Ostermoor woven in the binding

Sound sleep means restored strength and the reserve power necessary to *do things*. The moment you lie down on an

"Built—Not Stuffed."

Ostermoor $15.

the only consciousness you have is that of absolute comfort, and the sensation blends quickly into sound, refreshing slumber.

One million people know this. Join the army of Ostermoor Sound-Sleepers.

Compressing the Ostermoor sheets by hand

Send for Free Book and Samples

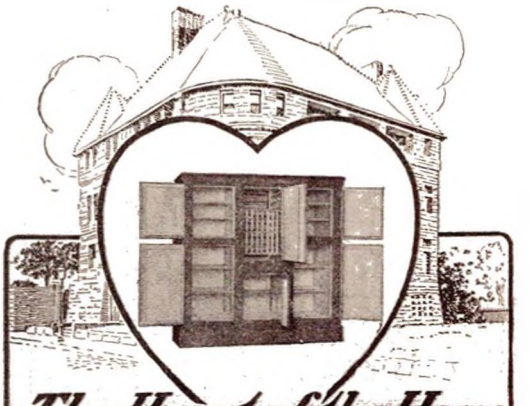
The Ostermoor is not for sale at stores generally, but there's an Ostermoor dealer in most places—the livest merchant in town. Write us and we'll give you his name. But don't take chances with imitations at other stores—make sure you're getting the genuine Ostermoor—our trade-mark label is your guarantee. We will ship you a mattress by express, prepaid, same day your check is received by us, when we have no dealer or he has none in stock. Sleep on an Ostermoor Mattress for a month—then, if for any reason you're dissatisfied, we'll return every penny of your money.

MATTRESSES COST Express Prepaid	
4'-6"—45 lbs.	$15.00
4'-0"—40 lbs.	13.35
3'-6"—35 lbs.	11.70
3'-0"—30 lbs.	10.00
2'-6"—25 lbs.	8.35

All 6 ft. 3 in. long. In two parts, 50c. extra

Ostermoor & Co., 110 Elizabeth St., New York

Canadian Agency: Alaska Feather & Down Co., Ltd., Montreal



The Heart of the Home is the Refrigerator

You are very careful about the foods you buy—but how about the way you *keep* them after you get them home. Are they equally pure and wholesome *when they come from your refrigerator?* If you are not perfectly sure, it will pay you to *write now* for our catalog, which shows how you can test your refrigerator to determine whether it is a safe place to keep food, and which also explains the scientific principles on which the famous

McCRAY Refrigerators

are built. This catalog will interest you whether you contemplate buying a refrigerator at present or not. The health of your family depends to a great extent on your refrigerator, and you ought at least know how "The Standard Refrigerator of America" is built, and how the McCray system gives the constant circulation of cold, dry air which is so essential in keeping foods wholesome.

The maximum of convenience and efficiency is secured by having your McCray Refrigerator **specially designed for your home,** and arranged for outside icing. Stock sizes are also carried for immediate shipment.

Write for the Free Book

"How to Use Leftover Foods"—by Elizabeth O. Hiller, and for any of these free catalogs:—No. A. H. Built-to-order for Residences; No. 87, regular sizes for Residences; No. 67 for Groceries; No. 59 for Meat Markets; No. 48 for Hotels, Clubs and Institutions; No. 72 for Flower Shops.

McCray Refrigerator Co.

96 Lake Street Kendallville, Indiana

I Can Succeed

"What other men have accomplished through I. C. S. help I can. If the I. C. S. has raised the salaries of these men, it can raise mine. If it has bettered their positions it can better mine. To me, I. C. S. means 'I CAN SUCCEED.'"

Get the "I Can Succeed" spirit, for the I. C. S. ***can*** raise your salary—whether you're a dollar-a-day man or a dollar-an-hour man, a long-hour man or a short-hour man, a young man or an old man, an inside man or an outside man, or whether you live in Europe, Asia, Africa, America or Australia.

On an average, 300 students every month ***VOLUNTARILY*** report better positions and salaries as the direct result of ***I. C. S. help.*** During February the number was 325. Men already in good positions have gone still higher through ***I. C. S. help.*** Failures have become Successes through ***I. C. S. help.*** There's an I. C. S. way for ***you***—to learn what it is, mark and mail the attached coupon today.

An I. C. S. Training Comes Easy.

If you can read and write the I. C. S. will ***go to you in your spare time*** and train you for a well-paid position in your chosen line of work. No hurrying, no waiting, no rigid rules—everything made clear and simple. No matter what time of day or night your spare time comes the ***I. C. S. is ready when YOU'RE ready.*** Mark the coupon.

Get in the SUCCESS class. Mark the coupon NOW. Doing so costs you nothing and entails no obligation,

SUCCESS COUPON

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 806, SCRANTON, PA.

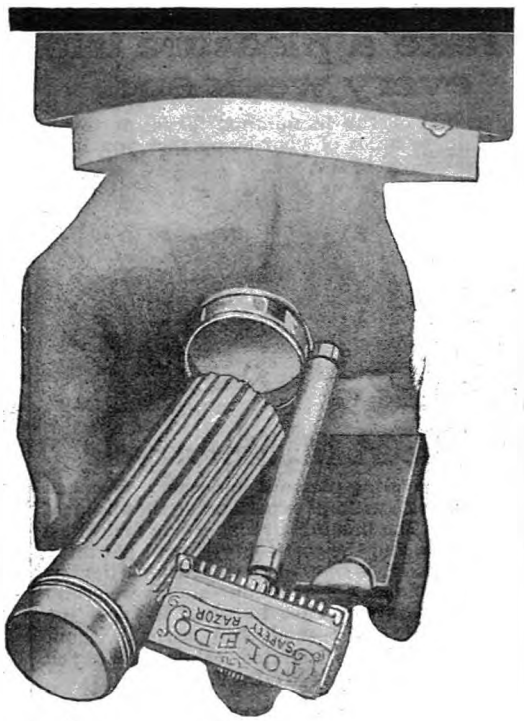
Please explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for the position before which I have marked X.

Bookkeeper	Telephone Engineer
Stenographer	Elec. Lighting Supt.
Advertising Man	Mech. Engineer
Show Card Writer	Plumber & Steam Fitter
Window Trimmer	Stationary Engineer
Commercial Law	Civil Engineer
Illustrator	Building Contractor
Designer & Craftsman	Architec'l Draughtsman
Civil Service	Architect
Chemist	Structural Engineer
Textile Mill Supt.	Banking
Electrician	Mining Engineer
Elec. Engineer	Concrete Engineer
Mechan. Draughtsman	Poultry Farming

Name_____

Street and No._____

City_____ State_____



TOLEDO SAFETY RAZOR $1

WITH A DOZEN BLADES

It Pleases, or Your Money Back

On a proposition like this, men, what in Sam Hill is the use of remaining a slave to the barbers? What's the use of buying razors on blind faith paying from $3 to $5 for the privilege? What's the use of remaining skeptical or indifferent on a proposition so safe and liberal?

Listen:—You send us one dollar. We send postpaid a Toledo Safety Razor with 12 blades, and instructions for use. Use Razor **according to instructions.** Whenever it fails to do good work; to give you a cool, clean, easy shave; whenever you think you haven't had your money's worth, just chuck the whole outfit in the little mailing tube and fire it back. Your dollar will be immediately returned.

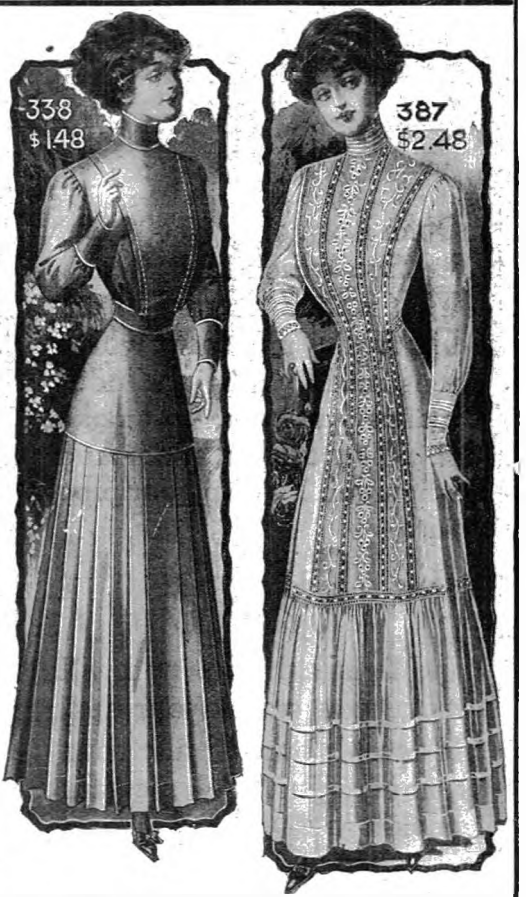
Why, Gee Whiz! We ought to get a dollar from every man in the country on a proposition like that. You can't lose.

Simple, Compact, Convenient.

The Toledo Safety Razor is simplicity itself. Comes in nickeled tube 3 1-2 inches high, 1 1-4 inches in diameter. Smaller than shaving stick. Blades made from best Swedish steel. Finest cutting edge. Handle, triple silver plated; likewise screw. Head made of genuine German silver; also back of blade holder. Whole thing in three pieces. So simple anyone can put it together without instructions. Throw in kettle and boil and you couldn't hurt it. A delight to shavers. So good we sell it on an **unlimited guarantee.** $1 and your money back if not satisfied. Send check, money order, dollar bill, stamps, anything that's handy. You'll forget if you turn the page. Send now. Get **Free booklet.** Valuable points to shavers.

Clauss **35 State St., Fremont, O.**

Our Monthly Specials



$2.25 LINON DRESS FOR $1.48

338. One Piece Dress of Good Linon. Smart style and a value that could not be duplicated for double the price. Gibson plaits and piping of contrasting color form plain but effective trimming. Skirt made with close fitting yoke and full pleated flounce. Easy to launder. Colors, Light Blue or Tan (Linen). Sizes 32 to 44 bust.

Special Price . . $1.48
Add 20c. for postage.

$3.98 LINGERIE DRESS FOR $2.48

387. Most remarkable value we have ever offered. Made of sheer lawn, white only. Three panels of beautiful open work and blind embroidery, outlined by dainty Baby Cluny lace, extend down front to 24 inch flounce. Same lace used on collar, cuffs and at waist. Each seam carefully sewed. Will launder nicely. Sizes 32 to 44 bust.

Special Price . . $2.48
Add 20c. for postage

You Are Guaranteed Satisfaction or Your Money Back on Every Purchase.

FREE Write for **FREE yearly** subscription to the **"STANDARD"** Bulletin. **MAY** and **JUNE** numbers now ready. Shows you all the **Latest New York Summer Styles**—styles that are **"JUST OUT"**—in **MADE-TO-ORDER SUITS** and **READY-TO-WEAR** Garments. Also many special **BARGAINS.** *WRITE TO-DAY.*

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NEW YORK CITY.

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If so, let us send you

THE NORMAL EYE

The Ideal Sight Restorer

for 10 days at our expense.

It helps Nature in a purely natural way to strengthen the eyes and restore the natural vision. Its action is in the nature of a gentle massage, which stimulates the eyes by restoring the normal circulation of blood—that is all that weak eyes require. But it does more—it molds the eye painlessly but surely to its perfect shape. This is necessary to correct near-sight, far-sight, astigmatism, and kindred defects. It is absolutely safe—it does not come in direct contact with the eyes; and five minutes' manipulation in your own home, twice a day, is all that is necessary to counteract eyestrain and headache, and relegate eyeglasses to the rubbish box. Throw away your eyeglasses. See nature, and read with your naked eyes. Write for instructive booklet No. 171-E, **and 10 days' test to**

THE IDEAL COMPANY
134 West 65th St., N. Y.

No. 114 1Kt. Gem Solid Gold Tiffany, $10.00

No. 163 1Kt. Gem Solid Gold Belcher, $15.00

No. 108 1Kt. Gem Solid Gold Stud, $10.00

See Them Before Paying

These gems are Chemical White Sapphires and **can't** be **told** from diamonds except by an expert. So **hard** they **can't** be filed, so will wear **forever** and retain brilliancy. We want you to see these gems—we will pay all expenses for you to see them.

Our Proposition—We will send you either rings or stud illustrated—by express C. O. D. all charges **prepaid**—with privilege of examination. If you like it, pay the express man—if you don't, return it to him and it won't cost you a cent. Fair proposition, isn't it? All mounted in solid gold, diamond mountings. **Send for Booklet.**

WHITE VALLEY GEM CO.
902 HOLLIDAY BUILDING, INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

STARTLING Watch Offer

The Great Burlington Special at an Anti-Trust Price!

The world's masterpiece of watch manufacture now sold direct!—The most amazing offer ever made in the whole history of the watch industry—an offer which has absolutely PARALYZED competition—**the offer of the genuine Burlington Special direct to the public at the rock-bottom ANTI-TRUST PRICE,** without middlemen's profits.

The Fight is On!

We will not be bound by any system of price-boosting contracts with dealers. We will not submit to any "high profit" selling scheme. We will not be dictated to by ANY Trust.

NO MATTER WHAT IT COSTS, we are determined to push our independent line even if we should have to fight a combination of all the Watch Manufacturers of the country!

And so we are making this offer—the most sweeping, astounding offer ever made on a high-grade watch. The famous BURLINGTON direct and at the same price WHOLESALE Jewelers must pay.

And in order to make the proposition doubly easy for the public we will even allow this rock-bottom price, if desired, on terms of $2.50 a Month Don't miss this wonderfully liberal offer. Sign and mail coupon now. Rock-bottom, anti-trust price, whether you buy for cash or time.

POST YOURSELF!

Be sure to get posted on watches and watch values, trust-method prices and anti-trust prices **before** you buy a watch. Learn to judge watch values!

Get the Burlington Watch Company's

FREE WATCH BOOK

Read our startling exposure of the amazing conditions which exist in the watch trade today. Read about the anti-trust fight. Read about our great $1,000.00 Challenge. Learn how you can judge watch values. Send your name and address for this valuable **FREE BOOK** now—TODAY. Sign and mail coupon

Burlington Watch Co., Dept. 1075, 19th & Marshall Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

Please send me, without obligation and prepaid, your free book on watches and copy of your $1,000.00 challenge, with full explanations of your cash or $2.50 a month offer on the superb ANTI-TRUST Burlington Watch.

Name.....

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No letter necessary, coupon will do.

BURLINGTON WATCH CO.
Dept. 1075
19th & Marshall Blvd.,
Chicago, Ill.

This elegant

3 piece outfit

only

$1.75 cash

We guarantee everything to your entire satisfaction. Credit given with easy terms simply for the asking.

90c monthly

Total price, $6.95

Credit given to all

B-711 — Black skirt of all wool Panama, finished below hip line with wide corded fold; trimmed with jet buttons and silk braid loops.

Black petticoat, silk finished, lace embroidered flounce; finished with hemming and dust ruffle.

White petticoat with deep embroidery flounce finished with hem-stitched pleats and under flounce.

This elegant three-piece outfit for only $6.95, 90c monthly, $1.75 cash.

Free A handsome belt goes with this outfit

Six months to pay

Our generous credit is cheerfully given to suit your every requirement. All the very latest creations of the world's fashion centers are shown in our

New Style Book FREE

It tells all—low prices—**easy credit** and is a complete catalog of clothing for women and children. Simply ask for Style Book No. 22. A postal will do. Write now.

Special Style Book for Men FREE. Ask for Catalog No. 44. It gives full information of all that is best and stylish in men's wear. **Easy Credit** and money saving are yours for the asking.

Write us today—now—and get all this valuable information from the world's greatest outfitters for men, women and children.

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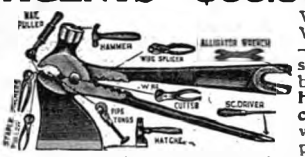
AGENTS—$33.30 A WEEK



Why not make it? Jack Wood did it! He writes—"Hurry up 100 more—sold first lot in 2 days—best seller I ever saw." **Hundreds of agents coining money**—$5.60 worth of tools for the price of one. Wonderful invention—drop forged from finest steel. Nickel Plated all over. **Astonishing low price to agents**—1,200 ordered by one man. Get our grand confidential proposition quick. Sample free—don't delay—experience not needed—write at once.

THOMAS MFG. CO., 2109 Wayne St., DAYTON, OHIO

I MADE $3,000 AND BUILT THIS HOME IN ONE YEAR

MRS. J. LEE, OKLAHOMA

Selling Improved IDEAL

Steam Cookers

J. C. Poling, O., made **$44 first 8 hours. Easiest, fastest seller. W. T. Corey, Ind., sold 145 in 4 weeks. Cooks meal for 8 to 15 on 1 burner; cooks tough meat tender. Saves half fuel bill and labor. Holds 16 one-qt. jars in canning fruit. Recommended by thousands.**

State and District Mgrs. and Agents wanted to sell this and 200 household articles. Write quick for new sales plan.

TOLEDO COOKER CO., BOX 72, TOLEDO, O.

Camp Guide Sent FREE!

Just your name and address on the Coupon below brings you the new 1910 edition of our famous Camp Guide, absolutely free. The most practical book on camp life ever written. Gives you **practical** information written by experienced men who have spent years in camps in every part of the country. **This camp guide tells you everything you need to know about camping**—it tells you how to camp successfully and enjoyably—gives you the information that you could not **possibly** secure otherwise except by actual and often disagreeable experience.

Get Ready NOW for Your VACATION!

The time for planning is growing short. **Go camping.** You cannot find a more healthful or enjoyable way of using the time at your disposal.

But when you do go—go right! Send for our new Camp Guide and Catalog the first thing you do. You will find listed and described the largest line of Tents, Camper's Supplies, Sails and Canvas Specialties carried by any manufacturer in the United States. **We sell direct from our huge factories to you.** You are sure of getting the **very highest qualities** it is possible to obtain **at less** than you would have to pay at retail for decidedly inferior goods.

Look at these Wonderful Values

This 7x7 ft. Wall Tent, made of the very best quality 8-oz. Single Filling Duck, cut and made with the most extreme care.

A simply astounding bargain at only $4.80

Family Compartment Tent, 9x16½ ft. Made of the best selected quality of 10-oz. Double Filling Duck. May be divided into rooms for eating and sleeping to suit convenience. Insures absolute privacy. The ideal tent for family or small party. **Specially priced at only $21.75**

Now Write for our FREE Camp Guide and Catalog

—don't bother with a letter—just your name and address on the attached coupon will bring you this great book by return mail. Whether you intend going camping this year or not, you should be sure to get this free book at once. You should certainly get our lowest prices, our bed-rock factory prices, on the very finest line of canvas specialties and camper's goods that it is possible to produce.

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Send the coupon for this FREE book today

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Gentlemen.—Kindly forward me free, postpaid, your new 1910 Catalogue and Camp Guide.

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No letter necessary; just send the coupon

New—Wonderful—Unexpected!

GLORIOUS DISCOVERY! BEST THING EVER HAPPENED. FAREWELL TO SWEEPING, DUSTING, HOUSE-CLEANING

NEW HOME VACUUM CLEANER. AIR DOES THE WORK

CLEANS CARPETS, RUGS, MATTINGS ON FLOOR

No Machinery—No Electricity—No Motors. One Person Operates. Does same work as high priced machines. SIMPLE, POWERFUL, EFFICIENT. It's the suction that does it. It's that terrific, irresistible inrush of air, carrying with it the dirt, dust and germs out of the carpets into the Cleaner. Weighs 9 pounds. Costs $8.50. Circulars give full details. Thousands praise it. Unlike anything you've seen or heard of. No such device sold in stores. Housekeepers everywhere have longed, wished, hoped for it.

$9 to $18 a day for Agents

FREE SAMPLE to active agents. A splendid opportunity for readers to make money—Men and women.

This new—marvelous invention, this saver—deliverer—champion of over-burdened housewives should be in every home—once used you wouldn't be without it for love nor money. **Weighs nine pounds.** Operated by child or frail woman. No expense—no labor. Terrific air suction draws dust, dirt, grit and germs from carpets, rugs, mattings, etc., while they remain on the floor; raises no dust, hence no dusting required. Every particle drawn into cleaner—then dumped.

Abandon Brooms, Brushes, Dust Cloths

They don't clean your rugs and carpets. Brooms and sweepers fill the air with clouds of dust, and remove a portion of the surface dirt. **The New Home Vacuum Cleaner sucks up into itself not only the surface dirt,** but the dirt, dust, grime and germs—from the very warp, fibre. **No more necessity to go through the disturbance and upheaval of house cleaning.** New Home Vacuum Cleaner keeps them clean all the time—cleans on the floor. **Saves money, time, strength and health.** Nothing like it anywhere—nothing can take its place. Away with hard work—away with slaving toil. Send today for a cleaner.

Read What Users Say:

F. I. Pierce, N. Y. "Wife more than pleased with Home Vacuum Cleaner. It does all and more than you claim for it."

Prof. Geo. S. McDowell, Pa. "Took 8½ ounces fine dirt from carpet 10 x 13 feet."

L. Banville, O. "Home Cleaner greatest ever. Have arranged for demonstrations in stores."

Mrs. Jane Shully, Nebraska. "You don't claim half enough. I wouldn't part with my cleaner for any price if I couldn't get another. My ten year old girl operates mine easily."

Mrs. Henry Deller, Rhode Island. "I must thank you for telling me of your wonderful cleaner. What a godsend it is to women. I have not felt so rested in years. Work now easy. Plenty of spare time. Don't see how you can sell it so cheap."

$8.50 SENT ANYWHERE

Price $8.50. Not Sold in Stores

Not $100.00; not $50.00; not even $25.00—**only $8.50.** Have a clean home, hours of leisure. Adopt the easy way—the modern way—the sanitary way—the scientific way. **All Hail! New Home Vacuum Cleaner, marvel of the 20th Century,** champion of overworked womanhood.

Each machine tested before shipping—each guaranteed as represented or money back. The price insignificant—the benefits everlasting. Will last for years. Not sold in stores.

Don't delay—don't hesitate—don't wait for others—don't wonder if it's true. **It is true—every word**—couldn't be exaggerated—words can't describe it. **Stop short! Put drudgery behind you—leisure and health before.** Enjoy yourself **now**—tomorrow may be too late. $8.50 will do it all—$8.50 brings relief from hard work—brings time to enjoy yourself—to visit frieuds—to read, shop, etc. Pays for itself in saving of carpets, rugs and mattings.

MAKE LOADS OF MONEY

This wonderful cleaner simply takes women by storm. They can't resist it—bargain day isn't in it. **No experience necessary.** Just hustle and the money rolls in. Shown in three minutes. Sold in five. Then on to the next. **None refuse. All buy. Hurry**—be first—get the cream. Women eager—they need it—when they see it, can't let it go. Drop everything—sell this marvelous vacuum cleaner. **Make $100 a week**—you can—easy. C. E. Goff, Mo.: **"Sold 5 Vacuum Cleaners last Saturday,**—my first attempt." Gustave Anderson, Minn.: "Enclosed find order for 12 Vacuum Cleaners. Ship prompt. **One man sold a dozen 3 days."** W. H. Morgan, Pa.: **"Sold 45 Cleaners in 25 hours.** Have sold two out of three persons canvassed." And so it goes. Hundreds of like letters every day; every one pleased, no one dissatisfied. All making money easy. **Agents' profit 100 per cent.** Write today—secure agency—get to making this easy money.

FREE SAMPLE to active agents.

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Geisha Diamonds

THE LATEST SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY

Bright, sparkling, beautiful. For brilliancy they equal the genuine, standing all test and puzzle experts. One twentieth the expense. Sent free with privilege of examination. For particulars, prices, etc., address

THE R. GREGG MFG. & IMPT. CO.

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Agents $6 to $18 a Day

New Method of Cleaning Clothes. Cleans Family Wash in 30 to 50 Minutes. Woman's Hardest Work Made Easy. No Rubbing. No Motors. No Chemicals.

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EASY WAY in 30 to 50 minutes cleans washing which before took entire day. All metal, strong, durable, sanitary, light in weight. Easily used, cleaned, handled — always ready. Child or weakly woman can use it. Saves washday drudgery.

Users Praise the "Easy Way."

J. McGee, Tenn., writes:—"One young lady cleaned day's washing in one hour with Easy Way—another in 45 minutes." Mrs. T. Bullen, Canada, writes:—"I washed bedding, heavy quilts, curtains, etc., without rubbing." Lauretta Mitchell, O., writes:—"Done a big washing in 45 minutes—sold three already." A. D. Poppleton, N. Y.:—"Gives perfect satisfaction. Washed bed quilts, greasy overalls and fine clothes. Greatest thing on earth." F. E. Post, Pa., writes:—

TWO WEEKS WASHING IN 45 MINUTES.

Clothes cleaned without rubbing." J. H. Barrett, Ark., after ordering 38 Easy Ways says:—"You have the grandest invention I ever heard of." J. W. Myers, Ga., says:—"Find check for 12 Easy Ways. Greatest invention to womanhood, forever abolishing miserable washday. Sells itself."

AGENTS GETTING RICH—**R. O. Cowan, N. Y., placed 13 in 6 hours—(profit $39.00).** Mrs. J. Brown sold 10 in 3 days—(profit $30.00). K. J. Blevins, O., writes:—**"Made 7 calls, sold 5 one day"**—(profit $15.00). R. H. Latimore, Pa., writes:—"Sold 4 this morning. Never yet turned down." A. G. Witt, Pa.:—"Received Easy Way yesterday; sold 4 today—not out for orders." Mrs. Gerrish, Mont., ordered sample, then 1 dozen, then 100—(profit over $300.00). **Just made one shipment 1000 Easy Ways** to Russian agent. N. Boucher, Mass., orders 75 more, says:—"Everybody wants one, best business I ever had." A. S. Verrett, La., sold 8 in one day—(profit $24.00).

Over 100,000 Sold.

FREE SAMPLE TO AGENTS—WE WANT MANAGERS, AGENTS, MEN OR WOMEN—home or traveling, all or part time, to show, take orders and appoint agents. **Easy Way new article,** not worked to death. Best seller out. Every family wants one. People glad to see it demonstrated; buy without being asked and throw away costly wash machines to use it. **Only 2 sales a day means $36.00 a week profit.**

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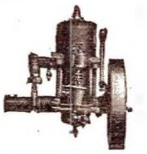

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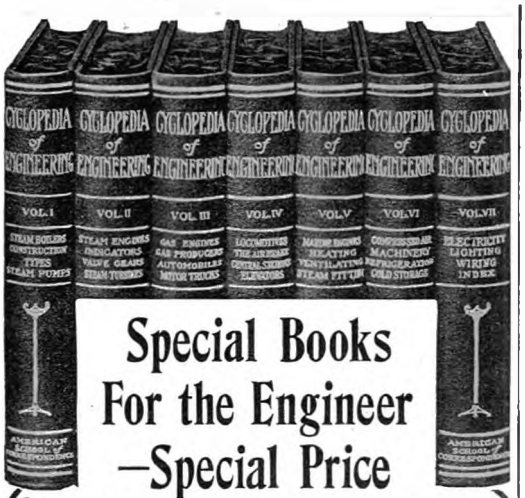

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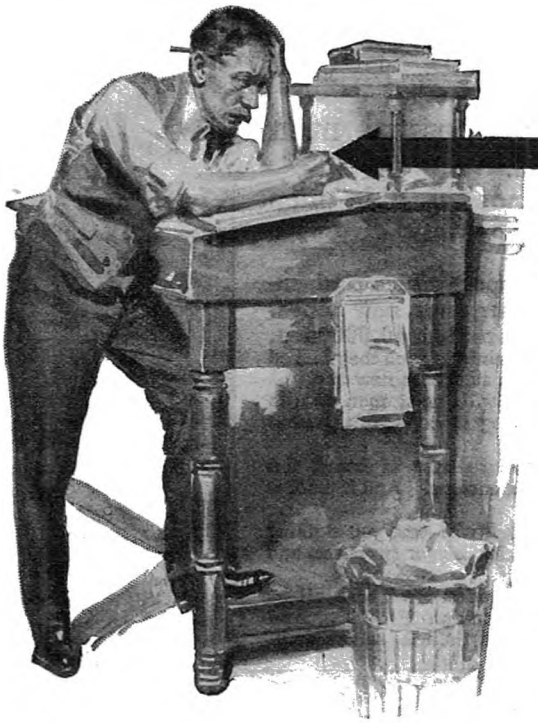

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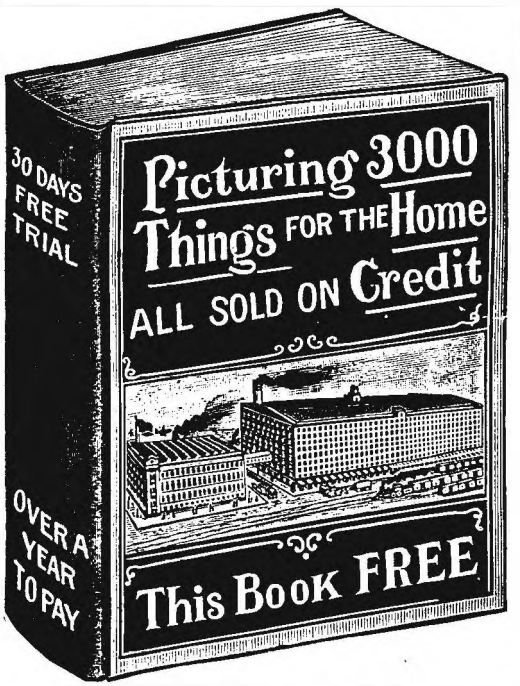

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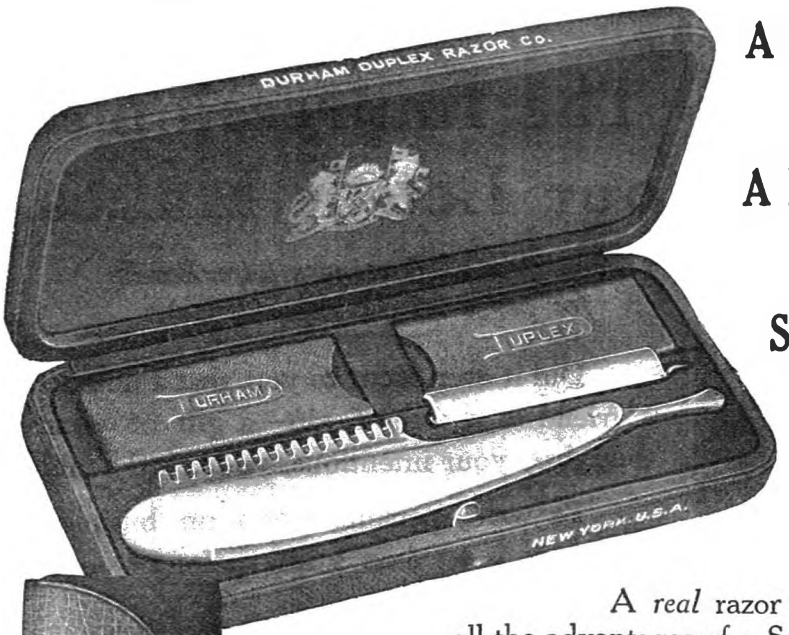

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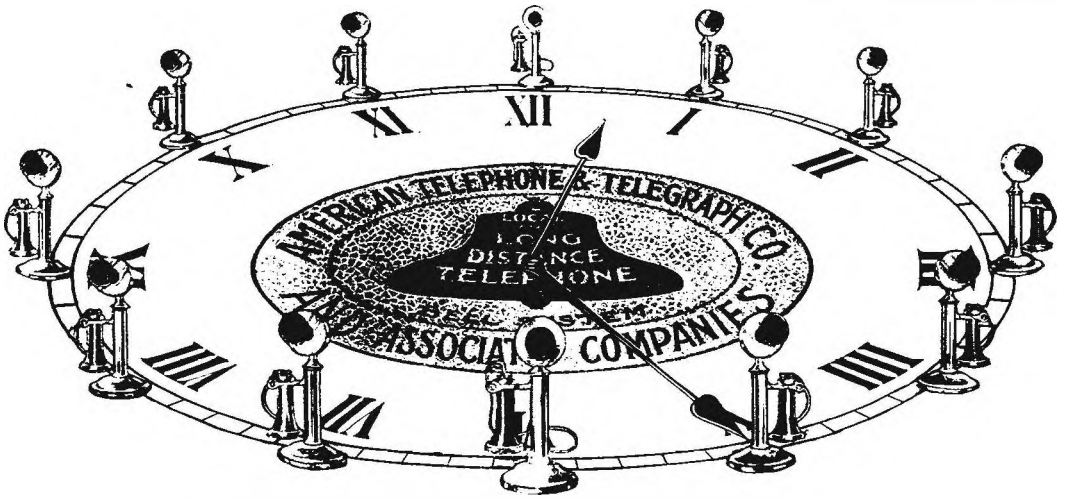

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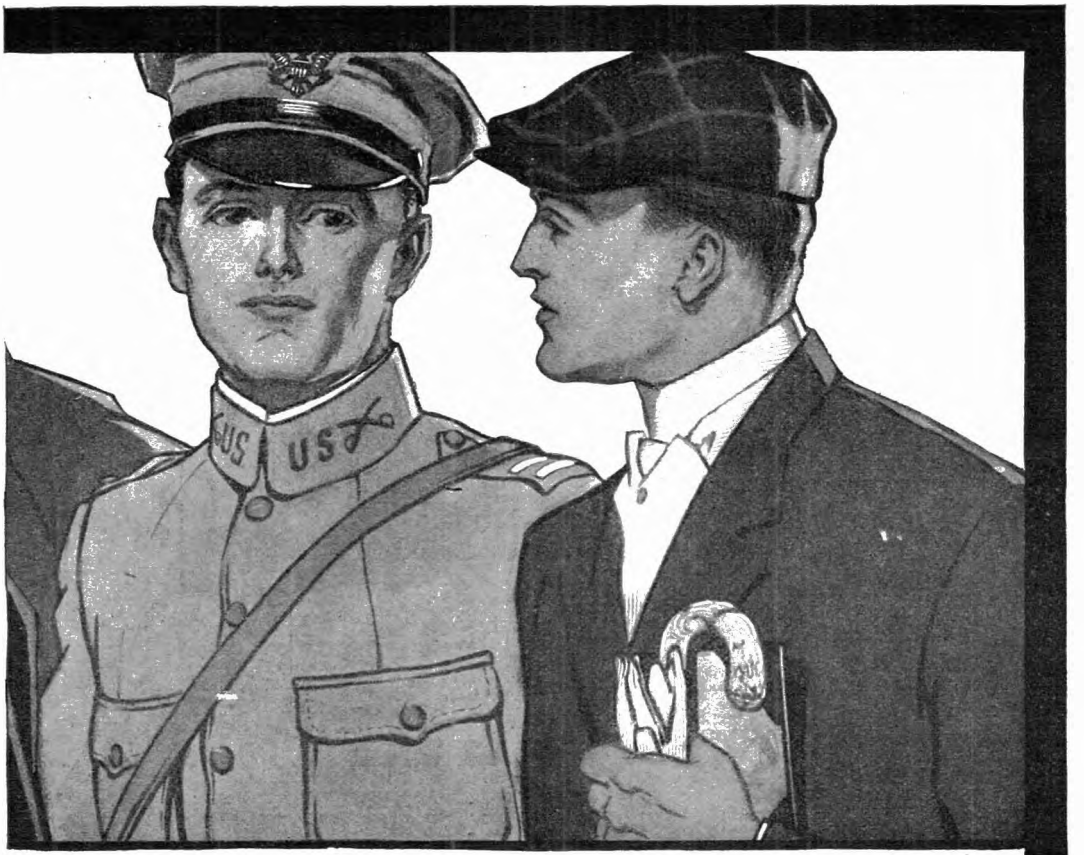

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Write and we'll send you a pamphlet—Dept. A.

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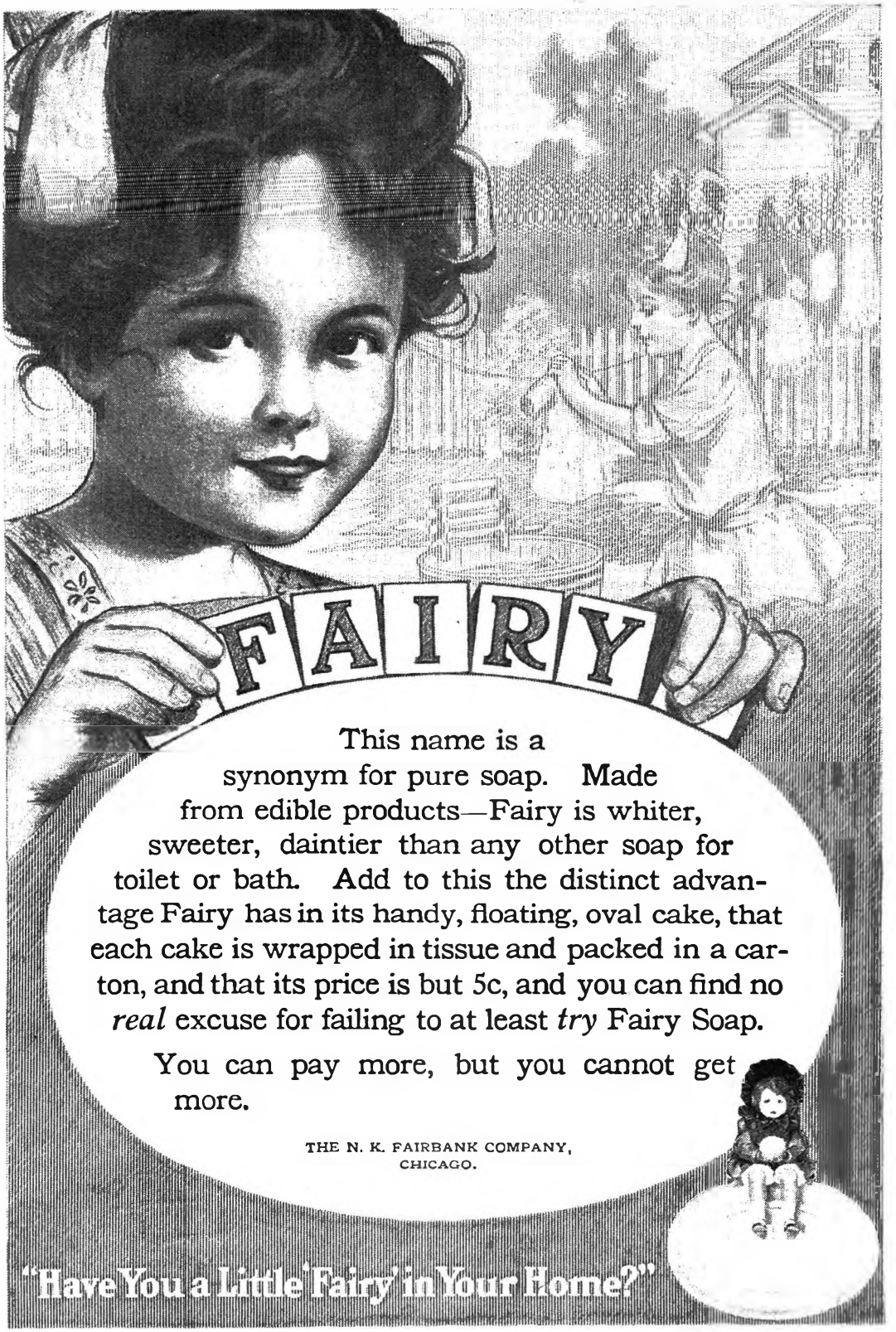
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