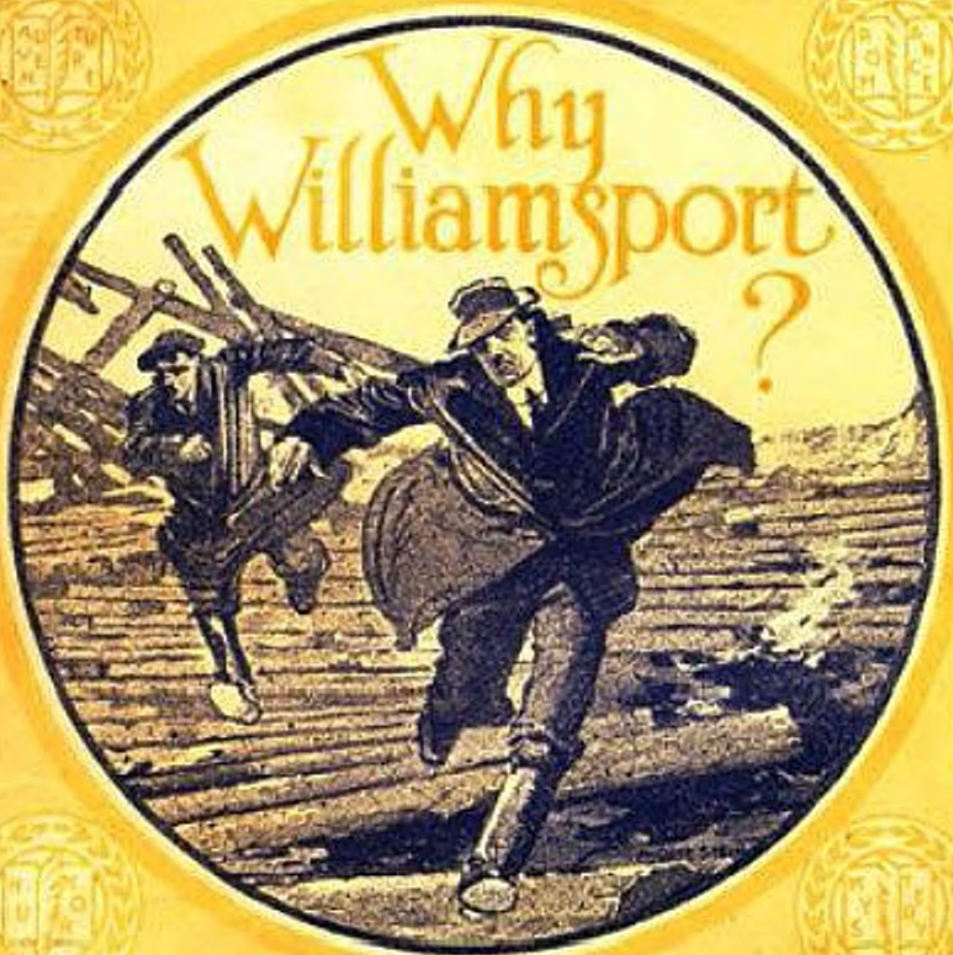
TWO NEW SERIALS BEGIN IN THIS ISSUE

THE ARGOSY

SEPTEMBER



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Why Williamsport?

by Douglas Pierce

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION.

"BUT why Williamsport?" puzzled "Fuzzy" McNeill. "Why Williamsport?"

He was standing in a group of residents of that thriving Pennsylvania city—dignitaries for the most part, including the mayor and president of the Board of Trade—who were gathered at the Philadelphia and Reading station to extend a fitting welcome to George P. Whittlemore.

Now, if you don't know who George P. Whittlemore is, you simply confess your own ignorance.

Just recall the tremendous success of "Alaska," "The Dome," and "The Other Fellow," not to mention a half dozen or more other plays which have come from his pen, and you will have no difficulty in placing him.

Called the Pinero of America, Whittlemore in a few short years has revolutionized the traditions of the stage, and given expression to our national ideals in a way no other man has even approximated.

His latest drama, "The Outlook," said to be a brilliant analytical study of the criminal mind, had been announced some months before, but had been held off from production through one delay after another until public interest was whetted almost to the feverish point with which Paris awaited Rostand's "Chantecler."

At last, though, came the definite promise of a presentation. It was to be on the night of June 14, Whittlemore stated—at Williamsport.

The dramatic critics hastily took down their atlases and gazetteers, and read:

"Williamsport, city, county seat of Lycoming County, Pa., on Susquehanna River; pop. 31,506."

Then in a body they besieged the famous author.

"Why Williamsport?" they demanded.

Whittlemore gave them very little satisfaction. He simply answered that for reasons sufficient to himself he had chosen that as the most desirable spot for the première.

Had he come from Williamsport, they persisted, or ever lived there? Was it, in short, a sentimental reason which had induced his choice?

"No," the dramatist responded. "I have never been to Williamsport in all my life."

"Is there any especial theatrical or histrionic reason, then?" they asked. "Has Williamsport a theater or stage particularly adequate for the production?"

Again Whittlemore shook his head.

"'The Outlook' doesn't require any elaborate facilities," he said. "Almost any properly equipped stage will do for it. As a matter of fact, we are going to put it on at a summer vaudeville theater in Vallamont Park, about a mile and a half out of Williamsport."

"In an amusement park?" they gasped.

"Yes"—Whittlemore grinned—"where the usual scale of prices, I believe, runs from ten to twenty-five cents, with a free ride on the trolley thrown in."

After that the dramatic critics had nothing more to say. Baffled and nonplused, they retired from the field.

"Pshaw!" growled the eldest one among them, a crusty old cynic. "It's merely a smooth press-agent trick. Whittlemore is simply working for a lot of free advertising for his old play."

Still, even that explanation failed entirely to satisfy, chiefly for the reason that the new play needed no booming. Already interest was aroused in it to such an extent that seats for a first performance would have brought a high premium, even though the show had been given at the Metropolitan Opera-House, or Madison Square Garden.

Consequently, the query, "Why Williamsport?" still continued, and, whether or not the resultant discussion helped the play, it certainly gave columns of publicity to the town.

The beauties, the advantages, the history of Williamsport were heralded to the world in a fashion that as paid matter would have been simply beyond price.

Not that Williamsport cared much. As a community, she is pretty well able to stand on her own merits without having to resort to puffery or buncombe.

Still, even the most substantial person is not immune to the subtle flattery of seeing his praises sung in print, and it cannot be said that Williamsport was in any way displeased at the sudden fame which had descended on her.

Nor was she insensible to the honor paid. Williamsport people knew quite as well as those in New York what the production of a new Whittlemore play meant to the literary and dramatic world, and the town was naturally agog with excitement over the coming event.

It was for this reason that the distinguished reception committee had gathered that morning at the Reading station to meet the great playwright.

Yet at Williamsport, as everywhere else, the unanswered question was in the back of every one's mind, and "Fuzzy" McNeill merely expressed the universal speculation when, for perhaps the ten thousandth time, he put it into words.

"Fuzzy" McNeill, despite his nickname, was not at all caterpillarlike, or woolly, or unraveled in appearance. On the contrary, he was a very trim, smooth-looking young man, whose clear-cut features and sharp, inquisitive glance told you he was a reporter as soon as you looked at him.

The pseudonym, like the love for printer's ink, was a sort of heritage in the family. It had been bestowed on Fuzzy's father when he was a war correspondent with the Army of the Potomac during the sixties, and each of the young fellow's brothers had borne it in turn when he entered newspaper life.

There was a Fuzzy McNeill in Boston on the *Journal*, another in Philadelphia on the *Times*, and another in San Francisco on the *Examiner*, and now Donald, the youngest of the family had grown into the name, and become star reporter on the Williamsport *Bee*.

It was that inbred "nose for news" which now kept Fuzzy the fifth pondering over the Whittlemore conundrum.

The mayor, in frock coat and high hat, happened to hear his muttered query, and turned with a trace of irritation.

"Well, why not Williamsport?" he observed, a trifle sharply. "I'm getting tired of hearing that eternal question. Surely we

have as intelligent and cultured a community as can be found anywhere. Why shouldn't Whittlemore come here to put on his show, if he feels like it?"

"No reason, none at all," rejoined the reporter. "Nor, on the other hand, is there any apparent reason why he should."

"Perhaps," suggested the president of the Board of Trade, "he is seeking for a fair and unbiased verdict on his work. He recognizes this as a representative American city, prejudiced neither for nor against him, and—"

"Fudge for that!" interrupted Fuzzy irreverently. "He'd never stir off Broadway if that was what he's looking for. He knows they hand it to 'em straight from the shoulder there, whereas here we wouldn't dare say it was bad if we thought his play a veritable piece of cheese."

"Well, what is his reason, then?" snapped the president of the Board of Trade. "He must have one."

"I don't know, nor why he didn't pick out the usual and nearer 'dog-towns,' New Haven, Atlantic City, or Trenton," said Fuzzy; "but, by jingo, I'm going to find out before Whittlemore leaves this burg."

CHAPTER II.

A DOUBTING THOMAS.

THE discussion ended at this point; for some one excitedly announced that the train was whistling in, and the reception committee had to line up along the platform.

A moment later the express rolled into the station, and the members of the company engaged to present "The Outlook" disembarked from the Pullman, loaded down with their bags and suit-cases.

Last of all came a short, alert man with iron-gray hair, close-cropped mustache, and shrewd, kindly eyes behind his gold-rimmed glasses, whom it was no trouble to recognize from his pictures as George P. Whittlemore.

The crowd swooped down upon him like a school of perch after a fly, and for the next few minutes he was kept busy with introductions and hand-shakings; but after a bit, the mayor, acting as a sort of master of ceremonies, evolved some kind of order out of the chaos, and bore off the distinguished visitor to an open-face hack with white horses.

The members of the theatrical company, together with the remainder of the reception committee, filled up a long string of carriages behind; and a procession having thus been formed, the way was led up Pine Street, and through Fourth, to the Park Hotel.

Whittlemore had nothing but praise for what he saw. The substantial business houses and the evidences of thrift and prosperity along the earlier part of the ride drew his attention no less than the handsome residences set back in their wide yards after the party had turned the corner and were proceeding along tree-shaded Fourth Street.

Nor was it any counterfeit admiration he expressed.

Whatever else may be said of Peter Hurtig—the man who did for Williamsport much what "Boss" Shepherd did to the national capital after the close of the Civil War—it cannot be denied that he, to a great extent, transformed the town, and infused a sense of civic pride equaled by but few other places in the country.

Williamsport is a beautiful city, not only through location, but also by the efforts which its citizens have put forth.

Its stores are up-to-date and enterprising; its churches, schools, and public buildings imposing; and its homes stamped with the indefinable mark of class.

One of the show-places of the town is the Park Hotel, with its wide verandas and ornate architecture, as it stands set back in spacious grounds filled with trees and ornamented by beds of blooming flowers.

Here the procession halted, and Whittlemore, having alighted from his carriage and mounted the steps, was speedily surrounded, the crowd which had followed his triumphal entry being augmented by accessions from within the hotel.

"My friends," he said at length in response to repeated demands for a speech, "my friends—for surely I must consider you all such in the face of this flattering welcome—one of the big detectives of real life recently said there was no such thing as a 'mystery' outside of the story-books; that the criminal invariably leaves a trail as wide as a barn door, if one only has sufficient sense to follow it; and, in the light of recent events, I am inclined to agree with him.

"A great 'mystery' has been made by those enterprising chaps, the newspaper

boys, out of the fact that I have chosen your charming city as the place to give the initial presentation of my new play.

"We have been assailed with the question, 'Why Williamsport?' until our ears are sickened; and all the time the explanation is so simple and natural that you'd think almost anybody would hit on it.

"If I have not enlightened the seekers for information, believe me it was more from a desire to tease than because I had any deep, dark secret to conceal.

"In short, the real reason why I selected Williamsport, apart from those advantages which have already been mentioned—the culture and intelligence of its people, the possibility of securing an open-air theater so suitable for this time of year, *et cetera*—was because I wished to economize my time and kill two birds with one stone.

"I am a pretty busy man, as some of you may know, and as I have on hand a play dealing with this region and centering about the logging industry, the idea struck me that by putting on 'The Outlook' here I would also have the opportunity to imbibe the local color and atmosphere necessary for my next venture.

"That is the answer, ladies and gentlemen, to the oft-repeated query, 'Why Williamsport?' but, although I don't want to utter any threats, I am afraid, since you have made my coming so pleasant, that I shall be strongly tempted to follow suit with all my future productions, and bring them first to Williamsport. It looks to me very much as though I were due to catch the Williamsport habit."

"All right," the crowd laughed back at him. "Come whenever you like. The oftener the better."

Then ensued another season of handshaking and introductions — Whittlemore meeting, as it seemed to him, about half the population of the town; but finally, on the plea that his presence was urgently required at the theater in order to conduct the final rehearsal, he managed to break away from the courtesies showered upon him, and with the members of the company set out for the amusement park.

He put in the afternoon at hard work, and returning to the hotel at five o'clock pretty well tuckered out, retired to his room, leaving word at the desk that he expected to lie down until dinner-time, and was not to be disturbed for anything short of a fire or earthquake.

Hardly had he removed his coat and collar, however, and stretched himself out on the couch, before a "bell-hop" with only a preliminary knock bolted in at the door, and presented a card.

"Sorry, suh." The boy stood discreetly ready to dodge, if Whittlemore should start to throw anything. "But we jest couldn't git rid of de gen'l'man no way. He say he done got to see you."

The dramatist tore the card into shreds without even glancing at it.

"Tell the fellow to go to the dickens," he snapped crossly; "and ask that clerk, too, what he means by sending you up here, after I left such positive orders that I was not to be disturbed?"

"Yas, suh," murmured the boy apologetically. "I know it's wrong, suh. But you can't blame us, suh. Dat ar Fuzzy McNeill he sho' hab a way of gittin' what he wants."

Whittlemore sat up suddenly on the couch.

"Who?" he demanded. "Did you say Fuzzy McNeill?"

"Yas, suh. "Dat's de gen'l'man what's wantin' to see you. He's got some writin' dere on de card fer you."

Whittlemore hurriedly stooped over and, gathering up the fragments of pasteboard from the floor, pieced them together.

"Donald McNeill," he read, "representing the Williamsport *Daily Bee*," while down in one corner was the penciled line:

"Brother to the Fuzzy McNeill with whom you used to work on the Boston *Journal*."

The dramatist hesitated a moment; then turned to the bell-boy.

"Show Mr. McNeill up," he said.

"No need for that," spoke up a blithe voice from the doorway. "I'm here already." And Fuzzy entered the room.

Whittlemore cast a swift glance of appraisal at his unceremonious visitor, and nodded as though satisfied with what he saw. As the bell-boy had said, Fuzzy McNeill had a "way" with him, a sort of likable audacity which carried him through the most difficult situations.

Laughingly the dramatist extended his hand.

"You're a chip off the old block; that's plain enough," he said, genially, motioning the other to a chair, and rummaging in his suit-case for a box of cigars. "Tell me, how is your brother? I haven't seen or

heard from the old scamp in over six months."

"Oh, Bob's all right," rejoined Fuzzy, impatiently, "but I didn't come up here and murder sleep for you, like *Macbeth*, in order to discuss my relatives. I'm here for business."

"Ah?" Whittlemore, although still smiling, slightly elevated his eyebrows. "Well, in that case, what can I do for you?"

"You can answer me one question. I know it's pretty rough to butt in on you this way, when you must be dog-tired, but it's the one chance I have to get you alone, for to-night, of course, you'll have a bunch trailing you everywhere you go."

"Oh, cut out the excuses," returned Whittlemore. "I'd stand for a good deal worse, for the sake of your brother. What is it you want to find out?"

"Same old thing, Mr. Whittlemore," said Fuzzy. "Why Williamsport?"

"But, my dear boy, I gave a full explanation of all that this morning. Didn't you hear the little speech I made down on the steps of the hotel?"

"Oh, yes; I heard that all right."

"Well, then, why come to me with this inquiry, when you already know all there is to be known?"

Fuzzy's lip curled into an expression of skeptical scorn.

"Look here, Mr. Whittlemore," he said, "that sort of bull con you handed out may go down with a lot of people, but after having been in the business yourself, you never expected a real reporter to swallow it, did you? What I want to know is the genuine answer. Come, now, give it to me straight. Why Williamsport?"

CHAPTER III.

A FAIR PROPOSITION.

The dramatist lighted a cigar and puffed at it thoughtfully for a moment or two before answering.

"You are determined not to believe me, eh?" he said at length, "when I tell you that it is merely to get local color and atmosphere for my new play?"

"Oh, yes; I believe that fast enough," granted Fuzzy, "but I say it's not your chief reason. There's something else behind it.

"You know, Mr. Whittlemore," he went on, "that we reporters get a sort of sixth sense; we can scent the presence of a piece of news when there is nothing in sight to justify our suspicions. You could have tried your show 'on the dog' at Albany, or Atlantic City, or New Haven, or almost any town in the country, and nobody would have given the matter a second thought. But the minute you said Williamsport, every newspaper man in the country felt instinctively that there was a story behind your choice.

"That is why I am so certain of my ground," he concluded, with an emphatic little jerk of the head. "If it was only myself who had the idea, I might put it down to imagination; but we can't all be wrong."

"I don't know about that," commented the other quizzically. "There have been delusions which swept whole communities. The 'Mississippi Bubble,' the tulip craze in Holland, the—"

"Maybe so," interrupted McNeill; "but there never yet was a delusion which swept the whole newspaper fraternity. Nor is this one; now is it?"

Whittlemore smiled.

"I refuse to incriminate myself," he bantered; "and if you're the newspaper man you claim to be, I don't have to. Let me remind you of what I said this morning. There is no such thing as a mystery. The motive for every act is as plain as a pikestaff, if one only looks for it in the right way.

"Now," he challenged, "you insist that I have an ulterior purpose in coming here; suppose you go ahead and hunt for it. I'll promise at least to tell you whether or not you have called the turn."

Fuzzy looked plainly disappointed.

"There seems to be so little to go on," he muttered.

"Oh, pshaw!" mocked the dramatist. "There is always plenty to go on, if one only has the eyes to see it. Come, now; I'll give you a start. Let's eliminate all the impossible reasons, and thus clear the field. What's your guess at the riddle?"

"Well, I have thought it might be a girl," suggested Fuzzy.

"Good Lord, no!" ejaculated Whittlemore with emphasis. "Whatever put that idea into your head?"

"Nothing, except that it's generally the explanation for most fool actions."

"Not in this case, son," Whittlemore

gave solemn assurance. "I've been a bachelor for forty-two years now, and with the help of Heaven, I am going to stay one. No; you can take it from me, there are no petticoats on this line of wash.

"What's your next guess?" he queried, with a twinkle in his eye.

"No more." Fuzzy shook his head. "If the reason isn't a feminine one, I'm stumped."

"Good. That leaves your mind free and unbiased, and is the point I was aiming for.

"Now, I'll tell you what I am going to do with you, young man," he went on. "I'll give you the chance to work this thing out. Mind you, I don't admit for a moment that it's anything but a mare's nest you have stirred up; but you shall have every opportunity of proving the contrary, if you are able to do it. You can be with me every moment I am in Williamsport, if you care to; hear everything I have to say, and see everything I do. In short, I am going to submit myself to your closest surveillance. Then, if you fail to discover anything, it will be either that you are not shrewd enough to detect it, or else that there is nothing to discover. That's a fair proposition, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," assented Fuzzy gratefully, "and almighty white of you, into the bargain, Mr. Whittlemore."

"Not at all," demurred the dramatist. "I am simply testing for my own satisfaction my theory in regard to so-called 'mysteries.' I assert that any one of ordinary intelligence, by exercising reasonable observation, can come pretty close to deciphering any human secret, no matter how closely guarded; and I shall be greatly disappointed if, before I leave Williamsport, you have not told me the answer to your question.

"I warn you, though," he added jocosely, "that you'll have to be on the job. I shall use every means in my power to fool you, and lead you astray."

"Go as far as you like." McNeill nodded confidently. "I'm not setting up to be infallible; but when it comes to stringing a reporter, there's a few past masters right here in Williamsport, and my eye-teeth have been pretty well cut. You're welcome to anything in that line you can put over.

"And now," he queried, "when is this sleuthing of mine to commence?"

"At once," returned Whittlemore. He glanced at his watch. "Time for dinner now. We'll have it together, eh, and then go out to the theater?"

Fuzzy, of course, was nothing loath; so, after the playwright had freshened up a bit, they went down to the dining-room.

While they were eating, a tall, rather imposing-looking man in a blond, florid style, entered, and as he passed their table gave the reporter a little nod of recognition.

"Oh, colonel"—McNeill halted him—"I want you to meet Mr. Whittlemore. Mr. Whittlemore, this is Colonel Thropley, the proprietor of the *Bee*, and my boss. Colonel Thropley was unable to be down at the station with the other members of the reception committee this morning."

"Glad to meet Colonel Thropley, I am sure," murmured Whittlemore politely; but Fuzzy noticed that the usual geniality was lacking from his tone, and that he did not offer to shake hands.

The newspaper proprietor, however, appeared to observe nothing amiss, and waxed rather effusive in acknowledging the introduction.

"You are here chiefly to get material for a new play, I understand, Mr. Whittlemore," he observed after the first interchange of civilities, "dealing particularly with the logging industry?"

"Yes," broke in McNeill, "and he has certainly struck a lucky time; for that reminds me, I heard this afternoon they're going to send a million logs over the dam to-morrow."

"A million logs?" repeated the playwright, lifting his eyes incredulously. "Surely you are joking?"

"Oh, no," Colonel Thropley struck in. "That is not a record drive, by any means. Still, you ought not to miss the sight, Mr. Whittlemore. It will furnish you plenty of excitement, especially if the logs happen to jam in the chute."

"Nor is he going to miss it," Fuzzy again spoke up. "If Mr. Whittlemore will accept me as his guide, I'll guarantee he sees everything to be seen, eh, colonel?"

"I guess that's right," laughed Thropley, dropping his hand on the shoulder of his young employee. "Fuzzy here has been watching log-drives since he was knee-high to a duck, and can pretty near qualify as an expert.

"Only you want to be careful, if you follow his lead, Mr. Whittlemore," he cau-

tioned. "The young rascal has had I don't know how many hairbreadth escapes on such occasions through his recklessness."

"Now, colonel," protested the reporter, "first thing you know, you'll be scaring him out. You don't think I'm going to take any unnecessary chances with America's foremost dramatist in tow, do you?"

There was some more banter of the sort, and then the colonel moved down the room.

Before he left, however, he took occasion to express his thanks for the courtesy which had been extended to him in placing a *loge* at his disposal for that evening's performance.

"The house manager tells me that this is in addition to the usual press seats reserved for our staff," he said, "and is done at your personal request."

Whittlemore smiled a trifle quizzically.

"Better wait until the show is over before you make too much of the compliment, colonel," he said. "Remember, you may not like it."

"Small danger of that." The newspaper proprietor laughed again. Then, with another of his effusive bows, he passed on to his own table.

"There'll be no doubt of his occupying that *loge*, will there?" Whittlemore questioned the reporter eagerly—so eagerly that Fuzzy glanced up with a touch of surprise.

"Doubt? Is there any doubt about a duck taking to water? Of course he'll be there, and equally, of course, Miss Merle Potter will be with him."

The dramatist gave a start.

"Miss Merle Potter?" he repeated.

"Sure. He goes everywhere with her. The talk is that they are just about as good as engaged. But why do you speak in that tone? Do you know Miss Potter?"

But Whittlemore did not answer directly. His face had grown absorbed and troubled. The kindly look was entirely gone from his eyes.

"Do you really mean to tell me," he muttered, "that such a beautiful young girl as Merle Potter is thinking of marrying that —that man? Why, to mention only one objection, he is old enough to be her father!"

"Ah!" Fuzzy drew a long breath. "I see you do know her." He leaned across the table. "I guess, too, Mr. Whittlemore, that you were four-flushing a bit, weren't you, when you said there was no petticoat on your line of wash?"

But the other had recovered from his momentary agitation.

"My dear boy," he said dryly, "you jump a trifle hastily at conclusions. If you had thought just a minute, you would have realized that the objection of age I advanced against Colonel Thropley is equally valid against myself. I am interested in Miss Potter because I happen to have met her, and because her father was the one man to stand by and help me out in the greatest crisis of my life. Everything I am or have accomplished I owe to the generosity and big-heartedness of Harlan F. Potter, and naturally I feel a deep concern in regard to the welfare and happiness of his daughter. But—" He paused and half-glanced down the room toward where Thropley was seated.

"But what?" asked Fuzzy.

"But if you're looking for the true answer to 'Why Williamsport?'"—Whittlemore smiled—"you'll have to seek it in another direction."

CHAPTER IV.

PROBING A TRAGEDY.

"YES," Whittlemore went on half musingly, "old Harlan Potter was a good friend to me. I was a waif, you know, left an orphan on the charity of strangers, and got kicked about so that presently I became incorrigible, and was packed off to a reformatory. It was about a hundred-to-one shot that I'd end up as a burglar or crook of some sort.

"But just about that time old man Potter came along. He was a trustee of the institution where I was incarcerated, and as I was doing a spell of punishment, he stopped and had a little chat with me. Honest, McNeill, that was the first time I'd ever had a kind word said to me in all my life, and I felt keenly grateful.

"The old fellow didn't stop with kind words, however. That wasn't his way. I guess he saw I had the making of something a bit better than a yeggman in me; for he interested himself in my behalf, got me out of that place, and sent me off to school at his own expense. I insisted afterward, I am glad to say, on regarding what he had put up for me as a loan, and forcing him to take back every cent of it with interest; but that doesn't detract at all from the true philanthropy of his action.

"Later, too, when I wanted to devote myself absolutely to playwriting, yet felt that I couldn't afford to give up the journalistic work which was bringing in my bread and butter, he backed me through one failure after another, until finally I got 'Alaska' on the boards.

"That time, moreover, he simply refused to accept any of the money he had advanced.

"'I took it before, George, for your own good,' he said. 'It meant something to you then to pay back, and helped strengthen your moral fiber. But now the money is piling in on you so fast that the amount you owe me is absolutely immaterial to you. So, do me the favor, my boy, of letting me feel that I have had just a little share in making your success.'

"Oh, I tell you," Whittlemore broke off with a shake of the head, "there was one grand old man. I couldn't have felt worse when I heard he was dead, if it had been my own father."

"Yes, I know," assented Fuzzy, "for there were lots of other people who felt the same way. You weren't the only one old man Potter helped, not by a long shot.

"Why, to look no farther, there's the colonel"—nodding his head toward his employer—"Potter had a double-riveted mortgage on everything Thropley possessed, and as the *Bee* wasn't doing very well just then, it was confidently expected that the old man would have to take over the property. But, bless you, it was discovered after Potter's death that the notes were missing. Evidently the old fellow, with his passion for doing good by stealth, had destroyed them, and never said anything about it."

"Yes," commented Whittlemore slowly, "that would have been very characteristic of Potter.

"By the way," he asked, changing the subject, "wasn't it Thropley who was out with the old man the day he got killed?"

"Sure it was." The reporter nodded. "And he was a nervous wreck over it afterward, not only from the shock of the tragedy, you understand, but also because of a feeling that on account of those notes people might think he was in some way responsible, although, of course, no one really acquainted with the facts could imagine such a thing for a minute.

"It was this way, you see." Fuzzy dropped into a narrative tone. "Mr. Potter and the colonel started to drive over to Jersey Shore on a business errand, and as it was in the quail season, took their guns along on the chance of picking up a few birds. They sighted a covey, and at once went after them, taking opposite sides of the field in which the birds had settled. Presently, the colonel heard a shot; but thought nothing of it, as a little tongue of woodland which ran down into the field prevented him from seeing what had happened. A moment or two later, though, he heard a call for help from a farmer who had witnessed the tragedy, and hurrying in the direction of the shouts, found Mr. Potter just breathing his last.

"It was the old story of trying to climb a fence with a loaded gun in your hands. The hammer had caught in a trailing vine, and the full charge of one barrel had entered the old man's breast.

"The only peculiar thing about the incident," Fuzzy continued, "was that Potter had always been overcautious in his hunting. He was an enthusiastic sportsman, but he would lose many a good shot rather than take any chances with a loaded gun. The only explanation for his carelessness on this occasion is that he must have forgotten slipping in the cartridges and so thought the gun wasn't loaded."

"Yes," observed Whittlemore, who had been listening closely, "that is just about the way I got the circumstances from the newspapers. Unfortunately I was in the hospital at the time with a broken leg, and couldn't come on to the funeral. All I could do was to write my condolences to Mrs. Potter.

"But tell me," he asked, poising a mouthful of pie on his fork, "did anybody examine Potter's cartridge-belt after the shooting?"

"Not that I ever heard of. Why should they?"

"To see whether the cartridges in the gun came from it."

"But of course they did. They were in the gun, weren't they? Where else would Potter have got them except from his belt?"

"Where else, indeed?" The dramatist shrugged his shoulders. "But, my dear boy, had any one taken the trouble to look, that would have been definite knowledge; and the older you get the more you'll learn that an ounce of definite knowledge is worth a pound of conjecture any day in the week.

"Another thing," he went on. "What

was the business matter which was taking the two men to Jersey Shore that day? Did anybody take the trouble to inquire into that?"

"Oh, yes." McNeill flushed a little at the sarcastic tone of the question. "The colonel made no secret of it. They were going over to look at a piece of land which he wished to offer Potter as security for an extension of his loans. It was the last unencumbered thing he owned, and although it wasn't worth a darn, I guess he was hoping against hope to rope the old man in on it. The land was just a little beyond the field where the shooting occurred."

"Then, were they going to it, or returning, when they stopped to engage in quail-hunting?"

"Going to it."

"How do you know?"

"The colonel said so."

"Very good. But was there no corroborative evidence sought? Did nobody follow the tracks of their buggy-wheels, or seek for some person who might have seen them? An important point of that sort ought not to rest on the unsupported testimony of one man."

"An important point? How do you make that out?"

"Well, would it not have been an important point to be sure whether or not Mr. Potter had seen that land, and if so, what answer he returned to the proposition of Colonel Thropley?

"However"—he gave an impatient wave of the hand—"there is no use in going into that phase of the matter now. After the lapse of two years, it would, of course, be impossible to find out."

"What difference would it make, anyhow?" demanded Fuzzy. "The notes were destroyed, weren't they? Potter was merely bluffing in a benevolent way, when he set out on the trip that morning."

"Ah, true," assented Whittlemore. "I had forgotten for the moment that the notes were out of existence. Well, that practically settles the question, doesn't it?" And he calmly drank of his coffee.

Still there was something in the manner of his agreement which did not entirely satisfy the reporter.

Fuzzy, eying the other narrowly, sat pondering a moment or so; then suddenly broke out with:

"Look here, Mr. Whittlemore, you surely don't mean to insinuate—"

"I mean to insinuate"—Whittlemore smiled bafflingly as he drew out his watch—"that it's high time we were on our way to the theater."

"But answer me one question," persisted the reporter. "Has this almost forgotten tragedy anything to do with your coming to Williamsport?"

"Ah, Fuzzy! Fuzzy!" The dramatist shook a deprecating finger. "Didn't I warn you to be on the lookout for hocus-pocus? I am afraid, for all your boasting, you are an easy mark.

"Come on." He rose from the table. "Let's go out to the show. Perhaps you may find the answer to your conundrum there?"

CHAPTER V.

A PUZZLING SCRUTINY.

Fuzzy had no chance for any further questioning then; for, as they emerged from the dining-room, the reception committee swooped down upon the playwright and bore him off to the handsome parlor-car placed at his disposal by the Williamsport Traction Company.

Like a chariot of fire, with lights blazing from every coign of vantage, it swept through the streets of the town with its distinguished company aboard; then headed for the open country, and the mile and a half run to Vallamont Park.

It was a beautiful evening, with the moon riding high in the heavens, and Whittlemore could not restrain his admiration as he sat gazing out of the window.

Swiftly the car sped up into the rolling hills, beyond which frowned like sentinels a ring of mountains, while below spread the wide, peaceful valley of the Susquehanna, the lights of the city stretching along its shores.

All too short was the ride, indeed, for the author's enthusiasm; for it was but a few minutes until the big, glowing archway which marked the entrance to the park hove into view, and they were at their destination.

Early as it was, crowds were already pouring in at the gate, quite content to sit about under the trees in the cool evening air and listen to the strains of an excellent band until the hour for the performance arrived.

Noting this, and noting, too, the big win-

dows of the rustic playhouse, now open to permit of perfect ventilation, Whittlemore turned to Fuzzy with a humorous twinkle in his eye.

"Did you ask me, 'Why Williamsport?'?" he said. "Compare this, my son, with what a *première* to-night would have been on hot, stuffy, noisy Broadway with the lights all blazing, and a perspiring throng pushing into the theater, the whirring of the electric fans only serving to stir up the desiccated air, and the temper of everybody back of the curtain worn to a raw edge with the heat. It's all the difference, I tell you, between an Inferno and the Garden of Eden."

"Maybe so," admitted the reporter; "but all the same, that's not the reason you came here. You might have gone to ocean's edge in Atlantic City, you know."

"Ah, none so stubborn as those who won't be convinced," railed Whittlemore.

They were at the entrance to the theater by this time, and the mayor indicated a sort of throne prominently arranged in the center of the auditorium where the playwright was supposed to sit during the performance, surrounded by the members of the reception committee.

"Is my modesty to be slaughtered thus to make a Williamsport holiday?" muttered Whittlemore under his breath. "Not on your life!"

Diplomatically he expressed his appreciation of the compliment shown him, but at the same time pointed out that his duties would require him to be back on the stage more or less during the evening.

Then, with a furtive nudge to Fuzzy, and a whispered "Come on," he led the way rapidly to the rear of the playhouse.

Later, when the audience was all assembled and the curtain just about to rise—for Williamsport does not have New York's bad habit of straggling in all through the first act—the two stole around again, and took obscure seats well toward the back of the auditorium.

They were hardly settled, with Whittlemore congratulating himself on having entered unobserved of the reception committee, when Fuzzy gave him a jog with his elbow.

"There! What did I tell you!" exclaimed the reporter. "Didn't I say Thropley would be here with Miss Merle Potter?"

Whittlemore quickly glanced in the direction indicated, and saw the blond, portly colonel just ushering into a *loge* at one side of the theater a strikingly lovely girl of about twenty-two.

"Jove!" he muttered involuntarily, as he gazed at the animated face with the dark eyes and long lashes. "So that is Merle Potter? What a wonderful transformation from the rather gawky child I used to see at Bar Harbor six years ago!"

He continued to stare as though fascinated, and Fuzzy, observing him, shrewdly speculated whether a petticoat might not now be on the dramatist's line of wash, even though there had been none when he came to town.

He had not long to ponder the problem, however; for by this time the curtain had risen, and Fuzzy, gripped by the swift unfolding of the action, found himself with eyes and ears for nothing but the play.

It was a murder mystery about which Whittlemore had written, yet it was more than that. As though with a scalpel he laid bare the inner workings of an essentially criminal mind in a man of intelligence and culture.

With consummate craft, the character around whom was woven the story laid his guilty plans, leaving as it seemed no possible loophole by which responsibility could be traced to him.

Every circumstance he deftly arranged so as to point to the suicide of his victim, and then, with his end accomplished, and the sordid motive gratified which prompted it, he felt free to exult in his diabolical cunning.

Yet all the time one felt—so subtly had the author spun his threads—that Nemesis was impending, that sooner or later the weak joint would crop up in his structure of duplicity which would bring both it and him down in ruin.

This element of sustained suspense, in the art of creating which, no less than in his faultless character-drawing, Whittlemore was a master, gave the chief interest to the play; and the audience there that night at Vallamont Park hardly breathed as one tense, absorbing situation followed another, all linked to the central theme.

Fuzzy, although not as a rule an overimpressionable youth, sat on the edge of his seat on tiptoe with excitement, lost, as has already been said, to everything except what was taking place beyond the footlights.

Yet, for all his oblivion, the instinct of the reporter did not entirely desert him. In a subconscious sort of way, he knew that Whittlemore did not share his interest in the pictured scene, was indeed—strange as it may seem with an author at a trial performance—not following the action of the play at all.

As the curtain fell at the end of the first act, and the deafening thunders of applause awoke Fuzzy from his trance, the fellow turned to uncork some of his enthusiasm on his companion.

But he had to repeat his remark twice before he got any response from Whittlemore.

The elder man's eyes were glued on the *loge* where sat Merle Potter, as though—to use Fuzzy's expression—he was getting ready to eat her up.

"Well, if that's the way tender yearnings take 'em, excuse me from any of it," muttered the reporter. "He looks like a Corsican vendettist getting ready to use his stiletto."

And it must be admitted that, although there came an occasional gleam of softness, Whittlemore's expression was for the most part stern and relentless as that of an avenging Fate.

CHAPTER VI.

"FOR JUST ONE PERSON."

THE play was over, and everybody, satisfied with the dénouement, clapped and clapped, while the company returned again and again to the stage to bow its thanks.

All concerned had covered themselves with glory, for there had not been a single flaw in the presentation, and there could be but one judgment in regard to the merits of the piece.

Already the correspondents of the big city papers were hurrying off to wire their editors that Whittlemore had scored another brilliant success, and even eclipsed himself in this latest effort.

Called before the curtain at the end of the third act, the author had made a felicitous little speech in which he had repeated, although in different phrasing, most of his sentiments of the morning.

There was one sentence, however, that no one seemed exactly to understand.

"For just one person in the world this play was written," he said; "and if that one person comprehends its meaning and message, even though all the rest of the world had condemned it, I should have been content. But when, in addition, you, the public, bestow upon it your favor and applause, as you have done to-night, I feel that my cup is full and running over."

"A girl! A girl!" went the rustling whisper through the playhouse, as every one connected his words with the delicate love-story he had interwoven into the somber warp of the plot. "He's been a confirmed bachelor for years, but he's been bowled over at last, and this is his tribute to his sweetheart."

But Whittlemore resolutely refused to confirm or deny any of these conjectures when they were put up to him, or to give any fuller explanation of his meaning, and presently, amid the excitement of the last act and the repeated curtain-calls at the finale, his cryptic statement was forgotten.

And now at length the curtain was raised and lowered for the last time, and the audience began slowly to disperse, everybody, as has been already said, in a delighted and enthusiastic state of mind—that is, everybody with the possible exception of Colonel Thropley.

The proprietor of the *Bee*, strangely enough, looked pale and ill at ease. He strove to bear himself with his usual self-confident, flaunting air, but it was all too plainly a pretense. The defiant curl was gone from his long, military mustache, and it drooped dejectedly. His eyes had a worried, anxious look.

"Come," he said to his companion almost gruffly. "Let us be getting out of here."

But, unheeding him, she broke away with a little exclamation of pleasure, and fluttering across the house, presented herself laughingly before Whittlemore.

"Are old friends quite forgotten, Mr. Whittlemore?" she demanded with mock reproach. "Mama and I have been sitting up in state all afternoon expecting you to call."

"But it was only a deferred pleasure, I assure you," he pleaded. "Really, Miss Merle, what with getting things in shape for to-night and one thing and another, I haven't had a moment since my arrival that I could call my own. I shall certainly give myself the satisfaction of renewing old acquaintance with you and your mother to-morrow, though, if I may."

"If you may?" she mimicked teasingly. "As though every one in Williamsport or anywhere else, for that matter, wouldn't be only too tickled to entertain such a famous personage as you have become. On that promise," with a charming smile, "mother and I will forgive your defection to-day, although," she confessed naively, "I had already forgiven you. I would forgive anything to a man who has given me three such hours of enjoyment as you did to-night."

"Whittlemore had been receiving congratulations and praise from all quarters in a bored sort of perfunctory fashion; but now at her encomium, he looked up quickly, and flushed as sheepishly as a schoolboy.

"Did you really like the play?" he asked shyly.

"Like it? My only regret is that mother was kept from seeing it to-night by one of her neuralgic attacks. Why, everybody is crazy about it, Mr. Whittlemore—everybody except Colonel Thropley." She gave a little jerk of her head toward the colonel, who stood behind her in an undeniably sulky attitude. "He says it does not appeal to him."

Whittlemore raised his eyes and caught the colonel's glance fair and square. For the space of a long breath they glared at each other with challenge upon the one side, defiance on the other. Then, in spite of himself, the colonel's gaze wavered and fell.

"Ah," said Whittlemore quietly, "I am surprised. I should have thought the play held a special appeal for Colonel Thropley."

The big man started and choked. He seemed about to make an angry retort, but evidently reconsidered the impulse, and tried to speak in his customary easy manner.

"I think Miss Potter unintentionally misquotes me a little, Mr. Whittlemore," he protested. "What I really said was that the play did not appeal to me personally as much as either 'Alaska' or 'The Dome.' That is, of course, purely a matter of preference, however, and my judgment may well be wrong.

"And now, Miss Potter"—advancing toward her with a slightly proprietary air which made Whittlemore grit his teeth—"if you are ready."

A little later, as Fuzzy and the dramatist passed out of the now deserted theater, and strolled down through the park, the latter turned with one of his quick questions to the young man.

"Do you believe she is going to marry that big cur?" he demanded.

"Well, people say they are just about the same as engaged"—Fuzzy shrugged his shoulders—"and the Lord alone knows what a woman will do."

"No," rejoined Whittlemore with some vigor: "in this case, *I* know."

"And will she, or won't she?" asked Fuzzy.

"She won't," said Whittlemore.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNJUSTIFIABLE ORDER.

Had Fuzzy McNeill been paying his usual close attention, it is possible that he would already have discovered the answer to his oft-repeated question, "Why Williamsport?"

But Fuzzy's wits were wool-gathering tonight, concerning themselves with vague aspirations and ambitions which had recurred to him in the past from time to time, but which he had hitherto always put from him as futile and idle dreams.

As he and Whittlemore journeyed back to town, he fell into a reverie, which lasted even until after they were once more in the playwright's room, and seated over a little supper which the latter had ordered up.

"Why so pensive, son?" Whittlemore finally rallied him. "You look as if you wanted to 'sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings.'"

"Oh, I was just thinking," rejoined the other, a trifle bitterly, "thinking how profitless this treadmill of a reporter's life is. Now, look at you. Your pen accomplishes something worth while. You mold the lives of men and women by what you write, and your work stands. Mine, even if I get to the top-notch of my profession, is forgotten in a day."

"Well," returned Whittlemore, munching at a club sandwich, "if that is the way you feel about it, why don't you cut journalism, and go in for writing plays or stories?"

"Cut journalism?"

"Certainly. Mind you, I don't agree with all you say about your profession, but I do believe this, that when a man of your

age gets sore on his vocation, the thing for him to do is to quit it, and tackle something which appeals to him more strongly."

"But my family are all newspaper men."

"So were mine all shoemakers, as near as I can find out, but that doesn't mean I would have made a success pounding a last.

"I shouldn't wonder at all"—he surveyed the other critically, "if you would make decidedly good at creative writing. You have a pretty keen judgment in regard to men and things, well-developed powers of observation, and a terse, clear style of expression—or at least I judge so if the description in your paper to-night of the reception given me is any sample of what you can do."

"Oh, I can write all right," cried Fuzzy, glowing under the praise of such an authority. "Give me the facts, and I'll guarantee to make a readable story out of them. But"—and again his face fell—"there's the deuce of it. Where does one get the material to write about, when one tackles a play or a novel? Where, for instance, did you get the story you told us to-night in 'The Outlook'?"

"Material?" repeated Whittlemore. "Why, the woods are full of it. Look around you, my boy. Every day things are happening of vital, thrilling interest—dramas in real life, which put to shame for human interest anything you ever read between covers, or saw on the stage."

"But I have always heard," objected Fuzzy, "that a true story made rotten fiction."

"Yes," assented the other, "and it is so, because most true stories seem wildly improbable. Then, too, the stories of real life usually fail to satisfy our sense of the eternal fitness of things, just as life itself fails entirely to satisfy most of us. In a book, the hero may experience countless perils, but we always know he will come out unscathed at the end, whereas in real life he may meet his finish anywhere from Chapter 1 to Chapter 76.

"In real life, the proud millionaire lands, as a usual thing, on top, and the honest young workingman gets it in the neck, the innocent prisoner finishes out his sentence, and the wrong man marries beautiful Evelyn; and these are things that the public won't stand for.

"We demand a happy ending to our books and plays in the effort to blind our eyes to the grim fact that in life there can be no happy ending. Death and sorrow are the ultimate goal of all.

"No," reverting to his theme. "The task of the creative writer is to reconstruct the story of real life, so as not to jar against his readers' prejudices. Let him take from the episode which he has heard or witnessed for himself its salient dramatic incident, and then build backward and forward from this the story, not as it actually occurred, but as one would like to have it occur."

He paused a moment while he breathed on his eye-glasses and polished them with his handkerchief.

"For example"—he replaced the glasses astride his nose and leaned slightly forward—"take this Potter tragedy of which we spoke earlier in the evening. What would you call the dramatic and central point of that affair?"

"Why, the moment when Thropley, hurrying across the field, arrived on the scene to find the old man breathing his last."

"Exactly. And what does that scene suggest to you? Here we have the old man on the ground gasping in the throes of death, the farmer who witnessed the shot hurrying off to telephone for a doctor, and Thropley, the debtor, left alone with the victim of the accident. Suppose those notes which meant so much to Thropley were in the old man's pocket, and—"

"No," corrected Fuzzy. "The notes had been previously destroyed."

A slight enigmatic smile flickered across Whittlemore's lips under his grizzled mustache.

"But this is supposed to be fiction we are working on," he said. "Can't you see the story which might be woven out of the circumstances of that affair?"

Fuzzy pondered deeply.

"Well," he said at length, "things could be twisted around so, I imagine, as to make it out that old man Potter committed suicide."

"Yes," agreed the author; "but they could be twisted around more easily I think to make it out that he—

"But I'll go into that with you some other time," he interrupted himself abruptly. "It's almost one o'clock," glancing at his watch, "and time for an old codger like me to be abed, especially if I'm to be off with you at nine in the morning to see those logs go down the river."

"I think I'll do my write-up of your

show to-night, while it is all fresh in my mind," said Fuzzy in leaving. "You liked my story of the reception, Mr. Whittlemore; just wait until you see what I turn out on the play. There's a subject that I feel I can let myself loose on."

Then with a cordial good night on both sides, and a promise to meet in the morning for the logging spectacle, they separated, and the reporter betook himself to the office to indulge in a wild welter of adjectives.

He had just about half-finished the two columns of glowing commendation of Whittlemore's play when the door opened and in walked his employer.

The bad humor which the colonel had displayed at the theater evidently hadn't been assuaged since; for he merely grunted in response to the courteous salutation offered him, and passed on to his desk.

He made a pretense there of busying himself in looking over some advertising contracts, but it was evidently only a blind; for his gaze roved from them constantly to where Fuzzy sat hunched up over his table, and the way he clinched his cigar between his teeth betokened more anxious thought than he was wont to bestow on any mere details of office routine.

Presently, as though reaching a decision on the matter with which he was concerned, he rose, closed down the lid of his desk, and with an affectation of carelessness sauntered over toward the reporter.

"So, you're going to chaperon this Whittlemore fellow to the log drive to-morrow, eh?" he questioned. "What time do you start out?"

There was a touch of husky eagerness to his tone quite out of keeping with the unimportance of the inquiry. Fuzzy, absorbed in his task, however, failed to notice it.

"Oh, about nine o'clock," he said. "I thought I would take a couple of hours off then, and still have time to make my regular round of the court-house and city building before noon. Of course, though, if you need me—"

"Oh, no, no!" hastily deprecated Thropley. "Take all the time you like, my boy. Take the whole morning if necessary. It's a good advertisement for the town to let strangers see something of the character of our resources. Yes, indeed; take all the time you want. The rest of us here in the office will manage to look out for your work somehow between us.

"Anyhow," with a forced attempt at geniality, "from the looks of that bunch of copy, you seem to be doing a fair day's work ahead of time.

"What is this?" He picked up a page of Fuzzy's manuscript, and glanced it over. "A write-up of the doings to-night, eh?"

Then he frowned blackly, as his eye caught one of the laudatory phrases.

"Spreading it a bit thick there, aren't you?" he sneered. "Did you really fall for the play to that extent?"

"Fall for it?" exclaimed Fuzzy, "I think it is the greatest and most wonderful play I ever saw in my life."

The colonel ground out a contemptuous oath.

"Well, all I can say," he railed, "is that I'm surprised at you, and the rest of the people who are cackling the same way. You are simply hypnotized by this fellow's reputation and past achievements. Why, that thing to-night was simply a rank piece of cheap melodrama."

Angrily he caught up the sheaf of pages which had been written and ran them over.

"You don't mean to say that you're fixing to give any such space as this to the rotten fiasco?" he stormed. "Why, you're stringing it out here to over a column."

"Yes, sir. Two columns was about what I thought it deserved. Whittlemore's standing, and the wide-spread interest in this production all over the country, would almost call for that, not to speak of—"

"Stuff and nonsense!" exploded the colonel. "Waste two columns on a lot of bunk like that? Cut that stuff down to a stick and a half, I tell you, and give the most of that to the local people."

"But, colonel, we can't afford to do that," expostulated Fuzzy, striving to remain cool. "This is not only a big theatrical event, but also a social head-liner. Everybody will be looking in the *Bee* to-morrow night to see what we have to say, and when they find only a little snippy notice that we might give to an 'Uncle Tom' show, or 'ten, twent', and thirt' repertoire troupe, there'll be a roar go up that you could hear from here to Harrisburg."

"All right, let 'em roar," snapped the proprietor defiantly. "I'm running this sheet, and, by Jericho, I'll put in or leave out of it just what I please. A stick and a half is all we give to 'The Outlook,' do you understand, and I want the bulk of that used in jollying the local people."

He turned on his heel as though to walk

away; but Fuzzy halted him with a sharp ejaculation.

The reporter had risen to his feet, his face white with indignation; and now snatching up the article he had just written, he tore it into shreds and tossed it into the waste-basket.

"Yes, I understand," he cried; "and I want you to understand, too, that I don't stand your bullying, hectoring ways a minute longer. You can put what you please in your rag; that's your privilege. But I refuse to stultify myself by working for a man who doesn't know that the first principle of journalism is the subordination of one's personal prejudices to the duty of furnishing the news.

"I'm going over to the *Sun* or the *Gazette-Bulletin*," he declared. "where they have the right idea of what a newspaper should be; and, although I haven't the slightest doubt that the *Bee* will keep right on, I think you'll feel my loss to a greater or less extent.

"There's my key to the office, Colonel Thropley." He flung it down on the table. "I'll call around to-morrow to get my things and what money is owing to me. Good night."

He caught up his hat, jerked it over his eyes, and stalked from the place.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOG DRIVE.

TRUE to his promise, Whittlemore rose bright and early the next morning and, with breakfast duly despatched, was out on the veranda of the Park Hotel waiting for Fuzzy, when the latter appeared whistling down the street as gaily as though the loss of a job were a matter of the most minor consideration.

Hailing the dramatist cheerfully, he cast a somewhat critical glance at his clothes.

"This isn't a morning reception we're going to; it's a log drive," he protested. "Didn't you hear me tell you to put on old duds?"

"I'm sorry," returned Whittlemore meekly; "but these are the worst I have."

"All right, then; we must be as careful of them as we can. But I tell you frankly, you'll be a sight by the time we get back.

"And it's going to rain, too," he added, casting a weatherwise glance toward the skies. "Surely you have a raincoat, or a cravenette, or something of that kind with you?"

Yes, Whittlemore had a raincoat upstairs in his room, and would send a boy for it at once.

"Good. I'll borrow an old cap and a pair of rubber hipboots for you from Al the clerk here in the hotel, and then you needn't care what happens to you."

Thus accoutered, accordingly, the two shortly afterward set out, and as they walked down the street toward the river Fuzzy recounted the circumstances of the night before which had led to his severing his connection with the *Bee*.

"Did you ever hear of such a silly thing in all your life?" he demanded. "Cutting down a three-ring affair like that to a stick and a half, and all because his liver or something happened to be out of order, and he personally didn't like the show."

"It wasn't his liver that bothered him, Fuzzy," observed Whittlemore. "It was his conscience."

"His conscience?"

"Yes. I haven't got time to explain now, but I will later. There's a good story in it, too, both in the newspaper and fiction sense of the word. The burning question of the moment, however, is what are you going to do next? Have you any plans?"

"Well, I told him I was going over either to the *Sun* or the *Gazette-Bulletin*, but that was largely bluff. Of course, I shall make a try at those places; but the chances are not strong for my being taken on, as both of them already have all the men there is any need for.

"No; to tell the truth, I expect I shall have to leave town. The opportunities for a man in my line are not overabundant in Williamsport."

"Then, why not come with me and be my private secretary?" Whittlemore said quietly.

Fuzzy glanced up sharply, incredulous.

"You aren't joking?" he demanded.

"Not a bit of it. The post happens to be open, and I should be more than pleased to have you take it. Besides, as you would have the framing of all my excuses, it would be admirable training in the art of writing fiction, which you say you want to take up."

Fuzzy hesitated a moment.

"It's a wonderful opportunity," he said wistfully; "but I have always wanted to

feel that I was making my own way in the world, and that if success ever did come, it would be due entirely to my own efforts.

"Nonsense." Whittlemore dropped the bantering tone in which he had hitherto indulged, as he laid his hand gently on the young man's shoulder. "No one wins success in this life, my boy, entirely on his own efforts. We are always helped more or less on the way. I was by old man Potter, and so is every one else by somebody or other. You needn't be a bit ashamed to accept any aid that comes your way. Heavens, that is all we are in this world for, to help one another.

"Say no more." The reporter laughed out gleefully. "I am quite convinced, and not very difficult to convince at that, I guess you fancy. The job is mine, thank you. I've got a double-nelsen on it.

"Say," he questioned eagerly, an instant or two later, "one part of a private secretary's job is to know all his employer's secrets, isn't it?"

"Why, yes," smiled Whittlemore, "except those that are personal and private."

"Well, then," urged Fuzzy promptly, "'why Williamsport'?"

"Ah"—the dramatist laughed—"but I believe it is a point in law that new arrangements cannot affect existing contracts, and we already had a bargain that you should find that out for yourself."

By this time they had come to the river, and, naturally, the conversation turned to the subject in hand as Whittlemore halted to gaze upon the interesting sight spread out before him.

All along the shore were moored rafts of logs, held loosely together by ropes, and extending far out into the stream.

For miles along the bank they stretched, and Whittlemore inquired wonderingly where they had all come from.

"Oh, from up in the mountains." Fuzzy gave a jerk of his head back toward the hills. "The wood-cutters get them out up there, and pile them up along the banks of the little streams. Then, when a freshet comes along, they push them into the water and let the current carry them on down to the river, where they are caught and fashioned into rafts in this way, and held until there is need for them at the mills, when they are sent on down stream. This is a sort of assembling or gathering place for them, you understand, where they are held until they are wanted.

"Come on, now, though, if you want to see some fun," he shouted, and rapidly led the way down to the dam, where the big sluice-gates at one side were being opened to permit of the coming drive.

The water boiled and bubbled up in the chute as the heavy gates were forced back on winches, and then with a free passage before it, the river poured through in a tumultuous, roaring sweep of current.

Upon this ensued a scene of rapid activity. Men loosed the tethered rafts closest to the dam, and set the logs afloat, to shoot down with the stream into the chute, where they knocked and pounded and banged against each other with a noise like thunder.

Other men—the experienced masters of the drive—sprang out on the drifting logs with pole and cant-hooks to herd, and guide and keep them straight, so as to prevent any jamming or impediment.

It reminded Whittlemore of nothing so much as a cattle stampede he had once witnessed in the West, with a score of cowboys vainly striving to control their panic-stricken charges; only this was if anything more spectacular and exciting.

The foam and spray dashed high in air, as the logs, shooting down the current with lightning-like rapidity, battered and ground against each other in the churning maelstrom of the chute.

There was noise and shouting in the air, and the thrill of actual danger as one watched the men leaping from one slippery foothold to another in the effort to pilot the unruly craft they rode.

The bridge above the dam was by this time black with people, and crowds stood all along the bank gazing at the sight.

Fuzzy, however, did not yet consider that he had fully played his part of showman; so, grasping his companion by the arm and shouting some directions utterly unintelligible above the turmoil, he led the way two or three blocks up-stream.

The rafts close to the dam had all been sent through the chute by this time, and the men were beginning to loose those in the vicinity to which they had just come, so Fuzzy proposed that they should go out on some of the still tethered logs in order to give the dramatist the opportunity of seeing the drivers at close range.

"There isn't a bit of danger," he asserted, confidently. "These stout ropes can't possibly give way, and the men will

shout out ample warning before they unloose any raft we happen to be on."

Under this assurance, therefore, yet not without certain timorous qualms, Whittlemore followed out upon the treacherous footing.

The rain which Fuzzy had predicted had now come on, and was falling in driving sheets, but, protected as he was, the dramatist did not mind this, except as it made the logs a trifle more slippery and harder to cling to.

His chief concern was lest inadvertently the rope which held them safe to shore might be loosed. The picture of himself down in that boiling chute, where the logs hurtled and beat against one another, was not particularly appealing.

For all chance a man would have, thought he, he might as well be in a sausage machine.

Consequently he cast anxious glances ever and anon toward shore to satisfy himself that the rope still held fast.

On one occasion, however, when he and Fuzzy were intently watching the daring exploits of a certain ultra-adventurous driver known as "Three-Finger Jack," he forgot for a time to glance toward the bank, and when he finally did so he received a not altogether pleasant surprise.

"Look!" He caught Fuzzy's arm in a quick grasp. "Isn't that Thropley—the man stooping over there just at the water's edge? See, he is rising up now."

"Oh, yes." The reporter finally *was* able to discern the person indicated. "Yes, that is the colonel all right. Wonder what he is doing down here this morning? He doesn't generally trouble himself to look at a drive. Probably they are short-handed at the office on account of my leaving, and he is covering this in order to help out."

"You don't suppose he could be up to any monkey business, do you?" somewhat apprehensively questioned the playwright.

"Monkey business? What could he do? Oh, you mean he might unfasten the rope? Pshaw, if that crowd there caught any one trying to do a thing of that sort they'd lynch him quicker than a wink, and Thropley knows it as well as I do.

"No," he asseverated, "I tell you there is absolutely no danger. Look! There goes 'Three-Finger' after another one! Good boy!" excitedly as the bold driver steered a wallowing log safely down to the chute, and then, just at the last moment, leaped back to the log behind, and from that to another and another, until he was at last once more in safety.

But as they stood applauding the skilful feat, the reporter suddenly started, and looked around him with quick concern.

The raft on the outer edge of which they were standing was starting to disintegrate and separate into its component logs.

"By glory!" Fuzzy shouted. "The rope has parted in some way! Back to the shore there, Whittlemore, as fast as you can make it!"

But it was too late. By some trick of the current, the logs nearer the bank had already slipped down-stream, and between the two men and safety stretched an ever-widening spread of open water.

CHAPTER IX.

FACING ANNIHILATION.

INSTINCTIVELY the playwright threw off his raincoat, and started to free himself of his cumbersome hipboots with the evident intention of swimming back to the still tethered logs.

But Fuzzy voiced an energetic protest.

"Don't try it!" he screamed. "You have no idea how swift that current is, nor what a suck of undertow it has. Besides, you run the chance of being hit with a submerged log going at the rate of forty miles an hour. It's nothing short of absolute suicide!

"Our only chance is to stick to these logs we are on until we get down close to the chute, where they crowd nearer together, and then by springing from one to another, as the drivers do, gain the shore.

"Watch me," he urged, "and try to follow my lead exactly. Then I'm sure we'll come out all right."

The last words were spoken as they drifted apart; for by this time the raft had utterly broken up, and the two were left to hazard their perilous voyage on separate barks.

Still, being in the same stretch of current, and on logs of nearly identical dimensions, they kept pretty close together, and this was the one ray of comfort Whittlemore could glean from the situation.

With Fuzzy's constant admonitions and encouragement, he managed somehow to maintain a footing upon his plunging, rolling craft, and even to get a pretty clear

idea in his mind of what he was expected to do when the moment came for action.

So they swept on down the stream with ever-increasing impetus as they drew nearer and nearer the dam.

Then suddenly something happened which Whittlemore did not at first understand, but which evidently increased their danger from the way Fuzzy began dancing about on his precarious perch to shout frenzied directions and wave wildly with his arms.

In at the mouth of the chute the playwright saw three monster logs drive broadside and wedge, and upon this barrier there was erected, almost in the twinkling of an eye, a structure of up-ended logs like a monster wood-pile.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The impact of fresh logs as they drove down against the obstruction and added to the hurly-burly was like the cannonading of artillery. The air was filled with the sounds of splintering and rending as great tree-trunks crashed together; but the obstruction did not yield. Instead, it constantly grew, and became firmer.

Logs striking against it shot many feet into the air, and then came thudding back to add to the pile.

But, despite these and a hundred other perils of the situation, the hardy lumbermen had already swarmed out on the blockade, and were striving with frantic efforts to loosen it up.

"It's a jam!" Fuzzy trumpeted through his two hands to his companion. "Heaven pity us! if we ever get swept— Oo-oo-oh!" he broke off. "Look at that!"

One of the workmen had lost his footing and fallen into the water on the upper side of the jam. He caught at one of the outcropping sticks above him and started to draw himself up; but just then a big log, with a sudden change of direction, drove at him like a catapult, and smashed him as completely as one might smash a mosquito on the back of one's hand.

A couple of fellow workmen, at the risk of their own lives, dragged up his crumpled remains to be carried ashore; then the work went on without halt or cessation.

Sick and unnerved at this terrifying catastrophe, it was all Whittlemore could do to stick upon his log. His knees trembled under him; he buried his face in his hands to shut out the sight of the grinding logs and tossing, foam-flecked water.

And just at that moment, Fuzzy, suiting his own action to the word, shouted the command to jump.

Whittlemore saw him spring lightly from the log upon which he stood to another nearer shore, poise himself an instant, and then spring to another; but he could no more have followed than he could fly.

He was paralyzed in the grip of an appalling fear.

Fuzzy, observing his inertness, halted his own flight to safety and kept calling vehement exhortations, but the other was powerless to heed or obey.

He was hypnotized by the ever-increasing peril of the bristling log jam and the horror of the tragedy he had witnessed.

Already he gave himself up for lost.

But from the top of the jam Three-Finger Jack at that moment caught sight of his plight, and without a moment's hesitation threw himself over the edge, straight into the crashing, tempestuous mêlée below.

Landing on a log just about to bang into the barrier, he stepped quickly from that to another just back, and so in a minute or two was riding with easy, swaying balance directly abreast of Whittlemore.

"Nothin' to be afeered of, sport," he adjured in a careless, conversational tone. "Easy as walkin' upstairs, ef you only think so. Come now, foller me an' take a try at it."

The man's absolute self-confidence and lack of fear had its effect upon the dramatist, where Fuzzy's apprehensive urgings had only thrown him into greater panic.

As by magic, his nerve returned, the strength and agility came back to his limbs, and without a moment's hesitation he started to follow Three-Finger Jack's unconcerned progress toward the bank.

"Easy there, easy," cautioned his guide, as he observed signs of undue haste on the part of Whittlemore. "Be sure your foot is firm on one log afore you start for the next. There hain't no hurry; we got all day to make it in, an' the logs'll keep comin' down right along to give us a place to walk on."

So by precept and example, this six-foot angel of rescue finally piloted his protégé to *terra firma,* and Whittlemore, at last feeling good, old, solid Mother Earth under his feet, promptly collapsed in a swoon with the relaxation from his long strain.

"Wa'al, I'll be durned," said Three-Finger Jack. "An' there's a feller, they

say, ain't afeered of no play-actress livin'. Jest bosses 'em around like I would a gang of Pollaks. Strange what little things will knock out some of the bravest folks goin'."

One of the first things Whittlemore did after he returned to consciousness, was to draw down Fuzzy's ear and ask for Three-Finger Jack's name—"the one he signs on the back of his checks, I mean," he said.

And since Three-Finger is now the proprietor of a flourishing lumber business of his own, it is, perhaps, not hard to guess where he got his backing.

Fuzzy, meanwhile, as soon as he had satisfied himself that his friend had sustained no serious injury, was busily inquiring here, there and everywhere if any one could tell how the accident had happened which had set Whittlemore and himself adrift.

There could be no doubt that the parting of the rope had caused their trouble, and also by sending down more logs than the drivers were able to handle had precipitated the jam at the chute. But how had the rope come to part? That was the question which nobody seemed able to answer.

It was an absolutely new cable, according to reports, and there had been no undue strain on it.

Rather disappointedly the reporter returned from his investigation to Whittlemore.

"By Jove," he said, "the thing seems to be a complete enigma."

"Enigma?" retorted the playwright "Why, my boy, it's all a part of the same old conundrum. Find the answer to that and you'll know how the rope came to part."

"The same old conundrum? What do you mean?"

"'Why Williamsport?' of course," said Whittlemore.

CHAPTER X.

A FORTUNATE ENCOUNTER.

From so incomprehensible a remark, Fuzzy could only conclude that the playwright was still a little light-headed from the shock of his experience.

Who but a delirious man could connect two such totally dissociated events as the parting of this rope and the bringing of Whittlemore's new play to Williamsport?

He therefore passed the matter off without comment, and merely contented himself by advising the other that he keep quiet and avoid undue excitement.

They had carried the insensible writer into a house close at hand, and he was now reclining on a couch as he strove to recover his shaken energies.

Announcing finally that he felt quite himself again, and was ready to start uptown, he was met by Fuzzy's stern insistence that he remain where he was.

"You're feverish," declared the dictator, "and in no condition to be moved. I've sent for a doctor, and until he has a look at you, you sha'n't stir."

"I'm not feverish," protested Whittlemore, indignantly, "and I don't want to see any doctor. I tell you I am as fit as I ever was in my life."

But his expostulations were of no avail, for Fuzzy, having discreetly locked the door, had the key in his pocket and stoutly declined to yield it up in response to either threats, promises or bribes.

While they were still hotly arguing the matter, however, Nature, abetted by the scoundrel who had cut the rope and created the jam, came to the aid of Whittlemore's contention, for with the sound of hurried footsteps down the hall, a knock came at the door of the room, and an excited voice informed them that the river was rising rapidly around the house and that unless they left at once there was grave danger they might be swept away.

That settled the question, for Fuzzy knew that the conditions just then were ripe for a regular, old-fashioned June freshet.

The river had been rising steadily for some days, with all its tributary streams and creeks pouring in a flow of water as a result of heavy rainfalls in the mountains.

On top of this had come the driving rain-storm of that day, and then, to cap the climax, the log jam which dammed up the already swollen current had forced it right up into the city.

Nor was it mere back-water. The mouths of the storm-sewers were flooded, turning back the streams from the rain with which they were already gorged, and transforming the manholes into geysers which burst open and spouted out their contents.

Moreover, some very dangerous eddies set in which threatened to do an incalculable amount of damage to houses and property in the neighborhood.

It was one of these, sweeping through the lower story of the house where Fuzzy and Whittlemore now were, that caused the immediate evacuation of the premises to be imperative.

Escape by the front door, the two men found, was already cut off, so rapidly was the water coming up, and therefore they were forced to climb out of the window to a porch roof and perch there forlornly in the hope that some good Samaritan would come along and rescue them.

Then a piece of almost incredible good luck happened. Spying around in quest of relief of some sort, Fuzzy happened to notice a couple of rowboats knocking about in the wash of the adjoining back yard, and moored by a couple of long chains to an up-stairs bedroom window.

Vociferously hailing the owner of the dwelling—for he knew practically every man, woman and child in Williamsport by name—the reporter finally brought an old fellow to light, and started diplomatic negotiations with him.

"See, you've got a couple of boats there, John?" observed Fuzzy carelessly.

"Yaas." The old man wagged his head knowingly. "I've been through too many of these Susquehanny 'freshes' to git ketched like so many of 'em do. Whenever the water climbs up jest so high, I git out my boats an' have 'em ready, an' then I know I'm all right, whatever happens.

"But what be you two doin' stuck up there on that roof?" he inquired, with the gleam of a sarcastic twinkle.

"Oh, we're waiting for a friend to come along and take us off," rejoined Fuzzy, nonchalantly. "Only trouble with him is, he's so darned long getting around. Don't suppose you'd care to loan one of your boats for a half hour or so, John?"

"No." The old chap decisively shook his head. "Boats is at a premium around in this part of town just now. Why, I heered that Hub Ketchell is gittin' as high as ten dollars an hour fer them old rotten John-boats of his'n. A nice new skift like either one of them of mine ought to bring in three times that, if I was a-rentin' of 'em out, which of course I ain't."

He glimpsed at Fuzzy warily out of the corner of his eye.

"Well, I'd roost here from now till doomsday before I'd pay ten dollars an hour for any boat," observed that tactician loftily. "Seeing as I'm in a bit of a hurry, I might go so far as to pay a dollar for the rest of the day"—producing a couple of silver halves from his pocket and jingling them suggestively in his palm—"but that is sure my limit."

A prolonged dickering ensued, but in the end the boat-owner agreed to let them have one of his skiffs for $3.50 from then until six o'clock that evening, when it was to be waiting for him at the Park Hotel.

The bargain ratified, he transferred possession by the very simple process of tossing over to them the end of the mooring chain, and their craft having been drawn up underneath, they let themselves down over the eaves, and dropped aboard.

"And now, you big stiff," announced Whittlemore, "I'm going to show you just how much of an invalid I am."

As he spoke he grasped the oars, and with a few well-directed pulls sent the boat flying out over the top of the submerged fence, and into the broad, watery thoroughfare of the street.

"Does that look feverish?" he demanded, as he skilfully rowed along the water front on an inspection tour, and even nosed up close to the jam which had so nearly proved his finish. "Does that look as though I needed to be under the care of a doctor for the state of my nerves?"

But he soon found that for all his boasted dexterity and strength, the swirls and cross-currents down in that section made handling a boat pretty stiff work; so as their curiosity was satisfied, and they had seen all there was to see, he gratefully accepted Fuzzy's suggestion and turned his prow up-town.

Moreover, as the storm was now over, and he was beginning to get pretty warm with his exertions, he removed not only the heavy raincoat and hipboots he was still wearing, but also his under coat and vest, together with his collar and tie—a fact for which he later thanked his lucky stars.

Then in his shirt-sleeves and with perfect freedom of action, he sent the boat fairly skimming up the street toward the hotel.

They were about two or three blocks away from it, when Whittlemore, glancing up a side street, which being on higher ground was above the flood, saw approaching Miss Merle Potter.

Resting on his oars, he waited for her, and when she came up gallantly offered to ferry her across, or take her any place she might be going.

But she declined the invitation with a self-sufficient toss of her pretty head.

She had been taking luncheon with friends, she explained, and had waited until the storm subsided before returning home. Now that the rain had ceased, though, she had no fear of difficulty in reaching her domicile. Their house was on the high side of Fourth Street, and but four or five doors away from the corner where she stood. The water could not be over two or three inches deep on the sidewalk, as she showed them by poking tentatively with her umbrella; so, since her friends had provided her with high rubber boots, it would be silly for her to trouble them to row her the short distance she had to traverse.

In the face of this there was, of course, nothing for Whittlemore to do but acquiesce; still, as he bent anew to the oars, he looked back over his shoulder like Lot's wife to watch the trim, girlish figure as, with skirts uplifted, she confidently strode along.

About half the distance between the corner and her home she had progressed, the water, as she foretold, not reaching to her shoe-tops, when suddenly, as though something had given way beneath her, she threw up her hands with a gasping, gurgling cry and disappeared.

It all happened so quickly that for a moment Whittlemore was hardly able to comprehend what had occurred.

He sat staring stupidly at her umbrella, where it bobbed up and down on the widening ring of wavelets made by her precipitate plunge.

Then a gasping ejaculation from Fuzzy galvanized him into life.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the reporter. "That big storm sewer which runs under here must have caved and she has gone down into it!"

Whittlemore waited for nothing further. Over the side of the boat he went, the water only rising to his knees. But a couple of steps farther and he, too, went down over his head.

He groped around frantically there in the depths and suddenly grasped something which he knew to be a girl.

Holding her close, he sought to regain the surface; but the pull of the underground stream was terrific. Struggle as he would against it, he felt himself being dragged farther and farther along with irresistible force.

And then his foot came in contact with something firm—one of the ponderous stone blocks which had formed the roof of the caved-in sewer.

He gave a mighty shove against it, and with this aid was able to drive himself with his burden to the surface. Another moment and Fuzzy was dragging both of them into the boat.

CHAPTER XI.

BOLDNESS WINS.

EXCEPT for the scare, it was plain to be seen that Miss Potter was none the worse for her adventure.

Indeed, by the time she was lifted into the boat she had fully recovered consciousness, and she at once began to urge that her mother be not acquainted with the serious character of her accident, but left to imagine it a mere ordinary wetting.

She also insisted, and in this was hospitably backed up by Mrs. Potter when the latter met the party at the door, that the rescuers should return to her house as soon as Whittlemore should have gone over to the hotel and changed into dry clothing.

Accordingly an hour or an hour and a half later, for Fuzzy declared he had never seen any one so unconscionably long, or so finicky about making a toilet as was Whittlemore on this occasion, the two presented themselves once more at the Potter residence and were received by a radiant vision in blue and silver, who looked the last person in the world to have just been through so terrifying an experience.

"Well," philosophized Fuzzy to himself, "if any one should tell me that she had just come out of the sewer, I would certainly call him a liar. It just goes to show that you can't ever judge by appearances.

"And yet you can sometimes, too," he went on with his reflections. "Here's Whittlemore, for instance, giving all the signs of a man that's hard hit, and what's more, he is hard hit. I'd bet a hat on that proposition with any man on earth.

"By Jove"—he glanced shrewdly from his friend to the girl as they sat talking and laughing, with eyes seemingly only for each other—"by Jove, I believe it's mutual. Oh, what will Colonel Thropley think when he finds that he isn't to get his paws on that fortune after all?"

Fuzzy made one or two ineffectual at-

tempts to break into the conversation, but finding himself only delicately snubbed for his pains, strolled from the room and across the hall to a sort of "den," which Mr. Potter in his lifetime had used as a study. His widow out of sentiment had always kept the place just as he used to have it.

From across the hall Fuzzy could still hear the murmur of voices running on unchecked.

"Well, I guess I was the 'crowd' there all right," observed Mr. McNeill, proceeding to make himself comfortable in a big, roomy chair. "They don't seem to care whether I am with them or not."

Meanwhile over in the other room Merle diffidently, and with a touch of heightened color, had approached the subject of their recent experience.

"I haven't thanked you properly yet for saving my life, Mr. Whittlemore," she said; "and I don't know that I can.

"But, oh, if you only knew how I felt when I found myself going down, and those dark waters closing over my head, and then what a blessed, blessed relief it was to come to myself there in the boat, with you and Fuzzy bending over me.

"No." She shook her head. "I can never express my thanks to you as I should like to. Words are too inadequate. But I do want you to know that I understand the desperate risk you took, and that I appreciate your gallantry and daring."

Whittlemore made a sudden resolve.

"Miss Merle," he said, "do you want to square any little obligation you may feel you are under to me? Now, don't answer too quickly; for I warn you that I am going to take a step you may seriously resent."

The girl's eyes widened. What could he possibly mean?

Nevertheless, she replied without a second's hesitation.

"I don't care what it is, Mr. Whittlemore," she said, "nor do I think I could possibly take serious umbrage at any action of yours. You have my permission to go ahead."

"Well, then," said he, "I am going to ask you a very impertinent and personal question."

"An impertinent question?"

"Yes. It is simply this, have you any idea of marrying Colonel Thropley?"

Her head went up haughtily, and a sharp rebuke for his audacity evidently trembled on the tip of her tongue.

Then, with the recollection of all this man had done for her, the lines of disapproval relaxed about her mouth, and the gleam of offense faded from her eyes.

"Believe me, it is not out of idle curiosity that I ask this," pleaded the dramatist; "but because it is a vital matter and one on which, for your own sake, I must be informed."

She straightened up and looked him squarely in the eyes with a glance whose sincerity was not to be questioned.

"Mr. Whittlemore," she said, "I do not know what your purpose is, but I am content to believe that it is a good one and thoroughly justifiable.

"I shall answer you as straightforwardly and directly as you have asked your question. Only last night I gave Colonel Thropley distinctly and definitely to understand that I would not marry him, and I also told him that I thought it better we see nothing more of each other."

Whittlemore drew a long sigh of relief.

What more he might have said or done is hard to calculate; for it was a tense moment, and the fact that she had given him her most intimate confidence was mounting like heady wine to his brain, inciting him—settled old bachelor though he was—to all sorts of ardent impulses.

He took a hasty step toward her and half-opened his arms.

But just then her mother came into the room.

CHAPTER XII.

WITH OPENED EYES.

In the meantime, Mr. McNeill, lounging luxuriously in the big easy chair across the hall, had made an astounding discovery.

It was not by any elaborate process of logic or deduction that he made it. Fuzzy's mind did not work that way. He was used to trusting far more to that reporter's "sixth sense" of which he had spoken; and it must be admitted that this handy little adjunct very seldom failed him.

Nor did it do so in this instance. Fuzzy had not been consciously thinking on any subject related to his discovery; nor, so far as he could afterward remember, had he led up to it by any mental steps or processes.

It simply burst upon him like the sun

coming out from under a cloud, and brought him up out of his chair wide-eyed and excited.

He knew at last the answer to, "Why Williamsport?"

As Whittlemore had told him would be the case, too, when he finally stumbled on the truth, there were no doubts and uncertainties about this conjecture. He was sure that he was right.

What a blind mole he had been not to see the real explanation before with all the hints and suggestions which had been thrown in his way!

Why, Williamsport was the one place in all the world where "The Outlook" could be presented, if it was to serve its author's chief purpose in writing it, and unveil the long-concealed guilt of a murderer.

Yes, thought Fuzzy, as the dramatist had said in his speech in front of the curtain the night before, the piece was written for the benefit of one person, and that person was unquestionably and inevitably Colonel Thropley.

"Heavens!" muttered McNeill. "How everything dovetails and works in together, now that one has the clue! Whittlemore, full of a sense of obligation toward old man Potter, and having his suspicions aroused that the tragedy was something more than an accident, wrote this play as one step in the campaign he is making to bring the slayer to justice. This is the reason he was watching that *loge* so intently at the theater — in order to note the effect the thing produced on Thropley, and also to satisfy himself that his conjecture was not amiss.

"And, by George! the story of the play was almost an exact paraphrase of the actual occurrence. If Thropley is guilty, he could not possibly fail to understand the meaning of it. It was tantamount to a direct accusation.

"But *is* Thropley guilty?" pondered the young fellow. "It certainly seems a pretty slender chain of evidence which Whittlemore has against him. And yet I don't know, either. The fact that those notes were missing, and could so easily be put off on Potter's well-known habits of secret philanthropy, together with the strange circumstance that on that one occasion the old man, against all his teaching and custom, was carrying a loaded gun, certainly does give a kind of sinister complexion to the business.

"Whittlemore evidently believes that Thropley got up the trip over to Jersey Shore with the definite purpose of getting hold of those notes and doing for the old man; and since it was an extension of the notes that they were going to see about, it certainly looks as though the old fellow would have taken them with him.

"Nor was his way of managing the killing such an entirely hit-and-miss matter as appears on the surface. Suppose, unbeknown to Potter, a couple of cartridges were slipped into that gun, and the old fellow went off with it careless and unsuspicious, wasn't it almost a cinch that the gun was going to go off? And even if the shot failed to kill, might not Thropley have figured it was certain to so wound him that he himself could finish the job. Another charge in the body would never cause question, if the facts seemed clear that Potter's gun had exploded by accident.

"Gee!" he exclaimed regretfully. "How did it come that none of us at the time ever thought of inquiring a bit more closely into the circumstances? If we'd only—"

He stopped short and sprang to his feet. His eye, roving over the room, had suddenly fallen on the shotgun which had caused the fatality. It stood in the corner, ready to hand, as it had always stood during its owner's lifetime, and close by, over the corner of a cabinet, hung the cartridge-belt.

Hurriedly Fuzzy stepped over and examined the latter. Every pocket in it was filled. If it was in the same condition that it was the morning of the tragedy, it was evident that the cartridge which had killed old Harlan Potter was not one of his own.

Continuing his investigation, Fuzzy was just about to pick up the gun and also examine that, to see whether the hammer had been loosened or the weapon tampered with in any way; but he heard footsteps outside in the hall and, settling the gun hastily back in place, turned to see who was coming.

It proved to be Mrs. Potter, and she told him that Dave Storms, a young fellow employed at the post-office, wanted to speak to him on the telephone.

"All right, I'll be there in just a second," rejoined Fuzzy. "But, first, I want to ask you a question, Mrs. Potter. Are these things"—he waved his hand toward the gun and cartridge-belt — "exactly the

same as they were when brought home after the accident?"

"Oh, yes; I have never touched them in any way except occasionally to brush off the dust. The sight of them often gives me a pang"—her eyes filled with tears—"and I suppose I am wrong to have them out in view; but I like somehow to keep everything here just the same as it was when father was alive."

Fuzzy made some appropriate remark of sympathy. What it was, he hardly knew himself; for his brain was thrilling with the conviction that at last a definite link of evidence had been unearthed to connect Colonel Thropley with the death of old Harlan Potter!

CHAPTER XIII.

PROOF POSITIVE.

RESPONDING to his telephone-call with a shade of impatience, for he supposed that Dave Storms, believing him still employed on the *Bee*, merely desired to impart some such item of interest as that there was a new baby at his house, or that his mother-in-law had gone to Philadelphia, Fuzzy received another surprise.

"Where in Sam Hill have you been?" demanded the post-office employee. "I've been telephoning all around Robin Hood's barn trying to get hold of you. Come on right down to the Government Building; I've got something important to tell you."

"But I'm not on the *Bee* any more, Dave. Call up Carney or some other reporter and slip it to him."

"Oh, I know you're not on the *Bee*. This isn't a newspaper steer—or, at least, not yet. It's something for your private ear."

"Well, can't you tell it to me over the wire?"

"No, I don't dare to. I'm not sure enough of my ground. I'll let you have this much, though; it's about the parting of that rope down at the river this morning."

"You mean that it wasn't an accident?"

"You're getting warm."

"And you know who did it?"

"Well, I have a pretty strong suspicion. I'm not going to say another word over the telephone, though. If you want to hear what I've got to say, it must be face to face."

"All right. I'll be down there in less than a jiffy." And slamming the receiver back on the hook, Fuzzy dashed out of the house and pushed off his boat in such an excited state of mind that he did not even stop to acquaint Whittlemore with his news.

Then, as he pulled down swiftly through the flooded streets, that "sixth sense" of his got to working again, and he was able to forestall Storms's information.

"It was Colonel Thropley again!" he exclaimed, suddenly dropping the oars as the solution broke upon him.

"I had been thinking," he told Whittlemore in describing the episode afterward. "I have been thinking as I rowed along that you were a pretty nervy duck, believing Thropley a murderer, to come to town and hand it to him as you did in that play. What's more natural, I said to myself, than that seeing you camped on his trail in that way, he should try to get rid of you? A man who had committed one murder certainly wouldn't balk at a second, especially where it was a case of saving his own neck.

"And then all of a sudden it came over me that he *had* tried to get rid of you by cutting the rope, and I realized, too, what you meant when you said the perpetrator of that could be found by seeking your reason for coming to Williamsport."

With this final reflection, too, Fuzzy abandoned an impulse to return and warn the dramatist against further attack. It would be unnecessary, he saw, since Whittlemore must be already on his guard.

Accordingly, after a moment's hesitation, he continued on his way, and in due course arrived at the Government Building.

"Well, what makes you think it was Thropley?" he accosted Dave Storms, as he leaned over the latter's desk.

Storms looked up at him astounded.

"Who said anything about Thropley?" he demanded.

"Well, you told me you had a pretty good idea who it was, and as I am already satisfied that the colonel was at the bottom of the outrage, I want to know what you have against him."

"But look here, Fuzzy, we can't go accusing a man of that stamp without mighty strong proof. This would be a jail matter if he were found guilty."

"It would be worse than a jail matter," returned McNeill grimly. "You forget about that poor Swede who got smashed up in the jam down there this morning. Robert Thropley is as directly responsible for his death as if he had put a bullet through his heart. You're not attempting to shield a

murderer, are you? Well, then, go ahead and reel off what you know."

Thus adjured, the post-office clerk plucked up spirit again and consented to tell his story. It was pregnant with significance.

Briefly stated, it was simply that he had seen Colonel Thropley down on the river bank that morning furtively change his shoes to a pair fitted with sharp spikes, which he drew from his pocket.

Merely supposing that he was using the spikes as a safety device with which to go out on the logs, Storms thought little of the matter except for the secretive way in which the change was made.

Then it recurred to him that he had seen the colonel balancing and teetering on the rope in his spiked shoes, and he had determined to get hold of Fuzzy and pass him on the suspicion for what it was worth.

"And it's just good enough to land my recent boss behind the bars, if I'm not mistaken," commented McNeill. "I think we've got a case against him now all right. At any rate, I'm going to lose no time in laying these facts before Whittlemore, and see what he wants to do."

Accordingly he started to row back in hot haste to the Potter residence, but he had not proceeded more than a block or so before his attention was attracted by a crowd of police and firemen gathered outside the office of the *Bee,* and with the newsgatherer's instinct, he could not resist stopping to see what was the matter.

"Hallo, Casey," he hailed the chief of police. "What's the excitement?"

"Oh, that darned sewer has caved here again," returned the worried-looking official, "and is in such bad shape that I'm afraid the *Bee* building is going to follow it. But that is not our chief trouble."

"What is then?"

"Why, when I came around to warn everybody that the building was unsafe and they'd have to get out, Colonel Thropley kited at the first sight of me up to the top floor, and locking himself in there, refuses to be dislodged. He says he'll shoot the first man that tries to take him."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ENDS OF JUSTICE.

It did not take the shrewd-witted Fuzzy long to reach a correct diagnosis for his late employer's erratic action.

The chief of police declared that the colonel must either have bats in his belfry or else have been putting away too many "tall ones" lately, but Fuzzy knew better.

He was convinced that it was a case of that "guilty conscience" which "needs no accuser."

Filled with guilty fears, Thropley could offer no other explanation to himself, when he saw the chief of police enter his establishment, than that he was wanted by the officers for his crime down on the river bank that morning.

Overtaken with panic, he had fled, and now in his delusion was apt to maim or kill any number of people before some one could get close enough to convince him of his mistake.

"I've sent for axes, and the chief of the fire department is going to help me out by playing the hose," commented the police chief, "but," with a shrug of the shoulders, "I'm free to admit that getting out a 'bug' is never a job to my liking. Take it from me, kid, there'll be one and maybe more of us, carried out feet first, before we get that fellow's gun away from him."

"No," broke in Fuzzy quickly. "There's a way to get in there to him, chief, that he doesn't know anything about, and you can take him by surprise and so overpower him. It's the trap over an old elevator shaft which used to be nailed down, but about a month ago I got locked up on that floor by mistake, and rather than stay over night I pried out the nails and dropped to the floor below.

"Show me the place," observed the chief, with Napoleonic brevity, at the same time lifting his hand to his men as a signal to follow him.

With the aid of the fire department a half dozen ladders were noiselessly raised just under the spot which Fuzzy indicated, and three big coppers, mounting to the ceiling, stood ready to throw back the trap at the word of command, while a second trio, perched on the other three ladders, were prepared instantly to spring through and overwhelm Thropley by force of numbers.

He, they could see by various feints made to draw him out, was entirely ignorant of these preparations, and still closely guarding the door.

At last everything being in readiness, the chief of police lifted his hand.

"Now!" he gave stentorian command, and at the order, the six-foot square piece

of flooring went up and out of the way like a feather, and through the aperture thus provided sprang the three chosen as captors.

After them, up the ladders as nimbly as squirrels, went the chief and the rest of his men, and it may be assumed correctly that Fuzzy was not left behind in the scramble.

By the time they reached the top, however, the struggle was all over, or at least the policemen thought so, for momentarily relaxing their vigilance they gave the prisoner just the opportunity he was seeking.

Wrenching himself loose from one officer, he snatched the revolver just taken from him out of the hands of another, and thrust the barrel to his temple.

Bang! A shot rang out before they could interpose, and the man crumpled up lifeless in the arms of the two coppers.

"Batty as a rabbit, wasn't he?" remarked the chief of police.

"Oh, yes," assented Fuzzy, "I noticed that he was badly 'off' last night."

There was no use in creating a scandal, he felt, or in harrowing up old griefs which time had begun to assuage.

But to himself McNeill was saying:

"Nemesis has overtaken you, Robert Thropley. Thus are the crafty always taken in their own deceit!"

THE END.

THE SONG OF THE DEEP-SEA WIND.

UNDER the banks of a summer shore,
Where the nodding palm-trees stand,
I drowse the hours of idle day
Over a silver strand;

I sing in the low, soft winds that go
To watch the ripples play,
And waft the frail, white, tiny sail
Across the laughing bay.

But out, far out, where runs the deep
By reef and roaring crag,
By landless sea and shoal unseen
I fly my lawless flag;

I fling my might in the shrieking night
Across the blackened wave,
And the man-shark waits at the yawning gates
Of the fearful deep-sea grave.

And be it trader or be it sail,
Or liner, gaunt and trim,
Or be it ship steel-sheathed for war,
Terrible, gray, and grim—

From truck to keel clean-swept they reel
As they flee before my breath,
Till rent, aroar, they plunge ashore
Straight on the teeth of death!

And the fisher on the farthest beach
Who heard their helpless gun,
Who marked the rocket's rise and reach
Down to the lurid sun,

Knows by the gull, deep-gorged and full,
And the corse on the floating mast,
That wild and fell and leagued with hell
The deep-sea wind has passed!

Thomas Bicket.

The Medicine Man's Bluff

By Walter G. Patterson

STI-LAM-POA-NAH, the nonagenarian, was the sole survivor of that band of fierce old warriors known half a century ago as the "Fighting Chippeways."

When the Northwest was still an unbroken wilderness he had been the band's most virile "big medicine-man"—half devil, half priest—and the bloodiest-minded savage of them all. He was the oracle whose inspired words incited the band to murder and rapine, and he held in his cruel hand each warrior's gift of life or death.

To-day he was a bent and decrepit old man; his shrunken features and parchment-like skin gave him the appearance of a dried-up, vicious old man-monkey. His eyes alone, with their unblinking, snaky glitter, retained a sign of the old virility, and told you that the spirit glaring through them had lost nothing of its cruel ferocity.

But Sti-lam-poa-nah* was no longer the all-powerful medicine-man of the tribe. The Chippeway people had long since become civilized, and were skeptical both of him and his soothsaying gifts. Their young braves now got inspiration and ordered their goings and comings from the soft-tongued words of peace which dropped from the lips of the paleface priest. The fiery-hearted old man whispered to himself that they were become a race of squaws, and that water ran through their veins in place of blood.

The young men even scoffed at Sti-lam-poa-nah's alleged power to foretell future events from what he read in his "medicine." They derided his claim that the Great Spirit made clear to his eye during his mystic incantations what were wise things for the tribe to do, and what unwise.

The urchins of the Chippeway village, and an occasional bright-eyed squaw, went so far in their contempt of him at times as to heave decayed things at his hoary old head—half-rotted turnips and the gnawed bones of rabbits and such culinary refuse.

Instead of chiding his tormentors, the young men of the tribe—and even the elders, with their supposed greater sedateness of mind—seemed to take the keenest delight in the sacrilegious acts. They would mar with laughter and clap their hands in glee at some particularly lucky shot by the youngsters.

Such, for instance, as the time when young Bounding Elk, son of the big chief, stole close to the discredited old prognosticator and caught him fair in the face with the badly decomposed carcass of a porcupine.

The tribe's merriment knew no bounds when they saw Sti-lam-poa-nah stagger, half blinded, to his feet and start to pick the sharp quills from his lacerated old countenance.

By nature superstitious, it might, however, have given the jeering ones pause had they seen the malevolent gleams that darted from the old man's eyes, or had they heard him grit the sharp yellow fangs left him yet as teeth, the while he muttered fierce maledictions beneath his breath on the chief's son, and on the son's father and his mother,

* The irreverent Montana cowboys, taking sides with his enemies, were wont to refer to the old fellow as "Steal-'Um-ponies," the cowboy vernacular for "horse-thief." Sti-lam-poa-nah means literally "One who reveals what is hidden."

and all who in any degree bore kinship to him.

As he pulled the barbs from his quivering flesh, the vindictive old malcontent prayed the Great Spirit, fervidly and categorically, to give the lad the itching-pox, which scars and tortures the face; to wither his right arm; to cause his bones to rot and to disintegrate with much pain from the mysterious bone-racking sickness which invariably results from the sting of the wood-tick.

He went back and carefully specified to the Great Spirit that it should be the malignant black type of pox the lad was seized with, and that all the tribe should take it from him; and he only cut short his curse when his breath gave out, and he had perforce to desist, although there were yet other evils in his versatile and vindictive old brain he fain would have called down on the youth and his kin.

Of late years, he had done nothing else but sit crouched under his blanket in the door of his wickiup and curse under his breath, and grit his old teeth and hate deep—and perforce let it go at that. He knew he had no friends in the tribe, and that more open resentment would but aggravate his own case.

He would never have done anything else but these futile and puerile things perhaps had he been a less vigorous hater, or one of poorer memory, or had he not firmly believed that one day a time of reckoning would come. He would forever have continued to "let it go at that," perhaps, had he, in short, been other than Sti-lam-poa-nah, the personification of hate, who was known never either to forget or forgive an enemy.

To spill blood was to him a mental stimulus; to watch the contortions of the tortured was as pleasant comedy to his eyes; "seeing red" was a heritage—his normal state of vision—and he abided his day of vengeance with what fortitude he could summon.

He believed, deep in his wicked old soul, that the Chippeways in time would grow tired of the unexcitement of peace. His cruel eyes snapped when he pictured to himself a battle between the braves, unskilled in war, and the white soldiers. Many must fall on either side, he gloated — and he hated both white and red man with equal fervor. Therefore, as I have said, he awaited the day of his vengeance patiently, and smiled a cruel, savage smile because he was sure it would come.

II.

TOWARD the close of a warm summer afternoon in 1905, the whilom soothsayer was squatted, as his custom was, in front of his tent of skins, buried in the folds of his blanket of somber gray. Likewise he was buried in thought. He was, in short, in his most vindictive mood.

A company of Uncle Sam's soldiers—the enemy he detested, perhaps, worst of all—was encamped just outside the Chippeway village. The almost ludicrous ease with which the tribe's warriors, of largely superior force to the whites, could swoop down upon the latter by night and annihilate them to the last man, had preyed on him and tempted his gory old soul almost past the power of restraint. He was desperate. Glooming over the golden but fleeting opportunity to see a killing and be drunk on revenge (which he had cunningly but futilely hinted to the more hot-headed of the young braves as their own opportunity to redeem themselves) had fanned his smoldering passions to a flame.

Never had he cursed and poured out vituperation more soulfully, nor with such infinite zest of detail.

From scalplock to the bottoms of the feet, he had given its meed of anathema to the vital portions of each man's body—paleface and redskin alike—as parties to the new and accursed order of things which had robbed him of his desires.

For an inspiration which should arouse the Chippeway braves out of their squaw-like lethargy—put even a tithe of the war-like spirit of their fathers into them—cause their hearts to yearn for scalplocks with which to decorate their lodge-poles, instead of the frumpery gewgaws of the post-stores for the bedecking of their own bodies—for an inspiration which should effect these things, Sti-lam-poa-nah cheerfully would have bartered with Satan the filmy spirit within him, and been content to roam through all eternity imprisoned in the breast of a dog or coyote. He would have resigned, with a cruel smile, his hope—the hope of all good red men—ever to take part in the Indian paradise: the endless chase across the happy hunting-ground, in pursuit of the ghostly moose and elk, astride a milk-white steed. And no man could offer a

greater sacrifice than that for the gaining of a soul's *ante-mortem* desire.

Far into the night the white-haired old savage remained huddled beneath his blanket, searching his crafty brain for a scheme whereby he could arouse a vengeful spirit among the braves and incite them against the proverbial foe of their race, so convenient to their hand.

Long after the others of the sprawling village were wrapped in sleep, and no sound disturbed the quiet night save the mournful yap of coyotes and wolves, or the occasional sharper yelp of the village curs, wrangling over carrion; until the moon went down behind the Bitter Root range and only the stars blinked on, Sti-lam-poa-nah, one-time oracle, and successful instigator to deeds of blood, pondered and brooded, and failed to find the inspiration he sought.

Alternately he cursed his waning power of imagination, and blasphemously prayed the Great Spirit for help.

He was about to give up for the present and seek his couch of skins within the wickiup, when out of the fog enwrapping his weary brain an old memory flashed, as a ray of light will sometimes pierce an overhanging cloud. He cursed himself long and deep and consistently for not having recalled it sooner.

A hideous grin crept over his weazened, apelike face. What he had remembered was this:

A year before or thereabouts his professional jealousy had been aroused upon several occasions by rumors of the remarkable skill displayed by a certain signal officer belonging to a company of soldiers then encamped near the Chippeways, in forecasting coming squalls and storms at times when the skies had been all over a smiling blue.

Privately, the old malcontent believed it was wizardry that accomplished such miracles, and he hesitated with no little trepidation, fearing he might be turned to a hyena or wolf, if he became too inquisitive.

Curiosity and jealousy, and a secret desire to rejuvenate his own sadly discredited box of tricks, had, however, overridden his scruples at last, and one day, masking his hatred of the palefaces under a hypocritical, three-cornered smile, he had made bold to steal to the white camp and seek out the signal officer.

To entertain himself, in great part, and to while away the dragging time, the white officer had explained to the wily old Indian as best he could—for Sti-lam-poa-nah's knowledge of English was limited—that he got most of his skill in forecasting from telegraphed reports of weather conditions elsewhere, and from printed records, which he spread out before him.

In conclusion, the signal officer had given the interested but perplexed old fellow an almanac of the current year, and, hoping to make things plainer to him by a practical illustration, had showed him how to tell by the charts the exact coming of an eclipse of the moon, then almost due.

Sti-lam-poa-nah had borne his prize home with him, so delighted that he caught himself feeling almost grateful to his white instructor. But this had speedily given place, by the natural workings of his mind, to gloating over the artful manner in which he congratulated himself he had wormed the enemy's secrets from him. And then, in a fever of excitement, he had awaited the day when the moon should grow dark. Already a crafty plot was budding and taking form in his brain to turn the phenomenon to account, and bring his long-wished-for revenge, if the white man's promise proved to be "good medicine."

The night set for the eclipse had come. A black shadow had crept across the face of Old Luna at the precise moment the pale-face wizard-book had foretold. And with much chuckling in his skinny old throat, Sti-lam-poa-nah had wrapped the wonder-working pamphlet in deerskin and secreted it with great care deep in the ground, in a corner of the wickiup.

Now Sti-lam-poa-nah's ideas concerning the phonomena of the heavenly bodies were the weird and fantastic ones of the untutored savage. He believed an all-powerful sky-witch in reality controlled the awesome spectacle he had witnessed. And putting two and two together in his scheming head, he had concluded that power to reinvoke the same magic was given once each year, at the date set down in the book, to the person fortunate enough to be its possessor. He had then planned and plotted in this wise:

He would continue to suffer the contemptuous treatment of the tribe in silence until twelve additional moons were almost past, when he would dig up the wizard-book again, and fix the exact date in his mind for reinvoking the moon-magic.

He would wait until the very night of it,

and then summon the big chiefs and braves of the tribe to a great powwow.

In a manner which would strike the chill of a deep fear to the souls of the jeering ones, he would relate to them how the Great Spirit, angered by the Chippeways' departure from the ways of their warlike fathers, had whispered to him during one of his mystic incantations that a dire calamity was about to be visited upon the tribe unless they instantly forsook the paleface priest and renewed their allegiance to him.

And to prove that his warnings were in all truth the words of the Great Spirit, he would tell them how the mighty Manitou, at his (Sti-lam-poa-nah's) behest, had promised to set as a sign in the heavens the shadow of his own all-powerful hand, clear and distinct, where all might behold it.

Thus had the blasphemous old charlatan planned and plotted, and a glare of hatred had leaped from his wicked eyes, and many satisfied grunts had come from his shrunken throat, as he pictured to himself how the frightened big chiefs and braves would fall on their faces and creep before him when of a sudden the shadow crept over the moon and the fear of death smote their souls at this fearsome evidence of their despised medicine-man's power.

Yet carefully and craftily as he had schemed, patiently as he had awaited the hour of his triumph, his senile, weakening memory had played him false, almost with fatal results. The time for reinvoking the sky-witch magic had nearly come due again, at a crisis when its invoking was vital to his dearest desires, ere he had again recalled it. And because of this mental lapse and his narrow escape Sti-lam-poa-nah had cursed himself, consistently, as bitterly as he had before cursed the son of the chief.

III.

THERE was deep amazement and the exchange of many wondering glances when, two evenings afterward, old Sti-lam-poa-nah, the surly and silent one, appeared suddenly at a council-fire of the Chippeways' big chiefs and braves, his face distorted into a hideous grin, plainly intended to be pacific. Their amazement increased when the snaky-eyed old medicine-man extended his ape-like claw to each of them in turn, accompanied by an affable but age-cracked "How!" as though he were the most popular of the tribe's patriarchs.

Into not a few heads there flashed the vague suspicion that the hand of the Great Spirit had at last been laid heavily upon the aged one's brain—and, to a degree, they regretted this.

Even as he had come among them the assembled red men had been debating the feasibleness of driving the malicious old brooder out into the swamp for the wolves to make such feast upon his shrunken frame as they might—a cheerful custom of savagery which civilization had not yet altogether eliminated from the tribe.

The pleasure of disposing of him thus would be denied them, they reflected resentfully, if the Great Spirit had laid his hand on the old soothsayer, for custom also still decreed that the mentally afflicted were under the Great Spirit's especial protection and were to be nurtured and treated with reverence and awe by themselves.

They were yet in doubt and deliberating in their minds as to what Sti-lam-poa-nah's sudden change of attitude meant, when the man of medicine slowly and with great dignity squatted himself abruptly at the right hand of Wah-no-wah-we, the principal chief, his one-time allotted place in the circle—and began to gaze sternly, one by one, into the ring of wondering faces surrounding him.

The pipe had gone around twice, and except for here and there an amazed grunt no one had ventured to speak, when of a sudden Sti-lam-poa-nah got stiffly to his feet, stepped with majestic mien close to the council-fire, where a glare of yellow light fell upon his shriveled features, and stretched out his arm to command attention.

"Let my brothers listen to the words of deep wisdom which the great Manitou has whispered in his servant's ears, that he might bear them to his erring children and save them from the wrath to come," the daring blasphemer began in the musical Chippeway tongue.

"The great Manitou is angry and would fain destroy his misguided children, who have forsaken him in their blindness to follow the teachings of the false-tongued white priest.

"Many moons ago, long generations before your fathers' fathers were papooses at their mothers' backs, the great Manitou gave the red men, as a heritage for all time, the broad plains which stretch from the big river to the mighty salt waters. He caused

herds to roam the plains in numbers greater than their wisest man could count, and gave them many swift ponies to hunt the herds down. He warned the red men to guard their country with their lives against the encroachments of their enemies.

"All was well for many long seasons, until one evil day a white-faced priest crept like a snake into the red men's hunting ground and commenced to drop honeyed words of deceit among them, urging them to abandon the teachings of the great Manitou, mighty war god of the Chippeway tribe, and follow the puerile new ways of peace." Here Sti-lam-poa-nah's lip curled contemptuously. "He asked them to follow a strange and unknown god and to become squaws and weakling old men instead of mighty warriors and promised them great rewards from the strange new god.

"At first the red men laughed at the words and tapped their foreheads, thinking the interloper one who was afflicted by the Great Spirit and who was to be laughed at by them, but cherished. But as the white priest persisted and said scornful words concerning their mighty medicine makers and the mystic rites of the tribe they grew angry and slew the false-hearted one.

"Another white priest came in his stead and was likewise slain; many priests came and all were slain. Yet, as continual dropping wears at last into the flinty rock, a time came when the red men listened to the teachers of false things and became convinced they were true words.

"For twelve times twelve moons the Chippeways have been a race of old women, and water has run in their veins in place of the fierce and unyielding war blood of their fathers. They have buried the hatchet and put the yoke of their paleface master about their necks. They go to the strange god's mission and send their children to the white man's school. They have learned to deride and scoff at the man of mighty medicine, who taught their fathers the path to glorious conquest over their enemies. They have come to value the glass beads and brass rings of the thieving paleface trader higher than the scalplocks of their foe. The Chippeway warriors have become squaws, cowards, afraid of their own shadows, at whom brave men point the finger of scorn. The great Manitou is much angered and would destroy those who have forgotten his gifts and wise teachings, and there now remains but one path of escape for my brothers ere the fury of the great Manitou descends."

Sti-lam-poa-nah, crafty and scheming arch-hypocrite that he was, had spoken in slow and impressive sentences, using many flowery metaphors dear to the savage heart, which I have omitted because they are not to be well translated into English. It was close on to midnight, the hour set in the wizard-book for the eclipse, before he at length finished his peroration and stepped majestically several yards away from the council-fire, where the light of the full August moon fell across his scheming face. Never had he looked the part of the malicious, weazened old ape more faithfully than now, as he stood frowning in stern silence at the circle of fire-lit, uneasy countenances before him.

"There remains but one path of escape," he continued sharply, pointing a threatening finger at the circle. "Let my misguided brothers swear by the ashes of their warlike fathers instantly to renounce the teachers of false things who have led their footsteps astray, and to be guided again by what is revealed to them in the big machine when I, Sti-lam-poa-nah, incant and study its hidden mysteries. Even thus has the great Manitou bade me warn you. The great Manitou has spoken."

Glances of sudden alarm passed rapidly from face to face in the circle. The earnest and dignified bearing of the long-despised medicine-man almost convinced them that his words were inspired and the tribe's danger great. He had his trump-card yet to play, however, to drive the last doubt from their minds. And after a short pause, to give the lying words of warning time to sink deep into their breasts, the wily blasphemer of a sudden lifted up his arms and turned to face the moon, shedding its fleckless effulgent beams over the weird assemblage.

"That I may prove I speak words of truth the great Manitou has vouchsafed to set a mighty sign in the heavens that those who dare to doubt may see and believe. Let my brothers behold! Even now as I speak the great war-god of the Chippeways will blot out the light of the moon by casting the shadow of his all-powerful hand across it. Let my brothers behold! And if I speak not the words of truth, let the great Manitou send instead a bolt of swift fire to strike me down—even now—"

Then a strange, awful thing took place.

The sacrilegious prayer was still falling from the blasphemer's lips, when, without warning, a long, brilliant streak of fire shot like a lightning bolt apparently from the face of the unruffled moon itself, and struck him full in his upturned, evil old face. He crumpled to the earth in a shuddering mass, clutched convulsively once or twice at a near-by clump of sage-brush, and stiffened out in death.

The awed chiefs and braves gazed at the quiet form a moment in terror-stricken silence, and then, one by one, slunk away, fearful to remain in a spot which had been visited by the great Manitou's wrath, or to touch the body of one who had dared to blaspheme and defy the all-powerful war-god.

And there the body of the old medicine-man continued to lie while the carrion birds feasted on him, and until his shrunken frame had turned to a heap of bleached, glistening bones, and finally to dust, none ever having the temerity to approach the accursed thing.

To this day they have a legend among the Chippeway people which tells how the false-hearted Sti-lam-poa-nah met his death for daring to defy the great Manitou, and they and their children believe this to be the full truth, and are awed and perhaps made more devout by the belief.

IV.

A STRANGE thing happened, as it chanced, that very selfsame night from which, however, the paleface people of the region, conversant with both incidents, deduce another and less gruesome and awe-inspiring a meaning.

A small band of white soldiers, who formed what was called the geodetic surveying party, happened to be at the top of one of the low-crowned Bitter Roots that night trying out a new scheme for flashing signals from mountain to mountain during darkness, in the same manner in which they use the heliograph for daylight signaling. For the night work they were experimenting with calcium powders, burned in front of powerful reflectors, and they were meeting with considerable success.

The band had been throwing signals for some hours from the opposite side of the mountain and had started home, when, upon reaching the edge of the cliff overhanging the Indian assemblage, they had suddenly caught sight of the dark crouching circle, and of the gaunt old soothsayer who seemed to be addressing them.

"Let's throw a little scare into the bunch!" mischief-loving Corporal Mulcahey had suggested to his companions. "Sure, if we shoot a small jolt of a strake of foire amongst them 'twill make them jump and think the divvul is broke loose, an' 'twill do no harrum at all, at all!"

The suggestion met instant approval, the reflectors were set up hurriedly and focused, whereupon the "strake of foire" leaped toward Sti-lam-poa-nah too swiftly for any of the assembled red men to suspect where it came from.

"Faith, the ould scalp-lifter belaves he's kilt intirely!" commented the delighted corporal, as he saw his surprised victim crumple to the earth and start clutching at the brush.

And the geodetic survey party wended their way gleefully back to camp, little suspecting the fatal consequences of their innocently meant prank upon the age-enervated and weak-hearted Indian.

TWO GLOVES—A ROMANCE.

ONE is a glove so small, so softly white;
It nestles in a pocket out of sight—
A waistcoat-pocket just above the heart
Of one who'd scorned the pricks of Cupid's dart.
A perfume faint, as of crushed rose-leaves, lingers
Within the creases of this glove's small fingers.

The other is a well-worn riding-glove—
A thing that hardly seems a gift of love;
For curving palm of piqué, stitched and thick,
Still holds the imprint of a stout crop-stick,
Also the odor of tobacco mellow;
Yet this glove rests beneath my lady's pillow!

Beatrice E. Rice.

The FRAME-UP

By E. V. Preston

CHAPTER I.

WARNED.

WHEN it is hot in Duluth, it is good and hot, and Officer Larsen of the "force" was perspiring freely under his helmet as he turned in from the glare of Superior Street and entered "Dutch Louie's" cigar store.

Nevertheless, he did not remain long in the grateful shelter. Officer Larsen seemed possessed that afternoon of a restless energy quite foreign to his usual disposition, and after a brief few moments' conversation in an undertone with the proprietor, took an abrupt departure to brave once more the sizzling temperature outside.

Moreover, in leaving he declined with a stern wave of the hand the choice, gold-banded perfecto which Louie would have pressed upon him.

Such conduct on the part of a "cop," and especially of Officer Larsen, whose field of tribute extended from the apple-woman, two blocks below, to the delicatessen store on the corner above, could scarcely fail to excite comment.

Two gentlemen, languidly playing seven-up in the back room, and whose shifty eyes, without seeming to stray from their cards, had marked Larsen's every movement and expression, glanced at each other in surprise.

Stylishly, if somewhat sportily, dressed young men they were with freshly shaven faces, white manicured hands, and slightly puffy eyes—the type one sees along Forty-Second Street in New York, Clark Street in Chicago, or Market Street in San Francisco.

They toil not, neither do they spin; yet Solomon, in all his glory, never wore such gaudy silk hose, or more faultlessly creased and ruffled trousers.

The two in the cigar-store—known respectively, if not respectably, as "Percy, the Rat," and "Buffalo Ike"—exchanged wondering glances, as already noted, over Officer Larsen's unprofessional tactics; then the Rat, leaning back in his chair, called through the curtained archway to the proprietor.

"What's biting the big Swede?" he questioned curiously. "First time I ever knew him to renege on a handout."

Louie turned at the inquiry with a glum shrug of his fat shoulders.

"Vance!" he informed them with monosyllabic brevity.

The two in the back room swore softly at the name.

"That skinny little dub thinks he's a second Teddy Roosevelt since they've made him the big noise down at headquarters," observed Ike with some rancor. "Why, he's putting the town square on the bum."

"He's a piece of cheese," assented the Rat feelingly.

Louie advanced ponderously from behind his counter, and parting the curtains, stood surveying the pair with gloomy disfavor.

"Do you know vot Larsen vas tellin' me?" he said. "Id vas a message from de chief. He says I better look a leedle oudt; I got too many crooks hangin' around here.

"Vot is more," he added impressively, "he specially mendtion you two undt Pinney. 'Gif dot bunch de can, Louie,' Larsen say to me. 'Dey is no goot.'"

"Well, of all the nerve!" ejaculated the

Rat, and Buffalo Ike likewise voiced indignant protest.

"Vance ain't got nothing on us," he growled.

"Ain'dt he?" The cigar store proprietor came a step closer and lowered his voice. "Maype so; *aber*—"

He paused, evidently deciding that he was talking too freely, and resolutely closed his lips.

"I know vat I know," he contented himself by hinting darkly.

"Nix, nix, Louie," protested the Rat impatiently. "Come across with it now you've started."

"That's right," assented Buffalo Ike. "Wise us up, old man. If Vance has got his lamps set for us we want to know it. What is more," he added significantly, "we're *going* to know. Understand?"

The tone was distinctly threatening; and Louie, well aware what this gang could do to his place if they had a mind to, paled.

"Vell," he yielded weakly, "I oughtn't to told you; but you is goot friendts of mine, undt I take a chance. Vance dinks you is in cahoots mit dot Stetson."

"With Stetson?" they exclaimed incredulously.

"Yah. Dat up-hold feller vat has been robbin' all dese trains undt gittin' away with it."

"Of course, of course." They nodded hurriedly. Everybody knows about Stetson. But why should Vance mix us up in that deal? You must be mistaken, Louie."

"No," insisted the German obstinately. "I tells you I am righdt. Lasdt nighdt I vas playin' pinochle mit Detective Kelly over by Heinie Spetnagel's place in Vest Superior, undt ve comes home togedder.

"'Vell, Louie,' Kelly says to me ven we come to bid goot nighdt, 'you beated me dis efening, *aber* I git even mit you some day ven I come down to your joint undt snag dot bunch of crooks you keep hangin' aroundt.'

"'Vot you knockin' dem poys for?' I says. 'Dey ain'dt doin' nodings.'

"'So?' says he. 'Vell, de chief dinks different. Oh, I know,' he says, 'dot dey ain'dt workin' none of deir petty larceny tricks; ve pudt a stop to dot. But how aboudt some of de rough stuff—de strong arm game?'

"'I know nodings,' I tell him. 'De poys git deir mail by my place, undt somedimes dey set aroundt undt play cards for de cigars. Dot's all I haf to do mit 'em.'

"'Oh, come.' Kelly pudts his arm aroundt me, undt pats me on de shoulder. 'You hear 'em talkin', undt you know ven dey is dere undt ven dey stay away.

"'I tell you,' he says confidential-like, 'you can make yourself solid mit de chief undt git a piece of money besides, if you choose to open up.'

"'How, a piece of money?' says I.

"'V'y,' says Kelly, 'ain'dt dere $5,000 rewardt for Stetson, dead or alive? You'd be in de cut-up.'

"'Stetson?' I says. 'I know nodings aboudt no Stetson.'

"'But your friendts do,' he says. 'Don'dt pull that innocent look on me, Louie. You know dot dey're in Stetson's gang all righdt.'

"'I don'dt pelieve me,' says I.

"'All righdt,' Kelly says. 'Haf id your own way. If you dink more of dot bunch *als* you do of standin' goot mit de chief undt gittin' in on dot fife t'ousand, go aheadt.

"'But ledt me tell you,' he says, 'Vance is on to dot crowdt, on to 'em mit bot' feedt, undt he's goin' to landt 'em sure. You cand't save 'em. Better dink it ofer, Louie. Better dink it ofer, undt make up your mind to snitch while apples is ripe.'"

There may have been more to report anent this illuminating conversation, but at that moment a customer entered the shop, and Louie was obliged to waddle away behind his counter.

The two in the back room sat staring at each other in a silence compounded of concern and indignation.

No one feels quite so keenly injured as the crook who is wrongly accused.

"Well, wouldn't that frost you?" finally broke out the Rat.

"Didn't I say this Vance was a piece of cheese?" demanded his comrade disgustedly. "Piping us off on that lay! And he calls himself a detective, eh? Why, he hasn't got a grain of evidence against us."

"Evidence!" snarled the other. "What has evidence got to do with it? Vance wants to make a showing on this Stetson case, and he's simply fixing to slough us. What's more, he'll do it, too, unless we make a quick getaway."

"And us with not enough between us to pay car-fare to Minneapolis!" sneered Ike. "Do you suppose I'd be hanging around this jay town the way Vance has sewed things up if it wasn't a case of have-to?

"By George, I almost wish we *were* in with Stetson," he muttered ruefully. "We'd at least have a stake in our jeans and could pull freight for Chi., or New York, or some place where there's something doing."

The Rat arose, jamming his hands somewhat excitedly into his pockets.

"Stake or no stake," he exclaimed, "I tell you, we've got to beat it. If you're going to stay here, and be sloughed by Vance, I'm not. Oh, where the dickens is Pinney?" he broke off, fretfully. "I want to talk to somebody with sense instead of a mutt like you."

So deeply engrossed were they in their discussion that they had failed to note the arrival at the store of another young man or his light step as he made his way toward the rear room.

As a matter of fact, he had been standing several moments, partly concealed behind the curtains at the archway, listening to their agitated bickering.

"Did I hear my name mentioned?" he now observed, disclosing himself to view.

The two in the room glanced up with a start; then exclaimed in one breath:

"Pinney!"

Then, interrupting and breaking in upon each other, they started to pour out a recital of the news they had heard, but the newcomer halted them suddenly with a quick, imperious gesture.

"Well, there's no use squabbling about it," he said in a careless, conversational tone. "The game ought to be over by this time. Let's telephone down to the *Herald* and get the score."

Following the direction of his warning nod, they glanced over his shoulder to see the broad figure of Detective Kelly just coming in at the door.

CHAPTER II.

AN EASY MARK.

As long as the "fly cop" lingered about the premises the conversation remained virtuously and amicably confined to the topic of baseball.

The score having been received, was dissected, and commented upon as seemingly the most important fact in existence, but the moment Kelly had somewhat grudgingly taken his departure, it was dropped with swift celerity.

"Well, you are a pair of gooks!" Pinney, the leader, faced around upon his two associates with a contemptuous curl of the lip. "Blabbing your business out so that you could be heard from here down to City Hall!"

The objects of his reproof hung their heads abashed, and Ike tried to make a mumbling excuse.

"Aw, what difference did it make?" he muttered. "The 'flat-foot' didn't get to hear anything."

"Yes, thanks to me," retorted Pinney, dryly.

"Anyhow," broke in the Rat, defensively, "it cuts small ice whether we were overheard or not, as I think you'll agree when you listen to what we have to tell you."

"I don't need to listen." Pinney smiled ironically. "I was standing right there behind that curtain all the time you were holding your gabfest. Of course, it might just as well have been Kelly, or even Vance himself; but fortunately it was only I."

They allowed the sarcastic thrust to pass in their surprise at his easy unconcern. They had fancied that Pinney would be as badly knocked out as themselves at learning the seriousness of the situation.

"Well, if you know what's up," exclaimed the Rat, "seems to me you're taking it pretty cool."

Pinney only laughed.

"Good joke, eh?" burst out Ike wrathfully. "Maybe you think Vance won't dare to slough us on this fool notion of his?"

"Oh, no." Their leader gave an emphatic shake of the head. "He'll put us over the jumps all right. As Percy wisely remarked, it is up to us to beat it. You fellows can do as you like; but I, for one, am going away from here."

Ike uttered an exasperated growl. Such debonair *insouciance* in the face of the difficulties encompassing them was simply maddening.

"Talk sense," he snapped, "or else keep your trap shut. How are we going to beat it with the kick as empty as a kid's bank on circus-day?"

Pinney, however, still continued to regard them with that same teasing smile.

He was of the same general type as his companions, but with a difference. None were gentlemen; but, while Ike and the Rat were mere window-glass imitations, Pinney was a pretty fair quality of paste.

Both in point of education and natural endowments, he was in a class ahead of the

others, and as a result they had come to defer to him and follow his leadership.

He, on the other hand, often disdainful of their density and slower wits, was accustomed to banter and flout them. But now he evidently decided that the sport had gone far enough; for, becoming serious, he motioned the two back to their seats at the table, and drew up a chair to join them.

"Now, listen to me," he said authoritatively. "We shake this burg at midnight to-night, and we don't hobo it, either. We'll slip quietly down to the dock, board the Columbia just before she pulls out for Detroit; then it's hey for New York and the bright lights, with a bank-roll in our pockets thick enough to choke a horse."

They stared at him as though they believed him suddenly gone crazy.

"Fact!" He nodded his head joyously, no longer able to keep the secret to himself. "Boys, I've scared up a live one!"

"A fall guy?" they demanded breathlessly.

"The softest ever."

"And he's got money?"

"Nothing but— Sh!" He broke in upon their expressions of jubilation with a warning glance toward Dutch Louie in the front room. "Not so loud. That old frankfurter is trying to scoop up an earful, and I'm getting so I don't altogether trust him lately."

"All right." Ike and Percy modulated their transports. "But, for Heaven's sake, *spiel*. Don't keep us guessing all night."

"Well"—Pinney dropped his voice to a cautious whisper as he began his narrative —"I was never one to take much stock in this wind-tempered-to-the-shorn-lamb dope. According to my observations, the more a guy is down, the worse things generally start to pile on top of him. But for once the play does go through.

"This morning I gets tipped off—never mind how—to this same Vance stuff that you got from Louie, and were making such a ballyhoo about when I came in; so, feeling pretty blue, I hot-footed it down to the depot on the chance of striking some conductor I knew, and working him for transportation down to St. Paul.

"Nothing doing, though. For four mortal hours I hung around there, sweating and swearing, and not a man showed up with whom I had even bowing acquaintance, except old Demarest, that we cleaned on the wire-tapping deal, but who didn't dare squeal for fear of losing the job he had held so long.

"At last it got along past noon, and I was just about to give up when this darkest-before-dawn stunt I'm telling you of happened.

"Up to me comes sidling a farmer-looking guy, and passes me one about how hot it was.

"Naturally, I wasn't in the mood for conversation, especially with a rube, and I was on the point of moving off, when fortunately it struck me that maybe I could shake him down for a ten or twenty.

"'Oh, a good sport don't mind a little heat,' I comes back at him. 'Maybe we can find something in a glass with ice in it.'

"My idea, you see, was to steer him down to one of those dumps by the Point, slip him a 'peter' in his booze, and then, when he was dead to the world, frisk him for what he had.

"Of course, the boss of the joint would hold out for the long end of the cush—they're all leary on taking a chance now with Vance watching them so close; but I figured that I could probably make railroad fare out of the play, and anyhow it was the only scheme I could think of on such short notice.

"The rube had a surprise to hand me, though. 'You're on, partner,' he says. 'I'm down here straight from the lumber country for a good time and nothing else; but before we start out on this career of frivolity I want to heel myself.'

"'Heel yourself?' says I. 'Do you mean, get a gun? That isn't at all necessary. I wouldn't take you to any place that isn't strictly respectable.'

"'No, no; you don't understand,' he laughs. 'I was referring to the necessary funds for our enterprise. I want to hold up my end, you know, and practically all I have with me is in the shape of a certified check. Lead me to a bank, will you, so that I can get it cashed? There'll be no trouble; my signature is guaranteed.'

"'A certified check, eh?' I asked. 'What is the amount?'

"'Five thousand,' he said, 'and—'"

"Five thousand!" broke in Ike and the Rat together. "And he wasn't a bug or stringing you?"

"Boys, it's as straight as that I'm standing here this minute. He's got that $5,000 in yellow-backs on him right now."

The two auditors started up scowling.

"*He's* got it?" they demanded. "Do you mean to say—"

"Easy, easy." Pinney waved his hand. "You don't suppose I was going to cut up any money like that with 'Nig' Foley, or Big Chris, or any of those other wolves down by the Point, do you? Of course he's got it, and he's going to keep it, too, until we get ready to relieve him of it ourselves."

"But, Pinney," the Rat expostulated excitedly, "you're running an awful risk, letting go of him for even a minute with all that in his poke. How do you know where he may not be straying, or who may not get hold of him while you're joshing here with us?"

"How do I know?" Pinney shrugged his shoulders. "Simply because he has gone to sleep up in my room, and I took the precaution to lock the door when I came away."

Ike rose to his feet, evidently prepared for action.

"What's the play?" he asked. "Chloroform or a blackjack? Anyhow, there's no use waiting. Let's go over and get the money."

"Yes," sneered Pinney; "and have Vance after us by wire before we'd got a hundred miles. Gee, but you are crude, Ike."

"Well, how do you propose to do the separating then?" grumbled Ike sulkily.

"By a little game of cards. As I told you, our friend is here for a good time, and his particular brand of festivity, it seems, is gambling. The first thing he asked me was where he could find a faro bank. I told him Vance had closed down everything of that kind tight; but since he was bent on playing, I could possibly induce a couple of business acquaintances of mine — the president of the First National Bank, and the treasurer of the Empire Milling Company—to drop around to my rooms to-night for a friendly game of poker."

"And he stood for that?" demanded the Rat.

"Stood for it? He asked me if I thought his $5,000 would be enough."

"By Jove!" The Rat wonderingly shook his head. "It sounds too good to be true!"

CHAPTER III.

TURNING THE TABLES.

About nine o'clock that evening, President Duquesne of the First National Bank and Treasurer Morley of the Empire Milling Company—otherwise, Buffalo Ike and Percy, the Rat—appeared at Pinney's apartment and were duly introduced to Mr. Lockhurst, the pleasure-seeking lumberman.

Mr. Lockhurst was evidently in genial mood; for Pinney, by herculean efforts had managed to scrape enough together to blow him off to a dinner at the Spalding, and the savor of the planked whitefish which had served as the *pièce de resistance,* still lingered on his palate.

He also was manifestly flattered at being included in such exalted company, and it was all the pseudo president and treasurer could do to keep their faces straight in the presence of his obsequious deference and naive confidences.

"I'm almost ashamed to do it, Pinney," muttered the Rat during a moment when the attention of their quarry was otherwise engaged. "It's too easy."

"Didn't I tell you so?" Pinney grinned. "But don't rush things," he cautioned. "Remember, we've got to stall him along until just before midnight, then turn the trick quick, and make the boat before he has a chance to holler."

With this understanding among the three rascals, therefore, play was begun.

Sorely against Pinney's will, to say nothing of Louie's, Ike had borrowed, partly by threats and partly by persuasion. $100 from the cigar store proprietor, and by the aid of this, together with a liberal flourishing of checks, they managed, especially since Pinney acted as banker for the game, to create a showing of wealth.

It had required almost a surgical operation to extract the hundred from Louie, and only by taking him so far into their confidence as to reveal that they had a "fall guy" to be trimmed, and by giving solemn assurance that the money would be returned with usury on the morrow, had it finally been obtained.

Even Ike now regretted the transaction, however, as he saw the utter trust with which the stranger accepted the worthless checks of "President Duquesne" and "Treasurer Morley."

"I thought we would have to put up some kind of a bluff," he whispered apologetically behind his hand to Pinney. "I never believed any one could be quite so soft."

"Well, no use crying over spilled milk," returned Pinney. "Only make sure the $100 is mailed back to Louie before we

shake the burg. We don't want to give Vance any loophole to bring us back on. He can't extradite us for this job; gambling is only a misdemeanor. But if we skipped with the hundred they'd try to make it out grand larceny."

Perhaps both of them might have been more disturbed, though, if they had known how much fat Louie was worrying over that century he had been cajoled into giving up.

The more the thrifty German considered the matter the more apprehensive did he become.

True, he was not explicitly informed as to the plans and purposes of the trio; but he had overheard that afternoon the words, "getaway," "Columbia," and "midnight," and putting two and two together it did not take him long to arrive at a pretty correct conclusion as to what was in the wind.

Nor did he go quite so far as to calculate on Pinney's wariness in returning his money, but simply mindful of the gang's rapacity and of their necessity for hurried flight saw himself already mulcted of his precious simoleons.

"I dink," he finally decided after closing up his store, "I dink I go 'roundt by dot Pinney's room undt vait until dey come oudt. Den I make certain I git mein money pack. Sure, I miss mein pinochle game; *aber* dot is better *als* losin' all dot *gelt*."

Accordingly he toiled painfully along the steep streets of the hilly town until he finally reached the abode of Pinney, and then pantingly, but on tiptoe, dragged himself up the two flights of stairs.

As he paused at the landing and laid his ear cautiously against the door he heard the rattle of chips and the subdued murmur of voices, and drew a long breath of relief.

He was in time; the bunch was evidently still there. All that remained now was for him to settle himself down to wait.

Meanwhile, under Pinney's orders, the game had been progressing languidly. Some slight encroachment had been made on the visitor's $5,000—enough to get him keyed up and keep him interested; but practically the players stood just about as they had started.

It was a warm night, and with the windows closed and the blinds drawn the room soon became stifling.

Lockhurst, who was of rather portly build, soon showed the effects of the heat. His collar wilted visibly and the perspiration stood out in beads on his forehead.

"Whew!" He turned to Pinney. "Can't we have a window open?"

"I am afraid not." The host shook his head. "You know I told you the police are very strict on gambling just now, and if anything was heard to arouse suspicion they might raid even a private game like this. Of course Mr. Miller and Mr. Duquesne here, to say nothing of myself, couldn't stand for any notoriety of that sort."

"Well, then," panted the other, "if you'll excuse me I think I shall have to shed some garments."

He rose as he spoke and removed his coat, exposing to view a big .44 revolver hanging in a holster just under his left arm.

"I generally go fixed," he smiled, "in case of emergency; but I guess there's no need to be careful in this company."

So, divesting himself of the weapon, he laid it carelessly on the mantelpiece and also took off his waistcoat.

The three crooks, whose faces had paled a bit at the sight of the big gun, now glanced at one another in satisfaction. The man was completely at their mercy.

Utterly unobservant of them, however, Lockhurst resumed his seat in shirt-sleeves, and the placid progress of the game continued.

As eleven o'clock boomed out from a neighboring church steeple Pinney gave a slight nod, and with this ginger became suddenly infused into the proceedings.

The stakes ran higher, the betting was more brisk, the losses of the stranger rapidly increased.

"President Duquesne," who was also apparently a loser, at this point suggested the removal of the limit, and Mr. Lockhurst readily assented.

"Suits me," he observed laconically as he skinned over his cards; and accordingly the bars were taken down.

At 11.30, after a furtive glance at his watch, Pinney again gave that slight significant gesture to his companions.

It was the signal to close in.

They would have just about enough time now to round up the victim's $5,000, jump into the automobile which they had waiting below, and catch the boat before she pulled out.

On the table was a jack-pot which had already gone twice around, and it was the Rat's deal.

No one was able to open, however, so the deal passed to Ike, and from him in turn to Pinney, the pot being duly "sweetened" on each occasion.

Four times around had it been now, and the amount on the table was assuming tempting proportions.

Pinney surveyed it interestedly and indulged in a bit of persiflage with the stranger to draw the latter's attention away from his nimble fingers as he gave a final shuffle to the pack.

There was no more expert manipulator of cards in the whole Northwest than this same "Kid" Pinney, and he knew quite as well the nature of the hands he was dealing, as though he had been able to see them.

To the Rat and himself, who, according to his plans would merely push the betting up to a certain point and then retire, he gave respectively a diamond flush and two pairs, aces up.

Lockhurst he started off with three kings, expecting to add to them later on the draw a pair of fours, while Ike, who had been selected to administer the *coup de grâce*, was given at the beginning only a measly pair of treys.

The program worked out exactly to his designs. Lockhurst, after a single glance at his cards, produced his roll, and skinning off a hundred dollar bill, tossed it to the center of the table.

The Rat promptly raised the break to $500, and after some well-simulated hesitation Ike came in, followed by Pinney.

Lockhurst made it a thousand dollars to play, and the Rat increased this to $1,500, at which figure the draw was made, everybody staying in.

The stranger called for two cards, making a full house, as it was above indicated that he would, but, since the Rat had stood pat, warily bet only $100.

"Five hundred more." The Rat raised him, and Ike and Pinney staying, Lockhurst came back at him with another $500.

Things now being in good trim, Ike took the field in earnest, Pinney and the Rat retiring after another raise or two, and leaving him pitted alone against Lockhurst.

Back and forth the two bet, until every chip on the table, all the worthless checks of "President Duquesne" and "Treasurer Morley," Louie's $100, and what money had been already won from Lockhurst lay piled up in the center.

"Well, it's a show-down," observed the lumberman, as he flung out the last bill of his $5,000 to call Ike's final bet. "What have you got?"

"Four treys," announced the Buffalonian easily.

"No good." Lockhart started to draw in the pot. "I have four kings!"

The three stared at each other aghast. Then the solution suddenly dawned upon them. They had been opposed to a smoother manipulator even than Pinney, and were beaten at their own game. Instead of accepting the small pair dealt him he had helped himself to another king.

But they were in no humor to let him get away with the booty. They had been desirous of avoiding desperate measures, if possible, but since it was forced on them, why, it would have to come.

"Stop!" Pinney's voice rang out sharp and stern, as Lockhurst leaned over to draw in his winnings.

The stranger glanced up in surprise to find three revolvers leveled at his head.

With an impulsive movement he half reached for his own weapon, then realizing that it had been discarded, let his hand drop back on the table.

Pinney and his associates, still keeping him cautiously covered, began to gather up the hoard.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," said Lockhurst quietly; then he began to laugh.

They stared at him in amazement. Could the man's misfortune have suddenly turned his brain?

But he still laughed on, his sides fairly shaking at their puzzled expression.

"Oh, what a bunch of rank amateurs you are!" he chuckled.

"What do you mean?" Pinney scowled.

"Simply this!" as with a quick motion of his hand he swept away the set of false whiskers which covered his chin, and the toupee which graced the front of his head.

Never was more radical change effected in a man's appearance. Instead of the shaggy, rather dull-looking lumberman they saw now a cold, masterful face, with a jew and chin like iron, a high, intelligent forehead and blue-gray eyes, keen and steady as steel.

But startling as was the alteration in him, it was not more so than that produced upon Pinney, Ike, and the Rat.

As their glances met his scornful gaze involuntarily their faces blanched, their

eyes grew wide with fear, and their hands, holding the leveled revolvers, sank tremblingly to their sides.

And who was this man, who by the mere power of his personality could so overawe three desperate crooks intent on plunder and an escape.

The answer came, as Pinney, slowly recovering from his stupefaction, gasped:

"Stetson! Stetson, the hold-up man!"

In the excitement of the moment, no one noted the creaking of the stairs as fat Louie lumbered down them to get to a telephone and call up police headquarters.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GETAWAY.

ABOVE the poker table, the unmasked highwayman flashed a grim smile of contempt toward the three dismayed rogues.

"Well, why don't you play the hand out?" he taunted them. "You were keen enough to do it, when you thought I was only a poor slob of a lumberman; what are you hanging back for now? You are still three against one, ain't you, and with the drop on me at that. And I'll bet you want that five thousand as much as you ever did. Why don't you start something, then? You've got things your own way."

But the disgruntled trio stood shrinking before him, meek as so many sheep. Pinney, it is true, flushed under the biting raillery, and half raised his gun, but the impulse died a-borning, and his hand dropped nerveless to his side again.

Looking on that flint-like face, which he had often seen pictured and could not possibly mistake, recalling the many sinister tales he had heard of this man's daring and resource, he simply did not dare to move.

He, like his companions, was cowed by the magic of a name.

The highwayman swept them with another scathing glance.

"Bluffed, by heck!" he scoffed. "Three of you bluffed to a standstill by one lone man and a bit of reputation! Come, aren't you going to take the money you've plotted and schemed so hard for, now it's right in front of you? No? Well, then, I guess we'll close the session. You cheap cowards aren't even ordinary amusement."

Leisurely he leaned over and counted bill by bill the $5,000 he had brought with him, folded it into a roll and slipped it into his pocket, disdainfully pushing back the $100 of Louie's and the mass of fake checks which the others had contributed.

Then, with the same elaborate unconcern, he walked over, put on his coat and vest, repossessed himself of his gun, and with a yawn started toward the door.

"Wait just a minute," interposed Pinney, his voice hoarse between fear and rage. "Why have you done this thing? Simply to have sport with us?"

"Oh, no." Stetson shrugged his shoulders. "If that had been my idea, I'd have got fooled; for you skates merely bored me. No; I had quite another purpose in view.

"You see," he grinned, "I had learned that this new Chief Vance you have down here had done you slimy grafters the honor to suspect you of a connection with me, and I wanted to push the game along. The 'Pinks,' as it happened, were getting rather uncomfortably close on my trail, and I figured that if I could throw a bit of dust in their eyes and turn them on to you for a spell it would give me that much more of a chance on my getaway.

"You obligingly walked right into my little trap, and since the 'Pinks' and Vance by comparing notes, have probably by this time settled the identity of the stranger Pinney had out to dinner with him to-night, I fancy you are going to have a hard time explaining things.

"I guess that's all you need to know, boys," he concluded, turning again toward the door. "Sorry I can't linger in your interesting society; but I have an idea the 'bulls' will be around here before long, and I have pressing business elsewhere."

Seeing him about to leave, and realizing at last to the full how they had been tricked and used by a cleverer rogue, a spark of belated courage flamed up in the timorous hearts of the three.

With a practically simultaneous movement, their fingers reached for the triggers of their weapons.

But quick as a flash Stetson whirled about, and they found themselves gazing into the muzzle of that menacing .44.

"Ah!" he rasped. "So you thought you'd plug me in the back, eh? Why, you curs, I have eyes all over me. Now, just for that, I'm going to have some fun with you. Pinney, stand on your head!"

The leader of the trio hesitated just a

second, then, as he saw an ominous gleam steal into the gray-blue eyes bent on him, hurriedly obeyed.

"Good!" grinned the tormentor. "Now, Percy, you can beg like a dog, and 'President Duquesne,' you—"

But the infliction of further indignities was stopped by a sudden shuffling of heavy feet on the landing outside and the sound of an imperative rap on the door.

"Good Lord, the cops!" gasped Percy, the Rat; and heedless of Stetson or anything else, with this new terror to lend him wings, he dashed toward the nearest window, flung it up, and leaped out.

In an instant, Ike and Pinney, recovering their equilibrium, had followed suit, and the hold-up man was left alone.

For a breathing space he hesitated, a somewhat quizzical smile on his lips. He glanced toward the door now sagging under the strain of the police attack without; then seeming to reach a decision, swiftly took the road pursued by his late companions.

As he flung himself across the sill, he saw a water-pipe at one side still trembling from the descent of the others, and reaching out to grasp this, slipped rapidly to the ground.

True, being of heavier build than the trio, his weight wrenched loose a length of piping, and he finished the journey a little more speedily than he had calculated upon; but fortunately for him, it was the bottom section which gave way, and he sustained no worse injury than a good hard jolt as he struck the ground.

Regaining his feet, he hurriedly glanced about and saw the dark forms of the three grafters vanishing up an alley.

"In that case, me for the other direction," he muttered; and as a crash from above sounded out at this minute, showing that the door to Pinney's quarters had at last given way, he lost no time in acting on his decision.

Down the alley he sped, running with remarkable agility for so heavy-set a man; dashed around a corner into a back street, and almost crashed into the automobile which Pinney had ordered to remain there in waiting.

Stetson's quick mind grasped almost by intuition the purpose of the car standing there in the shadow of the trees along that rather squalid-looking thoroughfare.

"Ah," he accosted the chauffeur, "this is for Mr. Pinney, isn't it?"

"Yes," the man admitted, "to take him and his friends down to the Columbia. But they'll have to be showing up mighty quick if they expect to make it now. Boat sails sharp at midnight."

"That's just it." Stetson's satiric smile was hidden under cover of the darkness. "They have—er—decided not to come, and I am to use the car in their place."

As he spoke he had clambered inside, and the chauffeur never doubting the word so authoritatively delivered was already applying the power. Stetson certainly seemed to have the faculty of making people do as he wished.

Another second and the wheels had begun to revolve. At breakneck speed they shot madly down the street.

A block or so away they passed another automobile also defying the speed limit, and with a sudden exclamation the chauffeur jammed down his brake so hard that Stetson was almost pitched from his seat.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded angrily.

"Didn't you notice?" answered the man. "That was Vance. If he caught my number I'll probably be jerked up to-morrow good and hard."

"Well, don't slack up on that account," adjured Stetson. "Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Hit her up again, and do it lively. Here's a twenty to square any trouble you may get into."

Accordingly the chauffeur, his scruples vanishing under the influence of the tip, did hit her up lively; but as they whirled along his mind returned again and again to the recent encounter.

"Wonder what the chief was hustling up in that end of town at such a rate for?" he remarked.

"Yes," assented Stetson, "I wonder?"

One object of his mission they might have found out if they had followed the hurrying official, and that was to give the subordinate who had conducted the raid on Pinney's quarters an exceedingly uncomfortable ten minutes.

Vance himself had been out on other business at the moment Louie's agitated telephone message arrived, and with visions of the $5,000 reward for Stetson looming large before him the understrapper in charge at headquarters had organized the attacking party on his own responsibility.

The chief, as soon as he learned what was up, had lost no time in hurrying to

the scene; but it required only a glance over the disheveled room and the assembled bunch of crestfallen "cops" to tell him he had come too late.

"Humph!" he snorted, his stubby mustache bristling with indignation. "Another blunder like this, Kelly, and you leave the force.

"Didn't you have sense enough" — his eye sweeping unerringly to the window of escape—"to guard the back of the joint while you were brass-banding around at the front?"

"The darned old roost is three stories high," defensively muttered the luckless Kelly. "I didn't figure on 'em leavin' in no airyoplane."

"No; and apparently you didn't figure on any such simple thing as a water-spout, either," came the sarcastic retort. "How did you come to start out on this mismanaged job, anyhow, without my authority?"

"Well, sir, the Dutchman here," waving a hand toward Louie, who was industriously engaged in recovering his hundred and such other usufruct as was available from the mass of chips and worthless checks upon the table, "the Dutchman, he telephoned in that Stetson was here with the bunch, and considering that it was an emergency case, where the 'Pinks' were liable to get ahead of us, I took the liberty of—"

"Letting the prize get away," broke in Vance.

"Well, sir," poor Kelly had to admit ruefully, "it certainly looks as though I had done that very thing."

"So?" The chief suddenly turned his glittering eye upon Louie. "It was you that snitched, eh? What happened to cross the spirit of your dreams? I thought you sent me word this afternoon that you didn't know a thing against the Pinney crowd?"

"Vell, I didn't then"—the cigar man wriggled unhappily—"*aber* I loan dem a hundert dollars vat dey say dey vanted to trim—vat dey say dey vanted to use in pizness, undt aftervorts I git scared aboudt my hundert, undt I come here undt listen at de door. Undt den I hear Pinney say: 'Mein Gott, it's Stetson!' or somedings like dot, undt I peep t'rough de keyhole, undt I see dot up-hold man joost de same as his picture in de paper.

"So, naturally, I dink right avay of dot fife t'ousand revard on him, undt I hurry off undt phone to headkvarters joost so queek as I could."

"Humph!" The chief ruminated. "That sounds pretty straight, and yet there are one or two quirks in it that don't seem altogether right. Guess you had better go back to the office with me, where I can question you more at length."

"All right, sir. Joost so soon as I finish countin' up mein money."

It was an unfortunate remark.

"Your money?" repeated the chief. "How do I know that is your money? Here, hand it over until you prove title."

"No, no," protested Louie excitedly. "I tell you it is my money—mein hundert dollars vat I foolishly loaned dem grafters."

But the chief was inexorable. "Fork over," he insisted, and Louie had to fork.

"Py chingo!" the Teuton muttered wrathfully. "I hopes you neffer does catch dat up-hold man!"

"Well, hope what you please, but don't bet any money on my not doing it," rejoined Vance dryly. "I've already telephoned for Bud Evans's bloodhounds, and unless I'm badly mistaken we'll have the whole gang before morning."

CHAPTER V.

"I ALWAYS GET WHAT I WANT."

THIS chronicle of events, it must be admitted, has heretofore been chiefly taken up with the doings of what were upon occasion aptly termed "undesirable citizens," yet that is not to say that certain more appealing characters were not involved in the strange skein of happenings connected with the pursuit of Dan Stetson, the notorious outlaw.

Assuredly no one could have been more appealing than Mathilde Biron, the little French-Canadian girl, who boarded the Columbia that night just as the gangplank was being drawn in, and lifting a tear-stained, perturbed face to the purser, asked for accommodations.

Mathilde had come to Duluth about a year before to take a position as stenographer in a big manufacturing plant.

A quiet, modest, unobtrusive little thing, she was far removed from the type of shorthand princesses who affect wide, floppy-brimmed hats and the latest fashion in hair.

The city life and the rattle and bang of the office where she worked seemed, indeed, to leave her untouched, and at the end of

the year she remained just about the same quaint little Quaker that she was when she started in—sweet and serene and innocent as a wild rose wet with morning dew.

Every morning punctually at nine o'clock she arrived at her desk, and save for the brief luncheon interval, remained until five. Then she betook herself to the highly respectable, if unpretentious, boarding-house where she lodged, ate her dinner, and afterward spent the evening happily reading or sewing in her own room, except on the very rare occasions when she went out to the theater with a girl friend.

On Sundays she went in the morning to mass, for she was a devout Catholic, and in the afternoon took a walk through one of the parks or along the shores of the lake.

That was her blameless, colorless and uneventful existence; nevertheless she was not unhappy in it. The facility natural to her French blood was pushing her ahead in her vocation, and she took a thrifty joy in her small, but steadily increasing, bank account.

Nor, quiet and unobtrusive as she was, must it be supposed that romance had altogether passed her by, although that fact did not particularly conduce either to her comfort or peace of mind.

Most men with whom she came in contact failed apparently to find her shy prettiness attractive, but there was one, a Mr. Phelps, who boarded at the same house, whom she fairly bowled off his pins.

Phelps was a big, rough fellow, supposed to be an iron-ore prospector. His surly, uncommunicative ways had made him decidedly unpopular in the boarding-house, and he was seemingly well content to have it so, delighted to speak to none of the others and have none of them speak to him.

But with the advent of Mathilde Biron a change came over the spirit of his dreams.

He took to hanging about the parlor when she came down a little before the dinner hour to play on the piano; he intercepted her in the halls on one excuse and another; he bribed the dining-room girl to seat her at the same table with himself.

It was palpable to even the dullest intelligence that Phelps was hard hit.

As their acquaintance grew, too, he began to pester the girl with invitations to all sorts of entertainments.

The word "pester" is used advisedly, for Mathilde did not like Mr. Phelps. His rough, bearlike ways frightened her.

She felt a something sinister about the man which instinctively repelled her.

Yet her steady declination of his invitations, and her frightened avoidance of him only seemed to increase his ardor.

A day or two before, as she was going up to her room, he had stepped suddenly around a turn in the hall, and clasping her in his arms, had broken into passionate protestations of love.

Utterly taken by surprise, Mathilde felt for a moment as though she would swoon, then as his hateful kisses rained down upon her face, the French in her awoke, and she struggled against him with the vindictive fury of a little wildcat.

She clawed at him with her nails, struck at him with her clenched fists, kicked out with her stout boots.

"Ha, that is good!" he laughed, easily withstanding her assaults. "I like to tame spirited little things like you."

"Let me go!" she hissed. "Let me go, or I shall scream and bring the whole house here!"

"Oh, no, you won't." He laid a heavy hand across her lips, as an indication that he could stifle any cry she might try to raise.

Nevertheless, after a moment or two—either to test her or because he feared some one might really come—he did release her.

With the sense of liberty, she started to dart away from him up the stairs, but like a cat playing with a mouse, he caught her by the wrist and jerked her back.

"Why do you hate me so?" he questioned, studying her flushed, indignant face.

"Let me go!" she panted hoarsely, stamping her foot. "Let me go, and never dare to speak to me again!"

"You won't marry me, then?" he asked.

"Marry you?" she gritted between her teeth. "I'd die first!"

For answer he snatched her once more into his arms and crushed her to his breast.

"Oh, yes, you will!" he declared fiercely. "You'll marry me inside a month. I want you, I say; and what I want I always get!"

What more he might have said or done in his tempestuous wooing is hard to tell; but at that moment some one started to come up the stairs, and he was perforce obliged to let her go.

"Remember," he repeated, as she sprang away from him up the steps, "I always get what I want."

Safe in her own room with the door locked, Mathilde flung herself down on the bed and gave way to a burst of hysterical weeping.

She was no longer the wrathful fury offended and defiant, but a mere sobbing, frightened child.

What should she do?

She asked herself this question over and over again.

She must certainly leave this house, but where could she go to escape her detested pursuer? He knew the office where she worked; by very little espionage he could soon find out her domicil.

Then recalling his determined, relentless words, "I always get what I want," she grew cold as ice.

So, between fits of terror and despair, completely puzzled as to what she should do to protect herself, she lay shiveringly awake half the night, until at last, worn out both in mind and body, she finally fell asleep.

Morning, however, with its warm, bright sunshine, served to dispel many of her terrifying apprehensions, and when she came down to breakfast and learned that Mr. Phelps had departed on one of his mysterious trips, and expected to be gone several days, her spirits rose almost to their normal pitch.

Youth is resilient at all times, and Mathilde, for all her demure ways, was of an exceptionally optimistic nature, letting troubles, when no longer imminent, slip from her almost as easily as the water rolls from a duck's back.

Besides, with her religious tendency, she was firmly convinced that, being a good girl and in no wise culpable in the matter, Heaven would look out for her.

So she went tranquilly about her work all that day and the next, her mind at ease until late in the evening, when she had retired for the night and there came a knock at the door of her room.

Aroused suddenly from sleep and a sort of nightmare dream in which she had been fancying herself flying from Phelps, she was at first afraid to open the door; but, reassured finally by the landlady's voice, she consented to do so, and then all thought of her persecutor was forgotten.

It was a much more perturbing matter she found which demanded her attention; for the landlady handed in a telegram announcing the serious illness of her mother, and bidding her come home at once.

There was only one way to reach the little Canadian hamlet on the north shore of the lake. She would have to catch the Columbia sailing at midnight, or else wait over for another day.

Feverishly Mathilde glanced at her watch and saw that she would just have time to make it. So hurriedly dressing herself and tossing a few necessaries into a hand-bag she hastened to the wharf with all the speed at her command and just at the last second sprang aboard.

The bell rang, the whistle sounded and the boat moved out into the harbor. The lights of Duluth lay astern, mounting in long irregular lines up the steep hill upon which the city is built.

Mathilde paused for a moment to recover her breath after her run, and then set out to find the purser and book accommodations.

She pushed forward through the crowd and started to ascend a companionway leading to the main saloon.

But hardly had she laid her hand upon the rail before the sight of a man just ahead of her caused her to recoil pale-faced and gasping and flee affrightedly back to the shadows of the outer deck.

If it had been possible she would instantly have left the boat—even despite the urgent summons which was calling her home—for she felt there could be no chance of a mistake.

The back and shoulders of the man ahead of her upon the stairs she recognized as belonging indubitably to Phelps.

(To be continued.)

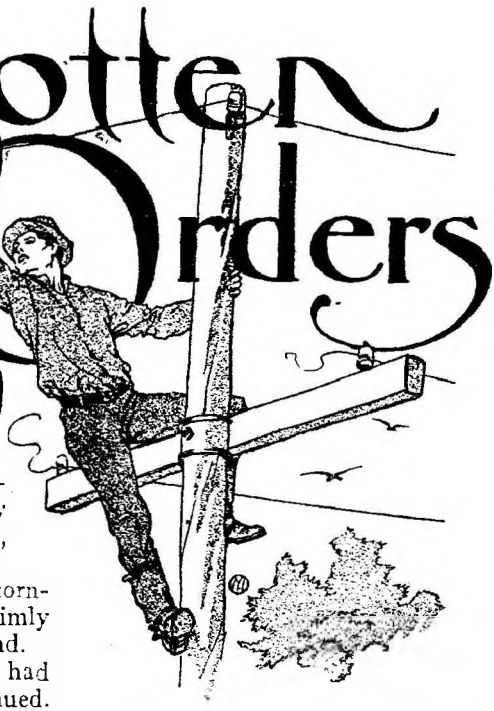
A QUATRAIN OF EXILE.

PALACE and fane, and treasure of immemorial art!
Suaver speech and softer sun, lavisher legendry—
Then sudden flutter of stripe and star—a leap o' the heart—
And swift thought-flight to the darling hills the thither side of the sea!

Charles Fitzhugh Talman.

Forgotten Orders

By Elmer Millard



"NO! A man who deserts his engine just because he suddenly sees a red light ahead of him, isn't the one I want to marry."

Edith Rogers's black eyes flashed scornfully at Tom Stevens as he turned grimly toward the door with his hat in his hand.

"You know the contempt that father had for engineers who jumped," she continued. "He pulled a throttle from the time he was twenty-five, but he never left the footplate while his train was moving.

"I'm sorry you've broken your arm and been laid off, but it's your own fault. No girl wants to marry a man she has lost her respect for." She paled a little at the spasm of pain that ran over Stevens's face, but she kept on. "So it's got to be 'good-by,' Tom, for you and me."

She held out her hand, but he did not notice it, as he flung out through the doorway and down the path to the gate.

During the week that followed Stevens cursed his broken arm and meditated deeply, on the steps of the little cottage near Pine City, where he lived with his mother and sister.

The puffing of the big mountain "hogs" over in the yards of the D. M. and P. came tauntingly to his ears, reminding him of his disgrace and bringing back vividly the scene of his last night in the cab.

The "367" had been steaming badly and had worn his nerves to a thin edge as he nursed the Limited up the Summit incline. He had left Craig Cañon an hour late, and, with the heavy grades before him and a green fireman on the deck, he knew he had few chances of picking up the time he had lost.

Then the danger signal had flashed into view, and with it visions of a break-in-two and runaway freight cars dashing down upon him.

With a warning cry to the fireman, he had jerked shut the throttle, thrown on the air, and leaped from the gangway. When the world became real again, he had found a track-walker bending over him in the light of a red lantern, trying to bandage up his arm, which hurt frightfully.

It was only a case of a loose rail, and he had mistaken the warning signal for the tail-lights of a caboose.

When his month was up he would go back to work in the cab of a freight engine. It irked him to lose his run, but that Edith should have scorned him as a coward nearly drove him to desperation.

He had done all he could to stop the train. After that why was it wrong to consider the saving of his own life? He had been a little too quick to "light out," and he was taking his punishment. To Edith, however, it had only been a proof of a yellow streak.

Somehow Stevens's bad luck seemed to have dated from the time the D. M. and P. had made Pine City the end of the division and run a third rail through the Wasatch tunnel.

It had been vile, suffocating work pulling a train through that smoke-filled hole, in the old days before they put in the big generating plant up at the falls, but nevertheless nearly all the engineers cherished an inborn hatred for the big electric locomotives that coupled onto their trains and whirled them through the five-mile tunnel between Pine City and Granite.

Until then he had had Edith all to himself, but with the electrification of the tunnel had come George Collins, the superintendent of the power-plant, who, though apparently not an ardent rival for Edith's affection, had always seemed to be waiting his chance to step in between Stevens and the engineer's daughter.

And now it looked as if his chance had come. Twice during the past week he had seen Edith and Collins together in the village, and had noted the air of ownership the superintendent had assumed toward her.

Five days went by and no note of relentment from Edith. With his arm in a sling Stevens was pacing fretfully up and down the path that led to the front gate, when the sound of wheels caused him to glance toward the road.

A buckboard hove in sight. In it were Edith and Collins. They were too engrossed in each other to notice the engineer, and Stevens's eyes narrowed as Edith's merry laugh floated back to him with the smoke of Collins's cigar.

He watched the buckboard swing around a turn in the road and disappear behind a clump of tawny-barked pine.

"That 'super' has certainly got his nerve with him," he growled. "The D. M. and P. isn't paying him wages to drive good-looking girls back and forth between Pine City and the generating station. He's probably only giving her a lift as far as her uncle's ranch up at the Gap, but I wonder what her lineman brother would say if he saw her riding with his 'super' during working hours. Maybe I wouldn't like to spoil that soft-handed galoot's pretty face for him."

"Tom," came his mother's voice from the front porch, "the yardmaster wants you on the phone. It's something important. Come quick!"

Stevens hurried up the front steps into the house. On one of the walls of the front room was the telephone, with its receiver dangling by the cord. He picked it up and placed it to his ear.

"I'm Stevens," he called, "what is it?"

"This is Jennings, at the office," came the voice from the other end of the wire. "Say, did you see Collins go by yet, on his way to the power-house? He just passed a few minutes ago? Well, do you suppose you can get a horse and go after him? Just got a wire from the general manager at Elko saying he wants to see him when he goes through here on his special in about an hour and a half. We won't be able to get Collins on the phone until he reaches the generating station, and then it will be too late. Your arm wouldn't bother you? Good! Go ahead. Put in a bill for your time and trouble, and I'll see that it goes through. Good-by."

Stevens hung up the receiver, grabbed his hat, and hurried out of the door.

"Going up the road a way to stop Collins and send him back," he called to his mother. "Guess I can get Peters's mare if the old man isn't down in the meadow."

The neighbor across the road was sitting down to his noonday meal, when Stevens hailed him through the kitchen window, and before ten minutes had elapsed the engineer was in the saddle speeding up the road out of the valley.

It was a two-mile-climb to the top of the ridge. On the other side, the road led slowly down into the cañon of the Yuba, where at the foot of the falls the rushing waters surged by the foundations of the brick power-station.

At the top of the tall cedar-poles beside the road ran the three bare copper strands that carried the twelve hundred horse-power of electricity from the power-house at the falls to the transformer station at Pine City.

Sitting easily in his saddle, as his horse's hoofs sent up a cloud of yellow dust behind him, Stevens soon reached the top of the ridge.

On the other side of the slope just where the road began to pitch downward, he caught sight of one of the company's linemen tying his horse to a small tree.

It was Jack Rogers, Edith's brother, and as Stevens pulled in his mare, he turned with a nod of recognition.

"Hallo, Stevens!" he called. "What brings you up here? Going over to the plant to get a job throwing switches?"

"Not as bad as that," returned the engineer. "I'm looking for Collins. They want him back at the office. Did you see him go by?"

"No. He must have been ahead of me. I left the office about fifteen minutes after he did. He sent me up here to replace a couple of insulators while the current's off."

"Well, I'm on my way." Stevens swung his quirt across the mare's flank and was off down the grade.

Like many engineers he had little interest in the "juice," but when he remembered that surging through those three small wires overhead were 60,000 volts of death-dealing current he gazed at them for a time with a feeling of fascination.

"It's no wonder the linemen can't work on the wires when they're loaded like that," he mused. "It's a mystery to me how they ever find time enough to keep the line in shape."

His mare was blowing heavily and her flanks were steaming, when down the road ahead Stevens caught sight of a patch of white among the trees. As he drew nearer he soon made out the buckboard and the forms of Edith and Collins.

They were just passing along a shoulder of the ridge and were looking out over the cañon at the blue buttes in the distance when Stevens's hallo brought them to a stop.

He drew up beside them, raised his hat to Edith, who nodded a faint recognition, and then turned quickly to Collins to deliver his message.

"The general manager wants you at Pine City," he said. "His special goes through in about an hour. Jennings, the yardmaster, sent me to notify you before you got too far."

At the word "special" Collins started. Turning in the seat his eyes swept rapidly across the western sky-line where the pine-fringed ridge they had just crossed traced its sharp outline in the rays of the setting sun.

Both the girl and Stevens noted the superintendent's terrified expression, and looking up they followed his line of vision to where one of the huge cedar-poles of the transmission line stood silhouetted against the blazing background.

A dark shape perched near the top of the pole like a giant eagle suddenly caught their attention.

"My Lord! What have I done?" gasped the superintendent jerking his watch from his pocket and glancing quickly at it. "It's 5.50, and I ordered the current on at six for the special. That's your brother Jack, Edith, up there among the wires. I sent him out to replace two broken insulators while the line was dead between 5.30 and 6.30, and then forgot to countermand the order when I phoned for 'juice' to handle the special."

"My brother! And there's only ten minutes left! Why don't you do something? There is surely some way to save him." She turned appealingly to Collins.

"Yes," stammered the superintendent. "Here, Stevens, let me have your mare. You can't travel fast enough with that broken arm."

"Take her if you want to," said Stevens, "but you can see she's badly winded. What's more, it took me at least twenty minutes traveling as hard as she could go to get here from the spot where I passed Rogers. You said yourself that the current goes on in ten minutes."

Collins glanced wildly about. For a moment his eye took in the pair of climbing irons and a bundle of lineman's tools in the back of the buckboard. He looked quickly away, but Edith had noted them also. She sprang out into the road and grasped his arm.

"There's a lineman's outfit! Can't you cut the wires?" She pointed up at the transmission line. "Isn't there time? It's the only way to save him." She turned to Stevens. "Ride up the ridge and warn Jack if you can, while Mr. Collins climbs the pole and cuts the wires."

"Oh, but I can't do that, Miss Rogers. If my watch should happen to be slow and the current come on while I was up there."

"Your watch isn't slow," said Stevens in even tones. "It's just 5.57; we've wasted two minutes already."

"It's out of the question." Collins's voice shook with excitement and his hand sought the mare's bridle.

"And you mean you're afraid? So that's the kind of a 'quitter' you are. Yes, I guess you had better go." Stevens swung himself from the mare's back while Edith gazed at him in wonderment and alarm.

"No! Wait a minute!" He jerked the pair of climbing-irons from the tail of the buckboard and thrust them toward the superintendent. "Here, buckle these on me."

While Collins was fumbling with the straps, Stevens lifted his arm from its sling.

"Tom, you mustn't, you'll fall—your arm," cried Edith.

"It won't make much difference," muttered Stevens. "There, Collins, that'll do. Now go!"

As the superintendent climbed furtively into the saddle and sped off up the road, Stevens picked up a pair of pliers from among the tools, thrust them in his belt, and strode over to the base of the nearest pole.

Setting his teeth to master the grinding pain in his broken arm, he placed his hands against the opposite side of the pole, and driving the spurs deeply into the soft, splintering wood, he drew himself slowly upward.

It was a thirty-foot climb to the cross-arm, but long before his good right hand caught the heavy timber, the torture in his half-knit arm nearly overpowering him. Twice on the way up the dizzy throbbing in his head forced him to stop to rest.

Drawing himself painfully astride the cross-arm he paused for a moment, and gazed down into the agonized face of the girl below.

"There are just two minutes left," she called, peering at the superintendent's watch he had laid on the seat of the buckboard.

"Look out," cried Stevens. "The wires will hit you. Run up the road a way."

He hitched himself out along the cross-arm to the nearest one of the wires. The jaws of the pliers closed with a snap.

Ping! Whirr! The wire went whipping viciously down to the ground. Stevens was moving over toward the copper strand on the other end of the cross-arm, when from the cañon below a faint roar was wafted up to him.

Both he and Edith had heard the sound before, and they knew that down in the power-house the water was rushing through the tail-gate and that the wheels had started the dynamos to whirring. At any moment the switches would go in.

With a dread that caused Edith to reel and sway, she saw that the minute-hand had crawled full upon the hour. She cried out to Stevens that it was too late, but he paid no attention to her entreaties to desist, and with her eyes riveted upon his every move she saw him sever the second wire.

As the pliers bit into the last copper strand, three feet above Stevens's head at the top of the pole, the girl in the road covered her eyes with her hands, but a quick twist of the engineer's wrist sent the remaining wire whipping down to join the other two on the earth.

A great blue flare leaped up from the roadside that almost blinded the girl and started the horse to rearing and plunging. The power was on.

"It's all right, Edith," called Stevens unsteadily from the pole-top. "Jack's safe now, though it looks as though both of us had a pretty close call that time."

He swung himself down from the cross-arm and drove the spurs of the climbing-irons into the soft wood. He reached out to grasp the pole, but somehow it seemed as if the strength in both his arms had failed.

His climbers slipped from the pole, and, grasping frantically at it, he began to slide toward the ground. The spurs caught with a jerk, and with his arms outstretched his body pitched off into the underbrush.

When his senses returned he was lying in a clump of manzanita bushes.

"Oh, Tom," sobbed Edith, bending over him, trying to stanch a trickle of blood from a gash in his head. "You're not killed? Will you ever forgive me for calling you a coward?"

Stevens painfully raised himself on his uninjured elbow.

"Forgive you? Of course I will, Edith," he said with a world of tenderness in his voice.

At the top of the big pole beyond the gap that Stevens had made in the transmission line, the three copper strands gleamed and burned in the last rays of the setting sun. They moaned softly in the light summer wind, and to Edith, as she gazed tremblingly up at them, their sounds came down like the wailing cry of disappointed fiends.

TO PHYLLIS.

WERE I asked to drink a toast to thee
  And repeat the virtues that are thine,
It would be a happy task for me,
  Though I'd never reach the draft of wine.

From the Very First Minute

By Burke Jenkins

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

A SUDDEN DECISION.

I AM an impulsive bookkeeper with a bicycle as a hobby which I ride every Saturday night. Only, this time it was Friday night, because Decoration Day, that year, came on Saturday. Events followed.

Now, I hate work as cordially as any man I know; and the monotony of double entry every day of the week, even with the comfortable salary that regularly went with the slavery, made me almost indignant that I was perfectly satisfactory to the firm.

As regularly as pay-day rolled around I got my thirty-five bucks in a neat little envelope with my name immaculately written thereon. I would tear the end off carefully, so as not to mar any of the bills; count the coin; tuck it snugly into my fob; beat it back to my hall-room; jump into my bicycle suit; pick up my wheel, which I kept shining like new tin; trot it down-stairs to the street; mount, and keep pedaling till my cyclometer registered two hundred miles.

I suppose it was an asinine sort of a safety-valve, but I firmly believe to this day that that night-and-day ride once a week was what made me keep what little mind I still have.

Somehow, I simply couldn't get myself fired. There seemed to be an inexorable fatality that kept me as a cog in the mercantile machinery of Coblin & Maxwell, leather findings. I have no great amount of will-power, and, with eggs at thirty-six per doz, thirty-five is not to be sneezed at. I couldn't resign.

As I have intimated, the next day was Decoration Day, and, of course, a holiday. I hate holidays. They spoil me. But I determined to ride out my general grouch at my uneventful life by an overdose of pedaling. I had fixed on riding a triple century before I quit.

Now, I always rode a very high gear, humped my back like a question-mark, and never saw any more of the scenery than twenty feet directly ahead. I always dug my mileage out on the Merrick Road on Long Island, knew every inch of it, had a good lamp, and kept the same dogged pace night and day. Fifteen miles an hour is pretty good going, hour in, hour out.

There is a distinct fascination to night-

riding, and by two o'clock on Saturday morning I had numbed myself into a pleasant-going piece of grinding machinery, a sort of resistless onwardness that I delighted in. The moon had gone down an hour since, and the dull grayness of the macadam road that caught the glint of my light was everything I could see; and my objective self was all that really saw that. The thinking part of me was on some sort of a dreamy debauch, air-castle building.

There is a sharp, right-angle turn in the road about five miles west of Patchogue. On either side is a stiff hedge of very thick shrubbery.

How I myself escaped very serious injury was entirely due to practised agility; for, at the very angle of the turn, I met an onrushing motor-car which showed not a light —not even a gas-lamp. Nor did the driver catch the glint of my own diminutive headlight until too late to avert the impact.

But I had learned the trick in earlier days, and it was sheer instinct that actuated my muscles. Abandoning my wheel to fate and using the handlebars as a fulcrum, I made as clean a vault as you'd wish right into the brush hedge at the roadside. Scratches were my only suffering.

I do hate to hear that popping crackle of a breaking bike, though this time the greater damage that immediately followed took my mind from it.

The sharp application of brakes, coupled to the quick turn the machine was making at the very second, caused it to cant perilously near a complete upset, and there came hurtling almost directly at my feet a man who had been muffled up in the back seat. He lay in the road limp, and from the way he had landed I knew he was badly hurt.

The automobile flopped back into position, and the chauffeur scrambled over to me. When he saw the man lying there he became much perturbed.

"My Heavens! do you think he's dead?" he cried.

"Go and light one of your lamps," I replied in a good deal of disgust; "then we can see a little bit more about things. It strikes me that more light on your part would have pre—"

"Yes, yes, I know," said the fellow, as he stepped to the car.

He lit a gas-lamp, detached it from its bracket, and threw the glare of it to the roadside. I knelt beside the injured man in quick examination.

There were no cuts, nor, as far as I could determine, were there any bones broken. The heart was beating fitfully, though a chalky pallor spoke of something serious, a skull injury.

The eyes finally fluttered uncertainly as the light fell closer to them, and, with this encouragement, I hastened to suggest to the chauffeur:

"Here, quick! We'll get him back into the car. You take his feet."

The fellow set the light on the ground, while I caught the man under the arms, and we thus managed to carry him to the automobile. Without great difficulty we got him to the broad seat in the rear, where he slumped down into unconsciousness again.

"We'd better make it quick for Patchogue; there's a hospital there!" I suggested.

"Are you coming along, too?" answered the chauffeur in what I took for an odd tone.

"Why, yes," I replied. "I'll just bundle this smashed wheel of mine up there in front beside you. Maybe it can be patched up some way."

I left the side door, where I had been propping the man's head to as comfortable a position as circumstances would warrant.

Passing by the front wheels of the machine, I drew my poor, battered bicycle from underneath, and was about to hand it up to the fellow in front when, with a sharp "Hi!" he threw in his clutch, the gears caught sharply, and the lunge of a passing mud-guard nearly threw me to the roadway.

The rattling coughs of his opened muffler grew fainter.

I was startled, mystified, and generally disgusted at this unexpected defection. What in thunder could the man mean? And why had he ignored the idea of returning to Patchogue where the nearest medical aid lay? Instead, he was making directly away from such assistance.

And I knew enough of medicine to know that the injured man stood in need of immediate attention, and, furthermore, an attention that must not be a moment relaxed in vigilance for at least two weeks. I was absolutely at a loss to account for the unceremonious departure.

"It certainly couldn't have been that the fellow didn't want me to make him pay for my damaged wheel," thought I as I once more set down the bicycle, and began to

rekindle the lamp which, by some miracle, had not suffered much beyond a dent or two.

But the bicycle itself was a complete wreck. It made me fairly sick as I looked at that jumbled mass of twisted spokes, dangling, shattered rims, and writhing tubing. For, as it was my sole hobby, I had spared no expense to equip it with the best.

My disgruntlement at the loss of my wheel for a moment took my mind off the odd and exciting incident that had just happened; but a spot of white at the roadside, in another minute, brought it sharply back.

The white object proved to be an envelope which, without a doubt, had fallen from a pocket of the injured man when he had met the ground so violently; for it lay in exactly the spot from which we had lifted him.

I picked it up and, by the light of my lantern, discovered that it was unaddressed and unsealed: so I don't believe moralists will blame me overmuch when I say that I immediately drew forth the contents.

And there, in the flicker, I discovered a ticket for a first-class passage on the Conrader for Liverpool!

There was, besides, a stateroom "reservation" for room No. 89, but sign of a name there was none.

I looked for the date of sailing. It was that very morning at six; Saturday, that is.

So here was I five miles from Patchogue at 2.35 A.M., with a wrecked bicycle and an impulsive, adventurous nature; a ticket to Europe, and a most unaccountable but fast-growing itch to fling that bookkeeping job to the winds.

The hunch was on me and I did short-cut thinking.

The injured man couldn't possibly be able to use the ticket himself in time. If he was able to talk in two weeks, I missed my guess.

As to my right to appropriate the ticket, I reckoned my ruined wheel would count in somewhat as payment.

Besides, the mean way the rascal of a chauffeur had given me the go-by made me mad, and I may have been a bit warped for the moment ethically.

Anyway, though, I'm giving facts; and if I deserved punishment for what I then and there decided to do. following events certainly more than overbalanced the scale of justice.

I made my mind up at the very second I lifted the wreck of the bicycle and flung it bodily into the hedge.

And, with that fling, I seemed to throw from me every tie that had chafed so distressingly this long time back. The decision reached—to really do something decided—acted like a tonic upon me. I was to be an adventurer—I.

So I covered the five miles or so to Patchogue in a record stride, and just in time to catch the milk-train into New York.

My connections were wonderful. I took the Subway to Spring Street; then blew myself to a taxi across town to the pier.

The jingle in the engine-room of the Conrader seemed almost timed to the instant my foot touched the deck. The tugs swung us an arc into mid-stream.

I gazed at the snaggled tooth-line of Manhattan's sky-scrapers which I thanked my stars I was leaving for adventure at last.

I wore a bicycle suit, none too clean; had some twenty-nine dollars and an appropriated ticket; had not the slightest notion as to what I purposed doing—but, doggoned if I wasn't whistling free and clear as I went in search of room 89 to wash up for breakfast.

CHAPTER II.

MYSTERIES BEGIN TO PILE UP.

STATEROOM 89 proved to be the regulation affair. There were two berths—an upper and a lower. Opposite these a sofa, with a washstand and towel-rack, mirror, etc.—the usual equipment.

Thoroughly satisfactory it all appeared to me as I breathed in the sea-air which was already beginning to waft into the room from the southward as we steamed for the Narrows.

I fairly smelled freedom through that open port-hole. There is nothing like old ocean for the real lure.

Of course, I had neither change of clothes nor luggage of any sort, but not a wrinkle of worry troubled my brow on this score. I would manage somehow. Perhaps in a day or so I would be able to strike up a friendship with some fellow on board—a friendship familiar enough to warrant my asking the loan or sale of a shirt or so.

So I happily made lather with the new little cake of soap that bore the steamer's name in sharp letters, and proceeded to

eliminate as much as possible of the Long Island grime that still clung to me.

Ablutions accomplished, I found a place in the dining-saloon and smacked away heartily at a distinctly well-cooked breakfast. Events, even so far, had given decided zest to appetite.

The room was already plentifully full, and an old gentleman who was seated opposite me kept nodding away in friendly fashion until he finally broke silence with the question:

"Can you tell me which side is Fort Hamilton? I always get them mixed."

We were just passing through the Narrows, and the two forts that guard the entrance showed up sharply in the early morning sunlight.

"Well, sir," I chuckled, "you've struck me just where I'm weak myself—I never could remember."

Meanwhile, I was looking over the old gentleman's dimensions and wondering if one of his shirts would fit me. He framed up pretty good, and I decided to cotton as close as possible through the day and let friendship ripen.

The thing proved easy enough, for conversation made itself from the jump, and within ten minutes I knew his name, which was Alexander Clay, and his business, which (as near as I could gather) was coupon clipping.

We rose from the table at the same moment, and I suggested the smoking-room. I reasoned that cigars which I could buy there would help some.

As he and I made for a door leading to the deck I was conscious of the fixed and quizzical stare of a humped-up and much-bemuffled old lady in black. And, somehow, I seemed to bear in a short but hazy memory that I had seen her outline for a fleeting glimpse when I had quitted my stateroom just before breakfast.

Old man Clay and I spent pretty much of the entire day together, and in the course of it got chummy enough. I grew to like the old cuss immensely. He was traveling alone, apparently had oodles of money; so that by nightfall I hadn't the slightest qualm in outing with what I had had on my mind from the very first moment I set eyes on him. I tried my very best not to misrepresent the truth; though, of course, I did repress some details.

"You see, Mr. Clay," said I finally, when the genial glow of a post-prandial perfecto had settled on him, "a sudden change of plan made me take steamer at an instant's notice. I actually hadn't time to go home and get a grip. Fact is, I haven't even a change of shirts. You can well see my affair was urgent."

I gave him just enough to make him interested, and the shot was not a wild one. I had counted on his doing just what he proceeded to do; that is, make the offer himself.

"Why," said he in sudden inspiration, "you and I are pretty much of the same build, aren't we?"

I feigned stupidity at what he was driving at; but replied confidently enough, when I allowed the light to dawn upon me:

"So we are—er—do you really mean it? Of course, Mr. Clay, I shall be happier to pay you for the articles."

"Oh, tut, tut, Munroe," cried the old gentleman, familiarly as you'd please, "I'm only sorry that I can make it only a fresh shirt and collar and a suit of pajamas to-night. By to-morrow, though, I believe I can fit you out in a long-trousered suit, if you want it, from my trunk in the hold."

I worded profuse thanks.

"Don't mention it," glowed the old fellow in the good feeling his own generosity gave him; "we're all apt to be caught in such a fix. Why, I remember once when I sailed for Havre on exactly eleven minutes' notice from the time I received the cablegram."

He laughed heartily as he continued:

"I was in the barber's chair in my office building and half of my face was shaved. But business was business, and I stopped tonsorial operations then and there—had the ship barber finish the job. Good thing, too—that deal netted a hundred thou'."

I'm not to be much censured if I let the old plutocrat believe that I, too, had been summoned to Europe in some such hasty, cablegram fashion, am I?

So, about eleven o'clock we quitted the moonlit after-deck where we had been smoking, and I went with Mr. Clay to his stateroom, where he unfastened a plethoric grip. Five minutes thereafter I bade him a genuinely-felt "good night," and stepped into the corridor, the shirt and pajamas under my arm.

My own cabin was on the other side of the ship and nearer the bow.

Now, later events make me believe that a vague impression I had of being watched

was really the fact; though I actually saw no one about at the moment, except a stewardess who was reading at the extreme end of the passage.

But I'm not much of a chap for putting stock in vague, old-womanly fancies; so I entered stateroom 89 in most cheerful mood, slapping the door shut behind me almost too noisily, considering the hour.

I clicked on the electric bulb and undressed leisurely, hanging my clothes on the hooks thereunto provided. I kicked off my shoes and tucked them under the lower berth; then donned the pajamas, which were decidedly of better quality than those to which I was accustomed.

For a moment I sat on the side of the mattress running over this wild freak of an outing I had set for myself, and the feeling of unrealness of it all was equaled only by a sort of bubbling delight I couldn't help experiencing.

Positively I didn't feel a care; it didn't affect me a whipwillow what happened when I reached Liverpool. I reasoned that I had money enough for the trip's incidentals, and beyond that I didn't worry.

I was delightfully boy-tired—a sensation I hadn't experienced in years. So I reached up, yawning luxuriously, and switched off the light.

It's an awfully peculiar thing how a sleeping person becomes aware of something unusual occurring about him.

This time I awoke almost in advance of the happening; for, even though the moon had long since gone down, I could faintly discern—from way back in the gloom of the lower berth's shadow—that my door was slowly opening.

It was really more of an impression than actual seeing; but I was certain I was right. But I made no move to arrest it. Instead, as a person will in like instance, I kept mouse-quiet.

There followed the slow closing of the door, coupled to a noise, slight but unmistakable, of the swishing of a skirt.

"As soon as she switches on the light, she will discover her mistake," thought I, as I once more closed my eyes, this time in feigned slumber.

I argued that the woman would be relieved to make an unnoticed exit from my room as soon as she had discovered that she had mistaken it for her own.

But, lying there with my ears tense to every sound, I failed utterly to hear any click of the switch or to notice any heightening of the light through my closed lids.

Instead, the swishing continued a bit; then finally ceased. This was followed by a light step and a vague sense of groping about a moment.

I couldn't stand it longer; so I ventured to open my eyes for a look. This was little use; for, beyond a blurred shadow, I couldn't make out a thing in the greater darkness just before dawn. And I was just upon the point of calling out, when I faintly discerned that the door was once more opening; and the dim glimmer of the corridor was quickly followed by the more rapid closing of the door. The catch of the knob snapped lightly; then followed quick footsteps down the corridor. Now, this was certainly too much for me!

I groped for the electric button, found it, and clicked on the light.

For an instant I was blinded by the change from the dark, then I looked down at the floor, and saw there a woman's black silk dress!

Next my eye flashed to the hooks whereon I had hung my own clothes. They were gone! Even my hat had vanished.

Well, here was a predicament. If I was destined ever to set foot out of my room, I must do it in skirts. But, anyway, what in thunder could it mean?

I found no woman's shoes, so instinctively I began to grope under the berth to see whether I had, at least, been allowed to retain my footgear.

"Yes, *they* are there, anyway!" I grumbled, as I felt familiar leather; but the next instant my hand came in contact with more cloth.

Something had been thrown into hiding. Down on my knees I went and snaked it out. Maybe it was something I could wear to better advantage. Whether I could or not I'll not answer. Judge for yourself.

For I held in my clenched fist a jumper and pants of a pattern once seen never forgotten.

They were convict's stripes!

CHAPTER III.

A BRACE OF FOOLS.

I BEGAN to wonder whether, after all, I loved adventure as much as I had calculated. What was I to do?

I couldn't appear in either of the get-ups that had been left me; that was certain. And the affair wasn't as though I had come aboard the steamer in the usual regulation manner.

However, I might excuse my conduct to myself, I could not be so sure that others would view things in the same light.

"Well," I finally concluded, "the quicker I have the thing over with the better."

So I stepped to the push-button and rang for the steward. After about two minutes he rapped at the door.

Pajama-clad, I opened it wide enough for my head and said, as I slipped a half-dollar to him:

"Steward will you send the captain here?"

If I hadn't been so excited about the affair, I might have known what a fool thing such a request was. But the steward soon got me to realize that the purser was the man I needed.

Then I sat on the bunk and tapped my foot till another rap spoke of the arrival of the purser.

He was a short, leather-hided sort of a little cuss that looked like he could lick his weight in wild cats, which I don't doubt he could; and he shot a sharp squint over the entire room, including myself, in an appraisal of much doubt.

"You sent for me, sir?" he inquired shortly.

"Yes," I replied. "I have had a very disagreeable experience."

And then I opened out into an exact recountal of my having waked up to the opening of the door, of the exchange and theft of the garments, and explained my present predicament.

"And, more important," I concluded, "I thought it only right that you should know as soon as possible that there is an escaped convict at large on the vessel. What do you think yourself?"

He looked me over oddly.

"I think," he finally drawled in what was evidently his most effective tone, "I think that you yourself can go a little deeper into your own story. It strikes me, and has struck me all day, that it is mighty odd this room has had no name down on the purser's books. By the way, what *is* your name?"

"David Munroe," I replied, sheepishly I must confess.

"And how is it that your name wasn't entered as occupant of this room?" queried the purser.

Now I was in for it, and there was only one way left for me. That was absolute truth.

So I opened right out into full particulars about everything. I didn't varnish the story a trifle, though there was one point which I forgot to mention.

Imagine my surprise when it was the purser himself that suggested the omission.

"You don't seem to remember the interchange of looks you had with a humped-up old woman from time to time to-day, Mr. Munroe."

"What are you driving at?" I cried. Then recollection came over me swiftly. Sure enough, I had noticed that old woman looking at me.

"Why—what—" I blurted. "Do you think that it was really a man—the convict all the time? And that it was he that waited for me to get to sleep to make the exchange and steal my clothes?"

"I think more than all that," grunted the purser sourly. "Fact is, I *know* more—and I guess it's about time for you to give the whole thing up."

"Why, for Heaven's sake, you don't—"

"Say," he cut in, "you certainly don't expect me to swallow that bike-riding, automobile, smash-up yarn you've just been spinning, do you? Especially since we got a wireless about ten o'clock that 'Crumb' Waters had escaped, and to keep an eye out for him!"

I was stupefied.

"What in the name of creation are you getting at? Then you think that I myself am the convict, and that I'm only playing this story as a part—"

"Hold on," he interrupted, "I don't know *which* of you is Crumb Waters; but I do know that we began to have our suspicions early in the day about that old woman being a man. But, of course, we couldn't connect it with the truth until the marconigram.

"And now that you have been good enough to try to work as bold a dodge as actually to *send* for me, why, I'm obliged to tell you that the thing's too thin to catch *this* birdie. You two are cahoots! That's certain!"

"But what in thunderation would I get myself deprived of the only clothes I had for? Certainly that would be the act of a fool, if I am what you say I am."

"That's the very cleverness of the scheme. Come now, Munroe, as you call yourself, come out with where the other fellow is, and it'll be better for you both."

This certainly was amusing.

"Why, I haven't the ghost of an idea about the thing other than I tell you!" I cried. "I have already told you how my clothes were just stolen from me, and you can believe me or not, as you like—and be blowed to you!"

"Now, that kind of bluffing don't go with me!" said the purser emphatically, "and the sooner you drop it the better. There isn't a leg for you to stand on; but if I could make out—"

And right here came an interruption—a decided one.

For a step suddenly sounded on the deck directly beneath my port-hole. Then came a muffled sort of scrape as an object was whirled through the opening into the room directly at our feet.

I recognized what it was fast enough; and its appearance at this very moment was a veritable god-send. In fact, I don't believe anything else could have put me so quickly out of the tight place I found myself in.

I don't believe I ever looked upon that old bicycle suit of mine with such affection; for that's just what it was—my stolen suit that had hung on my door not an hour since!

"*Now* maybe you'll believe me and my story!" I cried triumphantly, as I caught up the garments and flourished them before the befuddled gaze of the purser.

Nor could I blame him much for his bewilderment. Indeed, my own mystification was just as great as his; though my relief at the incident modified the sensation somewhat.

Accordingly, I was willing enough to go to any lengths of forgiveness when he finally managed to gather himself and blurt out his apology.

"Mr. Munroe," said he, "I hope you will not hold the thing against me. You must admit your yarn sounded slightly fishy."

"Oh, that's all right," I replied magnanimously. Then I started as a sudden thought came to my mind. "But the real convict must have done this! We must catch him!"

We both sprang for the port-hole. Of course, we were too late to see any one, even in the growing light; for day was breaking.

"What a brace of fools we were!" I cried.

CHAPTER IV.

A GAME OF "NEXT."

"WHAT in the world can this new move mean?" queried the purser.

"You know as much about it as I do," I replied with a semi-repressed yawn, for I certainly had had anything but a restful night. "And I don't see that we are any nearer getting the man than ever. As for me," I went on, "I simply must get some sleep."

"Well, I should think you did need it," he replied, "after everything that has happened to you since your wheel-ride."

I eyed him sharply to see that he was sincere. As there was not a trace of sarcasm showing, I realized with pleasure that all trace of suspicion had been removed from me.

"And now," continued the purser, "I'll just take these pieces of evidence to the captain and lay the whole thing before him. Something's got to be done. Meanwhile, though, you just tumble back into bed and get some sleep. I guess we can be pretty sure that nothing will develop until breakfast time, anyway."

He caught up both the woman's dress and the convict's regalia. Tossing them into the arms of the steward, he therewith awoke that worthy from the complete daze that had paralyzed him from the very second he laid eyes on the stripes.

Then they left me.

I took plenty of precaution this time, you may be sure, to see to it that the inner catch of the door was fastened, and even went so far as to screw the swinging port snugly.

I fell asleep immediately, and was dead to the world until the breakfast-bugle rang out its appetizing blare.

Divesting myself of the pajamas, I washed and dressed leisurely—finding, much to my satisfaction, that the old gentleman's shirt was an astonishingly good fit.

The dining-saloon was plentifully filled with passengers as I made my way to my seat, for we had not yet run into heavy weather.

I started in heartily on the five-coursed

breakfast, and had just about got down to where I was puzzling as to my preference for griddle cakes or hot waffles, when everybody in the saloon was startled by a bellow of unrestrained anger coming from down the corridor.

Then a voice, which somehow seemed familiar to me, even in its fury, came to us:

"Yes, you just go get him! Send him here! Quick! I never heard of such nerve in my life!"

There followed a slam of a door, and the next second my room steward stood at my elbow, with the announcement that the gentleman in 72 would like to see me.

I rose mystifiedly and strode down the passage toward room 72.

As I neared the door there reverberated therefrom deep, bass growls of ill-restrained wrath. Then I recognized the room, though I had visited it by night before.

I entered to a snappy "come in" and confronted old man Alexander Clay. He was fairly glistening with red rage, and he chose sarcasm as the vehicle to relieve himself of the surplus.

"Oh, so you are perfectly willing to come and talk the thing over, are you? Argue it out, as it were?"

The surprise on my face was certainly no feigned affair.

"I haven't the ghost of an idea what you mean, Mr. Clay," said I in as cool a tone as I could muster, in view of his own loss of self-control.

"Oh, you haven't, haven't you?" he blurted out. "You were not content to wait until I could get my trunk up—even after I had been good enough to give you a shirt and—"

He seemed, on that instant, to awaken sharply to something noteworthy about my appearance.

"Why—what in—? So you aren't wearing it, after all!"

It looked to me about time to get down to tacks.

"Look here, Mr. Clay," said I. "I should just like to know what you are talking about. You loaned me a suit of pajamas, which were more than welcome last night—and a shirt, which I have on at this instant and which—"

"Yes, yes, but the suit—the *suit!*" he fairly yelled. "And after I had even volunteered to give you one as soon as I could get my trunk up from the hold. You knew I had here but the one I was wearing myself. It was bad enough, your taking it, but now—dog my cats, if you're even wearing it!"

"What!" I cried, "*your* suit has been stolen, too!"

"Stolen, *too!*" came his own bewilderment. "I should say it had; and I haven't a thing to wear to breakfast; furthermore, I'm as hungry as a wolf!"

By this time a little light was beginning to break in upon me. This light fast growing, I easily jumped to a conclusion; and sang out:

"Then the convict, after he had appropriated *my* suit, came to the conclusion that, being a bicycle rig, it was too noticeable; so he managed to sneak into your room and—"

"The *convict!*" cried old man Clay in amazement and quite naturally.

Then I told him hastily what had happened; and while he was digesting the unusual series of events, I rang for the steward and sent him post-haste for the purser.

"This latest development must be known immediately," I explained to Mr. Clay's questioning stare.

It wasn't many seconds before the official appeared, and as soon as he saw me he exclaimed:

"Have you found out anything new, Mr. Munroe? For our part, not hair nor hide have we seen of the rascal, though every one of the crew has been notified. The trouble is that nobody has any definite idea of the man's real appearance."

"That's so," said I. "Not one of us has seen his face at all as it appears as a man; and all any of us *has* seen is as much of it as showed under that deep bonnet he wore as the old woman yesterday."

"But look here," broke in old Mr. Clay, who had long since forgotten his wrath in the interest of the moment, "it seems to me that we at least have a bit of a clue, even if we haven't got a good look at his face."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, my suit—you remember it, don't you? It certainly was of a decided enough pattern."

"Of course," I replied, "now you come to mention it, I do. It was a sort of pepper and salt, with a green stripe queerly interwoven."

"That's it!" cried the old gentleman warmly, "and let me tell you, gentlemen, that *that* is the *only* piece of the kind. I

had a suit made of it and shipped from London.

"So that, if you do catch sight of that particular weave on anybody aboard, you've got your man."

"Good enough!" exclaimed the purser; "and now, Mr. Clay, in order to convenience you in getting another suit, I'll have your trunk sent up from the hold immediately."

"I would suggest," said I, changing the subject, "that we keep absolutely quiet concerning this affair. Any spreading of the story until we capture the convict will but serve to warn him and put him doubly on his guard."

"A good idea," agreed the purser, and we forthwith quitted Mr. Clay's room.

You can be pretty sure I kept my eyes peeled for any sign of our man; and even the other passengers seemed to have caught some sort of kindred uneasiness, though none yet knew the facts of the case.

I saw the purser in earnest conversation with some other official, whom I took to be the first officer, and argued that he was giving our latest discovery, along with as good a description of the identifying suit as he could in words.

Then, shortly thereafter, old Mr. Clay himself appeared, clad in another of his suits, which was still pretty wrinkled from its recent confinement in the trunk.

He took the seat beside me, although it was not the one regularly assigned him, and, as he gulped down his oatmeal, he whispered:

"Anything developed yet?"

"Nope," I answered equally low, "but things are on the *qui vive* generally."

I thumbed over to the corner where the first officer and the purser were at that very moment joined by no less a person than the captain himself.

"Huh!" chuckled old Clay, "this thing's kind of funny, isn't it?"

"And blamed interesting, too!" I added, still keeping my gaze on the group of officers in the corner.

The purser it was, I believe, who first caught sight of a man who was just upon the point of entering the dining-saloon. He nudged the others sharply, which, of course, not only attracted their attention, but also that of Mr. Clay and myself.

The man who thus became the focal point of five pairs of scrutinizing eyes certainly appeared to be oblivious to the fact; for at the moment he was giving vent to a most prodigious yawn.

This evidence of his being absolutely at his ease was further accentuated by the leisurely manner in which he took a seat and picked up the *menu*.

Meanwhile old man Clay's face was a study. The next second he whispered sharp: "That's my suit and no other. I could swear to it on a stack of Bibles!"

A quick glance at the three officers told me that they had tumbled to the fact, and a look of inquiry from the purser in our direction made me realize that he was looking to us for verification as to the identity of the suit.

"You are dead sure, Mr. Clay?" said I in a hurried whisper.

"Absolutely!"

And, with that as a clincher of my own recognition, I bowed an emphatic affirmative.

This seemed to allay all doubt, and, just as the man was indulging in another ill-suppressed yawn, the three officers approached his chair from the rear. Keyed to the interest of it all, both Mr. Clay and myself rose from our own places, which flanked the other table.

The captain's tone was wonderfully quiet, but I noticed he kept his right hand planted snugly into the bulging pocket of his coat. Even I had seen revolvers used that way in my time.

"You can save a disturbance, Crumb Waters," said he, "by stepping with us quietly into my cabin on deck."

"Crumb Waters?" echoed the man in Mr. Clay's suit.

His drawl was the most soporific line of talk I ever listened to. Even in this moment of tension, he didn't seem to be able to hurry one word. I immediately suspected that the fellow was addicted to some drug; a conclusion I believe to this day, though, as will appear, I never had the chance to verify it.

"Crumb Waters?" he repeated unsteadily. "Never heard of him. What are you driving at, anyway?"

"Come, now," ordered the captain shortly, "that line of delay doesn't go with us, my man. We've got about the surest kind of ev—"

Here old Mr. Clay could restrain himself no longer, though by this time a goodly little collection of passengers had gathered about the group.

"What're you doing with that suit on?" he broke out.

"That's just what I'd like to know myself," answered the sleepy one.

"It's *mine,* and you know it," cried the old gentleman. "You stole it from my room last night or early this morning."

Not a ripple appeared on the other's countenance of placidity.

"Stole nothing," replied he; "if there was any stealing done, it was in my own cabin."

"Look here, man," put in the captain, "of what use is it to you to gain these few moments? We've got you dead to rights, and you know it."

The sleepy one seemed to rouse himself to what was almost vehemence—or it was as near that as he could muster.

"Now, you listen yourself," said he, "and here's all I know about this thing. About a half-hour ago I woke up and started to dress, when what should I find on the chair where I had left my own green suit but this pepper-and-salt affair that fits me about as well as any hand-me-down."

"What," exclaimed the purser, "you claim that *your* suit was stolen, too?"

"I tell you that this thing was substituted for mine; and, as I was hungry and didn't have any more clothes until I could get my trunk, why, I did the only *sensible* thing and put on what was there *to* put on.

"See anything wrong in that? And as for your calling me by the dainty-sounding name of Crumb Waters, you're way up too high in the air for me to understand at all."

Here the dreamy one seated himself again, and actually began to tackle his grapefruit.

We certainly were a mystified group. The question was just how much of this sleepy drawl was assumed.

"You say yours was a green suit?" said I, putting in my oar.

"Yes, I said so, didn't I?" he snapped; "and I say so again, but I'll be darned if that isn't all I *am* going to say until somebody comes back with my own clothes. I'm hungry."

Here the circle was broken in upon by the arrival of my room steward, who had had a greater opportunity than either the officers or the rest of the passengers to become acquainted with the details.

"Captain," said he, "I pressed that green suit for that gentleman last night."

It was old man Clay who first saw anything ludicrous in this latest turn of events.

"It certainly looks like our delectable friend, Crumb Waters, has started us on a pretty chase," he remarked.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, don't you see—as not one of us knows his face, he is just going to keep on stealing suits and making exchanges. And as it's only by the suit that we can spot him, as long as he can keep the thing up, he's safe."

"By jingo, you're right!" exclaimed the purser.

Then we all looked at each other bewilderedly.

CHAPTER V.

A SWIFT CHANGE OF SCENE.

"HOLD on now, gentlemen." The captain broke the silence finally. "It's not going to be quite as bad as all that. In fact, I think this clothes stealing and substitution has gone about as far as it is going to. And the way I believe I can stop it is this:

"I shall immediately call an assemblage of all the passengers and state the story to them. Then we can all be on our guard for the fellow. We haven't had any rough weather, and the consequent absence of seasickness will enable all to be present."

And that's just what was done.

The vessel teemed with excitement the rest of that day; and it looked as if, were the convict to elude the vigilance of all these people, he would indeed have to be clever.

I almost felt a something which I think was akin to pity for the hounded rogue. And there was another feeling which nearly approached gratitude, for he had really done me a good turn.

For I don't question it was due to this greater interest and excitement that I was enabled to escape getting into very hot water for having appropriated that ticket.

As it was, though, not another thing was said about my irregular embarking, and by noon of that day old man Clay had further put me on a more comfortable footing as to appearance by lending me another suit — a blue serge from his well-stocked wardrobe.

About sundown the wind backed to northwest, giving us a nasty, quartering roll that set everything jumping. And it was

really a ludicrous picture to see the passengers, one by one and with a curious furtiveness, slink away to their staterooms.

It certainly is a strange thing that seasickness should be treated as such a joke; for the suffering must be very real and intense, though I myself have never experienced it. Indeed, I have often thought that some early influence—some parental heritage before that early time when I was thrown on the world as a "newsy"—had cut me out for the sea.

I actually breathe differently when I'm afloat, with a clear, hearty, lung-filling freedom in tune with the expanse of it all. I'm certainly a sailor at heart. One thing is sure—I never was cut out for a bookkeeper.

But, though my experience at that time was limited as to the sterling qualities of a vessel, it took no fine sensibilities to realize that the Conrader was a miserable packet in a quartering roll of sea.

She wasn't a new boat, anyway, and I believe she was badly trimmed on this trip. But, whatever the cause, she certainly wormed and wallowed through the early part of that night in a most disgusting fashion.

I rather reveled in it, though, as a grateful change from city slavery, and even saw fit to pace the leeward deck on the starboard bow where the black funnel of smoke was swirled overhead and fast disseminated in the gloom of a thickening night.

There was a decided promise of fog, coupled to a rapid lowering of temperature. And it finally got so cold that, having no overcoat—nor even a sweater—I decided that I would make discretion the better part of valor; so I sought the protection and warmth of the smoking-room.

I had a vague notion that possibly I might run across old man Clay there and consequently a game of cribbage; but the place was absolutely deserted. Indeed, since we had struck into heavy weather, it almost looked as if I was about the only passenger with sea legs.

As it was only about ten o'clock, I hated to go to bed; and finally decided upon the rather boring pastime of continuing my "constitutional" up and down the starboard corridor.

Now this corridor terminated aft in the dining-saloon, and just before one reached the doorway thereto there was a smaller door which communicated with the pantry—or sort of mid-ground between galley and table.

In the perilous lurches of the vessel my progress was a grotesque travesty on a real walk; and, upon rounding on my heel at the forward turning point, I almost lost my footing; but the incident didn't prevent me from catching sight of a figure that darted suddenly into the pantry.

I started for the door as fast as I could make my way in the rolling unsteadiness and was in plenty of time to distinguish—enough to justify suspicion, anyway—that the man would bear investigating. For, out of the pantry door he popped again and stood a second, hesitating, under the flicker of an overhead lamp that swung at this point.

And that second was enough for me; armed as I was with a minute description of the vivid green suit everybody on the vessel had been on the lookout for that entire day.

It was our man!

He caught sight of me immediately and, clutching tightly the hunk of meat and bread he had just filched from the pantry, ran nimbly through the dining-saloon.

I took up the chase on a handicap; but I was firmly resolved, at least to keep him in view until I could call assistance.

Straight to the other door of the dining-saloon he made; then up and out into the gloom of the deck. I followed fast and could just distinguish his fleeing form from the surrounding shadow.

I kept a close second until he entered the smoking-room; but, as he managed to fling the door shut right in my face, I lost a bit here. And I reopened the door and gained the room only in time to see him leave by the other door on the port side.

But I *was* in time to see him scrape his right hand cruelly against the projecting head of a finishing nail that had been carelessly driven into the molding of the door jamb.

It was a nasty cut, from wrist to knuckle; and before he was again lost in the shadow of the port-deck I saw the blood spurt from the gash.

But no pity was in me at that moment, especially for this rascal; so I sprang to the door myself and out onto deck again.

Somehow he had, this time, managed to disappear completely. I didn't even know whether he had gone forward or aft.

I gave vent to my disgust in heart-felt invective, an accomplishment which I like-

wise must have inherited from some piratical sire, for I am quite an adept.

But it was no use. I had lost him.

In my chagrin of the first few seconds, and in the perspiration of the short but hot chase, I failed to notice any change in the weather. But there had occurred a decided one.

The promised fog had made good its threat and was thick upon us; but what was far more noticeable was the very decided lowering in temperature. The sensation was one of being inside a vast refrigerator.

I remember that, for a minute, I wondered at this; and it even now strikes me strange that I didn't fathom the cause. But I had little more than a minute then.

Sharp realization of some deadly menace came to me at the very second the clang of the engine-room bell rang from somewhere in the ship's vitals.

She reversed—but too late.

Hoarse yells and scufflings of hurrying feet came simultaneously with the sickening grind of steel plates as they were wrenched from their confining rivets.

The old ship shivered like a mortal as her bows ground into a crumpled mass of junk.

Then the truth flashed on me fast enough: the Conrader had struck an iceberg.

When I came to rational thought I was swimming methodically.

How long the interval was during which I acted upon sheer instinct I have no means of determining. Nor have I ever been able quite to understand how I managed to get clear of the wreck.

The suddenness of such a peril can be appreciated only by one familiar with the sea; and I certainly ranked myself as fortunate indeed that I was out on deck at the instant she struck.

I never like to think of the fate of the poor devils in the shattered forecastle; nor of the rest of the ship's company, for that matter. But, of course, the time then was given to thought of myself only.

I am by no means a slouch in the water, and, at first, found little difficulty in keeping afloat. I even was making some progress, though as to direction I hadn't the ghost of an idea.

Finally, however, the chill of the water, coupled with my soaked clothes, became a terrific drag.

"There's only one thing I can do," thought I, "and that is to get as clear of hamper as possible."

Those who know anything of the matter will realize what a job I had to free myself of shoes and coat. But I did actually manage finally to do both, right out there somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic.

Then I made easier going of it; and, sticking to the old-fashioned breast stroke, with now and then an occasional flop over onto my back, I managed to put through the time until the faintest glimmer of dawn broke over that waste of waters.

By the time the sun rose I reckoned that I had been in the water some four or five hours; but my suffering was not so much from fatigue in swimming as it was due to the terrible coldness of the water. Finally I felt that indescribable, but never-to-be-forgotten drawing of a cramp.

True, it was only in the sole of my left foot; but it argued a worse successor. Should the cramp extend to my leg, I knew I should have to go down.

The very thought keyed me to my utmost, and I eagerly took occasion to scan as much as I could of the horizon whenever I found myself surged to the crest of a wave. But a swimmer's lowness in the water precludes distant vision; but what I did see finally heartened me mightily.

Not a hundred yards off, and rolling to the swells that had followed last night's blow, was a man on a life-raft.

My last ounce of strength I put into overhand strokes; but I don't believe I could have pulled myself up to safety even after I had reached the side of the raft.

But I didn't have to; for an extended hand came to me as I was panting my exhaustion.

I clutched it frantically, but not so frantically but that, even in my plight, I found it noteworthy—that hand.

There was a decided and recently inflicted gash on the back of it, extending from wrist to knuckle.

CHAPTER VI.

CLOSE TO ATLANTIC'S SURFACE.

THE strain and tension of having expended my last ounce of strength being eased thus at so critical a moment caused reaction. I lost consciousness completely, nor did I come back to reality until the sun was pretty near its highest point.

A feeling of overpowering languor held me some moments, and I found it difficult

to disabuse myself of the sensation that I was laboring under the influence of a wild and disagreeable dream.

"Back to the world, eh?" came a cheerful voice from right alongside me. "Feeling O. K.?"

I raised to my elbow and cleared the mental cobwebs from my salt-smarting eyes.

I grunted a second or so in finding my voice; then replied:

"Yes—thanks to you."

"Pshaw, nothing of the sort. I never saw any man put up as game a fight as you did. You saved yourself, for all I did was to pull you aboard."

"But you came to my assistance," said I.

"I *tried* to hard enough," was the reply, "but the oars of this darned shebang got adrift somehow when I cut the thing free; so I just had to watch you make your own struggle. I can't swim a stroke myself.

"But, here, the Lord knows we'll probably have plenty of time for talk afterward. What d'you say to breakfast?"

"Breakfast?" said I bewilderedly.

"Why, sure," was the prompt answer, "don't you think it's time?"

"Time enough," I replied; "but where's it to come from?"

He reached into the breast of the soggy, but distinctly *green* coat he was wearing, and pulled out a chunk of salt meat and a half loaf of damp bread.

And if I had needed further verification as to his identity, this would have clinched it; for I certainly recognized that meat and bread.

It was the self-same provender I had seen him sneak from the ship's pantry.

Now, whether he read the truth of my recognition in my quizzical features or not, I don't know; but, certain it is, he just sat there cross-legged and grinned at me in most amiable manner.

I couldn't help liking the fellow immensely. Besides, things now were certainly to be viewed from a different standpoint; and if ever two men were upon an equal footing, of a surety we two were—out there on that raft in the Atlantic.

And so it was that not once was any mention, or even hint, made as to mutual recognition. We tacitly agreed to keep clear of the subject. Certainly we had enough of more vital interest at the moment.

"Well," said he, "somehow I had gumption enough in the excitement to still swing on to my jack-knife. So here goes."

Whereupon he cut the meat and bread into exactly equal shares.

"And it seems to me, friend," he went on, "that it'll be just as well to make breakfast rather light. You know, there may be other breakfasts necessary.

"Though I do believe," he added, "that we are still right in the track of steamers. Our chances are as good as we could hope."

I munched away at my chunk of meat; he did the same.

As to a size-up, I figured that he was about of my own age. His build was athletic, though tending to slightness; but it was a slightness that spoke of wonderful endurance; that kind of stamina that is best described as "wire."

Picture him, therefore, as some five feet eight inches. Smooth-shaven except for a two-day stubble, light-haired, and gray-eyed—with a trick of twinkle in them.

At first I could account in no way for the positive exuberance of his manner in such circumstances as we found ourselves. But then, finally, I tumbled to what I concluded was the solution. Further consideration intensified my viewpoint.

I argued that, hounded as he had been from end to end of the steamer, and thus kept continually upon the jump, he must indeed consider it actual good fortune to be shipwrecked.

After all, circumstances do certainly alter cases.

And I then and there made a resolution; a resolution that I found easy enough to make, in view of the generous way in which he had shared his little all so willingly.

"Sure thing," said I to myself, "nobody is going to find out the truth about him from me, if we are ever picked up. Let them deduce what they will."

The sea had been falling decidedly, and we now rolled to an easy swell. This gave us the much-desired opportunity to dry out a bit in the sun.

But, though neither of us once spoke about it, our greatest suffering came from thirst—a thirst which the bite of salt meat went far otherwise than to alleviate. In fact, by not even a hint did we broach the subject until a sort of promise showed up in the western heavens near nightfall.

He took off his coat and spread it out in the center of the raft, propping the edges up as best he could. To my questioning look, he explained:

"That thunder-head promises a pretty

sharp downpour, I think. And maybe it'll be heavy enough for us to catch some. Anyway, the coat'll be plentifully soaked, so that we can squeeze out some moisture, hey?" He chuckled humorously, as he added: "Though it may be kind of green-colored and taste of dye."

By this time, though, I welcomed the idea of even such a beverage as we waited for the squall to hit us.

This time the sailor's adage of "short warning soon past" certainly received the lie, for the storm heightened by the minute.

The downpour was terrific, and as soon as the coat had become thoroughly soaked it began actually to hold a pool of water. We lapped eagerly at this, for it certainly was an uncertainty as to when we would have another such chance.

But our other discomfort was woful. A raft of this nature consists of but two end-pointed cylinders laid parallel some three feet apart and connected by a cribwork of wood. So that it rides right on the surface of the water especially if loaded.

A most uncomfortable craft it soon proved itself in the nasty chop of a sea that quickly rose to the whipping of the storm. And, as night closed in, the water was breaking all over us, soaking and chilling to the bone.

I believe that scientists tell us that a wave can only attain a height of forty feet, from hollow to crest. They may be right, but I doubted it that night. Never will I forget the sensation of those gigantic heaves and surges.

By good fortune, a coil of line that was part of the equipment of the raft had not gone by the board with the oars. Otherwise, without this to make fast to, we would certainly have been swept clear of our only hope.

Nor even when the faintest glimmer of dawn began to show its streaks to the eastward did the storm abate. Up and down we lashed and fretted in the fury of weather and sea.

Horizon vision was denied us, our range being confined to a matter of yards; but the sky overhead was slowly lighting and daylight always brings at least a bit of hope.

Then came the incident—striking; unusual.

At first I thought it an uncouth fancy of my overwrought nerves, but the impression was certainly distinct.

In sharp relief against the sky overhead there suddenly reared a menace that threatened to plunge us instantly to destruction. A fast flash of what was near to intuition made me realize the truth.

It was no fretwork of imagination; but the decidedly practical, material, and hard outline of a vessel's bowsprit; bobstay, side-stays, spreaders, and foot-ropes!

And I even made out two dim figures of men struggling to muzzle a flapping jib that snapped to my ears in verification of eyesight.

I had but an instant, but I took in fully what would happen.

With a sharp cry and a wrench I awoke my raftmate to the danger. A leap and cling was our only hope.

Down plunged the bows of the struggling vessel; up we surged to the meeting, and the slap of the raft came sharp against the chain bobstay.

I gripped a side stay, wormed higher, reached the spar itself, then lay a second, belly-flat and panting. My companion gained a foot-rope.

Then the vessel began to rise to the next billow.

But a wind-weakened yell and the sudden bareness of the spar told that what had been our salvation had spelled wo to two others. The raft fell clear of the rigging, but the jib, unrestrained, snapped viciously, for the men that had been struggling with it were gone!

I hope those poor fellows found the raft.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SURPRISE OF MY LIFE.

I HAVE never gotten over the coolness of the man beside me there on that jumping spar.

"We seemed to have changed places!" said he quietly, though in a tone that carried distinctly, even in the ear-whipping wind.

"And," he continued, "our duty is obvious enough."

"What do you mean?" I managed to voice, with difficulty, for the motion made me grip to a whitened knuckle.

"Why, we've got to stow that jib," he replied, "since there's no one else left to do it. And mighty quick, at that! If I fills and pays her off into the trough, something'll happen!"

"I'll do the best I can," said I, though I knew that my best was wonderfully bad.

But he certainly made up for my inefficiency. It took no second glance at him gasketing that vicious jib to tell that he was a sailor to the core.

"There now!" he chuckled finally, addressing the sail as human, "I guess that'll hold you some, eh?"

Then he worked nearer me, where I clung on for dear life further inboard, and together we scrambled and clutched till we reached the forward deck.

We stood panting a moment at the bitts before a roar came to us from somewhere aft:

"Hi there, you two wind-jellied swabs! Ginger—ginger! How long, in the name of thunder, are you going to be forrard? Lend a hand aft here, and on the double!"

"The old man seems to be in a huff," laughed my companion. "Come on, let's give him a little surprise."

And back we trotted to a position within the glow of the binnacle lamp, which was still lighted, for daylight was not overstrong yet. So that, gaunt-eyed, dripping, and bedraggled from our perils, we must certainly have looked like ghosts to the broad-chested giant of a man who stood at the wheel.

"What the—and in the name of the eternal—who?" he gasped in a bewilderment that was quite natural.

The truth that we then hastily told him certainly did defy probability, but we stood before him as living verification of authenticity. He had thus unwittingly and miraculously traded two men for two others. But he saved further talk for a less stressful moment.

Sailors are built that way; a vessel's safety has the call on all other considerations. So his tone changed suddenly to the authoritative:

"Know how to reef? he shot the question.

I shook a doubtful head, for my inexperience made me cautious, but my companion assented vigorously.

"Then tumble forward there again," ordered the big man, "and double-reef the foresail—'cause I'm going to jog this blow out. Can't make no headway, 'specially underhanded, so we might as well ride comfortable. We've got plenty of sea room, and besides, we can talk better below."

Somehow or other I managed to lend a little aid in knotting the reef points, though my seamanship at the time was miserable. But what I lacked the other more than made up, and in short order we were able to run up the canvas.

The skipper put the wheel over and the schooner hesitated a moment. But she finally decided to be good, and veering slowly, she heeled to an able angle and eased herself comfortably to a quartering roll.

The skipper put the helm down, lashing the wheel, then he beckoned us to follow as he led the way down the companionway into his cabin.

Here he further showed his knowledge as to what to do by unhesitatingly and without a word uncorking a brandy flask, which was certainly medicine to us in our wet chill. Then he stepped over to where a door stood propped ajar and closed it.

Returning nearer us, where we were gulping a second hooker of the liquor, he raised the lid of a large slop chest that lay partway in the lazarette.

"I reckon you can fit yourselves out in dry togs among that there," said he; "though I ain't doin' nothing as to guaranteeing a perfect fit."

And this unusual man actually did not put one question to us until we had culled out dry garments from the assortment of clothing in the chest. We were each fortunate enough to find really passable outfits, even to shoes.

"Well, now," said he finally, "let's have the yarn; for of all the tarnation, unbelievable ways of boarding a man's vessel, seems to me you two selected the top-notch of unusual in gettin' on this old hooker of mine!"

So, to his gesture, we seated ourselves on a transom before the center table, and, at my nod, the other launched into the story of our shipwreck and what followed.

I was particularly struck by the clear, concise and direct manner in which my noteworthy companion gave a rapid résumé of what had befallen us from the moment the ship struck. Here was a man of education and training.

But I noted especially that he made no reference to any event prior to the calamity to the liner—not even a hint. In fact, from a quick and furtive look or two he shot at me, he appeared to be putting me on a like footing of secrecy. And I saw no reason, then, why I should betray his trust in this regard.

When, finally, in conclusion, he gave a

graphic description of the manner in which we had been virtually scooped up on the bows of the schooner at the same moment that the other two wretches were thrown off, the skipper cried:

"Then Jim and Bill are gone? I must have been too dazed at seeing you two to get a good line on what could have happened."

He sprang to his feet and started to the companionway, keyed to action. "We must do something to try to save them!"

A heavy lurch of the schooner threw him smartly against a bulkhead just as I reminded him:

"No boat could live in this sea. And we must have drifted a mile since. We can but hope they managed to find our raft. They certainly had good chance to gain it, too, for we quitted it at the very second they were washed overboard."

The skipper saw the reason in this, grim though it was.

"I liked those fellows," was all he said, seating himself once more on the transom opposite us.

At that moment the door which he had been at such pains to close on our dripping entrance opened briskly, and there stood outlined in sudden surprise a girl of about eighteen or twenty.

Her minute of hesitation revealed her to be of a lithe, eager, pantherlike readiness of muscle. Not in all that swaying, tossing, and rolling was she for a second so much as tempted to grasp a single steadying hold. She eased herself in oily fashion to every lurch—here, indeed, was a child of the sea.

"Why, father!" she exclaimed. "I *thought* I heard strange voices. What in the world—and who—"

The old man's calm tone explained:

"Oh, I thought you'd might as well have your sleep out. It's been blowing tarnation hard all night, and—"

"Oh, has it?" she broke in. "Then, I win my wager!"

"Yes, that cloud really meant more than even I at first thought, and just about dawn these men were swept aboard, and—"

He drew a review of the occurrence.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" she replied quietly.

Well, here certainly was a girl for you! She had actually been fast asleep during all that howling tempest, and was now informed of what I still think little short of a miracle, and her calm reply was an "Oh, that's it, is it?"

A loud guffaw from the captain roused me from my bewilderment.

"You see," he chuckled, "my daughter was born at sea, and her mother before her. Forty years have shown me that the sea can do wonders and play many tricks. Bella comes by calmness naturally."

The girl smiled brightly as she crossed the cabin and took a seat beside her father.

Her hair was tawny, thick, and confined, I noted, with a brown ribbon in an unfeminine sailorlike knot, and she wore her practical suit of pilot-cloth with the ease of service. Not over-tall, she still had a dominance of carriage, unusual in one of her stature.

A decided tan accentuated the brightness of gray, ingenuous eyes that were flashing fearlessly at the two of us. Then suddenly she sprang to her feet again.

"But, father," she cried, "they haven't eaten!"

There was woman for you, and my groaning stomach blessed her for it.

"Well, by glory, that's a fact!" ejaculated the old man. "Where in thunder's that black rascal?"

The question was greeted by a burst of merriment from his daughter.

"I guess where he usually is when there's any wind stirring," she laughed; "namely, busily engaged in some African prayers in his bunk in the galley."

"Dog me if I don't fire him when we get to Charleston," growled the skipper, but not over-convincingly.

"You just know you won't, dad! You've threatened to give him the final every storm we've had for the last ten years. And you know as well as I do that we couldn't get along without Sam's cooking any more than you could get along without your collection."

"Well, maybe you're right, Bella; maybe you're right," he assented, the daughter's smile infecting him. "But, anyway, the wind's going down considerable, so he ought to be able to rustle some grub by now. I'll just dig him out, and, after we've had breakfast, we can talk things over."

He mounted the steps to the deck, and we heard his heavy footfalls as he went forward to the galley. The girl manifested absolutely no embarrassment at thus being left alone with us; in fact, no society belle could have had more of the grand manner—a natural easiness.

Moreover, there was a wonderful fascination to her; a personal note, highly accentuated by the strange environment in which her life had been spent. And the short moment I took my own eyes from her I noted that my companion's gaze was riveted in double-clenched intensity—not a phase of her moods, as they flickered their story in her noble countenance, but met an answering concomitant in his.

"Ho, ho," rumbled the captain as he returned to us, "the sight of that nigger was sure enough to make the angels weep! He had his head all swathed up in a quilt and was singing some sort of a wail when I slapped into the galley. But I've tumbled him out for fair at last; and I can promise some eats inside a half-hour, anyway. So, while we're waiting, let's fix things up."

"In what way?" I inquired.

"Why, I just want to know whether you men are willing to consider yourselves as taking the places of the two lads I lost. For, not counting this son of Ham of mine, they're all the crew I carried."

"For my part," said I, "I consider *that* the only thing we could be expected to do."

"Oh, I'm willing to make the pay the same, anyway," said he.

"Which is more than generous," offered my companion.

"But I'm not so sure that I would be worth my salt as a sailor." I objected. "I know scarcely anything of the sea."

"You two appeared capable enough when it came to reefing the foresail," said he.

"No credit to me," I replied. Then I pointed to the other. "My friend here knows the ropes, though."

"Oh, not much," was the modest rejoinder. "I simply have had some experience in yachting, and love it all immensely."

"Well, you'll suit me to a T—you two!" emphasized the skipper, "and, though I never heard of changing crews in mid-ocean before, if you'll just take possession of the fo'c's'le we'll consider the matter settled. I suppose it ain't exactly a nice job to offer gentlemen; but it's about the only way I calculate we can reach Charleston, where I'm headed. What say you?"

Both of us shouted a hearty affirmative.

"Of course," he added, "we all might as well eat at the same table, and be sociable." His cordiality was refreshing, and timely, for at this moment about the blackest negro I ever saw descended the companionway, bearing dexterously a tray of steaming and tantalizing food.

We fell to ravenously; then suddenly the captain looked up from his plate and laughed heartily.

"Drat my buttons!" he cried. "We haven't even introduced ourselves to each other!"

His tone here came in droll mockery of the obsequiously polite:

"I, gentlemen, am Jeremiah Stovall, captain of this here tub, Minnie M., bound from Cape Sable; and this is my daughter, Bella."

We all laughed in the humor of the thing.

"And I," I added, "I am David Munroe, a shipwrecked bookkeeper."

We turned to my compatriot in interest.

"My name is Waters," said he simply.

But, all the same, I was dumfounded that he would have the nerve to give his own name—even if the little schooner wasn't equipped with wireless.

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM BLISS TO MISERY.

THE next few days were a positive pleasure. The weather cleared to laughing skies, and the wind held to our scudding beam. The schooner proved herself a smart sailer, and I learned fast, for I loved it very much.

By the second day, even, I was entrusted with my own trick at the wheel, and, if I do say it myself, my improvement was steady.

Those that know all about such things can form their own opinions as to how much of my progress in the gentle art of sailorizing was due to the one who taught me most. For Bella Stovall stood her watch with the rest of us.

I can see her now as she'd give the wheel a spoke or two in the knowing "feel" of the flaws, easing the racing vessel to that nicety which anticipates every whim of the fabric as she dances over the briny. Now and then she'd cock a calculating eye at the jaws of the gaff, keeping a "good full," her hair whipping free to the wind and her face glowing with the perfect health that was hers.

Oh, I learned fast enough, even if my appetite did begin to fall off—and that in spite of the really wonderful cooking of Sam!

Of course, owing to the necessity of division of labor, I saw little or nothing of Waters, except at meal times; we held alternate watches, and I began to think that nothing further would happen to complicate matters before we raised land. Our log showed wonderful time made, and we were all in consequent high spirits.

Then, of necessity, on a moonlight night that rivaled day in brightness, came the first indication of a break in the serenity and happiness that had been mine. And it was myself, to be sure, that precipitated matters.

The girl was steering and I was lolling at easy length on the roof of the cabin-house before her and puffing a ruminative pipe which I had found in the fo'c's'le.

The devil only knows what prompted that sudden, unmeditated blurt:

"Miss Stovall," said I, "do you always intend to live this life?"

I believe the girl knew far better than I did what was coming. She glanced hurriedly down through the open hatch, below which her father was playing solitaire. Waters was asleep forward.

Then she looked up slowly.

"No," she said, simply, "I did think so, but now I don't believe I'll always live on the water."

"How long since you changed your mind?" I went on, drifting into the snarl.

She laughed musically. "Oh, not very long!"

There seemed to be, in the amusement in her eyes, a something that tantalized me into following up the topic, slight though it appeared on the surface.

"Well, just how long?"

"How should I know exactly?" she replied, then added: "Perhaps, maybe—two days."

Then, like the veritable ass I was, I torrented forth the wildest jumble of my life:

"Oh, Bella, then you have answered the question I've been carrying in my eyes? I simply couldn't drown it—I don't want to—and you think you can—"

I neared her and put my hand over hers as it clung to the spoke of the wheel.

She sprang back from the contact in an amazement which, if it were not natural, was certainly well acted.

"Why, Mr. Munroe," she said low, but distinctly, "I didn't understand. I am sorry if I have hurt you—have caused you suffering. You see I—"

"But what did you mean just now by saying that only for the last two days that—"

She let me get no further, but answered in almost a hint of temper:

"I meant just what I said."

"And the reason?" I know I was rough, but the thing stung.

"You have no real right to quiz me, but the truth hurts no one, even if it comes out rather earlier than intended. In fact, we had intended to tell father to-night, anyway.

"We?" I cried, dumfounded.

"Certainly *we!*" she laughed lightly. "You never heard of a girl doing anything very decided without there being a 'we' to it, did you?"

I brought my face to hers, our eyes meeting.

"Just what do you mean?" I said.

"Why, it's simple enough," came the slow reply. "Mr. Waters has asked me to marry him, and, as I happen to love him, I'm going to do it."

I staggered back in the hurt that numbed me in its sudden flash.

"Why, that man is—he—" I was stammering out a cur's revenge for my own disgruntling. "Listen to me—"

A footfall sounded immediately behind me and a voice rang a significance other than its words:

"Hadn't you better be turning in, Munroe? You know your watch immediately follows mine. It's nine o'clock now."

I looked into the steely eyes of Waters and met there a warning.

Why I showed no resistance I cannot tell, but I simply stumbled forward to the forecastle and buried a troubled head in the pillow of my bunk. And the rest of that voyage was a hell of indecision for me.

Should I tell the girl and her father all I knew?

She should be warned; but, oh, how small a revenge it looked!

"At any rate," I finally semi-consoled myself, "the wedding can't take place until we reach land. Something may come out before then!"

But I slept a troubled watch.

I did manage, though, to get a pretty good grip on my outer man by the next morning, having drilled myself pretty sharply during my trick from two till six.

So that it was with almost a look of surprise and even a semblance of congratula-

tion that I replied to old Skipper Stovall's hearty announcement at breakfast:

"Well, Munroe!" he cried, "nothing like the ocean for quick work! Seems to make every kind of decision more sudden, eh?"

"What do you mean?" I thought fit to inquire, though I knew right enough what he was driving at, even if the looks of Waters and the girl hadn't been confession enough.

"Why, these two children have fixed it up!"

"Well, I declare!" I acted.

"But there's no kick from me!" went on Captain Stovall. "I have always told Bella that it was her *own* heart and not mine that was to do the picking, and as she is my only treasure, I want *her* happiness first!"

"Your only treasure, indeed!" broke in Bella, with a view to changing the subject, which, of course, was of a deadly disagreeable nature to me, under the circumstances. "Your only treasure! One would think you didn't even think more of your collection than you do of me. And you know mighty well you *do*, dad!"

After this triumphant reply, she quieted down.

A look of the zealot, coupled almost to a craftiness entirely foreign to the captain's usual self, stole into his eyes. I had seen a collector's fanatical abstraction before and could read it pretty well. But I was scarcely prepared for the splendid display that followed.

"Dog my cats!" exclaimed the old gentleman, "if I don't celebrate the occasion by showing you gentlemen the sight of your lives!

"That is," he went on, as he rose to his feet, "if either of you know anything about rare coins."

"I was a bit of a collector myself once," I replied, thus firing him to the added enthusiasm of showing his pride to one who really knew and appreciated.

Taking a clasp-knife from his pocket, he opened it and approached his berth, which was built into the side of the cabin. Tossing his pillow from its position at the head, he inserted the blade, with a practised nicety, between the cracks of the "matched" Georgia pine bulkhead.

A neatly fitted and almost invisible square of the wood loosened to his prying and, being thus removed, revealed an opening of perhaps fifteen inches square by twenty deep. Then he pulled out a bronzed box of attractive workmanship.

And when he slapped that heavy casket on the table before us, opened its catch, threw back the lid, and began running his fingers through the jingling contents, I could feel with a swift flow the old, dormant, numismatist's lure surge over me.

For a private collection it was really wonderful, and to my appreciative enthusiasm the old fellow glowed:

"Aha, I've kind of surprised you, Munroe, eh?"

"I should say you had!" I cried as my eye lighted upon an old Roman coin I had once gazed at piratically in a museum's glass case. "Truly wonderful. How long have you been at it?"

"How long has he been at it?" put in the girl almost in jealousy. "All *my* life and Heaven knows how long before! Every cent he can rake and scrape goes into those disks!"

"But, my dear," he objected, with that old, threadbare excuse of the collector, "it's just really putting money in the bank. I can, at any time, realize more than what I paid for the coins; they are increasing in value all the while.

"Why," he exclaimed, "I don't doubt for a moment that I can raise five thousand dollars on the gold alone the very day we reach Charleston, if I want to."

"Five thousand dollars!" repeated Waters who, up to this moment, had been singularly silent.

"Every cent of it!" affirmed the skipper emphatically.

Waters glanced hurriedly up through the companionway out on deck where Sam was standing his turn at the wheel.

"Isn't it dangerous to talk quite so loud in the possible hearing of that negro?" he inquired.

"Who, Sam?" answered Bella with a light laugh, "why, Sam's as honest as the day is long! *His* only failing is his fear of storms and consequent praying when he ought to be at the sails. Dad's had him for years. Why, he even trusts the vessel to him entirely at times, when we are in port."

"All the same," objected Waters, "I think it's putting temptation in the fellow's way."

I here made a mental note, a decided resolution to be on the *qui vive* with an eye on Mr. Waters.

And just then came interruption.

"Land ho!" bellowed the black down the hatch.

CHAPTER IX.

QUICK DOINGS ASHORE.

THE wind held very light all day and it was not until nightfall that we finally were taken in tow by a harbor tug and laid alongside a wharf.

I know of nothing more trying than thus beating back and forth with your prospective harbor in plain view, after a long and stressful voyage. And I, particularly, was dead keen to set foot from the deck of that vessel.

"Bella and I usually manage to get a bit of change to shore life and fodder," explained the skipper. "And you, my boy," he went on to Waters, "can find us tonight at Bromley's Hotel.

"Of course, you, too, Mr. Munroe," he added, "are welcome, if you have nothing better to do."

I muttered a conventional thanks for the second-handed invitation; but I had already made up my mind not to accept. I decided that I would have other fish to fry.

As the four of us quitted the schooner's side Captain Stovall gave instructions to Sam:

"Keep a good lookout, remember!"

"'Deed I will, boss, 'deed I will!" was the gleaming-toothed rejoinder.

And at the corner where the slip gave way to an avenue of more pretension, we separated. Bella and her father caught a street-car to the modest hotel which was their destination; Waters walked unhesitatingly up a side street for two blocks and entered the swing doors of a cheap restaurant which was next door to a saloon of low type; while I (after a feigned start in another direction) managed to keep him in view, a maneuver rendered easy enough in the ill-lighted streets.

Of course, I didn't venture to enter the restaurant after him, but chose rather to keep my watch from the near hiding of the saloon next door.

I ordered a drink which I sipped near the window end of the bar. Here I commanded the street, and I confess that I was greatly surprised at what I saw within ten minutes.

For, reeling unsteadily in a drunkenness which he cerainly must have acquired in record shortness of time, there walked past the window the negro cook!

He was accompanied by another darky with whom he was engaged in earnest, though maudlin and undertoned conversation. I don't know why it was, but I instinctively connected the cook's absence from the vessel as being in some way associated with the fellow Waters.

My suspicion appeared to be further justified when, quitting the saloon for the street myself, I saw the colored pair enter the selfsame restaurant.

I didn't venture to go right up to the window of the eating-place; nor did I immediately afterward believe that I had lost anything by so doing.

A scant five minutes it was before I flattened myself back into the doorway of the saloon; for the swing-doors of the place alongside opened hastily, and there walked out at a brisk pace—Waters.

I let him pass within two feet of my concealing shadow. Then I dogged him closely; for I had reason to think that something was brewing.

Unswervingly and unconscious of my following, he headed directly back the way he had come; turned at the avenue; then started down the slip toward the wharf. But just before he ventured to cross the stringpiece, he shot a hasty, backward glance; and I was just in time to escape his vision by a sudden dart behind some packing-cases.

Assured, finally, that he was not followed, he unhesitatingly crossed from the stringpiece to the schooner's rail; then to the deck. I lost not a movement.

The next minute he shoved back the companion-slide and the glare of a lantern that swung to a cabin carline, shone a fitful second upon his face. He looked excited.

But the light from the companionway lasted only an instant; for he was quick to draw the slide shut. And now all the radiance that came to me was the dim glow from the grated skylight of the cabin-house roof. This gave me an idea, though; and one I was not slow in putting to action.

On tiptoe I, too, gained the vessel's deck and managed, without the veriest hint of noise, to worm myself in a sprawl out over the cabin top. Finally I reached a position where I could look down into the cabin.

I didn't command the entire interior, for there was only a tiny spot through which I

could obtain a view, but what I could see was that part which proved of momentous import.

At the instant I applied my eye to the grill of the skylight, Waters was opening the blade of a jack-knife he carried. Then unhesitatingly he went directly to the head of Captain Stovall's bunk.

He certainly was skilfully quick in the way he found and opened the square door of that hiding-place, prying it dexterously from its grooves.

Then he pulled out the bronzed box and tucked it under his coat.

I waited for no more. Here, indeed, was proof. Now I could have a sweet enough revenge on my rival!

But my next thought was a bit more worthy. I could save Bella from such a man. Before this, I couldn't bring myself to tell all I knew of the fellow for two reasons: First, because such a thing would look too much like jealous spite; and then, I simply could not forget the really noble way he had shared with me, had even rescued me when we were adrift on the raft.

But now—now, this was different.

I am not overconfident physically; so the idea never occurred to me to wait for him at the companionway and grapple with him. Besides, I was not armed.

My duty—as I then saw it—I immediately set about. How colored it was by personal feeling I'm not prepared to state.

So the next minute I was on a dead run up the slip and into the avenue. I was familiar with Charleston, having covered the town once as a stove agent.

I even knew a short cut to Bromley's Hotel; for I had had a furnished room opposite; had taken several meals there in fact. Five minutes of fast going, therefore —I am good with my legs—brought me to the hotel entrance.

To my breathless stutter of inquiry, the clerk motioned to a door on the first floor, and, in response to my vigorous rap, there came an immediate summons to enter.

I flung open the door and strode straight over to the table where Bella and her father were seated. It was a private dining-room, and they were just finishing their supper.

I didn't beat around the bush.

"Captain Scovall," I cried, "that scoundrel Waters has just stolen your coin collection."

Both sprang to their feet, and Bella stood as if petrified.

"My collection!"

"Oh, I was a fool not to have warned you before!" I jumped into the revelation. "But somehow I simply couldn't. I had really got to like the fellow myself. But, not ten minutes ago, I saw him pry out the partition where you kept the box."

"But, Sam—where was he?" exclaimed the captain.

"My opinion is," said I, "that he saw to it that the negro was pretty well supplied with gin money. I saw him drunk not many minutes since. A pretty good way to get the coast clear.

"But here, let me tell you all I know. Even before the steamer was wrecked, we had a wireless to keep a sharp lookout for the fellow."

"A wireless? For goodness' sake why?" wailed Bella. "Oh, dad, what in the world is this that has come upon me. I won't; I simply won't, and *don't*, believe this against the man I love."

The old captain soothed her to him, and spoke quietly:

"What is it you are trying to tell us?"

"Briefly stated this," I cried in some heat, for I felt abused somehow; "this fellow Waters is an escaped con—"

"I have just managed to save this for you, Captain Stovall," sounded a clear, though low voice directly beside me.

I had left the door open behind me in my haste. It was Waters!

The girl sprang to his arms, while the skipper clutched with even more mad love at the restored bronze box. I stood dumb.

"You remember I told you it was dangerous to put temptation in Sam's way," Waters went on to explain. "And I just happened to overhear him talking over the manner he intended to work the trick. By the greatest chance and luck, he and another darky took a table at a cheap restaurant right near me, and, being pretty well filled, they spoke not over-softly."

"But—" I stammered.

The massive figure of the captain whirled and a stubby finger pointed to the door.

"Go!" said he, looking hard at me.

CHAPTER X.

THE WHY OF IT ALL.

I PASSED a wretched night.

The first part of it I simply wandered

aimlessly around the streets; and it was not until eleven o'clock that a sudden sensation of hunger told me that I had not eaten supper. So I sought out a place that was still open and munched ruminatively.

To say that I was absolutely disgruntled and chagrined is putting it mildly. I was more nearly furious; for I had been ordered out by a man for whom I was striving to do a service—a genuine one.

Then, coupled to chagrin, was mystification. What in thunder did the fellow Waters have up his sleeve by this move? For, not for an instant, did I credit his wild explanation.

"Of course," I finally muttered to myself, "he wants the girl. Married to her, he counts upon being safer. He'll thereby be able to stick to the schooner where he'd be reasonably secure."

I finished my meal, lit a poor cigar, then I beckoned the waiter.

"Do you rent rooms here?"

"Yep!"

"Got one vacant?"

"Yep!"

"Can I have it?"

"Yep!"

"How much?"

"How much?" I had to repeat this while he appeared to think.

"One bone!"

"In advance?"

He eyed me over wisely.

"Sure!"

So that even this arrangement for my night's sleep didn't tend to put me into better humor, or serve to make me love my fellow man more fervently.

Even sleep wouldn't woo for a cent; for a problem had suddenly come to me. Here was I, a citizen of the United States, possessed of the knowledge that an escaped convict was right within reach! What was my duty, aside from my personal feeling?

I tossed and tossed on that rocky mattress in the worry of groaning indecision until two o'clock.

At about that hour came a knock at my door. I opened to a self-possessed telegraph boy.

"Mr. Jumpworthy?" he inquired sweetly.

"No, I'm not!" I bellowed, "and this is a fine hour for you to make any such mistake. I've a good notion—"

At this point a door across the hall opened, and a bald pate was popped into the gleam of the gas.

"Come over here, boy!"

And the lad trotted over willingly enough.

"Then are *youse* named Jumpworthy?"

"Yes."

"De editor uv de *Daily Star?* Well, den, sign here."

The man wrote his name; then tore open the telegram before he reentered his room.

What he read seemed to please him hugely. He even looked over my way and nodded in friendly fashion.

"By ginger!" he exclaimed, "they've got him at last! A fine flare headline for me; and I was wondering what in thunder I could cook up for news!"

"Got whom?" I queried.

"Here, read for yourself;" and he passed the wire to me.

It was brief:

"CRUMB" WATERS CAPTURED—PARTICULARS LATER.

After that I slept, for no longer did I have to make any decision.

I awoke but little refreshed, and with that sensation of the unreality of my whereabouts which we all at times have experienced. But by the time I had splashed in water from the broken pitcher on the rickety washstand, I began to refit the links of yesterday's happenings.

Then I remembered the telegram. Here, indeed, was verification for me—even an opportunity for gloating.

But, somehow, I felt anything but exultation. In spite of myself I had grown singularly fond of Waters. And now I found that, even though he had proved himself my successful rival, even though I had actually seen him with my own eyes engaged with so practised a cunning in getting possession of the coin box, still I could not, for the life of me, suppress a feeling of absolute sorrow that he had so soon been recaptured and was probably, at this very moment, on his way back North to finish a term in the penitentiary.

I pictured Bella's wo; her short-lived happiness snapped by a verification of my unbelieved accusations of the night before.

Was there anything I could do? Couldn't I, at least, offer some consolation? I counted my own pride as nothing, for I dearly loved the girl.

"At least," I finally reached conclusion, "I can see how the land lies by having my breakfast at Bromley's Hotel. Some chance may offer itself."

It was about nine o'clock when I paid my reckoning and started the scant half-mile walk to the place. My lodging-house was situated about a mid-way distance up a side block, and so I rounded into the avenue within a minute.

I think it was the bow of familiar ribbon on her hat that first attracted my attention. I was almost sure that it was Bella there, standing before and eagerly gazing into a jeweler's window.

But I must be positive. I stepped eagerly up to her. But who was this beside her?

Both whirled at my quick-footed arrival.

The man was Waters!

My look of bewilderment must have been patent enough, for certain it is that I never in all my life was so taken aback.

But my surprise was met by some inner amusement on his part, though I did read in his face an undertone of sadness. As for the girl—she promptly turned her back and once more became engrossed in the diamonds on display.

I certainly was lost in this quarter.

"So you, too, have heard the news?" said Waters, not unfriendlily.

It took me a second to collect myself before I replied:

"If you mean by news that I heard of your recapture—yes. I saw a telegram to that effect."

"Then evidently you didn't get all the particulars. You see the capture was made on Long Island, somewhere near Bayshore."

"But you are Crumb Waters!" I cried.

"My name is Waters," came the easy tone I had grown to hate, for it always spelled disgruntlement to me; "but I am not '*Crumb*' Waters.'"

"But you were disguised on the steamer—you stole the suits—you certainly are mixed up in some crooked deals some way!"

He looked at me earnestly.

"Munroe," said he, "I believe you're man enough to deserve to know the truth. But, though I am not afraid of anything I've done, I must have your pledge of secrecy.

"You see," he added in explanation, with a backward glance at Bella, "I have not myself alone to think of now."

I was burning with curiosity by this time, and would have promised anything. But I will say for myself that this is the first time I have revealed the confidence, and it's in the past well enough not to matter.

"No," repeated Waters, "I am not the Crumb Waters you naturally took me for. That unfortunate man is my half brother."

"Unfortunate?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, distinctly so. If you know anything of the asininity of some of our courts' decisions you will realize what I mean. For a far more logical place for my half brother would have been an asylum, and it was for that very purpose I contrived to aid him to escape. You see he is a paranœic. It's a subtle disease and not always recognizable.

"I calculated to smuggle him abroad and there put him in some institution. You see, the poor fellow is not only criminally insane, he is lame as well."

I was pretty well confused by this time, so I put it plainly.

"Will you mind being a little more explicit? Somehow I can't very well connect the links."

"Here you have it then," he said rapidly. "Crumb Waters, as he is called—my half brother, that is—was serving a twenty years' sentence in Suffolk County.

"Knowing him to be in the mental condition that we had been unable to *prove* at the trial, I determined to free him. Accordingly, I concocted the following scheme:

"Being allowed to visit him, I did so on the eve of Decoration Day. I went to the prison in an automobile, and before entering the gateway, I dropped into the hiding of some brush, which was piled right alongside the yard wall, a feminine disguise.

"Then I entered the prison, as usual on my visits to him. In his cell we managed to make an exchange of clothes, for the plan was for me to take his place and effect my escape by relying upon my own superior agility. I am something of an athlete."

"So I have observed," said I, dryly.

"He, of course, was to represent me and return to the waiting motor, for we calculated that his identity would not be detected in the darkness.

"Well, everything went well with me. I managed to scale the wall easily. I found and donned the woman's attire, caught a train to New York, and boarded the steamer as agreed. But what I have never been able to make out is what went wrong with

him. I know he got away all right in the motor-car, and I had even given him his steamer ticket."

"That's where I 'come in!" I cried, and then I told him all I knew.

"But why," I concluded, "why did you not come out with this before? Why all that subterfuge on the steamer when you found things had gone astray?"

"I thought, at first, you were some friend, since you had possession of the stateroom, but I got no return to my signaling to you that first day. And as for coming out with the truth, perhaps you may know that aiding a criminal to escape is a felony in itself, however justified I might feel morally and under the extenuating circumstances.

"Besides, it would just give him all the more time to get clear, for the steamer was equipped with wireless, you remember. Even now I have your word not to divulge the truth."

"You have," said I.

"Then we are friends?" he asked as he shot out his hand.

I took it and we shook.

"Bella," he called to the girl, who had persistently kept her back to me, "come over and shake hands with Mr. Munroe. Things are all right now."

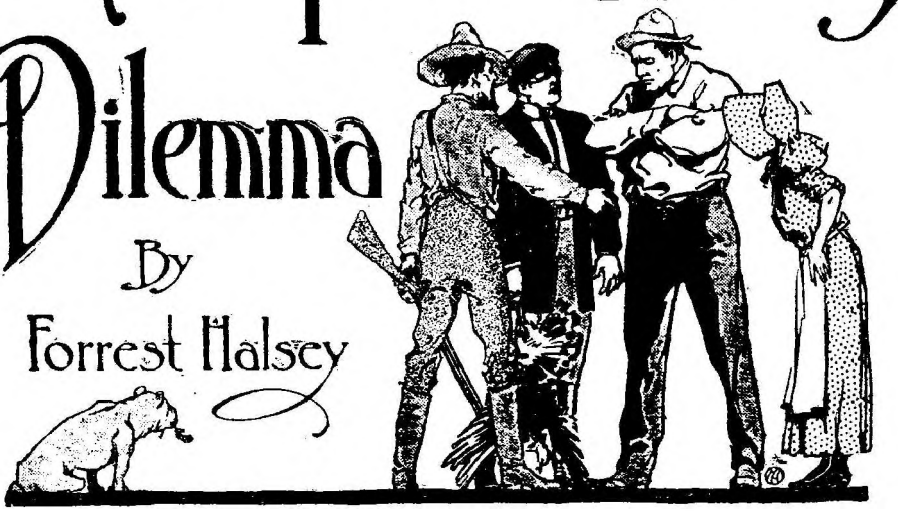
But somehow I didn't get overmuch comfort in that handshake.

Eleven days thereafter I managed to get back my old bookkeeping job. But it took me three months of tight saving to buy another bicycle.

THE END.

A Tender Heart's Dilemma

By Forrest Halsey



"LITTLE boy," said the tender-hearted Mr. Phillips, "would you like a ride?"

The barefooted urchin drew a line in the dust with his big toe, glanced from under the torn brim of his huge straw hat at the tender-hearted gentleman in the automobile.

"Yes, sir," replied the little boy.

"Then get in," said the tender-hearted man.

The little boy scrambled in and, sitting down on the leather cushions, grasped the side and back of the seat with a grim clutch.

"I never see one of these yer things before—but I hearn of 'em," he remarked.

The tender-hearted man smiled kindly behind his goggles.

"Hold on," he cautioned.

Then he started the automobile, and the road glided smoothly under the wheels.

Mr. Phillips was going very slowly.

He did not wish to frighten the little boy; furthermore, he did not wish to frighten himself, as the Virginia road was full of yawning chasms into which, if an automobile went in a hurry, its driver was apt to leave in a hurry, too—over the front of it.

"Do you like it?" inquired Mr. Phillips presently.

"Yes, sir," said the little boy.

"Such a sweet, gentle little boy," thought Mr. Phillips. "How nice that I am able to give a little pleasure to a child. If the rich were kinder to the poor, we should not hear so much about socialism. I am sure that we do not do our duty by these poor people."

Just then a pair of mules, driven by somebody in a sunbonnet, came around the turn of the road. The mules stopped dead short to think.

Mr. Phillips was very considerate, and stopped his machine.

The mules, having thought the matter over, decided to get up on the side of the road. They got up there and leaned against a hog fence for some more reflection.

Now, everybody knows that the most considerate thing to do in a case like this is for the owner of the machine to get out and lead the frightened team past the object of their terror, speaking kindly to them the while.

Mr. Phillips got out of the car and climbed the bank, thinking of kind things to say to the mules.

"Whoa, nice horsies!" said Mr. Phillips.

"My Heavens, what is this horrible thing all masked with great glaring eyes that has come out of that red terror and is moving toward us, calling us out of our names?" snorted the mules to each other.

"Keep away from um, or I'll have the law on you, you raskill!" shouted the sunbonnet.

"Madam," said the considerate man.

But the mules had seen enough. They whirled by Mr. Phillips, and after them went the wagon on two wheels. The lady driver fell back over the seat and lay kicking and yelling as the wagon rattled and bounded down the road.

Mr. Phillips saw it dash into a hole, saw the lady thrown into the air, screaming, bounce back into the wagon and disappear in a cloud of dust.

"Good gracious," said Mr. Phillips, "I must catch them."

A wild yell came from behind his back. He turned.

Down the road through a swelling volume of dust he saw the automobile flying. Out of the dust came a yelling of terror as of a small boy who saw his death very near and objected to the sight.

Dazed stood the considerate man. In one direction was a cloud of dust; that was the mules. In another was a second cloud of dust; that was the machine. In both directions human beings were in deadly peril, whirling possibly to their deaths; and he, from the promptings of his considerate heart, was the cause of it all.

He groaned. Then he thought of the woman, and he ran after her. Then he thought of the boy, and he ran after him.

Then he sat down to think. What in heaven was to be done?

About him for miles and miles stretched the peaceful country, with no sign of house or human.

He could not run both ways at once. He must make up his mind.

Well, the woman probably knew how to stop the mules; besides, judging from the wrinkles, she had not long to live, anyway. The boy certainly did not know how to stop the automobile. It would go flying through the country, spreading death and destruction. He must catch it.

He began to waddle after his car.

Mr. Phillips was fat, and was not made for running. The day was hot. In a short time he thought that he was going to die. A little later he was sure of it. Shortly afterward he sat down to do it, happy in the prospect of release from his overwhelming misfortunes.

It was a nice place to die in. The shade of the trees was cool. Perhaps leaves would fall on him in pity. If he did not die, farmers would fall on him—not in pity.

Oh, why had he tried to be nice to the poor? Had he stayed in the machine and said nothing to any one, all would have been well.

A cold nose was pressed against his hand. He looked down to encounter the friendly eyes, wriggling body, and wagging tail of a bulldog.

The considerate man was touched. Here was a friend, something that pitied him. He felt tears come into his eyes. What a nice dog!

He patted the dog. The dog pricked up its well-chewed ears, stiffened, then dashed into the bushes behind Mr. Phillips.

From the bushes came squawks, flutter-

ings among the underbrush, beating of wings upon the ground.

Mr. Phillips sprang up. That cruel dog was killing something. He ran into the bushes. The dog was doing just what he thought. A fine turkey lay at Mr. Phillips's feet, life beating feebly in the slow thrash of its wings.

The dog gave one look at Mr. Phillips, then sneaked away into the brush. Being a farm-dog, he knew that the best thing for him in a case like that was to take a walk, a long walk. He took it.

"The cruel dog," thought the tender-hearted man. "I will have to put this poor creature out of its misery. I wish I had some chloroform."

Not having provided any when he set out for his run, he drew his penknife and despatched the turkey.

He left the spot very sick. Turkeys were all right when well broiled, but—Well, he knew he would never care for turkey again—never.

And he had been so fond of turkey.

"Move a foot an' I'll blow your head offen you, by dogs! You chicken-thief!" cried a voice.

The tender-hearted man looked up. Also, he looked into a shotgun. Behind the shotgun was a tanned face lovingly encircled by salt-colored whiskers.

"You chicken-thief, I got you now! Pick up that turkey and come here."

"Allow me to explain, sir," said Mr. Phillips.

"Pick up that turkey," ordered the man with the gun.

Mr. Phillips did so. Something told him it would be better to explain later. It is not very easy to explain with a head that has been blown off.

Securing the turkey, he walked toward the man with the gun. He smiled with his well-known philanthropic smile. The newspapers always spoke well of that smile. They had said that it showed a tender heart. But it is hard to see a tender heart through an automobile mask.

"You keep away from me," said the man with the gun in a voice that shook slightly. "I have hearn of you masked robbers, an' I'd sooner blow your head off than not."

His fingers crooked on the trigger.

"I am not a robber," protested the philanthropist. "Please don't shoot me. My name is—"

"Hole him. Done let him git away. Hole him till I git there," screamed a voice behind them.

There was the sound of a wagon rattling through the chasms of the road, and then the lady and the mules dashed up.

"You vill'in!" screamed the lady as she approached.

"Madam," said Mr. Phillips kindly. He was much relieved to see that she was not dead—very much relieved.

"Jim," cried the lady as she reined in the mules. "He clum outer a devil wagon to rob me—scart my team to death, so that they run away an' jolt the livin' life outer me. It was four mile before I could git a grip on 'em. But now—"

She sprang out of the wagon.

"Holt that gun on him till I kill him."

She came for the tender-hearted man brandishing a mule whip around her head.

"Miss Barker," said the man with the gun, "I'm the sheriff of this county an' he's my prisoner. I am a goin' to march him to the squire an' have him jailed. He has just killed the squire's best turkey. You know how the squire is set on them turkeys of his. I don' think you need worry none, Miss Barker. When the squire sees that turkey he's goin' to kick an' butt an' bite all at once. Come with us, Miss Barker. An' you," to the tender-hearted man, "march ahead. If you bat an eye I'm a goin' to sprinkle your brains so you won't ever be able to find 'em again."

"I'll come an' see the robber when the squire sets eyes on that turkey," said the lady.

"Allow me to explain," wailed the tender-hearted man.

"I reckon the squire may allow you to," said the sheriff. "But seein' the store he sets by his turkeys, I doubt it. March!"

"Hadn't you better tie his hands, Jim," suggested the lady in the sunbonnet.

"No," said the sheriff.

The tender-hearted man in the midst of his misery thought this was very kind of the sheriff.

"You see, if I did I would have to carry the turkey. An' I want the squire to see first sight who done kill it. The squire is so awful quick that if he thought I'd done it—well, the squire don' wait for nothin' when it comes to them turkeys of his. He is all wild now havin' lost three in the last week. He'd better carry it."

The tender-hearted man, as he trudged

ahead carrying the turkey, thought very unkindly of the sheriff.

Had the public, which knew and heard so much of the philanthropies of Mr. Phillips, been able to see the procession which went in the sunshine down the corduroy road, it must have been moved to tears.

First came Mr. Phillips carrying the turkey, then the sheriff with the shotgun pointed at the middle of his back, next the mules driven by the lady in the sunbonnet, who voiced her opinion of the noted philanthropist's looks and morals at every step.

"He was takin' that poorhouse kid with him, Jim," she cried, struck by a sudden thought. "Ast him wot he's done with him. An' wot's he done with his devil wagon. He mabee has murdered the pore chile, Jim."

"Madam," the tender-hearted man turned, struck with sudden horrid memories of the boy in the machine.

"Move on an' shet up," cried the sheriff. "You can say wot you want to to the squire. That is, if you are able to say anythin' 'tall after he sets eyes on that turkey."

Mr. Phillips moved on, shuddering. His thoughts were appalling. Here he was, forty miles from a town, a whole county away from a railroad, walking before a man with a shotgun, carrying a turkey, and to be finished off at the end of his walk by a gentleman who could butt, bite, and kick.

And then the child. What had become of him? And the automobile? Never in all his philanthropic life had Mr. Phillips realized how awful the human race could be.

Why had he listened to the wretch in the Washington club who had told him he would enjoy himself by a little spin through the tide-water counties of Virginia? Why had his chauffeur fallen sick? What had become of the small boy? Probably there was a mangled heap in a load of wreckage somewhere before him on the road. Oh, why had he ever tried to be kind to people? They were not kind to him.

They mounted a little rise. Below them the hill dipped and then rose again plentifully strewn with huge hollows out of which stuck broken logs, the bones of the road. Coming up the hill was a huge man in a blue shirt.

"There's the squire now," said the man with the shotgun.

"Squire!" he called.

"Now you'll git kilt, an' then jailed," chuckled the woman in the sunbonnet.

Mr. Phillips shrank. Never in his life had he seen such a big man as the one who mounted the hill. His arms were like brown leather stretched over bulging muscle.

He stopped short.

A gun was poked into his back. Then he went on.

The squire came nearer.

He had red hair. Mr. Phillips had always heard that red-headed people had violent tempers. He wanted to kneel in the road and beg for his life. He wanted to drop the turkey and run. He wanted to die, to die painlessly.

A second poke with the gun showed him that he did not want to die just yet.

How could he explain matters? He could say a dog did it. But where was the dog? The man with the gun would tell the awful person with red hair that he had seen him killing the turkey. They would not believe him when he told them that he was only putting it out of its misery. Why did he ever try to put it out of its misery? No one wanted to put him out of misery.

The squire came nearer.

"Squire," yelled the man with the gun, "I found this here feller killin' a turkey, an' brung him to you."

The squire approached and looked sternly at the tender-hearted man. "What were you doing it for, sir?" said the squire.

"A dog had just mauled it. I only wished to end its misery," cried Mr. Phillips, glad beyond words that the squire took the matter so calmly. "This man would not let me explain."

"Sheriff," said the squire, "as an officer of the law you should hear all sides. You did wrong to lose your head, sheriff."

"But, squire, it was one of your turkeys. I seen him killin' it. Look at them tail feathers. It sure is one of your turkeys."

The squire looked at the feathers on the murdered bird. His face turned scarlet. The veins swelled on his forehead. His huge fists knotted into battering-rams.

"Scoundrel!" shouted the squire, and he dashed for the tender-hearted man.

For the first time in all his honored life the philanthropist thought he was about to die. An hour ago he would have thought of dying with some complacency. He knew that the papers would say nice things about him, and nice people would come to his funeral, and lots of buildings would bear his name for future generations to see what a fine man he had been. But to die over a

turkey! Oh, that was too horrible. What sort of a story would it make for the papers?

He tried to run, to pray, but the horrible red-headed man hypnotized him, held him shuddering, as he came roaring and swinging his fists.

All was over.

He was to be murdered for a turkey, for having a tender heart.

Then a dog ran out of the bushes and began to fawn on the man with the gun.

"There's the dog that chewed up the turkey!" shouted the kind-hearted man. "See, there is a feather in his mouth yet. That dog did it."

The squire stopped short.

He saw the feather. Then he roared out:

"Jim Simmons, that low cur of yours has been killin' my turkeys. The other three I lost were all chewed up and now he has chewed the last one."

And he cast himself on the man with the gun.

The gun fell to the ground and went off with a loud report. The mules whirled the wagon around and sailed down the road with the lady in the sunbonnet. The dog cast himself upon the squire and swung to his coat-tails.

The tender-hearted man ran.

What a terrible thing the world was! He had never seen a fight. As soon as they had killed each other they would come and kill him.

Oh, why had he ever tried to be kind to anybody? Never would he do it again, never. After this his heart would be a rock.

He panted up the hill. The road took a sharp turn to the right. Behind him some one shouted.

The man who had arrested him was running away from the squire, now he was mounting the hill right behind Mr. Phillips.

Behind him raced the squire. Behind the squire raced the dog.

"I'll kill the both of you," yelled the squire.

Mr. Phillips ran faster.

Behind him he heard the panting breath of the sheriff.

"I'll get you both!" the squire's voice was growing nearer.

Mr. Phillips ran around the corner of the road.

And there before him stood his car, and over the top of the front seat peered the ragged straw hat and freckled face of the poorhouse child.

"Hurry up," yelled the boy.

Mr. Phillips, scarlet, wet, and gasping, hurriedly staggered to the car and stumbled in.

"Quick, get away. They air comin'. Go fer your life," yelled the poorhouse boy.

Mr. Phillips gave one shudder. Of course the gasoline had given out. That was why the car had stopped. It was all up with him. Despairingly he released the clutch and kicked the lever.

To his astonishment, joy, and surprise, the car moved smoothly onward.

"Wait!" a pale face set in salt-colored whiskers appeared in the road by his side. "Let me git away from here. There won't be no arrest nor nothin'. Save me from the squire, stranger."

Mr. Phillips hesitated.

"Don't you trust him!" yelled the boy, bouncing on his seat. "He's a liar. I know. I live in the poorhouse he runs. Let the squire lick him. He's licked me awful."

Mr. Phillips threw the lever to top speed. In a whirl of dust the car sped rapidly away.

The poorhouse kid cheered lustily as, looking back, he saw another cloud of dust in which the squire was licking the man who had often licked him.

It was quite a long time before Mr. Phillips spoke.

"How did you stop the car?" he asked at last.

"Don't know," replied the poorhouse kid. "When you got out I started to get out, too, but my foot hit something an' she went flyin'. I just helt on to the wheel like I seen you do. I thought I was goin' to be kilt every minute. Then she went over a bump an' I fell outer the seat. I fell onto that" — he pointed to a lever — "an' she stopped. Then I waited for you."

He paused, his face fell, tears came into his eyes.

"Gee!" he said. "But Jim Simmons will lick me fierce to-night."

Then he grinned.

"But he's gettin' a good one hisself now. An', anyway, I had a ride in a ottermobile. That's worth a lickin'."

His face lost the grin.

"I gotter git out now, mister," he said. "I gotter go back to the poorhouse."

Mr. Phillips stopped the car. The boy slowly climbed out.

"Thanks fer the ride," said the boy.

He began to walk slowly back toward where Jim Simmons was getting a licking.

Mr. Philips regarded the small figure in the straw hat trudging through the dust.

"Wait a minute," called Mr. Phillips.

The boy turned and waited.

Mr. Philips thought a minute.

"Would you rather go back to the poor-house or come with me," said Mr. Phillips. "I mean for good and all."

The boy's face turned pale under his freckles; he looked at the car, then at its driver.

"Mean it?" he said fearfully.

"I mean it."

There was a sudden rush. A dusty small boy jumped onto the seat beside the driver and gave a glad whoop.

"Let her go," he cried.

Mr. Phillips let her go.

He was a tender-hearted man.

The Swivel of Suspicion

by Marie B. Schrader

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS ARRIVAL.

"KINDLY reserve a parlor, bedroom, and bath. Southern exposure. Arrive to-morrow."

Henry Hughes, the good-looking clerk at the Antlers Hotel, carefully read the message again, then gave a low whistle of satisfaction.

"Looks as if we were going to get rid of that last suite of rooms after all," he exclaimed to the night clerk, who had just made his appearance.

"What?" said the latter in surprise. "I had given that up as a bad job. It is so late in the season, you know. People are beginning to think about going home instead of coming up here."

"Well, here you are," said the day clerk, displaying the telegram.

His associate read it and remarked:

"Oh, well, this may be a matter of only a few days."

"At any rate," said Hughes, "I win my bet about renting that suite. You said it was hoodooed. Do I win?"

"You do. I admit it," regretfully answered the other. "But," he added, "what about the rates? Nothing is said in this wire as to price, and you know that that particular suite is the highest priced one in the hotel.

"Don't worry," replied Hughes with a wise smile. "Any man who could be so reckless as to order accommodations at a summer

resort of this kind without inquiring about expenses must have money to burn."

"What's his name?"

"Van Dusen," replied Hughes. "Can't you read? Here it is on the telegram. G. Van Dusen."

"I never heard of him."

"Neither did I," said Hughes. "Evidently he is a foreigner."

"A foreigner?" repeated the night clerk.

"Yes. Some one who lives outside of New York," explained Hughes. "At least that's what these rich people at this hotel call such people. Funny what yaps these swells are, isn't it? I've had enough of the White Mountains! Think I'll try the seashore next summer. The altitude seems to make everybody more high and mighty than ever. There's no use talking, I never was cut out for a millionaire. If I had all the dough these families have it seems to me I would do something else with it besides spending it on luxurious living. Now that suite that Van Dusen has engaged, for instance, will cost the gentleman a cool fifty dollars a day."

"Oh, the price has gone up, I notice," remarked the night clerk.

"Certainly," smiled Hughes. "Anybody who orders *carte blanche* has to pay for the privilege. It was forty yesterday and fifty to-day. The demand increases its value. Think of wasting fifty dollars a day on two rooms and a bath!"

"It is awful," admitted the other. "But then, ponder over the money wasted on other things. Take Mrs. Dunkle's dog, for instance."

"That infernal black poodle!" exclaimed the night clerk, with a look of disgust.

"Certainly. She calls him '*mon cher*,' which means 'my dear.' He has a maid and a footman to take turns in administering to his wants. That dog's living expenses are away ahead of mine. Well, I must look after this Van Dusen suite."

He then gave orders by phone to the housekeeper in regard to the rooms.

"When do you expect the new guest?" inquired the night clerk.

"The wire doesn't state the exact time. These millionaires wouldn't take the trouble of looking up the trains. They come when it suits them. Just let me get down to earth among the middle classes once more, and I promise myself no more hostelries like this one. I'd like to get down in the sand and listen to the waves roll in and watch the pretty girls walk past. You don't see any of those up here," he concluded.

"Not many," assented the night clerk.

"If I were a pretty girl," continued Hughes, "I would actually be afraid to stop at this place, where there are no men but old ones, while the women do nothing but sit on the porches and rock and tear people's reputations to tatters."

"Well, as far as that is concerned," was the reply, "most of them have lived in glass houses for so long that they really ought to know better than to throw stones. By the way, did you notice that string of pearls Mrs. Townsend wore last evening? Well, she told Mrs. Dunkle, and Mrs. Dunkle told me, of course, that her last husband brought it up to her on Saturday as a week-end present. It cost fifty thousand."

"Oh, was that all?" sarcastically commented the night clerk. "Let me see. She has only been married to this one three months. By this time next year she will probably be suing him for alimony."

At this moment there was a clatter of horses' hoofs outside, and a handsome bus drew up in front of the Antlers. The management used the bus as a novelty, for the majority of the guests had employed automobiles for so long that they liked the change.

The two clerks glanced casually out of the window.

"Nobody there," said Hughes. I really wasn't looking for any one, you know."

As he spoke the footman opened the door and a woman descended and entered the hotel. A porter ushered her to the desk.

"Who can this be?" asked the day clerk in a low voice, as he busied himself with the register and prepared the pen and blotter for use.

Groups of guests who were sauntering and rocking here and there all seemed possessed with an interest in the same query.

Eyes were lifted from absorbing novels. Fancy work fell unheeded from jeweled fingers. The entire place seemed awaiting a solution of the vexatious problem. For at the Antlers every one must know without delay who every one else is.

The newcomer seemed unconscious of the curious scrutiny lavished upon her.

She was tall and slender and walked quickly with a graceful movement. Her brown dress was unostentatious, but evidently made by a tailor who understood his business.

"That's one of Louis's gowns," remarked one fair inspectress with conviction to her companion, as the two watched the progress of the visitor across the foyer hall.

"How clever you are, dear. How can you tell?" sweetly answered the congenial friend.

"Because I know his curves," replied the first speaker. "It cost her something, too."

The guest had by this time reached the desk, where she raised her brown traveling veil for the first time. Her back was turned to the idlers on the porches.

Hughes and the night clerk instinctively looked at each other when they caught sight of the woman's face, for it was both young and pretty.

"You received my wire, of course?" inquired the young woman in an attractively toned voice.

"A wire?" politely repeated Hughes.

"Yes," replied the newcomer. "It should have reached you. I left unexpectedly—earlier than I had planned. I wanted a suite!"

"A suite?" repeated Hughes. "I am very sorry, madam, but the last suite in the house was engaged just before you came by a Mr. Van Dusen."

The young woman began to laugh.

The clerk, thinking that she evidently believed he was not telling the truth, added: "Mr. G. Van Dusen!"

Still the young woman laughed.

The clerk failed to see the joke, so waited patiently for her to recover herself.

"That is the name under which I wish to be known while here," she explained, finally. "G stands for Grace."

"Oh!" exclaimed Hughes, embarrassed by his blunder. "Strange I never thought of the wire as coming from a lady—" He felt like adding, "a lady so young and pretty," but checked the words in time.

"We have your suite quite ready, Mrs. Van Dusen," he added.

"*Miss* Van Dusen, if you don't mind," corrected the new guest.

"Oh! One of *the* Van Dusens," politely suggested the clerk for want of something better.

"Well, yes. One of them," coolly replied the young lady in reserved, non-committal tones.

A bell-boy now came forward.

"Oh, by the way," the new arrival said in low tones, as she rearranged her veil and picked up her gold mesh purse, "I don't care to make the acquaintance of any one while I am here, and you will oblige me by giving me a small table alone near the door in the dining-room."

CHAPTER II.

AT THE GOSSIPS' MERCY.

WHEN Miss Van Dusen had been at the hotel a week, the guests confessed to themselves that they knew about as much regarding her as they did when she arrived.

The young woman held herself aloof from all with whom she came in the slightest contact, and made it plain that she wished to be bothered by no one.

This was a very unusual thing at the Antlers, where everybody knew everybody else, and where all united in trying to kill time in the easiest and most agreeable fashion.

The further away Miss Van Dusen got from the hotel guests the nearer they wished to be to her. Curiosity was responsible for this desire. Each woman there wanted to be the first to prick the outer covering of the Van Dusen reserve in order to be able to triumph over her associates. But wishes, evidently, did not bring about the desired result.

Had the newcomer been a woman who proved on close inspection to be strictly beyond the pale of the niceties of etiquette demanded by the women of that particular clique, they would have proceeded to ignore her. But try as they would, they could find no fault with her.

She came and went quietly, unostentatiously, with a certain well-bred manner which passed muster with the most critical.

The one fault one and all found with her was her apparent disdain of their presence. And yet she was not rude. When the entire matter was summed up it amounted to the simple fact that Miss Van Dusen preferred her own society to that of any one else, and yet a person with common sense would never have accused her of wishing to be alone on account of selfish arrogance.

Her manner was modest and reserved.

The old men who remained at the Antlers when the younger ones had spent their week-ends and departed, all confessed to a liking for the stranger. This only added fuel to the flames of the resentment the women felt. How dared their fathers and

uncles approve of a person about whom they knew nothing. This, too, when the woman had paid not the slightest attention to them any more than she had to the female contingent.

"Take my word for it, dear friend," said Mrs. Dunkle, who had developed into the ringleader of the inquisition, "that woman has a history. Nothing under the sun will ever convince me to the contrary. And, be sure it will all come out before she leaves the hotel. The clerk tells me she is here for an indefinite stay. At least he judges so from the fact that she has never said anything to the contrary."

"A most mysterious person," remarked Mrs. Stevens, who usually agreed with everything Mrs. Dunkle said. To tell the truth she was just a bit afraid to disagree, for since the publication of Watson's poem Mrs. Dunkle's friends had secretly dubbed her the woman "with the serpent's tongue." Knowing her and fearing her, they were still dominated by her—such was her power.

Mr. Dunkle was a broker in Wall Street and came of a fine family. His wife, also, boasted of her ancestry.

She was a middle-aged woman with a set figure, gray hair, and a general disregard for the approach of old age.

Every woman who used henna to dye her white locks a glorious red was held up as an object of pity by the frank Mrs. Dunkle.

"Why do women dye their hair at such an age?" she asked a listening circle. "Because they want to please the men," she added, in answer to her own question. "Look at me? Why don't I bother to cater to the masculine sex?"

No one answered. But every one thought in her heart that it was a pity Mrs. Dunkle did not take some precautionary measures to stave off approaching years, especially as her husband seemed so bored in her presence.

"I will wager my tiara," remarked one wealthy woman, *sotto voce*, "that Dunkle has the time of his life when he takes those frequent trips to New York to 'look after stocks,' as he explains. My husband told me last time he was up here that he saw Dunkle with a merry party last week. She thinks she has him fast. She'll wake up some day. A woman who lets herself grow old in our circle can't possibly hold a man while all the rest of them are keeping young."

"Have you noticed," said Mrs. Dunkle, "how carefully Miss Van Dusen watches every one in this hotel?"

She paused, impressively, then went on: "*I* have. Whenever she thinks she is not observed her eyes are very busy taking in all that is going on around her."

"Can you imagine why she asked for a table near the door?" inquired Mrs. Stevens.

"Of course I don't *know* why," replied Mrs. Dunkle, "but I will tell you what I think!"

The circle closed in about her. Books and fancy-work fell unheeded.

"It's my opinion," continued Mrs. Dunkle, that she isn't *Miss* Van Dusen at all."

"Who can she be, then?" breathlessly asked a dozen voices.

"I believe she is *Mrs.* Van Dusen," proceeded Mrs. Dunkle, "or Mrs. Someone Else. When she first arrived I distinctly heard her say when the clerk asked if she were Mrs. Van Dusen that she 'wished to be known' as Miss Van Dusen. Now that strikes me as a peculiar statement for any correct person to make. Mark my words, there is something wrong with her domestic arrangements. She has a husband. Trust to that! Else why would she avoid becoming acquainted with all the men here."

"Because they are so old and unattractive," answered the youngest woman in the crowd.

"Well, those who come up for Saturday and Sunday are attractive enough," retorted another woman.

"Yes, but no one gets a second look at them," impertinently replied the younger woman. "They are too closely guarded."

"It is remarkable," began a voice from the outer edge of the circle, "that a young woman as she is, and rather pretty—"

"'Pretty?' broke in Mrs. Dunkle," I would never call her so. She has a turned-up nose, insipid blue eyes and such childish dimples. No man likes dimples these days. They are quite, quite out."

"As I started to say," continued the voice, "it is undeniably strange that a young, pretty woman, with dimples, should stay so much to herself. Maybe her husband is getting a divorce—or trying to get one. Men are so vacillating in their affections these days—and she knows she must be very careful. In such times, the slightest word or act is misconstrued. One never knows who is watching, making

notes, ready to report when the case comes up. Often the greatest surprises are furnished at the last moment by some utterly unsuspected person."

"She ought to know," wisely remarked another woman to the one next her, "for there were more surprises in her case than any I can remember in recent years."

"The safest plan," continued the divorcée, "it seems to me, is to leave the poor girl alone. She is here with a purpose. She knows what that purpose is, and we should be humane enough to leave her to her loneliness. But I believe I have solved the mystery."

"She could at least bow slightly to people who are disposed to be friendly," commented Mrs. Dunkle. "Now, I have made a number of overtures to her, but she has disregarded them all."

"She even snubbed young Wickersham, whom you put up to getting acquainted," sweetly remarked another voice.

"There wasn't much 'putting up' to it," retorted Mrs. Dunkle. "He was crazy to meet her."

"Who is she, anyhow?" inquired Mrs. Stevens.

"Some one that no one has ever heard of," replied Mrs. Dunkle. "She told the clerk she was one of *the* Van Dusens. Now, will some one kindly enlighten me as to who the Van Dusens are without laying stress on *the*. I have never heard of them."

The entire circle shook their heads. The problem was too much for them.

"At any rate," remarked one, "she seems to have plenty of money."

"Yes, she has money," all agreed.

"Remember what I tell you," cautioned Mrs. Dunkle, "you won't have long to wait before we learn something. Murder will out."

"Gracious! You can't possibly suspect anybody of murder," exclaimed a woman who had been reading, and so had missed the start of the conversation.

The discussion was terminated at this point by the sound of an automobile siren and the *chug-chug* of a big touring-car as it dashed up the road and halted in front of the doorway.

"The Brookses!" exclaimed some one.

A man and woman and two children alighted and disappeared within. A second car then arrived and deposited several servants.

The driver of the first car, who had busied himself with the machine, now looked up for the first time, took his goggles and cap off, and inspected the hotel. Then he gazed casually at the row of women on the porch.

"Such impudence!" exclaimed Mrs. Dunkle.

Just then Mr. Brooks reappeared.

"Take the car to the garage, Favre," he ordered.

"*Bien, monsieur*," replied the chauffeur.

"A Frenchman!" here exclaimed Mrs. Dunkle.

"He is awfully handsome," remarked the youngest woman. "Too bad he is a chauffeur."

As she spoke she wondered at the cynical look which passed over Favre's face as he caught sight of Mrs. Dunkle.

CHAPTER III.

A WRENCH AND AN ENCOUNTER.

FOR a while the arrival of the Brooks family absorbed the attention of the hotel guests, but interest in them soon died down, and Miss Van Dusen again resumed her place as the chief subject of comment.

If the young woman were conscious of the excitement she occasioned she gave no visible evidence of the fact. She came and went without disturbing any one. If one of the men performed some little service for her, such as handing her a book which she had dropped, she thanked him with a sweet smile, but one which offered no encouragement for further conversation.

The younger people played the usual games in vogue at such summer resorts, and they could see that Miss Van Dusen watched them with an air of knowledge concerning the various points made, but she discouraged any invitations to join in the sport.

Days went by, and Mrs. Dunkle and her set confessed that they seemed no nearer finding out Miss Van Dusen's secret.

"For, trust me," said Mrs. Dunkle, with a sage wag of her head, "there *is* a secret. I haven't changed my mind. The summer isn't over yet. It takes time to uncover family skeletons."

As she spoke, Miss Van Dusen herself emerged from the shade of a near-by tree, ran lightly into the house, and reappeared wearing a wide-brimmed and very becoming hat. Under her arm she carried a book.

She stopped for a moment at the desk to speak to the clerk.

"Going for a walk, Miss Van Dusen?" he remarked pleasantly.

Hughes liked the young lady, although she had very little to say to him. He had resisted all attempts on the part of the others to draw him out concerning her. Indeed there was nothing he could tell them, but they chose to believe that he was in the secret.

"I can't make her out any more than they can," he confided to the night clerk," "but I'm not going to let the others in on that. I wonder what her game really is. Seems to have loads of money. Orders the best of everything."

Now, in answer to his query, Miss Van Dusen replied:

"Yes. I think I shall go over to Artist's Rock."

"But that is several miles from here and difficult to reach," remarked the clerk.

"Oh, I shall find it all right," answered the young woman, and proceeded on her way leaving a buzz of interest behind her.

"She has no more intention of going to Artist's Rock than I have," observed Mrs. Dunkle, with emphasis.

Every day Miss Van Dusen went for a long walk, and invariably she went alone. The other women couldn't understand why a young and pretty woman could spend so much time in her own society, but she did not ask their advice on the subject.

On this particular afternoon she went swiftly down the path hung with ferns and wild flowers in such profusion that they tangled themselves around her feet.

After walking a short distance she arrived at a point where another path crossed the one she had followed.

She knew very well that the new path was the one which should lead her to Artist's Rock, but instead of going in that direction she continued on down the original one.

Had Mrs. Dunkle seen her she would have said:

"What did I tell you?"

But Mrs. Dunkle was not there, for which fact Miss Van Dusen was grateful, for instinctively she did not like the woman, although she had no idea of the extent of the latter's curiosity regarding her.

Had Miss Van Dusen been asked for an explanation of her present move she would have replied:

"It is simple enough. I merely changed my mind about where I wished to go."

At any rate, she continued to follow the first path. Now that she was out of sight of the hotel people, she threw away her reserve and began to sing. Her voice was a well-trained soprano of unusual volume and sweetness, and she knew how to use it with expression.

She walked on, singing and gathering ferns, until she reached a spot where, high up on an overhanging rock on the mountainside, she caught sight of a crimson flower which attracted her keenly by reason of its unique coloring. Throwing aside her book, flowers, and hat, she started up the mountain after it.

She had not taken more than half a dozen steps when the ground below her right foot seemed suddenly to cave in, and with a cry of pain she fell heavily.

The next instant she withdrew her foot and tried to stand up.

The effort proved too much for her, and she fell back against a clump of bushes. Her face became white, for the pain in her ankle was excruciating. She could move only with the greatest difficulty.

What was to be done? To walk was an impossibility.

After some minutes had passed, the pain decreased, and much to her relief she discovered that she could stand once more. Evidently she had merely given her foot a bad wrench. She felt exceedingly grateful that the injury was no worse. A genuine sprain in her ankle would necessitate her returning to New York and she owned to herself that she was not ready just then to leave the Antlers.

She was still suffering some discomfort, however, as she sat by the roadside and wondered how she would be able to get back to the hotel. She decided that she would wait until a farmer's wagon or the hotel bus came along. That was simple enough, until she reflected upon the length of time it would take for either to pass that way. Unfortunately there was no train due, and it wasn't the time of day for produce wagons. She decided that she wouldn't accept assistance from any of the hotel guests who might chance to pass, for that would open up an acquaintance whether she wished it or no.

Just then the heavy *chug-chug* of a big car going up-hill was heard in the distance.

Miss Van Dusen watched for it to come around the curve.

The next instant the big automobile flashed into sight, its metal shining in the sun.

She saw it was a new one, and thought it must belong to some one in the nearest town, since she had never seen it at the hotel before.

On it came at splendid speed, and was just about to pass by, when suddenly it stopped and a man alighted and busied himself with examining some part of the machinery beneath the machine.

He did not see Miss Van Dusen, and she did not make her presence known.

He was so enveloped in a voluminous linen coat, cap, and goggles that his own mother would hardly have known him.

Miss Van Dusen wondered who the man might be.

She sat quite still and watched him as he deftly worked over the mechanism of the car.

After some moments, in which he was completely absorbed in his work, and during which time she watched him constantly, he evidently achieved the desired result.

Pulling on his gloves, and once more drawing down his goggles, he turned around in the direction of Miss Van Dusen, and was just about to climb into the machine again when he looked directly at her.

She was still sitting by the roadside leaning against a tree, for she did not want to make the effort of attempting to go back to the hotel until her foot was in a better condition.

The driver of the automobile looked steadily at her for an instant, then lifting his cap, said:

"I beg your pardon, but you look awfully tired. Can't I be of some service to you?"

And he advanced to where she sat.

His words were spoken in the manner of a well-bred man, and Miss Van Dusen had no hesitancy in replying to them, especially as she decided that he must be a visitor somewhere in the neighborhood.

She attempted to rise, but fell back against the tree.

He sprang forward, put out his arm, and she leaned gratefully against it.

"Oh, thank you so much!" she murmured. "It's awfully kind of you. There! That's better. It was just the strain at first. I can get along nicely. You see I have been sitting for some time."

She took a step or two forward, but limped decidedly.

"Why," said the man, "you must have wrenched your ankle."

"I—I think that was what happened," explained Miss Van Dusen. "I wanted to pick that beautiful crimson flower up there, and I fell. I—I didn't get the flower," she added with a smile.

"But you shall have it after all," said the obliging stranger.

Before she could remonstrate he had dashed up the mountain-side and soon returned, holding in his hand the flower which had caused so much distress.

"Oh, thank you," said Miss Van Dusen with an illuminating smile which caused her to be positively beautiful. "That was very good of you."

"Oh, don't mention it," returned the stranger. "It was a pleasure to get it for you."

He had raised his goggles and Miss Van Dusen noted the fact that he was quite handsome, with a certain strength about his mouth and jaw which, to her way of thinking, stamped him as belonging to a different class from the men who were idling their time away at the Antlers. She wondered where he lived and who he was.

"Are you ready to go now?" he inquired, after a pause.

"To go?" repeated Miss Van Dusen somewhat surprised.

"Yes."

"Where shall I go?" she inquired.

"Why, back to the Antlers," he said.

"You seem to know where I live," she exclaimed in amazement.

"Oh, yes, I know," he answered. "And I am going to take you back right away, where you can bathe your foot and rest comfortably for a while, until you have fully recovered."

"But you were going in the other direction," she protested.

"Oh, that doesn't make any difference," he said politely. "I was just testing this new car."

"Oh, yes it does, too!" she persisted. "I don't want to take you out of your way. You must live some distance from here."

"I am at the Antlers," he replied.

"Oh," she exclaimed, then checked herself. It seemed strange that she had not noticed one so attractive in his personal appearance.

"You must have arrived since I left for my walk," she remarked. "You and your beautiful car!"

"Oh, no," he said with a smile, "I have been at the Antlers almost as long as you have, and this handsome car is not mine. It belongs to my employer, Mr. Brooks."

"Then—then, you are—" began Miss Van Dusen scarcely crediting her ears.

"I am Mr. Brooks's chauffeur," answered the stranger with a bow and an enigmatical smile, "Henry Favre, at your service."

CHAPTER IV.

MISS VAN DUSEN'S CAUTION.

THERE was a moment of embarrassed silence on the part of both.

Finally the chauffeur broke the ice.

"You seemed surprised to learn my identity," he remarked.

"I—I," she began, "was wondering why it was that I had not noticed you coming and going at the Antlers."

"Well, you see," he said good-naturedly, "I was always attending to business. When you were around I was either just coming or going, and I always wore my livery."

"Your livery," she repeated. Then she laughed.

"Why do you laugh?" he inquired.

"I don't know," she answered. "Only the word 'livery' seems so strange when applied to you."

"I don't know why it should," he replied. "I am following my chosen profession in being a chauffeur. There isn't much I don't know about machines. And as for the 'livery,' it's rather difficult to tell a chauffeur from a real gentleman when he is done up in a linen coat and goggles, now isn't it?"

There was a tone of cynicism in his voice, and Miss Van Dusen answered lightly.

"Why do you make the distinction between chauffeur and gentleman."

"You don't suppose for an instant that the two could be successfully combined?" he demanded. "Unless a gentleman chooses to playfully call himself a chauffeur. No chauffeur would dare presume so far as to place himself in the class with *real* gentlemen," he concluded.

"Now you are joking," she said. "Why shouldn't a chauffeur be a gentleman? Many a man has been compelled to follow a calling far from congenial to him. Just because he is unfortunate enough to place himself beyond the pale of the class called 'society' is no reason why he should not in reality be in many cases the superior by breeding and intelligence of many who would not condescend to notice him beyond giving him an order as to his work."

"By Jove, you possess real common sense!" exclaimed Favre. "What brings you to the Antlers among all those featherbrains there? You are not one of them."

She shook her head.

"I beg your pardon," he went on, "I didn't mean to be impertinent. I didn't mean really to inquire, although I suppose you know as well as I do that all the old cats at the Antlers are eaten up with curiosity to know what you *are* doing there?"

"No, are they really?" inquired Miss Van Dusen. "Why should I interest them."

"When a young and pretty woman—" began Favre. Then he stopped suddenly.

"I beg your pardon for overstepping my place. When a young lady doesn't choose to tell everybody at a summer resort all about her past, present, and future, the middle-aged gossips become suspicious. You see, I hear all the talk, through bits of conversation from my betters and also from my inferiors."

Again he smiled a slow, sarcastic smile, which interested Miss Van Dusen greatly. She had never known any one who had such a complete command over himself and his surroundings.

This man was of no namby-pamby nature. True, he was a chauffeur. But evidently he was a superior chauffeur who possessed a grasp of conditions such as Miss Van Dusen had never before encountered.

This chauffeur seemed to tower above his employers, the Brookses, whom it was easy to see had no interest in life beyond counting their money, and spending it. This man knew life as it was. He could sift the false from the true, and Miss Van Dusen admired such capacity of discrimination.

"How is your foot now?" asked Favre, suddenly changing the subject.

"Better, thank you."

"You seemed to be not adverse to permitting me to give you a lift a moment ago," he went on. "Now that you know who I am, I hope it will not make any difference."

"You have proven yourself a friend in need and, therefore, a friend indeed," said Miss Van Dusen.

"Then you will let me drive you back to the hotel."

"Yes. That is, if you will take me only as far as the big clump of bushes just

this side of the entrance. You know, the place where the big tree that was struck by lightning stands."

"I know the spot," replied Favre.

His voice, however, assumed a chilly tone and his expression was one of disappointment.

Miss Van Dusen glanced keenly at him as he helped her tenderly into the car and made her comfortable with a cushion for her foot.

"Please don't think that," she said suddenly, laying a hand on his arm.

"Think what?" he demanded gruffly.

"Don't think I asked you to put me down there, just because you—"

"Because I am only a chauffeur," he answered.

"Well, yes, but for reasons which I cannot very well explain just now, I would much prefer it," she finished.

Favre gave one searching look at her face.

"You know what you are doing," he said briefly. "If I can be of any assistance, call on me."

"Oh, thank you," she said in grateful tones. "But it is nothing of that sort—that is—nothing for which I should require aid from any source. I must depend upon myself alone. That is what I am trying to do. If these people here saw me with a man—with any man—"

"I understand," put in Favre. As a matter of fact he didn't understand at all.

He started up the machine.

"Oh, my book and flowers," exclaimed Miss Van Dusen. "Please get them. The flowers don't matter so much, for they must be withered by this time, but I don't want to lose my book."

In an instant Favre ran quickly to the spot where she had been sitting and returned with a faded bunch of ferns and a book.

"I suppose you don't have much time for reading," she inquired as she took them.

"To tell the truth, I don't," he answered, "not just now, for the Brookses don't seem to want to do anything else but go out motoring."

"If ever you have the time," said Miss Van Dusen, "I would advise you to read this novel."

She held the book up for him to see the title.

"'Beyond the Cross Roads,'" he read aloud. "I like the name. And the author—"

"Aylmer Norcross," she answered. "It is worth reading."

"Come to think of it," he said suddenly, the title 'Cross Roads' suggests our meeting to-day, for it was just 'beyond the cross roads' that I found you. I will certainly get that book."

"Let me lend you mine," suggested Miss Van Dusen. "I have only a few pages more to read."

"That's awfully good of you to think of it," said Favre.

All this time they were spinning along in the high-powered machine. The three miles which Miss Van Dusen had traversed by foot soon sped by and they were nearing their destination.

"Do you see that overhanging rock there?" suddenly inquired Favre.

"Yes," replied the young woman. "It is beautiful. Such an artistic view with the wild flowers and the big mountain towering above it."

"I noticed it particularly," went on the chauffeur, "because it looks exactly like a painting by an American artist which won a prize in Paris a few years ago. I wouldn't be surprised if he had made his picture from this very scene. The coloring is exquisite as the light filters through the trees."

"You have an appreciation of the artistic, that is quite evident," said Miss Van Dusen. "France is a wonderful country for art. How I would love to go there. You were born there, weren't you, Mr. Favre?"

"I was there for a long time," he answered.

"I speak some French," continued Miss Van Dusen, "but I am sensible enough not to try and attempt it with a native Frenchman. By the way, you speak beautiful English. Where did you learn it?"

"From my mother," briefly answered Favre. "She taught me all I know."

"I have seldom heard a Frenchman speak so well. You must have been over here some time."

"That's it," said Favre. "My mother taught me the rudiments, and then, contact with the world completed the job."

As he spoke he put the brake on the car.

"Here we are," he said, as he descended and carefully assisted Miss Van Dusen to the ground. "Are you perfectly able to get back alone?" he asked.

"Perfectly," she replied. "You found the right spot. This is the tree and the clump of bushes. You don't think any one

from the hotel saw us?" she now asked nervously.

"Not a soul," replied Favre with a laugh. "Not even that hypocrite, Mrs. Dunkle."

"Of course I need not caution you to be careful not to mention having met me," said Miss Van Dusen.

"Certainly not," replied Favre. "By the way, what do you say to taking a spin with me to-morrow? I can meet you here and no one will be the wiser."

Miss Van Dusen hesitated for a moment.

"I think it would be delightful," she replied, holding out her hand in parting; "you may look for me at three o'clock."

"Until then," replied Favre, raising his hat with a pleased smile.

The automobile disappeared around the turn of the road, and Miss Van Dusen walked slowly on her way to the hotel.

The next instant a woman stepped from behind the thick bushes. It was Mrs. Dunkle. She had heard everything. She merely waited long enough for Miss Van Dusen to be safely out of sight before she, too, started toward the hotel.

At last she had learned something with which to astonish every one, but she made up her mind that she would hold on to the amazing news until the proper opportunity for telling it arrived.

CHAPTER V.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

THE next day was unusually warm for such an altitude, and the guests of the Antlers sat listlessly about bemoaning the recklessness of the thermometer.

Miss Van Dusen, however, seemed not to mind the heat. She walked gracefully in and out of the hotel, and seemed so completely occupied with her own thoughts that the others actually envied her the power of forgetting surroundings and temperature.

"That woman is a wonder," remarked one of the men who had spoken before of her charms. "Nothing seems to feaze her. She must know well how you women despise her on account of her lack of interest in the daily happenings here, but she doesn't show her feelings. You simply can't guess her."

"Indeed," remarked Mrs. Dunkle, who overheard the remark. She was very busy embroidering a linen piece, but her work did not prevent her from keeping in touch with every word, every move on the part of those within the immediate vicinity.

"What is your opinion concerning her?" she inquired with a cynical smile. "You seem to approve of her methods?"

"I must say, I consider her quite attractive," boldly replied the man. "Her one fault, it seems to me, appears to be the fact that up to date nobody has succeeded in finding out anything more about her than they knew the first day she arrived."

"Really?" said Mrs. Dunkle. "Suppose some of us know more than we pretend to know."

She looked significantly at the woman sitting nearest her, and then with a triumphant glance around at the rest of the loungers, all of whom were looking in her direction, she pretended to become busy once more with her fancy-work.

"I wonder what she can mean by that?" remarked Mrs. Stevens in a low voice to her right-hand neighbor.

"Evidently she has learned something," answered the lady addressed.

"Pshaw! How could she?" returned Mrs. Stevens. "Only yesterday afternoon she was telling us to wait and murder would out, and all her favorite expressions."

"Yes," said the other woman, "but I have noticed to-day that she is thinking hard about something."

"Maybe she has heard about the good time her husband has when he goes to New York. Everybody on the place knows all the details except herself, and she prides herself on the fact that she keeps such a tight rein on him. Isn't it funny?"

"Where is the mysterious young woman?" asked some one.

"Getting ready to go out for a walk," said Mrs. Dunkle with authority.

"What, a walk in all this heat? Why, it's suffocating," remarked one of the men.

"That won't keep her from going—just the same," announced Mrs. Dunkle as she looked up with a sarcastic smile.

"She *does* know something," whispered one of the ladies. "What did I tell you?"

"What time is it, Mr. Stevens?" inquired Mrs. Dunkle.

"It's exactly ten minutes to three," he replied.

"You may look for Miss Van Dusen at any minute now," calmly announced Mrs. Dunkle.

While the crowd on the porch was still wondering, Miss Van Dusen herself, looking as fresh as a rose, ran lightly down the steps and disappeared along the same path she had followed the day before.

"I suppose she's going to Artist's Rock again to-day," commented one of the watchers.

The next instant the young woman returned quite unexpectedly. Evidently she had lost something, for she began searching about.

"Can I be of any assistance?" offered one of the more polite men.

"I—I have lost my gold-mesh bag," explained the young woman.

"I trust there was nothing of great value in it," said the gentleman.

"Only a few bills," answered Miss Van Dusen after some hesitation.

Just then one of the children ran forward with the bag. In handing it to its owner it fell, and the contents were scattered on the ground. Mrs. Dunkle was close enough to count five one-hundred-dollar bills.

After thanking the gentleman and the child, Miss Van Dusen once more started down the path.

She was late, and hoped the interesting chauffeur with the handsome face and the manner of a gentleman would still be waiting for her. She was not so sure of that, however, for she recalled his suggestion that she would not care to ride up to the hotel with him because of his menial position.

At last she reached the clump of bushes where he had left her the day before. She had not seen him since, although she knew that he must have taken the Brooks family out for a long spin that morning, for she had heard some of the people discussing their trip.

It was with a feeling of genuine relief that she caught sight of the big new car, and the next moment Favre was standing before her, cap in hand.

"Did you think I didn't mean to keep my word?" she asked.

"No," he answered simply. "I knew something must have detained you. Besides, who ever heard of a woman being punctual in an unimportant matter like this?"

"Then you believed in me?" she asked with an arch look.

"Absolutely," he replied. "I know something about people; you see, a chauffeur has plenty of time in which to study his fellow man, to say nothing of the women. How is your foot?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, it's all right to-day," she replied. "I know I shall enjoy the ride."

In another moment they were seated in the luxurious car and were spinning along the mountain road.

"Now, let's forget the Antlers and all the people there," suggested Favre.

Miss Van Dusen readily assented, and within a short time the two began to feel as if they had known each other for years. Meanwhile at the hotel, after the hubbub of excitement over Miss Van Dusen and subsequent finding of her gold-mesh bag had died down, there came a lull in the conversation.

"Oh, I wish something would happen," remarked one of the women who sat rocking herself with a bored expression.

Suddenly Mrs. Stevens chanced to glance into the entrance hall toward the clerk's desk.

She watched steadily for a moment, then grasped Mrs. Dunkle's arm.

"Something is going on in there," she said.

"What makes you think so?" inquired that worthy lady.

"Don't you see how excitedly those men are talking?" continued Mr. Stevens.

Mrs. Dunkle studied the group in the hall attentively.

"They do seem very much interested in something," she observed. "Why isn't Mr. Dunkle around? Men never are on hand when they are really wanted. I could send him in to learn the news. There's Mr. Brooks, who seems to be taking an active part in the conversation. Maybe we can prevail upon him to enlighten us. I would ask that clerk myself, only he is so impertinent in not answering the simplest questions."

At this moment Mrs. Brooks joined the group at the desk.

Everybody on the porch by this time was trying to catch an inkling of the conversation that was being carried on in low tones.

At last Mrs. Brooks made her appearance on the porch. She seemed unusually excited.

"Such a dreadful thing!" she exclaimed. "Think of having a thief in our very midst! The clerk tells me this isn't the

first time in the last few weeks that this has happened, only it has been kept quiet."

"Why, what has happened?" asked several voices at once.

"Happened?" replied Mrs. Brooks, excitedly, "a large sum of money has been stolen from our rooms. Heaven only knows what else has been taken!"

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. DUNKLE SUGGESTS A CLUE.

WITHIN five minutes the entire atmosphere of the Antlers seemed to have changed completely. Groups of people here and there discussed the robbery. The intense heat was forgotten. Every one had a suggestion. Books and embroidery fell unheeded to the floor, while elaborately coiffured heads were brought into quite close contact.

The clerk, Hughes, was besieged with inquiries. Every man and woman in the place wanted to extract some bit of information that the others had not been fortunate enough to secure.

In all the weeks of summer mountain life, nothing had occurred to so thrill the guests in their daily round of monotonous existence.

"Who can it be?"

If this question were asked once within five minutes it was asked several hundred times.

"Of course it is unfortunate that the Brookses have sustained a loss, my dear," remarked Mrs. Stevens to a friend, "but that isn't so serious, after all, as is the idea that the Brookses may not be the only people to suffer. How do you know that all the rest of us may not have been robbed?"

This was an unusually daring suggestion to emanate from Mrs. Stevens Indeed, it seemed more like Mrs. Dunkle. But no matter what the source, it was sufficiently startling to cause every man and woman to forsake the porch and rush upon the clerk with a demand for room keys so that each might inspect his personal property. Anxiety was written all over the features of those who recollected that they had left valuables lying carelessly about.

The tour of inspection occupied some time, and when again the household was reassembled on the veranda some real light was thrown on the subject.

The clerk tells me that Mrs. Townsend lost several handsome pieces of jewelry a few days ago," said Mrs. Brooks. "She promised to keep the matter quiet until detectives could be secured from New York. The clerk had an idea that one of the Townsend servants was guilty and a close watch was kept on them, but they were all able to establish alibis. Hotels of this kind never like to send to the city for expert detectives unless they have to. It has been my experience that they will resort to every expedient under the sun to keep from doing so, for as soon as a New York detective is employed, somehow news of the robbery leaks out and all the papers are filled with long articles on the subject."

"It isn't very pleasant to have your full family history published, just because you have lost a few diamonds," remarked a bejeweled woman. "I find that hotels nowadays are very thoughtful of their guests in protecting them from the newspapers."

"Yes, they are," agreed another. "But when so many robberies occur it is time to make an investigation. It's the principle of the affair that is annoying. Do tell us exactly how you discovered your loss, Mrs. Brooks."

"It was simple enough," replied that lady. "This morning when we took a spin over to Sunrise Point, Mr. Brooks thoughtlessly left a roll of bills lying on the table in our sitting-room. But we have done that sort of thing before and nothing has ever happened until now. When we returned it was gone."

"Do you suspect any of your servants?" asked Hughes, who had come over to the group.

"No. I would hate to think them dishonest, for the maids and the footman have been with me for years. Mr. Brooks's valet is absolutely above suspicion. The only person about whose character I am not so thoroughly informed is the chauffeur, Favre; but both Mr. Brooks and myself have not the slightest doubt in regard to his honesty. He came to us very highly recommended through an intimate friend of ours who had known him in France for years and who absolutely vouched for him. He has not been with us longer than three months, but has proved satisfactory in every way."

"Did he enter your rooms this morning at all?" inquired Hughes.

"Yes. But only for a moment to help Mr. Brooks with some things to be taken in the car."

"Then he is above suspicion?"

"As far as our experience and that of our friend goes, We have found him an exceptional man, a fellow who seems a bit above his surroundings. Really, he is rather a well-read man, so Mr. Brooks tells me. Indeed, I don't know how we would get along without Favre. We have had so many chauffeurs who were unreliable."

"That's true," chimed the chorus.

"Where is the chauffeur now?" asked one woman. "Have you questioned him?"

"Not yet. He went out a little while ago with the new car. I don't like to ride in it until I feel sure it is all right. Favre is putting it through its paces, so to speak. He assures me it runs beautifully. There was some little trouble at first. We expect him back at any moment. Of course we will question him, but one has to be careful in such things."

So the conversation ran on.

Then, to the surprise of every one the clerk told Mrs. Brooks that perhaps everything would be straightened out more quickly than they had at first supposed.

"By a lucky accident," he explained, "the money I gave Mr. Brooks in cashing his check this morning consisted of marked bills which I was holding in reserve for an attempt to catch the thief who had stolen money last week from another guest."

"What!" exclaimed everybody. "Money was stolen from some one else?"

The clerk assured them that such was the case.

"I kept the matter quiet," he explained. "I didn't want to disturb any one unnecessarily. When Mr. Brooks asked me to cash his check I didn't like to ask him to wait. So it happened that I gave him the marked bills. It was a lucky thing, for the thief can't get very far away from the Antlers without being discovered by some one."

"He's a foxy fellow," said Mrs. Stevens aside to Mrs. Dunkle. "Goodness only knows how much money has been stolen here lately. He isn't telling all he knows by a great deal."

A thousand and one bits of advice were proffered by the guests. The clerk listened patiently, but shook his head.

"I am expecting Mr. Woodly, the proprietor, back at any moment," he said. "He only went as far as the village. I am sure he will start some active movement to put a stop to this thieving. It can't go on any longer. We must get detectives. The thief must be found."

During all the hubbub Mrs. Dunkle had had very little to say. Usually she was the most inquisitive, most talkative person on the verandas. On this occasion, however, she remained singularly silent.

"What is your opinion of the affair, Mrs. Dunkle?" asked some one.

But Mrs. Dunkle only shook her head.

"Surely you must have some theory," suggested Mrs. Stevens.

"What is it?" demanded a dozen persons at once, for each knew that Mrs. Dunkle's ideas were always highly original and entertaining, no matter how far from the truth they might be.

"How much money did Mr. Brooks lose?" asked Mrs. Dunkle of Hughes.

"Oh, five or six one-hundred-dollar bills," he replied.

"I thought so," said Mrs. Dunkle with a set look of understanding on her face.

"Have you an idea, Mrs. Dunkle?" politely inquired Hughes.

"Yes, I have." replied Mrs. Dunkle, "but I'm not going to tell it to you. I will speak to Mr. Woodly himself about it."

"Here is Mr. Woodly now," said some one.

When the details of the latest robbery had been recited to the proprietor, he said:

"Well, it's time to get busy. Something must be done at once. The question is, what shall be the first move."

"If you will accept some advice from me," said Mrs. Dunkle in an impressive manner, "I would suggest that you question the mysterious Miss Van Dusen. I think she will be able to throw some definite light on the matter."

(To be continued.)

THE POWER OF GOLD.

THE poet swears that his love is complete
In a falsetto voice—she forsakes him.
Old Moneybags throws himself down at her feet
With a false set o' teeth—and she takes him.

SO the four of us, Helen Chadwick, Dufresne, who was our host, Loring, and I, went into the conservatory. The argument, begun at dinner, as to whether the sensitive plant is responsive to the breath as well as to the touch, had to be settled. Dufresne, laughing, promised that we should soon see how wrong we were—how little we really knew.

The warm damp of the place was a trifle disagreeable to me. I would much rather have kept my seat at table, where the port and cigarettes were, than to have made one of this pseudo-scientific investigating party. But, idly drawn into the discussion at first, nothing would do save that I come along and have my chance-expressed opinions beaten to earth under the demonstrated truth of Dufresne's assertions.

He and the girl had paused near the door of the hot-house to admire a rhododendron in full bloom; I was loitering a little way behind them on the brick-paved walk—when it happened. Nothing more thoroughly unexpected could have been imagined. Loring, who had wandered a bit farther along, suddenly turned and came hurtling toward us, his jaw hanging, eyes a-bulge, the light of stark madness on his face!

I took a step forward.

"What, in the name—"

And then he was upon the two beside the pink-blossomed bush. Dufresne, knocked clean off his feet, with a stifled cry and a wild upflinging of his arms, sank from view in a whirlpool of swishing leaves into the foliage beside the path. Miss Chadwick, sent spinning to the opposite edge of the walk by a glancing blow from Loring's shoulder, staggered a moment, strove ineffectually to regain her balance by clutching at the near-by shrubbery, then toppled ungracefully to her knees in the moist loam.

"Loring!" I cried out. "In pity's name, man—"

Side-stepping quickly, I reached out and tried to hold him. As well try to detain a runaway express-train. My grip on his shoulder was off in a twinkling, and on he plowed, with huge, swift strides toward the conservatory door.

Another moment and he had gone.

Dazed, I stared at the aperture through which he had fled. Behind me I heard fat Dufresne struggling to get out of the branches into which he had fallen; vaguely gathered that he had at last extricated himself and approached the girl, inquiring with wheezing solicitude as to her state.

Loring was sane when he came into the green-house. Sane up to thirty seconds ago. And then—mad.

What in the world—

Then I came to myself with a start. Loring was my friend. I had brought him to this house to-night. In a way, I was responsible for his actions. Curse the fellow! Yet he hadn't cut up as he had because he wanted to be eccentric. Something

had happened to him. Something back there along the walk, had given him a bad scare. Something, terrifying enough to unbalance his reason.

Great Heaven, he was at large now in the crowded drawing-rooms beyond! What might he not be up to? I was his friend, accountable to my host and hostess.

Swiftly I turned and went out of the door. No trace of him, or of any freakish action of which he might have been guilty, appearing among the gay party in the ground-floor rooms, I mounted the stairs to the chamber set apart for the men's hats and coats, and there found Loring's things. Evidently he had not left the house.

"Beg pardon, sir!" the servant at the front door met me at the foot of the stairway. "The gentleman who came in with you this evening, sir. I thought I ought to say something to you. Left without a thing on his head, just the way you are now, Mr. Murdock, not ten minutes ago. First I thought he was going after something he'd left behind in the motor you came in. But he ain't come back. I thought—"

I had run up-stairs, got into my overcoat and hat, and was descending the steps of the stoop in another two minutes. The fellow *was* mad! Whatever had upset him in the conservatory had driven him in a panic of fright from the very house itself, bareheaded, coatless.

I was frightfully worried. Unconsciously my steps were taking me in the direction of our club, where, I suppose, I had an unformed idea he might have run. As I entered the place, the first man I saw was —Loring!

He sat at a table nearest the open door of the café. His dress-coat had been exchanged for a dinner-jacket; there was something liquid in a glass before him. I crossed to his side. He did not look up. To all outward appearance, he was as cool and collected as ever I had seen him.

"Well?"

I let a pent breath escape me, and dropped into the opposite chair. I stared, speechless, at the man. And what a man he was! Six feet three, huge in proportion, with a bronze-skinned, smooth-shaven face. A man to look at with an involuntary straightening of the shoulders, inflation of the chest, and general attempt at "bigening"—if I may coin the word—in instinctive imitation of his splendid physique. Indeed, a man!

And he had been thrown into a paroxysm of fear so great that heedlessly he had knocked down his host of the evening and a frail woman, then bolted from the house to flee through the streets without stopping for proper covering, temporarily a lunatic through excessive fright—*this* near-giant, as badly scared as that?

"Well?" I repeated eagerly after him. "What's it all about?"

He said nothing.

"Don't you mean to talk?" I blurted, amazed. "Am I entitled to an explanation —or not?"

His eyes had not yet met mine.

"Can't you see," he said through his set teeth, "that I've had a shock, and a bad one? I'm trying to hold myself together. It isn't easy. I'd be obliged to you if you wouldn't ask questions. Not just now, anyway."

I sat back, gnawing my mustache. Could any but a strong man have held himself even thus well in check after the way he had gone to pieces not a half-hour before? Yet, if he was strong-willed enough for that, what could have shaken him so completely at Dufresne's house? Curiosity such as mine could not be concealed under even the wettest blanket.

"Will you tell me this?" I said after a while. "What threw you into such a funk?"

In silence he tore the bar-check between his fingers into tiny bits.

"You didn't see a reptile in the greenhouse?" I hazarded. "There wasn't a tarantula hidden on some transplanted bush? Nothing like that?"

He gave a scornfully negative gesture.

"Well, what the deuce was it?" I rapped out. "Dufresne, the girl, and myself were the only living human beings besides yourself in the place. We didn't do anything to alarm you surely. Did you go stark, staring mad on account of the silly flowers themselves?"

At last he looked full at me.

"What would you say," he almost whispered in his intensity, "if I told you it *was* the flowers? A little cluster of exotic plants that you didn't see in the far corner of the room, and that I didn't see either, but that I smelled? That those drove me clear out of my mind for a minute and more —eh?"

He leaned back.

"What would you say?" he went on. "You'd have nothing to say, because you

don't understand. You don't know the past. It won't make pleasant telling, I promise you. But you must know. Very well. Listen to me.

"Nine years ago I sat in this very club. Thirty at the time, I had realized every ambition in life but one. I had money, plenty of it, all earned by myself. Thirty, you understand, and with a fortune means hard work. I had worked hard. Harder than most men ever do, I guess; but I was built for doing hard things.

"The one attainment I lacked was a wife. No woman so far had pleased me. If that sounds egotistical, remember that my financial success had convinced me that I was the sort of a man capable of entertaining for a woman that thing known as a 'grand passion'; that I must pick and choose the girl upon whom to lavish a powerful love with care. Hence I had been waiting all these years, waiting for the one woman.

"But I was tired of waiting. And that night a man came and sat in the next lounge-chair to mine in the billiard-room and gave me hope that perhaps my waiting was over. A queer-looking individual he was. A new member of the club, I believe. A corpse was what he would have reminded you of: his yellow skin was drawn tight over his cheek-bones; there was far too little flesh on his limbs to make him an attractive figure to contemplate; and his eyes—I don't like to think of those burned holes in a sheepskin even now.

"His talk was full of a wonderful collection of exotic plants he had seen in a house near Washington Square. To my monosyllables of polite interest he brought forth an invitation to visit the place and look at the collection. I protested myself ignorant in such matters. That made no difference, said he; I would enjoy seeing this botanical display, he was sure. Besides, the collector had a daughter. I would surely like to see *her*.

"And then, for a solid hour, the emaciated stranger poured into my ear a description of a woman such as no one ever listened to, I'll take oath upon, since the world began. Impassioned, inspired of his theme, he set my brain on fire with the picture of his friend, the daughter of the floramaniac.

"I jumped to my feet.

"'Take me there!' I exclaimed. 'I want to see—these wonderful plants.'

"We went straight to the house, a large brown stone dwelling of the old-fashioned type. The conservatory was in the rear of the building. My breath caught in my throat as I entered the heated room. Orchids, nothing but orchids, thousands, tens of thousands of the flowing, multi-shaded flowers, hung from the walls and ceiling of the place. Having seen nobody but the servant at the door, my corpse-like acquaintance told me that doubtless the collector was too busy at the moment to welcome me; however, he assured me that it was all right; I might stay as long as I chose; then he left me.

"As I stood gazing around the room I felt my senses swaying within me in time to the languorous nodding of the rows upon rows of trailing blossoms everywhere in view. What was this feeling? I looked down at my outstretched hand. Steady as a rock. Yet all inside my arm, the nerves, the tissue, the blood, the muscle, were in motion, in swaying motion.

"How long I stood entranced, deliciously thrilled by that movement within me which the rhythmical moving of the flowers inspired, I cannot say. Perhaps it was five, ten minutes—perhaps an hour, two—that I stood spellbound, hypnotized, incapable of any other sensation but that one of inner motion. And then—

"Before my eyes the rows of orchids bent apart. Slowly, with exquisite grace, it was like the waving open of a lane in a wheat field caused by the wind. Yet there was no wind, not the faintest breeze, in the room. Wider became the opening of that aisle in the blossoms' close ranks. Suddenly at its end I saw—the collector's daughter.

"How the man who had brought me here had lied. She was a million times more perfect than he had pictured her. Beautiful, she transcended beauty. A tall woman, lithe, well-rounded as to figure, black-haired and with eyes and lips which were the only 'rememberable' features of her face for me at the moment, I felt love at first sight—a stirring of my grand passion at last!—at my first glimpse of her, this goddess of the orchids.

"Slowly, with the languid grace of the swaying flowers, she advanced toward me through the lane they had made, as though by her royal command. She put out her hand. I took it in mine. The words I would have said to explain my presence

there did not pass my lips. What use were words—between us? Eye to eye, hand clasped in hand, it was as if all the words in the world had already been spoken to perform our introduction.

"After a while we talked. What of is no matter. Hours later I left the house—alone. The next afternoon I returned. The day following found me there as well. Days sped into weeks, the weeks into a month, and we were engaged. I did not declare my love. I had no need to do so. It was plain without speech—as was her regard for me.

"'When will you marry me, my Goddess of the Orchids?' I whispered.

"At first she hesitated. She could not leave her father; he was very old; she was all he had, and he would be unhappy without her. I remarked that his unhappiness could not be of long standing, surely, if she came with me, since he had never manifested enough interest in her welfare even to see me from the first time I came into the house.

"'You do not understand,' she told me gently. 'My father's way is strange, perhaps, but he loves me. Next to his flowers I come only second in his heart. If he lost me he would grieve. I cannot cause him pain. There is only one way—'

"She stopped.

"'What is the one way?' I asked.

"'There's an orchid,' said she, 'that he would give his life to possess if he could. So rare is it that not one has ever been seen by a white man; only rumors of its existence have come through the natives in the region of its growth. If my father could own one of that rare species, a single specimen—well, don't you see that he would be so happy, so completely absorbed in its possession, that he would not mind the shock of giving me up—not till long after you had brought the *Cattleyea Trixsemptia* back and we were married, at all events.'

"'I am to bring him this orchid, am I?' I smiled.

"'You love me?' she asked, anxiously.

"We were sitting on the ledge of a splashing fountain in the center of the conservatory. I rose and took her hands.

"'You shall see,' I said. 'Tell me where this flower grows. I will get it. Not till I have proved my love for you will I look into your eyes again.'

"We parted. That night I made one at a dinner given in honor of a celebrated Englishman who was a professional orchid-hunter. Bound for South America next day, to the section of the country, indeed, near which I had been told the plant I sought was to be found, I decided that I would be in luck if I could persuade this experienced traveler to let me accompany him into that strange land. Of course, after we arrived in Venezuela our ways would part; he was after a type of orchid different from the species I desired, and, in hunting his quarry, he would go along one route inland, I another.

"He was sincerely glad of my offer to join him. I explained that I wanted to go on an orchid hunt 'just for the adventure.' Next morning we took steamer together; in a week had reached South America, and then—a queer thing fell out.

"An Indian came to the Englishman with word of an orchid field that lay behind the Orinoco. It was the same spot toward which I had been directed to go. According to the native's story, it was perilous work getting to the place, and would take at least a month of the hardest kind of journeying. But the orchids there were very fine, very rare. If the professional cared to make the attempt—

"'Look here,' said he to me, 'I'm going to have a try for some of those flowers.'

"Here was a second stroke of luck. Since there was an entire field of these plants, I could come out with the truth at last that this, I felt certain, was the species of orchid I was hunting on my own hook. There was no longer any danger that the Englishman would hunt the same flower that I wanted if he knew my purpose, and perhaps be lucky enough to 'nose me out' in the search. Plainly, there were enough orchids of this description for all. So, together with this expert huntsman, I could journey to the spot with much less difficulty than alone.

"'But I won't take you with me,' he went on. "You heard what his nibs the native chief said just now. The trip's mighty dangerous. You couldn't stand it. Sorry, old man, but you've got to be left out of this.'

"'Just the same,' I informed him, 'I'm coming.' And I told him the business that had brought me from home. 'That's all—I'm coming,' I added.

"'No, you aren't,' said he firmly. 'That's all right about your hunting this

kind of an orchid. Don't know where you ever heard of it, or what put the notion of finding one into your head. But you've got to give it up. You don't know what you're about. A green hand at the business, and take a journey like this—man, you'd die!'

"'Will you?' I asked.

"That I can't say,' and he shrugged his shoulders. 'I'll stand a better chance of getting to the place than you, though. I'm inured, rather, to this sort of thing. Though I don't mind saying that I'd rather not go on this particular journey. From maps and hearsay of the trail it's going to be a little bit of a crosscut through Hades.'

"'Then why go?' I pursued.

"'There's an incentive in my case. A group of collectors is behind me, money-coffers open to pay a prize for whatever I get. My reason's clear. But, blame me if I can see yours in wanting to come along with me so headstrong and keen.'

"This time I shrugged.

"'Oh,' said he, 'so it's a girl? Been thrown over by some woman, have you, and want to go into danger to forget?'

"'On the contrary,' and I smiled. 'I'm doing it to please the girl I've won.'

"'Good Lord!' he blurted out, gaping at me. 'Good Lord—you mean to tell me a girl, a girl who cares about you, has let you come down here to hunt a trophy in the spot you want to go? Does she know anything about the way orchids are found? Oh, her father's a collector? Then she *does* know.'

"He continued to stare at me.

"'Look here, Loring,' he said suddenly. 'Don't mind if I ask you a question. But weren't you introduced to the lady of your choice by a rack-boned skeleton of a man with a yellow skin, deep-burning eyes—sort of an upheaval-from-the-crypt sort of chap?'

"'Yes,' I exclaimed, my eyes widening.

"'I thought so,' he said. And after a moment: 'I see,' he added. 'The same old game. I know the woman who sent you down here. Everybody in the orchid-collecting business knows her, more or less. She's a plant fiend. Same sort of mania as attacks people by way of drugs, the drink, and so on, you know. Seen her collection? It's the finest in the world; pretty nearly every orchid known is there. Shall I tell you how she got them?' He leaned toward me. 'Through just such fools as you, Loring.'

"I stumbled to my feet, furious.

"'Steady on!' he cried. 'Hear me out. I want to do you a friendly turn, old fellow; upon my soul I do. Listen. That woman, I tell you, is a fiend. We all know her well. See if this isn't the way she's hoodwinked you. Told you, didn't she, that her father would never be happy if she married and left him; that just one thing might be counted on to take his mind off losing her—a certain rare orchid? Anyway, that's what she's told other men time and again. All of them have started out to bring her the plant, too. Some succeeded. And the reward? She laughs at them, and then tells the truth. There is no doting father. The orchid she wanted for herself. It's all she cares for—orchids. Men are nothing. Orchids — they cost men — she wants orchids.

"'That's the fate of the men who succeed. But those who fail? Loring, the bones of a dozen, a score of the men who have tried to perform her mission lie bleaching now in the swamps and along the roots of jungle-trees the world over. Only one man failed to bring back the orchid for which he was sent and still lives. Do you know who he is? The man who brought you and the orchid queen together.

"'You remember his looks. She put that brand on him down this very way three years ago. Since then he's been trying to win her in the only way that seems possible —through her passion for the flowers. Men like you, big and strong, he seeks out, brings to her so that she can send them forth to complete her collection. When she has a specimen of every orchid ever known, he hopes that she will marry him. That's the living, disgusting truth, old man, as I breathe here before you.

"'Believe me, you're designed for a victim like all the rest. I'm telling you the truth. And I'm warning you to turn back before it's too late. Will you take my word —will you go home?'

"'No!' I roared. 'You lying hound—'

"I think I meant to kill him then with my own two hands. But suddenly reason came to my aid. Evidently it was going to be no easy matter for an untoughened white man to penetrate alone to the spot where the orchids I was after were to be found; I must bring what I had vowed I would back to my affianced. With this man's aid,

I might better be able to do so. What if he had dared to traduce the woman who was to be my wife? I could gloss even that over for the time, for the sake of getting what I sought. Afterward the lies he had told me—the lies, built up on some rumor of the girl's existence which he had come upon, and retailed to me for the purpose of causing me to abandon the field, with the glory of being first to find a new plant, to him—I could cram these down his throat with my fists.

"'I beg your pardon,' I said, appearing to be cool. 'You'll have to overlook what I've just said. I'm a good deal upset over what you've told me. I—I've no doubt you mean to be decent to me.'

"'And you'll quit this idea of hunting the orchid?' he asked eagerly.

"'No,' I replied, and the sneer with which I glanced him over must have been plain. 'I'm going with you.'

"His face reddened.

"'As you like,' he said curtly.

"Followed a week of busiest activity. Our outfit was purchased, porters hired, guides engaged. At length, when everything was in readiness, we assembled, a small army with enough supplies for quite that body, to start the march into the solitude. One month it took us to reach the head of the Orinoco. Then began the real hardships of the journey into the unbroken jungle.

"No such strain could be imagined as was put upon our party in the next fortnight. A bare chronicle of the events that befell us would not convey a tithe of what the suffering really meant. Menaced by reptiles, crawling creatures of every revolting description; attacked by the wild men of that forest region with their deadly blowguns; racked by swamp fevers, and always pressing on—on into the unknown—in a silence that daily grew more and more oppressive—the memory of that trip will be with me always in its harrowing details.

"And now our chief guide died. Before him had dropped off a third of our original number of porters and choppers. Without the leadership of the native, who knew the general direction in which lay the orchids, we were helpless. A party of Indians were encountered three days later, and, in response to our questions, they waved their hands toward the sun as the course we must follow before the 'poison plants' were in reach. On we fought.

"And in another week a perceptible odor was in the air; an odor which the Englishman said meant that we were nearing the orchids. Each day, as we progressed, this odor became more clearly defined. Finally it was distinctly unpleasant, then disagreeable, lastly uncomfortable. Another day and the scent grew positively menacing. Each breath one drew into the lungs seemed charged with fumes of a poisonous, sickish-sweet drug. Five porters fell senseless on the fifth day as we drew nearer to the source of the noxious aroma.

"And yet the orchids were not yet in sight, seemingly no nearer than when we started. Another day, and the odor in the air was insupportable. The natives refused to go farther. My white companion, the professional hunter, lay senseless in his tracks. I was near swooning myself. With the wind in our faces, blowing that poison off the orchid-field somewhere in advance of us, it was useless to think of keeping on any further.

"Then, and then only, did I believe the truth of what I had heard of the woman who had sent me on this wild-goose chase. Indeed, she must have known something of the perils into which I had gone at her bidding. And she had let me go. I was to have been another victim.

"I cursed her to high heaven, there in the middle of that black, silent forest, with the spirals of the invisible poison-odor coiling around me in the air. And I swore that I would have revenge—the revenge of bringing her what she had driven me out to get!

"Alone, I essayed one final dash forward in the endeavor to reach the flowers which seemed so near, yet were ever so far from my touch. Surely, we could not have halted many miles distant from the field. Perhaps by running, with body bent close to the ground—but it was useless. The wind brought the deadly fumes full in my face, cramming them down throat and nostrils. Reeling, half dead, I returned to the others.

"At once we began the homeward march. More than half our corps were dead by the time we had progressed a quarter way back along our trail. Half-way to the coast, and only a miserable handful of our original party remained. How those of us who survived managed to do so is a mystery. But at last four shattered ghosts of human beings, two Indian porters, the Englishman

and myself, returned to the civilization of Venezuela.

"But I was not through. A month's rest, and I was trying to organize another party to start back toward our abandoned goal. Not in the same way we had gone before. I had worked out a plan. By approaching that unseen field of orchids from the opposite side, the wind blowing the other way, a chance might hold good that the flowers could be reached by circumventing the full effect of the poisoned perfume.

"No one would attempt the journey with me. The Englishman was finished—forever, he said, with all orchid-hunting. His motive was now not so strong as mine, I thought with a smile. Money could not tempt him to keep up the search for the *Cattleyea Trixemptia*. My revenge, though, kept me in full enthusiasm for the hunt; it was all I thought of, waking or sleeping.

"When I was satisfied that nobody would accompany me, I set back toward the head of the Orinoco myself alone. This time, traveling swiftly because lightly burdened and unaccompanied by any laggards, I made the edge of the jungle in a little over two weeks. The plunge through the forest, however, took longer alone than when I had expert choppers to clear a trail before me. But I made progress somehow.

"Often as I fought my way through the tangle of rank underbrush, waist-high and almost inextricable, I muttered aloud: 'So they picked you for a strong man, eh? A strong, robust man? A good one to send on a difficult mission, yes. Well, I'll show them yet—I'll bring back that flower!'

"And—how I do not know—I reached the orchid field at last! For two days previously the same old noxious odor had been in the air, but not nearly so perceptibly as before, because I had figured well in keeping the wind in my back. Inside an hour all the gathering force of the perfume which had turned our party back on the first attempt was compressed; dizzy, almost stupefied, drugged into partially insensibility, I parted the leaves in the foliage before me—and gazed upon the end of my journey!

"There were the flowers—blue, blue orchids! The only ones ever looked upon by white man's eyes. A thrill ran through me; almost I had the feeling then of the collector, the scientist in untrod fields, the primal discoverer of the miraculous.

"And then—drowsiness, languid heaviness, an overwhelming desire to cast myself down to sleep then and there, came to replace the momentary feeling of elation. I must pick my blossom, and be quick. The fumes of those waving, ultramarine flowers before my eyes were stealing over me more powerfully than ever before. Quick! I must be quick!

"I advanced. Step by step I drew near the largest cluster of the nodding, swaying poisoned cups of light, dark, dappled blue. Another dozen paces forward. My sensations were those of the opium smoker yielding himself gradually to the influence of the drug, yet withholding full surrender to prolong the delicious agony of complete capitulation. Could I reach an orchid, pluck it, get away, before—before it was—too—late—

"Heavens, I must fly! I could not hold out against that overpowering odor. I wheeled drunkenly. Blindly I lurched forward. Something swept my face. My eyes flew open—it was a cluster of orchids behind me which had been drawn across my cheek. With a scream of fright, I bounded sidewise, tripped over a vine, fell—

"And for that interval I knew no more.

"When I awoke it was to find that the breeze which blew over the tiny clearing where the poison plants were had shifted. Their perfume was no longer in the air. I staggered up. My head ached, and my eyeballs burned. What had I been doing, lying there on the ground?

"It came back to me. I had been overcome by the odor of the flowers. Only for the changing of the wind, preventing more of the fumes entering my lungs as I slept that drugged sleep—I shook myself together. Now was my chance to get away.

"Not for any price on earth would I have sought once again to pluck one of those blossoms so near to me. My plan of revenge against the woman who had sent me into this Gehenna was completely driven from my head. Now—while I yet could—was my chance to get away. Facing about, I started running.

"On and on I sped. Gradually, though, my speed was diminishing. Not from weariness, not from fatigue. Something else. I slackened to a walk. I stopped short in my tracks. Turning about, I sniffed the air. No trace of that odor—no trace—

"Wildly I dashed back toward the clearing and its orchids. *I must have that scent in my nostrils again!* I must go to sleep under its spell once more. I could no more

resist the impulse that brought me back toward the poisonous blossoms than I could voluntarily stop breathing. I burst into the clearing. On tiptoe, I reached up to the nearest cluster of the blue buds, drank deep of the awful, sickish odor—once—twice—

"In my tracks I fell, overcome, a smile on my lips.

"I ought never to have walked again, I know. Yet I did. How long after it was, I have no means of telling. It was still daylight—or was it another day? I was heavy, sluggish, deeply depressed. I felt suddenly so frightened there alone in that clearing with those hideous, mocking plants swaying around me, that I hurled myself upon the ground, screaming, beating the moss with my hands and feet, frantic with fear of my loneliness, my dreadful plight.

"Then that feeling passed. I would get out of here. I would break and run now, and never stop running till I had put the length and breadth of the jungle between me and those ghastly plants. I sprang up. With a wild yell—a sort of farewell to the fearful spot—I leaped away into the neighboring forest.

"This time I did run until I was physically exhausted. I dropped down on a fallen moss-hung log to gather breath. An hour or more I sat there. And when I rose—it was to hobble off in the direction of the *Cattleyea Trixsemptia* again, the lustful light in my eyes of the opium fiend returning to his den, the drunkard to his dive!

"I was caught. Useless to try to break away from the spell now. That poisonous perfume of the blue orchids had enchained me to the spot forever. I spent the next interval of time—three days, as near as I could judge—in the heart of the clearing, drugging myself with the scent of the flowers, waking, drugging myself again.

"Why didn't I die? I prayed for death, a release from my agonizing dilemma. Weak, now, to the point of prostration, yet I continued to live. I knew that I had wasted away to a mere skeleton of skin and bones—by no effort could I make my lips meet over my teeth—that I was emaciated by lack of food as well as the injurious effects of the poison I was inhaling, to the point almost of bloodlessness in all my veins—and yet I lived on.

"What was to be the end? I felt only a mild curiosity as to this, so it be soon. Another day went by. I was weaker now. Sixteen hours of the twenty-four, at a guess, had been spent in drugged sleep on my back in the middle of the clearing.

"With glazed eyes I looked around me. And looked again.

"Was I mad at last?

"There before my eyes stood my Goddess of the Orchids—she who had brought me to this plight!

"Slowly she approached across the noiseless moss. She stretched out her hand. I tottered to my feet. The claw at the end of my broomstick arm went out, encountered her fingers—*real flesh and blood!*

"'Drink this,' she whispered in my ear.

"A flask was held to my chattering teeth. Something scalding hot ran down my parched throat.

"'Now, lean on me'—again her voice, wondrous soft.

"And slowly, carefully she began to lead me out of the clearing, through the jungle. A little way and we met her train of porters and guides. While a rough litter was being made for me I sat upon the ground, leaning against her knees as she stood. Strangely, now that I was with this party I felt no craving for the drugged breath of the blue orchid to which I had been the slave.

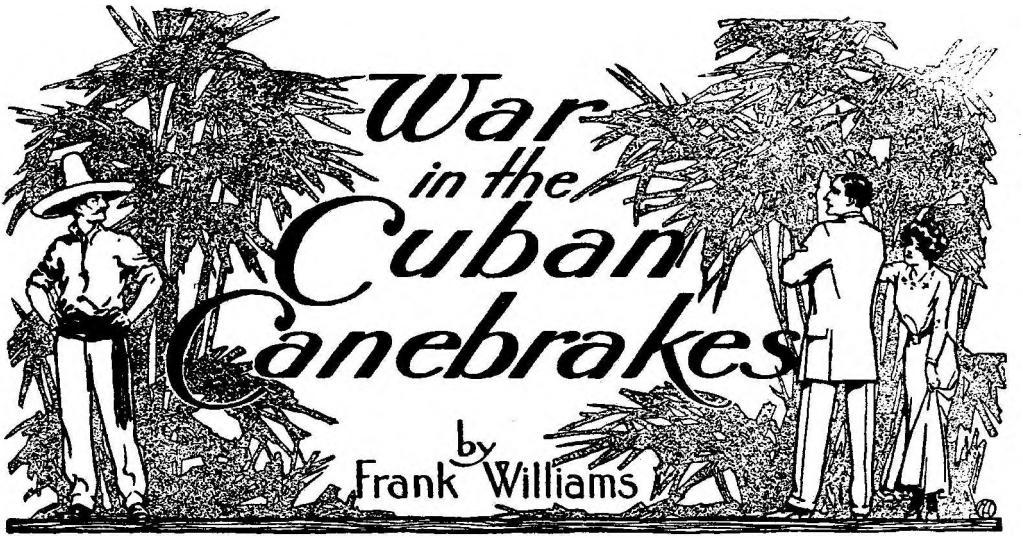
"The journey back to the coast I do not remember. Something of my days of convalescence in Venezuela, though, I can recall. There it was that I heard the story of her search for me from the woman who had saved my life.

"Her passion for orchids was really so powerful that she had served men very much as the Englishmen had told me for years. I was to have been treated no better nor worse than the rest. Only—me of all the others she really loved. After she had sent me forth on her mission, she recalled the fate of so many of her suitors who had gone into the wildernesses before; she realized then that she could not let me die or suffer as she knew I would.

"That was the strange point. You see, she knew the dangers that would beset any one upon that trail into the jungle. And, knowing the perils of such a journey, she took it upon herself to save me if she could. Much as she had always loved orchids never once had she sought a rare plant herself. With me, though — she thought me worth seeking after, it seems."

"So, I suppose," I remarked, "you married her and lived happily ever after?"

He looked at me, wild-eyed. "*Married* her?" And he shuddered.



SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

NED CUMMINGS and his wife have eloped from New York and gone to Havana, where Cummings lands with very little cash and no prospects, as both his family and Nathalie's (the Northrups) are sore, and Mr. Northrup has started annulment proceedings. Ned has been brought up in idleness and has no knowledge of Spanish, so the prospects of his obtaining a job in Cuba are slim. However, he lands one as English-speaking manager for the Santa Maria sugar plantation at Tunucu, and proceeds thither with his wife to find that Driscoll, the former manager, is leaving because of the dissatisfied condition of the tenants. Ramon Spinoza, a handsome fellow, is at their head, and almost turns that of Nathalie, while Ned, on his part, cannot but be sensible of the charm in Dolores Perez, daughter of Luiz, the keeper at the plantation, who is one of the family. Spinoza is mysteriously shot and wounded on the night of their arrival, and it is intimated that Cummings fired the bullet. Four fires are set in the cane, and only back-firing prevents the conflagration from spreading. Some of the natives are caught and perish between the two sets of flame, and this only incites the Cubans the more against the new manager, who holds out little hope of acceding to their demands. The second night Ned finds a note on the floor signed by Spinoza as representing the tenants and calling on him to get out or die. "Let one warning be sufficient" is the final sentence.

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISE IN THE CANE FIELD.

HAD any of Ned Cummings's friends been able to watch him during the half a week he had been in Cuba, they would have been amazed at the change both in his appearance and his manner. From a light, indifferent, pleasure-loving young man, he had changed to one of considerable gravity, deliberation, and executive ability. With an innate unwillingness to be beaten at the game he had undertaken, he accepted the tremendous problems that came to him and rendered a decision, one way or the other.

He spent his odd hours poking about the plantation, the mill, and the workmen's houses in company with Perez. And where at one time he did not know the difference between a defecator and a vacuum-pan, he very shortly became expert in the manufacture of sugar as far as the technical knowledge went. He found that by nature he was a mechanical engineer, and as he became more familiar with the work, thought he detected points in the machinery where improvements might be made.

It was under the stimulus of those newfound characteristics that Ned received the letter from Spinoza announcing the ultimatum. His forehead corrugated as he read the insulting note, and he brought to bear on his decision all the experiences of the past few days.

Nathalie and he were reading by the lamp in the cool sitting-room when he found the letter, and after scowling at it for a few moments he tossed it over to her.

"Shall we go home?" he asked bluntly.

His tone was that of a confident, self-sufficient man, deferring, out of courtesy, to the woman he loved.

Nathalie read the scrawl twice, and when she looked at Ned there was a flickering of fear in her eyes.

"I don't want to stay there and be killed," she said plaintively.

"You won't be."

"How do you know?"

"I won't let you, you can rest assured of that. I hope you are not going to insist on going away from Tunucu, Nathalie. We have vowed not to return to New York, and I mean to stick to the vow. If we leave here, where *would* we go?"

Nathalie pleaded to go anywhere out of this wilderness of cane and jungle in which mysterious death lurked.

But Ned stood firm in his determination not to leave, and presented his side of the case so masterfully and yet gently withal, that Nathalie looked with wonder on this changed man, and felt her arguments die in her throat in a kind of awe of him. But she was still a good deal of a spoiled child, and grew petulant and fretful, whereupon she witnessed an illuminating display of her husband's iron firmness, coupled with a restrained temper.

It was at this juncture that the servant brought in the evening mail, which included a letter from Ned's brother, which he read aloud:

DEAR NED:

Why haven't you written, you dunderhead? Nobody knows where you are, what you are doing, or what you are going to do, and I might state that I, for one, would like to be kept posted. I gather from your silence that you have either cut loose from the governor and Mr. Northrup, or have decided to ignore the whole collection of us. That's not my idea of the way to be grateful to a brother who has been saddled with all your misdeeds and been your buffer to the world. But that's neither here nor there.

What I started to write was, that the annulment proceedings started by old Northrup are proceeding altogether too nicely. By circumstantial evidence and local witnesses it has been adduced that you misled, deceived, and wilfully did pervert the truth in your actions and conversation with said party of the second part, and if things keep up this way you will soon be at liberty to hock your wedding-ring. The only thing that the prosecution needs is a written or verbal statement from Nathalie that certain things alleged in the complaint are so, and the judge will put his name to the decree. So far it has been kept out of the papers.

Judging that you may be hard up, here's a hundred you can pay back some time. Use it in keeping happy, for Heaven knows that if we aren't happy nothing else in the whole world counts. If you wish, let me know where you are. Anyway I will write once a week and keep you posted. Regards to Nathalie.

Your brother,

BILL.

P. S.—I can send you a list of the items Nathalie must swear to if she wants the annulment; it might amuse you to see what strange things you did before your exile.

"Confound him," explained Ned, half-angered, "he always has a sting in the tail of his letters somewhere, even if he is a bully brother! I was wondering how we'd get along to the end of the month without drawing on my salary in advance. Come over, Nathalie, dear, and sit on the arm of my chair. I would speech with thee.

"Look here, honey," he went on, tenderly slipping his arm around her, "are you unsatisfied with the way I am doing in this place?"

"Well," she admitted grudgingly, "I am not entirely satisfied."

"In what way?"

"You are too friendly with that Spanish girl. It's nothing except you seem to be under the influence of her looks. I think she's a pug-nosed, greasy, fat busybody, and I should think you would, too. I don't know why she is here anyway."

"I don't either, for that matter," he replied thoughtfully, "and no more does any one else that I can find out. At any rate, I shall try to please you in regard to her, but there's this about it—she always bobs up at the psychological moment. In return for this I want you to be very sparing of your graces in the direction of Spinoza. It is only fair and—"

So they apparently settled the matter that had been in the air ever since their first arrival. And even though they waxed tender in the extreme, Ned Cummings when he had gone out to smoke under the stars, finally had to admit to himself a certain incompleteness in his wife's and his own feeling for each other, a lack of a rich and enduring stimulus. He admired Dolores, and he saw no harm in admiring her. Had he been in love with Nathalie in the way he should have been, he would not have really admired the Spanish girl as he did. And he knew it.

Chills romped along his vertebræ. Had he after all made a mistake? Was Nathalie only in the end the most intense whim he had known? Did she feel the same way he did? If so, under impulse, she might write for that bill of complaint and sign it, for she was a spoiled child still in many things.

The thought gave him a thrust of pain. Again Ned wondered if these ideas had come to Nathalie, and had clairvoyance been numbered among his powers, he would soon have discovered that they had.

Despite the declarations of war that Ramon Spinoza and his cohorts had been so free in hurling, they were rather tardy in taking them up. This was due, no doubt, to the desire of the leader to recover from his wounds. As day after day passed and nothing materialized, Ned began to fall into a false security.

With old Perez he rode miles upon miles around the fields, watching the men at work, laying away in his keen mind plans of the country and its resources that he might have to draw upon later. He tried also to mix with the men, but they would have none of it. There had been a break between them, and that ended it as far as Spanish natures went.

Later on Ned was asked why he did not during this period make arrangements for military protection, and the effectual crushing out of any incipient rebellion. To this he replied that the matter was not a political one, or between anybody excepting his men and himself, and that he from the first had decided to settle it on that basis. There was no attempt on the part of the men to intimidate the province with the idea of later turning all of Cuba upside-down; it was a dispute between Cuban labor and American capital.

The days passed until a week had gone by from the time of the ultimatum. Ned was now deeply engrossed in the study of sugar, chemically, commercially, and agriculturally. There was a fairly complete library on the subject in the house, and this he devoured, soon astonishing the heads of departments under him with his knowledge. At the mill he became so versed in the wonder of its machinery that he could detect by the slightest sound if something was wrong. Some of his evenings he spent making rough sketches of an improved centrifugal strainer that had come into his mind.

Then occurred an incident unfortunate in its beginning, and serious in its outcome.

Ned, in the course of his investigations concerning sugar, made it a habit to go directly into the fields with his book, and study the plant and its growth at first hand. Nathalie had objected to this because of its danger, but Ned, armed with a revolver, had laughed her fears aside, and continued his pursuit. And this time it was not danger that he encountered.

One afternoon about half-past four, when the lowness of the sun permitted his entrance to the fields, he put on his hat and plunged into the heart of the great expanse of cane west of the house. Walking was easy, as the rows were fully six feet apart, and he proceeded a half mile before he found a plant exhibiting the phenomenon he desired to study. Then he lost himself in his subject.

Turning back at half-past five he had gone perhaps two-thirds of the distance when he heard a noise. Instantly he stopped and drew his revolver, advanced cautiously — and stood face to face with Dolores.

The girl's eyes were bright, her cheeks red, and she seemed to be laboring under a great agitation. Her white dress and blue silk scarf threw her luxuriant beauty into bold relief by their very simplicity. Ned Cummings stood aghast at a vision of such loveliness as he had never seen.

"What is it?" he exclaimed curiously. "Why are you so excited?"

"I came to see you," replied the girl, flashing her great eyes upon him with their promise of hidden fire.

Ned laughed uncertainly.

"Well, now you have me, tell me what you want."

"I don't *want anything*, now that I have *you*." Ned stared and tried to believe this was the same girl who before had shown only her maidenly demureness.

"Well, really, you know," he demurred, "you can't go on talking to me like this. It isn't proper. Let's get out of the cane where it's good walking."

"Proper?" the girl burst out. "What do I care about its being proper? I love you, that is enough. Every inch of me cries out for you, and I must have you!"

She seized his hand in both her hot little ones, and again Ned felt that exquisite thrill that had assailed him the first

time he had ever laid eyes on the girl. But he pulled himself together, and forced her to walk along beside him. Thus gradually they neared the road that ran along the cane field. She was silent for a few moments.

"I love you, *señor,*" she said then softly and tenderly.

Ned had been forcing himself to think about sugar violently, and had really interested himself again in the subject, to the neglect of his companion, when he felt cool arms about his neck and she had kissed him. Sugar, self-control, and books went to the winds of heaven.

Few men there are who will not pluck ripe glowing beauty's honeyed lips when they are lifted in all their delicious witchery and lure. And Ned Cummings, at this stage, was quite an ordinary mortal. He had done his little best, but the person who stood, icy and terrible in disgrace and anger looking at him, did not know that. In the midst of his intoxication there was a sigh, and then a fall among the cane.

It was Nathalie, and she had fainted.

CHAPTER VIII.

FACING FAILURE.

WHEN Ned Cummings saw Nathalie lying white and still in the cane at the edge of the field, and realized into what a situation his folly had brought him, he turned fiercely upon Dolores, words of terrible anger upon his lips. But the girl had disappeared amid the cane.

With quick hands he loosened Nathalie's dress at neck and waist, and fanning her desperately with his hat, soon noticed with joy the first flutter of returning consciousness. Suddenly she looked up into his eyes with an expression of such disgust that he turned away his own.

"Let me explain," he began vehemently, but his wife cut him short.

"That needs no explanation," she said, struggling to her feet without his aid. "All I needed to know was what I saw. Now I am convinced. Let that be the end of the matter."

In vain Ned pleaded the extenuating circumstances. She would not listen, or, if forced to listen, would not heed. Together they walked miserably homeward, and to both recurred the thought of how foolishly happy they had been on the first day of their arrival. Thus, often, do a few weeks change the course of our lives.

From that time there was a constraint between them. No longer was Ned admitted to the intimacy that had unconsciously been so dear to him. A seemingly impassable barrier had been erected that, try as he could, he was unable to overleap.

One day, cool and white and sweet, Nathalie came to him.

"Where is that letter from your brother William?" she asked.

"In my chiffonier drawer," he answered innocently. "Why do you wish to see it?"

"I think I shall write him to send me that list of items I must swear to in order that the annulment decree may be granted. I have been thinking of this very much of late, and I see no other course open to me. Will you let me get the letter, please?"

Ned's face went suddenly white under his tan. So this was going to be the end, after all? He had not thought matters were at quite that stage. To his sense of failure so far he was, then, to have added the malodor of public scandal and sure disgrace!

"Well," he thought, "I can say nothing. She is the injured one, and hers is the right to do as she pleases." Turning to Nathalie he said:

"Certainly, dear, since you think it is best I shall not oppose you."

She left the room, and Ned knew later she had written the letter to his brother, for he saw her post it in the office.

During these days Dolores was angry and sullen. The Spanish nature, fiery in the accomplishment of love, is, if anything more terrible in its denial. The girl made no attempts to see him alone, and rarely came to meals, but the young American knew the consuming flame of her passion was raging inwardly since its object had been sought in vain.

But he paid her very little attention and attempted to forget that she had ever existed. Certainly there was enough happening every day on the Santa Maria plantation to keep him occupied.

In the first place Driscoll had not been found. Reports by telegraph indicated that he had not boarded any trains on the night or the day following the shooting of Spinoza. Equally ineffectual was the hunt of the *rurales* in the dense woods surrounding the plantation. The Alonzo Sanchez hills paralleling the Rio Zaza, a small

stream, had been searched without effect, and at the command of the leader, the soldiers had penetrated the higher Banao Hills, some twenty-five miles away, with equally unsatisfactory results.

Moreover, none of the tenants or workmen had seen him, though their eyes had been sharpened by the offer of a liberal reward. In short, the former manager seemed to have disappeared altogether, a fact more than disquieting to the present incumbent of his job. Ned, as the leader of the *rurales* promised, had been subjected to constant attendance by two members of this body, who in full accouterment, accompanied him every time he went any distance, on horseback or afoot. But as his conduct was, in all cases, above suspicion, nothing more had been said concerning prosecution.

Things were brought to a head one day by a note from Spinoza himself.

"For the last time," it said, "are you going to comply with our demands? The men are starving in the fields. In case you do not come to our terms, we will dicker with you no longer."

And in reply Ned wrote:

"I will not accede to your insolence on a single point. If the men are starving it is their own fault. As for dickering, I have had enough of it myself. Either do something or go back to work."

The morning after despatching this defiance, Ned did some close figuring. Counting himself, his chiefs of departments, chemists and all other intelligent men who had the keeping of law and order, he found he could depend on an even dozen quick-shooting, straight-thinking and very brave white persons, most of whom were Americans.

These he called over to luncheon one day, and during the meal put the situation before them without exaggeration, one way or the other. He wound up with a statement as to the probable and immediate show of hostility on the part of the tenants, and suggested that those with families in the States go home with two months' pay in their pockets and wait for things to blow over. Two accepted the offer.

The others, mostly soldiers of fortune, unmarried, and without dependents, greeted the war cloud with unfeigned delight.

Delicately Ned sounded old Luiz Perez when the others had gone. The caretaker, much to the American's surprise, sided with the plantation owners and manager. His wise head taught him that nothing was gained by violence or inflammatory methods. Moreover, his whole life had been spent in the old stone house, and being near the management of things, had inculcated in him a certain autocracy.

Dolores, Ned did not ask. She evidently was a fixture and had to stay; she certainly could not be thrown out on the world regardless. It was Nathalie who gave him the most concern. Three separate times he went to her and almost begged her to pack her things and leave for New York. But with a fine scorn which was part obstinacy the girl refused, saying she would eat her dinner now she had ordered it, and that a woman's place was by her husband, however he chose to treat her.

No sooner had Ned received Spinoza's last message and despatched his answer, than events began to happen, and the manager was kept on the jump anticipating and defeating them.

First a series of fires started in the cane, but these were not serious, since the company of *rurales*, now restored to its complete strength of one hundred by the arrival of a detachment, were able to cope with them before they had made much headway. That there were no more serious conflagrations was due to the fact that, though the tenants were hostile, they all objected to seeing their only chance of a livelihood go up in smoke. Thus it soon became difficult to find cane that could be burned without starting an internal riot in their own rebel ranks.

The next thing Ned faced was a walk-out at the mill. When it became known that war was irrevocably declared, the hands there, fearful for their own safety, or in sympathy with the strikers, stayed away from work and left things in serious shape.

Piled up outside the elevator were great heaps of six-foot stalks, fragrant, but souring. Railroad cars, run down from Zaza del Medio, piled up on the small siding with their loads of cane, and down the road occasionally would crawl a great groaning cart pulled by six oxen with the last *arrobas* from some outlying point.

Ned Cummings worked desperately to relieve this congestion at the mill, for this must be kept running at all hazards. Like the heart in the body, if the mill stopped the whole plantation was dead. More than

this, all cane must be ground within thirty-six hours after cutting. To prevent the loss of money and cane caused by a stoppage of the vast machinery, Ned picked the best of his men and offered them enormous wages to stand by him in this crisis. Some of them accepted, and he was in this way enabled to keep the wheels turning, though not much more.

His troubles did not end here. It was now almost the first of February, and the cutting and grinding season should have been at its height. Acres upon acres of cane stood in the fields ripe and ready for the knife or *machete*, but there was none to catch the yield at its crucial point. In this extremity, also, Ned turned to the coffers of the plantation. He paid double and triple wages to the few daring men who risked their lives in the deeps of the cane.

When the fires ceased to be a menace, he sent the *rurales* out with the workmen, and after that there was scarcely a day that did not have its tale of wounds or death.

And the rebels, noting his success, started a guerrilla warfare of brutality and treachery. Riding their mangy little horses, they would sweep down upon the cane, destroying what they could and stealing pigs and cattle which sometimes wandered into it or along the borders.

Ned, at his wits' end, debated very seriously the calling in of help from outside. But his new-found tenacity of purpose and bulldog refusal to be beaten by circumstances, decided him against this.

It was in the midst of the situation just described that he found a letter one morning beside his plate at breakfast, bearing the postmark Havana, and addressed to him in cramped Spanish handwriting. He opened it wonderingly, and saw a communication from Señor Alvarez, the Havana representative. It ran in part as follows:

> Reports have come to me of great discontent among the tenants and laborers on the Santa Maria. In fact, I have but lately forwarded to the owners in Philadelphia a petition headed by one Ramon Spinoza, complaining of the conditions existing under you. I am sorry to learn of this, for I had imagined you were the sort of man who would restore what order had been lost under Driscoll.
>
> So serious were the complaints, evidently, that to-day I have received a cable from the owners in Philadelphia that they have started for Tunucu by way of Antilla, and may be expected early next week.
>
> I write you this that you may take what steps are necessary to restore affairs to their best condition, bearing in mind, however, that expenses must be kept down. A low expense will be your best credential with the directors.

Ned laughed bitterly and threw the letter across the table to Nathalie.

"It looks as though I had about come to the end of my rope," he said, when she had read to the close. "I suppose I will hang myself with it next. I guess I have failed, with all my trying, but I have done the best I could. If I can hold out here till those fat and foolish directors arrive, I will turn things over to them with thanks, and get out like Driscoll."

"I think you have failed with me, Ned," replied his wife gently, "but you have done wonders here to keep things going at all. Don't give up now, when you seem to be at the bottom of the well. I want to see you win, and I want to help you win in my own way; but that isn't the old way."

"You want to see me win?" he cried, amazed at this sudden grave maturity in Nathalie that he had never noticed before.

"Yes, if you should ever care to win back the old conditions between us, you must win the new ones that face you here."

Hope again surged up in him.

"I'll do it!" he cried.

CHAPTER IX.

DOLORES'S REVENGE.

THE first important thing that occurred to Ned to do on the following day was the construction of some adequate defense, should the plantation structures be attacked. A careful survey of the house itself told him that it would not be worth while to attempt holding, since the upper part was of wood and susceptible to fire. Besides, its foliaged grounds gave great opportunity for stealthy marauders.

Standing on the porch of the *hacienda*, which faced south, Ned scrutinized the surrounding structures. To the west was the great mill, and behind it rows of tumbledown workmen's huts, useless for hiding or defense. South, before him, stretched the great rectangle of cleared ground, made flat and unprotected for the very purpose of exposing those approaching. On the far side of this were some of the "chiefs'" houses—neat frame and plaster structures,

and the line of these continued unbrokenly up the east side of the quadrangle. Behind them, still farther eastward, were more homes for workingmen.

Cummings shook his head, and walking down the steps, looked to the north of the *hacienda.* His eye lighted on the barracks of the *rurales* who were detailed to guard the plantation. This was an oblong building, of great age, constructed of hard clay bricks, overlaid with pink plaster. There were loopholes in its walls, and inside was a beautifully carven green bronze cannon, which rang like a cathedral bell when struck. This relic, although brought from the worthless Cabaña fortress in Havana, could still be fired with safety, and often had been on days of great festivity.

The building easily held its allotment of one hundred *rurales,* with one large and two small gun-rooms besides; there was a well in the *patio,* storerooms, arms, ammunition, and all the rude conveniences for military existence.

"We will begin on that," said Ned to himself, and he called the heads of departments into consultation that very morning.

At first the problem of defense seemed difficult, as there was no rock to be had, and trees were so far away as to be impracticable. Then Ned had an inspiration.

The mill was running at less than half capacity. He remembered the little steel molasses cars used in conveying sugar from the vacuum pans to the crystallizers. These would be just the thing. He went to the mill and measured one. It was three by two by one foot in dimensions, just the size for his scheme, and he became elated as he talked to Wilson, the fire-chief about the scheme.

With what men they had they went to work, carting all the unused molasses cars to the barracks, and when the *rurales* came in at noon, a detachment of them was added to the number on the job. At lunch Ned explained his idea.

"It came to me first when I remembered concrete blocks," he said.

"I was very much in need of something that could be piled up and still be bullet-proof. As it is now, the walls of that fort are so old and dry they could be chipped away easily. Besides, I understand the progressives have secured a field-piece of some description, and if they have, plaster and bricks aren't much in the way of resistance.

"Now we will take these little cars, turn them on their sides, and fill them with sand or clay, afterward building them up two deep around the barracks. There is an unused railroad-switch by the site of the old mill, and we can rip that up and use the rails for roofing. That ought to make the place practically impregnable. At any rate it will be a safe residence."

"A safe residence? What do you mean, Ned?" asked Nathalie.

"We move into the barracks to-morrow, without fail," he replied quietly and authoritatively. "If you and the servants can attend to the packing up in the house here, I will look after the construction of the fort. But we have no time to lose."

Nathalie did not argue or reply. She was beginning to respect these calm but indisputable orders of her husband, and she bent all her energies to seeing that the present one was executed.

Those were two days of prodigious effort. The ten chiefs fell to with the *rurales* and worked shoulder to shoulder with them, heaving the steel cars, wheeling barrows of earth, and fastening the defenses together with plaster made on the spot. When evening of the second day arrived the barracks presented an entirely different appearance, and a fairly impregnable exterior. Even the roof had been crossed by the rails from the old switch, the ends of these resting in niches in the masonry.

Meanwhile the servants had collected anything of value in the house, packed it, and carried it over to the fort. Next the general store was rifled of all its provisions, consisting in large part of smoked meat, canned goods, and all sorts of odds and ends. These were stored in one of the smaller gun-rooms, just back of the kitchen.

The night of the first of February brought trouble. After accustoming themselves to redstone floors, bare walls, and no verandas, every one had agreed that the barracks was not such a bad place after all. Ned Cummings had voiced this sentiment as the select company, consisting of the chiefs, Nathalie, Luiz Perez, and Dolores sat outside in the *patio* after dinner.

He had scarcely spoken when on the still night air there came a long, low murmur, like the buzzing of a distant insect. He stopped suddenly, feeling an uncanny crawling up his back. The others, too, had fallen silent, holding their cigars suspended in their fingers.

"They're coming," said Dolores suddenly, and all looked at the girl. How should she know? Of late she had been sullen and silent; her beauty had lost its glow, she was burning herself out with her own fierce longings. Only her eyes remained bright, and in them was a flickering flame.

"I have heard them come through the cane before," she added, divining their suspicions.

"When?" asked Ned.

"When my sister lived," said the girl simply. "Two years ago."

Soon in the distance a song began to be heard; then other sounds, and soon a medley of weird music, such as is found nowhere but in Cuba.

"I should figure there were fifteen hundred of them," said Wilson. "Wonder where they're headed?"

The barracks stood at about an equal distance from both the east and west cane fields, and, as has been said, northeast of the main house. The singers, careless of consequences, came bellowing through the east cane field until they approached its very edge. There they stopped, and those in the fort heard mutterings, and mumblings of low discussion run up and down the line.

Finally, seen by the light of the lopsided moon, which was just beginning to make its appearance, three men stepped forward. One limped slightly and carried his arm in a sling.

It was Spinoza.

The young Cuban and his followers advanced toward the fort under a white flag, and stood perhaps a hundred feet from the entrance, a heavily barred gate. For ten minutes they stood there motionless and waiting.

"Well, what is it?" asked Ned finally from the ramparts of the fort above.

"Ah, Señor Cummings," cried Spinoza, apparently delighted. "*Buenos tardes. Como esta V.?*"

"Cut the flowery language and let's get to business," said Ned bruskly. "What do you want?"

"Several things," retorted Spinoza, just as bruskly, "and the first is you. You shot me that night, and since there seems to be no justice in this land, we have decided to get a little for ourselves. Therefore we want you to give yourself up, with your wife. When you have done that we will go away gladly and do no damage. Afterward we will no doubt come to satisfactory terms."

"No doubt," said Ned, sarcastically. "If that is all you have to offer in the way of terms, you are wasting a lot of valuable time standing in the moonlight. Don't come here with a show of force and expect to intimidate us. All we have to do is connect ourselves with the outside world and call for help and you will be wiped off the face of the earth."

Spinoza laughed sneeringly.

"All the wires are down," he said, "I superintended the cutting personally. Give yourself up, or we will come and take you. We're tired of waiting. Come, now, your answer!"

"My answer is this," cried Ned furiously: "Leave these premises by dawn, or I shall not be responsible for what happens. You are warned. Now, go immediately."

He had scarcely spoken the words when there came from within the barracks a series of piercing screams. In the excitement of the approach none of those clustered at loopholes or on the ramparts had noticed Nathalie disappear temporarily. Now they looked about wildly from one to the other, and there was a concerted rush in the direction of the furious commotion.

Ned, with the fear of the unknown gripping at his heart, had turned his head at the first sound.

It was five seconds later when, with a sudden regaining of his mental equilibrium, he whipped out his revolver and faced Spinoza.

The crafty young Cuban and his comrades were already in the shadow at the edge of the cane fields.

Ned had been tricked.

With a cry of futile anger he ran around the platform behind the ramparts to the rear of the fort, whence the shrieks were now coming, weaker and evidently muffled. In the moonlight he saw a sight that stopped his heart for the moment. He raised his revolver, but dropped it helplessly.

At a little distance, her face bound tightly in a towel, Nathalie struggled desperately with two men who were dragging her across the short distance to the edge of the cane.

With the cry of a wild man, Ned leaped

down the stone steps to the floor below and plunged toward the entrance.

But wiser heads prevailed, stronger hands held him from this reckless dash, and only when he had exhausted himself with frantic efforts did he come to reason again.

"While we were all in front," some one was saying to him, "these men came to the postern gate, which is near Mrs. Cummings's quarters. Somebody let them in while she was there—"

"Who—who let them in?" demanded Ned, frantically.

"I did," said a calm voice, and the crowd turned in amazement upon Dolores.

But the girl did not see nor heed them. She went directly over to where Ned stood erect for the first time after his mad attempt at rescue.

"Take her away," he cried, trembling from head to foot, "or I'll kill her."

Eager hands seized the girl.

"No, wait," he cried after a moment.

"Why did you do this thing?" he demanded, terribly.

"I wanted you, I loved you, I must have you," flashed back the girl in magnificent defiance, her breast heaving. "*She* stood in my way, in our way, and there was nothing else to do. She must go, I decided, and now she is gone and we are free to have each other. Those two out there will be happy now?"

"What two?"

"Señor Spinoza and Señora Cummings," said the girl, and Ned choked.

"Oh, Señor Ned," cried the girl despairingly, "come, let us be happy together now. Let us go away to some far place and love forever."

She reached out her hands to the young American.

A crafty light supplanted the fury in his eyes.

"I will do it, Dolores," he cried, "I will do it. We will go to some far place to-night. Hurry and make ready, we have not a minute to lose."

The Spanish girl uttered a great cry of joy and ran from the room.

"Now," said Ned briskly to the others, "I want forty volunteers." He got several times that number, including the *rurales*, and he picked carefully among them, meanwhile having sent the women and servants to fill knapsacks with provisions and supplies.

"What is your plan, Mr. Cummings?" asked Wilson, but in reply he only received a stony stare.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE EVE OF BATTLE.

THE moon had sunk behind the trees when Ned gave the word that all was ready. Under a pretext he had kept Dolores in her room until the last moment, and she, trembling with anticipatory raptures, only awaited the word to start forth on this journey with the man she loved. At last he approached and led her to the rear gateway.

Not fifty yards off was the edge of the great northern cane field where the capturers of Nathalie had disappeared, but in which there were only scattered and occasional groups of the rebel tenants.

"For fear we may not be happy," said Ned, bitterly, "I have ordered an escort to accompany us," and he turned Dolores so she could see the twoscore men, armed to the teeth and apparently provisioned for a long campaign.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, recoiling.

"Come with me and you will find out."

"I refuse to go." Her head lifted and her eyes flashed with imperious fire.

"March out of that door with me," commanded Ned in a fearful voice. "And if you make a sound you die where you stand." He glared at her out of eyes so wild that they subdued her. "Perez will be your guardian; you need have no fear. He will guide us."

They started forthwith. Others were left behind for the remaining and larger portion of the garrison to keep up the appearance of busy hostility and determination, even to the extent of impersonating Ned in looks and speech, that the enemy might not know of the party that had sallied forth.

Quietly, with no sound but the faint swish of the guinea-grass underfoot, the party stole on single file to the edge of the cane. To the east there was a rosy tinge in the air where hundreds of the enemy had built camp-fires in the cane whereby to sleep. There was no sound in the north field; there was no sound anywhere but the cries of night insects and an occasional drunken yell, denoting the completion of a night of festivity. Down the long rows

of cane there was a whisper of leaves, and above all the diamond dust of the stars. A faint fragrance floated upward and made the air sweet.

With Luiz Perez in the lead, the file proceeded. Ned had taken Dolores by the arm to make her keep pace with him. The girl was weeping silently, and from time to time trembled. But Ned was oblivious to all this. In his mind was a dull and slowly growing fear for Nathalie.

Where could she be? Why should they want her? What would they do with her? Was Spinoza to renew his deferred courtship. He turned sick with a kind of agonizing nausea at the thought.

There was Nathalie, unused to thinking or doing for herself, accustomed to the comforts of life, forced into the lair of this creature. How would she, helpless, feminine, dainty, contend against his wooings? And with the thrust of a spear dug into his vitals, the remembrance came to Ned that at one time Nathalie had not been averse to these attentions.

When the edge of the great field had been reached at last Perez paused. Before them rose huge black masses of forest and into these, after a few words with Ned, the party plunged. Here it was heavy going comparatively, for the roots of the great lianas clinging to the trees formed a dangerous network. There was, too, a kind of penetrating, damp air that one felt in the lungs.

Presently they turned to the right, splashed through a brooklet, and continued on. Perez led with the sureness of a bloodhound, for he knew every foot of ground within twenty miles of Santa Maria.

They had not started until almost three o'clock in the morning, so that there was no time to waste if they were to reach their destination before dawn. The men under the heavy packs groaned with weariness, and Dolores cried out with the pain of her feet, unused to such traveling. Their direction was northeast and then east until they were several miles directly behind the enemy.

Dawn was just breaking when the old man held out his hand as a signal to halt. The soldiers bearing the packs dropped to the ground exhausted; and Dolores, finding a moss-covered tree-root, curled against it, and in a very few minutes was asleep. Ned hurried forward.

Before them, covered with hanging vines and almost indistinguishable, was the broad, low mouth of a cave.

"Is this it?" asked Ned doubtfully.

"Yes."

"Does any one know about it?"

"Not that I know of. It probably has not been entered in fifty years. For that reason we had better start a fire inside to burn out any wild animal and purify the air."

They at once set about this task, and Perez entered the cave. He was soon back.

"It's as clean and neat as a whistle," he reported, "and the occupant or occupants have not been gone more than an hour at the most. We had better hurry and take possession at once. Then we will have nine points of the law, and a few guns ought to constitute the tenth. If they come back we can either drive them out or make them join us."

This advice was quickly followed, and before long the cavern was cluttered up with the food and blankets of the invaders. The cave itself was a huge affair, probably at one time used as a hiding-place for refugees, and could have held twice as many as now entered it. Its vaulted roof, round and salt-streaked, was fully ten feet above the solid floor, and extended backward without lowering for a distance of more than a hundred feet. Beyond this, broken blocks of stone and refuse of various descriptions made passage difficult.

Ned awakened Dolores and walked her into the cave, where she looked about with frightened eyes. Some of the men were building a little room for her with blocks of stone, and suddenly the incongruity of her position struck her.

"But, *señor,* I ought not to be here all alone," she said.

"I'm sorry, but old Luiz will have to be your chaperon; heretofore you haven't been such a stickler on etiquette that I remember. In fact, I recall one day in particular when you were very desirous of forgetting about it altogether. Let's not waste any time on this."

Ned sat down, pulled out a fountain pen and a piece of paper, placed the paper on a block of wood and began to write. His message was:

SENOR SPINOZA:

Your camp is full of my spies, and I am kept in constant knowledge of your actions. Should the lightest harm come to my wife,

Nathalie, the same harm shall come to Dolores, whom I hold a prisoner for that purpose. If you would care to exchange prisoners kindly indicate the fact in writing and give it to the soldier who brings this. Your cause is doomed to defeat, *señor,* and I ask you to be sensible before you have gone too far to escape the inevitable.

EDWARD CUMMINGS,
Manager Santa Maria.

Ned called to him a young negro of excellent record and intelligent looks, and, handing over the message, gave his final instructions.

"Return to the fort if possible and deliver the message from there. If this is impracticable, advance into their camp under a white flag. And while you are there see as much as you can and remember it. Find out where my wife is and how she is treated. Meanwhile, we will go down and harass them as soon as possible since they do not know of our escape. Now—"

Ned had just risen to his feet in conclusion when his eye was attracted by a strange face peering from behind a tree not a hundred feet away. It was a white face, gaunt and shaggy, and on it grew a tangle of heavy brown beard snarled into a mass by twigs and leaves and briers. The eyes were wild. The man's body, which was partially visible, was covered with a torn shirt.

With a cry, Ned leaped for the strange apparition, which seemed to be gibbering at him. The wild man leaped away from the tree with the agility and cunning of such creatures, and in a moment he had far outdistanced Ned in his shadowy flight through the trees. And back to the mystified leader came a high-pitched, unearthly laugh that made him shiver as though a chill had come into the air.

The rest of that day passed in swift activity, undisturbed by any attempts of the hermit to return to his former home. It was almost sunset before the cave had been completely made over to suit the necessities of its new occupants, and by that time Ned had begun to wonder what would be the reply from Spinoza. When nightfall had come without the reappearance of the soldier there was uneasiness in the camp.

They had just finished supper when the messenger came staggering in, bloody and exhausted. He was fed and restoratives applied before being allowed to speak.

"They beat me because I saw too much in the camp," he said at last, "and they would have killed me had it not been for the white flag, and for the fact that I was covered by the guns from the fort. There has been some brisk fighting there all day, and numbers of the attackers have been killed. Your fort, Señor Cummings, is impregnable; not a man has been killed, and only two were wounded through carelessness in exposing themselves."

"But the camp—my wife!" cried Cummings impatiently. "What did you see?"

"She is well and carefully cared for, as one of the soldiers told me when I was waiting for the answer to your note—"

"There is an answer?" cried Ned. "Blockhead, give it to me." He took the paper from the negro's hand and read:

SEÑOR CUMMINGS:

I do not care to exchange prisoners just now. However, rest assured your wife is safe and happy. I wonder if she ever looked into your eyes the way she has into mine. Keep your Dolores, but do not harm her. There is no need. Nathalie has mentioned you at times, but all birds flutter before capture. *Adios* from us both.

RAMON SPINOZA.

Flames danced before Ned's eyes, as if some one had shot a cannon off in his face. It was with difficulty that he resisted an impulse to cry aloud and start out that very night alone to the camp of the enemy. His position of responsibility held him.

"We attack to-morrow!" he cried, and there was joy in the cave that night.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE RISK OF HIS LIFE.

DAWN brought activity and preparation. Ned was also treated to one of the surprises of his life, such a surprise as to change the whole tenor of events. He had gone outside to hurry the preparation of breakfast, when he saw a slab of wood on the ground near the entrance to the cave. Certain black marks on this slab interested him, and he stooped to examine them more closely.

They were words painfully scrawled on the yellow surface with charcoal, and a few moments later Ned made out:

The owners of S. M. are captured by rebels. Prisoners.

Ned could not at first believe the evidence of his senses, and then there returned to

him the remembrance of the letter Señor Alvarez had sent, announcing the arrival of these formidable persons, and suggesting that he have a small expense-sheet.

So they were captured. The young man only hoped that no harm would come to them, but he laughed sardonically when he imagined the look his employers would give him when they first met. Also, he wondered if his discharge would not be accomplished in record time.

But who had left the message? Ned glanced around, half suspecting, and saw the head of the mad hermit protruding from a clump of growth. The manager waved the piece of wood reassuringly and advanced, but the other turned and kept an equal distance between them. Then it occurred to Ned that the message had been written in English, and he returned to the camp, pondering this last enigma.

But not for long. The start was about to be made, and he busied himself with the final details. The anxiety in his breast in regard to Nathalie was amounting now to almost a fever. He had never supposed he could be swept away in a torrent of such fear, nervousness, and torture as now possessed him. And, besides this, he knew that there was nothing of the sickly sentimental feeling of calf love about it; he was swayed by a big, insistent, overwhelming need—the need for his wife. He had not realized what a hole her absence left in his existence.

With old Luiz Perez in the lead and Dolores personally escorted, the party moved swiftly off under the great trees. They had not gone far when Perez stopped and examined the ground carefully. Then he turned to the left and proceeded some quarter of a mile.

Three miles away they had heard the sounds of battle, and now as Ned and his forty men drew near, there was a constant rattle and clatter of small arms, punctuated occasionally by the bellow of a cannon.

"They have their field-piece in action," thought Ned despairingly, "and the fort cannot stand that very long, I'm afraid."

Just then there was a terrific roar in the direction of the fort and Ned burst out laughing.

"The boys are replying with the old bronze cannon, but Heaven only knows what they're shooting in it," he said.

When a safe distance behind the sounds of battle, just where the edge of the forest became cane, Ned halted his detachment. Then taking with him the young soldier who had acted as peace commissary the day before, he climbed a tall ceiba-tree which hung its wide branches over the border of the waving green field.

Across the mile of undulating sugar-cane the whole plan was laid out. There, surrounded by a nebula of white smoke which lifted lazily, was the fort. Ned examined it through the glasses which the *rurale* carried. It was still in good condition, but the cannon had begun to batter its solid front. The barracks was now wholly surrounded by the enemy. From the north, east, and west fields the smoke of rifle fire appeared in white clouds. The enemy had been driven farther back because of the destruction of the cane, but the duel still continued with much vigor on both sides.

Ned could not suppress an involuntary exclamation of admiration at the gallant defense of those in the fort. Then his mind turned to the more important question, the answer to which would bring him nearer to his wife.

"Which is the tent of the Señora Cummings?" he asked anxiously, scanning the rows of white splashes that appeared against the green.

Manuel took the glasses and for a long while studied the distant camp.

"It is the middle tent of the middle row," he said at last, "you cannot miss it. There is a red rag tied to the pole to warn people away. Spinoza is the only man who dares go within ten feet."

Ned looked long and earnestly, but he could see no sign of life except three or four sentries stationed conveniently near in case of emergency. After a while he climbed down and awaited nightfall.

It was about eight o'clock when a dirty, slouching peasant left the camp of the forty. His light hair had been stained with juices known to negro cunning, and his face darkened a trifle. In his belt was a great ten-inch knife and a murderous-looking revolver, and by his side swung the inevitable sheathed *machete*. He headed immediately in the direction of the rebel camp.

Ned Cummings had taken this method of attempting to communicate with Nathalie. He could wait no longer; parley would have merely delayed things without satisfaction and only have resulted in insult.

In undertaking his present mission he risked his life, but he gladly took the chance.

Drawing nearer and nearer to the enemy he heard the sounds both of drunken revelry and mourning. There must have been execution from the fort! Good old friends to fight like that in his behalf! He crept crouching along the alleys of the cane until he arrived at a point not far from the edge of the camp. He could make out the white tents.

Then he halted. It seemed as though dawn must come and foil him as he waited the cessation of noise and shouting and brightness. Finally the last reveler dropped somewhere and there was silence. Ned crawled forward. None opposed him. Evidently, then, they did not suspect the absence of the forty men, for they had posted no sentries.

Seizing an *aguardiente* bottle in one hand as a pretext for drunken wanderings, the young man made his way through the camp unsteadily. Every one was in a stupor, and Ned smiled at the chances for wanton slaughter that presented themselves.

At last he approached the tent where Nathalie was confined. His heart almost stood still with joy at the thought of meeting her again, and his blood leaped in his veins. There was one sentry who stood before the entrance resting his head on his hands, which were in turn clasped over the muzzle of a rifle. His shoulders lifted and fell regularly. He was almost asleep.

Looking about him swiftly, Ned rose without a sound and approached the man from behind. One swift blow from the bottle in his hand and Ned eased the unconscious guard to the earth silently. Then crawling to the flap of the tent he whispered Nathalie's name.

There was no answer. He whispered it again, adding: "It is I, Ned."

He heard a stir within and saw a glow as a candle was lighted.

"Enter," said a strained voice he scarcely recognized as Nathalie's. He pushed aside the canvas and crawled into the tent. Against the farther wall she stood, almost fully dressed, the gleam of fear in her eyes and a knife in her hands.

"I am disguised, darling," he whispered, "so do not be afraid."

She came toward him slowly, unbelieving, and at last recognized him beneath the strange hue of his garments and his hair. Their meeting was silent but intense. He held her in his arms and kissed her ravenously. Then they sat down on the floor.

"Has Spinoza persecuted you?" he asked fearfully.

"All the time," she breathed in return. "I have thought sometimes that I would kill myself, but somehow I felt that you would come, and did not do so. But he is becoming more insistent all the while."

"Is it true that the owners of the Santa Maria have been captured?" he asked.

"Yes, they are in another part of the camp. I have not seen them, but they are here, and I am afraid it will go hard with them."

"Why?"

"They have been warned that unless they give in to all the demands of the men they will be hanged to-morrow morning. Spinoza told me this himself, and I know he means what he says, for he is ugly and savage at his failure to take the fort, and because he has lost so many men."

"But the United States! He would have that government to answer to."

"He either does not realize that or else he doesn't care, for he swore by everything sacred that he would carry out the threat unless they complied."

"And the owners?"

"Will not give in. It is magnificent of them and quite American, but a very foolhardy position to take."

"I must get help somewhere," cried Ned desperately. "This cannot go on."

Suddenly Nathalie began to weep.

"Oh, I have been so unhappy," she said. "Is it true, as Spinoza tells me, that you are satisfied with that Spanish girl, and have written him a note that you don't care what becomes of me?"

Ned ground his teeth madly.

"The dirty, lying hound," he snarled under his breath; "so those are the things he has been telling you. Now you *must* believe me when I tell you that I have only held her prisoner as a hostage for your safety. Should as much as a hair of your head be hurt, she would suffer in like proportion. I have sworn that, and I mean it."

Then, in the darkness of the little tent, surrounded by danger and savage hatred, Ned and Nathalie restored their love, and, in the new-found happiness that was theirs, lived briefly above the clouds. For into their hearts had come a new, deep feeling that made what they had once considered the great passion seem by comparison a small and worthless thing. Ned explained the incident with Dolores in the cane-fields, and

Nathalie admitted that Spinoza had come to the house and told here where to go to witness her husband's treachery to her.

The moments of their wonderful new love sped swiftly. At last Ned sprang up.

"Darling, I must go," he said wistfully, looking at his watch. "There cannot be much of darkness left." He clasped her in a last embrace and had released her when a quiet voice said:

"Hands up."

They both turned and looked into the cruel eyes of Spinoza, who stood in the doorway, a revolver pointed at Ned's heart. With the soft cry of a wounded bird, Nathalie crumpled up on the ground.

"No one was ever quite as welcome to any one as you are to me, Señor Cummings," said Spinoza pleasantly. "I had not counted on this visit quite so early. Let us have a little talk—us three. Look to your wife."

With the contents of a pitcher of water on the little table beside the cot, Ned revived Nathalie, who clung to him with fear and desperation, sobbing violently. Finally he calmed her. Then he turned to Spinoza.

"What have you got to say?" he asked.

(To be continued.)

Dick Harper—Horse Thief

by Courtenay Savage

I DON'T think there are very many of you who can look the whole world straight in the face and say you've been a horse-thief. I can.

You see the way it happened was this: Jean and I had only been engaged a week, and were spending Saturday and Sunday down at her uncle's place, among the Wheatly Hills.

It was a perfectly wonderful night, much too nice to sit on the veranda and talk nothing, and as Aunt Bertha wanted some stamps in the worst way—dear, thoughtful Aunt Bertha—we said we'd take a horse and go after them. Uncle almost spoiled the whole thing by saying that we really ought to take Thomas along, as the roads were not extra good, and the horse might become unmanageable.

We started off about eight-thirty, minus Thomas (the post-offices all close at eight). We drove slowly because it was a wonderful night. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, and the moon was so bright it made the country seem like a fairy picture in a play.

We got to the village about nine, and it was half-past before we started home again. We took the long way, so as to get the full benefit of the drive. Maplehurst, Uncle Jack's place, was only a little over a mile from the village, but the long way made it almost five.

We got to one place in the road where there wasn't a house in sight. The horse was driving, for—well—I'll admit I was holding Jean's hands, when suddenly we stopped.

I looked up quickly, and saw another horse and wagon right in front of us, and coming our way; in fact, the two horses' noses were almost touching. I reined in our beast, and started to pass the other people on the right.

I was busy driving, so I didn't look up at the other folks, when Jean gave a little cry of surprise and grabbed me by the arm.

Then I glanced at the other carriage, expecting to see something startling. It *was* startling, for there was nobody in it. The horse was driving himself.

I pulled up, and jumped out. The other horse was as gentle as a kitten. She stood still the second I said "whoa!" The carriage was a two-seated surrey, handsomely upholstered. The reins were wound around the whip-stock, and on the floor of the carriage lay a tiny velvet pump.

I must say it was mysterious. Jean and I talked it over, and tried to decide what was the best thing to do.

She thought the rig might belong to some one who was calling at one of the farm-houses along the road, but common-sense could tell you that farmers' visitors didn't travel around in carriages on the order of the one we found, and they don't wear number two velvet pumps.

We hatched one set of plans after another. Jean wanted to take the rig home, and let Thomas find who it belonged to in the morning. Of course that would have been the most sensible thing to do, but I thought I was hot on the trail of an adventure, and I wanted to drive the carriage back to the village and hand it over to the police.

Jean wouldn't think of accompanying me, and the more she scolded the more convinced I became it was the proper thing to do.

Finally it ended by my escorting her to within sight of the house, and then driving off in the direction of town in the other rig. Jean warned me there probably wouldn't be any one waiting up for me, and how she might forget to tell Anna to leave the front door unlocked, but all to no avail.

That horse was a peach, and I covered the distance to town in a little over ten minutes. I decided that as I didn't know just where to find the village guardian of the peace, I'd go to Jenkins's livery stable, and ask their advice. There wasn't any one at the stable that knew me—I was a stranger in a strange land—but I knew the name of the colored man who looked after the horses was Isaiah; Jean told me that Thomas often put the horses under the Jenkins's shed while he waited for a train.

Well, I drove into the yard, by a side lane, and there wasn't any one there. I waited a minute, then I whistled. Before I could blink my eyes, let alone move, about a dozen men came at me. Like a young mob they rushed up and surrounded the wagon, all yelling so loud they almost caused a runaway.

"Drop them lines and throw up your hands!" cried a big, lantern-jawed fellow, pointing a gun at me, while two or three of the others grabbed the horse by the bridle.

"Throw 'em up!" he repeated, and in such a commanding manner that I felt forced to obey.

Just then a very stout man puffed up.

"Did you got him? Did you got him?" he asked, sadly in want of breath.

"Yes, Mr. Schmitt, we've got him," answered a man with a brogue. He had taken his stand by the horse's head.

"Oh, how glad I am!" said the stout party, with an accent that savored strongly of the fatherland. "Did you arrest him, officer?"

"Not yet, I ain't had time," replied the constable. "I've got him though; he can't get away."

"Well, for why don't you do it now?" asked Schmitt.

"You're arrested," said the constable, turning to me. "Get out of the wagon!"

"Arrested? On what charge?" I asked. The sudden appearance of the attacking party had, up to now, taken away my power of speech.

"It don't help you none to make out that you don't know," said my stout friend. He walked up to the horse and stroked his nose. "Did they take father's *schoenes kind?*" he said. "Did they run off with him?"

"Did they run off with him?" It dawned on me then that they thought I had stolen the horse.

"I found this horse wandering along the Woodfield Road," I explained. "So I brought him down here to see if I could find who he belonged to."

"Sounds good!" said Mr. Schmitt. "I hopes you don't think he tells the truth. Make him get out of the wagon."

"Ain't likely," added the officer. "Ain't there been horses walking right out of locked barns lately? He's one of the gang."

"Sure he is. The horse was left alone while I gets me a drink, and when I comes back he's gone."

"Get out of the wagon! How many times must I tell you?" said the officer, and I did as I was bid.

As I stepped to the ground, two men grabbed me, and held me tightly by the arms.

"I'll take him right to the jail," said the officer.

"Yes," put in Schmitt. "Only look out. Maybe he tries monkey-business."

"See here!" I broke in. "My name's Harper. I'm visiting out at Mr. Roland's place. I found that horse wandering along the Woodfield Road, and I brought it here to see if I could find who it belonged to. Take me out to Mr. Roland and let me identity myself. The phone's broken, or you could telephone. Just take me out there."

"Sure, and have the rest of your gang hold us up, and set you free; not much!" The speaker was a young man who'd been holding the horse.

"But I don't want to spend the night in jail," I objected.

"I'm not surprised," said the officer. "There ain't very many that is partial to jails, but I notice the lock-ups are always kinder crowded for room."

Gladly could I have torn that Rube to pieces. Imagine being the butt for his sarcasm! If it hadn't been for the stout party, I'd have offered him five dollars, and walked away.

The procession started. Two men walking ahead, then my humble self, a man grabbing me by either arm, Schmitt and the constable, who still held his pistol in his hand, bringing up the rear, while the gentleman with the brogue drove the horse.

It was after ten, and we only went a block, but by the time we reached the courthouse a big crowd was at our heels, all peering and craning their necks to catch a glimpse of the desperate criminal.

Up the steps we trooped, and into the long hall. The constable went ahead to open the door of the cell, for they had only one.

He came back a few minutes later terribly fussed. The cell was locked, and no key could be found. Henry Smith, the janitor, had gone to visit his sister over the river.

Two or three of the town officials came in while I was waiting patiently to be jailed, and scowled at me from under their big straw hats. Outside the crowd still waited, its size increasing every minute, and through the open door I heard their remarks.

I couldn't see any one, but I would hear a woman's voice ask: "That one in the brown suit?" and I would occasionally catch a fragment of conversation between some old fellow and his friends. It was always the same harrowing tale of how his brother, or his wife's second cousin, had that white mare of his'n taken out of the barn right in the daytime, while the folks was to the Grange picnic, and what a smart lot horse-thieves in general were.

It was beginning to grow more than tiresome, having a lot of men standing on one side of the room casting threatening glances in your direction, while an equally threatening crowd pushed each other aside for the chance of getting a look at you.

How long this would have gone on I can't say, but a lot of young fellows came singing along the street. I could hear their exclamations as they saw the crowd, and pictured in my mind how they were shoving their way through to the front and asking questions. Suddenly I heard one of them shout:

"Gee, a horse-thief! We ought to lynch him! That's the way they treat those fellows out West!"

Needless to say I didn't get lynched, but the noise waked up the gentlemen in the corner. When they heard the crowd begin to talk about taking the law in their own hands they got busy.

The first thing they did was to shut the front door.

Then there was a hurried consultation among the three or four men who seemed to be the town officials, and it ended by my being led down a flight of stairs into the cellar. I thought I was to be left there under a guard; but no, for after a moment's halt, while some one went to see if the coast was clear, I suppose, I was led up another flight of steps and so out into the open air.

From the front of the building came the noise of the crowd, and we hurried on. I

thought of trying to make a break and run for it, but as the odds were ten to one I gave up the idea. Time after time I tried to tell the crowd who I was, but they wouldn't listen.

After going for a long block, we turned in at a large house that was set further back from the road than its neighbors. Again there was a hurried consultation, and once more a wait. I couldn't figure just what they were going to do with me.

Probably they thought me such an important criminal they proposed to turn the sheriff's guest-room into a cell for the night. I had visions of slumbering peacefully in a comfortable bed, while the police-force kept guard outside my door; and I almost laughed when I thought how left they'd be when they found out who I really was in the morning.

My beautiful dream was shattered, and I was brought back to earth in a hurry by being marched round the back of the house and down into the cellar.

"Bring him in here, and mind your head," said the man who seemed to have assumed the command.

We stumbled along in the darkness to where the fellow stood with the lantern.

By the glimmer of this I saw I was in a coal-bin. A fair-sized bin, made of heavy boards, with a small doorway through which we had entered. I never knew how they got the coal in; there must have been a chute or a window somewhere, but they'd covered them up so as to lessen my chances of escape.

"He will be all right here till morning," said the sheriff. "You'll be down about ten to make a formal charge, won't you, Mr. Schmitt?"

"Sure," replied Schmitt.

They all went out then and closed the door after them. The rest of the conversation was unintelligible. All I could hear was the piling of stuff against the door, and finally all was silence.

I felt all round the walls, reminding myself of the man in one of Poe's stories, who was fearful of stepping into a bottomless well. I had one consolation—I knew there wasn't any well. In fact, all I found was a very small pile of coal, brushed back in one corner, the remaining portion of the winter supply.

I am not certain about what happened next, but, being one of those people who can't stay awake forever, I slept.

How long I was unconscious I can't say, but I woke suddenly. The noise of a lot of loud talking and things being pushed around made me wonder where I was. Like a flash, I remembered it all, and like a flash came to mind the memory of that lynching suggestion.

I was too paralyzed to move. I just cowed down in one corner and awaited my fate. I tried to be brave, but my teeth were chattering; and I could feel the rope choking me already.

Then the door to the bin opened. I buried my face in my hands and waited for the infuriated mob to surge in on me—I had enough presence of mind left to know that mobs always surged—but, instead, a small voice that was very dear to me said: "Dick, are you there?"

I looked up, and there was Jean standing in the doorway, the sheriff holding a lantern over her head.

I was half blinded by the sudden glare of light, and for a second I was speechless from mingled fright and joy.

"Dick," called Jean again, "if anything's happened to him I'll never forgive myself," she added.

"I'm all right," I said, jumping up and going to her side.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried, taking my hands and kissing me, dirt and all. "Aunt Bertha and I waited up for you, and when you didn't come I got so nervous. Then Bridget came in from the village. She'd been visiting her sister, and said that they were going to lynch a horse-thief. I was so frightened for fear it was you I made Uncle Jack get up and come here with me. Why, you're all black!" she suddenly broke off.

"Rather," I answered; "you can't live for very long in a coal-bin and stay white. Let's get out of this."

There were half a dozen people outside—Uncle Jack and his wife, Thomas, and two or three others. The sheriff begged my pardon a great many times, and hoped he'd never make a bad mistake like this one again. If I'd have thought of it at the time, I'd have worked the injured feeling and the damaged reputation game; but I was so full of joy at the prospect of a wash, and a pillow somewhat softer than a heap of coals, that I forgot everything else.

When I awoke next morning I found a very embarrassed stout gentleman by the name of Schmitt waiting for me on the side

veranda. He was even more profuse in his apologies than the sheriff had been.

He and his man had left the horse untied, it seemed, and it had wandered off. It was their fault entirely. He would rather lose ten thousand dollars than the horse, and that was why he had been so angry when he thought it had been stolen. His mother loved that horse so. Would I ever forgive him?

"But what was the velvet pump doing in the wagon?" I asked when he had finished spluttering his apologies.

"The pump! I guess she falls from my pocket. I was showing it to my mother before I goes out. I make 'em. I am Schmitt, what they call the shoe king. For a peace-offering, I give you all the shoes what you can wear when you get married, and I give the lady the same. After all, weddings are better than what lynchings are, for dancing is awful hard on the shoes."

AFTER THE FIRST DAY'S BATTLE.

THE strength that bore us through the battle's chances
Draws back into the deep;
Weariness droops on our beleaguered lances,
And God sends space for sleep.
The tide of night, sacred from wells of being,
Flows softly overhead;
As through the gloom I gaze, with eyes deep-seeing
As one already dead.

In our slight camp, close circled by the foemen,
Enchanted by the night,
The iron men-at-arms, the girdled bowmen
Dream fitfully of fight.
Beyond the ramparts, where the steel-shod charges
Tore into mire the plain,
Dew drips on broken brands and riven targes;
Death sleeps among the slain.

In this deep midnight of supernal vision,
Despair and daylight done,
Life blends with death, grown equal in their mission,
And utterly at one.
Too wise for fear and overstrong for violence,
I catch their undertones,
And seem to see from spheres of starry silence
A valley white with bones.

Now at this last the lines of doom surround us,
Implacable and strong;
No mercy in the gloomy powers around us—
We mocked their powers too long!
But, unperturbed and free from hope or sorrow,
Purged clean of all the past,
We see through the red gates of fight to-morrow
Dark fields of peace at last!

Frank Lillie Pollock.

Just Like Wyoming

by Edgar Franklin

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

In the effort to give an unusual entertainment, Mrs. Peter Scrimmins, of Blythemount, a select suburb, sends out invitations for a hobo party in a freight-car, her husband being high up in the railroad line. But through some miscalculation, when but eight of the guests have arrived, ahead of the host and hostess, the door is slammed shut, the car hitched to a train, and carted off into the unknown. The next morning the eight find themselves in their dress-clothes apparently thousands of miles away from home. Savage, the grumbler of the party, insists that they must be in Bloody Hollow, Wyoming. In any case, the locomotive has gone away and left them. High cliffs are on every hand and the rusty track leads off over a trestle above a turbulent river and then into a tunnel. The only sign of habitation is a ramshackle, deserted factory of some sort, provided with cots and a considerable quantity of canned goods. In order to cook some of these, Moore starts to make a fire in the furnace, which acts queerly. The others withdraw, and finally Moore follows them outside, remarking that he has come out to wait till the fire burns up. His words turn into a yell, and he dives straight under the freight-car as the factory starts to rock, and from its depths come the detonations of a million thunders.

In short, Moore has contrived to explode the boiler, most of the factory, and nearly all the food supply. The rest of the party anger Savage, who withdraws to regions unknown in the sulks. Meanwhile Brayton ventures to walk for help through the tunnel, but comes back on the run, with the report that the tunnel is full of bears. Moore thereupon undertakes to face the animals, but he, too, reappears in short order. A storm threatens, and then Pye discovers a hand-car, which he declares he is not strong enough to work, and as it is not big enough to hold the whole party. Miss Kinsley suggests they draw lots to find out who shall drive it for help through the bear-infested tunnel. The short strip falls to Brayton, who starts off valiantly, but is seen to slow the car down, then, when he reaches the trestle, lift the thing to look underneath, when, with a crash, it toppled over into the rushing torrent below.

CHAPTER X.

ANCHORED AND OTHERWISE.

A FLASH of lightning came from above. It brightened the growing gloom and defined more clearly the figure of Mr. Brayton, standing with hands upraised upon the first tie, the perfectly posed picture of utter amazement.

Distant thunder, banging away merrily, seemed to arouse him from the overwhelming astonishment of the moment. He straightened up and snapped his fingers in annoyance. Then he shrugged his shoulders and turned away—and from between Moore's teeth escaped:

"*Cold feet!*"

"Mr. Moore!" Mrs. Byrd protested.

"Did—did he do that purposely?" Miss Kinsley asked faintly.

"As a strictly honorable gentleman, I must decline to have an opinion!" Moore grinned.

"But of course he did it purposely!" Pye cried angrily. "He all but broke his back heaving the thing over, and—"

"And now he has the refrigerated nerve to steer back here with that smug grin on his face!" Moore said, almost in awe.

Assuredly, there was nothing chagrined or apologetic about Mr. Brayton as he approached.

He had destroyed, or at least put out of commission, their solitary means of communication with the world beyond the mysterious hollow, but it appeared to affect him not at all. He stepped along lightly, almost airily, and he smiled faintly.

And, tripping along the platform, he even contrived a smooth laugh as he remarked:

"Shame, wasn't it?"

"It's a shame that you didn't go after it!" Pye observed tartly.

"You didn't strain your shoulders or your back, knocking it over, did you?" Moore asked anxiously.

Mr. Brayton favored him with a supercilious little laugh.

"I suppose it is rather hard for you to understand just what an abnormal muscular development means to a chap," he said. "That was just one of the sort of accidents that happen."

"And that—that was an accident?" Mrs. Byrd breathed wonderingly.

"Why, the crank-shaft—I think it was—must have stuck somehow, and the wretched little thing stopped short. You saw it stop?"

"We all saw it stop!" Moore assured him gravely.

"I tried to see just what was wrong, but I couldn't without tilting the car. So I tried it, and I must have underestimated my beastly strength, as usual, and over she went!"

"Do you always perspire little steamy Niagaras like that when you underestimate your strength, Brayton?" Moore asked.

Again Brayton glanced at him.

"I put a little force into getting that flying start to the tunnel," he suggested.

No one, it seemed, cared to comment further upon the situation. They looked steadily at Mr. Brayton, though, and after some seconds Mr. Brayton laughed nervously.

"Well, really, one might think that I'd done that deliberately!" he said.

Still no one spoke, although a queer little cackling noise suggestive of glee came from Moore's direction.

"Well, upon my soul! I believe—" Mr. Brayton began, to Pye.

Mr. Pye turned away stiffly and offered his arm to Mrs. Byrd, and they walked off. Mr. Phelps turned to his bride with a faint grin, and, with an angry stare at Brayton, the lady took his arm and led him after the first pair. And Brayton had turned to Miss Kinsley with:

"You, at least—"

Miss Kinsley merely looked at him.

Moore shaking happily, watched him lay a hand upon her arm—and he stepped up with a stern:

"Unhand that lady, sir! My arm, miss!" With a queer little laugh, Miss Kinsley accepted it. Mr. Moore then turned to snap his fingers beneath Mr. Brayton's well-chiseled nose. "Meaning utter contempt!" he explained.

"Look here—" Brayton began.

"Not one more word from you!" said Mr. Moore.

"Well, what would *you* have done?" came hotly and flatly from Mr. Brayton.

Moore's lips pursed for a moment.

"Is that car smashed, Brayton?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Badly smashed?"

"Yes."

"Can it be put back on the tracks and repaired?"

"It—I don't believe so," Brayton said wonderingly.

Moore drew himself up coldly.

"Then, I will admit frankly," he said, "that, had I been in your position, I should have gone straight through that tunnel if all the powers of evil had been standing in plain sight with loaded rifles—or whatever they use!" He bowed to Miss Kinsley. "In boyhood I protected you, Edith," he added. "Let me now escort you from this polluting presence, as per example of Pye! This way, please!"

Mr. Brayton, left alone, rammed his hands in his pockets and stared savagely after them as they walked off. He turned, some few seconds later, and strode into the depths of the factory.

Strolls upon that particular platform were rather limited. Having traveled perhaps two hundred feet, Moore and the girl were at the far edge; and as she took Mr. Phelps's empty chair Mr. Moore sat down at her feet and dangled his legs over the end.

There was silence until:

"He's a coward, isn't he, Jimmy?"

"Eh? Brayton?" Moore looked up suddenly and grinned. "I don't know. It's blacker than pitch in there."

"And there are bears?"

"Well, there's one bear—that I'll swear to! I don't know about the rest of them, but that one growled within an inch of my head, Edith, and then he hit at me with a large, healthy paw. It was—well, all I waited to see."

"Would you have gone through with that hand-car?"

Moore laughed a little.

"I don't know. I guess so, Edith. I'd have tried it, anyway, I think, but—you never can tell."

For a little neither spoke; then:

"How long do you suppose it's going to take Mr. Scrimmins to find us, Jimmy?"

Mr. Moore looked at her squarely.

"If we had enough to eat here, and some comfortable beds, I'd hope that he never found us before cold weather!" he answered honestly. "It's the first time in ten years I've been able to get a good look at you, without a lot of artificial surroundings—to-day!"

"I mean really?"

"Um—that's hard telling. Of course, it may be possible to find out immediately just who brought us here, and why, and find out just where we are. Then again, I suppose we may have been messed up with dozens of other freight-cars, and they may have to look all over the country for us. I don't know much about such things. Not more than a week, anyway, I imagine."

"A *week!*"

Mr. Moore started at the tremble in the tone.

"Good Lord, Edith, you're not frightened?" he gasped.

"I'm not frightened, but—"

"Because you mustn't be!" Mr. Moore said warmly. "They won't be worrying much about you at home, for they know we're all together. And as for you yourself, I'm right here to take care of you!" He nodded emphatically. "I've been taking to-day as sort of a joke, you know, but if you're really scared I'll start out at daylight and tramp from here to Halifax, and get us right out of it—quick!"

"Well, you needn't—"

"Yes, I need, if it'll make you any happier, Edith!" Moore persisted, patting the hand he seemed to have acquired. "You have no idea of the things I'd do to make you happy, little girl. Because, if you had—"

"It's raining, Jimmy!" Miss Kinsley broke gently, but firmly, as she rose. "I think we'd better go inside."

Mr. Moore glanced up at the black sky. With a whisk, his wrinkled coat was off and about Miss Kinsley's shoulders with their absurd evening cloak, and he was piloting her toward the office doorway.

Rather curiously a faint yellow light shone out there. They entered to find an elderly lantern standing upon one of the desks and Mr. Phelps busy opening one of the pear cans. Brayton and Pye, it appeared, were elsewhere, and the elder lady was saying:

"Oh, I do hope Mr. Pye doesn't anger him!"

Phelps looked up from his can; and much veneer had worn from Phelps during the last twenty-four hours, for he said candidly:

"I think Pye could lick that stuffed dummy, Mrs. Byrd!"

"The said dummy being Brayton?" Moore queried.

Mr. Pye said that he was going to find him and speak his mind!" Mrs. Byrd informed him.

"Well, that's nice," said Mr. Moore.

And just there they all flinched together, for a blinding flash of lightning had been followed almost instantaneously by a deafening crash of thunder. When it had died away and the rain was howling and swirling in earnest, Mr. Moore was smiling serenely. Miss Kinsley had pressed close to him in momentary terror; just now she was freeing herself in some confusion from the protecting arm that had encircled her automatically.

"Nothing but a little storm!" the cheerful member remarked happily.

"Shall we wait until it's over to have dinner or supper, or whatever it is?" Phelps inquired.

Before they could reply the door from the factory burst open suddenly. Mr. Brayton, breathing hard and smiling rather sheepishly, was among them.

"That—that frightened me!" escaped him.

"Nursie'll run right up-stairs and get a feather-bed to wrap around your head!" Moore suggested. "The storm's just beginning."

Mr. Brayton glanced at him and moistened his lips.

"As it happened, I wasn't referring to the storm."

"Then the—"

Having drawn a long breath, Brayton interrupted him with his musical laugh.

"It was something entirely different," he said quickly. "You see, I met Pye out there in the works, and he said that he had something to say to me. He took me off in the far corner and—and I lighted a cigarette—just scratched a match and lighted a cigarette."

"Why the wealth of detail?"

"Well, I threw away the match and it flared up and sputtered—it sputtered rather like a fuse, I fancied for the moment. And in the light I just caught sight of a tremendous hogshead, and what do you suppose was painted across the face of it? Or what do you suppose I thought I saw, rather?"

"Hair tonic?" Moore asked.

"Blasting powder!" asserted Mr. Brayton!

"*What?*" Phelps's unopened can dropped with a thud.

"But of course it wasn't," Brayton laughed. "We'd all have been blown to Kingdom Come long before this, if it had been!"

"How long ago did all this happen?" Moore asked, with lively interest.

"Oh—quite a little while ago."

"About as long as it took you to gallop across the factory?"

"Perhaps."

"Well how much fuse was there?" Mr. Moore pursued quickly.

"There was no fuse at all, of course!" Brayton said, impatiently. "It was only something that caused the match to sputter, and it helped make up the picture, I suppose! I'm—I'm growing imaginative!" he added.

"I don't know about that," Moore said, thoughtfully. "It takes brains to imagine things, and—" He broke off and looked from one to the other. They did not seem particularly concerned, and Mr. Moore smiled. "Well, don't imagine anything more of the same sort, Brayton," he concluded.

"Nothing more is going to happen today. There is nothing left to happen, even here," Mrs. Byrd said, soothingly.

"That's a sane and proper sentiment," Moore agreed, cheerfully. And he turned to Brayton with:

"Where's Pye?"

Brayton's soulful eyes widened suddenly.

"Why, I believe I left him sitting out there on the hogshead!" he replied.

"The one with the blasting—" Moore began.

He said no more. Instead, gripping Edith and Phelps together, he joined them in one terrific crash to the floor of the place!

For a crash of sound had split the whole world—a crash that made their late boiler explosion seem like the popping of a miniature firecracker! Timber—beams—iron—steel roared and boomed. The building seemed this time to rise cleanly from its foundation and soar away skyward! Their lantern gave a wild plunge toward the ceiling and, by some strange trick, crashed down to the desk again and danced about, upright still.

And then, after a great, insane eternity, a period of time far beyond any mortal's estimate, they seemed to be there still—all save Mr. Pye!

They were sitting on the floor in a circle. They had quite finished screaming. Now, through settling clouds of dust, fanned hither and thither by the damp breeze from the emptied sashes, they were staring stupidly at a roaring, kicking something on the floor—a something with a huge coil of rope around its neck and thrashing legs and arms and the voice of an infuriated bull!

And it was the fresh, awful, crowning roar of the voice, some two seconds after that, which identified the something definitely as Mr. Savage!

CHAPTER XI.

VISITORS FROM A DISTANCE.

A violent rush of the storm without, and the better part of the dust was sucked through the windows, and the air chilled suddenly and grew clearer.

Wild-eyed and glaring, Mr. Savage sat up abruptly. Six strange, white faces were grimacing and mouthing at him—and his own mouth and lungs opened simultaneously to emit an astounded:

"God—bless—my—soul!"

Off in the distance a long, grinding crash indicated clearly that a tottering bit of wall had fallen. Then all was still, and they were shaking themselves and smiling, and Phelps tittered senselessly:

"Why—where did you come from?"

"Were you—you on the barrel, too, Mr. Savage?" Miss Kinsley asked.

"He was in the barrel!" Moore stated. "He was the contents, and when the fuse burned him he exploded with rage and—"

"What in blazes is it? What's it all about? What happened that time?" Mr. Savage shrieked, as he struggled free of the rope about his neck. "Did some one hit me or did I fall, or—"

"Where were you?"

"In the closet there, of course!" Savage rasped, indicating the open, swinging door of the big empty cupboard. "I sneaked in there for some rest when I came back—you were talking about bears outside, or some other fool topic—and I suppose I went to sleep."

"Well, there has been a powder explosion," Brayton explained kindly. "There was a hogshead of—"

Mrs. Byrd's amazing scream split the air!

"And Mr. Pye was sitting—sitting on the hogshead!"

Brayton's jaw dropped. It was not the only jaw either. Eyes widened in sheer, overwhelming horror, and Moore choked:

"Are you certain, Brayton, that he was—he was—"

"Yes!"

"And you never warned him? You never even shouted at him or—"

Mr. Brayton licked his lips. Plainly, he had not gone to that trouble; and he had something a little more hideous to explain now than the mere upsetting of a hand-car. He smiled in sickly fashion and—

With a creak, the door opened, and a voice said:

"Did any one hear that last little pop?"

They whirled to face Mr. Pye, alive and, so far as could be seen, entire!

There were signs of wear upon him, to be sure. His dress-coat was mainly ribbons; he was a beautiful pearl-gray with dust; half a window-frame hung rakishly over one shoulder and he patted the top of his head rather dazedly, but he was able to walk and talk, for he went on:

"Did you all fall or did you know it was coming and sit down until it passed?"

"Why, you were—you were right on top of it!" Brayton gasped.

"I was right on top of it until I saw you turn and shoot away as if you'd stepped on a dynamite mine!" Mr. Pye said coldly. "Since you didn't trouble to warn me, I concluded that there must be danger of some sort, and I got down and investigated, and then—um—I came after you."

Moore was assisting Miss Kinsley to her feet.

"And you got across the whole factory in time—" he began, wonderingly.

"I crossed the space where the factory used to be," Pye corrected blandly, "and I was blown under a machine of some sort just as the roof fell in. The factory proper, by the way, is no longer there!"

Rising, they stared at him uncomprehendingly. Mr. Moore, his dingy forehead wrinkled, stepped to the factory door and looked out into the presumably roofed space beyond.

And the wind of all-outdoors set his coat-tails to flapping and a great swirl of rain splashed in. An instant, he squinted upward; then slammed the door and gasped:

"Why, the roof's all gone!"

More than the roof has gone," Pye began. "The—"

Savage was himself again; loudly and positively he interjected:

"And the next good gust of wind will bring this part down around our ears, and we'll all be crushed to death!"

"I don't think so!" Moore said quickly. "This office part is differently built from the rest of the place. I noticed that particularly. It's more solid all around and—nothing but the windows have been injured in here. "Wait a minute!"

He headed for the stairs in the corner and ran up them nimbly. A little space, they heard him walking softly about overhead; and he returned to them laughing.

"Has any one been up there to-day?"

Heads shook. Mr. Moore laughed again.

"Well, the roof's still on tight and the walls are solid," he continued. "And what's more interesting, there are two dandy big double beds, and a chest full of bedding! So the ladies are all right for to-night, and there are blankets enough to make us comfortable on the floor here."

He looked them over triumphantly.

"And now go on opening your pears, Phelps," he smiled. "We mustn't let a little thing like that blast excite us. It's high time for supper!"

Probably all other watches in the mysterious factory had stopped by that time.

Certainly Moore's had—as he had discovered while dressing after a very refreshing dip in the icy little stream.

But, unless the sun had altered its habits, it must be somewhere between five and six o'clock in the morning. The glowing warmth of the sunlight, the wonderful deep blue of the sky, indicated that they were in for another torrid day.

And how many more torrid days after this one?

His toilet complete, one absent, half-weary eye on the tunnel up-stream, Mr. Moore stared ahead and thought hard. Certainly, it did seem that Scrimmins must have been able to locate them long before this. Yet there was no sign of a relief expedition, no hint of a rumbling train. And those Blythemount yards held, at times, hundreds of freight-cars, coming from six directions, going to six other directions.

Externally, there was nothing whatever, so far as he knew, to distinguish their insane vehicle from any of the hundreds; wasn't it quite possible that tracing them down might take weeks upon end?

And if it took even another day, matters were going to be pretty serious in the mysterious hollow. There were, to be sure, sufficient canned pears and pilot biscuits to make a breakfast; and after that—well, after that, by noon say, one or another of them would have to forget that his little feet were tender, and hike straight across country for help, if the tunnel had disgorged nothing more cheering than a bear.

Meanwhile, where in blazes were they? On that proposition, he received a little unexpected assistance just then. Mr. Savage had appeared and clambered down to the edge of the stream. He had performed hasty ablutions, and now he was approaching Moore with:

"Coldest stream in the whole Northwest—always had that reputation!"

"What?"

"That one there. It's like ice. It was just the same the summer that Colonel Westling and his brave boys were wiped out—right over there. I remember it as if it were yesterday. I was only a boy then, and my father—"

"Confound it, Savage! Talk sense!" Moore cried irritably.

"What's that?"

"This isn't the Northwest! This isn't your — Bloody Hollow, or whatever it was!"

Now it is tradition that no one can quite tell just when Mr. Savage is speaking in sober earnest, or when he is amusing himself according to his own peculiar lights. Moore, at all events, could not tell just then; for with a queer little twinkle in his squinting eyes, Savage said sharply:

"This may not be Bloody Hollow, Wyoming—but it is Bloody Hollow, all the same. I don't pretend to say how we got here. It seems impossible—I'll admit that fast enough. But we're here, nevertheless, and we're in the worst Indian country in the United States! There are more full-bloods in this county than anywhere else in the Union, and they're the absolutely vicious, untamed kind—as bad now as they were forty years ago. You're in a place where you'll be safe when the last man-jack of 'em's dead—and that's not yet by any means! You—"

"Oh, fudge!" Mr. Moore screamed at him, as he turned and tramped away for the tracks and the freight platform.

And that was really about all there was to tramp to. He found Miss Kinsley standing upon it, looking at the wreck, awed.

"There was nearly an acre of factory there this time yesterday!" she breathed.

"And now there's a pile of third-hand lumber and scrap-iron that isn't worth carting away!" Moore agreed sagely. "That office part of ours looks as if a cyclone had carted away the rest of the block and left it standing alone on the corner, doesn't it?"

"There isn't even—even part of a wall of that whole big place left standing!" the girl continued.

"Well, what of it? It isn't our place!" Mr. Moore stated. "If people don't want their factories injured, they shouldn't leave them standing around like this, Edith. If I had a nice factory, I wouldn't cart it off to a deserted spot and then abandon it, would you?"

"I—I don't know."

Mr. Moore folded his arms and stared across the open space.

"*I wonder whose factory this is?*" he said. "I wonder what it used to be?"

"And I wonder who'll pay for all the damage?" Miss Kinsley added.

"Well, so do I!" said Moore cheerily. "Is any one getting breakfast?"

"Mr. Phelps is opening some more of those dreadful pears."

Mr. Phelps proved it by appearing in the doorway of the factory's remaining fraction just then, with a can in his hand and a dreary smile on his countenance.

"You people had better come along," he suggested. "I've brought up some nice, fresh, cold river water! It goes just fine with cheap pears and concrete crackers!"

"Black Devil!" was that chief's name!" Mr. Savage observed, stamping past. "I couldn't think of it!"

"What—what did he say?" Miss Kinsley cried.

"Black Devil!" Savage repeated distinctly. "The Indian that led the bloody massacre—right over there!"

And he passed on hurriedly as Moore's eye began to spit fire.

Mr. Savage had relapsed into silence when they entered the office. He was grimly engaged in splintering little pieces from a pilot biscuit with an empty pear can; and the rest of them were standing around gloomily.

Only Mr. Brayton was missing; and Phelps, looking about, observed:

"Has the boy Hercules sense enough to realize that he doesn't deserve even this kind of meal, or—"

"The boy Hercules," said Moore, who stood by the doorway, "is coming on the run. The bogy-man's after him again, I think!"

And surely Mr. Brayton was hurrying! Coming across the rough ground from the west, he heeded not the stones, and gave no thought to the more or less artistic stumble which he executed not less frequently than every third step. His high brow was shining with perspiration as he struck the platform, and he cried breathlessly:

"Oh, I say! Everybody!"

"What now? More powder?" Moore queried.

"Come out here, all of you! We don't have to walk!"

"Eh?"

"No! We'll all ride—bareback, horseback!"

"What's the cowardly fool babbling about now?" Mr. Savage asked genially, as he stepped out.

"Look over there!" Mr. Brayton cried. "Eight of them! I—I thought I saw them go behind that hummock, looking for something to browse upon, and I went over! And there they are!"

"Well—*they are!*" Moore cried in amazement.

And they really seemed to be. They were all of five hundred yards distant; they were lean and worn of appearance—but they were, nevertheless, eight live horses.

"Well, where in the name of commonsense—" Phelps began.

"Hey! Wait a minute!" Mr. Savage interrupted. "Don't you know what they are?"

"Demon horses?" Moore hazarded.

"Demon rats! They're ranch horses—half wild horses—Western horses!"

"Eh?"

"Yes!" Savage persisted excitedly and amazedly. "If you've never been in the ranching country of the Far West, I'll gamble my last dollar that you never laid eyes on horses like those!"

"As a matter of fact, I don't think I ever did!" Moore admitted.

"Well, whatever they are, they're going to get us out of this comfortably!" said Mr. Brayton, apparently conscious of having, in a measure, redeemed himself. "I'll drive them over here and we'll find rope and tie them up, and we'll make blanket saddles and rig up some sort of bridles, and then we'll all go galloping away!"

Savage's chuckle was significant to the point of uncanniness.

"Yes. You go over and drive 'em here!" he suggested softly. "Just take one of 'em by the mane and lead him and the rest'll come along. I'll go with you. Those fellows are branded, and—"

Brayton had started off. Savage, limping slightly, hobbled swiftly after him—and the rest of them watched in silence.

And really there was little enough to watch. They saw the pair cover half the distance. They saw eight scrawny horses look up suddenly. They saw Savage clutch Brayton and halt him, and then, stooping a little, look sharply at the animals.

At that point, the said animals having apparently come to a unanimous decision, sent the dust flying suddenly and galloped headlong toward the southern ridge. Up it they went in a compact, flying little body—and with a flutter of hoofs and a last swirling cloud, they were over it and gone!

If Brayton looked keenly disappointed, Savage seemed too much occupied with other emotions to feel that particular one. The acid man's eyes were big and round and,

perhaps, a little scared; his lips were working silently as he covered the warm stretch at Brayton's side—and he hurried along the platform to exclaim hoarsely:

"Well, this *is* Bloody Hollow."

"As previously remarked!" Moore smiled. "Only it isn't!"

"All right! We'll suppose it isn't! We'll suppose that we're still in New York State or the southern part of Canada, or anywhere else that we'd get to in the course of one night on the rails! *What in thunder are horses doing here with a Y-bar-OL brand on 'em? Hey?"*

He stared at them with round-eyed defiance.

"Why, I—I seem to remember that brand, too!" Pye commented.

"It belongs to one of the best known ranches in Wyoming! It belongs to a ranch that never shipped a horse out of the State! You may believe that or not. Heaven knows, what you believe can't—can't alter conditions now—but it's cold fact! We're in bad Indian country!"

"But, man dear," Moore smiled, "this is nineteen-eleven!"

"Nineteen - eleven or eighteen - seventy-five, if we ever leave this place alive and you're able to investigate the matter, I'll give you a million dollars if you'll find me a native that's willing to ride through Bloody Hollow alone!" Mr. Savage stated.

"But—"

Moore, staring and grinning at the westward ridge, stopped short. The grin, too, vanished suddenly, and they looked at him curiously. Mr. James Moore was actually turning white.

And then, with a quick motion, he brushed a hand across his eyes and laughed rather shakily, as Phelps cried:

"What's the matter?"

"Why—why, nothing's the matter," Moore stammered. "I—I thought I saw an Indian stick his head over that ridge and duck down again. That's all!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE REAL BAD LANDS.

THEY stared at Moore with expressions which it would have been difficult, indeed, to analyze. Mr. Savage shot to his feet with a hoarse little cry of something very like pure fright.

And then Moore was laughing—and in a fashion that failed to sound his usual note of merriment.

"It was only imagination," he said. "Don't all look as if we were going to be scalped."

"But you did see something, Jimmy!" Miss Kinsley stated positively. "I never saw you turn pale before in all your life!"

"Oh, I do it—lots of times," Moore protested. "If you ever saw me greet my tailor when he turns up with his bill—"

"Jimmy, if you did see anything, don't try to turn it into a joke!" the girl persisted.

Moore ceased to smile, and ceased without any effort at all.

"It was a curious delusion," he said. "Undoubtedly it came from Savage's Wild West talk. But for an instant I could have sworn that a real Indian appeared over there—"

"All right," Savage put in briskly. "Was he bareheaded? Did he have any feathers or anything of that sort?"

"Feathers? He had a whole barnyard of feathers! A big pile—as big as that!"

"War-bonnet!" Mr. Savage commented shakily. "I was afraid of that!"

"Did he—did he look this way?" Mrs. Phelps quavered.

"Well, whether he did or not, remember that *I'm* here!" her husband said bravely, from the depths of his scepticism.

There was a curious, bewildered little smile on Moore's lips.

"No, he didn't!" he said. "He seemed to be looking at that dust-cloud behind the horses. He just shaded his hand and looked over in that direction, and—"

"It's plain! It's all perfectly, terribly plain!" Savage interrupted once more.

"Plain? It's nonsense! I didn't see it!" Moore protested angrily.

"Have it your own way! They've sacked the ranch-house and murdered the whole crowd—there's no doubt about that—" He broke off abruptly. "If you let off one more of those ear-piercing shrieks, you'll tell them our exact location very nicely, Mrs. Byrd! They've stampeded the stock, and those horses are probably a little fragment of the main bunch! They—"

"That's enough! *Stop!*" Moore cried wildly. "Good Lord, Savage! Look at the women! Look at Brayton! Do you want to kill them off with fright just because I was fool enough to tell about something I didn't see at all?"

"And the thing to determine now is: Can we barricade the place strongly enough before they get here?" Savage wound up bluntly. "They can always burn us out if they discover us, of course, but news may have gone to the garrison and some of the troops from the post may be after them—"

He stopped, for Moore was walking down upon him with white, clenched fists.

"That will be just about enough of your three-act play, Savage!" he said. "You ring down the curtain now, before any one faints, and don't ring it up again! Understand? I was ass enough to mention the illusion; now I'll climb up that ridge and look over it and make dead sure that I saw nothing at all. And until I get back, you talk about pink teas and the new heels for dancing slippers and things like that!"

He turned to the others.

"I'm going to settle the silly question to your satisfaction and my own!" he said. "It's absurd, but—well, what—" he ended with a gasp of amazement.

For Phelps and his wife and Miss Kinsley, all together, were pointing toward the southern ridge. And now, together still, they chorused:

"Why, he's gone!"

"What? The Indian?" Moore cried.

"That wasn't an Indian!" Phelps said agitatedly. "That—why, it looked like a Westerner! He was on horseback, and he had a big slouch hat!"

"And he had a rifle across his saddle!" the bride cried.

"And he just rode to the top of that ridge, right over there!" Edith added. "When I caught sight of him he looked like a statue against the sky-line, and then he pulled his horse about and galloped right out of sight again!"

The choleric red had left Savage's face.

"You—really all saw that?" he choked.

"Yes! It was as plain—" Phelps began.

"Get indoors!" Savage commanded. "That settles it!"

"Settles what?" Moore asked. "The confounded place is full of mirages, or else the natives have turned up at last. That's probably it! The sight of this wreck probably scared—"

"All right, young man," Savage snapped. "You're welcome to your own views, and you may air them as much as you please—in there! You're not going to stand outside here and put everybody else in danger, though!"

"But—"

"It is perfectly clear," Savage hurried on, with unwonted lack of rasping in his voice. "We are actually here in Bloody Hollow, however we came here. There's an Indian uprising! And the man who appeared on that ridge just then was a settler who knew nothing about it up to the moment. He either saw Indians or saw traces of them, and he demonstrated his extreme good sense by getting out of sight as fast as he could. We will do likewise, and do it immediately! Indoors, please!"

Mr. Moore swallowed hard.

"Indoors be hanged!" he cried. "I'm sane, if nobody else is! We're not in Wyoming, and we're not in danger of being attacked by Indians or any one else! I'm going over to that west ridge and see what's beyond it, and—"

He stood alone. Under Savage's persuasive hand they had huddled into the little office building, and Edith was saying:

"Jimmy! I think you had better stay here and—"

"Well, I'm going," Moore said stubbornly and angrily, as he strode up the platform.

Head up, walking rapidly and rather painfully, he struck off across the cup-like bit of country—and they watched him breathlessly.

Minute after minute went by. The figure grew smaller and smaller as it climbed the ridge. Now and then he stumbled and caught himself on a bush or a bit of brush; now and then he paused to dash perspiration from his eyes.

Until at last Moore had all but topped the rise. He hesitated. He ended by dropping flat and wriggling up the last few feet. They saw his head go cautiously above it and his neck crane.

And then, straining their eyes, they saw Mr. Moore duck backward quickly! So violently, indeed, did he move, that he slid downward some ten or twelve feet in a queer, crouching position. He dug his feet into the ground, then, and turned toward the factory site. Bending low, he began to run, helter-skelter, pausing neither for bush nor for stones, leaping some rough spots and tripping over others!

Whatever Moore had viewed from the elevation, plainly he had seen *something!*

On the bottom of the hollow his pace slackened. Moore was traveling with obvious difficulty, mouth shut tight and breath coming hard.

He made the platform at last. He tottered along it. And as Savage opened the door, he all but tumbled into the office!

"It's—it's actual fact!" he gasped.

"Real Indians?" Phelps wheezed, amazedly.

"Yes!" Moore dropped into a chair, and for a minute his heaving chest refused to release further words. Then—"Real—Indians!"

"How many?" Savage asked, quickly.

"About—twenty! I didn't wait to count!"

"About as many as there were bears?" Miss Kinsley asked, with a little smile.

Moore's face, though, belied any intent to jest.

"There's no joke about this!" he breathed heavily. "There may be one or two less than twenty—there may be two dozen!"

"Mounted?" Savage inquired.

"They've all got horses—yes. They were just standing around when I looked at them. This hollow must be a natural clay bed, or something of that sort—it's all woods over there. There's a sort of natural clearing for a quarter of a mile or so, and then thick pine. They were—in the clearing!"

"How were they dressed?"

"They—" Moore stopped. "Well, they weren't dressed!" he confessed. "Not so that you noticed much, anyway!"

Savage's voice was no more than a croak:

"Were they painted?"

Moore licked his lips and shook his head dazedly.

"All colors of the rainbow!" he stated. "They had feathers enough to bust the whole millinery market for the next ten years! They had guns and there were some blankets rolled up on the horses, and some more baggage, or something, I think, and—"

Phelps, shaking violently, had laid hands upon a heavy desk.

"These windows are all smashed, and there are no shutters," he quavered. "If I roll these desks up to the windows, will they do for the start of a barricade, Savage? I don't know much about these things! God knows, I wish I'd never had to find out anything at all about them! If the worst comes to the worst—"

"Enough! I understand!" Savage put in roughly. "I've always carried an automatic pistol since that fellow threw the bomb at me. It's in my pocket now, Phelps, have no fear! We will not be taken alive! . . . Catch Mrs. Byrd, Pye," he added, more gently, as an afterthought. "I think she fainted just then!"

"The poor thing! It's just—just as well!" Mrs. Phelps said, in a tiny, pale voice, pointing one white, trembling hand toward the window. "Don't move that desk, Bertie! Don't speak—any one! Just *—look!*"

Frozen, crouching, hardly daring to breathe, they obeyed—all save Mrs. Byrd, who, having failed to faint, was upon a stool in the corner, her face in her hands.

The finger had pointed to the westward ridge. Seven pairs of eyes fastened upon that ridge — and seven hearts seemed to stop beating!

For over the crest a figure was rising swiftly—a grim figure which had no place at all in the same era with hobo parties and aeroplanes. Topped by an enormous war-bonnet, striding a lean pony, it was nearly naked and plentifully painted. Before it a short rifle lay across the horse's back.

It was an Indian in full war-paint!

He came quickly into plainer view. He headed down the decline, and a second figure appeared behind him. And then a third and a fourth—and they were filing down into the hollow now, a string of them, and more and more and ever more were trotting over the ridge!

A dozen were in plain sight and headed for the breathless office!

Fifteen had appeared—and eighteen—and twenty—and—

And no more, I think!" Moore choked.

"Twenty-two!" Savage breathed.

"They're Sioux!" Mr. Savage pursued. And then he turned and whispered to the gathering in general:

"You may as well say your prayers, if you want to! They're Sioux, and they're on the war-path! There's only one end to this thing now, and there's no hope!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ONE BRAVE MAN.

GRIM and sinister and merciless, the file came in, their horses moving slowly, their rifles black and glitterless in the sunlight!

Gulp and blink as he might, Moore opened his eyes each time to find that they were still there and still coming! They existed! They were fact! If traveling from New York to Wyoming in the course of a night was remarkable, here was something rather more staggering! By all the accounts that he had ever heard, Indian warfare, bloodthirsty Indian bands, belonged to the long dead past. They had gone farther than from New York to Wyoming on that fatal car; they had gone an entire generation into the past!

"They're stopping!" Edith whispered.

Moore stared afresh. They were, indeed, coming to a halt, and they were far less than a quarter mile distant.

That huge fellow with the towering bonnet, who rode in front and who seemed to be the leader of the band, was staring toward the factory. The rest of them, as they drew up beside him, stared also.

Then, close together once more, they ceased to stare. They seemed to be talking; and Savage suggested happily:

"Council of war!"

"Eh?" Moore said.

"They've seen your tracks. They've spotted us. They know we're here. Now they're deciding just how to finish us!"

There was a stirring behind him — a noisy, injudicious stirring that sent a cold chill down more than one spine! Mr. Pye had straightened up, and upon his face was the oddest expression of grim determination that any of them had ever seen on mortal countenance!

"Savage!" he said crisply.

"What?"

"Do you believe that?"

"Their council of war?"

"Yes."

"Is there any doubt about it?" the sour man whispered, with a significant wave of his hand.

Mr. Pye cleared his throat.

"You know more about Indians than I do, Savage," he said. "You've lived out there—"

"Out here, you mean!" Savage corrected, dryly.

"I mean nothing of the sort! I decline to believe that we're 'here,' as you call it! I don't pretend to explain this crazy business at all. But what I do propose to do, personally, is to save the ladies!"

"Hey?" They turned and gaped at him, and Mr. Pye squared his rather narrow shoulders and started at once for the door!

"I'm going out there and talk to them and divert attention from the rest of you!" He moistened his lips and smiled faintly at the chorus of horrified gasps. "I am positive that things are not as bad as you fancy," he explained. "I don't understand it at all, but this is the twentieth century, and there are no more Indian massacres or anything of that sort. I am simply going to find out who they are and what they want—and very likely where we are. If"—his voice thickened somewhat—"if it should prove that they are actually real savages on the war-path, I shall—feign insanity at once!"

"Eh?"

"Indians never hurt a demented person."

"Go right out, Pye!" Savage said. "You're perfectly safe!"

"But what's the idea of risking your life—" Moore began, with a troubled smile.

"I don't think that I'm risking my life at all," Pye said firmly. "And the idea is this: I'm almost positive that they're civilized, in spite of appearances, and that they can tell us where we are. If it appears that they are otherwise, I shall tell them some wild tale about having been stranded here—prospector, or something like that—my horse dying—"

"*In those clothes?*" Moore gulped suddenly.

"Or some similar story, about a fabulous gold-mine, or something like that, you know, and lead them away from here. That is the whole idea, and I believe that it is practical."

"But they may kill you!" Mrs. Byrd wailed.

"True, madam. Better one life than eight!" Mr. Pye said sternly.

"Well, don't you do it, Pye!" Moore said. "We—"

Mr. Pye's voice broke suddenly.

"If I stand here and talk about it much longer, I *won't* do it!" escaped him. "Good-by."

He pitched at the door and jerked it open. Outside, he stood in the sunshine for a minute and smiled vaguely. Then Mr. Pye gave vent to a sound that might have been the pleased shout of a lunatic, or might have been the remark of a cat whose tail had been shut into the door.

It attracted the attention of the band, however. Twenty-odd faces turned toward

the freight-platform—and Mr. Pye, at a trot, started in the direction of the faces.

Unquestionably it was a daring thing to do. They discussed it not at all in the unearthly quiet of the warm little office. Unconsciously huddling together, they kept out of the betraying light from the windows and watched and watched.

Pye, whatever his real emotions, was covering the ground with apparent enthusiastic pleasure. Hard going and thin shoes considered, his step was brisk and light; plainly he was anticipating a pleasant interview—and the Indian band seemed similarly expectant. They had spread out a little now, and they were grinning fiendishly in Pye's direction, and—

"See that!" Savage breathed. "They're getting ready to head him off if he tries to make a break at the last moment."

"Will they — harm him?" Mrs. Byrd asked faintly.

Slowly Mr. Savage turned and looked at her. He looked for, perhaps, three seconds. Then he turned slowly to the window once more — and Mrs. Byrd was weeping violently.

"If—if you were a man, you'd take your —your pistol and rescue him from his own folly," she sobbed.

"I am not a man; I am the president of a trust!" Mr. Savage said absently.

"Wow!" escaped Moore, in a pained little cry.

"Oh, they've got him! They've got him!" Miss Kinsley gasped.

"Well, did you expect to see them run away from him?" Savage inquired gloomily, as he squinted. "They—ah, yes! That's the last of the Pye!"

For assuredly they had "got him."

With a forward surge the band had surrounded the prospective martyr. Now they were about him in a circle, a strange ring of naked, painted red men and lean, fretting ponies, through which Mr. Pye was only indistinctly visible. his hands waving suddenly and his face contorted.

And then they yelled. A chorus of wild whoops went up—long, blood-curdling cries that froze the very marrow in the bones of the watchers. Horses danced — rifles were flourished aloft — the big fellow who had ridden in advance of the troupe threw back his head and opened his lungs, and the very air vibrated with the awful screams that left his throat.

The ladies had crept into a far corner. Fascinated, chilled through and through, the four men stared on.

The savages were sliding from their horses now, and the purpose was not quite plain. It became plainer in half a minute. With the animals wandering hither and thither, a chorus of horrid laughter went up — and they were dancing frantically about Mr. Pye.

"Know what it is, don't you?" Savage breathed.

"No!" Moore choked.

"Ghost dance!"

"Don't they do that when—"

"*S-s-s-h!*" said the sour man. "Think of the ladies! Yes, Moore, they do!"

"Can it — can it really be an Indian war?" Phelps gasped.

Mr. Savage regarded him briefly with a grim, resigned smile.

"Is there anything about that ceremony that suggests the launching of a battleship?" he asked.

"Well, it didn't take long!" Moore remarked curiously.

They gazed the harder. The dance seemed to be over. The Indians were leaping back to their horses again, and some four or five of them, afoot, were about Mr. Pye, who seemed to have been stricken dumb. The leader stood a little bit apart and spoke loudly, waving his arms, and in the office they could just catch the sound of his brazen voice.

Then, with a wild whoop, Pye was seized bodily. Bodily he was lifted into the air and set astride the chief's horse. That grim survival of early frontier days followed swiftly, and one arm went about the unfortunate victim, while the other waved frantically with the rifle. There came one last torrent of aboriginal cheering—and they were galloping in the train of the riderless horses, toward the southern ridge.

Pounding fearfully up and down, Pye and his captor led the cavalcade; and be it said that he neither looked back nor cast even one glance toward the wrecked factory. Once, in fact, he seemed to be waving a hand in mute farewell to them all—and then the chief's horse had plunged over the ridge.

The rest were galloping after. The chief and Mr. Pye disappeared. Five more of them disappeared. And then ten and fifteen —and the last flanks vanished over the crest in a cloud of dust, and the hollow was deserted once more.

"Well—by—the—Lord!" Savage gasped. "It's over!"

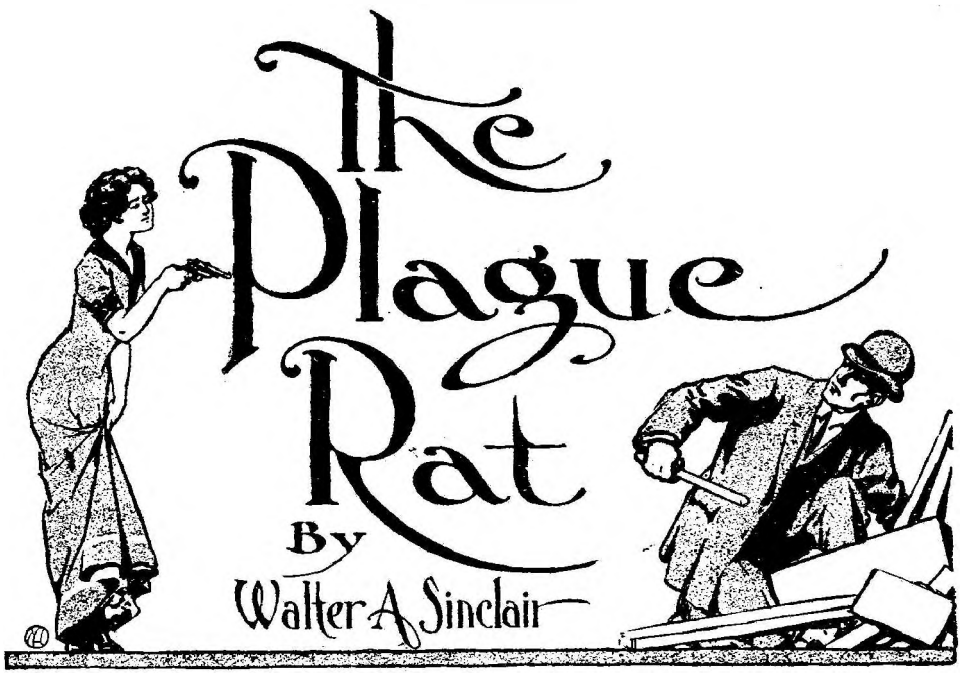
A scream came from the corner.

"They haven't—er—killed him," Moore said in an awed voice. "They've captured him and taken him away with them!"

"And what will they do to him?" Mrs. Byrd asked.

"Madam," said Mr. Savage, in a very deep voice, "let us try to forget that poor Pye came here with us. Believe me, it is better so."

(To be continued.)



DR. CLYDE was directly in the man's way, and the two crashed together and staggered in a wild conglomeration of grasping hands and tottering legs. Even in the darkness the scientist recognized the watchman of the specimen-room.

"There he goes!" shouted the man, releasing his hold and falling back. "Did you see him, doctor? The rat!"

"The rat?"

"Professor Ladoux's latest," gasped the man.

"How? Which way? Quick as you can say it!" exploded Clyde.

"Due west. Minute ago. Just going into the room when he ran past me. Ugh! It was close," chattered the watchman.

"Your gun! Here!" The doctor's tones were commanding. He wrested the weapon from the man's fear-palsied grasp, and sprang around.

"There he goes, through that lighted space," the watchman yelled.

The scientist jumped forward. He, too, had seen a small dark shadow suddenly scurrying across a circle of light cast from a street arc. As he flung back over his shoulder, "Look out for the others," he caught a warning cry of, "Be careful! Bubonic—"

But Dr. Clyde needed no diagram to explain what "Professor Ladoux's latest" was. He knew that a rat, infected with the bubonic plague for observation purposes, had in some manner escaped from the institute, and was now dashing like a pestilence into the unsuspecting city.

Once it eluded him there was no estimating the havoc it might bring in its wake. Fully aware of what its bite or scratch meant to him, if they came to close quarters, he strained himself to a furious burst of speed, for it was his institute, the one he was proud to serve, from which this fearful menace had escaped. The scientist's mind only saw a city stricken by the plague and knew that he must act alone and swiftly to stay the terror and to prevent the news from ever leaking out.

Once more he saw the tiny shadow flicker across an arc-light area, and yet once again. He was gaining on it. It was beginning to take shape. He prayed for a deserted street, for a palsying of the city's traffic at that point, so that he might hunt undisturbed.

The way ahead lay clear, it was nine o'clock at night, and the street was silent, but at any moment the city's traffic might debouch upon his trail and end the chase, muddle the scent, or launch the pestilence.

But next to the actual spreading of the plague he dreaded the avalanche of denunciation which would descend upon the institute—if nothing worse. There was no time to stop and figure out how such a dangerous specimen could have escaped. He only could plunge on with the one thought, that he must overtake the rat and kill it. He counted on the ravages of the experiment to tire the animal enough so that he could catch up to it.

A stray and friendly dog suddenly ran at him, barking cheerfully and romping around in his path. The foolish canine lumbered joyously in his way, and as the physician, with an exclamation of dismay, swerved to one side, the dog flopped in front of him.

In a moment the scientist had tripped over him and had fallen to the pavement. The dog, with many wagged apologies, tried to lick his face, but, brushing him aside, the doctor waved him away and ran on. The dog followed him for half a block, and then, realizing his company was not wanted, slunk away.

Muttering at his fate, Dr. Clyde hurried on, his college days reasserting themselves in the speed he put forth. Again he caught sight of his quarry. Two blocks had been safely passed without other interruption than that of the dog.

The rat was moving in short rushes, pausing to observe a course. It had come to a small park upon which fronted several pretentious residences, an old section of the well-to-do, which had withstood the advancing wave of cheap apartments.

In the light of the street-lamps the scientist saw the rodent waver across the street and then dart between the iron palings surrounding a brown-stone house which had been one of the city's old-time fine mansions. Dr. Clyde arrived at the fence to find that the rat had disappeared.

One glance convinced the young medical man that the animal had vanished through the slightly opened basement window. For a few minutes Clyde stood frozen to the spot, hoping that the pestilent rodent would reappear, but no such luck was to be his.

"Nothing to do but walk right in," he muttered, looking the place over. The house was a three-story and basement dwelling, on the corner.

An iron gate faced on the side street. Clyde tried this gate without enthusiasm, and found it locked. Outside the gate stood a metallic garbage-can, set there for the collectors. He looked up at the house, and saw no light in any of the windows.

Dr. Clyde was young, and somewhere in his system was a wide streak of adventure. He had not hesitated a moment in pursuing the rat which carried a deadly bite, and now as he stood watching the outside of the house in which were, he knew not how many unsuspecting persons, he remembered in a flash how he had climbed into his home when as a youth he would return from midnight excursions.

He was desperate. The situation could not be much worse than it was, and he realized that if the dread pestilence, the bubonic, broke out in the city as a result of this rat escaping, he would be among the first to volunteer his services in work which more than likely would end his life.

Before he had given the matter much thought, he had stepped up on the garbage-can and was reaching for the top of the iron pickets. A burglar might have hesitated, but the scientist had a clear conscience.

With a cool head, albeit some misgivings, he worked up along the gate-post and reached the top. The process of throwing one leg across the pickets was not so easy, but he managed to do so. He caught the toe of that shoe in a cross-bar of the gate-post, and thus supported, cautiously drew the other foot over.

The skirt of his coat caught on a picket as he let go to drop, and for a second he hung there. Then the fabric tore away, and he fell into the inclosure, bruising his hands as he sprawled on all-fours.

Without waiting to ascertain the extent of his damages or if he was noticed, Clyde hurried softly to the propped-up basement window. Kneeling in the narrow areaway, he pushed the window open until he could lean into the space, and then struck a match to light the way before him.

The floor was four feet below him. A laundry-table was immediately under the window. There was no rat in sight.

Clyde carefully reversed himself and put forth an exploring foot. Presently it reached the table, and followed it with the other foot. In a moment he had let himself into the basement. Before jumping to the floor he removed the stick of wood propping open the window. Holding it as a club he stepped to the floor.

By striking another match he was able to find an electric light, which he turned on. Carrying the club he softly tiptoed around the basement, until he was certain there was no other window or door open through which the rat could have escaped. He held to the club as his weapon rather than the revolver, which he had slipped into his pocket. He had no intention of arousing the house with a shot if he could knock over his quarry with a stick of wood.

He again made a reconnaissance of the basement. There was a pile of wooden boxes near the furnace. They seemed to furnish the only hiding-place a rat would seek. Possibly there had been food in some of them which would attract the animal.

Cautiously he knelt down by the pile of boxes and began carefully prodding in the interstices. Constantly on the alert for any sight of the rat darting from the cover of the wood, he was quite absorbed in his task.

Suddenly he received a cold shock, as he realized that somebody was standing over him.

"Don't move—or I'll—I'll shoot!" came a firm but not very audible voice.

A groan escaped the young scientist. He had been so intent on killing his rat that he had forgotten that there were other people in the city.

He was about to turn his head when he was warned again.

"Don't you dare move, or I'll kill you," the voice said.

Clyde realized that it was a feminine voice, and that it was quite calm, although it was not particularly fear-inspiring.

He managed to look out of the corner of one eye. The light of the single electric lamp revealed a determined young woman of medium size, holding what first appeared to be the latest product of the Krupp cannon factory. Closer inspection later disclosed this to be a magazine revolver of businesslike caliber.

"Go away. There is danger," the scientist whispered.

"Not if you keep quiet," she answered.

"You don't understand," he began helplessly.

"The situation seems perfectly plain," she replied calmly.

"But it isn't at all as plain as it looks," he stammered, trying desperately to pick the right words and not reveal too much.

Through it all he remembered he was not to expose his institute to criticism if it could possibly be avoided.

"You will have trouble making the judge and police"—she drawled the words out—"believe it."

"Do I look like a burglar?" he demanded angrily.

"Yes," she answered promptly.

"Then you haven't met many," he snapped, losing patience.

"I'm a bit old-fashioned," she retorted, with equal warmth.

"I suppose you think I'm looking for the family jewels in this rubbish," he cried impatiently.

"I don't have to think anything about it," she responded coolly. "I'll leave that to your lawyer. Maybe you're a firebug."

"Maybe I am, but I'm not," he ejaculated. "I'm a physician."

"Oh, looking for splints to tie up a broken arm," she giggled.

"May I rise from this uncomfortable position without having my head blown off?" he inquired, humorously. His legs and arms were beginning to ache from the enforced immovability.

"Not at all. Remain just as you are," she cried, apprehensively. "How do I know what you'll do?"

"I won't do anything until I do what I came in here to do," he replied, trying to speak as frankly as he could.

"Very sorry, but you'll have to postpone that about ten years," she sighed, bringing the revolver up to bear on a point in the center of his neck.

"Just to prove that I am an honest man, you may take the revolver in my right hand coat-pocket," he announced.

"Do honest men carry them?" she inquired sardonically. "I am not posted on the latest medical innovations, but I suppose you doctors have to work up business."

"I'll hand it to you—" he began.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," she interrupted. "Stay as you are."

She stepped nearer, and his spine pringled as he felt the chilly snout of the revolver snuggled against his neck. With a deft movement she reached into the pocket of his coat indicated, picked out the watchman's revolver and stepped back.

"I can shoot equally well with either hand," she added, admonitorily, as she leveled both weapons at him and then let her right hand drop.

"We're wasting time when every minute is precious," he began.

"Right. I was just going to invite you up to the street door until I could call a policeman," she agreed.

"Forget all that until I attend to this matter," he remarked. "You are in imminent danger unless you are sensible and listen to me."

"You have such a persuasive way I am afraid to listen," she mocked.

"There is danger—"

"Yes, if you move," she cut in.

"It may come out any minute," he continued. "Can't I stand up?"

"All right. But remember, the first false move and I shoot," she warned, menacing him with the revolvers.

With a sigh of relief Dr. Clyde arose and stretched himself.

"Drop that club," commanded the young woman.

Clyde looked at her. She was dark and slim. Her eyes were clear and in the artificial light seemed black. They looked into his unwaveringly. Her lips were red and pressed into a straight line. Something about them seemed to indicate that under happier circumstances they would curve into bewitching Cupid's bows.

"I must keep a weapon," he protested. "There is no telling when that rat may rush out—"

"Rat?" she echoed.

"Yes," he admitted grudgingly. "A rat. Now will you retire to safety? Please go to the top of the stairs, anyway, and if I shout, you shut the door behind you. Leave it to me."

"Are you entirely in your right senses?" she demanded.

"Never more sensible in my life," he declared.

"Of course I don't know what your past life has been," she hesitated. "But—a rat?"

"It ran in through the basement window and I climbed in after it," he explained.

"Perfectly clear," she agreed. "Do you take chances of imprisonment by pursuing every rat you see into strangers' houses?"

"Certainly not," he snapped. This is a particular rat. It—" he suddenly checked himself.

"Proceed. Your story strangely interests me," she mocked.

"Won't you believe me that I am an honest man and that I came in here, taking the chances you mentioned, for the sake of doing a great good?" he cried.

There was a quality in the scientist's voice which would have promised him a great future as a family physician had he chosen to follow that line. The girl looked at him thoughtfully.

"You don't look very criminal," she admitted, adding quickly, "but one never can tell. You may have a dual personality."

"Dual fiddlesticks!" he exclaimed.

"Some say it amounts to the same thing," she replied sweetly.

"Then you won't?" he demanded, savagely.

"How can I, when appearances—"

"Many an honest dog has been hanged because of appearances," he interrupted.

"You'll only get ten years or so," she soothed.

"Very well. I must protect you. Call down somebody else to do the sentinel act until I can catch and kill that rat," he begged.

"There isn't—somebody else has gone for police," she corrected herself hastily.

An apprehensive look crept into her eyes and she took a tighter grip on the revolvers.

"There isn't any one else," he asserted loudly. "Well, you're quite sufficient for the job, and anyway, I'm not going to do anything desperate nor try to run away."

"No. I wouldn't if I were you," she remarked, meaningly.

"Well, I suppose there's no way out of it but to tell you the truth," he pronounced grimly. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Now comes the story of his life," she observed. "I do hope you have a good imagination."

"Very well, doubt," he flung out. "But if you see that rat coming, promise to shoot it and shoot quick."

"And let you escape or brain me!" she exclaimed.

"There could be worse things—especially if that rat escapes," he remarked meaningly.

"Go on. I'll hear it," she agreed.

"Promise not to tell what I'm about to reveal," he pleaded. "It isn't for myself I'm asking this—I don't care what you do with me. Well, of course I do care, but that's a secondary matter," he amended. "Do you promise?"

"I never promise anything without first knowing what it is," she answered calmly.

"Sensible, but obstinate," he thought admiringly.

"What is the wonderful rat mystery?" she persisted.

"I'm connected with the institute over here," he began. Her eyes opened in something akin to horror.

"Oh! Are you one of those awful vivisectionists who cut up live animals?" she demanded. "I've read about you. I wouldn't dare trust myself with you men. I'm no antivivisectionist, but I've read enough to have a dread of you. They say there is no telling at what you will stop. I often fear one of you will kidnap my little Fido. I guess you can stop your story right there."

"This is no time or place to discuss the merits of vivisection," he said sternly. "I will say that I am not one of 'those,' if that will ease your mind. I'm a bacteriologist, and deal with germ cultures."

His tone at the moment was commanding, and she paused.

"This rat was for the institute," he continued. "It escaped and I followed it here. It's in there somewhere," he added weakly, pointing to the pile of boxes.

"Is that all?" she asked disappointedly. "I can't see any good excuse for climbing into a house and acting like a burglar for the sake of an old rat. Of course, we don't like to have them in the house, and it was very nice of you to offer to rid us of it, but we have to expect rats in the city."

"Oh, can't you understand?" he exclaimed impatiently. "I thought you looked like a girl of quick comprehension—"

"Thank you," she cut in. "But I'm afraid I can't accept your apology. Now you march toward those stairs."

"But think—" he protested.

"I have thought until it makes my head ache," she replied. "Now go! You don't look like a bad man. You act queer and your story is wild, but you are likely to be dangerous, and I won't have you around. We are quiet, respectable people here, and hate notoriety. I'm going to give you a chance. Understand, it is not for your sake, but because we detest getting into the newspapers. You can go if you will do so at once and quietly. And if you don't vanish from this section of the city, I'll start calling for police. March!"

"Stop!" he cried helplessly.

"Go!" she spoke, stepping behind him and prodding him in the back with the revolvers. "If you don't, I'll shoot."

"You wouldn't do that!" he asserted.

"Wouldn't I? Just try me another moment," she retorted. "Go now, before I become hysterical and accidentally pull the triggers."

At this new and alarming possibility the physician started.

"But the rat?" he asked, a bit wildly.

"Fido is a splendid ratter," she replied.

"Fido will be a splendid corpse," he retorted.

"Will you march?" she demanded, poking a cold revolver muzzle against his neck.

Reluctantly he moved up the stairs and opened the door. As he did so a small fox-terrier, barking feverishly, darted past him and into the basement. Clyde found himself in a splendidly fitted-up old hallway, decorously lighted with a shaded incandescent.

"You will find the street-door open," said the girl's voice behind him. "I left it that way so that either you or I could run out in a hurry if the occasion necessitated. Now go, and keep moving as fast as you can—and never come near here if you don't want to be arrested."

"Keep that basement-stairs door shut," pleaded Clyde. "I'll come back with some men who will convince you—or your family of my reputation."

"Go!" she repeated firmly.

"It's a matter of life or death," he continued pleadingly. There was something about this splendidly self-possessed girl that appealed to his every chivalrous instinct, and he longed to be her protector. "You must hear it all and realize—"

"Not another word or I'll scream for help," she interrupted. "Now go at once, or I'll—"

Her words were suddenly interrupted by frantic yelps, a pattering of paws, and into

their presence dashed the terrier, growling excitedly.

As the hall light fell upon him, it revealed that he had something clutched in his teeth.

It was a rat!

"He's got it!" shouted Clyde frenziedly. "Keep away!"

The terrier shook its captive proudly and excitedly. There was a squeak, and the rat writhed in the dog's grip far enough to nip the canine. Fido gave a yelp and released his hold. At the same moment Clyde, forgetting he was covered by two revolvers, sprang forward, and with one swoop grasped the rodent. As he did so he felt a sharp nip, and with horror saw the rat's teeth had penetrated the fleshy part of his right hand.

He was cold all over as he clinched the rat's head, gave its body a quick backward snap and broke its neck. As calmly as he could he examined his hand, still holding the rat's body.

The tiny drop of blood showed that the rat's teeth had penetrated the skin, making a small wound, but one which in this case was sufficient.

At this juncture he came out of his first horror with a start. The terrier had started toward his mistress, who held out one hand to be caressed.

"Stop!" cried Clyde. "Don't let that dog near you. It is death!"

"Death?" she echoed, shrinking back in alarm. "What do you mean?"

Clyde seized the dog's collar and held Fido to him.

"We three," he said, holding up the rat, "represent the scourge which ravages whole continents."

He realized even then that he was a bit theatrical, but he had reached a state of mental torture where he cared little about the style he used.

"I don't understand you," she faltered.

"Please keep away and be quick. I'll take the dog with me," he said. "He was bitten, you know."

"But you can't take my Fido away," she protested. "I won't allow it. He isn't badly hurt."

"Don't you realize that I wouldn't go to all this trouble for a mere gutter-rat?" he demanded irritably.

"It did seem rather odd, but I—I thought you were a little bit demented—till Fido caught that rat," she answered. "And you acted so promptly and calmly. Tell me, what it is? You are so white!"

"Promise now not to tell," he asked.

"Yes, I'll promise," she replied. "Is there something wrong?"

"The rat escaped from the institute's specimen-cage," he announced. "It was one Professor Ladoux was experimenting with. He—he had inoculated it with the bubonic plague!"

Clyde tried to speak the words as calmly as possible, and the girl took her cue, steadying her nerves after the first little start of alarm.

"And you took this risk all for total strangers?" she asked in an awed and puzzled tone, something akin to admiration making her eyes incandescent.

"Better just one than a city's population," he answered simply.

"It is almost as if you had done it for me personally," she breathed. "You are a modern knight!"

"Nothing of the sort," he protested. "It's a risk our profession has to take."

"Can't I do something to show I appreciate the sacrifice it—may mean?" she inquired solicitously.

"Yes. Promise you will never tell of this night," he replied. "That's why I had to act like a burglar, rather than have our institute the object of denunciation, which would have ended its existence. Otherwise I would have come in the front door with a squad of police at my back. The world must never know of this affair. If I die, it will just be another fool experimenter killed by his own experiments, when the story reaches the outside world."

"But you mustn't die," she cried imploringly. "It wouldn't be right! One so unselfish and brave! Maybe if you act promptly—that rat doesn't show any terrible signs of disease."

"It was inoculated very recently, I believe," he explained. "Maybe—but there! I am waisting time here! Have you a telephone?"

"Yes," she answered. "Can I do anything?"

"Call up the institute," said he, giving the number. "I can't let go of either dog or rat. Tell the watchman Dr. Clyde is here with his hands full, and for him to bring a covered basket, and to bring along disinfectants or to notify Professor Ladoux. And now, I'll wait outside on the front step. Keep at a distance!"

He waited in suspense. With no one to speak to, the horror of it struck chill to his heart. And on top of all was the poignant regret that he was about to be struck down by the death that stalked at noontime, the unseen terror of Asia, the pestilence that wiped out races, just as he had met the right girl.

It was all wrong, a cruel fate which had sacrificed him to the experiments of another just as the world would begin to be bright for him. Looking up into the starry night, he silently voiced his protest against the injustice of it.

Suddenly there was a rush of footsteps down the hall from the direction in which the girl had gone to telephone. There was some strange premonition, some promise of news in the quick, eager sound of those footfalls.

Almost instantly she rushed into his presence. Her cheeks were glowing, her eyes shining, her lips parted in eagerness to speak the words which sped her to him.

"Oh, that watchman!" she cried, elated. "He said he telephoned Professor Ladoux as soon as you went away, and that Ladoux said the rat he inoculated died this afternoon—"

Something suddenly expanded the scientist's lungs and collapsed them in a quick sigh of relief.

"Then this—" he began, and without waiting for reply, threw the dead rat across the street into the gutter.

"It's not the one. The real plague rat was burned in the institute furnace after dying," she continued rapidly. "The professor got this one while he was out to-day, and put it in a cage, intending to experiment to-morrow—but it was just a plain, perfectly good rat. Oh, I'm so glad!"

She fairly danced with excitement, while the terrier, released from the bewildered physician's grasp, skipped about, barking happily.

"Glad?" he echoed, his voice ringing out with a sudden note of joy and yearning. "Are you glad on my account?"

"Yes, yes! Why not?" she answered, her eyes suddenly growing dim. "If it had been the other, it would have been too terrible—"

She suddenly blanched, pressed one hand over her heart, and grasping blindly at the newel-post of the staircase, slipped toward the floor—she who had been so cool and brave through the whole trying affair.

Clyde sprang forward, his hands outstretched, in time to catch her by the shoulders and break the fall. And when her eyelids fluttered apart a few moments later, his face was close to hers, and he was crying:

"Girl! Girl! I don't even know your name!"

THE CHOICE.

Morn of the orient eyes,
  The broad-browed noon—
These do I prize,
  But for the dearest boon
    Give me the eve,
    When the long shadows weave!

The eve, and one fair star—
  Love's own!—within the west;
And from afar
  A wood-bird's hymn of rest,
    Low note on note
    Slipped from a mellow throat!

Breeze-whispers drifting bland;
  Leaf-vows of tender tone;
And Love's warm hand
  Close nestling in my own—
    Herein for me
    Lieth eve's raptury!

Clinton Scollard.

In the Name of the King

By
Albert Payson Terhune

CHAPTER XXIII.

DARING DEATH.

UNRECOGNIZED, in my Indian dress and dense coating of tan, I hurried down the Broad Way toward the White Hall.

Pausing once, I inquired from a passing burgher whether the council sat during Stuyvesant's absence. He told me it did, and that it was probably in session at the moment.

(Folk in New Amsterdam breakfasted at six in those days, and went to bed, for the most part, winter and summer, at sunset. Official business was always transacted in the morning; the earlier the better.)

I had known this was Council Day, and I was relieved that that body held its routine meetings while the governor was away. It would make my task the easier.

Still unnoted (for trappers and Indians were as common sights along the Broad Way as pedlers at that period), I reached the White Hall. For an instant I loitered at the huge bulletin-board near the entrance, with its burden of placards.

At the top of the list I caught my own name in large script, and read the offer of a thousand-guelder reward for my capture alive or dead.

For well nigh a year, as the date showed, it had remained there. Of a certainty, Stuyvesant did not readily forget a delinquent.

I had an odd feeling, as might a ghost who reads the tale of his own death. Then shaking my shoulders angrily, as though to throw off some physical weight, I entered the building and ran up the broad, low stairway at whose head stood the Council Chamber door.

At the latter lounged a sentinel. He was nodding, with shut eyes. Even in my perturbation I smiled at thought of the difference his attitude would show were old Silver Leg at home.

Stepping past lightly, without waking the soldier, I pushed open the door and walked into the room.

About the long table, as of old, were grouped the burghers. At the board's head, a silver chain of office about his lean shoulders, sat Louis Van Hoeck. He was reading from a despatch, evidently just received.

"Whereat," he read in a weary, monotonous voice, "the Swedes did surrender unto us the last of their forts, and did formally

make over to me the title to their Delaware River holdings. I trust, by the grace of Providence, to be once more in New Amsterdam on—"

"Pardon!" I broke in, "Hear *me,* gentlemen! His excellency's despatch can wait on my more important tidings. The—"

"Dirck Dewitt! By all that's holy!" roared bluff old Oloffe Van Cortlandt. "What make *you* here, man?"

"Guard, ho!" yelled Louis, jumping to his feet.

"Wait!" I ordered sharply. "My arrest can follow in due time if still you think well of jailing me. I bring news. I—"

"Guard!" bawled Louis again.

A soldier or two ran into the room. Van Hoeck pointed at me, his thin lips parted to give command.

"Hold on!" protested Van Cortlandt. "With due respect, Master Secretary, I beg to suggest that a convicted man doth not run into the jaws of death of his own volition; if there be not some monstrous strong reason driving him. Let him say his say. I'll warrant it is of import."

Louis turned angrily to the guard again, but a general murmur of assent to Van Cortlandt's plea checked him. As he paused irresolute and glowering, I took advantage of the brief interval to say:

"The Palisade Indians and their allies are massing to attack the city. To-day or to-night they make their raid. They—"

"Tut!" sneered Louis. "Another Indian scare, forsooth! Your cry of 'Wolf!' comes a year late, Mynheer Spy. It served you once. It shall not do so now. Guard—"

"It is the truth!" I vociferated. "Would any lesser thing make me come here? I have dwelt among the savages for months. My tale is true. And I am here at my life's risk to tell it."

"The Indians are our sworn friends, nowadays," scoffed Van Hoeck. "You should have coined a better story to—"

"Gentlemen!" I cried, exasperated. "Will you let this man's unbelief weigh against my solemn warning? Is the safety of your wives and little ones of so slight account that you will neglect—"

"The man's speaking truth, for all he's a dirty spy!" declared Van Cortlandt. "I know enough of human nature to see that. *Mynheers,* our chairman is howling for the guard. Let them be summoned, by all means — to defend our town. What say you?"

Again a murmur of strong assent greeted his words.

"Tell us your tale, Dewitt," Van Cortlandt went on. "And, if it be true, I, for one, shall use what scant power I have with the governor to save you. Speak out!"

In as few words as might be I repeated what I knew. Once or twice an impatient gesture from Louis sought to discredit my narrative. But I could see the others believed.

When I had finished, Van Cortlandt brought his huge hand down on the table with a bang worthy of Stuyvesant himself.

"'Tis the *truth!*" he proclaimed. "Everything proves it. The governor's absence; the redskins' patient cunning in waiting till the town is stripped of its master and its best defenders, the whole account. There is no time to waste. As for a first step—"

"As a first step," interposed Van Hoeck, "I order the guard to lock the returned spy in the city prison. He shall be hanged as quickly as I can find and countersign the death-warrant made out for him by the governor. And—now—"

"Pardon, Heer Secretary," put in Van Cortlandt. "You are not Petrus Stuyvesant, but a mere figurehead. We — the Council of New Amsterdam—have a voice in this.

"*Mynheers,*" he continued, turning to the councilors, "here is a fellow who dares death at the savages' hands and then at our own, to save our babes and women from the scalping knife. Shall we pay such service by hanging?"

"No! no!" broke from a dozen throats.

"Mynheer Van Hoeck," cried Van Cortlandt. "The Council of New Amsterdam has spoken. What is your one voice against ours? You are our acting chairman. Not our master. The man goes free!"

"You shall answer to his excellency for this!" snarled Louis, his face white, his fanglike teeth gleaming yellow under his back-curled lips.

"We stand ready to answer to his excellency at all times, Mynheer Van Hoeck," was the reply, "without reminder from you. We have growled at each other long enough. It is time to see to the defenses and to call out every man who can bear arms."

Van Hoeck had left the table and was whispering to a guard officer. The latter signaled now to the two of his men. And the three approached me.

"Officer!" snapped Van Cortlandt. "What are you about to do?"

"To arrest this man at the Heer Chairman's orders, sir," answered the officer.

"The council has just declared the man free," said Van Cortlandt sternly. "If you lay hands on him you do so in defiance of that council. And, as you well know, disobedience to a council order means a year's imprisonment as well as an hour a day in the stocks. Now, arrest him if you have a mind to the penalty."

The soldiers halted, then slunk back to their places.

"Arrest him!" shouted Van Hoeck. "I command it."

"Pardon, Heer Secretary," mumbled the officer, "but the honorable council's orders must bind us in his excellency's absence."

"Poor Louis!" I consoled Van Hoeck. "If only some one could some time be found who would obey you, what a sublime leader you would make!"

Frantic at my solemnly sighed words and at the laugh they raised, Van Hoeck rushed at me. Several men threw themselves between us. Thy forced him back to his seat.

Then began a quick session. Hurried orders were despatched and defense plans made. Soon the meeting was adjourned, each man hastening away on special duty.

As I passed down the stairs I caught up with Oloffe Van Cortlandt.

"*Mynheer,*" I said, "accept my deepest gratitude."

"The shoe is on the other foot," he grunted. "Hark ye, lad! I have saved you, for the minute. But you know as well as do I that when old Silver Leg returns, neither I nor the whole council can avail you aught. And he is not a man to forgive a spy. Take my advice: Vanish!"

"I cannot," I replied, "though I thank you none the less."

"Cannot? And why, pray? Art in love with the idea of hanging?"

"Not overly much," I said, "but there are perchance a few other things a trifle more precious than life."

"I have yet to hear of any," he grumbled. "Take my advice and—"

"One of those other things," I resumed, "is the safety of others. You said in council just now that the city is pitifully in need of every man who can be found to defend the place against the Indians. It seems that this is no time for a true man to—'vanish.'"

"You would stay and help us in our dark hour?" he cried. "Us, against whom you came a-spying? We who have offered a reward for your death?"

"I would not," I retorted, "were the choice left to *me*. But there seems to be no choice. Duty seldom leads us by the road we prefer?"

"H-m!" he growled, clearing his throat impatiently. "If there be one thing above another that I detest, 'tis a spy. But—but—hang it, Master Dewitt, I ask the honor of shaking your contemptible hand! Spy or no spy, you're a *man*, sir. And now," he blustered on, ashamed of his emotion, "let us waste no more precious time in palaver. To work!"

It was about an hour later. The whole city was buzzing like a hive of bees. Every one was at some special task.

Women were burying silver and were carrying full water-buckets to the house roofs in the event of the city's being fired.

Old men were cleaning weapons, molding bullets, sharpening swords. Such few men of fighting age as still remained in New Amsterdam were strengthening the wall palings, barricading house-fronts and manning the stockade.

All at once a lookout on the spire of St. Nicholas's church raised the cry:

"The Indians!"

"Which way?" demanded a hundred voices.

"To the north!" he answered, pointing.

Half the population rushed to the wall or to the roofs for a look at the invaders.

Out of the woods to the north marched a red horde, nearly two thousand strong. Every savage was armed. Each was in full panoply of war-paint.

Marching steadily, slowly, in compact formation, the Indians calmly approached the flimsy stockade, behind which a ridiculously small body of untrained, ill-equipped white men awaited their attack.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ATTACK.

LOUIS VAN HOECK, as his excellency's representative, stood fearlessly at one of the stone gun bastions of the wooden wall, watching the oncoming host. From every point of the wall bristled weapons.

Through its opening, steel headpieces

gleamed. The two cannon were manned, the gate shut and barricaded.

The savages noted these signs of preparation and halted. The stolid faces of their leaders showed a tinge of chagrin. The Indians had looked to catch the town unguarded, with open gates; to fill its streets with murderous braves before the first cry of warning could be raised.

In which case nothing could have saved New Amsterdam from an absolute massacre and total destruction.

Now they found themselves confronted by determined men, forewarned, ready to die in defense of their homes. The sight of the two cannon and the line of leveled muskets was not reassuring.

There was a brief conference. Then one of the chiefs walked forward with a careless, majestic tread until he stood before the gate.

"What seek ye?" called Louis Van Hoeck.

The chief's hand went up in the familiar "peace sign."

"My brother," he answered in tolerable Dutch, "we come as friends."

"As friends?" I retorted from my position near the gate, and speaking in the Lenape dialect; "wearing war-paint and carrying full equipment of weapons? Is it thus that 'friends' pay visits?"

"Silence, there!" ordered Louis, glaring down at me.

Then to the chief he added:

"If you come as friends, why are you in such numbers, and armed?"

"We hold in two days a solemn conclave," answered the chief, "with the Pequots and the Narr-a-gan-setts from the north. We meet in the plains below your village of Haarlem. It is a sacred festival. While we await the northern folks' coming, we thought to visit your great city. Will you make us welcome for the love we bear the Dutch?"

"We cannot admit you here," declared Louis. "Our governor is away and he would not permit us to receive visitors of honor in his absence. Go back."

"Our people have come far—from beyond the Palisades," answered the chief. "Their canoes lie along the river bank a mile to northward. We cannot, for shame, go back and tell our women we have been refused admittance where we came as guests. Let us camp for the night beneath your walls."

"You cannot!" insisted Van Hoeck. "Go back whence ye came. It is my last word. Must I enforce it with powder and ball?"

The chief's heavy face did not change. He stood silent a moment, then walked back to his fellows. There was another conference.

An order was muttered. The whole two thousand turned and marched obliquely northwestward toward Hudson's River.

"You see," said Van Hoeck to Van Cortlandt a little later, as he descended from the wall, "'Twas a mare's nest. The 'raid' was a mere visit of curiosity. And the wondrous 'peril,' whereof the spy prated, is over."

"I am not so sure," answered Van Cortlandt. "What say you, Dewitt?"

"Indians do not come to conclaves—nor on peace visits—in war-paint," I replied.

"Pshaw! 'Twas a ruse of Dewitt's to gain a pardon," growled Van Hoeck, "which a soft-hearted council gave him against my better judgment."

"The danger is *not* over," I insisted. "Mynheer Van Cortlandt, since the secretary is so dull, I beg you to see the city remains under arms. Look yonder!" I broke off, pointing westward.

Down the river in solid phalanx moved a fleet of war-canoes, each full of Indians.

"To the shore! To the Battery foot!" yelled Van Cortlandt. "'Tis a flank movement."

But it was not. As our soldiers ran westward down the narrow lanes that led to Hudson's River, the canoes passed by without so much as veering to landward.

Below the Battery fort they paddled, and straight to the south. Nor did they pause until they had reached Staaten Eiland. There they disembarked.

"Now, what make you of *that* move?" demanded Van Cortlandt of me.

"I do not know," said I, sore puzzled. "But I counsel you not to relax guard."

"'Tis simple," here contradicted Louis. "They need provisions. The game has all been cleared out of our woods to far north of Haarlem. On Staaten Eiland there are still plenty of deer and bears. They go for a hunt and a feast."

The burghers near-by nodded in approbation of the theory. The news spread through the town that all danger was past. And the good folk looked at each other shamefacedly at memory of their fright.

I went to the nearest tavern. There I ate, then flung myself on a bed and slept like a log. I had known no slumber for thirty hours and I was exhausted.

I had a disgusted feeling of anti-climax. On the morrow, if the Indians' supposed attack had really been averted, I would shake the dust of New Amsterdam forever from my feet and go back to Massachusetts, there to take up again my long interrupted farm life among my own father's own people.

I had once more scored a failure. This time a ludicrous one. The Indians' assault that I had so mock-heroically proclaimed, was doubtless a figment of the imagination; born in the brain of the messenger who had visited the Tappan Zee village.

For, Indians are ever wont to be egregious liars; and this one had heard of the proposed intertribal conclave and had distorted it into a New Amsterdam attack.

On the morrow I would bid Blanche farewell—and my heart throbbed heavily at the thought! I would see her safe on her way to her father, in the Pomp-i-ton country, under escort. Then I would leave forever this scene of so many dead hopes.

I did not awake. At least, not consciously. Of a sudden I found myself on my feet in the middle of the room, my hand on the hilt of my hunting knife, my ears full of a wild confused clamor.

Shouts—screams—the report of a gun—a death yell! Then from the steeple of St. Nicholas's church rang the harsh clangor of an alarm bell. And the fort bugle caught up the din.

To the door I rushed The little city was alive with commotion. Below me, toward the Bowling Green, stretched the white, dusty Broad Way.

And up the thoroughfare came tumbling, through the gloom, an awful avalanche of leaping, half-naked, shouting creatures. The Way was blocked from wall to wall with Indians!

Their weapons glittered under the starlight, their plumed head-dresses tossed fantastically against the sky. From a thousand throats came the shrill war shout.

Waiting till midnight, the savages had crossed from Staaten Eiland, had landed under the very noses of the careless Battery guards, and were swarming up through the city.

And I—*I*, whose senses should have kept me apprised of peril—had slept like a log instead of being on hand to give the alarm.

The tavern, behind me, was full of swearing men and of weeping, hysterical women. The landlord, a bald, fat dwarf, with a fringe of red whiskers, bustled to the door beside me, in his night gear, a blunderbuss in his hands, a horse pistol caught between his teeth.

"At 'em!" he bellowed right valiantly. "At 'em, everybody!"

He waddled out into the street. I caught him by the arm and jerked him back. But I was too late. From the vanguard of the advancing Indian throng an arrow sang. The landlord, with a queer little choking sound in his throat, collapsed in a heap upon the ground.

I pulled him back into the doorway, where a woman and a young girl at once threw themselves on their knees beside him, their lamentations filling the house.

Scarce had I time to snatch up his pistol and blunderbuss when the red mob was abreast of us. A young brave raised a tomahawk to hurl it at the crouching, weeping women at my side. I discharged the blunderbuss full in his face.

Then, slipping the awkward weapon under my left arm, as he fell, I had barely scope to cock and fire the horse-pistol at a savage who was hacking at me with a hatchet.

Down he went. From the yell his comrades raised, he must have been a man of note. While the main body dashed on, a dozen or more Indians rushed the doorway where I stood.

Keeping well between the two protecting posts of the threshold, I clubbed the blunderbuss and laid about me with all the strength I had.

An arrow stuck in my shoulder. A knife thrust reached my forearm. But I fought on, wielding the heavy blunderbuss with a swiftness and force that for the moment held my foes at bay.

Then came another concerted rush. Down whirled my gun-butt on the shaven scalp of an Indian. And as he crashed earthward at the impact, the stout wood of the blunderbuss stock shivered to splinters.

A huge savage took advantage of my instant of helplessness to fling himself upon me, knife in hand. I was just able to flash out my own knife, to parry his wild slash and to stab furiously at his chest.

I felt my blade drive through bone and flesh. The dying man clasped me about the arms and body in a convulsive grip that I could not shake off.

As he did so a warrior behind him leveled a blow at me with a knobbed club. I saw it coming. But the weight and the death struggle of the man who grasped me impeded my motions as I sought to fling myself to one side.

For one instant I saw the whole scene—the choked street, the houses whence the flames were already beginning to burst, the wild, inhuman faces of my foes, the giant who was aiming the club-blow at my defenseless head.

Then, as the Indian who had seized my body fell limply to the ground, and I ducked sharply to avoid the other's club, I knew instinctively that I was too late in my movement of precaution.

For, all at once, the air burst into a million varicolored lights. There was a crash that blinded and stunned me. I felt my knees double under me through no volition of my own.

Then I fell an interminable distance, felt my body thud noisily against the door lintel and—and—

That was all! Afterward I knew nothing except that, far—*very* far—away, women were screaming and that their shrieks caused my anguished head untold tortures.

Then I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT THE MERCY OF THE MERCILESS.

"YOUR EXCELLENCY," Van Cortlandt was saying. "I have had the honor to describe to you his services to our city. Had we heeded his advice more closely many a life and many a house would have been spared."

I listened dully to my advocate's pleas. For I knew well enough what judgment Petrus Stuyvesant would pass. I knew naught could ever turn him from a decision once formed. And, well nigh a year agone, he had formed the decision to execute my unworthy self.

Much time had passed since the night of the Indian raid upon New Amsterdam. The savages had looted the city, slaying and burning, and had fled back to their Palisade wilderness, burning Pavonia village as they went.

On the morning after the massacre, I had been found lying just outside the burned tavern, in the midst of a grim little ring of my slain.

It was Oloffe Van Cortlandt who (inspecting the dead and wounded as they were carried to an impromptu hospital in St. Nicholas's church) had recognized me. He had made sure there was still a flickering ember of life left within me, and had had me borne to his own house, that faced the street now bearing his name.

There for weeks I had lain 'twixt life and death; too drowsy, too stupid to heed aught that went on about me. My soul was held by very feeble bonds, just then, to my battered body. For I had no yearning to live on.

Then came a change. I opened my tired eyes one day to find Blanche Goffe leaning above my pillow. From that hour I improved. And from that hour she had never left me; nursing me tenderly as an angel of mercy.

And at the last I emerged weak and thin, but convalescent, from the Valley of the Shadow.

Stuyvesant, meanwhile, had returned from the Delaware. So busy was he in supervising the rebuilding of the half-destroyed city and in caring for those who had lost all by the raid, that I half hoped my own case might be forgotten by him.

I was strengthened in this by learning that Louis Van Hoeck had been slain during the massacre—fighting gallantly at the head of a detachment of soldiers.

I was daily growing stronger. Soon it would be safe to move me from my sick-room. Van Cortlandt and Blanche and I planned that I should be rowed by night across Hudson's River and should make my way, with Blanche, in easy stages, to the Arareek country.

On the morning before the night of the date set for my escape, the clank of spurs and scabbards sounded in the lane in front of the Van Cortlandt house. I went to my window, Blanche at my side, and looked down.

There, before the door, stood a squad of the city watch. Their officer was talking with Oloffe Van Cortlandt who, from his gestures, was apparently making vehement protest of some sort.

At last Van Cortlandt turned and re-

entered the house. A moment later he had come into my room.

"Lad," said he, his lips twitching, "I've black news for you. We delayed your departure a day too long. I—"

"I understand," I answered, touched at his emotion, "I am to be sent to prison until the gallows can be prepared."

"No," he muttered, "not quite that—yet. You are summoned to appear forthwith, before his excellency, in the council chamber. I have sent for a litter to bear you thither. And I will go with you. Whatever poor eloquence or influence I may have shall be used for you."

He tramped hurriedly out of the room, growling something about going for his hat and staff. The watch captain and one of his men stood just outside the door, to prevent any possible chance of my escape. Though—faith—I could not have run a hundred yards on those tottering legs of mine.

Blanche brought me a cloak and a hat—part of the costume of civilization with which Van Cortlandt had provided me—and then proceeded to throw her own scarlet-lined mantle over her shoulders.

"*You* are going away, too?" I asked.

"I am going with you," she replied.

"But I—"

"I am going as far on your road as they will let me, Dirck."

"That road, Blanche, leads to the gallows foot. I pray you spare yourself the suffering. You cannot aid me. I shall be but the unhappier, knowing that you are distressed on my worthless account. And I must keep a calm mind now if ever."

"Then you do not want me to go with you as far as I may?" she asked, troubled.

"Want you? *Want* you?" I echoed, almost fiercely, "I want you always and everywhere! Each moment you are not with me is drear loneliness."

"My good, *good* comrade!" she whispered softly, her big eyes raised to mine.

"Comrade!" I repeated. "No! I stand in the shadow of death, sweetheart, and I dare not lie. I am *not* your comrade. I am your *lover!*"

"No, no!" she protested, shrinking back. "You told me once—and you meant it—that you loved me not. Let me remember you as the honest, dear comrade whom I have learned to look on as a beloved brother—"

"So be it!" I sighed, my sudden elation dying and leaving me strangely weak. "So be it. Forgive me that I annoyed with love words a girl who is too wise to care for me in that same mad way. But I *do* love you, Blanche. With all the heart and soul of me!

"Ah, do not grieve," I hurried on, as her brimming eyes took on a wondrous light. "You *could* not love such a man as I. And I am thrice happy, just to have been near you so long. I—"

Oloffe Van Cortlandt bustled into the room, making much pother and haste to mask his feelings.

"Come," he called, "the litter is ready. Captain, we are at your disposal. Lean on my arm, lad. So! Now, march!"

And we set forth thus for the council chamber.

With Van Cortlandt and Blanche on either side of me, I entered upon the council's session. Stuyvesant's ruddy face grew redder as he caught sight of me.

Blanche would have had me sit down, for I was still pitiably weak. But I preferred to meet my fate standing.

So there, leaning on a corner of the table for support, I stood. And if my body was feeble, there was at least no flinching in the gaze wherewith I met Petrus Stuyvesant's wrathful glance.

And we two remained for a space, wordless, eying each other—while the councilors looked on in uncomfortable silence.

News of my arrest had preceded our coming. My case had caused the wildest interest among the people. Nearly the whole population of New Amsterdam was gathered in the square before the White Hall, to hear the tidings of the verdict.

It was Stuyvesant who first spoke.

"Well, Mynheer Spy!" he observed.

"Well, Mynheer Silver Leg," I returned, with an air of grave courtesy.

He grew purple.

"You dare call me—*me*—by an odious nickname?" he howled.

"Even as your excellency has just dared call me by a far more odious one," I assented quietly.

"Pardon, your excellency," intervened Oloffe Van Cortlandt, rising at this juncture and clearing his throat, "I crave permission to address this council and your honorable self."

Without waiting for further leave, the gallant burgher plunged into a fervid defense of my unworthy self, and a still more fervid plea that my life be spared.

He pointed out that my supposed work as spy had evidently profited England nothing; since no British attack had been made upon New Netherlands.' He cited, in glowing colors, my action in returning at life's risk to warn the city of the Indian raid.

He was pleased to say that the arming of the burghers as a result of my warning, had saved New Amsterdam from total annihilation on the night of the massacre.

He gave a right dramatic description of my fight with the savages at the tavern door; and pointed to my present weakened, emaciated state as the result of my so-called heroism.

Oh, it was a splendid plea! The burghers broke in more than once with scarce checked applause. Blanche's wan face was tinged with hope, and she covertly slipped her little hand in mine.

Even old Silver Leg forgot to scowl at me and listened; first reluctantly, then with very evident admiration.

With the words that open this chapter of my narrative, Van Cortlandt closed his speech and sat down. Instantly, five or six enthusiastic conclave were on their feet to indorse his appeal.

But Stuyvesant motioned them to their chairs again; angrily, contemptuously, as a fox-hunter might order a hound to its kennel. And—as ever when his fierce will clashed with theirs—the burghers obeyed.

"I have heard all that can be said in defense," snarled the governor. "And all the facts in the case were already before me. Dirck Dewitt, stand forward!"

I moved along the side of the table until I halted before him. He looked me full in the face again. And I met his gaze as fearlessly as before.

"Mynheer Dewitt," he began, his big voice as steady and emotionless as though he were reading from a scroll, "at your life's peril you returned to this city to warn its inhabitants. At your life's peril you fought, well-nigh to the death, that same night, in this city's quarrel."

He paused, while all wondered. Then he resumed:

"In recognition of those two services I herewith publicly thank you in the name of their High Mightinesses the States General of Holland. I thank you in my own name as Governor of the New Netherlands. I thank you from my heart in the name of the citizens whose lives and property you sought to save. And to prove a country's gratitude. I take pleasure in bestowing upon you the Order of Orange."

He took a blazing decoration from his breast as he spoke and pinned it to my coat.

The council chamber was in an uproar. The staid burghers cheered themselves hoarse. They slapped each other on the back, waved hats and wigs, crowded about me, then shaking my hand and congratulating me.

They even sent up three huzzas for the governor himself. Never before in all his eighteen-year administration had Stuyvesant come so near being popular as at that moment.

His excellency stood unmoved, and waited for the first noisy excitement to subside. Then, still facing me, he continued, as though no interruption had occurred:

"Mynheer Dirck Dewitt, you have also been proven a spy of the English king. For that crime you have been condemned to death. The sentence will be carried into effect in half an hour."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GIRL.

A GASP from the incredulous burghers: a loud babble of protest—a stifled little cry from Blanche Goffe—and his excellency rapped angrily on the table for silence.

"The city hangman has been notified," said he, "to have the gallows in readiness. A file of soldiers, led by the provost marshal, will conduct you, forthwith, from this spot to the place of execution. And may Heaven, in its divine pity, have mercy upon your soul!"

I straightened my shoulders, saluted, and turned to face the provost marshal. The latter stepped forward, received the death-warrant scroll from Stuyvesant, and laid a hand on my shoulder.

The burghers, held in check thus far by Stuyvesant's glare, broke into a fresh clamor or expostulation.

"Silence!" roared the governor.

But, though the others halted irresolute, one person in the great room knew no terror of the brutal man. Blanche Goffe darted forward and caught Stuyvesant's upraised hand.

"Your Excellency!" she panted, "you *cannot* — you *will* not — do this thing? Think what he did for you all! He—"

"Mistress Goffe," interrrupted Stuyve-

sant, "you have deserved well of us. It was you who helped to bear the warning here, and who spread the alarm through Haarlem village. You have nursed the sick and wounded right zealously during the weeks that followed the disaster. I grieve that you should range yourself with such a man as this."

"It is an *honor!*" she declared. "And I would not part with it for all the wealth of this new land. Oh, Your Excellency, I entreat you, do not cast this blot on your fame! Do not condemn to death a brave, true man! In the name of all you deem holy—"

"You demean yourself," he broke in roughly, "to speak for so vile a creature as a condemned spy. What can such a man be to *you,* that—"

"What is he to *me?*" she cried, her face transfixed, her glorious eyes ablaze. "He is the man I love!"

"Blanche!" I cried, unbelieving.

"The man I *love!*" she repeated. "The man I have loved from the hour that first I saw him! And—and until this very day I knew not he returned my love! Now that I have learned it, will you take him from me? You praised my few poor services to your city. Repay those services ten thousandfold, and save yourself from ignominy, by setting him free! Oh—"

"You are beside yourself with hysterical fear!" he answered. "It is not meet that modest maid should speak as you have just done. Nor does it profit aught against justice. Provost marshal, take your prisoner!"

Again the provost marshal stepped forth. But ere he could lay hands on me, I had sprang forward to where Blanche still knelt before Stuyvesant.

Unmindful of the other's presence, unmindful of my fate, of everything save the blindingly beautiful light that had just burst upon my waning life—I raised her gently in my arms and held her against my heart.

She lifted her drenched eyes to mine, and our lips met in a long kiss. Then I released her, my whole body a-thrill with a heavenly joy.

"You have made it all worth while, dear heart!" said I. "Death—my wretched failure—and *all.* I can die right blithely now. For the longest, fullest life could hold no more divine moment than this!"

"Dirck!" she wept, clinging to me. "*Dirck!* I—"

The roar of a cannon shook the White Hall to its very foundation. From the street outside rose a babel of excited voices, and the running of countless feet.

Out of the window I glanced instinctively. There, just beyond, to the southward, stretched the sun-kissed waters of the upper bay. And, at anchor, scarce a stone's throw from shore, a stately war-vessel rode. Behind her, with sailors busy at sails and anchors, were six other warships.

And—from their peaks, in the morning breeze, fluttered the flag of England!

"What does it mean? What does it mean?" raged Stuyvesant incoherently.

"It means, Your Excellency," I retorted, delirious in my unexpected triumph, "that seven line-of-battle ships of England's fleet lie off the Battery; ready, if need be, to blow your Dutch village to atoms. It means that my life has been *no* failure! It means," I blundered on, incoherent in my mad joy, "It means I shall—*live!*"

"Tell the fort soldiers to man the guns!" bellowed Stuyvesant to his orderly. "Ring the alarm bell to summon the whole city to arms! It is a trick! And—"

"Your Excellency," I interrupted Van Cortlandt, stopping the orderly by main force, "you are condemning New Amsterdam to useless bloodshed. What chance have we, in our weakened, unprepared state, against the connonade of seven line-of-battle ships? It is madness! Do not take your people's lives in a futile defense."

"Am I master here or not?" screamed Stuyvesant. "This colony is still under Dutch rule. And, in the name of the States General, I—"

"*No!*" I interrupted. "*In the name of the king!*"

"Provost marshal," commanded Stuyvesant, stung to fresh fury by my words, "take this spy out and hang him! If it were the last order that ever I gave, I—"

"If the order were obeyed," put in Van Cortlandt, "the English would terribly avenge his death. Let him alone, provost marshal. By the council's authority, I order it!"

"The council?" stormed his excellency. "What is the council's word against mine? I order—"

"Petrus Stuyvesant," interposed Van Cortlandt, "for years you have ridden roughshod over the rights of this colony, and of this council. And we have endured it. But the hour for endurance is past.

It is a question of our people's safety. *Mynheers,* what is your word? Shall we suffer this madman to bring ruin and slaughter on our city to gratify his stubborn pride? Shall we let the English lay our town in ashes; when by yielding, we may save all?"

"No!" came the unanimous answer.

For a moment, Petrus Stuyvesant glared about him like a baited lion. Then, as a welcoming cheer from the townsfolk at the water's edge greeted the arrival of the last English vessel, the old governor collapsed into his chair, buried his face in his great hairy hands, and groaned aloud.

The yoke of his despotism was forever broken. And he knew it. There was something almost tragic in his tense despair.

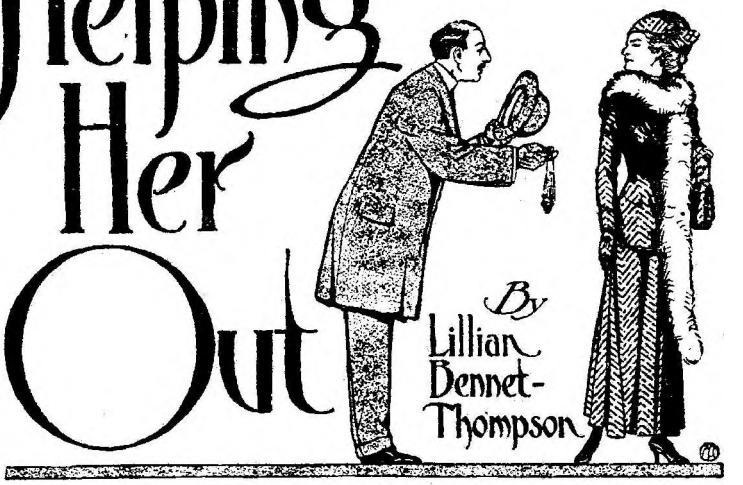
I felt a warm little hand grasp my fingers. All at once I forgot everything about me. I forgot that my golden plans had at last succeeded, that my country's future was assured—that New Amsterdam had just died, and that New York was newly born!

Yes, I forgot it *all.* I remembered naught, cared for naught, save that my wondrous dream maiden at last was mine!

All *mine!*

THE END.

Helping Her Out



By Lillian Bennet-Thompson

SHE was pretty and trim and neat, from the crown of her smart fur toque to the tips of her dainty Oxfords. Gowned all in dark blue, with black fur stole and muff, she sat directly opposite me in the cross-town car, and I found myself wishing that I knew her—that one saw more of her type in New York.

I had first noticed her on the Lackawanna ferry-boat, crossing from Hoboken to Twenty-Third Street, and I was glad when she boarded the same car with me.

She was distinctly good to look upon; and I indulged myself as much as possible, without actually staring. Two or three times she glanced up from the book she was reading, and I quickly looked away; but once our eyes met squarely, and I fancied that she flushed just the veriest trifle before her gaze fell on the printed page again.

I had been called to see a client in Newark that afternoon, and was now on my way to the house of my sister, who lived on Claremont Avenue. Nettie had been anxious that I should come up for dinner, because she was going to have a few people there whom she wanted us to meet.

It is with deep regret that I confess that my sister regarded an unmarried man as something to be eliminated from the face of the earth. She had made an excellent match herself—Judge Hunter was no mean catch—and I could not see why she could not be satisfied with her achievement and let me alone.

But she considered me little short of a disgrace to the family, because I had never

been able to find the One Girl; and had religiously constituted herself a committee of one to parade an unending procession of more or less charming specimens of femininity before my critical eyes.

I may have been hard to please, or lacking in appreciation, or deficient in taste; but, somehow, Nettie's matrimonial candidates had failed to appeal to me sufficiently to make me yearn to change my comfortable bachelor existence for the uncertain and elusive joys of wedded life.

My sister contended that I was very well able to support a wife, which was the fact; that I was getting older every day, which was self-evident; that I ought to settle down, which may or may not have been true; and that I was getting bald, which was absolutely false.

At any rate, she was continually inviting me to dinner or some entertainment, with the sole purpose of introducing me to some unattached damsel who appealed to her as a possible future Mrs. Archer.

I had a strong suspicion, based on sundry dark hints contained in the letter I had received from her the day before, that at the "quite informal" dinner, to which I was at present on my way, I should meet but yet another of Nettie's hopes for a sister-in-law.

I did not mind particularly. Most of the girls were good looking, well bred, and entertaining, which was all that a reasonable man could well demand in a dinner partner. But I was really beginning to fear for my liberty, lest it be wrested from me.

Nettie's selections were becoming more and more inviting; and if she kept on—perhaps this Miss Wells that she had casually mentioned as having been asked to make one of the party for the evening might prove my Waterloo.

And I reflected that if Miss Wells looked anything like my charming *vis-à-vis,* I should not object in the least to knowing her, anyway.

I suddenly became conscious that my gaze was fixed admiringly upon the girl in blue; and that she was not only aware of my regard, but was not entirely pleased by it. So I promptly turned my offending eyes away, only to find them going back to the attraction across the aisle like steel to a magnet.

I think the plea that "I can't make my eyes behave" might have well applied in my case.

Just as the car approached Fourth Avenue the traffic policeman blew his whistle, and no stop was made on the west side. I wanted to get a down-town Subway train from the station on the west, and, accordingly, I prepared to alight on the east side and walk back.

I rose and moved to the doorway, noticing that the girl in blue was just ahead of me. She glanced over her shoulder, saw me, frowned, and quickly turned her eyes to the front again.

I regretted that my admiration had been so open as to annoy her; but under the circumstances there was nothing I could do, except to mind my own business and go on and attend to it.

And then I saw that the pretty silver mesh-bag that swung from her wrist was open, and its contents in danger of being scattered on the car floor.

"I beg your pardon," said I, leaning forward.

She paid no attention, but a tinge of crimson stained as much of her pretty neck as I could see.

"I beg your pardon," I repeated, this time closer to her ear; "but—"

She flashed an angry, scornful glance at me; and, the passenger who barred her exit having alighted, she sprang lightly to the street and hurried away. As she did so, a square of monogrammed linen fell from the mesh-bag and fluttered to my feet.

I picked it up and got off the car, looking around for the girl. She was nowhere in sight. It would be of no use to search for her, so I hurried across the street to the Subway station.

It was my intention to take a local down to Fourteenth Street, and from there an express up to Manhattan Street, which was the nearest station to my sister's house.

I bought my ticket and passed out upon the platform, and—there stood the girl in blue! The instant she saw me, she turned her back and walked away.

I was in something of a quandary. I had no desire to receive another rebuff; but I had some of her property, which it was clearly my duty to return.

I glanced at the handkerchief which I still held. It was of fine, cobwebby linen, and bore the initial "W," embroidered in one corner.

It was not a cheap handkerchief, by any means, and the more I looked at it, the more certain I became that I ought to make

an attempt to restore it to its owner, even at the expense of being received with contumely.

I followed the girl in blue down the platform; and when she reached the end and turned to walk back, I planted myself directly in front of her, removed my hat with one hand and held out the handkerchief with the other. This time I did not beg her pardon; I was afraid to waste any words.

"I believe that this—" I began; but I got no further.

Like an offended goddess, she swept by me, her cheeks aflame, her eyes bright with anger.

"You cad!" she said; and her voice was low and tense.

"But—but this is yours!" I stammered.

Without deigning me another glance, she darted into a car of the express, which had just come into the station.

The rush-hour had not yet begun; but there was a large number of people waiting for the train, and in an instant they had surged between me and the girl in blue, effectually shutting her from my sight.

I poked the handkerchief into my pocket, and got aboard. If she didn't want it, I wasn't going to try to give it to her. I caught an express-train at Fourteenth Street, going up-town.

I was tired, having had a rather strenuous afternoon; and, as there were no empty seats in the car I entered, I walked ahead through two or three other coaches. All were packed; but at last I found a vacant place, and sank into it with a sigh of relief, before I realized that—directly across from me sat—the girl in blue!

What a look she gave me! Scorn, disgust, and loathing were blended in it; and I felt like a beast. Evidently she had hurried ahead to escape me; and I had, to all appearances, followed her!

In deference to her feelings, I was about to rise and leave the car; but the aisle was by this time packed from side to side, and I should have had to force my way through the crowd, a proceeding which I had no mind to do.

So I contented myself with resolutely staring out of the window. The bell clanged, the express started with a jerk, and I became aware that some one—a woman—was running along beside the car-window and making wild gestures to me.

It was my sister Nettie!

We were now moving so rapidly that she was left behind; and I could make nothing of her frantic waving and pointing. It seemed to me that she was trying to draw my attention to the girl in blue, who sat on the cross-seat opposite, her downcast eyes fixed on her book; but that was absurd.

I waved my hand in reply and pointed up-town, to indicate that I would see Nettie at the house; and then we swung into the darkness of the tunnel and she was out of sight.

At Forty-Second Street the cars became still more congested; and it would have been almost impossible for me to leave my seat. The girl in blue kept hers, probably for the same reason. I did the best I could to avoid looking at her; but, as we sat directly facing each other, the process was not altogether easy.

I read every advertisement in the car at least four times before the guard called out Ninety-Sixth Street, and I saw with relief that the charming stranger was preparing to get out.

Collecting her belongings, she hurried down the aisle, her head held high, her pretty shoulders thrown well back.

I sighed as I watched her retreating figure. If only circumstances had been different, if I had had the good luck to encounter her at the house of a mutual friend, how pleasant it would have been!

As things stood, she had branded me as a "masher," an insolent male flirt; and I had to sit tamely by while the most attractive woman I had ever seen walked out of the car and my life!

Probably I should never see her again; or if I did, it would be under some such conditions as these, which rendered my knowing her an impossibility.

I looked at the empty place where she had just been sitting, and then leaped to my feet. For there, on the seat before me, lay her silver mesh-bag!

I grabbed it, and reached the door in three jumps, almost bowling over a stout gentleman who was about to enter.

Thank Heaven! she was still in sight. She had stopped to speak to the ticket-chopper, and as I emerged from the car she turned back toward me.

"This is the train I ought to take, then," I heard her say.

Then she saw me, stopped, hesitated, and finally came on, her eyes resolutely set straight ahead. I took my courage in both hands and held out the mesh-bag.

"This bag, madam—" I began.

"If you *dare*, address me again I shall hand you over to the police!" she cried.

Her face was very pale, but her manner and tone were icy. I was not particularly flattered by the opinion she evidently entertained of me; but I could not help admiring the way she carried herself.

"I beg your pardon," I said, "but you don't seem to understand. I have no wish to annoy you; I only wanted to—"

"Enough! Must I appeal to the guard for protection?" She stamped her foot and darted past me into the train.

I followed. There was nothing else to do. It was a Broadway express, the train I wanted, and—I still had the bag! If she appealed to forty guards and had the whole police reserve out after me, I must give back her property.

I would, I resolved, remain on the cars until she got out again, if she went on up to the end of the line. Then I would hand back the bag as soon as I could get a decent opportunity.

I was considerably ruffled by the summary treatment I had received at her hands, and I felt that only the apology she must surely make, when she learned how deeply she had misjudged me, would salve my wounded pride.

I sat down at the extreme end of the car from her and bided my time. Of course, I might have approached her now, but I had no hankering after a scene before a couple of hundred people; and I was not sure that she would permit me to explain my business before she started a fuss.

The more I thought over the situation, the more provoked I became. Here was a young woman who went about scattering her belongings broadcast, and who treated as a thief or a pickpocket an inoffensive young man whose sole desire was to do her the service of returning them.

I was sure I did not look like the type of fellow who goes about insulting young women, and it spoke ill for her discernment that she should have picked me out for one of them. She might, at least, have listened to what I had to say before pronouncing judgment.

She rose as the train pulled into Manhattan Street, and I was relieved to think that she had selected the very station at which I myself wished to get out. As she left by one door, I went out of the other, following a dozen paces behind her.

When she reached the sidewalk, she stopped stock-still and waited for me to pass. I was tired of apologies by this time, and attempted none.

"Look here," I said abruptly, "if you'll listen to me for a moment, I will—"

"Another word, sir, and I'll appeal to that policeman!"

She pointed a shaking forefinger at a bluecoated bicycle "cop" who was slowly approaching.

"Do!" said I angrily. "Call him, by all means! Perhaps then I'll get a chance to say what I want to, if you're not afraid you're going to be kidnaped!"

She looked doubtful, but she took me at my word.

"Officer!" she cried shrilly. "Officer!"

The man on the wheel glanced up and she beckoned. He brought his bicycle to a standstill, rested one foot on the curb, and, sitting upright, pushed back his cap and looked at her.

"Well, miss, what is it?" he asked.

"This man," she said firmly, "has been following me for nearly an hour. He has spoken to me several times, and I want you to arrest him!"

She was game, at any rate!

"Is it true that you've been annoying this lady, young feller?" demanded the policeman sternly, turning to me.

"If I have, I had no intention of doing so," I replied, while the girl shot a hostile glance at me. "It is true that I spoke to her two or three times, but it was merely because I wished to be of service to her.

"We came over in the same cross-town car, and when she got off at Fourth Avenue, I noticed that her purse was open. I tried to tell her of it, but she refused to listen to me. Then she dropped her handkerchief, and I made an attempt to return it to her. She called me a 'cad'!

"Then she left her purse in the Subway train, and I tried to hand it back to her. She threatened to 'appeal to the guard,' so I awaited a more favorable opportunity. I didn't want to start anything in the car. Here is the purse. If to try to return lost goods to the owner is a prison offense, I shall be quite ready to go to jail!"

I held out the mesh-bag, expecting the girl to claim it instantly. To my surprise, she did nothing of the kind. Her lip curled as she produced from her muff—another mesh-bag, the exact duplicate of the one I had found in the train!

"He is not telling the truth!" she said clearly. "Here is my purse! This man's story is absurd! He stared at me all the way from Hoboken in the ferry-boat and across town on the car. Then he spoke to me when I was getting off, followed me over to the Subway, down-town and up-town again. I got off the train at Ninety-Sixth Street by mistake, and he got off also; as soon as he saw that I was going to get on again, he followed me!"

"I told you, madam, that you had dropped your handkerchief, and that I wished to return it to you," I interposed. "That is the only reason I spoke to you; and when you left the train, I saw your purse lying on the seat, and hurried after you with it. Here is your handkerchief; I shall be glad to return it to you immediately."

I put my hand into my overcoat pocket, but the handkerchief was not there! Vainly I searched through all my other pockets, inside and out.

I strove to remember what I had done with that unlucky piece of linen. I had certainly had it in the Subway train, but after I had found the purse, I could not recall what I had done with it.

As I dived into one pocket after another in my fruitless search, I could see the expression of scorn deepening on the face of the girl in blue. I must have looked sheepish. I certainly felt so.

"I've lost it!" I blurted out finally, when it became perfectly evident to me that the missing handkerchief was certainly not in my possession.

"What did I tell you, officer?" The girl's voice was clear and cutting. In spite of my entire innocence and good intentions, I winced.

"I don't believe he ever had it," she continued heatedly. "And I don't know nor care where he got that purse, but it is certainly not mine. Must I submit to further annoyance, or will you be good enough to rid me of this person?"

"One moment," said I, before the policeman could speak. "I am sorry you have felt annoyed, but it is not my fault. I *did* pick up your handkerchief, and if I have lost it, as I appear to have done, it must have been when I rushed out of the train to hand you this purse, which I believed to be yours.

"I picked it up from the seat in the Subway train which you had been occupying, and it is certainly sufficiently like the one you are carrying to make my mistake a natural one. I'll just look inside and see if there is any clue to the owner."

I pressed the catch and the purse opened. Inside lay a pearl collar, composed of several strands of milky, glistening jewels, a small change-purse, and a card.

As the rays of a street-lamp fell upon the gems, the girl in blue gave a queer little cry.

"Why, that *is* my bag, after all! I must have picked this one up by mistake. Please give it to me!"

She held out her hand, but I drew back a little, while the policeman raised his eyebrows and gave vent to a low whistle.

I felt decidedly taken aback. To think that this girl, of all the girls in the world, should attempt such a transparent trick to secure possession of a valuable necklace!

"You have your bag there, I believe," said I. "Both of them certainly cannot belong to you, and you have already claimed the one you have in your hand."

"I tell you that one is mine! That collar is mine! Do you think I don't know my own collar? I broke the clasp this afternoon and put it in there because I could not fasten it on my neck. Please give it to me!"

I took out the card from the bag and turned it over. My sister's name stared up at me! The pearls were hers!

"Of course, the bag and its contents are yours, madam," I said sarcastically, "although how they happen to be in company with my sister's card is something of a mystery to me. If you know your own collar, how does it come that you do not know your own purse?"

"The pearls are mine!" she cried. "I don't know anything about your sister's card. Give them to me! Officer, please make him! He had no right to keep them!"

To say that I was amazed at the turn affairs had taken would be putting it mildly. My little girl in blue was evidently no better than a thief! As soon as she had seen the jewels, she had declared that the bag was hers!

That was what Nettie had meant when she had tried to convey a message to me. She had left her purse on the Subway train, in the very seat which the girl in blue had afterward taken, and she had tried to signal me to get it for her. And, of course, I had not understood!

The policeman stood looking from one to the other of us, a humorous smile twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"I see it all now!" cried the girl excitedly. "This bag here is his sister's, and he has put her card into mine in order to be able to lay claim to it! Or else, he saw the pearls in my bag and took it away from me! And now he's trying to keep them. They are mine!"

"They are not!" I contradicted sharply. "This is the card of Mrs. Ellery Hunter, my sister. I think Judge Hunter's brother-in-law is somewhat above any such light-fingered performance as you describe."

"I am on my way to Mrs. Hunter's house!" declared the girl. "If you *are* her brother, sir, and have really been acting in good faith, I beg your pardon. Please give me my pearls and let me go. I am late now."

"Hold on!" said the policeman, rather amused at this sudden change of front. "I guess I'll just take you both along with me and let you tell your stories to the magistrate. He'll know what to do."

He jerked his front wheel onto the sidewalk.

The girl caught her breath with a little gasp, and her cheeks paled. She looked ready to cry.

I was good and mad by this time. I had wasted considerable time, I had made a fool of myself over a pretty face, I had been called a cad and accused of picking pockets. It looked very much as though my accuser had been responsible for whatever had been done in that line.

I shrugged my shoulders. It made very little difference to me whether I went down to court or not. Of course, I should be late for dinner with Nettie, but I had had enough of girls for one day, and the prospect of meeting Miss Wells had ceased to allure.

To think that the only girl who had ever really attracted me should turn out a would-be thief!

She looked at me and then at the policeman. Her lip quivered.

"Are—are you going to take me to jail?" she faltered.

"It's the best way to settle this, miss," returned the officer cheerfully.

And then the girl burst into tears.

It was very awkward for me. I shoved my hands into my pockets and swore under my breath.

I hate to see a woman cry; it always makes me feel like a great, hulking brute. And this girl looked so entirely helpless, forlorn, and miserable!

I was unutterably sorry for her. Of course, she had brought it all on herself, but if I had minded my own business I shouldn't have become mixed up in the affair.

The policeman was less sensitive. Probably he had seen pretty girl pickpockets cry before, and it made less impression on him than it did on me. But he looked at her commiseratingly and then scowled in my direction.

The girl fumbled for her handkerchief, failed to find it, and wept still more bitterly, whereupon I fished my own out of my pocket and pressed it into her hand. She accepted it without a word, and dabbed meekly at her eyes.

I could stand the spectacle no longer. I grabbed the policeman by the arm and drew him aside.

"See here," I began in a low voice, "can't we arrange this without going to court? If I can persuade this young lady to say no more about the pearls—"

"I tell you they are mine!" sobbed the girl. "And if Mrs. Hunter is your sister, she will tell you they are not her property. She knows me—is expecting me—"

"Nix!" said the policeman with determination. "I'm sorry, but I'll have to take you both along."

"Wait!" I cried breathlessly.

A great light was beginning to break upon me.

Had I, after all, made a stupid blunder? Had Nettie meant to call my attention to the girl in blue, and not to the lost handbag?

What about that letter "W" on the handkerchief I had lost? This girl, who said she knew Nettie and had an appointment with her—could *she* be the Miss Wells my sister had mentioned in her letter?

"Is your name Wells—er—" I began.

She nodded, still sobbing.

"Then it's all right!" I exclaimed joyfully. "You come with me, and—"

"No; you'll both come with me," interrupted the policeman impatiently.

He was singularly good-natured for a policeman, anyway, and it was a wonder he had waited as long as he had.

Several persons had stopped and were looking at our little group with interest and

curiosity. It was only owing to the rapidly gathering dusk that we had not been surrounded by a gaping crowd long before.

I was in a quandary. I knew perfectly well that if I allowed the policeman to take Miss Wells to court, Nettie would never forgive me, and I could not hope for any more lenient treatment from the hands of the girl in blue. I had made a sweet mess of the whol business.

There was certainly some explanation of the interchange of purses, but it did not occur to me at the time. I might bribe the policeman to let us go, and then I could take Miss Wells at once to Nettie's and prostrate myself before her in apology.

"Come along," said the officer briskly, laying his hand on my arm. "We can't stand here all night."

"Why, Ben, what's all this?"

It was my sister's voice, and I turned to find her standing at my elbow.

"Evening, Mrs. Hunter," said the policeman, touching his cap. "This young feller claims he's your brother. Is he?"

"Why, certainly," replied Nettie. "What's all this about, Ben? And who is this?" she added, indicating the girl in blue.

"I've had the misfortune to get into a misunderstanding with Miss Wells," said I, "and your purse got mixed up with hers on the train. Hers had your card in it, and yours was just like hers, and this policeman was going to take us to court to get it all straight."

"I should think you ought to be taken somewhere to get straight," Nettie said a trifle sharply.

Probably my explanation was not as lucid as it might have been. The policeman grinned and gave his version of the affair.

"And you say this young person claims to be my friend, Miss Wells?" cried Nettie. "She's not! I don't know her!"

That was a facer for me! Not Miss Wells! She had been playing a clever game to get away from the policeman, and I, like a fool, had been only too ready to help her. I expected to see her crumple up; but she did nothing of the sort.

"I never said I was Miss Wells!" she cried angrily. "This man asked me if my name was Weller, and I said yes. And you *do* know me, Mrs. Hunter! I had an appointment with you for half past five today! Perhaps, though, you have forgotten it."

Nettie peered closely at her.

"Why, of course!" she exclaimed. "How stupid of me to have forgotten you! But then, I only saw you once or twice, you know. You were to come about my vacuum cleaner, weren't you?"

"Yes," said Miss Weller.

"Well, we'd better go right on to the house, then," continued Nettie. "I'm not anxious to stand here, the center of a crowd."

She glanced disdainfully at the little circle about us.

The policeman had no objection to our going. In fact, I think he was extremely glad to be rid of the whole business. He knew Nettie well enough to be sure that everything would be all right, and we were therefore allowed to depart.

"Here is your purse, Miss Weller," said I humbly as Nettie started off a pace or two ahead.

The girl shook her head.

"How do you know it is mine?" she wanted to know. "Your sister hasn't identified her own yet. You had better ask her about it first. You wouldn't take my word before; there is no reason why you should now."

I think Nettie was privately disgusted with both me and Miss Weller. But she was very nice, and whether by accident or design, left me alone with the girl as soon as we reached the house, while she went out to speak to the cook.

I sat in one chair and Miss Weller sat in another. I looked at Miss Weller, and Miss Weller examined the pattern of the rug.

The silence became awkward, strained—intolerable.

"I suppose you think I'm a blundering fool?" I said finally.

"No; I was just thinking that you must believe me a senseless idiot," she returned unexpectedly, without raising her eyes. "But when I was in Hoboken this afternoon two horrid men tried to scrape acquaintance with me. I have not been in the city very long, you know, and I get nervous. When you spoke to me, I didn't stop to look at you or to think.

"And then, when you apparently followed me and were so persistent, I didn't know what to do. It never occurred to me that you might be going in the same direction, or that you had any legitimate reason for wanting to speak to me. I was just

excited and frightened, and I hope you'll forgive me."

"The forgiveness should come from you," I assured her. "I am more than sorry I frightened you; I only wanted to do you a service, and—"

Just then Nettie came back into the room.

"Now, about that mesh-bag of mine that has been causing so much trouble," she said briskly. "I left it on the train, of course, and didn't miss it until the cars had started again. Then I saw you, Ben, in the seat directly opposite the one I had been in, and thought I had succeeded in making you understand what I wanted you to do."

"Is this yours?" asked Miss Weller. "I put mine on the seat beside me, and never noticed that there was more than one."

Nettie took the mesh-bag and opened it.

"Yes, this is mine," she said. "You picked up the wrong one."

Solemnly I handed the bag containing the pearls to Miss Weller. She took it—and smiled, the first smile I had seen on her face. It was very becoming.

"The necklace is only an imitation," she exclaimed shyly, "but I value it because my father brought it to me from Rome just a little while before he died."

"And now," said Nettie, "about that cleaner, my dear. I have the contract all signed for you."

Of course, I couldn't permit Miss Weller to go home alone. As she had told me, she was almost a stranger in the city, and I could not think of allowing her to go downtown after dark, especially as I had been instrumental in keeping her out so late.

On the way she told me that she was an orphan and obliged to earn her own living. She had an excellent position as sales agent for a large vacuum cleaner company, and was doing very well. I immediately decided that I needed one of her cleaners for my office, and asked permission to call and see her about it.

I was late for dinner at Nettie's, but I did not care. I am afraid I was somewhat preoccupied, but Miss Wells was quite well able to take charge of the conversation. In fact, too able. Deliver me from women who claim to be "able talkers"!

I bought a vacuum cleaner the very next week. And the one I purchased was the last one Miss Weller sold. In fact, she resigned her position almost immediately after that.

As Nettie had said, I was perfectly well able to support a wife, and there was no need to wait. I was getting older every day, but I still maintain that I am *not* getting bald.

And my sister is very fond of the girl in blue.

THE ROSE-LINED STREET.

I know a street where roses sweet
  Hang o'er the fence on either side—
A wondrous screen of leaf and bloom,
  Behind which sunny gardens hide.

There, wreathed about with tangled vines,
  Old-fashioned houses meet the eye;
From one a girlish face looks out
  And smiles on me as I go by.

Rich purple blossoms hang their heads
  Across the old gray walls of stone;
I hear a banjo's sweet refrain,
  And hum the words in undertone.

With dainty touch and challenge gay,
  The wind slips by, a merry sprite;
A bird song mixed with tinkling bells
  Trails through the morning's sweet delight.

Each day I wander down this way,
  For heart, as well as loitering feet,
Has found the gate among the vines
  That shuts her garden from the street.

Adella Washer.

The DEADHEAD

CASTAWAYS

by Bertram Lebhar

(A NOVELETTE.)

CHAPTER I.

THE FOURTH PRIZE.

A WEEK previously I should have laughed incredulously if anybody had told me that I, a poor paperhanger, was about to take a pleasure trip around the world on a magnificently fitted steamship, with a lot of howling swells for fellow passengers.

My chum, Bill Snedeker, would have guffawed just as heartily, too, if it had been suggested to him that he was going to accompany me on such a trip as my guest.

Bill is a plumber's helper by trade. He is a great, big, raw-boned fellow with callous spots on his hands, and feet so big that when he is dressed in his Sunday best he is often taken for a plainclothes policeman. I mention these details of his personal appearance to show that he isn't the kind of fellow you would expect to find traveling first cabin with a lot of moneyed tourists.

As for my own appearance—well, I must admit that I am not likely to be mistaken for one of the idle rich. I guess anybody could size me up right off as a fellow who works with his hands for a living. Not that I'm ashamed of that, of course. I'd much rather look like an honest working man than like that weak-faced, empty-headed dude, Archibald Everett Potts-Perkins, for instance.

Archibald was one of our fellow passengers on the Hildegarde. I'm going to tell more about him later.

It was all because of my desire to win an automobile that Bill Snedeker and I became globe-girdlers. No, we didn't travel around the earth looking for the automobile. Of course not. What I mean to say is that it was owing to the fact that the *Globe-Herald*, our enterprising local daily, offered a fine four-thousand-dollar touring-car as first prize in its "Great Proverb Contest" that I was tempted to become a competitor.

There was a long list of prizes offered—

all sorts of useful and useless articles, from an automobile down to a pair of pearl-handled cuticle scissors.

I wasn't interested in any of the other prizes, though. I was out after the grand prize—that fine touring-car. I made up my mind that I was going to get it, too. I went into that contest in dead earnest and lost half my sleep every night figuring out the solutions to the puzzle-pictures which were printed, one each morning, on the editorial page of the *Globe-Herald*.

All you had to do to win was to guess what proverb each picture was supposed to represent. To make the task easier they sold you for twenty-five cents a book containing ten thousand proverbs alphabetically arranged. By going all through this list carefully one was sure to find at least one proverb that fitted each individual picture.

The trouble was, though, that most of the pictures were of such a nature that they seemed to fit about eight different proverbs equally well. I remember I spent seven hours trying to make up my mind whether to write down "All is not gold that glitters" or "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" as the correct solution for picture No. 7.

Bill Snedeker used to laugh at me when he saw me poring over that proverb-book and scratching my head in perplexity. He told me I was a fool to go to so much trouble for nothing. He said I stood about as much chance of becoming President of the United States as I did of winning a prize in that contest.

I kept right on, however, and when I had mailed my answers to the office of the paper I awaited the announcement of the winners with eager expectancy. I felt that I stood a good chance of capturing that automobile.

One morning I met Bill on the street, as I was on my way to work, and he slapped me on the back enthusiastically.

"Good old Pete!" he exclaimed. "I didn't think it was in you. A feller with a brain like yours ought to quit paperhangin' and study law or medicine or somethin' of that sort."

"What do you mean?" I gasped. I had not yet bought a morning paper.

"Why, don't you know?" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Your name is on the front page of the *Globe-Herald* this morning as winner of the Proverb Contest."

"Then the touring-car is mine!" I gasped. "Gee whiz! What luck! I'll take you for a joy-ride next Sunday afternoon, Bill. I've always been daffy to own a machine. You see, living in the suburbs and having a barn at the back of the house, it won't cost me anything to store it, and—"

"Hold on there!" he interrupted. "You ain't won the auto, Pete. That's the first prize. You've won the fourth prize."

"And what's that?" I asked, considerably disappointed. He took the paper from his pocket, unfolded it, and showed me my name in print on the front page. With an exclamation of disgust I read:

> Winner of Fourth Prize, Mr. Peter Byrnes. This prize consists of a trip around the world for two persons, on the Overseas Tourist Company's palatial new steamer Hildegarde.

"Rats!" I exclaimed savagely. "I've picked a lemon. What the deuce am I going to do with a prize like that?"

CHAPTER II.

THE WHITE ELEPHANT.

Bill Snedeker, in his kind way, did his best to cheer me up. "It isn't the prize—it's the honor of winning it," he said. "Everybody that sees your name in the paper will know that you must have brains—which nobody ever suspected, until now, Pete.

"And besides," he went on, "if you can't take that trip around the world yourself, maybe you can sell the ticket, or perhaps the *Globe-Herald* will hand you the cash instead, if you tell them you don't want to travel. I don't see as it can make any difference to them."

That last suggestion appealed to me as a good one. I hurried around to the newspaper office and sent in my name to the business manager.

He shook his head and laughed when I told him that if it was all the same to him I would rather have the money than the trip around the world.

"Sorry, my boy," he said, "but I can't do anything for you. You see those prizes, valuable as they are, didn't cost the *Globe-Herald* a cent. The firms that contributed them were glad to do so gratis because of the free advertising they get. Even the four-thousand-dollar touring-car we got for nothing. You can understand, therefore, that we'd be money out of pocket if we were to

give the lucky winners the cash equivalent instead of the prizes."

"But a trip around the world is absolutely of no use to me," I protested. "I'm a workingman and I couldn't spare the time to go on such a cruise, even if I had any desire to travel."

"That's too bad," he sympathized. "The Hildegarde is a mighty fine boat. It's a grand opportunity for anybody who can afford to take advantage of it. I'll tell you what, Mr. Byrnes. Why don't you go and see some of the other prize winners and try to persuade them to swap with you. Maybe some of them would prefer the trip around the world to what they've won. I don't suppose you're the only dissatisfied winner."

I decided to follow this suggestion. The addresses of the other winners were given on the front page of the paper. I went around to the lucky owner of the touring-car first. I didn't figure, of course, that there was much chance of his being willing to exchange his automobile for a world cruise for two on the palatial Hildegarde. Still I wasn't overlooking any bets. It was just possible, I said to myself, that he might be a fellow who hated motor-cars. There *are* such people, you know — and they're generally just the kind that like to go traveling in those personally conducted tourist-parties.

I was unlucky, however. The winner of the first prize proved to be well satisfied with his acquisition. He said he had been wanting an automobile for years. He winked his left eye when I spoke of the pleasure and educational advantages to be derived from a trip around the globe on a magnificent steamer like the Hildegarde. He said he preferred to do *his* traveling by automobile.

I tried the winner of the second prize, which consisted of a fine piano with self-playing attachment. I didn't have much use for such an instrument myself. The people with whom I boarded were not musically inclined, and no doubt they would have refused to find room for it in their little suburban home. Still, I thought, it would be better to own a self-playing piano than a steamship ticket for a tour around the world. Unfortunately the winner of the second prize thought so, too. He laughed at my offer and told me that I had an awful nerve.

It was the same way with all the others. Even those at the bottom of the list, whose prizes were of small value, scornfully turned down my offer to exchange. A lady who had won a cheap, cloth-bound edition of "Visits to Foreign Lands," in seven volumes, told me that she would rather read about other people traveling than go through it herself. She was always so terribly seasick, even when she took a ride in a ferry-boat, she explained.

There was just one person out of the whole list who was willing, in fact eager, to swap prizes with me. He was winner of prize No. 15.

For one brief moment my heart beat fast with hope and joy. But when he explained that his prize consisted of a complete correspondence course in fancy dancing which, as he had a wooden leg, was of no practical use to him, I threw down the proposition. True, I didn't have a wooden leg; but I had no more use for a correspondence course in fancy dancing than I had for a trip around the globe, so I decided that the exchange would do me no good.

After I had exhausted the list of prize-winners, I visited the offices of the Overseas Tourist Company.

"How much will you allow me on these tickets?" I inquired of the general manager.

"Not a red cent," he answered with a grin. "You see, we're a new company and not very well known as yet. We're having difficulty in getting enough bookings for that trip. We've got lots of room on the boat and are anxious to get people to swell the passenger list. That's why we contributed that prize to the contest. The tickets are worth nothing to us."

After that there seemed to be only one thing left for me to do. I put an advertisement in the newspaper offering to sell my prize cheap. I let the advertisement run for several days and it cost me fifteen dollars. It was a dead loss, because I did not succeed in attracting the attention of anybody who desired to take a trip around the world.

The worst of it was that the twenty-second of the month, the day on which the Hildegarde was scheduled to sail, was drawing very near. After that date my prize would, of course, be worthless, for the tickets were good only for that one trip.

The thought of this made me desperate. I worried so much over my inability to dispose of those tickets that I lost flesh and couldn't sleep nights. At length I became so ill that I had to consult a physician.

"Your nervous system is very much run down," he informed me. "You are very near to an attack of nervous prostration. What you need is a good long rest and a complete change of air. If possible, go away to the mountains or the seashore for a couple of months."

"That's impossible," I said. "I haven't got the price. How much do I owe you, doc?"

"Two dollars."

"Say! Instead of the two bones, how would you like a couple of tickets for a trip around the world on the new palatial steamship Hildegarde?" I inquired eagerly.

I was so desperate by this time that I'd had been glad to dispose of my prize at that low figure.

The physician shook his head.

"I'm much obliged, young man, but I'd rather have the two dollars. I couldn't afford to neglect my practise long enough to girdle the globe.

"But if you've got a chance to take a trip like that," he went on, "why on earth don't you go yourself? That would be just the thing to put you in shape again. It would be even better than a vacation at the mountains or seashore. I tell you candidly, young man, that unless you do take a rest and change of air right away, you'll be flat on your back within a week."

At first I told myself that his suggestion was entirely out of the question. I couldn't picture myself—me, plain Pete Byrnes, a poor paperhanger — going on a pleasure cruise with a bunch of swell tourists. The very thought of sitting at table with ladies and gents who could eat peas with a fork without dropping a single pea, made me feel uncomfortable.

But when I got to thinking about what the doctor had said about nervous prostration I changed my mind. Another consideration which made me decide to go was the knowledge that it was the only way of preventing my prize from being absolutely wasted. I didn't know of anybody else who would be willing to take the trip even if I made him a present of the tickets.

Therefore I notified the Overseas Tourist Company that I should be aboard the Hildegarde when she sailed, and they entered the name of Pete Byrnes, Esq—that's the way they wrote it—on the passenger list.

There was still one of the tickets to be disposed of, however. The reason the *Globe-Herald* had offered a double trip as the fourth prize in the proverb contest was that they figured the winner would want to take his wife along.

Now, I didn't have a wife, and I didn't know any girl who would be willing to become Mrs. Pete Byrnes on such short notice in order to get a honeymoon trip around the world. For that matter, I wasn't acquainted with any young woman whom I would have cared to ask.

On the other hand, I didn't like the idea of wasting half my prize. I inquired of the company whether the other party had to be a woman and they told me that it didn't matter. I was privileged to take whoever I wanted, regardless of sex.

The only person I could think of was my pal, Bill Snedeker. He shied when I first put the proposition to him, and said he'd as soon think of trying to cross the Atlantic in an airship.

After a lot of argument, though, I managed to get him interested.

"You've always said that you wanted to see the world, you know, Bill," I reminded him. "As long as you live you'll never get another opportunity like this. Think of visiting London and Paris and Denmark and all the rest of them European capitals, and then running across to China and Africa and Bombay! Think of going through the Chop Suey Canal! Think of going to Egypt and seeing the Pyrenees that was built by Pharaoh—the feller who fiddled while Rome was burning!"

At length I got him so worked up that he said he'd go. In fact, he thanked me with tears in his eyes for being kind enough to invite him.

Poor Bill! If he had only known what was going to happen on that trip! If only I had known it! Wild horses couldn't have dragged us aboard the Hildegarde in that case.

CHAPTER III.

TROUBLE AT THE OUTSET.

BILL SNEDEKER said that we'd have to buy some swell clothes.

"Since we're going to travel in style we'll have to look like the goods," he declared. "We don't want everybody on the ship sneerin' at us and givin' us the icy stare."

My finances were so low that I couldn't afford to buy more than one extra suit, a

yachting-cap and a pair of white canvas shoes. Bill, however, had a couple of hundred dollars in the savings bank, and he recklessly decided to spend every cent of it on what he considered an appropriate profit.

You ought to have seen him when he stepped aboard the Hildegarde! He sure was a dazzling sight. He had on a light green flannel outing suit, a red tie of knitted silk, a lavender shirt, a white yachting-cap, pearl gray canvas shoes, and he carried a rattan cane with a gold-plated handle.

He had half a dozen other such costumes in his trunk, too. It was his intention, he explained to me, to make a complete change of attire from head to foot every day of the week. That was Bill Snedeker's idea of being a "smart-setter"—to use his own expression.

Before the Hildegarde sailed we made a tour of inspection and decided that she certainly was a mighty fine boat as far as interior decorations and conveniences went.

She was as luxuriously fitted as a private yacht, and had all the comforts of a hotel. The captain looked like a fellow who knew his business, the crew as spick and span as the crew of a battle-ship, the stewards were as polite and anxious to please as if we had owned the ship.

"I can see that we're going to have the time of our lives," remarked Bill to me, languidly twirling his rattan walking-stick as if he had been used to carrying one all his life. "I'm mighty thankful to you for inviting me, Pete."

"You're welcome," I answered. "Have you looked the other passengers over, Bill?"

"Yes. They're a tony bunch, ain't they?"

"A darn sight too tony to suit me," I replied uneasily. "I wonder if we couldn't arrange to have our meals served private in our stateroom."

"Why should we?" he demanded indignantly. "You don't mean to say that you're scared of them folks, Pete? If so, you're awful foolish. Why, when they learn that you're the fourth prize winner in the *Globe-Herald's* great proverb contest I bet they'll make a big fuss over us. We'll be the social lions of the trip."

I had my doubts about that. They looked to me like a stiff and haughty lot. I caught some of them staring at us as if they suspected that we'd escaped from a menagerie. Their manner caused me to apprehend that we weren't going to get along very well with them.

There weren't very many persons aboard. As the manager of the Overseas Tourist Company had told me, they had experienced quite some difficulty in getting bookings. More than half the staterooms were vacant. It looked to me as if there was scarcely enough passengers to pay running expenses. I feared that under the circumstances the company would seek to economize by skimping on the meals.

I was agreeably surprised, therefore, when we sat down to our first meal aboard, to find that it was a regular banquet. There were about ten courses and the bill of fare was printed in French, just like a swell restaurant.

I got so tangled up with my knife and fork and became so rattled when I caught folks staring at me across the table that I didn't enjoy the meal very much and scarcely tasted half the things that were placed before me.

Bill Snedeker, however, made up for my poor appetite by eating enough for two of us. He wasn't at all feazed by his surroundings, nor even by the baffling French words on the bill of fare.

"Here, waiter," he shouted to the steward, pointing to the card. "You'd better bring me everything on the program from soup to nuts—that is, everything except these here horse dovers. I'll skip them. I understand that they're fond of horseflesh over in France, but nothin' like that for muh!"

He spoke so loud that everybody in the dining-saloon turned to stare at him. I saw a pretty girl at the other end of our table suddenly hold her napkin in front of her face. Some of our fellow passengers were smiling, others wore a pained expression.

Bill didn't seem to be aware that he was attracting undue attention. He turned to me and in a whisper cheerily urged me to "brace up" and follow his example of appearing perfectly at home.

"Don't look so scared, Pete," he whispered. "If you do they'll get wise in a minute that you ain't used to this sort of thing. Watch me and learn how to throw a bluff that you're in the habit of dining like this every day of your life."

He leaned across the table in an easy, nonchalant way, and reached for a dish of olives which was between him and a stout, red-faced old gentleman who wore a fierce military mustache. The olives were just beyond Bill's reach. His finger-tips touched the edge of the dish and caused the other side of it to spring up from the table. An olive shot from the dish as if it had been discharged from a gun and hit the red-faced old gentleman squarely in the eye, while several other olives lodged in his lap.

Several persons tittered. I gave a gasp of horror and choked on a spoonful of soup. The stout old gentleman's face grew redder than ever.

"Confound you, young man," he growled, as he wiped his eye with his napkin, "where the deuce are your table manners?"

Bill was quite self-possessed. It takes a whole lot to rattle him. Being a plumber by trade he's quite used to having folks swear at him. So he smiled pleasantly at the old gentleman.

"You must excuse me, boss, it was an accident, of course. If I'd have thought for a minute that I couldn't reach them olives, I'd have asked you to pass 'em. I'm sorry that one hit you in the eye. You got off easy, though, at that. You're lucky that that there dish didn't contain dill pickles instead of olives."

"You're coarse, sir — very coarse," growled the old gentleman, not at all appeased by Bill Snedeker's apology and pleasantry.

"It is astonishing that such—er—persons as that are allowed on this boat," remarked a languid-looking young man with a curly blond mustache, who sat next to the old gentleman. "I was led to believe that this party was to consist of refined and congenial people. I am sure that I should not have booked if I had known. It is most unpleasant to travel around the world in such disagreeable company."

This young man was Archibald Everett Potts-Perkins, to whom I have already alluded. He was the most haughty, peanut-headed, fussy little dude that I have ever met. Merely to look at him filled you with a desire to take him by the back of his neck and shake him until his teeth rattled.

He was speaking to a middle-aged lady who sat at his right hand, but his voice was loud enough for the words to reach us. Bill merely glanced across at him and grinned.

"Why look, Pete," he said to me in a loud tone, "there's a Willie-off-the-pickle-boat. I wonder if his mama knows he's out."

Archibald Everett glared at Bill, but thought it best to say nothing more. Later on, however, when dinner was over, I saw him in conversation with the captain, and couldn't help overhearing what he said.

"Captain," he cried pompously, "I demand that my seat be changed before the next meal. I positively refuse to sit at the same table as the two—er—extraordinary persons who were opposite to me at dinner. Their table manners are simply disgusting. The short one is bad enough—he actually tilted his soup-plate and ate the stalks of the asparagus—but the tall one is absolutely impossible."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BELLE OF THE HILDEGARDE.

I TOLD Bill what I had heard. He snorted contemptuously.

"So he thinks I'm impossible, does he? I've got a hunch, Pete, that I'm going to have a run in with that Willie-boy before we've gone very far on this trip. Where does he come in to give himself any airs, I should like to know? He didn't win a prize in a proverb contest."

A little later, as we were pacing the promenade-deck, we came across Archibald Everett Potts-Perkins conversing with the pretty girl who had put her napkin in front of her face at the dinner-table when Bill had made that remark to the steward about the *hors d'œuvres* — or "horse dovers," as he pronounced it.

She was undoubtedly the prettiest girl aboard the Hildegarde. I learned later that her name was Ruth Tillotson and that she was traveling with a maiden aunt who was worth half a million.

"The Willie-boy certainly knows enough to pick the best looker, don't he?" remarked Bill Snedeker to me in a whisper, glancing admiringly at the girl in the steamer-chair. "Ain't she a peach, Pete? We've got to make her acquaintance later on and cut out that dude. It oughtn't to be a hard job."

I was amazed at his audacity. Until then I had not suspected that my friend Bill had nerve enough even to think of framing up to a swell girl like that. I suppose a fellow gets that way after he's been in the

plumbing trade for some time. With us paperhangers it's different. We're a shy and humble lot.

And then, maybe, it was the sporty clothes Bill was wearing which made him feel so perfectly at ease in that crowd. Clothes do make a lot of difference in a fellow's personality. Put a hod-carrier in a dress-suit and he's liable to feel dashing enough to want to lead a cotillion at a high society ball.

At any rate, whatever the reason for his gall, Bill Snedeker certainly had it with him all right; for that evening I actually found him sitting, as cool and self-possessed as you please, on a steamer-chair beside Miss Tillotson, talking away as if he had known her all his life.

"Yes, ma'am," he was saying as I came along, "my friend, Pete Byrnes, is one of the smartest fellers you ever met. He won fourth prize in the *Globe-Herald's* great proverb contest. That's how smart *he* is. Here he comes now. I'll give you an introduction to him. Don't be scared; he's the most democratic fellow you ever see. He's not at all puffed up, although he's got good cause to be, for there were over thirty thousand entries in that proverb contest, and, as I've told you, Pete copped off the fourth prize."

I turned hastily and fled. My modesty made me shrink from an introduction just then. Afterward Bill took me sternly to task for this.

"You big boob!" he exclaimed indignantly. "What in the name of Mike made you run away like that? I boosted you so much to that peach that she was just dyin' to meet you. Say, Pete, she's a stunner. I'm in love with her already. I'm gettin' along famously with her, too. I betcher she and me'll be callin' each other by our first names before this ship is half-way across the Atlantic. That pie-faced dude won't stand a show."

His self-confidence would have taken a tumble, I guess, if he had overheard the conversation which took place between the girl and her rich maiden aunt concerning himself.

I couldn't help listening, for I was sitting right near them, but hidden from their view by a stanchion. After their first words I figured that if I got up and let them see me they'd be awfully embarrassed, so I stayed right where I was.

"Ruth," said the elder lady sternly, "I was very much astonished to find you in conversation with that vulgar, overdressed young man who spilled the olives at dinner. I must insist upon your keeping him at a distance. Your dear mother would never forgive me if she were to learn that I had permitted you to make such undesirable acquaintances."

"Oh, it doesn't matter, auntie," laughed the girl. "Surely one doesn't have to be so particular whom one talks to on a trip of this sort. He and his friend struck me as being such extraordinary persons that my curiosity tempted me to encourage him to speak to me.

"I never had so much fun in my life," she went on with a giggle. "I thought I'd just have to scream with laughter at some of the things he said—things that he didn't intend to be funny, I mean. For instance, I was looking at the sun sinking below the horizon, and I exclaimed enthusiastically, 'What a beautiful shade of red, isn't it?' and to my great surprise he answered: 'Yes, ma'am, I paid a dollar and a half a pair for 'em, too.' He thought I was referring to his socks.

"And when we were talking about the cruise," she continued with another giggle, "and I asked him whether he wasn't just crazy to see Venice, he answered 'No, I can't say that she appeals to me very much. I seen a statue of her once—a broken statue with the arms missing—and I think our American girls have got her beaten forty ways for looks.' Those were his exact words, auntie. I have never in my life met anybody as refreshingly ignorant as that young man."

Just then that dude Archibald Everett Potts-Perkins came up and asked her to take a stroll with him, and she and her aunt received him very graciously.

"Poor Bill!" said I to myself as I watched them walk off arm in arm.

And I didn't have the heart to repeat a word of that conversation to him.

CHAPTER V.

DISASTER.

I WANTED to make a serial out of this narrative, but the editor said he was overstocked with serials and that I'd have to tell it all in a few thousand words.

Therefore I cannot go into details as to the many interesting places we visited and

the queer things we saw in foreign lands. I'll have to skip whole continents in order to get to the most thrilling part of my story and tell you of the startling thing that happened to us when we were homeward bound.

Up to that time Bill Snedeker and I had enjoyed the cruise immensely. Although it was such a long trip we never got tired of it and were tickled to death at the wonderful places we visited. A hundred times Bill thanked me for giving him this opportunity to see the world, and a hundred times I congratulated myself upon the fact that I had not succeeded in disposing of the prize I had won in the *Globe-Herald's* proverb contest.

The complete rest and the bracing sea air soon put my shattered nervous system into better condition than it had ever been. The fine meals that were served aboard the Hildegarde caused us to put on so much flesh that we began to look like a couple of Dutch aldermen.

As for our fellow passengers — well, some of them remained stand-offish to the very end and did their best to make us feel that we were not welcome aboard. Chief among these was young Potts-Perkins, of course, and the old gentleman who had been hit in the eye with an olive. He never forgave Bill for that and used to snort at us contemptuously whenever we approached him.

The snobbish attitude of these people didn't worry us any though. We let them severely alone and found that it was possible to enjoy ourselves thoroughly without their friendship.

Quite a few of the passengers began to warm up to us, however, by the time the Hildegarde arrived at the other side of the Atlantic. I think, with all due modesty, that they came to the conclusion that we were pretty decent fellows, even if we didn't know all the etiquette book had to say about the proper use of the knife and fork.

Miss Ruth Tillotson was among those who gave us the glad hand. In spite of the warning that I had heard her wealthy old aunt give her, she continued to keep up her acquaintance with Bill, and was very sweet and gracious to me when he introduced me to her.

Bill was quite sure that he was making great headway in his siege of her heart and that "that pie-faced dude" Potts-Perkins didn't stand any show. I knew better, of course. After the conversation I had overheard I couldn't help feeling that her only reason for being friendly with poor Bill was because he amused her. She didn't consider us in her class at all. She was interested in us merely in the same way she would have been interested in a couple of trained monkeys or performing seals.

I didn't mention this to Bill, however. In the first place I didn't want to hurt his feelings by the cruel truth. In the second place I don't suppose he'd have believed me, anyway.

It wasn't long before the poor fellow was head over heels in love with her, and by the time we were on the homestretch he had actually made up his mind to ask her to marry him before we docked.

When he confided this determination to me I tried hard to dissuade him from taking such a fool step. I gently reminded him of the difference in her circumstances and his. We had learned by this time that her old man was a banker and worth half a million.

Bill wasn't open to argument, however. He pointed out to me that the papers were always printing items about rich society girls eloping with their father's chauffeurs. He said that a plumber's helper was as good as a chauffeur any day in the week, so he didn't see why he should despair of winning her.

One night he and she were sitting together on the deck looking up at the stars, when suddenly he got all his courage together and took her little hand in his great big calloused paw.

"Ruth," he began— It was the first time he had ever called her by her first name, for in spite of the boast he had made to me that he would do so before the Hildegarde reached Europe, he had never dared take the liberty until now.

"Ruth!" he said, very earnestly, "I feel that I must— "

He didn't get a chance to tell her any more, for just then somebody yelled "Fire! Fire!" in a voice of terror, which brought us all scrambling to the decks in a state of wild panic.

I must admit that I was as badly scared as most of them. It isn't pleasant to find yourself on a burning ship, miles and miles from the nearest land, and with not another vessel in sight.

At first I was in hopes that it was a false alarm or, at the worst, a trifling blaze

which could easily be extinguished with a hand-grenade.

But although the captain and other officers sought to convey this impression in order to reassure the excited passengers, I could see by the anxious look on their faces that the fire was a bad one.

The blaze was down below, but in spite of the desperate efforts of the crew to keep it from spreading, it was not very long before the flames had broken through the decks and enveloped the upper part of the ship.

If the Hildegarde had been previously soaked in oil for a whole year she could not have burned quicker. There was scarcely time for us to take to the small boats before the whole vessel was a pillar of fire.

Fortunately everybody on board managed to get away, the captain, of course, being the last to leave. As we sat in the boats watching the ill-fated steamship burn to the water's edge we all shuddered and congratulated ourselves upon our narrow escape.

But although we had escaped the horror of being roasted to death, our plight was still perilous and unhappy enough.

There we were, adrift in open boats many miles from land, shivering with cold and in danger of perishing from hunger, thirst, and exposure, if we didn't drown in the meantime.

How bitterly I regretted at that moment that I had ever entered the *Globe-Herald's* proverb contest.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ISLAND.

In the panic-stricken rush which had followed the captain's order to take to the life-boats, Bill Snedeker and I had managed to keep together.

I was glad of this because, although I felt quite sure that the boat was going to overturn and that we should all be drowned before morning dawned, it was some slight comfort to know that I should enjoy my friend's company during my last hours.

Not that Bill was particularly cheery at this period, to be sure. Although his was generally one of the most buoyant and optimistic dispositions I have ever known, he was as depressed as any of us now.

What seemed to prey upon his mind more than anything else was the fact that his elaborate wardrobe was a total loss. Of course, none of us had had time to remove any of our baggage from the burning Hildegarde. Bill's six new suits and his entire collection of silk shirts, loud-hued neckwear, hosiery, etc., perished in the flames.

I believe he was more upset by that calamity than he was by the peril with which he and all of us were threatened. Several times that night I heard him mutter under his breath that if we ever got to land he would sue the Hildegarde's owners for the price of his lost outfit.

Even the fact that Miss Ruth Tillotson was also an occupant of our boat did not cheer him up. In fact, it added greatly to his depression and gloom, for she sat in the seat ahead of us and Bill's hated rival, Archibald Everett Potts-Perkins sat beside her, and Bill could see that they were holding hands like an engaged couple.

In addition to those I have already mentioned, our boat contained Miss Tillotson's maiden aunt and several of the passengers who had been the most snobbish toward us. Among these was the stout, red-faced old gentleman with the military mustache.

The old gentleman's name was Major Andrew Robinson, a retired officer of the British army. He presented a strange picture as he sat there on the front seat of the life-boat, for he had been asleep when the alarm of fire was raised and he had rushed on deck in a bath-robe, night-cap, and carpet slippers, which he wore now.

Some of the other passengers were almost as scantily dressed, and Miss Tillotson's aunt was minus her teeth.

She seemed to regard this as a serious loss, but as there was nothing to eat aboard the boat and there didn't seem much likelihood of any of us ever getting a chance to eat again, I couldn't see what good her teeth could have done her even if she had retained presence of mind enough to bring them along with her.

Never shall I forget the horrors of that night. It was not long before our boat became separated from the others, for we carried no lights and the sea was so rough that it was impossible for us to keep together.

It was bitter cold and our boat was so crowded that she sat very low in the water, and every now and then an icy wave would drench us all from head to foot and cause the women to screech with terror and the men to groan.

I haven't the space here to tell in detail all that we suffered, for it was many hours before land was sighted. Until then we drifted aimlessly around more dead than alive, with no idea of where we were and expecting every minute to be dumped to the bottom of the ocean.

The captain had put two members of the crew in our boat to handle the oars. They rowed hard for a time, but after a while they were exhausted and allowed the boat to drift. It didn't seem much use rowing anyway, for even those seamen didn't know in which direction the nearest land lay.

Just when we were so maddened with hunger and thirst that we were seriously thinking of drawing lots as to which one of us should be eaten first, we drifted into sight of shore.

None of us knew what land it was. The two members of the Hildegarde crew said they guessed it was a desert island, but although we feared that their surmise was correct we were not dismayed.

Better a year on a desert island, thought we, than another hour of torture in that open boat. At all events, whatever the limitations of the place, no doubt we should be able to get fresh water there and something to eat—even if it were only grass.

Therefore we urged our two seamen to pull for the shore as fast as they could. And worn out and famished though they were, they bent over their oars and made the boat fairly fly through the waves.

As we drew near we saw that the island was a small affair with a mountain on it which rose about eight hundred feet above sea level.

"I presume it is an island of volcanic origin," declared Major Robinson, who prided himself upon his knowledge of physical geography, "and that hill is really the top of an extinct volcano."

"I don't care what its origin may be as long as there's eats and drinks on it," exclaimed Bill Snedeker as our boat grounded on the beach and we all jumped out.

"We're bound to find fresh water," declared the major confidently, drawing his bath-robe about him and adjusting his night-cap. "Where's there's a hill there's always a stream. Let some of us men go inland a bit and look for it."

"I wonder if there are any wild animals on this island," suggested Miss Ruth Tillotson nervously.

"Goodneth grathuth! I hope noth!" gasped her aunt, who, because of the absence of her teeth, was unable to speak very clearly. "To be eathen by thigahs or lions would be muth worth than drowning."

"Don't be afraid of that, ma'am," replied one of the seamen. "I don't believe we'll find a single living thing here—not even a fruit-tree. I never saw land so barren looking."

But even as the man spoke, Archibald Everett Potts-Perkins let out a shriek of terror.

"There's cannibals here!" he screamed. "Look! Look!"

"Cannibals," we all gasped, as we gazed in the direction in which his trembling finger pointed.

And, weak as we were from exposure and lack of nourishment, the sight we saw sent us all scampering up the mountain as fast as if we had been trying for a new Marathon record. A dozen black men were running along the beach toward us, waving their arms and uttering weird cries as they came on.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CANNIBALS.

We must have presented a queer spectacle as we dashed up the side of that volcano in order to escape being massacred and masticated by those savages.

The major, his nightcap all askew and the tail of his bath-robe flying in the breeze, gallantly assisted Miss Tillotson's aunt. Each of us men helped one of the other ladies, young Potts-Perkins holding Ruth Tillotson by the hand—much to Bill Snedeker's disgust, of course—and frantically urging her to run for her life.

After we had advanced a little way up the mountain we ventured to look behind us to see if we were being followed by the blacks.

To our great relief we discovered that they were making no attempt to chase us. They were all gathered around our boat, which we had drawn up high and dry on the beach, and appeared to be holding a powwow.

We took advantage of this respite and threw ourselves wearily upon the ground, for we were all badly winded and too weak to run much farther.

Until then we had not had time to study

the black men carefully. One hurried glance at them had been sufficient to send us all rushing up the hillside in wild panic.

But now, as we watched them from our elevation, we discovered that they were not at all like the pictures of savage island inhabitants we had seen in books.

"They don't seem to be armed," declared Ruth Tillotson. "I don't see a sign of a weapon about them. I thought savages always carried spears or bows and arrows."

"Maybe they've got revolvers concealed in their trousers-pockets," suggested Archibald Potts-Perkins.

"Pooh!" scoffed the major. "Who ever heard of cannibals carrying revolvers?"

"And who ever heard of cannibals wearing trousers?" exclaimed one of the seamen. "I don't believe they're savages at all."

"You don't, eh?" cried Bill Snedeker. "Just look at 'em now. If those are the actions of civilized men, I'll eat my hat."

He pointed as he spoke to the blacks, who had suddenly joined hands, formed a circle, and were executing one of the most extraordinary dances we had ever seen.

First they formed a ring and went round and round on the sand like a lot of school children playing "London-Bridge-is-burning-down." They went round so fast that it made us dizzy to watch them. Then they let go each other's hands and began to hop on one leg. Next they all stood on their heads. Then they joined hands again. Finally they knelt down and dug their noses in the sand. After this they began to travel on all-fours like dumb animals.

And while they were going through all these queer stunts, every one of them was yelling at the top of his voice. They were the most weird, blood-curdling yells I had ever in my life heard.

"I can't imagine what race of men they belong to," said the major, with a shudder, "but I think it would be a good idea if we were to move a little farther toward the top of the mountain. I haven't the slightest doubt now but what they are savages. What we have just witnessed is probably their war dance. After they get through with that they will come up here and attack us. My experience in the British army has taught me that the top of a hill is the best place to resist an attack of tribesmen."

We all got up and made a desperate effort to continue our march to the mountain top. After witnessing that weird dance there was not one of us—not even Miss Tillotson's aunt—who did not feel strong enough to walk.

A little farther up the side of the volcano we made a discovery which filled us with joy. It was a stream of fresh water. Needless to say we all lost no time in drinking heartily.

And to our great surprise, a short distance from the stream we found a hut which looked as if it had been built by civilized men.

Somebody suggested that there might be savages inside this hut, but the hope of finding something to eat there caused Bill Snedeker to volunteer to approach it and learn what it contained. The two seamen and I offered to accompany him.

And sure enough, when we got there Bill's hope was realized. The hut was a storehouse filled to the roof with cans and iron-hooped barrels of preserved meats, biscuits and matches.

Of course we were exceedingly astonished at this discovery, but we did not waste any time trying to find a solution of the mystery just then.

Each of us seized a can of preserved meat and ran with them back to the rest of the party. We all went at that foodstuff like a lot of wolves. Bill's table manners and mine were as good as the rest of the crowd on that occasion, for not having any knives or forks, we couldn't make any breaks.

We were all so busy eating and drinking that we clean forgot all about those black men down below on the beach until suddenly Bill Snedeker, who was worrying a big chunk of corned beef like a starved dog, pointed to the foot of the hill.

"Look!" he cried. "Those cannibals are coming up here after us."

We all looked and gave vent to cries of dismay. Sure enough, the black men were swarming up the mountainside, waving their arms and yelling wildly.

CHAPTER VIII.

KING SOLOMON.

Because of the major's experience in several campaigns against savage tribes in India and Africa, we all looked upon him as our leader.

He did not present a very soldierly picture, to be sure, as he stood there scowling upon the advancing enemy.

Few men can look soldierly when attired in bath-robe, nightcap, and carpet slippers. But to give him due credit, he was more cool and collected than the rest of us, and his first words proved that he was a quick thinker and a strategist.

"Did I understand you fellows to say that that storehouse yonder was unoccupied?" he inquired, turning to me.

"Yes, sir," I answered. "There wasn't a soul inside."

"Very good," said he. "Then we will use it as a fortress. Let us advance upon it with all possible speed."

He led the way up the hill and we soon reached the hut, entered it and barricaded the door by placing some of the iron-hooped barrels of provisions behind it.

"We shall be safe here for a little while at least," said the major. "If only we had some weapons with which to repulse those beggars."

"Well, for that matter they haven't any weapons either," said I, looking at the advancing enemy through a knot-hole. "They seem to be coming against us empty-handed."

"That is probably some trick," declared the major. "Those black devils are generally very cunning."

Yelling at every step the black men came rapidly up the hill and halted in front of the hut. One of them, a tall, powerfully built fellow, stepped forward from the rest of the group and knocked on our barred door.

"What do you want?" growled the major.

He did not expect, of course, that his question would be understood, but he hoped that the fierceness of his voice might scare away the enemy.

To our vast astonishment the black man answered: "Open dat doh and let me in! I have come to visit the Queen of Sheba."

We all looked at each other dazedly.

"He speaks English!" gasped Bill Snedeker. "Now, what do you know about that?"

"Who the deuce are you?" demanded the major, through the knot-hole.

"I am King Solomon," was the astonished reply. "I am de great King Solomon, de wisest man in de world. I have brought with me my retinoo of princes and we have done come to pay our respecks to Sheba's queen."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed the major, and he turned to us excitedly. "I know who these fellows are now. They're not savage natives at all. They're escaped lunatics."

"Escaped lunatics!" we all repeated in a horrified chorus.

"Yes," declared the major. "I remember reading in one of the last batch of American newspapers we received on board the Hildegarde, that a dozen lunatics had escaped from an asylum near the coast and put out to sea in an open boat. I remember distinctly that the newspaper stated that the fugitives were all darkies. These must be the chaps. They are doubtless cast away on this desert island like ourselves."

"Goodneth grathuth!" exclaimed Miss Tillotson's toothless aunt. "How very hohbble! Think of our being imprithoned on thith island with a lot of madmen. It makth my fleth creep. I almoth think I would prefer cannibals."

"Maybe they are harmless imbeciles," suggested Bill Snedeker. "All lunatics aren't dangerous, you know. Some are quite pleasant if you handle them right."

"Did the newspaper state whether or not those fellows are violent, sir?" inquired Archibald Everett anxiously.

"Yes," replied the major gravely. "It is no use trying to deceive you, ladies and gentlemen. According to the paper these chaps are all dangerous lunatics. They killed four of their keepers when they made their escape from the asylum."

We all shuddered. The black man outside resumed his knocking on the door.

"Come! Come!" he cried impatiently. "Why do you keep me waiting? His Majesty King Solomon is not used to being thusly treated. Open that doh immediately and let me pay my respecks to Sheba's queen."

"She can't be disturbed at present," yelled the major through the knot-hole. "She's taking a little nap. Go away, your majesty, and come back again in a couple of hours. She may be awake by that time."

"All right," replied the colored lunatic. "I would not disturb her majesty for worlds. But be shuah to let me know as soon as she awakes."

To our great relief we heard him walk back to where his companions stood.

"I wonder which one of us he thinks is the Queen of Sheba," said Ruth Tillotson nervously.

"Grathuth goodneth! I hope it ithn't I," exclaimed her aunt.

"Fear not, ladies," said the major gallantly. "None of you shall fall into the hands of those madmen while there is a man of us left to protect you. Thank Heavens they haven't any weapons. With this stout barricade we ought to be able to hold them off for a good long time."

CHAPTER IX.

THE VOLCANO.

"I WONDER who built it?" I remarked presently. "Do you suppose it could have been put up by those crazy coons?"

The major shook his head.

"I scarcely think so. According to the newspaper the boat in which they escaped was a small one and couldn't have contained all the provisions which are stored here. Somebody else must have been on this island at some time or other and—luckily for us—left this stuff behind."

"Maybe this will explain the mystery," exclaimed Bill Snedeker, taking from a shelf a bottle with a scroll of paper inside it.

We opened the bottle, unrolled the paper, and read:

> These provisions were left here by the crew of the British freighter Sysonby, who were cast away on this island on June 1, 1909, after their ship had sprung a leak and sunk.
>
> We were on this island for twenty days before we succeeded in attracting the attention of a passing vessel. Hope the unfortunate wretch or wretches who find this will have better luck than us in this respect.

This certainly solved the mystery of the storehouse, and it added to our gloom; for the knowledge that our predecessors had been forced to remain on this island for such a long time caused us to fear that there was little likelihood of our being speedily rescued.

"Just imagine having to stay here for twenty days with those lunatics!" exclaimed Ruth Tillotson with a shudder. "We shall all be raving mad ourselves by that time."

"If we are not torn to pieces by them before then," groaned young Potts-Perkins.

"I wonder what they are doing now," said I, going to the knot-hole and taking a peep.

"Good Heavens!" I cried. "They are all coming up here together. I guess they have decided to make a combined attack upon this door."

My guess proved correct, for a few seconds later we heard the thumping of their bodies against the stout boards as they hurled themselves upon our barricade, and our blood ran cold as we listened to their maniacal yells.

Evidently King Solomon had changed his mind about waiting for the Queen of Sheba to finish her nap, for we heard his deep voice above the rest commanding us furiously to "open dat doh," and not keep his majesty waiting.

We hurriedly strengthened our barricade by pulling more of the iron-hooped barrels behind the door. We did not believe that the blacks could succeed in breaking it down, but nevertheless we were terrified by the fury of their onslaught and the uncanniness of their screams which were unlike anything we had ever heard.

"We must do something to quiet them," gasped the major. "I remember reading once in a scientific work that music generally has a soothing effect upon the insane. Won't somebody please sing something."

Everybody except Bill Snedeker was too scared to be able to respond to this appeal. Our vocal cords seemed to be paralyzed. Bill, however, immediately complied. He had a deep bass voice and he managed to make himself heard above the din outside.

His choice of a tune, however, was unfortunate. I suppose he was too rattled to realize the tactlessness of his act. He began to bellow a classical little ditty, at one time very popular, entitled "I may be crazy, but I ain't no fool."

Instead of soothing those maniacs it produced an exactly opposite effect. Their yells became twice as loud and ferocious as before and they redoubled their attacks upon the door.

"For Heaven's sake sing something else or stop singing altogether," cried the major. "Can't you give them something sweet and soothing?"

"How about 'The Last Rose of Summer'?" inquired Bill.

"The very thing," declared the major. "If any song will quiet them that ought to. Let us all sing it together. Perhaps one voice isn't enough."

We all made a desperate effort to join in the chorus, and the result was not so bad considering how very scared we were.

But even this sweet melody did not pro-

duce the desired effect upon those lunatics. I guess the man who wrote that scientific work about music soothing the insane had never been up against the kind of maniacs who were trying to break down the door of our hut.

We gave it up as useless after a time, and then the major had another idea.

"I believe I know what's the matter with those chaps," he cried. "It isn't us they're after. It's *the food.*

"Probably it is past their dinner-time, and they've been used to dining on the provisions contained in this storehouse. Consequently they are frenzied with hunger and rage at being deprived of their supplies. I believe if we were to send them out some cans of meat and vegetables they would go away satisfied."

"But how are we going to get the stuff out to them," I objected. "We daren't open the door, and there is no other way, as far as I can see."

"It isn't possible to do it at present, of course," agreed the major. "But later on, when they have ceased their attack, we will open the door for a moment and place outside the hut enough cans to keep them well fed for some days. Then they may leave us alone in future. They are bound to become exhausted and go to sleep soon, and that will be our opportunity to carry out this plan."

Just at present, however, those lunatics showed no signs of becoming exhausted. Their yells and their furious efforts to gain entrance to the hut seemed to be growing stronger every minute.

And then, suddenly, above the din they made, we heard another sound — a low rumbling, growling noise, which seemed to come from the bowels of the earth, accompanied by a jarring of the ground beneath our feet which caused every timber of the hut to rattle.

"Good Heavens! Jumping Jupiter! What's that?" I exclaimed fearfully.

"It is the crater!" responded the major in a voice of horror. "Ladies and gentlemen, I am very much afraid that the volcano is about to erupt."

Bill Snedeker didn't know much about volcanoes. He proved it by the remark he made.

"Well, let her erupt, old pal," he said lightly. "What do we care? It can't hurt us while we are inside this hut."

The major gave him a withering glance.

"You ignorant fool!" he growled. "Don't you realize that if that eruption takes place, this hut—the whole island, in fact—will probably be buried beneath tons of molten lava, and we shall all perish."

"Gee!" exclaimed Bill, looking very much worried. "That sounds bad. What can we do to prevent the volcano from erupting?"

"We can't do anything, of course," snapped the major. "Our only chance of saving our lives is to get back to the boat and as far away from the island as possible before the eruption becomes acute."

"But how are we going to get to the boat?" I demanded. "If we step out of this hut those madmen outside will fall upon us and maul us to death."

"That's just the trouble," groaned the major. "We appear to be in dire peril either way. I don't know what to do.

"But we've got to do something," he added, as the rumbling, growling noise suddenly grew louder and the shaking of the ground beneath us became twice as violent. "And we've got to do it quick. You'll have to decide, ladies and gentlemen, between those lunatics and the volcano."

CHAPTER X.

A DESPERATE SITUATION.

As the rumbling within the bowels of the volcano grew more pronounced and terrifying, the fury of the madmen outside the door subsided.

I guess they were awed by this phenomenon of nature, for pretty soon they were racing each other down the mountainside as fast as they could run.

When I looked through the knot-hole and discovered them in full flight I turned excitedly to the others.

"Quick!" I cried. "Here's our chance. They've gone away. Now let's beat it quick for the boat."

"Before we go," said Bill Snedeker, "hadn't we better grab some of this foodstuff? We're liable to get mighty hungry again in the boat if we ain't picked up soon."

This was a good suggestion and we proceeded to act on it. Each of us seized a couple of small cans, and with these in our hands we ran down the volcano and along the beach to the spot where we had left our boat.

And then we all gave vent to a cry of horror and despair. The boat was not there. Those black lunatics had seized it and left the island in the thing. We could see them already some distance from the shore, going out to sea as fast as they could row.

For a few minutes we were all too dazed to do anything more than stand there on the beach staring stupidly at those black fiends who had deprived us of our only means of leaving this place of peril.

We did not bother to call out to them to come back. We knew that it would be no use and, besides, even if they had been willing to return for us and there had been room in the boat for us all, I think we would have preferred to perish by the volcano's eruption rather than drift on the ocean, perhaps for days, in an open boat with those dusky madmen for company.

The major, as usual, was the first to display some presence of mind.

"If those chaps have gone off in our boat they must have left a boat of their own—the one in which they landed on this island," he said. "Let's see if we can find it."

We gathered some hope at these words and searched all over the beach for the lunatics' boat; but not a sign of it did we find. I guess it must have been smashed to pieces in the surf, or else they had allowed it to drift out to sea when they first arrived.

Then, indeed, we all gave ourselves up for lost. The fury of the volcano was increasing all the time, and for two days and nights we stayed on the beach, expecting every minute to see great streams of fire and molten rock come pouring down the mountainside toward us.

We had made up our minds to throw ourselves into the sea when this happened. We figured out that it would be much pleasanter to be drowned than roasted to death.

But, of course, we were neither drowned nor burned. If we had been, how could I be writing this narrative now?

Just before the volcano began to erupt in real earnest, the lookout on a freight-steamer passing very near the shore, spotted the major's nightcap, which he was waving frantically, and they sent a boat to take us all off.

When we got back to the United States we were glad to learn that the other passengers of the ill-fated Hildegarde had been picked up at sea, so that the story ends happily after all.

But no more trips around the world for me and no more proverb contests. I am afraid that if I went in for another one I might win a prize consisting of a voyage to the North Pole, and my physician might persuade me to use the tickets myself.

Bill Snedeker says that the next time he crosses an ocean it will be by train—and he's willing to wait until they build the bridge.

Oh, yes, one word more about poor Bill. A few weeks after we arrived home we picked up a New York newspaper and saw among the social notes an announcement of the marriage of Miss Ruth Tillotson to Mr. Archibald Everett Potts-Perkins.

All Bill said when he read it was: "Well, there's no accounting for tastes."

But the poor fellow was so discouraged that he didn't even have the heart to sue the Overseas Tourist Company for those six swell suits of clothes he had lost in the Hildegarde.

THE SECRET.

I SHAME myself that I cannot
  A simple secret keep.
Last night I walked the garden plot
  Because I could not sleep;

And there beside the listening rose
  I spoke my heart aloud—
The rose this morning redder glows,
  With conscious blushes bowed;

Oh, I shall pluck thee, traitor rose,
  And shut thee in my book;
Thy breathing doth my heart disclose,
  And thy too conscious look!

Alwin West.

CHAPTER XVII.

A JOB FOR A MAN.

FRANK STANLEY looked down at the ghastly white face of—Dave May.

"The ambulance will be here directly," said one of the policemen. "I called it up before I came in. I knew it would be wanted."

"Not so very much," snapped old Zeb. "There's only one man hurt."

"Yes, I saw what was coming," put in Dave May feebly. "I got all the others out of the way."

"Why didn't you beat it yourself?" asked the other policeman.

"I didn't think it would hit the engine. It was calculated to miss it by about fifteen feet."

"*Calculated* to miss it?" roared old Zeb. "What do you mean by that?"

"Don't worry him, Mr. Grant?" pleaded Stanley. Then, in a whisper, inaudible to May, he added: "Don't you see he's dying?"

"No, he isn't," was the snarling rejoinder. "Anyhow, he's got to give me an answer."

Before Zeb could repeat his question to Dave, the engineer said, in a low tone, but clearly, as if he were forcing himself to speak, despite his growing weakness:

"I guess I'm all in. If I thought I'd get well, I'd let the game go as it lays. As it is, why, I'll tell you something, and—"

There was an interruption. A young man, in a white uniform, and carrying a small satchel, came hurrying up the stairs. He was the ambulance surgeon.

Everybody stepped aside to let him get to the patient. He made a hasty examination, then looked about him in some perplexity.

"It will be hard to get him down to the ambulance," he said. "But it will have to be done. I can't do anything for him here. There are no bones broken. The trouble is all internal."

"Will he get well?" whispered Zebediah.

"I hope so," replied the surgeon, also in a whisper. Then, aloud: "But I'll have to get him to the hospital as soon as I can."

"Shall we bring up the stretcher?" asked one of the policemen.

"I wish you would, officer."

As the two policemen went down the stairs old Zeb bent close over Dave May and asked:

"Now, what was it you were going to tell me?"

"Does the doctor say I'm going to die?" demanded Dave.

The surgeon spoke for himself:

"I hope not. But if you have anything on your mind I should advise you to get it off. It will make you feel better, and, if anything *should* happen—"

"You mean I *will* die," broke in Dave. "I can tell that by your looks. I've seen doctors before when some guy on a job got his, like I have now. It's all right, doc. *I'll* talk."

Old Zeb moved forward The surgeon backed away a little, as if not to intrude on the expected confidence.

"Stay here, doc," said Dave. "What I'm going to talk about won't be any secret now. I shouldn't let it out if I thought I'd get over this. But I know, as well as you, that I've got it good. There's a pain in my side as if every rib was stove in, and I don't breathe the way I should."

He stopped gaspingly. Zebediah glanced at the surgeon. The latter nodded, as if to say that the injured man had made a correct diagnosis. Then old Zeb asked, in as gentle a tone as he at the moment knew how to assume:

"Can't you tell me in a few words?"

"Yes," replied May. "I can give it to you in a sentence." Then, with sudden energy: "*There is a lot more of this building going to fall.*"

"What part?"

Old Zeb's eyes were blazing, and his fingers twitched as if he found it difficult to keep them away from the helpless engineer.

"That wall up there," answered Dave. "It is due to come down on the run as soon as it is hit by a brisk wind. The wind is coming, too. Look across the bay to the Jersey side—the northwest—where we get all our storms. Don't you see it?"

Zebediah turned quickly and glanced in the direction indicated. Dave had spoken the truth. There was a rising bank of gray clouds that surely presaged a hard blow before long. Men who work on sky-scrapers soon become weatherwise.

After gazing at the darkling sky for a moment, old Zeb looked up at what Dave had called a "wall." There was no wall, properly speaking, at present—only the steel skeleton of one. It was in the front of the building, overhanging the street, and it towered into the air four floors above them.

At the very top the front steel frame stood alone, without any support except such as it gave itself. There were no side-wall cross-beams to brace it. As Zebediah and the others looked, they could see it swaying slightly, even in the trifling breeze then prevailing.

Under ordinary conditions this would not have been a thing to cause apprehension. Oscillation is expected at the top of very high buildings, even when they are completed. It was Dave May's prediction of disaster that gave it significance.

"Why do you think the wall will fall?" asked Zebediah Grant, bending over him.

"The girders of the two top stories don't hang together. They are out of their sockets."

"Who did it?"

"I did—with my derrick."

"But you couldn't do it alone. Who helped you?"

Dave May turned partly away, as well as his weak state would permit, and a frown shadowed his pallid face, as he replied, shortly:

"That's none of your business. I'm speaking only for myself."

"But if there are others in it, you ought to say who they are," persisted Zeb.

"I know what I ought to do," retorted Dave. "If you're not satisfied with what I'm telling you, I won't say another word. If I'm going to die, I don't mean to go knowing I've done dirt on my pals. You get that into your nut good and hard."

It might have been noted, by a close observer, that many of the men standing around seemed relieved.

"All right. I won't ask you that," said old Zeb hastily. "Tell me where the girders are out of gear and we may be able to fix them."

"I *know* you can fix them. That is, if there is anybody here with real nerve. It's a job for a *man*, I'm telling you."

"Well, go on."

"Don't hurry me, Mr. Grant," was the irritable reply. "I ain't making this confession to oblige you, but to ease my conscience. I hate *you*. It was you who said I was a drunkard. That was a lie—a black lie!"

The young surgeon interposed, by feeling his pulse, in the hope that he would divert Dave's thoughts. But the engineer pushed him aside as well as he could, and continued, wrathfully:

"That lie you told about me, Zebediah Grant, is the cause of all this trouble. It's going to kill me, too. I suppose, now, I

never *will* get hunk. But if I do get over this, look out for me. I'll *kill* you for it. That's what I'll do. I'm having one satisfaction, however; I'm telling you to your face that it was me made part of this building tumble. If I hadn't been caught by the end of that big beam which sent my engine down, I'd be waiting for that other wall to drop, and I wouldn't raise a hand to save it."

The burst of passion completely exhausted him. The surgeon darted forward with some ammonia that he took from his satchel, and held it to the injured man's nose. At the same time he said, peremptorily:

"Here, here! Don't get worked up like that. It takes too much out of you. Keep quiet till you've been looked over at the hospital. Then you can say what you like."

"O. K., doc., I won't let go again," answered Dave, with a wan, docile smile. "But I ain't quite used to being so weak. And when I think of some things that's happened, it sort of gets away with me."

"I know! But you'll have to bottle up your steam for the present," laughed the surgeon. "We'll pull you through, if you give us that much help."

"No, doc. You can't do it. If I didn't know that, I wouldn't be giving myself away to the boss the way I am," declared Dave resignedly.

"Will you tell me where these weak places are in that wall?" asked old Zeb, taking no notice of the engineer's outbreak. "The wind is getting up. If there is any way of preventing another accident, I should like to know what it is. Things are bad enough, without letting them get any worse."

"It's those two top big girders," was Dave's businesslike response. "They don't go into their sockets, and, of course, they are not bolted. In fact, they are only kept up by resting on about two inches of the uprights at each end."

"Say, Stan," whispered Jack Price, who had just pushed his way through the crowd to the side of Stanley, "I don't see how we are going to escape another crash, do you? Two inches! Gee! Why, they are bound to work out of that if the wind gets any higher."

"They mustn't work out, Jack," returned Stanley. "Listen. Dave has some scheme. I hope it's a good one."

Old Zeb had been gazing anxiously at the steel web above them. It seemed to him as if he could see the great horizontal beams at the top beginning to fall already. He bent over Dave, who was also regarding the girders intently, and said:

"I don't see how we *can* secure those girders."

"You can't secure them," returned the engineer. "I didn't mean that. What you can do is to lift them off."

"How? The engine's gone, and that makes the derrick useless."

"That's fool talk," blurted out Dave. "Oh, I wish I was able to stand up for about a minute! What's to prevent your manning the derrick cables and lifting the girders off by main strength? That's easy. You've got plenty of men right here on this floor, without counting the others you could bring up from below."

"But how are we to get the hooks and chains on the girders? Who's going up there to do that?"

Dave May laughed — a queer little chuckle—very different from the sonorous guffaw that usually came from him when he was in full health and strength.

"That's it," he said. "That's where the trick comes in. I told you it would take some one with nerve. That's going to be a job for a *man*."

"I'll do it," shouted Jack Price, as he forced himself forward.

Frank Stanley caught him then by the shoulder.

"No, you don't, Jack. Did you suppose I didn't see that you were limping? You're hurt. But, of course, like the durned idiot you are, you were trying to hide it. You got caught in the smash, I suppose?"

"It's only a trifle, Stan. A chunk of flooring-tile plugged me on the ankle. That's nothing."

"Nothing, eh? It's enough to bar you out of this stunt, all right," growled Stanley. Then, turning to Zebediah, he said: "I'll climb up to that girder."

"Well, that's right," was old Zeb's response. "You had a hand in putting it up that way, I have no doubt. So you ought—"

Just then he caught Frank Stanley's eye, and judged it wise to break off. He walked over to the heap of cables and chains and began pulling at them in the attempt to get them straight.

"Help the super get that derrick tackle

clear while I go up!" called out Stanley to the other men. "We've got to work quick if we're going to make it, I tell you."

There was no lack of willing hands. Whatever they might have done to cause damage originally, the men were unanimous in their endeavors to repair it now. Besides, Frank Stanley was exceedingly popular, and his life was at stake.

Just as he began to climb the steel upright, hand over hand, to get to the girder four stories above, the two policemen returned with the stretcher.

By the time they had placed Dave May in it, and were carrying him toward the badly wrecked stairs, Stanley had reached the girder. He seated himself on it, astride. He did not care to walk upright on its eight-inch width. It rocked too much in the rapidly rising gale.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AVENGED.

THERE was no time to be lost. The wind increased in force every instant, and each gust seemed to be aimed directly at the shaky beam on which sat Frank Stanley.

He assured himself that Dave May had spoken truthfully when he said that the two beams which had been purposely misplaced lapped over on top of the uprights only two inches. How long would that two-inch grip last?

"Hurry up with that tackle!" he shouted to the man handling the derrick some fifty feet beneath him.

He knew they could not hear what he said. The wind carried his voice out to sea, instead of allowing it to descend to them. But he made signs with his waving arms, and they understood he was urging them to be quick.

With wonderful celerity, considering the difficulties of their task, the men had taken the kinks out of the cable. Then they moved the derrick-arm over, so that the great hooks were within Stanley's reach.

Deftly he caught the beam on which he stood in the hooks, and gave the signal to haul away. The chains tightened with a clang. He must get off the girder before it began to swing free in the air. But how?

The roar of the wind in his ears would have confused him had he not become used to it on many a stormy night at sea, to say nothing of his aerial experience as a "rigger" on high buildings like the Monckton. He had no time to crawl along the beam. He must get on his feet and run, even if it *was* only an eight-inch pathway. He did it, jumping off the end of the girder just as the chains and hooks lifted it clear.

"Whew!" ejaculated Stanley, as he dropped astride of the other girder. "That was a close call. Another second and I'd have been tipped off into kingdom come. Oh, well, a miss is as good as a mile!"

With this bit of homely philosophy to comfort him, he watched the swinging girder on its way to the thirtieth story. The men handling the tackle were skilful, and there was no hitch. Old Zeb did not venture to give them instructions. He admitted to himself that they knew more about the operation than he did.

Jack Price lent a hand at the ropes, but he never took his eyes off Stanley. He knew that it was not easy to sit up there so patiently in that hurricane, and he muttered to himself anxiously:

"By the Lord, if Stan didn't hold on like grim death with hands and knees, he'd be blown off that beam like a boy's cap!"

This was not far from the truth, either. Stanley confessed it afterward under cross-examination.

Soon the empty hooks came swinging up again. This time, when Stanley had clamped them upon the girder and signaled to lower away, he did not have to jump off. He stayed with the girder and went down with it.

An unaccustomed person might have thought the trip about as perilous a one as could be conceived. But it seemed mere play to Stanley. When he got down to the thirtieth floor he stepped off the beam as nonchalantly as if he were walking out of an ordinary passenger elevator.

Jack Price was glad to see him finish the journey safely. But he dared not say so. Stanley would have thought him childish if he had offered congratulations. Such feats are part of the day's work with men who put up steel-frame sky-scrapers. Still, as Dave May had said, it was decidedly "a man's job."

Zebediah Grant was pleased, and for once he did not seem ashamed to betray his satisfaction. He chuckled as he exclaimed:

"Well, I don't think so *very* much damage has been done. Now that those two big girders have been taken off, there is nothing else likely to come down. The

other beams and uprights are pretty well braced."

"I hope everything *is* all right," was Frank Stanley's feeling remark. "It would be a tough job to get any more of that steel 'top-hamper' down in this wind."

Old Zeb looked at Stanley with a queer expression for several seconds. He appeared to be trying to find words to fit something he had in his mind. At last he blurted out:

"Stanley, I've been doing you a grave injustice."

The other men on the upper floor were busy getting the overturned engine out of the pile of rubbish and straightening up generally. But some of them overheard this confession. They stared at old Zeb in astonishment.

Stanley did not reply. The superintendent went on thoughtfully:

"Dave May is going to die. That's positively certain."

"Poor Dave!"

"Yes, but that isn't all of it. Before they carried him away—while you were climbing up to those girders—he asked me to bend down so that he could whisper. He said in a solemn way he knew he was going to die, and he wanted to assure me that there was no other plot to hold back this building. Besides, he declared on his oath that you were never concerned in any of the schemes."

"I never have been," interjected the young man.

"I had come to that conclusion before he said so," rejoined old Zeb dryly. "However, I was glad to get it from *him*. He told me all about those blue-prints. I never supposed you touched them."

"You charged me with it."

"I know I did. I was probing everything to get at the bottom of the conspiracy. I knew one was in existence, but I couldn't easily get at the particulars nor find out just who was in it. May took all the blame himself when he whispered to me. But he admitted that a person named Millen, a telegraph operator, did the actual work under his direction. It seems this Millen has a grudge against me for something. I haven't the least idea what it is."

"You haven't?" There was decided sharpness in Frank Stanley's tone.

"No. I never saw the man in my life until to-day. I noticed he was lame. Of course, I had found out before May told me that Millen had been at the plans, and I had got Griggs, the wire chief at the telegraph office, to discharge him. It was better than taking the trouble to call in the police. Then I wanted to see him, and I expected that as soon as Griggs told him that I was responsible for his dismissal—I instructed Griggs to do that—he would come here."

"He did come," remarked Stanley. "I found him shut up in one of the sub-cellars."

"Did you? Ah! I didn't know anything about that. But I got a confidential man of mine to question Millen, because I believed he knew all about the plot. I told him to use any and every means to get at the truth. If he put Millen in that cellar, he must have been giving him a taste of what the police call 'the third-degree.' Is he in the cellar now?"

"No; I let him out. Jim Millen is a friend of mine. I can answer for it that he knew nothing at all about those two girders having been fixed."

"Hum!" grunted old Zeb. "That's what May said."

"Then why are you hunting Millen down with this spy of yours, Crouch?"

"I'm not hunting him down. But he broke into my safe, and he ought to be punished. Still, as he did no real damage, I guess I'll have to let him go. Dave May begged it of me, and I couldn't deny the pleadings of a dying man—even though that man had just confessed that he caused all this destruction. He said he did it because I had accused him of being a drunkard. What an absurd thing for him to get mad about! Why, I'd forgotten I ever said it."

"Well, Dave hadn't."

"No; so it seems. Well, anyhow, I promised to let the whole matter drop. I'm too soft-hearted always, I know. But I can't help it. It's my nature."

"The durned old hypocrite!" muttered Jack Price, who chanced to be limping by.

"There's one thing," continued old Zeb diffidently. "You used some rather tough expressions to me in my office yesterday afternoon. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

"Why did you call me what you did?"

Stanley controlled with some difficulty the wrath which always welled up in him when old Zeb began his badgering, and answered quietly:

"You charged me with being in the plot against you after I had said I was innocent."

"But you confessed you altered those blue-prints."

"I know I did. I wanted to protect Jim Millen. You are convinced now that I didn't do it. You knew it then."

Old Zeb grinned. Then, without another word, he went to the broken stairway and slowly descended.

"What's he after?" thought Stanley. "He'll find Jim Millen down there, and that may mean trouble. Anyhow, Zeb told me to be in his office in half an hour, and I'll just keep the engagement. This smash-up has delayed me some, but he can't blame me for that."

With a resolute step, and a frown bringing his straight brows together, Stanley went down after the superintendent.

"There's going to be something doing yet between Stan and old Zeb," commented Jack Price, as he watched Stanley disappear. "Whenever Stan looks like that, it is a warning to the other fellow to stand from under."

It did not take Stanley long to get to the main floor. He was used to climbing over all kinds of impediments, and he made nothing of the mountains of rubbish that lay on the broken stairway, especially near the bottom.

A telegraph boy almost ran against him as he stepped off the lowermost stair.

"Where's Mr. Grant's office at?" asked the boy.

Stanley pointed to it, and the lad went in. Stanley walked over to a certain pillar at the rear of the big main floor. He had perceived Jim Millen standing there, waiting for him.

"I'm glad you've come, Stan," was Jim's hurried greeting. "Crouch has just gone into the office with Zebediah Grant. I'm going in there, too."

"What for?"

"You'll see if you come in with me."

"I will. But, see here, Jim. Don't let your temper get the better of you. It will do no good. You must use diplomacy."

"Sure! You watch my diplomacy," returned Jim Millen in a calm voice.

Stanley wished it were not quite so calm. It didn't sound altogether natural. But he made no comment. He merely walked over to the office with Millen, cane and all, stumping along by his side.

The door was open, and the two young men were taken aback by what they saw. Old Zeb was huddled down in his swing-chair, his elbows resting upon his open roll-top desk, and his face hidden by his hands. His shoulders heaved convulsively.

The telegraph messenger, book in hand, stood apathetically by his side. He was waiting for old Zeb to sign for the message. Crouch, the spy, leaned against the table, with his hands in his pockets. He was looking down at the superintendent as if he did not know what to make of it all. He scowled as Stanley and Jim Millen appeared in the doorway.

"You'd better not come in," he said in a low tone. "Mr Grant doesn't want to see any one."

Old Zeb raised his head abruptly and said, angrily:

"It's not your business to say that, Crouch. I can speak for myself."

One glance at Zebediah Grant's face was enough to show that he had been deeply moved by something. He was pale, and his eyes were red and watery. He had been weeping. In one hand he held the telegram he had just received.

"I thought you'd had bad news. That's why I said it," faltered Crouch.

Old Zeb ignored the apology. He took the book from the boy and signed it with a firm hand. Then he carefully folded the telegram and put it in his pocket, as the boy went out. Whatever emotion had overcome him when he first read the message had been forced down by the iron will of the man. Old Zeb prided himself on his self-control.

"What do you want?" he demanded, addressing Millen. "If you go to the telegraph office where you were employed, you will find that your place is open for you. I telephoned Mr. Griggs a little while ago. He said it was all right. Stanley is a friend of yours. He'll tell you why I've done this. Is there anything else?"

There was an instant of silence. Then, all the fury that for two years had been pent up in the poor battered, twisted, anguished body of Jim Millen, broke loose in a rush of words that seemed actually to force old Zeb back in his chair.

"Is there anything else?" repeated Millen, in a shriek of rage. "Yes, there *is* something else — a great deal more! You took my situation from me, and now you give it back. How very good you are! I'll take that situation because it's mine. I don't have to thank you for it. I could have got

it by going higher up in the telegraph company. There are men there who wouldn't care what you wanted. Don't make any mistake about that. As for those plans that I looked over, you can do what you like about that. But you'd better do it quick. I've got something against *you*. That's why I'm here."

"I don't intend to do anything about the plans," answered old Zeb, recovering himself a little. "But I think your friends should have you examined for your sanity. You are making threats, and that's dangerous in a law-abiding community. I don't know why you have anything against me. It's a mystery. This isn't the first time I've heard about some strange injury I am supposed to have done you."

The coolness of Zebediah Grant inflamed Jim Millen almost to frenzy. Stanley kept a vigilant eye on him.

"Do you remember the Golden Hope?" shouted Millen. "Have you forgotten her voyage to Yokohama two years ago? Do you remember the sailor you abused on account of the loss of some of the construction steel you had on deck? Do you remember how you struck that sailor when he did not expect it, and how you knocked him backward down a hatchway? Of course you remember it. Men don't forget things like that. They may pretend to, but it is always with them, just under the skin. Well, I was the sailor whose bones were broken and his health destroyed, and you—Zeb Grant—are the man who crippled me for life!"

As Jim Millen shouted the last word he sprang forward, and his right hand went into an inner pocket of his coat. Stanley caught him around the waist.

"Quiet, now, Jim!" whispered Stanley. "You can't do that. Don't let them see you have a weapon. That *would* settle it."

"How do you know I have a gun?"

"Oh, that's it, eh?" interposed Crouch. "I suspected that. Mr. Grant, shall I go out for a policeman?"

"Shut up!" snapped old Zeb. "I told you before I can run my own business."

"Let him go for a policeman!" screamed Millen, struggling to get away from Stanley. "Bring the police in. Then I'll tell them who this Crouch is—or was—in Illinois!"

"What do you mean?" mumbled the spy, turning pale.

"I mean that you're an escaped convict from Joliet. Your name is Sid Lowry, and you were in for murder. You can't deny it. I was a telegraph operator in Joliet when you got away a year ago. I sent out and received over a hundred messages about you. I—"

But Crouch was gone. He made one dive for the office door and was out of the main entrance of the Monckton before Pat Creegan had made up his mind to stop him.

Old Zeb had taken but little notice of Millen's denunciation of Crouch, or of the latter's sensational flight. He had been fumbling in one of the drawers of his desk, from which he brought forth a sealed letter.

"Stanley," he said quietly, "if you can keep that excitable friend of yours from shooting me for two minutes, I should like to read something from this letter that may be of interest to him."

"Go on," shouted Jim Millen. "I'll listen."

"I have just had a telegram from my firm in Pittsburgh. My brother is dead in Yokohama. This letter he sent me a month ago, when he knew he could not live long. I was to open it when he was dead, but not before. I have just read it to myself."

"Yokohama!" exclaimed Stanley. "I did not know you had a brother there—or that you had a brother at all."

"Yes; he had been in Japan for two years. He went out on the Golden Hope to build a bridge near Yokohama."

"Do you mean to say your brother was on the Golden Hope two years ago?" shouted Millen.

"Yes."

"But you were there, too?"

"I never was in Japan in my life. My brother, Zebulon, always attended to our Oriental business. The air of Japan was good for him. But it could not save him," added old Zeb with a sigh.

"Zebulon?" exclaimed Stanley.

"Yes. Our mother was great on scriptural names. So, when my brother and I were born—twins—we were named Zebediah and Zebulon. Let me read this letter. That is, the part that concerns you. Ah! Here it is:

"'On my trip to Yokohama, on the Golden Hope, I got into an altercation with a sailor. His name was James Millen. Without intending it, I knocked him down a hatchway and he was badly hurt. The doctors said he would never be able to walk again, but that he might live to be a very old man. He went to New York afterward,

I heard, to work as a telegraph operator. Find him and take care of him. I have named him in my will for ten thousand dollars, but I want you to look after him personally as well. He had a messmate named Frank Stanley, who is now a steel-worker, I believe. Stanley might help you to find Millen. Don't fail to do this. I don't believe I could rest easy in my grave unless Millen knew how deep is my remorse. It has been the one great grief of my life. But, as Heaven is my judge, I did not mean to hurt him like that. I did not. I did not. I swear it. If I had ever been well enough to visit America again, I would have sought him out and begged him to forgive me. Won't you make this appeal to him, Zeb? Surely, he won't hold spite against a dead man, who never intended him any real harm. You know I could not do it purposely, Zeb. Tell him so. It is the dying prayer of your brother.'"

Old Zeb brushed the back of his hands across his eyes as he finished reading. There was a long pause. Then Jim Millen said very softly:

"Then it was not you who did it, after all? But—you look like the man who did."

"We were twins," answered old Zeb simply. "Moreover, our names are the same, for everybody called us both 'Zeb.'"

There was another silence. Then Jim Millen spoke again, still softly:

"Will you let me shake hands with you, Mr. Grant?"

Old Zeb got up quickly and held out his hand. Jim Millen took it with a hearty squeeze. He was still strong in the fingers. Then, as Frank Stanley also held out his hand to old Zeb, he said over his shoulder, with a smile:

"Well, Jim, you are avenged. But not in the way you expected, eh?"

The feud between old Zeb and his men was over from that day. Perhaps the death of Dave May had something to do with it.

The Monckton Building was finished on time, but with only two days to spare.

THE END.

HOW EVE GOT EVEN.

When Eve appeared to Adam's ken,
His words were timorously sage;
"Why buy your gowns from Paris when
The woods are full of foliage?
Go to the fig, my dearest wife,
Select the goods and pick your dress;
Ah, Eden of the Simple Life,
This is the Eve of Blissfulness!"

The years rolled by. A snake one day
Hissed: "China silk—real Irish lace!"
And Mrs. Adam did straightway
In patterns hide her lovely face.
Then Adam's heart grew adam-ant
As Eve's new passion he could see.
"Buy clothes for her? I won't—I can't—
This is the Eve of Bankruptcy!"

So e'en to-day with girded loin
Poor Adam treads the busy mills;
He patiently runs down the coin
While Eve, at home, runs up the bills.
Yet 'tis not all a cheerless plight,
This job of keeping women fair—
And Adam finds a huge delight
In this, the Eve of his Despair!

Wallace Irwin.

His Misdirected Ambition

by William H. Greene

IF Judson Yarley's ambition had been a little greater, he might have amounted to something. If he hadn't had any ambition at all, he would have been all right. Or perhaps it was because there was a little love mixed up in it that things didn't come out just right. Love, as everyone knows, is a very disturbing element.

The small ancestral estate of the Yarley family is situated about twelve miles from the little village of Round Hill, Virginia, on the side of a hill, entirely surrounded by higher mountains of the Blue Ridge range. They have a small garden, and eke out the rest of a slender existence by tending sheep during the winter for the surrounding farmers.

Up to the time of young Judson's branching out into a cold and cruel world, none of the family had ever possessed sufficient enterprise or love of adventure to make the twelve-mile journey to Round Hill, and see the railroad trains which passed through that village, with a certain vague relation to schedule. In fact, the most up-to-date mode of conveyance the Yarleys had ever seen, and the only kind in which they had any confidence, was a horse and buggy. They did not believe in automobiles. It was nonsense to suppose a carriage could go by itself. They had never heard of aeroplanes.

Their ideas of the country in which they lived were extremely vague. They knew that the Civil War was over, and had heard rumors of a war with Spain, but considered these predictions mere sensationalism. Spain was farther off than Richmond, they had heard, and it seemed foolish to expect hostilities from so remote a country. This was their opinion as late as the year 1909. Later their most cherished prejudices, beliefs, and traditions were to be entirely upset by the son and heir to the family estate.

It began in Judson's early youth, when he showed a strange and unaccountable desire to attend the little school over in the valley, four miles away. This was an innovation which was looked upon with disfavor, and only tolerated under protest. The family pride was a trifle hurt. No Yarley, male or female, had ever done such a thing, and accomplishments like reading and writing were regarded as tending toward over-refinement and degeneracy.

Judson was allowed to have his way, however, as long as he did not carry things too far, and he managed to attend the greater part of several sessions at the school, bravely trudging the eight miles a day. He not only attained some proficiency in the above-mentioned arts of reading and writing, but also learned some of the mysteries

of the third-R, and even dabbled in a strange study known as geography, which had a strong stimulating effect on his young imagination.

It was at school that Judson first met young Luther Kent, the son of a neighboring farmer, who was as prosperous and up-to-date as Judson's father was poor and benighted. Judson's overgrown, gawky figure, and shabby, home-made clothing, soon caused him to become the object of that heartless ridicule with which children so thoughtlessly and unintentionally wound each other. Luther Kent, spick and span as a small clothier's dummy, was the leading spirit of this constant persecution. The result was a fight, in which Luther was frightfully mussed up, being no match for the young mountaineer in strength.

The teacher wrote a note to Judson's parents, which he dutifully took home and deciphered for them as well as he could, and which they did not in the least understand until he explained the whole matter to them. His mother was inclined to lecture him mildly, but his father appeared to be rather proud of his son's prowess, so the note had little effect. But Judson had acquired the reputation of being a bad boy, though he was really of a most peaceable disposition, and would never have fought with any one without being goaded into it.

This incident, and the fact that his father suddenly came down with a bad attack of rheumatism, brought Judson's education, so far as schooling was concerned, to an end, though his real education had scarcely begun.

Several years of healthy outdoor life and hard work turned Judson into a splendid young giant, almost as handsome, in his way, as he was awkward and uncouth. But he never quite settled back into the rut which the preceding members of his family had always followed. He persisted in venturing forth into the world, visiting strange places and mingling with strange people. This adventurous spirit may have been handed down from some hardy ancestor of Colonial times, having lain dormant for many generations, to crop out at last in this twentieth century backwoodsman, for his making or undoing, as fate or circumstances might decree.

He went to Round Hill, saw the railroad trains, and soon became quite used to them. He brought home books, wasted valuable time reading them, and became quite unreasonably angry when his father tore out the pages for pipe-lighters. In fact, he acted so strangely in many ways, and had such outlandish, advanced ideas, that the rest of the family declared they would never ruin another child by allowing him to go to school.

But worse was to come. These first eccentricities, though annoying, were nothing compared to Judson's strange and unaccountable actions after a certain young lady had come into his life. One might say galloped into it, as she came on horseback.

It should be explained that within the last few years the adjacent country had become a resort for queer people known as summer boarders. Luther Kent's father had not been slow to grasp the financial opportunity that this circumstance offered, and had turned his farmhouse into a summer hotel with a fancy name. There was not much trouble attached to this change. He simply refrained from painting the house, and it became rustic looking and picturesque, which was what the city people wanted, and paid fancy prices for.

Young Luther Kent found a most congenial occupation in entertaining the young lady boarders and making things as pleasant as possible for them, thereby increasing the popularity of his father's well-paid-for Southern hospitality. His only fault was a tendency to spend all his time on the pretty girls and let the plain, unattractive ones amuse themselves as best they could. But when Miss Edith Mardel, of Baltimore, arrived, all the others, attractive and less so, were forgotten.

It was on a fine August afternoon, or "evening," as it is called in Virginia, that Miss Mardel and Luther Kent, having been on quite a long horseback excursion, rode through the narrow "gap," and came out suddenly and unexpectedly in the little amphitheater in the mountains where the Yarley estate was situated. Judson himself brought them water to drink and gave them directions as to the shortest way home.

His mother, his sister, and a few country girls of the neighborhood, were the only women Judson had ever seen. To spring a real Baltimore society belle on this young mountaineer, who had just education enough to make him appreciative, was a little unfair, to say the least.

Kent did not introduce them, but Judson missed no detail of her beauty. When she returned the big dipper from which she

drank, she smiled at him. That was sufficient. Judson put that dipper away and would allow no one to touch it. The fact that Kent had not introduced him to Miss Mardel aroused feelings in his breast which would have meant the beginning of a feud if he had lived in Kentucky instead of Virginia.

From that time on Judson became more than ever a puzzle to his long-suffering family. To be sure, he wasted less time reading than before, but he bought a razor, something that no Yarley had ever used before, and for a while his face became a mass of cuts and gashes, until at last he acquired some proficiency in handling it. He also purchased "store clothes"—a light checked suit that the Round Hill merchant told him was the very latest thing. Patent-leather shoes, sizes ten, a celluloid collar, a red necktie, a straw hat, at least one size too large, a blue band for the hat, and a pair of green socks completed an outfit which the storekeeper assured him was absolutely correct in every detail.

Aside from the color scheme, nothing seemed to fit him. The hat and collar were too large, coat-sleeves and trousers too short, and the green socks would not stay up, because he used rubber bands for garters. Still in an extravagant mood, his fancy strayed to thoughts of jewelry, and he spent "two-bits" for a large piece of glass to wear in the red necktie. He was now ready to make his début in society.

II.

"WHAT a superb specimen of physical manhood," said Edith Mardel to young Kent, as they rode back that day, after having accepted Judson's very simple hospitality. "I'm sure he would be an interesting fellow to talk to, living so close to nature and away from the world, as he does. I'd like to meet him again."

Miss Mardel was a young lady with ideas, as well as beauty.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Kent, none too well pleased at this suggestion. "You would probably find him very stupid and uncouth."

Kent was not experienced enough to know that this was exactly the wrong thing for him to say—the very thing to pique her interest in the other fellow. Miss Mardel smiled. Kent would have been astonished if he could have known how much more "stupid and uncouth" she found him, with his aping of city manners, than the natural roughness of the unaffected young mountaineer.

"Oh, a girl gets tired of too much elegance and polish sometimes," she said.

"I suppose so," answered Kent, not getting her sarcasm at all. "But I don't think you would like this chap. He's a bad fellow. Sort of black sheep, I understand." Again saying the very thing to arouse her interest.

"We will ride up here again some time," she rejoined, "and you shall introduce me to him."

"All right, if you insist." Kent found the prospect of another long ride with Miss Mardel most agreeable, and after all there was little reason for *him* to fear Judson Yarley as a rival. The Yarleys were only "trash," while he was a Kent, with a well-memorized list of lies always at his command, about the thousands of slaves his people had owned "before the war."

He in no way understood the social gulf which lay between him and this young lady—a gulf practically just as wide as that between her and Judson Yarley—and one which it would require generations to cross. Moreover, he had a natural conceit which led him to mistake mere politeness for personal interest. Hence his attitude toward her.

They took another horseback ride a few days later and poor Judson was introduced to Miss Mardel. He was frightfully embarrassed because they caught him in his rough working clothes. He could not understand, of course, that this was the only costume in which he could possibly interest her.

She asked him many questions concerning his simple life, which he managed to answer somehow. She seemed delighted with the little log house in which he lived, calling it "too cute for anything." She went in and met his father and mother, whom she also plied with questions. Her escort was very much neglected for a while, and when she left, Judson was allowed to help her mount, and held her dainty, gloved hand in his big paw for a moment, while she told him how much she had enjoyed her visit, and invited him to come to see her some time.

Judson's idea of "some time" was the next day.

When he appeared at Kent's select sum-

mer boarding-house the following afternoon, and asked for Miss Mardel, he was arrayed in all the splendor of his new outfit, not even omitting the cut glass stick-pin in the red tie. While he waited on the front porch the boarders, seated about on the lawn, all agreed that he was the funniest thing they had ever seen outside of a show, and that their summer holiday would not have been complete without him.

Miss Mardel came out through the front door unsuspectingly, took one look at him, gasping out the words: "Pardon me—I forgot something," dashed precipitately back into the house. It was fully five minutes before she gained sufficient control over herself to dare to come out again.

Judson stayed about three hours that afternoon, and Miss Mardel was the jolliest sort of company, on account of being obliged constantly to invent excuses for her laughter, which broke forth every time she looked at him. He was entirely unconscious of the sensation he was creating, and went away confident that he had made a favorable impression. Miss Mardel nearly collapsed when he had gone, and her mother, who had no sense of humor, asked her what she could have been thinking of to invite such an extraordinary looking young man to call.

Luther Kent was triumphant. "I told you you would find him quite impossible."

"I didn't suppose he would get himself up like a clown in a circus," said Miss Mardel indignantly.

III.

An informal dance was to be given at another boarding-house not far from Kent's. There was a large, open-air pavilion, and everybody for miles around was invited to come and dance till daylight. "Straw-rides" and parties were organized to attend this dance and Luther Kent invited Miss Mardel, of course. Young men were very scarce at the time, and he was rather monopolizing her.

A few days later she received a carefully composed note from Judson Yarley, asking for the pleasure of escorting her to this same dance, and, taking her acceptance for granted, saying that he would call for her on the evening in question. This note arrived at the last moment, too late for a reply, and to avoid a clash, she and Kent started off an hour ahead of time.

When Judson arrived and was told that Miss Mardel had already left with Kent, it did not tend to put him in a good humor, though it was explained to him that his invitation had arrived too late and that Kent had spoken first. He drove on, with the idea of at least having a few dances with Miss Mardel. He had been to a few rough country affairs in the neighborhood and had an idea that he could dance.

Arriving on the scene, in all the glory of his "clown costume," as Miss Mardel called it, he immediately hunted up that young lady and made arrangements for a dance with her. There were no programs, and it was difficult for her flatly to refuse him without appearing rude, so she promised him the next waltz.

Judson's arrival on the floor of the pavilion had caused considerable merriment, but he was totally unaware of this fact, and when he was seen talking to the popular Baltimore girl, it gave him a certain prestige. People stopped laughing at him and wondered if he could be dressed that way for a joke. Perhaps he was paying a bet, or being initiated into some secret society, they thought.

The next dance was the lancers, in which Judson wisely refrained from participating. Then came his waltz. The rustic orchestra of violin, guitar and mandolin struck up a dreamy melody, and he grasped his partner in a bear-like embrace and pranced off as if he had to catch a train. He caught several, spreading destruction on all sides. No couple on the floor was safe while he was at large, but his career was as short as it was spectacular.

Luther Kent was waltzing with a stout young lady whose company he was not enjoying in the least. Judson and Miss Mardel dashed past him, and, though Kent always denied it, several people saw him stick out his foot just in time to catch poor Judson. At any rate, whether it was his own feet or Kent's which he tripped over, Judson landed on the floor with a crash. Miss Mardel cleverly saved herself from going down with him, and Kent, deliberately leaving his partner, led her to a seat.

As Judson got to his feet and started to slink away, he heard some kind-hearted girl remark:

"Poor fellow, I hope he didn't hurt himself."

"So do I," replied a clear, shrill voice.

"I couldn't help laughing, but it was a shame for that horrid Luther Kent to trip him up."

That was sufficient. Judson strode heavily out of the pavilion, untied his horse and drove off alone, planning vengeance. He was in an ugly mood, and his face burned with the thought of the figure he had cut, while the people's laughter rang in his ears. He was glad to have some one on whom to lay the blame. If ever a man deliberately planned to commit murder, Judson did that night.

The result was inevitable. Judson Yarley and Luther Kent met, as they were bound to, a few evenings later, in a little "dive," half-way up the mountainside, where very bad whisky was sold at a profit which would have made the proprietor rich if he had not been obliged to hand over such a large portion of it to the authorities, to keep from being discovered by the sheriff and his unerring sleuths.

Judson had sworn off work and taken to drinking more than was good for him since his humiliating experience at the dance. He was again dressed in his "store clothes," now somewhat dilapidated, and not quite so funny as when they were brand-new. It only needed a sneering laugh and some allusion to dancing from Kent, to start the trouble.

There was a nasty mix-up, knives were drawn, and when it was over the proprietor of the place locked up and went into retirement indefinitely. The others who were present sneaked quietly away, each inventing his own alibi for future use.

Judson helped himself to another drink, dragged Luther's inert form outside, threw him across his horse's back, climbed unsteadily into the saddle himself, and rode recklessly down the mountain, along the road which led to Kent's home. He dashed up to the front gate, swaying from side to side in his saddle, brandishing his knife, the blood streaming from a cut across his cheek.

"Kent!" he shouted. "Kent! Come out here and get your son. I've brought him back to you. Come out, you old fool!"

He dumped young Luther unceremoniously to the ground, where he lay in a huddled heap. It was then about 1.30 A.M., and every one in the house was asleep, so after shouting a few times more and failing to attract any attention, Judson rode off.

Kent was found in the morning, still lying insensible where Judson had left him. Judson was also found, a few hours later, riding aimlessly up and down the road, thoroughly sobered, very shaky, and ghastly pale, where his face was not stained with blood. The sheriff was summoned to take charge of him, but his mind seemed hazy, and he could tell no connected story of what had happened. It was not until Kent regained consciousness that full particulars were obtained.

Luther Kent, in a hospital in Washington, and Judson Yarley, in state prison at Atlanta, Georgia, both happened upon the same item of society gossip about a month later—Judson in a smuggled copy of an Atlanta paper, and Kent in a Washington one. This item announced the engagement of Miss Edith Mardel and a well-known Baltimore society man.

THE LIGHTSHIP.

ALONE upon the sand I stand,
  Where tireless billows round me roll,
And lift a lantern in my hand
  To mark the hidden shoal.

Whatever mood may rule the sky,
  One solitary, constant star
Burns in the darkness, here on high
  To warn the ships afar.

Glad the farewell they take of me
  Bound outward on the fields of foam;
And glad the welcome when they see
  My light that leads them home!

Frank Dempster Sherman.

After Hope Was Dead

By Fred V. Greene Jr.

"SEND 'em? Well, I guess I will!" A chuckle of delight escaped the old man, as the letter which he had read over again and again, slipped from his fingers to the table. Going to the bureau-drawer, he pulled from it some pieces of wrapping-paper, from which he selected one that was cleaner than the rest. On one side it bore his name and address, it having enclosed a package he had received at some time in the past.

Vanderpool's hands shook with nervous anticipation as he sat down at the little table and carefully penned on the clean side of the paper the name and address of the concern interested in his patent, and from whom he had just received a letter, asking him to forward to them the model and all the papers regarding it.

The inventor had labored for seven years upon a machine that would greatly cheapen one of the processes in the manufacture of shoes. The long, patient struggle to solve the problem had practically exhausted his funds, until he had been forced to take quarters at a very cheap lodging-house.

His machine had been perfected only a few weeks previous, after which followed the issuance of the patent papers, with the result that already one firm had become interested enough to inquire regarding it, and it seemed that at last his dream of success and wealth was to be realized.

Vanderpool turned from the table to seek in the bureau-drawer for some string, and as he found a piece that suited his requirements, he started toward the table again, just as a gust of wind from the open window caught the piece of wrapping-paper and blew it to the floor.

The old man's fingers trembled as he caught it, and laying it on the table again, he proceeded to wrap up the documents together with the miniature working model, and then tied them securely, after which he hurried from the house in the direction of the post-office, walking as rapidly as his age would permit.

When he reached it, there was already a line in front of the stamp-window, and Vanderpool took his place at the end, the precious package in his hand, and leaned heavily against the partition—the exertion of his hurried walk had a plainly visible effect upon him.

Then as the person in front of him edged ahead, the old man did likewise, and as he leaned against the partition again, he heard something in his vest-pocket crack, and he knew that his glasses had been broken. And as he reached to see how badly they were damaged, the man ahead of him moved away from the window, his wants already satisfied, and Vanderpool took his place, to ask the clerk how much postage was necessary for the package he handed him.

This matter was quickly settled, and after placing the stamps on the parcel, and dropping it in the box, he took out his broken glasses, and after examining them ruefully, retraced his steps homeward.

As he let himself into his lodgings, a man who was seated in the little parlor rose and advanced toward him.

"Are you Mr. Vanderpool?" he asked.

"I am," the other replied.

"Then you're the man I wish to see. My name is Lansing—Horace Lansing. Can we have a few moments together?" Then he added cautiously: "In private?"

The old man studied the other's face keenly before replying, and as his scrutiny seemed to be satisfying, he said: "Yes. We can go to my room."

"Just the thing," the other declared, and the two ascended the stairs, and as they entered the room, and Vanderpool closed the door after them, the stranger turned toward him.

"You have just patented a machine that is of use to shoe manufacturers, haven't you?" he queried.

"I have," was the quick reply.

"I am interested in it," the other went on. "I have just come from Washington, where I examined the papers on file in the Patent Office, and I am ready to come to terms with you regarding the marketing of the machine."

"Then you think it a good thing?" Vanderpool queried excitedly.

"If I didn't, I would not have put myself out by coming here to look you up. But even so, I may be wrong. One can never tell until the actual machine is working."

The old man stared at Lansing closely an instant, then he said: "I'm afraid you're too late. I have just mailed the papers and the miniature model to a New York house with whom I've been corresponding."

"And are they going to take it?" the stranger asked eagerly. "Have you closed with them?"

"No—not exactly," Vanderpool replied.

"Then don't do it," Lansing hurried to advise. "If your machine will do all you claim—and I think it will—I'll give you twenty-five thousand dollars for the manufacturing rights, and pay you a royalty on all machines sold."

The old man stared at him blankly. He could hardly realize he was not dreaming—such an offer was far better than he had expected—and the thought of the wealth it would mean robbed him of his powers of speech, temporarily, at least.

"Well, what do you say?" the other demanded rather impatiently.

"But—but I've already sent them the papers," Vanderpool declared. "I've just mailed them."

"Just mailed them," Lansing repeated. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that Holt & Co. wrote me, asking that I send my patent papers, as well as the small model I had, to them. And I just did it, and gave them an option. I left the package at the post-office less than fifteen minutes ago."

"Then get it back," the other insisted. "It is undoubtedly in the post-office yet, and if so, I think you might get it back. Let's go down and try."

Vanderpool readily assented, and the two hurried from the house, and on the way discussed the merits of the machine and the future there was for it, until at length the old man presented himself at the stamp-clerk's window again.

"About twenty minutes ago," Vanderpool began, "I mailed a package here, addressed to New York. Can I get it back?"

"The New York mail left a few moments ago," was the reply. "It's on the way there now."

"But can't it be stopped?" the old man inquired anxiously.

"I don't see how it can."

Vanderpool turned from the window to Lansing, who had listened impatiently to the conversation with the postal clerk.

"It's gone!" the old inventor blurted out.

"So I heard," the other retorted, and from the look on his face, it was plainly visible that the statement caused him much annoyance.

"Isn't there something I can do?" Vanderpool queried.

"I don't see that there is," the other returned. "I've engaged passage on a steamer leaving New York for London to-morrow at three. And I've got to go on that vessel, as I have an important engagement over there on the day I am due to arrive. I wanted to settle this matter before sailing."

Vanderpool gazed helplessly at him, quite at a loss for a suggestion. But the other was thinking, and he suddenly exclaimed: "I'll tell you what we might do."

"What?" the old man questioned, eager for some solution of the case.

"My boat doesn't sail till three. Those papers will be delivered in the first mail in the morning. We'll go to New York to-night, and you go to the firm's office—" He stopped, then added: "What did you say their name is?"

For a moment the old man could not recall whether he had said or not, but he replied, "Holt & Co."

"All right," Lansing continued. "You go to this concern's office, and say you've

changed your mind about selling them, and demand that the package of papers and the model be returned to you. Then that will give us plenty of time before I sail, to make our arrangements."

The look of joy on the inventor's face suddenly changed.

"But suppose you decide you don't want it—then I lose out in both cases," Vanderpool argued.

"I've told you what I'll give you," the other contended, impatiently. "It isn't a question of my not closing the bargain with you — the one just at present is your getting that package. Will you do as I suggest?"

"But are you sure you want to buy it?"

"If I wasn't, I wouldn't be here at this moment, would I?"

As Lansing studied the old man's face he was amazed to see it suddenly cloud, and Vanderpool shook his head sadly.

"Then you won't do it?"

"I—I would like to do so," the inventor slowly returned. "I would like to, but—"

"But what?" Lansing snapped.

"But I—I haven't the money—"

"Money for what?"

"It takes five dollars for car-fare to New York, and I—I haven't got it."

The stranger broke into a laugh.

"Is that the only reason why you can't go?" he asked.

The old man nodded his head regretfully.

"Well, if that's what's stopping you, get ready right away."

As Lansing spoke he drew a roll of bills from his pocket, and tendering a ten dollar one to the other, added, "Here's for your trouble. We'll call that a payment on account."

Vanderpool's eyes lit up with joy as he realized that the only obstacle in his path to wealth was now removed, and hastily packing his old-fashioned grip, he accompanied the stranger to the depot, where they later boarded a train for New York.

Upon their arrival they parted, the old man going to a cheap hotel which the other recommended. With the understanding that Lansing would call there in the morning for him, preparatory to their trip down-town, the inventor went to his room, where he sat far into the night, marveling at the wonderful good fortune that had been so suddenly thrust upon him.

Early the next morning Lansing put in appearance, and as the inventor had not breakfasted, he invited him to do so with him, and they sought out a near-by restaurant. After a hurried meal they started down-town.

Lansing was the conductor of the trip, as the old man had no knowledge of the city, and when they later entered a large building, he directed that Vanderpool go up to the offices of Holt & Co., while he stayed in the hall below to await his return.

"And above all things, don't let them bluff you off," he cautioned. "They may put up an argument, but you insist upon the return of your papers."

"I will," Vanderpool assured him, but the other's words aroused a feeling of trepidation within him.

The old man stepped into the elevator, which shot him upward to the floor he desired, and as he walked down the hallway the name of the firm for which he was seeking, appeared on a door before him, and he pushed it open.

"I want to get a package I mailed to you yesterday," he told the clerk who stepped inquiringly toward him.

"You what?" the other asked in marked surprise.

"I say that I mailed a package yesterday, addressed to Holt & Co., from Dunston, and I want to get it back."

"Why, we've received no such package," the clerk told him.

Vanderpool stared at him in surprise, then blurted out: "Oh, yes, you have, and I want it."

"Well, if you think that, all right," was the cool acquiescence of the other. "But I tell you that we've received no such package. And even if we had, I couldn't give it to you. You'd have to see Mr. Holt. I don't know you."

"And I want to see him," the old man burst out. "I want—"

"Mr. Holt is not down yet," the clerk interrupted.

"Then I'll wait for him." Vanderpool threw himself into a chair, as he added: "How soon will he be here?"

"I've no idea," was the evasive reply, and the clerk watched the old man from the corners of his eyes as if he expected to see him verify his suspicions that he was a crank of some sort.

But Vanderpool settled back to await patiently the arrival of the man with whom he had had some correspondence,

and after a brief period the door opened and an important-looking individual strode through the office to the private one beyond.

"Is that Mr. Holt?" the inventor queried — the man had disappeared so quickly that he had not been able to call to him.

"Whom shall I say wishes to see him?" the clerk queried.

"Mr. Vanderpool, from Dunston."

The old man watched the other as he disappeared through the doorway he had seen Holt pass, to quickly reappear and nod the inventor toward him.

"Why, Mr. Vanderpool, I'm glad to see you," Holt declared as he shook hands.

"Don't know whether you are or not," the other contended.

"But I am. Any one who is brilliant enough to perfect a machine such as you have done—"

"Then you received the package?" Vanderpool interrupted.

"What package?"

"The one I mailed you yesterday."

"Why, it hasn't reached me as yet," the other said, showing his surprise at the old man's statement.

"You mean to tell me you haven't got it?"

"I certainly do." Holt affirmed.

Vanderpool's eyes narrowed, and the lines of determination on his countenance deepened.

"I've told you what I want, and why I came down here," he insisted.

His voice was low and insistent, but it changed a trifle as his rage got the better of him.

"But really, I haven't—"

"Don't say that!" the old man fairly shouted. "You received it, and I want it. I want it, I say!"

Holt suddenly sprang to his feet, and his eyes flashed fire as he retorted: "Mr. Vanderpool, you have no right to speak that way in my office, and I'll not have it."

He pointed to a pile of mail before him.

"Here is all that I have received this morning, and your package is not there. If I had it, I'd gladly give it to you, if you wished it. I am not one of the kind who would keep another's property against his wishes."

Something in the other's tone, and the force behind it, told the old man that he was wrong in his accusation, and his voice was calmer as he said: "Then you—you really haven't got it?"

"That's what I've just stated, and it's the truth. If you mailed the thing yesterday, as you say, it should have reached here. But it may come in a later mail this morning. Suppose you come in again about twelve."

"I—I think I will," the old man said.

"Very well, but why do you want it back? When you were announced, I thought you were bringing personally your reply to my letter. But the package—"

"I've—I've got a little change to make in it," the other stammered.

"Oh, I see," Holt remarked, but there was a keenness in his eyes that the inventor did not detect. "Just a change, eh?" he added thoughtfully, although in reality he was searching the other's face.

"Yes — just a change," Vanderpool repeated.

"Then come back about twelve. It may arrive by that time."

He bowed his caller out, and the old man hurried to where Lansing was impatiently awaiting his arrival.

"Well, where is it?" he snapped.

"I don't know," the other replied regretfully. "It hasn't arrived yet."

"Not arrived yet!" Lansing sneered.

The old man shook his head.

"And yet you say you mailed it yesterday?"

Vanderpool nodded his reply.

"Then Holt is keeping it from you. He probably smelled a rat, and—"

"But he told me to come back at twelve," Vanderpool put in. "He said it might arrive by then."

"Yes, and then he'll tell you to come in to-morrow, and each day it will be the same thing. He'll keep stringing you along, thinking you've had a better offer, until he feels the other fellow will get tired of waiting, and give it up. Then he'll renew his offer and you'll accept. That's the way he's got it mapped out, and the worst of the whole thing is, he has you completely at his mercy. You can't do a thing."

"Do you really think that?" the old man faltered.

"I don't think it—I know it!" was the emphatic response.

"Then what—what is there to do?" Vanderpool queried.

Lansing faced him determinedly.

"There's just one thing, and that is to scare him into giving the papers back to

you. Go up and demand them. Threaten him with the law. It's your only chance. If you don't get them by twelve, it's all off between us, as I have important business to attend to, I can't wait a moment after. And you say there is your signed agreement in the package, giving him his option at the figure he quoted."

"There is."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, go back and get—"

"I will!" Vanderpool broke in, and the hardened look on his face proved his intention of securing his property at all hazards.

For the second time he entered the elevator, and left it to stride into Holt & Co.'s office.

"I want to see Mr. Holt again," he told the clerk.

"Not in," was the reply.

"Not in, you say!" the old man echoed helplessly.

"Mr. Holt went out a few minutes ago, and said he would not be in again till four."

"But—but he told me to come back at twelve."

"Yes, and he told me that if any package came in mailed from Dunston to give it to you."

For a moment the old man stared at him blankly; and then, completely crushed by the new turn of events, he faced about and left the room.

"You didn't get them?" Lansing cried out in an inquiring tone as Vanderpool neared him.

Vanderpool told him of Holt's absence, and the other declared angrily: "Well, I'm through with you. There's no use of my wasting time further. He won't give up as easily as we had hoped, and he'll hold you to your signed agreement. Good-by."

The old man was too taken aback to speak, and his eyes moistened as he watched Lansing stroll away, and realized he was taking along with him his horse for future wealth. Not until the other was lost in the street crowd did the inventor come back to the present, and as he did so he realized the futility of staying longer in the city, where his expenses were so far in excess of those in Dunston. He decided to return home on the first train he could catch.

Accordingly, he arrived at the railroad station after repeated inquiries, and learning there was a train about to leave for his town, hurriedly purchased his ticket, and was soon on his way back to Dunston.

As he slowly made his way from the depot to his lodgings, he realized what a different feeling he had from that of the day before, when he covered this same stretch of sidewalk. Then he saw only the prospect of wealth and happiness ahead of him.

Of course, he had the offer of Holt & Co., but it was so much smaller than the one Lansing had made that it seemed wrong to accept it, yet that was what he had done, and the very fact that he had written them of his acceptance prevented his doing business with any one else, until he either secured the papers or word from them that they had decided not to close the deal.

So his home-coming was not a particularly happy one in any sense of the word. The old man shambled along the street, his head sunk deep on his chest. When he had nearly reached his place of residence he heard hurried footsteps behind him, but gave no heed to them.

They came nearer and nearer, and just as he was about to turn into his home a voice behind him caused him to face about quickly.

"Pardon me, but could you tell me where Mr. John Vanderpool lives?" the stranger queried.

The old man stared searchingly at him an instant, then replied, "That is my name."

"Is that so?" was the surprised remark of the other. "Then you're the very man I want to see."

"Is it about—my patent?" the inventor queried huskily.

"It is, and—"

"You're too late," Vanderpool sighed. "Too late."

Then in a few words he explained that he had already made arrangements for the sale of his machine, and the other expressed true regret that such was the case, and, in a meditative mood, retraced his steps down the street again.

The old man, now almost beside himself with grief, hurried within the house, and as he entered the hall his eyes opened wide as he caught sight of a package on the table there that closely resembled the one he had mailed to Holt & Co.

He thrust his hand in his vest-pocket, and, drawing out his broken glasses, held

one of the lenses before his eye and read his own name on the wrapper. With fingers now clumsy from nervous anticipation, he tore off the outer paper.

To his utter amazement, he realized the contents were the very papers and model he had mailed to Holt & Co., and suddenly recalling the man who had accosted him only a few moments before, he seized the bundle and dashed out of the house and down the street at a pace far swifter than that usually attempted by a man of his years.

After a run of two blocks, he caught sight of the stranger just ahead of him, and centering all his remaining power in his voice, he called loudly.

The other turned about, and in response to the old man's beckoning, walked back toward him.

"I've got the papers!" Vanderpool cried in delight, as the man neared him. "What offer will you make?"

They held a hurried consultation on the sidewalk, with the result that the man, who had heard of the newly invented machine, after examining the model carefully, made an offer almost double the one Lansing had made, and they went back to Vanderpool's lodgings to draw up the necessary documents.

When they reached the old man's room he suddenly faced the stranger.

"I can't understand how they came back to me," he said as he unfolded the papers. "Holt & Co.—"

"Why, look here," the other broke in, as he examined the wrapping paper, "here's their name on the inside of this."

For an instant the old man stared at the other blankly, then a smile of understanding broke over his face.

"I know now," he chuckled gleefully. "I mailed them to myself, I'll bet. You see, this paper came to me, wrapped about some documents from Washington, and I turned it over and wrote the New York firm's name on the other side. Then, while I was looking for a piece of string, I remember the wind blew it on the floor, and I didn't notice that, when I picked it up, I put my name on the outside. At least, that must be what I did. And I'd have noticed it at the post-office, when I put the stamps on, if I hadn't broken my glasses while leaning against the partition there. But as it was—"

"To me it looks like a lucky thing you did break them," the other put in. "But come—let's sign these agreements."

Vanderpool smiled to himself as he thought of just how lucky, in a financial way, it really was, and as he reached for the fountain pen the other extended to him, he laughed: "No, I guess I'll use my own. It brought me good fortune when I used it on the wrapper—perhaps it will in this case, too."

IN CONVALESCENCE.

You were so kind when I was lying ill—
  Said such sweet things when I could not reply,
  I deeply longed to live; anon to die
While, anxious-eyed, you sat beside me still.

To-day, my feet firm on Recovery's hill,
  You have grown cold again! Oh, loved one, why?
You were so kind when I was lying ill—
  Said such sweet things when I could not reply!

If it was pity made your eyes to fill,
  I pray have pity now, but don't deny
  What 'tis akin to, and no man may buy.
I'm getting well almost against my will,
You were so kind when I was lying ill!

Edward W. Barnard.

With A Mustang's Help

By George B. Walker

SHORTY STRIKER, otherwise the Kid, twenty-four and ambitious, was the owner of about ten head of good cow ponies and champion bronco-buster of Nye County, Nevada. He now swung down from his mount and hitched across the sidewalk into the Palace saloon.

Taking his drink of raw red, he slouched over to the stove and was soon immersed in the Sunday news.

Two grizzled old prospectors sat on the opposite side of the welcome heat, and finally the Kid gave up disgustedly, trying to read about the Russian countess who did such a series of alluring dances, and was endeavoring to give the public her secrets on beauty.

Such sentences as these were the cause of his abandoning the paper.

"I tell yer, Mike, that is the finest hoss I've seen out in the hills as long as I've been there. If he was caught, the feller what put the rope on him would get a nice little stake out of it."

"Wal, it sure is the best piece of hoss-flesh I ever seen, all right; but I don't think there's a puncher in this county who's slick enough to get the Shy Un. Why, three year ago, a crowd of fellers from the East heard about him, and tried to stalk him, usin' a whoppin' big outfit, an' he give them the ha, ha!"

"I agree with you. These kids what's doin' the ridin' act can ride, all right, but they don't know nothin' about catchin' a horse like that one. Why, it takes a man like some—"

Shorty jumped out of his chair excitedly and, walking over to the two men, stood squarely in front of them.

"Say, you old mossbacks," he exploded, "just because nobody's caught that Pine Ridge mustang yet, you needn't get the idea into your heads that there ain't no good men left in this country. I ain't took a chance at gettin' him; but if I do take one, I'll hook him onto my string."

Old Mike, the man who had spoken first, looked up at him insolently.

"That's pretty big talk, young feller, an', while I allus did respect a man who could talk big an' then make good, I ain't never had no use for the guy who is all bluff. You've got to show me."

The other old-timer, who was slightly acquainted with Shorty, looked up at him.

"Mike's got it right, Kid, an' take it from me, that hoss ain't goin' to be easy caught."

Kid's Irish was up, and he was not going to be downed by a couple of old ground-rats, as he contemptuously called them to himself.

"Well, gentlemen"—he spoke slowly, so as to lend weight to his words—"you seem to think that I am one o' them no

'counts an' quitters; but, believe me, I ain't, an' I'm goin' to make you a bet if you'll take me up. As far as that goes, you fellers ain't found that rich ledge you've been talkin' about since last spring. Apparently, there's more than one person around here what ain't made good," he quietly remarked, and looked absently at the ceiling.

"Well, let's have the bet," old Mike quickly interposed, not desiring to have his failures brought to light and scenting a possible bit of easy money.

"Is that your team standin' at the hitchin'-post?" Shorty asked.

They nodded.

"Wal," Shorty drawled, "I'll bet you half o' my string o' saddle animals, against them two poor little rats, that inside of a week I'll lead your wild terror right down the main street of this here town. If I didn't need the other half to stalk the bad hoss with, I'd be willin' to bet them, too," and he spat derisively into the stove.

"You're on," the two old men chorused.

"You've got from this Sunday until next to do that leadin' stunt," old Mike threw after him, as the Kid walked out of the saloon.

"Yes, an' I'll do it," Shorty called back as he swung into the saddle and galloped up the street.

II.

THREE days elapsed, and the morning of the fourth found Shorty hard on the mustang's trail.

The day before he had cleverly dug a pit in the ground, and, making a running noose in his *riata,* led the free end of it to the hole. Staking Peg, his saddle animal, near by along with two other mares, he got into the hiding-place to await developments. All of these preparations were in the immediate vicinity of the mustang's spring, in a good-sized cañon.

For half a day he sweltered in the hole, which was far too small for the slightest degree of comfort, waiting for something to happen.

Suddenly Peggy threw up her head and nickered, and, glancing carefully from his concealment, Shorty saw that the other two horses were standing with their ears pricked forward.

"Well, here he comes at last," Shorty told himself thankfully. "An' here's where I come pretty close to gettin' him."

Sure enough, it was the wild horse coming for his daily water.

Peggy again invited him to come closer, and whatever doubts he had had to cause him to pause were dispelled, and he walked directly into the noose.

Immediately Striker snapped it shut and jumped from the hole the better to fight him. He was caught by the forefeet, and Shorty already considered the bet surely won.

Jumping into the air, the wild animal came down stiff-legged.

Thereupon the cow-puncher threw a twist for the hind legs and missed.

Trembling with terror, the horse went into the air again; and Shorty, with a heavy pull on the rope, threw him to his side. Lashing and squealing with rage, the animal got again to its feet, when, in another endeavor to throw him, the rope, weakened where the hoofs had hit it, gave way.

Shaking his head, the erstwhile captive deliberately kicked Peggy and sailed off in a fine, reaching gallop, followed by the three mares.

Shorty stood helpless with the end of the rope in his hand.

"Wal," he spoke aloud. "if that ain't the doggoneddest I ever seen or heard tell of. The son-of-a-gun broke the stake-ropes on all o' them when I was fightin' him, an' then this here rope broke, an' he sails off with the bunch in tow."

And, throwing the saddle over his shoulder, he plugged eleven weary miles back to camp.

Arriving here, he found that all his other stock was loose, and for the latter half of the day he had the questionable pleasure of trying to catch them. At last, after many attempts, he managed to rope Daffy, the tamest, and, saddling him, tried to get the others.

They disappeared in the gathering darkness, and when Shorty turned in for the night, the last thing he heard was a heavy neigh of, what seemed to him to be, derision, and knew that it could come from the throat of one horse only.

In the morning, after a slight breakfast, he saddled Daffy and took up the trail again.

Rounding a small sand-dune an hour later, he found that he had come out right among the animals.

"Now," he yelled, "I've got a fair chance with you. That shoulder of your'n must be

some sore to-day, an' on a horse like Daffy you're sure goin' to be easy pickin'."

Although his shoulder was sore, and he ran with a limp, the wild horse managed to keep just out of range of Shorty's rope, which was ready for instantaneous use.

Clear to the hills, twelve miles, he led the man on horseback, and then, plunging into one of the cañons, continued to forge along. Striker, on his grain-fed horse, slowly gained, and when about thirty yards away, uncoiled and straightened his *riata*, secure in the certainty of his capture.

Suddenly his mount pitched forward, its forefeet breaking through the shallow crust of the alkali covering an old badger hole, and he distinctly heard a bone snap.

Scrambling to his feet, he threw a shot after the rapidly disappearing cause of his misfortune, and cursed long and heartily. Walking back to the helpless pony, he stood for a moment in doubt. Shaking himself together, he spoke decisively:

"Daffy, old boy, you've seen your last round-up. Gosh, I hate to shoot you, but I guess there's nothin' else to do."

Stepping back from the suffering animal, he pulled his gun and fired twice.

Lashing about in its death struggle, Daffy kicked a large stone wildly, and Shorty stopped its flight with his shin, unwillingly.

Seating himself, he began a vigorous massage of the injured limb, at the same time ruminating over his bad luck.

"Gosh!" he muttered, gazing blankly at the ground in front of him, "I was sure some fool to make that bet with them two old ground-rats and then brag about it. Gee! they'll sure have a fine time with me when I get into town empty-handed an'—"

His eyes had rested for an instant on the stone that had hit him, at first with no recognition, but suddenly with full comprehension. Jumping forward, he picked it up and looked carefully at the specimen. Apparently satisfied, he held it at arm's-length and spoke in a reverently superstitious manner:

"An' I was just goin' to yell about all the hard luck that I've had," whereupon he fell to and feverishly started the erection of a pile of stones.

III.

In town, old Mike and his partner watched the end of the week draw near with growing satisfaction. Rumors of the bet between the two old men and the champion "buster" of the county had spread rapidly, and the town was split up into two factions —those with money on Shorty, and those betting on the old men.

Sunday morning, odds were given against the younger man, and by three in the afternoon it was generally accepted that he had lost. Nevertheless, the crowd hung about the main street, anxious to be in at the finish.

Finally a much bedraggled figure carrying a saddle came around the corner.

"Thar he is!" a voice shouted. "An' he ain't got no hoss with him."

There was a simultaneous rush, and Shorty was plied with numerous questions, all of which he waved aside until comfortably seated at the lunch counter in the Palace.

Between bites he gave them the story of his failure.

"An' I guess that about proves that you lose an' we win," old Mike grinned complacently when he had finished.

"Yep," the young man rejoined. "You win that bet, all right; but I beat you to something a whole lot better."

"You what!" the other asked, drawing back in surprise.

Striker carefully drew his hand across his mouth, turned in the chair, and faced him.

"Ain't you always been lookin' for the ledge what that rich float you found last year come from?"

"Sure."

"Wal, I just happened to find it about two miles up the cañon from your claims," and for corroboration he drew from his pockets a handful of specimens.

Breathlessly the crowd inspected them; then Nichols, the "barkeep," broke the awed silence.

"Wal, Mike," he decided, voicing the crowd's attitude, "you won the bet, but if them's fair specimens, the Kid has sure beat you to the ledge." Then, turning to Shorty:

"What did you name it?" he asked.

"Why, I called the claim the Wild Hoss, seein' as how he led me to it. Ain't that some luck, though?"

"It is," the other agreed tersely.

"Blind luck, blind luck," old Mike growled to himself as he turned away with the realization that Fate had again played him false.

The Argosy's Log-Book

By the Editor

REALLY, readers, I must congratulate you, for it is you who have made this Log-Book feature of THE ARGOSY, the remarkable success it has become. Your letters, hailing from widely separated sections, and covering so broad a range of topics, from turtle eggs to thoughtfully expressed views on the ethics of a story, are far and away the most interesting contributions to such a department that have ever come under my observation. The great advantage THE ARGOSY enjoys over a similar correspondence corner in any of the big dailies, lies in the fact that its circulation being so much more wide-spread, differences in climate, customs, and even habits of speech, all play their part in making the reading of these letters not only absorbing occupation for the moment, but informative in the shape of stored knowledge for the mind. I am particularly pleased that we have got away from the discussion of how to write a story and into a zone that reflects the varying environments in which our half million readers live.

Here, for example, is G. E. E., writing from Chicago in June, and when you see these lines you have a mental picture of just how he is enjoying his vacation season by one of the Great Lakes. He begins:

I am an old reader of THE ARGOSY, and in my case I think it fills a niche different than with any of your readers. I am no lover of continued stories, to read them as such, but THE ARGOSY stories suit me, and as each month goes by I read the complete novels and the short stories, then lay the numbers by till vacation, June 26, when I go to our cottage in Michigan and read and fish till Labor Day in September. I have not read a continued story since last July, but have my ARGOSIES packed now from September to July, inclusive, and will read the *completed* stories during the coming hot days in the next ten weeks. They suit me, but my favorites are Seward Hopkins, Fred V. Greene, and A. P. Terhune.

Quite a reverse method in reading is pursued by A. J., writing from Waupun, in the adjoining State of Wisconsin, who, in renewing his subscription for two years, takes occasion to remark:

I think THE ARGOSY is the best magazine of its kind. I think the *Hawkins* stories are fine, but there are none that go unread. In the July ARGOSY you wish to know our habits in reading THE ARGOSY. First I read the Log-Book. Then I begin with the serials that are nearly through. Next come the complete novels; then the short stories. Then I start the new serial. I have no favorite author.

Jay K., of Salt Lake City, has found our magazine both entertaining and helpful. I myself fancied that the story he criticizes was anything but stereotyped, but then as I asked especially for opinions on it, I am indebted to him for his frankness in expressing his.

I have been a regular reader of THE ARGOSY for many years, and think it the best American magazine of to-day devoted to fiction. I think the introduction of the Log-Book a great feature, and I always read this first. I am having some experience on a college paper, and always follow your suggestions in the Log-Book closely. Edgar Franklin and Burke Jenkins are my favorite authors. I noticed that you asked for comments on "Midnight Between Towns." Frankly, I don't think much of the story. It follows the stereotyped, melodramatic type too closely.

L. W. F., of Providence, Rhode Island, wishes us to give him a few more stories like "Roy Burns's Handicap" and "Midnight Between Towns," while T. H. S., in Minneapolis, after stating that he has been a reader for eight years claims that there have been only two poor stories in all that time, viz.: "Roy Burns's Handicap" and "The Woman He Feared." And in his turn he can't understand John McM. (in July Log-Book) not liking Terhune's stories. In reply to J. C. F., of Clanton, Alabama, who enjoyed "His Handicap Mate" and "From Stripes to Shoulder-Straps," we published a story about printers in the March issue—"A Little Printer's Big Enemy."

Howard G. W., from Westport, California, a reader of thirteen years' standing, wishes to know whether I don't agree with him when he says that his "idea of story-writing is that one must be possessed of a fair imagination, and above all, be able to produce a good plot, and not put too much of his time and effort into describing the "crystal-like lakes," etc. I certainly do agree with him, and, I may add, that story-writing is one of the most difficult pursuits a man or woman can follow. You must know all that your characters are supposed to know, and a lot more besides. The keen critics that dilate on THE ARGOSY stories in the Log-Book should convince any one of this. And this leads up naturally to a letter from a Missouri friend, writing from Lebanon, Carl W. Thank you, Carl, for sparing me from wasting time over a piece of work with which you yourself were not wholly satisfied. I wish there were more like you.

I have been reading THE ARGOSY about six years, and think it the best magazine published. I like short stories that have a little love in them. I think all of the serials are just fine, and can hardly wait for the next issue. I expect you think you are hearing from an old man, but you are not. I am only seventeen, so I guess my opinions won't amount to much. I wrote a short story, and was going to send it to you, when I happened to read about that young fellow in the June Log-Book that made so many mistakes, so I changed my mind.

I am glad to tell our Canadian friend that I have in stock both a tramp and a sea story with which he should be greatly pleased. He is Fred L. B., of Deseronto, Ontario, and writes as follows:

Ten years ago I had a magazine handed me. The complete novel was "The Great and Only," about a circus. It was so good that I have always plumped for THE ARGOSY since then. I am an invalid, unable to walk, and, with reading my greatest pleasure, am always tickled when THE ARGOSY comes my way. I like the stories where the telegraph and telephone play a part, as that is my old profession. The serials are good, and the *Hawkins* yarns unbeatable for humor. I also like a good story of those heroes of the road—the hoboes. Can we not have one soon? And don't forget another good one

about our big colleges. No Wild West in mine, but a big whoop for the sea and railroad stories. The hard-luck stories are good, too. I think they give us a good insight into one side of life in a big city.

As an off-set to T. H. S.'s opinion, I print the subjoined from Robert L. H., in Correctionville, Iowa:

I have read THE ARGOSY for the last three years, and would not give it up for anything. I agree with M. H. B., of Pittsburgh, when he says that some people seem rather narrow-minded when they ask you not to publish any more stories of a certain kind, for they are not the only ones to be considered in the publication of a story. Of the past stories I have read, "The Woman He Feared," "The Tail of the Oregonian Limited," and "The Trail of the Flashlight" were my favorites, but they were all good. In the July number "The Sign of Fear" was a dandy, and "The Breaking Faith of an Insurgent" was a very good one, as it showed his great love for his country, even to the extent of the killing of his brother to save it. P. S.—Your Log-Book makes THE ARGOSY perfect, and I would not like to see it changed.

Now, after so much sweetness, we will bring ourselves down to earth with the comments of E. W. R., writing from Orchard, Nebraska, who says:

You have asked for opinions on THE ARGOSY stories. They are good, but some are better. I don't like such stories as "Roy Burns's Handicap." The hard-luck stories grow stale. The more stories with a plot laid outside the city of New York, the better your book will take with the majority of your readers.

Short and sweet is the post-card from E. M., of Waycross, Georgia, which runs: "I sure enjoyed that short story entitled 'Cupid Fans the Pitcher.' I like such stories as those." This reader will be especially pleased to learn that I have in stock a serial with its scene laid in the Okefenokee Swamp, not far from his neighborhood. From another Southern State, Mentone, in Alabama, I have the following tribute to a story which has surely served its purpose of providing entertainment. The writer is Mrs. C. P. O.

Some dozen or so (fifteen perhaps) years ago a story appeared in THE ARGOSY called "A Peruvian Paradise," written by W. Bert Foster. I have my copy, with the first seven pages gone, worn to tatters by long use, for I have read it to my children over and over again, and always with fresher enjoyment. I read it last winter to the husband of one of the children who had enjoyed it as a child. I now have to improvise the first seven pages of the story. This is a great strain on the inventive powers of a lady who is the mother of seven daughters, "with all the appurtenances thereof." Could you republish this story? It seems to suit all ages.

In regard to the foregoing, I wonder how many other readers take pleasure in reading a story more than once. With some of Dickens's novels I have enjoyed them more the second and third time of going over than the first. Still in the Southern zone, I now give place to a breezy letter from F. L. M., in St. Augustine, Florida, the oldest city in the country, I believe. But in spite of this the writer enlivens his remarks with language that is nothing if not up to date.

I am an old reader of THE ARGOSY, and I would like to give my opinion of the star publication. I began reading THE ARGOSY in 1900, and I think it is the best publication on the market. Tell Fritz Krog to get a wiggle on and give some of his time to the motorist, and give us a yarn on the motor-cyclist. Some class to Seward Hopkins and his "Vengeance Burned Away." Get the hook to the mushy love stories, and give us something with ginger to it. The man who wrote "Around the World in Twenty-Four Hours" ought to have a Carnegie medal. I want to give best regards to Elbert Wiggins and his serial, "In Quest of the Pink Elephant." Do not forget George C. Jenks. He is the candy with his "Sky-Scraper Conspiracy." I give THE ARGOSY credit for having such a good bunch of contributors. I give Palatka, Florida, credit for producing a person like C. Y. H. (June Log-Book). She surely does know a good story when she sees one. Palatka is a hot-air burg of the first water. That is where I came from, and that is why I know how to make so much noise. Hurrah for our home town! E. H. R. (June Log-Book), the man from the bean town, is onto his job. Long live the serial stories. Give us something from Mexico. A medal for Albert Payson Terhune. F. H. R., from Charlottesville, Virginia, must surely be a Southerner, judging by the way he boosts Southern atmosphere. That is what I call a man. Give me something that reeks with Kentucky colonels, and pretty Southern lassies, and a shooting brawl thrown in for good measure. All that there is to life is what we get out of it, so if we can't see what we want, let us read about it. William H. Greene is onto his job. "The Fighting Streak" is the best ever. P. S.—My motto: Don't be a knocker, be a booster. Always give friends and enemies the same chance.

In reply to Milton J. P., of Plymouth, Pennsylvania, he must surely have noticed that it is only now and then of late that the scenes of stories have been laid in New York. As to Pennsylvania, I have both a Pittsburgh and a Philadelphia story in stock.

I have read THE ARGOSY for the past five years, and consider it my favorite magazine. Such stories as "At Lone Wolf Cabin" and "Four Magic Words" are crackerjacks. The only criticism I can make is that nearly all the stories have their scenes laid in New York. Why aren't some of them placed in Pennsylvania, in the anthracite region?

Here is a peaceful citizen of Buffalo, New York, (W. R. B.) rooting hard for sport and war yarns.

THE ARGOSY is improving. "Cupid Fans the Pitcher" is a good one. Why not give us one baseball story a month during the baseball season? I like stories of Revolutionary and Civil wars, and also Russian stories, but for mercy's sake kill the *Hawkins* stories. They are getting to be too much of a chestnut. Lebbar and Terhune are your winning team. As an organist who provides one or two *new* things every Sunday for the people, I know what it must be to edit THE ARGOSY.

And apropos of trying to please everybody, A. S. McG., of St. Louis, utterly disagrees with our Buffalo friend on one point. Note below:

About 1885 I commenced reading *The Golden Argosy*, published in the form of a story-paper, and have stuck to it all along down the line. Have no criticisms to make or suggestions to offer—am perfectly willing to buy it in the dark. My preference in serial stories for the past twenty-five years has been "The Fantom Flier," by Jared Fuller, published in 1904-1905. *Hawkins* — my vocabulary is limited to Webster's unabridged, and I cannot find anything that will express my appreciation of *Hawkins*.

J. W. B., of Milford, Utah, is to the fore with a suggestion for another ending to "One Thrill Too Many." I wonder, by the way, if the majority of ARGOSY readers are not like the majority of play-goers in preferring that the hero and heroine should "live happy ever after." But here is what J. W. B. has to say:

I have been reading THE ARGOSY since 1887, and have never willingly missed a copy. I look for it every month with more interest than I do my check. I have never been a regular subscriber; being a Boomer R. R. man, I buy it where I find it. I first read the serials, then the complete novels, short stories, then the ads. Give us another story like "Through Circus Rings." "Vengeance Burned Away" is fine, so far, and "One Thrill Too Many" is a bird if Mr. Lebbar had only finished it right. I think the hero's aunt should have disinherited him, and he should have married the governess, who turned out to be a rich heiress. But they can't please us all. THE ARGOSY is the best, anyway.

As editor of the whole magazine I am wondering whether what A. R., writing below from Massachusetts, has to say of the Log-Book is as wholly complimentary as it sounds:

I was greatly interested in the reports in the Log-Book regarding the method in which the magazine is read, and find that others besides myself go for the serial the farthest advanced first, then the next farthest advanced, then the short stories, and then the complete novels. The Log-Book has proved as interesting to me as any of the stories. I have taken the magazine for several years, and, following a hard day at newspaper work, enjoy reading of others' troubles.

Herewith one of those rarities, a letter from New York, written by Lee J. B. W., who says he likes Western stories best.

I notice in the July number you would like to have the readers explain their habits of reading the book. Mine is, start from page 1 and read right through. I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for the last five years, and never missed a copy of it in all that time. George C. Jenks must have been an ironworker. How true to life he makes old *Zeb Grant* in "A Sky-Scraper Conspiracy"! I ought to know, because I was an ironworker myself a few years ago. Keep up the good work with your stories, as they are the greatest ever.

T. L. H., of Miami, Oklahoma, has made a mistake of ten years in the date he mentions. No. 1 of *The Golden Argosy* bore date December 9, 1882. We are proud to have him still with us.

The number of years I have been reading THE ARGOSY speaks louder than all the testimonials I could give. I commenced with No. 1, *Golden Argosy*, 1872. Am I right in date? I, a boy of thirteen, thought it the only paper published, and have never had cause to change my opinion. I do not care for the *Hawkins* and some similar stories, but upon the whole THE ARGOSY is not excelled by any publication.

Did you ever hear about the man who painted a sunset just exactly as it was in nature, hoping to be crowned with the laurels of a great artist, and found himself regarded merely as a photographer? Nature, you see, must be idealized to make it art, and so must Western stories, to make them seem true to the big majority of readers, who, of course, do not all live in the West. Just as in plays, people like to see a locality as they have grown to believe it is, not as it actually exists, so, too, in stories. Paul Armstrong admitted to me himself that there never were such cowboys on ranch or plain as he described in "The Heir to the Hoorah," but if he had made them more like Eastern folk, the play would not have scored the immense hit it did. Perhaps some day I will try the experiment of printing a Western story as the Westerners really are to-day, to find out how much—or how little—it is liked by the big majority of readers. All of which is prefatory to the following letter from Mrs. M. C., of Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, Canada, who has my special thanks for the paragraph in it she asks me not to print. I wish she might hear the song, "The Girl by the Saskatchewan," one of the big hits in "The Pink Lady," the musical comedy that has captivated New York. But to the letter:

We have taken THE ARGOSY for ten years. That speaks for itself. I don't need to say that we like it. We began in Montana, and when we moved here were willing to pay the additional price to secure it. We like your Log-Book immensely, and have thought several times of writing and telling you about some of your mistakes in your Western stories. Then we would say, "What's the use? You can't make most Easterners understand us. They have an idea we are all wild and woolly and uneducated." I wish I could write stories. How I would like to tell of our West as it really is! But I am awfully afraid our Eastern friends would be disappointed. Now, for instance, take "The Shooting at Big D." You never, never find cowboys like those. I know, for I have cowboys all over the country around me, and have known some all my life. In fact, I am married to a cowman. I have lived in California, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, and Nevada also. Then, you take that revolver-shot: the author shows his ignorance of the shooting power of our modern guns. No pocketbook would stop a bullet nowadays. They probably did about the time of the Civil War, but not now. If you doubt it, try it; but I advise you to take something besides a human being to put back of the pocketbook.

The foregoing leads us naturally to some remarks of R. A. G., from Washington, District of Columbia, anent the difference between the improbable and the impossible in stories. You will note he votes hard for the impossible, but he is wrong about that ash-tree. He forgets that it was raining.

I have been reading THE ARGOSY for about twenty-five years. I observe in the Log-Book that many of your readers ridicule what they term impossible stories. I prefer the impossible kind. Perhaps I should say the apparently impossible kind. But I do not care for the *improbable* sort. Note the distinction. I recall reading, when quite a young man, several stories which at the time were called impossible; viz., "Frank Reade and His Steam Wagon," also his "Flying Machine," also his "Electric Wagon," all of which are quite common nowadays. Let us have some good *impossible* stories along scientific lines. Jules Verne was no fool, although every one thought so when he wrote "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea." Now, a word about improbabilities, and at the same time a knock at Mr. Fritz Krog. In his story, "Midnight Between Towns," he refers to the mountaineer *Tom* being knocked out by a current of electricity conducted by an ash-tree coming in contact with the trolley-wire. This is improbable, as wood will not conduct a current of electricity unless very much soaked with water.

For the benefit of G. D. M., who writes from Fort Worth, Texas, I may say that this would be a very dull world if we all thought alike, and I dare say an expression of differences in opinion is a contributing factor in making this Log-Book such a favorite feature as it seems to have become. He says:

I read THE ARGOSY in a systematic way—*i.e.*, I start with the nearest completed serial, then the next, coming to the completed stories next, following which I absorb the various short stories, finally rounding up with the editor's Log. I *do not* and *have not* found a story in The ARGOSY that has been dull, and as you have many thousand readers to please it seems to me that those who are so ready to criticize and call some stories *bum*, etc., should at least reason with themselves, saying. "Well, if I do not like this particular author's writings, several thousands of others do, so I will say nothing hurtful if I cannot give it a boost." There are some of your authors, such as B. Lebhar, F. V. Greene, and G. C. Jenks, I greatly admire for their good, plain way of writing their stories. But while I favor them, still I am not so narrow-minded as to think all readers should do likewise.

Under date of June 30, Barney A. M., Jr., in Mobile, Alabama, an enthusiastic admirer of the Munsey fiction magazines, writes as follows, but Mobile is not as unsung as he seems to imagine:

I suppose that you do not know there is a place by the name of Mobile on the map, and you will be surprised to receive a letter from it; but we receive your Magazines (spelled with a capital letter) regularly every month, just like New York or any of the other big cities. I get THE ARGOSY, *The All-Story*, and *The Cavalier*, and I think that they are the best I have ever seen or heard tell of. I read the Log-Book in THE ARGOSY first of all, and I see a lot of letters from people saying that they do not like serials; but, for my part, I like the serials best of all. Hurry along with that "Vengeance Burned Away," and some more of those *Hawkins* stories. Also ask some of the contributors to come and see if Alabama and the surrounding territory is not a good place to lay the scene of a story.

In reply to the final suggestion of E. A. W., writing from Governor's Island, New York, another story of the Civil War is now being written for us, based on one of the most striking episodes in the entire four years' conflict.

I have been reading every story in THE ARGOSY for a number of years, and I am pleased with both the continued and short stories. I have been greatly entertained with "The Fighting Streak," by W. H. Greene. I am taking more notice of this from the fact that I am a veteran of the Civil War, and everything pertaining to that period and conflict interests me. The defeat of General Hooker at Fredericksburg by a flank movement of General Jackson's command is graphically criticized in his memoirs by Carl Schurz, who was present in command of a division. More stories of the Civil War setting would be appreciated.

In striking contrast to the foregoing I accept the "dare" of George C. MacK., from Allerton, Massachusetts, who, after abusing both "Midnight Between Towns" and "The Fighting Streak" in strong language, adds: "I suppose that no part of this letter will ever be printed in the Log-Book on account of its critical character, but, nevertheless, I must write to relieve my feelings." Here is the section of his denunciations I have elected to reproduce: "Verily if war is hell, it is not in the tongue of a man to define 'The Fighting

Streak.' It is an inhuman shame to have a good magazine dragged into the mire of uninterestingness (*sic*) by a duo of such murderously meritless complete novels."

If my publishing of the foregoing does not settle the argument for Randall V. P., of Oklahoma City, I trust my reproduction of his own letter will do so. From the very nature of the communications in the Log-Book it should be perfectly evident to any one that they are all genuine. I keep the letters, however, so that any who still doubt, may see them with their own eyes in my office.

I have been reading THE ARGOSY for the past five years, and like it better than any magazine published. I was certainly glad to find a story by Fritz Krog, and it certainly was a dandy. Mr. Krog and Mr. Terhune are my favorites. I am writing this letter to settle an argument. A friend of mine says the letters in THE ARGOSY Log-Book are fakes, so I told him I would write to you and prove that he was wrong.

If Dr. W. B., of Elmira, New York, will read carefully again page 714 in the July ARGOSY, he will find no mention of the word chloroform, to which he takes exception. As Mr. Terhune is personally acquainted with a son of the man who discovered the famous anesthetic, it is scarcely likely that he, of all men, would commit the anachronism of introducing it in Stuyvesant's period. Mrs. L. E., of Old Chatham, New York, writes that one of the reasons she likes THE ARGOSY is that the stories are clean, so that she is not afraid to have one of the children pick up a copy. G. T. L., of Minneapolis, enters a plea for freight brakemen and switch tenders instead of engineers as heroes of railroad stories.

In reply to Dr. C. N. N., of Anderson, Indiana, I am inclined to agree with him in regard to the story he mentions in a paragraph I am not printing. As to the smaller type for the Log-Book, the influx of letters has been so great as to make this imperative.

I have been reading THE ARGOSY for about six years, and I regard it as the very best publication of its kind. I enjoy reading the Log-Book, too. It is amusing to get the opinions of the other readers. We can't all think alike, but you do surely try to please us all. I like the serial stories best, and my great favorite is Albert Payson Terhune. His stories are "peaches." He keeps close to historical facts, and instructs while he is entertaining. The stories are all good. A little of *Hawkins* is all right, but much is very tiresome. I would suggest a dose of *Hawkins* about every three months. This will be a plenty. I am sorry to see the Log-Book go into small type. It is hard on us old people. THE ARGOSY is the only magazine I read, except those of a medical nature, but I read it well. I even read every word of "An Exhibit That Walked Away." I do not pass anything. "In the Name of the King" is splendid. I do not see how you could do better in your efforts to please us all.

Here is another Indiana reader, of the fair sex this time, hitting the nail on the head in defining just the sort of entertainment THE ARGOSY seeks to convey to its readers. She is Mrs. H. W., of Terre Haute, and she begins:

Since the inauguration of the Log-Book offers so good an opportunity, I wish to tell you how much pleasure your magazine affords me. I have read it for many years, and have enjoyed many splendid stories published therein. THE ARGOSY furnishes the kind of light reading one looks for when the day's work has tired out body and mind. One is always sure to find something of interest. In recent numbers I have specially enjoyed the clever stories of a comparatively new contributor, Fritz Krog. His "Midnight Between Towns," published in the June number, deserves special mention. It is a fine story, interestingly told. It claims the reader's interest throughout, and one must feel a sigh of relief arising when the lovers are finally united after such serious troubles.

Below you will find gun lore galore from W. H. L., of New Virginia, Iowa, which I commend not only to my readers who wish to be ready with their critical microscopes, but to all my authors as well, one of whom has been going about in sackcloth and ashes for months at having committed the fearful breach of speaking of a forty-eight caliber weapon.

I am a reader of THE ARGOSY, and like it best of all monthly publications. You have some excellent stories, and all are good. You will, I see, let some of your authors make some mistakes, such as describing some part to a certain engine or piece of machinery which that particular make does not have, or in speaking of guns as a 42 or 48 caliber, when there is no such caliber made. Foreign guns are generally designated as millimeter, while in calibers there is made in the United States only the 22, 25, 30, 32, 38, 40, 41, 44, 45, and 50 caliber. Shotguns are spoken of as 8, 10, 12, 16, 20 gage. The general guns used by the cowboys are 44's and 45's. I intend to keep on reading THE ARGOSY, for I like the stories. *Hawkins* is all right; so are the others.

B. H. H., of Tuska, Oklahama, reads the serials first, next the short stories, and then the complete novels. He adds: "I like mystery, adventure, and Western stories best, and I always find them in THE ARGOSY, but in no other. I also like Terhune stories." H. B. M., a stenographer of Webb City, Missouri, is informed that a stenographer was the hero of "The Scarlet Warning," the complete novel in July, 1905. He thinks THE ARGOSY simply great, and like stories such as "The Shooting at Big D" and "The Sign of Fear." C. H. S., from Southbridge, Massachusetts, has never read a magazine that equals THE ARGOSY. He wants more stories like "An Up-to-Date Shipwreck" and "The Tail of the Oregonian Limited." He adds: "The short stories are extremely good, especially *Hawkins*. I also take a great interest in the Log-Book and think it is a benefit to the readers."

Here comes J. L. C., of Normandy, Tennessee, with a criticism of a criticism:

I am always very busy day and night, but can always find time to read THE ARGOSY. Notice where Paul W. E., of Chillicothe, states he disliked "His Brother's Eclipse," because there was nothing to make it distinctive, whereas I liked it better than any serial I had ever read, and consider that it had more distinctive features than any others, and was brimful of realities from start to finish. For shorter stories, "The Tail of the Oregonian Limited" was the best I have ever read in any magazine. But I haven't any complaint to make on any of your stories, as you always use the greatest care in your selection. The Log-Book is very interesting and instructive, and I enjoy it very much.

Many men of many minds, runs the proverb, and whereas F. D. S., writing from Antioch, California, arraigns poor *Hawkins* in no unmeasured terms, he eulogizes "Roy Burns's Handicap" and the hard-luck stories. But here is what he says:

I have been a soldier in the ranks of THE ARGOSY, *All-Story*, and *Railroad Man's Magazine* for over ten years, and have not missed one number of either of them. All of the short stories are good, all interesting and good reading except the *Hawkins* stories. I never read them at all. I think that they are the silliest and most ridiculous stories I ever read. Now, fancy me, thirty-nine years of age, or anybody else that age, reading "Alice in Wonderland," "Dame Trot," or "Old Mother Goose." These and *Hawkins* stories are about the same thing—more for a child to read. It is too bad to let half a dozen pages go to waste, where the space should be used for a story that is something like "A Tenderfoot's Stand." Give us more like "Roy Burns's Handicap" and "His Brother's Eclipse," and down-and-out stories something like "When a Man's Hungry." I have twelve to fifteen men with me all the time, and they anxiously wait for each number to arrive. They all think the world of THE ARGOSY. I enjoyed "Midnight Between Towns" and "The Shooting at Big D."

Frank S. R., of Chicago, says it makes him "sore" when he reads letters "knocking" Terhune and the *Hawkins* stories. He reads serials first, next the complete novels, and the short stories last." He adds that "In Quest of the Pink Elephant" and "Midnight Between Towns" hit him about right.

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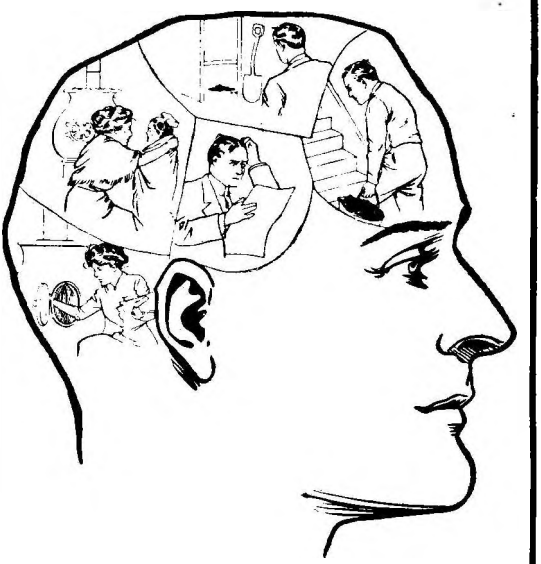

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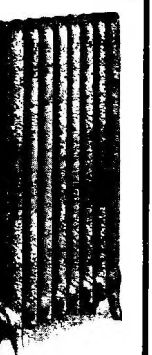

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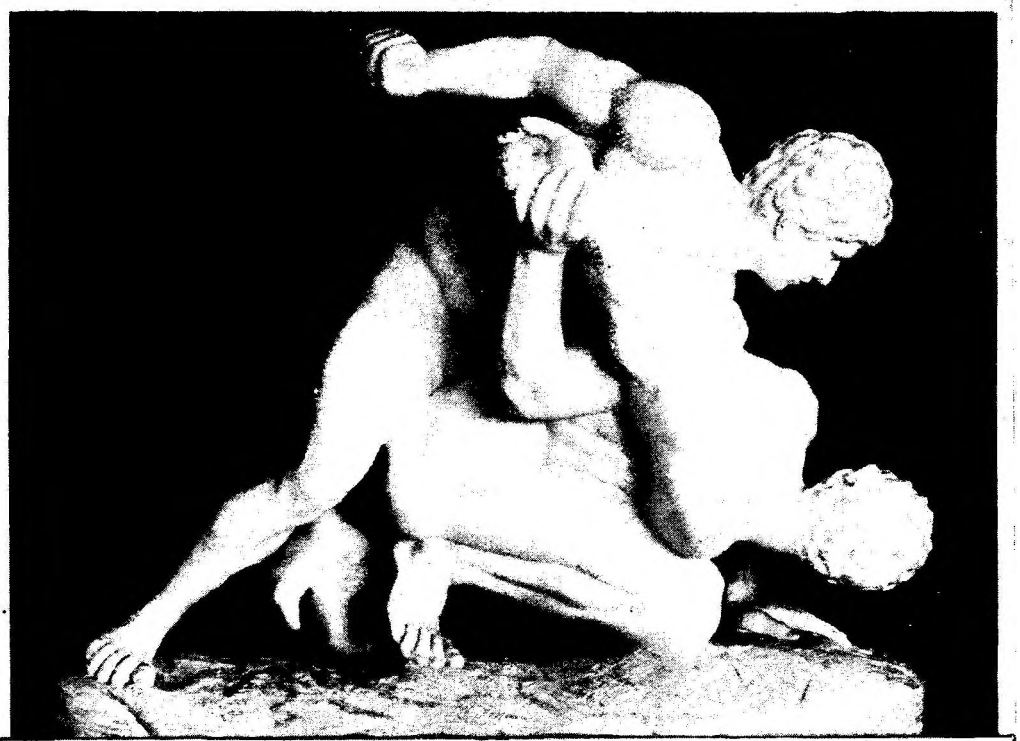

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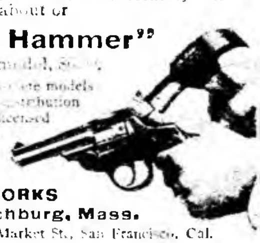

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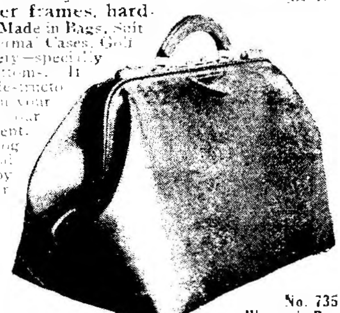

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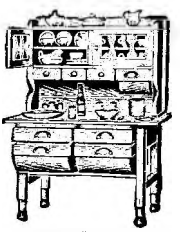

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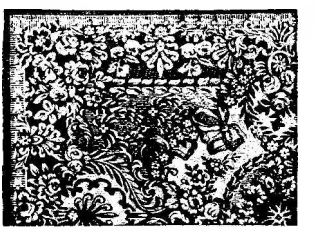

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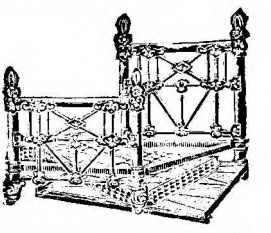

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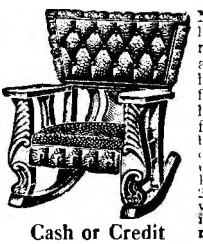

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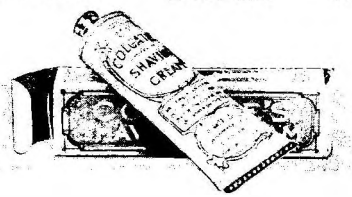

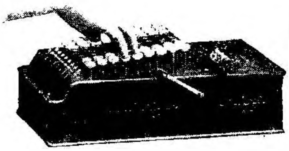

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"We use the Comptometer for various purposes in our card cost accounting system, and constantly checking the calculations on our outgoing invoices, and in footing pages of journal, cash book, ledger, etc.

"Sessions Fdy. Co., Bristol, Conn."

"My trial balance has decreased from a three or four days' work to one day's work. If you are pushed with work it is a helper. E. H. [illegible], Tralake, Miss."

"We use your machine for footing the posting on the card ledger and find it absolutely proof to such an extent in our trial balance that we have not had an error in our trial balance within the last two years.

"Hungerford Brass & Copper Co., New York."

Why not let us send you a book about it, FREE? Or, a Comptometer on free trial, prepaid, U. S. or Canada?

Felt & Tarrant Mfg. Co., 1734 N. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.

Racine SHIRTS

With collars attached.

FOR general wear—either for work or sport. Serviceable, sensible, and economical.

Cut to fit *you*, from Flannels, Twills, and Chambrays of extra quality. Made with double lapped and stitched seams that laugh at hard wear and laundries. Not "skimpy," but generous in fullness. If you want shirts that will last to the last and please you all the time, insist upon the "*Racine*."

Sold where good shirts are sold

The Chas. Alshuler Mfg. Co.

Makers

1201—14th St., Racine, Wis.

Want New Suit?

It will cost you nothing. Everybody needs clothes. Your friend, neighbor or acquaintance will buy of you. Profit on two orders will get you a free suit. The easiest thing in the world.

BIG OUTFIT FREE

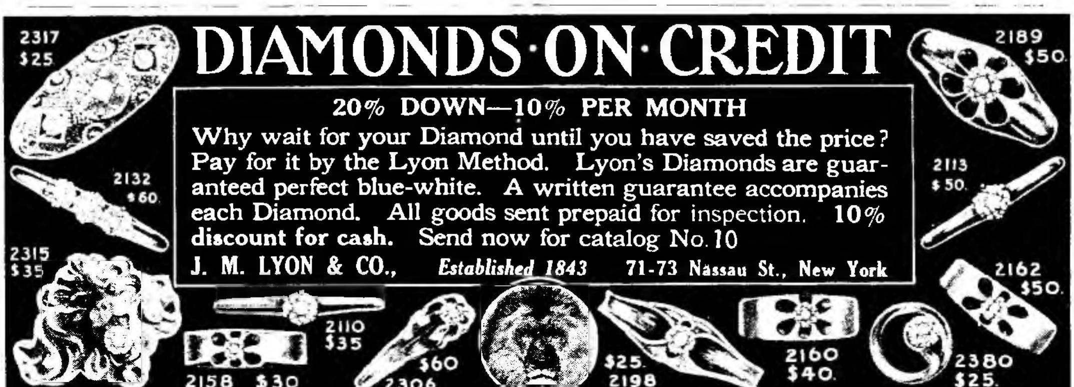
We give you a bigger and better line and make our prices lower than any other house in existence. Our system insures a better fit, better work and better service. No express charges.

CLOTHING AGENTS

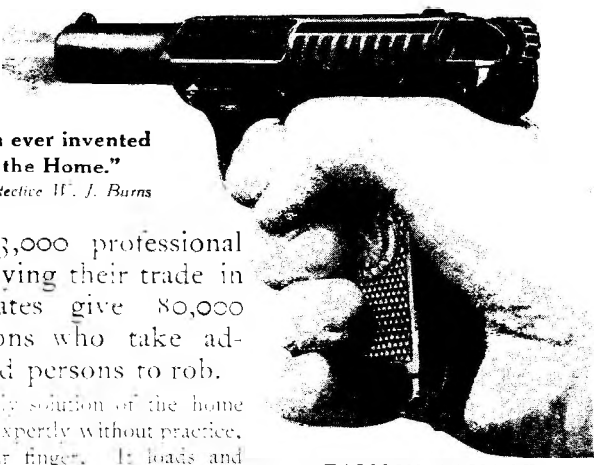
WANTED—Now is the time to get in the game. Our men make from $5 to $15 a day easy. Take up the clothing business as a side line—it will pay you well. You need no money or experience. We furnish everything to start.

FREE **Complete Sample Outfit** including big assortment of cloth samples, latest fashions, tape measure, special offers. Write at once before we get someone else in your town. This is a wonderful opportunity to make some money and start you in a well paying business.

THE CAPITOL TAILORS, 919 Capitol Bldg., Chicago



3000 Burglars Loose



"The greatest weapon ever invented for the protection of the Home."
Detective W. J. Burns

CRIME records show that 3,000 professional burglars and footpads are plying their trade in large cities constantly. Estimates give 80,000 tramps, loafers and vicious persons who take advantage of unprotected homes and persons to rob.

The New Savage Automatic is the only solution of the home protection problem. Anyone can shoot it expertly without practice, because you aim it as easy as pointing your finger. It loads and recocks itself, therefore has no jerk or trigger-flinch to spoil your quick, easy aim. Feels right and steady. Shoots 11 shots as fast as you press the trigger—one shot to a trigger pull.

Your home will be protected tonight if you stop at the store today and examine a Savage Automatic.

Send for a copy of "Bat" Masterson's book which explains why a novice can shoot the Savage Automatic with wonderful accuracy.

FAMOUS SAVAGE RIFLES

Send also for free booklet which explains about the famous 303 Savage Featherweight, and the 22 cal. Takedown Repeater. Savage Arms Corporation, 106 Savage Avenue, Utica, New York.

THE NEW SAVAGE AUTOMATIC

GLASTENBURY

HEALTH UNDERWEAR FOR MEN

GLASTENBURY Established 1855 KNITTING CO.
REG. U.S. PAT OFF

Made in fine Australian Lambs' Wool, Worsted and Merino.

A leader for over fifty years. Glastenbury has proved its superiority as to fit, finish and wearing qualities. *Guaranteed not to shrink.*

Every garment shaped to the figure. Drawer bands are adjustable and require no suspender straps. No guessing as to size. Exact chest measurement on every shirt, exact waist measurement on every pair of drawers. *Every garment guaranteed.*

All Glastenbury underwear is elastic, non-irritating and durable. Made in five grades each, *light weight, medium* and *heavy weight.*

None genuine without Glastenbury trade mark on garment.

Prices 50% under imported goods of same quality. Prices: $1.50, $1.75, $2.00, $2.25, $2.50, $2.75 and $3.00 per garment.

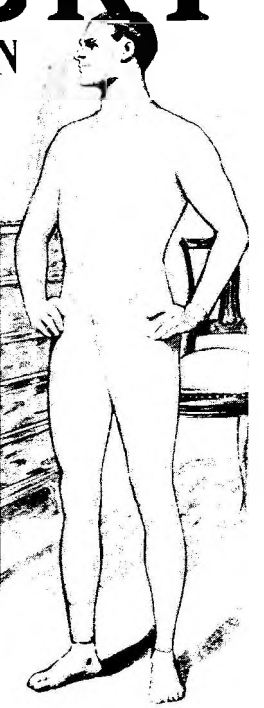
Best protection from Grippe, Pneumonia and Rheumatism.

Write for booklet and sample cuttings.

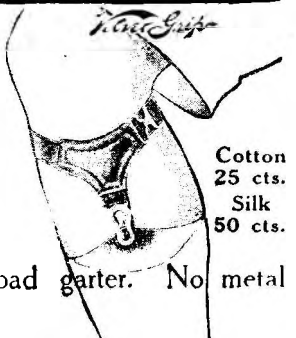
GLASTENBURY TRADE MARK HEALTH UNDERWEAR
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

MILLS AT GLASTONBURY, CONN.

GLASTONBURY KNITTING COMPANY
Dept. B. GLASTONBURY, CONN.



Boston Garter



The Most Comfortable Men's Garter Made

PAD TYPE

Cotton 25 cts.
Silk 50 cts.

High type of pad garter. No metal touches the leg.

Guaranteed Against Imperfections.

Fits smoothly—stays in place—retains its hold until you release it.

Durability assured by superior quality in materials and workmanship.

On sale wherever there are good stores.
Sample pair postpaid on receipt of price.

GEORGE FROST COMPANY
MAKERS, BOSTON

$4.80

A Month For 10 Months

No. 363

Buys this Exquisite "Perfection" DIAMOND RING

No Money Down

Just your regular monthly payment of $4.80 after examination by you. Can you imagine any easier way to secure a fine, pure white Diamond? All you have to do is to ask us to send you this Ring on approval. It will be sent at once, all charges prepaid. If you are not perfectly satisfied, return it at our expense. This Diamond Ring is our great special. It is the result of years of painstaking study and experiment, and now stands alone as the **most perfect Diamond Ring ever produced. Hence the name "Perfection."** Only the finest quality pure white diamonds, perfect in cut and full of fiery brilliancy, are used. Each diamond is specially selected by our diamond experts, and is skilfully mounted in our famous Loftis "Perfection" 6-prong ring mounting, which possesses every line of delicate grace and beauty. Guaranteed to be exactly as shown. Each ring is cased in a handsome, blue velvet ring box, with white satin lining.

Write for our Free Catalog containing over 2,000 illustrations of Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry, Silverware, etc. It tells all about our easy credit plan. Write today.

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The Old Reliable Original Diamond and Watch Credit House
Dept. D 317 92 to 98 State St., Chicago, Ill.
Branch Stores: Pittsburg, Pa., and St. Louis, Mo.

Clothing Salesmen Wanted

$150 Per Month and Expenses

are made by active men selling our popular line of clothing. No experience necessary. We are **America's Pioneer Tailors.** We operate the largest mills in United States and sell goods cheaper than any other house. Finest tailored suits, $7.50 up. At these prices you have no trouble in getting orders. **OUR PLAN**—We furnish you large, handsome sample outfit, cloth samples, lithograph fashion plates, tape measure, order blanks, advertising matter, all sent express prepaid. Don't buy a suit or overcoat anywhere, at any price until you see our liberal offer and the biggest and lowest priced tailoring line in the United States.

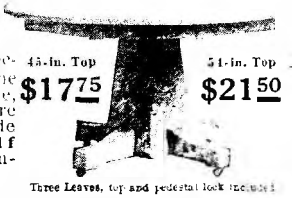
THE OLD WOOLEN MILLS CO., DEPT. 919, Adams & Market Sts., Chicago

You Save over Half on "COME-PACKT" FURNITURE and It's Honest all Through

$15.75
Glass Extra

We sell direct only—factory to you—saving you all dealers' and jobbers' profits, expensive packing and one-half the freight. You put the completely finished sections together. The result is handsome, substantial furniture of the highest grade at less than **half the cost** of common place.

"BIG SIX" Catalog Mailed Free.



45-in. Top **$17.75**
54-in. Top **$21.50**
Three Leaves, top and pedestal lock included

Quarter Sawn White Oak—rich in beautiful flake and grain—used throughout. You see just what you get—it's Honest All Through.

Our name and guarantee back every piece—your money back any time you say.

Try our way ONCE—that's the proof.

$19.75
Beveled Mirror, 8x30 in.

COME-PACKT FURNITURE CO., 934 Edwin Street, Ann Arbor, Mich. (G)

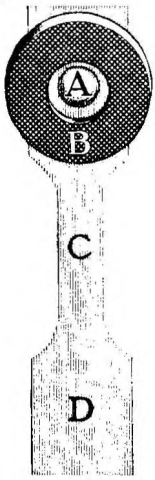
Corns Ended In Two Days

The pain stops instantly. Within two days the whole corn loosens and comes out.

Blue-jay has done this fifty million times. It will do it for you—that we guarantee—no matter how tough the corn.

The secret lies in a bit of B & B wax—a wonderful invention. It loosens the corn without soreness or pain. You don't feel it at all. The corn is forgotten until it comes out.

Go get it. Don't let corns torment you any more.



A in the picture is the soft B & B wax. It loosens the corn.
B protects the corn, stopping the pain at once.
C wraps around the toe. It is narrowed to be comfortable.
D is rubber adhesive to fasten the plaster on.

Blue-jay Corn Plasters

Also Blue-jay Bunion Plasters

15c and 25c per Package

All Druggists Sell and Guarantee Them

If not convinced, ask for sample—free

Bauer & Black, Chicago and New York

Makers of Surgical Dressings, etc. (33)

"DON'T SHOUT"

"I hear you. I can hear now as well as anybody. 'How?' Oh, something new—THE MORLEY PHONE. I've a pair in my ears now, but they are invisible. I would not know I had them in, myself, only that I hear all right."

The **Morley Phone** for the

DEAF

makes low sounds and whispers plainly heard. Invisible, comfortable, weightless and harmless. Anyone can adjust it. Over one hundred thousand sold. Write for booklet and testimonials.

THE MORLEY CO., Dept. 752, Perry Bldg., Phila.

FREE You Can Have This Switch FREE

Send us a sample of your hair and we will mail you this beautiful **22-inch human hair switch to match.** If satisfactory send us **$1.50** any time within 10 days, or sell 3 to your friends for $1.50 each and get yours **absolutely free.** Extra shades a little higher. Souvenir catalog showing latest styles of fashionable hairdressing, etc., on request. Enclose 5c postage. **Marguerite Colly, Dept. 166, 115 S. Dearborn St., Chicago**

STARTLING

Watch Offer

The Great Burlington Special at an Anti-Trust Price!

The world's masterpiece of watch manufacture now sold direct!—

The most amazing offer ever made in the whole history of the watch industry—an offer which has absolutely PARALYZED competition—the offer of the genuine Burlington Special direct to the public at the rock-bottom ANTI-TRUST PRICE, without middlemen's profits.

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We will not be bound by any system of price-boosting contracts with dealers. We will not submit to any "which profit" selling scheme. We will not be dictated to by ANY Trust.

NO MATTER WHAT IT COSTS, we are determined to push our independent line even if we should have to fight a combination of all the Watch Manufacturers of the country!

And so we are making this offer—the most sweeping, astounding offer ever made on a high-grade watch. The famous BURLINGTON **direct and at the same price WHOLESALE Jewelers must pay.**

And in order to make the proposition doubly easy for the public we will even allow this rock-bottom price, if desired, on terms of

$2.50 a Month

Don't miss this wonderfully liberal offer. Sign and mail coupon now. Rock-bottom, anti-trust price, whether you buy for cash or time.

POST YOURSELF!

Be sure to get posted on watches and watch values, trust-method prices and anti-trust prices **before** you buy a watch. Learn to judge watch values!

Get the Burlington Watch Company's

FREE WATCH BOOK

Read our startling exposure of the amazing conditions which exist in the watch trade today. Read about the anti-trust fight. Read about our great $1,000.00 Challenge. Learn how you can judge watch values. Send your name and address for this valuable **FREE BOOK** now—TODAY. Sign & mail coupon.

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Please send me, without obligation and prepaid, your free book on watches and copy of your $1,000.00 challenge, with full explanations of your cash or $2.50 a month offer on the superb **ANTI-TRUST** Burlington Watch.

Name.....

Address.....

No letter necessary; coupon will do.