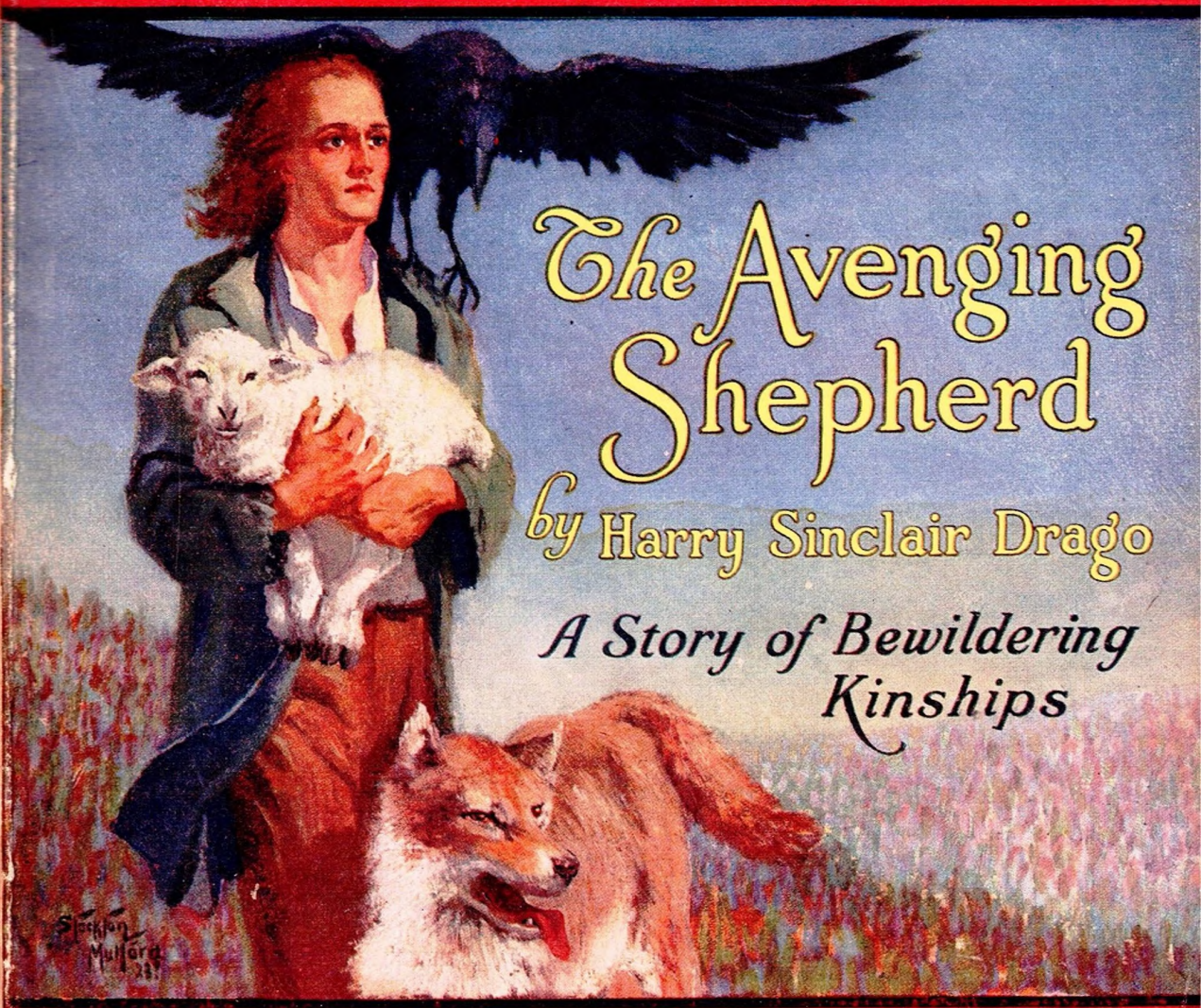
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



The Avenging Shepherd

by Harry Sinclair Drago

A Story of Bewildering Kinships

10¢ PER COPY SEPTEMBER 22 BY THE YEAR $4.00

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

SEPTEMBER 22, 1923

FOUR CONGOLEUM RUGS LESS than the price of ONE

TRIPLE GUARANTEE—There is only one guaranteed Congoleum, identified by the Gold Seal above. It protects you against dissatisfaction and gives you an unconditional money-back guarantee. Behind the Gold Seal Guarantee is our own Double Bond.

Choice of Two Famous Patterns— 3 Rugs Free—Year to Pay

We show above two of the most popular Congoleum patterns that have ever been produced. One dollar pinned to the coupon below brings you either pattern on approval. One 9 foot by 12 foot rug and three small rugs to match, each small rug 18x36 inches.

Be sure to ask for our Free Book of 10,000 Furniture Bargains—anyway!

Pattern No. 534 This is the Oriental Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rug shown at the top of the page. On the floor, it looks unbelievably like an expensive pile fabric. The richest blue color dominates the ground work. Mellow ecru old ivories, and light tans, set off the blue field. Mingled with these lovely tints are peacock blue, robin's egg blue and darker tones. Old rose, tiny specks of lighter pink and dark mulberry are artistically placed. Darker browns and even blacks, subdued to faintness, lend dignity and richness.

The border background contrasts with the blue all over center by reversing the color scheme. Ecru and tan shades form the border background. In this rug you have all the advantages of design and coloring, of cheerful warmth and lovely color effects so much sought after in high grade pile fabrics.

An ideal all purpose rug, beautiful in any room. Perfect for living room or parlor. Lovely in bedroom or dining room. Charming in the kitchen.

No. E4C534 9 ft. x 12 ft. Congoleum Gold Seal Rug with 3 small rugs to match, each 18 x 36 inches—all four only $17.95

Tile Pattern No. 408 Probably no floor covering of any quality or kind, ever piled up the popularity of this wonderful design. It is a superb tile pattern that looks like mosaic. Lovely robin's egg blue, with shadings of Dutch blue, and a background of soft stone gray, give a matchless effect. This design is particularly suited for the kitchen or dining room.

No. E4C408 9 ft. x 12 ft. Congoleum Gold Seal Rug with 3 small rugs to match, each 18 x 36 inches—all four only . . . $17.95

10000 Other Furniture Bargains

Our Catalog of 10000 Other Furniture Bargains—Now Ready. A Postal Card Brings It FREE!

Spiegel, May, Stern Co.

Ask for FREE Catalog

1770 35th Street, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

$1.00

Brings All Four Rugs on a Months Free Trial

Ours is the only house in America that can make you such an offer. No one else can bring you a genuine guaranteed Gold Seal Congoleum Rug, in the full 9 ft. by 12 ft. size, with three small rugs extra, and all for **less** than the **regular price** of the big rug **alone. And on a years credit.**

Clip the coupon below. Write your name and address plainly. Say which pattern you want. Pin a dollar bill to it—mail at once.

We will ship immediately, on a months trial, **all four Congoleum Rugs**—in one complete neat package. No muss, no bother, no trouble to lay. **If satisfactory, take a year to pay.**

The Greatest of Bargains Pay Almost as You Please

Almost everybody knows the price of the famous Congoleum Gold Seal Art Rugs. They are advertised and sold at the same standard price everywhere. And bear in mind that you don't send us the full amount. Only one dollar now and the rest later—taking a year's time. Look everywhere else first if you wish — stores, catalogs, magazines and newspapers. You'll find no offer like ours.

If you return the rugs, your dollar will be refunded and also all freight costs.

Three Rugs Free

For the heavy wear spots in front of range, sink, kitchen. At thresholds, in the hall, in front of dresser or bed. While this offer lasts, we give three of these small rugs free with each large rug; **all four for less than the price of one.**

The Rug of Guaranteed Wear

Congoleum Gold Seal Art Rugs are the fastest selling floor covering known. They are rapidly becoming the national floor covering—highly prized in good homes for any and all rooms.

Waterproof. No burlap for water to rot. Surface is hard, smooth and wear-resisting. Does not stain. Not marred or hurt by spilling of hot liquids.

They lay flat from the first moment without fastening. They never curl up or kick up at edges or corners. No need to tack or fasten them down. Dirt cannot accumulate underneath.

Less work. Rid yourself of back-breaking drudgery. Dirt, ashes, grit, dust or mud cannot "grind into" Congoleum Gold Seal Art Rugs. A damp rag or mop keeps it clean and colorings bright.

No laborious beating, no sending to cleaners. Absolutely sanitary. All this guaranteed by the famous **Gold Seal** that means complete satisfaction **or your money back.**

VERY IMPORTANT We do not offer our bargains or send our free catalog into bigger cities. If you live in a city of 100,000 population or over, we cannot fill your order for this **Congoleum Rug Offer** or send our **free catalog.** To everyone else we bring all the advantages of our house freely.

PIN A DOLLAR TO THIS COUPON

Spiegel, May, Stern Co.
1770 Thirty-fifth Street, CHICAGO, ILL.

I enclose $1 for the 4 Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rugs—exactly as described—in the pattern selected below, on 30 days free trial. If I return them, you are to refund my $1, also all transportation costs. Otherwise I will pay $1.50 monthly until special price of $17.95 is paid.

I SELECT PATTERN NO. . . . . .

If you wish both patterns write down both numbers, send $2.00—pay $3.00 monthly and get all 8 rugs.

Name .....

Street, R.F.D. or Box No .....

Shipping Point.....

City..... *State*.....

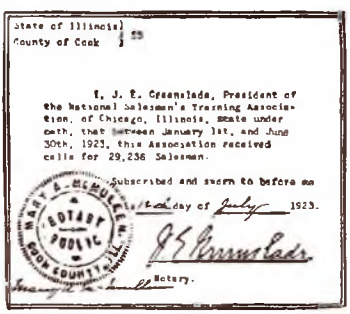
Also send me your latest FREE Furniture Book.

If You Want Bigger Pay Make This FREE TEST

There's a sure way to increase your earning power. And here is such an opportunity. Look into it—you may recognize it as your one chance to earn the biggest money of your life.

ARE you ready for a shock? Then, let me tell you that if you have average intelligence and can read and write, there is a quick and easy way for you to earn enough money to satisfy any average ambition. And after reading this offer, if you do not quickly make more money, you have no one to blame but yourself.

Don't take my word for it. By a simple test—you can make in the privacy of your home—you will know that every word I say is true—or otherwise. The test does not obligate you or cost you one penny. But make it! Then judge for yourself. It has proved to be THE opportunity for thousands. They have found the way to bigger pay—are now earning from five to twenty times as much as formerly. And the beauty of it is they enjoy every minute in the day's work. They are their own bosses.



State of Illinois } ss
County of Cook }

I, J. E. Greenslade, President of the National Salesmen's Training Association, of Chicago, Illinois, state under oath, that between January 1st, and June 30th, 1923, this Association received calls for 29,236 Salesmen.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 1st day of July 1923.

J E Greenslade

Notary.

NOTARY PUBLIC COOK COUNTY, ILL.

The thousands who have made this test before you, and who are now making the money you would like to make, are now salesmen. Ninety-five per cent once thought they were not "cut out for selling" that salesmen were "born" and not made. They found it was a fallacy that had kept them in the rut. They discovered that anyone with proper training can sell, and they are making from $5,000 to $10,000 a year, because they had the vision to recognize opportunity.

Thousands Have Proved It!

For instance, Ellis Summer Cook, 20 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, left a $25 a week job and last year made $9,000! H. D. Miller, another Chicago boy, was making $100 a *month* as a stenographer in July 1922. In September, 3 months later, he he was making $100 a *week* as a salesman. W. P. Clenny of Kansas City, Mo., stepped from a $150 a month clerkship into a selling job at $500 a month. He is making $850 a month now. M. V. Stephens of Albany, Ky., was making $25 a week. He took up this training and now makes 5 times that much. J. H. Cash of Atlanta, Ga., exchanged his $75 a month job for one which pays him $500 a month. O. H. Malfroot of Boston, Mass., stepped into a $10,000 position as a SALES MANAGER—so thorough is this training. All these successes are due to this easy, fascinating and rapid way to master certain invincible secrets of selling.

Simple as A B C

Sounds remarkable, doesn't it? Yet there is nothing remarkable about it. There are certain ways to approach different types of prospects to get their undivided attention—certain ways to stimulate keen interest—certain ways to overcome objections, batter down prejudices, outwit competition and make the prospect act. If you will learn these principles there is awaiting you a brilliant success and more money than you ever thought of earning.

As you will see by the affidavit to the left thousands of reputable selling organizations in America turn to this Association for their Salesmen. We can never take care of all the demands made on us for this better type of trained salesmen.

Make This Free Test at Once

Don't turn this page until you have clipped the coupon, filled it out, and sent it on its way. The test is contained in a free book, "Modern Salesmanship" which we will gladly send you without obligation. After reading the book through you will ask yourself the question it brings up. The answers will prove whether this is your opportunity or not. So mail the coupon NOW.

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASS'N.
Dept. 2-M-2, Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Ass'n.
Dept. 2-M-2, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me without obligation on my part your free book, "Modern Salesmanship" which will enable me to test my ability at home, and full information about the N. S. T. A. System of Salesmanship Training and Employment Service.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Age.....Occupation.....

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLIV | CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 22, 1923 | NUMBER 4

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FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

Florence M. Pettee's

MARKED DOWN

is a mystery novel of extremely baffling content. Nancy Dayland, charming Diana of the Law, is assigned to solve the problem. The handicaps are severe, including a puzzling message from the very edge of the grave. Woman's wit finally flushes the close-lying quarry.

FIRST OF FOUR PARTS NEXT WEEK

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependancies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

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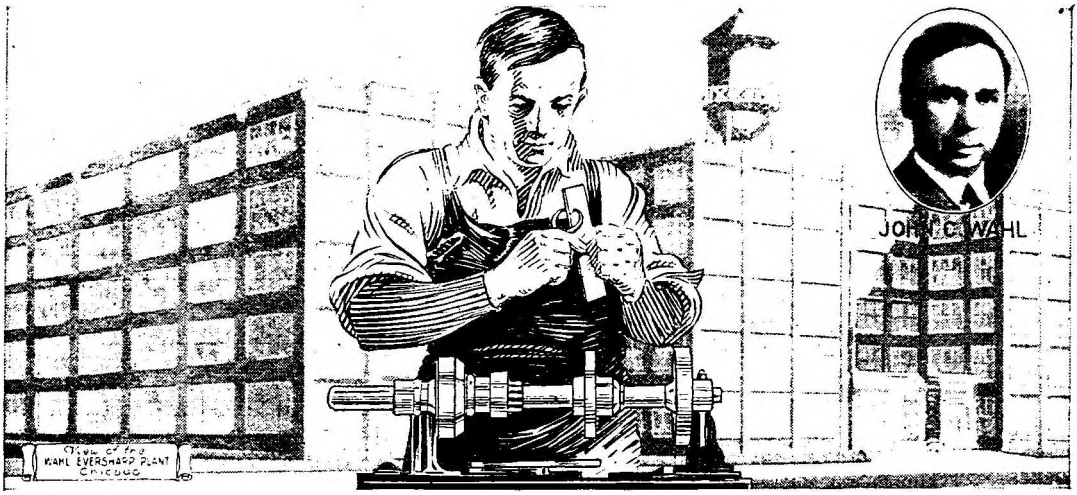


The $12 a week mechanic who became a millionaire!

TWENTY-THREE years ago, John C. Wahl was working as a mechanic in Peoria, Illinois, at $12 a week.

To-day, he is a millionaire—having an income that runs into six figures—nationally and internationally known as the inventor of the Wahl Adding Machine, the Wahl Fountain Pen, and president of The Wahl Company, manufacturers of the famous Eversharp pencil.

It is interesting to note that the change for the better in the life of John C. Wahl came the day he saw an advertisement that hit him straight between the eyes. As he puts it, "it told how the International Correspondence Schools could make a draftsman of a fellow without interfering with his daily work." That day, John C. Wahl enrolled and started to build for the future. His present success is proof that he builded well.

"Pick the line of work you like best," he said the other day, "and stick to it. Study hard and success will take care of itself. Nothing is impossible when a man really makes up his mind that he's going to get ahead."

John C. Wahl is just one of thousands of I. C. S. students who have made good in a big way. The lives of such men should be an inspiration and a guide to every man who wants a better job and a bigger salary.

If the I. C. S. can smooth the way to success for other men, it can help you. If it can help other men to go forward to better jobs and bigger salaries, or to success in businesses of their own, it can help you, too.

At least find out *how* by marking and mailing this coupon. It doesn't obligate you in any way to do this, but it may be the means of changing your entire life.

MAIL THE COUPON TO-DAY!

— — — — — — — TEAR OUT HERE — — — — — — —

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2210-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Personnel Organization	☐ Better Letters
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Foreign Trade
☐ Business Law	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ Business English
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Civil Service
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Private Secretary	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Business Spanish ☐ French	☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Electrical Engineering	☐ Architect
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Blue Print Reading
☐ Mechanical Engineer	☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Railroad Positions	☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ Plumbing and Heating
☐ Civil Engineer	☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Automobile Work
☐ Metallurgy ☐ Mining	☐ Navigation
☐ Steam Engineering	☐ Agriculture and Poultry
☐ Radio ☐ Airplane Engines	☐ Mathematics

Name.....
Street
Address.....
3-27-23

City..... State.....

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WE MANUFACTURE AN ARTICLE OF WEARING apparel that can be sold in most every home by men or women agents. Enormous demand and no competition. No other firm is selling same article direct to consumers. Prices 50% less than retail stores. Our agents make big profits and get them in advance. We deliver and collect. No experience necessary. Full instructions accompany handsome selling outfit—FREE. We can use part or full time workers. If you want a big money-making proposition—easy sales and no competition—write at once for full details. WRIGHT & CO., CONGRESS, THROOP & HARRISON STREETS, Dept. B-50, Chicago.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. CARNATION CO., Dept. 200, St. Louis, Mo.

TAILORING SALESMEN, $50.00 EXTRA PROFIT GUARANTEED. Sell Wright's men's suits and overcoats made-to-measure $23.50—$26.50—$29.50 retail—BOYS' SUITS TOO! Lowest prices—biggest money-making line in America. Every sale boy's suit gives you live prospect for man's suit. Women buy too. You double your sales and profits. You get your profit in advance—we deliver and collect. Large samples men and boys clothes in handsome carrying case—Free. Write for full particulars, WRIGHT & CO., Congress, Throop & Harrison Sts., Dept. C-50, Chicago.

MAKE BIG MONEY. SPARE OR FULL TIME. EVERYBODY LOVES POPULAR MUSIC. FEW HOURS A DAY WITH UNIQUE PLAN BUILDS CUMULATIVE INCOME. REPRESENTATIVES CASHING IN. RESERVE TERRITORY. GET PARTICULARS QUICK. CROCKER-STEINKAMP, DEPT. A-9, QUINCY, ILL.

FORD GOES 66 MILES ON 1 GALLON GAS. Other makes do equally well. Wonderful new Vapor Humidifier. One sent FREE to Car Owner to quickly introduce. Give make car. WALTER CRITCHLOW, Suite 364, 716 Madison, Chicago.

SELL SOMETHING NINE OUT OF TEN WOMEN WILL BUY because it saves double its cost the day it is bought. 50c each. $2.00 profit on $3.00 sales. PREMIER MFG. CO., Dept. 811, Detroit, Mich.

TAILORING SALESMEN. OUR $20.00 SAMPLE OUTFIT FREE. Take orders for De Luxe Custom Tailored Suits at $31.75. Make $75.00 weekly. Salesmen everywhere enthusiastic and pronounce it handsomest line and most wonderful values in U. S. You keep deposit. We deliver and collect. OLIVER E. WOODS & CO., 537 S. Franklin, Chicago.

GREATEST SENSATION! ELEVEN PIECE toilet article set selling like blazes at $1.75 with $1.00 dressmakers shears free to each customer. Spring rush on. FOSTER REID CO., 90 Winslow Bldg., Station C, Chicago.

AGENTS:—Free sample Dr. Elliott's Vegetable Oil Soap—19 Full-sized packages right out of stock. Tea, Coffee, Extracts, Spices, Food Products, Laundry and Toilet Soap samples. Everything furnished. Send postal today. HARLEY COMPANY, Department 69, Dayton, Ohio.

$15.00 A DAY TO AGENTS, taking orders during spare time, from friends and neighbors, for our fine made-to-measure clothes. You get your own clothes at inside wholesale prices. Write today for BIG FREE SAMPLE OUTFIT. Full details will be sent at once FREE. WASHINGTON TAILORING CO., Dept. W-304, Chicago, Ill.

SELL MADISON "BETTER MADE" SHIRTS direct from our factory to wearer. No capital or experience required. Easily sold. Big profits. Write For Free Samples. MADISON MILLS, 503 Broadway, New York City.

AGENTS: BIG PROFITS, NO COMPETITION. Make $5.00 to $15.00 daily selling our beautiful Scripture Text Calendars. Agents now selling from 10,000 to 50,000 yearly. Write now. MESSENGER PUBLISHING CO., Dept. 142, 314 West Superior St., Chicago, Ill.

LIVE AGENTS MAKE $10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. D. Seed Filter Company, 73 Franklin, New York.

AUTHENTIC LIFE OF HARDING, over 350 pages, fifty pictures, lowest priced—biggest, finest book, best seller. $150.00 weekly profit easy—best terms. Get free outfit quick. WALTER PUBLISHING COMPANY, Desk 13, Cincinnati, Ohio.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

GO INTO THE CRISPETTE BUSINESS. Everybody likes Crispettes. You can make a lot of money. We start you. Write for facts. LONG EAKINS, 1951 High St., Springfield, Ohio.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

GOOD FARM LANDS! Near hustling city in lower Mich.; 20, 40, 80 ac. tracts; only $10 to $50 down; bal. long time. Write today for free illustrated booklet. SWIGART LAND CO., Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR $$—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Advice free. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 209 Security Bldg., Santa Monica and Western Ave., Hollywood, California.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TAILORING SALESMEN. MAKE $10.00 PROFIT ON SALE. Get our outfit made-to-measure suits. 160 fabrics. Six prices $18.00 to $30.00. Finest goods. Union made. Fix your own selling prices. Make all the profit you want. Undersell all competition. Lower prices than any other line—you get big profits in advance. We deliver and collect. Guaranteed quality by firm established 1880. Write for full particulars. FRED KAUFFMANN, The American Tailor, 1300 W. Harrison St., Dept. E-50, Chicago.

AGENTS—MAKE LARGE PROFITS SELLING NEW PRODUCTS PUT UP IN UNUSUAL AND ATTRACTIVE WAY. EVERYBODY WANTS THEM. EVERYBODY IS A GOOD PROSPECT. YOU CAN MAKE $12 A DAY, EVERY DAY, OR $1.50 AN HOUR IN SPARE TIME. NO CAPITAL OR EXPERIENCE REQUIRED. WRITE FOR DETAILS TODAY. TREASURE HOUSE, 9 E 16 VANDALIA AVE., CINCINNATI, OHIO.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS: Get into the tailoring game. Make $75.00 to $125.00 a week and up right from the start. No experience necessary. We teach you and supply finest Selling Outfit. $10.00 to $20.00 a day profits easy. You get paid every day. Write quick. Address Dept. 657, GOODWEAR CHICAGO, Inc., Chicago.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

MAKE $30.00 DAILY, TAKING ORDERS FOR $3.98 UNION-MADE RAINCOATS. FACTORY PRICES. FAST SELLERS. WONDERFUL VALUES. YOUR PAY DAILY. WE DELIVER AND COLLECT. AMERICAN EAGLE RAINCOAT MFG. CO., 155 N. UNION ST., DEPT. 11, CHICAGO.

Start And Operate Your Own Business and acquire financial Independence. Openings everywhere. Either men or women. We furnish everything and show you how. Big explanatory book "The Open Door to Fortune" FREE. Ask for it now. National Scientific Laboratories, 12A, Richmond, Va.

Tailoring Salesmen: who will appreciate snappiest **"Direct To Wearer"** line on earth **"Virgin Wool"** custom tailored suits and overcoats $28.00. Big advance commissions. Representatives furnished a high grade tailoring shop in one elaborate case. HOUSE OF CAMPBELL, State at Congress St., Chicago.

BIG FAST PROFITS FOR AGENTS. "Repeater 6" Fuse Plugs sell on sight wherever there is electricity. Do away with lighting troubles. Welcomed everywhere. Get details. Sample 20c. Moss-Schury Mfg. Co., Inc., 11-A, Detroit, Mich.

TAILORING AGENTS: Our $31.50 All Wool tailored to order suits and overcoats are $20 cheaper than store prices. Commissions paid in advance. Protected territory. Beautiful assortment. 6x9 swatches free. J. B. SIMPSON, Dept. 660, 831 W. Adams St., Chicago.

DISTRICT SALESMEN WANTED, all or spare time. Earn $1,500 to $3,600 yearly. We train the inexperienced. NOVELTY CUTLERY CO., 77 Bar St., Canton, Ohio.

AGENTS—$15 A DAY—EASY. QUICK SALES—FREE AUTO—BIG WEEKLY BONUS—$1.50 premium Free to every customer. Simply show our Beautiful, 7 piece, Solid Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Appeals instantly. We deliver and collect. Pay daily. NEW ERA MFG. CO., 803 Madison St., Dept. 20-BG, Chicago.

AGENTS—CLEAN UP $100 WEEKLY WITH "NIFTY NINE", weekly average 100 sales—dollar profit each. 30—40 sales daily frequently made; demonstrating outfit cinches order. 30 other coin-coaxers, all daily necessities. Postal brings our unique plans. DAVIS PRODUCTS COMPANY, Dept. 58, Chicago.

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE OFFER. HO-RO-CO, 118 LOCUST, ST. LOUIS, MO.

AGENTS: MY PRICES LOWEST EVER. GOOD SUITS $18 UP. MAKE $5 TO $25 DAILY. START IN SPARE TIME. My free suit offer is a wonder. Send postal to R. A. ALLEN, 202 S. GREEN, DEPT. 1821, CHICAGO, FOR SPECIAL OFFER TO AGENTS.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC. ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write LITERARY BUREAU, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

SHORT STORIES AND PHOTOPLAY PLOTS REVISED, TYPEWRITTEN and Marketed. Send manuscript, enclosing return postage, for Examination. No obligation. H. L. HURSH, Dept. 4, 210 Muench St., Harrisburg, Pa.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

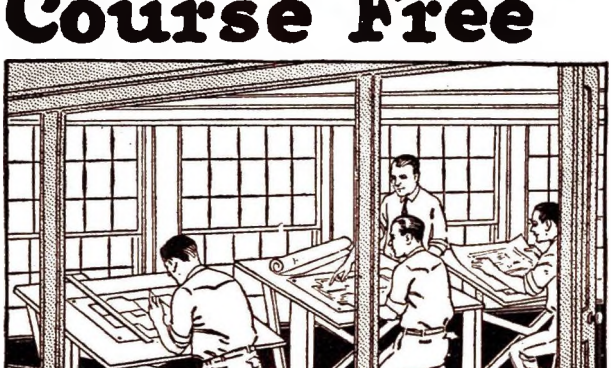
Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

EXTRA!

$90 Drafting Course Free

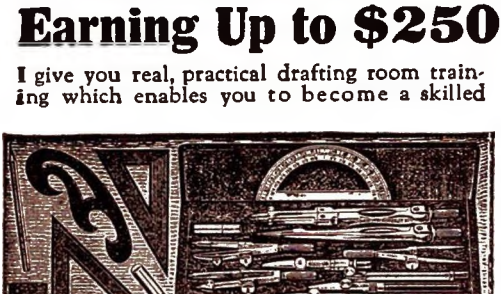
Prepares You For a $3000 to $3600 a Year Position

This is a very extra special offer which I am making because I want to impress upon all men the great opportunity which lies before you now if you become draftsmen. For 25 years I have been Chief Draftsman and never before has the outlook been brighter or the demand greater for draftsmen. It has been estimated that there are 6000 draftsmen wanted every month for steady positions in clean, pleasant offices and with opportunities for quick advancement. I want men to take advantage of my offer.



I Guarantee to Train You Until You Are Earning Up to $250 and $300 a Month

I give you real, practical drafting room training which enables you to become a skilled draftsman in the shortest possible space of time. The work you get is close, personal work with the Chief. It is not a matter of taking a course and then being through. I continue to train you until you are qualified and actually do accept a position paying up to $250 and $300 a month. That is an offer I have been making for 20 years.



Send Free Coupon

It costs you nothing but a stamp to mail the free coupon for my book, "Successful Draftsmanship". Get it today. It tells you how I can afford to train you until you get your position. I urge your immediate action because I cannot, will not, and do not take all of the students who apply. Some will certainly be disappointed.

FREE Drafting Outfit

Above is pictured a handsomely finished drafting outfit which I send to you free as soon as you register as my student. These are regular drafting instruments—the very same that I use myself—and the outfit contains everything necessary for the performance of your work in drafting. Mail coupon, or send postcard or letter today.

Chief Draftsman, Engineers Equipment Co.
1951 Lawrence Ave., Div. 94-56 Chicago, Ill.

Chief Draftsman, Engineers Equipment Co.
1951 Lawrence Ave., Div. 94-56 Chicago, Ill.

Without any obligation whatever, please mail your book, "Successful Draftsmanship", and full particulars of your liberal "Personal Instruction" offer to few students.

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Age _____

ELGIN'S
NEW BOULEVARD
17 JEWEL!

SEND US NO MONEY

JUST A POSTAL WILL DO

ONLY $1.00 DOWN

New special 25 year gold cases. New 17 Jewel Boulevard Models. New gold moire dials—real works of art.

Greatest Watch Offer since the war, bar none. You can now own the world's best known watch at the lowest factory price—a price lower than most houses charge you for inferior and off-brand makes.

Sent On Approval. We send you this new 17 Jewel Elgin on approval and after you are fully satisfied, you pay only a little each month, so little that you will never miss the money.

$5.00 CHAIN and KNIFE SET FREE

Write Today for catalog and full particulars of this special introductory offer. We are the world's largest Elgin Watch House; we have trusted wage-earners for nearly a quarter of a century, and will trust you.

HARRIS-GOAR CO., Dept. 339, Kansas City, Mo.

Get This Wonderful Ring. If You Can Tell It From a Genuine Diamond Send It Back

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLIV SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1923 NUMBER 4

The Avenging Shepherd

By HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

Author of "Smoke of the Forty-Five," "Out of the Silent North," etc.

PROLOGUE

THE COMING OF THE BASQUES.

HIGH up among the Cantabrian foothills there is a *paramera* sealed valley. One enters and leaves it by a rocky trail that winds its way to the rim of the surrounding country by means of many tortuous grades. To the north, opposite the spot where the trail emerges from the valley, tower the grim, treeless, snow-capped Pyrenees—the great Basque barrier which armies and adventuring princes have assailed in vain.

It is a goodly country. There, for nine centuries or more, men have tilled the soil and herded their flocks, no one among them rich, and no one poor; bending the knee never to king or potentate. Seldom, indeed, have they even made a promise of allegiance to any ruler, and then only with such reservations as left them free men and the makers of their own laws and the keepers of their souls.

This day a man toiled up the trail which led to the outside world. He paused at the rim and let his pack sink to the ground. He was a mere boy, for all that his body was man-grown. His name was Angel Irosabal.

He was the eldest of ten sons, and yet, until to-day, he had never been out of the

valley. This was equally true of his brothers. That Angel fared forth into strange lands to-day was only because he was turning his back forever on the valley of his fathers.

Since childhood he had worn the sleeveless sheepskin jerkin and leather breeches of the herder. He was in holiday garb to-day—rough homespun woven from the fleece of the sheep he himself had guarded, and fashioned to his figure by his mother's skillful hands.

Angel knew that as he proceeded through the valleys to come, his attire, alone, would proclaim that some momentous event impended. And with good reason. Yet, surely, neither Angel nor his fellow could foresee that the business he was about was to change the course of history. Still, no less a thing was to come from it.

Take your map and place your finger upon the Bay of Biscay. You will see where the rocky coast of Biscay Province —old Vizcaya—turns back the surging tides. Nestling beside it is Alava, and beyond, to the north, hard pressed by the Pyrenees and the Cantabrians, you will find Guipúscoa. It is a far-distant country, remote from the affairs of the world (or it was, then, in 1860), but during the previous year word of the new world had filtered into its upland valleys.

The New World—California! There was magic in its very name. Gold was hidden in its hillsides and streams; its wide valleys were rich, fertile beyond anything Guipúscoa knew. Rumor had it that those valleys only awaited the coming of man to be made to bloom as had the lowland gardens of Valencia.

It was a land where one rancho was larger than all of Guipúzcoa—larger than all three of the Basque provinces put together! And men were their own masters there. They made their own laws!

Gray haired Bonafacio, Angel's father, had whispered that tale to his sons. They had asked him many questions, for they knew that the soil of the *paramera* was almost exhausted. They had need of a new land; but the father had allowed a full year to pass before announcing his decision.

The time had come. One of them must go forth in search of a new country. When he had found it—be it California or South America—the rest would follow—all but the head and the youngest son of each family. This, so that their seed should not be lost to their native land.

They had heard him in silence, knowing that Angel, as the eldest, would be the one to go. Sober faced, the boy had accepted his responsibility. A day of feasting had followed—several whole sheep had been roasted upon the spits; tankards had been filled with smoldering *chacoli.*

That was yesterday. This morning, Angel had taken up his pack and kissed his mother good-by. With his brothers to bear him company he had set off across the valley to where the trail began. There, in the gray dawn, a dry-eyed girl had met them. His brothers had turned back then, and Angel, left alone with the girl, had taken her in his arms and kissed her.

Both knew it was good-by; but there had been no tears. Angel would have held himself shamed had tears dimmed his eyes. Tears were for Catalans and Andalusians, and other soft peoples of the plains. He was a Basque.

The girl was like him in this; not within the memory of man had a foreign taint crept into the blood. And so, although her heart was breaking, she had smiled bravely. It is the Basque way.

Even now, as Angel gazed down at the white-washed *caserio* of the Irosabals, his face was unmarred by emotion. He was a heroic figure as he stood there, tall, gaunt, with his hand shielding his eyes as he stared across the valley, his wind-tanned, copper-colored cheeks reflecting the rays of the westering sun.

Patiently his eyes swept the *paramera* until he had located the landmarks of his boyhood. Old memories rushed to him, and the minutes dragged by before he lowered his hand. From his pocket, then, he took a blue magpie feather. When he had it firmly secured to a small rock, he hurled it out into space; knowing that it would fall not far from where the trail began. It was the signal that they had agreed on, which should tell the girl that he had reached the top.

Picking up his pack, he turned his face toward Bilboa and the west. Spain was to know him no more. Later, for a brief two weeks, he loitered in Vera Cruz and Parral. In Mexico, his Basque tongue was unknown, and so, by force of circumstance, he had recourse to Spanish, a "second" language, which he spoke with greater elegance than Mexicans had been wont to hear.

Angel took no pride in this accomplishment. Spanish had long been the language of business in the Basque Provinces, where, strangely, it had attained a degree of purity unknown outside of Seville. Hence, the boy's use of the language was natural. In itself, it was a trivial matter. And yet, it was materially to affect his future life and the lives of those who were to follow in his footsteps.

El Camino Real—the king's highway—was still the great thoroughfare to California. In Parral, Angel purchased a horse and joined a wagon train bound for Los Angeles and Monterey. He went armed, as did his fellows, for even as late as 1861, the road led through a wild country.

America's attention was far from the Southwest. The great battles of the Civil War were being fought, and although the war touched the lives of those along the border, and volunteers for both sides were not wanting, it was with the problems which the war brought, rather than with the war itself, that the frontier was concerned. Their old enemies, the Apaches and the Teguas, had sensed the relaxing of the restraining hand to which they had submitted. If history does not record those turbulent days in the Southwest, it is only because they were concurrent with events of far greater importance east of the Mississippi.

Angel was essentially a fighting man. The days that followed were to his liking. As the wagon train moved north, tales of the great battles came with increasing frequency. Had the boy been free to do as he pleased, he surely would have turned his back on California. But the war was not for him.

Soon after the train turned west, its troubles began. More than once, Angel's nostrils dilated to the acrid smell of gunpowder. A month later, tired and saddle-worn, he crossed into California. There, the war divided attention with the Comstock and Yuba River. Gold was on everyone's tongue. California was not only the greatest country in the world, it was the richest. Just wait until the war was won!

Now, the boy's way led ever northward; through the San Joaquin valley, past the Merced, the Tuolumne, the Sacramento. He was in a sheepman's paradise. Even the Pyrenees could not match the Sierra Nevada.

The basin narrowed as he left Sacramento behind him. He took to the hills and explored upland valleys that dwarfed the *paramera* of his childhood. No longer did great flocks of short-wool merinos greet his eye. Here, was only talk of gold; of the fortunes being taken out of the Feather and the Yuba.

Angel knew he had found the place he had been looking for. The soil was light, sandy—the very finest in the world for sheep. Bunch-grass, wild clover and a variety of salt bush were abundant. Timber was to hand, also. Nothing was wanting. Land was cheap.

The very bigness of the country was in its favor. In three days' journey he had not seen a fence. Best of all, this land was not unlike his homeland. Therefore, from old Nevada City he dispatched word to Guipúscoa.

The residents of Nevada City were not of a discerning mind. To them, Angel was just another Mexican. His features, hair, the color of his skin and his stature should have marked a difference in their eyes, but they failed of it; and largely because Irosabal had a Spanish ring to it, and because the boy spoke Spanish. Later, when out of loneliness and the desire for speech, he consorted with Mexicans, the term "greaser" was applied to him without question.

At the time, the term of contempt meant nothing to Angel. He had not a dozen words of English at his command. Later, though, it was to make a difference. And the tragedy of it! Had he come to California without a word of Spanish at his command, he would have been received as

was his due—the first of a distinct, proud, industrious and thrifty race. Instead of which, he dowered himself and his brothers with the contempt reserved by Americans for the shiftless, lazy, gambling Mexican peon.

But no matter. Winter was at hand. It proved to be a mild one. Angel went back to the hills and built a cabin. Very little snow fell in the mountains that year. No one appeared to notice the fact, least of all the boy busy with the plans for the coming of his people. Spring came early. In April he went to Sacramento to meet his brothers.

The newspapers of that day make bare mention of their coming, and yet, there were more than forty in the party—men, women, children. Most of them were related to Angel. The girl to whom he had tossed the blue magpie feather was among them.

Her coming was a surprise arranged by Angel's father. They were married the following day. By the end of the week the party had been provisioned and properly outfitted. Lambing time was nearly over; the season for buying and selling breeders would follow immediately. Before it began, Angel's party had to be housed. Therefore, he led the way to the valley south of Nevada City without further delay.

There began, then, such a job of pioneering as America has seldom witnessed. The year was to be long remembered in California. What snow there was in the mountains went off rapidly. The streams rose over night. Sacramento was devastated.

Close on the heels of the flood began the severest drouth in California's history. By mid-summer, cattle and sheep were starving. Horses were slaughtered in great numbers in order to save range for the cattle.

Conditions grew steadily worse. Not once during the long hot months did rain fall in the Sacramento Basin. To the north and east, where the foothills were timbered, the bunch-grass and dwarf sage survived.

Angel's people profited by this. They were able to buy sheep at their own price. No wonder, then, that before winter came again they were cordially hated by the less fortunate sheepmen of the Basin. And now, for the second year in succession, were the mountains free of snow. The fact was noted this time. It was an ominous sign. Spring but proved it—the drouth was unbroken; even in the hills, the sage, hardiest of plants, withered and died.

There was nothing for Angel and his people to do, but move. But to where? No one came forward to offer them range or help them in their extremity. They were a people apart.

But they knew how to meet misfortune with a brave face. The houses which they had built, the corrals, the crops which they had planted—these and all of the fruits of a year of hard, unremitting, back-breaking toil were lost to them if they moved. Undaunted, they chose to drive their flocks to some new country where they could begin again.

Their courage brought them one reward —a new and distinct term of contempt. They were no longer "greasers;" they were "boscos"—a strange corruption of the Spanish "Basque." "Greasers" quit; these "boscos" were fighters, and accordingly, they were to be watched. There were too many foreigners in California, anyhow!

The Central Pacific was being built. Already the railhead was beyond the Sierra Nevada. Along this route, then, did Angel and his followers go. Those who had horses rode, the others walked, driving their herds before them. In the rear thundered their wagons. California was glad to be rid of them. But it was California's loss.

For nearly a century the way of the pioneer had led to the West. Here, then, was the first trek eastward. It made history, for it brought to Nevada its greatest factional fight—the war of the cowboy and the sheepherder. The big cattle outfits were well established in the valleys north of the Humboldt.

Range was free, but there was no room for sheep. There had been trouble enough already over sheep. Arizona had had a taste of it. Sheep were a Mexican business anyhow.

Nevada was a new state and things were lax, but even if the politicians down in the old Washoe country had no concern with

anything that did not affect mining and Virginia City, folks north of the Humboldt could look after themselves. So along the river, from Dufrayne's mill to Fort Halleck, the warning went up—"Sheepmen Stay Out!"

The cowmen did not lack arguments for the stand that they took. Sheep huddle closely while grazing. They have an upper and lower set of teeth, so they virtually crop grass and herbage to the very roots, and, what they do not eat, their knife-like hoofs destroy.

With free range, it was not to be supposed that herders would keep their flocks moving. At that time, no one gave a thought to the future. The universal intention was to rip out a fortune in a hurry.

If cattle did not destroy the range, it was because of the habits with which nature had endowed them, not because of the care or foresight of the men who owned them. Equal carelessness with sheep meant the ruining of the range; for if they grazed time and again over the same land, nothing could survive on it, not even the sheep themselves.

And this was the country to which Angel, as a last resort, led his people! So far, they had followed the railroad, but the construction gangs had only reached the Truckee; so at the river, they took the trail to Fort McDermitt. In a general way, their objective was the Owyhee Basin or, denied that, the valleys of the Tuscarora Range, to the south of the Basin.

Before them stretched an arid, semi-desert country. There were no towns. White men were few. In a sense, it was Indian country, for although the Piute was, to all intent, peaceful, he had not forgotten what he and his brothers had done to the white man at Pyramid Lake.

Observe this immigration, then, for what it was—a journey of privation, danger and hardship beneath a scorching sun, and undertaken without previous knowledge of the country through which they were to pass. At the river crossings, quicksands awaited them; when they left the river their children were to cry, and their own tongues grow thick, for want of water.

They knew nothing of the desert. They were even less fitted, by experience, for their task than the men and women who had followed Brigham Young across the plains. And at their journey's end, if they won through, was what? Organized hostility, hatred and contempt!

The picture is well nigh hopeless. Add to it that they were to stop not less than three times to bury their dead beside the trail; that four of their women were to know the anguish and travail of childbirth. Is there aught of misery that was not theirs?

And yet they triumphed. Eventually, in July it was, they crossed the Humboldt for the last time. They were just south of Winnemucca Mountain at about the spot where the town of Winnemucca now stands.

Here the Little Humboldt joins the big river. Due to some miraculous urge of fortune, they chose to follow the smaller stream. It was a happy choice, for surely they never would have been suffered to cross the Tuscaroras.

Almost immediately the country began to change. Small, fertile valleys opened before them. The grass grew green in the creek bottoms; in the distance low, friendly, grayish-green hills, fringed with stunted cedars, arose. Water was always to hand; the creeks were heading in those hills ahead —Willow Creek, Rebel Creek, Martin Creek and a score of small streams as yet unnamed.

Martin Creek was the largest. Soon they came to the spot where it flowed into the Little Humboldt. The river bore away to the northeast; the creek's course lay to the north, its promise unmistakable. It was not to be denied!

Angel's party turned to the north. Unknowingly, they were entering the garden spot of northern Nevada—Paradise Valley, so named, ten years before, by a cavalry lieutenant who left his bones to whiten there.

Angel, his five days' old daughter in his arms, was the first of his party across the Martin. He wasn't aware of a tall, sinewy, sullen faced man and a boy, a lad of nine, who sat in their saddles upon the opposite bank staring at them as they forced the sheep across the shallow ford.

The man and boy were father and son.

A trader had opened a store on Cottonwood Creek (destined to become the town of Paradise), and they had been on their way there when they had caught sight of the Basque caravan. Open hostility had flashed in the man's eyes. He was a cowman, a Kentuckian named David Gault. Sheep were as little to his liking as they were to the big outfits in the Basin.

The boy, Joseph, shared his father's anger. In silence, they waited for the strangers to draw near.

"Hit's greasers, all right," the boy said at last, his mouth hard. "Reckon they air comin' to stay?"

The man shook his head. "Ain't no room fer sheep ner greasers in this yere country, Joseph. We fit the Injuns fer hit; hit's ourn. Ain't no furriners goin' ter take hit from us. Let 'em come with their sheep—they won't stay long!"

Gault was mistaken. Not only were the Basques to cling tenaciously to Paradise Valley, they were to prosper there, raise their families, draw reinforcements from distant valleys in the Pyrenees and, in the end, become American citizens. And this despite the fact that they were to be reviled, scorned, cheated and warred on for twenty years. Later, the term "greaser" was to be unheard; throughout Nevada and Idaho they were to be just "boscos," and the word was to be uttered with such bitterness as the Mexican had never drawn.

Early in those twenty years the Central Pacific was to be completed. Prosperity was to follow; towns were to be built—Winnemucca, Golconda, Tuscarora—new settlers were to come, bringing banks, schools and churches.

Among the newcomers there were to be impartial men, but even these were to regard the Basques as a sullen, clannish, not-understandable race. They were to trust them at their banks; for no man could say but what they were honest, prompt in the paying of their debts; but it was only the banker who was to accept the Basque as a proud, thrifty, hard-working man, and therefore a good risk.

And the Basques were to repay their enemies in their own coin. They were, indeed, to become a sullen people, but they had ever been lovers of solitude, dependent on their family life for social pleasures. So, driven in on themselves, they were to become clannish to a degree the Basque had never known in his own land. They knew how to hate and bear a grudge, and, Indian-like, they did not forget.

Twenty years were to bring Basque saloons, inns, stores and forwarding-agents to Winnemucca and Golconda. Paradise was to become a Basque town. What a Basque wanted, he bought from a Basque. Let these *gringos* keep to themselves. They wanted nothing of them. If sheep were killed, cattle could be killed, too; and it often happened that they were.

Angel Irosabal was to foster this spirit. He was to become rich; the father of many children, although none was to take the place of the little Margarida, who had been born in a covered wagon. To those of the rising generation to whom he was not bound by blood, he became *padrino,* (godfather) a tie as binding as the blood strain.

His *ahijados* were to be counted by the score. And between himself and the fathers of these children was to exist a bond known only to *compadres.* It was to make him supreme among the Basques.

He was to be the fount of wisdom. For ten years, and for twice ten years, they were to follow him, and he was to rule not only wisely, but well, instilling pride of race in the young—preaching and convincing them of the enormity of their sin should they take to husband or wife one of an alien race. And yet, in the richest years of his life he was to hold himself shamed, betrayed; and the dimpling, black-eyed babe whom he held in his arms to-day, was to be the cause of it.

No hint of that distant shadow rested upon Angel as he pulled his horse to a stop beside the cattleman and his son. A pleasant word was on his tongue as he bowed with Old World courtesy to Gault.

Gault's answer was a sneering grunt: "I don't know where yo're from, stranger, and hit don't matter, nohow; but I'm a-tellin' ye yuh've toted yore stuff a long ways fer nuthin'. Yo're a-goin' back—way back! This is white folks country. Ain't no sheepmen a-comin' in yere! Don't yuh

bother 'bout unloadin' them waggins. I'm tellin' yuh—git 'em turned about by ter-morrow! Yuh can't stay here!"

Gault was not bluffing; and if time was to prove him mistaken, it was only to be after years of violence and bloodshed. So, it was with an angry clanking of spur-chains that he wheeled his horse and galloped away, the boy at his heels.

Half an hour later they pulled their horses to a walk. Gault glanced at his son.

"Yore face is white, Joseph," he drawled. "The trouble yore mammy saw in her cup is a-comin'. Ye ain't skeered, be yuh?"

"I ain't skeered a nuthin'," the lad answered bravely. "I reckon I kin shoot straight."

"Well, hit'll git to shootin', if they try ter stay. Yore mammy an' me ain't a-goin' ter move again; we're too old. Other folks round hyar is like us. Ain't no one a-goin' ter take away what's ourn by right."

"But the man had a baby in his arms. What's a-goin' ter become of hit if thar's shootin'?"

"Humph! Don't ye go worryin' 'bout no greaser kid, Joseph. Ain't nuthin' could mean less ter yuh."

And now score one for Fate! David Gault and Angel Irosabal were to be laid low by the same blow; for no less a thing was to occur than that the son of one was to woo and win the daughter of the other; and defying prejudice, ostracism and religious as well as racial barriers, they were to wed—the boy to be held no better than a squawman by his people, and the girl an outcast by her race.

But their love for each other was to sustain them. And it is with the second Joseph, the fruit of their marriage, that this story is chiefly concerned.

CHAPTER I.

THE STORM.

THE days of that August had been sunless. At rare intervals, and then for only an hour or two, would the leaden skies part for a reassuring glimpse of the blue heavens beyond. The air was heavy with silence, and although the weather was warm that stillness which hung over mesa and valley was not unlike the hush which ushers in the violent storms of winter.

The woman in the herder's cabin, far up the side of Buckskin Mountain, busy with her bread-making, paused to glance down at the wide valley which stretched away from the base of the mountain to the Timbered Buttes far to the west. Even at the distance from which she observed it, it took definite shape; the fringes of green willows and buckthorn clearly defining the course Martin Creek took as it zigzagged across the valley. Likewise, the never-failing willows marked where the smaller streams cut through to the Martin.

Moving smudges of color, she recognized for cattle. The same sense told her that they were not grazing; they were moving too rapidly. Subconsciously, she wondered if they, too, had been made uneasy by this stillness which hung so heavily in the air. She was a Basque, and therefore, superstitious enough to believe that it portended some evil.

And yet, the face, which she pressed to the window to-day, seemed marked with something deeper than mere transient apprehension. It was a singularly beautiful face—serious, delicate—the skin a pale olive tint. He hair was as black as night, and her eyes appeared blacker than any night. But although her eyes—lonely, wistful—arrested the attention, it was her mouth—patient, contented—hinting of suffering and the conquering of suffering—that was unforgettable.

There were no other cabins on Buckskin. Often for weeks on end no one passed the door. The few who did were prospectors or Indians. They never tarried, and so there was no one to carry the tale of that face so often pressed to the window.

On clear days, the woman—she was only twenty-five—could see the town of Paradise. There were no other settlements within forty miles. What supplies they needed, her husband either carried or hauled from there.

If her eyes sought to pierce the haze that hung over the valley to-day for a glimpse of Paradise, it was only because

her husband was there, or by now returning from there. Oftenest, her eyes sought the white-washed house and ranch buildings to the north and east of the little town which even distance could not rob of an air of prosperity. Angel Irosabal, the headman of the Basques, lived there.

She was that mighty man's daughter!—and yet, for eight full years she had not entered there, nor in all that time—through sickness, the birth of her son—had one of her own blood exchanged a word with her. There were her brothers and sisters in that big house, a mother, too, but if they wondered about her, or hoped that the stern father would relent, Margarida Gault, the herder's wife, had no sign of it.

Eight years is a long time for a father to bear a grudge; it is an equally long time to keep hope of forgiveness alive. Joe Gault's wife had come to believe that the years would never be so many that her father would open his arms to her.

Always she told her husband it didn't matter; that she no longer cared. Often she whispered as much to herself; but on the days when Gault went to town, or when he was away on the mountain, some mad impulse drove her to the window. She believed it to be only habit, and she tried to fight it; but, when once the desire had planted itself in her brain, torturing hours of restlessness always followed, and often defeated her.

At the window, she found peace, of a sort; and she never left it without breathing a prayer that God might soften her father's heart; for surely in His eyes no sin was hers. She had but married the man she loved.

That he was of another religion, and of a breed of men who had persecuted her people, was her only transgression. That thought sustained her—she was not a penitent.

If her husband never mentioned her father's name, it was not because he failed to read the message in her eyes. He understood. And much of the business, which took him over the mountain, was only invented so that the bitterness in his heart could be voiced unheard by her.

There were other Gaults in the valley, kinsmen of his—the old Cross-K outfit—but he never mentioned them. In fact, he had long since forgotten them; but he had never been able to forget the man who had put that hungry look in his wife's eyes.

Daily, in countless ways, he tried to make up for what marrying him had cost her, and he came as near to succeeding as love, and patience, and unfailing kindness can come. But some few there were who pitied Margarida Gault. They wondered how she withstood the loneliness of that little cabin perched high upon the mountainside.

Gault, so they said, was a cowman; how could he expect to have luck with sheep—and on the Buckskin Mountain of all places! If the cattle outfits and the big sheepman kept their hands off Buckskin, it was because the range was so poor that even the jack rabbits refused it.

And yet for all their talk, Gault's sheep grew fat. There was timber-clover in those little parks of stunted cedars and junipers on the mountain top. Valley men said it was bad for sheep and cattle; it bloated them and they often died. But Gault found that his sheep thrived on it if they cropped it for only two or three days at a time.

So if his industry fell short of making him a prosperous man, it at least provided the essential things of life, and that pitying few in Paradise Valley would have been surprised had they known that the snug wee cabin on Buckskin often echoed to happy laughter. It was the abiding place of love, the shrine of an infant god who held the hearts of Joseph and Margarida Gault in his pudgy little hands.

He was called Joseph, too—a manly lad of seven, with his father's reddish-brown hair and his Basque mother's finely chiseled features. He was old for his years, and already self-reliant; in his eyes was a wisdom as of the aged. It was a baffling look to his parents much as if he were reading their souls, and not their lips.

Margarida had first noticed it one day as she turned from the window with her eyes filled with tears. She had smiled and kissed him, but his expression had not changed. It seemed that he saw through her pretense and understood the grief which

ate at her heart. It had left her with an uncanny feeling, and she was careful to see that the child's questioning eyes never found tears in her own again.

He had been in the kitchen with her today, but the angry cawing of a flock of crows had drawn him outside. She had heard him calling to them as they circled about the cabin scolding a winged laggard. Joseph often talked to the crows and the magpies.

This was disquieting to Margarida; for it brought home so poignantly his loneliness. Even Indian boys played and romped with other children. No wonder then, that Joseph turned to the wild for companionship. He was only answering a primitive instinct which had come down to him through many generations of roving fathers.

It was, however, in a self-accusing frame of mind that Margarida went on with her work. The afternoon was well along, and by the time she had finished her baking it was dark in the kitchen. She had not known it was so late. A glance at the clock showed, however, that twilight should still be an hour away. Alarmed, she ran to the door and called:

"Joseph! Jo-o-seph!"

The air had grown so cool that she shivered as she stood in the doorway waiting for the boy's answer. Uneasy, she called again, and when her second call went unanswered, she rolled up her apron and started off toward the coulee where the dogs were holding the herd for the night.

She stopped when she had gone some hundred yards from the cabin and called again. As she waited, the stillness, which had settled heavier than ever over the mountain, seemed to clutch at her. Not a leaf was stirring, and although it was the time of evening when the whippoorwills sail over the sagebrush, there was not a wing in the air, nor could she catch the sound of their plaintive, mocking call. She crossed herself nervously, and turned an anxious eye toward the road which led up from the valley, wishing that her husband was home, but knowing that he would not come home for another hour at least.

Joseph had not answered, so she picked up her skirts, and half ran to the coulee. The shadows were deepening, but she could see the flock standing uneasily, apparently loath to bed down for the night. The dogs were running back and forth grumbling to themselves, as if by this show of authority they hoped to make the flock lie down. They paused only for a second on catching sight of Margarida, for they sensed even better than the sheep that something was amiss. Their mistress's excitement was quickly communicated to them, too, and they barked sharply.

Margarida had expected to find Joseph with the dogs, but a hurried glance told her that they were alone. Her throat went dry with fear as she realized the truth. What could have happened to him? Her hands shook as she raised them to her mouth. "*Jovencito!*" she cried. "Where are you? Answer me!"

She stopped suddenly as she caught sight of the milling sheep in the center of the flock. They were kicking up a great dust. A moment later from out the dust cloud rode Joseph, astraddle a snorting ram!

Margarida could only hold her breath. She was afraid to call to him, for if the ram bucked him off before he got to the edge of the flock, the sheep would be panic stricken immediately. Once upon the ground, the child would be ground to death by their sharp hoofs.

What had tempted him to do this thing? Was he without any sense of fear? She knew it was remarkable that the animal permitted Joseph to ride him at all. This particular ram had been running wild on the range all summer, and he was possessed of a fiendish temper and a dangerous sense of dignity.

And yet as she watched, Joseph caught sight of her, and, although he called and waved his hands, the ram did not buck. In five minutes, he had ridden clear of the flock. The dogs tried to turn the ram, but Joseph urged him on, and not until he was within a few feet of his mother did the boy slip to the ground. The animal waited to have his ears scratched and then, with lowered head, he dashed back into the flock.

Margarida ran to the child and caught him up. "Joseph!" she murmured, "you

frightened me so. I've been calling and calling for you, *muchachito*. What if you had fallen?"

"Grandpa wouldn't throw me, mother," the child answered stoutly.

"Grandpa—you call him Grandpa?" Margarida exclaimed, aghast.

"Well, he looks mean like grandpas look," Joseph declared naïvely.

"Hush — hush — Joseph!" Margarida crooned as she pressed her cheek to his. "*Cállate, jovencito*. Maybe to-morrow we can find a better name for the ram. But we must go, it is night. Let me have your hand, *nino!*"

Even though they hurried along, it was black night before they reached the little draw in which the cabin sat. A thin, piercing, scream—far-off and ever rising—struck their ears. With each step they took, it grew. Margarida clutched Joseph's hand. The air about them seemed to tremble.

"Run, Joseph." Margarida warned. But the next moment the full fury of the wind struck them and knocked them down. Suddenly the air was filled with whirling sand. Great clouds of it were scooped out of the mountain and hurled at them. It cut the eyes and scourged the cheeks. Choking and half blinded, Margarida turned her back to the wind, and with Joseph in her arms staggered to her feet. The cabin was nearly a hundred yards away, and Joseph was heavy for her, but with strength she had little suspected she possessed she swung him up and went on. In spite of her efforts she sank to her knees again and again.

With every passing second the storm grew in violence. The wind was ripping out sagebrush and greasewood, and hurling it into the air. Once, a piece of buckthorn struck her and drew blood. Mountain and valley were being swept clean of this debris. Branches and limbs of dead willows and mahogany trees, and all the litter of the range, were in that wild maelstrom.

No cry escaped the boy's lips and, although his mouth and eyes were closed tightly, the expression on his face was not one of fear. Even with his mother's body to shield him from the screaming storm, the razor-edged sand seared his little face. When she fell, he snuggled to her and waited patiently for her to rise and go on again. Later—it seemed a long time—he heard her kick open the cabin door.

Once inside, Margarida let Joseph slip to the floor. The gale was rocking the cabin, the windows were rattling, and the door banging back and forth as if the storm was intent on ripping it from its fastenings.

With an angry cry, Margarida hurled her body against it and forced it shut. Through every crack and cranny the fine sand was sifting in. It grated beneath her feet as she ran to the kitchen for a lamp. The light flickered fitfully as she placed it upon the table; and as she went about poking bits of rags into the crevices, it cast weird shadows of herself upon the walls and ceiling.

Joseph was thrilled rather than alarmed. He hurried about believing he was helping his mother, but Margarida soon found that it was impossible to keep the sand from coming in, and as she gave up trying, Joseph voiced the very question that was stabbing at her heart:

"Where is daddy, mother?"

"Under shelter, I hope, Joseph. He must have left the valley before the storm broke. He'd know it was coming. If he made the box cañon this side of the Circle-Z fence, he's safe. No horse could keep a trail on such a night. I'm only afraid that he'll be worried about us, and try to get here before the storm is over.

"Your father is a good man, Joseph. You ask God to take care of him. We wouldn't know what to do without him. *Virgen santísima!*" she entreated as she sank to her knees, "don't let him risk that trail to-night." She crossed herself and waited for Joseph to do the same, but the boy was staring off into space. He did not arise when Margarida got to her feet. He was muttering something and, listening, she heard him say:

"Oh, God, take good care of my daddy. My mother needs him, 'cause I ain't old enough to be a man yet. You tell him we're all right, and not to be scared. But if he's going to come, You tell his horse where to go. Old Pepper is smart; he'll understand what You tell him."

Without further sign the boy got to his

feet. His mother looked at him speechlessly. "You don't cross yourself, Joseph?"

"I do when I pray, mother; but I don't like to pray. I was just talking to God, then. I often talk to Him when I'm on the mountain."

Just why this simple statement should have brought a mist to her eyes, Margarida did not know, but her voice trembled as she asked:

"And what does He say to you, my little son?"

"He tells me how to make friends with things. Guess there ain't nuthin' on the mountain that's afraid of me."

The child's simple honesty made him a pathetic figure. Unconsciously, he but emphasized his loneliness. Margarida shook her head as she set about getting supper. Joseph's talk frightened her, and she resolved that at any cost she would see that he went to the valley in the fall.

The child was hungry, and he ate what his mother placed before him. The whining wind and the sound of the sand beating against the window panes filled the room as they sat at the table. Margarida ate but little. By the time they had finished, it was Joseph's bedtime.

An hour later, the dishes washed, and the sand swept up again, Margarida ventured to open the door, hoping to find some sign of the storm's passing; but the night was wilder than ever. It was nine o'clock, and as the minutes passed and her husband did not come, she took courage; for if he had not sought shelter he would have been there by now—or else he never would come!

And while she waited for him, two men —Race Eagan and Tiny Mears—squatted beside their sage-brush fire far under the protecting wall of the box cañon north of the Circle-Z fence. This fence was a line fence and, although a drift fence had been built below it, it never sufficed, in bad weather, to hold the herd.

Farther west, this line fence became the barrier for the big sheep outfits. In fact, this Piute Meadows fence, as it was called, had been the scene of two pitched battles and numberless minor affrays. Whenever the Circle-Z was seriously annoyed the trouble was along this line.

Race and Tiny had been "riding" the fence. The storm had caught them out in the open. They had fought it for an hour before dashing to cover. They were fairly out of the gale beneath the overhanging wall, but their horses stood with heads lowered, their manes and forelocks flattened out before them in the wind.

"No use our sittin' here," Tiny grumbled. "Might as well turn in. This zephyr is a-goin' to last all night."

"Yeh, and there'll be Circle-Z steers all over hell to-morrow," Eagan agreed.

"Ain't our fault. No man could live in that storm. I'm a-goin' to sleep."

Tiny's preparation for bed was limited to the unrolling of his blanket and the removal of boots and chaps. He was about to lie down when Race saw him stiffen.

"What's the matter, Tiny?" Eagan asked banteringly. "The wind scare you so to-night?"

"Didn't yuh hear it?" Tiny whispered.

"What?"

"A shot! I heard it plain—off there to the west. The wind would carry the sound a long ways to-night."

"Yeh, and all this stuff that's flyin' around in the air would kill it in a short ways. Ain't nobody out in this storm. Kit's over west, but that cagy boy ain't nestin' in a fence corner. He's somewhere where it's warm and—"

Race felt Tiny's fingers close upon his ankle, and he stopped short. Their faces grim, they stared at each other.

"D'yuh hear it then?" Tiny asked anxiously.

Race nodded. "Sure did!" he muttered. "Reckon it wa'n't far off, either. Pull on your boots, Tiny. We got to go."

CHAPTER II.

THE STAMPEDE.

JOE GAULT could read the weather as can only a man born and bred on the range. When he rode out of Paradise at five o'clock in the afternoon of that day, he knew the storm would strike in a few hours. He spurred his horse to a sharp hand canter as he turned eastward. Pep-

per's free-swinging stride made light of the long, desert miles, but the storm came on with speed that mocked the animal's best. Gault's eyes swept the sky.

"Hit's shore a-goin' to come soon," he muttered aloud, "an' hit's a-goin to be a fence twister, too. Mought a-known hit would come to-night. Reckon we'll just about make the fence by the time she strikes."

He had usually allowed himself four hours for the journey from Paradise to the cabin. At the speed at which he rode to-night he would lessen that by at least a full hour, but as the minutes passed he realized that even such a saving would not see him home in time. He had not yet reached the Circle-Z fence when the darkness which had settled so early upon the mountain, cloaked the valley. Within half an hour man and horse caught the first sound of that wild, high-pitched humming which was rushing toward them from the west.

The box cañon north of the fence was still some miles away, but it was not of it that Gault thought as he pulled his hat low over his eyes and tied his neckerchief over his mouth and nose. He had been glancing up the mountain for the light which Margarida always burned for him. He could not locate it to-night. It worried him, even though he told himself that the night was so heavy a light could not be seen so far.

He knew nothing could have happened to Margarida or Joseph, but the very fact that he could not see their light made him more anxious than ever to be home. He knew his sheep would fret until the storm was upon them, but the dogs would hold the flock. When the sand began to fill the air, it would be hard to drive the sheep from the coulee: for they were sheltered from the wind there.

The storm struck then, with a mad rush, and abruptly terminated Gault's chain of thought. Pepper snorted and lowered his head, but he went on, his eyes half closed, preferring anything to turning about and facing the blinding sand. It was impossible to see ahead for more than ten feet, so Gault kept his horse to the fence. In this fashion they went on for an hour.

Pepper stumbled as he slid down into a little arroyo. He nickered pitifully as he straightened up. Gault reached out his hands and covered the animal's eyes. As if grateful for the kindness, the horse broke into a canter.

Later, they dropped into a dry-wash. For a brief minute they were out of the full sweep of the wind. Gault recognized the place and knew that they had only two miles to go before reaching the draw where they were to turn off on the trail which led up the mountain. For some time, subconsciously, he had been calculating the chance of his being able to climb Buckskin.

Pepper knew the trail well enough, but in places it was steep and dangerous, a misstep in the darkness would plunge them to death. But this weighing of difficulties amounted to less than nothing, for Gault knew that he would make the attempt.

Not long after they came out of the wash he fancied he heard the barking of dogs. He listened carefully, but he did not catch the sound again. As far as he knew, his own dogs were the only ones within miles. If they were with the flock in the coulee the wind was against his hearing them; still, he would have sworn he had heard the baying of dogs, and directly ahead of him, too. It made him uneasy, and he urged his horse on; but he had not gone more than a hundred yards before a shot, deep and muffled, boomed in his ears.

The horse heard it, too, and tossed up his head. Gault stopped him in his tracks, and listened intently. It seemed that the noise of the storm would drown the sound of a shot, unless it were near. Gault admitted that he might have been mistaken about having heard dogs barking—a coyote would have accounted for it—but there was no mistaking that shot.

And then, as he waited, it came again—the deep-toned bark of a high powered gun! Gault imagined he had caught a flash of spurting flame almost simultaneous with the second shot. The Circle-Z fence turned south here, and it was where it came back to the north, less than a quarter of a mile away, that he believed the streak of flame

had stabbed the darkness. He had his gun in his hand by now and, in spite of the storm, Pepper dashed ahead as Gault raked him with the spurs.

Gault swung himself to the ground as he came abreast the corner of the fence, and with the reins in his hands he stumbled toward it, dragging Pepper after him. A gasp of astonishment was rung from him as he saw that the fence was down. Hand over hand he went along it until he came to the place where it had been cut. He ran his fingers over the sharp ends of the wire. "God!" he muttered. "Ain't no sheep nor cattle done hit. That's nippers!"

Pepper almost pulled the rein out of Gault's hand just as the herder bent again to examine the fence. When the horse came down he stood stiff legged, snorting with fear. Gault raised his voice to speak to the horse when a confusion of sounds which rose above the bellowing of the storm struck him. The next instant the barking of dogs and the mad bleating and baaing of sheep filled his ears.

"God A'mighty!" he cried out, and his voice shook, "how am I a-goin' turn 'em?"

He was in his saddle already and dashing toward the oncoming flock. Instinctively he sensed that they were his own sheep. From the direction from which they came there could be no doubt of it. There weren't any other sheep but his on Buckskin.

But what had happened? It wasn't sheep nature to fight dogs and storm. If the flock had started to drift it would have gone the other way. But the answer was not far to seek. Gault shook his head grimly; he knew!

It was not coincidence that found the Circle-Z fence down in the flock's very path. Things didn't happen that way on the range. Whoever had cut the wire had known that the sheep were being stampeded. Once through the fence, the flock certainly would turn to the east. There the deep cañon of the North Fork of the Little Humboldt cut across the Circle-Z country.

Gault's sheep would not be the first ones that had been swept over the rim-rocks to their death. If they missed that fate, they still would be trespassing on Circle-Z range, and they would be put off—and the manner of their ejection would not be pretty to see. The fence cutting would have to be explained, too. The evidence was only circumstantial, but it was damning; range law had convicted men on less.

Gault knew that the Circle-Z waddies rode this fence every night. The shooting which he had heard had undoubtedly occurred when one of them had found the wire cut. Storm or no storm, they would be back before long. Trouble would ride with them.

Gault felt trapped. Who had done this thing to him? Not the Circle-Z; Thad Taylor was no friend of his, but this game was cut beneath anything the old cattleman would lend himself to. Besides, he had nothing that Taylor wanted.

This blow had been aimed by some one who hoped to drive him out. It had been tried before, in other ways; but the Basque *gente* had not succeeded with the organized discouragement which they had doled out so adroitly. In back of this stampede was hatred, revenge! Gault recognized it for what it was. It aroused his fighting blood.

He had always beaten them. The thought stiffened his lip, and wheeling his horse, he swung the animal broadside to the sheep which were swarming against him. Rising in his saddle he bellowed to the dogs. They recognized him and ran toward him. As they came on Gault fanned his gun. The sheep began to mill as the leaders shied back from the barking gun and the flashing teeth of the dogs.

Gault forced his horse into the flock as he saw the leaders checked. For an instant, the billowing sea of wool appeared to rock back and forth. Gault saw that the storm aided him, for as the flock lost momentum the sheep turned their heads away from the biting sand.

It was the advantage he had hoped to gain, and he crowded them back step by step. The dogs, almost as wise as men in the ways of sheep, followed his lead. Gault began bawling in a sing-song tone:

"Coo-sheep! C' sh'p! Coo-o-o-o—sheep! Co—she', coo—she', coo-o—sheep!"

The next second or two would bring the decision. The sheep in the center of the flock were wavering already. If they got away now, it would be caused by the sheep in the rear pouring around the edge of the flock. Gault kept on calling, but he held his hands to his eyes and tried to see what was happening to the left and right of him.

He cursed as he saw an old ram break free. His gun leaped out and he pulled, but the pistol was empty. He was about to hurl it at the ram when one of the dogs leaped into the air and knocked the fleecy animal end over end. In less than a minute the flock was flowing up the mountain!

One of the dogs hung back and howled. Gault rode over to him, expecting to find a sheep with a broken leg. Even from his saddle he saw that there was something on the ground. He loaded his gun before he got down, intending to shoot it if it was badly hurt, but as he got to his knees and reached out to turn it over, his blood turned cold. The thing before him, half buried in the drifting sand, was the body of a man!

It was still warm. Gault struck a light four or five times before he managed to get a glimpse of the man's face.

"Kit Dorr!" he gasped as he recognized him. Gault's eyes bulged from their sockets as he caught another look at the man before his match flared out. "Dead—! He's shore dead!" he muttered. "God A'mighty, this is a-goin' to be terrible bad for me, Kit! Hit shore is!"

Gault got to his feet, and stood looking down at the dead man, his head shaking wearily.

"They shore got me this time," he drawled. "Folks all know we had words; and the wire cut; my sheep stampedin' around, and one of two got through the fence, like as not—God A'mighty! Ain't no man a-goin' to believe I didn't kill you, Kit; ain't but one or two even a-goin' to try to believe hit. Reckon things couldn't be worse for me. And them who killed you is a-goin' free; most likely they'll never be caught. The law or the Circle-Z'll git me, and that'll be the end of hit."

Common sense told him he gained nothing by standing there, but the thought that there might be some way out of the net haunted him. He seemed to have lost the ability to think clearly. A dozen plans which suggested themselves were dismissed immediately. Not one of them held a possibility of success. What good would there be to hide Dorr's body? He'd be missed, and the fence would tell its own story. Buckskin would be combed as soon as the storm was over.

Gault even considered taking the body to the Circle-Z, but such a course seemed hopeless.

"That would jest save my neck for the law," he argued to himself, "an' the law's all stacked ag'in me. Ain't no jury in Paradise would believe anythin' I said."

His hand flashed to his gun as he heard a man call to another, off to his right. It was Eagan calling to Tiny Mears.

"I knew they wouldn't be long a-comin'," Gault muttered. "Ain't nuthin' for me to do but go. An' I guess I'll have to keep on a-goin', But dam' 'em, they won't take me alive!"

CHAPTER III.

FLIGHT.

GAULT was a mile away by the time Race Eagan stumbled over Kit Dorr's lifeless body. The storm showed no sign of abating. Gault mumbled his thanks for that. The storm was to his liking, now, erasing his trail almost instantly. His sheep were still ahead of him. He caught up with them in the next ten minutes. They were going along without causing the dogs any further trouble. Soon the trail began to swing around the mountain into the very teeth of the wind; for over half a mile, they were a fair target for the full force of the storm; and as they climbed higher and higher, it seemed that the gale must sweep them off their feet.

To the right of the trail the mountain fell sheer to the floor of the valley. The sheep began to string out and hug the inside curve of the trail. Once or twice the dogs barked to hurry them on. Gault gave Pepper his head, but the horse could not keep up with the flock. In fact, he braced

his body for every step he took and, although Gault had urgent need of haste, the horse was not to be pressed.

The snail's pace at which he rode fretted the man sorely, and it was with a keen sense of relief that he felt the horse veer off to the left some thirty minutes later. The trail widened here, and Pepper loped along. Gradually, he quartered on the wind. In a short while Gault realized that the violence of the storm had lessened. By this token, he knew they were descending the wide draw which led to the coulee. Before they reached it, Pepper caught up with the flock.

Without conscious effort, a plan of what he must do had formulated in Gault's mind. He intended to be far away by daylight, but when the sheep had been rounded up, so strong was habit in him that he stopped to help the dogs bunch the flock for the night. From his patience, and the even tenor of his droning song, one would have little suspected that he had aught to hurry him.

Half an hour must have passed as he continued to circle around the sheep. The old ewes were the first to heed his song. Their example had a salutary effect upon the rest of the flock, and after the rams had impressed their households with their watchfulness and superior intelligence, they, too, bedded down. The tired dogs sat about, their eyes half closed. It was sign enough that the excitement had passed.

Gault did not attempt to find the trail of the man, or men, who had stampeded the sheep. The storm would have long since destroyed any sign. He knew the guilty ones were far away by now, for they would not have lingered after seeing the flock rushing down the mountain.

Pepper had not eaten since noon, and so, when Gault left the coulee, he went directly to the barn, and fed the horse. Much was to depend on Pepper in the next twelve hours. Gault loosened the cinches of his saddle as the animal ate and, before leaving the barn, he filled a small bag with oats and fastened it to a ring in the saddlebow. If he moved slowly, it was because he dreaded facing Margarida.

He had brought to her, already, such grief and misery as comes to few women, but the blow he was to deal her now made what had gone before seem as nothing. He knew she would meet it bravely. She ever had been the braver of the two. But why had God always demanded braveness of her? What had she done to deserve the load she had been made to carry?

And this thing to-night! Gault knew she would have to bear the brunt of it. If he got away, he would come back some day to prove himself innocent. Failing that, he had only to die, but she would have to stay here, poor, shamed—raising her son in a country where every man's hand would be raised against him. God! Was there aught of justice in this?

Gault raised his clenched fists to heaven, and a terrible oath escaped his lips. His honest, God-fearing nature had rebelled at last.

"God—if there is a God—why You a-doin' this to her?" he demanded in awful tones. "Why do You want to break her heart?—and that's what hit's a-goin' to mean! I ain't never asked nuthin' for myself; You ain't had much to do for either of us; but I'm a-askin' You now—how You a-goin' to take care of her? What You a-goin' to do for her and Joseph when I ain't here no more?—You got to look out for 'em, God! You got to take moughty good care of 'em; 'cause if Ye don't—I ain't a-goin' to believe there's any God! Don't let no man's hand touch my boy. He's clean, and You got to keep him clean, God! Do all You can for him and his mammy, and if You can't do nuthin' for me—I won't mind."

Margarida, worn out with anxiety, had dozed off in her chair beside the table. She sprang to her feet as her husband opened the door. "Joseph!" she cried as she ran toward him, her voice singing her relief at seeing him safely home.

Gault appeared unusually tall in the flickering rays of the lamp, his face gaunt and drawn, his eyes bloodshot from the storm. Margarida caught the grim set of his mouth, and the ghostly pallor of his face. She stopped short.

"Joseph!" she exclaimed. "What has happened? What is it?"

Gault pointed to the lamp. "Put it out!" he said sharply, and as Margarida blew out the flame, he locked the door.

The ashes in the hearth were still aglow. Gault stirred them with his boot until they dimly illumined the room. The supplies for which he had gone to town were in a gunny sack thrown over his shoulder. He took the sack, and put it in the kitchen as he had always done, and coming back to the fireplace, he took several newspapers and a catalogue from his pocket and tossed them onto the table.

Margarida's gaze followed him. His every move said to her that something serious had happened, but Gault, not seeing that she read him so well, tried to be casual as he spoke.

"Had trouble with the sheep," he began.

Margarida stopped him. "They were all right just before the storm, but that's not why you asked me to put out the lamp, Joseph." Her tone was accusing. Gault stared at the glowing coals.

"Yes—and—no, Rita," he muttered. "Somebody stampeded the flock. I jest managed to turn 'em, this side of the fence. The fence is down—cut!"

Margarida Gault's face blanched. She grabbed her husband's arms as if she would shake from him the mystery this night held.

"You mean *our* sheep?" she demanded incredulously. "Some one stampeded our sheep, and cut the Circle-Z wire so they would go through?——Joseph!" It was a groan. Gault turned his head away.

"Don't keep me waiting," Margarida exclaimed when she could speak. "Tell me what happened! Everything!"

But she had to drag the story from him, for he was still trying to hold back word of Dorr.

"How could this have happened?" she demanded, when he had finished. "Who could have done this thing?"

"Reckon the less we say about that, the better hit'll be. You and me know who done hit, but hit can't be helped."

She caught her breath as understanding flashed in her brain. Trembling, she turned to the fire. "I—I—understand, Joseph," she murmured brokenly, her voice tired, impotent. "I didn't think they would stoop to this."

Gault winced. How could he tell her what must be told? He couldn't just *go*. So, it was with a decision born of desperation that he said tersely:

"Guess you remember Kit Dorr, Rita."

His wife nodded, surprised at the mention of Dorr's name at this time.

"Of course. But why? Had he anything to do with this?"

Gault cleared his throat nervously.

"Kit's dead—killed!"

"Ah-h-h!" There was surprise and horror in her eyes. It seemed as if by some psychic force she foresaw the dénouement of the tragedy. Her mouth hung open. It seemed to ask a question.

"I left him half buried in the sand beside the fence," Gault went on, watching her mouth.

"The fence?" Margarida's hand flew to her mouth, and she backed away, her eyes bulging. "Joseph—*Joseph!*" And when Gault's eyes met hers, she stared at him madly. He saw the question which crept into her eyes, but he was mute. Slowly, then, a word formed on her lips:

"You—"

Gault could not answer at once. He shook his head slowly when he did speak, and his voice was hoarse:

"No-o, Rita, hit wa'n't me! I didn't kill Kit Dorr. Folks is a-goin' to say I did, though; an' there ain't no one a-goin' to believe I didn't."

"Oh, Joseph!" Margarida implored as she rushed to him and threw her arms about his neck. "Don't say that! I have never known you to lie. If you say you did not kill him, *I* believe you. Look at me, Joseph. I have faith in you!"

Gault trembled as he swept her up into his arms and kissed her.

"I haven't done much, have I, to pay you back for all the faith you've had in me?" he said brokenly.

"Joseph, my man!" Margarida repeated again and again as she clung to him.

Not until she asked to be put down, did he release her.

"Joseph—do you know who shot Dorr?" she questioned.

Gault nodded: "The same folks who stampeded the sheep. Ain't no doubt of hit. Kit must a-happened along as they was cuttin' the wire."

"You—you don't think my father did this?" Margarida demanded. "He had nothing against Dorr."

"No! No, he didn't have a hand in this, but the hatred of me that he's preached all these years is to blame for hit. The Basque boys have been a-listenin' to him so long they would do anythin' to git rid of me. Dorr got hit 'cause he was in the way. The Circle-Z boys must 've found Kit's body some time ago. Like as not, they'll be here, lookin' for me, 'fore mornin'. Mornin'll bring 'em, sure pop! I got to be a long ways away by then."

Margarida just nodded. She knew as well as he that his life would be snuffed out if he were caught before the excitement subsided. Yes, he had to go. And these minutes—they were too precious to be wasted. Even while they had talked, a posse might have started for the cabin. The future was black for her, but the present was beset with such danger that she dared not think of what was to become of little Joseph and her.

"Is your horse ready?" she asked anxiously. "I'll have a snack ready for you by the time you get him. We've been foolish to stand here idle."

Gault was back with Pepper by the time she had the lunch wrapped. The storm was abating. If it held on as it was now, he would be over the mountain and well into the Owyhee country by daylight. It was his intention to go down the Little Owyhee and cross into Idaho. Beyond that, he had no definite plan.

"I ain't a-goin' to tell you where I'm headin'," he said huskily. "You won't have to lie to folks, then, when they try to dig hit out of you. If anybody comes to-night, say I ain't home. An' don't worry no more'n you have to, Rita. Ain't no way of sayin' how long I'll be gone. I'm a-goin' to square this, some day. The wool's contracted for; hit'll give you money enough. You'll have to git a boy for the sheep. Git word to Kincaid; he'll find a herder for you. An' if you need anythin', ask Kin; he's the only friend I got in the valley."

"Yes, yes—! Joseph," Margarida answered, "but hurry, *hurry!* What if they came now?"

"I got to kiss the baby 'fore I go," Gault mumbled, and with his wife at his heels, he tiptoed into the kitchen and opened the door of the little cubby-hole in which the child slept. The boy did not stir as his father dropped to his knees and brushed his cheek with quivering lips. Icy despair tore at Gault's heart as he gazed on his son and realized that this might be his last look at him. A mad impulse to awaken the child and hear his voice once more almost overcame the kneeling man.

Gault felt his wife's hand upon his shoulder, entreating him to delay no longer, but for a while he could not take his eyes away from the boy's face; pride and love held him chained.

Tears were denied Gault. Dry-eyed, he had to face the mother, or else even her fine courage must fail at his going. That he masked his misery was no small accomplishment.

"Don't tell him nuthin'," Gault whispered when the door had been closed, "hit'd only poison his mind. When he asks about me, tell him I had to go away for a spell. Keep this night from him as long as you can, Rita, 'cause he's gittin' so he thinks like a man; he'd want to do somethin'. And that mustn't be. I don't want him to grow up with his heart full of hate and meanness. As long as I'm alive, this is my fight; I got to settle hit myself. If anythin' happens, so I don't git back, I know you'll raise him to be a man. Teach him to—*what?*"

The sudden fear which had flashed in Margarida's eyes had forced the question from him.

"Isn't that our dogs?" she insisted.

Gault listened.

"Reckon hit is," he muttered. "Someone's a-comin'!"

"Kiss me then—quick! Put your arms about me for a second, my man. Come back to me, Joseph! I couldn't live with-

out you. No matter when you come, I'll be here! And now, go! *Go!* They'll be here any minute!"

Why he should have hung back, Gault could not have said, but he did not mount his horse until Margarida bolted the door. He heard something thud against it, and he wondered if she had fainted. He even ventured to call to her. When he heard her answer, he swung himself into his saddle and struck off across the mountain to the north of the coulee. The tears which had been denied him, blurred his eyes now. It did not matter; there was no one to see.

Margarida had half fallen against the cabin door as she bolted it. Valiantly, she endeavored to arrange her disordered thoughts. What was she to do when these men came? Had she been asleep?—or would it not be better to pretend that she was anxiously waiting for her husband to return from town?

As she pondered the matter, she heard horses outside the cabin. The next moment, the butt of a gun beat an angry tattoo on the door.

"Hello-o-o!" a voice cried.

"I hear you!" Margarida answered. "What is it? What do you want?"

"*Open the door!*"

"I'll not open the door until I know who you are!" she called back.

"I'm Eagan—Race Eagan, of the Circle-Z—I want to talk to your husband."

"My husband is not here!" she replied, stoutly. "He went to town to-day. I've been expecting him home for hours."

Eagan conferred with the other men. Then:

"Guess he'll be along directly. We got to see him. You open up and let us in. Kit Dorr's been killed. We're here to get the man that got him. What you goin' to do?"

"Wait until I light a lamp," Margarida exclaimed. "I'll let you in. There isn't anybody here who had anything to do with killing Kit Dorr."

Two other Circle-Z men were with Eagan. The three of them searched the cabin hurriedly.

"He ain't here," Race grumbled. "He's been here and gone, or he'll come soon. We'll wait a spell!"

"You think my husband killed Dorr, eh?" Margarida asked, her eyes snapping.

"What we think don't matter! We want Gault! You said he hadn't been here, didn't yuh?"

Margarida nodded: "You understood me correctly."

Eagan pulled a chair up to the table and sat down.

"Might as well sit down, boys," he said brusquely, his eyes following Margarida as she walked back and forth. He found her singularly beautiful. He began to wonder about her and what was to become of her. Margarida caught his eyes and seemed to guess his thought. Eagan picked up a newspaper and read it aimlessly, wondering about her. He stiffened suddenly.

"*Say!* I thought you was mistaken, ma'am," he exclaimed insolently. Turning to the others, he said:

"Gault was here! She's just been playin' for time."

"What do you mean?" Margarida demanded.

Eagan's lip curled as he tossed the newspaper on the table:

"I mean that there's to-day's *Silver State*. It couldn't have got to Paradise before four o'clock. How did it get here if he didn't fetch it? Ain't no airships bringin' mail up here, is there? And don't you forget that foolin' us won't help him any. Where's he headin' for?"

Eagan almost roared his question. Great was his surprise, then, to find little Joseph facing him from the kitchen door, his sleepy eyes squinting along the sights of his father's old deer gun.

"Don't you move!" the child warned. "You wouldn't talk like that to my mammy if my daddy was here; and I reckon I ain't going to let you do it, either!"

"I'm damned!" Race drawled as he surveyed the boy. "I *do* be damned! I guess you mean it!" He grunted as he turned to his companions:

"Come on, let's ride! And say, kid," he added as he looked at Joseph, "for your sake, I hope your paw is travelin' *fast!*"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Harness-Shy

By COLLINS D. BRADLEY

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

BILL did not see her until late in the evening, but when she finally impinged upon his vision he felt that the day had been wasted. That was odd, for he had been pleasantly active and the Fourth of July in Las Palmas, California, offers agreeable diversions to a young man of Bill's temperament and circumstances.

That is, his temperament was cheerful; he was twenty-five; he had but lately quit his job; he was tastefully and fashionably clad in two hundred and thirty-eight dollars' worth of clothes; he owned a second-hand automobile, and he had a week's wages in his pockets.

But there she stood, modestly, in the front row between her restive, blue-chinned papa and her placid but watchful mamma. The block was roped off for dancing. Bill leaned gracefully upon the barrier and stared across the roadway at her. She was just tall enough; she was—but why describe her? To each man is his ideal. She was Bill's.

She was not dancing, but he knew that she could—just as he knew that she had a soprano voice and that she smiled infrequently but beautifully. He suspected that she ate only ice cream. These were a few of his specifications for feminine perfection and something told him she was nothing less than that.

Young men approached her from time to time, but they all went away again quickly, crestfallen. It was just like her queenly cruelty, Bill thought, so to stand, slim and tall and beautiful, dressed in white, refusing to dance with them no matter how they pleaded. As soon as he got around to it Bill was going to ask her himself.

Now her father was speaking heatedly, with gestures. Probably he wanted to go home. Well and good—let the old crab go. But perhaps he would take his daughter with him?

Bill turned quickly about and worked his way out of the crowd. Once in the clear he soon espied a fellow who had been refused by the wonderful girl.

"Howdy, brother," said Bill cordially to the poor chap; "have a good cigar?"

The other eyed him doubtfully, but took the smoke; for superior quality was loudly proclaimed by its band.

"Thanks," said the fellow.

Bill smiled, seized the stranger's limp hand and spoke in a confiding tone.

"You don't know me and I don't know you, but we both know Flora del Tobacco," said Bill. "Morgan is my name. If you can present me to some young ladies who dance I'll guarantee not to queer you."

"No fooling," the other declared, exhaling slowly his first smoke wreaths. "Oh, sure. You can call me Al. Pick your victim, friend—I know 'em all."

Bill indicated the haughty beauty.

"Try again," Al advised. "My statement was too inclusive. I will revise it downward. I know 'em all but her."

"Oh," said Bill. "I thought I saw you speaking to her."

Al hitched up his belt and rocked uncomfortably on his heels.

"Nay, nay, friend, not speaking," Al confessed. "No! I started to ask her for a dance a while back—I guess you saw me then. But her old man's with her. He's got a bad eye, I'm telling you. Brother, that girl's dad gave me one nasty look. I didn't say a word, old-timer, not a word."

Bill regarded him with horror.

"You had the impudence to speak to that young lady without an introduction?"

Al waved the cigar in protest.

"I did not," he insisted modestly. "Her paw looked hostile. If it wasn't for him everything would have been jake."

Bill saw, despite the fellow's spurious air of gentility, that he was at heart a ruffian.

"Is that so?" asked Bill.

Al replied with offensive glee.

"Sure," he declared. "I can tell. I give her the eye and she came right back at me."

"You're a liar!" cried Bill.

"Who's a liar?" Al demanded. "I'm going to flatten your nose! Say that again and I'll lay you cold. Aha! You're afraid to say it again, you big bluffer. Nothing doing. I won't fight here—come over in the alley if you want to fight. No, sir! I won't go nowheres with you. If you touch me I'll call my gang. You better beat it, you big stiff!"

Bill left the fellow and picked his way around the edges of the throng. He was resolved upon a bold expedient, but the prospect caused a dryness in his mouth and a lack of resilience in his knees. He halted in a shadow, and lifting his cap, bowed to a telephone pole for practice.

"Good evening, madam," said Bill. "May I plead the *al fresco* and bohemian nature of this gathering as an excuse for addressing you? Madam, I thank you.

"Dear me! I have neglected to replenish my card case. My name is Morgan, madam, William Morgan."

"Mrs. Post and Mr. Post? Very glad to meet you, sir. And Miss Post! Charmed, I assure you.

"My object, Mrs. Post, was to inquire whether there is any way in which I may help you to enjoy more thoroughly the festivities of the evening. A cigar, Mr. Post? Don't mention it.

"I should esteem it a privilege, madam, as your husband is not dancing, if you would favor me— No? Really? But perhaps Miss Post? Oh, I thank you, Miss Post. Tut, tut! I am sure that you are a true daughter of Terpsichore. I hope, indeed, that my own inexpertness will not detract from your pleasure. Let's go! That ought to fetch her."

A young female, in clinging black, so slender that she had stood unnoticed on the other side of the pole, peeped out at Morgan. Bill stood, cap in hand, paralyzed with embarrassment, and beneath the lacy brim of her hat he glimpsed a cloud of sooty hair, brow, neck and breast of startling, marble-whiteness, lips like a smear of blood, and eyes like two wet blots of ink.

"Was you addressing me?" she asked.

Bill replaced his cap hastily. He felt that he was blushing. He shook his head and turned away, but the girl skipped forward gayly.

"Oh, that's all right," she assured him. "I don't get sore when a feller talks like a gempman. Sure I'll dance with you. Peddle some more of your line, kid. It's got me going."

Bill was touched. This girl was plainly a creature of some perception. He felt that to refuse her outright, or to explain himself now, would be brutal. Gently he disengaged her hand from his arm.

"Miss, thanks," said Bill. "I will enjoy dancing with you, but it wasn't the next I was asking for. Could you save one for me later in the evening?"

She frowned slightly, and her tone, as she answered, was less cordial.

"I ain't all dated up, quite," she conceded.

Bill left her, with relief, and plunged into the crowd. Many persons resented his edging past them, and said so. Others attempted to arrest his progress forcibly. It is not strange that he miscalculated a little and brought up beside Mr. Post instead of Mrs. Post.

The gentleman in question, against whom Bill had been thrust quite violently, uttered a curse, glaring fiercely and projecting his iron chin so that Morgan did not make the speech he had rehearsed.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Bill nervously.

"Huh!" replied Mr. Post. "Ouch! Say, lad, get back off of me. Understand? What do you think this is?"

Bill surged strongly backward and gained room in which to stand. Further overtures, he judged, might better be postponed. He watched with contempt and animosity the male dancers who glanced toward him, doubting not that they were "giving the eye" to Miss Post.

The set of Mr. Post's jaw, and the hardness of his stare at these individuals were not encouraging to Bill. One bold chap started in Miss Post's direction, slowed down and wet his lips, but came on doggedly. He glanced furtively at the girl, but Mr. Post's eyes held a power of fascination. Halting at the rope, the youth muttered something in a smothered voice.

Bill, craning his neck, was shocked to see that Miss Post's lips were parted, that she was about to speak. There was a gleam in the corner of her eye which seemed to indicate that she was not entirely displeased with the fellow.

"Who are you talking to?" demanded Mr. Post loudly and suddenly. "Hey! Don't stand in front of me."

The supplicant started, quailed, and hurried away.

"That's the stuff!" said Bill heartily.

"Huh?" grunted Mr. Post querulously.

"Er—" replied Bill. "Have a cigar?"

Mr. Post clutched the smoke eagerly.

"Thanks, lad," he said, genially. "I don't care if I do. I been wanting one for an hour, but I can't get out of this crowd."

He lighted up and at the second puff spoke to Bill again, his eyes moist with affection.

"You put out a good line of smokes."

"Oh, you're welcome," Bill assured him. "Take another one for after a while. Go ahead—that's all right."

"Say," confided Mr. Post, "you're a real guy. Most of the young chaps in this town are soft shells, ain't they? They've been sneaking up all evening and then slinking off like they was afraid the daughter would bite 'em. If they want to dance with her why don't they speak above a whisper? What do they think she's here for?"

Bill took his cue instantly. Looking straight into the forbidding countenance of Mr. Post, he spoke in a tone that caused Mr. Post's hat to lift perceptibly from his head.

"They're no good!" said Bill.

Mr. Post agreed.

"I know it. Listen, why ain't you dancing?"

"Stranger here," Bill replied in a fine roar. "I don't know anybody."

Mr. Post seized Bill's sleeve.

"What's your name?" he asked.

II.

It was in a daze of delight that Bill led her out in a waltz to the music of the firemen's band. She danced as he had imagined she might. Her name was Miss Dolan. Her voice was all he had hoped it would be. Her eyes were blue. He was doubtful about the ice cream. It seemed a bit solid for the diet of such a delicately lovely creature. Perhaps she lived on sodas.

"Do you always dance like this?" he asked.

"Why, yes, don't you?"

"Never before," he declared fervently. "Somehow, I never took as much interest in it."

The subject, apparently, held little charm for Miss Dolan.

"Do you know when the fireworks are to be shown?" she asked.

"Oh, the fireworks?"

With a violent effort Bill concentrated his attention on her words rather than on the lips with which she formed them.

"I don't know about the fireworks," said Bill. "You see, I'm a stranger in town. I think I'll like it here, though. Miss Dolan, you reverse smoother than Lloyd George."

She was silent. Bill looked quickly at her left hand and at her face. She wore no rings, and she smiled.

"I didn't intend to stay here at first," Bill continued glibly, "because I had no idea that I'd find what I was looking for."

"You have been searching for something and found it here?"

"You," said Bill. "I've been looking for you all my life."

"You got that off rather well," she said.

Bill chuckled complacently.

"Sounded just as though I meant it, didn't I?"

"Almost."

"Well," said Bill, "the reason it sounded that way was because I did mean it."

Unfortunately the musicians stopped for breath and the other dancers applauded so loudly that further conversation was impossible. When the band went back to work she spoke quickly, as if to forestall him.

"You seem rather impetuous, Mr. Morgan. How fortunate you are to be able to go or stay at your pleasure. May I ask what business you are engaged in?"

"I do different things," said Bill.

"Very different, I'm sure," she agreed demurely.

"What I mean," he hastened to explain, "is that I don't do the same thing all the time. I believe in freedom of action. I cut across lots to keep out of the ruts. The captains of industry have tried to draft me into the ranks, but I've managed to stay on detached service and answer no roll calls. Then, you see, I've been looking for—"

"Yes, yes," she interrupted, "how interesting. I suppose you meet many—many people, I mean, and have lots of—well, adventures?"

"Some," said Bill glumly.

The waltz had ended all too soon. The effect Bill had achieved did not seem wholly favorable. However, he had craftily stopped on the opposite side of the street from Mr. and Mrs. Dolan, and therefore had a minute or two longer in which to remain beside Miss Dolan while she walked across.

"That was a wonderful waltz, *I* thought," he said. "I wonder if you could give me another lesson right away? We only had part of a dance that time because we did not start promptly."

Miss Dolan's manner was indifferent.

"I'm not sure that I care to dance any more this evening," she informed him.

Bill assumed a disappointed expression, but she refused to look at him. She was gazing at the crowd outside the ropes. Suddenly she spoke again.

"Did you say that you were unacquainted here? There is a young woman who seems to know you."

"Where?"

Bill was truly surprised. Then he saw the willowy girl in black bending eagerly across the rope beckoning to him.

"Yoo-hoo-oo, Mr. Smi-ith," she called, "this is where I'll be."

She gave a come-hither wag with her head, indicating by rolling her eyes, another girl of equally sophisticated appearance at her side.

"What's the matter with her?" muttered Bill.

"I think she wants you to meet her friend," Miss Dolan suggested helpfully. "Oh, that's quite all right. I enjoyed the dance, Mr. Morgan—or is it Smith? But don't let me detain you from your friends any longer. No, no, I insist."

She laughed gently and hurried away.

Bill had to be rather short with the other girls, but he caught Miss Dolan again just before she reached her parents.

"I have decided not to dance any more," she said instantly.

"But, please, Miss Dolan, let me explain about that girl," Bill begged.

"Is that necessary?" she asked.

If put properly, with the right air of ennui, the question would have squelched Bill. She should have gone on, too, and left him. But she hesitated and looked curious.

"Why, Miss Dolan, shucks!" Bill began confidentially. "I—"

They both started at a sudden, shocking detonation like a thunderclap. It was so loud and arresting that the murmur of the crowd ceased; so violent and near at hand that the concussion felt like a slap in the chest.

Miss Dolan seized Bill's arm involuntarily, and Bill, equally obedient to instinct, caught her hand in his.

"Just fireworks," said Bill, soothingly; "they're shooting them from the roof of the hotel across the way."

The throng stared upward; a long-drawn "A-a-ah" was intoned in chorus as, with a barely audible, far-off pop, a constellation of golden comets streaked down the sky. Another loud explosion startled Miss Dolan into renewing her relaxing grip.

"Oh, what a noise!" she cried. "Are they skyrockets?"

Bill explained volubly.

"No. They are bombs, made of papier-mâché. They are shot from mortars. A fuse is timed to burst them at the top of their trajectory. I had a job shooting them once—"

Miss Dolan, grown calmer, snatched her hand from his.

"Where is my mother?" she interrupted.

A yell sounded from the other side of the street. A third explosion, louder than the others, seemed to shake the earth and a sheet of flame flashed overhead. Bill thrust Miss Dolan violently aside and sprang at a round, black object, about the size of a baseball, which spun and bounced across the asphalt to meet him.

No infield idol of the bleacherites ever scooped a hotter grounder or got it away faster. With all the strength that was in him Bill pegged the bomb upward and away from the crowd. It seemed that he had barely released it before it exploded with a stunning crash and blast of fire. It showered the people with burning powder and nearly deafened them, but did no serious injury to any one.

There was a moment of panic and outcries and bewilderment. Then Dolan came running to wring Bill's blistered hands.

"My boy," cried Dolan, dropping half of the good cigar unnoticed from his trembling lips—"Bill, my boy, you're a real guy."

Behind Dolan came the others, surging over the broken ropes. Bill was tossed and tumbled in a maelstrom of grateful citizens. The mayor demanded his name. The secretary of the chamber of commerce started a subscription list for a medal. The man, still pale and shaking, who had inadvertently tipped over the mortar so that it shot down into the street, descended a fire-escape to thank Bill tearfully.

Morgan was not displeased with the demonstration, but just then he wanted to see Miss Dolan. As in a dream he realized that the black-clad Nemesis was trying to kiss him. He eluded her embrace and burst through the adoring throng.

Mrs. Dolan was crying a little as she welcomed him. Miss Dolan looked at him silently, with an expression that brought a gulp to his throat and paralyzed his tongue with a pang of joy.

"Josephine," said Dolan, "Jo, girl, that bomb was coming straight at you."

"Yes," she said. "I'll not forget."

"Shucks, Miss—er—Josephine," Bill protested audaciously. It's a pleasure. The bomb rolled right into my hand, so I threw it away. I got the habit when I was a third baseman. Can we have another dance?"

But the one dance was all he gained. The band belonged to the union; it was nearly midnight; and the air they played was "Home, Sweet Home."

"Josephine, shucks," said Bill. "This is the last dance."

"I'm sorry, too."

"About that girl—" he began.

She listened, smiling.

"I never knew any one like you before," she declared when he had done. "You are an adventurer, a soldier of fortune! I didn't understand at first. I was afraid you might be a tramp. Now I know you are a hero."

"Josephine, de—shucks!" he deprecated. "This is my lucky day. I liked this town at first, and now it likes me. I thought you were the sweetest thing in the world, and now—but anyhow I'll stay here, I guess. I've had three jobs offered me already. The best was from the president of the light and power company. He wants to make me boss trouble shooter for this district, he says. There might be a future in it. I have a diploma in electrical engineering."

"I'm awfully glad," said Josephine gravely. "It's a wonderful opportunity, I'm sure."

Then the band stopped playing for the last and final time.

The crowd was dispersing, and Josephine's parents were moving away. Bill and Josephine followed in silence. Bill was gazing upon the bright fields of fancy, sensing but dimly the things and people near him. It was not until he had entered the lobby that he thought to wonder why the Dolans lived at a hotel.

At the elevator Josephine halted and gave him her hand, which he held joyously, though it hurt his blisters.

"Good night, Mr. Morgan," she said. "I will write you a note as soon as we reach home, for I want to hear from you. I shall expect to hear of your success in business soon. You may always be sure of my gratitude and my sincere friendship."

"Why—why, thank you, Miss Dolan," said Bill. "But—er—why, I hope so."

Mrs. Dolan chimed in cordially.

"And if you ever visit Oakland you must come to see us all."

"Oakland? That's five hundred miles from here. When do you leave? I can come to see you off, at least?"

"Don't bother. We must be on the road at eight o'clock," said Josephine. "You shall hear from us, soon. Good-by."

She followed her mother through the open door. Dolan added a few words of explanation.

"We're driving up—just stopped here for the day. Coming home from my vacation. Early start to-morrow. Good-by, boy."

"Good-by," said Bill. "But, wait, Josephine, shucks!"

The aged elevator boy slid the gate shut with a clang.

III.

THE instant he awoke next morning Bill sprang from his bed at the city auto camp and looked at his watch. The hour was eight thirty.

"Shucks," said Bill.

At nine o'clock he ran his flivver into a garage.

"Friend," said Bill to the proprietor, "my hands are so blistered that I cannot drive this splendid machine. Believe me, nothing but necessity would part me from this valuable and and reliable car. Hear that motor? I call her Kit Carson. She never misses. Look at those tires! Like new, and all cords. Power? She's got more pull than the Southern Pacific. Speed? I've never been caught. Mister, she starts like the Highland stag, and you can run her all day and find the radiator as cool as the nose of a healthy bloodhound."

The proprietor spat, poked his thumb through the decayed top and kicked another dent into a front fender.

"Fifty," said he.

Bill beamed.

"You're right, sir. Fifty per hour per gallon."

The garageman's hard-boiled eyes never flickered, but he elaborated his former statement.

"Fifty dollars."

"Listen, brother," said Bill scornfully; "I was offered two hundred for this car."

"What year was that?"

"There's other dealers in town," Bill hinted.

"Take it to 'em."

"You've got me there," Bill conceded. "I'm out of gas. Give me a hundred."

"Fifty," chanted the trader.

"Oh, shucks," said Bill. "Fork it over. Where's the depot?"

IV.

A MONTH later Dolan had changed his opinion of Bill.

"Say, Jo, how much do you know about that lad?" he demanded passionately, casting the evening sporting pages on the floor.

Josephine came slowly from the hall into the living room. She had just closed the front door behind Morgan.

"As little, almost, as you did, daddy, when you introduced him to me."

She sat down in an armchair near the fireplace, tucked her feet up beside her with a supple movement, and hurriedly opened a magazine.

"I know, I know," said Dolan heavily; "I still think that was the best piece of work I ever did. But there's something wrong with him. If you noticed, he refused to answer a straight question about his regular way of making a living."

Josephine glanced at him over the top of her magazine with a bright smile, showing such delicious teeth and dimples that Dolan's frown relaxed slightly despite his earnestness.

"That was rather clever, I thought, daddy."

"Clever?" echoed Dolan, sadly.

Mrs. Dolan interceded quickly.

"Now, Ed, what was it? Nothing to lose your temper over, I'm sure."

Josephine refused to take any part in the discussion at this stage, and signified it by snuggling deeper into the unfeeling embrace of the chair.

"He said," Dolan replied severely, "that he used to run an information bureau, but had to give it up because his stock was exhausted."

Mrs. Dolan returned silently to her tatting. Her husband continued aggrievedly:

"I wouldn't have asked him, only he struck me for a job, and a green man is not much good to me. I hired him to get even. If it was anybody else I'd have thrown him out the window."

"Oh, is he going to work for you?" Mrs. Dolan asked. "That's too bad, isn't it? Anybody can assemble automobiles."

"Not anybody," Dolan contradicted. "Not quite. My gang is handpicked. They'd be mighty hard to replace."

He addressed himself again to the back of Josephine's magazine.

"I gave him the job, Jo, because you asked me to. Will he stay with it now, do you think?"

"Yes, I think so," said Josephine cheerfully.

"I don't," declared Dolan. "They offered him a good place there in Las Palmas, and bang! he forgets all about it to follow you up here."

"He wasn't out of work long," Josephine reminded him.

"And he wasn't at work long, either," Dolan returned. "He's a salesman one week; in a garage the next; another week driving a truck; and now, down to hard labor. A day or two of it will be all for him."

Josephine laid down her magazine, to reply gently:

"He is never discharged. He quits because he wants to. He doesn't need to work like most people. He can do almost anything."

"But," protested Mrs. Dolan, "has he no ambition?"

"Mother," said Josephine, "I don't suppose that the practical cost of success you mean ever even appealed to him as being desirable."

Dolan shook his head gravely.

"I get four or five like that every year. There's a soft spot in them, I think. They say they can't stand monotony. A clever man can keep shifting a long time, but at the last he's always behind the lad who sticks at one thing till he's good because it's too hard changing. The plodder don't like the rut—what saves him is that he can't get out."

"I still think," said Josephine, "that Will can be successful just any time he tries."

Dolan took aim at her with an enormous forefinger.

"Just so; but he will not try long enough."

Josephine got up and kissed her mother. Then she addressed her father casually, over her shoulder, as she walked toward the hall.

"I told him that, but he didn't understand, I'm afraid. It will not surprise me greatly if we never see him again. Of course, if he does go to work and you dis-

charge him, that won't prove anything, will it?"

"I'll promise you that," said Dolan gruffly. "I'll not fire him. Is there anything depending on his holding the job?"

"Well, yes. You might say there was a great deal depending on that," Josephine answered softly.

Dolan picked up his paper, but listened to her light footfalls as she danced up the staircase in the hall. He gripped the sheet tightly as she paused at the top of the flight, and then, when she called down sweetly, "Good night, father," he flung himself back in his chair and resumed his reading.

V.

DOLAN beckoned to Ham Hamilton, his straw boss, a red-eyed, sour-faced man in ostentatiously clean overalls. Cupping his hands to Ham's ear to exclude the din, Dolan bellowed to his subordinate.

"Ham," said Dolan, "watch the new man. I expect to see you on your toes breathing hard down his collar. He must earn his four bits an hour. In case his job gets too easy for him, find him another immediately."

Ham smiled sadly, and from their station, close beside it, glanced along the moving chain which carried embryo cars in close procession from end to end of this wing of the factory. Chassis after chassis was spawned, smoking hot, from a dark, cavernous oven. Each grew and developed swiftly as it progressed, until, leaving the conveyor, it rolled off upon the floor, an automobile, new, shining, complete.

Parallel to the chain, on both sides of it, stood movable racks piled higher than a tall man's head with parts. A gang of helpers were constantly "muling" new ones into place and hustling away the empties. Between these racks and the chain were two rows of young men working at a speed for which few humans are geared.

"The man," Ham inquired, "who started this morning?"

Dolan shouted fiercely in reply.

"The big, tall fellow with the chest on him. The hollow-bellied, limber-legged one with the curly black hair."

"I know," Ham said; "you mean the one with the gloves on."

"Gloves!" cried Dolan. "That won't do."

Ham shifted his cud reflectively.

"He's helping land the bodies right now, but I think they're fitting better than at first. The front fender men were asking for help a minute ago. How'd that be?"

Dolan nodded.

"It's lighter," he said, "but it's dirtier and harder on the hands. Set him at it. I want to discover the color of his blood."

VI.

ANOTHER chassis glided in front of Morgan. There was a shout from above, the cough and gasp of a pneumatic hoist. A touring car body with top and windshield already in place swung down through a square hole in the ceiling. Morgan and another tall man who stood opposite reached up, and as the body was lowered guided it onto the frame.

They cast off the grapnels. The sighing hoist snatched them upward again. The two men seized the body and with quick, tremendous jerks squared it around into place. Then they mounted the running boards and sought to thrust bolts down through holes in the body and frame.

The holes never matched. The body bolts never slipped in. The body, always slightly warped, had to be sprung, twisted, jerked until it fitted. But when Morgan's last bolt dropped into place he was done with that car. A man farther down the chain would put on the nuts and washers.

He scooped the sweat from his forehead with a crooked forefinger and reached up for another body.

He had read of automobile factories, and had got the impression that everything went smoothly, like a perfect machine. He had heard of workmen oppressed by a terrible monotony in their toil, having no pride in their tasks because no skill was required of them.

He saw that he had missed the truth. There was no monotony here. Each chassis and body had a stubborn uniqueness. Some yielded only to force. Others required coax-

ing. All demanded dexterity and strength. Morgan saw plainly that any man who held his own at this sort of work had skill and endurance to boast of. Nor would he suffer from ennui while tugging and hauling and wrestling and sprinting till he panted.

Bill started and glanced around as Ham bellowed in his ear. Morgan wondered, as he followed the straw boss, how the bodies could be landed without his help, but looking backward he saw his former partner and the fellow who had been tightening the nuts let out another notch of speed and dividing the two jobs between them, finish as quickly as before.

Ham advised Bill to remove his gloves, and he did so, but with misgiving; for though the burns on his palms had healed, his skin was still tender.

His new task was to tighten four bolts on the front end of each car. One of the fender men showed him how to do it. Anxious to keep up with the procession, Morgan hurried to the next car, but the workmen stopped him with profane shouts. If Morgan tightened his bolts first they drew the fenders out of shape so that the other men could not work. He found that when the fenders were partially fastened he could get his bolts in by bearing down on the fenders to insert the upper pair and lifting to put in the lower ones. Then, when the other men had made all fast and got out of his way he could reach inside the frame and start the nuts and draw them tight.

But he was slow. He was pleaded with at the last of his job by a little fellow who fitted front aprons and could not work until Morgan had finished. As he started anew, each time, he was railed at by the fender men who had to wait for him.

The frames were hot from the oven. The paint was sticky, the kiln drying it only theoretically. Sweat soaked his clothes and ran down his forehead into his eyes. He found that he could hold the nuts with his fingers while he twirled the bolt with a socket wrench and for a time he made speed and kept up with the other workers.

But his fingers, scored with tiny, circular cuts from the bolt threads rapidly became sore as the skin shredded and the paint sank in. That was his left hand. His right, with which he turned the socket wrench, was blistered, and his arm and shoulder muscles were knotting and cramping with fatigue. He had finally to use a spanner on the nuts when his finger tips became raw, and that slowed him. Then followed a nightmare period of useless effort to make speed while Ham, Dolan, and his fellow workers howled instructions at him.

Finally he got passably skillful with the spanner and gaining a little, stood waiting for half a minute while the fender men got ready for him. It was literally the first time he had been still for an instant since the whistle had blown that morning. He worked faster than ever on the next car, but found himself losing ground again.

He was puzzled. It was like running on a treadmill. No amount of effort seemed to increase his speed. He put every resource of hand, eye and brain into his task. He lost track of his surroundings as though drunk with work, and when at last he heard the hoarse scream of the whistle and the car before him stopped crawling forward, and the noise died down, he could hardly realize that it was already noon.

In half an hour the whistle blew again. Bill was young and strong. He felt that in an hour he might have recuperated a bit, but half that time was just enough to let him realize how tired he was.

He picked up his socket wrench with a grunt when he returned to his station, for his hand was now very sore. He doubted whether he would be able to maintain the pace he had held during the morning.

Ham fingered an electric controller handle built breast high on a pillar near Morgan. The chain began to creep forward. Bill leaped at a chassis, and, to his surprise, finished before it had crawled into the next man's territory. He looked up to see Ham swing his lever a notch farther. The second car reached the deadline before Bill could finish, though he worked faster. He saw Ham touch the handle again.

"This camel is getting sway-backed," muttered Morgan.

VII.

Bill threw down his wrench, stepped over the chain, and strode across the floor

to the foreman's rolltop desk by the windows where Dolan sat filling out reports with a pencil.

"I want to quit," said Bill.

Dolan's serious, steady gaze did not change as he looked up at Morgan. He drew a block of blank forms from a pigeonhole and poised his pencil above it.

"I didn't think you'd stick," he murmured.

He wrote for a moment, then reversed the pad, sliding it toward Morgan and extending the pencil.

"There's your discharge," he continued. "Sign at the bottom. The timekeeper out by the clock will give you a slip to present to the cashier in the executive building."

Morgan took the pencil and bent down to sign.

"The color means nothing," Dolan went on; "the company has them all printed alike on yellow paper."

Bill stopped writing to stare at him.

"So that's what you think?" he asked. "And Josephine? I suppose she believes as you do?"

"Why no," Dolan admitted. "Not exactly. She said last night she thought you had the grit to stay. I never did."

Morgan ripped the top sheet from the pad, balled it thoughtfully between his palms and tossed it into the waste basket.

"I am quite willing to make any concession to your daughter. She was right. I won't quit. Fire me."

"What's the trouble?"

"I can make more money for less work elsewhere. I took this job to see what it was like—I know, now."

"Yes?"

"Yes, indeed. I thank you for giving me a tryout and all that, but I'll waste no more time here."

"I begin to get your slant on the subject," said Dolan. "Where do you go next, if I may ask?"

Morgan smiled and waved his hand.

"I'm not worrying about that. I always look for something I haven't tried before and give it a whirl. Some day I'll find a job that likes me and in which I may expect an ultimate recompense worthy of my efforts. That day I settle down."

"You won't, though," said Dolan. "You won't stick there nor anywhere else."

"Why not?"

"Why, just because there isn't any such job. It's all in your eye. There are drawbacks to any position. The hell of it is that any kind of work consists mainly of work and that takes nerve and patience as well as ability."

Morgan smiled the smile of conscious superiority.

"Thank you," he said, "I am glad to learn your views on this subject and I shall reflect on them with greater interest seeing as I do the high position to which you have attained after a lifetime of following such principles. Don't hand me that old line, Mr. Dolan. I know that you don't like me and that you want to make me quit.

"Fire me now. Go on! Then tell your daughter. If it's any comfort I can assure you that she disapproves of me even more heartily than yourself."

Mr. Dolan's features assumed that a rich beet color and he clenched and unclenched his massive fists, remaining seated only by a visible effort.

"Now, hold on," he directed hoarsely. "I'm where I am all right, but my life isn't over yet. I'm pretty good still—never mind that."

He rocked to and fro a moment until the swelling had subsided in his neck.

"Now about this firing. I discharge no man without giving him a chance to make good. I'll not fire you. To get out of here you have to quit. You're docked half an hour's wages now for the time you've wasted. Unless you admit you're beat you'll stay here forever. If you don't work till the sweat drips from the end of your nose nine hours a day I'll cut your pay till you'll owe me money for being allowed in the plant. Ham! Come here."

He beckoned violently to his lieutenant, then turned on Morgan again.

"Snap out of it, you! Get to work!"

VIII.

BILL was shifted twice that afternoon and he began to understand the true devilishness of Dolan's scheme. It might be pos-

sible in time to get used to any one job. The first few days are always the most arduous. But by moving Bill at proper intervals Dolan could keep him forever breaking his heart to maintain the pace on unfamiliar tasks. Dolan knew that Bill's pride would make him do his best always. It was part of Dolan's job to know that sort of thing about a man, and to use his knowledge.

Bill lasted out the week on his nerve and getting off at noon on Saturday went to his boarding house and to bed.

There were two awful months during which he went to sleep exhausted every night at seven and got up, still tired, just eleven hours later. Saturday afternoon and Sunday seemed no longer holidays as they once had been, but mere breathing spaces in which to sleep and rest.

It was hard, this mechanical, pleasureless routine, for Bill had heretofore put the pursuit of gayety first among the purposes of life. The sad fact that Josephine sent him no word seemed, after what had passed at their last conversation, to forbid all hope of reconciliation with her. At first he grew more tired and depressed daily, and found himself, each Saturday morning, able only by supreme effort to work the ensuing half day.

But during the third month his palms hardened. Then his muscles ceased to ache and merely felt tired all the time. Next he found that in each week there was one day when he felt some of the vigor of youth and the spring of strength again. Mondays he could have enjoyed life if he had leisure. Later this buoyancy lasted through Tuesday, and finally, at the close of his fourth month of toil, he found himself not quite stupid and spiritless with fatigue even by Saturday noon.

Dolan and Ham had been doing everything in their power, Morgan thought, to break his spirit. They had shifted him as fast as he got used to a job. The conveyor was speeded notch by notch until the most experienced men complained. And at length, having tried him at everything, still unable to make him complain, they evolved an entirely new scheme for making him work just a bit harder than anybody else.

They arranged two benches, clear beyond the end of the conveyor chain, between it and the place where the boy stood who filled the gas tanks. These benches they loaded with material and tools. The plan was, that as each car came off the track a card should be attached to it by an inspector, as usual, telling in what respect, if any, it was incomplete or imperfect. Bill was to read this card and make the car right within the five minutes before another got there.

Morgan was raised to the pay of an inspector, which was about halfway between what he had formerly received and that of a pieceworker. The first day of this method it proved a great success. The factory established a new production record and Morgan was forced to perform prodigies of labor. So fast and hard and well did he work that even Ham pitied him and warned the gang that careless work on their part, throwing more on Bill, would cost the responsible party a fine.

Five cars a day were added to the factory output at a jump. The pieceworkers gained, on the average, fifty cents per diem. Dolan was complimented by the superintendent. And that official got a congratulatory letter from the president of the company.

Morgan did not rejoice. He thought his increase in pay insignificant in comparison with the four thousand or more dollars that he added to the daily profits of the company. He was now fully convinced that he was being exploited by Dolan. That under such a foreman honest ability and diligence alone gained a man nothing. He did not quit, though. He was resolved to make Dolan suffer. Bill intended to make himself indispensable, first, then bawl Dolan out and leave the Summit plant flat on its back.

He spent two months on this newest job and began to think that the time had come. The work even here had gradually grown easier. He thought, secretly, that he could have handled five more cars a day, but he did not boast of it. Then, as the market for Summit cars seemed insatiable, Dolan took other steps to increase the capacity of his department.

The boss of the maintenance gang put his

men to work one day building another chain beside the first, on which, it was rumored, a larger but similar type of car was to be put together. Morgan applied at once for a piecework job on this new chain when it should be completed, but Dolan refused to promise him anything definitely. This made Morgan still more certain that Dolan could not afford to lose him. He felt that for very shame Dolan must have given him a more highly paid job, but for the fear that no one could be found to repair cars as quickly as Bill could do it. Another example of exploitation. The very fact that he was a superior workman seemed to condemn Bill to stay in the rut forever.

Then, one morning, Morgan learned that he was not indispensable after all.

"No, no, my boy," Dolan said, calling him from his station. "No need to go back on the end of the line any more. You've worked hard and long, you've stuck to it through thick and thin, and you've never whimpered except just at the first, there. Now, my lad, I said I would do right by you, and I will. You deserve it."

Morgan wondered what was in store for him, and also, who would replace him. He did not dread Dolan's ingenuity any longer, though. He had worked at every job along the chain already, and he knew that the worst of them was easier, yet more highly paid than his last one.

"Come here, young feller," repeated Dolan, with what Morgan thought a malicious grin, "come with me, Bill. Come to see the fine piecework operation I'm going to let you try."

Morgan followed toward a heavy screen partition which separated the wheel room from the rest of the floor.

Dolan led him into the cubicle and pointed to a new bench with a stack of big tires and rims beside it, a rack full of automobile wheels in front of it, and a pneumatic wrench suspended above it by a wire cable and a counterbalance. These wheels and rims and tires were much larger and heavier than those which Jack, the regular wheel assembler, was working on at his bench across the room.

"There," said Dolan. "There you are, my lad. That's the stock for the wheel assembly of the new cars the plant starts building to-day. As soon as the daily production reaches thirty you will get paid at the rate of twenty-five cents a car."

"Yes," asked Morgan, "and what do I get meanwhile?"

"Fifty-five cents an hour," said Dolan. "And you needn't thank me, for you've earned it."

Morgan's smoldering suspicion became a blaze.

"Fifty-five? Nothing doing. I guessed there was something funny about this. You know I've been making sixty-five."

Dolan nodded indifferently.

"I'll give it to somebody else, then. Soon you'll be wishing you had it, though. We'll be making fifty cars of this type a day inside of six months—but you don't need to take it unless you want."

"Why can't I stay on the other job, then, until this gets going right?"

"Because," said Dolan, "it wouldn't be fair to whoever started this job. I'm a square dealer. If you don't take this piecework job, mind you, you don't get any."

IX.

So Morgan, grumbling, started all over again. He had to put the tires on the rims, inflate them, and bolt them to the wheels. It was not, at first, a matter requiring great speed, but it was hard labor, as any motorist knows. Also the pneumatic wrench was not the work saver it seemed. It was fast enough, but when once a nut was screwed tight the machine had to be shut off on the split second, or it turned on its own axis and threatened to knock the operator down or break his wrists.

The new assembly line made but five of the big cars that day, and Morgan assembled only six sets of wheels, but he was sufficiently tired at night. His neck and back were sprained by the continual twisting jerk of the wrench, and his wrists and fingers were so weak that he could hardly hold his knife and fork at supper. His old operation was being performed well enough by three new men hired that morning.

Bill reflected bitterly that for weary weeks he had done that three-man task for

a third of what it now cost the factory. Why, he wondered, had he not received at least two men's wages? He went to work, though, with the intention of learning to make real speed, now that speed might earn him more money.

He tried out every conceivable method of doing each part of the operation. He consorted with tire jockeys at service stations to learn their tricks with big tires. He took advice from Jack, who handled only small tires, concerning the handling of the air wrench. He worked at top speed always, and when he was able to finish his daily stint before quitting time, employed his leisure practicing sleight of hand. He learned to grasp a certain number of nuts from a boxful without looking at them. He practiced starting the nuts on bolts. He studied, day by day, the motions that he made, and sought to reduce their number.

After a time he hit upon the trick of cutting square holes in the top of his bench and building in square boxes so that he could keep all his material within reach without encumbering his working space. He faced the top of the bench smoothly with sheet iron, at his own expense, so that a tire could be slid with a shove from one end to the other, and congratulated himself that this saved six steps for each four wheels.

Dolan came in occasionally and stood quietly watching him, making no comment on his methods and improvements. Once in a while when something stopped the chains for a minute or two, a workman would drop in to joke with him about the operation. Because of the constant lifting of the heavy wheels from bench to rack, it was the most back breaking job in the department, and because Bill got his work done always, though others sometimes did not, it became a custom to pretend that the wheel assembly required no skill, but strength merely.

Morgan rather enjoyed their chaffing, generally. It pleased him to be regarded as stronger and more enduring than others. The perverted humor of one man only irritated him.

This was a beetle-browed, brawny giant with a stubble of blue black beard always on his square jaws and a sneer forever on his swart lips, who spoke clumsily in a lingo heavy with outlandish habits of tongue and voice. This chap seemed to be trying to frighten him with clumsily conceived tales of death from exploding tires, from lungs rotted by the white talcum dust of new casings, of deafness caused by the continual roaring of the pneumatic wrench. George Prenski was his name.

Morgan tried to pity the dull witted brute and to laugh at his gruesome sallies, but there was a cruel, sullen light in the big fellow's sunken brown eyes that put a sting to his jests.

But, despite Prenski's warnings, Dolan's ominous silence, and the derision of his fellow laborers, Morgan began to fall in love with his job. He had no longer any doubt but that he would eventually earn a fabulous wage, for he knew that his endurance was unlimited, and time tests had told him that the twenty-five cents per car allotted to the wheel assembly would not have to be split with a helper up to seventy-five cars a day, and perhaps if he could think of one or two more time saving stratagems, not even then.

Gradually Dolan boosted production. After two months the day came when the plant made thirty of the new cars. Morgan, having filled out his piecework card, was placing it in the rack near the time clock that evening, when Prenski slapped him on the shoulder and fell to capering grotesquely.

"Ho-ah! Bell, ol' falla," he mouthed. "What you workin' on tomaw? Hah?"

Morgan had to look up just a bit to meet Prenski's eyes, yet Prenski was much the larger man. He was a good two inches taller at the shoulders, the lack of any neck making the ordinary means of judging his size misleading. Bill sensed something out of the ordinary sinister in George's manner. The fellow seemed about to burst with a secret of humorous import.

"What am I working at to-morrow?" Bill ventured, and, perceiving that this translation was substantially correct, answered it. "Why, the same old thing, of course."

Prenski restrained himself no longer, but

screamed with laughter. Morgan watched him with rising displeasure. At length Prenski calmed himself and posed awkwardly, expanding his huge wrestler's chest and flexing his bare right arm to show the knotty biceps.

" Don' git mad, Bell," he warned. " I'm takin' you' job tomaw. Ha-ho!"

Morgan's short laugh of disbelief brought further insistence.

" Dolan promise me. I kin do her. I use the air wrench more than one year on the chassis."

Morgan's eyes glittered so that Prenski sobered and frowned ferociously.

" Loog ou'," he cautioned. " Don' mak me mahd!"

" And I mustn't make you mad?" Morgan queried grimly. " Is that so?"

He turned back from Prenski and the time clock into the building. Dolan was locking his desk. His smile was that of a man with a hardened conscience, and his cheery greeting seemed to Morgan evidence of years of shady dealing. Bill spoke warmly and directly.

" Is it true that you've given my operation to Prenski?"

Dolan's customary blandness was quite unshaken.

" I wanted to see you about that, Morgan. I didn't promise it to you definitely, remember. Prenski offers to do it for a cent less than the price I mentioned to you. He wants it because that's more money than he's getting now, even so. However, I told him I couldn't think of doing it until I'd given you a chance to meet his offer—"

" You go to hell!" Morgan interrupted. " You—" he choked and turned away.

" Wait a bit, lad," cried Dolan soothingly. " Don't lose your head now. Wait till I get through."

But Bill was furious.

" That 'll do. I had the right angle at first, and, like a fool, let you kid me out of it. I got a notion to shove your job down your throat—crossways. There's two methods of dealing with a guy like you. For your daughter's sake I'll try the other one."

Dolan turned swiftly to the color of a new brick, but held his breath. Morgan would not have heard him anyway. Bill was hurrying toward the time clock again.

X.

He was late the next morning, purposely. Before going to Dolan's department he visited the chassis line to make sure that George Prenski was following certain instructions which he had received in the alley near the factory the night before.

All was as it should be in the chassis department.

Bill's eyes were slightly bruised and the left side of his jaw seemed a little out of drawing, but these peculiarities were insignificant by comparison when he stopped with arrogant bearing in front of Prenski, who actually cringed at sight of him.

Prenski's eyes were badly puffed and discolored. His nose was twice its usual breadth and greatly flattened. His lips were swollen inside out and his left ear had assumed the appearance of a scarlet mushroom. He was working, though slower than usual, at his regular post, and showed no desire to quit it.

Morgan strolled on into the final assembly department. There was much less noise than ordinarily. The heavy car conveyor was stopped and the workmen stood idly in groups. The crowd within the tire room did not see Bill enter. He leaned against the door jamb and watched the four men who jostled each other in front of his workbench.

Dolan, at some worker's mistake, growled so that the man flinched and tore the skin from an already battered knuckle with a hammer. At this fellow's anguished cry the laborer at his right, tightening nuts with the roaring, snorting pneumatic motor, glanced aside from his task for the fraction of a second, and the forty-pound, four-cylinder machine, driving a socket wrench with terrific speed, whirled a nut down solid on its bolt and turned viciously about its own shaft.

It tore its handles loose from the operator's grasp and swatted him on the chest. It knocked him down, whirled a wheel from the bench on top of him, smacked Dolan's

face with a loop of heavy air hose as he futilely dodged, and swung wickedly to and fro at the end of its supporting cable, howling and chattering.

Rubbing his face, Dolan retreated to the far end of the bench and closed the valve on the compressed air pipe before he ventured to approach the thing. The voice of the fallen man sounded loud in the sudden stillness.

" Four bits an hour, huh?" he questioned angrily.

He thrust the wheel off his legs and arose.

" You want me to wrestle that iron mule for four and a half a day? Gimme my time, guy. I'm gone."

Dolan's reply was instant and acrid as he closed the hand control on the wrench and reopened the line cock.

" Why don't you hang onto it?"

A voice sounded from outside the wire partition.

" Hey, Dolan, chassis department wants to know what your gang's laying off for?"

Morgan chose this moment to lounge forward from the sheltering doorway. Dolan caught sight of him and made immediate outcry.

" Hi! Half an hour late, Morgan."

Morgan smiled.

" Did my absence cause you any inconvenience? I thought you had another man for this job?"

Dolan fairly snarled his reply.

" You know why he ain't here. Don't stall. No more tying up the line like this—get me? Once more and out you go—if it takes a month to break in a new man."

" Oh, and in the meantime?" drawled Morgan.

" Give us some wheels."

" How much are you paying, to-day?"

" Same price I made you first," Dolan snapped. Then he turned savagely on the extra men. " Get away from that bench and let this man work. Don't stand there with your finger in your mouth! Hi! Get a truckload of rims. Hey, Sleepy, jump! Bring some tires. You, with the lead in your shoes—drag some wheels here from the painters! Move!"

Then Morgan went to work. A spring took him from the center of the bench to the end where, stretching out his bare, heavy muscled arms, he clutched a tire and a rim from two loaded racks. Holding the tire upright on the floor, he jammed the lower edge of the rim into place over the valve with one quick thrust. Two or three slapping shifts of his hands, a kick with his foot, and the tire was on.

He slammed it on the bench with inflating stem in contact with a compressed air outlet. Whang! slap-slap, biff, bang with another on the bench. Two more. Bill slid the inflated tires to the right spot like curling stones on ice. Clang! he plucked a forty-pound rear wheel out of a rack which had been rolled into place behind him and tossed the tire upon it so expertly that one more thrust jammed it home.

With the skill of a prestidigitator, he plunged both hands into a box and drew out exactly six rim lugs without even looking at them. Clash, clash, clash, and the lugs were in place. Another dart and six nuts were in his hands. Ambidexterity now.

Three twists with each set of fingers started the six nuts. He grasped the polished brass handles of the wrench, started it sounding and whirling and banged it down on a nut all in one smooth, accurate motion.

In a second or less the nut was tight, and as the full drive of the motor kicked suddenly, mightily, against the bracing of his straightened arms and the grip of his fingers, the muscles of his half revealed shoulders and of his bare throat leaped into sharp relief. He held it so a moment, stalled and hissing like a dragon, while he looked slyly over his shoulder at the workman who still rubbed his sore chest, and at Dolan. Then he tightened the six remaining nuts as fast as he could plunk the wrench down and lift it again.

The flying hands plunged and came up with shining valve hood, dust cap and lock nut. The swift fingers ran them home and tossed the wheel into the rack. Another whanged upon the bench. A tire clashed upon it, a sort of prolonged rattle sounded, and the wrench began to roar again.

Helpers took the wheels four at a time

and rushed them over to the chain. The clamor behind him told Bill that the department was working at full speed again. A half hour later they were taking away eight of the finished wheels at a time instead of four.

When he had been working three hours the helpers dragged away a completely loaded truck. Sixty-four wheels, sixteen jobs; that meant, that he had gained on the harried, hard driven gang outside. But Morgan did not slacken. He wanted to show Dolan what he could do to the hardest operation in the department. It was Saturday, a short day, and he knew that the plant would only make twenty-five or twenty-six cars, yet he completed wheels enough for fifty before the sound of the whistle stopped him.

XI.

DOLAN called to Bill, halting him on his way to the time clock. Andrews, the foppish, hard eyed and capable factory superintendent, stood with Dolan near the conveyor. Bill narrowed his own eyes, as he reflected that he was probably to be fired at last, and went toward the two with a defiantly indifferent air, determined to forestall any such intention. Yet he had, strangely, just sufficient reluctance to believe Dolan so unfair that he waited for the foreman to speak.

" Come here, Morgan, my lad," said Dolan blandly; " we want to ask something of you."

Andrews glanced at Bill and continued an inaudible conversation with Dolan. Bill's temper began to boil at the slight. Ham, who was loitering near by, suddenly intercepted a glare from Dolan and hurried away. The last workman had left the department, and heavy silence filled the building.

As soon as Ham had disappeared Dolan spoke to Bill.

" Look, now, Bill," he said. " I've a bet with the big boss here that you can do up a car faster than any one man he ever saw. Are you a sport, my boy? If you can finish in just twice the time it takes one to pass through the hands of the whole gang, I win. I know you can do it. Will you?"

" You're asking a favor of me?" Bill demanded.

" You'll be paid for it," Dolan added hastily.

Morgan grinned cynically.

" That's better. How much?"

Dolan frowned and winked as if to silence Bill, but Morgan was determined to rebuke him.

" I'll do it for five dollars. No less."

Andrews pursed his lips and raised his eyebrows slightly at Dolan, but said nothing.

" All right," said Dolan anxiously. " All right, Morgan. You can have the five. Here it is, in advance, but don't let me down now. Work fast."

Morgan took the money with just a bit of hesitation.

" Watch me," he said. " How do you want it done?"

Andrews spoke up impatiently.

" There's a chassis in the oven now. We'll let it run at just half speed because there are usually two men working on it at a time. You are to perform all the operations so as to pass my inspection, without slowing or stopping the chain—if you can."

" Jake," said Morgan.

Dolan turned to the controller and set the conveyor in motion.

Morgan ran to Jack's bench in the tire room and put tires on four wheels at top speed. He was waiting when the chassis emerged from the oven. With the ease of long, hard practice he installed battery box and battery, the mast jacket around the steering post, the running boards, the front fenders. Dolan and Andrews followed him step by step, watching every detail of the work.

" Open up a notch," cried Morgan. " I am in a hurry."

With a grin of pure delight Dolan touched the controller.

Morgan worked carefully, swiftly, and as he found that the skill in every trick of the work, so hardly won, had not deserted him, called for more speed. He wished that he had not made up so many

wheels unnecessarily, for he was a little tired when he started this test, and as it went on he felt his strength and agility flagging. But still, he knew that his nerve was good to carry him through, and mindful of the days when he had rebuilt cars in five minutes apiece, he shouted again to Dolan and flung himself at the task with a fierce desire to demonstrate just how much grit and skill he did possess.

He flung down one tool when he had finished with it and in the same motion picked up another. He vaulted over the hood from side to side. He dived underneath, sprang inside and out again. The walls reechoed to his toil. He tightened nuts so fast that the clashing of his spanner had the rhythm of a riveting hammer. He was wet with sweat and plastered with paint and dust. Dolan rocked on his feet like an elephant in silent glee as he realized that Bill Morgan was outdoing even his usual whirlwind style.

And he was doing a perfect job, too. Screws can be driven like nails, for instance, and there is a way of putting on nuts and hub caps with a hammer without stripping all the threads, but Morgan screwed them down as carefully as the proudest of new owners might have done. Yet he made ever increasing speed. And suddenly he had finished.

Bill stepped aside, while Andrews inspected, fished the damp bill from his shirt pocket, and handed it to Dolan. He was angry no longer, for he felt that he had not only proved his mettle, but beaten Dolan's game.

"Take it," he insisted. "I don't work that hard for money. Call it a favor between friends."

Andrews stepped back from the car and nodded to Dolan after a grinning look at his watch.

"You win," he chuckled. "Fine work, Morgan. Good-by, and luck to both of you. You tell him, Dolan, I must get out."

He grasped Dolan's paw, nodded to Morgan, and bustled away.

"He's feeling good," Dolan remarked, "and no wonder. He's going East to the main offices next week. For all that we showed him something, I think. Have you heard that, beginning Monday, I'm superintendent here? And you're to be foreman."

"Foreman!" Morgan repeated.

"Yes," Dolan assured him, "foreman. What did you think I was training you for? I could have taught you a piecework job in a week. I would have told you yesterday, but you wouldn't listen. I took up Prenski's offer because you'll need a man for the wheels after to-day."

"Oh," said Morgan.

"Ham is a good straw boss. I'd advise you to keep him, but decide for yourself. I scared him so that under me he didn't dare go on a bootleg jag oftener than once in three months."

"Say," said Bill, suddenly, "did you have this in mind all along?"

Dolan chuckled.

"Sure, my boy. And many's the time I came near telling you. But after all, I'm glad you stuck on and won out by yourself. I put it to you hard, I know. There was little enough time to train you—a foreman has to be old friends with every bolt thread in this department to know when his gang are doing their best. Be easy on the boys; they are not all such fast workers as you."

"Shucks, Mr. Dolan! Thanks, shake!" said Bill. "I take back all I thought about you."

XII.

MORGAN enjoyed the warmth of self-congratulation and the honest joy of the man who has licked his job, until he was fully halfway to his boarding house. He had bucked a tough game to the finish and he had come through. He had proved himself. He was sitting on the world and plucking stars. Then the reaction came, as usual.

Why stick around longer? Honor was satisfied. He knew and Dolan knew that the automobile game was his meat if he cared to shoot. He had negotiated the first and most difficult hurdle in perfect style, therefore, the race had lost its attraction for him, and he had no backers to disappoint if he pulled up short.

"The first thing I know," said Bill, arguing with himself, "I'll be so old I'll have to settle down. I wouldn't be surprised if I'd better be stepping out to look things over while I can still see without wearing glasses."

Yet there was something attractive about being foreman in the plant. He was still undecided when he reached his room and found a letter there from Central America. He felt an exultant premonition as he opened it.

It was Alec Macey who had written him —"Horizon Al" and "Rambling Bill"— their nicknames had been at the technical institute and the salutation showed that Macey remembered the old days. The momentary president of a certain republic, Macey announced, was the present liberal employer of several of the old bunch. They were constructing and laying out a great hydroelectric system for the capital. There was some doubt, Al admitted, that salaries would ever be paid in full, but it was the life of Riley. Macey claimed to have exerted a heavy drag and got permission to send for Morgan.

It was a big chance, he said. If the thing was ever built as planned it would make the international reputation of every engineer who had worked on it.

Morgan gave a mighty shout of joy, and bareheaded, letter in hand, ran from his room and down the stairs. First telegraph Macey. Then to resign from his foremanship by telephone to Dolan and look up the steamer sailings.

In the street he met the postman on the afternoon round, and received another letter. He jammed this in his pocket and ran out. At the end of a block, however, he slowed to a walk and withdrew the unopened envelope for another inspection. A few paces farther he stopped, to open it. It was not a long letter, but Bill stood for several minutes, reading it through more than once. Then he turned about and went back to his room, slowly, and as if he had suddenly realized how tired he was, but still smiling.

He sat in his room rereading the second letter, and after a bit the one from Central America dropped unheeded on the floor. Finally Bill got up and went down to the telephone.

XIII.

LATER, by standing up all the way on the trolley car, he managed to keep awake long enough to get off at the right street. Josephine met him at her door, and as it was an unusually warm evening for January, they sat on the front porch.

She was just as lovely as ever. It seemed to Bill that he had forgotten how beautiful she really was. Josephine thought she had never seen him look so interesting.

His eyes, shadowed by bruises and heavy with fatigue, seemed to hold a misty yearning. The paleness of his cheeks, the new leanness of his jaw and chin, due to lost weight from overwork, seemed in her eyes to give him a spiritual aspect.

Josephine admitted humbly that she had misjudged him. Bill, with the vision yet before him of golden southern beaches, of stately palms against a brilliant sky, of fettered torrents foaming and Spanish music in the heavy tropic night, let her talk on.

But a little later, after a long pause, Bill told about himself. He had tried to work at his profession more than once. The first time they had put him in an office at a desk figuring the cost of telephone lines —a dreary task to Bill. It was—insulators, such a type, so many to the cross-arm; so many cross-arms to the pole; so many poles to the mile; so many miles by another man's survey. Making marks on paper with his back to the window while every dingy digit spoke to him of the taut, burnished wires slanting gleaming in the sun and the tall poles standing on the high green hills. He had lasted a month.

Again he had been on the night shift at a power house in a Sierran cañon so deep and dark that no wind ever blew and the stars stayed out all day. He spent a winter there, snowed in—six months of solitary nights until the ancient magazines were all read into bits, and he knew his books by heart, until he chanted formula by the hour to drown the never ending moan of the giant dynamos. He came back out of that with the first truck that brought supplies in the spring.

For the rest he had drifted—trying anything, barring nothing. Now, he told Josephine, he was ready to stay put. Though not directly useful at present he still held technical training an asset. He guessed he might as well hang on with the automotive industry.

Josephine thought so, too. Then they talked of more personal matters still.

It was late when Bill reached his room, but he was not sleepy. He was greatly exhilarated and prone to burst into song. He undressed partially, and then struck by á sudden thought, wrote a long letter to Macey. Much of it was descriptive of Josephine, the rest of it was devoted to chiding Alec for wasting his youth in wandering, but at the end Bill wrote:

Sail on, old Argonaut. May fair winds follow you. I'm going to stay ashore.

THE END

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THE SAME OLD WORLD

I AM the same old world
Forever more!
The young to-day believe that I am new—
As in the past, the young
Have thought before!
Their elders, as of old, think me askew—
Forgetting quite the things they used to do—
I am the same old world!

I am the same old world
That Adam knew,
That Homer through the seven cities sang,
That on their rocks, the rude
Cliff-dwellers drew!
I saw the Babylonian gardens hang,
My ears were old when Pharaoh's clamor rang!
I am the same old world!

I am the same old world!
The human heart
Still beats the same! There are no patterns new
For souls of men! Nor they,
Nor I depart
From what we were! What men did, men will do—
Life is—to learn that platitudes are true!
I am the same old world!

I am the same old world!
The poets sing
The world that might have been, the world to be;
Still—in my orbit I go journeying!
The world I am they seldom seem to see—
But, though the songs they sing are not of me—
I am the same old world!

I am the same old world!
I hear their cries
Who think to mold and change me at their will,
But in a little while
Their crying dies,
And I whirl on, upon my axis, still!
They learn, at last, when they have trod the mill—
I am the same old world!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery.

Cheddar Cheese.

By FRANCIS LYNDE

Author of "A Glorious Fool," "David Vallory," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

JAMES BARRETT, teller in a Denver bank, prepares to go to Ogden for his marriage to the beautiful daughter of a prominent man in the Utah city. President Hawley of the bank asks Barrett to deliver en route at Araquito two hundred thousand dollars in currency required by a client. The president informs his teller that word of the impending money transfer has leaked out into criminal circles, and his belief is that Barrett will not be suspected by the crooks. On the train Barrett takes the treasure valise into the dining car with him. Across the table is a large, fleshy man who winds up his meal with cheddar cheese. Barrett orders black coffee. The next thing to strike his consciousness is the fact that he is a prisoner in a log cabin—and the two hundred thousand dollars is gone. He breaks out, finds himself lost in a remote mountain range, struggles across a strange desert and blindly stumbles into a railroad water tank just in time to escape death from thirst. His obsession is that people will believe he stole the missing money, and he is bitterly determined to track down the robbers and reinstate himself. So he plays hobo on a freight train and inconspicuously enters the city of Copah, where he registers under an assumed name at the best hotel.

CHAPTER V *(continued).*

THE PEOPLED AREAS.

EXPECTING momentarily to have somebody step up and tap him on the shoulder, constable-wise, Barrett was only too glad to follow the bellboy to the elevator and to be whisked up to the ten-o'clock at-night desertedness of the fourth floor corridor. Behind the locked and bolted door of room 406 he struggled out of his topcoat and sank heavily into a chair. Now that he had come to the beginning of some attempt to retrieve his misfortune, he realized what a hopeless task he was setting himself.

What did he know about thief catching? And if he had the accomplishments of a Sherlock Holmes, how could he take even the first step without a shadow of a clew

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to guide him? After all, wasn't it merely a broad guess that he had been taken from the train at Copah?

Then the other thing. Every move he might make would have to be made in the certainty that trained thief catchers were searching for him quite as earnestly as they were searching for the stolen cash. They had doubtless decided long since that when they should find him they would find the money.

That thought about the lapsed time made him glance at an advertising calendar hanging on the wall. In that long ago past in which he had boarded the westbound train in the Denver Union Station it had been Wednesday. Counting up the intervening days on his fingers, he found that it was now Sunday—Sunday night—that was why the town had appeared so unnaturally quiet as the taxi whirled him up from the station.

Sunday—and Tuesday was to have been his wedding day! It wouldn't be, now. It was more than likely that he would be behind the bars in some county jail before Tuesday came around. What would Della say and do? Or, rather, what had she already said and done?

He tried to prefigure her attitude toward such a smashing ruin of everything, but the effort failed. Yet in imagination he could see a little way into the likelihoods. For one thing, she wouldn't sit down and cry, as another woman might.

Besides being the most bewitchingly beautiful of all created things, she was a true daughter of the breezy, self-sufficient West, capable, keen witted, utterly fearless. He could see her eyes widen and the ripe red lips tremble a bit at the first shock, then the pretty lips would stiffen into firm lines suggestive—just the least bit suggestive—of the Jason Haynes grimness. She wouldn't believe her lover was a thief; she'd never believe that.

This conclusion made him feel better—a little better, anyhow. So long as the one altogether lovely and desirable believes in a man, there is hope. Barrett got up stiffly and crossed to the door of the bathroom. The bellboy had snapped the light on, and the white tub and the array of clean towels looked inviting. Having no thought beyond getting clean and tumbling into bed, he took a hot bath and a cold shower.

But when that was done he suddenly discovered that he was ravenously hungry. Rummaging his second suit and clean linen out of the larger suit case, he dressed and descended to the lobby. If the thief catchers were waiting for him, it was no use trying to dodge them eternally; he might as well face them one time as another. At all events, he couldn't lock himself in his room and starve. It wasn't so simple as all that.

Passing through the lobby to the street without meeting any adventure, he went in search of an all night restaurant, and was fortunate enough to find one in the same block. The Sunday night after-movie patrons were comfortably filling the place, but he found a small unoccupied table in a corner, and ordered a meal so bountiful and substantial as to make the waiter look him over curiously—until the questioning look was effaced by a generous tip.

The meal eaten, and the famine edge thus gratefully dulled, Barrett went back to the hotel and up to his room. And since even the sharpest trouble loses something of its point when it meets the impact of a full stomach, he went to bed and fell asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow.

Although a bright morning may usually be trusted to bring a lightening of glooms, physical or other, it was with no very cheerful countenance that Barrett turned out after his first night in the well appointed hotel, shaved himself, had his bath, dressed with his customary sedulous care, and sallied forth to begin as he might the struggle to regain his lost foothold in an exacting world.

But now the fine courage which had inspired him while he was whittling with blistered hands at the floor in the mountain cabin, fiercely determined to do or die, seemed to have evaporated with his return to the peopled areas. The task which he had set himself, and which had appeared difficult but not altogether insuperable, when viewed at the distance of the wooded moun-

tain on the farther side of the Red Desert, now took on the aspect of the ridiculous.

Who was he, with his raw ignorance of crime and criminals, to pit himself against the daring bandits who had robbed and kidnaped him with such Machiavellian skill that he had nothing but deductions and wild guesses with which to supply the place of the real facts?

It was with these dispiriting thoughts doing a dizzying merry go round in his brain that he strode across the lobby, looking neither to right nor left, on his way to the breakfast room. Once within the swinging screen doors, and without having felt the dreaded tap on his shoulder, he breathed more freely.

While there were plenty of vacant seats, he saw to his dismay that all of the tables were more or less occupied, and chiefly by men. Although a city bank teller may not have a large out of town acquaintance, Barrett realized suddenly that he did know quite a number of his bank's non-resident customers. Hence there was a chance—a remote one, but still a chance—that he might be seated at a table with some man who might recognize him.

In this dilemma his mind shuttled swiftly. There was a small table for two in a side alcove, with one of the places vacant and the other occupied by a woman who was reading a newspaper. The woman was holding her paper spread in such a way as to conceal her face, but Barrett argued instantly that there was less danger of identification by a woman than by a man. A sign to the head waiter was all that was needed, and a moment later he was seated opposite the newspaper reader.

During the time spent in giving his breakfast order nothing happened. His table companion seemed so deeply interested in her newspaper as not to be aware of the fact that somebody had been placed at her table. Then came the unnerving crash, and Barrett was deeply thankful that there was no heart disease in his family.

For when the young woman put the paper aside he found himself looking straight into a pair of dark eyes widened like saucers—the eyes, namely, of the one altogether lovely and desirable.

For a moment, as was most natural, neither was able to speak. Then, also as was most natural, it was the young woman who first found voice.

"*Jimmie!*" she breathed. "Or am I dreaming?"

"N-nothing like it," he stammered. "On some accounts I could wish you were. For four days I've been having a pretty horrible dream myself. What brought you here, to Copah?"

"You did," she replied evenly. "But where ever have you been since Wednesday?"

"Where haven't I been!" he murmured brokenly. Then: "I can't tell you here; it's too frightfully public. I—I suppose there is a price on my head."

For answer she handed him the copy of the *Daily Miner* which she had been reading. Although the incident was now four days old, the story of the big robbery was still front page stuff. From what he could gather in glancing over "specials" from Denver and elsewhere the earlier, accounts of the robbery had favored the theory of a bandit conspiracy in which he, James Barrett, had most probably been the victim of a mysterious murder. But public opinion had changed or was changing. If there had been a murder, it was argued that some trace of the body would have been found before this time.

Since no such trace had been found, and the oil syndicate's chauffeur who was waiting for the bank messenger and the money stoutly maintained, and was able to prove by the testimony of eye witnesses, that no one had left the Wednesday night train at Araquito, there was only one other conclusion to be drawn.

James B. Barrett, a trusted employee of the bank, and one who was in a direct line of promotion, had evidently found his price and had proven false to his trust.

This was said to be the reluctant admission of the bank officials, and they were offering a reward of ten thousand dollars for information that would lead to the missing teller's apprehension.

"Now you see why I was shocked stiff and silly at finding you sitting here at my table," said the young woman, taking the

newspaper from him and standing it up on the end of the table so that it partly shielded him from the view of the other breakfasters. "I had just been reading that. Haven't you seen any of the papers since Wednesday?"

He shook his head. "I haven't seen or heard anything. You'll know why when I can explain a few things. But you haven't told me what brought you to Copah."

"I said that you did."

"I'm afraid you'll have to show me."

"It was very simple. I met the train at the Ogden station Thursday, and when you didn't appear I found the porter of the Denver through sleeper and talked with him. He remembered you perfectly. I think you must have tipped him pretty liberally. You did? I thought so. He said he missed you somewhere between Saint's Rest and Copah, and thought you had gone forward to the dining car. He was quite positive that he never saw you again."

"But that didn't point particularly to Copah," Barrett interjected.

"No; but something else that he told me did. He said he didn't see you get off here, but he was sure you must have, because when the train had passed Copah he saw that your hand baggage and coat were gone out of the sleeper."

"And then?"

"Then I drove up to daddy's office, and there I found that the Denver bank was telegraphing to ask if you had reached Ogden. Next, we got the afternoon Salt Lake papers, and they had the story of the robbery. Of course I knew then that something dreadful had happened to you—not to your morals, but to you—and I simply *made* daddy bring me here."

Barrett gasped. "Then your father is here, too?"

"He came here with me—yes. He insisted it was just a crazy notion on my part. He still thinks so. Of course, we didn't learn anything new when we got here. Nobody had seen or heard of you. Several people had got off the Wednesday night train, but none of them answered your description. Daddy wanted to go right back home to Ogden yesterday, but I persuaded him to stay over."

"What made you do that?"

"Don't ask me. I don't know. But I just couldn't give up and run away. I *knew* something would turn up if we should stay."

Barrett smiled ruefully.

"Well, something has turned up. I am the something."

The waiter had served the two breakfasts, and though his appetite was gone, Barrett forced himself to eat a little. Halfway through the meal he said:

"Among other things, I've lost my name. I'm registered here as 'J. Baxter, Chattanooga, Tennessee.'"

He was looking straight into the fearless eyes of the young woman as he said it, but there was no flicker of awakening suspicion in them.

"That was perfectly prudent," she said, "and it was awfully lucky that you thought of it."

"It has only postponed the smash for a few minutes," he returned gloomily. "Your father will give me away. Whereabouts is he? Why isn't he here breakfasting with you?"

"Didn't I tell you? Yesterday, when I begged him not to take me back home, he said that if I was determined to stay he'd take a day or so to go and take a look at Blunt Mountain. There has been a new gold strike out there, and there is a good bit of excitement here over it."

"He'd go away and leave you—at a time like this?" Barrett queried.

For a moment the dark eyes opposite were downcast.

"I may as well tell you, first as last, Jimmie, dear. Daddy persists in calling you a—a dude; that was his generation's word for a man who had a proper respect for his hair and linen and finger nails. He says you haven't any red blood in you; that no clerk has: the fact that a clerk is a clerk proves it—otherwise he wouldn't be a clerk. I've tried to make him see that a teller in a good, big bank isn't exactly a clerk, but it's no use. And as for leaving me, he told me I might get on the train and go home, if I got tired of waiting for him."

Barrett nodded. "That isn't all of it," he said. "Go on and say the rest."

"I'm going to — because it can't be helped. Daddy said, right away, as soon as the telegrams began coming from the bank, that I'd had a lucky escape."

"Good Lord! He thinks I'd throw up the chance of marrying you for a paltry two hundred thousand dollars?"

"He—he says every man has his price, and—"

"And I had found and taken mine, I suppose. Well, I can't prove that I haven't—though that is what I came here to try to do. I guess I may as well go to the hotel people and tell them that I lied on the register; that my name is James Baxter Barrett—the man they're looking for."

"*Jimmie!* Don't say things that make what daddy says of you sound as if it might be true! Hurry and finish your breakfast so we can go somewhere and talk. Can't you see that I'm dying to know what's been happening to you in these four days. You must remember that I don't know a single thing yet, except that you're here."

"I'm through now. I wasn't half as hungry as I thought I was. You go first. If there is a detective waiting in the lobby for me, you needn't be mixed up in it."

"I think I see myself!" she retorted loyally. So it was together that they rose from the alcove table and left the breakfast room.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN HEARTS ARE TRUMPS.

ONCE more Barrett ran the gantlet of the public lobby, this time with Della beside him. The Hotel Intermountain, being strictly modern, had its parlors on a mezzanine floor, and at this early hour in the day they were empty. Choosing the most retired corner, Barrett wheeled an arm chair out for his companion, and another for himself; but the young woman quickly rearranged them so that she would sit facing the distant elevators while Barrett's back would be turned to them.

"Now, then," she commanded, "begin at the beginning and don't overlook the tiniest, littlest thing!" and Barrett did it, going all the way back to the talk with President Hawley in which he had first been told of the responsibility that was to be loaded upon him, and bringing the story down to the moment of mutual shock and recognition in the hotel breakfast room.

"You poor, poor dear!" she murmured, when he had finished. "To think of you locked up in that mountain cabin blistering your poor hands trying to whittle your way out!"

"That was nothing compared with the tramp across the desert without water," he returned, luxuriating in the bath of sweet sympathy. "Don't you—don't you think the way I stuck it out was just a little bit red-blooded, Della? I hoped you would, you know. I think if your father could have seen me then—"

She brushed the imputation aside airily.

"Daddy doesn't know you—that's all, Jimmie, dear. You are red-blooded enough for me. I think you have been perfectly splendid so far. But we mustn't let it rest at that. The money has simply got to be found."

"That is what I told myself, and it is what kept me going while I was trying to break jail and later while I was making that fearful tramp to the railroad. And it looked then as if it might be barely possible. But now—"

She put out a hand to stop him. "Never mind the 'but now,' It's got to be possible. Please go over that scene in the dining car again—when you drank the black coffee. You said there was a man at table with you and that you noticed him because he ordered cheddar cheese with his pie. Are you sure he didn't get a chance at your coffee after the waiter had served it and when you weren't looking?"

Barrett shook his head.

"Of course, I can't be entirely certain I wasn't looking for anything suspicious. The man had paid no attention to me all through the dinner, and I'd hardly looked at him. I was thinking all the time of that suit case on the floor between my feet."

"Would you know the man if you should see him again?"

"I'm afraid even that is doubtful. He had the section opposite mine in the Denver-Ogden sleeper, and I suppose I'd been seeing him more or less all afternoon. But

I didn't notice him particularly; merely enough to remark that he was big and rather fat and looked a bit like the caricatures of the bloated bondholders you see in the comics."

"Was he in your sleeper all the way over from Denver?"

"I can't be absolutely sure, but I think he was."

"I can't help believing that he was the man or at least one of them," she decided instantly. "Put it this way: when you lost consciousness, he'd naturally be the first one to notice it, wouldn't he?—sitting right there at table with you?"

"Why, I should suppose so—yes."

The young woman pressed a finger on her lip and the dark eyes grew thoughtful.

"I wonder if anybody has thought of questioning the dining car people—the conductor and waiters?" she said.

"I can only guess at that. You'd suppose every member of the train crew would have been questioned and cross-questioned long before this."

"Yes; but they might have missed the dining car. That doesn't run all the way through in the train, does it? Don't they take them on and drop them off as they are needed to serve the meals?"

"They do that on some of the trains, I'm sure. Let's find out what became of *my* dining car."

"*You* can't find out," was the quick reply. "You mustn't show yourself anywhere or to anybody. This is where I come in."

"You?"

"Yes, I. I know some of the railroad people here; the superintendent and his wife and their daughter. I was on a deer hunt up in the Junipers with them last fall. You stay right here and keep out of sight, and I'll go and find out about that dining car."

Barrett protested quickly, and his protest was as emphatic as that of a really red-blooded man might have been.

"I can't have you running into all sorts of things to help me, and I won't!" was the form the protest took. But she merely laughed at him.

"You are just the least bit mid-Victorian, sometimes, Jimmie, darling; don't you know it? I'd do a lot more than just to be your errand boy- -or girl—*and that money's got to be found!*"

Barrett put in a rather dismal hour while she was gone. All the manhood in him was up in arms against the idea of letting a woman, and the loved one, of all the women in the world, entangle herself in the web in which a cruel fate had enmeshed him. Then, too, the flaring headlines in the newspaper, no less than the matter under them, were depressing him woefully.

He knew well—nobody better—the pitiless efficiency of the bank protective association of which his own bank was a member. It was unbelievable that he could remain in a Copah hotel for another twelve hours without being detected, identified and arrested. Indeed, it was little short of a miracle that he had escaped thus far.

He was still lamenting his peculiarly hard lot when Della returned with the light of discovery dancing in the dark eyes.

"Good luck!—at least, it's a little good luck," she exclaimed. "Mr. Hogan was in his office at the station and the newspapers had already told him all the things he needed to know; that we were engaged to be married, and all that. So I didn't have to explain, any more than to say that, according to the Pullman porter's story, it seemed possible that you might have left the train here at Copah.

"He said the train crew had been questioned and they didn't know. Then I asked him about the dining car people, and he said that I had more brains than all the rest of them put together, and got busy with the telephone."

"I've known about the brains for a good while," said Barrett with a sober smile. "What happened next?"

"It turned out that the car is here—waiting to be taken on Forty-One to serve luncheon. We couldn't get at the conductor; he was discharged two days ago for grafting. But two of the negro waiters say that a young man was taken suddenly sick in the diner one night last week—they couldn't remember which night it was—and his friend had him taken off here at Copah."

"And the friend was—"

"They muddled over that. One of them

said he was a tall man with a black beard, and the other said that the friend was a big man, clean-shaved but for a yellow mustache. But both of the negroes said that they helped lift the sick man off the car after the diner was taken out of the train and side tracked here in the Copah yards."

"And after you had learned all this?"

"It is developing into a very carefully worked out plot, don't you think?" she went on. "I talked quite a long time with Mr. Hogan and it was easy to see that he believes what daddy and everybody else seems to believe—that you took the money.

"He doesn't deny that you might have been the man who was carried out of the diner that night, but he refuses to believe that you were sick, or that you were kidnaped without your knowledge or against your will. He intimated that it was what he called a 'frame-up,' and I could see that while he was trying to make it as easy as he could for me he believes you were the one who did the 'framing.'"

"Played sick and hired somebody to take me off the train?" Barrett queried. "Why should I go about it in such a roundabout way when all I had to do was to walk off?—which is precisely what I was expecting to do at Araquito."

"That is exactly what I argued. But he had his answer ready. He said that you were above the average in intelligence; that you couldn't be a bank teller unless you were—all of which I cheerfully admitted. That being the case, he said, you'd know perfectly well that you couldn't escape with the money and stay escaped—that sooner or later the high class detectives employed by the bank would run you down.

"And when that happened you'd have a perfectly good alibi, and could prove it by the dining car people. And he wound up by saying that I'd better get daddy to take me home; that that was the best place for me just now."

"I think so myself," Barrett agreed dejectedly. "It is a deep laid plot, all right, but I didn't invent it. I'm just the goat. If you stay here the next thing they'll be saying is that you are my accomplice.

"I shall be grabbed; that's a foregone conclusion. The only wonder is that there wasn't a detective waiting for me when I came in last night. And I can't prove a thing in my own favor; I couldn't even be sure of finding the way back to that cabin where they locked me up."

The young woman stood up, and for a moment or two the dark eyes grew darker and then became suspiciously bright.

"Are you really going to give up that way, Jimmie?" she asked. "Is—isn't it in you at all to make a fight for yourself—and—and for me?"

Barrett had thought that a new birth had come for him while he was struggling to make his escape from the cabin on the mountain. But now he knew that those were only the preliminary pangs. As if in some mysterious way, the fine flame of courage and fortitude that never says die leaped from the tense little figure standing before him into his own breast and the transformation was wrought. Springing out of his chair, he crushed her suddenly in his arms.

"I'm not worthy to kiss your feet, Della, dear—much less to marry you!" he said tenderly. "But I think you have put something into me that will make me fight—fight to the last ditch! But you'll have to help—tell me where to begin. I've worn my brain out trying to find the weak place in this wretched plot."

With a little twist that showed how silken strong she was she freed herself and pushed him back into his chair.

"Now you are talking like my own Jimmie again," she said. "I knew it was in you somewhere, if I could only find it. Turn your chair again so you'll have your back to the elevators. I'll keep watch while we talk. Do you think you've got it straight—that the robbers planned to carry you off so that everybody would believe you had stolen the money?"

"I haven't the slightest doubt of it now. Everything points that way. And the plan has succeeded perfectly, thus far. All that is needed to complete it is my arrest and trial and conviction. After that there will never be a shadow of suspicion to fall upon the real thieves."

"But didn't you tell me that President Hawley said there was likely to be an at-

tempt made to rob the bank's regular messenger—which was the reason why he was sending the money by you three days ahead of time?"

"Yes; I gathered from what he said that there was some danger of a holdup, though he didn't go into particulars."

"Well, that ought to give them something to think about, though it probably won't, now they've made up their minds that you are the guilty one. But we need not bother about what they are thinking. The first thing we have to do is to plan some way of keeping you from being recognized and arrested. That part of it won't wait."

"Conceded," Barrett agreed briefly.

"I have a plan, if you'll consent to it."

"I'll do anything you say, even if it is to wear a wig and a false beard."

"Good! That is a promise, and I'm going to hold you to it. You were going to marry me in Ogden to-morrow, weren't you?"

"For pity's sake, don't remind me of that now!" he begged. "Four days ago I was on my way to claim you, and I then had a free man's right to. But now—you are talking with a man who has one foot in the penitentiary, Della girl. Oh, I'll make the fight, as I promised to; but we both know there isn't one chance in a hundred of winning out."

She made a quaint little mouth at him. "It's nice and dear of you to be noble and self-sacrificing, and all that, but I'm not going to let you spoil my plan. Will you marry me to-day—this very morning?"

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated. "Why, Della dear, you don't know what you are saying. Haven't I just told you that I already have one foot in the penitentiary? Would I consent to make you a convict's wife?"

"You are not a convict yet, and I don't mean that you shall be—not if I can help it. Anyway, it wouldn't make any difference to me. If they should take you and try you and sentence you, I should beg the judge to wait just a few minutes until I could find a minister—before he sent you to jail, I mean."

"You darling!" he murmured. "There isn't another like you in all the world! But think a minute. How could it possibly help if we were married?"

"It will help a lot. You are going to be awfully sick, pretty soon, and by noon you won't be able to go down to luncheon; you'll have to have some toast and tea, or something of that sort, taken up to your room. And as long as I stay Della Haynes I can't go near you; they'd turn us both out of the hotel if I should go to your room."

"But what—"

"Wait until I'm through. The first thing and the main thing is for you to keep out of sight, and the only way to do that is to be sick and go to bed. But we'll have to plan together, and I've got to have a right to be with you whenever I want to be. If you can think of any better plan than mine—"

"But your father?"

"Yes; I've thought of him, too. You will remember that I told you he expected to be away two or three days, and that he told me to go home if I got tired of waiting for him. Having said that, he won't hurry back. Are you pretty nearly ready to get sick? We mustn't lose any more time than we can help."

"But see here, you little firebrand," he expostulated; "you couldn't pull a thing like a wedding off without advertising it to the whole world!"

"That is my part of it," she countered serenely. "I have a theory—don't ask me where I got it, because I don't know. It's this: I feel sure that the robbers, or some of them at least, are still here in Copah—and maybe the money is, too.

"They would figure that when you escaped from the mountain cabin you'd make for a railroad, and the railroad would bring you here. Consequently, some of them will be here watching for you—waiting to tip you off to the detectives when the time is ripe; which means that when suspicion has been fully turned upon you by your disappearance. And that time is now."

"Yes, but—"

"Wait," she interposed. "If I am right, our starting point—our only starting point

—is here in Copah. If there is a member of the band here watching for your return, he wouldn't betray himself to you, of course. But he might to somebody else; somebody who was watching for *him*. Don't you see?"

Barrett's brain was working normally again, and he began to see the possibilities. If the robbers knew that he had broken out of prison—out of the place where they had taken him—and it was fair to assume that by this time they did know—they would certainly want to know what had become of him.

With suspicion already turned upon him, as evidenced by the offer of the huge reward and the tone the newspapers were taking, it remained only to see him safely behind the bars and their own safety would be secure. And the proceeding she had outlined—the leaving of one of their number to check his return to Copah, and to point him out to the officers of the law—had all the earmarks of probability.

"I see your point," he assented. "But where do we break in?"

"You must leave that part of it to me. But I'll have to have a free hand, and I can't have that if I'm scared stiff every minute for fear you are going to be discovered and arrested. So you see my plan is the only one."

For a long minute Barrett studied the pattern of the carpet at his feet, and when he looked up his smile was a sorrowful grimace.

"Speaking of red blood," he said, "can you think of anything more pusillanimous than for a grown man to play sick and go to bed and let the woman he loves best in all the world go out and take the brunt of things?"

Her laugh was an easing of strains.

"There will be enough red blooded situations in it to go all the way round and lap over before we get that money back," she prophesied. "But you'll do as I say, won't you? You won't make me go down on my knees and beg you to marry me, will you?"

"Not while I'm alive and sane enough to know what I'm doing. But there must be one condition."

"There are not going to be any conditions whatever. But you may name it if it will make you any easier in your mind."

"It is this: if I am taken and tried and convicted, you'll get a divorce. You can do it easily, you know. Conviction of crime is sufficient grounds."

"What good would my promise be when you know I'd break it? But I'll promise, if that is all you want. What did you say your room number is—406? Why, that is right in the same corridor with mine! Now, then, let me see how sick you can look when you try right hard."

CHAPTER VII.

"THE PLAY'S THE THING."

AT ten o'clock on the Monday morning following the loss by the Denver bank of two hundred thousand dollars the Rev. Colby Millen, an athletic and warm hearted young subaltern in the army of the church militant, ran lightly up the broad marble stair to the mezzanine floor in the Hotel Intermountain, hastening to keep an appointment with his bishop, who was stopping over in Copah for a few hours between trains.

In the mezzanine gallery he saw two persons slowly making their way toward the elevators—a man walking with halting steps and a young woman who was apparently supporting and encouraging the stumbler. Instantly sympathetic, the Rev. Millen sprang to offer help, and when the young woman looked up to thank him he was quite dazzled by her beauty; dazzled on one hand and touched on the other by the distress and alarm in the dark eyes lifted to his.

"Oh—thank you so much!" she murmured. "If you'll take his other arm—I'm trying to get him up to his room. A sudden seizure of—of some kind—"

"I quite understand," said the athletic one, slipping a strong arm around the invalid and half carrying him for the few steps still to be traversed. "If you'll ring for the elevator—"

The car came up at once and the stumbling man, who seemed to be quite speech-

less, was safely gotten into it. The young woman called out the floor, and the further journey to the door of room 406 was made without incident.

At the door the stricken man found his tongue.

"Thank you," he said in a queer, choking voice. "I shall do very well now. I'll go back to bed. I suppose I shouldn't have tried to get up this morning. Don't worry, dear—I'll be all right." This to the young woman.

"Are you sure you don't want me to call the hall man to help you?" she asked solicitously.

"Oh, no; all I need is quiet—and rest. Please don't worry." And he let himself into the room and closed the door.

Left thus in the corridor with the young woman, the ready helper was still gently sympathetic.

"If there is anything I can do?" he offered. "Shall I have the house physician called?"

"Oh—I hope it isn't so serious as that!" was the faltering reply. Then, with a little quavering of the pretty lips: "It's so sad. We were going to be married to-day—this morning, you know." They were walking slowly toward the elevators, and she seemed to be bursting with a desire to confide in somebody. "James—er—I mean Mr. Baxter—wasn't entirely well when he got here yesterday, and now—"

"Are you both strangers in Copah?"

"Mr. Baxter is, but I have friends here; the Hogans—railroad people. Perhaps you may know them."

"Mrs. Hogan and her daughter are members of our church. Do they know you are here and in trouble?"

"Oh, yes—they know I'm here. But they don't know anything yet about Ji—Mr. Baxter. His coming was—er—accidental; I mean it was quite unexpected. We—we didn't intend to be married here and now, but when I saw how much he needed me—needed some one to take care of him—"

"The situation is quite clear," the athletic one broke in warmly. "It is very noble and womanly of you to wish to take your place beside the poor gentleman at a time when he so evidently needs your love and care. There are no obstacles to the marriage, I presume—aside from his untimely illness?"

"No, indeed—none whatever! My father gave his consent a long time ago, and, besides, I'm of legal age."

"I suppose neither of you have been—er—married before?"

"Mercy! I should hope not!"

"Then I see no reason why your joint wish should not be carried out. If Mr.—er—Baxter is in for a long illness—as we'll hope he isn't—it will be very hard for you not to be in a position to wait upon him and care for him."

"That's just it. When you found us in the mezzanine I was going to take him to his room and then go and find Mrs. Hogan and Kate, and see if they wouldn't help me to do all the things that the—the gentleman is supposed to do in such cases."

"Your devotion and loyalty are very heart warming—quite so," declared the young clergyman, to whom pure sentiment was a thing holy and sacred. "I have an engagement with the bishop just at this moment, but in half an hour or so I shall be entirely at your service. I'll meet you anywhere you appoint and go with you to the courthouse to secure the marriage license. Possibly you'd like to call upon Mrs. Hogan and Katherine in the meantime?"

The young woman laid a grateful hand upon the well muscled clerical arm. "You are *so* good and helpful, Mr.—"

"Millen," he supplied—"Colby Millen. I am temporarily in charge of St. Mark's-in-the-Wilderness."

"Thank you again and again. I'll go to the Hogans' at once, and if you wouldn't mind coming there for me—"

"Excellent! I'll call for you within an hour, at the farthest."

They had reached the elevator bay, and he was handing her into the car. As the safety door clanged shut she made one more demand upon him.

"The hotel people," she began, with a diffidence either real or such a faultless imitation as to be indistinguishable from the genuine. "We came here—my father and I—two days ago, and daddy has gone out

to the new gold field, and I can't reach him. If you could explain to the hotel manager, without going to too much trouble, just why we should be married so hurriedly while Mr. Baxter is confined to his room—"

"Certainly," was the ready response. "But—er—pardon me, but who shall I say you are?"

"Oh, please forgive me! So many things have happened this morning that I really am quite irresponsible. I'm Della Haynes, of Ogden, Utah."

"Not the daughter of Jason Haynes, the mining magnate, surely?"

She smiled up at him bewitchingly.

"Daddy says I am, and I've never had any reason to doubt him."

"And you say your father knows you are intending to marry this Mr. Baxter?"

"Oh, yes. As I have told you, he gave his consent a good while ago."

The elevator was stopping at the mezzanine floor and, repeating his promise to meet her in an hour or less at the Hogans' house, the young minister got out. Landing on the ground floor, the young woman passed the lobby loungers in swift review.

"Nothing very suspicious looking here," she murmured to herself, and then, walking like a person with a well defined purpose, she passed out to the street and took a taxi for the call at the Hogans'.

At a comfortable mansion in the hill suburb east of the business district she dismissed the cab and went courageously into what she feared might develop into a battle royal. But to her joy, the railroad superintendent's daughter, a rather dashing young woman of athletic mold, was the only member of the family at home. And Miss Hogan had seen the morning paper.

"You poor, poor darling!" was one half of her greeting as Della appeared in the doorway of the morning room, and the other half was a smothering embrace of commiseration. "To think that you'd be coming within an ace of marrying such a poor, weak, miserable wretch as that Barrett! And you thinking him so splendid!"

The young woman with the unreadable dark eyes freed herself gently.

"Do I look exactly like a disconsolate widow, Katie, dear?" she asked, seating herself in the nearest chair.

The daughter of a long line of Ulster patriots looked her visitor over appraisingly.

"You don't; and that's the honest fact, Della, child. I'm hoping you have the proper spirit. If any man thought more of a bagful of dirty money than he did of me—"

"Yes? What would you do, Katie?"

"I'd show him; and I'd show him quick!"

"That, my dear Katherine, is precisely what I'm planning to do—and I hope you and your mother are not going to think it's too horribly callous of me. Did I ever tell you anything about Jimmie Baxter?"

"Not the first word. Who might he be?"

"He is a man I met when I was East in school. He fell in love with me then—or he says he did; anyway, he wanted to marry me when I was graduated. But I wasn't ready then."

"Of course you weren't! And then this Barrett scalawag came butting in and—"

"Wait, Katie, dear; you haven't heard it all. The most wonderful thing has happened. While I was at breakfast in the hotel this morning somebody came and sat down opposite me. I nearly fainted when I saw it was Jimmie Baxter. He was traveling for somebody or—or something, and it just happened; our meeting that way, I mean."

"Well?"

"Katie, he loves me just as much as ever he did. He has read the papers and he knows what an awful thing has happened to me. He is one of God's own gentlemen, Katie, dear. What do you suppose he wants me to do?"

"I know well enough what I'd want you to do if I were a man and stood in his shoes. I'd make you marry me, whether you wanted to or no! Then you could show the world and all that you're not breaking your heart over a man that couldn't even keep faith with his job—let alone with a woman."

"Oh! Do you really think people would believe that I didn't care?" This in wide-eyed innocency that would have deceived the most astute of inquisitors.

"Wouldn't you be giving them the best

proof in the world that you didn't? But is this new man really in earnest? Or is he just swept off his feet, like, by this trouble that's come to you?"

"Yes, dear; he is in earnest; but maybe I'm the one that's swept off. He is willing to wait and have a church wedding and all that, but I'm not willing to wait. He was looking awfully bad when I met him, and he ate almost no breakfast at all. And, just a little while after we talked, he had to go back to bed in his room at the hotel. Mr. Millen, of St. Mark's, helped me take poor Jimmie up from the parlors to his floor. Katie, dear, I want the right to go and take care of him—and I want it *now!*"

"But, Della, child—if he is sick—"

"Isn't that all the more reason? Mr. Millen seems to think it is. He is coming here presently to go with me to get the license. And I want you and your mother for witnesses—just you two, you know. Of course, the way things are, it must be very quiet and unexciting; just as simple as we can make it."

At this conjuncture it was the resolute Miss Hogan who was in danger of being swept off her feet.

"You'd do this, Della—without waiting for your father to come back, or anything? I'm thinking that butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, dear; that's what I'm thinking. Why, you sly little witch, you had this party all spoken for before ever you came here, even to putting the comether on Colby Millen! We'll come—mother and I; sure we'll come—only you don't need us at all. Anybody would do for witnesses."

"Oh, yes; I do need you both. You are the only friends I have in Copah, and you know everybody that *is* anybody. I don't care any more for the conventions than I have to, but I—I really should love to have people get this thing right. You know what I mean. I'd like to have people know that I *have* the proper spirit, as you put it; that I wasn't obliged to be left a waiting bride at the altar to-morrow. You see what I'm trying to say."

"I see," was the sisterly rejoinder, "and I'm *crying* proud of you, Della, dear. And we'll take good care that other people see, too. I only hope you'll be as happy as you deserve to be."

"Don't worry about that. I've never been so sure of myself as I am this morning. Now if Mr. Millen would come—"

"He's coming up the walk this minute," said the large hearted one, looking out of the window. Then, going swiftly into action: "You meet him and go with him, dear, whilst I run upstairs and get some clothes on me. Mother's gone to the hospital to see a sick woman, but I'll take the roadster and pick her up. We'll meet you at the hotel by the time you're ready."

Quite as self-possessed as if she had been the hostess instead of a visitor, Miss Haynes met the young minister at the door.

"I am ready," she said with a smile that no man, old or young, could have withstood. "Miss Hogan asks to be excused. She is preparing to go after her mother, who is out, and they'll both meet us at the hotel."

"Very good. You don't mind walking? I'm not rich enough to own a car."

Secretly, in her heart, Della promised herself that this sympathetic young laborer in the vineyard, who looked so much more like a football athlete than a minister, should later have a car, if she had to buy it out of her dowry. But aloud she said: "I like to walk. I've tramped all day long after deer or bear in the Junipers and I love it."

There was not much said on the walk of a few squares to the courthouse, but the Rev. Millen, who was as conscientious as he was sympathetic, was doing a goodly lot of thinking. The young woman's giving of her name at the last moment in the hotel elevator had proved a rather shocking revealment.

He had read the newspapers and, like everybody else within reach of the Associated Press specials, he knew that the absconding bank teller, Barrett, was engaged to be married to the daughter of Jason Haynes, the wealthy mine owner of Utah—was, in fact, on his way to his wedding when he yielded to the base temptation.

Most naturally, Millen accepted the only conclusion that offered: Miss Haynes, mortified and humiliated by the position in which she found herself, had accidentally

met an old flame at the breakfast table in the hotel, and had permitted herself to be caught in the rebound, angry pride adding its flick of the whiplash. True, she had not gone into the details with him, but he was wise enough in the ways of men and maidens to be able to piece out the story for himself.

Summing it up, it presented a case in which his duty as a man and a minister was clear. So when they entered the courthouse, he drew her to a seat on a bench in the rotunda and sat down beside her.

"I must talk with you a few minutes before you take the final step, Miss Haynes," he began gravely. "And first I must ask a few questions, which I hope you will answer frankly and freely. Is it not true that you were engaged to this man, Barrett, who, as it seems, has robbed his employers?"

She nodded brightly. "Yes; it is true."

"And, but for this despicable thing he has done, you would have married him?"

"I suppose I should."

"Pardon me if my duty makes me break down all the barriers, Miss Haynes, but—did you love this man?"

"I—I thought I did."

"But now you are going to marry another man on the spur of the moment. My dear young lady, I am asking you to think well before you take this irrevocable step. I want you to ask yourself, honestly and fairly, if, in marrying this sick man, you are not doing yourself and him a cruel injustice; if you are not moved to take this step more because of wounded pride and a natural—a very natural—desire to show the world that your heart was not touched, than for any real feeling of love that you have for Mr. Baxter."

Her reply was prompt and apparently unequivocal.

"I know very well what I am doing, Mr. Millen, and my conscience is perfectly at ease. Whatever has happened in the past I am sure of this: that I love the man you helped me take to his room in the hotel a little while ago with all my heart, and there is no sacrifice too great for me to make for him. I know what you will say, and what the world will say—for a little while, at least—that I was caught in the rebound; that I married in a fit of pique, and to try to make people believe that I didn't care.

"Let it be so. Believe it if you wish; and if others ask you about it you may say that I didn't deny it when you asked me if it were so. Is there anything else you would like to know? If not, wouldn't we better get through with the formalities? I don't want to keep Mrs. Hogan and Katherine waiting."

The young minister sighed and gave it up. There was a touch of defiance in her tone to warn him that he had gone as far as he dared—if not a little too far. Apparently there was no obstacle, legal or ecclesiastical, in which case he could only do his office and hope for the best.

At the official desk to which he led her he explained the circumstances in which the bride, and not the groom, was applying for the license, and was somewhat relieved at the readiness with which his companion answered all the questions that were put to her about the groom's age, his birthplace, nativity, and so on.

It argued that she was not marrying a stranger, at all events. Also, it argued well that she was not in the least embarrassed, save when it came to giving the names.

"Is it absolutely necessary that you should have the full names?" she asked; and when the clerk said that it was customary, she asked again: "Wouldn't the marriage be legal unless the full names were given?"

The license clerk was no lawyer and he confessed it smilingly and passed the query over to the clergyman. "How about that, Mr. Millen?" he inquired.

But here it was a case of the blind leading the blind.

"I don't know how the law regards it; the church deals only with the Christian names: 'Do you, James, take this woman, Della,' and so forth."

"I guess we have names enough," said the clerk, and it was to James Baxter and Della Haynes that the license was made out.

On the short walk around to the hotel the young minister thought of something else.

"Do you—er—want the ring ceremony, Miss Della?" he asked.

"Why—yes," she returned; "it ought to be, oughtn't it?"

"If you wish it, certainly. Have you a ring that will answer?"

"I haven't, but I'll get one," was the prompt reply; whereupon she steered him into a jeweler's shop and let him wait while she chose a plain gold band, calmly fitting it upon the third finger of her left hand and removing, as Millen noticed, a very beautiful diamond in a platinum setting to permit the fitting.

He gasped a bit at this. The diamond, he argued, must be the Barrett engagement ring. And he was relieved when she didn't put it on again; when she dropped it into her purse with the gold band and signified her readiness to go.

In the hotel parlors they found Mrs. Hogan and her daughter waiting, the younger woman with her Irish eyes sparkling, and the older looking a trifle dubious, but with her lips set as if she were firmly determined to see this most unconventional proceeding on the part of the younger generation through to a respectable end.

Two minutes later the young minister, heading the party of four, was tapping at the door of room 406 in the fourth floor corridor, bending his head to listen for the permission to enter.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE.

OBEDIENT to orders, Barrett had gone honestly to bed after the retreat to his room, so it was a rather wan looking young man in pink pyjamas who, from his propping of pillows, greeted the wedding party as it filed solemnly into the room. Della was the first to reach his bedside.

"Play up, Jimmie, dear—for pity's sake!" she whispered hurriedly; and then: "I've got a ring; don't forget and try to find your own!"

"So dear of you to be willing to tie yourself to a sick man," he said, loud enough so the others could hear; but his kiss, when he drew her down to him, had nothing of the stage quality in it.

Very gently she disengaged herself and with exactly the proper shade of bridely embarrassment introduced him to Mrs. Hogan, to Kate, and to Millen. Barrett's fine resolves became as water in his bones. Again and again during the interval of waiting he had sternly determined to make a clean breast of everything when Della should appear with the minister; to do this and firmly to forbid the sacrifice—an attitude in which he felt sure any minister of the Gospel would support him.

But the presence of the two women witnesses was an insurmountable obstacle. He knew women—a little—or thought he did, and he was well convinced that a confession of his real identity before Mrs. Hogan and her daughter would be equivalent to crying it from the housetops. With a faint groan he acknowledged the introductions; then the clergyman drew his little black book from an inner pocket, and a moment later his chancel voice was filling the room: "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here—"

As all the world knows, the Episcopal marriage ceremony is mercifully short. Della's responses were clear and distinct, and Barrett's—well, they were as hearty as a sick man could be expected to make. At the question, "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" Mrs. Hogan felt that something was incumbent upon her, so she said, quite majestically: "I do," and then followed the solemn troth plighting and the ceremony of the ring, the prayers, the joining of hands; after which, with his brain in a whirl, Barrett heard, as from a great distance, the irrevocable pronouncement: "Forasmuch as James and Della have consented together in holy wedlock—and thereto have given and pledged their troth—I pronounce that they are man and wife—"

It was not until it was all over and Kate Hogan was smothering the bride in an athletic embrace, that Barrett remembered that his money—all the money he had—was accursed. Choking with dismay, he held out his arms to his wife and while he held her close it was no sweet endearment that passed between them.

Barrett's hoarse whisper was: "Money—have you got any money for the—the fee?"

"Plenty of it," she whispered back. "Thank Heaven!" he gasped. "My pocketbook is under the pillows; take it out, but don't give him any of that money: I'll explain later."

"Trust me," she breathed; and in a few minutes the formalities were complied with, the door closed upon the forger of happy shackles and his two accomplices, and husband and wife were alone together.

Barrett sat up in bed and put his face in his hands.

"Della, dear," he began hoarsely, "if I don't win out of this with a clean slate I'll make you a widow in sober fact; I'll promise you that! I feel like a yellow dog!"

She gave him a smile that, under less harrowing conditions, would have set him afire.

"Is that the way it makes you feel to be married to me?" she mocked. Then: "It's about luncheon time. Are you hungry?"

"Just at the present moment I am a good many things that you will never understand; but I suppose even a yellow dog may have an appetite. How are you going to feed me?"

"I'll show you pretty soon. I'm going down to luncheon now and to face whatever curiosity there may be below stairs. The hotel people know we are married. Mr. Millen told them we were going to be."

"Can't we have luncheon sent up here and eat it together?"

"We could, but we're not going to. It is my part to spy out the land and I can't do it if I stay here with you. We mustn't forget that this little one-act piece of a wedding we've staged for the benefit of Mrs. Grundy is only the curtain raiser for the real thing. We've got to find those bandits and get that money back. And time is awfully precious."

It had been Barrett's invariable rule never to smoke before meals, but at the moment he felt that a sedative of some kind was a crying necessity.

"If you'll feel in my coat pocket over there and get me a cigar before you go," he begged. "You may not believe it, but I'm all nerves. I want to get up and fight somebody. This hiding out business is simply dastardly!"

"Woof!" she said with a little imitation shudder. "I like you when you look all savage and fierce like that. It makes me want to rumple your hair and say, sic 'em! —only the pink pyjamas do take the edge off a little. Whoever told you you ought to buy pink pyjamas, Jimmie, dear?" But she got him the cigar and held a match for him to light it before she vanished.

Left to himself, Barrett sank back among the pillows to blow reflective smoke rings at the ceiling. The kaleidoscopic whirl of things in the past few hours had left him in a daze from which he was just beginning to emerge. How completely and hopelessly an orderly and moderately well behaved world had been turned topsy-turvy for him in a few short days! Would he ever be able to win back to things normal and conventional again?

What had the revolutionary fate that had laid hold of him and jerked him out of his accustomed and comfortable rut still in store for him? Would the cloud of guilt that enveloped him be cleared away so that he could once more take his place behind the bronze window grille in the bank? Or would the slender thread of a chance that Della—God bless her!—was trying to spin, break and drop him into a prison cell?

Dubious as the outlook was, a thrill of joy ran tingling to his finger tips when he realized, as he might never have realized in the ordinary, conventional run of things, to what superb heights a woman's love and loyalty could rise. Della knew; she believed in him; she would fight for him. Heavens, what a treasure he had found and plucked out of the ghastly tangle of things!

"She knows perfectly well that I haven't a Chinaman's chance of keeping out of prison," he told himself, "but she was determined to make the last glorious sacrifice of herself while there was yet time. God, how I love her and the very ground she walks on! And if the Chinaman's chance should happen to come my way, I'll fight and die before I'll let her sweet life be spoiled!"

Wherein, little as he might appreciate or apprehend it, spoke a very different sort of

man from the James Barrett of the teller's cage; the James Barrett whom the Denver haberdashers knew as a difficult customer when it came to the nice and important matter of matching colors in socks and neckties.

The better part of an hour had slipped away before a stir in the corridor warned him that the curtain was about to rise upon another act. But when the door was opened it was only to admit Della, carrying a tray upon which was disposed a sick man's luncheon; namely, a pot of tea and a stack of buttered toast under a napkin.

" Don't swear," she begged, when she put the tray down and came to beat up his pillows. " I couldn't let you get well and all wolfishly hungry in too big a hurry, you know. It wouldn't look reasonable. But I'll smuggle you up something substantial for dinner this evening if I have to buy it at a restaurant and bring it in under my arm. Did you think I was never coming back?"

" I thought, and I am always going to think, that every minute I spend away from you is a minute lost, ruined, blacked out of my life. And as for the toast and tea—' Better is a dinner of herbs where love is '—"

" ' Than a stalled ox and hatred therewith,' " she finished, laughing. " Only there is hatred, too, of a sort, only it hasn't yet got above the ground floor, thanks be. Eat your toast and I'll tell you what I've found out. But tell me first, how many people know your middle name?"

" I think you are the only person this side of Ohio who knows it. Why?"

" Are you quite sure nobody in Denver knows it?"

" Reasonably sure. I've never used it—never liked it. It's the name of an uncle by marriage on my mother's side, and I have always cordially detested the uncle."

" So far, so good. As I was passing through the lobby on my way to the dining room a little while ago, a man came from the street and went to the registry desk. Do you believe in intuition and such things?"

" I'll believe in anything you lay claim to. Go on."

" I had what daddy would call a ' hunch ' right away; I don't know why, because the man didn't look like a Sherlock Holmes or anything of that sort. I made believe I was looking for a magazine, and so killed time at the newsstand until he got through talking to the registry clerk and went away. Then I went across to the desk and fascinated the clerk. You didn't know I could fascinate people when I try, did you?"

" The man is a detective?" Barrett asked; and he found the toast growing dry in his mouth.

" The hotel people think he is. He has been here for two days, watching the register and asking questions about all the new names: yours was one of them that he asked about. The clerk very obligingly told him that you came in on the late train last night, that you were sick in bed and that you'd just married me."

Barrett groaned. " If he is any kind of a sleuth at all he won't be satisfied with any such sketch as that. The next thing we know, he'll be trying to break in here and get a sight of me. And then it will be all over but notifying the undertaker."

The bride of an hour was sitting on the edge of the bed, elbows on knees and her face propped in the cup of her hands.

" If we could only disguise you in some way," she mused. " If he is really suspicious, he'll bribe the corridor man or the chambermaid, or somebody, and get his chance to look at you. Did you ever wear a beard and mustache, Jimmie?"

" Never!" said Barrett fervently, having come upon the mundane scene some years after beards had been banished from the faces of all men.

" But you would wear them—for my sake—wouldn't you?"

" I'd grow a pig's nose if you wanted me to. But, dearest, a man can't raise a beard and a mustache while you wait."

" Never mind. We'll keep the door locked this afternoon, anyway. Now I have some news of another kind. What would you say if I should tell you that I think I have found one of the robbers?"

" Oh, but you couldn't; when you don't know any more than I do who they are."

" Still, I believe I have found one of them. Let's go back to that dinner in the

dining car. 'You said that the man who sat opposite you was a big man: was he red-faced?"

Barrett tried to remember. "Yes; I think he was."

"And with a little bald spot at the crown of his head?"

"I can't say; I didn't notice the crown of his head."

"Smoothed-shaved?"

"No; he wore a mustache, heavy and blond."

"Exactly. When I went into the dining room a little while ago I looked all around, wondering if one of them mightn't be there, watching and waiting for you to turn up. There wasn't anybody that looked at all suspicious; even a big man with a red face, a blond mustache and a little round bald spot didn't look suspicious.

"But when my eyes fell upon him I had another of those queer little mental elbowings, so I had the waiter put me at a table where I could see him as I ate. He was alone and he didn't say or do anything out of the usual until just at the very last, when the waiter brought his pie."

"And then," said Barrett tragically, starting up in bed, "then he told the waiter to take the cheese back and bring him cheddar!"

"That, Jimmie, dear, is precisely what he did. I nearly choked over my tea when I heard him say, growling like a bear: 'Cheddar, *cheddar!* I told you to bring me *cheddar* cheese, didn't I?' It fairly took my breath away."

"You didn't let it rest at that?" Barrett broke in eagerly.

"You may believe I didn't. After luncheon, while the kitchen people were getting your toast and tea ready, I had another little talk with the registry clerk. He's a nice young man, Jimmie. I believe he'd tell me the inmost secrets of his heart if I should ask him.

"That big man who is so fond of cheddar cheese has been here since last Thursday morning. He claims to be interested in mines and says he is waiting for somebody who is to meet him here. You'll say there is no proof that he is the robber, or one of them, which is perfectly true.

"But, just the same, *he is the man who could tell what became of you after you lost consciousness in the diner!* And not only of you, but of the suit case you had on the floor between your feet."

"It would be absolutely incredible—but for the cheese," Barrett protested. "But that part of it does seem to ring the bell. If I could have a few minutes alone with this cheese epicure I'd make him tell me a few things—or I'd sweat some of the fat off him trying!"

Della ran soothing fingers through his hair.

"Easy does it, dear," she cautioned. "Leave it to me, and I'll find out all the things we need to know. It's the detective that is bothering me most just now. We've got to get rid of him in some way. And we've got to work fast.

"It is plain enough to me that the big man is waiting in the expectation that you will turn up here in Copah, so he can point you out to the officers. But he won't wait indefinitely. Besides, daddy will be back sometime; and we don't need any more complications than we have now."

"Ump!" said Barrett, sipping the hot tea. "You certainly said a generous mouthful then. Your father will murder me and any jury that was ever impaneled would acquit him—and very properly, too. How long have I got to stay in bed?"

"You mustn't be impatient. Bed is the safest place for you right now. It's a mercy you disappeared from the public gaze as promptly as you did this morning. With two men stopping here in the hotel, both of them on the lookout for you—"

"But you can't imagine how it grinds me to stay here and hide behind your skirts, Della! If, by some unheard of fluke, we should happen to win and get the money back your father will never forgive me for this part of it."

"Never mind daddy," she returned lightly. "Results are what count with him. And, speaking of money, what is the matter with the money you've got in that fat pocketbook under your pillows? I'm asking because we'll probably have to use some of it before we're through."

"It's counterfeit money, so far as any use

we can make of it is concerned," he told her; and then he explained the trap the robbers had set for him by the exchange of bank notes.

"What do you know about that!" she exclaimed. "Have you spent any of it?"

"I had to pay the taxi driver who brought me up from the railroad station last night. The only good money I have is the change he gave me out of a ten dollar bill. I didn't remember, until after I was in for it, that I didn't have any money that was safe to spend."

"Luckily, you've married ready money; a little of it, at least. Daddy makes me an allowance and I have my own bank account. I'll wire for some money to-day."

Barrett rocked his head on the soft, downy pillows.

"My Lord!" he groaned. "Have I got to go on eating humble pie to the end of the chapter? Wasn't it enough that you should take the risk of marrying a potential convict without having to begin spending your own money on him the first dash out of the box?"

She made a bewitchingly attractive little grimace at him.

"That, you dear old tinderbox, is the very smallest thing we have to consider. Finish your toast and tea and let me lock you in and vanish. Time flies and there are a fearful lot of things to be done between this and dinner."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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TO THEE

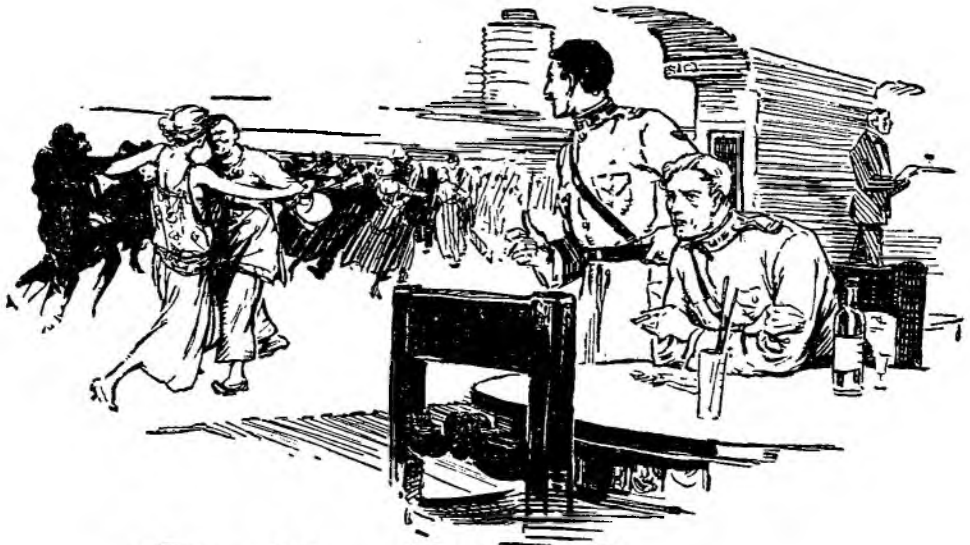
WHAT shall I say to thee, beloved,
To tell the love that's in my heart?
What words could fitly that express
Which in itself is measureless,
And knows not space or part?

What shall I say to thee, beloved?
Oh, look within my eyes and see,
Viewing thy image pictured there;
Know deep within my heart I bear
An altar raised to thee.

And this I say to thee, beloved;
No other name that altar knows,
But that dear name so loved by me,
But the dear name that's borne by thee,
Wreathed by love's fragrant rose.

And I can only say, beloved,
Look deep within that heart of thine,
And what I cannot here express,
Because it is so measureless,
Read in thy heart for mine.

Julia Leonard.



The Wager

By ISA URQUHART GLENN

"KIRWIN, you'll find rain in hell as soon as you will a straight girl in a dance hall in Manila! Don't wax sentimental over a pretty blonde, out here, until you know the circumstances which landed the lady among the half-breeds. I'll wager that girl is as tough as they make 'em in even this off country."

This from young Angier.

"I'll take you! There's something in her face that one can tie to. Call her over, at the end of this dance, and let's settle it. Long wait ahead of us, anyway, until Mayhew shows up. He won't be in a hurry, with this deluge. Been roughing it sufficiently; he'll be taking it easy while he is in town." Kirwin's older and somewhat graver face was turned toward the dancing couples. He stared at them from underneath beetling brows, dispassionately appraising the girl whom they were discussing.

"Ever find out why Mayhew is in the islands?" asked Angier idly. "Secretive cuss! Acts like a Secret Service bird—prowling around unlikely places, such as this joint in which he arranged to meet us to-night."

"Job brought him. That's straight enough. But I see what you mean. He does seem to be looking for something outside the job. Now, as to that bet—"

Seriously they arranged the terms of the wager. In the byways of the world, trifles are serious when big things are not happening.

"Two to one—"

It was young Angier who plunged the deepest. He was at the age when a man is sure that he knows the woman game.

"It will be the same old tale," he said. "Men! One man; then two men; then a few more—and the streets."

It rained—as if a gigantic bucket of water were being emptied from the clouds that lowered over the city.

Manila, like all ladies, has moods: and when she weeps it means trouble. Her rainy mood is sinister—reminiscent of un-

told horrors. The Moat, evil in even its modernized form, seems, when bespattered by the raindrops that turn oily as they strike, to be hiding dark secrets of a past age. Over the wet and slippery Bridge of Spain many men have gone to their ruin; through the Puerta Isabella Dos many women have reached the bottom. Manila blinks through the downpour, knowing full well that men are strong, and men are weak, but no man can be both. And well does Manila know that few women in her clutches have achieved the first.

The tin roof reverberated under the bombardment of the rain. The wind hit the building, which vibrated. A breath of damp, cool air blew in to the crowded dance hall. The dancers paused, for an instant taken aback by the fury of the storm. They felt the insecurity of the human being in the face of the elements. The clamor of the trap drum was unaccompanied by the sliding sound of feet; even the feet faltered. The wind died down as suddenly as it had arisen. The music of the Filipino jazz band broke forth with renewed vigor. The dancers again set out upon the vast floor, moving along in the fox trot as interpreted by the two hemispheres.

At a table near the dancing floor sat the two officers who had made the bet. They waited for their white uniforms to dry out from the storm that had caught them unprepared. Amusement showed in their sunburnt faces as they watched the many odd variations of the great American dance. The dancers circled past their table, the mestizos throwing out their feet with waving motions inherited from the Spanish habanera, the full blood natives flopping carelessly along in heelless chinelas which necessitated exaggerated glides, the Chinamen shuffling. Dancing with these assorted breeds were girls as unmistakably Caucasian as their partners were Oriental. These girls clung precariously to the loose sleeves of the Chinaman, the unconfined shirt tails of the Filipino, the starched coat of the mestizo. The painted faces looked up at the yellow, brown and bister skins of their partners. White teeth gleamed from the men's open mouths; gold fillings flashed between the dangerously smiling lips of the girls.

Angier grinned.

"Watch your pure and very blond lady leering up at that greasy old chino! Young for it, too. Now you, Kirwin—you never believe wrong of a pretty woman, though you agree about the shortcomings of the ugly ones. But you are wrong, old top! Sin overtakes the fair, not the unlovely. Look at that girl's dress. Disreputable! What decent woman would show all of her naked shoulders and most of her back to this crowd? Do you suppose that the chino dancing with her thinks she is decent? Not on your life he doesn't! His decent women swathe themselves in stiff brocades and padded coats."

"So do his indecent ones. Stick to facts."

They ordered another round of the sickeningly sweet and depressingly lukewarm soft drinks of a reformed Manila. The straws wilted as soon as touched, and fell over the sides of the tall glasses in the manner of Victorian heroines who swoon.

The music stopped. The dancers separated, going to the different tables.

Pink and shabby, tawdry skirts; very lovely hair in long and thick curls down her back and hanging in her eyes—that variety of soft blue eye which, when angry, suggests steel heated to the white pitch, but which crinkles engagingly when merry; face hard and sophisticated—the dancer of the wager!

Easy to induce her to sit down at their table; impossible to persuade her to take a drink from the flasks with which they were armed against contingencies. She insisted on soda water—and then more soda water.

"I want something sweet and cold," she told them. "God—how I've missed it! I hate places where there's not enough ice for ice cream."

Before the soda water arrived the music started again. Kirwin half rose from his chair and bowed ceremoniously to the girl. "Will you give me the pleasure of this dance?"

"Gee!" exclaimed the young person. "And the soda water on the way!"

"I thought you'd like it," muttered the man.

"Like it? Like to dance?" She broke into laughter. "Say—don't you know yet that a person's job is never fun? It's bread and butter for me to move my feet, not pleasure."

She seized the glass of purplish mixture that was being placed before her and plunged the spoon, and after that her nose, into its enticing depths.

"Now, this is real joy!" she announced.

"Where you living?" Angier was already at the business of winning his bet.

The girl turned on him a cold and wary look that, as she studied his frank, boyish face, softened into good fellowship.

"Over in the Tondo—a Ford-sized life in a Ford-sized room. I take my shower under an oil can, and that after I've gone out and fetched in the water that's in the can. And if the water runs out before the soap's off, I've got to hustle into my kimono and get some more to fill up the darned can—and then jump under it like the house was on fire, so's the water won't give out again. That's comfort for you! And me used to Broadway! I tell you—give me Broadway, with the human toads staring at you! Out here, there's nothing to stare at you except half-breed frogs. I'm not strong for half-breeds. That's the reason I came over here when you called me—because you fellows are white." She gave them another of her wary looks; prepared for their unbelief.

"What's your name, kid?"

"Miss Casey—to you!" replied the girl promptly, and with emphasis on the title.

"What's your name to the chinos?" asked the amused Angier.

The girl's face turned a dark and painful red. She glanced helplessly at the man whose manner toward her was marked by a difference.

Kirwin smiled kindly in response to this glance.

"That's enough, Angier," he said with some sternness in his voice. "Miss Casey, my friend is distinctly young and rather flippant; take him with a grain of salt."

"Sure!" responded Miss Casey. "I've often met 'em like that. They're harmless."

Angier lifted his glass to his merry young mouth. From the glass issued a gurgle or two. Miss Casey eyed him for a moment; then turned to Kirwin with a degree of confidence.

"Say—what did you two fellows call me over here for? I know it wasn't just to have a good time. You can't fool Mary. I know the difference in men. He's guying me, but he isn't tough."

Kirwin bowed, growing respect in his deep-set eyes.

"Miss Casey, we owe you an apology. We did an unpardonable thing; we made a bet on you. It isn't what men should do about a woman—"

"... But you did it about me, because I'm not a woman—I'm just a dance-hall girl in the Orient? Oh, don't apologize; I understand. I'm used to it."

There was no longer a trace of the ironic in Kirwin's deference. Something of old-fashioned ceremony crept into his manner and softened the girl. She smiled at him without rancor.

"Don't say a word," she said kindly, with the obvious intent of putting him at his ease. "You haven't hurt my feelings a bit. I know when to get mad; and I know when not to. I don't think either of you meant a thing. And it's a comfort to be sitting here with two men from home. Forget it!"

Angier withdrew his face from the tall glass. He put his hand on the roughened hand of the girl as it rested on the table beside her soda water.

"I'm sorry," he said. "And I want to ask you something, quite aside from the bet. We're all Americans, as you said. Is there anything that we could do for you?"

Mary Casey put her other hand on top of his and pressed it. For a moment there was a mist over her blue eyes.

"You're a nice boy. Much obliged. But there isn't anything. I'm taking care of myself; and I can pay my rent, and pick up my meals one way or another. And not from men!" The guarded look was again in evidence as she said this. Then she laughed. "You see how mean I am, about suspecting men! But I have to be that way. There aren't too many you can trust."

To the jerky strains of Manila's latest jazz—a tune already, in America, a year old and buried—she leaned across the rickety table and looked from one to the other of the men. It was a direct, level look.

"What was the bet?"

"Oh, I say! Miss Casey!" began Angier uncomfortably. "See here: I've already said I was sorry I'd made it." He took out his cigarette case. He struck a match. There was a tinge of nervousness in his manner.

Mary extended her hand for a cigarette. "Might as well have one," she said; "though it does register guilt, in the movies, for a woman to smoke!" She leaned back in her cane chair and absently watched the thin blue vapor that curled up from her nose. Her rouged lips were parted in a rather hard smile. "Never occurred to you, did it, that women could stay straight easier if you men weren't so keen on saying we were crooked? Of course I can guess what the bet was! And I can very nearly guess which of you it was who bet for me. And—on account of one of you having taken a chance on me—I may tell you a thing or two before the evening is over. I'd somehow like a man who had the nerve to take a chance like that—on my side—to win his bet!"

The muchacho approached the table for orders. He bowed obsequiously to the two officers and brushed his arm contemptuously across the shoulder of Mary Casey. He drew back suddenly, rubbing his cheek. Miss Casey's hand had administered a smart slap on that yellow expanse. She glanced apologetically at the two Americans.

"It's the only way to treat 'em," she informed them. "Treat 'em rough, and in a hurry! That's my way, and it works. If you don't know the game, this is no place for you."

She looked out over the floor. A stout and perspiring mestizo, with the unmistakable Chinese look, was approaching.

"I must dance with this bum. He's one of the 'influential patrons,' and the management would have a fit and bounce me if I turned him down. I'll be back after he's walked a mile on my feet."

The two men watched her as she steered the lumbering mestizo through the crowd. Neither of them spoke.

At the end of the dance she returned to the table and sat down as a matter of course. This was the Orient, and a long way from home and its standards of caste. And these Americans had been decent to her—kind to her.

"Ain't it fierce, to have to dance with a man that's a hop toad and an elephant all in one?" she inquired with a passing annoyance.

"Know the game? Sure I know the game—and a darned good thing I do!" she continued, taking up the conversation where they had left it. "I've known it since I was a kid. I'm twenty-three now; and I've been thanking my stars all that time that I knew it. You put yourself through the China Coast, and you need to know the ropes of life. You think I'd want to be one of those sweet, innocent dunces that you men always like to believe we blondes are—and that we aren't, so many times? I'd have fallen into the paws of a Chink—I would! Innocent sweetness can't come through the China Coast whole, and don't you forget it! I've walked straight, but it wasn't by being sweet and innocent that I did it. It was by knowing every devilment that men can be up to. They are all alike—the men I meet. Their skins are different colors, but their ideas are the same. All yellow inside, and black and brown and white outside."

Musingly, she sipped her soda water. In this repose her mouth showed hard lines in crescents at the corners. There were wrinkles raying out from her eyes—baby eyes, at times. These eyes now turned contritely to the two officers.

"That was hitting below the belt, wasn't it? My turn to apologize now! But it isn't often I meet fellows like you—fellows who'll talk to me instead of wanting to paw me—guys who are drunk, and—" Her voice trailed off. She stared unseeingly at the crowd as it pranced past the table. "God! I don't blame men for the way things are with us girls! If I was a man I'd play the game that way, too, I guess. They haven't got a thing staked on the turn

of the wheel. But we've got everything to lose. And if we aren't careful we lose it; that's all."

The wind came up again and tore at the house, and around the house, with concentrated enmity. It played with the loose shell windows as the cat with the mouse. Inspired by this lack of control in the elements, Kirwin became elemental in his questioning of the girl.

"Born and brought up in New York, on Eighth Avenue, you say? Then why out here?"

"What's a girl who's poor to do to feed herself? Not but what the men 'll feed her—if she's a fool! A man goes and marries, and gets a girl baby. And does he have that girl baby taught a trade when she leaves grammar school, like he does his sons? He does, like hell! He throws her out—in front of men—to catch a husband! 'Tisn't fair to the girls. Look at me: I didn't know how to do a thing except dance. I'd learned how to do that on the sidewalks, to hurdy-gurdies."

The noise of the rain on the roof deadened her voice, so that the men had to lean across the table in order to hear her next words.

"I said I'd tell you a few things. All right! I will! It may help you in your bets on other women."

Her voice became shriller, more filled with excitement. The rain no longer deadened it; it was charged with an electricity that carried it above the storm.

"When I knew that if I didn't want to marry one of the poor simps I met—with his hair slicked down with grease till it looked like shiny black shoes—I'd have to scratch for my living, I got busy and hunted a job in a cheap dance hall in that part of town. My job was to dance with any dirty, smelly man who came in and hadn't got a girl along. Not much of a trade, but it was a long sight better than the one my sister took up—on the streets! That was another trade you didn't have to be trained for!

"'Mary, be careful!' my mother kept telling me. 'A girl has got to be careful—because the men won't be careful for her.'

"By the time I'd learned the game of taking care of myself, I'd worked up to a sweller dance hall on Broadway. The fellows who came in there were clean, except in their minds. But I kept saying to myself: 'Mary, be careful!'

"And then, one evening, in came a seedy looking man who made you think he'd seen better times and a fatter living. Always shaved clean, and smelled of talcum powder. But his clothes were brushed until there wasn't a bit of nap left on them, I used to think when I was dancing with him and looking at his shoulder. He was an actor, out of a job, he told me. They tell you the story of their lives when they're dancing with you.

"Once he came in downright hungry. I shared with him that night the dinner the management gave me.

"I got in the habit of looking for him, and sharing my dinner with him. I respected myself a lot because I was giving him dinner instead of him feeding me. Silly, wasn't it?" She looked at Kirwin.

Kirwin nodded gravely. "I understand that perfectly," he said. "You would feel that way. So should I, in your place."

"Thanks!" said Mary Casey. "Well—you know—after you've fed a man when he's hungry, you get to sort of think you own him. You feel like you're his mother, you might say. I got to feeling that way about Teddy. I felt like he was mine. I don't suppose I thought about marrying; I knew he couldn't support me. But I never thought about anything that I'd be doing, way off in life, when we were older, without thinking about him being right there with me. You know what I mean? I just didn't think we'd ever be anywhere without the other one being there, too. Not that he said anything much, only—'I'm awful fond of you, kid!' But I didn't mind. I was fool happy, dancing afternoons with all sorts of men, and all the time thinking that pretty soon Teddy'd be coming in by the doorkeeper, and looking around for me—and then sit in the darkish restaurant eating part of my dinner—though it did used to leave me pretty hungry, for the dinner the management gave us wasn't much on size. Some of the girls used to kick about those dinners; you're awful hungry after

you've been dragged around the floor for hours and hours by heavy-footed hicks. But the management laughed at the complaints; said the girls would keep their figures if they didn't eat too much. I'll say I kept mine! I was 'most starved every night when I got to bed. My stomach used to feel as if it was sticking to my backbone. I was on the floor every dance. I was popular with the men who came there. It isn't that I'm pretty; I'm not. And so they look again to see what the deuce I am. And that gets a man's goat—when he can't make out what he likes about a girl.

"Anyhow, if I'd ever been pretty I'd have lost it by now. I've been so darned careful; and when a girl's careful, and suspects everybody, she gets hard and mean looking. The other girls—those that aren't careful—get hard and tough. It all comes to the same thing; they look the same way in the face. Women can't look soft in the face unless they're taken care of by their people."

"When you are talking this way, you don't look hard," interrupted Kirwin.

"That's because it's a comfort to sit here and say everything that comes into my head. Most times, when I'm across a table from a man, I have to think before I open my mouth: 'Will this give him a handle?' And so I just say: 'Oh! Isn't this a lovely floor?' And: 'My! But you are a dandy dancer!' When like as not he's stepped all over me."

"Men are brutes! They even step on the ladies' toes!" the laughing Angier remarked.

"They step on more than their toes," the girl countered. "They step on anything the girl gives them a chance to step on! At least, most of them do. I never saw but one who wouldn't. And I lost him—lost sight of him, I mean—on account of losing his card." She lifted her long and thick lashes of a golden brown that caught the light from the swinging oil lamps and formed a delicate nimbus around her serious eyes. "But I'm going to tell you about him. I'd like you to know I've met one man I could respect. Men who hang around dance halls not even a boob could think much of!

"It was this way:

"Times got worse. I got so I couldn't make out. They raised my rent on me. I couldn't go to live with my people. They bunked and washed and cooked in one room, with a window and the fire escape for their excitement; and I'd got used to better. I couldn't go back there—not with Teddy in my head. He'd have looked down on me, see?

"So Teddy says to me: 'Why don't you try South America? I've been told they pay high, down there, for American dancers. And board and lodging thrown in,' he says. And he says that he'll see if he can get me a chance, through a friend of his that's in town looking for girls to go down to Colon. This friend came in to talk to me about it. It's a swell chance to make big money, he says. The Panamanians are ready spenders, he says, and crazy over dancing. And Teddy kept trying to make me go.

"I went. The boat got in about seven o'clock in the evening. The man they sent to meet me said that I was to hop into my dance clothes and hurry along with him to the hall. My trunk would go up afterward.

"Say, I'm telling you—I never did see a dance hall like that one! It was a scream! The guy hadn't told me that the Panamanians were all colors! Everything was sitting at the tables, from putty-colored dudes with diamonds in their embroidered shirts to jet black niggers in fine clothes. Each man had poured a bottle of scent over himself. The smell of that perfume, and the smell of the different breeds of people, all hot and perspiring, was something fierce. It made me feel queer, all of a sudden.

"I sat down at one of the tables, and the fat, cream-colored woman who ran the place came over and gave me something to drink, to cool me off, she said. It made me cool, but odd feeling. I leaned my head on my hand, so's the floor would stop going around. And something—the heat, maybe—made me so sleepy I thought to myself I'd swap my job for a bed, if I could of found a bed. And then I realized that somebody was stroking my arm; long, pressing strokes like you give a cat's back.

There wasn't much feeling in my arm; it was sorter dead; but I knew darned well that somebody was fooling with it. I opened my eyes wide. It was a coon who was fooling with my arm! A real coon, like we have at home—only this one spoke a lingo that I guess was Spanish. Any rate, I didn't understand a word he said. And I jumped away from him; I never had had a coon stroke my arm, and I didn't like it a bit. So I says to him: 'You get away from me!' But he laughed so all his teeth showed; and he reached over and grabbed me. That waked me up sure enough; and I kicked and screamed. And the next thing I knew a white man had come across the room and lifted that coon by the scruff of his neck and thrown him in a corner. I've seen fights in my day—but say! I never saw a prettier one than that! The white man cleaned out the crowd!

"The cream-colored woman rushed over and began jabbering at him; and the dudes with the diamond buttons stood close by and laughed and whispered to each other in their crazy talk, and pushed their shoulders up in the air until you couldn't see their big ears; but that American paid no attention to them. He treated them so like scum that I was proud to be standing by him.

"The American took me by the arm—not spoony; just sort of as if he was boss around those diggings—and walked me over to a table in a far corner, away from the jabbering dudes. We sat down. I was sorter nervous by that time. There was something I didn't get, if you know what I mean? So that man tells me:

"'This is no place for an American girl! How'd you come here?'

"I told him all about the contract I'd signed to dance there. And I told him about Teddy, and everything else I could think of. He was a comfort in the midst of all those funny people. He didn't smell of perfume, and he had on plain white clothes, and they were clean around the collar and cuffs. Different, that's all. While I was talking, he sat there looking at me with his eyes half shut, like he was sizing me up. And every now and then he'd nod his head. Once I heard him muttering something about: 'My first assay would be—pure gold!' And I got scared; I thought that he was crazy, too. But when he saw how I was getting as far away in my chair as I could, he laughed—first time he'd laughed. And I noticed that his nose stayed quiet while he was laughing, instead of working up and down like the dagos' noses did. And his eyes laughed; and the dagos' eyes don't laugh. That made me trust him.

"He told me that he was a mining engineer, down there on a job for a Denver crowd.

"'Miss Casey,' the engineer fellow said then, 'I'm not going to leave you here! Do you know what sort of place you're in?'

"I told him all over again about the contract to dance. He frowned, and beat on the table with his forefinger. And when I stopped talking he told me what kind of place it was. I don't suppose I need to tell you?

"I never would have got out of there whole except for that American. I tell you what, I burn candles in the church for that man!

"He explained it all to me; just what business Teddy's friend was up to, shipping girls down to the dance halls in South and Central America. But I didn't like to believe Teddy knew what that friend of his was wishing on me. The American thought he knew; and he called him an awful word. I felt mad—and sick—and I told him that he was lying about Teddy. But I didn't believe he was lying. And he was awful nice about it; said he didn't blame me for talking up for my friends! But say! What men are friends to girls like me? Never but one man was straight with me—that fellow in Panama!"

The blue eyes were not hard now; neither did they crinkle merrily. Mary Casey's soul looked out of them.

"That engineer fellow was the man I told you I could respect," she stated gravely. "You know what he did for me? He helped me get away from that place! He worked our way through the jabbering crowd until we were near the door; and then, when the music was blaring loud, he threw his coat over my dance dress and

grabbed me with his left arm while he pushed off the men who ran in front of us with his right fist. He had a heavy fist—that fellow! I saw one man's nose start bleeding. And a few more were knocked over like ninepins. It only takes one white man to ball out a crowd of niggers and spinnachers.

"'Sorry for the rough house, Miss Casey,' said the engineer fellow, 'but we have to make our get-away before these nigger police show up.'

"We made it! We ran along the crooked streets that I'd thought were so funny when I drove up from the boat; but they weren't quite as funny when we were running along them in the dark and I was catching my heels in the holes between the big paving blocks that didn't fit even against each other. One of the heels came off, and we didn't have time to go back and pick it up. I hobbled along as well as I could, holding on to the engineer fellow's nice hard arm. I didn't want to fuss when he was being such a good sport.

"All the way down to the docks the engineer fellow was telling me, as well as he could for running and dodging from shadow to shadow of the squatty houses, and looking up and down each street that we had to cross, what I was to do when I got to New Orleans. But I didn't hear a word he said; I was so busy thinking how nice it was to have a man like that taking care of me—and how strong his arm was. If I'd stopped thinking about his arm, and thought more about what he was saying to me, I'd have been better off. But you never are foxy at the time that you ought to be.

"He swung me aboard a ship just as the gangplank was drawn up. All he had time to do was to push a card into my hand.

"'Here's my address,' he said. 'Let me know how you are coming on, and where you are.' And then he said: 'Hasta la mañana!' which I'd picked up in the dance hall, and knew meant that he was going to see me some time.

"The captain was looking over the rail of the ship. The engineer fellow threw him a little package twisted up in a piece of paper that he tore from a notebook; and he said something to the captain in Spanish.

"So there I was, on a banana ship—in my dance dress and one heel off my slippers, and the engineer fellow's coat over my shoulders! I must have struck that captain dumb! But I didn't care. I was too busy staring at the engineer fellow back there on the dock.

"A puff of wind came up and blew the card that he had given me out of my hand and down into the water. I leaned way over the rail and saw it sucked under by the churning of the machinery. And then I remembered that I hadn't read it. I'd been too busy staring at him to read his note. I ran after the captain and asked him if he knew the name of the fellow. 'No,' he said, 'he'd never seen the chap before.' I took the fellow's coat off and looked through the pockets to see if there wasn't another card in one of them. But there wasn't a thing except some papers scrawled all over with his figuring—his mining work, I guess.

"That's the way I lost out. But I've always kept the coat. It reminds me that I once met a good man.

"When we got to New Orleans with those bananas, I was still a long way from home. And I didn't have a cent of money; my purse was in the trunk that they'd been going to send up to the dance hall at Colon. I said to the captain the day we made port:

"'I don't know how I am to pay you, unless you wait until I get a job in this town.'

"The captain told me that the engineer fellow had paid my passage, and fifty dollars over for me to get a start on—buy some clothes to wear when I was out looking for a job. That was a real man, that fellow! And as I didn't know his name, having been such a fool about not reading his card for looking at him, I couldn't hunt him up to pay it back. So I burn the candles for him."

Silence—except for the noise of the jazz band and the shuffling feet.

Kirwin broke this silence. He leaned nearer the girl; his voice was very kind as he spoke to her.

"You shouldn't have come out here. No girl should come out here so long as she can make a cent in the States."

"Dance halls in the States are supposed to be respectable. They'll keep girls on that they suspect a lot about; but they bounce her as soon as all the people outside the business know about her. See? Everybody who went to dance halls in New York knew I'd left on that contract; I'd been such a fool I'd told it all around, trusting Teddy and his friend as I did. That closed the doors of every place I tried to get an engagement. I've chased halfway round the world, now, trying to get to some place where they couldn't find out about it. San Anton—'Frisco—Honolulu—I've tried 'em all. And I've sloped out of all of 'em for the same reason. Running away from the flag, I was, instead of following it like the cocktails did. Somebody'd always show up who was there that night in Colon, or who had heard about it; and nobody believed my tale. I don't blame 'em! I wouldn't have believed it if any girl had tried to pass off on me that she'd been such a fool. Girls like me are supposed to know their way around. But I'd been too smashed on Teddy to see straight. That was my one big mistake: to get soft on him. Girls like me can't afford to care for a man.

"It did me one good turn—that jolt at Colon. It knocked Teddy out of my head. I couldn't help seeing the difference between him and the engineer fellow."

She absently stirred the sediment at the bottom of her glass.

"Listen: now I've told you all this—there's one more thing I want to tell you—I've walked straight, even out here. You believe me?" Her voice was tense.

Kirwin and Angier spoke at once. "Yes!"

"I wish I could see that engineer fellow again, and tell him that, too. He did a lot for me."

The rattle of the trap drum, the bellow of the brasses, rose above the storm that still raged outside. The rain beat on the roof in rivalry with the drum.

"Nice night to be getting back to the Tondo, in a shaky carromata!" said Mary Casey. "But it's near closing time. You can tell by the state of the chinks' camisas. When they are soaked through, it's early morning. Chinks don't heat up as soon as other men. Ain't they a sweet lot? And heavy on their feet! Oof!" She lifted one slippered foot and rubbed it tenderly.

A Filipino walked up with mincing gait. He thrust out a dance ticket. With a shrug of her thin shoulders Mary Casey went on the floor and abandoned herself to his arms.

Angier turned a sober face to Kirwin.

"You win!" he said.

Kirwin twisted his wrist around until he could see the face of the watch strapped there.

"No use to wait for Mayhew. It's two o'clock."

He clapped his hands together sharply. He settled their score with the muchacho who came in response to that summons. The two men arose from the table of empty glasses.

Fresh air came in to them as they opened the door. Seeming a part of that fresh air was the tall and lean man whom they encountered on the narrow sidewalk. A man in white linen of unmilitary cut, on his close-cropped head a slouched panama that had seen better days. As the three hailed a passing calesa and took refuge within its cramped depths from the downpour, the man took off the battered panama and carefully drained the water from its brim. The little horse attached to the calesa by casual harness ambled down the street.

Above the sloshing sound made by the little horse's feet as he wandered through the puddles, the tall man lifted up his voice and spoke:

"Hard time getting away from the dames at the hotel," he announced grimly. "Those women would chew over a bit of Heaven itself until it was as pallid and unappetizing as an over-masticated piece of bacon! I fled for my life, finally. Healthier down in the bowels of the earth, surrounded by gold that doesn't belong to me, and that I am merely passing on for the chaps who are buying up Masbate."

"Does it never make you want some gold of your own, Mayhew?" inquired the curious Angier. "I'd not be able to stand the strain of being a mining expert. Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink. That sort of stuff."

"Might if I hadn't been very busy with something else. I've been prospecting for human gold. Struck the vein once, and lost it through a fluke." He turned a rather shame-faced gaze on his friends. "What would you say if I told you that for years I'd been chasing a pipe-dream from pillar to post—always trying to catch up with it and see if I was right in my assay? Taking unlikely jobs which would carry me to unlikely places—never overlooking a dance hall this side of hell—with only one thing tangible enough to prove to me that it wasn't actually a dream—a broken slipper heel that I'd picked up in the street on my way back from—from the vision, you might say!"

"So it's a woman you've been sleuthing, you old son of a gun!" howled gleefully the unobservant Angier.

But Kirwin leaned forward and touched the cochero on the shoulder. "Mano!" he commanded. "And hurry that plug along!"

The calesa turned a corner on one of its two inadequate wheels. The three men were thrown against each other.

"What the devil, Kirwin," began Angier. "Oh! I see!" He whistled softly.

"Sila!" Kirwin directed the cochero.

The calesa veered around a curve on its other wheel.

"Poco más!"

The calesa came to an abrupt halt in front of the dance hall that they had quitted a short time before. The men of the jazz band were coming out, their swathed instruments under their arms. The proprietor was fitting the key into the lock of the door.

Kirwin leaned from the calesa and looked anxiously up and down the narrow street. A solitary female figure, huddled under a dripping umbrella, was picking its way, with the delicate step of the dancer, between the pools of water that overflowed from the gutter on to the sidewalk.

Kirwin sprang from the calesa. He pulled the astonished Mayhew after him. With one hand on Mayhew's shoulder, he turned him in the direction of the huddled figure under the umbrella.

"Go fit that heel to Cinderella!" he laughed.

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THE POOR

BY Cairo's lordly towers,
Or on the desert waste,
The Arab spreads his food and asks
The passer-by to taste;
But what are spires that point to heaven
And every formal prayer,
If hearts are dead to human love
And self-triumphant there?

Oh, many a golden chariot rolls
Across the rattling stones,
Whose wheels with every echo tell
Some wretched creature's groans;
The poor man must be honest,
Who loses or who wins;
No gilded veil to cheat the crowd
Conceals the poor man's sins.

Dust to Dust

By ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "Ashes to Ashes," "McCarty, Incog," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

CLAUDIA LANGHAM, last of a family socially prominent in New York for generations, marries Niles Hamersley, despite the objections of her old playmate, Stephen Munson. As Claudia leaves the church with Hamersley an evil-looking man stops her husband. Claudia sees fear and guilt in her husband's face. He persuades her to await him at her home and leaves with the stranger. As the hours pass she realizes Stephen was right about Hamersley and her love for him fades away.

Next day when Hamersley comes, Claudia repulses him after listening to his vague excuses, and finally flees from him up to the cupola in the disused upper part of the old Washington Square house. She tries to halt him with her father's revolver, but he laughs, and she drops the weapon. He picks it up and is about to follow her when a part of the floor gives way and he falls to the room below, as the revolver explodes, dying instantly. Claudia collapses. When Matthew Rowe, the family attorney, arrives he tells Claudia that to hide a scandal she must conceal the fact that she had quarreled with him. In an interview with the police she does this.

CHAPTER VIII.

STEPHEN STANDS BY.

"DR. VAN TUYL said I was to get you straight to bed and make you take some broth, and then he would give you something to quiet you so's you'd have a good sleep," Annie announced as Claudia entered her room. "Is everything all right, deary? You won't be bothered by that police doctor again?"

"I don't know," replied Claudia wearily. "Did he or his assistant talk to you?"

"Yes—and precious little they got out of me!" The old woman tossed her head. "The doctor wasn't so bad, but that Mr.

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Dawes asked the most impudent questions! It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him it was none of his business what you told me about—about Mr. Hamersley being called away when you got home yesterday, and as to how you looked and how you acted, and whether you slept well or not."

"He asked you that?" Claudia frowned as she drew off the gown which the other had unfastened and sank into the chair before the dressing table. The face that stared back at her from the mirror was ghastly in its drawn pallor, with great purplish shadows about the staring eyes and wan lips drooping pitifully, but she scarcely glanced at her reflection.

How quick that man Dawes had been to assume because of that scene before the church that all might not have been well between Niles Hamersley and herself, and what effrontery he had shown in daring to quiz her servants! People who ordinarily came into contact with the police were probably subjected to the most rigid inquiry, but such people were not of her world, and surely a Langham was entitled to more consideration and respect than the mere man in the street! By what right had that odious person attempted to pry into her every act and thought?

Yet Uncle Matt had permitted him to question her about the fictitious "Brown" until her nerves all but gave way beneath the strain, and only interfered when she herself protested. How had she ever endured that dreadful ordeal?

Now that the tension was past, a supreme lassitude encompassed her, and she sipped her broth and then lay back among her pillows with a benumbed feeling of indifference. The thread of her life had been broken, and though some day, somehow, she must take up the loose end and go on, for the sake of what the world would say, she longed now only for oblivion.

Yet she dared not close her eyes! Whenever her weary lids drooped that scene in the attic, in all its stark horror, arose again before her, and she started upright with a smothered shriek. Was she going mad? Must she live that hideous moment over and over until her tottering reason fell and utter insanity came?

Dr. Van Tuyl found her with racing pulse and feverishly glittering eyes, her whole body twitching spasmodically and her slim, burning fingers plucking at the silk coverlet.

"Come, my dear—this will never do!" He felt her wrist for a moment, then allowed it to slip limply from his hold. "You must sleep."

"I cannot!" Her voice was high with the overtone of delirium. "I see him when I shut my eyes! I see him as—as he fell. He is standing here—here before me, and then with a crash he is gone—and only the dust—the dust rising in a cloud like smoke—"

"We will soon banish that!" The doctor patted her hand reassuringly and turned to the bathroom adjoining while Annie advanced to smooth the coverlet with anxious, tremulous hands.

"My lamb!" she murmured. "Oh, be careful what you say! He doesn't know—"

But Claudia was past caution.

"All the world will know!" she babbled. "They will know, but they will not see Niles as I see him now. They will not have to see him die over and over again as I must—only I! His face—that look of fury, and then fear, and then the dust swirling up over his head!"

"Hush, Miss Claudia!" Annie tried gently to press her back upon her pillows. "You don't know what you're saying! Try not to think of it, for you're only doing yourself harm!"

"Harm!" Claudia's half crazed brain caught at the word. "I thought he could never do me any more harm. I thought it would be the end; but now I can never put him from me!"

Annie started and drew back as the doctor came up noiselessly behind her.

"Don't mind the poor child, Dr. Van Tuyl!" she whispered. "She's out of her head from the shock and grief, but it 'll pass. When she's herself again she won't know what she's said."

Claudia looked up as the physician bent over her and pushed up the lace of her sleeve. His benign face, with the trimly pointed gray beard and calm, compassionate eyes beneath the heavy brows, had been

familiar since her earliest childhood, and his coming had always meant relief from pain; but now, somehow, it had changed. His eyes were growing smaller, twinkling suspiciously, boring into her brain, and his expression, doubting, watchful, was curiously like that of Dawes when he questioned her.

Or was it Dawes himself who stood beside her? Dr. Van Tuyl seemed to have receded, vanished like a shadow, and in his stead Dawes leaned toward her, his skeptical face with its hard, knowing smile coming nearer and nearer.

"I told you the truth!" she cried, shrinking away. "It was an accident! There was no dreadful, secret thing—ah!"

A sharp pain darted through her arm, and then, oddly, it seemed to be Dr. Van Tuyl once more, who smiled gravely as he withdrew the needle.

"There! No dreams will disturb you to-night, I promise you, my dear. Annie is right here, and she won't leave you, but you must not talk. Just try to rest."

Claudia relaxed with a little tremulous sigh.

"I thought that man was here again—the man who questioned me! He was so officious, so insultingly inquisitive! You won't let him come any more, doctor? I can't bear it!"

"No one shall harass you any further, for to-night at least. You are safe from all intrusion, Claudia. Don't you feel a trifle easier now?"

Did she imagine it, or was there that same odd note of repression in his usually hearty tones that had been evident in Uncle Matt's voice when he first mentioned the revolver? The attorney must have told Dr. Van Tuyl the same story in which he had coached her—the story she was supposed to have told him. Did the doctor doubt that harmless fabrication that Niles was merely playing with the revolver when the end came? Surely he, too, could not be seriously entertaining the stupid notion that he had meant to shoot himself!

But a soothing warmth was creeping sluggishly through her veins and her body seemed to be sinking deeper and deeper into the soft bed with a delicious sensation of comfort and relaxation. The lights, too, were more dim and the familiar objects about her floated mistily in a faint, opalescent haze. Somehow it required a tremendous effort to turn her head on the pillow and reply to the doctor's question.

"I feel—drowsy, I think." The overtone was gone and her voice dragged leadenly. "I feel as though I were—drifting somewhere."

"That is as it should be." Dr. Van Tuyl felt her pulse once more and rose. "Don't try to hold yourself, my dear; just drift. I will see you in the morning."

He turned away, and his low tones came to her in an indistinguishable murmur as he gave some final instructions to Annie. Claudia did not try to listen. Her heavy lids drooped lower and lower, and now no specter of the afternoon's tragedy came to torture her, only a soft curtain of darkness over her tired eyes and her brain itself seemed mercifully numb.

The return of Niles Hamersley, the bitter moment when her fears as to his past were confirmed, the struggle and pursuit and then that sudden, fatal misstep which plunged him into eternity—all the swift moving events of the last few hours were vague and nebulous now, as though they had taken place long, long ago, and some one else, not she, had been concerned in them. To welcome the silence and the dark—to rest—to drift passively with the gentle current into oblivion—

How long she slept, if sleep it was, Claudia did not know. She found herself all at once drawn up in bed, crouched high upon her pillows, listening with every nerve taut and quivering. What sound had penetrated the drugged coma in which she lay and aroused her consciousness? Faint, muffled snores came from the couch at the foot of the bed where the exhausted Annie slumbered, but otherwise the silence was profound.

The low night light cast a steady, unwavering shadow into the far corners of the room, and through the window the paling moon sent eerie rays athwart the floor. It must be very late, within an hour or two of dawn. What could have awakened her that Annie had not heard?

Then upon her straining ears there came the soft, stealthy tread of footsteps down the hall. Could it be old George prowling about? But his steps were short and irregular, feeble with age, and these were steady, cautious, slow!

Claudia drew herself up yet higher and glanced quickly at the bedstand beside her. A heavy cut glass jar of talcum powder was the first object which met her eye, and she caught it up just as the footsteps halted outside her door and a groping hand fumbled with the knob. It did not occur to her to cry out and arouse Annie, and already the knob was turning, the door was opening inch by inch—

The head of the bed was deeply shadowed, touched neither by moonbeams nor the glow of the lamp, and Claudia sat poised and motionless. A black coat sleeve and shoulder appeared, and then a man stepped forward a pace into the room and paused as though confused. Summoning all her strength, Claudia hurled the heavy jar, but her wavering arm missed its aim, and the missile struck the edge of the door, just above the intruder's shoulders, scattering its contents like a white cloud over him and falling with a crash to the floor.

Annie started up with a cry, but the man had already vanished, and Claudia fell back, exhausted with her effort, while rapid footsteps descended the stairs.

"For Heaven's sake, deary, whatever—" Annie began, but the girl pointed hysterically at the door.

"The man! Didn't you see him? Oh, call George!"

"You must have been dreaming, Miss Claudia." Annie paused.

From below had come the faint rattle of chain and bolt, and then the slam of the front door, and for a moment mistress and maid stared at each other. Then Annie seized the portable lamp, and, stepping over the débris of broken glass and powder upon the floor, she flew out and down the stairs, her gray hair streaming behind her.

Claudia tried to rise, but her limbs gave beneath her and she sat down on the side of the bed, drawing the covers about her as the hurried pad of feet came down the hall and George knocked anxiously on the door.

"Some one broke into the house! I—I think he came from upstairs!" Claudia exclaimed. "We heard him run out the front door, but, oh, George, please go up and see what—what he has been doing!"

"A—a burglar!" In his dressing gown and slippers George looked more wizened and feebly than ever, but he drew himself up valiantly. "Maybe there was two of them! I'll just go see—don't you disturb yourself, Miss Claudia."

He drew the door shut behind him and the slight current of air caused the powder which had scarcely settled to rise in a little swirling cloud again, like white dust.

Claudia watched it with morbid, fascinated eyes. So had that other dust, gray and unclean, floated up from that hole in the attic floor which had engulfed Niles Hamersley at the very moment when she seemed to be delivered helpless into his hands! Was dust of one sort or another to rise continually before her in ever recurring reminder of that dreadful moment? In a stray moonbeam the white particles sifting slowly down took on a silvery luster and seemed to resolve into vague shape and form out of which a ghostly face appeared to detach itself and float before her distraught gaze.

Then in an instant the white cloud swirled up once more as Annie opened the door.

"He got away, whoever he was, but he's a marked man!" she announced grimly. "He must have been fairly covered with that powder when you threw the jar, Miss Claudia, for he's tracked it clear down to the front door and out with him, and he'll never be able to brush his clothes free of it. It's bound to stick in the seams. Do you want I should call up the police?"

"Oh, no!" Claudia shivered. "He—I'm sure he couldn't have been just an ordinary burglar, Annie. Could he have been in—in that room where Niles is lying?"

"Your poor ma's room, that's been sealed till now? No, deary, and—and Mr. Hamersley's body ain't under this roof now; it was took away while you was in that first deep sleep. Mercy sakes, what's that?"

George appeared again in the doorway.

" The door at the head of the attic stairs that the police doctor locked has been forced open!" His voice squeaked with excitement. " Even with just this candle I could see the trails he's left through the dust all over the attic floor and down from the cupola! He must have come over the roof and got in that broken window up there, and then found he couldn't get back the same way. There's no telling what he wanted, for it don't seem as if he touched anything—only walked around!"

He paused for breath, and Annie asked meaningly:

" Did you look around good upstairs? Did he go snooping around my other locked doors?"

George shook his head slowly.

" I looked, but he don't seem to have stopped till he got down here. It's mighty queer!"

" Well, he's gone anyway, and there's no harm done," Annie observed practically. " Go on back to bed, George; Miss Claudia's got to rest."

Still muttering to himself, George departed, and Annie turned to her charge.

" Lie down again, deary, and I'll give you the medicine the doctor left for you in case you woke up," she urged. " I'm sure I don't know what ever else can happen in this house, but I guess it 'll be quiet the rest of the night. We'll tell Mr. Rowe about that man in the morning, but try not to think of him now."

Claudia took the medicine obediently and permitted herself to be tucked into bed once more, but all sleep had been banished and she lay staring wide eyed while the fading moonlight was merged into darkness and then the dawn crept in at the window.

Annie had dozed off again on the couch, and only her asthmatic breathing broke the silence at first. But presently there came the distant rattle of a milk wagon, its tin cans clattering as it approached from the avenue. Then a whistle blew with a thin, piping note, to be taken up in shrill chorus which ceased as abruptly as it had started, leaving a stillness so profound that the twittering of the multitude of birds over in the square came plainly to Claudia's ears.

She listened quietly to the sounds of the awakening city, her nerves mercifully deadened once more but her mind alert and clear. A strange, fatalistic calm seemed to have settled over her spirits, and she gathered her spent forces with a courage born of that moment when the intruder faced her from the doorway.

Her glimpse of him had been too fleeting in the dim light to make recognition possible, but a swift intuition as keen and sure as visual proof warned her that the man was no mere burglar. If he were not the interloper of that scene before the church, he was nevertheless connected in some fashion with that affair in the past of the man whose name she bore. Its shadow had not vanished with his death, but had spread until it loomed over her, all the more menacing because unknown.

She did not fear physical harm; that instant when the intruder halted confused on the threshold showed that he had blundered. Had he mistaken her room for the one directly above, in which until a few hours before Niles Hamersley's body had lain? Whatever his object, he or another would come again, as the man Hugo Zorn had come on the previous day, and Claudia realized that she must be prepared to meet him, to fight with every weapon at her command to stamp out this old scandal, whatever its nature, that threatened her name anew.

When Annie awoke at last it was broad day, and despite her protestations Claudia insisted on rising and dressing, and then wandered about the house like a slender, unquiet ghost. The doorbell rang incessantly as George, with great dignity, turned away reporters and the horde of curiosity seekers drawn by the flaring headlines with which the newspapers blazoned the sensational death of Niles Hamersley.

After a shrinking glance at them, Claudia had thrust them aside unread and she was pacing the floor of the library, waiting until such time as she might call up Matthew Rowe and tell him of that midnight visitant, when George presented himself.

" Mr. Stephen is here, Miss Claudia. I was to say that he didn't hope to see you, he just wanted to know if there was anything he could do."

"Stephen?" Claudia turned impulsively. "I will see him, George; please ask him to come in here, and if Mr. Rowe or the doctor calls, show them into the drawing-room."

Stephen had not failed her! She had disregarded his warning, misconstrued his motive and sent him away with bitter resentment, but now that his prediction was verified and suffering and tragedy had come he had not forgotten his promise: "I am your friend, standing by if any sorrow or harm should come to you." His last broken words returned to her mind bringing with them a warm glow of gratitude. Dear Stephen! She might have known that he would be faithful even when her life lay in ruins about her.

"Claudia!" His voice sounded from the doorway and he paused for a moment and then came slowly forward. "It is more than good of you to see me. I had no wish to intrude at this time, but I was conceited enough to hope that there might be some way in which I could serve you."

Claudia had found herself somehow unable to advance a step to meet him and the hand she held out to him was cold as ice. Could this be the handsome, merry-eyed boy of a few short months ago—this pale, stern-faced man with lines graven deeply about his sensitive mouth and an odd, new dignity in his bearing? What could have so changed him? Impulsively she voiced her thought.

"Stephen, have you been ill? It was kind of you to come. I—I don't think there is any one else in all the world I could talk to just now. But you look as though you, too, had known trouble."

"I've been working hard, that's all." He shrugged and drew forward a chair. "Don't let me keep you standing. Claudia, I'm not here to offer the usual trite condolences, although God knows I'd give half my life if this trouble and grief had not come to you. I only want to know if there is anything I can do, if I can relieve you of any of the duties and cares that will obtrude at a time like this, so that you may have the peace and quiet which must be more important than anything else now. May I help?"

As he stood before her, Claudia gazed up into the wistful, steady brown eyes bent upon her and a sudden resolve came. That he could be trusted she knew beyond question, and although Uncle Matt had proved himself a staunch ally she felt a swift longing to confide in this friend of her childhood.

"I think it will help me a great deal just to talk to you, Stephen." She indicated a chair close to her own, and when he had seated himself she added: "You learned of the accident from the papers?"

He nodded. "Have you seen them? You know of course that Mr. Rowe made a statement for you?"

"Did he? Whatever he said was right, of course, but—but it wasn't true, not all of it. Niles's death was sheer accident, then when the floor gave way, but everything was over between us before that. I—I had seen with your eyes, Stephen, and realized my mistake."

Claudia paused. "I didn't mean to speak of the last time I saw you, but I want you to know that your intuition was surer than mine. I can say nothing ill of the dead, whose name I bear, but I've always been honest with you. I am shocked and horrified by this frightful tragedy, but I am not grieved. I seem to have lost the capacity for suffering—lost it when I knew that the man I thought I cared for was hiding something shameful from me!"

A little silence fell after she had ceased speaking, and then Stephen asked:

"That deathbed summons, then? You have reason to doubt it?"

Claudia smiled wanly.

"The best of reasons. I gave that version to the medical examiner and I suppose Uncle Matt repeated it in the statement for publication, but only he and old Annie know the truth. I never learned who that man was who followed us from the church nor why Niles went away with him. He refused to tell me anything on his return and warned me not to pry into his past. It was then I told him of my complete disillusionment and that my—my affection for him was dead. There was a hideous scene, and I fled from him in actual fear, but he followed even to the attic.

"I found father's old revolver and meant to kill myself, Stephen, but I hadn't the courage and dropped it. Niles picked it up—I think he intended to put it somewhere out of my reach—but the floor suddenly gave way beneath him, and as he fell he accidentally discharged the revolver. That is the real story, Stephen, but the world must never know it! The scandal, that horible thing in his past—oh, if we can only bury it with him!"

Her companion had listened without comment and only the hands clenched tightly on his knees and the vein which stood out throbbing on his temple betrayed the emotion that consumed him. Claudia was lost in her own despairing thoughts, however, and when he spoke Stephen's voice was carefully controlled.

"You are afraid that the truth will come out now? What does Mr. Rowe think, Claudia? Is there no way it can be averted, nothing I can do?"

"Niles's enemies mean to strike at me. I have already had proof of that." She told him of the coming and mysterious departure of the man calling himself Zorn, and of the nocturnal intruder. When she had concluded Stephen rose and stood before her once more.

"Mr. Rowe must know of this without a moment's delay! You are not safe alone here in this house with just these two feeble old people to protect you! Will you let me go to him, Claudia? Will you let me tell him that you have confided in me and ask if he can suggest any way in which I can be of service?"

Claudia shook her head.

"I had rather he did not know that I told even you," she murmured. "You see, he's backing me up in that part of my story about the bonds, and—and he did something else, too, to make my account of what took place in the attic seem really true. When he comes to-day I will tell him what happened in the night, of course, and do whatever he advises. There isn't anything you can do, Stephen, but it has been a comfort just to tell you."

She rose as the doorbell rang once more and this time Stephen took the hand she extended in both his own.

"Perhaps I shall be able to help you, after all," he said slowly. "Perhaps we can lay this ghost from the past which threatens your peace of mind. But I will make no move until you tell me that I may. Remember that I am always within call and I shall be waiting. At any time, any hour that you need me, you have only to summon me, Claudia. I am standing by!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHADOW LOOMS.

DR. VAN TUYL found his patient with brightened eyes and a faint touch of color in her pale cheeks. He departed convinced that the night's rest had worked the miracle, for Claudia had warned the servants to make no indiscreet reference to the intruder.

She felt indeed imbued with a new spirit, but no drugs had wrought the change. The sight of Stephen Munson, the touch of his hand, the reassurance of his friendship and that he stood in instant readiness to come to her aid—it was this that had given her fresh courage and lightened in some measure the burden of despair and dread which weighed upon her soul. It mattered little that no practical means of availing herself of his help had presented itself; the knowledge that he was at hand in case of need was sufficient for the moment to enable her to face the immediate future with renewed confidence and hope.

How she had missed Stephen! Even in that strange ecstasy of happiness which now seemed so unreal to her, through the hurried, crowded weeks of her engagement, the whirl of preparation for the new life that she had fondly believed lay before her, she had missed his familiar presence, his ready sympathy and quiet understanding.

Niles's personality had engulfed hers. He had demanded, and she had given, but Stephen had always felt her every mood and responded to it, effacing himself; he had anticipated her every wish, been at once her comrade and her slave as long as she could remember and even in the height of her infatuation something had been wanting.

How strange that she should only realize

it now, that only when he stood again in her presence had the knowledge come to her of what his friendship meant! Through the bitterness of her disillusionment, the shock of the tragedy, and anguish of apprehension lest the cloud which enshrouded Niles's memory should overwhelm her also, Stephen appeared as a very tower of strength. She was glad that she had taken him into her confidence.

It had not been easy. She had obeyed that first swift impulse knowing that if she temporized the pride which was her ruling passion would have sealed her lips, but Stephen had understood! There had been no "trite condolence" as he said, no reminder of his warning nor open expression of sympathy and pity that would have made her soul writhe, but merely the quiet assurance that he was at her service. How arrogantly she had flouted his friendship and now what a precious thing it was!

Matthew Rowe did not make his appearance until nearly noon. It seemed to Claudia that he looked haggard and careworn, although the smile with which he greeted her was as kindly as ever.

"You slept well, my child? Dr. Van Tuyl helped you to get some rest?"

"Until a man broke into my room, Uncle Matt! I threw a powder jar at him as he stood in the doorway and he disappeared even before Annie started up."

"'A man'!" Matthew Rowe echoed, drawing his brows together. "Are you sure you didn't imagine—"

"Imagination wouldn't have trailed the powder down to the front door, Uncle Matt, nor broken open the attic door, which George says the medical examiner locked!"

She told him in detail of the affair. Summoning George, he went to examine the attic door for himself. Then while she waited Claudia heard him at the telephone and when he rejoined her there was an added gravity in his manner.

"You should have called me up at my rooms the moment you knew the man had escaped, Claudia. The police ought to have been notified immediately."

"But why?" she cried. "I did so hope to avoid further notoriety, and there was nothing stolen—"

"The forced lock on the door and those fresh footprints in the attic would have to be explained to the authorities, my dear." The attorney seated himself on the couch beside her. "Their investigation is not concluded yet, and this house—every one and everything in it—is technically still in their hands. You cannot seem to understand—"

"I confess I cannot!" Claudia paused, biting her lip. "It is an outrage that this house should be invaded by the police! They should have heard my explanation yesterday and gone, not treated this dreadful affair as though—as though we were people of no account! It is awful enough that the Langham name should be dragged into print without having a sensational mystery attached to it where none exists!"

She raised her eyes to his, but it was evident that Uncle Matt did not share her indignation. Why did he look at her so oddly, almost compassionately? She felt a curious sense of alienation, as though this old friend whom she relied upon as a second father had become all at once a mere soulless legal adviser, with more consideration for the stupid methods of the police department than for what was due to her!

As though in confirmation of her thought he replied slowly:

"'The law is no respecter of persons,' Claudia. That is a truth which you cannot appreciate because it has never been brought home to you before. If it is our object to avoid scandal and notoriety we must primarily convince the authorities that we have nothing to conceal, that even in irrelevant details we have told only the truth. Arrogance will only breed antagonism."

"What difference does it make whether they are antagonistic or not?" Claudia demanded. "We aren't concealing anything except the real state of affairs between Niles and me, and the reason for it! I don't mean to seem ungrateful for all you are doing, Uncle Matt, and if they come again I will try to be patient, but if you knew how humiliating it seems—"

"I do, my dear, but there is no help for it. Mr. Dawes is on his way here now, and I advise you to tell him with every show

of frankness just what occurred. It will do no harm, however, if you appear to take it for granted that the fellow was an ordinary burglar, and the more vague your description the better. If he is, as you think, connected in some way with this mystery in your husband's past which it is our first interest to bury forever, we don't want the police getting hold of him before we find out just what we have to cope with, and decide how to stamp it out."

Rowe leaned forward earnestly. "Claudia, you have promised to be absolutely candid with me. Why do you think that man broke in here last night? What object had he?"

"I can only think that he must have learned in some way what—what had happened to Niles and—and the location of the room into which he fell," she responded hesitatingly. "I can't imagine how he found it out, but I believe he thought the body was still there and he wanted something—some papers, perhaps—that might be in one of the pockets. In the dark he blundered and entered my room in mistake for the one just above.

"There doesn't seem to be any other explanation, Uncle Matt, and I saw by the way he stopped on the threshold, in the instant before I hurled that jar at him, that he was taken aback at finding himself there. What papers were found on Niles, do you know? Didn't Dr. Jeffreys or that Mr. Dawes look?"

"I searched him first, before even Dr. Van Tuyl saw him," the attorney remarked grimly. "There were no papers of a private nature. But we must make it a point to go thoroughly over his effects when you feel equal to it. We must find out what this thing was which hung over him—if it was a matter of scandal, or worse. Be careful when Dawes comes, child. He is more shrewd than perhaps you give him credit for being. Although you carried off a difficult situation well yesterday, remember that your story may still look a trifle fishy to him in view of the abrupt way Hamersley left you immediately after the ceremony. Your unwavering belief in the explanation he is supposed to have given you and your devotion to his memory are as important to impress on Dawes now as at your first interview—if we are to keep him from discovering the skeleton in the closet!"

Why did Uncle Matt add the last phrase as though there could be any other reason for her deception? There was something in his attitude, just as there had been on the previous day, which she could not understand, but his advice was sound. Much as she detested the rôle she must still pretend, not only to Dawes but to all the world, that her idol had had no feet of clay.

She had forgotten to tell the attorney that Stephen called, and as the optimism with which his visit had inspired her waned with the mounting of her troubles once more, her eyes dulled and the color ebbed from her cheeks. When Dawes came he found the young widow of Niles Hamersley composed, but pensive and wan. She greeted him with an air of bewildered contrition that had every appearance of sincerity.

After giving him her account of the supposed burglar's intrusion and escape, she added:

"Mr. Rowe said I should have called the police at once, but as long as the man had got away and my jewels and the silver were safe, it didn't occur to me to do so. He said Dr. Jeffreys ought to have been notified because the burglar got in through the attic and forced the door, but I didn't even know the doctor had locked it! I—I haven't any idea of the formalities necessary when a terrible thing like this happens."

Dawes dismissed her explanation with a nod.

"There was a light in your room, you say?"

"Yes, a very low one. My old nurse was asleep on the couch at the foot of my bed, and the burglar must have caught sight of her when he stopped; I threw the jar of powder then, and he ran."

Was her tone sufficiently artless? Claudia wondered. The round, ruddy, countenance before her told her nothing, and Uncle Matt had retired to the window, where he stood contemplating from behind the curtains the changing groups of morbid sightseers, as though purposely detaching himself from the present interview.

"What did he look like? How was he

dressed?" Dawes rapped out the questions briskly. "Give me as accurate a description of him as you can, Mrs. Hamersley."

"I'm afraid I can't describe him at all!" Claudia made a little helpless gesture. "He had on some sort of a soft hat, I think, for his face was in shadow, and dark clothing. I couldn't tell whether he was tall or short; my glimpse of him was only momentary."

Dawes's small, twinkling eyes had narrowed in the expression she remembered from yesterday. Could he suspect that she was deliberately vague in her reply? The intruder had actually been small and slight, and he had seemed to bear a general resemblance to the man who had followed from the church. But that might have been due solely to her excited imagination. Claudia could not be sure, but she wished that Dawes would turn that keen, searching glance from her face.

"That is unfortunate." His tone was dry. "When you threw the jar at him, he ran straight downstairs and out the front door?"

"Yes. His footsteps sounded down the stairs, and Annie, too, heard him fumble with the key and chain, and then slam the door after him."

"How many servants do you keep ordinarily, besides Annie and George?"

Claudia looked her surprise at the seeming irrelevancy of the question.

"Only four—the cook, laundress, housemaid and kitchenmaid. I have been living very quietly, you know, but the staff would have been augmented—"

"No men, then, except old George?" he interrupted her brusquely. "Does your chauffeur sleep in the house?"

"Oh, no. John has his own home—" Claudia broke off suddenly. "Surely you don't think—"

"That it was an inside job?" he finished for her, and then at her blank expression he added: "Your 'burglar' was familiar with the house, Mrs. Hamersley, or at least knew how it was laid out inside if he could find his way straight to the front door in the dark. I'll have a look around later, but I want some information from you for the medical examiner's report. How long have you known Mr. Hamersley?"

Claudia braced herself. Had her heart ceased to beat? It felt like a stone in her breast, and the effort to draw her breath was almost pain, but she forced herself to reply:

"Two years."

"Where did he come from originally?"

"He was born in Canada, in some small town up in the Northwest. I—I have forgotten the name." She was aware that Uncle Matt had half turned from the window and was listening intently, but she could not look to him for her cue. There had been no discussion of Niles Hamersley's early history between them, no preparation for this!

"You have the names and addresses of his relatives, however." Dawes spoke authoritatively, as though stating a fact, but Claudia shook her head.

"Mr. Hamersley had none. He told me more than once that he was quite alone in the world."

It was the literal truth, and as she spoke the thought came to her for the first time of how little she really knew of the man she had married. During the long night of suspense following his abrupt departure at the church door she had realized dimly that the life of Niles Hamersley was a sealed book, but now it came home to her in full force. Why had the question never arisen in her mind during their betrothal? Had his personality so blinded her that she had never thought to look back, but only forward into the future which was not to be?

Her heart was thumping heavily once more and she was suddenly conscious of the pause which had followed her reply. Was Dawes purposely waiting for her to volunteer a further statement? She set her lips tightly, and then as though even that slight change of expression had not escaped his notice he spoke.

"What did he tell you of his family? Where was he educated? What was his business? Have you any idea of the value of his estate?"

"He told me very little, and I never asked; it did not occur to me to do so."

Claudia's pride was up in arms at the insistence in his tone. She was still a Langham! How dared this man catechize

her in this manner? Niles Hamersley was dead. His antecedents and his personal affairs were no concern of the authorities, for even the secret thing which hung over his past had nothing to do with the tragic accident that had ended his life.

But Uncle Matt was advancing toward them, and she glanced at him in time to read his warning frown. Arrogance would only breed antagonism, he had said. She must impress this man anew with her utter faith in her husband. Lifting her eyes to his, she continued:

"Mr. Hamersley spoke frequently of his family, of course, in a general way. His father was a younger son who came from England to engage in sheep farming, I believe, but he became interested in mines or oil, and made a fortune. I know nothing about his mother except that she was an American girl, an orphan who came from the Coast somewhere. Mr. Hamersley himself was not a university man; I fancy he obtained his education merely in local schools. I don't think he was ever actively engaged in business. He traded in Wall Street occasionally, but more for amusement, excitement, than anything else. At least, that is what I gathered, for we never discussed financial affairs, and I haven't given a thought to the value of his estate. I don't even know whether he—he made a will or not. Mr. Rowe will have to look into all these matters for me; I cannot fix my mind on them now!"

"Do you know when Mr. Hamersley left Canada, and where he went before coming to New York?"

Dared she tell Dawes the little she knew? Would it be safe? What if the authorities for some reason decided to look up Niles's past? With the resources at their command, would they not be sure to unearth the very thing which she was trying so desperately to keep from the world?

"I couldn't say when he left Canada, but I know that he traveled practically all over the globe; shot big game in India and Africa, fished in Norway and Scotland and Labrador—" Claudia broke off once more, this time with a little catch in her breath. "Surely the medical examiner does not require all this for his report! It—it is inexpressibly painful to me! Mr. Hamersley's friends—he was a member of several exclusive clubs, an intimate associate of the most prominent men in the city—they will be able to tell you all you wish to know!"

"Who was his lawyer?" Dawes turned at last to Matthew Rowe, and the latter responded smoothly:

"I have already taken steps to ascertain that, with a view to the settlement of the estate. I knew Mr. Hamersley very slightly, but of course his reputation, his standing, was all sufficient, and Miss Langham was of age when she decided to contract this marriage. Otherwise I might have considered it expedient to make formal inquiries, but in his case the very thought would have been ridiculous! We must advertise for heirs, as a matter of form, and if we receive any results I will communicate with you."

Dawes shrugged and rose.

"Mr. Hamersley's body will be at your disposal this afternoon," he observed. "The medical examiner has performed the autopsy, and when I get back down town he will be ready to hand in his report. I'll take a look at the attic now, and I want to see George."

Rowe accompanied him from the room, and Claudia sat where they had left her, deep in conjecture. Did his final words mean that this detestable police investigation was over? What had prompted these inquiries into the past if they were satisfied that no cloud hung over her husband that might have led to his deliberate firing of that shot?

Perhaps it was the mere routine of the department, though. Claudia breathed more freely at the thought. Perhaps there remained only to consign the body of Niles Hamersley to the ground with all the dignity befitting one who had married a Langham. Then if that man who had taken him from her at the church should appear again with any ugly reminder of a hidden stain upon his memory, Uncle Matt should deal with the situation.

Dawes departed without further speech with her, and when Matthew Rowe reappeared he had his hat and stick in his hand.

"I must be getting on, Claudia, to make the final arrangements for the funeral. To-morrow will be Saturday, and without any show of indecent haste I think it would be well to have everything over. Are there any special directions you want to give?"

"No." She shuddered, and her voice was very low. "I would rather leave it all in your hands, Uncle Matt. I shall never be able to thank you for what you are doing for me, and I won't try now! You don't know what your counsel and support have meant to me! Now, if we can only bury Niles's past with him—"

"You told all the truth to Dawes just now?" For a moment the attorney held in his the hand she had extended in farewell.

"Did Hamersley really tell you nothing more about himself than that? I have blamed myself a hundred times in the last two days that I did not obtain his history before I permitted you to intrust your life to him, but you had made your choice before you took me into your confidence, my dear."

"I don't believe I would have listened to you!" Claudia shook her head with a sad little smile. "Looking back, it seems as though I had been bewitched; as though a spell were cast over me! It does not appear incredible that I should never even have wanted to know any more about him, but before I met him he had made such an assured place for himself in our world, and his personality was so strong, so dominant, that I did not give a thought to his past.

"I told Mr. Dawes all that I learned from Niles's own lips, except one thing: whatever his estate, he did not inherit it all, but made a great deal in earlier stock speculations in some other city—Chicago, I think. From chance remarks I gathered that he had spent some years in the Middle West, but I did not mention it just now because it came to me that perhaps during those years of this—this shadow settled over his life."

"If you hear anything more about it—if an attempt should be made by that fellow who accosted Hamersley at the church to approach you in any way, send him to me." Matthew Rowe paused in the doorway. "I think we may safely conclude, however, that the worst of your troubles are over."

With a great part of the burden of anxiety lifted from her spirit, Claudia ate the dainty luncheon which Annie prepared, and then allowed herself to be persuaded to lie down. Uncle Matt must be right; if the man Zorn who had called on the previous afternoon was indeed the instrument of Nemesis that had halted Niles there before the church, he could not have known of the tragedy which had taken place so shortly before his coming. But some inkling of it must have reached him while he waited. That would account for his precipitate departure, and if the intrusion during the night had been for the purpose of searching Niles's body, it was surely a final attempt to keep that affair of the past from coming to light. She would only have now to put it from her thoughts forever. When on the morrow her duty to the man whose name she bore should be fulfilled, she would be at peace to take up her life again—

A knock at the door interrupted her musing, and she rose wearily to admit old George. He was trembling with agitation, and his voice had sunk to a hoarse whisper.

"That man is here again, Miss Claudia—the one calling himself Mr. Hugo Zorn. He's more set on seeing you than ever, and Annie said that if you received him I was to ask you to look real close at the clothes he's wearing. She said you'd understand."

Zorn! And Annie suspected him to be the man who had broken in the night before! Her allusion was unmistakable. Had she not declared that the traces of powder from the jar hurled at the intruder would cling, making him a "marked man"?

In a curiously dull, level tone Claudia told George to say that she would receive her visitor. Smoothing her hair mechanically, she descended the stairs with a dragging step. Had Uncle Matt been too sanguine, after all? Was that shadow which only now she had thought banished forever to rise again on her horizon? Would Hugo Zorn prove to be the man she feared?

Going straight to the reception room, she crossed the threshold and advanced a few

paces toward the man, who had risen at her entrance. Then she paused and for a moment they regarded each other. Slight and sallow, with those repulsively red lips and the narrow eyes gleaming like a snake's beneath their heavy lids, the interloper of the church door stood before her, and darker and more sinister than ever the shadow loomed.

CHAPTER X.

HUGO ZORN STRIKES.

"YOU wished to see me? I am Mrs. Hamersley." Claudia stood slim and straight before her visitor, and marveled inwardly at the steady tone of her own voice, for her heart was beating like a triphammer and it seemed pulsing in her ears. "You called yesterday, I believe, but you didn't wait."

"I learned that I had arrived too late." It was that guttural voice she remembered from the church, in that tense moment when he had first addressed Niles. His lip lifted in a smile which disclosed long even teeth of an astonishing whiteness. "I hoped to reach here before your husband returned. I was his friend."

"You brought a message to him at our wedding," Claudia observed without preamble. She had made no move to seat herself, and as her caller remained standing a shaft of sunlight filtering through the lace curtain at the window fell upon his shoulder. In the seam of his otherwise immaculate sack coat a faint thread of dusty white was revealed. Her instinct had not been at fault! It was imperative that this man, even more than the authorities, should believe her version of her last hour with her husband that she had given to the world, yet his very presence sickened her. Let him tell his wretched story of the past and go!

"The account of the dying benefactor given to the papers was most touching, most clever!" Zorn bowed with a little gesture of mock deprecation. "However, there need be no pretense between us, Mrs. Hamersley!"

"Pretense?" Claudia echoed quickly. Here was danger, and she forced a note of surprise in her tone. "But you came from Boston, from poor Mr. Brown. My husband told me—"

"We waste time!" he interrupted, his sallow face darkening. "I know what must have taken place between you when Hamersley came home. He said when he left you there before the church that you'd hate him from that moment. He knew his very look had given him away, and there would not be a chance in a million for him to win you back. I thought that was putting it too strong, for he was always a wizard with women; but you hated him, all right! I never guessed till I came yesterday afternoon, though, how far you might let it carry you!"

Claudia felt a premonitory chill run through her veins. The man's effrontery showed all too clearly that he believed he was the master of the situation. Yet what hold could he have over her? The bond between himself and Niles Hamersley had been severed with the latter's death. If he could be made to think she did not fear its public disclosure he would be checkmated.

"I do not understand. You speak very strangely, Mr. Zorn. Why should I hate my husband?" She hesitated, and then decided to take the initiative. "If it was not true about his ill friend, have you come to tell me why he went away with you and where you took him?"

"That depends!" Again those repulsively red lips parted in a smile of infinite meaning. "That's what I came for yesterday. It's quite a long story, going back some years, and it would have interested a lot of people while Hamersley lived. We're old friends, as I said, and I did a favor for him once; took a mighty big risk, too, but he never was grateful. When I turned up the other day at the time when I thought it would be worth most to him to have that story forgotten, he couldn't see how valuable it was. But I closed the deal with him on his own terms because I figured you would be sensible."

"Blackmail?" Claudia's lip curled, but little specks were dancing before her eyes. What was this dreadful thing which Niles had done?

Zorn shrugged his narrow shoulders.

" Friendship ought to be worth something in this world! I stood ready to be the same friend to you that I was to him; ready, if you showed you appreciated it, to forget that old story—but that was yesterday! Now I can do you a bigger favor even than I did him in old times, Mrs. Hamersley, but I've got to have a fitting return for it, and I know what it's worth."

" Do you think you would be believed if you attempted to malign Mr. Hamersley's memory to the world now?" Claudia asked scornfully. " You are very frank about your business methods, Mr. Zorn! My husband was very ill-advised if he paid you anything to forget some unfortunate episode in his life, for your memory is treacherous. You proved that by trying to reach me yesterday. His past has nothing to do with me, no matter how many other people may be interested in your reminiscences! Did you imagine I would pay you to suppress some old scandal?"

" It would be suppressing evidence now." His eyes had narrowed to mere slits and gleamed evilly, but Claudia was scarcely conscious of their gaze. " Evidence!" What could this dreadful creature mean?

He advanced a step toward her, and his guttural tones lowered. " Do you suppose I haven't doped out how Hamersley died? That excuse for his leaving you could have been easily proved a lie if the police had bothered to find out whether a death certificate was issued in Boston for Henry Brown or not. They thought you'd swallow it, though, and you were a Langham! That's why they've swallowed the rest of your story about the loving reunion yesterday, and the revolver going off accidentally when Hamersley fell through the floor!"

His speech had coarsened, but Claudia took no note of the words themselves. It would be useless, of course, to try to convince him that there had been no break with Niles, but did he doubt the accident with the revolver? Could he believe her husband had committed suicide? Did this old scandal, whatever it was, seem " evidence " of it to him?

" I have listened long enough!" she said haughtily. " If you think that Mr. Hamersley killed himself you must be mad!"

" Killed himself!" Zorn laughed, and there was something in the quality of his voice which made Claudia's nerves crawl. " Even the police wouldn't be fool enough to think that! They might figure, though, that you'd made up that Henry Brown story so's they wouldn't guess there'd been bad blood between you. If they did that, all they'd need would be the motive, and what I could tell them would supply that. Begin to see where I can do you a favor, Mrs. Hamersley?"

Without knowing why, Claudia felt suddenly afraid. Like some evil genius, this man's advent had brought disillusionment, suffering, tragedy into her life. What was he threatening now? But he must not be allowed to see that he had caused her even this disquietude! She shook her head and replied:

" No, Mr. Zorn! I fail to see how anything you could tell the authorities about my husband's past could affect me in any way!"

" You hated him!" The sardonic mask was for a moment laid aside and to her horrified eyes the man's face seemed that of a veritable fiend. " Nobody was ever good enough for you till he hypnotized you the way he did the others, but you married him. And when you found out you'd tied yourself to a man with something in his life that he was afraid of, something that might drag him in the dust and you with him, you hated him worse than death!

" When he came to you yesterday and tried to make you see that you'd have to stick whether you liked it or not—Oh, I know the line he meant to take!—you told him to go! Hamersley wasn't the kind you could get rid of so easy, though, and then you rushed up to the attic for that revolver. He followed you, and you let him have it—and then that rotten old floor gave way under him! The police might have doped this out for themselves, if they knew you hated him, and why. That's all they need for a case against you—the motive!"

" Stop!" Claudia found her voice at last in a low, choking cry. From the instant

his meaning burst upon her consciousness she had tried to silence him, but sheer horror rendered her dumb. Now it gave place to a mounting rage and scorn such as she had not known even when Niles himself stood in her presence stripped of all pretense. Did this blackmailer think to terrorize her with his infamous insinuations? That he would dare carry out his implied threat to go to the authorities with his story was, of course, absurd; but his venturing to approach her at all was an outrage such as she had never dreamed of encountering. She turned to the bell.

"This interview is over. I shall not trouble to reply to you, but if you approach this house again or attempt to molest me in any way, you will be placed under arrest. I should give you in charge now, not only for this effort at blackmail, but for breaking into my home last night!"

She paused as Zorn drew in his breath sharply, but he did not speak, and under her scarifying gaze his sullen eyes wavered and fell. "I do not care, however, to be annoyed by such a petty, sordid matter. Take your story to whomever you will."

"You'd better think this over, Mrs. Hamersley!" He spoke now in a hurried undertone, for George was approaching down the hall. "I've only said what others besides the police may be thinking this minute, even without knowing what I do! I'll give you a couple of days—till Sunday evening, say—then I'll phone you, and if you're wise you'll be ready to talk business with me!"

"George!" Claudia turned without reply. "Mr. Zorn is leaving. Please show him to the door. I am not at home to him again."

She mounted the stairs and, entering her room, closed and locked the door. The very thought of Annie's curious questioning now was unbearable. She wanted to see no one. She felt a strange, repugnant sense of uncleanness, as though she had been breathing poisonous air and come in contact with some noisome thing, and she quivered from head to foot with disgust and loathing.

How had this creature dared to approach her? How dared he! That for a time was all that filled her raging brain. The new name which she bore had become an unspeakable degradation. It was identified with something dishonorable, perhaps even criminal, for the suppression of which she, Drayton Langham's daughter, had been asked for blood money! Writhing under the stigma, no speculation entered her mind at first as to the possible nature of Niles Hamersley's guilt; it was enough that he had placed himself in the power of such a low being as Zorn, and that the latter should imagine his power extended over her also.

As a measure of composure returned to her, however, Claudia found herself wondering with ever-increasing dread what it was which the past held. Would she have been wiser after all to temporize with this blackmailer, to let him tell his story in order that, as Uncle Matt had said, they might know what they had to cope with and decide how to stamp it out?

Yet, except for their own information, of what avail would it be? To prosecute Zorn would only mean precipitating the scandal and the alternative, to stoop to traffic with him, was too utterly shameful to be considered! To be sure, she had placed herself in Uncle Matt's hands and he had directed that if Zorn came to her he was to be sent to him, but Claudia was glad that she had disregarded this dictum.

She had handled the situation for herself, in the only way her pride and self-respect could tolerate, and it would be best for Uncle Matt not to know she had talked with this blackmailer, above all, that he would telephone on Sunday night in a final attempt to force her into an infamous bargain. She would not admit even to herself the suspicion that Uncle Matt might advise some compromise, but she was determined that not one penny should be paid to still Zorn's idle threats. The stain on the name she bore was not of her placing, but she would be forever dishonored in her own sight if she listened for an instant to such a proposition.

Annie came twice to the door, dolefully pleading for admittance, but Claudia sent her away, and until darkness fell paced the floor, still driven by the lash of her indignation. But even Annie and George must

not know, they must not guess the humiliation of soul which the coming of the man Zorn had brought! The old nurse had already surmised that he might have been the intruder of the night before, but neither of them should ever suspect their mistress' marriage had so lowered her as to subject her to an attempt at extortion!

Opening the door at last she permitted Annie to dress her and then descended to the dining room, where she made a pretense of eating the dinner George placed before her. The food choked her, the very air was oppressive, and the old butler's anxious, questioning gaze was almost more than she could endure.

When she arose at length from the table he faltered:

"That man, Miss Claudia—he didn't mean more trouble to you, did he? I told Annie the first time he came that I didn't like his sneaking ways, and now I'm sorry I ever let him in!"

"No, you were quite right, George. He was just a—a crank, with the usual demand that I finance him in some impossible scheme. You—you remember how they used to approach father now and then?" She hesitated and then added hurriedly: "Don't mention his coming to Mr. Rowe. I am giving him enough trouble just now without annoying him over such a small matter and I don't think the man will attempt to see me again. If he should happen to telephone, however, I will give you a message for him."

Had she succeeded in deceiving old George? Claudia shrugged wearily as she made her way once more to her room. She had silenced him, at any rate, and he would never dream the wretched truth. Her bitter resentment had burned down to a dull contempt and she resolved to dismiss the man from her mind. His odious attempt had failed of its object, and his threat had been a mere idle effort at intimidation. The accusation he had made would have been horrible, of course, if it had not been so utterly absurd, but his sole object was to terrorize her. He would never dare make such an insane charge against her.

She dreaded the long night and the thoughts which would come unbidden to bear her company, but almost at once a deadening fatigue overcame her, more mental than physical, and she dropped into a heavy slumber.

Awakened from it after long hours by a bright shaft of moonlight beaming full upon her face, Claudia sat up drowsily and looked about her. Annie was again at her self-appointed post, snoring peacefully on the couch at the bed's foot. Save for her stertorous breathing all was still. Without arousing her, Claudia slipped out of bed and went to the window to draw down the shade, but paused with her hand on the cord.

Who could that be, pacing slowly along the sidewalk just below? There was something familiar in that tall, erect figure and the swinging, easy stride. The night breeze had blown the curtain aside and on a sudden impulse Claudia leaned slightly from the opened window and watched the figure as it passed on a few yards toward the avenue, then wheeled with almost military precision and started back still at that measured pace.

Who was he? Claudia drew a little quivering breath and a gentle, warm glow settled about her heart. In a minute he would come within the radius of the street lamp, she would see his face! He was no nocturnal stroller; that even, firm tread denoted purpose and there was something alert and watchful in the quick turn of his head as he scanned the house.

There! He had entered the circle of light, he was lifting his face, looking straight toward her window. Claudia drew back hastily, blushing in the semidarkness.

It was Stephen! When she told him of her previous night's experience he had said that she was not safe there with only George and Annie, and now he had constituted himself her protector! Believing perhaps that she would never even know, he was patrolling her house, on guard! Dear, loyal Stevie! He had reminded her during that memorable interview when she disregarded his warning, that they had as children played at being brother and sister. He was proving himself a brother indeed now!

A feeling of peace and security stole over her, a blessed sense of relaxation as though a healing touch had come to her bruised spirit, and Claudia crept into bed once more,

a tender hint of a smile curving her pale lips. Stephen was watching. No harm could come to her now! Swiftly, softly, as though to a little child, sleep descended upon her.

CHAPTER XI.

IN HALLOWED GROUND.

CLAUDIA awakened refreshed and more calm than in all those torturing three days. There seemed an added oppression in the silence which brooded over the house, a solemn hush as though time itself stood still awaiting an impending event. But remembrance came to her with a sharp pang only when Annie, thin-lipped and long of countenance, laid over a chair a new black gown of such elaborate mode as to appear frivolous despite its streamers of crape.

The funeral! Niles Hamersley, after a life whose vicissitudes might be only conjectured and whose controlling impulses for good and evil must now remain forever shrouded in mystery, was to receive that morning the final honors due to the memory which the world would hold of him, and then would lie in hallowed ground. How strange it still seemed that she could contemplate the momentous fact with no other emotion than the aftermath of horror from having witnessed the tragedy of his death!

The sense of change, of transition, the realization of a need for readjustment to meet the exigencies of the immediate future, until she might close the house for a time and take Annie to some quiet retreat—yet how could she think of these things with the hour of mental travail before her?

"Did you order this gown, Annie?" she asked as the old woman stood in eloquent silence waiting for a comment.

"Does it look's if I had?" Annie sniffed. "Mr. Rowe said everything was to be left to him and I wasn't to bother you with a question. He got your measurements from me yesterday. That Mrs. Yates who called on you picked it out for him, together with your hat and veil, and I must say, Miss Claudia, if he'd left it to me—"

"'Mrs. Yates'!" Claudia repeated, annoyed. Why did that commonplace, underbred climber intrude in her affairs at this time, usurping the privilege of the most intimate of friends?

Friends! But she had none, of her own sex! The thought came to Claudia with an odd little shock. She had always held aloof from the overtures of the girls of her own set toward a closer relationship than the conventional demands of society entailed, sufficient to herself. Now it had devolved upon this outsider to render her a service which must be acknowledged by the social sponsorship for which the woman was evidently angling.

What could Uncle Matt have been thinking of to place her in such a position? Yet who of her own innermost circle had come to her in this hour? Of course Mrs. Sears Edgett and the rest had been too well-bred to force themselves upon her. They hadn't ventured to intrude upon her supposed grief, but—could there have been another reason? Had "others," as the unspeakable Zorn insinuated, found food for conjecture in the details of the tragedy and discreetly awaited the course of events?

She—Claudia Langham—needed no one! A proud little smile curved her lips even while she shrugged in distaste at the gown. She would live down the sensation caused by her sudden widowhood and go on supreme in her position, requiring no sycophantic friendships!

"There, Miss Claudia! It's the loudest looking mourning ever I see, but I s'pose it 'll have to do for now!" Annie shook her head dubiously at the result of her handiwork. "Everything's ready for the services in the drawing room, and though Mr. Rowe wanted the funeral private there's a mass of flowers come."

Everything was ready! While she slept Niles must have been brought back for the last time to the house which was to have received him as master! A short hour, and it would be purged forever of his presence! But Annie had continued garrulously:

"You'll need a secretary to answer all the letters and cards that's been sent, but folks haven't called the way they did when your father died. I only hope they'll leave you

in peace when everything's over so's you can rest, deary, and forget this terrible time. But it 'll be a queer funeral to be held under this roof!"

Unconsciously she had touched upon Claudia's earlier thought and the innocent comment carried with it a sting. So even her old nurse had noted the aloof bearing of society! Not for worlds would she acknowledge herself aware of it also, and Claudia replied quickly:

"Mr. Rowe was right, of course; the services cannot be conducted too quietly. Has —has any one telephoned?"

A swift remembrance had come of the solitary watcher on guard during the night hours and Annie replied as though to the thought.

"Only Mr. Stephen. He just wanted to know how you felt and if there was anything he could do, but not to disturb you. There, that's Mr. Rowe's ring. He said for you to wait upstairs till he sent word to you."

The doorbell rang almost continuously during the moments that followed and the subdued stir which ensued penetrated even the seclusion of her room. Claudia had wandered once to the window, but drawn back hastily at sight of the gathering knot of people below and the time seemed interminable before at last Uncle Matt's summons came.

The heavy, dank odor of many flowers rose in a stifling wave to the very stair's head and she fought back a physical qualm as she descended to meet the attorney. Could it be only three days since Uncle Matt had waited there to escort her to a far different ceremony? It seemed that years of soul searching torture had passed over her head in that brief interim and she greeted him with a little, wavering smile as he tucked her hand within his arm.

"You feel better, Claudia—stronger?" he asked solicitously. "This will be the final effort, my dear; the final demand upon your self-control."

"I know, Uncle Matt; I am ready." She darted a glance at the drawing-room door. "Who is here?"

"Only a few of Hamersley's associates and fellow club members. They wished to attend, and I thought it a gracious move, in the absence of relatives," he replied in a quick undertone. "I will be at your side, of course, and unless you wish to approach the casket—"

Claudia shivered.

"No, Uncle Matt! I am not insensible—not dead to all feeling! It is just that I—I do not want to see his face again."

He nodded in silent comprehension, but why did he look at her so curiously, with that odd intensity of gaze? The impression passed from her mind the next moment, however, for they had crossed the threshold of the drawing-room and she braced herself for the ordeal confronting her. There were familiar faces among the group of men who had risen at her entrance and the minister who stood waiting to begin the service was the same dignitary of that ceremony three days before, and yet she was scarcely conscious of their presence.

Her gaze was fixed upon the casket banked with flowers, but once more that sense of unreality pervaded her and she walked as though in a dream. It was all like a scene in which she, Claudia Langham, must play a part, but which held for her no poignant significance.

The minister was speaking now, but his subdued intoning of the solemn words seemed to come from far away and with an effort she forced her numbed brain to follow.

". . . He that believeth—yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth—shall never die."

So short a time had passed since she had repeated after that same rich, mellow voice her promise "Till death us do part." It was strange how the words of that other service should return now to mingle with this ritual of even greater solemnity! How soon that promise had become an empty thing, the words ashes in her mouth! Why had no premonition come to her with that exhortation at the beginning of the ceremony: "If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

There in the body of the church had sat the man with knowledge of a cause, moral

if not legal, which made of that marriage an unholy mockery, and he had held his peace until too late! Why had no intuition warned her of the presence of that enemy who was so quickly to destroy her happiness? Yet had he not really been an instrument of the fate which seemed to be watching over her? With this evil thing ready to rear its head from the past at any day, any hour, his warning of it had come in time to spare her the shame of being wife in anything but name to the man now lying dead before her.

The minister's voice seemed to have droned on interminably and now once more snatches of phrase were borne in upon her thoughts.

"I am a stranger with thee and a sojourner; as all my fathers were.

"Oh, spare me a little, that I may recover my strength—"

She would be strong! The memory of her father and those who had gone before her had upheld her through all the horror of the past tragic days, the sacred duty to the traditions of her family and the spotlessness of their name had been ever before her and so far she had not failed! The end was near; she would find strength to go on!

As the service continued Claudia still sat motionless with bowed head and her tearless eyes veiled. Beside her, Matthew Rowe cleared his throat in subdued fashion and now and then a slight stir of movement came as one or another of those who had counted themselves Niles Hamersley's friends shifted his position, but over all that measured intoning went on.

". . . Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust—"

The words pierced her consciousness with a swift, terrible reminder, and an uncontrollable shudder swept her slender frame. Dust! The man who had wronged her by placing upon her the stigma of his own clouded name was mere dust now, like that other dust which had risen with his fall to settle again upon him as he lay below!

Would that hideous scene ever fade from her memory? A little, faint sound between a sigh and a moan came to her ears. Could it be that she herself had uttered it?

Claudia caught her lip between her teeth and her eyelids fluttered as she suppressed the impulse to glance up and meet Uncle Matt's gaze. It was upon her, she knew, she could feel it, but it was not wholly in anxious solicitude; she was conscious again of that dispassionate, almost alien curiosity which prompted him, even without meeting his eyes. What could be the question in his mind about her? Was he amazed at the rein she had been able to keep over her emotions, at the self-control she had displayed? Surely he might have expected it.

He should rather have been astonished had she failed when the test came, suddenly and dreadfully as it had confronted her. Yet why else was he studying her so closely that not even that little shudder and gasp of remembered horror had escaped him? It was a return of that incomprehensible attitude of yesterday, and she found it vaguely disturbing.

The service drew to a close at last, with a final prayer, and as Claudia rose and placed her hand on Matthew Rowe's arm the clergyman approached. She listened to his few, well chosen words gravely, with a stony, dazed expression in the eyes she raised to his, which seemed to denote a depth of grief beyond tears, and her low tone when she murmured a response quivered without her conscious volition.

She did not know what reply she had made, nor realize that he had left her, given place to several of the older men who had come to do honor to Niles Hamersley's memory. All of them had known her father, some of them had been accounted his friends, and now as they clasped her hand in wordless sympathy before taking their leave she found herself actually fighting for composure.

The service was over, that solemn intoning had ceased, and Claudia was all but overcome with the desire to get away. Anywhere, out of that room, where the vivid, clashing reds and purples of the banked flowers jarred upon her vision with almost physical pain, and their mingled scents caught sickeningly in her throat; away from the casket and that face which she must look upon again if she advanced a step or two nearer.

He could not harm her now; he was as the dust to which he would so soon return; but the very sight of his features, even though composed and aloof in death, would recall a host of memories that must be put from her forever if she were to regain the pride that was her birthright. His very presence in the house of her forefathers seemed a profanation, its nearness to her now a horror unspeakable.

Blindly she turned to the door, her fingers unconsciously tightening on the attorney's arm. When they reached the hall she drew a deep, tremulous breath.

"You were splendid, my dear; your manner was perfect!" Matthew Rowe spoke in low, reassuring tones. "Was it too great a strain, though? Do you feel equal to the trip to the cemetery? I must warn you that we will in all probability be trailed out by reporters and find more of them on hand when we reach Greenlawn. Although for that very reason your presence would be advisable, I can represent you if you are too ill—"

Claudia shook her head.

"I'm not ill, Uncle Matt, and I must go, of course. Did you think I would hesitate at this last public duty after enduring so much? The reporters, I suppose, are a necessary evil, and surely they won't attempt to approach me?"

"No. They will try to get snapshots, perhaps, but you will have your veil. Wait in your room, and I will send word up to you when everything is arranged to start."

Annie was waiting to adjust the incongruously chic little toque with its heavy, flowing folds of crape and in its frame the girl's small, colorless face looked singularly immature, almost childlike, except for the suffering that brooded in her deeply shadowed eyes. Claudia gave one shrinking glance at the mirror, and then turned away; Niles Hamersley had brought even this upon her—that she must make a mockery of the conventional manifestation of mourning! He was gone, but for many days she must masquerade in this profane travesty of grief, and in so far he could still reach out from the grave and assert his claim upon her.

But was that all? Might there not be still some way in which, although dead, he could prove a menace to the future? A sudden qualm, almost premonitory in its unheralded coming, struck deep into her spirit. The man Zorn had found his sordid merchandise unsalable to her; if, then, he was no longer a factor to be reckoned with and the cloud from the past disappeared wholly from her horizon, could further suffering come, in some for as yet undreamed of, from her brief, tragically ended infatuation?

But this was morbid, absurd? Were her nerves getting the better of her now when the worst was over? Claudia lifted her head defiantly beneath its burden of crape. What power had Niles Hamersley to injure her now?

As though in reassuring answer to her thought, the subdued, heavy tramp of feet walking in measured unison reached her from the floor below, and she heard them pass out of the front door. Her heart missed a beat, and then raced on as if a restricting band had been loosened from it, for that slow march meant only one thing—that dreaded presence had been removed from her house and never could its shadow loom again upon the threshold.

Matthew Rowe sent for her almost at once, and she drew her veil as a screening mantel before her face while they descended to the waiting car.

In spite of the assiduity of several plain-clothes men, cameras were leveled at her from every discreet point of vantage, and as the attorney had predicted, more than one machine trailed after theirs when they set forth.

The hot noon sun beat down relentlessly upon the closed car as it proceeded at a snail's pace behind the sable draped vehicle leading the way, and Matthew Rowe frankly mopped his forehead, panting in the ovenlike atmosphere, but Claudia was scarcely conscious of it. Slim and white and motionless she sat beside him, immune to any mere physical impression in the lethargy which had stolen once more over her spirit. Just to endure passively until this hour was done! Not to think, to feel, but to move mechanically through this last phase of her task and then to relax, forget!

Her companion ventured a tentative remark or two, but he met with slight response and a silence lapsed between them until they entered the great gates of the cemetery and followed a winding drive to the waiting grave, a little apart from the others in the Langham inclosure. The first glimpse of it roused Claudia with a little shock from her apathy; the man who had brought a hidden shame and disgrace upon her must intrude even in this hallowed domain, his dust would in the fullness of time mingle with that of her honored dead!

It was fitting and proper, of course, in the eyes of the world, that this place should be accorded to her husband, but abhorrent that dissimulation must enter even here! She was not aware that her change of expression had been noted by Uncle Matt until his hand touched her arm in mute caution and she hastily drew down her veil once more as they alighted.

Several individuals loitered about in the vicinity, seemingly absorbed in contemplation of the adjacent monuments, but none ventured to draw near and in an incredibly short space of time the last act of that morning's drama was over.

With bowed head Claudia stood beside the attorney, his arm cradling hers with every evidence of paternal consolation, but all feeling seemed dead within her as she watched the casket lowered into the grave and heard the earth fall upon it in dull thumps. It was only when from each spadeful a faint puff of dust arose like a sighing breath, to hang motionless upon the still air and slowly disappear, that she quivered in a return of the horror that had overwhelmed her at the moment of tragedy. But soon the mound was heaped with flowers. It was the end.

Could she pray for him? The impulse came, but her own spirit was too far from the humility of prayer, and after standing for a moment longer in silent contemplation of the grave she permitted Uncle Matt to lead her back to her car.

The homeward drive seemed far shorter, for John tactfully accelerated their speed, and both she and her companion were sensible of a reaction from the tension that had held them on the outward way.

"Don't let the reporters annoy you, Claudia. I'll give out any necessary statements to the press, and people won't begin to call for some little time yet." Matthew Rowe took off his hat and ran his fingers through his shock of iron gray hair. "You needn't see them when they do, of course, but it won't be wise to remain in seclusion too long."

"Why not?" Claudia asked, the little edge of her tone betraying unguarded nerves. "I denied myself to every one for more than a year after father died—"

"And there were whispers about your—eccentricity," the attorney interrupted, to end his sentence with an odd hesitation.

Claudia shrugged.

"Does that matter?" There was an unconscious note of hauteur in her tone. "Surely my life is my own now! Must I consider the idle whispering of a society which will grovel for invitations when I throw open my doors again?"

"You've considered nothing else for the past three days!" Matthew Rowe spoke with sudden asperity. "Your life is not yours alone. It belongs to society as well, whether you are Claudia Langham or Judy O'Grady! Niles Hamersley's death has created a sensation, remember; it will die down, but it won't be forgotten. If you deny yourself to society too long, whispers will be rife that perhaps you are not actuated alone by grief over your bereavement; that after all there was something more in his desertion of you before the church than you admitted, something more in that last interview between you two, than has ever been known to the world. Forgive me for speaking plainly, my dear, but you must realize that the end is not yet."

"I shall do everything that convention demands of me as—as the widow of Niles Hamersley," Claudia responded coldly. "Beyond that I refuse to allow this hideous affair to affect the future!"

The attorney shook his head slowly, but he made no reply and there was silence between them until they reached the house once more. There Claudia left him in the library while she went to her room to remove her hat and veil. When she descended he was standing by a seldom used book-

case in a corner, absorbed in the pages of an old volume which he had taken from the top shelf.

He gave a slight start on seeing her, for her soft footfalls had made no sound on the deep pile of the rugs. Replacing the book he advanced, dusting his hands lightly.

"You will lunch with me, Uncle Matt?" Claudia asked.

"Thanks, no, my dear. I have a number of things to see to, and you should rest. If anything occurs that you want to consult me about call me up at my rooms without delay; my man will know where you can reach me at every hour—" He paused and then went on with deepened gravity: "Remember, Claudia, to let me hear from you without fail if you should be annoyed in any way."

Should she tell him about Zorn? But, no. She had closed that episode, or would, if the man telephoned on the following evening, and Uncle Matt would look upon his attempt at blackmail as only another reason to be subservient to public opinion!

"I will call on you, of course, if I need you." She gave him her hand. "You have been my mainstay through all this dreadful time, Uncle Matt, and no father could have done more! I can never repay your wonderful kindness and thoughtfulness!"

"You can by heeding my counsel now, Claudia!" he responded. "Don't underestimate the intelligence of others. That's the big mistake made by those with something to conceal. The danger—of scandal—has not been stamped out; it is still smoldering, and the least breath of gossip will fan it into flame. I am not an alarmist, but I cannot caution you too earnestly to be on your guard!"

He was gone, and Claudia paced the floor in puzzled thought. What could Uncle Matt have meant? From the moment when he came to her after examining Niles Hamersley's body there had been something in his manner strangely at variance with his usual frank, whole-hearted cordiality; something watchful and repressed, almost suspicious, as though he doubted her word.

It had been there when he first questioned her about the revolver and then coached her in the account she must give of her husband's last hours, and had seemed intensified during the interviews with the official Dawes. She remembered, too, how he had studied her as if waiting to catch her in some look or word that would tell him more than she had divulged.

What could he imagine she was concealing from him? Why had he cautioned her with such desperate earnestness to be on her guard? Did he fear further trouble from the man Zorn—

Claudia stopped suddenly, swaying, and caught at a chair back for support as a horror greater than any she had known surged over her. *He believed she had shot Niles Hamersley!* The thought of Zorn had recalled his accusation and the warning that he was only putting into words what others might be thinking. Uncle Matt was one of those others, he believed her to be a murderess, yet loyally he had come to her rescue, concocting a story to hoodwink the authorities and strengthening the circumstantial evidence of it by himself placing the cartridges and cleaning cloth where they would appear to corroborate it.

Dull hammers seemed beating in her ears and she felt herself choking, fighting for breath as though struggling to throw off some invisible and terrible enemy, but her brain, awake now to the enormity of the attorney's suspicion, raced back over every moment she had spent in his presence since the tragedy and found only confirmation in his attitude.

Even to-day he had cautioned her not to give occasion for whispers that there was "something more in that last interview than had ever been known to the world." He had spoken, too, of comment on her past "eccentricity." Did he mean that people had questioned her sanity? He had known her all her life, and surely he could believe her capable of murder only in a moment of madness! Was that indeed his conclusion, and why, in spite of his rigid code, he had created false evidence in order to shield her?

Claudia had halted before the old bookcase in which he had with such covert haste replaced the volume he was consulting at her entrance. It contained only old treatises on various semiscientific subjects which had interested her father from time to

time and she had never examined them, but now on a sudden impulse she reached up to the top shelf for the volume that had engaged Matthew Rowe's attention. It was entitled: "Primal Manifestations of Mental Disorder."

Steadying her reeling senses under this fresh shock she examined it mechanically, then glanced in haste at the other volumes on the shelf. The one she held in her hand was the only one touching on insanity in any phase and—it was the only one free from dust! The backs of the others had been scrupulously cleaned, but in the long years they remained undisturbed a delicate film had accumulated on their tops.

Uncle Matt had made quick use of the few minutes she had spent upstairs! Claudia could see him taking down that book, blowing away the crumbled particles gathered upon it by time and decay and hurriedly turning the pages for some reference he remembered, some reference in connection with his dreadful suspicion of her! Her father had never mentioned an interest in mental disorders and the very presence of this book in the house was a surprise to her, but all other thought was lost before the hideous fact confronting her. Uncle Matt believed that she was mad, and while in this condition had taken the life of her husband!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

LIGHT

OH, light has ways as soft as silk,
And ways as hard as steel;
Moon-water, lying white as milk
Beneath the sky-boat's keel,
Or sunshine on the city streets
That harsher than brass cymbals beats.

There's light across a bird's gay wing,
And green light in a tree,
And changing, opal lights that fling
A net around the sea,
And cool, blue light on hidden lakes,
Just as the world to dawn-time wakes.

Light goes on little, purple shoes
Across high drifts of snow,
And light itself in light does lose
Where sunny gardens grow,
And light as secret as the skies
Hides long in the beloved's eyes.

Faith Baldwin.

Etiquette and Addison Utley

By CHARLES DIVINE

ADDISON UTLEY let his gaze wander out of the window and down the tree-lined residential street toward the city's twelve-storied skyscrapers. He had done it a thousand times before and always with the same gleam in his eyes. But he didn't see the rooftops. He saw instead the imposing figure of Thomas A. Nevins of Nevins & Company telling him, with one hand chummily on his shoulder: "Mr. Utley, that promotion is yours at last. For a long while I have hesitated between you and Whipple, but now my mind is made up. You're the man for the job. And a substantial raise goes with it!"

"Addie, dear, your breakfast is getting cold." The voice of young Mrs. Utley crashed through his dream—not that it was the sort of voice that crashed—it was low, throaty, and sweet—but the words it uttered at this juncture brought him back with a bounce from Utopia to toast. "Still thinking about that job?"

"Uh-huh."

"You mustn't worry about it too much, or you'll get sick."

"Can't help it."

"Eat your breakfast, or I'll think you don't like my cooking."

He answered her pleasantly across the table. The Utleys had been married three years, and yet they could smile at each other at breakfast. More than that, Addison Utley could get up from his chair, as he did now, and walk around to his wife with a half-bitten piece of toast in one

hand and kiss her on the cheek just below her chestnut-colored hair. He went back to his chair with his eyes shining brightly.

"I'd like your cooking in hell."

"Addie! Is that a tribute?"

"Of course, dear. I mean that the way you get up dishes is so nice that they could even make me forget the discomforts of that over heated region I mentioned."

"Thanks."

For a moment silence fell between them, except for the crackle of toast between energetic masculine teeth. In the street outside the apartment house the noise of passing automobiles testified to the number of business men starting for their offices, while a block away rumbled surface cars carrying factory workers to other doors. Eastlawn was now one of the biggest cities up State. And although it lay two hundred miles from New York, it began to display a metropolitan air of its own. Office buildings emptied a horde of stenographers over the sidewalks at noon, banks belched a crowd of bright looking young men in the right collars, and people got knocked down by automobiles in the streets. Eastlawn was important commercially. After a period of depression in its industrial life it had returned, as its Chamber of Commerce pointed out, to ninety-nine per cent normal. Nevins & Company shared in this revival, as Mr. Utley well knew. His reflections were again interrupted by his wife.

"Oh, Addie, you're terrible!"

He looked up surprised.

"What—what's the matter?"

"Your spoon in the coffee cup. You ought to keep it in your saucer."

"Yes, dear." He transferred the spoon to its proper place, sipped a mouthful of the hot coffee, and, finding that it wasn't quite sweet enough to suit him, proceeded to help himself to more sugar. The action brought another protest from his wife.

"Addie! How many times have I spoken to you about not putting your wet spoon in the sugar bowl! It leaves hard lumps in it. Lumps that look like—like reefs."

"Reefs!" he echoed. "I'm sorry."

"I'll have to get you a book about table etiquette, I guess. I saw one in Mrs. Abbott's apartment."

"Am I a lunkhead, Laura?" He paused. "I was born on a farm, you know, and I guess—" His well shaped head, poised lightly on sturdy shoulders, nodded with what was intended to be mock solemnity; but his wife sensed a real perturbation underlying it— "yes, I'm a lunkhead all right."

"No, you aren't either. You're a dear, and I like you. There's a friendly, homely air about you, Addie—like a stove in a country store."

His large, frank eyes looked at her, uncertain.

"Thanks for the compliment. I won't quarrel with you. Anybody who'd quarrel with you, Laura, would be a brute. And I'll try to remember about the sugar bowl and the—the reefs. I think that was the nautical term you used. I don't want our happiness to be shipwrecked on any reefs like that. Eh?"

"It really is more important than you think."

He pushed back his chair.

"More important to Mr. Nevins than my getting to work on time?"

"Yes, but what if he should invite you to dinner at his house."

"No danger! He only dines with Senators and his wife's high society friends--- Laura, I don't see any toothpicks on the table this morning."

"Addie!"

He caught the look of distress at once.

"Well, now, if you don't like common wooden toothpicks I'll get some of those little individual quill toothpicks, each one wrapped up in a little paper envelope. They're nice enough to have right on the table!"

"Oh, Addie!" She rose from her chair. "You're almost hopeless."

She stood at the window looking out into the street. From where he sat swallowing the last mouthful of coffee he could see the graceful lines of her figure.

"Don't worry me at meals, dear. I've got enough trouble as it is, keeping up with Mr. Nevins's expectations of what a young man should be in his office. And Whipple's after the new department job too."

She turned back from the window.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to keep nagging at you all the time."

"Oh, you're all right, Laura." He rose and went to the closet for his hat. "Only you remind me of the show we saw in New York last winter. Remember? The fellow who said his wife was his best pal and severest critic?"

"Am I as bad as that? And platitudinous, too?"

He gave her a quizzical look.

"Plata—*what?* Now, Laura, what does the etiquette book say about swallowing the dictionary at the table!"

He gave her a pat on the shoulder, as gently as a bear, and kissed her on the lips. Then he hurried into the street.

She walked to the sun parlor and watched him turn the corner. A grave expression came to her eyes. Addie didn't have the polish of a lot of other men—men who ran good businesses in Eastlawn and belonged to the country club and lived in houses of their own and entertained a great deal. But he was a fine fellow just the same! He was honest as the day is long, she told herself, and his heart was in the right place. If she had it to do over again she would marry him as quick as a wink! And success and a better home would come to them soon. Perhaps Mr. Nevins would decide to put him in charge of the selling department before he went away on his summer vacation. And then they could afford to have a maid.

She went back to the dining room and began clearing away the dishes. After the kitchen work was done she set about ironing one of her husband's shirts—the laundry always ruined them! After lunch she had some leisure which she spent first with one of the new novels and later with one of the neighbors. Then, at five o'clock, the door burst open and Mr. Utley came back from the office. But he came back flushed and excited. She could see that at once.

"It's happened!" he exclaimed, pausing in the center of the living room.

She caught her breath.

"What? The promotion?"

"No. Mr. Nevins's dinner. He's invited us for Thursday night."

"Oh, Addie, that's fine. That means you'll get the job—if you don't spoil your chances with the Nevins's cutlery," she concluded teasingly. "The Nevins's dinners are as formal, I hear, as any in town. Mrs. Nevins is decidedly *comme il faut.*"

Mr. Utley nodded solemnly.

"Yes, that's what Mr. Nevins gave me to understand, though he didn't say it in highfaluting French."

"Tell me all about it. I'm terribly interested, Addie. How did it happen?"

Mr. Utley flung himself into a chair, as if the tale were so miraculous that he couldn't support a recital of it standing. He sighed and began:

"Well, first Mr. Nevins sat in his private office. He pushed the button under his desk and Jimmy came—"

"I know, that supercilious boy. But go on—what did he say?"

"He said: 'Mr. Nevins wants to see you, sir.'"

"I mean what did Mr. Nevins say."

"He said: "Jimmy, tell Mr. Utley I want to see him.'"

"Oh, Addie! You're deliberately tantalizing me. Tell me what Mr. Nevins said to *you.*"

"He said: 'Utley, Mrs. Nevins and I would like to have the pleasure of your company and your wife's at dinner this week. Would Thursday suit you?' And I said something finally, I guess."

"I should hope so."

"Anyway, it was decided, and he added: 'We always dress for dinner at our place, Utley.' And I said: Yes, sir in a kind of a daze and backed out of the office right into two stenographers! My dinner coat must be in fine shape, in the bottom of that old trunk!"

"No, it's all right. It's old but it will do. I got it out a couple months ago and pressed it and hung it up in the bedroom closet."

"Laura, you're a wonder."

"Your *clothes* are all right," she said with special emphasis.

"You mean the clothes will do if I will."

She faced him gravely.

"That's about the size of it, dear. This is one time when you've got to mind your

p's and q's and soup spoons. Mr. Nevins probably makes a social test of the men he intends raising to high office in his company. And I don't want you to fall down."

"Neither do I."

"The dinner is Thursday and this is Tuesday night. You have two evenings to prepare yourself. Over there by the davenport you'll find a book on table etiquette and some pamphlets. Sit down, dear, and improve yourself while I go in the kitchen and get dinner ready."

"Golly! You work fast."

He moved over to the davenport and took up the literature she had indicated.

"I borrowed them from Mrs. Abbot upstairs."

Mr. Utley reflected, not on the pages open in front of him, but on a vision far outside the window.

"Wouldn't Whipple be surprised if he knew old Nevins had invited me to dinner! Eh, Laura?"

"Mr. Whipple would probably know what to do if he were invited. He's evidently quite a polished young man."

"H'm-m-m," mused Mr. Utley, "I suppose he is. And he belongs to the country club. But then he hasn't any wife to support. If I were single I could afford to be a member down there, too."

Mrs. Utley paused in the door.

"Am I a handicap, Addie?"

"No, no." He looked up abruptly. "I didn't say that at all. You're not a handicap; you're an angel."

She smiled and turned toward the kitchen.

"And even angels have to get food for their husbands. Go on, read the book, Addie. If there's anything you don't understand, ask me."

Mr. Utley, alone with the literature of "The Correct Thing to Do." knit his brows over its pages. He was still grappling with its conventions when his wife called him to dinner and told him to bring the book along.

"I've set the table with extra forks and spoons to-night, as if we were having a course dinner, so you'll get used to them. The soup spoon's on the outside—no, not that one, the next one. You always work from the outside in toward your plate with cutlery. Remember that, it's easy."

He tried to smile at her.

"Yes, my love."

She found many things to correct in his endeavor to follow the book. At one time he said:

"I don't see what's wrong with this picture."

"Look at the man," she returned, indicating the gentleman in the illustration. "He's picking up a fork that fell on the floor."

"Well, that's better than leaving it there for the waiter to step on, isn't it?"

"He should leave it for the waiter to pick up. The book tells you that."

At length he flipped the pages rapidly, in a mood of despair.

"Great Scott! If a man did all the things it says here, eating wouldn't be any fun any more."

II.

THE next day at the office Mr. Utley learned that he hadn't been singled out for exclusive favor at the Nevins's table. Whipple had also been invited, but for Wednesday evening not Thursday. A good looking young man, with sleek black hair, he paused at the door of Mr. Utley's little office and let the other know of his engagement.

"If I'm late at the office to-morrow morning, old top, you'll know it's because I've run away with Mrs. Nevins's pearl necklace. It's from Fifth Avenue, you know." He passed on, humming, "Yes, We Have No Bananas To-day."

Mr. Utley couldn't help but notice how coolly Whipple took the affair. As for himself, Mr. Utley was quaking. One night more and he would be sitting in the Nevins's dining room in his turn—and he dreaded it. When he got home he confessed his qualms to his wife.

"It will be an ordeal, every minute of it. What'll I say to Mrs. Nevins if she speaks to me."

"Anything that's gracious. Or you can discuss the civic club's movement to improve the river banks—she's interested in that—or the trend of modern poetry—but,

don't worry, dear, I'll take over that subject. I'll keep her busy talking to me. I've followed her hobbies in the newspaper. You can talk to Mr. Nevins. You won't mind that, will you?"

"Well, that's bad enough. You see, I've never dared talk to him about anything except bolts and shafts. Outside the office he may want to talk about foreign politics —and I don't know a Soviet from a Fascisti —or whatever it is. I'll keep him on bolts and shafts, I guess. I'm safe there, and, besides, I've got some new ideas along those lines."

"Not too much business," cautioned his wife. "Let him take the lead, and follow him. And follow his table etiquette. Watch his knives and forks, and do the same."

Mr. Utley groaned.

"I wish they had never been invented!"

III.

THE evening of the dinner found Mr. Utley hot and uncomfortable.

"I hate dress clothes," he complained to his wife as he stood in front of his mirror and tried to tell himself that he was perfectly clad.

"Lots of men like to get in dinner clothes at night. My brother used to say there was something about them that made you feel different."

"He was right," returned Mr. Utley, twisting his head, "especially around the neck. This collar has the feeling of a monkey wrench."

"You must be getting stout, Addie."

"No, I'm thin to what I was. Worrying too much, I guess."

"Are you ready, dear?"

"I suppose so," he replied reluctantly. "As ready as I ever will be."

"Then 'phone for a taxi."

Half an hour later a taxicab deposited the Utleys at the porte-cochère of the Nevins's palatial home. Mr. Utley was somewhat relieved by the aplomb and grace with which his wife carried them along, from vestibule to drawing-room and thence to the wainscoted dining room with its huge crystal chandelier, a relic of an older day. Mr. Nevins apparently was as much at home in his dinner clothes as in his private office, and his wife, a large, elegantly garbed woman, conducted herself like an actress in a drama of royalty. The pearl necklace was a knockout! Mr. Utley could see that. Moreover, it was genuine, which was more than he could say of her conversation. How anybody could speak in that affected tone and enjoy it was more than he could understand! She didn't act natural at all.

"She may be worth her weight in gold," he thought, "but I wouldn't trade Laura's little finger for the whole kit and caboodle of her!"

Suddenly he wondered why Mrs. Nevins looked at him so sharply. What was wrong with his soup? He wasn't making any noise with it, and he was careful to put the point of the spoon in his mouth without spilling any of its contents.

He glanced across at Mr. Nevins and found him smiling. The smile vanished at once. Mr. Utley wondered if he had imagined it. He watched surreptitiously and saw that Mr. Nevins was employing his spoon from the side. So was Mrs. Nevins. That was it! Of course, he should have known better.

The maid took away their plates.

"Poor Russia is in a deplorable state," said Mrs. Nevins.

Mr. Utley turned in his chair to look after the maid, thinking at first that it was of her Mrs. Nevins had spoken. He caught a warning glance from his wife. She seemed to say: "Keep your wits about you!" He grew flustered and took refuge in buttering another roll, though he still had a remnant of the first one on his butter plate. Then he discovered that on the latter reposed two knives, both the butter knife and a larger one, each of which he had used. He made the discovery at the same time that Mr. and Mrs Nevins seemed to have made it. Mrs. Nevins's lips settled in a thinner line. Mr. Nevins's mouth widened, as if with amusement. Mr. Utley snatched the bigger knife away from the butter plate, where it didn't belong, but in his haste he miscalculated and it fell rattling to the floor. He grew red.

"I mustn't pick it up," he thought. "I

mustn't pick it up." Yet he felt that he ought to cover his fault with something.

"I used to play mumblety-peg when I was a kid," he remarked in explanation to Mr. Nevins. Mr. Nevins laughed. Mrs. Nevins did not relent in hauteur.

"Marcia," she said to the maid, "please bring Mr. Utley another knife."

The maid obeyed and seemed to know, by some sixth sense, that Mr. Utley had abandoned the first knife to the floor.

The look of distress on his wife's face hurt Mr. Utley more than the frigidity of Mrs. Nevins or the thinly veiled amusement of her husband. He grew panicky. He sought refuge in talk, as if a flood of conversation might so occupy the table that everybody would forget to look at their plates. Bolts and shafts and valves and fittings—he raced through their qualities and defects with a speed that seemed to surprise Mr. Nevins. In doing it, however, his vigilance at the plate relaxed. He used his knife vigorously in cutting his lettuce. Something like horror came into Mrs. Nevins's austere countenance, and this time a broad smile illuminated the face of his host. Mr. Utley's confusion grew greater. There was no doubt about it: Mr. Nevins was frankly amused at his table manners; Mrs. Nevins was horrified.

The remainder of the dinner passed like a long, heavy nightmare. Mr. Utley found himself groping through it obscurely, bound and fettered, and yet making frantic efforts for freedom. He used so many implements to bring this about that by the time the dessert course arrived he had no more spoons on hand. Even in his clumsiness there was a naturalness which his wife saw and found pathetic. She felt sorry for him. "Poor Addie! He's made a mess of it."

Through his own mind echoed one of the etiquette book's confounded phrases. "One must know how to use the finger-bowl and the napkin, and one must know when to rise from the table." He wished he had never sat down! As for rising, his stomach had always told him when to do that. It seemed hours before Mrs. Nevins released him from the ordeal; it was as if she insisted deliberately upon prolonging the torment.

Mr. Utley didn't know when or how he made his departure from the Nevins's mansion—whether he staggered out or was carried—but, once in the taxicab, he breathed deeply, as if inhaling air with which he felt familiar and secure, and brooded in silence. His wife said nothing until they reached home.

"Well, I did it!" he admitted finally. He tore off his collar and tie violently. "You can't make a purse out of a sow's ear."

His wife went to him and put her arms around his neck. There was a catch in her voice.

"I'm afraid you've lost the promotion, dear. But never mind. I love you just the same."

"Was I—was I awful?"

She bit her lip.

"Pretty awful."

"Now don't go crying over spilt milk, Laura." He patted her affectionately on the shoulder. "What's done is done, and we've lived pretty happy so far, and I guess we can go on the same way. Though the head of the selling department would have been a fine thing. Laura, tell me one thing. Did Mr. Nevins laugh at me?"

She hesitated and then nodded her head.

"I'm afraid he did."

They sat silent and solemn.

"Well, I handed him a laugh, anyway," said Mr. Utley at length. "That's more than Whipple ever did." Yet there was little consolation in this thought. He could picture the careless ease with which Whipple had undoubtedly behaved himself the night before at the Nevins's. Whipple had reported on the function with his usual flippancy—"good cuisine and perfect service. A pleasant time was had by all." Mr. Utley went to bed declaring that he felt as if he never wanted to eat again.

"Throw away the dishes, dear, and burn the etiquette books. Close up the kitchen and sell the refrigerator. I'm going to live on food tablets after this!"

IV.

Mr. Utley was late the next morning. He had forgotten to set the alarm the night

before and had overslept. When he reached the office Whipple greeted him with word that the boss had been calling for him for half an hour. That was a bad omen. What could Mr. Nevins want with him so early in the morning, and so insistently, unless to break the news to him that at last he had come to a decision about the new head of the selling department, and, faithful to his promise, he was letting Mr. Utley know the worst as soon as possible.

"Sit down, Mr. Utley," said Mr. Nevins from his swivel chair as the other stood in the doorway. "I want to finish this letter before I take things up with you." There was an awful deliberateness in his tone. He turned to his secretary and continued: "Instead of taking on new men at this time, we are, as a matter of fact, forced to consider the reduction of our staff. As a measure of economy we have decided that we must let several good men go. Your application, therefore, comes at a bad time, and the best I can do is to put it on file for future reference. As you know, ah, ah —what was that last, Miss Simmons? Oh, yes, for future reference. As you may know, we try to set a high standard among our employees, and when we discover that any of them cannot measure up to it, after a fair trial, we are forced to let them go. Sometimes this trial lasts two or three years, and not until then are we convinced that we know our men and their capabilities thoroughly."

Mr. Utley felt the sweat on his forehead. He had been with Nevins & Company exactly three years. Mr. Nevins's voice continued dictating:

"This is not a heartless method of dealing with new men, for they come to us knowing our requirements and our protracted period of probation before promotion can be definitely announced. We tell them that Nevins & Company is no sinecure. And when we let them go at the end of three years we have broken no promises with them. I feel it necessary that you know these facts if you wish to hold out hopes of coming to us eventually. In the fall there may be an opening, but there is no department head unfilled at present. The last has just been appointed. Trusting that you will—"

Mr. Nevins's voice trailed off into a polite formula, while Mr. Utley felt that the letter had a special and terrible significance. There was a certain etiquette to it. It was Mr. Nevins's way of letting Mr. Utley know what was about to fall on him—an introduction to disappointment and failure.

Mr. Nevins finished dictating and wheeled around in his chair.

"Now about your case, Mr. Utley." He gave him a long, level glance.

"Yes, sir," came weakly from Mr. Utley, his face white.

"It's been bothering me for a long time and I want to get it off my chest."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Utley.

"Sorry hell!" retorted Mr. Nevins. "I'm tickled to death. You're going to be head of the selling department with a fifty dollar raise. And I want you to have dinner with me to-night and we'll talk it over. I haven't enjoyed a dinner like that one last night since before I was married. You acted natural, the way I've been aching to do for months, but my wife won't let me. Frills and la-dee-da's! They make me sick. But you, Utley, you're just naturally a man after my own heart. Mrs. Nevins will be away to-night and we'll dine alone. And for God's sake don't go the bother of dressing up!"

SEA CHANGE

BY THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

is a Complete Novelette of shipwreck and rescue, in which the major troubles of the victim befell after he had flattered himself he was over the worst of them. This very unusual story will appear in the issue for September 29.

The Man Without Hands.

By LYON MEARSON

Author of "The Lost Hour," etc.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TERROR—AND A SCREAM.

THE black night oppressed Val as he hastened along the almost blotted-out road toward the old house. He traveled swiftly now, having been over the ground in the afternoon. He could not throw off the feeling of espionage; whether human or other than human. He laughed to himself, softly, in derision at this unaccustomed uneasiness.

If it were only something that one could grip with both hands, something of fighting flesh and blood, he would not have given it another thought; but it seemed to Val that it was more than that. As he looked around he could see nothing but the inky vegetation at the side of the road and above him a dull, gray-black sky, with a faint phosphorescence in the east. Around him, hemming him in on all sides, were unseen hands plucking at him to hold him back, almost-heard voices warning him to turn his face away from the old house, nebulous, smoke-like spectres which he could not see, yet which he felt he could almost see.

He laughed aloud once, just to hear his voice, and to throw off this feeling; his voice sounded strange and unaccustomed in the night air, as though it belonged to a different being. And then, suddenly, the old house loomed up directly before him, black as anything this side of the pit could be, with deeper black where the windows were.

Even from where he stood he could see that the house was the veriest shell, standing erect simply because nobody had thought to push it down. As he looked at it, the first drop of rain fell. He moved

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toward the veranda, and in the shelter of its overhanging roof he lighted his lamp quickly. Suddenly the rain came down without any more warning or preliminary. The water fell in solid sheets, beating upon the house like a waterfall on the eternal rocks.

With his lantern dispelling only a trifle of the surrounding darkness, Val pushed his way in through the door, which hung precariously on one hinge. There was a vicious stab of lightning—unusual for that season of the year—and a rumbling of thunder, first in the distance and gradually growing closer until it terminated in a tremendous clap that shook the house to the eaves.

Val found himself in the entrance foyer, bare of furniture of any kind, with plaster hanging perilously from the walls and ceiling, his lantern making flickering shadows on the walls and in the corners. He felt something brush his feet, and heard something scampering away swiftly in the darkness. Rats! Well, he wasn't afraid of rats—not after the kind he had known in the trenches.

He looked around the foyer swiftly. Outside the rain flooded the earth, a cloudburst of continuous pouring water that beat on the thin roof and walls of the house, making it reverberate like a drum. It splashed in through the entrance door and through the windows in great splashes, as though some one outside were pouring it in in buckets. Val shivered slightly, and made his way into the living room, which opened into the entrance hall.

This was an immense room, and his little light could make but small headway against the gloom that shrouded the walls and corners. He made out, in his first quick glance, that it seemed to be devoid of furniture, with the exception of a kitchen table and a pine chair that stood in the middle of the room. On the table was a tallow candle, half used. He moved forward to examine the table, for he was interested in these signs of recent human habitation. The shadows danced strangely on the walls, and a spider crept swiftly across the table, away from the candle, as his light fell upon it.

Then, without warning, he heard something that momentarily turned the blood in his veins to ice.

There was the tinkling of piano keys in the room, the sound of notes as though a light finger had run rapidly up the scale. A shiver ran through him, and he whirled quickly. He saw something he had overlooked; in one of the corners was a dilapidated old square piano, of the oldest possible vintage, and a tiny shadow leaping off the brown case showed him that a rat had run across the keyboard.

He had to laugh at his attack of nerves. To think of Valentine Morley being afraid of an empty house at night, of his own shadow! Yet he realized, of course, that it was more than that; it was the atmosphere of the dark and the supernatural in which he had enveloped himself.

With an effort he threw off the feeling of oppression. A quick glance around the bare living room convinced him that, with the massive fireplace, the interior of the piano, the old-fashioned mantel, and all the various other natural hiding places, it would take quite a while to go over this room as thoroughly as he should have liked. He resolved to examine the rest of the house swiftly, and come back to this room later. He had no great hope of discovering anything this night, yet he thought that perhaps he might have a stroke of luck; he might, in a flash, be drawn to investigate something that otherwise would take months of searching to find. Anyway, he was spying out the lay of the land. He would come again, of course, and when he did he would have more than a vague notion of where to look.

He wished now he had brought Eddie Hughes with him; it would have made him feel more comfortable. It was too late, however, so with a shrug of his shoulder that was meant to be philosophical, but turned out to be a cold shiver, he went out into the entrance hall again, where he had noted the stairs that led to the upper part of the deserted house.

It was a rickety, winding staircase that led upstairs, giving off the dust in clouds as Val's feet fell on the steps. Each stair creaked loudly, as though in protest at this unwarranted intrusion of an age-long pri-

vacy. Mice and rats scurried away at his approach, and the spiders in the corners of the stairs moved warningly as his shadow fell upon them.

He found nothing of any assistance to him in the upper part of the house, though he went over the empty rooms carefully. Great cracks were opened in the ceiling over his head, and in the floor under his feet. What paper there was on the walls hung down to the floor in long panels, and in many places the plaster had come off, exposing the laths and logs beneath.

Outside the rain beat down heavily, soggily, having settled into a steady, monotonous downpour. The empty chambers and halls echoed and reëchoed to the dull beat of the storm, and the sense of oppression that Val had been experiencing all evening was heightened by the gloomy rooms and leaping shadows caused by his lantern. In the corners his light reached not at all, unless he stepped right up to them.

Once or twice he thought he heard a step below, but he put it down to his imagination and to his overwrought nerves.

"Steady, Val!" he spoke aloud to himself, to calm his nerves. "Don't be a baby, you big mutt." His voice rumbled peculiarly in the empty rooms, where a voice had not been raised for perhaps a generation.

He examined each room carefully, and decided there was little hope of finding anything upstairs. The walls were almost bare. There were no panels and the floors and ceiling were thin, so that nothing could be hidden in them.

In the attic he found nothing of any value, though he examined the place carefully.

"Well, Peter Pomeroy, old chap, if you've hidden anything in this house, which I doubt, I think it must be downstairs—in the living room, maybe, or the kitchen."

He remembered that he had yet to examine the dining room, kitchen, butler's pantry, and any other rooms that were downstairs in addition to the living room. There must also be a cellar, he decided. Would not a man bent on hiding treasure think naturally of the cellar?

Turning toward the stairs, he creakily made his way down to the foyer.

What was that?

He whirled swiftly, thinking he heard a noise of some kind above the beating of the storm. He strained his eyes into the darkness and could see nothing.

With a muttered imprecation at the jumpy state of his nerves, he groped his way through the dark hall in what he supposed was the general direction of the kitchen and dining room. Again he stopped suddenly, thinking he heard a slight movement.

Holding the lantern high over his head, he examined as much of the place as he could, the moldy plaster around him, the dilapidated ceiling and the half falling stairs. Nothing. He went on.

Around the bend he went, into the darkest place he had seen yet, sheltered from all possible light by the overhanging stairs. A dark, swift figure moved, and then another.

His quick eye caught them. He put down the lantern and reached for his automatic, but he was not quick enough. Two figures hurled themselves on him. His right arm shot out in a short jolt, and caught the first assailant under the ear, flinging him down hard on the creaking floor half a dozen feet away.

A great figure loomed in front of him now. Even in the darkness he could see who it was. There was no mistaking that menacing bulk.

"Oh, so it's you, Iggy!" he shot out.

"Yes, it's me, you—" cursed the handless one, gratingly.

With a shock that shook the narrow hall the two big men thudded together. Val experienced a distinct surprise at the great strength of the man with no hands. He felt no alarm, however, because how could Teck have a weapon?

That being the case, he disregarded the flailing arms of the big fellow and reached for his throat. He saw the other's right arm come up suddenly, flicking up like the head of a rattlesnake, and he had no time to duck, even if he had wanted to.

It was a glancing blow on the head. That was all he knew. In front of him everything went black and silent, and he slumped down into a heap at Teck's feet.

Val came back slowly. He saw a gleaming light, dancing far in front of him like a will-o'-the-wisp, now getting farther away, and now drawing closer. His head ached badly. Now the light began to come closer to him, and still closer, until finally it rested next to him, and he discovered it was the candle, lighted now, on the plain kitchen table in the living room, next to which he sat in the pine chair.

He tried to arise, and found that he could not. He was bound to the chair. For some moments he sat perfectly still, trying to piece together the happenings of the last few minutes. He found it difficult.

He remembered, of course, having put out his first assailant. He remembered recognizing Teck, and closing with him. He remembered the flick of the scoundrel's wrist toward him, and then he remembered no more. It was plain, therefore, that Teck's arm had found his mark.

Yet how could a man without hands knock him out? He puzzled about this for a little while, and then, his head aching, he had to give it up. For the matter of that, how could a man without hands beat out the brains of poor old Mat Masterson? He couldn't. But he had done it.

Next to him the candle burned fitfully, almost going out, often, at the sudden drafts from the window, lighting up the ceiling in quick light and extinguishing it in swift darkness. The rain increased in intensity, and there was the rolling and reverberating of distant thunder. Val glanced toward the door and saw that it was closed—locked probably, though that was unnecessary, as the open window was before him, with neither pane nor sash.

The rain swirled into the room through the window viciously. Val could actually hear the intense silence that had settled down upon the house over the noise of the storm. The noise was external; inside it was still as the grave. He shuddered. He did not like to think about graves at this time and in this place. He cursed his stupidity again in not having had sense enough to bring Eddie Hughes along on this trip.

Perhaps Eddie, being alarmed at his absence, would follow along. That led to another train of thought. Eddie, too, might fall into the hands of the enemy, unawares. Given a moment to draw his gun, or room for a left hook, and Eddie would be able to take care of himself—but would he be given that moment? Val doubted it, and he gave himself over to the task of attempting to loosen his bonds.

He was satisfied now that he had indeed been watched as he peered into Jessica's little house from the road. Of course he would have been watched. It was foolish to think that T ck would not have thought of that. A twinge went through his head, and he promised himself an ample vengeance.

He could make no headway with the bonds. It was a clean, workmanlike job, and there was little chance of his being able to release himself. He would need some assistance. At his side the candle guttered and sputtered in its grease, and Val had an uneasy sense of another presence in the house with him.

Was Teck or his thug still in the house? That might be, though Val had not heard them. If not they, who could it be? Not Jessica, certainly. In this rain, and alone at this hour? No, not Jessica.

Was it something human, then? After all, nobody had ever been able to prove that all supernatural visitations actually were false—actually did not exist. And this old house—there was something about it that savored of the other world, of the world beyond the grave.

He could scarcely throw the feeling off, though he despised himself for it. Lower and lower the candle sputtered next to him. Higher and higher came the rumble of the storm. On the pine table, next to his elbow, something splashed, softly, yet he heard it. He turned quickly and his breath went short.

It was a crimson spot of warm, human blood.

As he looked, another drop fell next to it. He looked up in a sudden panic and saw that it was coming from the ceiling—a thin, dark trickle that turned red when it came into the compass of the candlelight.

What was up there; bleeding, dying, dripping through this old ceiling in the

black night? There was another splash of a drop of blood and another.

Suddenly, with a wet sobbing splash, one of the drops struck the candle wick full, extinguishing it instantly, leaving the room and Val in a black, velvet darkness. For an instant or two—or was it an eternity or two?—he sat there, immovable, his face pale.

There was a sudden, leaping flash of sheet lightning, illuminating the room to the last, farthest corner for a brief instant. At the window toward which Val was looking he saw something that made his blood freeze.

Framed in the window, a figure from the old world, was the upper part of a man. Although the time of seeing the apparition was only an instant, Val could remember every detail. The figure was dressed in the frock coat affected by the old Virginia planters, and the face was shaded by a large soft hat. It was a pasty, old face, with a white goatee and mustache. The eyes were unutterably mournful and aged, dark windows that looked upon the world in sorrowful aloofness. Every line on the figure's face was plain to Val in the fraction of a second in which he glimpsed it.

He was in black night again, enveloped in it as though he were in bed with his head under the stifling covers. He could not put his hands up to feel of it, but he would not have been surprised to know that his hair was standing on end. He could feel his skin, all prickly, as though a cold blast had struck him.

Then there was a peal of thunder that shook the old house to its very foundations, and as silence succeeded that overwhelming noise, the scream of a woman, wild and shrill, cut through the night like a rapier blade, from somewhere inside the house. It was a cry drawn from the soul, the cry of a being in terror, in deadly fear.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A NEW MOVE.

THE first emotion that swept over Val was one of unreasonable, uncontrollable fear. It was the fear of the unknown, an emotion that overwhelms the senses. Why the vision of the mysterious man at the window should so have affected him Val could scarcely have told; instinctively, however, Val had felt that this was not a being of any world he knew; rather was it something that returned to walk the earth at night when storms raged and lashed the earth in fury.

Yet the figure, even in that brief glance, had seemed flesh and blood enough. There was something in that face that reminded Val of something—of something he had known or had seen. He could not place it anywhere, at present, but even in the wave of fear that covered him momentarily he thought of it. And now that the apparition was gone, it recurred to his mind insistently. Who was this old man, and what did he want here?

The storm shattered its waves thunderously upon the empty shell that resembled a house. The room was now as black as something the other side of the eternal pit. Strain his eyes as he would, Val could make out nothing except the dim rectangle that he knew was the window. What was the meaning of the blood that dripped down upon him, through the ceiling? A slight shudder passed through him, and he told himself that he was chilly.

Was a man dying over his head? Was he already dead? A human being was up there, his life fluid ebbing away, and Val could do nothing to help. He struggled blindly, furiously, with his bonds, and though he gained no material advantage, yet he profited by it, when once he had stopped his struggles, panting. It had steadied his mind and driven away this mysterious fear that had possessed his soul, that had entered into him regardless of the dictates of his reason. He felt more himself.

And that shriek? Who? Could it have been Jessica? He did not know—a woman's shriek, especially one such as he had heard, is sometimes a quite indistinguishable thing, knowing neither age nor color; it is simply the incarnation of terror—terror articulate.

There was still Teck to reckon with, Val thought. Teck and his man surely would be here soon. They had bound him, and

for one purpose or another they were certain to return. He wondered, almost impersonally, whether Teck would put him out of the way permanently this time. He rather inclined to the idea that Teck would not; but then, it was not a thing any one could be sure about. Not that Teck would hesitate at murder! Especially here, where he could do almost anything he cared to do, with no one the wiser. But he had the feeling that the handless one was not yet ready to put an end to his existence summarily.

He paused for a moment in his meditations and glanced around. The room was as black as ever, and he could make out nothing, but it seemed to him, for an instant, that he had heard a movement in the room; not a solid, concrete movement, something of the flesh, of humankind—this was a different kind of movement, like the sobbing of the wind through a midnight forest, or the intangible, nebulous movement, light as the moonlight, of a graveyard Thing crossing a tombstone.

He could see nothing, but he could feel a Presence in the room; behind him, on the sides, shrinking in the lee of the lowering walls, moving, peering at him from all sides. He gave an involuntary shudder, and tried to laugh it off, but it would not down. Something was in the room with him. Outside the rain fell soddenly, beating on the dull earth regularly, dripping off the eaves, pounding on the reverberant roof. Val shifted uneasily in his seat and tried to pierce the darkness.

"Who is there?" he asked suddenly, loudly, over the beat of the elements.

There was no answer, but the next instant his every sense was on the alert, the gooseflesh prickling his skin. As he turned back to the front of the room he could have sworn that a shadow had slipped from one side of the room to the other—across the lightened gloom of the window. It was no more than a shadow, and made no more noise than one in its passage; but it was something that he had seen, he was sure of that. There was something in the room with him.

"Who's that?" he asked again, staccato.

As before, the beat of the rain was his only answer.

Suddenly he felt that this Presence was standing behind his chair; he twisted in his seat to try to make it out. There was a twicking at his bonds, light as the sunlight on the tops of trees, and he felt the cord loosen. There was another lithe motion, and he felt a sharp bladed knife glide through the cords that held his hands fast.

Stiff, he tried to rise, and found that he could. The cords fell off him, and he was a free man. He whirled from one side of the room to the other in the endeavor to make out who or what it was that had freed him, but could see nothing. A cold gust of wind, coming from an unexpected angle, blew on him, and he saw dimly that the door was open. It had been closed before.

"That's how he—or It—got out," he told himself grimly. "Well, whoever you are, thanks awfully."

His first act was to feel in his pocket for his tiny, powerful electric flashlight. He sighed with relief when he found it, because one needed light here rather badly at times. He must get out of this room, he decided. Teck and his confederate knew he was in this room; therefore he must be gone when they returned.

He felt his way to the door and out into the little entrance room, which he ascertained was also empty. It seemed plain to him that Teck and his man had left the place, temporarily at any rate. But there was something upstairs that must be looked at—something lying on the floor, bleeding, perhaps dead—almost certainly dead. Val could not go away and leave that lying there.

He believed he knew how to find his way to the room—he had noted the room when he had been up there, directly above the living room, where he had been bound. It was a room with thin floors, with great cracks between the boards, so that in the daytime one could probably look down into the living room. Val could imagine a burning, intense eye staring eternally through the crack into the room below.

He made his way silently upstairs, not making use of his flash for fear of divulg-

ing his whereabouts. Quietly he moved, and so carefully, feeling each step before he put his weight down upon it, that it took him quite five minutes before he reached the top of the stairway. He paused at the door of the room above the living room—paused, and touched his hand lightly to the automatic in his pocket—which they had neglected, strangely, to take away from him. For bandits, it occurred to Val, Teck and his playmates were as careless as they could well be.

He touched the knob of the half falling door, and entered the dark room. At first he could see nothing. Cautiously he allowed the beam from his flashlight to play on the floor and around the walls. He discovered nothing. He turned it on the center of the floor—where he had been almost afraid to train it.

"Who'n 'ell's there?" grated an exasperated voice.

A warm glow of thanksgiving came over Val. He was no more alone—and the man who was dripping blood was evidently alive.

"Hello, Eddie," he chirped. "I'm not keeping you up, I hope."

He trained the flashlight on the floor, where the figure of Eddie Hughes was staggering, a bit unsteadily, to its feet. With a quick movement he was at Eddie's side, assisting him.

"No—I've had my beauty sleep, sir," replied Eddie.

Val turned the light on his face. He was a ghastly figure, with his face streaked with blood from a deep, ugly gash over his right eye. Evidently he had fallen immediately over a large crack in the floor, and it was this freely flowing blood that had put out Val's flickering candle. The blood was clotted now, though he must have lost rather more of it than a man can conveniently spare.

"Hurt much, Eddie?" inquired his employer.

"No; I'm all right now," said Eddie. "Knocked me for a gool for a while, though. Dunno how long I've been lyin' there, dead to the world. Never had a chance to take a wallop at 'im—"

"At whom?" inquired Val.

"That guy without no hands. I—"

"How do you get into this, anyway?" asked Val. "I thought you were at the pictures—"

"Oh, them pitchers! I sorta changed my mind. I came along to the little house an' I seen how things was, so I guessed you had gone down here; so naturally I strung along. I sneaked into the house, quiet like, an' tried to get into the room downstairs. It was locked, so after I give the once over to the other rooms downstairs, I came up here, where they jumped me. I got a flash of old boy Teck swinging for me, but I didn't worry none about it, because that bird's got no hands, so how could he hurt me? That's all I know, sir," he finished simply.

"Looks like a glancing gash you got," remarked Val. "Guess it's lucky it didn't catch you full. I suppose he thinks you're dead."

"Well, I don't feel so darn strong, sir," came back Eddie. "I suppose I must 'a' lost a quart of claret. I think a drink 'll fix me up all right, though. What's the next move?"

Val considered a moment. "I don't know," he confessed. "What do you think?"

"Well, there's only one thing for it," replied Eddie. "It seems to me we ought to beat it back to Miss Pomeroy's house. I have a hunch that big yegg's there; we'll corner him there an' give him what for."

This sounded reasonable. "He has been running around loose rather too long, hasn't he?" said Val. "I think you're right."

"Let's go, then. But, lissen, boss—he belongs to me," insisted Eddie.

"Nonsense," said Val. "He belongs to the law—and that's where he's going. He's interfered with us just once too often. I didn't want to do that, but—"

"But you don't have to do it, Mr. Morley," protested his man. "Just hand the big bum over to me—an' the law 'll never see him."

"Your ethics are all wrong, Eddie," Val put in. "What do you want to do—slug him? You can't slug a man with no hands, a defenseless human—"

"Defenseless me eye!" burst in Eddie, dropping all his painfully acquired correct

English. "How do you get that way? If he's defenseless, I'm in me cradle listenin' to me mother jazzin' about the treetops an' the cradle rocking, an' all. Defenseless—say, I guess you wouldn't think so if he'd cracked you one on the bean like he did me—"

"He did, Eddie," broke in Val soberly. "I wonder what he carries?"

"Whatever it is, it's a world beater—that's all I got to say," said Eddie. "Gee! That crack he gave me was enough to make my whole family sick."

Silently they made their way out of the house, seeing and hearing no one. Evidently the place was deserted once more, left to its long sleep as before.

A few handfuls of rainwater sufficed to wash the blood off Eddie's face, and, bound up with his employer's handkerchief over his right eye, he was once more ready for whatever the night should bring forth. By the time they reached Jessica's little cottage the rain had got in its work well, and they were soaked, with their clothes clinging to their limbs.

A broad beam of light emanated from the living room window, cutting a few feet into the night with its golden glow and leaving the rest of outdoors blacker by contrast. Val knocked on the door. After a moment it was opened by Jessica herself.

In silence she preceded them into the living room, where Val and Eddie stood, two dripping figures, curiously out of place in the secure comfort of the small room.

"Is Teck here?" asked Val. He looked at her for a reply, but she stood singularly silent, a new, a different Jessica Pomeroy than he had known.

There was a subtle change in her, and as he looked again he saw that the change was not too subtle; he could sense it easily. The atmosphere was different, somehow; her attitude toward him was different. He could see a peculiar tenseness about her demeanor, about the corners of her eyes, for instance, out of which she regarded him quietly.

"Why do you ask?" she inquired calmly.

It was now his turn to stare at her, in inquiry. "Why do I ask?" he echoed.

"Yes. What is Mr. Teck to you?" she asked again, intoning monotonously, as though repeating a lesson that had been drilled into her by constant iteration.

Val looked at her unbelievingly. Was this the Jessica Pomeroy he knew? The Jessica Pomeroy who had made an appointment to explore the old house with him this night? She was different, and he could scarcely say how, though her attitude was plain enough now. It was no longer friendly; it was almost openly hostile. But it was not that he was thinking of—external differences were easy to detect. Something inside of her had gone wrong, he could see that; some fuse burned out; some fine wire of determination severed.

"What's wrong, Jessica?" he asked, stepping up a bit closer to her impulsively. "You're so changed from—"

She stepped away from him, two spots of color flaring in her pale cheeks.

"I never gave you permission to call me Jessica, Mr. Morley," she said. "And as for anything being wrong—"

"Why, this Teck—" he began.

"I am engaged to marry Mr. Teck," she flashed back at him. "Really, I hardly see why you take it upon yourself to thrust your interference upon us in this matter. I told you at our first conversation that I was engaged to marry him—".

"Why, Jessica!" burst out Val, puzzled, and a little angry. "You said—"

"Never mind what I said, Mr. Morley," she cut in calmly, monotonously. "You will confer a great favor upon me if you will go back to New York and forget all that has gone before."

"But surely, Jessica," he protested, "you cannot marry this murderer! Why, he has twice tried to kill me, and—"

"Your opinions in the matter will hardly convince me, Mr. Morley. Will you be good enough to do as I ask you—go away, and not come back?" She spoke appealingly, a tremor in her otherwise emotionless voice.

He examined her silently for a moment or two before speaking, his brain pounding with this unexpected development. He did not for a moment believe in what she was saying—that she was acting a part he was

well aware. How could the woman he loved be so cold and indifferent to him? Why, she simply couldn't—she was—

"Surely you're joking, Jessica," he exclaimed. "Why, you know, for a minute I thought you meant it—"

"I'm not joking, Mr. Morley. I mean every word I say. If you're a gentleman, you'll do as I ask."

She moved toward the door, an unmistakable sign that the interview was at an end. There was nothing for Val to do but bow and take his leave in silence, which he did, his head whirling dizzly from the suddenness of the let-down.

Without a word Val and Eddie walked around the house to the road where their car was cached. The rain has eased up a little now, and it was warmer, though Val did not notice these elemental changes in the least. It was a shock to the tense nerves of both of them when a small feminine figure suddenly stepped out in front of them from the shadows that lined the bushes at the side of the road.

"Mr. Morley!" she said in a whisper.

"Hello! What's all this?" muttered Val to himself. He and Eddie stopped dead in their tracks.

"It's me—Elizabeth—Miss Pomeroy's servant," said the voice.

"Oh, yes. What is it, Elizabeth?" Val asked kindly.

"Why, it's about Miss Jessica," said the old woman. "I—I heard what she was saying to you. You mustn't mind what she says, Mr. Pomeroy. I know her true feelings in the matter—anything she said to you to-night is not herself speaking. It's that devil Teck—he can make her say and do things she would never think of doing. He's a kind of a hypnotist—can make her say anything he likes by just looking deep in her eyes. That's how she happened to come down here, you know," the old woman hurried on in her recital.

"Down here?" queried Val.

"Yes—she wasn't going to come, but he looked into her eyes and said she'd have to come; and here she is. That handless hypocrite! He told her what to say to you to-night—he's still there, him and his friend; they're in the kitchen, waiting for you to go. I just thought I'd tell you, because—"

"Thanks very much, Elizabeth," said Val kindly, a warm glow fanning itself to a flame in his heart again. "I won't forget. Now run along back to the house before they miss you."

She made a little curtsy and merged again with the darkness.

So his suspicions had been true! It was not Jessica who had spoken to him this evening—it had been Teck himself; Teck speaking with the lips of Jessica Pomeroy. He would marry her, would he? Val grated this to himself, adding a few words learned in France. He would marry the electric chair! Or better still, he, Val, would choke him with his bare hands. That would be satisfactory. He enlarged upon this idea. Ah, it would feel good to get his fingers into the throat of the black scoundrel!

It was a silent ride back to the hotel, with Eddie occupied wholly in making the rickety flivver keep to the road, and Val veiled in his thoughts. As for going home, as Jessica had suggested, he had not the slightest intention of doing any such foolish thing.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BOOKS AGAIN.

AT the hotel Val and Eddie called on the resident doctor and had Eddie's wound washed out and bandaged up properly. It was a nasty cut, which had cleaned itself out thoroughly by the simple expedient of bleeding freely, and was no longer dangerous, though the doctor said it might leave a slight scar.

Eddie felt as good as new, and none the worse for his experience, though he looked rather desperate with his immense cross-shaped plaster covering his right eye and a large part of his forehead. Once in their rooms, the men sat down to discuss the situation and to think out some solution, if possible.

Val lighted his pipe, sat down in a large easy chair, and gave himself up to reflection for a few minutes. Eddie sat in silence,

too, smoking a vile smelling cigarette of pure Virginia tobacco. Here, away from the world, the men were equal; they were friends who could discuss mutual matters on a basis of equality; there was a firm footing of respect under them.

"Well, what do you say, Eddie?" asked Val at length.

Eddie was still silent. It was almost as if he had not heard. He leaned comfortably back in his chair, and smoked luxuriously, relaxing every limb.

"Come—snap out of it, Eddie. This—"

"This here, now, Ignatz Teck—" began Eddie calmly.

"Ignace, Eddie," corrected Val. "Be precise."

"Well, Ignace, then; though I don't see as it's any different. This here Teck bird must be removed, mustn't he?"

"Looks like it, Eddie. I had thought of handing him over to the police, but there are reasons why it might be inadvisable. In the first place, I don't want to drag Miss Pomeroy into it; and though she is absolutely innocent, of course, yet that won't prevent the papers smearing her name all over the story. In the second place, I am not certain that the police would be able to get anything on him. The only thing that might connect him with the murder of old Mat Masters is—"

"The books," supplemented Eddie.

"Exactly. And what's to prevent him from getting rid of them at the first alarm—"

"Let's help him get rid of them," decided Eddie.

Val looked his inquiry. "You mean—"

"Sure thing. He must have them with him—seeing that they probably contain the dope about where this here money's stuck away. Why—I bet they're in his room right now."

"Wouldn't be surprised," assented Val, nodding his head. "But I don't think he's been able to locate the money himself, yet. In fact, I'm sure he hasn't. The thing to do is to beat him to it."

Eddie nodded. "Have you any idea at all—"

"Not the slightest, Eddie. Suppose you were an old man, and you put some instructions in a book about where to find your fortune. What would you do?"

Eddie was quiet for a space. "I guess I'd mark the place, some way," he said at length, "so's I wouldn't forget."

Both lapsed into a brief silence again, and it was Val who broke it this time. "By Christmas, Eddie, I think you've hit it! Ah, the perspicacity of the working classes! You think—"

"Well, I think a ten thousand dollar bill is a pretty decent sort of marker, boss," said Eddie evenly. "If I was doing the marking, I think—"

"Elementary, Watson, elementary!" quoted Val, now thoroughly alive to the idea. "I remember exactly where that bill was. It was in the Bible, page 200. Deuteronomy. Maybe there's a passage that refers to it in this Bible. I know the exact chapter. Let's have it, Eddie."

Eddie handed him the copy of the Bible that lay on the little table beside the bed. "The Property of the Gideons." Val read the section carefully, but could find nothing that looked like a clew to what he wanted. He read it over carefully again, and then shook his head as he put it down.

"Nix," he said. "Nothing doing."

"I didn't think you'd find anything there," said Eddie. "You'd have to look at the Bible he used. Might be—"

"Probably you're right, Eddie, if there's anything in this theory. A Bible's a pretty big book, and a man might make annotations in it that could easily be overlooked unless you knew just where to hunt for them. Then the only thing to do is to—"

"To lift the books out of Teck's room—"

"Again!" laughed Val. "Say, we could take a moving picture of those books, they've been doing so much traveling. But I think you have the right angle, Eddie, at that. The best time to get those books would be right—"

"Right now," put in Eddie. "I don't think his nibs is back yet—that old girl said they were still in the house there. I don't think he'll be in any great hurry to leave, until he has to. It don't seem reasonable that he'd carry those books around with him, so I imagine they're still in his room."

"His room's right on this floor," said Val.

Eddie stepped to the French windows and threw them open, letting a flood of pure, sweet air into the room. The rain had ceased, and the stars had come out miraculously, studding the heavens above Chesapeake Bay with their glory.

The window opened on a long balcony, or sun parlor, which ran the length of that side of the house.

"Right at the other end of this balcony," said Eddie, "is where this here handless wonder lives. If the window isn't open, I think I know where a cold chisel 'll do the most good. We'll slip in, cop the books—"

"If he isn't home," interposed Val.

"And if he's home, so much the worse for him, that's all I gotta say," remarked Eddie. "Nobody can give me a wallop like this and get away with it as easy as that. Maybe there won't be nothing left for the police—"

"Now, Eddie. None of that stuff around. We'll be thrown out of the hotel, and it's the only decent one this side of Norfolk," laughed Val. "And, anyway, that won't get us anywhere. Of course, if he starts any roughhouse, why, we can slip it to him, but I don't think he'll pull that stuff here. Get the chisel."

Eddie unbuttoned his coat; a large chisel stood in his inside pocket, ready for duty.

"I kinda thought that at the old house," he remarked, "we might need it, so I brung it along."

"You think of everything, Eddie," said Val. "Let's go."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MOVE AND A CHECK.

IN the little cottage on the Pomeroy estate, two people faced each other across the table, Jessica dull, defeated, tense; Teck nonchalant, the light of victory in his greenish eyes, sprawling hugely on a chair, his stumps in his pockets, his characteristic attitude, a sneer curling his lips.

"Thank you," he was saying. "That should send this Morley cub about his business. I am in your debt."

He was mockingly polite, the while he held her eyes with his. She, unable to wrench her gaze away; sat there looking into his burning orbs as though he were a serpent and she a bird. The light had burned out of her eyes now; she could only look at him, tired and surrendered.

"Don't be sarcastic, Ignace," she replied, and her voice was like her gaze, even, monotonous, dull, without a high light or a quiver in it. "I sent him away because you ordered me to. If there is nothing else to-night, you might go away—"

"There is nothing else to-night Jessica," he said, and there was an attempt at softness in his tone, and a relaxing of the lines about his mouth. "But to-morrow—" he trailed off into silence, a pregnant, significant silence.

"To-morrow?" she intoned. "What do you mean?"

"Don't you know?" he asked, and the mocking light slipped into his eyes again. She shook her head quietly, as if she did not greatly care. This man had possession of her, body and soul—or so it was, at the moment. What did it matter what to-morrow had to bring?"

"To-morrow," he said slowly, enunciating each word carefully, permitting it to sink in, spacing out his words so that she could catch the full import of what he was saying. "To-morrow you are going with me to Norfolk. We will take out a marriage license in the morning. In the afternoon we will be—"

"No, no! Not that!" she burst out, galvanized for an instant into life, a fleeting instant that was gone almost as it came. "I cannot do that—"

"Yes, you can," he said slowly, gazing full into her eyes. The color that had flamed up receded from her cheeks as quickly as it had come, leaving her listless, languid, and complacent—his to order, his to do with whatever he willed.

"To-morrow you will do as I ask, Jessica," he said again, repeating the sentence once more, slowly.

"Yes, Ignace," she replied in a whisper so low he could scarcely catch it. She was careless of what he asked again; it was of no consequence. Had he asked her to ac-

company him to a justice of the peace or a minister to-night, she would have done so unquestioningly now.

"Ah, exactly, my dear," he said. "I knew you would see it my way."

He was courtly now, and attentive—the attitude fitting in a man toward the woman he is about to take unto his bosom as wife.

"I'm tired, Ignace," she said unexpectedly. "I want to rest. Now that I have promised—"

"Of course, my dear," he replied to this. "Of course." He rose and faced to the door. "I'll go now. To-morrow I'll be here early. And in the meantime"—he turned to her again and his voice grew hard, flinty—"in the meantime, don't try any nonsense. I've had just about all of that that I can stand from you—and from that Morley nuisance. I haven't been hard with you, because I always thought that eventually you would come to your senses about this matter—but my patience has its limits, Jessica, and I want to warn you that I intend to carry my program through regardless of what it costs. If persuasion won't work, why, there are other ways."

His voice now purred softly, confidentially, like a cat's, with the same suggestion of sheathed claws and sharp, wicked teeth.

She succeeded, finally, in wrenching away her gaze.

"Good night," she said quietly, evenly, not trusting herself to look full upon his face. He made as though to take her in his arms, but she evaded him with a heedless, natural movement that carried her beyond him. Her cheeks now flamed with color, and had he looked closely he would have been able to see the fighting will that, dormant until now, was awakening in her depths.

"Good night," she said again.

"Good night," he replied, and turned toward the door.

At the door he paused once more. "And remember what I just told you—you know I don't joke about such things."

She regarded him in silence as he let himself out, but a surprising change came over her as the door closed upon him. Her form straightened out, new life came into her glorious eyes, and her breath came and went more rapidly. She was a different woman; she was purposeful and awake, vibrant with energy and life; a woman fighting for her own.

"Elizabeth!" she called into the kitchen.

That old woman appeared at the door, her eyes tired, her figure sagging.

"Has that old he-devil gone?" she asked. "I thought he'd never go. He—" she caught the expression on her mistress's face then.

"Why, Jessica, honey—" she exclaimed, going to her and stroking her hand, "what's the matter? What is it?"

She saw fright in her mistress's face—fright, fear, mingled with determination, sudden, unchangeable resolve. "Why, Jessica—"

"I'm all right, Elizabeth. Tell Germinal to harness up the horse and get the trap ready. We're going to Norfolk—and back to New York to-night."

Elizabeth shook her head. "Germinal's gone," she said.

Jessica stared her astonishment. "Gone!" she said. "When, and where—why?"

"A few minutes ago—that crippled old fathead was in here, so I couldn't tell you. If a nigger can get pale, that's the way Germinal looked, the black old fool. He came running into the kitchen, nearly dead with fright—you could actually see him pale under that brown skin of his. He could scarcely talk—his tongue didn't seem to be able to work, somehow—frozen to the roof of his mouth. Finally, all I was able to get from him was that he had seen something, a ghost, I guess—he kept talking about how the grave gives up its dead—"

"The grave!" interjected Jessica.

"Yes. He said graveyards were yawning—his hair was actually standing on end. I do declare to goodness, I never saw a man so scared as that man Germinal. Said he wouldn't stay in this place another minute—he said it was full of 'hants' and that he just saw a dead man disappear into the bushes. He hitched up his wagon and went to town lickety-split before I had a chance to argue with him or to find out what it was all about.

"The last I seen of him he was layin' the whip on good—you'd be surprised at all

the speed he could get out of that old bundle of skin and bones that he used to say was a horse. I declare to goodness gracious I never in all my born days—"

"Gone!" said Jessica. "Just when I need him so badly, too. I wonder what it really is that people manage to see around here at night. I never saw anything; did you?" Elizabeth shook her head.

"But we must get back to Norfolk to-night, Elizabeth. I must get away from those eyes—those green eyes that look right into me. I'm not my own master when he's looking at me, Elizabeth—he could get me to do anything. He seems to project his own will into me, somehow; fills me up with himself; he takes possession of my senses, Elizabeth—oh, Elizabeth, I'm afraid of him—afraid of what he'll make me do!"

She was wild-eyed in her momentary terror.

"There, there, honey!" Elizabeth soothed her. "It 'll be all right—he won't make you do anything—just say the word and I'll empty a tea kettle of boiling water on his head, and give him something really to worry about. I'll—"

"You don't understand, Elizabeth. The man's a demon—he will stop at nothing, and I'm powerless when those terrible eyes catch me like a fish on a hook. I must get away—"

"We'll walk, then," decided Elizabeth. "It's not so far, even if it is dark. Get your things, honey, and I'll get dressed, too. We won't stop for a suit case. The rain's stopped, and we'd better get right along.

"Hurry," she called after the girl, who was already on her way to her room to get her hat and coat. "We'll give that filthy beast something to think about—when he comes to-morrow and finds we've gone. Once back in New York—" Her voice was lost in the retreat to her room.

A few minutes later they extinguished the lamp in the living room and stepped out of the door, closing it carefully, and turning the key in the lock.

"Is there another boat to-night, I wonder?" remarked Jessica anxiously. "It seems to me—"

"Not to-night, I think, Miss Jessica," replied the old woman, "the way I remember these boats. But I think we'll do better to go to Newport News for the night—stop in one of the hotels there—and take the early morning boat from the Point to Willoughby Spit—he'll never expect us to do that; in fact, he'll probably be on his way out here. I wonder where Mr. Morley is now," concluded the older woman irrelevantly.

"I wonder," came softly from Jessica. "I'd feel a whole lot safer if he was with us," she confessed. "Well, come on, Elizabeth," she said. "Let's go as quickly as we can."

They stepped out into the black road, lined with shrubbery. Hardly had they gone ten yards when a figure stepped in front of them, appearing silently out of the black bushes like the veriest apparition.

"My goodness gracious!" exclaimed Elizabeth in a voice that was almost a shriek. Jessica did not speak; she had been too frightened, momentarily. Her hand went to her bosom, and she stood there, pale, and almost swaying from the fright and the shock.

"Just where do youse folks t'ink youse goin', huh?" growled the apparition, which now turned out to be the young rough who had accompanied Teck earlier in the evening.

"Why—why—we're—ah—we're going for a walk, though I don't see what business it is of yours—" began Jessica.

"Oh, youse is goin' fer a promenahd, huh?" mocked the young man. "Well, it is me bizness, an' don't let nobuddy tell yer diff'runt, see! Just promenahd yerselves back an' do yer walkin' on de porch. Dis here night air ain't none too healthy fer young female wimmen—nor fer no old hens, neither. He glared malevolently at Elizabeth, who glared back at him as though she would like to scratch his eyes out.

"Yer see, yer might git yer tootsies wet, walkin' so late," he explained. "Come on, now," he ordered, seeing that the women were about to remonstrate indignantly. "Don't gimme none er yer guff about it—I got me orders an' dey gits carried out, see! Me orders sez yer stays in dat dere house to-

night, an' dat's where yer stays—" He stepped up to the women threateningly and added: "Dat is, if yer don't want ter be knocked fer a row a' red, white, an' blue barber poles. Git me?"

There was a brief silence, with Jessica struggling hard to keep back the tears of rage and disappointment. This man Teck thought of everything. Being a trickster himself, he expected trickery in everybody —even in the woman he wanted to marry. And the maddening part about it was that he had been correct in his assumption—that he had outguessed her.

"Come on! Snap inta it, before I carries yer back to dere house," he threatened.

Jessica and Elizabeth turned without a word, and made their way back to the house.

Jessica was dully conscious of her defeat. It was plain to her that she would not get away from that house this night—that she would be here in the morning, when Teck called for her. Her only hope was that Val would call first. Elizabeth told her that she had explained to Val, and that he would certainly not return to New York without first trying to see her. He would come in the morning—of that she was certain; but it was important that he come early; that he make his appearance before Teck came upon the scene. Otherwise it might be too late.

CHAPTER XXX.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES TURN UP.

LIKE two shadows, creatures of the night, Val and Eddie crept along the balcony of the hotel. One room, far down toward the end of the balcony, was lighted, but the rest of the building was dark. Teck's room, they knew, was next to the lighted one, on the extreme end of the balcony.

Far in the distance was the great arc light of Willoughby Spit, a tiny star in the immensity of the tenebrous atmosphere that lay, like a somber cloak, over the bay. Over toward Hampton Roads were the riding lights of two battleships, and a few electric lights gleamed over Fortress Monroe, leaving in black relief the motionless figure of a sentry who had stopped, momentarily, high up on one of the bastions of the twelve inch guns.

"Two on and four off," murmured Eddie, noticing the sentinel. "Glad I'm off that stuff."

"S-s-shh-h!" cautioned his employer.

At last they stopped outside the windows of Teck's room. All was dark inside. For a full minute they paused there, at one side, so as not to present a target if by some chance the room was occupied. They could hear nothing, though the window was slightly open.

"O. K., I guess, Eddie," whispered Val.

"Yes, sir," replied Eddie. "Shall we go in, sir?"

Val nodded. Cautiously he pushed the window open and stepped in over the low sill. Eddie followed him. The room was still as the grave. It was not possible to see anything.

"Got the flash, sir?" inquired Eddie.

"Here it is," said Val, producing it, and pressing the button. "Oh, the devil!" he exclaimed in exasperation when no beam of light rewarded his efforts. "The battery's dead."

"Wait a minute," said Eddie. "I'll pull down the shades, and we can switch on the lights. We'll be out of here in a moment, anyway, sir—long before old boy Teck gets back."

"Go ahead," consented Val. It seemed safe enough. Eddie pulled the shades down carefully, first closing the windows tightly. In an instant the room was flooded with a glare of electric light.

They looked around them cautiously, silently, though there seemed no particular need for silence. The books were not in evidence, but that was to be expected, of course.

"Here, let's try this suit case," said Val. He opened it. It was full of clothing. He tried another. It was locked.

"Eddie, the chisel," he directed.

Eddie pried open the suit case with his cold chisel, utterly ruining the lock. They opened it on the bed, pouring out the books.

"Here it is," announced Eddie triumphantly, producing the Bible, a small, compact book bound in the conventional black.

"Now I wonder"—he scratched his head contemplatively, laying his hat on the bed in order that the scratching process might be efficient—"I wonder what—"

The door of the adjoining room opened quietly, but not so quietly that they did not hear it. Both whirled on the instant, taken utterly by surprise. It had not occurred to either of them that Teck might have two rooms. It was so simple that they had just not thought of it.

Framed in the doorway were Horseface and Rat, automatics in hand, looking just as brutally dangerous, as efficient, as when Val had seen them last in Teck's rooms on the East Side of New York.

"If yuh'll kindly stick up them dere fins o' yourn," suggested Horseface, "we won't have ter perforate yuh. An' be dam' quick, git me!"

The hands of Val and Eddie went up slowly. It was a trap, and a simple one—one that they had absolutely overlooked. Val knew that these men were to meet Teck down here in Virginia, but he had, somehow, forgotten the fact. Evidently they had followed on the next train.

"Dis here looks like boiglary ter me," suggested Rat, leering. "Breakin' open er soot case an'—"

"I'll excuse you from the definition of burglary, Rat," broke in Val. "Both you and Horseface, I'll take it for granted, are well acquainted with exactly what constitutes burglary. At the moment, I don't think I care for any expert instruction—"

"Aw, close yer trap!" snapped Horseface, "before I lets dis here gat go off, carelesslike. Sit down dere on de bed, both o' yer, an' don't make no suspicious moves, neither. I'm a nervous guy, an' when I gits nervous I presses triggers."

Val and Eddie sat down as requested.

"Just what do you think you're doing?" inquired Val politely. He appeared calm, even in good spirits, the while Eddie sat next to him raging inwardly at their childish stupidity in having been trapped so easily.

"We're just havin' a little visit wid yer, that's all," said the Rat. "We likes yer comp'ny, see? Us an' youse, we'll just have one o' dem dere feast o' reasons an' flow o' souls, dat's what. Chawmed t' meetcha, 'm sure," he mocked, waving careless circles in the air with his ugly blue-black automatic.

"I trust we're not keeping you awake?" inquired Val courteously. "Because if you'd care to go to sleep—"

"Naw, dat's a' ri'," said Rat "We is just as li'ble ter put youse ter sleep, if it comes ter dat."

Val rose. "If it's all the same to you—"

"Sit down!" snapped Rat, his gun barrel becoming steady instantly.

Val sat down. "What do you intend to do about it?" he asked. Next to him sat Eddie, his eyes black and hard, his mouth a single straight line. He was almost burning up with rage.

"About wot?" queried Horseface. "Youse? Oh, dat's a' ri', kid," he assured him. "De boss 'll be here in a few minits; he'll tell us. Dis time, if ya gits bumped off, ya'll git bumped off permanent, git me? Me, I gotta wallop on de bean dat I won't fergit in a hurry—an' youse has ter pay fer dat. In de meantime, don't make no move if yer don't want ter pay fer it right erway. Dat's all I gotta say."

They sat in utter silence for a while, Horseface and Rat with their deadly looking weapons in their hands, Val chipper and contented, and Eddie raging. It was Val who broke the silence at last, irrepressible.

"You people should go into business—just imagine your sign," he chattered. "'Plain and fancy assassination done here. Victims called for and delivered. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back!' There should be big money in it, Horseface. There must be lots of people who really deserve killing—"

The door opened and Teck entered, taking in the situation at a glance.

"Good evening," he said courteously. "Still engaged in—er—breaking and entering, I see," he remarked. "Well, well. It's a bad habit that you really ought to break yourself of, Mr. Morley. If you had had the proper upbringing—"

"Well, we're not all gifted in the same direction, Iggy," came back Val. "Some can commit burglary successfully, by instinct, like some who shall here be name-

less "—he looked at him significantly—"and some have to study very hard before they master the knack of it. We really ought to study at your feet—maestro!"

Teck shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. "Well, it wouldn't do you much harm—your technique is all wrong, anyway. You know, Morley, one of these days you're really going to get hurt—I'll begin to play with you for keeps; you won't have a marble left by the time I get done with you, if I ever start that."

Val laughed. "You know, Iggy," he said, "you're the most refreshing blackguard it has ever been my good fortune to meet. Really, outside of musical comedy, I never would have believed you existed."

Teck bowed as though pleased.

"You honor me, my friend. We strive to please. But this is not musical comedy—the villain wins, Morley."

His face hardened, and the fun went out of it. He was business again—a scoundrel engaged in his profession. The scar that slashed across his countenance throbbed and grew livid.

"All I have to do," he said, "is to call the office on the phone and explain to them that I found you two in my room, rifling my suit cases—"

Val laughed loudly. "Swell chance!" he exclaimed. "I have a life sized picture of you explaining that to the hotel detective—giving him the books as Exhibit A, say!" He paused and looked at the books with meaning.

"Honest, Teck," he said, "do you expect me to swallow that?"

Teck was angry. "Then how about shooting you and your—er—your friend down, caught in the act of burglarizing my room?" he asked grimly. "They don't have to see the books—"

"I don't think you will, Iggy," remarked Val lightly. "You see, you're in no position to bear investigation just at present. In fact, I think we'll go, Eddie," he said to the man seated beside him. "This man can't stop us."

"All right, sir," said Eddie, putting on his hat with care and deliberation, and standing up.

"I was just about to suggest it," came from Teck, amazingly. He stood in the center of the room, his hands characteristically in his pockets, lounging nonchalantly in front of them. "Understand me, Morley—if I had any particular reason for detaining you, you would stay just as long as I wish you to stay—but you're out of this game for good, anyway—and if you'll take a little friendly advice, you'll leave for the North the first thing in the morning."

"I'm out of the game for good!" echoed Val. "Why, how did you get any such fool idea?" He stared at him in wonderment.

The other gave him back look for look, and for a moment neither spoke in words, but there was much that was said in their eyes, in the lines around their mouths, and in their attitudes. It was Teck who spoke first.

"Miss Pomeroy has finally sent you away. You told me yourself that you would be here until she sent you away—and she has done so. That should be sufficient—"

"It would be sufficient, Iggy," came back Val, and his voice was flinty. "It would be sufficient—if she had. But it was not she who sent me away—it was you. It was you, speaking with her lips—"

Teck interrupted him with a laugh of mirth.

"Oh, my Lord!" he said in evident enjoyment. "The kindergarten class in mesmerism will please stand up! Is that your regular line of nonsense, Morley—or do you reserve it for special occasions, like this?"

"Laugh if you like, Iggy—but you won't be laughing long. I'm in this game for keeps—and if I go it will be feet first. You can tell that to Horseface and Rat, here, if you want to—because I'm going now, unless you or they care to stop me."

He turned with Eddie to the window and threw it open.

"Whaddya say, boss?" queried Rat. "Do we give 'im de woiks—or does de boob git away wit' it wunst more?"

He punctuated his remarks with his automatic, the while Val turned insolently, poised in the sill.

"Tell him to shoot—if you dare, Iggy," he said lightly.

The eyes of the two men met and held; it was Teck who turned his gaze away first.

"All right, Eddie," said Val, and turned to Teck for a last parting shot. "And, Iggy—stay away from the Pomeroy place—that's my last word to you."

His expression was without emotion, but his intonation was stony.

Ignace Teck said nothing. They went through the window, and closed it carefully behind them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SECRET FATHOMED.

BACK in their rooms, Val and Eddie sat down to talk it over. The lightness had, momentarily, dropped from Val as one drops a cape from his shoulders. He was conscious again of defeat. He had had the book in his hands—and had lost it again. He felt sure that the secret was in the Bible. It was not that the money meant anything to him, but the achievement of his purpose meant a great deal.

Suddenly he was irritated with the whole business; with the Hotel Chamberlin, the Pomeroy property, himself, the money, Eddie. He gave voice to his irritation audibly.

"For Heaven's sake, Eddie—don't you know enough to take off your hat in the house?" he asked harshly. "That lid—why do men wear derbies, anyway?" He looked at the offending hat irritably.

"Yes, sir," replied Eddie. "There are lots of reasons for wearing derbies, sir," he said. "Of course, begging your pardon and meaning no disrespect, the primary reason is to cover the bean, if I may say so. That being the case, you would naturally remark that it could be done without so much waste space. But—"

"Are you trying to kid me, Eddie?" demanded Val. "Because, if you are—"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Eddie. "How can you think such a thing—as though I would be so disrespectful! What I meant to say when you interrupted me, was that sometimes even the wasted space in a derby hat could be utilized to advantage."

He took off the hat, and took a small, thick, black bound book out of it.

It was the Bible they had gone after.

Open mouthed, astonished, Val stared; for a little while he was almost speechless. Finally he found voice, the while he contemplated Eddie, who sat there, holding the Bible in his hand and gazing at it admiringly.

"For the lova Mike, Eddie;" he gasped. "How did you ever manage to do that—I never saw you pulling it."

"Neither did they, sir," said Eddie, respectfully. "It's a sorta heavy Bible, sir," he added reflectively. "Now, in a silk hat, there would 'a' been more room—"

"You'd have taken away the suit case in the silk hat, I guess," said Val, his good temper restored marvelously. "I must admit that you've certainly earned your salary to-night. Any man who can actually find a real use for a derby hat has my respect. Let's have it and we'll see what we can see."

He took the book from his man's outstretched hand.

"Better pull the blinds down, I guess, sir," said Eddie, and he did so. "Never can tell what that there handless prodigy will be up to."

On page two hundred Val found the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh chapters of Deuteronomy, in part. He read carefully for a while, but could see nothing that was of significance.

"Moses seems to have a great deal to say here," commented Val, "but he doesn't seem to say anything about Peter Pomeroy. Can it be he didn't know the old gent?"

He returned to his reading of the text. He had an idea that perhaps mad old Peter Pomeroy had used a part of the text to indicate the hiding place of his money—but how had he used it? That was the point at which Val had to confess himself stumped.

That, he reflected, was one of the places he considered himself stumped. There were others. In the rush of events this night, he had had no time to think about his strange liberation in the old house on the Pomeroy grounds. Who was it who had cut him loose from his bonds? What ghostly fingers were those that had wielded the knife?

Even now, in the light of his own room,

with Eddie sitting opposite him, he shivered involuntarily when he thought of it. Like the figure of a dream it was—the shadow that had been his benefactor there. And yet, who was it? The question recurred again and again. Flesh and blood it was, of course—it was a real knife that had done the cutting; he had felt the concrete, fleshy touch of the liberator.

There was some one prowling around the old estate that none of them knew of, he felt sure—some one who knew his way about, too; with the lightness, softness of a cat, with the ability to blend with the ghostly shadows that filled the old place—some one who did not like Teck, it would appear, else why should he go to the trouble to cut loose his enemy?

That there was some one there who would in the end have to be reckoned with, Val was sure. He did not think that the Unknown had made his last appearance in this matter. He felt that there would be a time when he would be face to face with the Mystery again—and when the Mystery would speak to him.

With a puzzled sigh he went back to his perusal of the Bible. He read carefully, slowly, noting every word and ever letter, and having finished with the two pages—one hundred and ninety-eight and one hundred and ninety-nine—between which the large bill had lain, he started once more, deliberately.

He had gone halfway down the page when he leaned forward with excitement, his eyes bright with the discovery. He saw what he had not seen before—marks—pencil marks, so slight, so slender and light, that it required strong eyes to behold them. He read the passage:

> And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, that thou mayest go in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey; as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee.

In this passage the slight mark appeared under the words *go* and *unto*. It was plainly the beginning of a message. He glanced further. Now that he knew they were there, he could see more underscorings on the page. It was a message from the dead.

"Got it, Eddie!" he exclaimed. "Get a pencil and paper, and take it down as I give it to you."

Eddie took out a notebook and wrote down what he was told, sitting there in silence, not disturbing his employer by so much as an unnecessary movement.

"Put down 'Go unto,' Eddie," said Val.

> Therefore, it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in Mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaister them with plaister.

Mount was underscored—the only word in the passage underscored. Through the succeeding passages Val spelled out the word *Monroe*, composed of single letters underscored in sequence.

"Mount Monroe," dictated Val. "Got that—Go unto Mount Monroe?"

"Yes, sir," said Eddie. The rest of the message was short, spelled out through the chapter in the same way, single letters in sequence.

It read in full:

> Go unto Mount Monroe, to the secret cave known only to Jessica, my daughter. To her, my sole relative and heir, is left all that is there contained.
>
> PETER J. POMEROY.

Val leaned back in blissful contemplation of this. So there really was treasure. Doubloons, pieces of eight, Spanish gold! It was more or less like a novel of adventure, he told himself. He had never been in this on account of the money. As a matter of fact, he had doubted gravely that there really was any money hidden, buried, or wherever it was that people put money away, if they did not put it in banks.

And now it had come true, miraculously, like a fairy story. It gave a sharp zest to life, this thing. To go hunting for buried treasure, and to find that, somewhere, there is treasure really buried! His blood had not so raced through his veins since the first time he had raptly read through the pages of Stevenson's epic of buried treasure and villainy and blood curdling adventure.

"So there really is something in it, Eddie," he exclaimed.

"It seems so, sir," answered Eddie.

"Where is this here Mount Monroe, anyway?"

"I guess Miss Pomeroy 'll know."

Secret caves on mountains! It was almost too good to be true. And he had uncovered it himself—that would weigh with Jessica, he considered. Perhaps—

He allowed himself to sink away into a reverie about the girl with hidden lights in the coils of her hair. There was that dream he had had about a wedding. Now, it was not impossible for such a dream to come true. Men have married women before—he considered. Not such women as Jessica, of course, but it was possible that to them the women had seemed just as wonderful. That was absurd, of course—as if any woman could be as wonderful as Jessica; yet men were foolish, and they had their dreams.

"To-morrow morning, Eddie," he said, "we start out early—at daybreak. We'll get Miss Pomeroy to go with us—the note says she knows where the cave is—and we'll have the loot before old boy Iggy is out of bed. Then back to New York—maybe."

"Yes, sir," said Eddie. "After breakfast, sir," he supplied.

Val laughed. "This is no time to think of food, Eddie. Haven't you any soul for romance?"

"Yes, sir," said Eddie. "This here romance thing is more romantic on a full stomach, though."

"Well, go to bed, Eddie. I'm going to turn in."

Eddie went into his room and prepared for the night. Val made his preparations quickly, threw open the window full, and turned out his light. There was a table near the window, and on it he threw the Bible which he had abstracted from Teck's room.

"Good night, Eddie," he called.

"Good night, sir," came a sleepy voice.

The room was bathed in darkness and in sleep; the slumberous shadows were deep except near the window, where a wan moon somewhat lightened the gloom with a thin, cold, silvery light.

From far off, across the bay, came the bell of a vessel, to be answered by other bells, mellowed by their passage over the water. Here and there on the water the great searchlight of Fortress Monroe played unceasingly, vigilantly, and somewhere below, far on the road, an automobile chugged noisily on its way.

Outside Val's window two shadows halted a— large bulk, on whose handless stumps the moon played, shrouding them in a ghastly light, and another, smaller, who held in his hand a flashlight.

"There it is—on the table," whispered a hoarse voice, when Teck had got accustomed to the darkness. The table stood by the window, bathed in the light of the moon, and was easily discernible.

The smaller man reached in and seized the book. Outside on the balcony he played his flashlight on the cover.

"That's it," hissed the voice of Teck.

They were gone.

It was almost like a nightmare. Val sat up in bed and called to Eddie.

"Asleep, Eddie?" he asked.

"What is it, sir?" came back a sleepy voice.

"The Bible—it's stolen again," said Val.

There was a scuffle—Eddie leaping out of bed.

"It would be, sir," he said, coming into the room. "Shall I go and get it? That book has traveled more—"

"No, don't bother, Eddie. Let them have it," replied Val. "I'm too tired to bother about it."

"I know, sir," remonstrated Eddie, awake now. "But the dope about the money—they might uncover that—"

"I think not, Eddie," yawned Val sleepily. He reached under his pillow.

"You see," he said, "I rather expected a visit some time to-night. He won't be suspicious if he has the Bible—and I don't mind." He handed Eddie a sheet of paper he had produced from under his pillow. It was the page of the Bible containing the data indicated by Peter Pomeroy, neatly cut out.

"Good night, sir," said Eddie.

They were not destined, however, to spend the rest of the night in sleep.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

The Broken Chip

By VINCENT HUGHES

IT was with nervous fingers that Laurence Gray picked up the whiskbroom and brushed one or two imaginary specks from his evening clothes. The mirror informed him that he could do little more to lessen the appearance of poverty; true, the black tie was frayed, the white shirt had seen better days, but the mother-of-pearl studs looked well and there were no moth holes in the tuxedo. Consulting his watch he saw that it wanted ten minutes to the hour. At eight Stevens would call in a four-wheeler.

He sat down on his bed—a small one, which his landlady, Mrs. Ogden, had installed so that the room might also be accomodated with chairs, table, and bureau. His eyes taking in the few dreary contents rested eventually on a pair of dice which, with some odds and ends, were in a little tray on the dresser.

After a moment's thought he leaned over and took them up and, warming them in his hands, threw them on the white cover of his bed. Something depended on the result, and they showed seven! Breathing easier he threw them again. Eleven. He waited before trying a third time. Twelve! Replacing them in the tray he thrust his hands into his pockets and walked up and down the room; then he stopped and, tolerant of his weakness, once again took up the dice and rolled them along the floor. Seven!

"My luck's in all right," he told himself, his eyes shining. He was too anxious to wait longer, and taking up his hat he turned out the gas and stepped into the hallway.

There was a light in the bathroom and framed in the open door was a little nude girl of seven. Her black hair was a mass of curls and beads of water dripped from her pink, healthy body. Her name was Mary Elizabeth Jones.

"My, ain't you dressed grand," she said facing him unblushingly. "Where're you goin'?"

Where he was going, Laurence replied, was less important than that little girls like Liza should not run about naked.

"Oh, shucks," she disagreed. "I got

to wait for towel, and if they don't hurry up I'll be dried." She surveyed him. "Ma says your an actor-feller. Are you?"

"I am when I can get work, Liza."

"In the circus?"

"Once or twice."

"I seen your picture. And Ethel's too. My, she's beautiful. I seen everything in your room. When you go out I go and sit in there. And ma's in the circus. She says she's sorry for you."

Laurence Gray was really embarrassed. He could more readily face a packed house than this unabashed little sprite.

"When I'm growed up," she shouted after him, "I'm goin' to marry you. Ma says I can."

He continued on his way downstairs. A figure stood silhouetted against the front door and he could see the gleam of carriage lamps outside. "On time to the dot," was the way Stevens greeted him.

Max Stevens was a clubman. He could afford to play when most people were sleeping and sleep when most people were working. The ravages of this fast routine had left their mark on him, particularly about the eyes and mouth. Yet, distinct enough in the dark cab, Gray's face was the whiter, the more strained.

"It's my last chance. I'm risking all I have," he said.

"How much is that?"

"Two hundred and fifty. If I lose it—"

"You mustn't look at it that way," interrupted Stevens "If Trequair heard that he wouldn't exactly welcome you. You know as well as I do, or should know, that everything's square there."

Gray acknowledged Trequair's honesty only mildly.

"You've met Ethel Le Manquis?" he asked after a silence.

"Yes. Last time I saw her was in 'The Bohemian Girl.' The fact is I've never been able to figure Ethel out. Jack Wilson says she's sporty—" He was pulled up short by the grip of astonishingly strong fingers on his forearm. "What's the matter?

"Just this," said Gray quietly. "I hope to marry her."

"What!"

"And I've long since discovered many virtues about her which hardly coincide with what you might—" he slightly prolonged the word—"have been going to say. One is her objection to gambling."

Stevens decided it was not the time to contradict him.

"But it's in my blood, I guess, and—as you pointed out yesterday—I'm not likely to get the chance of Trequair's very often. Anyhow, I've had such damned rotten luck lately at everything."

"I hardly get you," said Stevens.

"It's plain enough. If you see Ethel don't give me away, that's all."

Once before had he visited the select gambling house facing the park, and on that occasion he had dropped three hundred dollars. Now Trequair, a tall Englishman, aristocratic, charmingly mannered, received him as though he had been a member. He remembered him perfectly, he said, and hoped he would have better luck.

Before entering the red-carpeted, spacious drawing room Laurence exchanged his money for chips. The cashier looked up when he saw the bills.

"Real money, eh?" Laurence nodded and asked for ten whites, ten reds, and four blues. He watched Stevens hand over a check, then together they wandered into the large room.

There were a number of people present, all in evening dress, and several handsome women. Most of them were playing roulette and in an abrupt silence he heard the click of the ball. A man rose from a green baize table and addressed him.

"Care to make a seventh? We're held up. Poker."

Laurence hesitated, glancing anxiously at the roulette wheel, then he signified his willingness.

"If your luck's out you can play the wheel later," said the man. There were no introductions, but in deference to the ladies the men stood up as he took his seat. "It's five dollars ante, and twenty five before the draw."

A butler stood by for orders and each player contributed a white chip to the house. Laurence ordered a plain ginger ale.

At the end of half an hour he was in

no position to retreat and try his luck at the other table. He had left four whites, two reds, and two blues. The man on his left dealt and the lady opposite opened the pot. It was raised twenty five dollars. Closely examining his hand Laurence discovered that he had been given six cards instead of five; he was about to declare it dead when he saw he had three knaves. He came in for the raise, as did everybody else at the table.

It was not without a tingling feeling of shame that he skillfully packed three cards and asked for two; he was surprised that his voice sounded cold and indifferent. Although the thought didn't occur to him as vividly as it did long after, it was the first time he had deliberately cheated.

His two additional cards were a pair of fives. The opener bet a red chip which was raised to thirty five dollars. Laurence studied his hand then threw in his last remaining chips, raising the pot twenty dollars. Four players saw him show the winning hand. Amongst the pile of chips which he swept to his corner was a white one, conspicuously broken. Not until he stacked his winnings did he notice it however—and then it became immediately important.

Instinctively he felt that this broken white chip would humor the goddess of his fortune. It did. Not once was he called to part with it and at eleven thirty, when the ladies decided to quit, he found it had brought him luck beyond all expectations. He avoided the wheel and, his pockets bulging, went to the cashier's office. He watched the man counting, but when he came to the last stack of whites he stopped him, summarily.

"Just a moment," he said, picking up the broken chip. "If you don't mind I'll keep this."

The man smiled. "All right, sir," he said. "And what's more I won't deduct for it."

Outside he hailed a cab and told the driver to stop at a certain address before going on to Twenty Third Street. There, outside a lighted window, he whistled several times before it was pushed up, the curtains discreetly drawn a little to one side, and a feminine voice informed him it was past twelve o'clock.

"Ethel, this is Laurence. I'm sorry to break in on you at this hour, but I couldn't sleep without letting you know. I've broken a promise and—"

"What promise?"

"Cards."

"Oh."

Laurence was disappointed at the mildness of her tone. He had sentimentally expected, hoped for an impulsive disapproval, a scolding; it would have reassured him of her interest and love.

"But now I'm through, Ethel. I swear it. To-night has been the turning point of my career, and I'm a different man. Ethel I won close on two thousand four hundred dollars and I want you to marry me tomorrow. Will you?"

She didn't answer his question, but, instead, made him repeat the amount he said he had won. Oh, wasn't he a clever boy! Yes, she would forgive him, but although she was not rehearsing to-morrow, Saturday, they must talk things over before being too hasty. She would meet him for lunch and they might go into the country in the afternoon. Certainly, she whispered, she loved him, devotedly; of course she did—

To the cabby he gave a five dollar bill, and, in his room, before going to bed he went half-heartedly to his knees and muttered a prayer. He asked leniency for his cheating, and strength for the future. He would pay all his debts, make a new start, and never look back.

When he met her at Rector's he found Ethel becomingly gowned in soft gray and as he led her to a table he was proud. Here her acquaintances were many, and more than one greeted her by her Christian name. He had already been busy, he told her, and showed her a new bank book with a deposit of two thousand three hundred dollars. "It's a lease on life," he explained. Then from his pocket he produced the broken chip and explained to her how it had brought him luck.

"Laugh at me if you like," he said, "but it's going to bring me success, Ethel." To prove his belief he launched into the re-

counting of a series of amazing draws, the filling in of straights and flushes—but about the misdeal he was silent.

"But last night brought me something more than money," he went on. "It brought me to my senses. Ethel, I'm through with the stage. At best it's demoralizing business—all this waiting and waiting around for an engagement, and even when you get one not knowing if it will last a week. I'm through. This morning I saw Charlie Evans; you don't know him, but he's with the Westchester Securities. There's a chance of my getting a job in their office; anyway I'm to go there Monday morning and Charlie will pull for me and introduce me to Mr. Lawson, the manager." He spun the broken chip in the air, and caught it. "I'll get the job for sure."

Ethel nodded approvingly. "We open in Washington on the fifth," she said, "and Mr. Soloman has promised me the understudy. It's a New York show, and we'll probably be at the Astor later on."

The small diamond on her third finger scintillated, attracting his attention. His mind was swiftly invaded by the memory of a sacrificial purchase, the pawning of his watch and cigarette case in order to pay the proper and conventional respect to an agreement. Now, in his affluence, that symbol appeared cheap and tawdry.

I've been thinking—I might get you a better ring."

"Oh, Lorrie!"

"Although—maybe—you wouldn't like to part with that one; would you, Ethel?"

Reflectively she toyed with her dessert. "Well, if you got me a nicer one—But there's other things I need terribly. There's a sable at Jones's I'd just love."

"Maybe we can get that, too. But Ethel, couldn't we—let's get married today—this afternoon."

She regarded him mildly. "Better wait a while," she said. "If you get that job and everything goes right we'll make it next Saturday. Then we could go to Atlantic City and stop over there until Monday."

He kissed her fingers, and they went to Tiffany's and selected a ring. But, the bank being closed, the check that Laurence tendered was not regarded with favor, and the sapphires had to be placed aside.

"How stupid of you," Ethel told him when they were outside. "Now we can't go to Jones's, and if the sable is gone on Monday I'll never forgive you."

Laurence apologized. Her manner was so delightfully possessive, she appeared so radiant in her piqued disappointment, that he became doubly conscious of his inconsequential blunders. "I'll make the check over to you," he said, "and you can do your own shopping early before rehearsal."

They drove out to Garden City, stopping there for dinner, then returned in time for a theater. On Sunday Ethel had an engagement in the evening, and he stayed in his room writing a letter to his married sister. On his return from posting it he bought a small box of candy, and wrote on it: "To Liza, from the celebrated actor, Laurence Gray." This he left on his bureau, near the alarm clock decorated with a singing canary, and where he knew she would be sure to find it. The next morning he transferred the broken chip to the pocket of a new suit of clothes, and went down to keep his business appointment.

"We have here," said Mr. Lawson, a kindly, white-haired old gentleman to whom he was introduced, "an established house. From the outside, as you may have observed, the building doesn't amount to much; but inside it has an intergrity—enjoyed, I believe—" here he glanced over his steel eyglasses at Evans for confirmation —"by few similar concerns. Mr. Evans has an opinion that you are to be thoroughly trusted. Well, we don't usually employ any one who is not known to us, but we do happen to want a clerk in the auditing department."

There was about him, thought Laurence, that fatherly disposition, kindliness, that he had associated only with one other in the days of his boyhood. Observing this, it warmed him to a full appreciation of his capabilities, a desire to succeed and give his best.

In a simple, straightforward way he acquainted the manager with his precise feelings. "I'm twenty seven, sir," he said,

"and I'm anxious to settle down in the service of a firm like this. I want to get on. It's not only for myself—I'm engaged to be married."

"I have found," commented Mr. Lawson nodding his head, "one sure method for success. Grit and determination."

"Depending," returned Laurence earnestly, "upon where one applies it."

"I think not. Whatever profession a man may choose he has but to apply himself diligently to that end. Success must follow."

The old gentleman rose, and dismissed Evans. "Yes, work is the thing," he repeated, turning his gray eyes on Laurence. "Work—supplemented by honesty. There's a great deal of commercial shuffling here in New York, but the firm that condones it comes a cropper sooner or later. Depend upon it, dishonesty recoils on the man who perpetrates it—like a rattlesnake. I've no point in saying this to you. You have the cut of a decent, straight young fellow; but I'm merely telling the motto of this firm."

Laurence was given an opportunity, and right there he took off his coat and started working. Luck was with him; he could feel it was with him—preferably in his waistcoat pocket. But entirely apart from the fetish of a broken white poker chip, a playful sop to Nemesis, he felt that things were moving rapidly. The dramatic change from hopelessness to approximate luxury tingled his blood and nerved him to surmount almost insuperable tasks.

When he returned to his room that evening he was not surprised to find himself utterly tired out. There was a letter awaiting him and he saw that it bore the address of one of the biggest theatrical firms on Broadway. Opening it he read that his presence was desired at their offices at eleven sharp on Tuesday morning. It was the offer of a part! This, he believed, was further proof of the magic of the broken chip and for a moment he was torn by conflicting desires. But during his vacillation he heard the sound of tearing paper, and seeing what his fingers had accomplished he was at once decided. Freed, he flung the letter into the waste-paper basket.

Of the rejection of the theatrical manager's offer Ethel was not at all sure that she approved; but his enthusiasm for the new work conquered her. Usually slow in giving vent to an interest in his looks she now commented on his liveliness, his spirit. The fact was that the establishing of himself at Ross & Conover's had enlivened him considerably; his worried, hang-dog expression disappeared and the mirror reflected a brighter, more youthful man.

He was liked, too, in the office until an incident threatened his popularity. As he was leaving for lunch one morning he had approached Mr. Lawson and told him that in his desire to learn the business of the house he would gladly stay behind any evening and help; a certain hostility, slight but none the less perceptible, emanated from the ranks of his fellow workers on his return. He was at a loss to account for it until one of them condescended to explain:

"You're to come back at nine o'clock tonight. That's what you get for playing up to the old man."

"And bring your bed with you," said another. "Believe me you'll need it."

"Who said we're to have a new president?"

Laurence canceled an appointment with Ethel which had been arranged for that evening. "That little broken chip will help me to a promotion before the end of the month, dear," he explained to her. "I'm to go back at nine o'clock and work with Mr. Lawson, our manager. You don't mind, do you?"

Well, she had refused an invitation to a party for him, that was all. But she could study her part, she supposed; she also had some sewing to do—yes, for Saturday. No, she wasn't sure if she were looking forward to it so eagerly after all. She wasn't, if the acceptance of a motor ride at the hour of ten that same night was an indication of her sincerity. But Laurence believed in her too well to permit of doubt in connection with her pettishness; to him it was merely a characteristic contributing to the generality of her charm and loveliness—and he was confident that she cared for no other man.

The day had been warm and, before

changing his clothes, he splashed contentedly in the bath. While he was there Liza took possession of his room, and more particularly of his alarm clock. She had often seen him set it and fix the bell and she now had a go at the same business herself; only one thing did she accomplish, however, before putting it back on the table: her little fingers unwittingly turned the hands so that the clock was exactly one hour slow. Laurence, returning, bundled her out of the room, dressed and went down to dinner. Later it was only for a fleeting instant, glancing at the time before lying down on his bed, that he expressed surprise at the earliness of the evening; he had more time for the forty winks than he had anticipated. He awoke with a start and saw that it was fifteen minutes to nine, and in his haste to get to the office he forgot, for the first time since it had come to him, the broken chip! It was in his other suit, locked up in the closet.

The Westchester Securities building was in sight when a church clock, somewhere, chimed the hour of ten. Laurence didn't stop to count; all it meant was that he would be no more late than a minute past nine. The street was dimly lit, not a soul was to be seen, and he was surprised to find the front door of the building slightly ajar; but there was a light in the main office and he concluded that Mr. Lawson, anticipating his punctuality, had left the door open for him. He entered and ran up the two short flights of worn stairs into the main office. It was woefully silent and deserted. A single glance at the office clock right ahead of him might have provoked amazement, then carefulness, next suspicion at the pervading stillness. But he didn't notice it; he only noticed that Mr. Lawson's office was dark, the door shut. This brought him to a decision: "Mr. Lawson! Mr. Lawson!"

There was no reply and walking to the manager's office he opened the door and stepped in. He was immediately seized by unseen hands, dragged into the room and man-handled in the dark. He fought desperately and, once, broke away, aiming for the closed door; but whoever were his assailants, they were too many for him and a fearful blow on the jaw sent him to the floor.

Half an hour went by before Laurence regained consciousness. At first, sitting up in the dark, he thought he had been dreaming; but as his hands encountered unfamiliar objects, the hard mahogany table, an office chair, he gradually realized where he was. Then, starkly, he recalled what had happened.

There was little or no light from the window and, still dazed, he felt his way to the door only to discover it locked; with out success he felt for the key on the floor. Then came the thought of matches; but, searching, he could discover none in his pockets, none on the table. He leaned against the wall. He was now sure that there had been a robbery, and Mr. Lawson —he knitted his forehead—what had happened to Mr. Lawson—?

Suddenly—he thought he was not alone! Tense, he listened for a sound of breathing and could hear nothing; but the presence of something—man, animal—was emphatic; he could feel—yes, that was it—feel something in the room. Peering into the gloom, a general creepiness ran through his body. His one desire was to escape, to get away, anywhere; and in a flood of relief he thought of the window.

To the latter he went, groping his way around the mahogany table, and half-way his foot kicked a soft dead weight on the carpet. It was instantly borne to his mind that what he had stumbled on was a human body! Trembling, he knelt down and touched it with his hands, and more from sheer desperate fright than curiosity he felt for the throb of a heart. He could discern none.

The harsh noise of a patrol wagon reverberated through the street and up to the house-tops; it stopped as suddenly as it had come, but the momentary quiet only preceded footsteps on the narrow stone stairway leading to the main office. All at once Laurence was gripped by an amazing fear, fear intensified when, feeling in his waistcoat pocket for his everlasting protector, the broken chip, he realized that he had left it in his other clothes. He knew he was in the room with a dead body; and when

the police entered they would find him there, in the dark, and whatever the result he would, at least, not be able to marry Ethel to-morrow and go to Atlantic City.

The newcomers were now vigorously trying to enter the office. "Locked," he heard one of them say. "Here, Jim, give it your shoulder." Quickly Laurence sped across the intervening space and reached the window. He opened it, intent only on escaping, if necessary by dropping to the street—when the door was burst in and he was ordered to hold up his hands. One of the policemen covered him, while another turned on the light. Old Mr. Lawson lay dead on the floor.

"Well, what yer got to say?"

For the moment Laurence had nothing to say. He only blinked in the light and at the sight of the inert form of the manager he stood open-mouthed, gasping.

"Why—why it's Mr. Lawson!" were his first words.

He was briefly warned that anything he might say would be used as evidence against him.

"Against me? Me? Why you surely don't think that I did—did that!"

But little heed was taken of his question. He was now securely held by a husky policeman while the others went about their exasperatingly efficient business. Mr. Lawson was bluntly pronounced to be a dead man, and the revolver with one chamber emptied, resting wickedly and nakedly on the table, was noted; the safe open, too, was remarked upon, and severely left alone.

The policeman now shook Laurence as though he might have been no more than a bundle of clothes.

"Well," he asked again, "what yer got to say?"

"Why, you've made a mistake, officer." Laurence tried his best to appear calm, to still the violent beating of his heart; but, talking, he immediately lost all control over his faculties In a high-pitched voice pointing to the body of Mr. Lawson he said: "This gentleman is my boss, the manager of t—this office. I was attacked by three or four men when I came in, and—why, you've made a terrible m—mistake that's all."

The faces that confronted him showed too plainly that not one word of what he was saying was believed.

"I'm telling you the truth, so help me God. My name's Laurence Gray and I came in here at nine o'clock to keep an appointment with Mr. Lawson. When I entered the room I was jumped on by three of them, knocked down and—" here, feeling his chin, he found a slight laceration on it—"look here! See that! That's where they got me."

But still he was confronted by the stony, hard-hearted countenances. Intuitively fearing them he was at once driven into a frenzy of denial.

"He asked me to be here at nine o'clock I tell you—I came—and— How could I have locked the door; answer me that? When I came to I tried my damnedest to open it. I couldn't because the man who shot Mr. Lawson had locked it from the outside."

Continually protesting his innocence, even cursing them for their blundering stupidity, he was forced into the patrol wagon and taken to jail. The key of the office door was found directly beneath the window; without a doubt it had been thrown there by the prisoner. The one great chance of acquitting himself—and, at that, only a chance—melted into the immutability of a bygone hour when, the next morning, his alarm clock stopped for want of re-winding. With it stopped every hope, every possibility he had of regaining his liberty.

It was proved on his own evidence that he had been at the offices of the Weschester Securities at nine o'clock on Friday evening. It was about nine-thirty when some one had heard the shot. Several clerks also testified that Mr. Lawson had asked the prisoner to come back at that hour, and they surmised that he, Laurence Gray, knew as well as they did that the manager would be alone.

The prosecution asked whence came the two thousand dollars in the bank with which the prisoner had briefed counsel for the defense? For nearly a year and a half Gray had been out of work; how had he got hold of this sudden fortune? It had been won at a game of poker. Where? When?

With whom? Laurence, sure in his innocence, refused to tell. It was a triumph for the prosecution, and the learned attorney for the defense was ridiculed for receiving tainted money for his services.

All Ethel Le Manquis could say for her lover was that he had arranged to do some extra work with Mr. Lawson so that the firm would be more liberal with him in the matter of salary. No money had been taken from the safe—there was little there it seemed—still it was not for the want of desperate and diabolical endeavor that the prisoner had failed to get away with it. The net of circumstantial evidence was drawn so tightly around him that on the closing day when the jury returned their verdict, Laurence Gray looked the criminal he was judged to be. He received a sentence of twenty five years in jail of which he served nearly eighteen before a repentant yeggman in a death-bed confession proved that it was he and not the man in Sing Sing who had shot and killed Mr. Lawson.

II.

It was a crisp autumn morning when Laurence passed through the iron gates, once again a free man; free, they had told him, because he had been wrongly convicted, because there was no mark whatsoever against his good name. He had money in his pocket and he wore a brand new suit of clothes which he distinctly remembered having made with his own hands. He looked no more than his age, forty-five; his face was ashen, his hair gray, there was a network of indented lines around his eyes and mouth, and except for a bending of his neck he was erect enough and his step firm and vigorous.

Physically he had nothing of which to complain. The damage had been mental. It was his mind that, year after year, had slowly become atrophied, and he was now stolid. New York was no more than a desert, huge, terrifying, utterly without precinct of comforting wall and roof. He felt insignificant, terribly free and disregarded.

No word had come to him from outside—he had, years ago, given up all hope of that—and now, there seemed no place where he might find that monotony of peace to which he had blessedly resigned himself while in prison. There, too, he had had friends, more, in fact, than he had even known before; guards, jailers—other prisoners. And there had been a total absence of ambition within that inclosure, that hideous desire to rise above one's fellow man which once had pervaded and tortured him. All men were alike there, all were equal. Back here in the city he would be sucked into the vortex of a rushing, maddening struggle for existence which, in Sing Sing, had not concerned him.

But being suddenly free again, what was infinitely worse was his incapability of adjusting himself to the loss of time. The invigorating air was that of early morning after a black night of deep, heavy sleep. That the trees, the flowers, the grasses, this and that person were eighteen years older than when he might last have seen them was a bewildering fancy. This was most confusing when he found himself in Times Square. He couldn't get it into his head that all those years had gone by before, miraculously he was standing where he stood yesterday. Here was the true extent of his misery: he wanted to believe that everything had remained as it had been while only he himself had altered, aged. And yet even as he grappled with this difficulty the whole of Times Square, the clothes and manners of the passers-by, gave evidence of their progress.

He was more conscious of a desire to go to all his friends and show himself so that they would welcome him, offer their hands, and beg his forgiveness. He went down Broadway and after a vain search he was informed that the Westchester Securities had moved to Fifth Avenue. When he found the building he went in and asked for Charlie Evans; but not one of the smart, well-dressed young clerks had ever heard of Charlie Evans, nor, for that matter, of any name he dared mention.

There was little satisfaction in establishing his innocence in a house where now no one was known to him, and he wandered on to his old boarding place. Thank God it was still in its accustomed spot, still what

it had always been. The landlady was a stranger to him, however, and she was certain that no Mrs. Ogden had ever lived there.

"Maybe ye've got the numbers mixed," she declared, "or the wrong street or something."

Laurence was sure about the house. He had lived there, he said some years ago—before he went away to South America. The trouble was that he had left some clothes behind, in his room. Would it be much of a bother if he had a look for them?

She regarded him with open suspicion, asked several questions, then said that if it would satisfy him he could search the house from top to bottom. Followed by the puffing landlady he ran up the well-remembered stairs and hurried to the back room, the door of which he familiarly pushed open. He had not expected it to look as it was when last he occupied it, but he was quite unprepared for its cleanliness, new furniture, new wall paper. His mouth twitched as he turned away.

"I lived in that room," he said.

There was, the landlady admitted, an old suit in the closet—or, at least, there had been. She had thought of giving it away except that it was hardly good enough to wear. Taking a key from another closet farther along the corridor she opened the door. Yes, it was there, she said; on top of the shelf. In an ecstasy he was quite unable to suppress, Laurence, regardless of the dust, held the old suit to his heart. It thrilled him; he became pleasurably associated with himself as he was eighteen years ago; he could feel with his bare hands the desired tangibility of his lost youth.

Then a startlingly swift thought invaded his mind and his breath came and went in little short gasps as the importance of a necessary discovery conveyed itself to him. Hesitatingly, he fumbled with trembling fingers in the waistcoat pockets and in the last one they encountered a little, hard, jagged edge. It was the broken chip, somewhat yellow and faded, but nevertheless still a talisman, still the delivery from all his misfortunes. He broke into a wild laugh and closed his hand about the chip until its edge bit into the flesh.

"Ha, ha," he shouted to the astonished landlady, "now I'm safe again. With this in my possession I'll face all they've left me. I'll succeed, yet!" Slightly hysterical, the moth-eaten suit bundled under his arm, Laurence dashed out of the house.

In Sing Sing he had mastered the tailoring trade, but a fellow prisoner had told him that they made clothes by machinery in New York. Apart from that, when his money was gone, he could think of no method whereby he might earn a living. Every penny of his bank account had gone to pay the lawyer for his defense, years ago. Deciding to be as careful as possible with what money he had he took a room on the west-side near the river for which he paid fifty cents a night, and once arrived there he put on his old suit. He was boyishly delighted to find that it still fitted him and for sentimental reasons he wore it when he went out to eat at a nearby restaurant.

Later, in the midst of a flare of happiness, sitting on a bench in the park in sight of Columbus Circle, he suddenly realized that of all the city's millions he knew not one. Inquiries for friends at his old boarding house had failed, lamentably, to get the least encouragement. All had left, or died. It was staggering to think that a mere eighteen years should create this incontrovertible void of old companionship, rob him of all his earlier acquaintances.

But it wasn't his friends that he wanted exactly; it was Laurence Gray, as he used to be, as he could even now see himself, eighteen years ago. No, it wasn't Ethel, for instance; he visualized her not as he had seen her that day at Rector's but as she would now appear—a woman of forty seven, probably fat, prosperous, and, which was most horrible, absolutely done with the pleasures of youth, romance. He, Laurence, was not. He wanted nothing more than to take up his courtship just where he had left off; but how? And with whom?

Phantom—yes, phantoms all. Even he himself, sitting there in an old out-of-date suit pretending he was still a young man, seemed rather a ghost of past days, days and friends which every tick of the clock sent further and further into irrevocability

and the grave. It would not be long before he joined them—

A young woman crossed to his bench and sat down. In the twilight her face was a dull white and her small, full mouth appeared black; although she was fairly well dressed there was an air of dejection about her, but Laurence, glancing at her, responded to her youth and lonesomeness. She would be about twenty four, he thought; an actress most probably and, like himself, out of work. Once her large eyes gleamed luminously in the dark—like those of a cat—but she said nothing and appeared to be absorbed in the serenity of the night.

Two or three times he nervously cleared his throat to speak to her but each time something stopped him. True she might be just as lonely and unhappy as himself, she might even be glad of his company, a few kind words of common, park-bench sympathy. But still during the next half hour, he wavered.

He knew that she was wretched and miserable and the desire to talk to her was ever uppermost in his mind, but though he consulted the broken chip he was still undecided. Looking down at it, it seemed rather to dissuade than inspire him and suddenly he knew why; its yellowness reminded him of the brand his late years had given him; on his face was the pallor of the prison, in his closely cropped hair was the smell of a narrow cell. The truth was that now he had little or no claim on the attention of decent society much less should he force his jail-bird personality on a girl only half his years.

Absently, he restored the talisman to its home in his waistcoat pocket, and drew in his breath. No, he told himself, he was forever expelled; no matter where he went the odium of Sing Sing would follow him, clothe him in unmistakable apparel, and in the daytime—or whereever light struck him—he would be marked down and shunned by everybody. He rose heavily and walked away.

He had gone about thirty yards when he heard footsteps behind him, then a soft voice: "I think you dropped this." It was the girl of the bench and in her fingers she held the broken chip. "I heard something fall," she said without a spark of animation in her tone or eyes, "and after you had gone I found it. It must have fallen out of your pocket."

Laurence, glad only just then for the return of his property, was almost foolish in his thanks. "I wouldn't care to lose it," he told her, "not for anything in the world. I lost it once before and I—" He stopped abrubtly.

"It's a poker chip, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's all it is. Just a poker chip."

"You seem mighty pleased to get it back."

"I am."

"Maybe it's a souvenir?"

"It is: A souvenir of my youth."

She was walking on toward the light of Columbus Circle, but Laurence, happy to have her by his side, preferred the shade. When he asked her to share a vacant bench with him she made no demur, and in her willingness to talk and the volubility of her chatter her lonesomeness was quite apparent. At first, she said, she had thought it was a fifty cent piece. What had happened when he lost it once before?

Laurence interlocked his fingers and looked away. "You wouldn't believe me, if I told you."

"Yes, I would."

"I'd prefer not to tell you, anyway. But I'll say this much; that when it's with me I'm lucky, lucky in everything. It's a charm, a talisman. Years ago I won it in a poker game and—well, maybe you'll think I'm crazy but I believe in it; mostly, I guess because the one time I went out without it a terrible misfortune came to me—something you'd never believe." He looked directly at her, briefly; they analyzed each other.

"Then perhaps, now I've held it in my hand, it'll bring me good luck, too," she said seriously.

"Maybe."

"I haven't had much up to now."

"You haven't?"

"None at all."

Her quietness, the manner of barely moving her lips as she spoke, pleased him, and he immediately liked her. He discerned, also, or thought he did, a certain straight-

forwardness in her eyes and a total lack of pretense and misrepresentation in her pretty features. The corners of her mouth drooped sadly, but the absence of any trace of cosmetic revoked his former opinion as to her calling.

"You're not on the stage, are you?" he asked.

Slowly, she shook her head.

"Then please don't be angry with me for telling you that at this hour you shouldn't be alone in the park. It's going on eleven."

"I know," she returned, sighing a little. "I came here about six o'clock to think out what I should do. I've made up my mind to do something more useful than wash dishes and scrub floors all my life. I'm twenty-five, and I want—before it's too late—to be set free, to get away from the bondage which has always been my lot. I want to see something of the beautiful world—" her wide-open eyes looked fervently up to the stars—"the country flowers, the mountains, and the blue sea."

A little soulless laugh escaped him. "I've been in bondage, too," he said to her. "Eighteen years of it; and like you, maybe, through no fault of my own."

She was still looking heavenwards. "That's about how long I've had of it; looking after father, mending for him, and then working here and there to get a little money so that I could pay the rent. Mother died when I was a little girl, and father—ten years ago."

"But, at least, you've always had your freedom."

"Very little."

"I hadn't any. My eighteen years were spent in Sing Sing!"

She stopped breathing; but Laurence, his eyes averted, was relieved to think that she had no intention of leaving him.

"Yes, in prison," he repeated, deliberately.

"Mine was prison, too."

"But I was innocent."

"So was I."

There was a silence, then she said: "Were you really innocent?"

"God's truth. It must have been in the papers. Laurence Gray. I was convicted of shooting Mr. Lawson of the Westchester Securities and I served—" but the recounting of that couldn't be told, his voice failed him. On another point he was more at ease. "A fellow named Guido or Guilio or something confessed only the other day," he said brokenly. "But I—"

"Please go on."

"Well, I feel it didn't matter—not after so long. I mean whether he confessed or not. Not now—it's too late." Talking in this way to some one so pulsatingly, so warmly related to what he still considered the outside world, came dangerously near breaking him, and he could feel his eyes smartening.

"What did you say was your name?"

"Laurence Gray."

Her little words of sympathy cheered him, and he was sorry when she went away. She made a half promise to meet him there again, and in his room he gave all the thanks for his good fortune to the broken chip. Undressing, he hung his beloved coat over the back of a chair and did his best to crease the worn-out trousers. He slept hopefully.

She was not there the following evening and he sat for hours, unhappily alone; but the next day he saw her and, rising, took off his hat. She was paler, he thought, her step listless and weary; this, too, was perceptible in her greeting. She sat down and informed him that she herself was very unhappy.

"I tried real hard, to-day," she explained. "I went to all the big stores—but I wasn't dressed good enough, I suppose." For a second her eyes cleared. "Your poker chip isn't so very wonderful, after all."

Laurence suggested that she hadn't yet given it a fair trial. He felt sure she would soon get a job; she was nice looking and just the sort of girl they needed. But he warned her that there was little freedom working in a big department store; he had heard it was much of a grind. She agreed with him, but—

"Really I hate to tell you what I did last night," she said quietly, the slightest tremor in her throat. "I went begging things, coffee, sugar, and bread, and made myself a supper in my room. But the

landlord says he'll throw me out if I don't pay what I owe him."

He at once understood the meaning of her restless fingers, her strained, hungry expression.

"D'you mean you haven't eaten?"

"Not anything—to-day—"

Little actual money stood between him and blank misery but he was prepared to spend all he had so that this girl should not go hungry. He was almost dragging her across the Circle toward the brilliantly lit restaurant when she told him that she knew of a cheaper place along Broadway. Once there he begged her to eat all she wanted and not worry, as she said she was doing, about whether he could afford to pay for it. With the appeasing of her appetite she became brighter, prettier, and they were soon good pals.

"I feel as if I'd known you a long time," she told him. He discovered, much to his bewilderment at first, that in spite of her destitution a sense of humor still predominated. She teased him for his solemn face, his clumsiness. "And for heaven's sake," she demanded, half-seriously, "where did you find that old cutaway?"

He explained to her just why he was wearing it and exactly what it meant to him; but she smiled away his fears. "I don't think you're so old," she stated; and from that moment Laurence was braver.

In case it might tend to halt the progress of their friendship he refrained from asking questions; but she readily told him about her struggles. Her father had been drowned ten years before; he had gone to work and she had heard nothing of him until, several days later, they found his body. After that she had worked in a cheap boarding house, washing dishes, and trying to hold on to the room in which she and her father had lived. But since she had decided to try and do something better she hadn't been able to pay the rent, and now she couldn't even get a job scrubbing floors.

He walked as far as her house; a dingy neighborhood.

"If it wasn't so late," he said, "I'd interview Mr. Landlord and let him know you have a friend with a fairly hard fist."

The street was filled with little heaps of refuse, the smoke from scores of rag and paper fires, lean cats, wretched people, as thoroughly dismal, he fancied, as was his own future. Preparatory to leaving him she took off her hat, displaying lustrously black curls. He had a flashing picture of a little girl standing in an open door at the end of a corridor.

"Was your mother on the stage?" he inquired suddenly.

"I don't know. I never heard daddy speak of it."

Laurence thrust his fingers into his waistcoat pocket. "I've been wanting to ask your name," he said breathlessly; "but I—"

"Elizabeth."

His heart jumped.

"Elizabeth what?"

"Elizabeth Mason."

"Oh," said Laurence. "For a moment I thought you might be some one I knew—some one I knew a long time ago."

"I wasn't always so badly off as I am now. Father had saved a little money; but a friend told him to invest it in some shares—and I've often thought he committed suicide because the shares were a fraud."

Laurence asked, absent mindedly: "What shares were they?"

"I don't know. I've never bothered to look at them. They're still in his trunk, wrapped up in paper. Once I nearly lit the stove with them, but I kept them because they were daddy's."

"Bring them with you to-morrow. Maybe they're worth something."

This she promised to do.

"Now listen," he went on gravely; "to-morrow's Sunday, isn't it?"

"All day."

"I won't be able to find employment on Sunday, but as sure as I stand here I'll find work Monday. Never you mind about going back to washing dishes; you're through with that. Keep on trying for a job in one of the stores. And in the meantime"—he pulled out a roll of money, hiding its scant size from her—"here's something that will keep the landlord quiet."

She protested instantly.

"Now please don't refuse," he said earnestly; "if you only knew how much you've cheered me, what you've done—I can't tell you what you mean to me. Honestly, I swear it. I'll get a job on Monday, and this will pay for your rent. Please take it."

She came down to him now, her face twisted in dumb thankfulness, her eyes beginning to glisten as she laid her hand on his sleeve.

"You've been wonderfully kind to me," she said; "and I'll never forget it—never, as long as I live."

"That's all right," he told her. "Tomorrow at three. The same place."

In the broad light of Sunday, when he saw her coming toward him, Laurence began to be afraid that she would now find him in his real colors, a released convict; but she gave no sign, and smiled happily when he took her warm little hand and held it until she gently withdrew it.

They walked far into the park and Laurence told her the full story of his imprisonment, how he had gone to the office without the broken chip, and why he now placed so much faith in it. She begged him to let her hold it for a while, and it was clasped in her hand as he went on to tell her how it had come into his possession.

"I'm certain it's still lucky," he concluded. "For one thing—it brought me you."

She glanced quickly at him. "Do you really mean that?"

"Mean it? Why you've made all the difference on earth to me. The only thing that worries me is that people will take me for your father, instead of—" He paused.

"Instead of what?"

He looked away. "Instead of your friend."

"They won't," she defended. "Besides I don't like boys. I like men; they're more sensible."

When they sat down a brown paper bundle under her arm fell to the ground. She laughed when she saw it. "Look," she exclaimed, "both of us forgot all about father's shares. I brought them for you to see."

Undoing the string that fastened the parcel, Laurence saw only that they were shares in the James Motor Corporation of Canada. He knew very little about shares, and as to the importance of the James Corporation his close confinement in Sing Sing had prohibited all enlightenment. But he had often heard some of the prisoners say—in reply to jocular and derogatory remarks anent the James flivver—that they wished to God they had shares in the company. Of this he hastened to acquaint her, and, womanlike, she appealed to a passing policeman for correct information.

In doing this she displayed an unusual amount of cleverness, telling Laurence to hide the shares under his coat and putting her question in a simple, casual way. The policeman, grinning at her, supplied this astonishingly important hint:

"Say! If you had shares in that company," he said pointedly, "you wouldn't be seen inside a James."

They were silent until they were alone, then Laurence jumped to his feet.

"What did I tell you," he shouted excitedly. "You've been holding the chip all afternoon. Didn't I say it would bring you good luck!"

Elizabeth made a valiant effort, but it couldn't be done. She burst into tears.

Later, outside her house, Laurence regained something of his former enthusiasm—but only a little. For over an hour he had been strangely silent. But now he thanked her for her companionship, for her encouragement, for—above all, he said—her belief in him.

"What about all you've done for me?" she insisted.

He replied that what little he had done was nothing. Her comradeship had meant more to him than he could possibly explain, and there had been several things he meant to say to her; but now—

"But now?" she inquired demurely.

"Now I've changed my mind. You know what I am. You know where I've been for the last eighteen years. You know, too, that I'm a middle aged man."

"I know," she retaliated, "that you were innocent, and that you're the kindest and nicest man in all the world."

Modestly, he thanked her. "But I've decided to go away," he added. "I'll leave New York and make a clean start somewhere else. It'll be better for—for both of us."

"If you don't stop saying such things," sobbed Elizabeth, "I'll start crying again." And already the tears were falling. In a dull, confused manner Laurence knew that his future happiness was hanging in the balance, and on impulse, he thought, once again, of the broken chip in his pocket. Making sure it was safely there, he took the liberty of calling her by her Christian name.

"Elizabeth—don't cry."

"You know I've got nobody b-but you, she stammered. "And—and if you go away I'll be perfectly miserable and lonesome a-and unhappy. You gave me all your money, and it's only right you sh-should share mine. Oh, don't you understand what I mean?"

Laurence had a rough idea, but he attempted to fight shy of it.

"You can't possibly care for me?"

"But I do; I do."

He edged nearer to her, his heart beating violently.

"Then will you—will you—that is if I get work and—?"

Elizabeth lifted her tear-stained face to his.

"Yes," she said gladly. "And when we're married the broken chip can be an heirloom in the family."

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A REAL MYSTERY

I HAVE studied picture-writing
Of the aborigines;
And as for hieroglyphics,
I decipher them with ease.
Why, obelisks are A B C,
And so are totem-poles;
You ought to hear me read at sight
From ancient parchment scrolls.

From waxen tablets, too, I solve
Things graven with the style;
And hall-marks, codes, and characters
My time will oft beguile.
And shorthand is not hard. I read
With ease a foreign tongue.
The signs from A to Zodiac
I often browse among.

Now, I can read between the lines
With free and easy swing—
Find tongues in trees and books in brooks,
And all that sort of thing.
In fact, no obstacle I find
The very least obscure,
Except the scrawl supposed to be
An artist's signature.

Blanche Elizabeth Wade.

A Month to Live

By DON CAMERON SHAFER

CHAPTER XVI.

A CONFESSION.

ROLLIN took the three hundred dollars retrieved from the highwayman and the seven hundred dollars received from the sale of his car and wrapped the sum neatly into a square package, and tied it securely. Then he wrapped it again in some heavy paper from the grocery store, and affixed thereto, in a perfectly lifelike manner, half a dozen canceled stamps, sticking them on with the white of an egg. He addressed the parcel to Miss Lidia Foster. When he came up from the village the package was included in the mail.

After this Rollin felt better. Like Charlie and Eddie, he also had done what he could to help the boss—without disclosing his identity. Now she had the money to pay the rent—if she could find any one to pay it to! Otherwise, she could apply it on the notes at the bank. She couldn't possibly know who sent it. The more he thought about this scheme, the cleverer it seemed. Every time he saw her he visualized her surprise and wonderment when she opened the package. It was, he thought, the best joke he had ever planned.

Confidence in his cleverness received a light jolt the next day when she sent for him.

" Sit down, please," she said severely as he came up on the porch.

Rollin sat, uneasily. He could see that she was very grave.

" I'm going to be truthful and frank with you," she announced, looking at him closely. " I am, as you must know, in great need of money. Can you loan me a few hundred dollars?"

This staggered him, threw him off his guard, so to speak. He hadn't expected her to ask him for money.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 1.

"Miss Foster—Lidia—" he began; "I'll be equally as frank and truthful. Simple Simon couldn't show you a sixpence."

"I thought so," said she.

"I know so," grinned Rollin. "I only wish I had some money."

"Your wish, sir, has come true!"

Her brown hand came out of a deep skirt pocket clutching a big roll of yellow bills. "Here," said she, "is a thousand dollars."

"You are too generous," said he. "So much money all at once frightens me."

"This is not prompted by my generous nature. I merely return to you what is yours."

"Mine?" Rollin feigned surprise. "Mine?"

"Yours," she nodded. "But I want you to know that I am grateful."

"Oh, it doesn't belong to me."

"Yes," she insisted. "It belongs to you."

"No," he affirmed. "Not now—"

She put it in his hand. "I understand—" she began. "It was noble of you—"

But Rollin tossed the roll carelessly into the dooryard and never looked to see where it fell.

"I confess," said he. "And throw myself upon the mercy of the court. I—I meant well!"

"I know you did, but—"

"I didn't think you would ever find out who sent it."

"Those stamps were canceled on letters, not on packages. That wrapping paper came from Jakel's store. Besides, the postmaster said no such package ever came through the mail—and you brought it in to me."

"I didn't know," said he, "that Sherlock Holmes had a sister."

"You are," said she, "not nearly so secretive and mysterious as the average detective story."

"Hah! You slander me, woman!"

"But your good intent touches me deeply."

"Good intent makes excellent paving stones where the climate is apt to be torrid, but it will not pay the rent."

"I'll manage somehow," she sighed.

"I wonder," said he.

Lidia went out into the yard and rescued the money, laying it carefully on the table.

"I suppose," said she, with a touch of sarcasm, "you have had considerable practice in tossing away thousand dollar rolls."

"I have," nodded Rollin.

It required no trained observer to see that Rollin was no ordinary farm hand. His education, his culture, his manner, all spoke eloquently of better days. She knew that this young man had never worked on a farm before, if he had ever worked anywhere at anything. She believed also that he had thrown away other, perhaps many, thousand dollar rolls. You could tell that by the very gesture.

"I do appreciate your desire to help me—"

"It is more than a desire," smiled Rollin. "It has assumed all the importance of a deep seated determination."

"But the trouble is, just now, I don't seem to be able to get in touch with my landlord."

"Oh," said Rollin in a strange voice. "Oh, yes—your landlord."

"I can't find him."

"Have you—ah—looked closely?"

"My letters have all been returned. Even his man in charge does not answer. Of course, *he* is never home."

"He?"

"My landlord—always going somewhere for his health."

"Oh—he enjoys poor health, does he?"

"Revels in it."

"Well, as long as he doesn't press you for the rent—"

"That's just it. An installment is due right now; and I can't pay it. And now that I have to make some arrangement with him—some agreement to take care of this loss until I can recuperate—I can't find him at all."

"Ah, perhaps the poor fellow, grown desperate, is hiding from the doctors."

"I'm sure something is wrong."

"Probably the unfortunate's head!"

"Maybe he is—is—dead."

"No," said Rollin in great confidence; "I have a feeling—a presentiment—that he is very much alive."

"But my letters—my telegrams—"

"I wouldn't worry. Perhaps his agent is out of town. You'll get some word in a few days."

"Well—it has been quite a few days already."

"Patience—you'll hear from him yet."

"In the meantime my contract has defaulted and I will soon be putting in crops on land I do not own or control."

"Would that make any difference?"

"It might. If I default on the rent and forfeit the contract, he could rent the land to some one else and confiscate my crop."

"Oh, he wouldn't do that!"

"Might. It has been done often enough by absentee landlords right in this vicinity."

"Oh, I'm sure he will understand."

"He will not. He is selfish, greedy, profligate. All he cares about is to get money to spend."

"And his health, of course."

"I imagine, from what I hear, that the best thing that could happen to his health would be to lose his money. Then the doctors would let him alone and he would have to go to work."

"All that might easily happen."

"It might, but it never does."

"It happened with me," said he quietly.

"Oh," said she, turning to him anxiously. "I often wonder about you."

"Your interest is the greatest treasure I possess," said he. "I would be poor indeed without it."

"There is your thousand dollars. Take it."

"No."

"You must!"

"Not!"

"Please."

"I shall never touch it again."

"Nor will I."

"As you please."

"I shall turn it over to the county welfare society."

"That will be nice, but I doubt if they need it more than you."

"That is not the point."

"Ah—the novelty of it! This argument has a point!"

"I could not accept money from strangers."

"I am not a stranger."

"You've been here only a few weeks."

"Well, that's quite long enough to get acquainted."

"Why, I do not even know your name."

Some inner devil prompted Rollin to do the very thing he did not want to do. He got up slowly, looking down at her with a twisted little smile.

"My name," said he, "is Rollin Ross Foster Livingston."

"Oh!" she cried, jumping to her feet. "Oh!"

"And I am your selfish, greedy, profligate and invalid landlord."

With this he turned and walked away.

The girl ran after him, calling, but he did not stop.

For a long time she stood there in the moonlit yard, beneath the great cottonwood trees. Then she sighed and went slowly back to the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUSINESS—AND PLEASURE.

ROLLIN worked for more than a week before he saw Miss Lidia again, except at a respectable distance. Once or twice he saw her about the house, or on the porch, but there came no opportunity to go near her. Once he saw her galloping away over the fields on a bright sorrel horse. In the meantime no other man worked harder at the wheat.

Even those immense northland fields of grain cannot stand forever against the massed attack of modern harvesting machinery. Even though the harvest hands recruited so hurriedly are a rough and a tough lot, with individual histories better left untold, they manage somehow to get the work done. With the exception of a few showers, the weather held, and throughout the north the greatest wheat crop in the history of the country was finally hauled away to the bursting elevators.

All signs of this great annual industry quickly faded. The itinerant harvest hands drifted on up into Canada, where there was still wheat to be harvested. The machinery was hauled away.

Only the blackened rings on the yellow stubble where the straw stalks had been burned remained to tell the story of the harvest.

Then came the gleaners to the fields—great flocks of red winged blackbirds, hovering like clouds over the stubble. A scattered remnant of prairie chickens grew fat on the grain that was left. Mourning doves, meadow larks, flocks of smaller birds were busy picking up the scattered grain.

Farming is the one and only industry where the manufacturer has nothing to say about the price of his product. In common with all others, Lidia Foster had to sell her wheat for what the grain dealers choose to pay for it, regardless of what it had cost her to produce it. The price was regulated by a mysterious "market" located in Chicago. The very fact that she was somewhat delayed in getting her grain to market, due to the fire, added to her loss, as the price of wheat was dropping daily.

But the price of flour did not react.

Bread cost no less.

With the wheat sold and the harvest hands paid, Lidia Foster was far in debt. The fire loss had wiped out more than the profits for the year. She could not possibly pay the interest at the bank and the rent and make a new crop.

Yet such is the continuous cycle of farm work that no sooner is one crop harvested than the work of making another must begin. It was time for the big tractor and the mule teams to break ground for next year's wheat.

Now that Lidia Foster knew that the landlord, in the flesh, was right on the place, she determined that he could either run the ranch himself, and put in next year's crop, or he could make some arrangement with her to stay on the place.

She expected him to come to the house and demand the ranch. When he did not come, but stayed right out in the fields working, she became anxious. Landlord or no landlord, Charlie and Eddie went right ahead with next year's wheat. The tractor with the gang plows was turned over to Rollin to drive. The heavy mule teams were out on the land turning over the good black earth in long even slices.

With the naked eye you couldn't tell the landlord from the hired men. Rollin was now in the full of his strength and he worked as hard as any one. And as he worked Rollin wondered what thoughts, what plans, were taking shape in Lidia Foster's mind. Now that she knew who he was, what would she do? What did she think? What would she say? Whatever happened, he made up his mind that he would keep away from her until she had time to think it all out and send for him to hear the verdict.

It came rather sooner than he expected. One evening she sent for "Ross" to take her to the village. He knew then that she had come to a decision.

So had Rollin.

He was going to stay—regardless.

He backed the flivver out and ran it to the house. He strode up the front steps and thundered at the screen door.

"I've come," he said in a gruff voice, "about the rent."

She was smiling bravely.

"And you know darned well I can't pay the rent."

"I've the pa-pers here in my pocket." He slapped his khaki shirt dramatically. "Pay, or out on the street you go."

"Oh, good sir, think of my poor old mother!"

"Ah hah! At last I have you in my power. You can marry me or—"

"It isn't quite, quite so—so funny, as you may think."

Rollin noticed, as she took her place behind him in the car, that she was winking fast.

"Ye gods!" he groaned. "If only I wouldn't try to be funny!"

"Oh, I don't mind your teasing me!"

"I wasn't trying to tease you, Lidia."

"You were making fun of me because I am a woman, because I tried and failed."

"It was only my foolish way of trying to make you smile again. You used to laugh at me very easily, Lidia."

"That was when you were trying to be serious."

"I'm serious now."

"You think because I am a woman, in trouble, that by acting the clown—"

"Acting natural, Lidia!"

"Because I have failed."

"You haven't failed—yet!"

"That I must throw myself either at your head or at your feet."

"God forbid, Lidia!"

"Why can't you treat me like a man?"

"I think, Lidia, it's because of the way the sunlight strikes your hair."

"Oh—some day I shall cut it off."

"And because of the freckles on your nose, Lidia."

"Those," she sighed, "will be rather more difficult to eliminate, as well I know."

"A little hard luck this year, Lidia—but other years are coming."

"True—but we have to live through this one first."

"You aren't giving up?"

"Oh, no," said she. "I'm going ahead if—if some arrangements can be made."

"An arrangement has already been arranged with the manor lord."

"Oh," said she.

"The rent has been reduced to three skipples of wheat and five fat hens per year."

"I'll pay what I can."

"You pay the interest on those notes and don't worry about the rent."

"I don't suppose the rent means much to you," sadly.

"Nothing," said he bravely—"nothing whatever. I have, before now, bet more on a lame horse."

Rollin discoursed at some length trying to tell her how little he cared about the rent.

"Will you please stop talking about gruesome things and tell me what you are doing here, anyway?"

"Driving my pretty cousin to town."

"I'm not exactly your cousin."

"Well, the pretty stands."

"And I'm not pretty."

"Then I guess I better have my eyes looked after at once."

"Why did you come here incog and disguised like a German spy?"

"I came here, as you know, to die."

"Don't—don't jest."

"It wasn't any joke at the time. They said I couldn't live the month out."

"Who said so?"

"Specialists!"

"But you did!"

"I did—just to spite 'em!"

"Were you, then, so very ill?"

"Oh, no—I only thought I was."

"Oh—and that little Frenchman cured you!"

"He did not—a Scotchman cured me."

"How?"

"Stole everything I had."

"But the ranch!"

"He couldn't sell that on account of your lease."

Then he told her all about his illness and the years he had struggled to get well. He explained to her why she had not heard from Mac—that he had absconded with the remnant of the Livingston fortune.

"But you have your health," sighed she.

"And—and you, Lidia."

"Oh," she said—"poor me!"

"Happiness and contentment."

"Ah," said she; "your recovery progresses wonderfully."

"But I am not entirely well, yet."

"No?" She looked at him anxiously. "You certainly look good—"

"To you?" he interrupted.

"To any one," said she.

"It's my heart," he explained.

"Ah!" said she. "It has been broken?"

"No," he smiled. "I'm only afraid it will be."

"Who," she sighed, "would dare do such a thing to my landlord?"

"I will not try to deceive you. It's a girl."

"Oh! I never would have guessed it. Might have been a dog, or a horse."

"A girl, with—with hair, Lidia."

"That makes identificaton too easy."

"Hair like the evening sunlight, Lidia."

"Oh," said she; "you mean red! I trust, sir, that you are not talking sentimental nonsense just to bewilder and betray this poor little innocent country girl."

Not until the flivver roared over the wooden bridge did he speak again.

"Remember, you have a certain responsibility," said he. "You saved my life."

"Again?"

" Yes," he nodded, " and I hope you are not laughing at me this time."

" I'm not laughing, only when I think how you looked in those awful clothes—like a scarecrow turned tramp."

" I was a tramp," he confessed, without shame.

" You!"

" Yes, little me. And not intentionally, either."

He told her in detail the whole story, from the time he discovered that Mac had taken every cent to the morning when he awakened to find himself an impressed laborer on his own ranch.

" I'm glad," said he, " that Mac did not take the place. I'm only sorry he did not leave me enough to satisfy those notes at the bank."

" Well," said she, " we can enjoy our poverty together."

" If you will let me stay."

" Of course you will have to stay."

" Have to?"

" Can stay, if you wish. I have fixed up a room at the house."

" I prefer the bunkhouse."

" That wouldn't be right—on your own place."

" It is leased for a term of years," said he.

" By a bankrupt who cannot pay the rent, thereby forfeiting said leases."

" The rent, as I explained, has been reduced."

" And you can't own a ranch," said she, " and live in the bunkhouse with the help. It isn't done out here any more."

" It will be."

" And it doesn't seem hardly right—you, the owner, out there working in the fields."

" But other ranch owners work."

" Oh, they are reconciled to their fate."

" And I have noticed that you work hard, Lidia."

" It has become a confirmed habit with me."

They were coming now to the village.

" Would you—could you, Lidia, after a bit—consider me—ah—as a partner in this enterprise?"

" I will have to consider any proposition you offer."

" Then I shall not offer any," he declared sulkily.

" I have already defaulted on the contract," said she. " The place is yours to do with as you please."

" Then I give it to you, Lidia, part and parcel, roods, chains, acres—be the same more or less."

" You will not!"

" O-ho," said he. " Who are you, to tell me what I can do with my own ranch?"

" You need it more than I. I—I can work."

" There," cried he. " Now you've done it. You've trampled my pride in the dust. You've humbled me at your feet; you've thrown my fortune in my face and insulted my worthy attempt to earn an honest living."

" I'm sorry," said she. " I didn't mean it that way."

" You implied that I cannot work."

" I didn't mean to—forgive—but only it doesn't seem right that you should work."

" You goad me to madness. Why isn't it right that I should work?"

" Well, for one thing, you never have—before."

" Ah," said he, " that ' before ' saves you from a cruel fate! And look what ' never have before ' did to me. Work, I'll have you know, postponed my demise indefinitely and gave me a chance to be a man."

" You have proved it, Rollie."

" And so I propose to remove all temptation from my future, and make sure that I will always have work, by giving that old ranch to you, Lidia."

" Don't be absurd."

" On condition that you let me stay and work for you."

" With me, Rollie!"

" When I had this ranch I never did anything with it. I let it go backward, rented it, abandoned it. Why, it didn't even pay the taxes until you took it, Lidia. You made something of it. Your work did that and it rightfully belongs to you."

" No," said she; " it belongs to you."

" It won't—to-morrow."

" I shall not accept it."

" You must—for my sake. I don't want

to suffer a relapse. The least bit of property, a few dollars of ready money and I might fall from grace. Then a debauch of idleness, an orgy of imaginary ills—the end!"

"Oh," said she, "I guess you're cured of all that."

"Only relieved. It might break out again."

The little car came chugging up the dusty street and stopped before the post office.

"Oh, Rollie," said Lidia eagerly, "if only we could sort of work—here—together."

"We can," said he. "My sentence to the country is for life!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN."

"HOW much you reckon he'll weigh, Ed-dee?"

Eddie looked Rollin over very carefully. He felt of his arms, his legs, he poked him with an inquiring finger.

"He'll scale close to one hundred and eighty-five," said Eddie.

"Cookie! Cookie!" called Charlie, until that worthy hurried from the bunkhouse. "Fill your eye with this."

"He sure fills th' eye better'n he did."

"Now I know what you've gone and done with all them provisions what should have fed us another month," accused Charlie. "You've been throwin' of 'em down this grinnin' rat hole."

"I—I did try to plump him up a bit. Forgive me!"

"Perhaps the Governor will pardon you. I cannot."

"I jest couldn't bear to hear him rattle," sniggered the cook.

"First empty sack I ever see walkin' around," said Eddie.

"I admit the extenuating circumstances—"

Rollin took this chaffing in good part.

"Snatched him right out of th' grave, Eddie and I," continued Charlie. "A couple of buzzards followin' him around. An' what thanks did I get for it—I asks you, what thanks? Absolutely none. Wanted to stay right there an' die. Went an' busted me in th' nose for my trouble—that's what he done."

"He did," said Eddie. "He scratched your nose—I saw him do it."

"An' I've been a-watchin' and a-waitin' for you t' build him up, cookie, till I could pay him for that dastardly blow without bein' arrested fer cruelty t' animals."

"I'm feeling pretty good this Sunday morning," grinned Rollin.

"We've fatted you up like a lamb fer th' slaughter," continued Charlie. "Of course, if you prefer t' wait a few more days while th' cookie hand feeds you until you grow up t' be a regular he-man, like myself, or Ed-dee here, all well an' good—we'll try t' restrain our impatience. Otherwise, I aim t' take hold of you strongly an' humble your pride in th' dust."

"Side hold, or catch as catch can?" asked Rollin.

"Any way you think you'll fall easiest," grinned Charlie. "Whichever 'tis, I'm a-goin' t' pour dust on your head—handsful of it."

"Come and do it," said Rollin. "'And damned be he who first cries "Hold! Enough!"'"

Thus do strong young men amuse themselves the Western country over of a Sunday morning. These trials of strength are without ill feeling, but rough enough for all that. Charlie had the advantage of weight, but Rollin matched this with some half forgotten wrestling instruction from his youthful Y. M. C. A. gymnasium experience.

They laid off coats and waistcoats, emptied their pockets of valuables and things. A ring of laughing men quickly formed around the contestants, cheering them on. They circled, crouching, each looking for an advantage. Charlie was the first to leap in, catching Rollin in a great bear hug, attempting to break him down by sheer strength. He came mighty near doing it, too. Just in time Rollin remembered how to break this grip, and his muscular forearm caught Charlie under the chin, forcing his head back until his neck could not stand the strain. The grip broken, Rollin quickly

tripped Charlie and threw him heavily. He was up like a flash, red with shame, his friends yelling wildly.

Charlie's strength was truly enormous. He forced Rollin to his knees, to the ground, where Rollin had to exert himself to the utmost to keep from being pinned fast. Rollin was very much surprised at the strength he had accumulated in a few weeks. He used it all as he strove to recall the tricks he had been shown or had seen in professional wrestling. Hold after hold he broke—time after time his defense kept Charlie from making an end of it. Up and down, rolling and standing—now one, now the other on top—about them a noisy ring of yelling, dancing spectators. Never had they seen anything like this. Never before had Charlie's strength been tested to the full.

And then it happened. Charlie broke a wrist lock and squirmed out of a body scissors. Then Rollin maneuvered him into the famous toe hold—and it was all over. No human being can stand the agony of this grip—and Charlie could not break it. With the sweat pouring down his face, his muscles knotted with pain, he yelled "Enough!"

"Kiddo," panted Charlie, slapping off the dust, "you're all there; your physical recovery is complete. If I can prevail upon the boss t' quit farming and open a health resort, she will make her everlasting fortune."

"It merely demonstrates again," sneered Eddie, "that a strong mind in a weak body is superior to a weak mind in a strong body."

"Oh, it does?" snorted Charlie. "It does—does it? Just suppose you take a fall out of Mr. Nabisco!"

"Nothing would suit me quite so well," grinned Eddie. "If you catch hold of my hoof, man, you'll think a mule—"

"Not to-day," said Rollin. "I'm all in. Some other time, boys."

Rollin walked away down the farm road and turned off into the woods along a coulee. As he walked he thought of Lidia Foster.

Soon the coulee narrowed down until it was no more than a dark ravine overhung with trees. He followed it up until a trickle of water appeared and a mossy stone offered a comfortable seat. Here he reviewed the events which had led up to the great moment in his life.

This was the hardest hour of thinking he had ever indulged in, and it brought forth sigh upon sigh. At last he shook his head in the affirmative and owned right up to the truth.

"Rollie Ross," said he, half aloud—"Rollie Ross, your—"

He never finished that sentence.

His rolling eyes caught a sinister shape against the tree tops above him. No second glance was necessary—a dark, misshapen thing was swinging there, twisting and turning at the knotted end of an old binding rope.

Rollin moved hurriedly out of that ravine and returned to the road where, if he did see any one, the chances were that the persons feet would be on the ground! Soon he came to a rustic bridge over a brook and found a seat on the pole guard rail.

He shuddered when he thought of Shiver Slater. Assuredly the dope fiend deserved his fate. Such lynch law justice was no more than one could expect in this part of the country; but—but— He'd been in a bad way himself when they found him. A few more days—

Strange how things happen! He had been born on this ranch; he had come back here to die; and now he was very much alive.

He had idled away a considerable portion of a lifetime, thrown away a sizable fortune and all but wrecked a perfectly good physique.

He had been a worthless coot. And now he was a penniless fool. But he had his health and strength back. That was something.

His natural genius for doing the wrong thing at the right time had asserted itself, and he had told Lidia who he was. He couldn't stay on here working for her. And besides—besides—he was—he was—well, he didn't want to go away!

In the midst of this painful self-castigation a familiar creaking assailed his ear,

and Rollin looked down the road to see the tin peddler wagon approaching. The old gray mare plodded slowly and it was some little time before the ancient drew rein and nodded his greeting.

"No, no!" cried Rollin. "Go away. I don't want to be rescued again! Honest!"

"Well, you needn't be so peevish—I'm not going to drag you away."

"Indeed you are not. I like it here."

"You look as though it agreed with you."

"It does—remarkably well. Never felt so good in my life."

"Ain't goin' to die then?"

"Oh, yes—some day. No hurry about it though."

"On a diet?"

"Yes, indeed—the cookie has restricted me to all I can eat in three meals a day."

"Eat everything?"

"No—only such things as are ordinarily classified as victuals."

"Like your work?"

"Man, man—I love it! If doctors would only prescribe more work and less medicine, the number of miraculous cures would be astounding."

"No doubt of it at all, sir," he nodded. "I've never felt better since I bought this old wagon."

"Then you weren't a born tin peddler?"

"Oh, no!"

"Acquired habit?"

"Yes—just picked it up lately. But I've always had an idea I'd like to do it."

"Before that you did something else?"

"Before this I was guardian of a damn fool."

"That's the thing a damn fool needs most."

"It's a terribly responsible job—and wearin'."

"Oh, I know. I wore out one."

"An' this particular damn fool left in my charge was the worst of 'em all."

"All but one," sighed Rollin.

"I'd just like to lean my eye on a bigger one."

"Look at me."

"What particular bit of damn foolishness have you been up to lately?"

"I'm—I'm in love," sighed Rollin.

"A marriage certificate usually cures that."

"And I had a chance to woo and win her as a plain farm hand, just like they do in the pictures, and then I went and told her who I am."

"Well, who are you?"

"I own the ranch," said Rollin. "I'm the greedy blood-sucking landlord—the grasping, miserly old skinflint—that's who I am!"

"Now you've gone and done it."

"Busted the whole plot."

"Reduced your chances of being a hero to zero."

"She—she hates me."

"She?"

"The young woman who has rented the ranch—my ranch."

"I guess now, young man, you're in so deep I can't help you."

"If you have any suggestions—"

"Well, there's always hope."

All this time the old tin peddler was busy hanging up a tiny hand mirror on the side of the cart. He took out a pocket shaving outfit and a pair of scissors. With his back to Rollin he soon snipped off the white beard and was lathering his face. A few strokes with the safety razor, a slap at each side of his face with a wet towel, and it was done. Then he reached into his side pocket and took out a set of false teeth in a handkerchief and clasped them in his jaws, turning to face Rollin.

Rollin looked, and gasped:

"Mac!"

"Rollin!"

The young man flung himself from the guard rail and seized the little old man in his arms, pounding him on the back and laughing and saying a hundred things all at once.

"I might have known—I might have known it was you, Mac, in spite of your disguise; but I didn't—I didn't—not plus whiskers and minus teeth."

Some more pounding and incoherent words.

"Now, why in hell the masquerade and following me around in an old cart?"

"Just to keep an eye on you."

"So you've been watching me, you old—"

"But—but, Rollin, you haven't said a word about the money."

"What money?"

"Your money."

"Money never did me any good, and, anyway, I can take it or leave it alone."

"But—but, boy—you don't seem to understand. I didn't take it at all."

"Well, then, you'd better—and damn quick, too!"

"Don't want it; got plenty of my own. I just pretended to take it—knew it would kill you if I didn't—wanted to jolt you out of your coffin. It's all intact, with interest at your command."

"Then I command you to keep it a profound secret, or I'll strangle you."

"You mean—"

"I mean that I'm not going to touch that money—I'm cured of the money habit. I'm going to earn an honest living."

"Well, I ain't sure but that I've overdone the treatment!"

"And you're going right back to town, Mac, and deed this ranch to Lidia Foster."

CHAPTER XIX.

"YEARS AND YEARS AGO."

THIS was never intended to be a love story. My sole purpose was to tell of a certain young man, about to die of chronic idle-gentlemanitis—one of the dread diseases threatening our whole social order—who was tricked into finding his manhood and self-respect through the enterprising machinations of those indefatigable twins, Work and Want.

That he also found The Woman is quite another matter; fortunately, one that can be passed over rather hurriedly.

The next day but one Lidia rode out to the south field, where Rollin was recharging the tractor with liquid horsepower from a platform wagon.

"You have deceived me," she accused, looking down at him from the saddle.

"Possibly," he admitted, busy with the oil can. "Men are always doing it."

His hands were very black, and there were finger smudges on his tanned cheeks.

"Old man Na-ko-mis is in his war paint."

"He is making his strongest medicine," said he, "so that when he returns from the warpath there will be a bright red scalp at his belt."

"Oh," said she. "For true?"

"Uh-huh. True as Gospel."

"My hair—again! You were always facetious about the color of my hair."

"I rather like the color of your hair, Lidia. It's—it's rather sunny."

"It's—rather red," said she. "And my freckles, sir—oh, don't forget to mention my freckles!"

"I regret the departure of such a dependable source of amusement."

"Oh, they aren't all gone—yet."

"A few holding out valiantly on the citadel of your nose."

"Just for that I won't tell the good news that brought me here."

"Go on! I haven't heard any good news in ages."

"I won't," she retorted determinedly.

"Please!"

"All right, if you must know," she yielded. "The custodian of your family fortune, old MacKintyre, has returned to his office in the city."

"I suppose so—the sly old rascal!"

"So now you can have him arrested."

"I shall try, instead, to think up some suitable reward for saving my life and—ah—discovering you, Lidia."

"I don't believe," said she seriously, "that he ever took your money."

"I know darned well he didn't."

"But you said so!"

"And so I believed at the time."

"Then, he didn't take it?"

"He only pretended to take it."

"Why all the strategy?"

"Said he thought if I got good and hungry once it would do me good."

"I hear that it is a heroic but wonderful treatment for the loss of appetite."

"Said he thought that if I had to do a little hard work once, in order to satisfy said appetite, it might be good for what ailed me."

" Hard work," said she, " is a powerful antidote for fashionable and expensive diseases."

" It is," he admitted. " Cured me of symptoms, doctors, sanatoriums, diets, complexes—everything."

" So now we can't be poor but proud together," she sighed.

" I hope we can at least be together, Lidia."

" Oh, but now you are once again the elder son of Mammon."

" Does that make so much difference?"

" All the difference in the world."

" I don't see why."

" Because the poor farmer's daughter has discovered that her hero is young and handsome and rich—"

" Not altogether in money."

" Oh, I have all those other kinds of riches, such as the long-hairs love to twitter about in rime—only they aren't negotiable at the bank."

" Still they have their values, Lidia."

" Not as collateral."

" If you must know the truth, I ran through a good bit of the family fortune before Mac came to the rescue. Succeeded rather well at being the family spendthrift, for a confirmed invalid."

" Still, there is doubtless some of the old circulating medium left," she remarked, sighing.

" Enough, I hope, so that you won't have to worry about notes in the bank or making next year's crops."

" Your money will not stop my worrying."

" It will if you will give it a chance."

" Gold can never buy me!"

" I don't want to buy you, Lidia. I want to win—ah—you—your respect and esteem."

" You have both, young man."

" And whatever money there is left—"

" I shall not touch."

" One of the wonderful things about modern banking is the things you can do with money and never even look at it."

" Keep your miserly hoard and gloat," she smiled. " It will comfort you for bad news yet to come."

" Bad news, Lidia?"

" You have just suffered a great loss, sir."

" Ah," said he. " Then I have lost favor with you."

" Worse—far worse—you have lost the ranch."

" Curses!" he quavered. " So I've drunk up the old homestead, too!"

" Mac sent me the deed this morning."

" Blessings on thee, little Mac."

" Don't credit him with giving anything away. He's from Scotia. I begin to suspect that you gave Mac an order to that effect."

" Possibly."

" But I shall not take it."

" You have it now."

" I mean, I shall not accept it."

" Oh," said he. " Funny thing about a piece of property—if any one deeds it to you it's too late to refuse it. The only thing is to deed it to some one else."

" But I don't want it!"

" Lidia!" he cried. " Think of your poor Sunday school teacher!"

" I mean—that is—oh, don't you see, Rollie, I can't take it."

" Cannot?"

" Not without—embarrassment."

" Have I embarrassed you, Lidia?"

" You put me under certain obligations."

" I am sorry," said he truthfully.

" And how can we be partners when you furnish everything?"

" I'm not furnishing everything."

" Yes, you are, too. The ranch—"

" Your ranch, Lidia."

" And all the money."

" But you furnish the most important part, Lidia—the brains."

" Oh, brains!" she sniffed. " Brains!"

" The knowledge, the experience, the intelligence necessary to make a success of this venture. I've only been a rancher for a few weeks—I couldn't possibly run the damn thing without you, girl."

" Oh," said she, " you flatter me—and rather profanely."

" So the proposition is not so one-sided after all."

" It makes me feel like a poor relation—a beggar."

" Don't, Lidia! You bring back unpleas-

ant memories—only a few weeks ago I was rapping on kitchen doors."

"Oh, Rollie!"

"Asking for a hand-out—begging."

"Oh, dear boy!"

"And I was the poor relation—dependent on you for a living."

"You punish me!"

"You took me in and—"

"But I didn't even know who you were."

"That makes it all the more wonderful," said he. "A stranger, and you fed me."

"Even Charlie wouldn't take it for that. We needed help and he would have brought in a wild chimpanzee if he could have found one."

"And now when I want to repay your kindness—"

"You do not owe me kindness."

"I owe you everything—and now when I want to help—"

"You have helped—lots."

"I want to do more."

"You want to do too much."

"That would be quite impossible," said he. "But well worth the time and effort if it only made you like me a bit."

At this she blushed very prettily and touched the horse with a spur so that he wheeled around, tossing his fine head.

She flung the last word back over her shoulder:

"I liked you—years and years ago."

THE END

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THE MAN WHO HASN'T MADE GOOD

I SAW him to-day as he passed on his way,
The man who hadn't made good,
And he looked just the same as the big man of fame,
This man who hadn't made good.
His eyes were as clear as the overhead sky,
Not a trace or a sign of that little word, die,
And gee! as he passed, I just wondered why
The man has never made good.

So I hollered "Hello," and, say, do you know,
This man who hadn't made good
Actually smiled like a glad, happy child;
This man who hadn't made good.
He told me his story, and I must confess,
Although he'd lost money, he'd found happiness.
The world stamped him "Failure," but he isn't, I guess,
This man who hasn't made good.

You see them around, for they're easily found,
The men who haven't made good.
It's the popular thing to be called by the ring
The man who hasn't made good.
But the biggest success isn't always the man
Who's rolling his nuggets about in the pan.
It's often the fellow who failed with that plan,
The man who hasn't made good.

Percy W. Reynolds.

S'Liza

By LIDA WISE HICKOK

OH, I don't know: nobody ever tells *me* anything. I just overhear the elevator boy talking to the servant girl in the next apartment, or I'd never know a thing. It's lucky that my brother John's forgetful and always puts off doing things. When we moved in here, there was a hole in the front door where the other people had a Yale lock—a hole about an inch wide—and when they left they took it with them—the lock, I mean—and John was going to have another put back in, but we've been here six months now and he ain't done it yet. Well, for once I'm glad he's so shiftless, 'cause nobody ever tells *me* anything, and I wouldn't hear a thing if it wasn't for that hole in the door.

John gets home about half past six pretty near every night, and he finishes reading the paper he begun in the subway, while I put the dinner on the table. He's very quiet, he never tells *me* anything; I guess he thinks an old maid sister don't know much about the world, and I wouldn't if it wasn't for that hole in the front door. Why, there's so much talking going on in the hall there some days, I can hardly get my work done. You see, that elevator boy runs the elevator up to our floor—the top—and leaves it stay there while he talks to the servant girl next door. Her folks are away to business all day, so she can do her work whenever she likes.

Monday morning I had just got to the front door when I heard him ask her if she went to church the day before. "Uh-uh," she said. "Christian Science?" he asked. "Naw, deed: a Baptist I's born, a Baptist I'll live, and a Baptist I'll die." "Christyan Science looks putty good to me." "Oh, sure, it's all right, but I don't believe it can cure you of no infectedness," says the girl. The bell rang, and he had to take some folks down from the fifth. He was only gone a minute or two, and she waited till he came back.

"Aw, folks make me tired," says he. "They all think they must be *nice* to the elevator boy, poor thing—it's 'Good mornin', Steve'—'Good night, Steve'—'How is you, Steve.' They don't never think that there's only *one* of me and nearly a million of them by the time I drop 'em down in the mornin' and lift 'em up at night! I wonder how *they'd* like to say good mornin' and good night to that many elevator boys! The only feller in the house that don't do it is the guy in there."

I drew back quick for fear he'd see me, for he was pointing right at our door.

"Yep," he continued, "he's a dumb one, never opens his head. Every week or so he seems to remember I'm on earth and gives me a dollar. Odd lookin' chap, he is—all that gray hair and a young face—looks like a movie hero."

"There's somethin' phony about my bunch, sure," says the servant girl. "The youngest one is the real missus; she gives me my orders and pays out the cash. She's a good looker, all right, but she's hidin' from somethin'—police, *I* think. I heard that aunt of hers say: 'Well, if I was forced to take another name, I'd choose something better than *Jane Jewett!*' 'That's where you're wrong, aunty, dear; no one would ever think of looking for me under a foolish name like that; I'm safe.' Of course she ain't running any crooked card game or anything *here*, but she brings home dandy laces and silks, and they ain't for dresses, neither. You hear a lot about women shoplifters, an' the police findin' stolen goods hid away. I shouldn't wonder if—" The elevator bell rang, and the girl went in and closed her door.

My gracious, I was scared! Robbers, and right next door! Why, we might all be held up any minute, being the handiest for em.

When John came home I told him we had a band of robbers next door, but he only laughed, and said: "You're always dreaming, aren't you, S'Liza, old girl? You go to the movies too much." Now ain't John queer? What's movies got to do with the robbers next door? I don't go so much to the movies, but one's got to know *something* of real life! And no one but John would ever call anybody S'Liza! My name is Eliza. And I'm not so old, either. Of course I'm coming along, but I keep my figure, and last week was the first time I ever touched up my hair. I don't know why he says such things—John's not a bit like the rest of the family; we all say things flat just like they are. His leaving home when he was young may have had something to do with it. He came to New York, and we never heard from him for a long while, then he wrote and asked if I'd come and keep house for him in this apartment. What happened in all that while, I don't know. He works somewhere; I don't know, he never tells *me* anything. Some nights he'll say, "Well, I threw another bull today;" but that's a joke, I guess, for I've read that they only have bull fights in Spain and Mexico. Oh, I *do* keep up my reading. I brought all my Chautauqua books from home with me.

I wanted to get a look at that robber woman next door, so I watched early one morning, and she came out and had to wait as the elevator was stuck. She was joined by the fat woman who lives in apartment A, keeps roomers and keeps growling. "Good morning," says Jane Jewett, in a very sweet voice; but I guess that's one of her disguises! "Good morning," said the fat lady. "Elevator stuck now! I wonder what next? My Gawd, this is the worst run house in New York: they get your money, stick you ten cents for telephones, and give you no service. I'll bet it's that boy's fault." "I think I must use the stairs," said Jane Jewett. "I'm sorry you have to wait, but I'm sure it is not the boy's fault." I got a good look at her; my gracious but she's pretty—big brown eyes and red hair—henna'd, *I* think; another of her disguises, no doubt.

John came home late, looking awfully pale; I was scared, and asked if he had the flu or grip or something, but he said: "No. I'm sorry to be late, S'Liza, but I've seen a ghost! I tried to catch up with it, but it ran and ran, and I lost; lost again." He stood for a long time, lookin' and lookin' at nothing. I felt goose flesh creep up and down my spine. I don't know what he meant, and he didn't tell me anything.

Of course he couldn't have seen a ghost, it was too light. I don't know much about ghosts, I only know they live in the dark. I went to a Spiritualist séance once, and they had to make the room dark so we could see the spirit lights floating about. The medium sat in the middle of the circle, and she said she'd keep clapping her hands so we'd know she wasn't moving the lights about as *they* would be moved by spirits. Somebody, to be smart, turned on the lamp light quick, and there sat the medium with her dress skirt folded back on her lap, her left hand was slapping her bare knee and her right hand was waving the phosphorous lights about! I ain't believed in ghosts much since then: maybe there is such things—*I* don't know.

John went out for a long walk later, and when he came back he said: "It's all right, S'Liza, I've buried the ghost." Now ain't John queer? To talk about burying a ghost! It can't be done. He must have done something else, but I don't know; he didn't tell *me* anything.

The next morning the elevator boy was having a long visit with the servant girl. He was saying: "Gee, but your missus is one grand dame; too bad if she's a crook. Last night when she came in, she seemed scairt and out of breath as though she'd been runnin', and looked about to see if anybody was follerin' her. I didn't see no policeman nor nothin'."

"Yes," said the girl, "she was scared for fair, she didn't eat no dinner, and I heard her say: 'It does seem that New York would be big enough to hide in, but' —and then I let a plate fall and didn't hear no more. But if she's hidin' from the police, I don't believe I can stay here; it's gettin' on my noives." "Aw, knock off early to-night and come down to the corner, there's a good show on—'The Woman Who Vamped the Sheik.'" "Oh, that 'll be grand, I love them vampers," she said, and shut the door as he went down in the elevator.

I tried to get John interested in what was worrying me, by telling him people was getting suspicious of the folks next door. He said he thought it was all nonsense, but if I felt uncomfortable about it, he'd close up that hole in the front door, but my gracious, I didn't want him to do that! Why, I might be murdered in my bed and not know a thing about it until it was all over with! So I said that robbers never come in at front doors; more likely it would be by fire escapes or down the dumb-waiter, and he said he'd take care of them. Now, whether he meant he'd take care of the dumb-waiter and fire escape or of the robbers, I don't know.

It's funny about sisters—men's sisters, I mean. They hang around and do a lot of worrying about their brothers and things, but nobody notices it. You hear and read all the time about devoted wives and self-sacrificing mothers, but there aren't no Christmas cards about sisters. Now, I'm older than John, and I used to lie to mother and declare he hadn't been swimming with the other boys when he *had*. I used to be so busy secretly passing his puppy love letters around that I never got any time for my own—not that I could have done that for myself, of course *not*—but I'd liked him to, to a—oh, well, I don't know, maybe I wouldn't, but anyway, the only sisters you ever hear of are in convents!

The elevator was late coming to a stop on our floor the next morning, and the first thing I heard the boy say was: "I want to say right here, that if there was something else I could do, I wouldn't be liftin' this darn elevator up and down, you betcha your life—but I can't. I got gassed over there at Ypres, and now the guvment is paying me Rockefeller's income, and an inspector comes around every month to see if I'm still worth the money. He come this mornin', and say, it did seem to me that he was doin' some detectif work on the side, the questions he ast me about the people in this house. Shush, shush! Here comes Averdupoise Annie. She wore out the *old* cable, we had to put in a new one yesterday, and I had my life insured." Then he said to Apt. A, very politely: "Oh, good morning, mum; very well thank you, mum; but grandmother's got the smallpox, Emily and Maggie's got scarlet fever, and Jim's a sickenin' for—" "My Gawd, Steve, what are you doin' on this elevator? Don't you know that those are all

catching? Let me off at once!" "Yes, mum, just a minute, mum."

The elevator went down to the bottom, and I couldn't hear any more, but the servant girl, as she closed the door, laughed and giggled, so I knew that elevator boy was fooling. So *he* had been to the war. John had, too. Once I tried to get him to tell me about it, but he just put his hand on my shoulder and said: "I'm sorry, old girl, but I don't seem to be able to talk of hell or dream of heaven any more." My gracious, John startles me sometimes. He is kind, but so queer. If I didn't know that all our folks have been straight and God fearing, I'd think that John was—but there, *I* don't know.

I never lived in an apartment until I come to New York, and it took me a long while to get used to the dumb-waiter and the tubs in the kitchen and no back fence; but that's silly to speak of the back fence; you don't have any neighbors in New York anyhow. Nobody speaks to you here, so I *was* surprised when the bell rang one morning, and when I opened the door, who should be standing there but our robber neighbor! She asked if she might use the fire escape from my window to get into her apartment; she was locked out and the servant was away. A pretty story, thinks I; she just wants to get a look at our apartment.

I said that I felt awful sorry to have to refuse her, but — and I said this pretty strong and pointed — that because I was afraid of robbers, my brother had locked the window, and I couldn't open it. She said she was sorry to have troubled me, and she'd go and get a key from her aunt. She looked sweet and innocent, but I don't know—just a disguise, maybe. Anyway, she knows that she can't get in here by the fire escape. How funny that the first time I should have a chance to neighbor in this town, it should be with a robber! New York's an awful wicked place! You *never* know who you're talking to!

We've been very quiet for a couple of days. The servant girl's been home sick with the grip. It's mighty dull with nobody round to tell you anything.

John had a friend in to see him last night—a tall man with such a nice voice, and when I went into the kitchen to fix the cake and the cocoa, I heard him say: "You were hard on Madeleine, John; you should have relented." "My God, man, I *did* relent! I was wholly in the wrong; I knew that, but it was too late then. I'd give my *life* to find her!" My gracious! John *is* so forceful. Whatever does he mean? *I* don't know.

When I came back in, they began to talk of something else; about some books John has, and he was saying that theosophy was the only religion that reconciled him to life, that it seemed the only one of them all that gave everybody an equal chance, and this it did through Karma—whoever *she* may be, I don't know, John never tells *me* anything! He said that he had just got the last Ephemeris and was casting a horoscope: now, whether he was still talking about religion or a foundry, *I* don't know; he gets me so mixed up! But I gathered from this theosophy, as they call it, you die and come back, die and come back, and keep on doing it.

I guess that talk of John's with his friend kinda upset me, or maybe it was the cocoa, anyhow, I took a bicarbonate of soda and went to bed, but I couldn't go to sleep. Along about twelve o'clock I heard some one running across our roof, then heavier steps followed, and then two pistol shots! My gracious, I was scared. I slipped on my bath robe and went and called John. He hadn't gone to bed yet, and he stepped out in the hall and spoke to the elevator boy. Steve was on night duty, and he told us that robbers had broken into the floor below and was making a get-away over our roof when the police got them. "And," says he, "I miss my guess if there don't some others go up the river." That's a New York expression, I guess, I don't know, but he looked at the apartment next door and nodded his head very wise like, and I could see what he meant.

Now I should think John would listen to me next time! I didn't *say* anything, but just wait and see who's right!

I heard talking out in the hall the next day. John was buried deep in his beloved Sunday papers and I knew he wouldn't see

me, so I listened at that hole in the door, and I nearly fell over back, for if there wasn't the robber woman herself talking to the elevator boy!

He was saying: "Oh, yes, mum, they got that servant girl of yours all right, she give the dope to the burglars what got on our roof last night; them burglars were friends of hern. That lady was *some* Lallapalooza! I was on to her when you first hired her, mum, and I strung her along with some gab, then a detectif put me wise that she was some slick article! To make sure, I took her to the movies one night, and I framed up a little game—oh, just some change in me overcoat pocket—but she bit and got it all right, and so slick I didn't know when she done it." "Well, we are very grateful to you, Steve, you did save *some* of our things. I'd like to talk to that detective, but my phone is out of order—do you suppose that servant girl fixed it so it couldn't be used?" "Sure Mike—oh, scuse *me,* mum, I mean—surest thing you know, she done it all right. That bird was on to all the tricks to make sure for a quick get-away. But use the phone downstairs, mum." "No, thank you, Steve, I'll ask the lady next door if I may use hers, I know she won't mind, she has such a nice kind face."

My gracious! You could have knocked me down with a feather! That servant girl one of the robbers, and she talking to the elevator boy as brazen as you please, trying to make him think her mistress was the robber, and poisoning my mind and all, and this nice little lady saying I had a kind face and I'd been thinking her a—but then *I* didn't know; nobody ever tells *me* anything.

I just couldn't look her in the eyes when I opened the door, and I only stammered I'd be pleased to have her use the phone, and her voice was so sweet when she thanked me. And I know, now that I see her close to, that her hair *isn't* henna'd, and she looked so pretty in a house dress of that Egyptian stuff everybody is crazy about now.

I went into my room while she talked on the phone to the detective—it hangs on the wall in the hall—oh, the phone does, I mean—not the detective—oh, dear, I'm so *excited!*

I stepped back quick into my room, and after a while she came to me. She told me that she and John had married, but before the honeymoon was over, he grew jealous about a foolish little thing. "And," she said, "I was not going to spoil him by explaining. I made up my mind to give him a lesson—I just ran away and never let him know where I was."

Gracious! Think of a young girl like that giving a grown-up man a lesson! I never heard of such a thing. I said it seemed like Providence had sent her here to the same house where he lived—but she gave a soft little laugh and said:

"I guess *I* played Providence this time, S'Liza—"

Now, there *she* goes calling me that queer name; but when she stopped a moment before saying it, and then stooped down and kissed me on the forehead, the name sounded different somehow.

"You see," she continued, "I never lost track of John: I never meant to let him go, I just wanted to give him a lesson. I knew it was a risk to take the apartment right next door to him, but it was the only one vacant, and I couldn't bear not to be near him, so I took the risk. He nearly caught me one night—I saw him—saw the sad look on his face, and the gray hair, and —well, I knew I couldn't wait much longer, and this morning I realized that I could not wait *any* longer, so I came in here purposely. I didn't *have* to use your phone."

My gracious, we had all clean forgot about the telephone! I went into the hall, and there, sure enough, was the receiver swinging and swinging against the wall! I went and hung it up. Whatever that detective must have thought, *I* don't know.

When Madeleine followed me, I whispered what did John think of her coming to the same house and never letting him know. She laughed that nice little soft laugh of hers:

"Oh," she says, "he thinks it just a coincidence, and as he must not lose the value of his lesson, I shall let him think so."

So, John don't know! She never told him anything.

EACH MAN HAS A BROKEN VOW

EACH man has a broken vow
Somewhere in his heart.
Why should I be sad that now
I have felt the smart
Of your broken word to me?
Of your swerving loyalty?

"Each man has a broken vow."
Oft I've heard folks say—
"Each man has a broken vow"—
Often—but, some way,
Heartbreaks don't seem real or true
Till it's us they happen to.

Every wife must face at last
What I face to-day,
Drink the bitter cup I drink;
Find a word to say:
"I cannot forgive," or, "Dear,
I forgive." The choice is clear.

Each man has a broken vow
Somewhere in his life.
And the trial I suffer now
Comes to every wife.
Can I build that faith again
Once so white and free from stain?

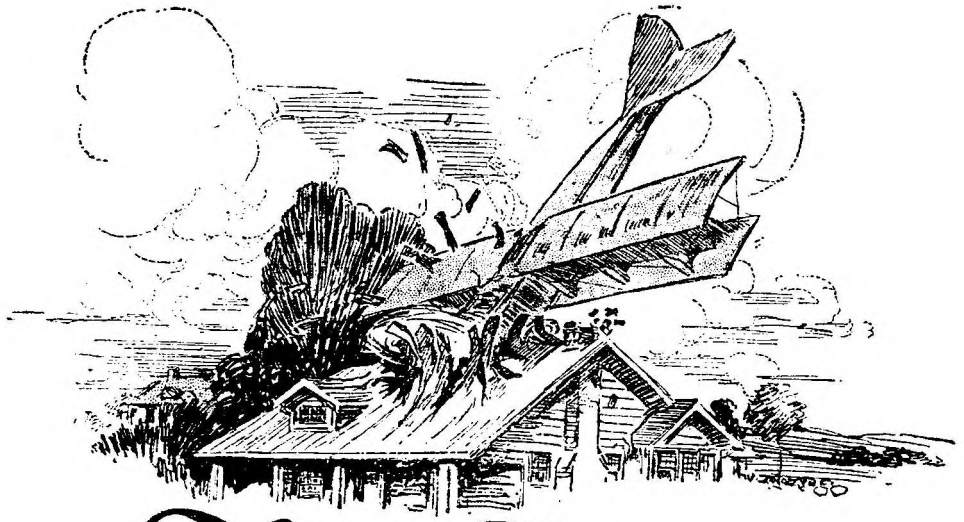
If you once could so deceive,
Once could so betray,
How can I again believe
Any word you say?
I'd have staked my life that you
While life lasted, would be true.

Each one has a broken vow
Hid in some past day.
Have I not a word I broke
Somewhere hid away?
Would I have you, for that doubt
From your own life cast me out?

Dear, we're human, not divine.
Well this truth I know.
After all, I know you're mine,
Soul and body. So,
While that's true, what smaller thing
Harm to you or me could bring?

Kiss away these tears. Their need
I've forgotten now.
If a vow is broke indeed,
We'll make another vow,
As we stand here, hand in hand,
This: to always understand.

Mary Carolyn Davies



The Deuce

By WOLCOTT LeCLÉAR BEARD

"NO, ma'am," said the old hospital orderly in answer to Miss Althea's question. "He ain't no common soldier: that's one sure thing. He was a most *un*common soldier. Which is lucky. 'Cause the army couldn't afford to have many like him. But now he ain't a soldier at all. Which is luckier still."

"You mean that he has been discharged from the army?" pursued Miss Althea.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Why? for what?"

With a stumpy forefinger the orderly made circular motions on the top of his head, as though he was stirring, and thoroughly mixing, the brains supposedly contained in that head. After a moment of frowning effort. Miss Althea made a fairly accurate guess as to the meaning which the orderly intended to convey. With an effort she managed to control her rising indignation.

The hospital was not a military hospital in any strictly technical sense. Army regulations fail utterly to define its status; it was, in no sense, a governmental affair. It was simply one of many nondescript institutions which became necessary after demobilization began. Its function was to care for certain obscure cases—cases which the overworked army doctors had no time properly to observe, in order to determine whether or not they would eventually yield to treatment, leaving the men principally concerned able to earn their living in their accustomed manner.

This hospital, as it happened, had been financed by Miss Althea's father. Patriotism, doubtless, had much to do with this action of his; but there could be no question of the fact that he also desired to provide his son, a rising and really competent physician, with a unique opportunity to gather valuable experience. Possibly also the thought occurred to him that a hospital of this sort might afford a safe and sane outlet for the activities of Miss Althea, who was "rising" thirty-four years, and who described herself as a "mystic" and a "student of the higher psychology." Her father

was wont to describe these activities more simply as " glorified, romantic flap-doodle." The decision as to which of these definitions is the more correct is one that must be left to individual opinion.

But, anyhow, be these things as they might, Miss Althea considered that as a matter of course she was vested with proprietary rights in the hospital and all that it contained. To be sure the crusty old orderly seemed tacitly to dispute this—but what of it? He was only a " case " himself. Miss Althea never had liked him. Now, as she gazed at the form of the sleeping man under discussion, she disliked the orderly more than ever.

" How dare you say such things?" she demanded with cold dignity. " Of him—a bird-man! A human eagle, who soars—"

" Well, ma'am, I wouldn't say that this feller ever done much soarin'," the orderly interrupted. " He never tried—not alone, that is—but once. That time, before he got very far, he lighted. He lighted in a tree. That's why he's here."

" And yet, if I mistake not," rejoined Althea, " not once merely, but many times, I have heard this gentleman referred to as the ' Deuce.' Am I not right?"

Now, Miss Althea possessed hardly a bowing acquaintance with a pack of cards. That is to say that she knew the cards merely by sight and name. She had heard that a particularly brave and expert flying man was known as an " ace." She knew that a deuce had two spots on it; an ace but one. Clearly, then, the word " deuce " must signify an aviator with twice the prowess of an ace. What else could it mean? What could be more simple?

So simple, in fact, was Miss Althea's reasoning that the orderly could not follow it, and therefore suspecting a verbal trap, effected a retreat while there was still time.

" We call him the Deuce because he's the deuce of a liar an' the deuce of a four-flusher—unless he's the deuce of a lunatic, which is as bad as both the other two put together," said he, and having delivered this parting shot, stumped away as fast as his artificial leg would allow.

With a ladylike sniff of triumph Miss Althea turned her eyes once more upon the man in the hammock. Despite the ill-fitting uniform of a private soldier, which he still wore, in face and form the sleeping man might have been cut from the cover of a popular magazine, or better still, from one of the most expensive posters that advertise ready-made clothing. The very sight of him gave Miss Althea a queer, fluttering sensation in the cardiac region—a sensation to which thus far she had been a stranger.

It was not at all an unpleasurable sensation. Quite the contrary. She began to think that her ultrasheltered girlhood might not, after all, have been an unmixed advantage. Could the abusive language of that old orderly apply to a being such as this? Obviously not!

Miss Althea was wont, rather pridefully, to say that it was a person's mind, not his body, that interested her. Even now she struggled not to allow any doubt concerning this maxim of long standing to enter *her* mind. Moreover, of this maxim the man in question was a notable example. He was something of a mystery to Miss Althea. He was suffering from a malady which—among most others—was unknown to her until then.

Miss Althea did not know the name of this disease. She never would willingly hear the name of any disease; the very sounds affected her most unpleasantly. This obscure ailment manifested itself largely in the fact that the Deuce had utterly lost his memory. He could not recall even his own name; yet in other regards his mind did not seem to be affected. Indeed, in Miss Althea's opinion no mind could be much more brilliant than was his.

Miss Althea had been drawn to this man since first he had entered the hospital, some little time before. In him she had discovered not only a fellow psychic, but one whose development along those lines far outstripped her own. At his feet, metaphorically speaking, Miss Althea sat as a disciple.

At this point she started to heave a contented sigh, but before it was finished the sigh changed to a startled scream. This was owing to the man in the hammock. Without the slightest premonitory symptom of awakening he sprang to his feet. Snatching from the veranda rail a pair of field

glasses that were resting there, he ran across the lawn to a low-branching tree and up the tree. As near the top as he could go, he leveled his glasses, gazed earnestly through them and then returned, even faster than he had gone.

"Here!" he exclaimed, thrusting the glasses into Miss Althea's hands. "It 'll be visible from this point by now. So look where I point. Tell me what you see."

With a thrill of excitement Miss Althea tried to do as she was told. She leveled the glasses and fussed desperately with the focusing screw in order to adjust them to her somewhat myopic eyes. Once a moving black speck danced into the field, but only to dance out again. For an appreciable time the glasses wabblingly sought for it, but in vain.

"Can you see? Have you found it?" asked the Deuce impatiently.

"I don't know. I don't see it now," answered Miss Althea breathlessly. "What is it?"

"Look for it!" commanded the Deuce, ignoring the question she had asked. "Look for it—quickly! Over there—it 'll go out of sight in a moment behind that hill. Look, I say!"

The glasses by this time were in proper focus, and when directed according to the Deuce's instructions, the black speck danced once more into the field of vision. The principal trouble was that it kept on dancing; Miss Althea's hands, tremulous with excitement, accounted for that. Besides, the speck was either very small, very distant, or both.

It was alive—it must be, for it was flying, evidently some hundreds of feet above the ground. But just what it was she could not determine, and very soon it had passed behind the hill, as the Deuce had said, and could be seen no more. Miss Althea lowered the glasses.

"Well," he asked, "what did you make of it?"

"I'm not sure," she answered with a puzzled frown. "It must have been a large bird, I think. Probably a crow, from the way that it flew.

"Did you ever see a crow as big as that?" he demanded scornfully.

Now, as a matter of fact, Miss Althea had no way of judging the size of the object she had seen; there was nothing to which she could compare it. As it was not an airplane, she had naturally assumed that it must be a large bird; and a crow was about the largest one would be apt to see in that part of the country in that season of the year. Besides, it rather looked like a crow. Yet such is the power of mental suggestion that Miss Althea immediately rejected her matter-of-fact definition of that which she had barely seen, and hunted wildly for a less plausible explanation, but could find none that would do at all. Frantically she searched the storehouse of her memory for ghostly occurrences that might be made to fit, but not one could she find that could be made to apply to a crow that in reality was something quite different.

"Think!" commanded the Deuce earnestly. "Make a mental picture of the thing you saw. It flew through the air—of course. But apart from that, was any part of it moving—fluttering?"

"Why—yes," answered Miss Althea after a moment of hesitation. "It was flying, you know. So the wings flapped. They *had* to flap, hadn't they?"

"Are you sure they were wings—the things that flapped?" demanded the Deuce.

Miss Althea was not sure of anything now. She made no reply.

"Might that fluttering thing that you saw—mightn't it have been a shawl?" pursued her questioner.

"A shawl?" repeated Miss Althea wonderingly.

"A shawl. A fluttering shawl," answered the Deuce impressively.

Utterly confused now and floundering helplessly in a mental quagmire, Miss Althea gazed at him, her eyes almost as round as those of an owl. "But—but what could a crow—or any bird—be doing with a shawl?" she asked helplessly.

"Did I say it was a crow? Or any bird?" he asked severely in return; then answered his own question. "I think not."

This was too much. Miss Althea acknowledged to herself that she was in the presence of occult mysteries which, though close to her fondest desires, lay far distant

from her wildest dreams of personal experience. Quite unable to extract herself from her quagmire, she frankly surrendered and begged for assistance.

"No," she admitted. "You didn't say it was a crow, Mr.—Mr. Deuce. Indeed, you *almost* said that it *wasn't* a crow. But But what could it be? What *could* it be? Tell me! Do tell me! Do!"

"Not yet," answered the Deuce darkly. "It would be useless now—worse than useless—until I have proof. I hoped you might see more distinctly. As matters stand—the whole thing is too incredible—too *bizarre*."

Here he paused, then went on, apparently thinking aloud, rather than addressing his words to Miss Althea:

"It's rarely, if ever, that they appear in daylight. In all the chronicles I have read—in all that I've heard—I never knew of a case."

"Oh, what is it? What *is* it?" still begged Miss Althea. "Help me! Help me to understand!"

"I will," the Deuce assured her. "First, however, I myself must understand, and there it is you who can help me. You know that house? You can see it from here."

He handed her the field glasses as he spoke, but Miss Althea refused then by a wave of her hand. She seated herself stiffly in a near-by chair, while the Deuce lounged in his hammock, still holding the rejected glasses, and waiting for her to speak, which she presently did.

"I know the house to which you refer, Mr. Deuce. By sight."

"I infer, then," said he, "that you don't know the inhabitants of that house."

Miss Althea flipped her skirt into smoother lines, stiffened her backbone and sniffed. It was a most expressive sniff. As clearly as words could have done, it conveyed the information that the Deuce's inference was perfectly justified.

"Exactly," said he with a sympathetic nod in concurrence with her unspoken reply. "I quite understand. The thought vibrations emanating from that house could hardly fail to be antagonistic—actively—even painfully antagonistic—to a sensibility so keenly delicate as yours, but—"

"I consider the young woman who inhabits that house to be an exceptionally undesirable person, and her mother, if possible, even more so," incisively remarked Miss Althea, cutting in. "They are both newcomers to this place. I do not regard them as desirable acquaintances, and therefore I have declined to know them."

It was plain that in so far as those two women were concerned, Miss Althea was inclined to abandon psychological theory in favor of unscientific statements of fact. The Deuce hastened to lead her back once more into the former field.

"The mental vibrations sent forth by the people you describe could hardly fail to clash with those of your sensitive mind," said he. "Moreover, their vibrations, coming from people with whom you have no personal acquaintance, must be most powerful in order to produce so decided an effect. You have felt those vibrations, but have you stopped to analyze them? Have you ever attempted to analyze them? Tell me!"

His manner was most authoritative. Miss Althea thought for a moment, then shook her head.

"No," agreed the Deuce. "It is only natural that you should not make any such attempt; the repulsion was so strong that you desired only to put it out of your mind. But stop. Try now to analyze those antagonistic vibrations. Was the repulsion that you felt merely an instinctive dislike of those people, or was it something stronger more subtle? A shrinking from something dark—evil—dangerous. Think!"

Thoughts came crowding into Miss Althea's mind. For years she had considered herself deeply versed in the higher psychology—whatever that may be—but now, with a shock, she began to fear that after all she had been sadly superficial. What happened was this:

It began with those two women, mother and daughter, who had taken the house—a mere bungalow—not far from the hospital, but closer still to Miss Althea's home. The mother was thin, with much white hair and gleaming, black eyes. The daughter, a girl of three and twenty years, or thereabouts, likewise had black eyes. She was a forward, highly colored creature in Miss Al-

thea's opinion, who laughed entirely too much. Why certain people, notably of the opposite sex, should consider this young woman attractive was something beyond Miss Althea's comprehension. Nevertheless, it was indubitably true that wherever this person appeared a number of more or less eligible men would usually be found in her train. Moreover, Pliny, the doctor, Miss Althea's brother, was among the most prominent of these. There was no denying this. Even the patients in the hospital discussed it. The whole countryside knew it. To Miss Althea it was incomprehensible—but there you were.

Now, previous to the advent of these people, Miss Althea had regarded her face and figure as being of an agreeable plumpness; of having a pleasing disposition toward *embonpoint*. But once as she was passing the younger of those women she heard—distinctly heard—an allusion to "a pink hippopotamus." It was all very well to say that it was a joke, or not intended for her ears, or—what probably was the fact—that the words were not applied to her at all. Miss Althea knew better.

"At all events, after hearing the foregoing expression, she had dieted, intending thereby to remove the superfluous flesh; and in this she was all too successful. The flesh went so quickly that the skin hung on her face in more or less graceful festoons. But was that any reason why one of these women—the elder one this time—should describe her, with alliterative insult, as "a ripe, romantic, rhinoceros"? Of course, Miss Althea had not heard her say this. She had said it to some one who told it to some one else, so that it came to the ears of a friend of Miss Althea's and so to Miss Althea herself. But eventually it *had* come to Miss Althea. That was the main point.

Therefore it had not occurred to Miss Althea that her dislike of these people required any theory of inharmonious mental vibrations to account for it. But now that her attention was called to the matter, it was these vibrations, after all, and not the attempted wit of those whom she regarded with deserved contempt, which caused the repulsion she felt.

In other words, Miss Althea now believed that she had overlooked a bet until the Deuce pointed it out to her. She said as much. The Deuce nodded and went on:

"Have you thought—do you know the exact nature of these vibrations? And the nature of those from whom they come?" The Deuce asked solemnly.

Naturally Miss Althea did not know. Nobody in the world could truthfully have answered those questions affirmatively. Miss Althea shook her head.

"The black magic of the Middle Ages, the witchcraft of old New England and the malicious animal magnetism of modern times," the Deuce went on, "are all simply some of the many variants of mental force sent out in etheric vibrations, as you know."

As a matter of fact, Miss Althea did not know the nature of "etheric vibrations," nor even that such things existed—if indeed they do. But the expression sounded well. So Miss Althea achieved a masterly silence, and as the Deuce wisely pursued his questions no further, for the time all went well.

"So the witchcraft in Salem and elsewhere," continued the Deuce, "was simply this vibratory force, directed to the ends which the chroniclers of those times have recorded. There is no reason for us to doubt those chroniclers. They were conscientious men, and in many cases were eyewitnesses of what they recorded. Neither is there any reason why any or all of these phenomena should not be repeated. In fact, as I—you also, in a measure—have every reason to believe they are repeated—here—now—among us—every day. So think—"

"Say—youse! Climb outer that an' get back to yer cage!" here interrupted a raucous voice. "The doctor wants yer. He's a-gonter send a pill inter yer stummick, a-huntin' for the mind that yuh never had. So you beat it—see?"

It was the orderly once more. Miss Althea felt that his vibrations were only a degree less offensive than those of the people who had been under discussion. But the orderly paid no attention whatever to her, and with the administration of the hospital she knew that she had no right to interfere. As a mouthpiece of the physician, even the Deuce recognized the orderly's

authority, for he rose obediently, but lingered for an instant as he passed Miss Althea.

"Think of what I've said. Think—especially—of what we saw. Think of these things in connection with each other. I'll see you again; I need your aid. For the present—good-by!" These sentences the Deuce whispered with an air of profound mystery into Miss Althea's ear. Then he was gone.

II.

Miss Althea was thinking, as the Deuce had told her to do. She was thinking hard. At any other time so much concentrated mental effort undoubtedly would have resulted in a severe headache. Now it afforded her only delightful, shuddery thrills. They came to her as she went slowly down the hospital steps and got into the motor car that waited for her. They accompanied her on her homeward journey. She passed the village post office as the two women who had been under discussion were emerging therefrom; and this, taken in connection with what the Deuce had said and implied, afforded the greatest thrill of all, a thrill that lasted while the car climbed a gentle acclivity that led to her father's house, and that even followed her as she attained the privacy of her own rooms.

Here she sat down, and for the first time tried definitely to arrange the novel ideas that had been whirling, helter-skelter, through her brain ever since the Deuce first had placed them there. Miss Althea had a powerful mind, she considered, and one that was naturally well ordered. She rather prided herself upon these facts. It was without surprise, then, that she found that in thus arranging her thoughts, she succeeded remarkably well.

All the occult phenomena formerly grouped under the generic heads of "magic" or "witchcraft"—Miss Althea rather fancied that way of putting it—were in reality manifestations of mental force.

In granting the above proposition, parenthetically, who could deny the wisdom shown? Which of us could argue intelligently a subject such as that one? But to resume.

The second proposition, that if witchcraft ever was possible, it is possible still, likewise was a proposition that Miss Althea regarded as incontrovertible. The "vibrations" which came to her from those two women—her lips tightened as she thought of them—spoke for themselves. The older of those two women certainly looked like a witch if ever anybody did, and as for the younger one—well, she wouldn't go into that for the present. Now, as to that object of which she had caught a glimpse through those field glasses only a little while before.

Was it really a crow? She had thought so at the time. But was it? What she had taken for wings beating the air, for instance, might that not really have been a fluttering shawl. A shawl, on a human body, very distant astride a broomstick or the like. That old woman wore a shawl sometimes on cool evenings; Miss Althea had seen it. As for the women—well, that question was one that could be decided later.

But was that thing really a crow, or a human form, shooting through the air on a broomstick or the like? This was the main point to be decided. From Miss Althea's point of view one phenomenon was quite as possible as the other, even though the two were not seen with equal frequency. The longer she debated this question with herself, the more definitely she was inclined toward the latter of the two conclusions.

This debate was still in progress when a maid tapped at Miss Althea's door and announced that luncheon was served. Miss Althea went down at once; Miss Althea's family was wont to be prompt at its meals.

The family consisted, beside Miss Althea herself, of her father and two brothers. The father was an indulgent father. He believed in riding his own hobby and allowing others to do the same. His hobby consisted in making a collection of many millions of dollars; but though this hobby afforded him unalloyed pleasure, he realized fully that tastes differ, and therefore forced nobody else into the same line of endeavor. Every one, therefore, was satisfied, or ought to have been.

For the younger of his two sons, who was an inventor, with a burning desire to

build the coming heavier-than-air flying machine, the father put up shops and a hangar on the grounds. For Pliny, the physician, he bought a hospital, as already stated. Had witches, astral bodies and the like been procurable in the open market, Miss Althea's parent would doubtless have supplied her with a large and well-selected assortment of them. As this was impracticable, Miss Althea herself was doing her best to supply the deficiency.

Only three sat down to luncheon, for the younger son was away. The table stood upon a veranda from whence there was a view over the distant roof of the bungalow wherein dwelt the two women of Miss Althea's suspicious detestation, on across a mile of fields to a point beyond and including the hospital and ending with a hill that concealed everything but the sky on its farther side.

"Pliny," said Miss Althea after a little, laying by her plate a pair of field glasses that she had brought to the table with her, "who is that mysterious man whom you call the Deuce? Is it true that you consider that—that he is—well, insane?"

Miss Althea could hardly bring herself to utter that last word. It brought from her an involuntary sigh of profound relief when Pliny, whose mouth for the moment was too full for utterance, vigorously shook his head.

"He isn't a lunatic, and there's nothing mysterious about him at all," said he as soon as he decently could. "In private life he was the head of one of those freak cults which are eternally springing up, and and which, I believe, he called 'Psycho-esotericism' or some foolishness like that. He was drafted into the aviation work and hurt himself in an airplane accident the first time he tried to fly. It is owing to that accident that he's in the hospital. He has what is called aphasia, caused by a blood clot on his brain, probably. He has lost his memory, but he's not a lunatic or anything like one. He's not even a particularly interesting case. There's nothing in the least mysterious about him. He may be a little erratic; men in his condition are apt to be. But that's all."

Pliny was rarely disinclined to lecture mildly on subjects connected with his profession when opportunity offered. Now he paused, but after fortifying himself with more food and half a cup of coffee, resumed his discourse.

"It's that orderly," said he, "who is an interesting case. He's lost his memory also, it appears, but there's no discernible reason why. We don't believe that he's shamming, but we aren't quite sure."

"I'm sure he's shamming," said Miss Althea, positively. "I don't like that orderly. His vibrations are most—"

"Althea, you just 'tend to your collection of tame hobgoblins and let Pliny run his hospital to suit himself," here interrupted their father.

Miss Althea was offended, but wisely said nothing. Laying down her fork she raised her field glasses and once more—for she had done the same thing before during the meal—swept the landscape. For a moment she allowed her gaze to rest upon the bungalow whence emanated those vibrations which had caused her so much mental unrest, and then went on, over the fields, and over the hospital to the hill behind.

As the glasses brought this hill into view Miss Althea half rose in her seat, with a little gasp. Both the men stared at her in amazement.

"What in blazes—" began her father; but this time it was Althea who interrupted.

"Look!" she cried, pressing the glasses into his hand, and then pointing. "Look! Tell me what you see!"

Wondering, he obeyed.

"I can't see anything," he said after a moment. "What am I supposed to see?"

"Not on the ground," she cried, half hysterically. "In the air. Look!"

Again he obeyed. Then, with a sigh, he handed the glasses to his son.

"I can't see anything," he grunted. "You have a try."

"Quick!" added Miss Althea. "Quick, or you'll be too late!"

Pliny raised the binoculars and pointed them in the direction indicated by his sister's outstretched finger. Almost at once he lowered them again, shaking his head.

"Couldn't you see anything—*anything?*" asked Miss Althea eagerly.

"I saw something," he replied. "I couldn't tell, though, what it was with any certainty, because the glasses aren't focused for my eyes. However, it wasn't anything but a crow that I saw; of that I'm nearly sure. It must have come from behind the hill, as crows usually do, and alighted in the cornfield that you can't see because it is on the other side of that bungalow. Is that what you meant?"

"I—I suppose it was," answered Miss Althea hurriedly. "I mean, that is, that we saw the same thing—the thing you thought was a crow."

"Well—what did you think it was?" asked her father. "One of your tame spooks that flew the coop?"

To this pertinent question he received no reply. Miss Althea herself had "flew the coop." What was the use in discussing such matters with those two men? Like Mr. Kipling's vampire, they "never could understand."

The excitement of the morning had been nothing to what Miss Althea now experienced. Then there had been doubt in her mind; now there was none. If not in some way interfered with and stopped, she was convinced that the quiet countryside inhabited by her, her family and some few others, was due to become the scene of an orgy of witchcraft that would leave that tame affair of Salem and its vicinity simply nowhere.

It must be stopped—stopped at once. That was self-evident. And who was there to stop it but Miss Althea herself? No one, save only the Deuce. At any sacrifice, Miss Althea must seek him at once, and together they would save the community from this disaster which, if unchecked, would spread like a dread epidemic. There was nothing else to be done. Miss Althea ordered her car.

This time, though Miss Althea could not have told why, she directed her chauffeur to take a road that led by the door of that bungalow. Miss Althea had no idea of what she expected to find there. Certainly it was not what she did find. For before that door stood her brother, the doctor's fast roadster, from which Dr. Pliny himself was just alighting, while that "creature," as Miss Althea mentally termed her, the younger one of the two women, stood on the veranda, evidently waiting for him.

"Stop!" Miss Althea ordered her chauffeur. Then she called: "Pliny!"

Pliny came, frowning. "Well?" he asked irritably.

For a moment Miss Althea was at a loss, but for a moment only. Something had to be done—something had to be said, at any rate, now that she had called her brother, and there was no time to lose.

"Is *she* ill?" demanded Miss Althea, obeying the first impulse that prompted her, and with a wag of her head toward the young woman on the veranda. Pliny frowned even more than he had done before.

"That's not your concern," he replied with brotherlike frankness. "Even if she were, you know I don't talk about my patients. Was that all you wanted to say?"

"No," was Miss Althea's reply. "I wanted to ask something that I forgot before. It's about that man you call the Deuce, and that horrid orderly you have."

She repeated all that the orderly had told her about the Deuce, with marginal notes and comments of her own. If the orderly had heard what she said he would have become unequivocally aware that so far as Miss Althea was concerned he had not earned a favorable opinion. To express all this took her some minutes, while her brother fretted. In a way she was sparring for time. She desired greatly to think of some method by which she could get him away from that young woman of the unsympathetic vibrations.

"And I think," she concluded desperately, "that this young man—the Deuce, as you call him—is really ill. I saw him this morning, you know. Won't you come and look at him? Now?"

"No," answered her brother crossly. "I won't. There's nothing wrong with the man now any more than there was when I last saw him. As for the rest of it, that orderly was simply talking through his hat, probably because he saw you didn't like him. So if that's all you have to say, Althea, you'd better go on about your own affairs, and leave me to mine."

Without giving his sister any opportunity for further remarks, Pliny faced about and returned to the young woman, still waiting on the veranda. And the mind vibrations sent forth by this young woman were, in Miss Althea's opinion, even more antagonistic than before.

III.

THE hospital for which Miss Althea was bound had formerly been a country house of some pretensions; but the fortune of its previous owner had been added, not long before, to the collection of dollars which Miss Althea's father was so interested in making—which was the principal one of his two great fads. Naturally, then, the house stood in the midst of rather extensive grounds, dotted here and there with shade trees. From under one of these trees, quite close to the junction of drive and highroad, sprang the Deuce, who, with frantic gestures, flagged the car. It stopped. Jumping upon the running board, the Deuce placed his lips close to Miss Althea's ear.

"Send your man away," he hissed in a mysterious whisper. "I have much to say. Much that must not be overheard."

"Then something has happened!" eagerly whispered Miss Althea in return.

"Yes," he agreed, still in the same whisper. "And there is more which is about to happen. You know that. Trained and sensitive psychic as you are, you *must* know that!"

Deeply flattered, Miss Althea nodded assent; then addressed her chauffeur:

"Peter," she said, "go up to the hospital and see if I left my purse there this morning. Hunt for it and bring it to me."

Now, according to her lights, Miss Althea was an extremely—even a painfully—truthful woman. As she sat there in her car waiting for the chauffeur to walk out of earshot, her mind entertained no shadow of doubt that would tend to shake her faith that the coming conference between her and the Deuce was of vital importance to the entire countryside. For whatever power mind vibrations may have or may lack, the power of mental suggestion is beyond dispute. Miss Althea believed what she wished to believe; and in this regard Miss Althea differed only in degree from all the rest of humankind.

"Those who went forth this morning have returned," he said hurriedly, in a low voice, hollow and impressive.

"I know they did," agreed Miss Althea. "Or at least, I know that one of them returned. I saw her as she came. Came flying, as she flew away this morning. And I saw her afterward—only a few minutes ago. She's with my brother now."

"Your brother!" cried the Deuce, starting back. "Heavens! But their design is plain. As they cannot touch you personally they would strike you through your brother. Doubtless he would be merely one of many victims. They will act at once. They must act at once, if at all, and they know it. For they fear us—fear you and me—and with reason. Together our psychic force, exercised for good, far outweighs theirs, used only for evil. But as they will act quickly, we must act more quickly still. Are you prepared—will you dare—to brave them? Say!"

For a moment, but a moment only, Miss Althea hesitated. Then certain memories darted into her mind. "Pink hippopotamus"—"ripe, romantic rhinocerous"—and the sight of that girl, as she stood on the veranda, waiting for Pliny. Miss Althea hesitated no longer.

"I will dare anything," said she stoutly.

"Of course," he assented, trying to conceal his relief at her announcement. "Now listen. These people are to have a meeting—these evil entities—"

"You mean those witches?" asked Miss Althea, who liked to be explicit.

"Yes," answered the Deuce. "Witches. For want of a more scientific term—witches. They are to meet—probably from hundreds of miles around. Where that meeting is to be held I have no way of knowing—as yet. But we must know. We must find out, and you must help me. As those two—those whom we know—leave their house in order to go to that meeting, they must be followed."

Poor Miss Althea fairly gasped in consternation. She visualized herself astride a broomstick, high in air, with the landscape rushing by far below her. She, who

never had dared to mount even a well-mannered horse!

"They must be followed," the Deuce went on inexorably, "and it is we who must follow them. I say 'we' because I need your help. Our psychic forces must be united—must work in concert. Therefore we must go together."

"On—on broomsticks?" she asked, her eyes round with fear and wonderment.

"No," he answered gravely. "Physical levitation, by means of a broomstick or otherwise, is a power that I never have tried to attain; and there is not time for me to attain it now—far less to teach it to you. But an airplane will serve—serve even better—and there is one in the hangar by your house."

Then, for the first time, a doubt crept into Miss Althea's mind. A microscopic trace of shrewdness, inherited from her father, weakly asserted itself.

"But how do you know about this meeting?" she asked. "How do you know, even, that there is to be one?"

"Are their reasons not clear to you?" he demanded with an air of disappointed and outraged dignity. "Is it possible that *you* can't see? Can't see that when you and I, two trained psychics, have joined forces for good, the powers of evil must need help—reënforcements—if they are to have even a fighting chance? If they did not need that help—need it urgently and instantly—do you suppose they would risk being seen, in the very act of levitation, at such an hour?"

"You mean that otherwise they wouldn't dare fly on broomsticks in broad daylight?" asked Miss Althea; for in discussing matters as important as this, she preferred to have them stated in words that could not be misunderstood.

"They wouldn't dare fly on broomsticks in broad daylight," repeated the Deuce with deep approval. "Just that. How simply and how well you put it!"

"But you couldn't get the airplane. My father—my brother—the servants—they wouldn't let you," incoherently objected Miss Althea. "Besides, the hangar's locked—with a big padlock, and—"

"Do you suppose for an instant," interrupted the Deuce with a smile, "that we would allow such slight obstacles as those you mention to deter us."

Now that smile of his was a most superior smile. Superior and pitying. It made Miss Althea feel very small and very ignorant, indeed. So she said nothing, and the Deuce went on:

"Moreover, your father will not be at home. He has been called to the city, in order to attend a meeting there; I heard your brother say so. Your brother also will be away. He is in the power of those women—the women of the evil vibrations. They will no longer stay here; we are too powerful, and they fear us. When they leave they will take him with them. As for the servants, they matter nothing. We shall be well on the way in our pursuit long before they could interfere."

"But even so," her terror growing as obstacles were swept away. "Even so—what of me? I couldn't explain what I'd done. My family wouldn't understand. They don't know about such things—it isn't in them to know. How could I come home and tell them—with the airplane gone, and all? Oh, I'd never dare! Never! Never in the world!"

She shuddered at the very thought of such a homecoming, but the Deuce's smile was still untroubled. It was changed, however; its pitying superiority had been replaced by a look of sympathetic understanding that went straight to Miss Althea's maiden heart. His face looked more than ever as though it had been cut from a most expensive poster, as reaching forward, he grasped her hand, which rested upon the door of the car. The act caused Miss Althea to experience the same pleasurable cardiac fluttering which she had felt when gazing upon his sleeping face, but to a greater degree. A very much greater degree. Then he spoke.

"But why should you explain?" he asked very gently. "Why should you go back at all?"

"What?" cried Miss Althea. Also she jumped as though he had yelled "boo!" at her, but she did not withdraw her hand. His had closed upon it, so it did not seem worth while. In a voice that was low, but

which stirred Miss Althea's heart as it never had been stirred before, the Deuce went on:

"Why should you go back at all?" he repeated. "Why not come with me—remain with me—forever—as my bride? Do we not need each other? Could there ever be a union of souls more perfect than that of yours and mine? Think! Think of the added power—of the surer triumph over our enemies—over all that is evil—that would be given by our combined soul vibrations, thus brought into closest accord. Think, I say!"

Thus commanded to think, Miss Althea tried her best, but it is hardly to be wondered at that her thoughts were in a whirl, despite her utmost endeavors. All the previous romance of her life had consisted solely of that which her own imagination had created. Now, for the first time, she listened to the pleadings of a lover—and such a lover!—who besought her to fly with him. Literally to fly with him!

Moreover, nothing but an elopement, in the present case, would serve his end; even in her confusion of thought Miss Althea realized this clearly enough. Indulgent though her father might be, to hope for his consent to her union with the apostle of some obscure psychical cult, and at that an apostle whose mind was believed to be affected—though never for an instant did Miss Althea credit such a thing—to hope for her father's consent to such a union was a thing too absurd to be entertained for a moment. And her father had many and efficient ways of imposing his will upon others; hence, the success with which he collected those millions.

On the other hand, she was certainly of age. She had inherited a fortune from her mother. Once married, and her soul vibration strengthened by their union with those of her mate, her position, she felt would be impregnable.

Then, the romance of it all! And the victory that such a union would bring! "Pink hippopotamus!" "Ripe, romantic, rhinoceros!" Bitterly—oh, most bitterly, should those words be repented by those who had uttered them!

Here the Deuce broke in upon Miss Althea's thoughts.

"There is no more time for words—your man is returning," he said in a hurried undertone. "But you cannot refuse me! You must not! Our union would be too perfect for that. So meet me at half an hour before midnight, on the path leading to the hangar. Promise me! Promise now!"

"I promise," said Miss Althea. There was no time for more words, as the Deuce had said.

Without the purse—naturally, in view of the fact that Miss Althea had it all the time—the chauffeur returned, and the car bore its occupants away. Though Miss Althea went for a long drive in the country in order to collect her thoughts, they still remained in a whirl of exaltation. When she returned home, and found that during her absence Pliny, her brother, had telephoned, saying that he was called away and would not return that night, the possibility of any lingering doubt vanished utterly, for to her, at least, it proved that beyond peradventure the Deuce, in addition to his other psychic qualities, was nearly, or quite, omniscient. Could such a being fail in anything that he should undertake? The question was too absurd even to answer.

This faith buoyed Miss Althea through the long hours of waiting. Never once did it fail. She felt that if necessary it would have enabled her cheerfully to undertake the saddle-breaking of a broomstick fresh from the range—or the factory, or wherever it is that wild and untamed broomsticks come from.

The faith upbore her while she made her simple preparations, which consisted principally in secreting the key of the hangar and of donning warm clothing. To the latter, it is true, she added a becoming, much-beflowered hat, which she knew was hardly suited for purposes of aërial flight, but which, under the circumstances, she found herself unable to resist. It sustained her while the counted minutes passed, while Miss Athea wondered whether, upon arriving at the tryst, she would be gathered into a passionate embrace, after the manner of lovers of whom she had read. Her own lover, she realized, being different and far superior to lovers of the standards, or stock brands, might not follow the same prece-

dents. If he did elect to follow them, however, Miss Althea would undergo the ordeal unflinchingly. Upon this she was resolved.

The Deuce's procedure, however, was all his own. As she arrived at the place of meeting, he stepped forth from the deep shadow of some trees and grasped her wrist.

"Come!" said he, striding so fast toward the hangar that Miss Althea was obliged to trot in order to accompany him. "Come! The time is short."

"Here!" panted Miss Althea. "Here—take it. It's the hangar key."

"It is unnecessary," was the response. "The door was open when I arrived. It was the orderly who opened it, as I then learned. In civil life—to which, being discharged, he has now returned—his profession was that of robbing garages of tools, motor parts and valuables of a like nature. He had broken into the hangar for a similar purpose, and upon my engaging that you and I would desist from giving an alarm, he has consented to help us. But he now waits impatiently, fearing interruption. So come!"

For a moment, but for a moment only, Miss Althea's faith wavered. The astounding statements had been made as calmly as though they had been to the effect that in private life the orderly was a clergyman whom the Deuce had therefore induced to wait and tie the conjugal knot. Then an explanation struck her, and admiration restored her failing faith. For, after all, what directness—what singleness of purpose the Deuce had shown in thus following his mission, which was for the greatest good, and ignoring the smaller evils incidental to the attainment of that mission! This was the reasoning by which Miss Althea's faith and admiration became reinstated upon its pedestal more securely than before.

Therefore, even the mental vibration—whatever these might have been—of the orderly did not strike Miss Althea with their usual antagonistic force. He was waiting outside the hangar, where the great, two-seated flying machine had been trundled forth in readiness for their coming.

"The tank's full and the motor's all right," said he, as he saw Miss Althea and her companion. "As for the rest of it, I can't say. I don't know these machines, and don't pretend to."

To these remarks the Deuce made no reply. He pulled at the controls, then gracefully handed Miss Althea into the observer's seat. With a little fluttering breath of excitement, which still had no fear in it, she suffered the two men to strap her into place. Then, as the Deuce climbed into his own seat, and the straps were adjusted, he turned to Miss Althea.

"Concentrate," he commanded impressively. "Send forth your soul vibrations to act with mine, to the end that our first victory may be assured from the start."

Before Miss Althea could reply, he had nodded to the orderly, and the orderly gave the propeller a mighty twirl. A deafening roar, motor exhaust and rushing air, followed instantly. The car went jerkily forward, skipped over the ground once or twice and then ran smoothly; they were in the air. Glancing over the side, Miss Althea could see the shadow of the airplane growing as it slid, smoothly and silently, over the moonlit earth as the shadow of an ascending hawk glows and glides across a field. She saw the landscape spread itself, picturelike, below her.

Instinctively—drawn by the adverse vibrations emanating therefrom, she herself would have said—Miss Althea's eyes were drawn toward that bungalow, which now grew near and nearer with every second that passed. What it all meant Miss Althea had no idea. The Deuce, however, waved one hand, in triumph or warning she never knew which. That hand wave—that infinitesimal lapse from attention to the work at hand—proved the beginning of their end.

The engine stalled. The sudden cessation of its exhaust was so startling that Miss Althea almost screamed. In the silence she could hear the sounds of music, as they rose from the bungalow. The sounds became plainer—plainer still. The airplane's nose dipped. The Deuce, she could see, wrestled desperately with the controls, but without avail. Still the plane swooped down. Nearer and nearer came the lighted bungalow, which seemed rushing to meet it. They were upon it. There was a frightful crash—darkness—then light again.

Miss Althea opened her eyes. She was in a room that was brightly lighted, and she saw that the unshattered portions of the walls were trimmed with flowers. It was also filled with people, among them her father and younger brother, all in festal array.

And under an archway of greenery at one end stood three figures; one that of a man in clerical black, one of Pliny, her brother, with a flower in his buttonhole. In his hand Pliny held that of the younger woman whose house had been invaded and who was clad in white. The elder of the two women stood hard by.

All of these things Miss Althea saw as one sees objects revealed by a flash of lightning.

Then darkness again closed in upon her—darkness and oblivion both, for she had swooned.

There followed a time—how long Miss Althea had no means of knowing—a time of dreams that were troubled and incoherent.

At last she woke to find herself in her own room, a white-capped nurse departing on some errand through the doorway, and her father sitting by her side. She would have questioned him, but he stopped her.

"You mustn't talk," said he. "Pliny and the other pill-sharps agree on that. I'll tell you all you need to know. You—and that plane—and the lunatic who was driving it—all smashed through the roof of that bungalow into Pliny's wedding. No one was badly hurt—the plane had its wings stripped off as it came, but otherwise wasn't so much damaged, which was a miracle. We hadn't told you that Pliny was going to be married; we knew you didn't like his wife—and we knew the row you'd have made if you had been told. And now you have heard pretty much all the news there is."

Miss Althea shook her head. Her face became troubled.

"The Deuce—where is he?" she asked weakly.

"Oh, somewhere around," answered her father with assumed carelessness. "I don't know just where."

"I want him," Miss Althea persisted, her face more troubled still. "I want him now!"

Then it was that the offhand manner which until then he had affected dropped wholly away from Althea's father. When he spoke there was both concern and real tenderness expressed in his voice.

"My girl," he said, "I don't think you want to see that man. The shock of that crash sent the clot of blood, or whatever was on his brain, on its way once more. He's now the man he used to be—the man you never saw. The memory of his former life is restored. But the memory of the time when he knew you—of the time between his first accident and this second one—is now an utter blank. He doesn't know, except for what he has been told, that you exist. Do you understand what I mean, Althea?"

It is not probable that Miss Althea understood. Her mind, like her body, was weakened, and moreover she was obsessed with one idea to the exclusion of all others.

"I want him," she repeated. "I want him now."

With a sigh her father rose, went to the door and beckoned. Concerning this point there had been many discussions among the attending physicians, with the conclusion that if she insisted it would be best to grant her wish—and have done with the matter once and for all. So, in answer to her father's summons, a man entered. He bowed and smiled, and advanced to the bedside, uneasily bowing and smirking still.

Could this really be the Deuce? Could this really be the man she had known? So far as their features went, the faces were the same—frightfully, dishearteningly so.

But this man was dressed in civilian clothes, baggy, somewhat worn and not too neat. He wore a very low collar and a flowing tie. There was no power in his face. His smile was oily, and so, when he spoke, was his voice.

"I am rejoiced, Miss Althea, to see that you have progressed so far on your road to recovery," said he. "We were together, I am told, at the time of your accident—though personally I can recall nothing of

the occurrence. They tell me also that you are interested in psychic matters, and have some knowledge of them. Permit me to give you these leaflets. They tell of the aims of our society—the Psycho-Esoterics. You may be interested."

Weak though she was, there came from poor Miss Althea a sob that seemed almost to rend her. The visitor—the stranger in a once familiar body—was hurried out by the nurse.

Althea's father took her hand and held it in both his.

"Don't cry, girl—don't!" he begged. "What's the good? Do you want him yet, Althea? I'll get him for you, if you do. If he don't know you now, he can learn to. I'd no idea—not a notion—that you'd feel like this. But cheer up. I'll get him. I don't care what it costs."

"He isn't—isn't for sale," sobbed Miss Althea.

"He isn't? Oh, yes, my dear—all men are," was her father's reply. "Just wait—you'll see. Say the word, and I'll send right out and get him for you now—this minute. Shall I?"

"It isn't that—you couldn't do any good," sobbed Miss Althea. "It's the vibrations—the thoughts. They overcame us. Oh—but you can't understand!"

No, her father could not understand—not her nor any woman. He had found out that many years before. It was clear he could not help, so he pursued the only course left open to him. He held her hand in both his, that were big and comforting. So she lay and cried, which was probably the best thing she could do, until at last the sobs grew fainter and finally ceased, for she was sleeping.

Then her father rose, tiptoed out of the sick room, and gently closed the door behind him.

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THE LIP AND THE HEART

ONE day between the Lip and the Heart
A wordless strife arose,
Which was more expert in the art
His purpose to disclose.

The Lip called forth a vassal Tongue,
And made him vouch—a lie!
The slave his servile anthem sung,
And braved the listening sky.

The Heart to speak in vain essayed,
Nor could his purpose reach—
His will nor voice nor tongue obeyed,
His silence was his speech.

Mark thou their difference, child of earth!
While each performs his part,
Not all the lip can speak is worth
The silence of the heart.

John Adams.

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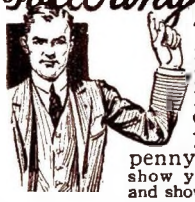

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The pathway of life is lighted by the sunshine of knowledge—and darkened by the clouds of ignorance

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Can you guide *two* lives down the pathway of life instead of one?

Are you able to take a sweet, delicate, fragile little soul, care for it as you would a rosebud, and let that soul, under your guidance, bloom forth in its full womanly splendor?

Knowledge is the sunshine that lights the pathway of life. In the intimate relations of marriage, many a heart has been broken, many a soul has despaired, in the darkness shed by the clouds of ignorance.

You, young man, owe knowledge to her who some day will place her heart, her soul, her life in your hands. Unless you know the answer to the scores of questions arising from the close intimacies of marriage—unless you can solve the problems of love arising from the heart—your goal of happiness will be far away, and the road will be long and hard.

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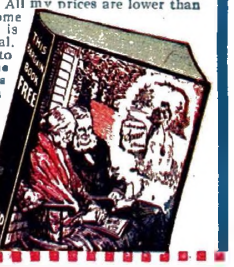

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