THE JAILBIRD BEGINS IN THIS ISSUE

THE ARGOSY

FOR SEPTEMBER

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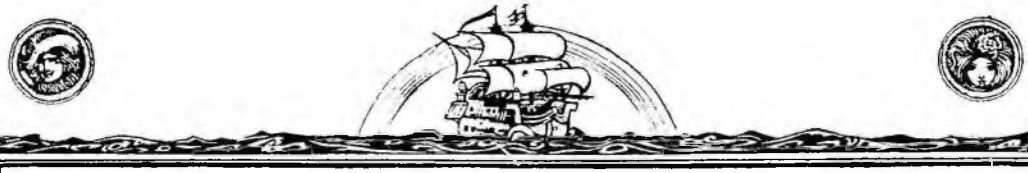

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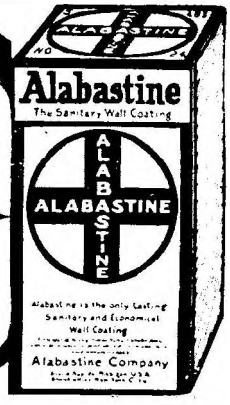

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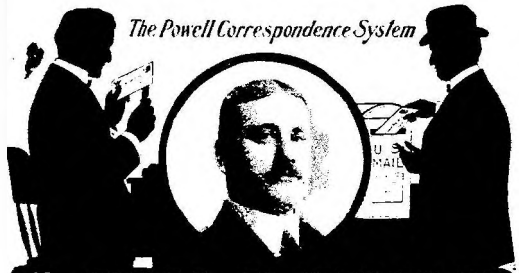

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. LVIII SEPTEMBER, 1908. No. 2

THE STORM-CENTER.

By FRED V. GREENE, Jr.,

Author of "On the Brink of the Precipice."

The harrowing experiences of an editor in a matter where facing his past was concerned.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

THE GATHERING OF THE CLOUDS.

THE tinkling of the telephone-bell caused Stephen Weldon to spring suddenly from his chair. Walking hurriedly across the room, with that nervous little stride so familiar to all his friends, he seized the receiver and inquired: "Well?"

"Mr. Hartwell to see Mr. Weldon," was the businesslike announcement.

For a second or two, Weldon seemed so taken by surprise that words failed him. Then the expression of bewilderment suddenly changed to one of fear, and his face worked convulsively as he endeavored to speak.

But no sound came—he seemed as one suddenly stricken dumb and making violent efforts to articulate.

"Shall I send him up, Mr. Weldon?" broke in the operator, who was waiting patiently at the other end of the wire.

With a supreme effort, Weldon managed to murmur faintly: "Tell him—to wait—a moment."

The receiver, slipping from his hand, dangled at the end of the cord, rattling noisily against the wall. Then Weldon, his face pale and drawn, staggered to his library-table, clutched at it for support, and literally fell, weak and limp, into the big chair alongside it.

Stephen Weldon was only twenty-eight, yet he had already, as they say, made his mark in the world. His name was well up in the list among the prominent authors of the day, and he was chief editor for all of Frank Cartwright's magazines. Besides this, his first drama had just been produced by a prominent theatrical manager of New York, and had proved a big success.

Weldon's rise had been meteoric—in fact, almost marvelous.

Coming to New York from a little obscure New Hampshire town twelve years before, his entire worldly possessions were the clothes upon his back, his little worn Testament, and eight dollars in money. To Weldon this amount seemed almost a fortune, but it rapidly dwindled away during the time he devoted to finding employment.

Day after day passed in the same fashion—a long, weary chase after the elusive position he wanted—in fact, must have. How often in after years he had told the story of how he secured his first job.

Starting out one morning to answer the newspaper advertisements, hunger growing until he felt he could not stand it another hour, he headed for the office of Miller & Co., who had advertised for a boy.

Arriving there, he found four other boys waiting, apparently just as anxious for the position as he was. But he *must* get it, he told himself. Mr. Miller had not reached his office as yet, and the bookkeeper, Hartwell, in answer to Weldon's inquiries regarding the position, ordered him, in a very arrogant way, to sit down with the rest and wait his turn.

With a beating heart, Weldon seated himself upon the bench in the outside office with the other boys. The difference between himself and them was most marked — Weldon quiet, reserved, and anxious — the others talking, laughing, pinching each other and apparently endeavoring in every way they could to make their presence more noticeable.

"Say, you kids have got to make less noise there, or I'll chase the whole bunch of you out of here," the bookkeeper yelled angrily, which brought out a series of muffled sneers and laughs.

This seemed to provoke Hartwell more than ever, and he strode toward them threateningly.

"Get out of here—every one of you!" he commanded, seizing the largest boy roughly by the coat-collar and jerking him to his feet.

"What fer?" demanded the boy surlily. "I'm waitin' fer de job."

"Well, you'll not get it; and get out now, without another word."

The other boys, with the exception of Weldon, had already risen, and were apparently undecided whether to run or stay and see the outcome of the argument. The lad whom the bookkeeper had jerked to his feet looked in the direction where Weldon was still seated, apparently taking no interest in the proceedings around him.

Noting that his physique was not a match for his own as to size or weight, an idea seemed to strike him. In an outburst of confidence, he declared to the bookkeeper: "Dat's de guy what caused de trouble."

His finger, black and grimy, showing a great lack of personal attention, was pointed directly at Weldon.

"He poked me in de ribs and made me laugh," he added.

Weldon gazed at the boy in blank amazement. He could not believe his ears. To be blamed for the trouble, when he had taken absolutely no hand in it whatever, took his breath away.

Unfortunately, he had not been in the great city long enough to learn its many dishonorable methods and unjust accusations.

Jumping to his feet, he walked boldly over to the urchin, who towered over Weldon almost a head. With indignation written in great letters all over his face, he cried: "How could you tell an untruth like that? You know it is not so. It was you who started and kept up all the noise."

It was now the bully's turn to display his anger. Raising his clenched fist threateningly, he yelled: "You lie, you—"

But he got no further in his denunciation. With almost catlike rapidity, Weldon cut him short with a stinging blow in the face, and before the bookkeeper could interfere, the two boys were rolling on the floor, each struggling to best the other.

As Hartwell seized Weldon's coat-collar—he now had the bully subdued—and jerked him to his feet, the door opened and Mr. Miller, the head of the firm, gazed wonderingly at the spectacle.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded, looking at the bookkeeper for explanation.

Hartwell's manner had suddenly changed from one of superiority to one of subservience.

"These boys are here, sir, in reply to your ad in the *Morning Star*, and they got fighting among themselves, sir," he explained.

"They did, eh? Well, get out of here—every one of you."

"Please, sir," Weldon pleaded, as he endeavored to stanch the flow of blood from his nose, where the bully had evidently landed with telling effect, "I was not at fault, sir. And I want the position, sir."

Something in the boy's tone and manner arrested Mr. Miller's attention. He hesitated for a moment, his face softened somewhat, but before Weldon could continue, it had resumed its hard, set appearance.

"Out—out with you! I want none of you! Get!" he cried.

The other boys had already started toward the door, but Weldon hung back.

Seizing his arm roughly, Mr. Miller commanded, "You—too!"

"But, sir," Weldon pleaded, looking up into Mr. Miller's face, with the tears welling in his eyes, "he called me a liar—and I am not! I never told a lie in my life, and no one can say I ever did. So I hit him—first."

The old gentleman's face softened, his voice suddenly lost its harshness, and the hand which only a few seconds before had been pointing Weldon toward the door, now detained him. He ordered the others away and led Weldon into his private office.

The outcome was that Mr. Miller became so impressed with Weldon and his story that the latter was hired immediately, and supplied with his first week's salary at once, in order that he might get something to eat.

Weldon's desire to please in his work soon won everybody with whom he came in contact. As Mr. Miller remarked to the cashier upon the fourth morning of his advent into the office, "I tell you, Simpson, there's no use talking—that boy is a prize. My only fear is that it may be a case of a new broom sweeping clean."

But worse than that was to befall. On this very day Simpson went out for lunch and forgot to lock his cash-drawer. Hartwell, the bookkeeper, and Weldon were left in the office. That night, in endeavoring to balance his money on hand, the cashier found a shortage of one hundred dollars.

After carefully going over for the fourth time his record of receipts and expenditures, he went into the private office to tell Mr. Miller of the shortage, and also of his own negligence in leaving the cash-drawer unlocked.

"Hartwell and the new boy were the only ones in the office," he concluded; "I hate to suggest it, but it seems the only probable explanation."

Hartwell was called in and questioned thoroughly. He had been in Mr. Miller's employ for four years, and never a suspicion of any kind had been cast upon him. So his employer was most cautious in his line of interrogation.

Suddenly Hartwell seemed to recall an explanation. "Since you bring it back to me, I do remember that while Simpson was out to lunch your phone rang, Mr. Miller, and I came in here to answer it. Robbins & Co. called off those figures you found on your desk on your return. I guess it took at least ten minutes, and all that time Weldon was alone in the office. But I don't think—"

"You have no right to think," Mr. Miller angrily broke in. "I do the thinking for this concern. I can afford to run no risks. We have no proof against him, but he must go. He seemed so good—but, hang it all, you can't trust the boys of to-day. Send him in to me."

Without a word, Hartwell left his employer's presence, and, signaling young Weldon, whispered: "The boss wants you."

Weldon entered Mr. Miller's private office confidently.

"Well, young man," was the greeting he received in a cold, harsh voice. "I find we do not need you after to-night. You've been paid up to the end of the week; but that's all right, you—"

"Mr. Miller!" Weldon gasped, "you mean that I am discharged!"

His surprise and grief at the loss of his position was so apparent and rang so true that his employer fumbled nervously among the papers on his desk, avoiding Weldon's glance.

"Yes," he replied, with a forced attempt at severity. "You must go now. Never mind why—just go."

Weldon could not keep the tears back, and in a choking voice, full of indignation, he broke out: "Mr. Miller, why am I discharged? I am from the country—I am not familiar with your city ways. But justice—at least, the justice we have in New Hampshire—demands I know why I am sent away."

He had already heard of the missing money, and intuition told him that in some way it was connected with his dismissal.

"Well, I wasn't going to tell you," exclaimed Mr. Miller, as he faced around in his chair. "But since you demand to know—or, as you put it, justice demands—there has been some money stolen—"

"And you think I took it," Weldon interrupted, the tears suddenly drying up and his face radiating anger from every line and feature. "You accuse me of stealing it!"

He raised his voice, and in outraged indignation fairly yelled it. Then his voice became soft and modulated, as he continued:

"Mr. Miller, I am only a poor country boy, trying to get a start in life. But I am honest—I only want what I earn. I did not take your money!"

Drawing from his pocket the little roll of bills that the cashier had advanced to him, he declared, "I have not earned all of this." Counting out some of them, he continued, as he laid them upon his employer's desk: "This belongs to you. I go, but time will in the end prove my innocence."

With that the boy turned on his heel, got his hat from the peg, and went out into the street.

This had all happened twelve years before, yet the memory of it had never been erased. In a few days he secured a position in Mr. Cartwright's employ, and, almost before he realized it, was writing short stories. This proved to be his forte, and he was quickly heralded as a rising young author.

His salary advanced with great rapidity, and to his business friends he was known as a person of the greatest honor and integrity. He took an active part in religious work, and had full charge of the Young Men's Society in the South Church.

But the thought that he had once been branded as a thief was always uppermost in his mind. Many a sleepless night he had passed dreading the day when this unfortunate experience might be brought to light. Since he had been discharged from Miller & Co.'s he had never seen or heard of any one connected with the concern, but something told him that some day the facts would come out.

And now the time had arrived. Should he see Hartwell or not? If he refused—well, Hartwell might think that success had caused him to feel too far above him. And in that case, Hartwell might—"No, I suppose I must see him," Weldon told himself. "I dread it, because I am certain he has not forgotten."

With a firm step he walked to the telephone, and, taking up the receiver, announced in a steady voice: "Please send Mr. Hartwell up."

Then he sank into a big armchair, to await the inevitable.

CHAPTER II.

THE CLOUDS IN THE DISTANCE.

"HALLO, Steve!" Hartwell exclaimed, as he staggered into the room. "Oh, I beg your pardon, though. S'pose it should be *Mr. Weldon.*"

With a bow that Weldon took for a mock courtesy, he continued: "I beg your pardon again — Mr. Weldon it should be—and is. How is Mr. Weldon to-day?"

The condition of his caller had already been only too plainly revealed, much to Weldon's disgust. And perhaps he showed his feelings a trifle too plainly, as, still standing, he questioned, not noticing his caller's extended hand: "Well, Mr. Hartwell, what brings you here—and in this state?"

"Well, now, look here, Steve—darned if I can help calling you Steve, so I'm not going to try— Say, let's sit down."

So saying, he dropped into one of the large, deeply upholstered chairs that were Weldon's pride. As he felt the cushions give under him, he partially raised up again, allowing his full weight to sink into them.

With a half leer and a glance around the room, he remarked, almost under his breath: "Pretty fine—pretty fine!"

"Well, Steve," he went on, after a moment of silence, during which Weldon wondered anxiously what the outcome of the call would be, "seems to me the world's been pretty good to you, eh?"

Seeing on the table alongside him a cut-glass, silver-tipped cigarette-box, he reached over and, taking one out, lit it deliberately, and took a deep inhalation of the heavy Oriental smoke, remarking with a harsh laugh: "The Lord helps those that helps themselves."

Weldon still stood with one hand resting on the edge of the table. His face was drawn and anxious, as he nervously watched every move of his caller.

After another deep inhalation, Hartwell faced around suddenly—so quickly that Weldon jumped back a step. "Steve, it doesn't pay to be honest—I've found that out," Hartwell exclaimed.

Then his head sank upon his breast, and he seemed lost in deep thought.

Weldon had now overcome his first fear of the man. Perhaps, after all, he had forgotten.

Reaching over, he picked up the cigarette Hartwell had laid upon the edge of the table, the lighted end of which was burning dangerously near to the pol-

ished surface, and placed it on a silver ash-tray.

Hartwell now lay back in the big chair almost like one dead. Even his chest seemed motionless, and Weldon, fearing he would fall into a drunken stupor, broke the silence by questioning: "Well?"

The former bookkeeper roused up slowly.

"Steve, as I look around here, I repeat what I said before, honesty doesn't pay. Look at me—what am I? Only a drunken, broken-down creature. Got fired by old Miller, after being with him for nearly seventeen years and only getting—mind you, only getting—twenty dollars a week. And if I had stayed there for seventeen more, I don't suppose I'd ever have got another cent.

"Then my wife—well, Steve, maybe I was to blame, but she left me. She was a good little woman, but one day when I came home—I had been on a spree the night before—there was a note there for me. She'd gone, but said if I'd quit drinking, she'd come back."

Again he seemed to relapse into a series of memories.

By this time, Weldon had lost all the fear he experienced when Hartwell was announced. He had already decided what to do. He would get rid of the man as quickly as possible—give him a few dollars—and then leave word at the hotel office that he was always out to Mr. James Hartwell.

"Well, Mr. Hartwell," he exclaimed cordially, as he left the position he had retained from the time his caller had first entered and walked over to the side of the other man's chair, "brace up, and be a man."

He patted him encouragingly upon the shoulder. "Give up the drink first," he went on. "You'll find your wife will soon return. You know that passage of Scripture, 'The ways of the wicked—'"

But he got no further. With a spring, Hartwell was upon his feet, his features distorted in a drunken frenzy, his eyes flashing fire.

Shaking his fist threateningly in Weldon's face, he began in loud tones: "Don't quote Scripture to me! Don't you dare do it! 'The ways of the wicked—'" and he broke into a coarse, sneering laughter. "Do you think you can preach to me, Steve Weldon? You may be able to do that to the young fellows in your Bible class at the church in which you are so prominent. But I know you."

Weldon, at the first intimation of the outburst, had retreated step by step to the other side of the room, where he now stood close up against the wall, every muscle of his body trembling, his face betraying only too plainly the fear within him.

Advancing toward him, Hartwell continued: "Yes, I know you—and all about you—and your prominence in church work. The newspapers have given columns to it, and I've read them all. But I know where you got your start in life! And if they knew that the Stephen Weldon who is held up before every one as the model young man was only a common—"

But he did not say it. Whether it was the fear in his own heart that Weldon had been innocent of the crime he was accused of some years before, or whether it was the sight of the man before him who raised his arms and face supplicatingly toward him, he stopped short just there.

Weldon's knees trembled beneath him as he leaned heavily against the burlaped walls. He tried to think, but it was useless.

What could Hartwell's plan be? Did he want hush-money? Had he fallen so low as to become a blackmailer—the lowest of the low crimes?

Weldon could not believe it, yet it seemed only too true. Had he better offer him money right away, or wait until he asked for it? Perhaps, after all, he reasoned to himself, it would be better to wait until the request came and not appear too anxious.

In the midst of these thoughts he felt a hand laid gently upon his arm.

"Come, Steve," Hartwell said, as he pointed to the chair in front of them. He now seemed quite sober and himself again. "Sit down."

Weldon permitted himself to be led to the chair and sank heavily into it, where his small frame seemed almost lost in the width and depth. Drawing a small

rocker in front of this one, Hartwell went on:

"Steve, I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings. I really didn't mean to. Only when I think of the inequality of things, and the old saying, 'Them as has, gits,' my blood just boils over, particularly when I've a little fire-water in me. Guess I'm sort of a socialist.

"But, Steve, I want you to do me a favor."

He stopped and looked up into Weldon's face almost pleadingly. The editor's countenance was now white and drawn, and his lips trembled as he tried to ask, "How much?"

But, fortunately for him, his speech failed him, and no sound passed his lips.

"Steve," Hartwell went on, "I want you to take me in here for a while. Let me sober up first. Then I promise on my word of honor that no liquor shall I touch as long as I stay here. I have no home now and no money to go anywhere. I'll fall lower and lower if you don't, and I'll soon be an ordinary sot. You'll do it, won't you?"

Weldon avoided his gaze. He was revolving in his mind just what was best. Turning and meeting Hartwell's eyes, full of their look of entreaty, his decision was made harder than ever.

"Then, Steve," Hartwell added, "after I am back in the old way, I'll send for the little woman and we'll start all over again. You'll do it?"

"Why, really, Hartwell, I'd like to," Weldon replied, "but I fail to see how I can. You see, I do a great deal of my writing here in the mornings—I never arrive at the office till about eleven. So, naturally, I could not be disturbed. Then, again, I have a great many friends—personal and business—who come here to the hotel to see me. Often it so happens it is upon personal matters, and the presence of a third party would prove—well, embarrassing."

"But think—" Hartwell pleaded, when Weldon cut him short.

"No, I can't do it. I really cannot. You see, there's my Young Men's Society meets here every week, and—"

"Yes, your Young Men's Society," sneered Hartwell. "But do you suppose—"

But Weldon, feeling he knew only too well what was coming, permitted him to go no further.

"On second thought," he interrupted, avoiding Hartwell's glances, his eyes bent steadily upon the little silver souvenir of the hundredth performance of his play—"on second thought, perhaps I can do it, and I am glad to be able to help you. But you may stay conditionally. One is that you will not drink a drop while you are here. Another is that whenever I have company you will either go out or else retire to the bedroom. And one other—as soon as possible you will leave me. Because to take you, I really inconvenience myself. Do you agree?"

"Indeed I do, Steve. You'll make a man of me, see if you don't."

Hartwell had risen and seized Weldon's hand thankfully. But the editor's grasp was anything but cordial, and his hand felt cold and clammy.

"Oh, by the by, Hartwell, I nearly forgot I have an appointment at eight-thirty. You'll have to pardon me if I keep it." Weldon had already parted the heavy red velvet portières and, going to the closet, was putting on his overcoat, when Hartwell seized the collar and pulled it up on the other's shoulders.

"Thanks — awfully," Weldon murmured. "You'll pardon me, but I must hurry."

Without another word, he rushed through his living-room and slammed the door after him. He did not wait for the elevator, but rushed down the many flights of stairs, through the brilliantly lighted lobby, and, brushing by every one, his eyes staring straight ahead, hurried out into the crispness of the cold winter night.

CHAPTER III.

A LULL IN THE STORM.

THE next morning Weldon arrived at the office quite early for him—it lacked a few moments of ten. He had reached home late the night before, tired out mentally and physically, after tramping for hours through Central Park. Finding Hartwell in bed and asleep, he prepared to retire as noiselessly as possible, and was successful in not awaking his new roommate.

After a sleepless night, he dozed off just as the rolling of the milk-wagons was heard in the streets below. But it was only for a few moments—he awoke with a start, in the midst of a bad dream.

Crawling carefully out of bed, he was tubbed and showered and half dressed before Hartwell stirred, roused up, and rubbed his eyes, apparently not just certain as to where he was.

"Oh, good morning, Steve!" was his greeting. "Couldn't just seem to place where I was. Is it time to get up?"

"Whenever you wish to do so," Weldon replied, as he tugged and pulled in his endeavor to button his collar. "I've got to be at the office early to-day." Drawing on his coat, he added: "I'll breakfast now. Can't very well wait for you. But when you are ready, go right down to the dining-room. Sign my name to the check. I'll leave word that it is all right. I'll see you to-night. Good-by," and he left his unwelcome guest to himself.

As he entered his private office and greeted his stenographer, she exclaimed: "Why, Mr. Weldon, is your watch fast? You are quite some earlier than usual."

"Yes—no, not exactly. But I had a bad night, so decided to get down early. Has the mail come in yet?"

"Yes, sir; I have it here in my desk."

She pulled out a drawer, and handed him a bundle of letters. Rapidly running through them, he separated the letters from the manuscripts that were mailed to him personally.

As he opened letter after letter and quickly glanced over them—long practise had made this an art with Weldon—he wheeled around, and, addressing his stenographer, remarked:

"I think we'll answer these first; then I'll run through these new manuscripts."

In a short time the dictation was over, and he leaned back in his chair to think. In the rush of business, he had momentarily forgotten Hartwell, and all connected with him. But the memory of him returned quickly, more magnified and more powerful than ever.

What was his game, and what would be the end of it? After all, it was only the mere matter of a hundred dollars—but to return that amount to Mr. Miller would be direct admission of his guilt. Yet how gladly he would have given five times the sum to prove his innocence.

"Hang it all!" he exclaimed aloud, as he dropped forward in his chair and, putting his elbows upon his desk, buried his chin in his hand. "Why couldn't Hartwell have died—no, I don't mean that, either. I wouldn't wish death to visit any one—but that this skeleton should come to life and haunt me!"

"Were you speaking to me, Mr. Weldon?"

Weldon gave a little start as he realized that he had been thinking aloud.

"No—that is—you see, I'm a bit nervous to-day. I guess it was my poor night, Miss Jackson."

Reaching for the pile of manuscripts, he selected one.

"Why people insist upon rolling their manuscripts beats me," he observed, as he endeavored to straighten out sheets that had been carefully sent in a mailing-tube.

Glancing hurriedly over the first page, he turned to the second, then tossed it impatiently on his desk. "Mr. Ogilvie will get it back folded instead of rolled," he muttered.

The second one was taken up, but a glance seemed to suffice—it quickly went the way of the first. Turning his chair around so that he faced his stenographer, Weldon exclaimed almost pettishly:

"It is the strangest thing to me how people can waste their time and mine by sending in the stuff they do. I'm positive those two people," and he waved his hand toward the manuscripts he had just thrown aside, "never read a story in our magazines; or else they lack common sense or good judgment, whichever you wish to call it. They seem to think we take anything, as long as it's a story. They don't spend the time to study our style, but expect to educate us up to theirs. It's ridiculous!"

He wheeled around in his chair again, evidently thoroughly out of patience with the world in general and with authors in particular.

"It does seem strange," the stenographer ventured, but Weldon apparently did not hear her as he tore the wrapping from another story.

"'Merton's Mystery,'" he real aloud from the title-page. "Alliteration, eh?

Well, let's have a look into it and see what it is like."

He glanced over the first page carelessly, then turned hastily to the second. A gleam of interest spread gradually over his face. At last he had found a good one, if appearances counted for anything.

Weldon settled down deep into his chair, tilted it back a little, and crossed his legs, a position he always assumed when reading a story he liked. The haggard lines seemed erased entirely, as he turned back to the first page again, read it over very carefully, and then went on again with the second.

Still he read on, turning page after page. Fortunately for him, no one entered to disturb his perusal of the story that interested him so deeply. As he finished the last page, he folded the manuscript up carefully, apparently in deep thought, and laid it upon the desk, remarking aloud: "Hamilton Peyton—I never heard of him before. Yet he handles his subject like a professional. It's too good for an amateur."

Turning around to his stenographer, he exclaimed: "Miss Jackson, that's the best story ever submitted to us. It's a pleasure to get stuff like that!"

"I am glad to know you are pleased with it, Mr. Weldon," she remarked. "Is it so unusually good?"

"I should say it is!" he replied with emphasis. "It has every point that makes up a good story—it swings into the plot almost immediately—and the climax is absolutely unexpected and with a twist that shows the highest pinnacle of the author's art. And for holding the interest it cannot be beaten. But the strange thing about it is, *who* is Hamilton Peyton? He's no amateur or beginner, that is certain. Yet I never recall hearing of him before. Did you, Miss Jackson?"

Weldon's stenographer had become so accustomed to his habit of talking aloud to himself that she rarely followed him, unless being directly spoken to. So that when he questioned her, at the conclusion of his spoken reverie, she jumped, and, with a little start, exclaimed: "Did you address me, Mr. Weldon?"

"Yes, I did," he replied, with just a trace of impatience in his tone. Then he added: "I asked you if you have ever heard of Hamilton Peyton?"

"No," she replied slowly, apparently searching the remotest retreats of her brain. "I don't think I have."

"Strange—very strange," he mused, almost under his breath. "By the way, I think I'll write him to call. He lives here in the city, and I'd like to talk with him. Just take this letter, if you please. You know Mr. Cartwright's principle—know your authors."

Weldon quickly dictated a brief letter, asking Peyton to call as early as convenient in reference to business. That done, he had just settled back in his chair when the door opened suddenly and a cheery voice accosted him.

"Good morning, Weldon! Anything new to-day?" Before him stood Frank Cartwright, the successful publisher. A man about forty-five, his hair and mustache iron-gray, his step was as light as a boy's. As he stood in the doorway, his appearance showed in every way the prosperous business man of the world.

"No—not particularly," Weldon answered, then added quickly: "Oh, yes, there is, too. I have just read a story that I consider the best we have ever received."

"That is saying a great deal," observed Cartwright, a smile playing around the firm lines that were deeply engraved upon his face.

"I know it is—but the story is a corker. It is—"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," apologized the young lady who presided over the reception-hall, and who had already entered Weldon's office, card in hand, before she realized that Mr. Cartwright was also there.

"What is it?" Weldon questioned, as he reached for the piece of pasteboard she held out to him.

Glancing at it hastily, he suddenly exclaimed: "How very odd! Here is the very author of whose story I was just speaking. Tell him to wait a moment."

This last he addressed to the girl who had announced the writer.

"No, don't do that," Mr. Cartwright commanded. "Send him in. I'm not going to stay, Weldon. And if you want to see me later, I'll be here after three."

Mr. Cartwright left the room, and

Weldon faced around in his chair, curious to see what the new author was like.

A timid knock, and a sad-faced, rather shabby and unkempt young man, about his own age, entered.

"Mr. Weldon, I believe?" he ventured, as he twirled nervously in his hand a faded brown derby.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCURRYING CLOUDS.

FOR a moment Weldon stared at the newcomer without answering. There seemed something familiar in his face, yet try as he would, he was unable to place the man before him.

"Yes, I am Mr. Weldon," he said at last, his kindly steel-gray eyes apparently reading into the other's very soul. "And you are Mr. Peyton, I believe."

Extending his hand, Weldon grasped the other's firmly as he added: "I am very glad to meet you, indeed. In fact, only a few moments ago I dictated a letter asking you to call. But pardon me, won't you be seated?"

Rising, Weldon placed a chair alongside of his own.

Peyton seated himself cautiously, apparently fearing that he had taken too much upon himself in calling; and when he now found himself in the presence of the prominent author and editor, he continued casting his eyes around, as if looking anxiously for some avenue of escape.

"Mr. Peyton," Weldon went on, "I received a story of yours to-day, and have already read it."

This sudden reference to the matter that bore directly upon Peyton's call seemed to almost take the fellow's breath away. Noting this, Weldon quickly added: "And it is a particularly good story. In fact, I enjoyed it immensely."

"You—did!" Peyton managed to gasp, his eyes opening almost to double their usual size.

"Yes—I did," Weldon exclaimed.

"And you—accept it?" Peyton's face was now drawn and anxious. He could hardly believe the good news, and apparently feared some unseen power would arouse him from his dream—the dream that seemed too good to be true.

"Indeed I do!" Weldon replied fervently.

His tone was so reassuring that Peyton drew a long breath and sank back in his chair again. "And, furthermore," Weldon added, "I should like to see anything else you do. But tell me, what have you been writing for?"

"Me—writing for?" Peyton repeated, hardly knowing whether this was meant as a compliment or not. "Why, Mr. Weldon, I've hardly had anything accepted before—although I've written a lot of stuff. But the manuscripts always come back. The same old reason. I've sent a number of stories here, too."

"You have?" Weldon exclaimed in astonishment. "That is strange. I never saw them."

"Oh, I don't mean to you personally, Mr. Weldon. I've just sent them to the magazine. But a friend of mine, who knows of you, told me to mail one to you personally, and then call the next day. He said that you might help me in some way, and that if the story was not just what it should be, that"—he hesitated a moment, apparently almost afraid to continue—"you might tell me just how to fix it. That's why I came."

"I see." Weldon spoke kindly, almost reassuringly, a slight smile playing around his mouth. "Well, Mr. Peyton, I can't tell you how to fix it!"

Peyton's jaw fell, but Weldon hastened to add: "Mr. Peyton, it requires no fixing. The story is perfect as it is. But where did you get your plot?"

"I—well, the plot is not from life—merely the beginning of it is," Peyton replied in somewhat embarrassed tones. "You see, sir, the balance of the story is entirely imaginary."

"Yes, that's the best way, as a rule," Weldon assured him.

"Some years ago—I think it is about twelve," Peyton continued, "I worked for a down-town firm. I was office-boy there, and in that capacity—but I'm afraid I am taking up too much of your time, Mr. Weldon."

"Not at all—not at all," the editor assured him. "Go on."

"Well, one day a sum of money was missing from one of the offices that I had occasion to visit, and a new office-boy was suspected and discharged."

He hesitated for a moment, as if uncertain whether to proceed or not. Weldon was now all attention, his mouth tightly closed, showing stronger than ever the deep lines around it. Plainly he was laboring under a nervous tension even greater than his caller's had been some moments before.

"Go on! Go on!" Weldon exclaimed excitedly.

"There is no more to tell," Peyton replied simply. "I left my position—or, to be more exact, was discharged—at the end of my week. I could not seem to content myself with commercial life. I guess I was not cut out for it. I wanted to read—to write—and to dream. Since that time I have made my living, such as it has been, with my pen." Then in a burst of confidence, he added: "And I tell you, Mr. Weldon, it's been a tough proposition."

"Eh? What?" the editor questioned blankly, as he seemed suddenly to come out of a trance.

"I say I've had a hard time of it," Peyton answered as he gazed curiously at the editor. "But I must be going, Mr. Weldon. I've taken up too much of your valuable time."

He had already risen, and Weldon mechanically extended his hand. With an apologetic cough, Peyton inquired: "When do you wish me to call for my check, Mr. Weldon?"

"Oh, we'll mail that to you on Wednesday."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" Peyton's gratitude was only too plainly evident. Grasping the editor's hand, he bade him good day, and strode out of the office, feeling as if he were treading upon air.

After the door had closed behind his contributor, Weldon stood a moment, lost in thought; then his old habit of soliloquizing aloud returned. "I wonder—oh, no, it can't be," he murmured. Then the editorial instinct reasserted itself, and he exclaimed: "I'll run that story next month. I shall substitute it for something else. Let me see what I can take out."

Seating himself at his desk, he quickly glanced over the make-up of his forthcoming number.

"Just the place for it!" he decided, after making some calculations. "I'll take out this one of Belsted's. I can edit Peyton's story to-day—I'll start on it at once."

CHAPTER V.

THE WIND FROM THE WEST.

FOUR days had passed, and events seemed to have settled down somewhat, although Mr. Cartwright had stopped in the editor's office on his way out that night, and in the course of a short conversation remarked: "Weldon, you don't look well—you seem tired out. Perhaps you are going it too hard. Why don't you take a few days' vacation? Atlantic City is a good place at this time of year."

But Weldon assured him there was no need for anything like that—he had been worried over a little personal matter, that was all.

Leaving the office shortly after his employer, he strolled up Fifth Avenue leisurely, taking deep breaths of the crisp, winter air. He did not notice the passing promenaders—he was thinking of Hartwell—and himself.

After all, perhaps he had done right in taking the man in. He was no annoyance, and had seemingly changed, much for the better.

On two occasions, when friends had called unexpectedly, Hartwell had immediately taken his hat and coat and left the hotel, not returning until late, first making certain the guests had gone by inquiring at the desk. So, in this way, he had been most considerate.

Then, again, he had been company for Weldon. It really seemed good to receive his cheerful greeting when returning from business, and to find the fire, which Hartwell had lit, burning brightly in the grate.

He also made himself useful in many ways, attending to his host's laundry, the sending of his clothes to the tailor's, and the filing of his personal correspondence. But with it all, Weldon had a certain fear of the man that he could not overcome—a dread that in some way Hartwell would allow the club the editor felt sure his guest held over his head to fall.

Entering his apartment now, Weldon was surprised to find Hartwell not there

—something that had not happened since his advent into his new home.

"Good Heavens! Does this mean he has taken to drink again—and is coming back intoxicated?" Weldon groaned as he threw himself into the large chair that stood before the unlit fireplace.

"I cannot stand this strain," he continued, without removing his overcoat—his hat he had thrown carelessly upon the table. "When he is here, I worry because he *is* here; and when he is not, I worry for just the opposite reason. It must stop! I am glad to do anything for him I can, but I certainly cannot afford to break down my health. Here I am, working myself up into a frenzy, and a fine condition I'll be in to address that young men's meeting to-night, as I promised—"

Hurried footsteps in the hall arrested his attention, and a key turning in the lock told him his guest had arrived. "I hope—he is sober!" Weldon gasped just as Hartwell entered the room, and, stumbling over a chair in the darkness, felt along the wall for the electric button.

"Confound that chair!" he exclaimed angrily. "But I'm glad I got back before he did," he continued aloud. "Hang it all, where is that button?"

Then he added, as he felt his way along the wall: "I suppose I'd better broach the subject to-night. I think things have gone far enough to do so. Wonder what he'll say. Perhaps—"

But he got no further. He had pressed the button, and the sudden glare from the electrolier blinded him, causing him to cover his eyes with his hands. Weldon heard what he had said—the chills raced up and down his spine, and his face grew hot and cold by turns as he realized that apparently the crisis had come.

Already Hartwell had detected the sounds of some one in the room, and his eyes, now accustomed to the light, fell upon his host.

"Oh, hallo, Steve!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know you were home. Been here long?"

Without waiting for a reply, he continued: "Thought I'd get in first, but I didn't."

He ended his remarks in a chuckle, almost bordering upon a laugh. How it grated upon Weldon's already overstrained nerves, as he endeavored to draw himself together and not show his feelings too plainly.

Throwing his overcoat over a chair, Hartwell took a match from his pocket, and, dropping to his knees, prepared to light the gas logs. As the flame flickered and then spread over all of them, he jumped up, exclaiming: "Steve, that certainly does look good to me on a cold night like this! It's too early for dinner—let's put out the electric lights and sit here a few moments. I like to watch the flames—and think."

Weldon made no reply. In fact, he gave no outward evidence that he heard. And not until Hartwell realized Weldon still had his overcoat on, and touched him upon the shoulder, asking, "Are you cold, Steve?" did he notice his guest.

With a little start, he jumped up, remarking absently: "I had forgotten I had not removed it." Hartwell helped him off with the coat, and, taking it to the bedroom, hung it up carefully. Returning, he found Weldon staring, wild-eyed, into the fire.

"What's the matter, Steve? Doping out another story, I suppose. Heavens! I only wish I had the knack of doing it, too. With the time I have on my hands, I could make some money. Goodness only knows I need it bad enough! I'm nearly at the end of my rope. I'll be forced to beg—or do worse, unless something turns up quickly. Why—good Heavens, Steve! What's the trouble? Are you ill?"

Weldon was now trembling from head to foot, and his face, ashen-hued, looked even worse in the flickering light of the gas logs. Hartwell was already on his feet.

"Shall I ring for a doctor?" he asked anxiously.

"No—it's nothing—really," Weldon managed to gasp, but his voice was thick and husky.

While he saw and heard all that was going on around him, his thoughts were far away. Had this last speech of Hartwell's been made in the attempt to warn him of what was coming so soon—what surely would come?

"Why doesn't he ask it now—why

keep me in suspense?" were the thoughts flashing through Weldon's mind.

Hartwell dashed to the bath-room, and quickly returned with a glass of water, which the editor grasped and drank eagerly. The effect was almost instantaneous—his face brightened as he murmured: "Thanks—awfully."

"Steve, I don't like the way you act at times," Hartwell remarked as he resumed his seat. "I'm afraid you're going it too hard."

"No—it's really n thing," Weldon hastened to break in. "You see, Hartwell, I have been pretty busy of late, and have had a lot upon my mind, and to-night—well, I feel about played out."

"Now, Steve, I'll tell you what you do." Hartwell's tone was really authoritative. "We'll have our dinner served up here, and then you go straight to bed. A good night's rest will make a new man of you."

"Oh, no, I can't do that to-night, Hartwell, much as I would like to," Weldon objected, and then added: "You see, I am scheduled to address the Young Men's Society at the church."

"Well, surely, Steve, your health is of far greater importance to you than those young men are. Don't do it to-night."

"I must!" was the dogged reply. "I've *got* to do it."

"Of course you know your own business better than I. But I think you are very foolish."

"Perhaps," Weldon replied absently.

His eyes still stared straight into the fire, his elbows upon his knees and his chin in his hands. Even in the flickering firelight, Hartwell could plainly see the drawn, pained look upon the editor's features.

"I've got it, Steve!" he suddenly burst out after a few moments of silence. "If you *must* go, I'll go with you."

"Oh, no!" Weldon exclaimed in tones denoting absolute terror.

How could he bear to stand before that assemblage, telling them of the life they all should lead, and know there was one pair of eyes resting upon him, their owner sneering at the speaker, convinced that he had not always followed his own teachings—that he had secured his start in life indirectly through theft?

No. It was out of the question entirely. He could not do it.

"No, Hartwell, not to-night," he repeated, but he did not look the man in the face as he spoke.

"And why not, I'd like to know? Perhaps I haven't been all I should be"—he suddenly faced his chair around to Weldon's—"but if you practise all you preach, you should be very glad to think I am willing to go—in fact, want to."

"Yes — I am," Weldon answered slowly.

Then an idea seemed to strike him and he added hastily: "But, you see, Hartwell, I have to see some people after the meeting—"

"That's all right," Hartwell interrupted, seemingly determined, for some unknown reason, to attend. "I'll come home alone, if you say. But I *want* to go."

Vainly Weldon racked his brain for some good reason why Hartwell should not go. But evidently there was none—or else he could not find it.

"Very well; you may come with me," he agreed finally. "But you will have to return alone."

"That's all right; I don't mind that. I have simply made up my mind that I *want* to be at that meeting."

Had it been any one else, Weldon would have been delighted at such a desire to attend a religious service. But he felt that Hartwell had some ulterior motive. He was certain there was something behind it all.

"Isn't it time for dinner?" Hartwell asked suddenly, rudely breaking in upon the editor's worried thoughts.

Jumping up quickly, Weldon exclaimed: "Yes—I had lost all track of time. I must wash: then we'll go down, although I do not feel like eating. Ugh!" he exclaimed, as he shivered perceptibly. "The very thought of food goes against me."

CHAPTER VI.

JUST BEFORE THE DOWNPOUR.

"STEVE, if you don't eat more heartily than you did to-night you'll be ill," was Hartwell's caution as they returned upstairs again after the dinner.

"Oh, bother my appetite—and myself!" Weldon's voice plainly showed his loss of patience. "You are constantly harping upon my health. I assure you it was never better—that I am perfectly well, both mentally and physically. Permit me to impress this fact firmly upon your mind."

"Well, of course I meant no harm," Hartwell remarked in injured tones. "But if you take it that way—"

"Yes, I do, Hartwell!" Weldon interrupted emphatically. "It is positively distasteful to me."

"Oh, very well," was all the reply the guest made, as he seated himself alongside the table, and, picking up a magazine, absently turned over its pages.

For some moments neither spoke—Weldon was busy with his own thoughts. After all, he had made his mistake at the very first. What a fool he had been to take in this man, whose presence had already caused him many hours of mental anguish and worry! How much better, and, in fact, cheaper, it would have been to send him to some boarding-house, and pay his bills.

But Hartwell had asked to be taken in *here*. And, thinking it only for a few days, he had agreed to the plan. The fact of the matter was that the request had been so sudden, so unexpected, that Weldon had not had time to think of the results that might be the outcome.

Would he dare, at this late day, to request Hartwell to go elsewhere? Would he dare to stand up before this man, after hearing what he said only a short time before in the darkness? Suddenly he broke out: "I've got to do it! I can't—"

"Were you speaking to me, Steve?" Hartwell inquired, looking up from the magazine.

Weldon gave a start as he realized that he had been thinking aloud. For a moment he was without words, wondering just how much of his thoughts he had spoken.

He glanced at his guest. There he sat, showing every evidence of enjoyment in the comfort and luxury surrounding him—stretched out in the deeply upholstered chair, his feet resting on a Flemish oak taboret.

"I said," Weldon exclaimed excitedly, as he sprang to his feet—"I said—" he repeated, then stopped abruptly.

He gazed eagerly around the room as if in search of help. The look of anger had disappeared, and in its place was one of entreaty.

"I said—" he began again, this time in the most apologetic of tones, then added quickly, averting the questioning gaze of his listener: "Why, it must be time to go!"

"Look here, Steve," exclaimed Hartwell, as he rose from his chair and took a step toward the man who almost cowed before him, "what the deuce—"

But Weldon had drawn out his watch. "Why, it's a quarter to eight!" he almost shouted. "We must be starting at once."

"I'm ready," was Weldon's announcement as he emerged from the bedroom, overcoat on and hat in hand.

"Go on out and ring for the elevator," Hartwell directed, as he rushed into the inner room for his own outer garments.

The wait in the hall for the car was a quiet one; neither spoke, each seemingly taken up with his own thoughts. Reaching the main floor, they walked through the lobby of the hotel and out toward the sidewalk.

Hartwell had gazed intently at his host's face as they descended in the elevator.

Reaching the sidewalk, he linked his arm through Weldon's as he questioned anxiously: "Steve, you are under some mental strain. Why don't you tell me about it? It would make it much easier for me."

"Undoubtedly it would," Weldon quickly agreed, his tone laden with irony. Then he stopped abruptly and exclaimed: "Hartwell, this must stop, if we are to remain—friends. You must refrain absolutely from your inquiries regarding my health—my worries—my—oh, everything! Do you understand?"

Without waiting for a reply, Weldon turned and resumed his quick, nervous stride. Hartwell was so taken with surprise by the sudden onslaught that, for a moment, he stood spellbound, then hurried after the editor, now a few steps ahead. When he caught up with him, the walk to the church was continued in silence.

Arrived there, Weldon led the way toward the assembly-room at the rear. As they entered the door, a young man, standing just inside, seized the editor's hand.

"Mr. Weldon, I believe?" he said questioningly.

"Yes," was Weldon's almost inaudible reply.

"Then come with me," the other directed as he started ahead up the side aisle.

"Just a moment," Weldon called. The youth stopped and faced about.

"I have brought a friend with me," the editor continued. "Have I taken too great a liberty?"

"Not at all!" he exclaimed enthusiastically as he extended his hand to Hartwell. "We are only too glad to have strangers come to our meetings. In fact, that is just what Dr. Olden desires."

Turning to Hartwell, Weldon waved his hand toward the rows of partially filled seats.

"Take any one," he directed, and followed his guide toward the front of the room, where he was introduced to the pastor of the church, Dr. Olden, and the president of the Young Men's Society, both having already taken their seats upon the platform, where they anxiously awaited the arrival of the distinguished speaker of the evening.

As Weldon seated himself in the chair reserved for him, the pastor, rising, opened the meeting with a brief prayer, at the conclusion of which the president arose and made quite a lengthy speech, dwelling upon the principles and purpose of the society—also their desire to welcome strangers to their meetings.

"I am overjoyed, and I know I am also speaking for Dr. Olden," he continued, "when I gaze over this assemblage and see a number of strange faces before me. Only the other day my attention was called to a magazine article which stated that the churches of New York were cold—that the stranger within our gates received, with a very few exceptions, absolutely no welcome from the members of the churches or their pastors.

"I read it very carefully," he went on, "and regret that the writer did not visit our church. Had he only done so, that broad statement could not have been made. St. Edward's would stand as an oasis in the desert for the army of strangers New York continually shelters. And particularly are the men, young and old, welcomed to the meetings of our Young Men's Society. And I wish to say right here that it is the hearty wish of both Dr. Olden and myself that you tarry just a moment after the conclusion of the meeting, that we may shake your hand and welcome you personally among us.

"Our society proposes to have with us each week some successful man who has risen from the ranks and made his name in the world—one who, through pluck and perseverance, and the fear of God, has risen step by step, until the uppermost rungs of the ladder have been reached. One whose words will bring cheer to the discouraged, and give added strength to those already struggling to gain a foothold at the bottom."

Advancing a step toward the chair in which Weldon was seated, the speaker continued: "Following these ideas, we have with us to-night one who has made his name a household word from coast to coast, from Canada to Mexico, and even farther—whose literature has been eagedly devoured by"—with a smile, he turned toward the person spoken of—"may I say millions?—whose play stands out above all others as by far the most successful and uplifting play of the season."

With a wave of his hand toward Weldon, he concluded: "Gentlemen, I have the pleasure of introducing to you Mr. Stephen Weldon."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST FEW DROPS OF RAIN.

ALTHOUGH Weldon had heard every word of the speaker, he sat as one in a stupor, his eyes glassy and staring straight ahead.

The truth was that, no matter which way he looked, he could see only the cold, accusing eyes of Hartwell staring directly at him. He tried to avoid their gaze, but it was only for a moment—he seemed as one hypnotized.

Then a new fear spread over him. Would he dare to speak of his past, with Hartwell drinking in every word? Could it be possible his sudden determination to attend this meeting was only to secure a firmer hold upon his victim?

Then another terror, greater than all the others, sprang before him—suppose Hartwell should denounce him publicly during the evening?

The rush of these thoughts, and countless others, through his already fagged brain, placed him almost upon the verge of collapse, but when he heard himself introduced, he endeavored, with a mighty effort, to collect his scattered senses. He realized that the president of the society had already seated himself, and that all eyes were now upon him—the speaker of the evening.

With a supreme endeavor, he regained control of the muscles that rebelled against being used, and rose painfully to his feet.

"Gentlemen and friends," he began in husky tones, "I wish to state before proceeding that I am—the poorest of poor speakers. Your esteemed president has asked me to tell you of the many steps up the stairway of success." His voice had lost its huskiness, and the words rang out clear and distinct, although he still kept his eyes glued to a point far above the heads of the gathering and at the rear of the room. "Your worthy president has told you I have reached the highest rungs of the ladder of success. Right here I beg to differ with him. I do not feel that way for a moment. I do not believe that any one, no matter how successful he has been, is satisfied with the success he has made. I believe the battle-cry of every proud son of the United States is, or should be, 'More, more, more.' But, my friends, behind it all should be, to secure the proper satisfaction from these attainments, the absolute fear of God."

Weldon had been speaking rapidly and earnestly, and, as he directed this last sentence at his hearers, he allowed his eyes to drop from the point he had stared at so intently, to look them squarely in the face.

As he did so, he caught again the almost hypnotic stare of Hartwell. For a moment, Weldon seemed to be again under their influence, and he hesitated before proceeding. He reached over and poured out a glass of water from the pitcher standing on the table at his right. His hand trembled perceptibly as he raised it to his lips and eagerly gulped down the contents.

The effect was almost instantaneous—it was just what his parched throat demanded, and he had again broken the spell cast by those accusing eyes.

Resuming his fixed stare at the back of the room, he continued:

"I hardly feel it would interest you to tell of my first experiences in this great city. It is practically the same as innumerable young men have found it before me, and as countless numbers will find it in the future, just as long as the arm of Ambition beckons them from the country, the small towns, and even other cities nearly as large as New York, calling to them in loud tones that 'A young man's chances are far greater here than anywhere else in the Union.'

"Whether that is true or not is not for me to say. The simple country youth finds everything here far different from what his dreams of the great city pictured them. The life is different—the work is different—and, most terrible of all, the morals are different. It is an appalling condition, nevertheless true, that in this wonderful city, the pride of the nation, there are a thousand and one pitfalls, ready and anxious to gather in the unsuspecting youth, and presided over by the most avaricious and unprincipled vampires of the world.

"But the young man, direct from the quiet, homely, healthy, God-fearing atmosphere of the country, unversed in the evils of the city, feels a loneliness that cannot be described—one must experience it personally to realize what it means. This loneliness resolves itself into a desire for comradeship—a longing for cheerful and friendly words and faces.

"Here in New York, this is sadly lacking. And it is this lack societies like your own is intended to supply. A few kind words, or a hearty handshake, may be the means of keeping many a young man from traveling the road that goes down, and down, and down, until there is only one end left. Let us all remem-

ber this, not only in our church-meetings, but in our every-day life.

"But I have promised your worthy president that I would give a little résumé of my own life, my struggles, my ambitions, and my desires."

Here he told briefly of his arrival from the little country town and his endeavors to obtain a position—the securing of it, and the sudden discharge for, as he put it, "a most unjust reason."

Here he faltered again, stammered, and, finally proceeding, followed his life through his first struggles as a young author. From this point, he modestly forbore going into further successes, and, with a few final words, resumed his seat.

A short speech of thanks from the president, and the meeting was at an end. The gathering seemed loath to disperse, however, but hung around in little groups, shaking hands and exchanging cheery words.

As Weldon left the platform, he was approached by one after another, to all of whom he extended a hearty handshake. As he passed through the many groups, a familiar face caught his eye. The man was still some feet away, but Weldon could not help noticing the eyes that were following his every move.

For a moment he could not place the man, but, as he approached him, he suddenly realized it was the young author, Peyton, working his way toward him.

Grasping his hand nervously, the writer exclaimed: "Mr. Weldon, I am delighted to see you again. I read that you were to speak to-night and came to hear you. And it did me good—it honestly did."

"I'm glad to hear it, Peyton," Weldon replied warmly. "How are things going with you?"

Although there were a number around them, awaiting an opportunity to shake the hand of the renowned editor, upon realizing that the conversation between the two might be a personal one they respectfully fell back a few steps.

"I am only waiting now the publication of my story, Mr. Weldon," Peyton replied. "Then I can go ahead. But at present—" he stopped abruptly; then added anxiously: "Mr. Weldon, have you decided when you would print it?"

"Oh, that's so; I meant to tell you. It will be in next month's issue. I rushed it through, substituting it for another story."

"Mr. Weldon, I do not know how to thank you," replied Peyton. "It means so much to me—far more than you can realize. At times it almost seems too good to be true."

"But it is true," Weldon assured him. "And you will realize it more fully when you receive your check next Wednesday. But I must say good night. Drop into the office—any time. I'll always be glad to see you."

Turning from the happy young author, Weldon hastened toward the door, which he reached after many handshakes.

As he stepped out into the clear, cold night, a shadow at the side of the entrance arrested his attention, the unexpected sight of which gave him a little start.

"Going home alone?" questioned a voice he recognized as Hartwell's.

It sounded sullen and gruff to Weldon, but he replied cheerily: "Yes, unless you accompany me."

The two walked rapidly in the direction of Weldon's hotel, neither making any attempt at conversation.

Even after their arrival home they did not seem in a talkative mood. But suddenly, as Weldon prepared to retire, he was taken aback by Hartwell appearing, his eyes flashing and his fists clenched.

"Look here, Steve Weldon," he said, "that line of talk you handed to those young fellows to-night sounded awfully nice and pretty. But I knew you didn't always believe as you claim you do now. If those chaps knew how you got your first start in life, do you suppose they'd be so crazy to glad-hand you? You bet they wouldn't. If some one should suddenly tell them—"

He stopped, and, wheeling upon his heel, walked deliberately into the other room, where he sat down and gazed intently into the fire.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST HEAVY DOWNPOUR.

THE following morning Weldon arrived at the office a few moments after eight—an unheard-of hour for him.

All the previous night he had not closed his eyes. After Hartwell's denunciation he lay there perfectly still, fearing that each moment he would not only continue his attack, but follow it up with a demand for blackmail.

For some time Hartwell had sat perfectly motionless, staring directly into the fire. Just how long it was Weldon did not know, the seconds seemed hours, the moments eternities. At last, Hartwell had risen and prepared to retire, his host feigning sleep. Soon his heavy breathing told Weldon that he was in the land of dreams.

All night long Weldon lay there—longing for the sleep that would not come.

At last the first streak of gray stole timidly through the heavy lace curtains. With a sigh of relief, he rose quietly, dressed with all possible speed, and, carefully opening and closing his door, rushed down the hall to the elevator, and soon found himself in the deserted street below.

Breakfast was entirely forgotten—the very thought of eating was distasteful to him—and he hurried along, his head bent low toward the pavement.

Not until he was roughly greeted by a baker's boy, whom Weldon nearly crashed into as he was delivering an armful of bread at the basement of a hotel, did he realize that he was already some blocks from home.

Without a reply, he turned to the right at the next corner and resumed his walk in the direction of Central Park. Arriving here, he hurried along the deserted paths, lost to all his surroundings, his mind completely occupied with his own thoughts.

But his already fatigued system could not stand the exertion he was forcing upon it. He began to tire, and as the day was already begun, he turned downtown again, this time picking his way among the many roughly-clad and horny-handed laborers hurrying to their day's toil.

Down Broadway he continued his quick, nervous stride, in due time reaching his office, which he found deserted and quiet. Without opening his desk, he seated himself—now thoroughly worn out, mentally and physically.

How would this end? When would it end? Where would it end?

These were the thoughts that raced and crashed through Weldon's brain, until it seemed to him his head would split and burst into fragments.

Springing suddenly to his feet, he exclaimed wildly: "I can't stand this! I'll go raving crazy if it keeps up much longer!" Then he seemed calmer, as he added: "After all, if the worst comes to the worst, I'll pay—pay until I haven't a cent left in the world, if necessary. I couldn't—I wouldn't face the world, if they knew the Stephen Weldon who has been preached about and has preached himself was accused—No, they shall never know! I'm a coward, I suppose, but I could not face it. But Hartwell has really made no demands. Perhaps it is only the disordered condition of my mind that makes me fear he will. At any event, I'll try not to show I fear him."

He now seemed quite calm, and rolling back the top of his desk, proceeded to examine the letters and papers put there after his departure the night before.

Taking up a package, which he knew from the wrapper to contain proofs from the pressroom, he tore the cover off, and ran through the rough sheets. At the very bottom of the pile he found Peyton's story, "Merton's Mystery."

In his desire to get his mind off his own troubles, and realizing just what an interesting tale it was, he decided to go over it immediately. He carelessly brushed to one side the other papers that littered his desk and started in upon his work.

It was the story of *Merton*, a young boy who had come to New York from the country. A few days after he had secured his first position, one hundred dollars had been missing from the cashier's desk, and the boy was accused of the theft and discharged. The narrative then went on to tell of the many difficulties he had experienced in securing another position, and his success in at last obtaining one in a lawyer's office.

Up to this point Weldon could not refrain from noting the strong similarity between his own beginning and that of *Merton*.

The young law clerk proved, by his industry and desire to please, an excellent addition to the office staff. Then the desire to study law came to him, and by depriving himself of all luxuries and many of the actual necessities of life, he managed to do this at night.

He progressed rapidly, and eventually graduated, and passing very successfully the examinations, was admitted to the bar.

His already established integrity won him many clients, and soon he found himself at the head of a large and prosperous law firm. But his success did not end here. He later received an appointment to the bench.

It was while seated here, dispensing justice to the many prisoners before him, that a man was brought in on a charge of grand larceny. *Merton* was already familiar with the case, having read carefully the papers bearing upon it, and realized that, although the evidence was not entirely complete, there was enough to hold the man.

As the prisoner was brought to the bar, he leaned far over the judge's desk and said something in a low tone, too indistinct for any one around to hear. But *Merton* heard it, and his face paled perceptibly as he ordered the prisoner brought around to his side, where a whispered conversation was held.

Suddenly the judge, motioning the prisoner aside, declared: "Discharged —for lack of evidence."

The man proved to be an employee of the firm *Merton* had first been engaged by upon his arrival in New York, and from which he had been dismissed with the brand of thief upon him.

A few days later this same man had approached *Merton*, and holding over his head the club of the accusation of years ago, and of his recent discharge as a prisoner, demanded money. After some words, *Merton* yielded, only to be called upon to do the same again and again, the requests coming closer and closer as the weeks and months went by.

At last, in sheer desperation, *Merton* decided to stop the blackmailer and allow the fellow to do what he would. The judge was now broken in health and spirit—only a shadow of his former self.

A few days after making this resolution he received a telephone call from his hounder—he must see him that night at his home. *Merton* knew only too well what this meant—it was the same way in which he had been warned of all the previous requests for money.

All day long his mind was upon the subject of the evening call. But he was determined to stop it, once and for all.

Late in the afternoon the office-boy brought in a card. He did not recall the name at first; then he realized that it was the man who years before had dismissed him from his employ, branded as a thief.

Should he see him or not? What could he want?

Merton's curiosity got the better of him, the man was ushered in, and the object of his visit briefly told. At its conclusion the judge fainted, as he realized that at last his troubles were over. The money which *Merton* was accused of taking had been found that day behind the cashier's desk, where it had evidently slipped from the back of the cash-drawer, and lain all these years. And only the moving of the office to another building had revealed its hiding-place.

That evening when the blackmailer called he was met with the story of the lost money, and after threatening him with the reopening of the case upon which *Merton* had discharged him, he was ordered to leave the house, and did so, a very crestfallen individual.

As Weldon finished his proof-reading, he laid the sheets upon his desk carefully.

"There's no use talking, Miss Jackson," he remarked to his stenographer, who had entered during the editor's reading, "that is certainly a fine story—one, too, that improves upon a second reading. Why, really, the clever way the author handled that blackmailer—"

He stopped short, his arms dropped limply upon his desk.

"I—never—thought—of—that—" he gasped, and for a moment he seemed on the verge of collapse.

His entire body trembled and twitched, and his head sank upon his breast.

Fortunately for him, his stenographer, who sat with her back to him, did not see this new display of emotion, and

having accustomed herself to her chief's habit of thinking aloud, paid no attention to his last remark.

Weldon realized now that he did not dare print the story—at least, not as long as Hartwell was with him. He was certain he would read it, particularly as he had been told what a fine story it was. And only a day or so previous Hartwell had spoken of it himself, inquiring when it was to be published.

"Oh, yes; he'll surely read it!" Weldon groaned to himself.

If the idea of blackmail—and the editor had tried to convince himself it had not—had not already entered Hartwell's mind, this would merely put it into his head. "No, I cannot—I dare not—use that story at present," he decided. "Later, perhaps, but—"

"You will pardon me, Mr. Weldon," interrupted a voice which he recognized only too well. "You said for me to come right in at any time, so I have taken you at your word. But I'll only detain you a moment."

As Weldon had turned in his chair and recognized the young author, he forced himself to murmur, "Good morning, Peyton."

Noting how pale and haggard the editor looked, Peyton exclaimed:

"Why, you do not seem at all well, sir. In fact, you look positively ill. I trust nothing is amiss."

There was the ring of sincere anxiety in the author's tone.

"No—really—not at all," Weldon muttered, hardly hearing what the other said. His mind was in a turmoil. How was he to break the news to Peyton that he could not use his story in the next issue, as he had promised only the evening before to do?

"Well, I just called, Mr. Weldon, to suggest a new title for the story, one which occurred to me last night. I think it ever so much better than the original one. Is it too late to change it?"

"No—it is not," Weldon returned, avoiding the author's gaze. Then he blurted out: "I'm sorry, Peyton, but I can't use the story this month, as I promised."

"Mr. Weldon — you don't mean — that!" Peyton gasped.

He leaned far forward in his chair, the muscles around his mouth twitching.

"I do—it cannot be helped," Weldon forced himself to say positively.

Peyton fell back. "Why—oh, why not?" was all he seemed to have strength to mutter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CLOUDBURST.

THE disappointment of Peyton was pitiful. He sat there, staring and wild-eyed. Weldon, naturally tender-hearted and sympathetic, writhed in his chair as he noted the keen disappointment of the young author.

"Of course you will receive your check on Wednesday just the same, Peyton," he said, in a vain attempt to comfort the man.

But he was beyond consolation. His story, the first big one he had ever sold, had been promised publication the following month.

How he had looked forward, counting the days, until he should see his name under the title as the author! He knew it was a good story—but he had a number of others on hand just as good.

This was to be an opening wedge—the first editor he had had the courage to brave in his den. And success had been so easy, he was encouraged to a point almost reaching audacity when it came to seeking other markets for his yarns.

In fact, he felt that, armed with his published story in *Cartwright's Magazine*, the sale of others would be easy.

But now all was different. What if they did pay promptly for the story! It was the publication of it that he desired far more than he did the check, much as he needed the money.

Slowly and painfully he rose, and without a word shuffled out of the office, a look of absolute despair upon his countenance. As Weldon reached over and pushed the door shut—Peyton had left it open—he muttered aloud: "Poor chap, he seemed terribly cut up over it. But he'll get his check just the same. Surely, he has no great kick coming. But he's just like all these fellows with their first story—no matter how badly

they need the money, their whole interest lies in publication. I'm sorry for him; but when he gets his check, he'll find it excellent balm. But enough of Peyton —I'd better get Calligan."

He seized the telephone and asked for the printing department.

"Hallo! is Mr. Calligan there?" he asked. "Oh, this you, Calligan? Well, I've decided not to use that 'Merton's Mystery' this month, after all."

"Why not? Well, simply because I've decided not to. You had better use the one you were going to substitute it for. I think, after all, it will be better to make up that way."

For a moment he was silent, apparently listening to the other. His mouth twitched nervously, and at last he broke out: "I don't care if you have the whole thing in form — break it up again. Neither do I care if the entire force of compositors have read the story and are stuck on it. I want it left out this month."

Another pause and he continued: "Very well, I'll be here all day. Come over if you wish, but it will not alter my decision."

Without another word, he angrily slammed the telephone receiver back upon the hook and turned to his desk again, where he busied himself with the many matters claiming his attention.

Some quarter of an hour later the door opened suddenly and the foreman of the printing department strode in and demanded: "I say, Mr. Weldon, why don't you want that story to go in next month? We can't very well take it out now. The whole thing is in form. Why, to break that all up would cost—"

Weldon was now thoroughly angry, and his eyes flashed as he broke out:

"Look here, Calligan, who is the head of this concern, you or I? You heard me say 'Merton's Mystery' does not go in this month. That ends it, no matter how much it costs."

"But, Mr. Weldon, it will delay the issue," the foreman remonstrated. "It will throw everything out and raise the very deuce in general. Why, it's a corking story—most of the boys have read it, and think it just great."

"Oh, it will be published in a later issue," Weldon remarked absently. "Of course it's a good story — I wouldn't have bought it if it hadn't been. That's all."

"But think, Mr. Weldon. We've our contents page all cast—and the entire magazine all in form. I can't see—"

Weldon sprang to his feet. "Look here, Calligan, not another word. If you can't get that story out and another in its place, and the magazine out on the regular date, I'll get a man who can. Do I need to say any more?"

His voice had risen with his anger.

Just then the door opened and Frank Cartwright entered, a puzzled look diffusing itself over his features.

"Why—why—what's wrong here?" he demanded as he glanced from one to the other. Then, turning to Weldon, he added: "What's the trouble?"

The publisher's presence gave matters a turn for which Weldon had not bargained. Stammering almost inaudibly, he muttered: "I have—ordered a story substituted—in next month, and Calligan objects very strongly to doing so."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" the publisher remarked. "Calligan, I don't think I need inform you that you are entirely under the orders of Mr. Weldon. Whatever he commands you to do, see that it is carried out to the best of your ability. I certainly thought you understood this thoroughly."

But Calligan was not so easily subdued. The Celtic blood in his veins was boiling under the mild rebuke his employer had just administered.

"That's all very well, sir," he replied. "I realize Mr. Weldon's authority, and am always ready to do anything that is possible. But I cannot do impossibilities."

"Why, what do you mean?" Cartwright demanded, his face now all curiosity.

"I mean, sir, that it is impossible to substitute another story for the one Mr. Weldon orders taken out. And the one he wants taken out now we substituted for another only a few days ago. And it's a splendid story, too. But with the contents page all run off and the entire magazine in form, to break it up again means a day or two delay. We cannot get it out on time, that's certain."

Mr. Cartwright turned to Weldon.

"What story is it you wish taken out?" he asked. "Is it not as good as you first thought it was?" he questioned of Weldon.

"Oh, yes, it's a fine story," the editor hastened to answer Mr. Cartwright. "It's the one I spoke to you about the other day."

"The one you claimed the best one we've ever accepted?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then, why take it out?" the publisher naturally wanted to know. "Surely, you have some good reason."

"Why—yes—" Weldon stammered, apparently feeling the very ground slipping beneath his feet. "I thought—well, perhaps we had better save it for some weaker number. You see, Mr. Cartwright, this number is particularly strong, anyway."

"Well, if that is the only reason—"

Weldon broke in: "Then, again, there are too many stories in this number that are laid right here in the city."

"Of course, I don't mean to interfere with your running of things, Weldon; but if those are the only reasons, let it go through. As Calligan says, the substitution would cause a delay of a day or two, and to obviate this we will have to keep the force working a couple of nights. That means quite an extra expense, so I would say let it go as it is. It will be all right."

Turning to the foreman, he added: "We'll let things stand as they are, Calligan. That's all."

As the foreman left the room, Cartwright placed his hand upon the editor's shoulder.

"Of course, Weldon, do not misunderstand me," he said. "I appreciate your reasons for wishing the story held over. You were looking at it from the artistic standpoint. But in this age of commercialism, do not allow art to blot out entirely the matter of expense. Understand me correctly—I am not criticizing you in the least—simply cautioning you. If I have made a mistake, blame me."

With a good-natured laugh, he left the room.

Weldon was now weak and limp. After all, it never rains but it pours.

First, the painful interview with Peyton; then the mutiny of one of those far inferior in rank, and finally the overruling of his own orders by the publisher in favor of the foreman. This, in itself, was deep humiliation.

And now the story would be published, and would surely be read by Hartwell!

But there was one satisfaction—the present state of affairs could not last much longer. In a little short of two weeks the magazine would be on sale. Even if he had managed to rid himself of Hartwell, the latter might get the magazine and read it, as Weldon knew he was interested in two serials they were running.

Yes, as nearly as he could figure out, the end was fast approaching.

Then a sudden change spread over his face.

"Why worry myself sick over it?" he reasoned. "It will not help matters any. I'm going to be brave and face the music. If it comes—well, I'll surely be as ready to meet it as I will be if I live in mortal terror every moment. I'll brace up, be a man, and perhaps my total unconcern may help to throw Hartwell off his guard.

"Pshaw! I talk just as if I knew Hartwell is going to blackmail me. Perhaps the thought has never entered his head—I certainly wish it had never entered mine. Really, he has not said anything definitely to prove to me he has any wrong intentions. I've been a fool—a perfect ass—to worry myself sick over this thing.

"I'll pursue a different track from now on. I wonder what effect it will produce. To-night Hartwell is met man to man. I wonder if he'll notice the difference. By Jove! and Peyton—I'll drop him a line just as soon as Miss Jackson returns. He'll be the happiest fellow in New York when he gets the news. Just about as happy as I was unhappy when I received it."

CHAPTER X.

BRAVING THE ELEMENTS.

With a far different feeling than any he had experienced for some days, Weldon left his office a trifle earlier than usual and hurried back to his hotel,

where he found Hartwell stretched out, reading one of the latest magazines. Weldon's greeting was cordial in the extreme — so much so that Hartwell showed plainly his surprise.

After a few words, Hartwell laid down the magazine and began earnestly: "I say, Steve, forgive me for speaking as I did last night. I did not mean it. But my temper has led me astray before this."

"That's all right, Hartwell," Weldon answered lightly. "I know how it is."

"You must have got out rather early to-day," Hartwell continued, glad to pass from the incident of the night before. "You had gone when I awoke."

"Yes," Weldon replied in a far-away tone.

Turning abruptly, he passed to the other room, where he prepared for dinner. In a few moments he called through the portières: "By the way, Hartwell, I've got to go to the new show at the Folly—'The Price of Vanity.' Would you like to go with me? It ran all last year in London, and made the hit of the season there."

"I'd like to, Steve," was the hesitating reply, "but I have no evening clothes, you know."

"Not necessary," Weldon hastened to assure him. "I shall not dress."

So they attended the theater together and enjoyed the play very much. Arrived back at the hotel, Weldon suggested a little supper in the café. He seemed himself again, and Hartwell marveled at the sudden change in the man, but discreetly kept it to himself.

Time passed rapidly—a week had elapsed—and Weldon was striving earnestly to maintain the part he was playing, but he was a poor actor.

As the date for the publication of the magazine approached, the old harassed, nervous manner gradually returned, and although Weldon strove harder and harder to overcome it, the task proved beyond him. Again he was starting at every sound, his greetings were cold and distant, and he seemed to be avoiding his guest.

His bravery had been short-lived—he now felt he could not face the outcome. The morning of the twelfth of the month—the magazine was issued on the fifteenth—he entered his office looking paler and more haggard than ever.

For some time he sat, staring straight ahead. Then, with a gesture of impatience, he exclaimed, "I've *got* to do it."

He rose to his feet slowly and passed out of the room. Hesitatingly, he entered the publisher's private office.

"Mr. Cartwright," he began, "I think I'll act on your advice and take a few days' vacation. I am afraid I'm rather run down."

"Yes, I really wish you would, Weldon," the publisher replied. "I have noticed for some time you have looked poorly. And to-day you look worse than ever. Go now—and get the rest you really deserve."

Telephoning to the hotel and asking for Hartwell, he found that he had gone out. This was just what Weldon desired, and without a word to any one he hurried to the street, where he hailed a passing cab, and was rapidly whirled to his rooms.

It was only the work of a few moments to pack his bag, and he was soon on his way to the railroad station. He had given no address to which his mail might be forwarded—in fact, he had not made up his mind where he would go.

As he sat in the cab his thoughts reverted to Peyton.

It seemed strange he did not come in, joyful and happy, after receiving the letter that informed him his story would come out as first promised.

Reaching the ferry, he rushed through the waiting-room and up to the ticket-office, fearful of meeting some one he might know. Then the thought struck him—he had not decided where to go. Mechanically he announced, "Atlantic City, please," and dashed onto the boat.

As he seated himself in the train he realized that at last he was alone—alone in the true sense. For some days, at least, there would be no accusing eyes to look at him—no Hartwell.

Naturally, this person would wonder. But let him. Why worry about such an unimportant thing? Then, when he came back—but he quickly despatched this thought from his mind. When he did come back it would be time enough to think and plan. Until then, perfect rest and peace.

Arriving at his destination, he selected one of the smaller hotels and signed his peculiar, illegible signature. The dapper clerk swung the register around and, after studying the name Weldon had inscribed there, remarked affably, "Thank you, Mr. Milton."

Weldon was on the point of correcting him, when he checked himself.

"Oh, let it go at that!" he thought. "No one knows me here, and I want to know no one." So Mr. Milton he remained.

After going to his room and unpacking his bag, he strolled out to the boardwalk. Here he found relief at last. His troubles were forgotten in the blaze of style and the many novelties that lined the highway along the ocean.

His delight at once more being free, without a care or a trouble, made him a boy again, and he allowed his fancies full rein, eagerly pouncing upon everything that promised something new and novel.

When he returned some hours later to his hotel he was very tired. But it was a healthy fatigue, caused by the exercise the long walk had given him. He enjoyed his dinner, and then seated himself in the lobby to watch the passing panorama of guests.

As he allowed his eyes to follow a very beautiful woman who had just passed, he realized that an elderly, pompous gentleman a few feet away was looking directly at him. Something in the eyes seemed familiar, but the concentrated stare embarrassed him, and he turned in the opposite direction.

The inability to remember faces was Weldon's one failing.

A few moments later he turned in the direction of the desk, where he saw the elderly gentleman conversing with the clerk, and noting that they were both looking in his direction, realized he was the subject of their conversation.

Attempting vainly to recall this gentleman, who he was positive had asked the clerk regarding him, he was suddenly conscious of a hand laid upon his shoulder. A strange fear seized him, and for a second or two he was afraid to look up.

Then a kindly voice remarked: "I beg your pardon, Mr. Milton, but your face is so familiar. I am positive I have met you, yet I cannot recall where."

Weldon was puzzled at being addressed as Mr. Milton. For a moment he could not understand it. Then it suddenly dawned upon him—that was the name the clerk had deciphered from his signature, and the one he had given this stranger, whom Weldon now knew had asked about him.

He was on the point of correcting the mistake, but decided not to. After all, what was the difference? He would never see the man again, and it would only entail explanation. Then it was probably a case of mistaken identity, anyway.

These thoughts rushed through Weldon's brain in far less time than it takes to tell them, and he replied affably: "I really could not say, sir. I do not remember having ever met you before."

"Very likely," the other murmured as he rubbed his chubby hands together. "My wife tells me I have no memory any more, but I trust you will pardon me."

"Oh, certainly, sir," Weldon replied, rather amused than otherwise over the incident.

"Yes, my wife tells me I am getting old," the fat gentleman continued, as with a dignified wave of his arm he motioned Weldon to be seated and drew up a chair beside him. "I guess she is right—I guess she is."

He paused a moment, then went on as he took two thick, black cigars from his pocket: "Have a cigar? Just the thing after a good dinner. My favorite brand—have them made to order."

Weldon was already shaking his head, and as the other finished he replied: "Thank you, but I do not smoke."

A disappointed look spread over the elderly gentleman's face. "Well, perhaps you are better off—perhaps not," he said. "Can't say that smoking ever affected me—but it has my pocketbook," and he broke into a hearty laugh that shook his entire body. "Still, I am sorry you won't try one. I like people's taste for cigars to agree with mine. My wife — there she is over there" — he raised a fat forefinger and pointed toward a group of elderly women on the other side of the lobby—"the one with

the black-and-white striped dress—well, she just hates tobacco in every form. Only allows me to smoke in my den. Some women are so peculiar about tobacco. You are from New York, I understand."

Weldon assented, and the other went on:

"So am I. Great city! Nothing like it in the world! I've lived there nearly all my life. Made my little pile there, and now my wife wants me to travel to other cities and spend it elsewhere. Women are so peculiar!"

As he spoke the fellow was tugging to pull from his vest-pocket a large silver card-case.

"If I can ever get this thing out," he added, "I'll give you my card. Pleased to have you call some time."

With a violent effort he succeeded in extricating the case.

"I'm the head of that concern," he added proudly, pointing to the firm name engraved in the corner.

Weldon glanced at it carelessly; then it slipped from his hand as he seized the arms of the chair to catch himself.

"I remember—you now, Mr. Miller!" he gasped, his face ashen-hued.

"You do?" the other exclaimed, noting Weldon's agitation. "And who are you?"

Before he could recall about the other name, Weldon found himself replying: "Stephen Weldon. I worked for you once, and you discharged me—"

"I remember you now, young man."

Mr. Miller had suddenly risen, and sarcastically added: "Up to your old tricks, eh? Mr. Milton, is it?"

And without another word he strode over in the direction of the hotel office.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STORM CONTINUES.

Weldon watched Mr. Miller as he conversed earnestly with the clerk for a moment, then strode over to the group of women to whom he had previously called attention. Gathering together his senses, the editor walked toward the office.

For a moment he leaned heavily upon the desk, apparently uncertain just how to start the conversation. The clerk, who had been so polite and solicitous only a short time before, now seemed to ignore his presence entirely. At last Weldon addressed him:

"I beg your pardon, but you evidently made an error regarding my name—it is Weldon, Stephen Weldon!"

The clerk, who was listening indifferently, sneeringly inquired: "Stephen Weldon, the author, I suppose?"

This question delighted the editor; at last he was understood and known! He hastened to reply, "Yes, I am he. I just came down—"

But the clerk suddenly broke in:

"Well, Mr.—Weldon, what can I do for you?"

The significant pause before he used the editor's correct name was too pointed to escape the inference it carried.

Words failed Weldon for the moment. It seemed the entire world was leagued against him.

He stammered, hesitated, and at last managed to murmur almost inaudibly: "I just wished to correct you about my name."

Walking slowly to the elevator, he ascended to his room and retired, although the hour was yet early.

His mind was in a tumult. He had come here for absolute rest and quiet, and already a new suspicion—in fact, an accusation—had been cast upon him.

His intention was to leave the next morning, but on second thought he decided to remain. He liked the place, and, after all, why should he fear a person like Mr. Miller?

He partook of an early breakfast and started for the beach, where he spent the day, not returning to his hotel until after sundown. Arriving there, he ate a light dinner and retired. The two days that followed were a repetition of the preceding one, and he was beginning to feel quite himself again.

But the next day—the fateful day he had dreaded—the fifteenth of the month—a desire to receive his mail seized him, and he returned to the hotel for luncheon, and then called up his hotel in New York on the long-distance wire.

After some delay the connection was established, and he recognized the voice of the head clerk.

"This is Mr. Weldon, Norman," he began, but the party at the other end broke in, "Oh, Mr. Weldon! How are you? And where are you?"

"I am in Atlantic City," the editor replied. "Is there any mail there for me?"

"Yes, indeed," was the answer; "just wait a moment." Then he heard faintly: "Yes, Mr. Weldon is on the wire, Mr. Hartwell. Yes, certainly."

The voice came distinctly again as the clerk continued: "There is quite some mail here, sir, and we have had a great many inquiries for you. A young man named Peyton has been here a number of times and seems very anxious to see you. Then there have been others, but they did not leave any cards with me. Mr. Hartwell has them, I believe. Shall I forward your mail, or do you wish Mr. Hartwell to attend to it? He was here at the desk when you called up and heard me call you by name. He wishes to speak with you before you cut off."

"'The best-laid plans of mice and men,'" murmured Weldon to himself, as he heard the latter part of the clerk's speech. "I must be under the guidance of an unlucky star."

Then, speaking in distinct tones, he answered: "No; hold all my mail. I shall return to-day. Tell Mr. Hartwell I will see him then. Good-by."

"Wait a minute! He wishes—" but Weldon had already hung up the instrument and the conversation was ended.

He sank heavily into one of the large chairs in the lobby. After all, his trip had been a failure—a useless worry and expense. He now had to return to face the inevitable.

He felt that he had erred in not talking to Hartwell. If the man had any wrong ideas, they must certainly be strengthened now—the editor had shown plainly his desire to avoid him, and consequently his fear of the man.

Consulting the time-table he had in his pocket, he ascertained there was a train to New York in about half an hour.

"I'll take that one," he decided, "and face them all. I know I am in the right; and if every one on earth thinks to the contrary, there is One above who knows that I am innocent."

It took him but a few moments to throw his things into his bag, and he was once more on his way to New York, where the last few weeks had meant so many hours of mental torture.

The clerk who had sneered when Weldon had told him who he really was, was not at the desk, and another made out his bill, headed Mr. Milton. The editor quickly paid it, and rushing out, called a cab and was soon on his return trip.

His courage came back with every turn of the wheels of the carriage, so that by the time he boarded the train he felt equal to meeting face to face a dozen Hartwells.

As the train started slowly, Weldon sank back on the cushions, fully reconciled to the ordeal before him. He took no notice of any one in the car, seemingly interested in the scenery through which he was being rapidly whirled.

"Isn't it a fine story?" he heard a voice question, and for the first time he took note of the speaker.

He was one of two gentlemen seated in front of him.

"Yes, it certainly is," the other agreed. "It struck me particularly. The plot is not a very original or unusual one, but the way the author has handled it certainly makes it most interesting and fascinating."

"Well, I think that as a whole *Cartwright's Magazine* has almost as good reading in it as any magazine published, don't you?"

Weldon had listened, uninterested, to the conversation, without any desire to eavesdrop; but when he heard this compliment to his magazine he was all attention.

"A plot for a story," he told himself, straightening up in his seat to hear better any further favorable comments.

For a moment both men were silent; then one of them remarked thoughtfully: "Do you know, Jack, I don't consider that story one bit overdrawn. I think there are—yes, I feel safe in saying hundreds of men in just the same position as *Merton* was—held up and forced to pay well to keep from the public something of which they are oftentimes absolutely innocent. But we don't hear of the cases, of course."

"Yes, I suppose so," his friend agreed.

"Men who would rather pay than have their honesty or integrity questioned in the least."

Then he continued absently: "I wonder if this story is based on a real experience. In fact, I have often wondered about stories — do the writers found them upon actual occurrences and facts, or are they wholly the product of a fertile imagination?"

"I've often wondered that very thing," returned the other. "If I ever meet a writer, I'm going to ask him. But there is one thing about that story—if an unprincipled person had a hold upon another and the thoughts of hush-money had entered his mind, the reading of this story might help him to a quick determination to use that power. And if he had not thought of it, it might put it into his head."

"Yes, that's very true," agreed the other.

Weldon had heard it all. At the beginning of the conversation he had realized it was Peyton's story they were discussing, and he listened carefully for what was to follow. But the ending of the conversation was entirely different from what he had expected. The stranger had put into words the very fear that had made Weldon's life in the recent past a torment. All the courage which Weldon had called into play earlier in the day, and which gave him the strength to face the inevitable, now faded away and left him a weak, trembling, fear-stricken coward.

In the midst of his panic he heard one of the men remark: "Yes, and I wonder who will be the first person to suffer from any ideas caught from this story?"

"I will be," Weldon wailed under his breath. "I—I—the editor of the magazine—I—who accepted the story—I will be the one."

He was even on the point of leaning over and informing the people in front of him of his terrible predicament. Just then the application of the air-brakes told him that the train was slowing up. The brakeman announced a station, at which a few persons got off.

As the train started on slowly, Weldon sprang to his feet. With a frightened cry, plainly audible to those seated around him, he seized his bag and rushed down the aisle, muttering: "I can't face them—I can't go back."

The train had now gained considerable headway, and was some distance from the station. But Weldon hurried out upon the platform, reached the lower step, and attempted to swing himself from the now rapidly moving cars.

With only one hand to balance himself (he held his bag in the other), he was on the point of jumping, when the train swung around a curve. Weldon lost his balance and grabbed frantically at the hand-rail to catch himself. But too late!

With a cry of fear to those who, noting his peculiar actions, had hurried after him, he apparently rolled directly under the train.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LIGHTNING STRIKES.

As has been said, those in the car who had noted Weldon's peculiar actions rushed after him. Two or three had just reached the platform when they saw him fall.

The brakeman had been one of the first to follow him, and, realizing what had happened, he seized the bell-cord, giving one long, steady pull. The air-brakes were already grinding—the train quickly came to a halt as the trainman swung himself to the lowest steps, and, leaning far out, looked back to where he expected to see only a mangled form.

The sight of Weldon, slowly and painfully rising to his feet, almost dazed him.

"He's all right! He's getting up!" he cried. "But I guess he's hurt, though," he added.

The editor had already got upon his feet, and limping painfully over to the other track, sank down upon the rail, where he buried his head in his hands.

The heavy train was backing down toward the injured man. But still he sat, apparently ignorant of the fact.

When Weldon first decided to jump he had no objective point in mind. He wanted to get away—anywhere.

He had heard what those men in front of him had said and was positive that to

go back meant full exposure. His courage failed him entirely—he would go away and start life anew—make another name where the accusation of his youth could not follow him.

He knew that every revolution of the car wheels brought him nearer to the city. He could not even wait for the next station. He must jump now.

But just as he nerved himself for the spring, the lurch of the train came. He could not regain his balance, and fell. In falling, he struck the rough ballast upon his side, and, although badly bruised, he did not notice it. Instead, he murmured a brief prayer as he heard the car wheels rush by, only apparently a fraction of an inch from his head.

It was only for a second, though. The train had now passed and he was safe from further injury.

He did not even see them stop as he painfully rose to his feet. But he did glance down at his clothing, and discovered that it was torn in several places. With a limp, caused by a bruised hip, he struggled to the other track and sat upon the rail.

As he did so a small fragment of leather caught his eye. It was a piece of the bag he had carried, which had evidently fallen under the train. There was not another fragment of it in sight—the wheels had done their work well.

A shudder ran over Weldon as he realized that he had missed the same fate by only the narrowest margin.

"Are you hurt, sir?" the editor heard a voice call.

Coming to his senses, he glanced up. Almost upon him were three men in uniform.

They were from the station the train had just left. Their attention had been drawn to the sudden halt of the express, and seeing the man on the track, they had divined the trouble and rushed to give any help that they could.

Before Weldon could reply, the heavy train was backed up alongside him.

"Why did you do a foolhardy thing like that?" the conductor demanded.

"Why—why—because I wanted to get off—at that station," was the faltering reply, as Weldon pointed down the track.

"Well, if that's all, and you're not injured, we'll go ahead," the conductor announced. "But let me tell you, young man, you had a very narrow escape. Don't try it again. You may not get off as easy next time."

As the crowd rushed to get back on the cars, a young man who had been on the outskirts of it, vainly trying to see the injured person, now stepped up. Just then Weldon raised his head.

The young man, forgetting that the train was about to start, hurried toward him with the cry: "Mr. Weldon—what is it? Can I help you?"

But the editor seemed too dazed to realize that he had been addressed. Glancing vacantly around, his eyes finally fell upon the speaker, who stood directly in front of him. With a cry of joy he sprang forward and, seizing the man's hands, exclaimed: "Don't leave me, Tom—don't leave me!"

Realizing that something was wrong, the other replied: "Don't worry, Mr. Weldon. I'll help you back to town."

"Oh, no! Not that—not that!" Weldon retorted. "I don't want to go back. I'm going away—far away." Then he added: "And you are going with me, Tom. You are the only friend I have now."

Tom Sinclair was one of the readers for *Cartwright's Magazine* and a great favorite with every one. As Weldon rambled on, Sinclair's face looked worried and troubled—he realized that apparently the editor had broken down and was laboring under a delusion, or else on the verge of nervous prostration.

There was a tinge of pity and sorrow in Sinclair's voice as he disentangled his hands from Weldon's and replied: "All right. Come with me, Mr. Weldon, back to the town. We'll go to a hotel and talk it all over. I'll stay with you."

Weldon struggled painfully to his feet and leaned heavily upon Sinclair's arm.

As they approached the station they saw opposite it a hotel, to which they directed their steps. Not a word more was said, and, depositing Weldon in an easy chair, Sinclair went to the desk and asked for a room, explaining that he had a sick friend with him.

When they reached the apartment, and after the bell-boy had gone, Sinclair announced: "Now, I'm going to send for a doctor. You're a very sick man, Mr. Weldon."

But the editor was on his feet in an instant. "No, Tom," he said, "I don't need a doctor."

Then, seizing Sinclair's arm nervously, he added: "Tom, I need friends—friends whom I can trust and who trust me."

"Pshaw, Mr. Weldon, don't talk like that!" He was now more certain than ever that the editor's mind was deranged. "Why, friends? You have thousands of them!"

"No, Tom," the other insisted. "Listen. Sit down. I trust you as my friend, and I'm going to tell you my trouble. Draw your chair up closer. That's better. Now, listen to me carefully."

Then followed a detailed account of the whole story from beginning to end.

For a moment neither spoke. Then Weldon questioned: "Do you blame me, Tom, for going away—for trying to get far off somewhere and starting over again? And, Tom"—his voice now dropped to a whisper as he leaned over and spoke in Sinclair's ear—"you are going with me!"

"Mr. Weldon, you will pardon me, but you are speaking foolishly," rejoined Sinclair. "You have allowed your fears to outweigh your discretion. Come back—"

"No—never!" Weldon interrupted positively.

"Hear me out, sir. Do you think any one would believe this story, in the face of your denial? No, indeed. Do you think people would believe this Hartwell in preference to you? No! Who is this Hartwell? He has no standing. You have allowed this to prey upon your mind until it has magnified itself a hundredfold."

Sinclair's words were spoken earnestly and sincerely and had the desired effect.

"Then *you* don't believe me guilty, Tom?" Weldon demanded anxiously.

"Certainly not—neither would any one else who knew you. As for those who do not know you, you really need not care whether they do or not. Come back with me."

Sinclair had noted the change that had come over the editor since telling his story. His face had more color in it now and his eyes were clearer. He seemed almost himself again. "We'll have dinner here," Sinclair continued. "Then we'll go on to New York. Face this Hartwell. If he has any wrong ideas, gathered from that story, you will quickly find out. But take my assurance that your fears are groundless."

"Perhaps you are right." Weldon spoke thoughtfully, his eyes upon the floor. "Yes, you are!" he exclaimed; "Tom, I'm so glad you happened to be where you were this afternoon. I hate to think of where I might have been at this moment were it not for you. How good it is to have friends! I longed for some one to talk this matter over with. But I had no one. Then you came—and I eased my mind by taking you into my confidence. And now I am brave. Honestly, I am. And we're going back. I am ready for the worst!"

A hasty examination showed only a few had bruises; even his limp had almost gone as with Sinclair he descended to the dining-room. A short time afterward they were being rapidly whirled toward New York.

When Weldon dropped Sinclair at his home the pressure of the other's hand as he bade the editor "good night" was so hearty that it gave him added strength and bravery for the meeting with Hartwell.

As he stopped at the desk for his mail he hardly returned the clerk's greeting, so anxious was he to learn his fate. Standing outside his door, trying to find the keyhole, he noticed that the light was on in his rooms—it shone through the transom.

"Good!" he exclaimed under his breath. "He is here, and it will soon be over—one way or another."

As he entered, Hartwell, who was seated at the table reading a magazine, laid it down carefully. "Well, you are a dandy!" he exclaimed. "Where have you been and why didn't you let any one know where you were?"

"Why, you see, Hartwell," Weldon

began effusively, "I just took a few days' vacation—away from everybody. I wanted to get far from trouble, care, and business worries."

"You evidently succeeded," Hartwell commented. "I haven't seen you look so well since I came here. But I'm going to finish this story. It's the one you spoke about—the one by that young fellow Peyton. And, by the way, he's been here a number of times to see you—seems awfully anxious about something."

Weldon's face had paled a trifle, but he gritted his teeth, determined to keep up his courage. As Hartwell picked up his magazine again, Weldon turned toward his room.

A few moments later he heard the magazine slammed noisily down upon the table, and Hartwell announced, "That certainly is a bully story!

"Oh, by the way, Steve," he called out, pushing the portières aside as he entered the room, "you are too tired to talk or decide upon anything to-night, I suppose. But to-morrow I want a little of your time. I want to talk over a matter that means a great deal to me—and to you, too, for that matter. But it will keep. I only hope that you will see it as I want you to. Good night."

Without another word he turned away, and Weldon was alone again.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RAINBOW.

As the full import of Hartwell's remarks struck Weldon, it was only by exercising all his self-control that he prevented himself from springing up and demanding an explanation.

"Of course, there is but one thing he wants to talk over," he argued to himself. "He has just finished that story, and perhaps the only reason he wants to put it off till to-morrow is to decide just how much to ask for. But he'll not get it—not one cent. I shall stand firm, come what may. Here I take him in—keep him—make a man of him—and then—oh! what is the use of thinking of it? I'll face him."

In the midst of these troubled thoughts his eyes closed and his system was soon wrapped in the sleep its overwrought condition demanded. When he awoke the following morning Hartwell was already up and about, and his greeting was cordiality itself.

At breakfast Weldon noticed Hartwell's unusual display of good-humor. He even caught his guest smiling to himself once or twice.

"The villain!" he reflected. "He's probably thinking how easy it will be to get money out of me. But wait till he tries. He'll meet with a different reception than he expects."

When he reached the office his stenographer informed him that Mr. Peyton had called every day to see him.

"He seemed awfully disappointed not to find you," she added. "As I could not tell him where you had gone or when you would return, he said he would call or telephone every day till he found you. And he has."

"I wonder what he wants that is so important," Weldon mused as he turned to his desk to go through the pile of correspondence before him.

He had lost himself in the work. The ring of the telephone interrupted him. It was Peyton, and he seemed overjoyed at finding the editor back again.

"I have some information of vital interest to you, Mr. Weldon," he explained. "Please wait in your office—I will be there inside of an hour."

"Now, what can he have on his mind that is of great interest to me?" Weldon asked himself, then plunged back into his work.

His stenographer had just gone to luncheon. Then the door opened and in rushed Peyton, followed by a young man about his own age.

Seizing the editor's hand enthusiastically, the author exclaimed: "I am so glad I have caught you at last!"

Then, turning to the man behind him, he added: "Mr. Weldon, this is Mr. Miller."

Drawing chairs close to the editor's desk, Peyton began:

"Mr. Weldon, I have come to tell you that you are the *Merton* in my story."

Weldon sank back in his chair, limp and weak, asking himself: "Where will

this end? What does *he* want—money, too?"

But Peyton was hurrying on.

"Let me go back. About twelve years ago I was employed by a concern down-town. One day I was sent to deliver a message to the office of Miller & Co. The bookkeeper was in the private office—I could hear him talking over the telephone, so I had to wait until he had finished speaking. There was no one else in the office. My eyes, in glancing over the room, caught sight of the cashier's drawer, partly open. It was a temptation I could not resist. I reached over, and seizing some bills, hurriedly stuffed them into my pocket and rushed out."

"Then you stole the money?" Weldon exclaimed. Seizing Peyton's arm, he shook him violently as he almost screamed: "Tell me, did you?"

"Yes," Peyton repeated. "I took the money. After I had rushed out of the place I found that I had a hundred dollars. I was terrified at the enormity of my crime. I wasn't really bad, but the sight of money so easy to get seemed to craze me. My room-rent was overdue, and the landlady had informed me that morning that I must pay up that very day or get out. I only needed five dollars. I must have been mad—crazy.

"In a day or two I learned that the office-boy had been suspected and discharged. But I dared not confess, much as I wanted to. I feared arrest. The next week I lost my position: and then, having money in my pocket, I decided to follow my hobby—literature. Needless to say, it was very hard. Many a night I have gone to bed without a morsel to eat since breakfast. And then the one thought that seemed to be eating away my brain was that I was a thief.

"This went on for twelve years. Oftentimes I have been upon the verge of suicide. When everything seemed darkest and absolutely hopeless you accepted my story. It was the first large sum of money I have ever earned. My first thought was to use part to repay Miller & Co., make a clean breast of everything, and take the consequences.

"This I have done, as Mr. Miller here will tell you. But the climax came when they told me the name of the boy who was discharged for the crime"—he hesitated a second, then added under his breath—"Stephen Weldon!

"Can you ever forgive me for the part I have played and the many heartaches I must have caused you, Mr. Weldon?" Peyton begged anxiously.

Before the editor could reply, Mr. Miller, who up to this time had been silent, broke in:

"And as the junior partner of Miller & Co.—my father is staying at Atlantic City—can you forgive us for the unjust accusation our firm placed upon you?"

Rising slowly to his feet, Weldon extended a hand to each of the men.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, "I cannot thank you for what you have both done for me to-day. But some day I hope to."

Seizing and shaking their hands fervently, he added: "But please excuse me now. I must get right up-town."

Seizing his coat and hat, the editor rushed out of the building. In a few minutes he was at his hotel. He was positive that he would find Hartwell upstairs—it was his lunch-time and, not having anything else to do, he always read after dining.

Weldon burst into the room. Yes, Hartwell was there and greeted him cordially.

"What brings you home at this hour, Steve?" he inquired.

"Nothing particular," Weldon replied, as he endeavored to regain his breath. "But, by the way—Hartwell—you spoke last night—"

"Oh, yes," the other interrupted. "This is a very good time to tell you and ask your advice."

Weldon had seated himself, his eyes flashing angrily at the cool manner of the man before him. Already his words of defiance and denunciation were framed.

"It's this, Steve," Hartwell went on. "I have secured a good position, and start in next Monday. But I want my wife back. I've reformed—and—well, And I want you to go to her and tell her Steve, she'll find out the difference now, just how different I am, and get her to come back to me. Please do it, Steve."

Weldon could scarcely believe he had heard aright.

"Is that all you want of me?" he demanded sternly, looking the other directly in the eyes.

"Why — sure!" Hartwell faltered, puzzled at the strange expression upon Weldon's face. "Isn't that enough? I want her—I need her! I cannot get along without her any longer! You'll do it, won't you, Steve?"

"Indeed, I will, Hartwell," the editor agreed, seizing the other's hand in a grip of iron, "and good luck will be with me, I know. You'll soon be together again."

THE END.

LOCKED OUT.

By KATHARINE EGGLESTON.

A winter story of late hours, a missing door-key, and a vigilant policeman.

"IT must be late?" Margaret Wilsden leaned across the table toward Fenton.

"It is," he assented, with inward satisfaction.

She had so evidently just waked up to the fact that he took her forgetfulness of time as a favorable indication.

"How late is it?" she asked, an expression of uneasiness taking the place of the smile with which she had been absently enjoying her surroundings.

"All of a quarter to twelve," he told her as he looked out into the larger dining-room, where the clock hung.

"Oh, I must go, then!" she cried, starting up, and hastily gathering her gloves and muff together.

"Go!" Fenton exclaimed. "Why, the program is only just through its overture. All this preliminary tuning has been to fill in while the dinner of the evening's lion settles so that he can roar in good voice! You cannot leave yet!"

"But I have forgotten the key! Auntie gave it to me because she particularly hates having the house rung up at unseemly hours. She even disconnects the bell, so that she cannot be disturbed. I must get back before they are all in bed."

Margaret went on with her preparations; and Fenton, with emphasized reluctance, summoned the waiter. He hated to give up the blissful *tête-à-tête*. He had worked with such insinuating care to ingratiate himself into the favor of the particular Mrs. Antrim, until he had earned the privilege of taking her niece to this dinner unchaperoned; and he rebelled with silent enthusiasm against the circumstance that seemed about to cut short his pleasure.

"Wait!" he exclaimed, as he rescued Margaret's coat from the waiter and held it folded in his arms, while he advanced his new-born plan. "Let me telephone for them to put the key out for you so that you can get in? Then you can stay for the rest of this!"

Margaret was frankly glad to have an opportunity to remain that she might hear the great tenor; and she found it entirely agreeable to stay with Fenton, who was unconsciously telling her how much he cared for her in the noiseless speech of eyes and the eagerness with which he surrounded her with everything that might add to her enjoyment.

He came back from the phone laughing.

"That's a luscious and juicy Hibernian you have up there! She said the missthruss was tuk wid a headache, and had gone to bed, not wishin' to be dishturbed, but that she, Norah, would put the key under the railing. So, we can stay for the rest!" And Fenton helped to pull off the one long glove that was already on, and saw Margaret comfortably reestablished opposite him, with an air of extreme satisfaction.

"Aunt Josephine is dreadfully particular—" Margaret began, as a new aspect of the affair strayed into her mind. "She may not like my staying out so late."

"If she has left orders not to be disturbed, and the key problem is met, she

will not know when you come in," he explained, with a glibness that told Margaret how well worth the effort he thought keeping her there to be.

"It—it seems like deceiving her!" she said, her hesitancy so confused with a smile that Fenton knew his way had won.

They remained during the vocal excitement of the tenor; they listened with blissful imperviousness to the monologist; and finally regretfully prepared to go.

"It has been nice!" Margaret responded to Fenton's question, as he helped her from the hansom in front of her aunt's forbiddingly dark house.

"They might have left a light!" she pouted, as she took in the situation.

"Never mind!" Fenton rejoined consolingly, too generally blissful himself to see any drawbacks in anything.

A heavy snow, succeeded by a gentle rain, had spent most of the day turning what was usually a well-kept and orderly street into a dirty thoroughfare, and on the steps remnants of the snow still showed between the posts of the railings.

Fenton pulled off his glove and dabbled about in the spaces between. Margaret stood in the entrance, a mere ghost of a girl, with her light gown and cloak shining faintly through the darkness.

The street-lamps seemed to content themselves with spilling a glistening smear of light on the wet pavements, and Fenton found his search unaided by them.

"Your Irish Norah certainly said she would put the key under the rail," Fenton said, as he straightened up after his unsuccessful effort.

"Can't—can't you find it?" Margaret questioned, with a catch in her voice that made Fenton bewail the conditions which kept him pawing fruitlessly between the cold, wet posts of the stone railing.

"She surely wouldn't have put it down there!" Margaret called, as he reached the lowest step. "On which side did she tell you she would hide it?"

"On the left!" he replied, as he started his feeling process again.

"You can't tell anything from that! She even wears her hat wrong way round, because the milliner told her the bow went on the left, and she never is sure which left is! Look over here, please. It's probably on the right, if she told you it would be on the left!"

Fenton crossed the steps, and began his search on the right.

"If it wasn't so dark! Would you mind standing behind the door there, so that if any one comes by you will not need to be seen. Then, I'll strike a match and have a fresh look!"

Margaret stepped behind the outer door, as he pulled it closed; then he got out his match-box.

"Jove, I have only three left!" he exclaimed, as he ran his finger down into the case, hoping to find even a piece of match to help him out.

The first match flared up, and sent a few dejected sparkles limping across the dirty snow; but Fenton had scarcely assured himself that the key was not between the first post and the house when darkness settled over him again, with a plush-like thickness.

He heard some one coming along the street.

"Stand back!" he whispered to Margaret, as he prepared to wait till the passer had gone by.

He felt particularly averse to having any one see Margaret decorating her aunt's door-step at that hour in the morning. The neighborhood was wholly residential, and Mrs. Antrim had been for so long a prominent woman in her circle that the episode could not fail to be discussed.

Margaret sank back against the wall, waiting breathlessly for the man to pass.

But he did not pass; he paused at the foot of the steps. Fenton saw him outlined against the steely streaks of light that shot out occasionally from the street-lamp across the wet asphalt.

Then he saw him start up the steps. It seemed the better part of valor to meet him half-way.

"What's up?" a thick voice asked.

Fenton was tempted to resent the question; but the thought of Margaret made him hesitate.

"Come, now, what's up, I say?" the voice demanded, with more insistence.

"I can't find the key!" Fenton answered, as he pulled out his second match, and went on with his search.

The flare of light caught on the metal on the man's coat, and Fenton knew that he was talking with an officer of the law.

"Can't find the kay! Is that it?" the policeman commented, a fine flavor of sarcasm mingling with his brogue.

It rasped Fenton's already disturbed nervous organism; and he felt a wild longing to reach out in the darkness and wrest satisfaction out of the officer. The idea that he was being taken for an impostor did not fit well into his notion of the best way to retain the good opinion of the girl behind the door.

"Perhaps you will give me some assistance. They promised to put the key out for me, under the railing, so that I need not disturb the servants." Fenton spoke in carefully controlled tones.

The policeman chuckled pleasantly.

"You are a game one! But Oi happen to know that Mis' Antrim's family is all gurrls excipt the butler, and he is black. It's mighty nice and kind ye are to that same family! If ye are so considerate, it's no wonder that ye've been gittin' the silver so plentiful about here these last weeks. Ye tuk it to save the servants the trouble of claning it!"

Fenton straightened himself up beside the railing, with angry amazement thrilling up and down his spinal column.

"You don't mean that you take me for one of the gang of housebreakers that have been about here recently?"

"It's jest for that Oi'm goin' to take ye!" the man replied, as he lifted a whistle to his lips.

Evidently waiting for just such summons, a motor-hansom, that stood under the light at the corner of the street, shot toward them.

"Look here, my man, this is going too far!" Fenton protested.

"Not so far as ye'll be whin Oi git through takin' ye!" the policeman returned affably.

Fenton turned to the door behind which Margaret crouched, in a panic of fright.

"Miss Wilsden, I will have to rouse the house to get you in!" he said, boiling inwardly at the officer who had placed him in such a predicament.

Margaret stepped out of her hiding-place just as the hansom stopped at the curb. Its lamps threw a sufficient light for the dainty elegance of her dress and the slender lines of her figure to be discernible.

The policeman exclaimed under his breath, and seemed to pause irresolute.

Fenton thought he was beginning to question the wisdom of his actions, and hastened to push the thought to conviction.

"You see, my man, what a mistake you have made; it may be unpleasant for you! This is Mrs. Antrim's niece, and I am trying to find a key that was left out for her, so that the servants need not be disturbed!"

"But, lavin' the kay on the rail, where any one might see it! That's not loike the lady here, who jest paid me one hundred dollars to arrist the burglars, if they was in her house, widout lettin' her know."

The man was evidently at a loss about the continuance of his work, but unwilling to desist if his suspicions were not removed.

"Auntie did do that, Mr. Fenton. She gave the special officer they have had put on this block a hundred dollars to arrest the thief without scaring her, if he was discovered in her house."

Her voice, even without the persuasive and gentle sincerity of her face, did more to further shake the officer's assurance. He recalled the members of Mrs. Antrim's family as they had been told off to him, and he could remember distinctly that there had been no mention of a niece.

Margaret's visit had begun only the week before, and after the excited measures for safety had been instituted on the heels of the first of the burglaries.

But the neighborhood was wrought to such a pitch of eagerness to accomplish the arrest of the vandals that the officer dared not trust his judgment to the extent of leaving this suspicious couple at large.

"Where is this kay, then? Show me the kay an' Oi'll let you off!" he told Fenton, really hoping that the key might be produced, and so give him grounds for surrendering them.

"I—I haven't been able to find it!" Fenton was forced to acknowledge.

The policeman's distrust leaped into fiercer life because of his leniency, which seemed inexcusable in the light of Fenton's words.

"It's funny, if the kay was lift out for ye, that ye can't be findin' it!" he observed. "It's quare that Mis' Antrim

would be leavin' her niece to sthand on the wet steps all night!"

"It was the maid who told us where she would put the key!" Margaret volunteered.

"Oh ho, the maid! So she's helpin' you, is she?" the man exclaimed, suddenly seized with the conviction that there were two well-trained and experienced crooks busy at imposing on him.

"Since ye can't find the kay that ye know is here," he sneered, "Oi'll jest trouble ye to stip into the cab and hunt the kay wid me!"

Fenton knew by the domineering assurance of the man's voice that the idea of their guilt had now rooted itself in his mind.

"You idiot!" he allowed himself the liberty of saying. "You will pay for letting your stupidity victimize us! I can't leave this lady standing on the door-step while I go to the station with you! Help me hunt that key!"

The officer, with an obliging kindliness, for which Fenton gave him little credit, aided him to feel between the posts, up one side and down the other, but no key was forthcoming.

"Oi'm thinkin' you'll have to discharge that maid!" he commented, with an acidity that made Fenton wild.

"I'm obliged to rouse the house, Miss Wilsden, to get you out of this scrape," Fenton now said to Margaret.

He punched ineffectually at the disconnected bell.

"Does any one sleep on the ground floor?" he asked, after his efforts had proved unavailing.

The policeman was standing in open-mouthed amazement at what looked to him like colossal nerve on the part of the two housebreakers.

"No one; the servants are all on the top floor. And auntie's room is on the second floor in the rear," Margaret whispered despairingly.

"Well, if you've finished your grandstand play, Oi'll jest trouble the two of ye to come wid me."

The patience of the officer was exhausted, and there was a finality in his voice and manner as he touched Fenton's arm that forbade further parley.

Fenton helped Margaret into the cab, and sprang quickly in beside her, pulling the doors together and holding them securely.

"You can stand there on the front!" he informed the officer with some emphasis.

"Thank ye; ye are good to let me go 'long!" was the response from the Irishman, whose sense of humor seemed to keep itself intact in spite of the onerous duty before him.

"Make her spin, Jimmy! Oi'll be glad to git shut of these two. They are too smairt!" he called up to the driver.

After a few moments of silent and very rapid progress along the avenue, Fenton heard Margaret sob. The sound sent his hand searching hers in the darkness; and the nestling, clinging pressure as she felt his fingers almost convinced him that being arrested had its advantages.

"Isn't that a drug-store?" she asked, as the car flew by some colored globes in a show-window.

"Yes. Here, turn back to that drug-store. We will telephone from there to Mrs. Antrim," Fenton called to the silent figure that huddled down on the front of the flying cab.

"Indade, ye can do your phonin' from the station as well!" was the unsatisfactory reply.

Fenton's hand was about to reach over the apron, with malicious intent, to hurl the unobliging officer off, when the cab veered, shot over to the curb, where the driver jammed the brake with such suddenness that the vehicle quivered, and the occupants were thrown forward, with numbing violence, against the doors.

The great eyes of the motor-car, that their driver had tried to avoid, glared for an instant in their faces, and then hurled off up the street, pursued by a roaring volley of oaths from the cab-driver.

Fenton drew Margaret up on the seat and into his arms, where she lay still.

"All right there?" came from the driver.

"All right," Fenton called back hoarsely, trying to find out whether Margaret was unconscious or merely scared.

The whole episode had occupied but a moment, and the cab was bowling along down the street at its accustomed swift rate, almost before Fenton could realize that the menacing eyes had passed them by.

Across the edge of Margaret's hat he looked, expecting to see the big policeman. But no figure was silhouetted against the flying lights. He shifted Margaret against his arm, so that he could lean forward, for he felt confident that the officer would be crouching on the other side of the doors. But he was not there!

It then dawned pleasantly on Fenton that the spurt of the cab to avoid the plunging motor-car, and the sudden stop as the driver jammed on the brake, had shot the policeman from his perch.

The driver, in the enthusiasm of his linguistic vengeance, had evidently not noted the officer's hasty alighting, and had mistaken Fenton's hoarse "All right" for his!

Fenton cheerfully hoped that the policeman had struck a conveniently located tree or stone, and proceeded to give his attention to the sweet burden that rested against his shoulder.

"Is it all over?" Margaret asked.

"Yes; we are—all right!" Fenton replied.

He had meant to say, "in heaven," but thought better of it.

"Where is the policeman?" Margaret went on.

"He—oh! He had to leave suddenly and unexpectedly!" Fenton replied, with a humorous inflection that surprised Margaret into active thinking.

She straightened herself to dependence upon her own spinal column, with disappointing celerity.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"The cabby stopped before the policeman was ready—so he went on!" Fenton replied, with a laugh.

"It isn't funny, I'm sure. What are we to do now? If we've lost the policeman, what's the use of going to the station-house, with no one to arrest us?"

Fenton sprang up, and called to the driver:

"Stop! We've lost the policeman! He must have been spilled when you stopped so suddenly! Look here; this is all a fool's mistake! You have no authority to arrest us; and the policeman—"

"We'll go back for him!" the driver cried.

He waited for an instant for Fenton to resume his seat. But Margaret had listened to the dialogue, and, almost before the driver announced his intention, she was out on the pavement, fear nerving her, and running with all her fleet young might away from the cab.

Fenton, without an instant's delay, leaped out and flew after her.

For an uncertain moment the driver held his car; then, realizing that he had no right to retake them, he whirled about and started back for the policeman.

Margaret sped along the asphalt, with a speed that made Fenton exert himself. The few pedestrians in the street were too much engrossed with their own affairs to meddle. Margaret whirled around a corner, and then Fenton overtook her.

"I—I couldn't go back and find that poor man all mashed up," she explained apologetically, leaning almost breathless against the wall of a building.

"Of course not!" Fenton agreed, marveling at the ways of womankind.

"Now, what shall we do?" Margaret went on, with a despairing emphasis on the "now," as if she thought they had reached the limit of possibilities.

Fenton pulled out his watch, ostensibly to learn the time, but really to gain some of his own in which to formulate a plan.

He could not send Margaret to a hotel at such an hour alone; he could not go with her. Once the thought came to him that she might spend the night riding in the Subway trains, under the chaperonage of the general public, but one glance into her dainty and worried face told him how impossible such a scheme was.

In all the great city he could think of no place where he could take her, except to her aunt's home; and his knowledge of Mrs. Antrim made that expedient seem rather worse than any other.

A cab was approaching, and, hailing it, he lifted Margaret in.

"We will get in here and—and—take a ride!" he finished lamely.

Margaret was very still, and Fenton felt miserably conscious that the embarrassing situation was working decidedly against his hopes.

"We will have a try for a drug-store again," he said, trying to speak lightly.

He called up directions to the cabby, and they both sat in silence as the tired horse pounded along.

A stifled sob from the girl roused him.

"Miss Wilsden, don't let this worry you. There must be some way out!"

"But I—I don't want you to telephone auntie. She would be the last one to—to forgive—such a—such a—"

"I won't—indeed I won't!" Fenton hastened to assure her.

Then the impossibility of doing otherwise came to him.

"Perhaps, however, it would be best!" he suggested.

"Oh, you don't know auntie!" she cried in undisguised fright.

Fenton did know auntie well enough to hate leaving Margaret to face her righteous indignation and outraged ideas of propriety alone.

"I don't see— By Jove! I've got it!" he cried jubilantly.

"What?" Margaret demanded, hope reviving in her breast.

"My sister's got some people at her house to-night who are to take a steamer at four in the morning—this morning—and she's been having a little supper for them. They may be up yet, some of them."

Margaret sat in the cab waiting, with all sorts of terrible visions of being taken among a lot of strangers at three in the morning. Then Fenton stayed in the drug-store so long that a black horror settled over her, for fear that even this last hope was to be withdrawn.

"It's all splendid!" he cried, as he joined her. "They have been staying up rather than go to bed and be wakened so early; and they really seem to look upon our coming as an agreeable diversion."

Fenton laid a cluster of violets on Margaret's hands, and she began to feel safe and happier than ten minutes before she believed she ever could feel again.

Mrs. Warren was making coffee in a machine in the dining-room, when Fenton led his shrinking companion up to her. Mrs. Warren smiled at the obviousness of her brother's yielding to the charm of the scared but daintily pretty girl, and the warmth of her greeting helped more than the coffee to bring back the color to Margaret's cheeks.

"It all works out splendidly, Rob," Mrs. Warren explained. "We are going to take the Morrises down in the machine, and we can leave Miss Wilsden on the way back. It will be light by then, and she—"

"I may find the key, and auntie will never know!" Margaret exclaimed, with such a hopeful tone in her voice that they both laughed.

The vague light of the early winter morning was struggling with the night uncertainly when the big car crawled, as quietly as might be, up to Mrs. Antrim's door.

Margaret and Fenton went cautiously up the steps, while the others watched them in breathless interest.

With a little cry, Margaret pointed to a groove in the stone pillar. The key—not under or even near the rail—was in plain sight!

Fenton fitted it into the latch—and the door was open!

"Signal from your window if you get to your room without being seen!" he whispered.

"Yes, I will!" Margaret assented, with a swift glance up into his face that sent him down to the car with a very agreeable thrill in his heart.

The big motor circled and stopped. All eyes were fixed on the third-floor windows.

The right one was softly raised; and, for a moment, there was a violet blur in the gray dawn.

Auntie never knew. The match met her approval as being "preeminently proper."

FLATTERY.

FLATTERY never seems absurd.
The flattered always take your word;
Impossibilities seem just,
They take the strongest praise on trust;
Hyperboles, though ne'er so great,
Will still come short of self-conceit.

John Gay.

THE JAILBIRD.

By BERTRAM LEBHAR,

Author of "The Time Limit," "The Isle of Mysteries," "When a Man's Hungry," etc.

What happened to the man who resolved to live up to an evil reputation he didn't deserve.

CHAPTER I.

THE BROAD-MINDED MR. DOLMAN.

THE bookkeeper of Dolman & Co. sat at his high desk, adding up columns of figures with marvelous rapidity.

He was a man of striking appearance. At first glance one would have judged him to be quite advanced in years, for his close-cropped brown hair was tinged with gray, and there were deep lines in his face.

A prolonged study of his features, however, conveyed the impression that he was not so old, after all. There was an indescribable something about his face which indicated that he might still be youthful, despite the furrows and the gray hair.

As he leaned over his desk, his coat off and his shirt-sleeves roped up to his elbows, his steel-blue eyes concentrated upon the columns of figures before him, and a frown upon his brow, one somehow or other gathered the impression that he was a man young in years but one who had seen more trouble than most men encountered in a whole lifetime.

This was the belief of old Caspar Dolman, head of the dry-goods firm of Dolman & Co., Canal Street.

"I've got the best bookkeeper I've ever hired," remarked the old man, as he stood conversing with a customer in the front part of the store.

"I've only had him three weeks, but he's a wonder. He's the quickest and most accurate figurer I've ever heard of. He'd be worth a fortune to a bank, I should think. He's quick to learn, too. When I hired him I was disinclined to take him on, because he confessed that he wasn't familiar with the details of the dry-goods trade. He said he could soon pick it up, however, and he certainly has. In the three weeks he's been with us, he's picked up as much about the business as would take another man years to learn."

"Humph!" remarked the customer carelessly, "my experience with bookkeepers has been that when they're so mighty quick to pick up things they've got to be watched carefully. I've hired a good many bookkeepers in my time, and I've always found that the slow, plodding fellows are the best kind. The quick fellows are generally the ones that turn out wrong. Now, I'll bet you don't pay this fellow an extra high salary, do you?"

"No," replied old Dolman, rubbing his fat hands together and chuckling. "That's the best part of it. When I asked him how much money he'd work for, he said he'd take fifteen a week to start with. After I'd seen him figure I hired him quick, without even asking him for references. He's worth three times that amount of money, by gad!"

"There you are!" exclaimed the customer triumphantly. "That only goes to prove my suspicions. If he's such a fine bookkeeper why does he work for such small wages? There's a nigger in the woodpile, somewhere, I'll be bound. To my mind, Dolman, you made a mistake in not asking him for references. I make it a rule never to hire any help without good references. Even the scrubwoman who cleans out my store once a week has to come well recommended. It pays to be careful these days."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed old Dolman. "That's where I differ from you, Hazleton. I don't attach very much importance to references, as a general rule. If references told the truth they'd be of some account in my eyes; but it's very rarely that they do. They're like the lines you'll find in a young lady's autograph album, very pretty, but not to be taken too seriously.

"I've known lots of employers who

will discharge their clerks for dishonesty or bad habits and then sit down in cold blood and write them out good references, painting their characters in glowing colors. There's very few men who care to stand in the way of a discharged employee securing another job. Under those circumstances what's the use of references, say I?"

The customer shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it all depends upon the point of view, I suppose," he said. "I guess I'll be getting along, Dolman! Don't forget to have those goods shipped to me by Tuesday. Good day! Take my advice and keep a watchful eye on that bookkeeper."

As he disappeared through the door, Dolman smiled to himself.

"Old Hazleton is the most suspicious man I've ever met," he mused. "He'd mistrust his own shadow. I'll bet there's nothing the matter with my bookkeeper. The trouble with Hazleton is that he's too narrow-minded. Now I'm not. I'm about as broad-minded a man as there is, I guess. I'll bet my bookkeeper is all right. He's dirt-cheap, too. To think of getting a clever chap like him for fifteen dollars a week! It's a rare find. Of course, though, clever as he is, I wouldn't keep him a minute if I thought he wasn't on the level."

Hazleton's words of warning must have had more effect on Dolman than the latter was willing to admit, for the old man sauntered to the back of the store to the little partitioned-off office where Tom Robbins, the bookkeeper, sat at work.

Dolman puffed at a big cigar and stood in the doorway watching his bookkeeper intently for a while.

"Getting pretty used to the business, eh, Robbins?" remarked the old man suddenly.

"Yes, sir," responded the bookkeeper. "I guess I've got hold of the details fairly well."

"I thought you would," went on Dolman, between puffs. "Another man wouldn't have taken a bookkeeper green to the business; but I knew that you'd pick it up quick. You see, I'm broad-minded, I am."

"Yes, sir," replied the bookkeeper, applying himself to his task once more.

"Now there's lots of employers would have asked you for your references before they'd have given you a chance," continued Dolman. "I don't attach very much importance to references. You see, I belong to the new school of business men. I'm broad-minded."

"Yes, sir," responded the bookkeeper again.

"I suppose if I had asked you for references you could have given 'em to me?" remarked Dolman after a pause.

The bookkeeper bent over his books without replying.

"What's that you said?" asked Dolman sharply.

"I didn't speak, sir."

"Well, I spoke to you. I say, if I should ask for references I suppose you could give them to me, eh? I don't attach much importance to references, though. As I said before, I'm broad-minded."

Again the bookkeeper ignored the question and bent low over his books. Old Dolman's manner changed. He appeared to be getting quite excited.

"See here, Mr. Robbins," he said, walking over to his bookkeeper's desk, "where did you work before you came here, anyway?"

"At Dawson & Co.'s, grain importers," answered the bookkeeper nervously.

"How long were you there?"

"A month."

"Where were you before that?"

"I was with a cloak-house."

"Humph! How long were you there?"

"Two weeks."

"And what were you doing before that?"

"I was clerk in a retail grocery-store."

"For how long?"

"Four days."

"Ah! And what were you doing before that, Robbins?"

"I was a waiter in a Sixth Avenue restaurant."

"The deuce you say! For how long?"

"For a month."

"You've been changing your jobs pretty frequently. How do you account for it?"

The bookkeeper dropped his pen and wheeled around on his high stool to face his employer.

"You say you're broad-minded, Mr. Dolman. I'll tell you the whole truth. I've held about twenty jobs within the last year and I've been fired from every one, because—because my employers were narrow-minded."

"How do you mean?" asked the old man eagerly.

"They asked me about my past and I told them frankly. That was my finish in every case. You see, they weren't broad-minded like you."

"Humph! What was it you told them about your past, young man?" asked Dolman sharply.

The bookkeeper's face set in lines of grim determination.

"I told them that I had served four years in a prison," he said quietly.

"What's that?" yelled Dolman, growing purple in the face. "In prison, eh? Hazleton was right after all, then. What did you go to prison for, young man?"

"I was charged with assault and robbery," said the bookkeeper, whose face had turned very white. "I was guilty of the assault, but not of the robbery. I'll swear I didn't rob the man. I only assaulted him and I was justified in doing so. The jury wouldn't believe me, however, and I was sentenced to four years.

"I've tried to live a straight and upright life, since my release. I've tried to regain my footing in the community. I've tried every kind of a job, but as soon as my employers learned that I'd been in prison they discharged me. I was so desperate that I was contemplating suicide when I saw your advertisement and was lucky enough to secure this job. I'm thankful to have found an employer as broad-minded as you, sir. I know that you'll give me a chance to live down the past."

He looked appealingly at his boss.

"Not I," said Dolman. "I couldn't have an ex-convict in my employ, young man. I couldn't think of it. I'm very sorry. I like your work very much. You're the best bookkeeper I've ever had, and the cheapest; but I'll have to fire you! You've been to prison and that settles it."

"But I thought you said that you were broad-minded!" gasped the unfortunate bookkeeper.

"I am. I'm very broad-minded; but I couldn't have an ex-convict working around this place. I'd be afraid to trust you out of my sight. How do I know that you've reformed? I don't think that a man who has been to prison ever does really reform. I think, however good your intentions are, you're bound to go wrong again, sooner or later."

"But let me tell you my story, sir," pleaded the bookkeeper. "I've never done anything really bad. I was more the victim of unfortunate circumstances than anything else."

"That's what they all say," rejoined old Dolman. "I never yet saw an ex-convict, young man, that wasn't ready to protest that he was the victim of unfortunate circumstances. I don't want to hear your story. It wouldn't be any use. I'd fire you, anyway. I wouldn't have a man who had been in prison working around me, under any circumstances. I'm sorry, but I'll have to advertise for another bookkeeper."

Robbins jumped down from his stool and seized his hat.

"Very well!" he cried hoarsely, "I'll go now. I won't worry you a minute longer. And you're the man who calls himself broad-minded, eh? This is the last straw. I've tried my best to lead an honest life, but the world won't let me. The world has refused me a living honestly and now I'm going to get one dishonestly. The world won't let me be an honest man, so I'm going to be a criminal.

"You speak the truth, Mr. Dolman, when you say that there never was an ex-convict who didn't go wrong again sooner or later. Can you blame us? You won't let us stay straight, no matter how much we want to. I'll be a criminal. You and your narrow-minded brethren have condemned me to it. I suppose you call yourself a good Christian. Whatever becomes of me, you'll be to blame for it. I hope you'll think of that when you go to church on Sundays."

The unfortunate man swept out of the office with his head erect and his eyes flashing contempt.

"What an unfortunate affair!" mused old Dolman. "Hazleton was right, after all. That young criminal spoke to me as if I had done something

to be ashamed of instead of he. He seemed to think that I'm not broad-minded, just because I won't stand for an ex-convict working in this store. By Jupiter! even the most broad-minded man in the world wouldn't countenance a proposition of that sort."

A little later old Dolman said to himself:

"He said he was going to be a criminal again from this time on. What a desperate threat! Maybe he'll try to break into this store to-night! I'll give orders to the policeman on post to keep a sharp lookout."

CHAPTER II.

A VISIT TO THE FOLKS.

TOM ROBBINS scowled at every man, woman, and child he encountered on his walk from the store of Dolman & Co. to his dingy little furnished room on First Street.

He hated the whole world. He was sore on humanity in general.

Humanity! He laughed bitterly at the word. It was such a misnomer. There was no such thing as humanity on this earth.

Churchgoing people prate of "the helping hand." The helping hand! Bah!

The term was a mockery! Who ever thought of extending a helping hand to the man who was down? The charitable world puts its foot upon the neck of the prostrate wretch and pins him down in the mire.

Suddenly Robbins began to laugh. He had a live sense of humor which even four years of prison life had not been able to destroy.

His thoughts reverted to his recent interview with old Caspar Dolman, and he could not help laughing. The fat little old man had presented such a funny spectacle.

He had boasted of his broad-mindedness, and yet when he, Tom Robbins, had put him to the test he had proved as narrow-minded as the rest of them.

Robbins recalled the purple hue that had come to the old man's fat round face and the startled look in his eyes when he learned Robbins was an ex-convict!

"He looked as if he was half inclined to run from the store and yell 'Police!'" laughed the discharged bookkeeper. "I noticed him glance apprehensively at the safe as soon as he learned that I was a jailbird, as if he expected to see me put it in my pocket and make a dash for the door! And such a man as that has the audacity to call himself broad-minded. Ha! ha! ha! It's a funny world."

When he reached his lodgings and let himself in with his latch-key, his mind was made up.

"It's very evident that I'll never get a chance to make a living honestly," he mused. "I've tried the straight and narrow path and it's failed. "The world owes me a living and I'm going to get it the best way I can.

"I'll get square on old Dolman, too. Just how I'll do it, I don't know yet; but I'll find a way to get even with that old hypocrite and all the rest of them who have denied me a chance to lead an honest man's life, as sure as my name's Tom Robbins.

"But, first of all, before I go wholly to the bad, I'll take one last chance. I'll try the folks. I've kept away from the old man and that hypocritical half-brother of mine until now because I thought, like the fool I was, that I'd get a new start in life before I went back to them.

"Now I'm through with pride and sensitiveness. They're my own flesh and blood and they've got to help me. If they won't I'll disgrace the family by committing every crime in the calendar. I'll go to Peekskill to-morrow and tell them that they must help me. I'll put my pride in my pocket. What right has an ex-convict with pride, anyway?"

With this resolution he threw himself upon the bed without undressing or even taking off his shoes, and tried to sleep.

After an hour or so, however, he gave it up as a bad job.

It was no use trying to tempt slumber. He felt that there was to be no sleep for him that night. His brain was too busy.

The air of the little room seemed stifling. He arose and went down-stairs to the street. He would walk all night. His restless mood demanded that he be moving, moving, moving, all the time. When morning dawned, he would take a train for Peekskill.

He would put humanity to the test for the last time! He would see if his own flesh and blood would deny him the chance to start life anew.

When morning came he went to the Grand Central Depot and bought a ticket for Peekskill. The railway fare cost him his last cent; but what cared he?

He had no fears for the future. He would not starve. His father or his half-brother would give him a start in life. If they wouldn't—well, he'd get all the money he wanted, dishonestly. He'd lead a crook's life and a merry one.

Old John Robbins was a famous character in the hustling town of Peekskill. He had been born and raised there and had made a fortune manufacturing furniture.

His factory was one of the largest in the town. He gave employment to three hundred men and girls and paid them starvation wages; for he and his son, Peter, bore reputations of being parsimonious almost to the point of miserliness.

When Tom Robbins arrived in Peekskill he set out immediately for his father's house, taking the most isolated route from the station, so as to avoid meeting anybody he had known in the past.

After he had passed one or two of his old friends, however, without any sign of recognition on their part, he began to think that his fears in this respect were groundless. He had changed so much since he had left this little town that apparently he was not recognizable.

He had just arrived at this cheering reflection when he heard himself called by name.

Turning half instinctively, he recognized old Obadiah Smithers, who had sold newspapers and stationery in Peekskill ever since Tom Robbins's birth.

Obadiah stood in the doorway of his store, his eyes dilated with surprise.

"Why, bless me!" he remarked, "if I ain't right! I wasn't quite sure. You've changed so much, Tom Robbins. I thought I'd take a chance, though, so I called you by name, never thinking you'd really turn your head, you know.

"So they've let you out of prison, eh? And you've come right back here to Peekskill. Where be you going now? To your father, I presume. Well, if you're goin' to ask forgiveness, it won't do you any good, Tom Robbins.

"The day you went to prison he swore he'd never again recognize you as his son. He said you could go down on your knees and beg for forgiveness, but you'd never get it from him. That's what he said, Tom, and you know your father — he generally does what he says."

"I'll try, anyway, Obadiah," said Robbins hoarsely.

"It won't do you any good, my lad. You can rest assured as to that. I suppose you know about his illness? No. Well, don't get alarmed. About a year after you went to—ahem—away, he was seized with a stroke of paralysis and had to give up work. He's mostly confined to the house now and he's turned the business over to your half-brother, Peter. You don't mean to say this is news to you; that you didn't know anything about it before?"

"No. I hadn't heard," replied Tom Robbins gloomily. "So Peter's got charge of the factory now, eh?"

"He's more than got charge of it," replied the newsdealer. "He owns it! Your father deeded it over to him last year."

Tom could not repress a groan. Here was his half-brother, only a few years older than he, and already a rich and prosperous man, while he, Tom Robbins —well, it was no use trying to put into words what he was!

With his eyes fixed moodily on the ground he shuffled on toward his father's house, despite old Obadiah Smithers's warning.

Old John Robbins was sitting in the garden reading a newspaper and smoking a brier pipe, when the ex-convict unlatched the gate.

He looked so aged and feeble that his son could not repress a shudder as he walked over to the wicker chair, wherein the old man sat.

His attention was so concentrated on his newspaper that he did not notice Tom until the latter stood directly before him and spoke.

"Hallo, father!" said the ex-convict.

Then the old man dropped his paper quickly and his eyes blazed with anger.

"You're in the wrong house, sir, I guess," he cried. "I don't know you. I've never seen you before."

"Take another look," said the other bitterly. "I'm your son, Tom Robbins. I guess you can recognize me all right, if you want to."

"I have no son by that name," hissed the old man. "I've only got one son, and his name's Peter. I don't know you, sir. You're a stranger to me."

"Now, see here, father," said Tom Robbins quietly, "you and I never got along together, as parent and child should, somehow or other; but you must remember that I'm your own flesh and blood and you've got to do something for me. I'm down and out. I want a new start in life. Since my release from prison I've been unable to get work. I've come to you for help, and you've got to give it to me."

"I'll not help you!" yelled the old man, "I'll not give you a cent! You've brought disgrace upon my name, and I'm through with you forever! You've had your chances and you've wasted them! You might have been a partner of your brother Peter's, if you'd obeyed my wishes, the way he did, and had gone to work in the factory. But, no; you insisted on going to New York and wouldn't listen to me, when I told you to stay here. As I expected, you got into trouble; but I never expected that you would disgrace the family by committing a crime which would land you in prison for four years!

"No, by gad, sir, I never expected anything like that from flesh and blood of mine. On the day I heard it I made a vow that I'd never have anything to do with you again, and by gad, sir, I'm going to keep that vow!"

"Then you'll not help me?" asked the ex-convict.

"No, sir! Not a penny! I'm through with you. If there's any good left in you, you'll find ways of helping yourself, and if there ain't any good left in you, it doesn't matter what becomes of you. As for me, though, I wash my hands of you entirely. I never want to see you again. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, I understand what you say," replied the young man with a bitter laugh. "It ain't hard to understand your words—they're plain enough. What is hard to understand is, that you, my father, should be able to utter them! Ha! ha! It's a funny world!"

He turned on his heel and passed out of the garden gate.

"I'll try my brother Peter, now," he muttered. "He's my last forlorn hope. The old man is obstinate by nature and as hard as a rock. I might have expected failure there, even if old Obadiah had not warned me. Brother Peter never was as hard as the old man. Perhaps I can persuade him to help me. At any rate, I'll try. I guess I'll find him at the factory."

It was only a few minutes' walk from the Robbins's home to the Robbins's furniture factory.

Arriving there, Tom Robbins opened the heavy iron door and climbed the stairs to the office on the second floor.

Without going through the formality of knocking, the ex-convict opened a door marked "private office" and stepped into the sanctum of the head of the concern.

A young man with a sharp face, a long, pointed chin and small eyes, was seated at a mahogany desk. Despite the fact that he was Tom Robbins's senior by five years he appeared several years younger than the visitor.

He looked up quickly as Robbins entered, and surveyed the newcomer from head to foot.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded sharply.

"You know me, don't you?" asked the ex-convict, in a voice that was almost a hiss.

"Yes, I know you," replied the other coolly. "You're Tom Robbins, a jailbird. What do you want here?"

"I want help, Peter. I'm your half-brother; your own flesh and blood—don't forget that. I'm down and out. I can't get a job. I want to lead an honest life and they won't let me! You've simply got to help me, Peter."

The other man shrugged his shoulders.

"I'd help you if I could," he said, "but what help could I give you?"

"Give me a job in the factory. The lowest kind of a job would do; I'd work my way up."

"In this factory! I couldn't think of

it. It's bad enough to have the disgrace of an ex-convict in the family without having him hanging around all the time. See here, Tom, why don't you go away from Peekskill where you're known? What's the use of hanging around here disgracing your poor old father and myself? Go out West where you ain't known, and start all over again."

"Will you stake me to some money?" asked his half-brother eagerly.

"Well, business is pretty bad just now," said Peter, "but I think I can spare you a little, if you'll promise never to come back here or bother us any more."

"Give me the money and I'll promise."

Peter's hand went to his pocket and he pulled out a leather pocketbook and extracted therefrom a bill.

"Here it is," he said, offering the bill to his unfortunate half-brother.

The latter's face went purple and his eyes flashed with rage as he snatched the greenback from the other's hand and tore it to pieces.

"Curse you!" he cried. "How dare you offer me a five-dollar bill? Do you take me for a beggar? Don't you dare insult me like that again, Peter Robbins, or I'll kill you where you stand!"

His manner was so fierce that with a cry of alarm Peter Robbins sprang for the ivory bell-button on his desk.

"Don't bother to call help," laughed Tom Robbins bitterly. "I won't hurt you. I'm going away right now. I won't stay here any longer despite your cordial brotherly welcome. You've done great work to-day, Peter Robbins! You've made a criminal out of an honest man! You've made a criminal out of your own brother!

"You were my last hope, and you've thrown me down. I'm through with an honest and respectable life now! You'll hear of me in the future, probably, and it may make you blush, when you do hear of me, to think that I'm your brother. I've served four years in prison, but I swear, as God hears me, that I've never done a dishonest act in my life; but now I'm going to start in with a vengeance! I'm going to make a record for myself, a record that'll make you ashamed of the name you bear! And you'll be to blame for it, Peter Robbins! You'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you're the cause of my downfall!"

He turned and walked swiftly out of the place, leaving his half-brother too stunned to reply.

For a full minute after the wretched man had departed, Peter sat motionless in his chair; then his eyes lighted on the torn fragments of the five-dollar bill, lying scattered on the floor. The sight of them broke the spell and he stooped eagerly down and, picking them up, gently fitted them together on the desk.

Several pieces were missing, and Peter sighed. Whether the sigh was occasioned by the impossibility of restoring the bill to its original form or by regret for the interview he had just had with his unfortunate brother is not known.

"Well, anyway, we've got rid of him, thank goodness for that!" he muttered.

In the meantime Tom Robbins was walking swiftly through the streets of Peekskill, uncertain where to go, and not caring now who recognized him.

As he passed the store of old Obadiah Smithers he was again hailed by that gossip.

"Well, Tom," said the old man eagerly, "have you seen your father? Has he forgiven you? I can see by your face that he hasn't. I told you you'd fail. I told you you were wasting your time to try it. They're a pair of hard men, your father and your half-brother Peter. You might have expected the reception you'd get."

Tom clenched his fists, his eyes blazing with anger and hatred.

"I'll get square with them," he hissed. "Don't you worry, Obadiah. I'll get square with them all, before many days have passed. They've shown me no mercy, and by Heaven, when my time comes, I'll show them none!"

CHAPTER III.

REVENGED.

Old Caspar Dolman was standing in the doorway of his store, reviewing the people who passed, when Hazleton came along.

"Hallo, Dolman!" he called. "Howdy? I can't stop to talk to you just now.

I'm hurrying to keep an appointment. Don't forget to send those goods, Tuesday. By the way, how's that new bookkeeper? Has he stolen anything yet?"

"He's gone," replied Dolman, "I fired him yesterday. I've got another bookkeeper now. He ain't as bright as the last; but he's got iron-clad references. He's got letters of recommendation from his previous employers, his clergyman, his parents, and the superintendent of the Y. M. C. A. branch he attends. Oh, I've been very careful this time."

"So you took my advice after all, eh?" laughed Hazleton.

"Oh, yes, I found you were right about that other fellow. After you had gone yesterday I asked him a few questions. What do you think I discovered?"

"What?" asked Hazleton with some interest.

"That my precious bookkeeper was a jailbird. He told me so himself, unblushingly. Admitted to me that he was an ex-convict and had served four years in prison. Of course I gave him his walking-papers instanter; and, would you believe it? the young rascal actually had the nerve to get angry because I wouldn't keep him in my employ! He gave me a terrible tongue-lashing and told me I wasn't broad-minded. What do you think of that for nerve?"

"Well, you're lucky to have got rid of him," said Hazleton. "So long, Dolman. I can't stop any longer. I hope your new bookkeeper will prove as satisfactory as his references."

But as Hazleton disappeared up the street, Dolman shook his head sadly.

"This fellow may be honest," he mused, "but he's darned slow compared to Robbins. Robbins was the finest bookkeeper I've ever seen. It's too bad his character wasn't as good as his figuring. I guess Hazleton is pretty near right. The only honest bookkeepers are the slow ones. When you get hold of a real rapid fellow, he's bound to turn out to be a crook. I guess I'll have to put up with slow bookkeepers in future. Well, sir, what can I do for you?"

The question was addressed to a short, thick-set man with the face of a prize-fighter, who had entered the store.

"Have you got a man named Tom Robbins employed here?" asked the fellow gruffly.

"What do you want to know for?" asked Dolman.

"I want to see him most particularly."

"Are you a friend of his?"

"Maybe."

"How long have you known him?"

"Say, mister, I'm not here to answer questions. I've got business with Tom Robbins. Is he here?"

"No, he isn't, my surly friend," replied the old man.

"Where is he, then? I understood that he was employed here as bookkeeper."

"He was until yesterday. I fired him yesterday."

"Oh, you did, eh? May I ask what for?"

"You may ask; but you won't get any answer unless you first tell me who you are."

"All right. I don't mind telling you. I'm Sergeant Crane, of the central office."

"Ah!" exclaimed the old man. "So he's been committing some more crimes, has he? That's what I fired him for, sergeant, because I learned that he was an ex-convict. What do you want him for?"

"Burglary. There was a big job pulled off on Broadway last night, and we've reason to believe that he knows something about it. Can you tell me where he is?"

"No, I'm sorry to say I can't, sergeant. When I fired him yesterday he naturally didn't tell me where he was going to. I'm not surprised to hear that he's committed a crime, though, for he threatened as much yesterday."

"He did, eh? What did he say?"

"He said he was tired of living an honest life and that henceforth he was going to make a living dishonestly."

"He did, eh?"

"Yes. That's why I'm not surprised to hear he's committed burglary already. I suppose I ought to congratulate myself that he didn't break into my place. I was afraid he would."

The other man glanced around the store, and shook his head.

"Robbins is too wise a crook to at-

tempt to crack a place like this. He only goes after big game." he said. "There's nothing for him to lift here except dry-goods, and that stuff's too bulky for a fellow working single-handed. It would need a truck and a partner to carry off enough of this swag to make it worth while, and Robbins works single-handed, as I understand it. I guess you're safe, Mr. Dolman."

"Well, I don't know so much about that," remarked the old man. "It wasn't the stock I was thinking of. It was the safe. There's over two thousand dollars in currency in the safe. He might come after that."

"Humph! Does he know the combination?"

"No. I didn't entrust him with that, luckily. Still you see, sergeant, the safe is a very old one and not very strong. I've always intended to replace it with a safe of modern make; but, somehow or other, I've always neglected it. Come back here and I'll show you. You see how easy it would be to pry open this door. Don't you think the safe's in danger while Robbins is around?"

"Well, I guess Robbins ain't around. He's probably beat it out of town, after pulling off that job last night. I don't think that you need have much fear of his coming here. Still, I'll give orders to the patrolman on post to keep a sharp lookout. One can't be too careful."

"Thank you, sergeant," said old Dolman gratefully. "Will you have a cigar?"

"Thank ye."

"If you catch Robbins, will you let me know. I'd like to feel confident that he's behind lock and key once more. I thought his boasted reformation was only a bluff."

"Bless you, Mr. Dolman, of course it was. That kind of a man never reforms. Before they're out of prison for one crime they're already plotting and planning the next. If I get him I won't fail to let you know. I've got my doubt, though, about making this collar. He's a slippery customer is Robbins. Well, good day, sir, and thank you."

"Good day, sergeant. I'm glad you called. Don't forget to give orders to the patrolman on post to keep a sharp lookout here at nights. I guess he'll take more heed of your instructions than he would of mine. I told him to keep a sharp watch last night, but he seemed to take it as a joke. You detectives are all right; but I'm afraid I must say that the uniformed force are a shiftless lot."

"I must admit you're right," said the other with a sigh, as he passed out of the door.

"So Tom Robbins has carried out his threat and started in, has he?" soliloquized old Dolman. "It's a good job I fired him when I did, or Heaven knows what would have happened. I'm awfully glad Sergeant Crane called. I don't suppose Robbins will dare to come here to-night. As the sergeant said, he's probably left the city for a few days after pulling off that other job."

But the next morning when old Dolman entered his store, he almost had heart disease.

The back window had been jimmied. The safe had been broken open and its contents stolen.

On the floor near by was a sheet of paper on which was written in red ink:

Revenge! A crooked life is so easy.
TOM ROBBINS.

When he had recovered sufficiently from the shock to be able to speak, the old man flew to the telephone.

"Hallo, Central!" he cried, "give me police headquarters. Is Sergeant Crane there? What's that, you say? He isn't in? Well, send some detectives up here immediately. This is Dolman & Co., Canal Street. I've been robbed by my ex-bookkeeper. Send detectives right away! There's over two thousand dollars stolen."

While central office detectives were examining the pried-open safe and old Dolman was bitterly cursing Tom Robbins and expressing an ardent desire to get hold of that young man, the people of Peekskill were expressing a similar desire and talking excitedly of the big fire which had occurred there, in the early hours of the morning.

The Robbins furniture factory had been burned almost to the ground.

The big building had burst into flame at 4 A.M. The local fire department had tried in vain to cope with the blaze.

Investigation showed that the fire was

of incendiary origin. It had started on the ground floor where a heap of rubbish had been piled and saturated with oil.

Peter Robbins stood watching the blaze, wringing his hands and calling upon the firemen to save his property.

Peekskill could not help laughing at his discomfiture. The fire put three hundred people out of employment, and for that Peekskill was, of course, sorry; but the people of Peekskill could not help rejoicing at the punishment that had come to Peter Robbins.

Because of their meanness and stinginess, neither he nor his father was popular.

Peter's fire-insurance had run out two days before. Peter had haggled with the company over a raise in premiums, and in the meantime had neglected to renew the policy. As a consequence the fire meant a total loss to him.

When he saw that his property was doomed he was crazed with grief and despair.

As for poor old John Robbins, when he heard the news he was seized with another stroke and was carried to his bed unconscious.

After the fire was over, one of the firemen discovered the following legend, scrawled in white chalk on the red brick wall of the cellar:

Revenge number two. I said I'd get square.
TOM ROBBINS.

CHAPTER IV.

CONFUSING CLUES.

THE fireman who discovered the writing on the cellar wall ran outside with a shout, to impart the information to the fire chief.

In his haste he collided with Peter Robbins, who was standing with sorrowful mien, gazing at the smoldering ruins of his furniture factory.

"Confound you!" snapped the unfortunate man, "can't you look where you're going?"

"Can't you look where I'm going!" retorted the fireman. "It's your business to get out of my way, you idiot. You've got no business standing here, anyway, interfering with the work of the firemen."

"Interfering with the work of the firemen!" sneered Peter. "A fine lot of work they do, for anybody to interfere with, don't they?"

He pointed a shaking finger at the smoking walls.

"I suppose I'm expected to feel grateful to you and your precious department for saving the ground my building stood on, eh? That's about all you have saved, darn you. That's what I pay my taxes for, is it—to support a fire department which gives me no help at all, in time of need?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Robbins," said the fireman. "I didn't recognize you or I wouldn't have spoken as I did. I don't blame you for being savage, seeing what you've lost. You shouldn't blame us firemen, however. We did the best we could. The fire was really too much for us. The man who set fire to your factory made too good a job of it, confound him."

"I'd like to learn who he is. I'd kill him," snarled Peter savagely.

"Well, I think I can give you a good clue to his identity," went on the fireman. "I've just made a discovery, Mr. Robbins. If you'll be so good as to follow me into the cellar I'll show you who's responsible for this dastardly outrage."

"Is he in there?" cried Peter eagerly.

"He ain't, but his name is. It's written on the cellar wall, in chalk. Follow me and I'll show it you."

Peter followed the fireman into the ruins and read the legend written on the red bricks.

"Tom Robbins!" he gasped. "So it was he, was it? I half suspected as much; but I didn't think he'd dare—curse him! By Heaven! he shall suffer for this. I'll show him no mercy. He'll go to prison for a good long term this time."

"The punishment for arson is pretty heavy, I reckon," remarked the fireman.

"Heavy! It couldn't be heavy enough to suit me! I wish the penalty were hanging! He should swing for it."

"He's your brother, ain't he?" observed the fireman. "I reckon you wouldn't want to see your own brother hanged, when it came to the point, Mr. Robbins."

"That's all you know about it," snarled Peter. "I'd stand by and see my own father hanged if he did me a scurvy trick like this. I wouldn't raise a hand to save him. If ever I catch Tom Robbins, it shall go hard with him. And I'm going to catch him, too, as sure as my name's Peter Robbins."

"There's one thing that puzzles me, Mr. Robbins," continued the fireman. "He says, there, 'Revenge number two.' Now I reckon that must mean that he's done something else which constitutes revenge number one. I wonder what that can be?"

"I suppose we'll find out later," said Peter. "In the meantime I'm going to notify the police and have him arrested as soon as possible."

He darted out of the ruins, his face so savage that it looked more like the face of a wild beast than that of a human being.

Among the crowd of spectators gathered around the scene, he espied the night watchman of the factory. He rushed at him and seized him by the throat.

"Confound you!" he yelled, "I paid you to watch this place at night. If you'd been doing your duty, this couldn't have happened, darn you. What were you doing all night? Sleeping?"

The watchman was a feeble old man, and the frenzied grasp of Peter's fingers on his throat almost choked him.

"Don't blame me, Mr. Robbins," he gurgled, when his angry employer, recollecting himself, suddenly released his hold. "It warn't my fault. I wasn't asleep, sir. I was on duty all night, so help me God; but I saw nobody enter the building. If I'd have seen him, I'd have stopped him, Mr. Robbins, I would indeed; but the man who set fire to your factory must have moved as silently as a cat, for he got in the place without letting me set eyes on him."

"You're a fine watchman, you are," snarled the enraged Peter. "I'll see that you're properly punished for this."

He darted off in search of the chief of police, and discovered that official on the outskirts of the crowd, talking to the fire chief.

"Chief Hawkins!" gasped Peter, "why are you standing here gossiping when there's work for you to do? Why don't you get after the man who set fire to my factory?"

"Why don't you tell me who he is first?" retorted the chief of police. "Don't you try to boss me, Mr. Robbins. I'm not one of your half-starved employees, I'm glad to say."

"I'll tell you who he is, if you haven't got the ability to find out for yourself," sneered Peter. "It was my scrapegrace half-brother, Tom Robbins, who did this dirty piece of work. Get after him and bring him here, alive or dead. I don't care which."

"Your brother Tom!" gasped the chief of police. "How do you know that, Mr. Robbins?"

"Because I've got a pair of eyes in my head, which you lack," sneered Peter. "Go into that cellar and see for yourself."

The chief of police and the fire chief went into the cellar and saw the handwriting on the wall.

"Gee whiz! That is a good clue, ain't it?" exclaimed the police chief to the fire chief. "It certainly does look as if this affair is up to Tom Robbins. I didn't know that he was in town. I'll get him, by gad, before many hours have passed. Just imagine his doing anything like that! I'm not surprised, though, for he's an ex-convict, and I suppose that, after a man's served a term in prison, he's capable of anything.

"I always liked Tom Robbins, though. He was always of a generous, affable disposition, quite different from his brother Peter, and his grouchy old father. I'm sorry to see Tom getting into more trouble. I never believed that he was guilty of that crime they charged him with in New York. However, this thing proves I was wrong, I guess."

An hour later the chief of police met Obadiah Smithers, the old newsdealer, who had risen from his bed to see the Robbins factory burn.

"I understand they suspect Tom Robbins of setting fire to the place, Chief Hawkins," he remarked.

"Yes," answered the chief, knowing the old man's propensity for gossip and trying to dodge.

"Well, if you've got a minute, chief, I think I can give you some important information."

"You can, eh? What is it?"

"Well, I reckon I was the first man who spoke to Tom Robbins when he struck Peekskill yesterday."

"You were, eh? What did he come here for?"

"To persuade his old father and Peter to receive him into the family again."

"And they wouldn't listen to him, eh?"

"No, sirree. I warned Tom he was going on a hopeless errand aforehand, but he reckoned he'd make a try anyway. Well, sir, I saw him when he was coming back from his father's house. He was real savage, and when I asked him how he had fared, what do you suppose were the words he used to me?"

"What?" asked the chief of police eagerly.

"He says to me: 'I'll get square with them. Don't you worry, Obadiah,' says he. 'I'll get square with them before many days have passed. They've shown me no mercy, and I'll show them none.' Them was the very words he used, Chief Hawkins. I reckoned you'd consider them important evidence?"

"You're quite right," rejoined the chief of police. "If we get him, as we shall, you'll make an important witness against him, Obadiah. The handwriting on the cellar wall would be damaging evidence enough, I guess; but with your testimony in addition, I reckon we'll fasten this crime on him without the shadow of a doubt."

"And do you think you'll catch him, chief?" asked Obadiah.

"I hope so," replied the chief fervently.

"Well, you'd better hurry up, Chief Hawkins, or the New York police will get him first," said the old man significantly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just this, chief, that the New York police are already on his track. They want him for something or other. I don't know just what. There was a New York detective here, late last night, looking for him."

"How do you know?" demanded Hawkins, in surprise.

"Because I happened to be sitting smoking at the door of my store, not feeling like going to bed, somehow or other. A smooth-looking fellow comes up and begins to ask me if I've seen Tom Robbins. I asked him what he wanted to know for, and then he tells me who he is and that they want Tom in New York."

"And did you admit to him that you had seen Tom?" asked Chief Hawkins anxiously.

"Yes, sir, I did. I told him all about our conversation. You see, I didn't expect then that this fire was going to happen, or I would have kept my mouth shut. Of course I'd prefer to see our local police force make the capture for this fire affair and get all the credit."

"The trouble with you, Obadiah, is that your tongue is bigger than the rest of your body put together," snapped the chief of police angrily. "If you'd kept your mouth shut about Tom Robbins being here, I'd have had this case all to myself. I don't want any of those New York fly cops floating around Peekskill. I'll wager they'll spoil the whole case."

"Well, come to think of it, chief," said Obadiah, "I reckon that New York detective has gone back to New York again."

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, when I told him about the unsatisfactory interview Tom had with his folks yesterday, the New York detective grunted and said, 'I guess after that throwdown, my man went straight back to New York. I reckon I'll go back to New York after him,' says he."

"He did, eh? Well, what made him suppose that Tom had gone back to New York?" asked Hawkins.

"I don't know, chief. You can search me. That was his idea, though. Of course he must have been wrong. If Tom had gone back to New York he couldn't have set fire to Robbins's factory early this morning, could he?"

"Well, it's possible," said the chief. "It's something like two hours by rail from here to New York, so he could easily have gone there, of course, and returned here early this morning to set fire to the factory. As a matter of fact, however, I don't think he did any such thing. My theory is, that after his unsatisfactory interview with his father and brother, Tom just hung around Peekskill until night-time, brooding over his hard luck and trying to think up a way

of getting square, until at last he thought of this dastardly piece of work and set fire to the factory. That's my idea. I think the New York detective is 'way off the track."

"I guess you're probably right, chief," admitted Obadiah. "I reckon Tom didn't leave Peekskill at all, as you say. Them New York policemen always think they know it all; but they ain't so smart at that."

But when the New York evening papers reached Peekskill late that afternoon, Obadiah and Chief Hawkins had reason to change their minds and agree that the New York detective had been right after all.

For the papers contained an account of the robbery of Dolman & Co.'s safe and the strange note left by Tom Robbins.

"Well, that settles it," remarked Chief Hawkins. "It's very plain now that Tom Robbins did go to New York, yesterday. I reckon I know just what his movements were. He went to New York, robbed Dolman's store, and then jumped on a freight and came back here to set fire to his brother's factory.

"He must be a desperate wretch. I wonder where he is now. Miles away by this time, I reckon. Wherever he is, I'll bet he's chuckling to think of the completeness of his revenge. I wonder how he'll feel about it, though, when he learns that he's killed his old father by setting fire to the factory?"

For old John Robbins had passed away that afternoon.

The old man never rallied from the shock he had received that morning on learning that the factory was in flames, and he died without uttering a single word.

CHAPTER V.

PANIC SUCCEEDS PEACE.

WHEN a certain freight-train reached Benford, which is a few stations farther up than Peekskill, a man jumped off.

The man was Tom Robbins. He didn't alight from the freight because he had any particularly reason for visiting Benford or any particular desire to jump off there.

He jumped off, as a matter of fact, to avoid being thrown off bodily.

Trainmen on freights have ways that are none too gentle in dealing with stowaways. And Tom Robbins was a stowaway.

He had boarded the freight at Peekskill, knowing that it was north bound, and that was all.

He didn't know how far the train was going and he didn't care. He had no particular destination in view. All he wanted was to get away from Peekskill.

Apart from that he had no plans, except that he had made up his mind to abandon the straight and narrow path forever, and to earn by force and roguery the living the world had denied him.

A freight-train came along, chanced to slow down a little as it reached him, and obeying an impulse he climbed stealthily aboard the bumpers of one of the cars.

When the train reached Benford, Tom heard the conductor approaching his perch, and as the train happened to be going just then at a pace slow enough to make jumping possible, he jumped.

That is how Tom Robbins happened to arrive at Benford.

"Well, I'm here," he said to himself with a mirthless little laugh. "I guess this place is as good as any. What am I going to do now? It's all very well for me to make up my mind I'm going to lead a crooked life; but how am I going about it? Shall it be forgery? I was always good at imitating people's handwriting. I reckon I ought to make a pretty successful forger.

"Or shall I branch out as a hold-up man? I guess with a piece of lead-pipe or a gun I ought to be able to scare timid folks into giving me enough money to support me. I look desperate enough, by gum! Or shall I try my hand as a burglar? That seems a lucrative line. Might try it. I suppose I'd be nabbed pretty soon; but it would be excitement while it lasted."

The situation appealed to his sense of humor and he laughed again, this time not without a ring of mirth.

"Oh, well," he ruminated, "I guess I'll not make up my mind as to just what line of crime I'll pursue. I won't have any specialty. I'll trust to luck and take advantage of opportunities, as they come

along. If I meet a prosperous-looking man on a lonely country road and he looks weak enough, I'll knock him down and take his money from him; if I see a store window which looks easy to enter, I'll break in and rob the till; if I get a chance to forge a check, I'll do it. I'll take whatever comes along. I'll live by my wits and the strength of my arm. That's about the best policy, I reckon.

"In the meantime I'll walk around some and look this place over."

He strode across fields and pastures until he reached the town. Suddenly he found himself on the bank of Benford Creek. He stood for a few minutes looking at the swift-flowing water as it raced toward the Hudson.

As he stood there a thought entered his brain, the same thought which has occurred to many a desperate man standing at the brink of a river.

Why not end it all? It would be so easy. The water looked so peaceful and inviting. A jump—a splash—a struggle to overcome the instinct to swim—for he was an accomplished swimmer—and it would be all over.

Why hesitate? The suggestion was a very tempting one, but he shook it off firmly.

Life wasn't worth the living, and yet he wanted to live. He did not want to die, just yet. He wanted to get square with the world first. He wanted to revenge himself on his own flesh and blood by disgracing the name they bore.

No, he would not jump; not just now, anyway.

And yet he could not tear himself away from the spot. He stood there like an animal fascinated by the proximity of a snake.

On the opposite bank of the creek, a girl sat in a round-bottom boat, fishing with a drop-line.

Tom Robbins found himself watching this girl without knowing why he was doing so. He didn't care a snap of the finger for all the girls in the world, and he certainly did not care whether or not this girl caught any fish.

And yet he found himself watching intently the casting and drawing in of the line.

The girl possessed more patience than luck, for she did not catch a single fish while Tom Robbins was there.

She evidently arrived at the conclusion, finally, that the reason for her lack of success was that she was dropping her line too near the boat, for she stood up to cast the hook farther out.

She swung the lead sinker around her head three times and let go.

Of course, the hook should have buried itself in the water several feet away from the boat; but it did nothing of the kind. What the hook actually did was to bury itself deep in the thumb of the girl's other hand, and she gave a scream of terror and pain.

Tom saw at a glance what would happen, and uttered a shout of warning.

(To be continued.)

LOCKED IN.

By GARRET SMITH.

A summer story with a decidedly cold interlude and a hot finish.

AN alluring hiding-place the ice-house had seemed.

The mercury stood at ninety degrees over the Fleetwood Valley, but to Percy Wilson it seemed like nine hundred. All that afternoon he and his gay house-party had been racing over the hills in a reversion to childhood taking the form of the game of hide-and-seek.

Hence the joy in the cool, dark, sawdust-carpeted recesses to which Percy had betaken himself as a happy thought.

But being locked in that delightful hiding-place was altogether different.

The game had been Don Sheldon's idea. Percy now sat on a pile of sawdust and said unpleasant things about Don.

He cursed that innocent youth's erstwhile joyous notion in a manner that bade fair to melt the ice and blow off the roof.

He also paid his compliments to old Jonas, his father's man, who had carelessly left the ice-house door open that afternoon.

And, in addition, he called down celestial wrath on the deaf ears of aforesaid Jonas, which had failed to note his young master's warning cry when, remembering the open door, he had returned, closed, and locked it before Percy, within, fully realized what had happened.

Jonas withdrew with a clear conscience.

Percy stayed right there. In fact, he saw a possibility of keeping right on remaining all night and then part of the next day. For Percy had let none of the others in on his brilliant scheme of hiding in the ice-house.

This exclusiveness on the part of Percy also furnished a theme for a short season of malediction on his own head.

Finally he stopped apostrophizing, and thought it over.

The crowd would hunt for him as a part of the game till dinner-time. That would be two hours. Not having found him then, they would become alarmed.

Percy, still enjoying the constitutional rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and failing to show up at dinner, was an unthinkable proposition.

From then on they would drag the lake and hunt for his mangled body at the bottom of cliffs and tall trees.

That would continue indefinitely. Come to think of it, he couldn't hope for release by Jonas coming for ice the next day. Persons searching for the body of a missing son and heir don't bother much about cool drinks.

Percy musingly trickled sawdust through his fingers and thought out a nice, neat epitaph he might have written on the ice-house door before entering if he had foreseen the outcome.

Also, he recalled pleasantly the legend of the facetious princess-bride who hid from her husband in the chest with the spring-lock. He chanted to himself the lines about finding her skeleton in the chest some fifty years later.

But it was ceasing to be a joke with Percy. Ice is commonly known to possess a temperature below the freezing-point. It likewise has an unpleasant habit of imparting this not exactly genial temperature to adjacent bodies, including those of athletic young men in light linen suits.

Furthermore, the walls of ice-houses don't let outside heat in, even when it is ninety degrees in the shade. That's not what ice-house walls are for.

Percival was growing decidedly chilly. He shouted and kicked the walls of his prison. This occupation he kept up pretty steadily for two hours. It kept him from freezing; but walls that shut out heat shut in sound.

All attempts to smash the door in—or, rather, out—failed.

At length, completely exhausted, Percy sank back on the sawdust, and for the first time realized the full horror of his position.

There was not the slightest chance of any one hearing his cries or opening the ice-house within twelve hours at least. It was located in a hollow, tree-shaded spot some distance from the house.

Meantime, he might be frozen to death.

And only a few feet away the heat stood at ninety degrees!

In a frenzy, he again attacked the door, using the ladder as a battering-ram. But the rivets and heavy hinges were unmoved. He beat the dead walls. He shouted again and again. All sounds were smothered.

Again he sank exhausted. Striking a match and looking at his watch, he found he had been a prisoner two hours and a half. It might well have been measured in years. At the house they would be waiting dinner for him.

Between exertion and hunger, his limbs refused further motion. That numbing chill was creeping over him.

A little longer in the blackness he stumbled about over the sawdust, more and more slowly and uncertainly, feebly throwing his arms about him in an attempt to keep the fast-ebbing bodily heat stirring in his veins.

Again he struck a match to note the time. Three hours and a half of this!

By now his friends must be searching the valley. Would any kind spirit suggest to old Jonas the possibility that the neglected ice-house door had invited him to enter? Jonas, alas, wasn't given to useful ideas!

Suddenly a wild notion struck Percy. He would burn himself out.

Choosing the door as the dryest part of the little building, he felt his way there, and, with his jack-knife, turned up a few splinters along a groove in the pine board. Then making a small torch of a handful of coarser shavings from the side of the ladder, he lighted it and held it up to the kindlers on the door.

They burned dully in the exhausted air. Then in a moment he realized that his attempt was wildly foolish. He would simply fill his little breathing-space with smoke that would smother him as well as the futile blaze.

He dropped his torch and reached up with his cap to put out the little fire. As he did so he wafted a puff of smoke into his nostrils, strangled, and toppled over to the sawdust, a helpless, huddled heap of despair.

His head was like so much lead. His body was numb.

He lay for only a moment, it seemed, when he felt in his brain the dreamy sensation of a freezing man. He shook himself together and staggered to his feet again.

He chafed his wooden fingers till he felt the sting of returning blood. Then, hardly thinking what he did, he drew his knife and fell to whittling desperately at a crack in the wall.

It was preposterous to think of cutting his way to freedom with a pocket-knife through those two layers of planks and the packing between. But he might possibly cut an opening big enough to shout through.

At length, after an hour of whittling, his knife struck a harder wood. He had simply gone through the plank at a point where it was backed by a four-inch oak beam.

As he was about to throw down his knife in final despair, there came a new idea like a veritable Heaven-sent inspiration.

Renewed hope was a tonic. He hewed the hole in the plank a little larger, then, shoving his knife-blade between the plank and the beam, he slowly hacked out tiny shavings till he had made a groove into which he could slip his finger.

Into this he pushed a tight wooden wedge whittled from the side of the ladder. Against the wedge he placed a bit of ice and warmed it with his breath till water ran into the groove and soaked the wedge.

If the ancients could split marble by that process, he could tear off a plank from a beam in the same way.

In a few minutes the swelling wedge had made a little gap between the plank and the beam. Into this he inserted another dry wedge and proceeded as before.

So he alternated, each wedge a little larger, till the plank was an inch from the beam.

Percy still had strength enough to break a round from the ladder. Inserting this under the plank as a lever, he threw his whole weight back on the end of it.

The plank gave way and came off. Removing the sawdust packing, he laid bare the outer plank. This he attacked with knife and wedges as before.

But his strength was fast failing. Progress was slower and slower. At length, however, the plank gave way a little and a current of air poured in. Then he fell by the crevice, too weak to force the plank farther.

Suddenly he became aware of a peculiar warmth. He opened his eyes. There was a light in his prison. Turning his head, he understood.

Instead of freezing, he was simply going to burn to death.

This is what had happened.

When he had given up his first mad attempt to burn his way out, his glowing torch had dropped unnoticed in some dry sawdust at the foot of the ladder. There it had smoldered with too little air to burst into flame. But with the advent of fresh oxygen, it had suddenly blazed up.

The ladder and door were well dried from exposure to the sun when the trap was open. The whole building was of resinous pine. The flames leaped through it like tinder.

Before Percy could move he was in a fiery furnace.

With the instinct of a cornered animal, Percy clawed back the sawdust in the center of the place, lay down, and threw it back over him like a cool, wet blanket.

The roof timbers began to fall. Several times he was nearly suffocated with smoke. Each time a puff of wind through the roof, now burnt open, blew

the flames aside for a moment and gave him a breathing-spell through an air-hole he had left in the sawdust.

At length the saving draft failed him a little too long. There was a moment of horrible choking for breath. Then everything faded away.

Percy opened his eyes in the light of a lantern. Don Sheldon was stooping over him. Millie Porter was bathing his face with cold water.

He was lying on a grassy slope near the lake shore. Turning his head inquiringly, he saw the smoldering ruin of the ice-house a little way off.

It had not been a dream, then.

"Thank God! He's come to!" exclaimed Don. "Say, old man, you had a close call. If that pile of ice hadn't toppled over when the wall burned away and rolled you out at our feet, you'd have stayed right up there and roasted. We never dreamed of your being around here. We thought you had played a joke on us this afternoon and gone across to the Hathaways' to dinner. We never thought of hunting after dinner-time."

SECRET ENEMIES.*

By F. K. SCRIBNER,

Author of "A Conflict with Cæsar," "The Eagle of Empire," "The Ravens of the Rhine," etc.

The man with a difficult trust to execute in a strange country and threatened by foes whom he has no means of knowing.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

ARRIVING in Paris to visit his friend, Victor de Marrast, Sir Harold Campbell discovers that the marquis has been consigned to the Bastile through a *lettre de cachet* in the hands of some powerful enemy. Campbell sets out in haste for the Château Bleaumont to aid Mlle. de Marrast, whom he has reason to believe is also in danger. At an inn some distance from Foulon he is overtaken by a man who has evidently trailed him from Paris. Escape being impossible, he turns to meet the stranger, his hand on the pistol in his pocket.

CHAPTER V.

NEW MOVES OF THE ENEMY.

THE door opened and a man crossed the threshold. For a moment the poor light bothered him and he peered forward, craning his neck sidewise. But although he did not in the first instant discern Campbell, the latter had no difficulty in recognizing the intruder.

It was the somber-faced servant who had admitted him to the Hôtel de Marrast.

Then the man saw him and took a quick step forward.

"It is you, *monsieur?*" cried he eagerly.

"So it would seem. Well?" replied Campbell sharply.

He had discovered one of the enemy—the traitor who had sold his master.

"They told me that you were asleep. It is fortunate, most fortunate, that you tarried here, *monsieur,*" murmured the other.

His manner of address was hardly what might be expected from an enemy who had ridden at breakneck speed from Paris to overtake him, but though Campbell was surprised, he did not for an instant relax his guard. He did not propose to be tricked so easily.

"So you expected to find me asleep? You see, I sleep lightly, my friend," said he coldly. Then he added in anger:

"But why did you expect to find me at all? You have followed me from Paris. Why?"

The man was plainly wearied, and the perspiration was rolling down his face. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

* *Began August* ARGOSY. *Single copies 10 cents.*

"*Monsieur,*" he stammered, "I have hastened after you from the Hôtel de Marrast, though I am unused to being mounted upon a horse."

Campbell smiled grimly.

"And so you have hastened after me. Well, now that you have found me, what then?"

The man coughed violently.

"Listen, *monsieur,*" said he in a weak voice. "I see you take me for an enemy—an enemy to my master, the Marquis de Marrast; and you are wondering why I am here."

Campbell made an impatient gesture.

"If it is for the purpose of detaining me, it will be the worse for you. Get out of my way!" said he gruffly, and took a step forward.

He no longer feared violence; the fellow was on the verge of collapse. He stretched out his hand and seized him by the collar; the other hung limp in his grasp, only opening and shutting his mouth rapidly.

Campbell thrust him aside with such force that his body crashed against the wall. The hostler, standing in the hall, was gaping, open-mouthed; the young Scotchman spoke sternly:

"My horse! What are you staring at?"

Then, suddenly, the man who had ridden from Paris collected himself by a powerful effort.

"*Monsieur!*" he cried hoarsely. "For God's sake, *monsieur*, listen to me, if you would save Mlle. de Marrast!"

Campbell turned sharply. There was a note of agony in the man's voice which could not be mistaken. The fellow stretched out his arms.

"Kill me afterward if you will, but first listen. It is a terrible night I have passed, *monsieur.*"

"If it is a trick, I shall certainly kill you. Come, out with it!" said Campbell sternly, and slammed the door in the hostler's face.

The man swallowed convulsively.

"*Monsieur,*" he stammered.

"Well, I am waiting," replied Campbell.

The other leaned heavily against one of the tables.

"*Monsieur,*" he went on, "I have served the Marquis de Marrast for eight years. *Mademoiselle* is my friend. I owe her more than I can repay."

"That is evident," replied Campbell coldly, but the fellow's manner convinced him that there was no trickery brewing.

"If the marquis were here he would not doubt me," continued the man. "Believe me, *monsieur,* since they took him away yesterday I have been almost beside myself. I desired to do much—to tear him from the hands of the soldiers—but I was powerless. Even as the Comte de Plauex was powerless in that dreadful hour."

"Well?" said Campbell sharply.

"I could do nothing, learn nothing, until last night—when you came. I was being observed; that miserable Jacques was watching me."

"Jacques?" demanded Campbell.

"The under-butler. I felt his eyes always upon me. I wanted to strangle him, for it was he who admitted the officer who came to take our master to the Bastile. Had I opened the door, *monsieur,* I should have slammed it quickly; then it might have been possible for the marquis to escape. Perhaps you remember Jacques, *monsieur?* It was he who passed you in the corridor when I had taken you up-stairs."

Campbell recalled the incident, but he had not noted the man's face particularly. So the fellow who had admitted the officer, and had without doubt opened the letter on the library table, was the under-butler of the Hôtel de Marrast.

His companion continued:

"When you knocked I did not want to admit you, *monsieur,* for I feared everybody. I even presumed, when, by the count's orders, I had locked you in the library, to station myself beside the little door hidden from your sight by the draperies; not the door by which the count entered, but another on the opposite side of the apartment. Well, it was not very long after the count had joined you that I discovered that I was not the only listener. The door through which he had come was, as you know, also concealed by curtains; after the count passed into the room some one stationed himself behind those curtains. I could detect him peeping through the aperture. It was that miserable Jacques.

"I heard everything that was said in the room; heard you read that terrible letter, *monsieur*. I began to tremble so violently I feared you would hear me. It was worse than I thought—not only my master, but also *mademoiselle*. All that time Jacques was listening, though he knew almost everything beforehand. Then, finally, you declared that you would save *mademoiselle;* would ride to Foulon that night. That was evidently what Jacques was waiting to hear, for at once he left his hiding-place.

"I followed his example, for I suspected he was going to leave the house—perhaps waylay you on the boulevard, and so prevent your going to Foulon to save *mademoiselle*. I think if he had tried to depart I should have killed him and taken the consequences. I was sure then that he had betrayed the marquis.

"But he did not intend to leave the house, for when I ran down the main corridor, unlocking the library door as I passed, he was near the foot of the stairs, and I followed so cautiously he did not suspect. He hurried to the rear of the building, opened a window, and looked down on the little alley running back to a branch of the main boulevard. It was through that way the marquis might have escaped.

"As I have said, Jacques leaned out of the window, and I quite close behind him. It would have been so easy to give one push and he would have fallen head-first to the pavement, ten feet below; that would have closed his mouth. Well, for a moment he looked out, and then gave a low, sharp whistle. It must have been the signal to some one, for after several seconds he began to speak rapidly. He was telling some one in the alley that you were going to Foulon to warn *mademoiselle*.

"You will understand, *monsieur*, that all this happened in a few moments. I had just time to jump back when he shut the window. It would have been I who would have felt the knife had he found me there; I am sure of that. So I waited until he had disappeared, and then went back to the main hall; at that moment you were descending the stairs. You remember, *monsieur?*"

"Yes," said Campbell shortly. "And have you ridden from Paris to tell me that some one was aware I am *en route* for Foulon? You might have told me there in the hall."

"*Monsieur* does not comprehend; Jacques was leaning over the banister at the head of the stairs. Do not think I feared so much for my own life. Only I thought this: if I can work in the dark I may be of some value; if they know that I know I will be watched, perhaps put out of the way. In either case how could I assist *mademoiselle?*"

Campbell looked at the fellow curiously. And the man had ridden during half of the night to tell him what he knew perfectly, that his journey to Foulon was not a secret. But he understood it was done in good faith through a desire to serve Mlle. de Marrast. For he believed that his companion had told the truth.

"What is your name, my friend?" he asked; then added: "I shall not forget to speak of this to the marquis when—I see him."

"Jean Labrie. I have the honor to serve as butler to the Marquis de Marrast," the man answered.

Campbell turned toward the door.

"Well, Jean Labrie, you are an honest fellow, and in the marquis's name I thank you for what you have done. Plainly you are exhausted. Remain here for a few hours—eat and sleep. I will pay."

The butler put out his hand in the quick, peculiar gesture which was habitual with him when in a state of excitement.

"But, *monsieur*," he stammered.

Campbell paused, his foot upon the threshold; he was impatient to be gone.

"I have not told you everything—what impelled me to mount a horse and follow you from Paris, the most important thing of all, *monsieur*."

Campbell took his hand from the knob of the door.

"You have something more to tell me?" he demanded.

"This, *monsieur:* at the first opportunity, as soon as Jacques left the hotel, which was shortly after you had gone, I followed you to the inn kept by Pierre Beschade."

"The inn near the Pont au Change—you followed me there?"

"To tell you what I had learned, for I hoped to find you before you had left Paris."

"And you failed. Speak quickly, my friend."

"You were not there, and I did not dare inquire of the landlord if any one had demanded a horse within the past half-hour. You see, I feared Jacques or one of his companions might be about and discover that I knew something. You may be sure, *monsieur,* I was terribly disappointed and did not know which way to turn. Then it struck me that the best thing I could do, seeing I was there, was to drink a bottle of wine; it would sharpen my wits. And, besides, I had not tasted a thing since before they took the marquis away.

"The main room was full, and I had no desire for company. I knew that on the second floor, overlooking the river, were private rooms where for a franc one might drink in peace. I went upstairs, gave my order to a waiter in the hall, and entered the first vacant alcove. The window was open and a little table beside it. I sat down, the most miserable man in all Paris.

"I had drank half the bottle of wine and was gaining renewed courage, when voices came to me through the window. At first I did not notice them particularly, for I understood that others had entered the alcove next to mine. The window of that one was also open, so to hear everything was not difficult if one chose to listen. Suddenly I pricked up my ears. Through the window a name came to me; it was that of my master, the Marquis de Marrast.

"I can tell you, *monsieur,* if I was indifferent before, now I became all attention. Perhaps it was only idle gossip—for in the taverns they gossip freely about one who has been imprisoned in the Bastile—but the idea came into my head that I should hear something important. I leaned forward, resting my elbows on the sill, and listened.

"'De Marrast will trouble no one, but there is that fool of an Englishman. No one ever knows what those English may do,' said one of those in the next room.

"'Do not bother yourself about *that,* my friend,' replied another.

"'But the fellow has ridden away; he may reach Foulon in the morning.'

"I heard a short laugh.

"'To be put under arrest. The police will be on the watch for him.'"

Campbell's face showed the surprise he felt at this unexpected statement.

"Then the police of Foulon are on the side of our enemies?" said he grimly.

Labrie made a little gesture.

"Because, *monsieur,* it has been represented to them that you have stolen a horse and ridden out of Paris."

"Stolen a horse! I?"

His companion permitted a smile to cross his sphinxlike face.

"You see it is this way, *monsieur,*" he explained. "It would appear that you succeeded in obtaining a horse, how or where I know not, but your enemies discovered it quickly. It seems that Beschade rushed up to some one, declaring with tears of rage that an Englishman, who had but lately arrived at his inn, had demanded of him a horse. He had stated that none could be obtained that night, but that something might be accomplished in the morning.

"Now, it happened a horseman had ridden up to the door and had left the beast standing while he went inside to refresh himself. Between his sobs the landlord declared the Englishman had slipped through the door, mounted the horse, and ridden off before any one observed what he was doing. He declared it meant ruin to him, for the owner of the horse would demand that he pay."

Campbell, though astonished beyond measure, could not repress a smile. He understood why the landlord had lied so cleverly.

"So that is the story, and of course every one in the inn knew that I had obtained what I desired," he said. "But how, pray, should the police of Foulon, eighteen leagues from the Pont au Change, know that a horse-thief was likely to arrive among them at the end of a few hours?"

"It but proves, *monsieur,* how clever are your enemies," answered Jean Labrie. "Now, it is certain that it is the desire of some one that you do not arrive at the Château Bleaumont too soon. In fact, they are a little afraid of what you might discover, *monsieur.* Well, the

story which the landlord told suited them exactly; to have you seïzed by the police and detained, if only for a few days, would be excellent. You perceive, in that event, the police would be doing their work.

"At once they put their heads together, and it resulted in some one being sent post-haste out of Paris and across the country to Foulon; some one who knew the road and could arrive ahead of you, if only an hour. For this messenger to repeat the landlord's story to the police must result in your arrest the minute you set foot in Foulon. Doubtless you would be liberated afterward, if you could furnish proof that—you did not steal the horse, *monsieur.*"

Campbell's face had become intensely grave.

"And did you hear this fine plot through the window?" he asked.

"That is what I heard, *monsieur.*"

Campbell bit his lip; he realized perfectly that he had been checkmated in fine fashion. To go on to Foulon meant, perhaps, some days of detention by the authorities; and it was imperative there be no further delays in reaching Mlle. de Marrast.

Just in what lay her danger he could only guess, but the marquis understood and had urged him not to lose an hour.

Labrie was watching his face narrowly. The young man turned to him almost fiercely.

"How far is the château from Foulon—surely not in the town itself?" he demanded.

"About a league—to the west," was the answer.

Campbell straightened himself like a soldier going into action.

"Then," said he calmly, "I will reach the château, and your police can go to the devil. It is not necessary to pass through Foulon at all."

For the second time he turned toward the door, and for the second time the words and manner of the butler restrained him. With the characteristic of his class, the fellow had been working up to a climax. Campbell saw he had something more to say and waited.

"It is true that *monsieur* might reach the château without riding too near Foulon, but—it is no longer necessary for *monsieur* to go to the château; within three hours *mademoiselle* will have started for Paris!"

For a moment Campbell remained speechless. During that moment it flashed into his head that the fellow had either tricked him, or else had lost his senses.

He made a sudden movement, as though to take him by the collar for the second time. The man drew back a step.

"Listen, *monsieur,*" said he in a grave voice. "What I have told you I learned last night at the tavern. I learned something else, also."

"Then out with it, in God's name!" cried Campbell.

"Oh, they told me plain enough. It was that no later than yesterday afternoon, a moment after the marquis had been arrested, a horseman departed from Paris for the château. He was to tell *mademoiselle* that her presence was required at the Hôtel de Marrast, and that no time was to be wasted. He must have reached her by now, and she will obey the summons, thinking harm has befallen the marquis. She will order the coach to be in readiness at once, for she will think only of hastening back to Paris."

Against his inclination Campbell was forced to accept the truth of this statement. He saw that he had to deal with supreme cunning; that the man who had sent the marquis to the Bastile knew how to play his cards well.

Mlle. de Marrast, knowing nothing of what had occurred in Paris, would believe the summons came from her brother; perhaps she would be tricked by a forged letter. She would, indeed, lose no time in leaving the château.

Then another thought flashed into Campbell's mind, a hope at which he grasped eagerly:

"But *mademoiselle* will come by this road; by going on I cannot help but meet her."

Labrie shook his head.

"And what would that profit you, *monsieur?* In the first place, there may be several with her, and what could you do against even two or three if it came to violence? And in the second, even if you got speech with her, what might she decide? You are a stranger, *monsieur.* Would she believe you?"

Campbell realized this was only common sense, but made one last effort.

"But the marquis's letter? It would be sufficient proof to her."

"And do you think, *monsieur*, that they would permit her to read that letter? The man who rode from Paris last night will have joined them and they will be on the watch for you."

"But if they had planned to entice *mademoiselle* to leave the château, why such precautions to prevent me reaching a cage from which the bird has already flown?"

"Because they do not know what you may do. The good folk of Foulon have ears and some may believe; it is even possible certain ones might ride after the coach if you exhibited the marquis's letter. In Foulon they love *mademoiselle*, for she helps the poor. Oh, that Jacques was a blockhead, after all; having read the letter, he should have destroyed it or put it in his pocket, then no one would have known what the marquis had written. But now it is feared you may show the letter to the honest people of Foulon, whose suspicions are easily aroused."

"I understand," Campbell replied; "yet, if I remain here and permit them to take *mademoiselle* to Paris she is surely lost."

"I do not think so, *monsieur*," answered Jean Labrie gravely. "A coach travels slowly, and it is eighteen leagues to Paris. They must stop here, or at some inn not far away, for the night; that, or go forward in the darkness. Now, what one cannot do by daylight may be accomplished under other conditions. We will wait, *monsieur*. Who knows what opportunity may arise between now and to-morrow morning?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE FACE IN THE CANDLE-LIGHT.

CAMPBELL had misgivings as to the outcome of the plan his companion suggested, but realized that he must, perforce, adopt it if he hoped to accomplish anything.

But Jean Labrie did not appear to be troubled with doubts. The man was utterly worn out and desired sleep above all things. Going to a room in the tavern, he threw himself upon the bed and in ten minutes was snoring soundly.

The remainder of the morning dragged heavily to Campbell. More than once he envied the peaceful sleep of the butler, whose zeal certainly equaled his own, but whose temperament permitted him to forget his anxieties.

Once seated on the grass beneath a tree at the rear of the inn, the Scotchman lost himself; but his brief slumber was troubled, and, although he felt somewhat refreshed, he awoke restless and ill at ease. He wondered what Victor de Marrast would have done had their positions been reversed.

It was in the early afternoon when Labrie joined him, his eyes heavy with sleep, but no longer drooping from weariness. Although the man must have felt that, under the circumstances, he should be treated with consideration, he retained his deferential manner, that of the well-trained servant in the presence of a superior.

Monsieur would pardon him, he ventured, for having slept so soundly, and had *monsieur* been provided with a suitable luncheon during his absence?

And when Campbell acknowledged that he had partaken that day only of a cup of coffee and a roll, Labrie hurried off to interview the powers which controlled the inn. Campbell had learned ere this that the landlord had gone to Paris, leaving the reins of government in the hands of his hostler.

And this hostler and Jean Labrie struck up a wonderful friendship; to what purpose Campbell was to learn directly.

The afternoon dragged with lagging steps; if Mlle. de Marrast had, indeed, left Foulon that morning, the coach could not be many miles away. Despite his habitual coolness, Campbell's pulses began to beat more quickly.

It was close to six o'clock when Labrie appeared suddenly before him.

"*Monsieur's* supper is served," said he. Then, after a moment's hesitation: "If *monsieur* will permit, there are certain things I will speak of while *monsieur* is dining."

Campbell nodded; somehow or other he was beginning to have great respect

for this quiet, sober-faced French servant, who, it seemed, always opened his mouth to some good purpose.

When they were alone Labrie made that quick little gesture which showed that inwardly he was laboring under excitement.

"*Monsieur,*" he began, "I have taken the liberty to make certain arrangements, which I submit for your approval. *Monsieur* will pardon me?"

"Certainly; go on, my friend," answered Campbell.

"I have enlisted Fortier in your behalf, *monsieur.*"

"And who is Fortier?"

"The hostler—who is more than anxious to assist us in whatever we may choose to do to-night."

"But how can he help us?" Campbell wanted to know.

Labrie began to explain.

"You see, it is this way, *monsieur.* We do not know much about this neighborhood, and it is necessary to know something in order to work in the dark. Now, this Fortier is perfectly familiar with everything; for instance, he has told me that the nearest inn between here and Foulon is ten miles away. It is, therefore, probable a coach which left Foulon early this morning would not stop for the night at that place; rather, it would push on and arrive here a little after nightfall."

"Proceed, my friend," said Campbell shortly.

"Well, it is an excellent idea to send out scouts when one is preparing to do battle, but I figured out that our forces were not large enough for that, *monsieur.* Therefore, I determined to enlist the aid of Fortier."

"But is the fellow to be trusted? A single slip and our efforts will end in failure."

"*Monsieur,*" continued Labrie gravely. "I had only to mention the name of Reveillon; from that moment the hostler began to beg to become one with us."

"And who is Reveillon? What has *he* to do with this matter?" demanded Campbell.

"Ah! I had forgotten that *monsieur* is a stranger to France. This Reveillon is the most hated of all men in the kingdom, among certain classes. It was he, once a poor man himself, who advocated the reduction of all wages. For that he was decorated by the king with the order of the Black Ribbon."

"And what, in God's name, has that to do with our affairs?"

"Just this. I said to Fortier: 'Listen! Do you know why *monsieur,* in there, is here? Why he has ridden so desperately from Paris? Well, I do not mind telling you, for I believe you to be a friend of the people. *Monsieur* has received word that his sister, who has been residing at a château near Foulon, has aroused the passion of a certain gentleman in Paris?

"'Of course, she would have nothing to do with him, therefore he has taken matters into his own hands. He has caused her to be kidnaped from the château and she is at this moment being carried to Paris, a prisoner. This abductor is no other than Reveillon, late of the Faubourg St. Antoine.'

"'What are you saying? This Reveillon is carrying off a girl?' he demanded.

"Then he began to ask questions, which I answered as best suited me. The result is that he will go through fire and water to rescue *mademoiselle,* for he hates this Reveillon worse than poison. He even proposes to send the stable-boys along the road toward Foulon to discover if a coach is approaching. Therefore, instead of two, *monsieur,* there are now five of us."

As he concluded Labrie began to rub his hands gently together.

Campbell could scarcely conceal his admiration for the fellow's ingenuity. He arose from the table with a lighter heart than he had had for hours.

"Well, and what next?" he inquired.

"Already the stable-boys have departed. We have only to wait here," replied Labrie quietly.

It was three hours later and twilight was falling when a youth, dust-begrimed and out of breath, dashed up to the inn. He reported that a coach guarded by three horsemen was approaching.

The hostler, who had received the news, lost no time in conveying it to Campbell.

"They will stop here, *monsieur,* if

only for supper, for there is not another inn nearer than two leagues, on the way to Paris. Conceal yourself. I will attend to this matter. That beast of a Reveillon will understand what it is to gain the enmity of the people."

Campbell followed this advice, but took care to station himself in an upper room, from the window of which he could see and hear what took place before the door.

Half an hour later a coach covered with dust pulled up before the inn. The three horsemen who accompanied it dismounted, and upon the porch stood Fortier to receive them.

One of the riders tossed his reins to the stable-boy.

"We desire some refreshments," said he gruffly to the hostler.

"Very good, *monsieur;* and, seeing that your horses are almost spent, I presume lodging also? Well, fortunately, we have rooms and to spare, for the house is empty," replied Fortier.

The man glanced at the horses, which indeed were covered with sweat. He seemed to hesitate.

A girlish voice issued from the open window of the coach.

"We must go on. Surely, an hour's rest will be sufficient," it cried.

The hostler shrugged his shoulders.

"*Monsieur* will pardon me, but I am somewhat of a judge of horse-flesh, and your beasts cannot drag the coach fifteen miles farther; the gates of Paris are almost twice that distance," he ventured.

As if to lend weight to his words, one of the horses at that moment began to breathe so loudly that the noise could be heard some distance off.

The horseman consulted with his companions.

"The devil!" answered one gruffly. "And why should we rush forward when both men and beasts are weary? For my part, I desire most of all a good meal and a comfortable bed."

The third horseman nodded

"I am also of that opinion," he added.

The first approached the coach, and thrust his head through the window. What he said was not distinguishable, but it was plain he was carrying on an argument. Finally he turned to Fortier.

"We will stay—and, understand, it is to be your best rooms." He opened the coach-door.

The slender form of a girl descended to the roadway. Peeping through the window, Campbell could see her face but imperfectly, for a wide-brimmed hat shaded it, and besides, the light was not good.

He heard a sharp expression at his elbow; it was Jean Labrie, who was peering over his shoulder.

"It is Mlle. de Marrast!" whispered the butler in an agitated voice.

During the next few hours Campbell was obliged to curb his impatience, but at length the time for action arrived. Labrie brought him word that those who had come with the coach had retired.

"And Mlle. de Marrast?" he asked.

"*Mademoiselle* occupies one of the lower rooms. Those on either side of her have been taken by the escort. The third has remained in the public room, evidently for the purpose of keeping watch. The driver of the coach is in the servants' quarters," explained Labrie.

"Then it is evident they suspect something," suggested Campbell; "otherwise all would have retired."

"You must remember, *monsieur*, that having seen nothing of you upon the road, they do not know where you are. In fact, they questioned the hostler, asking if a horseman had passed the inn during the day. Fortier knew how to reply, so, being at a loss to understand what has become of you, they have deemed it wise to take precautions, so you would not take them by surprise."

Labrie hesitated for a moment, then continued:

"Of course, *mademoiselle* understands nothing of this affair, and it is first necessary to explain everything to her, else not only will she refuse to leave the inn, but will raise an outcry and arouse every one. Now, I have been thinking, *monsieur*, that—well, it might be wise to have some one see her whom she knows perfectly."

"I understand," answered Campbell. "It is for you to inform *mademoiselle* why I am here."

"That is what I suggest. And you, *monsieur*—well, you see the door leading

from the public room into the hall is open, and that of *mademoiselle* is only a few feet away on the opposite side of the corridor. Now, it will be necessary for me to enter her room, but while I am there it will not be well for any one to overhear what we are saying; this would be possible if the man in the public room should take it into his head to cross the hall and listen at the keyhole."

"Ah!" replied Campbell grimly, "I see I need remain idle no longer. Go about your errand, my friend. I promise you no one will listen outside of *mademoiselle's* door."

Labrie slipped out of the little upper room in which they had been talking. After a moment Campbell followed, but while the other had turned to the left and descended the back stairs of the inn, he took the opposite direction and went down the front stairs quietly.

The lower hall was in darkness, except where the light from the open door of the public room cast a broad band across the floor. Campbell, standing on the lower step, was quite invisible, though he was within six feet of the entrance to the public room.

Five minutes slipped by, then suddenly a dark form appeared in the open doorway. For a moment the man stood peering into the darkened hall; then he muttered half angrily:

"Well, if I must stay awake when others are enjoying slumber, it will be more comfortable on the porch than cooped up in a closet smelling of stale wine."

He stepped across the threshold, made his way noiselessly through the hall, and opened the front door. When he had disappeared Campbell followed cautiously, stopping just inside the door.

He could hear the fellow pacing restlessly up and down the veranda, every once in a while stopping to look into the hall. When this occurred Campbell, who had stationed himself behind the door, could easily have touched him by reaching out his hand.

Suddenly a queer noise broke the silence of the night; to Campbell it came faintly, but to the man on the veranda with more distinctness. The sound was that of a heavy body falling.

Instantly the footsteps on the floor outside ceased; the man was listening intently.

The noise was not repeated, but evidently his suspicions were aroused, for Campbell heard the almost imperceptible swish of a rapier as it was drawn from the scabbard. The next instant the man jumped from his elevation to the ground.

The sound of his receding footsteps told Campbell he had hurried around the corner of the tavern from whence, doubtless, the noise made by the falling object had come. What was the cause the young man did not stop to consider; he left his hiding-place and, crossing the veranda, jumped noiselessly to the ground.

The stars gave sufficient light to render objects dimly visible; therefore, when Campbell in turn had rounded the corner of the building he was able to discern what was taking place in front of him.

Two men were facing each other, the larger, with a sword in his hand; the shorter, Jean Labrie. Either in attempting to enter or to leave by Mlle. de Marrast's window he had fallen.

There was no time to ponder. The man with the sword had but to cry out and his companions would be aroused.

Without a moment's hesitation Campbell snatched one of the heavily mounted pistols from his pocket and, grasping the weapon by the barrel, sprang forward.

Half turning, the man received the full force of the blow upon his head. His knees crumpled under him, and without a sound he fell in a heap at the feet of Jean Labrie.

"You see, the sill had rotted badly, *monsieur*," said the butler, motioning toward the window.

Campbell glanced up and saw that it was open. A great piece of the sill was missing where the decayed wood had parted under the grasp of Labrie's hand.

The latter read the unspoken question.

"I have spoken with *mademoiselle*," he whispered shortly.

Campbell took a step toward the window, then paused, for his companion was bending over the man who lay on the ground. The butler had removed his cravat and was tying it across the mouth of the unconscious Frenchman.

"Hurry, *monsieur,*" said he in a low voice.

Campbell laid his hand upon the window-sill.

"*Mademoiselle!*" he whispered.

There was a movement in the darkened room, and he saw the girl's white face outlined in the aperture.

"You are M. Campbell?" she asked in a strained voice.

"I am Harold Campbell," replied he briefly. "Labrie has told you why I am here, *mademoiselle?*"

He knew she was studying his face intently; after a moment she replied:

"I do not understand, *monsieur.* Is it true that—my brother has been taken to the Bastile?"

She was clasping and unclasping her hands nervously.

"It is true—since yesterday," the Scotchman answered.

He saw her shiver, then with an effort she controlled herself. There was a movement behind. Labrie was kneeling on the chest of the man lying on the ground, for the latter's legs were beginning to quiver.

"*Monsieur,*" said the girl faintly, "I do not know whom to believe."

Campbell took the letter from his pocket and thrust it into her hand.

"It is from the Marquis de Marrast, and was given me by the Comte de Pleaux last night. Read quickly, *mademoiselle,*" he said.

At the end of a moment a yellow light flickered in the chamber; Mlle. de Marrast had ignited a candle. Looking through the window, Campbell could see that she was bending over the letter; the candle-light shone on her face.

For the first time he was able to see plainly the girl he had ridden out of Paris to save from the enemy who had sent her brother to the Bastile.

He noted the strong profile, the delicate outline of her head as she bent over the paper. The old count had stated she was no longer a child, but at that moment she appeared scarcely a woman.

One hand rested on the table beside the candle; the curve of her white throat showed above the tight-fitting collar of her traveling-dress; her hair, gathered in a loose knot behind, gleamed golden in the yellow light.

As she mastered the contents of the letter every vestige of color faded from her cheeks. She remained perfectly motionless, staring down at the closely written page.

The hot wax from the guttered candle dripped onto her hand, but she did not notice it. Then, suddenly, she turned and faced the window.

"It is my brother's writing. I know it is *you* who have told the truth, and—those men who have accompanied me from Foulon lied when they said the marquis sent them to urge my return to Paris," she said in an agitated voice.

"Courage, *mademoiselle!* With God's help you have nothing to fear," replied Campbell earnestly.

She made a little gesture. Her face, though pale, became suddenly composed.

"And do you think it is for myself I fear? It is of the marquis, my brother, I am thinking, *monsieur,*" said she with enforced calmness.

Then, with a quick burst of feeling:

"Why are we waiting here? Take me to Paris, M. Campbell. I must see the king."

Labrie, coming up behind, touched Campbell upon the arm.

"The light—the light, *monsieur!* Let us hasten," he whispered.

But already the candle was sputtering in its socket. Campbell turned to the girl.

"Listen, *mademoiselle,*" said he earnestly. "Unbolt your door quietly. I will meet you in the hall and we will leave this place at once. Above all, make no noise."

He saw Mlle. de Marrast leave the window and cross the room quickly. He turned to Labrie.

"Go to the stable and wait for us. We will mount *mademoiselle* on one of the fellows' horses," said he briefly.

The butler glanced questioningly at the figure lying on the ground.

"Let him lie," said Campbell sharply, and turned toward the veranda.

As he did so he glanced once more through the window. The flame of the dying candle barely illumined the chamber, but he could see Mlle. de Marrast in the act of throwing a long cloak over her shoulders. She was al-

ready half-way to the door, her hand outstretched to draw the bolt.

Suddenly a loud voice arose in the hall on the farther side of the portal:

"*Mille diables!* there is something wrong here. Come out, Destrade!"

A loud knocking shook the door violently

"Open, *mademoiselle!*" cried the voice sharply.

CHAPTER VII.

A RAPIER, A TABLE, AND A HORSE-PISTOL.

CAMPBELL took a quick step forward; his foot came in contact with a hard object lying in his path. It was the hilt of the rapier which had fallen from the Frenchman's hand a few minutes before.

"Open, *mademoiselle!*" cried the voice again, and the door creaked under the pressure exerted against it.

Campbell stooped and caught up the sword; then, placing his free hand upon the sill of the window, he vaulted through the opening into the chamber.

The wick of the candle was sputtering fitfully; in another minute the room must be in darkness. For the third time came the command to open the door; no longer a request, but a peremptory order.

Mlle. de Marrast, her cloaked figure dimly outlined in the faint light, looked questioningly at Campbell. He made a silent gesture toward the window, crossed the room, and halted between her and the door; the steel blade of the rapier, held loosely in his right hand, glistened in the flickering light.

Then a little breath of air, wafted through the window, snuffed the wick.

"*Mort du Dieu!* Are you dead, or only sleeping?" cried the voice without angrily.

"Answer them," whispered Campbell.

"Who is there?" called the girl, steadying her voice.

"It is I—M. Charny—and Destrade. Open the door!"

"A moment. What do you desire? It is the middle of the night, *monsieur.*" *Mademoiselle* was speaking calmly.

There was a momentary silence. Campbell, standing near the door, heard the men in the hall whispering to each other, then one replied:

"Pardon, *mademoiselle*, but we heard voices, and just now there was a light in your room; and—at first you did not answer."

The tone sounded almost insolent. The color leaped into Mlle. de Marrast's pale face.

"I answer when I choose, *monsieur,*" said she haughtily.

Those without seemed to hesitate. Campbell fancied he heard a low oath. The men were plainly suspicious, but were undecided just how far to show their hand. This indecision was ended suddenly.

There arose the sound of a short struggle under the window. Then a voice, choked and gasping, cried out: "Help! The girl is escaping— Some one—"

The noise of a dull blow ended the sentence abruptly, but the words had reached the ears of those in the hall.

The knob of the door shook violently, then a heavy body crashed against the panel. *Mademoiselle* uttered a little cry. The voice of Jean Labrie arose above the tumult.

"This way—through the window, *mademoiselle!*"

A second shock shook the door, which began to give way, and a gleam of yellow light streamed through the widening crack.

Campbell's grasp tightened upon the sword-hilt. He stepped back a few paces and stood motionless in the center of the room.

"To the stable—mount *mademoiselle* on one of the horses, and ride toward Foulon!" he called to Labrie over his shoulder.

The noise made by the frenzied attacks upon the door prevented these instructions from reaching the ears of those outside.

The light sifting through the crack glittered on the naked blade of the rapier. A gentle touch fell on his shoulder.

"*Monsieur!*" whispered a voice in his ear, "do not remain. They are two to one. There is yet time."

"Go, *mademoiselle!*" he cried sharply.

The band of light across the floor was widening.

The door creaked and groaned ominously; the lock snapped with a report

like that of a pistol; another blow, and the shattered woodwork swung inward with a crash against the wall. The band of light spread out in all directions, revealing every object in the room.

Campbell, standing with the rapier gripped in his hand, faced the two Frenchmen who crowded through the opening. The light was at their back, so that their faces were in shadow, but he saw they were clad only in shirt, boots, and riding-breeches, and each wore a sword.

At sight of him the first stepped impulsively back and drew.

"Ah!" said he in a measured voice. "So it would appear *mademoiselle* is receiving company to-night, therefore she has permitted her friends to remain outside."

His lips parted in a sneering smile.

Campbell made no reply; he was measuring the man who in a moment would become his adversary.

The Frenchman's smile changed to a harsh laugh. Though he did not turn his head, he cried lightly to his companion:

"It is the Englishman, Destrade, who has joined us at the eleventh hour." Then to Campbell, banteringly: "If you can fight no better than you ride, *monsieur*, the amusement will be brief."

Campbell's sword quivered in his grasp. The sneering tone and the insult in the words sent his hot Scotch temper to the boiling-point. But he held himself in check, knowing he could hope to gain advantage only by coolness.

The voice of Mlle. de Marrast rang through the apartment.

"And why should you fight, *monsieur*? If it is my pleasure to receive M. Campbell, what is that to you?"

"Ah!" cried the Frenchman. "So it would appear it is the English custom for a gentleman to enter a lady's chamber by the window. Well, in France we have been taught differently. *Mademoiselle* has forgotten that we promised the marquis, her brother, to conduct her safely back to Paris."

He advanced a step, half raising his sword.

The girl, too, started forward, but Campbell restrained her by a sharp, low-spoken sentence.

"Do as I have asked, *mademoiselle*, before it may be too late."

There was an entreaty in his tone she could not mistake, and she understood he proposed to engage these men in order that her escape from the inn might be possible.

The Frenchman divined what was in her mind.

"The window! Guard the window, Destrade!" he cried, and, raising his sword, made a furious lunge at Campbell's breast.

But the Scotchman, who was no novice at the game, parried skilfully. The blades of the two rapiers met with a crash of metal which resounded through the room, then glided down each other until the hilts almost interlocked.

The Frenchman laughed harshly.

"Prettily done, Sir Englishman," he sneered. "Shall we rest a little? In the meantime M. Destrade will catch the little bird at the window. Afterward I am willing to teach you something."

Campbell bit his lip until the blood started. He understood he had as well as lost the game if the other held him to the room while his companion ran around on the outside. True, there was Labrie; but what could he do against a determined fighter with a sword?

With a quick movement he disentangled his blade from the other's hilt, sprang back, and lunged at his enemy. There was only one way: he must force the fight. If he could kill his opponent quickly, he could turn his attention to the second Frenchman.

But the man before him was also too skilled a swordsman to be taken off his guard; moreover, he possessed a double advantage. His back was to the light and he could take his time.

It was only necessary to guard and parry and permit the other to tire himself out in furious assault. The sneer upon his lips showed he understood the situation perfectly.

Campbell could see that the doorway behind his adversary was empty. Destrade had darted back into the hall and was probably half-way around the house toward the window. He heard the rustle of a dress behind him, and knew that Mlle. de Marrast was still in the room.

"Do not approach the window!" he

cried desperately, and parried a thrust which barely missed his neck.

Then suddenly hope dawned out of an ominous sky. A great tumult arose in the hall: the crash of a heavy object and the ring of metal against wood. The voice of Destrade rang out angrily.

"Out of the way, you fool! Have you lost your senses?"

Then, after an instant's silence:

"Finish him, De Charny. A madman armed with a table is blocking the door. I cannot fight a barricade."

De Charny uttered an oath. He flung aside his bantering air, thrust fiercely, and thrust again. He had lost one of his advantages: he could no longer fight for time.

A grim smile crossed Campbell's face. Labrie, armed with a table, had taken a hand in the combat. Monsieur Destrade would be kept busy for a few moments. Between a lunge and a parry he shifted his position; only a little, but the light shone less directly upon him. The contest was becoming more equal.

Again the crash sounded in the hall. The butler had swung the unwieldy piece of furniture at his enemy, only damaging the wall, but Destrade had perforce leaped back in order to avoid the blow.

It appeared that Labrie had gained something, for Campbell could see the second Frenchman in the middle of the hall opposite the door.

Then he lost sight of what was going on outside, for De Charny began to attack him at every point so fiercely that he gave back a pace.

For several moments the blades grated against each other, flashing and glittering in the yellow light. Campbell felt a prick in his forearm, and the sneer returned to the other's lips. Then, in turn, he drew blood from the Frenchman's cheek, but it was only a scratch. Honors were even.

"You fool!" flashed out De Charny suddenly. "What need for you to mix in this? Put up your weapon and be gone. I will permit you to return to Paris, if you will meddle no more in other people's affairs."

Campbell answered by a thrust in *carte:* the hilts of the rapiers clashed together.

"Will you take your life and be gone?" panted the Frenchman.

Again the table in the hall crashed against the wall. Destrade uttered a little cry, then hurled himself forward.

"*Mort du diable!* You have crushed my left hand, but now I will do for you," he shouted.

Labrie had swung his unwieldy weapon, lost his balance, and sprawled backward upon the floor.

Although Campbell could not see what had occurred, he judged from Destrade's word that he had gained the advantage. He freed the hilt of his rapier and began so furious an attack that De Charny could not cope with its quickness and backed toward the door, content only to guard his body.

Another crash came from the hall. Labrie, in final desperation, had risen to his knees and, seizing the edge of the overturned table, had shoved it against the shins of the advancing enemy. The pain and the suddenness of the attack threw Destrade off his balance.

The two men and the table became mingled in a confused heap upon the floor. And at that moment De Charny pressed back and, followed by Campbell, crossed the threshold. The scene of combat was transferred from *mademoiselle's* chamber to the hall.

(To be continued.)

A PROPHECY.

PROUD word you never spoke, but will speak
Four, not exempt from pride, some future day.
Resting on one white hand a warm, wet cheek,
Over my open volume you will say,
"This man loved *me!*" then rise and trip away.

Walter Savage Landor.

HIS RIGHT TO DIE.

By HOWARD R. GARIS.

Two unexpected happenings on a two-day boat of the sub-Atlantic fleet, going to make up a crisis not reckoned on in the possibilities.

DEEP down under the waters, the Turtle, swaying gently to and fro at her submerged wharf, near what, years ago, was the Battery, awaited her cargo of passengers and freight. Clerks in the offices, high overhead, were checking way-bills, manifests, and cabin lists.

Now and then one of the men would step to a pneumatic tube, which communicated with the lower dock offices, and send on its downward journey a bundle of papers.

On board the Turtle there was the hum of activity. In the engine-room grimy men, with oil-smeared hands and carbon-smudged faces, were inspecting the gigantic motors, testing the great purring dynamos, examining the immense drums over which wound the cable that stretched from shore to shore—from America to England—and which served to carry, on its mighty strands, the submarine.

"How does she load this trip?" asked Hosfer, one of the bill clerks, of Sutcliffe, who was in the passenger department.

"About as usual. Summer rush is a little heavier, that's all. I've got most of my checking-up done, and I'll blow you if you'll wait for me when you go out to lunch."

"Sure thing. I've got those manifests to compare, and I'm about up. Any of the real swells going this trip?"

"Quite a few, and some that ain't."

"How's that?"

"Couple of London detectives, taking back a chap wanted for murder. They're traveling first class, too—the nerve of those English sleuths! Catch 'em having anything but the best when it comes out of the pockets of the public. But I forgot. It's not supposed to be known. Might give the line a bad name if the first-cabin bunch heard who was aboard. They ought to make the Scotland Yard men go on a freighter. That's fast enough for 'em. Forget I told you. The old man don't want it to get out."

"I'm wise," said Hosfer.

"Guess it can't make much difference, though. I heard Captain Marline telling the chief steward that the Johnnie Bulls and their prisoner must keep out of sight on the trip or he'll shift 'em to second cabin in a jiffy. So I guess they'll lay low."

"Who's the prisoner?"

"Chap named Claxton—Newt Claxton. I checked his name a while ago. Of course, his don't go in the printed list, nor the *Sherlock Holmes* men, either."

"Who'd he kill?"

"Search me, though I did hear something of it. The papers had a lot about it, but I was too busy to read it all. He did up some fellow that ran away with his wife."

"Ought to have killed her, too. Half the time it's the woman's fault."

"This wasn't. Claxton shot the chap, and then lit out from London and tried to hide over here. But our men were too sharp for him. He got as far as Chicago, and they nabbed him on a cablegram description. Then a couple of plain-clothes "bobbies" came over, and now they're going back with him. It's hanging for his, all right. They don't have much of the 'unwritten law' on the other side, and they don't keep 'em alive so long as we do here. They work 'em off faster. Well, I'm done. Coming out? It's after twelve," and Sutcliffe laid aside a pile of papers.

The two clerks departed, heading for a lunch-room.

The Turtle was one of the older boats of the sub-Atlantic Line. While not the first of her class of submarines that marked the opening of the new era of

travel, she lacked several of the improvements of the newer type of vessels. But she was preferred by many passengers, just on account of her age.

She was a more roomy boat than the newer ones, and, though she was a two-day craft, against the twenty-four-hour ships in the same service, many took the Turtle because of her larger staterooms. In the one-day boats, where more powerful machinery ate up space, the rooms were small, like the berths of the old-time sleeping-cars.

Save in minor matters, among which were the installation of the manganese machine for making oxygen, the Turtle was one of the best of the under-water craft. One felt like calling her a steadier boat than any of her sister vessels; but, on a line where all the submarines were as steady as one hundred fathoms under water insured that desirability, the qualification would not hold.

For there was little sway to the boats, once they started to pull themselves ahead, cleaving through the water, swallowing the cable through the forward tube, passing it over the friction drums, and paying it out of the after tube.

There were six of the cables, and that on which the Turtle and the ships in her squadron moved was one of the first two.

It had been a momentous and world-astonishing undertaking to stretch them from New York to Southampton. Each one was as thick as a man's body, and floated at an average depth of one hundred fathoms—a depth sufficient to render the cables motionless from the disturbance of storms or ocean currents.

The work would have failed but for the discovery of arcigentum, that wonderfully buoyant and ever-existent radium gas, which filled the inner tube or core of the cables and floated them beneath the surface, even as a cork rides the waves.

The six cables were in a straight line from shore to shore, side by side, but a mile or more apart, though they converged at the same points on either continent. First there had been two, and, as the plan proved successful, two more were added, for freight service.

Then came two for the marvelous one-day expresses—those boats on which a man might eat a breakfast in New York and the succeeding one in London.

It was nearly time for the Turtle to start. The passengers were being brought down the tube which enclosed the elevators, and which ran from the lower level of the tunnel to the submerged dock.

On board could be heard the hum of the dynamos, tuning up for the harmony they were to play through the long night under the waters. There was the whir of many motors, great and small: the ceaseless throbbing and sobbing of the air-pumps, which were storing the precious atmosphere against the time when the ship would be six hundred feet beneath the surface of the Atlantic, closed hermetically against the entrance of any unbidden thing from without.

Captain Marline came from his cabin and glanced at his watch. It marked a half-hour from the time set for the sailing, but the government agent, without whose inspection the boat could not clear, had not yet come aboard.

"Confound him! He wants to make me late!" growled the captain.

"I have everything keyed up to break a record," he went on, turning to Mr. Bower, the first officer. "I know I can do it this trip in forty hours, and if I do it means I get a one-day boat. I've a good notion to phone? Ah! Here he is now!" as a little man, of rather dapper appearance, with iron-gray hair and a quiet manner, entered the cabin. "I was beginning to think you had forgotten us, Mr. Durkin," he added.

"No; I never forget," and there was a preciseness about the way the words were spoken that made one believe this was true. "I was detained. The Porpoise had a defective air-pump, and they had to fix it before I would sign a certificate."

"Then they're off ahead of us?"

"Oh, yes! An hour ago."

The Porpoise was one of the twenty-four-hour boats.

"I suppose you're all ready for me, Captain Marline," and Mr. Durkin produced a pencil sharpened to a neat point, also a bundle of papers tied in a neat package.

Altogether he was a very neat and methodical man.

"Ready and waiting. You'll find everything all right, I guess. This way, please."

Then, as the law governing the running of submarines required, the captain and the inspector proceeded to the engine-room.

Mr. Durkin glanced quickly, but with much-seeing eyes, at the machinery. He noted the dynamos, watched the humming motors, checked the air-tanks on his blank forms, made notes as to the pressure the gages showed, observed that the emergency supply of air was up to the legal requirements, and asked:

"Vitalizers all right, I suppose? Got the required number?"

"I have one hundred first-cabin passengers, and fifty second, which, with the complement of officers and crew, makes just two hundred souls aboard, sir. I have two hundred and fifty vitalizers, being the required twenty-five per cent in excess of the number of persons carried."

Captain Marline repeated this as if it was a lesson he had learned by rote. In fact, he said it so often he knew it by heart. The number of vitalizers or passengers differed slightly on succeeding trips.

The inspector went to where, in an immense rack, there were arranged the portable vitalizers, or reservoirs of compressed air. They were automatic machines, intended to be used in case of emergency should, for any reason, the atmosphere supply of the ship fail.

"I'll test one, and I guess that will do," Mr. Durkin remarked, picking up at random a vitalizer from the rack.

They were affairs shaped something like a diver's helmet, only much lighter, and were intended to be put on over the head in case there was need. Then, by fastening the rubber neck-piece and turning on the supply of air, one could live four days in a place devoid of an atom of oxygen.

There was, in the tank of each vitalizer, oxygen sufficient for ninety-six hours.

Mr. Durkin looked at the gage of the one in his hand. The pressure and the number of cubic feet contained were indicated by the black pointer. The supply was up to the standard.

Then, by the simple process of counting the number of vitalizers in the top row of the rack and the number in the first vertical line, and by multiplying the figures, Mr. Durkin found there was the number called for in the regulations. He returned the vitalizer to the rack.

"All right?" asked the captain, looking again at his watch.

"Correct," replied the inspector, filling out a sailing certificate in duplicate, and giving one to the commander of the Turtle. "You have a clean bill of health. I wish you a quick and safe voyage."

Shaking hands with the captain, Mr. Durkin, appointed to look after the material welfare of those who went under the sea in ships, took his departure.

"Give 'em the word, Mr. Bower!" called the captain, as he saw the agent go up the tube that communicated with the earth above. "We're five minutes late. Lively now! Are we all right?"

"All right, sir!"

There was a buzz as the electric signals were set in motion. The indicators in the captain's cabin, whence, through the engine-room, was controlled the great ship, showed that all was in readiness for the drums to begin winding the cable. The Turtle was about to leave.

At that moment the elevator in the tube came down faster than usual. From it dashed three men. It needed but a glance at the middle one to show that he was fastened to the other two by bright steel links.

"We'll miss the blooming boat, Carford—and all your fault!" cried the one on the left of the manacled man. "You would have another drink!"

"And why not, Bagot, when he's payin' for 'em?"

"Why not? Yes, indeed! I say there!" to an officer in a gold lace trimmed uniform—the dock-master—"hold the ship till we get aboard: that's a good chap!"

The dock-master did not pause in his signaling to indicate that all was in readiness for the start. But the two men, fairly pulling their prisoner along with them, increased their speed.

"We've got to cross in her," Bagot whispered to his companion, "or wait for new extradition papers. These expire today. Come on! Hurry! They haven't closed the gates! We can make it!"

They did, by a narrow margin. Then men, standing at the levers which operated the massive doors controlling the great lock where the Turtle lay, shoved the steel bars over. The gates slid in the grooves and went home. Then the outer ones were opened, admitting the ocean with a rush.

There was a swirl of water, a trembling of the submarine as the gears took up the cable, a subdued rumble as the drums began to wind it over their grooved surface, and the Turtle was off on her journey under the waves.

Few on the submarine had seen the detectives and their prisoner come aboard, for the trio had hurried through a deserted corridor and down a companionway. The passengers were all in their staterooms, arranging their belongings in order to insure comfort on the trip which, in contrast with the olden days, was so soon to end.

The officers and crew were busy with matters pertaining to the ship, so the Scotland Yard men, with Claxton handcuffed between them, had reached their quarters, in three adjoining staterooms, all unobserved save for the purser and those who shut the massive water-gates.

For a time none of the three spoke. They were breathing hard, from their rush to get aboard. With a long intaking of breath, which seemed to satisfy him, Carford released his hand and that of the prisoner from the steel bracelet. Bagot did the same.

Next they looked at Claxton. He understood, and placed his crossed hands, momentarily free, behind his back. There was a click as the cuffs locked, and a noise not unlike that made by a rattlesnake as the pawl slid along the rachet.

The prisoner in the little room sat down listlessly. Beyond, on either side, were similar little rooms, one each for the detectives.

Bagot locked and bolted the three doors. Claxton sat rather straight in his chair. He could not lean back without causing the steel to cut into the flesh of his wrists, but he had become used to it, in a measure, as he had traveled with the officers from Chicago.

"Nip an' tuck, Garge," wheezed Carford, for he had difficulty with his breathing. "We cut it pretty fine!"

"I wish you'd missed her," spoke Claxton.

He had done his best to bring this about, by having the detectives stop for drinks whenever possible. "I don't like this traveling under water," he went on. "I like to see where I'm going."

"Yes, it would suit you to stay here another month, waitin' for requisition papers," grumbled Carford. "Not much! We've had trouble enough gettin' you, but now we've got you, an' it's dead nuts you'll swing for it. Over here they turn murderers into bloomin' electric-lamps," and he grinned at his joke.

Claxton did not seem to mind it.

There came a knock at the door of the middle stateroom. Carford opened it, and the purser entered.

"Captain Marline says you three are to keep to your cabins until after the other passengers have retired," he announced. "That was the understanding, I believe, when you took passage."

"So 'twas, but it's a blarsted dirty trick," exploded Carford. "We're entitled to a bit of air, same as the rest, even if we don't travel in high sassity."

"What d'ye think ye're on—a steam-yacht?" asked Bagot. "Air on a submarine! All ye'll get comes in tanks!"

"Well, we ought to be allowed to take our turns walkin' about a bit." This from Carford, still grumbling.

"Captain's orders, you're to keep to your rooms until all the first-cabin passengers have retired," broke in the purser. "You can make your objections to him."

"Oh, it's no use kickin'," Carford replied as the officer withdrew. "We've got to stand it. It's only a little while. But I hate to be cramped up. I like lots of room." He was a big man.

The Turtle had been gathering way. Louder hummed the motors and dynamos, deeper were the notes of the giant drums. Dripping moisture, the cable came in through the forward tube, and passed out at the stern. Out of the depths beyond, and into the depths that were behind, it went, the submarine speeding along faster, faster, faster.

The waters rushed past the thick plates of the vessel, that was poking her tapering, hollow nose toward England, where happiness waited for some, sorrow for many, and death for the man who sat in

the little stateroom, his hands held tightly behind him in the steel clasps.

The waves overhead leaped and tossed restlessly, angrily, hungrily. There was a storm, but those in the Turtle neither knew nor felt it.

They were conscious of no motion, save only that of the swift forward passage, as the ship speeded ahead like an express-train on a well-ballasted track.

Down in the engine-room a corps of silent men sat beside the drums to watch the cable paying in and out. It was their duty to see that the wire wrappings were undamaged.

The least flaw meant the flashing of a message back to shore, by means of the cable itself, for it carried within it telephone and telegraph wires. In response a repair-boat would be sent out.

Other silent watchers sat beside the air-tanks to note that the mechanism for automatically replenishing the atmosphere worked perfectly, and to see that the poison-laden vapor was forced outside the boat and that the new and life-giving oxygen took its place.

Still others watched the delicate electrical instruments which told of the current ceaselessly passing through the cable—the current that was the life of the Turtle.

The day passed into night. Meals had been served and eaten. There had been pleasant laughter and songs among the passengers.

Brokers had kept their fingers on the pulse of the market. Promoters had closed deals by wire. Though in mid-ocean, they were still held to the land by the wonderful cable.

There had been observations from the great bull's-eyes of glass into the surrounding sea, made brilliant by glaring electric-lights which revealed the waters teeming with life almost as wonderful as that within the submarine.

In the stateroom where sat the prisoner and the detectives there was silence. The officers had smoked, drunk, and played cards until they were tired. The murderer rested on his bed, his eyes closed, thinking, thinking, thinking the thoughts that never die.

"Wonder how long before the bloomin' swells will get to bed," growled Carford. "I'd like to go out a bit and stretch my legs. It's close to midnight," and he shut his watch with a snap.

As if in answer to his words, there sounded a knock at the door, and the purser announced that they might take a turn about the ship.

"Want to go, Claxton?" said Bagot.

"I don't mind."

He arose awkwardly, his hands still manacled behind his back. They had been so since coming aboard, save only when he ate his lunch.

Now the detectives fastened themselves, one on either side of him, and, thus between his captors, the prisoner walked out into the passage.

"Let's take a look at the fishes," suggested Bagot. "We ran through a school of whales comin' over to get you, Claxton. Maybe we'll see some more now."

They went to the observation-room. It seemed deserted, but as the three men entered a woman who had been standing near one of the round windows passed out.

In the semidarkness—for the room was kept in twilight to afford better observation of the sights without—Claxton noticed that she wore a long, loose cloak that hid her figure.

"Guess they didn't count all the passengers," observed Carford with a laugh as the woman passed out of hearing. "If the captain knowed there was one here he might send us back, for fear we'd poison the air 'count of bein' bloomin' detective officers. Hey, Bagot?"

"Oh, I don't know. Look there! What's that beastly fish? It looked right at me!"

He pointed to the thick glass. Through it could be seen, in the glare of the strong light, a large shark. Then more flashed into view, until there was a horde of the sea-tigers swimming with the swiftly moving ship.

All at once there came a little jar, scarcely perceptible, and a moment later the water flowed bright red past the bull's-eye window.

"We must have cut one of the brutes in two," commented Bagot. "Yes, there's a piece of it," as the half of a giant fish floated past.

There was a rush of the other monsters toward it.

"I'd rather go to the cabin," said Claxton.

Perhaps the sight of blood affected him unpleasantly.

"We'll take a peep into the engine-room," announced Carford. "I was terrible fond of machinery when I was a lad. If I hadn't taken to detectin' I'd 'a' most likely been an inventor. We'll see the wheels go 'round."

They watched the silent man sitting beside the whirring machines and the winding cable, looking from the observation-gallery placed in the engine-room for the use of visitors.

"And to think that there black thing is hitched onto England," observed Bagot. "It's pulling us there at the rate of a bloomin' mile a minute. You're sorry, I suppose," turning to Claxton.

"No. I'm tired of it all. I'm glad it's at the end."

"Oh, you're a good ways from dead yet," said Carford, with ghastly cheerfulness. "There's the trial, an' lots of chances to get off. Insanity dodge ain't a bad one, though we'd have to testify you was rational on the way over."

"I'm not going to make a defense."

"Then you must be crazy," spoke Carford quickly. "That is, not exactly, but edgin' that way. Not make a defense!"

"No; I'll take my medicine. I'm satisfied. I killed him, and paid him back for what he did to me. It's worth it!"

The detectives glanced curiously at their prisoner. It was the first time he had referred to his case.

He did not seem to observe them, but was gazing at the cable that was, hour by hour, bringing him nearer to his doom. But he had got past fear.

"Let's go to bed," spoke Carford after a pause.

The three turned. As they did so Claxton saw one of the cable-watchers spring up.

He noted that the man raised his hand, and then leaped to a lever that was near by. As he pulled it toward him, there was a shout that sent terror to the hearts of all who heard it.

For at that instant there had been reached a defective place in the cable. A bunch of the heavy wrapping wires had in some manner become loosened, and stood up like talons to catch in the drum.

With a tearing sound, they scraped along the surface of the winding-machines. Then came a snapping of metal, and one of the drums seemed to fly apart.

The engine-room, which a moment before had been a place of order, was now a chaotic hell.

There were blue and green sparks, several feet long, stabbing the air and seeming to transfix the men. There were protesting shrieks from cylinders that had to bear a pressure ten times that which was usually put upon them. There were screeches from shafts that were on the point of breaking; growls, full of menace, from dynamos that, governless, raced to three times their safe speed.

There was the sound of gears being stripped, of pinions being sheared off, of bed-plates tearing loose, of stanchions breaking.

But, above all this, there was a terrifying crash as a great piece of metal flew straight toward the main air-tanks. There came a sound like a great sigh as the imprisoned atmosphere, ineffectually held back by the automatic cocks, rushed to regain its liberty.

Amid a silence that was almost as awful as the sudden noises had been, the ship came to a shuddering stop, swaying to and fro on the cable six hundred feet beneath the surface of the sea, midway in the Atlantic.

But now came other sounds—the cries of terrified passengers who rushed from their berths in all states of undress to know what had happened. There were screams of women, terrified cries of children, and the deep-mouthed cursing of the men.

Discipline was excellent on the sub-Atlantic fleet. To their stations sprang the officers and crew. Captain Marline had leaped from his berth at the first sound of the automatic bell in his state-room.

"Clear the engine-room!" he thundered, and Carford, Bagot, and Claxton, in the front rank of a crowd that had flocked to the scene of disorder, were shoved back from the observation-gallery. Then the doors were closed.

"What is it?" cried scores.

"Hey! You chaps were in there! What was it?" demanded a portly man

in a night-shirt. "Tell us what it was! The officers never will!"

He caught sight of Claxton's manacled hands as the prisoner stood between his guards, and cried:

"Great Heaven! Did he try to wreck the ship?"

"No!" yelled Carford above the din that followed the words. "Something went wrong in the engine-room while we were lookin' on. I guess it's all right."

He turned aside. "Let's get out of this," he whispered to Bagot, and, pulling Claxton between them, they managed to reach their staterooms.

For a time there sounded from the engine-room the din of confusion. The passengers, however, were soon quieted by the officers, who went among them, as they always do, assuring every one that there was no danger.

"That was a mess!" observed Bagot. "Wouldn't wonder if it took a week to straighten it out."

"And we have to stay under water, like a fish, all that time?" demanded Carford.

"Unless you want to walk, Joe. I don't believe that would be healthy, 'count of the sharks. You're not a duck."

Carford swore, and took a drink from his flask. There sounded a knock on the door.

"Is the ship sinking?" asked Bagot as he opened the portal.

An officer was standing in the passage-way. He had in his arms three queer objects.

"Captain says you're to take these," he remarked.

"What are they?" from Carford.

"Vitalizers."

"For what?"

"Why, they're filled with air," you bloomin' idiot," broke in Bagot. "They're like life-preservers. What's the matter? Is somethin' busted?"

"I don't know," replied the officer. "My orders were to bring these to you, and you're not to leave your staterooms. They are not to be used until the word is given," and he handed in the vitalizers.

"This is a rum go," observed Carford as the door was closed—"a deuced rum go. I wouldn't wonder—"

He paused and looked at Claxton. The prisoner was idly examining the vitalizers. Carford winked at Bagot, unseen by Claxton.

A little later Carford went out, first looking up and down the corridor to see that no officers were in sight to order him back. The place was light, as the emergency storage-batteries connected with the incandescents had been put into operation.

Guided by the sound of excited voices from the main cabin, the detective walked toward it. From the doorway he saw, surrounding the captain, a crowd of men and women.

Some of them were clad almost as lightly as they had been when suddenly aroused.

The commander seemed to be trying to explain something, but he was interrupted by frequent questions. All at once the portly man who had spoken to the detectives pushed his way through the throng.

Something bright and shining was in his hand. He had slipped a pair of trousers on, but his night-shirt was only partially tucked into them.

"Now, by Heaven, you tell us what's the matter!" he demanded. "What are you giving out the vitalizers for if there's no danger, I want to know?" and he held the shining thing close to the captain's face.

It was a revolver. The sight of the weapon served to calm the commander, for he was losing his temper. He looked coolly into the muzzle and chambers, which showed dull leaden points within their depths.

"I want to know!" the portly man repeated hoarsely. "I want to know!"

"Put that up, you fool!" said Captain Marline quietly. "I'll tell you, just as I have been trying to tell these passengers. I am holding back nothing, but I did not want to alarm the women unnecessarily. We have had an accident. The main air-tanks have been wrecked, and one of the cable drums smashed. That is the worst of the damage. We have wired to New York for help."

"What does it mean when you say the main air-tank has been broken?" demanded the man with the revolver. "Don't try to fool us with technicalities! I want to know! I've got a right to know. I'll kill any one who fools me!"

"It means"—and the captain spoke more calmly than before—"that we will have to draw on our reserve supply."

"How long will that last?"

"About four days. In that time you will be ashore. We will have the repair-boat here in ten hours."

"But if it doesn't come, and the air is all used up?" The portly man was trembling, and the revolver wabbled to and fro in his nerveless grasp.

"There are the vitalizers—one for each passenger."

"How much air do they contain?"

In silence the crowd awaited the captain's answer:

"Four days' supply."

There came from the passengers a sigh of relief, like the breath of a wind in the forest. Their fears were relieved.

Air was the most precious thing in the world to them now. That there was enough for over a week was news to end the terrible tension they were under. Carford went back and told Bagot and Claxton.

"All we've got to do is wait," he said. "But that engine-room was a mess, wasn't it? I don't see how no bloomin' repair-ship is going to do anythin' with it. They'll have to push us or tow us."

"An' you was goin' to be a inventor," sneered Bagot. "Why don't you go in an' help 'em?"

"I guess they can manage. I'm glad there's enough air. There's lots of things to eat and drink—especially drink. They got good rum aboard, I'll say that—mighty good rum."

The only change noted, other than the ceasing of the forward motion of the ship and the increased swaying of the cable, was the slight feeling of apprehension on the part of the passengers. Two hours after the accident many had gone to bed, but scores remained up.

These could be noted suspiciously sniffing the air at times, as though to detect when it would begin to fail them. The vitalizers, which had been given out on the first alarm, were taken up, since it was found that the auxiliary air-tanks were all right.

But the prisoner and the detectives kept theirs. Possibly the officer forgot, in the stress of added duties, that he had left three with them.

The crew in the engine-room did what they could, but the cable had fouled the drums, and the services of the repair-ship, with her powerful machinery, were needed to free it.

This craft could be attached to the Turtle at an opening just above the after-tube. Then the two vessels would be bolted together, sealed, and the doors between would be opened. Thus passage could be had from one to the other.

The repair-ship, as flashed in a hasty message responding to the one for help, was already on its way from New York. Then ensued a wait.

The hours passed slowly. The ten that the captain had said would elapse before the advent of the mighty Walrus—the repair-craft—went by, and half as many again. But not until twenty had flown did the passengers show much nervousness.

Then there came questionings and queer, frightened looks from face to face.

"I wonder what keeps 'em?" asked Carford.

He and Bagot had taken turns in going out to hear the talk of the cabin. The embargo seemed to have been raised.

"Guess the Walrus ain't as speedy as the cap. thought," was the reply from Bagot.

Twenty-four hours went by. The inquiries about the repair-ship grew more insistent. From replying to them dispassionately Captain Marline had come to answer in an irritated tone.

"The Walrus has started; that is all I can say," he would remark fifty times in the day. "She'll be here any minute now."

"Aren't you in communication with her by wire?" asked the portly man.

"Of course—it's none of your affair!" fired back the commander, stung to sudden anger.

He had not forgiven the pistol episode.

"Don't you talk that way to me!" yelled the portly man. "I'm Colonel Fuller. I won't stand it, you know! You've got to answer!"

At that moment a young man thrust his way into the group about the captain. The newcomer's face was pale in the gleam of the electrics.

"He's lying to us!" he cried, pointing to the commander. "I'm a telegraph-

operator. I know what I'm talking about. He's lying! There's no communication along the cable! There hasn't been any for hours! The wires are out of order!"

For answer, the captain turned and, with one blow, felled him to the cabin-floor.

"Shame!" screamed an excited woman.

"I ask your pardon!" Captain Marline exclaimed. "But I had to do it. He'd start a panic. I will tell you the truth.

"Communication is now interrupted, but I assure you, on my honor, we sent a message to New York, asking for help, and I received an answer that a boat was on the way.

"It is a small matter that the wires are now useless for purposes of communication, though there is still power in the cable, or the Walrus would not come to us, as she is coming."

"*Is* she coming?" asked a woman, intent on the details.

"Of course. In a few hours we will be under way again. Meanwhile, I beg of you to be patient. There is absolutely no danger. You are as safe as if you were at home."

The explanation seemed to satisfy the throng. The young man whom the captain had knocked down got up. He appeared dazed, and went from the cabin without a word.

The hours grew. It was the second day after the accident. There was no word along the cable. The Walrus had not come.

Helpless as a dead fish, the Turtle swayed to and fro six hundred feet beneath the water. The passengers had ceased to come to the tables. They ate hurried meals at the sideboards, pausing in the midst of bites to listen to any conversation bearing on the disaster, or to harken to anything that sounded like a message of hope.

Then came periods of awful, silent waiting. The captain, seemingly as imperturbed as when the ship had started, went about answering again and again the same question:

"When will the repair-ship come?"

"It will be here presently."

They seemed to have lost track of time. It was only the morning of the third day. As Carford got up from his berth he sniffed the air suspiciously.

"It don't smell as fresh as it did," he remarked. "I wonder if the reserve supply is gettin' low?"

"I think that captain's a bloomin' liar," was Bagot's comment. "I'm goin' out to take a look around."

He came back presently with a white face.

"They're puttin' on the vitalizers!" he exclaimed huskily. "There's a rumor that the reserve tank has sprung a leak, and there's no air left in it!"

He dived beneath his berth and brought out his vitalizer. He was about to adjust it over his head, with the tank resting on his shoulders.

"Why don't you wait till you need it?" Carford asked. "This air ain't half bad. I've breathed lots worse in a Lon'on music-hall."

Bagot paused and laid the apparatus down. Claxton was idly examining his.

"I'll wait a bit," said Bagot quietly.

But the air rapidly grew more foul. Soon there was a humming and buzzing in the ears of the three men, the sense of a tight band across the forehead, which warned them to adjust the vitalizers.

They could converse through them by speaking a little above their ordinary tones. One could also eat through them, for there was an arrangement to allow the temporary breathing of the air from the tank, leaving the mouth exposed.

It was the first time in the history of the sub-Atlantic Line that the vitalizers had been called into use, though they had often been tested in drills that the government required on all submarines.

"We look like bloomin' divers," remarked Carford, as he fastened his helmet in place.

"Are there plenty of 'em?" inquired Claxton.

"One apiece and a few over, I understand. I'm goin' outside again. Come along, if you like, Claxton."

The handcuffs, in the emergency of the accident, had been removed from the prisoner. Nor was anything said when the three tabooed men mingled with the other passengers. Though it was known who they were, there were other thoughts now than those of fit associates.

On every side there were ominous whispers, loud enough to penetrate the vitalizers. Men and women, with the white of fear showing through the glass of their helmets, paced restlessly up and down the cabins, the first and second class passengers mingling.

Little children ceased to play. There was a horrible gloom on every side.

The captain had ceased to say his litany of the repair-ship, "She is coming." He no longer murmured the *credo* of the line, that "Accidents were impossible to the cable."

He wore a worried, hunted look, as though he feared the sea would burst in through the heavy steel plates, and that with the rush of waters would come the monsters of the deep.

His eyes were sunken in his head, and there were puffy bags beneath them. His breath, exhaled through the vitalizer, smelled of liquor.

Carford, who had been moving amid the restless throng, came back to where Claxton and Bagot stood. He nodded to them to follow him, and when he had them safely in the stateroom he said:

"There's goin' to be hell! Get your gun ready!"

"Why?" asked Bagot.

"There's been a mistake in the vitalizers. The law requires them to carry fifty extra ones. Well, they've got 'em, all right, but the fifty haven't any air-tanks on. Somebody made a break, and the inspector didn't tumble to it. There's just one machine apiece for all on board."

"Ain't that enough?" asked Bagot.

"Yes, until some one of 'em gives out, as it's liable to do. All of 'em ain't perfect. Then there'll be some cove wantin' an extra one. There won't be any extra one. Then what comes? Why, hell—that's all. A panic an' a fight, an'—God help them as ain't got one of these bloomin' breathin' things on. I'm goin' to keep mine," and he got out his revolver and spun the chamber.

"Better take this," said Bagot to Claxton, passing him an extra weapon. "It's different from what it was between us. I lay odds it won't do you any good to try to give us the slip. There's no place to go unless it's outside," and he motioned toward the all-surrounding waters.

But Claxton refused the revolver, and, cursing him for a fool, Bagot put it back into his pocket.

"Don't ask me to protect you if some one blows your head off and takes your air-tank," the detective snarled.

The strain was beginning to tell even on him, lacking nerves as he did.

It was the evening of the seventh day. No word had come from the Walrus. The wires were dead to any messages. The passengers, with their grotesque head-dresses, walked about like animals in a cage, seldom speaking.

They had ceased to question when the repair-ship would arrive. They prayed to their various gods, and thought wild thoughts.

The men had long since deserted the engine-room. The only one on duty was the officer at the telegraph-instruments. His ear was tuned to catch the faintest click, his eye the tiniest flash.

But the machines were as silent as the fish that swam about the Turtle.

At midnight there was a commotion. Carford awoke from a fitful sleep. Who could slumber incased in a steel coffin with other prospective corpses walking about and waiting for death?

The detective arose, and Bagot followed him.

"Maybe it's the Walrus," spoke Carford.

The two men, seemingly caring nothing for their prisoner, went out into the corridor. But Claxton followed them. The confusion appeared to come from the women's cabin.

"Has the Walrus arrived?" asked Bagot of a man half dressed, like himself.

"Not that I've heard of."

"What's the row, then?"

"Well, it's a sort of arrival. Woman gave birth to a baby just now."

"What?" Bagot thought his hearing was failing.

"A baby! What's the matter with you?"

"Good Lord!" whispered Bagot within his helmet. "And there ain't another vitalizer on the ship! That bloomin' baby had better stayed away."

He pushed forward, but met a closed door. The passengers, being told of what had happened, and losing interest when they knew it was not the arrival of the

repair-ship, were drifting back—despairingly back—to their staterooms.

Bagot went closer to the door. He could hear a woman moaning, and a faint wailing intermingling.

"Kid must be alive," he muttered. "Probably a little air left loose, floatin' around the ship. But it can't last."

At that moment the surgeon, whose face showed white through his helmet, came bursting out of the room. He was followed by the captain.

"I must have a vitalizer!" the doctor cried. "The child will expire in a few minutes without it. There is no air, save a thin stratum near the floor."

"And there's not a vitalizer on the ship that isn't in use," spoke the captain, as though he was pronouncing a death sentence.

"But I can't understand! The inspection before we left New York—"

"There was a mistake," the captain said hopelessly, dully. "We are fifty short. There's only one apiece. Who would have thought a baby would be born?"

"But the child is here, and I must have a vitalizer. I can rig it up with a rubber tube. The baby will go right into the machine. It's such a little one!"

The captain stared at the surgeon for an instant, then he began taking off his own vitalizer.

"I'm done for, anyhow," he murmured. "I'd never get another boat."

The surgeon stopped him with a gesture.

"You can't give up the ship," he declared. "They'll need you—when it comes to the finish. There'll be scenes—"

He said no more, but the captain understood, and he no longer tried to remove his helmet. Instead, the surgeon began taking his own off.

"What are you going to do?" asked the commander hoarsely.

"My junior in there can finish what's to be done."

"No, he can't. We'll need your services before long. The air will begin to give out in some of the machines soon. You may be able to help us. You're under my orders. Keep the vitalizer on or I'll order you into irons." and Captain Marline spoke in tones that showed the surgeon there was nothing to do but to obey.

Claxton and Carford, who had remained in a corner of the cabin, approached the spot where Bagot had been listening to the conversation between the captain and the surgeon.

"What is it?" Claxton whispered to the detective.

"Baby just born. No air for it," replied Bagot as he turned aside.

The matter had ceased to interest him. He was going to the telegraph-room.

Claxton started. Carford, watching him behind the glass of the helmet, saw the prisoner's lips move. But he could not hear him whispering:

"A life for a life."

The murderer began to take off his vitalizer. He was the third of a sacrificial trinity.

"What are you up to?" asked Carford.

His voice attracted the attention of the surgeon and captain to the group. There were no other passengers near.

"I'm going to save the baby," Claxton announced simply.

"No, you don't!" Carford shouted.

"Why not?"

"You'll die."

"And what if I do? A man's life is his own. I took one; I'll pay the debt now and give another back in place of it—a better life than the one I took. I've got a right to die!"

"No, by Heaven, your life ain't your own! It belongs to the government an' the law, an' I represent the law. You've got to live. Let the kid die. You've got to be took back an' hung proper an' accordin' to law. Me an' Bagot's responsible for you. We ain't goin' to let no bloomin' murderer commit suicide!" and he motioned to Bagot to seize Claxton's hands and manacle them.

Bagot moved forward and shoved his fellow detective to one side.

"Shut up!" he cried. "You ain't a man! You're a devil! He's a man!"

Claxton had paused momentarily. Now he finished taking off his helmet. As he removed it, the lack of oxygen in the foul atmosphere of the boat smote him as though he had been hit with a club.

With trembling hands he tendered the vitalizer to the surgeon.

The doctor took it. He gave one look at the man who was sacrificing his life

for a baby, and then dashed back into the room where a woman was feebly moaning, and where the little new life was fast ebbing away.

Captain Marline held out his hand to grasp that of Claxton, but the murderer fell to the floor in a faint.

Carford began removing his helmet.

"What are you doing?" asked Bagot.

"He sha'n't commit suicide!" shouted Carford. "I'll give him my helmet. I'd rather be taken back dead than to let it be known I let a prisoner get away from me like this."

He was trembling from rage and terror.

"Come on, you fool!" exclaimed Bagot, dragging his companion away. "We'll all die jolly well soon enough. It's only a question of a few hours now!"

The detectives went to their stateroom. The captain looked down on the senseless and dying prisoner. Then he hurried into the room where the surgeon was saving the baby.

"I'll get a rubber hose and give him some of my air," the captain muttered. "I'll share it with him. We'll call for volunteers! The Walrus must come soon! It's got to!"

The junior surgeon, who had been helping his chief, came from the woman's room.

"Both doing well," he announced. "Brave chap, the one who gave up his helmet."

"Can't we save him?" begged Captain Marline. "I'll give him half my air. Others will!"

"It's too late," replied the junior surgeon, feeling Claxton's pulse.

"We'll all say that when the Walrus gets here," the captain murmured within his vitalizer.

An hour passed. It seemed like a day. Some of the passengers were beginning to feel dull and heavy, for the supply of air in the vitalizer-tanks was nearly gone.

A man staggered into the cabin. It was Colonel Fuller. He seemed choking. His florid face was purple.

"I want another vitalizer!" he wheezed. He could no longer shout. "This one has no more air in it."

Behind him came a throng. Many were staggering for want of air, their vitalizers being almost empty.

"I am sorry—" began the captain.

Suddenly, from the engine-room, there burst a man into the cabin. He was trembling. His face, seen through the glass in his helmet, was white.

"Where's the captain?" he cried, not at first catching sight of the commander.

"Here! What's wanted?" Marline's hand, in his coat-pocket, grasped a revolver.

"The Walrus! She's making fast now. We'll have her opened inside of a half-hour, and then there'll be all the air we want."

There came a grinding sound, a dull jar to the Turtle, and then the clank of metal on metal. The news spread through the ship.

"It's too late for him," said the junior surgeon softly as he helped lift Claxton into an unoccupied berth.

Half an hour later the vitalizers were laid aside, for the Turtle was filled with a fresh supply of air from the reserve tanks on the Walrus.

Two days later the Turtle was under way again, and reached England in safety. She was followed by the Walrus, for the repairs were only temporary.

The relief-ship had been delayed by a broken shaft, but there had been no alarm felt for the Turtle or her passengers, since the only message received did not tell of the extent of the damage, and later none could be sent, owing to a break in the wires.

"Remember that prisoner chap—the murderer—I was telling you of; the one that was aboard the Turtle the time she got stuck under water in mid-ocean?" asked Sutcliffe of Hosfer, one afternoon several months later.

"The fellow—Paxton or Haxton, wasn't that his name—who gave up his vitalizer to save a baby?"

"That's the one."

"What about him?"

"I see by to-day's papers they hanged him. He didn't die on the ship, after all. Walrus got there just in time, and they pulled him through."

"Might better have left him die."

"That's what I say. Let's go to lunch."

TAKING BIG CHANCES.*

By SEWARD W. HOPKINS,

Author of "A Lump of Bullion," "The Tail of the Lumberbeast," "The Great Bank Robbery," etc.

The series of fearsome happenings that set wide-awake a certain little sleepy village on the Atlantic coast.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Upon finding a murdered man in the house which he rents in the little town of Broggan, the young author, Joseph Dell, sends for his friend, Dave Warson, a detective. Warson finds in the man's pocket a paper which reads: "Scipio—600,000—Cash," which he takes to have reference to the buying or sale of some ship.

Dell is astonished to learn from Joel Bankred and from the postmaster, Jake Jicks, that the detective has been making secret inquiries into his own affairs. Warson returns late one night from a trip to Boston, and the next morning is found dead by Dell, in his neck a wound similar to that discovered in the murdered man.

CHAPTER IX.

THREATENING DANGER.

THE consternation and horror that filled my soul as I stood looking down into the upturned face cannot be portrayed in words within the scope of my vocabulary.

A cold, creepy feeling overwhelmed me. I felt sick and faint.

There was no doubt that Warson had been killed in the same manner as the stranger. There was the same tiny puncture, the same lack of the bleeding that would naturally follow a stab wound.

I felt myself reeling with the sick sensation of being face to face with a mystery I could not solve.

Somebody had entered the house during the night. That was certain. Yet, there was the remembrance that Warson had not spoken in his usual voice when he came in.

Had he been wounded somewhere else, and come home to die? It seemed reasonable at first. But surely a man would say something about it. Warson was not a man to let any possible chance of saving his life go by.

After gazing, with staring eyes, at the dead detective for a minute or two, I roused myself with a tremendous effort. I remembered I had work to do.

I staggered to the front door. It was locked, and a chain we had put on the inside was in place. Therefore, nobody had entered that way.

There was a back door, leading out toward the cliffs, and I examined that. It seemed the same as I had left it when I retired.

The key was in the lock. No key from the outside could unlock it, with the inside key in place.

There was a smaller narrow door at the side, opening into a passage from the dining-room. I hurried to that and examined it, with the same result.

Then there remained only the windows.

I began on the ground floor. I made the most careful scrutiny possible.

Every catch was in place. These were the ordinary catches found in country houses, where any are found at all, and might be opened from without by the use of a thin knife-blade strong enough to push them back. But once pushed back far enough to permit the opening of a window, they could not be replaced again from the outside after the window had been closed.

Having made an exhaustive examination of the first floor, I went up-stairs. Here the windows were all in the same secure condition.

A frantic feeling came over me. I had

never been superstitious, but there was something so superlatively uncanny about this thing that my flesh crept.

Yet I knew there was nothing supernatural in it. Somebody had a way of getting inside the house without using doors or windows.

Again I thought of secret passages. But I had examined the cellar a dozen times or more, and so had Warson.

There was no attic to the house, and I went into each room on the top floor and examined the ceilings. There was not a mark that could in any way indicate the presence of a trap-door.

The ceilings were old and stained and cracked. But the cracks were irregular, and formed neither square nor circle, nor did any make even an irregular détour and return to the starting-point. Nobody had come in through the roof.

There was no skylight; no way of getting to the roof except by way of a ladder outside.

In despair once more I went to the cellar. I took with me the hammer I had purchased from Jicks, and with that sounded every inch of the floor.

This was merely earth, and though I pounded and scratched and dug, I found nothing that indicated the presence of a trap-door.

I then attacked the walls. I had already examined them for crevices, secret springs, and every other contrivance known to builders of secret doors, but now I went over them in the same way I had the floor.

Inch by inch—pound, pound, pound—till my wrist ached. But the stones did not give, and the same hard, solid sound responded to every blow. It was maddening.

The only thing that remained was the chimney. As in many, and probably all houses I had ever seen, this reached to the cellar floor. There was no opening in it. It was built of brick. The mortar was solid, as they built in the old days. But I went over this chimney inch by inch, as I had the walls.

There was no secret door.

My theory that some one had found a way to enter the house was destroyed. There *was no way*.

I opened the front door and went outside. There had been a heavy dew, and the grass was wet with those sparkling drops of early morning that show every footstep.

I walked around the house. The silvery webs were not broken in a single place. Not even a cat, a dog, or squirrel, not even a rat, had disturbed the grass.

I went back to the house and sat down to think.

Undoubtedly Warson had come home wounded. Then, why had he not told me, so that I could do something for him? Where had he been when he was wounded? How far away from the house?

He had driven in from Vaders with our horse, and might easily have been attacked anywhere on the lonely road.

Had he been attacked? Had he overcome his assailants after they had given him that puncture?

Had he thought it a mere ordinary scratch, that amounted to nothing, and gone to bed expecting to be all right in the morning?

This maddening array of questions surged through my excited brain.

What was I to do? My whirling, dizzy mind tried to bring itself together sufficiently to form some idea of what my line of conduct ought to be.

Of course I must notify that miserable constable. There was no need of notifying Jicks this time. I had the key. He was no longer caretaker.

Of course I must notify the coroner. And then there must be that same old farcical investigation, and—

My mind halted here in absolute terror. And then—what?

I had been, in the first investigation, half suspected by the constable, even if not by the coroner. Warson had suspected me. Of that I felt quite sure.

And now, if I notified these officers of the law, how was I going to convince them that a man had been killed in the house unless I killed him?

Of course the constable, smarting under his defeat the first time, would place me under arrest. What argument could I use?

If I said that Warson had come home wounded, and had not told me, they would scoff at such flimsy waste of words. I might leave a window unlocked, and say I found it so. But this would lead to nothing.

I knew the case would go into the hands of detectives I did not know—men whose only idea was to find somebody on whom to fasten a crime and win laurels for themselves.

With a horror clutching at my throat, and drawing in my heart till its throbbing seemed almost ready to burst it, I realized that if I was again charged with committing a murder in that house, there was not the slightest chance of proving myself innocent. Think of the absurdity of trying to prove that a man had been attacked in there by somebody else, when everything showed that nobody else had been there.

And then, again, my throbbing brain recalled that Joel Bankred and Jake Jicks knew that Warson at least half suspected me. These country people had a way of getttng in on the winning side. How could I tell how many more in Broggan knew that Warson suspected me of the first crime?

And then again, with a fresh rush of sickening memory, came the words I had spoken to Jicks when he had told me of Warson. He had said:

"Surely you did not commit that murder?"

I had replied:

"No, surely I did not, but I will have a go at Warson if he tries to make it appear that I did."

These words of mine seared their way through my brain like a white-hot iron. In them alone lay condemnation.

The fact that I had sent for Warson to work out the crime would avail me nothing. I had been designated as the person to get a detective. I could not get out of it.

I had sent for a man who was looked upon by all Broggan as my personal friend. This fact might easily be construed into an act to protect myself. And Warson would then become the martyred hero who had been too honorable in his business to permit friendship to stand in the way of justice.

I saw a death sentence staring me in the face. A sentence it was out of my power to avert.

My soul recoiled at the thought. Perhaps I was wrong. I am not strong on ethics—not when my life is in danger for a crime I did not commit.

A wild, strange feeling came over me. I would not go to my death like a hunted dog. There was—there *must be*—an explanation to what now seemed inexplicable. And I would find it.

CHAPTER X.

FRANTIC CONCEALMENT.

THE cellar was the coolest place about the house. With all the cunning of a lifelong rogue, I carried the body of Warson down there and placed it where it would least likely be discovered.

He had come home after midnight. It was doubtful if a single soul in Broggan knew it. There was a road—a short cut—from the Vaders highway to the lane leading to the big house that we had used in going to and from Vaders.

Probably Warson had taken that. It was even possible that it was here he had been attacked. But by whom?

The horse was in the stable, and should remain there until the mystery had been far enough solved to make it safe for me to show him. For Jicks and Joel knew the horse had been left at Vaders for Warson, and if they saw the horse back their first question would be regarding Warson's whereabouts.

I went to breakfast as usual, compelling myself to assume my ordinary manner.

"When do you expect Warson back?" asked Joel.

"I don't know," I answered. "He said he was going to Boston. There's no accounting for anything Warson does."

"I'll see Miggsby to-day, and arrange that the horse is looked after."

My heart almost froze. I had not thought of that. Of course the stable people in Vaders would know that Warson had taken out the horse to return to Broggan.

I managed to keep up a front, although I felt myself reeling. I hurried away and back to the big house.

Something must be done, and done at once. If Joel asked at the stable, and I dared not request him not to, there was no way to stop the inquiry that would follow.

Warson would not have taken the

horse to go anywhere but Broggan. Any other place could be reached from Vaders by steam road or trolley.

Oh, this was the most maddening situation of all! Yet my life actually depended on some quick action.

Joel would go to the stable. He would learn that Warson had taken out the horse about midnight, in time to reach Broggan at one or two in the morning. And I had eaten breakfast at seven, saying I did not know when to expect him home.

My excited brain thought with a rapidity that almost set it on fire. It *was* on fire.

I rushed to the stable. We had only one vehicle, a light road-wagon, and, with a nervous energy that made the thing seem like a child's toy-cart, I dragged it from its place and out to the brink of the precipice, where the scarp of the rock was sheer, and the water of the sea seemed deepest. Turning the thing around, in my frenzied terror, I backed it over the cliff and let it go. I heard its splash in the water, and went to look.

It had disappeared.

Now for the horse. I could not sacrifice the poor fellow's life, although I knew it was my safest course. But even my sick soul revolted at this.

I put the harness on him, breaking the traces and the breeching-straps. Then I mounted him.

I went through the woods, away from all houses, and rode about five miles toward Vaders, keeping along the shore. There I set him free.

I knew he would be found. But the wagon and Warson would be missing. The delay, however, would give me half a chance at least to learn what I could.

I still had time to catch the stage before it started to Vaders, and dressing myself, and compelling an expression of calm unconcern to occupy my countenance, I joined Joel at the post-office.

"I think I'll go with you," I said to Joel, as he looked at me in surprise. "I'm going to New York."

"Ain't you afraid to leave the house alone?"

"No; it is well locked."

"Locks don't seem to make no difference to that house," he answered.

I made no reply.

"When do you expect Warson back?" asked Jicks.

"I don't know," I answered.

"He's away a long time. Must have got a clue this time."

Fortunately Joel was ready to start.

When we reached Vaders we had considerable time to wait for the train.

"Joel," I said, prepared to make the bluff of my life, "you spoke of going to the stable to see about the horse. I've time enough to go with you."

"Good," he said. "Come on."

Reaching the stable, Joel, who knew the proprietor well, introduced me.

"He's half owner of the horse Mr. Warson left here," said the stage-driver. "We thought we'd take a look at him to see how he was getting on."

"You'll have to go back to Broggan to do that. Mr. Warson took him out of here some time during the night."

"He did!" exclaimed Joel.

Then he turned to me with a look of astonishment on his face.

"I thought you said he wasn't home?" he exclaimed.

"I did say so. He probably went somewhere else."

"He might have done that," said the stableman. "Hey, George?"

A loutish sort of young fellow answered.

"Were you here when Mr. Warson came for his horse?"

"Yes."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"He mumbled suthin' 'bout Broggan. He wasn't just right. Guess he'd been drinkin'."

"How did he act? How did he look?" I asked.

"Well, he was dead-white and tired like, an' mopy."

"Strange!" I muttered.

"Gosh, he's got lost somewhere," said Joel. "I'll look for him while you're gone."

I had no fear that he would enter the house. He might go to the stable. But I had taken care of that.

The thought had come to me when I got rid of the horse and wagon that it would be a good idea to throw the body of Warson into the sea. This wouldn't do, though, I decided after thinking it over. But now I almost wished I had.

It was too late, however, to do anything more. I had come to Vaders to take a train for New York, and if I did not go suspicion would be roused.

The rumble of the train warned me that I had just time to return to the station. I left Joel with the stableman, talking over the probable fate of Warson.

What George had said had given me something new to think about. He was suffering in some way when he reached Vaders. Was it the wound? Had he been drinking and in this condition attacked on the way? Had he met the murderer of the man I had found in the big house and been drugged, the intention being to attack and kill him?

Or had the miscreants, whoever they were, stabbed him with a weapon—the wooden, poisoned weapon described by Warson himself—while they had him in their power, and let him go home believing he had learned something he could use against them n the future.

All sorts of queer ideas concerning this weapon flushed my brain.

It might not only be poisoned, it might also be so doctored as to inflict a tiny poisoned wound, but at the same time deaden the pain as the application of cocain deadens it, so that the victim did not even know he was wounded, and would die without being aware that he had been murdered.

All these things I was thinking of when my train rolled into New York.

CHAPTER XI.

WARSON DISCOVERED.

I HAD come to New York with one purpose, and one only. I went direct to the office of Baymer Brothers.

"I want to see Mr. Charles Baymer," I said, naming the head of the firm.

My card was taken into his office. Fortunately he was there.

"How do you do, Mr. Dell?" he said cordially. "Glad to see you looking so well. What's the matter? Didn't you get your quarterly check?"

"Oh, I got the check all right. I thank you for your promptness. It is quite another matter on which I have come to see you."

"Not in any trouble, I hope. That was quite a mystery you had out there. The detective told me about it."

"What did he tell you?"

"Well, not much. I guess I told him more than he told me. There was a dead man found in a house there, wasn't there?"

"Yes. I found him, and it was in a house I hired."

"Queer coincidence that it should be your house. Who was the man, do you know?"

"No. That's what I came here to learn."

"So far as I could piece it out, it was William Wratton."

"Did you know him well?"

"Well—not particularly. The only dealings I ever had with him was to buy a ship from him."

"The Scipio!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, the Scipio."

"Did you have enough dealings with him to recognize these?" I asked, producing the ring and watch.

"The chain and ring seem familiar. Yes. I do believe they were worn by William Wratton."

"Now, Mr. Baymer," I went on, "I am heart and soul in solving this mystery. It has reached a mania with me, and I shall never rest until I know who killed William Wratton."

"Why—what could such a man be to you?"

"He was nothing to me himself, but there is an underlying suspicion in Broggan that I know more about the thing than I should. You see, hiring the house, and finding him there, and all that."

"Yes, and of course your connection with our concern. Yes, I can see how country people would make a good case out of that. But then I wouldn't let that bother me. I'd simply go somewhere else and spend the summer. Of course you could know nothing about the sale of the ship."

"Neither do they."

"Ah! They surmise other motives. Well, you can tell them and set their minds at rest."

"Who was William Wratton?"

"'M. He was just plain William Wratton, so far as we know here."

"Was he a New York man?"

"No, I don't think so. He did not, during our negotiations, mention his home or family. He did not act like a family man to me. I fancied that he was more or less a shady character. Still, he had a good ship to sell, and we bought it. That's about all there is to him."

"I dislike to annoy you with questions, but this is more vital to me than you can imagine. I simply must ferret out this crime. Won't you take time to tell me the whole transaction?"

"Certainly. Time is nothing if I can do you a service. All there was to the matter can be told in a few words. The fact is that we wanted a ship for the South American service. We advertised for one, and this man came to us and introduced himself as William Wratton. Of course we asked nothing about himself he did not wish to tell.

"He told us he had a four-master called the Scipio that was in first-class condition, and he wanted six hundred thousand dollars for it. This is a prodigious price for a sailing vessel. We demanded a look at it, of course.

"Well, it proved to be fitted with auxiliary power so arranged that it took up no room that could be used for cargo, and was in every other way quite superior to the average vessel, and of great tonnage. We bought the ship. He was a little queer on the subject of banks, and wanted his money in cash. This at once struck us an indicative of his being in crooked lines somewhere.

"But we did not care for that. He had a good ship, and we needed one, and we bought his, even at a much higher price than we should have paid at any other time. He gave us good papers to prove that the ship was his, and with a clean bill of sale we gave him his cash, although it made us hustle some to get it.

"There you have it all in a nutshell. The ship is already about half-way to South America, and he walked out of here with the money in his pocket."

"Then it was for this money he was murdered?"

"I should say so, undoubtedly. But if robbery were the motive, why did his murderers leave the watch and ring?"

"The detective in the case explained that in various ways."

"Wise chap, that Warson. How is he?"

"He left for Boston a few days ago. He was all right then."

"I'm sorry I can't give you any more information."

"Didn't William Wratton say anything about what business he had been in, or anything else about himself?"

"Not a word. Except for ringing the praises of his ship he was like a clam."

It was clear that I had learned all I could from Mr. Baymer, and thanking him, I left. But what I had found out was something.

Warson had learned all I had just learned. And when he saw my check from Baymer Brothers, and not knowing the extent of my connection with the firm, had at once begun deductions on lines totally different from what he had had at first.

The question was, what had he learned on his trip to Boston? Had he really gone to Boston?

It was most regrettable that he had not told me what he knew that night when he came home.

I reached Broggan the next day in a most uncomfortable frame of mind. I was all at sea. I had nothing to start from in my endeavor to reach a conclusion.

Joel was about the first I saw.

"Oh, say!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad you've got back. What do you think? The horse walked into his old stable—where you bought him, you know, Dwight's, as cool as you please, with his harness on, and all the straps to the wagon broken. The two traces are cut and the breeching straps are broken. He must have run away with poor Warson and lost him somewhere in the woods. Then he must have got the wagon caught somehow and pulled loose.

"But we can't find the wagon nor Warson. What the devil *do* you suppose happened?"

"I don't know," I said. "It's a mystery to me. But I'm tired now. I'll see you to-morrow and we'll make a search."

I had my supper and walked to the big house.

When it was dark I carried Warson up from the cellar, and staggering, plung-

ing, falling, and yet desperate with a new-born hope, I managed to get him about a mile from the house, about on a line with the Vaders road.

Then I hurried back to the house and went to bed.

The next day, after Joel had made his trip in the afternoon to Vaders and back, I met him, and we began another search for Warson and the wagon.

"He must have been drunk, far as I can figure it," said the stage-driver. "Must have been dopey. Something must have frightened the horse and he ran away. But what the deuce became of the wagon? Warson must be in it somewhere."

But he wasn't. I led a roundabout search lasting till near dusk, and then drew near the spot where I had left Warson. I let Joel find him.

There was a sudden whoop.

"Here, Mr. Dell, this way! Here he is!"

And there he was, much to my apparent surprise.

The wagon was never found, but my safety was assured. I breathed more freely.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CORONER'S VERDICT.

BEING safe is not always being out of the woods.

Joel had been the discoverer. I left it to Joel to do the notifying.

The prominence that his success in finding Warson gave him in Broggan swelled Joel's chest.

"This," I said to him, "is a coroner's case pure and simple, although the constable must be notified that a crime has been committed. I will leave that with you. I am tired. I am going home and to bed."

He looked at me queerly.

"And do you call that house home?"

"It is my temporary home," I replied. "I rented it. I have no fear of being attacked. If I am I shall be able to take care of myself. Remember, notify the coroner at once."

"Don't fear me," he said. "I'm off at once."

I went back to the big house and went to bed. Visions of all kinds disturbed my dreams, but I was not molested during the night.

Yet, even upon me the strangeness of things had taken such a hold that in the morning I made the rounds once more to see if the doors or windows had been tampered with. Nothing had been disturbed.

Naturally, I was a witness at the inquest. Joel was the first one called.

Joel Bankred, being sworn, testified:

"I knew when Mr. Warson, detective, went to Boston, or said he was going. I knew that the horse owned by him and Mr. Dell had been left at Vaders for him to use whenever he returned. Mr. Dell and I went to the stable at Vaders and found that Mr. Warson had called for his horse about one o'clock and said he was going home—that is, to Broggan. Mr. Dell went to New York, and I wondered what had become of Warson. Then we heard that the horse, with a broken harness, had gone back to his former owner. A good many of us searched the roads and the woods but could not find Warson. We expected to find him in the wagon, or near it.

"Then Mr. Dell returned from New York, and when I told him about the horse he proposed another search. We spent an hour or two and then we found Warson. But not the wagon."

"In your former search," said the coroner, "had you passed over or near the spot where you finally discovered Warson?"

"Why—almost."

"Are you sure that the spot had not been examined by searchers previous to your finding Warson?"

"What are you trying to bring out?" asked the constable.

"Well, you see the wagon has not been found. Many things are possible in this strange case. It is full of complications. If the wagon had become wedged in among trees, and the horse broke loose, the wagon would still be there. Warson may have been pitched out, whether he was at that time dead or alive. But where is the wagon?"

"We could not find the wagon," said Joel.

"You haven't told me what you wish to bring out," said the constable testily.

The coroner waxed wroth.

"I am trying this case," he roared. "In the other case you told me that having done my duty as coroner I must shut up and let you do your work. And here you are butting in like an old woman. I know what I am trying to bring out. That's enough till I do it."

"You needn't get mad about it."

"Who's getting mad? Didn't you tell me in the other case to mind my own business? Now you mind yours."

"I am. I represent the law."

"Mr. Bankred will proceed."

"I don't know nothing to proceed with," said Joel. "I've told all I know. We found the man, but not the wagon."

"Very good. That concludes your testimony, then. Now, I understand Mr. Dell was with you when you found the body."

"Not exactly with me when I found it. He and I were working along together. I found Warson and called Mr. Dell."

"That's what I am going to do now. Mr. Dell!"

I was duly sworn, greatly impressed with the legal formalities and the heavy machinery of the law in and around Broggan.

"You have heard the testimony of Joel Bankred. Have you anything to add to it, Mr. Dell?"

"I have nothing to add to the testimony. But I wish to call your attention to the wound. You will notice that it is apparently the same kind of wound that killed the first victim."

"You are right. It is clear that the same hand struck both blows. I am glad you brought that out. You went to New York the day of Warson's return."

"Warson had taken the horse at one o'clock. I went to Vaders with Bankred on his first trip. Warson must have been somewhere between Vaders and Broggan then."

"Where were you all night?"

"Asleep in my bed."

"You are sure of that. You are under oath, you know."

"I am aware of that. I slept in the big house."

"And when you returned from New York you assisted Bankred in the search that resulted in finding the body?"

"I did."

"What was the object of your visit to New York?"

"To visit a firm of shipping merchants and get some clues to the first murder."

"Did you get them?"

"I got some information. It will do to build on."

"Have you any objection to telling what you learned?"

"No objection to telling you privately, but it was nothing that bears on the present case."

"It's a queer thing," broke in the constable, "that the man Warson suspected of the first murder should be the means of discovering Warson's body."

"What's that?" asked the coroner.

I was beginning to feel decidedly uncomfortable again.

"I say, that Warson suspected Dell of the first murder. And Warson was killed. And nobody could find Warson's body till Dell returned and led them to the spot."

The coroner looked puzzled.

"Are you accusing Mr. Dell of the murder of Warson?"

"I am saying it looks strange."

"Before you go into that, Mr. Coroner," I said, "perhaps it would be well to take the testimony of the stableman, who was the last man, except his murderer, who saw Warson alive."

"Have you concluded your testimony?"

"Yes, sir."

"George Bean."

Mr. Bean slouched into his place.

"Did you see Warson, the detective, when he called for his horse?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was his appearance?"

"He was either drunk or had been takin' suthin' worse than drink. I don't know. I ain't no doctor. But he talked thick an' said he was tired. His head kinder drooped on one side."

"Did he say he was going to Broggan?"

"Yes, sir."

"You saw him start?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he drive off like an alert, wide-awake man?"

"No, sir."

"That's all."

"Now," said the coroner, "the case to me seems so clear that I may, with propriety, direct the verdict of the jury. That Warson was killed is an undoubted fact. That he was murdered is at least debatable. The wound we see may have been self-inflicted. It is something with which I am not familiar, this small instrument that kills and scarcely leaves a mark.

"The question to be determined, is whether he was struck before he reached Vaders or on the way from Vaders to Broggan. The testimony of George Bean shows that there was something the matter with him when he reached Vaders. This might have been the result of the blow which had already been struck, or it might have been the result of drink, which made him an easy victim when attacked between Vaders and Broggan. Or, it might have been the cause of a sudden determination to commit suicide.

"There is no way of determining whether the horse ran away *after* Warson fell out, or *with* Warson and spilled him. The wagon has not been discovered. This leads up to the suggestion that Warson was attacked, taken away *in* the wagon to some distant place, from which he escaped and tried to make his way home on foot, or was murdered there and his body carried to the spot where it was found and deposited there *after* the first search had been made.

"I direct a verdict that David Warson came to his death by the attack of parties unknown."

This verdict was given.

I was again relieved. But I knew that detectives keener than Warson would now be on the case. Where would I stand then?

CHAPTER XIII.

A MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

It was just as I expected. The mysteries of the house at Broggan now interested the newspaper readers of several States. The story of the entire case was printed and garbled and misrepresented, as almost always is the case, until at last I stood out for the most part in glaring colors as an archfiend who had devised some devilish scheme whereby I could take human life without being detected.

I lived in a house where no other human being dare set foot. I was a keen-eyed, saturnine wretch, and women said I had the evil eye.

I was a sworn enemy of all mankind. I had no ax to grind, no motive in my various crimes, but was controlled simply by a mania for killing.

In others, I was a genius for detective work. I was assisting detectives when I could, and doing their work when they failed.

I was more courageous than most men because I fearlessly slept alone in a house that was known to be haunted. If anybody could run down the gang of thugs infesting the neighborhood of Broggan, I was that one.

I had already discovered clues unknown to the detectives. I was ready, at almost any time, to lay my hand on the miscreants.

And so it went.

With it all, as may be imagined, I was not very comfortable. I knew the end was not yet, and though I had lost some of my zeal for living in a haunted house, I knew the worst move I could make would be to leave it now.

I was not surprised when two detectives visited me. They were older men than Warson, and worked together along identical lines, one helping the other out when he saw a chance. They had worked in this way for years, and fitted in together like a ball-and-socket joint.

We had a long session in the big house. I went over the strange events that had occurred with as minute a regard to detail as possible.

I answered all their questions. I took them through the house, from top to bottom. They examined everything.

One even got down and stuck his head in the fireplace in the dining-room and looked up the chimney.

"It's big enough," he said. "But, while a man might easily fall or slide down, it is not likely that he could get out again without making a thundering noise. And to reach the roof he would have to use a ladder, and murderers are not in the habit of carrying ladders around with them.

"Moreover, the first man killed was either brought here after death or lured here on some pretext or other. If he was dead and was let down the chimney, his clothes would be covered with soot."

"They were clean and new," I told him.

"In the other event, if his enemies had sought to lure him here on the pretext of making some deal, he probably would have balked at entering a house by way of the chimney, such not being the orthodox manner among men who deal in thousands.

"It is clear to me that both men were killed outside the house. What do you say?"

"There seems to be no other theory possible," replied the other.

The first speaker's name was Lavin. His comrade's was Scole.

"Having reached that conclusion," went on Lavin, "we've got to do our work outside. What is your intention? Do you intend to remain here?"

"Yes. I don't like the notoriety, but I've got about all I can get now, and when this matter is entirely settled I fancy I shall need more rest than ever. And there is no place I know of, murder mystery left out, where such complete rest is possible as in Broggan."

"You haven't been overwhelmed with *ennui* so far," said Scole, with a grin.

"Not to any appreciable extent. But, as you see, it is a grand place. Air, scenery, all suit me exactly. And I don't like the people of Broggan to say that I was driven away by ghosts."

"Well, you are nervy, anyway. I am glad," said Lavin, "that this is your determination, for we shall need some one here, and it will save the necessity of sending for another detective. Having spent so much time here, and having been through all the row, you will be really of more service than a regular detective. Only, I advise you to keep your revolver handy. Got a good one?"

"No, nor a bad one. I never owned such a thing."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have spent all this time in this house without a gun?"

"I never thought of it."

"Well, you are either a brave man or a fool."

"Or else the murderer," added Scole.

"I hope you don't think that."

"No. Warson probably did, but he jumped at the conclusions he told you to avoid. We've seen too many mysterious cases to suspect you."

"Now," said Lavin, taking his own revolver from his pocket and laying it on the table along with a box of cartridges, "you keep that handy. Even if you don't know how to use it, you can make a noise. If you see or hear anything mysterious, learn what you can; but when things get too warm, blaze away."

The thing looked like a cannon to me. I smiled when I thought of trying to hit a man—much less a ghost.

"Don't be afraid to shoot," said Scole. "Anybody who molests you here will be an enemy. Make yourself easy about that."

The two left me, and I went about my daily life with the same regularity as before.

I did not expect to hear from Lavin and Scole immediately. As a matter of fact, it would not have surprised me if I never heard from them.

So mysterious, so completely baffling, were the ways of the assassins that I would not have been surprised to hear of the death of both detectives.

And, I must confess, what they had said to me had not added to my courage. Still, I was determined to stick it out.

If anybody else wanted that house, I wanted it just as bad. And if they wanted my life because I was hunting them down, they would get me just as well anywhere else as there. I determined to stay.

I took my meals with Joel's mother as before. I met the stage as before. And I bought a new horse.

Things went along pretty much as though nothing unusual had occurred. Country people of the Broggan type easily settle back into old ruts, and in a day or two the unruffled surface of life as it was in Broggan gave no hint of tragedy.

I slept soundly.

One night, however, I was extremely restless. I fancy I had slept unusually hard during the early hours, and about

one o'clock I began to roll. Every little while I would start up, imagining that I heard some one.

At one time I seemed to be dreaming. I thought that I was on a brilliantly lighted street, and went into a garden equally brilliant. When I woke up I was in darkness, as before.

I laughed at myself for a coward. Surely the tragedies were not getting on my nerves like that! I pulled myself together and slept till daylight.

When I did at last decide to get up, the sun was high and the day well started. I felt little refreshed. I had been in bed too long, and my sleep had been broken.

And there was a strange, indefinable feeling running through my mind that something queer had happened in the night.

I resolved, as I had so many, many times before, to make a round of the doors and windows.

I found the doors all secure, locked just as I had left them. The keys of all doors were in place inside the locks. No key could be inserted from the outside. The chain on the front door was in place.

Then I began on the windows. When I reached the little room I had fitted up as a library, and never used, I chanced to glance at my desk.

I had not written a line on it since I entered the big house. But there, in plain view, was a letter. It was not in an envelope. It was not even folded. It was written on the top sheet of a pad.

With a peculiar feeling—my heart beating rapidly—I picked it up. It was written in a fine woman's hand, and read as follows:

MR. DELL:

For God's sake leave this house and cease the search for the murderers of William Wratton and the detective Warson. I have been sent to kill you, but at the risk of my own life I am warning you instead.

When I saw you—I will say no more about the effect your appearance had on me—I felt at first like waking you. But I am afraid. I am in the power—the absolute power—of the worst gang of ruffians the world has ever seen. I came to warn you. I am doing so.

I return possibly to my own death. I shall report that I have committed murder in order to give you time to escape. For your sake and mine leave at once and let them believe you are dead.

CHAPTER XIV.

RAGING.

SOME one *had* been inside the house, and that some one a woman.

I read the hurriedly written note again and again. At first a sort of crawling, uncanny feeling took possession of me. This gradually gave way to one of startled wonder, which finally enlarged upon itself till I stood there the angriest man old Broggan had ever held.

A woman! I was being outwitted by a woman.

"What manner of woman could this be," I asked myself, "who entered houses in mysterious ways to commit murder?"

No doubt she had been the lure that led poor William Wratton to his death. Perhaps she was beautiful, with a devilish beauty that men would follow even when they knew death awaited them at the end of the trail.

I pictured her young, swarthy, with gipsy features, flashing black eyes, lustrous tresses, voluptuous form. Infinite grace marked every movement of her tall, lithe body.

Then a revulsion came, and I decided that even that kind of a *young* woman could not commit murder.

I pictured her again as a toothless old hag, some witch of a southern clime, with wrinkled and yellow skin, chuckling in glee over her victims.

But this wouldn't do. Such a woman could not write such a hand. Nor would such a woman warn me instead of killing me.

But I was enraged. Why, if she was warning me at all, did she not give me fuller information? Why did she not tell me how she managed to get in and then out of the house?

But *had* she gone out of the house?

I started like a wild bull on the charge. Rather, perhaps, like a hungry hound on the chase.

She had been there—so much was certain.

Had she gone? Was there some secret hiding-place in the house we had not discovered? Had I lived under the same roof all the time with one or more murderers?

Gnashing my teeth in impotent rage, I snarled, and, snatching my revolver, made a complete search of the house once more.

By this time I knew every inch of floors, walls, and ceilings. Blindfolded, I could go to where there was a knothole in the kitchen floor. Blindfolded, I could count the old tacks left when the last carpets were taken up.

But I found nothing more than I had found before—nothing.

There was no woman. There was no evidence that any one had forced an entrance. There was not a thread, not a button, not a hairpin, as a telltale of a woman's presence.

All horror had gone. All visions of the supernatural had fled. I stood face to face with a mystery, but it was a human mystery, with none of the occult to baffle me.

And I raged.

Why had a woman been sent to commit such a crime? Undoubtedly she had led William Wratton to his death, even if she had not actually struck the blow that killed him.

Certainly she had killed poor Warson.

But why a woman?

She had said in her note that she was in the power of a murderous gang. Why did she not tell me where that gang could be found? Why did she not remain and give me the chance to set her free, as well as settle once and for all the mystery of the double tragedy?

The more I thought of it the angrier I got. I fumed. I even cursed, and profanity was a stranger to my lips.

My first thought was to hunt for Lavin and Scole, and, with them, set a trap. But there rose in me a terrible thirst for vengeance.

True, I had little of which to avenge myself. Warson was a friend, but not a near one, and Wratton had been a total stranger. But I had had trouble enough over the thing. And three of us might bungle the whole business.

I resolved to fight this gang alone. Single-handed I would lie in wait for them and shoot them down, man or woman, as they appeared.

It was a wild, unwise resolution, but I was in a wild and unwise mood.

By what trick or device the woman had entered and gone again I could not imagine.

As I thought it over, smoking furiously till the smoke grew thick around me, I saw her again as a beautiful siren. For what other kind of woman could have lured a man of the world like Wratton to such a place, and through whatever secret way they had to enter?

I fingered my revolver. I wondered if I could shoot straight, after all. I had never tried. What good was the thing even if I did see them?

I went outside and wandered all about the place, making a search for some evidence that a person had been near. There was none.

I set up a target as big as the head of a barrel, and began practising on it. At first I had no knowledge where the bullets went. They certainly did not hit the target. Then I hit the edge. And once, probably by a miracle, a bullet struck almost in the center.

But it was enough. I had learned to handle the thing, and had used up more than half my supply of cartridges.

I went to breakfast.

"When do you expect Lavin and Scole back?" asked Joel.

"Joel," I said, "if you ask me that again about anybody, I'll knock your head off. Remember that. I've had enough of this funny business."

"W-what's the matter?" demanded Joel in amazement. "You look as if the ghost had really visited you."

"It has," I said savagely.

He stood and stared at me.

"The people of Broggan were right," I went on. "That house is haunted."

"Did—did some one really come in?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Evaporated and blew through a keyhole and then took human form again."

"Are you going off your head?"

"Yes."

That merely expresses the mood I was in. I gulped my breakfast in a surly way, and, lighting a cigar, strode back to the house.

I walked around it, and looked in the windows. I almost expected to see people dancing inside. I saw merely an empty house.

I went in. I walked through the rooms. Save for my own footsteps and hard breathing, everything was still.

How *had* she got in? With my rage, the problem almost drove me mad. Like Scole, I got down and stuck my head in the fireplace and looked up the chimney.

And, like Scole, I decided that while a person could come down, it would not be so easy to get out.

And then, like Scole, I knew it would require a very long ladder to reach the roof. How *had* that woman got in?

I read her letter again. I studied the handwriting. Had the letter not been written in haste it might have been beautiful chirography. As it was, it was a pretty scrawl.

I remembered my dream. I knew it had been no dream. She had stood over me with a light—ready, no doubt, to drive the poisoned styptic dagger into my throat if I opened my eyes.

She had begged me to leave to save her life and my own. I laughed.

What did I care for her life? And I could take care of my own.

CHAPTER XV.

A SUMMONS AT MIDNIGHT.

THAT day was a restless one for me. I took out the horse and drove furiously —anywhere—I cared not what road, nor through what towns.

I tired the horse, and returned. Then I walked till I tired myself. Then I went to supper. I had had no dinner. I wanted none.

"There's a band of gipsies up the road," said Joel. "Came last night."

"Well, what of it?" I asked.

"I wondered if they had anything to do with it."

"With what?"

"That ghost business."

"Yes. It is likely that gipsies know all about the secrets of an old house in Broggan. Were they ever here before?"

"I never saw this gang before. I've seen gipsies."

"Look out for your horses and chickens. Otherwise gipsies are not particularly the enemies of mankind. The gang that we want are not gipsies. If they are, they are superior to any brand of gipsies I have ever seen."

Joel looked at me in a hurt way. His expression was such that I apologized.

"I don't mean to be rough, Joel," I said, "but something really has happened. Just how it happened I don't know, but I am going to find out. And I am going to do it myself. I won't have the thing spoiled by too many cooks."

Joel nodded.

"I knew something was on your mind."

That night I did not go to bed at all. I arranged an easy chair in my library, and, placing my revolver handy to my reach on my desk, sat down to read. But it was impossible to concentrate my thoughts on a single sentence.

An old house is full of noises. The more you listen for them, the more you'll hear. It was so with me.

Once a mouse ran across the room, and I grabbed my revolver to shoot it. Then I laughed grimly at my own nervousness.

This would never do. If I wasted my energies on a mouse, what would I do if men should come?

I could think of nothing but the letter and the woman who wrote it. She had left her work so bafflingly incomplete that she might just as well have not written it at all.

Of course, she had given me proof that she could enter and leave the house at will, but there had been evidence enough of that before. Why, oh, why had she not given me some information?

But sitting still in a big old house, half furnished, listening for noises that never come, and starting at noises that do come, is nerve-racking work.

Every half-hour I would take my revolver and prowl through the place with a lamp, never thinking that I was making a splendid target of myself for any one who might be hiding in the dark.

And drowsiness began to overcome me. The night dragged its weary length along like a funeral dirge. I felt myself growing sleepy. My head drooped.

I caught myself several times, walked around a little to shake it off, but I had tired myself so during the day that the effort was too much. I wished then that

I had brought Joel to keep me company. And at the same moment I wished it, I knew he would not have come.

And then I fell asleep.

I sprang to my feet with a yell. I clutched the back of my neck with my hand. A sudden sharp stinging pain had aroused me, and I felt the poisoned wooden point.

But it was nothing. I had slept so long with my head bowed and my chin resting on my chest that the back of my neck was strained. I looked at my watch. It was five o'clock.

It was light enough to see without a lamp, and I took the revolver and went through the house.

There was no one there, and nothing had been disturbed.

I went out to the stable and surprised my horse with an early breakfast. He seemed to be pleased, and I remained talking to him. I liked his company as well as he liked mine.

The eternal problem of how the woman had entered the house again intruded itself. I say again, but in reality it never left me.

That day, if any such thing could be possible, was worse than the day before. I was tired, nervous, and still angry. All fear had left, if, in fact, I had been conscious of any at any time. I had not, until I read the letter, considered myself in danger.

I ate my meals a little more decently, smoked with Joel before he left for Vaders, and met the stage again when it returned with the mail. There was none for me, and I was glad of it.

I took a short drive in the afternoon, and by supper-time had got myself calmed down sufficiently to sit on Joel's front stoop an hour, smoking and talking with him.

Then I went home in a cool, determined mood, resolved to sit up all night and watch.

It was a lovely evening. The light of the moon came in at the windows with sufficient brilliance to enable me to see without a lamp.

I made a détour of the house, and assured myself that everything—that is, everything I knew of—was secure. Then I sat down and waited.

But again I felt myself growing drowsy. This would not do, for, if what the woman had said in her letter was true, somebody would come to do the work at which she had revolted.

So I lit the big lamp and sat down to read.

I read probably four hours. I did not look at the time, but it must have been about midnight or a little after, when there was furious pealing of the old-fashioned bell.

I started to my feet.

I had never had a visitor at night. No amount of money could induce anybody in Broggan to enter that house day or night. I thought at once of Lavin and Scole.

Still, to take proper precautions, I picked up my revolver and walked to the door. I was surprised that there was only one ring.

I opened the door just the length of the chain, and looked out. I saw no one.

With a mighty oath, I flung off the chain, intending to pursue whoever rang that bell, ghost or human though he might be. I stumbled. Something lay huddled in a heap on the threshold. I stooped.

(To be continued.)

LAW.

Laws, as we read in ancient sages,
Have been like cobwebs in all ages.
Cobwebs for little flies are spread,
And laws for little folks are made;
But if an insect of renown,
Hornet or beetle, wasp or drone,
Be caught in quest of sport or plunder,
The filmy fetter flies in sunder.

James Beattie.

NAMES AND NUMBERS.

By GEORGE M. A. CAIN.

A summons by telephone which brought, first, disappointment, then a revelation, and finally the unexpected in its train.

FOR once in his life, Tom Harrington was realizing the truth of the tradition that Monday is a blue day.

Ordinarily he accomplished but little on the first work-day of the week, but up to this particular morning it had been a very pleasing image that came between him and the briefs on his desk. The image was there to-day—the image of the same individual girl—but it appeared, as he had last seen its beautiful original, cold, haughty, scornful, looking and speaking final dismissal.

If it had grown dim as he tried to forget it, there was the little jewel-box in his pocket where he could feel it as a perpetual reminder that his ring had been returned to him yesterday by the only girl he had ever thought he really loved.

Pretty hard at the time, isn't it? Not much use to waste words over it, though.

Most of us have been through something like it somewhere along the line. And most of us have lived through it—lived to make it all up and go on as though it had never happened, or lived to thank our lucky stars that it happened just that way.

Some of us took a long while to find out quite how lucky we were. Others knew a little sooner.

There were moments, even this first morning after, when Tom Harrington wondered whether there would not be a time when he would be glad that a girl who could not trust him better than Dollie Eastbrooke had trusted him—had let him know before they were irrevocably joined together.

He felt pretty sure that the only thing that could ever make him glad again would be to have Dollie call him up and tell him he might come and—

"B-r-r-r." rang the telephone on his desk.

His hand trembled as he lifted the receiver from the hook.

"Hallo?" he called.

"Hallo," came back; "is that you, Tom?"

"Yes; who is this, please?"

"Why, this is Dollie. Didn't you recognize my voice?"

"I thought I did; but you always speak differently into the phone."

"Well, Tom—I'm in an awful fix. I did the silliest thing this morning. I took a dime out of my pocketbook for my fare down here to Warden & Smith's store; and then I came off without the purse. You know it costs ten cents on the cars since they took off the transfers; and I can't get back. I found a nickel for the telephone in my pocket, and that was all. I *can't* walk from Thirty-Fourth Street home."

"Of course you can't. I'll get off and come up to take you home. Awfully glad you called on me."

"Will you, really? I'll be in the waiting-room. And I am dreadfully hungry, too."

Without stopping to say "Good-by" or ask permission to leave the office, Tom grabbed his hat and started for the street.

He came near killing himself in boarding a car in the middle of the block. He raved at the wagons which persisted in crossing Broadway in front of the conveyance. He tried to bribe the motorman not to see any more passengers until he reached Warden & Smith's.

He thought he had never seen a street-car quite so slow as this. And yet, with all his impatience, he was almost ready to sing aloud for joy.

Dollie had asked him to come. She had turned to him in the first slight distress.

She would tell him now that she was sorry for her hasty misjudgment. It would be a trifle bitter to remember that she could ever have believed such evil of him; but the sweetness of just having

her again would be enough to make up a thousandfold.

He rushed into the store and dashed through the throng of customers to the waiting-room. Then he paused and looked in vain for the fair face of Dollie Eastbrooke.

For a moment he was disconcerted, until he remembered that there was a second waiting-room on the fourth floor. He hurried up the stairs, not willing to wait for the elevator.

The second waiting-room was more secluded than the first. Through the open door he failed to see all the occupants; so he addressed the uniformed attendant: "Will you please tell Miss Dollie Eastbrooke that Mr. Tom Harrington is here."

The process of finding the desired individual occupied the waiting-lady some moments, then he heard his name called.

"Oh, Tom!" cried the girl. "I'm so glad you—why, you're not Tom!"

"Yes, I am," said Harrington; "but you're not Dollie."

"But I am—Dollie Graham."

"And I am Tom Harrington. But it was Dollie Eastbrooke who called me on the phone."

"And *I* called up Tom Harri*man*. I thought the waiting-lady said Harriman. I wonder now. What is your telephone number?"

"29605 Cortlandt. What number did you call?"

"*29609;* and that accounts for it. They always mix up fives and nines."

"So they do," said Harrington in a dazed sort of way.

He was just beginning to realize that Dollie Eastbrooke had not called him up at all, that she was not wanting to make up their quarrel, that he stood just where he had stood all this gloomy morning.

He glanced again at the splendid creature before him and remembered that there was still another distress than his own.

But what could he, a perfect stranger, do to help her? He would find out.

"It's awfully funny about the names, though," he added to his assent to her explanation of the shuffled numbers.

"That doesn't seem so strange to me," the girl replied. "Dollie Eastbrooke and I were in the same class at school, and to those who called us Dollie we were always a source of confusion. And Harrington is so much like Harriman that that part is not strange, either."

Tom saw the opening to offer his assistance.

"So you know Dollie Eastbrooke?" he asked. "Well, then, you must let me help you out of your straits. What can I do? Oh, now, don't say, 'Nothing.' I happen to know that you haven't even the five cents to telephone to your—to Mr. Harriman."

"Oh, dear, I suppose I must ask you to lend me that much. I forgot about that."

"But that would make you wait; let me see you home."

"Why, I couldn't think of such a thing. Don't you see, I do not know you."

"Well, I am engaged to Dollie Eastbrooke—or rather was, till yesterday. Now you know me well enough."

"Were engaged to her, but are not now? Why, that might make it all the worse."

"Oh, it was not my fault. It was all a mistake on her part. She broke it off."

"Mr. Harrington, I am very sorry to have been so much trouble to you, but really—"

"You have not given me half the trouble you will if you make me leave you now."

"Aren't you being a little hasty with compliments? Please remember that I have not the honor of your acquaintance."

"Oh, but you have. I tell you, I am Dollie Eastbrooke's fiancé—or, rather was yesterday. You are a schoolmate of hers. That's enough. Besides, I was not paying any compliment. I only meant that you must not let me leave you without helping you out of your little trouble."

"Well," she replied in mock indignation, "if that is the way you usually spoil your possibly nice speeches, I don't know as Dollie Eastbrooke could be blamed much for breaking off with you."

"Oh, bother—what shall I say? Come and have some lunch. You said you were hungry nearly an hour ago."

"The idea! Why, I couldn't think of such a thing."

"Yes, you could, too. Come on," he urged. "I want to talk to you about Dollie—Eastbrooke."

"But it wouldn't be quite proper."

There was the least note of interrogation in her voice. Harrington made haste to answer.

"Proper, fiddlesticks! Of course it would be proper. Why, we are the same as old friends already. Come on."

It took some minutes of coaxing before Tom and her healthy appetite won the day. Then, when the question of helping her and the point of propriety had been settled together, Tom realized that they had about reached the end of conversational possibilities.

They were, after all, complete strangers. It was not until they had both finished a half-dozen oysters that he managed to think of anything further to say. Then he hit upon the veriest commonplace.

"Pretty decent restaurant, isn't it?"

"Yes, very good indeed. I was never here before."

"Is that so? I bring Dollie down here quite often—or did."

"Yes, and you will again."

Tom sighed.

"I'm afraid there is not much hope," he said.

"Oh, nonsense!" rejoined the girl. "Do you think the world is coming to an end just because you had a little spat? But you said you would tell me about it," she equivocated. "That is, if you don't mind talking about it to a stranger."

"Mind? I tell you that you are not a stranger. I feel as though I had known you always."

"Well, go on and tell me, then."

"Oh—Umm-mm. You see, it was like this: I have a rich uncle out in Iowa. He has the misfortune to possess a daughter. Still more unfortunately, he thinks the sun rises and sets in that daughter."

Tom paused. The girl looked up encouragingly.

"Well," he began again, "he sent the daughter on to New York to see the town. Put her up at the Waldorf and sent me fifty dollars with the request that I play the part of guide."

"I see," said the girl.

"I'm glad you didn't see *her*. Maybe she would have been all right if she had known some things about getting herself up. But she wore a Merry Widow hat that turned everybody on the street around in his course. There were more ribbons in her dresses than there was dress. And, to crown all, she covered up her good, wholesome freckles with a coat of rouge that would have scared a chorus-girl."

"And you had to take her around?" queried Miss Graham with a smile of amusement that would have been bewitching to Tom if he had not remembered that he owed loyalty to the memory of Miss Eastbrooke.

"Exactly," quoth Harrington. "Of course, I steered clear of all the places where I thought I might meet any of my friends. That is not so hard. These people that come in always want to see Central Park, the Eden Musée, Fifth Avenue—from a bus—the Statue of Liberty, art-galleries—all the things a New Yorker never goes near—and Coney Island.

"I had got safely through all the rest, and I thought Coney was the safest of all. It was Saturday when I took her down on the boat. We were just about to come home after a wild dissipation of trained lions, baby incubators, fireworks, and the rest. We had to wait about ten minutes for the last boat. And who should bob up but that miserable little cat, Mrs. Dabley? Do you know her?"

"Yes, I see; and she went and told Dollie you were down at the Island with a chorus-girl?" broke in the other.

"That's what I suppose," assented Harrington. "What I can't quite fathom is how Dollie could ever have believed her. *I* would not have believed that sort of thing about *her* if the whole city had sworn to it. But she did. Yesterday when I had the country cousin safely off my hands and went to the house, I was handed a note with my engagement-ring. I finally got Dollie herself to come into the hall; but she only repeated the things she had written in the note."

"But Dollie's awfully sorry about it now," began the girl. "She is quite as broken-hearted over it as you are."

"How do you know?"

"Why—why, I know—because any girl would feel that way afterward."

"Do you think you could tell how any girl would feel?"

"Yes. I think I could. You see, I think it was about like this: Mrs. Dabley came in Sunday morning with her story. Now, you must admit that such a tale is a bit startling. It may not convince for long, but it—startles. And you arrived on the scene too soon after she heard of it—don't you see? If you had waited till to-day to call, she would never have mentioned the thing at all."

Tom Harrington assented dubiously.

"Well, maybe that is the way it happened. But, honestly now, do you think that sort of a story ought to have made even a momentary impression? Would you believe it, even for an hour, about a man you were engaged to? About Tom Harriman, for instance? Wouldn't you have told the little busybody to go and mind her own business?"

"Oh, well, that's different. All people are not just alike, you know."

"You mean I am not like your Tom? Not quite so evidently trustworthy?"

"No, I mean there are great differences in the temperaments of girls."

"But you said you knew how any girl would feel."

"Yes, I do; I can tell by their actions about how they feel. If Dollie had acted the other way, I would know she felt differently. I would know she never doubted you for a moment, of course. Now I know she did have her moment of doubt. I know, also, that the moment is past."

"Then what do you make out of her failure to make any effort to straighten things up? There are telephones in her house and in my rooms."

The girl paused for answer to this question. Harrington saw her hesitation and drew his own conclusion.

"Miss Graham, are you perfectly sure you can prove your surmises about the way Dollie Eastbrooke feels toward me at the present moment?"

The girl smiled.

"Mr. Harrington, you are forgetting to eat, and that steak is spoiling," she answered, sparring for time.

"Perhaps she is too proud to own her mistake just yet; perhaps you said things that were a little unpleasant and rankled," she ventured at last.

"I don't *think* I did. But could anything I might have said equal the injustice of such an accusation?"

"Perhaps not. But I might as well tell you how I really know that Dollie Eastbrooke is sorry for the whole thing. I have seen her and talked to her about it."

"Seen her and talked to her about it!" cried Tom in amazement.

"Yes. She wants you to come back."

"She does? Are you sure? Did she say so?"

"Of course she does. I know she does even if she didn't say so in exact words. She couldn't help it."

"Well, but if she didn't say so, I don't see how I can go. She told me not to come again."

"Now, don't be unreasonable. You go right up there this very evening. She'll take you in and tell you how sorry she is. Take my word for it."

Harrington did not seem wholly satisfied. Apparently the evidence did not quite assure him that he ought to act on the advice.

"Miss Graham," he asked at length, "will you please tell me honestly just what she did say about my coming?"

"It does not make the slightest difference what she said. The important matter is how she feels."

"But I want to know what she said."

"And I tell you she wants you to come."

"Yet she did not say so?"

"Not in so many words—no. But I know she does."

"In so many words, what did she say? Please."

"The words do not count. People say things—girls especially—that they do not mean."

"But," persisted Harrington, "the words have to count with a man. I can hardly present myself to the liability of further scorn because even as nice a friend as you show yourself to be happens to think that *she* would want *her* lover to come back, supposing she had had a temporary loss of faith in him—which, she acknowledges, she never could have had."

A slight moisture gathered in the dark eyes of the beautiful woman, when, after a brief hesitation, she looked up again.

"Mr. Harrington, please go. Please go, because I want you to; because I do know just how I should feel if the same sort of thing *had* happened to me—with Tom Harriman."

The pleading look was too much for Harrington's equilibrium.

"Oh, I will go," he said, "since you ask me that way. I would go almost anywhere."

He looked rather longer than was good for him into the face that smiled gratefully up at him.

Suddenly he blurted out: "No, hanged if I will! I couldn't do it now. It wouldn't be fair to her. It would not be fair to myself."

"Why, Mr. Harrington, what is the matter?" inquired the girl, in alarm at his sudden change and the stress of his expression.

"Don't ask me," he said, almost sternly. "I can't tell you. It would make trouble. It would not be fair to you, either."

"Well, but, really, I don't understand you," pursued the girl in deep perplexity.

"Better for both of us that you shouldn't. You would feel badly about it, I know; and I would be a cad—and get a thrashing from Mr. Thomas Harriman," he broke off with a hard attempt at a smile.

A flood of color added to the girl's beauty as the full import of his words dawned upon her.

She sat silent, at a loss how to adjust herself to this absurd turn in affairs. Suddenly her eyes brightened with a solution to the puzzle.

"Really, this is awful," she said, with what was intended for a smile; "but you will be glad enough to go when I explain what an abominable little fraud I have been."

"No, don't talk like that. You couldn't be a fraud. You trust a man; you would believe in your lover no matter what men or woman said about him. And I would believed in you, no matter what you said about yourself."

"But you won't. Wait till I tell you." She spoke rapidly, lest the other should interrupt again. "I am a fraud. I made up all that stuff about the mixed telephone numbers."

"You're no fraud; you're an awfully clev—"

"Wait. Dollie Eastbrooke didn't even send me to do it. I took the responsibility on myself. She was about to destroy your photograph when I went in. I got a look at it. I made up my mind that if you looked and were like your picture—you deserved to be happy, and I wanted you to be. And I felt sure that, in spite of all she said, Dollie Eastbrooke would want you again.

"That telephone ruse was the quickest thing I could think of for getting to see you without committing myself about trying to help. You don't really think I would have come over here to lunch with you if I had not known all about you?"

"No, I think you are the best friend I ever had. I think that, now I have seen you, I would rather stay a lonely bachelor all my days than—well, I can't say anything more just now. I know how loyal you would be to a man; I would like to congratulate Mr. Thomas Harriman, but I don't think I could stand it."

The girl looked just a trifle more lovable than at any previous moment as she shyly raised her big eyes to meet Tom's.

"You don't need to congratulate him. You see—I made him up to explain my coming out when the attendant in the store told me you were there."

THE SEA-FOWLER.

THE baron hath the landward park, the fisher hath the sea;
But the rocky haunts of the sea-fowl belong alone to me.
The baron hunts the running deer, the fisher nets the brine;
But every bird that builds a nest on ocean cliffs is mine.
Come on, then, Jock and Alick, let's to the sea-rocks bold:
I was trained to take the sea-fowl ere I was five years old.

Mary Howitt.

WASHINGTON OR—WORSE?*

By EDGAR FRANKLIN,

Author of "The Taking of the Liberator," "The Chase of the Concession," etc.

Certain astounding happenings that broke the calm current of life in a banana republic.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

STEPHEN GIRTON and Ned Hemmett are respectively Secretary of State and Secretary of the Treasury in the little republic of Guanama, under United States protection. Hemmett passes into Puerto Carlo thirty cases which he supposes to contain personal property of a beautiful Spanish girl, Inez Vanniera, but which turn out to be rifles. Perdon, the Governor of the republic, mysteriously disappears, and Girton and Hemmett start for the uplands to ferret out what they suspect to be the beginnings of a native revolution.

On the train for Santa Maria they are set upon by a squad of Guanaman policemen and brought before Marado, ex-President of Guanama, who, it seems, is treacherously planning an uprising against the United States control. The two men pretend allegiance to the new republic, and are led by Marado to where his army is camped beneath the volcano El Demonio. Here they find Perdon, who has been condemned to death. They are caught in an attempt to rescue him, and ordered back to camp to be dealt with as traitors to Marado's army.

CHAPTER IX.

A DESPERATE OUTLOOK.

THERE are times when comment, remonstrance, speculation even, are too utterly futile for indulgence. This, apparently, was one of them. For a minute the three faced the grinning faces about them; then, with a grunt, and not altogether without the expectation of a bullet, Hemmett turned on his heel and stood motionless as the others followed his example.

"Forward!"

The rasping voice held still its contemptuous amusement.

"You may walk in single file!" they were commanded further. "Señor Girton will lead the way. Señor Perdon in the center. Señor Hemmett, you will precede me. March!"

Silently, head down almost, they obeyed, a native trotting before, chuckling and singing to himself.

There was no doubt whatever about their course. Straight for the cavern they made at first.

A halt was called suddenly. Perdon, amid derisive laughter, was jerked from the little line and thrust toward his cave once more. A shouted word or two of command, and a pair of natives settled beside the entrance—and the march was resumed.

Could cheerlessness have been added to their former situation, it was emphatically added now.

Under Alanza's sharp tongue, the pace grew almost to a jog-trot through the late afternoon heat. Puffing, beads of perspiration rolling down their cheeks, the pair proceeded without resistance.

Into the woods they plunged then, and the natives behind broke into discordant song. The words were Spanish, the melodies impromptu; the sentiment, however, was entirely unmistakable.

Down with the United States! Down with oppression! The head of the *Americano cochinillo* should stare at all free Guanamans from the gates in Puerto Carlo, to rejoice every free soul! The oppressors should be driven out and—so without end.

Sentries appeared, too, in quite unaccountable fashion—appeared from the undergrowth, grinned, laughed aloud, then, with a word of encouragement and enthusiasm, disappeared again.

Their own tent, at the southern end of

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the camp apparently, came into sight at last, and with it, as they paused for a moment, came Marado.

His face was white, his hands were twitching. He hurried to the group and choked over his words.

"You—have tried—" he began.

"Well, we failed!" Girton snarled. "A signboard isn't necessary to proclaim that fact, is it?"

"But—oh, the great folly, *señors!* The madness—the unwisdom of playing the traitor—the—"

"Traitor be—" Hemmett began violently.

"Wait!" Girton broke in. "See here, Marado! If all this pains you so greatly, you've only to give the word to release us!"

"But it is not—I—" escaped suddenly from the little man.

"I'll give you my word we won't try any more tricks if you'll forgive us this one!"

There had been a day when Girton's smile worked upon Marado as oil upon turbulent water. That day, seemingly, was past now. The small brown man fell to actual trembling.

"*Señors!*" he cried wildly. "It is the great—great fault of your own! It is the folly—the impatience of the *Americano* —it is—"

He stopped short. For a moment he stared at them. Then, at a sign, Alanza called cheerily:

"Onward, *señors!*"

Guanama's ex-President turned. Without comment, he walked away; and, despite their plight, Girton whistled aloud.

"So little Marado isn't the top notch of power here, after all!" he observed in an undertone. "I wonder—"

Alanza's pistol rapped him sharply on the shoulder.

"One does not wonder here, *señor!*" the voice behind announced. "Keep silence!"

Speculation ceased once more. Silently they trudged forward again.

But it was through new scenes now. Vast stretches of forest seemed to have been cleared here, after a fashion. Tents were thick, men thicker. Crowds upon crowds surged forward for a view of them as they passed.

Jubilant laughter arose. Cries of joy split the air. Cries, too, that found echo in other cries containing the word "*municion!*" Bits of wood, stones, smoking ends of cigars, were hurled at them.

And they endured it, for there was no choice. Boil with rage as they might, silence was their solitary course.

They knew Guanama; they knew that, just now, one solitary ill-judged word might precipitate an assault which, if it left them alive, would leave them also badly battered. They clenched their teeth and panted onward.

And then, suddenly, came another tap upon the shoulder of each. Alanza, graced now with sudden dignity, was at their side.

"We approach," he said briefly. "Be silent until you are addressed."

"Approach what?" Girton inquired tartly.

No answer was vouchsafed. Instead, Alanza, erect and alert, led the way to a path at the side; thence to a broad cleared space.

Some dozen men were about here, each armed with his rifle, each seemingly frozen into the stiffest of "attention" attitudes. Toward the center of the open space a table stood upon the mossy ground, and behind it a man was seated.

His skin was white—very much too white for a native. The cast of his features, too, bespoke the lighter skinned people. His chin was massive and smooth-shaven, his blue-gray eyes as hard and expressionless as chilled steel.

Long-nosed, strong-faced, wholly imperious, this mysterious being looked up now steadily at them.

He continued to look, too, as they were ranged before him and brought to a halt. His eyes all but pierced them through and through; and, save for faint curiosity in those eyes, the face remained as devoid of expression as if carved of stone.

He turned then to Alanza.

"Your prisoners, general?"

The Guanaman saluted.

"Even so, *señor.*"

"Very well." He turned slowly to the two Americans. "Your names are Stephen Girton and Edward Hemmett?"

"Those happen to be our names," Girton responded, "and who—"

A brisk snap of the fingers stopped him.

"Lately Secretary of State and Secretary of the Treasury under the United States government?"

"Not lately! Still!" Hemmett began incautiously.

"It was yesterday, I believe, that you renounced all connection with that government in the presence of Señor Marado?"

"Yes."

"You were brought to this camp last evening to serve faithfully with us, now and later?"

"That seemed to be the general idea."

The man at the table glanced at a line or two of scribbled notes.

"The information brought by the scout, General Alanza," he continued, "is that these two endeavored to desert this afternoon, after taking from his captors and taking with themselves one Lucius Perdon, lately our prisoner of war?"

"It is so."

"You saw the attempt to desert?"

"It was I, *señor*, who, with my men, stopped them."

"There was every evidence, then, of their intent to desert this force, general?"

"Yes, *señor*."

The paper dropped. The white-faced, hawk-eyed man behind the table turned quietly upon the prisoners.

"Have you anything to say before sentence is pronounced upon you?"

"Yes! I have!" came in a roar from Hemmett. "I've got this to say: you may do what you like with us, perhaps, but when little old Uncle Sam comes down on you and your movement with both feet and—"

"Sufficient!" The cold tone broke off the warmer flow. The white man pursed his lips thoughtfully. Then he nodded briefly with: "At half past eight tomorrow morning you will both be shot upon the hillside."

"With the Señor Perdon?" Alanza asked softly.

The man behind the table smiled.

"With the Señor Perdon," he agreed. "That is all!"

His unemotional eyes returned calmly to the paper. So far as the mysterious woodland gentleman was concerned, apparently, Girton and Hemmett had ceased to exist.

So far as concerned themselves, however, matters were otherwise. One long, gasping breath escaped Girton; he was before the table then, and his voice rang out suddenly:

"There's just one little valedictory speech I want to make, now that sentence has been pronounced!" he thundered. "That is—"

"*Señor!*" Alanza stepped forward warningly and angrily. As swiftly Girton's fist shot out. The native sprawled—was upon his feet in an instant, and with pistol drawn. And then—

"I shall permit him to speak, General Alanza," came placidly from behind the board.

"Thank you, and be damned to you!" Girton shouted as his clenched fists rested upon the table. "There are only one or two things I want to say! One is, that I know *you!*"

"I—er—" The man started back.

"Yes! Not in this country, perhaps, but in Washington, D. C. You don't remember it, perhaps. I do, and so does Mr. Hemmett! The second is, that if I have to come back after I'm dead, I'll see that you get *yours!* The third is, that when the United States have finished with you and the—the force you represent, they'll further take it out of these little brown fools who—"

"Enough!" Cold anger was in the gray eyes now. "You may remove them, Alanza."

It was done with more forceful enthusiasm than politeness.

A jerk, and the pair were faced about and all but run out of the clearing. A violent shove or two, and they were on the homeward path once more.

CHAPTER X.

WAITING FOR THE WORST.

THE crowds surged out again, the faces more triumphant, more leering!

The voices were raised once more in choruses of hundreds. And always, amid

all else, came that jubilant, insistent yell of "*Municion! Las municiones!*"

"It is painfully palpable," Girton muttered, "that the ammunition is on the job, Ned!"

"Yes, and that the free people are about to blow themselves to the worst licking that—"

Alanza, as usual, cut short the conversation.

"You will remain in your tent, *señors*," he informed them. "Dusk gathers now, and the order has gone forth that you be shot upon sight should you emerge without the command."

Silently they entered. Silently, wearily, they squatted upon the floor as José entered with another of his cheerlessly nourishing meals.

Another grinning native, well-armed, appeared and perched unceremoniously upon one of the cots.

"The little steel knives, *señors!*" he remarked flippantly. "I have been sent to see that you attempt none of the dreadful suicide!"

"If you see anything here, it'll be murder," Hemmett responded savagely, "and you'll be the one to play the star thinking rôle!"

Playfully a cocked Colts was leveled at his head.

"Ooh-hooh! I think not, *señor!*" came pleasantly.

The meal was over. Without unduly exaggerated courtesy, José removed the dishes. The guard, too, sauntered out, and the flap of the tent fell.

Girton, securing it, peered through for a moment. Their genial overseeer had upturned a flask to his lips, and was drinking and humming together. He thrust the bottle into his pocket and stretched himself comfortably before their only means of exit.

For a time neither of the captives had heart or inclination for talk. Side by side upon the edge of a cot, they smoked and thought—and thought and smoked: until at last Girton looked up with a rather weary smile.

"Well, we're up against our last night on earth apparently, Ned."

"It's not the first time."

"No, but it has all the earmarks of being the last time," the Secretary of State sighed. "We've been in tight boxes before. We've never been absolutely beyond hope of rescue, though."

"No, and we're not now, until they've blown the life out of us!" Hemmett replied with faint anger.

"I'm afraid things are a little different now." The Secretary of State found a new cigar. "We're absolutely beyond all hope, Ned. Even if we could send a message to General Cade, or any one else at Puerto Carlo, it would be a matter of a day and more before troops would get here. Even then—"

"Even then, any quantity of our men that could be sent might—and probably would—be thoroughly trounced! These devils very evidently have their cartridges now, Steve. They're wildly excited—about what, I'll wager not one in a hundred of them knows. They're ready for trouble in any and every way, shape, and form. We—well, we are just about done for, I imagine."

Rather forlornly Hemmett turned with a smile to his partner. His eyes dropped again then.

"Stephen, why in the name of common sense couldn't you have listened to me in the first place? Why couldn't you have made your report and let me take what was coming? It lay between putting it up to Washington—or worse. We have located the 'worse' with a vengeance!"

No answer rewarded him. The Secretary of the Treasury seemed to huddle down in a miserable heap.

"And all this—this infernal mess on account of one woman and one blithering idiot's soft-headedness!"

"Bosh! Smarter men than you have been fooled a great deal more easily, Ned. I—"

"But can't you understand that if you had let me take my own course—if, provided there was anything to be learned up-country, you'd let me come alone—how much better it would have been?" cried Hemmett. "Then I alone would have suffered with Perdon! By this time you'd very likely have had troops moving up here to find us both, and perhaps they'd have been here in time to check the distribution of that ammunition. Now—"

He broke off in a bitter snarl. His teeth shut tight, and his eyes fell again.

He was suffering, rightly and justly, perhaps, but suffering, nevertheless; and Girton, realizing the fruitlessness of such a proceeding, sought abruptly to swerve his thoughts.

"Did you recognize that man, Ned?"

"Eh?"

"The human iceberg who decreed our execution—who seems to be in command here?"

"I certainly recalled his face, from the Washington days. He was temporarily in charge of the embassy of—"

"Of the '*the* European power' Perdon was talking about." Girton substituted grimly. "Do you realize the significance of his presence here, in charge of the whole fiendish business?"

Sadly, thoughtfully, Hemmett nodded.

"It means that Perdon was altogether right—that's all, Steve. This little muss isn't all Guanaman in origin."

"No, and I doubt if any of it is," the Secretary of State sighed. "It means simply that this fellow has been sent to work up a revolution that—well, that will bring such a thrashing to Guanama from the United States that *the* European power will step in, solely in the interests of humanity, and try to put a stop to it."

"And that, again, means that the United States will have a really big power to lick, in addition to keeping things quiet here."

"And with the best part of the navy on the Pacific, and all this on the Atlantic coast, is the United States sure to win?" Girton demanded gravely.

The Secretary of the Treasury groaned as he rose. Once or twice he walked up and down the tent. He paused then before Girton.

"Steve," he said, "it's masterly, in a way. In one swoop the apparent revolutionists are going to slaughter Perdon and you and me. *That* means absolutely sure, swift vengeance from our old Stars and Stripes—perhaps a disastrous war that it isn't impossible to believe might spread around the world! But—"

He laughed bitterly at the absurdity of the notion.

"But if we could walk off with that cold-blooded devil—if we could drag him from behind his table and shoot up in the air and land at Washington, and—"

He broke off with a shrug, and reseated himself.

"However, there's no use in dreaming now. We may as well come down to good hard reality. Ned, do you suppose they'll allow us to write a letter or two before the festivity in the morning?"

"I don't know. We'll ask them—it'll put things off a bit at least if they consent." Girton shifted uneasily. "However, we won't bother about that now. We'll sort of ignore the fact that we're condemned and unarmed and surrounded and friendless and—"

A sharp thrust in the ribs stopped him suddenly.

Glancing upward, in the dim light of the lantern which had been left them, the Secretary of State followed his friend's pointing finger.

Noiselessly, without apparent reason, the rear wall of their tent was quivering violently! Wind there was none: their guard lay stretched before the forward end; and yet—the sharp twitch came again and even again.

"Is somebody monkeying with the guy-ropes of this affair?" Hemmett breathed.

"I—look!"

Pegged down firmly at the bottom, a little section of the rear wall seemed to have been loosened. There was a tug—and a fruitless one, if the intention were to bring up the canvas.

An instant's pause, and the faintest of ripping sound was heard. Through the thick fabric appeared the shining, sharply pointed end of what was unquestionably a native knife-blade. Perhaps a foot, it ran neatly through the canvas, leaving a loose-flapping hole.

And then came the slightest of possible clinkings! The upper flap of the hole was drawn back quickly—and through the hole itself appeared the long, shining, heavy-calibered muzzle of a powerful sporting rifle.

And it pointed, with deadly accuracy, at their own cot!

CHAPTER XI.

BEFORE MOONRISE.

THE grisly length of steel paused. Pointing straight toward them, it

wavered for a little, now to one side, now to the other, as if being poised more carefully by the unseen hand without the tent.

For an instant it occurred to Hemmett to dash quickly at the thing—to seize it boldly, and strive, with one wrench, to turn it upward. His muscles tightened; he was on the verge of a leap toward the threatening thing, when Girton's hand upon his knee gave him pause.

"Stay where you are, Ned!" came in an almost inaudible breath.

"But—"

"They've got us, whatever new trick this may be!" the Secretary of State went on. "You'll get a bullet from it the second that you move—be sure of that!"

"And suppose I do? I—"

Girton's face was very white as he turned with a faint smile to his partner of years.

"It is probably merely a neater and less incriminating way of despatching us than an open execution," he muttered very gently. "In a later emergency, you know, it can be blamed on almost any one."

"And are we going to sit here like a pair of dummies, and—"

The jaw of the Secretary of the Treasury dropped suddenly—so suddenly that Girton, too, turned toward the deadly muzzle at the rear. His breath left him in a sudden, amazed respiration.

For the muzzle had dropped flat to the ground.

Not that alone, but it was working toward them now. The barrel appeared entire. The magazine, the hammer, popped into view then. A final, cautious shove, and butt and all were within the tent—their own to pick up!

A moment they stared at it, incredulously. Still as two carven figures they remained for a while.

Girton bent forward slightly then, and peered hard. No, there seemed to be no cord attached to the trigger, no ingenious device to explode the weapon—nothing, in fact, save one big, modern rifle, new and perfect, and, when loaded, capable of driving a good half-ounce of lead through a man at every shot.

"Well—I'll be damned!" was Hemmett's sole, thunderstruck comment in an underbreath mumble.

"Wait! That's not all, either!"

Together their fascinated eyes were again fastened upon the long hole.

Without came another tiny scratching sound. The tent-flap stirred once more—opened again. A second muzzle appeared as unexpectedly as the first!

The mysterious worker seemed to be getting his bearings rather more accurately now. There was no pause this time. Swiftly, silently, the weapon was pushed inward, clutched in a big, brown, hairy hand. Cautiously it felt about—it located the first rifle—it laid the second carefully beside it.

And then it waved noiselessly, presumably to attract their attention had that not yet occurred. The fingers snapped softly, and the forefinger pointed almost commandingly at the guns.

The Secretary of the Treasury swallowed hard as he rose noiselessly.

"Steve," he whispered, "if angels have brown fists like that, there's one outside this tent!"

"Look out! Stay where you are for the present! It may be only to draw us over there and knife us quietly! It's not impossible to see through that canvas with the light in here."

Erect, Hemmett paused.

The hand had disappeared now. As suddenly it reappeared, a thick leather roll clutched where the rifle had been.

Gently the newest wonder was laid upon the ground—and it unrolled to display a massive, thoroughly filled cartridge-belt!

Back went the hand—out of sight. Back it came—into sight again! A second belt unrolled before them.

Tiger-like, Hemmett was upon the display with a bound. Be afoot what might, these were at least real guns and real cartridges, and—he was clutching them tight in both hands!

Two steps, and they were upon the cot, and the Secretary of the Treasury's countenance beamed like the rising sun.

"They're both loaded, Steve!" he whispered. "Both of 'em—d'ye hear? And there's stuff enough in these belts to wipe out a regiment of marksmen such as these confounded natives! Here!"

He slung one belt over his shoulder, and patted his rifle as he watched Girton follow the glorious example. And—"

His words ceased as he caught the renewing roundness in Girton's stare. Swiftly he turned toward the rear once more.

The mysterious hand had appeared again, clutching a new load. Its mate appeared beside it and beckoned, and Hemmett stepped hurriedly back and squatted low beside the hole.

He received the burden almost incredulously as the hand disappeared. He gulped aloud as a similar handful followed.

And beside Girton, as he strapped the one about his waist, he laid a second belt of heavy cartridges, burdened down this time with a brace of long-barreled Colt revolvers.

For an instant the two men stared from each other to the hole in the rear. Then:

"I beg his pardon!" Hemmett cried with incautious loudness. "That one's no plain rank-and-file angel, Steve! He's an archangel—a saint, or—"

"Hush!" Girton's eyes were twinkling excitedly, his face was flushed, but his calmer nature still predominated. "We're not out of the woods yet, Ned! Two rifles and four revolvers won't lick nine thousand men, even—"

"And if they don't, at least they'll prevent some of those nine thousand from shooting us like a pair of rats in a hole!" Hemmett murmured jubilantly. "Before we go, at half past eight, if we go at all, I'll guarantee that there'll be some unfamiliar brunette faces in—well, in a locality where ice is at a premium!"

Noiselessly he attempted a jig step. As suddenly as it had started it stopped again—for there were further queer doings at that rear stretch of canvas.

Up toward the topmost point the keen knife had appeared again, silently, mysteriously as before.

Some good ten inches of steel had penetrated now; with a gentle, sawing stroke, the canvas was being slit steadily downward. A foot laid open—then two and three and four—and the wall had been cut into two sections!

A hand without was holding them together. Another was thrust through, its forefinger beckoning now.

They exchanged a glance. They smiled queerly. For no apparent reason their hands met and clasped for an instant—and, their rifles ready, the two men stepped to the rear.

They might be going to death—death contrived by one of Guanama's astute brains. At least they were going armed and alert and ready to give an account of themselves should the seeming friend prove a false one.

Another glance, and Hemmett led the way.

The flaps parted slightly. Unhesitatingly, the Secretary of the Treasury stepped forth. An anxious instant, and his own hand beckoned through the gap—and the tent of the condemned had lost both its occupants as the guard drowsed over his fire in front.

The blackness was utterly unfathomable now, even after the dim lantern of their late abode.

Their bodies collided in the darkness, and separated again as a strong hand gripped an arm of each.

"This way, *señors!*" said a voice sibilantly. "It is not to speak until I give the word. Quickly, and step with care!"

Unquestioningly they fell into tiptoed step.

Straight into the bushes they went, into the heavy undergrowth among the trees. That there was a path of some sort their feet told better than their eyes. That their unseen guide, revealed only as a tall, wiry mass of man, knew his way by instinct was wholly apparent.

So, for the present, they were heading away from the main camp and traveling almost southerly. A quarter of a mile had been made now, it seemed, when a figure loomed dimly before them. A whispered word or two passed, and they moved onward again.

And then they turned to the right—toward those fateful slopes of El Demonio.

A new path seemed to have been found, and they were hurried along it, minute after minute, quarter hour after quarter hour.

Sentries appeared—listened to the whisper—concealed themselves again.

Ground was rising once more in the sharp fashion to which two previous trips had accustomed them. The woods, too, were thinning familiarly, as they hurried on their way. Around curves they went,

and—here and there—over rocks, guided unerringly by their tall savior.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LEFTWARD TURN.

When the best part of an hour had passed they came rather suddenly to the ending of the lowland forest and were on the edge of the lighter, opener mountainside.

A gentle push brought them to a standstill.

"It is here, *señors!*"

"Eh?"

The hard breathing of their guide moved a little to the left. He seemed to exchange a word or two with some one.

The bushes moved then—and for a moment it seemed that several men were approaching together. The pair gripped their rifles and waited; and through the gloom appeared the distant outlines of two horses' heads.

They were saddled, they were bridled. They were live, strong little native horses—good for anything in the way of work that Guanama could produce—and they came near to bringing a cheer from the astonished pair in the bushes.

"Mister Man!" Hemmett began. "If I—"

"Hush, *señor!* You ride, both of you?"

"Yes!"

"Then mount! I lead you to the edge of the forest."

Quickly, obediently, they found their stirrups. Quickly they swung across the little nags.

And with that same prompt certainty of motion the horses were led forward, down the widening natural trail—until, with the glowing crater well in view above, they stopped suddenly, and their guide dropped the bridles.

He was fairly discernible now—a big, handsome fellow, mighty of shoulder and arm and leg. His face was queerly set, queerly exultant, as he regarded them for a moment.

Hemmett bent over and laid a hand upon his arm, and his voice trembled a little as he spoke.

"Old man," he said, "I don't know who you are, or why you're doing this, But one thing I do want to say, for Mr. Girton and myself!"

He gulped a little, and his grip on the big arm tightened.

"Bill," he continued enthusiastically, "you're the whitest thing that ever paddled about this country in a Guanaman skin! You're the biggest-souled, biggest-hearted citizen that ever inhabited this or any other country!

"And the next time we meet, whether it's in Guanama or the United States or China or Australia, if you want two men to help you lick the entire community, or start you in business, or escort you in the biggest toot money can finance or ingenuity contrive, call on—"

"It is enough, *señor,*" the quiet voice said from wholly unsmiling lips. "I do what I do because—because I have reason."

"And if you'll tell us that reason—" Girton began.

"From here," the native pursued, calmly ignoring him, "you will make almost straight for the crater of El Demonio. You see—I point?" He indicated the direction. "Almost to the wagons, far over there, you go. Stop where you see the single tree and the few white stones about. Turn left, then, and ride around the Demonio, almost at the summit, through the thin trees above. You see them, too?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Ride, then, until you see the thick patch of trees on the other side. When you reach them, let each of you dismount and stand upon the ground. Let each light a cigar or a cigarette—or at least a match. You have them?"

"Yes."

"It is—enough, *señors.*"

"And what happens then?"

"A friend will meet you, *señors*—my own brother. He will guide you to Lareva, some thirty miles westward. From there, in the morning, you may make the train."

He nodded silently.

"Should you meet sentries, *señors*, remember only '*Libertad sin cesar.*'"

"The password?"

"The countersign, *señors*. And the password for the night is '*Victoria.*'"

His active hands fell. He waited

silently as they gathered up their reins. Their horses stirred, and Hemmett drew his own quietly to a standstill.

"Mr. ——?" he began.

"For you I have no name," came in a rather more animated tone of odd quality. "Hasten!"

"Well, whatever your name may be, then," Hemmett went on, "in the name of my friend and myself I want to thank you about as sincerely and heartily as one man can thank—"

"*Bastantemente!*" The word came in a strange, inexplicable, indefinable flare of hatred, apparently! "I want not *your* thanks! Go! I have fulfilled my promise! Now, *go!*"

A sharp kick from the brown-skinned anomaly, and Hemmett's horse almost unseated him in its forward plunge. Quickly, dazedly, he regained control—to find Girton at his side and both of them out in the starlit open, with the red edge of a tropical moon creeping over the horizon.

"Well—" The Secretary of State caught his breath as his mount settled to a steady, unhurried trot. "That was—an eccentric person, Steve!"

Girton laughed softly. "Hang his eccentricity!" he muttered.

"But whatever made him act like that?" The problem seemed to be consuming Hemmett.

Girton laughed again. For a moment he looked away. When his gaze returned to his partner it held an odd smile.

"What made you O.K. thirty cases of rifles to these savages, Ned?" he inquired irrelevantly.

"Eh?" Hemmett started violently. "Do you suppose it's possible—"

"I've quit supposing. Let's do the same with this kind of megaphone conversation, Ned. We're going to have our hands full getting clear, as it is, I fancy."

His lips pursed, his eyes staring with distinct and wondering speculation, the Secretary of the Treasury obeyed.

Silently, unhindered, unchallenged, they rode—onward and upward. The moon was gathering brilliancy now, and the open slope of the mountain left little to be desired as a riding way to freedom.

Nearer and nearer grew the rifle-wagons, the great wheeled affairs laden down with the fifteen thousand little engines of war. Mules, horses, or men—or all together—each reflected, must have had their work cut out when it came to bringing those big affairs through the forest.

There they were now, silent, canvas-covered, ominous, perching high toward the crater, waiting, probably, only until to-morrow to be eased down nearer to the camp and broken open.

"It was a large head that put them there!" Hemmett commented suddenly. "If there'd been enough luck in the world to have their revolution discovered and troops sent, it would have been a mighty small matter to run that whole load across the mountain and establish a new camp, wouldn't it?"

"Apparently."

Girton paused as they came to the thin patch of woods their guide had indicated, and looked backward.

"And not only that," he continued, "but— Ned!"

The last word was fairly hissed.

"Eh? What?"

"Look! They're coming up here!"

Like a flash, the Secretary of the Treasury turned in his saddle and followed the pointing finger.

There, below, emerging from the thicker woods, a thin file of mounted men were coming into view.

They were from camp — that was beyond question. They were headed straight upward, too—that was equally certain. And they—

"Into the trees!" Girton cried softly. "They'll see us! Isn't it better to make a dash?"

"No. I don't believe they've spotted us yet—and it isn't ten yards into the shadow! Go on! If we run, we'll be chased. If we can keep quiet in there, they may head somewhere else, and—go on!"

A dig of the spurs, and the little beasts went forward. A bound or two, and they were well within the shadow of the trees—and at a standstill.

And there the two refugees turned and faced each other with a grim smile.

"There are," observed Girton, "about as many slips between the cup and the lip in Guanama as elsewhere!"

"Rather!" Hemmett stared through the spare trees for an instant.

"Is there any chance of a getaway, if we started out of the other end of these trees?"

"Not one in a thousand. It's clear country in patches, almost all the way around the summit. The moon's coming up, too. We'd be spotted and chased in two minutes—and probably shot on the wing."

"Then—"

"Then we wait right where we are, and pray not to be discovered."

Together their eyes turned down-hill again. The little line was well defined now—some twelve or fourteen horsemen, proceeding rather rapidly up the side of El Demonio.

To the fore, and perhaps a hundred yards in advance, a single rider pressed forward alone, mounted upon a horse of such quality as Guanama had never produced.

Erect in the saddle, the man's eyes seemed to be covering the whole mountainside ahead, to be wholly unaware of the little troop behind. His splendid animal, too, appeared to have small concern with those in the rear; broad-chested, mighty of limb, he pressed upward, ever harder and harder, and the distance between him and his followers widened perceptibly.

Tensely the pair among the trees watched the oncomers.

This foremost individual, evidently, was their leader.

Would he maintain his straight-ahead way? Would he swerve to the right, toward the wagons, and thus ease their minds? Or would he take a leftward turn and come straight at them?

Another endless ten minutes, and he settled the question for them. A jerk of the rein, and the man trotted briskly along the slope, straight for the trees, and—

"He's coming in here!" Hemmett gasped.

(To be continued.)

A PLUNGE IN PITCH.

By GARRETT SWIFT.

A business deal planned in a ballroom, and which led to some lively times at sea and on an island.

"THERE," said Miss Granby with a great sigh of relief. "For goodness' sake, let us sit here a while and talk. I've been trying for two days to have a quiet word with you. Let them dance. We'll use our tongues and brains."

I looked at this matter-of-fact young woman with considerable awe. I had not met many young women, and those I had met were not much like this new friend, a guest, as I was myself, of Mrs. Manley at one of her week-end parties on the farm.

"So you wanted to talk to me and couldn't?" I remarked with surprise.

I had never before heard any one say it was difficult to talk to me.

"Yes," she went on briskly. "You know, I came all the way from Porto Rico just to see you."

"To see me!" I exclaimed. "Why—I can scarcely believe it. Had you heard of me?"

"Oh, no! I don't mean that I came here exactly to see you. But to see somebody, and when I had a talk with Nellie—Mrs. Manley, you know—she assured me that you were the very person I had come to see."

"It sounds uncanny," I answered. "Still, I feel inclined to thank Mrs. Manley. Imagine her thanked duly and suitably. Now, perhaps you will explain why I am the very one you came to see, or why Mrs. Manley says I am."

"Well, it won't take long to explain. I was born in Porto Rico, though my parents were Americans. I did have a brother, but he got mixed up in some kind of a native scrimmage and was shot. And my father died, and then my mother, leaving me an heiress."

"Really! I congratulate you. Not on having everybody die, but because you are an heiress."

"I'm more than an heiress. I'm a queen."

"Better yet. Not one of those voodoo queens I've read about."

"Not at all. Don't be silly. Nellie said your uncle thinks you are a fool. I don't, but don't begin to talk like one, or I shall believe it. They call me a queen—the Queen of Macibo."

"I've traveled some," I said. "And I've read a lot, but I don't recall any kingdom named Macibo."

"If you'll let me explain now. My father was a perpetual purchaser. He'd buy anything anybody told him was worth the price. And among other things he wasted money on was the island of Macibo, off the coast of Porto Rico.

"Now, I had never been to this island. I was up here at school, where I met Nellie—Mrs. Manley. And it was during this period that my father bought Macibo.

"When I found myself left an orphan, I also found myself practically a pauper. That is, my father had been reckless and had squandered his money, or what hadn't been squandered was invested in things that fell flat when he died—all but the island of Macibo.

"So, finding myself the owner of Macibo, and nothing else, I began to make inquiries concerning my possession. I received words of sympathy and commiseration from everybody. Macibo, it seemed, was a dreary waste—a useless patch of mud on the map.

"There was not an inhabitant on it, nor anything to feed inhabitants if there had been any. I don't know what my father paid for the place, but I learned that I couldn't even give it away. Nobody would go to the expense of recording the deed.

"In despair, I went to the island. I hired a small boat with a black sailor, and made the trip. It's about three or four hours' sail. Well, what do you think?"

"The black sailor fell in love with you," I said, "and made you the Queen of Micabo and set himself up in the king business. You escaped after untold hardships and made your way to New York, where you took refuge with your old school chum, and are now looking for a reckless, daredevil of a man to go down and kill the king and give you back your island."

She looked at me in fine disdain. A curl of scorn struggled on her lips with what tried to be a laugh.

"Mr. Thorpe, you ought to turn your attention to writing romances. The black sailor was about eighty years old, and the only thing he loved was a kind of liquor that goes to the head. No. None of the things your fancy pictures happened to me. But I found that, instead of owning an island that was worthless, I was the owner of an island worth millions."

"Millions! Good enough. Diamonds?"

"No."

"Gold?"

"No."

"Rubies?"

"No."

"I'm stuck."

"Asphalt."

"Oh, you mean that Macibo contains the stuff they use for paving our streets?"

"The same, only a superior kind. It is better asphalt than the Trinidad article. And there is a vast quantity of it. The island itself is, I should judge, about a thousand acres in extent. Around the edge, or rim, there is a narrow, low-lying coast line, and then barren hills of solidified asphalt. Nothing much grows on this, although there are little spaces of poor soil—dust, I suppose from the mainland—the accumulation of centuries, and a few scrubby trees or bushes grow there.

"But the whole island seems to be this black pitch. And there is a lake, even larger than the Pitch Lake on Trinidad, and about the same thing. It is constantly in motion; and, while there may be heat toward the center, the soft material that is cooling at the edge is merely warm. It cools, and by the continual motion of the lake it is thrown out on the hard surface and dries completely. Now, you have all I know about the history of Macibo."

"Yes," I replied. "You have inter-

ested me so far, but you have not yet told me why you came all the way from Porto Rico to see *me*."

"Well, I'll explain that. You understand my circumstances. I owned an island that could be developed into wealth, but no money to go to work with."

"Still, if your island really contains all that you say it does, that ought not to be an obstacle. It should be easy to find capital."

"It will be. Of course, I haven't gone very deeply into the matter, because I'm a woman, and men are always ready to rob a woman. I could make some arrangements with a paving company, but they would pay me a little royalty on the stuff they took out, and they would make all the money. I don't want to do that.

"I want somebody with money whom I can trust implicitly. I talked with Nellie about it, and she said you had a lot of money, or your uncle had, and she said you were brave and venturesome, and would be just the man to take up the work of development."

"I am certainly grateful to Mrs. Manley. But there is one other thing she neglected to tell you. I am forbidden to enter any business."

"You are— Let me understand that more fully. Are you ill? Did your head bother you at college?"

"No, my head was hard enough to stand football. But I am the proud possessor of one of the most obstinate, pig-headed uncles that man was ever blessed with. Now, you've told me some of your family history, listen to some of mine.

"My father was not a money-maker. He was a student, a dreamer, a theorist. He wrote some, but there is no great flood of wealth from scientific writings. He died poor.

"He had a brother, some older than he, after whom I was named. His name —like mine—is Gerald Thorpe. This Gerald Thorpe was no dreamer, no student, no theorist. He was a money-getter. He had no patience with my father, whom he called a fool. Yet under his crust he has a heart, and he really did, in his own way, which is not always a comfortable one, like my father.

"So, when my father died, my Uncle Gerald took his nephew Gerald under his wing. I was taken into his home, such as he had, and when I say that I don't mean that his home was a mean one. It simply wasn't a home. My uncle never married, and lived in a hotel —the Grambert. I remained there with a nurse till I needed a tutor, and then I went to college. I received all the money I wanted, went in for football, rowing, everything. I was not much like my father.

"But I was no idler, and did manage to graduate with some honors, and sallied back to New York, expecting to cut a deep hole in business, and eventually pay back to my uncle what I had cost him and occupy a position like him in the business world. But to my amazement he wouldn't listen to it."

"Kicked you out?" questioned Miss Granby.

"Not at all. Oh, he isn't that kind! But—remember my name is the same as his. And if there was ever a proud man, my uncle is *H*. He prays to his good name in the business world as a savage does to his idols. Let me enter business? Not much.

"You see, the trouble is, according to his ideas, I must have inherited my father's nature, and that some day or other it will crop out and make everything I touch a dismal, howling failure.

"According to him, I cannot, with my hereditary incubus, ever become a practical man of business. And as his name is the synonym on two continents for success with a big S, a wad of money, and perfect integrity, he says he doesn't propose to spend the rest of his life explaining that the idiot Gerald Thorpe, who is always making a fizzle of what he undertakes, is his nephew and not himself.

"No. He absolutely forbade my entering commercial life in any capacity. I have a liberal allowance, can have money for yachts, horses, travel, but none for business investments. My uncle says he can take care of that end of it. You see, there are no other relatives, and sooner or later I'll have it all. At least, he says so, and he ought to know."

"What a funny old man!" said Miss Granby.

"Well, he isn't so very old. He's a

solid, well-preserved man of fifty-five. He can eat nails, work twenty-four hours a day, scorns breakfast foods, smokes big black cigars, and thinks I'm a weak little fool-boy who needs his tender care to be guarded from a designing world."

"He's a peach! But why not get *him* in on this asphalt deal? He'd recognize the merit of the thing at once."

"No, he wouldn't. That's another of his iron-headed ways. He won't put a dollar into anything outside of these great United States of America."

"Isn't Porto Rico a possession?"

"Yes, but we don't know how long it will be. My uncle is in coal, iron, land. You couldn't interest him one minute with your lake of pitch."

"What a horrid monster! Let's bamboozle him."

"Eh? That isn't so easy."

"Nonsense. These pig-headed, self-made men are the easiest things going. I don't mean to tell him there's iron there on Macibo. In fact, what I was thinking of was to tell him nothing at all. There is the island, and I don't suppose you will hint that I would sit in Nellie Manley's house and tell you any untruths. The island is mine, and it can't run away. The asphalt is there, and more of it being used every year.

"I don't know how much capital would be needed, but I should think not a great amount. You see, you've got the asphalt to start with. And if there is any duty on asphalt from Trinidad or Venezuela, we've that advantage, as Porto Rico asphalt would come in free.

"It ought to be easy, judging from what you say, to get enough money to start. When we get started, if we want to start a company and float stock, we can do it."

"Well, all this has a musical sound in my ears. I would like to do something—something big—and surprise my uncle with my success."

"Then here's your chance. Ask him for money to buy a yacht. Tell him you are going to take a long sea voyage. None of this may be false. You will buy a vessel, or charter one, and you will go to Macibo. And we'll make millions! Think what that means to you and me! Millions of money with which to do anything we like!

"I am glad Nellie spoke to me about you. We'll get along all right enough."

"But if my uncle learns of it he might disinherit me."

"There are two answers to that. In the first place, you can adopt another name, so he will never know. It ought to be just as legitimate to carry on a commercial enterprise under an assumed name as to write a book under a *nom de plume*."

"Seems so."

"That's one answer. The other is that after we get started and the money rolls in by the ton, it won't make any difference if he does disinherit you. And he won't—nobody ever disinherits a rich young man who makes his own money. He will be proud of you."

Now, with all due respect to my uncle and to the opinions of others, what could I do? There she sat, a handsome young woman, her face flushed a little from excitement, her eyes sparkling and her white fingers resting on my arm.

"I'll do it," I said. "I can't do any worse than lose the money; and he doesn't care what I do with it as long as I don't go into business. The first thing is to get the money. The next is to think of a name."

"You must have a nice name—a high-sounding name. Of course, Thorpe is a nice name. I like Thorpe, and Gerald. But, of course, you must drop them for a time. I'll think of a name for you. Suppose you take my own name—Granby."

"That's reversing the order of things, isn't it? Doesn't the man usually offer the girl *his* name?"

"Not the first time he meets her," she said severely. "And we are in asphalt now—not love."

"It's a plunge for me either way," I said. "I've never been in either."

"Well, call this a plunge in pitch," observed Miss Granby. "It sounds so mysterious."

"What are you two talking about so seriously and so long?" came the voice of Mrs. Manley. "I believe you are beginning to make love already."

"We've done more than begin," said Miss Granby. "I have offered Mr. Thorpe my name, and he has accepted it."

"But—" stammered Mrs. Manley.

"For business purposes only," added Miss Granby. "And now I'm hungry."

II.

"Looks like somebody was ahead of us," said Jack McMahon, as we stood together on the deck of the three-master Cato. "There's a bunch of blacks getting out asphalt now."

"Well, they'll get off the island," I replied. "Miss Granby has given nobody any rights here."

"Rights! Nobody waits to be given rights in this part of the world. When you see a thing you want, if the owner isn't big enough to knock your head off, take it. If he is, wait till he goes away. Then take it. Take it, anyway."

The Cato, a big schooner, broad of beam and filled with numberless odors all strange to me, had been chartered by me to work for the Macibo Asphalt Company. This company, up to this time, consisted of Miss Granby and myself. McMahon I had hired as superintendent.

He had worked in the asphalt beds in Venezuela, and knew how to get out the stuff and how to manage the hands.

We had sailed from New York with machinery, tools, and some cheap portable houses, and had picked up at Guayama about fifty natives who were willing to work for us at what we considered liberal wages. McMahon said the wages were better than in any similar employment he knew anything about.

The captain and owner of the big schooner was named Marsoni.

All around us lolled our men, and the Cato was driving toward the island of Macibo at a good clip, for her.

I had brought material to build a wharf. There was a wharf. I had shipped a small power-boat to use for going to Porto Rico for supplies. A small boat was moored at the land end of the wharf.

Another schooner lay at the wharf, and numerous black men were wheeling their loads of asphalt to the deck.

As the Cato drew nearer, and it became evident to those on the island that we intended to land, all operations ceased and the hands stood looking at us.

Among some stunted trees on a little hill, where we could make out the roof of a little cottage, a white man stood gazing at the Cato with evident interest. Then he started toward the wharf.

I was the first to land.

"Do you want to see me?" asked the white man.

His face was tanned, and he wore light-colored, loose-fitting clothing, and a broad-brimmed cork hat.

"Not particularly," I answered. "If I am not mistaken, this is the island of Macibo."

"I believe it is called that."

"It is the property of the Macibo Asphalt Company, of which I am president. Miss Alice Granby, the owner, is now in New York, and I am here to establish the company's gang at work."

He raised his eyebrows a little superciliously.

"I have papers to show my authority," I went on. "Of course, you have none, and I will ask you to withdraw your men."

He laughed disagreeably.

"My friend," he said, "do you see that schooner? Do you see that wharf? Have you cast your eyes on these houses? I paid for them. My name is Jim Degraw. I'm not in the habit of putting money into a thing and then backing out."

"Nevertheless, you can't take any asphalt away from here."

"Well, as to that, we'll see. The ship's about loaded now, and we'll send that away, and then we'll send more. If you came here looking for trouble, you'll get it in such chunks you can't bite it off."

For a moment we stood glaring at each other. Another white man had joined him, and McMahon had quietly stepped to my side.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he said. "If that ain't Jim Degraw."

"Ah, ha, old fox!" said Degraw. "So you remember me, eh?"

"Yes, I remember you," retorted McMahon. "Unless I'm badly mistaken, you are wanted in Venezuela. Mr. Granby, this is one of the worst pirates the Caribbean ever saw. He's a jailbird. He wouldn't hesitate to commit murder. Oh, I remember you, Degraw."

There was a muttered curse, and I saw Degraw quickly put his hand to his hip-pocket. Like a flash, McMahon leaped forward and his great fist sent Degraw to the ground.

There was a frightful oath from the fallen man, and McMahon, who had evidently seen enough to know just what sort of emergency we were up against, gave a loud whistle. At the same time the negroes of Degraw started toward us on a run.

In response to McMahon's whistle our own men came rushing up, and the two forces hurled themselves at each other till the air was filled with shouts of rage and curses.

I had seen college fights spring up in a moment from almost nothing; but outside of a battle between bitter enemies, armed to the teeth, I doubt if anything worse than the skirmish I now beheld could be possible.

Huge, half-naked negroes tore at each other in a murderous fury, and knives were gleaming in the hot sun till the blood of a wounded man dulled their luster.

I stood practically helpless and wholly out of the fight. It was between Degraw and McMahon that the battle waged.

McMahon was at a disadvantage, for he had but little knowledge of his men. They were, however, fresh, well-fed, and they had had plenty of fresh water on board the Cato.

On the other hand, the black gang of Degraw's had worked in the enervating heat of a broiling sun, and they were hungry and thirsty. But they fought like demons, till the crew of the Cato, believing that we were getting the worst of it, sailed in, and then Degraw's men fled. They left everything behind them, even two or three of their seriously wounded.

They rushed to the deck of the schooner and began to cast loose. Degraw and the other white man saw what was happening, and shouting a promise to return and give me all I wanted, they, too, made for the wharf.

"Well, they've got one load," said McMahon, "but I'll be hanged if they'll ever get another. And they've saved us some labor, after all. See the houses? And we'll have two sets of machinery, and two boats. Oh, I don't know but we ought to be grateful."

"You be careful of him, *señor*," added Captain Marsoni of the Cato. "I've heard of Degraw. He's a bad man. He's only half white, and that's worse than all black. Down here it is, anyway."

Degraw's schooner was soon away from the wharf.

"I wonder how he learned of the pitch lake here," I remarked.

"Somebody told him, I suppose. There must be plenty of people who know about it."

"Miss Granby didn't know it herself till recently."

"Oh, well, she's a girl. You can bet there's a lot of natives in Porto Rico who know."

"It can't make any difference now," I added. "We've got possession. Let's get the men fixed comfortably and then have supper. I'm starved."

"It was a tough fight for appetites," said McMahon.

We had the wounded on both sides taken care of, and by the time night was down on us we were partially settled on the island.

McMahon wasn't a man to waste any time in preliminaries. In the morning he had our gang at work early, using everything Degraw had left behind. Our own stuff was later taken out and stored under shelter.

I made all the necessary arrangements for the comfort of our men, and ordered McMahon to see that they were well fed.

I remained long enough to see the Cato loaded and start for New York. Then in the launch I went to Guayama, where I took passage for New York myself in a steamer.

I rested easily. I saw no reason to anticipate trouble. However, it was coming.

III.

I REACHED New York before the Cato. I found the office of the Macibo Asphalt Company a busy place. Miss Granby was doing some fancy sewing and the stenographer was reading a novel.

"Oh, are you back?" asked Miss Granby.

"The question seems to be superfluous," I replied. "And there is a schooner-load of the stuff on the way."

"It takes you!"

"And I'm broke."

"Well, you'll sell the asphalt, won't you?"

"Of course. But I don't know when we'll get the money for it."

There was no time to dawdle. I went out and talked. I had a small sample of the asphalt, and before night I had sold the ship-load and had a contract for all we could get to New York that summer.

In a fine spirit of elation I returned to the office.

"Now, then," I said, "we must branch out. We can't begin to get enough up here to fill this contract in one schooner. And I can't go to my uncle any more. We'll organize a regular company. This ship-load will bring in the capital."

I knew nothing of how companies were promoted and floated. I had heard vaguely of men who made their living as promoters. I inquired and learned where one of these had his office. His name was Martin.

I went to Martin and showed my sample, and explained what we could do.

"All I need is capital," I said. "We can get any quantity of the best asphalt."

"Get your printing done. I'll get you capital."

Marsoni sailed into New York, and Martin saw the load. He nodded and grinned when I showed him the contract.

I had certificates of stock printed. The sun was surely shining benignly upon the Macibo Asphalt Company.

A week passed. Then Martin came into the office.

"There's your company," he said, handing me a small list of names. "They'll capitalize for four hundred thousand."

"Hurray!"

Then I looked at the list and held my breath. The first name on it was Gerald Thorpe.

I rushed in where Miss Granby was sitting.

"Now, what am I going to do?" I demanded. "My uncle! Heaviest subscriber but one. He's John Shiras."

"'M!" Miss Granby looked at the list and began to grin.

"It may be funny to you," I said. "But how am I to keep him from knowing?"

"Stay away from here."

"But—I can't."

"Why? You've got the contract, and what little corresponding there is I can do."

"I know. But—I've been thinking a whole lot about you since we started this thing. And—"

"Well?"

"I want to see you sometimes."

"That's nonsense. There is nothing about asphalt that leads to love."

"It makes a smooth road, and love needs one as a rule."

"It makes a slippery road, and love doesn't want that."

"It sticks, and love wants that."

"Listen," said Miss Granby sternly, as she laid down her sewing. She was generally sewing. "I want to tell you I won't have any love-making. I am not going to get married to you just because we are in business together. Anyway, you're only a boy."

"You didn't think I was too much of a boy to go down to your old island and get into a fight."

"How did I know there was another gang there?"

Well, I did not meet my uncle. The money was subscribed, and the shares were signed by Miss Granby. Then she sent out a call for a meeting, at which I was not present.

I saw her the next day.

"I think your uncle is a very handsome man," she said. "You'll never be the man he is."

"I'd rather be the man I am. Now, don't let's quarrel about that. We've got a lot to do, and we've got to do it. Gee! Wouldn't Gerald Thorpe have a fit if he knew that his nephew was in this asphalt business? But I wonder how he came to change his mind? He always said he'd never invest outside of the United States."

"He didn't. The asphalt is coming here."

Marsoni sailed again. I had little to do in New York, and the conversations I had with Miss Granby were more or

less acrimonious. She seemed to resent it because I was falling in love with her.

Now, I didn't know the symptoms of falling in love. But Miss Granby was a handsome girl, and had done me the honor to give me the first chance to become her partner, and I felt that it was my duty to fall in love with her.

Somehow, she did not seem to share that opinion, and I wondered at it.

At last Marsoni came again. Meanwhile I was fitting out other ships that would soon be ready to go to Macibo.

"McMahon wants to see you," said the captain.

"Anything wrong down there?"

"Yes—something about the food. McMahon didn't tell me much. Said for you to come at once."

"I'll go back with you."

"I don't want you to go with me, *señor*."

I looked at him in surprise.

"Well, what's *your* grouch?" I asked. "Don't you get enough to eat?"

"I don't want you to go back with me."

"Well, I *will* go back with you. Understand? I'm the boss."

He grumbled something and walked away.

I felt disinclined to leave New York again without seeing my uncle. I did not know what trouble might be in store for me at Macibo. I did not know if I would ever see New York again. So I went to the hotel.

To my surprise, even *he* did not appear pleased to see me. I marveled at his manner. Had my plunge into the asphalt business turned everybody against me?

"I thought you were to be gone a long time," he said. "Have a cigar. Where have you been?"

"Oh, around a bit. I came back for some clothes. I'm off again to-morrow."

I fancied there was a look of relief on his face.

"Do you want money?"

"No," I told him. "I've plenty for a while."

"I'm glad of that, Gerald," he said, and something in his voice made me look at him more closely. "I'm glad of that. I'm rather pushed for cash myself just now. Things are pretty hard in New York. I've lost a lot of money through others. And—I'm pretty well tied up with Shiras."

"I thought you didn't consider him square?"

"Well—I didn't. But in business we have to overlook a lot. I've gone in rather heavily where he was interested. And now I've invested in a new asphalt company. Martin says it was started by a young fellow and girl by the name of Granby. I hope everything will turn out all right. Still, I'm a little anxious."

This was a new uncle. Always before his dominant will made things come out all right. And here he was, almost whining in his anxiety.

"I guess you'll fetch 'em right," I replied. "By the way, I've something to say to you. I'm in love."

"Well, I expected that, Gerald. You are pretty young, but I won't quarrel about that. I hope you've chosen a nice girl."

"Fine. And the funny part of it is she's that very Alice Granby who started the asphalt company."

He stood as if petrified. His cigar fell to the floor. Then he turned and walked out of the room.

And when the door had shut behind him I fancied I heard his voice. He must be cursing me, so I thought, for marrying a girl in business. I took my hat and walked out.

IV.

"THERE's a man in the private office," said Miss Granby the following day, when I entered to do whatever was necessary before I sailed for Macibo on the Cato. "It's Mr. Shiras. He asked if Mr. Granby was here, and I told him you would be here some time this morning."

I walked into the private office, which belonged to nobody in particular, and was a private office merely because it happened to be in the suite we had rented.

A man did sit there—a man to whom I took a dislike the moment I set eyes on him.

I had never met the men with whom my uncle did so much business of late.

I had been at college, and when I was in New York my uncle barred me from business conferences.

Mr. Shiras struck me at once as being a good man to remain away from. He had small, catlike eyes, which looked at me furtively as I entered.

"You, I believe, are Mr. Granby?" he said.

"I am Richard Granby," I answered. "I understand from Miss Granby that you are the heaviest subscriber to the stock of the Macibo Asphalt Company."

"I am convinced, Mr. Granby, that you have in the island of Macibo a sure thing. The sample of asphalt is excellent. And I understand the stuff is practically inexhaustible."

"We believe so," I assented.

"Now—er—of course, Mr. Granby, you are not in the asphalt business for fun. Am I correct?"

"I haven't had much fun since I went into it."

"You are not looking for pleasure while you are selling asphalt. The manner in which you floated the company proves that you have an eye to the main chance. When a man goes into pitch, asphalt, or any of the products of the earth that are more or less dirty to handle, he does not do so with a desire of dealing in the stuff all his life. He wants to make enough out of it in a short time to go into something more refined."

"Asphalt can be refined," I observed.

"The stuff—yes. I am speaking of a business and its relation to society. But I think you understand me. Now, if I am not mistaken, you are the practical head of the operations on the island?"

"I am."

"Good. You are a practical man. I am a financier. Enough money has been subscribed for you to continue operations on a large scale. But we can make more. This is my proposition."

The slant of his eyes warned me that the proposition that was coming would not be an honest one.

"When you return to Macibo, send word as soon as you may be able that there is trouble. Any kind of trouble. Have a strike, if you like. An earthquake. Have something happen that will, for a time, appear to hold up all the output from the island.

"I happen to know that some of the subscribers to the Macibo stock are pretty short. If you suspend for a time it will be necessary for them to sell at a sacrifice. I, as the financial end of the concern, will buy up all the other stock, give you a substantial share, and then you can go ahead with the operations. You could even have a supply on hand and begin shipping at once. Our holdings—yours and mine—would become extremely valuable."

His low, soothing voice did not mislead me. I knew that the proposition he had made to me was nothing more nor less than the out-and-out robbery of my uncle.

"It is possible," I replied, "that no effort on my part will be necessary. The captain of the only schooner now in our service tells me that I am wanted in Macibo. I am going to-morrow."

He grinned with evident appreciation and, leaning toward me, poked me in the ribs with a pudgy finger.

"You'll do," he said. "You know the ropes. I'll gamble on you every time."

I had a distinct desire to kick Mr. Shiras out of the office. But, I reflected, this would scarcely do. Even if I denounced him to the other stockholders, I had no proof.

"You may leave the future to me," I told him. "And now I must go to meet the captain of the Cato."

We walked to the outer door together, and as he was leaving he handed me an envelope.

"Don't open this till you get to Porto Rico," he said. "It is a little token of the regard I have for our practical man of affairs."

"Keep it till I return to New York," I replied. "You may need it."

I was not in a very comfortable frame of mind when I left Shiras, and when Marsoni saw me coming on board the Cato his expression did not add any to my good-nature.

"Well," I began, "you look as if a corpse or a ghost was coming aboard."

"I'd as soon see either," replied Marsoni. "I told you, *señor*, that I did not want you to go to Macibo with me."

"But why?"

"It is this way: You have chartered the schooner. It will make trouble in my discipline if you are a passenger."

"Nonsense. If you use the men right, they will stick to you. I am going in the Cato. There is no steamer for two weeks."

I sailed in the Cato. I did considerable thinking about Captain Marsoni. His reason for not wishing me as a passenger was not obvious.

I studied the crew. They worked well, I thought; but there was no sign of cheerfulness among them. Their faces were set and stern, and I noticed that when they glanced toward the captain their expressions were far from friendly.

For two days this lasted, and the Cato was always going at a fair speed. Then the storm broke.

It was at noon. I stood near Marsoni on the after-deck. The mate, whose name was Benci, was at the wheel. Three men were coming aft. One of them carried a large deep plate in his hand.

"What's this?" asked Marsoni.

"A complaint of some kind," I said.

"Captain," began the largest of the three sailors, "the men refuse to eat this stuff any more. We stood it two voyages, although on the first voyage it wasn't so bad. And now that Mr. Granby of the company is here, we are determined to let him know how we are used."

"Go to your mess!" roared Marsoni. "*Señor*, pay no attention to these fellows. They are always grumbling."

"Taste that," said the big sailor to me savagely, thrusting the plate under my nose.

It was vile-smelling stuff. I did taste it.

"Is that your regular fare?" I inquired.

"It is a little better than usual."

"It's unfit for dogs," I said. "Pitch it overboard and run into the nearest port. I'll have the larder stocked with stuff you can eat."

A howl of fury came from Marsoni.

"I won't have you interfering on board this schooner," he said. "You create a mutiny. It is a crime."

"It will hardly be called a mutiny," I answered, "so long as I am practically the owner of the vessel. It is under charter to me, and I am paying you sufficient price for you to give the men decent food. They are my employees, and I will not have them fed this stuff."

Marsoni glared at me, and from the hysterical working of his lips I saw that the event had more significance to him than it had for me.

Benci, the mate, was interested in the conversation, but did not speak.

"If you are afraid," I said to Marsoni, "resign your command. I'll take charge of the schooner. You can't frighten me."

He turned purple. Then, losing all self-control, he let out a curse and sprang at me.

I knocked him down.

V.

It became evident at once that in my ignorance of rules governing at sea I had created a sensation.

Benci, without leaving the wheel, howled something that must have been a command to the crew, who were now crowding aft to see the unusual spectacle of a captain picking himself up from the deck to which he had been knocked by a passenger.

Upon Marsoni the effect of my blow was to render him, for the moment, almost insane. He let out a screech of rage and drew a revolver.

The gleam in his eyes, his swiftly working lips, and the imprecations that issued from them warned me that I had no time to lose. I was not sure whether the man would fire or not, but I took no chances.

I hurled myself upon him, and with my left hand clutching the hand that held the revolver, and holding it above his head, I rained blows upon his face.

Whether he intended to shoot or not I don't know, but the weapon was discharged. The bullet went into the air, dropping harmlessly into the sea.

Then I seized the revolver, wrenched it from him, and sent him once more to the deck.

"Now, Mr. Benci," I said, "I am in command of this schooner. I don't pre-

tend to know the laws governing sailing vessels at sea, but I do know this. The men were justified in objecting to poor food, and as long as they work for me they are going to receive stuff that is fit for men to eat. Which is the nearest port at which we can lay in a supply?"

"Charleston," he answered glowingly.

"Sail for Charleston, then."

I saw that the course of the Cato was changing. Marsoni picked himself up and slunk off to his cabin.

We were again quiet on board; but I saw the sailors talking among themselves, and there were many ominous shakes of the head. And after we had continued on a straight course for several hours, the same three who had first accosted Marsoni came aft to see me.

"Mr. Granby," said the spokesman, "we thought it no more than right to tell you that you are taking a big risk."

"Of what?" I asked.

"We don't know," replied the big sailor, "just how the law on mutinies at sea covers a fight between a captain and a man who charters a vessel. If it had been one of the crew who struck the captain, the minute we reached Charleston Marsoni would go ashore and the whole crew would be arrested."

"Oh, he'd go ashore, eh?"

"Sure. And that's where your danger is now. As soon as we anchor or tie up in Charleston Harbor he will go ashore, and you can't tell what he'll do."

"Can't, eh? Well, who is in command here now?"

"Well, of course you seem to be."

"Then, are you willing to obey my orders?"

"I am, and I guess the rest of the men are. You seem to want to treat us white."

"I certainly do. A great deal depends on the success of my trip to Macibo. I must get there, and I must have the good-will of this crew. I am ready to take any chances. Of course, as this schooner belongs to Marsoni, I can't put him ashore and steal his ship. But there is another thing I can do."

"Yes, sir?"

"I can prevent his going ashore to make trouble. We'll take care of the consequences later if any come. What's your name?"

"Bill Wilson, sir."

"Very well, Bill Wilson. Go get a rope and come back to me."

He stared at me a moment, but turned and walked away. In a short time he returned with a rope coiled on his arm.

"What do you intend to do?" demanded Benci.

"Mr. Benci," I replied, "I am ignorant of the rules at sea; but I believe it is unusual for the mate of a vessel to demand an explanation of his acts from his superior officer. And just now I am commanding this schooner. Get into Charleston and remain on board."

He seemed about to answer, but thought better of it, and his parted lips closed again without a sound.

"Now, Bill Wilson," I said, "come with me."

I led the way to the captain's cabin. He sat in a sulky mood at a little table. When he saw me come in he reached for a small chest under his berth, and I saw the gleam of another revolver.

"Drop that where it is," I commanded, placing the muzzle of the weapon I had taken from him close to his head. "Make a move and I'll shoot."

"What are you going to do?" he asked, straightening up again in his seat.

"I am not going to hurt you—if you are a good, nice little boy. But I am going to tie you up so that you can't go ashore and make trouble."

"I'll have you sent to prison," he cried, with a startled and angry glare.

"Possibly, some time; but not now. I've a great responsibility resting on me just at present, and I don't propose to permit a pig-headed captain to ruin me and those who are dependent on me. This schooner is going to take me to Macibo."

"I was taking you there."

"But your crew were stronger than you, and were not being used like men. I took their end of the controversy because they were right. Wilson, tie the captain so that he cannot get loose. Don't hurt him."

"This is an outrage," roared Marsoni.

"Possibly. But you'll have to put up with it. I told you I'd take no chance of failure."

In a few minutes the angry captain was well trussed in the rope.

"Lay him on his bed," I commanded.

This was done.

"I will take the key of your cabin," I said. "When we leave Charleston I will relinquish my command to you."

I locked him in. Soon afterward we were at a wharf, and I, with Wilson, went ashore. He was an intelligent fellow and could tell me what the crew wanted, and I resolved that their desires, when within reason, should be granted.

To my surprise, their requests were all reasonable. They wanted fresh meat occasionally, better drinking water, and more vegetables.

I could see no objections to all this. I had the old musty-smelling water-casks thrown out and new ones put in their place. I had the ice-box filled, the first time in many years. And the cook's eyes bulged when he saw the purchases come aboard.

"Now," I said, "we are prepared to last a few days. Get to Macibo as quickly as possible. When we are out of sight of land I will release Marsoni."

Benci gave the commands, and the Cato, with a willing and energetic crew, sailed away from Charleston.

When we had gone so far that land was no longer in sight I unlocked Marsoni's cabin.

"Now," I said, "as long as you obey me, and act like a man, you are again the captain of the Cato. I shall keep your revolver, and also cartridges for it. I may need it when I reach Macibo. Will you do what I want?"

"I'd be a fool to say no," answered Marsoni.

I set him free, put a box of cartridges in my pocket, and Marsoni took command.

Led by Wilson, who was an intelligent fellow, the crew worked as willingly under Marsoni as they had under me, for they knew I would stand by them, and that Marsoni was merely doing my bidding.

We sighted Macibo, and I looked at the island through a glass.

"I don't see anybody at work," I said to Benci.

He grinned.

"What did Marsoni tell you?" he asked.

"He said McMahon wanted me on the island. There was some trouble about the food."

"Is that all he said?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Granby, McMahon will never want you again. He was shot dead by the men who revolted for the same reason this crew did. And Marsoni knew that. It is always the way down here. It costs money to have good, fresh food, and those who receive the money to buy it for others usually keep the money, and the hands get what is never fit to eat."

"Then, if McMahon is shot, I've got a pretty fight on my hands."

"Yes," he said. "I shouldn't wonder if they shot you, too. They are an ignorant lot."

VI.

It was with no great pleasure or feeling of assurance that I stepped ashore at Macibo.

The wharf had not been tampered with, nor the huts. But there was an idle group of negroes playing cards, shooting craps, or at some other game, and absolutely no work was being done.

Had it been merely the matter of subduing a rebellion that had bad food for its cause, I could have gone about it the same as I had on the schooner, by giving the men proper food. But now I had the murder of my superintendent to avenge or punish.

I made sure the revolver I had taken from Marsoni was in my pocket, and walked along the wharf. I was met at the land end by a big Porto Rican, who looked ugly.

"Where is McMahon?" I asked.

"He—he dead," came the reply. "Nobody know who shot him. We had argument about grub, and he got mad. Yes, somebody shoot; but we don't know who. He's buried—there."

He pointed to a clump of scrub-trees.

"I'll find out who shot him. What's your name?"

"Henrico Nandez."

"Are you the spokesman for all the men on the island?"

"Yes."

"Then you, probably, led the rebellion and the attack on McMahon?"

"Yes."

I turned to look back. Big Bill Wilson and a half dozen of the crew stood on the deck of the schooner.

"Come here," I called.

"We can't," shouted back Wilson. "The captain has forbidden us to go ashore."

"I order you here."

I saw Marsoni spring from the companionway, and he seemed to be giving angry commands.

"You'll get no help from them," said Nandez with a grin. "We know Marsoni."

"Then I'll do it alone," I retorted, and, without thinking further, I let drive at him.

I did not knock him down, but there came from his big mouth the loudest and most angry roar I had ever heard from a human being. And in an instant things got so hot and mixed up on the island of Macibo that it is almost impossible to tell in a brief account what really happened.

Nandez made a jump for my throat, and I struck him again, dancing back out of the reach of his long arm.

At the same time howls of surprise and rage came from the other Porto Ricans, and in a mob they charged down to the wharf.

And at the same time I heard a yell of agony from Marsoni, and just glanced at the schooner in time to see him going over the rail into the sea, propelled by a dozen powerful hands. And then the entire crew came rushing to my assistance, headed by Bill Wilson.

"Stand by the man who feeds us well!" shouted Wilson.

The men from the schooner had picked up such weapons as they could lay their hands on, and they sailed into the mob of Porto Ricans with a desperate energy that more than made up for their lack in numbers.

Bill Wilson had an iron bar, and every time he swung it somebody fell down suddenly and remained down.

There was great shouting and cursing, as much on the part of the crew as the blacks. Somebody fired a pistol, and then was struck, and the pistol taken away from him.

I seemed more the storm-center than an active participant. I dared not shoot lest I kill one of my faithful men from the Cato.

The fight lasted at least half an hour, and I thought it was of much longer duration. Then there came a sudden lull, which I did not understand.

The blacks separated from the crew, and in the center stood Bill Wilson, with his great fist closed on the throat of Henrico Nandez.

"Listen to me," shouted Wilson, "those who can understand English, and those who can't may get the gist of what I say from those who can. You are making a mistake. The man you are fighting isn't a giant, but he fights to win. And when he wins, you win, too.

"Don't be fools. We had a rumpus on the schooner about the grub. This man took our part against the captain. He tied him up, or ordered me to do it, and went ashore to buy grub. We've lived like gentlemen since. If you kill him, you'll kill your best friend. You want to live. He wants the pitch taken off this island. He is willing to give you grub. But you shouldn't have killed McMahon."

When Wilson had finished he stood gazing at the group. Their angry and defiant looks gradually gave way to looks of surprise, and then one—a small, inoffensive appearing fellow — stepped forward.

"What you say is strange," he said to Wilson. "The superintendent told us there was no money for grub. For two days we had nothing but stale bread and water we could not drink. He said it was the order of the company."

"That was a lie," retorted Wilson. "I've been through one scrap with Mr. Granby, and as a result look at the captain of the Cato drying himself like a wet chicken. He's alone—he's out of this. Do you think this crew would stand by Mr. Granby if we hadn't been fed?"

The blacks conferred among themselves.

"We are willing to work," said the little fellow after a while, "if we have good grub and water. And if nothing is done about the death of the superintendent. He brought it on himself. He

fired at us and told us we could have no better stuff to eat."

"Tell them," I replied, "that I will provide good food, and make a fair investigation of the death of McMahon."

Wilson repeated my words. The little fellow translated them into Spanish. A shout went up.

I saw Wilson release Nandez.

"You've won another fight by being a man," he said to me. "I can see the island being made a success if you treat them as well as you did us."

"I certainly will, those who stand by me," I told him.

This was repeated.

Among people of hot, impetuous natures, these changes come quickly. From being a hated man, attacked by my own employees, I became a sort of king, worshiped by my subjects.

"What is your name?" I asked of the little fellow.

"Miguel Bencoti."

"Now," I said, "I ask that all the crew except Wilson return to the schooner, and all the men of the island retire except Nandez and Bencoti. We will confer and decide what is to be done."

I led the three I had named to the cabin that had been occupied by McMahon.

"Now," I began, when we were inside, "I will tell you this. I had contracted for the best supplies of food Guayama could furnish when I was here before, and I left enough money with McMahon to buy them. Where is that money?"

Nandez and Bencoti looked at each other blankly.

"Money? He said he had no money," said Nandez. "We have not received any pay."

McMahon and I had gone over our arrangements pretty thoroughly, and I knew where he had put the money I had left with him. I pulled up a plank in the floor of his bedroom and took out a box.

It was filled with money, just as I had left it.

"Perhaps you will believe me now," I said. "I left this money for you. If McMahon lied, and was stealing, he deserved what he got."

Nandez yelled and grabbed a bill. He rushed from the hut and I started after him.

"Stop, *señor*," said Bencoti. "He is going to prove your words to the others."

It turned out to be so. In a few minutes a great shout went up, and in a few more the hut was surrounded by the men.

They were mine. I owned them, body and soul, from that moment.

VII.

THE only man who remained sulky was Marsoni. Benci was reasonable enough, and was a good navigator.

I got Marsoni alone.

"You see the difficulty I am in," I said to him. "I am never sure of anything on this island."

"I'm sorry I ever saw it," he replied.

"That is what I supposed. What will you take for the contract and the schooner?"

"The Cato? You would buy the old Cato?"

"If I can get it at a fair price. I think the men would like to remain in my employ. But I don't want you."

"I am not sorry. I will sell."

He named a figure and I closed with him. The next thing was to appoint Benci captain. He wanted a mate, and I proposed Wilson. This proved to be agreeable, and Wilson took the office.

This cemented the friendship of the crew, and I had only the force on the island to deal with.

Nandez was evidently their leader. I appointed him superintendent of the works on Macibo. This met with howls of joy from the men.

Then I took him to Guayama in the launch to make purchases.

His eyes opened wide when he heard me order things for the men they had never had under McMahon.

"If we had only known, *señor*," he said, "we would not have been your enemies."

"You are not my enemies now," I answered. "But, Nandez, I have enemies of my own race who will not receive the treatment at my hands that you and your men are receiving. Now

—look. What will you say to them when you return?"

"I will say to them that we are working for a fine man. And we will work, *señor*—we will work."

"Very good. I am going to trust everything down here to you, for I must go back to New York. Things up there need me just now. There will be other ships down here, and I want you to fill them, but not to send them to New York till you hear from me through Wilson. Let the Cato come as usual, and I will send you instructions when she returns."

"I understand, *señor*."

I was confident that I had matters on Macibo in my own hands, and took the first steamship I could get to New York.

It was late in the day when I arrived, and the offices of the Macibo Asphalt Company were closed. I went at once to the hotel where my uncle lived.

I looked at him in amazement and alarm when I saw him.

He had grown aged. His cheeks, that had been round and ruddy only a few months before, were hollow, and the flesh hung in folds. His eyes were watery. His hands trembled.

"What in the world is the matter with you?" I asked.

"Matter with me?" he replied, with a weak sort of laugh. "I'm a fool, that's what is the matter with me. I didn't treat you right, Gerald. I told you—remember—I would never permit you to enter a commercial life because I was proud of the name I had built up, and your name was the same as mine. You would drag that name in the dust. Ha! That name would welcome dust now. It is in the mud."

"What has happened?" I asked.

"You remember I invested money on the representations of Shiras? He fooled me. He ruined me. I bought shares of stock that looked good on paper, but he ruined everything, always to his own advantage. All I have left now is what I put into the Macibo Asphalt Company. And as he was a heavy investor in that company, I fear he will ruin that, too."

"No," I said, "Shiras will never ruin the Macibo Asphalt Company."

"How do you know? What do you know about it?" he asked excitedly.

"I can't take the time to explain now. I have played a little trick on you which may make you angry, but it will come out all right. And now, let me tell you this. Whatever you know, or think you know, or whatever you read or hear about the Macibo Asphalt Company, keep to yourself. And under no circumstances sell a single share."

"You amaze me. You talk like a man who has inside information."

"I have. I'll see you to-morrow."

I went to the offices, but of course found no one there. I went to a club of which I was a member, and then to the house where Miss Granby had boarded after she had left Mrs. Manley's. But I did not find Miss Granby.

So I went to a theater and forgot everything until about midnight, when, after a good supper, I went to bed.

The next day I found Miss Granby at the office. She looked pale and worried.

"For Heaven's sake," she said, "what news do you bring? We are almost distracted here. Mr. Shiras was telling us that the island had proved almost of no value. And he said the Cato put into Charleston for repairs, and the whole thing was a failure. And I didn't hear from you, and have imagined all sorts of things."

"Keep on imagining," I said. "The island is a rank failure."

She gasped, but I did not pay any attention. I had resolved to do something that was not, perhaps, within the lines of the best ethics, but I knew enough to realize that Shiras had deliberately gone about his work to ruin my uncle. And had it not been for the Macibo asphalt he would have ruined two men by the name of Gerald Thorpe.

The next day the newspapers had accounts of all sorts of disasters that had beset the Granbys in the exploitation of an island they had claimed contained a great amount of asphalt. The picture drawn was one of desolation, failure, misery.

And I waited in the office for Mr. Shiras. I knew he would come, and he did.

"You are a wonder, Granby," he said, and his voice had a chuckle in it. "When you left I did not suppose you

would work the thing out successfully. I am certain now that you wanted to do it without instructions."

"Do what, Mr. Shiras?"

"Beat down the value of the shares. I will buy all the rest as soon as they are put on the market. And we'll come to an agreement."

"The only agreement I can come to with you is to tell you that I had absolutely nothing to do with the failure of Macibo. The men revolted and shot McMahon, the superintendent."

He stared at me.

"What is this you are telling me? What is this lie?"

"No lie at all, if you will follow me. I went down on the Cato. We had a mutiny, and Marsoni is no longer in our service. When, at last, I did reach the island I found a fine state of affairs. The men had revolted and shot McMahon. He had been dead when Marsoni left for New York, but he did not tell me. Everything was in confusion. So—you see."

"My God! What shall I do? Ah—wait—does Thorpe know this?"

"Know! You are the only one I've told."

"Then keep it to yourself. I'll get a fair price for my shares from Thorpe and won't lose it all."

"Very well," I said. "You know the shares must be transferred through the office. I will see Thorpe if you wish. What price shall I ask?"

"If I sell out at fifty per cent of what I paid I think I'll be lucky, don't you?"

"You would be lucky enough, but has Thorpe got the money?"

"I guess he has. I got him into a good many deals, and he lost some. You see, he was an overestimated man. He—something happened. He wasn't as shrewd as he used to be."

"And yet you would rob him?"

"Business is business. We don't call it robbing in New York."

"Oh, in that case, if you don't call it robbing, I'll go ahead. I'll ask fifty per cent of the purchase price of the shares."

The shares were sold—not to Gerald Thorpe, my uncle, but to Gerald Thorpe, myself.

"What does this mean?" asked Miss Granby. "You are buying these shares with the company's money."

"I'll pay it back in a few weeks. Listen. All that has been said and printed about Macibo was true—at one time. But—you will see shipload after shipload of the asphalt come to New York. I've put new men in command, and the stuff will be ready as fast as vessels can be hurried down there. The shares of the Macibo company are worth just now two hundred per cent."

"Goodness!"

"More than that—when we get things to running right the shares my uncle holds will bring him in enough to make up for what he has lost. The shares I have bought from Shiras will make me much more than a millionaire. And now, I ask you again, will you marry me?"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because, having some doubts in my own mind about our ability to make the Macibo Company a success, and wanting a life with money, I married your uncle."

"You! Are you my aunt?"

"Yes—I am your uncle's wife."

"Well, I've saved you from poverty. And—I'm going back to Macibo to get out asphalt as fast as a thousand men will do it. Tell my Uncle Gerald I congratulate him upon his marriage."

"But—I don't think you ever quite loved me, Gerald. You don't blame me, do you?"

"Not at all. It was silly of me to want to get married before I was able to support a wife. Very silly. In a year from now I can. In two years I can give her luxuries. In two years I can give her all the world contains."

"Will you come up to the hotel for dinner, Gerald?"

"No," I said with a laugh. "My uncle doesn't need me here as much as he does in Macibo. And, somehow—I think I'd rather go. I'll see you soon, though. And about the contracts—I'll take care of them. We'd better have a man in charge here. You are a rich man's wife."

"Whom shall I put here, Gerald?"

"Leave it to me. I shall not leave New York for a day or two. And—re-

member—I practically own the Macibo Asphalt Company now. And I promise you it will be a big success."

"Yes—I know it will. And you—you were the fellow my husband called a fool!"

"I *was* in some things. But I must hurry. I've got to get six ships to Macibo at once. We need the money—you, my uncle, and I."

"Yes," was all she said, and she was staring at me when I went out of the door.

The Macibo Asphalt Company *is* a big success, and my bank account is growing. Some day I'm going to take a rest, but when I do—oh, what's the use of going into all that? Some day when I am worth a million I am going to take a rest.

CHASING RAINBOWS.*

By DOUGLAS PIERCE,

Author of "His Good Right Hand," "The Shaft of Light," etc.

The pursuit of fortune in town by a fellow from the country, with an account of the jolts he received in the process.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

A young farmer named John King learns that his invalid father has been tricked into buying from Colonel Lindon a piece of worthless land. The farm being heavily mortgaged by this transaction, John starts for Philadelphia to try his fortune. Here, on the day after his arrival, he is arrested for passing counterfeit money which has been palmed off on him by three card-sharps, and is taken to jail.

He is released through the testimony of a kind-hearted commercial traveler, who again befriends the lad when he has lost all his money at the races. The two discover that the card-sharps who swindled John are planning, under the leadership of Colonel Lindon, to defraud young Arthur Chase, head of the traveling man's business house; and that Scott, one of the sharpers, is paying attentions to Arthur's sister Kate. In some trepidation John goes to the Chase house to give warning of the danger. Miss Chase demands to know whom he accuses.

CHAPTER X.

PLANNING A SURPRISE.

KING would rather have led up to the main issue in another way, but he had no alternative. To falter or attempt to evade Miss Chase's question now would simply be to throw away any chance of persuading her that he was telling the truth.

"Charles Scott," he therefore answered steadily, "*alias* 'Nobby' Scott, grafter, crook, and all-around swindler, and—the man with whom you were at the theater last night!"

She gave a quick start at the name, and a wave of color swept across her neck. Then she bit her lip and threw back her head in a gesture of angry hauteur.

"Since you know that Mr. Scott was with me at the theater, you must probably realize that he is also my friend," she replied. "Has no one ever told you that I can be quite as loyal as my brother?"

"As loyal, perhaps, but not so headstrong and prejudiced," King pleaded. "What virtue is there in loyalty to an unworthy object? I came to you, Miss Chase, not because I thought you would believe my mere assertion, but because I trusted you would be sufficiently unbiased to give me a fair hearing. That is all I ask, a chance to prove the truth of what I say."

The frank candor of his address carried weight with her. That was plain to be seen. Yet she was not ready to give in without a struggle.

A tinge of suspicion crept into the glance with which she was regarding him.

"And what is your object in coming to us with this remarkable story?" she asked with open irony. "Surely, you don't claim it is disinterested philanthropy?"

"Why, yes, in a measure. If I saw a man lying asleep in front of an oncoming railroad train I would do my best to get him off the track; and this is not such an awfully different case. Still, I will not deny that I have some old scores to pay off with Mr. Scott and his friend, Mr. Newman.

"Yes," in response to the comprehensive "Ah!" she uttered, and the swift raising of her eyebrows. "Yes, I, too, have been a victim of theirs. True, I was not quite such big game as your brother, but they were operating on a smaller scale at the time and they did not scorn the little one hundred dollars out of which they fleeced me."

Her lip curled in sudden disdain as what she thought was the reason for his action presented itself to her. She turned sharply upon him.

"And so all this hoity-toity is because Mr. Scott and Mr. Newman got the best of you on a business deal, is it?" she sneered.

"Why, yes!" But her little cry of triumph was cut short as he went on trenchantly:

"That is, if you call three-card monte 'business,' and if getting a greenhorn's money away from him by passing counterfeits on him may be termed a 'deal.'"

Her lips parted and her eyes took on a very different expression.

"But you are accusing these men of downright swindling?" she gasped.

"Exactly. I told you they were swindlers and grafters, blacklegs of the most notorious stripe, and I was using no metaphors or figures of speech when I spoke. I meant just exactly what my words imply."

"And he says he can prove it," she muttered as though to herself. Then aloud: "This seems amazing and incredible, yet I will hear what you have to say. Sit down, Mr. King," waving her hand toward a chair. "If these men are what you claim, the sooner we know it the better."

Thus encouraged, John lost no time in setting forth his story. He told her in detail that experience of his on the train, explaining how he had been lured into the game through the device of letting him observe the antics of an unskilful player, and illustrated the method of play with the aid of a deck of cards he took from an adjoining table.

"Ordinarily, the monte artist gives his dupe no show whatever," he explained, "further than to lead him on and induce him to bet his money. Indeed, at any critical point in the game the queen is not flung upon the table at all, but is deftly slipped back into the palm of the hand and another card substituted for it. Scott and Newman, however, introduced a clever variation, and at the same time did away with the danger of my putting up a howl by skilfully exchanging my good bills for their stage-money during the course of the game, and then letting me go away under the impression that I had won."

His story, and the manner in which King told it bore so strongly the stamp of truth that Miss Chase could not well bring herself to doubt; yet, in order to be thoroughly satisfied, she reminded him gently that he had volunteered to furnish proof for all that he might say.

"And that is not hard to get," he cried triumphantly, for he saw that his case was already won. "The police-court records will show that I was arrested for passing the counterfeit money which those two crooks palmed off on me; a man whom neither you nor your brother can doubt, since he has been with your house for nearly twenty years, will vouch for the truth of all I have said; I can bring you bartenders, pool-room hangers-on, and 'undesirable citizens' a-plenty to swear that the reputation of Scott and Newman is well known; but, strongest proof of all, I will convince you by the actions of the men themselves. Let me face them unexpectedly and without warning in your presence, and I do not feel that you will need any further evidence."

She pondered a moment longer, then surrendered utterly.

"Mr. King," she said, "you have

done us a great and invaluable service by opening our eyes to the true character of these rogues in time. I regret, of course, that we have admitted them here to our home and have gone about with them on terms of friendship, but if it teaches Arthur not to make an intimate of every chance acquaintance he happens to pick up, I shall not be sorry.

"And now," she went on, "let me know what is the danger from them which menaces him, and of which you spoke. They are not planning to decoy him into any monte game, are they, or to load him down with green goods?"

"Oh, no; they are using more subtle methods in his case. They have a rubber company scheme, on which they have already induced him to bite, and—"

"Yes, yes, I know," she broke in eagerly. "He has been talking of nothing else for the past week or two, and has been using every effort to persuade me to invest along with him. And it is a fraud, you say?"

"Can it be anything else," John asked scornfully, "with Scott and Newman touting for it, and the most unmitigated old scoundrel in all Pennsylvania back of the thing? Yes, you can take my word for it, it is a fraud of the first water."

"But you can never get Arthur to believe so," and she shook her head reflectively. "He is simply wrapped up in the scheme, and he is just obstinate enough to stick to it, no matter what is said or done. Indeed, I am sure, if he thought the rubber company were to be questioned, he would refuse to listen to a word against Scott and Newman."

"But can't you convince him of his folly?" argued John. "Surely, if you were to tell—"

"No, even I can do nothing with him when he gets into one of his pig-headed fits. Oh, put your wits to work, Mr. King, and tell me what I can do!"

Spurred on by this flattering appeal, John thought hard. At last he gave a quick sigh of relief.

"Ah, I have it!" he cried. "Out on the farm, when we wanted to protect the corn from the thieving birds we didn't tell the corn anything about it. We simply put up a scarecrow and frightened the birds away. Do you see my application?"

"Not exactly," she confessed, looking a little puzzled.

"Well, it's this way. Why not try what I proposed a while ago, and let me face this pair of grafters? You invite them out here without saying anything about me—"

"They are coming to-night, anyway," she broke in. "Arthur has invited them and a Colonel Lindon, who is also in the rubber company, to spend the evening with us."

"Good! Couldn't have been arranged better if I had planned it. All right, then. Say nothing to your brother or anybody else, but let me drop in unannounced along about nine o'clock and confront the party. If you don't see some lively skiddooing on the part of the bunch I shall very much miss my guess."

"Oh, I see!" she gave a quick laugh of comprehension. "You intend to play the part of scarecrow."

"Exactly. And what's more, I'll wager that Scott and Newman will trouble your brother no more. They will never believe, you see, but what I have put him wise to their entire record."

She clapped her hands delightedly over the project, and after a little further discussion of the ways and means to be employed, King took his leave.

Nor was the jubilant smile which rested upon his lips as he sauntered homeward entirely due to the prospect of at last overmatching the pair he regarded as responsible for all his troubles.

Rather was it owing to a realization that Miss Chase could not have been very deeply interested in Scott after all.

"If he'd really been any way solid with her," murmured King with great satisfaction, "I'd never have got a chance to put in a word, for she's the kind of girl that if she once took to a fellow would stand by him for keeps. No," throwing his shoulders back, "the field is still open, and it's anybody's race."

CHAPTER XI.

"SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT?"

LOVE is a mighty master, and revenge is potent to sway the minds of men; but

habit is stronger than either, and despite the delicious little tremors which set King's heart to throbbing every time he recalled the incident of his call upon Miss Chase and despite the grateful prospect ahead of evening up scores with Scott and Newman, he began to grow uneasy as two o'clock approached.

That was the hour he had been accustomed to start for the pool-room, and with its arrival he felt the old itch coming over him to try his luck.

The traveling-man, however, was ready for just such a contingency, and when he saw the symptoms growing in virulence, prepared to administer what he hoped would be a radical treatment.

"Look here, John," he said, opening a drawer, "I have here more than two hundred different methods and systems of play upon the horses, every one of which has been tried by myself or by some one whom I have known. Examine them and you will find that they all work out perfectly—on paper. It would seem that anybody who should conscientiously follow them would soon have Rockefeller looking like a second-hand edition of 'Progress and Poverty.' Yet take any one of those systems and put it into actual practise with real money, and you'll find yourself very shortly on the wrong side of the ledger.

"No, sir, I like easy money as well as anybody in the world, and I've gone against that game for every cent that I could rake and scrape; but from the general experience of all mankind, I have at last been forced to the reluctant conclusion that it's an unbeatable proposition.

"Did you ever know of a pool-room 'regular' laying aside any money in the bank, or being on the lookout for investments? No, and you never will. Yet many of those seedy, out-at-elbows chaps started out in life as smarter men than you and I. Many of them had money and prospects and every sort of a chance, if they had only seen fit to improve it; but they were simply carried away by the belief that they could beat this game, and have stuck to it until they sank to their present level. It is a disgusting, degrading, degenerating vice, worse, to my mind, than whisky, opium, or morphine, because its victims last longer to be a nuisance to themselves and to the community in general."

Many other things the traveling-man said, and he strove to prove his point by a wealth of statistics and data of various sorts; but there was one phrase he used which stuck in John's mind above all the rest and which did more than anything else to produce the result at which his mentor was aiming.

"Some day, perhaps, King," he said, "you may meet the woman you want to make your wife; but if you keep on at this folly, I certainly hope and pray you never will. For above all the wretched women in the world, God pity her whose lot is to share the fortunes of a pool-room fiend."

And after that John, whenever he felt the nip of temptation, had but to think of Kate Chase and immediately the desire to place a flier upon the "ponies" would pass away, for he realized that what his friend urged upon him was the sanest kind of advice, and he had a very vivid picture in his memory of a wife he had seen come to the pool-room door one afternoon to meet her husband and escort him home.

In fact, the traveling-man's cure proved lasting, for, hard as he had been going the pace, John King stopped short then and there and never again to the longest day of his life was he known to hazard a wager on any kind of a gambling proposition.

Still the traveling-man did not let up, because he saw that he had made an impression. Mounted on what was his favorite hobby, he went on piling up his arguments and driving in his points with a host of interesting anecdotes drawn from the experiences of himself and his friends until he suddenly noticed with a start that the afternoon had waned and dusk was stealing in upon them.

"Gracious!" he then exclaimed. "I had no idea it was growing so late. We shall have fairly to race through dinner in order to get dressed and out to the Chases in time."

And, indeed, it was but scant and hasty rations that his companion partook of that night, for to John's mind the cravings of his stomach were of very secondary importance to the presenting

of a good appearance and to being at the rendezvous on time.

The traveling-man noticed this unaccountable absence of appetite, and although he made no comment, being a shrewd old codger, he did not fail to draw his own conclusions. Being in love, he thought, might wean his protégé away from his infatuation for the pool-rooms, and if that result were accomplished he would be well satisfied, even though King's passion was so hopelessly ill-advised as to aspire to the wealthy and aristocratic Miss Chase.

Himself a confirmed old bachelor, however, he dispensed with none of his customary dinner, but went straight through in regular order. Yet at that, it was he who had to stand waiting a full ten minutes while John wrestled with the hair-brush in the effort to make a refractory lock lie as smooth as he desired.

At last, though, they were off, and arriving at the Chase residence, were admitted without delay. Moreover, the butler had evidently received his orders, for he ushered them straight back to the library, where the brother and sister were entertaining their guests, and without announcement threw open the door.

Arthur looked up in some surprise, but as he saw Kate hurrying forward to greet the newcomers, supposed it must be all right. The two grafters, however, glanced at each other open-mouthed, consternation overspreading their faces.

Was this a trap they had been let into, or what did it mean?

Kate, apparently unconscious of their trepidation, led John forward.

"Mr. Scott," she said, "I want you to meet my friend, Mr. King."

John made no motion to extend his hand. His glance, steady and cold as steel, met the other's confused and guilty gaze.

"I think I have already had that pleasure," he said dryly.

The crook fumbled a second in his vest-pocket, and with a quick, furtive motion pressed a one-hundred-dollar bill into John's palm.

"Nix," he whispered sharply. "Call it square and say nothing. There's still more in it for you if you can keep your head shut."

John King laughed in derisive triumph as he stuffed the yellow bank-note away.

"I am going to keep this hundred dollars, Mr. Scott," he said, taking no trouble to lower his voice, "because you owe it to me: but I am also going to tell the interesting little story of how you came to be my debtor to that amount."

The other glared viciously at him and was about to speak, when Newman, who had been edging over toward them, reached out and twitched his arm.

"It's all off, Nobby," he muttered hoarsely. "We're up against a stall. Can't you see the old geezer who tried to butt in while we were trimming the hayseed? Better beat it while we have a chance, before the cops get here."

Scott gave a rapid glance over John's shoulder, and recognizing the traveling-man, concluded that it was indeed a "time for disappearing."

Without ceremony, stopping neither for excuses nor adieux, scarcely lingering even to snatch up their hats, the pair broke tumultuously for the door and, racing pell-mell through the hall, sped down the steps and out into the night.

Arthur Chase, completely mystified by such behavior, stood gazing after them, his face a curious mixture of anger and bewilderment.

"Well, that's a curious way to act!" he exclaimed. "What on earth got into those chaps so suddenly?"

He spoke to no one in particular, but a soft and silky voice from the corner of the room which had not hitherto been heard made answer to him.

"Why, my dear Chase, if you must know," it said, "this looks very much to me like a guilty flight. Deeply as I regret to say it, I have heard some things to-day which lead me to believe that we have been grievously imposed upon by these young men, and that they are in fact notorious crooks.

"I take it, then, that their reputation must have been known to these gentlemen who have just come in, and with the realization of this and the knowledge that their game was up, the pair beat a hasty retreat.

"Am I correct in this surmise, gentlemen?" the speaker added blandly, coming forward.

But suddenly he paused short and assumed an expression of pleased surprise.

"Surely I cannot be mistaken," he said. "Is not this John King, the son of my dear old Blairsburg neighbor and comrade? Why, John, my boy, how do you do?"

And before King could prevent it, he found his hand seized and almost shaken off in Colonel Lindon's ardent grasp.

"Consarn it!" thought John disgustedly to himself. "I believed I had the whole nest of pesky varmints trapped, but the meanest one of all has broken through and got away."

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN TALK WAS NOT CHEAP.

THERE were questions and explanations galore before the truth finally came out.

John was obliged to recount at least three times the story of how he had been buncoed on the train, and Arthur Chase was finally convinced beyond the possibility of a quibble that his late associates had been merely a brace of impudent confidence men.

But through all the talk and the comments, the "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" of amazement at the brazen assurance shown by the pair, Colonel Lindon played a shrewd and tactful hand.

No one was more graceful than he in praising John for the skill he had displayed in exposing the crooks; no one louder in his execrations of the helpless duo.

"But if you had heard that they were dishonest, colonel," questioned Arthur Chase, "why did you not give the rest of us some intimation of it? Why did you permit me to appear with my sister and her friends at that theater party of theirs last night?"

"Ah, my dear boy," replied the colonel, "the only thing which made me doubt the stories I had heard was the fellows' apparent intimacy with you. 'Chase is a Philadelphian,' I said to myself, 'and these young fellows are native here. Surely, if there were anything wrong with them he would be more apt to know it than an outsider, a mere countryman like myself. The very fact that he admits them to his home and friendship is *prima facie* proof of their innocence.'"

"Yet you must have known something about them, colonel." It was the traveling-man who spoke up in that quiet, straight-to-the-point fashion of his. "They were working for you, and it is hardly conceivable that you took men into your employ without making some investigation regarding them."

The colonel shot him a vicious glance from under his overhanging brows, but his voice lost none of its suavity as he answered:

"So I did. I made certain inquiries concerning their capability and fitness for the kind of work I wished done, and being satisfied, took them on. But you must understand, my dear sir, we do not usually require a certificate of either social standing or high moral integrity from the men we hire to peddle stock. All we ask is that they shall be able to place our wares, and on that score I must confess I have no complaint to make of either Scott or Newman.

"Yet," he added, "I would willingly forfeit every sale they made for us rather than have had them connected with our concern, for of course I am the heaviest sufferer by this exposure. Such notorious rascals as they appear to be would prove a black eye for any company."

So it went. Both John and the traveling-man tried in a dozen different ways to pin him down, but the slippery colonel always evaded their casts and had a ready answer for every question put to him. To hear him tell it, he was a guileless old gentleman from the country, who had been shamefully imposed upon by a pair of slick city sharpers.

No one dared hint, of course, that his rubber company was a fraud; for thoroughly as John and the traveling-man believed it to be so, they had not the proof to back up their suspicions. Thus the colonel was enabled to bewail without fear of contradiction the damage which had been done to his splendid business proposition through the scurvy conduct of a pair of miscreants.

So exhaustively did he dilate upon this theme, and at the same time manage to boom the scheme upon which he was engaged, that Arthur Chase, already

much interested, was fairly carried off his feet by the flow of eloquence.

"By Jove, colonel," he cried, with sparkling eyes, "just to show you that I am not prejudiced by your having been hooked up with these scalawags, and that I believe in the company as much as ever, put me down for $50,000 worth more stock!"

King looked across at Kate with quick, startled inquiry, but she merely raised her eyebrows slightly, and shook her head back, as though to signify that she could do nothing; and, indeed, before anybody could have had time to interpose, the young man had swung around to his desk, and turned his impulsive offer into a binding transaction.

The colonel was profuse in his thanks, called Chase his "benefactor" and "preserver," and told him that by this action he (the colonel) was inspired with new courage to take up the rubber company and carry it to a higher destiny and greater triumphs than he had even originally planned; but, either satisfied with what he had accomplished, or else feeling some chilling effect from the manifest disapproval of the others in the room, he did not linger long afterward, and very shortly John and his friend also took their departure.

For a space the two walked along in silence; then King whirled around under a lamplight, with a short, rueful laugh.

"Well, we made rather a mess of it, didn't we?" he said. "About the only effect of our interference so far is that young Chase is deeper in the hole than ever."

"It's an old saying," remarked the other sententiously, "that 'a fool and his money are soon parted,' and I never yet heard of anybody being able to postpone the 'parting' process by butting in."

"All the same," announced John, with a little emphatic nod of the head, "I am going to try it. Or, at least, try to stop his parting with any more in the same direction. Perhaps, too, the colonel may not have been extra slick in covering up his tracks, and what has already been donated to him can be recovered. If he owns no rubber plantation, for instance, or if there has been any funny business in the organization of the company, it ought not to be hard to make him pony up, and those are details which I propose to find out about."

"You are taking on a pretty large contract, aren't you?" asked the other. "Where can you find out those things short of taking a trip to Central America?"

"Where? Why, right here in Philadelphia. Don't you suppose that Scott and Newman know pretty well the true status of this enterprise, and that if a fellow should get next to them, and tip them off that the colonel had thrown them down, as well as tell them some of the hard things he said about them to-night, they'd be very apt to squeal? Of course there is nothing in it for me, and it's really none of my business; but, all the same, I am going to see what I can do."

What he really meant was that if he could accomplish this thing, and preserve her brother from loss, he would win Kate Chase's gratitude and approval; but it seemed there was to be a more tangible reward, for the traveling-man, after pondering a moment, suddenly spoke up.

"Well, I don't know about it being none of your business," he said. "I hadn't intended to speak to you until everything was all settled; but I took the opportunity to-night to ask Chase if he couldn't arrange to give you a job with our firm; and, by George, he said he thought he could do still better by you.

"'I need a bright, wide-awake chap like 'that,' he told me, 'for a private secretary and general confidential man, and if you think your friend could fill the bill, why I'd rather give it to him than anybody else. I like his style, and I'm not blind to the fact that he's done me a great big favor in showing up these fakers before they had a chance to get in their work.'

"Yes, sir, that's just the way Chase spoke, and he's to go over your credentials to-morrow and, if everything is satisfactory, make you an offer.

"So, you see, John, if you do tackle this thing, it will be very distinctly your business, since it will be nothing more nor less than looking out for your employer's interests."

"And that's my long suit," cried King buoyantly. "I pulled my father

out of a hole when I was nothing but a kid, and if Arthur Chase will just let me run his affairs for a while, he'll never have reason to regret it."

There came a day when the traveling-man remembered that remark.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOLID WITH THE FAMILY.

THROWN into the control of a large fortune by the unexpected death of his father when he was just out of college, and knowing absolutely nothing of business, Arthur Chase had fallen an early victim to Colonel Lindon and his associates. In fact, he had been fair game for adventurers of almost every sort.

When John came to work for him—for the credentials proving all right, young King was taken on in a day or two—he found a desk crammed full of worthless securities in seemingly endless variety.

There were oil stocks, mining stocks, shares in industrial concerns, bonds of "boom" towns in the West which had long since gone out of business, mortgages upon "farms" situated in sandy deserts, or upon inaccessible mountain peaks—an appalling array of "junk."

"Let's have a grand house-cleaning," proposed John one day after he had worked into the harness and felt free to speak his mind. "This stuff takes up valuable room, and we might get as much as fifty or seventy-five cents for it from an old rags and paper dealer."

"All right," assented his employer, sick himself of having such reminders of his business inefficiency about. "Do with it as you please."

But John, as he waded through the highly lithographed and colored mass of documents, came to the conclusion that he knew a better scheme than dumping them upon the old-rags man.

Some of them he saw were backed up by the guarantees of responsible persons and corporations, and some represented an interest in concerns which, hopelessly mismanaged, had landed in the hands of receivers and were now being honestly conducted, while others still were fraudulent and illegal upon their face.

All these he sorted out, and by writing insistent letters, consulting lists of securities from every financial center in the country, and in cases where the illegality was patent, coming down roughshod with the threat of prosecution, he managed to realize a sum of money by no means to be despised.

The balance of the truck he laid aside until he had an opportunity to consult his old friend, the bartender, and through him discover the whereabouts of Scott and Newman, who since their last fiasco had naturally been laying rather low.

When he came in upon them one afternoon, at the cheap boarding-house where they were hanging out during these evil days, they glanced up in startled apprehension, not knowing what to expect, but John speedily allayed their fears.

"I bear you fellows no ill-will," he informed them smilingly; "for it is through you I have landed a position I never otherwise would have got. It's not revenge but business that I've come to see you about to-day.

"Now, this stuff here," unrolling the bundle of fake securities he had brought with him, "doesn't look at first blush as though it were worth the paper it is printed on. Probably most of it is not, but sometimes these dead ones come to life in a surprising way, and as there are fellows always ready to try a long shot if they can get it cheap, I want you chaps to take these off my hands and see what you can do with them. You know the kind of people to tackle with such goods better than I do, and you can have a full ninety per cent of all you make from the peddle."

Down on their luck, is it any wonder that the two grafters snapped at the proposition? They did, indeed, know the kind of people who were willing to speculate upon such slender chances, and as they set to work with a will, it was not long before the entire stock furnished them was off their hands.

Then King made a report to Arthur, and although he had, of course, got nothing like the original price of the securities, the amount he was able to turn over made the young millionaire open his eyes.

"That private secretary of mine is certainly a wonder," he observed to Kate at dinner that night. "He has taken

what was practically a waste-paper basket and turned it into a bunch of bank-notes for me. Oh, I tell you, it was little Arthur's lucky day when I ran across him."

She sipped meditatively at her coffee, and smoothed out with her forefinger a crease in the table-cloth.

"Why don't you have him up here oftener, brother?" she asked. "You say you enjoy being with him more than anybody else you know, and I, too, find him very entertaining. He is always so confident and enthusiastic about everything that it is quite a pleasure to talk to him. Get him to drop in on us in the evenings, and occasionally to come for dinner. I don't think he has many friends in Philadelphia, and I am sure he would enjoy it."

"Good idea," agreed Arthur, and accordingly King got into the habit of visiting frequently at the Chases' home.

Generally some one else would be on hand, and then there would be gay times, with the laughter and light conversation of the young people in the old-fashioned house. But sometimes, Arthur having gone out, Kate would be alone, and she and King would sit a long evening through before the grate-fire, while he poured into her sympathetic ear the hopes and dreams and aspirations of his ambitious heart.

And of the two kinds of entertainment, there is no question but that John enjoyed the latter the more.

Yet there was one dream and one aspiration which he never revealed to her. In that, he pictured himself as likewise sitting with her before the grateful glow of an open fire; but there was this difference, that he was not present as a casual caller, but, in slippers and lounging-coat, was there "for keeps," at ease in his own home.

Often and often, both in his waking thoughts and in his dreams at night, did the young man let his enraptured fancy dwell upon this vision, and then would drop back with a sigh to the prosaic facts of stern reality.

Kind though she was to him, how could he, a mere clerk upon a limited stipend, and with no social position at all, dare hope that he could win this radiant belle? True, he meant to be wealthy himself some day, a man of large affairs in the world; but scheme and plan as he might, the time seemed long ahead—a weary while to wait when one was all on fire with love and yearning. Meanwhile, too proud to speak himself, he was wretched every time he saw another man approach her.

And then one day, when he was least expecting it, a door opened to him through which he could discern a short cut to the fortune and position he craved. At a bound his easy optimism revived, and eagerly he leaped forward to seize the prize dangling to his grasp.

And never guessed at the mocking face that would grin at him from behind it!

(To be continued.)

AFTER THE CASHIER LEFT.

By EDMUND E. FIELD.

The bank officer who tried to better himself by means of a ruse and brought about a terrible condition of affairs in consequence.

ELMER LEE and Harry Staunton were deeply engaged in conversation. One was cashier, the other paying-teller, of the First National Bank, located in a thrifty town in one of the Southern States.

"If I leave on the 4 P.M train, I will be in New York by noon to-morrow," said Lee. "I can meet the president of the bank and the board of directors in the afternoon and submit my application in person. It will be better than if sent by mail."

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained, I suppose, and to be cashier of a bank in New York is quite a distinction; but how are you going to account for your absence from duty here?" inquired Staunton.

"Have you spoken to the president about it?"

"No, I have not," replied Lee.

"Don't you think that he will get wise that you are contemplating making a change?" went on Staunton.

"I can easily arrange that. I will write a telegram when I leave town, stating that I was called home by my father and hope to be on duty Wednesday. I'll instruct the operator not to forward it until to-morrow morning. If I get the position I seek, then I don't care what the president thinks. If I don't land it, he will be none the wiser."

About noon Wednesday the president of the bank approached Staunton.

"Have you heard anything from Lee since he left here Monday?" he asked.

"No, sir, I have not," answered Staunton.

"I fear he must be detained. I received a telegram from him yesterday, stating that he was called home, but would be back to-day. I hope nothing serious has happened to his people. However, he may be here later in the day or send us word."

Staunton, recalling the conference he had had with Lee Monday afternoon, was somewhat surprised himself that the cashier had not returned as he had planned. His telegram had worked all right. "Perhaps I had better explain to the president," he told himself.

Apparently leaving the desk for that purpose, a sudden impulse seized him. Retracing his steps, he resumed his seat at his desk, buried his face in his hands, and, resting upon his elbows, sat in deep meditation.

The business day closed, and Lee had not appeared; not a word had been received from him.

The president remained in his private office long after his clerks had gone home. He was carefully studying the telegram he had received from his cashier the day before. An anxious look spread over his face as he reached for the telephone directory.

Carefully turning the pages until he found the town, name, and number he sought, he rang central, and was quickly in connection with Lee's father. Lee was not there, and had not been, came the reply in answer to his inquiry. The banker's face was a puzzle as he hung up the receiver.

The president was a shrewd, cautious man. Up to this moment he had had every confidence in his cashier. Lee not at home — his deceptive telegram — his failure to return as he had wired—all this aroused suspicion.

Next morning as the banker sat at his desk sorting over his mail, he was surprised when informed that the bank examiners were present to go over the accounts. It is the custom of these examiners to come unannounced, but their appearance at this time was very satisfactory to him, in that it would prove whether Lee had a motive in disappearing.

The clerks glanced from one to the other with surprised looks. They could not seem to grasp the reason for an investigation. Did the examiners come voluntarily or were they sent for?

Lee, it was true, had not been on hand for several days, but no serious thought connected him with the examination. He had endeared himself to his fellow clerks by his kindly disposition and willingness to help them over many a hard place in the beginning of their clerkship, therefore each one felt, in a way, under obligation to him.

The president instituted a quiet investigation into the actions of the cashier preceding his sudden disappearance. He learned from the telegraph-operator that Lee had instructed him not to forward the message until the following morning.

Staunton, the paying-teller, when he realized that an investigation into the affairs of the bank had begun, became very nervous. He went into conference with the president, and related all that had been said in the talk with Lee on the afternoon of the latter's departure.

When Staunton had finished his story, the president concluded to telegraph the officials of the New York bank Lee had in mind, and received the following reply:

> No such person has communicated with or called upon us.

The banker did not seem surprised at the above answer. He had now exhausted every means at his command whereby he

might get some favorable report of the missing cashier.

When the fact became generally known that Lee had suddenly disappeared it created a considerable stir among his many friends. They were not only astonished, but sorely grieved, at his action.

A few days later an elderly gentleman appeared at the bank and introduced himself as John Lee, father of Elmer Lee, the missing cashier.

He was received very courteously by the president.

"I called to ascertain the truthfulness of the rumors implicating my son in some trouble you have here," the old man began.

"There is no doubt that rumor has correctly expressed the facts of your son's unfortunate position," answered the president.

"You mean that he has stolen money?"

"I do not know of any other word that could be used to express it more plainly. I have had the examiners here. They have carefully gone over his accounts, and report a shortage of ten thousand dollars."

"Ten thousand dollars! Ten thousand dollars!" cried the elder Lee. He sprang up, then dropped back into the chair and buried his face in his hands. "It cannot be — it cannot be — there must be some mistake! Elmer could not—he would not be guilty of wrongdoing," he murmured.

"The evidence is against him," replied the president. "The money is gone, and he has disappeared. The deceptive telegram, his untruthful statement to Staunton of seeking a position in New York, where, upon inquiry, they had never seen or heard of him, all tend to show how well he had planned."

"If he could be located, I am sure he would be able to exonerate himself," almost tearfully protested the father.

"I hardly expect him to return voluntarily. I have not yet asked the officials to apprehend him. He should be brought back and made to face the charge. 'Tis but right and just that an example should be made of him as a warning to other young men who hold trusted positions."

"You surely do not mean that you would send him to prison?" exclaimed the father.

"I can see no other way, unless some one makes good the amount of his shortage. That would close the incident, as far as the bank prosecuting him is concerned," replied the president.

The old man sat in silence. His breathing was quick and heavy. The perspiration on his forehead stood out in great beads. Crowding through his brain, perhaps like moving-pictures, he saw his son, an innocent babe, then a merry youth budding into promising young manhood: now a full-grown man, and a fugitive from justice.

Just what he thought in those few minutes may never be known. What greater love could a father show for an erring son than did that old man when he stood before the president and said:

"Take all I have—the homestead, the farm—but spare the boy. I can't believe he wilfully did wrong."

"For the present I will defer action in the matter, and consider your proposition," was the president's reply.

The old man left the bank, broken in spirit, broken in body, aged years more than when he had entered the building.

II.

"LOOK out there!" shouted the voice of a man in terror.

But it was too late. Beneath the big automobile lay the form of a man.

A number of policemen hurried to the scene, and, with great difficulty, pushed back the crowd.

After the machine had been pushed back a few feet, its owner bent over the victim and anxiously examined him. Then he spoke to the officers, and the unconscious form was gently lifted and placed in the machine, which moved away at a rapid pace.

"Well, I'll be switched, that's a new one on me. Knock a fellow's brains out, then carry him off to bury him before his friends have a chance to claim his body!" sarcastically commented a bystander.

"Sure, indeed, the poor fellow will get the best of care," said a policeman, "for that's Dr. Stratton himself. 'Tis police-surgeon he is, and has his own private hospital where he is taking him."

Tossing with delirium upon a cot in the sanatorium lay the victim of the auto accident. He had been there for a week, and still there were no signs of returning consciousness.

Consultations had been held by the best specialists Dr. Stratton could enlist, with no apparent results.

His identity was a mystery that baffled the police officials as well as the hospital attendants. Not a scrap of paper was found upon his person to indicate who he was or whence he came. The newspapers had published accounts of the accident, fully describing the man; the police had exhausted all known methods to find out who he was—all in vain. That he filled a sphere of life above the ordinary was very evident by his soft, well-kept hands and the fine texture of his clothing.

He was known as Dr. Stratton's personal charge. The nurses were frequently reminded of the doctor's instructions. "Notify me at once when you observe the slightest change in the patient's condition."

While making a tour through his sanatorium one morning, Dr. Stratton was hurriedly sought and informed that his special patient had shown indications of recovering consciousness. He lost no time in reaching the patient's bedside.

The man moved his head from side to side; then, with an effort, he half opened his tired eyes.

"How do you feel this morning?" the doctor gently inquired.

But there was no answer, and the eyes closed again.

The doctor bent over the patient, felt his pulse, and anxiously looked into his face.

The man on the cot turned, opened his eyes once more, gazed wonderingly at the doctor, moistened his lips with his tongue, and spoke for the first time.

"Water," he said.

The nurse readily responded. When he had drunk the contents of a glass, he lay back on the pillow, apparently satisfied.

The doctor instructed the nurse to watch the patient carefully and to give him drink and nourishment.

Later on in the day, when the physician returned, the nurse reported that the patient had apparently watched all that had taken place in the ward; he had partaken of nourishment and drunk freely, complained about a pain in his head, but never once paid any heed to or answered a direct question.

The doctor knitted his brow and seemed in deep thought while watching the man.

"Just as I feared this morning," he murmured; "his past has been blotted out; his memory is gone. It will require a surgical operation to remove some pressure upon the brain, then memory may be restored."

III.

On the evening of the day that Lee's father had called upon him at the bank, the president, on reaching home, showed evidence of worry. His daughter, a beautiful girl, whom the old man idolized because she was all he had in the world, commented upon his tired appearance.

"Why do you let that bank affair prey upon your health?" she asked. "Why not let the matter drop?"

"Let it drop?" repeated the father. "My child, do you realize that if Lee is not apprehended and that money not returned to the bank, it will be my personal loss?"

"What if it is?" answered the daughter. "Do you not place any value on your health? Lately you have done too much worrying about business."

"I know, my child, but Lee must be made to understand that crimes like his cannot go unpunished."

"Don't be too harsh on him. Lee has been faithful to you for ten years; he was always honorable and straightforward. I can't believe he would sacrifice his future for ten thousand dollars. What is that amount to you, with your wealth? I do believe you care more for that ten thousand dollars than you do for me," she poutingly added.

Placing his hand upon her forehead and gently pushing back a few loose and straggling hairs, and affectionately looking into her large blue eyes, he said:

"Tut, tut, my child, you are dearer to me than ten times ten thousand dollars!" and he impressed a kiss upon her lips.

"Then, listen. Do you remember ten years ago, when I was a mere child? A party of school-children went rowing upon the lake. Through the carelessness of one of them the boat was capsized. The people stood upon the shore, shouting in wild excitement. Three of the children drowned. I had gone down twice when a young man, attracted by the screams, came rushing to the water, plunged in at great peril, and brought me safely to the shore. Do you forget who that young man was?"

"Elmer Lee," sobbed the old man as he sank into a chair.

IV.

"By the way, doctor, how is your patient with the lost memory getting along?" inquired a visiting surgeon as he sat in the office of the sanatorium.

"Why, I've lost him," answered Dr. Stratton, with a confused look.

"Lost him!" exclaimed the other in astonishment.

"Yes, but not in the sense you imagine. Not under the knife, for you were to have been one of the specialists to take part in the operation. He has disappeared."

"I can't understand," remarked the visiting surgeon.

"Nor can I," responded Dr. Stratton, adding: "He certainly was a mystery to me. The fact that it was my automobile that ran him down obligated me in the cause of humanity to care for him, at least until he could be identified. He progressed as far as being able to be about, although his memory was gone; he could recollect nothing from one day to another.

"He would do as he was told, just like a child. Yesterday morning one of the male nurses took him out for a short walk, and left him comfortably seated on a bench in the park while he absented himself for a few minutes. When he returned, the patient had disappeared. Although a careful search was made, no trace of him could be found."

V.

WHEN John Lee, the father, reached home after the conference with the bank president, his faith in his son's innocence had not diminished.

"If I only knew where he was! If I could only talk to him in confidence for a few minutes," he continued to repeat as he walked to and fro, almost in desperation. "What shall I do? What can I do?"

Coming to a sudden halt, as if a sudden inspiration flashed upon him, he exclaimed: "I'll do it! I'll go! I'll find him!"

That night he packed a few belongings in a grip, and took the train for New York. That was where they said his son was gone; that was where he hoped to find him.

He knew nothing about the great city; he never for a moment stopped to consider the millions there, each intent upon his own business. What time would they have to be questioned about his lost son?

The police would receive him in the usual stereotyped manner, having hundreds of lost people reported to them. Police! He shuddered at the mere thought of them.

No, he must say nothing to them, as his son was a fugitive from justice. He would seek to find his boy in his own quiet way, trusting in a Higher Power to lead him.

He remembered he had a distant relative living in a suburb of the great city; he would go thither, explain all, and enlist his sympathy. He found this relative ready and willing to assist him; and, while walking through the park one day, the old man stopped suddenly and exclaimed:

"Elmer, my son! My son!"

Rushing to a bench, he stopped before a man who looked up into his face in blank amazement.

"Oh, my boy, my boy! Don't you know me?" half sobbed the elder Lee.

Taking the apparently dazed man by the arm, he led him away.

When the old man reached his stopping-place, he fully realized the condition of his son, and his grief was indescribable.

What had been done to him? Where had he been? Who was responsible for this awful thing? How came he to be alone in the public park? Who had left him there?

Question him as they would, they could not seem to arouse his memory.

What could they do in his present state? He could not be taken back to the home town. No, that would not do. The old man wanted to hear his story first. To call in a physician might expose his identity and lead to his arrest and forced return.

VI.

THE excitement in the town caused by the vanishing of Lee had subsided, save for the occasional reference to it by some old friend.

The newspapers had ceased to use the fact for sensational purposes, other matters of more recent note having crowded it out.

The president's daughter, by her gentle and sympathetic appeal for Lee, had touched her father's heart, awakening what seemed to have been a forgotten debt of gratitude. She had completely won him over; whatever opinion he entertained of Lee's guilt, for her sake he kept it to himself.

"I wish I had not gone so far into the matter," he remarked to the district attorney, who had called to consult him. "I would like to retract whatever action I have been instrumental in starting."

"But it is too late," answered the district attorney, who, being a young man of ability just elected to office, desired to do something to establish a reputation. "The law must take its course: the guilty must be punished. When Lee is apprehended, which he must and will be, I shall expect you to come forward and assist in the prosecution, if not voluntarily, then by legal process." He left the bank very much disturbed in mind by the president's attitude in the matter.

He—the district attorney—had quietly but persistently followed up the case. One of his men, who had been sent to interview the elder Lee at his home, had returned and reported: "Old man Lee has suddenly disappeared."

"Gone to New York, I suppose, to help his son spend the boodle," remarked the district attorney.

"Ten thousand dollars won't go far in that swift town. Perhaps he has an idea that he can invest it in Wall Street stock and pull out one hundred thousand in a few weeks," replied his assistant.

"If he has, he won't be the first fool who went in to clean up Wall Street and came away a sad but much wiser man."

Turning to his assistant, he continued: "I am going to New York for a few days to attend to some legal business. While there I will consult the authorities. I may possibly get a clue. I don't want it to be known here where I am going, so if any inquiry is made about my absence just say I have gone to Washington, where I will betake myself this afternoon, stay overnight, and go on to New York to-morrow."

That night, immediately after supper, the district attorney went to his room in the hotel in Washington. He was busily engaged for some time looking over some important papers that he intended to use when he reached New York.

He retired early, and slept soundly until he was awakened by loud talking in the adjoining apartment.

"That's the annoying feature of these rooms that have connecting doors," he grumbled to himself. "You can almost hear your neighbors whisper. It's a pity those two fellows in there wouldn't realize other people want to sleep, and stop their talking, especially at this hour."

But the phase of the conversation that now reached his ears caused him to sit up in bed, all on the alert.

"Charlie, wasn't it down here that you cleaned up that bunch of money from a banker not long ago?"

"That wasn't a banker; he was a clerk or cashier or some such thing in one of the towns south of here. He was introduced by a friend the night the game of poker started, and got in and lost one thousand dollars the first clip. He took the eleven-thirty train South, but was back the next night at eight. He dropped another thousand, and left on the same train. He kept that up for five consecutive nights, each night expecting his luck would turn.

"Strange, isn't it, how fellows of that stripe keep banging away with the odds against them, hoping for luck to change, but each time going deeper and deeper into the mire? It was so with that chap. His total loss that week was ten thousand dollars. Fearing that he might not

have been straight, and not caring to have our names connected with any scandal in case he was not using his own money, I persuaded him to quit. I never heard anything more about him, so I guess he could stand the loss. It was a gentleman's game; we were all gentlemen. As I picture him now, he was game and a bundle of nerves."

Imagine the district attorney's surprise at this revelation! What a clever piece of detective work would be attributed to him!

His first impulse was to knock on the door and make himself known.

But, no, that wouldn't do. Rather than be mixed up in the affair, the men would leave the hotel before their identity could be discovered.

He slept little the remainder of the night. Rising early, he quickly enlisted the services of the local authorities, who agreed to keep the men under surveillance until he returned. If they made any attempt to leave the city, they would be arrested as witnesses.

Old Mr. Lee and his relative meanwhile carefully guarded the son, hoping against hope that his mental power would return of its own accord. But finally the father gave up in despair and concluded to consult a physician.

Death would be preferable, the old man reasoned, to seeing Elmer continue in his present state.

He was easily persuaded to visit one of the many hospitals in the great city where eminent specialists could be consulted.

It was in one of these he underwent the operation, which was performed by the aid of several noted surgeons, including Dr. Stratton. When the latter discovered his lost patient, he was greatly surprised.

The patient lay apparently asleep for a day or two. The surgeons carefully watched over him.

Toward the end of the second day the nurse hurried to his bedside. He sat up, gazing around him in a strange manner. He rubbed his hand across his forehead, as if trying to think, then said:

"I attempted to cross the street in front of that auto, and my foot slipped. It was my own carelessness."

He put his hand again to his forehead and fell back among the pillows.

The newspapers that night published the following item:

> The man run down by an automobile some time since and whose memory has been restored by an operation, proves to be Elmer Lee, cashier of the First National Bank of Teddingford, Virginia.
>
> When he was about to leave the hospital, the district attorney of his city placed him under arrest, under the charge of absconding with ten thousand dollars of the bank's funds.
>
> Lee was amazed at the charge, but at once signified his readiness to return and face his accusers.

They arrived in Teddingford the next day. The news of Lee's arrest had been so quickly suppressed that not even the local newspapers referred to it. Awaiting to identify him was the man whom the district attorney had overheard in the hotel describing the card-game, and who had gladly offered his services.

When Lee was brought in, the witness looked at him and frowned.

"This is not the man I referred to," he said, looking in amazement at the district attorney, who was considerably confused at the outcome of what he supposed was to be his grand coup.

Lee was retired in custody of the sheriff, pending further investigation.

The district attorney, desirous of a conference with the bank president, invited the star witness to accompany him.

When they entered the bank, they were engaged in earnest conversation and paid no attention to their surroundings as they walked toward the president's office.

As they walked past the paying-teller's window, the witness, chancing to raise his eyes, met those of Staunton, and, turning to the district attorney, exclaimed:

"Why, there is the man I mean."

Staunton turned deathly pale. He was ushered into the president's office, where he broke down and confessed.

He had been a loser at the card-game, and when Lee had failed to return before the bank examiners arrived, was tempted to take the ten thousand dollars to make good his losses, believing that suspicion would fall on Lee, who was missing.

The sheriff was telephoned to bring Lee to the bank, and took Staunton away in his place, the district attorney departing with them.

THE FROZEN FORTUNE.*

By FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK.

The thousands that must be had and the millions that were found, only to keep melting away before the finder's frantic eyes.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STAKE PLAYED.

THE article which had riveted my attention occupied a column or more, with two crude cuts. It was the report of the successful trial flight of an air-ship, a motor-driven, steerable balloon of the Santos-Dumont pattern.

This flight had been made a few days before near Seattle. The inventor, Frederic Dumoines, was a Frenchman naturalized in America, and he claimed to be able to keep up a speed of thirty miles an hour for five hundred miles in calm weather.

In the trial he had actually remained aloft for ten hours, and had gone a hundred miles out to sea.

Pill read the story with no sign of interest.

"Well, what about it?" he said, handing it back.

"Why, don't you see what we could do if we had that machine? The paper says it's capable of making thirty miles an hour in a calm and sixty with a fair wind, and of keeping it up for nearly twenty-four hours. It isn't as far as that to—"

"By Jove, we could beat the Chrysalis by a week!" Pill exclaimed. "But likely it's a fake, and, anyhow, we can't run air-ships, and the balloon man wouldn't take the risk."

"Men will take a lot of risks for a chance at a million, and that's what it amounts to. Would you risk it yourself?"

"In a minute. But—"

"We'll make him see it the same way. How much money have we got left?"

I extracted the package of bills from my pocket and ran over them. There was seven hundred and thirty dollars.

"We'll offer him one hundred dollars down for expenses, and we'll give him a third share in the iceberg. If he won't take the hundred, we'll raise it, of course, but he won't haggle over expenses if he's willing to go into it at all."

"But it's such a deuced incredible story," said Pill.

"Too much so to tell him. We'll contrive a better sounding tale, for his own good. Then whatever money we have left over, we'll send to your sister. If we find the berg we won't need it."

"And if we don't find it?"

"We drown, of course. It's the last stake we have to play. Are you game to put up your life?"

We gazed straight into each other's eyes, tingling with excitement, and shook hands on it.

We left for Seattle that evening and at ten o'clock next morning we were inquiring for Mr. Dumoines at the hotel where he was staying.

He was in, luckily, and he received us in his room.

The aeronaut was a short, dry-faced man, very alert in his manner and with a reckless eye which I was glad to see. Indiscretion was what I hoped for in him, for we had no very sane proposition to make.

"Would you risk your life for a hundred thousand dollars, Mr. Dumoines?" Pill demanded abruptly.

"I risk it every day for a good deal less than that," replied the balloonist with a smile.

"We've read about your air-ship. Would you back it to make a continuous trip of six hundred miles, carrying three men?"

"Yes, certainly, if the wind was not against us."

"I mean out to sea."

Dumoines hesitated.

"This is the state of things," I inter-

posed. "Some weeks ago I discovered a very rich gold mine on an island about six hundred miles northwest of this port. I came back here, but before we could start back to it, another man stole the secret from me, and he's on his way to the island in a fast yacht.

"If he gets there first, it's all up with us. If you can put us there first in your balloon we will give you a third share in the mine. It will be worth anywhere up to a million dollars.

"Further," I went on, "here is a hundred dollars. It's every cent we have in the world between us. You can take it for expenses, and we'll risk our lives on the trip besides."

My voice sounded strange in my own ears, and, glancing at Pill I saw an expression of desperate, haggard earnestness on his face that startled me. I suppose I looked like that, and our looks must have been the strongest arguments for our sincerity.

"Well," said Dumoines, "I won't deny that a good gold mine would be very handy to me just now. I'm trying to get my air-ship adopted by the United States War Department. But, excuse me, have you any proof of your story?"

"Only these," I said, producing the half-dozen nuggets that I still kept by me.

"It's placer gold," I added. "I washed out over five thousand dollars' worth in four days, with nothing but a dinky little tin basin. Plenty of water handy, and no land near."

"What'll we live on? We can't carry provisions enough."

"There's plenty of food there that I left."

"Then how'll we ever get back? We can't inflate the balloon on your island."

"The yacht will be along in a week. We must capture it."

"Piracy?" exclaimed Dumoines.

"Oh, no. It's our yacht, and the captain will side with us as soon as he sees us."

I briefly told him then how we had been circumvented. Dumoines listened, amazed at first, and then he burst out laughing.

"Hanged if it isn't the queerest, sportiest thing I ever heard of. I wouldn't have missed it for a farm. But you know the air-ship could never do it without a fair wind, and head winds are what we're likely to have at this time of year."

I glanced out of the window. Over the roofs I saw a flag blowing out its brilliant red and white, and it was blowing seaward.

"Look!" I cried exultantly. "It's Providence—an east wind!"

"I'll do it!" Dumoines exclaimed. "I'll take the risk if you fellows will—and we'll start to-night."

"You're the man for us!" Pill cried, rejoicing as if he had his hands on the nuggets already.

"Now hustle's the word," went on the balloonist. "Luckily the air-ship's ready; she only needs to be inflated. She's out in the suburbs back of the city, and I'll go out and see about things at once. Meanwhile, you fellows buy what we need, supplies and tools, as much under fifty pounds as possible. Meet me at the balloon-shed at six o'clock. Take any car to the East End, and anybody'll tell you where my shop is. It's tolerably conspicuous."

Pill and I went about our buying in haste and had it finished before noon, spending a good deal of the hundred dollars expense money. We purchased three revolvers, with a box of cartridges, half a dozen tins of preserved meat and condensed milk, two bottles of wine, a couple of small, light shovels, and three good-sized tin pans.

Dumoines had all the scientific apparatus necessary.

Now that the thing was actually decided, my nerve came near failing me. The risk was so enormous, the voyage so unprecedented.

If the motor should break down we would be whirled about at the mercy of the winds till we went to the bottom of the Pacific. The same climax would be reached more quickly through a leak in the gas bag, and even if we managed to reach the berg there was a fair chance that we would never be able to leave it again.

I was badly scared, but I would not have given up the undertaking for anything. The alternative was too hideous.

However, with the consciousness that I would very likely never see Goldendale again, I wrote to Jessie.

I mentioned that Pill and I were sending her six hundred dollars by express and that we were leaving for the iceberg that day, saying nothing of Dolan's treachery, and leaving her to suppose that we were sailing on the yacht.

I begged her to forgive me and to think as well of me as possible under the circumstances, and then I came to the execution of a rather quixotic plan that I had been meditating all day.

"And I wish to entrust a very important commission to you," I wrote. "Enclosed you will find a sealed letter for the Bank of Goldendale. If you do not hear from me before the end of June I want you to deliver that letter personally to the manager, and tell him how you got it. But do not deliver it an hour before the end of the month. I can't explain what it means, but my honor, almost my life, and Pill's honor, too, are involved."

The enclosed letter was a complete confession that it was I who had forged the Hollis note, and I stated that Pill knew nothing of how I had procured the signature.

The act was not really so generous as it looks, for I knew that before the end of June I would be either dead or wealthy.

We finished our purchases in a couple of hours and had nothing to do. Dumoines was not at the hotel, and we loafed aimlessly and painfully about the city till at half past five we took a car that carried us far into the outskirts.

Following the conductor's directions we walked a quarter of a mile and then I saw the huge black bulk of the balloon towering above some sheds enclosed in a tight board fence. It looked exactly like the rounded back of an enormous elephant.

We were let in through a small door that a suspicious workman unlocked, and Dumoines came to meet us, his shirt-sleeves smeared with oil and engine-black.

"All ready?" said Pill with a queer quaver.

"Practically ready. How do you like the looks of her?"

The big flying-machine had held my eyes from the moment the gate was opened.

At the first glance it resembled an immense black bologna sausage floating in the air, with a spidery gallery of wires and braces slung below it. At one end was a great four-bladed propeller like a windmill, and under this a broad, sheet-metal plane that I supposed was the rudder.

There was a strong smell of gas about the place, and the machine quivered and swayed in the breeze, tugging at the cables that anchored it down.

The aeronaut exhibited the machine to us in more detail with all the pride of an inventor. The car, or gallery, where we were to sit, was a boat-shaped contrivance about twenty feet long, slung to a network of fine steel ropes.

It contained three seats, and the stern one faced a complicated switchboard bearing a confusion of small levers, wheels, gages, and cranks. A wheel like that of an automobile controlled the rudder, and under the car, and exactly amidships, was the gasoline engine and tank that supplied the power.

All round the car hung little sacks of ballast, and two cords, one black and one red, dangled from the upper works.

I took the sort of agonized interest in this elaborate and delicate mechanism that a condemned man might take in the gallows. It gave me a giddiness to look into the evening blue of the sky.

We had dinner together at a neighboring hotel, at Dumoines's expense, and he did not spare the cost. The champagne flowed lavishly, so that I had at least Dutch courage when we returned to the balloon yard.

After a careful look over the whole apparatus, Dumoines climbed into the car and sat down in the stern. We followed him.

"The east wind still holds—a miracle at this time of year. I take it for a sign of luck," said the expert. "All ready?"

"Yes," I answered, between clenched teeth; and "Yes!" added Pill.

"Let go!" Dumoines shouted, and dropped a couple of sacks of ballast over the side.

I had expected some sort of shock, but instead the shed roofs suddenly fell away from us. There was no sensation of rising, only the quick, strange disappearance of the earth.

I saw a lighted street below me, and

then, like an illuminated map, the whole area of the city spread out in lines of fire. It grew wider and less distinct, and I could see that we were passing over it.

Suddenly the rapid, snapping purr of the gasoline engine began under our feet. The air-ship quivered as the big propeller began to revolve. I felt the suck of cool air from its wings, and the machine turned its head to the sea.

The lighted city slid visibly past us, a quarter of a mile below. The hum of the motor rose in pitch; the propeller was a mere circle of blackness in the gloom.

Seattle became a brilliant streak in the distance. There was water under us. We were in for it. Our last stake was on the board.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RACE THROUGH THE AIR.

THE weird strangeness of this putting forth into the air kept me silent with a kind of awe, though I did not feel the expected giddiness. It was hard to realize that we were soaring at a height of a thousand feet.

We crossed the Sound, and presently I saw lights below us again. We were heading northwest, and should strike the Pacific near the corner of Vancouver Island.

Dumoines was whistling blithely, and presently he turned on a tiny electric glow lamp, the size of a marble, to look at the dynamometer.

"Twenty-eight miles an hour," he remarked, "besides the speed of the wind, which we can't estimate. Say thirty-five altogether. We'll be above the sea in three hours."

"We ought to sight the berg—I mean the island, some time before noon tomorrow, then," said Pill out of the darkness.

"Easily, if the wind holds. I can let her out a few notches more, besides. How do you fellows feel?"

I was beginning to feel queerly. I had a growing excitement, a kind of irresponsible joy, that made me want to move, sing, talk, or yell. I laid it to the champagne.

"I feel — I'm beginning to feel jagged!" Pill gurgled.

He half rose in his seat, and the air-ship lurched.

"Sit down!" yelled Dumoines, and I saw the nickeled glitter of a revolver. "If you stand up I'll shoot you dead."

Pill subsided, and I stifled my own restlessness.

"You're not jagged; you're air-sick," continued the balloon expert. "First ascent always makes you that way. It'll wear off directly, but if you move you'll spill us all out."

I found it hard to sit still. My head felt strangely light, as if it were about to float off into space by itself, and I was filled with a joyous sense of liberty and, strangely enough, of security.

I forced myself to remain motionless, however, and by degrees these sensations wore off, though I had recurring touches of them for some hours.

That night's rush through the air was far the strangest, but not the most unpleasant experience of my life. We could see nothing; above our heads was the solid mass of the gas-bag, like a world, and all around and below was thick darkness.

In spite of the pointed wind-shield, a keen current of chilly air whistled over us, and it grew bitter cold. No stars were to be seen. There was no sound but the rush of the wind and the incessant, deep-toned hum of the big screw that was driving us at the speed of a railway train.

That night was very long. I grew cramped, almost frozen in my place. I was facing the stern, and I saw the first faint lightening of the east.

The propeller began to outline itself as a black disk, and by degrees I made out the outline of the car, the curving belly of the balloon overhead, and the cramped forms of my companions, all dripping with dew.

White clouds were under us, vast billowy masses that looked solid enough to walk upon, and by looking down on this surface I was able to realize our speed for the first time.

The air-ship was literally flying, and the whole fabric hummed and vibrated like a taut wire. In a few minutes we ran into a great bank of thick cloud; a

saturating mist enveloped us and tore past in wisps and streaks as we ripped through it.

Then we dashed out on the other side. The clouds cleared under us, and I saw, far down, the gray, wrinkled surface of the Pacific, an empty plain, with not a sail or smoke to the whole rounded horizon.

The air-ship had proved its efficiency nobly, though some credit of course was due to the wind, which still blew fresh at the stern.

The sun came out gloriously, and under its warmth the balloon rose several hundred feet higher. Dumoines told us that he had thrown out twenty pounds of ballast during the night, but the ship was still six hundred feet lower than when we had set out.

We estimated, however, that we had traveled nearly four hundred miles, and as we were steering on a line to cross the iceberg's path, we expected to sight it within a few hours.

I felt cold still, damp, and dispirited, and it was not until I had breakfasted on canned chicken, condensed milk, and sherry that my courage revived. Dumoines would not let us smoke for fear of an explosion, and from time to time I saw him glance at the barometer and throw out a handful of sand.

"Are we sinking?" I inquired at last.

The aeronaut grunted.

"More than I like. She's leaking gas a good deal."

"Good Lord!" cried Pill. "Can't she hold out for the distance?"

"Depends on how far away your island it. I'll let her out a little more."

The note of the propeller rose to a shriller tone. The wind of our flight split cuttingly on the prow and roared over us in a furious blast.

We were making over forty miles an hour, but I could see without instruments that the slate-colored sea had come up much nearer, and that more than half of the little sacks of sand-ballast had disappeared.

It was a race against time now, and against the leaking gas. Mile after mile we rushed on, and yard by yard we sank, till we could plainly see the long swell washing and breaking under the car. Then a scoopful of sand would go overboard, and the air-ship would rise with a bound of a hundred yards, and the slow sinking would be repeated.

The forenoon wore away in these alternations, but as the sun grew hotter the balloon manifested more buoyancy. By our best calculations I felt sure that we were in the neighborhood of the berg, and we sacrificed several pounds of ballast to rise to a height of two thousand feet, where we would have a wider view.

From this elevation Pill and I swept the sea with strong glasses—in vain. There was no glimmer of ice, nothing but the faint trail of a steamer's smoke on the sky to the southeast.

Pill and Dumoines both looked at me in silent doubt. I was terribly uneasy. Could the iceberg have melted entirely away, or had we miscalculated its course?

If we failed to find it within a few hours—I looked down at the deep sea and thought of the leaking gas.

"How many more miles will your gasoline last?" I inquired.

"Perhaps a hundred. We might reach that ship in time to be picked up," said the aeronaut, nodding at the distant smoke.

"No. We'll find what we're after or go to the bottom!" I exclaimed with angry determination. "Push her for all she's worth. It can't be far now."

We had been sinking for fifteen minutes, and half a sack of ballast sent her soaring again. Through the air we tore at desperate speed, while Pill and I held the glasses continually at our eyes.

After almost an hour of flying thus toward the northwest, we ascended again to a great height for a wide survey of the ocean. But the field was still empty; even the steamer's smoke had now disappeared.

"Take her round in great curves," I ordered our pilot. "We're bound to sight it."

"There's only gasoline enough for another hour or so," said Dumoines. "There are but three sacks of ballast left. We'd better make for that steamer while we can."

"No!" I said stubbornly.

"I say yes," retorted the Frenchman. "We've shaved it fine enough. In an hour we'll be at the bottom."

"Never mind. I'll blow out your

brains if you steer her anywhere except as I say. Pill, stand by me," and before I spoke I covered him with my revolver.

The aeronaut looked as if he would have liked to rebel, but the odds were too great. Pill, though weakening, bravely produced his pistol likewise.

I was mad, desperate, and determined never to see land again without the gold.

Round went the air-ship like a circling hawk, in a great arc of miles. She sank, too, running down on a terribly swift incline as she flew.

And still there was nothing to break the monotony of the ocean's surface.

"Another big wheel more to the north," I ordered; and we swept around again. There was only one sack of ballast left.

"Dick!" entreated Pill, "for God's sake—!"

We had rounded another arc, and nothing was in sight. But I was in no condition to listen to reason. The last sack of sand hung near me, and I tossed it overboard.

"There!" I cried through clenched teeth. "Make the best of it. We can't get to that steamer now!"

Pill groaned. The air-ship shot up instantly to a height of several hundred feet, and my glass roved over the sea with terrible eagerness.

Pill was looking, too, and suddenly he touched my shoulder.

"What's that flash ahead and a little to the north?"

I saw something glitter on the sea, certainly, but I could not make it out. I kept the glass focused on it, agonizing with hope and fear, while the air-ship drove toward it half a mile a minute.

Then I caught a glimpse that was unmistakable—a glimmer of brilliant greenish-white on the sea, the certain glitter of ice in the sunlight.

"That's it, by Heaven!" I yelled. "Dumoines, you fool, we've sighted it. Here, take a look!"

The balloonist looked. "Why, that's no island, man. That's an iceberg!"

"Of course it is. The mine's on an iceberg. That's the spot."

The Frenchman turned pale.

"What do you mean? You said we were making for an island. Are you both crazy?"

He has since told me that he firmly believed that we were stark mad, and that he gave himself up as hopelessly lost. This was lucky, for his total despair made him docile.

"We didn't dare to tell you the truth before," I explained. "You wouldn't have come. But I swear the mine is on that iceberg, and you must land us there. It's the only solid spot we can reach now, anyway."

"You're right; I wouldn't have come for a million dollars if you had told me about an iceberg in San Francisco," said Dumoines. "It's no easy matter to land on as small a spot as that, either."

He slowed the propeller. The air-ship was skimming ahead like a swallow, slanting momentarily nearer the waves.

I could see the iceberg distinctly now, the spray that dashed high upon its sides, the precipitous cliffs, and I could even make out the spots of gravel and the rushing streams from the melting ice. It did not seem to have diminished greatly in size, but all its outline was far more rounded.

It was only half a mile away—now it was half of that. We were so low that it seemed as if we were going to collide with it. Dumoines stopped the propeller and stood up, holding the crimson rope that swung over his head.

"Be ready to jump when we come over it!" he yelled. "I'll have to rip her!"

"Everybody take a shovel and pan!" I cried, with a sudden inspiration, picking up these implements.

Our impetus and the wind drove us on, swooping down toward the ice. Like a flash it was under us—it was passing!

"Jump!" Dumoines shrieked, and pulled the red cord.

I heard a great ripping noise from the balloon, that seemed to falter and collapse as I leaped out wildly. I struck the ice with a terrible shock, and as I rolled over and over I caught a glimpse of the balloon springing aloft again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT THE PISTOL'S POINT.

PILL had fallen almost upon me, and as I picked myself up I saw him look-

ing dazedly around. Dumoines had stuck to his post a moment too long, had plunged into the sea, and was clutching at the slippery edge of the ice in the endeavor to get out.

The air-ship had risen slightly when lightened, but as I glanced up she plunged into the water with a great splash, fifty yards away. It was the last flight of the machine that had served us so well.

We hauled Dumoines out without difficulty, and his first look went toward the balloon, that was just disappearing under the waves. Then he turned a resentful gaze upon me.

"Well, here we are," he said. "Where's your gold mine?"

I picked up a handful of the scattered gravel underfoot, and sifted it through my fingers. A tiny yellow scale caught my eye, and I handed it to him.

He and Pill both examined it eagerly.

"Gad, I believe you're right!" the balloonist exclaimed. "I beg your pardon. It looks like gold. Let's dig up more!"

I never saw a man more excited than Dumoines, and in fact the first color from a gold mine is apt to go to the head. Slipping and regardless of his soaked clothing, he ran up the slope, with us at his heels.

There was the gravel I had washed, in half-frozen, muddy heaps. There was the cave I had hollowed out, and there were my meat-tins and my ax and my tin basin, red with thick rust.

Yes, and there was the gold I had been forced to leave—heaps of dull-shining yellow lumps and dust in the corned-beef cans—almost ten pounds of it. Some of it had been blown away, I thought, but there was plenty left to certify my tale.

Pill and Dumoines gave a wild hurrah together at this sight. Evidently no one had set foot on the berg since my departure, and the mine was still there to be worked.

But the surface of the berg had changed greatly, as a nearer look showed. The elevations were lower, the hollows were deeper, the flowing water was more plentiful, and there was more gravel exposed than when I had left it.

Great lumps appeared to have broken off, and the former sloping beach had disappeared. I judged that almost a third of its bulk was gone, and now that it was approaching warmer waters it did not appear likely to last more than two or three weeks more.

Without any delay we went to work. Pill had thrown one of the pans over when he jumped; I had taken a pan and a shovel with me, and this was enough with which to begin mining.

We set Dumoines to break and dig out the gravel with the ax and shovel, while Pill and I went to work with our pans beside one of the flowing streams of icy water.

It was all like my first sojourn on the berg, only this time there was movement round me, the sound of tools and the voices of friends. The clothes dried on Dumoines's back as he bent over the gravel, and Pill and I became splashed and wet through without noticing it, for the gold fever had us all hard.

And we made wonderful progress, for when we knocked off, tired out, muddy from head to foot and faint with hunger, we had a great heap of clean-up gravel and a big handful of pure, wet, heavy yellow metal.

It was growing dark. My lamps were broken, I discovered, and we had to eat cold fare from the stores I had landed from the Bolivia. The blankets I had left were sodden, so that we spent a sufficiently uncomfortable night, huddled together for the sake of mutual warmth.

My sleep, when I did sleep, was restless, full of nightmares of dizzy heights, of freezing, drowning, of immense wealth that always slipped through my hands, so that the dawn found me shivering and unrefreshed.

I would have given a hundred dollars in gold for a cup of hot coffee. Pill looked miserably pinched and unhappy in the cold, ocean dawn, but Dumoines's spirit was unconquerable.

He dashed ice-water over his hands and face, looked about mechanically for a towel, and dried himself with his damp coat-sleeve.

"Breakfast, boys!" he cried, "and then we'll get after our everlasting fortunes again."

The half-frozen meat and biscuit we swallowed produced a certain internal warmth, and we set to work again with

ax, shovel, and gold-pan. We worked hard that day, and by nightfall we estimated that we had cleaned up nearly twenty-four ounces.

We did not expect to see anything of the yacht for a couple of days at least. The food supply would be a serious question if she delayed longer and we had to put ourselves upon fixed rations.

This would spin out the Bolivia's stores for a week; and how we hoped now that the Spanish girl had remembered my figures correctly!

But another day passed, and another, and another, while we watched from hour to hour for the feather of dark smoke on the sky-line. At night we took turns in keeping guard so that Dolan should not take us unawares.

And all the while we worked, we worked too hard to notice wet or cold. The weather had turned disagreeable, with a good deal of mist and warm rains that made our ice island almost visibly dissolve. We dug and washed the harder, and with three pairs of arms at work the results were surprising.

The gravel we were at seemed richer, too, and once Dumoines brought us a shovelful of stuff that really seemed to be all gold. It was a pocket, and that panful of gravel cleaned up over thirteen ounces of coarse gold.

That was an exception, of course, but in those three days we stored away two hundred ounces of the precious stuff, worth well over four thousand dollars, which promised well for the future.

The following night Pill awakened me a couple of hours after midnight. He had been standing guard.

"What's the matter?" I said irritably, for I was very tired and sleepy.

"Take a look at that light. I've been watching it for half an hour."

"Star, I guess," I suggested at my first glance; but presently it seemed to me that I could distinguish it in slow motion along the sea-line.

Yet I was far from certain whether it was a star or something nearer.

We awoke Dumoines and we all stared through the dim twilight at the luminary, which presently became certainly motionless. We wavered from one opinion to another, till the gray light began to spread over the Pacific.

Then there was no room for doubt. Vaguely in the dawn we made out the black line of a small steamer lying motionless a mile and a half to the south-east.

We got out of sight behind the heaps of gravel. The outline of the ship grew more distinct.

She carried no flag, no smoke rose from her funnel, and without glasses we could not make out any figure on her deck.

Was it the Chrysalis? We had never seen our yacht except lying at her dock, where we could get no general view of her.

"If it's your friends, I suppose—pistols, eh?" observed Dumoines.

"You'll stand by us?" said Pill.

"I should rather think so. Do you suppose I'd let myself be done out of this gold-field? Look there!"

As he spoke, there was a vague stir on the distant yacht and a boat dropped over the side and started toward us, looking tiny as a nutshell as it heaved over the rollers.

"It's Dolan, sure," I said. "Be ready."

I twirled the cylinder of my revolver under my thumb. The boat came nearer. It was rowed by two men, and there was a third man in the stern seat, wearing a wide sou'wester.

When the craft was within fifty yards of the ice I saw what I expected—the gleam of a red mustache under that great hat. I heard a click from Pill's revolver. He had seen it, too.

The boat came up to the berg and began to circle it to find a landing-place. The sloping shore had melted away, and Dolan finally had to scramble precariously up an irregular spot while the seamen held the boat close to the ice.

For a minute we could not see him, though we heard the crunching of his boots on the ice and gravel. Then his head and shoulders loomed into view.

He was curiously examining something, which proved as he approached to be one of our empty meat-tins.

He walked right up to the heaps of gravel where we crouched. He was almost within arm's length when I sprang up and brought the black barrel of my pistol in line with his eyes.

Pill and Dumoines rose silently on either side of me, armed and menacing.

CHAPTER XXV.

GATHERING IN THE FORTUNE.

I DO not suppose that there ever was any one so startled as was Dolan. No wonder, at the apparition in that isolated place of the men he thought he had outwitted and left a thousand miles away.

He made a queer, choking noise in his throat, and his eyes almost started from his head. I think he believed us to be ghosts for a moment, but he put up his hands in an unconscious sort of way.

I had half intended to kill the man, but at his utter collapse I could not nerve myself to his murder.

"This is your last steal, Dolan," I said sternly, and shot the sou'wester from his head.

Dolan did not stir. He looked absolutely relieved at this material threat, and he moistened his lips several times.

"How—how did you get here?" he managed to articulate.

"We swam," said Pill severely. "And that's how you'll have to go back."

Dolan contrived a weak grin. His keen little eyes were roving from side to side and I saw that he was already beginning to recover from his stupefaction.

"We'll go aboard the yacht," I said. "We won't take you, Dolan. You wanted to get here, and you may stay."

The fact was that I feared the fellow's measureless audacity and cunning too much to allow him to come with us. I was not sure what stand our captain would take.

Pill and I struck the seamen in the boat with almost supernatural terror by making them recognize us, and they rowed us to the yacht as if the devil were after them. I could see Dolan standing alone like a pinnacle on the crest of the berg.

As we came alongside I made out the dry face of our skipper leaning over the rail. There were other faces, too, and among them that of Miss Ines Ranon, in a crimson yachting cap—pale as death, and her great eyes staring roundly.

I think she was the first on board to recognize us.

"What was that shot? Who have you got there?" shouted the captain. Then, as we clambered over the rail—"My God, Mr. Shields, it can't be you! How ever did you get to this place?"

"Never mind how!" snapped Pill. "The question is, how do you come to be here? Why did you sail without our orders?"

"I had your letter," stammered Captain Hart. "You said that I was to take orders from your partner, and go to sea—"

"I wrote no such letter."

"Dolan wrote it himself," put in the *señorita* calmly.

The skipper glared at her speechless, and his face clouded with dark purple.

"Then I've been made a fool of and a liar and a mutineer on my own ship!" he stammered, bursting with rage. "You and your red-headed Irishman'll get your due, miss, when we reach port. Gentlemen, I can't apologize—but—but the ship's at your service now, anyway. But how did you beat us here?"

"Yes, how did you get here?" Miss Ranon demanded.

"In a balloon," I said curtly.

"You two are men! There's no beating you!" she exclaimed, looking us up and down with whole-souled admiration.

Dumoines was gazing at her with all his eyes.

"Present me to the lady," he whispered, punching my ribs.

"Don't stand on ceremony with her. It isn't necessary," I said aloud. "Captain, don't say any more. I see how you were fooled, and I won't blame you. Do you know what we are here for? There's gold-bearing gravel in that ice. Ask the hands if any of them want to hire as miners at five dollars a day."

The men tumbled over one another to accept. Every one of the crew, down to the Chinese cook, volunteered, and we had to arrange to take them in turn, in order to give them all a chance without leaving the ship empty.

They hurried the picks, shovels, and mining apparatus out of the hold and into the boats, while we three had our first warm meal for four days.

Five sailors went back to the berg with us, jubilant as schoolboys at the prospect of big wages. We found Dolan

closely examining our scene of operations.

"You've got a good thing here, gentlemen," he began. "I see that it was no lie that you were telling me. Would you care to sell—either the whole or a share?"

"We would not," I told him.

"You'll get the same wages as the men if you want to handle a shovel and dig gravel," put in Pill.

Dolan shrugged his shoulders.

"I want to speak to you alone," he said to me.

I walked away with him, fully expecting some attempt at bribery.

"I want you to tell me on your word of honor how it stands betwixt you and Miss Ranon," he said, and to my astonishment I saw his red face working and sweating with emotion.

"It doesn't stand at all," I replied. "There's nothing at all between us. I'm engaged to marry a girl in southern California, and I trust that I'll never set eyes on Señorita Ines again after we land, for I fear her as I fear damnation."

"Faith, and I'm powerful glad to hear that!" said Dolan, and under stress of feeling his brogue asserted itself. "D'ye know, it's meself would die at her feet if she wanted it.

"Oh, I know all about her, and all she's tried to do to me, but I'm not afraid of her," he went on. "I thought she'd taken a fancy to you. I thought so in Vermilion, and I was sure of it in Sacramento. I went into this thing to plaze her, and I played you that dhurty trick because she came and offered to work with me. I didn't care anything about the blamed gold-mine. I've schemes on hand worth ten of that. I wanted to work with her, that's all, d'ye see?"

He stopped and looked dumbly at me, and I could see how his passion was eating into the steel and flint of his nature.

"You're not so bad after all, Dolan," I said, softened. "You're better than she is, anyhow."

"No, I'll never be in her class," he answered. "But I know how to get her. Money and power are all she cares for, and she'll marry the man that's got them. I've sweated blood to get them for her; I've murdered and I've robbed and I've lied, and I think I've got them in sight now. I want to get back to Sacramento right away to look after them."

"You're a glorious rascal, Dolan," I told him. "And I guess you'll deserve what you get, whatever it is. But your burglaries in Sacramento will have to wait. This business comes first."

Our men took hold of the work energetically. In a couple of hours we had a flume rigged with boards we had brought for the purpose, charged with quicksilver, and a vigorous gush of ice-water pouring down it. Six men with shovels fed it with gravel, and Pill and I watched it with cocked revolvers.

Dumoines worked with a pan meanwhile, and the results of this vigorous and, for the first time, really scientific labor, were astonishing. When we collected the tailings that night and cleaned up the amalgam we found the extraordinary amount of nine hundred ounces of pure gold.

One of our seamen, who had mined in Alaska, told me that only once had he seen a richer run.

We slept on the yacht that night, and after that day we kept Dolan a prisoner in his cabin. Neither would we allow the *señorita* to visit the berg, in spite of her entreaties.

Next morning at dawn the mining was resumed. Food was sent to us from the yacht at noon, and eaten in half an hour; then a new shift of men was sent from on board.

The flume spouted its muddy water incessantly, and the nuggets and dust gathered fast under the riffles. We had to stop work and clear out the amalgam twice that day, though all the nuggets big enough to pick up were kept out of the flume.

I have no doubt that the men stole a good many, but we made no attempt to search them. Just then a nugget more or less seemed of little consequence.

For the gravel was running with continued richness. We were burrowing into the ice now, splintering it out with picks, and pulverizing it to get out the sand.

In one spot the men found a nest of nuggets and dust big enough to fill a five-quart pail, mingled with only a little gravel. Luckily Pill was present when they uncovered it, or we might not have

had three nuggets of the size of the bowl of a pipe. This was the greatest single stroke we made, but every night we went back to the yacht with a sack as heavy as I could well lift.

There was need for every effort we could make, for the berg was obviously melting faster every day. We had drifted into the warmer waters of the Pacific, and great cracks and openings were beginning to show.

We thought that we should finish gutting it in ten days more, however, but after the fourth day of work we decided that we would have to work day and night.

Accordingly we rigged great flares of oakum, old rope and engine-waste, soaked in tar or coal-oil, and fixed them on iron bars set in the ice. The berg must have presented a weird spectacle, if there had been anybody to wonder at it—flaming with smoky lights, resounding with blows of picks and the shouting of men, while the lighted steamer lay off at a quarter of a mile.

We had to take turns at sleeping, and in fact it seems to me as if during the five last days I never slept at all. But I was certainly asleep, and very soundly, in my berth when Pill awoke me.

I had supposed that he was with the night-shift on the berg, and I sat up in instant alarm. He was splashed and covered with mud, and was shaking me vigorously.

"Wake up! Get up, quick!" he cried. "Something's wrong on the berg!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE END OF THE PAY-STREAK.

As I jumped out of the berth I felt the vibration of the yacht's engines as she started ahead. I ran up to the deck after slipping on coat and trousers.

The captain was there and Dumoines and the *señorita* and the muddy mining shift that had just come from the berg, all gazing over the rail at the ice island that loomed dim in the starlight.

"I thought we'd better knock off work and come aboard," said Pill. "She began to act so queer that—"

He was interrupted by a series of dull, heavy reports, like distant guns, apparently sounding from the sea beneath the berg.

"Like that," added Pill. "What do you think she's going to do? The skipper's got up steam to move a little farther away."

It sounded as if the berg were breaking up, but we were rapidly moving from it. Luckily, for before I could speak there was a rushing, great noise, like nothing I ever heard, except, perhaps, the roar of Niagara, and the whole iceberg seemed suddenly to rise into the air.

It balanced for an instant upon one edge, and then fell with a crash that seemed to split sea and sky. There was nothing visible but an enormous cloud of mist and spray, and the spray spattered on our deck even at that distance.

The yacht rolled her rails under water, and then I saw a gigantic wave rushing toward us, so lofty that its whitened crest towered up to twice the height of our masts.

"Hold fast, everybody, for your lives!" howled the skipper, and I heard him clang the engine-room signal.

Then we were lifted up—up, till we stood as if on a mountain-top, looking wide over the ocean, and I thought we were going to ride the wave. Then with a smothering crash its crest broke over our decks.

For a moment the ship was a wild chaos of water and foam, rushing high over the level of the rails. I was banged and swirled about, though I clung with a death grip to a steel stay and saved myself from going overboard.

Then the Chrysalis emerged, with a yard of water foaming on her deck and over the scattered forms of her crew.

Down we went again, sliding sickeningly into the chasm behind the big wave, and then up, and down, till we at last lay only moderately rolling on the still disturbed sea, and we dared to look round.

None of us had gone overboard, though we were all drenched and most of us more or less bruised. Even Miss Ranon had saved herself by clinging desperately to the rail.

I heard Dolan shouting and banging on the locked door of his room below, but no one thought of letting him out.

The iceberg was still there when the cloud of mist cleared, but it looked somewhat smaller. It was the captain who gave us the explanation at last of what had happened.

The berg had simply turned over, as it seems icebergs have a trick of doing. Melting takes place faster under water than above, producing an increasing top-heaviness until the berg at last capsizes, as had just happened.

Its outline was totally different now, and it looked smaller.

The question was whether we could still get at the "pay-streak."

It was a question that could not be settled till it was lighter, and we had to wait for three or four hours. As soon as dawn made the berg plain, we brought the yacht up to within thirty yards, and made the circuit of the overturned island.

Our powerful glasses showed no trace of gravel. There was nothing but the green, clear glare of the ice.

"The mine's gone—*borrasca!*" said Pill, using the Mexican slang for a played-out "lead."

All our mining apparatus was gone, too. Picks, shovels, flume, had all gone under, with our whole stock of quicksilver. Luckily Pill had cleaned up the riffles an hour before the catastrophe, so that not much gold had been lost in the flume.

"It's all over," said Pill, sorrowfully contemplating the glittering mass. "Nothing now but to get back to Golden-dale. This is the 5th of June, isn't it?"

"Yes. Lots of time," I replied, for I knew what he was thinking of.

"And we've got enough, after all."

"I should think so!" I said, recalling the big safe in the cabin that was crammed with bulging canvas sacks.

"Enough to make a big thing out of the *Bonanza*," said Pill, brightening. "Eh, Dick? Oh, let's get back to work. I've had enough of this war-and-adventure business."

My own heart responded to Pill's words. I would be glad to get back, too. I was tired of the sea, tired of the fever and the vicissitudes of the hunt for the frozen fortune, and I thought with unspeakable longing of the quiet and peace of the sunny little California town.

I thought of Jessie with fear and hope. Surely, I reasoned, love could close any breach, and I knew that she had loved me. But I did not realize how deeply I had wounded her.

"Get full steam up, captain!" Pill cried. "It's back to good old California for ours!"

In a couple of hours the iceberg was far out of sight in the west, and falling away from us at the rate of twelve miles an hour. I had no desire ever to see it again.

We let Dolan out when we were fairly started homeward, but always either Pill, Dumoines, or myself stood guard over the safe containing the treasure. The Irishman seemed in no way abashed or cast down by his failure, and he spent most of his time with Miss Ranon, who, to my surprise, seemed to have no objection to his society.

Whenever he was not with her it was Dumoines, for the French balloonist had become most assiduous in his attendance upon the girl. Whenever he came off guard duty at the safe he went on deck at once to look for her, and it was highly entertaining to see his disgust when he saw Dolan's bulky form lounging over the rail beside the *señorita*.

The rivalry between the two became a standing, if concealed, joke with the rest of us; though I would have dreaded the girl's influence on our susceptible partner if the game had not been played so nearly to a finish.

On the last evening of the voyage I had seen Dolan in close conversation with her for a long time. They were talking by the stern when I went below, and when I came on deck again, two hours later, they were still there. Dolan called me over to them.

"Congratulate me, Mr. Shields!" he said, and his red face fairly beamed. "Miss Ranon and I are going to be married as soon as we land."

I congratulated him, with a side glance at the *señorita*.

"Yes, you're surprised, but it's true," she said indifferently. "I'm tired of fighting him. Besides, he has explained to me that he has half a million dollars, and is on his way to become a great political power."

"Everything's fixed right." Dolan

broke in earnestly. "I've got control of Sacramento, got it organized, mapped, roped and tied, and next election I'll have a mayor and council that'll be like so many dolls for me. You've no idea what pickings there are in a deal like that. In another year or so I'll be the boss of the State Legislature, if everything turns out right, and they generally do—for me.

"She"—indicating Miss Ranon—"can go and shine in New York if she wants to. There won't be nothing too good for her to have. What she wants is the kingdom and the power and the glory, and I tell her that she can have them by wagon-loads."

"How about the Blackfoot mine?" I asked.

"The Blackfoot?" Dolan looked doubtfully at me and then at his fiancée. "Oh, that's fixed all right," he said, discreetly and vaguely, and the girl nodded.

I congratulated this pair, not without a secret terror of what their alliance might bring upon the land that was unfortunate enough to contain them. Dumoines came prowling about just then, and I called him.

"Congratulations are in order," I said, rather maliciously. "Our friends here are going to be married in a few days."

The balloonist cast a deadly glance at Dolan, a reproachful one at me, and turned away without a word. I knew how he felt, but I had less pity for him than he perhaps deserved.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SMASH OF THE MARKET.

We landed in San Francisco the next morning very early, and as soon as business hours arrived, Pill, Dumoines, and I went to the mint to arrange for the disposal of our bullion. Dolan and Miss Ranon vanished somewhere.

There was no difficulty about the sale of the gold, and by noon we had it all transferred to the government vaults, and had in exchange a great bundle of hundred-dollar gold certificates—four thousand three hundred and twenty of them. The division amounted to almost one hundred and fifty thousand dollars apiece.

From the mint we went straight to find a bank. Dumoines wanted to deposit his money at once, and Pill and I wished to have our pile transferred to the Goldendale bank, to avoid having to carry it.

There seemed to be some excitement in the financial quarters of the city. I noticed that the stock-brokers' offices were crowded, and there were anxious looking crowds on the sidewalk outside.

I could feel an intensity in the air, and when we turned the corner upon the Pacific National Bank we found the street blockaded with shouting and enraged citizens, and there was a white placard pinned to the closed door.

"What's the matter?" Pill demanded from the nearest man.

"Bank's closed its doors!" he replied snappily.

"But why? What's the matter with the town, anyway?" insisted Pill.

"It isn't just this town. It's the whole West, I reckon. What's the matter with you? Haven't you heard of the bust of the wheat corner?"

I had a newspaper in my pocket which I had been too busy even to glance at, but now I unfolded it.

There was the story, or the latter half of it, which has now become history—of the collapse of the Peabody corner in wheat, a crash where the price had broken at one dollar and ninety cents a bushel and had rushed down to sixty cents, while the bulls were wildly throwing their holdings overboard to avoid further loss and selling all sorts of securities to cover margins.

The whole stock-exchange list had slumped sympathetically from ten to twenty points. Mercantile houses and the weaker banks and trust companies were going down one after another, and the West was especially hard hit, for the bull ring had been backed more enthusiastically there than anywhere else.

At first I did not see how this would affect us, but Pill was quicker.

"Good Heaven! the Goldendale Bank!" he gasped, and his face was as white as the newspaper.

Then I saw. If the bank at Goldendale had failed it would very likely be too late to redeem the false note without publicity.

"We'll telegraph!" I exclaimed, and at the nearest office I wired to the landlord of the hotel where I had boarded.

"Is the Goldendale Bank safe? Reply quick."

In half an hour we got the reply at the office where we waited.

"Bank closed doors yesterday."

"Then it's all up with me," said Pill, tearing up the yellow paper. "The thing's bound to come out now. They'll have sent notices to all their debtors by this time, and Hollis knows."

"But we've got the money. We can square it."

"Oh, I don't suppose they'll prosecute. But it'll leak out, and there's an end of my work in Goldendale. And Jess'll hear."

Pill looked at me miserably. He did not know that I was more concerned in the danger than himself. I wondered anxiously if Jessie had delivered my letter on the news of the bank's suspension.

"One of us'll have to go down at once and reconnoiter," said Pill. "You'd better go. It's safer for you."

But I had good reasons for believing Pill to be safer from arrest than I was, and I demurred. I insisted that he should go with me. The fact was, I did not want to face Jessie alone.

"Well, come along," said Pill, giving in. "There's just time to catch the noon train, and we'll get there before it's too late to do anything to-day. Maybe we'll be in time if we get there to-day. They may not have taken any steps yet."

In ten minutes we were rattling over the switch-points of the railroad yards toward Goldendale. There had been no time to make any disposal of our money, and we each carried a small locked suit-case, packed with bulky bundles of government paper.

This was a fast train, and we hoped to reach Goldendale by four o'clock. We knew that the bank officials would be at work long after banking hours, in the straightening out of the books.

We were well on time till we reached Rochester, a hundred miles from our destination. Then the conductor came into the smoking compartment, which Pill and I happened to have to ourselves.

"There's been a freight wreck down the line, gentlemen," he said. "This train'll have to wait here till they bring up a special on the other side to take you on. They'll have one in an hour or two, I reckon."

"Oh, Lord!" I groaned.

It seemed that our luck had broken with a vengeance.

This final delay struck me with an almost superstitious dread. I felt certain that when we did reach Goldendale it would be to find a warrant issued for the arrest of one of us, or perhaps both.

Pill shared my foreboding. We discussed returning to San Francisco, but finally decided to go on and face the music, however bad it might be.

We had to wait three hours at Rochester; then our train moved on for a few miles, we got out and walked around the smoking wreck where a great gang was noisily at work, and boarded the waiting special on the other side.

This was anything but a fast train. It was a hastily improvised affair, hauled by a freight engine, I think, and it was half past eight when we arrived at Goldendale's familiar station. It was dark by that time, and I was glad of it.

Pill made straight for his house. There was a light burning, and we both hurried in.

"Pill! It's you!" screamed Jessie, opening the parlor door.

She glanced at me, but gave me no greeting.

"You frightened me so!" she exclaimed, flinging her arms round her brother. "Dear old Pill! Have you been to the iceberg?"

"Yes. Is there any news here?" said Pill, unable to restrain his anxiety.

"Any news from the bank?" I added. "Did you give them my letter?"

Jessie gave me an odd look, which made my heart beat faster, then she drew me aside into the parlor and shut the door. There she rummaged in the drawer of a table and produced a folded paper.

It gave me a shock of fright. I unfolded it—and saw in an instant that it was the fatal note.

"How could you have done it, Dick?" Jessie whispered in my ear. "It was to help Pill, wasn't it?"

"Jessie! You angel! How did you get it?"

And I flung my arms round her neck in a frantic hug and rushed out to Pill, with tears standing in my eyes.

"Here it is! Here's the cursed thing!" I shouted, and my voice broke.

"The note? That's it, by thunder!" cried Pill, in no less excitement. "Where did you get it? From Jess? How on earth did she get it?"

"I bought it from the bank," said Jessie, almost crying, but proudly.

"But how did you know it was there? And how in the name of wonder did you raise the six thousand?"

"You men are helpless creatures, even in your own business," Jessie replied. "I made the money without any difficulty at all, as soon as I needed it."

"But, how?"

"Well, I had the six hundred dollars you sent me, you know. Then I sold my bees for eighty dollars—"

"You sold your bees!" I ejaculated, knowing how highly she prized her apiary.

"I bought them back again afterward. Then I went to Lawyer Myers, because I knew he always looked after your affairs, and I told him I had to have six thousand dollars. He wouldn't advise me at first, but at last I got him to say that he would sell wheat short if he wanted to turn over his money quickly. I didn't know what that meant, but I made him handle the money for me. He said he was taking a flier in wheat himself.

"Wheat was at $1.86 a bushel then; there was a corner, you know. It kept going up all one day, and I was frightened; then it stopped, and jumped about, first up and then down, for a long time, and then it went down—down—down. Mr. Myers told me that he was 'pyramiding,' whatever that is, and, anyway, he bought back the wheat that I had sold, and he brought me seven thousand and two hundred dollars. He wanted me to buy more for a rise in price, but I wouldn't. Then I went to the bank with the money and got that paper. Please burn it," pointing to the note with an expression almost of terror.

Pill lit a match, and the dangerous document curled up into a black cinder.

"Jess, you're a brick!" said Pill solemnly, regarding his sister with round eyes.

For myself, I was struck dumb with the recital of so much nerve and devotion. I did not notice that she had failed to make one point clear, but Pill observed it.

"But how did you come to know anything at all about the thing?" he inquired.

"The letter—" began Jessie, and stopped.

"What letter?" demanded Pill in astonishment.

"Never mind that, Pill," I interposed hastily. "Jessie, you must have opened the enclosure I sent you to deliver."

"Well, you know a woman isn't supposed to have any sense of honor," said Jessie with rising color. "But no woman would hesitate to open any letter if she knew the honor was at stake of the man she—"

"Say of the man she loved!" I exclaimed. "Jessie, I've thought of you ever since we left. I've been a wretched cur, I know, but can't you forgive me now?"

"I'll say the man she—might forgive, then," finished Jessie, almost inarticulately.

She passed behind Pill and hid her head on his shoulder.

"But," she added, raising it for an instant, "I didn't open the letter. You had forgotten to seal it."

THE END.

TO THE SKYLARK.

Leave to the nightingale her shady wood;
A privacy of glorious light is thine,
Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
Of harmony, with instinct more divine;
Type of the wise, who soar, but never roam—
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home.

William Wordsworth.

THE BLOND LUNATIC.

By ZOE ANDERSON NORRIS.

What happened to a certain dinner-date of an American in London.

IT was Friday at ten in the morning. Moncure Brown, head of the great New York music-house of Brown & Co., was to sail for home on the following morning.

He stood at the window of his room in the London hotel, ruefully contemplating a letter from a friend, asking him to see a young Englishman—a pianist of much promise—before he sailed and hear him play.

If possible, would he get him a position in New York, or perhaps arrange a concert tour? He was much interested in him. Would he see him in any case? He was a tall, blond young fellow, very handsome, and his name was Graham.

Mr. Brown was busy. There were a thousand things to attend to before he sailed; but this was a very particular friend who had asked this favor of him.

"Tell the young man to come along," he phoned. "Let him come at six this evening. Say, let him come and take dinner with me. That will be better. We can have plenty of time to talk it over then, and he can play for me after dinner. If he comes early enough, he can play for me before. Tell him to call between six and seven. I will be in my room waiting for him."

Between six and seven he walked up and down in his apartment, waiting for the tall blond Englishman by the name of Graham. Half after six. He began to be impatient, wondering if, after all, he had given up his busy evening to no avail.

A quarter of seven, and the young man had not arrived. Seven, and he still waited!

In room number eleven of the same hotel another American by the name of Brown—Martin Brown—was busy getting ready to take a young girl out to dine, a very beautiful young girl by the name of Ethel Deams.

He whistled softly as he went about the room engaged in dressing. From time to time he glanced at himself in the various mirrors, anxious to make a good impression on Miss Deams.

True, he was to leave for New York the following week, but sometimes the same boat that took people over brought them back again.

The phone rang. He answered it.

"A young man to see Mr. Brown," said the clerk at the office.

"Yes, I am Mr. Brown," he replied. "What sort of young man, and what is his name?"

"Tall, blond, English," answered the clerk. "Graham is his name."

"Tall, blond, English," repeated Brown. "Oh! Show him up," and rang off.

"The man the tailors said they would send to measure me for my suit," he told himself.

Most annoying at that moment, but very courteous of those tailors to send a man because he hadn't time to go to their place. How courteous all the London shopkeepers were, as compared with the curt indifference of those in New York, to say nothing of their sometime insolence!

Presently there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," shouted Brown unceremoniously.

The door opened, and the tall, blond Englishman stood smiling on the threshold. He removed his hat and came forward with the air of expecting to be received with the same courtesy his employers had shown in sending him especially that the suit should be ready in time.

Brown stared at him.

"Howdy-do?" he said, wondering why the fellow didn't get out his tape measure and begin.

The young man advanced to the center of the room and still stood, hat in hand,

evidently expecting to be asked to sit down.

Brown bowed instinctively, remembering that noble ladies had taken to running millinery shops in London and concluding that this was perhaps some young scion of nobility who was measuring visiting Americans for their suits of clothes.

Impelled also by the young man's manner, which was of exceeding charm and graciousness, and influenced by the remembrance that he was to stand the firm off for the price of the suit, he finally asked him to be seated, begging his pardon for going about with his preparations for departing.

He glanced now and again furtively at the clock, wondering how he could ask the chap to get a move on himself without offending him and the firm.

"You leave for New York to-morrow, I believe," began the Englishman.

"No, not to-morrow," corrected Brown —"next week."

"Ah, then," smiled the young man, "I may see you again."

Brown frowned.

"Of course," said he. "If it doesn't fit, there'll be time to make alterations. That's why I am staying."

The young Englishman elevated his eyebrows slightly, then lowered them, remembering that musicians had many peculiarities, one of which was to follow aloud a train of thought which had often not the slightest connection with the subject in hand. Mr. Brown had, of course, many things on his mind upon the eve of his departure.

"It was very kind of you to let me come," said he, waiving the subject of the fit entirely.

Altogether unable to understand this, Brown glanced at the clock.

"We'll have to get a move on us," he remarked. "It is nearly dinner-time."

The young man also glanced at the clock.

"It is," he assented complacently, but without making any move toward the business of measuring.

Brown spent a moment in thought.

The tailors had treated him with marked courtesy, in spite of the fact that they knew he would leave without paying for the suit, but had that fact gone to his head to the extent of asking their man out to dine?

He concluded to waive the question of dinner until it was actually imperative that he start for the home of the girl.

"I think they'll have it ready in time," said he, taking out his silk hat and smoothing it gently over with the palm of his hand. "I expect to take great pleasure in that suit. I want it the latest fashion, of course, but no extra frills that will make it noticeable at a glance. I like my suits quiet, you know."

Finding it utterly impossible to comprehend this, and recollecting that musicians—and sometimes artists, too—continued their trains of thought aloud from time to time, without developing actual insanity, the Englishman began in this wise:

"I thought you were to sail to-morrow. That was why I wanted to come to-night. I should like to show you something of what I can do before dinner, if possible."

"I wish you would," declared Brown; "but wait a minute. Wait until I phone for a cab," adding on his way to the instrument, "I should like the trousers a little full—not so full as they wear them in Paris, there in the Latin Quarter, you know, but full—and the shoulders of the coat must be well padded."

While he phoned, the young Englishman, having partially recovered from the strangeness of these suggestions, arose with the air of walking across the stage, approached the piano, and opened it. He sat down, ran his fingers through his hair, *à la* Paderewski, and struck a few chords.

Brown, having finished with the phoning, turned to him amazedly.

The Englishman bowed slightly in his direction, as if in recognition of his desire to listen, struck a few more chords, and emerged softly into a prelude of Chopin's —that delicate and altogether exquisite prelude written by the master in the storm in a French château, where George Sand and her friends once left him to spend the evening alone.

Brown stood by, speechless with impotent rage, the hands of the clock moving nearer and nearer to the time at which the beautiful girl would be impatiently awaiting him.

He was rent with the desire on the one hand to pounce upon the player and tear him from the piano-stool, and the fear, on the other, of offending his courteous tailors, who were willing to permit him to hold them up for the price of the suit, which would be considerable.

The prelude started with rain-drops pattering softly on the window-pane. They grew louder, louder still, still louder. The storm began deep down in the bass, the steady fall of rain-drops maintained by the one insistent note resounding.

Distant thunder rumbled. Always insistently there remained the steady fall of the rain. The thunder came nearer and nearer. The storm descended. Clap after clap of thunder, pulsing chords in the bass accentuated by the steady fall of the rain, shook the piano and the atmosphere. It was almost possible to behold the flash of lightning.

It by and by began insinuatingly to die down, down, down, until at length, with a few soft splashes of rain-drops, the holding of the one note that had continued the rain throughout the melody drifted softly into silence.

The young blond Englishman, pushing his white fingers once more through his hair, arose, bowed slightly, as if accustomed to applause, and smilingly awaited it.

Brown was white with rage. The hands of the clock had flashed long past the hour at which he should have started.

"All very good!" he stormed. "Very good! But why in the devil don't you get out your tape measure and measure me for that suit of clothes?"

It was the Englishman's turn to stare and turn white. All the color left his cheek. His blue eyes flashed.

"What suit of clothes?" he demanded. "What suit of clothes? Ever since I have been here you have rung the changes on a suit of clothes. What's all this nonsense? I am no tailor. I came here to show you what I could do in the way of playing. You promised my friend to get me a place somewhere in New York or to arrange a concert tour in the States for me."

"I promised your friend," gasped Brown, "to get you a place in New York! To arrange a concert tour!"

Just then the phone rang furiously. Fixing the Englishman with his eye, in order to prevent a maniacal attack, Brown answered it.

"Is there a young blond Englishman in your room," asked the clerk in the suave manner common to the clerks of English hotels, "by the name of Graham?"

"There is a young blond lunatic up here," shouted Brown, "playing Chopin preludes on the piano when he ought to be measuring me for a suit of clothes."

He waved the lunatic wildly off with his disengaged hand, in spite of the fact that the young man stood perfectly still in the middle of the room, in his blue eyes some slight fear for his own safety.

"There has been some mistake," said the clerk in a voice like molasses. "The same initials, you know, M., you understand—Moncure, Martin. My fault—my fault entirely. A thousand pardons. The young man is not from the clothing firm. On the contrary, he is a pianist. He was to call for Mr. Moncure Brown, of the music-house in New York. Will you kindly tell him that Mr. Brown is here in the office, waiting to take him out to dine?"

LOVELY WOMAN.

YES, woman's love is free from guile,
And pure as bright Aurora's ray;
The heart will melt before her smile,
And base-born passions fade away;
Were I the monarch of the earth,
Or master of the swelling sea,
I would not estimate their worth,
Dear woman! half the price of thee.

George P. Morris.

THE MONKEY MYSTERY.

By RALPH ENGLAND.

A hue and cry in vaudeville that set several people by the ears and landed one of them in jail.

RUSSELL GREEN wrote a one-act play. When it was finished, he put the manuscript in his pocket and paid a visit to Miss Milly Rose in her apartments at the Manchester Hotel.

The actress was very glad to see him.

"Hallo," was her cheery greeting, "this is an unexpected pleasure. Haven't seen you for a dog's age. I was beginning to fear that you were dead, or had got married or something. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"I've been writing a play," replied Green, sinking into a comfortable-looking Morris chair.

"Of course you have," replied the actress with a laugh. "Everybody is writing a play nowadays. It must be in the air, I guess. Even my hairdresser has got the habit. She proudly informed me the other day that she had just finished a four-act 'society drammer.'

"The long-haired clerk at the Sixth Avenue drug-store, where I buy my cold cream, whispered to me yesterday that he has written the book of a comic-opera, and that a friend of his who works in a plumber's shop, across the street, is going to set it to music. There's no denying that this is a play-writing age. Of what does *your* maiden effort consist, sonny?"

"It's a one-act humorous sketch," replied Green seriously. "I've got it in my pocket. I brought it here to read it to you. Thought I'd get your opinion of it, you know, before I try to sell the thing. I've called it 'An Awful Lemon.'"

"That's a fine title," declared Milly Rose enthusiastically. "If it's produced, the critics will probably call it that anyway, so it's real sensible of you to get ahead of them. Well, let's hear it. I don't care how much I suffer to oblige a friend."

Green took the neatly typewritten pages from his pocket and began to read in a voice full of expression.

During the reading the actress laughed four times. This was decidedly encouraging. A sketch which could wring four separate laughs from such a *blasé* critic as Milly Rose ought to draw a good many laughs from an audience.

"It sounds pretty good to me," was Miss Rose's comment when he had finished. "I didn't think it was in you to turn out such good work. Of course, it will have to be rewritten and polished up and the plot altered, and some of the situations changed— With these few changes, I think it will do first rate."

"Could you suggest where I might place it?" inquired Green eagerly.

"Sure. I'm half inclined to use it myself. It seems to me that the principal part fits me like a glove. If you had written it expressly for me, you couldn't have taken my measure better."

"Are you in earnest, Milly?" inquired the surprised author incredulously. "You are always so full of chaff that a fellow never knows when to take you seriously."

"Sure I'm serious. For some time I've been thinking of forsaking the legitimate and taking the plunge in vaudeville. I've been looking around for a suitable sketch with which to make my début. I think yours will just about fill the bill. Leave the manuscript with me for a few days, my son."

The next night Milly Rose was dining with some friends at Shirley's when she espied Herbert Walters, the great vaudeville manager, seated at a table on the other side of the room.

She wrote something on a card and beckoned to a waiter. "Take this to that stout little gentleman, over there," she directed.

Walters read the note, rose leisurely from his chair, and sauntered toward her table.

"You want to see me, Miss Rose," he drawled with the patronizing air he always assumed toward actors and actresses unless they were stars of the first magnitude.

"Yes, Mr. Walters. Sorry to disturb you; but I want to tell you a piece of news. I'm contemplating going into vaudeville."

"Is that so?" responded the vaudeville manager indifferently.

He had seen Milly Rose's work, and while she was not a star, he knew that she could act. He would have been glad to secure her for his vaudeville circuit; but he was too crafty a business man to display any eagerness.

"I've got a crackerjack sketch," the actress continued. "It's written by a friend of mine, and is the best thing that has been seen on the vaudeville stage. How would you like to book me for a year?"

She asked the question with an elaborate air of carelessness—but in reality her heart was going pitapat as she waited for his reply. She was really very anxious to secure a contract with as big a manager as Herbert Walters.

"Humph! I don't know," replied the other coldly. "Come around to my office to-morrow afternoon, and bring your sketch with you, and we'll talk the matter over. I never talk business outside of office hours, you know."

Having delivered this rebuff, which was designed to humble Milly Rose into accepting half the salary she otherwise might have demanded, the manager made a stiff bow and withdrew.

The next afternoon the actress showed up at Walters's office in the Folly Theater.

"Here I am, and here is the manuscript of my act," she announced cheerfully. "Shall I read it to you?"

The manager nodded.

"I don't mind hearing a little of it, although I'm pretty much rushed today. You can go on reading until I tell you to stop, if you like."

"Now, see here, Herbert Walters," cried Milly Rose audaciously. "Don't you think you'd better drop that patronizing air? You want me, and I *know* you want me, so what's the use of four-flushing? I'm going to read the whole of this sketch to you, and you're going to listen to the very end, like a good boy, without interrupting."

The manager smiled and shook his head; but, nevertheless, he allowed her to read the whole play without making any attempt to stop her.

"That sounds all right," he remarked when the task was completed. "What's your idea of terms?"

"Fifty-two weeks' bookings at six hundred dollars a week," replied the actress coolly.

"Stuff and nonsense. Either you're crazy or you must think that I am. I'll pay you two hundred and fifty a week for yourself and company. That's the most you'd be worth to me."

Milly Rose shook her head firmly.

"Nix! It wouldn't pay me to forsake the legit for such ridiculous terms. Remember, there are three characters in the cast. I'll have to hire two 'supports,' to say nothing of the author's royalties. Why, man alive, what do you take me for, anyway?"

"I haven't taken you at all, as yet," replied Walters dryly. "That's my offer, Miss Rose. You can take it or leave it."

"Be a good fellow and make it three hundred and fifty," coaxed the actress with her most persuasive smile. "That will enable me to hire a decent company, pay the author his percentage, and at the same time have something left over for togs and grub. Come, say three hundred and fifty and we'll call it a deal."

The manager nodded with an affectation of weariness. "All right. Anything to avoid an argument. We'll make it three hundred and fifty per, although, of course, you're getting the best of me. I'll have the papers drawn up ready for you to sign to-morrow morning."

"Bully! By the way, of course I'm to be a head-liner on the bill every week? I rather flatter myself I've made something of a name in the legitimate, and I don't intend to go into vaudeville unless I'm properly appreciated."

Walters nodded again.

"Don't worry about that," he said. "You'll be one of the head-liners."

The next day the contract was signed. Milly Rose hired a clever young actor for the male rôle and a pretty little girl for the *ingénue* part. This completed the cast, and rehearsals began immediately.

Russell Green attended each and every one of these rehearsals. The lucky playwright was elated at the smooth way things were going.

True, Milly Rose and the stage-manager had so twisted and altered his sketch that, in its final presentation, it bore little resemblance to the form in which he had written it; but, nevertheless, Green managed to recognize the thing.

One evening, after rehearsal, Green and Milly Rose were walking up Broadway when the actress came to a sudden stop, drew a quick breath, and pointed the handle of her umbrella excitedly toward a poster displayed on top of a building on the opposite side of the street.

"Look at that!" she cried. "If that isn't a blooming outrage, I'd like to know what is."

Green gazed inquiringly at the poster. It was an announcement of the forthcoming week's bill at the Folly. In big red letters were the words:

First Appearance in Vaudeville,
MILLY ROSE AND COMPANY,
In a Screamingly Funny Sketch.

"Look at it!" exclaimed Milly Rose wrathfully. "Isn't it perfectly awful? Herbert Walters ought to be ashamed of himself to play me a dirty trick like that."

"What's the matter with it?" gasped the perplexed playwright. "It looks all right to me. Surely you don't object to being advertised, do you?"

"Object to being advertised! I should say not, indeed. That isn't what I'm kicking about. Don't you see the line at the top of the bill—'*Marsini's Marvelous Monkeys*'? That's what jars me. Those monkeys are announced in letters almost twice as big as those which advertise me. And they head the bill, too! Imagine me having to play second fiddle to a bunch of monkeys. It's the limit! I don't intend to stand for it, either. I'm going to see Herbert Walters about the thing, right away."

Despite the efforts of her companion to dissuade her, she retraced her steps to the Folly Theater and strode indignantly into the private office of the manager.

"See here," she cried, her eyes flashing fire, "you're breaking faith with me, Herbert Walters, and I won't stand it."

"Tut! tut! my girl, you're in a terrible state. What's all the excitement about?" inquired the manager calmly.

"I've got good reason to be excited. Didn't you promise me that I should be the head-liner on every bill?" cried the actress, stamping her little foot upon the floor.

"Not exactly. I promsied you that you should be *one* of the head-liners, and I've kept my promise. Have you seen the big posters? I've got your name in red letters over half a foot in length. What more do you want?"

"You've got Marsini's monkeys in red letters pretty near twice as big, and you've made them the head-liner. That's what I'm sore about," cried Milly Rose, tears of vexation trembling on her long eyelashes.

"Oh, pshaw! You don't mean to say that you're jealous of a lot of monkeys? That's ridiculous."

"Of course I'm not," exclaimed the angry actress. "It isn't jealousy. It's the indignity of the thing which makes me mad. If they were trained lions or elephants, it wouldn't be quite so bad; but to class me as a lesser attraction than a bunch of ugly, grinning simians is an insult that is not to be tolerated."

"But these are the brightest monkeys in the world!" protested the smiling manager. "This country has never seen the like of them. Surely their cleverness entitles them to unusual honors?"

"Then you should have put me first on the bill and the monkeys second—that would have been good enough for them. The brutes may be clever; but, remember, this is *my* first appearance in vaudeville. Surely that fact ought to make me your chief attraction.

"Besides, I claim the respect due to my sex. Remember, I'm a woman; and,

as a gentleman, you ought to have refrained from insulting me in this gross fashion. Oh, I knew I'd lose all my prestige by descending to vaudeville. I was a fool to forsake the legitimate and sign with you."

She suddenly drew her handkerchief from her sleeve and, holding it to her eyes, burst into tears.

"Tush-tush!" exclaimed Mr. Walters a little impatiently. "This foolishness has gone far enough, Milly Rose. Stop your bawling and don't make a fool of yourself, or I promise you that on next week's bills I'll put your name at the very bottom of the list, and print it in letters so small that you'll need a microscope to read it."

"You wouldn't dare!" cried the actress furiously. "For two pins, I'd tear up your blamed contract and refuse to appear. Don't you provoke me too much, or I'll do it."

"In which case I should go to court and get an injunction restraining you from appearing anywhere else until the term of your contract with me has expired," retorted the manager coolly. "Now, see here, Milly, I know your nerves are somewhat overwrought by the amount of rehearsing you've been doing, and for that reason I'm willing to bear with you. But, for Heaven's sake, have some sense and be reasonable.

"I've got to make Marsini's monkeys the head-liner every week. I can't help myself. It's the first time they've been seen here, and they're a great big attraction. It's written in Marsini's contract that his act must be billed in bigger letters than the rest of the program. He wouldn't sign with me on any other terms.

"Now, I've explained the matter to you — given you more explanation than you deserve, in fact. Be a good girl. Dry your pretty eyes—you'll find plenty of face powder in the little jar over there; I keep it on hand for just such emergencies—and I'll take you out and buy you some lobster-salad."

But Milly Rose was too angry to be appeased by such an offer. She stalked indignantly out of the office, holding her umbrella at an aggressive angle.

When she reached the street, her indignation grew as she caught sight of the electric-light sign over the doorway of the Folly. The sign read:

NEXT WEEK

MARSINI'S MARVELOUS MONKEY'S.

Milly Rose and Company, and ten other big attractions.

The electric current had been turned on since she had entered the building, and the sign now shone forth in letters of fire, revealing the painful fact that here, also, she was made to play second fiddle to the educated simians.

Although they were not to make their début until the Monday of the following week, Marsini's monkeys had already arrived, and were confined in cages in the basement of the theater.

As she stood on the sidewalk outside, glaring at the offensive sign, Milly Rose could hear the brutes chattering and squeaking.

She glanced through the chinks of a big iron grating in the sidewalk, and scowled as she caught sight of the hateful monkeys in the cellar beneath her feet.

Her anger did not diminish when, next morning at breakfast, she glanced through her morning newspaper and came across the following announcement in the theatrical column:

> The chief attraction at the Folly next week will be Marsini's marvelous monkeys. This is the first time these really wonderful animals have been seen in this country. They have created a big sensation in Europe, and their début here is expected to prove a big hit. Another début, at the same theater, will be that of Miss Milly Rose, who will be seen on the vaudeville stage for the first time next week.

"Lordy," exclaimed the actress, choking over her cup of coffee, "this is the worst of all! It's enough to make a girl forsake the stage and take in washing for a living."

When Russell Green dropped in, a little later, she poured her indignation into his patient ears.

"Even the press is impertinent enough to make me a side issue to those pesky monkeys," she wailed. "Was ever a woman so humiliated? This is what I get for stooping to vaudeville. It serves me right for being such a fool as to leave the legit."

The helpless playwright murmured his sympathy, but his consoling words fell upon unappreciative ears.

"Drat sympathy!" cried Milly Rose savagely. "We've got to do something. I'd rather die than appear on the same stage with those monkeys as the headliners. Can't you suggest something? You ought to be a man of original ideas—otherwise how do you expect to write plays?"

"I might go to Marsini and appeal to his gallantry," suggested Green. "Perhaps he'll consent to yield to you the star place on the bill, if I explain to him how bad you feel about it."

Milly Rose shook her head.

"I'm afraid it won't work. You can't expect much gallantry from a trainer of monkeys. However, you might try it. Tell him I'll never forget his kindness if he'll consent to take second place on the bill and let me have first. Oh, I do hope you'll be successful. You can't imagine how wrought up I am over this thing."

Green hurried off in search of Marsini. He found the monkey-trainer in the lobby of the Folly Theater, and put the proposition to him as diplomatically as possible.

Marsini was greatly astonished at the playwright's request, and by no means willing to grant it.

"I am verra sorry I cannot oblige da lady," he replied with many gesticulations. "It grieva me to refuse to do so, but beesiness ees beesiness, my friend."

Green argued with him until he realized that it was useless. Then he took his departure, and very disconsolately went back to report to Milly Rose.

The latter took the disappointing news much more cheerfully than Green had expected. Since he had last seen her a bright idea had occurred to her, and she now eagerly imparted it to him.

"If Marsini won't grant me the favor voluntarily, we must adopt other means," she said grimly. "I am going to write him an anonymous note warning him that something dreadful will happen to him and his monkeys unless he goes back to Italy by the first steamer."

"Good Heavens, Milly Rose, you're not serious?" gasped Green. "Surely this whole affair is too trivial to make violence worth while."

"Who's talking about violence? Of course I don't really intend to carry out my threat, stupid. It's only a bluff to scare him into quitting."

"But the mere sending of threatening letters is a felony," protested the playwright. "Marsini will go to the police, and you will land in prison as a result of this mad trick."

"No. I won't. How is anybody going to find out that I sent the letter? It'll be anonymous, and I'll print out the words, instead of writing them. Besides, I feel reckless enough to take a chance, just for the satisfaction of getting square with Herbert Walters. He will be hopping mad when he finds that the star number of his next week's bill has deserted him and left the country."

The next day Marsini burst into the private office of Mr. Walters in a state of great terror.

"Look here!" he cried, brandishing a sheet of paper on which something was written in red ink; "this I receiva in to-day's mail. I heeda the warning and go back to Italy by the next steamer. Not for a million doll' would I act in your theate' after this."

The surprised manager took the sheet of paper and read the following startling communication written with lurid ink, which bore an unpleasant resemblance to human blood:

> **Professor Marsini. You must leave America instantly. If you stay, you and your monkeys will perish. Don't fail to heed this warning, if you value your life and the lives of your pets.**

This amazing message was not signed; but a roughly sketched picture of a man's hand holding a dagger ornamented the bottom of the page, and supplied a graphic suggestion of what would happen to the monkey-trainer if he did not heed the warning.

Herbert Walters gazed frowningly at this strange epistle. His first impulse was to seize the telephone on his desk and get into immediate communication with police headquarters.

But just as he was about to lift the receiver from the hook, a sudden thought stayed his hand.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if this turns out to be some of Milly Rose's work. Yes, I feel almost sure it is, for it's written on the same kind of note-paper she always uses. I think I know a way to turn the tables on her and make her sorry that she ever tried this little trick.

"Don't worry about this letter, professor," he said aloud. "It's nothing more than a practical joke, and I believe I know who sent it. Believe me, you and your monkeys are not in any danger. As a matter of fact, you ought to be glad that this letter was sent. We'll use it to good advantage, and thereby get the best of the person who wrote it."

"How do you mean?" inquired Marsini, apparently reassured by the manager's words.

"Why, don't you see we can make a fine advertisement out of this threatening letter? I'll send word to the city editors of all the newspapers that we've got a great story for them. We'll show the reporters the letter, and they'll print sensational stories concerning it. The people will read the stories, and will come crowding here next Monday to see the wonderful monkeys who have been threatened with death unless they leave the country at once."

Walters then proceeded to carry out his plan.

He sent for the reporters and showed them the letter. Professor Marsini was on hand to be interviewed, and supplied the newspaper men with a thrilling and wholly imaginative account of a deadly enemy who had followed him from Italy, and who, he felt sure, had sent him this startling communication.

The evening newspapers printed thrilling accounts of the affair. Some of them published pictures of Marsini and his monkeys.

Herbert Walters rubbed his hands gleefully as he glanced through the pile of clippings on his desk.

"Poor Milly Rose!" he chuckled. "I'll bet she'll be boiling with rage when she sees the unexpected result of her little trick. She's made her hated monkey rivals more of a popular attraction than ever. She couldn't have given Marsini a better advertising if she'd tried."

The next morning Marsini again burst excitedly into the manager's office. His face was deathly white and his eyes bulging from their sockets as he sank, half fainting, into a chair.

"My beloved monkeys!" he gasped. "Oh, it is terrib', terrib'! Fool that I was, not to have heeded the warning!"

"Why, what's the matter, professor?" demanded Walters, noting with alarm the Italian's agitation. "Has anything happened to your monkeys?"

"Anything happened?" cried Marsini with a hysterical laugh. "Ha, you wretch, I could almost killa you for the cursed advice you givva me yesterday. If I had not listened to you, my poor beloved monks might even now be alive."

"Good Heavens! You don't mean to say they're dead!" gasped the manager.

"Dead—evra one of them," wailed the Italian, bursting into tears. "Each of them lies stiff and cold in his cage—murdered—poisoned by the wretch who sends me that let'. Ah! If only I had him here, that I might tear out his evil heart."

With an oath, Walters bounded from his chair and rushed down-stairs to the basement in which the monkeys had been confined.

One glance sufficed to convince him that Marsini had told him the truth. Each and every one of the marvelous simians was dead. Some empty peanut shells in the cages indicated how Marsini had come by his theory that his pets had been poisoned.

The vaudeville manager stood gazing in horror at the stiff, still forms. He realized that this tragedy had robbed him of his star attraction; but to do him justice, his sympathy was not for himself, but wholly for the unfortunate Marsini.

He knew that the Italian had devoted years to the education of his clever animals, and that he had loved them as dearly as if they had been his own children. He realized how poignant must be the grief of the bereaved monkey-trainer.

"Whoever has done this dastardly

thing shall suffer, if I can lay hands on him—or her!" he muttered. "I don't care who it may be—the person who has committed this outrage shall go to prison. Poor Marsini shall be avenged, if it takes my last dollar to accomplish it."

Suddenly he stooped down and picked up something which glittered on the floor, in front of one of the cages. It was a cut-steel button, the fancy kind which dressmakers use to decorate women's robes.

Walters recollected that he had seen this button somewhere before. Almost simultaneously, it occurred to him that Milly Rose owned a tailor-made suit studded with such buttons.

"Ha!" he exclaimed savagely. "This evidence is almost conclusive. That fool actress has been down here, and this is some more of her work. Well, she shall suffer for it. If I have her arrested, she won't be able to appear Monday night, and I shall be minus my two head-liners; but I can't help that. My blood is up now, and I'm going to avenge Marsini and his monkeys, if I have to close down the theater to do it. I suspect Milly Rose thought she would get hunk with me by doing away with my star act. Well, she shall go to prison for this dastardly piece of spite work."

He put the shining cut-steel button in his vest-pocket and went to his office, where Marsini still sat in a stupor of despair, his chin on his chest and his arms hanging listlessly from the sides of the chair.

"Cheer up, professor!" exclaimed the vaudeville manager. "I can't restore your dead monkeys; but I can at least give you your revenge. I know, now, who is responsible for the death of your pets."

"Who is it?" cried the monkey-trainer, his apathy suddenly giving way to almost demoniacal fury. "Tella me his name, that I may killa the villain."

"It isn't a man. It's a woman," said Walters. "You'll have to let the law deal with her, my friend. Her name is—"

"Miss Milly Rose is outside, and wants to see you, sir," announced the office-boy, suddenly appearing.

"Ha! Let her come in at once," commanded Walters grimly; and a second later the actress swept into the room.

She was dressed from head to foot in a natty blue tailor-made suit decorated with ornamental cut-steel buttons.

The vaudeville manager's eyes examined the costume closely. He did not fail to note that a row of these buttons ran down both sides of the skirt, and that on the left side one of the buttons was missing.

"Ha! Milly Rose," he said quietly, "I'm glad you've dropped in. I was just about to telephone to you to come here at once. By the way, let me introduce you to Professor Marsini—owner of Marsini's marvelous monkeys."

The actress bowed very stiffly to the Italian. Walters noted that her face had changed color.

"By the way," he continued, "I suppose you have heard that your rivals are dead?"

Milly Rose started and looked at the manager wonderingly.

"What do you mean?" she said. "I don't understand you."

"I mean that Professor Marsini's monkeys have been poisoned," cried Walters savagely, banging his desk with his fist. "I also mean, Miss Milly Rose, that I am going to telephone for the police and have you arrested fo your despicable act."

The actress laughed disdainfully.

"I don't know what game you're trying to work now, Herbert Walters," she cried, "but you can't scare me. I don't even know what you're talking about."

Walters drew from his desk the anonymous communication which had been sent to Marsini.

"You're not going to deny that you wrote this letter, are you?" he sneered. "If so, it won't do you any good. I recognize the note-paper. You were clever enough to disguise your handwriting, but you forgot to change your brand of paper. The next time you do any blackmailing, I should advise you to pay more attention to small details."

Milly Rose's chin was raised defiantly. She was deathly pale, and she trembled from head to foot; but her eyes met the manager's gaze fearlessly.

"Yes. I'll admit I wrote that letter," she gasped. "But of course I did not mean what I wrote. I was simply trying to scare Mr. Marsini. If his monkeys really are poisoned, I am ready to swear that I had nothing to do with it."

"In which case I fear that you will be committing perjury," sneered the manager. "You will, at least, confess that you went down to the cellar of this building and visited those monkeys."

"I won't admit anything of the kind," cried the actress indignantly. "I have never been down in that basement. I haven't been near those horrid beasts."

"Then, perhaps you can explain how it was that I happened to find this button close to one of the cages," and Walters suddenly produced the piece of cut-steel. "You are getting very careless in your attire, Milly Rose—otherwise you would not have come out with one of the ornaments missing from the side of that very natty skirt you're wearing. I see you have not even taken the trouble to cut off the thread by which the button was attached."

The actress suddenly burst into tears. "Oh, you are cruel," she cried. "You are manufacturing evidence against me, and I swear that I am innocent. I didn't kill those monkeys. Do you think I could stoop to an act as low and mean as that? Professor Marsini, surely you don't believe that I did it."

"I don't know," growled the unhappy Italian. "If you were a man, and I was sure you killa my pets—"

He did not finish the sentence, but his big fists opened and closed convulsively in a manner that was more eloquent than words.

"Well, we've got a pretty strong case against you, I guess, Miss Rose," said Herbert Walters. "And, under the circumstances, I deem it my duty to have you placed under arrest."

He lifted the receiver of the telephone and got into communication with police headquarters.

A little later two square-jawed plain-clothes policemen arrived from the precinct station-house.

"Here's your prisoner, officers," cried the vaudeville manager, dramatically pointing to the white-faced Milly Rose. "Professor Marsini, here, will press the complaint. He is the owner of the poisoned monkeys."

"You'll have to come with us, miss," said one of the detectives politely. "It's no use making any trouble. You'd best come quietly, and avoid a lot of unpleasantness."

"All right," said Milly Rose, wiping her eyes: "I'll go with you, gentlemen. Will somebody please call a cab?"

One of the detectives went to the window and hailed a passing hansom. Milly Rose was taken to the station-house, where her pedigree was written in the police blotter.

Then she was taken to court, where the magistrate became greatly interested in the case, and, after hearing Marsini's story and the prisoner's tearful denial of the charge, decided to postpone the hearing until the following day.

Not being able to obtain the requisite bail, the unfortunate actress was taken to the court-house dungeon and locked in a cell, where she spent the night crying her eyes out.

The next morning, when she was again haled before the magistrate, Herbert Walters was in court, looking very sheepish and contrite.

"Pardon me, your honor," he said, "I am afraid that we have made a terrible mistake. This young lady is innocent. Professor Marsini has found out who poisoned his monkeys. The crime was committed by a young man who formerly worked for the professor in the capacity of assistant. The professor was recently compelled to discharge him for drunkenness, and the fellow swore to get revenge.

"He stole into the theater yesterday and poisoned the unfortunate beasts. Last night he got very drunk, and boasted of his act while in a saloon. Some one who overheard him notified me this morning, and I hurried here at once to acquaint you with the real facts."

"But how about the evidence of the cut-steel button?" exclaimed the magistrate. "The prisoner swears that she was never in the cellar where the monkeys were kept, and yet you swear that you found the button from her skirt near one of the cages?"

"I think I can explain that also, your honor," said the manager. "I have been thinking the matter over since yesterday, and it has occurred to me that there is an open grating in the sidewalk above the basement. It is very possible that, as Miss Rose came out of the theater, the button broke from her skirt, fell through the grating into the cellar below, and rolled near the cages."

"Under the circumstances," said the judge, "I think I can safely discharge the prisoner."

"Will you forgive me, Milly Rose?" cried Walters penitently, as the actress walked indignantly out of court.

"No, I won't," she cried angrily, stamping her little foot. "I shall never forgive you, and, contract or no contract, I shall never appear in your hateful theater."

"Don't say that," begged the manager humbly. "The story of your arrest is in all the morning papers, and your fame has spread throughout the land. You are now twice as big an attraction as you were before. I'm willing to double your salary and put you at the head of next week's bill. Come, now, you shall be the top-liner, in place of poor Marsini's Marvelous Monkeys."

LEANDER HITS THE BIG WOODS.

By HOWARD DWIGHT SMILEY.

The visitor that brought terror in the night, relief in the morning, and proved a valuable ally later on in the game.

ME and Charlie Christy were homesteading it up in the Ontonagon the summer that Leander meandered in. It happened thuswise:

We'd taken up a hundred and sixty acres each, adjoining each other; and had put up a nice little shack, right on the line, and were batching together and hunting ginseng for a living.

Leander arrived in the night-time. One o' them warm, balmy nights, when the frogs sit up till dawn and keep everlastingly telling you to "grrrrround, grrrrround!" adding as an afterthought that it's "kneeeeeedeep!" and the skeeters all singing a serenade that would give you the impression there was a gang o' buzz-saws out taking a constitutional, and discussing the women's rights question in an undertone.

We left our shack door wide open, utterly regardless o' the possible invasion o' any or some o' the beasts o' prey then infesting the Michigan wilds, such as porcupine, polecat, *etcetera*, and I had been peacefully slumbering for hours when I was suddenly awakened by a punch in the ribs, accompanied by a growl from Charlie.

"Stop your snoring so blame loud," says he.

Now, after I'd turned this proposition over in my mind and thrashed it out for about two seconds, I jumped to the conclusion that Charlie was laboring under a delusion as appertained to me snoring. I had an alibi; for, while I was by then wide awake and breathing normally, there *was* snoring going on in the neighborhood, guaranteed to attract the attention o' the most fastidious.

I've been in a bunk-house when sixty strong and husky lumber-jacks, not one under six foot tall, were snoring together and in unison in a manner that caused the building to rock and the shingles to vibrate, and to effectually and conclusively drown the sound o' a thunderstorm just outside.

But that lumber-jack chorus, right in its youth and prime, would 'a' sounded like a gnat's love-song dwindling away in the dim distance, as compared with the disturbance I was listening to just then.

It made me feel proud that Charlie had given me the honor of having produced it. I was just about to tell him so, when he gave me another jab in the ribs with his elbow, and says:

"Thought I told you to stop snoring so loud. You've got me half woke up."

"That so?" says I, sort o' amused at his determination to blame it to me; "better wake up the other half and see what you think about it then."

When Charlie heard two sounds going on at one and the same time, when he thought there should 'a' been but one, he was mighty prompt about sitting up to take notice.

"What's making all that racket?" he demanded after he'd listened a spell.

"That's for you to answer," says I; "you called my attention to it."

"I thought it was you," says he. "but I guess it ain't. Get up and light a candle, and let's see what it is."

"Just what I intended to do," says I, and being on the outside o' the bed, I threw back the blankets and started to get up; that is, I swung my feet over the side o' the bed, but they didn't get within two feet o' the floor when they landed on something warm and big and hairy, which promptly let off a grunt that sounded like some one had ripped a hemlock plank in two, lengthwise, at close range.

O' course, I went right back to bed.

"What on earth do you suppose it is?" asked Charlie, after I'd explained why I came back so fast. "Think it's a bear?"

"Felt more like a buffalo," I answered.

"Ain't no buffalo in this country."

"I know it. I was just remarking on what it felt like. I don't know o' anything in this neck o' the woods that resembles it, judging by the feel."

"Well, get up and light that candle, and let's take a look."

I edged down to the foot o' the bed, got onto my hands and knees and stuck my off foot as far out as I could before putting it down. Once again the plank was ripped in two as my foot struck the same thing. I was back beside Charlie so quick you wouldn't 'a' knowed I'd moved.

"The blame thing seems to cover the whole shack floor," I informed him.

"Well, why don't you get up and light that candle, so we can see it?" he demanded.

"If you do any seeing to-night, you'll furnish your own illumination," I informed him. "I ain't wandering around on top o' critters o' that size in search o' a candle for your edification."

But Charlie's curiosity wasn't so acute as all that, and so we lay there and listened to the disturbance and waited for daylight, doing considerable speculating meanwhile.

The sun must 'a' been delayed by a washout that morning, for it seemed to us he would never show up. But after a year or so it began to grow light, and we sat up with our backs against the wall and the blankets around our legs and waited for the big show to commence.

And just then the critter began to wake up, and after a few preliminary grunts he got onto his feet, put his fore paws on one side o' the shanty, his hind ones on the other side, and stretched. Then he put all four feet together, humped his back up and up, till we couldn't see over it, and stretched again. Then he sighed.

It sounded like the exhaust o' a donkey-engine, and wafted the frying-pan off its hook on the wall. And then he faced around our way, sat down and calmly looked us over, licking his chops contemplatively.

Me and Charlie looked at each other, both o' us dumb and speechless. We didn't need a natural history to tell us what our visitor was, for we both knew that facing us sat a full-grown African lion!

Charlie wore an expression o' pained amazement, and I must 'a' reflected it more or less accurately, for I don't know o' anything that could be more surprising and disconcerting than to wake up and find an eight-foot lion sitting by your bedside with a big grin on its face, away out in the middle o' the big north woods o' Michigan.

"Well," I whispered, "what'd we better do?"

Just then Leander yawned. His mouth opened up and up and up until everything for miles around looked rosy and ivory and fatal.

"Let us pray," answered Charlie promptly.

At the word "pray" Leander shut his mouth and looked up quick. Then he turned to the table, put his fore paws on it, and buried his head between them, in an attitude o' abject devotion.

"Why, it's a trained lion!" gasped Charlie in amazement. "And a blamed accommodating one at that. Wonder if he'll sit up."

Leander promptly unprayed himself and sat up, waving his paws awkwardly.

"Roll over," commanded Charlie, encouraged by his success.

Leander promptly rolled.

"Get up and face the east and run a million miles without stopping," was Charlie's next command.

Leander either didn't understand this or was reluctant to obey, for he got up and ambled over to the bed and laid his head in Charlie's lap, looking up at him with eyes as gentle and appealing as a big dog's.

That settled it. We were three good friends from that time on.

O' course me and Charlie were some fidgety and nervous for a spell at having such a large pet around, and we gave Leander the same care and consideration that we would a hogshead o' warm dynamite on a midsummer day. But as time went on we came to understand that he was about the gentlest critter in the State, and wouldn't 'a' hurt us for anything.

He took his place in the family circle as calmly and confidently as a stray cat would, and proceeded to make himself amusing and useful to us from the start. He'd foller us around everywhere we went, and appeared to take an interest in everything we did.

Whenever we'd dig up a seng-root, Leander'd have his big nose right in the hole, wanting to know all about it; and darned if he didn't get to understand it after a spell, so's he'd recognize the seng by the smell. Then we made money.

It was this way: Whenever we'd start out after seng, Leander'd trot along ahead, sniffing and snuffing close to the ground like a big hound, and every time he'd find a seng-root he'd sit down beside it, look our way, and purr.

It'd sound like a buzz-saw working on half rations, and we'd know right away that we were wanted. It got so finally that all me and Charlie had to do was to wander from seng-root to seng-root and dig 'em out, while Leander scampered hither and yon, discovering more for us.

We were taking out more in one day than we ordinarily did in a month; and as they were paying four dollars and a half a pound that year, you can see why it was that we both set a heap o' store on Leander.

O' course we knew he must 'a' escaped from some show, and that his owners were probably hunting all over the upper peninsula for him; and while we would 'a' given him up if we'd had to, we weren't advertising his presence in the Ontonagon none.

We were thirty miles from the nearest town, straight into the woods, and where there wasn't much likelihood o' any one happening along unawares and discovering us, and as we didn't telegraph the news around promiscuous, Leander's whereabouts remained a deep mystery to the outside world.

Well, things moved as smooth as a trout in a brook with us all that summer. We moseyed along easy, amusing ourselves with Leander and accumulating seng until we had enough o' it baled up to break the market.

Every day or so we'd have to get out and shoot a deer to keep Leander in grub, and he'd go along with us and carry back the carcass, taking it by the neck and throwing the body over his shoulder, much the same's you'd carry a sack o' meal. Oh, I tell you that critter was the finest trained lion ever seen.

Then the seng began to peter out around our section, and we decided to take a hike over to the Pickerel Lake country and try our luck there.

Pickerel Lake is about forty miles south o' our homesteads and deeper into the woods than ever, so we weren't much afraid o' any one discovering our pet. We made the trip in two days easy, and were soon settled in a shack by the lake that used to belong to Frank Hahn, before he got killed; and we got busy with the seng right off.

It was the latter part o' August when we hit the place, and we kept ourselves and Leander busy until the tail end o' October, by which time we had accumulated two hundred pounds o' seng and had cleaned things up pretty generally around there. Then we started for home again.

We arrived there on the tail end o' the

third day, and long before we came in sight o' the shanty we heard sounds that told us there was something doing in our vicinity.

It was a familiar sound to me and Charlie—the sound o' the ax—and it riled us some, too, for we were sure they were on our land.

"I'll bet it's the Elm River gang," says Charlie after listening a spell. "They're always the first ones to get into the game in the fall, and they always pick the best cuttings, irrespective o' ownership.

"Just what I was thinking," I answered. "Remember them two cruisers that went through here last spring and stopped to ask a lot o' fool questions? We had a notion that they were Delancy's men, you know."

When me and Charlie had selected our homesteads, we had done so with the timber prospects in view, and had picked the most promising sections we could find. There was good pine pretty much all over both homesteads, but running through our north eighties was a bunch o' particularly fine trees; all clean, tall, and straight, with little or no hardwood among them.

We had figured that they stood us in at least ten thousand dollars each if we sold 'em standing, which we'd do, o' course, we not being lumbermen.

Tim Delancy, the boss o' the Elm River gang, was the most ornery and notorious timber pirate that ever came into the woods. We both knew him well, as he had been working in our vicinity for several seasons; but he had never molested us so far.

We knew, too, that he was a fighter, and generally didn't pay much attention to such small folk as homesteaders when he happened to get into their territory: but just bluffed or fought 'em off, as the occasion demanded. He generally had about fifty lumber-jacks at his back, and therefore he was usually successful with just the bluffing.

Howsomever, we didn't propose to be robbed without making some sort o' a holler.

So we hustled for the shack, where we only lingered long enough to put Leander inside with the command that he remain there until we returned, and then started away in the direction o' the sounds o' the chopping.

Just as we had anticipated, we found 'em working right in the heart o' our choice tract o' pine. They had already felled half the big trees, smashing and killing nearly all the young pine in doing so, which showed that they were working in a hurry and knowed they were stealing.

We passed a lot o' pairs o' choppers as we went along, but we didn't stop to talk to them; but made straight for some tar-paper buildings we saw ahead of us, where we knew we'd find the boss. Before we reached them a big, burly man, with his hat cocked on one side, came out o' one o' the shanties and swaggered toward us.

We were mighty quick in recognizing him as Delancy.

"You fellers looking fer a job?" he inquired as we came up.

"No, sir," snapped Charlie. "We're here to tell you that you're cutting on our land, and that you've got to get off."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Delancy. "Your land? Where'd you get the title, I'd like to know?"

"Homesteaded it," answered Charlie, "and you know it, too, you blame old timber thief!"

Delancy scowled, but kept his temper.

"This is State land," says he quietly.

"This is our land, I tell you. We wind up our four years and get our deeds this fall."

"This is State land," repeated Delancy, "and I've got a right to cut all the pine I want to. If you fellers don't like it, you know what you can do."

And then the argument became heated and vituperative. A lot o' the jacks quit work and came over to listen and offer suggestions, and between them and Delancy, me and Charlie were made to look as ridiculous as a pair o' porcupine on a ridge-pole.

"Well," says Delancy finally, "I'm here to cut pine, and pine I'm going to cut, whether you like it or not, so what're you going to do about it?"

"By glory! I'll tell you what we're going to do," says Charlie, mad clear through: "you'll get off this land hot-foot, and pay us for the damage you've done, or I'll sick Leander on you!"

"Is Leander your little pet lap-dog?" inquired one o' the jacks.

"Yes," says I quick, fearing that Charlie would give the thing away; "yes, he's our little pet lap-dog; but he's big enough to make things interesting for your bunch if we tell him to."

That raised a roar o' laughter and brought a lot more o' the jacks over to hear the fun.

"Go fetch the little feller over here and we'll have some Digger Injun stew for supper," says the first jack. "It's fine, 'specially with tame dog."

"If Leander happens into this bunch, it'll be lumber-jack stew that's et," retorted Charlie. "And he ain't particular about the stewing part, either."

And then they all started in and roasted us about our little pet lap-dog until we were so riled that we were seeing red, white and blue and the Declaration o' Independence. We knew it would be a case o' fight in another minute, and so wisely left for home.

"We're coming back, though," Charlie yelled at 'em. "And when we do, you polecats are going to take to the tall uncut like you never did before."

"Don't forget to bring Leander," they called back derisively. "We're hankering for that Digger stew."

"We won't," yelled back Charlie. "We'll bring him back so blame quick it'll surprise you."

"You ain't really going to do it, are you?" I asked.

"You're right whooping I am. He's a bigger argument than all the men Delancy ever hired, and when we turn him loose among them pirates you'll see doings."

We were back at the shack in a jiffy and got our guns out and loaded them. We didn't know but there'd be some gunplay when them fellers saw our little pet lap-dog bearing down on them; and as we didn't want no holes put through Leander, we thought it well to be prepared.

Leander sensed that there was something in the air right off. He'd never seen us mad before, and seemed to know that things were not just right.

We started back, and when we got to the edge o' the clearing we circled around until we were as close to the buildings as we could get without exposing ourselves. Then we marched boldly out.

Delancy and his men were still gathered together where we had left 'em, and were evidently discussing us; for when we started toward 'em one hollered: "Here they come again!"

We kept right on until we were within fifty feet o' them, with Leander leading, and then we stopped. Charlie stepped up beside our little pet, who was staring at the men and growling gently to himself, and pointed at the bunch.

"Sick 'em, Leander!" says he. "Eat 'em up!"

Leander braced his legs together, stuck his tail straight up in the air, bristled up his mane until every hair stood on end, and said:

"*Get out o' here!*" or roars to that effect.

It sounded like the trump o' doom calling to the lost ones at the other end o' the universe.

The result surpassed our fondest hopes. Me and Charlie were watching the crowd closely, with our guns half raised, ready to shoot first if the occasion demanded.

But, oh, no, there wasn't a gun to be seen in that crowd anywhere; instead, we had the pleasure o' viewing the choicest collection o' open mouths and white eyes ever gathered together at one and the same time.

Before Leander got half-way through his remark that gang had begun to fade, and by the time he was ready for the next sentence there wasn't ten men in sight; and all o' them, except Delancy, were dusting for the timber-line like their lives depended on their getting there before the whistle blew—which it did.

"Where're all you fellers going?" Charlie yelled after them. "Ain't you going to stay to supper and have some Digger Injun stew? Here's our little pet lap-dog. All you've got to do is cook him."

But they all seemed to 'a' lost their appetites, and didn't even pause to say so much as "No, thanks," or "Go to thunder!"

Delancy stood still, staring at us, and didn't seem to know what to do, so Lean-

der started over to tell him. That settled it.

Delancy is rated as a brave man; but when he saw that eight-foot bundle o' seething, rumbling ferocity coming his way, he just let out one yell and lit out for some other place in much the same manner that the singed bat made its exit from the place that General Sherman said war was.

We hung around for several days, waiting for some o' them to show up again, but none ever did. They seemed to be perfectly satisfied to let our little pet lap-dog rule the roost just as they had left it, and the lumber-jacks didn't even come back after their turkeys.

O' course, they done considerable damage to our little tract o' pine; but when we counted up two hundred double-edged axes and cross-cut saws, and the same number o' good cant-hooks, to say nothing o' the boots and clothes and enough grub to last us ten years, and one thing and another, like o' that; and a nice lot o' cut lumber, all ready to send down to the lake with the spring thaws, which hadn't cost us a cent, we began to see where we'd made money.

We never saw that Elm River gang again; but about three weeks after they left a couple o' fellers came tearing up to our shanty, loudly demanding where the king was.

When Leander heard their voices he came tearing out o' the shack like a house afire, and if an animal ever expressed great joy that critter did.

He romped and rolled and roared around them men like all possessed, licking their boots and kotowing all over 'em in his efforts to make 'em understand he loved 'em and was glad to see 'em again.

They were just as demonstrative as Leander, and it didn't take us long to arrive at the conclusion, and rightly, that they were his owners.

"He was traveling with John P. Hallinan's circus," one o' them informed us, "and the train he was on got wrecked one night, about twenty miles south o' Houghton, and the car he was traveling in, likewise his wagon, were smashed to smithereens. We suppose the poor critter was frightened clean out o' his wits, and just naturally started out and run for his life, and never stopped until he hit here.

"We've been hunting high and low for him ever since the accident; and had about given up hope of ever seeing him again, when a bunch o' men came into Houghton the other day with a tale about a couple o' homesteaders who had a pet lion thirty feet long and ten feet high, who, when he roared, caused the ground to tremble like the falling of a thousand big pines all at once, and who tore up huge trees by the roots and threw them a mile into the air with his mighty jaws.

"He didn't answer our description exactly, but we hustled right out here just the same. We're a million times obliged to you for taking such good care o' him; and if you'll just make out your bill, we'll pay it cheerfully."

O' course we didn't make out no bill. Leander'd more'n paid for his keep, and we told 'em so. It most broke our hearts to lose him, though, for he was sure the finest pet we ever had, before or since.

TO GIULIA GRISI.

When the rose is brightest,
Its bloom will soonest die;
When burns the meteor brightest,
'Twill vanish from the sky.
If Death but wait until delight
O'errun the heart like wine,
And break the cup when brimming quite,
I die—for thou hast poured to-night
The last drop into mine.

Nathaniel Parker Willis.

A HAPPY HOLD-UP.

By HENRY McHARG DAVENPORT.

How it happened that the man who was robbed had the laugh on his despoilers.

I T was fifteen minutes after 12 A.M. when Benson turned from Mott Street and came out amid the murky red lights of the Bowery.

The saloons and music-halls were in full swing, for the night was stifling, and the whir of electric fans from within seemed alluring.

Suddenly the door of a brightly illuminated café swung open; Benson caught the clink of many glasses, and the high, boisterous laughter of women. On almost any other occasion he would have been disgusted, but to-night he was tired, and the scene rather amused him.

He laughed, and walked on wearily. The streets were almost deserted, and he felt quite alone. Then, too, he was thirsty, and almost dizzy from the heat.

A party of men coming gaily, if rather unsteadily, from the gaudily painted entrance of the Sports' Burlesque Hall, suggested to him at least temporary diversion.

The swinging doors closed behind him the next minute, and he made his way, none too easily, through the crowd of roisterers to a little table somewhat apart from the others.

But if he sought to evade attention in this manner, Benson was very much mistaken. His entrance was at that very moment being commented upon by two burly toughs, who laughed significantly and nudged each other at their table directly opposite.

Totally unconscious of the attention he was creating, Benson began casually to take stock of his unusual surroundings.

Down in front a pale young man automatically pounded rag-time from a slab-sided piano, which looked old enough to vote, while on a raised platform above him a young woman in abbreviated skirts was painfully torturing that once popular song, "Love Me and the World Is Mine."

In her high, nasal voice the climax became a long-drawn-out shriek, with all the expression of a steam calliope.

Benson groaned inwardly, and took malicious satisfaction in fairly shouting his order. But the young woman heeded him not, and lustily continued the uneven soprano of her ways.

By the time Benson's waiter arrived, the "vocal contortionist" had finished her "stunt," and retired coyly from the platform to make way for the next "artists."

"Ladies and gents," announced the manager hoarsely, "the next attraction will be the world-famous clog-dancers, O'Rafferty and O'Rourke!"

The crowd showed their appreciation by an outburst of stamping that shook the floor.

Benson had been so interested in the scene before him that he had quite forgotten to pay for his order, when he arose to leave. Not so the waiter. In the hush that followed, his voice could be heard all over the room when he growled:

"That game don't go here, mister! Fork up for what you had or ye'll be bounced—see!"

Benson colored hotly, and dug his hand sharply into his wallet pocket. The next minute the waiter's eyes fairly popped out of his head, for in his customer's hand lay a big roll of bills, the top one of which was a gold certificate for five thousand dollars!

II.

BENSON looked first at the waiter, and then at the crisp yellow notes, while over his face came an expression of surprise quite equal to the waiter's.

"By Jove!" he muttered to himself; "I must have forgotten to take out that cash when I changed my clothes!"

Hastily shoving the money back into his wallet, he drew half a dollar from his change pocket and handed it over. The man's fingers clutched the money me-

chanically, and he walked to the cashier's desk in a kind of daze.

As he was about to return with the change, one of the men across the room beckoned to him. There were a few whispered words, and the two left the room abruptly.

Five minutes later Benson was in the street again, walking slowly in the direction of the nearest Third Avenue "L" station.

"Wait a minute, stranger, 'n help a feller wot's down on his luck!"

Benson thought himself alone, and the voice coming seemingly out of the thin air startled him.

"Where are you, and what do you want?" he muttered apprehensively.

A tall figure slouched out of the darkness and touched him on the shoulder.

"Jest step in off the street a second, boss!" bade the fellow in a low voice. "I won't keep you but a minute!"

Benson looked at the stranger's broad shoulders and powerful frame and, being a little man, was not long in making up his mind.

They groped down a narrow row of steps into a foul-smelling basement. It was dark as a pocket, and Benson felt somewhat relieved when the stranger proceeded at once to the business in hand.

"Now, here's me line of chatter. I turned a sport up the avenue for his sparkler. The cops is wise, and it's a cinch I've got to beat it. I'm broke, and I need the money more'n I do the ring. I'll let you have it for ten dollars! Do you cotton to me game?"

Benson drew back angrily.

"I wouldn't touch your dirty ring if I died for it!"

"Maybe you will!" was the man's sinister reply, as he rapped smartly on the railing above them.

"Here, what are you doing?" cried Benson sharply. "No crooked work, or I'll call an officer!"

"Oh, you will, will you? Well, it sounds to me as if one was coming now!"

Sure enough, the sound of rapid footsteps was heard moving in their direction. A minute later Benson dashed up the steps, and fairly flung himself into the arms of—Red Casey, one of the men from the Sports' Hall. At the same instant he was seized in a bear-like grip from behind, while the knotted fist of the redoubtable Casey flattened itself against his jaw.

Benson staggered and fell to the sidewalk, with thousands of little starry devils dancing before his eyes.

III.

It was but the work of an instant for Casey and his partner to relieve Benson of his surplus cash. The big roll would put them both on "Easy Street" for some time to come.

When his partner wasn't looking the big fellow pulled something from his own pocket and slipped it into Benson's.

"The poor devil," he told himself, "I orter give him something to get home on. I won't tell Casey, though, or he'd get sore and call me chicken-hearted."

A minute later the men went off down the street on the run. A block had been covered in this manner, when Red Casey suddenly stopped.

"You wait here!" he announced. "I'm going back ter that feller a moment. Seems to me that wad isn't as fat as it oughter be!"

Gentleman Jack heard him in surprise. He knew positively that they had taken every red cent the man possessed, but also knowing Casey, he didn't attempt to argue. If Casey said he was going back, nothing on earth could stop him.

When Casey plunged into the basement where Benson was lying unconscious, it was *not* to look for more money.

"The poor bloke," he muttered, "certainly got a rotten deal! If five dollars will help him any, it ain't for Red Casey to hold back. 'Specially after us raising him for five or six hundred."

Casey gave one last look at Benson as he climbed the stairs to the street, cursing himself for a soft-headed yap the while.

A few minutes later Benson's eyes opened, and he tried feebly to sit up.

"Hi, there! Help! Help! Police!" he yelled lustily as soon as he found his breath.

It was some ten minutes, however, before a bluecoat appeared and peered cautiously into the darkness that covered Benson like a blanket. To Benson he appeared, a veritable angel, with his

gleaming brass buttons and his kindly Irish face.

"Officer, I've been sand-bagged!" Benson cried, and, hastily running his hand through his wallet-pocket, he added: "Robbed in the bargain!"

The next instant a match flared, and he saw the burly form of Officer Murphy bending over him.

"Whist now, me laddie-buck; it's plain they didn't rob you entoirely. Here's a ten-spot and a fiver sticking out of your coat!"

Benson gave a surprised gasp and grabbed the money roughly out of the officer's hand. The next minute he was laughing so hard the tears ran down his face.

"'Tis more than Patrick Murphy can understand, to see you laughing!" broke in the mystified officer. "Faith, 'tis little enough to leave ye!"

"But, you see, the money *they* took was just a nice large assortment of—*stage money!*" explained Benson. "I'm playing the *Prodigal Son* in 'The Making of a Man,' at the Central Square. When the show was over to-night I rushed off without handing over the cash to the property-man. The toughs must have seen me flash the money when I was in the burlesque-hall up the street, and decided to relieve me of it. The way they did it was most effective, for by some freak of fate I am fifteen dollars to the good!"

"*Begorra*, 'twas a happy hold-up for you!" ejaculated Officer Murphy. "Shure, 'tis the first time I ever heard of any one *making* money by *losing* it!"

A PAGE FROM THE PAST.

By WALTER DURANTY.

How memory stirred uneasily at sight of a face almost forgotten.

I HAD hardly entered the crowded room before Bobbie Durham singled me out and hurried toward me.

"There you are at last, Uncle Ben," he cried. "You must come at once and meet Ethel. She is longing to see you."

I smiled at the air of pride with which the young man presented me to his fiancée; but as she shyly thanked me for my congratulations, I decided Ethel Harding was indeed a girl to be proud of.

And yet, as I looked down into the winsome face, I felt a vague sense of uneasiness as though the sight of her brought some unpleasant memory to my brain.

After chatting a few moments, I passed on to talk to Bobbie's parents.

"Well, Ben," said his mother with a beaming smile, "don't you think the new daughter Bobbie has brought us does credit to his judgment? Every one is charmed with her, and it is not an easy position to be in, all alone like this among strangers. But she won our hearts at once."

"She is a lovely girl," I replied. "And how delightful her soft Southern accent sounds among us Northerners."

Even as I spoke I knew that my praise was not sincere. I was still haunted by this strange idea of having seen the girl before, and somehow the remembrance of her disquieted me.

Could there be anything about this happy, innocent creature which might bring harm to the boy I had known and loved since he could barely walk, whose baby tongue had learned to call me Uncle Ben, though I was in reality no more than a close friend of his family?

I tried to dismiss the thought as ridiculous, and yet it returned, insistent and almost menacing.

When the majority of the guests had departed Bobbie and Ethel joined us, and after some minutes' conversation I told the latter how much I liked the Southern accent, which I had always preferred to our own. It may have been fancy, but it seemed to me that there was a quick shade of fear in her eyes before she answered me, and the disturbing memory grew stronger as I noted it.

We all know the aggravating fact of meeting some one whose face is familiar, but whom we are unable to place: consider, then, how much worse it is when this familiarity is accompanied by a sense of evil and danger, and you will be able to form some idea of my feelings that evening as I strove in vain to remember where I had seen Ethel Harding before and under what circumstances.

At last, still baffled, I said good night and stepped out into the hall to put on my overcoat.

As I looked back into the cheerful room I saw Miss Harding bending eagerly forward to speak to old Mr. Durham: and, watching her clear profile upraised attentively toward him, I suddenly remembered everything.

Yes, I had seen her before—like a picture the scene came back to me—that white, tense face and all around the black-dressed men and the dark, gloomy woodwork.

And that day, a confessed murderess, she had been on trial for her life.

I walked homeward, almost stunned by my tragic discovery. Once more I saw the narrow street of the little Southern town, the old-fashioned trolley-car in which I sat, and the low, stucco courthouse where the woman was suffering for her sin.

"Look!" the man next me had cried, "you can see her through the window; there, that is Emily White."

Just one glimpse, as through a picture-frame, and the woman's face was branded indelibly on my brain.

There she sat five years ago, Emily White the murderess: and now, Ethel Harding, she was engaged to marry the son of my old friends, the boy who was dear as a son to me.

It had been a remarkable case. The old paralyzed father, racked with ceaseless pains, but still lingering on in the life that was worse than death, and the young, beautiful daughter, unable to work because of him, unable to nurse him on account of her work. For a while she endured the bitter struggle, the complaints of her father and the hardships of her daily life, and then the strain had become too great, and she had resolved to end it all; so she bought poison and shared with him the meal that was to give rest to them both.

But her young strength had resisted the fatal drug, and she had awakened to find herself a parricide, arrested to stand trial.

Her position had aroused much sympathy. She had received a light punishment, and after two years in prison had been pardoned, and now she was Robert Durham's affianced bride.

All night long I lay awake in torture, wrestling with the problem. That he loved her was certain: that she loved him no one could doubt who had seen them together: there was no stain on her moral character, and she had expiated her sin. And the absence of base motive was shown by her attempt to die with him, and yet—a murderess—and the taint of two years' imprisonment that would rest on her and on her children!

What ought I to do? Surely, I could not permit this marriage to take place; but, on the other hand, it was not easy for me to ruin the happiness of the boy I had loved since his childhood.

As the first grayness of dawn began to chase away the darkness, my thoughts crystallized into decision.

I would speak first to the girl herself; perhaps, after all, I had made some error, and it might not be she. I had not entered the court-house. I had only been passing through the town, and had but looked in through the window at the trial, of which I had read; and yet I knew I was not mistaken about her face, and the anxiety she had shown when I spoke of her Southern accent gave confirmation to my fears.

Still, there might be some explanation; until I had spoken to her I need not be certain of the worst.

The next afternoon I found the opportunity I wanted.

Bobbie had to attend a militia drill, and he laughingly bade me make friends with my new niece by showing her my conservatories.

As we stepped into the warm, humid atmosphere among the gorgeous purple orchids, I noticed once more that glint of terror in her eyes, and my heart sank with an ache of certainty.

But I had to speak, and it was no good prolonging the agony.

"Miss Harding," I began abruptly, "do you know Pentaville?"

At the name her face went white, but she did not reply, and I continued:

"When I first met you, your face appeared familiar; I thought I had seen you before, and do you know where I thought it was?"

Still she did not speak.

"In the court-house at Pentaville, five years ago, where you were the defendant in a trial. Am I right or not?"

"Yes," she gasped, and the wanness of her face caused me absolute pain. "Yes, you know, but need you tell Bobbie? It was dreadful of me, but it is long past. I could not help—"

"My dear young lady," I said gently, "believe me I am sorry for you, and I regret bitterly the course I feel it my duty to take, but I cannot keep silent; your future husband must know, be the results what they may."

"Spare me," she cried appealingly. "It was not my fault; I had to do it; I could face the idea of living with him no longer. Have you no sympathy? Can you not realize my position?"

"It is not for me," I replied, "to decide how far you were justified. All I know is that Robert Durham ought not to be in ignorance of this."

"Are you sure he ought to know it?" she answered. "Do you think he will be any happier for the knowledge? Suppose it destroys his love for me; will he gain anything by that?"

"I cannot discuss that, but I must do my duty and inform him. I assure you it is neither easy nor pleasant for me to do so. If his love can face this blow, it will be all the greater afterward, and it is better that he should be told now, by a friend, than find out later from some one who may not wish to put the best construction on your action."

My last argument seemed to convince her, for she said no more, and in silence we walked back to the Durhams' house, where she at once retired to her room, and I sat down with a heavy heart to wait for the lad whose happiness I was going to wreck, perhaps forever.

After what seemed ages he came in, whistling cheerfully.

"Hallo, Uncle Ben!" he cried. "What have you done with Ethel?"

"She is up-stairs," I replied. "But sit down a minute, my boy; I have something to say to you about her."

"It can't be anything bad, though you look as solemn as if she'd committed murder."

I winced at his speech, and for a moment the words seemed to stick in my throat.

"Where did you meet her?" I began at last.

"She was staying with the Maynards, our cousins, you know, in Virginia, a year ago, when I first saw her."

"Do you know where she came from?"

"A little town in the South? I've forgotten the name."

"Was it Pentaville?"

"Why, yes, but why do you ask?"

"Well, now, Bobbie, suppose I were to tell you something against her—something that might stamp her in the eyes of the world—do you think you could hear me out calmly?"

My seriousness impressed him, and his face darkened with dismay and wonder.

"Go ahead," he said huskily.

"If I were to say I had seen her there on trial, that in that court-house she had faced a jury of her countrymen with her whole life at stake—if I were to say that, would you believe me?"

I paused, looking at him intently.

To my extreme surprise, his face lit up with relief and he smiled confidently.

"Oh, it is all right, Uncle Ben; I know all about that, and I think she behaved quite properly, though perhaps she did go a little too far."

"You think she was right?" I gasped.

"Indeed I do. The man was such a brute, she never could have married him; besides, her parents rushed her into the engagement, and—"

"What do you mean?" I cried in bewilderment.

"Well, you must know: he admitted it at the trial. I know she did say that she persuaded her brother to thrash Burke within an inch of his life, which he certainly did, but Burke was a cowardly brute to bring an action like that anyway. I wish I had a chance of talking to him," and his fists clenched fiercely.

I listened, stupefied. Parents—brother

thrashing Burke. What had all this to do with Emily White, the murderess of her father?

"I don't understand," I said weakly. "I heard a different story."

"You must have," retorted Bobbie, "or you couldn't have thought it anything against her. I'm telling you the real facts.

"Ethel was engaged to this fellow Burke for family reasons before she knew anything about him: and when she found out what a blackguard he was, he refused to give her up: and then one day he got drunk and insulted her dreadfully. Well, she couldn't stand that, so she made her brother give the cad an awful thrashing, half killed him, I believe.

"Then he had the nerve to bring an action against her for breach of promise, and for inciting her brother to attack him. He made beastly remarks about her character, too. I'm glad to say there was never a doubt about the result, though he got a nominal verdict over the inciting part, which she admitted, but he had to leave the town and never dared show his face there again.

"I suppose some one has been talking to you about the brutality of a young girl asking her brother to behave like that. I think she was quite right; she couldn't thrash him herself. Well, what is it, Timmins?" to the butler who had come into the room.

"Captain Robins has sent a message, sir, saying he wants you to go back to the drill-hall at once about enrolling some recruits."

"Bother Captain Robins and his recruits!" replied the young man. "Well, I suppose I must go. Tell Ethel to come down, Uncle Ben," he cried to me as he hurried off, "so as to have tea ready for a harassed servant of his country."

For some minutes after he had gone I remained buried in thought. Clearly there was a mistake somewhere. Was it possible that it was on my side?

My meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Ethel Harding, her face pale and tear-stained.

"Well," she said, "have you spoken to Bobbie?"

"He is still at the drill-hall," I replied, evading her question. "But tell me, Miss Harding, do you know anything of Emily White?"

"Why, yes," she said, surprised. "Her trial began the same day that mine did."

"At Pentaville?"

"Yes. My ordeal was over quite soon, and hers began the same day, in the same room even. Poor girl: it was worse for her than for me— But Bobbie, what about him?"

"Bobbie knew it all the time, and he thinks you were quite right," I said cheerily, "and so do I. I am only sorry I distressed you unnecessarily."

As the glow of happiness and pride in her lover returned to her cheeks, I thanked the chance that had saved me from exposing my blunder. Of course it had been Ethel Harding that I had seen in the Pentaville court-house, but it had been at her own trial, which had been overshadowed by that of Emily White, and the man on the street-car had made the same mistake that I had.

Before we could say more, Bobbie came back and rallied Ethel on her jaded appearance, complaining that hot-house air was terribly hard on the complexion.

"Why, even you, Uncle Ben," he concluded, "who ought to be used to it, look as if you had been seeing a ghost."

And as I thought of the grim specter of what might have been which had so terribly disturbed my peace, I felt within myself that his light words rang truer than he knew.

CARPE DIEM.

O Mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O stay and hear! Your true-love's coming.
Trip no further, pretty sweeting,
Journeys end in lovers' meeting.

William Shakespeare.

THE DOUBLED ROPE.

By MARVIN DANA.

A memorable night's experience that brought its participants into deadly peril on a high knoll.

THE drawing-room of Edwin Mason's country mansion was filled with the guests whom he had assembled for his house-party. Miss Esther Mayne, finding herself unattended for a moment, stepped out on the balcony that ran before the open windows.

The place was quite deserted, and the girl sighed with relief. The cool outer air of the June night in Vermont was grateful after the warmth within. In the dimness of a clouded moonlight, she perceived a chair standing in a nook beyond the curve of the window, and in this she ensconced herself for a brief enjoyment of the solitude.

Almost at once, however, this was broken by the approach of two men. They paused at the window, within a yard of Esther, who in her shadowy corner knew herself to be invisible to them. Then, ere she had even thought of making her presence known, the conversation of the men held her in helpless silence.

For by their voices she recognized the two: both were high in the councils of the great industrial concern over which their host ruled; and both were suitors for her favor.

"You finished your investigation before you left the city, I suppose?" Darnton was saying. "What have you found out?"

The low tone was sneering, but held, too, a hint of menace.

The answer in Hasbrooke's voice was instant.

"I have found out that you are a scoundrel; a thief! You have robbed the company deliberately. I shall lay the facts before Mr. Mason to-morrow morning."

There was a moment of silence. Then, the girl gasped at Darnton's next words:

"I have a good mind to shoot you, Hasbrooke."

"No heroics, please," came the crisp retort. "Put that revolver back in your pocket. You'll have trouble enough without going to the electric-chair."

"I could stand even that for the pleasure of killing you," Darnton muttered savagely.

Hasbrooke made no reply, but, with a contemptuous laugh turned his back and walked away. The other remained a minute longer, then he passed through the window into the drawing-room.

Esther, terrified by what she had overheard, strove to regain some measure of calm, and, in the end, succeeded. When she believed herself sufficiently composed to face the eyes within, she reentered the drawing-room.

As she crossed it, she was intercepted by Hasbrooke.

"Why, Esther! Where have you been hiding? I've looked everywhere for you—and how pale you are!" he added with tender solicitude.

"I am not quite fit," the girl answered, hesitatingly. "I think I'll go to my room now."

But ere she moved away, Hasbrooke bent close and whispered:

"May I see you alone to-morrow, Esther? I have something—to ask you."

Despite the agitation of alarm that still held her by reason of the occurrence on the balcony, the girl felt a glow of pleasure at her lover's words. She understood their significance, and the "Yes" she returned to them had in it a little thrill of shy happiness.

Her manner filled Hasbrooke with delight.

"I'm going to run away from the crowd myself," he confided to her, "but I'm not going to bed: I'm going to climb the knoll. I've always wanted to see the view by moonlight."

Mrs. Mayne, Esther's mother, accom-

panied by Darnton, came up at this moment, and Hasbrooke turned away.

"Oh, I wish to ask you about something," Mrs. Mayne explained. "Come with me into the morning-room, Esther. There's no one there, I think."

The girl went obediently, and listened patiently to her mother's rather prosy discussion of certain domestic details. When, at length, the older woman returned to the drawing-room, Esther remained alone, given over to the absorption of her thoughts.

Suddenly Darnton entered the morning-room. At sight of him a wave of repulsion swept over her; she would have fled, but he stood resolutely between her and the door.

And then, at once, he began a fervid appeal, pleading for her love, begging her to be his wife. That the man's passion was genuine, she could not doubt; and something of womanly pity moved her, despite her aversion, to utter her refusal gently.

But, when he persisted in supplications, she wearied, and so revealed a little of the fear and disgust with which he inspired her.

The effect on Darnton was instantaneous; he broke off his entreaties.

"You mean, there is no hope for me—ever?"

Esther bowed assent.

Swift anger flushed Darnton's cheeks, and his eyes—too close-set in their deep sockets—flashed ominously.

"There is some one else?" he said.

The girl reared her head indignantly.

"You have no right to say that!" she cried.

"It is true, all the same," Darnton retorted. "And, of course, it's Hasbrooke—the sneaking cur!"

He could not restrain this utterance of the hate that raged in him.

"How dare you! How dare you!" the girl burst forth. Her manner was sufficient proof that Darnton had guessed aright. "Will you leave me, please? At once!"

"Yes, I'll go," was the sullen answer. "I wish to see Hasbrooke—now, tonight!" The tone was malignant. "He shall not come between us!"

His eyes blazed into hers, and she read the threat in them. She sat in a voiceless panic of terror, staring at him, until he turned and strode from the room.

Then, she cowered in the chair, and buried her face in her hands as if to shut out the horror of her vision.

She understood that Darnton, in his present mood, was a madman, lustful of murder. He was the puppet of his unreasoning rage against the man who would take from him both love and good repute. He might, indeed, slay his enemy without fear, for he had nothing more to lose. The one possible joy remaining to him was revenge.

So he had gone to seek Hasbrooke—gone with threats on his lips, with a weapon ready to his hand. Esther had no slightest doubt as to his purpose. She knew the insensate fury of the man's anger when out of leash.

Once, she had seen him vent his fury on a horse; she had never forgotten or forgiven the cruelty of it. Now his hatred menaced the man she loved!

Esther sprang forward in a wild impulse to give the alarm, to warn, to save. But at the door she paused.

What should she do? To tell the danger to her mother would mean not help, but hysterics. And the others—would they not be incredulous? There would be delay.

What had Hasbrooke said? Oh, yes; that he would climb the knoll. This was the chief eminence of the neighborhood, a great natural mound, lying a quarter of a mile from the mansion.

It was a cone of earth, two furlongs through at the base, and five hundred feet in height. Near the top the outcropping rocks were massed in precipitous cliffs. The summit itself was but a few rods in area, and originally almost inaccessible. Mr. Mason, however, who delighted in the splendid view from this aerie, had a rough flight of steps hewn in the rock at the most favorable point, and to these an improved path ran from the level ground.

Next he had caused to be made a board platform over the rough surface of the top, on which benches were set out, that the sightseer might take his ease.

Finally, he had erected a lofty flagpole, whence the Stars and Stripes fluttered daily before the eyes of the whole

valley. Esther had visited the knoll often, for the view fascinated her. So had Darnton, she knew, since on one occasion he had accompanied her.

She remembered that Darnton had been close at hand when Hasbrooke spoke of his purpose to visit the spot this evening. Had he heard? Would he go there in quest of his victim?

At the thought, she whitened. She must act alone, and she must hasten. Already she had lost too much time.

Esther darted into the hall, which chanced to be empty, and, unobserved, hurried from the house. In a moment she had reached the shadows beyond the mansion, and then, gathering up her skirts she ran swiftly toward the knoll.

It occurred to her that she might easily pass Darnton, if indeed he were on the way, by leaving the winding path which bordered on a tiny lake, and instead crossing in a straight line the meadow that stretched to the knoll. With this thought, she turned and scurried through the thick-growing grass.

Esther's thoughts had been, at first, all for her lover's peril, but now a certain virginal confusion crept into them. For, as yet, she and Hasbrooke had not exchanged their vows. Hitherto, with maidenly timorousness, she had evaded his approaches to a final declaration, and had succeeded thus far in postponing, through shyness, the moment for which her heart most longed.

So it now seemed to her that there was something of overboldness in this seeking out of her lover: the act must surely appear to him an open confession of her tenderness. Yet, the circumstances permitted of no hesitation, and she sped on.

Presently she came to the foot of the knoll, and skirted it until she reached the point where the path lay. She paused for a moment, peering over its length, but clouds still veiled the moon, and she could distinguish no one approaching, nor was there any sound of steps.

She breathed a sigh of thankfulness, convinced that she was in time. Then she went flitting on up the steep slope of the knoll, and came, at last, to the flight of steps cut in the face of the cliff.

Esther rested here for a minute, panting. No sound came from the platform above her, and her last doubt vanished.

Without allowing herself opportunity for further thought, she climbed the stone stairs, and so came to the trap-door in the platform, which opened on the head of the flight. This was closed, and she rapped on it smartly.

There was a sound of hasty steps above; then the trap was thrown back, and she saw Hasbrooke staring down.

"Who on earth—?" he began.

But before he could finish the question, the girl had sprung to his side. Even in the dim light he recognized her, and a cry of amazement broke from him.

"Esther!" he exclaimed.

He strode closer, and caught the hands she held out.

The expression of her face warned him that something was wrong; that, and the fact of her presence there at such an hour.

"What is it, dear?" he asked. "You are in trouble! Tell me."

"It is for you—you!" the girl answered falteringly. "You are in danger. You must go from here, at once—now. He will kill you!"

"But I don't understand. Who will kill me?"

"Darnton! He told me so—there, at the house. I—I made him angry. He is mad with hate of you. He threatened again to kill you."

"Again?"

"Oh, I overheard him with you on the balcony. I was there, in the dark, beyond the window. Afterward, I was alone in the morning-room. He came—asked—he became crazed with rage against you. He will be here in a minute. I ran across the meadow to reach you first. You must go—hurry. There isn't a second to lose."

"Well, I suppose I must run away from him now, for your safe, if not for my own." Hasbrooke agreed with a grave smile.

He understood perfectly what had occurred, and he was aware that Darnton might ruthlessly slay both of them, if found thus together.

"We'll turn, after getting down the steps," he said to Esther, "and leave the path. In that way we'll avoid meeting Darnton. We can scramble down the other side of the knoll. It will be rough going, but it's the only safe way."

"Yes, yes," the girl agreed eagerly. "But we must hurry."

With that, she put her hand in Hasbrooke's, and they descended the stairs swiftly and quietly.

But at the foot the man paused to listen. To his dismay, he heard the sound of steps on the path below. The girl, too, heard, and breathed a little sob of terror.

"Don't be frightened, sweetheart," Hasbrooke whispered. "We'll manage somehow."

Yet, with the words on his lips, he was in the grip of despair, for at this moment the clouds parted and the full splendor of the moon shone down on the knoll. As the radiance fell, instinctively Hasbrooke dragged the girl into the shadow of the cliff.

Undetected flight down the knoll in the moonlight was now impossible, for already the newcomer was visible, ascending the path. The only chance of their escaping observation lay in their remaining silent and motionless in the gloom at the base of the rock.

The man approaching must pass within a yard of them if he would mount the steps. Hasbrooke hoped that Darnton might not see clearly for the moment in going from the moonlight into the obscurity about the stairs. Desperate as was the chance, it must be awaited, for there was no choice.

Darnton was now hardly a hundred yards from them, mounting slowly, cautiously, evidently on the alert. Hasbrooke raged at the helplessness thrust on him by the girl's presence. It would have been a simple thing for him to risk an attack, but he could not voluntarily expose Esther to the peril of flying bullets.

"If only he weren't armed!" Hasbrooke muttered savagely.

"But you know he is," the girl whispered.

"Yes—and I'm not. Oh, dearest, you should not have come here!"

At that, the girl clung to him.

"No, no! Why, he would have killed you without warning!"

And then, somehow, despite the fact that the steps on the gravel below sounded momently louder—somehow, his lips were on hers, and they trembled for an instant in the ecstasy of their love, without ever a question asked or answered in any words.

Hasbrooke put the girl from him and whispered a final direction:

"Crouch on the ground behind me. Even if he sees me he may not notice you. Perhaps I'll be able to manage him, somehow, so that you'll have a chance to get away."

As he spoke the words Esther sank down in a limp heap at his feet. He thought that this was in obedience to his command, and he turned instantly to watch Darnton's advance.

As a matter of fact, however, the girl huddled thus on the ground because the stress of emotions suddenly overcame her, her strength flowed from her, she half swooned.

Hasbrooke had an added thrill of dismay when he perceived that Darnton already carried the revolver in his hand. He had hoped that he might pounce on the man and engage him ere the weapon could be drawn.

That was now rendered impossible by Darnton's malignant caution. Yet, Hasbrooke stood poised to make attack. When his enemy was close enough he would leap from the shadow upon him. If fortune favored, he might master the man in the confusion of surprise.

At least, during the time of their struggling, Esther would have opportunity to escape.

Darnton paused a rod distant from the shadows of the cliff and remained motionless, evidently listening for any sound from above. He was too far off for Hasbrooke's attack, and the latter waited impatiently for his foe to come forward.

He could see the man with perfect distinctness, could distinguish the roving, furtive glances thrown here and there. The delay was alarming, inasmuch as the longer Darnton stared into the gloom at the cliff's foot, the clearer would grow his vision. The obscurity was sufficient to veil a lurker from the careless glance of a passer-by in the moonlight; it was not sufficient to hide an object from one who looked long and closely.

Then, of a sudden, Hasbrooke's heart jumped exultantly, for Darnton strode forward.

But only a single step. Then, as he

halted, the revolver was brought to bear, and the command came crisply:

"Just put up your hands, Hasbrooke. I can see you perfectly. Quick, now!"

And the wretched lover, having in mind the girl crouching behind him, raised his arms submissively.

Darnton chuckled triumphantly.

"Get up those steps," he ordered. "There's a capital place for the climax of our little drama just above here."

Again Hasbrooke yielded, and as quickly as possible. He was anxious only to get his enemy away from the spot before the girl's presence was revealed.

A great relief came to him as he mounted, and heard Darnton's steps behind him. Esther was safe; there was nothing now to interfere with her flight. As for himself—well, now it was man to man. Even though unarmed, he might find his opportunity.

But Darnton took no chances. He kept just far enough behind his victim to be out of reach of any possible blow, yet close enough to make his aim sure. Moreover, as he informed Hasbrooke after they had reached the platform, he would fire the instant his captive attempted any suspicious movement.

"I'll give you time to say your prayers," he jeered. "You've been having things all your own way—now, it is my turn. Yes, my turn!" he repeated gloatingly. "I'd rather enjoy tying you up and torturing you. There's plenty of rope on the flagstaff. But I'll be generous. You can have your choice—a bullet or a jump off the precipice."

There was a sudden sound on the stairs; then, on the instant, a form kneeling at Darnton's feet in frenzied humility, and Esther's voice wailing:

"No, no! You must not!"

At the first sound, Hasbrooke had divined the truth. Sick with fear for the girl, he risked all on one effort. Like lightning in his brain was the thought that at her startling advent, if ever, Darnton's attention would waver from him. On that chance he acted.

Hasbrooke was standing a yard beyond the stair-head; Darnton was that distance behind, having halted as he stepped upon the platform. Just as Esther's cry rang out, Hasbrooke put all his strength into one great leap backward.

As Darnton's eye dropped in amazement to the girl at his feet, Hasbrooke's body crashed full against him. The shock of the impact made him reel backward a step. His feet met the emptiness of the stairway, a curse broke from his lips, mingled with the report of the revolver; then he went hurtling down the steep steps of stone.

His collision with Darnton left Hasbrooke swaying for a moment at the head of the stairs. Then, as the aimless bullet whistled past, he stooped, and swung the trap-door shut, for the armed man might well prove dangerous, in spite of his fall down the steps.

There was no fastening for the door, which had been put in merely to increase the floor-space of the little platform into which it opened, but Hasbrooke knew that his weight on it would be enough to prevent Darnton's pushing it open, were he still uninjured.

Esther crept to him where he knelt on the door. She was half hysterical, wholly happy.

"Oh, you are safe—safe!" she cried.

Hasbrooke drew her close and kissed her very reverently.

"Your coming saved my life," he said.

Without warning, he sprang to his feet, and swung her to one side.

"I had forgotten," he explained. "He might fire up through the door."

He himself remained standing on the trap, and now the girl in her turn pulled at his sleeve.

"But you—you are in danger there. Come away!" she pleaded.

"No; it must be weighted down against him—if he comes," Hasbrooke answered. "I must take the risk." Then a better method occurred to him. "We can load it with stones. Bring them, Esther, as fast as you can—there!"

He pointed beyond the level space of the platform, where many bits of broken stone were lying, not ten feet away.

"Just bowl them toward me," he told her; and the girl flew to do his bidding.

Piece after piece, she picked up and half carried, half threw, toward the door, where Hasbrooke seized them and piled them in place.

In her agony of alarm lest injury befall her lover, Esther worked with

astonishing strength and speed. Some of the fragments that she threw so easily were of a weight beyond her power to lift at another time.

Hasbrooke wondered grimly as to what Darnton might be thinking of the din overhead—if, indeed, he were able to think at all. But, in the end, there was an ample weight of rock piled on the trap-door, and the lover was free to leave it, that he might comfort the wearied girl who had done so much for him this night.

"Oh, you—we are safe now!" she panted.

"Yes, yes," he answered, soothingly; and he believed that he spoke the truth.

But, presently, a faint sound came from below. The girl shivered in Hasbrooke's arms. The sound came again, more distinctly; it was some one straining at the trap-door. A little gasp from Esther revealed her terror. But the man held her closer, and whispered reassuringly.

"He can't lift the trap. We are quite safe. He will go away soon."

But the girl still trembled, as she listened to the efforts of the enemy below and heard his mumbled execrations.

After a while silence fell again, and the two waiting sighed in relief. The respite, however, was short. Very soon they heard new sounds from below.

Darnton had returned to the assault and he was now attacking the barrier with some sort of improvised tool.

"What is he doing?" Esther quavered.

"He has hunted up something with which he's trying to break through—a splinter of rock, perhaps, for prying the boards apart." Hasbrooke spoke as cheerfully as he could. "He won't manage it."

Yet, though he spoke thus boldly, the lover was far from satisfied. On the contrary, a new and heavy fear had fallen on him.

Now that he came to consider the matter, he realized that it could be only a question of time before the trap yielded to determined attack, since it was but flimsily built of thin boards. When that occurred, he might be able to overcome Darnton amid the confusion of the falling rocks, but there remained always the possibility that a bullet from the revolver might find a victim—and to this peril Esther would be exposed.

That must not be. Alone, he would have had no fear, but with her! . . She must be saved from the danger by some means.

But how? They were perched aloft on a pinnacle of rocks; on every side, the sheer cliffs fell for fifty feet or more before they touched the slope of the knoll. Familiar with the spot, Hasbrooke concentrated his whole thought on this problem, seemingly so hopeless—how to flee.

Again and again, his mind scrutinized the situation, and always in vain. Yet, in some subtle fashion, his intuition warned him to maintain the search. He had a vague but strong feeling that some hint of a means had been offered him. And then, just as he was on the edge of despair, came the inspiration.

It was Darnton himself who had suggested a possible method of escape. What had the villain said? "There's plenty of rope on the flagstaff."

Aye, and that rope might yet win them free!

Hasbrooke did not pause to canvass possibilities.

"We don't want to stay here all night just because of that fellow's crazy whims," he remarked briskly to Esther. "Now, if you'll continue to be brave, and help me, I can manage a way out."

"Yes, yes," came the eager reply. "I will do anything—anything, if only we can get away from here—away from that horrible man! What shall I do?"

"This way, then," Hasbrooke directed by way of answer, and he led her across the platform and beyond it to the north, up on the rough group of rocks that was the highest point of the pinnacle. Here, standing on the verge of the cliff, he pointed to a blur in its surface, some distance below.

"There," he explained; "once we can get to that, we'll be safe. It's a ledge that begins there. It's two yards wide and slants down to the knoll, after you turn that corner of the cliff."

"But how—?" Esther began, dismayed.

"I'll show you," Hasbrooke answered.

He sprang to the right, where the flagstaff stood, and for a minute was busy

there. Then he hastened back to the girl's side.

"See," he said triumphantly, "here's the necessary rope—strong enough and long enough. They can have it back when they want to run the flag up in the morning," he added with a laugh.

But he heard the sound of a board being ripped from its fastenings and realized that no time was to be lost. Swiftly he knotted the two ends of the rope around her waist and under her arms.

"Now," he explained, "I am going to let you down over the cliff, to that ledge. Afterward, I'll join you there. You won't be afraid?"

"Not very—if you tell me not to be."

"You'll be quite safe, and I'll follow you at once. One other thing: Here is my knife. Take it, please. You see, I have passed the rope around the flagstaff and tied the two ends about you. I'll let you down by the doubled rope, straight to the ledge. When you get there, use the knife to cut the rope above the knots—it would take too long to untie them. Then take the ends—be sure you get both, draw them as tight as you can. You will find a little pine growing out of the ledge. Wind the ends around the trunk of that; then tie them as hard as you can."

"Yes."

"It's necessary," Hasbrooke added, "because the flagpole, around which the rope goes, isn't in a straight line above the ledge, but a dozen feet to the west. If the ends aren't made fast by you, when I come down I'll be dangling in mid-air against the precipice, that far away from you and the ledge."

The girl shuddered at this and made him repeat his instructions. Then, Hasbrooke prepared for the final task.

From a point overlooking the ledge, where the brow of the cliff was smooth so that it would not fray the rope, he set himself to the effort. Very slowly he lowered the precious burden. Fearful of some unsuspected mishap, he was almost unnerved by the suspense, as he cautiously paid out the rope after she had passed from his sight.

It seemed an age before a sudden cessation of the strain on back and arms told him that she had reached safety.

He waited yet a little, then, assured, peered over the edge of the cliff. He saw her standing on the narrow ledge, thirty feet below him. She was busily winding the rope, which she had already severed, around the trunk of the tiny mountain pine. He watched her knot it; and then, at last, she looked up.

She seemed some fairy vision hovering there in the radiance of the moon. A swift exultation leaped in Hasbrooke's heart as he thought of the love she had tacitly confessed this night. He smiled and nodded gaily and threw her a kiss.

This she saw, and blew him one in return. Both were wildly happy, despite the peril of their predicament.

The noise of tearing nails, drowned in the crash of falling stones, warned Hasbrooke that the end was near, and he ran to the flagpole. Esther had drawn the rope taut, with both ends fast, so now he swung over the precipice without fear and went easily down the doubled rope, hand over hand, until he came to the girl's side.

He guided her along the ledge before him for a few steps, around a sharp turn. Here the ledge broadened, and overhead the cliff jutted out, an overhanging shield from any enemy above.

"Wait here," he commanded. "I'll be back in a moment."

He ran again to the pine.

It was his intention to cut the rope and to haul it down. Thus, no trace of their flight would remain for the enemy, nor any means of descent, should he guess their movements.

But Hasbrooke had but just cut through one end of the rope with the knife which Esther had returned to him, when he heard a shout from above. Involuntarily he looked up—just as a bullet fanned his cheek.

A shriek from Esther echoed the revolver's report. The next instant she had run to him, and, with the strength of frightened love, half dragged him past the turn, beneath the shelter of the frowning cliff.

Then, as the lovers stood side by side in that shadowy place, a cry of mortal terror smote the night. It was followed by an indistinct, hideous sound—the sound of something striking on the rubble of rocks at the foot of the precipice.

Hasbrooke understood, and he shook with the horror of it.

The rope, still fastened to the pine-tree by the one end which he had not had time to sever, ran thence to the flagpole, around which it passed, to dangle the remainder of its length loose in the abyss. But the slanting line was still kept taut by the weight of rope that hung clear.

The pursuer, in the blindness of his fury, had not paused to make sure that the rope was fast. Without hesitation, he seized the line that ran to the pine, and cast himself over the edge of the cliff. Instantly, when his weight came on it, the rope slid freely from the staff, and the victim of his own crime plunged, screaming, into the void.

Perhaps, after all, it was best so. He lived long enough to ease his tortured soul by telling the story of the evening. In the face of death, he was sane again, and penitent.

But before they parted that night, Hasbrooke drew the girl to him, as they stood alone in the moonlight, that was now unclouded.

"Esther," he murmured, "I love you. Let me hear from your lips that you love me — that you will be my wife."

"I love you," she answered softly; "I will be your wife."

And then, after their lips had met, Esther said very gently:

"In our happiness, we must remember to pity—him."

And her lover replied:

"Yes—to pity, and to forgive, him."

THE AFFAIR AT THE STATION.

By F. RAYMOND BREWSTER.

The terrible predicament of a girl on her way to the play, who found herself stranded with two cents at a railway terminal.

A HURRIED search failed to reveal its whereabouts. A more thorough examination was without result. She had ransacked her secretary and her bureau—everywhere she had looked—but still the letter could not be found.

And as she realized the futility of her search, a suspicious moisture appeared in her eyes, but she bravely checked the impending tears of disappointment. And what a disappointment, too!

Ella Vanson had been looking forward to this occasion for a whole week, and now, on the very night, her plans were to be frustrated by her own carelessness in mislaying that letter.

A week ago she had received an invitation from the MacGregors, in Elizabeth, asking her to accompany them to the theater in New York. Of course she had accepted — the play was the season's reigning success—and seven o'clock found her ready to start from the house. Then it was she made an alarming discovery.

She had forgotten where to meet the MacGregors!

Was it at the Central Railroad, or was it at the Pennsylvania? As this terrible feeling of doubt and uncertainty surged into her mind a frightened look came into her eyes, and her heart seemed to stop beating for an instant.

Ah, the letter! The thought was like an oasis in a desert of doubt, but a fruitless search proved it to be only an illusive mirage of disappointment. But there was not a moment to lose in vain regrets and useless search.

The MacGregors would be waiting for her somewhere, and Ella must either decide on one of the two railroad stations or stay at home, thereby not only disappointing herself, but causing the MacGregors considerable trouble and inconvenience.

Mrs. Vanson and her brother Bob had assisted Ella in the vain search for the missing letter, and they now endeavored to help her decide on one of the two possible meeting-places.

From her home in Newark five possible ways of reaching New York were open, but of these only two were accessible to the MacGregors in Elizabeth—one,

the Pennsylvania; the other, the New Jersey Central.

"Mr. MacGregor uses the Central to and from business every day," Bob informed her.

"And Mrs. MacGregor takes the Central when she shops in New York," Mrs. Vanson hastened to add.

"It seems to me the letter *did* say at the Central Railroad station," Ella cried eagerly.

And while Mrs. Vanson helped Ella with her wraps, Bob hurriedly consulted a time-table.

"There is a train at seven-twenty," he exclaimed. "You'll have to hurry to make it."

Four long blocks were between her home in Broad Street and the Central Railroad Station, and Ella nervously hastened to don her wraps and be off.

"Have you any money with you?" called thoughtful Mrs. Vanson as her daughter passed out into the vestibule.

"Oh!" she cried helplessly. "Not a cent! It's up-stairs. Now I'll surely miss the train."

"Here; take this," Bob put in, crushing a crisp ten-dollar bill into her hand.

"But the conductor won't change it!" Ella cried despairingly. "If there is a car in sight, I want to ride to the station."

Again Bob came to the rescue with the only coin in his pocket—a ten-cent piece.

"You're a dear!" Ella called to him. And she hurried from the house, thankful to be on the way at last.

As she glanced down the street, she saw that the fates were with her, for a yellow gleam from the headlight of an approaching "trolley" caught her eye, and it soon halted before her. Scarcely was she seated, it seemed, when the car came to a stop before the railroad station. She hurried into the ticket-office.

The big clock indicated exactly seven-twenty as she entered the station; and even as she stood before the grated ticket-window, the clang of the gong startled her.

"Train for New York; all aboard!" drawled the train-despatcher.

"Ticket to New York," Ella curtly announced, pushing the ten-dollar bill in through the grated window.

"All aboard!"

The train-despatcher's loud call echoed through the station, setting Ella's already unstrung nerves all a tingle and scattering in wild confusion her usually collected thoughts and self-possession.

Then a man rushed through the station bent on catching the train, and his frantic haste added to Ella's excitement.

She snatched up the bit of pasteboard the ticket-agent slid out to her, and undignifiedly dashed along the concourse to the tracks, breathlessly mounting the steps just as the cars began to move.

She had caught the train, but in her haste she had left in the possession of the ticket-agent nine dollars and eighty-five cents!

Serenely unconscious of her loss, Ella rested comfortably in the cushioned seat, gazing out into the night. The increasing rapidity of the passing lights and the swaying of the cars as they crashed by switches and roared over bridges was indeed gratifying, and served to relieve her mind of the uncertainty and doubt incident to her start. For would she not soon be with the MacGregors, ready for an evening of pleasure?

"Tickets! All tickets, please!"

The voice of the conductor rose above the roar of the train, and Ella reached into her purse. Then, for the first time, she became aware of her loss.

In the hurry and confusion of catching the seven-twenty, the change from her ten-dollar bill had been forgotten! She had in her possession the munificent sum of *five cents*.

On first thought, the shock of this startling discovery was distressing, but the knowledge that she would soon be with friends instantly banished all anxiety.

The sight of the conductor suggested to Ella the means of recovering her loss, and so, when he took up her ticket, she detained him. She knew that the run between Newark and Jersey City was a short one, and that the conductor would very likely make the return trip that night.

"Are you going back to Newark this evening?" she questioned as he bent down to catch her words.

"Yes. I'm due back there inside of an hour," he replied.

Then she told him of the incident at the ticket-office, and asked him to notify the

agent that she would call and claim the change next day. This he promised to do, and Ella, with a sigh of relief, resumed her comfortable position.

When the train drew into the terminal at Jersey City, she immediately entered the big waiting-room. One glance was enough to convince her that the MacGregors were not there!

At once the thought flashed through her mind that it was, after all, at the Pennsylvania station she was to meet them. A wave of uncertainty again surged over her, sweeping her into a sea of doubt, but the girl's presence of mind still remained.

Far across the big room the beacon light of the "Information" window shone out clear and bright, and she guided her ship of Despair into this haven of Hope.

"Has the Elizabeth train arrived?" she asked anxiously.

She felt as though her very life depended on the answer.

"The Elizabeth train is due in five minutes," was the verdict.

The long hands of the clock indicated seven-forty as she seated herself to await nervously and impatiently the arrival of the Elizabeth train with the MacGregors aboard. As the tortuous minutes dragged slowly by, her nervousness increased and seemed to lengthen the time a hundredfold.

At last the hands of the big clock registered seven-forty-five, and Ella listened intently for the rumble of an arriving train. But not a sound came from the big train-sheds beyond the waiting-room.

Another lingering minute passed, and still another. Unable to remain quiet another instant, she paced to and fro before the wide doors leading to the sheds.

From far out in the night beyond came the shriek of a locomotive whistle, and soon the rumble of the train could be heard. Then the flare of the headlight appeared in the shadowy train-sheds, and finally, to the accompaniment of squeaking wheels and hissing air-brakes, the Elizabeth train came to a stop.

But somehow Ella could not shake off the growing fear that she was mistaken in the meeting-place.

A stream of people poured from the cars, rapidly filling the long platform, and began the tramp to the ferry-boats. This was the theater-train of the suburbanites; and as the gaily dressed throng passed along, Ella eagerly scanned the sea of faces for those of Mr. and Mrs. MacGregor.

With sinking heart, she watched the crowd disappear onto the waiting ferry-boats, until only a few tardy stragglers remained. The MacGregors were not on the train!

Unwilling to believe that they had really not come, Ella grasped at the last straw of hope, and again hurried to the waiting-room. Perhaps they had passed her unnoticed in the hurrying throng of theaters-goers and had gone inside to meet her. It was her only chance.

Again she entered the big room—now quite well filled with travelers—and carefully scanned every nook and corner. What a picture of desolation this big railroad terminal presented when she realized that the MacGregors were not there!

The haunting fear that she had been mistaken about the meeting-place became a certainty. The non-appearance of her friends seemed to quicken her mind, for she now recalled that the letter had mentioned the Cortlandt Street ferry, and only the Pennsylvania Railroad landed at that street, the Central Railroad docking at Liberty, just one block below.

Ella was quick to act on the realization of this fact.

The boat connecting with the Elizabeth train was already well out across the Hudson, but another left in five minutes—an eternity to Ella—and at precisely eight she landed on the New York side. The short block between the two ferries was covered in surprisingly few steps, and, fortunately, a boat was waiting in the slip.

In the excitement and terrible suspense since leaving the train, Ella had not once given a thought to the lone five-cent piece which constituted her capital, but as she passed into the ferry-house she realized that the railroad company did not furnish passage gratis.

And after her ticket was bought, she still had in her possession the sum of two cents!

"What a fine story to tell Mrs. Mac-

Gregor," she thought as she rode across the river.

She was calm now, even joyful, for the knowledge that she was, at last, on the right track, buoyed up her fallen spirits wonderfully. But the sail across the Hudson seemed endless, for she was wildly impatient.

When the boat docked at the Jersey City side Ella, almost the first to land, hurried into the big waiting-room. Her eyes sparkled with mirth, and a smile lurked in the corners of her mouth, ready to leap out at the sight of the MacGregors; for now that her exciting trip was about at an end, she viewed her experiences in a humorous light.

Of course she knew that Mrs. MacGregor would be terribly worried at her non-appearance, and she realized, too, that they must hurry to be in time for the curtain at eight-thirty; but in spite of this, the reaction—the lifting of that terrible weight of uncertainty and doubt—caused her to smile.

The waiting-room was well filled when Ella entered. Hundreds of people sat in the high-backed seats, the wide doors constantly swung to and fro, while from the big shed the hiss of steam and the rumble of wheels indicated the arrival and departure of trains.

Ella swept the room with a glance, and her confidence fled. The smile faded from her lips, and into her eyes leaped a frightened, despairing look.

Carefully she scanned each row of seats, but they were empty! The telephone-booths, the restaurant, the long concourse at the ferry entrances—every part of the big terminal came under her scrutiny, but all were empty!

True, most of the waiting-room seats were occupied, the telephones were busy, and in the restaurant many tables were filled, while along the ferry concourse streamed hundreds of people, but to Ella, searching for the faces of her absent friends, the place was deserted!

And when, after her futile search, she sank down dejectedly into one of the high-backed seats, two big glistening drops stood in her eyes. But she valiantly stayed the flood.

There was only one explanation of the strange absence of the MacGregors, and that came from the big red-and-gold clock. Its hands pointed to eight-ten. Ella was twenty-five minutes late! Little wonder her eyes reddened.

What a predicament she was in! Stranded in a busy railroad terminal, friendless and almost penniless!

Two cents! These two coppers were all that stood between her and penury.

Although her eyes were dry, it was with difficulty that Ella controlled her feelings. And that great lump in her throat was chokingly insistent.

With an effort, she calmed herself somewhat, and began to seek some means of escape from this embarrassing situation.

For twenty-five cents she could telegraph, and for twenty cents she could telephone. Even fifteen cents would solve the problem of her escape, for with this small sum a single ticket to Newark could be purchased.

Fifteen cents! What a stupendous sum it represented to Ella in her present predicament! She thought of explaining her case to the ticket-agent or at the Information Bureau, but she realized that it would be useless; for these men, in their daily contact with all manner of people, hear many tales of varying plausibility and would doubt her story.

What did it matter that she was exceptionally well-dressed? Were not professional panhandlers and other unworthy characters well-dressed too?

Not until now did Ella realize what an ever-suspicious, uncharitable world this is.

Strangely enough, in her trouble, her mind turned to the stronger sex in casting about for a good Samaritan. But what sort of man would be most likely to heed her plea and prove a friend in need, she could not determine.

Sitting unnoticed in the great station, friendless and alone with her trouble, Ella fell to watching the passing crowd hurrying to and from the continually arriving and departing boats and trains. Her knowledge of physiognomy was quite limited, and to her the faces in the moving throng were cold and inscrutable.

Unconscious of the passing time, she sat there endeavoring to muster enough courage to ask help. Her reddened eyes, shifting about the big room to the various centers of activity, fell momentarily on

the swinging doors leading from the ferries.

Two young men entered. Both were tall and well groomed; the one dark, the other a shade lighter, and each carried a suit-case. Other men, too, had entered those doors, men of all sorts, but something striking in the manner and appearance of these two—unmistakably brothers—appealed to her, and she felt that she could address them with some hope of success.

And when they approached the vacant seats beside her, Ella felt that for once that evening fortune had smiled on her. They stopped quite near, and dropped their suit-cases to consult a time-table.

Ella heard their voices, but could not distinguish the words. And as she watched them, they grew more in her favor.

Although she knew that they might soon disappear forever into the shifting crowd, she could not move, for when the moment came for action her limbs refused to stir. The young men stood for a while closely examining the time-table, and then, when they were apparently satisfied, grasped their suit-cases and strode away toward the baggage-room. And Ella felt that she had missed a golden opportunity.

But fortune seemed to be with her now, for shortly they returned, this time empty-handed. They strolled leisurely toward her, chatting pleasantly and stopped almost exactly where they had stood before.

And now desperation lent her courage. She succeeded in gaining her feet, and walked unsteadily toward them.

"I—beg—pardon," she began falteringly.

Both men faced her quickly as she addressed them, and one man's hand was raised instantly to his hat. The other quickly followed his example.

And at this slight courteous act she took heart, but her voice trembled as she continued:

"I—I—can—you—will one of you gentlemen please loan me twenty cents?" she finished in confusion.

She hesitated a moment.

"I expected to meet friends here," she hastened to explain; "but I have missed them. I—I want to telephone home for some one to come and get me, and—I haven't any money." How childish her plea seemed to her when she recalled it later.

"Well, don't worry about that," the dark-haired one answered kindly, as his hand sought his pocket.

"Are you quite sure that is all you require?" the other put in, his hand, too, instantly diving for coin.

Ella's first thought was one of grateful relief for their confidence in her, but even then she was conscious of the remarkably striking similarity in their voices.

"Oh, I thank you so much!" she exclaimed.

The words seemed wofully inadequate, but her tone made them convincing.

As the tinkling of coins caught her ear, the realization that she was actually begging struck her, and the thought of accepting money from strangers was repulsive.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, as their hands were drawn from their pockets; "I really don't want the money."

"Don't want the money?" the dark-haired Samaritan repeated, puzzled.

The other's look was one of perplexity.

"I only want you to—I mean, I only ask you to pay the operator after I make the call—that is, if you have time," she stammered.

"Our train leaves in twenty minutes, but we'll have time for that," the light-haired one assured her.

And again there was that striking sameness in their voices.

Completely reassured by their manner, her self-possession returned somewhat, and she spoke with greater confidence.

"Then I'll call up brother Bob now, and ask him to meet me here!" she exclaimed joyfully. "You see, I live in Newark, and that's too far to walk, or I wouldn't be in this embarrassing position."

"In Newark," the one Samaritan repeated. "Well, why don't you ask your brother to meet you at the station there? Don't bring him all the way to Jersey City."

"Yes," the other urged; "it would be a pleasure to assist you further."

"Your advice is good," she admitted hesitatingly; "but I am already indebted

to you too much, and even though I repay you the money—and I surely will—I shall never be able to repay your kindness."

No sooner had she accepted the offer than the dark Samaritan strode over to the ticket-window, while the other accompanied her to the telephone-booth. Ella gave her home number to the operator, and while he made the connection she spoke to one of her friends in need.

But her tone was coldly formal now, for she realized that in the fulness of her joy at having found assistance she might possibly suffer by too much friendliness.

"In order that there may be no doubt in your mind that I am honest in my statements, I must ask you to stand at the booth door and listen."

"It is not necessary; I believe you," he answered simply.

"Unless you grant my request I must refuse your aid," she insisted firmly.

"Here's your party," the attendant broke in. "Booth two, please."

Ella entered the booth, but did not close the door, and she spoke in a loud tone, so that the man outside might hear. And though he stood near, he did not listen, but conversed with the other, who had, by this time, returned with the ticket.

Ella, in the booth, managed to explain to Bob—between his exclamations of surprise—that she had missed the MacGregors and would arrive in Newark over the Pennsylvania on the next train. And, of course, ever obliging brother Bob said he would meet her.

She did not tell him of that affair at the station in Newark, when she had forgotten her change; nor of her present dependence on the kindness of strangers, for she felt that it would cause needless worry at home. Safely lodged in her own house, the details of her series of misfortunes would sound better than over the ten-mile stretch of telephone wire.

And when she placed the receiver on the hook, and emerged from the booth, the world seemed to be of a brighter hue.

While the one good Samaritan settled the telephone charge, the other handed her the Newark ticket.

"Your train leaves in a few minutes," he informed her. "Are you quite sure we can be of no further assistance?"

"Yes; can we do nothing more?" solicitously inquired he of the dark hair, who had joined them now.

"Quite sure, thank you," was the smiling reply. "But," she added quickly, "I cannot go before knowing to whom I am indebted for this kind assistance. I must have your name and address, so that I will be able to reimburse you. I can never hope to repay your kindness."

"Your appreciation has done that," the dark one replied. "May we accompany you to the train?" he added gallantly.

"If you wish," she answered graciously.

But she would rather have said: "If you will," for somehow—well, there was a true manliness, a certain delicate touch of sincerity and sympathy in his manner and tone which attracted her to him, and she was surprised to find herself wishing that she might be longer in his company. Both of them impressed her deeply.

"Am I detaining you?" she asked, as the three left the big waiting-room and emerged into the mammoth train-shed.

"Oh, no," was the reply. "We are waiting for a train which doesn't leave for some minutes. My brother is going to Pittsburgh for a short time, and I am here to see him off."

They had reached the Newark train now, and already the crew was making ready for departure.

"Newark train; all aboard!" the conductor shouted.

"Oh, you haven't told me who you are!" Ella exclaimed, as she realized that the time had arrived when she must say good-by.

"I haven't a card with me," the dark one announced, tapping his pockets. Then, turning to the other, he asked quickly: "Have you one of my cards—or, one of your own will do?"

The younger man produced a card and, with a fleeting glance at its inscription, passed it to Ella. And just at that moment the conductor dashed by, calling: "All aboard!"

Ella turned to the train, but as she mounted the steps the voice of the dark one detained her.

"I should like to know whether you arrive safely home," he was saying. "You'll let me know, won't you?"

And she promised.

"Good-by!" he called, smiling, as he raised his hat.

His brother, too, joined in the farewell.

"Good-by!" she answered.

And, as the train began to move, she disappeared through the car doorway.

Seated safely in the speeding train, Ella's first act was to examine the bit of pasteboard, whereon was inscribed the name and address of her unknown friends. She read the name, "William Allan Roggers" with approval, and the Brooklyn address, although unfamiliar, sounded equally well.

As she sat dreamily flipping the young man's card, a sudden thought struck her, which caused a frown of perplexity to pucker her brow. She tried to recall some remark or some action of the two which would serve to clear her mind, but although she could remember almost every word that had been passed, there was not one that would enlighten her.

"Have you one of my cards—or one of your own will do?" the one had asked the other. And the other had passed over a card, but—whose was it?

This was the perplexing problem Ella was endeavoring to solve. And to her it was a most important question, for, well—

"What difference *does* it make, after all?" she asked herself.

And when the train drew into the Newark station she had not yet answered the question.

Bob—rivaling woman in curiosity—met her at the station as he had promised, but she left his questions unanswered until safely and comfortably seated in her own home, and then Mrs. Vanson and her brother heard the details of the affair at the station.

Early next day, over the telephone, the anxious inquiry of the MacGregors was answered, and Ella learned, to her surprise, that she had passed them in the middle of the Hudson River while crossing to the Pennsylvania station. And later Ella recovered the nine dollars and eighty-five cents which she had left behind on that eventful evening.

There was still another obligation to be fulfilled as a result of her experiences, and this one—the most important—was left until last. Not that the cancelation of her debt to Mr. Roggers was an unpleasant duty—it was far from that—but the perplexing question connected therewith made its outcome uncertain.

Not until the next day did Ella despatch a note to the Brooklyn address, enclosing the paltry thirty-five cents.

And, as the days passed, no acknowledgment of its receipt came, and Ella tried to dismiss the whole affair from her mind, but it would not down, for she continually found herself wondering which of her benefactors was William Allan Roggers.

Perhaps it was the younger one—he of the light hair—and if so, her letter had probably been forwarded to Pittsburgh, thus accounting for the delay.

But why should she expect a reply? Her note had formally advised Mr. Roggers of her safe arrival, and thanked him for the assistance that had made this possible. Perhaps he considered the incident closed.

She confessed to herself the hope that it was not.

Then, when least expected, a letter came. The postmark revealed its source, and Ella eagerly slit the envelope.

The signature first engaged her attention. It was the same as on the card she had received on that eventful evening. But the contents did not reveal the writer's identity.

True, the name was the same as that on the card, but whether the card was that of the older or the younger man Ella had yet to learn. During the days of silence the younger brother had ample time to return from Pittsburgh. Perhaps the delay had been caused by his absence.

Although cruelly formal, the letter itself was a distinct surprise to Ella. The writer regretted the delay in acknowledging her note, and asked her indulgence. Then came the surprise.

Would she grant him permission to call? He begged her not to consider this an unwarranted liberty, and, should it not meet with her approval, her silence would close the incident. But the pleasure of having been of some assistance to her would always be a source of gratification.

Ella's silence lasted two whole days. Then, although ignorant of the identity

of her visitor, she bade him come, setting an evening ten days hence.

The time dragged slowly by, and when at last the evening arrived Ella was nervously anxious.

The expected buzz of the electric doorbell startled her, and she hastened through the hall to answer the summons herself. Through the glass panel of the door she could discern the outline of her visitor, but it was too indistinct to be recognizable.

She swung the door open, and Mr. William Allan Roggers stood before her smiling, his hat raised.

It was the younger brother!

At first inclined to be disappointed, Ella found him delightfully entertaining, and when he left that evening it was with a very cordial invitation to journey out to Newark again.

And now, since that affair at the station, Mr. William Allan Roggers carries a special trip-ticket between Brooklyn and Newark, for already he has begun to practise economy.

BLOWN INTO TROUBLE.

By ROBERT RUSSELL.

What came of intercepting a letter in the wind, capped by the last straw which was laid on the next morning.

I CERTAINLY was mad! Not irritated or annoyed. Just mad!

Struggling with all the strength of my one hundred and thirty-five pounds through Forty-Second Street, in the face of the worst gale that my forty years had ever known, and turning over in my mind a certain impending domestic trouble, I slipped on a banana-peel.

With difficulty I regained my equilibrium, and had just rescued my hat from the feet of a three-hundred-pound person following in my wake, when the final straw came: a head-on collision with a female sailing before the storm.

And so I was mad! With an indication of the strength of my feelings, I stamped my foot on a letter which the wind had borne to me along the walk.

Picking it up, I approached the woman directly in front of me, who seemed to be unconscious of the fact that it had been blown from beneath the string of a parcel she was carrying.

"Madam," I said, not very graciously.

"Sir," she replied haughtily, "I do not know you."

"Nor I you," I continued, "but the wind—"

"The wind has nothing to do with it," she interrupted.

"I beg your pardon, but—"

"I am glad you have the decency to do that, but it does not excuse your speaking to me. Mind your own business."

"I was not begging your pardon for speaking to you, but to state that the wind decidedly has something—"

She turned on me hastily, angrily, and in spite of my condition I could not but admire her majestic bearing.

"If you do not leave me alone," she said, "I shall appeal to a policeman."

"Very well, madam," I returned, "but the wind lifted—"

"Never mind what the wind did," she again interrupted, now thoroughly aroused, and turned to continue her way.

"I was only trying to do you a service, madam. If you will look at this letter it will explain."

I have never seen a woman quite as incensed as she was by this time, as she stopped, beckoned to a policeman, and said to me with suppressed anger:

"I do not want to look at any stock letter of explanation, which I presume has assisted you out of many other difficult situations," and then, turning to the policeman, she continued: "Officer, arrest this man for insulting me. I will follow you to the station-house."

I smiled at the officer, and began my explanation, but his whole attention seemed to be riveted on the charms of the woman. I waited, and when he had satisfied himself that she was about to

follow us he swung round to me with quite a different attitude.

"Come on, now," he said, "and no long story of a mistake."

"See here," I replied, "this is ridiculous. I was merely—"

"Say, now, masher, cut it. D'ye think I'll listen to a spiel from you when a lady like that says you insulted her?"

"But look here," I urged, "you have got to listen to me a minute."

"I've got to, eh? I'll show you. Come on," grabbing me by the sleeve. "You fellers always have a good story. Tell it to the sergeant; he's used to 'em."

I began to speak as calmly as I could.

"I was walking behind that woman—"

He stopped, twisted me around, and shook his fist in my face.

"Woman, eh? She's a lady, if ever I saw one. Say, you're old enough to know better, an' I've listened to you as long as I'm goin' to. You keep yer yap closed till we reach the station-house, or I'll give ye the punch ye deserve. Now, come on, an' fergit it."

A silent procession filed into the station and ranged itself before the desk.

I was going to have no further foolishness, and began immediately.

"I was walking behind this—"

The sergeant raised his hand.

"Wait," he said. "I'll hear you in a minute." Then to the policeman: "What is the charge?"

"Insulting this lady on the street. He told me the same story—"

"Well, madam?" to the woman.

"I have never seen the man," she began, "and he—"

"I guess I know the story, after lookin' at you," said the man behind the desk admiringly. To me he said:

"What d'ye think of yerself, eh?"

Again I failed to master my indignation.

"I think that this is the most outrageous—"

"Take him away, officer," interrupted the sergeant. "We know his kind." To the woman: "Be here at nine in the morning, to appear."

And away they took me, into probably the most hopeless-looking place that it has ever been my fortune to gaze upon.

I am not a mild-tempered man, and at first I fear I did nothing to relieve my situation, but rather made it worse by giving way completely to my feelings so long pent up.

My few companions in the common cell looked at me in amazement, as I dilated on the injustice of the police force in general and of the particular sergeant here in charge in particular.

"In course," remarked a red-headed youth, when I had subsided, "didn't ye know Billy was th' worst in th' city?"

"Aw," came from a bow-legged man in the corner, "dis guy ain't one two six wid Hammerin' Pat, behind de desk in de Foist."

Looking back on the experience now, my failures to communicate with friends seem humorous indeed, but on that day each report of a kind-hearted policeman whom I could persuade to speak to me through the bars seemed a death-sentence.

"Out, out," was the word brought to me every time I purchased a telephone-message with a five-dollar bill.

At last, as a final resort, I told the officer to telephone to my wife. His somewhat disgusted conference with me thereafter was the final straw.

"The gal that answered the phone says she's gone out for the day," and the man turned away.

So it was with every other attempt to secure communication with the outside world. Either my ignorance of the proper manner of procedure or else my previous ravings cut me off completely from the favors shown other unfortunates, and I was left alone with my thoughts.

About eleven o'clock that night our quarters began to fill with persons of every condition of life. There were the little, wiry gentleman to the button of whose coat a watch-chain not his own had in some mysterious manner attached itself; the young man in evening-clothes who had left his hack fare in another pocket, and who could not pay his cabby; the abused individual arrested for being knocked down by a rough person, after no provocation on his part.

Their tales of wrongs and misunderstandings would fill a book, but for me they made no shorter the long hours on the hard bench that had been built against the wall for the comfort of prisoners.

Those hours and the insight they brought me into the hearts of those whose

lives contained the recollection of many such are not pretty remembrances.

At last we disreputable characters, all in the sight of the officers waiting to tell of our doings, appeared before the judge.

The man with the unaccounted-for watch-chain passed me on his way to some secure spot behind iron bars. The young man whose evening-dress told a pathetic story in the early morning light was dismissed in the custody of his cab-driver. The belligerent person was disposed of in a manner satisfactory to his antagonist, and then my name was called.

I wish to slight this moment also, and merely to say that, no one appearing to make complaint, and the policeman who arrested me being unable to give any definite statement, I was discharged.

The morning air had never seemed so fresh to me, nor the sky so blue, and as I mounted the steps of my residence I think I was a more considerate person than I had ever been during the uneventful years of my previous life.

The door opened smoothly, my latch-key slipped out as though it had never caused me any irritated ejaculations, the hat-rack stood convenient to my hand, and I entered the library resolved that life should hereafter be one calm voyage.

I think that there was a peaceful smile on my face as I turned toward my favorite chair. I know that whatever expression had crossed my countenance faded slowly, and there came an awful wonder—a terrible consternation—in its stead.

There, with her back to me, sat the cause of my night's incarceration. The graceful figure, the proudly poised head, were before me, and then, as she faced me, I saw again the snapping black eyes.

"*You* here?" she cried, hastily rising to her feet. "Cannot I escape you anywhere? Is my kindness in refraining from appearing to make charges against you no lesson to your hardened senses? Am I not safe from your obnoxious presence even in my cousin's home?"

"Her cousin's home." She, then, was the cause not only of last night's discomfort, but also of my anger on the previous day over an impending domestic trouble. She had written my wife that she was coming to make us an indefinite visit—and here she was.

I thought of my recent experience, and smiled as I reached in my pocket.

"Allow me to return to you," I said, "a letter which the wind took from you yesterday."

She did *not* stay indefinitely.

THE MAGIC NICKEL.

By I. VICTOR PEARL.

The drug-store clerk and the fresh customer who ordered soda.

THE soda-water clerk rested his arm on one of the faucets, and, leaning back against the fountain, had about him the air of a man who is well aware that for the humble sum of five cents he is able to serve out a cool beverage that tastes so delectable on a sultry summer's day.

It was lunch-hour, and, as there was no one else in the store, he permitted himself to maintain this tranquil pose for quite a length of time. But he did not feel that he was loafing. For was he not ready to attend to any customer that should happen to come in?

And soon some one did come in. This customer was a stocky, unprepossessing individual, with distended jaw and beady eyes. Besides, he wore a black derby hat; and, really, there always seems to be something sinister about a man who wears a black derby on a hot summer's day.

But at the soda-water counter equality reigns, and those who possess a nickel are peers. So, when this particular customer sank upon a stool and pushed back his hat, the clerk took a respectfully attentive attitude.

"Sars'p'rilla," called out the stocky man raucously.

The clerk mixed some rich brown sirup and a ball of ice-cream with some charged water, and placed the fizzling, frothing drink before the thirsty man. The latter, seizing the spoon, began to gulp down the

contents of the glass with greedy, splashing noises.

When he was through he took out a handkerchief that looked like a dirty ball, and wiped his lips with it. Then he rose and began to saunter out.

"I—I beg pardon," called the clerk after him in an embarrassed fashion.

"Hey?" demanded the other, with the stern sidelong glance of a man who cannot imagine why he is being troubled.

"Didn't you forget to pay?" intimated the clerk, with awkwardness.

The stocky customer gave the clerk another sidelong glance. Then he caused his cheek to twitch upward in the direction of his eye—which act is surely the most jeering kind of wink possible.

Finally he chuckled and, pushing his hands still deeper into his pockets, slouched out of the store.

The young man behind the counter stared with wide eyes at the retreating figure. Then he shifted his gaze to the counter, to see if the ill-mannered fellow had not left some sort of coin there.

But, no; nothing in the shape of money was to be seen on it. The honest clerk stood aghast.

Here was impudence! Here was a case of insult heaped upon injury! Not only had the fellow refused to pay, but he had also been deliberately insulting!

Now, under ordinary circumstances, the clerk would never have thought of creating an ado on account of a nickel; but his soul thirsted for vengeance.

Without even taking the trouble to discard his apron, he bounded from his official place behind the counter and made after the defaulting rascal. The latter was only half a block away, and, with his hands still in his pockets, was pacing along in a leisurely fashion, as if he had never owed a debt to any man.

However, hardly was the pursuer within a few feet of him when the absconding fellow turned around suddenly, as if by instinct, and, seeing who was after him, started nimbly down the street. Now, the clerk, though a young man, was not a good runner; but he had a healthy pair of lungs, and forthwith proceeded to make use of them.

His cry "Stop thief!" sounded eloquent, and was lustily taken up by a score of others who had joined him in the exciting chase. At last, as was but inevitable, the fleeing man ran squarely into a policeman's arms.

"What's he been doin'?" demanded that impressive personage.

"He's had a soda in my store, and ran off without paying," alleged the clerk, with businesslike succinctness.

"I ain't paid, ain't I?" snarled the captured individual. "Well, I bet yer a hundred dollars I paid. I left a nickel on the counter—near that chewing-gum box. You kin go back and see; that is, if you ain't taken it away already."

"You left no nickel there," retorted the clerk, with the emphasis of a man who knows because he has seen. "And as for your saying that I took it off the counter," he continued disdainfully, "well, I won't even try to answer you on that score. But we can go back and look. Anyway, I've left the store all alone, and must get on the job again."

The three, followed by a small crowd, marched down the street and entered the store. When they stepped to the soda-water counter there followed a chorus of ejaculations. For, on it, near the chewing-gum box, lay indeed a nickel.

"Told you so!" exclaimed the stocky man, with a triumphant snicker.

"Young man," the officer of the law began, as he turned severely to the stupefied clerk, "you'd better consult an oculist quick! And git out of here, the whole bunch of ye!" he added fiercely to the rabble that began to fill the store.

When the clerk was left alone, he stood staring limply at the nickel on the counter, and kept pressing feverishly his face and his forehead.

He was suffering from a violent headache, as well as from a peculiar kind of uneasiness. When a man has made a complete fool of himself he is very apt to suffer in this manner.

"But I don't understand it at all," he murmured to himself. "Of course the fellow had a confederate who placed the nickel on the counter when I left the store. But why? What kind of a fool trick was this?"

He pressed his hand to his forehead again, lifted the nickel, and opened the cash-box.

Then he fell forward and gasped. The cash-box had been cleaned out!

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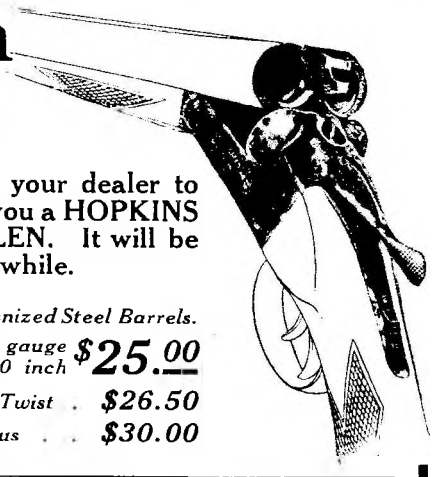

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If your dealer does not have genuine "Holeproof" Sox, bearing the "Holeproof" Trade-mark, order direct from us. (Remit in any convenient way). Mail this coupon to us and we will ship you the sox promptly and prepay transportation charges. And remember—the "Holeproof" guarantee protects you. If the sox come to holes and darning within six months, you get new sox FREE.

Holeproof Sox 6 pairs, $2. Medium, light, and extra light weight for midsummer wear. Black, light and dark tan, navy blue and pearl gray. Sizes, 9½ to 12. Six pairs of a size and weight in a box. One color or assorted to order.

Holeproof Stockings 6 pairs, $2. Medium weight. Black, tan, and black with white feet. Sizes, 8 to 11.

Holeproof Lustre-Sox Finished like silk. 6 pairs, $3. Extra light weight. Black, navy blue, Burgundy red, light and dark tan and pearl gray. Sizes, 9½ to 12.

Holeproof Lustre-Stockings Finished like silk. 6 pairs, $3. Extra light weight. Tan and black. Sizes, 8 to 11.

Reg. U. S. Pat. Office, 1906

Cut out coupon as memo

Holeproof Hosiery Co.,
176 Fourth St., Milwaukee, Wis.

Enclosed $___ Please send me _____

boxes of Holeproof _____ Size _____

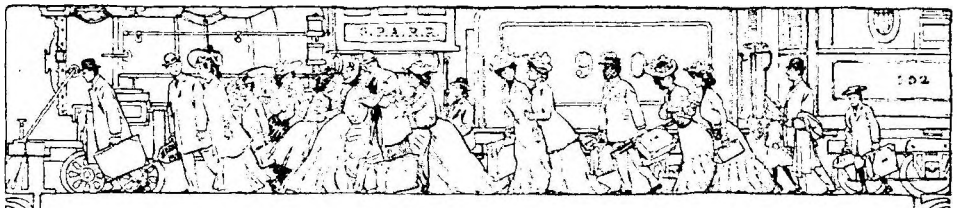
Weight _____ Colors _____

Name _____

Address _____

Holeproof Sox

3862



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If you know any stories of this sort write them and send them to the editor of the "True Story Series," RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE, Flatiron Building, New York, enclosing stamps. If the stories are unavailable, it goes without saying that they will be returned; if available, a check will be mailed to you immediately upon acceptance. Each story will be printed over the writer's signature.

You may never before have written for publication. No matter! Send your manuscripts, anyway; a true story writes itself.

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WHY IT IS SAFE

FIG. 1
Shows position of hammer, patent safety lever and firing-pin when not in use. Note the firing-pin and hammer do not touch, but—

FIG. 2
When the trigger is pulled, the hammer moves back and the patent safety lever moves up and in line with the firing pin, so that—

FIG 3
When the trigger is pulled, the hammer is released, striking the lever, which in turn hits the firing-pin.

This explains why accidental discharge is impossible with the

IVER JOHNSON SAFETY AUTOMATIC REVOLVER

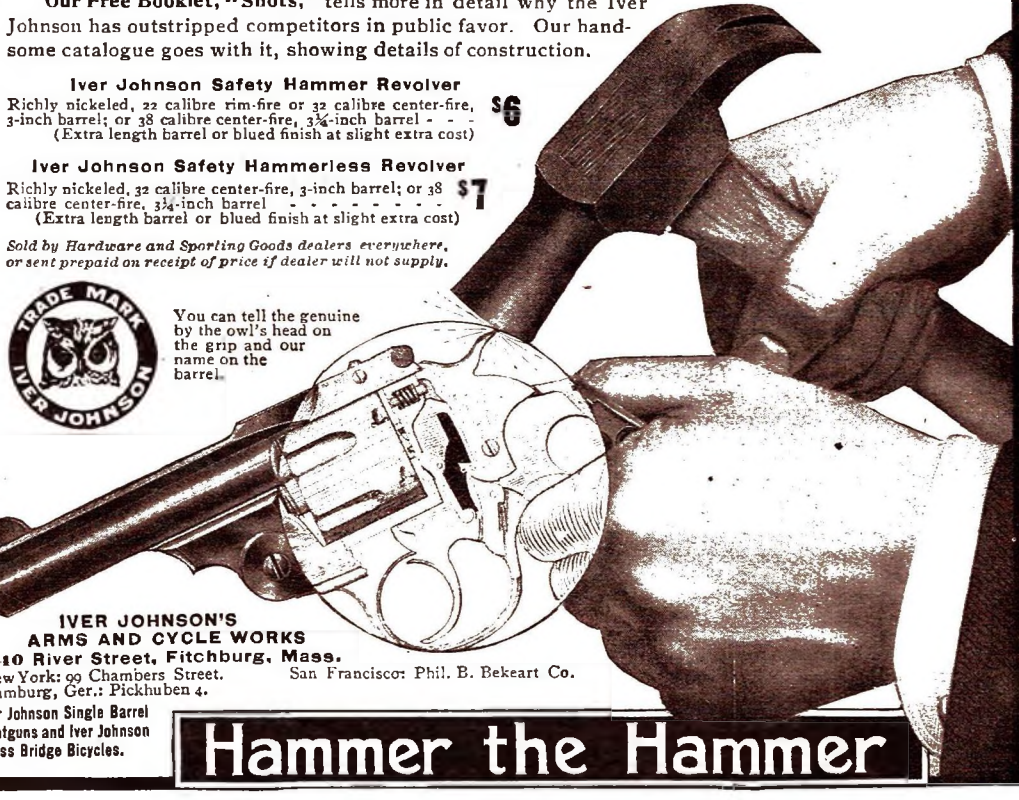
You can drop it, kick it downstairs, throw it against a wall, with no fear. Nothing doing until you pull the trigger. Then it shoots straight and hits hard. The best all-around revolver on the market.

Our Free Booklet, "Shots," tells more in detail why the Iver Johnson has outstripped competitors in public favor. Our handsome catalogue goes with it, showing details of construction.

Iver Johnson Safety Hammer Revolver
Richly nickeled, 22 calibre rim-fire or 32 calibre center-fire, 3-inch barrel; or 38 calibre center-fire, 3¼-inch barrel - - - **$6**
(Extra length barrel or blued finish at slight extra cost)

Iver Johnson Safety Hammerless Revolver
Richly nickeled, 32 calibre center-fire, 3-inch barrel; or 38 calibre center-fire, 3¼-inch barrel - - - - - - - - - **$7**
(Extra length barrel or blued finish at slight extra cost)

Sold by Hardware and Sporting Goods dealers everywhere, or sent prepaid on receipt of price if dealer will not supply.



You can tell the genuine by the owl's head on the grip and our name on the barrel.

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110 River Street, Fitchburg, Mass.
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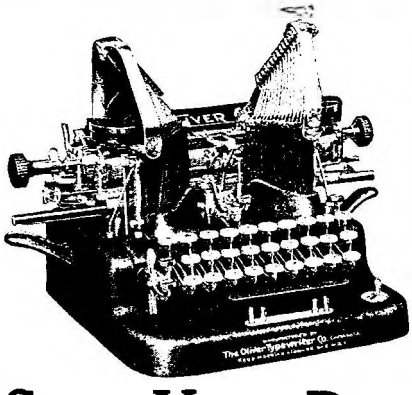
Seventeen Cents a Day
Buys an Oliver Typewriter!

This amazing offer—the New Model Oliver Typewriter No. 5 at *17 cents a day*—is open to everybody, everywhere.

It's our new and immensely popular plan of selling Oliver Typewriters on little easy payments. The abandonment of *longhand* in favor of clean, legible, beautiful *typewriting* is the next great step in human progress.



Already—in all lines of business and in all professions—the use of *pen-and-ink* is largely restricted to the writing of *signatures*.

Business Colleges and High Schools, watchful of the trend of public sentiment, are training a vast army of young people in the use of Oliver Typewriters.

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The Oliver, with the largest sale of any typewriter in existence, was the logical machine to take the initiative in bringing about the *universal use* of typewriters. It *always* leads!

Save Your Pennies and Own an Oliver

This "*17-Cents-a-Day*" selling plan makes the Oliver as easy to *own* as to *rent*. It places the machine within easy reach of every *home*—every *individual*. A man's "cigar money"—a woman's "pin money"—will buy it.

Clerks on small salaries can now afford to own Olivers. By utilizing spare moments for practice they may fit themselves for more important positions.

School boys and school girls can buy Olivers by saving their *pennies*.

You can buy an Oliver on this plan at the regular catalog price—$100. A small first payment brings the machine. Then you save 17 cents a day and pay monthly.

And the possession of an Oliver Typewriter enables you to *earn money to finish paying for the machine.*

Mechanical Advantages

The Oliver is the most highly perfected typewriter on the market—hence its *100 per cent efficiency*.

Among its scores of conveniences are:

- **the Balance Shift**
- **the Ruling Device**
- **the Double Release**
- **the Locomotive Base**
- **the Automatic Spacer**
- **the Automatic Tabulator**
- **the Disappearing Indicator**
- **the Adjustable Paper Fingers**
- **the Scientific Condensed Keyboard**

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The Oliver Typewriter turns out more work—of better quality and greater variety—than any other writing machine. Simplicity, strength, ease of operation and visibility are the corner stones of its towering supremacy in

- **Correspondence**
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- **Manifolding Service**
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- **Working on Ruled Forms**
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Can you spend 17 Cents a Day to better advantage than in the purchase of this wonderful machine?

Write for Special Easy Payment Proposition or see the nearest Oliver Agent. 4166

The Oliver Typewriter Co., 45 Oliver Building, Chicago.

Handy size and exact style of wrapping. Look for trade mark face on each box.

Photo of dollar outfit when opened. Count the 12 blades. Avoid bad imitations.

'Ever-Ready' 12 Bladed Safety Razor $1

EXTRA 'Ever-Ready' BLADES 10 for 50¢

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