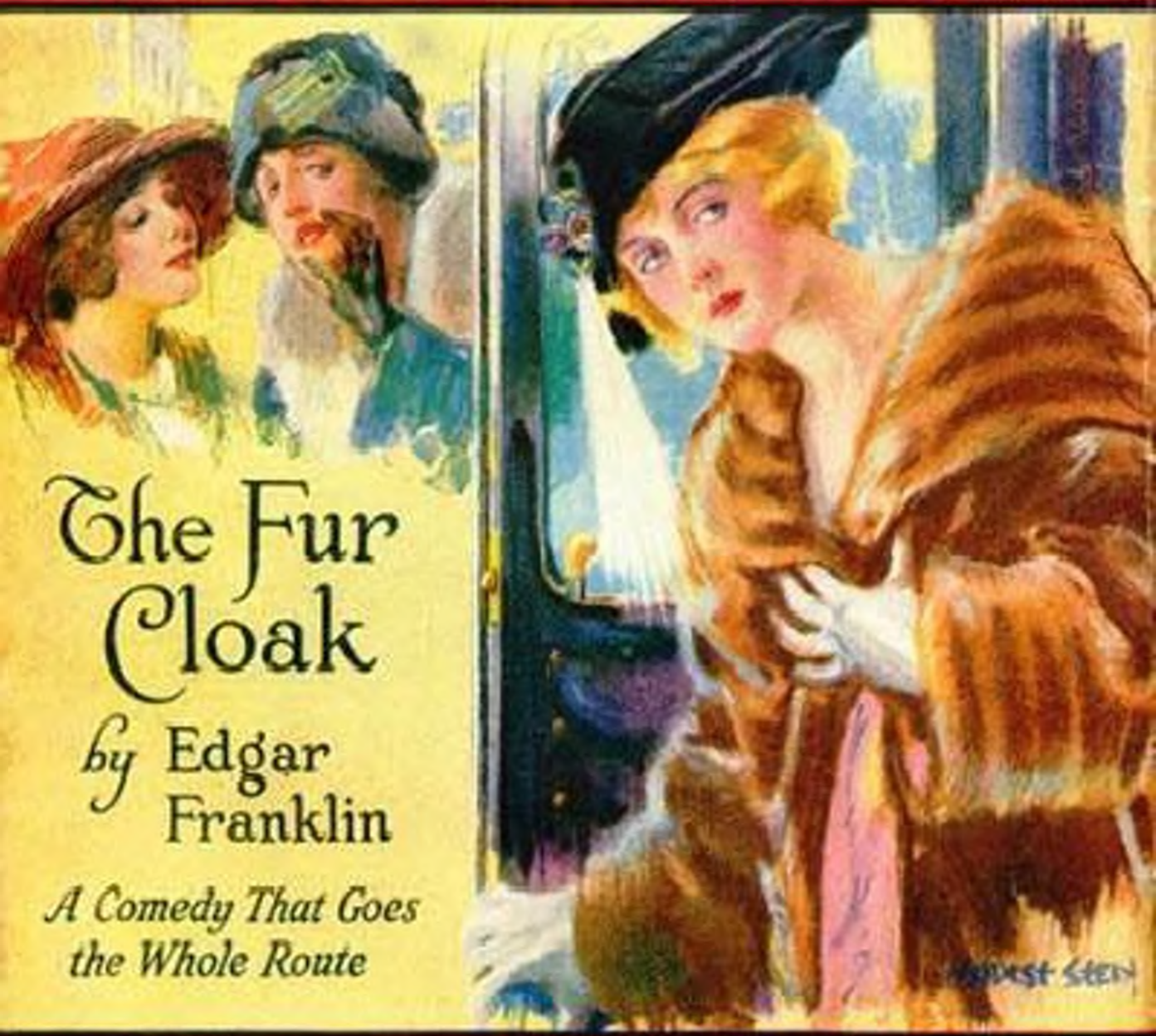
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



The Fur Cloak

by Edgar Franklin

A Comedy That Goes the Whole Route

10¢ PER COPY JUNE 24 BY THE YEAR $4.00

$1.00 Down Brings This 6-Piece Library Set

New Set with Large Roomy Divan

Only $1.00 with the coupon below brings this sensational furniture bargain to your home on 30 days trial. Complete 6 piece set of fumed solid oak living room furniture *including a wonderfully comfortable and roomy divan.* Only $29.85 for the complete set on this offer—on easy payments, too. $40 was the former price for a set like this—a special factory sacrifice makes this slash in price possible now. Seize this opportunity on our special approval offer—we take the risk.

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New 6-Piece Set

Fumed Solid Oak

This superb 6-piece set is made of selected solid oak throughout, finished in rich, dull waxed, brown fumed oak. All the four chairs are padded; seats upholstered with brown Delavan Spanish leather, the best imitation of genuine Spanish leather known. The upholstering is a rich brown color.

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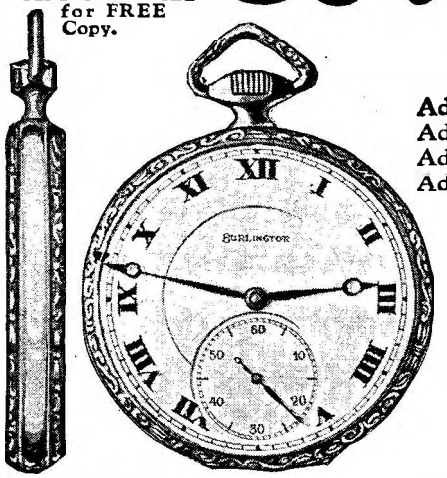

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLIII CONTENTS FOR JUNE 24, 1922 NUMBER 5

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

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SEVEN SHORT STORIES

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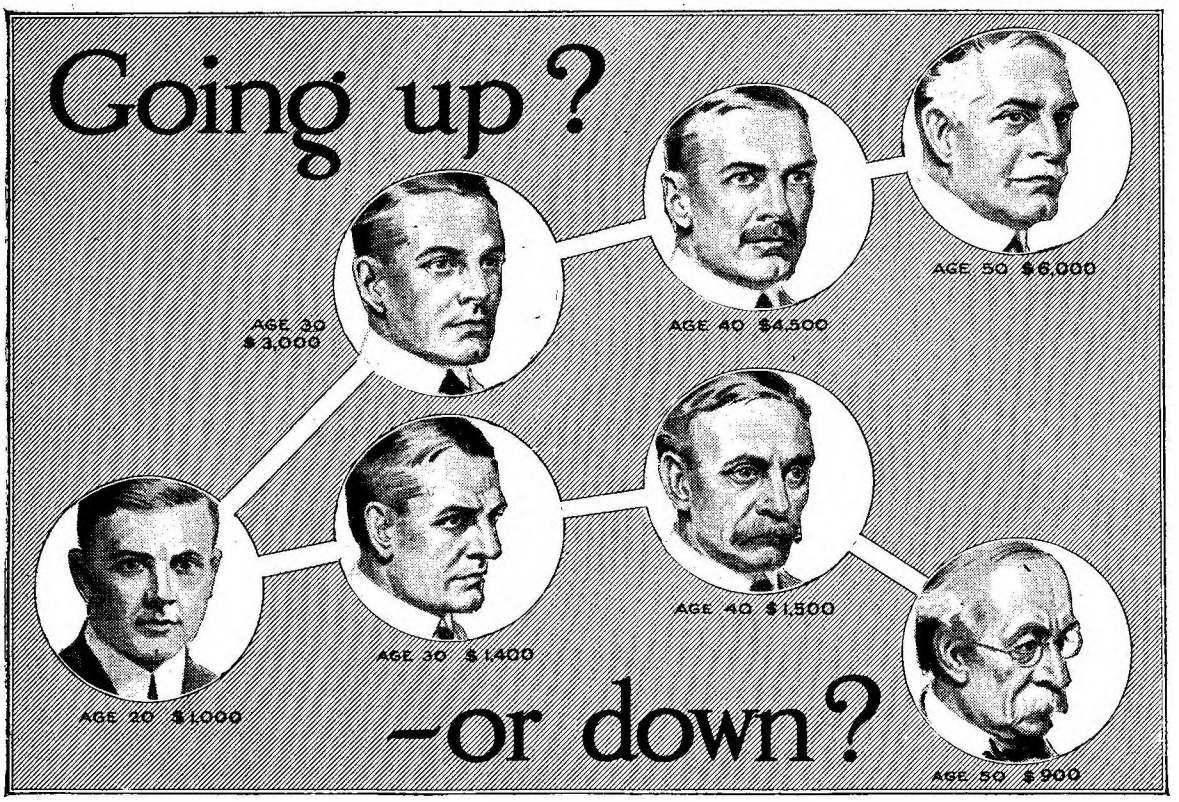
Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879



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

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

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

	LINE RATE	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination line rate $4.00 less 2 per cent cash discount.
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July 29th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close July 1st

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WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., 200 Olive, St. Louis, Mo.

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SALES AGENTS WANTED in every county to give all or spare time. Positions worth $750 to $1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar St., Canton, Ohio.

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WANTED: TAILORING SALESMEN—MAKE BIG MONEY from the very start—opportunity of your lifetime to get into your own business. We are the largest made-to-measure tailoring house in the country, furnishing elaborate sample equipments, including 500 all wool fabrics, and guarantee absolute satisfaction—perfect fit, best workmanship, or no sale. Write for line and all accessories to be sent free. Earn from $75.00 to $200.00 per week. State whether or not you have experience in taking orders for men's made-to-measure clothes. A. L. ARNOLD, Sales Manager, Box 483, Chicago, Ill.

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A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN—Make sparkling glass name plates, numbers, checkerboards, medallions, signs; big illustrated book FREE. E. PALMER, 500 Wooster, Ohio.

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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

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Think of it!
a genuine
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Keep the children at home

Eminent Authorities Endorse This Method

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You can now do so easily and conveniently regardless of your circumstances. A remarkable plan has been carefully worked out and the new features in the pricing and financing will astonish you.

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This plan would be impossible if it were not backed by a company whose activities were world-wide and whose finances were unusually strong. The Hallet & Davis Piano Company back this movement and are in a position to carry it out because they possess these essentials.

The coupon below will give you this confidential information by return mail. It marks a new departure which puts this wonderful instrument into homes of moderate means, where formerly they were obtainable only by the financially prominent.

This plan meets the *individual requirements* of every family, in every status and condition.

All parents should get the facts without fail. They are confidential. They will surprise you. Do it now to obtain them quickly. Mail the coupon at once.

THE VIRTUOLO
PLAYER PIANO
Made by
HALLET & DAVIS
Established 1839

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION COUPON

HALLET & DAVIS PIANO CO.,
146 Boylston St., Boston, Mass.

Send me confidential prices and terms of Virtuolo.

Name.....

Address.....

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

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXLIII SATURDAY, JUNE 24, 1922 NUMBER 5

The Fur Cloak

by

Edgar Franklin

Part I

Author of "A Noise in Newboro," "Regular People," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE WORTH OF SMILES.

ON the door of the third floor back the heavy knock sounded again, which caused both young women to start oddly.

Then, out in the musty hallway, some one grunted and a weighty tread moved off; from the top step but one of the ancient stairs came the inevitable loud creak, indicating the some one's descent. Miss Myra Carson stifled a shuddering sigh. Miss Daisy Walsh relaxed and yawned.

"Say, ain't she the wise old cat, though?" she observed. "She knew I was in here with you. They get that way after runnin' a rooming house a coupla years."

"But—"

"Oh, just rent, kid—room rent," Daisy smiled, showing her splendid teeth. "I didn't come across last week and there'll be nothin' doing this week, either." And here, conscience being apparently a mere dictionary word of which she had never even looked up the meaning, Miss Walsh extended her legs and contemplated the rather elaborate stockings with complacent satisfaction. "Well—y' can't give up five-fifty the pair for 'em and still be expected to pay room rent, can you, kid?"

"No," Myra said thinly.

Miss Walsh grinned up at her for a moment—grinned at a slim, blue-eyed girl of twenty or so, a girl with a dainty head and fine, intelligent features, a very pretty girl, in fact, in a very plain serge dress, which had been no real confection on the day it left the sweatshop, and since then had improved not one whit.

The picture before Myra Carson, on the other hand, was a very different matter. Whatever else she may have been, Daisy Walsh was certainly decorative.

She wore a gown of severe black, as befitted a young woman about to go to her work at the chaste cloak room of the expensive Hotel Aldean—yet its severity only emphasized the rest of her. The sinuous permanence of the waves on her bobbed head proved her hair dresser an honest man. Her lips, like her cheeks, simulated with very fair accuracy the coloring of a superbly healthy female; her under lids were interestingly dark, and it is not impossible that her astonishingly long lashes had been gummed into place within the hour. And even so, as Myra happened to know, Daisy Walsh was far from a bad sort—at any rate as bad sorts go when one is a furnished-roomer.

"Sometimes, y' know, I wonder where this Aldean bunch thinks us girls get off with this twice-a-month pay day stuff," Miss Walsh pursued, more gravely. "A girl gets her little roll on a Saturday night, and if she ain't too rabid she has a quarter or two left over next Saturday morning. But this stunt of having it handed to you one Wednesday and then waiting two weeks for the next—say, what are you so white about, kid? I'm not breaking your heart, am I?"

Myra, just then, was gazing fixedly at a small sign thrust into the edge of her crinkly old mirror, a card with two printed lines, the first in small type: "They Never Can Lick You If You—" and the second in staring capitals: "KEEP ON SMILING!" Myra smiled suddenly and turned to her friend.

"Breaking my heart?" she echoed.

"Because it's me that owes rent for the next room, honey—not you for this one," Daisy said dryly. "*You* couldn't owe room rent. You're not that kind."

"But I—I—but—" Myra stammered, not too lucidly.

Miss Walsh rose hurriedly and threw an arm about her.

"Say, listen! I beg your pardon, kid; I didn't mean to sneer," she said. "I guess I'm just ashamed of myself, Myra. I guess I got the jumps to-day, anyhow. Come over to the couch and go on."

"On with what?"

"Well, you were just starting to tell me the story of your life when *that* happened," Daisy reminded her, as they sat down.

Miss Carson's eyes, momentarily, grew round again.

"I *was* doing that, wasn't I?" she murmured, somewhat wonderingly.

And she gazed at the sign and smiled again, and the wonder increased rather than diminished; because it was not at all like Myra to be telling the story of her life to anybody. Very rarely, indeed, did she inflict her personal concerns on any sort of listener; early training and discretion and iron-clad pride and a few other considerations combined to forbid that sort of thing — and, all the same, there does come a time when one must talk or—or—

"Where was I?" Miss Carson asked.

"On the 'Way Down East' stuff, kid. You were telling me about the little old home town and the main street and the funny trolley line and the white picket fence in front of your place."

"Yes, and the old-fashioned garden in our front yard and—"

"And a regular home and a civilized family, with brothers and sisters and all that!" Daisy pursued, partly to herself. "I'll bet you hated to leave it."

"I did."

"Then, for the love of Mike, why *did* you leave it?"

Miss Carson sighed and surrendered to the impulse to confide.

"Oh, there were a lot of reasons, Daisy. Dad needs every last penny in the business this year, and with me out of the way there's one less to support. And I wanted some real thrills, you know, and a chance to broaden out by seeing something beside the home town and—I wanted to make some extra money, too, and—"

Her voice trailed off. Her smile had altogether vanished. Daisy considered her for a little and nodded sagely.

"But mostly because you had a terrible fight with *him!*" she suggested.

"What?" cried Miss Carson, and flushed startlingly. "What can you possibly know about—"

She bit off the words. Miss Walsh chuckled richly.

"Ain't you the funny kid, honey?" said

she. "You're deep like a drop of water! Well, it must have been some battle to start you going like that. Tell me about it, by rounds. I eat that stuff."

"It had nothing whatever to do with my coming to New York!" Myra said hotly. "It was simply because I'd decided to come and wouldn't be bullied into changing my mind. As if I were a child, you know, and couldn't—and, another thing, it was absurd of him to—"

"Wait—wait!" Daisy cried. "You're skidding all around, kid. Introduce me to this guy first. What's his name?"

"Why—Arthur. Arthur Bond."

"Good looker?"

"Oh, he's—" Myra began enthusiastically, and toned it down to: "Why, yes, he—I—that is, every one thinks he's handsome."

"Lotta dough?" Daisy quizzed further.

"Not yet."

"But he will have, and he's solid and respectable, and he loves you and you love him."

"Er—yes," Miss Carson confessed.

"And with a guy like that all sewed up, you scrap with him and get out and leave him for somebody else!" Miss Walsh snapped, exasperatedly. "Say, listen, kid—and get this right! How long have you been here?"

"Five months."

"Well, to-morrow morning, pack the little grip and hop the first rattler for home! Put your head on this Arthur's manly chest and tell him you're a nut, and you're sorry, and you'll never do it again, and—"

"Oh, but you don't understand at all!" Myra broke in. "We disagreed because he's silly. I—I'll have to tell you now, I suppose. You see, Arthur was brought up by a maiden aunt, and I think most of his ideas belong to eighteen eighty-five, or some such period. I told him quite frankly why I wanted to get out in the world for a year—we're to be married in another seven months, you know."

"Maybe," mused Daisy.

"I told him that I wanted some little adventures and thrills of my own, and that I wanted to make enough, all by myself, to cover my hope chest and trousseau and all that. And instead of—of even believing me, he grew insulting. He's horribly jealous, you know—horribly!"

"They all throw that bluff, kid," sighed Miss Walsh.

"And he actually—actually dared say that — oh, it's too ridiculous — that there was somebody else, Daisy! That somebody was luring me down to the temptations of a great city! And he swore that if there was, and he ever found him, he'd kill him and—oh, I don't know how much more of the same thing. That was the night before I started. We've made it up since, by mail, of course, and—and we're all engaged again and—"

Once again Miss Carson's voice faded out. Miss Walsh shifted, watching her meditatively, and the high grade sheet tin cigarette case in her hand bag clanked faintly; and Daisy frowned a moment and sighed. It had become her custom latterly to snatch a whiff or two at about this time of day, but for some reason not clear to herself she never felt like smoking in Myra's presence.

"Honey, have you made the fortune yet?" she asked gently.

"Not quite," Myra admitted.

"Just been blowing around from one job to another for five months?"

"Oh, I'd hardly say that! I—" Miss Carson began, with some asperity; and then, because she was utterly honest, ended rather weakly with: "Well, yes. I suppose so."

"Until last week I got you the dining-room cashier's job over in the Aldean, and if May Forbes don't get well—I wonder how she is, by the way?—you can hold that down permanently. Um-um. I don't get it, kid. I mean why a girl like you—"

Out in the hallway a step approached once more. As if many rehearsals had brought the act to perfection, each young woman stiffened and looked toward the door. The step passed on, and each young woman relaxed again with a faint sigh and Daisy frowned a little.

"Why, kid, cut out that stuff!" said she. "You don't have to look so scared on my account. What if the old hen does find me in here? She can't any more than tell me

I got to pay up or get out—and that don't mean anything in my young life. It's not you that owes her money, Myra, or—say, Myra, on the level, ain't you getting cold feet on this stunt of making your way in the great city?"

"Certainly not!" Miss Carson said, almost too promptly.

Some seconds Miss Walsh had been studying the small sign at the side of the mirror; her over-dressed eyes twinkled a little, and her over-tinted lips twitched.

"'They never can lick you if you keep on smiling!'" she read. "Honey, just between you and me and the near-bed over there, do you honestly believe in that bunk?"

"I do, indeed! And it's *not* bunk! It's—it's the secret of all success!" Myra cried, with tremendous energy.

"Let 'em slam you and slam you and slam you, and get up and grin at 'em every time, and pretty soon they'll get sick of slamming you and hand you the big wad with three palms, huh?"

"Yes!" cried Miss Carson, and smiled brilliantly, and in the excess of her enthusiasm even struck one slim knee with a small clenched fist. "I believe just that! I *know* it!"

Daisy Walsh sighed and hitched about, to face her friend more impressively.

"Listen, kid!" she said wearily. "I've lived. You ain't. I was rustling my own eats when they were washing your face for Sunday school. These lovely eyes have seen things you never even dreamed about, and that's how come I can tell you one thing: the good old smile gets you *nothing!*"

"But—"

"Only in books, honey—only in books. Think it over! J'ever see a really rich guy going around with the smile that won't come off? No, you never did. J'ever have to go to one of these twenty-dollar-a-minute specialists? I did, last year, and he was like the village undertaker—but he had three cars, and a million nurses to help him, and a six-story house to live in, and the waiting room looked like a mob scene! Looka Burkett, that owns the Aldean! If that old egg ever smiled, his face 'd split open and bleed! But he owns that house and three in Florida, and, outside o' that, they say he's got around ten million in the old sock—and he started out as a bellhop!"

"That doesn't prove anything at all!" Myra smiled serenely.

"And look at *me!*" Daisy cried. "Once upon a time I had your trouble, too! I used to sing while I worked and grin at the whole universe—and they thought I was weak-minded and easy and—well, nobody got away with anything, but they learned me my lesson. Honey!" said Miss Walsh, and gripped Myra's arm. "You want to get somewhere? Sure you do! Well, you gotta turn unpleasant!"

"Oh—"

"It's the right dope, kid! It's the right dope! I've tried both ways and I'm giving you the right dope! Smile all the time—and you're just any little jane. Get unpleasant and you get interesting!"

"About how unpleasant?" Myra asked, with rather bored curiosity.

"Huh? I don't know. I think you can go as far as you like, kid! Sometimes I think the sky's the limit. Only, I'm telling you, it does interest them! It gives them something to overcome and—"

"Oh! You're talking about—just men."

"Well, what else is there to talk about?" Daisy inquired, quite blankly. "And it shows 'em you think something of yourself. You try it, kid. It pays, and it pays good!"

Myra said nothing at all.

"I'm not shocking you again, am I?" Daisy asked suddenly.

"What? Good gracious, no!"

"Because I don't want you to get me wrong, Myra," Miss Walsh concluded, very tartly. "You're such a simple little kid you'd be liable to do that. Believe me, honey, there ain't a living soul can say *that* about me! Only, if they want to fight for a smile and buy me candy and gloves and stuff like that and take me places—oh, it all helps when a girl has to work for a living!"

Once more, Myra said nothing. She did continue to smile bravely, however, and somewhat meditatively; and having considered her for a time, Miss Walsh con-

sulted the incredibly small watch on her wrist, shrugged her shoulders and rose with a yawn.

"Coming over to the hotel now?"

"Not for another half hour, Daisy."

"Well—I gotta get on the job, kid. You think it over. Tie a can to the smile for a coupla days, turn ugly and watch 'em hand it to you! I mean it, kid! You don't have to look so pitying at me. Smitty ought to be down in the kitchen about now; I guess it's safe enough to make the grand bust for freedom!"

Thus, with an airy wave of her pink-nailed fingers, Daisy departed, and Myra Carson was left alone with all the splendors of the aged black walnut bed, the crinkly-mirrored dresser, the elderly Brussels carpet and the two dingy, undersized windows which gave upon a stretch of most unlovely backyards.

Briefly, as she stood before the mirror, much disgust and some anger surged up in Miss Carson. Daisy and her queer, unwholesome philosophy—pah! Or perhaps Daisy deserved decent pity rather than this distinctly smug shudder; wretched conditions all around had done much to warp Daisy's outlook on life. But—as if anything in the world could conquer the individual who faces it with unquenchable optimism and the smile of the truly courageous heart! Miss Carson smiled anew.

And there was something about the smile that she did not quite understand; it was not forced, to be sure, but this last two or three weeks there had been just the suggestion of effort about getting it to the surface. Miss Carson, staring on at her own reflection, found the smile departing slowly, slowly, until a grave and pensive young woman confronted her in the mirror.

To be absolutely honest, since her descent upon New York, the good old smile had *not* been so very rich in dividends! There had been that first job with Walker Brothers, so easily obtained, so promptly lost because Walker Brothers were forced to cut down expenses. There had been a rather distressing interval before she made connections with the Star Manufacturing Company and was given a desk of her own —only to learn, three weeks later, that the new receiver had decided to shut down the Star Manufacturing Company for good and all. And another interval, much more distressing, before she took the post with Marston & Marston. This had looked like a really good job; doubtless it would have proven such had not the younger Marston, disappearing without one word of warning, taken with him most of the firm's visible assets—leaving in fact only the office furniture and the books in the safe!

Save for the well-proven fact that there is no such thing as bad luck, one might have suspected that sheer bad luck was dogging Myra's steps. The most distressing interval of all had followed that Marston disaster; nobody in the whole world had seemed disposed to employ the cheery Miss Carson in any capacity at any price. Yet the ineradicable smile had persisted, and, surely enough, its reward had come at last, ten days ago, when Daisy Walsh rushed in with the glad news that, to all intents, she had captured the Aldean cashier's job for Myra.

And that, so to speak, was just it! Ten days ago and no pay day until next Wednesday. In this connection, pride and reticence being Myra's outstanding characteristics, there were several little details of which Daisy Walsh had not the smallest suspicion.

One of them bore directly on that violent, pale-cheeked start of Myra's, so nearly duplicating Daisy's own start, upon the approach of Mrs. Smith, landlady of the rooming house. It was the painful, if unadvertised truth that while Daisy seemed to be two weeks in arrear, Myra Carson had not paid a penny of room rent for three solid weeks. For the first of these it had been quite all right, Mrs. Smith vastly preferring tenants of Myra's stamp, and realizing fully that the best of us may become temporarily embarrassed. As the second rent day passed, the Smith cordiality had seemed a trifle strained. And, day before yesterday, she had stated in just so many words that she wanted money from Myra. Miss Carson's supply of that commodity this late afternoon was precisely forty cents!

In spite of which she smiled, since they

never can lick you if you keep on smiling. For a few days more she must adopt Daisy's distasteful trick of dodging in and out of the house when Mrs. Smith was out of sight; and then would come Wednesday and a little packet of green bills, and she would square her account with the lady — and smile on to success!

Wherefore, with more effort than she had ever had to use before, Myra smiled again, and set about preparing to leave for her evening's work in the large, elaborate and distinctly hot Aldean dining room. She even took to humming blithely, which is quite a trick to accomplish when one has breakfasted on half a bottle of milk and lunched on the other half. She glanced carefully at her spotless gown and slipped into her plain and inexpensive coat, with its rather ghastly collar of yellow fur. She adjusted her hat and picked up her bag, and still humming, started for the door.

And, this time without any warning steps, three more loud, insistent raps sounded on the upper panel—and Myra Carson stopped and turned white and trembled with sheer humiliation. Immediately after that, since she had neglected to lock the door on Daisy's departure, the knob turned and the portal was pushed open, to reveal the person of Mrs. Smith herself.

CHAPTER II.

SMILING ON.

PERCHANCE you have pictured this rooming-house landlady as a stout, untidy individual with frowsy hair and a coarse, loud voice. She was nothing like that. She was rather raw boned and extremely neat, with not one relentless steel hair out of place. She neither used bad grammar nor possessed a worthless husband, sitting down in the kitchen with his feet propped in the open and smoking a corncob pipe; the male Smith, in fact, held an exceptionally good position for one of his attainments, and some years they were able to bank his salary entire against their declining days. But Mrs. Smith, who hailed from the hinterlands of Connecticut, was not taking roomers as a matter of personal hygiene. She owned a chin and a nose, and a mind that should logically have graced the cranium of some great financier, and it was frequently observed by those who knew her well, but did not love her, that when a penny finally did escape Mrs. Smith's grasp it was possible to detect bruises and dents upon the Lincoln profile, as if the little coin had been subjected to great pressure.

This, then, was the person who, after a brief, penetrating stare at the gentle Myra, stepped in and closed the door behind her.

"I knocked a little while ago. I thought you were here," she said steadily.

"I—er—er—was!" Myra faltered.

"Yes, I thought so. Miss Carson, I spoke to you yesterday—"

"About my rent—yes, I know!" Myra began, breathlessly. "You—you see—"

"It amounts to eighteen dollars. Do you find yourself able to pay to-day, Miss Carson?"

"Why—no, I don't, Mrs. Smith!" Myra stammered. "Not to-day. You see, in this new position of mine, the pay day—"

"I know; you told me that before," Mrs. Smith said quietly, and looked her directly in the eye. "Miss Carson, I've kept lodgers for years, and I know people. You're not the hand-to-mouth type of girl who has nothing at all in reserve. I *think* that if you wished to pay, you could do so."

"Oh, but I assure you—"

"It needn't even be the full amount just now, if that makes it easier. If you can let me have ten dollars?"

"I can't."

Mrs. Smith's lips grew somewhat tighter.

"Five dollars, then?" she said tentatively.

"I can't!" Myra cried wretchedly.

"That means you won't!" the lady stated coldly.

"But it doesn't! I—I—I simply haven't the money!"

"Very well, my dear. You're mistress of your own affairs. And I'm mistress of mine, you know, and I have to look after them as well as I'm able," the chilly voice pursued. "Nowadays there's such a very small margin in this kind of thing that I can't afford any losses."

"No—of course not," Miss Carson murmured.

"So, unless you bring me back at least ten dollars when you come from work tonight, you needn't come!" Mrs. Smith snapped. "Because you can't have your room any longer. I have another tenant waiting!"

"You mean—"

"I mean just what I say. I don't understand it; I wouldn't have believed it of you, Miss Carson—but it just shows that you never can tell."

Here came a reasonably dramatic pause wherein the landlady, something of a psychologist, waited for Myra to weaken and open her hand bag and disgorge. Myra only stared back for a moment, lips trembling—and then, summoning all her boundless faith, she smiled! She smiled brilliantly, serenely, wonderfully; you never can lick anybody who smiles like that. Mrs. Smith stiffened.

"If that's the position you choose to take, there is nothing more to be said, of course," she stated with exceeding tartness. "Will you kindly give me your latchkey, Miss Carson?"

Myra, smiling still, fumbled into her bag and extended the key.

"And should you think better of this matter during the evening—or should you decide to change whatever plans you must have made—ring when you come back and I'll see if we can find a place for you. Meanwhile, I shall hold your trunk. You understand that, of course?"

Myra bowed. She could smile, but she could not talk just then.

Mrs. Smith held open the door and waited. Miss Carson, head up, stepped lightly past her and into the hallway, and then down the two flights and through the almost paintless front door into the early winter dusk.

So far as concerned the metropolitan district, she was homeless. It might be fair to assume that, long before she reached the corner, glistening tears were trickling down her cheeks, cold terror chilling her very soul? Nothing could have been farther from the truth: Myra simply smiled!

Not that the immediate outlook was overpleasing, but it was at least definite. Whatever one's capital, one has to have a place to sleep. In the Hotel Aldean, in some few special cases, rooms were assigned to divers employees—not nice rooms, by any means, little cubbyholes, in fact, which could not possibly have been rented to the exalted Aldean patronage, but at least rooms with beds. These matters were in direct charge of Miss Finch, the harsh and sour and unfailingly snappiest housekeeper; and as between chopping off a finger and begging a favor of Miss Finch, Myra would rather have lost the finger. However, these choices are not vouchsafed most of us; it was just one of the things that would have to be done, however unpleasant — and it wouldn't be unpleasant at all, Miss Carson informed herself suddenly and quickened her pace and smiled more sturdily and charmingly. It was the sort of expression that would surely disarm even a Miss Finch; but in suite of that—Myra decided suddenly as she hurried into the Aldean—the interview could and should be postponed until after the dinner rush.

This hotel maintained its own allegedly tipless cloak room. Daisy Walsh, standing demurely in the doorway of the ladies' room, one eye on the three maids under her, grinned briefly at Myra.

"She never got me, kid!" she whispered. "She near broke her neck getting up the basement stairs when she heard me coming down, but she never touched me!"

"Fine!" Myra agreed cheerfully.

"I'll say so. What's the matter, kid? You look hungry or tired or something? Still got the happy smile, though, ain't you? Say, honey, listen! Take the tip from me and try canning it! Turn ugly and watch things come your way and—"

More than this, Myra, speeding on, did not hear. She was in no mood at all to absorb more of the strange creed just at present; turning ugly would have been too, too easy! Miss Carson smiled her way to the desk in the corner of the dining room and popped into her chair, relieving a young woman who remarked with some acerbity that this was the second time she had been three minutes late—and vanished.

After which, dinner. Pretty women in

wonderful clothes, who laughed entrancingly, impressive gentlemen in sober black, who smiled, rushing waiters who bore incredible loads of rich, appetizing food, rushing buss boys who bore equally incredible loads of empty dishes, captains who strolled about majestically, and a head who surveyed it all with imperial dignity.

Myra was fairly acclimated now, but it was a difficult atmosphere to bear this evening. There is a vague tradition that those who see much food develop an acute disgust toward all but the lightest and daintiest articles of diet; Myra Carson, whose healthy young appetite had encountered nothing more substantial than milk since yesterday, was ready to brand this the silliest fallacy. In the good old days, so several had informed her, the Aldean had allowed each employee a certain amount of real food daily, to be consumed on the premises and reckoned as part of one's pay. That quaint and pretty custom, most unfortunately, had been abolished the very week before Myra's advent; nowadays one ate elsewhere and found a correspondingly larger sum in the pay envelope. And that bit of stationery—the thought was becoming more or less of a fixed obsession—would not meet her eye until next Wednesday, and—Miss Carson caught herself gazing raptly, hungrily, lingeringly at a certain glorious little steak, full two inches thick and swimming in liquid brown glory, patiently displayed by a waiter who seemed rather astonished at the long pause.

Miss Carson nodded sudden curt approval and then spent several difficult seconds pulling herself together after the harrowing experience. Decidedly, in the intervals of making change and marking checks with her little rubber stamps, and officially viewing tons of maddening nourishment, she would have to distract her mind from the thought of food.

She looked around, in search of interesting people who might be studied divertingly. There were several near at hand—the gray-haired, distinguished-looking man with the petite brunette who might have been, and was not, his daughter—the enormously fat man and his enormously fat wife, whose table looked like a sample display of all the wares in the Aldean kitchen; Myra watched them for one second and moaned internally as she looked away—the handsome brute over there who resembled a collar advertisement and smoked cigarettes even as he masticated turkey and chatted with the rather haggard and forlorn and very highly-painted little flapper opposite.

These were all well enough, but not particularly compelling; Myra's attention strayed nearer at hand, to the table just beyond her desk on the left, in fact, and—well, there were the same two men, apparently, who had been in three times before this week for dinner. Miss Carson's famished mind settled gratefully upon them; they, at least, spent more time and energy in conversation than in eating.

The elder man was a puzzle to her. He was short and rather lean and very wiry, and he might have been sixty. There was nothing pretty about him. His thin, gray hair straggled about in defiance of every convention; his collar was small and flat, displaying an unlovely neck and an Adam's apple which seemed to reflect every emotion. He owned a hawk nose and a wide, thin-lipped mouth, hard as flint; when he talked there was a filelike rasp to his voice; but the small gray eyes, wicked as sin itself, were the most striking feature of him. More than anything else, he looked like a retired pirate and—no, not that, either. Better, thought Myra, a peculiarly prosperous and heartless and successful pirate taking a brief vacation between cruises; there was a vital quality to that personality which laughed away the idea of retirement.

His companion could hardly have been a more dissimilar type. He was within a year or two of forty, one way or the other; his thick brown hair was gray at the temples. He was tall and slender, and but for the big glasses and the chronically vague expression he would almost have been handsome. When he talked he murmured rather diffidently, where the pirate snapped words out like the spitting of a machine gun. And he seemed to hold the pirate in high respect, while the pirate regarded him with something akin to contempt . . .

He was a student or an artist or something of the kind, and the pirate had caught him young, doubtless after making his parents walk the plank, and had broken his spirit. Perhaps he was a member of the crew now, although that seemed unlikely. If he was, he must be the pirate's private secretary, who attended to the correspondence and kept the records, stepping into his cabin while the active murdering was being done and—

Miss Carson gazed rather suddenly in another direction. That was the third time the student person had stared at her with timid, but rather warm, admiration.

Malini, captain of that side of the room, sauntered to Myra's desk and smiled with kindly dignity and a query in his eye. Cashiers always fell in love with Malini on the third day, and the unmoved Myra rather puzzled him.

"You get on—nicelee?" Malini asked.

"Oh, yes, thank you."

"I think you remain?"

"I hope so."

"And me, I hope so too," Malini observed softly and ardently, and waited for the little blush which did not materialize, Miss Carson being busy just then in a new inspection of the pirate. She turned quite suddenly back to the captain of waiters, causing him to lean forward expectantly.

"Mr. Malini—this old man—no, down at that table. Who is he?"

"Thees one, of the bad eye?"

"Yes."

"Wait—I theenk. He ees not stopping here, but—oh, yes! The name ees Wastford."

"Westford?"

"Yes. He come from—where? I think Idaho. He is verree, verree rich. He own mines. Why? What has he said to you?"

"He hasn't said anything to me," Miss Carson said irritably. "I was just looking at him. Who's the man with him? They've been in together before. Mr. Westford always calls him 'doc.'"

Malini, who could sense wealth and importance with astounding speed and accuracy, shrugged his shoulders.

"He? I do not know. He work for Wastford, I theenk. I do not know."

Once more he waited, apparently for some small tribute to his own rare, dark beauty. Miss Carson had quite forgotten his very presence on earth. Malini strolled away again.

So that strange old person was very rich, was he? She might have known it, though; nobody not several times a millionaire ever would have dared wear a coat like that in a place like this. No wonder they were all so respectful to him. Rich! A synonym for being able to buy all the food one craved. Although Westford was not greatly interested in food this evening. He had talked hard and steadily, about business apparently, while the younger man nodded and nodded, evidently assenting to everything. . . . And now he had altered, had the Westford pirate. His voice had dropped so that Myra could not catch even a word at intervals. If his gray eyes had been wicked before, they were positively Satanic now, flashing an evil, triumphant light that fascinated Myra. His swift undertone went on and on.

And even the student, accustomed to the pirate, was growing startled. He sat more erect as he listened; he grew less vague; he glanced around fearfully as the discourse finally ended in a sudden, sharp, short laugh that chilled the blood. Quite like a criminal, he gazed shiftily up at the passing waiter and paused until he was well out of earshot. Then:

"Er—yes! Efficient, surely, I should say, Mr. Westford—astoundingly so. But—er—ah—daring! Infernally daring, sir. I'm—er—glad *I'm* not involved!"

Whereat the pirate looked him up and down and permitted his savage lips to curl in a sneer.

"*You!*" said he, concentrating an opinion of several volumes into the one word.

All of which was very diverting, of course. But if Myra stared much longer at the pair, and the one called "doc" glanced many more times at Myra, Roveau, supreme and exalted ruler of the room, would step over and address a few muttered, ominous words to Myra. Legend had it that in the Aldean, when a lady employee came even under suspicion of flirting with a patron, she was escorted to

a small side entrance and thrust into the outer world, never to return. Myra could not afford that just now.

Nor had it any bearing on where she was to sleep to-night. Miss Carson stamped busily for a time, made further change, stabbed many checks on to the file, and pondered on the impending interview with Miss Finch. The queer pair rose and departed; other pairs rose and departed; the dinner rush was waning, and it was time to begin making up the totals. Miss Carson sighed slightly as she went about the task; even now she had not decided upon the correct approach in the Finch matter.

The simplest thing, to be sure, would be frank, direct statement of the case. Perhaps Miss Finch liked that sort of tactics. Perhaps she did not. Perhaps she was the sort of being one had to flatter and wheedle humiliatingly. Myra did not know, having hitherto met Miss Finch just once. . . . Perhaps she wasn't on hand at this time of night, which would be rather terrible. Perhaps Myra would have to see some one else. Perhaps she would have to go to the desk and try to rent a room, at whatever price, and ask them to charge it against her salary — although that sort of thing, very probably, was strictly forbidden here, if not rated as an actual attempt at crime. Perhaps, even—

Myra caught herself and smiled brilliantly at the empty dining room. She was becoming downright excited, and it would not do at all. The moment was by way of being a crisis in her life, and can she hope to survive crises who does not smile at their very gnashing teeth? Distinctly she cannot! So the indication for the immediate future was to hurry up her work here and then hunt down Miss Finch, and after that to trust to a fortune which cannot possibly be permanently unkind.

The books consumed the better part of another hour. Chairs were piled on tables, and vacuum cleaners were whirring in the dimmed room before Miss Carson had quite finished her evening's work; but she did finish it at last, and the annoying Finch matter lay directly ahead.

Myra smiled confidently and locked her little safe, and then, gathering those documents which were each night turned in to the manager's office, clicked the door of her little inclosure behind her and stepped out bravely.

Of course, she *might* explain matters to them in the office and have some sort of official backing before reaching Miss Finch. In fact, if Mr. Bostwick, the genial chief of the whole establishment, happened to be in there, she would do just that—and if Salton, his dapper little assistant, was in charge, she would do nothing of the kind. Salton had a way of ogling everything in skirts which, properly set before an intelligent jury, would have won acquittal for any young woman charged with his assassination.

The plain coat over her arm, the documents in her hands, Miss Carson entered the Aldean's inner sanctum—and paused and sighed faintly. Salton tilted back at his desk in the corner of the room, but there was only darkness beyond the glass panel of the door marked, "Mr. Bostwick. Private." It would have to be Finch, then! Myra laid the evening's records on Salton's desk, and, avoiding his eye, was about to turn away when: "Oh—Miss Carson, isn't it?" said the assistant manager.

"It is."

"Well, just a minute, Miss Carson, please; don't run away," Salton pursued, tilting his frivolous smile in Myra's direction for a moment. "Memorandum here for you, somewhere or other. About you, that is to say. Mr. Bostwick left it with me when he went out, and I had intended to send for you earlier. Where the deuce is the thing? Ah, here it is!"

He glanced at three lines scribbled in pencil on a leaf of a scratch-pad, and tossed it aside again. He tilted back and gazed boldly at Myra's beauty.

"Ah—you're replacing Miss Forbes, of course," he began.

"Of course."

"Well, Miss Forbes—happily, to be sure—has quite recovered from her recent and rather prolonged illness, Miss Carson. Mr. Bostwick had word from her to-day. She is returning to us to-morrow."

"Oh!" just escaped Myra's lips in a whisper.

"So that we shall not need you any longer," the assistant manager pursued. "Sorry, too, Miss Carson. Your work has been perfectly satisfactory, I believe. If there's a chance to place you in the house—later on, I mean—we shall be very glad to keep you in mind."

"Thank you," said Myra very quietly.

"And as to what we owe you—"

"*Yes?*" came from Myra with a hopeful gulp.

"You will please call—or send—next Wednesday, Miss Carson. Personally I should like to square accounts with you on the spot, but we had so many little difficulties with that sort of thing that we've made a cast-iron rule against paying any one, save on the regular day."

"Oh!" issued inaudibly from Myra.

Mr. Salton's eye was not nearly so bold as he waited for further comment. He loathed the task of dismissing pretty young women; he wished that Myra would go and have done with it. Instead of that, Myra merely stood and stared at him, second after second.

She could ask Salton for a loan. Infinitely she would have preferred death, because that loan would have been a personal matter, and— Myra smiled.

Yes, it is the simple fact—Myra smiled serenely, confidently, pleasantly as ever, even in the face of this newest, worst blow. She nodded slightly.

"Very well, Mr. Salton. Good evening," said Myra.

Watching her as she stepped daintily from the office, no one in the world ever would have suspected that she was in anything but the happiest, most secure frame of mind.

CHAPTER III.

THE HUNCH.

EVEN when the door had closed, even when she walked down the little corridor to the lobby, Myra smiled on. She faced the brilliant lobby, with its wealthy, well-fed, prosperous loungers, unflinchingly, and still smiled. Because they cannot lick you when you smile like that. Absolutely beyond the smallest shadow of the most insignificant doubt, they cannot! They positively *cannot* lick you when—when—

Miss Carson caught her own reflection in one of the decorative little mirrors, and stopped short. That wasn't a real smile; that was the expression of a congenital idiot! She forced it hurriedly from her pretty features; she confronted a sober, somewhat scared-looking young woman now. She moved on, slowly and without the springiness. That chronic smile, having left her face, seemed to have left her whole body as well.

Ahead, one of the blue and gold alcoves with the deep chairs beckoned invitingly. A bitter little surge went through Miss Carson. As an employee of the house, she would have earned instant dismissal by going in and sitting down; as a homeless young woman—since she had never heard of a well-behaved person being ejected from the Aldean's public chairs—she was privileged to loll at ease in there and reflect upon the next move. It showed that one could not have everything, did it not? The immediate choice lying between the alcove and sallying forth to walk the streets all night, Miss Carson stepped into the alcove and settled drearily on a little divan. And now?

The proposition of arranging matters with Miss Finch had passed into the class of things which simply are not. Whatever in special cases the Aldean might do for people on its own pay roll, it did not furnish free bedrooms for that great general public of which Miss Carson was once more a member. Returning to the Smith homestead with her forty cents meant no more than one trip up the steps and another down, a terse little interview with Mrs. Smith being sandwiched between trips.

Myra shuddered quite frankly. This, if one chose to be perfectly honest, was the net result of all her smiling—unless she elected to force her way into one of the dormitories maintained by organized charity, she would not sleep in a bed to-night or for several nights to come.

Strangely indeed, something very far from a smile made its way to Miss Carson's

features. It was not grief; it was not fear. It was just plain rage at the scurvy trick played upon her by circumstances. . . . The reward of the smile! Well, Daisy Walsh was right—absolutely and incontestably right! Of all things earthly, the least profitable was that imbecile smirk!

Rich red came to Miss Carson's cheek. Her eyes, which sparkled as a rule, took to glittering savagely. Queer thoughts come easily to one who has done a quantity of worrying, self-admitted or not, on an empty stomach. . . . Daisy was more than just right; she had isolated the secret of true success, and Myra, poor, feeble-minded creature that she was, had only sneered and —smiled! Bah! Unpleasantness was the thing that paid cold cash. Take the most recent case in point—Westford. No sourer, more savage individual breathed the air of New York that evening—and he was many times a millionaire. Whereas the person called "Doc," who smiled decently and vaguely every so often was merely working for Westford, and probably for a pittance at that. Oh, decidedly, even though she too owed room rent, Daisy was right. So much being settled, what of its practical application to her own case?

Was it possible at this late date that Miss Carson might reverse the machinery of her Pollyannaed brain, and learn a lesson from Daisy? That, banishing the eternal mechanical grimace, she might turn permanently unpleasant or even ugly? Ill-bred and unlovely as it may have been, Miss Carson snorted aloud. The element of possibility had ceased to figure: she had already turned.

Aye, in these last terrible minutes—to the best of Miss Carson's belief—her whole nature had changed. The very last ray of her personal sunshine had vanished forever; she detested the world and everybody in the world. Nor was this any flitting freak of hysteria—it was a permanent alteration of character. The worm had turned at last, and in the whole State there was not at this moment a more utterly unpleasant person than Myra Carson. She yearned to snarl at some one—at any one. She yearned to snap unpleasant words at people they would hurt most. More, she was downright grateful for this horribly different frame of mind. She would cherish it and foster it.

Some fifteen minutes, then, all alone in the alcove, Myra fumed on, growing more unpleasant with every minute. After that, rather curiously, she found herself cooling. Iron resolutions are right enough in their way, but this one did not indicate the path to a neat iron bed within the next hour. What was she to do? She could wire her father for money, and it would come. But that, since the home telegraph office closed at eight every evening, was tomorrow, and it meant abject surrender.

Like several others in the past, Myra had come to the great city determined to win her own little way, and whatever the rest of them may have thought or said, she had carried with her dad's complete faith in her success. He was a lot more than just a father, too; he had been Myra's adored chum since her very first memory; and he needed every cent in the business, which was trying to reach out beyond the home town and increase its stature. And he would read her wire, and decide that she was in real trouble, and spend more money traveling down here.

One cannot undo, all in a moment, a very sound early training; therefore Myra did not curse, aloud and luridly, as she must have done had she been a little more modern. But the amount and the quality of profanity in her eyes as she gazed around blackly— Well, just what ailed the young woman in the doorway?

She was a rather pretty girl of about Myra's own age. She wore a long fur cloak which, for the moment at least, all but halted Myra's breathing. A whole regiment of little sables must have died to furnish that garment! Or were they sable skins or were they something else? It did not matter particularly: the thing was absolutely wonderful. Along Myra's slender throat queer, hypersensitive little nerves could fairly feel the touch of that beautiful fur.

As to the wearer, she was blond and delicate, although her eyes and her mouth did hold a certain suggestion of meanness. Not when she smiled, though, did they?

She was smiling now, directly at Myra, eagerly, speculatively. Further, she herself labored under some sort of excitement, suppressed with visible difficulty. There was a feverish sparkle to her eyes as she paused in the doorway—and now, by all that was remarkable, she was speeding straight toward Miss Carson, on tiptoe!

"I—oh, I beg your pardon, of course, but—I—" she began.

"What?" Miss Carson said curtly.

"We don't know one another, but—but sometimes one just has to help a stranger, doesn't one?" the young woman rushed on, in a tremulous undertone, as she whisked into the seat beside Myra. "Will you help me?"

"Just why should I help you?" inquired the new Myra.

Some of the splendid and perfectly genuine color faded from the other girl's cheeks. Her scared eyes shot toward the open doorway for a moment and then sought Myra's face pleadingly.

"There's no real reason, of course—or what you'd probably consider a reason, I mean. We've never seen each other before, and I—I haven't any right to ask such a thing. But you wouldn't lose by it—truly you wouldn't! I paid forty dollars for this hat."

"What?" cried Miss Carson, and edged away a trifle, since people who cannot connect ideas have a habit of growing dangerous and violent at one second's notice.

"And my coat! Father paid nearly five thousand dollars for this coat. It would be yours, too—as a gift, I mean, and I'd be so glad—"

"My dear girl," said Myra, rising, "if you have friends here in the house, or if you're stopping here—"

The unknown caught at her hand and held it tightly; the unknown also laughed rather hysterically.

"Please, no! I'm not insane," she said. "I'm—distracted, I think. You don't understand, of course. I want you to change hats and coats with me."

"Why?" gasped Miss Carson.

"That's what I can't tell you. I have no time to tell you. Any minute now—Oh, won't you just believe that I'm not crazy, and that I haven't committed a crime, and that—that my whole life's happiness depends on my slipping away from here within two minutes?"

"But—"

"It isn't so much to ask, is it?" the girl pleaded, and also rose and snatched off her expensive little hat. "I didn't know which way to turn, and—I stopped in, and saw you sitting here in that coat that nobody 'd ever expect *me* to wear or—Oh, I didn't mean to say that!"

"It doesn't matter," Myra said acidly.

"And I thought that if you'd just trade even with me, you know, we'd both be winning, and— Won't you, *please?*"

She was extending the hat with one hand and holding out the other for Myra's! And there was something irresistible about her; it may have been her very real distress, or —or—whatever it was, Miss Carson felt herself being swept into a sort of emotional whirlpool. The agitation had infected her, too; her hat was off, and the other girl was jamming it on to her pretty coiffure and simultaneously slipping out of the wonderful coat, to reveal some three hundred dollars worth of gown beneath. Without the slightest actual intention of doing anything of the kind, Miss Carson removed her humble outer garment; almost in the same second she felt the soft swish of fur hurled about her shoulders. And now the girl was buttoning Myra's coat, and *now* she had thrown her arms about Myra's neck and kissed her!

"You darling thing!" she cried softly. "You don't know what you've done for me! You will, some day. And I hope you'll like my coat. I've had it just a week, and I love it."

"But—wait, please! Just a moment! I—"

"I can't wait—that's just it! And now will you do something more for me—just a little thing?"

"What?" Myra asked dazedly.

"Go out into the lobby and walk around. Stay in sight for just ten minutes and keep the collar turned up, so that nobody 'll see you're not me without walking right up to you. Look at the pictures, if you will, and if any one *should* approach you—to

speak to you, I mean—just move off, and keep on moving, and don't let them catch you. *Anything,* so that they don't suspect I've left the hotel for another ten minutes. You'll do that?"

"I—yes," faltered Miss Carson.

"Dearest! I hope *you* marry almost the loveliest man in the world, and that you're happy to your dying day," the strange and effervescent young person said breathlessly—and was gone.

That was it, exactly. She had not walked out or run out; she had headed toward the door and disappeared. Miss Carson closed her beautiful eyes for a moment; it was all a delusion, of course—the kind that comes to famished people. She opened the eyes again, and it was no delusion at all; the exquisite fur coat was still about her.

Then, just what had happened in this hectic two or three minutes? Miss Carson perched on the edge of the divan again to think it out. Really, it was rather simple; the girl herself had suggested both possibilities: either she had dealt with a maniac or she had helped a criminal to escape. On the other hand, there had been nothing really maniacal about the young person; and surely if criminals went around in cloaks like this, crime must be a much more lucrative business than any of the books admitted.

Miss Carson smoothed the fur, and meditated, and at least one idea took definite shape. Years of smiles had netted her forty cents; ten minutes of unalloyed ugliness showed a profit so far of about five thousand dollars. It was what they called a hunch!

All of which was nonsense, of course, and she wasn't fulfilling her part of the impossible bargain by sitting in here, was she? Myra rose and stepped slowly to the vast lobby with a rather adventurous thrill. Something very startling indeed was about to happen to her—something that bore no earthly relation to the grubby matter of finding jobs and food and making a furnished room look habitable.

She would be mistaken for the other girl and approached by some one deeply interested, somehow or other, in that girl. And then she would flee, and the some one would pursue her—whither? Around the Aldean, of course, since Myra would lead the way. She chuckled. Under Daisy's guidance she had been over most of the tremendous establishment; without effort she could keep the mysterious some one at a distance for an hour or more.

Only—where was he? Miss Carson, collar tucked up, glanced around. There were perhaps three dozen people in sight; not one of them started at the sight of her or moved in her direction. Not one, in fact, seemed even to take account of her existence. Two or three women, garbed in coats of almost equal splendor, examined her new garment superciliously and briefly; that was utterly impersonal. Myra, then, walked the length of the lobby slowly, waiting to be approached. Not a single conversation, even, was interrupted by her passing.

She turned and walked back again, with no more thrilling result. After the fifth minute she caught herself sighing; the local supply of adventure seemed to have exhausted itself in that one episode of the departed girl. Toward the tenth minute, the Aldean calm still remaining unruffled, normal cerebration returned to Myra and failed to sweeten her temper. She had a very valuable coat which was not, morally, her own. Just what did she mean to do with it, and, having done so, what did she mean to do herself?

The proper move would be a trip to the office, an explanation to Salton that a crook or a lunatic had just left his establishment, and a surrender of the coat to the "lost and found" office. That led easily and naturally to Myra's stepping out into the chill December evening with nothing more substantial than the thin serge dress about her—and she wouldn't do it. Turning quite warm, Myra vowed that she'd be—eternally hanged if she'd do that!

However, she would most certainly have to do something or other. One doesn't just stroll out in a coat like that and hunt down forty cents worth of night's lodging; there are too many possibilities. It could be pawned! Pawned for a small sum, of course, and later redeemed by the real

owner; everything considered, that was fair enough. Before the beauty of this idea Myra almost ceased being unpleasant for a moment; immediately an angry little sniff escaped her. In the whole town she did not know the location of one pawnbroker, and in addition to that the all-night variety of the species, to the best of her knowledge, had not yet been invented.

Well, it needed thought. Myra loitered on, turning down the collar since the time limit had long expired and it was rather warm in here. Perhaps—

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Salton, who must have risen through the floor,

"Oh!" said Myra.

"It—it *is!*" muttered the assistant manager, after a second bewildered look at his late employee—and he smiled; and for no obvious reason Myra flushed suddenly. Because that was not at all a nice smile. There was something extremely knowing and distinctly insulting about that expression; and its offensiveness grew as Salton recovered himself after the first shock. "I —er—was looking for you," he stated.

"Well? You've found me!" Myra snapped.

"I should say I had!" agreed the assistant manager, and winked and leered at Miss Carson. "I—well, to tell the truth—just shows what a fool a man can be, eh? I thought there was something in your expression, back there— What I mean is that I thought you might need your money, Miss Carson, and I was going to say that we'd stretch a point and give it to you now, rules or no rules."

"Oh!" breathed Myra Carson again, and in the intensity of her joy her heart skipped two beats.

"But a girl with—ah—a coat like that in reserve isn't in need of twenty-eight dollars and fifty cents, is she?" Salton chuckled and, with far too much familiarity, patted her befurred arm. "Well, girly, you certainly put it all over me! I've had my doubts about a great many of 'em, since I've been in the hotel business, but I'd have sworn that you— Gad! *Oh—you—kid!*"

Thus Mr. Salton concluded, kittenishly; and he gave a final pat to the arm and hurried away about his own concerns, giving just one roguish backward glance.

Miss Carson stood firmly rooted to the rich green carpet. At once she was extremely chilly and extremely hot. Her eyes snapped wicked little sparks. Her rapid breathing was audible at a distance of several feet. Just *what* had that little beast implied? And how dared he imply anything or— Oh, that life-saving twenty-eight and one-half dollars had been all but in her hand! An instant so giddy did Myra become that she feared herself about to soil a lifelong record for stability by fainting upon the spot; but the fog cleared presently, leaving simmering fury at Salton, long since disappeared down his little corridor. She would go after Salton and—no, she would not. She wouldn't be an absolute fool; in a way the nasty little rat had some justification.

But she would have to talk the whole thing out with some sane person, and that victim would have to be Daisy Walsh, crude but normal. She would tell Daisy everything, even to the forty cents. Miss Carson, folding the rather unfortunate cloak about her, sped down toward Daisy's station. That young woman appeared in her path, all ready to go home. And she, too, smiled—smiled more amazedly, more knowingly than had Salton. She opened her mouth wide for a moment, then she gasped: "Why, you sly little devil!"

"What—what do you mean?" choked Myra.

"You slick little egg!" Miss Walsh pursued, and this was probably even less flattering. "You got a sweety all the time, and you're that mousy I never even guessed you— Why, kid, I'd 'a' bet the last jitney that butter wouldn't melt in your mouth. I'd 'a'— Say, wotta y' know! It's *real!*" Miss Walsh gasped, snatching up a fold of the fur and fondling it. "I thought it was one of them fakes, but it ain't." She paused a moment, staring at Myra Carson; when she spoke again there was a touch of awe in her voice. "Say, honey, for the love o' Mike, who is this guy? Where'd you catch him?"

"There's no—no—'guy'!" Myra managed.

"Honey, you could let a pal in on some of it!" Daisy cried. "What is he? The guy that owns the mint? Has he got a brother rich as him? Does he—"

"Stop that!" Miss Carson cried savagely. "Stop it, I tell you. How dare you?"

Miss Walsh stiffened oddly. "Dare what?" asked her blank voice.

"Insinuate what—what you're trying to insinuate! I— That's what I came here to talk to you about—this cloak, of course. A—a girl gave it to me a few minutes ago —a girl I'd never seen before—a girl—"

"Say, listen, kid!" Daisy interrupted sharply. "You might need all that breath t' keep you alive some time; save it now. I know I look dumb, deary, but I ain't so dumb as I look. You might get that stuff over on 'em in Homeville, where they got hayseed in their whiskers and believe in Santa Claus, but you can't make it stick in this man's town—not in a million years. I'm hep!"

She grinned frankly and rather contemptuously at the numbed and speechless Miss Carson. "Don't get hot; I ain't asking questions," Miss Walsh concluded. "Maybe you're coming home now?"

"No!" gasped Myra. "I—I'm not! I—"

"No, I thought not. But it was polite to ask, wasn't it? Daisy laughed and moved past her. "Best o' luck, kid! You're good! I'll tell the whole wide world, you're *good!*"

Doubtless Myra should have seized her, should have held her by sheer muscular force and compelled her to hear the simple truth. But that same paralyzed, rooted effect was again upon Myra. Stupidly almost she watched Miss Walsh trip out of sight toward the employees' entrance at the rear.

And then, gradually at first, but fast gaining speed, heat began to generate once more within Myra. It appeared in her cheeks as a brilliant red; it seemed to be burning every inch of her now; her eyes dilated and her hot hands clenched. Was it—was it possible that both of them, Salton and Daisy, had leaped in one instant to the conclusion that she had—had directed her steps into the well-known primrose path? There was no other possible construction to put upon it. Incredible it might be, but they had dared—had dared to— Myra began to walk swiftly; her course led directly back to the main lobby and Salton's office.

Because, although Daisy might have escaped for the moment, Salton was still there, and it was Miss Carson's firm intention just then to fasten her fine, strong young fingers around Salton's throat and choke out of him the most abject apologies. More than anything else, perhaps, does this violent and unmaidenly impulse indicate the troubled Miss Carson's peculiar mental state that evening. Never in all her life had she laid angry hands on any living thing!

And it is pleasant to record that the initial impulse died suddenly as she came to the lobby and Miss Carson better understood herself: she was not really yearning to commit mayhem upon the Salton person. Her yearning actually was of an equally primal but a shade more decent nature; she craved a sturdy male protector. Specifically, she craved Arthur Bond. Yes, that was it. If only Arthur could appear magically before her, and with her go to Salton, and thereafter, with meticulous thoroughness and inflicting the maximum of pain, break most of the Salton bones as she watched— Miss Carson stood quite still.

Her fevered eyes were playing a rather mean trick, of course. But *there,* to the best of her seeing, stood Arthur Bond himself!

CHAPTER IV.

MISAPPREHENSIONS.

FIVE eternal months had rolled into history since last Myra Carson gazed upon the well-favored countenance of her beloved Arthur. Just now, with cyclonic speed and photographic accuracy, the whole scene of their parting reproduced itself, whizzing past her mental vision.

Indoors, Arthur had spoken with some repression, using a gruff undertone, be-

cause dad was in the next room with the door not quite closed. But out at the gate, whither Myra had walked with him, Arthur had spoken with not nearly so much repression. An elemental soul and vastly in love with Myra, Arthur had voiced clearly the opinion that there was something mysterious and unadmitted about this sudden determination of Myra's to spend a year away from home. Perhaps he had not chosen to put the thing in so many words, yet he had indicated a firm belief that some other, possibly more attractive, male creature lurked in the metropolitan background; and there had been little of the ambiguous about his final: "And if I ever find hi—I mean, if anybody ever hurts a hair of your head, Myra, I'll kill him if I swing for it! You're just a kid; you believe anything anybody tells you; you've no more business down there alone—if it *is* alone—than—"

There Myra had turned away coldly and hurried into the house.

An unworthy business, to be sure, but all forgotten now in this glorious moment of reunion—or, at any rate, forgotten by Myra. Her gentle heart gave one great bound. It was no figment of the tired brain; there he was! And as yet he had not seen her; Arthur, handsomer than ever, was looking around eagerly. Miss Carson forced out a faint, joy-suffocated:

"Arthur!"

Young Mr. Bond whirled about, eyes blazing happy recognition of the sound. And, public lobby or no public lobby, Myra rushed forward to throw herself into his great arms—and rushed—and stopped. Because Arthur Bond, instead of hurrying toward her, was recoiling. This was impossible, and was still the cold fact. The happy blaze had left his eyes in one immeasurably little fragment of time. His cheeks, an instant back the old familiar pink, had blanched strangely. Furthermore, his big, capable hands were thrust out, as if to push away Myra, although she was still one yard distant.

"Myra! You—you—" he gulped, and could gulp no more at the moment.

"Arthur! What's—the matter with you?" Miss Carson faltered.

There were grounds for this question, too. Arthur, never subject to fits, seemed about to have one. His hands worked, his eyes bulged, his mouth opened and closed, repeating the process several times. Then the seizure, of whatever nature, permitted him to move at least, and he covered the intervening yard with one stride and glowered down upon Myra.

"Where did you—get that?" he queried, with the greatest difficulty.

"Get what?"

"The coat! The coat!"

"Oh—that," Myra said bewilderedly. "The coat—that was—given to me—"

"What did it cost?"

"What? Five thousand dollars, I think. Never mind the coat, Arthur; I'll tell you about that later, and—"

One more gigantic pull, and Arthur seemed to have recovered most of his faculties. His remarkable greenish color turned to an ashy white; his nostrils grew wide, and Myra heard the grit of his teeth.

"Who is he? Where is he?" Arthur Bond demanded.

"You—"

"*Where* is he? Because I'll kill him! As surely as I stand here, I'll kill him with my bare hands, Myra! I'll kill—"

Gallons of cold water would have chilled her and calmed her no more effectively.

"What do *you* mean by that?" she demanded, in a hiss. "I've heard enough of that sort of thing this evening." And here her voice broke queerly: "Arthur, it isn't possible that *you* think—"

"Stop that, Myra! Never mind the denials. I understand!" Mr. Bond interrupted, with a very terrible smile; and, briefly, his own voice did some breaking, and with an unconsciously melodramatic effect young Mr. Bond raised his great fists, even as his lips trembled out: "Oh, you poor lamb! You poor little kid, to—"

"Arthur, please don't be an utter fool!" Miss Carson snapped. "People are looking at you!"

"Looking at me? Yes, and they're looking at *you*, looking at that damned thing you wear!" Arthur raved, far too loudly, self-control snapping suddenly and rendering him somewhat incoherent by its snap-

ping. "It's not—not you I blame, Myra. The blame's *mine!* I never should have let you go; I should have known—I *did* know, and I couldn't believe—and I should have kept you home! But by the Lord!" Mr. Bond declaimed further, "I'll find him if it takes the rest of my life, and—"

"Don't you dare say one more word of that character to me, or I'll have my father thrash you within an inch of your life, and he can do it, too!" cried Miss Carson.

"You can't brazen it out—not with me!" Mr. Bond choked furiously. "I'll tell you, Myra!"

Doubtless he said much more, but Miss Carson, who was not blind, found her attention straying from him rather suddenly. People seemed to be coming toward them from all directions. All sorts of people—guests who moved languidly, bellboys who moved rapidly, chatting business men in evening togs, who grinned astonished inquiry as they left their comfortable chairs! Ten seconds more, and she and Arthur would be the center of a crowd.

Nor was the mere hideous embarrassment of the thing by any means all. Myra's brain, abruptly adopting lightning for its motive power, opened the door of the future for her swift inspection.

She was done, done, done with Arthur Bond, after *this!* That might be considered settled; henceforth she would make her own way in the world. And that meant getting jobs—and getting jobs carried with it the necessity of having some one to give as reference. Once definitely and publicly involved in this ridiculous mess, she might forever delete the Aldean from her list of past employers. So much was absolutely certain.

Another glittering certainty seemed to be that barely two seconds hence flight would be an impossibility. A ferocious instant she looked up at Arthur Bond. Possibly a glimmering of reason was coming to Arthur; it was hard to say, of course, in the light of his recent performance—but his teeth had come together with a click and his fire eyes were blistering the gathering crowd; and the eyes swirled back to Myra, and it seemed that he was about to reach for her.

One swish, and she was out of his range. Another, and she was making for the splendid main doorway of the Aldean—and there, for a little, clear impressions ceased. A wide-eyed lady with a lorgnon stepped back quite hastily to let her pass; two gentlemen, smiling their curiosity, gave her way; a lank bellboy, for whatever reason, would have stepped before her and stayed her progress, but he caught Myra's infuriated eye, and thought better of the move. For a twinkling there were more men—and the door swung after Myra, and the grateful cold of the December evening was upon her cheek, even as the doorman, accustomed to dignified people, stumbled forward too late to aid her exit!

The Aldean does not run to glare. There are pleasant shadows in its big vestibule. The darkest was over there, and Myra, panting, stepped into it and stopped for breath.

To the very tips of her tingling fingers she was one mass of rage. Salton didn't matter, Daisy didn't matter, with their jumping to unwarranted conclusions; but that Arthur Bond, who had known her all her life, who had dared love her, whom she had fancied that she adored—that Arthur, too, could have taken the same jump! Well, it didn't matter now. He had done it, and, if she meant anything in his life, he would regret it to his dying day. To make a scene like that when— Myra looked back quickly and fearfully.

The scene had not yet come to an end; it seemed to be growing more puzzling and interesting to the little crowd. Mr. Bond, just now, was towering above them, lips tight shut; obviously he was not advertising the perfidy of one he had trusted, which was very sweet of him. He was looking around, too, as if not quite certain what direction Myra had taken—and now he was looking straight at the door and nodding to himself. He was moving, too, giving neither heed nor answer to the questions they were hurling at him.

He was coming after her! The whole thing was to be repeated out here! Terror came to Miss Carson. She looked about wildly. She found the Aldean carriage man, with his major general's dress uniform,

gazing respectfully at her cloak; and having gazed sufficiently he stepped forward and touched his cap with:

"Beg pardon, miss. Your car!"

"What!" said Myra.

"The man left word with me, miss. The officer on post here spoke to him about parking so long on the Avenue side here. He asked me to say, miss, that he's up the side street, by the ladies' entrance."

"Oh!" Myra said intelligently, and started down the steps.

"Not that way, miss!" the carriage man protested. "You can step right through the hotel, if you will."

"This is quite all right," Miss Carson said hastily, for Arthur Bond was striding toward the door now, full tilt.

With no great atmosphere of haste she stepped to the corner—a stretch of miles, with Arthur moving at that rate—and turned it; up the soft and merciful darkness of the side street she hurried, too, not very clear as to destination, heart beating rapidly, because if Arthur really determined to overtake her, escape was well-nigh impossible. Arthur's legs were of tremendous length, with muscles of iron!

But he shouldn't overtake her! She'd die before she'd let him overtake her! She looked back. Mr. Bond, at that very second, turned the corner and gazed about in search of his little and ostensibly lost lamb.

"Beg pardon, miss!" said the voice directly ahead of her.

Myra Carson halted with something of a jerk. It was a chauffeur, and a liveried one, too, standing with head bowed respectfully beside a very large and very elaborate closed car.

"Very sorry to have troubled you like this, miss," he pursued huskily, "but the officer wouldn't let me stay out front any longer." And here he held the door open most invitingly, and Myra glanced back once more. Arthur Bond, one foot raised as if to break into a run, was squinting in this direction.

Miss Carson stepped into the closed car and settled back on the cushions.

"Home, miss?" the chauffeur queried in a voice which held the odd suggestion of a quiver.

"Home!" Miss Carson said quickly. "Close that door."

The door slammed. Briskly the chauffeur edged into the driving seat, past a similarly liveried footman. Gasoline bills, apparently, did not figure in the cost of a car like this; the engine was running—and gears were whirring softly now and the wheels were turning! Miss Carson peered through the little window behind her at Arthur Bond, who strode up the block.

The car whined its way into third speed—purred along swiftly to the corner—turned it with a graceful whirl, and headed uptown. And *that* was the end of Arthur Bond.

Shortly Miss Carson found herself laughing, mirthlessly enough. If Arthur had witnessed that departure, his very worst suspicions were confirmed, were they not? Let them be! Arthur had passed from her life; henceforth she would think more of herself and less of Arthur.

Which led to the notion that it might be as well to do some of that thinking at once. She had stepped into the car to escape Arthur Bond. Where was she going now? Just a few blocks, of course, and then she would stop the vehicle, explain briefly to the chauffeur that he had erred slightly, and—and—to be sure, and what? Was she to walk the streets for the rest of the night? Hardly! A rather better idea than that came to Miss Carson at once; she would be somebody's guest.

It was perfectly simple. Thanks to the all-enshrouding cloak, she was on her way to the home of the cloak's owner, the daughter, at a safe guess, of some extremely wealthy family. Dumfounded parents would greet her, frantically demanding tidings of their child. And Miss Carson, so she fancied, would tell them the simple truth; and upon whatever eccentric escapade the nameless young woman might have embarked, this ought to earn Miss Carson some gratitude. Also, she would return the cloak itself, and, its value considered, that should win a little more gratitude.

So that, at this hour, the least cordial of families could hardly fail to beg her occupancy of one of their guest chambers—

which settled the gnawing problem of a place to sleep. Later on, if they happened to be really decent people, it was not impossible that the (almost certainly) banker father of the girl might help Myra into a real position with a real salary. All in all, it appeared to Miss Carson just then, she had made no great error in stepping into this extremely comfortable automobile.

Further speculation as to the immediate future was idle. Resolutely forcing Arthur Bond out of the picture, Myra took to reflecting whimsically upon her past. She had come to the great city expecting excitement and adventure; latterly the total absence of both had become a sore disappointment. But in a very few minutes this evening she had had excitement aplenty—and surely this ride was an adventure. Ten minutes back who in the world ever could have predicted that she would do a thing like this?

And it seemed to be the direct fruit of having hearkened to Daisy Walsh's creed, of having turned unpleasant! Rot! Was it, though? Had she held to her old, wonderfully optimistic form, she would have marched out of the Aldean after that Salton interview, smiling proudly. And she would still have been walking—whereas at present she was riding in luxury. Yes, riding to a home of wealth, and, in all probability, to prosperity! It was curious, wasn't it?

Where was this home of wealth, by the way? Miss Carson ceased her meditating and frowned out of the window. They had been rolling along for a considerable time now, and at a distinctly rapid rate; they had covered not a few blocks, but several miles at least. Imposing homes had been passed, too, any quantity of them; now they seemed to lie somewhere behind. Tall flats had taken their places; quickening, Miss Carson realized that by this time they must have passed nearly all the tall flat houses in the world, and even now these were thinning out. Vacant lots, great black stretches, were here and there and everywhere.

She was not at all familiar with the upper city. In fact, her single long trip in this direction had been taken on one of her earlier Sunday afternoons, on the Elevated, that having seemed the cheapest way to see some of the large town. On that occasion her nickel had not carried her nearly so far as this. Why, they must be in—in Williamsburg, or Fordham, or some such place, and decidedly it was no district of millionaire homes!

Pulses pounding peculiarly, Myra fumbled about suddenly and found the little telephone which connected with the chauffeur. As promptly, she dropped the thing. The daughter of the car's owner would hardly be asking if they really were on their way home, would she? That slip, so narrowly averted, would have meant revealing herself to a pair of doubtless faithful employees; and in their consternation at the discovery it was not impossible that they might have insisted upon her stepping out, even here, while they raced back in search of the real girl.

Of course they knew where they were going. Very likely it was to one of the glorious suburban residences of which Myra had seen pictures in the magazines. Miss Carson sank back again and drew the wonderful cloak more cosily about her, the while informing herself that all was just as well as it had seemed a little while ago.

And still—the neighborhoods they were passing through! With every street lamp, they seemed to grow rougher and more desolate and remote. For a full two squares there had not been a single lighted window, and hardly a dozen windows of any kind. They were in a perfect wilderness!

Off to the right, fathomless blackness stretched away, arc lamps here and there, faint and with great distances between them, like struggling, sickly stars on a murky night. Yes, and now they were turning to the right, straight into the utter gloom; they were bumping along what felt like poor dirt road. Miss Carson leaned forward and clasped her hands. Something *was* wrong!

Full quarter of a mile they must have swayed and rocked since leaving that last apology for a paved street. Now they were stopping in the very middle of all the pitchiness, before a low, shacklike house that stood well back. Faint light filtered

through the shades of two windows on the lower floor; there was never another human habitation in sight. Miss Carson felt her temperature dropping, second by second, degree by degree.

There was nothing accidental about this strange ending of the trip; the two liveried gentlemen up front were bestirring themselves in the most businesslike manner. The footman hopped lightly and undignifiedly over his door, and, standing in the roadway near the car, stretched contentedly. The chauffeur also stepped to the ground, and as the rays of the side-light fell upon his countenance Miss Carson's temperature ceased to be anything at all.

It had not occurred to her before, but she recalled now, and most vividly, that the chauffeur person had kept his head down at their first meeting. If she had thought anything of this, she had attributed it to the deep respect of a servant for his supposed mistress. But now Myra understood. No sane woman would ever have trusted herself alone in a vehicle driven by that creature. He was—he was—why, at the very least he must be a professional murderer!

His brow was low and his chin was large and blue; his eyes were deep-set and little and ominous. Past arguments of a violent nature were suggested by the thick scar on his nose and the little bulbous collection on one ear; he was, in fine, no more a wealthy man's chauffeur than he was bishop of a diocese.

Then, what was he? And where had he brought Myra Carson? And, above all, why? That, after all, was the most vitally interesting question, was it not? Miss Carson gripped her chilly hands together as the door opened and forced a fair imitation of wrathful fire to her eyes—and this, very possibly, did not show in the dark, for the chauffeur seemed all unintimidated as he opened the door and said heartily:

"Well, I gotter hand it to you, kid! You may have money, but you sure got sense!"

"Why have you—stopped here?" Myra Carson demanded.

So pleased was the gentleman with his own thoughts that he seemed not even to hear her.

"One little peep, and we'd 'a' had to stop and knock you cold, y' know," he pursued amiably, and than this voice nothing less like the voice of the humble servitor beside the Aldean could have been imagined. He jerked a thumb toward the footman, who, sauntering nearer, revealed himself as a person almost as sinister. "Him and me had a bet on you, kid. I said you'd put up a holler and start smashing glass, and he said you wouldn't. He wins. Come on!"

"I shall do nothing of the kind!" Miss Carson said. "Turn this car instantly and go back to—to the hotel!"

"Huh?"

"You heard me!"

"Hey, where d'ye get that stuff?" the chauffeur laughed savagely. "Come out o' that!"

"I will not!"

An ugly and abbreviated laugh left the person. He swayed forward, reaching into the car. Myra slapped about vainly, seeking something to grip, and also sought to brace herself against the floor. As well might she have braced against a locomotive. Even as her slim form stiffened, great arms were about it, and Miss Carson had already left the beautiful closed car, feet first and kicking.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

THE DIFFERENCE

WHEN she comes out in a dress of blue,
Made by herself in a day or two,
I find her very dear!
When she comes out in a pearly gray,
Bought in Paris, Rue de la Paix,
I find her dearer still!

La Touche Hancock.

The Devil's Hoof Print

by Garret Smith

Author of "The Gusher," "His New York Job," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

"WHERE'D you get that pair?" bluntly demanded the keen-eyed skipper of the tramp freighter Dawson. He and his first officer stood on the bridge regarding two mulattoes on the lower forward deck.

"The old man's our best stoker and the white-lookin' one he claims is his son. I think they're a pair of rascals up to something. I've asked the engineer to keep an eye on 'em," replied the first officer.

The two mulattoes referred to were Gabe Bradford, a huge, slightly grizzle-headed man with arms and shoulders like a gorilla, and Socrates, his son, a handsome olive-complexioned youth with straight hair, fine features and quick, intelligent brown eyes.

Socrates was old Gabe's problem. Raised to be shiftless and indolent, Socrates had grown to youth illiterate and wayward. Old Gabe's bogey of a man with the devil's hoof-print on his brow had lost its power to terrorize Socrates into submission. But when Socrates beat a companion at a colored social almost to death Gabe got him aboard the Dawson by physical force and threats to hand him over to the police should he refuse to go.

And here he was. Before the Dawson had been nosing her way clumsily across the Gulf of Mexico for an hour Socrates was the most wretched of men. With each movement every muscle in his body seemed to be tearing loose from its ligaments. Each choking breath of the superheated, gas-stifling air seared his lungs.

But the strain of the back-breaking toil was merely the beginning of his distress. Out beyond the mouth of the delta long-rolling ground swells raced across the Dawson's bows. The old ship rolled the uneasy gulf one better as each smooth swell of its bosom slid under her bows. And to this in turn the stomach of the distressed Socrates reacted, though by no means agreeably.

From the coal pile to furnace door he staggered across the swaying, heaving floor with his heavy shovel load growing steadily slower and more uncertain of his movements. Gabe alternately wheedled and bullied him into greater effort.

"Dar now, boy, keep a goin'," he would say. "Lil' hard till ol' muscles gits so they likes it. Little time they gits so they craves more wuk."

When an unexpected roll of the ship

would send the green passer staggering forward spilling his shovel load in widely scattering lumps Gabe would roar: " Yo' yaller fool, does yo' think yo's rolling de bones? If yo' crave gittin' yo' haid bus' open wif a slice-bar, jes' keep proceedin' dataway. Heah's wha dat coal b'longs, in a pile. Does yo' reckon dey hiahs yo' to sprinkle de ship wif coal dus'?"

Socrates, enfeebled now beyond retort, turned back to the struggle.

It was well toward the middle of the watch when the endurance of Socrates neared the breaking point and he leaned against the bunker.

" Git to bizness, sleepin' coon," Gabe shouted irritably. " Take de slice-bar an' loose de coal in dat uppah bunkah."

Socrates rallied his forces and obeyed. But his inexperienced eye failed to note comprehendingly the steep angle at which the fuel in the upper bunker lay. He drove the slice-bar feebly against a big lump that was as the keystone of an arch delicately adjusted.

The dazed passer failed to get out of the way in time. He went down under a heavy bituminous avalanche, his lungs clogged with the choking dust. His head crashed against the metal floor, and for the moment the light of his unhappy young life went out in blessed darkness.

II.

Socrates came to himself a few minutes later lying on the oil-smeared floor of the engine room. The oiler had just dashed a bucket of cold water over his head. Assistant Engineer Barron was stooping over eying him curiously.

" Guess you're all right now, boy," he said. " Rest here a few minutes and then get back to your bunker. I'll tell Gabe to let you take it a little easy for the rest of the watch."

Later to his chief he voiced the conclusions derived from his study of Socrates while he was struggling back to consciousness.

" You know that new passer you wished on me? The one old Gabe Bradford says is his son? Well, if he's that old nigger's son, I'll eat a couple of piston rings for breakfast. Don't believe the boy's a nigger at all. He got knocked out for a bit by a coal slide this afternoon and I got a good look at him. He hasn't a single nigger feature. And I looked at his finger nails. He has as well formed half moons as you or I. There's a mystery somewhere. I wonder where old Gabe got him and why. One thing is certain, Gabe has no right to him. I'm wondering if the young fellow's a jailbird or something."

" Well," said Nasby briefly, " I had some doubts myself, but I'm not much interested in mysteries. All I want to know is whether or not he's any good to you?"

" Can't tell for sure yet, because he's green and soft. But if he's what I think he is, he won't be long on a passer's job. I'll let him try stoking next trip if he shows any willingness to work. Then I'll groom him for watertender or oiler. Lord knows I'm up against it for brains on those jobs."

Meantime Socrates lay on his back on the floor beside the bunker just out of the way of Gabe's double-duty shovel, moaning softly.

But fortunately for the green coal passer, outside the Florida coast the sea was calm and continued so all the way to Boston. By the beginning of the next watch his seasickness had passed and his muscles, freely massaged with alcohol, were a little more pliant.

Encouraged by the assistant engineer's leave to take it easy during the rest of the disastrous first watch he had started to stretch such permission through the second. But Gabe felt differently about it. The tongue lashing he gave the young man at the first sign of soldiering attracted the attention of Assistant Engineer Barron.

A moment later, with no sign of having overheard this harangue, Barron sauntered out.

" Gabe," he ordered, " you dig your own coal for a few minutes while I use your passer in the engine room. I need a man with a long reach."

Socrates performed a trumped-up job of repairing the wrappings on an overhead pipe under the assistant engineer's personal supervision, giving that officer a chance suc-

cessfully to test the young passer's suspected worth.

" Boy," he said when the job was done, " if you'll tend to business on the bunker and work hard I'll give you easier work before long."

That was hint enough. From that moment on Gabe had no reason to complain of his son's industry. And he was able to keep it up by virtue of the fact that Barron frequently devised some little task for him in the engine room which gave him free moments and buoyed him with the hope of soon having nothing to do but light errands. He didn't mind in the least whispered mutterings of " engineer's pet " from the other stokers and passers.

As he went on watch the day before they made Boston, Barron called to him: " Socrates, keep an eye on your dad and see how he does his work. I'm going to lose a couple of stokers in Boston and I'm planning to set you to firing one of the boilers on the way back."

Nevertheless, when they docked and the rising young fireman was free for a few days he willingly spent his shore leave in his bunk. He felt as one who has suffered a long sick spell. The ambition which Barron had sought to fire in him amounted simply to the resolve to work his way back home as easily as possible.

" Once I gits to New Orleans I won't never tech foot on no ship agin," he declared fervently.

But his young strength quickly recuperated with his rest in Boston. When he returned to the fire room for the home voyage he found his muscles hardened to the new job and he soon learned the knack of spreading the coal evenly through the fire box. Barron continued to relieve the monotony by calling him occasionally to the engine room.

For three days all went smoothly. But off Hatteras the Dawson struck rough weather. When Socrates left the forecastle to go on second watch he worked his way precariously across a rolling spray-swept deck.

In the teetering hold stoking was both an art and an adventure.

" Watch close, Socrates," Gabe warned. " Don' open yo' fiah do' 'ceptin' when ol' ship tuhns downhill. Then yo' open up an' shoot yo' coal quick an' shut yo' doah bam 'foh she goes uphill. Does yo' don' do dat yo' fiah comes woof out all ovah yo' pusson an' yo' goes quick to yo' heavenly res', leavin' a trail o' burnt nigger smoke 'hind yo'."

But, as so often happens, the instructor, confident in his own skill, suffered from carelessness. Gabe opened his fire door as usual on the downward roll and spread a shovel of coal skillfully through the seething white-hot fire box. As he stepped back from the thrust of his shovel and reached for the door handle he stumbled on a loose piece of coal and fell. Before he could pick himself up the ship rolled again and an avalanche of flaming coal shot over him.

With a yell for help Socrates seized him by the arm and dragged him free, but it was too late.

Gabe spoke only once before he died. As he lay on the engine room floor he opened his eyes for a moment and whispered: " Socrates, sonny."

The young man bent over him.

" I goin' tell yo' sumpin, boy, case I don' git well. I ain't yo' pappy, an' my ol' woman ain't yo' mammy. Yo' real pappy's de man wif de debbel's hoofprint. He's a white man an' yo' mammy's a white woman. Yo' ain' no yaller nigger, Socrates. Yo' a sure 'nough white man."

Gabe Bradford, relieved, breathed his last.

III.

" MAMMY," Socrates said one day after he had returned home, " I has a s'prise waitin' fo' you. Does yo' tell me de truf an' kin prove it yo' makes money 'nough to live res' o' yo' life. When pappy an' me gits off de ship at Boston we's walkin' 'long de street an' pappy stops sudden an' says, ' Good Lordy, us must git away f'om heah quick! Dar's de man wif de debbel's hoofprint!' "

" Oh, Lordy massy!" groaned the widow.

" Wait now 'fore yo' Lordy massys. Does yo' listen yo'll glory hallelujah! We starts to go 'way quick, but hoofprint man sees us an' stops pappy.

"'Yo's Gabriel Bradford,' he says. 'Wha's my son?'

"'Yo' son?' pappy say. 'I don' know nuffin 'bout yo' son.'

"'Look heah, Gabe Bradford,' he say, 'if yo' lie to me yo' lose money. I got lot o' money now. I give ten thousand dollahs to any man whut bring back my son to me. I axes no questions,' he say. 'Who this white boy? He look like my son.'

"When pappy heah 'bout dat ten thousand dollahs he ready to sing 'nother tune.

"'Ex-cuse me,' he say. 'Does yo' crave yo' son ten thousand dollahs wuth an' ain' aimin' to make a niggah no trouble, I tells yo' de truf. Dis am yo' son. Take yo' son an' give me de ten thousand dollahs.'

"'Hol' on, nigger,' hoofprint man say. 'Mebbe so he is my son, but kin yo' prove it? I don't pay ten thousand dollahs for no humbug son.'

"'Sho kin,' pappy say. 'Prove it by my ol' woman soon's we's back in N' Orleans.'

"'All right,' he say. 'When yo' gits to N' Orleans send dis boy back wif proof he's my son an' I sen's yo' de ten thousand dollahs.'

"So, how 'bout it, mammy? Is I hoofprint man's son or is I not? An' kin yo' prove it?"

"Yo' shore is, an' I shore kin," exclaimed the widow, "but I ain't goin' to."

Socrates was decidedly taken aback.

"Yo' ain't goin' to?" he exclaimed. "How cum yo' is so careless 'bout money yo' don' want no ten thousand dollahs? Is yo' losin' yo' min'?"

"Look heah, Socrates Bradford, I brought yo' up fum a pickaninny. I reckons I loves yo's much as if yo'd really been my own lil babe. I'se sorry yo' foun' out yo' ain't 'cause it can't do yo' no good findin' out. They ain't even ten thousan' dollahs goin' hire me to do yo' harm. Besides, I's bein' paid money to keep yo' 'way from hoofprint man. How come he pay money to git yo' now when he give yo' 'way once lessen he wanna kill yo' like de other people say?"

"Wanna kill me? Who's other people?"

"They's de people whut pays pappy an' me de money. I don' know no names."

"Look heah, mammy. Yo's goin' tell me all 'bout dis bizness an' tell it quick. Yo's goin' tell me de truf 'cause I knows mo' dan whut yo' thinks. If yo' don' I's goin' call in a p'liceman and hab yo' 'rested for kidnapin'."

At such unfilial language from her foster son the widow fell to hysterical weeping, but Socrates showed no signs of relenting. He waited impatiently till the hysteria ran down to the point where she could hear words of reason, then broke in sharply:

"Come, mammy! Time's a slippin' an' my patience is hatin' itself. Cease yo' lamentations an' speak sense. Now, how come?"

The Widow Bradford's revelation, stripped of excess verbiage and much backing and filling, was in substance as follows:

A little over twenty years before when the Bradfords were living in Alabama a white man had called at their cabin late one evening with an infant boy in his arms. He said that the Bradfords had been recommended to him by a friend who had once employed Mrs. Bradford as a servant. He left the baby in her care, giving her fifty dollars and saying he would return in a few days.

In the brief encounter with the stranger the feature that had left an indelible impression on her mind had been a curious scar on his brow, a livid semicircle about two inches across, the arms disappearing in his hair. It had given his face a peculiarly evil appearance, and to the superstitious minds of the Bradfords had suggested the mark of the inverted hoof of his Satanic majesty. Subsequent events had to their minds confirmed this impression.

This evilly marked individual had assured them that he was the father of the child and that its mother was a white woman. Owing to the mother's illness and other family troubles he had to leave the boy in their care until things were straightened out.

But several weeks went by and they heard nothing more from the father of their charge. Then came an unsigned typewritten letter inclosing a hundred-dollar bill. This missive purported to be from relatives of the child's mother. The father, according to the letter, had deserted the mother, who

had since died. He had attempted to conceal the existence of the baby by turning it over to the Bradfords and abandoning it. The relatives of the mother did not wish the child to suffer and would therefore send the Bradfords one hundred dollars a month as long as he was in their care or until he was twenty-one years of age. It was impossible for them to take the child into their charge for various reasons. The Bradfords were required by the letter to move to New Orleans, leaving no trace of their whereabouts.

Mammy Bradford concluded her recital by producing from a bureau drawer a tiny locket in which was the miniature of a beautiful young woman's face.

"Dat's all we got to go by," she explained. "It was roun' yo' neck when yo' cum. I reckon dat's yo' real mammy."

Socrates studied the face earnestly and vague new longings stirred within him. This was his white mother of whom he had been robbed by his scoundrelly white father.

"What's my white pappy's name an' whereat he live?" he asked at length.

"Didn't give no name. Didn't say whereat he live. Never got no name fum nobuddy. Every month some strange man come roun' an' ask has we still got yo'. We shows him we has. Den he give us de money. Dat's how come pappy got yo' on de ship, so we keep hol' yo' till yo's twenty-one an' git one mo' hundred dollars. No, I ain't got no name ner nuffin, nuffin but dat lil gol' thing."

Socrates stared at her full of mingled rage and disappointment.

"So I's white," he muttered at last. "Got white folks livin', white folks with a heap o' money an' I don' know even they names. Don' know my own trully name."

Then he added after a little reflection:

"Dat white pappy o' mine suttinly am one gran' skunk. I's gwine fine him ef it take till Kingdom Come, an' ef he still livin' when I fine him he ain't goin' be livin' no longer den I kin jes' git my han's on him."

IV.

Alone in his own little box of a room in the Bradford tenement Socrates sat for hours concentrated in thought. Mental exertion was a new thing for him. He had inherited a naturally keen mind from his unknown parents, but it was untrained. His thought processes were essentially primitive, tinged with the ignorance and superstition of his foster parents.

One thing was clear to him; a brutal and unnatural father had cast him off. He had lost his birthright and his race. Were they beyond recovery? He was keen enough to see that, though he looked like a white man, he talked like a negro, acted like a negro and thought like a negro. He lacked a white man's education.

To sum up his bitter reflections he had left only one thing—revenge.

In the first burst of rage and disappointment his primitive soul called for blood. He determined to seek out and kill the man with the devil's hoofprint.

But how should he go about finding this stranger who was his father? The task seemed impossible. He had nothing to go by but a fantastically described scar on the face of a man of whose name and whereabouts he had not the slightest knowledge.

Nevertheless, so great was the force of his rage he was ready to attempt the impossible. He decided to go to Birmingham, Alabama, the city where his foster parents lived when he was put in their charge and where, presumably, his real father resided at the time. But such a search meant that he would have to continue to support himself. Moreover, mammy was getting too old to work, and with his coming of age the following month she would lose the payments from his white mother's relatives. Socrates was genuinely fond of old Mammy Bradford. His new feeling of hatred did not extend to his foster parents. He knew that whatever happened he would not let mammy suffer. Therefore he must move with extreme caution in his plan of revenge on his white father. If he committed a murder and was convicted and hanged it would leave mammy alone and helpless. After giving her most of his earnings on the Dawson, Socrates set out for Birmingham without telling her that the story of meeting with his father was pure fiction.

One phase of his campaign for revenge

he worked out in considerable detail as he gained in confidence.

The moment he left home he declared himself a white man. Dressed in his one good suit and holding himself strenuously erect he made a very presentable though somewhat stiff appearance. It took a supreme effort of will, nevertheless, for him to stalk past the Jim Crow cars and into one of those set apart for whites.

It seemed to Socrates that every passenger in the car stared at him hostilely and thought of challenging his right to enter. The metamorphosed young man flushed with embarrassment and shrank from every one who came near him.

A partly blond youth walking down the aisle in search of a seat chanced to glance at Socrates. The novice in social equality got halfway to his feet to " leave the white cap'n have his seat " before he remembered. He stiffened and sank back in a rage with himself.

" Yo' po' ornery white trash, yo!" he muttered to himself. " Almos' got hypnotized out o' yo' sittin's an' made a fool o' yoreself!"

He forgot again when the conductor punched his ticket.

" Cap'n, suh; thank yo', suh!"

The conductor glanced at him curiously and decided that he was being " kidded," but not by an expert.

As he sat listening to the conversation around him, it was driven home to Socrates more forcibly than ever before how different was his form of speech from that of other white people. He became quite embarrassed when the man in the seat with him tried to strike up a conversation. Socrates answered only in carefully enunciated monosyllables. The stranger, however, was of the monologue type of conversationalist and was gratified to find an intent listener. It was not given him to know, of course, that the listener cared nothing for what he was saying, but was closely studying his way of saying it. Socrates was also recalling and comparing phrases the assistant engineer on the Dawson had used.

Socrates gradually recovered from his first discouragements and made up his mind to talk and act like the white man he was. He reasoned, moreover, that only by doing so could he hope for any success in running down his white father and proving his own identity when he found him.

To go about freely among white men, Socrates realized he must change his name. " Don' want anybody from N' Orleans showin' up some time an' hear tell 'bout Socrates Bradford an' say ' sure, I knows Socrates Bradford, yaller nigger from N' Orleans,' " he told himself.

He canvassed a long list of fanciful names, but thought of nothing that pleased him until he overheard a man across the aisle address another as Smith.

" Dat's a nice handy name," he decided. " Smiths is so numbersome ain't nobody gwine notice one mo' added to de pile. I likes Henry fo' a front name, too. Henry Smith—dat's a pow'ful white-soundin' name. Henry Smith—dat's me."

So when the train stopped at the Birmingham station Mr. Henry Smith, a young man of confident bearing and purposeful countenance stepped off. Socrates Bradford was dead and buried.

V.

SOMEWHERE in the world, if indeed he still lived, was a man with a livid semicircular scar on his brow. On the station platform at Birmingham, Alabama, stood an unsophisticated young man who believed that somehow he was going to find this marked man.

Henry Smith was alone in a strange city, a new comer in an environment absolutely unfamiliar to him. He had a total of twelve dollars in his pocket; no job, no idea of where he could get one or what kind he could best fill. He lacked most every qualification. Yet having overcome his first embarrassments, he was conscious of a growing confidence that he would succeed in his mission.

" Now, lemme see," he pondered. " Let me see," he corrected himself. The man in the seat with him had repeatedly used the phrase, and the listener stored it in his mind as a specimen of white pronunciation. " Let me see," he repeated again. " Whereat I better go first off? We white folks

mos' generally stays to hotels. Mebbe ef I gits a room to a hotel an' sticks round dar dat ol' hoof print pappy o' mine be comin' in."

" What's a good hotel?" he demanded of a baggage man. Henry had decided on using as few words as possible, thus cutting down the chances of error in grammar and pronunciation.

The baggage man named the two leading hostelries. Henry carefully committed them to memory. Then he hailed a taxi, named the first hotel mentioned, and settled back to enjoy this fresh phase of his new-found estate.

Henry chuckled joyfully at the colored driver's " Thank you, suh," when he paid for the ride, and again at the obsequiousness of the hotel porter who seized his bag and settled the question of what to do next by leading the way to the desk. But there the neophyte stood puzzled as to how to proceed. He was thankful for the clerk's polite, " Room, sir?"

" Yes," replied Henry crisply.

" Something with bath at four dollars?"

" Yes," Henry assented without regard to ultimate consequences.

The clerk twirled a mysterious big book about and thrust a pen at him.

Henry stared alternately at the pen and at the book, seized by sudden fright. Did a boy have to write something in order to get a room at a white man's hotel? Socrates Bradford had been handy with the dice and cue; he had lately mastered the shovel and slicebar; but the pen was a new instrument to him. He hadn't the slightest idea what they expected him to write or how to write it.

At his embarrassed hesitation the clerk raised supercilious eyebrows and suggested, " Register, please."

Henry was in a quandary. He gulped uncomfortably and decided quickly.

" 'Scuse me, suh!" he exclaimed after a moment. " Forgot sumpin'. Let me see. Be back. Goin' see a man 'fo' I register."

He turned, snatched his grip from the indignant boy and bolted from the hotel.

Outside he walked rapidly for several blocks before he recovered from his panic. He was disgraced at that particular hotel and couldn't go back. That was evident. But he believed a hotel the best place in which to hunt for his father. He would try the other one mentioned to him, but first he must devise some way of dodging the register. If he could get that man at the desk to write for him. But how?

Happy thought! He set his grip down, drew out his handkerchief and bound it around his right hand.

" Reckon if a boy's got a hurt hand they can't 'spect him to write none," he chuckled triumphantly.

Then he hailed a taxi, and was presently dropped in front of the second hotel. But once inside, and headed toward the desk with his grip again in a porter's care, he was seized with another panic. What did it mean to register, anyhow? Would he have to tell him what to write? He'd better find out this time before he got caught again.

" Hol' on," he called to the porter.

The man turned back inquiringly.

" Didn't yo' wanta rigister, suh?"

" Not yet; goin' see a man fust."

" Check yo' baggage, suh?"

" Yas, check it."

Henry Smith was on familiar ground with that term.

Free of his grip, he strolled about studying the intricacies of a white man's hotel, and racked his brain for a scheme to find out about registering. Not until he was passing a bootblack stand did he get an inspiration. He would ask the bootblack.

Henry seated himself in the chair, and the boy attacked his brilliant yellow shoes.

" Boy, how yo' all like wukin' in a hotel?" Henry demanded.

" Purty good, suh, 'longs I has to wuk somewhar."

" S'pose yo' knows all erbout the hotel bizness," Henry continued.

" I ain' sayin' I knows it all."

" I don' reckon does yo' know whut they does when they registers," Henry declared in a bantering manner.

" I does so," the boy answered, willing to air his knowledge. " Enybody knows that."

" Well, what does they do, if yo's so smart?"

"They writes down der name an' the city whereat dey comes fum."

"Good boy. I gives yo' extra dime for dat," Henry boasted, happy in his new knowledge.

"Does yo' mebbe know how to write?" he asked.

"Sho' does. Jis' lef' school las' year. Wuz in de eight grade."

"Den mebbe I hires yo' to do lil writin' fo' me. I's got a letter I ain't sent 'cause I's hurt my han' an' can't write. Whereat kin I git a envelope an' a pencil?"

"Yo' gits envelopes on de writin' desk down de hall, an' dey sells yo' pencils at de news-stan'."

Henry secured the writing material and returned.

"Now jes' write on that envelope, 'Henry Smith, New Orleans.'"

The boy complied in a neat legible hand, and received a half dollar in payment, which made him a friend of the "foolin' white gem'man" for life.

Henry went to a writing desk with his model signature and address and sat for an hour patiently copying it over and over again. When he could make a fairly creditable imitation of the bootblack's production without looking at the original, he walked to the desk and registered.

VI.

In his room, Henry sat down carefully to consider his changed situation in life. Though nervous and somewhat afraid, his thoughts came quickly and clearly. Two things were immediately evident to him; he must have sympathetic assistance, secure work, and get away from the hotel. The obliging bootblack came to mind, and he hurried downstairs to him.

"Listen, boy," he said, "do's you crave makin' some money, 'nuf to keep you're mouf shut?"

"I shore do," was the smiling reply.

"Den meet me out whar nobody's gwin see us talkin' togedder."

Later, in a secluded spot in a near-by park, the two kept an appointment. Satisfied there was no one to hear them, Henry Smith told his new friend a tale that partially relieved the bootblack's consuming curiosity and thrilled him with admiration for his extraordinary new acquaintance.

Henry was disappointed when his friend declared he had never seen or heard of a man with the devil's hoofprint on his brow. But the promise of ten dollars for any news about such a man led the young negro emphatically to declare that he would ask his older and more worldly wise acquaintances whether or not they had ever seen such a terrible person.

Thus having secured his first agent to assist him in his seemingly futile hunt, Henry went to bed well pleased, and awoke the following day, determined to set about seeking work.

What could he do anyhow? He stopped on a corner and thought it over. He could shovel. He had shoveled coal. He could therefore shovel anything. But did they give shoveling jobs to white men? Then he recalled that Assistant Engineer Barron, on the Dawson, had promised to teach him to run the engine. White men ran engines. He had learned a little about engines on that ill-fated trip. They had engines in factories, he reasoned, and there must be factories in Birmingham. Where could a fellow get a job around an engine, he wondered?

A policeman passed him at that moment, and summoning all his courage, he stopped him.

"Excuse me, suh," he said. "I wants a job aroun' an engine, tendin' fiah, or oilin' an' such like. Could yo' tell me whar I kin fine one?"

After an appraising glance at his curious questioner the officer replied, "Why, I'll tell ye—the Y. M. C. A. has an employment agency. Mebbe they can fix ye up. Right down one block here an' turn to your right two blocks. Anybody around there'll point it out. Good luck."

Henry found the Y. M. C. A. employment manager without any difficulty and stated his case briefly. He had convinced himself by now that the odd jobs he had filled in the Dawson's engine room were far more important than anything else he had ever done. He enlarged upon them and impressed the Y. M. C. A. employment

agent with his ability as an assistant engineer.

"We have nothing of the kind listed at present," the agent told Henry, "but we'll send out an inquiry to the different plants and drop you a line if we hear of anything. Just give us your name and address."

Henry's spirits soared. He departed, feeling confident that all he need do was to wait a day or so and a job would come to him. A couple of days later he got his first letter. Highly elated, he hastened to the loyal bootblack and demanded:

"What yo' think o' that? Read it out loud. Yo' say yo' so edjicated. Let me see kin yo' read."

The boy, grinning broadly, read:

"MR. HENRY SMITH, Hotel Roseberry, City.

"DEAR SIR:

"If you will report to the engineer of the Gray-Dawson Sugar Machinery Company, 352 River Street, this city, I think you may be able to obtain the employment you desire. Present this letter as credentials.

"Wishing you every success, I am,

"Very sincerely,

"CHAS. CLARK,

"Emp. Sec."

VII.

THE engineer at the Gray-Dawson Sugar Machinery Company was not much impressed with Henry. But as the man he had was so hopelessly incompetent, he took Henry for a week's tryout. It was Henry's good fortune that no more promising candidate for his position applied during the following week, and he was allowed to remain.

At the end of seven days the novelty of being a white man had worn off. He managed to pay his hotel bill and move to a cheap boarding house. His job irked him. He grew homesick for old mammy and his negro companions. His new white companions irritated him. But from them he was learning to talk like a white man, and he found it easier to follow his new mode of speech than to revert to colored dialect.

Several times he met his bootblack friend and agent, but that shy, faithful negro always brought him discouraging news. Henry had about decided to throw up his job and return to his old mammy when his bootblack spy arrived one day with the first vestige of a clew. One of the lad's acquaintances, a venerable old negro, recalled having seen the white man with the devil's hoofprint on his brow, and declared he possessed knowledge of the man.

Henry was highly excited by this news, and demanded that the bootblack take him at once to the old negro. But the wily youth refused to do this. He told Henry he had a letter from the old man telling all he knew which letter he was to deliver only upon payment of fifty dollars. Henry was also reminded of his promise to pay the bootblack fifty dollars for any clew the latter could unearth.

A hundred dollars was about five times more than Henry possessed, and his agent was steadfast in his refusal to turn over the coveted letter until Henry paid him the money. The bootblack told him that the old man had sealed the letter and had given him emphatic instructions to let no one but Henry have it. And the latter was to destroy it when aware of its contents. Henry was intrigued by this mystery-implying demand and determined to raise the hundred dollars.

He returned to his work the next day with a new spirit. He put forth his best efforts, and soon amazed his chief engineer, who began to think Henry was, after all, the man he wanted. But once Henry got a raise, and his savings amounted to the coveted hundred dollars, he unceremoniously quit work.

He met his bootblack agent in the darkness of the little park where he had first unfolded to him the mysterious tale of his life. In subdued voices the two counted out the dirty bills. And Henry received the letter, greatly excited, though he could not read a word of it. Both, pleased with their bargain, went their respective ways, neither noting the shadowy figure in the palms who had witnessed their transaction.

But the figure showed no interest in Henry. It was the black boy he followed to the home of the old negro who had written the letter to Henry. When the old negro had dismissed the boy who brought him fifty dollars, the stranger knocked at the shanty door.

" Pappy, heah's a white gemman to see yo'," shouted the old man's daughter who opened the door.

The white-faced, white-wooled old figure got slowly to his feet and stood deferentially before the intruding stranger.

" Good evenin', suh," he rumbled in a deep, shaky voice. " Won't yo' be so kin' ez to set down, suh?"

The white visitor ignored the invitation, becoming suddenly menacing.

" Look here, nigger," he rasped out, " I know what that nigger boy and you been up to, so don't tell me any lies. Answer some questions now and let me see if you tell the truth. Remember, I know the right answer to some of 'em and if you answer wrong I'll stick you in jail.

" See that?" he added, turning back the lapel of his coat and displaying on his vest the badge of a private detective agency. At sight of it the old man fell to trembling so violently that he was forced to sit down again in spite of his deference to the white man.

" Now tell me," the dread visitor pursued, sternly, " what's the name of that little nigger who just gave you the money and where can I find him when I want him?"

" His name's Rastus Parker an' he's a bootblack at de Roseberry Hotel."

" Good. Now, why did this young white man, Henry Smith, send you the money by him? What did you do for Henry Smith?"

The old negro became more frightened than ever. This mysterious detective seemed to know everything. For instance, this was the first time he had heard the name of the man to whom he had been sending information, for Rastus, the bootblack, had faithfully carried out Henry's instructions to conceal his identity. No use at all, he thought, to lie to this detective.

" I—I giv' him a letter tellin' him sumpin' what he wanted to know," the old negro stammered.

" Did you tell him the truth? Did you tell him where he could find Vincent Farwell?" At the mention of this name the old man started violently. He hesitated a moment, but saw that silence would be futile.

" I might as well have it all out at once and get on the right side of this detective," he reasoned.

" I tol' him de truf, yassuh. I needed de money bad for me an' Mandy, else I wou'dn't tell him nuthin' 'ginst Marse Vincent. Dis white man, Henry Smith yo' say, ax Rastus to fin' out name o' man wif devil's hoofprint on his fo'head an' whereat he am now. I ain't tol' him hes name's Vincent Farwell. Marse Vincent ain't use dat name in twenty year. I tol' him name he use now, Marse Thomas White, an' dat he lib in New Yawk. Dat's de truf an' dat's all I know."

" In what part of New York did you say White lived?"

" Didn' tell 'cawse I didn' know. Neva did know. Jes' New Yawk."

" When did you hear from White last?"

" Free mont's ago, suh."

" What's your name?"

" George Washington Brown, suh."

" Now, look here, George Washington Brown, you did a lot of mischief telling this fellow where White is. How do you know this man Smith won't show your letter all around, maybe tell everybody where White is?"

" Oh, no, suh, 'deed he won't. He's pow'ful anxious to keep secret dat he want fin' out whar Marse Vincent am. I sen' word to him if he show to anybody I write Marse Vincent to look out fo' him. No, suh, he wouldn't dast."

" Now, let me tell you something. Don't tell this man Smith or this little nigger Rastus about Vincent Farwell or Thomas White. Don't tell White about Smith or that you told anybody anything. Understand?"

" Yassuh, I understan's. I don' tell nobuddy nothin' no mo'."

" You'd better not. If you do I have ways of finding it out. I'll have you sent to jail as sure as God made little apples. We'll let it go this time, but never again."

" Yassuh. Thank yo', suh."

" Now here's something to make it easier to hold your tongue. There'll be more later if you do as I tell you."

He handed the astonished old man a hundred-dollar bill and before the negro could recover his poise enough to thank him the

detective had shrunk back into his old inconspicuous self and departed.

Next morning when Rastus, the bootblack, came on duty the detective was his first customer. Rastus was stooping busily over the man's dingy shoes when a cold, incisive voice surprised him.

" Rastus Parker! Look here."

Amazed at hearing his name spoken by a perfect stranger Rastus's pop-eyes rolled up as bidden and he gazed horrified at the detective's badge held close to his nose.

" Rastus," said the voice again, " you're in trouble."

" 'Deed I ain't done nothin', suh," he stuttered. " 'Deed I ain't."

" Yes, you have, Rastus. You've been having meetin's with Henry Smith, a bad white man, and with George Washington Brown, a bad old nigger. You've been helping Henry Smith find out where he could get hold of the man with the scar on his face. The man with the scar's a bad man, too. If he knew you'd told on him he'd cut your throat as quick as he'd look at you. I've a good mind to have you arrested. I won't, though, if you promise never to have anything more to do with Henry Smith or that old nigger Brown and promise never to tell anybody anything about them or about the scar-face man. If you do tell I'll know it and send you to jail for life; that is, if the scar-face man doesn't find you first and cut your throat. I've been watching you and I'm going to keep on watching you. Understand?"

" Yassuh. I won't tell nobuddy. Suhr. I won't know Mr. Smith er ol' Brown no mo'. No, suh."

" All right, then. Here's a little something to help you remember. If you do as I've told you there'll be more later."

Along with the dime for the shine he handed Rastus a fifty-dollar bill.

VIII.

In the meantime, Henry Smith, with his precious clew to the whereabouts of his father thrust deep in his trouser pocket, hurried home to his boarding house. For a long time he sat and pondered over his next step. It was evident that he must play the rôle of white man for a good while longer and go through the throes of getting a white man's education if he expected to accomplish his mission.

At moments he thought the game not worth the candle and that he might better give up his plan of revenge and return home to the carefree, easy life of a negro. After all, Mammy Bradford was the only person on earth who really cared for him.

But at thought of the man who had cast him off when he was a helpless baby, denied him his birthright and wrecked the life of the beautiful mother whose picture he carried in the little locket, his rage returned in full force, and he determined to see the thing through to a finish.

Meantime nothing must happen to his precious letter of information. He studied it curiously and wished he dared get some one to read it for him. No, he couldn't do this, he reflected. He must hide the letter and set about educating himself so he could read it himself.

For a long time he thought of where and how to hide his precious letter. At length inspiration came. He folded it into a compact wad, then thrust it into the toe of an old rubber. Then he curled the rubber up tightly and tied it with a piece of cord.

" Reckon that 'll keep out all the wet," he decided. He tiptoed downstairs, out into the darkness, felt his way to the rear of the garden and by the light of a match concealed in his cupped palm, buried the rubber between the roots of a palmetto tree.

When he got back to his room he suddenly realized that he was hungry. It was after nine o'clock and he had not eaten since early noon, so decided to run down to the little corner restaurant for a bite.

In his abstraction he failed to observe the shadowlike detective who had just returned from settling the case of George Washington Brown and was patiently watching Henry's boarding house from the shadow of a tree.

When the stranger came up from behind and spoke to him there seemed to be nothing suspicious about his conduct.

" I beg your pardon, sir," apologized the detective, this time in a gentle tone, quite

different from the one used with George Washington Brown. "I'm a stranger in town. Could you tell me where I can find a restaurant?"

"Right roun' the corner, suh," Henry replied. "I kin show yo' the way, 'cause I'm goin' right there myself."

"Thank you, sir. I'd be mighty glad to accompany you. It's lonesome in a strange city with no one to talk to."

Henry preferred being alone with his thoughts, but he was too good-natured to rebuff a lonely man. Henry listened contentedly to the stranger's running account of his travels. When their modest supper was nearly over Henry found his attention wandering; a strange drowsiness was stealing over him. Suddenly the other man stopped talking and eyed him in a curious manner.

"You look as though you felt badly, sir," he said. To Henry his voice seemed to come from a great distance. "Better let me get you out into the air."

Henry got to his feet with an effort. When he tried to walk he stumbled and would have fallen had his companion not caught him. He remembered afterward being helped out to the sidewalk a little way down the street. Then he seemed to have fallen asleep.

When he awoke he was in a vacant lot about half a block from home. He was nauseated and his head ached fiercely. The suave stranger had vanished.

Henry picked himself up and found his way dizzily to his room, where he dropped on his bed, too sick and weak to undress. After a time he slept fitfully, and by daylight was able to handle himself again, though still feeling a little shaky.

But as soon as he had swept the cobwebs from his brain he realized that something had happened to his room some time during the night. The clothes had been torn off the bed and lay in a disheveled pile on the floor. Bureau drawers were open and their contents scattered about.

His first half-dazed thought was that he had been robbed while he slept, and he thrust his hands into his pockets to see if his money had been taken. It had not, but he was mystified to find it in his left pocket instead of his right, where he knew he had put it last.

He puzzled over the situation for a moment before realizing that his bed could not have been torn to pieces while he was sleeping on it. The marauder must have visited his room before he returned and he had been too sick the night before to notice it. His pockets must have been disturbed while he was unconscious out in the vacant lot. But nothing was missing from them. He took a hasty inventory of the room's contents. None of his meager belongings were gone. What was the thief's motive?

Finally he thought of the man who had eaten with him, and at a flash all became clear. This fellow had met him by design. He had put some kind of sleeping powder in his coffee when Henry wasn't looking. Then when he was unconscious the mysterious stranger had dragged him to the vacant lot, where he searched his clothes and left him. And before he revived and returned home the stranger had entered and ransacked his room.

But for what was the man searching? Undoubtedly the letter giving Henry the name and address of his father. Some one else knew of his quest and was likewise on the trail of the man with the devil's hoofprint!

IX.

FROM the moment the meaning of the attack upon him Henry Smith became the victim of a constant haunting fear of the unknown.

Who else was so anxious to learn the whereabouts of the man marked with the devil's hoofprint that he was willing to commit a crime in order to get such information? How had he learned of Henry's interest in the matter? Had he, too, found out that the once yellow negro was really the cast-off son of this mysterious white man?

Henry reviewed every step he had taken since he first learned the truth about himself and determined to find and punish his father. So far as he knew only Mammy Bradford was aware of his discovery and intentions. How many, if any, other people knew the secret? Aside from mammy there

was, of course, his missing father and his mother's relatives.

It was possible, of course, that the man who came around each month to make sure he was still with the Bradfords and leave the money had witnessed his departure from New Orleans and trailed him to Birmingham. He felt sure that mammy would not have given the man any information about him and besides, he had not told her where he was going. Moreover, he could see no reason why the people who had paid money to keep him hidden from his father all these years should now be trying to find the latter.

No, it must be some other mysterious person or group of persons who were now meddling in his affairs. The only other person who could have betrayed his interest in the man with the scarred face was Rastus, the little bootblack.

Believing Rastus might be able to shed some light on the incidents of the night before, Henry went around to the hotel to see him. But Rastus was missing.

"No, suh, Rastus ain't heah no moh," said one of the other boys. "He done frowed up his job this mornin' and went away. No, suh, I don' know whereat he am gone. He say he goin' hop a freight an' leave town. I reckon dat nigger got into a fight last night an' feahed de p'lice might want him."

That settled the question for Henry. Rastus had betrayed him, he felt sure. But as to just what information he had given, and from whom, and what danger might befall him, he was as much in the dark as ever.

With his faith in Rastus shattered, he began to wonder if the little negro had not deceived him all along. Perhaps the letter for which he had paid one hundred hard earned dollars was a pure fake. When he learned to read he might find that it meant nothing, or at least, that the information in it was false.

For days Henry was a prey to fear and inaction. He had a vague feeling that every time he left the house some one was following him. At night he locked himself in his room. He dared not see if his letter, buried in the garden, was safe for fear of revealing its hiding place. And again money was running low. He was doing nothing to increase his knowledge or to learn to read. The imperative need of doing the latter finally outweighed his fears of being shadowed, and he again visited the Y. M. C. A.

The same secretary who had already befriended him once more came to his assistance. When Henry frankly told him how illiterate he was, the secretary replied that he was like many another unfortunate man in their night school. Soon Henry found himself the most industrious and promising pupil of the latter. And his schooling was not confined to reading and writing alone. Now that he had a good job as an engineer, and under the encouraging influence of the sympathetic secretary, Henry took up the Y. M. C. A. course in practical mechanics.

Life was now full for him. Though never quite forgetful of his self-imposed mission, he was less mindful of it, and happily absorbed in his work and studies. He thrilled at the rapid progress he was making. But there was a cloud in the sunshine of his progress. No matter where he went a certain face—a face like that of the man he met on the night he was drugged—seemed always to appear and vanish quickly the moment he saw it.

X.

On his way home from school late one evening, Henry saw the figure of the man who had lately followed him jump behind a tree. Like a flash his anger rose, and he determined to have it out at once with his pursuer.

Instantly Henry darted toward the tree behind which he had seen his shadower conceal himself. The detective leaped into some bushes and attempted to escape, but Henry was already upon him.

"I've got you now, you damned rascal," he cried, as he slammed his rough fist into the face of his trailer.

The fellow squirmed and groaned, almost insensible, on the hard ground, until Henry's fury had spent itself and his blows and kicks ceased. Almost exhausted himself, Henry grabbed his bruised and bleed-

ing enemy by the throat, stood the shaky man on his feet, and demanded:

"Now, yo' sneakin' dawg, why yo' followin' me round? Tell me that."

The victim choked, spat out a tooth, and spoke, a little faintly, but in deadly earnest.

"I'll tell you nothing but just this. I've got you where I want you now. You're under arrest for murderous assault and resisting an officer. It 'll go hard with you, too. You've got a bad record. You assaulted and nearly killed a man in New Orleans less than a year ago. Look at that."

The fellow turned back his coat lapel and displayed a detective's badge.

"So you see what you're up against. Take your hands off me and come along to the station house peaceably before you get in worse case."

At sight of the detective's badge, Henry's blood ran cold. But in swift reaction his temper was again aroused. Since he was in for it anyhow, they'd never arrest him without a good fight.

In answer to the officer, he tightened his clutch on the detective's throat and shook him savagely.

"Yo'll arrest nuthin'," he growled. "Yo' git out an leave me 'lone or I'll kill yo'."

With a deft lightning movement the detective snatched a police whistle from his pocket and almost got it to his lips before the other could stop him. But before he could blow it, Henry wrenched it out of his hands and threw it over the fence. Then renewed rage and panic seized him. With a swift blow to the jaw he knocked the detective senseless and dragged his victim to the vacant lot, where he himself had been left drugged a few weeks before. There he left him, bound and gagged with strips torn from the man's own coat.

"Reckon he rests his frame safe an' quiet till I's quite a long way from these parts," he assured himself as he hurried back to his boarding house.

In his room, he worked quickly. On the bureau he placed the rent money for his current week. Tying up his essential belongings in a bundle, which he threw over his shoulder, he tiptoed downstairs and out the back way. He found his letter in the old rubber in the garden where he had buried it, and with this safely tucked in his pocket, he was ready for flight.

"On yo' way, boy! Ramble along 'fore the goblins git yo'," he whispered to himself, and dropped over the back fence into a dark alley.

Down one deserted street after another he dodged, taking a devious course that made less likely meeting with a policeman or a chance passer. He came at length to the railroad yard, and when the midnight freight rumbled out of Birmingham, Henry Smith lay stretched across the rods of one of the cars. Though his position was wretchedly uncomfortable, he forgot this in speculating upon the uncertain future.

XI.

A FEW days later, Henry, worn and hungry, aching in every muscle, grimy beyond recognition, his face covered with black bristles, dropped off a train in a cotton field just outside of New Orleans. He hid in the woods until dark, then walked into the city and presently found his way to Mammy Bradford's cabin.

Mammy was washing dishes in her little kitchen when he entered without the formality of knocking. She gave a squeal of alarm when she heard his step and looked up to see an apparent stranger entering her home unannounced.

"Nigger! What yo' mean cummin' into a lady's house 'thout knockin'?"

In his disguise of grime and black stubble, Henry for once looked like a genuine black man. But soon mammy's feeble old eyes recognized him. She cried out in pure joy:

"Socrates! Yo' angel chile!"

The next moment the prodigal was folded to her voluminous bosom. He forgot that he was not flesh of her flesh. He forgot that he was a white man. He was home again, in the arms of the only mother he had ever known, and it seemed very good to be there.

"Lawsy, chile, yo's pow'ful du'ty, an' I bet yo's hungry, too," she exclaimed, holding him at arm's length better to inspect

him. "Clean yo'self up while I gits yo' suppah. Then yo' eats an' tells yo' mammy whar yo' been an' what yo' been doin'."

Henry had decided that it would not do to take mammy too deeply into his confidence. During supper, therefore, he gave her a garbled account of his adventures. He merely allowed her to understand that he had gone to Birmingham in search of his father, whom he had not found. A fight with a policeman had obliged him to flee hurriedly, and he had come to her.

"Mammy, did the man what used to bring yo' the money come around while I was gone?"

"Yas, honey. He come roun' axin' was yo' still wif me, and when I says no, he didn't give me no mo' money."

"Did he ask yo' any question 'bout me?"

"He ax lot questions 'bout yo'. I didn' tell him nuffin', 'cause I didn' know nuffin' much 'ceptin' what I didn't dast tell."

"Wa'd he ask?"

"He ask whareat yo' is, an' ef yo' know I ain't yo' mammy, an' ef yo' knows who yo' pappy is. An' I tells him yo' don' know nuffin' an' I don' know whar yo' gone. Den he ask ef I think yo' go back to wuk on ship whareat yo' an' pappy wuked befo', an' I say mos' likely yo' is, and den he tell me keep my mouf shut an' he goes away. Dat's all."

Mention of the freighter Dawson recalled Barron, the assistant engineer, who had befriended him and suggested a refuge. He had been spirited aboard the Dawson before when it was supposed the police were after him. Why not seek refuge there again?

"Mammy," he said after a little thought, "I'm goin' stay here a little time, but I'm goin' stay hid so they won't any p'liceman be arrestin' me. Don' yo' say a word to anybody 'bout my being heah, not even to the preacher. I'll stay inside daytimes an' jes' go out little evenin's."

Thereafter for two weeks Henry remained hidden in his old home. He allowed his stubby black beard to grow longer, thereby continually decreasing the chances of his being recognized. Each evening he stole cautiously down to the docks to see if the Dawson was in.

Meantime he had his textbooks with him, and occupied his days by keeping up his studies. When he left his night school so abruptly he had just reached the point where he was able to go on independently, and was progressing rapidly.

He was now making daily attempts to decipher his precious letter, which was written in almost illegible scrawl. By the time he again met Barron he had succeeded in making out only half of the words.

One evening, about two weeks after his return home, strolling along the wharves, he recognized the familiar, battered nose of the old Dawson again nestled against her pier. He climbed aboard and had the good luck to find Barron, his engineer friend, in his stateroom. The officer came out promptly when told that Socrates Bradford wanted to see him. Henry had been uncertain of his reception, but his doubts vanished when he saw the eager, friendly interest on the engineer's face. He didn't even resent the method of address.

"Socrates, you worthless nigger," Barron exclaimed, "where've you been keeping yourself all this time? Why the whiskers? Tryin' to disguise yourself? Suppose you want your old job back."

Socrates, or Henry, assuming his most careful night-school diction, replied:

"Mr. Barron, I's—I'm going to s'prise yo' a little—maybe. I ain't—I'm not a nigger at all. Old Bradford tol' me jes' befo' he died that my real father an' mother were white. My father left me with the Bradfords when I was a baby an' then disappeared. I don't know who he is yet, but I 'spects he's a rich man. I'm huntin' for him an' been gettin' an education. I been runnin' an' engine, too, and am studyin' machinery. I thought you might give me a job in the engine room this trip an' perhaps help me some with my studies."

Then, on the spur of the moment, Socrates Bradford, alias Henry Smith, realized the necessity of another change of name. He was as anxious to wipe out the identity of Henry Smith as he had been that of Socrates Bradford. So he selected the first name that came into his head.

"There's another thing, suh," he went on, a little hesitantly. "You see, my real name ain't Socrates Bradford at all. I'm goin' away where folks won't know I ever was called a 'yeller nigger.' I don't want them to know I ever was Socrates Bradford. So I calls myself David Harris now until I finds out what my real name is. You might call me that, suh, if you don't mind."

Assistant Engineer Barron eyed the returned prodigal with delight. His judgment of Socrates Bradford had been vindicated. He had liked the boy from the start and had wanted to help him. The mystery about him, only half revealed, added new spice to association with the fellow. It was a relief, too, to find that he could deal with David Harris now on terms of equality. He put out his hand impulsively.

"Shake, white man," he said heartily. "You're just what I always thought you were, and believe me, you're a mighty bright white man and you're going to make something of yourself. You can count on me to keep your secret and help you all I can. I don't happen to have a real vacancy in the engine room, but I'm going to make one for you. My oiler was on a drunk all during shore leave in Boston, and will probably be drunk here. He's given me an excuse to fire him, and I'm going to do it. You ship with me as oiler this trip, and we'll buck hard into the lessons when we're off watch. Perhaps I can get you a better job before long."

On the voyage David and Barron deciphered George Washington Brown's important letter, which read:

> The person you desires to get information about is Thomas White. He has residence somewhere in New York City. I don't know where. It will be necessary for you to negotiate that information for your own self.
>
> More than twenty years ago now another white gentleman accused him of doing a great wrong to his sister and was going to have him arrested for deserting her. They had a fight in a barroom, and the other gentleman hit him in the face with a whisky glass, and cut a half-circle scar on his forehead. The niggers after that called him the man with the Devil's Hoof Print. When they tried to arrest him he disappeared, and they have been trying to find him ever since. He kept in touch with me so that I could get him information from home. His real name is not Thomas White. I can't tell you his real name, and if you let anybody know this information I have give you I will get into great trouble and you will get into worse.

XII.

Upon his arrival in Boston, David Harris resigned his job with Barron, drew his pay and went to New York.

David, now familiar with the use of telephone books and city directories, anticipated no difficulty in locating Thomas White of New York. But when he looked up the name in the directory he was appalled to find a number of Thomas Whites.

First he secured accommodations in a cheap boarding house, and then spent many days looking up the addresses of the Thomas Whites. He loafed about near their homes or places of business until he identified them, and each time he faced a man with an unmarked brow. But as the weeks went on the quest seemed more and more hopeless; his savings vanished; he became desperate. He slept little and ate indifferently. In short he became a nervous wreck. One day, after a signal disappointment, rage got the better of him. In a fevered state he resolved that when he found the man with the stamp of the devil's hoofprint he would kill him on sight.

Cautiously he sought out an unscrupulous pawnshop proprietor and purchased a revolver. Thereafter he always carried this weapon ready.

Gradually he worked his way down to the last Thomas White on the list. This man had an expensive house on upper Fifth Avenue. David felt hopeful, because he believed his father to be a rich man.

After a week of fruitless waiting outside in the hope of seeing this Thomas White, he approached the house and rang the doorbell. A supercilious butler told the haggard, wild-eyed young man that Mr. White was in Europe. He would see him when he returned, Harris vowed to himself.

A few days later David read in the papers that Thomas White, shipping magnate, was due to arrive from Europe the next day. A picture of the financier ac-

companied the article. David studied it carefully.

When Thomas White's ship docked, David was pressing forward in the front ranks of the crowd who waited at the foot of the gangplank to greet the passengers, his eyes glued on the faces of those who were streaming down from the deck.

His pulse quickened, his eyes bulged. There, before him, was the man whose face had been in the paper the morning before, a tall, dark, distinguished gentleman with iron-gray hair and Vandyke beard. A large soft hat set low over his forehead obscured his brow. With no thought of consequences David struggled through barrier ropes and made his way to a spot immediately in front of the tall, gray-haired gentleman.

"You're Thomas White?" he demanded in a wild, shaky voice.

"Yes," replied the other calmly.

As David felt his gun with one hand the other shot up and knocked off Thomas White's hat.

The gun clattered from his nerveless hand and he stood there stuttering in a violent reaction of embarrassment and fright.

There was no mark on the brow of the man before him.

XIII.

THOMAS WHITE hurried away when a uniformed officer seized David and led him off. On the edge of the crowd a thick-set, colorless man touched the officer's elbow and said something in a low tone. The officer released his hold on David, who found himself being piloted away by the thick-set man who kept a firm grasp on his elbow. Not till they were in a taxicab outside did the other speak.

"You're all right, son," he said. "You don't know me, but I saw you were a little out of your head, and I buffaloed the officer into letting me take charge of you. Jack Keegan's my name. I'll just take you up to my house until you feel a little better. You ought to leave this prohibition hooch alone, son."

Mr. Keegan's statements seemed plausible enough, and David gladly let his new friend lead him where he would. His late experience had pretty well unnerved him. His world was in chaos.

The first he remembered at Keegan's house was that some one peered into his bedroom, then turned to a companion and whispered: "He's asleep."

A moment later he heard footsteps retreating down the hall and voices at a distance. At intervals he heard his own name and Thomas White's mentioned. Finally curiosity overcame discretion and he rose and tiptoed out into the hall. Cautiously he listened intently to what was being said in the living room.

"You see he upset all our dope when he started to shoot up White to-day." It was the voice of Jack Keegan. "We've been working our heads off to keep him from finding his old man, supposing he was going to try to prove who he was and claim the property. We don't think he's got any proofs. Our people didn't even know whether Vincent Farwell was still alive or not until this boy ran away from the Bradfords and they got suspicious and trailed him. They found that old nigger Brown in Birmingham had given him a letter telling him to look up Thomas White, and our man got old Brown to confess that Thomas White was Vincent Farwell.

"But now it seems all this young fellow wants to do when he finds Farwell is to kill him. So why should we worry? That suits our purpose all right. And if he kills White and goes to the chair for it that gets 'em both out of our way. So all we've got to do is to let the boy alone and just watch him enough to see that the police don't get him before he turns the trick."

"But does he know who this White really is? You say he hasn't any proofs. Maybe the old nigger Brown misled him and us both."

"Not much chance," continued Keegan, "everything we've picked up since we got the tip seems to show that White and Farwell are the same. No use to have White arrested and accuse him of being Farwell on that old charge. That's outlawed. Witnesses mostly dead anyhow. Of course they may yet smash him in business. But

the best dope is to let the boy do the dirty work."

David did not wait to hear more. He tiptoed back into the bedroom to ponder on what he had heard. Some things were clear now. Evidently he was again in the hands of an agent of the people who had been hounding him for a year. He remembered what Mammy Bradford had told him; that it was the relatives of his mother who had been sending her money and keeping him in hiding. That fitted in with the letter from old Brown telling about the fight between his father and his mother's brother, and how his father had fled when charges were brought against him.

Evidently the first object of his mother's relatives in keeping him trailed was to get trace of his father with the same purpose that he had in mind—revenge. But they had also feared that he would reveal himself to his father and claim some property or other, probably his father's.

Now they wanted him to kill his father. That knowledge left David in doubt as to whether he wanted to kill the man or not. But as he thought things over he found that his sympathy was all with his mother's relatives. He could not blame them for wanting revenge. Should he cast in his lot openly with them? A second thought forbade it. There was still some mystery that he had not fathomed. They were his enemies, too. The remarks about keeping him from getting the property and hoping that he would kill his father and go to the chair proved that.

He quietly put on his clothes, tiptoed again into the hall, and finding the pair in the living room still in conversation, slipped noiselessly out of the front door and into the street. To make sure that he was not trailed, he walked around several blocks, doubled on his tracks, went through a department store that extended from one street to another, then took a taxicab and rode several blocks before getting out.

His next move was to go to a barber shop and have a clean shave. Then he went to a clothing store and bought an entirely new outfit. This almost exhausted his savings, but he had determined to go to the man whom he now knew might be his father and talk things over as one gentleman to another. And to be able to do this he must change his appearance as much as he could from that of the fellow who had knocked White's hat off on the pier.

For a long while David cogitated on the way to gain the desired interview. Finally, about the time he judged his man would have finished dinner, he rang up the house and inquired if a Mr. Harris could speak with Thomas White on a matter relating to the latter's son. There was such a long wait that David expected to be asked to deposit another nickel, then came word that if he was near enough to call within the next fifteen minutes he would be received.

David hurried around to the house, was at once admitted, and asked to wait in the library. As he sat there his gaze suddenly fastened on a photograph in a silver frame on White's desk.

David drew the little gold locket from his pocket and opened it. The face of the picture on the desk and the miniature face in the locket were the same. He was still gazing raptly at the photograph when he heard White's voice at his side.

"That was my wife," half whispered the older man. David whirled about and saw tears in White's eyes.

"Forgive my sentimental weakness," White pleaded, his face drawn and pensive. "I am no longer myself. I had a shock when I arrived from Europe to-day. I believe you said you could tell me something of my son."

"I can. But first may I ask that you will tell me something of your wife?"

David's slow, even voice consoled his violent emotions.

"Twenty-seven years ago, a young man like yourself, I went South on business and fell in love with her." White waved a hand at the photograph. "She was a daughter of a proud old Creole family, wealthy and aristocratic. I was a poor Yankee. Her people disapproved of me. We married secretly and a little son was born. She died the next week. They denied our marriage and tried to get the baby away from me. I managed, however, to get away with the little boy and left him for the time being with an old negro couple. Then, when they

found that I could prove our marriage, they brought against me charges of wife desertion, and added to that a trumped-up assertion that I had embezzled some funds from my father-in-law. Their evidence was strong, and I foolishly fled, instead of staying and standing trial. Had I remained they could not have convicted me on either charge. But I thought that by fleeing and hiding I would not be separated long from my little son, whom I intended to rescue as soon as it was safe.

" That's where I made my fatal mistake. When I returned for my boy he had vanished, and the old negro couple with him. They had a double reason for putting my son out of my reach and denying his birth. One, of course, was revenge for marrying his mother against their opposition. The other was that her father had left in his will a half million dollars to go to his first grandchild. Her brother did not propose to let that money get away from his family now that his sister was dead. The irony of that is that the fortune is still being held in trust, no other grandchild having ever been born.

" Everything that I had done since has been an effort to rehabilitate my name and my fortune for the sake of that son whom I believe I shall some day find. I long ago secured documentary proof of my innocence of the charges preferred against me. I have made a fortune, but as I have not found my son it is of no consequence. But about my boy, who would be a boy no longer, but is always that to me in my thoughts? What do you know of him?"

" What was your boy's name?" David asked, adding: " His real name, I mean."

" Vincent Farwell, Jr." The eyes of the older man again filled with tears. As he brushed them away he tossed the hair from his brow and exposed to view an ugly scar on his forehead.

Quietly David drew the little locket from his pocket and held it up beside the photograph on the desk.

" Father," he said quietly, " won't you shake hands with Vincent Farwell, Jr.?"

(The end.)

YOUR LETTER

IT was so . . . . you,
And the violets too;
And the words were concrete things,
Grafted on gauzy wings;
And I . . . .
Watching the cars go by
My window, saw
You coming out of the maw
Of distance . . . . Stopping there . . . .
Ah, dear!
Dear lintel and dear door,
Dear candlelight on the floor
And wall;
Dear spring and summer, and dear fall;
Dear memory,
That brings you back to me.

Floyd Meredith.

The Ju-Ju Man

Part II

by Thomas H. Griffiths and Armstrong Livingston

Authors of "The Soul of the Lamp," "The Diamond Theft," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

TWO South African crooks—Smale, a renegade Boer, and Burk, an Irishman—unite in stealing from Holden, an American trader, two fifty-pound sacks of gold and a map showing location of the tribal treasures of the Batateke, whose headman, M'Buli, is a "blood-brother" of the American. The thieves succeed in escaping to the river, but only after Burk has been slightly wounded by Celia, Holden's daughter, and after a fusillade of shots from Fred Rushton, factory manager and aspirant to the hand of Celia. It is the plan of Smale and Burk to ally themselves with the Bololos, traditional enemies of the Batateke; they enter the Bololo country, kill their guide for fear that he will tell of the gold they are carrying, then cache the gold in a creek. Unknown to them, they are observed by C'Wayo, dreaded juju-man, who carefully notes the surroundings and landmarks that he may seek the treasure later. Arrived at the Bololo headquarters plans are made with the shrewd headman, Lombo, for their alliance; the approaching column of Batateke, headed by Holden and Rushton necessitate an immediate plan of campaign. If the Batateke can be held off long enough, Smale and Burk will circle back to Holden's factory, loot the place, then will steal the Batateke treasure, part of which will be given Lombo—who will also be permitted to make slaves of what captives he may find. But Burk wants more than these things—the girl, Celia.

CHAPTER V.

AN AMBUSH OF FLAME.

A PARTY of over a hundred men does not move very quickly on its way through the African bush. It appeared to Fred Rushton, still so new to the country, that they were making very fair progress indeed, but he did not take into consideration the time necessarily lost in halts for food and rest, nor the sinuous curving of the narrow trail that never surmounted an obstacle if it could go around it. He was surprised when M'Buli sadly announced that they would not be able to prevent the fleeing robbers from reaching Gama, and gave orders to alter their route.

They were still some distance from their destination when darkness overtook them, and they were obliged once more to stop and prepare for the night. Africans do not feel comfortable in the dark. They insist upon all the human companionship they can obtain, aided by blazing camp fires. On this occasion Holden himself was glad enough of the crackling logs, for the country in which they found themselves was reputed to be the home of lions.

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If they halted early, however, they had breakfasted and were again upon the march before dawn had fairly colored the eastern sky. The two Americans were eager to come to grips with the men who had robbed them, and M'Buli made no secret of his pleasure at the thought of attacking Gama while aided by two white allies whose courage and resource would go far to steadying his black warriors. The men themselves were most cheerful, singing and laughing and joking as they pressed onward.

Their way led them through endless stretches of dry, tough grass that was always shoulder-high and frequently over a man's head. It lent them no protection from the sun, whose merciless rays beat upon them from a burning sky, and Holden and Rushton hailed the moment with relief when M'Buli assured them that another two hours would bring them within view of Gama. If he had formulated any plan of attack he did not confide it to them, and Holden felt so much confidence in the ability of the chief that he was quite content to leave all military arrangements to him. The old trader limited his own preparations to a careful overhauling of his heavy rifle, which he cleaned and oiled with fastidious attention to detail. Rushton followed his example, and though his heart beat quickly at the possibility of shooting a fellow man, even a bad one, he entertained a pious hope that he might puncture the hide of the scoundrel who had thrown a knife at Celia with murderous intent. As for M'Buli, his heavy spear and stout right arm needed no preliminary tuning up, and as he led his men steadily onward his thoughts doubtless dwelt with satisfaction on the ample target afforded by Lombo's great bulk.

In less than an hour, however, the three men were rudely recalled from their dreams of vengeance. M'Buli stopped suddenly, sniffed the air suspiciously, and shaded his eyes from the glare as he peered anxiously ahead. The two Americans guessed the truth even before he turned to them and uttered one brief word:

"Mbazu!"

Fire! There was a light wind blowing in their faces, and Fred could feel the wave of uneasiness that flowed through the line of savages as the current of air brought with it a faint odor of acrid smoke in confirmation of M'Buli's statement. In that land of sudden perils a sweeping bush fire is one of the deadliest dangers that can threaten. The flames fairly rush across the miles of tall grass dried to a tinder by the scorching sun, destroying every living organism that they encounter in their path.

As long as the wind remained light the Batatekes were in no immediate danger, for they could outdistance the flames until some place of safety was reached, and M'Buli accordingly held them where they were until one of his swiftest runners could go ahead and bring back a report on the extent of the fire. When the man returned, panting from his exertions, his gloomy face told them the worst even before he had gasped out his tale. He had climbed a small hill that had given him a comprehensive view of the country before them, and he had found that the fire was sweeping along the trail in a belt that apparently extended to a distance of five miles on each side of the path.

M'Buli considered the situation and shook his head gravely. He evidently thought that the extent of the fire was too great to permit of an attempt to circle it with any degree of safety, and he reluctantly gave the order to about face. Some ten miles in their rear was a stream broad enough to check the flames, and he determined to fall back upon that until it was possible to resume their advance.

Holden and Rushton, bitterly disappointed though they were, could not gainsay the wisdom of the headman's decision.

"Is this fire an accident," asked Fred, or do you suppose the Bololos have scored on us?"

"That is more than I can tell you," responded the trader gloomily. "Bush fires are not uncommon at this season of the year, when the natives start them as the simplest way of clearing land for planting. Certainly this one is a bit of bad luck for us. It means the loss of at least a day while the ground is cooling—unless a heavy rain comes along, and there's little chance of that."

They had covered barely three miles of

the necessary ten when the headman's raised spear checked them. It was Rushton this time who uttered the dread word.

" Fire!" he exclaimed. " That settles any possibility of its having been an accident, I guess. They fired the grass in front of us, and sent runners to touch it off behind us. What do we do now? Toast?"

Holden talked rapidly with M'Buli. The headman nodded vigorously at Rushton's suspicions of the origin of the fire, and the trader realized for the first time that it was no ordinary criminal that he was up against, but an unscrupulous and clever scoundrel of the deepest dye. The fiery trap that hemmed them in was never sprung by any savage, but clearly revealed the devilish working of a " civilized " mind.

The Batateke chief, who knew the country like the palm of his hand, swiftly decided upon the course he must follow to save the lives of his party. As Smale had foreseen, the only sure line of safety lay in the direction of Lake Bwala, whose shore consisted of a strip of sandy turf some hundreds of yards in depth that promised sanctuary from the flames. He spoke hurriedly to his men to this effect, and as there was no trail from where they were to the lake, what had been an orderly procession became a scattered rout of frightened men through tall grass that seemed maliciously bent upon tripping them at every step. Had Smale carried his plan one degree further and arranged an ambush in the vicinity of the lake, it is safe to say that the feud between the Bololos and the Batatekes would have ended abruptly in a decisive victory for the former, but the Boer had been too obsessed with the idea of looting the Holden factory to concern himself about striking a blow for his native allies.

An hour later, gasping from their struggles and streaming with perspiration from every pore, the Batatekes and the two white men burst from the grass and rushed to the edge of the water, where they threw themselves upon the ground in a state bordering upon exhaustion. The wind had increased considerably, and the last quarter of a mile had been taken at a run while the first clouds of smoke from the approaching fire rolled over their heads. A rough attempt had been made by all to keep in touch with one another, but a counting of heads revealed two men missing. It was never known what accident had separated them from their fellows, but of their ultimate fate in that surging sea of flame there could be no doubt.

The white men, more heavily clothed than the natives and encumbered with their rifles, had none too easy a time in keeping up with the main body of the fugitives. When they finally reached the open they also were too weary to do anything but drop to the ground and praise heaven for a chance to rest.

They were not destined to enjoy the respite for very long. M'Buli had not allowed fatigue to interfere with the performance of his duties as chief, and before giving himself any rest he had cautiously taken a survey of their surroundings. He came hurrying up to Holden with excited gestures, while the trader was still trying to catch his breath, and beckoned him to come and see what he had discovered.

They had come out of the grass upon the summit of a low hill from which it was possible to see far along the shore of the lake, and M'Buli pointed to a spot about half a mile away where a number of tents gleamed white in the sun. The headman had not the slightest doubt as to the character of the encampment, nor had Holden after a single sharp glance. He turned to Rushton with a word of explanation.

" Arabs!" he said.

The young man nodded comprehendingly, and his lips tightened as he grimly gazed at the distant tents. He had heard a good deal about these Arabian traders who send their caravans from the desert fastnesses into the heart of the Congo country. Ostensibly in search of gold, ivory, and other legitimate treasure, they in reality carry on a more nefarious traffic in human flesh—a traffic that is all too frequently connived at and sometimes encouraged by the self-seeking petty officials of the very governments that have sworn to stamp it out. The raiding parties are usually in charge of a villainous Arabian chieftain, and by their lawless nature attract to themselves ruffianly outcasts of every nationality, whose only

credentials are a rifle and the willingness and ability to use it. They are cordially detested on all hands, even by the tribes with whom they deal—poor blacks who never know when they themselves may be treacherously seized and carried off into captivity. For this reason the marauding caravan is usually well equipped with guns and ammunition sufficient to repel any attack that might be launched against them by the exasperated natives.

Rushton, Holden, and M'Buli were standing in plain sight on the crest of the knoll from which they were making their observations, and it soon became apparent that their presence had been detected by the Arab crew. There was a suggestion of confusion in the camp. White-clad figures scurried here and there, while horses were led in from the neighboring bush. These uneasy movements convinced the trader that the party had a guilty conscience and probably good cause for alarm at the unexpected appearance of two white men accompanied by a large body of armed natives.

He was so sure that they were engaged in some piece of iniquity that he yielded to a rare impulse of sardonic humor. He raised his rifle to his shoulder, sent a bullet singing over the encampment, and watched the result with a mirthless smile.

The Arabs stayed not on the order of their going, but went, their sturdy ponies galloping along the margin of the lake until they were hidden from sight around a bend. They made no effort to save their tents, which did not surprise Holden when he saw that the fugitives numbered scarcely a dozen men. He deduced from this that they were only a small detachment sent out on some special business from the main expedition, which presumably was not far away. He glanced at Fred Rushton.

"That was an easy and bloodless victory," he smiled. "Suppose we go down to the camp and see what they were up to?"

The Batateke warriors responded to M'Buli's hail and followed the white men along the shore until the encampment was reached. The tents proved to contain nothing of interest, confirming Holden's theory that the party had been traveling light, and the shelters themselves were of such flimsy material that even the Batatekes shruggingly declined to bother with them. Fred found one thing that appealed to him—a slender, beautifully fashioned spear that he thought would make a nice souvenir of the Dark Continent for Celia to take to the States.

Holden was still rummaging the tents for some clew to the nature of the Arabs' business when a loud shouting outside betokened a discovery of importance. He hurried off to join a group of warriors who were calling and gesticulating to him, and stopped aghast when he saw what they had found.

In a saucerlike depression where they had been concealed from view were more than twoscore blacks, each manacled by one wrist to a steel chain. They were of both sexes, of all ages and condition, but alike in the squalor and filth that was the inevitable result of their being herded together in a pen that was worse than any sty. A frightful stench assured the trader that some of the miserable wretches had already found a permanent release from their troubles, although no effort had been made to remove the bodies from the chain that bound the quick and the dead.

At the first appearance of the white man the unfortunate creatures shrank even closer together, cowering in terror from the threat of a new tyrant, but in a moment a sharp-eyed youth at one end of the line raised himself on his elbow and waved his free arm excitedly.

"American!" he cried. "American fella!"

A stir ran through the huddled mass, and several of the prisoners repeated the words with an accent of hope trembling in their voices. Faces that had been hidden were lifted toward the stranger, and two young women plucked babies from their dry breasts and held their emaciated bodies up to view. An old man drew on his limited knowledge of English while he rattled the iron on his wrist. "Free!" he cried. "Free!"

Rushton, who had come up, felt a lump rise in his throat at this compliment, not to themselves who were strangers to the blacks, but to his countrymen as a whole. He was sufficiently familiar by now with the petty

despotism of Africa to know that there were other so-called civilized races whose members might not have been greeted with the same spontaneous outburst of confidence. There are many whites in Africa who are more savage than the savages themselves, and who have grown completely callous to the sufferings endured by the natives. Rushton silently thanked God for this demonstration that the majority of his countrymen in Africa had lived up to the standards of mercy and justice established in some districts by the English, and had inspired in the breasts of the Bakongo the same feeling of security and trust.

No time was lost in justifying the good opinion of the prisoners. Rushton had noticed in one of the tents a big key, whose use was now revealed to him, and in less than half an hour the last of the living captives had crawled out of the pit and stretched his limbs in the rays of the life-giving sun. Holden ordered some rice boiled for them, and this, with some dried Mossamedes fish, bread-fruit, and a drink of poisonously strong tea, made up such a banquet as they had never dreamed of enjoying again.

There was one among them who could speak a little English, and another whom M'Buli could understand, and between them it was made clear that they belonged to a tribe whose country was nearer the coast. They had been surprised and captured by the small party of Arabs who had proceeded to march them by devious and untraveled paths to the shores of the lake, where the party expected to join forces with a large caravan. The fact that they had arrived at the rendezvous well in advance of the appointed time explained why a number of the slaves had died from exposure in their unsheltered pit. The spokesmen further volunteered the information that they could find their way home, after a little rest, if they could be provided with a few days' food.

As was to be expected, the heat and ashes of the burning bush made the remainder of the afternoon anything but pleasant. From time to time all hands took a dip in the lake, whose waters were fortunately free from crocodiles and other dangerous animals, and managed thus to make the stifling atmosphere more endurable to their parched bodies. They welcomed the moment when the actual line of fire had roared and crackled past them, leaving behind it a charred and smoking terrain that M'Buli regarded with gloomy foreboding.

During the night, however, their run of ill-luck was broken by a sharp squall of rain that meant to them the saving of many dreary hours of waiting. In fifteen minutes the burned ground was cool enough for even the naked feet of the Africans.

The following morning Holden drew upon his scanty stock of provisions for enough rations to last the late captives for three days and sent them on their way rejoicing. This took precious time, and it was nearly nine o'clock before their delayed march was resumed.

At noon M'Buli paused on a rise of ground and called the two Americans to his side. He waved his spear triumphantly toward a collection of grass huts that lay some miles ahead of them.

It was Gama, but instead of sharing the chief's rejoicing they gazed at the village in silence, both seized with the same thought.

"There is no smoke!" muttered Holden.

He fortunately had with him a pair of powerful field glasses, and he now focused them on the Bololo town. Not a sign of life was to be seen, and after a prolonged scrutiny he announced definitely that the place was deserted. M'Buli grunted in frank bewilderment before giving the command to advance.

An hour later they strode up the single street of the silent village, having taken due precaution against the possibility of an ambush. They found every hut stripped bare of its contents. Every stitch of clothing, every stick of wood, every movable object, had gone. The sole living inhabitant that remained in Gama was a mangy, ill-favored dog who still kept watch and ward in the doorway of the house that had been its master's.

In the same big hut where Smale and Lombo had devised their campaign, Holden, Rushton, and M'Buli squatted down in solemn conclave to discuss the meaning of this latest development. In a few minutes two

scouts came in with news that further complicated the situation. One of them had discovered the trail of the women and children going north, and the other reported that a Bololo war party had left Gama by a route that closely paralleled the one by which the Batatekes had arrived.

They were still trying to fit this bit of information into the puzzle of the whole when a chorus of shouts from outside heralded the appearance of a messenger. The three men sprang to their feet as a tired, panting runner reeled through the doorway and hurled a few breathless words at his chief.

An expression of genuine fear and dismay passed across M'Buli's features as he translated for the white men a message that made their cheeks blanch.

"Him come from C'Wayo. Him say Bololo man march one time by your house!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE ATTACK ON THE FACTORY.

ONCE Lombo had decided to carry out Smale's plan to raid the Holden factory he lost no time in the swift execution of his preparation. There was a good deal of bustle and confusion, a great deal of running to and fro, of shouting and laughing and seemingly endless turmoil, but eventually the desired results were accomplished with remarkable efficiency. The women, children, and old men, all of them heavily laden, departed northward, bearing their goods and chattels, to a village where they would be safe from any pursuit. Several speedy runners were deputed to start the bush fires before and behind the advancing Batatekes, and in an incredibly short time a cloud of smoke to the south announced the performance of their task.

Lombo, with over a hundred of his picked warriors, plunged into the bush on a beeline for Mafadi, with the natural result that their path ran parallel to the route which the Batatekes had taken from the factory. The two trails came dangerously close at some points, and the white men cast anxious eyes at the clouds of smoke from the burning grass which occasionally rolled over their heads, but taking their cue from the imperturbable Lombo, who was apparently satisfied of their safety, the adventurers made no protest.

With the headman and his inseparable companion, the fetish doctor, walking immediately before them, Burk and Smale had no opportunity for private conversation until nearly noon, when Lombo took advantage of a group of big baobab trees and halted his men in their shade. Then they were able to draw apart, while cooking their own meal, and enjoy a brief discussion of their affairs.

Burk was frankly uneasy, and made no attempt to conceal it.

"We've tackled a pretty big thing," he complained, "and I'm beginning to get the wind-up."

"What is worrying you?"

"The government," answered Burk. "It doesn't seem possible to me that any white man, however corrupt he may be, will sit quietly by and do nothing while a mob of blacks storm a factory occupied by two lone white women—and almost within sight of his headquarters."

"You might know I have thought of that," responded the Boer, a trifle impatiently. "You always say I have brains, and you always act as if I had none!"

"Excuse me, Piet!" laughed his tall companion. "Well, put me out of my suspense. Why have we nothing to fear from the commandant?"

"Because he has gone, with his sous-lieutenant, a hundred miles up the Congo to shoot elephant. He started yesterday, and he won't be back much under a week. Meanwhile the post is left in charge of a Senegalese sergeant of police who will take care not to see anything that might cause him trouble. Lombo can make out a pretty good case for himself, at that. He has been the victim of an outrageous and unprovoked attack by a party of hostile blacks under the leadership of Holden and his manager, and he is justified in getting back a bit of his own if he can do it. He has already sent word to that effect to the sergeant at Mafadi."

"Accompanied, no doubt, by a handsome dash."

"No possible doubt whatever," agreed Smale, and the two villains chuckled softly.

"If we move quickly and have any luck," said Burk, "I believe we will put the thing through. I must say I feel better since you told me about the commandant." He rolled himself a cigarette while he thoughtfully considered their prospects. "That was a good idea of yours, hiding those two sacks of gold. If we get the main lot we'll never miss them. If we don't, we can wait until things quiet down and then sneak back and get them. You're a wise old bird, Piet!"

"Mostly," agreed the Boer complacently. "At the same time, Dan, I may as well tell you that I made a big mistake in that business. It wasn't my fault, but just a bit of bad luck." He glanced about him and sank his voice to a whisper. "That Bololo I bumped off was a pretty important person in this outfit!"

"Who was he?" asked Burk anxiously.

"Anoka's son. He had gone north with a caravan and was on his way home when I picked him up in Mapra. Old Juju is wondering what's keeping him."

"My holy aunt!" exclaimed the Irishman. "If he ever finds out—"

"He never will unless he sees it in that smoke of his," replied the Boer reassuringly. "But I do wish the kid had had some other papa!"

It was not quite dark when their path plunged suddenly into a belt of jungle that betokened the neighborhood of the Congo. Their trip down the big river and their weary hike overland were still fresh in the minds of Burk and Smale, and they could hardly credit Lombo's assertion that they were now within three miles of the Holden factory. The Bololo dared go no farther that evening. He had planned to make his attack just before dawn, and he was afraid to approach any nearer to the settlement lest some word of their presence might leak into the factory or Mafadi. He ordered his men to get a good rest so that they would be fresh and keen at an hour when they might confidently expect the inhabitants of the factory to be sleeping their soundest.

It still lacked two hours of dawn when the white men awoke to find the Bololos already astir. The trail through the jungle was a well-defined one, or they never could have found their way through that inky blackness. As it was, they made fairly good speed, in spite of the fact that they took every precaution against noise. To Burk and Smale it seemed that they slipped along the sinuous path as swiftly and as soundlessly as a big black serpent intent on surprising its prey. The ruffians could have sworn that not a leaf crackled beneath their feet from the time they left the camp to the moment when they halted on the edge of the Holden compound.

But it is difficult to deceive the ear of a native, and there was one person awake on the trader's premises who sensed, rather than actually heard, a subdued unrest in the dark depths of the jungle that he could not ascribe to any natural cause.

This man was a tough, wiry, courageous Krooboy who rejoiced in the name of the Ace of Spades, as Holden had once laughingly christened him. He had grown old in the service of the trader, and had proved his loyalty and pluck on many an occasion when danger had threatened. No longer able to hold his own with the younger workmen, he was now employed on light jobs about the place, and during the present absence of Holden he had been assigned to the duty of night watchman in the compound. From dark to dawn he made his rounds, one complete circuit of the house and clearing every half hour, carrying in his hand a little bell, whose tinkling not only attested to his wakefulness, but also, he was convinced, kept evil spirits at a respectful distance. In common with many of his race who have been in continual contact with white men, it was the proudest boast of the Ace of Spades that he was an Englishman, an earnest conceit of which he could not have been disillusioned by any amount of argument.

He halted motionless at the sound that he did not understand, and listened with straining ears for its repetition. It did not come, and for a moment he thought that his senses had been deceived by the stirring of some big animal.

He was quite unaware of the approach of a savage, holding a knife between his teeth, whom Lombo had dispatched for the

purpose of discovering and silencing any person who might be awake. The assassin crept ever closer, moving lightly on the tips of his fingers and toes and as black as the night in which he was lost, until he was within a few feet of the unconscious Ace, whose form could be distinguished against the starlit sky. The Bololo rose silently to his feet, his knife now in his hand as he raised it for the stroke.

It was then that the stars in their courses worked for the Ace. His head was half turned in a listening attitude, and from the corner of his eye he caught the momentary gleam of starlight upon steel. It was warning enough for the cool-headed old Krooboy. He wasted no time on a second glance, but leaped from where he stood a full eight feet—a jump that did credit to his limber old body. He was aware of the shadow that sprang after him, and even while his body was in mid-air he grasped the heavy revolver that he carried in his belt and sent a shot behind him in the general direction of his assailant. A grunt of pain followed the report, and the dull impact of a heavy object upon the earth satisfied him that his snapshot had been well aimed.

The Ace of Spades did not often hit what he tried to, and he would have been very glad to stop for a jubilation over his bull's-eye, but duty compelled him to race as fast as possible toward the house, shouting the alarm at the top of his voice. He was further urged to this course by the fusillade of bullets that sang over his head, for Lombo had recognized the futility of concealment.

A tremendous uproar broke from the quarters of the Krooboys at this stage of the proceedings. They did not have the slightest idea of what danger might be threatening them, but they sprang from their beds and rushed out of the two entrances and through some of the windows of their building. Once in the open they became more frightened than ever, and with the instinct of wild animals they stampeded madly into the best cover at hand, which was the bush. By a happy chance the majority of them escaped through a gap in the line that the Bololos were rapidly drawing about the compound. only a few of the boys stumbling upon their enemy and being speared as they ran.

Only their headman, Black Billy, by name, took any thought of his master's wife and daughter. Instead of fleeing with his fellows he tore through the darkness in the direction of the house, swinging a weighty machete and ready to split the first skull that offered. His objective was the little room that served as Holden's office, the door of which had been left open these past two nights to permit the Ace of Spades taking shelter if it was necessary. He reached it just as the watchman was beginning to slam it shut, and barely managed to slip inside before the operation was completed. In the dark the two men questioned each other breathlessly, but neither knew more than that the house was beleaguered by a thousand yelling devils who had sought to kill them.

They had shut and locked the door, dropping the solid bars into place, just in time to check the rush of a group of Bololo warriors whose powerful bodies crashed vainly against the stout planking. The two Krooboys were still shivering at their narrow escape when they were recalled to their senses by the sound of Celia Holden's voice. She was on the further side of the bolted door leading to the stairs, and she was loudly demanding to know who was in the office.

"Me here, missy!" cried the Ace. "Me an' Black Billy!"

The words had hardly left his lips when a smashing blow was dealt upon the massive shutter that protected the office window—the same by which Burk and Smale had made their burglarious entry two nights before. Subsequent sounds of a rasping quality told of some one trying to prize off the hinges by means of a crowbar or spear, and the Ace of Spades immediately let fly with his revolver. Whether he did any harm he could not tell, but he certainly did some good, for the would-be intruder desisted from further attempts against that particular window.

By this time Celia had opened the inner door and poined her two faithful henchmen, her mind in a confused tumult of wild conjectures.

"What in the world is happening?" she gasped.

"No savvy, missy," answered the Ace. "Bad man try for kill us!"

The girl, cast upon her own resources in this emergency, made a desperate effort to regain her composure, and succeeded. She had not the least idea of who was attacking the house, nor could she possibly guess the real motive that actuated them, but she did know that her chances of making a successful defense were very slim indeed. The shouting outside told her that the factory was completely surrounded, and a crash from the rear of the building betokened a fresh attempt to break in.

Her first and natural supposition, as it had been two nights before, was that the raid was aimed at the provisions in the storeroom, where there was a stock of food sufficient to set up a whole village for a year of luxury and idleness. She was amazed that any party of blacks should dare to attack a factory even in the absence of its owner, but such a reflection was idle in the face of the evident fact that it only remained for her to come to some decision as to the best course to pursue.

She had her mother to think of as well as herself, and she did not feel that they would be justified in risking their lives in what must be a futile attempt to defend a lot of canned stuff and cheap trading goods. She determined to leave these to their fate, hoping that the raiders would be satisfied with that much loot and would take their departure with their ill-gotten gains. If they didn't, and essayed the sack of the whole house, then she could more easily fight them off from the vantage point of the upper story, which was reached only by the one flight of stairs guarded by the massive door at their foot.

She reached this wise decision in a few seconds, and driving the Ace of Spades and Black Billy before her, she hurried to the stairs. She had her revolver in her hand, and she lingered a moment before closing the door, struggling with an almost overwhelming inclination to wait for and shoot the first savage that appeared. She concluded, however, that it would be a tactical error to arouse a feeling of personal enmity in the breasts of natives who might otherwise restrain themselves to looting, and with a sigh of disappointment she pushed the door shut and dropped its fastenings in place. She was not normally a bloodthirsty young woman, but this outrageous attempt to rob her father while his back was turned made her just a little angrier than she had ever been before.

Mrs. Holden, trembling in every limb, was waiting for her in the room at the top of the stairway. The trader's wife was one of those splendid women who combine with frail bodies the heart and courage of a lioness. She was intensely nervous and high-strung, which accounted for her present trembling, but in spite of her advancing years she was capable of enduring more physical and mental strain than many a young man. She had a quality of stubborness, moreover, that enabled her to achieve high purposes in spite of shaking nerves and bodily weakness.

"I've fastened every window," she told Celia in a quivery falsetto. "What does this mean? I haven't heard of a factory being attacked in twenty years!"

Celia explained her surmises and indicated the plan she thought they had best follow. Mrs. Holden's eyes flashed fire.

"Let those black devils walk off with everything your father owns?" she demanded between chattering teeth. "I never heard of such a thing!"

"But we can't do anything else!" protested the girl indignantly. "We couldn't hold the house downstairs for five minutes!"

"Well—I don't *like* it!"

Black Billy and Ace opened a shutter cautiously and peered out into the night. The veranda cut off their view of the compound, but it was clear that they themselves had been seen from the fringe of jungle. They hastily withdrew their heads and slammed the shutter as a badly aimed bullet thudded into the top of the window. It did not come through the wall, for trade rifles are not distinguished for their penetrative power.

But the shot had an unexpected sequel. The two women stood frozen in their tracks as a powerful voice shouted in English:

"Don't shoot them! We want them alive!"

"Good Heavens!" quavered Mrs. Holden. "Did you hear that"

Celia nodded, her mouth suddenly too dry for speech.

She went swiftly to her father's room and returned with an armful of guns, ammunition, and machetes. She distributed most of them between Billy and the Ace, keeping two revolvers for herself.

"You savvy what that man say?" she asked.

"Me savvy," responded the Ace. "Him lib for make us slaves!"

"You must fight," said the girl. "Fight hard!"

The Ace of Spades drew himself up proudly. "Me English!" he answered with dignity. "Me nebber slave. Me English boy, an' die first!"

Celia's heart leaped as her Anglo-Saxon blood ran fast in response to that simple creed uttered fearlessly by an African boy in the very face of death. There were tears in her eyes as she looked from him to Black Billy, who was nodding a solemn acquiescence in the Ace's conception of the rights of man.

"I will stay here at the top of the stairs," she explained rapidly, "and you boys must watch the windows as well as you can." She looked around her in abrupt mystification. "Where is my mother?"

"She go for kitchen," answered Billy.

At that moment a shot fired into the lock of the door leading to the stairs announced the opening of a definite attack, and Celia was obliged to dismiss her mother from her thoughts.

It was Mrs. Holden, nevertheless, who was busily engaged in maturing a scheme that was destined to alter the trend of affairs and incidentally bring woe and desolation to the heart of Piet Smale. The trader's wife had had no experience with native assaults upon factories and stations, but she had heard the histories of many of them, and her memory was charged with ugly details that now rose vividly in her mind. In every case where the attack had been successful, the treatment of the captured whites, men and women both, had been characterized by a fiendish bestiality from which her thoughts recoiled with horror.

She grasped even better than her daughter the hopelessness of defending their position. Her senses reeled and her body threatened to collapse beneath her as she contemplated the prospect before them, but from somewhere in her being, the bottom of her soul perhaps, there rose triumphant over her fears the indomitable spirit of her Scotch and English and American ancestry. She knew in that sublime moment that come what might she would never be taken alive.

This determination once arrived at gave her the courage of desperation. She went into the kitchen, and presently reappeared, staggering under the weight of a five-gallon can of kerosene oil, and with this in her arms she tottered into her husband's bedroom.

Some years before Holden had had a trap cut through the floor, which was directly above the storeroom, so that he could reach his stock when necessary without going down the stairs and through the office. A ladder provided the means of descent.

Mrs. Holden, working with swift efficiency, lifted the trap, toppled over the ladder, and dragged her oil-can to the edge of the opening. With a steady hand she tipped the heavy tin and allowed its contents to pour into the room below. The fluid cascaded merrily down upon flimsy pine crates, barrels stuffed with excelsior, a pile of cotton waste, and a score of other inflammable articles.

By leaning down to the trap she could hear pretty well what was going on below, and she was not surprised to catch the sound of some one hacking and wrenching at the single window of the storeroom. There was no time to waste. She crumpled a newspaper, touched a match to it, and held it until it was burning well. Then she dropped it through the trap.

The room did not merely catch fire. There was a deep roar as it burst into one solid sheet of flame. A heavy black smoke rolled up into Mrs. Holden's face.

She straightened to her feet and instinc-

tively wiped her hands on a towel that hung by the washstand.

"There!" she exclaimed, with a fine satisfaction. "That's that!"

CHAPTER VII.

"AT LAST WE ARE ALONE!"

WHEN the attack on the factory commenced, Piet Smale drove straight for the goal of his desire—the storeroom. He left the actual fighting to somebody else, and having rummaged around until he found a hatchet and an iron bar, he started work on the window of the stockroom. The stout shutter defied him for a long time, but finally he wrenched it from its hinges, only to reel back from the opening with a bitter curse of disappointment, choking in the cloud of smoke that poured into his face. In a moment he saw all his hopes vanish, for he had no means of quenching the fire, and the briefest of examinations showed him the madness of trying to save anything from that blazing inferno. His very beard was bristling with rage as he stalked away from the scene and hunted for more promising pastures to loot.

Burk had left the matter of pillaging to his partner, whom he knew to be a finished student in the gentle art of plundering, while he and Lombo, with the majority of the Bololos, bent all their energies upon effecting an entrance to the house. They had no difficulty in doing so as far as the ground floor was concerned, the only shot fired at them being the bullet that the Ace of Spades sent crashing through the office window, whence it sang harmlessly off into space.

Their failure to offer any further resistance gave the shrewd scoundrel the clew to the defenders' real intention, and guessing that Celia had withdrawn to the second story, he decided to storm it before she could perfect her defenses. Once she had made the upper part of the house secure, a great many lives must be sacrificed before it could be carried.

He circled the building rapidly, looking for some means by which he could lead a party of savages to the veranda that ran about the second floor, but nothing offered. He might then have ransacked the outhouses for a ladder, but he had no time to waste on such luxuries. He measured the distance with his eye, and giving a tremendous leap in the air, he caught the edge of the veranda flooring. It was simple enough after that to pull his great body up to its level and swing himself over the rail, where he paused and shouted for the Bololos to follow him. They grinned and shook their heads, incapable of the feat he had performed, but one of them led the way by another route, swarming up one of the supports with apelike agility. They readily grasped the Irishman's intentions, and scattering in both directions, they began to hack at a dozen different shutters.

Burk left this work to them while he went from window to window in the hope of finding one that was not secured. He had almost given up the search as absurd when his eye caught a small opening that was above the level of his head. To his great delight he saw that it had no shutter, and that the lower part of the sash was raised.

There were several chairs near by, and he brought one of them to a spot where he could stand on it and look through the glass. He found himself gazing down a hall that ran the length of the building, flanked on each side by doors leading to the rooms that lined the piazza, and there was not a soul in sight. Amazed at his good fortune, he raised the window a little more and drew his body through the opening. He dropped to the floor as lightly as a cat, and with a revolver in each hand he proceeded on tiptoe to make a round of the rooms.

Black Billy and the Ace of Spades had found their hands too full for comfort. The attack was coming now from a dozen quarters, and two men could not be everywhere at once.

Billy, armed with a machete and a revolver, stationed himself silently before a window whose shutter promised momentarily to yield before the onslaught of a dozen or more Bololos. He waited patiently until it fell, and then opened a deadly

fire at short range. It was impossible for even a black to miss at that distance, and Billy was an old hunter with a cool head. Four times he fired, and four savages writhed upon the veranda before the rest of them escaped to safety around the corner of the house.

Billy could not stay to enjoy this momentary triumph. A hammering on the other side of the house warned him that a new danger threatened there, and slipping fresh cartridges into his revolver he raced for the door, intending to cross the hall and repeat his ambushing tactics.

He ran straight into the arms of death. He collided heavily with Burk, who was making his cautious way along the hall, and before the brave Krooboy could recover either his wits or his balance a shot from the villain's revolver split his skull.

"One gone!" exclaimed Burk. "There can't be many of 'em."

Mildly encouraged by his success, he pursued his tour in the direction of another room from which came the sounds of a fracas that appeared to be a battle royal. The tall ruffian coolly applied his eye to the crack of the open door, and stood enthralled by the sight within.

The Ace of Spades had pitted his solitary strength against ten Bololos who were far more determined and courageous than the lot that Billy had routed. The battle had gone to him in its preliminary stages, while he had his revolver; but a spear wound in his hand caused him to drop the weapon, and before he could recover it his assailants were upon him. They bore him back by sheer weight of numbers until he got his back to a wall, where he was making his last stand armed only with a machete. He managed to keep clear before him the semicircle swept by his flashing blade, and three times he succeeded in lopping off the heads of thrusting spears and sinking his weapon in the black bodies of their owners.

In spite of his agile defense, he was wounded in several places. But he forced his foes to give him a moment's truce, and when Burk strode through the door he was leaning against the wall, panting painfully and streaming with blood, while the Bololos stood watching him from a respectable distance. They could not but appreciate the resolute courage that had fought them to a standstill, and when the white man came into the room they willingly dropped their spears and left the issue to him. They parted slightly, leaving Dan Burk and the Krooboy face to face.

The Irishman could not resist a rare impulse toward generosity.

"You're a plucky beggar!" he said admiringly. "If you will drop that machete and be sensible, you can come with me as my servant."

The Ace of Spades gathered his muscles beneath him.

"Me English boy!" he cried. "You—scum!"

His legs straightened and propelled him, swift as an arrow, toward his tempter, the point of his weapon held stiffly before him and aimed at his enemy's throat.

It was the attack of a naked babe upon a grown man in armor. The plucky Ace was not within three feet of his mark when Burk, stung by the taunt, rapped out an ugly oath and fired at the African's head. The Krooboy spun around, caught at his head with both hands, and collapsed upon the floor, a thin, red stream spurting from his temple.

There was a flush of shame and humiliation on the tall scoundrel's face as he left the room, with the Bololos at his heels. That he, a real Britisher, should be an object of contempt to a black boy— It was intolerable!

He met with no more adventures on his passage down the hall, and reached without obstacle the big room into which the corridor led. He knelt down and approached the doorway on his hands and knees, convinced that he would find more defenders here, and his heart thrilled as he stole a glance into the room and recognized the figure of Celia Holden.

She had held the stairs with such deadly effectiveness that Lombo, who was in charge of the operations at this end of the house, had called away his men and sent them aloft to help those upon the veranda. They had managed to tear off a shutter from one of the windows of the room in which the girl was stationed, but she shifted

her position to meet the new attack and succeeded in keeping the savages at bay. She was lying on the floor, protected from spears and arrows by a sofa that she had drawn in front of her, and with her revolver resting upon the back of this useful piece of furniture she covered the window with an accurate aim. It would have been certain death for the Bololo foolhardy enough to show his head in that opening. Her back was turned to the door from the hall, and as she dared not take her eyes from the window for a moment, she was quite ignorant of the man who knelt in the passage and admired her. She thought continually of her mother and the two blacks, and would have given a great deal to know how they fared, but to leave her commanding post for an instant would have been fatal.

Burk checked the savages behind him with a motion of his hand while he watched the girl, fascinated. Probably if he had seen her in a ballgown dancing a waltz he would not have given her a second thought, but this other picture appealed warmly to his fancy. His heart beat fast as his eyes swept over her, lingering on the slim, long lines of her figure that was hardly concealed by the light wrapper which clung to it, and though her face was turned from him he could imagine the calm, resolute mold of her features. "Ye gods! What a wife for a man!" he murmured.

Determined not to injure her, he was at a loss how to capture the girl. It would be suicidal to enter the room in the face of that deadly revolver, whose bite he had already known. The fact that he had the drop on her gave him no consolation, for he shrewdly suspected that the command, "Hands up!" would merely end in his being obliged to fire at her in self-defense.

He could only see one way to attain his object, and that was to take advantage of her ignorance of his presence to shoot the revolver from her hand. He considered the shot carefully. His bullet must pass within an inch of her cheek, and if she chanced to move as he fired it would mean the end of all his hopes; on the other hand, if the shot was successful he could rush upon her before she could reach for the spare revolver that lay upon the floor beside her. A weaker man would have hesitated, but Burk was accustomed to act instantly upon his thoughts. He raised his weapon, steadying his arm against the door, and took careful aim.

He pressed the trigger and sprang forward as the report rang out. The girl's revolver went flying from her hand, and a cry was wrung from her by the stinging pain that shot up to her shoulder. Before she realized what had happened she was grasped by two arms that wrapped themselves about her like steel cords. She struggled desperately to free herself, but she was as helpless as a rabbit in the coils of a snake. In a minute or two her strength was exhausted, and as her body grew limp in his grasp Burk placed her gently upon the sofa, where she lay apparently unconscious.

"Who the deuce have you got there?"

Burk spun around. Piet Smale stood in the doorway, astonishment staring from his wide eyes.

"Oh—this is my loot!" answered the big ruffian gayly. "Where's yours?"

"Goin' up in smoke," replied the Boer grimly, "along with the rest of the house. We'd better mosey out of here pronto."

Burk threw back his head and sniffed.

"Did that fool Lombo touch off the shimbeck?" he demanded.

"No. The blaze started in the storeroom, an' somebody inside must have done the trick."

Celia Holden was rapidly recovering her scattered wits, and a thrill of hope shot through her breast as she heard the Boer's words. She felt sure that no one but her mother could have started the fire. What had become of her after that? The girl's mind was filled with a desperate anxiety, but she could do nothing to help her. On the contrary, if the older woman had succeeded in finding some hiding place a thoughtless question now might betray her existence to these murderous brutes, who might not know anything about her. Celia decided that she must keep still and let her mother play her own hand alone.

She ventured to steal a glance through

her eyelashes, and saw that the two men were partly turned away from her and only interested in themselves.

She remembered the spare revolver, a small affair of the bulldog type, that lay on the floor within easy reach, and she decided to make an attempt to secure it. Very carefully, watching her enemies all the time, she lowered her arm until her fingers closed upon the butt of the weapon. She drew her hand back again with equal caution, and almost gave a gasp of joy as she managed to thrust it out of sight into one of the deep pockets of her wrapper; there might be some things in the world of which Celia Holden was afraid, but death was not one of them, and now, come what might, she had one sure way to freedom.

She brought her maneuver to a conclusion just in time. Burk and Smale finished their talk and awakened to the pressing need of action. The tall villain recognized a big Bololo standing in the hall as one of the savages who could speak a little English, and he called to him to carry the girl outside to a place of safety and let nothing harm her as he valued his own thick neck.

The man obeyed, and as he left the room with his burden Burk turned to his companion.

"If this place is on fire," he said coolly, "we had better hunt through these rooms for anything worth taking."

He led the way into the hall, closely followed by the Boer, who never needed urging when there was a prospect of loot—in fact, he had once confided to his partner in crime that he had a set of bachelor apartments in Dresden that were rather cozily furnished with souvenirs of his adventurous career, and where he occasionally retired to live a life of elegant leisure under an assumed name.

Burk's eye was caught by a closed door with a crack in one of its panels, through which a stream of smoke was issuing into the hall, revealing the location of the fire. "We may as well see how it's burning," he said carelessly and flung open the door.

It was lucky for him that most of the smoke was escaping through a broken window. As it was, he was driven back by the oily cloud that burst out in his face, but not before his quick glance took in the form of a woman lying on the floor. Covering his mouth and nose with one hand, he dashed into the room, for he was no coward—and there is always the possibility that a woman may be wearing rings or a bit of jewelry.

"*Sacré diablo!*" shouted Smale. "Come out of that!"

Burk came willingly enough, dragging the unconscious Mrs. Holden after him, and the Boer slammed shut the door behind them.

"Not a thing on her," exclaimed Burk indignantly after a moment's search, "except a nightgown, and that's cotton!"

Smale glanced at the woman's face, blackened and repulsive.

"Suffocated," he diagnosed briefly. "Let her lie there, and be hanged to her! It must be her I've got to thank for losin' my grub."

They made a rapid search of the remaining rooms, picking up a trifle here and there, but finding little that really appealed to them. Burk paused twice in his search—once to launch a solid kick against the unresisting ribs of the Ace of Spades, whose insult still rankled in the white man's memory, and again, just before they finished, when he noticed a lot of feminine apparel hanging behind a curtain.

He guessed it to be Celia's, and gathered a big armful of it at random by way of proving to her his thoughtfulness for her comfort. On the spur of the same impulse he swept into a bundle the simple toilet articles spread upon a dressing-table in the same room. They descended to the lower floor, but here Lombo had been before them, and the place was clean of movable objects.

The Bololo headman was in a tempestuous frame of mind as a result of the expedition that had promised so well and resulted so badly. Despite the futility of the defense, eight savages had been killed outright and six more were so severely wounded that the chief ordered them put to death. He had neither the time nor the inclination to bother with injured men, and was only anxious to escape from this unpleasant neighborhood as rapidly as possible. His

temper was not improved by the discovery that a white woman was to be added to the party, whose presence would undoubtedly have a tendency to slow up their progress.

Nevertheless he had by no means lost interest in the tale of the Batateke gold that had so excited his cupidity, and he knew that his best chance of securing the treasure lay in hitching his chariot to the star of these wild adventurers until success crowned their efforts. Then— He privately determined to exact a larger share—quite a bit larger—than had been agreed upon to recompense him for this unexpected setback; meanwhile he craftily hid his disgust from Burk and Smale, and cheerfully told off a couple of men, at the big villain's request, to construct a rough litter of bamboo poles lashed together with rubber vine. Moreover, he displayed exemplary patience while the Irishman, still playing the chivalrous, wasted precious minutes in search before he found a small tent that he intended for Celia's use at night.

So swift had been the attack upon the factory that scarcely an hour had passed from the moment that the Ace of Spades had given the alarm to the instant when Lombo gave the guttural command for his warriors to fall into line. There was just enough light from the eastern sky to guide them on their way through the belt of jungle that interposed itself between the Congo and the grass country beyond. The destination of the party was now the Pallaballa Mountains, which they hoped and expected to reach before M'Buli could summon any adequate assistance to the defense of his gold. The success of the raid depended primarily on the speed with which it could be carried out, and Lombo never lost sight of that fact.

The Bololos traveled as fast as they could without exhausting themselves, proceeding most of the time at a sharp dog trot that almost drew tears of protest from Smale. It was at this stage of the journey that he began to appreciate the Bololo headman at his true physical worth, for the obese savage, forging his way through the bush like a stampeding elephant, set a pace that was hard to follow. Celia, who had been put in the litter, was jounced about until she was nearly breathless and her body was bruised from head to foot by the knobbly poles and tough lashings.

As a result of their speedy travel they had covered more than half the distance to their goal when they halted for the night in a pleasant glade by a running stream. They were temporarily in the heart of a jungle that was watered by a small tributary of the Congo, and the great trees with their far-flung, umbrageous branches were a heaven-sent relief after the oppressive atmosphere of the grass country.

Burk supervised the erection of Celia's tent, while she sat to one side, under guard of a Bololo, and watched the business in a silence born of anger and sheer fatigue. When the shelter was ready she was glad enough to obey Burk's mocking invitation to enter it and make herself at home. Her brain was teeming with questions to which she could find no answer, but she was too weary and sick at heart to press for an interview with her captors.

So far, at least, no attempt had been made to molest her. Her clothes had been given to her, and out of the incongruous assortment of articles that Burk had gathered she contrived to collect a complete costume. She was immensely cheered to find a stout pair of boots and a roomy shooting jacket—bits of apparel that would be invaluable if she managed to effect an escape and was obliged to force her way through trackless brush. She donned them immediately in readiness for any emergency, and she did not forget to slip into one of the side pockets of the jacket the revolver that was her sole protection.

When the evening meal had been prepared a portion of it was brought to her tent by a grinning young Bololo. She viewed it with dark suspicion, but she was ravenous with hunger, and concluded that she might as well risk the chance of being drugged as incur the certainty of fever from lack of food.

Fully two hours passed after she had finished eating while she sat buried in thought. The noises of the camp died away, and she began to contemplate rolling up in the blankets that had been given her and resting herself even if she couldn't get to sleep.

Then the flap of her tent was roughly thrust aside without warning, and Burk strode into the light of her lantern. He stood looking at her in momentary silence, his evil face twisted into a crooked smile that was meant to be propitiatory. In the dim light she could see the smoldering flame of mingled triumph and passion that gleamed in his eyes.

He took off his pith helmet and bowed low.

"At last," he said, softly menacing, "we are alone!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"I'LL CATCH YOU DEVILS!"

HOLDEN and Rushton were momentarily stupefied by the news that the Bololos were marching on the factory. The old trader was stunned by the blow that fate had dealt him, without warning and with no cause. In the earlier days there had been excitement and to spare, but for over a decade his career as a trader had been as peaceful as it was profitable, and apart from its novel setting in the wilds of Africa it hardly differed from that of a merchant in any New England town. Now he found himself drawn into a feud between two native tribes and compelled to match his wits against a pair of the choicest scoundrels in Africa. He was certain that the Bololos by themselves would never have dared to march against a trading factory; they must surely have been led on by the two white men whom he had never met or even seen, but who seemed determined to crush him relentlessly.

Rushton was the first to recover his wits. His only thought was for Celia, and for what might happen when the savages reached the factory. He had no hope of any timely aid from the police, for he had heard that the commandant was away and knew that his subordinates were untrustworthy and inefficient.

"We can't stop here!" he burst out. "We must send a swift runner to the barracks in Mafadi, even if it gains us nothing, and then follow the trail of these devils as fast as possible." He checked himself suddenly, moved to sympathy by the sight of Holden's drawn face, and sought to encourage the trader by hopeful words that in spite of himself rang false. "After all, sir, we don't know definitely that they plan to attack the factory. Even if they do, they will probably content themselves with looting. No doubt Mrs. Holden and Celia will have warning of their coming and escape from the house before it is too late. And the police—"

Holden shook his head sadly and interrupted the young man's well-meant efforts by turning abruptly to M'Buli.

"You will not desert me now, my brother?" he asked in the Batateke tongue.

"Your trouble is my trouble," answered the chief gravely. "My men are your men. Order what you will, they shall obey you."

Holden's eyes filled with tears as he grasped the hand of his friend. It did not occur to him that in this, his hour of adversity, he was reaping the reward of twenty years of fair dealing toward the Batatekes, who had come to respect him as the one white man who had often considered their interests above his own. He had given them good counsel in the management of their affairs; he had come among them with strong and satisfying medicines upon several occasions when disease had laid its dread grip on their villages, and he had frequently shown himself to be a powerful friend at court when the tribal interests clashed with those of the Congo government.

The African native makes few errors of judgment regarding the white men who come to live in his country, and the Batatekes had long since stamped Holden with the hallmark of their approval. Consequently when M'Buli pledged their services to his blood brother it was with the sure knowledge that every man in the party would follow wherever the old trader might lead.

Rushton, torn by terrible misgivings, was in a fury of impatience to be off. He was struck dumb by M'Buli's flat refusal, a moment later, to order his men to march on empty stomachs in the heat of the day,

and it was not until Holden sadly upheld the chief's decision and pointed out the folly of such a course that he was constrained to admit himself in the wrong. He controlled his restless nerves as best he could, but it seemed an eternity to him before a simple meal had been cooked and eaten and the headman decided that the sun was sufficiently low to permit of forced marching.

It was the headman's intention to start at a sharp trot and keep it up all night, or at least as far as the jungle belt, where the moonlight would be unable to penetrate and the darkness would make the way uncertain. Not even torches could be depended upon to keep them on the path, which once lost would mean the wasting of precious time before it was found again.

It spoke well for the clean life the trader had lived that he was able to maintain the pace set by the Batateke warriors, each of whom had been trained since boyhood to run with almost as little effort as he walked. Holden never faltered as mile after mile was left behind.

Rushton, happily for him, had done some cross-country work at college, and the experience now stood him in good stead. Once he had caught his second wind he was able to stride along in good shape until presently his limbs settled automatically to their task and left his mind free to think of other things.

He never forgot that race against time through the endless miles of whispering grass beneath the silver splendor of the moon. The coolness of the night prevented much of the discomfort that would have made the journey well-nigh impossible by day, and Rushton's senses registered the beauty of the scene in spite of the fear that obsessed his conscious thoughts.

Not in his wildest hopes did the young man believe that they would reach the factory in time to be of any assistance to those within its walls. Over and over again, as he ran, he calculated the start that the Bololos had; even if they merely marched all day and rested all night—which was exactly what they had done—they must reach the factory hours ahead of the Batateke warriors.

They were still five miles from their destination when they ran into the shadowy fringe of the jungle, and M'Buli reluctantly called a halt. Big fires were lighted, and the men threw themselves down to get what rest they could before the coming of dawn. Holden and Rushton sat beside each other, the same fallen log supporting their backs, but neither of them was in the mood for conversation.

Very gradually the eastern sky began to pale to a soft gray that slowly turned to pink. The Batatekes needed no rousing, but swiftly fell into line and plunged forward into the depths of the jungle, while behind them the sun came over the horizon a vast ball of crimson fire. It was hard to see the path beneath their feet, and several of them had nasty falls, but the pace never slackened for an instant.

Half a mile remained to be covered when they knew definitely that they were too late. A small clearing in the jungle gave them a glimpse of the sky ahead, and a tall column of smoke, black and oily, told its own story of ruin. The factory was destroyed, and the two white men sickened with fear as they contemplated the possible fate of its occupants. After one despairing glance in which their thoughts were revealed, they dared not meet each other's eyes.

M'Buli shouted to his men for an extra effort. They responded gallantly with an amazing burst of speed, great drops of perspiration beading their bodies and glistening in the first rays of the sun, and they swept at full stride into the compound of the Holden factory.

There they halted in their tracks, spellbound by the scene that met their eyes. In the center of the clearing was a blazing pile that could hardly have been recognized as the remains of a house. At a safe distance from the heat a small knot of Krooboys stood gazing at the conflagration, powerless to check the raging fire. The Batateke warriors, after their first glance, dropped to the ground and stretched their weary limbs, seeing that there was nothing they could do; but Rushton and the trader raced onward, their eyes searching the ground for a glimpse of things they feared to find.

It was Rushton who saw them first—two bodies stretched upon the grass just beyond the radius of the waves of heat. They lay there apparently neglected, although a few of the Krooboys were standing near by regarding them curiously. Fred sprang toward them with a cry, for one of the recumbent forms was that of a woman, and Holden ran close at his heels.

In another moment the trader was upon his knees beside his wife, lifting her head upon his arm and frantically calling her by name.

Rushton, after one look, remained erect and motionless, gripped by an agony of disappointment that left him incapable of speech or action. The other body was that of the Ace of Spades, and in all the expanse of the compound there was no sign of Celia.

Holden uttered a quick ejaculation.

"She's alive!" he cried. "Water, Fred—water!"

Rushton was recalled to mechanical action. He hurried like a man in a dream to a water-butt that had escaped destruction, and returned with a dipperful of the precious fluid. By that time Mrs. Holden had opened her eyes and essayed to speak, but the effort had been too much for her strength and she had relapsed into coma. Holden gathered her into his arms and carried her to the workman's quarters, which had remained uninjured, and laid her upon one of the rough beds. Fred followed him with the dipper, and left him there, patiently laving his wife's temples with water, and oblivious to everything else in the world.

The young man, staggering as he walked, made his way to the nearest group of Krooboys, who stood stupidly watching his approach.

"Missy Celia!" he cried. "Where is she?"

They looked at him and at one another before silently shaking their heads in a sign of ignorance. One pointed doubtfully to the fire, and the others nodded agreement.

Rushton stared at the leaping flames with his senses too mercifully stunned to imagine what the glowing embers might conceal. His brain had ceased to function. He found himself a second later staring down at the prostrate figure of the Ace of Spades. No conscious volition, but only a latent feeling of duty and responsibility, had brought the young manager to the spot where his services were most needed.

The old Krooboy was a gruesome spectacle. The flimsy clothing he habitually wore had been burned away, revealing a body that was cut and stabbed in a dozen places, and a clot of blood on his forehead marked the spot where a bullet had plowed a nasty furrow along his temple. Rushton felt for his heart, and found it still beating, and although his knowledge of anatomy was rather scanty it did not appear to the young American that the native had been injured in any vital spot. If his wounds received prompt attention it seemed probable that the hardy old negro would recover from their effects, and Rushton summoned all his flagging energies to the task before him.

The first thing necessary was to get the Ace out of the growing heat of the sun, and he called to the nearest Krooboys to come and lend a hand. His mind was so clouded by grief and exhaustion that for an instant he did not realize that none of the men moved in response to his summons. He spoke again more sharply, and one of the boys advanced timidly, shaking his head vigorously.

"No touch, massa!" he cried, rolling his eyes fearfully. "No touch! Him juju!"

"Juju?" repeated Rushton vaguely.

His tired faculties were still struggling with the puzzle of why the harmless old Ace of Spades should be juju, when M'Buli came up and saved the situation. What a man doesn't know doesn't hurt him. In placid ignorance of any cause for fear, the chief stooped and caught up the wounded man in his brawny arms and strode off with him to the workmen's quarters. Two negro women who opportunely turned up were set to work to clean and bind his wounds. The old trader was still devoting all his attention to his wife, whose mind during its occasional manifestations of consciousness seemed to be at least temporarily unhinged by the shock of such an experience.

Holden would not leave her, and delegated to his assistant the task of finding out from the Krooboys as much as possible of what had happened. Rushton, with raw and quivering nerves, settled himself to ask question after question as patiently as he could, striving to elaborate their monosyllabic answers into some sequentiality of narrative. Very slowly the story came out. They had fled too far and hidden themselves too deeply in the jungle to be able to give any account of the actual storming of the factory.

They only knew that thousands of yelling devils had burst from the bush and surrounded the house, to which Black Billy and the watchman had fled at the first alarm. There was much firing and shouting after that, and presently a glow of red through the trees signified that the house was on fire. Then the tumult died away, and a few of the bolder spirits among the Krooboys ventured to the edge of the jungle and peered through the bushes that fringed the compound.

These distinguished heroes, thrust forward by their mates, described to Fred, with a wealth of detail, how a big juju-man had appeared in the smoke and flame that rolled from an upper window, and they added a lively account of how he had spread an enormous pair of wings and flown to the ground, with Mrs. Holden under one arm and the Ace of Spades under the other. Rushton did not stop to dispute the likelihood of the picturesque details, but he noted in passing that this explained the reluctance of the boys to help him with the wounded man; if either a real or visionary witch doctor had been seen to touch him, the superstitious blacks would thereafter keep well away.

"And Missy Celia?" he asked again.

Not one of them could be found who had either seen the girl or knew what had befallen her, and Rushton turned away in misery.

M'Buli had been prowling around near the burning ruins and had joined Rushton in time to hear the last of the inquisition. His quick eyes and alert understanding gathered as much from the Krooboys' faces as Fred did from their clumsy English, and when the young man left them the chief seized him by the arm and led him toward the fire. In a moment he stopped and pointed to something that lay gleaming on the trampled ground.

Fred stooped and picked it up, at which M'Buli looked as scared as his dignity would allow him. He backed away uncomfortably as the American turned the object about in his palm. It was the claw of a leopard, circled at its base by a heavy band of gold that was delicately graven with characters and figures that were meaningless to the eyes of a white man.

"Who does this belong to?" he asked.

"Ngo!" answered M'Buli, in an awe-struck voice.

The word simply meant leopard, and Fred was quite well aware that it had once belonged to a leopard. He repeated his question patiently, hoping that the ownership of the token might cast some light on the uncertain details of the attack.

"C'Wayo ngo!" explained M'Buli.

C'Wayo, the Leopard. The name was familiar to Rushton, though it was some moments before he could remember in what connection he had heard it. Then he recalled a story of Celia's that she had once told him about saving a native from a terrible thrashing at the hands of the Congo police—"a crazy old witch doctor," she had laughingly described him—and she had given the man's name as C'Wayo. He further recollected that the day before they had received news of the Bololo plans by a messenger who, according to M'Buli, had come from C'Wayo.

Then it must have been this mysterious juju-man who had rescued Mrs. Holden and the Ace of Spades from the burning building. What was he doing there, and where was he now?

He put these questions to the chief, who only replied with a shake of his head. Rushton's feeling of despair grew deeper. If C'Wayo had saved two lives from the fire he would probably have saved Celia—unless she were already dead.

M'Buli gave a sigh of relief as the young man thrust the talisman into his pocket. The chief had a new idea that he wished to carry out, and again he beckoned to the

American to follow him as he led the way to the edge of the compound and struck off into the trail that the Bololos had taken after completing their fiendish work. Completely exhausted and hardly conscious of his movements, Fred stumbled along behind the big Batateke.

M'Buli went very slowly, scrutinizing every foot of the path as he progressed. He appeared to be looking for something, or else he was trying to glean information from the jumbled tracks left by a large body of men. They covered nearly quarter of a mile in this tedious fashion before the headman finally gave a grunt of satisfaction. His sharp eye had noticed a glittering object that was almost buried in the mud of the trail, and snatching it up with a triumphant flourish he turned and thrust it into Rushton's palm.

Fred found himself staring at a small silver brooch that he recognized as Celia's. How had it come here? Had one of the thieves dropped it from his share of the loot—or—or—

He hardly dared to breathe the alternative as a wild hope shot through his brain. It took every ounce of his courage to whisper a question to M'Buli.

"Has—has Missy Celia gone this way?" He illustrated his meaning with signs, and the Batateke nodded a prompt affirmative. Rushton's heart jumped at the suggestion that she was still alive, but a new doubt assailed him almost instantly. He pointed to the confused tracks at their feet and shook his head, trying to indicate by gestures that none of the footprints were those of a woman.

M'Buli caught the idea, and his face broke into a proud and cheerful grin because his limited English vocabulary chanced to contain the one needed word.

"Litter!" he exclaimed.

New life seemed to rush through the young man's veins at the magic words. Celia alive! Wounded, perhaps; in the hands of merciless savages, certainly; but still alive! He drew a long breath that was like a sob.

Swift anger followed upon the heels of relief. Rage possessed his very soul at the thought of his beloved held captive by these murdering brutes, and he shook his fists violently in the direction that they had gone.

"By Heaven," he shouted, "I'll catch you devils if the trail leads clear to hell!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

IN MONTEREY

IN Monterey—with vocal gold
The phrase allures, from years away
A splendid pageant is unrolled
In Monterey.
Dim aisles where Spanish padres pray,
While silver mission bells are tolled,
Across the fair primeval day.

There flaunts a caballero bold,
With señorita careless, gay—
Whose love is now a century cold
In Monterey.

Thomas J. Murray.

Don Luis Disposes

by Charles B. Stilson

"MIGUEL, it was fifteen years ago that I last killed a man."

Concealed in the deep shadow beside a window of his library, which overlooked the inner court of his home, Don Luis Oliban spoke guardedly; but there was a thrill of pleasurable anticipation in his tones. His slender fingers caressingly gripped and patted his revolver, a small-calibered weapon, deadly long in the barrel.

Don Luis had read all the books in his library; and he had seen a great deal of the life outside their covers, too. Now he was growing old and rather tired of it all. But the killing of a man; that was different —not a novelty to Don Luis, to be sure, yet a proceeding that had not become hackneyed by use.

"Fifteen years, Miguel."

Out of the darker shadow at Don Luis's elbow a voice more low than his responded: "Yes, master."

Two sides of the house and court below the windows were bordered by a band of shadow, where objects were vaguely defined, and shrubs and bushes took on the outlines of caped and whispering conspirators, and hanging vines rustled like the passing to and fro of mysterious silken skirts. Beyond that black ribbon, so contrasted with it as to appear fantastic and unreal, the remainder of the court and its contiguous gardens lay in the glow of moonlight so brilliant and yet so softly diffused, that the scene seemed to quiver and shimmer in a bath of falling luminous particles finer than mist.

In the center of the court a jetting fountain softly sprayed a circlet of orange trees, whose fruit hung in golden red spheres among clusters of waxen bloom. Near them a sentinel giant with folded arms, an organ-cactus reared its fluted columns, swathed in a cobweb mantle of tillandsia that glistened with the white of old men's beards.

Scattered about the brick pavement tubs and boxes furnished root space for a pageant of glossy-leaved agaves, showy-blossomed bromelias, acacias, and miniature mimosas. Climbing cambretum trailed its flaming spires from the pillars of the curtained veranda that edged the *patio*. Cereus flowers starred the fountain bank among the larger constellations of white convolvuli. From the dusky jungle of the farther gardens drifted the perfume of the tabernamon.

So strong was the mellow light that the interstices of the pavement might have been ink lines on a yellow page, the lime-washed wall of the house an edifice of marble inlaid with squares of sable slate, where paneless windows were pierced, each protected by its *reja* of vertical iron bars.

Near the angle of the wing a ladder stood in spidery silhouette; and at its top the figure of a man looked from a distance to be a fancy cut from black cloth and pasted beside a window. The tinkling cadences

of a cautiously strummed mandolin blended intermittently with the plash of falling drops in the fountain pool.

"A pretty sight, is it not?" Irony edged Don Luis's voice.

"Yes, master," said Miguel.

It was the sight which, when he had come from his bed to find a volume to relieve the tedium of sleeplessness, had caused Don Luis to refrain from making a light, and had sent him groping along the top of a bookcase for the leather-bound box which contained his twin, long-barreled revolvers.

The man on the ladder was a burglar—not of gems or plate or currency, of which he might have found a plenty in this house—but of hearts. He was a serenader.

His outline, sharp against the gleaming wall, made a target that only a bungling marksman would miss. Don Luis, whatever his other mistakes had been, was in that respect no bungler. He would not miss. But he hesitated. There was plenty of time. It was the hesitancy of the crouched tiger enjoying the prospect of its prey—an old, experienced, and very sure tiger.

At his elbow the servant waited, silent, respectful, stolid—he was an Indian. Possibly his interest and sympathy were with the musician on the ladder; but his loyalty belonged to his master.

"A knife thrust would be more quiet, master," he suggested; "a knife thrust in the dark. I—"

"No, no, Miguel. One attends to these family affairs oneself—or did. Perhaps times have changed; but *I* have not."

"No, master."

"To-morrow I will send packing the old woman whom I have paid to watch the Doña Isolina—Conchita is her name, is it not?"

"Yes, master—Conchita."

Don Luis looked out across the court. He saw it with the eyes of a connoisseur, eyes which had seen much of both beauty and ugliness.

"By the mother of God! It *is* a pretty scene," he swore, partly to himself. "Nowhere but in Mexico could it be equaled, nowhere in the world. Spain, the mother, has the passion, but is surpassed in the setting by Mexico, the daughter."

He fell to musing. He, too, had known his moonlit nights. The finger which was crooked around the trigger of the revolver had picked the strings of mandolins in perfumed gardens where bright eyes flashed in the dusk behind *reja* bars, and soft, girlish laughter had been sweeter than the strains of his music.

But all that was done with these many years. His son, had he been blessed with one, would be of an age for such matters now. His son! *Caramba!* Why had he not had a son? Why had Doña Mercedes died and left him no prop for his house? True, he might have remarried and sought to remedy the lack; but he never had cared to replace her. Oh, there had been "affairs"—what would one of a man left wifeless in his prime? But they—what the devil! What had set spark to this train of thoughts, anyway? Some word of Miguel's, was it not? But what was it? The reflections which it had aroused were persistent. A son! In the darkness the stern old lips softened and with reverence pronounced the magic words, "*Hijo mío.*"

"What do you say, master?"

Don Luis started.

"Miguel!" He spoke with sudden animation.

"Yes, master?"

"Miguel, go and awaken Jorge. Take a blanket, the two of you, and go to the foot of the ladder, among the bushes. No noise, mind; you know the trick. Raise a hand when you are ready, so that I may know. The game will fall in your net. Bring it to me here."

"Yes, master."

No sound or motion was apparent in the darkness beside him; but Don Luis sensed the withdrawal of a presence. The Indian was gone.

Again the master dreamed, his thoughts unrolling themselves in an endless painted picture.

He was old and lonely. The girl yonder—she was beautiful and very dear—like a fine vase. But one did not make a comrade of a daughter. One petted her, but did not confide in her, not if one were wise. She could promote no ambition. It was a son that a man needed.

Yes, he had been young, and a fire-eater, by all accounts. He had seen, and helped in the making, a deal of the history that was in the volumes on his shelves. He had been one of the "notables" of this most unhappy country, where trouble had been recurrent as the annual rains, and wars had blown like winds. From the days of Iturbide—nay, from Montezuma's time—down to Obregon, like a mad horse, men had ridden it only to their death.

Only one had sat the saddle successfully: Diaz, that stern half-Indian dictator. In his youth Don Luis had fought *insurrectos* under the strong old eagle, had been one of his favorites. So he had prospered.

Don Luis, too, was strong. Madero had distrusted him, and so had Huerta and Carranza. It spoke something for his strength that he had not fled; that in a land where distrust is closely akin to death, he still lived on. Danger, the thought of death, had never greatly moved him.

With Obregon he might have some influence; but he was too old and tired to care to use it. His possessions were large, his ambitions dead. If he had a son now it would be a different story—a son like the lad yonder on the wall, whom presently he was going to shoot.

Hark! The mandolin was playing an old, old tune. Don Luis knew its words:

> Queen of my heart,
> How your eyes,
> Like the stars
> In the skies,
> Gleam above me!

At the foot of the ladder a phantom hand waved thrice against the whiteness of the wall. Don Luis raised his revolver.

> Queen of my heart,
> Will your voice,
> Like the birds
> In the trees,
> Sing you love me?

From the darkness of the shaded wall a jet of flame sprang tonguelike toward the moonlight. Scarcely louder than a bullwhip's crack the report of the revolver spat across the courtyard.

Don Luis was a superexcellent shot.

At the summit of his frail stilted stage the silhouetted figure of the serenader started, staggered, toppled backward, and fell. A woman shrieked; two white arms were thrust for an instant from the bars of the *reja*. Something thrashed and muttered in the shrubbery at the foot of the ladder. A bird screamed and flapped over the wall. The fountain played its twinkling melody, and a thousand insects in the fragrant *patio* answered it.

With a steady hand Don Luis turned on the lights. He thrust the revolver into the pocket of his dressing gown, lighted a cigar, and waited.

Feet shuffled along the corridor, the library door was opened and closed; Don Luis and his unbidden guest were face to face.

One was a tall, gray, sallow, weary old man, most of his enthusiasms long ago burned out, but showing the marks of the tiger still in the fiery eyes under his bushy brows, and the deep parenthetic lines which inclosed his straight mouth and cropped mustache. A sleek tiger, too, for all his gauntness, his person as well kept and cared for as that of any *caballero* who swaggered in the *Alamedo*.

On the other hand was youth, active, well-knit, abounding youth, full of leaping blood and turbulent spirits, graceful as a leopard, royal as a king. He walked between the servants indifferently as if they had not been. The eyes, which were level with Don Luis's, burned with a warmer fire. The Indians had knotted his elbows at his back with cord, a useless precaution, for one of his arms was useless. In bonds, he did not shrink or cower, though there was a widening crimson stain on the white shirt inside his velvet jacket, and the pain of cord and wound had dampened his forehead and laid a haze of pallor on his brown cheeks.

There was a splendid insolence in the manner in which he stared about him, seeing everything and ignoring every one.

All this Don Luis saw and approved. It was as he himself would have done. He stepped quickly forward.

"Jorge, remove the rope. A glass of Xeres from the cabinet, Miguel."

Beside the cord Jorge laid upon the table

a wide hat of the finest Guayaquil grass and a broken mandolin.

Don Luis took the silver tray from Miguel and proffered it with a ceremonious bow.

"Doubtless the young *señor* is fatigued; and singing makes the throat dry."

Fiery eyes met eyes of fire, the ones curiously, the others faintly amused. Neither faltered. The stranger's bow was as low as his host's. He lifted the slender goblet and drank the wine with deliberate appreciation of its flavor.

"Many thanks, *señor;* it is excellent wine."

There was no trembling of the hand that returned the goblet to the salver, no abashment in the bold black eyes. He stood at ease, awaiting what might happen.

"Lock the door, Jorge." Don Luis's ears had caught the sound of swift, light feet in the corridor.

Scarcely was the key turned when the knob was shaken, small fists beat upon the panels, and a voice of tears and terror cried:

"Father! Father! Open the door! What are you doing to Esteban? Have you killed him? For the love of the Holy Virgin, open the door to me, father!" The beating continued without cease.

At sound of that voice, indifference left the stranger. He turned swiftly toward the door.

"Wait, *señor!*" Don Luis called softly, and in a louder voice: "Doña Isolina, return to your room!"

Jorge stood against the door, his drawn knife at his hip. Miguel moved forward to join him.

The young man looked at them contemptuously, then down at his own dangling left arm. He slightly shrugged his uninjured shoulder.

"I am here, *querida mía,*" he called. "I am unharmed."

"Thanks be to the most pure Virgin! *Ah-h!*" A weight slid down the door panels to the floor.

"She has fainted!" exclaimed the stranger, speaking to no one in particular.

"It is well," echoed Don Luis. "Now we can talk. I think, under the circumstances, you cannot find a few questions discourteous."

With magnificent scorn the stranger turned and faced him.

"But will you not sit, *señor?*" Don Luis waved a hand toward a deep leather chair. "You are wounded—through the left shoulder, I believe. Allow me." He bent forward and probed delicately with a long finger. "Yes, the bullet has cut the seam of your jacket, as I intended. See; the cloth is scarcely injured." The tiger was playing. "Be seated, *señor.*"

"Many thanks, *señor.* I prefer to stand."

"As you will. Who are you, *señor?*"

"Esteban de Corcuvion." Had it been Alvarado or Sandoval, the name could not have been more proudly announced.

"It is an old name, *señor,* the name of an old town—in Spain. There are many castles in Spain, *señor.*"

"It is the name my mother gave me, *señor.*"

"It is unfamiliar to me. Your family?"

"I am a man of the people."

"Presumptuous!"

"May not a man rise, *señor?*"

A true thrust, whether he knew it or not. Luis Oliban had risen far before he had prefixed "*Don*" to his name. Nor had he forgotten.

"Well, then, *what* are you?"

"A colonel in the army of the republic."

"Ah!" It had been Don Luis's rank under the dictator—and he had been older than this man when he had earned it.

"Field service, or—" All of Don Luis's contempt for honorary titles was in the uncompleted question.

"Field—the cavalry, *señor*—breveted at Jalapa."

"Colonel de Corcuvion, I salute you."

Don Luis's attitude was even more ceremonious than before, with the difference that now it was not assumed.

"Master, I found this." It was Miguel interrupting. He came from the door and placed in Don Luis's hands a section of iron bar from a *reja.* It had been sawed and broken at each end.

"*So-o*—an elopement!" Don Luis turned the bit of iron in his fingers. His shaggy brows lifted and lowered.

"Your purpose, *señor?*" His voice had lost its velvet, and was quick and sharp.

One hand crept to the sagging pocket of his dressing gown. The two Indians stiffened, with glittering eyes.

" We were to have been married by Padre Felipe at the Convent of San Sebastian."

Once more the burning eyes plumbed each other's depths. Truth was in the ones, in the others, death.

Don Luis's were first to be turned aside. His gaze wandered to the portrait of a beautiful woman which hung above one of the bookcases, and he became very thoughtful.

Miguel and Jorge relaxed and stared at each other. They had deemed the young *caballero* just one short step from heaven.

The prisoner extracted paper and tobacco from his sash. With his teeth and his right hand he cleverly filled and rolled a cigarette. Abstracted as he was, Don Luis noticed, and was quick to strike and hold a match. Esteban bent and drew the smoke deep into his lungs.

" Pardon, *señor*—the match burns your fingers."

" Many thanks. So it does." Don Luis dropped it, and continued to think. In the last few minutes he had experienced a number of astonishing transitions of feeling. Now his mind reverted to the reflections which had preceded his shot from the window.

Mother of God! To have had a son like this! *Diabolo!*

Somewhere between the two oaths, as far apart as heaven and hell, he found his decision.

He lowered his gaze. One might have fancied a twinkle in his hot old eyes; but his voice was chill and judicial.

" Colonel de Corcuvion, you have entered my home. I can shoot you dead, and none would dare to cavil. You know that."

Esteban looked into the gray old tiger face and bowed assent. In Mexico, as in few countries outside the Orient, a man's house is peculiarly his castle, and its inviolability is sacred.

" So it is not from fear—not because you are one of Obregon's colonels—that I offer you one means of escape. You will not be married by Padre Felipe of the Convent of San Sebastian—"

" Señor Oliban," interrupted Esteban with a hasty motion of his hand, " I bargain for my freedom with no man! Give me that other revolver that I see there on the table, and we will settle this matter. That is the only price."

" What! You young fire-eater! You would shoot your to-be father-in-law?"

" Ah!" Esteban advanced a quick pace. The fire in his eyes gave place to his soul.

Don Luis chuckled.

" I repeat: you will not be married by Padre Felipe of the Convent of San Sebastian. Do not interrupt—Miguel, open the door. I believe the Doña Isolina has recovered from her faint, and I fear that her back is weary with holding her ear to the keyhole. Jorge, go you to the Convent of Santa Maria in the Calle de las Esmeraldas, and fetch hither my own good confessor, Padre Antonio. Say to him that it is a matter of two souls to be saved."

" Esteban!"

" Isolina!"

The library door had opened to admit not one woman only, but two. One was young and slender, and of a beauty which her recent tears had but enhanced. She crossed the room like a breeze to the shelter of Colonel Esteban's one serviceable arm. The other was many years older, buxom, but not uncomely. She advanced toward Don Luis, holding her arms aloft.

" Luis Oliban, what would you do?"

Her high-pitched voice had tragedy in it. When he heard it Esteban started violently, stared and cried:

" Mother! So this is where you have been hiding? Why did you leave the little home at Toluca? I have searched for you everywhere."

" I did not want to stand in your way, Esteban. Your grand friends would sneer at the poor, ignorant old woman, and it would harm you."

" Harm them, you mean, mother, if I should catch them at it! But it is not true, I shall not lose you again."

Don Luis had listened attentively, his grizzled brows drawn together.

" So this is your mother, eh? Well, it does not matter."

" But it *does* matter, Luis Oliban! Este-

ban, I am going to bring great trouble to you, *querido! Ay de mi hijo!*"

"What do you mean?" Three voices asked the question. The answer was to Don Luis:

"I am his mother, *señor;* but *you* are his father!"

They stared at her as at something crazed. Esteban groaned, and held the weeping Isolina closer. Don Luis seemed to be stunned. He lifted a hand and inspected it. It was shaking as if with chill.

"You do not remember Conchita, do you, Luis Oliban? Little Conchita, of the olive orchards of Tamaulipas? Ah, well, the years have been long, and I have grown old and withered." She had not. "I do not blame you for forgetting."

But Don Luis had not forgotten; at least, he was remembering. He looked at her for a time, with his gray head held on one side, and a very peculiar expression overspread his wrinkled face. One would have said that he had bitten a pickle and found honey in it.

Down came his hand on his thigh.

"Conchita! By the Mother of God! It *is* Conchita! Little Conchita, over whom I once fought a *duello* with General Armuro wherefore my left leg still gives me pain in the rainy seasons. But you say—" He glanced sidewise toward Esteban.

"He is your son; I was always true to you, Luis."

"The devil you were!" Don Luis started to say; but he stifled the words in his throat; for he was beginning to see that this fidelity was not a thing to be sneezed at.

Mother of God! Yonder was his son—his *son!* There was not a doubt in his mind. Had he prayed to God and God granted the prayer, it would have been a son like this that stood before him. "*Hijo mío.*" In a faltering whisper, infinitely tender, his lips pronounced the words. Well, then, it was not a matter for tears. Come, come! But his eyes were moist and his voice was husky as he said aloud:

"So this is my son?"

"*Our* son, Luis. Is he not a marvel?"

Ay, this was his son's mother—the mother of this wonderful son!

"*Carai!* How the world is small! And you are Conchita!" He looked at her critically. "And to think that you have been in my house!" His glance became approving, his old neck arched, and he strutted toward her like a turkey-cock. Twenty years had rolled off his shoulders.

A blush burned on Conchita's plump cheeks, and her eyes sparkled; but she shrank away from him. "Unnatural!" she muttered.

"Well, why are you three pulling such devilish long faces?" demanded Don Luis, edging closer.

"Mother, we must leave this house at once!" said Esteban. "Good-by, my—sister." Unwillingly he began to unwind his arm from about Isolina, who only clung to him the tighter.

At last Don Luis saw the truth; but his reception of it made them think that it had driven him mad.

"*Ho! Ho! Ho!*" he roared, and "*Ha! Ha! Ha!*" and brought on a fit of coughing that nearly strangled him. "Why, you poor fools, the Doña Isolina is not my own daughter No, she is the daughter of that same General Armuro, my good old comrade with whom I fought the *duello*—intrusted to me in her babyhood, when misfortune and death overtook him. Now, will that shorten your faces?"

It seemed that it would—two of them, at least.

But Esteban stood straight and pale, and spoke above Isolina's head that was nestled against his jacket:

"Nevertheless, *señor,* my father, my mother, and I will go away at once. I cannot marry the Doña Isolina—"

"Be quiet, my son," interrupted Don Luis with a strange smile; and he approached and laid a hand on Esteban's shoulder. "There is enough of misery, God knows, in the world, *mío hijo,* without adding to it. It seems that a little disposition which I shall make may vastly alter the face of this matter. Padre Antonio shall perform two wedding ceremonies—and age shall be served before beauty."

Don Luis turned and bent ceremoniously, and gallantly bestowed a kiss upon Conchita's shapely hand.

The Gun-Fanner

by Kenneth Perkins

Part III

Author of "The Fear-Sway," "The Blood-Call," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

NAN'S FIRST MEETING WITH THE GUNMAN.

IT was a scene of dramatic contrasts that met Nan's gaze as she peered through the window of the thick adobe wall. The horseman loomed like a huge dilated shadow in the deep dusk, and before him the hunched old Mexican crawled like a black toad.

It was obvious to Nan that the little old man could make no stand against the visitor even if he had the will and the bravery to do it. One crooked old knee was shaking violently—so violently that Nan herself could see how pitiful a protector old Miguel was. She heard a choking ridiculous call come from the Mexican's throat, and she saw Cal Triggers's answer by riding directly toward him.

Miguel, having obviously lost his voice, lifted his shotgun. He pointed the shaking stub of the barrel in the general direction of Cal's head, and contrary to his mistress's orders, fired.

Nan could see the gun flash and the little hunched figure turning panic-stricken on his heels. Cal Triggers, unhurt, leaped from his horse with a laugh and rushed into the vine-covered empedrado after the old man.

Nan's resolve to receive the gunfighter as a guest vanished precipitously into thin air. She dashed to the door and leaned her frail body against it, feeling excitedly of the lock to assure herself that it had been turned.

"Now you got sense, Miss Nan!" the old woman croaked.

"What sense is there to this?" Nan replied. "He can come in a dozen different ways."

"But have no fear now. I am ready for him!" was the old woman's answer. "If he breaks in *I* will welcome him."

The woman heard Cal's footsteps clanking up the veranda, and old Mrs. Tobin faltered. Nothing she realized could be more terrifying than to wait for a man to break into a door. "Then talk to him, miss," she said, her toneless voice rising to the first pitch of excitement to which the woman had ever given vent. "Talk to him. It is better than fighting him. I will hide here underneath the staircase, and if he touches you I will fire!"

"No! No! You must not—"

But Nan's cry of objection was broken off precipitously by a sound she had not

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bargained for. In the room directly above the hall, where Nan and the old woman were waiting, there was the unmistakable sound of heavy footsteps.

When Cal Triggers had dismounted and chased old Miguel into the sanctuary of one of the barns, he returned to the house. Now that he knew that an attempt had been made to bar him at the point of a gun, he resolved to enter the house without announcing himself. The front door, he noted, was shut, and without a doubt locked. The windows of the first story were—after the manner of all windows of the old Spanish ranchos—barred with a filigree of iron.

Accordingly, without further ado, Triggers swung himself up on the trellis of the empedrado and ran across the old frame to a balcony on the side of the house. Here, without a moment's thought, he leaped into the open pitch-dark window. At first he was blinded, groping across the floor, passing old oaken chairs, a bed and then a door where his eyes dilated to the pale lamplight which came up from the staircase. He crossed the hall and, jumping down to the first landing of the staircase at a single bound, found himself looking into the candle-lit sala where Nan Harvess was waiting and, apparently, alone. Tobin, the ranch woman, hidden in the darkness underneath the staircase, saw Nan standing for the first time face to face with the huge gunfighter.

As Cal Triggers looked down to the floor and saw Nan in the soft beams of candle light, she seemed like a little child. Her face upturned to him was touched with wonder—not fear. As he saw the brown eyes, the pale cheeks and the half parted beautiful lips, Cal, suddenly stripped of all his audacity, said the very thing which there seemed no necessity of his saying: "Look here, little pal, don't you be afraid of me."

The look of wonder which had lit Nan's face had a very definite cause. It was not that she had been taken by surprise at this gunfighter's actually breaking into her house. It was the wonder at the terrific power of the picture he created. Triggers had emerged from the darkness of the veranda like a giant image coming out of granite and taking on life. She broke into a soft laugh which gave her her own voice and completely frustrated the visitor.

"So you are a bandit," she said, "breaking into my ranch and frightening my servants?"

"No, I am not! You must not be afraid. I am not a bandit, and I will not harm you."

Nan Harvess answered this again with a laugh.

Cal, realizing that he had little time to lose, ran down the remaining steps, went to her and asked quietly: "Just why do you laugh when a man comes to your ranch with the intention of—not of harming you, no—but of kidnaping you?"

The girl paled slightly, realizing that any moment the ranch hand would come to her assistance with a murderous cold-blooded finality. Nan's fear was transferred miraculously. It was not, as she had expected, a fear for her own safety, but for the safety of the brigand who was about to abduct her. She found herself in a situation more complex than she had bargained for. She was afraid of Cal Triggers touching her—not because she would recoil at the feel of his hand, but because she might see him killed before her eyes.

Bewildered at her own emotions, she fell back, partly to kill time, to the simple and easy defense of flattery. "I did not think you were handsome when you were out there on the field this afternoon." She blushed at the rawness of her words.

"That's a good way to save yourself—flatter me."

"I don't mean your face—that might be flattery. It's your figure—as you appeared up there suddenly out of the pitch dark. But don't come too close."

"Why not? You know why I came. You get on a horse and follow me to the mountains, and I'll not so much as touch you with the tip of my fingers. Otherwise I—"

"Perhaps you don't know"—the girl interrupted, eager to prevent his threat—"that there are horsemen all over the plains riding here. You yourself must have seen how they deployed—some to the north

of the ranch, some to the south. You are surrounded."

"Then I'll come to the point without any more hedging. I've come to claim you. I fought for you and I won you—you are mine. You are going away with me—and I'll let you understand first that as long as you are with me you will be safe—safe from the dangers of the desert where we're going—safe from desperadoes or Indians or Mexes; and remember this, too: you are safe from me!"

"You mean you are going to take me—into the desert!" Nan cried, no longer able to mask her fear.

"Exactly. When we pass through the desert and reach Mesquite we'll hunt up a sky-pilot and get married."

"You mean you think you can take me into a town like Mesquite and force me to marry you? What sort of a minister do you think will marry a man to a woman against her will?"

"If we can't find a sky-pilot, we'll have a Hopi wedding out there in the desert—take your choice!"

Triggers reached out for the girl's hand, and Nan, knowing that by this very move he was inviting his own death, screamed: "Don't touch me—or you'll—"

She threw herself in between Cal and the woman who was hiding with drawn gun beneath the staircase. "Tobin, give me that gun!" she sobbed convulsively. "If you hide there another minute ready to kill him I will go mad!"

Nan took the gun from the old woman who fled terrified into the rear of the house.

"Now, then," the girl said, "perhaps you will not try to touch my hand again."

Cal Triggers looked down, and a sight met his gaze which thrilled him as he had never been thrilled before. It was a frail, perfect hand that he saw, its pale, soft color touched brilliantly by a ring with Spanish topaz. The slender wrist was tipped upward—the tapering fingers and the soft palm clasped about the ugly black gunmetal. Cal noticed that the barrel was pointed at his heart.

The picture of that hand holding his death thrilled him to a curious laugh of joy. He reached forward with his arm and held hers, and while the gun was aimed directly at his heart, he bent down and kissed her hand over and over again.

The gun fell clattering to the floor, and Nan, her face blanched, her lips trembling, stumbled backward out of the man's reach. "Please go! I beg you!" she cried with a soft desperation. "They will kill you—when they come—they are surrounding the ranch!"

"Yes, I must remember that," Cal said. "But you see how willing I am to die."

"Yes, yes, I know! You needn't prove that—"

"And since I see that you don't want me to die, my mind is made up. You are going with me—down there to the desert."

"You are not afraid of this terrible thing—this abduction—when the whole country will be after you!"

"My mind is made up."

CHAPTER XV.

THE OLD CALICO'S LAST TRICK.

NOW that Nan had simplified her position by getting old Mrs. Tobin and her gun out of the way, she felt considerably cooler. She found that she could think more clearly even though she now stood before Triggers helpless and unarmed. She answered Triggers's decision with a new composure:

"Before you start in to fulfill your threat of abduction," she said coolly, "stop and think what you are doing. The whole of Red Town is out gunning for you. All they want is a chance to say that you have attacked a woman so that they can lynch you. If you think I'm afraid of you, you are wrong. And if you think I was flattering you a moment ago, you are wrong. I was not flattering. I found out when I saw you that I do not hate you—and that I never will hate you. I know now that I never can, because I want you to escape from death. I'm begging you to mount your horse and escape before you're caught!"

"Whether you hate me or not makes no difference. A man would be a fool to come riding into Red Town as I came and ex-

pect any girl he sees to fall for him. You don't have to love me. I have done nothing that will make you love me. But from now on I will fight for your love. Up until now all I have fought for is the word you gave that the best man at the rodeo would win you."

The girl covered her ears with her hands. "Don't talk of that!" she cried desperately. "I gave my word—and I am going to stick to it. But I can't ride away like this to the desert with a man the world has branded as a gunfighter. I can't bear the thought of it! All I can think of now is that they're coming to kill you. Mount your horse and go away from here. I beg you!"

"I am not afraid of them and I won't give in to them. You are mine, and I'm going to take you!" Triggers cried. He stepped to the girl, and before she had time to lift a hand against him, he had taken her in his arms. He held her up and she began to tussle. To Triggers it seemed as if he had caught a bird in his hands, and the girl's tussling was like the fluttering of wings. And with the same carefulness with which a man holds a bird which he fears he will crush Triggers carried Nan to the patio.

Nan's muffled scream brought the ranch woman Tobin waddling out into the yard, and, from the direction of the bunk shed, came little Miguel.

Both of the servants approached to within ten feet and then stood frozen. The woman gathered enough nerve to speak: "Don't be afraid, miss!" she cried hoarsely. "The sheriff and the chief are acrost the hoss corral, and I seen Saul Meakin ridin' up into the dry wash in the gulch. And there's the foreman and a bunch of other horsemen scattered all around the place and closing in."

"Let me down!" the girl cried. "There's still a chance for you to hide, and I'll say I sent you away, and that you did not touch me!"

"That chance is no good to me," Triggers replied exuberantly. "If I took it I would lose you!" He put the girl on her feet, still holding her hand, and then turned to Miguel, who, except for a quaking of the knees, was standing petrified midway between the bunk house and the horse barn.

A few horses were tethered near by. "Now, then, mozo," Triggers ordered, "you saddle two of these broncs good and pronto or I'll break your neck."

Old Miguel obeyed, hobbling over to the saddle bows, where saddles, blankets, and bridles were hung. He hurried to the watering trough where he untethered a pinto and roan saddle horse.

Triggers turned to Tobin. "As for you, lady," he said, "you get that calico pony of mine that's standing over there by the emparrado looking at me. And be quick. I don't want you to get mixed up in this gunfight—you being a lady."

Tobin, her little wizened body shaking with a chill, obeyed, mumbling, "You got us under your thumb now, but wait until the chief and Pickering step in!" This imprecation she uttered mainly to herself as she stumbled across the yard to Triggers's horse.

Before she returned Triggers took a sharp look in every direction of the ranch. The corner of the yard where he was standing was sheltered by the surrounding chuck houses, barns, and sheds. But beyond them he could catch glimpses of the sheriff's posse. Although Pickering had surrounded the ranch with only eight horsemen, Cal saw that every exit was guarded. He had heard something about a dry creek bed on the southwestern side where the ranch hand had said Saul Meakin was seen riding. Beyond this creek bed, and the barranca through which it ran, the hills mounted up step by step to the mountains. A creek bed, Cal thought, was a good place to defend himself from a big body of pursuers, because it afforded protection from onslaught on the sides.

The ranch woman returned with his horse, and Miguel led his two saddle ponies into the open. Cal examined the cinches of the two mounts and then turned to Miguel and the ranch woman.

"There's likely to be a little gun-shooting going on here any minute," he said, "and I don't want innocent bystanders like you to get bumped off. I also have a particularly tender spot in my heart for my

old calico bronc here. He's winded after the long day's riding I've given him, and he's no use for the journey we're going to take. Now you two people, if you value your hides, will mount this horse of mine and shag out for the county road as fast as you can, where the sheriff will give you protection."

"Why should we both mount that critter?" Mrs. Tobin asked petulantly. "My laigs is good enough."

"You let me run, señor, and watch me run," Miguel added. "I can beat that cayuse—if you give me the word."

"Get up there, you little seedwart!" Cal cried. "Do you think I'll argue with a Mex when I've got a posse ready to bang my head off?"

Miguel obeyed without a further word, helping the little ranch woman up to the saddle and scrambling up behind her.

"Now ride," Cal commanded, giving his old calico a whack with his hand. "And keep on riding until you cross the road—unless you want some lead between your shoulder blades."

The horse jogged off, passing the chuck house, and then the calf sheds, and breaking into a canter as it crossed the alfalfa field. When it was out in the open starlight, Triggers knew it was time for him to make his own break for the open.

CHAPTER XVI.

TRIGGERS CLAIMS THE PRIZE.

PICKERING had timed his men so that they would make their attack on the ranch at the same moment. When the fifteen minutes allotted them had elapsed, the sheriff and Scrub Hazen drove their mounts down through the mesquite which bordered the ranch on all sides. When they reached the first shack—the bunk house occupied by the Chinese cook—they came within sight of one of the horsemen they had posted on their left. On their right Saul Meakin had also advanced and was within sight. Presumably the ring had closed so effectually that every man was within sight of the horseman on either side of him. There was no possibility of Cal Triggers breaking this guard without riding through the fire of at least one man.

And all this time the sheriff—as well as his deputies—looked eagerly into the dim starlight for a sight of a horseman. As Pickering had pointed out to them, Cal Triggers would most certainly try to break through, and judging from his reputation, he was reckless enough to try and take the girl with him.

It was with this understanding of the facts that the sheriff, Scrub Hazen and Saul Meakin saw a calico horse, ridden by a man and a small woman, loping out into the open.

Pickering fired into the air, which was his signal to his men that the fugitive had been sighted. And from every direction the horsemen came. Scrub Hazen and Meakin raced chap to chap toward the calico horse, and when within range the latter raised his six-gun. Scrub grabbed his arm roughly, reminding him with oaths that he might hit the girl. A moment later they surrounded the calico horse and its riders with a facility that surprised them.

"We're tricked, men," the sheriff cried, emitting a foul string of oaths.

"It's ole Miguel and the Tobin woman!" Meakin sneered, "and I was just about to pot 'em!"

"Damme for not letting you!" was Scrub's disgusted comment.

"What the hell does this mean, Miguel?" Meakin asked.

"The outlaw came and took her away—our señorita," Miguel sputtered, scrambling down from his seat behind the ranch woman. "He made us mount this cayuse, and at the point of his gun made us ride out here!"

"So that was his trick—aye?" the sheriff shouted with rage. "If I get another chance I'll kill him on sight!"

"He's taken the girl out to the desert," the ranch woman cried excitedly. "You can't get him now. They took two fresh mounts, and if I know anything you'll never see the girl again, and it's best that you won't after her fallin' in that gunman's hands."

"If he's gone down to the desert, it means he's going to try the shortcut for

Mesquite," Meakin put in. "Like as not he thinks he can get a train there and clear out. I'll go into the desert after him. I know the trails!"

"And I'll follow," the sheriff said. "Hazen, you give us fresh mounts and then go back to Red Town. When your cowboys drive the herd over to Mesquite tell them to keep an eye out for Triggers and the gal."

"I'll do that, chief," Scrub replied. "And I'll arm every herder I got and tell them to catch Triggers and get him daid or alive. Damned if I won't kill him when I find him. Horse stealin' is a good cause if kidnaping ain't!"

"All right, Scrub," Pickering rejoined decisively. "Me as sheriff will give you birds all the right as deputies to shoot this hellbender on sight."

"I'll show him—deputy or no deputy!" Saul Meakin cried with oaths. "He floored me there in the saloon at Red Town, and now he's rustled my girl! Damned if I won't fill him so full of lead that the coyotes can't bite his rotting carcass without breaking their teeth!"

The farther walls of the gulch on the northwest side of the ranch threw back the echo of horses' hoofs, and Sheriff Pickering knew that for that night at least Triggers had escaped them.

Triggers, riding through the thorny chaparral at the end of the box gulch, emerged on the big mesa which was the base of the mountain range. He rode the roan mare which Miguel had saddled for him, and lead the little pinto on which the girl was mounted.

Nan Harvess said nothing during the ride, and it was not until Triggers crossed the long sage-covered plateau that he decided to speak. The cow trails which he picked out lead through dense thickets of sage and mesquite, and the two riders would have been comparatively safe even in moonlight. The three hours they had before the rise of the full moon made their escape a certainty. No one, either on mountain or on plain, could have detected their path. Triggers thought of the girl's feelings as she found herself riding, a prisoner, in this wilderness.

"Look here," he said, "you've got to remember what I told you: you are not to be afraid."

"Why should I be afraid of you?" the girl shot back with an audacity which, Triggers knew, was assumed.

"I've shown you that I'm an outlaw. Look what I did to your two servants. I chased them out into gunfire."

"I would have believed that, if you had not used your own horse," the girl said. "Men like you, I have heard, will save their horses before they save themselves. You knew well enough that Pickering and Hazen and the rest would not shoot because there was a woman on that horse. You're only pretending you sent them into gunfire."

"If you want to argue in my favor, all right, go ahead, and I'll listen as long as you want."

"I'm not arguing in your favor. I'm telling you that I'm not afraid of you. You have a little temporary power now, perhaps—but there's not one chance in a hundred that you can get away with this game. You remind me of a little mouse playing with a dozen hungry cats."

"Say that I'm a field mouse. I can burrow into holes. I can travel when the cats are sleeping."

"Yes, for a while you can escape them. But soon you'll find yourself in the desert wishing you could get something to eat. Your water will give out."

"We can drink sojuaro sap."

"The sun will make you crazy. You will find yourself surrounded by mirages. Every cactus you see you will think is some deputy from Red Town. The whole country will be out eager to lynch you."

"For a while we will travel in comfort. At least these ideas of yours will buoy up your spirits. You don't seem to be giving yourself up to despair."

"No, because I am convinced that in two days at the utmost you will be caught."

"And still you aren't afraid?"

"Why?" the girl asked. Her tone, Triggers noted, was stripped for the first time of its mock audacity.

"Two days is a long time to be in the desert with a—a desperado."

"It depends on the desperado," Nan answered quickly and without thought.

A long climb through a rising cañon of granite and sandstone bluffs, a lope across the broad "hog-back" divide, and then a descent into the warmer air of rocky, south-sloping gulches brought the two riders into the fastnesses of the desert.

The defile through which they had come down from the mountains opened on a limitless horizon circling south and east. Here Nan caught a whiff of the plain's breeze which brought with it the warm touch of buckeye and manzanita that had steeped all day in the beating sun. Nan was invigorated by this, and for some reason the deathlike loneliness of the wind's sound and the suggestion — almost imaginary — of a coyote on the southern horizon calling, did not depress Nan. The immensity of the desert, the black sweep of the sky touched by the curious green light that precedes moonlight—these things had an effect on her of a great adventure.

The moon came, tremendously dilated, its craters etched sharply, almost dazzling because of its sudden appearance. Its beams fell across the sea of black sage, and on the peaks of the mountains, bringing out the sharp contours of naked crags. The surrounding mesas suddenly loomed up like blue castles protecting the two fugitives from the world beyond.

Cal Triggers dismounted, unstrapped the duffel bag, which contained the provisions; helped the girl down from her horse and then fell to preparing their supper.

As he worked he said to himself over and over again: "*It depends upon the desperado!*" What the hell—

The girl meanwhile, oblivious of all danger, was drinking in the heavily laden wind and watching the radiance of the blue mesas.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DOGIES ROLL OUT.

EARLY next morning Sheriff Pickering summoned Meakin, Hazen and the rest of his little posse for a meeting at the Jackdog Saloon. This time, Pickering announced, an organized search would be sent out into the desert.

The Jackdog at sunrise was a graveyard of the dull, sodden remains of the previous night's debauch. The floor was a littered waste of sawdust, cigar butts, broken glasses, overturned chairs. The tables were covered with beer suds, ashes, cards, hairpins, with now and then an empty tobacco sack, a beaded gauntlet and a celluloid comb with imitation diamonds. In one booth a few grim, sleepy men were still at their game of California Jack, their faces pallid in the cross shadows of lamplight and rising sun.

In a booth opposite to this group, Sheriff Pickering summoned his men. Reports from each one emphasized the fact that Cal Triggers had escaped southward from the mountain range behind the Hazen Ranch. Such of the riders as had followed him under the leadership of Saul Meakin had returned baffled and exhausted by the light of the full moon. A good meal, some drinks, and fresh mounts were all that the posse needed for a concerted daylight search.

Besides his original seven men, Sheriff Pickering had summoned all of Nan Harvess's cowherds to join in this early morning meeting. They were the men, he pointed out, who could be trusted to continue the chase to the last ditch, for it was their mistress who was to be fought for. They would ride and fight, Pickering knew, in much the same spirit that the knights of olden time rode and fought for their queen and for their queen's name.

"No, I ain't goin' to take your whole outfit, Scrub," the sheriff said. "I know you're all worked up about this herd of yourn, wonderin' how it's goin' to get took up to the shippin' station for the freight train that's waitin' for it. I admit if we drafted your whole gang of cowdogs to go scentin' after this gunfighter you mightn't get your herd up to Mesquite for another week."

"I reckon we got to take that into consideration, sheriff," Scrub said. "Much as Cal Triggers concerns us—me in particular—I can't be forgettin' my cows. Seems like we ought to attend to gettin' the herd

off first, then take what men we can get for to chase into the desert after Triggers."

"*I'm* not thinking of the herd, Scrub," Meakin said. "I'm thinking of getting my man!"

Saul Meakin spent the entire meeting in cleaning his six-shooter and periodically holding his thumb to the barrel so that the morning sun, reflected through the bore, displayed what dirt was left. Before he was through with this little process the bore was a little whorl of scintillating and untarnished light.

"We're all thinkin' of gettin' your man, Mr. Meakin," Pickering said. "In fact, I been thinkin' all night, so's I feel as if I'd been playin' monte here with one-eyed Jo —my haid's that fagged out! And I been figurin' on just what lines I intend to conduct this here rescue party. Of course, your gal bein' kidnaped is the first thing—and if I wanted I could get the whole town to shag theirselves down into the desert so's the place would look like a park on Sunday mo'nin'. But I got better plans."

The men drew their chairs about the wet table, and all heads concentrated toward the pudgy bald pate of their leader.

"I figure that you, Scrub, and me and Saul Meakin here, is all as is necessary to make the trip. In the first place, if they's only three of us—and the best gunfanners among this gang, at that—it 'll mean we don't kick up a cloud of dust. Now, if I let the town go with us they'd kick up enough dust to be seen all the way down to Chihuahua. In fact, the President of Mexico would be jumpin' up and down tearin' out his whiskers, thinkin' they was a revolution comin' off or leastwise a invasion from the United States."

"If it's only Scrub and Meakin you want, sheriff," one of the other men at the table put in—it was Caborca—"why did you call us herders together in this here meetin'?"

"Yes, I'd like to know that, too, sheriff," Scrub said, scratching his flat red head perplexedly. "I'll be needin' my herders bad."

"I'll tell you why, Scrub. It's for a good reason—a damned good reason—and this is it: There's goin' to be a cloud of dust in this campaign, and it ain't goin' to be us that makes it. I said I wanted the three of us because we won't raise no dust. But the dust that is to be raised is goin' to be raised by somethin' else—and it's going to be pretty damned important. It's goin' to be your herd. Now, I figure Cal Triggers—and you all know I'm right—is going to cross the desert and make as straight a line as he can for the shippin' station at Mesquite where he can get a train and shag outen the State. If we can cut him off and keep him in the desert long enough we'll starve him—or famish him—both, mebbe."

"But the gal?" Scrub said. "Are you goin' to starve her, too?"

"Well, that's the point I'm comin' to. Bein' he has the gal with him, he won't be able to stick it out—like he would if he was just an ordinary bandit travelin' light. He'll have to come out of the desert and get food. You know that. You been there yourself."

"It's a good plan, sheriff. But if we have to ride up and down the desert keepin' him from Mesquite, how are we goin' to nab him?"

"Ah-h! Now you're gettin' to the best part of my plan," Pickering said enthusiastically. The sheriff drew lines in the beer suds on the table to illustrate his remarks. "Look here, men. Suppose Cal is down here in the desert where my finger's at. The herd's here. Now, Scrub, you and me and Meakin' ain't goin' to do the cuttin' off. Chances are we couldn't—just the three of us. That's where your herd comes in. Your herd—which churns up enough smoke for a cyclone—that's the barrier we'll set up between Cal Triggers and the station. Get my point, Scrub? Get my point?"

Pickering brought his huge fat hand down on the little hunched shoulders, bringing his argument home with a particular patness.

"I sure do," Scrub said. "But my steers ain't overly fond of desert travelin'. Alkali upsets their dispositions."

"You're sendin' 'em to Mesquite, anyways," Pickering objected. "And if you want to know the truth there was a cattle

run from this town directly through to Mesquite—much shorter than the one you been usin'."

"I use the northern run for safety," Scrub said. "Last season a herd—a little herd of Galloway bulls—was took down there through the Sulphur Cañon route, and it went bad. Killed three men. The animals went crazy with thirst and loco weed."

Saul Meakin, whose anxiety to get on the trail of his rival and enemy had grown beyond his control, put in an argument of his own.

"I heard about that bunch of Galloways, Scrub," he said quietly. "It was because they figured on gettin' water in Sulphur Cañon, and when they got there they found Sulphur Cañon was dry that season."

"And how do I know it ain't dry this season?" Scrub asked.

"I happen to know. There's water in the creek."

"Well, that settles it," Pickering said. "You send your herd down there direct from Red Town this mornin'. We go southwest. Cal Triggers will see the smoke of the herd, and he'll find himself blocked. We'll round in behind him, and there bein' only three of us he won't notice our smoke. Like as not he'll ride right into our hands."

"It's a good plan," Scrub admitted. "But mind you, chief, if they ain't any water in that creek at Sulphur Cañon, I know what 'll happen. Herd madness will set in, and we'll all find ourselves gored into the adobe like a bunch of butterflies on a cushion."

"I vouch for the water," Meakin said calmly.

"Then it's a go," Scrub agreed. "If they's water, we're all set."

Saul Meakin, having satisfied himself that his gun was perfectly cleaned, was the first to jump to his feet. Scrub turned to his foreman, Caborca, who, seated in the midst of the Hazen cowdogs, was picking his teeth with his jackknife.

"Roll the herd down as far as the mouth of Sulphur Cañon," Scrub directed. "We'll put the ole dogies to bed there to-morry night. How about that, sheriff?"

"That sounds all right, Scrub. And let your men remember this: keep heeled at all times, and a sharp lookout for any signs of the gunfighter. Ask every prospector you may meet if they've seen tracks of him. Then to-morry night me and you and Meakin will close in, ridin' eastward until we reach Sulphur Cañon ourselves. We'll all put the night in at the ole bed-ground at Sulphur Cañon, and if I don't miss my guess I'll say here and now that when we meet there we'll have a little tight-rope ack for the evening's entertainment."

Caborca and his herders having received these instructions, and the sheriff, Scrub and Meakin taking another round of drinks, the gang hurried out to their horses. According to the plan agreed upon, they hit southwest for the desert. An hour later, as they looked back over their shoulders, the dust cloud of the herd which had been punched under way rose up from the direction of Red Town behind them.

"The ole dogies are rollin' along," Scrub said to Pickering. "If this game of yours works, I'll agree that you're the best combination of cow general and man hunter I ever did see."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MUCKER.

THE sheriff and his two companions spent the morning in traversing the rimrock plain which was the middleland between the Red Town country and the desert to the south. During the afternoon they plunged into a group of mesas and cañons where the sage gave way to sojuaro and the gramma grass to rattle weed. Late in the day they found themselves in a desolate wilderness of painted rocks and dry, salt-incrusted stream beds. According to Pickering, there was only one water hole within a radius of thirty miles in this sun-baked demesne. If Cal Triggers found that pool his horses could be watered, and, the sheriff argued, he could stand out against pursuit for some time longer. "The best plan is to visit that thar hole," said Pickering, "and mebbe we'll get some tracks of our man."

Late that night they arrived in the long

falling cañon through which ran the sunken stream terminating in the pool. A long, easy ride during the hour of sunset brought them within view of a temporary desert camp. At first sight of this outfit the three riders thought that their work was accomplished. It seemed that Cal Triggers had found the pool and was proposing to spend the night there. But a moment's reflection persuaded the men that their fugitives would not have chosen a place of encampment which could be viewed the whole length of the valley for miles in either direction.

Furthermore, a ride of a few furlongs down the long defile gave the men a better view of the camp: the animals they had thought to be two horses turned out to be only one horse and a mule. A pup tent pitched near the sand of the old stream bed and the blue smoke of a fire mounting in the desert air like the smoke of an extinguished candle were further indications that this was a prospector's outfit, and not the fugitives for whom they were searching.

"Every prospector knows of this hole," the sheriff said. "Like as not Cal Triggers himself will head for it, and we ought to hear some news from that mucker down thar, even if we don't meet up directly with the bird we're after."

A short ride into the salt-incrusted bowl brought the posse to the outfit, and Pickering, followed by the other two, rode out to the middle of the cañon bed, where he called to the prospector.

A tall, sun-reddened man, in ragged felt hat, khaki and puttees, left his frying pan and bacon and climbed up to meet the three riders. The first detail of the little posse which caught his eye was the sheriff's rust-speckled star.

Pickering jumped precipitously to his subject.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Where'd you come from, and what's your business?"

"I guess it's plain to be seen, sheriff, that I'm only a mucker here doin' a little testin' for dirt. My name's Wickett—Jug Wickett I'm known by. And I'm from Quay County."

"Well, then, Mr. Jug Wickett," Pickering said, "bein' as you ain't in Quay County now, but in the county which I preside over as sheriff, you will consider yourself hereby appointed as a deputy. And your first duty is to inform me here and now concernin' the actions of a bird named Cal Triggers."

"Never heard of Cal Triggers, sheriff," the mucker answered, pulling at a long mustache.

Meakin and Scrub exchanged despairing glances, but Pickering went on in his own way: "Maybe you ain't never heard his name, but you seen him."

"I been down here in the desert for three months, sheriff, and I ain't seen nobody."

"The hell you ain't. Cal Triggers has been ridin' around here all day. He's got two horses, and bein' as he didn't carry a water barrel along he's got to water them horses. This is the only pool south of Red Town. *Now* tell me you ain't never seen him!"

"Well, I ain't. I answer I ain't. What sort of a game are you putting up, anyway, sheriff? Me a poor ole mucker that's never done nothin' nor ever seen nobody."

"It's plain that he ain't bluffin', chief," Scrub remarked impatiently.

"Our time's precious, chief," Meakin added. "Let's get the hell out of here."

"Yes, our time's precious, and we can't be wormin' out secrets. But I'll tell you this, Mr. Mucker, if you ain't met up with this gunfighter, Cal Triggers, yet, you will meet up with him sooner or later, and when you do you're to consider yourself as my deputy. To-morry night my posse is goin' to meet at Sulphur Cañon, and you're to report to me. If you see any traces of a big man with black hair and gray eyes, and if you give us information as will help us catch him, you'll be rewarded. And if I find out you've seen him already and are on the gunfighter's side—well, you'll be rewarded then also, but not likewise."

"I understand, sheriff," the prospector answered humbly, and then added in the same tone: "Just how big is this here reward, sheriff, if I may ask?"

Scrub Hazen was the man to answer.

"The bird we're after stole my gal. He's brought her down here into the desert

ag'in' her will. I'm a rich man, and a rich man who's had his gal stole will offer a reward that 'll make any mucker's time worth while."

"I'll keep my eye peeled, then, gents," the prospector rejoined. "I know this country like it was a little back corral in my own ranch. If I see this here gun-fighter you're after I'll pretend like I ain't seen you gents. And I'll trap him one way or another. Leave it to me."

"And another thing," Pickering added. "I'm advisin' you not to draw on him unless you're pretty sure you got the dead-wood on him. He's got a draw which you cain't see—like when a rattler jumps for a sage rabbit."

"I'll remember that, sheriff," said the mucker, "and I'll also remark that I do my trappin' my own little humble way."

The sheriff and his two henchmen left. Late that night they camped on the lip of a mesa which overlooked a large sweep of the desert. Sunrise gave them an almost limitless panorama, but it revealed no trace of the fugitives. All that day the three horsemen hunted; skirting the rims of the table-land, keeping always on the divides for the sake of the view. But another afternoon passed, and, dreary and exhausted, they took the trail for the bed-ground at Sulphur Cañon, where, according to their plans, they were to rejoin Scrub Hazen's herd and spend the night with the cowboys. They reached the bed-ground just before the herd.

Sulphur Cañon was a narrow gash in the mountains surrounded on all sides by bluffs which were painted vivid red and yellow by the ancient rain-washes. At the lower end of the cañon a big fan of lava flow, cross-bedded with alluvial clay and overgrown with gramma grass, was the customary bed-ground for a herd travelin' from Red Town to Mesquite.

Considerably earlier than Scrub had expected his herd came thundering across the plain.

"I reckon them cowdogs of mine have been giving the cattle a hard ride. Or else the ole steers are breakin' away from them."

This latter supposition was considerably nearer the truth. A long ride across the plain had ended in disaster at other times, Scrub recalled only too well; and if the herd could not be watered now there would be trouble.

Scrub turned to Meakin, who had been the man to vouch for the fact that there was water in Sulphur Cañon. "Where did you-all get that information?" he asked his friend.

Meakin, whose one aim in life since his defeat at the rodeo, was to capture Cal Triggers, had made up this bit of information out of his own imagination. Now he realized he must account for what might be a lie—and a serious one.

"I'll tell you, Scrub," he answered coolly, "if you're so all-fired anxious about watering your steers, I'd advise you to take a ride up there into the center of the cañon and find out. My information I got from a tenderfoot who was hunting for a claim. Now, tenderfeet, you know, Scrub, will sometimes swear they have seen a pool of water in the desert where there's nothing but salt. They'll even go so far as to say there's a lake down there near Horse Heaven. You know, Scrub, how it is. You know—"

But Scrub Hazen did not wait for any more hedging. He wheeled his horse and galloped into the center of the bowl, where an ore-crusher—now warped and useless—marked the spot where in other days herds had been watered.

The fear that had taken hold of him was now completely justified. A dry wash of rocks, fine sand, and salt was all that met Scrub Hazen's astounded gaze.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PILLAR OF CLOUD.

THE spirit of adventure in which Nan Harvess had at first taken her imprisonment did not forsake her with the setting of the moon. Nor did the terrific beating of the desert sun the next day conquer her. Continual swigs from Triggers's water flasks, three meals and a long sleep in the shade, during the hottest part of the day, kept up her strength.

Nan did not notice that her captor was letting her drink all she wanted without taking any water himself, until a certain incident happened. She drained one of the flasks dry and handed it back to him. Cal screwed on the aluminium stopper, and hitched the flask to his belt. It occurred to the girl that he had not taken any water that day, and for half an hour's ride she tried vainly to get this fact out of her mind.

Finally she turned to him and asked: "Are you going to take any water during this journey?"

"Of course. We're to go fifty-fifty on the provisions I have. In fact, I'll take a swig now."

He unscrewed the top of the empty flask and held the nozzle to his lips. No change of expression came over his face; instead, he tilted the flask higher as if drinking. Then, smacking his lips, he screwed on the stopper again.

"Did you like that drink?" she asked.

He turned to her. "You thought you emptied the flask? Well, you didn't. There was enough there for one swig. Enough to last me until sunrise to-morrow morning."

But by sunrise of the second day the other flask was drained; provisions were gone, and Cal Triggers found himself in the heart of the desert with all landmarks strange to him or else obscured by mirages. Finally one of their horses stopped sweating. Triggers did not tell the girl the seriousness of this sign.

If their mounts went down with heat-stroke it would mean that Cal and the girl were practically prisoners in the desert. "The broncs are good for ten miles more," Cal said to himself. "Then I'll build a fire so that the sheriff and the rest will find us."

But at the end of ten miles Cal changed his mind. While following a sandy rise of ground he came to a precipice which fell sharply to the bed of a sunken creek. Here he saw a mucker's outfit—a pack mule, a piebald horse and a pup tent. A pool of muddy water was all that remained in the salt-incrusted creek bed. A prospector, on the road, had put up here, taking advantage of the shade of a bowlder, a scraggly Spanish sycamore and the water.

Cal turned back on the trail before the girl reached the edge of the precipice. It would complicate matters, he reflected, if she saw the mucker. He led her back to a little barranca which cleft the precipice and opened on to the creek bottom. Here the two riders dismounted.

"I'm going to let you rest here alone," Cal said. "I'm going down there into the cañon—and I'll take the horses with me—not because I'm afraid you'll try to escape me, but because I want to water them, and the descent into the cañon is too dangerous for you."

Unsaddling one of the horses, he laid the blanket and saddle down in the shade of the cactus-filled ravine.

"Now, what's the saddle for?" the girl asked.

"For your head. Sleep. I may be gone a long time."

"Did you have no other reason for unsaddling my horse?"

"To cool his back."

"And no other?"

"Perhaps. A man does not tell his prisoner everything."

"I will rest, then, and I won't ask any more questions except one: Can we eat lunch when you come back?"

"Of course we can. There's plenty of food. Are you worrying about our food? There's plenty, I tell you. And you're not to worry."

Leading the two mounts by the rein, Cal picked his way down the steep cleft and came out on the creek bed. As he expected, he found a man under the pup tent resting. A raw-boned, sunburned man it was, with gray scraggly hair and a long, gray mustache which drooped over gold teeth. He was puffing at a corncob, and when he saw Triggers walking up to him he sat up as straight as the pup tent would allow and kept on puffing. One hand was on his holster.

"Don't throw your gun on me, pard," Cal said. "I'm damned quick at the draw."

"Who and the hell are you?"

"I'm a prospector like you, not a gun-

man," Cal rejoined. "I'm lost here in the desert, and I want you to help me out."

The mucker looked at Cal out of red eyes which, with his months of life in the desert sun, had narrowed to colorless points. Finally with a sheepish grin he buttoned the flap of his holster, walked over to Cal, and said:

"You scared me proper for a moment, mister. Thought you was this here bandit which has been terrorizin' Red Town."

"A bandit in Red Town?" Cal asked. "I didn't reckon you'd have much news of Red Town down here."

"And you're damned right. I never heard of Red Town in these parts exceptin' this mornin'. There's a posse huntin' down a bird by the name of Cal Triggers."

"And what's *he* done?" Cal asked, loosening the cinch of the saddled horse.

"What ain't he done? He's rustled two cut-hosses offen a rancher by the name of Scrub Hazen."

"Yes; I've heard of Scrub Hazen. Did they come way down here in the desert for a couple of cut-horses?"

"Wait and let me tell you. That's the worst they got on him—hoss stealin'. But he also done somethin' else which they say they'll lynch him as soon as they get their hands on him. He stole Scrub Hazen's gal and made off to the mountains. They trailed him into the desert and lost him night afore last. Then they figured they could cut him off by comin' down here—damned asses! I told them I hadn't seen a sign of man or beast for three months. Then you come shaggin' along, and of course I figured you're the bird they're after. But now I see you ain't got a gal with you, and you ain't got the face of a bandit."

"I'll keep an eye out for the hellbender," Cal rejoined. "You say he's got a girl with him?"

"That's how the story goes."

"Well, he ought to get potted if that's the case, and mebbe on my way to Mesquite—where I'm headin' for—I'll meet him."

"I'm not advisin' you for to go outen your way to meet him," the mucker said. "They do tell of his bein' a ripsnortin' killer when he's started. And he's sure started now—rustlin' a woman—and two hosses. *Two hosses!* Think of that!"

"And do they reckon they'll get him?" asked Cal.

"Damn right, they'll get him. Of course they lost the track the first night. And Scrub Hazen went back to Red Town to attend to shipping his herd up to Mesquite. Then he joined the sheriff and started down here for the desert. Scrub Hazen was here—little runt—and he sure was mad when I told him I hadn't seen trace of nobody.

"He said he was ridin' out on a wild goose chase while he left his herd with a bunch of green cow-punchers who had to take it to the shipping station. Looks like Hazen thinks more of gettin' them two rustled hosses back than he does of his beef herd."

"That shipping station is where I'm headed for, pard," Cal said. "And I'm lost. Maybe you—"

"Ah-h! Well, if you're lost, I'll have to set you on the way. But first set down and rest a while. You look all in. Have a drink?"

Cal drank eagerly of the whisky flask proffered him. He felt a sudden exuberance, and the big whiffs of smoke he inhaled deadened the thirst torture of his mouth.

"Thanks," he said. "I'm dry. No whisky—not even water."

"You're sure down and out," the mucker said. "I've just had my noon chow, but mebbe you'd like somethin' to eat."

"I can't be living off you like that, pard," Cal said. "You being in the desert as a prospector aren't supposed to feed every stranger that comes along. But I will say this: I've got some money to offer you if you'll grubstake me for a two days' ride."

The mucker puffed for a moment at his pipe and then shook his head. "You bein' a prospector yourself know that I couldn't do that unless you're downright starving. I'm traveling light. As you can see, I ain't trailin' a chuck wagon."

"All right, then. I am starving. Help me, and I'll pay you."

The mucker chewed at his pipe uncomfortably.

"And you say you're without water?"

"I am, and my horses are dry, too."

The old prospector focused his eyes intently on the two mounts, and then, without looking into Cal's face, said: "You had to get rid of your packsaddle?"

"The horse was trembling in the legs. There was no shade anywhere for him. I knew the cayuse would keel over with a cinch around his heaving belly, so I saved my bag and threw away the old sawbuck saddle."

"How far back?"

Cal knew that the marks of the saddle-bars still showed wet on the horse's back. He could not lie much further. Instead of answering the mucker's question, he rejoined quietly:

"Say, look here, it *was* a packsaddle. You aren't doubting that, damn you."

The mucker glanced at Cal's hand, but again avoided his eye. His answer was a jovial laugh. "You're gettin' ornery with heat and hunger—aye, boy?"

"I guess so. Have a smoke—that's all I've got left."

"Well, stranger, let me tell you something. I just got enough grub to last till I get to Horse Heaven, a hundred miles south, but I think I know a way I can fix you up. My regular diggin's ain't here where I'm at now. As you can see, I'm only travelin'—and doin' a little prospectin', too, of course. My shack is up in a place called Sulphur Cañon. Ever hear of Sulphur Cañon?"

"Sure. Don't know where it is from here, though."

"Well, Sulphur Cañon is directly on the route for the shipping station, where you're headin' for. What do you say to my fillin' your flasks, waterin' your cayuses, and givin' you a bit of chow—enough to last till you get up to my shack? Then when you're there you can help yourself to some canned beef and beans, water yourself again, and hit the trail for Mesquite."

"That sounds all right, pard," Cal rejoined. "And I've got thirty bucks here that 'll be a reward for this turn."

The mucker looked up again, his colorless eyes narrowing under the gray beetling brows.

"Say, stranger," he said, "if you're a prospector you wouldn't be dickering with money in the desert!"

"Are you doubting that I'm a prospector?" Cal shot back.

"God, no! But a prospector should ought to know that when a man meets another which has been beat by the desert he is supposed to help him, and not take a damned cent. If I took anything from you, I'd be damned in hell for it."

"Let it go at that, then, pard. And I'll repay you when my turn comes."

The old mucker turned to his pup tent, where he fished out his duffel bag. He handed Cal a half a loaf of bread, sliced off some ham, which he wrapped around a handful of raisins, and a can of corn. These Cal put into his own bag, and slung the filled water flasks over his shoulder. The two mounts were then led to the pool, where they drank prodigally of muddy water.

"Now, then, stranger," the mucker said, "if you don't know much about this here desert, I'm warnin' you; you have a hard road ahead."

"I've learned that much about it already," Cal rejoined.

"The country in between here and Sulphur Cañon is chuck full of mesas, gulches and hogwallows. And they ain't a man-sized landmark nowheres exceptin' cactus. And that cactus—when you're expectin' to steer your course by it, you generally find it's been tore up by some sandstorm. Added to this, you think you see a lot of things in this here desert which ain't. I mean by that they's mirages everywhere."

"I've found that out, too," Cal put in. "That's why I'm lost."

"Well, they's no sure way of my tellin' you how to get to Sulphur Cañon, exceptin' by the good grace of God, somethin' which occurs to me on the spur of the moment. You come up here on this here bowlder. I want for to show you something."

Cal did as the mucker commanded and his eye followed the gnarled, pointing finger.

"You see that thar pillar of cloud on the horizon?"

Cal's gaze went through the cleft of the creek bed, where it opened northward onto the limitless sand plain. On the horizon of this sea of sand drifts he discerned a little cone, white at the tip and spreading upward into the sky from pink to a pale lavender.

"That thar pillar of cloud is like the pillar of cloud which I call to mind I heard tell of as a kid: it was some phony story about the 'children' of some old cattle king or other bein' led through a wilderness, a pillar of fire leadin' 'em by day, and a pillar of cloud by night. Well, that thar pillar is thirty miles away and is headin' exactly for where you yourself are headin' at. It's goin' to Mesquite, and it's the dust cloud of Scrub Hazen's herd, which I heard tell of just this mornin'."

"Then, I'm to follow that herd?" Cal asked, smiling.

The fact that the mucker mentioned this herd so casually convinced Cal that as yet his identity was not suspected.

"It's the only landmark I can give you, stranger, and the beauty of it is that herd is going to pass directly through Sulphur Cañon. A herd passed through thar last year at this time, and I ain't got the alkali dust outen my teeth yet."

Cal mounted his horse, holding the reins of the other in his hand. "How will I know Sulphur Cañon when I see it?" he asked.

"If you ride like hell, keeping that cloud always on your left, you'll get to the cañon just before the herd gets thar, and you can tell it. It's one cañon in a million, with granite sides which go up and down like the Devil's Gorge in the Colorado. At one end is a gate cut through painted rock, and the other has a big fan of volcanic ash and cinders. You can't miss it. There ain't another gorge like it east of the Grand Cañon."

"I'm thanking you," Cal said as he wheeled his horse and started for the barranca, where he had left the girl.

"Don't thank me," the mucker said. "Some other time, mebbe, you'll repay me for what I'm doing."

Cal glanced back and caught a single glimpse of the pale, sharp eyes which were focused upon him like two little white coals, as white, it seemed, as the light of the desert sun which they reflected.

CHAPTER XX.

CAL FOLLOWS THE HERD CLOUD.

WHEN Cal Triggers returned to the little barranca where he had left the girl, he found that she had from pure exhaustion fallen asleep. The sound of the horses' champing awakened her.

Triggers said nothing of the episode he had just passed through. His only greeting was to proffer her a flask of water, from which she drank eagerly. Both felt revivified enough to eat, and the meager rations the mucker had supplied disappeared in another frugal but soul-satisfying meal. A few minutes' rest, during which Cal puffed silently at a rolled cigarette, and they were again off on the trail.

They trotted their horses across an alluvial plain of salt, rounded the abrupt contours of a mesa, and climbed into a gulch, where there was no single sign of life—no more cactus, no more desert rats, no more tarweed. It was merely a long defile of grotesque erosion shapes—faces, castles, gargoyles, at first salmon-colored and white, then turning slowly to a brilliant red in the distance and beyond to a pale purple. All the afternoon they rode through this gash in the desert. At the northern end an arc of the horizon was always in view, and they saw moving across it the faint, dun-colored pillar of cloud.

As they rode they said little. Cal was wrapped in his own thoughts and two problems absorbed him during the whole afternoon: one concerned the comfort of the girl. He was determined that she should not be kept in the desert another day—particularly since their chances for another good meal now depended solely upon the mucker's outfit in Sulphur Cañon. If he could not get his captive a meal by the following morning Cal was determined to strike directly for the herd, and demand it of the herdsmen. Of the two evils—to keep the girl hungry in the desert, or to engage a half a dozen cowpunchers in combat, Cal preferred the latter.

The other problem which nettled him dur-

ing that ride concerned his meeting with the mucker. There was one little point which he feared had betrayed him. The mucker had noticed the pattern of sweat on one of the horses. If he had been shrewd enough he could have seen beyond a doubt that those dark splotches were caused by the saddle bars of a Visalia saddle, and not a sawbuck. A sawbuck or any kind of pack saddle, Cal argued with himself, would leave a band of sweat where the breeching circles the horse's thighs, much the same as a hat-band leaves a mark on a man's forehead. The mucker had seen this, Cal was convinced.

But the old man, without a doubt, had been afraid of the gunfighter. He had kept his eye on Cal's hand during every crisis of the conversation and he had avoided his eye. If he did have his suspicions about Cal it was obvious that he was afraid to precipitate a fight with him when the two were alone. Perhaps he had a surer, safer way. It was a tradition among the inhabitants of the Red Town country that the " safest and surest place to keep your man is in the Old Lava Desert, for there you have him like a coyote pawing around in quicksand. All you have to do is to wait until he makes up his mind whether he prefers being buried alive, or scrambling ashore into the protection of your arms." Perhaps this was the sentence of imprisonment the old mucker had decided to pronounce.

But the farther away Cal got from the creek-bed where he had met the mucker the less he thought of him. A new and more imminent danger was to be considered.

All that afternoon the riders had kept the dust cloud in view, and as they followed it they lessened the distance to the herd. The cloud grew. From a small purple spiral it had faded to a dun-colored fan, still retaining something of its shape. The " handle " or lower point of the fan was no longer on the horizon. It was concentrated midway between the cañon where the riders were galloping and a distant range of mesa. An hour later the fan spread, dimming to a brown mist and reaching across the sky as it faded above the heads of the two riders.

The danger of getting too close to the herd and the cattle drivers began to impress Cal. He swore to himself that if he were alone he would go no closer to them, but would follow their dust by keeping a parallel course to them ten miles south. This he would do for the two days' journey to Mesquite and the railroad.

But Nan Harvess, he was assured, could not stand that two days' journey without food. To expect her to do it was little short of cruelty, and as he had decided earlier in the day, he preferred meeting Scrub Hazen's stocktenders and fighting them. His original plan—to stop in Sulphur Cañon at the mucker's shack and get food for her—was the plan he stuck to. It was foolhardy, he knew, but with the girl as his companion, there was no other course to follow.

The sun sinking toward the western mesa and turning the alkali plains to a dazzling yellow, cast the shadows of the riders in long grotesque shapes before them as they cut east across a plain of stratified and cross-bedded shales. A five mile canter on this level ground brought them within sound of the herd. Mounting a series of granite steps they found themselves suddenly in a red twilight long before sunset. A wind blowing southeastward brought the tang of alkali, which from then on grew denser and more choking. Fearing now that the cattlemen would see him, Cal picked out a safer course at the bottom of rutted cañons, creek-beds and barrancas.

And finally as they came out of a deep gorge and got the wind again on their faces, he realized the imminence of his danger with a sudden, compelling revelation.

On the wind there was the sound—almost imperceptible, but growing—of the distant thunder of the herd.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BEDGROUND.

AFTER Scrub Hazen had discovered that he had a growling herd on his hands and a bedground without a watering place, he rode back to the mouth of the cañon. His first intention was to

call his friend, Saul Meakin, to account for the disastrous bit of misinformation he had given. Meakin, Scrub reflected, must certainly have heard something about the water. He was not an out-and-out liar. And yet certain doubts were slowly beginning to form in Scrub's mind.

When the cattle owner arrived again at the bedground his desire to beat up his friend was complicated by the fact that the herd was pouring upward out of the plain onto the lava fan.

One glance at that big sea of backs and horns, and the practiced eye of the cattleman immediately sensed trouble. He spurred his horse down toward the vanguard of the herd, and picked out the leader of the drivers, who was Caborca, his stumpy little foreman.

"Look here, Tom," he shouted. "What's been happening? Them steers are all red-eyed and shuffling and stumbling along like they was drunk!"

"You know pretty well, chief, that's what any herd will do crossing this alkali plain. They're crazy mad with thirst. I let 'em ride, sayin' to myself I'd water 'em as soon as they got to this here cañon."

"Well, you won't water 'em. The creek's dry!"

"Dry! God! We got some hell to pay then!"

"Caborca," Scrub said bitingly, "there's been some crooked work goin' on somewheres. A squatter told Saul Meakin that they was water up to that creek."

"I don't know nothin' about any squatter, chief," Caborca said. "But I do know this: a bunch of our strays we found eatin' loco weed at the edge of the bluffs. The men punched 'em up, mixed 'em in with the herd and they're crazy wild."

"Look here, Caborca, you listen to me. We're goin' to have trouble with this outfit. You slow 'em up right here. Don't drive 'em any further into the cañon. Bed 'em right here!"

"And if they don't bed?"

"If they don't bed I'll break every bone in your brown carcass for the rotten puncher that you are! You and the whole gang should orter be drivin' a herd of skunks—not cattle on the hoof!"

What further maledictions Scrub Hazen had in his mind he did not utter, for something happened which precipitously cut off his argument with Caborca.

The two had been waiting while the big sea of horns and withers and rumps moved and thundered into the bowl where their drivers rounded them up for the night's rest. Beyond, a half a mile distant, a horseman emerged through the monotone of mist, galloping down over the scarp of a hill and tearing across the sandbars toward the herd.

Scrub recognized the horse of the mucker they had met in the desert during the morning's man hunt. Accordingly he wheeled his mount, left Caborca and galloped toward Sheriff Pickering and Meakin. All the horsemen, with the exception of the cattle drivers, reined in and gathered around the newcomer.

"I guess you're kind of surprised seein' me again, gents," Jug Wickett, the prospector, said, shouting at the top of his lungs so that he could be understood over the thunder of the herd.

"I reckon we are!" the sheriff shouted back. "What the hell's happened? You look like you been ridin' for your life."

"I guess you know what's happened. I seen the bird you're after!"

"Cal Triggers?" Meakin cried eagerly. "And the girl—was the girl with him?"

"No! She warn't with him. But if I got any sense left in this old sun-scorched haid of mine," he said, turning to Scrub Hazen, "your two horses was with him—and they was like to be dyin' with the hard ridin' he give 'em!"

"I'll kill the gun-shootin' thief!" Scrub cried, for a moment forgetting his concern for his cattle. "We'll ride to-night by moonlight, and I'll kill him!"

"How do you know it was him if the gal wasn't with him?" the sheriff—who was the coolest of the crowd—asked.

"I ain't positive. But I'll bet my life. He must have hid the gal somewheres in the chaparral. He come axin' me for food and water. And I give it to him—"

"You give it to him!" the men shouted. "You poor, slabsided jack!"

"Wait till I tell you. I had my plan,

and the first thing I did was to make sure he was my man. The gal not bein' with him kinder balled me up. But then I noticed one of his hosses hadn't no saddle, and he said he'd throwed away the pack saddle, but I could see it was sweatin' where there'd been a ridin' saddle on it—just a little while before. He got mad—and then I knew who he was. If he hadn't got mad he might have bluffed me some more. But he perked up and I thought sure as hell he was goin' to stretch me. Had his hand near his gun every minute. So I pretended to be friendly like, and I said if he wanted grubstake for the two days' journey he'd find it in a shack where I used to live at."

"And where's that?" Meakin asked excitedly.

"That's the point!" The old gray-haired desert rat smiled craftily. "I figured to myself, 'Where had I better send this gunman to?' says I. 'Well, I'll send him where he'll have a nice little sociable meetin'-up with the friends as wants to see him.' So I says to him, says I, 'Follow that cloud of dust which is Hazen's herd,' I says. That disarms him—my mentioning Hazen's herd as if he hadn't orter be afraid of it made him think I didn't know who he was. So he says, 'Where'll I follow it to?' And I says, 'Foller it till you get to a big box cañon which is called Sulphur Cañon,' and I described Sulphur Cañon to him so he'd know it. And I tells him, 'In the middle of the cañon you'll find my ole diggin's.' And he thanks me and rides off."

"And the girl?" Meakin asked again.

"Didn't see no girl. Didn't wait to see nothin'. I jumped on my cayuse and took a straight trail for here. He didn't take no straight trail, mind that! He's like as not been zigzagging through the desert cañons tryin' to follow the cloud of dust of this here cattle herd."

"Then you don't figure he's reached Sulphur Cañon yet?" Pickering asked.

"Not yet. But he'll be there before sundown, mark my words. And he'll go down there for grub, too. He was half crazy with thirst, and you can bet he ain't goin' to try to cross the plain to Mesquite without he gets somethin' to drink—and somethin' to eat."

"Then you've set a pretty slick trap for him, Mr. Mucker, and we're thankin' you."

"He thanked me, too!" the gray man laughed.

"And we'll let him walk straight into that thar trap afore we go scarin' him back into the south agin!" said Pickering. He turned to his posse. "Now, then, men, you-all listen to me. Sulphur Cañon is as a prison cell wunst a man gets in thar, bein' the walls drop sheer like the sides of a crater. Now we'll stop up both ends. Me and the boys here as has the fastest mounts will ride like hell to the upper end. The herd and the puncher boys stayin' here all night will stop up the lower end."

"But if the herd won't bed?" Scrub asked.

"All the better! Let it keep ridin'. All as it has to do is to ride as fur as this here mucker's hut and the drivers will step in and say, 'Howdy!' to the hellbender and save the gal!"

"That sounds all right, sheriff, but what will you use me for?" Saul Meakin asked eagerly.

"You! Wal, bein' as you're the most anxious guy here to plug our man on sight we'll give you the honor of meetin' up with him first. You take two riders—McGintry and Pedro here—and shag into the middle of the cañon right now. Hide yourselves wherever you kin—in the chaparral, the cactus bunches, behind rocks. Wait till the hellbender gets thar, then go in and pay him a call."

"I'll pay him a little lead, that's what I'll pay him!" Meakin snapped.

"And if you do that I reckon the law won't be axin' you any awkward questions," Pickering rejoined. "Now, then, hop to it, men. Let Caborca here tell the cowpunchers their duty. The rest of you foller me, and bein' we got to ride around to the granite gate of the cañon on the other side we better be startin'!"

"And me, sheriff, you won't be needin' me any more?" Wickett, the prospector, asked.

"You done your duty, Mr. Mucker," the sheriff replied. "But why don't you get a hand into this game. They's goin' to be some good shootin', mebbe."

"That's the trouble, sheriff, and if it's all the same to you I'll be ridin' back to my outfit in the desert. When I seen that fellow Cal Triggers back thar I got a look at his eye which makes me kind of shiver. It was a look which said, 'Good-by to you, Mr. Mucker, if you're trappin' me and I ever meet up with you agin!' So I'll be sayin' good afternoon, gents. I don't want to be here when that gun-fanner gets here. I'm a nervous man, gents, and the sight of him, after what I done to him, would like to petrify me!"

Sheriff Pickering laughed as the mucker rode away, then turning again to his men, he said: "Remember this, men, there's only two openings to this here cañon. The one at the upper end is where the gunfighter will enter at. I'm figurin' that he'll get into the cañon before we get up thar. But if he's late and any of you gents catch sight of him don't offer to fight him. Let him ride in. He's too damned slippery to take a chanst on. But once he gets in—good night!"

"Good night and fireworks!" Scrub Hazen shouted. "Once the bird gets in!"

"We won't keep him out, chief, rest assured of that!" Saul Meakin cried. "We won't keep him out! If I see him I'll let him ride straight to the shack—unless I'm in range and can pot him from behind a rock. And then it's good night, too—aye, what, gents?"

Meakin took the two riders assigned to him and galloped off as fast as the horses could travel. It was scarcely a half hour's ride before they came to a big cleft in the crater-shaped gulch. Here the only light was the diffused glow of the low western sun in the clouds of mist above them.

A dim bowl-shaped arena opened out of the cleft and the three riders found themselves surrounded on all sides by walls of crimson shales with streamers of red and pink rock intermingling with the sandstone. Centuries of erosion had polished these walls to impassable barriers. In the middle of the gulch was a shack of pine boards and near it an ore-crusher. A hundred yards farther on the creek-bed wound around a huge bowlder the size of a house.

Meakin dismounted and ordered his men to take the three mounts to a hiding behind this rock. One of his men he designated as a horse guard. The other he posted in a clump of Spanish sycamores near the base of the cliffs, which, although out of range, was the nearest hiding place except the ore-crusher. Behind the old frame Saul Meakin himself hid. As he did he thought over the chances of offering Cal a fight as he rode up toward the shack. If Cal Triggers came, and if he rode directly up to the shack from the upper end of the cañon, which was, in fact, the most direct approach —Meakin estimated that he would be well within range.

He resolved that when Triggers arrived he would shoot him from the protection of the ore-crusher without offering his adversary a fight. If this proved to be impossible, Meakin knew he could summon his two henchmen and besiege Triggers in the shack.

The sheriff at the upper end of the cañon, Caborca, Scrub, and the cow-punchers at the lower end, would make the conclusion of this fight inevitable. The fact that they were all eager—almost as eager as himself—to capture Cal Triggers, gave Meakin unlimited assurance and power. He held in his hand a number of different deaths which he could deal out to his enemy. In fact, he amused himself in thinking them over. Perhaps it would be safe—granted that Cal would be trapped—to play with him for a while before finishing him!

With these possibilities in mind Meakin, having posted his two men, hid himself and waited.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

The Peppermint Test

by Ray Cummings

"MR. QUIGLEY himself will be here any moment," said the Doctor. "I will give you the facts as briefly as I can."

"I know old man Quigley," the Chemist interjected. "He's been a member of the Scientific Club as long as any of us here. Most of us know him."

He appealed to the little group of men gathered in the private club room.

A chorus of nods answered him.

"Quite right," the Doctor agreed. "Mr. Quigley is also one of my patients—almost the only one I have retained since I gave up my medical practice for surgery. He came to my office yesterday on a personal matter that very narrowly escaped becoming a tragedy. It presents rather an interesting criminal problem. That is why I asked you gentlemen to come here to-night. The affair properly belongs with the police, of course; but I thought—and Mr. Quigley agrees with me—that if we could solve it here this evening before notifying the police—that would be the better way."

"What is the problem, Frank?" the Banker asked. "A tragedy, you said?"

"An averted tragedy. Here is the whole thing, gentlemen. As most of you know, Robert Quigley is a retired financier—a man now well in his eighties. He came to me yesterday in great perturbation, and announced that some of his family were trying to poison him."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the Chemist. "Has he gone crazy?"

"I asked him that," said the Doctor. "But he was quite serious, and—well, facts are facts, no matter how amazing they may seem. I must tell you first that Mr. Quigley, for a year past, has had the obsession—I can hardly call it anything else—that his health demands the constant administration of small but very strong peppermint tablets at frequent intervals between meals."

The Doctor smiled slightly. "I have had to humor him on that—Heaven knows, peppermint is an innocent enough vice." His smile broadened as he met the eye of a brother physician. He added: "Perhaps they even do him good, for all I know—the human stomach is a most peculiar organ. At all events, Mr. Quigley is addicted to them. He takes eight or ten a day, I suppose—I've limited him to ten. Here is a bottle of them he purchased day before yesterday, and which yesterday morning he brought with him to my office." The Doctor produced a fairly large bottle of small white tablets.

"They are a foreign make," he continued. "Mr. Quigley likes them because they are so strong of peppermint flavor he

considers them medicinal rather than a confection. He always buys the largest size bottle." The Doctor inspected the label. "Five hundred tablets it is supposed to contain."

"Did Quigley get poisoned from peppermint?" the Banker demanded. "What's the idea?"

The Doctor laid the bottle on the table, under an electrolier. He said solemnly: "Gentlemen, I have found by analyzation that each of these innocuous-looking little tablets contains one and one-half grains of strychnine—a fatal dose under most conditions!"

"Good heavens!" the Astronomer exclaimed. "Enough in that bottle to kill five hundred people!"

There was a chorus of similar ejaculations.

The Big Business Man asked: "How did Quigley ever discover anything was wrong with them? I should think the first one he took would have—"

"Nothing saved him but the utmost good luck," the Doctor rejoined. "Gentlemen, at the age of eighty odd Mr. Quigley is an extraordinarily methodical man. He always does things the same way—and that fact saved his life yesterday. Peppermint tablets, as you doubtless know, are not usually swallowed intact; generally they are allowed to dissolve in the mouth. Mr. Quigley, however, has his own method, from which he never departs. He nibbles at them—holds them in his hand and bites off tiny fragments, as though they were a dainty morsel of candy—which, indeed, I believe he really considers them, for all his swearing by their medicinal efficacy. Thus he found the taste of these bitter and unpleasant."

"I don't see why he should blame the poisoning on his family," remarked the Playwright. "Where did he get that bottle of peppermints?"

"The circumstances of the case are simple and fairly conclusive," said the Doctor. "Mr. Quigley personally bought that bottle—"

The Alienist interjected: "Let us assume there was no strychnine in them when they were purchased."

"I think so," agreed the Doctor. "We can eliminate the possibility of any poison being injected into them in the drug store. There is no motive. Mr. Quigley is totally unknown to this particular store. He just happened to be passing in his car, and stopped off and bought this bottle at random from the counter. His usual place was out of them, and he had some difficulty in locating another that carried this particular foreign brand."

"When did he buy them, did you say?" the Banker asked.

"Night before last. There is additional proof that the substitution of these poison tablets for the original peppermints was made in Mr. Quigley's home. The evening he bought them he took one, without unusual result. He left them, during that night, in the medicine cabinet of his bathroom. After breakfast the next morning—yesterday—he took a second tablet, with the result I have described. Then he brought them to me."

"In other words," summarized the Lawyer, "it is obvious that during that night, or breakfast time yesterday, some one of his household substituted the poison."

The Doctor nodded. "That certainly seems a reasonable assumption. It is rather far-fetched to suppose that some one from outside would break in for that purpose."

"What do *you* propose to do, Doctor?" asked the Very Young Man diffidently.

The Author interjected: "Somebody in Mr. Quigley's family is trying to murder him; with what motive?"

"For his money," the Banker retorted. "He's worth four millions. Isn't that motive enough?"

The Doctor went on quietly: "I am assuming for his money—therefore I eliminate all members of his household except those mentioned substantially in his will. He has gone over the document with me, and he tells me also that his family are familiar with its main points."

"That strengthens the motive," commented the Lawyer.

The Chemist started a question, but the Doctor waved him aside. "Just a moment. If you gentlemen will allow me these assumptions as facts, then we reach

this one conclusion: some one or more of four specific people must have tried deliberately to murder Mr. Quigley. Should this conclusion prove to be correct, I propose to determine here in this room to-night who is guilty and who innocent. To that end I have invited them all to come here with Mr. Quigley—they should arrive at any moment. I used an entirely extraneous pretext, of course; but I want you gentlemen to know in advance that I am going to put them to a test which I hope—and believe—may show us plainly which of them is guilty."

"Mr. Quigley said nothing of the affair at home?" asked the Big Business Man.

"Not a word. He came to me at once. I have told him to act as though nothing unusual had happened. I don't want suspicion aroused. If the police were to go after this — with 'bull-in-a-china-shop' methods—I doubt if the solution would ever be reached. I have told Mr. Quigley what I propose doing this evening. Beyond that, nothing has been said or done."

"What *do* you propose doing, Doctor?" asked the Very Young Man again.

"Who are these people coming?" the Astronomer demanded. "You said there were four?"

"Mr. Quigley himself and four others: Mr. and Mrs. James Robins—they are Mr. Quigley's married daughter and her husband; Charles R. Quigley, his brother; and Mrs. Billings, Mr. Quigley's housekeeper—a widow who has been in the family some twenty years. There are several other servants, but none of them are mentioned in the will except by very small legacies."

"Have we reason to suspect any one particularly?" the Lawyer asked. "What does Quigley think? Is there any ill feeling in the family?"

"He secretly dislikes his son-in-law intensely," the Doctor answered. "An old man's whim, I should say. I have always found James Robins rather a decent little chap. Charles Quigley, personally, I don't happen to like. He's never been in business—lives on the moderate inheritance which he and his brother had from their father. I don't believe it was much. Robert Quigley is a self-made man. Charles is a bachelor—a man now about fifty. He's abroad much of the time—rather a sportsman, I understand; goes on hunting expeditions and the like."

"He sounds promising," commented the Playwright. "Robert got rich in business; Charles stayed poor going on hunting expeditions."

"Tell us about Mrs. Billings, the housekeeper," the Author suggested. "Is she the kind who would commit murder?"

The Doctor smiled. "No, I should not say so. Nor any of them, for that matter. I should not like to accuse any one of them of such a crime, and I have no intention of doing so. That, in a way, is what makes the affair interesting. The guilty person must be trapped without an accusation."

The Playwright reverted to his original idea. "Tell us more about the brother. What does Quigley himself think?"

"I don't know—I wouldn't discuss it with him," the Doctor declared. "Gentlemen, I think all this sort of thing is futile. We could go on theorizing about these people indefinitely, and then, probably, we would overlook the one vital point that might show us the solution. The police might proceed after that fashion. What are the relative amounts to be inherited? The character of the people? Their need of additional immediate money? Which one could most easily have obtained the drug and prepared the tablets? Whence were they obtained? Prove that some particular one of them *did* purchase strychnine—and you have the criminal!

"These are police methods. But, gentlemen, we are not trained to that. Let us ignore all theory. For my part, if one of these four is guilty, all I want is to have them in this room. I will accuse no one. I will not mention this intended crime—in fact, I will keep as far from it as I can. But the murderer, if he is one of them, will show himself to us. Of that I am convinced."

"But, Doctor," protested the Chemist, "there are so many things—"

He stopped abruptly as the door opened and an attendant announced:

"Mr. Robert Quigley and family would like to see Dr. Adams."

"Bring them up," ordered the Doctor.

The door closed. The Doctor put the bottle of peppermint tablets back into his pocket and added hastily: "Say very little, gentlemen. Show no surprise at anything I may say or do. If I suggest anything, agree to it. Do what I tell you."

The men settled themselves casually about the room, and a moment later their visitors entered. Robert Quigley, the man who had so narrowly escaped death, was rather an energetic-looking octogenarian—a wizened, frail body, smooth-shaven, stern-featured face deeply lined, and a bald spot fringed with snow-white hair—but alert and dogmatic in manner. His daughter was a sweet-faced, gentle-looking woman of about thirty-five, fashionably and expensively dressed. Her husband appeared to be about the same age, his neat little brown mustache, pink cheeks and mincingly courteous manner making him seem distinctly effeminate.

Charles Quigley, the old man's brother, was a man about fifty—tall, lean and muscular, iron-gray hair, smooth-shaven face, and with an unmistakable outdoor look about him. He carried himself with a complacent air, as though conscious of a great personal superiority. He was dressed in a rough tweed suit of English cut.

Mrs. Billings, in an unnaturally brown false-front, and dressed at her best for the occasion, was a stoutish woman of around fifty-five. Her demeanor was that of a privileged family retainer.

Such were the members of the household of Robert Quigley, octogenarian millionaire, from among whom, without accusing any one of them, the Doctor had determined to pick a potential murderer. The room was in confusion a moment, while greetings were exchanged and introductions made. All the visitors, with the exception of the octogenarian himself, obviously were surprised at the number of men gathered to meet them.

When they were comfortably seated the Doctor explained:

"As you know, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Robert Quigley is a member of the Scientific Club here. The rest of us are also. We are engaged—largely for diversion—in the solution of such scientific problems as may arise among the club members.

"Occasionally one of us may evolve a scientific theory which he wishes to test. Or again, one of us may have made some scientific discovery which, before giving it to the world, he desires to discuss and perfect. For these reasons we frequently meet in one of these private club rooms, just as we have to-night—with such visitors as may be necessary for our experiment."

He paused a moment, looking about impartially over the assembled group. Then he continued:

"The specific reason for our being here this evening is to demonstrate a discovery of my own, on which I have been working for some years. I spoke to Mr. Quigley about it two or three weeks ago, as a brother club member. He was much interested, and suggested that I give a private demonstration to a few other members, using you ladies and gentlemen of his own family as subjects."

Quite evidently, from the expressions on their faces, this announcement was not altogether pleasing to the visitors. They looked at each other in surprise and apprehension. Charles Quigley remarked with some asperity:

"It strikes me you take a good deal for granted, Dr. Adams. Suppose we do not wish—"

"He takes nothing for granted," the octogenarian interrupted testily. "*I* volunteered your services. You'll do as I tell you—all of you."

"Glory be!" ejaculated Mrs. Billings.

The Doctor laughed good-naturedly.

"Naturally you ladies and gentlemen are apprehensive at being made the subjects of an experiment you know nothing about. I assure you there is nothing to fear—in fact, the whole thing is quite to your interest. Let me explain further. Mr. Quigley, in these latter years of his life, naturally wishes to plan the division of his estate with the utmost justice. I am going to speak quite frankly to you now—to Mr. Quigley himself as well.

"When a man reaches the age of eighty he becomes—well, peculiar—childish, even

—in many ways." The Doctor glanced at the octogenarian and smiled quizzically. "You did not know I was going to expose you this way, did you, Mr. Quigley? But that is true, my friends. Mr. Quigley *is* peculiar, though he does not think so. He takes unreasonable likes and dislikes."

"If you will permit me to say so," interposed the cherubic-looking son-in-law, "I don't see what you're getting at, Dr. Adams."

"You will in a moment. I may tell you all I am more than Mr. Quigley's medical adviser. In fact, I am proud to say I am rather his personal adviser as well—and one of his best friends."

The Doctor's glance at Charles Quigley was impishly malicious. He added: "Mr. Quigley confides everything to me. For instance, hardly a month ago he came to me, having about decided to disinherit his sister Jane in California because she had not written to him in several weeks."

The old man's daughter rose and seated herself on the arm of his chair, caressing his hair.

"Father dear," she said with soft reproof, "how could you be so silly?"

At the Doctor's bland smile when he paused Charles Quigley observed sourly: "You talk in circles, Dr. Adams. Just what is this experiment you want to make us take part in? How does it concern *us?*"

The Doctor's manner abruptly changed. He retorted sharply:

"It concerns all of you very vitally. Mr. Quigley is about to alter materially his will. He is going to discuss it here—to-night—in the presence of all these gentlemen."

The Doctor waited until the surprise of this statement had passed. Mr. Quigley's relatives exchanged startled glances; Mrs. Billings leaned forward in her chair, vague hope, anxiety and fear mingled in her expression.

The Doctor went on: "We are going to discuss frankly how Mr. Quigley should divide his estate. Rather an unusual proceeding? Yes, doubtless—but Mr. Quigley's whims are law in such a matter. More than that, I am going to call upon each of you to give your *honest* opinion as to what the terms of his new will shall be."

"You can leave me out," declared the financier's brother. "When a man gets so childish—"

Old man Quigley started to his feet in anger, but the Doctor waved him back.

"Just a moment! You—Mr. Charles Quigley—will do as you are told." There was no mistaking the authority in the Doctor's tone, or the fact that he *did* personally dislike the financier's brother.

The old man's daughter said mildly:

"But, Dr. Adams, don't you see we can't discuss such a matter. We cannot talk about—"

"Mrs. Robins," the Doctor interrupted courteously, "I realize quite well how awkward a thing it is. However, I assure you Mr. Quigley is determined it shall be done—so determined, in fact, that if any of you refuse you will be left out of the will almost entirely."

At this Mrs. Billings murmured: "I wouldn't never cross him." And the son-in-law said meekly: "We want to do as father wishes, of course."

"I believe that," answered the Doctor with apparent frankness. He exchanged a swift glance with the Alienist, whose expression seemed to indicate that he was wholly puzzled by the proceedings.

The Doctor went on quickly: "This affair is not so purposeless as it sounds, my friends. To ask prospective heirs what they think they should inherit is unusual and doubtless somewhat useless. But to ask them what they *honestly* think—and to have a means of making them honest—well, that should be interesting, at least."

The Doctor's keen glance seemed carefully measuring the effect of his words.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he continued quietly, "for over four years I have been experimenting with a chemical which would so influence the mind that—temporarily at least—complete frankness of speech would result. That was my goal. I have not reached it—but I have gone a considerable distance. You think I am not wholly serious? Why, that is hardly so revolutionary a thing as you perhaps consider it. Under the influence of alcohol, for instance, a man talks much more openly than otherwise. You all know that."

His darting glance held each of his listeners in turn. He added easily: "Mr. Quigley is interested because I have told him that I can, with a potable fluid I have prepared, make any one tell me his honest, sincere convictions on any subject."

Charles Quigley laughed ironically.

"You're to be congratulated, Doctor," he observed. "How does it work?"

The Doctor did not smile. "A scientific explanation of why alcohol and many well-known drugs loosen the tongue would weary you, probably—nor would you understand it. My preparation goes a little further than that, however. I have been able—very temporarily, of course—to make the memory more vivid; to recall to the subject's mind many little details that seemingly have long since been forgotten. This is important, my friends.

"For instance, Mr. Quigley feels that many of you have been unjust to him in the past—have been unkind. You have forgotten these little incidents, but he has not—since they impressed his mind more than yours. He wants you to recall them, for if you are to tell him frankly what you consider you deserve from him at his death you must have all the facts at your command."

The Doctor stepped behind a screen and produced a five-gallon glass bottle, such as spring water is sold in. It was about half full of a clear fluid, with a very slight tinge of color. He set the bottle on the center table.

"I prepared this drink about two hours ago," he said. "Jack, will you go out and get that tray of glasses? Eight or ten full-size tumblers will do."

The Very Young Man hastened away.

The Doctor added: "You need not be afraid of this, my friends. I shall drink some with you, as well as Mr. Quigley himself, and one or two of the rest of us. It is quite harmless."

He added as an afterthought: "You will experience no unpleasant sensations—I give you my word on that. Nor is it intoxicating, so that you will be tempted to talk of things you do not wish to mention. As a matter of fact, you will hardly know you have had more than a drink of water, which, indeed, is its principal ingredient."

"And any one who don't want to drink it with me," declared Mr. Quigley grimly, "needn't expect any of *my* money. I'm sick of asking favors of people who don't care anything about me."

The Very Young Man returned with a tray of tumblers, and he and the Doctor filled them from the huge bottle.

The Doctor raised a glass. "Come, gentlemen, who will be the first to drink?"

No one answered.

"Very well," said the Doctor. "I will start."

He drained the tumbler. "Who next?" he asked.

"I will," volunteered the Very Young Man.

He drained his glass also, bravado making him swallow it down without preliminary tasting.

The Doctor offered a third glass to the octogenarian, who drank its contents without hesitation.

"Pass around the tray, Jack," said the Doctor.

The Alienist took a glass, and one or two of the other men. Mrs. Billings drank hers with obvious apprehension, meanwhile trying to smile ingratiatingly at her master. Charles Quigley was contemptuous, draining his glass with a sneer. The financier's daughter and her husband were both rather solemn, but after a moment of hesitation followed the rest.

The Very Young Man collected the empty glasses.

"There," said the Doctor. "That was not so very formidable, was it? My chemicals normally have rather a disagreeable taste, but in deference to you I masked it, at the last moment, with peppermint—though you notice even the mint flavor is hardly perceptible. I used Mr. Quigley's fresh bottle of peppermint tablets when he was here this afternoon—we didn't have a thing here that would do."

He spoke rapidly and quite casually, producing simultaneously the peppermint bottle—only this time it was empty, for he had removed its cork and spilled the contents into his pocket.

He added ironically: "Mr. Quigley's peppermint tablets make good flavoring, my friends."

The Doctor waited, tense and with eyes narrowed, for the effect of his words. To the financier's relatives, obviously, they held nothing alarming; but Mrs. Billings's face had slowly drained of its blood. She stared at the peppermint bottle as though hypnotized; and then, with a low moan, crumpled and fell unconscious to the floor. The Doctor sprang to his feet.

"Dr. Gregg, will you lift her up? The couch there. Jack, you help him. She has fainted."

He turned to the others, who were in confusion.

"Do not be alarmed, my friends. What we drank was merely water—flavored with a little mint and vanilla."

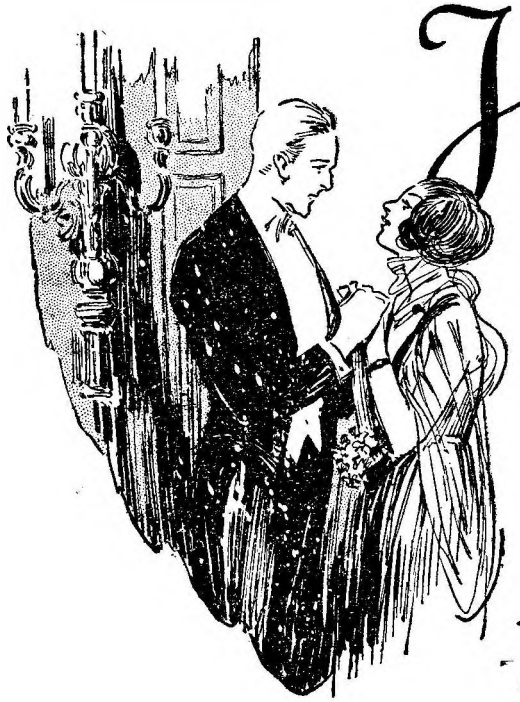
They carried the inert form of the housekeeper to the couch, while the Doctor briefly explained the circumstances to Mr. Quigley's amazed family.

A few moments later the Alienist, from his chair by the couch, said quietly:

"She is all right now. She has confessed. Her son—in Philadelphia—made her do it, for her fifteen-thousand-dollar legacy."

"By the almighty, I never thought of him!" old man Quigley exclaimed excitedly. "He works in a drug store. He—"

The Doctor interrupted, addressing the club members: "You see, gentlemen? That is a police detail—we did not need it. Jack, will you telephone police headquarters?" He added quietly: "I think that is all, my friends. I am glad to have exonerated you."



His Third Master

Part IV

by Max Brand

Author of "The Garden of Eden," "Gun Gentlemen," "The Untamed," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ARBITER OF FASHION.

JAMES VINCENT, arbiter of fashion, leaned beside the chair of a woman with one of those long, ugly faces which are as fascinating to some men as beauty—for they express keen intelligence. By the assured manner in which she turned her head Dickon knew that she was sure of herself. There were near her a considerable group of older men and women—an infallible token of wit or fame, or both. She was listening fervently to Vincent as Dickon drew near. The arbiter stood with his back to Dickon, and the latter noted the sharp contrast be-

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tween the youthfully vigorous lines of the man's shoulders and his gray hair. He changed his direction so as to come sauntering directly in front of James Vincent, in the hope that he might be remembered; if not, he would have to find some method of breaking in on the conversation. It was not necessary, however, for he had hardly come in line with the sad face and the cold eyes of Vincent when the latter straightened and nodded an invitation.

He remembered Dickon, and it was plain that he remembered him favorably, for he went so far as to disengage himself from the group and come straight to the younger man.

"When I met you the other night," he said as they shook hands, "I had a feeling that I should see much of you."

"I'm glad you remember me."

"My dear fellow, I never forget names and faces. Inconvenient memory, in fact; it packs my mind with waste material, you know, and sometimes when I try to think a host looks in on me—out of my boyhood, out of my youth—names, eyes, voices, smiles, frowns." He shuddered slightly. "I almost dread to be alone," he said in a changed voice, "for the walls of a quiet room are paneled for me—light and shadow, life and death—bah!" He recalled himself with a start. "Mr. Greene, forgive me!"

But Dickon had hardly heard the words. He was wondering how he, simple Dickon Greene, could dare to dream of using this formidable man of many moods as a tool in his upward social progress.

"Shall we stroll about?" suggested James Vincent. "Or are you dancing?"

"Stroll by all means. I'm killing time until the entertainment room closes."

"I remember now. Some one told me that you brought Marie Guilbert."

"Yes."

"A charming face, an intriguing manner," nodded Vincent.

"But?" suggested Dickon, smiling.

"Did I hint at a reservation?" asked Vincent anxiously.

"I only guessed at it."

"Not cold enough to be a great artist, I fear; that is all."

"Is coldness necessary?"

"Don't you think so?"

"On the stage?" mused Dickon. "I suppose so. An actor has to keep his audience at arm's length and never let them come up on the stage with him; he must make them admire from a distance."

"Yes. Otherwise comedy becomes farce; tragedy grows into sentimentality. Actresses keep their beauty to an advanced age—at least, the great ones do. That's because they are forever simulating emotions and feeling nothing in reality. They paint a picture which seems full of fire across the footlights, but behind them all is cold. For that matter, I'm suspicious of all artists. They are never simple; they use the world and the passions too much to believe in such things. A poet writes of a pure, great love—Tristan and Isolde; for his own part he is apt to prefer the wine cellar and a courtesan. A painter covers a wall with delightful murals; in his own house the walls are cracked."

"But Marie Guilbert is not an artist, then?"

"She has only a few motions toward artistry; she is the normal woman and therefore even the passions she simulates burn her up. If she stays with the stage she will be an atrocity before she's thirty."

Dickon remembered her as he had seen her lying exhausted on the couch in her apartment—the embers after the fire had burned out. In the meantime he had purposely guided James Vincent toward the farther end of the room for two purposes; first, because he wished Mrs. Rainey to see him in company with such a man; secondly, because he wished to have the connoisseur see Cynthia. He waited.

"Ah," he said suddenly, "there's a picture!"

A woman in a flowing gown brocaded heavily in gold stood behind Cynthia's chair, and the girl in her blue dress had half turned, framed by the color behind her. Dickon waited breathlessly—not for Vincent's criticism, but to learn whether or not he knew the girl.

"Yes," murmured the arbiter, "but the blue is too vivid for that dull gold. Eh?" The heart of Dickon fell. Then: "Besides, that dress is bad taste, I think. Blue is

too obvious a color for such pale gold hair as Cynthia Rainey's."

Dickon breathed again. She was known to the arbiter and it left one avenue of escape open to Dickon.

"I've been watching her most of the evening," he said, "because of what you told me about her at Silverman's."

"I?" echoed Vincent, frowning to remember. "I don't recall that we spoke of her; but we ran through such a list that she may have been included. What was it?"

"Something with which I can't agree."

"Ah?"

He saw the arbiter quicken himself to meet an attack on his judgment.

"You called her the most beautiful girl in New York."

"I? Im—" But James Vincent closed his lips quickly and cut off the rest of the word "impossible." "H-m!" he said, instead. "You don't agree with me?"

"Pretty, rather than beautiful," said Dickon critically. "Notice that her nose is not perfectly straight; and then don't you think her throat is a trifle too thin?"

"Strange," muttered James Vincent, "but I don't recall mentioning her at Silverman's."

"At least," said Dickon, "it was hardly a sober judgment." He challenged: "And it's not too late to retract."

"Retract?" echoed the other. "By no means! Liquor never clouds my mind; it brightens it to the last moment; then comes oblivion, a complete erasure of everything. Retract? No, by the Lord, I think alcohol inspired me at Silverman's and made me see things in Cynthia Rainey that I would never have detected otherwise. Did I call her the most beautiful girl in New York? I repeat it!"

He fixed his gaze steadily on her and Dickon waited with hungry ears.

"In some details there may be flaws. But who wants perfection? In a Greek statue it is well enough, but in a living, breathing woman let me see some human flaws. Look at the total effect, not at the separate features; look at the spirit, not at the fact. Meager, you say? No, it is the rounded slenderness of youth. And that irregular nose you object to—that and the smile and the large, clear eyes give the touch of purity which makes the picture perfect. By Heavens!" he muttered to himself, "whatever it was that I drank at Silverman's it gave me an added insight. No, sir, I shall not retract one syllable!"

It was the pride of one whose judgment was never questioned, and Dickon with a cold pleasure watched the indomitable arbiter argue himself into his own illusion. It gave him an added sense of power to see how easily the great man could be wound about one's finger.

From behind the plumes of her fan two eyes had watched the faces of Vincent and Dickon Greene with hawklike intensity, and now Mrs. Rainey seized an opportunity to touch her daughter's arm.

"Cynthia!" she whispered rather huskily. "Don't start; pretend that I'm saying nothing of importance."

Cynthia, with a girl's effortless smile, at once stared into the vague distance; only her head canted a graceful, imperceptible trifle toward her mother.

"You remember the Mr. Greene to whom I introduced you?"

"Yes."

"What did you think of him?"

"He had an interesting face—strong, wasn't it? But he was stupidly silent. He seemed embarrassed."

"Cynthia, you're a fool!" It burst out so suddenly that the girl started. "You are," repeated Mrs. Rainey with emotion. "Don't look at me! Here comes that impossible Joe Swain. Pray God he doesn't ask you for another dance; a nobody and an ass! No, there he goes by. Cynthia, your 'stupid' Mr. Greene is going to make New York look at you for the first time!"

A stain of pink touched the cheek of the girl.

"Mark my words," muttered Mrs. Rainey prophetically. "He has already brought James Vincent—*the* James Vincent! They are over there. Don't turn your head for Heaven's sake or they'll know we've noticed them. They—yes—they're coming toward us. James Vincent!" Her breathing grew rapid, almost stertorous. "They're going to speak to you. Cynthia,

everything may hang on this. God bless that boy!"

If the vocabulary of Mrs. Rainey had harked back to its pristine Western vigor—such words as she had spoken in the old days when every night she urged her husband to take the great risk and plunge with everything he had in the new irrigation project—if her voice grew hoarse and broken, her manner was quite ably maintained, and now she leaned back in her chair with an indifferent smile, praying inwardly that the pallor she felt would not make her rouge too obvious.

CHAPTER XXII.

TACTICS.

IT all happened in five golden minutes set with diamond seconds over which Mrs. Rainey long after brooded with a rich delight. Vincent and Dickon had paused beside them, the older man had spoken to her, to her daughter, and now the two went on together. Cynthia turned a dolorous face.

"I couldn't talk!" she moaned, digging her fingers desperately into her handkerchief. "I—I was tongue-tied. Oh!"

"Hush!" said her mother. "Thank Heavens you *didn't* talk. Your cue is silence and a smile or I'm a piker. I know how you felt—as I did when we were waiting for the water to come through the sluice-gates. My heart was between my teeth, but I didn't show it; and you have some of my blood in your veins, thank God! You stood the acid test, Cynthia. I'm so proud of you I could burst, dear!"

"But they didn't stay," said Cynthia, more hopefully. "Why?"

"Cynthia, you'll drive me crazy! How could they sit down? It would show that Greene brought Vincent to you on purpose, but as it is they think it looks like a chance meeting. But I see through them—like glass! Dickon Greene met you, admired you, and then off he rushes to this James Vincent to get an expert opinion."

"Mother, you talk as if I were a horse on sale!"

"Tush, silly! No matter for the words, it's the sense that counts, and this is gospel. He brings the connoisseur, Vincent."

"And James Vincent says three words and goes away."

"When a man is stirred he doesn't chatter, like a magpie. Do you know what your father said to me when he asked me to marry him? 'Louise, I need a manager; how about it?' And when I accepted him he said: 'Well, *that's* fixed!' Certainly James Vincent only said three words. If he'd said twenty you could tell that he put you down as nothing but a pretty face. My dear, great things are coming out of Dickon Greene. God bless that ugly Pasmore creature for bringing him around!"

"But—they went on so quickly!"

"What did he say?" Mrs. Rainey was murmuring. "Advertising does it? Cynthia, before the evening is over you'll be surrounded by a mob. At this very minute if those two aren't talking about you, then three of a kind beats a full house! Honey, I wouldn't trade the good opinion of that Dickon Greene for his weight in gold. Who *can* he be?"

She was quite right; James Vincent went away from the girl full of the new subject.

"It is her voice that completes the picture," he said to Dickon solemnly. "There's a sort of fate about it with most pretty girls. To compensate for their looks the Lord puts a rasp in their throats, and God knows a flat voice will ruin the dream of a Titian turned into flesh. Positively, Greene, I listened for her voice with a sort of horror, and a load dropped from my shoulders when she spoke. Sir, she is one of the three women in New York one can both look at and listen to."

"And the other two?"

James Vincent made a grimace. "To tell you the truth, I think the other two are a figure of speech. Ah, I must leave you here."

He went toward one of the galleries, and Dickon, smiling inwardly, murmured: "He's going back to her. Dickon, my friend, the best nets for catching clever men are the ones they weave for themselves." He went straight for Mrs. Littleton in the refectory room, and met her coming out trailing a small crowd after her.

"Do you know," she said by way of greeting, "that that blessed girl hasn't left the stage for half an hour—and dancing half the time!"

"But when is she coming into the ballroom to dance with *us?*" protested a youth from the rear of the hostess.

"There aren't enough of her to go around," answered Mrs. Littleton. "Miss Small, Dickon Greene, Miss Sylvia Lock, Miss Josephine Ashurst, Mr. John Welling, Mr. Hubert Reese, Mr. Godwin Sanders—have I named everybody?"

In the old days Dickon was more in the habit of studying the shoes of people he met than their faces; and for that very reason he made himself look coolly, steadily for one instant into the eyes of each person as he was presented. "I must be like James Vincent," he was saying to himself. "I must remember every name, every face." And there was such quiet interest in each of his glances that it made the others look at him in return. There was another reason for their attention: Mrs. Littleton's cordiality to this unknown gave him significance as the smile of a king makes and his frown undoes again. As for Dickon, if he had been allowed to make his choice he could hardly have selected a better group for an introduction by Mrs. Littleton; even to his socially uneducated ear each was a known name. Here, above all places, he must break ground for Cynthia Rainey.

"I suppose you've been watching Miss Guilbert," went on the hostess. "Or could you find a seat?"

He shook his head.

"Another attraction. I've been listening to the epigrams of James Vincent."

"He's gloomy to-night, they say. What has he been tearing down with that terrible tongue of his?"

"On the contrary, I thought he was extremely gay. But while I was with him he was on the subject of Miss Rainey and that always seems to inspire him."

He noted the blank glance which flashed from face to face in the group; only Mrs. Littleton nodded with interest. Dickon glanced over his shoulder to make sure, and then, with an unfeigned chuckle, he turned back to Mrs. Littleton.

"You see, he's with her now. Become an inseparable attendant."

"The girl with the pale-gold hair? She *is* lovely," murmured the hostess, and the murmur was prolonged through the group. It was enchanting music to Dickon. If he could prolong that attitude for another few moments she would be made, he thought. And to aid him, at that moment James Vincent leaned closer to Cynthia, talking rapidly.

"Do you know," said the hostess, "that James Vincent considers her the most lovely girl in New York?"

It brought a chorus from the others, a chorus of faint agreement from the girls, of open interest from the men.

"Not to doubt James Vincent's word," said young Godwin Sanders, "but don't you think that's going it a bit strong?"

It was to Dickon that he appealed.

"As a matter of fact," nodded Dickon, "it may be a matter of prejudice."

Sylvia Lock shook her head; she was pretty enough to be worried; she was even pretty enough to be frank.

"Then," she said, "it's the first time in history that Mr. Vincent has been blind. She does seem a little thin, doesn't she?"

"Vincent says," quoted Dickon Greene, "'Who wants perfection except in a Greek statue? Look at the spirit, not at the fact.' Besides, he declares that one can't judge her from a distance. He says that it's the voice that completes the picture."

He lowered his voice—secure in the knowledge that what he said would be repeated. "Vincent swears," he said to John Welling, "that she's one of the three women in New York one can both look at and listen to."

"The devil!" said the other seriously. "Who are the other two?"

"I imagine," answered Dickon, "that they're figures of speech."

"Something to round an epigram, eh?"

And in the eyes of John Welling appeared a swift and strong determination.

"As a fisher," thought Dickon, "I'll soon have the miraculous draft beaten to a frazzle."

The obvious opportunity before him was to stay close to Mrs. Littleton, to rivet her

interest in him, but obvious things, Dickon had firmly decided, were always dangerous. Instead, he asked Sylvia Lock to dance with him, and they wound off through the crowd of swaying couples carried by the swift rhythm of a waltz. With all his soul he yearned to look over his shoulder toward Cynthia Rainey, to see how she progressed, and because that was his impulse he sternly repressed it and concentrated upon Sylvia Lock. It was she who guided the talk toward Cynthia before the dance was half over.

"Do you see how they flock toward that girl?" she said.

"Toward whom?" queried Dickon blankly.

"Miss Rainey."

"Really?"

He turned his head and saw them all—Welling, Vincent, Reese, Sanders—either talking with Cynthia Rainey or else close at hand. And there were others whom he did not know. The rumor he had started and spread as rumors will—like oil upon the water.

"That's only the rule," said the girl. "Where James Vincent goes the rest follow—he so seldom steps out of his way for anybody, man or woman, that it's not surprising."

"Doesn't it occur to you," he said shamelessly, "that what he's launched with an epigram he can sink with the same means?"

She fell in with his metaphor with a chuckle. "But it may be a seaworthy ship," she said. Only a girl of Sylvia Lock's unquestionable standing could have safely added: "Do you know who she is?"

"I've never met her before to-night."

"I've seen her places," said Sylvia, not without malice. "Her father is rich—millions upon millions, they say; but no one seems to know much about them."

Her thoughtful look added as plainly as with words: "From now on she'll bear watching."

There was something so frank, even in the spitefulness of this girl, that Dickon was fascinated, and after the dance he took her reluctantly back to the gallery to fill an engagement.

"I'm afraid," she said, looking up at him suddenly as he left her, "that I've been talking too much. Have I?"

"Not at all," smiled Dickon. "I believe it's permitted to talk freely about topics of the day, isn't it?"

She laughed, delighted.

"Come to see me again before the evening's over, won't you?"

And so she was gone.

"Another step," said Dickon calmly as he went down the stairs from the gallery. "Another small step, but it leads in the right direction. I must ask William North about the Locks."

And he was so full of his reflections that he almost bumped into James Vincent coming up.

"Do you know," said the latter, without preliminary, and fixing Dickon with a cold eye, "I feel as if I'd been talking to-night in front of a mirror that reflects words. Wherever I've gone lately I've met with fragments of things I've said."

"Are you surprised?" said Dickon steadily, though he felt an abyss opening beneath him.

"Do you think I should be?" asked the other as coldly as before.

An interruption gained Dickon priceless time; a girl had come running down the stairs on the arm of a man, and behind them drifted a billowy woman wreathed in smiles.

"James Vincent," she said.

"My dear Mrs. Custer!"

It was a pleasant greeting, but Dickon felt the little cold reserve behind the man's voice. He did not wish to be interrupted at that moment. But Mrs. Custer was not to be denied. She came closer, still beaming.

"My daughter Gladys and I have been talking with a friend of yours. There they go now!"

She indicated them with a bright smile and a wave of her hand, and James Vincent turned to follow her glance; he shook his head as one in thought.

"Ah, yes," he said, his mind apparently clearing: "I have met him, but I don't know him."

"You don't know him?" echoed Mrs. Custer, her smile going out and her eyes

sharpening, foxlike, so that wrinkles appeared in the corners.

"No," said James Vincent quietly. "Do you?"

She seemed to be giving up something with reluctance, but a grim determination presently appeared in her face, and Dickon knew that Vincent had damned another reputation, another promising affair.

"I can't say that I do," she said, and went hurriedly down the steps. It would be strange indeed if Mrs. Custer did not extricate her daughter from the society of a man James Vincent had met, but did not know.

"To return to our broken thread—unless it embarrasses you?" said Vincent.

"Not at all," answered Dickon. "You are surprised to hear your own words repeated. But you should remember that a clever epigram becomes current coin; it is naturally passed from hand to hand."

The eye of the other twinkled, but grew grave again almost at once. The orchestra was playing again, but the sound seemed to come from a vast distance, to Dickon, so wrapped was he in the struggle with Vincent.

"Greene, you're too clever to be safe."

The hot blood leaped in Dickon.

"You spoke hastily, Mr. Vincent," he said, and though his voice was low an ominous ring was in it.

"I think I did," said Vincent calmly, "but you will admit the provocation."

"Freely," said Dickon. He was vastly relieved, and he felt a sudden gratitude for a man big enough to refuse to be angry; that calmness of Vincent meant a great deal indeed.

"Do you ever take advice?" said the arbiter gravely.

"From a few people, yes. Certainly from you."

"Well, you have often heard of the ladder of success?"

"Of course."

"Did it ever occur to you that when a person begins to climb it he puts himself in danger?"

The drift of the talk was beginning to escape from Dickon.

"In what way?" he murmured.

"After reaching a height one may miss a step, fall and break one's neck." And with a nod Vincent passed on.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VIOLETS.

HE did not go near either Mrs. Rainey or her daughter during the rest of the evening, for he understood perfectly that she knew what he had done; that speech of his about advertising had followed too quickly before the sudden influx of attendants upon Cynthia for her to mistake the cause of it all. He felt that a silent *entente cordiale* existed between them, and there would be time enough to build it still more strongly when he went to their home for tea. He had another reason for his reticence. Cynthia Rainey was surrounded by a brilliant galaxy of youths, she was riding on the crest of her first wave of social progress, and while the impetus lasted she would have hardly a glance for him. Afterward she would have a chance to think about the cause of all these events and she would make him welcome. In the meantime he enjoyed her from a distance—the flash of her eyes as she danced, her heightened color. Other people were beginning to look at her, for the rumor of James Vincent's opinion spread rapidly. The rumor hummed at the ears of the women: Another star is rising. And the men came to her with frank curiosity. Sensations never occurred at Mrs. Littleton's affairs, but at almost any other place that would have been the name for it. It was one of those evenings which women remember on their deathbeds as the climax of life.

"I have done two things," said Dickon to himself. "I have brought Marie Guilbert, which will make people notice me; I have started Cynthia Rainey, and they will connect me with that. As a result, they'll begin to ask questions and it will be better for me to remain in the background out of view. If I'm about too much they'll take me for a common busybody."

Right or wrong, he found an obscure corner of the arcaded gallery and remained there until the end of the ball, contented, for

the gay picture of the dance floor gathered and cleared and twisted in knots and spread out in wild mingling colors; and always he followed the progress of Cynthia as it became first notable and then a triumph. He was the cause; he was the secret spring. The world at large might attribute it to James Vincent, but the arbiter himself and Cynthia Rainey would know where to place the blame and the credit. He had not long to wait before the end. There was that sudden quickening of spirits, that rising of voices, that scurry of feet, that staccato of laughter and talking which announces the last moments of successful entertainment, with every one striving to wring the last life of enjoyment dry; this was the time that Dickon chose to go to Marie Guilbert.

The entertainment was closing in the smaller room; Marie herself was just off stage, but the audience, rising to depart, kept calling her back again and again. She was like a happy child, bowing to them, running out and begging them with gestures to stop the noise, kissing her slender fingertips over and over. No matter what she did, there was a fresh uproar at each appearance. The majority had left, but a small, compacted crowd gathered in front of the stage waiting until she should come down from it; men who wanted an introduction; women who wanted to see her face at close hand and see whether or not that color was the result of makeup, and hear her speaking voice, and criticize all those million nameless details which only a woman's eyes may detect. They were shameless about it, crowding toward the stage, for girls have much the attitude toward actresses that they have toward men—they admire them from a distance—they are just sexed enough to be intriguing.

Dickon waited a little back of the mass, and when Marie came out from behind the scenes and made for the side steps she paused and glanced over the crowd. She noted him at once with a smile and a slight nod.

"How many of these fellows," mused Dickon, "take that smile and nod for themselves?"

It was some moments before she could extricate herself from the introductions, and when she came to him her eyes were bright and fixed; they reminded him somewhat of the all-seeing brightness of the eyes of James Vincent, very drunk, at Silverman's. And, indeed, Marie Guilbert herself was intoxicated. He felt her quivering alertness to the murmurs of the crowd as they passed out of the room; she was with him only in body; in mind she was among the others drinking the praise. Her smile trembled and grew and waned like a flame.

Passing into the ballroom she drew a deeper breath as some of the excitement slipped from her. The huge floor was streaked with the slowest of the leaving guests, and they choked the exits with color and laughter, and outside the largest door they found Mrs. Littleton. She showed the strain by the shadow beneath her eyes; she showed the triumph by the fiber of her voice.

"Miss Guilbert," said Mrs. Littleton, "I think you know how much you've done for me. I hope you will teach me some time how I can make a return to you."

Dickon watched the girl critically. There was neither slang nor affected *sang-froid* in her answer.

"Why," she said as she took the hand of the hostess, "don't you see that I've been having a wonderful time?"

She was laughing as she said it; her head was back so that the full, white line of the singer's throat was shown; and in the orchid-colored dress she glowed. Something that James Vincent had said about her earlier in the evening recurred to Dickon, and indeed she seemed like one of those gorgeous tropic flowers which die young.

The image haunted him. Some one had given her a bunch of violets for a corsage, and when they sat in the taxicab he caught the faint fragrance surrounding her, seeming a perfume that came and ebbed with her breathing. It was a warm, still night, and she opened her furred wrap at the throat; in the shadow of the cab he barely sensed the white of her breast, the curve of her profile, a tender etching that was half the work of imagination.

He did not speak. She was leaning back against the cushions with half closed eyes, and he knew that she was rehearsing again

every moment of her triumph, sketching swiftly each of her songs, whirling in fancy through her dancing steps again, tasting the sweet relish of clapping and cries of applause. She wanted to be alone, and for his part Dickon was too troubled to talk. He almost prayed for a burst of clear light against her face, for in the shadow she seemed more lovely. All the admiration which had poured forth about her at the ball still clung to her; the taint of the violets clouded the mind of Dickon. He felt that his hands grew icy cold and his forehead burned. Again and again some impalpable power drew him toward the girl; he caught himself leaning to speak—and yet he had nothing to say.

"What is it?" muttered Dickon to himself. "What's wrong with me?"

He had been so sure of himself all during the evening, he had pushed so many personalities hither and thither like checkers on a board, forming the combination which would mean victory to him; the girl herself had been only a pawn in his game; and now he shuddered as he felt this sure self-possession diminish. He was slipping back into the old Dickon Greene, stammering, uncertain, stupid, full of blunders.

Once, indeed, the thought of William North sobered him like a dash of cold water against his face; the valet became the magic flower which saved Odysseus from Circe. But when, a moment later, he called up the picture of North again, it was not so strong as that maddening scent of violets that entangled him, lured him. A sort of sweet sadness began to trouble Dickon; he remembered to have felt it once before when he was looking at the face of a girl painted by Giorgione—done so tenderly, so full of life, and dead all these centuries! No matter what he thought, one idea recurred over and over: She is only for a moment; she is a flower about to fade!

The taxicab had stopped. He was helping her to the curb; and now they stood in the lobby of the apartment house.

"Good night," said Dickon resolutely.

But her hand lingered in his.

"Come up to my place. Céleste makes a rarebit fit for a king, and I have some beer that isn't two-seventy-five."

He made an enormous effort and looked her in the eye indifferently.

"It's late; and you're tired. I must go."

"Not tired now. Not a bit. That will come later."

If she would only let his hand go he felt that he would have the strength to refuse.

"Besides, we haven't had a chance to talk."

He framed the refusal carefully, but to his utter astonishment, what he said was: "I'd love to come!"

When they reached the apartment and she went to rouse Céleste he began to walk up and down the living room.

"I've got to get myself together," he was thinking. "I'm slipping fast. What the devil is it?"

He was standing quite still, frowning at the floor, when she entered again.

"Céleste is growling like a thunderstorm," laughed Marie Guilbert. "But she can cook even when she's half asleep."

He turned hopefully, hearing that breezy voice, and he saw that she had thrown a scarf over her bare shoulders, something like a changeably colored mist. When she moved it raised and ruffled; it stirred in a cloud across her throat and moved in a haze over the white arms.

"Kismet!" muttered Dickon to himself. "I am gone!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CRISIS.

WHEN he sat down she dropped into a chair beside him.

"You're troubled about something," she told him. "What's wrong?"

The tang of the violets reached him.

"I'm going to sit over here, if you don't mind."

He changed to a chair opposite her

"I want to look at you," he explained, and she laughed at the boyish compliment.

Her laughter was short, however, and he noted that she was sitting very straight in her chair; there was something in her face that reminded him of her expression when she answered the encores of the crowd at the Clermont, an inner excitement of

which her smile and her eyes gave only a hint. All at once, in a panic, he combed his mind for excuses—any blundering thing which would get him safely out of the apartment, and away from Marie Guilbert to the safety of the night outside.

"I shall not talk," said Dickon to himself. "If I begin I am lost."

"Have you thought of something that's gone wrong?" asked the girl, suddenly serious.

He nodded gloomily. Her sympathy was even more dangerous than her gayety.

"Have I pulled a boner?" cried Marie Guilbert. He noted dully that even the slang did not clear the cloud from his eyes.

"It *is* serious," murmured the girl half to herself. Rising, she came quickly to him; he sat on a long, low davenport, and she perched on the arm of it, close to him. "I haven't known you long, Dickon," she said, "but it seems as if we're almost pals. Tell me what's up. Two heads beat one."

"I'm trying with all my might to keep you out."

He looked up at her miserably; the scent of the violets stole about him. As for Marie Guilbert, she shook her head in bewilderment.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he said, frowning, "but I think it's chiefly you."

"I?"

"Or at least, those infernal violets."

She made a quick gesture, touching them, and her hand was incredibly white against the flowers; he looked at it fixedly, at the delicate finish and taper of each finger, at the slight dimple where knuckles should have been. And then something snapped in Dickon; his hands grew colder than ever, and all the blood in his body rushed to his heart and made it thunder. She stood up, looking at him in wonder, and the moment she recoiled a surge went through him, brought him to his feet above her.

"If I could talk to you I'd feel better."

"Fire away, Dickon. That's what I want you to do."

"The devil of it is that I don't know just what I want to say. I'd like to take your hands and lean close to you and say—I don't know what!"

She glanced up at him in a quick alarm and then he found himself looking steadily into her eyes, which he saw through a mist; he reached for her hands, found them, and they lay passively in his tightening grip. She had not resisted either with word or gesture, and he felt a tremendous, half-cruel exultation, like a man who sees some wild animal struggle vainly in a net. It snapped the last of his self-control and he was swept out of himself—out like an ebb tide running swiftly to the sea. Once there was a faint retraction of her hand, but it was hardly an attempt to gain freedom. She was afraid, terribly afraid of him.

"Marie—" he said.

"Let me talk!" she whispered. "If you have to speak, my name is plain Mary Gilbert. But listen to me, Dickon."

"I don't want to listen to talk, Mary."

Her eyes widened. His mind was oddly divided into two parts, one of which was a trembling hurricane of emotion, and the other was the mind of the new Dickon Greene, cold, unperturbed, noting in a sort of haze how her pupils dilated and that her lips were as colorless, almost, as the lips of Mrs. Littleton. "She is afraid," said the cold mind of Dickon, and his heart thundered: "She loves you; she is yours; take her!"

"You have to listen, Dickon. Your hands are cold as ice and your face is white; you aren't yourself."

That was her voice speaking, clear, still strong; but her fingers were small and soft and trembled in his and they kept saying: "I have no strength against you!"

"Go on," said Dickon.

"I think I know what you are about to say," she said rapidly, "but I don't want you to say it now. Come to me to-morrow."

"You will change; there will be no violets; no—God knows what!"

"Dickon, to the end of my life I'll never change."

The words fell on the stormy mind of Dickon as the small, clear treble of a child's voice, singing, falls upon the clamor of a festival mob.

"I'll tell you what my answer will be in a way." Faintly his colder mind noted that there was no slang, and it came sud-

denly to him that all her stagey manners, all her chatter were so many garments that disguised the real self. She was afraid, not of Dickon, but of something within him. What was it? "No one ever treated me seriously until I met you, Dickon. After I left you that first night I lay awake for a long time thinking about myself and knowing you were the finest thing that ever had entered my life. The moment I saw you I knew I could trust you, and, oh, Dickon, it's a wonderful thing to be able to close my eyes and stop watching, stop fencing with men and simply say: 'You lead; I'll follow!'"

"Mary—"

"Hush! Don't speak now! You aren't yourself. You're carried away like an audience that looks at me across the footlights, but there's nothing wonderful about me. I'm simple as a book in words of one syllable; I haven't a father; I haven't a mother; I'm nobody. Go away from me now; come back to-morrow and you'll find me just as I am now, as fixed as a rock in what I think about you. And if you don't come to-morrow I'll know that you've seen the truth about me and—don't care for it."

She paused with her lips half parted, as if she had more to say, but was stopped by something in his face, for the storm in him had gathered force. He only half heard what she said; the cold mind in him kept saying: "She is yours!"

"Dickon!" she whispered, and the hands strove once to escape from him and then were still; that fragrance of the violets was wine in his blood, music at his ear, and all the beauty in the world was gathered in the face before him; all its tenderness was gathered in her soft, quick breathing.

There was a stir of shadows in the corner, for the wind through a half open window had stirred the curtain, and when he looked swiftly toward it it seemed to Dickon that he saw in the obscurity a dim form take sudden shape—the long, grave face of William North, the eighteenth century naïveté of the brows as he had said: "And I knew that I had met my third master!"

Without a word, Dickon bowed his head, raised the hand of the girl to his lips, and left the room. He caught one glimpse of her as he passed through the door. Her hands remained exactly as he had left them, one raised a little higher than the other, and they seemed stretched out after him.

He went home in the utter silence of midnight past the lonely street lamps turning over in his mind how he would break the tidings to William North. An actress! That was the thing which would crush the old valet, and yet he felt that he could show the matter in a new light; he had the odd feeling of the guilty boy who has been playing truant and must make excuses to a stern master. Another thing worried him. All these amazing social adventures had been happening to the new Dickon Greene, who went through them cold, collected, observing and never observed. That Dickon Greene had established as a goal the wealth and the beauty of Cynthia Rainey; but here, at a breath, all his aspiration was blown away and the old self took possession of him. His calculation vanished like a pricked bubble and in its place there was the profound urge of an instinct drawing him toward Mary Gilbert. The appeal of her hands as they reached toward him in parting became a tremendous force.

CHAPTER XXV.

POVERTY IS A STRAIN.

HE had harked back so far, he had been so deeply buried in his thoughts, that what he expected when he laid his hand on the door of his apartment was the cramped walls, the low ceiling of his old rooms far up Broadway; and when he opened the door he stood a moment bewildered adjusting his memory. All the truth came slowly back upon him as he stared around at the spacious, ivory-tinted walls, as his glance slipped pleasantly over the lines of that Italian table, a work of art, as his foot pressed the rug. There were two floor lamps only to give light, one of them shaded in old gold, the other in a dense sea-green, and the two spheres of glow left parts of the big living room in shadow. Each included a comfortable chair in its domain of brightness, each brought out a

brief circle of the colors of that priceless rug, each cast above it an area of light on the ceiling so far above. The room became the symbol of the world toward which the new Dickon Greene was moving under the guidance of William North, a world where men study little except the art of living, where rough edges are not, a clean, fresh, brilliant world. It sobered Dickon. The first step into his apartment as he closed the door dimmed the image of Mary Gilbert and her reaching hands.

"Good evening, sir," said William North, coming through the arch from the library alcove. He bore the dressing gown over one arm, the slippers in the other, and it suggested to Dickon that the valet had been sitting up with these things for untold hours so that he might appear instantly as soon as the master returned.

"Why, North," he protested, "you up still? I thought you'd be in bed hours ago."

"At my age," said North, "men need little sleep. Five hours does me admirably, sir."

He took the coat of Dickon and slipped the dressing gown about his shoulders, then pushed a comfortable chair into a better position near a floor lamp.

"I shall wait until the morning before I tell him that I'm through with the social adventures," thought Dickon as he sank into the depths of that chair.

"I have a glass of hot milk ready, sir."

"You have?"

"And a wafer or two. An excellent sedative for tired nerves, sir."

"Good," murmured Dickon.

He felt the care of the valet enveloping him and tying the hands of his independence with invisible meshes; it had the effect on him of utter silence with water dropping slowly, measured beats that lulled the spirit; the glamour faded more and more swiftly from him. He had to key himself up to the thought of returning to the old life in the furnished rooms as one grows tense for a plunge into cold water. Now the step of William North returned and he placed on a lacquer table beside Dickon a tray that held a silver pitcher, a small glass, a saucer of wafers, a napkin of splendid linen, glimmering. He poured the milk, and Dickon watched the vapor rise and vanish briefly. Still no questions, though he knew North must be bursting with curiosity.

"A warm bath, sir?"

"If you please. But sit down a moment, North."

"Thank you, sir."

He took a small, straight-backed chair and sat down, keeping erect as though he paused only for an instant.

"Quite a natural depression, sir," nodded the valet. "Mr. William Archibald Devening was always done up after he had been out discharging social duties."

"I managed to pull through the trial of the ball," said Dickon, smiling faintly.

"You would, sir." The anxiety which had been kept in concealment clouded his face. "All went well, sir?"

"Had quite a skirmish to get Marie Guilbert, but finally she went with me. Quite a sensation, North."

"Very sharpening, are they not, the stage folk?" nodded North.

It jarred upon Dickon terribly.

"You speak of them as if they were a curious sort of cattle!"

"Not at all, sir; not at all!" he answered with a deprecatory wave of the hands. Then, chuckling: "I well remember Sir Gilbert Alin saying that he had seen two actresses who played the lady so well that sometimes one forgot they were acting."

William North shook with contained mirth, as if he feared lest his open laughter might jar upon the third master's tired nerves.

"The devil!" exclaimed Dickon.

"Eh?" cried the valet. "I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Sir Gilbert Alin must have been an ass!"

"No, no, sir. You must be thinking of Sir Geoffrey Alin—his cousin. Old Sir Gilbert was noted, indeed, for his impeccable good taste. Besides, he spoke as one well informed. For that matter I remember Mr. Wentworth saying that he thought one or two affairs with members of the profession gave a young man an edge quite as important as the polish that comes from travel. It was a fetish with him, in fact."

Dickon repressed a desire to hurl the tray at the head of the unconscious North.

"A smoke, North," he ordered. "Cigarette!"

"Before the milk, sir?" he asked, bringing a smoking tray.

"Damn the milk!"

"Certainly, sir."

He lighted Dickon's cigarette, removed the milk and the silver service, and reappeared a moment later from the direction of the kitchenette. Dickon melted.

"You'll overlook my shortness, North?"

"Very gladly, sir. Strong dislikes generally go with strong preferences. There was only one shadow in the character of Mr. Wentworth; it was sometimes impossible to know whether he were pleased, angered, or indifferent."

"A fault you will not find in me."

"Obviously not, sir. Returning to the stage—"

"We won't return to it. In brief, I found Marie Guilbert, took her to Mrs. Littleton's ball, and on account of her was very pleasantly received by the hostess."

"Naturally. She generally tries to have a few of high position on the stage around her, sir. The only idiosyncrasy I have ever heard connected with her name. But most of those who go in for the social leadership sort of thing have their oddities, you know. Mrs. Baldwin-Dexter, some years back, was passionately interested in chows and she actually asked a nameless person from Texas to a very select tea for the sake of seeing the lady's chow dog."

North shook his head in quiet amusement.

"Unfortunately, most of the people at the tea did not know that the lady in question was asked for the sake of her dog; they thought that she was one of the elect for some mysterious reason, and she was quite taken up for some weeks until Mrs. Baldwin-Dexter saw that the matter was becoming serious and let a few words drop."

"Comparing Marie Guilbert to a chow dog, eh?" murmured Dickon, whose sense of the ridiculous was beginning to be touched.

"A metaphor, sir."

"H-m! North, in punishment for what you think of the stage it would be an irony of fate if you should sometime have to serve in the household of one of 'em."

"Of course, sir," said William North stiffly, "you jest."

"H-m!" said Dickon.

"May I hope you were presented to Miss Rainey, sir?"

"Certainly, for I asked to be presented almost as soon as I arrived."

"You *asked?*" breathed the valet. "Did I hear you correctly, sir? You *asked* to be presented?"

"I asked brazenly and openly," said Dickon. He was swept away from Marie Guilbert and into the memory of his triumph at the ball. "And told Mrs. Littleton I had heard she was the most beautiful girl in New York."

William North could not speak; his eyes were wide with mute horror.

"I even quoted James Vincent as my authority."

"Good God, sir!" breathed William North.

"A small lie adds tang to the best story, North."

"But James Vincent, sir?"

"Of course I had to get to him before Mrs. Littleton reached him." He chuckled reminiscently. "And then he *did* say it, for I put the words in his mouth."

"Marvelous," gasped North.

"In the meantime I saw Mrs. Rainey and her daughter."

"I hope you were pleased with Miss Rainey?"

"Wonderfully lovely," said Dickon.

"Ah, yes; pretty, but I have never heard her called lovely, sir."

"Possibly not. Put her in the corner and pay no attention to her and she's not remarkable, I dare say. But surround her with admiration, crowd a number of the select about her, furnish her with a small social triumph, and she becomes radiant, North."

"And you saw her under those conditions?"

"Yes."

"Ah," murmured North gloomily, "then she has already arrived without your aid; she is being noticed without your assistance.

That marks off Miss Rainey as a possibility, sir. An evening wasted."

"Not at all. I did not say that."

"You mean?"

"That I made her success, North."

"Sir?"

"By quoting James Vincent's psuedo remark that she is the loveliest girl in New York."

"But, sir—"

"Of course she is not the loveliest; there may be twenty who equal her, but reputation is nine-tenths of fact, I suppose. After to-night every time people are introduced to Cynthia Rainey they will say to themselves: 'This girl is reputed to be the prettiest girl in the city.' And they will make her what they expect and hope her to be."

"Admirably reasoned, sir! And the Rainey's know it is your work?"

"I saw Mrs. Rainey before I lifted a finger."

"Then, sir, it is done!"

"Good God, North, do you expect a girl to be sold outright for the sake of social success." He added bitterly: "The whole affair sickens me! I buy a wife with a trick; she pays me with her money in return! Bah!"

"A very natural hesitancy," nodded North. "It is disagreeable, but people like us must put up with certain hurdles. Poverty is a strain, sir, and such a man as you cannot be happy without a certain amount of wealth."

"What makes you certain of that?"

"Because you love beauty, sir, and certain kinds of beauty can only be bought at a price."

The truth of it sank home in Dickon.

"I must be alone," he said suddenly. "Will you put out some writing materials, North?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MASTER.

THERE was an irony in it that made Dickon smile grimly to himself. It was the quality William North admired in him that caused his early treatment of Marie Guilbert; now it was North, indirectly, who proved to him so conclusively that a life with the actress would be impossible. He looked about him and everything on which his eyes fell was an additional proof; he could not live, now, without pleasant objects about him. He was no longer a boy; he wanted ideas, not ideals; he wanted facts, not hopes for the future. Eight years of hoping in a bank had left their mark; one part of his strength was gone—burned up. The ineradicable hunger remained, and as in all men it was a rather indiscriminating passion. He wanted to possess, but what he possessed did not so much matter. He wanted a goal attainable without great payment. What he desired above all else was a pleasant content, not a star-storming happiness which might scar him with the attaining of it. Mary Gilbert struck a thousand responsive chords; she thrilled him to the heart; but he looked on her as one looked on fire. It is easy to pick it up, but it is hard to keep one's hands from being burned. He thought of the joy, but he thought of the pain; and eight years of pain had taught Dickon to dodge the falling lash.

He went to the writing desk, sat down, and lifted the pen which William North had already dipped in the ink. The stationery was a pure white, thick as cardboard; the valet had seen to that. The chair was in perfect position at the desk; the light was arranged at that angle which threw the brightest glow on the hands of the writer and left his head in shadow. Others might think of these small details, but only a William North could do them perfectly. And this drove the hands of Dickon swiftly while he inscribed the date line and wrote:

DEAR MARY—

There he paused and dropped his forehead in his hand, for the writing of that name hurt him, and the picture of her standing as he had last seen her, with her hands half held out to him, brushed across his mind again. It was that picture which had rushed across his eyes again and again while William North talked. It was that picture which had convinced him that he dared not come back the next day and face her. One glance from her eyes, one instant

of that slow, wise smile, one gesture of head or hand would shatter his resolutions and bring him to his knees.

He thought at first of writing to her in a light vein, carelessly, but the words came heavily upon his mind. No, they had gone so far that he must meet the issue with her firmly and frankly—tell her the truth. There were soft sounds of North at work in the bedroom. He was like a fate to Dickon, and, indeed, the third master felt that there was an actual doom in his meeting with the strange valet. Thereafter they would lead lives interdependent.

The letter came in jerky phrases, each one labored; and in the background of his mind was North, who was waiting until the master went to bed. Until that time he would not leave his post.

DEAR MARY:

This letter will come in my place to-morrow. Partly because I have not the courage to come; partly because it will say things which I would not have the courage to say if I saw you again.

Perhaps when you sent me away to-night you had a foreknowledge that we were both on the verge of something we would regret afterward, and you were right. There are two things to say: First, that I love you with all my heart. Then, that I must never see you again.

That in itself is enough to make you despise me, but I must go on past the confession of weakness. You have taken up an illusion and called it by my name; now I have to introduce you to the fact so that you will take any lingering thought of me out of your mind and throw it into the junk shop of forgotten things. It is necessary that I tell you everything, for otherwise you may think that there is some mysterious force which keeps me from you and then perhaps you will keep the illusion you have built about me.

Indeed, there is no mystery. There is only this plain, bald truth, that I am afraid of life; the confession of a coward, and I cannot deny it. Five years ago I would have seized this happiness by the forelock and never let it escape again; but through the last five years I have lived with one continual hope—the hope of an escape from the horrible fate of poverty. Not that I quite realized how horrible that fate was, but lately events have occurred which awakened me, and now I see what I have been through. I cannot go back to it. I have, in a word, set up as a goal a rich marriage and toward that goal I am determined to drive.

I won't try to excuse myself. But I want you to think of this, and if there should remain in you some last shred of belief in me it will be destroyed as you read: of the two parts in a man, the heart and the mind, happiness for the mind is more necessary to me than the happiness of the heart. There is only one explanation I can give you: seven years of hope and striving toward that happiness of the heart have brought me failure. I am now bent on trying the other thing.

You will bury the thought of me before you finish this letter, but I can promise you this one thing: that I shall remember you forever.

Here he paused for a long time. It was very late. The first sounds of the morning life rattled through the streets; here and there, far off, there was the clatter of an occasional window being opened or closed. He had been conscious of a growing weariness for a long time, and now it swept over him and loosened his nerves. He scrawled his name hastily, reread the pages hastily, and coming again to the end of it, it seemed to him to be a barren scrawl which said nothing of all the tumult that moved him. He buried his head on his forearm to think; then he heard the clear, steady ticking of a clock which he had not noticed before; he slept.

It was almost at that same instant that William North started up from his chair worried because the master took so much time with this midnight letter. It might be that a glass of wine would clear his mind and make his work easier, so North poured the glassful and carried it in with tray and napkin and the quarter of an apple. Pausing behind Dickon he canted his head to one side, but when he heard the regular breathing of the third master he smiled and nodded to himself.

"Well," murmured the valet to himself, for like many of the best of servants he had formed the habit of talking to himself from being silent so much in the presence of others, "he has done enough this evening to weary himself."

He touched the shoulder of Dickon, and in doing so his glance went past the master's head and rested on the page of the letter spread out before him. The first line he read brushed the smile from his face; he glanced about him, half guilty, half horrified; then he read again to the very end.

The wine glass clattered on the silver tray as North carried it away, and when he sat down in the back room where he slept his face was seamed and old.

"He!" whispered William North aloud.

He folded his white, unmarred fingers together and wrung his hands.

"He!" repeated the valet, and bowed his head as if he had heard the news of the death of one dear to him.

"A gentleman? In love with a dancer?" muttered he, louder.

He fell back in his chair and laughed soundlessly, bitterly.

"My third master," whispered North in that peculiar conversation with himself, "and God knows, my last. But would a gentleman have looked at her—seriously? No, no, no! A dancer!"

He repeated the word in a silent agony.

There remained only one thing for him to do. He had no money; he had no resource; but to remain in the service of one who had proved himself no gentleman was impossible.

He packed his belongings hastily into the pockets of the old suit which he had been wearing when Dickon first met him—very few of them, indeed, until he came to a small volume of Burns which Dickon had given him the day before. William North raised the book in the manner of one stunned and looked at it over and under as though he perceived a mystery in it.

It made it harder for him to go on with his preparations for departure, apparently. But at length he was ready except for the necessity of changing from Dickon's suit into his own old clothes. Then he sat down and penned his note with painful care:

DEAR MR. GREENE:

Information of the most painful character and, indeed, word which would necessarily cause annoyance to you if you should be cognizant of it—

He paused in his writing and regarded the number of the long words with a sort of gloomy pride.

—compels me to take this summary leave of you without giving notice. I beg to acknowledge the volume of Burns which you gave me and which, unfortunately, I cannot properly take with me, feeling, as I do, that it is more fitting for me to step from your service and your house with nothing more than I carried into it.

I remain your debtor for—(gritting his teeth)—the charity which you showed me in our original meeting.

Wishing you all future success in your career, I have the honor of remaining, sir,

Yours most faithfully,

WILLIAM NORTH.

He signed his name with his usual flourish of the pen, a great, broad line which swept from the terminal "h" around the initial "w," but having made his flourish the pen dropped from the nerveless hand of the valet and rolled from the table to the floor.

"Why should I sneak out like a whipped cur from him?" said William North.

"I'll wake him up," he added after a moment, "and give him this note, which will tell him better than I can do it by word of mouth. While he reads it I shall change into my old clothes, and—"

He took up the note and went haltingly into the next room and leaned over the third master.

"Mr. Greene!" he called.

The master lifted his head. His eyes were dazed.

"Sir!" called the valet again.

Dickon rose slowly to his feet.

"Not so loud, North. I detest loud voices about me."

"Yes, sir."

The valet gathered himself, raised the hand which held the note, but the master, perhaps because his eyes were still hazy, failed to see it.

"By the way," said Dickon, and folding the letter once across he tossed it back upon the desk, "there's an addressed envelope. Put this letter in it and see that it's mailed, if you will."

"Even with *that* letter unsealed he trusts me!" thought William North. "Very good, sir," he said aloud.

"You called me, North. For what purpose?"

The hand which held the note moved slowly around behind North's back.

"To tell you the hour, sir. It is four o'clock."

"Good gad, and you've been waiting up

for me all this time? North, I'm a villain!"

"Sir, sir! Not at all, sir. No inconvenience at all. Shall I draw the tub, warm?"

"Hot, North."

And a moment later William North cried triumphantly, for the roar of the running water quite drowned his voice: "Besides, what did he do? They've made fools of better men than Dickon Greene. But he broke with her. He broke with her! And for the rest, he was only jollying her a bit. Was I a fool for not seeing it before? I was!"

He looked to the temperature of the water he drew with painful care; he turned down the covers of Dickon's bed accurately as if the corner had been laid down with a square; and when the master was safely ensconced in the bed the valet still lingered near, held by the contrite heart which needed some pleasant word. A moment adjusting the windows; another arranging the electric lamp on the bedside console.

"Everything you wish, sir?"

"Everything."

"Call you at any hour, sir?"

"No, I'll get up when I wake; no sooner."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night. North, you're a comfort!"

It was like a blessing to William North. When he was outside the softly closed door he stood with his trembling hand pressed against his forehead, for he felt as if he had just safely crossed a great abyss; never before had he known how necessary the third master was to him. He decided silently, then, to make no more questioning of Dickon Greene. The master's way would be the right way for him.

Going back to the letter he picked it up and read it through again. It seemed to William North now that the whole composition was an elaborate fraud; the third master was gracefully extricating himself from an entangling affair which might embarrass him unless it were terminated now. And he was managing it so that the girl in question would be least wounded. William North chuckled as he came toward the last part of the writing.

But, he thought, if the girl received such a letter as this she would be convinced of the power of her hold over Dickon Greene, and later on she might be tempted to use that power when the third master had safely established his household. It seemed better in every way that the letter should not be sent; let her whistle in the wind. So the valet went to the fireplace, lighted a match, and watched the letter flare and then die away to a crimson and then a blue-gray ash in which the writing was represented by a dark, thin scrawling line. This ash he crumbled between his fingers and actually tossed it up until the draft up the chimney caught the filmy stuff and carried it away.

Then he went to his bedroom, brushing the soot from the tips of his fingers and the thought of Marie Guilbert from his mind; his heart was strong with the knowledge of one good deed well done that night.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FINESSE.

LIKE all men of introspective natures Dickon Greene was apt to underrate his virtues and paint his failings black; but he had another quality of those who think a great deal about themselves: having given his sin a name strong enough to damn him, he was quite apt to forget all about it in an amazingly short time. He wakened the next morning certain that he had sold his soul; before he finished breakfast he took the sale for granted, pushed the thought of it behind him, reduced the memory of Mary Gilbert to a faint, almost pleasant ache, and faced the new events. The first thing he did was to start for Mrs. Littleton's to pay his party call. Most people chose a time when they were apt to find the hostess not at home to pay such a duty call as this, even if it were to a Mrs. Littleton, but Dickon was not one of these.

The infallible North had means of tapping the wires of the Littleton household, and within half an hour he brought Dickon the time of day when the society queen was most certain to be at home. It was at that exact hour that Dickon Greene presented himself. She was not only at home,

in fact, but she admitted it, and when Dickon entered the room where she sat she was plainly glad to see him.

He did not hesitate at the door, but he sent at her one piercing glance that saw everything before he entered the room. She, for the present at least, was the strong ship to which his social career was confided; partly through her, partly through Vincent, still more through his own clever manipulation, he had launched Cynthia Rainey, but Dickon knew perfectly that almost any girl with money or good looks can meet the best men in society. As William North said: "Give a squaw a million dollars and she will cause a flutter among the marriageables." That was not social success, for a success, as far as a girl was concerned, meant only one thing—her acceptance by other women of the exclusive set. For that acceptance of Cynthia Rainey, Dickon still depended first upon Mrs. Littleton. It might be a work of a long time, but he felt that she was the entering wedge both for himself and for his protégée. That accounted for the keen look with which he probed Mrs. Littleton as he entered. He had to read her mind and please it.

She was plainly in a mood of quiescence, lying in a great chair with her head far back against the cushions. She wore something full of ruffles and lace which looked at once too young for her and much out of date, but it seemed so comfortable and soft that it was decidedly pleasing. No other person in New York would have dreamed of wearing such a gown; it was one of those little tricks with which she kept people continually on the alert and escaped from categories as fast as they were made for her. She was quite apt to load her wonderful hands and wrists with enough jewelry to ruin a débutante one evening, and the next night she was dressed in perfectly subdued taste of an almost Doric coldness. This morning she had a steamer rug about her knees, a window open beside her, and a vase of green stuff and flowers on a stone bench under the window so that the breeze could ruffle in it.

"Will you pardon me for not getting up?" she said to Dickon.

He bowed as he took her hand, putting just a touch of deference in his manner; he had seen that that was not displeasing to her at the ball of last night.

She went on: "You see, I'm so exhausted by the work of that ball that I can hardly move to-day; every year I vow that I'll never give another, and every year when the season rolls along I fall into the net again. Some time the work will crush me, and it will serve me right!"

He murmured something in answer as he took a chair near her. It was obvious to him that she was not telling the truth, for though her pallor at any time fitted nicely into a tale of exhaustion, there was an alertness about her eyes and a fiber to her voice that belied it. It rather alarmed him, for he saw that she was in the mood when one keeps every mental and physical faculty in abeyance, except the faculty of criticism. At this moment there was no more temperament in her to color her judgment than there is warm blood in a fish; if he made the slightest misstep she would be aware of it instantly; if he opened his thoughts she would instantly be inside his mind. One careless remark would invite disaster. He decided on a brutal frankness.

She might attribute that to masculine enthusiasm and obtuseness; and where she would forgive such a failing and even be amused by it, because this morning very apparently she wanted something to take her outside of herself, on the other hand she would never forgive an attempted subtlety through which she saw with those keen, cold eyes.

"I should not have come," said Dickon. "I must have known that last night would tire you out."

"I know how it is with these party calls," she said maliciously. "One likes to have them out of the way at once, if one has a conscience. Personally, I am blessed with a very shallow conscience." She stretched herself carelessly in the chair. "You aren't offended?" she murmured. "And really, I'm glad to have you here."

That was true, he thought, but what a cat she was! She laid the tips of two fingers against her chin and studied him with the excusable steadiness of the invalid, who needs diversion. On one of those fin-

gers flamed a tremendous ruby. No other pale woman would have dared to wear it, but Mrs. Littleton wore it for the sake of the contrast, and for some reason it made her almost beautiful. Dickon decided that the reason why she could put on such flaring things was because of the brilliance of her eyes; there was always fire behind them, blown up or dying away to a coal, or simply guessed in the depths, as it was at this moment.

"I'm tired of thinking about myself, you see," she explained. "Won't you help me toward another subject?"

"I'll try."

She waited.

"For instance," she said, "tell me what to do at a house party in the country—besides riding and boating and walking."

"A picnic."

"A what?"

"An old-fashioned picnic where one brings a sandwich tucked under one arm and squashes it before noon—and then there's so much sand in the bread that it tastes like ground glass."

"And it's spring," said Mrs. Littleton thoughtfully. "You never see the green things when you're riding a horse. Dickon Greene, I think you're inspired. Will you come along and direct my picnic?"

It came so naturally that for an instant he didn't grasp the full portent of what had been said. Then it burst in upon him. He—Dickon Greene, the obscure—had been asked to Mrs. Littleton's country home! It dazed him. To be met pleasantly at one of her great functions was well enough; to be included on one of these selected house parties was in itself enough to enroll him among the stars. And instantly he made up his mind; Cynthia Rainey should go with him on that party; if it were important as a mile-stone in his social progress it would actually be a social heaven for Cynthia. He combed his mind swiftly for some means of introducing her without subtlety which Mrs. Littleton would see through, and searching he became conscious of her eyes and flushed. He cursed himself deeply for that luckless blush; and that sent the blood pounding to his temples. He was hopelessly betrayed.

When he looked up she was smiling quietly at him.

"I feel silly," said Dickon.

"You rather look it," she nodded. "What's the matter?"

There was only one thing to do: take the difficulty by the horns and crush it.

"I'll tell you. I'd rather go to your place in the country than anything I know, almost." He paused and then blurted out: "It would mean such a lot!"

There was just a flash of her eyes which proved that she understood the tribute and appreciated it.

"It's pleasant of you to say that. Now I suppose you won't go."

"I can't!"

He was glad of his flush now; it played into his game.

"Dickon Greene," she was saying, partially raising herself on one elbow as though she forgot her pose of weariness, "you're just about nine-tenths boy! Why can't you go?"

"As a matter of fact, I'm tied in a terrible knot."

"You look that, too. Trouble?"

"I should say!"

"Tell me about it."

"It's a girl."

"Of course."

"No, not 'of course.' I really don't go in much for that sort of thing."

"No?"

"You're amused, aren't you?"

"Just a little."

"I won't bother you with it."

"I think you're hungry to talk; and, of course, I'd like to hear."

"In a way, you *should* be made to hear. I met her last night at your dance."

"I can even name her, I think."

"You can?"

"Sylvia Lock. She talked to me after she met you; she liked you very much—I think."

"That's plain mischievous, Mrs. Littleton."

She shrugged her shoulders, delighted with the conversation.

"Not Sylvia Lock, then?"

"No, I'm in the same boat with a dozen others, I guess."

"Perhaps not. Every man thinks that the world worships the girl he's fond of."

"Yes, but this is Cynthia Rainey!"

He said it gloomily, dropping his head in the manner of one overtaken by a fatality; also it gave him an opportunity to look up at her through his brows. She was not smiling. She was seriously intent upon his bowed head and her knuckles were digging into her chin. The very abandon of her position proved the depth of her interest.

"Cynthia Rainey," she murmured.

"Think of that?" he said, making his laughter hollow. "Being interested in her is like being interested in a queen, eh? The prettiest girl in New York!"

He added in a gloomy burst of afterthought: "Even James Vincent is excited about her, and you know what that means!"

"To tell you the truth," she said, "it sometimes isn't altogether a compliment." She added hastily: "Of course I mean that in the best light."

"Of course. Concerning Cynthia Rainey it couldn't be taken any other way."

"H-m!" said Mrs. Littleton.

"But isn't she exquisite?" cried Dickon, letting himself swing into his subject. "Like a head carved in crystal, don't you think?"

She smiled.

"I should know better than this," he said. "I think about the first thing my mother told me was never to talk to one woman about another. But there's no one I can talk to, and you really invited it."

"Do you know that I'm more interested than you guess?"

"That's good of you. You don't mind, then?"

"Not a bit. And you can't even take yourself away from her long enough to go out on my party?"

"You know I'd like to do that no end; but last night I planned one of those old-fashioned picnics with Miss Rainey for next week-end. The dates interfere."

He leaned forward hopefully.

"I'm afraid they do."

"I knew it," groaned Dickon, sinking back in his chair again. "You see how much trouble she's already beginning to give me?" he said whimsically.

Mrs. Littleton was thoughtful; Dickon was on pins and needles.

"Do you know about her?"

"I don't," said Dickon. He must be frank. "I met her mother last night, of course, and I gather that Cynthia's folks are"—he paused and looked at her so that she might feel she was being invited into his confidence—"just people. You know?"

"Perfectly," she said gravely.

"But that's nothing—important."

"I suppose not." Her seriousness showed how important she felt it to be.

"She is catechizing me to see if the girl is a possible house guest," thought Dickon. "Now the Lord be with me!"

He said: "The worst thing—for me—is that her father is terribly rich."

"Is that an obstacle?" laughed Mrs. Littleton.

"Of course," said Dickon, frowning. "To have her so beautiful is bad enough; to have her praised by James Vincent is still worse; but when she has thirty millions on top of all that"—he tossed out his arms and let them fall again helplessly—"that simply means that fellows will flock around her. You know how it is?"

Her eyes wandered past him, thoughtfully.

"Who are you asking to the picnic?"

"Of course I'm leaving that to Cynthia," he said, combing his memory for names.

"Naturally. But didn't you talk over some possibilities?"

He remembered the young men of Mrs. Littleton's group at the door of the refectory room.

"John Welling and Hubert Reese and Godwin Sanders and Nancy Small," said Dickon. "I think we mentioned them in particular."

"Dear me," murmured Mrs. Littleton. "I intended to ask Hubert and Godwin to my party. This Cynthia Rainey is a nuisance!"

"Isn't she?" said Dickon heartily. "No end!"

"Have they accepted the invitations yet? No, you say none have been sent. Well, I'll simply have to rush along my own affairs and try to get in first."

The heart of Dickon fell in hopelessness,

but he forced a grin of delight. "I wish you would! By Jove, that would be bully!"

"How do you mean?"

"I'll have Cynthia all to myself!"

For the first time Mrs. Littleton laughed openly and delighted, as if she had cast away some lingering restraint.

"For the sake of the others," she said, "I think I ought to try for a compromise."

"Well?"

He frowned with suspicion, but his heart leaped again.

"It won't please you, I warn you, but Cynthia might like it. Suppose I ask you all to my party—you and Cynthia and the rest?"

"Victory!" thought Dickon, but by a great effort he made his face black. For he saw behind those keen, expressive eyes of Mrs. Littleton a gleam of suspicion. If he were too pleased now all would be lost.

"Not that!" said Dickon hastily.

"No?"

"That may be a compromise for Cynthia," said Dickon, "but it's an unconditional surrender for me. I know these house parties. Twenty times a day there are opportunities for people to get away by themselves."

"I should think that would be exactly what you want."

He decided on a bold stroke; it might ruin everything; but if it succeeded it would completely disarm Mrs. Littleton.

"May I say one very nasty thing—to be forgotten as soon as it's said?"

"Please do; I love to hear 'em."

"I'm afraid Mrs. Rainey is just a little bit socially ambitious!"

Mrs. Littleton folded her dead white hands under her head and laughed to the last particle of her delight.

"My dear Dickon Greene, what one of us is *not* socially ambitious? Frankly, I am!"

"But you don't understand. Consider this picture. There is your house, full of the socially eligible, you know."

"I understand. But Cynthia will not have her mother along, necessarily."

"Of course not, but even from a distance Mrs. Rainey is pretty sure to direct the plan of battle. When I think of her hearing that Godwin Sanders is near Cynthia I tremble."

"She's the dominant figure, I suppose."

"You've no idea how dominant! And, really, I have not a thing to offer—not even money; I'll be the first discard!"

"Do you know that I have a good many doubts of that?"

Mrs. Adolphus Dickens was announced from the door.

"Then I'll go," said he, rising with a frown. "You're absolutely firm on the house party, Mrs. Littleton?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," she said. "I want to see the fight. You'll come, won't you?"

"I'll come and do my best," said Dickon darkly. "No man can do more. But, Mrs. Littleton, I think you're distinctly unfair. I laid my hand on the table and you've taken advantage of it."

She laughed again as he turned toward the door. A broad, solemn woman of forty was entering.

"Mrs. Dickens," said Mrs. Littleton, "this is Mr. Greene."

They bowed, and Dickon, excusing himself, went out.

"And who," said Mrs. Dickens, settling herself in the chair that Dickon had just left, "who may that young fellow be?"

"Don't you recognize the name?"

"Greene is a common name, my dear."

"But that is Dickon Greene."

"I don't remember—"

"Start remembering now, then, Alice. He's already made more of a stir than you'd dream."

"But who is he?"

"Tush, Alice! Are you still asking about great-grandfathers? I haven't the slightest idea who his forbears may be, but I know that Dickon Greene is delightful, and just a little dangerous. I've an idea that he's just finished winding me about his finger. I've asked a girl I know nothing about to my house party this week-end."

"My dear!"

"I'll bet he's heading for Mrs. Rainey's house now. Well, no matter *what* he does, the way he does it is a joy to watch!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Out for Lunch

by Douglas Grahame

ELIAS BULLER, known throughout the trade as the " Old Man," impatiently consulted his worn silver watch, scowled down upon the conservative show room and officers of the long-established firm, and squared his bulldog jaw in the manner of a man who has decided upon an irrevocable course of action. He glanced over a slip of paper, upon which was written in his bold hand a list of names with figures beside them, and this did not lessen the unpleasantness of his facial expression.

" You're what I call a lemon picker, Harvey," he said, his rough voice harsh with annoyance. " You may know the line admirably well, but when it comes to selecting employees, why, you haven't any judgment at all. No, sir. You simply haven't the gift for that sort of thing! Well, I am certainly not the man to be made a monkey of by any one, let alone a show room counter-jumper, even if you did pick him."

Mr. Harvey, the person addressed, was the tall, stately man of middle age, even tempered and ever courteous, who by virtue of long experience and a quarter interest, was the " & Co." of the firm. He politely looked across the desk at Mr. Buller, but didn't say anything.

" I don't have to, and, by gad, I shan't put up with this sort of thing!" the Old Man roared on, half to himself. " Every man and woman in the place takes only an hour for lunch; all on the job except your young pick, that Clark fellow." He tapped the list, which he kept himself, with the back of his big hand. " His place is down there in the show room precisely at two o'clock. I thought I was conferring a favor on him when I changed his luncheon period from noon to one o'clock, but he doesn't seem to appreciate it at all. Two thirty, two forty-five. Bah! Never again!"

" But, Mr. Buller; he's a salesman—" began his associate.

" Stop! Stop, right there, sir! No more excuses! A salesman? Don't be absurd—I thought we had settled that thing a fortnight ago when you foisted him on our payroll? I tell you again he's not a salesman and I don't mind wagering that he never will be. He's a show room order-taker; his job is to show customers the line and explain clearly why our glassware, cut and plain, is considerably better than other lines. That's all I want him for, and that's all he's paid to do."

" Isn't that salesmanship of a pretty high order? The other men down there consider themselves salesmen, and it seems to me that's exactly what they are. It takes skill and ability to do that sort of thing." Mr. Harvey spoke in his quiet, courteous tone.

" No, it isn't. No, it doesn't," snapped Mr. Buller. " Now, don't try to argue, my dear Harvey. They're nothing more than counter-jumpers—our salesmen are out meeting the trade, going after business;

those fellows are there to merely furnish information that our catalogues don't contain."

The tactful Mr. Harvey held his peace, and had the Old Man been less ruffled he would have noticed that there was a twinkle in his kindly dark eyes. So each let the matter drop and turned his attention to the various matters of business on hand. Mr. Buller, however, was plainly upset and manifested his dissatisfaction in frequent puffs and sighs as he looked over the lists of customers and possible buyers that lay before him. When he came to the name of Pangle & Malone on the prospective section his sigh became a groan. Long had his salesmen, the best of them, endeavored to sign up the business of this redoubtable firm. But Pangle & Malone would have none of Buller & Co.'s glassware in any form. So the business, which was considerable, as the concern owned and operated an extensive chain of high-class hotels, went to competitors. The worst of it was that the Old Man had never been able to account for the persistent refusal to trade with his firm.

Buller & Co.'s salesmen were of the old and altogether conservative school. A dignified call, an aloof statement of the case, a request for an order made in very conventional and independent style, and if business was refused, a hurt look, a stiff nod and they would be on their way. This procedure had worked quite well in many cases; but Pangle & Malone were of the decidedly new school that must be sought out and "sold." They had worked their way up from hotel clerks, were good fellows and shrewd, and because salesmen of rival concerns had gone after them in the most effective fashion their business had been given to the houses that employed modern selling tactics.

Malone, a likable, magnetic fellow of thirty-five, was the more active of the partners and one of the most popular men in the staid little New England manufacturing city. Mr. Buller knew him by sight, but whenever they met he greeted him with a cold bow—he made it plain that he didn't at all like it because the young man had refused to do business with him. But Malone was ever cordial and seemed to overlook the older man's stiffness.

"Ah, hum; Harvey," Mr. Buller began again, "you needn't bother to look for a young man to fill the vacancy that has occurred in our show room—I'll attend to that matter myself this time."

"Well," quietly answered his associate, "I haven't anything to say except this: I chose young Clark because I felt that he would be the kind of young man who would develop into a first-class, up-to-date salesman in a short time. It seems to me that we can't go after every kind of business in the same old-fashioned way—"

"Enough, sir; I will not be dictated to!" roared Mr. Buller, smacking the back of one hand into the palm of the other. "I have respect for your capabilities, Harvey, but I've been in the business longer, much longer than you have, and I think I know what I am doing. For forty years I have followed the same method and with successful results. As you know, we—that is I—won't have a man represent us on the outside who is less than thirty years old. At that age, sir, a man is fairly well settled, his puppy days are over, he can carry himself with dignity. Why, only the other day I actually overheard your protégé humming to himself like a schoolboy. Fancy! He has a long way to go yet before he can acquire the correct Buller & Co. attitude of deportment as it is observed by our salesmen. And, I need hardly add, he is not going to get that chance!"

"But, Mr. Buller," inquired Mr. Harvey, "are you sure that he was told of the rules and regulations of the firm; was he warned that an hour was all that we allow for luncheon?"

"Bah! You talk like an infant, Harvey. He can see and hear and he certainly must have some degree of common sense to know what we expect of our inside employees. Don't talk to me about the matter any more." With that he buried himself in the papers on the desk before him.

Mr. Harvey held his peace, but for a man who was evidently responsible for the downfall of another he did not appear to be particularly depressed; in fact, there was a decided twinkle in his eyes. He was an

old friend of the Clark family, and now that but two members remained, the young man and his mother and their once substantial wealth had vanished beyond recovery, John Harvey was their sturdy champion. Well educated in book lore and schooled in the ways of the world, of which he had seen much before disaster had befallen, Ralph Clark was a very likable young man. Mr. Harvey had offered him the position in the show room with a hint that he would soon be one of their best salesmen, and young Clark had bent every effort to attain that envied position.

Mr. Harvey had broached to Mr. Buller the subject of sending the young fellow out to meet the trade after a brief apprenticeship in the show room, pointing out that he was well qualified to do so, as he had been in the "line" before. But the Old Man had flatly refused, declaring that Clark had been engaged as a counter-jumper and nothing else. So the matter had rested.

Regretfully Mr. Harvey had told Clark of the decision, but at the same time urged him not to be discouraged. Clark, who was a buoyant fellow of twenty-five, had been perceptibly depressed; his sanguine spirits drooped, and he was quite like a newly captured bird in a cage, going through his duties in the show room in a subdued manner that met the grudging approval of Mr. Buller.

II.

It was ten minutes to three and a very pleasant appearing young man, who wore good clothes well, and whose keen gray eyes sparkled with a firmly rooted delight in living, came into the show room, nodded affably to his fellow clerks, and in a much more cheerful mood than he had been in for several days, settled into the work of the afternoon. He had barely done so when Mr. Buller, spotting him, glared down at his clear-cut figure. With a growl, not unlike that of an enraged bear, the Old Man went to the office door and in a voice of thunder that made all the employees pause in their work, yelled out:

"Clark!"

The latter turned as he would at the report of a pistol, but didn't appear to be in the least upset. At a gesture from the Old Man, he made his way briskly to the short flight of stairs that led to the office floor, and faced the glowering old man calmly. His poise so aroused the ire of Mr. Buller that speech was utterly beyond him, so with a rough inclination of his head he ordered Clark to follow him into the private office.

"You—you insolent young puppy!" choked Mr. Buller, struggling hard to keep his hands to himself. "How dare you?" Boiling rage cut off any further articulation.

Clark, his honest eyes wide with puzzled amusement, but his bearing quite respectful, looked at his employer in amazement. The Old Man dropped into his chair, and the jolt seemed to restore his speech.

"Get out of here, sir," he howled; "get out of here, and don't let me see your smirking face again."

"But, Mr. Buller, I'd like an explanation of this strange conduct." Clark spoke quietly and with remarkable self-possession. "I admit that I am a few minutes late in returning from lunch, but please let me explain—"

"Get out! Get out! Or, by thunder, I'll have you put out!" barked Mr. Buller. "I am not the man to take impudence from any man, woman, or child, especially not from an insolent young ragamuffin like you! Begone, while you are still whole!"

"Mr. Buller," rejoined Clark in even tones, looking his employer straight in the eye, "Mr. Buller, if I have stayed out for lunch over long I am sincerely sorry; but the transgression was quite unavoidable I can assure you."

The Old Man said nothing; he couldn't. He stared at this quiet and determined young man as though he had been mesmerized. No servile, tail-between-the-legs attitude with this fellow. Down in his bluff old heart he was beginning to admire him.

"Mr. Buller," Clark resumed, "I entered the service of this firm with the single purpose of advancing its interests to the very best of my ability—in working hours as well as during my own time—and I can honestly say that I have, and am doing, that very thing."

A sarcastic phrase came to the Old Man's

lips, but for the life of him he could not utter it. He was beginning to feel a bit embarrassed and he glanced at Harvey, who was leaning back in his chair watching Clark with an expression on his face not unlike that of a fond parent standing by while his young hopeful chirps off a standard recitation. This so exasperated Mr. Buller that he found his tongue again.

"Hang it, Harvey, you're encouraging this—this bit of colossal effrontery," he cried; "aiding and abetting the most atrocious bit of insubordination that has ever come to my attention."

"You do me an injustice, Mr. Buller," said Mr. Harvey in mock, serious tones. "I have had nothing whatever to do with what you deem to be an act of insubordination."

"Well, then, what does all this monkey business mean?" demanded the Old Man, turning again to Clark. "Every day this week you have come back from lunch later and later. Every time I want you it seems you are out at lunch! What does it mean? Explain yourself!"

"Well, you see, Mr. Buller, I have been taking luncheon these last few days at the Regal—" the young man began in his straightforward way.

"What! You lunching at the Regal—you at a hotel of that sort!" broke in his employer.

"Why, yes. That's nothing new for me; I'm used to places like that—they know me over there quite well, particularly Mr. Malone, who is the proprietor, you know."

Mr. Buller stared at him, speechless, while Clark continued:

"As I understood my instructions from Mr. Harvey when I began my work here I was to bend all my efforts to advancing the cause of the house. Nothing—absolutely nothing—was said to me about the seemingly iron-clad rule of getting back to the show room precisely an hour after you leave it for luncheon. I was told that I was, and still am, I hope, a salesman and my business was to get business for the house. Well, sir, that is precisely what I have been about." He deftly reached into an inside coat pocket and produced a smart order book which he placed before the astonished Mr. Buller.

The Old Man opened it gingerly, peered into the thing, and what he saw made him gasp, lean back in his chair and stare at the young man before him.

"An order from Pangle & Malone, and you mean to tell me that you got it?" he said in a hollow voice.

"Yes, sir, that is just what I did. It wasn't a very easy task; took time and talk and reason, but Malone isn't such a bad sort, and finally he decided to let us have a trial order, which, I am convinced, will lead to the entire business of all their hotels coming to us, for they are the people who appreciate the very best."

"Hum, ha! Well." The Old Man was rubbing his hands, struggling with a mixture of pride and wounded vanity and not daring to look across at Mr. Harvey. The order, even though it was only a trial one, gladdened his heart beyond expression, but the thought that he had been outwitted by a whipper-snapper whom he had quite made up his mind to dismiss, cut him to the quick. It was an awkward position for him. He looked again at the book, and the official approval stamp of the firm countersigned by none other than Malone himself, entirely convinced him.

"You see, Mr. Buller"—it was Harvey speaking—"in these days a firm that wants to increase its business can't use the same tactics with every prospect. Now our young friend here is the sort of man to handle the type of people that Pangle & Malone are. Without intending flattery, he is mighty good company, knows what he's talking about and can state his facts in a most convincing way, and at the same time get an order and keep the good will of the customer. I saw these traits in him and I thought I would try the plan out on my own, as it were, for the good of the house, and also to prove that I haven't quite gone to sleep in the years I have been here."

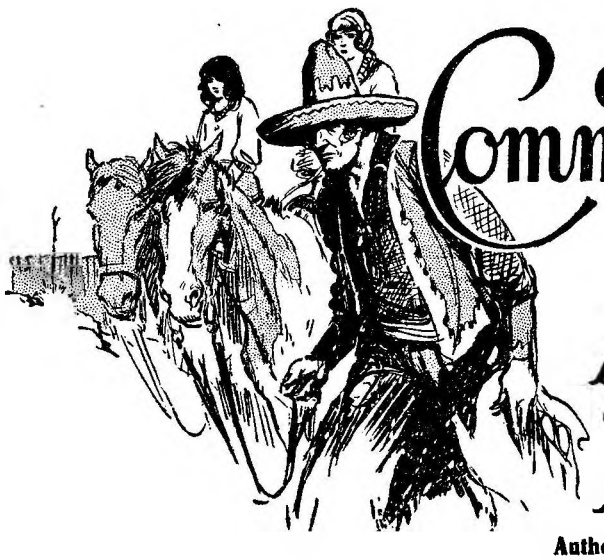
"Well, why the devil didn't you take me into your confidence?" demanded the Old Man, surrendering hard.

"Why, because, as you know, Mr. Buller, you would not have allowed such a thing, so I thought I would try it out, and then show you the results. You see, this young man is used to mingling with those

who are more or less in the smart set, so it appeared to me that he would be just the man to go after that very profitable Pangle & Malone business. So, to familiarize himself with our line, I put him in the show room, and—well, he did the rest himself."

Mr. Buller looked again at the order book spread before him. Then he got up abruptly, seized Clark by the hand and shook it heartily.

"Don't feel bad, my boy; my mistake," he said gruffly, "but I won't have you in the show room a minute longer. No, sir! You are going to be one of our outside men after this, at—er—considerably more salary than you're receiving at present."



Brass Commandments

Part VI

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Beau Rand," etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DESERT TERROR.

THE food Campan served consisted of jerked beef, dry soda biscuit and coffee. Campan made no apologies for it. Ellen ate little; Gloria's appetite was much better, and she attacked the food vindictively. Her glances at Campan were darkly threatening. She lacked the physical power to punish the man, but she made him feel something of her contempt of him.

However, Campan was seemingly impervious to her glances. Most of the time he managed to evade them, and when he did look at her it was with a speculative, probing squint. He was unperturbed by her manner; he was busy with his own thoughts; he was planning, scheming.

The sun had gone down. The afterglow illuminated the heavens, refracting a strange, weird light, soft, mystic, which gave to the desert a strange and unfamiliar aspect. A sense of supreme isolation afflicted Gloria, but she shook it off. She felt the intangible and insidious terror that creeps over one who enters the desert for the first time; the shrinking of the soul from a knowledge of the imminence of the infinite; the overpowering conviction of an unseen menace; the strange depression of the spirit which comes when one is enveloped in the desert's brooding calm.

She was impressed, thrilled, frightened, but her contempt of Campan dominated all other emotions. She gazed steadily at him across the fire.

"Campan, where are you going to take us? What do you mean to do?"

"Glory, I've been trying to settle that

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in my mind," said Campan. "When I first saw you and Ellen riding in the cañon I had no idea of doing what I've done. That is, I don't remember having such an idea. Mebbe I did. Mebbe it was your tone when you told me you didn't need any escort that set me on fire. Anyway, you're here, and I'm here."

"Campan, you'd better be sensible and let us go. We won't say anything about what has happened. We'll let on we never saw you. You can get out of the country, and stay out, not running any risk of meeting Lannon again."

When she saw Campan's eyes blaze, Gloria knew she had erred in mentioning Lannon. Campan sneered.

"Lannon!" he said, his voice betraying the bitter hatred he felt. He was silent for a time, staring at her across the fire. Gloria could see the passion working in him, a terrible leaven that mottled his face and swelled the cords of his neck.

"You think to scare me by mentioning Lannon!" he said fiercely. "Well, listen to this. I was on my way to Bozzam City when I heard you coming through the cañon. I'm going to shoot this thing out with Lannon, man to man, in Bozzam, where he put up his damned commandments! Lannon's played hell in the basin, but he ain't through. I'm going to jam his commandments down his damned throat!"

"Campan, if you've got any sense you'll stay away from Lannon," advised Gloria. "He'll kill you, sure!"

He was silent again, staring at her. She felt her warning had affected him, for she say the rage go out of his eyes and the color leave his cheeks. When he again looked at her after an interval during which he stared at the fire, she saw that his expression had become speculative.

His gaze roved from her, went to Ellen. He seemed to be moved to an inward mirth, huge, malicious. For a time he looked at Ellen. It was as though she were a slave that he considered buying. Admiration glinted in his eyes. Abruptly he looked at Gloria. Gloria felt shamed by the look, frightened. When he saw she was afraid, he laughed.

"Well, mebbe it won't be you," he said.

"Campan, what do you mean?"

"I mean this, Glory. There's a way of stirring Lannon up so's he'll come hunting me instead of me having to hunt him. There's a way of raising hell inside of him! A way of touching that damned cold nerve of his. That way is in taking a woman he thinks a heap of!"

Gloria was surprised into glancing at Ellen. Ellen was looking at her, wildly. Ellen's face had been dead-white; now Gloria saw a crimson flood sweep over it. She felt the blood mount to her own cheeks. But Ellen did not speak. Her face paled again; she met Campan's gaze steadily.

Campan watched them keenly; his sharp, probing glances seeming to seek an answer to a question he had in mind. When he saw that neither Ellen or Gloria betrayed any emotion after the first significant blush, he laughed lowly.

"I reckon you're both wise," he said. "You know what I mean. I reckon Lannon likes one of you. Mebbe he likes both. But he'll like one more than the other. Both of you know which one he likes best, because women are a heap wise in them things. The one which knows she ain't got any chance will tell on the other, because she'll be jealous. I'm taking the one Lannon likes best!"

Again the girls exchanged glances. Gloria's face was set, expressionless. When she saw Campan watching her, leaning over the fire the better to see her, she gave him a smile of cold contempt. When he shifted his gaze to Ellen, Gloria stole a glance at her. Ellen was staring straight at Campan. Her lips were set and white.

For an instant Campan watched them, looking from one to the other, shrewdly.

"Well," he said, "take your time. There ain't any hurry. Settle it between yourselves. The one Lannon likes best is going with me to Pardo. I'll marry her. The other can hop right on her horse and go back to the basin to tell Lannon what has happened."

Campan stretched himself out on the sand. With one elbow supporting his head he watched the girls. In his gaze was malicious interest.

Ellen's thoughts were tumultuous. Deliverance from her terrible predicament was at hand if she chose to speak, to tell the truth. She knew Lannon liked Gloria; she knew that she herself had failed to impress him. The " raw gold " conversation had convinced her that she had little chance to intrigue Lannon's interest. With a slight contempt for Gloria, and with her own vanity a trifle touched, she had lied to Gloria about her conversation with Lannon, intimating that Lannon had spoken the word " impossible " in referring to the Western girl. She was not at all certain that she liked Lannon well enough to want him as a permanent fixture beside her; she had meant to amuse herself with him and had felt a trifle piqued because he seemed to prefer Gloria. That was all. She had only to tell the truth to Campan and she would be free.

However, she knew she would not speak. Her decision had been taken instantly. She had never been placed in a position like this before, and she did not know what her decision would have been had she been forced to make it before she had entered the cañon with Gloria. Very likely it would have been the same, for she felt she could never save herself by sacrificing another of her sex. But she had learned much on the ride through the cañon; she had learned what humility meant; for the first time in her life she had a conception of the true meaning of the word " reverence," and she had divined the greatness of the soul of the girl who now sat near her. She felt she had been very close to God while in the depths of the cañon.

Gloria's feelings were not so solemn. She knew Lannon did not like her at all. For how was a man to like a woman if he did not respect her. Lannon did not like her because he had tried to kiss her against her will, and he had talked about her to Ellen. Also, though the crime was not so great as his later ones, he had slighted her in Ellen's presence. He had seemed from the first to prefer Ellen. He had shown that he respected her. Therefore he liked her.

But she would never tell Campan that Lannon liked Ellen. She would not sacrifice Ellen to save herself. Her thoughts were not devout; she did not think of God, or of the greatness of her sacrifice. She felt merely a sullen rage that Campan should think of such a thing. It was incredible that a man should think one woman capable of sacrificing another. That Campan thought it merely showed what sort of a beast he was.

She caught him looking at her and her rage flamed.

" Campan," she said; " you're a darned fool!"

" So you're game, eh?" laughed Campan. " So's Ellen. Well, we'll wait. One of you will change your mind. We'll go to the desert cache. Some of the Pardo guys will be there. We'll talk it over again."

He got up, separated the horses, forced Ellen and Gloria to mount. This time he tied only their hands. While he was engaged in that task Ellen asked for a drink of water.

" I reckon you'll have to wait till we get to the Kelso water-hole," he told her. " You see, I was headed for Bozzam City and wasn't thinking of needing water. So I had only what was in my canteen, and I used that to make coffee."

" Campan," said Gloria, " we haven't had a drink since we stopped at the waterfall in Salt Cañon. How far is it to Kelso water-hole?" She had seen how weak and nerveless Ellen seemed.

" Kelso's about twenty miles from here," answered Campan. He looked long at Ellen, and seemed to be considering. Then he looked at the horses and saw how restless they were, how Silver champed his bit and pawed the sand with his hoofs.

" I reckon we'd better get along," he said shortly.

He climbed into the saddle and sent his horse southward, leading the others.

Twilight had come while they had been resting at the edge of the mesa. They rode slowly into the darkening waste. Trailing behind, Gloria finally succeeded in guiding her horse close to Silver. She dared not speak, for Campan would overhear. But the light was still clear enough for her to see Ellen's eyes. The glance they exchanged would have made Campan hopeless of forcing them to break their silence

regarding Lannon's feelings toward them. The pact of sacrifice was sealed with a glance.

They rode on, into a hushed, solemn void. As the darkness grew a hot wind arose, accentuating their thirst. The wind bore a fine flinty dust that got into their throats and made their eyes smart. Campan had trouble with the horses. Silver, especially, exhibited a sullen reluctance toward going forward. He continually reared, tried to shake off the rope. Twice Campan halted and looked back at him. The third time he looked back he cursed violently, and threatened. Not long afterward Silver began to plunge, almost unseating Ellen. Campan halted his horse, got down, drew Ellen out of the saddle and seized Silver's bridle. He worked with it, and Silver screamed.

Standing near, Ellen covered her eyes and turned away, crying.

"Campan!" called Gloria, horrified. "Oh, you brute! You brute!"

Campan did not seem to hear. When he had finished with Silver the animal dropped to its knees. Campan waited until Silver got up. He stood near the horse, trembling. He was ashen with rage. His voice was light and dry and vibrated as though he had been running.

"I'll teach you to hang back, you——" he said. He turned to Ellen, seized her and threw her upon Silver's back. "If he does that again I'll kill him!" he threatened.

They went on again. This revelation of Campan's character brought to the girls a new cause for apprehension. Strangely, Silver seemed subdued, for he went on, with drooping head. His spirit was broken.

A trace of coolness began to be felt in the hot wind. They rode into a dense blackness, without sense of direction. Stars began to appear, coldly, brilliant, remote, aloof. Later they came in millions, creating a dimly luminous haze. Then arose an effulgent silver light, flooding the eastern horizon. It bathed the sky, dimming the stars. It was an early moon, and welcome, for it stuck its rim above a distant mountain peak and shone serenely down upon the desert, cheering the girls.

Features of the desert that during the day had seemed natural, now took on a grotesque appearance. A low mesa far eastward had the shape of a gigantic beast, crouching. A bed of lava, its surface swept clear by the wind, appeared to have a phosphorescent glow. The giant cactus, growing in clumps, stuck their hideous shapes upward in grim mockery. Against the pale horizon appeared moving shapes, dim of outline, traveling northward. Gloria knew them for a band of wild mustangs. But Ellen's first thought was of Indians or outlaws. She felt relieved when she saw the shapes trail off along the horizon, growing always smaller until they disappeared.

At a distance of several miles from the mesa where they had halted to rest, they came to a section of rugged, broken country, rock-strewn, featured by low, barren hills, great fissures. It loomed before them in the star haze, desolate, appalling. Campan halted his horse and sat silent. He appeared to be undecided whether to ride through the section or around it. Finally seeming to decide, he urged his horse straight ahead.

Silver refused to go. Campan's rope, leading from the pommel of Campan's saddle to Silver's rein, went taut with a vicious swish. Campan cursed, wheeled his horse. The animal, trained in range work, braced his legs against Silver's pull. For an instant the two horses stood there, straining, tugging. Campan was trying to get out of the saddle, but the taut rope was in his way and his movements were hampered. Silver's snorting betrayed his furious determination to break away. He plunged forward a few feet, backed so suddenly that Ellen almost tumbled out of the saddle, shook his head like a great terrier. The reins parted, Silver went back upon his haunches, and Ellen slid out of the saddle, alighting in the deep sand, uninjured.

Campan had cast the rope from the pommel of his own saddle; his horse shot forward as Silver, reins dragging and stirrups flying, scampered over the back trial. Campan had got his gun out. Crimson streaks leaped from his side as he raced after Silver. But Silver seemed untouched. He became a gray flash, rapidly dwindling in size, until he vanished.

In half an hour Campan returned. His horse was laboring, foam flecked his muzzle, his sides reeked with lather. He was heaving air into his lungs, and when he came to a halt near the girls he braced his legs far apart and stood with drooping head.

Ellen and Gloria had been working at the ropes that bound their hands. Ellen's hands were free and she was trying to untie Gloria's when Campan slipped out of the saddle and approached.

"I expected you'd try that," he said hoarsely.

He seized Ellen's hands, jerked her viciously toward the spot where she had thrown the short rope she had escaped, twisted her wrists until she sank to her knees, writhing in agony.

"That will teach you not to try to get away again!" declared Campan as Ellen moaned.

"Campan, you're a miserable coyote!" cried Gloria. "You've got her hands tied too tight! You're hurting her!"

Campan laughed. He was a hideous figure, bearing little resemblance to the Campan Gloria had known, who had danced with her at Benson's; who had always affected gentility.

He seemed to have entirely lost his self-control. His eyes had a cruel gleam; his mouth was open, the lips loose. He was a bestial thing as he stood there looking at the girls, the white scar drawing one corner of his mouth inward.

"Bushed!" he said, turning to stare at his horse. He cursed horribly and then stood for an instant gazing backward toward the point where Silver had vanished.

"You'll have to ride double now," he said as he stepped to Gloria. She got into the saddle without his assistance; she did not want him to touch her. But he helped Ellen up, then got on his own horse. He seemed to have changed his mind about going through the bad lands, for he rode westward along the edge of the broken country, making a wide circuit.

Gloria knew why Campan was going around the bad lands. His horse had been ridden so hard that it was almost ready to drop. She also knew why he looked backward so many times during the hour that followed. He expected Silver would get back to the Lazy J, that Bosworth would send the Lazy J outfit out to search for Ellen.

Gloria's hopes were now high; her heart sang a pæan of praise to Silver's implacable determination, to his speed, to his courage. It had seemed his spirit had been broken by Campan's brutal treatment. But he had been merely waiting. She felt now that he would be the instrument of their deliverance.

Deliverance, though, would not be immediate. Silver would probably go back the way he had come, through Salt Cañon. He would stop at the waterfall. He would have to go through the cañon to Bear Flat; and from there to the Lazy J the distance was great. Then there would be delay while Bosworth and his men got ready; more delay while they searched the desert for a trail. At best, she and Ellen could not hope for rescue until the next day.

Meantime what would happen? That interrogation tortured her. Campan had thrown off all pretense of manliness. He had become a brute. He feared pursuit; there was no telling what he might do!

A terrible thirst had seized Gloria. Her tongue felt thick, and was heavily coated with dust that burned and smarted. She was oppressed with a strange giddiness, her skin was dry and hot. She noticed that Ellen swayed often in the saddle; that the girl's grip on her shoulders seemed to be loosening. Three times she tried to speak to Ellen before her voice would come, and then she was amazed at the sound of it. The horse, too, was suffering from thirst, and the double burden he carried seemed to irk him. He tossed his head sullenly and kept his ears laid flat. His breathing was labored; when he exhaled the sound was almost like a moan.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"GLORIA, LANNON LOVES YOU!"

CAMPAN'S horse stumbled. He cursed violently and yanked savagely at the reins. His voice also sounded strangely hoarse and thick. Gloria saw him strike his horse with his fist. Ellen groaned

at the sight, but Gloria sat tense and white during the ordeal. Her chief emotion was that of wonder that any man could be so brutal.

She fell to thinking about water; how strange it was that humans had to depend so entirely upon it. Water was a vital necessity, of colossal importance. Where there was no water there could be no life. The desert proved that truth. Miles and miles of dead, dry sand, of blighted, stunted weeds. Air that held no moisture. A sun that seemed to thirst; a moon that seemed to shine in supreme isloation, as on a dead planet. Stars that seemed to hold gratefully aloof, twinkling pityingly. Men who became brutes; women who thought of nothing but water.

She rode on for a long time. It seemed that ages had passed since Ellen and Campan and she had rested beside the fire at the mesa. They had drank coffee there; but she remembered that at the time she had thought the coffee insufficient. It had not quenched her thirst; rather it had seemed to accentuate it. She had wanted water more than ever after Campan had mentioned that he had brought none. That was a human weakness, she knew, to desire the unattainable. The farther away a thing, the greater the desire. Desire became an obsession—like her thoughts of water.

She became aware that Campan had halted his horse and was again beating it. When she got her thoughts off of water she could think intelligently enough; and now she realized that Campan's horse was able to go no farther. The heartbreaking run he had made after Silver, together with the lack of water, had finished him.

She saw Campan dismount and draw his gun. He stood for a time close to the animal, looking at it. Then he sheathed the gun and came to where Gloria and Ellen sat on the brown horse. His eyes were wild and fierce; his lips were in a snarl.

"Get down!" he ordered.

He helped them down, stood beside Gloria. He took the ropes from their hands, not looking at them as he did so.

"I reckon we've got to the end of our string," he said thickly. "This is Kelso water-hole."

"Thank Heaven!" cried Ellen. She stared about eagerly. "Where is the water?" she asked.

"There ain't none," Campan seemed to say.

"What do you mean?"

This was Gloria; she stared at Campan.

Campan laughed, cackling insanely: "Just what I said. There ain't no water! Kelso's dry. Nothing but mud—caked, dry; so dry the crows won't bother with it!"

He pointed to a depression straight ahead, near where his horse stood, drooping.

"Go and take a look," he directed.

The girls went forward and paused to stare down into the depression. A natural basin rimmed by some rocks. Its bottom was cut and trampled as though by many hoofs. Little fissures ran through it, the moonlight revealing them. A dank odor assailed their nostrils. Kelso was dry; there was no doubt of that.

The girls stood for many minutes staring down at the place. Ellen swayed and Gloria put an arm around her. There came a sound. Both girls turned, to see Campan on Gloria's horse. He rode to a point about twenty feet distant and brought the horse to a halt. Campan's manner was strange; he did not look at the girls, but stared at the ground directly ahead of the horse.

"You wait here," he said. "I'm going on to look for water. We've got to have water. My horse is bushed. This one ain't much better. When the sun comes up there's going to be hell. It ain't far from morning now—an hour, mebbe. It's about forty miles back to where we started. There's no water between here and there. It's about seventy miles to the south rim. There's no water between excepting a *tinaja* I know of, about ten miles from here. It's eighty miles to the desert cache, where there's plenty of water. But that ain't here.

"I'm going to light out for the *tinaja*. I'd send one of you girls, but you wouldn't know where to find it. I'd take you along, but this horse can't carry three, and mine's bushed. I'll be right back. You wait. I ought to be back in two hours. If I ain't, you'd better get on my horse and try to make Salt Cañon. If I get back I'll

ketch up to you. I'm a heap sorry I got you into this; but I ain't to blame for Kelso going dry."

He urged the brown horse forward, still not looking at the girls.

"Campan, you don't mean to come back!" cried Ellen.

Campan did not answer. He put the brown horse to a trot, then to a gallop. The animal ran heavily, with great effort. For a while Campan and the horse were in plain view, then they vanished over a rise.

Ellen dropped to the ground and covered her eyes with her hands. Gloria stood, white and still, watching the horse Campan had left. The beast was plainly unable to carry both girls. Gloria went to it, seized its bridle and led it away from the dry bed of the water hole. The horse staggered a little, but whinnied when she patted its neck.

"Ellen," said Gloria firmly, "you get on this horse. We're going to travel quite a distance before the sun comes up. We're not going to wait one minute for Campan. He'll not come back. I hope he doesn't. We ought to be thankful we've got rid of him, the darned sneak!"

Ellen weakly objected, but in the end Gloria had her way; and they went northward, Ellen riding, Gloria walking beside her.

The moon still shone brightly, though it was hovering low over the western horizon. It would set before the sun came up, and there would be a period of darkness. Gloria fortified herself against that time by locating objects by which to guide their course. She had ceased thinking of water; it was more gratifying to think that they had escaped Campan.

She kept the low moon at her left, and strode along, leading the horse, staring ahead into the ghostly distance. Progress was slow, for the horse was exhausted, and there were stretches where the sand was deep and seemed to drag at her feet. Ellen sat limply in the saddle, hanging to the high pommel. Her hair was in disorder, her clothing thickly powdered with dust, her face gray and drawn. But her lips were set determinedly, and there was a resolute flash in her eyes when she looked at Gloria.

"Gloria," she said, "do you think we can make it?"

"We're going to try darned hard!" declared Gloria.

"It won't be your fault if we don't, dear," said Ellen. "You are a wonderful girl."

"Shucks!"

The darkness they anticipated came swiftly. The moon vanished with a last silvery, flashing glow, and a dense blackness engulfed the girls. Gloria found that her foresight in previously locating objects did not help her at all.

She did not even attempt to penetrate the black void into which they were going, but trusted to the instinct of the animal beside her, loosening her grip on the reins and allowing him to pick out the trail. She stumbled over rocks, sank into little depressions, toiled up rises with flagging muscles.

Her flesh cringed at each step—a cold perspiration bathed her. This strange world was inhabited by venomous reptiles and insects, denizens of the sand that carried death in their bite, and she did not know at what instant she might encounter one, might step on one. Once when the spatula leaf of a cactus brushed against her she almost screamed; another time a dry rustle stopped her breath, and she walked shrinkingly forward in an agony of apprehension. But the sound died away, gradually diminishing, and she decided that what she had heard was a sage hen fluttering out of their path.

When a pale light broke in the east and the darkness began to lift to that she could again distinguish dimly objects near her, her gratefulness was devout. Later when the lights broadened, deepened, so that the desert spread before her, gray, silent and vast, she pulled the horse to a halt and sank to the sand to rest. Ellen got down and sat beside her.

They found some remnants of food in the slicker on the saddle. Campan's canteen, the stopper still in the mouth, they saw hanging from a snap buckle on the saddle skirt. Gloria removed the cork from

the canteen and turned it bottom side up over a tin cup.

Two or three teasponfuls of water trickled into the cup. They wet their lips with the water, which was almost hot, and then sat down to munch the remnants of food—soda biscuit and jerked beef, dry and hard. By the time they were ready to move forward the sun came up. He made his presence known long before he appeared to view, flinging great, long lances of crimson and gold across the sky, piercing the heavens with gleaming, shimmering, rapier-like shafts and tinting the sand with a delicate rose color.

But his promise of continuing beauty was a delusion. His aspect changed when he struck a rim above the horizon; he poured a flood of blinding white light over the desert—a wave of blighting, withering heat.

Ellen insisted that Gloria ride for a time. But it was not for long. The Eastern girl began to sway and stagger, and Gloria got down and helped her into the saddle. Ellen would not permit Gloria to go on at once. She held to Gloria's hand which passed the reins to her. She leaned toward Gloria, her eyes misty.

"You've been good to me, Gloria," she said. "Much too good. I don't deserve it. You might have escaped this. Last night when Campan spoke about Lannon, why didn't you tell him that Lannon liked me best? You thought it."

"What if I did think it?" challenged Gloria. "I wasn't going to tell Campan everything I knew about that. It was none of his business."

Ellen smiled. "Gloria, you don't know. Lannon doesn't like me. He loves you. I found that out the day he took me home from Benson's."

"The day he told you I was 'impossible'?"

"Yes, that day."

"I reckon if he thinks I'm impossible, he can't love me a heap."

Gloria laughed stiffly. Her gaze was incredulous, scornful.

"Gloria, Lannon didn't say that. I said it. I lied to you. I thought I was interested in Lannon, and when I talked with him about you, and I saw that he liked you, I was jealous. Gloria, you should have seen his face when he told me you were gold, and he a prospector, seeking you. Gloria, Lannon loves you. I lied to you when I said he had fooled other girls. I don't know anything about his past life."

Gloria was gazing steadily at Ellen. On her face was a deeper crimson than the sun and the heat of the desert could bring. Her eyes were wide with wonder and amazement and reproach.

"Ellen, I reckon I understand," she said at last. "You did what I felt like doing."

"But you didn't do it," said Ellen. "That's the difference between you and myself."

"Why didn't you tell Campan that?"

"Gloria!"

Gloria leaned against the saddle. Ellen drew her head close to her and patted it and smoothed her hair. Presently they went on again, the desert flaming around them, an inferno of heat, silent, sinister, phantasmagoric.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RESCUE.

POLESTAR had not been out of the stable in two days, and he felt like running. Lannon responded to his mood, and the gray horse swept down the sage-covered slope near the Bosque Grand ranch-house like a whirlwind, scattering cattle, sending them lumbering out of his path.

Before him fluttered thrushes, ground owls, sage fowl. Bounding off to one side went a cottontail; insects flew in clouds; dust trailed him, ballooning lightly. Polestar ran a mile before the first edge wore off his spirit.

Then he tossed his head, whinnied his pleasure and went sweeping across a level toward a slope. Lannon let him run. With the keen, pungent scent of the sage filling his lungs, Lannon felt something of the intoxication that had gripped Polestar, and when they raced down the slope at the end of the level Lannon was grinning his delight.

The sun was not more than an hour high when Lannon rode Polestar into Bear Flat from the east. He saw a few stray cattle cropping the short grass. He remembered Barkwell telling him that the main herd had been driven northward, where the grass was better. That had been three days ago. The entire outfit was now out with the wagon, and he had spent three days with Perrin at the Bosque Grand. Ed Lane was still at the ranch-house, convalescing. Lannon rode the east side of the flat. He frowned as his thoughts went to a previous visit here, when he had discovered the dead cattle, and Brail.

On that night Barkwell and Yates had grown anxious and had sent a man to look for him. The man had ridden into Bear Flat and had found Brail. Riding back to where Barkwell, Yates and the other men of the outfit waited, the man had told them what had happened. The outfit had gone to Bear Flat, picked up the trail of horses that had recently been there, had traced them to the edge of the desert.

There they had seen a small bunch of cattle heading southward, driven by several men. The Bosque Grand men recovered the cattle. Grim and furious had been the chase after the rustlers. Not a rustler had escaped. Yates and the others had not recognized any of the riders, though a Bosque Grand man said he had seen some of them in Pardo, across the desert.

Yates had been puzzled because none of Campan's men seemed to have been implicated. He worried about the incident until the next day, when word of what had happened at Clearwater's reached him; news that was followed shortly by the story of the killing of Devake in Bozzam City.

Lannon had been quietly searching for Campan. No one seemed to know where Campan was keeping himself; it seemed no one in the basin was interested. But Lannon knew rustling would not cease until Campan was killed or driven out of the country. His men killed or scattered, Campan would recruit others.

Lannon had wheeled Polestar and was riding him toward the eastern slope of the flat when he saw a gray dot emerge from the mouth of Salt Cañon and move northward. Jumping Polestar westward, Lannon sent him toward the gray dot. When the dot crossed a far ridge, halting on its crest for an instant, Lannon started and paled.

The gray dot was a riderless horse.

Polestar raced westward. He ran two miles under the urge of his master's voice, and reached the base of the ridge where the riderless horse had stood. But the latter had fled at Polestar's approach and was now scampering up the slope of the flat toward the edge of the big plain above. But Lannon saw him clearly in the strong sunlight, and recognized him.

Again Lannon wheeled Polestar; sent him toward the mouth of Salt Cañon. As he rode he searched the cañon with swift glances, for a riderless horse might be significant of many things. He peered into the intersecting cañons as he passed them, but he did not draw Polestar down, for he felt that if Ellen Bosworth had been thrown the accident must have happened in the main cañon. She would not attempt to explore the smaller gorges unless some one was with her.

The tracks of two horses running straight through the cañon puzzled Lannon. It seemed that two horses had gone in, possibly yesterday, according to the way he read the tracks, and that only one had come out. If Ellen had company she was undoubtedly safe. Yet he held Polestar to a fast pace, not trusting his judgment as to the meaning of the tracks.

He halted Polestar at the waterfall. He saw where two sets of hoofs had made their imprints in the sand at the pool; he noted where a third set, pointing eastward, had stopped. He saw in the sand the prints of a horse's body, imprints of empty stirrups, a deep gash in the sand that might have been made by the pommel of a saddle. Silver, evidently, had laid down and rolled after drinking. Other signs convinced Lannon that Silver had not merely paused here to drink; he had stayed a long time. Grass that grew in the vicinity had been browsed recently. There were other indications.

Lannon sent Polestar onward, through the cañon. He paused at the entrance to the cache, then rode into it and through it.

Finding nothing he rode out and went on again, to the hills beyond the mouth of the cañon. He crossed the stretch of broken country south of the hills. He was almost at the edge of the broken stretch when a glitter among the stones arrested his gaze and he rode over, dismounted and picked up a small pistol with an ivory handle. It was one that he had seen on a shelf behind the counter in the hotel office in Bozzam City. He was certain it belonged to Gloria.

He leaped on Polestar, sat erect in the saddle and peered out into the desert. Seeing nothing move in the great waste, he rode down the long sand slope toward the desert. He saw where three horses had halted, had pawed the sand. He followed the tracks to the bottom of the slope and saw them lead away, southward.

His lips set into stiff lines, the muscles of his jaws corded, the color left his face. He wheeled Polestar, sent him back up the slope, through the stretch of broken country and around the hills to the mouth of the cañon. He rode through the entrance to the outlaw cache, slipped out of the saddle at the edge of the little stream that ran along the base of the north wall of the box-cañon, and filled his canteen with water, while Polestar drank. Presently he was on Polestar again, riding toward the desert. Again he came upon the hoofprints, following them into the big sand level.

Polestar went forward in an easy, swinging lope. An hour passed, during which time Polestar ran steadily, with little more effort than he would have expended had he been traveling over the hard sand of a plain. Yet when a low mesa loomed close ahead, Lannon drew him down, veered off and made a wide circuit. The presence of the third set of tracks might mean that the girls had been forced to ride into the desert against their wishes. At least, that was the way Lannon read the tracks, and there were various spots at the base of the mesa where a man might lie in ambush.

Swinging wide around the eastern side of the mesa Lannon detected movement in the vast space southward. Two or three miles distant was a dot—two dots—that seemed to be coming northward. He spoke to Polestar and the big silver horse flashed forward in a dizzying burst of speed. Lannon had not traveled half the distance toward the two dots when he recognized them. He observed that the two figures had seen him at the same time, for they paused, waved their hands at him and began to run toward him.

One of the figures stumbled and fell. The other went back and bent over the first; lifted it. Then they again came toward Lannon, one supporting the other. A few minutes later Lannon was standing in the deep, light sand, holding Ellen and Gloria close to him. Both girls were crying; Ellen hysterically; Gloria quietly. Lannon said nothing, then. For a few minutes he held them, reassuring them with his touch, while both held tightly to him as though fearing he meant to go away and leave them.

"Oh, Lannon!" sobbed Ellen, huddling against him. "Is it really you?"

"I reckon it is, Ellen. I saw Silver crossing Bear Flat. Don't talk now. Just sit down a minute. You're all right now; nothing more is going to happen."

He disengaged their arms, placed them gently on the sand, where they sat, pitifully weak and weary, watching him. Their clothing was thickly covered with dust; their hair was heavily powdered with it; their faces were gray with it, and their lips were swollen and cracked.

Lannon unslung the canteen. He untied the scarf at his throat, dampened it with water. He started toward Gloria, but the girl waved him away. He wiped Ellen's face with the dampened neckerchief, bathed her swollen lips, and at last gave her a taste of the water in the canteen. The girl begged for more water, but Lannon denied the appeal and went to Gloria.

He saw that Gloria was in worse shape than Ellen, and he divined that she had borne the burnt of their terrible experience. She did not look at Lannon when he dropped to his knees in front of her; though she drew a deep sigh of content and relief when the damp neckerchief touched her face. When she was forced to tilt her head back in order to drink from the canteen her eyes held a grateful glow as they met Lannon's; and he observed a crimson flood in her cheeks.

During the next few minutes Lannon went from one to the other, permitting them to drink sparingly; again bathing their faces. They revived swiftly, and at last Gloria got to her feet. She looked back into the blazing inferno of sand and sun, and shuddered. And, strangely, when she again met Lannon's gaze the crimson flood in her cheeks grew deeper and her eyes drooped in shy embarrassment. Lannon saw Ellen watching Gloria; saw her smile gently, understandingly. Astonished, Lannon stared inquiringly at Ellen. She met the look with the same gentle smile, though the smile deepened, became gloriously sympathetic.

While Gloria stood, gazing southward, Lannon went to Polestar and began to get him ready to carry his double burden. He turned while tightening the rear cinch strap, to see Ellen at his shoulder.

" Lannon," whispered the girl, " she loves you. Be careful and wise. She hasn't understood; but she does now."

" Ellen, how do you know?"

" Sh-h! She'll hear you! There have been no words, Lannon. But I know."

Lannon helped Gloria into the saddle and put Ellen up behind her. He gave both another drink from the canteen, and then turned Polestar northward. He walked at Polestar's head, swinging along rapidly, for they were many miles from the edge of the desert.

Lannon had ordered the girl not to talk, but he was intensely curious about the third set of hoofprints, and from the instant he had seen the girls walking toward him he had speculated about Gloria's horse. Thinking Ellen's words, " Be careful, and wise," might have meant that he was to avoid questioning Gloria about her and Ellen's experience, he had kept silent, waiting for them to volunteer the story.

But both girls were reluctant to speak. Campan had shamed and humiliated them, and they knew that when they told Lannon what Campan had done, Lannon would follow the man to Pardo.

And Gloria did not want Lannon to risk his life meeting Campan. Since her talk with Ellen she felt deeply concerned over Lannon's future. She knew Lannon loved her; she had known it when he had loocked into her eyes while kissing her on the night he had killed Devake. Her only doubt had been over the quality of his passion. But since Ellen had told her of Lannon's real feelings toward her, she felt that she did not want to lose him. Let Campan go. Let him escape to Pardo. He had never been anything to her; he knew she hated him. He would never come back to the basin, for he would fear the story of what he had done would be told and he would know that many men in the basin would shoot him on sight.

Gloria's concern was for Lannon alone. No good would come of his killing Campan. Some day, perhaps, she would tell him what had happened. By that time Campan would have left the country. She and Ellen had talked it over when they had seen Lannon coming toward them across the desert and both had agreed to keep their experience with Campan secret.

They were nearing the long slope that led upward to the section of broken country where Campan had surprised them by suddenly appearing behind them, when Lannon brought Polestar to a halt to rest. Turning, he faced the girls. He looked at Gloria, his gaze steady and intent.

" What happened to your horse, Gloria?" he asked.

" Why, he—" Gloria paused, reddened. " He died, Lannon, just before you came." How hard it was to lie to him!

Her gaze had dropped from his and she did not observe the joyous light that leaped into his eyes as she spoke his name. It was the first time she had used it in his presence; she had persistently called him " stranger."

" How did Silver get away?"

This question he addressed to Ellen, who was watching him with a curiously speculative gaze.

" We had him tied. He broke his rein."

Ellen's voice was low. He saw a wave of color flood her cheeks and his eyes narrowed.

" Ladies," he said dryly, " who rode the third horse?"

He received no answer, though he caught the girls exchanging a swift, startled glance.

He smiled faintly. "The wind wasn't so strong last night," he said. "I saw the three sets of hoof-tracks at the slope there. They were visible almost to the mesa where I met you. And I found this near the mouth of the cañon." He drew out the ivory-handled pistol and held it up to view.

Gloria did not look at him after glancing at the pistol; she could not look at him, to face the gentle reproof in his eyes. But Ellen said steadily:

"Lannon, we have lied to you because we didn't want you to rush into danger on our account. The third rider was Campan. He came upon us at the edge of the desert, tied us and forced us to ride with him. He said he intended to take us to Pardo. He meant to force one of us to marry him. We stopped on the other side of the mesa at dusk last night. A little later Silver broke his rein and got away. Campan almost ran his horse to death trying to catch Silver, and when we reached Kelso water-hole Campan took Gloria's horse, left his with us and rode on, saying he meant to try to get water at a *tinaja* ten miles farther on. Kelso is dry."

"Campan lied!" said Lannon in a strangely vibrant voice. "There is no water between Kelso and Pardo!" Watching Lannon, Gloria saw that his teeth were clamped tightly together, that his eyes were blazing with a cold, intense light. She knew instantly that he meant to ride to Pardo to punish Campan; and when she thought of what Pardo was; how the riffraff of the country gathered there—thieves, rustlers, gamblers, gunfighters, outlaws—and considered that Campan had many friends there, she felt Lannon would never come back alive. She slipped off Polestar and went to Lannon, grasping his arm in a tight hold.

"Lannon," she said, "you mean to go to Pardo. I knew you would go when you heard what Campan did. That's why I didn't tell you. I want you to promise you won't go. Please!"

He saw a light in her eyes which told him why she did not want him to go—a light that he had longed to see, and had looked for in vain until now. But he had given his word about Campan. He shook his head.

"Please, Lannon!" she pleaded. And when she saw that he was not yet persuaded she grew calm and quiet and stood there, forcing him to meet her gaze. Then she said in a low, steady voice: "Lannon, please don't go. I know how you feel; I know what you have said about Campan. But I don't want you to go, Lannon. Campan and his friends will kill you. And I want you for myself, Lannon. I love you."

Lannon's entire body seemed to leap at that word. His eyes held a fire so intense that Gloria felt she must droop her own from them. But though she trembled, and her heart grew faint, she held his gaze until she saw the flame die out; saw a cold, mirthless smile on his lips. Then she knew her confession had been unavailing. Saying no further word to him she got into the saddle in front of Ellen, and they went forward again, to the desert's edge. They climbed the slope, threaded their way through the hills and reached the mouth of the cañon. They had hardly more than entered the cañon when they saw, half a mile downward, a group of horsemen, sweeping toward them. There were a score of riders, and among them she recognized Bosworth and Connor, the Lazy J foreman.

CHAPTER XXX.

CAMPAN PAYS.

CAMPAN'S lie about his having hopes of getting water at a *tinaja* lay heavily on his conscience. There was no water between Kelso and Pardo, as he had known well enough when he had left Ellen and Gloria. He knew that a base impulse had sent him away from the girls; he felt they would never reach the edge of the desert. For a long time after he left Kelso Ellen's words kept drumming in his ears, and his recollection of the plaintiveness of her voice seemed to grow more vivid. But there was death in the desert for those who were without water, and where there was no chance for all to survive he maintained he had as much right as they to live. Anyway, he was taking that right.

So he rode on, attempting to justify his action, and sometimes speaking aloud.

He rode steadily until the dawn came. And then he discovered that the brown horse was beginning to show signs of weakness. A short time after the sun came up the horse suddenly sank to its knees, shivered for an instant, struggled upright and stood, refusing to go forward at Campan's command. Campan cursed and slid out of the saddle. The horse's foreleg dangled queerly, the animal moaned.

Campan cursed again. Then his face blanched, his lips twitched, his whole body trembled.

"Broke a leg!" he said to the surrounding silence. He seemed amazed, incredulous. A monstrous injustice had been done. The horse knew he wanted to get to Pardo, to water. Out of pure perverseness the animal had permitted this thing to happen. He had purposely broken the leg.

Campan drew his gun and shot the horse, eying it with bitter malignance as it fell and quivered. For an instant Campan stood, staring into the flaming world that now seemed to gyrate around him; then he unbuckled the cinches, pulled the saddle off the horse, threw it over his shoulder and strode southward.

Some slight notion he had of turning northward, but he had no difficulty in deciding he would not. Lannon was northward, and he didn't want to meet Lannon after what he had done to the girls. He was not certain that he had ever entertained thoughts of meeting Lannon. He might have told himself that he had meant some day to meet Lannon with a gun in his hand; he had almost convinced himself that he had perfected his draw until he could match Lannon. But he knew better, he had known better all along. Lannon's swiftness in getting his guns out was incomparable; he was a marvel. The man didn't live who could beat Lannon to the draw.

Campan went on, under a sun that seemed intent upon withering him, through heat that seemed to suck the breath out of his lungs. He walked perhaps two miles before he realized that the saddle might never be needed by him again. Then he dropped it and stood, wiping the sweat and dust from his eyes.

He tried to lick his lips and found that there was no moisture in his tongue. The perspiration that bathed him was cold, clammy. He moved southward again, with measured step, thinking of the distance he must travel to water. He estimated that he had ridden five or six miles since leaving the girls. Two miles more he had walked. Take eight miles from seventy. That left sixty-two. Sixty-two miles!

He must conserve his energy; he must not yield to the panic that threatened him. He would need all his strength and senses on this trip. Calmly, he walked on. He even smiled defiantly into the shimmering, dancing glare ahead.

Noon found him several miles from where he had dropped the saddle. Strange hallucinations were beginning to oppress him. For instance, there were times when he thought the girls were following him; times when he was sure he could hear Ellen's voice saying: "Campan, you don't mean to come back." Once he answered the voice: "Hell, I sure do!"

"That's a lie," he whispered. Realizing that he had spoken aloud, and stopping to stare around to make sure he was not being followed, he grinned with embarrassment.

Throughout the afternoon he kept going southward. At dusk he dropped to the sand near a low ridge. When he got up again it was because the sun was blistering his face. His legs were wavering, his head was wagging from side to side. He heard some one croaking: "I reckon that damned sun don't ever sleep!" When he realized that it was his own voice that he heard he said reprovingly: "Campan, you don't want to get to talking like that. It ain't your sun!"

Hilarious over the joke he stopped to laugh. But the voice frightened him and he stood, blinking, trying to steady himself. Then he went on again, tracing a wavering course through the sand, keeping the sun at his left shoulder. The sun, though, wouldn't stay at his left shoulder. It kept moving around to his right. He couldn't permit that, so he changed his course to keep the sun where he thought it belonged.

It was strange how things persisted in changing the order which he had established for them. Stranger than that was the way

the sand of the desert moved to his right. Always to the right. It flowed swiftly past him, like water. Water! Water! There was plenty of water! Who said there wasn't water? A sparkling pool of water was there, straight ahead of him, not more than a mile or so distant. There were green trees and grass all around the pool. Well, he hadn't lied to the girls after all. There wasn't any *tinaja,* of course; he had lied about that. But as for there not being any water! Whoever had said that knew nothing about the desert!

He traveled the mile and stood swaying uncertainly, staring around him. "No water!" he heard a voice saying, and recognized it as his own. "Fooled!" he laughed.

When the sun waned Campan found himself standing near a saddle. He stood, fighting for clarity of vision, for clarity of thought. And when he had convinced himself that it was his own saddle that was lying before him he sat down beside it and cackled insanely. Then he turned over on his side and slept.

He awoke to a sun that seemed to swim in a blinding light just over his head. His thoughts seemed marvelously clear and he was in a jovial mood. He stared down at the saddle and tried to speak his thought: "Why, I am mighty certain I left you here four or five days ago." But though his thoughts were clear, the words would not come through his lips. His tongue clacked dryly, like a stick of wood against his teeth. But it wasn't necessary to talk to the saddle where there were men and women around to talk to. He bowed to Ellen and Gloria, who stood near him.

"So you're back!" he said. "I was pretty certain you'd gone away for good. But that sun never would stay in one place; it kept sliding over to the right. If you'd hold it in place for a little while, I reckon I'd make it." His eyes widened; he brushed a hand over his eyes. "Why, they're gone! But here's Bannack and Lally and Tulerosa and the rest to talk to. They told me you'd been killed!" he laughed. "A guy brought word that Lannon had throwed his guns on you! There's Devake, too! Well, I reckon we'll get to Pardo now, if we can keep that sun where it belongs!"

He sank down beside the saddle and laid his head on it, only to sit up and stare around him in bewilderment. He tried to get to his feet, but his legs would not support him, and he sank down again, muttering thickly. His tongue persisted in coming out, so he tried to push it back with his fingers; failing, he let it stay out and leaned back on the saddle to stare at the sun.

He was back again at Bozzam City, in the hotel office. He saw Lannon and Ellen sitting at a table.

"I ought to have drilled you then," he tried to say. No words came, but his thoughts were clear and he was sure he was speaking. "That would have saved trouble later. Not having water has spoiled that!"

He was living again in the past; memories were marching past him in review. He felt some of the thoughts he had were as fantastic as some of them were real. But he could not seperate them. The front of the post office in Bozzam City was vividly before him; he could even see some glittering objects on the hood above the bulletin board.

"Lannon's commandments," he muttered. "That guy sure means business. But going away now would make people talk."

He lay still for a few minutes, scowling. Then he managed to lift himself so that his weight rested upon an elbow. He now was convinced that the people he had been seeing had not been real people at all, but figures of his imagination. He could see the desert all around him, flaming with a white fire, desolate, devastated by the blighting heat. The scenes he had been witnessing were hallucinations—all. Here came another. Derisive, sneering his contempt of these fantasies of the brain, he dropped back upon the saddle and with half-closed eyes watched a shape that he saw coming toward him out of the polychromatic veil that seemed to be descending before him. This latest figure appeared to be a gigantic silver-gray horse. He thought at first it was Ellen's, which had broken away from him one night in the distant past, but as the horse drew nearer he saw it was Polestar, with Lannon riding. Polestar came up silently. He halted when within a few feet of Campan. He shone in the sun like a

white flame. Lannon, too, was a strangely white figure. He was covered with glittering particles. That was dust, desert dust. It was like powder.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FROM THE DAY I FIRST SAW YOU.

THE Lazy J, being nearer to Salt Cañon than Bozzam City, had been selected by Bosworth as the place where the girls would more quickly recuperate from their experience. A Lazy J rider had flashed across the plains to Bozzam City for the doctor, who arrived at the ranch almost as soon as the Lazy J outfit, escorting its two charges. The Bozzam City doctor, after one look at Ellen and Gloria, pronounced them as healthy as they had ever been. "But I reckon they'll like water a little better than usual, for a time," he said.

For three days the girls had rested. On the fourth morning Gloria announced that she was going home. When she left the Lazy J, Ellen rode with her. Gloria's father, having visited the girl at the Lazy J on the day she had been taken there by Bosworth's outfit, returned to Bozzam City to tell the story of what had happened in the desert. The doctor returned with Stowe.

When Gloria and Ellen rode down Bozzam City's street a great many of its citizens were out of doors watching them; and when they dismounted from their horses in front of the hotel, the entire population surrounded them. Respect of the kind she had vainly sought, was Gloria's. Men who had paid little attention to her in the old days now bashfully beamed upon her. Their respect for her was in their eyes, in their manner was reverence and admiration. Those who go close to death and dishonor, to emerge heroically, are worthy. Stowe had not failed to include in his story the incident of Campan's serpentlike cunning in attempting to force the girls into a confession that would have meant a sacrifice for one of them. Bozzam City's inhabitants were still wondering which of the girls Lannon loved.

Blushing, eager to get into the hotel and away from the crowd, the girls were moving toward the gallery of the building when Perrin edged his way toward them.

"Wa-al, you're back," he said. "An' I'm mighty glad of it. But I'm wishin' I could say the same thing for my boss."

Gloria paled. "Why," she exclaimed. "What do you mean, Perrin? Where is Lannon?"

"He went into the desert after Campan the day before yesterday mornin'. Said he'd follow Campan to hell, ef need be. I reckon he'll do it. He wouldn't take none of the boys along. He was wild! I never seen him look so full of hell!"

Gloria drew a deep breath. "My God, Perrin!" she cried. "They'll kill him! All of Campan's friends are in Pardo! Perrin, why did you let him go?"

"I reckon nobody can hold Lannon when he wants to do a thing," replied Perrin uneasily. "The day you was bein' took to the Lazy J by Bosworth's outfit I run into Lannon in Bear Flat. I seen you an' Ellen an' the Lazy J outfit goin' up the slope of the mesa, an' I asked Lannon what had happened. He told me. He rode home with me. The next mornin' him an' Polestar was gone. Lannon had left a note for me, tellin' me whar he was goin'."

Perrin turned away. His steps took him to the western corner of the hotel building. He turned his back to Gloria and stood with bowed head, seemingly saddened by a presentiment that evil had come to the "boss" he so much admired.

Watching Perrin, reluctant to go inside the hotel now that she knew Lannon was in danger, Gloria saw Perrin start; heard his loud ejaculation:

"Wa-al, by thunder! Look thar!"

Following Perrin's gaze Gloria looked down the street. In front of the post office was Polestar! Astride the big silver horse, leaning toward the post office, and occupied with the bulletin board, was Lannon!

"Lannon! Lannon!" cried Gloria in a ringing, joyous voice.

Heedless of the watching crowd, caring nothing now for appearances, feeling only a great delight that he had come safely back from the desert, Gloria ran toward him. Lannon heard her voice; saw her;

held out his hands. She reached him, seemed to leap into his waiting arms; was swept upward to Polestar's back.

She saw that he had removed the six cartridges from the little shelf below the bulletin board. He held them in the palm of one hand, and Gloria gazed from them to his eyes, which were agleam with satisfaction. Both were unaware that part of the crowd was now near, watching curiously.

"I'm taking them down," said Lannon. "They've been there long enough to convince a certain element in this basin that they are the statutes of law and order in this section of the country."

"Oh," breathed Gloria, "I'm glad—so glad you came back!"

Lannon held her close, while Polestar, cold, aloof, disdainful of sentiment, stood quietly, apparently oblivious.

"Campan is dead," said Lannon presently. "He died on the desert of thirst. I've brought back your saddle. I got to Campan too late."

She huddled closer to him, trembling. "Oh, Lannon—Stephen—I was so afraid!"

"Stephen," he said, his voice vibrant. "Once when you called me 'stranger,' you said—"

"Hush!" she reproved. "Stephen, when I saw how you looked at me when I called you that I used to cry—because—because I didn't want to do it—to call you that. But I loved you from the day I first saw you, as you stood in the archway, looking at me."

"I think I loved you before that," he told her. "It was when I stood outside the door and heard your voice when you spoke to Devake. Do you remember?"

Saying nothing more, for they saw that the crowd of men and women was swarming toward them, they rode forward, toward the hotel. Lannon brought Polestar to a halt in front of the big gallery. He saw Ellen Bosworth standing near, looking up at him, her eyes glorious with sympathy and understanding.

(The end.)

The Gratitude of Kings

by Frank Pope

J. HOLLINGSWORTH BROWN, who was known in the Roaring Forties as Joe Brown, sat at a small table in front of the Café Venus and looked out upon the plaza of Monquesas City. Across the plaza, with its gorgeous flowers and sparkling little fountain, was the Hotel Ysabel. To his right was the president's palace, and to his left the reddish-brown walls of the old cathedral. On the table stood a half-filled glass, and still closer to Brown was a lighted cigarette. He was alone, and he was lonely. What was even more poignant, he was several thousand

miles from Times Square, and he was nearly broke.

Picturesque and soiled natives strolled by, seeking the shade of the awning for the length of the café front, but Brown took no notice until he became conscious that some one had stopped directly in front of him. Then he glanced up into the troubled face of a young man who could be nothing but an American. Brown's face lighted up.

"Hello, kid," he said heartily. "Sit down and have a drink. Gee, what d'you know about that? I haven't said that for months, and I didn't make a mistake."

The new arrival accepted the seat and the drink. He also apologized for his inability to return the hospitality.

"Forget it," said his host. "I've been there. I'm not so far away right now. The bank roll is anæmic, but I guess she can lose a few more drops. She isn't strong enough to make any real fight for life, anyway, so we might as well kill her. Thank the Lord, at these prewar prices she'll die slowly. Tell the cup-bearer what you want, and if it's an American drink tell him to bring me one. I've been taking anything he brought me just because it was a drink."

The guest knew both the waiter and the capabilities of the Café Venus cellar. In the course of the impromptu party the confidential stage was reached.

"Bill," asked Brown, who had learned that much of his new friend's name, "what are you doing in this terrible burg?"

Bill's story was brief. He had been sent to the Central American state as a representative of an American corporation which had plantation interests; had partaken too freely and too frequently of anti-Volstead beverages; had lost his job—by cable; and now a walking trip to New York looked long, but not improbable.

"But what about you?" he asked, when he had finished his recital. "How did you come to land here?"

Brown grinned rather ruefully.

"Me, too," he admitted. "You see, I'm a press agent. I don't gas about it much, but up in Times Square they call me 'First Page Brown.' Well, let that go. I'm drifting down Broadway a few weeks ago, out of a job—not broke, but just loafing a few days—when I meet Sam Levy. 'What are you doing?' says he. 'At liberty,' says I. Then he asks do I want to go to South America with an opera troupe. I says I'll try anything once. 'When can you sail?' he asks me. It's about eleven o'clock on a Monday, so I says I can't go before three o'clock because I've got to go uptown to get my stuff.

"Well, anyway, I get on a Lamport and Holt boat on Thursday with the troupe. We're booked up all right, but the show is a terrible flop everywhere we play. We take in about enough to make the jumps, but the ghost doesn't walk and everybody is sore.

"We play five or six stands, and business is getting no better very fast. Last week we hit this burg, La Marco, a few hundred miles south of here. That's my Waterloo. I meet a guy from New York that's in the consulate there, and we stage a party.

"It lasts four days, and when it's over the troupe has beat it. My little partner has his job, but I've only got a head, the air and some very light dough. I do a Peary, and head north, get in here this morning, and from the looks of it here I stay until I find me a Santa Claus with a ticket to New York in his kick. That's the sad story, Bill. Now, what can we do so we won't die of thirst?"

"Damfino," was the solemn answer.

"Of course you don't," said Brown. "That's the trouble with guys like you. You're all right as long as things run smooth, but when you get up against it you curl up and die. That's where I live. That's the time my bean begins hitting on all six. I can't really think right until I'm broke or near it."

"All right," returned Bill, being a man of few words. "You say it."

"I'll say it all right," returned Brown, "as soon as I see anything to say it about. I can't manage this greaser talk, but I'll make some one understand what I want. I'll get it, too. How long have you been here?"

"Six months."

"Can you talk greaser?"

"Sure."

"Then that's that. Now, who do you know here?"

"Everybody—and that's not much," said the misanthrope.

"You like this burg about as well as I like Volstead, don't you?" grinned Brown. "I guess it's a hard-boiled egg, but cracking eggs is my specialty. I think we can squeeze about two more drops of blood out of the bank roll and still have enough left to eat on. You've got a place we can sleep, haven't you? All right, that's that. Break the news to the waiter, and we'll go into executive session."

An hour later the hopeful pair stood in front of the office of *El Heraldo,* the leading paper of Monquesas City.

"Old Papa Gomez, who owns this sheet, is the boss Sinn Feiner," explained Bill. "He's ag'in' the government all the time. He's a good old guy, too. He's Don Juan y Larranga Jesu Maria Gomez, but every one calls him Papa.

"Wonder if he'd kick if I called him Pop?" said Brown. "Guess I'd better not until I know him better. Well, let's go. It's a long time since I went after a job in a newspaper shop, but I haven't forgotten the game. You introduce me, and I'll do the rest."

"How?" was Bill's pessimistic query. "This paper is printed in Spanish."

"That's where you fit, my cheerful young friend," explained Brown. "We hunt in couples. I furnish the ideas, and you supply the language. I write the stuff, and you put it into this foolish talk. Now can the objections, and let's go."

II.

Dignified Don Juan Gomez looked up in mild surprise at the American invasion of his sanctum. Said sanctum was a pine table in a corner of what Brown rightly supposed to be the editorial room. Don Juan interrupted his task of writing a vitriolic editorial about his pet pest, President Garcia of Monquesas, but before he could speak Bill burst into a flood of Spanish, ending with a wide flourish and the only words Brown could understand—"Señor Brown."

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"I just told him you were a regular guy, and that when you played the newspaper circuit you were always the headliner," Bill replied.

"As long as your friend does not speak Spanish," remarked Papa Gomez smilingly, "perhaps we'd get along better if we all spoke English."

"That listens good to me," said Brown, surprised. "But where did you learn regular talk?"

"In New York," replied the editor calmly. "I go up every year or so, and I lived there some time ago. I used to work on the *Herald* cable desk."

"The old *Herald,* eh?" almost shouted Brown. "Say, do you know— Well, never mind that. Time is fugiting. Bill and I are up against it, and we need a job. One job for both of us. Listen, Pop, I'm a regular newspaper man. I can get the stuff, write it, read copy, hold down a rewrite job, make up, or do anything else around the shop.

"Wait a minute. Spanish is out for me. That lets me in only for getting the stuff and writing it. Bill here can put it into your lingo. But we've got to have a job, Pop. The old bank roll is nearing a tragic end, and she must have some oxygen, even if I have to do real work for it."

Papa Gomez looked solemnly at the two young men, pulling his long, gray mustache. Finally he said:

"Once or twice when I've been in New York I've heard of a man named Brown—'First Page Brown,' they used to call him. Ever hear of him?"

"Pop, your search is ended," declared Brown. "That's my moniker."

"I've heard that this Brown is a fair press agent," continued Gomez.

"Fair!" gasped Brown. "Say, listen, Pop, I hate to talk about myself; but when it comes to press-agent stuff the spotlight is all mine. I've worked against the best of them, on Broadway and on the road, and I'm looking back when I go under the wire. Why, when the Universal was putting out that big film, 'The—' But you

wouldn't know about that. Anyway, I'm good. I admit it, and so do the rest of the bunch."

Gomez smiled, still worrying his mustache.

"Perhaps I know more of you and your work than you think," he said. "At least, I'm very glad to meet you, Señor Brown."

"That goes double, Pop," was the reply, "if the job comes through."

"I am considering," answered Gomez. "You have done many things, I know. Have you ever specialized in revolutions?"

"Revolutions!" Brown was staggered. "Well, no. But there's got to be a first time for everything. I'll get away with it."

Gomez regarded the modest young man thoughtfully for a moment. Then his smile disappeared, and he said:

"Sit down. Perhaps we can do business. I can tell you my idea, and you can think it over. This country has a president, Don Miguel Garcia, who has ruled it for twenty years. He is a grafter, and is incompetent so far as governing is concerned. But he has built up a following, and no one has been able to oust him.

"My father, who started this paper, tried it and failed. I have been trying it for ten years, and he is still president. You see, no matter how many votes are cast, no matter for whom they are cast, he and his friends do the counting. So he remains in office."

"I see," said Brown. "Old tricks—that's the answer."

"That, as you wisely observe, is the answer," agreed Gomez. "Well, things have been growing worse. Not only are the people getting poorer and poorer, but he has placed so many restrictions on the export and import trade that the foreign corporations are becoming tired, and we are in danger of losing much of our business. These corporations have paid him thousands in bribes, but he is insatiable, and they are growing weary."

"All right," said Brown. "We'll throw him out. Let's go."

Gomez grinned.

"It's a little more complicated than that," he said. "The end is greatly to be desired, but the means must be carefully considered. I have thought of many ways, but there is some insuperable objection to each. I have finally decided that a revolution will be necessary."

"Why haven't you staged one before?" asked the New Yorker.

"It is dangerous," replied Don Juan. "The welfare of Monquesas and the lives of our people must be considered. Garcia has an army, or what he calls an army. It really is only a personal guard, for he is extremely unpopular and for years has ruled only through fear. He pays the guard enough to keep it loyal to him, and these men—about two hundred in all—have the only real arms known to be in the country. I say known to be, because I have a small stock of rifles and ammunition, which I have kept in readiness for some years."

"Fair enough," responded Brown. "Bill and I will get the men to handle 'em. You will have to pay the freight, but from the looks of the inhabitants that won't be heavy."

"If we can arouse the natives," explained Gomez, "very little money will be needed. The trouble is to get them waked up, to get them aroused to that point where they will revolt against this tyrant."

"That's my job," said the press agent. "That's easy. But here's something important. What do we get out of it—Bill and I?"

After some discussion of steamship fares and other details, it was agreed that, if the revolution succeeded, Gomez should pay seven hundred dollars in gold, which, Brown estimated, would land them in New York with enough left to "buy lunch at the Claridge." He wanted nothing more. Land him in New York with subway fare, and he would even forego the Claridge lunch. But, if the revolution failed, there would be nothing, and each must save himself.

This settled, Brown "put the bee on Pop," as he expressed it, for expense money, and went to work, with Bill as his interpreter and chief aid. A week elapsed, during which the propaganda was carefully spread among a select and trusted few; and *El Heraldo* published, day by day, scorching

editorials against Garcia and his administration.

The date for the uprising had been set, and a few days before the time selected Brown and Bill were hard at work in a back room of *El Heraldo* office. Bill was putting into fiery Castilian the latest extremely libelous indictment of Garcia that Brown had written in his best Broadway style, and Brown himself was completing his artistic labors on banners that were to be carried by the revolutionists. He had just finished his masterpiece, printed from Bill's Spanish copy, and reading, in Brown's original English:

MEN OF MONQUESAS
Are You MEN or MONKEYS?

" Listen, Bill," said that artist as he stood back to admire his work; " there's a few little things to be fixed up before we pull this stunt."

" One of them being Mercedes, I suppose," replied Bill, racking his brain for Spanish epithets even more insulting than the ones he had used. " You've got a nerve. Fixing to throw Garcia out and making love to his niece at the same time."

" You said it," declared his superior emphatically. " One of them's Mercedes. I'm going to put Mickey "—his Broadway for Miguel—" down and out, all right, but his niece is going back to New York with me. I raised the ante on Pop just to buy that extra ticket, and it isn't going to be wasted."

" I don't see why you wanted to mess this up with a skirt," said Bill grouchily. " These janes play the devil with everything. Here we have a perfectly good little revolution under way, and you—"

" Listen, bo." Brown was impressive. " I declared Mercedes in, and she's in to stay. If you don't like it, choose your nearest exit and run; do not walk. Signed, Joe Brown, fire commissioner. And can that ' jane ' stuff, too. She's Señorita Garcia, or Mercedes, even if her uncle is the biggest crook in the country."

" Oh, all right, all right," Bill capitulated weakly. " Have it your own way. But if it flops, don't say I didn't warn you. I don't think Mercedes is very strong for Uncle Mickey, anyway. Life is no bed of roses for her. Her old man left about one hundred thousand dollars when he died, and Mickey took it all. All she gets is board and lodging."

" Know what I'm going to do when I get home?" asked Brown, with Mercedes in his mind. " I'm going to start a school like the Berlitz with a new system. I'm going to use love-making talk in the classes. Funny how quick you can pick that up. Mercedes and I get along great now, and she's only been teaching me less than a week."

" I'll say you've got a lot of speed, Joe," grinned Bill, " but I'm scary about your control. S'posing Mercedes stalls on the grade."

" Not a chance, kid," came the assured reply. " She's signed up on Joe Brown's equity contract, and no greaser impresario, even if he is her uncle, can make her break it."

" Well, I hope you're right," answered the pessimist, " but a woman is like a revolution—you can't tell which way she'll break."

" This woman and this revolution are going to break right," declared Joe. " Look, Bill. It makes me think of her lips—this red paint and white canvas. She's aces, kid—aces!"

" I didn't think she had to use red paint," said Bill wickedly, but Brown was too much absorbed in his love dreams to resent this, which was a palpable libel, as Mercedes had a complexion which shamed the best of artificial ones.

This and other things Brown told her that night as they sat in the shade of an old tree on the beach. Her liquid Spanish and a few words of English, combined with what little of her lingo she had taught him, and his Broadway vocabulary, seemed to suffice them for all practical purposes.

" You will not hurt my uncle, will you?" she asked anxiously. " Of course, he has been sometimes cruel to me, but I do not want him hurt."

" Well, you see," said Brown, " that's up to him. If he's a good dog and lies down when he's told, he won't be hurt. I

think I can pull this stunt so that no one will be hurt—sort of movie stuff, you know. I know one who won't be damaged, and that's me. I'm going to save myself for you, sweety."

"How will you save yourself, Jose?" she queried.

"Listen, kid," said the newly named Jose. "When that army of shoeless patriots starts to pull the chair out from under Uncle Mickey I'll be so far in the rear that six forced marches won't put me in touch by wireless. I'm too valuable on Broadway to take long chances down here for small dough."

It is doubtful if Mercedes gathered the full meaning of this, but the accompanying actions reassured her as to her standing with "Jose," and she relaxed against his shoulder.

"But if the revolution should fail?" she ventured timorously.

"Not a chance," boasted Brown. "It's all set. I never let go of my stunts until I know they're safe. About a week from now I'm going to say: 'Lights! Action! Camera! Shoot!' and in half an hour it 'll be all over."

Once more the flood of strange language rather swamped Mercedes, but a strong right arm supported her, and she dismissed her doubts.

This wonderful Jose of hers could not fail.

III.

For the next few days the plans for the uprising kept Brown and Bill busy. After consultation with several leaders of the political party opposed to Garcia, it was decided to "pull the stunt," as Brown phrased it, on Friday. Military titles were freely distributed to the proud aids. There was a little jealousy over these titles, but the press agent proved himself also a diplomat.

"I fixed that scrap," he reported to Gomez. "I gave the highest rank to the tallest men. That was all right with them."

After looking over the ground Brown laid out a schedule for Thursday night and Friday; a scenario, he called it.

"We'll get the troupe together by midnight Thursday," he decided, "and we'll start the march at daybreak. I've picked a great location for the mobilization. Tell your chief supers to get their gangs behind that bunch of trees, up the beach, by midnight. That will give us about a mile and a half march to the plaza. We don't want too many down there, because when we get under way we'll pick up recruits in every block. By the time we get up to the plaza we'll have a fair little army."

"Do you think it wise," inquired Gomez, "to try to hold them on the beach for several hours? Do you think they will stay?"

"They'll stick, all right," replied Brown. "That's where you come in. You've got to dig up some more campaign expenses, and we'll give 'em a drink now and then. That 'll keep 'em both warm and enthusiastic. Then, just before we start, you hand them a hot line of talk about patriotism and oppression and what a great little guy you are. Jazz 'em up, you know, so they won't weaken on us."

"I understand," said the editor. "Alcohol and oratory make a good combination at a time like this. I think it will be wise to give them some coffee and a little food before we start."

"Sure. They'll need that. Some wise guy that wrote the titles for one of Griffith's films said that an army marches on its stomach. He probably copped the idea—most of these title writers steal their stuff—but it's good dope."

Gomez promised to attend to the commissary department.

"You give out those rifles of yours, Pop," continued Brown. "You know the guys you can trust. They've all got machetes, anyway, so they'll all have some kind of fighting tool. I'll look out for the banner carriers. Then, I'll want two gangs of huskies, one bunch with picks and shovels."

"For what?" asked Gomez. "They cannot fight with those implements."

"Listen, Pop," said Machiavelli Brown solemnly. "Did you ever hear of a real revolution succeeding if there were no cannon? Of course not. So we're going to

have cannon. This job is no No. 3 company."

"And where, may I ask, do you propose to get them?"

"That's where the picks come in. There are a dozen or more old cannon planted down near the docks where they tie up the small boats. The boatmen use them for hitching posts. I'm going to dig 'em up and let 'em lead the army."

"But you can't use them," objected Bill.

"Moral effect, son—moral effect," replied Brown. "Garcia will be so fussed he won't recognize them, and when he sees cannon coming into the plaza he'll just be a trail of dust in the distance."

"But you haven't any gun carriages." This from Gomez.

"That's where the old bean comes in," said the brains of the uprising. "Bill is going to boss the job of digging up the cannon. I'm going to take the other gang to the car barns, and we're coming back with the car trucks and the horses to pull 'em."

Gomez and Bill laughed.

"It is fortunate," said the former, "that Señor Arigo did not succeed in his attempts to electrify our street car line, or there would have been no horses. Our conservatives did us a favor then."

"How come?" asked Brown.

Gomez explained: "Arigo declared we were behind the times with our ancient horse cars, and demanded that we have an electric line. But one of the other members of the council objected on the ground that if we did away with the horses the farmers would have no market for the hay they raised. And the council took that view."

"Well, we're much obliged," laughed Brown. "Now, you both understand what to do. We'll be all set and we'll pull the grand finale while Garcia is getting ready for breakfast."

"Are you to lead the army, Señor Brown?" inquired Gomez.

"If it has to retreat I'll be leading it," said Brown. "Otherwise, I'll direct this revolution from behind a 'dobe wall. I don't think any of Garcia's men will be awake enough to shoot, but I'm taking no chances on the marksmanship of our own army. If there's one thing that annoys me, it's having my clothes torn by bullets. No, I'll hand out the final orders and let the army have all the glory."

"I," said Gomez proudly, "shall march with the army of liberation. I shall wear the uniform I wore when I was in the president's council. The army must have a leader, and that post of honor shall be mine."

"Suit yourself, Pop," agreed Brown. "You won't get any argument from me. But leave our dough in a safe place in case anything happens to you."

"Nothing will happen," boasted Gomez. "I have faith in my destiny."

"I've got a lot more faith in keeping out of danger," was the wise reply. "But have your own way. Don't forget the route of the parade. Keep along the beach to get what recruits we can down there, and then come up that street that brings us out back of the cathedral. That will hide us until we get almost to the plaza. Then all we have to do is to march around the cathedral, give a hearty cheer, and dash across the plaza to the palace. We've got to try to surprise this bird."

"Listen," said Bill suddenly. "We've got this thing framed to the final curtain, almost, but here's a thing we overlooked. When we get old Garcia on the run, who's going to be president?"

"Not me," disclaimed Brown hastily.

"You need not concern yourselves with that," smiled Gomez. "I have already arranged it. The victorious army will acclaim me provisional president until a special election can be held."

"Pop, you're a fox," said Brown admiringly. "I never thought of that. And you'll pay Bill and me out of the public funds instead of out of your pocket. Some fox, Pop."

Gomez smiled complacently.

"One must look ahead," he explained. "Besides, I shall be in a position to do any little favors for you that may be necessary."

Thursday night arrived. Gomez's native aids were busy in the cantinas during the evening, and shortly before midnight small

parties of fairly well alcoholized patriots made their way to the beach. A scouting party had captured Garcia's beach patrol of three men, who had immediately joined the rebels. All had been warned to be quiet, so there were no cheers even when Brown and Bill, with four antique cannon —all Bill's gang could dig up—arrived in camp with the guns on the car trucks, drawn by the weary horses. Large kettles of coffee hung over a few fires, and this was popular after all other stimulants had disappeared.

Gomez's rifles and ammunition were distributed just before dawn, the several hundred men formed into some sort of ranks, the banners were handed to the men chosen to carry them, and then Brown, Bill, Gomez and the tall patriots selected to lead the battle made their final inspection.

" Well," said Brown finally, " they look like the supers of my late opera troupe at an early morning rehearsal of ' Carmen,' but maybe they'll get away with it."

" The divine spark is in each breast." Gomez was getting oratorical. " They realize that the fate of their country is in their hands."

" Yeah," drawled Brown. " And that firewater is in their stomachs. Save that line of talk for your speech, Pop. And, say, it's about time that you made it. Bill, tell those captains to shush their men. Pop's goin' to tell 'em a few things."

Perched on the stump of a tree, Gomez was an imposing figure. The few places on his uniform that were not trimmed with tarnished gold lace were hung with medals. A revolver dangled from his belt, and he waved a long, shining machete.

There were a number of " *Vivas!*" as the martial figure appeared, although most of the heroes were too busy rolling cigarettes or whetting their machetes on the calloused soles of their bare feet. But when Gomez started there was no lack of attention.

A stream of denunciation of Garcia, his ancestors and descendants, poured from his lips in flowery, rolling Spanish. He pictured the fair land of Monquesas under the heel of the oppressor, and then, in cooing accents, he drew another picture of that land as it should be, with all its people happy, contented and well fed, and with no work to do except to take part in fiestas. When he had finished the loud " *Vivas!*" were mingled with shouts of " El Presidente Gomez," at which the orator smiled beatifically.

" Pop," said Brown, as the orator, somewhat winded but still full of fire, stepped from the stump, " you are sure some talker. I don't know what you were saying, but it was good. I've heard Bryan and Tom Watson and the Tammany spellbinders, and you've got it all over them. I'm for you, Pop."

" My heart spoke for me," orated Gomez. " I see my country bleeding at the feet of the tyrant, and—"

" Yeah," said Brown again, " I know all that stuff. But time is getting on. Bill, tell those guys to get this outfit started. Come on, let's go."

Raggedly but surely the army got under way, filing past the generalissimo, who looked it over and frowned.

" You know," he said doubtfully, " I don't exactly like this whole proposition. It's too easy. We've kept it under cover as well as we could, but it seems impossible that nothing leaked. Still, if it did, what's Garcia doing? What's happened to his guard?"

Gomez and Bill, more optimistic, laughed at his fears.

" It is his conceit," said the former. " Garcia could not imagine any one trying to drive him from the palace. He would laugh at anybody who told him such a story. Everything is all right, Señor Brown."

" Maybe you're right," replied Joe. " I hope so, anyway. Well, here's the rear guard. Fall in. Let's go."

And they went.

They skirted the clump of trees, straggled along the beach, the bare feet shuffling softly through the sand, and turned up the badly paved street chosen for the advance on the palace.

Leading the line went a score or so of former members of the president's guard who had left that organization for some grievance or other, commanded by an ex-

sergeant. Their duty was to see that no one ran ahead to give warning at the palace and to make sure also that the army was not attacked from the houses on either side.

The theatricalism of the job appealed to them. They sleuthed along, half bent over, and casting keen glances left and right from under knitted brows. Their rifles were at the ready. The sergeant, a tall, rangy person in dirty white trousers, torn shirt, and an enormous high-crowned straw hat, waved a machete a yard long, and dashed from one side of the narrow street to the other, whispering orders to his soldiers and appealing to the men in the houses to join the army.

There was no lack of recruits. This was an exciting game, and they played it joyously. As the men joined the ranks, the women and children fell in behind, not wishing to be hurt, but desiring to see all the fun.

Back of the skirmish line came two tall rebels carrying Brown's famous "Men or Monkeys" banner, while farther down came "Why Be Slaves?" done into Spanish, and other inspiriting slogans. The carriers of the first banner felt themselves the most important in this line, and, in honor of their job, each had secured a red sash which he had draped across his chest. That these sashes made good targets had not occurred to them.

Next came the four guns, grim looking but empty, the horses and the flat wheels of the trucks making a great clatter on the uneven pavement. Then, in all his glory, marched Don Juan y Larranga Jesu Maria Gomez, revolver drawn and sword flourishing, looking every inch the hero and patriot. Behind him straggled the army, supported on either flank by wives, children and sweethearts.

The quiet for which Brown had wished was out of the question now. The women screamed advice and endearments to the men, and the youngsters cheered shrilly.

Brown, who had run ahead to watch the progress of the guns, scowled at his command as it ambled along.

"A fine body of men," he grumbled, shaking his head. "Wonder where they got those old rifles? I'll bet some of them came to Peru with Pizarro. If one of those guys ever tries to fire one, it's sure death for him."

The habilaments of the army struck him as unique.

"Look at that little chap, Bill," he said. "I never knew before that a man with only two hands could carry a rifle and a machete, hold up his trousers and hang on to his hat all at the same time, and still have a free hand to throw kisses to the girls. That guy ought to be in vaudeville. Look at 'em, Bill. I wish I had a camera man here. A couple of reels of this would be worth all kinds of money up home. Nobody would believe it wasn't specially staged."

"Ole! Ole!" shouted the spectators as the grim-faced skirmishers passed, and then "*Viva Gomez!*" as that martial figure came along. By the time the head of the line had reached the rear of the cathedral the army and its following numbered several thousand.

Here a halt was called, and the skirmishers sneaked around the building to reconnoiter. They reported no unusual activity at the palace or in the plaza. No guards were to be seen, and the palace apparently slept, unsuspicious of the fate fast approaching the president.

"Well, Pop," said Brown, "it might as well be now as any other time. Go to it, old man, and good luck!"

Gomez waved his machete, the skirmishers slunk around the corners of the cathedral, the guns creaked into motion again, and the army fell in behind, more or less enthusiastically.

The women and children dashed madly through the outlying streets to come into the plaza from the sides and to watch the fray from places out of direct range of fire. The head of the column reached the plaza and strode on, tramping across the president's flower beds as if they were the face of Garcia himself. The four guns took the broad walks, but the fighters stalked ahead over every obstacle.

Brown and Bill, from the shelter of the pillars of the cathedral entrance—said pillars being four feet square—watched the advance.

"See 'em dodge the fountain, Bill," chuckled Brown. "They'll fight for their country, but they won't bathe for it."

The farther the army marched, the slower it progressed. By the time it had reached the middle of the plaza most of the heroes were being prodded along by the machetes of their officers. Slowly and painfully it dragged on, nervously awaiting the first shot from the palace. But the shot did not come. Nor did any other sign of life from the dingy white, two-story building that housed the oppressor of the poor of Monquesas.

"I don't get it," puzzled Brown. "It looks like Garcia had been dispossessed in the night. His guards must have seen this bunch."

At that moment some overeager patriot pulled the trigger of his weapon, a shotgun, and the sound split the morning air like the roar of a cannon. Instantly two or three more nervous fingers touched triggers, wasting perfectly good bullets on the air. Almost before the first echo had a chance to be heard fully one-half the army was streaking back for the cathedral. But Brown did not propose to have his revolution spoiled at the last minute. With Bill at his side, each with a revolver, they faced the fugitives.

"Tell 'em to throw it into reverse, Bill," ordered Brown, waving his pistol in the faces of the fleeing men. "Tell 'em quick and loud."

Either Bill's shouts or the two revolvers halted most of the runners, and reluctantly they turned back to where the rest of the army, not wishing to run and not daring to go forward, stood waiting.

"We've got to take a chance, Bill!" Brown exclaimed. "We've got to be rear guard and keep these bums in line. Let's go."

And, like a shepherd and his dog herding sheep, the two Americans drove the ragtag remnant along with waving pistols and shouted commands.

Suddenly from the ranks of the liberators burst the gorgeous figure of Papa Gomez, revolver in one hand, machete in the other. Heroically he dashed across the few yards between the vanguard and the palace, sprang up the broad steps, and beat upon the double doors.

"Open, Garcia!" he shouted. "The people of Monquesas demand entrance. Come out and face those you have robbed —tyrant, scoundrel, oppressor!"

Spurred on by his bravery, half a dozen men ran to his side and put their shoulders to the doors. Suddenly these gave way, precipitating Gomez and the others to the floor of the hall. Spanish curses rolled out to those in the plaza, but aside from these the place was like a tomb.

Brown and Bill pushed their way to the front just as Gomez picked himself up.

"The coop is empty," muttered Brown. "What do you know about that? Garcia took it on the run. I wonder when he got wise?"

"And where are the guards?" queried Bill. "Some of them ought to be around here somewhere."

This question was answered by a barefooted soldier who came from the rear and addressed Bill.

"Señor," he said, "the president's guards are over behind the cathedral, and they want to know if you will let them join your army."

For an instant Brown was stunned. Then he sat down on the steps to laugh in comfort.

"Bill," he gasped, "ask him where Garcia is."

El Presidente Garcia, the guard informed them, had left the palace with Señorita Mercedes the night before, and had said he would be away for some time. He had told the guards to go to their barracks, a few blocks away, and they would be paid off in the morning. Would the gringo general pay them?

Gringo General Brown would not, but he was perfectly willing they should join his army and take chances on getting something later.

Meanwhile, Gomez, as soon as he found the palace to be deserted, had posted a few trusted men to prevent looting. He planned to live in the palace himself, and wanted no damage done to the furnishings. Then, whispering commands to his aids, who went back to the army, Gomez

mounted the stairs and a moment later appeared on the balcony attended by a tall patriot waving the Monquesas flag. Wild cheers, inspired by the aids, greeted him. Majestically he doffed his hat and bowed. Then, raising his hand for silence, he launched into a glowing panegyric on Monquesas, its brave citizens, and, above all, on the heroic and statesmanlike Don Juan y Larranga Jesu Maria Gomez, liberator of a downtrodden people.

Brown and Bill, sitting on the steps, could hear but not see him, and Bill translated, sentence by sentence.

"I'll tell the world he's some orator," admitted Brown, as the sounding Spanish phrases rolled over their heads. "Well, let him get away with it. It's all cold for me now. I rather hoped we'd have just a little scrap to make it look real, but perhaps it's better this way. Now we've got a real job, Bill. We've got to find Mercedes. Let's go."

"How about our dough?" asked the cautious Bill. "We'd better get that from Pop while he's good-natured."

"That can wait," said Joe decidedly. "My gal is more important than all the dough in this musical comedy country."

Gomez waved his hand to the army, shouting a few words in Spanish.

Slowly the crowd began to disperse.

"He's going to buy them all a drink at the big cantina," said Bill. "I'll bet that is all they'll get, too," he added. "Come on, Joe, let's get him now."

But Brown did not hear. He was watching a figure that was coming through the disappearing army. The figure was clad in khaki riding trousers and coat, and was running. With a wild yell Brown dashed to meet the runner, and an instant later was hugging away what little breath Mercedes had remaining.

"I ran away from my uncle this morning," she said, when she could speak. "We were at the house of Señor Arigo last night. My uncle has gone now, I do not know where. But I am with you, Jose, and I do not care."

"You said it, you're with me!" shouted Brown. "And you're going to stay with me. It's all right, Bill. Let's go."

"Just a minute," replied Bill. "Here comes Gomez. We need that kale, don't we?"

Gomez approached with stately pride. He had acquired an air of dignity, almost of majesty, in the few minutes that had passed—an air befitting his new station as President of Monquesas. He was attended by several of his shoeless aids.

"Pop," said Brown, holding out his hand, "we pulled it off, didn't we? I told you we would. Now, I'll tell you—"

But Gomez, bowing in a most courtly manner, interrupted with an upraised hand.

"Señor Brown," he said sternly, "we wish to take this occasion to express our thanks for the service you have rendered the State of Monquesas. In token of our gratitude, we ask you to accept this."

"This" was a small leather pouch which jingled pleasantly as Brown took it.

"We also wish to state," continued Gomez, "that we do not desire among our people a man who is able to wield such malign influence over them; and, therefore, as President of Monquesas, grant you twenty-four hours in which to quit this country. Should you be found here after that time, we shall consider that we have been defied, and shall order your incarceration."

Brown stared, open-mouthed. It took a minute or so for this new development to sink in.

When he finally comprehended what Gomez had said he muttered to Bill:

"Well, can you beat that? Here we pull this stunt, make this bird the president, and we get the bum's rush. There was a title writer once who wrote something for a film about 'the gratitude of kings.' I never got that line before, but now I know. Well, Bill, it's all wet here. Let's go."

IV.

A FEW hours later Brown, Bill and Mercedes were rowed out to a little Portuguese steamer in the harbor by a revolutionist who had already resumed his peace-time avocation of boatman. Bill sought the captain, and arranged for their passage, dis-

covering that the steamer would sail in about half an hour.

A stateroom was secured for Mercedes, the two Americans agreeing to bunk wherever convenient. Brown escorted the girl to her room and returned to find Bill leaning over the rail, watching the crowds drifting aimlessly about the streets of the town. To all appearances the revolution was as completely finished as if it had never been. Joe ranged up beside him, and together they watched until the whistle sounded and the little steamer began to move slowly out of the bay.

"Bill," said Brown, as he slapped his friend on the shoulder, "we're headed north, headed home. Back to Broadway again. Even with prohibition, New York is the greatest town in the world. I can almost see Times Square and all the lights now. Listen, Bill, this is an occasion to celebrate. Let's dig up that purser or steward, or whatever he is, and see if there's a drink on board. I need one, and we both deserve one."

The Portuguese boat was very poorly equipped for passengers, but it did have what passed for a smoking room, and to this the pair found their way. There was just one occupant, slumped in his chair with his back toward them.

As they entered he straightened up and turned.

Brown gasped.

"My God, it's Mickey!" he said.

Ex-President Miguel Garcia smiled as he held out his hand.

"Surprised to see me, Señor Brown?" he said in good English. "I thought you would be. We are to be fellow passengers. You brought my niece on board, I hope. I should hate to have her left here."

"She's here all right," answered Brown. "But you—how did you get here?"

"I came on board this morning, while you were busy with your revolution," said Garcia.

"But—but—" stammered the flustered press agent. "Say, listen, wise me up to this, will you? I'm about sunk."

"It is really very simple," explained Garcia. "Naturally I have known of your plans for some time. I did not stop you because you were helping me. I have been weary of Monquesas and my position for several years, but this is the first good chance I have had to get away. I have wanted to resign, but five or six of my associates, with whom I have been forced to divide some of the money I have acquired, refused to permit it. So I have had to await my chance. You gave it me, and here I am."

"But these pals of yours," said Brown. "Where are they?"

Garcia smiled sweetly.

"That is my one regret," he replied. "I could not run the risk of being stopped. So I had my guards lock them all up last night. They will be freed this afternoon, none the worse."

"I'll take off my hat to you, Mickey," said Brown admiringly. "So you're going to New York? Well, I don't know your plans, but you can stick along with Mercedes and me until you make up your mind what to do."

"That will not be necessary," answered the ex-ruler suavely. "I wrote the Waldorf for reservations a week or more ago. I hope you and Mercedes will be my guests there until you look around. And you, too, Señor Bill," he added.

"Now I am sunk," whispered Joe. "The Waldorf, no less! And guests! Then you got away with something, after all?"

"A little," said Garcia carelessly. "I have a few hundred thousand on deposit in New York, and as much more in Paris that I have sent over from time to time. I am a cautious soul and desired to provide for my old age."

"I'll say you did," was Brown's astonished reply. "Well, of course you know I'm going to marry Mercedes whether you like it or not," he added rather defiantly.

"So I supposed," was the smooth reply. "I shall arrange to have the wedding at the Waldorf. I shall, of course, defray all expenses. And while we are on this subject, there is one little thing you should know. Mercedes will be of age in a few months. I shall not wait until her birthday, however, but will turn over to her as a wedding gift the fortune her father left her. It has increased a little in my hands; not so much

as I could wish, but it is sufficient to save you from worry."

"Sunk and never coming up," murmured Brown. "Me—Joe Brown—pulling a revolution that works, getting the only girl I ever saw that I want to keep looking at forever, and getting a hundred grand and more with her! It doesn't happen, that's all—it can't."

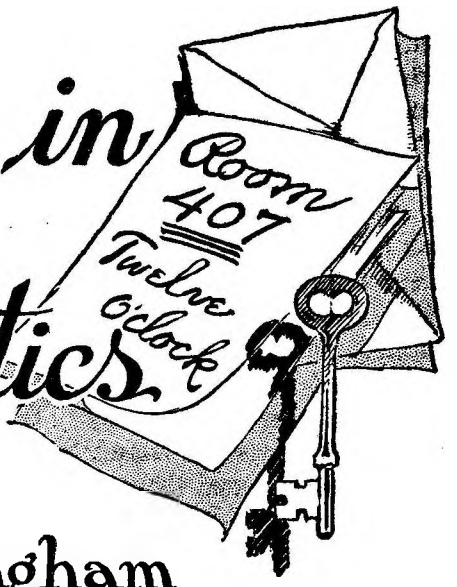
"Moreover," continued Garcia, "I shall need a secretary. I plan to go to Paris soon, and I shall be most grateful, Señor Bill, if you will accept the post of secretary and traveling companion. The remuneration will be satisfactory, I assure you. I owe you something also for your part in the little revolution."

"Mickey," declaimed Brown solemnly, "I've heard a lot of hard stories about you. Some of the knocks Gomez handed you were birds. But I'm beginning to believe that you're a regular feller. There's just one thing I'd like to know. Who put you wise to our little act? Who kept you posted so that you knew when it was going to break and just when to make your getaway?"

The former tyrant of Monquesas smiled slowly.

"Señor Gomez," he replied.

A Lesson in Melodramatics



by Herbert J. Mangham

DON lingered over the last bite of his pastry. Most people can spend only a small portion of their lives in San Francisco, so during that small portion they linger over their pastries.

"No," he said, reluctantly swallowing, "I shall not go to Elizabeth's with you. I know you balmy young fools want to be alone, not having seen each other for a month. I was young once myself, if you can imagine it. Besides, being a third party is devilish boresome."

"Come out of it!" urged Louis. "You know if Elizabeth finds out that I left you to wander around by yourself she will wrap the piano lamp around my neck! If you don't want to play a lone third, Elizabeth can easily find a fourth."

A waiter laid an envelope beside Don's plate.

"How little you know me!" sniffed Don, eying the envelope speculatively. "I never play 'sights unseen.' I always draw either a hooked nose or a lisp. Surely you—Holy cats! Who dares address me as the 'Young Man with the Wavy Hair'? Louis, there's something hard in this envelope!"

"Open it," advised Louis.

"You open it!"

"I won't. It is marked 'Personal,' and the 'Personal' is underlined."

Don gingerly tore open the envelope and drew forth a sheet of scented stationery. A key tumbled through his fingers to the tablecloth.

"'Room 407. Twelve o'clock,'" he read.

"'Still waters run deep!'" quoted Louis. "I'll tell Elizabeth you had a previous engagement."

"I've changed my mind!" said Don. "I believe I will go with you, after all."

"No, you won't! We balmy fools prefer to be alone. Besides, we have no desire to bore you—when there are so many more interesting pastimes in San Francisco!"

"But what shall I do?"

"At twelve o'clock sharp you go to room 407, insert your key in the lock, turn it, blush boyishly and walk in! Even I, with my inferior intellect, can get that much out of the letter. But you probably—"

"But, Louis, this isn't the continent!"

"No, but it's San Francisco."

"That's what puzzles me!"

"What sort of a person is she?"

"How should I know? The letter isn't signed. I can't ask the waiter, because I did not notice which one gave me the envelope."

"Look around," suggested Louis.

Don allowed his eyes to roam slowly.

"It must be that blonde at the second table," he surmised. "Nobody but a blonde would behave like that."

The lady under surveillance turned her head until her gaze clashed with Don's. She flushed angrily, gave him what is known in some circles as "the once-over," and jerked away with a toss of her head.

"There's one possibility disposed of," chuckled Louis.

Don, continuing his quest, found himself without warning gazing into a pair of eyes of Latin depth and luminosity. Just one electric instant, and the eyelids were lowered, leaving him free to explore an amazing panorama of creamy cheeks, jet brows and lashes, and ripe cherry lips. He turned away, a bit breathless.

Louis gulped his demi-tasse and rose hastily.

"See you later, old chap," he said. "My engagement comes earlier than yours, you know. You pay this check, and I'll shoulder the next."

"But, Louis—"

Louis continued, unheeding, to the doorway.

Don paid the check and made his way to the lobby. The woman did not look at him again.

He loitered a few minutes in the shelter of an imported marble pillar, guaranteed genuine by a proud manager, watching the expressive gestures of two members of a visiting opera company. Perhaps the sender of the note was also one of them, but he immediately rejected the idea. This was not an opera bouffe. Even foreigners did not do such things in America.

The lady of the electric glance came out of the dining room and started toward the elevator. Although she passed within two feet of Don, she made no more of his presence than she did of the hundred others in the lobby. Reaching the elevator, she paused, turned her head just enough to reveal a profile of exquisite loveliness, and was gone!

Don ascended to his room. Louis's room was empty, he found, entering by way of the connecting bath. Returning to his own, he picked up his golf bag, surveyed it thoughtfully, and threw it on the bed. A shrug of the shoulders indicated that he intended to think no more of the affair, and he put on his coat and hat to go forth in search of amusement.

Noticing that his watch was not running he stopped in the lobby to set it by the clock over the clerk's desk. The clerk, he thought, might be able to tell him who the fair disturber was, but Don hesitated to ask the identity of a woman with "an electric glance and ripe cherry lips." He hesitated, too, at turning the letter over to the police. Although it might have been the wisest course, it would certainly not be sporting.

One of the cinemas on Market Street advertised a Nazimova production, but the dynamic Russian's miming failed to interest. A dozen times Don decided to return quietly to his hotel and to bed, and an equal number of times he changed his mind. Although the adventure had a story book beginning, it would almost certainly not have a story book ending. There was no apparent reason why his prosaic life should suddenly flare into purple romance. Nothing could be gained by "framing" him, or doing any of the other things that commonly

occurred in the type of popular melodrama beginning with such episodes.

Perhaps the sender of the note was not the lady of the ripe cherry lips. Then to obey the directions might lead him into any embarrassment imaginable. It was conceivable that the note had not been meant for him. He had not noticed whether there had been any other men with wavy hair in the dining room. "The Young Man with the Wavy Hair," forsooth! Don blushed in the darkness.

The stillness of the darkened auditorium became stifling, until Don had to leave the theater. He roamed Market Street from the Ferries Station to the Civic Center, staring at window displays that might have been exact duplicates for all the impression they made upon his busy brain.

Crossing Powell Street for the third or fourth time he decided on the instant to go straight to bed and to sleep. He wanted to devote all of the next day to business so he could return to Sacramento. His irrevocableness of decision was evinced by the briskness with which he walked to his hotel, entered the elevator and directed the elevator boy to let him off at the fifth floor.

He absently looked at his watch. Just as his eyes fell upon the dial the hour and the minute hand met.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I should have said fourth floor!"

His vacillations were mere pusillanimity, he decided; he was going to see the thing out! Walking straight to room 407 he unlocked the door and pushed it open. The room was lighted dimly by a single light on the far side. He stepped inside and closed the door behind him.

A woman and two men sitting at a table on the far side of the room turned startled eyes toward him. A shaded lamp threw its light downward, leaving the faces around the table in semidarkness, but the woman was easily recognizable as the one who had attracted his notice at dinner. She crossed the room and spoke softly:

"You are an hour early!"

"My watch stopped," explained Don sheepishly. "I must have set it an hour ahead of time."

The woman hesitated an instant.

"Sit down," she said. "Dagby, draw up a chair."

The smaller of the two men crossed the room—a crouched, sinister shadow in the vague light—brought another chair to the table and took his place behind it. Taking the proffered seat, Don turned to examine the man and woman standing in front of him. The woman's beauty appeared even more seductive in the dim light of the shaded lamp. The man was tall and muscular, with eyes of an unpleasant blue. His crimson hair flared out like a great dahlia in violent bloom. Neither the man nor the woman offered to introduce themselves or open a conversation.

"Chilly, isn't it?" ventured Don affably.

Receiving no answer he became rather nettled. This was not very interesting!

"What is your opinion of the Russian situation?" he asked, making a second attempt. "I advocate immediate sterilization!"

The same sally had created gales of laughter at a party in Sacramento, but its repetition did not incite a smile.

There was a low whistle in the hall.

"It's Stub," said the red-haired man. "Let him in, Rosita."

"I hope Stub's a conversationalist," remarked Don.

Rosita opened the door. The newcomer was short and rather stout, with bloated cheeks that narrowed his eyes into malevolent slits.

At a signal from the red-haired man Dagby grabbed Don's arms and pinioned them behind his back. The red-haired man whipped out a revolver.

"What quaint methods of entertainment!" remarked Don.

"If you raise your voice," threatened the red-haired man, "I'll kill you!"

"I never raise my voice," Don reassured him. "My nature is far too lethargic."

"Search him, Stub!"

Stub investigated Don's clothing.

"He hasn't got them," he reported.

"Tie him!"

Stub and Rosita made ropes of the bedclothing and bound Don to his chair.

"Now, where are the diamonds?" demanded the red-haired man.

"Diamonds?" echoed Don interrogatively.

"Don't play innocent! We know your mother has had financial troubles and that you have brought her diamond necklace to San Francisco to raise money on it. Where is it?"

"I put it in a safety vault this afternoon," said Don.

"No, you didn't!"

"Well, it is in the hotel safe."

"The kid's lying, Red!" interrupted Stub. "I been follering him the whole evening, and he didn't turn nothing over to the clerk."

"And your friend isn't carrying it, either," added Red. "We held him up when he got out in the suburbs, but all we got was twenty-eight dollars and a half pint."

"The deceitful sinner!" exclaimed Don. "He didn't mention that half pint to me! I hate the stuff, but a suggestion on my breath would give me social distinction."

"We searched your room while you were out," continued Red, "but we couldn't find any trace of the diamonds. Where have you hidden them?"

"If you know so much about where they are not," said Don, "you should be able to find out where they are."

Red's eyes hardened, and he again leveled his revolver.

"If you know what's good for you," he said, "you'll tell me where those diamonds are and be damned hasty about it!"

"Shoot, if you must, these wavy hairs," declaimed Don, "but it won't help you find the diamonds!"

Red snorted with exasperation. Dagby stepped out of the shadows. The half light falling on his face deepened the network of lines that had been painted there by forty years of diablerie.

"I'll make him tell!" he promised.

He seized Don's arm and began to twist it. Don clenched his teeth stubbornly. Dagby next forced his fingers back slowly toward his wrist. Don paled, and the sweat beaded upon his forehead.

"You can't force me to do anything!" he hissed. "If you continue this you'll accomplish nothing but to make me faint!"

Dagby arose and looked over his victim's anatomy as if to select a fresh point of attack.

"That is," amended Don, "if I can faint. I never have."

"Let him alone," interceded Rosita. "Don't you see he's not going to tell? The diamonds must be in his room. Where else could they be? Go up there again and search thoroughly, all of you! Perhaps there is a false bottom in some of his baggage."

"Very well," consented Red, handing his revolver to the woman. "Keep an eye on him, Rosita!"

"Use two eyes, Rosita!" recommended Don.

Rosita locked the door and returned to Don, laying her revolver on the table.

"You're a brave fellow!" she whispered, wiping the perspiration from his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Praise from such divine lips is praise indeed," said Don.

Rosita smiled then.

"Kiss me!"

"Help yourself, lady!" invited Don. "I'm in no position to resist!"

Rosita stooped and quickly unloosed the bonds. Don stood up and experimentally clasped and unclasped his fingers.

"Now, kiss me!" said Rosita.

She placed his arms about her waist, drew his head down and pressed her lips to his.

"Lady, lady!" exclaimed Don. "You must give me lessons in this! Have you a vacant hour on Tuesdays and Fridays?"

"Are the diamonds in your room?" asked Rosita.

"Still trying to trap me?" said Don. He pushed her away from him and back slowly to the telephone. "I understand! You have been merely a decoy in a game of deceit! This ingenuous display of affection is, I suppose, just another dodge!"

"Don't you use that telephone!" commanded Rosita, quickly retrieving the revolver from the table.

By straining his shoulder muscle, Don lifted the receiver hook enough to establish connections. He could faintly hear the operator's voice in the receiver behind him.

" I won't use the phone," he said, speaking slowly and distinctly, " as long as you have that gun pointed at me. There are four of you to my one. I realize that you have the advantage unless the police are, unknown to you, on your trail!"

" Oh, the police!" said Rosita, contemptuously. " They're numbskulls, all of them! But I really wasn't trying a dodge that time."

Don eased his shoulder, carefully letting the receiver hook fall into place.

" You must admit," he said, " that I had grounds for suspicion."

Rosita returned the revolver to the table.

" I like you!" she said, placing both hands on his shoulders. " I would leave these men for you! Together we could roam the world and follow our fancy. I can teach you! Adventure, romance, money, travel—all would be yours; and I—I am not ugly, am I?"

" You are not," agreed Don.

" Then you will come?"

The low whistle again sounded in the hall. Don quickly ran to his chair and rewrapped the bonds about himself.

" I'm all right!" he said. " Open the door before they become suspicious! We'll get out of this somehow!"

Rosita admitted the three men.

" No luck!" announced Red.

He directed a demolishing glare at the unabashed Don.

" Young man!" he said ominously. " I'm not quite sure just what we are going to do to you!"

" You might bribe me," suggested Don, " by telling me the name of your hairdresser!"

Red scowled.

" I'll fix the young whelp!" said Dagby.

The old man knelt and removed one of Don's shoes and socks, then placed a tray by his bare foot. He next piled the tray high with crumpled newspapers. His object became apparent when he reached for a box of matches.

Don decided that it was time to act.

Placing his foot against Dagby's chest, he sent him sprawling against Red's legs. Then he grabbed the revolver from the table and covered the party.

" Throw up your hands!" he commanded. " No, that isn't right. *Throw up your hands, you curs! I've gotcha now!* Tie their hands and feet, Rosita!"

He grinned amiably while the fickle Rosita made secure her former confederates.

" Now search them for Louis's twenty-eight dollars! And don't forget the half pint!"

He sat on the floor to replace his shoe and sock.

" There's not much of the half pint left," reported Rosita, " but I found a lot more than twenty-eight dollars."

" Just give me the half pint and the twenty-eight dollars! You can keep the remainder. Grab what you need and let's make our get-away! Good night, fellows! We've had a very interesting evening! Don't forget to send me that hairdresser's address, Red!"

Don locked the door on the outside.

" My room is on the floor above," he said. " It will only take a minute to get a few of my things."

They hurried to the stairway at the end of the hall.

" Look!" exclaimed Rosita as they reached the mid-story landing. " There come the police! They are stopping in front of my room!"

" Indeed! How do you suppose they discovered you?" said Don. " Possibly somebody peached! Come, we must hurry!"

Don's room looked as if it were in the throes of a spring housecleaning. A pyjama-clad figure was lying on the bed, shivering under the breeze from an open window, and bound and gagged so securely that he could move little more than his eyelashes.

" Louis!" ejaculated Don. He lowered the gag. " What happened, old man?"

" I was just getting into bed," explained Louis, " when I thought I heard you in here. When I came in through the bathroom I was immediately grabbed by three yaps who wanted to know where your necklace was! I told the blithering idiots you didn't wear any!"

Don replaced the gag, disregarding the amazed eyes above it.

" Poor little chappie!" he crooned, wrap-

ping the blanket around Louis. "Left to lie here in the ocean breezes with nothing on but his pinky pyjamas! Why, his itty tootsums is almost blue!"

The eyes above the gag grew larger.

Don found his golf bag on the floor, where it had been thrown by the marauders. He emptied it of the clubs and drew forth a flashing necklace. Rosita screamed with delight.

"This will keep us going for some time," said Don. "I dropped it in here so it would not arouse the curiosity of any prying chambermaids. The police are probably watching all exits. Do you believe you can get by them?"

"It won't be the first time!"

"Then you take the necklace and go ahead! We can get out more easily if we go separately. I'll follow in a few minutes and meet you at the corner of Powell and O'Farrell."

Rosita pocketed the necklace with sparkling eyes and opened the door.

"Don't forget the place," adjured Don. "Powell and O'Farrell! I'll come by in a taxi."

Rosita blew him a kiss and vanished.

Don returned to the figure on the bed and looked into a pair of eyes that, by this time, were fiery.

"Poor boy!" he commiserated while he untied Louis. "He's had a strenuous evenine, hasn't he?"

Louis stood up and removed the gag.

"What the devil," he demanded, "does all this mean?"

Don now seated himself in a chair.

"A queer sort, wasn't she?" he mused.

"Do you really believe," asked Louis, "that that woman is going to meet you at Powell and O'Farrell?"

"Not unless she waits there until morning," replied Don.

Louis's jaw dropped.

"You—you deliberately made her a present of your mother's diamond necklace?"

"Oh, the necklace!" said Don as of something half forgotten. "It's only cut glass! You see, when mother's stocks went down she pawned the necklace and had a paste replica made. When the stocks went up again she sent me to get the original back for her."

He reached for his hip pocket.

"Here's your half pint, what there is left of it. Perhaps in the future you will leave your valuables with me!"

Mrs. Partner

by

Mary Graham Bonner

IF it hadn't been for her nose, which was a blunt little affair tilting up in a quite saucy manner, you would have said that when the Lord had made her He had had a grudge against the rest of femininity. For she possessed every other attribute of beauty.

Her skin was the envy of every one who saw her. It was soft and smooth and clear, and her color was superb—and her own.

That was enough in itself to make her envied, for she did not live an out-of-door life. She lived in the city of New York, and she worked in an office, and seldom had more air than was encountered between the subway exit and the office, or the office and the subway entrance. And that hardly counted for anything, for with so many exits you could get three blocks below the street announced in the subway and within a few doors from her building. Her eyes were blue and clear. Her hair was brown. And it waved of its own free will and accord. And she was tall and not so thin as to be scrawny, nor too fat so as to be matronly.

In fact she was a magnificent, glowing creature, and no matter what she wore, and no matter what the day, and no matter how late she had been out the previous evening, she always looked freshly radiant and lovely.

A few envious girls said, " Yes, she'd be beautiful if it weren't for her nose." That was a balm to their jealousy. For she was *not* perfect in her beauty. She had a serious drawback to real beauty—right in the center of her face.

But few were really envious of her. Most of them liked her too much to be jealous of her looks. She was too genial and natural; too unconcerned about herself; too oblivious to beauty. And most of them loved her little tilted nose, too—it made her so human, somehow, with all her beauty. A nose *could* humanize a person. There was no mistake about that.

And this was Margaret Cole.

The office where she worked was in a large motor company. It was a beautiful office, and all around her was light. From her desk she could see out into the street. There was some life to a job of this sort.

A good many girls were employed as private secretaries and clerks here. There was something rather fine about working in a big automobile place. Magnificent motors were on the main floor. Automobiles of huge size and magnitude and luxury and opulence were so near at hand, friendly, all a part of the same business as was Margaret. It made one feel so much richer, somehow.

Of course, too, there was another nice thing about this business. There were most dashing young salesmen. Oh, there were no drab, miserable, white-faced office-confined-looking men about. Here they looked smart and well-dressed and well-groomed, and in good physical condition. They spoke so well, too. They carried themselves with assurance. Their work gave them variety, and a mingling with different types of people made them possess poise. For did not some of them go forth as demonstrators as well as salesmen, giving buyers and prospective buyers lessons in the running of fine cars? Oh, yes, there was a great deal of prosperity in the very feeling of working in such a place.

But of all the salesmen and demonstrators there was one, yes, there was one, who to Margaret was not only all that could be admired in a salesman of a large automobile establishment, but who was all that her imagination could conjure up in the way of a perfect man. And the imagination of a beautiful young girl of nineteen is not any two-by-four affair.

Bobby Griffith had such an engaging smile. She could see how the customers liked him. Yes, from her balcony above she often looked down at Bobby and admired his ease of manner, his assurance. Not even a society person with lorgnettes could feeze Bobby. Not for a moment. Bobby was nobody's fool.

And Bobby had at once taken to her. Oh, yes, there had been no mistake about that. After office hours they so many times had jammed but jolly trips home in the subway together, strap-hanging with thoughts removed from their present closely packed environment. In the evenings there would be picture shows—beautiful picture shows. At the finish of the feature true love would triumph, and at such times Bobby's hand would press hers and he would toy with her fingers. How sweet it all was! Life was wonderfully gay, filled to the brim with great happiness.

There was nothing silly about Margaret. She was never jealous of Bobby when he went out to demonstrate a car to some creature of fashion. He was polite, agreeable, his beautiful salesmanship smile that he had was always working at just the right

speed; but he was unmoved and untouched and unflattered. Margaret could understand. She was sure many a woman bought a car because of Bobby's personality. But did Bobby fawn and grovel? Not a bit of it, for all his graciousness, and because he was a salesman he did not deem it essential to be obsequious or ingratiating.

Of course every one knew what was coming. They had watched the affair progressing, and were delighted. And after an evening when Bobby had told Margaret he knew no other man had ever loved a girl as he loved her, and when she had said she had never known a girl could be so happy as she was—that next morning they told them in the office.

So they began to make plans. Everything went so smoothly. They would be married that autumn.

As autumn approached, and their love grew stronger, the automobile business went in for a great slump. But their own happiness was quite untouched by outside reverses.

There had come outside reverses, though. Bobby was making very much less money than formerly. The business had been going down and down with a steady regularity. A great deal of Bobby's former money was made up largely of commissions. It always seemed as though they were very apt to soar higher and higher, but not that they could grow so much smaller as to be almost negligible. But they were. Cars sold for less; they almost did not sell at all.

But Bobby and Margaret were not discouraged.

"Of course," Bobby explained, "it is to be expected. I did very well for such a young man, and I have managed to save enough to get a good deal of the furniture and for a trip for us. And it's a good company; even if times are bad just now, it looks fine ahead. It won't be any time before business picks up with a rush again. Not any time at all."

They were married, and they had their trip, but the money went faster than they had ever dreamed it would, and they were glad when they came back that they had not bought the furniture on the installment plan, but had bought outright with what they could both put in together. And the trip had been so well worth the large amount it had demanded.

On the trip they had talked of many things, of their happiness that lay ahead, of the wonderful future for Bobby. He was young and he was bright. Margaret was sure of it, and Bobby bowed to her superior knowledge.

He was popular. He would do wonderfully. And Bobby was full of hope.

"Oh, in no time at all," he said, "we'll be having a couple of cars of our own. A little one just for you, one of those snappy little low ones that sleek along in such style."

"Well, let's think of one at a time," Margaret smiled. And they laughed and talked of it.

For a while Margaret had planned she would keep on with her work, but when she got back, and it was a question of her leaving or of the other girl who had worked with her—there was now only enough business for the one—she thought she would give up her job. For she was married, and had some one to provide for her, while the other girl had no other help and much responsibility.

So Margaret looked after the house, and cleaned and washed and cooked and marketed and brought home her own bundles. And watched every expenditure. For more and more it seemed to be expensive to live. And she would read in the evening papers of reduced costs of living. She had yet to meet them in the flesh or at the grocer's.

Every month it seemed as though there were always some additional expenses.

But she was so happy. How dearly she loved Bobby! How much he loved her. And how happy he was dreaming ahead.

Although it was getting worse all the time now at the office—it always got much worse before the turn for the better came, Bobby explained.

"Not a thing in commissions," he added, "and business rotten. Each day I think it has reached the bottom, and then it goes lower still. But I feel very cheerful about it. If I can get through this bad time it will be a wonderful thing. Why,

lots of people are out of work now—lost good jobs, too, and reliable men—not through any fault of their own. Just bad business conditions. It's just a question of hanging on a little longer and then it's all going to change."

He succeeded in hanging on a little longer. And then with a crash it came—business became so low that the only salesmen who were retained were those who had been with the firm much longer than Bobby, and who had wives and several children.

Margaret knew something had happened when he came home that evening. There was something rather tragic about his attempt at being cheerful. He tried so hard to make his voice light. To have him discouraged, blue, was more than she could endure.

"What happened?" she asked. "Tell me, dear. As long as I have you I don't care how rotten business gets. Is it business?"

He nodded.

"Well?"

"Well," he said in a hollow voice that was accentuated through his attempt to make it vigorous, "the tension is over."

She didn't know what he meant by that.

"Tension, dear?" she queried softly.

"Yes, lost my job. The tension of holding on for grim life as I've been doing—well, there's a certain relief in that being removed."

"My darling!" She had her arms around him. "Do you think I care for an old job? An old job? An old job?" She repeated the words with strengthened emphasis at each repetition. "I don't care as long as I have you. I know it's awful—to lose your position—but please don't feel badly. It's just a little bit insulting to me if you do!"

He brightened. "Oh, I know. It was different for me than for any other of those men. Their wives will rub it in on them or make them feel poor and no good and failures, or make themselves out to be martyrs and pitied and thought in bad luck. It is so different with you!"

"There are our Liberty bonds—four all told," she said. "I guess they'll keep the wolf away for a time—and darling—"

"Yes,"

"Say you don't care about the old job. Why, the world is full of jobs! Maybe not just now, but, dear me, in no time at all jobs will be as thick as can be, and we'll wonder why we worried."

And despite the business tragedy of the day, they made a happy meal of supper that evening.

But the next day brought with it discouragement. Maybe in no time at all jobs would be as thick as could be, but for the time being that was anything but the case.

"I couldn't get a thing," Bobby reported that evening. "They offered me a job—not so very much of a salary—or rather not so very much of a job—"

He broke off vaguely.

"What, darling?"

"Well, it seems to me that there is no in-between for me. Either I am capable of trying to cut a figure in a smart automobile establishment—and I'm not capable of that any more—or I'm capable of being a day laborer."

Margaret looked surprised.

"I don't think I quite follow."

"Well, I was pretty well fagged out—not a thing in sight that I could do. All the jobs seemed to be in lines I knew nothing about! I met a friend of mine on one of the papers. Of course I gave him my usual little plea of the day, my desire for a position. He said there was one on his paper, but he didn't think it would do for me. Of course I brightened, and said I would tackle anything if only they'd be a little patient with initial stupidity, but—what in thunder do you suppose it was?"

"I haven't the remotest idea," Margaret smiled.

"The only job they had down there was for some one to handle an investment column—writing answers to widows regarding safe and sane ways of salting the money away. I'd be a fine one at that. A lot I'd know about my subject. Well, that was the only vacancy *they* had, for example."

"Well, I wouldn't let that upset me," Margaret said. "You aren't supposed to be a general handy man around all jobs. And be thankful you're not. Suppose you

were trained for that! I can imagine nothing more deadly."

Bobby patted her hand. "Little sport," he whispered huskily.

"But you said something about being a day laborer?" she queried. "What did you mean by that, darling? Gracious, but job-hunting has made you vague!"

"Well, I won't be vague any longer. I was offered a job in a garage—as a mechanic—you know—one of these oily black begrimed people who work over other people's cars!"

"You won't always be working over other people's cars!" Margaret exclaimed. "And if you are, for the time being, why, it's all good training. It's your line. The more experience you have in connection with every part of it the better it will be—"

"Do you mean you want me to take it?" Bobby gasped.

"Don't you want to?" she returned.

"Well—I thought for your sake, for the sake of your friends, you mightn't like to feel your husband was an ordinary mechanic, wearing old tan clothes and so greasy that his nails never looked right. It's rather a come down, isn't it, from the seat at the wheel of the car to an awkward sprawl underneath it? One of the men I used to know in the office—a Mr. Simmons—owns a garage, and I ran into him today—he was the one who suggested this."

"And what did you say?"

"I said I couldn't decide just offhand, and he told me to think it over for a few days. He needed some one, and I knew enough to be satisfactory to him—I always did have rather a hankering after mechanics, and yet it seemed so hard on you."

"What's hard on me?" Margaret cried. "Do you suppose I married you for your white collar? Do you think that was what I fell in love with? Well, you can change that idea now. You don't flatter me when you imply that."

"So you'd like me to—to take it?"

"If *you* would; certainly."

And so it was settled. The pay was very much less than he had been receiving, but there was something in the work that attracted him. And though the money which came in did not meet the money which went out—or rather they met and sniffed rudely at each other—yet Margaret and Bobby were not unhappy. Others were knowing hard times — harder times than they were—and the Liberty bonds were filling in the gaps.

It was astonishing how happy one could be—or rather two—if they were two with natures such as Margaret and Bobby possessed—when poor. Some one once had written a book about poverty and happiness and every one had laughed and treated it all as a joke. Well, Margaret and Bobby wouldn't have thought it so absurd.

They had the nest egg in the bonds, Bobby had a job, and a job that, despite its lack of neat attire, fascinated him.

And business began to pick up. Or perhaps it was that he was worth more to the shop. At any rate it appeared that every one was having cars repaired rather than buying new models.

"It seems to me that I'm better off than I ever was," Bobby said a while later. "I don't have to dress up for this job, and I don't wear out my clothes. Why, it's a great saving when too much isn't expected of one."

And so it went on with better news for Margaret almost at the end of every day.

It was three months later that he bounded into the apartment, grabbing Margaret and dancing her about with him.

"You'll never believe it! You'll never believe it!" he cried.

"I can't until I hear," Margaret managed to gasp.

"He has asked me to become a partner —*me, me, me!* He has liked my work, he says; thinks I'm born to the job. Anyway, he wants me as a partner!"

It took some little while for Margaret to understand it all. There was something so joyous about it that Bobby could not clearly elucidate the details.

"You see," he carefully explained later, "Mr. Simmons, this most delightful boss of mine, and owner of the Simmons' garage, has bought out some one else, and he wants me to run the other place, and he is willing to make me a partner. In fact, he seems quite eager to do so. And so—I'll be the partner."

"Oh, you blessed brilliant thing," Margaret hugged him excitedly. "Of course I knew you'd be something like that—something fine and at the top and wonderful. Dear Mr. Partner, how proud of you I am. And may I now be so bold as to ask Mr. Partner to partake of a simple repast with me? Food won't stay hot, you know, even for a partner!"

Suddenly Bobby's face clouded, and he looked very solemn, very subdued, very, very quiet.

"Margaret," he said. His voice was almost a whisper.

Something seemed to clutch at her heart. Bobby was so changed in a twinkling. Had he been working too hard? Was anything going to happen to him? She tried to speak, her voice made no sound.

But he was talking now.

"I'm so thoughtless, so worthless, so contemptible. Here I have been talking about being a partner. There's just one real partner in this whole wide world—just one person who deserves that title—that's you, you brick of a girl, *my* partner!"

"Why, Bobby," Margaret laughed, a little unsteadily, "I thought something had happened to you!"

"Something had," Bobby continued, "when for a moment I took any credit to myself or my own work. If it hadn't been for you—you who loved me and not my white collar—I never could have become a partner. Never, never, never."

"Don't be absurd, dear heart," Margaret smiled, as she put her arm in his and led him toward the dining-room. "Mr. Partner mustn't be absurd, you know!"

"And neither must Mrs. Partner," he returned. "Mrs. Partner, the best sport in the whole world!"

Vibratin' Harmonious

by Victor E. P. Johns

HEAVEN knows I believe in speedin' up with the times, and if there's a new beauty secret or a latest thing in styles that I ain't yet wise to, pass me the word, deary; pass me the word. But when it comes to new thought, psychicanalysis, or whatever they call it, and such strong subjects for heavy thinkers, put me down among the missin' and unaccounted for.

Josephine, on the other hand, jumps at a new-fangled idear like a trout at a plump, green fly, so I wasn't exactly surprised when she took serious Marcia's remarks about the power of her mind. Josephine showed a weird streak even when we went to school together out in Chicago and dreamed of spot-lights and delirious applause. She never indulged in the frivolities of youth, but spent perfectly good hours at night, when any right-minded girl would of been out learning the latest step or cultivating the worth-while boys—well, what I mean

to say is she spent her spare time studying French and vocal and elocution, and goodness know what.

" Want a good foundation on which to build, 'cause I'm going to make something of myself," she used to say.

Of course, studying don't do no harm, but I always maintained that you either got talent or you haven't.

One July morning we left our ancestral flats for New York and joined a hundred thousand other more or less young things who were chasing jobs on Broadway every day from ten to four.

Not having had no experience made it difficult for Josephine and me, but just before the anxiety of the thing got too much for our untried nerves the god of the Rialto took pity on us and give the cue to a director who was engaging a chorus for a musical show. He looked us over, tried our paces, and decided to take a chance.

The next two seasons Josephine played parts and begun to get a reputation as a beauty. It all goes to show what a good press-agent can do, deary. The papers called her " petite," and spoke about her " wistful expression." Said she had a " fragile and haunting beauty." The next thing we knew she was leading woman for Willie Lorraine.

Last season we played the same show. Josephine was prima donna. But I gotta hand it to her 'cause me being a glorified show girl with three lines and gowns by Hortense just made no never mind at all.

In the company was also eight English ponies. What with their lady-of-quality airs and thinking the entire weight of " The Merry Dairy-Maid " rested on their dancing legs, they certainly handed the agony to my sensitive nerves. And it was these blond beauties from the Gaiety, London, which put the idear of going abroad into Josephine's head. If they hadn't talked so much about the immense advantage that comes from looking out upon England's public from the sacred confines of the Gaiety stage, why, she'd 'a' been perfectly content to of gone summering up to the Adirondacks or Martha's Vineyard, or somewhere, instead of getting ambitious.

" Luella," said Josephine one evening when I was visiting in her dressing-room, " after a girl's been musical comedying for eight years or so it's time she commenced to think about her future. I've decided to get practical and forget my artistic nature."

" And this little speech is by way of what?" I inquired.

" I've about decided to go to London for the season, try for a job at the Gaiety, and —well, just see what happens."

" You talk nonsense. It 'd be more to your advantage to take a good rest, act like a lizard on a mountaintop, and—well, just see what happens."

The more Josephine thought about it the more determined she became. The only encouragement she got was from Marcia, a new girl in the show. Marcia's awful bright and interesting, but that weird. Always talking about " vibrations " and people's " auras."

" M'dear," she said when Josephine confided her desire for a substantial manor setting and 'n aristocrat for a leading man; " m'dear, whatever one wants he can have, providing only he wants it hard enough."

" That's certainly a grand thought," I chimed in; " where'd you get it?"

" Why, it's a very old thought," she answered, " but not well understood." Then turning to Josephine, " What you ought t' do is to go into silence and meditate. There's absolutely no limit to the power of your mind. Absolutely none. All you gotta do is to send your thoughts out into the other, concentrate hard on whatever you want—health, money, love—yes, even a title—and they're sure, positively, to reach the thing or person you desire. But first of all you *got* to learn to vibrate harmonious with the cosmic force you wish to use."

That was going beyond my depth, but I looked wise and sorta got her drift when she rambled on:

" Now you, f'rinstance, will need the love current, which you must connect yourself with by means of concentration and meditation. If it's a titled English husband you feel you simply have to have, just hold thoughts in connection with you and he. Make a mental picture of yourself walking round a beautiful park with a old feudal castle in the background; see yourself at the

dinner-table, you at one end and a nobility at the other, with witty, classy people in between; imagine yourself riding to hounds—" But Josephine said that was something she posi-*tive*-ly could not do.

" Don't worry about the means," Marcia went on, " that's no concern of yours. Don't worry about a job at the Gaiety. Some way or 'nother your desire will materialize, crystallize out of the ether, and it's not for you to reason how."

Josephine bought a book and started a " demonstration," as she called it. Which means she began to concentrate.

" The Merry Dairy-Maid " closed its run in March and then come the thrilling days for Josephine of getting ready. Said she felt like a bride buying her trousseau as she dashed from shop to shop spending as much on taxis as she did on clothes. At last she rented her apartment to some nice people who were glad of the chance to pay two fifty a month for a roof and grand piano; her trunks were packed; her passport was in her handbag, or wherever it is a lady carries a passport; and the Ethonia was chained to her pier.

Some friends took Josephine down in their car, and a bunch of us girls was there to *bon voyage* her off. Exactly at noon some little whistles peeped and a big whistle moaned; excitement got wild around the gangplank; and two little tugs bumped and pushed and shoved till they'd swung the boat around and started her on the way.

" As we steamed down the river New York looked beautiful in the haze, and for a minute I felt sad at leaving," Josephine told me last week when she got back all filled with that demonstration I spoke about. What I mean to say is she give me the scenario then of her trip to England.

In spite of the steamship company's booklet on foreign travel which tells you not to get exclusive, but to enjoy the voyage and your fellow travelers' society, 'cause the ocean is a great little leveler, Josephine laid back in her chair and watched the world go round the promenade-deck. She says no good comes from mixing up with everybody on board.

That night there was a gorgeous moon, and Josephine thought what a ideal trip it's going to be, but—well, it never come out again, and I haven't finished the story.

The next morning there was a rough gale and a wicked sea. The boat was naturally pitching something grand. Josephine ate breakfast in the almost deserted dining-room and then went on up to the lounge. Looking out at Atlantic's heaving bosom through the plate-glass windows made her feel like February violets or a bunch of hot-house grapes, so she climbed up to the boat-deck and stood under the bridge. The wind tore her to pieces and the spray got her soaking, but she stood there wishing the old boat would roll and pitch just twice as hard.

It was too wearing, though, and she couldn't stand it long. Had to gasp for breath and grab at things like a baby learning to walk. Suddenly a lurch, a sudden blast of wind, or something, spun her round the corner right into the arms of Romance.

He was somebody she hadn't seen before, Josephine said; a wonderful looking thing in a golf suit, six feet tall, and so English! They were both nearly blowed overboard trying to get to the stairway, but laughed like sillies. Finally they got down-stairs, where Josephine fell in her chair too exhausted for words, but managed to find strength to thank him for having rescued her from death and a watery grave.

" My word! But you're a good sailor to be out such weather," said the Wonderful Looking Thing.

" My godmother was a mermaid," Josephine answered, getting bright.

" And a jolly good job she made of the christening. I say! That's what I'm going to call you, the ' Little Mermaid '; that is, if you don't mind."

" I shall like it."

" And in exchange call me ' Vernon,' which is a family name, and given to me by my godmother."

That's how it all started, deary. He slid into a chair and they talked madly. Vernon proved to be such an interesting person. He'd traveled a lot, got banged around during the war, had wavy blond hair, and the loveliest voice. Josephine always was bugs about voices.

After lunch they walked twenty times around the deck, then sat down and

watched the others do their turn. Quite a distinguished crowd was on board, and Vernon and the Little Mermaid whiled away the hours trying to guess who was who.

Josephine said 'twas a funny thing, but in no time at all she and Vernon were so chummy she was pouring out her ambitions about a Gaiety career. The Wonderful Looking Thing told her that that classical home of English musical comedy was the hangout of the male blue-bloods of London, and if she wasn't prepared to leave home and mother and grace some ducal palace, why, she'd better turn round and go back. He'd seen her several times in " The Merry Dairy-Maid," and—well, he'd warned her.

The two of 'em spent hours at a time watching the happy throng, only I guess 'twasn't so very happy or such a big throng on account of the sea, if you get what I mean. Vernon told Josephine the most thrilling things about the war, and she was too happy for words just sitting there looking at his lean, handsome face and listening to his lovely voice. He was awful nervous, though. His pet trick was to open his cigarette-case, then snap it shut, open, snap, open, snap, all the while he was talking, and his blue eyes at times got a faraway, dreamy look. All of this must of been a hang-over from his life in the trenches and perhaps wasn't vital damages. Damaged or not, the mermaid adored her kingfish and went mooning around, deep in the throes of a love dream.

They'd been on their way exactly seven days when Vernon proposed. 'Twas about eleven o'clock and the night was dark and foggy. Sounds like a melodrama, don't it? They'd been promenading around the deck and stopped a while to lean over the railing to watch for phosphorous at the ship's side. Everything was quiet, no sound except the swish of water and the moaning of the fog-horn. Josephine said she'd 'a' felt awful creepy and lonesome but for Vernon's arm, which was around her, and his shoulder, which she was snuggling up against.

Vernon began it. " Two more days and then it 'll all be over. The gales have been a-blowing, the water has been piling mountainous high, the sun has tucked itself behind thick, black clouds, and danger has always been sneaking just ahead, but to me the past week has been a spider-web dream of moonshine. I've been in love, deary; I've been in love with you since you were blowed into my arms. The gods have been kind. They brought you in answer to my longing."

That sounds like he, too, must 'a' bought the book, and been concentrating and meditating and going into silence.

Then Josephine got original and said: " And I have never been so happy before." Leave it to lovers to say bright, snappy things to each other.

" Do you reah-ly mean that, my little Mermaid?"

" Well, rather!" his little mermaid answered.

" Deary, will you—" A long pause.

" What?" Josephine's intuition knew what he was going to say and her woman's contrariness made her pretend she didn't. Every ambitious idear had been drove completely outta her head, she told me. All she wanted was Vernon; to be with him forever—in England, New York, Shanghai, Iceland, she didn't care where. And instead of encouraging him and making things easier, there she stood acting like a foolish ingénue.

" Will you—I'm no end in love with you, reah-ly. Will you—marry me? Oh, I say! You will, won't you?"

Josephine didn't answer for a minute, but snuggled closer. He drew her tight to him, bent over and kissed her. They continued to hang over the rail and gaze out into empty space, all the while that darn fog-horn kept playing its melancholy tune.

Then: " Yes," she simply answered, or I mean, answered simply.

Suddenly she put on her laughing record.

" What is it, dear?" Vernon asked.

" Ain't it just like a novel, or something?" she gurgled girlishly. " Years ago I saw a play in which the heroine lived deep in the mountain fastness. One day along comes a nice, handsome hero, and the two of 'em fell for each other something violent. As is natural in the drama, he didn't confess his love until the last act. The blushing and happy girl nestled in his arms, saying her heart beat faster, too,

or words to that effect, since first they met. She lay there contentedlike for a second, then looking startled, she pushed away—not too far. 'Say, man,' cooed the mountaineeress in her drawling way, 'what's your name?' A good tag, I thought, but unreal. And here am I, on the deck of a ocean liner, promising to love a man till death do us part, whispering, as I do now, 'Say, dear, what's your name?'"

Deary, don't that double you up? Josephine, at her time of life to go drifting in such unknown waters; she who'd made such a good resolution about getting practical!

Of course, earlier in the week she'd wondered who her dashing cavalier was and looked through the passenger list several times when she found some names with "V" as 'n initial, but got no clue. Then it struck her as being kinda romantic to worry along on "Mermaid" and "Vernon," so she cut the curiosity.

Well, Vernon laughed and said that since his name would be hers some day he supposed she really had a right to know what it was, and that the only reason she didn't know already was because there had never been no occasion to use it. And wasn't it romantic?

Then, deary, Josephine got the shock of her life. Marcia's system had worked. Vernon was the Viscount Wolingbrook!

I pause for a reply. Josephine, I imagine, paused for a good long while.

Vernon explained that to avoid notoriety he never had his name published in the passenger list as he liked to play around like a ordinary person and not be stared at all the time.

Josephine said that in spite of being awful happy and contented that fog-horn begun to edge her nerves. She found herself getting fidgety and restless. Then, for no reason at all 'cause she hadn't heard no sound, she looked over Vernon's shoulder.

A woman dressed all in black, with a black veil or scarf over her head, was just getting up from a near-by chair. She kept in the shadows as she went down the deck and dashed inside at the first doorway. But Josephine wouldn't of cared if the whole ship had been sitting there listening to Vernon propose.

Midnight sounded and they said "Good-night." She'd hardly got to her stateroom when some one knocked on the door. Opening it, she saw a strange woman. "Miss Stewart?" the stranger asked. "May I come in a moment?" Josephine invited her in and drug forward a chair, all the while wondering who she was and what she wanted this time of night.

"Miss Stewart—I learned your name from the card beside your door," the woman began, "it's a painful duty I have to perform and I hope you're a brave little woman, because—" For a minute Josephine got dizy and didn't hear what was said account of the jar to her nervous system. It flashed over her that this woman in black was bringing trouble, that glad wedding-bells were never going to ring now for she and Vernon.

Then like as if she was coming out of a faint she slowly began to understand. The woman was Vernon's wife; to-night was the first time she had been able to leave her cabin since the first day out; and it pained her to discover what a mess her husband had got Josephine into. However, the poor boy's mind was all gone as the result of shell-shock during the war, and so, of course, he couldn't be held to blame. Ever since he got out of the military hospital he'd been having all sorts of outlandish idears. His latest piece of home-brewed fiction, as she had just found out, was being single and a noble. He wasn't no viscount at all. Just plain Mr. Wolingbrook.

She'd had her poor husband under the care of a specialist in New York who feared the case was incurable, and now she was taking him back to England. Vernon, not the specialist. She cried a bit, said she was going to pieces under the strain, and wouldn't Josephine try to forgive him?

The specialist gave her one crumb of comfort, though. If Vernon could ever be made to realize what he was doing his mind might then be coaxed back into its natural haunts. She wasn't altogether without hope and had decided the next time her husband tried to throw a spell she was going to get emotional and make a scene which might be the means of calling back his wandering brains. If he held to his story—well, then

'twas too late and nothing was left for Vernon but a sanitarium. Here now was her big chance, and she hoped Josephine would soon forget the unfortunate affair and have a nice time in England.

When Josephine was alone again she had a good cry, then resolved to do her bit. By making Vernon confess he'd been having a riot of a time in his own peculiar way she would help save his tottering reason. So she thought and thought till daylight, then went to bed.

The Little Mermaid was confined to her room all the next day, a poor, limp invalid with a throbbing head. The Wonderful Looking Thing was quite cut up when he found she couldn't take part in the daily fashion parade. However, she promised to join him for coffee at eight o'clock that night in the Palm Room and take a stroll later.

After a bite of dinner she joined Vernon, like she'd promised, and they went on deck. For a long time neither one spoke. "Poor Little Mermaid," Vernon finally said, "she'll be all right to-morrow. And to get sick the end of the trip. I'm surprised."

At last, after miles of walking, the deck become empty, save for a few scattered loungers. Josephine begun to take herself in hand 'cause she had a job t' do and 'twasn't going to be no easy one. While she was collecting the raveled ends of her wits and emotions they came to a full stop and leaned against the rail. Seems like the railing was where most of their big scenes was played.

"Deary," Vernon suddenly said, "why should we wait till London before getting married? We shouldn't. And in order to wind up the trip as it commenced—romantic—we're going to get married to-night. The captain of a boat, you know, can tie the holy knot of matrimony, and the captain of this boat is a friend of mine. I've made arrangements, and inside an hour you're going to be the Viscountess Wolingbrook."

The Little Mermaid took a deep breath. "No such thing," was her first line.

"Wha-what?"

"'No such thing,' I said."

Josephine told me she nearly lost control of herself when she looked at Vernon. Surprise, pain, grief, and love were registered by his eyes all at the same time.

"Why—why not?" he asked in a faint, hurt voice.

"For two reasons; first, because I'm not going to marry you; second, because even if I did I wouldn't become no Viscountess Wolingbrook."

"I say, what do you mean?"

"Just this, that I know you're still suffering from the effects of shell-shock, that you should take yourself in hand and control your nerves and your wild idears, and that you nearly succeeded in making a fool of me."

She wanted to cry, to pet him, to put his head on her shoulder or her head on his shoulder, only now she mustn't. She wanted to scream, to pat his cheek, and tell how awful, awful sorry she was. But instead she acted cold as steel and domineering.

"Shell-shock! Yes, in 1916 I had a slight case. 'Twasn't anything. And that's years ago. I don't understand."

"Why have you pretended to be somebody you ain't? Because I spoke of the Gaiety? Did that plant the thought in your mind?"

"I have not pretended to be nobody," he answered loftily, as they say in novels.

Josephine realized she was not on the right track. She stopped her bullying and begun to plead. She sobbed, wept real tears, and appealed to all that was good and noble in him to tell her why he'd trifled with her so. He said he hadn't trifled; every word he'd said was the gospel truth and he'd swear it on his honor as a English gentleman. She grew gay and laughed and tried to coax 'n admission from him. He clung to his story like burrs to a woolen skirt. She stormed and raged. He still clung. She acted that night as she never acted before.

She played her climax, demanding that he tell her why he did it. "Why," she asked with indignation trembling in her voice, "did you pretend to be a carefree bachelor? You, with a wife down-stairs, sick the entire trip."

"A wife!"

"Why play the game longer? It's been a good joke, and I'm sportsman enough to enjoy it, even though the laugh's on me. But before I say good night—and good-by—tell me it was a joke, done in fun. It was, wasn't it? Please."

"No, it wasn't no joke," Vernon come back, "and you're talking a bally lot of nonsense. I'm Joseph Vernon Wolingbrook—Viscount Wolingbrook, Weythmead, Kent. I am not crazy, as you seem to think. I've got no wife, sick or well, downstairs or anywhere else. I love you and I'm going to marry you."

The tone of his voice made Josephine believe every word he said.

"I think I can guess what happened. Come with me." Taking her by a limp arm he led the way to one of those apartments which has everything but a kitchenette. In the living-room sat the dame which had called on Josephine the night before. When they stalked in she rose from her chair and stood stiff and haughtylike.

Vernon was the first to speak. "Miss Stewart, this is my sister," he said, trying desperate to keep his voice steady and cool.

Then, deary, the two blue-bloods from England had a genteel scrap. Josephine learned that sister was a proud person who simply couldn't bear having Vernon look at a woman not of his class, and to marry one—my de-ah! And when she heard Vernon propose to a unknown girl she at once proceeded to invent a story which was aimed to keep brother for some high-born English flapper.

As for Vernon, he was getting good and tired of sister's actions. Damn-me, she'd been his jinx all his life. She'd meddled in his affairs often before, but, thank Gawd, this time he'd foiled her vile plot, so he had.

Then he told Josephine that knowing sister's lack of enthusiasm for those not of the titled class he just said nothing to her about his little mermaid, and to Josephine he said nothing about a sister, 'cause if she knew he had one on board she'd think it funny he didn't take her around.

"But let's forget it," said Vernon. "Come, Little Mermaid, you're going to be a sea bride to-night, and this ring will be your wedding-ring." From his little finger he took a thin band of platinum set solid with diamonds. "With this ring I thee am going to wed." They started toward the door. "Come, sis, you're going, too—to be a witness."

Josephine was dazed, but willing and terrible nervous. Sis was dazed and nervous, too, but not willing. However, she realized she held a rotten hand, so quit the game. They all piled up to the captain's quarters, where he and some other officers were waiting. The Viscount Wolingbrook took unto himself a bride with no wedding-bells, orange flowers, gossipy crowds, or nothing.

That's the story of Josephine's last love affair, deary. It's kinda romantic, but ain't it a scream? She's in town now with her Wonderful Looking Thing on a honeymoon trip around the world, and talks "vibrations" and "auras" as much as Marcia used t' do.

One day last week she said to me, "Luella, why don't you get serious and demonstrate for a better job? You don't want to pose in the front row all your life, do you? Now, listen, deary. 'The Merry Dairy-Maid' is going on the road in October, and there's no reason why you shouldn't have the part of *Mazie*. You're just the type and can dance all around the girl who played it last year. I know very well you could do it, and you do, too, don't you?"

I said I thought I could, so she told me to concentrate hard for several days, then go down to the office and demand the part. To please Josephine I went off into silence and meditated on *Mazie*. 'Twas a funny thing, but the more I thought about it the more I wondered why I hadn't thought about it before. The part, I mean.

So yesterday I dolled up, went to the office, and in my winningest way demanded my rights. Half 'n hour later I come away with a contract and *Mazie* in my handbag. Josephine acted something foolish when I told her.

"There! You see," she said, "everything depends upon the mind."

Well, maybe so. But I'm inclined to think she'd 'a' got Vernon and I might of got *Mazie* just the same, 'cause I certainly believe in luck.

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